

MR. RATCLIFF HAS A BUSY DAY !

by

MARTIN CLIFFORD



When Mr. Ratcliff, the sour-tempered House-master at St. Jim's, "put his foot down," he stepped into trouble which dogged his footsteps all day long !

THE FIRST CHAPTER INKY !

GEORGE FIGGINS grinned. "Here he comes!" he said. Figgins, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, was looking out of his study window in the New House.

His chums, Kerr and Fatty Wynn, were busy at the study table. They were filling squirts from a bottle of ink. A third squirt, already filled, lay on the table. It seemed that Figgins and Co. were expecting a visitor, and were making rather unusual preparations for his reception in the study.

"Gussy coming?" asked Fatty Wynn.

"Yes!"

"We're ready!" remarked Kerr.

They joined Figgins at the window and looked out. Across the quad, from the direction of the School House, came an elegant figure.

It was that of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the ornament of the Fourth Form.

Arthur Augustus was not looking

his usual serene and amiable self. There was a dark frown on his noble brow. His eye gleamed behind his eyeglass.

Something, evidently, had roused the wrath of the swell of St. Jim's. He was coming across from his House to the New House, not with friendly intent.

"Looks fearfully wrathful, doesn't he?" remarked Figgins. "Coming over to wallop the lot of us!"

"And all because a fellow dropped an ink-ball down his neck in class!" said Kerr. "What a fuss over a trifle!"

The chums of the New House chuckled.

Arthur Augustus glanced up. His wrathful frown deepened at the sight of the three grinning faces looking down.

"Oh! So you're there, you wot-tahs!" he called up.

"Coming to see us, old bean?" asked Figgins affably.

"Yaas, wathah! I told you in class that I would give you a feahful thwashin' for dwoppin' that beastly

ink-ball down my neck ! If you will come wound to the gym, I will thwash you one aftah anothead ! ”

“ Come up to the study and thrash us one after another ! ” suggested Figgins.

“ I should pwefer to deal with you in the gym, Figgins ! If Watty hears a wow in the studay, he may barge in. ”

“ You’ll be glad for somebody to barge in before you get through ! ” said Kerr.

“ Wats ! ”

Arthur Augustus D’Arcy marched on to the doorway of the House. It was very probable that if Mr. Ratcliff, the Housemaster of the New House, heard a row in the study, he would “ barge ” in. But if the mountain would not come to Mahomet, Mahomet had to go to the mountain ! An ink-ball down his noble neck might seem a trifle light as air to the fellow who had dropped it there. But it was no trifle to Gussy, who had had a considerable amount of cleaning and changing to do since class. He had warned Figgins and Co. that he was going to thrash them, as they richly deserved ; and now he was coming over to do it.

The New House trio stepped back from the window. They picked up the inky squirts from the table.

Squirts in hand, they took up a strategic position inside the door. There they waited, with grinning faces, for Gussy ! They were not feeling fearfully nervous about the thrashing he had promised them. But they did not want him to begin ; they did not want to damage Gussy. They hoped that three squirts, full of ink, would be enough for him when he arrived. If not, they were ready to follow it up with the bottle !

They listened for Arthur Augustus’

footsteps. The swell of St. Jim’s had gone in at the doorway of the New House. They expected to hear him about a minute later.

But a minute passed, and they did not hear him. There was no sound of footsteps in the study passage. Another minute passed !

“ He’s taking his time up the stairs ! ” remarked Fatty Wynn.

“ Gussy never hurries ! ” grinned Figgins.

“ I hope he hasn’t chucked it up, and gone back to the School House ! ” grunted Kerr. “ All our trouble for nothing—— ”

“ No fear ! ” said Figgins confidently. “ Gussy’s a man of his word ! He’s coming all right ! ”

“ Hark ! ”

“ He’s coming ! ”

There was a sound of footsteps in the passage, coming along from the staircase. They approached the study door.

Figgins and Co. exchanged a blissful grin.

With the squirts at a level, they waited for the door to open. Had the footsteps passed the study door they would have been disappointed. But the footsteps did not pass. They stopped outside. The proprietor of those footsteps was coming direct to Figgy’s study.

“ Ready ! ” breathed Figgins, as the door-handle was grasped from without and turned.

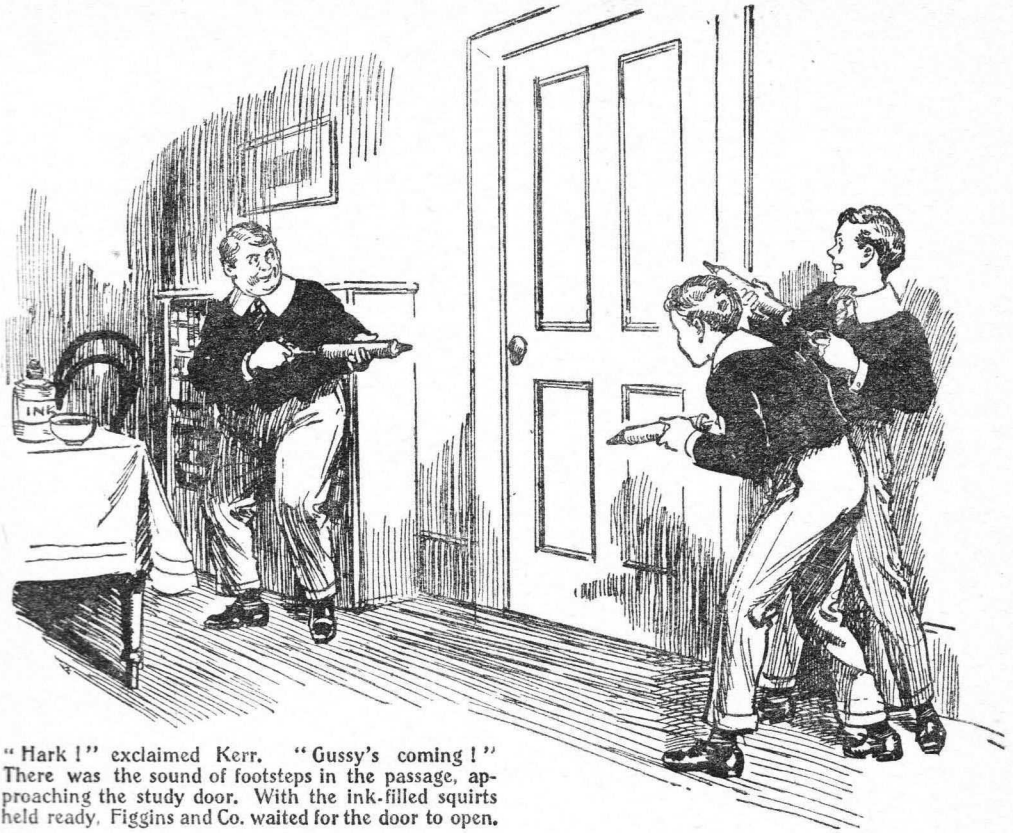
“ What-ho ! ”

The door flew open without a knock ! It flew wide, and as it flew, three squirts shot at the same moment. It was beautifully timed !

Squish !

Splash !

Full upon the figure in the open doorway shot three drenching streams of ink, all landing together. There was a startled howl !



"Hark!" exclaimed Kerr. "Gussy's coming!" There was the sound of footsteps in the passage, approaching the study door. With the ink-filled squirts held ready, Figgins and Co. waited for the door to open.

"What—what—upon my word! How dare you!"

The figure, as it howled, staggered back, stumbled, and sat down in the passage. It sat and streamed with ink!

Figgins and Co. gazed at it—in horror!

The squirts dropped from their nerveless hands!

They stood rooted to the floor, gazing with bulging eyes at the ink-splashed face that glared at them: not the face of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form, but the face of Mr. Horace Ratcliff, Housemaster of the New House!

THE SECOND CHAPTER TRIBULATIONS OF A FOOTBALL CAPTAIN!

TOM MERRY ran his fingers through his curly hair—a way he had when he was worried. On the paper before him, in No. 10 Study in the School House, lay a rather crumpled sheet of paper, on which a number of names were pencilled. It might have been a problem in "maths" instead of a list of juniors of St. Jim's, to judge by Tom's expression. That list of names seemed to be giving him food for thought.

His chums, Manners and Lowther, were in the study. Manners was carefully loading his camera with

films, having some snaps to take on the morrow, when the Rookwooders were coming over to play football. Monty Lowther was poaching eggs for tea at the study fire.

"Ready!" said Lowther.

"Thank goodness we've got Fatty Wynn!" said Tom.

Lowther looked round.

"Fatty Wynn?" he exclaimed.

"Yes; thank goodness for that!"

"You've asked that fat New House bounder?"

"Eh, what? Of course."

"Well, you might have said so!" said Lowther warmly. "What's the good of three poached eggs for tea if Fatty's coming?"

"Not much!" remarked Manners, closing his camera. "Three hundred would be nearer the mark."

Tom Merry stared at his chums.

"What on earth are you fellows burling about?" he inquired. "What the thump have poached eggs got to do with football?"

"Football!" repeated Manners and Lowther.

"Yes, ass! Yes, fathead! Do you think I'm bothering over cricket, or tennis, or kiss-in-the-ring?"

"You said you'd asked Fatty——"

"Of course I have, and thank goodness we've got him," said Tom. "If we hadn't got Fatty Wynn to keep goal to-morrow we shouldn't have an earthly. As it is, it will be touch and go. But with Fatty in goal——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Manners and Lowther. Evidently there had been a slight misunderstanding.

"What are you cackling at, you duffers?" asked Tom crossly. "I can tell you it's not jolly easy to make up a team to beat Jimmy Silver's crowd from Rookwood with a lot of fellows in sanny with colds. They had to catch colds just before the

Rookwood fixture—that's the sort of asses they are! But with that fat New House man in goal——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"They won't get past him in a hurry," said Tom. "Thank goodness——"

"You howling ass!" said Lowther. "I thought you meant you'd asked him to tea!"

"Tea!" repeated Tom. "Fathead! Who's thinking about tea?"

"Well, I am, for one, as it's past tea-time," said Monty, "and the eggs are ready, likewise the toast. If you've finished that jig-saw puzzle, let's have tea."

"Let's!" agreed Manners.

Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, now I come to think of it, I'm ready for tea," he confessed. "I fancy we've got a good team, even with so many men knocked out. Fatty Wynn's the best goalkeeper that ever was or will be——"

"Not bad, for a New House bounder!" admitted Lowther.

"Figgins is magnificent in the front line——"

"Don't let the eggs get cold!"

"And Kerr is jolly good at half! Thank goodness they haven't been catching colds in the New House."

"The toast's getting cold."

"Front line, Blake, D'Arcy, little me, you, Lowther, and Figgins——"

"Who's making the tea?"

"Halves, Kangaroo, Kerr, and Manners——"

"I say, I shall be taking photographs!" said Manners.

"You won't!" said Tom. "You'll be playing half. Backs, Herries and Digby. Goal, Fatty Wynn, and thank goodness we've got him there. If he catches a cold before to-morrow I'll spifficate him. He can catch pneumonia after the match if he likes."

"Good enough team!" remarked Manners.

"Gratters, old bean, on working out your jig-saw so successfully!" said Monty Lowther gravely. "Now, what about tea?"

The chums of the Shell sat down to tea.

Tap!

"Trot in!" called out Tom Merry.

The door of No. 10 opened, and George Figgins walked in. Tom Merry and Co. looked at him. Generally, Figgy of the New House looked as cheerful as any fellow at St. Jim's. Now he seemed to be in the dismal depths of dolefulness. His brow was darkly clouded, and he looked as if most of the troubles of the universe had descended on his youthful shoulders.

"What's the row?" asked Tom anxiously. "Don't tell me that Fatty Wynn's caught a cold, like so many other silly asses."

"Eh?" said Figgins. "Oh, no! He's all right."

"And Kerr——"

"Oh, Kerr's all right."

"And you?" asked Tom. "You look all right, except that you look as if you'd lost a half-crown and found a farthing."

"It's rotten!" said Figgins miserably. "I—I say, it's fearfully rotten. All the fat's in the fire."

"Give it a name!" suggested Manners.

"That ass D'Arcy——"

Tom Merry looked alarmed at once.

"Nothing wrong with D'Arcy, surely? I saw him after class. He looked wrathful about something, but——"

"The blithering idiot!" said Figgins. "He's done it."

"Done what?" roared Tom Merry. "Look here, we want D'Arcy to-

morrow. We can't spare him. He's a silly ass, if you like, but he can play soccer. If anything's happened to him, I'll jolly well punch his head."

"Nothing's happened to him that I know of, except a jaw from Ratty."

"Well, that's all right, then," said Tom in relief. "I've had worry enough making up a team to meet Rookwood, with a lot of fatheads on the sick list. But if the team's all right——"

"It isn't!" groaned Figgins.

"Then what——" The junior captain of St. Jim's was alarmed again.

"We're out of it!" groaned Figgins.

"Who?"

"Kerr, Fatty, and me!"

Tom Merry jumped up from the tea-table. His face was a study.

"Out of it! You silly ass! What do you mean?"

"Detention from our Housemaster——"

"You've gone and got yourself detained by your fatheaded Housemaster on Rookwood day!" roared Tom.

"It was that born idiot Gussy——"

"My goalkeeper — detained!" gasped Tom Merry. "Is Ratty mad? Doesn't he know we're playing Jimmy Silver to-morrow?"

"He doesn't know or care!" snapped Figgins. "Lot Ratty thinks about footer. He's not like old Railton! Blow him!"

"He will have to let you off——"

"Catch him letting a man off when he's had three squirts full of ink bunged in his chivvy!" groaned Figgins.

"You—you—you——" stuttered Tom. "You—you've been squirting ink over your Housemaster the day before the Rookwood match?"

"It was an accident, of course!"

That ass D'Arcy came across to look for trouble! We waited in the study for him with the squirts. How were we to guess that he barged into Ratty when he came in——"

"Oh, my hat!"

"I suppose Ratty spotted from the fathead's looks that there was trouble on," groaned Figgins. "He seems to have jawed Gussy, and sent him off with a flea in his ear; and then came up to our study to jaw us! Of—of course, we thought it was D'Arcy butting in, and let him have it with the squirts as soon as the door opened, and—and—and it was Ratty!"

"Great pip!"

"He was wild——" mumbled Figgins.

"Housemasters squirted with ink are liable to get a little wild!" said Monty Lowther solemnly. "It's the nature of the beasts."

"Oh, don't be a funny ass!" said Figgins dismally. "The long and the short of it is that he gave us six each, and detained us for four half-holidays. And the first of them is to-morrow — Rookwood day; and that's that!"

Tom Merry glared.

"You ass! You fathead! You chump! I could manage without you or Kerr, at a pinch, but I can't manage without Wynn in goal! He's got to play."

"He can't!"

"He must!" roared Tom.

"If it were an away match, we might cut, and chance it!" said Figgins. "But we can't play under Ratty's eyes here."

"He's got to let you off!"

"He won't!"

"Tell him it's a big fixture to-morrow——"

"I've told him!"

"Well, what did he say?"

"He said that I should have thought of that before committing an unheard-of outrage——"

"Ratty all over!" agreed Manners.

"Oh, just!" said Lowther.

"I—I came over to tell you!" said Figgins dismally. "Of course, it's frightfully unfortunate. Leaving New House men out of the team means a licking for St. Jim's. School House men ain't much good——"

That was the last straw.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther made a converging movement on Figgins of the New House. They collared him on all sides.

"Here, hold on!" yelled Figgins.

The Shell fellows held on—hard! —though not in the sense intended by George Figgins.

"Bump him!" said Tom. "Bump the silly ass! Knock the stuffing out of the howling chump! Squirted Housemasters the day before a match — mop him up! Getting my goalkeeper detained—scrag him!"

"Yarooooh!" roared Figgins, as the Shell fellows proceeded to bump him, mop him up, and scrag him. "I say—whoop! Leggo! I tell you—ow! I say—yaroooop! Oh, crikey! Yarooooooooh!"

What was left of George Figgins was hurled headlong out of No. 10 in the Shell. The door slammed on him.

Manners and Lowther resumed tea; Tom Merry took up his football list—now sadly in need of revision. His tea was cold—his egg was cold—his toast was cold—but he heeded them not. On the other hand, his temper was hot! He had had many difficulties in sorting out a team to meet Rookwood on Wednesday—and now it was knocked into a cocked hat! He was feeling rather like the Raven's unhappy master, whom unmerciful

disaster followed fast and followed faster! Really, it was the limit!

THE THIRD CHAPTER

ROUGH ON GUSSY!

"WATS!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy made that remark in Study No. 6.

Tea was going on in that celebrated study in the Fourth Form passage in the School House of St. Jim's.

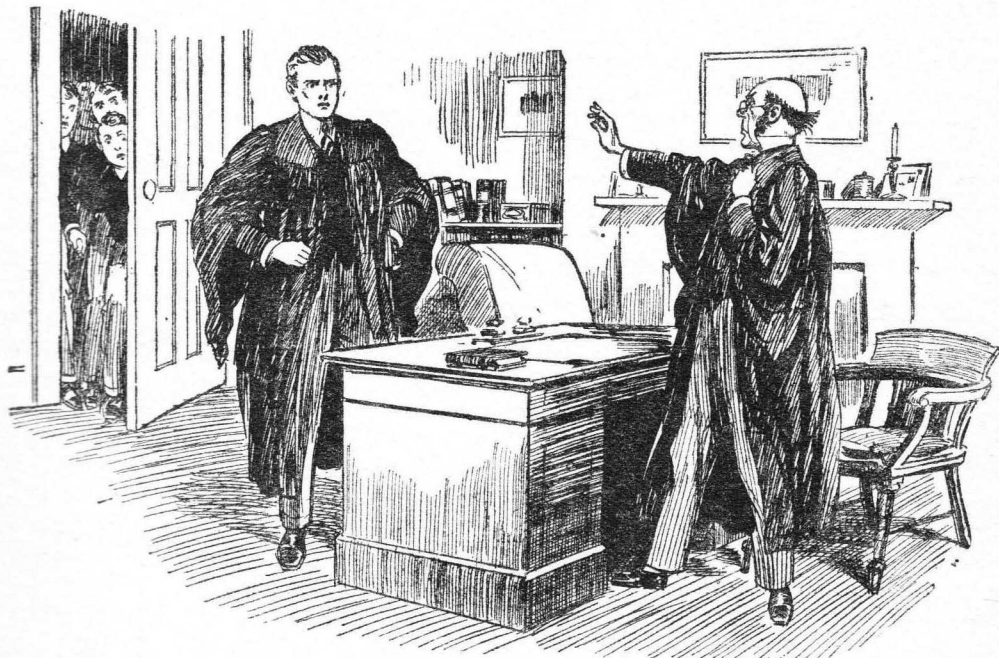
footer match to-morrow!" said Digby.

"I fail to see the connection, deah boy——"

"I mean, if you started thrashing Figgins, you'd be in sanny to-morrow instead of on Little Side!" explained Digby.

"You uttah ass!"

"You'd need assembling again, like a car after a crash!" remarked Herries.



At the first mention of the detained juniors, Mr. Ratcliff held up a bony hand. "Kindly go no farther Mr. Rallton," he said acidly. "Nothing can be done." "But the juniors attach a great deal of importance to the fixture this afternoon," said the School House master.

There were four fellows in the study—and three of them, Blake and Herries and Digby, were grinning. D'Arcy was frowning.

"My dear chap," said Jack Blake, "Ratty did you a good turn in sending you back before you'd thrashed Figgins. You ought to have thanked him."

"Weally, Blake——"

"You see, you're wanted in the

"Weally, Hewwies——"

"So it's all for the best!" said Blake. "Glad you came back in one piece, Gussy! How many pieces do you think you'd have been in if you'd started thrashing old Figgy?"

"I wegard you as an ass, Blake!"

"I've never thought much of Ratty!" said Blake. "But I must say I'm obliged to him now. He ought to have a medal for life-saving."

"Hear, hear!" concurred Herries and Digby.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jammed his eyeglass into his noble eye, and surveyed his smiling study-mates with scorn and indignation.

"I wegard you all as uttah asses," he said, "and I wegard Mr. Watcliff as a meddlin', interferin' old boun-dah! He had no wight whatever to stop me fwom callin' on fellows in his House! I weally don't know how he guessed that I was goin' up to Figgins' studay to thwash those cheekay wottahs. Pewwaps he noticed that I was lookin' wathah watty."

"Must have, if he wasn't blind," said Blake. "You were scowling like a demon in a panto when you started."

"Weally, Blake——"

"Looking like the First Murderer in a play!" said Herries.

"I wefuse to admit anythin' of the sort! Pewwaps I was fwownin'. I should think it was enough to make any fellow fwown to have an ink-ball dwopped down his neck in class!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I see no occasion whatever for wibald laughtah! It was howwibly uncomfy! And I am goin' to thwash Figgins, Watty or no Watty."

"Leave it till after the Rookwood match, then," suggested Blake. "And I'll tell you what—we'll all come to the funeral."

"Wats!"

"Did Ratty ask you what you'd come for?" inquired Digby.

"Yaas, wathah! I considahed it wathah impertinent of him; but I answahed him civilly; a fellow has to be civil to a Housemastah, you know. I thought I had bettah not tell him that I wegarded him as an inquisitive old ass!"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Blake.

"Yes, I think it was better not to tell him that! It might possibly have offended him! You never know!"

"Ha ha, ha!"

"I merely said that I was goin' up to see Figgins! Fwom that, he seemed to think there was a wow on, and ordahed me out of the House!" Arthur Augustus breathed hard. "I came vewy neah tellin' him what I thought of him! But I westwained myself."

"You ass!" said Blake. "I'll bet he's jawed Figgins if you let out that it was a House row! He never loses a chance of jawing a fellow."

"Wats!"

There was a tramp of feet in the passage outside. The door of No. 6 was hurled open. Tom Merry appeared in the doorway; behind him, Manners and Lowther. The chums of the Fourth stared at their sudden visitors.

"Hallo, don't they teach you in the Shell to knock at a door before barging into a study?" asked Blake.

Tom Merry did not answer. He strode in. Judging by his expression, he was in a mood of towering wrath.

"That idiot Gussy——" he gasped.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"You blithering, blethering ass!" roared the junior football captain of St. Jim's. "Do you know what you've done?"

Arthur Augustus rose from the tea-table. He jammed his eyeglass into his eye, and surveyed Tom Merry with calm disapproval.

"Pway calm yourself, deah boy," he suggested. "I do not like bein' woared at! It thwows me into quite a fluttah to be woared at."

"You unutterable idiot——"

"I wefuse to be chawactewised as an unuttewable idiot——"

"What on earth's the row?" exclaimed Blake, in astonishment.

"What has Gussy done this time? He's always doing something, of course—never was such a born ass, and never will be. But what——"

"He's got three of my men detained for to-morrow!" roared Tom Merry. "He had to go over to Ratchiff's House and kick up a shindy——"

"I wefuse to admit that I was kickin' up a shinday!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly. "I was goin' ovah to thwash Figgins——"

"And those fatheads waited for him in the study with ink-squirts, and squirted Ratty by mistake, and got detained for to-morrow——"

"Bai Jove!"

"Now we're three men short in the Rookwood match!" roared Tom Merry. "And who's going to keep goal, what?"

"All the fault of that howling ass!" said Lowther.

"That gibbering image!" said Manners.

"Bai Jove! I am sowwy if Figgins and Co. are detained for to-mowwow," said Arthur Augustus. "That is wathah wotten! But I wefuse to admit for one moment that it was my fault! If the wottahs were waitin' for me with squirts, it is wathah luckay that Watty got it instead of me. I wegard that as vewy fortunate indeed."

"You—you——!" gasped Tom.

"It might have wuined my clothes!"

"You—you—you——"

"Pway do not stuttah at a chap, Tom Mewwy! I considah——"

"Figgins and Co. out of the team!" said Blake, with a whistle. "My hat! That tears it! It will be a walk-over for Rookwood."

"Wats! I shall be in the team, Blake. I wathah think that I shall bag a few goals——"

"We're dished and done!" said Tom Merry. "We've come here to slaughter that burbling image! We're going to make mincemeat of him! We've mopped up Figgins, and now——"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Collar him!"

"Bai Jove! I weally must say—yawwooh! Gweat Scott! Wescue!" yelled Arthur Augustus, as he rolled over in the vengeful grasp of the Terrible Three of the Shell.

But there was no rescue for Gussy! Blake and Herries and Dig looked on cheerfully while Arthur Augustus went through five hectic minutes. What happened to him, Gussy hardly knew. It felt like a series of earthquakes, mixed up with half a dozen motor-crashes.

When the Shell fellows left the study, rather breathless, Arthur Augustus lay in a heap on the carpet, more than breathless. He gasped and gurgled.

"Oooooogh! Urrrgh! Gwoooooogh! Oh, bai Jove! Wow! Urrrrgh!"

He sat up at last.

"Wurrgh! I am quite bweathless! Bai Jove, I will give those feahful wuffians a thwashin' all wound! Urrgh!"

The swell of St. Jim's staggered to his feet. His face was crimson, and his eyes gleamed with wrath.

"Come on, you fellows!" he gasped.

"Back up, you know!" Arthur Augustus started for the door, on the trail of vengeance. But he did not get far.

"Back up?" repeated Blake.

"You've played the giddy ox, and lost us the Rookwood match to-morrow. You haven't had enough! Those Shell fellows don't know how to rag! Collar him, you men!"

"Bai Jove! I—yawwooooh! I

pwotest—I considah—I say—whoop!”

Blake and Herries and Dig did not back up their noble chum on the trail of vengeance! They collared him, and up-ended him in the study. They rolled him and bumped him. The last state of Arthur Augustus was worse than his first.

When Blake and Co. had finished, and left the study, Arthur Augustus remained on the carpet, with a dizzy feeling that the universe had crashed in pieces round him.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER

NOTHING DOING!

THE following morning there were serious, not to say solemn, faces in both Houses at St. Jim's.

Gloomiest of all were the visages of Figgins, Kerr and Wynn of the New House.

In class that morning in the Fourth Form-room, Figgins and Co. looked so gloomy and glum that Mr. Lathom glanced at them several times, and wondered what was wrong with the usually cheery trio.

Figgy and Co., of course, felt it the most. Not only were the prospects of the Rookwood game jeopardised by three fellows standing out—but they were the three fellows! Apart from jeopardising the match, they had to cut football, and sit in a Form-room, in detention.

It was too absolutely rotten for words—though Figgins and Co. found a good many words to utter on the subject, all the same.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked gloomy, too, though not so gloomy as the chums of the New House. Fellows persisted in taking the view that Gussy was partly to blame for the catastrophe—a view that Gussy warmly repudiated. Gussy was a little comforted by the prospect of the

goals he was going to score against Rookwood; which, he hoped, would compensate for the weakening of the team. That prospect was no comfort to the other fellows, who did not expect Gussy to get away with a bagful of goals.

In the Shell room Mr. Linton found Tom Merry rather inattentive in class. He was quite sharp with him several times.

But it could not be helped. A football captain who had lost three of his best men, on the eve of an important fixture, really could not fix his attention on verbs in *are, ère, ere, or ire!* It was asking too much, though the master of the Shell did not seem to realise it.

It was a fine, clear day—ideal for football! It would not have been so bad, really, if it had been fearfully rainy or impenetrably foggy. In such a case footer could not have been played. But the weather was beautifully propitious, while everything else was unpropitious.

Tom Merry gave hardly a thought to the valuable instruction of Mr. Linton that morning! He was wondering who was going to take Figgy's place in the first line, Kerr's in the second, and Fatty Wynn's in goal.

All the footballers were glad when they got out in break. Lessons, in such distressful circumstances, were the limit. Really, they felt that they had more important matters to think of!

“I'm going to Railton!” Tom Merry said to his chums, when they came out. “He's a good chap, and he will put in a word for us.”

“Um!” said Manners and Lowther.

Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, was undoubtedly a good chap! The trouble was that Horace Ratcliff, Housemaster of the

New House, wasn't! And the decision rested with Ratty.

However, Tom's chums agreed that it could do no harm, if it did no good, so off he went to Railton's study.

Railton listened with sympathy; and promised to speak to Mr. Ratcliff—though with out holding out much hope of a beneficial result.

He lost no time, walking across the quad at once to the other House, and presenting himself in his colleague's study.

Mr. Ratcliff greeted him with frosty politeness.

The stiff, crusty, acid New House master had no great liking for Railton, who was a younger man and keen on games. Ratcliff disliked games. Also,

he regarded the School House master as too easy-going with his boys. Ratcliff was a whale on discipline; and his idea of discipline was unbending severity.

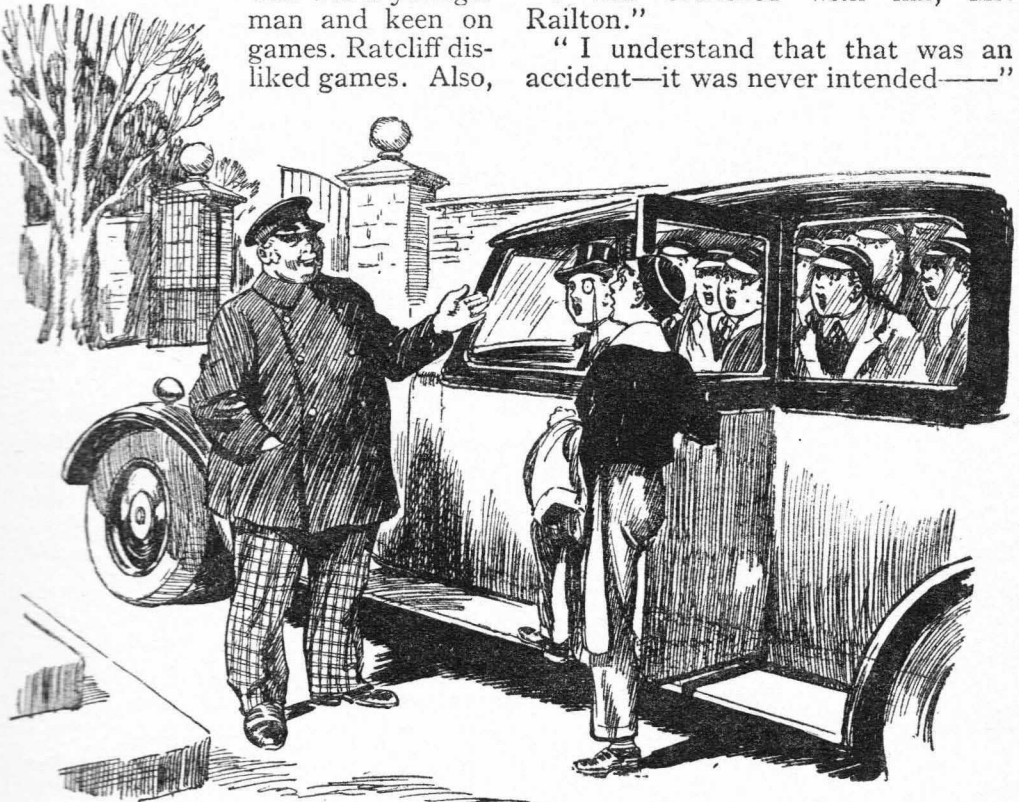
At the first mention of the detained juniors Mr. Ratcliff held up a bony hand.

"Kindly go no farther, my dear Railton!" he said acidly. "Nothing can be done!"

"The juniors attach a great deal of importance to the fixture this afternoon, sir!" said Mr. Railton mildly.

"Possibly! I shall hardly pardon an act of outrageous hooliganism on that account!" said Mr. Ratcliff. "I was drenched with ink, Mr. Railton."

"I understand that that was an accident—it was never intended——"



"Cheap prices are good for business," said Mr. Snooks. "It ain't every garage that could do this trip for fourteen bob a head." "Wha-a-t?" ejaculated Lovell. There was a general gasp of surprise among the fellows packed in the car, for Lovell had told them it would be four shillings a head!

"Had it been intentional, Mr. Railton, I should have taken the three boys to Dr. Holmes, and requested him to expel them from the school. It is because it was an accident that I have been lenient."

"Oh!" said Mr. Railton.

"Such accidents must not happen," said Mr. Ratcliff.

"I fully agree! Yet, in the circumstances——"

"No circumstances could cause me to rescind the punishment of the three juniors who drenched me with ink."

Mr. Railton retired defeated.

It was hardly necessary for Tom Merry to ask him the result when he came back to his own House. His expression was enough.

"I am sorry that nothing can be done, Merry!" said the School House master. "Very sorry indeed!"

"Thank you, sir!" said Tom, dismally.

That was that!

Kildare of the Sixth, the captain of St. Jim's, was indignant—if that was any use.

"Look here, I'll speak to Ratcliff," he said. "He's bound to listen to me as Head of the Games."

And Mr. Ratcliff had a second visitor in his study.

But he did not listen to the Head of the Games! He cut Kildare even shorter than he had cut Mr. Railton.

"Not a word on that subject, Kildare!" he said sharply.

"But, sir——" urged the St. Jim's captain.

"Not a word! I do not desire advice from a School House prefect in the management of my House," said Mr. Ratcliff sourly. "Neither advice nor assistance."

"As Head of the Games, sir——"

"Kindly close the door after you, Kildare."

Kildare breathed hard.

"Some other punishment, sir, some other time—it seems rather rotten to spoil a football match for the Lower School!" he said.

Mr. Ratcliff looked at him.

"Did you say rotten?" he asked.

"Am I to understand that you are describing my method of maintaining discipline in my House by that word, Kildare?"

"Not at all, sir! I did not mean that—but——"

"I am glad you did not mean that, Kildare! Had you meant that, I should certainly have laid a complaint before the Head!" said Mr. Ratcliff grimly.

Kildare breathed harder.

"If you'll listen to me, sir——"

"I have no time to waste on the subject, Kildare! Please leave my study."

The captain of St. Jim's went. He realised that he had not improved matters. His obvious belief that Ratcliff was acting in a tyrannical and cantankerous way only helped to confirm that crusty gentleman in his grim determination.

"Sorry—nothing doing!" he told Tom Merry.

And that, again, was that!

"The crusty old tick!" Tom said to his chums. "He doesn't care a rap if he mucks up a football match. Any other master would let a man off detention for a match. He can whop Figgins and Co. as much as he likes—that wouldn't matter. But——"

"Dashed old acid-drop!" said Manners.

"Can't anything be done?" said Monty Lowther. "Look here, old Ratty sticks in his study, like a winkle in a shell, on half-holidays. Those

New House bounders will be in the Form-room. Ratty mightn't even know, if they got out and played football——"

Tom pursed his lips thoughtfully. But he shook his head.

"More likely he'll keep an eye on them," he said. "Anyhow, if he found out they'd cut detention all the fat would be in the fire! He would barge into the game and yank them off the field."

"N.G.!" said Manners.

"If he would go out for a walk," said Lowther.

"Catch him going out for a walk! Frowsting over his study fire—that's his mark!" grunted Tom.

"Talkin' it ovah, you men?" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came up to the three Shell fellows in the quad. "It's wathah wotten, isn't it? I twust, Tom Mewwy, that you wealise, on weflection, that I am not to blame in the mattah?"

"Fathead!"

"I do not wegard that wemark as polite, Tom Mewwy."

"Ass!"

"There is a silvah linin' to the cloud, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus encouragingly.

"Blessed if I see it! What is it?"

"I shall be there——"

"Eh?"

"And I can tell you, I am goin' to have my shootin' boots on. If I get thwee or four goals——"

"Kill him!" said Tom.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Slaughter him!"

"Yaroooh!" roared Arthur Augustus as he was suddenly up-ended in three pairs of hands. "You feahful wuffians—you wotten wottahs—whoop!"

Bump!

"Oh, cwikey!"

The Shell fellows walked into the House for third school, leaving Arthur Augustus to roar. Evidently they drew no consolation from the prospect of Gussy scoring three or four goals against Jimmy Silver and Co., of Rookwood.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER

LEAVE IT TO LOVELL!

JIMMY SILVER stared.

"Car!" he ejaculated.

"Car!" assented Arthur Edward Lovell.

"But——"

"Leave it to me!" said Lovell.

"But——"

"My dear chap, leave it to me."

Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome, of the Rookwood Classical Fourth, looked at him very dubiously. Arthur Edward Lovell was smiling in rather a complacent way.

The Fistical Four of Rookwood were sauntering in the quad, killing time till the hour of departure for St. Jim's and football. It was rather a long step from Rookwood to St. Jim's, and the train was to be a rather early one from Coombe. Lovell had come out of the house and joined his chums, with that satisfied smile on his face which apprised them that he had been up to something.

Arthur Edward Lovell was often up to something. He had a firm belief that he was a managing sort of fellow, and that if things were left to him to manage, all would go well.

Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome were not so sure of it. They had had a good many samples of Arthur Edward's management. Only too frequently something went wrong. This, according to Lovell, was through somebody being an ass! His chums agreed that it was, and that the ass was Arthur Edward!

"Now, look here, Lovell, old man!" said Jimmy. "We'd all rather cut across to St. Jim's by car, instead of changing trains and so on, but——"

"That's all right! We're going to do it."

"But we're not made of money!" Newcome pointed out. "A car to carry a dozen fellows that distance and wait to bring them back again, costs money."

"You don't travel on the railway for nothing!" Lovell pointed out in his turn. "They charge for railway tickets, you know! Ask 'em at the station—they'll tell you so."

Lovell was being sarcastic.

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Raby. "I jolly well know that the railway costs less than half any car I could get hold of."

"Very likely!" assented Lovell. "If it were left to you, old chap, it would be N.G. But if you leave it to me——"

"I'd rather know the figure first!" said Jimmy Silver. "Then we can arrange about the car."

"That's all right; I've arranged it," said Lovell calmly.

"You've arranged it!" ejaculated Jimmy.

"Yes; saves time to get it through! I've fixed it up on the telephone, with Snooks in Coombe."

"Well, my hat! Without asking anybody's leave!" exclaimed Raby. "Of all the cheeky asses——"

"If you prefer a stuffy train, and changing at three or four stations, nobody's stopping you!" said Lovell. "I'm going by car! I fancy the rest will be going by car, too! But please yourself."

"You've engaged Snooks' car to take the football eleven over to St. Jim's!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

"I have!" said Lovell calmly.

"As soon as he named the price, I jumped at it. It works out at much less than the return tickets for the whole bunch. To be exact, four bob a head."

"Four shillings each!" yelled Jimmy Silver, Raby and Newcome with one yell.

"Four shillings! Cheap, what?"

"Well, Snooks must be in the business for his health," said Jimmy Silver. "He can't want to make any profits! Four bob a head to run a whole crowd of fellows over into Sussex, wait for us, and bring us back!"

"Exactly! I was a bit surprised myself!" confessed Lovell. "I knew Snooks was a reasonable man, and keen on custom. I knew he'd cut it as fine as he could to get the order. We might tip him five bob over, I think."

"I think we might!" grinned Raby.

"I explained to him, over the phone, that it had to be a low figure, or it couldn't be done!" said Lovell. "He made his own price—and you can bet I didn't wait for him to say it twice! I closed on it—snap!"

Jimmy Silver nodded.

"Well, I suppose Snooks knows his own business best!" he said. "Blessed if I see how he can do it. But I suppose he knows."

"Lovely day for a long motor run," said Lovell. "Better than sticking in stuffy old trains, what?"

"Hear, hear!" said his comrades heartily.

Jimmy Silver and Co. looked quite merry and bright. There was no doubt that a motor drive was preferable to stuffy trains and changing at various stations. Likewise, it saved time, for the railway was not direct, and a car, of course, could cut across country. For once, the Rookwood Co. felt

that it was all right to leave it to Lovell!

Tommy Dodd and Cook and Doyle, of the Modern Side of Rookwood, came over to the Fistical Four.

"Time to get along for the train, you chaps!" said Tommy Dodd.

Lovell grinned, the grin of superiority.

"We're not going by train, old bean! We're going by car."

"Come into a fortune intirely?" asked Doyle.

Jimmy Silver laughed.

"Lovell's found a man to do it fearfully cheap! Four bob each——"

"Four rats!" said Cook.

"Honest Injun!"

"Well, my hat!"

"And we needn't start till half an hour later than we intended," Lovell pointed out. "Lots of time—we cut off nearly half the distance by car!"

"Well, I'd like a motor run as well as anybody," said Tommy Dodd. "But I don't quite see——"

"Leave it to me!" said Lovell.

It was left to Lovell. Other fellows in the Rookwood junior eleven—Mornington, Erroll, Conroy, Rawson—were glad enough to hear that it was going to be a motor trip, though they marvelled at the amazingly low price quoted by Mr. Snooks of Coombe.

Arthur Edward Lovell had a very pleased and satisfied expression on his face when the time came to start.

Mr. Snooks arrived with the big car—big enough not only for the football eleven, but for five or six more fellows, too. And every fellow who could pack in was anxious to go along and see the Rookwooders beat St. Jim's—or be beaten by them, as the case might be. Mr. Snooks, a little plump gentleman with a cheery face and a twinkling eye, was in great good humour—evidently pleased to

get this order for a long motor trip. He had recently started in business in Coombe, and was anxious for custom, and he touched his hat to Lovell, and thanked him very civilly for having put this business in his way.

"Not at all," said Lovell airily. "Jolly glad I thought of ringing you up, Snooks." He grinned at the fellows packing in. "These chaps can't understand how you do it at the price."

"Reasonable prices make more custom, sir!" said Mr. Snooks genially. "Cut it down to the bone, sir."

"That's right," said Lovell. "That's business. Well, it's time we were off. Glad you left it to me, you men?"

"Yes, rather!" said Jimmy.

"Hear, hear!"

"Toppin'," said Mornington. "I suppose there's no mistake?"

Lovell stared at him.

"Mistake!" he repeated. "What do you mean? How could there be any mistake?"

"Well, you know what an ass you are!" remarked Morny.

"Look here, you cheeky fat-head——"

"Shut up, Morny," said Erroll. "We're all obliged to Lovell. This is going to be a ripping trip."

"Yes, rather!"

"Cheap trip, anyhow," said Mornington.

"Cheap prices good for business, sir," said Mr. Snooks. "It ain't every garage that could do this trip for fourteen bob a head——"

"Wh-a-a-t?" ejaculated Lovell.

There was a general jump among the fellows packed in the big car. They stared at Mr. Snooks.

"Fourteen shillings!" repeated Jimmy Silver.

"Yes, sir; and what with the

tance, and waiting to bring you back, and the price of petrol and oil, I think you'll admit it's reasonable."

"Oh my hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Mornington.

Lovell stood as if rooted, one foot on the ground, one on the step. He blinked at the cheerful Mr. Snooks.

"Did—did—did you just say fourteen shillings?" he asked, finding his voice at last.

"Yes, sir, same as I said on the phone!" answered Mr. Snooks in surprise.

"Oh, crikey! I—I thought—I—I thought—I thought you said four shillings!" said Lovell faintly.

"Oh, sir, give a man a chance!" said Mr. Snooks. "'Ow's a man to live?"

Arthur Edward Lovell did not answer that question. He was not really interested in how Mr. Snooks was to live!

"Fourteen shillings!" said Jimmy Silver faintly. "Oh, you ass, Lovell! You blithering ass! Why didn't you ask the man to repeat what he said, if you couldn't hear——"

"I—I thought——"

"Gammon!" said Mornington. "If you thought, what did you do it with?"

"I 'ope you young gentlemen are satisfied," said Mr. Snooks anxiously. "If you tot up the distance, and the juice, you'll own up that fourteen bob a head is pretty reasonable."

"I've no doubt it is!" said Jimmy. "But——"

"But——" gasped Tommy Dodd.

"But——" murmured Newcome.

"We've lost the train!" said Valentine Mornington. "It's the car, or washing out the football match!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Oh, crikey!"

Jimmy Silver drew a deep breath.

"This is what comes of leaving it to Lovell! Get in, you ass—get in, you fathead—get in, you dummy! We've got to play St. Jim's this afternoon if it bankrupts us! Get in, you blitherer."

Arthur Edward Lovell got in.

He got in, in silence.

He had nothing to say! It was seldom, very seldom indeed, that Arthur Edward Lovell, of the Rookwood Classical Fourth, had nothing to say! This was one of the rare occasions.

The car rolled away, packed like a sardine can. It was a ripping day for a motor drive. Snooks was a good driver, and the car ran well. But——

But it was useless to think of "buts." Jimmy Silver and Co. had left it to Lovell—and that was that! And most of the way to St. Jim's was occupied by the Rookwooders in telling Arthur Edward Lovell what they thought of him, of his brains, of his management, and of everything that was his! And everything they thought was frightfully uncomplimentary.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER

MONTY TO THE RESCUE!

MONTY LOWTHER smiled.

The smile widened into a grin.

The grin developed into a chuckle.

Lowther laughed.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry and Manners looked at him. After third school the three were in the quad; Tom wrestling with the mental problem of the football eleven, Manners sympathetically silent; Lowther deep in thought. Tom's thoughts were glum enough; but Lowther's, to judge by the outcome, were of a cheery and exhilarating nature.

"You silly ass!" said Tom.

"Chuck it! If you think all this is funny, go somewhere else and cackle!"

"Tommy, old bean, you're losing your good temper and your nice manners," said Lowther chidingly.

"Well, don't be an ass!"

"Yes, don't be an ass, old chap, when Tommy's so fearfully worried," said Manners. "Tom feels about the footer just as I felt that time when a

"Go and boil it."

"About the footer——"

"Oh," said Tom. "What about that? Looks to me as if I shall have to stick Pratt in Figgy's place, and Glyn in Kerr's. But what about goal?"

"I mean, suppose Figgins and Co. could play after all——"

"They can't!"



Feeling rather fed-up, Figgins, Kerr and Wynn followed on the heels of Mr. Ratcliff to the Form-room. Many sympathetic glances were turned on them, for it was the general opinion that Mr. Ratcliff was being too severe in detaining the juniors when there was an important football match on.

fathead hid my camera, and I couldn't find it."

"Ass!" said Tom ungratefully. All the cameras in the wide world did not matter, in comparison with one football match, in the opinion of the junior captain of St. Jim's.

"But look here!" said Lowther.

"Give us a rest!"

"I've got an idea——"

"They'd be game to cut detention——"

"Oh, rats! We've had all that! Can't risk it with Ratty."

"Suppose Ratty went over to Wayland——"

"Why should he, fathead?"

"He might get a telephone call."

"What rot!"

"I heard from Figgins that Ratty's

given them lines to do during detention. They go into the Form-room at two-thirty and write five hundred lines each. They're booked till five, anyhow, and longer if the lines ain't done! That's the jolly old sentence, I hear from Figgy."

"Serve 'em right, if it wasn't for the footer!" growled Tom Merry.

"But they could pile into the lines and get them done, if they liked, before Rookwood gets here, and have them all ready for Ratty."

"What on earth for, fathead? If they're going to stick in the Form-room they may as well do the lines there, I suppose. What do you mean?"

"I mean that I've got something to say, if you'll shut up a minute and listen to a chap."

"About a man for goal, do you mean?"

"Oh! Yes."

"Who, then?"

"David Llewellyn Wynn, Fourth Form."

"You silly ass——"

"Oh, give a man a chance to speak," urged Lowther. "I tell you I've got a wheeze—a gilt-edged stunt—the catch of the season! I tell you I can make Ratty walk over to Wayland this afternoon. Sure to walk—he's too jolly stingy to take taxi-cabs. All the better—it will keep him busy all the longer. The game will be over when he gets back."

"You howling ass!" said Tom. "Are you going to walk into Ratty's study and ask him to go for a walk so that the New House men can cut detention while he's gone? Think he'd do it?"

"The advantage of living in modern times," said Lowther, "is that we have the advantage of modern gadgets. In the reign of King John,

for instance, if you wanted to tip a bloke anything you had to see him and speak to him, or else write him a message. The rapid march of science in modern days, my beloved 'earers, has changed all that. Science has enabled a fellow to pull a man's leg——"

"What on earth are you burbling about?" asked Manners.

"The telephone!" answered Monty.

"If that ass, Gore, kept himself a bit more fit I could shove him into goal!" said Tom Merry musingly. "But——"

"Will you listen?" hooted Monty Lowther. "Don't I keep on telling you I've got a wheeze, and Fatty Wynn can keep goal?"

"Oh, rot!"

"Ratty is Housemaster of the New House," went on Monty. "He pays the House bills. He draws cheques on the Wayland and County Bank."

"Does he? I suppose he does! Mad?" asked Tom.

"Suppose——"

"Suppose I try Gore in goal?"

"No!" shrieked Lowther. "Suppose you shut up a minute and let me speak! Suppose Ratty got a telephone call from Mr. Sneff, the manager of the Wayland and County Bank——"

"He won't!"

"Telling him something—we can think out the details later—but something that would make Ratty hop over to Wayland in a hurry to see Sneff at the bank——"

"For the love of Mike stop talking rot! Why should Sneff telephone to him on this particular afternoon, just to oblige us?"

"They haven't installed television in the New House!"

"Television!" repeated Tom Merry blankly.

"Yes! If they had it wouldn't work! But they haven't! Ratty won't see Sneff when he phones! He won't know that that particular Sneff is a Shell fellow of St. Jim's, pulling his leg."

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Oh, scissors!" ejaculated Manners.

"Catching on?" asked Lowther sarcastically. "I must say it's time you did! Ratty gets a call from Sneff—or thinks he does! He goes trotting over to the bank at Wayland—keeping him nice and busy while we're playing Rookwood. Figgins and Co. have their lines all ready done. They nip out of the Form-room as soon as Ratty's signalled clear. They play in the match. When Ratty comes in, they've got their lines all ready for him. The old bean won't have a single suspish."

"He will know his leg's been pulled when he sees Sneff at the bank," said Manners.

"He won't know who did it!"

"Well, that's so."

"Never mind if he did," said Tom. "It's worth while taking a whopping for playing tricks, Monty, if we can get Figgins and Co. in the game."

"Why, you silly ass——"

"But will it work? I don't see——"

"You're not expected to see anything, Tommy, except a football and a couple of goal-posts. That's the limit of your intelligence."

Tom Merry laughed.

"If there's a chance, Monty, old man——"

"Of course there is! I've been thinking this out, and I tell you, it's as easy as falling off a form," said

Monty Lowther confidently. "Everybody knows how stingy old Ratty is—the mere suggestion of losing some money would make him get up on his hind legs and bark. Touch him on his pocket and you hit him where he lives!"

"Yes, that's so, but——"

"I tell you, he will go hopping over to Wayland like a kangaroo. It's a good hour's walk for anybody—nearly twice that for Ratty; you know how he crawls. If he walks down to Rylcombe to take the local train, it's half an hour's walk, and the train's slow. Then he's got to walk to the bank from Wayland Station, and it's a good step. And then there will be a jaw with Sneff, who will be jolly surprised to see him——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We'll time it for him to clear just before three—kick-off's at three," said Monty. "I tell you, he will be kept busy till the game's over, and Figgins and Co. can change and get back into the Form-room, ready for Ratty to trot in and collect their lines."

Manners nodded thoughtfully.

Tom Merry's eyes glistened.

The mere thought of getting David Llewellyn Wynn into the St. Jim's goal that afternoon was enough to make Tom Merry keen.

"If—if it can be worked!" he said breathlessly.

"Work like a charm!" said Monty.

"A walk will do him good," said Tom. "He never takes enough exercise. That's one reason why he's so jolly crusty."

"Sheer benefit to him!" agreed Lowther. "And it's up to us, as really nice boys, to think of our kind masters, and work for their benefit."

"Hear, hear!" grinned Manners.

"If——" said Tom.

"No 'if' about it," said Monty Lowther. "I'm going to wangle it! I shall have to think out the details, of course. I can't tell Ratty any crammers on the phone! I shall have to put it diplomatically."

"If he spots your voice——"

"Think I can't alter my voice, fat-head!" grunted Lowther. "Who's the best actor in the School House Dramatic Society, I'd like to know?"

"Blessed if it doesn't look as if there's something in it!" said Tom.

"Lots in it!" said Monty. "Heaps in it! Tons in it! All you've got to do is to go and tip Figgins and Co. to get their lines ready, as they'll be playing soccer this afternoon and won't have time later. Leave me to think out the jolly old details."

"If it works——"

"Didn't I mention that there was no 'if' in it?"

"Well, I'll speak to Figgins, anyhow."

"That's right! Linton is going out this afternoon—I heard him speak to Lathom about going for a walk—so we can use his phone. Right as rain!"

Tom Merry, perhaps with some lingering doubt, but feeling hopeful, went in search of Figgins and Co. Monty Lowther, until dinner-time, was deep in thought—elaborating the details of that masterly scheme for getting Mr. Horace Ratcliff off the scene for the afternoon. And the cheery, confident grin on Monty's face told that he, at least, had no doubts about the matter.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER

CALLED ON THE PHONE!

"FIGGINS! Kerr! Wynn!"

"Yes, sir!"

"You will follow me to the Form-room!" said Mr. Ratcliff.

"Yes, sir!"

The three New House juniors followed their Housemaster to the Form-room. Many sympathetic glances turned on them as they went.

Mr. Railton saw them and frowned slightly. Kildare of the Sixth saw them and remarked to Darrell, of that Form, that Ratty ought to be lynched.

That opinion was widely held at St. Jim's that afternoon.

But whether Ratty ought to have been lynched or not, it was evidently impracticable to lynch Ratty; and, like an obstinate horse, he had to be given his head.

Indeed, the knowledge of the general disapproval of his severity made Mr. Ratcliff all the more acidly determined. That was the kind of crusty gentleman he was.

The Form-rooms were silent and deserted. It was a glorious winter's day, with a bright gleam of sunshine on the old quad and the playing-fields.

Figgins and Co. trod quietly into the Fourth Form-room, on the heels of their tall, angular Housemaster.

They took their places at their desks. Their manner was very quiet and subdued.

"You will remain here!" said Mr. Ratcliff.

"If you please, sir——"

"You need not speak, Figgins."

"If you'd let us off this afternoon, sir——"

"I have said that you need not speak, Figgins."

"It's rather a special occasion, sir!" said Kerr. "And if you'd give us detention another day instead, sir——"

"You may be silent, Kerr!"

"We never meant that ink for you, sir!" said Fatty Wynn. "We
——"

“ Silence ! ”

The hapless three were silent. Mr. Ratcliff gave them an exceedingly sour look.

“ I quite understand,” he said, “ that you would rather play games than remain in detention. No doubt this will impress upon your minds to be more circumspect on another occasion. I trust so.”

Figgins and Co. made no reply to that. They had only one comfort at the moment: Ratty, anyhow, had got the ink !

“ You will remain here until five o'clock. I shall then come over and release you from detention. By that time you will each have written five

hundred lines of Virgil. If you have not finished your task, you will be kept in detention until the total number of lines has been written. I warn you, therefore, not to waste your time in idleness.”

With that, Mr. Ratcliff left the three to their dismal fate, and closed the door of the Form-room on them. Figgins and Co. exchanged expressive looks.

As the angular gentleman went into the quad, to return to the New House, he came on Tom Merry.

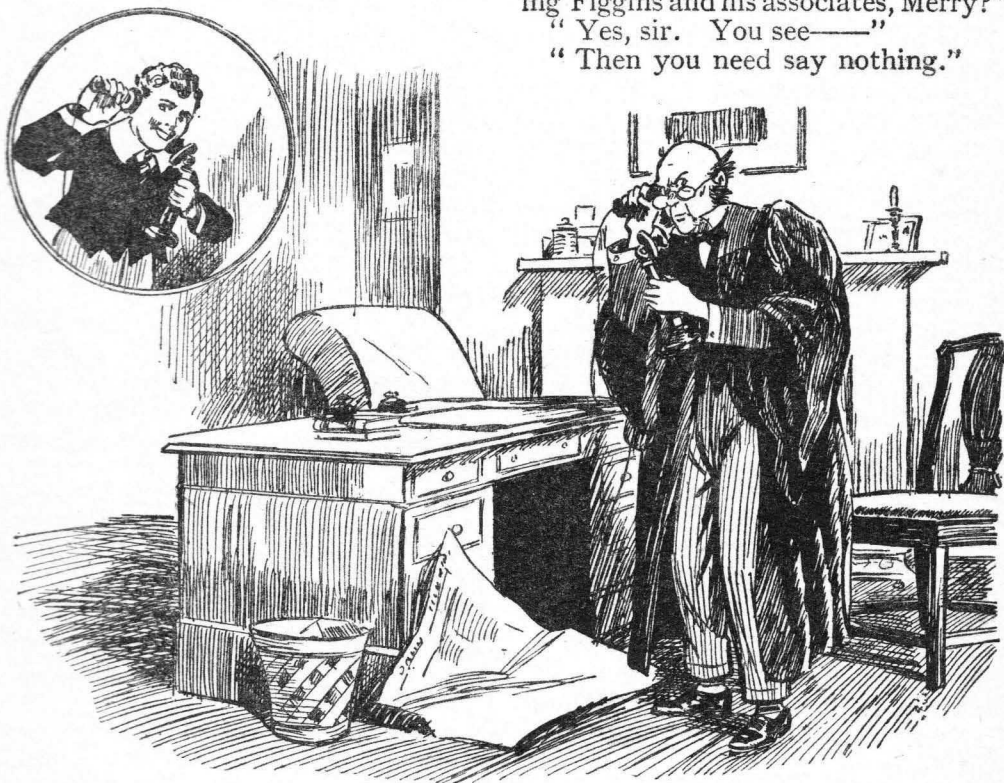
“ If you please, sir——” began Tom.

Mr. Ratcliff raised a bony hand.

“ Are you about to speak concerning Figgins and his associates, Merry? ”

“ Yes, sir. You see——”

“ Then you need say nothing.”



“ What ? ” barked Mr. Ratcliff into the transmitter. A slightly husky voice came through. “ I am sorry to disturb you, sir, but the matter is urgent. Could you possibly come over to the bank this afternoon ? ” Little did the New House master know that it was Monty Lowther who was speaking !

"But, sir——"

Mr. Ratcliff walked on, leaving Tom Merry breathing very hard. In the quad he encountered Kildare of the Sixth.

"If you'd allow me to speak one word, sir, about the juniors who are detained this afternoon," said the captain of St. Jim's.

"I can do nothing of the kind, Kildare."

Mr. Ratcliff proceeded on his way, leaving Kildare feeling how very unfortunate it was that a Sixth Form man couldn't possibly think of kicking a Housemaster!

That gentleman went into his House, and to his study. Bright as it was out of doors, the out-of-doors did not tempt Ratty out. It was cold and there was a keen wind. Mr. Ratcliff preferred a warm, cosy, snug study, with a big fire and the window shut.

With a sigh of content he sat down in his armchair, put his feet on the fender and opened a financial newspaper. The prices of stocks and shares were the most interesting reading for Mr. Ratcliff. He dabbled in the stock markets, and his acid temper was, perhaps, sometimes due to the prices going the wrong way. A man who bought Pinky-Pong Tin shares at 10s. could hardly feel happy and equable when he saw their value falling to 2s. 6d.

Buzzzzz!

Mr. Ratcliff had been only a few minutes in his armchair when the telephone bell rang.

He rose, laid down the newspaper, reached for the receiver, and unhooked it with an annoyed ejaculation.

"What?" he barked into the transmitter.

A slightly husky voice came through.

"Is that Mr. Ratcliff?"

"Mr. Ratcliff speaking."

"I am sorry to disturb you, sir, but the matter is urgent. Could you possibly come over to the bank this afternoon?"

"The bank?" repeated Mr. Ratcliff.

"The Wayland and County Bank, sir."

"That is Mr. Sneff speaking, I presume? But why——"

"I would rather not go into details on the telephone, sir! But if you could possibly call at the bank this afternoon——"

"Certainly I could do so, if necessary. But——"

"Up to four o'clock, sir——"

"But what——"

"It is not a matter, sir, that I can explain on the telephone. To be frank, it is a matter in which it is necessary to use some caution. I understand that Wednesday is a half-holiday at the school, and you will therefore be at leisure, I presume. If you could call——"

"Certainly. If the matter is serious——"

"Undoubtedly it has its serious side, sir, a very serious side; but, as I have said, on the telephone——"

"Oh, quite, quite. I will certainly call—let me see, there is a train from Rylcombe at three-fifteen; I can catch it without difficulty. I shall be at the bank by four, Mr. Sneff."

"Very good, sir! That will be satisfactory in every way."

Five minutes later, Mr. Horace Ratcliff, in coat and hat, stepped out of the New House and walked down to the gates.

From the window of Mr. Linton's study in the School House, three Shell fellows watched him go.

"He's off!" breathed Manners.

"The walk will do him good!"

said Tom Merry. "And he's asked for it."

"Begged for it!" agreed Manners.

"I wonder," said Monty Lowther musingly, "whether Ratcliff thought it was Mr. Sneff speaking? I never said so. Ratty said so."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He can have a jaw with Sneff, when he gets to the bank. He likes wagging his chin over stocks and shares. The matter has its serious side, my beloved 'earers—it's rather serious if we lose our goalkeeper in the Rookwood match, but one cannot explain these things on the telephone——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is a matter in which it is necessary to use some caution——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Lots of caution, in fact! Now I'll cut off and tip Figgins, and you'd better be ready to give the Rookwooders the glad hand, Tommy—they may blow in any minute now."

Two or three minutes later, Figgins, Kerr and Wynn were changing for football. Ratty was safe off the scene—and all was calm and bright!

But was it?

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING!

"RIGHT!" said Lovell.

"Left!" suggested Jimmy Silver.

"I said right!" remarked Arthur Edward Lovell coldly.

"Quite! And you said four shillings when you meant fourteen——"

"Look here——"

"Left!" said Newcome decidedly.

"If Lovell thinks we ought to turn to the right, it's bound to be left."

"Sure thing!" agreed Raby.

"Leave it to me!" said Lovell.

"What?" roared nearly every Rookwood fellow in the big car.

"I said leave it to me——"

"Oh, leave it to Lovell!" said Mornington satirically. "We may get to Greyfriars or Highcliffe or Eton or Harrow if we leave it to Lovell! Quite nice places."

"You ass, Lovell!"

"You fathead, Lovell!"

Snort from Arthur Edward! It was one of Arthur Edward's weaknesses that he always knew best, and had no hesitation in saying so. He was not discouraged by a series of mistakes that might have discouraged any less confident fellow.

During the run across from Rookwood in Mr. Snooks' car, the other fellows had had quite a lot to say to Lovell. But they had tired of the subject at last—though not, perhaps, so soon as Lovell had.

Apparently Arthur Edward had recovered his confidence. He did not, in fact, see that he was to blame at all in the little matter of that misunderstanding with Mr. Snooks. If a man did not speak plainly over the phone, Lovell could not be expected to catch on. All the other fellows thought he was to blame; but that only showed what asses they were. Fresh from that disastrous mistake, Arthur Edward was happily prepared to make another. But the other Rookwooders, perhaps naturally, were not quite prepared to leave anything to Lovell just now!

The big car had stopped at a crossroads. That they were quite near St. Jim's, all the fellows knew. Jimmy Silver was fairly certain that the turning to the left was Rylcombe Lane, which led direct to the school. Lovell was absolutely certain that it was necessary to turn to the right. Mr. Snooks sat at the wheel and waited

patiently. He was a patient and obliging man, and particularly anxious to oblige because of that rather unfortunate misunderstanding about the cost of the trip. Had it been possible, Mr. Snooks would willingly have turned both to the right and to the left and thus satisfied both parties. That not being practicable, he sat at the wheel and waited for directions. He was a stranger in Sussex, and he looked in vain for sign-posts.

"Better turn to the left!" said Tommy Dodd.

"And why?" demanded Lovell hotly. "Mean to say you remember this road any better than I do?"

"Not at all. We came by train before," said Tommy Dodd. "Never been over this ground that I know of."

"Then why do you think we ought to take the left turning?"

"Because you think we ought to take the right!" explained Tommy Dodd.

"You silly ass!" roared Lovell.

"I think it's left——" said Jimmy.

"I know it's right!" retorted Lovell. "We've left ourselves none too much time, either. If you want to be late for the kick-off——"

"If we could only spot a native and ask him," sighed Raby.

"You never spot a native when you want one!" grunted Lovell. "Luckily, I remember this corner perfectly."

"Bow-wow!"

Nobody but Arthur Edward relied on Lovell's perfect memory of that corner. The Rookwooders were fed up with leaving things to Lovell.

"Hallo, here comes a jolly old native!" exclaimed Cook, as a tall, angular figure came into view on the left turning.

"My hat, and here comes another!" said Newcome, as a short, plump

gentleman appeared in sight, coming along behind the halted car.

"It never rains but it pours!" said Jimmy Silver. "We shall get the news now, from one or both of them. But I'll bet that the left turning is the one—that tall johnny is coming from the school, I fancy."

"What's put that into your head?" sniffed Lovell.

Jimmy Silver smiled.

"I happen to remember having seen him at St. Jim's when we were over there for the cricket," he said. "He's a Housemaster. And he's got a face a fellow doesn't forget in a hurry. I think his name's Ratcliff."

Lovell stared at the tall, angular gentleman who was coming up the lane. He nodded. He had a faint recollection of having seen that sharp-featured face before, with its penetrating eyes and thin, set lips.

It was, in fact, Mr. Ratcliff, Housemaster of the New House, on his way to Rylcombe, which he had nearly reached.

"Well, if he's a St. Jim's master, he will know the way to the school, and he can tell us," said Lovell. "I fancy it's to the right!"

"I believe that turning to the right leads to the village," said Jimmy. "I dare say Mr. Ratcliff's going there."

"Coming away from it, more likely!" said Lovell.

Jimmy Silver laughed.

"Well, we shall soon see, fathead."

The Rookwooders, in the halted car, waited for Mr. Ratcliff to come up. Several of them recognised him and remembered him, though it was not likely that he remembered them. He came on with his quick, jerky strides, a very cross expression on his face, and breathing a little stertorously. Mr. Ratcliff took little exercise, and walking soon put him out of breath

He was, in fact, looking forward to getting to the station and getting a rest in the train. The more tired Mr. Ratcliff grew the more cross he grew; and so his expression was not in the least amiable as he drew nearer to the Rookwood car.

Behind the car, the plump gentleman who was coming from the direction of Wayland was also drawing nearer. But he was the farther off of the two, so the Rookwooders gave their attention to Mr. Ratcliff.

That angular gentleman glanced at the car as he came up, and at the cheery school-boy faces within. He frowned a little. He did not know the Rookwooders; if he had ever seen any of them before he had forgotten them, but their cheery looks did not please a cross-tempered man who had corns, and was feeling them.

Jimmy Silver raised his cap politely.

"Excuse me, sir——" he began.

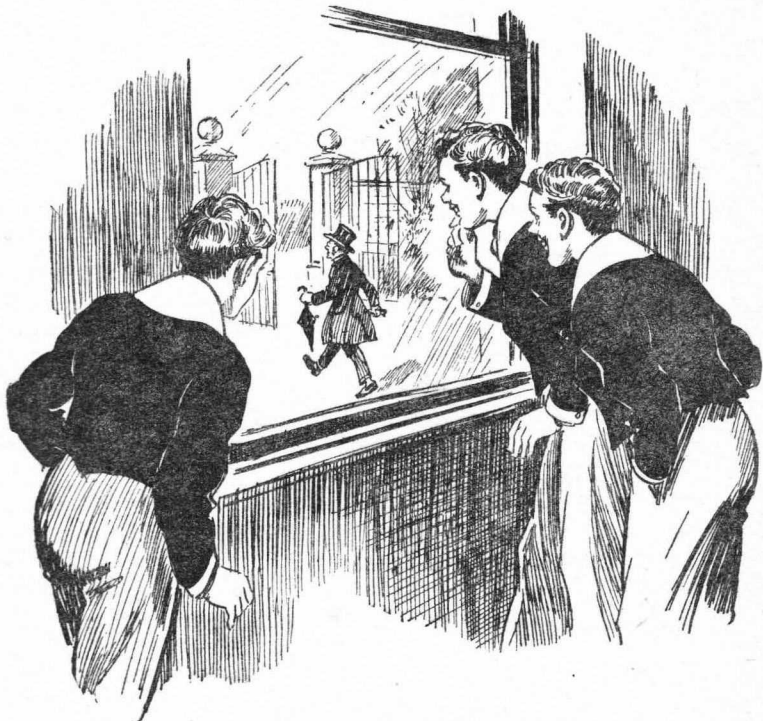
Mr. Ratcliff stared at him.

"What?" he barked. "What?"

"We're not sure of our way, sir," said Jimmy. "If you'd kindly tell us——"

Jimmy Silver broke off in sheer surprise. It was Mr. Ratcliff who caused his surprise. Having arrived at the corner where the car stood,

Mr. Ratcliff could see along the lane to Wayland. His eyes fell on the short, plump gentleman who was coming from that direction. And his eyes bulged with astonishment. Apparently forgetting the existence of the junior who was speaking to him, Mr. Ratcliff stepped away from the car and stared blankly at the plump gentleman, now near at hand.



From the window of Mr. Linton's study, Tom Merry and Co. watched Mr. Ratcliff walk down to the gates. "He's off," said Manners. "The walk will do him good!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "He's asked for it!"

He actually jumped!

"Bless my soul!" he ejaculated.

"What—what——"

Jimmy Silver and Co. could only blink at him.

The plump gentleman coming up to the corner seemed, to their eyes, a perfectly ordinary and commonplace gentleman. He was elderly, he was quietly dressed, and might have been

a banker, or something of the kind, by his looks. Certainly there seemed to be nothing about him to cause a schoolmaster to jump nearly clear of the ground in astonishment.

Mr. Ratcliff now stood, the picture of amazement. It seemed as if the grisly ghost of a plump gentleman could not have startled him more.

"I say, sir——" recommenced Jimmy Silver.

Mr. Ratcliff did not even hear.

He made a stride towards the plump gentleman. And he fairly barked at him:

"Mr. Sneff! Sir! What does this mean? I insist, sir, upon knowing what this means—and at once!"

THE NINTH CHAPTER

ROUGH ON RATTY!

MR. SNEFF stopped.

He stared at Mr. Ratcliff.

Evidently he was surprised by that gentleman's tone and manner.

"My dear sir!" he ejaculated.

Mr. Ratcliff breathed hard through his nose. He was looking more angry than astonished now.

"I repeat, sir, what does it mean?" he snapped.

"I fail to follow you, sir!" said the manager of the Wayland branch of the Wayland and County Bank. "To what, Mr. Ratcliff, do you allude?"

"To your extraordinary conduct, sir!" exclaimed Mr. Ratcliff. "I was on my way to Rylcombe Station, sir, to take the train to Wayland, sir, to see you at the bank, sir, and I find you walking here, sir, by the purest chance, as if you had made no appointment with me this afternoon, sir!"

"An appointment?"

"If I had not seen you here, sir, I should have gone on to Wayland and missed you at the bank. And I

have met you by the merest chance. Is that, sir, the way to deal with a customer of the bank?"

Mr. Sneff looked bewildered.

"But I have no recollection of an appointment, Mr. Ratcliff! I have no recollection whatever."

"You have no recollection, sir, of an appointment made hardly half an hour ago!" barked Mr. Ratcliff.

The bank manager looked still more hopelessly bewildered.

"Half an hour ago!" he repeated.

"Yes, sir!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff. "By telephone, sir! I started immediately, as you said that it was urgent."

"There is some mistake, sir," said Mr. Sneff soothingly. "You must have taken a wrong call, or something of the kind. I certainly have not telephoned to you to-day."

"You—you—you have not telephoned?" stuttered Mr. Ratcliff.

"Certainly not! I have not even been in the bank since lunch," said Mr. Sneff. "Other affairs——"

"You did not telephone from the bank?"

"I did not telephone at all!"

"You—you—you did not want to see me on an urgent matter?" gasped Mr. Ratcliff. "A matter requiring caution?"

"Certainly not!"

"Then what—who——"

"Some error at the telephone exchange," suggested the bank manager.

"Nothing of the kind, sir!" barked Mr. Ratcliff. "Names were mentioned, sir—my name, sir, and your name. You stated—or, at least, the person who spoke to me stated—that it was an urgent matter, a serious matter, that could not be explained on the telephone."

"Then you have been deceived, sir, by some trickster," said Mr. Sneff.

"Some impudent person has played a trick on you."

"A-a-a trick!" repeated Mr. Ratcliff.

"I should have thought that you would know that it was not my voice, sir!" said the bank manager.

"I noticed that your voice was husky—I supposed a cold, or something of the kind——"

"Not my voice, sir!" said Mr. Sneff firmly. "I have certainly not called you up on the phone to-day. Doubtless the huskiness was assumed to disguise the voice, as it is clear that a trick has been played."

"You mean that someone else in the bank——"

"Certainly not, sir!" said Mr. Sneff warmly. "No one in the bank has telephoned to you! Of that I am assured. Someone has played an absurd trick on you by means of the telephone; but I am absolutely certain that it was no one at the bank."

Mr. Ratcliff gave him a grim look.

He was by no means so absolutely assured of that, as Mr. Sneff declared himself to be. The idea was fixed in his mind that the telephone call had come from the Wayland and County Bank. When once an idea was in Mr. Ratcliff's mind, it was rooted there and he did not part with it easily.

"Some thoughtless junior clerk, perhaps——"

"Nothing of the kind, sir!"

"Then who, sir?" barked Mr. Ratcliff. "I was most certainly called on the telephone and asked to come across to the bank. Who——"

"That is not for me to say, sir! Perhaps some mischievous boy at the school——"

"Nonsense!" barked Mr. Ratcliff.

"Mr. Ratcliff!"

"I said nonsense, sir, and I repeat, nonsense!" said the New House master acidly. "No boy at the school would venture to play such a trick! The mere idea is unthinkable."

"It is certainly unthinkable, sir, that any member of my staff at the bank would even dream of playing such a trick!" exclaimed Mr. Sneff. "That idea is simply absurd."

"At all events, it is clear that I have been deluded by some trickster," said Mr. Ratcliff tartly. "Luckily, I have been saved a useless journey by this chance meeting. Good-afternoon, Mr. Sneff!"

"Good-afternoon, sir!"

Mr. Ratcliff, with a brow of thunder, turned and started walking back to St. Jim's.

The manager of the Wayland and County Bank glanced after him, and smiled faintly. Mr. Ratcliff scouted the idea that any St. Jim's fellow could have had the unexampled nerve to play such a trick on a House-master. Mr. Sneff did not feel so sure of that. From his own experience of Mr. Ratcliff, he could guess that that gentleman was not popular with the boys.

Jimmy Silver and Co. in the car smiled, too.

Like Mr. Sneff, they rather considered that there was a probability that that mysterious telephone call had come from a telephone at St. Jim's, and not from Wayland. However, they were glad to see that Mr. Ratcliff did not think so.

Jimmy Silver called to the banker as he resumed his walk towards Rylcombe.

"Which way to St. Jim's, sir?"

Mr. Sneff looked round.

"Take the left——" he said.

"Not the right?" asked Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Cheese it, Lovell!"

"Well, I think——"

"The left!" repeated Mr. Sneff. "Follow that gentleman to whom I was just speaking—he is returning to the school."

"Thank you, sir!" said Jimmy.

Mr. Sneff walked on towards the village and disappeared. The Rookwood car snorted into motion again.

"What a game!" grinned Mornington. "I'll bet it was some fellow at St. Jim's who's been pullin' that bony old bean's leg."

"Shouldn't wonder!" said Jimmy Silver, laughing.

"Somebody wanted to get him out of the way for the afternoon!" remarked Raby. "He looks the kind of man that lots of fellows would rather not see about the place."

"He do—he does!" grinned Newcome.

"If that's the case, it's rather rotten for the fellow that he met that banker Johnny at the corner of the lane!" remarked Arthur Edward Lovell. "He's going back now—and whoever wanted to get shot of him will see him again sooner than he expects."

Jimmy Silver whistled.

"Well, we shall get in long before he does," he said. "We'll mention it to Tom Merry, and if it's a St. Jim's jape, he can pass the word on."

"Good egg!" agreed Lovell.

"Rotten luck on the japer," said Mornington. "I suppose we mustn't ask Snooks to bump into the old gent from behind! That would keep him out of harm's way! Would you do it for another ten bob, Snooks?"

Mr. Snooks chuckled.

He was always open to an offer of an extra ten "bob"; but he did not think of earning that sum by bumping his car into a schoolmaster's back!

He honked on his horn as a hint to Mr. Ratcliff, who was walking along the middle of the lane, to get out of the way.

Honk! honk!

Mr. Ratcliff frowned round at the car. He was not in a good temper. He had a pain in his corns, and a still more severe pain in his temper.

No doubt that chance meeting with the bank manager was fortunate, as it had saved him from spending most of the afternoon on a wild-goose chase. On the other hand, instead of getting a rest in the train, he had another walk before him—and he disliked walking intensely. Twinges in his corns did not make walking a pleasure.

He grunted angrily as he stepped to the side of the road for the car to pass! He grunted again, still more angrily, as it swept by in a cloud of dust, leaving a scent of petrol behind.

The Rookwooders smiled back at his thunderous face as they rushed on, Mr. Snooks letting out the car to top speed to make up for lost time.

Mr. Ratcliff waited for the dust to subside and then jogged on again. He made slow progress. The Rookwood car was out of sight almost in a moment.

Ratty gave it no heed. He did not know the schoolboys in the car, and did not even think of them in connection with the football match Tom Merry and Co. were booked to play that afternoon. He had, indeed, forgotten all about that football match—it was not a matter in which the New House master took any interest. He had far more important matters to think of—chiefly the twinges in his corns.

If any practical joker at St. Jim's needed a warning that Mr. Ratcliff was returning, instead of going on to Wayland, there was ample time to deliver that warning. At his present



“ Mr. Sneff ! Sir ! ” barked Mr. Ratcliff. “ What does this mean ? I was on my way to the bank to keep my appointment with you, and by the purest chance, sir, I find you walking here ! ” Mr. Sneff looked bewildered. “ But I have no recollection of an appointment, Mr. Ratcliff.”

rate of progress, Mr. Ratcliff was likely to arrive at the school a good twenty minutes later than the Rookwood car. And—with a strong suspicion in his mind that such was the case—Jimmy Silver intended to drop a hint to Tom Merry as soon as he saw him.

The car rushed on.

Horace Ratcliff was still far, far away when the Rookwood car honked up to the gates of St. Jim’s.

THE TENTH CHAPTER

DISASTROUS !

“ **W**IGHT as wain ! ”

Arthur Augustus D’Arcy made that remark.

The other fellows agreed.

It was—or seemed to be—as right as rain ! Every face wore a cheery smile.

Figgins and Co. looked cheerfulest of all. Everything in the garden—so far as Figgins and Co. could see—was lovely !

They had taken Tom Merry’s tip, and got their lines done in time. Mr. Ratcliff had certainly not dreamed of it when he left the three juniors in the Form-room. But, in point of fact, each of them was already provided with five hundred lines of Virgil, ready to be shown up after detention. Those lines were in their desks in the Fourth Form room. Ratty was far away on a wild-goose chase—Figgins and Co. had changed for footer—and

the Rookwood crowd had just arrived. In these happy circumstances, Figgins and Co. fully agreed with that celebrated philosopher, Monsieur Pangloss, that everything was for the best in the best of all possible worlds!

"It's weally wippin'," declared Arthur Augustus, who was looking a thing of beauty and a joy for ever in the most elegant football clobber that ever was. "I wathah wondah that I did not think of this wheeze myself, you know——"

"What could you have thought of it with?" inquired Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"It's a jolly old winner, anyhow!" said Figgins.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You New House kids can always rely on a School House man to pull you through!" said Monty Lowther affably.

To which Figgins and Co. ungratefully rejoined:

"You School House fathead!"

"It's weally wippin', you know," said Arthur Augustus. "Watty is wight out of the way, and ewevythin' is wight as wain! In these happy circs, deah boys, I shall not give you the thwashin' you asked for, for dwoppin' that beastly ink-ball down my neck in class yestahday."

"Oh, do!" urged Figgins.

"Weally, Figgins——"

"We've time to strew you over the ground in small detached pieces while Tom Merry is jawing to Jimmy Silver," remarked Figgins.

"Bai Jove! I have a good mind——"

"Gammon!" said Kerr, shaking his head. "If you had a mind, old bean, good or bad, you'd have shown some sign of it before now."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy breathed

hard. In the present happy and satisfactory circumstances, he had been prepared to overlook the dire offences of Figgins and Co. Now he looked warlike again.

"Bai Jove! You cheekay New House wottah——" he began.

"Hallo, something's up!" exclaimed Blake. His eyes were on Tom Merry, who was deep in talk with the junior captain of Rookwood. There was a startled and dismayed expression on Tom's face.

Apparently, what Jimmy Silver had to say had had that effect on him.

"What the dickens?" said Figgins.

"Bai Jove! What——"

"Oh, crumbs!" Tom Merry was heard to exclaim. "Of all the rotten luck—of all the absolutely putrid luck——"

Arthur Augustus forgot his rising wrath as he heard that.

"Bai Jove! Somethin's up!" he exclaimed. "Whatevah is the mattah, Tom Mewwy? What's the twouble, old bean?"

"What's up?" demanded Figgins.

"The game is!" groaned Tom Merry.

"What the thump——"

"Ratty!"

"Bother Ratty! Ratty's far enough away by this time!" said Monty Lowther. "Ratty's safe till after the game."

"He isn't!" groaned Tom.

"How the dickens do you know, then?"

"He's coming back!"

"Coming back!" yelled the footballers blankly.

"Yes! Jimmy Silver's seen him—they passed him on the road—and he's coming back——"

"Oh, gweat Scott!"

"But—but—but——" stuttered

Monty Lowther, utterly taken aback by this unexpected outcome of his masterly scheme for getting rid of Ratty. "How—why—what—how?"

"Cough it up, Silver!" said Tom Merry dismally.

Jimmy Silver looked concerned. Arthur Edward Lovell looked deeply sympathetic. All the Rookwooders were sympathetic, now they knew how the matter stood. Jimmy had given Tom Merry the "tip," little dreaming how serious the matter was. But he knew now.

"I'm sorry, you fellows," he said. "I thought I'd better give the tip here, after what I heard the old bean say to the bank manager. I fancied somebody here might have been japing, and that he would want to know that the old bean was coming back, and——"

"The—the—the bank manager!" stuttered Lowther.

"Yes—man named Sneff——"

"But what—how?" stammered Lowther helplessly.

Jimmy Silver succinctly related what the Rookwooders had witnessed, and heard, at the cross-roads near Rylcombe. The St. Jim's fellows listened in utter dismay.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "Watty comin' back! All the fat's in the fiah now, and no ewwah!"

"Putrid luck," said Lovell. "But ——"

"What ghastly luck!" groaned Figgins. "Thanks for giving us the tip, Silver, but—what utterly ghastly luck!"

"Rotten!" groaned Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"From what the old bean said to the banker johnny, I fancied that some fellow here might be rather anxious to know that he wasn't clear

for the afternoon," said Jimmy Silver. "So——"

"After all, he's a good way off yet!" remarked Arthur Edward Lovell, in a very thoughtful sort of way. "And he was rather crawling when we lost sight of him. There's time——"

"It's tough luck, you fellows," said Jimmy Silver. "Still, you've got the tip in time to get clear. I never guessed that it was fellows in Tom Merry's team who were in the soup! It seems that that is so——"

"Yes, rather!" groaned Figgins. "It's us! And—and—and Ratty's coming back. You—you—you saw him coming back?"

"Yes; passed him on the road in the car!" said Lovell.

"Oh, great pip!"

"Bai Jove! It's feahfully lucky that these chaps spotted it!" said Arthur Augustus. "Watty would have butted in aftah we had started, and you can bet on it that he would have dwagged Figgay and Kerr and Wynn off the ground. Now they've got time to change and cut back to the Form-room."

"Yes, that's lucky!" said Tom Merry.

But he did not look happy! Owing to the warning kindly given by the Rookwood fellows, Figgins and Co. had ample time to get back into detention, undiscovered by their Housemaster. That was all to the good, so far as it went. But it left Tom Merry without three men he wanted for the game. Monty Lowther's masterly scheme had been a hopeless frost.

"Who'd have thought it?" grunted Monty. "It was a ripping wheeze—the catch of the season! Who could have guessed that that ass, Sneff, would be taking a walk

this afternoon instead of sticking in the bank! Bank managers ought to stick in banks."

"Bai Jove! Even a bank managah is entitled to take a wamble sometimes, Lowthah!" remarked Arthur Augustus. "I should think they would get feahfully stuffay, stickin' in a bank all the time."

"The old ass!" hissed Lowther. "If he wanted to take a walk, which he shouldn't have done, why couldn't he walk in some other direction? Of course, he was bound to barge into Ratty! The bank ought to sack him."

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"Oh, ring off, fathead! All the fat's in the fire now!" groaned Monty. "Ratty won't be in yet—he crawls like a snail! But even Ratty won't take long enough walking back to let us get through the game."

"Hardly!" grinned Blake.

"Aftah all, you can pick out thwee School House men, Tom Mewwy!" suggested Arthur Augustus. "I have always thought it wathah a good ideah to play a team entirely fwom the School House—New House men are not weally vewy much good, you know."

"Kill him!" said Figgins.

"Weally, Figgins——"

"Shut up, Gussy, for goodness' sake!" said Tom. "You men will have to stand out now; that can't be helped. I shall have to fill your places somehow. Thank goodness these Rookwood chaps gave us the tip—Ratty would have barged in and mucked up the game if he'd found you playing. That would have given us the kybosh and no mistake."

"But——" said Figgins.

"But——" mumbled Fatty Wynn.

"But——" grunted Kerr.

Arthur Edward Lovell smiled. Arthur Edward had been standing with a deep wrinkle of thought on his brow. Apparently his meditations had given him satisfaction, for he smiled.

"I'll tell you what——" said Lovell.

Tom Merry and Co. glanced at him. If anybody had any suggestion to make, in these harrowing circumstances, they were only too willing to listen to it.

"It seems that you can't spare these three men!" said Lovell.

"Well, I can fill their places," said Tom, "but a lot of men here are on the sick list, and——"

"You want them badly?"

"Frightfully!"

"That bony old bean isn't anywhere near the place yet," said Lovell. "When we passed him he was crawling. You've got at least a quarter of an hour yet."

"We can't play a football match in a quartah of an hour, old thing," said Arthur Augustus.

"Shut up, Gussy!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Well, leave it to me!" said Lovell.

"What?" ejaculated Jimmy Silver.

Lovell did not heed him.

"Leave it to me!" he said. "Put off the kick-off for a quarter of an hour—that won't hurt! And leave it to me."

"But what——" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"What——" ejaculated Figgins.

"No time for talk!" said Lovell briskly. "Leave it to me, and I'll pull you through! Willing?"

"Yes, but——"

"Then it's a go!"

Arthur Edward Lovell turned away.

He departed at a trot. Jimmy Silver and Co. gazed after him blankly. Tom Merry and Co. gazed after him equally blankly.

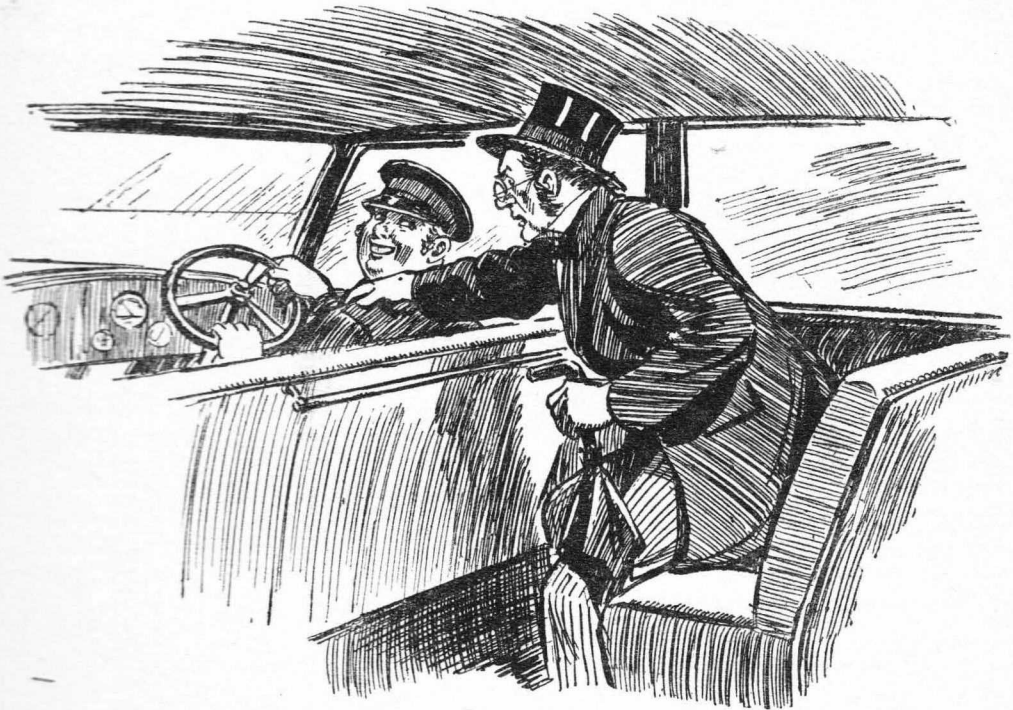
"Lovell!" hooted Jimmy.

Arthur Edward Lovell did not answer or turn his head. He was making for the spot where the Rookwood car had been parked, and he was going at top speed. Whatever was the mysterious "wheeze" that

The footballers gazed at one another. What Arthur Edward Lovell fancied that he was up to was a mystery to the Rookwooders and St. Jim's men alike! Tom Merry and Co. were willing to catch at the merest straw of hope. But they were utterly mystified.

"What on earth——" gasped Tom Merry.

"He's gone!" said Blake.



"Driver, stop!" shouted Mr. Ratcliff. "Good gracious, is the man deaf? Will you stop?" Mr. Snooks smiled and drove on, giving no attention to the acid voice yapping from behind.

was in the mind of Arthur Edward, it was clear that he considered that there was not a moment to be lost.

"Lovell, you ass!" shouted Raby.

"Lovell, you fathead!" roared Newcome.

"Lovell, you duffer!" yelled Mornington.

Lovell disappeared!

"But what——" ejaculated Monty Lowther.

"Bai Jove, you know, I wondah if that chap is a little cwacked——"

"Hallo, that's the car going!" yelled Raby in amazement. Wafted on the wind came the sound of the Rookwood car starting up.

"Is he mad?" breathed Jimmy Silver.

"Mad as a hatter!" said Morny.
"He's gone—in the car——"

"What the merry thump——"

In sheer amazement the footballers listened as the car roared away from St. Jim's. The roar died away in the direction of Rylcombe.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER

A LIFT FOR RATTY!

MR. RATCLIFF gasped.

He snorted.

Seldom, or never, had the master of the New House at St. Jim's felt so angry, so irritable, so extremely unpleasant in every imaginable way.

He had stopped to rest. He sat on a grassy knoll, half-way back to St. Jim's, rested his corns, and breathed hard.

Such a trick as had been played on the telephone might have annoyed even a good-tempered man. And Horace Ratcliff was anything but a good-tempered man.

His corns had given him a little trouble on his outward journey. They gave him more when he was homeward bound. He was glad of a rest.

He had not even the consolation of looking forward to the punishment of the unknown trickster who had befooled him on the telephone. He scouted contemptuously Mr. Sneff's suggestion that any schoolboy would have ventured to play such a trick on so august a person as a Housemaster. In spite of Mr. Sneff's assurance on the subject, he suspected that it was some thoughtless young clerk at the bank who had pulled his leg. He wished that he knew for certain! He would have been glad to get that thoughtless young clerk sacked!

Unwilling as he was to spend money, Mr. Ratcliff would have been glad, just then, to hail a passing taxi. But

passing taxis were few and far between in a lonely country lane.

There was no sign of a taxi or any other vehicle. Not even a farmer's cart—if the Housemaster could have asked for a lift in one! He would have been glad of a lift in almost anything.

Honk-honk-honk!

Mr. Ratcliff looked up hopefully.

It was the honking of a car! But his momentary hope died away as he saw that it was coming from the direction of the school. He wanted a lift, but not in the wrong direction. Mr. Ratcliff grunted angrily.

But the car slowed down and stopped. Mr. Ratcliff, looking at it, fancied that he had seen it before. It looked like the big car he had seen at the cross-roads when he had stopped there to speak to the bank manager. But if it was the same car, it was no longer loaded with the same crowd. Only one fellow was in it, who looked like a schoolboy. As for the driver, Mr. Ratcliff had not even glanced at him, and did not know him again. He did not, indeed, glance at him now, and certainly did not observe a twinkle in the eye of Mr. Snooks or a lurking grin on his plump face.

The schoolboy in the car stepped out.

"Looking for a lift, sir?" he asked, raising his cap very politely.

The Housemaster blinked at him.

"I should be very glad of a lift, if the car were going in my direction," he answered. "But——"

"Well, the car can turn easily enough," said Arthur Edward Lovell cheerfully. "If you're looking for a lift, I'm getting down here. The fact is, I've done with it now, and the driver would be glad of another job."

He glanced at the driver.

"Very glad, sir!" said Mr. Snooks. "Drive you anywhere, sir! Shilling a mile, sir, any distance."

Mr. Ratcliff jumped up from the grassy knoll.

This offer came like corn in Egypt in one of the lean years.

It was only half a mile to St. Jim's from that spot; so on the terms stated by Mr. Snooks, the charge would only be sixpence to get back to the school. But Mr. Ratcliff was prepared to go to the length of giving him a whole shilling, so troublesome were his corns.

"I shall be very glad to hire the car for a short distance," he said. "Can you turn in the lane here, my man?"

"Bit narrer here for turning, sir!" said the driver. "I can turn easy enough at the cross-roads, a bit farther up."

"Very good," said Mr. Ratcliff.

He stepped into the big car thankfully. Lovell stepped along to the driver and spoke in a low tone.

"You've got it clear, Snooks?"

"Yessir. Eightpence a mile for you, sir!"

"We'll see that the eightpences are all right," said Lovell, with a cheery grin. "It's worth a lot of eightpences."

"Anything to oblige, sir!" said Snooks. "Very glad to oblige you, sir, specially arter that little mistake on the phone this morning."

"Off you go, then!"

Lovell stepped back, raising his cap once more with great politeness in farewell to Mr. Ratcliff.

The car ran on.

Arthur Edward Lovell started walking in the opposite direction. It was not going to take him long to get back to St. Jim's. But it was likely to take Mr. Ratcliff much

longer—though he was not yet aware of that fact!

With a feeling of great satisfaction, the New House master leaned back in a seat in the big car.

It sped on to the cross-roads, where a short time ago the Rookwooders had witnessed his interview with Mr. Sneff.

But it did not slow down there to reverse.

It turned the corner and sped on.

Mr. Ratcliff sat up in surprise.

Why the driver was going on, instead of turning and going back, was past his comprehension.

But that was what the driver was doing!

Certainly it did not occur to Mr. Ratcliff that that polite schoolboy had had any ulterior motive in getting him that lift. Neither did he guess that the driver of the car had any private instructions. He was simply astonished.

"Driver!" called out Mr. Ratcliff. "Stop! You should have turned at that corner."

Mr. Snooks seemed deaf.

"That was the corner!" shouted Mr. Ratcliff.

Snooks drove on.

"Driver! Stop! Good gracious, is the man deaf? Driver! Will you stop?" yapped the New House master.

The driver certainly seemed deaf. He gave no attention whatever to the acid voice yapping from the car behind him.

He drove on, letting the car out to great speed! Mr. Ratcliff sat transfixed with astonishment and anger.

"The man is deaf or mad!" he gasped. "Upon my word! Deaf men should not be allowed to drive cars! It is dangerous! Upon my word!"

The car whizzed on. It avoided Wayland by taking a side-road, and rushed on into the open country.

Mr. Ratcliff leaned over and clutched the driver by the shoulder. The man glanced at him.

"Stop!" shouted Mr. Ratcliff frantically. "I desired a lift to the school. Cannot you understand? The school!"

"Yessir."

"You are going directly away from it."

"Yessir,"

"Are you deaf?"

"Yessir."

"Goodness gracious! The man appears to be stone deaf!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff. "Where can he possibly be taking me? He must have misunderstood, and—and—where can he be going?"

They were five miles from St. Jim's already. Mr. Ratcliff, in an absolutely frantic state, shouted, roared, and howled at the driver. Suddenly, to his immense relief, the car slowed down and stopped.

"Thank goodness!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff.

The driver dismounted and opened the bonnet. He stared and groped within and whistled.

Mr. Ratcliff descended. He was glad to get out of the car, at all events. He stared round him. Fields and trees and hedges met his gaze. He knew where he was—miles from the town of Wayland, the nearest spot where he could obtain a conveyance. He gritted his teeth.

Mr. Snooks seemed utterly engrossed in his engine. But he looked round as Mr. Ratcliff grabbed his arm.

"You utterly stupid man!" yapped Mr. Ratcliff. "You have brought me in the wrong direction."

"Yessir! It's the carburettor, I think," said Mr. Snooks.

"The—the what?"

"The carburettor! But it's all right—I'll get going again, sir! P'r'aps an hour——"

Mr. Ratcliff gazed at him. He had a strong suspicion that the man was either insane or intoxicated. He had not seemed deaf when Mr. Ratcliff hired his car in Rylcombe Lane; yet he had seemed stone deaf during that wild drive. Now, apparently, he had engine trouble—miles from everywhere. Mr. Ratcliff was disinclined to trust himself in that car again, even if the man agreed to drive him direct to St. Jim's. Certainly he was not willing to wait an hour while an insane or intoxicated man tinkered with the engine.

"Soon set her right, sir!" said Mr. Snooks cheerfully. "She's a good old bus, sir! If it's the carburettor, I'll 'ave her right under the hour. Now, where's them tools? My eye, if I forgot to put in my tools——"

Mr. Ratcliff breathed hard through his thin nose. Taking no further notice of the man, he turned away, and started walking in the direction of Wayland. If the man had claimed a fare, Mr. Ratcliff was prepared to refuse, in the most bitter and determined way, to give him a single penny! But the man did not claim a fare! With his head in the bonnet of the car he did not even seem to observe Mr. Ratcliff go. On the whole, Mr. Ratcliff was glad to get away without an argument with a man whom he suspected of being intoxicated, if not actually insane.

He walked to Wayland.

When he was out of sight, Mr. Snooks smiled, helped himself to a cigarette, and sat down cheerfully

to smoke. When, considerably later, Mr. Snooks drove away from that spot, the engine trouble seemed to have disappeared of its own accord! Mr. Snooks smiled as he drove. He had put in an extra ten miles to oblige Master Lovell, which at eightpence a mile came to six and eight. All was grist that came to Mr. Snooks' mill.

ing—they could do nothing else! But exactly what they were waiting for—and how long they were to wait—they did not know!

Lovell had asked them to leave it to him! If he had any stunt for getting the St. Jim's men out of their present disastrous scrape, they were

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER

THANKS TO LOVELL!

"THE ass!" breathed Jimmy Silver.

"The fathead!" murmured Raby.

"The dummy!" hissed Newcome.

Jimmy Silver and Co. were non-plussed. So, indeed, were Tom Merry and Co. The footballers were wait-



"You're playing those New House men, after all," said Kildare, giving Tom Merry a very keen look. "Aren't they detained this afternoon?" "They—they were," said Tom Merry. "But—hem—but—" Tom could not explain that they had broken detention!

only too willing to leave it to him. He had said that he would pull them through. How, they had no idea! Having said that, he had gone off in the car! And that was that!

The minutes that passed were packed with worry. Jimmy Silver and Co. were in a state of suppressed wrath. They had had some experience of leaving things to Lovell!

Tom Merry and his men were quite puzzled, but they had a tincture of hope. Anyhow they had to wait. It did not matter very much whether kick-off was a quarter of an hour later than the time fixed. Jimmy Silver could hardly decide to play without Lovell in the team. Tom Merry certainly could not begin the game, with Figgins and Co. in the ranks, at the risk of Ratty barging in and calling them off soon after the game had started. Both parties, therefore, were willing to wait, and see what on earth it was Arthur Edward Lovell intended.

But they were puzzled and worried.

Some of the fellows punted a footer about, to pass the long minutes. Others discussed the strange state of affairs.

Figgins and Co. remained on the spot. They were in dread, every moment, of seeing their Housemaster in the offing. Still, if there was a dog's chance of playing in the match, they weren't going back to the Form-room. Not if Figgy and Co. could help it.

"Bai Jove, you fellows," murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, "I weally fail to compwehend what that chap Lovell can do in the mattah, and I weally wathah feah that he is off his wockah! Do you fellows think he is off his wockah?"

"Blessed if I know," said Tom

Merry. "He said he would pull us through, but——"

"As that Indian chap at Greyfriars would say, the butfulness is terrific!" remarked Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"The car went off towards Rylcombe," said Figgins. "I suppose he can't be thinking of running over Ratty!"

"Bai Jove! That would keep the old bean cleah of us," remarked Arthur Augustus. "But it would be wathah a dwastic measuah, Figgay! I twust Lovell is not thinkin' of anythin' so vewy dwastic."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I make the fellow out!" said Kerr. "But one thing's certain; if there's a chance to play, we're playing."

"What-ho!" said Fatty Wynn emphatically.

"How long is the dashed ass going to be?" growled Herries. "Can't hear anything of the car coming back!"

"His pals don't seem to have a lot of faith in his stunt, whatever it is," grinned Kangaroo of the Shell. "They're calling him all sorts of names."

"Well, we've got to wait!" sighed Tom Merry. "Can't let Figgins and Kerr and Wynn join in unless we're safe about Ratty. But—oh, bother!"

"Blow!" said Monty Lowther. Lowther's spirits were quite dashed by the unexpected failure of his great scheme.

"All that ass Gussy's fault!" growled Figgins. "If he hadn't got us detained——"

"Weally, Figgins——"

"Hallo!" yelled Blake. "Here's Lovell!"

"Bai Jove! Here he comes!"

Arthur Edward Lovell reappeared

in sight, coming down to the football field at a rapid run. His face was pink with exertion. Evidently he had been hurrying.

The juniors stared at him. They had heard no sound of a returning car. It seemed that Lovell had left the car somewhere, and returned on foot.

They were more and more puzzled.

"Kick him!" murmured Raby.

"Kick him as soon as he gets here, the silly ass!"

"Hard!" said Newcome, with a nod.

Jimmy Silver laughed.

"Let's hear first what he's done," he said. "Give a man a chance."

"Rot! You know what comes of leaving anything to Lovell!" growled Raby. "What he wants is a jolly good kicking."

All eyes were on Lovell as he came trotting up. Not only the footballers, but a crowd of fellows who had gathered round the field, watched him with curiosity. Lefevre of the Fifth, who was going to referee the match, stared at him rather grimly.

"Is that the man you're waiting for?" he asked.

"That's the man," answered Jimmy Silver.

"Then I suppose you'll get started, sooner or later!" grunted Lefevre.

Without answering that remark, Jimmy Silver and Co. ran to meet Lovell. The St. Jim's fellows followed.

Lovell stopped, breathing rather hard, but grinning. It was clear that he had come back in a state of great satisfaction.

"Well?" hooted Jimmy.

Lovell chuckled.

"All serene!" he said.

"Look here, put us wise, there's a good fellow!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"You've been gone a quarter of an hour, and Ratcliff may come in any second now, and if he finds these three fellows out of detention——"

"He won't!" chuckled Lovell.

"But how?"

"I've lent him the car!"

"What!" roared a score of voices.

"Lent him the car!" said Lovell cheerily. "The old bean was fagged, you know, and I thought he'd like a lift. He jumped at it."

"You—you—you've lent Ratty your car!" gasped Tom Merry, while Jimmy Silver and Co. gazed speechlessly at the happy Arthur Edward. "That means that he will get here sooner——"

"Later!" corrected Lovell.

"Later in a car than by walking?" said Tom.

"Lots!"

"Look here, Lovell——" roared Jimmy Silver.

"Give a man a chance to speak," said Lovell. "You see, it depends on the direction taken by the car. I've tipped Snooks to take him on a run into the country——"

"Wha-a-t!"

"And land him somewhere miles from a station——"

"Oh!"

"And he'll do it!" said Lovell. "Snooks is a very obliging man. He will do anything for a tip!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Lovell!" gasped Jimmy.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Figgins.

"You—you—you've tipped your driver to take Ratty for a ride——"

"Miles!" said Lovell.

"And—and strand him!"

"Just that!"

"Oh, crikey!"

"And—and—and has it worked?" gasped Tom Merry.

"Like a charm! Last I saw of the

car, it was doing forty, with the bony old bean inside ! ”

“ Great pip ! ”

The juniors gazed at Arthur Edward Lovell. They just gazed ! He had almost taken their breath away.

“ Then—then—— ” Tom found his voice. “ Then Ratty’s safe off the scene ! ”

“ Safe for some time, at any rate ! ” said Lovell cheerfully. “ He will blow in later—tired, very likely ! I dare say we shall be gone by then—I’d rather not meet him again, if avoidable. I think very likely he might be unpleasant. ”

“ Bai Jove ! I should think that vewy pwobable indeed ! ”

“ Ha, ha, ha ! ”

“ Anyhow, I’ve told Snooks to bring back the car after he’s stranded him, and wait at a distance from the school here, ” said Lovell. “ We can walk to the car after the game. Might be a row, or something, if the bony old bean ran into Snooks here, what ? ”

“ Well, my hat ! ” said Jimmy Silver.

Raby and Newcome could only stare—or rather, gape ! Leaving it to Lovell had, for once, been a success !

There was no doubt about that ! Lovell had done the trick ! He had worked the oracle ! He was the goods !

“ Bai Jove, you men, I weally think we ought to pass a vote of thanks to Lovell ! ” said Arthur Augustus D’Arcy.

“ Hear, hear ! ”

“ Passed unanimously ! ”

“ Bravo ! ”

Arthur Edward smiled complacently.

“ Not at all ! ” he said. “ Just an idea, you know ! You see, it was

my doing that we had a car here at all—the fellows left it to me, and I fixed it. I generally manage all right when things are left to me. ”

Jimmy Silver gasped. Then he laughed.

“ Let’s get going ! ” he said.

And the footballers, in a joyous mood, safe now from interference from the obnoxious Ratty, got going !

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER

A GREAT GAME !

TOM MERRY kicked off.

The game was soon going hot and strong.

Rookwood had come over in great form ; but they found the home team in great form also. In the first few minutes of the game, Rookwood got through, and made a fierce attack on goal. But a fat figure in the St. Jim’s goal seemed all eyes and hands and feet. The deadliest shot failed to beat David Llewellyn Wynn. Again and again the fat Fourth-Former saved, till the leather went to midfield, with the St. Jim’s men after it.

“ Bravo, Fatty ! ” shouted fellows round the goal. Fatty Wynn grinned at them cheerily.

“ This is better than detention ! ” he said.

“ Ha, ha, ha ! ”

No doubt it was ! After that sample of Fatty Wynn between the posts, Jimmy Silver and Co. realised that they had all their work cut out to carry out their programme of beating St. Jim’s on their own ground.

But for Arthur Edward Lovell, that capable custodian would not have been standing in the chicken-run. Neither, it was certain, would the first goal have been scored by George Figgins—as it actually was ! Figgy was the first man to find the net,

amid a roar of cheers from the St. Jim's crowd.

"Goal!"

"Bravo, Figgy!"

"Good man!" gasped Tom Merry, clapping the New House junior on the back. "Good man, Figgy!"

George Figgins chuckled.

"We owe that to that Rookwood man, Lovell!" he said.

And Tom Merry laughed.

There was no doubt that the St. Jim's men owed a great deal to Arthur Edward Lovell. The teams were fairly evenly matched; but without Figgins and Co., St. Jim's would certainly have been playing a losing game.

The Rookwooders were quite aware

of that fact.

But they were too good sportsmen to care about that.

They were at St. Jim's to play the game;

and though they certainly were very keen on winning,

they did not

want a hollow victory over a weakened team. If Jimmy Silver and Co. could not beat St. Jim's at their best, they were willing to take what was coming to them.

But they were going to beat them if they could! And they put a lot of beef into it.

The Rookwood attack was fast and furious; and again and again they came down on the home goal,

like wolves on the fold. But David Llewellyn Wynn was a tower of strength between the posts.

It was not till close on half-time that Raby put the leather in for Rookwood, and the score stood level when Lefevre blew the whistle.

It had been a rather gruelling half; and all the men



Receiving the ball from Jimmy Silver, Mornington rushed it down on the home goal and then let drive. Thud! It was a great shot, and Fatty Wynn made a vain effort to prevent the ball entering the net. "Goal!" howled the Rookwooders. "Goal! Hurrah!"

were breathing hard and glad of a rest.

In the excitement of the keen game, they had forgotten all about Ratty. In the interval, they remembered the unpleasant existence of that gentleman.

Tom Merry cast a quick glance round, as he sucked a lemon. But there was no sign of a tall, angular figure. Mr. Ratcliff was still at a safe distance.

Nearly all the Lower School of St. Jim's had gathered round the ropes to watch. Among them were a good many seniors, for the game was well worth watching. And it was rather gratifying to the juniors to see the athletic figure of Kildare, the captain of the school, in the crowd. This was honour indeed for the junior eleven!

"Bai Jove! There's old Kildare!" remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Jollay old Kildare lookin' on, deah boys."

"Looking for those goals you were going to get, perhaps!" remarked Blake. "He will have to go on looking."

"Weally, Blake——"

"Hallo, he's making faces at you, Tom!" said Monty Lowther.

Kildare of the Sixth was not exactly making faces at Tom Merry. But he was beckoning to him.

Tom went across to the ropes, to see what he wanted. He had rather a misgiving that he could guess!

Kildare gave him a very keen look.

"You're playing those New House men, after all," he said.

"Um! Yes!"

"Aren't they detained this afternoon?"

"They—they were!" murmured Tom. "But—hem—but——"

Kildare looked rather grave. He was a keen footballer, and in complete

sympathy with the junior captain in this matter. Still, he was a Sixth Form man and a prefect.

Then a faint smile dawned on Kildare's face. He remembered what Mr. Ratcliff had said to him that morning!

"Well, I suppose it's no bizney of mine!" he remarked. "Mr. Ratcliff told me this morning that he desired neither advice nor assistance from a School House prefect in the management of his House! I suppose he knew what he was talking about."

And Kildare, with a nod to Tom, strolled away. Tom Merry was smiling as he rejoined his friends.

The sides lined up for the second half. There was still no sign of Mr. Ratcliff, and the juniors had no doubt that he was still wearily walking from the solitary spot where Snooks had stranded him. They charitably hoped that the walk would do him good!

The whistle went.

It was hammer and tongs again, both sides going strong. A goal came to Tom Merry, and St. Jim's were leading two—one.

Then came a determined attack from Rookwood, overrunning the defence, with the exception of the fat Fourth-Former in goal, who not only seemed all eyes and hands and feet, but seemed to have two or three pairs of each! There were three or four narrow escapes, before St. Jim's rallied and drove the enemy over the half-way line again. Fatty Wynn fanned his crimson face in goal.

Now came Arthur Augustus' chance. Gussy, so far, had contributed none of those brilliant goals with which he had intended to enliven the match and enrich the home score.

Now the ball was at his feet, and one at least of those brilliant goals was on the point of materialising!

But at the psychological moment a Rookwood half crashed into Gussy, and the swell of St. Jim's found himself sprawling, with Arthur Edward Lovell sprawling over him.

Arthur Augustus gasped. Arthur Edward grinned. Where the leather went, Gussy did not know!

But Jimmy Silver knew!

He sent it to Mornington, who rushed it down to the home goal, and for once took David Llewellyn Wynn by surprise.

There was a howl from the Rookwooders.

"Goal!"

"Hurrah!"

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus, as he staggered up. It was quite a brilliant goal; but it was not, unfortunately, Gussy's; it was Rookwood's!

"Two all," said Tom Merry, as the footballers went back to the centre of the field, "and five minutes to go! We've got to pull up our socks, you men, and whop 'em!"

"Two all," said Jimmy Silver, at the same moment, "and five minutes to go! We've got to put some beef into it, you fellows, and mop 'em up!"

And both sides played up to the finish with that deadly determination which was rather like the old story of the irresistible force brought to bear upon the immovable object!

They were still going strong when the whistle went!

And the great game ended in a draw. Honours were even!

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER

ALL SERENE!

"FIVE minutes to five!" remarked Figgins.

"Only five minutes more!" yawned Kerr.

"I'm ready for tea!" remarked Fatty Wynn.

Figgins and Co. made those remarks, as the door-handle turned and the door of the Fourth Form room opened.

Mr. Ratcliff heard them as he opened the door.

Nobody looking at Figgins and Co. just then, sitting patiently at their desks with piles of finished lines before them, would have supposed that they had been engaged in a strenuous football match that afternoon! Nobody would have supposed that they had changed after it—the quickest change on record—and fairly flown from the changing-room to the Form-room; and that they had been there only three or four minutes.

Certainly Mr. Ratcliff had no reason to suppose so!

He looked in, sourly.

He was tired—very tired! He was cross—very cross! Still, there seemed no reason for visiting his crossness on the devoted heads of Figgins and Co.!

He had had to walk to Wayland from the spot where he had parted with the cheerful Mr. Snooks. From Wayland he had taken a taxi back to the school, partly because he was so very tired, partly because his tea-time was at five. And here he was, looking sourly into the Form-room—acidly resolved to keep the three juniors in detention if they had not finished their lines!

He stepped in.

Figgins and Co. rose respectfully. He eyed them, and then eyed the lines. But there was no fault to be found with the lines. Three impositions of five hundred lines each, quite nicely written, were ready for Ratty's inspection.

There was a grim silence for a moment. Then—

"You may go!" said Mr. Ratcliff.

"Thank you, sir!" said Figgins.

And they went!

Outside, in the passage, they winked at one another! Then they scudded away, to join Tom Merry and Co. who were entertaining the Rookwooders in the School House after the match.

Mr. Ratcliff walked sourly back to his own House.

He was glad to sink into the armchair in his study, after his fatiguing adventures that eventful afternoon.

He saw nothing of the merry party in the School House, and knew nothing of it. Which was just as well, for he might have recognised among the Rookwooders the polite youth who had placed Mr. Snooks' car at his disposal; and that might have led to trouble!

After tea, Tom Merry and Co. walked with the Rookwood crowd to the spot where Mr. Snooks waited for them with the car, and saw them off.

"Beat you next time, old bean!" said Tom Merry and Jimmy Silver simultaneously—and they laughed, and parted.

. . . !

Nobody ever discovered who had put through that mysterious telephone call to Mr. Ratcliff on Rookwood day.

Certainly, there were plenty of fellows who knew, but the fellows who knew kept their own counsel.

Mr. Ratcliff never knew! And that was all that mattered!

THE END

THE TIGER OF THE SEAS!

It happened one hot morning during the summer holidays. Jimmy Silver and his chums, Lovell, Raby and Newcome, of the Fourth Form at Rookwood School, were staying together in a little fishing village on the Cornish coast. With them, also, on a short visit were Val Mornington and Tubby Muffin, who, truth to tell, had invited himself!

The six boys took out a rowing-boat and paddled lazily about the bay. Jimmy Silver and Lovell elected to bathe, and Tubby Muffin decided to join them.

The three boys swam to an isolated rock which jutted out of the bay. Jimmy and Lovell dived in again and swam back to the boat, but Tubby Muffin seemed reluctant to take the plunge. Shouts of encouragement from the boat failed to move him; then a sudden flurry in the water showed that there was a very good reason for Tubby's hesitation!

For swimming round and round the rock was a shark, albeit a small one! The sinister triangular fin of the tiger of the seas seemed to have a sort of horrid fascination for the fat Tubby, as it sheared through the water.

It was dinner-time for Tubby; and he wondered dismally whether it was the shark's dinner-time too!

Tubby's yells soon brought the boat up to take him off, and the shark, balked of his fat prey, made off out to sea. After that, Tubby Muffin did not bathe again! The boys learned from the fishermen that such unwelcome visitors, though very rare in those parts, did sometimes stray into home waters.