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"THE SECRET SOCIETY OF ST. JIM'S!" GREAT YARN OF WITHIN.
TOM MERRY & CO.

The GEM

2d



"YOUR HOUR HAS COME!"

THE ST. JIM'S SECRET SOCIETY MOVES IN MYSTERIOUS WAYS, MAKING BULLIES
AND SNEAKS TREMBLE!

The SECRET SOCIETY



The sack was jerked off Knox and he saw that three figures in black cloaks and masks surrounded him. "You young hounds!" gasped the prefect. "I'll have you sacked for this!"

CHAPTER 1.

Mutiny!

"MATTATHS are gettin' sewious!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's made that statement in a very decided tone.

And the half-dozen glum-looking juniors who were gathered in Study No. 6 in the School House growled in reply:

"Bow-wow! Tell us something we don't know."

Tom Merry & Co. were looking glum. As a rule, those cheery youths were quite bright and chirpy. Tom Merry's smile was like a ray of sunshine. Monty Lowther was always humorous. Manners was a cheerful chap. And Blake, Herries, Digby and D'Arcy of Study No. 6 generally looked as if they hadn't a care in the world.

Now they looked as if they had been collecting the cares of the whole universe.

The sunny smiles, the cheery chipping, the little jokes, were all gone. The glory, so to speak, had departed from the House of Israel.

Evidently something had happened.

In fact, as Arthur Augustus put it, matters were getting serious. The GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,514.

Terrible Three of the Shell had come along to Study No. 6 to talk matters over with the chums of the Fourth. As Monty Lowther declared with great solemnity, it was time for them to stand shoulder to shoulder if St. Jim's wasn't to go entirely, hopelessly, and absolutely to the giddy bow-wows.

In the first place, the Head was ill with "flu."

The juniors, who liked and respected their headmaster very much, were a little concerned about that. Still, it cannot be said that the Head's illness by itself would have brought this tragic gloom to their youthful brows. They were sorry he was ill; but they could have borne it with fortitude if there had been nothing else the matter.

But there was.

Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, was away. The juniors missed their kindly, cheery Housemaster, who always had a genial nod and a smile for them. Yet again it must be admitted that Mr. Railton's absence by itself would not have plunged them into the blues in this way. They could have borne up under it quite cheerfully.

It was, to come to the point, the "rotten" state of affairs resulting from the illness of the Head and the absence of Mr. Railton that worried them.

Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, was acting, in Mr. Railton's absence, in his place. Mr. Linton was a good Form-master, somewhat severe in his methods, but, upon the whole, Tom Merry & Co. were pleased to give him their approval. But as a Housemaster he was, as Tom Merry emphatically declared, N. G.

Mr. Ratcliff, the Housemaster of the New House, as senior master, took the Head's place while he was indisposed. And Mr. Ratcliff was a severe, acid, "nagging" gentleman, with a special "down" on Tom Merry & Co. True, he did not come into contact much with the heroes of the Shell and the Fourth. But he could not be trusted to hold the scales of justice with an even hand. Anybody who was down on Tom Merry & Co. was certain to be looked upon with an approving eye by Mr. Ratcliff.

Hence the trouble.

With a disapproving headmaster, to whom no appeal could be made, and with the reins of House government in a slack hand, matters were not going well with the juniors.

Kildare, the captain of the school and head prefect of the School House, did his best. But Kildare could not see everything, and he could not be in two or three places at once.

SCHOOL FUN, MYSTERY AND ADVENTURE ABOUND IN THIS POWERFUL LONG YARN OF TOM MERRY & CO.

of ST. JIM'S! By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

And the juniors could not tell tales to Kildare.

Knox, the prefect, and Cutts of the Fifth, Tom Merry & Co.'s old enemies, found their opportunity now, and they were not slow to take advantage of it.

Lines and lickings, lickings and lines—that was the order of the day.

An appeal to Mr. Ratcliff would only have increased the lines and lickings. And any appeal to Mr. Linton would have been equally useless, for the Shell master quite approved of lines and lickings as the best method of governing unruly youths.

Therefore, it was clear that matters were getting serious—very serious indeed.

Of the seven juniors gathered in Study No. 6, there was not one who hadn't a large number of lines still in hand, imposed by Knox, or by Mr. Linton himself, or by Mr. Ratcliff. And most of them had smarting palms, in addition.

Something had to be done. The Head's indisposition might last for weeks. Mr. Railton would certainly be away a week, at least. And the Co. had come unanimously to the conclusion that they weren't going to stand it.

"Mattahs," said Arthur Augustus solemnly, "are gettin' altogether too sewious. I have two hundred lines to w'ite out."

"And I've got three hundred!" growled Herries.

"We've all got lines," said Tom Merry, rubbing his palms together, "and Knox caned me this afternoon. He said I was making a row in the passage."

"And you weren't?" asked Dig sympathetically.

"Well, perhaps I was," admitted Tom Merry, "but it was no business of Knox's."

"Certainly not!" "Wathah not, deah boy."

"And we can't do anything with Ratty!" said Monty Lowther thoughtfully. "All we can do with him is to keep out of his way."

"Yaas, wathah!" "Only, we can't keep out of Knox's way, and Cutts'. That rotter, Cutts! He's only in the Fifth, and he isn't a prefect; but he's taken to cuffing the juniors," said Manners, with a deep breath of indignation. "If we go for him back again it's a row, and we get the prefects down on us."

"It's wotten!" "Beastly!" "What's going to be done!" "I wepeat that mattahs are gettin' awfully sewious, and I suggest that some step be taken," said Arthur Augustus.

"What step, ass?" "I wefuse to be called an ass. In the cires—as it will, of course, wequiah thinkin' out—I wpose that you fellows put yourselves undah my guidance—"

"Rats!" "As a fellow of tact and judgment, I considah—"

"Rot!" "If you fellows are goin' to make wude remarks, I shall have no alternative but to withdraw fwm the discuss," said the swell of St. Jim's, with dignity.

"Hear, hear!" said Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Hallo!" exclaimed Tom Merry, jumping up as the study door was thrown open. "What the dickens— Oh, it's Knox!"

Knox strode into the study. He had a cane in his hand, and a frown on his brow. The juniors eyed him with suppressed fury. Any other prefect, or, indeed, a master, would have knocked at the door before entering. But Knox had no politeness to waste upon juniors.

"Well, what do you want?" asked Blake.

"Have you done your lines?" demanded Knox.

"No!"

"Wathah not! Quite imposs to do so many lines all at once, Knox, deah boy."

Knox frowned more darkly. He knew very well that the juniors had not done their lines; he had given them too many to be done in the time.

"You were ordered to take in your lines before tea-time," said Knox, in his most bullying way.

"Yaas, but—"

"I warned you that you would be caned if you didn't do them."

"Oh, we're going to do them," said Tom Merry.

"That won't do! Your impositions are doubled," said Knox, taking out a

Lines and lickings, lickings and lines! That's the lot of Tom Merry & Co. when they find themselves at the mercy of Gerald Knox, prefect and bully. But then suddenly and mysteriously comes the Secret Society of St. Jim's—to give the "knock" to Knox!

pocket-book, and making a pencilled note; "and if you've not shown them up before bed-time to-night, they will be trebled. That will keep you pretty busy to-morrow afternoon, I fancy."

The Co. looked daggers at Knox. To-morrow afternoon was a half-holiday, and the juniors did not want to be kept busy with lines on that afternoon.

"And now, hold out your hands," said Knox, swishing the cane. "You first, Merry."

Tom Merry's eyes gleamed. He was getting "fed-up" with Knox and his bullying. His temper was getting near danger-point.

"What am I to be caned for?" he asked.

"Have you done your lines?"

"Not yet."

"Then you know what you're going to be caned for," said Knox. "I'll take some of the cheek out of you, or I'll know the reason why! I'll bring you to your senses while Railton's away, and he'll hardly know you when he gets back. Hold out your hand!"

"And the rest of us after Tom Merry, I suppose?" asked Blake.

"Yes; the lot of you. I'll teach you something like discipline now there's a chance! I don't approve of cheeky fags!"

Tom Merry put his hands behind him. "Do you hear me, Merry?"

"I'm not deaf," said Tom Merry coolly.

"Then hold out your hand."

"I won't!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Bwavo, deah boy! I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort, too!"

Knox paused. For a junior to disobey the orders of a prefect was something new. Yet it had been certain to come, sooner or later, if Knox persisted in his persecution.

"Very well," said Knox, lowering the cane. "I shall take you to Mr. Linton and report you. Follow me!"

"Rats!"

"Wh-a-a-at?"

"Go and eat coke!"

"Why, I—I—I— You cheeky young sweeps!" roared Knox, quite losing command of his temper. "I—I—I'll thrash you! I'll—I'll—"

"Bow-wow!"

"Wats!"

"Clear out!"

Subordination was evidently at an end, and the juniors, having once broken out, as it were, were having their money's worth. If a licking from Mr. Linton was to follow, they felt that they might as well compensate themselves in advance by "slanging" Knox to their hearts' content.

"Yaas; wun away, Knox! You are an uttah wottah!"

"And a rotten cad!"

"And a beastly bully!"

"Go and eat coke! Buzz off!"

Knox did not buzz off. If he had been cooler he might have hesitated to tackle seven angry juniors, prefect as he was. But he wasn't cool; he was in a towering rage.

He leaped upon Tom Merry and lashed out with the cane. But he had time for only one lash. Tom Merry's right came out and caught Knox on the chin with a terrific upper-cut, and the prefect staggered back. As he staggered, the juniors rushed upon him, and he was borne to the floor with a crash.

Tom Merry snatched up the cane.

"Give him some for himself!" roared Blake.

"Pile in!"

"Let him have a taste of it!"

The rebellious juniors were too excited now to think of the consequences. Tom Merry brought the cane down with a resounding thwack across Knox's shoulders as he struggled in the grasp of the juniors.

"Yow-ow! Oh!"

Knox gave a wild roar, tore himself loose, and bounded to the door. He received another slash before he reached the doorway. Then he leaped through into the passage, and Monty Lowther's boot caught him behind as he leaped, and he yelled and rolled over.

"Huwwah! Wag him!" yelled Arthur Augustus.

"Pile on the oad!"

"Go for him!"

But Knox did not wait to be piled on. He picked himself up and fled. His footsteps died away rapidly down the passage.

And the seven juniors in Study No. 6 looked at one another, their excitement cooling down considerably.

"My hat," murmured Blake, "we're in for it now! Whacking a prefect! By gum!"

"He dwove us to it, deah boy."

"That won't make any difference to Linton. He's gone to fetch Linton. My only hat! What's going to happen now?"

And the juniors waited in considerable trepidation for the results of their unpremeditated but extremely serious rebellion.

CHAPTER 2.

Catching It!

KILDARE of the Sixth looked into Study No. 6 with a troubled expression upon his handsome face.

Seven equally troubled faces met his gaze.

Old Kildare was very popular with the juniors, and he had done his best to see that matters went well after the departure of Mr. Railton. He had kept Knox within bounds at first, but later on that became difficult, as the prefect had succeeded in ingratiating himself with Mr. Linton. Kildare was a plain, straightforward fellow, who would never have deigned to toady or flatter; and Knox had no scruples on a point like that, so he had the advantage of the St. Jim's captain there.

"Well, what have you young rascals been up to?" demanded Kildare gruffly.

"Playing the giddy goat, I'm afraid," said Tom Merry ruefully.

"Yaas, wathah! I admit——"

"Knox has just rushed downstairs, looking like a demon," said Kildare. "He's gone to Mr. Linton's study. What have you done to him?"

"Caned him," said Tom.

Kildare jumped.

"You've done—what?"

"Well, it was only a couple of lashes across the shoulders, not what you'd really call a caning," said Tom cautiously.

"You—you young ass!"

"He came for me," said Tom Merry. "He was going to slog me because I wouldn't hold out my hand, and—and I think I must have lost my temper, somehow. You get fed up with Knox in the long run, you know."

"Yaas; I considah——"

"What was he going to cane you for?" asked Kildare, with a worried look.

"Because our lines weren't done at tea-time. He knew we hadn't had time to do them. How are we to show up hundreds of lines at tea-time?"

"It was a bit thick, I suppose," muttered Kildare. "But you know it's very wrong to strike a prefect. You should have appealed to Mr. Linton instead of taking the law into your own hands."

"Ye-es; but he wouldn't have listened. He gave us some lines himself."

Kildare was silent. He knew that the juniors had been in a troublesome and difficult position, though they had undoubtedly made matters worse by acting as they had done. Striking a prefect was too serious an offence to be passed over.

There was already heavy steps and the rustle of a gown in the passage. Knox was bringing the master of the Shell upon the scene.

"I'll say what I can for you kids,"

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said Kildare hurriedly. "I'm afraid you're in for it, but I'll do what I can."

"Thanks, Kildare!"

Mr. Linton swept into the study. Knox followed him in with a scowling face. The prefect's clothes were still dusty from his fall in the passage. He had gone directly to the temporary House-master, and Mr. Linton had lost no time in coming on the scene.

Ever since the departure of Mr. Railton there had been trouble of some kind or other with Study No. 6, and Mr. Linton was fed up with it. Naturally, he was not inclined to suspect that a prefect had made a set against certain juniors. It was much more probable, to his mind, that the juniors in question were unruly young rascals, who wanted to kick over the traces now that their Housemaster was away, and Mr. Linton felt deeply resentful at the mere thought of being regarded as of less account than Mr. Railton. He intended to show the delinquents that he could come down on insubordination with as heavy a hand as the School House master himself.

"Kildare, you are here. I will take this matter in hand myself," said Mr. Linton. "It is too serious for a prefect to deal with."

"I wasn't thinking of dealing with it, sir," said Kildare. "I looked in to see what was the matter."

"Very well. You may retire now."

Kildare hesitated.

"Excuse me, sir, I think I ought to say a word. I don't defend what the youngsters have done, of course——"

"I should trust not!" snapped Mr. Linton.

"But, sir, I must tell you—it is my duty—that Knox is too hard upon them. It seems that he was about to cane them for not having done their lines, when they had not had the time——"

"I think, Kildare, that any remarks you have to make to me concerning another prefect had better be made in private," said Mr. Linton icily. "This kind of thing is subversive of all discipline."

"If you think so, sir——" said Kildare, colouring.

"I do, decidedly. Besides, this case is clear. These juniors have insulted a prefect. If I were to pass such an offence or deal with it leniently, I should be unworthy to hold authority in this House. I am about to punish them most severely."

"Oh, cwumbs!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

"If you are going to punish them now, sir, it will not be any use my giving you my view of the case afterwards in your study," said Kildare dryly.

"I am not interested in your view of the case, Kildare," said Mr. Linton sharply. "My impression is that these juniors, who are always giving trouble in one way or another, consider that they are at liberty to turn the House into a bear garden now that their Housemaster is away. I shall try to impress upon them that the reverse is the case."

"Very well, sir," said Kildare. "If you will not listen to me, there is no more to be said. As head prefect of the House, I may say that I am entitled to be listened to."

Mr. Linton flushed.

"I am aware that Mr. Railton placed a great deal of authority in your hands, Kildare. I may state plainly that I do not intend to do the same while I am head of the House. It seems to be your desire to let the juniors run wild. I cannot say that I have confidence in you."

Kildare's eyes flashed.

"If you haven't confidence in me, sir, there is nothing for me to do but to resign from my position as a prefect!" he exclaimed hotly. "I therefore place my resignation in your hands until Mr. Railton's return, when I shall ask him to consider the matter."

Mr. Linton nodded coldly.

"I accept it," he said.

"Very well." Kildare turned on his heel and strode from the study. There was no more to be said. But as he strode down the passage, with burning cheeks and indignant heart, he heard Mr. Linton's voice:

"Knox, as Kildare has resigned, I shall make you head prefect of the House until Mr. Railton's return."

"Thank you, sir," said Knox, in his silky, almost cringing tones. "I shall do my best to deserve your confidence, sir."

"I am sure you will, Knox."

"Thank you, sir. You are very kind to say so."

Kildare set his teeth as he went down the passage. He was no longer a prefect—until Mr. Railton returned, at all events—and Knox was head prefect of the House for the same length of time. Kildare wondered bitterly how matters would progress in the House under Knox's rule.

In Study No. 6 the juniors stood in dumb dismay. Good old Kildare had chipped in to help them, with his usual love of fair play, and he had "got it in the neck" himself, in consequence, in the most crushing way.

Knox was triumphant all along the line.

Knox was head prefect.

There would be indignation throughout the House, in the Sixth, as well as among the juniors; but Mr. Linton, who was blessed with a tremendous amount of obstinacy, which he mistook for confidence, would not be moved in the least by that.

And matters would certainly go from bad to worse for Tom Merry & Co., for now there would be no check whatever upon Knox's tyranny.

But Mr. Linton did not give them much time for thinking. He took a cane from Knox's hand, and rapped out an order.

"Hold out your hands in turn!"

The juniors had collared Knox and booted him out of the study. But the most reckless of them did not think of resisting a Form-master. They obediently held out their hands, and the cane came down lashing again and again, till each of the juniors had had three cuts on either hand, and they were simply wriggling with pain.

Then Mr. Linton and Knox retired from the scene, the prefect inwardly gleeful, and the Form-master feeling that he had performed a necessary stern duty. And in Study No. 6 there was a sound of wailing and gnashing of teeth.

CHAPTER 3.

Figgins Rises to the Occasion!

FIGGINS of the Fourth paused, and whistled softly.

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn of the Fourth—the famous Co. of the New House—were coming along the Fourth Form passage in the School House—coming to Study No. 6.

The New House Co. for once were not on the warpath. Although the rivalry between the juniors of the two Houses at St. Jim's seldom slept, it was "off" now—quite off. As Figgins nobly

said, they couldn't rag the School House bounders at a time when they were "down." The old dispute, as to whether the New House or the School House was cock House at St. Jim's, could stand over until things were going better with Tom Merry & Co.

Kerr fully agreed with the great Figgins in taking that view, and Fatty Wynn went a step further in suggesting that the persecuted juniors of the School House should be asked over to a stunning feed in the study of the Co.

In times of trouble or stress, Fatty Wynn's great specific was a feed, and he believed that a really good spread would buck up the School House fellows no end. And as the chums of the New House were in funds, Fatty's generous suggestion had been adopted nem. con. Supplies had been laid in, and here were Figgins & Co., brimming over with kind intentions, come over to ask their old rivals to tea.

But as they drew near Study No. 6, sounds met their ears that did not seem to indicate that the juniors were in a festive humour. Figgins & Co. paused in the passage in wonder. For this is what they heard proceeding from Study No. 6, in a kind of chorus:

"Yow-ow-ow!"
 "Groo-ooogh!"
 "Bai Jove! Wow!"
 "Ow! My paws! Ow!"
 "The awful beast! Ow!"

Evidently there was trouble in Study No. 6. Kerr remarked that it looked as if the Assyrians had come down like a wolf on the fold.

"Doesn't sound as if they want to go out to tea, does it?" said Figgins doubtfully.

"Oh, come on!" said Fatty Wynn. "Nothing like a feed to buck you up. When you've got to bear anything, you can't do better than lay a solid foundation. They'll cheer up like anything when we tell 'em we've got a whole salmon, a cake, and three kinds of jam. You see?"

Figgins nodded, and tapped at the door. The voice that came from within Study No. 6 was not welcoming.

"Oh, go away, fathead!"

Figgins smiled and opened the door. Seven cheerless juniors glared at the trio from the New House.

Figgins & Co. looked at them, and came into the study and closed the door. The suffering seven did not utter a word of welcome. They uttered nothing but groans and grunts.

"My hat," said Figgins, "you look as if you'd been through it!"

"Yaas, wathah! We have been fihwough it!" groaned Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "If the Head were not on the wocks, I should appeal to him. But it is no use appealin' to Watty. Your dustin' Housemaster would only give us some more."

Figgins nodded sympathetically.

"You're right, Gussy. Old Ratty has been a bit easier with us lately, though. We hardly know him in the New House now. He's as pleased as Punch at being in the Head's shoes for a bit."

"He hasn't been easier with us," grunted Blake. "We tried to keep out of his way. But we can't keep out of Knox's way. What do you think? Kildare has resigned, and Linton has made Knox head prefect of the House."

"Oh, rotten!"

"That means we're under his heel for good—until Raitton comes back, anyway," said Tom Merry. "Oh, my hat! My palms feel on fire!"

"Knox will be found slaughtered one of these days," said Herries darkly. "I

know he will. I can feel it in my bones."

"You fellows are having a high old time, and no mistake," remarked Kerr.

"Oh, rats! Have you come over to tell us that?" growled Monty Lowther.

"You can go back to the New House and eat coke. What do you want on the respectable side of the quad, anyway?"

"Yaas, wathah! I wefuse to have these New House boundahs gloatin' ovah our feahful suffewings."

"Let's kick 'em out of the House," said Manners, rising. "It will be some comfort to pass the licking on."

"Hear, hear!"

Figgins grinned and held up his hand.

"Pax!" he exclaimed.

"I wefuse to pax—I mean—"

"We've come over as friends—as your old pals," Figgins explained.

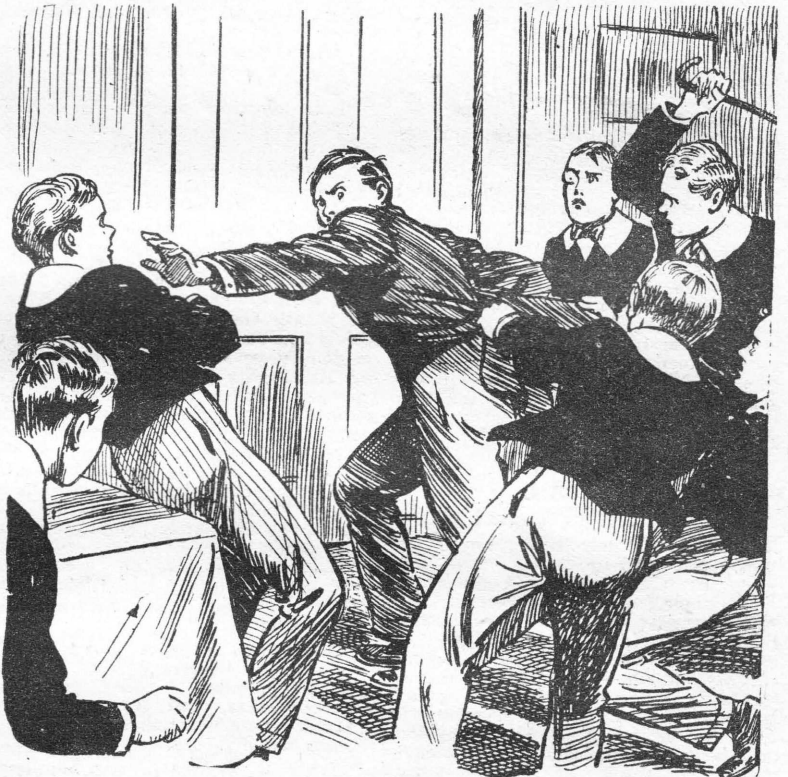
"Come along," said Figgins. "No good grunting and groaning, you know. Besides, we've been thinking this matter over for you, and I've got an idea."

"Whose?" groaned Monty Lowther. Lowther was suffering severely, but if he had been going to his execution he would undoubtedly have made a little joke on his way there.

"My own, of course!" said Figgins indignantly. "Look here, you ass—ahem!—I mean, come over to the New House, and we'll talk it over in my study, without any danger of anybody spying. There are sneaks in this House."

"Look here, Figgins—"

"No offence," said Figgins hastily, "but I've heard about it. Levison is hand-and-glove with Knox, and has been giving you away."



"Yow-ow! Oh!" roared Knox as Tom Merry brought the cane down with a resounding thwack across his shoulders. The prefect tore himself loose from the grasp of the juniors and bounded to the door.

"While you fellows are in this hole we've agreed that there's not going to be any more House rows. They are off. While you're down on your luck we're going to stand by you and back you up as much as we can."

"That's the programme," said Kerr and Wynn together.

"Bai Jove, I wergard that as weally wippin' of you, Figg, deah boy, and I take back my wemark!"

"And we've got a stunning feed ready in our study, and we want you fellows to come over," said Figgins. "It's really something decent."

"A whole salmon," said Fatty Wynn temptingly, "and one of Mrs. Taggles' biggest cakes, and three kinds of jam."

"By Jove, you're going it!" said Tom Merry, laughing in spite of the aching in his palms. "This is really awfully decent of you chaps."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Yaas, it's twue," said Arthur Augustus. "No good bein' watty with Figg for statin' the pwecise twuth, deah boys. Levison and Mellish have both been sneakin' and cuwwyin' favah with Knox, and gettin' us into wows, and there's no denyin' it. Half our twoubles have come fwom their sneakin', and the othah half fwom punishin' them for their wotten sneakin'."

"Come on, then," said Figgins. "Tea's ready."

The School House juniors rose to their feet. They could not help feeling that it was very kind of Figgins to back them up in this way, and Figg's offer was too good to be refused. Tom Merry & Co. marched out of the study with the New House trio. As they came out into the quadrangle they were the recipients of a good many

sympathetic looks and remarks from their friends.

"I hear you laid into Knox," said Kangaroo of the Shell. "Good luck to you."

"And then Linton laid into us!" groaned Blake.

"Never mind; it was a jolly good thing," said Lumley-Lumley of the Fourth. "I guess it will be a lesson to Knox."

"Linton has made him head prefect of the House."

"Oh, by gum!"

"Head prefect!" howled Reilly. "Bedad! What a rotten shame!"

"Oh, rotten!" exclaimed Bernard Glyn. "Still, it won't last after Railton comes back. Mr. Railton knows Knox better than Linton does."

"And we shall have a high old time till Railton comes back!" remarked Clifton Dane, with a dismayed whistle. "This takes the bun, and no mistake!"

Tom Merry & Co. walked across the quad with Figgins, leaving the School House juniors discussing the new and disconcerting situation with dismayed faces. They realised that they were fairly under the thumb of the bully of the Sixth now. Popular prefects like Kildare and Darrell, and Langton and Rushden, would not be able to interfere to prevent injustice when Knox was placed in authority over them, and backed up by the Housemaster.

The juniors agreed that it was getting altogether too thick; but they also admitted that they did not see what was to be done. As Lumley-Lumley remarked, they mightn't like it, but they had to grin and bear it. Bear it they certainly had to do, whether they grinned or not. The only fellows who were likely to grin in the circumstances were Levison and Mellish, who were high in favour with the new head prefect.

CHAPTER 4.

A Tremendous Wheeze!

FIGGINS' study in the New House presented quite a festive appearance when the Co. ushered their guests into it.

The evening was a little chilly, and there was a big fire blazing in the grate, and the kettle was singing cheerily on the hob. The table was spread for tea, and a handsome spread it was. The whole salmon, of which Fatty Wynn was justly proud, reposed on a large dish, and looked very tempting indeed. And in spite of their sufferings Tom Merry & Co. realised that that severe caning from Mr. Linton had not impaired their appetites.

Figgins made the tea, Kerr carved the salmon, and Fatty Wynn handed round the plates and the toast. Under the cheery influence of fragrant tea and a good feed and good fellowship, the persecuted heroes of the School House felt their spirits revive.

"Bai Jove! This is bettah than House wags," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Thank you, deah boy; I will have anothah helpin'. What about the ideah you were speakin' of, Figgy? We are pwepared to give it our distinguished considewation."

"Hear, hear!" said Tom Merry & Co. cordially.

As a matter of absolute fact, the chums of the School House did not think that Figgins' idea was likely to amount to much. They had a strong persuasion that the School House was the place for ideas, and that all

"wheezes" emanating from the rival establishment were only "so-so" at the best. But Figgins & Co. had acted so handsomely, they were prepared to listen to Figgins' suggestion to any extent just then, and make the very best of it.

Figgins coughed modestly. "Well, I think it's rather a good idea myself," he remarked. "You see, I've been reading a story about a secret society, and that put it into my head."

Tom Merry paused with his fork half-way to his mouth.

"A secret society?" he said.

"Yes. They flourish in America—and places," said Figgins.

"Go hon!" said Monty Lowther sarcastically.

"I know all about all their methods," went on Figgins, ignoring Lowther's remark. "When a person is disagreeable to them they hold a secret council, with masks over their chivvies, and remove him."

Arthur Augustus looked puzzled.

"Wemove him?" he repeated.

"Yes."

"How do they wemove him, deah boy? And what good does it do to wemove him? I suppose he would be just as disagreeable in one place as anothah."

"Ass! Removing him means bumping him off!"

"Gweat Scott!"

"Of course, that's carrying the thing too far," went on Figgins. "You don't want to bump off Linton or Knox. But what's the matter with a secret society? You see, they've got a down on you in your House. You can't go for Knox without getting Linton on your necks. You can't go for Linton without being sacked. But a secret society could go for the rotters, and nobody would know. Nobody would suspect whence came the blow!" said Figgins impressively, apparently borrowing that expression from the romance he had lately perused with so much profit.

"Bai Jove!"

"A secret society!" said Blake, with a thoughtful brow. "It would be jolly good fun, anyway."

"Masks and daggers and things," said Digby. "Good egg!"

"Penny plain and twopence coloured!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"Look here, Lowther—" began Figgins warmly.

"Yes, shut up, Monty," said Manners. "I think Figgy's idea is a jolly good one. A secret society could go for the rotters without getting it in the neck afterwards."

Monty Lowther grinned.

"But if Knox goes for us, and a secret society of seven members goes for Knox, it won't take him long to guess who they are, even if we have our chivvies masked," he remarked.

"Yaas, that's so."

Figgins smiled superior.

"But it won't be a secret society of seven members," he explained. "It will be a society of three members, and you can take it in turns to act, you see. The other members can show themselves in public about the same time, and prove an alibi. More-over—"

"That's a good word, anyway," murmured Monty Lowther.

"Moreover," repeated Figgins firmly, "the first time the secret society gets to work, all the seven of you can be in public places, open to inspection, so that you can't be suspected. For we

three will take your place for the first sitting—see?"

"Suppose, for instance, Knox is collared and taken somewhere for judgment, and punished—three masked johnnies do the business—of course, he'll suspect you at once. You'll prove that all the time you were in your studies or in the Common-room. That will clear you of suspicion, and you will be able to go to work afterwards quite safely."

The chums of the School House looked admiringly at the great Figgins. "Risky if you get bowled out!" said Blake.

"We're willing to risk it, to give you a start," said Figgins. "And after the secret society has once got to work, it will be a regular case of terrorism. Knox won't dare to bully and rag the kids when he thinks he may be collared at any moment by the Masked Three of the Black Band, or whatever you like to call it."

"Cutts will pull in his horns a bit, I fancy. Levison and Mellish will stop sneaking when they find that the unknown three are on their track. Even old Linton might go slow when he receives a mysterious warning from the Black Brotherhood."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"By Jove, Figgy, you are a corker!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "It's simply a stunning wheeze. And it will be great fun, too."

"Tremendous, deah boy!"

Figgins smiled with satisfaction. He was not above feeling gratified at impressing the School House juniors with the excellence of New House wheezes. Certainly, nothing of the kind had ever been mooted at St. Jim's before.

And the mere idea of forming a secret society, with black masks and secret signs, and the whole bag of tricks complete, so to speak, appealed very much to the imagination of the juniors. Already in their mind's eye they could see themselves hauling the obnoxious Knox before the secret tribunal, and passing judgment upon him, and making him thoroughly sorry for himself, without a fearful licking from their Housemaster to follow.

"It's ripping!" said Tom Merry. "Keep it dark, of course. Not a word outside our noble selves."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You can post up notices to the obnoxious persons—such as bullies and sneaks," continued Figgins. "Something in this style: 'Tremble! The Secret Tribunal is on your track!' or, 'Look Out for the Bloodstained Brotherhood!'"

"Oh, it's stunning!" said Blake. "We'll make 'em hop! And we've got masks and things among our props in the Junior Dramatic Society; no difficulty about that. Masks and black cloaks, that's the wheeze!"

"We'll try the villains before the secret tribunal," said Manners thoughtfully. "Mind they don't recognise our voices, though."

"You can cultivate deep bass voices for the occasion," said Figgins, "and, as I said, we three will take the matter in hand for the first sitting of the secret tribunal. The meetings can be held in the old tower—that's well out of the way—after dark. We can keep the props there, hidden under one of the loose stones in the floor. When a victim is to be captured, he's suddenly tackled in the dark, a sack slipped over his head, and there you are!"

"Bwavo!"

"You let us know when you want us to get to work, and we'll be ready."

said Figgins. "You can rely on us. Have some more tea?" went on Figgins, suddenly dropping from the dramatic into the commonplace, and the juniors grinned.

That tea in Figgy's study was, after all, a joyful occasion. The juniors discussed and rediscussed the scheme with ever-growing satisfaction. Even if the secret society did not have the effect intended, at least it would be a lark. But all the members of the society hoped that the effect would be great—that the tyranny of Knox, the bullying of Cutts and Gilmore, and the sneaking of Levison and Mellish, would be nipped in the bud, and that, as Figgins remarked, everything in the garden would be lovely.

CHAPTER 5.
The Sneak!

"ANYBODY got a dogwhip?" Harry Noble, more familiarly known as Kangaroo, asked that question in the School House.

It caused some surprise among the juniors to whom he put the question.

"What the dickens do you want with a dogwhip?" asked Clifton Dane. "You haven't got a dog."

"If not, I shall have to use a cricket-stump," said Kangaroo.

"But what's the little game?" exclaimed Blake.

It was after morning lessons, the day after the great meeting in Figgins' study in the New House. Tom Merry & Co. had discussed the great scheme of the secret society at great length, but as yet no step had been taken in the matter.

"It's Levison!" said Kangaroo, breathing hard.

"Sneaking again?"

"Yes."
"Bai Jove! The wottah!"

"I've just had Linton down on me," said Kangaroo, whose face was red with anger. "Knox reported me to him for splitting his canes in the Form-room. It's time his canes were split, I should say. But how did Knox know I split 'em? He wasn't there. Somebody was watching me and told Knox."

"Levison or Mellish," said Tom Merry. "Nobody else in the House would do such a rotten thing as spy on a fellow and sneak about him."

"Wathah not!"

"That's what I want the dogwhip for," said Kangaroo. "I'm going to call on Levison, and talk to him."

"With a dogwhip?" chuckled Blake. "Yes. Words are no good with a cad like that. But a jolly good licking may teach him to keep his tale-telling to himself."

"Hear, hear!"

"Hold on, though!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "Unless you're quite sure it was Levison, it is hardly the thing to pitch into him."

"Yaas, he ought to be twied," said Arthur Augustus. "Bettah leave him until—"

"Shurrup!" murmured Blake.

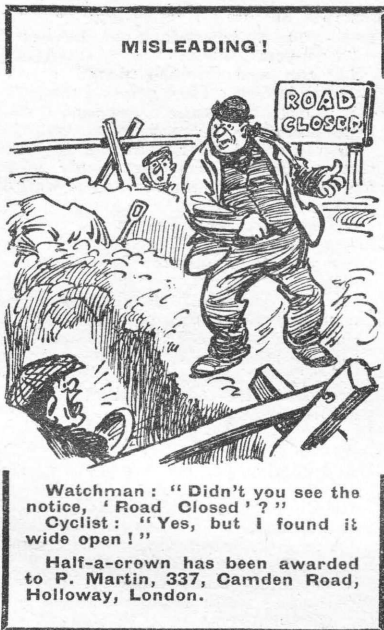
"Weally, Blake, I was not goin' to say anythin' about the secret—"

"Cheese it, you idiot!"
"I wefuse to be called an idiot, and I wepeat that I was not intendin' in the least to mention the— Yow-ow-ow! Some howwid idiot has stamped on my foot! Yow!"

"It's all right, Tommy," said Kangaroo. "Levison's going to own up."

"How do you know?"

"I'm going to lick him till he does," explained the Cornstalk, "then I'll lick him for sneaking. See? Quite simple."



said Kangaroo, seizing Levison by the collar and jerking him off his chair. "Now, you rotter"—the cricket stump rose and fell—"take that—and that—and that!"

"Yow-ow-ow-ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And that—and that—and that!"

Own up, you cad!"

"Knox!" screamed Levison. "Knox!"

"He's asking for knocks, and he's getting knocks!" grinned Lowther. "Give him what he's asking for, Kangy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Cave!" yelled Reilly from the passage. "Here comes Knoxy!"

The prefect strode into the study.

"What is this?" he asked angrily. "What are you doing to Levison, Noble?"

"Licking him for sneaking," said Kangaroo coolly.

"Put down that stump!"

"Certainly! I've finished with it."

"Now follow me to the House-master!"

"Follow in your father's footsteps!" murmured Monty Lowther.

Kangaroo hesitated; but he decided to follow Knox. The head prefect of the School House swung out of the study, and the Cornstalk followed him to Mr. Linton's room.

The master of the Shell looked up with a worried frown.

"I have to report Noble, sir, for a brutal assault upon Levison with a cricket-stump," said Knox. "It is a particularly brutal case—Noble having attacked a smaller boy than himself."

Kangaroo flushed crimson.

"You rotter!" he exclaimed wrathfully. "I licked him for sneaking, as you know!"

"Silence, Noble!" thundered Mr. Linton.

"Well, sir, Mr. Railton never allowed sneaking when he was here," said Kangaroo independently. "Knox oughtn't to allow juniors to come to him telling tales!"

"I trust that there is nothing in what Noble says, Knox?"

"Nothing at all, sir," said Knox calmly. "I certainly should not allow tale-bearing if I knew of it. I trust you know me better than that, sir. I have endeavoured to carry out your wishes and instructions to the best of my ability, sir; that is all."

"Quite so, Knox. I will put down this unruliness!" said Mr. Linton, taking up his cane. "You have acted in a ruffianly way, Noble. I shall punish you severely. Hold out your hand!"

"But, sir—"

"Hold out your hand at once!"

Kangaroo gritted his teeth and obeyed. He received six cuts before he was dismissed from the study. And Mr. Linton's last words were:

"If you repeat this conduct, Noble, I will detain you for every half-holiday for the rest of the term, and I shall make it a point to ask Levison whether you interfere with him in any way."

Kangaroo departed in silence. To be gated on every half-holiday for a whole term would be a worse punishment than the most severe licking, and he realised that it would not do.

Levison was safe after that.

When the juniors were going in for lessons that afternoon, Levison met the Cornstalk in the Form-room passage and regarded him with a sneering smile.

Kangaroo clenched his fists, and undclenched them again.

"Had your lesson—what?" asked Levison, with a sneer.

"You cad!" muttered Kangaroo. "You've only got to wait till Railton comes back, then there will be an end of your sneaking, and I'll—I'll—"

"Oh rats!"

"Why, you—you—you—"

"Oh, shut up!" said Levison, with a shrug of the shoulders. "You're all gas, you know!"

Kangaroo made a stride towards him. "Look out, Kangy!" muttered Tom Merry. "Knox is watching you!"

"Well, what are you going to do, you rotter?" asked Levison, eyeing the Cornstalk coolly.

Kangaroo controlled himself with difficulty.

"I'm going to wait!" he muttered. "It will keep."

"So you are threatening Levison, Noble?" said Knox, coming along the passage. "I heard you. You will take two hundred lines."

Kangaroo gritted his teeth, and went into the Form-room boiling with rage.

Levison swaggered into the Fourth Form Room.

His star was in the ascendant now, and he could afford to swagger. The contemptuous looks of his Form-fellows did not effect him in the least. If he could not be liked, at least he could be feared, and that was a considerable satisfaction to the cad of the Fourth.

But, as Blake remarked in a furious whisper to Dig, his time was coming.

It was not advisable for anybody to "go" for Levison openly. The sneak and the bully were hand-in-glove, and Levison was safe from open punishment. But when the secret society got to work, then there would be trouble for the "rotters." Figgins' great idea was the only resource.

CHAPTER 6.

The Warnings!

"GREAT Scott!"

"What does that mean?"

"Phew!"

"Is it a joke?"

"My hat!"

There was a buzzing crowd in the Junior Common-room in the School House. They were gathered before a paper that was pinned on the wall.

The paper was a common sheet of notepaper. Upon it was a most surprising notice, written in Roman capitals, and, therefore, affording no clue to the hand that had written it. And it ran:

"WARNING!

SNEAKS, BULLIES, AND ROTTERS
GENERALLY, TAKE WARNING!

YOU ARE WATCHED!

THE SECRET SOCIETY HAS ITS
EYE ON YOU!

TREMBLE!!!"

"My only summer chapeau!" ejaculated Kangaroo, as he stared at that amazing notice. "This must be a joke! It's like a bit from Figgy's serial in the 'Weekly'—"

"Somebody's being awfully funny, I suppose," remarked Glyn.

"Somebody been reading 'Deadwood Dick' and 'Bloodstained Bill,' and got it on the brain!" chuckled Dane.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The Secret Society," said Gore.

"Who the dickens are they?"

"Secret silly asses, I should say!"

"Secret lunatics!" suggested Reilly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's a warning to sneaks, bullies, and THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,514.

rotters!" observed Lumley-Lumley. "I guess you had better look out, Levison!"

"And you, Mellish!"

Levison and Mellish stared at the peculiar notice. They grinned sardonically. Their impression was that it had been posted up there by some unfortunate victim of their sneaking to scare them; but they were not likely to be scared by a paper pinned on the wall of the Common-room.

"Silly rot!" said Levison, shrugging his shoulders. "If a prefect sees this, there will be trouble for the duffer who stuck it up there!"

"Here's Darrell!" said Kangaroo, as Darrell of the Sixth passed the door. "Chance for you to sneak, Levison!"

Darrell looked into the Common-room. The excited exclamations of the crowd there had attracted his attention. But Darrell was not the sort of fellow for Levison to sneak to. If he had taken tales to Darrell, he would have been caned on the spot for tale-bearing, and he knew it.

"Hallo! What's the excitement?" asked Darrell, with a smile.

"A giddy Secret Society!" grinned Kangaroo. "Look at that, Darrell!"

The juniors made room for Darrell, and the big Sixth Former strolled into the Common-room, and looked at the notice on the wall. He looked surprised, and then laughed.

"What does this mean?" he asked.

"Is it a joke?"

"Must be, I suppose," said Kerruish. "Not but what something of the kind is wanted here. There's been too much sneaking and bullying since Railton went away!"

A murmur of approval followed the Manx junior's remarks.

Most of the fellows there were quite of his opinion.

"It's all rot, of course!" said Darrell, jerking the notice down from the wall. "You musn't play these tricks, you know! Don't let there be any more of it!"

And the good-natured prefect crumpled up the paper in his hand and walked out.

"Good old Darrell!" said Lumley-Lumley. "I guess Knox would have raised Cain about it. But I guess there won't be any more of it."

But Lumley-Lumley "guessed" wrong. A few hours later there was a second notice, an exact reproduction of the first, pinned up in the same place in the Common-room. The juniors saw it there, and wondered. Whoever was putting these notices up was looking for trouble, Kangaroo remarked, and sooner or later he would find it.

It came to the ears of Knox somehow—the juniors could guess how.

Knox came into the Common-room, and looked at the paper and scowled. The reference it contained to bullies and rotters was directed to him, as he very well knew. He glanced round at the juniors in the room.

"Who put this paper here?" he demanded.

There was no reply.

Knox gave a baffled look at the crowd of faces. If the juniors did not choose to tell him who had put the warning notice there, there was nothing to be done. Even Levison and Mellish were unable to give him any information. The Secret Society, whoever they were, were quite unknown to the sneaks of the School House.

"I shall find out who is playing this fool trick and punish him!" said Knox, tearing down the paper. "If there is any more of it, I shall report the matter to the Housemaster! You had better be careful!"

And Knox strode angrily away. He went to his study, where Cutts was waiting for him. The two black sheep of the School House intended to pass the evening pleasantly with a little game of nap—of course, quite unknown to the powers that were. If Mr. Linton had known Knox a little better, he would certainly not have made him head prefect of the House.

Cutts was sitting on the table, staring at the looking-glass over the mantelpiece, when Knox came in. Knox followed his glance and started. Upon the mirror words were traced in chalk in large Roman capitals:

"WARNING!

THE SECRET SOCIETY IS WATCH-
ING YOU!

LOOK OUT!"

Cutts turned to the prefect with a grin.

"Is that a joke?" he asked.

"I—I suppose it's some cheek of those rotten fags!" said Knox, between his teeth. "Did you find that foolery written there?"

"It was there when I came in," said Cutts.

"You didn't see anybody hanging about the study?"

"No; there was nobody here."

Knox took a duster and wiped the glass clear. His face was dark with rage.

"It's Merry or some of his friends," he said. "I wish I could catch them in the act, that's all!"

"Can't your invaluable friend Levison catch them?" said Cutts, laughing.

"It seems not. But they'll be bowled out soon, and then"—Knox gritted his teeth—"then let them look out! But never mind those cheeky fags now; let's have a game!"

The two seniors settled down to their play. It was an hour later when Cutts left the study, with a satisfied smile, having won most of Knox's spare cash. He left the prefect in a temper that was far from amiable. Knox was a bad loser. As Cutts pulled the door open, he uttered an exclamation:

"My hat! Look here!"

Knox gave a yell of wrath. On the outside of the door, visible now that it was open, a sheet of paper was pinned bearing, in large letters:

"BEWARE OF THE
SECRET SOCIETY!"

Cutts gave a whistle.

"That wasn't there when you came in," he said. "Some kid has had the awful cheek to pin that notice there while we've been playing!"

Knox, pale with rage, picked up a cane and strode out of the room. He made his way directly to Tom Merry's study. His suspicions had fallen upon the Co. at once. But the study was empty; the Terrible Three were out. Knox strode on to Study No. 6, but that famous apartment was also drawn blank.

The discomfited prefect stamped into Levison's study. He was keenly anxious to get at the author of that chalked inscription on his door, and it was a time when his henchman in the Lower School should have been able to aid him. He found Levison and Mellish together in the study, both of them looking a little queer. On the study table words had been chalked in large letters:

"SNEAK! LOOK OUT FOR THE
SECRET SOCIETY!"

"What does that mean?" roared Knox.

"We—we found that here when we came in!" faltered Levison. "Blessed if I know who did it! Somebody has been here while we were in the tuck-shop!"

"You young fool! Find out who it was and I'll skin him!" hissed Knox. "Haven't you sense enough to spot the fellow who plays a trick like that?"

"I suppose I can't see what's going on while I'm not here, can I?" growled Levison sullenly.

"If you don't find out who's playing these tricks, you'll get a licking yourself, that's all!" said Knox savagely.

He stamped out of the study, and returned to his own quarters. He had not been absent more than ten minutes, but when he came into his room there was a fresh inscription in chalk on the looking-glass. Knox stared at it as if he could hardly believe his eyes, but there was the warning notice in large letters:

"ROTTER! THE SECRET SOCIETY IS ON YOUR TRACK! TREMBLE!"

Knox, with feelings too deep for words, took his duster again and wiped the glass clear. The Secret Society was beginning to get on his nerves.

CHAPTER 7.

The Secret Society Act!

TAGGLES, the St. Jim's porter, grunted as there came a loud ring at the bell. It was a good hour after locking-up, and Taggles did not like being disturbed. But he had been disturbed in like manner a good many times lately. He guessed that it was Levison who was ringing the bell, and he grunted discontentedly as he went down to the gates.

"Buck up, Taggles!" said Levison, between the bars of the gates. "Don't keep me waiting here all night!"

Taggles snorted. "Which I'll report yer for bein' late, Master Levison!" he growled.

Levison laughed. "Report and be hanged! I've got a pass!"

"Yes, I know you 'ave, you young blackguard!" Taggles muttered under his breath. "Nice goings hon since Mr. Raitlon went away! Which you're a young raskil, and Knox is another raskil!"

"What are you mumbling about, Taggles?" asked Levison pleasantly.

"Ugh!" Taggles unlocked the gates, and Levison came in. Under favour of the head prefect of his House, Levison had many liberties that were not enjoyed by the rest of the juniors. Levison did not intend to play the sneak and informer for nothing, and Knox had to make it worth his while.

The head prefect was kept accurately informed of all cases of delinquency among the School House juniors, at the price of allowing the informer to break as many rules as he liked. Levison always had a pass out of gates when he wanted one—and he wanted one pretty often. He had his own peculiar amusements outside the walls of St. Jim's, which he pursued with greater freedom now that Knox was head prefect of his House.

Taggles went grunting back to his lodge, and Levison, whistling, swaggered away across the dark quadrangle towards the School House. But his

swagger and his whistle ended suddenly as three masked and cloaked forms suddenly leaped upon him from the shadows of the old elms.

Before he knew what was happening, Levison was grasped and a sack was dragged over his head, and the open end of it drawn tight round his waist with a cord.

Levison, taken utterly by surprise, struggled furiously inside the sack, and began to yell. But a heavy hand pressed the sack tight over his mouth, and his yells were stilled at once.

"Silence!" hissed a deep bass voice through the covering. "You are in the hands of the Secret Society! Silence!" "Help!" spluttered Levison.

The sack was pressed more tightly over his face. Then he was swung off his feet, and three pairs of strong hands grasped him and carried him away.

Levison trembled in the sack. The Secret Society, whoever they were, had not stopped short at words evidently. The warnings posted up in the School House had been followed by deeds at last. The sneak of the School House was in the hands of the Secret Society.

Not that they were "secret" to him. He was quite assured that they were Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther. Levison hadn't the slightest doubt on that point. And while he was being carried silently away through the darkness he was inwardly resolving to report the Terrible Three to Knox and bring down condign punishment upon their devoted heads.

But that was in the future. For the present he was in the hands of the enemy. What were they going to do to him? Where were they taking him? Levison shivered.

He had done enough to earn the severest punishment from the juniors he had spied upon and betrayed. It was only too likely, that he was about to receive what he deserved, whatever might happen to the avengers themselves afterwards. And the prospect was not pleasant.

He struggled again in the sack, and was promptly lowered to the ground and bumped, and after that he ceased to struggle. He ground his teeth and waited.

Where was he being taken? For five minutes now he had been carried, and that was time to reach any spot within the walls of St. Jim's. Yet he was still being carried on. The gates were closed. He could not be taken out of the gates unless he was dragged over the wall. Still his captors tramped on with him. Where?

Levison realised that he was being taken about at random, in order that he should not afterwards be able to retrace the journey; so that he could not, when he was free, discover the secret meeting-place of the Secret Society.

The journey ended at last. Levison could see nothing in the darkness in the interior of the sack. But he felt that he

was being carried through some doorway, into some building. Certainly it was not the School House. It might be the old tower, the ruined chapel, the woodshed, the bikeshed, the gym—anywhere. He could not tell.

He was set down on a cold stone floor.

There was a moment of silence, and then he heard a match struck. A candle had been lighted. Then several seconds of silence.

Then a deep bass voice—a voice that was evidently disguised, and which Levison tried in vain to recognise—pronounced the words: "Take off the sack!"

The sack was jerked from Levison's head.

The cad of the Fourth sat up and looked dazedly about him. Three dark figures stood round him, covered from head to foot in black cloaks. Their faces were hidden by masks, in which eyeholes had been cut, through which their eyes gleamed strangely. Convinced as he was that it was simply a comedy, and that the masked trio were only his schoolfellows, whom he knew perfectly well, Levison nevertheless felt a thrill of uneasiness as he gazed upon them.

He looked round the room in which he found himself. But if he had hoped to recognise the place, he was disappointed. That it was a small room was all that he could be certain of, for the walls had been draped in black—Levison could see that it was cheap canvas, daubed with black paint—and the floor was covered with the same. Overhead, black canvas had been stretched to conceal the ceiling. The room was black on all sides, without a clue to the real aspect of the place.

Levison felt himself baffled. It was not likely that he would be able to retrace the way to the secret meeting-place of the masked trio. But, after all, it would not be necessary, for he was convinced that he knew whom they were.

"Bind him!" Levison made a movement, but a grip like iron was laid upon his collar. A cord was looped round his wrists, and another round his ankles, and knotted.

He sat helpless on the floor in the centre of the black room, with the three weird-looking figures standing round him. And he noted with growing alarm

(Continued on the next page.)

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that one of them had a dogwhip in his hand.

"Prisoner!"
"Oh, chuck it!" exclaimed Levison. "I know you, Tom Merry! Do you think you can take me in with this kind of rot?"

"Prisoner," repeated the deep bass voice, "you are in the hands of the Secret Society!"

"I'm in the hands of three silly fools who've been reading American penny horrors, and who are playing the giddy goat!" growled Levison.

The chief of the Secret Society coughed.

"Ahem! Insolence to the Secret Society is punished with death—I mean, with two cuts of the dogwhip," he said. "Touch him up!"

Lash, lash!
"Yow-ow-ow-ow-ow-ow!" roared Levison.

"Silence!"
"Help!"
"Another cut!"
Lash!

"Yaroooh!"
"Silence, prisoner! You are now on your trial before the Secret Society, appointed—by—by themselves, to inquire into cases of sneaking and bullying, and to put the offenders on their trial, and punish them according to their deserts."

"Go and eat coke!"

"You are accused of sneaking."

"Oh, rats!"
"The evidence against you is clear, but the Society is willing to hear your defence. Did you, or did you not, sneak about Noble of the Shell the other day?"

"Find out!"
"Did you, or did you not, search Tom Merry's study, looking for chalk, to fix upon him an accusation of having put up some of the notices of the Secret Society?"

Levison started. He had not known that there had been an eye on him on that occasion.

"What have you to say, prisoner at the bar? Guilty, or not guilty?"

"I'm not going to say anything, you silly idiots!" howled Levison. "Do you think I'm taken in by this rot? I know your voice. You're Tom Merry!"

Levison was sure by this time that he recognised the tones of the captain of the Shell.

"Silence for the chief of the Secret Society! Guilty, or not guilty?"

"Rats!"
"The prisoner refuses to plead at the bar of the Secret Society," said the chief. "He is therefore adjudged guilty. He is sentenced to twenty strokes with the dogwhip, well laid on!"

"Hear, hear!" said two deep, bass voices.

Levison was puzzled. He could not tell which of the voices was Tom Merry's, now that he had heard them all. But he felt certain that Tom Merry was the chief.

"Carry out the sentence!"
The masked figures advanced upon Levison. He shrank back in trepidation.

"Here, hold on!" he exclaimed. "I—I—I'll plead, if you like, you silly idiots! Not guilty!"

"Too late!"
"Look here!" yelled Levison. "If you lay a hand on me I'll go straight to Knox and tell him what you've done, and who you are!"

"You will sneak to Knox?"
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"Yes, I will!"
"Prisoner at the bar, your present declaration is taken as complete proof that you are a rotten sneak. The proofs are complete, anyway. No one is touched by the Secret Society until the proofs are complete. Execute the sentence."

"Hands off! Yow-ow-ow! Help!"
Levison was seized and turned over on the floor. Two pairs of hands held him there by the neck and the feet, and the chief raised the dogwhip.

The dogwhip rose and fell with swiftness and precision, and every lash elicited a yell or a gasp from the sneak of the Fourth. The chief counted the strokes as he dealt them, and he put a great deal of muscle into each one of them.

Levison's yells rang out loudly, till the masked individual who held his head jammed a hand over his mouth, and held it there. After that, Levison only gasped and spluttered.

"Twenty!" said the deep voice at last.

"Groo-oo-ooogh!"
"Prisoner at the bar—"
"Growowoggh!"

"Your sentence is now executed. I recommend you to think over your rotten ways and reform. Any further sneaking will be punished in the same way."

"Gro-r-rh!"
"You are now given a chance to reform. Stop sneaking and tale-bearing. Try to be a decent chap, and the Secret Society is done with you. But one word of sneaking again—to Knox, or Linton, or to anybody—and the Secret Society will hear of it, and you will go through it again. Do you understand?"

"Yow-ow-ow-ow!"
"Take him away!"

The sack was placed over Levison's head again. He was lifted up and carried out. Once more in the cold night air; carried, he knew not whither, in the strong grasp of three pairs of hands.

He was set down at last, and the sack whisked off.

He rolled on the ground, blinking round him with dazed eyes. He was in the blackest darkness. Faint footsteps died away in the distance. Levison sat up, blinking. He made out at last that he was in the quadrangle, under the trees. He wrenched furiously at the cords on his wrists, and in a few minutes succeeded in getting his hands free. Then he dragged at the bonds on his ankles, and released his feet, and staggered up.

He had been rapid. But it had taken him five minutes to release himself. If he had yelled for help, and waited till someone found him and released him, it would have taken longer. The three mysterious avengers were long gone. Levison knew that it was useless to think of trying to trace them down in the shadowy quadrangle. No doubt they were in their House before this.

He rubbed his wrists and gritted his teeth. He was smarting from the castigation he had received in the Black Chamber, smarting all over. And he was boiling with rage.

"Hang them!" he muttered. "But I know who they are. Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther. I'm certain of that. Hang them! I'll make them smart for this!"

And Levison, with his teeth set and his eyes gleaming with rage, rushed away at once towards the School House.

CHAPTER 8.

Not Guilty!

"BAI Jove! Levison looks excited!"

"Seen a ghost, Levison?"
"Looks a bit dusty, too!"

Quite a little crowd of juniors were in the Hall as Levison rushed into the School House. His eyes glittered as he recognised the Terrible Three among them. The chums of Study No. 6 were also there. Levison shook a furious fist at Tom Merry.

"I'll make you smart for it!" he yelled.

"Eh?" The captain of the Shell looked surprised. "What do you mean, Levison? What am I going to smart for?"

"For the rotten trick you've played on me!" snarled Levison. "Do you think I didn't know you? I recognised your voice all the time."

"My voice! What are you driving at?"

"You'll soon see! I'm going straight to Knox!"

And Levison dashed away towards Knox's study, leaving the crowd of juniors staring after him in astonishment.

Knox started to his feet when Levison burst suddenly into his study without knocking.

"What the dickens—" began Knox angrily.

"I've got something to tell you, Knox!" panted Levison.

"You needn't burst into my study like a mad bull, if you have," growled Knox. "Besides, I've warned you to come here quietly when you've got anything to tell me. Do you want it to be jawed all over the House, you young idiot?"

"This won't keep," said Levison savagely. "I tell you, I've been collared in the quad, put in a sack, and carried off somewhere, and licked with a dogwhip!"

"Wh-a-a-at!"
"It's those rotters who call themselves the Secret Society—Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther!" howled Levison. "They were masked—"

"Masked!" gasped Knox.
"Yes. And they took me into a room hung in black."

"Look here! Don't pile it on!" said Knox roughly. "I don't want an instalment from a newspaper serial."

"It's the truth!" said Levison fiercely. "I tell you, they collared me in the quad. They shoved a sack over my head, and lifted me up, and carried me somewhere; I couldn't see where. When they took the sack off I was in a room hung with black, and the three of them were masked, and wore black cloaks covering them from head to foot, like members of a secret society in a silly novel. They've got the idea out of some rotten book, of course. They tied me up, and gave me twenty with a dogwhip."

"By gad," said Knox—"by gad! Mind, stick to the exact facts, Levison. This is enough to get those young rascals a flogging apiece, if it's true. But don't say anything you can't prove."

"I can prove it all right. I tell you, I knew Tom Merry's voice."

"You didn't see his face?"

"How could I, when he was masked?" hooted Levison. "That was what they wore the silly masks for. They didn't think I'd know their voices; they tried to disguise them, but I knew them all right."

Knox rubbed his hands. There was



"My hat!" exclaimed Cutts as he pulled open the door. "Look here!" Knox gave a yell of wrath. On the outside of the door another of the mysterious warning notices had been pinned!

no doubt that he had a case against the Terrible Three at last, a case that would get them into serious trouble. However much a Secret Society might recommend itself to the romantic notions of the juniors, it was quite certain that the Housemaster would disapprove of it most strongly.

A flogging apiece, if not the "sack," would be the punishment meted out to that precious Secret Society.

"Mr. Linton must know about this," said Knox. "I've told him already about the warnings chalked up in my study, and he's ratty about it. This will bring him down on those young rotters like a ton of bricks."

"The sooner the better!" growled Levison.

"Come with me!"

The head prefect of the School House proceeded at once to Mr. Linton's study, taking Levison with him. There he made the cad of the Fourth repeat his story. Mr. Linton listened in amazement, his brows growing darker and darker. The master of the Shell was astounded. He was not a novel reader, and he had no romantic ideas whatever; and the formation of the Secret Society of St. Jim's seemed to him merely a piece of unparalleled audacity and "cheek." As soon as he had heard Levison's story to the end he selected his stoutest cane.

"Call the three boys concerned in here at once, Knox," he said.

"Yes, sir."

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther were called into Mr. Linton's study. They came in quite calmly and cheerfully to meet Levison's accusation.

"You are aware why I have sent for you?" demanded Mr. Linton, with a thunderous frown.

"I suppose Levison has been saying something, sir," said Tom Merry quietly.

"Levison accuses you of having seized him in the quadrangle, made him a prisoner, and thrashed him."

"When, sir?"

"Less than half an hour ago, as you know jolly well," said Levison, between his teeth.

"I shall punish you most severely for this outrageous conduct, Merry."

"Punish me, sir!"

"Certainly! Do you think—"

"But I didn't do it, sir."

"Levison declares that you were the leader—"

"Did he recognise me, sir?"

"He could not do that, as your face was covered in some ridiculous manner, but he is positive that he recognised your voice," said Mr. Linton.

"I think Levison must be mistaken, sir," said Tom Merry demurely. "Or perhaps he is not telling the truth. Levison isn't a very truthful chap."

"You know jolly well it's the truth!" snarled Levison. "You tried to disguise your voice, but I knew it all right—and Manners' and Lowther's, too."

"Mine?" said Monty Lowther, in surprise.

"Yes; you were one of them, and Manners was another."

"Do you boys deny it?" asked Mr. Linton, with a worried look. He had taken the truth of Levison's accusation for granted; but now he realised that he could not very well punish the Terrible Three without proof. He was aware, too, that Levison did not bear a very good reputation for truthfulness, while, on the other hand, Tom Merry was known to be the soul of honour.

"We'll do more than deny it, sir," said Tom Merry. "We'll prove that Levison is not telling the truth—prove it as clearly as you like, sir."

"And in what way?"

"We haven't been outside the house since dark, sir. It's been dark a good hour, and Levison says this happened half an hour ago. Well, we've been inside the School House all the time, and any number of fellows can prove it. I was playing chess with Glyn until

ten minutes ago, and we'd been playing a good hour. Glyn will tell you so, if you ask him. Four or five fellows were watching the game. After we'd finished playing we came out of the Common-room, and we've been talking in the Hall ever since. We were just going up to do our prep when Levison came in. There are a dozen fellows who can bear out what I say."

"It's a lie!" exclaimed Levison fiercely.

"Silence, Levison!" said Mr. Linton, frowning. "This matter can easily be put to the proof. Call in Glyn, Knox."

The prefect, giving Levison a far from amiable glance, obeyed. Knox began to see that his crushing case was falling to the ground.

Bernard Glyn was called in. He corroborated Tom Merry's statement from beginning to end. To prove the matter more clearly, several other Shell fellows were called in and questioned. They all bore unmistakable evidence that Tom Merry & Co. had not been outside the House since dusk.

Mr. Linton fixed a very stern look upon Levison.

"It appears that you were mistaken, Levison, in supposing that you recognised Merry's voice," he said.

Levison himself was dismayed and at a loss. He could not suppose that half a dozen fellows were lying to save Tom Merry. He knew now that the Secret Society could not possibly have been the Terrible Three. His thoughts went at once to the chums of Study No. 6. Of course, it was Blake, and two more of them! But, after his previous statement, he could not very well declare that he had recognised Blake's voice, so he was silent.

But Kangaroo burst out angrily:

"Mistaken!" he exclaimed. "He whoppers to get Tom Merry into a row!"

"Silence, Noble!"

"And I don't believe there's a word of truth in the whole affair!" exclaimed the Cornstalk. "We all know what kind of an imagination Levison has."

Mr. Linton looked more keenly at Levison. Certainly, the junior's story of what had happened to him was a strange one—very strange indeed. Was it possible that he had concocted it from beginning to end? It was evident that his statement that Tom Merry was concerned in the matter was false. It was quite likely that the rest of the story was equally untrue.

"I trust, Levison, that you have not been trying to deceive me in this extraordinary story?" said Mr. Linton in a grinding voice.

"It's true, sir—all true! I've been dogwhipped, and—and——"

"Very well. The story seems to be extraordinary, but I will let that pass," said Mr. Linton. "I advise you, however, to be very careful before you make another accusation like that. You have very nearly caused me to commit an act of injustice. You have falsely accused Merry——"

"I—I thought——"

"You should be quite certain before you make an accusation, Levison. You will beg Merry's pardon, in my presence, for having made this accusation."

Levison gritted his teeth hard.

"Oh, sir——"

"Or I shall cane you," said Mr. Linton grimly.

"I—I beg your pardon, Merry!"

"Granted!" said Tom Merry airily, and Levison trembled with rage.

"You will take a hundred lines, Levison, as a lesson to you to be more careful on another occasion," said Mr. Linton. "Now you may go."

"But, sir——"

"Enough! You may go!"

And Levison went.

Tom Merry & Co. followed him out of the study with smiling faces. The cad of the Fourth had certainly not scored this time, and the juniors' opinion of Mr. Linton had risen. They felt that the well-known description of a certain schoolmaster applied to the master of the Shell—he was a beast, but a just beast.

Knox turned savagely upon Levison when they were alone.

"You thundering young ass!" he said between his teeth. "A pretty mess you've made of it, haven't you? Now tell me how much truth there was in it. Were you lying from start to finish?"

"It was all true," said Levison sullenly. "I must have been mistaken about Tom Merry. It seems pretty clear that he was in the House at the time. Of course, I know now that it was Blake."

"Blake! How do you know?"

"I feel sure of it."

"You felt sure that it was Tom Merry ten minutes ago," said Knox, with a sneer. "You'd better take a bit more care next time, you crass idiot! I'm on the right side of Linton now, but he will soon begin to give me the marble eye if I take accusations like this to him. And you're such a confounded liar that I don't know whether to believe what you've told me or not. Very likely you invented it all."

Levison scowled.

"You'll jolly soon know that it's true enough," he said. "I've had my turn, and it will be yours next if they're not found out and flogged."

"What?"

"They've done me and they're safe after it. They're more down on you

than they are on me, and your turn will come next," said Levison, with a sneering grin. "When they tie you up and lick you, Knox, you'll know whether it's true or not."

And Levison swung away. Knox was left with a deep frown on his brow. Levison's last words had given him food for thought.

CHAPTER 9.

No Clue!

THE extraordinary adventure of Levison was the talk of the School House that evening.

The Secret Society was on every tongue.

A good many fellows did not hesitate to state their belief that Levison had drawn upon his imagination for the whole story, and his disproved accusation against the captain of the Shell confirmed them in their belief.

Tom Merry & Co. did not give any opinion on the subject. They maintained a non-committal silence. When Reilly demanded Tom Merry's opinion, the captain of the Shell replied that he was fed-up with Levison, and had nothing to say about him or his yarns.

"But sure, do ye believe there's such a thing as a Secret Society at all?" demanded Reilly.

"I must say it looks like it," said Tom Merry gravely, but he declined to express a positive opinion.

When the Fourth Form went to bed, Levison was the recipient of many curious looks in the Fourth Form dormitory in the School House.

The cad of the Fourth certainly looked as if he had been through it, and that bore out his story of the dog-whipping in the Black Chamber.

But even if his yarn was true in every detail, the Fourth Formers had no sympathy to waste on him.

He had brought his punishment upon himself by sneaking, spying, and tale-bearing. The Secret Society, if it existed at all, had been formed for the purpose of keeping Levison, and fellows like Levison, in check, and the juniors heartily concurred in the scheme. There was hardly a fellow in the Form who did not wish good luck to the secret three, whoever they were.

Levison kicked his boots off savagely. Mellish was the only fellow there who felt any sympathy for him, and Mellish was feeling considerably uneasy for himself. He had an idea that his own turn might come next—if Levison's tale was true. Levison went to bed, and uttered a sudden exclamation as he saw a sheet of paper pinned upon his pillow.

There was a line daubed on the paper in capital letters, with a brush, affording no clue to the hand that had written it:

**"YOU HAVE TOLD TALES AGAIN!
BEWARE OF THE SECRET
SOCIETY!"**

Levison ground his teeth as he read the warning.

The chief of the three had warned him that if he told tales of what had happened to him in the Black Chamber he would be duly punished, and he had gone directly to Knox with the tale. And here was the warning that the punishment was in store. Levison grabbed up the paper, crumbling it in his hand, and turned a furious look upon Jack Blake.

"You put this here, Blake?" he demanded.

Blake looked round.

"What's that, Levison?"

"You put this paper here! I know perfectly well that you were one of those three rotters! I'm going to show this paper to Darrell when he comes in!"

"Show it to him by all means, my son," said Jack Blake easily.

When Darrell came in to see lights-out, Levison strode towards him, holding out the paper. Darrell stared at it.

"Blake pinned that on my pillow!" exclaimed Levison savagely.

"Blake——" began the prefect.

"It's only another of Levison's whoppers, Darrell," said Blake calmly. "I didn't put it there, and I didn't even know it was there till Levison showed it to me."

"It's a lie!" said Levison fiercely.

Blake's eyes glittered. He made a stride towards Levison, and the cad of the Fourth promptly backed away behind Darrell.

"Hold on, Blake!" said Darrell quietly. "Levison, be a bit more careful what you say, please. Did you see Blake put this on your pillow?"

"It was there when I came into the dorm," said Levison sullenly.

"Then why do you say Blake put it there?"

"I know he did!"

"How do you know?"

"He was one of that gang that collared and licked me!" growled Levison. "I thought it was the Shell rotters at first; now I know one of them was Blake!"

"Indeed! You accused Merry, Manners and Lowther to Mr. Linton," said Darrell, who had heard the whole story. "Now you change it to Blake. Have you the impudence to say that you recognised Blake's voice—after what you've said before?"

"I know it was Blake!"

"You have no right to say anything of the kind. Still, I will ask you, Blake, whether you were out of the House this evening. This nonsense must be stopped, whoever is at the bottom of it!"

Blake grinned.

"I dare say Levison will get the right chap, if he accuses everybody in the House in turn," he remarked. "As a matter of fact, I haven't been out of the House since dark, and a dozen fellows can prove it."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I have been with Blake the whole time. We were watching Tom Mewvy playin' chess with Glyn a long time, and aftah that we were talkin' to the fellows. Hewwies and Dig were with us."

"So was I, I guess," said Lumley-Lumley. "It's all bunkum, Darrell! I know quite well that Blake hasn't been out of doors this evening."

"Sure, and I know it, too!" said Reilly.

"We can all prove it, Darrell," said Hammond. "Levison is talking out of the back of his neck again!"

Levison gave a baffled look round. Again he was nonplussed. He did not believe in his heart that Blake would lie, and it was impossible to believe that a crowd of the Fourth would back him up in a lie. Evidently the members of the Secret Society did not belong to Study No. 6. Blake, Herries, Digby and D'Arcy could not possibly have had a hand in his punishment in the Black Chamber.

He thought of Kangaroo, Dane, and Glyn, but their evidence in Tom Merry's favour showed that they, too, had been within doors at the time the Secret Society were punishing Levison.

Then who could the mysterious three possibly have been? Possibly not School House fellows at all. But if they belonged to the New House, why should New House fellows take up the quarrel at all, when it did not concern them? The New House juniors had nothing to do with Knox or Levison. Besides, it could not have been a New House fellow who had placed the paper on Levison's pillow—that was impossible.

"Well, Levison, what have you to say now?" snapped Darrell.

"I—I—I know they're mixed up in it somehow," stammered Levison. "Make them say who put this paper on my pillow, then?"

"Darrell looked round.

"Did any fellow present put this paper on Levison's pillow?" he demanded.

There was a chorus in reply:

"It wasn't me, Darrell!"

"Then it was one of those Shell rotters!" howled Levison. "Tom Merry, most likely—"

"You'd better let Tom Merry alone!" said Darrell dryly. "And you're getting altogether too free with your accusations, Levison. You will take a hundred lines for accusing Blake of this, when it is quite clear that he did not do it. Think before you speak next time; that's my advice. Now hold your tongue and go to bed."

And Levison had no choice but to obey.

The sneak of the Fourth was evidently not prospering, and it was some time before he slept after lights out. By telling tales to Knox, and again to Darrell, he had provoked the vengeance of the secret three, whoever they were, and he felt that he was in danger of another punishment.

And the mysterious three had only to await another opportunity of collaring him and inflicting the punishment with perfect impunity. They could not be stopped, and they could not be punished, since they were utterly unknown. Levison's sleep that night was troubled with dreams of black masks and rooms hung in black, and dog-whips.

The chums of Study No. 6 smiled sweetly after lights out. The paper on Levison's pillow, of course, had been placed there by one of the Shell fellows, unknown to Blake & Co., so that they could truthfully deny knowing that it was there.

Levison scowled when he turned out in the morning, and scowled all the time he was dressing. He was in an extremely bad humour. He had expected quite a high old time as Knox's favourite, now that Knox was head prefect of the House; but instead of that he was getting the most troublesome time of his life, and the knowledge that he deserved it did not make it any more agreeable.

When the Fourth took their places in the Form-room that morning, and Levison opened his desk, a card met his eyes, placed in his desk to greet him as soon as he opened it. It bore the words, in daubed capitals:

"SNEAK! TREMBLE!"

Levison did not tremble, as the message of the Secret Society enjoined. He clenched his hands with rage.

He snatched up the card, and held it up for Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, to see.

The little Form-master blinked at it over his glasses.

"Dear me!" he said. "What ever is that, Levison?"



"It's all right now, ladies; we've caught the mouse!"
Half-a-crown has been awarded to V. Ralph, Dawn Farm, Botney Hill, Billericay, Essex.

"Somebody's put that in my desk, sir!" said Levison, his voice trembling with rage.

"What an absurd trick!" said Mr. Lathom, frowning.

"It's a regular persecution, sir! I think the fellow who's playing these tricks ought to be found out and stopped."

"Most decidedly!" said Mr. Lathom. "Do you know who it was?"

But Levison had had enough of making wild accusations. He had no idea who it was, and he did not venture to utter the long list of names of the persons he suspected.

"No, sir!" he said.

"Did any boy present put this card in Levison's desk?" demanded Mr. Lathom, blinking over the Fourth Form.

"No, sir!" came a chorus.

"It was one of the Shell, I'm certain, sir!" ejaculated Levison.

Mr. Lathom frowned with annoyance.

"This nonsense must be put a stop to!" he exclaimed. "I will step into the Shell room and speak to Mr. Linton. Come with me, Levison, and bring that card."

Blake and Figgins exchanged uneasy looks as the Form-master walked out, followed by Levison. If the whole of the Shell were questioned, it looked as if the secret would come out. Tom Merry would not tell an untruth on the subject, and it would not be possible for him to refuse to answer questions.

The Fourth Formers were feeling anxious.

Mr. Lathom rustled into the Shell Form Room, where the juniors were at first lesson. He explained hastily to Mr. Linton, and the master of the Shell looked at the card with a dark frown. He held it up for the Shell to see.

"Boys"—Mr. Linton's voice was like the rumble of distant thunder—"I demand to know if any boy present placed this card in Levison's desk in the Fourth Form Room?"

There was no reply.

"Answer one by one!" said the Form-master. "I am determined that this absurd nonsense shall cease."

And the master of the Shell questioned the whole Form in turn. Each of the fellows made the same reply—he had not placed that card in Levison's desk. Levison watched Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther keenly as they

stood up and answered. But their words came out firmly and calmly, and he could not think that they were lying.

Levison felt as if his head was turning round. Was it some fog in the Third or the Second, then, who was playing these tricks?

As if the same thought had entered Mr. Linton's mind, the master of the Shell turned towards the door, with a remark to Mr. Lathom:

"This affair must be inquired into thoroughly. Come with me, sir, and I will speak to the Third."

Mr. Lathom and Levison followed the master of the Shell to the Third Form Room. Mr. Selby, the master of the Third, looked at them in surprise. When Mr. Linton stated his business, Mr. Selby at once put the question to the Third.

Levison keenly watched Wally D'Arcy and Frayne, who were on especially good terms with Tom Merry. But Wally and Frayne and all the rest answered up at once. They hadn't put the card in Levison's desk, and knew nothing at all about it. Mr. Linton frowned more darkly than ever, and proceeded to the Second Form, where the same process was gone through, with the same result.

"We seem to be where we started," Mr. Lathom remarked. "It is, of course, useless to question the senior boys. It would be absurd to suppose that anyone in the Fifth would be playing these foolish tricks."

Mr. Linton nodded frowningly.

"I cannot understand it," he said. "I watched every boy as he answered, and I think I should have detected an untruth. Yet every boy denies having been concerned in the matter." He fixed his eyes upon Levison. "Levison!"

"Yes, sir?" muttered Levison, not quite liking the Form-master's look.

"I cannot help thinking it is possible that you are playing these tricks yourself in order to obtain a little cheap notoriety," said Mr. Linton severely.

Levison jumped. He had been bitterly disappointed by the result of the investigation, but he had hardly expected the Form-master to come to a conclusion like that.

"I, sir?" he gasped. "I?"

Mr. Linton scanned his face sharply.

"I will not punish you upon suspicion merely, Levison, but I warn you to be very careful," he said impressively. "You may go back to your Form-room."

And Levison went, consumed with rage inwardly. He began to wish that he had not succeeded in establishing for himself a reputation as an amateur Ananias.

Blake & Co. looked at him as he came in. His expression was enough to show them that no discovery had been made.

After morning lessons, the chums of the Fourth lost no time in comparing notes with the Terrible Three, but they did not speak on the matter till they were out in the quadrangle, safe from Levison's prying eyes and ears.

"How on earth did you get out of it?" Blake demanded.

"Blessed if I didn't think the game was up!" said Figgins. "How on earth did you fellows wriggle out of it?"

"Out of what?" asked Tom Merry cheerfully.

"They questioned you—"

"Yes."

"Well, then—" said Digby.

"They asked us if we'd put that card in Levison's desk," said Monty Lowther. "Of course, we told the truth on the subject. George Washington isn't in it

with us. We simply told the truth—we hadn't."

"You hadn't?" yelled Blake.

"Certainly not!"

"Then—then who did?" gasped Kerr.

"There can't be another Secret Society at work as well as us!" Tom Merry laughed.

"More ways than one of killing a cat," he remarked. "We thought it safer for the card to get into Levison's desk without any of us putting it there."

"Bai Jove! But the card couldn't get there by itself, deah boy!"

"Have you ever heard of such a person as Toby, who has the honour of being page in the School House?" asked Tom, laughing.

"Toby? My hat!"

"A tanner to Toby, and the trick was done! Toby can keep a secret; and Levison has ragged the poor kid so much that he was glad of the chance of giving him something back. By a judicious expenditure of tanners the warning notices of the Secret Society can be posted in future without any of us having a hand in it," Tom Merry explained.

"Bai Jove!"

"And—and you fellows didn't put it there!" ejaculated Herries. "Toby did!"

"Exactly! And I don't think anybody's likely to suspect Toby of being a member of the Secret Society, what?"

"Wathah not!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the members of the Secret Society of St. Jim's laughed loud and long.

CHAPTER 10.

Knox's Turn!

TOM MERRY & CO. in spite of the Secret Society and all its work, had a far from pleasant time during the next few days.

Knox, though utterly puzzled as to whom the secret three could possibly be, was convinced that Tom Merry and his friends had some sort of a hand in the matter.

The result was that he was harder than ever upon the heroes of the School House.

Levison, too, was busier than ever in his peculiar department. The slightest infraction of the school rules by the juniors he hated was certain to come to the ears of the head prefect, and lines and lickings resulted. Whenever the matter was serious enough, Knox would take it to Mr. Linton; and Mr. Linton, worried and annoyed by the trouble he found upon his hands, grew more severe than ever.

Mr. Railton was not coming back yet, and the Head was still indisposed; Mr. Ratcliff was still acting in the headmaster's place; Mr. Linton was still Housemaster of the School House. Knox, as head prefect, and high in favour with the Housemaster, had everything in his hands.

At first Kildare had succeeded in keeping Knox within some bounds, but that was over now. Kildare was no longer a prefect; he had retired from that rank till Mr. Railton's return. And Darrell, Langton, and Rushden could do nothing against the head prefect, backed up by the Housemaster.

Knox had it all his own way, and he was taking his opportunity to feed fat his ancient grudge against Tom Merry and his chums.

But for the safety valve, so to speak, provided by the Secret Society there

would probably have been an outbreak among the juniors. As it was, the great society held many secret meetings, debating what was to be done with the obnoxious Knox and the equally obnoxious Levison.

The result was quite a flood of daubed warnings to the bullying prefect. Knox found the notices of the Secret Society chalked in his study, pinned on his pillow, and even hooked on his back. One morning he came into the Sixth Form Room with a card fastened on the back of his coat by means of a small hook, bearing the inscription:

**"BULLY! YOU ARE WATCHED!
LOOK OUT!"**

Knox's temper was not improving, as was natural in the circumstances. And although he found it impossible to trace any of those offences to Tom Merry & Co., he visited punishment upon their heads at every slight excuse. As for the Secret Society venturing to lay hands on him, he hardly thought it possible, but he was very carefully upon his guard all the same.

But the blow fell at last!

Knox had gone over to the New House to visit Sefton of the Sixth, who was one of his chums. And when he left the New House at about eight o'clock a light suddenly appeared in the window of Figgins' study. If Knox had noticed it he might have guessed that it was a signal to someone in the dark quadrangle, but he did not notice it.

He strode across the quad, thinking chiefly of a "quid" he had lost in a little game with Sefton. Suddenly, as he passed under the elms, three dark figures leaped upon him, and a sack was whisked over his head before he knew what was happening.

He was borne heavily to the ground, enveloped in the sack, and a heavy knee was planted on his chest.

In a moment the prefect realised that it had come at last, that he was in the hands of the Secret Society.

Levison's yarn was evidently true!

The Sixth Former struggled furiously and shouted; but the sack was jammed close to his face, and it muffled his cries.

Three strong pairs of hands were upon him, and his struggles were unavailing.

A looped cord was passed over his wrists, and they were drawn together and tied. Then a cord was passed round his ankles and knotted.

He was helpless.

He felt an inward shiver as he was lifted from the earth and carried away, the three captors breathing hard under the heavy burden.

Knox yelled again for help, and then yelled with pain, as a pin was pushed through the sack and found a resting place in his leg.

"Yowwwwwwwww!"

"Silence!" came a deep voice.

Knox did not yell again; he did not want any more of the pin. The captured prefect made no further resistance.

He knew that he was in unmerciful hands, and that the Secret Society did not intend to deal gently with him. He shivered as he was carried away into the darkness.

Where were they taking him?

He tried to make out the direction, but blinded by the sack it was impossible. He began to count the steps taken by his captors as well as he could, with the idea of tracing them afterwards, and thus finding out the secret meeting place of the society. But he soon realised that he was being carried to and fro, in order to baffle anything of the kind, and he gave it up.

Five minutes, which seemed as long as five hours to Knox, elapsed, and then he knew that he was being carried into a building.

He was dumped down, none too



Three masked and cloaked forms suddenly leaped upon Levison. Fourth knew what was happening, he was grasped

gently, on the floor. His weight had told upon the members of the Secret Society.

He lay in the sack, sprawled upon the floor, for two or three minutes. Through the sack the glimmer of a light struck upon his eyes. The silence around him was only broken by the rustling movements of the three.

Then a deep voice was heard, a voice speaking in a deep bass, which Knox knew was assumed for the occasion, and through which he vainly endeavoured to trace any familiar tones:

"Remove the sack!"

It was just as Levison had described it to him. He was going through it in his turn, and he trembled with mingled rage and fear at the thought.

The sack was jerked off, and Knox blinked in the light.

Three figures in black cloaks and masks surrounded him as he lay bound and helpless on the floor.

"You young hounds!" gasped Knox. "I'll have you sacked for this!"

"Silence, prisoner!"

"I—I'll smash you! I—I'll—"

"Help!" yelled Knox. "He—owww!"

Knox's yell broke off as a chunk of soap was crammed into his open mouth.

"Prisoner at the bar," went on the chief, in a deep voice, "you have been guilty of bullying and tyranny!"

"Groogh!"

"You have been warned again and again! You have not reformed!"

"Gr-r-r-r!"

"Now the hour of vengeance has struck!"

"Owwwwww!"

"Your punishment," went on the deep voice, "is already decided upon. Your spy was given twenty strokes. As you are a worse offender, you will have thirty! Turn the beast over!"

The last remark was scarcely in keeping with the solemnity of the proceedings. Knox was certain that it was a junior speaking. But which junior, among the many at St. Jim's? That was the question.

It had been proved clearly enough, on the occasion of Levison's capture and the inquiry that had followed, that the secret three were not any of the members of Tom Merry & Co. Was it possible that they were New House fellows? Knox thought of Figgins & Co. He remembered that Figgins had met him in the passage as he came out of Sefton's study. Had the young rascals been watching him, and had they followed him?

It seemed the most probable theory; though, as Figgins & Co. were generally on fighting terms with the School House, it was rather curious that they should have taken up Tom Merry's quarrel in this way.

Two of the masked figures seized Knox and turned him over. They grasped him by the collar and his ankles to turn him. Then the chief picked up a dogwhip.

"You are going to take thirty strokes, well laid on, Knox," said the deep bass voice. "I advise you to meditate upon your sins, and resolve to turn over a new leaf. That is the only way that you can escape the hands of the Secret Society."

"You young hounds! If you dare to touch me—"

Lash!

"Yow-ow-ow!" gurgled Knox.

Lash, lash, lash, lash!

The blows came down with vigour and precision. It was exactly like a flogging, and Knox had not known what it was to be flogged since he had been a young rascal in the Fourth Form.

This seemed to bring back old times. The blows descended fast, and Knox wriggled and squirmed and gasped under them. He would have yelled for help, but the chunk of soap which he had ejected from his mouth was thrust in again, and held there by a firm hand. He could only gasp and splutter chokingly.

Lash, lash, lash!

Twenty strokes had been given, and the bully of the Sixth was writhing and gasping with pain. He used a cane freely enough himself, and never cared for the pain he inflicted; the sufferings of others had never affected him in the least. Indeed, he rather enjoyed it. Now his own turn had come, and enjoyment was gone. He writhed and gasped and spluttered.

Lash, lash, lash, lash, lash!

The strokes came pitilessly down. Maddened with pain, the furious prefect struggled wildly, but his hands and feet were securely tied, and firm hands held him.

Lash, lash, lash, lash, lash!

"Thirty!" said the deep bass voice. "Oh, give him a few more!"

"No. That is his punishment. Prisoner on the floor, do you think that you have had enough?"

"Groogh!"

"Remove the gag. If he yelps stick a pin in him."

The soap was taken from Knox's mouth, and he did not yelp. He had had quite sufficient experience of that pin. He gasped.

"Oh, you villain!"

"Have you had enough?"

"I'll smash you!" hissed Knox. "I'll have you sacked! I'll—"

Lash!

"Yaroooh!"

"Have you had enough, prisoner on the floor?"

"Yow! Yes. Oh! Yes."

"Are you sorry for having been a bully and a beast?"

"Hang you! I—"

Lash!

"Are you sorry?"

"Oh crumbs! Yes; awfully sorry. Ow-yow!"

"Very good! Will you act more decently in the future if the Secret Society lets you off without further punishment?"

"You young hound—"

Lash!

"Yes," wailed Knox. "I—I will. I—I'll do anything you like. I'll say anything you like. Ow-ow-wow! Grooogh!"

"Keep your word, prisoner on the floor, and the Secret Society have done with you. Break it, and your next punishment will be more severe. This time you have been thrashed as you deserve. Next time you will be shaved clean on your head, and tarred. That is a warning."

"I—I—I—"

"Silence!"

Knox cowered into silence. The spirit had been quite taken out of the bully of the Sixth by that flogging. Like most bullies, he was a coward at heart, and he was almost whimpering now, senior and prefect as he was. He was only anxious to get out of the hands of the Secret Society without further punishment. Vengeance would come afterwards.

If only he could have spotted some clue to their identity. As if to oblige him in that respect, the chief, in throwing down the dogwhip, allowed his arm and hand to come out from under the cloak. Knox's eyes fastened almost greedily upon the hand. Would he know it again? His eyes glittered.

Across the wrist was a thin, red mark such as might be made by the scratch of a pin. The prefect's heart beat with a fierce joy. He would know that wrist again, and when he found a junior with a scratched wrist he would have found the chief of the Secret Society.

"Replace the sack."

The sack was drawn over Knox's head again. He was lifted and carried away, with the chunk of soap jammed into his mouth again, a thick piece of canvas being bound round his head to keep it there. He had no chance of calling out when the three avengers carried him from the Black Chamber.

A few minutes later Knox felt himself dumped down on the ground, the sack was whipped off, and the three figures vanished before he could glance at them. He lay under the dark trees, bound and gagged. The gag he could not possibly get rid of without the use of his hands, and he set to work wriggling his wrists free. It was nearly half an hour before he succeeded, but



from the shadows of the elms. Before the cad of the sack was dragged over his head!

"You are in the hands of the Secret Society! Are you prepared to meet your doom?"

"Oh! Ow! Groogh!" gasped Knox. He fixed his furious eyes upon the speaker, endeavouring to penetrate his disguise. But the black mask and the black cloak told him nothing. The cloaks of the three hid them from head to foot. Knox could see that they were not real cloaks; they had been roughly made of cheap canvas daubed with black paint.

Probably the Secret Society had no extensive funds to expend upon their terrifying paraphernalia. The room was hung with the same material; and Knox strove in vain to guess where he was. If he could only have seen a hand or foot he might have had some clue, but he could see nothing except black cloaks and masks.

when his hands were once loose, he jerked away the gag, and cut the cord round his ankles with his pocket-knife. Then he staggered to his feet, dishevelled, panting, aching in every limb. Two minutes more, and Knox was in Mr. Linton's study, pouring the tale of that amazing outrage into the astonished ears of the Form-master.

CHAPTER 11.

Some Persons Unknown!

"MY hat!" ejaculated Kangaroo. "It's getting thick! Knox this time!"

"Yaas, it's weally gettin' quite excitin'."

"Awfully exciting," yawned Blake. "It isn't all lavender to be head prefect of the House when you happen to be a bullying prefect."

There was great excitement in the School House.

What had happened to Knox was on every tongue now.

Had Knox taken some time to think the matter over he might have hesitated to avow in public that he had been collared and flogged. It was an exceedingly humiliating confession, and it caused many smiles and sneers and shrugs of the shoulders. Knox had not taken time to think. He was only anxious for vengeance.

And vengeance was not to be had.

Mr. Linton had taken the matter up at once. He had called the prefects into his study, and ordered an instant investigation into the matter. The prefects investigated in a somewhat perfunctory manner. They were all of opinion that Knox thoroughly deserved what he had received; that he had, in fact, asked for it.

Knox's swagger and swank since he had become head prefect had not pleased Kildare or Darrell or Rusden or Langton in the least. He had been put over their heads, and he made them realise it quite clearly. They were not at all disposed to exert themselves in his cause.

However, the prefects made the inquiry.

Nothing came of it.

Not a single junior could be found in the School House who had a scratch on his wrist, that certain clue by which Knox hoped to discover the offender.

But that only confirmed Knox in his suspicion that the Secret Society were not members of the School House at all, but New House fellows who had taken up the cudgels for Tom Merry & Co.

The inquiry was, therefore, transferred to the New House.

Figgins & Co., and Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence were the juniors upon whom Knox's suspicions chiefly rested.

But all those juniors proved conclusively that they had been in their own studies ever since Knox left the House after his visit to Sefton. Figgins, indeed, called Knox himself as a witness that he had seen him in the House just before he left, and Knox had to admit that that was so.

Mr. Ratchiff made the inquiry keenly enough, Knox having found much favour in his eyes. They were very much alike in methods and manners.

But the junior with a scratched wrist was not discovered in the New House.

In fact, when the inquiry was over, it was quite clear that there wasn't a single scratched wrist in the school at all.

Knox was amazed. He had seen that scratch—a red, prominent scratch—with his own eyes.

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He had made a special note of it. He had told it to the Housemaster as a certain clue to the leader of the delinquents.

And it had not been found! Such a mark could not, of course, be concealed. A scratch was a scratch, and it could not have healed up completely in the course of half an hour or so.

Yet it could not be discovered.

To assemble the whole school and question each fellow individually as to whether he had taken part in the outrage did not recommend itself to Mr. Linton's mind at all. Previous questionings had been useless. Besides, with the prospect of the "sack" before him, could any boy be expected to own up? It was useless to drive the offender into telling a falsehood, Mr. Linton considered.

Knox felt that it was useless, too. Besides that, he began to have a suspicion that the secret three were not St. Jim's fellows at all.

Tom Merry & Co. were very friendly with Gordon Gay & Co., of Rylcombe Grammar School. True, they had many a row and rag, but they were on cordial terms, notwithstanding that, and it would be just like Gordon Gay to "chip in" in such a quarrel.

Knox remembered that the Grammarians had visited Tom Merry that very afternoon; he had seen Gay and Frank Monk and Wootton major talking to the Shell fellows in the quad.

The clue of the scratched wrist having utterly failed to reveal the culprit, Knox was driven to the conclusion that Tom Merry & Co. had leagued with the Grammarians, and that the Secret Society were Gordon Gay and his friends. There the investigation had to stop.

To visit the Grammar School and demand an inquiry there on a vague suspicion was impossible. If Gordon Gay & Co. had been within the walls of St. Jim's that evening they must have broken bounds for the purpose, and doubtless they would have covered up their tracks carefully enough. Dr. Monk would have pooh-poohed any suggestion of the sort if Mr. Linton had thought of referring the matter to him; but Mr. Linton, though he was somewhat inclined to share Knox's opinion, never thought of doing anything of the kind.

The matter had to drop.

Knox, in a state of fury, mingled with uneasiness for the future, had to take it "lying down."

He had been so certain of discovering at least one of the three that it was a bitter disappointment to him. But there was evidently nothing to be done.

But while Mr. Linton was intensely angry, and Knox fumed, there was rejoicing amongst the members of the Secret Society of St. Jim's.

After prep that evening the Terrible Three visited Study No. 6, where Blake & Co. greeted them with cheerful smiles.

"All sewene?" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Right as rain!" said Tom Merry.

"And yet Knoxy had a dead certain clue," grinned Blake—"a clue that Sexton Blake or Ferrers Locke would have followed to the bitter end—what?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But it's wathah queeah," remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy thoughtfully, "considewin' that it was you three Shell boundahs who collahed him—"

"Shush!"

"Walls have ears, ass!" said Monty Lowther.

"And it means the sack if anybody's bowled out," Manners remarked. "Flogging a prefect is a bit more than a joke, however much he may have deserved it."

"Yaas; but about that scwatch on the w'ist, I thought it was all up when I heard about that," said Arthur Augustus. "I wegarded you as a weckless ass to let Knox see your w'ist at all, Tom Mewwy!"

"Go hon!"

"And how did you hide it, deah boy, when they looked for it?"

Tom Merry laughed and held out his arm. There was no sign of a scratch on his wrist.

"Bai Jove! Did Knox dweam it, then?" asked Arthur Augustus, in astonishment.

"No; he saw it right enough."

"Bai Jove! But how—"

"It was there then, but it vanished afterwards," explained Tom Merry. "Of course, I let the duffer see my wrist on purpose!"

"Gweat Scott! But how did you get w'id of the scwatch?"

"Washed it off immediately I got into the House, of course."

Arthur Augustus' eyeglass dropped from his eye in his astonishment.

"Washed it off?" he repeated.

"Yes."

"But—but how?"

"Soap-and-water."

"You washed off a scwatch with soap-and-watah, Tom Mewwy?"

"Certainly!"

"I pwesume you are pullin' my leg," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "Pway be sewious. You know perfectly well that it is impos to wash off a scwatch with soap-and-watah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, deah boys—"

"Not that kind of scwatch," grinned Tom Merry. "You're as big a duffer as Knox, Gussy. You see, I put the scratch on first, to let Knoxy see it—to put the rotter on a false scent. Have you ever heard of grease-paint, make-up, and the Junior Dramatic Society? What's the good of being an amateur actor if a fellow can't paint a scratch on his wrist?"

"Bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Poor old Knox is quite mystified!" grinned Tom Merry. "He's been hunting high and low in the school for a fellow with a scratch on his wrist. He will have to conclude that the Secret Society doesn't belong to St. Jim's at all. The best of it is that Gordon Gay has a scratch on his wrist, and when he comes over here to tea to-morrow, I shouldn't wonder if Knox spots it. I fancy he's got a suspicion of the Grammar School chaps now—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And if he should go off on a wild-goose chase to the Grammar School, it will keep him busy. It won't hurt Gay and it won't hurt us, and it will amuse Knox!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

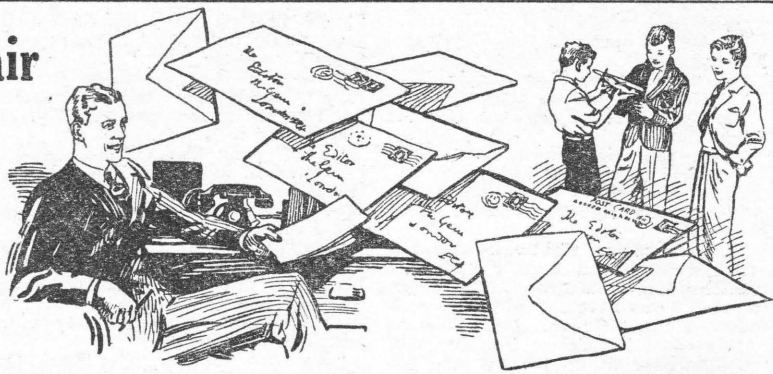
Tom Merry's surmise was correct. The following afternoon Gordon Gay & Co. came over to tea in Study No. 6 at St. Jim's. Knox spotted them as they came sauntering across the quadrangle, and he came down to meet them at the door.

Gordon Gay, Monk, and Wootton raised their caps very politely to Knox. Tom Merry had confided the history of the Secret Society to the Grammar

(Continued on page 18).

The Editor's Chair

Let the Editor be your pal. Drop him a line to-day, addressing your letters: The Editor, The GEM, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.



HALLO, chums! It was very welcome news to all of you last week, no doubt, to learn that Reginald Talbot is coming back to St. Jim's so soon. As I said, the first grand story of the series starring the "Toff" will appear in next Wednesday's GEM.

It is not as a cracksman, however, that this popular character makes his re-appearance. Under the good influence of Tom Merry & Co. he threw aside all his evil associations, and he is determined to keep to the path of honesty in future, come what may.

But the Toff is still wanted by the police for his many crimes. That he has reformed does not wipe out his wrongdoings, and it is as a fugitive from justice that in

"THE RETURN OF THE TOFF!"

he once more comes into the lives of the chums of St. Jim's. The latter do all they can to help their unfortunate chum—even to the extent of coming between the arm of the law and the Toff. But at the same time they realise, as Talbot does, that he is in a tight corner.

Mr. Fix, of Scotland Yard, is hot on his trail, and the detective finds a willing helper in Ernest Levison. It is touch-and-go for Talbot several times—due to the scheming of the cad of the Fourth.

But though the Toff eludes capture, his plight seems hopeless. He is an outcast of society, hunted and harried everywhere. And it will always be so, unless he can redeem himself in the eyes of the law.

That is the theme of Martin Clifford's wonderful yarn, and readers will, as I did, enjoy every word of "The Return of the Toff!" It is a story in a thousand, and you will be doing your friends—and your Editor—a favour if you put them wise to it. Don't forget!

"THE REMOVE ON A DIET!"

Just when Harry Wharton & Co. are

congratulating themselves on the return of Mr. Quelch and the departure of Mr. Chesham, the faddist Form-master, they receive a big shock. Mr. Quelch's health breaks down again, and the Remove is still to have the pleasant society of Mr. Chesham as Form-master!

The juniors are fed-up with the faddist and his weird and wonderful methods for looking after their health, and they have certainly made that clear to Mr. Chesham. But the latter, showing a firmer hand, soon starts imposing more freak rules of diet on the Removites. Harry Wharton & Co. hesitate to revolt against the faddist, but how to defeat him otherwise is a big problem.

In his usual sparkling style Frank Richards tells you next week all about the adventures of the chums of Greyfriars under faddist rule. Make sure you read this ripping yarn. Let me remind you once again to see that your GEM is always reserved for you.

IN REPLY.

Miss C. Egan, Dublin, S.E.4.—I am sorry, but no numbers of the "Popular" are now obtainable. Thanks for your suggestion; I will bear it in mind.

L. Huke, Dagenham, Essex.—Your "Pen Pal" notice will appear in due course. As I have said before, there is a long waiting list.

B. Dallas, London, W.1.—Please see reply above to Reader Huke.

Miss M. Banks, Ashford, Kent.—Thanks for pointing out that the famous playwright, composer, and actor, Noel Coward, writing his life story in a well-known Sunday newspaper, said he used to read the GEM and "Magnet." I read what he had to say. It was a feather in the cap of the companion papers.

PEN PALS COUPON 20-2-37

PEN PALS

A free feature which brings together readers all over the world for the purpose of exchanging topics of interest with each other. If you want a pen pal, post your notice, together with the coupon on this page, to the address given above.

Miss Yvonne Hodges, 50, Howick Street, Launceston, Tasmania, Australia; girl correspondents; age 15-17; sport, films, stamps; India, U.S.A., South Seas, China, South America.

Miss Edna Edgeworth, 71, Brookdale Road, Walthamstow, London, E.; girl correspondent; age 16-18; abroad.

D. Sacree, "Ikaya," Lower Piers Road, Wynberg, Cape Town, South Africa; age 13-15; stamps.

Miss Veronica Hessian, 15, Erin Street, Roslyn, Dunedin, New Zealand; girl correspondents in any part of the world; general topics and stamps.

Gerard Borman, 498, Edmund Street, Arcadia, Pretoria, Transvaal, S. Africa; age 13-17; stamps, photography, curios.

A. King, Pigeon Hill, Midhurst, Sussex; age 19-21; sports, films, country life.

Eric Dalroy, 17, Portland Place, London, W.1; age 20-25; sports, horseback-riding and polo.

H. Hoole, Bedford.—Thanks for your artistic representation of the document that the St. Jim's juniors drew up in a story some time ago. You did it very nicely and neatly. If you are fond of this sort of work, why not join an art school?

G. Stribling, Welling, Kent.—I am afraid it would be quite impossible to send you a copy of the "Pen Pals" waiting list.

R. Hodge, Harborne, Birmingham.—Thanks for your suggestion. I will make a note of it. You know the answer by now to your request for the return of Talbot.

A. Pinckney, Highwood Hospital, Brentwood.—Glad to hear that you are delighted with the GEM, Alex, and that you have got many new readers among your ward companions. Thank you! Please convey to them my best wishes, and I hope all of you will soon be fit and well again.

K. Forster, East London, South Africa.—Thanks for your letter and New Year wishes. I am pleased to hear that your mother greatly enjoys the St. Jim's stories. Tom Merry & Co. are as popular with old readers as young ones.

G. Crawford, Marston Green, Birmingham.—Write to the Back Number Dept., The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Bear Alley, London, E.C.4, for the GEMs you require, enclosing a postal order to cover the cost and postage.

E. Willson, Leicester.—Tom Merry is nearly sixteen years old, and Manners is sixteen. Glad you like the Greyfriars stories. Sorry, but I have already published that joke. Try again!

Just a reminder before I close. If you have not yet read this week's "Magnet," take my tip and get a copy to-day. It contains another great yarn of the stay-in strikers of Greyfriars, called "The Fighting Form!"

All the best, chums!

THE EDITOR.

A. H. Williams, 127, Thimblemill Road, Beewood, near Birmingham; age 15-16; cycling, cricket; Australia, South Africa.

H. D. Wilson, 89, Chelston Road, Northfield, Birmingham; age 16-19; pen pals; Canada, U.S.A.

Miss Gladys Hayes, 9, Affleck Street, King's Cross, London, N.1; girl correspondents; age 15-18; tennis, films, music.

Miss Florrie West, 93, Spenser Road, Stoke Newington, London, N.16; girl correspondents; age 15-18; tennis, swimming, snaps.

Miss Connie Reason, 24, Berwick Road, Wood Green, London, N.22; girl correspondents; age 15-18; sports, nature, stamps.

Verrall Johnson, 3, Leicester Street, Sydenham, Port Elizabeth, S. Africa; pen pal.

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School chums, and Gordon Gay & Co. were greatly tickled by it.

"I want to speak to you, Gay," said Knox grimly.

"Go ahead!" said Gay affably.

"Will you let me see your wrist?"

"M-my wrist?" ejaculated Gay, in astonishment.

"Yes; your right wrist."

Gay held out his left hand.

"The right one!" snapped Knox.

"Isn't that right?" asked Gay innocently.

"Let me see your right wrist at once!"

"Hold on!" said Gay, slipping his right hand into his pocket. "It occurs to me that you have no right to give me orders, Knox, old man. I don't belong to this school, you know. You can make the kids here sit up to any tune you like, but we don't care twopence for you!"

"Not threeha'pence!" said Wootton major.

"Not a ha'penny!" corroborated Frank Monk.

Knox gritted his teeth. His bullying was, indeed, out of place; he had no authority over Dr. Monk's boys. He changed his manner with an effort.

"Will you oblige me by showing me your wrist?" he asked.

"Oh, certainly, if you put it nicely like that!" assented Gordon Gay.

"There you are!"

He held out his wrist for inspection.

Knox's eyes glittered as he saw a red scratch on the wrist. He felt that he had found his man at last.

"So it was you!" he exclaimed.

Gay looked surprised.

"I! What was me?" he naturally inquired.

"How long have you had that scratch?"

"Lemme see! I got it from a pin in that ass Mont Blong's jacket, when he was showing me a ju-jutsu trick!" said Gay thoughtfully. "Two days ago, Knox. Awfully good of you to inquire after my little accident in this way!"

"You young hound!"

"Eh?"

"You were here last night!" exclaimed Knox fiercely. "I saw that scratch! You will follow me to Mr. Linton at once!"

Gay regarded him with cool contempt. "I shall do nothing of the sort," he answered composedly. "You can go and eat coke, my friend. Come on, you chaps! We've wasted enough time on this lunatic!"

And Gordon Gay & Co. proceeded to Study No. 6, leaving Knox standing with a brow like thunder.

CHAPTER 12.

No Luck!

TOM MERRY & CO. were all in Study No. 6, waiting for the arrival of the Grammarians.

The chums of the School House were standing an extra-special feed to celebrate the punishment of their tyrant, and the Terrible Three and Figgins & Co. were all there.

The study was considerably crowded, but there was room for the three Grammarians. The festive board, as a novelist would say, groaned under the goodly viands. Fatty Wynn's face was quite beatific in its expression.

"Welcome, my infants!" said Jack Blake cheerily. "The feast is spread in the festive hall, and everything in the garden is lovely!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

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"Good egg!" said Gordon Gay. "We've brought over a topping appetite apiece. By the way, has your prefect Knox gone dotty?"

"Not more than usual, so far as I know!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "Did he ask to see your wrist? I saw him talking to you."

"Yes," said Gay. "He's awfully interested in a scratch I've got there. Seems to me that he's off his rocker. He told me to follow him to Mr. Linton, and I came up here."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a roar of laughter in Study No. 6. The Grammarians looked puzzled; but Tom Merry concisely explained, and then Gordon Gay & Co. joined in the laughter.

"My hat! What a dodge!" said Gay admiringly. "Let him come looking after me if he likes! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Of course, you can prove that you were indoors last night, if necessary?" said Tom Merry.

"Quite easily."

"Not that your headmaster would be likely to listen to such a yarn, if Knox were ass enough to go and complain to him," grinned Figgins. "I shouldn't wonder if he brings Linton here to speak to you, though."

"Talk of angels, and you heah the wustle of their wings!" remarked Arthur Augustus, as a knock came at the study door.

Mr. Linton entered, with Knox behind him. There was a worried and harassed look upon the face of the master of the Shell. The Secret Society was beginning to get on his nerves. He had plenty of matters to think about besides Knox and his endless troubles with the juniors, the absence of Mr. Railton throwing a good deal of extra work upon his shoulders. Possibly he was getting a little fed-up with Knox.

The juniors all stood up very respectfully as Mr. Linton entered.

"Gay, I wish to have a word with you."

"Certainly, sir!" said Gordon Gay.

"Were you within the precincts of this school last evening after eight o'clock?"

"I, sir? Oh, no, sir!"

"You give me your word, Gay?"

"Certainly!" said Gordon Gay.

Mr. Linton paused. The Australian schoolboy's eyes met his clearly and frankly.

Knox's acid voice broke in:

"He has a scratch on his wrist, sir, exactly the same as the one I saw."

"I've a scratch on my wrist, certainly," said Gordon Gay; "but I was doing my prep at the Grammar School last evening at eight o'clock."

"I don't believe you!" said Knox.

Gay shrugged his shoulders. He did not care a straw whether Knox believed him or not.

"That will do, Knox," said Mr. Linton, with a worried frown. "We must accept Gay's assurance on the point."

"If you were to see his headmaster, sir—" Knox ventured.

Mr. Linton shook his head decidedly.

"Gay would repeat his assurance in the presence of his headmaster, and no purpose would be effected," he said. "It is certainly a strange coincidence concerning the scratch on Gay's wrist, but I am compelled to accept his word."

And Mr. Linton rustled out of the study.

Knox waited till he was gone, and then he turned savagely upon the three Grammarians.

"You can fool him," he snarled, "but you can't fool me! I shall catch you at it next time, and then you will smart for it!"

"Catch a weasel asleep!" grinned Gordon Gay. "Knox, old man, you couldn't catch me in a month of Sundays!"

"You admit it was you, then?" howled Knox.

"Not at all. I don't admit anything," said Gay cheerfully. "You've said you don't believe me. Well, you can believe what you like, old chap; it doesn't matter to me in the least! You can believe that I flew over in an aeroplane, if you like! I haven't the slightest objection."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Knox stamped furiously out of the study. The laughter of the juniors followed him down the passage. The prefect lounged moodily into Cutts' study, and the Fifth Former looked at his clouded face, with a smile.

"Not bowled out the young rotters yet?" he asked.

"No!" growled Knox.

"Why not look for the place where they took you? If you find it, you may find some clue to the young rascals."

"I don't believe they're in St. Jim's at all," said Knox. "I'm pretty certain it's a set of those Grammar School rotters chipping in."

"Phew! It will be pretty hard to put salt on their tails, if that's the case!" said Cutts, with a whistle. "Not that I think it's likely. But what are you going to do?"

"I'll make them squirm for it, anyway! If it's Gay and his friends, they're doing it to oblige Merry, and I'll make Merry smart for it!" said Knox, gritting his teeth.

"And suppose the Secret Society collar you again?"

Knox looked very troubled.

"I suppose I shall have to chance that!" he grunted. "Look here, you're a keen beggar, Cutts, and it may be your turn next! Can't you give me some advice?"

Cutts laughed.

"The only advice I can give you is to let the young beggars alone," he said. "You can't find them out, and they can't be stopped. They've got a good bit of pluck and resource to think of this wheeze at all. I've given up cuffing the fags myself. Safer to let them alone, in the circus. I don't want to be yanked off in the dark and flogged. Not at all to my taste. Leave them alone, Knox, old man. You've run on to a bigger job that you can handle, and my advice is—chuck it! When Railton comes back, the whole thing will come to an end."

"I'm going to make them feel that life isn't worth living before Railton comes back!" said Knox viciously. "I shan't be head prefect when Railton's here again."

Cutts shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, if you're going to hunt for trouble, I can't help you," he said. "I've given you my advice—chuck it!"

"Oh, rats!" growled Knox.

And he swung out of the study and slammed the door behind him.

Knox, in his hour of need, condescended to ask help and counsel from the other prefects. But the other prefects gave him exceedingly short and sharp replies. Darrell candidly advised him to stop being a beastly bully. Langton suggested that he should try being decent by way of a change. Having obtained scant comfort from the prefects, Knox stamped away ill-temperedly to his own study.

As he entered his study, he uttered almost a yell of rage. Chalked in big letters on the looking-glass was the

notice, greeting him as he entered the study:

"BULLY! THE SECRET SOCIETY IS WATCHING YOU! BEWARE!"

Knox panted with fury as he rubbed the chalked letters from the glass. While he was so engaged, a stone whizzed through the study window and dropped on the floor. In surprise, the prefect stared at it. A paper was tied round the stone, and he dragged it off and unfolded it. Daubed on it, in large letters, were the words:

"THE HOUR IS COMING!"

Knox rushed to the window and looked into the quadrangle. A great many fellows were to be seen, but no one was near the window, and there was no possible clue to the person who had thrown in the note.

Knox's hand trembled a little as he thrust the threatening note into the fire. His courage was beginning to fail him.

CHAPTER 13.

Levison Has Had Enough!

"WOW! Wow!"
 "Groogh!"
 "Great Scott!"
 "Oh crumbs!"

Tom Merry & Co. heard those lamentable exclamations as they passed Study No. 6 an evening or two later.

The captain of the Shell opened the door and looked in.

Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy were groaning in chorus, what time they rubbed their hands, or squeezed them under their armpits.

"Been through it again?" asked Tom. "Yaas, bai Jove! Oh cwumbs! My beastly hands feel as if they have been flayed!" gasped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Knox, of course?"
 "Yaas."

"He's found a card pinned on his back," grunted Blake. "It wasn't us, but he felt certain we knew something about it. So we did, as a matter of fact, but he has no right to jump to conclusions like that. He's licked us all round."

Tom Merry's eyes gleamed.

"Dash it all, you can appeal to Linton for that!" he exclaimed. "Even Knox isn't allowed to cane chaps on suspicion."

Blake groaned.

"But he's got his excuse ready," he snorted—"we haven't done our lines—as usual. He's taken jolly good care to load us up with lines, so that he's always got an excuse for going for us. I've got about three hundred overdue."

"And I've got four hundred or so," grunted Herries.

"I've left off counting mine," said Digby. "I can't do 'em all, so what's the use? Knox has been worse instead of better since the Secret Society put him through it."

"And he's specially waxy now, because he's lost his sleep," said Blake. "Levison's had his lesson. He hasn't sneaked at all the last two days—he's afraid to. I hear that Knox has been cutting up rusty with him."

"Well, that's so much to the good," said Tom Merry. "Knox will have to be dealt with again—more severely. He was warned, and he promised to reform. Next time, perhaps, he will keep his promise. He's making us smart because he can't get at Gordon Gay. He thinks the Secret Society are Grammarian chaps. Well, it's time the Secret Society got to work again."



Clip, clip, clip! went the scissors as the chief of the Secret Society got busy on Knox's hair. Thicker and faster tufts of it fell from the prefect's devoted head. "Gr-r-r-r-r!" he gurgled. A close crop with a tarring to follow was not a happy prospect for the bully of the Sixth!

"But how?" said Blake dolefully. "The cad is too awfully careful. He is on his guard now. He has taken to keeping inside the House after dark, and if he goes out, he always has a chap or two with him—Cutts, or Gilmore, or Sefton, or somebody. He doesn't mean to take any chances. The Secret Society won't be able to get at him again, so far as I can see."

"Wathah not! The awful wottah is too deep for us!" said D'Arcy despondently.

Tom Merry shook his head. "We'll see about that," he replied. "Shush! Here comes the beast!"

Knox came striding along the Fourth Form passage. He paused as he saw the Terrible Three in the doorway of Study No. 6.

"Have you done your lines, you three?" he demanded.

Tom Merry smiled. "Yes, Knox. All done, every blessed one, and taken in to Mr. Linton."

And Monty Lowther and Manners smiled, too. They had bucked up with their latest imposition in order to give Knox no excuse for doubling them.

"Oh!" said Knox, with a scowl. "Don't grin at me in that impertinent way! Take a hundred lines, Lowther!"

"Eh? What for?" demanded Monty Lowther.

"For impertinence," said Knox, scowling.

"But I wasn't impertinent, my dear fellow," objected Lowther.

"Take two hundred lines!" snapped Knox.

"Look here—" began Tom Merry and Manners together warmly. This was getting a little too "thick" even for Knox.

"Take two hundred lines each, and show them up before bed-time," said

Knox. "Fail and they will be doubled and you will be kept in to-morrow afternoon to write them out."

And Knox strode on up the passage, leaving the Terrible Three dumb-founded. Jack Blake grinned at them in a feeble way.

"You're getting it now," he said. "It's a case of the giddy wolf and the lamb over again. If you do anything, you get it in the neck. If you don't do anything, you get it in the neck just the same. Knox has got us under his thumb."

"My hat!" muttered Tom Merry, drawing a deep breath. "We're not going to stand this. It's too thick. I'm going to appeal to Linton."

"You'll only make matters worse."

"I'm going to try. Come with me, you chaps!"

"Ahem!" said Lowther. "Of course, we have a right to appeal to the House-master. But, considering that Linton backs Knox up, old chap—ahem!"

"Let's try, anyway."
 "Oh, all right!"

Lowther and Manners followed their leader to Mr. Linton's study. The Form-master gave them a look of sharp inquiry. He listened impatiently while Tom Merry stated his case.

"We appeal to you, sir, as our House-master at present. Knox has given us two hundred lines each for nothing at all."

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Linton. "I am sure Knox would do nothing of the kind. What reason did he give?"

"Ahem! He said Lowther was impertinent; but he wasn't."

"Probably opinions differ on that point," said Mr. Linton dryly. "After what happened in Study No. 6 last week, I am quite prepared to believe it. I

shall certainly not rescind your impositions. You may go."

"But, sir—"

"You may go!" repeated Mr. Linton more sharply.

The Terrible Three left the study.

"Didn't I tell you it wouldn't be any good, Tommy?" said Monty Lowther despondently, when they were in the passage. "Linton backs up Knox, all the time. Naturally, he wouldn't hear a word against the chap he's made head prefect. It's no good. I suppose you're not thinking of carrying the appeal further on—to Ratty?"

"Well, no," said Tom. "I know that would make matters worse. Ratty would only go for us. There's only one thing to be done. The Secret Society have got to give Knox another lesson." "They can't get at him!" growled Manners.

"I've got an idea about that."

And the Terrible Three returned to Study No. 6, where the members of the Secret Society held a long and serious council together.

Meanwhile, Knox had gone into Levison's study. The spy of the Fourth was alone there when the prefect came in. Knox closed the door and fixed his eyes upon Levison in a very unpleasant manner. He had a cane in his hand, and Levison eyed the cane uneasily. Matters had not been going well between the precious pair for the last few days.

"You haven't been to my study lately," said Knox.

"No," said Levison, his eyes still on the cane.

"You know our arrangement," said the prefect. "I was to be kept regularly informed of all that went on in the House. That's my system. Why haven't you made any reports for the last two days?"

Levison shifted uneasily.

"I—I'm not going to sneak!" he muttered. "Look here, Knox, it isn't safe. You can't find out who those secret rotters are, and you can't stop their tricks. I'm jolly well not going to be collared and flogged again, if I can help it. You can manage without my help."

Knox gave him a bitter look.

"So you are afraid of these young fools, with their silly masks on?" he snapped.

"Well, yes, I am. I've had enough."

"And do you think I'm going to let you desert me like this?" demanded the prefect. "I depend on your reports for keeping the juniors in order."

"I'm not going to bring you any more reports," said Levison doggedly. "I'm sorry now that I started it at all. Kildare used to manage without having reports brought to him when he was head prefect. It's a rotten thing, anyway, and I'm fed up with it. I'm not going to do it any more."

Knox set his teeth hard.

"Very well. Of course, you can have your own way. You were late for calling-over last night, Levison. Hold out your hand!"

"Wha-at?"

"You can't expect me to favour you. I caned Tom Merry and Blake for being late for call-over, and I must be just."

Levison backed away.

"Don't talk that rot to me!" he snarled. "Look here, Knox, if you begin bullying me I'll go to Mr. Linton and tell him that you've made me sneak about the fellows, and established a regular system of spying and tale-bearing. How would you like that?"

"I don't think he would believe it, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,514.

especially when I tell him that I have punished you for tale-bearing," said Knox grimly.

"Wha-at?"

"That's what I'm going to do now. You are a sneak, Levison, and I disapprove of sneaks. Hold out your hand!"

"I won't!" yelled Levison.

Knox said no more, but he strode at the cad of the Fourth, seized him by the collar, and lashed him across the shoulders with the cane. Levison roared and struggled in the grasp of the bully of the Sixth, but the cane rose and fell relentlessly. Levison's experience in the hands of the Secret Society had been nothing to this. He was thoroughly thrashed and gasping with pain when the prefect threw him aside at last.

"There!" panted Knox. "That may bring you to your senses, you young rascal. And you'll stay in to-morrow afternoon and write out two hundred lines."

Knox quitted the study and slammed the door after him. He left Levison groaning and grinding his teeth. It was not the first time that the cad of the Fourth had discovered that the way of the transgressor is hard. Between the Secret Society on one side and the bullying prefect on the other, the spy of the School House seemed likely to have an exceedingly unpleasant time.

CHAPTER 14.

Victory!

MIDNIGHT had tolled out from the clock tower.

St. Jim's was buried in silence and slumber.

The last door had closed; the last light had been extinguished.

But in the old School House of St. Jim's there were several fellows who were wakeful.

Knox, in his room in the Sixth Form passage, was sleeping soundly enough. He did not hear a cautious step in the passage outside; he did not hear the handle of his door turn softly.

Like all the Sixth Form, Knox had a room to himself study and bed-room combined. The dim starlight, falling into the window, glistened upon the bed and the sleeping prefect.

Knox awoke suddenly.

A tap on the shoulder had awakened him, and he started up in bed, to discover that he was not alone in the room.

Three dark figures, cloaked from head to foot, their faces concealed by black masks, stood by his bedside.

Knox glared at them for a moment.

"Your hour has come!" said one.

He had taken so much care of himself since his experience at the hands of the Secret Society that he had ceased to fear reprisals from them. Outside the House he gave them no chance of getting at him; and that they would venture to attack him inside the House had never occurred to his mind.

He realised his mistake now.

Here, in his room in the School House, at the hour of midnight, the Secret Society had come. And Knox glared at them with mingled rage and terror.

He opened his mouth to yell, but the three were prepared for that. In an instant he was seized and pushed down into bed again, and a handkerchief was stuffed into his mouth.

Knox struggled wildly in the bed.

But three strong pairs of hands were sufficient to keep him down, and his wrists were dragged together and tied. A cord, passed round his head, secured

the handkerchief in his mouth. Then he was yanked out of bed upon the floor and his ankles were tied.

Unable to struggle or to call out, the prefect lay upon the carpet, his dilated eyes fixed upon the three dark figures.

"Put on the sack!"

It was the deep voice he had heard before in the Black Chamber. The prefect, shivering with cold and terror in his pyjamas, was shoved into the sack, and it was drawn tight about him.

Then he was lifted from the floor.

With wild-beating heart, striving vainly to call out, the bully of the Sixth felt himself carried out of his room.

Whither were the captors taking him now? Not to the Black Chamber, where he had been punished before; they could hardly get him out of the House. He felt himself carried upstairs, flight after flight. He guessed that he was being taken to the top box-room—a secluded room, far from the bed-rooms and dormitories, where a little noise was not likely to be noticed, even in the silence of the night.

He was set down upon a cold, hard box, and he heard a door closed and locked. He was a prisoner, locked in the secluded box-room with the three.

Who were they?

His suspicion that the Secret Society were Gordon Gay & Co. vanished now. The Grammarians could not be in the School House at St. Jim's at that hour of the night.

Neither could they be New House fellows. At all events, it was extremely improbable.

Were they Tom Merry & Co.? That did not seem likely, either, for the Shell fellows had proved a conclusive alibi on the occasion of the first appearance of the secret three at St. Jim's.

"Take off the sack!"

The sack was drawn away.

Knox glared round him with starting eyes. A candle lighted the scene.

He was in the top box-room, as he had suspected. This time the room was not hung in black. Apparently the secret three had not risked bringing the weird paraphernalia of the Secret Society into the House. But the three figures were clad in black cloaks and masks complete.

"Knox," came the deep voice, "you know in whose hands you are?"

Knox glared, but he could not speak. The secret three evidently did not intend to give him a chance of waking the House.

A single yell of "Help!" from the bound prefect would have put a sudden end to the proceedings in the box-room.

"You have broken your word, Knox."

"Groo-ogh!" mumbled Knox faintly.

"You promised to amend the last time you were in our hands. You have not kept your promise."

"Grrrrr!"

"You were warned of what would happen if you persisted in your evil courses," went on the deep tones. "Now the sentence is going to be executed."

Knox's eyes almost started from his head as the chief of the three produced a pair of scissors, and another of the dark figures lifted a jam-pot full of tar from an empty trunk. He made wild efforts to speak, but the handkerchief stuffed into his mouth prevented all utterance.

Two of the conspirators grasped him, and the chief set to work upon his head. Knox wriggled and mumbled spasmodically as the scissors clipped through his hair, and tufts of it fell over his face and on the floor.

He wriggled wildly, but he wriggled in vain. The thought of how he would

look on the morrow, with the hair shaved clean off his head, made him grind his teeth. Tuft after tuft of hair dropped off under the clipping scissors. Knox rolled his head wildly, and gave a fearful gurgle as the scissors clipped the tip of his ear.

"Better keep your silly napper still!" said the chief.

Knox gurgled.
"You want to speak?" asked the chief, his eyes gleaming at the prefect's furious face through the holes in his mask.

Knox nodded his head.
"You can't have the gag taken out. You would make a row," said the chief in his deep tones. "You can write if you like."

He produced a pencil and a sheet of paper, and placed them on the box within reach of Knox's right hand. The cord was slackened sufficiently to allow the prefect to write.

"Stop it!" That was what Knox wrote down in scrawling pencil.

"Rats!" said the deep-voiced chief. "I'm going to shave every hair off your silly head, and then anoint you with tar."

The prefect shuddered.
Clip, clip, clip! went the scissors. Thicker and faster the hair dropped from Knox's devoted head. He was feeling quite cold about the head now. He knew the yell of laughter that would greet him on the morrow, when he appeared in public with a shorn and shaven crown. This was worse than the flogging. And the tar was still to come.

Clip, clip, clip, clip! As actively as a professional barber, the chief clipped away at Knox's hair.

"Gr-r-r-r-r-r!"
Knox began to scribble again.

"Stop it! I'll do anything you like!" The chief paused. Knox was very nearly bald by this time. His head looked like that of a convict.

"There is some more to come off," said the chief; "not much, but some. You will look very pretty in the morning, Knox."

"Gr-r-r-r-r!"

"I should recommend you not to show yourself all at once. You will give the fellows quite a shock."

"Gr-r-r-r!"

"If we let you off the tar, will you promise to amend your wicked ways, and try to become a decent chap?"

"Gr-r-r-r!"

"Nod your head if you mean yes." Knox nodded his head. He would have agreed to anything to avoid being reduced to a state of complete baldness, with a coating of tar to take the place of his hair.

"Will you keep your word?"
Nod!

"You are an awful liar, you know. Will you put it into writing?"

Knox shook his head savagely.
Clip, clip, clip!

Knox nodded hurriedly, and his ear had another narrow escape.

"Good! You will write as I dictate."
Nod!

The chief laid down the scissors. From under his black cloak he produced a small sheet of cardboard and a fountain-pen. Knox's eyes glittered as he saw them. Evidently the three had come with the intention of forcing him to write as they dictated. They knew in advance that he had not the courage to go through his punishment and defy them to the end.

"Take the pen, Knox!"
Knox took the pen, and his right hand was wholly released, so that he could



write with freedom. One of the masked avengers held the tar-jar ready. It had occurred to Knox to attempt to struggle now that one arm was free. But the jar of tar held above his head caused him to abandon that idea at once. He did not want the tar to come swamping down on him.

"Now write as I dictate," said the chief in deep tones. "Fail to do so, and you perish—I mean, I shall shave you quite bald, and tar you all over, and leave you tied up here till the morning. You have provoked the wrath of the Secret Society of St. Jim's, Knox, and you are doomed!"

"Doomed!" repeated the two masked followers of the chief.

There was the sound of a chuckle from the direction of the door. Knox started. He realised that there were other fellows outside the box-room listening to the scene. He wondered savagely how many of the School House juniors were concerned in the proceedings of the Secret Society. The chief turned a glance towards the door.

"Shush!" he growled. "This is a serious matter, Brother of the Black Chamber! Shush—I mean, silence!"

There was another chuckle, and then silence.

"Write!" said the chief sternly. "I, Gerald Knox, of the Sixth Form at St. Jim's— You rotten cad, write in your own fist! If you try to disguise your writing again, it's all up with you! Mind, this is your last chance! Write as I tell you, in your own hand, or I'll shave you bald and tar you from head to foot, and flog you into the bargain! You're not getting half what you've been asking for!"

Knox's eyes blinked, but he obeyed. The chief turned the sheet of cardboard over, and Knox started afresh, writing at the dictation of the deep-voiced chief:

"I, Gerald Knox, of the Sixth Form at St. Jim's, confess that I am a cad and a bully, and beg to say that I'm sorry for it. I promise to mend my ways and try to become decent, and will endeavour in every way to do my duty as a prefect, without being a beastly bully and rotter as heretofore.— As witness my signature,

"GERALD KNOX, Sixth Form."

"Good enough!" said the chief, and there was another chuckle from the

doorway. "This confession will be posted up in the House to-morrow," Knox, and you will be expected to keep your word. Fail, and the Secret Society will seize you again, and next time you will not escape. Next time your hair, eyebrows, and eyelashes will be clean-shaved, and you will be tarred from top to toe, as well as receiving one hundred lashes with a dogwhip!"

Knox shuddered. He knew that the masked chief meant every word he said. Although the masks and the cloaks and the secrecy smacked very much of amateur theatricals, there was no doubt at all that the mysterious society was in deadly earnest.

The chief waited for the ink to dry, and then slipped the card under his cloak. The candle was blown out.

In the darkness Knox heard a sound of departing footsteps, and then the door closed softly, and he was left alone.

The juniors—whoever they were—were gone! Knox struggled with his bonds; but, as on the previous occasion, he was nearly half an hour in getting free from them.

Long before that, the members of the Secret Society were in bed and asleep; and Knox knew that it was useless to visit the dormitories in the hope of catching them. However much he might suspect their identity, he could prove nothing.

Knox wriggled himself free at last, tore away the gag, and limped away from the box-room, shivering with cold and almost sick with rage and chagrin.

He went back to his room, and plunged into bed. But it was not easy to sleep. Somewhere in the School House was a card he had written, and on the morrow it was to be posted up in the House for all St. Jim's to read.

Knox writhed with rage and shame as he thought of it. That confession, written in his own hand, would cover him with humiliation as with a garment.

He had carried matters with a high and heavy hand, but the Secret Society had won in the long run. Even if he found out the offenders, and obtained their punishment, that would make no difference to the shame and the humiliation of his own position.

The game was up!

The Secret Society of St. Jim's had won hands down, and the bully of the Sixth was beaten, badly beaten! He knew it, and realised it clearly, and he knew that his only chance of ever holding his head up in the school again was to secure the suppression of the document written by his own hand.

CHAPTER 15.

All Serene!

TOM MERRY came downstairs with a cheery face in the morning.

The hero of the Shell seemed to be in great spirits.

"Merry!"
It was Knox's voice, but not Knox's usual tones. His tones were very subdued; in fact, quite civil.

Tom Merry looked at him with a smile. Knox's head looked a little odd; his hair was so exceedingly short. He ground his teeth as he caught the smile upon Tom Merry's face. He seemed about to break out for a moment, but he restrained himself. He could not afford to quarrel with Tom Merry just now.

"Last night," said Knox, sinking his voice, and glancing round to make sure

(Continued on page 28.)

THE FORM THAT "WALKED OUT" ON THEIR FORM-MASTER BECAUSE HE WANTED THEM TO WEAR SANDALS!

THE FADDIST FORM-MASTER!

WHAT HAPPENED LAST WEEK.

Owing to the illness of Mr. Quelch, the Remove Form at Greyfriars is taken over temporarily by a new master, Mr. Chesham. Much to the annoyance of Harry Wharton & Co., he proves to be a food and health faddist, and he starts to impose his fads on his Form.

Wharton is forbidden to play cricket because the new master thinks he has a weak chest. Then Mr. Chesham tells the Remove that breakfast will in future consist of porridge instead of eggs and bacon, with the promise of more changes in diet to come.

After that shock comes another. The Remove learn that they will take exercise in the Close at half-hour intervals during lessons, but the snag is that they are to be led round in orderly array, like a flock of sheep.

Grumbling to one another, the juniors start lessons. But at the end of half an hour, Mr. Chesham orders the Form to follow him, and leads them out into the Close.

(Now read on.)

A Shock For Bunter!

THE Close at Greyfriars was deserted at that hour in the morning as the Remove marched round in silent wrath, following their Form-master.

A face looked out of a window of the Upper Fourth Form class-room, and Bob Cherry, glancing up, recognised Dabney. The Upper Fourth fellow made a derisive gesture, and Bob Cherry shook his fist.

Mr. Chesham glanced round.

"Cherry! What is the meaning of that gesture?"

"I—I was just shaking my arm, sir," stammered Bob.

"Is there anything the matter with your arm?"

"Oh, no, sir!"

"Then why did you shake it?"

"I—I—I just shook it, sir."

"That is very curious," said Mr. Chesham. "You mean that you felt a sudden impulse to shake your hand in the air?"

"Ye-es, sir."

"Very singular, indeed! It is evidently a variety of St. Vitus dance," said the Form-master. "Have you experienced anything of the sort before, Cherry?"

"Yes, sir," grinned Bob.

"You must not laugh, Cherry. This is a serious matter. If taken in time, there is no reason why a permanent cure should not be effected; but if neglected, the most serious results may follow. I only hope it is not too late. Is the impulse to shake your hand accompanied by any feeling of pain in the arm?"

"Oh, no, sir!"

"Then I am glad to say the case is not far advanced," said Mr. Chesham.

"Taken in hand now it can be checked and ultimately cured. Some time to-day I will give you a bottle of lotion, which you will rub on your arm for a quarter of an hour every night before going to bed. After a week you can tell me the

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By Frank Richards.

(Author of the grand long yarns of Greyfriars appearing every Saturday in our companion paper, the "Magnet.")

result." Mr. Chesham turned away again. "Follow me!"

Bob Cherry's face was a study as the Remove marched on. The juniors could hardly suppress their merriment, but Bob Cherry did not feel merry. To have to rub his arm with lotion for a quarter of an hour every night, because he had shaken his fist at Dabney, was rather rough, he thought. But it was of no use attempting to explain now. The Form-master would only be angry, even if he believed him.

"Well, you're in for it, Bob," murmured Nugent.

"The infulness for it is terrific," purred Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "Fortunately it is only weakfully that the esteemed Cherry must rubfully lotion his honourable arm."

Bob Cherry grunted.

"Chesham won't be here a week," he growled. "If he is, he will be booked for a high old time."

And the Remove chuckled. They re-entered the class-room and lessons were resumed. Then came another walk and another resumption of lessons. Work was certainly interrupted, but, as Mr. Chesham said, what was that when the boys' precious health was at stake?

When the morning class was dismissed Billy Bunter lingered behind the rest

In imposing his cranky ideas on his Form the faddist Form-master is asking for trouble—and he gets it in the revolt of the Remove!

to speak to the Form-master. Mr. Chesham looked at him.

"What is it, Bunter?"

"If you please, sir, you told me to remind you—"

"Ah, yes, of course! I'm glad you remembered it, Bunter. Come with me to my study," said Mr. Chesham.

Billy Bunter followed the Form-master to his study, his fat face glowing with happy anticipation. In the study Mr. Chesham groped in a drawer of his table, and produced a bottle containing a dark-coloured fluid.

Bunter eyed it nervously. Mr. Chesham drew the cork, sniffed at the bottle, and recorked it. Then he held it out to Bunter.

"That is it, Bunter."

Billy Bunter took the bottle gingerly enough.

"Wh-wh-what is it, sir?"

"It is a cure for the habit-hunger you suffer from, and which makes you believe you are in need of food, when, as a matter of fact, you have already

eaten too much. You will find the directions on the bottle—one dose before each meal, and one dose directly after, and a double dose before going to bed. Keep this up for a week, and you will find that it will make a marvellous difference to you."

Billy Bunter's lower jaw had gradually been dropping while he listened to the Form-master, and now it looked almost as if it were going to detach itself from his head altogether. He looked at the bottle, and he looked at Mr. Chesham, and he gasped like a fish.

"One dose before each meal," he murmured dazedly, "and one meal directly after each dose, and a bed before going to a dose—"

"No, no!" said Mr. Chesham, with careful correction. "One dose before each meal, and one dose immediately after, and a double dose before going to bed."

"But—but—"

"You may go, Bunter. Take great care to follow out my directions carefully."

Billy Bunter left the study. He walked along the passage like one in a dream, still holding the bottle of medicine straight out before him in his hand.

The Medicine Is Not Taken!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!" It was Bob Cherry's exuberant greeting as Billy Bunter walked dazedly into the Close, holding the bottle of medicine, and with an expression of dreamy stupefaction on his face.

"What have you got there, Bunter?"

"I—I don't quite know," murmured Bunter. "I—I've just escaped from a maniac."

"My hat!"

"What's the matter?" asked Nugent. "Didn't you get what you expected from Mr. Chesham?"

"I got this."

"And what is that?" asked Harry Wharton.

"A bottle of medicine."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's no laughing matter, Cherry. I say, you fellows, the man's mad. Absolutely stark, staring insane. What do you think he's given me this medicine for?"

"I should tink tat it vas to drink," said Fritz Hoffman, the German junior of the Remove.

"Oh, don't be an ass! He's given me this medicine to cure my hunger. If he tried to cure it with pies and puddings and things, I wouldn't mind. But medicine!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The man's mad! I'm to take a dose before every meal, and a dose after going to bed, and a double dose before something or other—I don't quite remember. It doesn't matter, as I shan't take any of the filthy stuff!"

"If Mr. Chesham has ordered you to—"

"I don't care! He's not a giddy doctor, is he?" exclaimed Billy Bunter aggressively. "How do I know it won't

HARRY WHARTON & CO. ARE IN REBELLIOUS MOOD IN THIS EXCITING YARN OF THEIR EARLY ADVENTURES AT GREYFRIARS.



"Hurrah for the Remove!" yelled Micky Desmond. "Down with all bastely faddists! Let's get out!" There was a cheer and the Remove swarmed to the doorway, leaving Mr. Chesham staring at them helplessly.

poison me? I don't know what it's made of."

"Taste it," said Nugent encouragingly. "It may not be so bad, you know. Give a chap a chance."

"Taste it yourself."

"Oh, I don't mind! Take the cork out."

Billy Bunter uncorked the bottle. A pungent odour was perceptible at once.

Nugent took a tiny drop of the medicine on his finger and tasted it with the tip of his tongue. Then he made an exceedingly wry face.

"Ow!" he said expressively.

"What's it like?"

"I don't know exactly—something like it smells—rotten, anyway."

"I hope you'll enjoy it, Bunter," said Hazeldene sympathetically. "You'll get used to it in time, very likely. You'll have a chance to, if you take all the doses it says on the label."

"No fear!"

"Hand it over," said Bulstrode.

"We'll make a cock-shy of it; that's about the best thing we can do with the rotten stuff."

"I say, you know, Chesham may inquire after it—"

"Tell him to go and eat coke."

Bulstrode took the bottle from Bunter's not unwilling fingers and walked off with a dozen of the Remove at his heels. He set it up on a post some distance from the house, and the Removites selected stones.

"There may be a row over that," said Harry Wharton warningly.

Bulstrode looked at him with a sneer.

"You needn't chuck any stones if you're afraid," he said.

Wharton flushed crimson.

"You know I'm not afraid," he broke out angrily. "But—"

"Well, then, take a hand in the game, and don't creak."

"That's right!" exclaimed Levison.

"What right has the fellow to dose us with his confounded medicines. It's

about time we ragged him into his right senses."

"Hear, hear!" shouted a dozen voices.

"Well, there's something in that," said Wharton. "Anyway, I'm not going to have Bulstrode hinting that I'm afraid. Here goes!"

But it was Nugent who hurled the first stone at the bottle. That decided the matter for Harry Wharton. Right or wrong, he was with his chums, and would not keep out of anything they ventured into. He was the next to throw a stone, and the neck of the bottle went off with a crash.

"Good for you, Wharton!"

The bottle had fallen to the ground, and the liquid it contained was running out, but only the neck was broken. Bulstrode set it up again, and a shower of stones from the laughing Removites crashed on it and splintered it to fragments.

"That job's jobbed," remarked Bulstrode. "If Chesham inquires after his medicine, Bunty, tell him the Remove have made an end of it."

"I'm afraid he would be angry, Bulstrode," said Bunter. "I shall tell him the bottle got broken. That will be the exact truth. I was always brought up to tell the truth. I say, I'm jolly hungry. If any of you fellows are going to the tuckshop before dinner I don't mind coming along."

"Very likely," said Bob Cherry, walking away.

"Really, you fellows—Wharton, Nugent, Hurree Singh—I wish you wouldn't walk away while I'm talking! Awfully selfish set of fellows I have to associate with, and no mistake."

The chums of the Remove went down to the nets for some cricket practice before dinner. Owing to Mr. Chesham's order forbidding him to play, Harry Wharton was only an onlooker. He chafed, and had never felt so strongly inclined to revolt against authority. To

be governed by a tyrant was bad enough. But to be ruled by a faddist was intolerable.

"Ah, I'm glad to see that you remember my instructions," said a voice near him, and Harry turned to see the mild blue eyes of the new master fixed on him. "I hope it will be possible for you to take up cricket again next summer, Wharton. But *festina lente*—we must make haste slowly, you know. With care you will be restored to health. Is that Cherry at the wicket?"

"Yes, sir."

"How reckless of him, with that strong tendency to an attack of St. Vitus dance in his right arm," said Mr. Chesham anxiously. "He might cause permanent injury to the limb by his dreadful carelessness. But it is my fault. I should have warned him. If harm comes of it I shall blame myself. Cherry!"

Bob Cherry glanced round. Hazeldene was about to bowl, but he paused as the master of the Remove called out.

"Yes, sir," said Bob.

"Come here, at once!"

Bob Cherry's face fell.

"I'm batting, sir."

"Never mind. Come here at once, Cherry!"

Rebellion flashed into Bob Cherry's face. He guessed what was coming, and he was inclined to disobey. But it was practically impossible to disregard the master's order. He waved his hand to Hazeldene and walked off the pitch with his bat under his arm and a cloud upon his usually sunny and good-tempered face.

The look of real concern on Mr. Chesham's face somewhat disarmed him. The master of the Remove might be a fussy faddist, but he certainly had a kind heart.

"Cherry, you must not play cricket until I am satisfied as to the state of your arm. It is very reckless of you."

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"My arm is all right, sir."

"It is quite impossible for your arm to be all right, Cherry, when it was suffering from an incipient attack of St. Vitus dance this morning," said the Form-master severely. "You had better rest in the shade of a tree; and don't forget the lotion this evening."

"But I want to play cricket, sir."

Mr. Chesham smiled indulgently.

"Naturally, Cherry. You have no knowledge of what is necessary for the preservation of your health, but, fortunately, you have a Form-master well versed in such matters. You will do as I tell you, or I shall be angry."

The chimes from the clock tower interrupted the Form-master, and he gave a start. He looked at his watch quickly, and then, opening a little packet, which he extracted from his waistcoat pocket, took out two small pills. Much to the amusement of the juniors, he popped them into his mouth, and swallowed them. Then he breathed a sigh of relief.

"Dear me, I had almost forgotten my usual dose," he murmured. "You will be careful to carry out my instructions, Cherry."

And the Remove master walked on. Bob Cherry and Harry Wharton looked at one another in expressive silence for a minute. The cricketers went on with the game.

"There's two of us out of it," said Bob Cherry at last. "No breakfast, no cricket, and the Upper Fourth cackling at us like a lot of old hens!"

"Blessed if we're going to stand it!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "We told Quelch we would give the new master a chance, but we never expected anything of this sort."

"Quelch can't have known what he was like, either."

"And I fancy the Head doesn't. He's taken on for his scholastic attainments, and I don't deny he's clever. But this faddism—"

"It's too thick!"

"We're not going to stand it!" growled Wharton. "Life won't be worth living if he goes on. If we have any more of his fads there'll be rows in the Remove."

The Revolt of the Remove!

"DINNER!" said Nugent, as the bell rang and the Remove crowded into the lofty dining-hall.

Mr. Chesham took his place at the head of the Form table. The dinner of the juniors at Greyfriars was of a solid description, and the task of carving was no sinecure. But Mr. Chesham made a light task of it to-day. The helpings he sent round on each plate were small, and the juniors stared at them. Billy Bunter surveyed his plate almost with tears in his eyes.

"My only hat!" murmured Bob Cherry. "That chap must have been brought up in a blessed boarding-house."

There were discontented faces along each side of the table. The first helping of beef disappeared, and plates were passed up for more. Mr. Chesham shook his head with a pleasant smile.

"There will be no second helping, my boys."

There was an audible growl from the Remove.

"Mr. Quelch always gave us a second helping, sir," said Bulstrode.

"That is changed now."

"The first helping was jolly small, sir," said Nugent.

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"Perhaps so. I must explain to you my views on the matter. Surely none of you can be so ignorant of the simplest rules of health as to be unaware of the fact that very little meat should be eaten in hot weather. A quantity of wholemeal bread has been provided to supply the deficiency."

"I'm hungry," said Billy Bunter.

Mr. Chesham's mild blue eyes turned on him.

"Ah, you are hungry, Bunter! Have you carried out my instructions with regard to the bottle of medicine I gave you?"

Billy Bunter was silent.

"Have you taken a dose before dinner?"

"If you please, sir, I'm very sorry, but the bottle was broken. It was broken before I had time to take a dose, sir."

"Dear me! How was it broken, Bunter?"

"A—A stone knocked against it, sir."

"I am afraid you have been very careless, Bunter. You are paying the penalty of your carelessness, however, in suffering a recurrence of the habit-hunger."

"If you please, sir, it's real hunger I've got now."

"Quite a mistake," said Mr. Chesham blandly. "It's a feeling that comes from habit, and is due to an illusion of the imagination, and is quite distinct from real hunger. The only resemblance is that it feels precisely the same."

"It feels awfully real, sir," murmured Bunter. "I—I should like a little more beef, if you please, sir."

"I must refuse, Bunter, in the interests of your health. You may, however, have another slice of wholemeal bread."

Billy Bunter made a grimace which it was fortunate the Form-master did not see. The Removeites left the table in an extremely discontented mood. They were ripe for revolt that afternoon, and it needed very little to set the smouldering discontent into flame.

"What can we do with him?" said Russell. "The bouncer will keep on till he's reduced us to skin and bone, if he's not stopped!"

"I've a good mind to complain to the Head," growled Billy Bunter. "I don't see why we should be starved to death."

"Lot of good complaining against a Form-master," said Jones secundus. "The Head wouldn't listen to us—especially on a question of grub."

"It's rough," said Bulstrode. "If I were captain of the Remove you'd jolly soon see a difference, I can tell you."

"What would you do?"

"Never mind. You've made Wharton captain, and you can stand by him. Let him get you out of this, that's all," sneered Bulstrode.

Meanwhile, the chums of Study No. 1 were talking together very seriously on the subject.

Bob Cherry and Harry Wharton had ample cause to be exasperated over the prohibition of cricket practice, and the others were hungry.

"We're not going to stand it," said Bob Cherry. "But the question is, what can we do? It would be rather caddish to complain to the Head, and probably wouldn't be any good, either."

"Well, if the Head listened to complaints against a Form-master, he'd have his hands full," said Harry Wharton, with a smile.

"True. But that makes it only the worse for us."

"We've got to depend on ourselves, that's all," said Wharton. "After all, the Greyfriars Remove has always been

able to fight its own battles. We've got a reputation for keeping our end up, too. We've given this chap some rope to please Quelch. It seems to me that we've done enough for Quelch's sake. If we knew exactly how long he'd be away from the school, we might make up our minds to grin and bear it till he came back. But we don't know."

"That's so. And this Chesham ass is such a good-tempered beast that a chap hardly likes to rag him," Nugent remarked thoughtfully.

"Ratherfully. The good temper of the ass is terrific."

"Right," said Harry Wharton. "We want to give him a chance. I suppose this faddism has grown on him, you know. You often notice that people start with wholemeal bread or vegetarianism, and that's all right. Then they keep on until they grow into faddists. That's the case with this ass, I suppose. He doesn't know where to draw the line. I think we ought to tell him."

The Removeites chuckled.

"Will you tell him, Harry?"

"Yes, I will," said Wharton resolutely. "If this goes on it will lead to ructions in the Remove, and that's not fair on him without giving him a warning first."

The Remove were in a dangerous mood when they filed in for afternoon school. Mr. Quelch had ruled with a rod of iron, but even he had not always been able to keep the reins of discipline tight on that restive Form. Mild little Mr. Chesham was not the man to do it, and he had not started the right way.

"Ah! We are taking English history now," said Mr. Chesham cheerfully. "Before we commence the lesson, however, I have some instructions to give you, my lads. The use of shoes in modern times has been carried to such excess that the feet of human beings scarcely ever have an opportunity of relaxing themselves and resuming a natural shape. This can be remedied by the use of sandals. I have ordered a supply of sandals from London, and I expect them down to-day. You will make it a point to wear sandals for at least one hour a day."

The Removeites looked at one another speechlessly. They could imagine what the Upper Fourth would have to say when they saw the Removeites walking about in sandals. There was rebellion in every face.

All eyes turned upon Harry Wharton, some in expectancy, some in sneering derision. He was the leader of the Form, and it was a post of responsibility as well as honour. Would he rise to the occasion? The sneers were banished as the leader of the Remove rose to his feet.

"If you please, Mr. Chesham, may I speak a word?"

"Certainly, Wharton," said the new master genially.

"There have been many changes made in the Remove during the couple of days you have been with us, sir. We know you mean well by us—"

"That is certainly the case, Wharton, and I am very pleased by this spontaneous acknowledgment of—"

"But we don't like it, sir."

"Eh?"

"I'm sorry to have to say that we don't like it, sir. We are always prepared to show you the respect and obedience due to a Form-master, but we think we have a right to have our personal liberty left to us without interference, as it was in Mr. Quelch's time. The whole Form thinks as I do, sir."

The murmur of applause that followed Harry Wharton's speech

showed that he spoke quite correctly on that point.

The leader of the Remove had been allowed to finish his speech simply because the Form-master was too amazed and taken back to interrupt him. But the clouds were gathering on Mr. Chesham's brow, and he turned a thunderous look upon Harry Wharton as he finished.

"Wharton, do you know what you are saying?"

"Yes, sir; I'm speaking for the whole Form. We think we ought to be allowed to have as much grub as we used, and to play cricket just as we like."

"Stand out here, Wharton!"

Harry walked out before the class. His manner was respectful, but there was no trace of fear in it. He required all his courage now, for he knew perfectly well that he might be flogged by the Head for what might be construed into defiance of a Form-master in the Form-room.

But Harry did not "face the music" alone.

Nugent, Bob Cherry, and Hurree Singh rose at the same moment, as if moved by the same spring, and followed him out before the class.

After a moment's hesitation, Hazeldene left his seat and joined them.

Mr. Chesham stared at them blankly.

"What do you mean by coming out here?" he asked. "I ordered only Wharton to step out before the class. Go back to your places!"

"We're with Wharton in this, sir," said Nugent. "He's speaking for us. We all think we ought not to be interfered with."

"Is that the way to address a Form-master?"

"We're sorry, sir; but we have our rights, and—"

"You have no right to oppose me in any way, or to set your opinions against mine!" said the master of the Remove harshly. "I cannot overlook this breach of discipline. Is any other associated in this rebellion?"

"Faith, and I am for one!" exclaimed Micky Desmond, coming out and joining the group of culprits.

"And I, for another!" said Jones, following him.

It was a signal for revolt.

The whole Remove rose and marched out from the desks, with the exception of Bulstrode and Bunter, and, after a second's pause, those two followed.

Mr. Chesham stared at them helplessly.

"Really—really!" he exclaimed.

The signs of weakness and irresolution were all the Remove wanted to make them throw off all restraint.

Micky Desmond gave a shout.

"Hurrah for the Remove, and down with all bastely faddists! Let's get out!"

There was a cheer, and the Remove swarmed to the doorway, laughing, one or two flinging books across the room to show their defiance.

Before Mr. Chesham realised what was happening, the Removites streamed out of the class-room, and in a minute more he was left alone.

A Difficult Position.

MR. CHESHAM stood in the Remove-room, somewhat non-plussed.

He was a man with the best intentions in the world, but he could not understand that petty interference

was harder to tolerate even than tyranny.

He looked at the open door, from which the Remove rebels had streamed, and passed his hand across his forehead.

"Ungrateful!" he murmured. "Dear me, what is to be done?"

That was rather a difficult question to answer. The Remove had revolted and he had not nipped the revolt in the bud. How to deal with it now was a question wiser heads than Mr. Chesham's could not have answered satisfactorily.

His authority was set at naught. If he went out into the Close, and ordered the boys to return to the class-room, he knew that they would not obey. He could call upon the Head for assistance. That would be effective, but what a humiliating confession to make to the Head that he could not keep his Form in order unassisted.

But the fact that the Remove were in the Close instead of in the class-room could not remain long unknown to the rest of Greyfriars. The situation required to be dealt with instantly, but how?

One weakness naturally led to another.

Mr. Chesham hurried out of the class-room and looked into the Close. The thought in his mind was to find Harry Wharton. He had already discovered how extensive was Wharton's influence over the reckless Form. Wharton could effect what was impossible to the new master—if he would. Anything to save looking ridiculous in the eyes of all Greyfriars.

"Wharton!"

Harry Wharton started, and came towards the Form-master.

It was far from being his wish to

triumph over Mr. Chesham. Had the new master been a bully or a tyrant, Wharton would have delighted in defying him, and would have revelled in the present situation. But Mr. Chesham was only a weak man, and quite kindhearted and with good intentions. Harry would willingly have done anything he could to extricate him from his humiliating position.

"You called me, sir?" said Wharton, with more respect in his manner than in his heart.

"Yes, Wharton. What—what does this revolt mean? Is it possible that you are resolved upon defying your Form-master's authority?"

"I should be very sorry to do so, sir; but—"

"You know what this must lead to, Wharton. If I call Dr. Locke's attention to the matter, the leaders in this unexampled outbreak will be expelled from the school."

Wharton's face set doggedly.

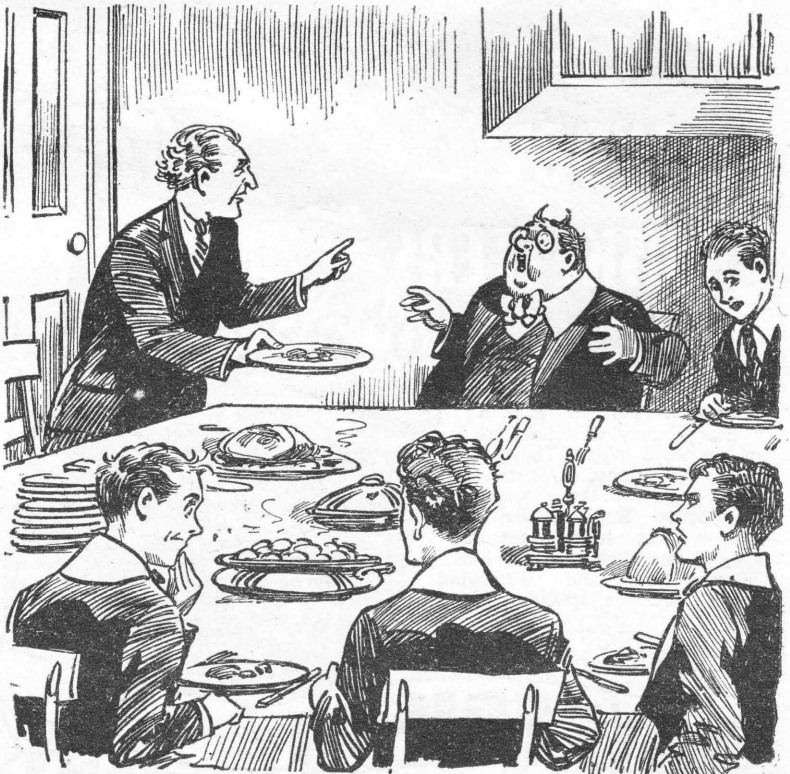
"Possibly, sir. We're only standing up for our rights."

"That is nonsense. I know better than you do what is good for you, and I am acting for the best. If you all immediately return to the class-room, I will overlook this occurrence, and no one shall be punished. Otherwise, I shall have no recourse but to call in Dr. Locke."

"I will speak to the fellows, sir."

Harry Wharton repeated the Form-master's offer. The Remove chuckled over it. Even from Mr. Chesham they had not expected such a confession of failure.

"We won't give in," said Bulstrode. "Let the Head come. He can't expel the whole Form, anyway. I'm for sticking it out!"



The helpings of dinner Mr. Chesham sent round on each plate were very small, and the juniors stared at them blankly. Billy Bunter surveyed his plate almost with tears in his eyes. "My only hat!" murmured Bob Cherry. "That chap must have been brought up in a boarding-house!"

"Easy enough for the rank and file to stick out," said Harry Wharton contemptuously. "I don't wish to be expelled, Bulstrode."

"If you're getting afraid——"
"That is the second time you've hinted as much, Bulstrode. If you are willing to back up your words with your fists, take your jacket off!" Wharton broke out angrily.

Bulstrode retreated a pace.
"This isn't the time for fighting!" he exclaimed. "We've got to deal with the new master now, Wharton."

"Then hold your tongue! Fellows, I'm not for giving in to Mr. Chesham's fads any more than the rest of you; but it's no good going too far. We've made him plainly understand that we won't put up with his rot. I think we've done enough for the present. We don't want the Head brought into this!"

"Rather not!" said Nugent.

"My idea is that he'll draw in his horns now. Anyway, we ought to give him a chance. Let's get back to the class-room."

"I'm not going!" said Bulstrode.
"You dare not stay here alone," said Harry. "Well, you chaps can do as you like. It's like Bulstrode to jump on a fellow who is down, and Chesham is down now. I'm going in."

Harry Wharton walked away with his friends.

The rest of the Form followed. Bulstrode brought up the rear. As Harry had said, he dared not remain alone. Mr. Chesham's relief showed in his face.

He had been saved from an unpleasant and humiliating position by the influence of the Form captain, and

his manner was very subdued for the rest of the afternoon. There was no further mention of the new regulations.

"He's had his lesson," Nugent remarked, when the Remove quitted the class-room once more. "We shan't hear anything more of those giddy sandals."

Harry Wharton nodded, but Hazeldene looked doubtful.

"I don't know," he said. "Chesham has been taken aback, but that won't happen again. He'll come up smiling to-morrow, I expect."

"Then he'll get another lesson, that's all," said Harry Wharton.

"What about the cricket?" asked Bob Cherry dubiously. "We've told him we're not going to stand his rot, so I suppose we can go and practise."

"Yes, certainly," said Wharton. "If he thinks we're ill, he ought to send for the school doctor. We've had enough of his bosh. Let's get down to the pitch." And the chums of the Remove were soon busy on the junior pitch with the rest of the Form.

Temple, Dabney & Co. of the Upper Fourth came along to stare at them.

"Hallo!" called out Temple. "I thought you were on the sick list. Wharton—had a pain in your little chest, or your tummy, or something?"

"Oh, rather!" said Dabney. "And Bob Cherry was ill, too—St. Vitus dance, or measles, or something."

"More likely a yarn to get out of meeting us in the Form match," said Fry, with a shake of the head.

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Bob Cherry.

"I hear you've got a grandmother for a Form-master now," grinned Temple.

"Kind old codger who gives you pills and wraps you in cottonwool."

"And nurses you when you're peevish," said Dabney.

"And sings you to sleep," remarked Fry.

"Hallo! Here he comes."

Mr. Chesham was coming towards the cricket ground. He glanced towards the cricketers, and his face flushed as he saw Harry Wharton at the wicket and Bob Cherry bowling the ball. He stopped at the ropes.

"Wharton! Cherry!"

"Yes, sir?"

"Come here immediately!"

The two Removites slowly obeyed. "You have disobeyed my positive orders!" said Mr. Chesham severely. "I overlooked your insubordination of this afternoon, and I suppose this is the consequence. Go into the House immediately and remain there. Take two hundred lines each."

Harry Wharton's eyes blazed.

"Do you hear me?"

Hot words of defiance were on the tip of Harry Wharton's tongue. It was as much for Mr. Chesham's sake as for his own that he restrained himself, turned quietly away, and walked into the House.

The Sandals!

THERE was a buzz of talk in the Junior Common-room. Most of the Remove were discussing the events of the afternoon, and the vagaries of the faddist Form-master, and the Upper Fourth fellows who were present were making sly allusions to the predicament of the rival Form, and chipping the Removites in every possible way.

There was an excellent prospect of a row, for the Remove were by no means patient in temper that evening.

"It's rotten!" was the general opinion of the Remove. "He had a lesson to-day, and now he's got his back up again."

"Wharton oughtn't to have given in," said Bulstrode; "he ought to have stuck out when he was ordered off the cricket pitch."

"Yes; I rather wonder he knuckled under," Skinner remarked. "I wouldn't have done so."

"Nor I," said Billy Bunter. "I should have pointed out to Mr. Chesham gently, but firmly, that I had a right to do as I liked. You won't catch me taking any of his rotten medicine. I'm not afraid of Chesham!"

"Bunter!"
Billy Bunter jumped nearly clear of the floor. It was the Form-master's quiet voice at the door. The faddist's mild blue eyes blinked into the room.

"I—I—" stammered Billy Bunter in utter dismay. For a fellow who wasn't afraid of Chesham, he looked extremely dismayed.

"You were speaking of your Form-master disrespectfully, Bunter."

"I—I—I'm sorry, sir! I really didn't mean to speak of you with anything like disrespect. I respect you very highly, sir, and I wouldn't dream of saying what I think of you if I thought you could hear me. We all respect you very much, sir, and we don't think you're a faddist."

"You will take fifty lines, Bunter."
"I—I—I'm sorry, sir! I really didn't mean to speak of you with anything like disrespect. I respect you very highly, sir, and I wouldn't dream of saying what I think of you if I thought you could hear me. We all respect you very much, sir, and we don't think you're a faddist."

"Oh, sir, it's quite a mistake on your part to think that I meant to——"
"Silence!"

"Certainly, sir! I won't say another word. But you might let me explain that——"

"Take a hundred lines, Bunter."

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"Oh dear!" gasped the Owl of the Remove; and he relapsed into silence at last, in case the hundred lines might become two hundred if he persisted.

Mr. Chesham glanced round the room, grown strangely silent. Some of the Remove were inclined to hiss the new master, but the look on Harry Wharton's face stopped that. Mr. Chesham glanced at Harry, and then his glance passed on as if he did not take particular note of the captain of the Remove.

"My boys, I have come here to speak a few words to you. There was a case of gross insubordination in the classroom to-day. I have overlooked that. If it is repeated I shall deal sternly with the offenders. This is a warning to you all. Meanwhile, the new regulation I mentioned to you in class will be carried out."

The Remove were silent; they were too surprised to be anything else. The new master seemed to be gaining courage again after his defeat. He had his tail up again, as Bob Cherry expressed it, with a vengeance.

"The sandals," continued Mr. Chesham, "have arrived. The consignment has been delivered by the carrier. They are in the Form-room. Each boy belonging to the Lower Fourth will go to that room and select a pair to fit him, and will wear them to-morrow morning on coming down, and will change them for morning school. I shall expect this order to be implicitly obeyed. I have your best interests at heart, though some of you don't seem to understand that."

There was a suppressed giggle from the Upper Fourth fellows. The Remove looked at one another with burning eyes. To be made to look ridiculous in the presence of the rival Form was the bitterest pill of all.

"Another new rule," went on the faddist Form-master. "You are accustomed to having tea in your studies, and eating all kinds of things that are not good for your health. This must cease. In future the whole of the Remove will be expected to appear at the school dining table at the proper time for tea and will take that meal from the school fare, in the presence of their Form-master."

The Remove gasped. Give up tea in the studies—the most cherished institution of Greyfriars. Give up the last relic of their ancient freedom, and be cackled at for ever by the Upper Fourth. It was not likely!

In the silence of consternation that followed the Form-master's words Temple rose to his feet. There was a subdued grin on Temple's face.

"If you please, sir," he said, "as captain of the Upper Fourth, I wish to express the opinion of my Form that you have done well for Greyfriars by keeping the most unruly Form in the school in order like this."

"Hear, hear!" said Dabney & Co.

Mr. Chesham blinked with his mild eyes at Temple.

"Thank you," he said. "I am glad to see that my efforts meet with appreciation in some quarters, and I hope the Remove will soon come to see matters in the same light. In fact, I am sure that such will be the case. Good-night, my boys! And do not forget to go to the Form-room and select your sandals."

And Mr. Chesham walked away. The torrent of hissing, long hard-held, burst forth in a volume. The Form-master affected to hear nothing. The Remove were in a fury, and the chuckles of the Upper Fourth and the Third Form fags added to it.

"Are we going to stand this?" roared Bob Cherry.

Harry Wharton's face was hard and determined.

"No!"

"Little boys must be kept in order," said Temple. "I quite agree with Chesham. The Remove eat too much, and they're too cheeky by half. I think—"

What Temple thought will never be known, for just then Russell's fist caught him on the nose, and he sat down without finishing his remarks.

There was a rush of the Upper Fourth fellows to rally round their chief, and a rush of the Remove to assail them. The temper of the Remove was up now, and fellows who would not submit to a Form-master were not likely to stand so much chipping from another junior Form.

"Sock it to them!" shouted Nugent.

"Kick them out!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "Buck up, Remove!"

"Hurrah!" shouted the Removites, and they hurled themselves into the fray. They were in the majority, and the Upper Fourth hardly had a chance from the first. Temple and Dabney were hurled out into the passage, and Fry followed them, sprawling over his leaders; and then, one by one, the Upper Fourth fellows were flung out.

The room was cleared of the obnoxious enemy in a remarkably short space of time. Then the Remove, somewhat relieved in their minds, paused to deliberate upon their next proceedings.

"We're not going to wear the giddy sandals," said Bob Cherry. "That's certain."

"Quite certain," said Harry Wharton. "We must go to the Form-room and get the beastly things. But instead of coming down in them to-morrow morning, we'll make a pile of them—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Outside Mr. Chesham's bed-room door, and he can find them when he comes out," said Harry Wharton. "That will be a pretty plain answer to his rot, I think."

"Ha ha! Rather!"

"The ratherfulness is terrific."

"Good!" exclaimed Nugent. "It's ripping. We all stand together in this, and if one is punished, the whole Form will have to be punished, too."

"Hear, hear!"

"Now let's go and get the sandals. It's us against Chesham now, and we'll see who gets the best of it—the Remove or the faddist."

"Hurrah!"

And the Removites crowded out of the Common-room. A quarter of an hour later Mr. Chesham looked into the Form-room. The sandals were gone; evidently they had been selected by the Remove and taken away, to be worn on the following morning according to instructions. A satisfied smile wreathed the mild face of the faddist.

"Very good," he murmured. "The affair of this afternoon was but a momentary outbreak, and it is quite over now. I am sure that I shall soon quite bring round the Remove to my way of thinking."

And the new master went on his way contented.

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The Remove's Defiance!

CLANG! Clang!
The Greyfriars Remove awoke. It was morning and the far from musical tones of the rising-bell were ringing through the clear air.

Harry Wharton sat up in bed.

"Up with you, you chaps."

Billy Bunter yawned.

"I'd like another five minutes if you don't mind, Wharton. I say, Cherry, don't put that sponge near me, you beast! It's wet. Ow—ow—ow! You rotter! Can't you see I'm getting up?"

The Remove were quickly out of bed. They were not usually so prompt to the clang of the rising-bell. But this morning they had business on hand.

They dressed themselves and put their shoes on, amid much merriment. There was to be a new defiance of the Form-master, on more determined lines this time, but in a way that he would find it harder to deal with. Harry Wharton glanced round to see if all were ready.

"Don't forget the sandals," he said.

"Not likely," chuckled Nugent.

"Come on, then," said Harry quietly.

The Remove left the dormitory and went quietly downstairs, each junior holding a pair of sandals in his hand. Harry Wharton stopped at the door of the new master's room. There was a pair of shoes on the mat. Harry Wharton laid his sandals beside them.

Then in turn each of the Removites followed his example, until about thirty pairs of sandals reposed in a pile against the door of the Remove master.

"My hat!" murmured Bob Cherry. "There will be a clatter when he opens the door."

"There will be a row," said Nugent—"a row in a double sense—but we can stand it. Let's get out."

The Removites went out into the green Close. Some of them were feeling a little uneasy as to the result of the escapade. But the ringleaders of the revolt—the chums of Study No. 1—were perfectly cool and self-possessed.

After the Remove had gone down, Herr Rosenblum, the German master, came out of his room and walked along the passage to the stairs. The fat German stopped and stared in blank amazement at the pile of sandals outside Mr. Chesham's door.

"Mein crashious!" he murmured. "I tink tat is ver' strange mit itself after, ain't it? Vy for does Herr Chesham desire so many sandals?" A grin dawned on his fat face. "But perhaps it is vun trick of te juniors. Ach! Te young rascals!"

He tapped at Mr. Chesham's door.

"Was you awake pefore, Herr Chesham?"

"Yes, certainly," came a voice from within. "What is wanted?"

"Nutting, mein herr, nutting; but tere is sandals pile up here, und I tink—"

Before the German master could get further the door was snatched open, and Mr. Chesham looked out excitedly. There was a crash of falling sandals. The whole pile of them fell inwards as the door opened, and they crashed round Mr. Chesham's feet. The Form-master gave a jump.

"Goodness gracious!"

Herr Rosenblum suppressed a chuckle.

"Vat is all tat heap of sandals for, mein herr?"

"I—I am amazed—"

"Ach! It is vun trick!"

Mr. Chesham recovered himself. He stared at the scattered heap of sandals.

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and his brow darkened. The defiance of the Remove was plainly to be read there.

The German master looked at him curiously.

"Nat is all tat for?" he asked. "Vere is it tat all dese sandals come from mit demselves after, ain't it?"

"It—it is a joke of the boys of my Form," muttered Mr. Chesham. "I shall deal with it severely. Excuse me, Herr Rosenblum."

He withdrew into his room, and the German master passed on, his fat face wreathed in smiles.

A few minutes later the master of the Remove came downstairs. The juniors looked at him cautiously as he sat down at the table for breakfast, but he did not speak a word concerning the sandals.

Breakfast was as Mr. Chesham had promised the day before. There were neither eggs nor bacon, and the bread-and-butter was flanked by basins of porridge. It was good porridge and wholesome food, but the Remove were on the warpath now. They refused to touch it, and they ate their bread-and-butter with chilling dignity.

The Remove assembled in the Form-room at the usual time. There was an air of tense though suppressed excitement about the juniors. Mr. Chesham came into the room with a clouded brow, and addressed the Form from his desk.

"Boys, I am very sorry to see that you have neglected to carry out my instructions with regard to the sandals." Dead silence.

"Instead of wearing them you have piled them in a heap outside my bedroom door. I can only take this as an act of defiance."

THE SECRET SOCIETY OF ST JIM'S!

(Continued from page 21.)

that no one was near to overhear him—"last night I—I had some trouble with those young rascals who call themselves the Secret Society."

"Did you really, Knox?" said Tom Merry.

"Yes." The prefect's eyes blazed for a moment at the calm and innocent face of Tom Merry. The curb he was putting on his temper was very irksome. "Look here, Merry! I'm pretty certain that you know something about it."

"I?" said Tom, in mild surprise.

"Yes, you!"

"Go hon!"

"I—I'm not trying to bowl you out," said Knox, breathing hard. "I—I'm

Bob Cherry murmured "Go hon!" in a sarcastic tone, but the rest of the Remove were silent, expectant.

"I must know who it was that suggested this act of insubordination," said Mr. Chesham. "Let him stand forward!"

No one stirred from his place.

The Remove were standing together as one man. Mr. Chesham was non-plussed.

In the dead silence of the Form-room a pin might have been heard to drop.

"Very good!" said the new master, in a low, incensed tone. "Very good, I—"

He broke off.

The door of the Remove-room had opened from without and a well-known figure stood in the doorway. Mr. Chesham looked surprised. The Remove burst into a cheer. It was Mr. Quelch.

The old master of the Remove advanced into the room. He was still looking somewhat pale, but much better than when he had left Greyfriars. He walked up to the desk with a cheery nod to the Form.

"Mr. Quelch!" ejaculated Mr. Chesham.

"Yes," said the Remove master quietly. "I have returned earlier than I expected. I am ready to take charge of my Form again."

Mr. Chesham looked relieved. Doubtless he was relieved to be extricated from the difficult position he found himself in, and perhaps he had already had enough of the Remove.

"Very good, Mr. Quelch. I have done my best with the Form, though I am sorry to say there have been some differences. I willingly return the charge into your hands."

not thinking of punishing them. Last night I wrote out something on a card in the box-room, and—and you—they—said it was to be posted up for all the school to read. Well, I don't want that to happen."

"No," said Tom Merry innocently.

"No. Will you see that this card is destroyed, or, at least, kept strictly dark, and—and there won't be any more trouble for any of you?"

"Of course, I can't speak for the Secret Society," said Tom. "I can give you my opinion—my disinterested opinion—on the matter, if you like."

"Go on," said Knox between his teeth.

"Well, my opinion is that the Secret Society has been formed to stop you ragging the juniors, Knox. If you chuck it, I should think it very probable that they will let you alone. If there's no more trouble, I consider it extremely likely that that confession—I mean, that card you speak of—will be kept strictly dark until Mr. Railton comes

"He shook hands with the Form-master and turned towards the door. The Removes hardly knew what to make of the matter. Mr. Quelch had returned early and suddenly, and it seemed evident that he must have known something of what was going on in the Remove at Greyfriars, both from his return and from the curious expression on his face. It was not till afterwards that the juniors knew that Wingate had written to Mr. Quelch to let him know the trouble that was caused by his absence.

Mr. Chesham paused at the door and his mild blue eyes sought the Remove once more.

"Good-bye, my boys," he said, kindly enough. "I am afraid we have not pulled together very well, but I hope that you feel friendly towards me, as I certainly do towards you."

It was an appeal that was not lost on the Remove. The juniors melted at once. Harry Wharton rose in his place.

"Certainly, sir!" he exclaimed. "There have been some misunderstandings, that is all, and we all respect you very much. I wish we had got on better. Good-bye, sir."

"Good-bye, sir!" chorused the Remove.

And so the faddist Form-master went.

As to what had happened during his absence, Mr. Quelch discreetly never spoke a word. Bygones were allowed to be bygones. Mr. Quelch reigned in his old place, but for the rest of that day the Remove chatted and chuckled over their experience of a faddist Form-master.

(But the Remove stop chucking in next week's grand yarn, when the faddist comes back again! Look out for "THE REMOVE ON A DIET!")

back, when it will be destroyed. Of course, I'm speaking simply as a disinterested person, but that is my opinion."

"It's understood, then?" said Knox. Before long Gerald Knox's surrender was known to all the members of the Secret Society at St. Jim's.

The tyranny of the Sixth Form bully was at an end.

Tom Merry and his chums and Figgins & Co. celebrated the victory in a tremendous feed, at which Figgy was the guest of honour, in recognition of the great service he had rendered in supplying the idea of the Secret Society.

As for the Secret Society of St. Jim's, it existed no longer.

(Next Wednesday: "THE RETURN OF THE TOFF!" Here's the school yarn of the year! Starring the one-time schoolboy crackman, Reginald Talbot. Don't miss this thrill-packed story. Order your GEM early.)

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