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THE SMART SET AT ST. JIM'S.

LONG, COMPLETE
TALE OF
TOM MERRY.

By
MARTIN CLIFFORD



SNAPPED
IN THE
ACT!

NO. 26

VOL. 1.

Snap!
Snap! Only
a few seconds
apart came the
snaps. The Smart
Set started up in
amazement. "What
on earth's that?"
exclaimed Gore.

G



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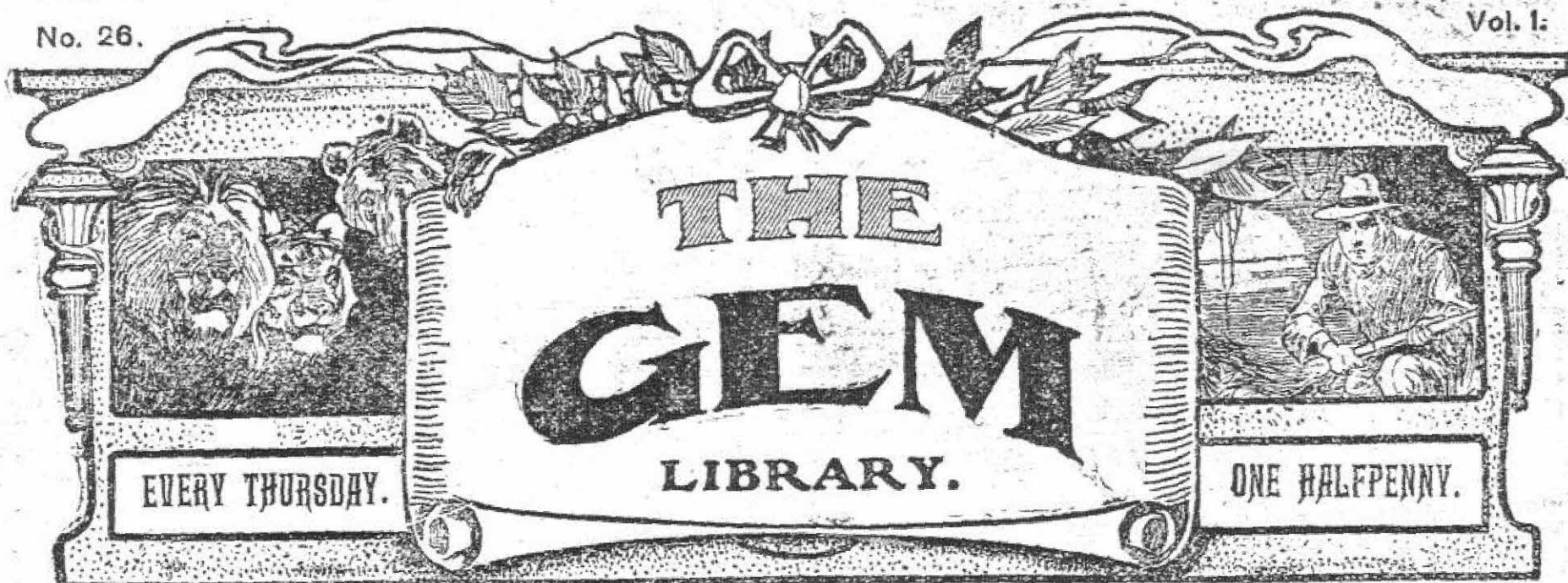
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THE SMART SET AT ST. JIM'S.

A TALE OF
**TOM MERRY'S
SCHOOLDAYS.**

By
**MARTIN
CLIFFORD.**

CHAPTER 1. The Smart Set.

TOM MERRY sat up on the grassy bank and stared.
"I say, Manners!"

His chum, who was deep in the ferns, lying at full length and resting on his elbows while he read the latest number of "Pluck," gave a grunt.

"Manners!"

"What's the row?" said Manners, without looking up. "Why can't you let a fellow alone when he's reading, Tom Merry?"

"There's something on," said Tom impressively. "I don't know what it is, but there's some little game on. Look here."

Manners sat up, looking resigned. It was half-holiday at St. Jim's, and the chums of the Shell—known in the school as the Terrible Two—had taken a stroll through the Castle Wood, in the direction of the ruined castle on the hill.

On the path up the hill they had taken a little rest. It was a drowsy autumn afternoon, and it was pleasant to sit there in the deep, thick grass among the bushes, under the old trees, with the hum of insects in their ears. Manners had begun to read, and Tom Merry busied himself in mending a damaged pocket-knife.

It was while he was thus engaged that Tom Merry's attention was attracted by the sight of a junior from St. Jim's coming up the path to the ruined castle.

There was nothing surprising in that, in itself, but it was the manner of the youngster that excited Tom Merry's curiosity.

He was looking to right and left in an extremely cautious way as he came up the path, as if in fear of being watched.

The chums were hidden by the grass and bushes, and the new-comer did not see them, in spite of his watchfulness. He passed on and disappeared into the old castle.

Tom Merry had wondered, but he would soon have forgotten the circumstance, had not a second junior appeared a few minutes later, coming up the path to the castle in the same cautious manner. He, too, passed on into the castle.

Tom Merry wondered more. When two more juniors



Before Gore could wriggle in at the window Figgins had a grip on each of his ankles, and held him fast.

had passed in the same way, in the same direction, he roused up Manners.

"There's something on," he repeated. "Four kids have just gone into the ruins, old chap, looking as if they were going to plot a plot, or scheme a scheme."

"Let 'em plot plots, and scheme schemes, till they get a crick in the neck," said Manners; "I'm reading."

"No, you're not," said Tom, calmly jerking the book away and stuffing it into his pocket. "You're looking into the affair with me, Manners."

Manners grunted.

"Well, what's it all about?"

he asked resignedly. "Why shouldn't the kids sneak into the ruins if they want to? Hallo, there's Gore!"

Gore, of the Shell, was coming up the path. He, too, looked round cautiously, and hurried into the old castle.

Manners stared at Tom Merry.

"The plot thickens," he murmured. "Gore is generally up to some mischief, and sometimes in a sort that won't bear investigation. I expect it's a smoking bee."

"Well, we had better look into it," said Tom Merry. "Hullo, there's some more!"

Mellish and Jones of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's were coming up the path. They passed on into the ruins.

"More of Gore's set," said Tom Merry. "I've known there's been something going on under the rose for some time."

"Perhaps it's only some scheme of the School House against the New House, suggested Manners.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"No, it isn't that," he said. "Three of the chaps who went in first belonged to the New House, and the rest to our house. It isn't a house row."

Manners looked interested.

"Perhaps Gore is working up your old idea—an alliance, you know, of School House and New House juniors, to take us down a peg or two," he said. "He would like to bring us down off our perch, you know."

"Well, we're going to look into it," said Tom Merry. "As leaders of the junior portion of the School House at St. Jim's

Thursday.

ONE LONG, COMPLETE SCHOOL STORY.

One Halfpenny

it's our duty to do so, and nice dutiful chaps like us never neglect our duties. I wonder if they're all in?"

"No, here comes another."

Another youth was coming up the path.

"My hat!" said Manners. "It's Gussy!"

"D'Arcy! By Jove!"

The youth they had just perceived was by no means a common sort of individual. There was no possibility of mistaking Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of Study No. 6 in the School House, for anybody else at St. Jim's. D'Arcy was the swell of the School House, and on the present occasion he had "done himself down" in an extremely nobby manner.

His Eton suit fitted him like a glove, his boots had an aggressive polish, his hat was the tallest and shiniest ever seen at St. Jim's, his gloves were lavender, and his waistcoat was a coat of many colours. He had an eyeglass screwed into his eye, and he surveyed the path through it as he came along, with as much caution as the other juniors had shown.

"D'Arcy!" murmured Tom Merry. "Then I expect we shall see Blake and Herries! Those three bounders always go together; they stick together like thieves, or Figgins & Co."

"What an extremely wuff path!" they heard Arthur Augustus murmur as he passed them. "My boots are awfully beastly dusty, bai Jove!"

He paused for a moment to flick the dust from his boots with a handkerchief, from which a sweet scent was wafted to the noses of the Terrible Two.

"I weally do not see why this meetin' couldn't be held in one of the studies at the coll," muttered D'Arcy. "It is extwemely fatiguin' to walk to this wotten old wuin."

He passed on into the ruined castle.

Tom Merry jumped up.

"He's the last. Blake and Herries aren't in this act, Manners. Come on."

"Where are you going?"

"Into the ruins, to see what the giddy conspirators are up to."

And Tom Merry led the way.

He did not go through the ancient gateway as the juniors had done, but selected a spot where the old castle wall had yielded to the ravages of time, and showed a deep gap. The Terrible Two clambered through the gap, and found themselves within what remained of the ancient castle.

"Hallo," muttered Tom Merry; "there they are!"

Amid the masses of fallen masonry they could see the mysterious meeting.

Eight juniors were sitting on chunks of stone or brickwork, in a rough circle, all of them looking very solemn and serious.

Gore looked round the circle. It was clear that Gore was the leader.

"We're not all here," he said. "But I don't see why we should wait. Have you all kept it dark as I told you?"

"Yes."

"Yaas, wathah," said Arthur Augustus. "I have not bweathed a word to a soul. I told Blake and Hewwies that I could not tell them where I was going, because I had pwomised you, Goah!"

Gore frowned.

"What did you want to mention me for, fathead? I——"

D'Arcy rose to his feet.

"I don't know yet what the purpose of this meetin' is," he said. "But befoah the pwocceedin's start, I want it to be understood that I am to be tweated with pwoper wespect."

"Look here——"

"I stwongly object to bein' weferred to as a fathead. I have seveval times quawwelled with Blake and Hewwies because they persist in chawactewisin' me as an ass! I wefuse to be alluded to as a fathead!"

"Sit down——"

"I wefuse to sit down until this mattah has been settled. Am I to be tweated with pwoper wespect?"

"I'll treat you to a thick ear if you don't shut up."

"Then I weally think I had better wetire fwom the meetin'," said D'Arcy. "It is imposs. for me to submit to such expwesions. I must consider my dig."

"You'll get a dig in the eye if you don't stop playing the giddy ox," said Gore. "I'm getting fed up with your dig, I warn you."

"Then I will wespectfully wetire fwom the meetin'."

"Sit down," said Gore, in a rather more conciliatory manner.

"Don't be an ass! Sit down, and let's get on with the washing."

"I do not wish to be obstinate," said D'Arcy. "I desire to pwomote the harmony of this meetin' in every manner poss., but befoah I sit down I must be assured that I am to be tweated with pwopah wespect."

"Oh, kill him, somebody!" said Mellish.

"Oh, sit down, Gussy!" said Gore impatiently. "We'll treat you with as much respect as you deserve, never fear."

"Thanks!" said Arthur Augustus, with a graceful bow. "I am satisfied."

And he sat down again upon his chunk of masonry.

"Now, gentlemen," said Gore, looking round. "I have asked you to hold a most important meeting, and it's held in this lonely spot to make sure that we sha'n't be interrupted, and that those rotters, Merry and Manners, won't get on the track."

"Hear, hear," said Jones.

"Some of you," said Gore, "are in the secret already. Others are new recruits to the movement, and will have to have things explained to them. It's a revolt."

The hearers looked duly impressed.

"Things have been getting into a rotten state at St. Jim's," said Gore, "especially since Tom Merry came to the school. People talk about the strenuous life, but it may be made too strenuous. When it comes to compulsory cricket or football I think it's time to put one's foot down. Why should a chap exert himself if he doesn't want to?"

"Why?" said Mellish cordially.

"Yaas, wathah," said D'Arcy. "I have an extweme objection to exertin' myself at all, at any time, still I must say that cwicket is a gwand game."

"Let those play it who like it, then," said Gore. "I don't! I like to smoke a cigarette in my study. Why shouldn't I if I want to?"

"It's extwemely bad for the wind," said D'Arcy. "You feel the wotton effects of it if you twy to wun afterwards."

"Well, it's my wind that suffers, not anybody else's," said Gore. "I'm going to do as I like. Let's all do as we like. That's the idea."

"Jolly good idea," said Jones.

"Things are too slow at St. Jim's," continued Gore. "The Smart Set have always been sat on and put down. In the upper Forms, Kildare comes down like a hundred of bricks on a chap who tries to go the pace——"

"What do you mean by going the pace, deah boy?" asked D'Arcy.

"I mean smoking, and putting money on horses, and having a drink, too, if we like."

"Kildare says that's wotten blackguardism," said D'Arcy "and with all wespect to you, Goah, I weally think he is quite wight."

"Are you looking for a black eye, Gussy?"

"Certainly not."

"Well, you're going the right way to find one. Now you snaps, my idea is this, that the ~~upper~~ form fellows can be killed by the prefects if they like, but we're going to stand against tyranny. The athletic set can play cricket all day and all night if they like, but the smart set are not going to be sat on. We're the smart set. We're going to keep our end up, and if we can't do it openly, we'll do it secretly."

"Hear, hear!"

"This rotten rowing between the two houses," continued Gore, "is silly rot. What do we want to row one another for? Better have a quiet smoke together."

"Hear, hear!"

"Let the other chaps go on rowing, and playing cricket and footer, if they like. We're not going to. We're going to gather in all the recruits we can to the cause of independence, and make a stand against tyranny."

"Hear, hear!"

Gore produced a packet from his pocket.

"I've got a lot of cigarettes here," he said. "It's my treat. Light up, all of you."

The cigarettes were handed round.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy rose to his feet.

He serewed his monocle into his eye and stared at Gore.

"I was wequested," said Arthur Augustus, with emphasis, "to attend a meetin' for the purpose of pwomotin' the interests of the Smart Set. I came with pleasuah, but I didn't think that I was being asked to a meetin' of silly wascals."

"What's that?" exclaimed Gore. "Who are you callin' rascals?"

"All of you," said Arthur Augustus, with an inclusive sweep of his hand. "All of you are silly wascals. This smokin' business is extwemely silly. As for not playin' cwicket, I'm weally ashamed to hear any chap say such a thing. You are a set of silly wascals, and I tell you so for your own good."

Considering that D'Arcy was telling them for their own good, the Smart Set did not look very grateful. Gore was turning back his cuffs in a very suggestive way.

"My advice to you is," went on D'Arcy, "not to listen to Goah, and not to smoke those beastly cheap cigawettes. All of you come with me to the tuck-shop in the village, and I'll tweat you to ice-cwream. Chuck those nasty things away, deah boys."

"I'll chuck you away," howled Gore, who saw that Gussy's eloquence was having its effect, especially the reference to ice-cream. "You've been asking for it a long time, and now you're going to get it."

"Get what?"

"The licking of your life, my son. I'll teach you to preach to us."

"I weally had no intention of pweachin'——"

"Nice sort of chap you are to preach, too. Do you ever think of anything but tall hats and high collars? Gr-r-r!"

Gore rushed at Arthur Augustus.

Fortunately, he caught his foot in a stone, and went down headlong before he reached the swell of the School House, and the thump elicited a loud howl from him.

D'Arcy gazed at him calmly through his eyeglass.

"How extremely clumsy of you, Goah! I should think you would hurt yourself fallin' about in that way. I should, weally!"

Gore scrambled up, red with rage.

"Get hold of the brute, chaps!"

"I am not a bwute, and I wefuse to be taken hold of," said D'Arcy indignantly. "You pwomised to tweek me with pwopah wespsect—"

"We'll slay you, you preaching tailor's dummy, that's what we'll do."

And it really seemed as if the swell of St. Jim's was booked for a rough experience.

But just at that moment a voice came from the ruins.

"Vat is all tat pefore? Poys, vat are you doing here mit yourselves after?"

Gore gave a gasp.

"It's old Schneider!"

He knew the voice of the German master at St. Jim's.

In a moment the Smart Set was scattered far and wide, running in all directions like hares, leaving most of the cigarettes unsmoked on the ground.

Arthur Augustus was saved!

The voice of the German master, without the sight of him, had been quite enough for Gore and the Smart Set. In the words of the poet, they did not stand upon the order of their going, but went at once.

The pattering of active feet died away in the distance; as if by magic the gathering of the Smart Set of St. Jim's had vanished!

But Augustus did not run with the rest; he stood looking round him in a surprised and fluttered condition.

"Hallo, Gussy!"

The Terrible Two came out of the ruins as the last of the Smart Set vanished, and Tom Merry gave the surprised D'Arcy a powerful slap on the back.

Gussy jumped, and ~~his eyes were jerked away from his eye~~ and hung down at the end of its silken cord.

"Tom Mewwy!"

"Yes, old son, just in time to save you from being scalped," said Tom. "Bravo, Gussy! I'm proud of you!"

And he was about to give the swell of St. Jim's another forcible demonstration of his admiration, when Arthur Augustus skipped out of his way.

"You can be as pwoud of me as you like, Tom Mewwy, but I weally must insist upon your not bein' so extwemely wuff," exclaimed D'Arcy.

"But you really are a chap to be encouraged," said Tom Merry. "The way you stood out against those silly kids was splendid. I never thought you had it in you."

D'Arcy purred.

"I am weally extwemely bwave when I get my back up," he said, "and weally Goah quite pwovoked me. But where is Herr Schneider?"

"Somewhere at the school, I suppose."

"But I heard his voice," said Arthur Augustus, looking bewildered.

Tom Merry laughed.

"You heard me imitate it, Gussy, old son, to scare those silly bounders away. They were rather too many to tackle on our lonesome, you know, so I borrowed old Schneider's beautiful accent. Manners, vas not dot so after?"

"It vas pefore?" said Manners.

"I am extwemely obliged to you," said Arthur Augustus, with a graceful bow. "I think it was the intention of those boundahs to be vewy wuff. They requested me to come to their meetin' and I came, but I did not know what it was all about. I certainly do not intend to give up cwicket in favah of cigawette smokin'."

"I should think not," said Tom Merry. "Considering how you play cricket, that would be too great a loss to St. Jim's."

"I agwee with you, Mewwy."

Manners seemed about to choke. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was impervious to irony. Tom Merry slipped his arm through that of the swell of St. Jim's.

"Come along, Gussy."

"Where are you going, Tom Mewwy?"

"Why, to the village, of course, for that ice-cream."

"What ice-cwream?"

"The ice-cream you were going to treat those bounders to. Under the circumstances, you can't do better than treat your heroic rescuers to it."

"Rather!" said Manners. "Just what I was thinking. It's a jolly good idea of yours, Adolphus."

"But it's not my—"

"Oh, yes, it is," said Tom. "Are you coming with us, or shall we tell Mother Murphy to chalk it up to your credit?"

"I think I'll come," said Arthur Augustus, after some reflection. "Twot along, deah boys!"

And the dear boys trotted along.

CHAPTER 2.

Who Shall Be Leader?

KILDARE, the captain of St. Jim's, put his head into Study No. 10, the apartment which had the honour of sheltering the chums of the Shell. The Terrible Two looked at him. Tom Merry was mending a fishing-rod, and Manners was finishing some prints.

Kildare nodded genially.

"Ah, I thought I heard you two kids come in," he remarked. Tom Merry sniffed.

"Who are you calling kids?" he demanded.

"My mistake," said Kildare, coming into the study. "I want to speak to you chaps."

"That's better. Take a seat, if you can find one. Manners, you ass, what have you got your silly prints all over the room for. I trod on one only just now—"

"You trod on one of my prints?" howled Manners.

"Yes. Does it hurt 'em to tread on 'em?" asked Tom innocently.

The amateur photographer looked daggers at his chief.

Kildare laughed.

"I'll sit on the table," he said. "I want to speak to you fellows seriously. You are generally regarded as the head of the juniors in this house, Merry."

Tom Merry rose, bowed, and sat down again.

"Quite right," he remarked. "But Blake and the chaps in Study No. 6 can't see it. They are very obstinate on that point, those kids."

Kildare laughed again.

"Well, I have spoken to Blake as well," he said. "But to come to the point. There are some things going on in the lower forms that I don't like."

"What's the row?"

"For one thing, a good many of the youngsters have started copying the bad manners of some of the Sixth," said Kildare. "You know there used to be what they called a Smart Set in the Sixth, and a nice blackguardly set it was. Since Monteith and I have been on better terms than we used to be we've managed to keep things pretty straight in the upper Forms. But, unfortunately, there's something of the kind obtaining in the lower."

Tom Merry nodded.

With the meeting of Gore and his friends at the ruined castle fresh in his mind, he knew more about that than the captain of the school did.

"Some of the youngsters," went on Kildare, "have taken to smoking in their studies, and I have had information that one or two of them have been seen going to the Golden Pig in the village, a place where a low gambling set hang out. Anything of this sort is much more serious among juniors than seniors, and it's got to be put a stop to."

"I should say so."

"As I have said, I can keep my eye on the upper Forms, but in the lower it is more difficult, and that is where I want your help, Merry."

"My help?" said Tom, in surprise.

"Yes. I want you to look into this. You can look into the matter better than I can, and you may be able to do a lot of good without my assistance. But if you want me, you have only to come and tell me so. You understand? I should be sorry to have any fellow kicked out of school, but that is what that sort of conduct leads to."

"I see."

"If it could be stopped without a row, it would be better. Blake has promised to do his best, and so has Figgins of the New House. If you two join in heartily, I have no doubt that the matter will end without any unpleasantness."

"Of course," said Tom casually. "You've told Blake and Figgins that I'm the head of the affair."

"No, I'm afraid I forgot that important point," said Kildare, with a smile. "You can tell them that yourself, Merry."

"Right-ho! I'll see them about it and explain," said Tom.

"Well, I think I can promise you to look into this matter Kildare, and I'll do my best."

"Thank you, Merry," said Kildare gravely.

And the captain of St. Jim's left the study.

The Terrible Two looked at one another.

"I don't mind doing old Kildare a good turn," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "He's a good sort. And, as a matter of fact, we were thinking of looking into the affair ourselves."

"That's so. Of course, we know that Gore is at the head of the business."

"Of course he is. Kildare doesn't know that, but we do. I don't know exactly how to handle Gore. Of course, I could give him a hiding."

"That would very likely do him a lot of good."

"Yes; but it mightn't cure him of his naughty ways," said Tom, shaking his head. "A hiding sometimes makes a fellow all the more obstinate, and I don't want to be put to the trouble for nothing."

"If there is any lower Form chap goes to the Golden Pig, it's Gore," said Manners decidedly. "He must be a rotten cad. If it came out it would be a disgrace for the school."

"We've got to cure him," said Tom Merry. "I'm sorry Kildare forgot to mention to Blake that I am to be at the head of the movement. It may lead to misunderstandings. Suppose we go along to Study No. 6, and see them about it."

"Can't do better."

And, leaving their occupations just where they were, the Terrible Two left the study, and made their way to the quarters of Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy.

They found the chums of the Fourth Form at home, having tea.

"Hallo!" said Blake hospitably. "Come in! You're late, but there's still a sardine left, and you can have it between you. Don't spare the grub."

"Thanks; but we haven't come to tea," said Tom Merry apparently not fascinated by that solitary sardine. "We've come for a little talk."

"All right, I don't mind," said Blake. "Go ahead! You don't mind if I do my preparation while you're talking, do you?"

"Don't rot, Blake. This is a business matter."

"Fire away!" said Blake resignedly. "Don't both speak at once."

"It's about the Smart Set."

"Kildare has just been speaking to us on that subject."

"Yes, he wants us to look into it, and he thinks you may be able to do some good under my guidance."

"Under what?" asked Blake unpleasantly.

"Under my lead," said Tom Merry. "Of course, as a member of a higher Form, and a fellow a good deal older than you, I take the lead."

"How much older?" asked Blake. "About a fortnight? As for taking the lead, I've been fed up with your leading. With your Triple Alliances and your hobby clubs you're enough to turn a fellow's hair grey!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, somebody must be leader," said Tom. "And as I'm the fittest person—"

"Oh, rats! You are trying to be funny, now."

"Yaas, I should say so. The leadah ought to be pprovided by this study. I have been thinkin', deah boys, that I should not make a bad leadah."

That was D'Arcy's contribution to the discussion.

"Oh, you dry up!" said Blake. "You make me tired."

"I wefuse to dwy up. I—"

"Hallo, here's Figgins!"

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, known throughout St. Jim's as Figgins & Co., presented themselves at the door of the study. The great Figgins gave a condescending grin.

"Hallo!" said Blake politely, "What have you been doing with your face, Figgy?"

Figgy passed his hand over his face.

"What's the matter with it?"

"That's what I want to know. I suppose it is a face?"

Figgins frowned darkly.

"I haven't come here to row," he said. "But—"

"What have you come for, then?"

"I've come for a little talk."

"Oh, great pip!" groaned Blake. "Here's another one come to talk. You and Tom Merry will have to take it in turns, that's all. Do you think you could do it out in the passage there, with the door shut?"

"It's about the Smart Set," said Figgins, ignoring Blake's playful suggestion. "Kildare and Monteith have been talking to us, and we've decided to take a hand in the game. It's a pity to see you School House wasters going on the road to ruin without putting out a helping-hand to save you."

"Well, of all the cheek!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "There's more of your New House animals in the Smart Set than there are of our fellows."

"Well, any way, we've got to yank them back and bring them up in the way they should go," said Figgins.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"The only point to be settled," said Figgins, looking round, "is who shall be leader? There isn't really much to be said on the point, as a matter of fact. Of course, you chaps are willing to follow my lead."

Blake and Tom Merry looked at one another. Then they both looked at Figgins.

"Well, what do you say?" asked the latter.

"I can't think of anything suitable," said Blake. "There's no words in the English language to express my feelings."

"Twy Fwench, then," suggested Arthur Augustus.

"I don't know of anything to reply," said Tom Merry thoughtfully, "except the ancient and classic word 'rats'!"

"Well, if you chaps intend to cavil at everything," said Figgins, "I don't see how we're to pull together at all. I think at a time like this you might be willing to do the proper thing, I do really."

"I should say so," exclaimed Kerr. "There's altogether too much nerve in you School House chaps."

"Shall I make a weally good suggestion that has come into my bwain?" asked D'Arcy.

"Oh, get it out!"

"Well, suppose you leave the question ovah for a time, and let the first chap who does somethin' towards puttin' down the Smart Set take the lead?" suggested Arthur Augustus. "I weally think that would be an awfully beastly good ideah, you know."

"Well, there's something in that," admitted Figgins. "You School House chaps are so jolly conceited that you can't see things in their true light. I'm willing."

"So am I," said Tom Merry. "And you, Blake?"

"Oh, you can count me in!" said Blake. "I don't suppose either of you chaps will think of anything, so you might as well elect me leader to start with."

"Good!" said Tom Merry. "That's settled, and from this mment we're on the warpath. Come on, Manners!"

And the Terrible Two marched off.

"Come on, chaps," said Figgins. "We're on the warpath, too, and I reckon we shall be the first to do something useful."

"I say, won't you stop to tea?" asked Blake hospitably.

"There's a sardine left, and you can have it between you."

Figgins sniffed.

"Thanks; but we won't take advantage of your generosity, old man."

"Don't mention it. You're very welcome. It's rather a big sardine, come to look at it, and you can carve it for three."

But Figgins & Co. were gone.

CHAPTER 3.

Quite a Mistake.

BOOM!
The big clock at St. Jim's boomed out the hour. Boom!

Eleven strokes echoed dully through the quiet autumn night. The great school was sleeping. At all events, it ought to have been sleeping, but, as a matter of fact, some of it was very much awake.

"Herries, you're going to sleep!" Jack Blake spoke in a whisper.

The chums of Study No. 6 were not in bed. The prefect, who had seen lights out in the Fourth dormitory had seen them tucked up in bed, and had suspected nothing. But the three chums had not undressed, and as soon as the coast was clear they had slipped out of bed.

Blake and Herries and D'Arcy were on the warpath.

They knew that George Gore was the chief of the Smart Set, and they suspected him of being the individual who had forbidden communication with the rogues at the Golden Pig. To ascertain the truth was the first step, and to deal with the young rascal in an adequate manner afterwards was the second.

And so Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy were on the watch.

They were on the first landing on the big staircase of the School House, on the alert for Gore if he should leave the Shell dormitory, and come downstairs to leave the house. It was Blake's idea, and Herries had found objections to it when it was mooted.

"He may go out to-night," said Herries. "It stands to reason that he only goes sometimes. We don't want to stick on the stairs all night for nothing."

"If you're too lazy to take a hand in the game," said Blake, "you can go and eat coke."

"But—"

"I'm ashamed of you. Think of the honour of St. Jim's. And Tom Merry trying to get ahead of us, to say nothing of Figgins & Co."

"Yes; but—"

"Not a word. You'll stick it out with us, or we'll disown you, won't we, Gussy?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hear that, Herries! Gussy is ready, and you hang back. You ought to feel small. Gussy is worth forty of you."

Arthur Augustus purred.

As a matter of fact, he had been inclined to raise objections himself to a long and perhaps aimless vigil on the stairs at night; but after receiving so much praise he felt that he must back up his chief.

"Yaas, wathah," he assented. "I mean to stick it out, Hew-wies. Have a little pluck, old man. Down't be downhearted."

Herries grunted.

"Oh, I'm game if you are!" he said. "But I think it's rot."

And so it came to pass that Study No. 6 were on the look-out when the school clock chimed out the hour of eleven.

At least, Blake was on the watch, and Herries was sitting and leaning against the banisters, nodding off to sleep, and a snore had come from the aristocratic nose of Arthur Augustus.

Blake thumped Herries in the ribs.

"You're nodding off, fathead!"

"I—I—where—what—oh, I'm wide awake!" said Herries confusedly.

"Yes, you look it. Now, Gussy."

Blake pinched Arthur Augustus. The swell of St. Jim's gave a little squeal.

"Don't be so howwidly wude and wuff, Blake."

"Wake up, then!"

"I am afraid I can no longah accord you my fwiendship if—"

Arthur Augustus ceased suddenly as a hand was clapped over his mouth.

"Shut up!" said Blake fiercely, in a whisper. "There's somebody coming."

The swell of the School House relapsed into silence. Wide awake enough now, the three juniors listened intently. There was a faint sound from the upper corridor, the unmistakable sound of stealthy footsteps approaching the head of the stairs.

Blake drew a deep breath. His plan was justified. Here was the leader of the Smart Set on his way to the Golden Pig; here he was caught in the very act—at all events, on the point of being caught in the act.

Blake nudged his comrades.

"Collar him as he passes," he said. "I think about the best idea is to rush him into the nearest bath-room and souse him in a bath and turn the water on him."

"Ha, ha! Good!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Silence now; here he comes!"

Through the darkness of the stairs a dim form could be faintly seen. Recognition was impossible, but the chums of the Fourth had not the slightest doubt that it was George Gore.

They quivered with eager impatience, ready to spring upon the foe as soon as he should set foot upon the landing where they lay in ambush. Onward came the dim figure, peering before him in the darkness; but he did not see the chums of Study No. 6.

"Now!" whispered Blake suddenly.

In a twinkling the three threw themselves upon the dim form. He was dragged down in a moment, and Blake clapped a hand over his mouth to keep back the startled cry he might have uttered. Blake did not want any masters brought upon the scene.

The captured individual squirmed on the linoleum under the weight of the three chums, in vain fighting for his freedom.

"Hold him!" gasped Blake. "I never thought Gore was so beastly strong. He must have been going in for athletics lately."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Don't let him make a row, Blake."

"I'm looking after him."

Blake jammed his handkerchief into the captive's mouth. He held it there while Herries grasped the prisoner's wrists, and D'Arcy sat upon him.

"Bettah yield yourself our pwisonah, Goah!" said Arthur Augustus. "I considah it extwemely pwob that you will get hurt if you wesist."

The captive was still struggling frantically, and a gurgling sound came from his mouth as if he were trying to speak.

"Bring him along," said Blake.

They clutched up the prisoner and carried him away. Blake at his head, D'Arcy at his feet, and Herries still holding his hands in a vigorous grasp. The prisoner wriggled, but he was helpless.

Down the stairs to the next floor, and along the corridor, and into a bath-room the victors carried him, and down into a bath he went with a plump.

"I say," remarked Arthur Augustus. "Befoah you turn the watah on, Blake, just a moment! Aren't you likely to spoil his clothes?"

"Very likely, I think," said Blake cheerfully. "Still, they'll dry again. Anyway, a chap has no right to be dressed at all at this time of night."

"But weally—"

"He ought to be in his pyjamas, and if he isn't, that's his own look-out," said Blake decidedly. "We can't be expected to look after a chap's clothes for him. Turn the tap on, Herries. It doesn't matter which, they're both cold now. Or, rather, turn 'em both on."

The victim struggled furiously at the bottom of the bath. But Blake and D'Arcy held him grimly down.

Splash! Slosh!

Herries had turned on the taps. The water went down into the bath with a rush. A horrified gasp escaped the gag in the mouth of the prisoner, and he wriggled and struggled more furiously than ever. But three pairs of hands held him in a relentless grip.

"Better keep his head above water if possible," said Blake very considerably. "We don't want to drown him."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Gore, my boy, I'm sorry for this. It's strictly necessary to teach you how to live in a decent and respectable manner, and I can't think of anything better than this for the first lesson. If you have any suggestions to make for the next occasion I shall be pleased to hear them later. At present you are going to have a bath. You will be all the better for it, and probably will be glad to get back to bed, instead of going to join your nice friends at the Golden Pig."

Slosh! Swash!

The water was a foot deep now, and the prisoner was almost entirely immersed. His desperate struggles made a loud splashing in the bath, and the chums of the Fourth came in for a good deal of water. But, as Blake said, they had to face things like that in the sacred cause of duty.

The water deepened. Blake carefully kept the prisoner's head above it. D'Arcy staggered back as the prisoner got one leg free and gave him a drive on the chest with it.

"Oh, my word!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "What an extremely wuff bwute!"

"Here, hold on, he's getting loose!" exclaimed Herries.

Blake shoved the prisoner deep under water.

"Get in and sit on him, old man."

"Rats! You do it!"

"I should make my clothes wet."

"Well, what about mine?" howled Herries. "I'm wet up to the shoulders as it is."

"The chap isn't grateful for the trouble we're taking," said Blake. "I wonder if he's had enough?"

"Better ask him."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Gore," said Blake, "I'm going to take the handkerchief from your mouth, and if you give a yell I shall shove your head under. Do you understand?"

The prisoner gurgled. Blake jerked the gag from his mouth. "Now have you had enough, Gore?" he demanded. "Will you promise amendment—"

"You silly ass!"

The prisoner gasped out the words. But it was not the voice of George Gore; it was the voice of Tom Merry.

Blake let go the prisoner in his amazement, and staggered back.

"Tom Merry!"

The others let go too. The result was that Tom Merry went right under the water. He came up again with a mighty heave that sent water all over the bath-room. The taps were still running at full force. Tom Merry gasped for breath.

"You howling asses! You ought to be jumped on!"

"Tom Merry!" gasped Blake.

"Tom Merry!" echoed Herries.

"Tom Mewwy!" said Arthur Augustus. "What a gweat surprise!"

"I'll surprise you!" howled the unfortunate victim of the chums' zeal. "You howling maniacs, what do you mean by ducking me in a beastly bath?"

"We took you for Gore," murmured Blake. "Ha, ha! Sorry! Quite a mistake."

"Ha, ha, ha!" giggled Herries. "Quite a mistake. We're sorry."

Tom Merry, boiling with wrath, scrambled out of the bath. The latter was now running over, but in the darkness and the excitement the juniors did not note the fact.

"We are vewwy sowwy," said Arthur Augustus. "Ha, ha! But you must admit that it is extwemely funny, Tom Mewwy! Ha, ha!"

"Do you call it funny to be ducked in a bath, you owl?"

"Yaas, wathah! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Then there's more fun for you," said Tom, giving Arthur Augustus a drive on the chest that toppled him over into the flowing bath. "I like to please people."

D'Arcy disappeared into the bath with a mighty splash.

"Woorooh!" howled Blake, as a wave from the overflowing bath caught his legs and soaked them to the skin. "Woorooh!"

"Doesn't seem so funny now, does it?" asked Tom.

"Help!" spluttered D'Arcy from the bath. "I'm ddownin'!"

Blake leaned over the bath to help him out. He received a sudden shove from behind, and laid down with his face and chest in the water. There was another fearful splash, and Tom Merry and Herries had the benefit of it. It could not make Tom Merry wetter than he was, but Herries gave a howl.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "How do you like it done, Blake?"

Blake extracted himself from the bath.

"I'll scalp you!" he roared. "What do you mean by ducking a chap and spoiling his clothes? My hat, I'll—"
"Cave!" whispered Herries. "I heard a door open!"
In a moment dead silence reigned in the bath-room.
It was broken by the voice of Arthur Augustus, as he scrambled out of the bath.
"Tom Mewwy, you have acted in a wude and wuff mannah, and I—"
"Shut up!"
"Cave!"
"I insist upon speakin'," said D'Arcy. "I am not accustomed to bein' tweated with diswespsect, and I wefuse to submit to it, I distinctly wefuse!"
"Shut up!"
"I wefuse to shut up. I have been tweated outwageously!"
"Oh, kill him, somebody!" groaned Blake. "We're discovered!"

The door opened and a lamp flashed into the bath-room. Herr Schneider, the German master at St. Jim's stood looking into the room in boundless amazement.

"Poys, vat was te meaning of tat pefore?"

The juniors had nothing to say.

"Turn off tose daps after."

Blake turned off the taps. It was high time, for the bath-room was flowing with water nearly ankle-deep, and the flood was spreading out into the corridor.

"Mein gootness!" said the German master. "Dere nefer vas such poys pefore after. Dis shall be inquired in to-morrow, aint it? Go pack to ped!"

The drenched and dismal juniors obeyed.

Herr Schneider went back to his room, muttering to himself. The juniors mounted the stairs, and parted at the dormitory door.

"You'd better kill that thing!" said Tom Merry, looking at Gussy. "I never knew a chap who wanted killing so much and so often."

"Well, he gave us away," said Blake. "Still, there was certain to be an inquiry in the morning. There was a lot of wetness about the floor, you know."

"It is extremely unjust to blame me," said Arthur Augustus. "Whatevah the consequences, it was necessary for me to pwotest against bein' tweated in such an exceedingly diswespsectful mannah. I weally think that Tom Mewwy—"

"Oh, dry up!" said Tom. "What were you doing on the stairs, Blake? Watching for Gore?"

"Ha, ha, yes! And we took you for him. But what on earth were you doing, wandering about in the middle of the night?"

"Gore had left the dormitory, and I was on his track," said Tom ruefully. "Manners was too sleepy to get up, so I was going it alone."

Blake started.

"Has Gore gone out, then?"

"Yes."

"He never passed us on the stairs."

"I expect he took the back stairs," said Tom. "He guessed something. Anyway, I dare say he's far enough away by this time. It has been a ghastly frost, and no mistake, old kids! Good-night!"

"Good-night!"

They parted with feelings too deep for words. While Study No. 6. had been ducking Tom Merry, Gore had left the School House by another way. None of the chums felt in a condition to see the matter further. They dried themselves as well as they could, and went back to bed, and the chief of the Smart Set was left to his own devices.

But Figgins & Co. were on the watch that night also.

CHAPTER 4.

A Night Out!

STARLIGHT glimmered upon the old quadrangle at St. Jim's, on the ancient elms and still more ancient walls clad with clinging ivy. Under one of the elms Figgins & Co. were waiting on the watch.

Unconscious of the watch being kept in the School House, and of the blunder the watchers were making, the New House trio were keeping ward in the open air.

It was Figgins's idea.

"You see, kids," the great Figgins condescended to explain to the dutiful Co., "some of the horrid wasters who call them selves the Smart Set break bounds at night to go down to the Golden Pig, and as we don't know which house they may come out of, it's no good keeping watch indoors. We must have a night out."

"Well, it's a fine night!" Kerr remarked. "It won't hurt us, even if nothing turns up. But suppose we find a fellow breaking bounds? He may be just going down to the village tuck-shop, or to the river to set night-lines, in the most innocent way in the world."

"I know that, and I don't say we're to jump on his neck at the start. What's the matter with following him and tracking him to his giddy lair?"

"Well, that's a good idea, if he doesn't spot us."

"Rats! Tom Merry fancies himself in the detective line, and I don't see why we shouldn't come out strong as shadowers, too. If anybody comes out of either house, he's certain to get over the wall in the same old place, because there's no other easy spot, and we'll be on the watch there, and track him down like blighounds."

"And if nobody comes?"

"We'll watch every night until somebody does," said Figgins determinedly.

"That's a big order, Figgy."

"You know the agreement. The chap who first distinguishes himself is to be leader. Well, I suppose we're not going to let the leadership fall to Tom Merry or Blake because we're too lazy to sit up a bit," said Figgins, with withering scorn.

"Rather not!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn. "I'm surprised at you, Kerr, for suggesting such a thing! I am really!"

Kerr grunted.

"I fancy you'll be the first to fall asleep in the quad, all the same, Fatty," he retorted.

And the canny Kerr was quite right there.

As they kept watch and ward under the elm near the ivy-clad wall, it was only by continual pinches that they succeeded in keeping Fatty Wynn awake.

The school clock boomed out eleven.

"Hallo," murmured Figgins, "here comes somebody."

The New House trio lay low in the shadow of the elm.

A dim form came silently from the direction of the School House. It passed the elm, and halted at the ivy-clad wall, and for a moment a gleam of the stars shone upon the face as it was upturned. Figgins & Co. nudged one another.

"Gore!"

It was Gore, of Tom Merry's Form, and a School House boy. Figgins & Co. did not like Gore, and they already had a suspicion that he was one of the juniors upon whom a watch might with advantage be kept.

Gore clambered up the ivy and dropped over into Rylcombe Lane.

"He's gone!" muttered Kerr.

Figgins rose to his feet.

"And we're going to follow, kids. Come on!"

The long-legged, nimble Figgins was soon over the wall. The Co. followed fast, and the three of them stood under the stars outside the school walls.

"There he is!" muttered Fatty Wynn, pointing.

The figure of Gore was just disappearing down the lane towards the village.

"He's going to Rylcombe," said Figgins—"the Golden Pig, for a cert! But we must make sure. Marchez-vous, kids, and mind you don't give yourselves away."

They marched on, on the track of the unsuspecting Gore.

The chief of the Smart Set was indeed bound for the Golden Pig. Late as the hour was, the disreputable inn was lighted up when the juniors came in sight of it. Gore did not go in by the public entrance, but tapped at a window.

Figgins & Co. were watching him from across the street.

"You see," murmured Figgins, "we've tracked him down! He's going in!"

"That he is!"

The window had opened in response to Gore's tap on the pane from outside. A red-faced man, dressed in a loud check suit pulled aside the blind and leaned out of the window. He grinned in a friendly way at Gore.

"Hallo, young gentleman, so you've come again?"

In the silence of the night the juniors across the way heard the greeting:

"Yes, here I am, Tadger," said Gore.

"Come in! Come in and welcome!"

The man pushed the sash higher, and gave Gore a helping hand. In a few minutes the foolish lad had clambered in at the window, and it was shut again, and the blind fell into its place.

Figgins & Co. looked at one another.

"There's proof positive!" said Figgins. "But let's go and have a squint."

They crossed the road and drew cautiously near the window.

The blind was down, but it was crooked in one place, and a glimpse could be had of the interior of the room from outside.

The New House juniors looked in.

They looked into a low-ceiled apartment, round the ceiling of which hung clouds of tobacco-smoke. At a round table five men were seated and a boy. The boy was George Gore. The men had cards in their hands, and the red-faced gentleman was dealing a hand to Gore. There was whisky on the table, and glasses, and all the men were smoking. A more vulgar and disreputable-looking crew Figgins had never seen; but to Gore they probably appeared a jolly set of sporting fellows.

Figgins turned to the Co. with deep disgust in his face.

"The ass!" he muttered. "The silly, fat-headed ass! Ho

can't see that they are only making game of him, and only want his money! The silly ass!"

"I say," said Kerr, uneasily, "I don't like to go away and leave him among that lot, you know. He's a silly ass and a cad, but—"

"Well, we can't yank him out by the hair of his head," said Figgins, "and it's no good starting a row at this time of night."

"I suppose not. But we must do something about it."

"I've got an idea in my head. No good sticking here. I'll talk about it as we go back. This place makes me feel ill."

The juniors left the unsavoury spot. In the lane, as they walked back to the school, Figgins unfolded his plot.

"You see," he explained, "Kildare and Monteith have asked us to look into this matter, along with Tom Merry and Jack Blake; but we can't possibly give Gore away to them or to the Head, and they don't expect it. It wouldn't be playing the game."

"No, that's right enough."

"We've got to deal with the matter ourselves. Now, if Gore was a kid in our own house we'd give him a study licking, and make him a bit more decent, or kill him in the attempt."

"That would work, I should think," said Fatty Wynn.

"No, it wouldn't, in this case, because Gore belongs to the School House, and, the affair would grow into a house row, and a lot of School House kids would take Gore's part, and might even join his giddy Smart Set for the sake of getting one up against the New House," said Figgins sagely. "We don't want anything of that sort."

"My hat, no! But we could turn him over to Tom Merry!" suggested Kerr. "Merry and Manners and Blake could give him the study licking, and it would be all right coming from School House fellows."

"Yes, so far as that's concerned, it would be all right; but then the matter would be out of our hands, and in Tom Merry's, and we should be dead in the act," said Figgins. "We don't want that either."

"Then I don't see—"

"Of course you don't till I explain. You never do!"

"Look here—"

"Oh, listen to me! I've got a ripping idea for curing Gore of his little ways, without making a house row, or calling up Tom Merry for assistance."

"Go ahead, then. You're so beastly long-winded, Figg!"

"If you want a dot on the boko, Kerr—"

"I don't! Get on with the washing!"

"Well, you remember how you did the Head in those impersonations the other night?" said Figgins. "Why shouldn't you do it again for Gore's benefit?"

The Co. gave a simultaneous chuckle. Kerr was the champion amateur theatricalist in the New House Dramatic Society, and being the son of an actor, with a keen ambition of following in the paternal footsteps, and a great ability in that line, he frequently delighted the New House juniors with little entertainments in Figgins's study.

His impersonations were very clever, and he had passed himself off as the German master so as to deceive even the keen eyes of Tom Merry on one occasion. In the privacy of the study, before a select audience of juniors, he had even gone to the length of assuming the character of the Head, white hair and pince-nez and all, and had given a lecture on Greek roots in the doctor's manner amid hilarious applause.

"Jolly good idea!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn. "Kerr will do it to the life."

"I think I could do it," said Kerr modestly. "It's a ripping idea if it comes off."

"I don't see why it shouldn't come off," said Figgins. "It will be pretty dark in the quadrangle, and you'll pass muster easily enough. We'll get back to St. Jim's as quickly as we can, and help you make up, and then we'll wait for Gore to come in. If it doesn't scare him out of his wits to find himself caught by the Head after his little excursion, I'm a Dutchman. My hat! if the Head lets him off, on his promising never to do so no more for ever and ever, I fancy he will be frightened enough to stick to his word."

The Co. grinned gleefully.

"You see," said Figgins, "we want to cure him without showing him up and getting him expelled. I don't think there could be a better way of doing it. I'm pretty certain that Gore is the head cook and bottlewasher of that precious Smart Set, and without him the bottom will fall out of the whole thing. If we reform him, the Smart Set busts, and we've done the trick, and Tom Merry and Jack Blake will have to sing smaller than they've ever sung in their lives before. See?"

"Good wheeze!" said Kerr. "It will work."

And Figgins & Co. hurried on to the school to prepare that little surprise for the chief of the Smart Set.

CHAPTER 5.

The Way of the Transgressor!

MIDNIGHT had struck from the clock-tower of St. Jim's when George Gore came slowly up the lane towards the school.

Gore was not looking as if he had enjoyed his night out. He had lost five shillings at nap, a considerable amount to a schoolboy whose pocket-money was limited, and that loss necessitated the giving up of a new football he had promised himself for the coming season.

But that was not all. He had smoked a cigar while he was at the Golden Pig, and it left him feeling uncomfortable. Young as he was, he had already accustomed his system to tobacco, and so he was not sick, but he was feeling uneasy. Besides that, the jolly sporting fellows whose acquaintance he was so proud of had induced him to taste their whisky-and-water, and he had a dull, fishy look in his eyes and a swimming sensation in his brain, as peculiar as it was unpleasant.

Altogether, Gore did not seem to have enjoyed that taste of "life." "Life," in the estimation of Tadger and his sporting friends, was to be found in keeping late hours, gambling on cards, and betting on horses, smoking bad cigars, and drinking whisky-and-water. That was what the gentlemen of the Golden Pig called "life," and Gore was very proud of being considered a sportsman like the rest.

Tadger had been very sympathetic about his loss.

"It's only want of capital," the sporting gentleman averred, as he shook hands on parting with Gore. "You've plenty of pluck and plenty of nerve, but you haven't enough capital to stick it out. You're the man to win if you had the money, not the slightest doubt about that. Why, some of them were looking nervous of you, as it was."

"Were they?" said Gore, highly flattered to have made such knowing men of the world as Tadger's friends look nervous.

"They were," assured Mr. Tadger; "and if you had had a couple of pounds, you'd have cleared the table, and gone home with ten pun in your pocket. I'm certain of that."

"Do you really think so?"

"I does, Master Gore. You've got the pluck, and you only want the capital. It would be worth while trying to get it, I should think."

"I don't see how I could get it."

"Well, you could borrow—"

"Not so much as that, I'm afraid."

"Of course, I don't want to advise you," Mr. Tadger said disinterestedly. "But I know a chap—at your school, too—who wrote home to his people, asking for a couple of pounds to repair his bicycle as had had a nasty fall under a waggon."

"But what good was that?" said Gore, bewildered. "If he paid the money for repairing his bicycle—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Mr. Tadger. "You see, his bicycle hadn't had any accident at all, and he used the tin to play a big game here, and he went off with seven quid in his pocket."

"Seven pounds!" said Gore, gasping.

"Seven pun, Master Gore, neither more nor less," assured Mr. Tadger. "I ought to know, as I lost two of them myself. And it wasn't mere luck, mind you, but jest nerve, and having capital enough to play a good game."

"I'll think about it, Mr. Tadger," said Gore, "and thank you very much."

He went his way, and Tadger returned to his friends.

"Only five bob," said one of them, with a sniff. "What's the good of wasting time over a silly fool of a kid for five bob, Tadger?"

"Well, it's a few drinks all round," said Mr. Tadger apologetically, "and we're all thirsty souls. But there's more coming. He'll soon be along here, I fancy, with a couple of quid in his pocket, and that will be nearly half-a-sov. each for us. And I fancy that won't be the last, either."

Quite unconscious of the estimation in which he was really held by the sporting gentlemen of the Golden Pig, Gore made his way back to the school. To his mind, excited by the gambling fever as it was, Tadger's scoundrelly suggestion that he should deceive and practically rob his parents had come as something like a shock at first. But as he became accustomed to the idea he rather liked it.

Besides, after having won seven pounds from the sporting fraternity at the Golden Pig, like the former lucky lad, whose name Mr. Tadger had forgotten to mention, he could return the two pounds to his father, saying that he could do without it, after all, and then he would be able to feel quite honest again.

This was rather a bright prospect, and it comforted him. At the same time it was uncomfortable to think that he had lost the five shillings he had saved up towards the purchase of a football, and still more uncomfortable to find that the trees in Rylcombe Lane were not at all stationary, as usual, but persisted in moving about, sometimes in circles and sometimes nodding to him as he passed. He would have been greatly alarmed at this peculiar phenomenon had he not guessed that it was due to the liquor he had swallowed at the Golden Pig.

DAILY MAIL.

NEXT
THURSDAY.

"THE RETURN OF MONTY LOWTHER."

A TALE OF TOM
MERRY'S SCHOOLDAYS.

The long walk through the cool night air refreshed him somewhat after the sickening atmosphere of whisky and tobacco at the inn. He reached St. Jim's at last, and climbed the wall. From outside the wall was far more difficult than from inside it being necessary to find foothold in a worn buttress, and Gore in his present state was not exactly in the condition for a difficult climb.

The result was that he fell with a thump upon his back on the hard ground, the concussion knocking all the breath out of his body. He lay there for what seemed to him a few minutes, but what was in reality a quarter of an hour. The quarter was chiming from the clock-tower as he rose to his feet.

The effect of the whisky was passing off, and his second essay at climbing the wall was successful. He gripped hold of the ivy, and lowered himself down on the inside.

He drew a breath of relief as he found himself within the walls of St. Jim's once more.

"I shall have to leave the whisky alone in the future," he murmured. "I should have been in a ghastly fix if I hadn't been able to get over the wall. Tadger is very kind, but I shall have to draw the line somewhere."

He turned towards the School House. The next moment he shrank back again into the shadow of the wall, his face white and his heart palpitating with terror. A dim figure had loomed up in the starlight—an awe-inspiring figure in cap and gown!

Gore did not need telling whom it was. The cap and gown, the white hair and the gold-rimmed pince-nez, were enough for him.

"The Head!"

He groaned the word under his breath as he crouched desperately in the shadow of the dense mass of ivy. Had he been seen? What was the Head doing in the quadrangle at that time of night? What could possibly have brought Dr. Holmes out of doors at a quarter-past twelve?

He was inclined to groan aloud as he answered his own question. Dr. Holmes could only be there because he suspected someone of breaking bounds and was on the watch for him.

Gore quivered under the ivy like a hunted hare with the hounds close at hand. Had the Head seen him? The figure was advancing with a slow and solemn pace, suited to the dignity and the years of the Head of St. Jim's.

"Boy!"

The deep voice broke the silence of the starlit night. If the Head's tones were not exactly the same as usual, George Gore was not in a condition to notice any difference.

"Boy!"

There was a chance yet. The Head knew that he was there, but could not have seen him clearly, as he did not address him by name. If he could escape unrecognised—

He made a sudden dash. But the Head seemed prepared for it, and with an agility marvellous in a reverend and respected schoolmaster, he skipped in Gore's way and collared him. As soon as he felt a grip on his collar the delinquent collapsed. The game was up now with a vengeance!

"Gore!"

He was recognised. The Head let him go, and he stood palpitating. The shock of discovery had completely sobered him, and the effect of the whisky was gone, save for a faint, sickening odour that still hung about him.

"Gore!"—the Head's voice was absolutely terrifying—"so it is you—er—Gore, who have dared to break bounds at night, and to return to the school smelling of spirits!"

"I—I—I—"

"Wretched youth! Where do you expect to die when you go to—I mean, how dare you break the rules of the college in this shocking manner?"

Gore was too confused to take much notice of the doctor's temporary lapse.

"I—I—I—"

"Are you still intoxicated, sir?"

"No—nunno—I—"

"Then what do you mean by that senseless repetition of an alphabetical letter?"

"I—I—I—"

"Where have you been?"

"Only—only for a walk, sir."

"And you found whisky somewhere in your walk?" exclaimed the doctor.

"I—I—I—"

"Tell me the truth. You have been to the Golden Pig?"

"I—no—yes—yes, sir."

"You have played cards with Tadger and his set."

Gore was amazed at the knowledge of the doctor.

"No—yes—yes, sir. I didn't mean—"

"Then you know your sentence, Gore."

"I—I—I—"

"You are expelled from St. Jim's, sir."

"Oh, sir! Please, sir—"

The Head waved his hand. "Not a word, Gore. You are a disgrace to the college. You have led younger and more innocent lads astray. You are a scoundrel, Gore."

"I—I—oh, please, sir."

"You are a thorough rascal."

"Yes, sir. Only, please—"

"There is no alternative. You will pack your box to-morrow morning, and leave the school by the first train. I will wire to your father explaining the circumstances—er—of the case, and he will understand why you cannot remain at the school."

"Oh, sir—please, doctor—"

"Silence, Gore! Shall I have innocent lads contaminated by your contact? The School House isn't much of a place already, without you to make it worse."

Gore stared. That was certainly a very strange remark for the Head to make. Perhaps the Head thought so too, for he went on very quickly.

"You must go! You are expelled! To-morrow you leave St. Jim's."

Gore fell upon his knees. "Oh, sir! Think of my father! He'll be as wild as anything—he'll lick me, sir! Oh, don't send me home!"

"If he licks you, that's just what you deserve, Gore. I cannot have the school contaminated by your presence. It is impossible."

"Oh, sir! Please, sir!"

The Head appeared to relent. "Can I believe that your sorrow is sincere, Gore, and not dictated merely by fear of being expelled from the school?" he demanded.

"Oh, yes, sir! I'm awfully sorry! I will never do anything like it again! I've been a fool, sir! I'll promise not to do anything of the sort any more."

"Can I trust you, Gore?"

Gore could have wept for joy at the signs of relenting.

"Oh, yes, sir. I swear—"

"You must not swear. How dare you suggest swearing in my presence."

"I mean, sir—"

"Never mind what you mean. Gore, I am inclined to look over this rascally action on your part, but remember, I shall have an eye on your conduct in the future. Outwardly I shall not take any more notice of you than of the other boys, but remember that if my vigilance—er—seems to sleep, I shall be keenly on the watch all the time. And the first time you are caught in the act, Gore, you are expelled."

"Yes, sir. Oh, thank you, sir!"

"Therefore, I will let you off with a flogging. You will come to my study after prayers in the morning."

"Yes, sir."

"Er—no, upon second thoughts I will inflict your punishment now. Fortunately I have a cane with me," said the Head. "Hold out your hand."

Gore held out his hand. He didn't like being caned, but anything was better than being expelled, and a caning was not so bad as a flogging, either. He considered himself lucky to get off so cheaply.

But the Head showed that he meant that caning to be remembered. He brought down the cane upon Gore's palm with a cut that made the rascal wriggle.

"Now the other hand."

Gore shuddered and obeyed. Another cut, and another gasp and wriggle. So on for four cuts alternately on either hand. Gore was wriggling with pain, but the inexorable Head was not finished yet.

"The other hand, Gore!"

"Oh, sir—"

"Hold out your hand!"

Gore obeyed. Down came the cane with a whiz. But Gore simply had not the nerve to stand it again. Half involuntarily he drew his hand away. The cane, meeting with no resistance, swept downwards, and came against the Head's leg with a resounding thwack.

The Head gave a yell. "Oh, you rotter, I'll pay you out for that!"

Which was certainly an astounding remark for the Head of St. Jim's to make.

CHAPTER 6.

Gore Has a Narrow Escape.

GORE stood in absolute stupefaction for a moment. He did not know whether the Head had suddenly gone insane, whether he himself was under a delusion, or whether the world was coming to an end.

But after that one bewildered moment the truth dawned upon him, for a faint, but quite audible chuckle floated to his ears from under the elms, and for the first time he knew that the scene had not been without witnesses. And the Head was hopping on one leg, and claspings the other, and gasping, in an undignified manner that Dr. Holmes would certainly never have been guilty of. His pince-nez had fallen off, and he had dropped his cane.

Gore clicked his teeth together. He knew he had been made



"Hallo, young gentleman, so you've come again?" In the silence of the night the Juniors across the way heard the greeting. "Yes, here I am, Tadger," said Gore.

a fool of, and that someone made up as the Head of St. Jim's had put him through the most terrifying experience of his life. And with that thought, he went for the sham Head like a wild bull.

"Oh, you rotter! I'll show you!" he roared. "I'll teach you to play your giddy tricks on me."

The sham Head was not prepared for this attack.

He was devoting his attention solely to clasp one leg, and dancing on the other, and Gore's furious rush bowled him right over. He went down sprawling, and his cap came off and the white hair with it, and save for an artificial complexion and some skilfully-done wrinkles, Kerr was revealed.

"Oh, you rotter!" howled Gore.

He sprawled over the sham Head, punching wildly. The fright he had had, to say nothing of the caning, made him simply wild.

"Help!" gasped Kerr. "Rescue!"

Two boyish figures come bolting from the shadowy elms. Two strong pairs of hands laid hold of Gore, and dragged him off his victim. He wriggled and struggled furiously in their grasp.

Kerr staggered to his feet. One of his eyes was closed up, and his nose emitted a thin crimson stream, which was trickling down to his collar. He was gasping for breath, and he looked very dusty and rumped.

"Hold that beast," he gasped; "he's like a mad bull. It doesn't matter if you hurt him."

"Let me go," yelled Gore.

"Shut up, you ass," said Figgins; "do you want to wake up the whole school?"

"I don't care! Leggo!"

"All right, if you want to explain to the masters where you've been, you're welcome," said Figgins; "keep it up."

But Gore did not keep it up. Figgy's words had scared him, recalling him to a sense of his position, and he gave in quietly.

"Confound you!" he growled; "what do you mean by meddling with me? What business is it of yours where I go?"

"Lots," said Figgins. "We're going to make you behave decently, or die in the attempt. It's all for your good, and you mustn't mind being hurt."

"I—I thought it was the Head," said Gore. He was immensely relieved to discover that it was not. "You rotten bounders! What do you mean by it?"

"It was my idea," explained Figgins. "We're going to cure you, you know."

"Better tell tales to the masters," said Gore, with a sneer.

"That's not in our line," said Figgins. "We're going to cure you off our own bat. I say, Kerr, old chap, I hope he hasn't hurt you much."

"Not much," gasped Kerr; "I'm all right."

"I say, you were an ass to give the game away."

"Was I?" said Kerr wrathfully. "What would you have done if you had got a fearful stinger on the shin, eh?"

"Well, it can't be helped," said Figgins. "It was a good idea, and you've muffed it. I'm not blaming you, though. It couldn't be helped. It was Gore's fault for dodging the cane. He ought to be ashamed of himself. He never could bear a little pain."

"Ha, ha! I'm jolly glad," said Gore.

"We'll give you something else to be glad for," said Figgins. "have you any suggestions about curing him, chaps, as this has turned out a frost?"

"Duck him in the doctor's pond," suggested Fatty Wynn.

"Right-ho. Come along—why, he's gone!"

Gore had suddenly torn himself away and bolted.
"After him!" muttered Figgins.

Gore was bolting for his life across the quadrangle towards the School House. Figgins and Fatty Wynn dashed after him as fast as they could go. They really had no intention of ducking him, but Figgins wanted to make his scare complete. Kerr did not join in the pursuit. He did not feel quite fit just then.

Gore had reached the little window he had left open at the side of the School House. He had left it about an inch open, so that it would not show, and yet could be easily opened from the outside. He had not expected seconds to be so very precious at the time of his return, of course.

He reached the window and pushed it up. That occupied only a moment. But a moment meant much to him then. He hurled himself head first in at the window, and at the same moment Figgins and Fatty Wynn overtook him.

"Catch hold of his legs!" gasped Figgins.

Gore kicked out violently.

Fatty Wynn gasped and sat down, as a boot came heavily upon his chest. But before Gore could wriggle in at the window Figgins had a grip on each of his ankles, and held them fast.

"Got him!" said Figgins.

Gore wriggled spasmodically. He was too far in at the window to get out again, and he could not get completely in while Figgins held his ankles.

"Lemme go!" came a muffled voice from within the window.

"Leggo, you beast!"

"Not this evening," said Figgins; "some other evening."

"You beast! I'll yell and wake the house!"

"Right-ho! Then you can explain to your housemaster what you were doing out of the house at half-past twelve!"

Gore ground his teeth with helpless rage. He dared not rouse the house, and he was absolutely at Figgins's mercy. He began to plead, changing his tone as he found that bullying would not serve.

"I say, Figgy, let me go! You're a decent chap!"

"Yes, that's so, and it's rather a come down to touch a chap like you!" said Figgins cheerfully.

"Don't rot, old chap! Lemme go!"

"Sha'n't!"

"You beast! I'll break your neck for this to-morrow!"

"You contradict yourself, Gore. I can't be a decent chap and a beast, too. As for breaking necks, you look a good deal more like breaking your own at present, and I know you'll hurt yourself if you wriggle about like that."

"Let me go!"

"Don't let him go till I've stuck this pin in him!" gasped Fatty Wynn, getting up. "The brute has knocked all the breath out of me!"

Gore writhed with horrid anticipation.

"Don't! Don't let him, Figgy! Oh, scissors, don't let him!"

"Well," said Figgins gravely, "you admit, Gore, that you ought to be severely punished for being such a rotter!"

"No, I don't! Hang you!"

"H'm! Have you got that pin handy, Fatty?"

"Yes, here it is."

"Keep him off!" gurgled Gore, in an agony. "I admit it, Figgins. I admit anything you like."

"H'm! Will you promise, honour bright, to turn over a new leaf?"

"Yes, yes."

"You'll keep your word?"

"Yes, yes."

"You'll never go to the Golden Pig, and those other pigs, again?"

"Never."

"Shall we trust him, Fatty?"

"Better stick the pin in, in case of accidents!" said Fatty Wynn solemnly.

"I promise!" howled Gore. "Let me go!"

"Well, perhaps——"

Figgins relaxed his hold, and Gore finished going through the window—suddenly. He came down on his hands, and turned a complete somersault, and there was a fearful crash of broken crockery. Then a yell from Gore.

"My hat!" said Figgins. "Surprising how accidents will happen! Are you all right, Gore?"

"Hang you!"

"You've broken something, I think! I hope you haven't shed any of your gore, Gore!"

"I'll get even with you for this, Figgins!" hissed Gore. "Just you wait, you beast!"

He slammed down the window. The next moment he was crouching in a corner, shivering. A footstep had sounded in the gloom, and a glimmer of light came through the darkness.

"Mein gootness! Is tat some more of dose poys pefore?"

If Kerr had been in the School House Gore might have suspected another impersonation, but he knew that this must be Herr Schneider.

Although Gore did not know it, the reader knows that Herr Schneider had been disturbed once before that eventful night.

The German master had not been able to get to sleep again, and he had heard the noise below and come down to investigate. He had no doubt that it was caused by some more of the juniors being out of their beds.

Gore was crouching in a little room attached to the kitchen where Mrs. Mimms, the housedame, kept a great deal of crockery. Gore had settled a good deal of that for her. The glimmer of a candle appeared in the doorway.

"Vat vas tat noise after?" demanded Herr Schneider, standing there in his dressing-gown and slippers and surveying the room. "Ach! Dere is mooch grockery proken mit itself pefore. Vas it te cat, or vas it vun of dem poys after?"

Whiz!

Gore, in desperation, hurled his cap at the candle with deadly aim. The candlestick went to the floor with a crash, and, being a china one, smashed to pieces. The candle, of course, went out.

Herr Schneider staggered back in alarm, and, as he did so, Gore bolted past him and sped upstairs like lightning.

"Ach! Mein gootness! Vat vas tat after pefore?"

Before the startled German master could strike a match Gore was out of sight. Herr Schneider, grumbling to himself in German, took his way slowly upstairs. He looked into the Shell dormitory, and cast the light of the candle on Tom Merry's face. Herr Schneider was always suspicious of Tom. When in doubt go for Tom Merry, was his motto. But Tom was indubitably asleep, with his curly head resting on the pillow and his eyes closed fast in repose, and Herr Schneider retired baffled, very much to the relief of George Gore, who was palpitating in his bed and did not breathe freely until the German master was gone. It had been a very eventful night for the chief of the Smart Set at St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 7.

Figgins Takes the Lead.

TOM MERRY expected trouble the next morning as a result of the night's adventure, and he was right.

The swamp of water from the overflowed bathroom had done considerable damage to the ceilings below, and there would certainly have been an inquiry had not Herr Schneider already known the delinquents.

The German master having made his report to the master of the School House, the delinquents were called over the carpet in Mr. Railton's study.

They could not very well explain what their object had been in leaving their sleeping-quarters at that time of night, nor is it probable that the housemaster would have approved of Blake's method of curing the transgressor by ducking him in a bath of water.

There was nothing to do but to face the music, and grin and bear it, and that the juniors did. They came out of the housemaster's study with their hands tucked away under their arms, each of them looking as if he were trying to fold himself up into a kind of pocket-knife.

"Never mind," said Tom Merry, "we've done our duty, and that's a comfort! But I'd like to know what Gore was up to last night."

He soon knew. After morning school Figgins & Co. came over to the School House on a visit to Tom Merry's study, to relate the startling happenings of the night.

Study No. 6 were called in to hear the tale. They heard it with mingled feelings. While Study No. 6 had been ducking Tom Merry by mistake, Figgins & Co. had been on the track of the offender, had bowled him completely out, and had given him a warm time.

Study No. 6 and the Terrible Two exchanged glances. The School House had certainly not had the best of it that time.

Figgins looked round with a pardonable air of pride.

"Well, what's the verdict?" he demanded. "You remember our agreement?"

Blake looked inquiringly at Tom Merry.

"Do you remember any agreement with Figgins, Merry?"

Tom looked at Manners.

"Do you, Manners?"

Manners looked reflective.

Figgins appeared about to explode with wrath.

"You know what that agreement was!" he bellowed.

"The chap among us who first distinguished himself in tracking down the Smart Set was to be leader."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus innocently. "I wemembah that perfectly, Blake! I do, weally, Tom Mewwy! I wemembah—oh!"

He turned upon Blake.

"What did you pinch me for, Blake? You know perfectly well how stwongly I object to such pwactical jokes."

"You want pinching sometimes," said Blake, "and at times you want killing. Then at times you require boiling in oil."

"I weally do not see——"

"No, you never see anything, fathead!"

"I pwotest——"

"Oh, dry up! Figgins, old man, I have a faint recollection that there was some sort of a kind of an agreement, something like the one you mention."

"Have you?" said Figgins sarcastically. "Try again, and perhaps you'll remember all about it, Blake, and won't try to wriggle out of it."

"I don't want to wriggle out of it," said Blake warmly. "That's mean, Figgy! And I don't see how we can have a mean man for leader."

"Look here——"

"Still, an agreement's an agreement——"

"Pity you couldn't think of that a little earlier."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"So it's agreed," said Figgins, looking round. "Mind, I don't want to insist on my rights. It's not much catch leading you silly School House kids, anyhow, and I dare say we could do the trick better alone, all off our own bat."

"Hear, hear!" said the Co.

"Oh, come, let there be peace!" said Tom Merry, waving his hand. "Let dogs delight to bark and bite, it is their nature to——"

And Blake chimed in:

"Let New House wasters growl and fight, it is their nature, too."

"Ha, ha, ha!" howled Herries.

"What are you cackling about?" demanded Figgins.

"Have you broken anything inside, or do you always go off like that?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shouted Arthur Augustus, who was always a few moments later than anybody else to see a joke or anything whatever. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"My hat! Now Adolphus has started going off like a cracker!"

"Ha, ha, ha! That is weally extwemely funny, Blake."

"There you are, Blake," said Figgins. "You can set up as a mirth-merchant now, with that recommendation from Gussy. If he says it's funny, it must be. He ought to know, as he's the funniest animal that ever funned."

Figgins, do you intend that wemark to be taken in a dis-pawagin' sense? I shall be sowwy to speak wudely or wuffly to any gentleman pwesent, but I must say that unless I am tweated with pwopah wespect, I shall feel compelled to punch the nose of any diswespectful boundah!" Arthur Augustus was looking warlike.

Tom Merry caught him by the shoulder and shoved him back.

"Hold on, Aubrey!"

"You have wuffed my jacket," said D'Arcy. "I wish you would not be so wuff. And I think I have wemarked before that my name is not Aubwey, but Arthur Augustus!"

"Peace!" said Blake. "Let us have peace before we have pieces. The question is, is Figgins entitled to the rank, style, and title of Leader of the Reform Movement?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Good old Gussy!" said Figgins. "I withdraw my remark about your being a funny animal. You are, of course, but I won't say so."

"I'm quite weady to overlook any hasty wemark."

"We'll put it to the vote," said Tom Merry. "Is Figgins sufficiently extinguished—I mean distinguished—to be considered leader of the Reform Movement?"

"Yes," said the Co. simultaneously.

"Ye-e-es," said Study No. 6 more slowly.

"Yes," said Manners.

"There you are, Figgy," said Tom Merry. "You're elected leader unanimously, and I must say I think you'll make a jolly good one. Fair's fair."

"Right you are," said Figgins. "Now I'm leader, I've got a suggestion to make."

"Fire away."

"We've been discussing the matter," said Figgins, with a nod towards the Co., "and we work it out like this. Gore and his giddy Smart Set have got to be cured of their little ways, without a row about it if it can be helped; but anyway, they've got to be cured."

"That's so."

"If our little game last night had worked out better, I think Gore's fright would have lasted him a long time," said Figgins; "but it was a frost. I've thought of a new plan, and one that will cover the whole of the Smart Set as well as Gore."

"Expound, my son."

"One of you kids does photography; I've heard about a photographer in your hobby club."

"Yaas, wathah. It's Mannahs."

"Please, I'm the photographer," said Manners, bowing.

"I thought so. Well, you've got a camera that will take snapshots, I suppose?"

"I can take you either with a snap or a time exposure," said Manners. "I can——"

"Right you are," interrupted Figgins. "A snap will be

what we want, I expect, but you might get one of the other sort as well."

"But what am I to photograph?"

"The Smart Set."

"Eh?"

"I believe they've got a habit of holding meetings in the ruined castle," said Figgins; "and smoking there, and very likely guzzling filthy beer, too. A photograph of a meeting of the Smart Set, each with a cigarette in his mouth, and perhaps a glass in his hand, that's my idea."

"My only pyjama hat!" ejaculated Blake. "And a ripping good idea, too."

"If we only showed that photo to the Head," said Figgins, "it would be enough to get the leaders of the silly set of rascals expelled, and the rest flogged in a way they would remember. Of course, we don't want to do anything of the kind; but with that photo to hold over their heads, we should have the Smart Set in the hollow of our hands."

"We should, by Jove!"

"Then we should give them the alternative," said Figgins, "of breaking up and dropping their beastly smart ways, or being shown up. Mind you, although I don't like anything in the nature of sneaking, I'd rather show them up to the Head than have them go on with their silly, disreputable rot."

"You're right, Figgy. They're bringing disgrace on the school, and if they won't turn over a new leaf, they ought to be kicked out," agreed Tom Merry. "I think the idea is simply splendid."

Blake thumped Figgins on the back.

"All hail, noble captain!" he exclaimed. "We are thy humble servants and followers, and will follow thee to death or to the tuck-shop, or whithersoever thou leadeest."

"Oh, don't rot!" said Figgins.

"I'm in deadly earnest," assured Blake, "especially about the tuck-shop."

"It's a jolly good idea," said Manners, who was an enthusiastic amateur photographer, and glad to see his hobby thus called in. "I'll do my best and I might get half a dozen negatives to make sure. I'm using films in my camera now and I'll take a roll of six. Nothing like making sure."

"Then that's settled," said Figgins. "Next half-holiday the Smart Set are pretty sure to meet in the ruins again, and we'll track them down. So long!"

And Figgins & Co. quitted the study. Blake and his chums followed. Left alone in their quarters, the Terrible Two looked at one another.

"Rotten!" said Manners. "Of course, Figgy has earned the post, and it's only fair to make him leader. But I don't like coming out second best, Tom."

Tom Merry nodded.

"Neither do I, Manners," he assented. "But, you see, there's three of them, and only two of us, and three heads are better than two. I wish old Monty Lowther were back again with us. He had some good ideas sometimes."

"Yes, we were a stronger team when we were the Terrible Three," said Manners. "I wish old Monty would come. Still, this is a ripping idea of Figgy's, and we'll back him up for all we're worth."

Meanwhile, Figgins & Co. strolled out of the School House, and Kerr and Wynn went off to speak to someone, and Figgins walked towards the New House alone. He grinned as he saw Gore coming towards him.

"Hallo, Gore!" he remarked. "Been smashing any more crockery lately?"

Gore scowled darkly.

"You beast! I'll pay you out for the trick you served me last night!"

"Rats! You ought to be shown up," said Figgins. "I consider that we've let you off lightly."

"Show me up, then," sneered Gore. "Where's your proof? You haven't any."

"So your lesson hasn't done you any good, eh?" said Figgins. "We'll give you another some time, Gore."

And he walked on, and entered the New House.

Gore reflected for a moment, and then followed him. He signed to Mellish, his chief backer in the Smart Set, to join him.

"What's the game?" asked Mellish.

"I told you what Figgins did to me last night," growled Gore. "I'm going to pay him out. I saw the Co. go off on their own, and he's gone to his study alone."

"I say, it's risky going into the New House."

"Not if two of us go."

"I don't want——"

"You'll come with me, or I'll lick you instead of Figgins," said the bully of the Shell.

And Mellish thought he had better obey.

They went on quickly to the New House. Figgins glanced out of his window and spotted them, and grinned a grin to himself.

Gore and Mellish entered the house boldly enough, and

ascended the stairs. They trod lightly as they came close to the door of Figgy's study. The door was half open. It opened inwards towards the side wall of the room. Gore gripped Mellish's arm and pointed.

"Look there."

"I see."

"He's behind the door," said Gore, with a silent chuckle. "The silly cuckoo doesn't know he's showing his cap and his big boot. Ha, ha!"

It certainly seemed to be as Gore stated. Beyond the half-open door could be seen the toe of a boot projecting into full view, as if someone were standing behind the door in hiding, and quite unconscious that he was showing any part of himself. And at a distance of five feet odd inches from the floor, the peak of a cap showed round the door.

"We've got him!" muttered Gore. "The silly ass is hiding there; he knows we're coming, and he's ready to jump out on us. Doesn't think we've spotted him. Ha, ha!"

Mellish grinned.

"What are you going to do?" he asked, in a whisper.

"We won't go in," Gore whispered back. "We'll just rush at the door, and slam it as hard as we can back against the wall."

"My hat! That will hurt him."

"That's what I want to do."

"Ha, ha! Go ahead."

"Mind, shove your hardest on the door, and jam it right back against the wall," said Gore. "He'll feel like a pancake when we've done with him."

"Come on, then."

They gathered all their strength, and rushed at the half-open door. To hurl their weight upon it, and jam it back on the wall was the work of a second.

Crash! The door met with no resistance, but went right back to the wall, taking the two entirely by surprise, and the next moment they were tumbling over each other into the study.

"Why—what—"

"How—"

Gore sat up, rubbing his head, which had come into violent contact with the floor. He was sitting on Mellish's legs, and Mellish was squirming; but Gore did not seem to notice it. He looked at the door. It had swung back from the wall, and Gore saw a boot lying on the floor, and a cap pinned to the door so that the peak showed past the edge of the wood. Then he knew how he had been fooled.

Mellish saw it, too. He wriggled from under Gore and scrambled to his feet.

"Nice sort of an ass you are!" he sneered. "Fancy being taken in by a trick like that! You ought to have more sense, Gore!"

"Hallo!" said a familiar voice, and Figgins looked cheerfully into the study from the passage. "What are you fellows doing in my quarters, eh?"

Gore looked daggers at him as he rose, slowly and painfully.

"You beast, you did that on purpose!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins stepped back into the passage and shouted:

"Rescue! School House cads in our study! Buck up New House!"

There were answering shouts, and a pattering of feet in the corridor. There was no time to be lost. Gore and Mellish made a wild rush to escape. They had to run the gauntlet, and they were looking very rumpled by the time they emerged into the quadrangle, and the derisive shouts of the New House juniors followed them. They looked daggers at each other and separated.

CHAPTER 8. The Snapshots.

SATURDAY afternoon!

It was a fine September afternoon, and most of the boys of St. Jim's were turning out for early footer practice. There were some, however, who were employed in a less manly and honourable way.

The Smart Set were holding another meeting in the ruined castle. In that lonely spot they felt pretty safe from interruption, and they did not know that the reformers were on the track. The meeting was more numerous than the one Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had attended, and which had been surprised by the Terrible Two.

Gore's followers were on the increase. Ten juniors of both houses had come into the fold of the Smart Set, and they were gathered in the ruins for the purpose of smoking cigarettes with a solemn pretence of enjoyment.

Gore looked round upon the meeting with an eye of pride. His influence was mounting, and ere long he hoped to number such a following that the Smart Set would be able to hold its own in the school, and put Tom Merry and his friends in the shade.

"I say, it's jolly here," remarked Gore. "Of course, it's rotten that we should have to do our smoking in secret, but we must put up with that. The great thing is, to do it and show that we're not going to be put upon."

"How can we show that by doing it in secret?" Mellish wanted to know.

"Now we're all here," said Gore hastily, without replying to Mellish's question, "I want to put a resolution to the meeting. We're going to stick out of the sports as much as we like, Kildare or no Kildare, Tom Merry or no Tom Merry. Who's game to back me up through thick and thin?"

"I second the motion," said Mellish, "I don't like footer. Too much like hard work."

"Hear, hear."

"Hands up for the motion."

Every hand went up.

"Good," said Gore; "we'll show them! Now I've laid out the money we subscribed for the purpose, and I've got a jolly lot of smokes here. Cigarettes galore, and cigars for those who like 'em. Which will you have, Mellish?"

"A—a cigarette, I think," said Mellish, dubiously.

The others said the same. Gore was the only one who put on a cigar, and he did it with an air of relish that was far from being genuine.

"I've got something here to wet your whistles," he went on. "We're not the kind of chaps to drink ginger-pop. I should think. Look here."

From a parcel he produced a bottle of whisky, and a syphon of soda-water.

"What do you think of that?"

"I think we'd better draw the line somewhere, for one," said Mellish; "a smoke is all very well, but you don't get me drinking any of that horrible stuff, Gore."

"It's jolly good whisky."

"So it may be, but it's not good for us."

"You're a nice chap to start preaching."

"I'm not preaching. But I'm not going to roll home drunk to St. Jim's and get expelled," said Mellish. "I'm not quite such a fool as that."

"Bah, a little won't hurt you," said Gore, feeling extremely grown-up as he uncorked the bottle, and poured some of the fiery liquid into a tin mug, and squirted some of the soda into it. "It's all right, I tell you."

"I don't believe you like it," said Mellish incredulously. "Let's see you drink it."

Gore sipped at the mug.

"It's jolly good."

"Is it? Then you're not so greedy as you usually are," said Mellish. "You're mighty sparing with it. Give me another cigarette. Thanks. I'll have a light at yours, Jones!"

Snap!

The sudden sound came to the ears of all the boys present.

Snap! Snap! Only a few seconds apart came the snaps. The Smart Set started up in amazement.

"What on earth's that?" exclaimed Gore.

Mellish turned pale.

"It sounded like a camera."

"A camera! My only aunt!"

Snap!

Mellish threw away his cigarette. The rest of the Smart Set followed his example. They were looking surprised and alarmed. The idea of being snapshotted at that moment was enough to alarm them.

"Hang it all," said Gore. "Let's go and see what it means."

He dashed towards a thicket-clad mass of ruins whence the snapping had proceeded.

"Hallo!" said a cool voice.

Tom Merry rose into view. With him were Study No. 6 and Figgins & Co. Manners was stowing his Kodak away in an inside pocket. Gore glared at the reformers.

"What have you been doing?"

"I?" said Tom Merry. "Oh, I've been watching Manners!"

"What have you been doing, Manners?"

"Oh, snapping some silly asses who call themselves a Smart Set!" said Manners.

Gore scowled savagely.

"You're not going to take those negatives away from here," he exclaimed. "Hand over that camera. Hand that camera to me."

"Well, it's a hand camera, certainly," said Manners. "But I'm not going to hand it to you, Gore. Go home."

"Give it to me or we'll take it by force."

"Don't do anything ferocious, dear boy."

"Come on," shouted Gore; "let's take it away from him."

The Smart Set looked at one another dubiously.

ANSWERS

They were eleven in all, counting Gore, and the reformers numbered eight. But Tom Merry and his comrades were the champion athletes of the lower Forms, and could certainly have licked the Smart Set or twice as many of the same kidney. Weedy youths addicted to secret smoking were not likely to stand up long against fresh, strong, clean-living young athletes.

Upon the whole the Smart Set decided to leave that camera in Manners' possession.

"Come on," said Tom Merry, invitingly. "We're waiting for you."

But the Smart Set declined to come on.

"Let's get home," said Manners. "I want to develop those films. I believe the negatives will come out first rate. I shall be able to take the prints this afternoon, and if you smart fellows want to see them, and to know what we're going to do with them, you can drop into our study about tea-time."

And Tom Merry and his friends marched off, leaving the Smart Set looking considerably troubled in their minds.

"My hat!" said Tom. "It has been a howling success all along the line. Figgy, old chap, you deserve to be leader! The knell of the Smart Set has struck."

"Yaas, wathah."

They returned to the school. Manners turned everybody out of his study while he was developing the films. The negatives were dried in ample time to take some prints in the sunny afternoon.

Meanwhile, Gore and his friends were in a state of extreme nervousness. The Smart Set, disquieted as to what use the reformers intended to make of the photographs, rounded on Gore, and reviled him heartily for getting them into such a scrape. Gore, who knew that if one of the prints came to the notice of the Head he would be expelled from the school, was too uneasy and dispirited to reply to the insults and taunts hurled upon him by his ungrateful followers. He had shown them "life"—as he had learned it from Mr. Tadger—and now they were ready to jump on him. Such was the gratitude of the Smart Set!

Before tea-time most of the smart ones had wandered to Tom Merry's study, unusually civil in their manner to the hero of the Shell.

"Can we come in, Merry?"

Tom looked at Manners.

"All ready, old son?"

"All ready," said Manners.

"You can come in, asses," said Tom Merry, politely.

They came in, looking dubious and sheepish. All the reformers were in the study, and the athletic eight were prepared for hostilities. But the Smart Set were not in a hostile mood. They were in a humble and chastened spirit. Never had a set of smart sporting gents looked more willing to eat dirt.

Manners had four prints arranged on the table. Tom took them up one by one with the air of a showman.

"Here," said Tom Merry, holding up the first—"here we have a snapshot of the Smart Set of St. Jim's, showing them all smoking cigarettes, excepting Gore, who is smoking a cigar. Gore has also a bottle of whisky and a mug in his hands. The label on the whisky-bottle comes out very distinctly. Anyone who likes to examine this print may do so. I need not say that it is useless to damage it, as any number can be taken afresh from the negative."

The photograph passed from hand to hand. It was really a fine one, the picture showing up with clear-cut lines, and most of the Smart Set being recognisable feature for feature.

"Here," said Tom Merry, taking up the second print, "we have the same set of silly asses, but some of them have taken the cigarettes out of their mouths, and are holding them in their fingers. They look startled, doubtless, because they had heard the snap of a camera. Here, gentlemen, is the third print. It shows some of the Smart Set throwing away their tags, and some of them on their feet, looking round. Here is the fourth: really a fine photograph of Mellish, looking as if he was frightened out of his wits."

There was a chuckle audible in the study. But the Smart Set were in no mood for chuckling. They looked at the prints, and read there enough to ruin them if Tom Merry chose to make use of the photographs.

"What are you going to do with these things, hang you?" demanded Gore desperately.

Tom Merry looked him straight in the face.

"We're going to make conditions."

"Oh, go on!"

"The prefects have left it in our hands to put down the rotten, blackguardly business that you silly asses call being smart. We're going to do it. No more smoking, no more visits to the Golden Pig, no more guzzling that filthy stuff in the rains—no more Smart Set."

"That's it," said Figgins. "No more Smart Set."

And the reformers ejaculated simultaneously and solemnly, "No more Smart Set."

"And what if we won't agree?" said Gore, half-defiantly.

"I shall be sorry if you don't," said Tom Merry quietly.

"Sorry for you, and for having to take a serious step. If you

refuse to live decent lives like decent lads, instead of pothouse loafers, I shall place these photographs in the hands of Dr. Holmes to do as he thinks best."

"Sneak!"

The word brought a flush to Tom Merry's handsome face, but he replied calmly:

"The prefects have put the business into our hands, and we are responsible. It is not sneaking to prevent a set of foolish rascals from ruining themselves and bringing the name of the school into disgrace. You were at the Golden Pig the other night, Gore. I've heard that the police are looking for a chance to raid that place. Suppose it were raided and a St. Jim's fellow found there? Nice for the old school!"

"Blow the old school!" growled Gore.

"I dare say those are your sentiments, but they are not mine," said Tom Merry. "I mean what I say. The Smart Set is to vanish, vanish utterly, or else these photographs will be handed to the Head. You can take your choice."

"We agree, we agree," howled the Smart Set as one man.

"I suppose we must," said Gore. "Of course, you'll destroy the photographs if we agree to your terms, Tom Merry."

"Yes. But we shall keep the negatives. They will be safely locked up, and ready for production at any time the Smart Set feels inclined to revive itself and start in business again," said Tom Merry significantly. "You can't fool me, Gore; and I don't trust you half an inch. I think I've made myself clear."

"I should say so," said Figgins. "You talk like a Dutch uncle. They agree."

"Do you all agree?"

"Yes."

"Then you can clear out, and I hope you will have sense enough to go straight in the future," said Tom Merry.

And the Smart Set, looking exceedingly crestfallen, filed out of the study.

"Well, that job's jobbed," said Figgins, "and a jolly good job, too!"

"I think," said Tom Merry, looking round, "that we can report success to Kildare."

"We can, we can."

"Yaas, wathah."

"And most of the credit is due to Figgins. I vote that he goes and does the reporting," went on Tom Merry.

"Hear, hear."

"Not a bit of it," said the modest Figgins. "We'll all go together."

After some discussion this was agreed to, and the eight juniors made their way to the study of the captain of St. Jim's. Kildare, who was about to have tea, looked somewhat surprised at the invasion.

"Hallo, we've come at a wrong moment!" said Tom Merry. "Another time—"

"It's all right," said Kildare. "What is it?"

"We've come to report."

"Report what?"

"The death and burial of the Smart Set."

The captain stared.

"Honour bright?"

"Honour bright!"

"I know I can rely upon you, Merry," said Kildare, after a pause. "But you had better tell me all about it—without mentioning any names, if you like."

"Right-ho."

And Tom gave a graphic description of the campaign against the Smart Set. Kildare listened gravely at first, and then laughed till the tears ran down his cheeks.

"It's a good thing well done," he exclaimed. "You all deserve great credit; and so long as you keep the negatives I think the Smart Set will remain out of existence. Have you had tea, my lads?"

"Not yet."

"Then, unless you've got something especially good in your studies, suppose you sit down and have tea with me," suggested Kildare.

"Oh, Kildare!" said the juniors breathlessly.

To be asked to tea by the captain of St. Jim's was an honour that rarely fell to a junior, and the reformers had not dreamed of it.

"Will you?" asked the captain.

"Well, rather, and thanks awfully."

"Yaas, wathah! We are extremely honahed, deah boy."

It was a jolly tea in the captain's study, and the noble reformers felt quite repaid for the trouble they had been put to in extinguishing the Smart Set at St. Jim's.

THE END.

(Another grand long, complete school tale of Tom Merry next Thursday, entitled "The Return of Monty Lowther." Do not fail to read it, and please order your copy of "The Gem" Library in advance, Price One Halfpenny.)

NEXT
THURSDAY.

"THE RETURN OF MONTY LOWTHER."

A TALE OF TOM
MERRY'S SCHOOLDAYS.



Stormpoint

A School Tale. By MAURICE MERRIMAN.

READ
THIS
FIRST

Rex Allingham, Jim Fisher, and Bob Bouncer are three well-known chums at Stormpoint College. Hal Trehearn, the captain of the school, favours them; but they are bullied by Jardon and Symes, two Fifth-Formers, who play many spiteful tricks upon them. A new boy named Alburton comes to Stormpoint, and the chums object to his swaggering disposition, so nickname him "Swipes." Perkins and Porker, having a grudge against Bob Bouncer, combine with one another and decide to blow him up with explosives. They mix some chemicals, but instead get blown up themselves, and are surprised by Mr. Salmon, one of the masters. Perkins at once says that he does not think that masters ought to be allowed by law to keep such dangerous chemicals. (Now go on with the story.)

The Result of the Explosion!

Porker sat up amongst broken chemical-bottles and badly upset chemicals, which were hissing on the floor, turning it to all colours, and smelling what Rex would have called "wicked."

The unfortunate porter did not appear to know whether he was in the beginning of that week or the middle of next. Rex, Bob, and Jim rushed round, not feeling at all sure that Porker would not be like the chemical-bottles—in pieces. They were relieved when they saw that a few cuts and a blackened face were the worst that had happened.

"Bust me!" hooted Porker.

"If you are not already bust, poor, plump Porker, you are unbustable!" observed Bob. "Ha, ha, ha! I believe the man is on fire. He's smoking like a haystack that has been struck by lightning!"

"Wowrow! I am afire!" yelled Porker, leaping to his feet, and dancing about, while he held his trousers away from his flesh—at least, he tried to do so. "I'm burning!"

"We shall have some roast pig directly!" cried Rex. "I believe I can smell roast pork!"

"Phew! If roast pork kicks up this effluvium, I'll never eat it again," declared Bob. "It's enough to choke an East End dustman. There will be no young flies in the college next season."

This was all very well, but an explosion such as Perkins had consummated was a thing to make itself heard. Dr. Andale, in his study, heard it distinctly. It caused him to run a zigzag line across what he was writing; then it caused him to spring to his feet and rush towards the laboratory.

The smell of the thing told him where the explosion had occurred. A blind man could easily have found his way to it, so could a deaf one. That smell was mixed, and horrid.

"Boys!" cried the doctor.

The roars of laughter instantly ceased. Perkins had not laughed at all, so far, neither had Porker, but the others made up for it. Now they were silent, for there was something rather threatening in the doctor's voice.

"I'm burnt," howled Porker, "and I'm getting burnt worse and worse! Woohoo! There's a tickling sensation all over me!"

"That ought to be rather pleasant," observed Bob.

"Who is the cause of this?" demanded the doctor.

"If you please, sir," exclaimed Perkins, "it was merely a little accident, and it is not at all likely to occur again."

"Did you cause the explosion, boy?"

"Oh, no, sir! I wouldn't think of doing a thing like that."

"Did you cause the explosion, boys?" demanded the doctor, turning towards the chums, who were making desperate efforts to stop laughing.

"No, sir," answered Rex. "We had absolutely nothing to do with it. We, like yourself, are merely spectators; and, to tell the truth, I would rather be a spectator of an explosion than be the originator of it."

"Someone must have done it," said the doctor, "and the boy who is telling me a falsehood will be very severely punished."

"I wouldn't think of speaking falsely, sir," declared Perkins; "especially to you, because you always find out the truth when there's a row. No, I always tell you the truth. Of course, on this occasion you misunderstood me. You asked if it was my fault, and knowing that it wasn't, I

had to tell you the truth, and say it wasn't my fault. It was the chemicals that caused the explosion, and, as I have already said, I don't think masters ought to leave dangerous chemicals about where innocent schoolboys might inadvertently touch them."

"You said just now that you did not cause the explosion."

"I beg your pardon, sir, I said that—I—er—was sorter instrumental in the matter, but that it was the chemicals that caused the explosion. In your confusion, you may have slightly misunderstood my meaning, and—er—considering the fearful agony I have undergone, I feel quite sure that no humane gentleman such as yourself would think of touching a poor innocent schoolboy who inadvertently happened to—er—come in contact with certain chemicals that it is the duty of masters to keep under lock and key. You can see, sir, how terribly I am injured."

"What were you trying to do?"

"I was merely slightly experimenting—"

"I'm going to get out of the college when he starts experimenting—not slightly!" growled Bob.

"You shut up, Bob Bouncer!" exclaimed Perkins. "I only wanted to make an explosion, sir."

"You succeeded!" said Bob.

"There!" exclaimed Perkins. "You are always talking about sneaking, and yet you go and tell the doctor I caused the explosion."

"You are an extremely foolish lad, Perkins!" said the doctor, who had allowed him to ramble on, because past experience taught him that was the surest way of learning the truth. "Do you suppose I need to be told that there has been an explosion? Do stop that ridiculous noise, Parker!"

"I'm all on fire, sir! I believe I'm being cremated into a cinder-heap!"

"You are much more likely to be converted into a barrel of oil!" growled Bob.

"Silence, Bouncer! How dare you joke about such a disgraceful matter? What were the chemicals, Perkins?"

"Promiscuous, sir. I was experimenting, and I took 'em sort of haphazard, but there was nothing of the slightest dangerous nature amongst them."

"How do you know that if you do not know what chemicals they were?" naturally inquired the doctor.

"If you please, sir, I can tell at a glance if chemicals are dangerous, and if they are anything like that I wouldn't think of touching them."

"Don't talk such rubbish to me! You do not know the name of a single chemical, and yet you dare to assert that none of them were dangerous!"

"I beg your pardon, sir! There was sulphuric acid, and anyone knows that is not dangerous."

"I'm in another place when Perkins gets amongst chemicals that he considers dangerous!" said Bob. "He's bad enough with safe chemicals; what he would be with dangerous ones I don't know. You will find that stuff warm you up above a bit, Porker. It's bound to burn holes through your clothes if it was anything like strong."

"Will it burn my flesh?" groaned Porker.

"Well, that's a silly question to ask. If it burns your clothes—"

"You have no right to frighten the poor man, Bouncer!" said Perkins, glancing uneasily at the doctor, who appeared to be deciding how he should deal with the matter.

"He doesn't need any more frightening," said Bob.

"I'm inclined to think that you have startled him enough for one day. If it wasn't for the chemical fumes, his face would be as white as a slab of lard. As it is, it is the colour of the rainbow."

"You've no right to make fun of him," said Perkins. "and I hope the doctor will punish you very severely for such misconduct. It was all through your vile behaviour that the little accident occurred."

"What had Bouncer to do with it?" demanded the doctor.

"If you please, sir, it would never have occurred if it had not been for Bouncer. The manner in which he has treated me is simply shameful. Flesh and blood could not stand it, and although I am not the slightest bit vindictive, it was only natural that I should try to get some of my own back."

"Do you mean to tell me that you were going to try to blow your schoolfellow up?" gasped the doctor.

"Oh, no, sir, nothing like that. I wouldn't think of doing anything like that, 'cos I might get hung."

"What were you going to do, you extremely silly lad?"

"Merely give him a sort of startler, sir. I was going to put a pailful of the stuff under his bed, and he—he—he—I'll bet it would have startled him. It startled Parker even in broad daylight, so it would have been bound to startle Bouncer in the dead of night."

"Surely the boy must be demented!" gasped the doctor. "Why, you would have blown up the whole college!"

"I wouldn't have used enough of the stuff to do that, sir. It isn't at all likely, considering that I should have been in the college, and so I would have blown myself up. Besides, I wouldn't have wanted to blow you up, 'cos, although you are fearfully strict, and are always down on me, we might have got a worse master. I think you try to be just, and if you don't succeed in my case it isn't your fault. It's only because you don't understand all the goodness in my nature."

"I scarcely know how to deal with such a simple boy as you are, Perkins!" said the doctor. "Go and change your clothes, Parker. The stuff won't hurt you."

"But it is hurting me, sir!"

"Well, go and take your things off."

"I think, sir, I can bear my sufferings for a little longer. I have the feeling that it would do me good to see you flog that boy."

"Go at once!"

"How awful to think that a man should put such sinful notions in a master's head!" observed Perkins. "Just as though any master would flog a poor injured boy for a little accident, caused through searching for knowledge!"

"According to your own showing, Perkins, you wanted to have vengeance on your schoolfellow, and this renders your gross misconduct far worse. I feel assured that seriously speaking to you will have no effect at all, and—"

"I assure you it will, sir. It will have a wonderful effect, because I always listen to every order you give."

"Then it is a great pity that you do not obey them. You know perfectly well that I have forbidden you to touch any of the chemicals."

"It escaped my memory, sir."

"Then I must take measures to make you remember my orders in future. It always pains me to have to chastise a boy—"

"Not as much as it does the boy, sir. You ought to consider his feelings."

"Any chastisement would be given for his benefit."

"I wouldn't benefit by it a bit, sir. If a master hits me it makes me ten times worse, but if he speaks kindly and says don't do it again, I always obey him."

"That is not my experience with you. I shall cane you."

"It wouldn't make me obey a bit, sir. I'll promise anything you ask, but a caning always makes me savage. It does me harm physically and mentally."

"It would appear that I do not cane you with sufficient severity in that case, but I dare say I shall be able to alter that on the present occasion. Come into my study."

"I would much rather not, sir. I feel dreadfully sick and—"

"Not so sick as you will directly," growled Bob. "If I were your master, I'd warm your dear little jacket, my beauty. I'd teach you to try to blow up a gentle school-boy, who never did you any harm, except make you walk a few miles for your sneaking propensities."

"It's downright shameful that a boy should incite a master to acts of brutality. My father does not agree with corporal punishment—"

"Ah, that shows he did not go the right way to work with you," observed the doctor. "Follow me into my study."

"Oh, please sir, I couldn't bear it in my present weakened condition! It would be my death, and—"

"Come this way, my boy."

"I say, sir, I—"

"Do you hear my order?"

"My cries would disturb Mrs. Andale, and— Oh, I say, sir!"

Dr. Andale caught the delinquent by the collar, and led him to the lethal chamber.

"He's quite correct about his cries," observed Bob, a few minutes later. "Did you ever hear a fellow make such a jolly row over a whacking? The doctor never hits too hard, either."

"I'm inclined to think that he is hitting hard enough this time," observed Rex. "You see, where he gave himself away was admitting that he was going to have vengeance on you. I believe if the silly idiot had kept his mouth shut he would have got off with a reprimand and an impot. But the doc. does not like anything in the shape of revenge."

When Perkins came out he was howling dismally, and he did not get much sympathy from the chums, who would have taken a caning with a few spasmodic leaps, and no tears.

"Poor Perkins!" exclaimed Bob. "Lend him your handkerchief, Rex. He wants to snuffle. Still, the doctor did not blow him up."

"As sure as the blue-bub-blood of the Perkins flushes from my heart through its veins—boohoo!—I'll have vengeance for this!" hooted Perkins.

"Your blood is red, Perkins," said Rex, "and it doesn't flush through your veins. It comes back that road. You mean arteries. Those are the little jokers it flushes through."

"I don't care about that—"

"You jolly well would care if your blood started flushing the wrong way about. I don't know what the exact effect would be, but I have a notion that it would make you feel awfully squirms. But never mind, Perkins. You blew us up very nicely, and you got a most thorough thrashing for it."

"I'll write to my father about it. I'll show you the sort of fellow I am. I'll let you read the letter, and you will see if I'm frightened of my father or anyone else. I'll go and write the letter at once!"

"I say!" growled Bob. "I'll bet the letter will be funny. I hope he shows it to us, as he threatens. Don't laugh at it if he does. Let's come and watch him."

Perkins wanted to be nice and quiet, and as he knew that Jardon had gone out, and was not expected back till late that evening, he took the liberty of using his study and his paper. Perkins was not a good letter-writer. He spoilt three or four sheets of paper before he got something to his satisfaction, and feeling really proud of his achievement, he handed it to Rex.

"Read it aloud!" he cried. "Just you read it out, and that will tell you what I mean!"

It was a frightful-looking letter, and the spelling was, to say the least of it, very indifferent.

"Ahem! Don't you put a date to your letters?" inquired Rex.

"Hang the date! Read the letter."

"Sir—rather formal that to your own father, isn't it?—I herewith inform you that a most brutal and violent— you want an 'o' in violent, Perkins—violent assault has been committed—I see you don't believe in shoving in double letters—on me in these premises. A slight accident occurred in the haystack—"

"Rats! I never wrote anything about haystacks!"

"It looks like haystack. It's either that or house on fire."

"No, it isn't. It's laboratory, only as I didn't quite recollect how to spell it I wrote it indistinctly. My father is very particular about spelling."

"He will have cause to be particular when he gets through this little lot."

"I, of course, got the blame for it, and the doctor seized me, and knocked me about in such a shameful manner, that I am partially perillised—ha, ha!—in the arms and legs. Both my arms are perfectly useless—"

"So is his brain," growled Bob.

"You shut up, Bob Bouncer! Go on, Rex!"

"I am perfectly powerless to move my right arm, and my left is nearly as bad. When I tell you that I cannot hold a knife and fork, you will know how badly I am injured. I am going to commit suicide to-morrow in the river at four o'clock. There is a train that gets you here at half-past two, which is the time I shall be passing the station on my way to the river. I wish to be buried—quite simply."

"Yours, etc."

"Magnificent!" exclaimed Rex. "The only thing is, will he believe you cannot hold your knife and fork when you have held a pen to write this letter? He will certainly think you are frightfully injured if you cannot hold your

STORMPOINT (continued).

knife and fork, for you are so good at that sort of work. Come on, you chaps!—He makes me tired!"

"Lend me a penny, one of you, for a stamp for this letter," said Perkins, as they were about to leave the study.

"Bothered if I will!" said Bob. "You had better burn the idiotic rubbish."

"Will I! You don't know me. Miserable creatures! I never came across such beastly meanness. I'm not going to use one of my own pennies. If that beastly Jardon hasn't got a stamp, I'll send it without one, and the governor will have to pay twopence, which will serve him right, and—"

"Why, you little villain!" roared Jardon, returning quite unexpectedly. "How dare you rummage in my study—stealing my paper and my stamps, too? Won't I pay you! I'll teach you to thief!"

Then Jardon, already in a very bad temper, vented his fury on the unlucky Perkins, and he received rather a different sort of flogging to that which the doctor had given him. Jardon was always brutal when he struck a boy, and knowing that Perkins would not dare to say anything about it, as he had undoubtedly taken the paper, and was caught in the very act of attempting to take a stamp.

Possibly Jardon did not know how hard he was hitting, but Perkins did, and the way he howled ought to have convinced the bully, but unfortunately for Perkins, no masters were about, and Jardon did not take the slightest heed of his howls.

At last he released him, but he kept him in his study till he had stopped his sobbing. Then Perkins posted his masterpiece, and awaited results.

The boys had a half-holiday the following afternoon, and Rex, Bob, and Jim thought there would be some fun if Perkins senior came down, so they questioned Tim Perkins concerning the matter, and suggested that they should call at the "tuck shop," and all go to the station together. To which Perkins raised no objection.

"You can go to the station, you know, and tell my father which way I have gone. I shall go to the river by the bridge, but I'll keep in sight."

"Are you going into the water, Perkins?" inquired Rex.

"What do you think. It's too jolly cold. No, I intend to give him a scare, and you will see what an awful row I will get the doctor into. You see if I don't make him thoroughly ashamed of himself."

Rex winked at Bob, who insisted on paying for the amount of their little entertainment; then they made their way to the station, and Perkins, when the train came in, pointed out a tall, calm-looking gentleman, who got out of a first-class carriage, as his father.

"He ought to travel third," murmured Perkins; besides, I'll bet that cigar he is smoking cost him sixpence. Beastly extravagance! My mother is always complaining about it. Well, I'm off! See that he follows me!"

"Mr. Perkins?" inquired Rex, raising his cap, as he approached that gentleman.

"Yes, my lads," answered that gentleman. "Do you know what I have come about?"

"Yes—ha, ahem!—Tim showed us the letter. Awful nonsense, you know!"

"Ah, his mother opened the letter, and it has seriously frightened her. She wished me to come. Tim!"

That worthy pretended not to hear, but walked towards the river.

"I see!" exclaimed Mr. Perkins. "He is going to drown himself. Well, we must follow, and stop the rash act. Nice day, my lads. Rather cold, but bright."

Mr. Perkins did not appear to be in any hurry; he sauntered on, chatting about various things, and he got to learn

exactly what had happened, though the chums omitted to tell him what Perkins's object had been.

Tim slackened speed to give his father a chance of catching him, but that worthy also slackened speed, and he did not come up with Tim till they were on the bridge.

"Don't stop me, father!" cried Tim, in his most tragic manner. "I won't be stopped. I am desperate!"

"I regret to hear that, boy," exclaimed Mr. Perkins. "Very cold, isn't it?"

"Oh, you can take it coolly!"

"I fancy you will directly," observed Mr. Perkins, who knew his son's playful ways, and was determined to give him a severe lesson. "That water looks remarkably cold and—er—wet. It's green andummy, too, isn't it?"

"I leave you for ever. Tell my mother my last words: I am going to end my wretched life—further down the river—where none can stop me."

"My dear lad," exclaimed Mr. Perkins, grabbing him by the collar, "don't do anything rash."

"But I will! I'm determined to be drowned, only it isn't deep enough here. I shall go to the bathing pool."

"Pooh! There's no necessity to take all that trouble. Is your arm better?"

"No, it is worse."

"I find the same fault with your spelling."

"I hate spelling."

"Perhaps that is why you never do it. But look here, Tim; if you are determined to commit suicide, why not make the attempt here? I will show you what I mean."

Then Tim uttered a wild howl, for his father picked him up, lifted him over the rails, and flung him headlong into about three feet of icy water.

The way Tim scrambled out made the chums roar with laughter. He did not wait to argue matters, but rushed towards the college.

"That is rather severe punishment," said Mr. Perkins, "and I am sorry to have to do it; but the lad has really frightened his mother. He has made her quite ill, and she begged me to bring her here, but I flatly refused. The fact is, he is an only son, and she spoils him abominably. So do I—at least, I have done, so far—but I hope to make a man of him, and that little lesson will do him no harm. He is certain to change his clothes immediately. Now, come with me for a stroll, and then we will pay a visit to the college."

Mr. Perkins, on their arrival, went to the doctor and instructed the comrades to bring Tim, telling them to all come, as they would be able to explain exactly what had happened; and about ten minutes later the three chums, accompanied by the delinquent, entered the study, where they found the doctor in conversation with Mr. Perkins.

"I have been most shamefully treated," declared Tim.

"Well, your father certainly adopted rather drastic measures," observed Dr. Andale, "but—"

"I feel sure, sir, you don't know the awful injury you have caused me. I am bruised all over. My back must be in a most frightful state. If you saw it, it would make

your heart ache worse than my back aches."

"Nonsense!" said the doctor. "I certainly gave you a severe caning, because you deserved it; but—"

"You nearly flayed me alive, sir. I'm sure if my father saw my back—"

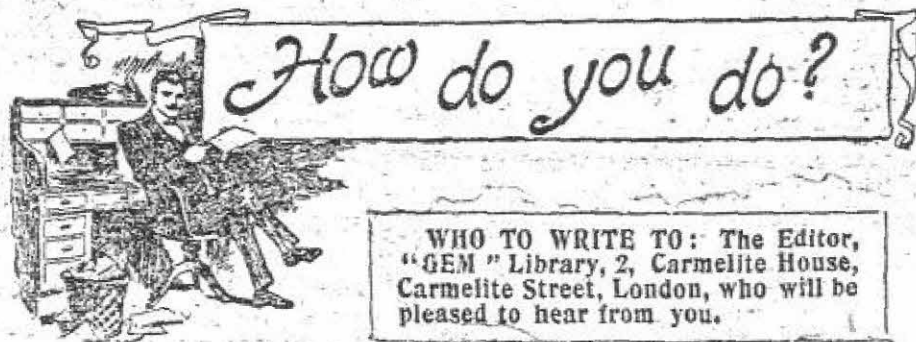
"That is ridiculous!" interposed the doctor. "Strip to the waist. I insist. I never strike a boy in anger. Probably I err on the other side."

"Well, I'll just show you, sir," cried Tom, stripping to the waist. "Look at that."

Dr. Andale started back, and Mr. Perkins gazed at him in astonishment.

"Boy," cried the doctor, in a voice that caused Tim to cringe, "do you dare to assert that I struck you in that brutal manner? My lad, surely I have not caused you to hate me, that you should bring such a terrible accusation against me."

(Another long instalment next Thursday.)



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