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THE OCEAN REBELS!

RIPPING LONG COMPLETE SCHOOL STORY INSIDE

The OCEAN



When Mr. Ratcliff decided to cane a dozen St. Jim's juniors he did not expect them to outwit him by howling so loudly that everyone thought he must be killing them!

CHAPTER 1.

An Indignation Meeting!

"WHAT I think is—"

"Exactly."

"In my opinion—"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I want to point out—"

"Bwavo!"

Tom Merry's voice was drowned by a cheer from a score of excited juniors. He gave up the attempt to make himself heard, and waited for a lull.

It was an excited gathering on the boat-deck of the Condor. The great steamer, which had sailed from Southampton with a hundred St. Jim's juniors on board, was throbbing on over the blue waters of the North Sea, under a cloudless September sky.

The St. Jim's fellows had welcomed the idea of opening the midsummer vacation at sea on the steamer. They had looked forward to having a good time; and when they had once got their sea-legs they had had a good time. But this was chiefly due to the fact that Mr. Horace Ratcliff, the senior master, had been, until lately, confined to his cabin. Mr. Ratcliff was a bad sailor, and it had taken him a long time to get used to the salt water.

While he was ill, Mr. Railton had taken charge of affairs, and all had gone well. But Mr. Ratcliff had emerged at last, with a green countenance and an acid temper. He had immediately taken the reins of authority into his own hands, with the result that in a few days the Saints were in a state of exasperation.

Mr. Ratcliff had been master of the New House at St. Jim's, and he had not been liked there. But under the eye

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of Dr. Holmes he had not been able to give his peculiar temperament full play. On board the Condor he was senior master, and monarch of all he surveyed. And as soon as he was able to stand, he had proceeded to make his power felt.

And the boys—especially the School House boys—did not like it. As Monty Lowther remarked, the New House chaps were used to Ratty's funny ways. But the School House fellows thought it was not good enough.

Fellows in the Fifth and Sixth grinned and bore it—or bore it without grinning. But the juniors, among whom the sense of discipline was not so strong, murmured; and now some of them were airing their grievances on the boat-deck.

Tom Merry had mounted on a deckchair. It was a rather insecure rostrum, but he kept his footing by careful balancing. He had not succeeded in saying anything so far; but everyone knew what he was going to say, so they did not wait for him to finish before they cheered.

"Bravo! Good old Merry! Bravo!"

"Yaas, wathah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus of the Fourth Form. "Tom Mewwy has exactly expressed my sentiments in the mattah."

"But I haven't said anything!" grinned Tom Merry.

"The fact is—" said Jack Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!" The fact is, deah boys—"

"Dry up a minute, Gussy, and let me speak."

"I wefuse to dwy up. What I think is—"

"Order!" exclaimed Lowther. "Order for the chair!"

"Order for the deckchair!"

"You see," said Tom Merry, "as soon as he could make his voice heard, 'it's impossible for us to put up with this sort of thing—'"

"Absolutely impos, deah boy!"

"Hear, hear!"

—IN THIS SPLENDID YARN OF THE CHUMS OF ST. JIM'S AT SEA!

REBELS!

By Martin Clifford.

"It's all very well for the New House chaps to be nagged and ragged by Ratty. He's their Housemaster. But—"

"Are you looking for a thick ear, Tom Merry?"

"Don't interrupt. What I say is, Ratty has no right to put on airs towards the School House chaps—"

"Hear, hear!"

"Well, he's senior master," said Figgins. "You can't get out of that."

"Yes; but in my opinion a great deal too much importance is attached to his seniority," said Tom Merry. "To say that a senior master is any better than a junior master is the same as saying that a senior Form is better than a junior Form—that the Fifth is better than the Shell or the Fourth, which is—"

"Rot!" said Monty Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah—feahful wot!"

"In my opinion," went on Tom Merry, warming to his subject, "much more importance should be attached to juniority—"

"To what?" yelled Figgins.

"Juniority."

"What on earth's juniority?"

"I'm not here to attend to the neglected education of a New House fellow," said Tom Merry loftily. "If you don't know what juniority is, you can go and ask your precious Housemaster, Figgy. As I was saying, in my opinion more importance ought to be attached to juniority than to seniority—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Turn that fellow out. He's interrupting the meeting!"

"I'd like to see somebody turn me out," remarked Figgins, in a casual way.

"Well, shut up! Where was I?"

"On the deck-chair."

"Ass! Let me see—oh, more importance ought to be attached to juniority than to seniority. I put it to you, gentlemen of the Shell, and the Fourth Form—"

"Hear, hear!"

"Is there such a thing as human progress? Is there an improvement in society from age to age? There is."

"Vewy pwobably."

"There is!" repeated Tom Merry, with emphasis. "Now what is the cause of this improvement? It is evidently because the younger generation is superior to the other one. If the younger generation is superior to the older one, the older one must be inferior to the younger one—"

"Did you work that out in your head?" asked Kerr.

"Don't interrupt. Now it is absurd for the superior to take orders from the inferior, isn't it?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Therefore promotion ought to go by juniority, not by seniority—"

"Hear, hear!"

"And the junior Housemaster ought to be in authority, and the senior Housemaster ought to go and eat coke," said Tom Merry. And this magnificent peroration was followed by a round of cheers.

Jack Blake began to speak, but for some moments he could not make his voice heard. He seized Tom Merry by the sleeve and tried to jerk him off the chair.

"Hold on!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "I mean, let go! What are you up to?"

"Get off that chair!"

"Eh?"

"Get off that chair!"

"I'm addressing the meeting—"

"Yes, I know you are. And what do you mean by taking the lead in this matter?" demanded Blake. "I'm your junior by two months and seven days, so I'm entitled to be leader on your own showing!"

Tom Merry was taken aback for a moment.

"Hear, hear!" exclaimed Digby. "Get off that chair, Merry!"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Of course, there's a limit to everything," he said. "I'm

no believer in carrying one's principles to ridiculous extremes."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Besides, as the most sensible fellow present—"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I cannot allow that statement to pass uncontradicted—"

"The fact is—" said Figgins.

"Order!"

"Rats!"

"Look here," said Tom Merry, "to come to the point once more, we've had enough of Ratty's funny ways."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Figgins can stand up for him if he likes; but Ratty's a rotter!"

"Hear, hear!"

"He pecks at Railton, who is a decent sort—"

"Good old Railton!"

"And shuts him up. He assumes all sorts of authority, and has lengthened the time given to lessons."

There was a general groan.

"Strictly speaking, we're entitled to do no lessons at all during the vacation; but the Head arranged it, and we agreed. We weren't asked, as a matter of fact, but we agreed tacitly—"

"Well, that's a good word," said Kerr.

"We agreed tacitly. We don't want to go back on our agreement. The Head had a curious idea that on board ship we should get into mischief if we had nothing to do all day, and the arrangement of the lessons was the result. Of course, the Head was mistaken. We know how to look after ourselves; and he might have left it to us."

"Yes, rather!"

"But he didn't; and we agreed to keep on the lessons—tacitly. But it was understood that afternoon lessons were to be cut short, and holidays frequent. Ratty is lengthening them again, and grunting about the holidays, too!"

"Rotter!"

"Cad!"

"Beast!"

These tributes to Mr. Ratcliff, and many more of a similar character, interrupted the speaker for some minutes. They came as heartily from the New House as from School House boys. The juniors were at one in the matter. Figgins had remarked that a fellow ought to stand up for his Housemaster if he could, but that Ratty was past the limit.

"The question is, are we going to stand it?"

"No."

"Are we going to resist the tyrant, and pull him down off his giddy perch?"

"Yes."

"Then, how?"

Silence.

"Oh, we'll find a way," said Blake, after a pause. "Ratty hasn't any right to worry us. After all, we're on this voyage for our health, and with Ratty grousing about, our health is bound to suffer. We shall have to stop him, if only from a sense of duty."

"Yaas, wathah! And I've got a wippin' ideah, deah boys."

"Go and boil it," said Figgins.

"Weally, Figgins—"

"No time for D'Arcy's ideas," said Monty Lowther. "Life's too short. What I say is—"

"Wats! I have a wippin' ideah—"

"Now then, Gussy, ring off—"

"I decline to wing off. I have a wippin' ideah—"

"Out with it!" said Tom Merry. "Cut it short—"

"I think that undah the circs the best thing we can do is to take possession of the steamah and turn piwates."

"Turn what?"

"Piwates."

"What on earth are piwates?"

"He means pirates," roared Blake. "Ha, ha, ha! Captain Kidd in a silk hat and an eyeglass! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Blake, it's wathah had form to cackle at a sewious suggestion."

"Pirates!" said Tom Merry. "Oh, my hat! Ha, ha, ha!"

"I think it's a wathah wippin' ideah to turn piwates. I was weadin' a stowy the othah day of a chap who wan away from school and turned piwate, and he had a weally wippin' time. He had a wakish-looking' cwaft—"

"A what?"

time. He had a wakish-lookin' cwaft—"

"Oh, a rakish-looking craft," said Tom Merry, grinning. "I'm afraid the Condor isn't sufficiently rakish-looking for the purpose, Gussy, so we can't turn pirate."

"Weally, it's a wathah wippin' ideah!"

"We shall have to think of something a little more ripping, I'm afraid. The question is, how shall we muzzle Ratty? What I mean is—"

Tom Merry stopped suddenly.

A tall, thin gentleman had suddenly appeared on the boat-deck. His thin, sour face was extremely acid in expression and his eyes, greenish-grey in hue, had hard glints in them.

It was Mr. Ratcliff, the senior Housemaster.

He came straight towards the excited meeting, and a sudden silence fell upon the juniors.

CHAPTER 2.

The Tyrant!

"**M**ERRY!"

Mr. Ratcliff rapped out the word sharply.

Tom Merry raised his cap politely.

"Adsum—I mean, yes, sir!"

"What is all this noise about?"

"Noise, sir?"

"Yes, noise! You juniors have been making a great deal of noise, shouting and stamping," said Mr. Ratcliff harshly.

"If you please, sir," said Blake, "shouting is a good exercise for the lungs—"

"Yaas, wathah; and stamping is a good exercise for the legs, sir."

"We have to take exercise on deck every day, sir," said Monty Lowther.

Mr. Ratcliff frowned darkly. It was not difficult for him to see the veiled impertinence under the submissive manner of the juniors. He had provoked it himself, but that did not make it any more pleasant for him.

"Lowther, D'Arcy, Blake, you will take a hundred lines each!" he snapped out.

"Yes, sir! What for, sir?" asked Blake.

"For impertinence to your master."

Blake's eyes glinted.

"If you please, sir, you're not our master. Mr. Railton's our master."

"Blake!"

"Yes, sir."

"You cannot be unaware that as senior Housemaster I am in authority over boys of both Houses," said Mr. Ratcliff.

"I regard your reply as deliberate insolence."

"Yes, sir," said Blake.

There was a faint giggle, and Mr. Ratcliff bit his lips.

"I shall be compelled to make an example of you, Blake. I intend to maintain order here. Merry, get off that chair!"

"Off this chair, sir?" said Tom Merry.

"Yes," exclaimed Mr. Ratcliff angrily—"and at once!"

"I'm not doing any harm here, sir!"

"Will you obey me, or not?"

"You are not my Housemaster, sir."

Mr. Ratcliff breathed hard through his nose. It was no time for words, and he made a step towards Tom Merry to drag him off the chair.

Tom Merry made a sudden movement, and lost his footing on the insecure rostrum, and fell—right into the arms of Mr. Ratcliff.

The senior Housemaster gave a gasp as the junior plumped upon his chest, sending him flying backwards.

He went with a bump on the deck, and Tom Merry rolled off his chest and jumped up, leaving him gasping like a landed fish.

"My hat!" murmured Blake. "There'll be a row now!"

He was right.

Mr. Ratcliff slowly sat up, his face convulsed with anger. He maintained a sitting posture for a minute, while he recovered his breath, and then, with slow deliberateness, rose to his feet.

"Merry!"

"Yes, sir?"

"Follow me below!"

Mr. Ratcliff walked away, fully expecting the junior to follow. Tom Merry did not stir from the spot.

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"I say, you'd better go!" murmured Figgins.

The hero of the Shell shook his head.

"It will be serious!"

"I don't care," said Tom Merry. "That was an accident, and it wouldn't have happened if he hadn't interfered with us. What right had he to interfere?"

"None; but—"

"Ratcliff is taking a mean advantage," said Tom Merry, with a flash in his eyes. "I'm not going to be caned by him!"

Mr. Ratcliff turned round as he reached the stairs and saw that Tom Merry was not following him. His brow became like a thundercloud.

"Merry!" he called out.

"Yes, sir?"

"Come here instantly!"

Tom Merry hesitated for a moment, and then crossed to where the Housemaster stood. The other juniors followed him in silence, anxious as to what would happen. Several of the ship's hands were looking on with curious glances, and Captain Bolsover, on the bridge, was looking down upon the scene.

"I ordered you to follow me, Merry!"

"Yes, sir!"

"You disobeyed me, sir!"

Tom Merry was silent.

"I am going to cane you for your insolence," said Mr. Ratcliff. "I shall give you six extra strokes for disobedience."

Tom Merry's lips came tightly together.

"Now follow me below to my cabin!"

Mr. Ratcliff descended the stairs amidships. Tom Merry made no motion to follow.

"Bwavo!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "That's the spiwit, deah boy!"

Mr. Ratcliff looked up the stairs. There was a red spot in either cheek now. He realised that he was beginning to look ridiculous.

"Merry!"

"Yes, sir?"

"Follow me!"

"You are not my Housemaster, sir!"

"Do you refuse to obey me?"

Tom Merry drew a long breath.

"Yes, sir!"

The die was cast now.

There was a murmur among the juniors—a murmur of anxiety and uneasiness. What would follow they had no idea, but it was certain that Mr. Ratcliff could not give way without losing his last vestige of authority on board the Condor.

The Housemaster appeared to be perplexed himself. He had provoked resistance, but he had not a strong nature, and did not know how to deal with it when provoked.

"Merry," he said at length, "your punishment will be more severe if you do not obey me instantly."

"I will obey my own Housemaster's orders," said Tom Merry.

"What is this?"

It was a deep and pleasant voice, as Mr. Railton came along the passage below. The sound of the New House master's voice had reached him in his cabin, where he had been at work.

Mr. Ratcliff looked round.

The arrival of Mr. Railton relieved him to some extent of his difficulty.

"I am dealing with a case of insubordination," he said. "Indeed," said Mr. Railton, looking worried. "What is the matter?"

"Tom Merry refused to obey my orders, and seems to think that we will have your support in doing so—"

"I did not say anything of the sort," broke out Tom Merry. "I said that I would obey my own Housemaster."

"Come down here, Merry," said Mr. Railton quietly.

"Yes, sir!"

"You must understand," said Mr. Railton, "that Mr. Ratcliff is senior master here, and that the Head gave him authority over both Houses."

Tom Merry bit his lip.

"Dr. Holmes said, before we left St. Jim's, sir, that each House would remain under its own master."

"Yes, certainly; but in matters of general discipline, the senior master takes full authority," said Mr. Railton, speaking with an effort. The assumption of authority over his boys by the other Housemaster was as galling to him as it could be to them, but he was not in a position to resist it. "You must understand that, Merry, and all you other boys must understand it, too!"

The juniors were grimly silent.



"Will you obey me or not?" snapped Mr. Ratcliff, making a step towards Tom Merry. Tom made a sudden movement, lost his footing, and fell—right into the arms of the master. "Ow!" gasped Ratty, as the junior sent him flying backwards on to the deck.

"You must obey Mr. Ratcliff on all occasions," said the School House master. "I—I order you to do so."

"That alters the case, sir. I will obey Mr. Ratcliff if you tell me to."

"Well, I do tell you to do so!"

"Very well, sir!"

Tom Merry followed the New House master to his cabin. His face was a little pale, his lips firmly set. He realised the difficult position of his own Housemaster, and did not wish to make it more difficult. But it went very much against the grain to give in to Mr. Ratcliff.

Mr. Ratcliff's cabin was a double one, one apartment being furnished and used as a study. It was this room he entered now, Tom Merry following him in. The New House master selected a cane from his desk.

"Hold out your hand, Merry."

For a single instant the hero of the Shell hesitated, and then he held out his hand. He had made up his mind to go through with it, and it was of no use hanging back now. He held out his hand.

Mr. Ratcliff measured the distance with his eye very carefully, and made the cane sing through the air as he brought it down.

It was a terrible stroke, and it made Tom Merry wince with pain. But he set his lips hard together, and no sound passed them.

"The other hand," said Mr. Ratcliff harshly.

The second stroke was as savage as the first. Then followed five more on each hand, till it seemed to Tom Merry that the skin was being torn by red-hot irons, and every nerve in his body was thrilling with the pain.

Yet his teeth remained tight, his lips sealed.

There was a baffled expression upon Mr. Ratcliff's face as he threw down the cane. He had inflicted a savage punishment, but the scorn in the boy's eyes still stung him.

"You may go!" he said harshly.

Tom Merry quitted the cabin without a word.

CHAPTER 3.

Tom Merry is Excused!

THE electric bell buzzed for afternoon school a few minutes after Tom Merry quitted the Housemaster's cabin. Tom Merry made his way forward to the room which had been the third-class dining saloon when the Condor was a passenger ship, and which was now used as the Shell class-room.

"Tom!"

Manners and Lowther met him. Tom Merry gave them a nod and a faint smile, though his lips were trembling.

"Let me look at your hands," said Lowther.

"It's nothing!"

"Let me look!"

The chums of the Shell gave a simultaneous growl of anger as they saw the red and swollen flesh. Mr. Ratcliff had struck very hard. He would never have ventured to use the cane so at home, at St. Jim's, where he was responsible to the Head. But here there was no one above Mr. Ratcliff; he was answerable to himself alone. As with most weak natures, the possession of power brought out his worst qualities, and made him a tyrant.

"The beast!" said Manners.

"The cad!" said Lowther.

"Oh, it's all right," said Tom Merry. "The bell's gone; let's get on to the class-room."

"Have we got to put up with this?" said Lowther, between his teeth. "Isn't there anything that can be done?"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Railton ought to make a stand against the cad," said Manners hotly.

"How can he, when the Head placed him under Ratty's orders?"

"Well, something ought to be done."

"I was thinking of a revolt," said Tom Merry restlessly. "But that would place Railton in a difficulty; and, besides, it wouldn't help the New House chaps. They would

be under him, and he would make them suffer for it. He's pretty nearly as rough on Figgins & Co. as on us."

"That's true."

"We shall have to think it out, that's all. Let's get along to class now."

The Terrible Three entered the Shell class-room. The Form were in their places, and Mr. Linton, the master, frowned a little as the chums came in. Then he started as he caught sight of the face of Tom Merry.

"What's the matter, Merry?"

"Nothing, sir," said Tom.

"You are looking very white."

"I—I'm all right, sir."

But even as Tom spoke bravely a twitter of pain passed over his face.

Mr. Linton was a severe master, but a conscientious one. He came towards Tom Merry with a look of concern on his face.

"If you are not well, Merry, you can be excused lessons," he said. "You certainly look very strange. Is it sea-sickness again?"

"No, sir," said Tom Merry, with a faint smile.

Mr. Linton glanced at his hands, which Tom was unconsciously twisting in the pain that racked them.

"What is the matter with your hands, Merry?"

"Nothing, sir."

"Show them to me."

Tom Merry held out his hands.

The Form master's brow grew very dark as he looked at them. The traces of a savage castigation were very plain.

"Who has done this, Merry?"

"It is all right, sir."

"It is impossible that Mr. Railton would cane you like this."

"He did not, sir."

"Now, Merry, I can see that you wish to shield the brutal person who has used you like this," said Mr. Linton. "But I must insist upon you telling me. You have been used in a brutal and outrageous way."

Tom Merry turned crimson.

He could see that Mr. Linton believed that he had been ill-used by some bullying senior, and he wanted the bully's name so that he could punish him. When he learned that the bully was Mr. Ratcliff, the senior master on board, the situation would be rather awkward, after the expressions he had used in the presence of all the Shell.

"Come, Merry, answer my question!"

"I have been caned, sir."

"I can see that, Merry. But by whom?"

"By Mr. Ratcliff, sir."

Mr. Linton started and coloured.

"I—I did not think of that," he said. "I— But you are not in a state for lessons, Merry. You are excused for the afternoon. You may go on deck."

"Thank you, sir."

Tom Merry quitted the class-room. He was glad to be relieved of the afternoon's work. He was upset and aching from the caning, and in no condition for any kind of study.

He went on deck. He caught a glimpse of Mr. Ratcliff's thin figure going towards the second-class smoke-room aft, now used as a class-room for the Fifth Form. Mr. Ratcliff was Form master of the Fifth. Tom Merry was careful to avoid the New House master, and he went up to the boat-deck and sat down in a chair in the shadow of a boat.

The Condor was deserted above decks save by the seamen and the officers on the bridge. The steamer was moving at an easy rate through a sunny sea, and there was scarcely a cloud in the sky. The sea rippled and gleamed round the great ship, and a summer breeze blew across the wide waters. All Nature smiled that glorious day, but Tom Merry's face was dark.

The voyage had begun happily enough, but now it bade fair to terminate in general discomfort, owing to Mr. Ratcliff's love of interference and domineering.

At St. Jim's the man's unpleasant temper, though kept in control by awe of the Head, had often made things intolerable in his own House. Now he had full control over both Houses. And there was no doubt that the sense of power had got into his head, so to speak, and the worst had not come yet.

His old rivalry with Mr. Railton, his old bitter dislike of Tom Merry & Co., would be gratified now to the full. If matters went from bad to worse the situation would grow intolerable. And what would happen then?

"In trouble, youngster?"

Tom Merry started from a gloomy reverie and looked up. The kindly face of Mr. Green, the second mate of the Condor, was looking down upon him. The second mate was on the best of terms with the boys of St. Jim's, and Tom Merry gave him a friendly nod.

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"It's all right," he said.

Mr. Green laughed his jovial laugh.

"You don't look as if it were all right. Ay, ay, I saw that little row a while back. Longlegs is rather a cough-drop, ain't he?"

Tom Merry laughed. He knew who Mr. Green meant by the irreverent appellation of "Longlegs."

"Yes, he is rather a rotter," he agreed.

"And you have been catching it?"

"Yes."

"Discipline must be maintained," said Mr. Green, with a solemn shake of the head—"discipline must be maintained. But I dare say Longlegs— Good-afternoon, sir!" And Mr. Green turned, with a bland smile, towards Mr. Ratcliff, who was coming across the deck.

The New House master looked at him rather sourly, and then turned to Tom Merry.

Mr. Green gave a slight shrug of his broad shoulders, and then walked on.

Mr. Ratcliff fixed his eyes upon Tom Merry.

"What are you doing here, Merry?"

"Sitting down, sir."

The Housemaster's sallow cheeks went pink. He had left his Form under the charge of the German master for twenty minutes and had come up to take a turn on the boat-deck, and, to his amazement, he found Tom Merry there. His brow was very dark.

"Don't be impertinent, Merry. How comes it that you are here instead of being with the Shell at lessons?"

"Mr. Linton has excused me for the afternoon, sir."

The Housemaster looked baffled for a moment. Tom Merry's excuse was so valid that he could not possibly find fault with him.

"Why did Mr. Linton excuse you, Merry?"

"He thought I was not in a condition to work, sir."

"Because you had been caned?"

"Yes."

Mr. Ratcliff scribbled on a page of his pocket-book, tore it out and folded it, and handed it to Tom Merry.

"Take that to your Form master at once, Merry."

"Very well, sir."

Tom Merry went down to the Shell class-room with the note.

Mr. Linton looked surprised to see him, and still more surprised when he read the epistle. It ran as follows:

"Dear Mr. Linton,—I do not wish Merry to be excused any of his work.

"Yours, etc.,

"HORACE RATCLIFF."

Mr. Linton read that note through twice, with a heightened colour; then he took up his pencil and wrote on the back of it, refolded it, and handed it to Tom Merry.

"Take that to Mr. Ratcliff, Merry," he said.

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry, wondering what was in the note.

He found Mr. Ratcliff walking up and down the deck, with his thin hands clasped behind him.

Mr. Ratcliff looked at him sharply.

"What have you come here for again, Merry?"

"Mr. Linton has sent you this note, sir."

"Give it to me."

Mr. Ratcliff opened the note, and his face went almost green as he read the following polite communication:

"Dear Mr. Ratcliff,—During school hours I should not allow even the Head, if he were here, to interfere between my pupils and myself. Merry is excused for the afternoon.

"Yours, etc.,

"J. LINTON."

Mr. Ratcliff read the note and then looked at Tom Merry. He felt baffled. He had overstepped the limit in this direction at least, and had been brought up very sharply.

He screwed the note tightly in his hand and tossed it over the rail into the sea; then he turned on his heel, without another glance or word to Tom Merry.

CHAPTER 4.

Fatty Wynn is Disappointed.

"TOM MEWWY!"

Tom Merry looked up. He was reclining in a deckchair, reading the "Magnet," when the swell of St. Jim's tapped him on the shoulder.

"If you are not particularly intewested in your weadin', Tom Mewwy, I should like to speak to you."

"Well, as a matter of fact, I am," said Tom Merry.

"Couldn't you go and speak to Figgins?"

"Weally—"

"Never mind," said Tom Merry, laughing, and laying his book down on his knee. "What is it, Gussy? I can see by your expression that it's a matter of the most awful and fearful importance."

"Yaas, wathah! It's about that wottah Watcliff."

"Go on!"

"It's absolutely impossible for us to stand him, and I have thought of a wathah bwiliant ideah of pullin' him off his perch."

"You want to turn pirate again, I suppose?"

"Nothin' of the sort. It is a bwiliant ideah, and it flashed into my bwain all of a sudden."

"Well, what is it?"

"That is what I am goin' to explain at a general meetin'," said D'Arcy. "I am callin' a meetin' of the Lower Forms for the purpose. All the Fourth Form and the Shell are requested to be in the Fourth Form class-woom—othahwise known as the second-class dinin'-woom—at five o'clock pweicely."

"What for?"

"For me to explain the bwiliant ideah that flashed into my bwain."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Is anybody coming?"

"Yaas, wathah! Both Forms."

"I mean, have they promised to come?"

"I pweesume there is no doubt about their turnin' up on an occasion like this," said D'Arcy, with dignity. "The posish is gwoin' intowable. I shall jolly soon bwing the wottah down off his perch, Tom Merry, if I am pwopahly backed up by the juniahs. I twust that the pain of that feahful lickin' has subsided."

"Yes, rather," said Tom Merry. "It's all right now. I'll come to the meeting."

"Good! Of course, you will wemembah that it is I who am callin' the meetin', and you will not start makin' speeches."

"Right-ho!" laughed Tom Merry. "You shall do all the spechifying, Gussy, and you can keep it up as long as the fellows can stand it."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"But you will be responsible for all casualties. That's understood."

"Pway don't wot, deah boy! I—"

"This is a jolly good story!" said Tom Merry, opening his "Magnet" again.

"Is it weally?"

"Yes, and I should enjoy it much more if silly asses wouldn't come along talking to me."

Tom Merry buried his face in his book before Arthur Augustus could reply.

D'Arcy screwed his eyeglass into his eye, and surveyed the hero of the Shell for a moment, and then strolled along the deck. He was not quite sure whether Tom Merry meant anything or not by his last remark. But there was no time to go into the matter now. He had to let it be known that a meeting of the juniors was being held.

Fatty Wynn was leaning on the rail, gazing at the sea, with a meditative look on his face. D'Arcy tapped him on the shoulder, and Wynn looked round.

"Will you be in the Fourth Form class-woom at five o'clock pweicely, deah boy?" said D'Arcy.

Fatty Wynn's eyes glistened.

"Yes, rather! I was just thinking that that would be a ripping idea!"

"Were you, weally?"

"Yes. We haven't much for tea, you know, and I get so hungry this September weather. What is there to eat?"

"To eat?"

"Yes. I suppose you're not going to stand a feed without something to eat, are you?"

"Who's talking about a feed?"

"You are, aren't you? What the dickens are we to meet in the Fourth Form room for if there isn't a feed on?" exclaimed Fatty Wynn indignantly.

"It's not a feed; it's a meetin'."

"Oh!" said Fatty Wynn, and he turned away and gazed at the sea again.

"I say, Wynn, it's a wathah important meetin', and you had better come," said D'Arcy. "Tom Mewwy is comin'."

"Is he? Will there be any refreshments?"

"I don't see—"

"You can't expect fellows to fag along to the Form-room unless refreshments are provided. It's asking too much."

"It's a most important occasion."

"Yes; but will there be—"

"We are goin' to deal with the tywant!"

"The what?"

"The tywant! We are goin' to pull him off his perch!"

"Good! But will there be any refreshments?"

"Pewwaps I might manage to pprovide some light wewfreshments."

"If that's a go, I'll come."

"Suppose we say lemonade and buns," said D'Arcy, who was beginning to think that this meeting would hardly be a success if only Tom Merry attended it.

"Well, you might put in some cake, too."

"Vewy well."

"Lemonade, buns, and cake?" said Fatty Wynn, with a businesslike air.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Good! I'll come!"

"Vewy well. The meetin' is fixed for five pweicely."

"I'll tell you what I'll do, D'Arcy, to help you make it a success. If you like to give me the tin, I'll do the shopping for you. I'm a pretty good customer at the buffet, and I can get good terms for quantities."

"But we shan't want vewy gweat quantities," said D'Arcy, realising that if he placed himself in the hands of the obliging Fatty the meeting would soon change its character and become a feed instead.

"Won't you?" said the New House junior. "You say this is a general meeting to take in the whole of the Lower Forms?"

"The whole of the Fourth and the Shell. We don't want Third Form youngsters. They are not old enough to undah-take the wesponsibility of buckin' up against the Watcliff wottah."

"Well, the Fourth and Shell will make over forty. Say, a bottle of lemonade and a bun each—needn't provide the cake for the lot, you know. Get a cake for me, and I'll explain, that there isn't enough to go round."

"Yaas, but—"

"Oh, if you'd rather serve it round, I'll calculate how much you will want."

"But I wouldn't wathah—"

"Very well, then. Say, a six-pound cake; that will be enough for me, and a slice or two over for Figgins and Kerr. Now, about forty bottles of lemonade, or, say, fifty, as the cake is certain to make me thirsty—"

"Weally—"

"Fifty bottles of lemonade. But it's no good being mean about it, Gussy. In for a penny, in for a pound, you know. Say, sixty bottles, and then every fellow can be sure of having a swig. Sixty bottles of lemonade, at three-pence each, will be one hundred and eighty pence—that's fifteen shillings—"

"Bai Jove!"

"Forty buns—or, say, fifty—or perhaps it would be better to have exactly as many buns as bottles of lemonade. What do you think?"

"I weally think—"

"Very well; sixty buns, then. Sixty buns, a penny each, is five bob. That runs you into a pound for the meeting, and jolly cheap, too, considering. Then there will be the cake and some jam-tarts for me—"

"Jam-tarts!"

"Not unless you wish, of course; but I don't see how I can attend a meeting, and make all the arrangements, without having a bit of a feed for compensation. A cake and a dozen jam-tarts, and a few cream puffs—say, five bob for my little lot, and you'll do the whole lot on twenty-five bob."

D'Arcy screwed his monocle into his right eye and stared at Fatty Wynn.

He was somewhat careless with money himself, but not quite so careless with it as Fatty Wynn appeared to be—with another fellow's cash.

"Weally, Wynn—"

"Now, that's the lot," said Fatty Wynn. "Five bob for a snack for me, five bob for the buns, and fifteen bob for the lemonade—sixty bottles. Perhaps it would be better to have some ginger-beer for the sake of variety. Instead of sixty lemonades we'll have forty each of lemonade and ginger-beer."

"But—"

"That will come to a little more, but it will please the fellows. Now that's settled, and if you'll hand over the cash I'll see to it in a jiffy."

"Weally, deah boy—"

"I shall get a discount from Mrs. Price for the quantity, you know, and I'll expend that in pies. I'm very fond of pies, and, on second thoughts, I ought to have something more substantial before I start eating tarts and buns and drinking ginger-beer. Don't you think so?"

"Pewwaps so; but—"

"I can do the lot on twenty-seven bob," said Fatty Wynn, "and, considering the meeting you'll get, it's cheap at the price."

"Vewy pwob, but—"

"Hand over the cash. If you make it an even thirty

bob I can work in tarts all round. You've only got to say the word and it's tarts all round."

"Yaas, but—"

"May as well see to it at once. I'll guarantee that the tarts are fresh. Mrs. Price knows better than to try to take me in with stale tarts—or buns, either. Shall I go at once?"

"Yaas, if you like."

"No good going without the cash."

Arthur Augustus felt in his pocket and sorted out four pennies, which he placed in the palm of the amazed Fatty Wynn.

Fatty stared at them.

"What's that?" he gasped.

"Fourpence, deah boy."

"Fourpence!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"What's it for?"

"The weweshments."

"The—the refreshments—"

"Yaas—one bottle of lemonade and one bun. That is enough for you, deah boy, and the othahs won't want anythin'!"

Fatty Wynn looked at D'Arcy, and looked at the fourpence. Then he looked at the School House swell again. He was greatly inclined to hurl the fourpence into the sea, and Arthur Augustus down the hatchway. But he reflected that if the feast he had sketched out was not to come off, one bottle of lemonade and one bun would be better than nothing.

Before he could quite decide what to say, D'Arcy had strolled on, leaving Fatty with his hand still outstretched, the four pennies in the palm.

The fat junior pulled himself together and slowly made his way to the tuckshop on the upper deck amidships.

CHAPTER 5.

D'Arcy Spoils the Photograph!

"MANNERS!"

"Get out of the way!"

"Mannahs, deah boy—"

"Stand aside!"

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"You shrieking idiot!" yelled Manners, who was standing on the promenade deck focusing his camera. "Can't you see you're in the way?"

"I may be in the way, or I may not be in the way," said D'Arcy, in his most stately manner, "but that doesn't excuse this beastly wudeness."

"Will you move?"

"Undah the circs I decline to move. I wegard you as a wude beast."

"You're standing in the way of my view," said Manners, with measured accents. "I'm trying to take that smack over there while I've got a chance. Will you get out of the way or shall I come and massacre you?"

"I should uttably wefuse to be massacred," said the swell of the School House frigidly.

"You screaming ass!"

"I wefuse to be alluded to as a scweamin' ass! I considah—"

"Kill him, somebody!" said the unhappy Manners. "I'm just in the right spot for a good snap, and the villain's in my way!"

Monty Lowther rose from his deckchair with the air of one who was making a great effort for the sake of friendship, and seized Arthur Augustus by his collar and jerked him aside.

"Lowthah, you wottah, welease me at once!" spluttered the swell of St. Jim's. "Do you hear me, you wescally wude wottah! I insist upon bein' immediately weleased. You are wumplin' my collah!"

"I'll rumple your neck if you don't keep quiet!" said Lowther.

Manners was looking through his viewfinder again. The Condor was gliding smoothly along over a sunny sea, and the smack astern was in an excellent position for a snap. But Arthur Augustus was not so easily disposed of. His dignity was at stake. He gave a mighty wrench and tore himself away, leaving his collar in the grip of Monty Lowther. He loomed up again just in front of the camera as Manners snapped, bursting with indignation.

"Lowthah, I considah you a wude beast. I considah Mannahs a wude beast. I considah Goah a wude, cacklin' beast! I considah—"

The rest of Arthur Augustus' considerations remained for ever unknown, for Manners placed his camera on the deck and charged at him like a Spanish bull at a matador.

D'Arcy was bowled over, and he went rolling along the deck, with the indignant photographer sprawling over him.

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"Go it!" shouted Lowther. "Sock it to him!"

"Mannahs, if you do not immediately welease me I shall give you a feahful thwashin'!"

"Cave!" muttered Gore.

Mr. Linton and Mr. Lathom were coming towards the scene from different quarters. They arrived on the spot at the same time.

"Manners!" rapped out the master of the Shell.

"D'Arcy!" said little Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth. "D'Arcy, get up immediately!"

"How can I get up when this beastly wottah is sittin' on my chest?"

"Dear me!" said Mr. Lathom, peeping through his spectacles. "That is very true. Manners, please—er—get off D'Arcy's chest immediately!"

"Certainly, sir," said Manners.

He rose to his feet, and Arthur Augustus sat up. He felt for his eyeglass and screwed it into his eye. He felt for his collar to put it straight, but his collar was gone.

"Mannahs! Lowthah! I wegard you as a pair of wuff beasts!"

"What is this nonsense about?" asked Mr. Linton.

"Don't let it occur again, Manners!"

"Yes—er—certainly!" said little Mr. Lathom. "Don't—er—let it occur again, D'Arcy!"

The matter would have ended there, but the noise had attracted the attention of Mr. Ratcliff. He came up just as Mr. Linton finished speaking.

"Another disgraceful scene of hooliganism!" he said, frowning darkly. "The ship will be turned into a pandemonium soon if this is not put down!"

"If you please, sir," said D'Arcy, "I wathah object to bein' chawactewised as a hooligan!"

"Silence, D'Arcy!"

"Certainly, sir; but I stwongly object."

"Have you punished D'Arcy, Mr. Lathom?"

"Er—no!" said Mr. Lathom, blinking. "I have not—er—punished D'Arcy—as I think a little—er—horseplay does not requir—er—"

"I am sorry to differ from you. You will take a hundred lines, D'Arcy!"

"Weally, Mr. Watcliff—"

"Silence! Have you punished Manners, Mr. Linton?"

The master of the Shell frowned. He was not so meek and mild as little Mr. Lathom, and he did not like Mr. Ratcliff's tone. At the same time, it was impossible to dispute the authority of the senior master.

"No," he said shortly. "I have reprimanded Manners, and I consider that is quite sufficient to meet the case."

"I have to dissent from your opinion. My opinion is that these disgraceful scenes of horseplay and hooliganism cannot be put down too strictly. The repose of St. James' Collegiate School was frequently disturbed by these absurd House disputes, but I intend a new regime to obtain on board the Condor while I am in charge. Manners, you will take a hundred lines!"

Manners' eyes gleamed.

"I will take lines from my Housemaster or my Form master, sir," he said.

"Manners!"

"You are neither, and you have no right to give me lines!" said Manners.

"Another word, Manners, and I will give you a flogging instead of lines!" said Mr. Ratcliff, his lips trembling with anger. "Mr. Linton, I expect you to keep the boys of your Form in a better state of discipline."

Mr. Linton flushed.

"The discipline of my Form was never questioned by Dr. Holmes," he said. "My boys have never been impertinent to a master whom they respect!"

It was Mr. Ratcliff's turn to flush, and his sallow face went crimson. Mr. Linton was very angry, or he would not have spoken so pointedly. The senior master was at a loss for a moment.

"I shall expect those lines from Manners," he said at length. "If they are not forthcoming, I shall conclude that he is supported in his insolence by one whose duty it is to curb it."

And he walked away.

The juniors felt inclined to cheer Mr. Linton, but the master of the Shell was not the kind of master to cheer. His face was red and annoyed. He spoke snappishly to Manners:

"Manners, you will do the lines as Mr. Ratcliff has directed you."

"Yes, sir," said Manners submissively.

"And you will always obey Mr. Ratcliff's orders."

"I will if you tell me to, sir."

"Well, I do tell you to," said Mr. Linton, his face relaxing a little. "I quite understand your feelings in the matter, but it is the duty of both boys and men to submit to constituted authority, even wher it is most galling."

"Very well, sir."
 And Mr. Linton and Mr. Lathom walked away together, talking in low tones
 Arthur Augustus slowly smoothed his ruffled hair.
 "It's rough on Linton," said Lowther. "It's rough on all of us. Why couldn't Ratty keep sick all the time?"
 "I say, Lowther——"
 "My photograph's ruined," grunted Manners, "and the smack's only a speck now. I'd give twopence to anybody who'd throw Gussy overboard!"
 "Weally, Mannahs!"
 "Oh, scat!"
 "I wefuse to scat, whatever you mean by that widiculous expression. Lowthah, will you have the kindness to return me my collah, or shall I give you a feahful thwashin'?"
 "I think you'd better give me the fearful thrashing," said Lowther. "I've dropped your collar over the rail."
 "Weally, Lowthah——"

"Oh, if Tom's coming we may amble in!" said Lowther. "Couldn't you manage to get your speech over before the meeting starts? That would be much more comfy for all concerned."

Arthur Augustus did not deign to reply to this impertinent question. He went below in search of a clean collar, and then resumed his canvassing for the mass meeting in the Fourth Form classroom.

CHAPTER 6.
 More Meetings!

AS Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came out of his cabin, arrayed in a clean collar of absolute spotless white, he almost ran into Figgins.
 Figgins, the long-legged chief of the New House juniors, stopped at once.
 "Hallo, Gussy! Are you coming to the meeting?"



D'Arcy was bowled over, with the indignant Manners sprawling over him. "Cave!" muttered Gore. Mr. Linton and Mr. Lathom were coming towards the scene from different quarters. "Manners!" rapped out the master of the Shell. "D'Arcy!" exclaimed Mr. Lathom, master of the Fourth.

"The buttonhole had burst and it was torn, so it wouldn't have been much use to you," said Lowther comfortingly.
 "I wogard you as a wottah!"
 "Go hon!" said Monty Lowther, reseating himself in the deckchair and stretching out his long legs. "You surprise me!"
 "I should thwash you both," said D'Arcy, "but the weathah is too hot; and, besides, I have othah fish to fwy at the pwsent moment. I am callin' a most important meetin' in the Fourth Form woom at five o'clock, and I want all the Shell to come."
 "What's the wheeze?"
 "I have a brilliant ideah for pulling that wottah Watcliff down off his giddy perch, you know. It flashed into my bwain all of a sudden."
 "Will you want to talk?"
 "Of course, I shall address the meetin'."
 "Then you can count me out," said Lowther. "Life's too short to waste any of it listening to your speechifying!"
 "I wogard that remark as wude!"
 "Go and get a clean collar."
 "I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort. Are you wottahs comin' to the meetin'? Tom Mewwy is comin', and Fatty Wynn."

D'Arcy stared at him.
 "What meetin', Figgins?"
 "I'm calling a meeting to discuss the situation and to talk over a plan I've formed for pulling the Ratcliff rotter down off his perch," explained Figgins. "I want the whole of the Fourth Form and the Shell to come."
 "I am afwaid it will be impos——"
 "Oh, you'd better come! Everybody will be there!"
 "I am afwaid it will be impos, as I am myself callin' a meetin' at the same time," said Arthur Augustus, surveying Figgins suspiciously through his eyeglass. "It looks to me as if you are twyin' to bone my ideah!"
 "Your ideah! Why, it's my ideah!"
 "Nothin' of the sort! I have been collectin' fellows for the meetin' for the last half-hour!" said D'Arcy indignantly.
 "I wathah considah——"
 "Look here, Gussy——"
 "Tom Mewwy and Fatty Wynn and Mannahs and Lowthah are comin' to my meetin'."
 "Kerr and Pratt and French and Kerruish are coming to mine."
 "You had bettah give up the ideah of holdin' a meetin'!"

Figgins, and come to mine, instead. I am goin' to explain—"

"Rats!"

"If you say wats to me, Figgins—"

"You can go and eat coke!"

"I'm holding a meetin', Figgins, in the Fourth Form, and all othah meetin's are cheap imitations, and not genuine. I am holdin' my meetin' at five o'clock!"

"Curious; I'm holding mine at five o'clock."

"In the Form-woom?"

"In the Form-room."

"You will have to give way, Figgins, as I had the ideah first. Besides, I have a wippin' plan to bring Watchcliff down off his beastlay perch, you know."

"What is it?"

"I shall explain that to the geneval meetin'."

"You can go and explain it to the fishes in the North Sea," said Figgins. "I've got a plan to explain to the meeting."

"I shall wefuse—"

"Oh, scat!"

And Figgins walked away.

Arthur Augustus glared after him through his eyeglass, and then went on beating up recruits for his meeting. Figgins was doing the same.

It was unfortunate that both had fixed upon the same time and place for the meeting, but the coincidence was easily explained. They wanted the meeting to take place before tea, which was at six. And the Form-room was the only available place where they felt that they would be safe from the lynx eyes of Mr. Ratcliff.

Figgins strolled into the tuckshop, or the buffet, as it was called, amidships on the upper deck—the next above the main-deck. Fatty Wynn was there, and half a dozen

other juniors. Fatty Wynn was looking in a contemplative way at an empty lemonade glass and a plate upon which two small crumbs were discernible. He looked round as Figgins tapped him on the shoulder.

"Coming to the meeting?" asked Figgins.

"D'Arcy's meeting?"

"No, my meeting!"

"You holding a meeting, too?"

"I'm calling a general meeting of the Fourth Form and the Shell at five, in the Form-room," said Figgins, with some dignity.

"So is Gussy."

"Never mind Gussy! Are you coming? I suppose you are going to back me up?"

"Yes, I suppose so," said Fatty Wynn, hesitatingly. "I've been rather done by D'Arcy. He said there would be refreshments at the meeting, and when I made him come to the point his precious refreshments came down to a bun and a bottle of lemonade, and he gave me fourpence to get them. I thought I might as well have them here, and I've had them. He led me to expect a feed on tarts and buns and cake, and it was a disappointment."

"Hard cheese," said Figgins sympathetically.

"Yes, it was, rather. I'm bound to attend the meeting, but if you're giving one the same time and place I shall back you up!"

"Good!"

"Will there be any refreshments?"

"Certainly. Every fellow coming to the meeting will be entitled to—"

"Now you're talking."

"To stand himself anything he can pay for—"

"Oh!"

"And there will be absolutely no restrictions. Anybody who likes, too, can stand a bottle of ginger-beer for the chairman—that's me."

"Oh!"

"I'm glad you're going to back me up, Fatty, and I hope you'll have a nice feed. I say, Blake, are you coming to the meeting?"

"First I've heard of it," said Jack Blake.

"I'm calling it at five, in the Form-room, to discuss our grievances—"

"I wefuse to allow you to state anything of the sort, Figgins," said D'Arcy, coming into the tuckshop. "I'm callin' the meetin' at five—"

"Oh, cheese it!"

"I wefuse to cheese it! I'm callin' the meetin' to discuss a bwiliant plan that has flashed into my bwain for stoppin' Mr. Watchcliff's funny twicks!"

"Look here, Gussy—"

"I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort. I wepeat—"

"I tell you—"

"Pway let me finish—"

"The trouble is that you never will finish—"

"Are you two chaps going to keep on like a couple of giddy gramophones?" asked Jack Blake. "Because if you're not getting tired, I am!"

"It's like this, Blake—"

"It's pwecisely like this, deah boy—"

"I don't want to know what it's like. If you're both anxious to be in the Form-room at five o'clock you can come along to my meeting—"

"Eh?"

"What?"

"I'm calling a meeting at five o'clock in the Fourth Form room," explained Blake, "for the purpose of discussing the situation and propounding a plan I have formed for putting Ratty in his place."

"Bai Jove!"

"Herries and Dig and Walsh and Reilly are coming—"

"There'll be a row if you start holding a meeting while I'm holding mine," said Figgins warmly.

"Yaas, wathah! And there will be a wov if either of you start holdin' a meetin' while I'm holdin' mine!"

"Rats! I tell you—"

"Hallo, Blake! Hallo, Figgins!" said Skimpole, the brainy member of the Shell, coming into the tuckshop and blinking at the excited juniors through his spectacles. "I'm glad to see you, and you, too, D'Arcy! I want to speak to you—"

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

"That is almost rude, Blake! I want to speak to you very particularly. I am calling a meeting—"

"Eh?"

"Of the Fourth Form and the Shell—"

"What?"

"To be held in the Form-room at five, to discuss—
Ow! What's the matter? Stop shoving me, Figgins—
don't push me like that, Blake! Let go my collar, D'Arcy!
Oh! Leggo! Ow!"

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But they did not let go, and the latest caller of meetings was bumped out of the tuckshop and bumped on to the deck, and left there in a state of complete bewilderment.

CHAPTER 7.

A Mixed Meeting!

"FIVE o'clock!" said Tom Merry, rising from his deck-chair and putting away his "Magnet." "Time for the giddy meeting!"

He crossed to where Lowther was leaning back in his chair, with his yachting-cap over his face, and shook him.

Lowther yawned and sat upright.

"What's wanted?"

"You are! We're going to the meeting."

"Oh, blow the meeting!"

"May as well go along. I hear that most of the Shell are going, and we don't want to be left out. Besides, we ought to keep those kids in order!"

"Something in that," said Lowther, getting up. "Are you coming, Manners, old man?"

Manners was leaning on the rail. He straightened up, with a grunt.

"Yes, I suppose so. Something's got to be done about Ratty, but I don't believe in trusting it in the hands of those junior kids."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, I expect it will be left to us to suggest a way out of the difficulty. Let's get along, anyway."

They descended from the promenade to the upper deck, and found quite a number of juniors belonging to both Houses making their way aft to the Fourth Form room.

When they reached it they found it pretty full.

Skimpole spotted them as they entered, and came towards them.

"You have come to my meeting?" he asked

The Terrible Three stared at him.

"Your meeting, Skimmy!" said Tom Merry. "Are you holding a meeting, then?"

"Yes; I am calling a meeting of the Fourth Form and the Shell to discuss the outrageous conduct of Mr. Ratcliff, as exemplified in his act of tyranny to-day—"

"My hat! That's a strong word for caning."

"Caning!" said Skimpole, blinking through his glasses.

"Who's talking about a caning?"

"What are you talking about, then?"

"About Mr. Ratcliff's wholly unjustifiable act of tyranny to-day. He has had the astounding cheek to confiscate my book on Determinism—I mean the book I am writing, you know, which is destined to revolutionise thought in two hemispheres, and to—"

"Oh, ring off, Skimmy!"

"Well, he has confiscated it," said the brainy member of St. Jim's. "He found me making up my notes for the 284th chapter, and took it all away from me. What do you think of that?"

"It would serve him right to have to read it."

"Oh, really, Merry! You see, I can't get on with the book till I get my notes back. I was working at my chapter on the evolution of the idea of personal responsibility considered as a factor in the problem of—"

"Cheese it, old chap! You may know what you are talking about, but I don't! And I don't really want to!"

Skimpole nodded.

"Yes, I was thoughtless to suppose that your naturally feeble intellect could take any interest in such matters, which are far beyond your comprehension," he agreed.

"But, at least, you are sufficiently intelligent to understand that I cannot get on with my work till I get my notes back."

"Does it matter?" asked Manners, yawning.

"I am surprised at the question, Manners. When my work is published, civilisation will take a great leap forward. Meanwhile, the clock of human progress is stopped. As I have pointed out in my seventy-ninth chapter—"

"Bai Jove! Deah boys, I'm glad to see you have awvived."

"I am speaking to Merry, D'Arcy."

"So am I, deah boy!"

"You are interrupting me. I was explaining that in my seventy-ninth chapter, dealing with the great truths of Determinism, I point out that—"

"Oh, wing off, Skimpole, old chap! We haven't time for all that wot now. So you've come to the meetin', Tom Mewwy?"

"Well, I've come to a meeting," said Tom Merry, with some stress upon the indefinite article. "I don't quite know whose meeting it is."

"Mine, deah boys! Come up to the fwont; I am just goin' to make my speech."

"There are some occasions," said Lowther, "when, without being unduly modest, a fellow would rather take a back seat. This is one of them."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Hallo!" exclaimed Blake, coming up. "I'm glad you chaps have come. I wanted the Shell to be represented at my meeting—"

"Your meeting, Blake!"

"Certainly!"

"Oh, don't talk wot, deah boy! Tom Mewwy has come to my meetin'—"

"Now, look here, Gussy—"

"Gentlemen of the Fourth Form—"

It was Figgins' voice ringing through the room and dominating the ceaseless buzz of talk. Everyone turned to look at Figgins. He was mounted upon a form, and the Co. were ranged on either side of him. There were a considerable number of New House juniors supporting their chief.

"Hear, hear!" shouted Kerr and Wynn.

"Gentlemen of the Fourth Form of St. Jim's, and you Shell chaps, we are now met on a solemn occasion charged with the destinies of the Lower Forms."

"Hear, hear!"

"Bai Jove! I cannot allow this! Figgins, you wottah, get down immediately! You have no wight to address my meetin'!"

"Gentlemen, the time has come when we cannot—"

"Cheese it!" bawled Blake. "What do you mean by addressing my meeting, Figgins? I've called this meeting to discuss—"

"When we cannot submit any longer to the—"

"Rats!"

"Get down!"

"Go it, Figgyl!"

"Boo!"

"Cannot any longer submit to the tyranny of Ratty—"

"Hear, hear!"

"And I, therefore, call upon you—"

"I wefuse to give my permish—"

"Get down!"

"I, therefore, call upon you—"

"Yah!"

"Order!"

"I'll jolly soon have order!" exclaimed Blake. "I'm not going to have my meeting bagged under my eyes like this!"

And he rushed towards the speaker. A couple of New House juniors barred the way, and the next moment Blake was rolling on the floor, struggling desperately with Pratt and Jimson. That was more than Digby and Herries were likely to stand, of course, and they rushed to the rescue immediately. Kerr and Fatty Wynn immediately joined in, and then several other juniors on both sides. The din was terrific, and though Figgins was still talking, not a word could be heard.

Tom Merry was laughing almost hysterically. Everybody in the Form-room was either laughing, hooting, fighting, or shouting, and it was like Babel.

Kerr went down, with Digby on his chest; and Figgins, giving up the attempt to make himself heard, jumped off the form to aid his chum. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jumped on the table and waved his hand frantically for silence.

"I address the honouvable meetin'—"

"Shut up!"

"Order!"

"What I wish to point out is that Mr. Ratcliff's conduct was wholly unjustifiable. In the seventy-ninth chapter of my book—"

"Order!"

"My view of the mattah is this—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "I don't think I shall make a speech, after all. Go it, Gussy! Go it, Skimmy! Buck up, Figgins!"

The door opened, and Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, looked in. Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, was looking over his shoulder.

"Stop that fearful row!" shouted the captain of St. Jim's.

"Do you hear me? Stop that row!"

"I am addressin' the meetin'—"

"In the seventy-ninth and eightieth chapters of my book I point out—"

"Gentlemen of the Fourth—"

"Shut up!" bawled Monteith. "You'll have Mr. Ratcliff here in a moment."

The name of the senior master had some effect. The noise subsided, and most of the excited combatants separated.

"Now then," exclaimed Kildare, "what's the row about?"

"You are labouwin' undah a misappwehension, Kildare. There is no wov; this is a meetin' of the juniahs to quietly discuss—"

"You young ass!"
 "I refuse to be called a young ass, I——"
 "Shut up this row at once!" said Kildare. "If you——"
 "Thank you, Kildare," interrupted a thin, acid voice.
 "I will take the matter into my own hands."
 And Mr. Ratcliff entered the room.

CHAPTER 3.

Mr. Ratcliff Comes Down Heavy.

MR. RATCLIFF stood beside the prefects surveying the disordered scene. There was a glint in his green-grey eyes that meant trouble. Both Kildare and Monteith looked flushed and annoyed. They did not like having the matter taken out of their hands in this cavalier way.

An uncomfortable silence fell upon the room. The fact that the noisy meeting had been called to discuss the actions of the unpopular master added to the awkwardness of the situation.

"It seems that the juniors will never learn discipline," Mr. Ratcliff remarked in his dry, satiric voice. "What is the cause of this totally inexcusable hullabaloo?"

"If you please, sir," said Kildare firmly, "Monteith and I are dealing with the matter."

"I am dealing with it now, Kildare."

"We are the head prefects of the two Houses, and quite capable of doing our duty, sir," said the captain of the school undauntedly. "I think the matter should be left in our hands."

"I disagree with you, Kildare."

"No other master at St. Jim's would bring the prefects into contempt by a public slight like this," flashed out Kildare.

"I do not wish to argue the matter with you."

"I agree with you, Kildare," said Monteith, who had at one time been very "thick" with the New House master, but much less so since a friendship had grown up between him and Kildare. "I think——"

"You need not tell me what you think, Monteith," said Mr. Ratcliff coldly. "I have come upon a scene of disgraceful noise and disorder. I shall deal with it myself, that is all. Boys——"

There was a perceptible hiss at the back of the room.

Mr. Ratcliff paused, and his sallow face went scarlet.

"What boy was that?" he rapped out savagely.

There was no reply to the question, but the hiss was repeated from several quarters at once.

The Housemaster looked round him.

"Reilly, you hissed?"

The Irish junior hesitated for a moment.

"Sure, and I did!" he replied frankly.

"You will take two hundred lines——"

"Faith, and I——"

"Take three hundred lines."

"Shame!" came a voice at the back of the crowd of juniors, and a murmur followed.

Mr. Ratcliff's eyes seemed to glare.

"Who called out?" he demanded harshly.

"Shame!"

"Lowther, that was you!"

"Yes, sir," said Monty Lowther, in a negligent, imperturbable manner which was wholly his own. "Quite so, sir."

"You—you dare to say——"

"Yes, sir."

"You will take five hundred lines, Lowther."

"Certainly, sir."

"And every boy concerned in this disrespectful disturbance," said Mr. Ratcliff, "will take one hundred lines, and bring them to me before bed-time this evening," said the New House master harshly.

The juniors exchanged fierce glances. That sentence meant the loss of an evening for all of them; it meant weary writing and re-writing instead of their usual amusements. There was a hiss again.

"And in future," said Mr. Ratcliff, "meetings in the Fourth Form room are prohibited. I shall look to the prefects to see this order carried out."

"Meetings in the Form-rooms are always allowed at St. Jim's, sir," said Kildare coldly.

"Possibly; but they will not be allowed on board the Condor."

"Dr. Holmes would not approve——"

"You will please refrain from passing any opinion on my measures, Kildare. Your duty is to see them carried out."

Kildare's eyes blazed. Although the best-tempered fellow in the world, he had a hot Irish nature, and was peculiarly irritated by the small, pecking ways of Mr. Ratcliff.

"I do not consider that my duty!" he exclaimed.

"If you are to remain a prefect, Kildare, you will obey my orders, and carry out my instructions."

"I have no desire to remain a prefect under your directions, sir," said Kildare. "I am perfectly willing to resign."

"And I am at one with Kildare in this matter," said Monteith promptly. "If Kildare resigns, I resign also."

"You had better leave the room, I think," said Mr. Ratcliff harshly.

The two prefects walked out without a word.

"Let there be no repetition of this scene," said Mr. Ratcliff harshly. "You will disperse immediately, and write your lines."

And he followed the prefects.

"Shame!"

"Rats!"

Mr. Ratcliff heard the words distinctly, but he felt that it was better to affect to hear nothing.

Tom Merry closed the door behind him with unnecessary violence, and there was a buzz in the room at once.

"The rotter!"

"The beast!"

"The tyrant!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Who says mutiny??"

"I do!"

"And I!"

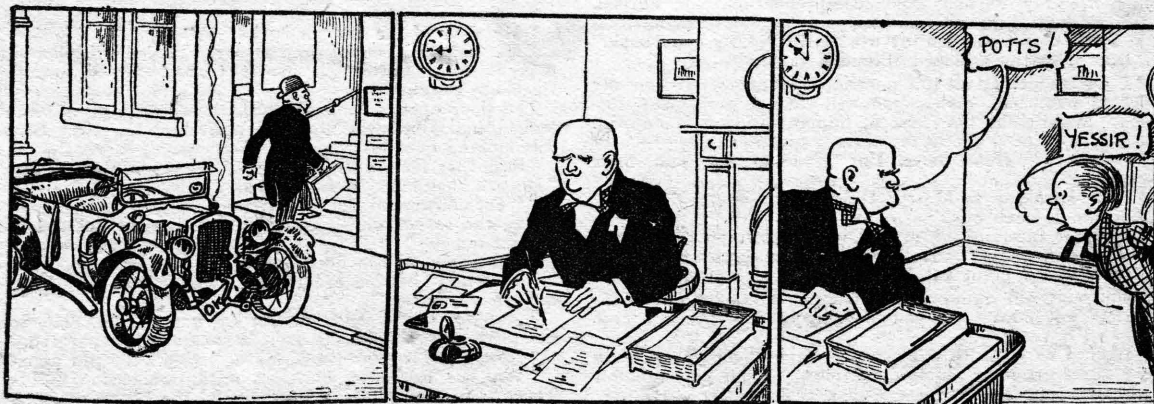
"Hold on!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "I've got an idea——"

"This meeting was called for me to explain ideas on the subject," said Figgins warmly.

"Rot!" said Blake emphatically. "This meeting was called by me to explain my views on the matter, and——"

"Bai Jove! As a mattah of fact, this meetin' was called by me to——"

Potts, the Office Boy!



"Oh, hold on!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Don't start all that again. I've got a wheeze to make Ratty sit up, in a way he can't touch us for."

"Well, in that case, we'll give you a chance," said Blake. "Two minutes for Tom Merry. Two minutes is quite enough."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Too much for a mouldy School House wheeze," said Figgins. "Make it one minute, and keep him up to time."

"Shut up, Figgins—"

"Rats!"

"I say, listen to me," said Tom Merry appealingly. "It's a ripping wheeze to make him sing small, and make him look a silly ass, and he can't touch us."

"Go on, Tommy!"

"On the ball!"

"We've all got a fearful heap of lines to do—"

"We know that!"

"We've got to hand them in before bed-time—"

"We know that, too!"

"But Ratty didn't specify what lines we were to write—"

"Oh, any old lines would do!" said Blake.

"Yes, and that's where my idea comes in. Why shouldn't we write out lines from Shakespeare?"

"We could if we liked, I suppose," said Blake. "But where the idea comes in is a mystery to me. Do you call that an idea?"

"Yes, I do—because there are some special lines in Shakespeare that fit the case, and describe Ratty to a T."

"Oh, I see!"

"Time you did. You all know the lines about the japes a fellow plays when he's dressed up in a little brief authority—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll look them out in Manners' Shakespeare, and get 'em correct, and we'll all write out those lines—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And all take 'em to Ratty before bed-time."

There was a roar of laughter in the Form-room. The joke seemed to the juniors to be excruciating. The lines were innocent enough in themselves, and Mr. Rateliff could not find fault with them without flagrant injustice. Yet their application to himself would be unmistakable.

"Is it a go?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Yes, rather! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake. "It's the best thing I've heard of for a dog's age." And he thumped Tom Merry heartily on the shoulder.

Figgins was thumping him with equal appreciation on the other shoulder, and the result was that Tom Merry staggered forward, and had to grab Arthur Augustus D'Arcy round the neck to save himself from falling.

There was a wail from the swell of the School House as his new collar crumpled up.

"Pwaw weloase me, Tom Mewwy. That's the second collah I've wuined to-day!"

"Sorry, my son. It was these two dangerous lunatics—"

"Hurrah!" shouted Blake. "It's a ripping wheeze. We'll start on the lines directly after tea."

And the meeting of the juniors broke up, the boys in remarkably high spirits, considering that each of them had a heavy imposition to write out.



CHAPTER 9.

The Imposition!

"THERE is something going forward among the juniors, I believe," Mr. Linton remarked to Mr. Railton, as they met on the promenade deck after tea.

The sun was going down towards the cliffs of England, and the dusk gathering on the wide waters of the North Sea. The sturdy figure of Captain Bolsover was statuesque on the bridge. Senior boys were sitting about the upper decks, but not a junior was to be seen.

The School House master nodded in reply to Mr. Linton's remark.

"I think so, too. How is it that none of them came on deck after tea?"

"I am afraid there is mischief afoot. Perhaps Kildare can tell us something."

The master of the Shell beckoned to Kildare, who had just come up.

The captain of St. Jim's came towards the masters.

"Do you know why the juniors are below?" asked Mr. Railton.

"They all have impositions to do, sir," said Kildare quietly.

"All of them?"

"Yes, sir; all the Shell and the Fourth."

Mr. Railton compressed his lips.

"Imposed by Mr. Rateliff, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir. They were making rather a row in the Fourth Form room, and he started on them. They've got about enough to keep them busy till bed-time."

"This is very curious," observed Mr. Linton. "The juniors did not look as if they had heavy impositions to do at tea-time. They looked quite in high spirits."

"I observed that myself," Mr. Railton remarked. "And there was a great deal of whispering, too, and chuckling."

Kildare grinned.

"I believe there is something on, sir," he replied. "But I can't quite guess what it is. The Shell are in their room, writing away, and the Fourth Form are in theirs, doing the same. I've looked in at both rooms, and they're just writing, quietly enough."

"It is very curious."

The dusk of the evening deepened, and the stars came out in the deep blue sky. The lights of the Condor gleamed through the night. From various points on the dark sea glimmered light after light, from the riding-lights of smacks to the red-and-green headlights of throbbing steamers.

Mr. Rateliff came on the promenade deck and sat down in his chair there. He was not a companionable man, and preferred to smoke his cigar by himself. It was getting towards time for the juniors' supper when Tom Merry came on deck.

The promenade of the Condor was well lighted, and as Tom Merry came up Mr. Railton glanced towards him, and clearly saw the expression on his face. He read the twinkle in the eye, and the curve of the lips aright. There was something "on."

Yet otherwise the hero of the Shell looked innocent enough. He had a number of foolscap pages in his hand, and was evidently coming to show his imposition to Mr. Rateliff to orders.

He had chosen his moment well, if he wanted an audience. Mr. Railton, Mr. Linton, and Mr. Lathom were all near

NOT FOR SALE!



the rail, a few paces from the senior master. Kildare, Darrell, and Monteith were chatting close at hand. There were a dozen other seniors within view, and Captain Bolsover was chatting with Mr. Railton. The captain of the Condor had a hint of the difficulties among the passengers, but it was no business of his, and he never ventured a remark on the matter.

Mr. Ratcliff looked up at the sight of the junior with the paper in his hand. He smiled sourly and held out his hand for it.

"Ah, this is your imposition, I suppose, Merry?"

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry demurely.

"I hope you have written it better than the last you gave in to me. Otherwise, I shall require you to write it again."

"If you please, sir—"

"I want no excuses!"

"If you please, sir, I'm not making excuses. I only wanted to say that I've written out some lines from Shakespeare, as you did not specify what the lines were to be."

"Very good," said Mr. Ratcliff.

He held up the paper in the light and read, and a change came over his face. Mr. Linton, who was looking at him, gave a start of amazement. For the senior master's brow was like a thundercloud, and his eyes were glinting with fury. For this is what Mr. Ratcliff read:

"Man, vain man,
Dressed in a little brief authority,
Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven
As make the angels weep."

Those four lines were repeated twenty-five times, to make up the required hundred.

Mr. Ratcliff did not trouble to look down the page. One glance was sufficient for him.

"So this—this is your imposition, Merry!" he said, so thickly that his words could be hardly understood.

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry cheerfully.

"You—you have dared to write this?"

The junior looked surprised.

"Isn't it written all right, sir?"

"You—you know what I mean. This unparalleled insolence!" panted Mr. Ratcliff. "This unheard-of audacity—these lines!"

"They're not my lines, sir," said Tom Merry. "I didn't make them up, sir. Shakespeare wrote them."

"You will take a thousand lines, Merry!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff.

"Yes, sir. Will the same lines do?"

"No!" thundered the New House master. "You will write a thousand lines from Æneid."

"Very well, sir."

"Now go!"

Mr. Ratcliff screwed up the paper and pitched it over the rail. Tom Merry quietly retired.

Jack Blake was the next junior to bring up his imposition.

"My lines, sir," he said, stopping before the New House master, and raising his cap.

Mr. Ratcliff, still looking very disturbed and angry, took the paper and glanced at it. Then his glance became fixed, for this is what he read:

"Man, vain man,
Dressed in a little brief authority,
Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven
As make the angels weep."

Mr. Ratcliff turned purple.

"Blake!" he thundered.

"Yes, sir. I hope the lines are all right, sir. They're from Shakespeare, sir. I thought I'd make a change from Virgil, as you didn't mention what lines they were to be."

"You will write out a thousand lines from the Æneid, Blake!"

"What for, sir?"

"For this unheard-of insolence!"

"What insolence, sir?"

"Another word, and I will cane you, Blake!"

"Very well, sir; but I think it very hard that I should have to write out a thousand lines for nothing!"

And he retired looking very much injured. Every spectator of the scene was looking on with smiles now. They could see that there was something in the impositions that threw the senior master into a rage, though they could not guess what it was.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was the next junior to appear. He had a roll of papers, with his big writing sprawling

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over them. He raised his silk hat very politely to Mr. Ratcliff, and presented the sheets.

"My imposish, sir."

Mr. Ratcliff glanced at the imposition. He read there those famous lines from Shakespeare, with which he was now growing familiar. He sprang to his feet.

"D'Arcy, this is a scheme, a plot! I can see that! Follow me to my cabin!"

"What for, sir?"

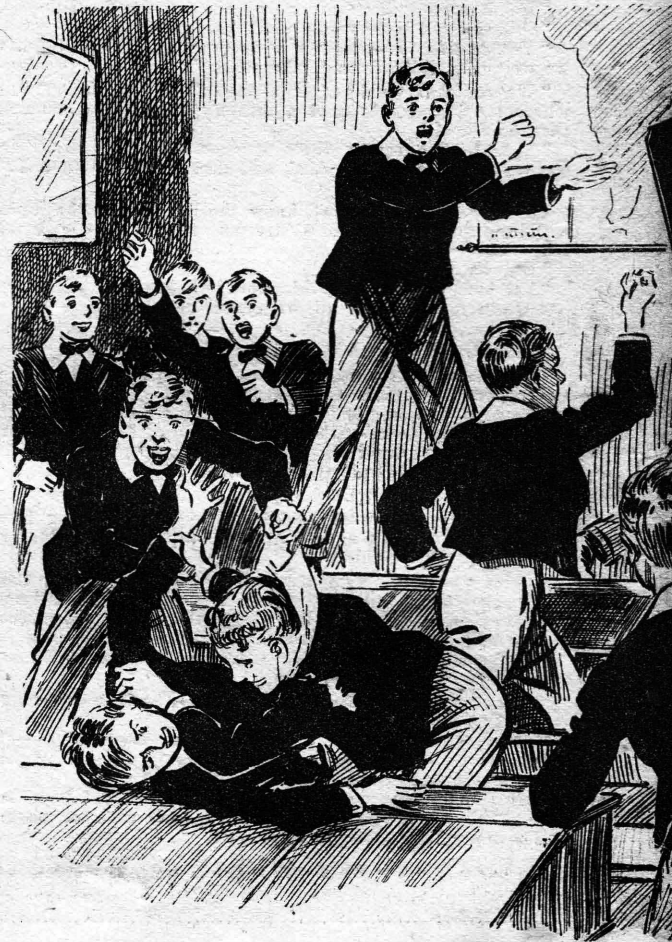
"I am going to cane you?"

"Bai Jove!"

Mr. Ratcliff stalked away to the steps. D'Arcy looked after him, and then turned to his Form master, Mr. Lathom.

"Pway excuse me, Mr. Lathom, but can you see anythin' wrong with my imposish?" he asked.

The master of the Fourth glanced at it. Then he rubbed his glasses and looked again. Then he smiled.



"I'll jolly soon have order!" exclaimed Blake. "I'm not going towards Figgins. A couple of New House juniors barred the way Jimson. School House juniors rushed to

"D'Arcy, you should not have—er—written that."

"But Mr. Ratcliff gave me the imposish, sir."

"Yes, er—but—"

"He did not specify what lines we were to write, sir."

"No, but—ha, ha, ha—I mean, ahem! Mr. Ratcliff is looking back for you. You had better follow him."

"But I am weally to be caned for nothin', sir? I wergard that as wathah wotten."

"Come, come, you must go at once."

D'Arcy, with an injured expression, followed the senior master. He left little Mr. Lathom smiling. The lines so exactly hit off the character of Mr. Ratcliff that it was impossible not to see the application and to enjoy the joke.

"What is it?" asked Mr. Railton, leaning towards the Fourth Form master. "What was there so amusing in D'Arcy's lines, Mr. Lathom?"

"It is a—a—what the boys call a wheeze, I think," said

Mr. Lathom, with a quiet chuckle. "It seems that Mr. Ratcliff did not specify what lines they were to write, and they have chosen some from Shakespeare."

"No harm in that."

"No, only in the application of the lines to the peculiar circumstances of the case!" And Mr. Lathom repeated the lines.

Mr. Railton laughed heartily.

"Ratcliff has provoked it," he said. "But the boys are acting within their rights, and if he were wiser he would take no notice of the hidden reflection upon himself. It would be far wiser to affect not to see it."

"True; but Mr. Ratcliff is not wise, I am afraid."

A loud howl was heard from below. Mr. Railton compressed his lips.

"That is D'Arcy being caned," Mr. Lathom remarked.

The School House master nodded gloomily.

"I am afraid this situation is too difficult to last," he



have my meeting bagged under my eyes like this!" He rushed the next moment he was struggling on the floor with Pratt and rescue and a terrific fight ensued.

said. "Ratcliff is the man to assume boundless authority, but not to make himself respected. His whole system is to meddle and interfere. There will be trouble."

And the master of the School House was right.

CHAPTER 10.

The Sufferers!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY received three cuts on each hand in Mr. Ratcliff's study, but he might have been receiving three hundred by the noise he made. At the first cut, he gave a terrific howl which was heard half over the steamer, and it made the senior master jump a little himself.

"Hold your noise," he exclaimed fiercely.

"Yaas, but it hurts, sir," said D'Arcy.

"Silence, D'Arcy! The other hand."

"Certainly, sir!"

D'Arcy received the second cut, and gave a yell like a Red Indian on the warpath. The New House master glared at him.

"Silence!"

"Yaas, wathah, sir! But it hurts, you know."

"The other hand again."

Another cut, and another terrific whoop. This time the sound rang fore and aft on the Condor, and was heard by the captain on the bridge, and the hands about the ship. And the same result followed every cut, till Mr. Ratcliff was finished. The New House master was in a state of simmering fury by that time. The yelling from the cabin would give everyone on board the impression that he was using the junior cruelly, and cause unpleasant remarks to be passed.

Mr. Ratcliff was spiteful by nature, but he did not wish the circumstances to become the general topic of the steamer.

He threw down the cane with a scowl.

"You may go, D'Arcy."

"Yaas, sir."

And the swell of St. Jim's quitted the cabin. Outside he met Monty Lowther, who was coming along with a paper in his hand.

"Hurt?" asked Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah! The beast laid it on very hard."

"You could be heard all over the ship."

Arthur Augustus grinned.

"Yaas, I thought so. Have you got your imposish there?"

"Yes; here it is."

"You'll get the beastlay cane, too. Watty is in a feaful wax. Mind you make a dweadful wow and keep up the game."

"Yes, rather!" grinned Lowther, and he tapped at Mr. Ratcliff's door and entered.

The master was looking very heated.

"My imposition, sir," said Lowther meekly.

He laid it on the table. Mr. Ratcliff glanced at it, and stopped only to read a couple of lines.

"Man, vain man,
Dressed in a little brief authority——"

That was enough for Mr. Ratcliff. He jumped up and grasped the cane, his face inflamed with rage.

"Hold out your hand, Lowther," he thundered.

"My—my hand, sir?" said Lowther, looking very surprised.

"Yes, your hand. Quick!"

"Isn't my impot all right, sir?"

"Will you hold out your hand, or shall I thrash you?" shouted the senior master.

"Oh, very well, sir; but I should like to know what I am being punished for!" said Monty Lowther, with the air of a martyr.

He held out his hand, and received a cut that almost justified the terrific yell he uttered the next moment. Another cut, and another fearful yell.

Mr. Ratcliff breathed hard through his nose. He would have given Lowther as many as D'Arcy, but he felt that it would not do. The boy was yelling as if he were being seriously injured, and Mr. Ratcliff thought of the looks he would have to face on deck afterwards.

"You may go, Lowther."

"Thank you, sir."

About a minute after Monty Lowther left the cabin. Herries presented himself with his impot. Mr. Ratcliff was no longer surprised when he read those famous lines. It was quite clear to him that the whole thing was a plot, and that he would see no other lines than those.

"Herries," he said, as quietly as he could, "who suggested to you to write these lines?"

Herries looked surprised. Herries was sometimes rather dense, and sometimes he chose to appear denser than he was.

"Why, it was you, sir," he replied.

"I? What do you mean?"

"Yes, sir. Don't you remember, sir, you gave us those lines because you found us rowing in the Form-room."

Mr. Ratcliff snapped his teeth.

"I do not mean that, Herries. I mean, who suggested to you these particular lines from Shakespeare?"

"Are they particular lines, sir?"

"Herries, pah; you are too utterly stupid to understand! You may go."

"Yes, sir. Is my imposition all right, sir?"

"Go!" thundered Mr. Ratcliff.

And Herries went.

Manners came in next. Manners had more lines to do than any of the others; but they were the same lines, endlessly repeated on quite a sheaf of papers. Mr. Ratcliff

gave the lines only a glance. They were very well written, in Manners' neat, legible hand, and there was no fault at all to be found with the execution.

"Manners," said Mr. Ratcliff harshly, "you deserve to be caned for this insolence, but I will pardon you if you will tell me who is at the bottom of this affair."

"What affair, sir?"

"You know perfectly well that these lines have been written in direct insolence to myself."

Manners shook his head.

"I don't see how that can be possible, sir. Shakespeare wrote those lines a long time before you were born, sir, so he can't have meant them as a reflection upon you."

Mr. Ratcliff's eyes glistened. Herries might be dense, but Manners was quizzing, and he knew it perfectly well. The master picked up the cane.

"Hold out your hand, Manners!"

"My hand, sir?" said Manners, as if he thought that Mr. Ratcliff might possibly have meant his foot.

"Obey me, Manners!"

"Certainly, sir."

Manners received a sharp cut, and immediately sent forth a yell that echoed through the steamer.

Mr. Ratcliff jumped.

"What did you do that for, Manners?"

"It hurts, sir."

"This—is this a plot!" exclaimed Mr. Ratcliff, almost foaming by his time. "This is a concerted plan among you!"

"I always yell when I'm hurt, sir," said Manners innocently. "Shall I hold out the other hand, sir?"

"Leave my cabin!"

Manners went out, and passed Figgins coming in.

Figgins nodded to him, with a grin, and came in and laid his impot on the table. Mr. Ratcliff gave it a glance.

"Figgins, was it your idea to write these lines?"

"My idea, sir?" said Figgins, to gain time.

"Yes. Or was it suggested to you by someone else?"

"Is there anything wrong with the lines, sir?"

"You know perfectly well they are intended as insolence to myself. If you were the originator of the scheme—"

"What scheme, sir?"

"This scheme to treat me with disrespect."

"Oh, sir! We always show you as much respect as we feel, sir," said Figgins.

Mr. Ratcliff picked up his cane again.

"Very well, Figgins, unless you tell me the name of the boy who proposed this plot I shall punish you."

Figgins held out his hand without a word. The cane came down with a whiz, and the cut was severe. But Figgins might have been in the jaws of a tiger by the fearful shriek he gave.

"Figgins, be silent!"

"I'm hurt!" said Figgins.

"Leave my cabin!"

Figgins went out.

Mr. Ratcliff breathed hard and mopped his perspiring forehead. He began to feel that he was getting the worst of the contest with the juniors of St. Jim's. He had power on his side, but power is not always strong against ridicule. He knew that he was already ridiculous in the eyes of all on board, and there was more to come.

Reilly of the Fourth was the next junior in. He showed up his lines, with a lurking grin on his face that was too much for the patience of Mr. Ratcliff. Without wasting words, Mr. Ratcliff seized the junior by the collar and began to lash him with the cane.

Reilly struggled and wriggled, and let out a dreadful yell at every lash.

"Ow! Wow! Ah! Mercy! Murder! Help!"

Reilly was hurt, but on ordinary occasions he would have taken his punishment without a word. His yells now were plainly part of the scheme. But Mr. Ratcliff did not know how to stop them. He could do nothing but cane the junior, and he was doing that already. He lashed harder, with savage energy, and Reilly's terrific roars sounded through the ship from end to end.

"Help! Murder! Ow!"

Mr. Ratcliff desisted at last from sheer terror, lest the junior's yells should bring half the ship's company rushing in alarm to his cabin.

"Get out of the room, Reilly!" he panted.

"Faith, and I'll be glad to!" gasped Reilly. "Sure, and I'm kilt entoirely!"

He scuttled out of the cabin.

A minute later and Kerr presented himself at the open door, with a sheet in his hand.

"My imposition, sir!"

Mr. Ratcliff glared at him.

"You can go."

"But my lines, sir!"

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"The—the juniors are excused from showing up the lines," said Mr. Ratcliff thickly. "The—the imposition is rescinded."

"Very well, sir."

And Kerr retired, grinning.

CHAPTER 11.

Tom Merry Owns Up!

"H A, ha, ha!"

"Hear us smile!"

"We've won! Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors had met in the Shell class-room. Meetings in the Fourth Form room were stopped, but nothing had been said, so far, about the Shell-room. And to that apartment, at the fore end of the upper deck—formerly the third-class dining saloon—the juniors of St. Jim's had retired to compare notes.

Those who had suffered castigation at the hands of Mr. Ratcliff were hurt. But they cared little. They had won the victory.

Mr. Ratcliff had been beaten hollow, and had shown it by rescinding the imposition. The juniors were in a jubilant mood.

"Hear us smile!" trilled Figgins. "This is where we gloat! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It was wathah a wippin' ideah of yours, Tom Mewwy, about that quotation fwom Shakespeare," observed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I weally wondah that I didn't think of it myself."

"So you would have, if you'd had the brain," said Tom Merry cheerfully.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"I don't see what you are all gloating over," said Skim-pole. "The difficulty has not been solved. We—"

"We've made Ratty sing small."

"Yes, but—"

"We've made him take back h's impots."

"I know, but—"

"We've made him look an ass to everybody on the ship." "Quite so. But we haven't recovered the notes of my book which he has confiscated, and that is far more important than—"

"Oh, never mind your book!"

"But I must mind it, Blake. It is most important. A new age is ready to dawn upon the world. A new epoch awaits the publication of my book, and I'm stopped from enlightening the world simply by this—"

"Ring off, Skimmy! There's too much of you and your book. Now, as we're all met together I may as well tell you what I called the original meeting for."

"Hold on, Blake, deah boy. I was I who called the original meetin' for the purpose of explainin'."

"Oh, cheese it!" said Figgins. "You School House chaps would talk the hind leg off a mule! The reason I called the original meeting was that—"

"Shut up, Figgins!"

"Pway wing off, deah boys!"

"Go it, Figgyl!"

"Oh, don't make such a row!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"We shall have Ratty down on us again in a minute!"

"Well, that won't worry us much," said Kerr. "We're up against Ratty now, and it's a tug-of-war between us." Kildare looked into the room. There was a smile upon the face of the handsome captain of St. Jim's.

"Bed-time, you youngsters!"

"The meeting will have to be postponed till to-morrow," said Figgins. "After morning school I'll explain—"

"Aftah mornin' school I'll explain—"

"Bed-time!" said Kildare, laughing. "Come, now, make a-move, or you'll have to go to bed in the dark!"

The juniors dispersed to their berths. The New House fellows were berthed forward on the main deck, and the School House aft. The boys had settled down into their places on board, and made themselves comfortable in their quarters. Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther had a cabin to themselves which contained four berths, one being left unoccupied and serving as a sort of cupboard for their various properties. Blake, Digby, and Herries had a little room with four berths in it, and nearly space enough to breathe, as Blake described it. But they were happy at being together, and they had christened their cabin "Study No. 6," in remembrance of their old quarters at St. Jim's.

The juniors went to bed in a jubilant mood. They had entered into a contest with the obnoxious master, and they felt that they had had the best of it.

Mr. Ratcliff had been forced to retract, and that was a very real victory. But the more thoughtful among the boys knew very well that this was only the beginning. On the morrow, in all probability, the struggle would be renewed.

"Ratty won't take this lying down," Lowther remarked,

with the air of an oracle. "There will be a row to-morrow."

"Very likely," said Tom Merry, as he kicked off his boots. "But I don't see exactly what we can do."

"I think I have an idea. You remember Figgins told us he tried to get at the name of the chap who proposed the lines from Shakespeare?"

"Yes, mine," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Well, he'll try again. He can't punish the whole of two Forms, but he can come down heavy on the ringleader, if he can find him."

"But he can't," said Manners. "There's not a chap in the Shell or the Fourth who would give Tom away. Mellish or Gore might, but they'd never dare."

"You never know what Ratty will do," said Lowther.

And the Terrible Three went to bed. In spite of the excitement of the day, and the anticipations of trouble on the morrow, they slept soundly enough, and did not awaken till the electric bell buzzed in the morning. They had become quite accustomed to their floating home, and reposed as calmly in the narrow berths as in the dormitory of the old college.

Mr. Ratcliff's face was gloomy in the dining-room the next morning when the boys of St. Jim's went in to breakfast. He had evidently not forgotten the incidents of the previous day. There was a coldness between him and the other masters. His colleagues did not approve of his course of conduct any more than the boys did. But Mr. Ratcliff was the kind of man to be rendered only more obstinate by opposition.

It was a bright September day, and after morning lessons the boys went on deck in cheerful mood. The wide North Sea lay shining round the churning steamer, dotted with craft. Tom Merry was whistling cheerily as he went up the stairs amidships, when Mr. Ratcliff called to him.

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry, turning round.

"Come into my cabin, Merry."

Tom Merry made a grimace and followed the senior master into his cabin. There was an acid look upon Mr. Ratcliff's face that put him on his guard.

"Now, Merry," said the New House master, fixing his glaring eyes upon Tom. "I have a question to put to you."

"Yes, sir."

"Yesterday the juniors were guilty of the most unexampled insolence in the selection of lines for the imposition I gave them."

"You did not specify what lines were to be written, sir, and—"

"Don't prevaricate, Merry."

Tom Merry turned red.

"I am not prevaricating," he replied hotly.

"Do you deny, then, that the lines written were intended to have a direct and disrespectful application to myself?"

Tom Merry was silent.

"Answer my question, Merry."

"Well, sir, if there was any truth in the application that is not our fault, is it?"

"I did not ask you for further insolence, Merry."

"You asked me for an answer, sir."

"Very well, we will not argue the point," said Mr. Ratcliff, in a quiet tone of concentrated anger. "What I wish to know is who was the ringleader of this matter? Who suggested writing those lines for the impositions?"

Tom Merry did not speak.

"Answer me, Merry."

"I have nothing to say, sir."

"Do you know from whom the suggestion came?"

No reply.

"Ah, I perceive that you have courage enough only to be insolent," said Mr. Ratcliff, with a bitter smile. "I suppose it was absurd of me to expect you to own up to the truth."

Tom Merry flushed scarlet.

"You have no right to ask me the question, sir. Mr. Railton would not do so."

"We are not discussing now what Mr. Railton would do. If you are afraid to own up to what is true, I have no more to say to you except that your cowardice is only equal to your insolence," said Mr. Ratcliff venomously.

Tom Merry's teeth came together hard.

"I am not afraid," he said. "I have done nothing wrong. It was I who suggested those lines for the imposition."

"I thought as much."

Tom Merry stood silent and defiant. He expected the master to take up his cane, but Mr. Ratcliff made no motion to do so.

"I have already learned, Merry, that you are the usual leader of the juniors in any act of insubordination or insolence," said the senior Housemaster, in measured tones. "You have attempted to turn my authority and myself into ridicule. For that only the most exemplary punishment will suffice. No, I am not going to cane you, Merry—that has been tried without effect. I am going to flog you!"

Tom Merry started.

At St. Jim's boys were sometimes flogged, but the punishment was rare, and was never administered by anybody but the Head himself. And Dr. Holmes had very, very seldom found it necessary. Tom Merry had never dreamed that even the influence of his "little brief authority" would carry Mr. Ratcliff so far as this. He drew in a quick breath.

"You are going to flog me, sir!"

"Yes; I am going to flog you in public," said Mr. Ratcliff, dwelling on the words with evident relish. "The Forms will be mustered on deck, as in the Hall at St. Jim's, and you will be flogged in the sight of all as an example to the rest."

Tom Merry turned pale. A flogging was bad enough in itself. A public flogging was ten times worse; but a flogging in sight of the ship's company, as well as the boys belonging to the school, was intolerable.

"You have only yourself to thank for this, Merry," said Mr. Ratcliff. "I shall give you twelve strokes in public, and I think that will have the desired effect."

"I will not submit."

The words seemed to be torn from the boy. But Mr. Ratcliff only smiled in his sour, sardonic manner.

"Go on deck, Merry, and await me there."

"I will not be flogged!"

"Go on deck!" thundered the master.

Tom Merry turned and slowly left the cabin. He understood it all—the bitter humiliation that was intended to humble and cow him, and break his spirit. To be stripped and flogged in public, with the seamen looking on, and the officers on the bridge witnessing his humiliation—it seemed to the proud lad that he would rather die!

Mr. Ratcliff stopped at the door and called out to Knox and Sefton. Knox was a School House prefect, a bully, and extremely unpopular with the Lower Forms. Sefton belonged to the New House, and was in the Sixth. Both were on the worst of terms with Tom Merry & Co., and Mr. Ratcliff knew that he could depend on them now, when Kildare and Monteith would certainly have failed him.

"I have decided that Tom Merry is to be flogged in public, Knox," he said. "He has confessed to being the ringleader in the juniors' insolence yesterday. I shall require your help."

"Certainly, sir," said Knox cordially. "I've thought for a long time that it was just what he needed, only Kildare has always taken his part against us."

"Kildare has no voice in this matter. The flogging will take place at half-past twelve, and I shall require you both there."

"Certainly, sir," said Sefton and Knox together.

And Mr. Ratcliff walked away, to give orders for the assembling of the Forms on deck.

CHAPTER 12.

Mr. Ratcliff is Determined!

TOM MERRY came up on the promenade deck, and his expression at once attracted attention. Manners and Lowther joined him in a moment.

"What's the trouble?" asked both together.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "What's the beastlay twouble, deah boys?"

Tom Merry smiled faintly.

"Nothing; but I am to be flogged."

"Flogged!"

"Yes—and in public!"

"My hat!"

"Before all the school, and before the hands about the steamer," said Tom Merry bitterly—"a sort of exhibition, you know."

"The—the hound!" muttered Lowther, pale with rage. "The cowardly brute!"

"Oh, it's all right—I'm not going to stand it!"

Manners looked anxious. There was an expression on Tom Merry's face that alarmed him a little.

"I say, Tom, old man, what are you going to do?"

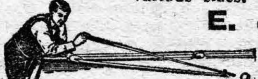
Tom Merry shook his head.

(Continued on page 19.)

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HALLO, chums! Are you enjoying this week's fine number of the GEM, and the merry adventures of the St. Jim's favourites aboard the Condor? Of course you are! Well, next Wednesday's story in this fascinating holiday series is even better than this week's yarn. Look out for fun and surprises, and a hundred per cent. adventure in

"THE SHIPWRECKED SCHOOL!"

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"THE WORLD WRECKERS!"

and another "quick laugh" comic strip, featuring Potts the Office Boy. Order your GEM in advance—that's the safest way to avoid disappointment.

UNIQUE!

Two boxers met—both won and both lost! How did it happen? This way: Ronnie Summerton, of Birmingham, smote his opponent, Kid MacNally, of Hanley, good and hard, but in his eagerness to send the "Kid" to the floor for a decisive count he dashed in and landed a foul blow. The referee naturally awarded the fight to Kid MacNally. An uproar followed the decision, and when it died down the authorities announced that the two fighters had agreed to have another set to over a distance of six rounds. The "next" fight, however, did not go beyond the second round. This time Ronnie Summerton made no mistake. He knocked the "Kid" down for a count in the first round, and only the bell saved him from defeat. In the second round he put his game opponent down for a count of nine on two occasions, whereat the Kid's seconds wisely threw in the towel. But the fact remains that both fighters won and both lost!

RUNAWAY KATE!

Kate's a sheepdog—not an ordinary sheepdog, but very near a champion in the matter of rounding up obstinate sheep. Incidentally she finished fourth in the recent International Trials. Her performance on that occasion prompted Lord Mostyn to purchase Kate from her owner. The deal was made, and Kate, complete with collar and chain, was waiting in his lordship's car while the

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luggage was put aboard. Suddenly the door of the car was opened, and Kate promptly sprang out and bolted at full pelt. Shepherds tried in vain to whistle her back, but Kate had been trained only to respond to her master's whistle. She kept on galloping and was soon lost to sight. One of the shepherds remarked that she was running for home—Berwick-on-Tweed, which is a hundred and forty miles away from where the car was waiting. Whether Kate reached home has yet to be recorded.

HEARD THIS ONE?

Jones: "There's enough wood in your head to make a boat."

Smith: "Oh, yeah? Well, there's enough water in yours to float it!"

SWEEPED OUT TO SEA!

Jack and Fred, two "fifteen-year-old" boys, were taking advantage of the fine weather. They hired a couple of skiffs from a Deal boatman and put out to sea. All went well until one of Jack's rowlocks unshipped itself and fell overboard. The only thing Fred could think of was to row back to the shore and fetch out another rowlock. In the meantime, Jack was being swept out farther and farther until he was lost to sight. Coastguards were informed of the boy's plight, all along the coast, but it wasn't until five hours later that the news came through that Jack was safe. It was at Kingsdown, three miles away, that he eventually landed, none the worse for his adventure, except that he was tired. During his five hours afloat in his unmanageable craft he had tried to attract the attention of a passing tramp steamer. Imagine his feelings when the steamer continued on its way. But Jack was a fighter. He noticed that the tide had suddenly slackened off, so he used his oar as a paddle, and with great difficulty came in sight of the shore at Kingsdown. There a watchful bathing attendant rowed out and towed Jack in.

NO RULES AT THIS SCHOOL!

Yes, it's a fact! If you are a member of Summer Hill School, Leiston, you can do practically what you like. There are no rules, no irksome discipline; in fact, if you want to kick your master you can! Furthermore you can smoke, swear, read what you like, call the masters by their Christian names and—smash windows! If any pupil at this ultra modern school does anything really "off the rails," however, the rest of the school sits in judgment on him and decides the punishment. The founder of this unusual school—Mr. A. S. Neill—is convinced that his method of training youngsters is a sound one. And you can bet your life the fifty-three pupils in his charge wholeheartedly agree.

PERPETUAL MOTION!

In the year eighteen hundred and forty a Charing Cross craftsman made an unusual bell, which is now on view in Clarendon Laboratory, Oxford. That bell, believe it or not, has been ringing constantly from the day it was made, and looks like ringing on for ever and ever—at least, until the works give up the ghost. The bell is worked by a "dry pile" battery which never needs any attention from the hand of the man, for it charges itself automatically. For ninety-two years—to date—the bell has been ringing, and no part has been repaired or exchanged. Oxford readers should take the opportunity of visiting the museum to view this bell before some part of the "works" breaks under the strain.

A BOOK EVERY BOY SHOULD HAVE!

September is here with us—and this sunny month is "marked" every year by the arrival of a fresh HOLIDAY ANNUAL. And this year's H.A. is fresh in every sense of the word. Your old favourites Tom Merry & Co. appear in its voluminous pages at frequent intervals. So also do Harry Wharton & Co., the famous chums of Gwyrriars. In addition, there are scores of other attractive features, including tales of sport and adventure, jolly rhymes, a play for amateur actors, four gorgeous colour plates, and four superbly printed photogravure plates. Yes, the Holiday Annual is the best book for Gemites, and I earnestly commend it to your notice. Your nearest newsagent is certain to have a copy—ask him to let you have a squint at it. If you don't want to buy it after that I am almost tempted to say that I'll eat my hat!

SMUGGLERS!

Across the Belgium frontiers smugglers are waging a roaring trade these days. All manner of cute dodges are employed to smuggle their contraband wares to agents "on the other side of the border." One of them takes the form of loading a number of riderless horses with smuggled goods and stampeding them. Once across the border they are quickly rounded up by waiting confederates and relieved of their valuable burdens. Yet another method, really unique, concerns the lady who travelled across the border so many times that suspicion was aroused in the minds of the authorities. The lady was stopped, and how do you think she carried her smuggled diamonds? You'll never guess! In her glass eye! 'Sfact! That glass eye was so cunningly made that it was a comfortable and easy receptacle for diamonds.

THEN HE WOKE UP!

It was a warm day—very warm for cricket—and a certain batsman had given the field a lot of running about to do. Thus when the next wicket fell, one of the fieldsmen fell, too! He stretched himself out on the grass, closed his eyes and—went to sleep. In came the next batsman, and the bowler was about to send down a ball when the umpire noticed that the "field" was not quite what it ought to be. One player was lying on his back, apparently dead to the wide! The match was stopped and the players gathered about the prostrate fieldsmen. Then they had to wake him up before the match could be resumed!—An incident from the recent match between Market Rasen and Elsham, played at the former's cricket ground in Lincolnshire.

THE OCEAN REBELS!

(Continued from page 17.)

"I don't know."

"You'll have to knuckle under."

"I shall not knuckle under!"

"But how—?"

"I don't know. But I won't be flogged! He shall kill me first! I've made up my mind about that!" said Tom Merry, between his teeth.

The chums of the Shell looked worried and anxious. When Tom Merry spoke like that they knew that his mind was made up, his resolution irrevocably fixed. But what was to be done?

"Bai Jove!" muttered D'Arcy. "The wottah is passin' the limit, you know. We shall have to stop him somehow."

And the swell of St. Jim's walked over to his chums, who were sitting on the rail, with a very dejected air. Blake, Herries, and Digby were sitting on the top rail, with the heels of their boots hooked on to the lower one, and apparently unconscious of the danger of their position.

"Wherefore that worried look, Gustavus?" asked Blake. "You look as if you had lost your last threepenny-bit and the last bus home."

"Pway don't wot, Blake! This is a sewious mattah!"

"Anything happened to your silk hat?"

"No; it is not so sewious as that, but it is vewy sewious. Tom Mewwy is goin' to be flogged on deck!"

Blake nearly fell over the rail in his amazement.

"Tom Merry! Flogged!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"My only hat! Ratty is coming it too strong!"

"Tom Mewwy says he will not submit, but I weally do not see what he is to do. You see, deah boys, force is on the side of Mr. Watcliff. He will call on the pwefects to hold Mewwy, you know."

"Kildare wouldn't do it, or Darrell."

"Nor Rushden," said Digby, "nor Monteith. But Knox would, and jump at the chance!"

"Look here, if Tom Merry won't knuckle under, we're going to back him up!" exclaimed Blake excitedly. "We're not going to stand—"

"Blake," said Mr. Lathom, coming along with a troubled look upon his kind face, "the Fourth Form are to assemble on deck to witness a flogging. Please inform the rest."

"Yes, sir," said Blake dejectedly.

The word had been passed to the other Forms also. Mr. Railton and Mr. Linton could be seen speaking in low, but somewhat excited tones. Mr. Railton's brow was knitted and the master of the Shell looked very angry.

Tom Merry was in his Form, and he resented the proposed punishment very keenly. Mr. Railton was seen to leave his companion very abruptly and go below, and the onlookers guessed where he had gone.

"He's going to talk to Ratty," said Figgins. "Going to try to persuade him to have a little sense."

"He won't succeed," said Blake.

The juniors were right.

Mr. Railton descended to Mr. Ratcliff's cabin and knocked at the door, and a sour voice bade him enter.

He found the New House master carefully examining a birch.

"Can I speak to you for a few minutes, Mr. Ratcliff?" said the School House master, keeping his temper well under control.

"Certainly; I have a few minutes to spare. I must be on deck at half-past twelve for the flogging."

"Are you determined to carry this out?"

"To carry what out?"

"The idea of flogging Merry."

"The question is rather absurd. I have assembled the Forms to witness his punishment, and I am scarcely likely to make myself look ridiculous by altering my mind upon the matter now."

"It is a very serious matter."

"I am quite aware of that. The offence Merry has committed is a serious one."

"A boyish prank—"

"I am determined to put an end to such boyish pranks on his part!"

"And I must say that it was provoked."

"I am not prepared to listen to criticisms of my actions from you, Mr. Railton. I must remind you that I am senior master."

"You need not remind me of that," said Mr. Railton bitterly. "You have kept me pretty well in mind of it. But on this matter I feel I must speak out. Merry does not deserve to be flogged."

"That is not my opinion."

"Even if he did deserve that punishment, it would not be right to thus humiliate him before all the ship's company. You must remember that it is not only the boys who will witness the flogging, but the seamen and the officers of the steamer."

"That will make the lesson all the more salutary, I conceive."

"It will make the punishment more bitter and humiliating."

"It is my intention to make it so. Merry has been encouraged too long in his insolence. His audacity has gone too far. I intend to stop it, and to make a public example of him. I do not think the Lower Forms will dare to enter into a contest with me again, after the public flogging of their ringleader."

"They will be in a state of mind which will certainly not make for peace. You do not know the amount of resentment you will evoke."

"I know nothing, and care as little. I know what my duty is, and I am resolved to do it!"

Mr. Railton bit his lip. He knew exactly how much considerations of duty affected his colleague. It was evident that his remonstrance was futile.

"Then you are determined, Mr. Ratcliff?"

"Quite determined."

"Nothing but harm can follow."

Mr. Ratcliff looked at his watch.

"I am afraid my time is up," he remarked.

"One moment," said Mr. Railton. "Have you reflected to what desperation this may drive a proud and high-spirited lad like Merry? To what—?"

"I see no reason for treating Merry differently from the other juniors," said Mr. Ratcliff. "I must go now."

"Yet a word. You know that Dr. Holmes would not approve of this!"

"I know nothing of the sort!"

And Mr. Ratcliff went out of the cabin.

The School House master followed him slowly, with a gloomy frown upon his face. His appeal had been in vain, and the flogging was to take place. Mr. Railton's heart was heavy as he followed the petty tyrant of the Condor on deck.

CHAPTER 13.

A Desperate Deed!

MR. RATCLIFF glanced about him with a look of satisfaction. He liked to make an impression, to make his authority felt, to have eyes fixed upon him. He was fully gratified now.

The Forms were assembled on deck, in regular order, as in the Hall at St. Jim's on such occasions. Not a boy was missing from his place.

The masters were there with their boys, and every face was dark.

Captain Bolsover and Mr. Green were looking down from the bridge, and Mr. Thropp, the chief mate, had come from the door of the chart-house to look on. The seamen of the Condor were equally interested in what was going forward, and several hands had ceased work for the moment. Some of the stewards had come up to look on from a distance.

There was a hush in the great crowd. The steamer was throbbing on over a sunlight sea, under a blue sky. The foam ran in a long wake behind her, and the black smoke drifted down the wind. Every eye was turned upon Mr. Ratcliff, and the sense of his own importance added a strut to the senior master's walk.

"Merry!"

Tom Merry was in his place in the ranks of the Shell. Lowther and Manners were on either side of him, both looking savage and sullen. The Shell, as a matter of fact, were ripe for mutiny, though Mr. Linton was doing his best to keep silence and order, as in duty bound.

Tom Merry hesitated a moment as his name was called, and then walked out before the Form, and stood facing Mr. Ratcliff in a clear space before the assembled school.

The junior's face was pale, but there was a determined tightness about his lips, and a gleam of resolution in his eyes.

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Ratcliff fixed his eyes upon the junior.

"Merry, you are to be flogged as a punishment for the fault of which you have confessed yourself guilty. Remove your jacket."

There was a breathless hush.

Tom Merry made no motion to obey.

Mr. Ratcliff snapped his teeth.

"This obstinacy will serve you little, Merry. If you do not remove your jacket, it will be removed by force."

Tom's eyes met the senior master's steadily.

"You have no right to flog me," he said quietly. "Dr. Holmes would not have done so. Mr. Railton would not do so. You have no right."

"Remove your jacket instantly!" said the senior master harshly.

Tom Merry did not move.

From the Shell came a murmur, which was echoed from the Fourth Form.

"Keep it up, Tom!"

Mr. Ratcliff frowned.

"Silence!"

The murmur died away, but the boys' eyes were blazing.

Mr. Ratcliff signed to Knox and Sefton.

"Remove Merry's jacket!" he said.

"Certainly, sir!"

The two Sixth-Formers advanced towards Tom Merry. There was a distinct hiss from the whole school.

"Silence!" cried Mr. Ratcliff, with glinting eyes.

Tom Merry's face had a hunted look for a moment.

He had said that he would not be flogged. To be seized and held by brute force while the punishment was inflicted would be worse than if he had submitted to it from the first. Yet what was to be done?

He was powerless once the grasp of the two big seniors was upon him, and he would not have a chance even to struggle.

"Keep off!" he muttered thickly. "I tell you—"

Knox and Sefton grinned, and came quickly towards him.

Tom Merry gave one quick look round, and then sprang away.

There was a cry of surprise, of amazed horror.

The junior had leaped upon the rail of the steamer. He was standing with one foot on the lower rail, the other on the upper, and it seemed as if every movement of the vessel would hurl him headlong into the sea.

Knox and Sefton paused, irresolute.

"Come back!" shouted Mr. Railton. "Merry, are you mad? Come back!"

"Fetch him back!" shouted Mr. Ratcliff.

Tom Merry stood, swaying with the motion of the steamer, on one side of him the crowded deck, on the other the deep sea.

"Keep back!" His voice rang sharp and clear now, his face, white as death, was fiercely determined. "Keep back,

you cowards! Another step, and I will throw myself into the sea!"

And Knox and Sefton knew that he meant it, too, and their own faces went white as they glared at him in helpless and baffled anger.

Mr. Ratcliff bit his lips savagely. He was the only one on deck who could not read aright the desperate determination in the boy's white face. To his small and mean mind it seemed all mere bluff, he was incapable of even understanding the feelings that moved the lad.

"Fetch him back!"

Mr. Railton turned upon him savagely.

"Ratcliff, are you mad?"

"Silence!"

"Cannot you see that this is no time for obstinacy? Do you wish to be responsible for that boy's death?" cried the School House master.

Mr. Ratcliff sneered.

"I am hardly likely to be deceived by this theatrical nonsense," he said acidly. "Merry certainly has no intention of throwing himself overboard."

"Look at his face, man—cannot you see—have you no eyes to see?"

"Once and for all, Mr. Railton, I refuse to be interfered with by you. Merry, I command you to return to the deck instantly."

"Not unless you promise that there shall be no flogging," said Tom Merry, between his hard, set teeth.

"Come back at once!"

"I will not!"

"Knox, bring that boy here."

The unpopular prefect would willingly have done so, but he had sense enough to see what Mr. Ratcliff was too obstinate to see. He did not move.

"Do you hear me, Knox?"

Apparently Knox did not hear, for he did not make any attempt to obey, but quietly stepped back into the Sixth-Form ranks.

Mr. Ratcliff's sallow face blazed with anger. If he gave way now his authority was at an end. To go on was worse than to give way; but he had gone too far to retreat. He hesitated for a moment, and then strode towards Tom Merry.

"Merry, descend to the deck at once!"

"I will not!"

"Then I will make you."

Mr. Ratcliff sprang towards the junior. Tom Merry kept to his word. Before the master's grasp could be laid upon him, he leaped from the rail, and disappeared, with a plunge, into the deep sea.

CHAPTER 14.

Tom Merry's Peril!

THERE was a cry on the deck of the steamer—a cry of mingled grief and rage. Mr. Ratcliff stood thunderstruck.

"Man overboard!"

"Tom!" shouted Lowther, dashing to the side.

The deck was a scene of the wildest confusion. Captain Bolsover, who had been watching the scene intently from the bridge, acted with instant promptness. His hand was already on the bridge telegraph. In an instant he had signalled to the engine-room, and the engines were reversed, and the great ship stopped in the churning water.

The seamen sprang swiftly to obey the quick, rapping orders. A boat plunged down into the water. But ere it could be got away, three splashes had followed that made by Tom Merry.

Manners and Lowther, careless of everything but their chum's danger, had plunged in recklessly after him, but the first splash was made by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

At that terrible moment the swell of St. Jim's remembered how Tom Merry had recently plunged into a stormy sea, and risked his life to save him from drowning. And, without thinking of anything else, D'Arcy scudded to the rail, and dived over. His silk hat went sailing away as he plunged into the sea.

But the School House swell had forgotten that there would be a considerable difference between Tom Merry and himself in the role of rescuer. He was not a very good swimmer, and more likely to need help than to render it.

Lowther and Manners reached Tom Merry almost at the same moment, and grasped him. Tom's face was white and set, and there was a feverish light in his eyes. He did not speak a word, and did not seem himself in any way.

"Help!" shouted Manners. "This way!"

The excited fellows on deck were casting lifebelts and deckchairs and everything that came handy into the sea. D'Arcy, fortunately, had secured a lifebelt and clung to it, and looked round for Tom Merry. The boat was pulling

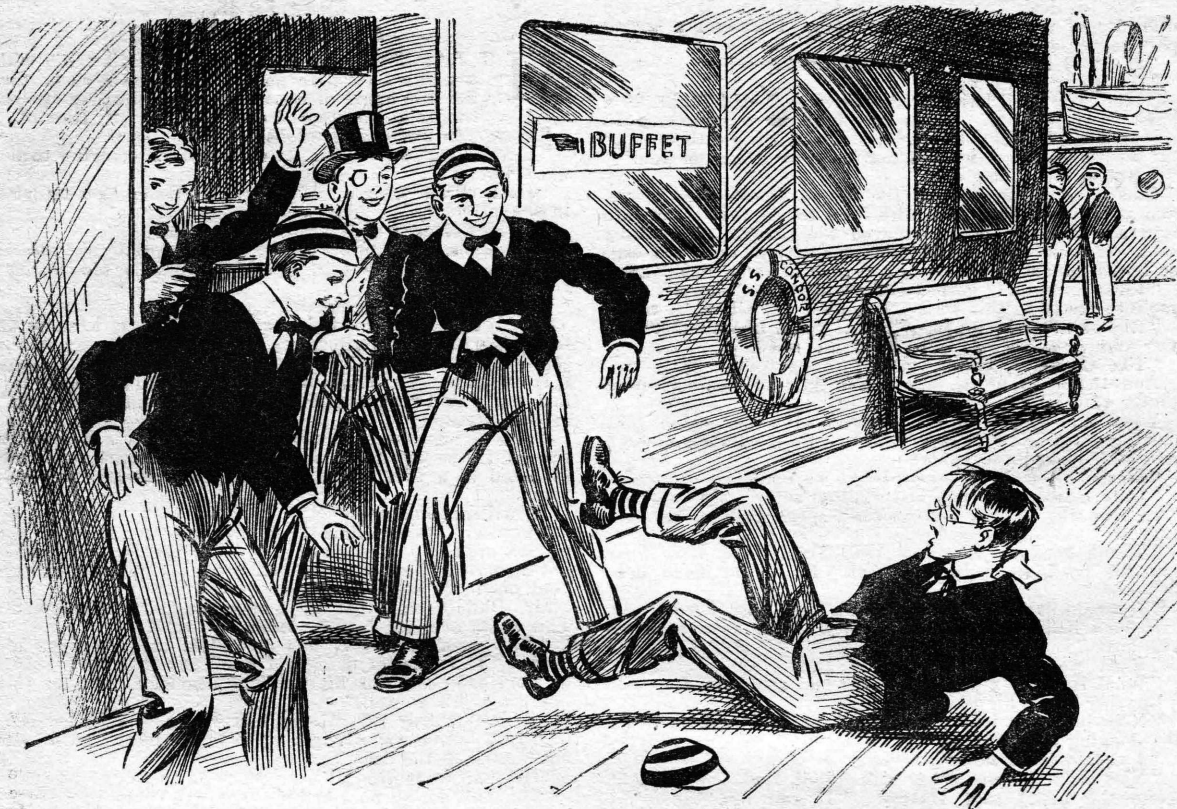
Don't Miss
This
Gripping
Yarn.

The House of Horror!



"Then came a steady plump, plump, as of someone descending . . . Nelson Lee held tight the leash of the straining Wolf, and directed his torch up the stairs. Nipper was beside him, his revolver levelled, and Inspector Harker behind. Suddenly a huge and shaggy head came into the light . . . there came a fierce snarl, which almost froze the blood in the veins of the three men! . . . This is only one of the thrilling incidents from the dramatic book-length novel of sinister mystery and detective adventure which appears in the current number of the NELSON LEE LIBRARY. "THE HOUSE OF HORRORS" is the detective-thriller of a life-time! Get it to-day.

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"Stop shoving me, Figgins! Don't push me like that, Blake! Let go my collar, D'Arcy! Oh, leggo! Ow!" But the juniors did not let go, and Skimpole was bumped out of the tuckshop and bumped on to the deck, and left there in a state of complete bewilderment.

swiftly towards the chums of the Shell, and Mr. Green seized Tom Merry, and hauled him in.

"All right," he said cheerily. "Only a ducking."

Tom Merry sat where Mr. Green placed him without a move. Lowther clambered in, and scrambled to his side at once, and pressed his arm.

"Tom!" he whispered. "Tom, old chap!"

Tom Merry lurched heavily against him.

"Tom!"

But Tom Merry did not reply. He was unconscious, his face strangely white and set. Monty Lowther threw an arm round him to support him, and the boat pulled towards the steamer.

"Help! Pway help me, deah boys!"

It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy who was calling. Mr. Green and Manners gave him a hand, and he was dragged in. He sat on a thwart, dripping and shivering, the water forming a pool under him, and felt for his eyeglass.

"Is Tom Mewwy all wight, Lowthah?"

"Fainted," said Lowther shortly.

"Bai Jove!"

In a couple of minutes Tom Merry was aboard the steamer again, and Mr. Ratlton carried him below.

There was a general gasp of relief among his friends when they learned that his life was in no danger.

Mr. Ratcliff was still on deck, so dazed and confused by what had happened that he did not know what he was saying or doing.

"Of course, that was a piece of sheer obstinacy on the boy's part, Mr. Lathom," he said.

Mr. Lathom blinked at him through his spectacles, and walked away without replying.

"Merry hoped to frighten us by this freak," said Mr. Ratcliff, addressing his next remark to Mr. Linton.

The master of the Shell turned his back. Mr. Ratcliff flushed uncomfortably, and went below. The black looks of everyone on deck began to take some effect even upon him.

"Bai Jove! If Tom Merry had been drowned we would have thown that wottah into the beastly watah aftah him!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

"We just would," said Blake with emphasis. "But I say, Gussy, what on earth did you fall in, too, for?"

"Fall in!"

"Yes. When I saw you last you were standing safe

enough here, and I'm blessed if I know how you came to fall in."

D'Arcy wiped his wet eyeglass on his wetter sleeve, and screwed it into his eye.

"Weally, Blake, I pwesume you are wottin'. I leaped into the watah to wescue Tom Mewwy fwom a watewy gwave."

"My only hat!"

"He wisked his life for me only the othah day," said D'Arcy, with dignity. "I felt that I could not do less than make a return for it."

"You young ass! You know you can't swim in anything bigger than a bath."

"Weally, Blake—"

"You came a jolly lot nearer being drowned than Tom Merry did."

"Yaas, I dare say that is quite twue. You see, I nevah thought of that till I was in the watah."

"Just like you! Where's your silk topper?"

D'Arcy made a lugubrious grimace.

"Lost, I am afraid, Blake. That's the third toppah I've lost since we left St. Jim's. I have only one left now."

"I'd have minded it for you if you'd told me you were going to fall in."

"I didn't fall in. I jumped in. I suppose it was watah widiculous when you come to think of it, as Tom Mewwy is a bettah swimmah than I am. But I nevah thought of that, you know."

Blake slapped him on the shoulder.

"That's all right, Gussy. You're a good little ass—"

"Weally, Blake—"

"And we're proud of you."

"Well, as a mattah of fact, you ought to be watah pwoud of me, you know. It's watah nice for you wuff wottahs to know a decent chap, who can show you how to be well-dwessed and—"

"D'Arcy, go and change your clothes immediately," said Mr. Lathom. "You will catch cold."

"Bai Jove, you know, I nevah thought of that!"

The swell of the School House suddenly paused in dismay.

"Come on," said Blake, linking his arm in D'Arcy's. "Dig and I are going to give you a rub down. We want to keep you alive if possible, though if you die of a cold we shall have you stuffed, and keep you in the study at St. Jim's—"

CHAPTER 15.

A Timely Surrender!

"Weally, deah boy, I am in a feahful fix. It's the old difficulty of the twousahs ovah again. I haven't a second pair to change into."

"If you'd like the steward's old trucks—"

"Oh, pway don't wot!"

"Well, you shall have my Sunday pair," said Blake, in a burst of generosity. "You ought to have something in recognition of pluck. Come on, kid, and I'll get them out."

"Weally, Blake, I wegard that as vewy decent of you."

"Not at all. Come on!"

Blake and Digby hurried the School House swell below, and gave him a rub down with hard towels that threw him into a glow, and quite removed the danger of catching cold. It removed a considerable quantity of skin, too, but, as Blake remarked, that was a matter of small importance.

"Pway leave off!" gasped D'Arcy at last. "You will wub me into pieces at this wate. I think I am all wight now."

"Right-ho!" said Blake. "But if you'd like another rub, you know, you've only got to say the word."

"I'm all wight, thank you."

And the swell of St. Jim's clad himself again, feeling pretty raw all over.

When the chums of the Fourth left their cabin they met Manners and Lowther, who had changed their clothes, and both looked very glum.

"Merry all right?" asked Blake at once.

"Only a little feverish, Mr. Railton says," said Lowther.

"He's to stay in bed, and we can't speak to him. Rotten, isn't it?"

"Thank goodness it's no worse. Tom Merry must have lost his head when he did that. He might have been drowned."

"It would have been Ratty's fault," said Lowther fiercely. "If Tom had been drowned, Ratty would have been his murderer."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"What is Ratty going to do now—do you know?"

Lowther shook his head.

"Nobody seems to know. But I hardly think he'll try the flogging dodge again."

"I should think not."

"Now perwaps you chaps will admit that I was wight from the first," said D'Arcy. "If you had taken my advice—"

"Your advice? What advice?"

"To take possession of the steamah and turn piwates."

"Ass!"

"I wefuse to be called an ass, Lowthah! If Tom Mewwy were not lying at the pwesent moment in a fewewish condish I should give you a feahful thwashin'!"

And D'Arcy walked away, still convinced that the best thing to do under the circumstances was to seize the steamer and turn pirates.

The Shipwrecked School!



The cruise of the Condor comes to a sudden and exciting end in next week's ripping yarn of Tom Merry & Co. at sea.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,281.

MR. RAILTON came out of Tom Merry's cabin with a grave face. He gave a slight start as he saw the thin figure of the senior master leaning against the wall. He stopped and looked at Mr. Ratcliff.

"Were you anxious about Merry?" he asked.

"How is he?" asked Mr. Ratcliff, without replying to the question.

"He is better—only a trifle feverish. He can get up later in the afternoon."

The New House master drew a deep breath.

"I suppose, as a matter of fact, there is nothing the matter with him," he said, with something of his old manner returning.

Mr. Railton's eyes gleamed.

"He is in a feverish state," he said. "He was wrought up to a high pitch of excitement, and then the plunge in the cold water could not fail to have a bad effect. Thank Heaven it is no worse. You might have had his death to answer for, and you would have regretted this petty persecution then."

"Mr. Railton!"

"This is no time to mince words. You have persecuted this lad till he was driven to a state of desperation, and then he acted in a wild and wilful manner; but the fault was yours."

"I will not endure—"

"You will endure plain English," said Mr. Railton. "I cannot pretend to treat you now with the respect you do not deserve. There has very nearly been a tragedy through your obstinacy and folly!"

Mr. Ratcliff stared at the junior master in amazement. This was a new line for Mr. Railton to take.

"You seem to forget your place," he said, between his teeth. "I am master here, and I tell you that Merry shall be punished—both for his previous insolence, and for this last act of his as well."

"I do not deny that Merry was wrong, and he has confessed it; but he was wrought up to such a pitch that he was not himself at the time."

"He shall be punished!"

"He shall not be punished!"

"What?" said Mr. Ratcliff, hardly able to believe his ears. "What are you saying?"

"You heard what I said. He shall not be punished. There has been enough of that," said the School House master grimly.

"Do you dispute my authority?"

"Yes, if necessary. Merry shall not be punished. If you persist in this course you will be treated with the contempt you deserve."

"What!"

"Keep your place, and your authority will be respected by me and by my colleagues," said Mr. Railton quietly. "I have no desire to cause trouble, or to depart from the instructions given by Dr. Holmes. But any further persecution of an innocent lad I will not allow."

"You—you will not allow!" stammered the other.

"That is the word. I will not allow it. Think for a moment. You have made yourself detested by all—boys and masters alike," said Mr. Railton, with merciless frankness. "If I choose to wrest authority from your hands I should be obeyed, and you would not be obeyed. You know it—"

"I—I—I—"

"I shall not do so unless you drive me to it. I have no desire to bring authority into contempt—to set an example of insubordination among the boys, who ought to see nothing but concord among their masters. I shall carefully refrain from opposing you if you choose to take a sensible view of the matter. But I tell you plainly that this persecution of Merry is to go no further."

"You threaten me?"

Mr. Railton nodded calmly.

"Yes, I threaten you."

The senior master looked for a moment as if he would strike the younger man, but some lingering spark of prudence restrained him.

"If you threaten me with a mutiny in the school," he said thickly, "if you hold over me a revolt of the boys, headed by yourself, I acknowledge that I am in your hands."

Mr. Railton smiled contemptuously.

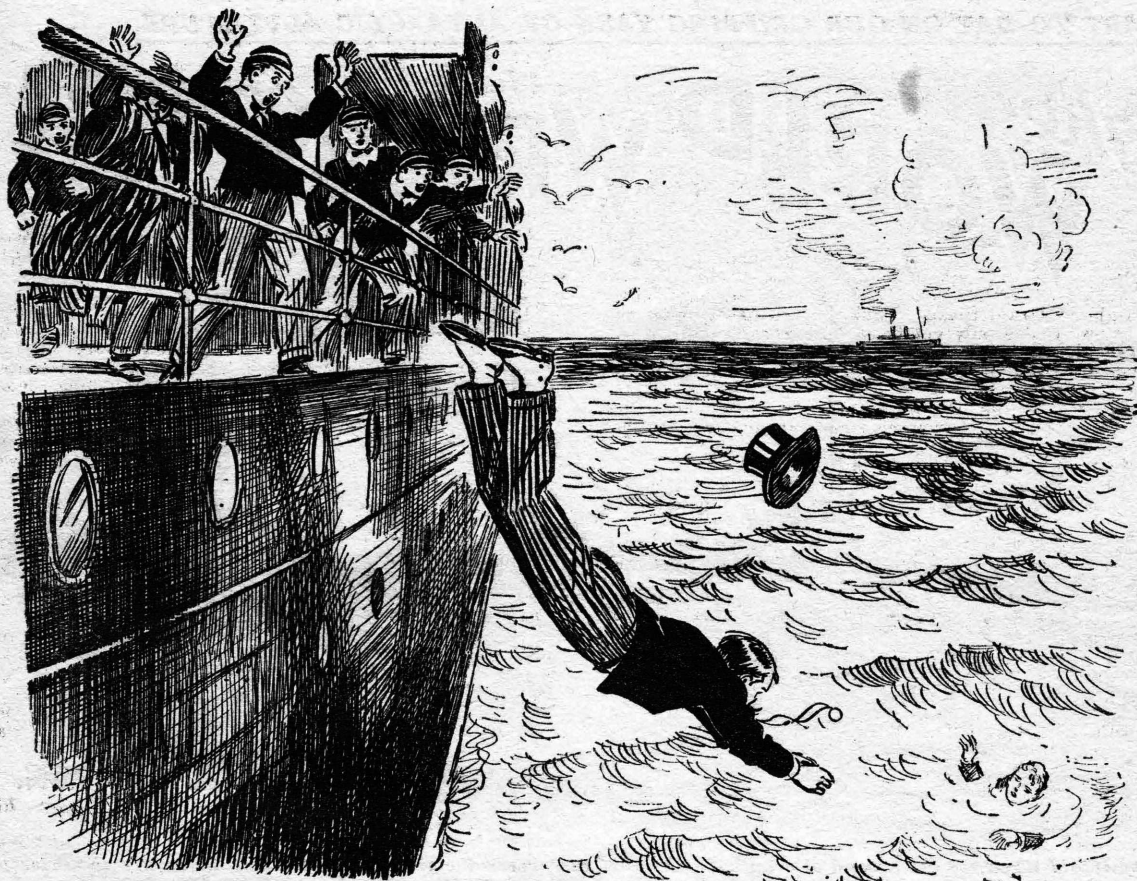
"I hold over you nothing of the sort. I simply state that you are holding your authority merely on sufferance, and that if you force me to it I shall take it out of your hands."

"I quite understand. I have no choice but to submit to your terms."

"So I imagine."

"But, trust me," said Mr. Ratcliff, his voice trembling with passion—"trust me, Dr. Holmes shall hear of this! You will be compelled to leave St. Jim's!"

"I am quite willing for the matter to be taken before the



"Man overboard!" "It's Tom!" shouted Lowther. At that terrible moment D'Arcy remembered how Tom Merry had recently risked his life to save him from drowning. Gussy scudded to the rail and dived over. His silk hat went sailing away as he plunged into the sea after Tom Merry.

Head when the Condor returns home, if you choose," said the School House master calmly. "I think I shall be able to justify myself. For the present, then, it is to be understood that this affair ends here and now, and that there is to be no further question of any punishment for Merry."

Mr. Ratcliff could not reply for a moment; his anger choked him and mastered his speech.

"What is your answer—yes or no?"

"Yes," muttered the senior-master.

"Very well."

And they parted.

Mr. Railton went on deck. There the excitement had by no means subsided; in fact, it was on the increase. It was near time for afternoon lessons, but no one showed any intention of repairing to the class-rooms. Seniors of the Fifth and Sixth looked almost as excited as the juniors. Blake & Co. were discussing the situation in raised tones as the School House master came up, and they did not see him in their excitement.

"This is the finish, anyway," Blake was saying. "If Ratty keeps up the game we're going to back up Tom Merry."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Are you all game to stand by him?" exclaimed Monty Lowther eagerly. "If we all stand together Ratty can do nothing. The Sixth are just as much disgusted with the rotter as we are, and they wouldn't help him."

"He wouldn't find more than a few rotters like Knox to stand by him," said Manners; "and we don't care for Knox. If we stand shoulder to shoulder Ratty will have to give in."

"Bai Jove! That's my ideah, you know. We can't allow Tom Mewwy to be thwashed, you know—it would be infwa dig. My ideah is to muzzle Watty."

"We're all in it," said Figgins grimly. "If Tom Merry isn't pardoned, we all stand by him and back him up against Ratty. He shan't be flogged."

"Never!"

"Ahem!"

The juniors looked round in some dismay as Mr. Railton coughed. Blake coloured, but he was looking determined.

The juniors of St. Jim's were in deadly earnest, and all parties were united firmly on that point—that Tom Merry should be backed up to any necessary extent against the senior master.

"I have something to tell you, my lads," said Mr. Railton quietly. "Mr. Ratcliff has decided to pardon Merry."

The juniors looked rather blank. All that they had been prepared desperately to contend for was granted unasked, and the vision of a mutiny of juniors faded away.

"The matter will be allowed to drop, in the circumstances," said Mr. Railton; "and the least said the soonest mended. You will get ready for afternoon school."

"Yes, sir," said the juniors together respectfully enough.

The news spread along the deck, and there was a general clearing of faces and unknitting of brows. Ratty had done the only sensible thing, as Kildare put it; but he, and many others, suspected that Mr. Ratcliff would not have acted so sensibly had not pressure been brought to bear upon him.

Blake & Co. took the same view.

"It's Railton who's managed it," Blake said confidently.

"Ratty wouldn't have had sense enough to give in till we were ragging him baldheaded. Railton has put on the screw somehow. Good luck to him! I suppose we can consider this a victory."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry did not appear again till tea. He was looking rather pale as he took his place at the table with the rest of the Shell, and unusually quiet.

When tea was over the hero of the Shell was escorted on deck by a troop of cheering juniors.

Mr. Ratcliff, in his cabin, heard the shouts from the deck.

"Hurrah for Tom Merry!"

He snapped his teeth as he heard it; but he could do nothing else—nothing but listen, with a black brow, to the cheering.

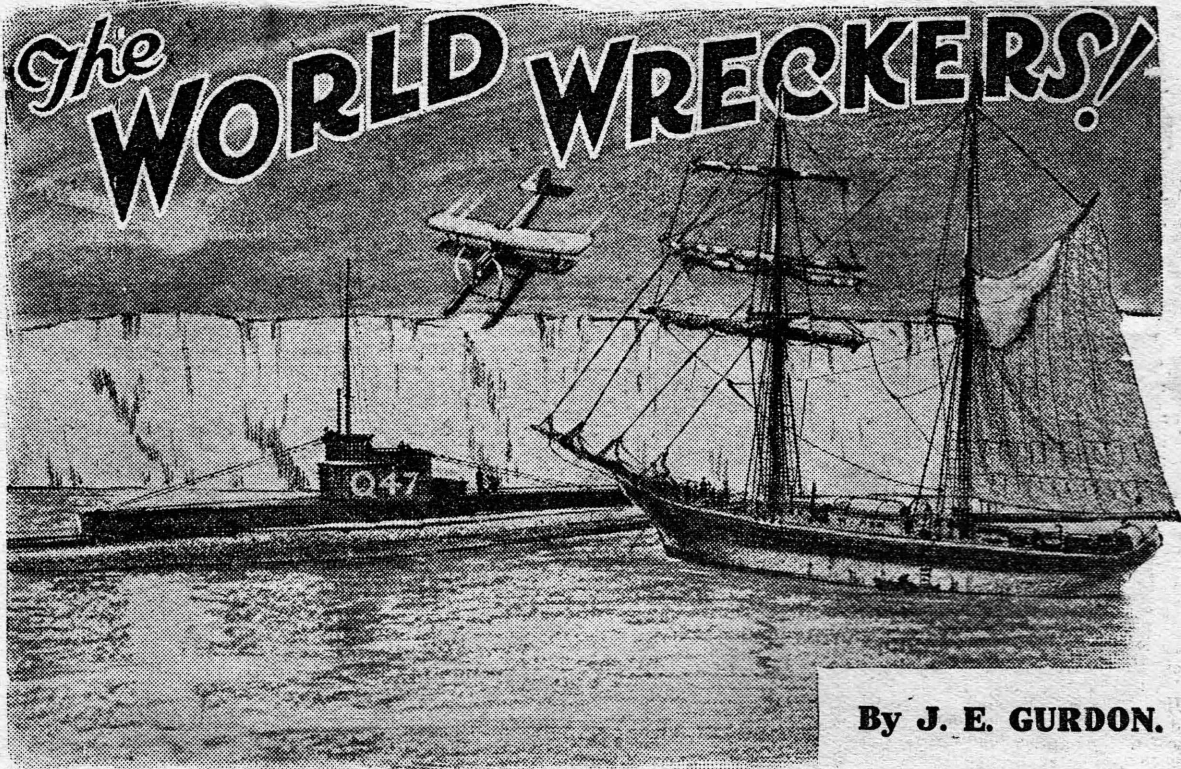
No one cared for his anger now, and Tom Merry was the hero of the school on the steamer.

THE END.

(Look out for thrills! Next week's long complete yarn "The Shipwrecked School!" is an absolute wow!)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,281.

START TO-DAY ON OUR GRIPPING YARN OF ANTARCTIC ADVENTURE.



By J. E. GURDON.

The World Wreckers are a band of criminals who have discovered the secret of controlling the earth's weather. Having concealed themselves somewhere in the Antarctic, they have threatened to wreck the British Empire by earthquakes and droughts if they are not paid a vast sum of money. The British Government have sent an expedition, consisting of a submarine, an aeroplane, and a base ship, to destroy the Wreckers. After various clashes Jim and Rex Tempest, the airmen of the expedition, are attacked by five enemy planes. Four are shot down when Rex's gun jams, and in attempting to break the propeller of the fifth with a weight on the end of a rope, he lassoes the gunner of the enemy plane!

Success!

PANTING and fuming, Rex set about the job of hauling in his captive, slipstream or no slipstream.

An impossible task, this, if tackled blindly, but a little ingenuity made it almost easy.

His end of the rope was already made fast to the ring of the Scarfe mounting—a ring whose diameter was the same as that of his cockpit. Stops were provided on the ring to prevent the gunner from accidentally swinging his Lewis into angles that would blow away planes or rudder, but when these stops were unset the ring could be made to revolve round a complete circle.

Having seen to this, Rex clamped the gun itself horizontally on its uprights, then, using the barrel as a lever, began steadily rotating the ring.

The whole contraption worked much the same as a windlass. Rex had sufficient leverage to turn his mounting in spite of the terrific strain, and the mounting coiled up the rope as though it were a drum.

Like an anchor being weighed against the tide, the prisoner was slowly raised to the edge of the fuselage. One final heave and he was lugged into the cockpit.

Not even badly hurt he sprawled on the floor, goggling at Rex and puffing in a melancholy manner.

"Good-afternoon!" said Rex politely.

No further conversation took place, for at that moment the engine coughed explosively, choked protestingly, and lapsed into silence.

"Out of juice!" announced Jim's voice. "Rear tank's shot up and empty. We're going to get a ducking!"

This struck Rex as being an optimistic way of describing what would happen to a crippled land machine forced to alight on the weltering waters that awaited them, but Jim managed to put her down flat and true in a wave trough.

The bottom planes sank but held.

Jim crawled out of his cabin and wormed his way aft, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,281.

where he looked down at the captive, noted the bomb and the rope, and nodded understandingly.

"Mr. Fairy, I presume!" he murmured. "Well, let's hope he can swim. We've about five minutes to float."

"That's long enough," retorted Rex amiably. "Here comes the jolly old speedboat."

Tearing through the rollers towards them, her prow throwing aside vast fans of foam, was a motor-boat which both recognised as the one attached to the brigantine.

"Yoicks! Tally-ho! Attaboy!" roared Jim. "The wheeze has worked!"

"Looks like it! There's Cap'n Bruce in the bows, and Skipper Sherwell behind him. Yep. It's worked all right. What cheers, everybody!"

Dexterously Jim caught a line thrown from the speedboat, and the transhipping was effected after nothing worse than a spluttering swim and a few mouthfuls of salt water. Then the plane, having been buoyed with empty oil drums and petrol tins, was taken in tow and a course set for the shore.

"Any casualties?" asked Jim, upending a flooded flying-boat.

The commander laughed.

"Only the unfortunate Killer," he replied. "Cartwright and his man judged its path to a hairsbreadth. When they turned it loose to rev by itself it came charging up through the mist, bang at the brigantine, looking most dashing and fearsome."

"I myself took it for the submarine," put in Captain Bruce, "and I thought you fellows had gone mad."

"So did our World Wrecker friends," observed the commander dryly. "They scuttled about like agitated ants, and popped off fifty shells at the poor brute before they got him. Shocking bad shooting! Then you flying wallahs started your Wild West show up aloft, complete with lassoing, rodeo effects, and so forth, and everyone got so interested that we simply marched up to the ship and took possession of her. Net result—forty-eight prisoners, two troop-carriers, a two-seater, and four scouts. Quite a decent bag! Hallo,

Rex, young fella, you're looking very thoughtful. What's worrying you?"

"What's for supper?" countered Rex. "It's been a hungry sort of day!"

"Any luck?" queried Captain Bruce, looking up as Commander Sherwell entered the brigantine's ward-room. The commander shook his head, grunted in an exasperated manner, and flung himself into a swivel-chair.

"None!" he growled. "Pon my soul, it makes one hanker after the late lamented Spanish Inquisition! I suppose," he added hopefully, "that you couldn't get the carpenter to rig up a rack or something on the after deck? I've talked myself hoarse interrogating the blighters, separately and collectively, and not one of 'em will so much as hint where their headquarters lie. How about trying a pair of thumbscrews? Simple to operate and extremely persuasive, so I've heard!"

Captain Bruce chuckled mirthlessly.

"There are times," he agreed, "when being civilised does cramp one's style. To have forty-eight prisoners, and not be able to get a crumb of information out of 'em, is enough to make any man barbaric!"

The silence of gloomy irritation fell upon the ward-room. It was the day after the brigantine had been recovered from the World Wreckers. In spite of that success, however, the little expeditionary force was no nearer its goal. The ship was theirs again, the repairs to Q 47 were nearly completed, the enemy's plans had been captured, and not one of their number had escaped. But unless one of those prisoners turned King's Evidence, it still seemed impossible to locate the headquarters of the gang.

"Eight more days!" murmured the skipper some moments later.

Commander Sherwell nodded without speaking.

The bang of a hard fist on the table jerked the two sailors back from their reverie.

"What the——" they exclaimed together.

Jim Tempest cut their expostulation short with another and heftier bang. Young Rex eyed his brother with astonished disapproval. It was not like Jim to lose his temper and start beating up the furniture.

"We're chumps!" roared Jim. "We're sock-headed loons! We're prize, beef-witted, fat-brained saps!"

"No doubt!" snapped the commander, wrinkling his nose huffily. "But there's no need to rub it in!"

Jim hastened to apologise.

"I didn't for a moment mean you, sir, or the skipper, either. I meant Rex and I."

"Oh, you did, did you!" protested the boy indignantly. "Well——"

"Listen!" interrupted Jim. "I said that we're champion asses, because we ought to have seen hours ago that it's simple enough to find out for ourselves where the chiefs of this precious gang hang out."

Captain Bruce leaned forward.

"Carry on," he said quietly.

"Those five fighters that attacked us yesterday," continued Jim. "You say that they had just that moment blown over the horizon, and hadn't even landed?"

"That's so. They were escorting a troop carrier, which was intended to convey myself and a few others to their leader for examination. As soon as they spotted you cruising about up aloft, the big machine alighted and the escort waded in at you."

"Has the trooper been touched since we bagged her?"

"No. I gave strict orders on that point."

"Good!" grunted Jim. "In that case we can work the oracle all right. The odds are that that carrier came straight from their headquarters. If we measure how much petrol still remains in her tanks, and subtract that from the total capacity, we've got the amount of juice she used coming here. Next, if we take the bus up and find out her speed, and how many gallons she burns per hour, we can easily calculate how far she must have come yesterday. That gives us the distance to our objective."

"Sound enough," nodded Commander Sherwell. "But what about direction? It would take us days, even by air, to search a circle having a radius of, say, a couple of hundred miles."

"No need to," returned Jim promptly. "We know the strength and direction of the wind yesterday. The trooper's drift indicator will still be set according to the course she followed. From those three bits of information we can make a pretty shrewd guess as to what point of the compass she came from."

He jumped to his feet.

"Hop to it, Rex!" he ended. "The sooner we make those consumption tests the better."

Racing through the ward-room door they collided with a figure only dimly to be seen in the ill-lit passageway.

From his victim's startled yelp, Jim recognised him as Sweetly, the cook.

"Sorry!" he called out, and sped on.

"Rum sort of chap, old Sweetly," observed Rex, as they gained the deck. "Always seems to be lurking about in dark corners. That's the third time we've bumped into him this week."

Jim nodded absently. At that moment he was much more interested in the sky than in the habits of Sweetly, the cook.

There was, in fact, a good deal about that sky to give any flyer food for thought. Even for the Antarctic, it was lowering, sinister, and forbidding, grey, and hard-looking, like the inside of a rusty steel helmet.

"G-g-gosh!" chattered Rex. "Isn't it c-c-c-cold!"

The deep voice of Captain Bruce replied from behind him:

"And the barometer's falling like a stone. You'd better postpone your flight, Tempest."

"All the more reason why we should get a move on," returned Jim. "This may be our last chance for a week."

Followed by Rex, Jim slid down a rope into the ship's dinghy and cast off.

A short, sharp pull, and a scramble up the slippery face of the Great Ice Barrier, brought them to the camp where the captured planes had been pegged down, and where the snow had been rolled flat to provide a runway.

Ten minutes later, with twin engines bellowing defiantly, the big monoplane troop carrier waddled nose round to the wind, lurched forward, skimmed and rose, Jim at the controls, and Rex as the solitary occupant of the huge cabin abaft the wings.

Since for him the trip was only a joy ride, he had ample time to make a tour of inspection round the lockers, rifle racks, and other fittings which lined the walls.

"Jolly well planned," he mused, "and everything ship-shape and tidy! Hallo! What's this rum-looking gadget?"

The "gadget" in question was a metal cylinder, some six inches in diameter, and rather more than two feet long. One end was rounded, while the other bore a complicated arrangement of taps and dials, ending in a splay-mouthed nozzle.

The cylinder was suspended from the cabin roof in a canvas cradle. From two bands encircling it there hung a webbing harness similar to that of a parachute. It looked heavy, but when he lifted it down Rex found that the shell was of some aluminium alloy, and that the apparatus was singularly easy to handle.

"This needs investigation," he muttered, then tucked the cylinder under one arm and wormed his way through the narrow scuttle that gave access into the pilot's cockpit.

Comfortably enclosed by sheets of unbreakable glass, Jim was dividing his attention between his instruments and the growing murk through which the plane was forging.

"Shouldn't be surprised if there's a shower," he observed, as Rex squeezed into the spare seat beside him. "What's that thing you're lugging about? An outside in thermos flasks?"

"Dunno! I brought it along for you to have a look at." Jim examined the find with interest.

"Flame-thrower!" he pronounced. "It's a chemical gadget for squirting fire about. Useful sort of tool if you want to blaze a runaway out on rough ice, or what not. But don't start fiddling with the release-wheel, or even that won't be much use!"

He nodded towards the fire extinguisher, which was mounted ready to hand, close by the dashboard.

Rex was peering through the window at the starboard engine.

"Beginning to run a bit rough, isn't she?" he said. "My hat——"

The cry was wrung from him by a sudden, deafening, stunning vibration that seemed to seize upon the machine and shake it as a terrier shakes a rat.

Jim's hand flew to the starboard engine throttle. He was too late.

Before their eyes the engine struts writhed, twisted, and buckled. All the structure of the plane screamed and shuddered.

A thing like a scimitar leapt at the centre section, gashed its way into the leading edge, and stuck quivering. Then, with a roar like an agonised beast, the engine wrenched itself free and was gone, leaving only the torn sockets of its struts, like broken fangs, protruding from the wing.

The stick banged hard a-starboard as Jim tried to hold a level keel, for the port wing, weighed down by the remaining engine, instantly dropped.

It was useless. Full ailerons could not fight against that dragging weight. Rolled completely over on her side the huge machine pitched earthwards.

Silence, except for the shrill wail of the gale, fell as Jim switched off.

"'Traid we're for it!" he growled. "There's no holding her. Where are you off to, Rex? Shinning up that wing won't help. You're not heavy enough to balance the other engine!"

"I know," retorted Rex, slamming open the sliding roof of the cabin. "But I can jolly well stop that wing from lifting!"

In spite of their deadly danger Jim howled with laughter as the boy slipped into the flame-thrower's harness, grabbed the fire extinguisher, rammed it into the belt of his flying-coat, and squirmed up through the opening.

But though both comical and desperate, the scheme was sound—he could see that.

To clamber up the outer surface of the wing, in the teeth of a biting hurricane, kicking footholds through the fabric and clawing grips for the fingers was a bit more unpleasant than any other job that Rex had ever tackled.

Once, when a frail camber rib snapped beneath his groping boot, and he was caught by the stream of the sideslip to swing out beyond the trailing edge over empty space, he glanced downwards.

For a full second after that he merely clung, shivered, and kept his eyes shut.

But falling at this speed, certain death lay less than three minutes ahead.

He gritted his teeth and climbed another two yards.

Half-way up to the wing tip was far enough. Here he gripped the main spar of the wing between his knees, swung the nozzle of the flame-thrower upwards, and turned the release wheel.

Hissing venomously, a gush of orange fire leapt from the cylinder—a gush that split into myriad sparks and fiery droplets as it played upon the wing like water from a hose.

Instantly the fabric was licked away, exposing the bare skeleton of the plane.

A reverse turn of the little wheel and the searing stream ceased as suddenly as it began. Quenching then, the cold fluid from the extinguisher was turned upon the smouldering structure.

Robbed of half its surface, the stripped wing sank, forced down by the lift of its undamaged opposing plane, despite the weight of the port engine.

Rex knew that he had succeeded, but knew little else.

Suddenly sick, and feeling as though his bones were loosened in their joints, he hugged the main spar and waited.

There came a moment when the air was filled with stinging snow and the sounds of splintering woodwork.

All sense of movement ceased.

"O.K.!" boomed Jim's voice cheerily.

Dirty Work!

REX rolled off his perch, found himself in a deep drift, spluttered, sat up, and glared malevolently at the stumps of the engine-struts.

"What caused that?" he croaked.

For a moment Jim did not reply. He had scrambled clear of his cockpit and was examining the scimitar-shaped fragment that had stuck in the centre section.

"Here's your answer," he smiled as Rex joined him. "See what it is?"

"'Course I do. It's half one of the starboard prop blades. The beastly thing bust in the air, and the vibration jiggered the engine loose. What about it? We guessed that as soon as it happened."

"See nothing rum about it?"

"Well, it's metal, and it's hollow. But lots of props are built like that nowadays."

"Have a look inside—close up by the tip."

The boy did so and whistled expressively.

"There's a thing up there like a bun, made of lead, with a rubber ring round its base, and, by gosh!—the whole inside's been smeared with glue or something!"

"Correct! Full marks for observation! Nil for deduction! Can't you spot what's happened? It's plain as dough. This blade's been doctored. When we took off, that lump of lead with the rubber facing was lying close by the boss. It was held in place by the coat of glue, and as long as it remained there, of course, the engine ran pretty well true. But as the prop kept spinning the lump naturally crept outwards until it reached the tip and threw the whole caboodle off its balance—with the interesting results that we already wot of! Brainy, eh?"

"But," objected Rex, "who could have fixed this stunt?" Jim shrugged.

"We'll find out when we get back," he promised grimly.

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"By which token it's time we started hiking. I rather fear that this alleged monoplane is no longer airworthy."

Since the wreckage of the machine looked like a fly after being hit with a hammer, Rex thought it unnecessary to agree. He concentrated on another point instead.

"What's more," he said, "we'd jolly well better tread on the gas. Seems as though the sky's falling over there."

He pointed southwards. Jim stared and nodded.

Some five miles away, across the wilderness of snow, a swirling curtain of grey hung between clouds and earth—a curtain that slowly but relentlessly was creeping nearer.

The World Wreckers had turned loose their secret powers.

Without a word the two compared compass bearings, turned their backs upon the smashed machine, and plodded off on the long trek home.

An hour later the blizzard overtook them—blinding, suffocating, all but paralysing.

Eight hours later, staggering with fatigue, and mercifully numbed into half-unconsciousness, they reached the rim of the Great Ice Barrier, and strained their eyes tensely through the lashing screen of the storm.

Faint and shadowy, the masts of the brigantine loomed through the gloom. Close at hand were the snow muffled shapes of aeroplanes.

Relief warmed their blood. During the eternity of stumbling and groping each had been haunted by the knowledge that an error of one degree on the compass bearing inevitably spelled disaster. To find their course true was like being respited from the scaffold.

They tried to cheer, but the wind tore the feeble sounds from their lips.

The pull back to the ship drained the last of their strength, for the sea was sticky with the brash of newly forming ice.

No answering shout responded to their hail as the dinghy bumped alongside.

Nerves screamed against the hurt of further effort, yet somehow muscles hauled them up the rope, to fall helplessly over the bulwarks and slump limply down on the ice-sheeted decks.

The gale howled and the rigging drummed, but no human voice eased the silence. The ship was as a ship of the dead.

It was this uncanny quiet that roused the exhausted pair as no tumult could have done.

Jim was the first to pull himself to his feet. He helped Rex up, and, without wasting precious breath in words, the two fumbled their way to the ladder leading down to the ward-room.

Here again there was no sign of life, nor sounds other than the dull surge of the tempest, the hissing and booming of waves against the hull, and the bat-like squeak of a hanging oil-lamp as it swung to the rolling of the ship.

There was a hint of horror in Rex's eyes as he gripped his brother's arm.

"What's happened?" he whispered hoarsely.

Jim made a gesture enjoining silence. He was listening intently. Abruptly he strode to the door of Captain Bruce's cabin and pulled it open.

A second he paused on the threshold, then entered silently, Rex close at his heels.

On the bunk lay a familiar, burly figure in blue uniform.

"The skipper!" gasped Rex, as Jim bent over the limp form. "Is he—is he—"

"No, he's not dead. He's drugged!"

Jim's fingers closed round the unconscious man's wrist.

"Pulse O.K.," he announced, a moment later. "Don't think he's in any danger, but he won't come to for hours. We can't do any good here. We must search the ship. You take the fo'c'sle. I'll go aft. Best keep a gun ready, in case any of those prisoners are snooping around. Take a roll card, and tick off the name of every man you find. Meet me back here as soon as you can."

The job did not take long. Back in the ward-room they compared cards.

"My fellows were in their bunks," said Rex.

"So were mine. The whole crew's had the same stuff. I found no one missing. Did you?"

"Yes. Sweetly!"

In understanding silence they eyed one another. Each was remembering a dozen little incidents in connection with the cook; incidents not suspicious in themselves, yet full of meaning in the light of this last discovery.

"Sweetly!" echoed Jim. "Of course. That explains everything. A spot of something sleepy in the soup or coffee, and the whole crew's knocked out. Then off he clears with the prisoners. Easy!"

"But what about Q 47?" queried Rex.

"Submerged. Lying nice and snug on the bottom, out of the gale. We'd best get in touch with her toot sweet."

Down in the hold, in a specially constructed sound-proof chamber, Jim tuned in the Fissenden oscillator—an affair of metal diaphragms and electric coils which could both

receive and transmit underwater signals up to a range of thirty miles.

The amplifying earphones clamped to his head, he carefully adjusted the graduated dials, while Rex looked on impatiently.

"Got her!" he exclaimed triumphantly. "Old man Sherwell must be a bit peevish about something. He's making her buzz like a bluebottle. Hallo! Great Scott!"

"What is it? What's up?" demanded Rex, almost dancing with excitement.

Jim looked up. His face was set, and there was a look in his eyes that Rex had never seen before.

"She's down," he answered simply. "Dived under a big pancake berg for shelter, and fouled her screws in something. They don't know what it is, but it's holding her fast."

"Why don't they send out divers?"

"They can't. That's the hideous part of it. Some blighters have doctored the accumulators. They've been giving off a gas of some sort ever since the foul jolted her. Now the whole crew's scuppered, except Reilly. He was in the signalling-room when the racket started, and he's been there ever since. Daren't open the doors because of the gas, and is already half dead from suffocation."

"Where are they?"

"Twenty miles nor'-nor'-east. Reilly says the berg's easy to spot 'cause its southern end is aground on Cape Wraith. I've told him to keep his pecker up and we'll be along as fast as a plane can take us. The hull doors of the diving compartment are open. Sherwell saw to that just the second before he conked out. It gives us a chance. C'm on!"

Though speed was vital, so was the necessity for not forgetting one single item of preparation.

Fighting down the temptation to rush blindly, they drew up a list of every bit of apparatus that would be needed. These, in addition to self-contained diving-suits, included gas masks packed in water-tight satchels, essential drugs from the medical stores, hacksaws and other tools, tallow to protect their bare hands, and an underwater oxy-acetylene flame apparatus.

Even shovels and spades to clear the snow from the planes were remembered and stowed in the dinghy.

To their huge relief, by the time they pushed off from the death-like brigantine the wind had died down to little more than a stiff breeze, though snow still poured out of the leaden sky and the cold was so intense as to sear like hot iron.

Rex stared after the ship as they bent to the oars.

"She looks rum!" he shouted.

"What does?"

"The ship. There's something queer about her. Can't quite spot what it is, though."

Throughout the pull to the shore he puzzled over this point, but arrived at no solution. Then the immediate task of getting a plane ready for flight drove the whole problem from his mind.

Hampered as they were by the cumbersome rubber diving-suits, the business of shovelling and prop swinging resembled the nightmare of being chased over saggy swamps by mad bulls. At last, however, it was over, the engine started, a dozen bombs slung in their racks, and all the paraphernalia packed into the after cockpit.

Laying the Eggs!

THEY had chosen the two-seater captured from the enemy twenty-four hours before, because it was fitted with exceptionally broad skis that only sank slightly into the soft surface.

The last job was to screw up each other's copper helmets—a job which even the desperate situation failed to make solemn. In fact, Rex hooted, spluttered, and boomed inside his dome every time he pictured the spectacle of two airmen flapping about through a blizzard in diving-suits.

Taking-off was a long and anxious ordeal for Jim, since he was completely blind inside his cabin, and could only charge ahead, trusting to luck and the feel of the joystick.

When at last the controls became alive under hands and feet and the bumping changed to a smooth, purring rush, he sighed explosively.

For the second time that day lives depended upon a compass, and once again long practice proved its worth. So accurate, indeed, was Jim's reckoning that he very nearly flew into the battlement of ice that rose from the centre of the berg that Reilly had described.

Twice he circled the vast slab, which measured a full two miles in length by three-quarters in breadth. From its general lowness, however, he knew that the ice could not be very thick, and this dimension was of far greater importance than mere surface size.

"Get ready, Rex!" he roared, quite forgetting that his voice was inaudible.

He swung the machine into the eye of the wind.

Loose off when we're about a hundred yards this side of the hummock. Lay six eggs, and remember you've got to pitch every one of 'em true."

To see the ice at all he had to fly at barely one hundred feet, but Jim was too old a hand at the game to be caught by the blast from his own bombs.

The instant that Rex banged his shoulder, to signal that the bomb was away, he kicked the rudder-bar as though he wished to knock it off its pivot.

With howling wires the machine skidded wildly sideways and upwards. Scarcely missing the starboard tip, a column of fire, smoke, and debris spouted thunderously through the snow.

Six times this manoeuvre was repeated, and of the six bombs only one fell outside the original mark.

Jim throttled back and landed. Lashings were passed over the wings and tail, and secured to screw pickets driven firmly into the ice. Without this precaution the machine would inevitably turn turtle should the wind shift. All stores were then unloaded, and the two plodded through the drifts to the edge of the big crater.

Anxiously they peered down, then Jim gleefully punched his brother by way of congratulation.

Although the pancake was more than twelve feet thick the bombs had done their work. Water was surging and bubbling at the bottom of the hole.

Some yards from the edge two more pickets were screwed home, and a couple of lines, several fathoms long, made fast to the eyes. Having neatly coiled these lines, the pair passed the other ends round their waists, slid down into the crater, and together began the long descent.

It was like plunging into a tank of icy ink, for all light vanished as the water closed over their helmets. For a distance of several feet the wall of ice continued, then ceased abruptly. They had emerged into free water below the berg.

Two blazing fans simultaneously stabbed the darkness as they switched on their torches, but the thousand-candle-power lamps, though brilliant at the source, could only penetrate a few yards, so dense was the murk.

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This was what Jim had feared, knowing that the coastal waters of the Antarctic are commonly clouded by countless millions of microscopic creatures.

"Finding the sub in this soup," he reflected bitterly, "is like being a blind man in a dark room looking for a black hat that isn't there! Now, what on earth does Rex think he's doing, dancing about on the end of his rope like a lunatic spider?"

The comparison was certainly justified, for Rex's light had ceased sinking, and was now bobbing about in an agitated manner, some ten feet higher than Jim and twenty yards away to the right.

At that moment, in fact, Rex was in the grip of the worst horror and terror of his life.

Out of the surrounding night something long, round, and tough had stolen, slipped clamily over his hands and suddenly tightened itself round his feet.

The more fiercely he kicked and struggled, the more relentless became that unseen hold.

He wrenched at the lamp on his belt till its beam pierced downwards. The light shone upon glistening, snaky coils that bound both ankles.

"Jim!" he shouted. "Jim! Jim!"

The cry, of course, was useless, but Jim had already begun climbing back to investigate.

Slowly his light drew nearer, and was trained upon a writhing tangle of legs and coils. A hand reached up, gripped, and started to unwind.

Surprisingly the snake-like thing slackened limply, without so much as a wriggle.

It was no squid or sea serpent that had held him, but a loose length of flexible steel cable which had been swaying with the tide and currents.

To Rex the presence of this cable was inexplicable, but to Jim, with his experience of war, it was the answer to the riddle of Q 47's fate.

What he held in his hand was a broken mesh of netting, of the type used to entangle submarines.

How it came to be set in this particular channel was a question that did not concern him at the moment. He was far more occupied with the possibility that this lucky find would lead them to the captive.

The hope was fulfilled. Carefully following the cable, he came first upon the main spread of net, where it had been

born by the driving force of its prisoner, and then upon the submarine herself, lying half-engulfed in the silt of the bottom, at a depth of twenty fathoms.

Without that guiding thread, he knew, their chances of ever finding the wreck would have been negligible.

It needed no long examination to discover two reassuring facts. One was that the submarine was undamaged, except for the cocoons of cable that had whipped round the screws and thrust boxes. The other was that, as Reilly had foretold, the door in the pressure hull, leading to the sub-compartment, was open.

From the inside of that compartment the door could be shut and the pumping gear set to work ejecting the water. Then an oxy-acetylene flame would soon cut an entrance through the remaining bulkhead.

But nothing could be done to help the crew until they were brought to the surface, since clean air was needed to clear the gas. The first job, therefore, was to free the propellers.

Thanks to that scientific marvel, the underwater flame apparatus, this task proved less formidable than it looked, lasting only half an hour of relentless burning and hacking.

All the time they worked Rex was strangely and insistently troubled by the unnameable change in the appearance of the brigantine as they left her. It exasperated him not to be able to spot the change. Also, some instinct kept warning him that it was a matter of importance—that it might even be vital.

As the last strand parted, the answer came with dazzling completeness. In that instant he not only realised what had happened to the ship, but also that her very existence was at stake.

To avert that final, crippling disaster, he must get back at once. His mind raced as he sized up every angle of the problem.

It meant leaving Jim to carry on alone, leaving him, without any possibility of explanation. But now that the heavy work was done, Jim might be able to manage single-handed.

"He must!" Rex told himself dourly. "I've jolly well got to get back to the ship, an' that's all there is to it!"

As his brother waded forward and disappeared through the door into the hull, he released the compressed air tap to inflate his suit, and rose like a bubble through the darkness to the surface.

Of the desperate scramble up the face of the crater, and the struggle to start the cold engine, he remembered little afterwards. Brain and muscles acted so mechanically that it came to him as a shock, when once in the air, to realise that somehow he had managed to get rid of his helmet and ponderous diving weights.

No longer was snow falling. Overhead the sky was coldly

blue, while far out to sea a great wall of mist marked the rearward of the blizzard.

Seeing this, he pushed the throttle open to its widest, for he knew now that fine weather would bring greater peril than any storm.

Because the wind was offshore, the flight back seemed a mere crawl, although the needle of the air speed indicator pointed steadily at a hundred and thirty.

Staring along the engine cowling as the ship came into view, he saw what reasoning had told him to expect.

At the foot of the barrier were five little groups of men, each group straining to launch a boat.

As he watched, all movement ceased for a second, then was renewed with feverish vigour. The enemy had heard and seen the plane. Between him and them it was a race, with the ship as prize.

Forced to the urgent need of lightning thought, his dazed brain suddenly became cool and clear.

"Bomb the boats?" he muttered. "No good! Might pot one or two, but they'd soon scatter and t'others would get the ship. Ah! Got it!"

It was a simple alternative that he chose. Since he couldn't be sure of preventing the boats reaching the ship, he would see that the ship wasn't there for them to reach.

The offshore wind was strong. The tide was running out. Only one long anchor chain held the brigantine.

To plant one bomb on the precise spot where that chain entered the water needed the trickiest of flying and sighting, but he did it for the simple reason that he knew he daren't miss.

Low over the boats the plane thundered. A slender metal pear fell lazily from her racks. A waterspout roared up from the sea.

Rex's yell was like a raven's croak, but it was a yell of triumph; for the brigantine, trailing her shattered chain, had been caught by wind and tide, and was drifting out to sea and safety.

Instantly he swung the machine round, intending to bomb the pursuing boats out of the water, but as swiftly changed course, and began to patrol up and down between the boats and the brigantine.

There was sound reason for this defensive move, galling though it was not to attack.

To drop more bombs with any prospect of doing damage meant exposing himself to withering fire. In ordinary circumstances he would have taken the risk and thought nothing of it, but with the ship and the submarine in their present plight, the whole expedition might be wiped out if he happened to get hit.

(Only seven more days remain before the World Wreckers start their demolition of the British Empire! Look out for thrills next week!)

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