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VOL. 5.

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by
MARTIN
CLIFFORD.



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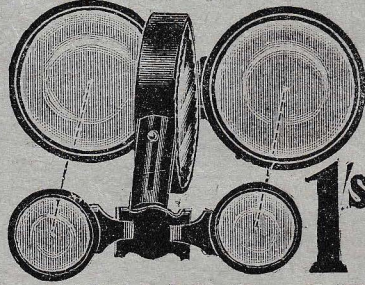
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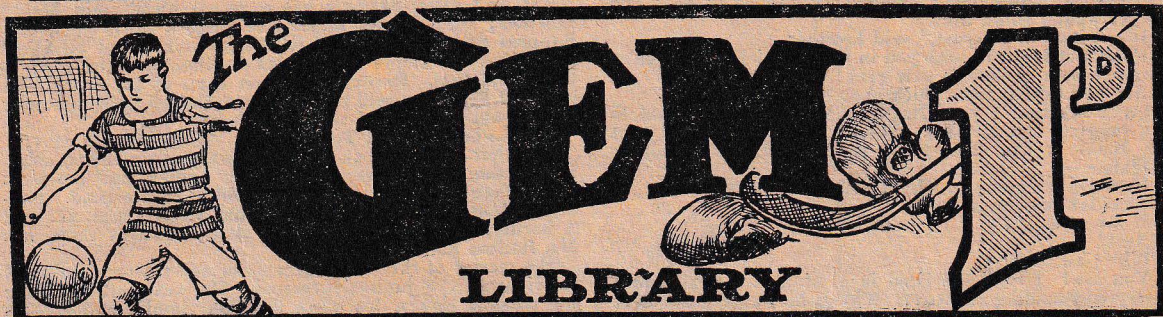
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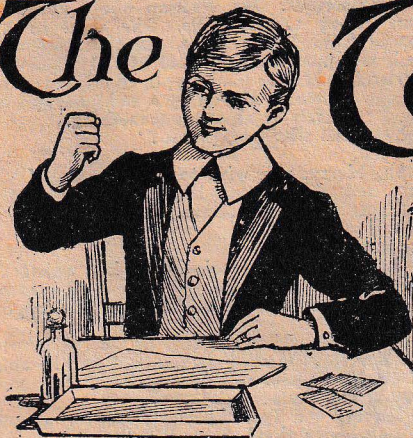
Every

Thursday.



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The Terrible Three's Sub.



"There's something the matter!" said Tom Merry. And he brought his fist down upon the study table with a bang.

CHAPTER 1.

Mr. Railton is not Himself.

THERE'S something the matter!"

And Tom Merry brought his fist down upon the table with a bang. There was a tinkle of broken glass, and Manners gave a roar.

"You silly chump!"

"What's up?"

"Look what you've done, ass! That was one of the best plates I've taken for weeks. It's broken."

"By Jove, so it is!" said Tom Merry. "What do you say, Lowther?"

"It does look a bit bent, I admit," grinned Monty Lowther, glancing at the shattered plate. "Can't you mend it, Manners?"

"Mend it!" howled Manners. "It's chipped all up! Why can't you keep your hands still, Tom Merry? What's the beastly table for if not—"

"Oh, ring off!"

"That's all very well. What am I going to do about that plate?"

"Do nothing, my son—it's done!"

"Don't try to be funny! What I want to know is—"

"Are you going to be quiet?" said Tom Merry impatiently. "I've got something important to say."

"And so have I!"

It looked as if the Terrible Three were about to come to blows. Manners had taken a lot of pains over that photograph, and it certainly was annoying to have it broken before he had taken the print.

"Look here, Manners, don't be an ass! How

A Splendid, Long, Complete School Tale of
Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's.

By Martin Clifford.

was I to know your plate was on the table? I'm sorry—"

"That's all very well——"

"What's the important thing you want to say?" interrupted Lowther. "Dry up, Manners, for goodness' sake!"

"There's something the matter!" said Tom Merry again.

"You're right!" growled Manners. "And I want to know what you're going to do about it?"

"About what?"

"That negative."

"Oh, blow the negative, and you, too!"

"It was worth a lot——"

"Bosh!"

"Oh, turn off the gas!" exclaimed Lowther. "I want to know what the giddy matter is?"

"It's Railton," said the hero of the Shell.

"Railton?"

"Of course! Haven't you noticed any difference in him lately?"

"Well, now you come to mention it, he does seem a little pale," agreed Manners, forgetting his precious plate. "But, of course, that may be anything. Look how pale I get when I do a little extra work!"

"Can't say I remember it," said Tom Merry. "But it's not only paleness. He's worried over something; you can see it in his eyes."

"Besides," put in Lowther, "he's getting absent-minded. Only this morning he asked me if I'd done him some lines he'd never given me. Yes, you're right, Tom Merry, there's something the matter."

"And I mean to find out what it is!" declared the leader of the Terrible Three. "We can't allow our respected House-master to go about like this."

Next
Thursday:
**"BINKS,
MILLIONAIRE."**

By Martin
Clifford.

A LONG, COMPLETE TALE OF TOM MERRY NEXT THURSDAY.

"Why not speak to him about it?"

"Can't do that, ass! He'd tell us to go and mind our own little businesses. No; we shall have to set to work and discover what's ailing him."

"It's overwork, I expect," said Lowther.

"Don't wonder at it, with you in the School House. You're enough to turn anybody's hair grey!"

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

"Can't say that I am. But look here, we don't want to start ragging one another. There's quite enough of that with Blake & Co. The point is, how are we going to elucidate—"

"How are we going to what?" asked Manners.

"Elucidate the mystery—"

"What mystery?"

"Ass!"

"Who's an ass?"

"You are! I shall get tired in a minute! Isn't there a mystery surrounding Railton? Why is he walking about as if he—as if—"

"As if he'd got the toothache?" suggested Monty Lowther.

"Toothache be blowed! A man with the toothache doesn't get pale and thin. I tell you Railton's thoroughly knocked up. And why is he knocked up?"

"Why?" repeated Manners, with a wave of the hand.

"There's a reason for everything," went on Tom Merry seriously; "and Railton isn't the sort of chap to worry himself thin over nothing. There's something grave—"

"I don't like it!" exclaimed Manners.

"No more do I," agreed Lowther.

"Then the only thing is to find out what the cause of his worry is. I know it's none of our business, really, but it's out of the question to see him walking about like this."

"Absolutely!"

"Oh, quite!" said Manners.

"Then—Hallo! What's up with you, Skimmy?"

The study door had opened, and the weedy figure of Skimpole could be seen. The amateur Socialist of St. Jim's stood blinking at the Terrible Three through his large glasses for a moment.

"What do you want, insect?" asked Lowther politely.

"That remark was entirely uncalled for!" said Skimpole, stepping into the study. "However, it is only to be expected when one remembers that you are the victims—"

"Oh, rats!"

"Really, Manners, your rudeness does not improve—"

"Your face'll get improved if you don't ring off!" said Manners. "If you came to say anything, say it, and don't stand there jawing!"

"Very well, I will say no more—"

"Thank goodness!"

"—about that subject," went on Skimpole. "The reason I came into this study was because I wish to commune with you—"

"You wish to what with us?"

"I see your intellects are not equal to the strain of listening to words you are not accustomed to hear. Now, under a Socialistic regime—"

"Gag him, somebody!"

"Socialism is—"

"Hang Socialism! We don't want to have anything to do with it!" said Tom Merry threateningly. "Now, look here, Skimmy, you'll get chucked out on your neck if you don't give your beastly Socialism a rest! I give you two minutes to have your say! Buck up!"

"One moment!" interrupted Skimpole. "Now we are on the subject—"

"That's eight seconds gone!"

"Oh, very well! I merely wanted to ask you if you had observed any change of demeanour in Mr. Railton of late? It appears to me he's worried and anxious about something."

"Oh, you've seen it, too, then?" remarked Manners. "Of course, we've observed it, ass! We don't go about with our eyes closed!"

"There was not the slightest reason why you should have referred to me by that rude—"

"Is that all you have to say?"

"No. I wanted to suggest something. As Mr. Railton seems so run down, I thought it would be a good idea to buy him something to pull him together—"

"Some corn-plaster, say, or—"

"Don't be absurd, Manners! Corn-plaster would be quite useless. I was thinking of a bottle of some wine or other."

"It's not a bad idea," said Tom Merry. "If you've got a fancy to buy some medicine, Skimmy—why, I've no objection!"

"I should scarcely ask your permission, Merry," said Skimpole coldly. "I only thought it might interest you; I imagined, in fact, that you would be moved to purchase Mr. Railton some little luxury yourself."

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 146.

The genius of the Shell turned and left the room. The Terrible Three looked after him thoughtfully.

"It isn't often Skimmy has a decent idea," said Monty Lowther; "but I must admit this seems a fairly good one. Suppose we pop along and tell Blake and his set all about it? When he knows it concerns Railton, he'll be with us heart and soul. Railton's the best chap at St. Jim's, and even old Figgins would be in with us, though he does belong to that old barn called the New House."

"Right-ho!" agreed Tom Merry. "Come on, my sons!"

They left the study, and walked slowly along the corridor. It was the interval before afternoon lessons, and the most likely place to find Blake & Co. would be in the quad. Suddenly Manners, who had hold of Tom Merry's arm, gripped it harder, and nodded. Coming slowly towards them was Mr. Railton himself.

The master of the School House seemed pre-occupied, and oblivious of the juniors' presence. He was walking along the passage slowly, his gown flapping limply, and the set expression of misery on his features came somewhat as a shock to the Terrible Three. The House-master was usually so light-hearted and genial.

What on earth could be the matter with him? It certainly was something serious. Mr. Railton would never be upset to such an extent over a trifle. The sight of his anxious face moved Tom Merry a lot, for the handsome leader of the Shell was more than fond of Mr. Railton—the two were firm friends. Master and pupil could never be more attached to one another. Moved by a sudden impulse, he stepped forward. He felt he must say something.

"Could you tell me the time, sir, please?"

Mr. Railton started.

"Oh—er— Ah, Merry, you wish to speak to me?"

He smiled wanly, and tried to brace himself up. Evidently he had not heard Tom Merry's question.

"I only asked the time, sir."

"Certainly, my boy!"

Mr. Railton's hand went instinctively to his waistcoat pocket, where he usually wore his valuable gold watch. Then the House-master's face flushed a little, and he dropped his hand to his side.

"I don't—er— Really, Merry, I fail to see the reason for your request. Ten steps farther on, and you will be able to see the school clock. Kindly think next time before you ask such unnecessary questions!"

He passed on, leaving the Terrible Three looking at one another in more perplexity than ever. What could be the matter with Mr. Railton? He wasn't like himself at all.

"Well, I'm dashed!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "He seemed quite flustered for a minute. And did you notice his face? Poor old Railton! There's something decidedly up, chaps. He's not in form at all."

"Why didn't he tell you the time?" said Manners, in a puzzled voice. "He put his hand to his pocket to fetch his watch out, and then seemed to remember it wasn't there. He's sold it—pawned it, or something!"

"Bosh!"

"Utter piffle!"

"All right!" said Manners. "That's what I think, anyhow. He must be short of money. Come along; let's go and find Blakey!"

They passed out into the quad., and saw Blake & Co. collected under one of the trees. Without waiting, the Terrible Three crossed the intervening space.

"I say, you kids—" began Tom Merry.

The Famous Four of Study No. 6 turned their eyes towards the Shell fellows indignantly.

"Us what? Look here, you Shellfish—"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Oh, dry up, Gussy! Go indoors and change your waistcoat; you were wearing that one yesterday!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I fail to see the reason for that remark!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, adjusting his monocle, and glaring stiffly at Tom Merry.

"Of course, you do, ass!"

"I object to bein' chawactewised as an ass—"

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

"I uttably wefuse to go and eat coke!"

"Then stop where you are!"

"I uttably wefuse— Or, wathah, I should say, I fully intend to stop where I am, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus. "Bai Jove, you appear to be sewious over something, Mannahs!"

"They all appear more or less as if they were contemplating some dark deed!" grinned Jack Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"What's up with you?" asked Herries. "Even Gussy's limited brains have perceived that something out of the usual is—"

"Hewwies, I object stwongly to that insinuation!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus wrathfully. "Unless you

pronounce yourself willing to offah me a complete apology, I shall have no option but to wemove my coat, and administah a feahful thwashin'!"

"Turn the switch off! There's a good chap, Gussy!" said Lowther. "We've heard a jolly lot too much about your 'feahful thwashin's'!"

"If you think I was jokin', deah boys—" "We don't think anything about you!" put in Tom Merry. "We look upon you as if you didn't exist!"

"Weally, deah boys—" "Now, look here, Blake," said Tom Merry, turning his back on D'Arcy, who glared in indignation. "I didn't come here to have a wrangling match with your tame tailor's dummy—"

"Bai Jove! You howwid boundah—" "—but to speak on a matter which is just as important to you fellows as it is to us. Don't you understand, Gussy, that I've got something serious to say?"

"Bai Jove, deah boy, I thought you were wotting!" said Arthur Augustus, cooling down in a moment. "Pway accept my sincere apologies. I had no ideah you weally meant it, deah boys. You quite understand, howevah, that I must stand on my dig., and, undah the circs.,—"

"Quite so, Gussy; under the circs., you felt compelled to defend yourself, didn't you?"

"Yaas, wathah!" "Well, the next thing is this," continued the head of the Shell. "Have either of you kids, or, rather, fellows, noticed any change in Railton of late? In my opinion, he's absolutely stale—knocked up—"

"Bai Jove, Mewwy, that's just what I've been thinkin'! Mr. Wailton seems frightwfully wowwied ovah somethin' or othah."

"Half a minute, ass!" chimed in Jack Blake. "Let somebody else's voice be heard, for goodness' sake! Funny thing, Tom Merry, I was only thinking just now that something very peculiar is up with old Railton. I hope it's nothing serious. Life wouldn't be worth living at St. Jim's without him."

"Wathah not, deah boys!"

"He's a brick!"

"Best chap at St. Jim's!"

"So we've decided to discover what it is that's worrying him," said Manners. "It won't be easy to do; but after thinking it over, Merry, I suggest going along to his study after all, and asking him to tell us what it is, and whether we can help him at all."

"Heah, heah! I wegard that as a weally top-hole suggestion, Mannahs," said the swell of St. Jim's. "In fact, quite unusual fwom you."

"There's just time before afternoon lessons," said Digby.

"I second Manners' proposal."

"And I third it, deah boys."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see the weason for that giggle, Hewwies. Now, are we all weady? Bai Jove, you are cwumpling my collah, Blake!"

"Then shut up!"

"I wefuse to do anything of the kind. I considah I have just as much wight to talk as you. Ow!"

D'Arcy gasped as Jack Blake pulled his ear with no little force. The Terrible Three walked off in the direction of the entrance-hall. Although not cold, the day was certainly not warm, and standing about was a cool business.

"Blake, you are a fwightful wuffian!"

"You've told me that before, Gus. Now, dry up, there's a good chap. Tom Merry's gone in."

"Bai Jove, so he has!"

Arthur Augustus straightened himself, and, forgetting all about his "dig.," hurried indoors. The swell of the School House was one of the best fellows breathing, but, like everybody else, he had his peculiarities. In the hall the seven juniors had a few words more conversation, then went and knocked at the door of Mr. Railton's study. They waited for a moment, as no answer was forthcoming, then knocked again.

"Come in!"

Tom Merry opened the door, and the seven visitors trooped into the room. Mr. Railton was reclining in an easy-chair before the fire. Tom Merry noticed with some surprise that there was no smell of tobacco in the room. Had the House-master given up smoking?

"Well, boys, what is it you want?"

Mr. Railton smiled as cheerfully as he could, but the lines on his forehead and the dull expression in his eyes told the boys that the smile was forced. Something very serious was the matter.

"We thought, sir—that is to say," began Tom Merry, turning slightly red. "To tell the truth, sir, we don't like it."

"Wathah not, sir!"

"Don't like what, my boys?"

"Your—your being so pale and thin, sir," said the hero of the Shell desperately. "You're run down—ill. We can see there's something worrying you, and frankly, sir, we don't like it. You're not yourself. We want to know if we can help you, that's all, sir."

CHAPTER 2.

Mr. Railton Receives Visitors.

MR. RAILTON started. "I—I do not understand you, Merry," he said, trying to smile in his old genial fashion. "Why should you come to me and inquire after my health? There is nothing the matter, I assure you."

"That's all!—I mean to say," went on Tom Merry hastily, "that you can't deceive us, sir. The very expression on your face—"

"Yaas, wathah, sir! The vewy expression on your face tells us that ewverything isn't what it ought to be, and that something is wadically w'ong."

Mr. Railton smiled.

"It's very good of you, my boys, to take this interest in my well-being, and I heartily appreciate it; but you are worrying yourselves over nothing. I am quite all right."

"But you're so pale, sir."

"And thin."

"Not to mention worried," put in Blake. "We can see it in your eyes, sir."

"No, no, Blake; you are mistaken. It is not so serious as all that. I admit I am a little run down, perhaps, and out of sorts."

"Is there anything we can do, sir?" asked Blake. "We don't like to see you worried like this."

"I assure you, Blake, you are more worried than I," the House-master smiled, though the smile was palpably forced.

"Now, boys, I must really ask you to go. I have work to attend to."

"Pway accept our apologies, Mr. Wailton. We had no ideah we were intewwuptin' your labours. Come along, deah boys, we must leave Mr. Wailton in peace."

"It's jolly certain he won't get it while you're here, ass!"

muttered Blake. "Can't you dry up?"

"Certainly not, Blake! It would mean a loss of dig."

"Oh, blow your dig! Well, sir," Blake went on, raising his voice, "we're glad it's nothing serious, and hope you'll soon be your old self again."

"Yaas, wathah, sir!"

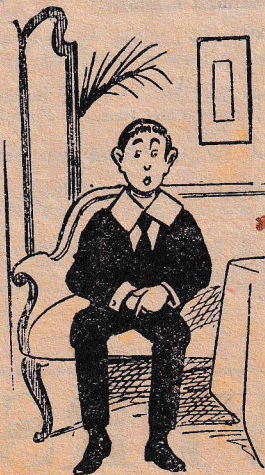
The juniors trooped out of the House-master's study, all of them with the exception of Tom Merry satisfied that they had been worrying themselves over a trifle. The captain of the Shell was far from easy; it was worse than he had imagined. Mr. Railton would not even admit there was anything wrong, therefore it was something secret—something that he didn't want anybody to know, something he wished to bear the burden of alone.

"He was making excuses," Tom Merry told himself.

"He wanted us to think it was the work that was causing him worry. But it isn't. It's something outside the school altogether; I'm certain of that."

As soon as Mr. Railton's door had closed, the smile died

Boys who do not read "THE GEM."



The boy
at
the party
who is
SO
goody-goody!

from the master's lips, and a look came into them that he had never revealed outside his own study.

It was an expression of utter misery, almost of horror.

Five minutes he sat there, staring before him with sightless eyes, thinking—thinking of something that caused him almost acute mental agony. Suddenly he threw his hands on the table, and buried his face in them.

"Oh, Heaven, what can I do—what can I do?" he muttered after a moment. "I dare not tell the doctor. I cannot ask him for the—"

He looked up.

"Yet there is no other way. Oh, it is terrible—terrible! And those boys—Blake, Merry, and the others. They are worried over me. Ah, they have good hearts, all of them, in spite of their pranks and jokes. It is good to know that I have such boys around me; but I hate deceiving them. They think it is overwork."

He laughed at the mockery of it.

"Overwork! Would to Heaven it was nothing worse! Poor little girl—poor little girl!"

He sat in his chair thinking again, taking no heed of what went on around him. He was wholly absorbed in his reverie. A knock came at the door, but Mr. Railton did not hear it. Again it came, this time louder, and the master started. With an effort he pulled himself together and picked up a pen.

"Come in!" he called, making a pretence of being busy writing.

The door opened, and Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, stepped in. His quick, alert eyes took in everything. He, as well as the juniors, had not failed to notice the vast difference in his House-master.

"Well, Kildare, what is it you want?"

"Nothing much, sir," replied the skipper. "Only I'm writing an article for the magazine, and I want to verify a certain matter. The best authority I can think of is your—"

He mentioned a very rare and expensive classic, which Mr. Railton prized above all else. It usually reposed in full sight on the House-master's bookshelf. Now, however, Kildare failed to see it.

Mr. Railton turned slightly red.

"I—I—I'm afraid you'll have to get your information from some other source, Kildare," he said, as if confused. "At present I have not got the book you mentioned. It is lent to somebody, and it may be some little time before I get it returned to me."

Kildare was surprised, and looked keenly at Mr. Railton. "I see, sir. I didn't know you'd lent it out. I shall have to look up what I want elsewhere, then. Thank you, sir. By the by, you seem to be rather run down."

"It is nothing, Kildare. Merely a little overwork."

"Well, I hope you'll soon be better, sir," said Kildare. "You're not like yourself at all."

The head of the Sixth left, and Mr. Railton relapsed once more into his reverie. They all noticed it! The Head would be next, he told himself. His condition was getting conspicuous. Yet what man on earth could keep his customary spirits and geniality when a matter of life and death hung in the balance?

And while Mr. Railton sat in his own study thinking and musing, his late visitors were holding a conference in the Terrible Three's residence, Study No. 10.

"I tell you, kids, Railton was bluffing us," declared Tom Merry. "Do you think overwork would make him go grey, or, rather, make him look so pale and haggard?"

"Of course not!"

"Heah, heah, deah boys! We can't allow Wailton to walk about like this. I suggest we form a deputation and visit the Head."

"Head be blowed!" said Monty Lowther. "No, I intend to run down to Rylcombe and buy some tonic. Follow Skimpy's example, as a matter of fact."

"Skimpy's example?" asked Blake, "What are you jawing about?"

Tom Merry told his rivals of the Fourth about Skimpole's idea, and that the amateur Socialist had gone down to the village to buy some medicine.

"Good wheeze!" chuckled Jack Blake. "It'll make old Railton look up if he gets some tonic from all of us. There's no time now, but after tea we can skip down and have the stuff delivered before call-over."

"Yaas, wathah!"

So it was decided.

CHAPTER 3.

Dr. Holmes Insists.

THE cold that evening was intense, and a chill mist hovered over the ground. Winter was setting in in earnest. Not many boys were out, and those who were were mostly our friends of the Fourth and Shell. Tom Merry had informed Harry Noble of the idea, and Kangaroo, as the Australian boy was familiarly called, had in turn told his chums Dane and Glyn.

In addition to this, Arthur Augustus had, in a thoughtless moment, let on to his young brother, Wally D'Arcy, of the Third, who forthwith retold the wheeze for the edification of his Form mates. A whip round resulted in Wally and Curly Gibson stealing down to the village that night with the others.

The Rylcombe chemist thought half the school had been taken suddenly and seriously ill. The assortment and variety of medicines, pills, wines, etc., the juniors purchased was astonishing. D'Arcy bought a three-and-ninepenny bottle of medicated wine, Tom Merry a box of pills, Blake a patent cough cure, Kangaroo an assortment of herbs; while the others carried to St. Jim's articles too numerous to be mentioned. At any rate, as Tom Merry remarked, if Mr. Railton didn't get well after that lot, then he ought to go and see a specialist.

"I reckon this lot'll last him a week, don't you?" grinned Bernard Glyn, as they walked up Rylcombe Lane. "He'll have to take a dose of each to-night before he goes to bed." "And in the morning we shall find his cold remains," said Blake. "No, he'll start by taking my cough cure."

"Rats! He hasn't got a cold," exclaimed Herries.

"Ass! What does that matter?" said Blake. "This stuff'll cure anything. He won't need any of your muck after he's taken this. You kids have wasted your tin."

"Wats, deah boy!" said D'Arcy. "Mr. Wailton will commence by takin' my wine. It is vewy impwob. he would dwink your beastly cough mixture in pweference to medicated wine."

"It's my opinion he'll refuse the lot," said Kangaroo. "Or even if he accepts them he won't drink 'em. He isn't ill; it's only a run-down feeling, I expect."

"The best way is to wait and see," remarked Tom Merry. "If he takes it, all well and good; if he doesn't, he can't say we didn't do our best, can he?"

"Wathah not, deah boy!"

They trooped into the quadrangle, and made for the entrance. Here they held a short conference. Then Blake left them, and went in search of Binks, the School House page.

Half an hour later, Mr. Railton, who was endeavouring to drown his thoughts in the pages of an interesting novel, was startled by a tap at the door. Somehow a tap at the door seemed to set his nerves on edge, for he jumped a trifle, then leaned back in his chair.

"Come in!" he said. "Come in!"

Binks came in. In his hand he held a parcel. With a half grin he laid it on the table, and looked at the House-master.

"For you, sir."

Before Mr. Railton could reply Binks had disappeared. The master looked at the parcel curiously, then untied the string.

"Cough mixture!" ejaculated Mr. Railton in astonishment. "Really, there must be some mistake. I know nothing about any cough mixture."

He picked up the wrapper and examined it. On it, in clear printed letters, were the words: "To Mr. Railton, with best respects. Get well quick, sir."

"Dear me!" The master of the School House read the inscription in surprise. Then he smiled to himself. "It is from Merry or Blake, I expect," he murmured. "Well, it is good of them, whoever it is. But if they only knew—if they only—Come in!"

It was Binks again, and he brought another parcel. It bore the same wording, and contained a large bottle of medicated wine. Mr. Railton was again surprised.

"This is most peculiar!" he muttered. "Who can be sending me these things? Well, well, I like to see it! It shows me that my boys are anxious about my health, and want me to get well. Tom Merry is at the bottom of it, though, I'll warrant."

Three minutes later Binks appeared again with still another parcel. This one contained two bottles of blood purifier, and a small pamphlet on Socialism. Mr. Railton smiled.

"I think I can guess who this is from," he murmured. "Skimpole is a little too ardent, I am afraid. He gives himself away. Or perhaps he may have meant me to guess? Skimpole is a peculiar fellow."

When, a few minutes later, a fourth parcel was delivered, Mr. Railton began to suspect a jape. It was the juniors'

ANSWERS

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"Have you been eating peppermints?" roared the big man, "answer my question!" "Well—er—yes!" answered Tom Merry thoughtfully. "I remember eating some last Wednesday or Thursday. (See page 11.)

way of telling him to get well quickly, and Mr. Railton appreciated it for what it was worth.

Every five minutes for the next hour a parcel was brought up by Binks with clockwork-like regularity. Binks, by the way, appeared to have a fixed grin on his face—a grin that wouldn't come off. And by the time they were all done the House-master was feeling in decidedly better spirits. On his table was a large array of medicine-bottles, pill-boxes, etc.

"Upon my soul," he laughed, "I shall be able to start a chemist's shop, at this rate! But what can I do with them? My last wish would be to displease the young scamps. So I suppose I shall have to keep them here. I cannot thank them either, for I do not know the names of the givers. Ah, an idea!"

Mr. Railton sat down, and drew a piece of paper towards him. Having written a few words upon it, he left the study and descended to Hall.

There was no one about. Mr. Railton walked to the notice-board, and pinned the piece of paper to it.

"I imagine that about fits the case," he murmured; then turned and made his way to his study again.

In the corridor he met Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth.

"Ah, Mr. Railton, is that you?" the short-sighted little man inquired. "I have just come from Dr. Holmes. He wishes to see you, I understand."

"Er—I really beg your pardon, Lathom! I didn't quite catch what you said!" exclaimed Mr. Railton, starting out of his gloomy musings, into which he had again relapsed.

"The Head wishes to see you," repeated Mr. Lathom, in a louder tone. "I have just left him."

"Oh, quite so! I will go to him at once! Thank you, Lathom—thank you!"

The master of the School House hurried down the corridor, and made his way to the Head's study.

He found Dr. Holmes busy, with a pile of papers in front of him on the desk.

"Ah, Railton! Sit down, will you? What did you think

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NEXT
THURSDAY:

"BINKS, MILLIONAIRE."

A School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.
By MARTIN CLIFFORD.



of those papers I gave you to read? Are they worth anything, or—"

"Papers, sir?" repeated Mr. Railton, in a puzzled voice. "I don't think I understand."

"Yes, you do, Railton! Don't you remember those examination papers I handed to you last Wednesday? You promised to glance through them?"

"I am afraid I have no recollection of it, sir. Wednesday, you say? That was before— Of course!"

Dr. Holmes looked at his subordinate keenly. Mr. Railton was not himself at all. Was it possible he had forgotten about the papers? He seemed to be pale and intensely worried. Strange!

The doctor rose to his feet, concerned, as he realised that the House-master was really ill. This would never do! And only a week previous he had been his usual, genial self.

"Dear me, Railton, is it possible you have forgotten them?" he exclaimed, laying a kindly hand on the other's shoulder. "I am afraid you are out of sorts—"

"No, sir; I am all right!" was the hasty reply. "But I must confess that I have no knowledge of the examination papers you mention. Are you not mistaken—"

"Upon my soul, Railton, you surprise me!" the kindly old doctor exclaimed. "It is useless your denying it—you are in some trouble. Tell me what it is—tell me if I can help you in any way."

Mr. Railton endeavoured to pull himself together. He smiled, and shook his head. How he would have liked to tell the Head everything! But that was impossible—it would never do to foist his troubles on to the Head's shoulders.

"You are mistaken, sir. I may be a little run-down—I admit I am, but I assure you it is nothing serious—"

"I refuse to believe that, Railton! You cannot remain here and continue your duties while in this state. I had no idea you had changed so much. You must take a rest."

"A rest, sir? No, I cannot agree—"

"Tut-tut! You must! You are run-down, my dear Railton—completely run down! You must go to—the seaside or somewhere to brace yourself up. You cannot remain at St. Jim's in this unhappy condition."

Mr. Railton shook his head decidedly.

"It is impossible, doctor!" he said, with emphasis.

"And I say the reverse!" cried the Head, sitting down again, and adjusting his spectacles. "Since you will not take my advice, Railton, I fear I must make it an order."

"But who is to take charge of my House, sir—"

"I will attend to that. There is a friend I can get down for a fortnight who will fill your position. Now, no more objections, Railton. To-morrow morning you leave St. Jim's for a couple of weeks; and when you return I shall expect you to be your old cheerful self. Good gracious, man, you are completely changed!"

"Since you insist—"

"I do insist—most emphatically!"

"Very good, Dr. Holmes!" exclaimed Mr. Railton, in a low voice. "It is kind of you to give me this rest—very kind—and I do not know how to thank you. I need it, right enough, and hope to be well again soon. As you say, a change will probably work wonders."

A few minutes later he left the Head's presence.

The thoughtful old doctor had done the right thing. In the morning Mr. Railton would leave St. Jim's—but he would not leave it to go to the seaside. Any spot on the face of the earth would have been the same while the present state of affairs prevailed.

Down in Hall the crowd of juniors were collected round the notice-board, many of them unable to understand the purport of the paper pinned thereto.

"I say, Merry, what's this about?" called Gore, as the Terrible Three strolled in.

"Which, my son?" asked Tom Merry, pushing his way through the crowd. "Hallo! It's in Railton's writing!"

He read the notice, and grinned.

"To all those boys who have been thoughtful enough to present me with health-restoring properties—thank you! I will do my best with them, and sincerely hope to show you all that your kindness has not been in vain—"

"HENRY RAILTON."

"What's he mean?" inquired Pratt, of the New House.

"What health-restoring properties? Is this some new wheeze of yours, Merry?"

Tom Merry looked at Pratt innocently.

"Mue?" he repeated. "How should I know anything about it, kid? Better go and ask Railton himself if you're so curious. Come on, my sons!"

The Terrible Three adjourned to their own study.

Soon after, at prep, Mr. Railton came round and announced the fact that he was leaving for a couple of weeks.

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The juniors, though sorry to lose him, were glad as well, because they could see he needed a rest badly enough.

The following morning, before first lessons, the House-master was off. He had given the address in London where he intended staying, and smiled as he crossed the quad to the waiting trap. Tom Merry & Co. had turned out to give him a good send-off.

"I hope you'll be better when you come back, sir," said the hero of the Shell. "We shall miss you awfully."

"Yaas, wathah, sir!" put in D'Arcy, who was resplendent in a brand new waistcoat of rather startling pattern. "It will be fearfully wotten without you, Mr. Wailton!"

"Oh, you'll soon see me again, D'Arcy!" smiled the House-master, as he climbed into his seat. "By the bye, there is a new master coming down to-morrow to take my place. I shall expect you to treat him exactly as you do myself, boys."

"Don't you wowwy, Mr. Wailton! I will see that the new mastah is tweated with pwopah respect. You can trust me— Bai Jove, Blake, what did you do that foah?"

Blake turned red.

"Shut up, you dunny!" he whispered fiercely. "If you don't I'll jam that beastly topper over your eyes!"

"Bai Jove!"

The direful threat had the desired effect, and D'Arcy relapsed into silence. A moment later Mr. Railton departed, the juniors giving him a rousing send-off.

"Well," said Tom Merry, "he's gone!"

"Did you guess that all yourself?" inquired Blake sarcastically.

"Rats! Now, look here, kids, we know jolly well that Railton isn't ill because of work at St. Jim's, don't we? There's nothing here to worry him, as a matter of fact."

"Except Gussy!" chuckled Lowther.

"Lowthah, I must request you to withdraw— Gweat Scott!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake had brought his fist down upon Arthur Augustus's shiny topper with considerable force, and had completely extinguished the swell of the School House.

With an effort D'Arcy wrenched the headgear off, and glared round him, a warlike expression in his eyes.

"Bai Jove, Blake, where are you, deah boy? I wegard you as a fwightful wufian, and I must request you to put up your hands! I cannot allow such wuff tweatment to pass unpunished—"

"What are you going to do, ass?" inquired his leader.

"It is my painful duty to remove my coat and thwack you with the severity that the case demands! My toppah is uttaly wuined!"

"And so will that waistcoat be if you remove your coat! I don't think its appearance would be improved—certainly the beautiful hues wouldn't—if it came into contact with the quad—"

"Bai Jove, deah boy, I forgot that! Pway step inside, and I will pwocceed to wipe up the foah— Weally, Skimnap, you are intewwuptin'—"

Skimpole had approached at a run, and for once in a way he appeared to be excited. Behind his huge glasses he was blinking rapidly.

"Merry, Blake—"

"I'm not merry!" interrupted Blake.

"I didn't say you were!" exclaimed Skimpole.

"Yes, you did! You said 'Merry Blake,' when, as a matter of fact, I'm distinctly sad!"

"I fear I do not understand you, Blake. Now, pray listen, all of you!" went on Skimpole. "I have made a most important—I may say a distinctly enlightening—discovery. It has put me all of a flutter, and I am most anxious for you fellows to share my knowledge."

CHAPTER 4.

The Enlightening Letter.

TOM MERRY stepped forward. He could see that the amateur Socialist of St. Jim's had really found something out—something of importance. It took a lot to move Skimpole to his present excited condition. So the leader of the Shell held his hand aloft.

"Dry up, kids!" he said quietly. "I fancy Skimnap's got something serious to tell us."

"I have, Merry; but I think it would be better if we went indoors. The matter is very private, and I don't want to tell it to anybody I couldn't trust. You understand?"

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy! I must say you have flashes of weason at times, Skimnap! You can trust any of us not to let the cat out of the beastly bag!"

"Skimnap's right, kids!" said Tom Merry. "It'll be more satisfactory to go indoors. If it's something secret, we don't want Mellish or French to come nosing around."

If Mellish got hold of it it would be all over the school in an hour."

Wondering what the great discovery was—for Skimpole would never descend to the level of japing—the juniors trooped into the School House. As the Terrible Three's study was the largest, they turned their steps in that direction.

"Now," said Tom Merry, when they were all inside and the door closed, "hurry up and tell us what it is, Skimpole. The bell will go in a minute, so we haven't got much time."

"I quite realise that!" exclaimed Skimpole, blinking at his audience. "If you fellows will keep silence for a short time—"

"You're wasting breath!" remarked Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! Get on with the washin', Skimmay!"

"Very well, I will get on with the wash—I mean to say, I will begin at the beginning. As I was passing Mr. Railton's study a short time ago I noticed in the recess against the door an envelope."

"The plot thickens!" murmured Lowther.

"It was scarcely noticeable," went on the genius of the Shell, "being dark-grey in colour. I should not have noticed it only I was walking along with my eyes turned towards the ground. As a matter of fact, I was thinking out an article for you to put in the 'Weekly,' Merry—"

"Bother the 'Weekly'!" interrupted Herries. "What was in the giddy envelope?"

"I am coming to that point in due course. Seeing the envelope there, I wondered what it could be, and idly picked it up. I looked inside—it contained a letter!"

"Ah!" said Blake dramatically.

"Before looking at the name and address on the outside, I had unfolded the letter and read the few words it contained. Up till that moment I had imagined it to be a circular of some sort; therefore, it came somewhat as a shock to me when the meaning of the words impressed itself upon my brain."

"You will get something impressed on your nose in a jiff!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Come to the point, ass—the time will be gone in a moment!"

The juniors were really interested, and listened attentively.

"The letter, my friends, was addressed, not, as I thought, to one of the boys, but to Mr. Railton," said Skimpole, with a blink. "Of course, you quite understand I should not have read it had I known; but in my pre-occupied state I had done so before I realised what I was about."

"And is that all?" asked Herries.

"I have not come to the gist of the matter yet," declared Skimpole. "I am glad I read Mr. Railton's letter—glad because it enlightens me as to why he has gone all to pieces lately. It explains his haggard looks. And, my friends, the matter is a terribly serious one, and I trust you will look upon it and treat it as such!"

Skimpole was talking in a manner foreign to his usual style, and Tom Merry guessed that the matter really was, as he said, vital. He held up his hand for silence, and the others, realising the gravity of the situation, waited eagerly for Skimpole to continue.

"Here is the letter. I feel I am doing right in showing it to you."

The genius of St. Jim's produced a grey envelope and laid it on the table.

"You cannot do better than read it for yourselves," he said. "You will find in it the explanation of Mr. Railton's strange breakdown, and realise what a state of mind he must be in."

He stepped back, and the others crowded eagerly forward. Tom Merry was in front, and his face grew serious as he perused the letter.

"Dear Mr. Railton,—In reply to your communication of yesterday's date, I very much regret to inform you that the sum you mention—£25—would be quite inadequate to meet the demands of the case. I have made a second examination of your sister-to-day, and find that if her life is to be saved, an operation will be absolutely imperative—and such an operation would necessitate procuring the services of at least two eminent surgeons. The expenses, I need hardly say, would be at the very least, not less than £80. The operation would be a perfectly safe one, and if you can raise the money, your sister's life and health will be assured. On the other hand—well, you know as well as I do what will be the result. So, if at all possible, let me have a cheque by return. I will attend to everything. In a fortnight, perhaps, it will be too late.—Yours sincerely,

THOMAS EVERETT."

The juniors finished reading, and stared at one another silently—an expression of gravity appearing on their faces that seldom found a place there. Tom Merry was the first to break the silence.

"Poor old Railton!" he said feelingly.

"But, I don't understand," began Herries. "I can't see—"

"I admit I'm a twifle puzzled myself!" exclaimed D'Arcy.

"Can you undahstand the meanin' of it, Tom Mewwy?"

"I can see it all," said the hero of the Shell quietly.

"It's Railton's sister who is ill, and if her life is to be saved, an operation must be performed."

"We know that," remarked Blake.

"And the operation costs money," went on Tom Merry.

"Evidently Railton can only find £25. And what's the good of that when £80 is needed?"

"Phew!"

"That's why he's gone thin and absent-minded! How could he think about his work with that trouble on his mind? Just fancy his agony! If the operation can't be performed, his sister will die, and he can't afford the operation! It must be awful for him!"

"Rather!" said Manners. "But couldn't he have got the money from somewhere?"

"Evidently not, or else he would have done! It's not a millionaire's job, you know, being a school-master, and Railton may have some private call upon his resources—a relative to support, perhaps. I don't suppose he liked telling anybody about it—especially the Head. He couldn't ask Dr. Holmes for the tin, could he?"

"He could have done," said Lowther, "but I suppose he was too proud—you know, he didn't want to press his troubles on to anybody else. Besides that, he may be trying to scrape the money together even now. There's a week yet, according to the date on the letter."

"He'll have a job, though," put in Blake. "You can see now why he was so worried. It was because he couldn't raise the wind! But I reckon if the worst comes to the worst, he'll go to a moneylender—"

"I don't suppose he's got any security," said Digby.

"Bai Jove, no! What a fearful hole!" said D'Arcy, looking round him. "I don't suppose Mr. Wailton's friends could advance such a sum as that, an' even if they could, he doesn't like to approach them. Unless something is done at once, he will be forced to wesor to othah measures. He will have to tell the Head and his own friends, and genewally admit that he is stonay-bwoke. And that is nevah a nice thing to do, deah boys. Bai Jove! Gweat Scott!"

"What's the mattah now, kid?"

"A weally wippin' ideah has cossed my bwain," replied Arthur Augustus. "Pway listen a moment, deah boys! I shall not keep you moah than five minutes."

"We've heard your ideas before, Gussy," interrupted Tom Merry. "Ring off, there's a good chap, and give somebody else a chance."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"I think I understand now why Railton couldn't tell us the time," said the Shell captain. "He sold his ticker, I expect."

"Didn't I say so!" cried Manners. "Didn't I say he'd pawned it, or something? So he has! It must be simply fearful for him! What a thing money is, to be sure!"

"Well, we shall have to take a hand in it," declared Jack Blake. "And look here, I vote we all run across and see Figgy after lessons. In a matter of general interest and importance like this, he'd consider himself left out in the cold if we don't consult him, and let him into the secret."

"Of course," agreed Tom Merry. "We'll form a kind of triple alliance for a short time, and we'll work amicably together. It'll be rather unusual, I confess, but a change is good for everybody."

"I can't see what Figgy's going to be brought into yet," said Monty Lowther. "What are we going to do, anyhow?"

"We'll decide that later," answered Tom Merry. "Hallo, there goes the bell! Skimmay's shown quite exceptional brain power this morning!"

"Really, Merry—"

"You have, Skimmay, and that's a fact. You might easily have shown the letter to Mellish or Gore; then the thing would have been all over St. Jim's by to-night. Like a sensible person, you brought it to us, and we, of course, will keep it strictly to ourselves!"

"Of course!" chorused his followers.

"I think I have more sense than to show a letter of such importance to a boy like Mellish," said Skimpole, in a dignified tone. "I brought it here, Merry, because I realised that if anybody could do anything, it would be you!"

"By Jove, kids, Skimmay's getting quite complimentary! But look here," Tom Merry added, turning to the amateur Socialist of St. Jim's, "if you do by chance let a word out about it, we'll skin you by inches and boil what's left of you in paraffin oil!"

"Really, Merry, I see no reason for those absurd threats. You can absolutely rely on my discretion to say nothing. But I cannot stop another second; I simply detest being late for class, and I shall have to ask you to excuse me!"

"It's all right, ass—we're all coming, too," said Blake.

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And the juniors trooped out of the study, their minds filled with thoughts of Mr. Railton's great trouble, and how it were possible for them to help him out of it.

Immediately after lessons—Mr. Linton and Mr. Latham had both been surprised at the unusual quietness of the morning's work, for it would never have done to get detained—the heroes of the Fourth and Shell, after a short consultation in Study No. 6, sallied out and crossed to the New House.

"Hallo," said French. "What's up? It's not often Blake and Tom Merry walk arm-in-arm. Looks as if they were going to see Figgins, too! There's something unusual in the wind."

"Rather," agreed Jimson, another New House junior. "We shall have to keep our eyes skinned, and keep a lookout. There's sure to be ructions for somebody when those three get together!"

"Jape up against Gordon Gay, perhaps. The Grammarians have been pretty quiet this week—anyhow, we'll soon see."

But for once the rivals of St. Jim's were to meet to discuss, not a jape, but something of a very different character. When they chose, Merry, Blake, and Figgins could be as serious as anybody—and they chose to be so on this occasion, although Figgins & Co., not knowing the reason of the visit, were at first inclined to be hostile.

Tom Merry burst into the New House study unceremoniously. The renowned Figgins, the long-limbed leader of the Co., was engaged in blowing up a practice football; Kerr, the canny Scot, was reading the latest issue of "Pluck," and Fatty Wynn, as usual, was attending to matters appertaining to grub. As a matter of fact, Wynn was just in the middle of a choice jam-puff, having taken the opportunity to pop it into his mouth while his companions' faces were turned.

Figgins jumped to his feet when he saw who his visitors were.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed. "How did you escape from the menagerie? Did somebody leave the cages open? And look here, Tom Merry, people usually knock at that door before they come in."

"Do they?" grinned Tom Merry. "Well, I'm the exception to the rule—savvy? I shouldn't advise you to get ratty, Fig., old man. We're seven to three, you know."

"Yes," said the lank New House junior, "that's the usual way you School House rotters go about! You daren't come equal numbers because you're afraid of getting ragged. I've only got to yell, and it'll bring half the House down on you. You've run into the lion's den, with a vengeance!"

"Lion's den?" observed Lowther. "I thought it was the monkey-house!"

"You've come to the wrong place," said Kerr. "The monkey-house is across the quad—"

"Oh, dry up!" said Tom Merry. "We've come across on a serious matter, Figgy—"

"Quite so! It will be a serious matter for you, kid!"

"Figgy, I must request you to cease your waggin'," began Arthur Augustus.

"Wagging?" repeated Figgins. "What are you jawing about, Eyeglass? I haven't got anything to wag!"

"Don't be widic', deah boy! I meant we didn't come ovah heah to wot—"

"You didn't come over here to what?" repeated Figgins, with a wink at his faithful Co.

"Oh, you utter ass, Figgy!" interrupted Blake, in exasperation. "Can't you see we're waiting to speak?"

"That's a change, anyway. I thought you were always speaking! However, since you seem unusually grave over something—"

"We are, Figgins," said Tom Merry seriously. "It's no laughing matter this time. It's pax for the time being. When we come across to this House, we usually come to work a jape; but to-day it's different. Don't rot any more, old man—it's really urgent!"

Figgins looked at his rival keenly.

"Sorry, Tommy!" he exclaimed, sitting down. "I really thought you were joking. It's pax, then. My hat, chaps, you look like a lot of judges! What's in the wind?"

Tom Merry produced the letter and told the New House trio of its history. And as they listened, their faces grew graver and graver, until the ten of them seemed a different set of boys to the noisy, laughing good-natured crowd they usually were. French and Jimson, who had strolled along the corridor outside wondering what in the world was wrong. They had never heard the three rivals so quiet before.

"My only Aunt Jane!" said the leader of the New House juniors at last. "It's a serious matter, and no mistake! But why did you come to us, Tom Merry?"

"Because I thought you'd like to be in it," said the Shell leader. "We ten, with the addition of Skimpole, are the only chaps in the school who know."

"It's jolly good of you," said Figgins, realising more than

ever that, although deadly rivals, the three factions were in reality the staunchest of chums. "It's a ticklish business, though. I don't see how we can help; down here, at St. Jim's, everything's so dead—"

"Look heah, deah boys," put in D'Arcy, "I haven't told you of that wippin' ideah I thought of."

"Please don't!" begged Manners.

"Don't be absurd, Mannahs. It's a weally fine wheeze, I assuah you!"

"All right, kid, get it out," said Tom Merry resignedly.

"I fully realise that the time is limited, so I will not beat about the bush. My ideah is to waise a subscription, deah boys, and send it along to Mr. Wailton anonymously—put nothing in the lettah to show who it is fwom, don't you know!"

Tom Merry looked at Figgins; Figgins looked at Blake, and Blake looked at Tom Merry.

"My hat!" they ejaculated in unison.

Then they looked at D'Arcy. The idea was certainly a daring one; it had never occurred to either of them. But was it feasible? Could it be done?

"By Jove, Gussy, you've got more brains than I gave you credit for!" cried Blake, clapping the swell of the School House on the shoulder, and jerking his monocle from his eye. "You do have flashes of reason at times, although, I admit, they are very rare!"

Arthur Augustus beamed.

"In a delicate mattah of this sort," he said, "it is necessary to have a fellow in charge who has got both tact and judgment. You will leave eweverything to me, deah boys. I will see that nothing is—"

"Half a mo', Gussy!" said Tom Merry. "Two heads are better than one. Now, suppose we did raise this subscription, kids, where should we send the proceeds to? We don't know Railton's address."

They hadn't thought of that.

"The Head does!" exclaimed Herries. "He'd tell us."

"He'd want to know what we wanted it for, and we couldn't cram to him. Besides, there's nearly £60 to raise, and we couldn't get a quarter of that."

"No, I suppose not," remarked Figgins thoughtfully.

"As you know, deah boys, my governah sent me a tennah last Fwiday," put in Gussy. "I haven't bwokeen into it yet, and if you are all willin' I should like to start the subscription with that twiflin' amount!"

The others gasped.

"Ten pounds, Gus!" said Wynn, holding his waistcoat. "By Jove! What a lot of grub you could get for that!"

"Oh, ring off, Fatty!" growled Figgins. "It's decent of you, D'Arcy—jolly decent; and the tenner would give the sub. a solid appearance immediately."

"Rather!" said Tom Merry. "You're a brick, Gussy! But what will you do for pocket-money?"

Arthur Augustus waved his hand. As a matter of fact, he had only one-and-ninence on him, and that would have to last him at least a month; but beneath his gorgeous waistcoat he had a heart as soft and generous as anyone's breathing. D'Arcy was a gentleman right through; as Tom Merry said, a brick.

"Bai Jove, deah boy, I haven't finished my last tip yet! Don't you wowwy about me; I shall have quite enough to cawwy me through. I insist on your takin' this tennah, Mewwy! I shall be as wight as wain!"

He produced the ten-pound note, and handed it across the table. Tom Merry looked at his companions. He well knew the state of D'Arcy's exchequer, so did Blake & Co.

"You're a decent old kid, Gussy!" was all Tom Merry said. But it meant a lot. "Now, about sending it, chaps? I've got an ideah. Why not go straight to the Head, and lay the whole matter before him?"

"But—" began Figgins, agast.

"The doctor is a decent old sort—you all know that—and I'm absolutely certain he'd approve of our wheeze. He can't very well do otherwise. Besides, there are other things to think of. We don't know Railton's address; Dr. Holmes can tell us. We sha'n't have enough money by long chalks; the Head might make it up out of his own pocket. He's fond of Railton, and would do it like a bird. And it's jolly certain Railton hasn't told him anything."

"I second Tom Mewwy's wproposal!" cried Arthur Augustus. "The doctah is a bwick, deah boys, and would instantly approve of our scheme. I say, go to the doctah!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Gussy's right!"

The decision was unanimous. So, after a few minutes' continued conversation, the meeting—the quietest meeting ever held between the three rivals—broke up, and the ten juniors proceeded to the Head's study. Time was precious, and Tom Merry meant to waste none of it.



Tom Merry tapped at the Head's door and waited expectantly. The other juniors were feeling a trifle nervous now that the critical moment had come. "Come in!" came the Head's voice. (See below.)

CHAPTER 5.

The Subscription.

HE tapped at the door, and waited expectantly. The others were feeling a trifle nervous, now the critical moment had arrived. But Tom Merry was confident. "Come in!"

They all trooped in, and stood in front of Dr. Holmes. The leader of the Terrible Three was in advance, and the Head looked at him in some surprise.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed, adjusting his glasses. "May I inquire the reason of this unexpected visit?"

"We're all in it, sir," replied Tom Merry. "There's a very serious matter we wish to speak about, sir, and we thought—"

"Serious, Merry?"

"Yes, sir. I'll tell you all about it, if you'll let me. Mr. Railton's gone away because he's so ill, hasn't he, sir?"

"Yes, my boy," replied the Head, in surprise. "Well?"

Tom Merry thereupon related the whole incident of the letter for the second time, and the old doctor, at first amazed, grew more and more concerned. When the junior had finished, he was pacing his study almost excitedly.

"Yes," he muttered, as he read the letter; "it certainly seems clear enough. Poor Railton! I had no notion any such thing— Ahem! However, boys, what is this scheme you wish to propose to me? Let me hear it!"

"Well, sir, it's this way—"

"It was D'Arcy's idea first—"

"Yaas, wathah, sir! Onlay—"

"Who's going to talk?" whispered Tom Merry. "Can't you chaps be quiet for a minute? I'm spokesman!"

An argument in the Head's study was impossible, so Tom Merry again did the talking. He was watching the doctor's face rather anxiously, and was gratified to see a pleased expression appear in his eyes. He finished, and the headmaster hesitated.

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NEXT
THURSDAY:

"BINKS, MILLIONAIRE."

A School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.
By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"Well, my boys, I hardly know what to say! The idea is a good one, I admit, and between us, I dare say, we could make up the necessary amount. I can quite understand Mr. Railton's silence. No man likes approaching another about financial matters, and Mr. Railton is even more sensitive than most. But he ought to have told me—yes; he ought to have told me!"

Dr. Holmes was silent for a moment, then looked up. "Let me see, there are ten of you—Figgins, Blake, Merry, Herries— Ah, yes; I know you all, and I can trust you not to breathe a word of this matter to the rest of the school."

"Thank you, sir!" said Tom Merry quietly. "Skimpole will say nothing, I am certain. And, remember, the subscription must be anonymous. If any boy wants to know what it is for, his curiosity will have to go unsatisfied. All other arrangements can wait until the money is raised."

"We'll start at once, sir." "As soon as possible, my boy. By the by, D'Arcy, I feel I must say a few words to you. Your great generosity in this matter has given the subscription a—"

"Oh, weally, sir," said Arthur Augustus, turning red, "I have got plenty of tin to last me through!"

"That doesn't alter the case. I shall not forget it, my boy. Mr. Railton is fortunate in having you in his House."

"Weally, doctah—"

"Now, I think we have discussed everything. I am sure I don't know what the other masters would think of me if they knew of this conspiracy. However, a human life is in the balance, so the cause is a good one."

"Rather, sir!" Another quarter of an hour sufficed to settle everything, then the juniors took their leave, highly elated. There was something doing now—something better than any jape that had ever been perpetrated.

"By Jove, chaps, the Head's a brick, isn't he?" said Tom Merry, as they entered Study No. 10.

It was rather a tight fit for the ten of them, but they managed to find seats somehow.

"Now," said the leader of the study, "if you will be quiet, kids, your uncle will just go over everything from start to finish, and then we'll settle the matter of the sub."

At any other time, for any other cause, both Figgins and Blake would have claimed the right to get on their hind legs and make speeches. Now, however, no comment was uttered. This case was different; it wouldn't be seemly to squabble as to who was to talk. It was a matter of life and death, and all the juniors there instinctively recognised Tom Merry as the spokesman. It never even entered their heads to claim their rights.

A long conference ensued, the matter was talked over, and the ten conspirators decided to take a certain number of boys each, and go round for donations.

"It'll be a bit of a job," said Tom Merry, "because the chaps won't like giving money for something they're in the dark about. We can only assure them it is for a good cause. If that doesn't satisfy them, they can keep their beastly tin. Anyhow, don't forget to say that the sub. already amounts to close on £13."

The nine other juniors had contributed their all to bring the amount up to this total. Nothing was done until the evening, for the dinner-bell rang almost immediately. Afternoon lessons seemed tremendously long, and again the masters were astonished at the quietness of their usually most troublesome pupils.

There is no necessity to go into details regarding the subscription. Suffice it to say that the allied rivals had not much difficulty in gaining donations from such boys as Kangaroo, Bernard Glyn, Clifton Dane, Reilly, or Jimson. All the prefects, including Kildare, Knox, Darrel, and Monteith contributed; and, in fact, the Fifth and Sixth, taken as a whole, dubbed up magnificently.

They knew that Tom Merry & Co. wouldn't get money under false pretences, and it served to show that, although they were considered young rascals, they were trusted and believed.

The junior school couldn't make it out at all. Mellish and Gore, who had refused point-blank to contribute to Tom Merry's "rotten fake," as they called it, were more curious than anybody else.

"We won't make them pay up," said Figgins, as he handed Tom Merry a pile of coppers, threepenny-bits, and sixpences. "If they like to say such things about it, let 'em! But French, Pratt, and one or two others, will have to give something, or I'll know the giddy reason why!"

"Yaas, wathah, Figgay!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Pwatt got a quid from his patah this morning, so he can easily afford a few shillin's. Bai Jove, we are gettin' along spiffin'ly, deah boys! Look at this lot I've got heah!"

The swell of the School House produced a handful of small

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change, but in the middle of it Tom Merry—they were in the latter's study—detected a gleam of yellow.

"Hallo!" he said. "What's that?"

The long-limbed one looked close.

"My only hat!" he said. "A quid!"

"A quid?" echoed Tom Merry. "By Jove, Gussy! What kind gentleman gave you that wealth?"

Arthur Augustus hesitated.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I couldn't tell you all in a minute—"

"Couldn't tell us?"

The other two juniors looked at D'Arcy curiously, much to that youth's discomfort. The rest of the plotters were taking the hat round still.

"That's rot, Gus! You could never have taken a sovereign without having the name of the donor indelibly impressed on your mind! Why, there's nobody at St. Jim's contributed as much as that—except you!"

"I uttably fail to see the reason of this ridiculous crows-questioning, deah boys," said Gussy. "The tin is theah, and that is all that is necessary!"

Tom Merry started. The truth had just struck him. D'Arcy had given the money himself! It was no unusual thing for him to discover a sovereign in another pocket—having put it there, perhaps, a month before, and forgotten all about it. And the hero of the Shell had guessed correctly. Arthur Augustus had changed his waistcoat immediately after tea, and, greatly to his joy, had discovered the golden disc in one of the pockets.

It had never entered his head to keep it. All he thought of was that it meant another lift-up to the subscription. There was no selfishness about Arthur Augustus D'Arcy!

And he had fondly imagined he could mix it up among the other money and let it go in without being questioned concerning it!

"Look here, Gussy, old man, I've guessed your giddy secret," said Tom Merry. "You've shoved that sovereign in yourself, haven't you?"

"I?" exclaimed D'Arcy, in affected surprise. "Certainly not—that is to say, deah boy— Weally— Don't be widie—, Tom Mewwy! You know quite well I had no othah money!"

"It's no good, kid—we can see through you," put in Figgins. "And you shouldn't do it! My only Aunt Jane! Haven't you given enough without that last quid?"

"I must weally refuse to say anothah word on the mattah, Figgay! It is quite impos. foah me to say off-hand who contributed the soveveign!"

And Arthur Augustus beat a hasty retreat to escape further questioning. Left by themselves, Figgins and Tom Merry looked at one another in silence.

"Just like him, the young ass," said the latter at length. "He found it, I suppose, in another waistcoat."

"Of course," agreed Figgins. "But what a chap he is! After giving ten pounds, and making himself short for a month, he must needs go and— Oh, hang, it's too good of him!"

The long-limbed New House chief looked across the table.

"You don't know our Gussy!" exclaimed Tom Merry feelingly. "In spite of his talking powers, and other little faults, he's one of the very best! We wouldn't lose him for all we could see!"

"Now, how about Pratt and French and the others? They're in my House, so I shall have to interview them. I shall not be long."

Figgins wasn't. Accompanied by about ten other New House juniors, who had willingly contributed, the lank chief demanded a subscription from the resisters—even if it were only a copper.

Pratt refused absolutely, so Figgins was forced to adopt severe measures. To tell the truth, he frogs-marched the gentle Pratt round the quad three times before he got the contribution, but he got it! The others, seeing what was in store for them, paid up like lambs, although they growled because they weren't told what the money was for.

"Good!" chuckled Figgins, as he returned with Kerr to the School House. "That's the way to treat 'em, kid! Hallo! What are all you fatheads waiting for?"

He addressed a curious crowd in the corridor outside Tom Merry's study. Not that they were able to hear anything. The stout oak door was locked, and nothing but a quiet murmur proceeded from behind its solidity.

"There's nothing to see, asses," said Figgins pleasantly. "You can stop here all the blessed night if you like, but you won't find anything out, my sons!"

The two were admitted quickly, and the crowd only caught a sight of Tom Merry, Manners, Blake, and Lowther sitting round the table seemingly discussing football, since Blake had one of those objects in his hands.

"The subscription is now complete, my children," said Tom

Merry, when he had counted Figgins's extra donations, "and the sum total is exactly £20 3s. 4^d."

"Not so bad," said Blake. "That, with Railton's £25, brings it up to £45."

"Go hon!" said Lowther.

"So that the Head will have to put £35 to it. Dash it all, it's a lot—an awful lot—but he'll do it as willingly as Gussy gave that extra quid!"

"Weally, Blake, I must pwotest against your absurd——"

"You can protest all you like, kid. We know your little tricks. Now, suppose we go to the Head? By the by, oughtn't Skimmy to know about this? It's all through him that it came about, you know——"

"I saw him half an hour ago," said Digby. "He gave me half-a-crown and said he didn't want to hear any more about the affair, as he is just commencing another long book on the glorious qualities of Socialism!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, he's settled!" laughed Tom Merry. "Come along, kids, we'll go straight away to the doctor's study."

CHAPTER 6.

Tom Merry's Journey.

THE elated juniors trooped out into the corridor. The Head was very pleasantly surprised when he received his visitors. He had hardly expected the subscription to be completed so quickly, and he had certainly never suspected the amount would be as much as £20.

After a short consultation the kind-hearted doctor opened a drawer, and produced banknotes to the value of £40—£5 extra in case of emergency, he explained. These he placed in a perfectly plain envelope, and, having sealed it securely, he handed it to Tom Merry, much to the latter's surprise.

"I am going to trust you to see this delivered," he said gravely. "I have no need to impress upon you the urgency or importance of the case, and I think I may safely leave it in your hands."

"Thank you, sir."

"You will journey to London by the first train in the morning, and will take this package to a District Messenger Office, close to Mr. Railton's apartments. The rest, I think, is simple. The messenger-boy will be told to deliver his package to no one but Mr. Railton. It has got to be placed in his own hands. You understand?"

"Yes, sir, I understand. And after that I must return immediately?"

"Immediately, my boy," answered the Head decidedly. "I am going a little too far, I imagine, in allowing you to travel to the City alone——"

"I shall be all right, sir," said Tom Merry quickly.

"Yes, Merry, I have every reason to think you will. Now, that is all, I think. Some people would say the project has been carried out too hurriedly, but I differ there. This is a matter of life and death, and much depends upon Mr. Railton getting the money immediately. That the letter explaining the situation is genuine, I have no doubt at all. Mr. Railton's very appearance and break-down corroborates that."

"Of course, sir—and you don't know how pleased we are to be of assistance to him," said Tom Merry. "We all like Mr. Railton, sir——"

"Rather!"

"Hear, hear!"

"And can't bear to think of him in trouble. So the sooner he comes back to St. Jim's the better we shall be pleased, sir."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"There is one matter I wish to speak about before you go, boys," exclaimed Dr. Holmes, smiling at the juniors' enthusiasm. "There is a new House-master coming down to St. Jim's to-morrow to take the place of Mr. Railton——"

"But not for long, sir?" they chorused anxiously.

"Only until Mr. Railton returns," smiled the Head. "I endeavoured to get a friend down for a fortnight, but I find he is away at present. Therefore I have had to engage another man—a stranger—and I hope he will prove as good a House-master as Mr. Railton."

"That's impossible, sir!"

"It is expecting much, I admit. However, you will see for yourselves to-morrow, boys. His name, I may tell you is Mr. Hichen Birch. Now, that is all—you may go."

"Yes, sir."

"I shall not forget the splendid spirit in which you have all conducted this matter, and I may as well say that I am proud of you, my lads—proud to be your head-master!"

"And we're proud to be your pupils, sir!" chorused the juniors together.

"Yaas, wathah, sir!"

The boys crowded out, thinking what a jolly old sort the doctor was. St. Jim's was a good place, after all! So was the School House—yes, and the New House as well! In fact, the juniors were on good terms with everybody. There was

no feeling of hostility to-night. It was pax. And weren't they lighthearted? The Fourth and Shell couldn't make it out. The Terrible Three, Blake & Co., and Figgins & Co. strolling about arm-in-arm laughing and joking as they had hardly ever laughed and joked before. It was inexplicable to them.

To the reader, however, it is clear enough. They had as good as saved the life of Mr. Railton's sister—or, if not that, they had saved the House-master from becoming involved in debt, probably with somebody who would worry him for its return. Yes, the three studies had every reason to feel elated.

And the following morning Tom Merry started for London. Figgins and Blake envied him, but they realised—although they wouldn't admit it—that Tom Merry was the proper one to go. The Shell was a Form above the Fourth, and so claimed precedence.

There is no need to relate Tom Merry's adventures in London—they were uninteresting, anyhow. He completed his task satisfactorily, and went to the big terminus feeling rather relieved. It wasn't a pleasant feeling to have so much money on him, and he was glad to get rid of his responsibility.

He found the train for Rylcombe just about to start. He dashed along the platform and opened the first door he came to, for the train was already on the move. Tom Merry had failed to notice a card in the window—"Engaged."

He scrambled in, and a porter closed the door with a bang. The leader of the Shell at St. Jim's sank into a seat, breathing hard. There was only one other person in the compartment, and he was now glaring at Tom Merry in a decidedly unwelcome manner.

He was a big man—big everywhere—not what would be called stout, but getting on that way. He had large hands, and larger feet, and his face, chin, and neck appeared to be all in a line. With a countenance as red as D'Arcy's best waistcoat, and a scalp as bald as a cricket-ball, he looked the very sort of man to frighten the average schoolboy out of his wits. Tom Merry, however, was different, and returned the man's glare with a cool grin.

"Didn't you see this compartment was reserved?" roared the florid individual. "What the dickens do you mean by entering it, confound you?"

"I didn't see any ticket," said Tom Merry.

"Don't lie to me, boy! You saw it as plain as I see you! I'll have you thrown out at the next stop!"

"We go for an hour before we stop," exclaimed the junior. "Besides, isn't there plenty of room in here for me as well as you?"

"No, there isn't! I reserved this compartment for myself, and, by gad, I've a mind to thrash you for having the insolence to——"

"What's the good of bullying?" said Tom Merry quietly.

"Bullying! Look here, don't you say another word, boy, or you'll find yourself——"

"I think I've got as much right to talk as you have! What great objection have you to my staying here?"

"I see too much of you young brats in my life to want them in railway-carriages with me!" retorted the man, placing his feet on the opposite cushions. "Now, you'd better be quiet. I've had quite enough of your tongue!"

"It appears the best way of getting a little peace," said Tom Merry coolly, pulling out a paper and commencing to read.

Everything went smoothly for a matter of five minutes, then the florid man uttered an exclamation, flung his paper down, and sniffed loudly.

"Are you eating peppermints?" he roared.

"What do you want to know for?"

"Silence! Answer my question, boy!"

"Not until you ask me politely," said Tom Merry sweetly.

"I don't see why I should be ordered about by you."

"You will see in a minute! Let me tell you I am accustomed to having my order obeyed!"

"Change is good for everybody," murmured the other.

"Silence! Answer my question. Have you been eating peppermints?"

"Well, let me see." Tom Merry thought a moment.

"Why, yes, I remember eating some peppermints last Thursday, or was it Wednesday——"

"You had better not make me angry——"

"Oh, are you like this when you're pleased, then? My hat, I shouldn't like to see you with your rag out!"

The big man glared at Tom Merry furiously, unable to make anything of this cool schoolboy. Evidently, the former was the owner of a particularly violent temper, in addition to being a bully of the most pronounced order.

"You will go a little too far, boy——"

"Rather not! Think I don't know the station——"

"Go on! A little more and I will thrash you whether you like it or not!"

"Oh, I give you my word I sha'n't like it!" said Tom Merry, who was thoroughly enjoying himself.

He loved exasperating anybody who started bullying him. He could see that his travelling companion was in earnest, but the leader of the Terrible Three was ready for anything.

"If you don't hand me that bag of peppermints at once I'll carry out my word!"

"It wouldn't be a bad idea to carry yourself out as well, while you are about it. However, to save a row, I'll oblige you."

And Tom Merry calmly produced a paper-bag and handed it to his enraged companion, who, with a muttered exclamation, hurled it far out of the window.

From that point onwards, until they were within a few minutes of their stopping place, silence reigned within the compartment, the large-limbed gentleman in the corner being unaware that his youthful companion was still sucking peppermints as serenely as ever. Then he uttered an exclamation, and appeared to be looking for something. Tom Merry watched out of the corner of his eye, grinning to himself meanwhile.

His fellow-passenger had risen, and was looking under the seat. Finally he sat down again and glared at the boy opposite.

"Have you seen that bag of cigars?" he growled.

"Bag of cigars?" inquired Tom Merry innocently. "What bag?"

"It was lying on the seat here," said the florid person suspiciously. "Have you seen it?"

"Well, of all the questions! Didn't you throw it out of the window? I thought it rather—"

"What!" roared the other. "Do you mean to tell me that—"

"Quite so. I picked up the bag, handed it very politely to you, and was somewhat surprised to see you throw it out of the window! However, it was your business, so I made no remark!"

"You—you young brat! You did it on purpose!"

The man rose to his feet and grasped Tom Merry's arm. What he had thought to be the peppermints had been in reality his own cigars! Had he felt the weight of them he would have known in a moment, but he had pitched the bag away without a suspicion.

"Now then," said Tom Merry. "Hands off, please!"

For reply the man grasped his thin walking-cane, and brought it down with considerable force on the youngster's shoulders. Now, Tom Merry could stand a lot of slanging, but when it came to violence he thought it high time to take a hand.

"You brute!" he cried. "Let me go!"

"I'll teach you to play tricks, my lad! I'll have you know that I'm considered one of the strictest masters—"

The cane descended again, and Tom Merry wrenched something out of his pocket—something that flashed in the sunlight. The next second the bully gasped.

Something extremely cold had struck him with deadly force between the eyes. For a moment he was staggered. Then as he caught sight of his face in the glass he started violently.

It was streaming with blood!

CHAPTER 7.

Gordon Gay's Jape.

At least, he thought it was blood. As a matter of fact, it was nothing more terrible than a little crimson concoction of Tom Merry's own manufacture, with which he always filled the reservoir of his liquid-pistol.

The stream of fluid had struck the bully with considerable force, and in his excitement he thought that Tom Merry had gashed him—for a place of that sort would give scarcely any pain at first.

"You little fiend!" he gasped. "You have injured me! I am bleeding!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry roared. The joke was too good. He had expected the big man to half kill him, yet here he was sitting on the seat staring before him as if dazed.

Just then the train pulled up at the junction, and Tom Merry jumped out on to the platform. Without hesitation the other followed, and commenced roaring to the porters to stop the boy.

The appearance of the florid man streaming with blood was startling, and cries of horror arose. Several ladies uttered several shrieks, and were firmly convinced that black murder had been done. Perhaps it would be their turn next!

"He struck me with a knife!" exclaimed the "victim," dabbing his face with a handkerchief and looking after Tom Merry. Then another cry arose. The Rylcombe train, on the other platform, was just moving out, and the "dangerous character" was escaping.

"Stop him!"

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But it was too late. The train was going too fast. And then, at that moment, a terrible suspicion came into Tom Merry's mind. The recollection of the initials on the big man's handbag confirmed the suspicions, and the hero of the Shell looked serious.

The man he had japed was none other than Mr. Hichen Birch, the new House-master! It was certain—and Tom Merry wondered what would be the end of it. It was the master's own fault, however, and the junior consoled himself with this thought.

Meanwhile, the trick had been discovered. Mr. Birch's fury was great. He wanted to know who the boy was, and grinned viciously when he learned that his assailant was a St. Jim's scholar.

There was no other train for over an hour, so by the time he arrived at Rylcombe his temper was still far from unruffled. He glanced about him for a moment, then strode out into the street. The station hack stood there, and the driver held up his whip.

"Cab, sir?"

"No, confound you!"

Mr. Birch passed on, angered afresh as he felt for one of his choice cigars, and remembered that they were probably lying on the permanent-way dozens of miles distant. His luggage was to follow.

He walked onwards for a while, consoling his ruffled temper with a cigarette. Presently he caught sight of a couple of boys going slowly up the road.

Being a little undecided as to his bearings he resolved to question them, taking it for granted they were St. Jim's boys. He had never been in Rylcombe before, and was unaware of the Grammar School's presence.

"I say, boy," he called, "come here!"

Gordon Gay and Frank Monk looked round, for the two juniors were none other than the Grammarian Fourth-Formers.

"My hat!" exclaimed Gordon Gay, in surprise. "Who does he think he's talking to?"

"Who is the red-faced merchant, anyhow?" said Frank Monk.

"I don't know. By Jove, yes I do!"

"Do what?"

"Know who it is!"

"Who?"

"That giddy new House-master for St. Jim's. You know Railton's gone away? Tom Merry told me."

"I like his blessed cheek!" said Frank Monk.

"He thinks we're St. Jim's chaps, I expect, and can order us about as he likes—"

"Did you hear me?" roared Mr. Birch.

The Grammarians stopped, but made no efforts to retrace their steps. The new master came up angrily.

"Which is the way to the school?" he said, glaring.

Gordon Gay was just about to speak when he checked himself. The big man had asked for the "school." He hadn't said which, so it wouldn't be Gordon Gay's fault if he directed him to the Grammar School, would it?

"Oh, I see, sir!" he exclaimed meekly. "You are the new House-master, I suppose, sir?"

Frank Monk repressed a grin and winked at the hedge.

"I am, boy. Be quick! Which way do I go?"

"Well, it's not very far," and the schoolboy actor directed the new master to Rylcombe Grammar School, although he never mentioned the name.

Without even thanking his instructors, Mr. Hichen Birch strode away, and the Grammarians stood in the middle of the road watching until he disappeared round the corner.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He'll go ordering the chaps about," grinned Gordon Gay.

"My only aunt, I can see trouble ahead for Mr. Hichen Birch!"

"Great Scott, is that what it answers to? I pity the St. Jim's bouncers if that's going to take charge of the School House!"

"Rather! Tom Merry's in for a hot time. Come on, kid, we'll take the short cut and be home before the Birch merchant!"

"What-oh!"

The two Grammarians hurried off, chuckling. Meanwhile, the new St. Jim's master wended his way to the Grammar School, all unconscious of his error. At last he came to the gates, and paused for a moment. He could see the juniors running about in the quad, several of them engaged in punting a football to and fro.

"Hum!" muttered Mr. Birch. "I had an idea the place was bigger than this." He glanced at the young footballers. "If those boys belong to my House I shall soon put a stop to that game! Football is bad enough on a field, but in the playground it is out of the question!"

He stepped into the quad, and commenced walking towards

the entrance hall, taking no heed of the juniors. They, for their part, were too engrossed in the game to notice the bulky figure of Mr. Birch, until he wandered right across the "field."

"Hi! Look-out, there!"

"You're filling up the goal!"

"Can't you keep outside the line——"

Mr. Birch turned in amazement. Were the boys daring to address him thus? Surely not! And yet——

"Look out, Red Nose! Oh, my hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Goal!"

Somebody had kicked the ball, whether by accident or design, was unknown, clean into Mr. Birch's expansive waistcoat. The shot was a splendidly-judged one, if intentional, for the football landed fairly on the middle button. Mr. Birch sat down on the hard quadrangle quite suddenly. The leather had come with some force, and for a moment it took all the wind out of him.

"My hat, you've done it, somebody!"

"Who is the old josses, anyhow?" inquired Carboy, of the Fourth.

"Hanged if I know!" answered Jack Wootton. "Shouldn't walk there if he didn't want to get hit."

"Silly old chump!"

Mr. Birch scrambled to his feet boiling with rage. The boys were speaking of him as if he were a common workman. Yet they knew who he was; they must know, Gordon Gay and Frank Monk were hovering on the outskirts, grinning hugely.

"You—you confounded young scoundrels!" roared Mr. Birch, brushing himself down. "I'll teach you to show insolence——"

"Half a minute, old man!" interrupted Harry Wootton coolly. "The tradesman's entrance is round the corner. If you want to buy any old clothes——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The new St. Jim's master swung his cane round, and Harry Wootton just had time to get clear. Otherwise he would have received a stinging cut.

"What did you do that for?" he cried angrily. "You'll get chucked out on your neck if you try any tricks. For two pence——"

"Here, what's the row?"

Hake, of the Sixth, walked up and gazed at Mr. Birch curiously. The florid gentleman scarcely looked like a schoolmaster as he stood there, getting redder and redder in the face with rage.

"Why, this blessed chap started aiming at me with his beastly cane," explained Harry Wootton wrathfully. "I reckon you'd better have him slung out into the road, Hake. He must have escaped somehow."

"How dare you?" gasped Mr. Birch, dancing with fury.

"How dare you, I say! This impertinence——"

"Half a minute!" said Hake, tapping the other on the shoulder. "Who are you, anyway?"

"Who am I? You cheeky young scamp——"

Hake turned red.

"I'll thrash everyone of you! I cannot imagine what discipline you have had——"

"Who are you?" repeated the senior.

"Confound it, boy, call me sir!" roared the new master.

"I'm hanged if I do!"

"You refuse?" Mr. Birch grinned with rage. "Very well. I may be a new master, but I mean to be treated with proper respect."

"A new master?" repeated the senior curiously.

"Yes, sir, a new master. And let me tell you those boys will be called to account for daring to address me as they have done."

"But——" began the Grammarian.

"No 'buts,' sir, to me!" roared Mr. Birch, as if he were addressing a fag. "You, I may remark, have been scarcely less impertinent than the others. I shall see that the doctor administers a severe thrashing."

Hake looked round him helplessly. The Fourth-Formers were grinning hugely. It came as a change to see a Sixth fellow—especially a bully like Hake—treated in this manner.

"Blessed if I'd let him speak to me like that, Hake," muttered Jim Preston.

"I'm a prefect," began the senior, with some heat; "and I——"

"Prefect! What do I care about that, sir? Don't dare to utter another word!"

Mr. Birch stamped his foot on the ground and looked around him. The Grammarians couldn't make it out at all. Who was this blustering fellow?

"Look here——" began Hake wrathfully.

"Silence, boy! Will you keep your tongue still?"

"No! I'm not a Third Form fag, and I'm hanged if I'll be ordered about by you. New master indeed!"

"Yes, sir, a new master, and you know well enough who I am. Ah, now we shall see!"

Mr. Hichen Birch was looking in the direction of the porch, and the boys followed suit. A master in flowing gown had appeared, and he looked curiously at the group in the quad. It was Mr. Adams, who presided over the Fourth Form.

"I wonder whatever that man can want?" he muttered. "There appears to be some alteration in progress. Perhaps I had better make inquiries."

He strode across the quad, and surveyed Mr. Birch curiously. That pompous individual was looking a trifle triumphant; he was waiting for Mr. Adams to greet him with the respect that was due to him. But the master did no such thing.

"Perhaps you will tell me what this unseemly scene is?" he said coldly. "You, sir, seem to be making a deal of unnecessary noise. May I inquire your business here?"

Mr. Birch stepped back.

"Yes, you may inquire my business here, but that doesn't say I shall satisfy your curiosity. You are a Form-master, I presume?"

"That is so, sir."

"Well, I am not in the habit of answering impertinent questions," exclaimed Mr. Birch. "Allow me to tell you that I am your new House-master."

"New House-master?" repeated Mr. Adams, taken aback.

"I think there is some mistake."

"No, mistake, sir. Take me to the doctor at once, please. We will see what he has to say."

"Look at our giddy new House-master!" cried Frank Monk from the background. "My hat, ain't he a sight for sore eyes, chaps? Fancy having to take orders from that!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors roared, and Mr. Birch, who had been enraged ever since he stepped out of the train at the junction, nearly choked.

"Take me to the doctor!" he thundered, making the Fourth Form-master jump. "Somebody shall be made to pay for this——this outrage!"

Mr. Adams, seeing the kind of man he had to deal with, turned without a word, and led the way to the Head-master's study. Mr. Birch followed.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Dr. Monk, as the big man blustered into the room. "Who is this——this individual, Mr. Adams?"

"There has been a scene in the quadrangle, sir," replied Mr. Adams. "I cannot rightly understand it all, but this——er——gentleman appears to be under a delusion——"

"Nothing of the sort——" began Mr. Birch.

"One moment, please!" interrupted Dr. Monk. "Pray continue, Mr. Adams."

"He is under the impression that a new House-master is required, and that he has come to fill the vacant place. Consequently he has been ordering the boys about, including a prefect, and they naturally resent it."

Dr. Monk looked surprised for a moment, then a light of understanding dawned in his eyes. As for Mr. Birch, he began to wonder if, after all, there had not been some mistake. But how could there be a mistake? He was at St. Jim's.

"I think I understand the situation," said Dr. Monk, looking at the big intruder coldly. "I presume you are under the impression, sir, that this is St. James's College, and that I am Dr. Holmes?"

Mr. Birch looked round helplessly.

"I—I certainly did think so," he stammered.

"Then you were mistaken," replied Dr. Monk icily. "This is the Rylcombe Grammar School, and St. Jim's is over yonder." He pointed with his hand. "It would have been better had you made inquiries first, instead of blustering in and upsetting my pupils. If you have been submitted to impertinence it is entirely your own doing, and I cannot punish any boy under my charge. Good-day, sir!"

"But——"

"Kindly show this gentleman to the gates, Mr. Adams."

Mr. Hichen Birch crossed the quad, in a dazed manner, hearing the laughter of the Grammarians as if from a distance. He—a House-master—had come to the wrong school, and had started ordering the boys about. The absurdity of it struck him forcibly, and it seemed that his anger would never be allowed to die.

"Somebody will have to pay for this," he muttered as he strode along the road to St. Jim's. "Never—never in my life have I been so insulted!"

By all appearances the juniors at St. Jim's were in for a hot time. Before coming to Rylcombe Mr. Birch had been accustomed to handling a rougher set of boys than the Saints. He had run his own school, and had "bossed" about to his heart's content.

As a matter of fact, he had been forced to discontinue his establishment, because the boys simply wouldn't stand him. Since then he had been under-master at a large

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boarding-school in the North. An act of unwarranted cruelty on his part had resulted in his dismissal.

Dr. Holmes knew practically nothing of this side of his character. He was only engaged for a fortnight, anyhow. He was a good scholar—a first-class scholar, in fact—but he never learnt to control his ungovernable temper. Hence he never got on.

If he imagined he could bully the juniors of the School House at St. Jim's, however, he would soon find out his error. Tom Merry & Co., at least, would put up with none of it.

CHAPTER 8.

Mr. Birch Makes Things Hum.

It happened to be a half-holiday that day, and as Mr. Birch grew near St. Jim's he heard the shouts of boys, and the "thud" as leather struck leather. A football match was evidently in progress.

"This is more as I imagined St. Jim's," he muttered, as he surveyed the old pile. "I had no notion there was another big school so close. Confound it!"

He walked on, and was just about to turn the corner, when a cycle-bell rang. Instead of moving to the side of the road, he remained where he was. The next second a cyclist came flying round the bend, spotlessly dressed, while an eyeglass floated in the wind behind him, suspended from a black cord.

"Hi! Look out! Bai Jove!"

Mr. Birch had dived right in front of D'Arcy's front wheel. The swell junior tried to swerve, but it was too late.

Crash!

In a second Arthur Augustus, Mr. Hichen Birch, and the magnificent bicycle were scattered over the roadway in wild confusion. Tom Merry, who was riding close behind, jammed on his brakes, and pulled up just in time to escape blundering into the wreckage.

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus sat up. His cap was gone, his spotless clothes were dirty and crumpled, and, worst of all, his monocle was shattered into a thousand fragments.

"Gweat Scott, how extremely unfortunate! Just look at my clothes, Tom Mewwy. They are fearfully wuffed, and my collar—"

But Tom Merry was helping Mr. Birch to his feet. He had recognised him immediately. But that did not prevent him from giving assistance. Fortunately, no one was really hurt, and the bicycle appeared to be none the worse for its fall. The new master's wrath was boiling over again.

"You little— Ah, so it is you, is it?" He glared at Tom Merry, who was brushing him down. "I shall make you pay for this outrage pretty stiffly, my lad."

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus rose to his feet hurriedly.

"Are you the new House-mastah, sir?" he queried.

"I am, boy, and—"

"But the affiah was an accident, sir," exclaimed the amazed D'Arcy. "You weelln' don't mean to say you are goin' to punish us foah wunnin' you down?"

"Silence! And don't speak to me in that ridiculous fashion!" roared Mr. Birch, jamming his hat on. "You deliberately ran into me."

"Weally, sir, I must protest," exclaimed D'Arcy excitedly. "I was widing wight past you when you'd clean into my fwont wheel. It was a mattah—"

"Did you hear me, boy? I say, you did it on purpose. And if you don't speak in a different manner—"

"He can't sir," put in Tom Merry. "It's a distressing fact, but the poor chap was born like that."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

Mr. Birch leaned forward, and cuffed Arthur Augustus over the head. The swell of St. Jim's turned in amazement.

"Bai Jove! I cannot allow—"

"You cannot allow!" thundered the new master. "Upon my soul, have I come to a school or a reformatory?"

The juniors grew hostile at this insult.

"Look here, sir, it's not fair to say things like that!" cried Tom Merry indignantly. "D'Arcy would never answer you back if you were reasonable. How can he help speaking with a lisp? I call it unjust."

"Oh, you do? Very good, perhaps you will call this unjust? I am master here now—"

"Not yet, sir."

"Silence! I say I am master of the School House, and I mean to put up with no insolence. You will each write me five hundred lines before to-morrow mid-day. You understand?"

Mr. Birch was evidently punishing Tom Merry in a roundabout way for the affair in the train. He turned heavily, and continued his way to the school, leaving Tom Merry and

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Arthur Augustus staring at one another in silent amazement.

"My hat!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Well, of all the rotters I ever came across," said the leader of the Terrible Three, "I reckon he's about the worst! I used to think old Ratcliff was pretty stiff, but he's an angel compared with this chap."

"Wathah, deah boy! I considah the new mastah is a beastly twant! The accident was entiahly his own fault, and yet he gives us five hundred lines. It is absolutely widic.—pwepostewous!"

"Of course. I've never heard anything to beat it. Fancy old Railton doing such a thing!"

"He would nevah have been such an uttah ass as to walk into my fwont wheel, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus, picking up his bicycle. "Come along. We'll go and tell the othahs!"

"Well, if Birch thinks he's going to walk all over us he'll find himself jolly well mistaken," said the hero of the Shell determinedly. "I'm not going to be trodden on by anybody!"

"Wathah not, deah boy! Bai Jove, my monocle is bwoken!"

"Blow your monocle!"

"But it's the best one I have, Tom Mewwy."

"Do you think I care, ass?"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, you are wude, and fwightfully unsympathetic. I shall no longah wegard you as a fwriend unless you—"

"Yes you will, Gussy. Come along, I'm anxious to see what's happening up at the school."

They mounted their cycles and returned to St. Jim's. Having put their mounts in the shed, they crossed the quad. In the hall a noisy crowd of juniors gathered, while further on Blake & Co. were talking excitedly with Manners and Lowther.

"The rotter!" cried Blake.

"The low-down bounder!" put in Lowther.

"Tom Merry was correct," went on the former in indignant tones. "He's a beastly bully, right enough!"

"What's up?" asked Tom Merry. "Has the Birch-bird started bullying already? My hat, he doesn't lose much time! I've got five hundred lines to do already."

"Five hundred lines!"

"My only topper!"

"Rotten, isn't it? D'Arcy is overjoyed because he's got a like amount to set to paper. He knocked old Birch-broom sprawling in the lane."

"Ha, ha, ha! How did it happen?"

The juniors listened intently as Tom Merry related the incident. D'Arcy chimed in now and again, but as nobody took any notice of his remarks it didn't matter.

"And he gave you five hundred lines each for that?" cried Monty Lowther indignantly. "He ought to be hoofed out!"

"Rather," agreed Tom Merry. "But we must put up with him for a couple of weeks. I don't know how we shall get through 'em, but we must try. Now, what was that I heard when I came in? You were hardly referring to our gentle House-master in tones of endearment."

"Great Scott, no!" cried Jack Blake. "It's like this. Young Dudley, of the Third, was crossing the quad when Birch came in. Like a little fathead, Dudley went up to him and asked what he wanted."

"My hat!"

"Young Dud said he thought it was a tradesman come to the wrong entrance, and told Birch to go round. Of course, it wasn't anything cheeky, yet the cad swiped Dudley across the back with his beastly cane until he howled. Rotten shame, I call it!"

"Yaas, wathah! If Birch continues these twicks, deah boys, we shall have to show him the ewwor of his ways. Bullyin' is barred at St. Jim's."

"I should say so," remarked Blake. "We can stand a lot from a master, but not that."

"And it's impossible to sneak to the Head."

"Of course."

"Then, if matters get much worse, we shall have to take a hand," said Tom Merry. "By the look of things, we are going to have a regular hot time of it. If he starts chucking his weight about before he enters the school, he'll be unbearable afterwards."

"Bai Jove!"

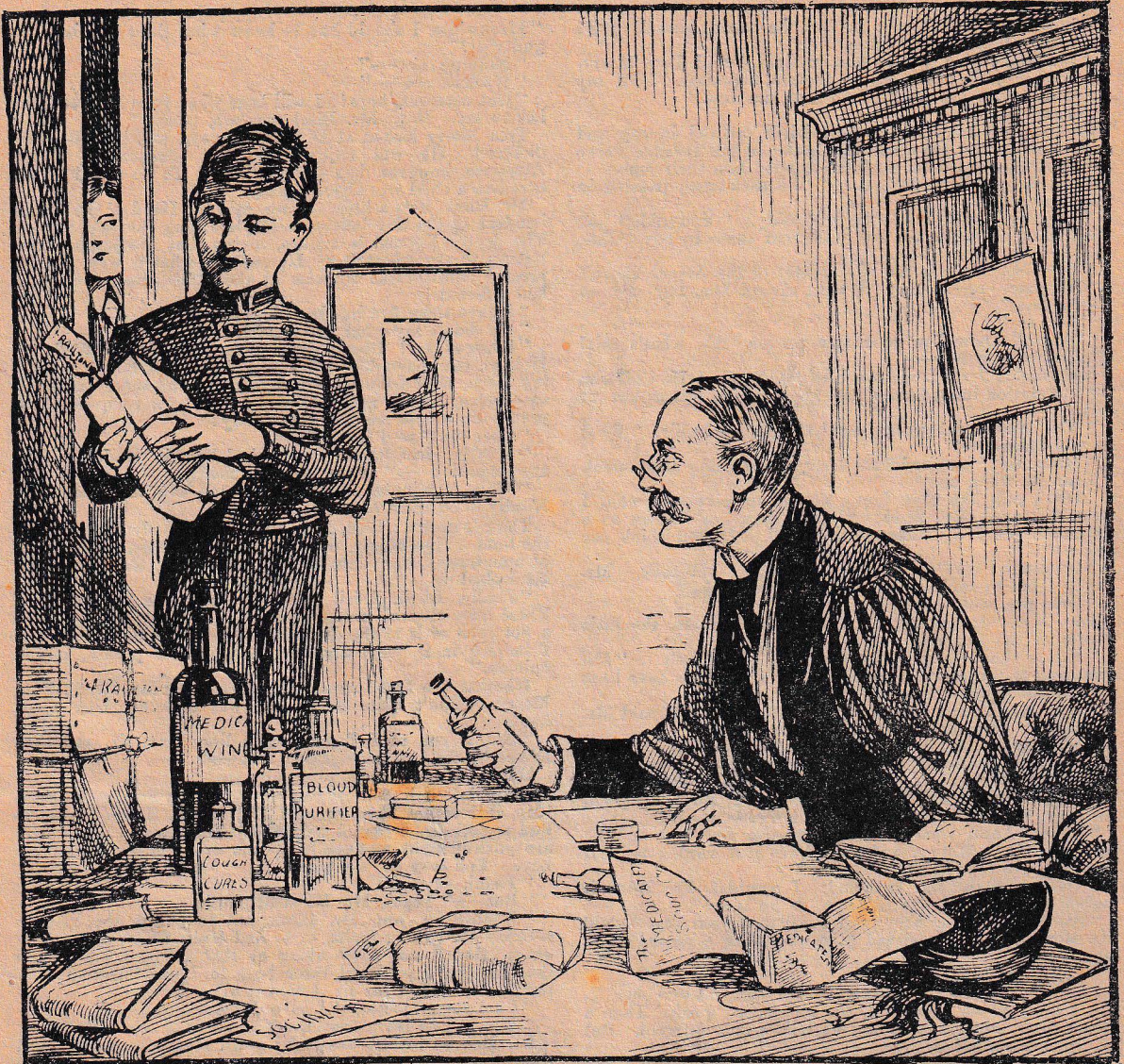
"What's up, Gussy?" asked Blake.

"I've got an idea, deah boy!"

"Oh, cheese it!" began Herries and Digby.

"Half a minute!" interrupted Lowther. "Don't forget that brain wave he had with regard to the sub. Give him a hearing."

"Oh, all right!"



"Upon my soul," laughed Mr. Railton as Binks brought in another parcel. "I shall be able to start a chemist's shop soon at this rate?" (See page 5.)

"It is nothing much, deah boys, only it stwuck me that we might play a twick on the new mastah."

"How?" asked Blake.

"Mr. Birch has given Tom Mewwy and myself five hundred lines to do each. Well, it stwuck me—"

"That's twice you've been struck," said Herries. "I hope you're not hurt."

"Oh, don't wot, Hewwies! I say, the ideah came into my head to wite the lines in a peculiar way. Mr. Birch did not specify any particular sort of lines, did he, Mewwy?"

"No, I don't think so, kid."

"He just said lines. So I suggest I wite out the words: 'Bullies have a hot time of it at St. Jim's.'"

"That's all right," said Lowther, "but I can't see anything particularly striking in it. It's as good as any other old line."

"Fway wait a moment, Lowthah. I have not finished. Tom Mewwy's line could be somethin' like this: 'Mr. Birch is the new mastah of the School House.'"

"Do you call that an idea," said Herries disgustedly.

"I am afwaid you are too dull to see the innah meanin', Hewwies, old man. I am suah the others see the joke."

"I'm blowed if I do," declared Blake. "What is it, kid?"

"I don't believe he knows himself," said Manners.

"Mannahs, you are wude. If you will wead the two lines togethah, they wead like this: 'Mr. Birch is the new mastah

of the School House. Bullies have a hot time of it at St. Jim's.' You see, deah boys, it is an insinuation that Mr. Birch is a bully, and he cannot fail to see it."

"By Jove, Gussy, that's not half bad!" said Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He'll make you do 'em all over again," said Digby. "Perhaps double 'em."

"Dry up, Dig, there's a good chap!" exclaimed Blake. "I call it a good idea of Gussy's. Birch didn't say what lines he wanted, so he'll have to put up with what he gets."

"Rather."

"And the lines, taken apart, read all right. It's not Tom Merry's fault if he writes something that seems to go with Gussy's, is it?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Certainly not!"

Five hundred lines are a lot to do, especially when a boy is itching to get out all the while. But at last Tom Merry and D'Arcy got them done. It had taken them all the afternoon and evening, but it was a good thing to have them out of the way.

At supper time, Mr. Birch made his first appearance. He had been introduced to all the masters, and was then chatting with Mr. Ratcliff, the master of the New House.

It was plain to see he was one of those men who think themselves everybody; who ought to express a wish to have it immediately executed.

Before the other masters, Mr. THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 146.

Birch was quite different; in fact, he made himself quite agreeable at the supper table.

"We won't give 'em to him to-night," said Tom Merry, "but wait until the morning, before breakfast. He'll say we've done 'em too quick, if we take 'em now."

"Yaas, wathah!"

So the next morning, as Mr. Birch, attired in cap and gown, came down the stairs, the leader of the Terrible Three and D'Arcy stepped forward and handed him their lines.

"Ah, so you have done them?" he exclaimed, pausing in the corridor.

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry meekly. "You didn't say what lines, so we wrote out just what came to our minds, sir."

"Er—'Mr. Birch is the new master of the School House.' Is this yours—er—Merry? A most absurd line, boy—a most absurd line."

"Yes, sir."

"You all know I'm your new master. Ah, what's this? 'Bullies have a hot—'"

Mr. Birch's florid face grew black with rage. He had seen the imputation immediately, and knew that it was meant for him.

"You impertinent young hounds!" he cried loudly. "What do you mean?"

"Mean, sir?" inquired Tom Merry, in seeming amazement. "Mean by what, sir?"

"Don't talk like that, boy. You know very well what I mean!" roared Mr. Birch. "These lines are written as a deliberate piece of insolence to myself. If you think you can—"

"Insolence, sir!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "Weally, Mr. Birch, I fail to see the reason of your remarks."

"Dear me, what can be the matter?"

Tom Merry looked round. It was Mr. Lathom, the little master of the Fourth.

"Please don't interfere!" snapped Mr. Birch. "I'm attending to this matter—er—Lathom. These boys have been unpardonably impertinent!"

"Dear me, I hope that is not the case, D'Arcy?" said Mr. Lathom, in surprise. "It pains me to hear—"

"Do you doubt my word, sir?" exclaimed the House-master aggressively. "I say they have been impertinent, and that is enough."

"Oh, of—of course, I take your word, Mr. Birch!" agreed the little Form-master hurriedly. "I was only—"

"I don't know what Mr. Birch means, sir," put in Tom Merry. "Both D'Arcy and myself are still waiting to hear how we have been cheeky."

"Yaas, wathah, Mr. Lathom! I considah Mr. Birch is makin' a gwave mistake in actin' as he is—"

"Another word, D'Arcy, and I will box your ears!" said Mr. Birch, as though he had been addressing a second Form fag.

"Bai Jove! Weally—"

"Clap!" Arthur Augustus staggered back, his ears ringing. For a moment he stood still, too amazed to speak. Then a gleam came into his eyes, and he took a step forward. But he checked himself in time.

"Your action just now, Mr. Birch," he said hotly, "was hardly that of a gentleman, and I must request that in futuuh you wefain from tweatin' me as if I were a child! It is possible to go too far, sir!"

"You—you cheeky young puppy—"

"Mr. Birch—Mr. Birch, pray remember what you are saying!" cried little Mr. Lathom, aghast. "I must remind you that these boys are unaccustomed to being addressed in such terms."

"Mind your own business, sir!" roared Mr. Birch furiously.

"I repeat these boys are both insolent young puppies, and I mean to make an example of them!"

"Before doing so, Mr. Birch, I should like to know what their fault is. You appear to be talking rather strongly, and I shall be obliged if you will moderate your language a trifle!"

Mr. Birch swung round and came face to face with Dr. Holmes.

CHAPTER 9.

Towser in Danger.

THE Head appeared to be sterner than usual, and he gave the new House-master a decidedly cold look.

"I—I am sorry if I have displeased you, sir," muttered Mr. Birch, between his teeth. "But these boys appear to be the essence of impertinence!"

"I have never found them so," said the Head quietly.

"Nor I," put in Mr. Lathom. "I fear Mr. Birch is far too sensitive. He even forgot himself when he addressed me!"

"We will discuss that later, Lathom," said the Head.

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"Meanwhile, I should like to know what these two boys are guilty of?"

"Nothing, sir—"

"Wathah not—"

"One moment, boys! I will hear what your House-master has to say. Now, Mr. Birch, explain, please."

Tom Merry looked at D'Arcy sideways, and his left eyelid flickered. He was enjoying himself immensely. Arthur Augustus, however, was on his "dig." To be boxed on the ears like a child was above a joke.

Mr. Birch, now a little quieter, told the Head of the bicycle incident of the day before, misrepresenting the case grossly. The doctor listened in silence, seeing that the juniors were itching to say something. He guessed what it was, and expressed considerable surprise at the punishment Mr. Birch had inflicted.

"I gave them five hundred lines apiece, sir—"

"He didn't say what line," flashed Tom Merry.

"Silence, boy! Speak when you're spoken to! Well, Dr. Holmes, they have done the lines as I ordered, but in composing them, they have contrived to make the sense extremely suggestive, which reflects upon myself. In fact, sir, they practically accuse me of being a bully!"

"Dear me!" said Dr. Holmes.

"Weally, doctah, Mr. Birch is labouwin' undah a misapprehension—" began Gussy excitedly.

"Wait a minute, D'Arcy. Let me see the lines first. Kindly hand them to me, Mr. Birch."

The old doctor adjusted his glasses and slowly read through the lines. Tom Merry, who was looking closely, saw a gleam of amusement creep into them for a second, then disappear. He looked up.

"Really, Birch, I fail to see the reflection you mention. These lines are well written, and quite sensible: 'Bullies have a hot time of it at St. Jim's!' D'Arcy is quite correct, and I believe in it. A bully is a contemptible person, in my opinion."

Whether the Head meant this for a dig at Mr. Birch, Tom Merry couldn't quite decide. It was certainly very much like it.

"But if you read Tom Merry's lines first, sir, and then D'Arcy's, the two go together, and—"

Dr. Holmes coughed.

"Again, Birch, I must confess that I see nothing in these lines that reflect upon yourself. Of course, if you choose to find something, I cannot help that. The lines by themselves are quite all right, and you have been wrong in detaining these boys. You may go, my lads."

"Thank you, sir!"

"But—," began Mr. Birch helplessly.

"I must ask you, Mr. Birch, not to punish the boys so severely for trifling faults, or to find faults where none really exist. Had I not come along at that moment you would doubtless have punished those boys for some imaginary impertinence. My dear sir, I cannot allow it."

"I am sorry, doctor, if I have displeased you—"

"You cannot learn everything at once, of course."

Dr. Holmes turned, swept his gown after him, and walked down the passage. He was beginning to think that the hidden meaning in the two lines was true. Mr. Birch was a bully!

Meanwhile, Tom Merry was relating the incident, much to the amusement of his chums. What a smack in the eye it had been for Birch. Rather!

"Of course the Head saw it," said Blake.

"I should say so. Only he wouldn't let Birch know," replied Tom Merry. "I reckon he had a suspicion that there was more than a little truth in it. Gussy, we've got to thank you for a jolly good take-down of the gentle Birch-broom!"

Arthur Augustus beamed.

"The ideah has worked wippingly," he exclaimed, screwing a new "window" into his eye. "But I wegard Mr. Birch as a weally howwid pewson. I cannot understand how a man can be such an uttah beast!"

"Your language is getting rather strong, Gussy," said Monty. "What fearful injury has the new freak done you?"

"It is not a physical injury, Lowthah, but a mattah which has wuffed my dig. to a considerable extent."

"Go hon, Gussy, that's terrible!"

"I am not jokin', Mannahs. Mr. Birch has had the extreme audacity to box my eahs!"

"My hat!"

"It is a fact, deah boys, and I am consid. upset about it," declared D'Arcy. "It is a sewious mattah when a mastah begins boxin' a fellow's eahs."

"Rather!"

"If he attempts any such thing again, I shall be forced to go stwaight to the Head and ask him to pwotect me from furthah onslaughts."

"No you won't, Gussy," said Tom Merry. "We can settle

Birch-broom all right. By Jove, what a difference between him and old Railton?"

"Great Scott!—yes! I wonder how he's feeling now?"

"Who?" asked Manners.

"Railton."

"Oh, as lighthearted as Gussy when he's got a new waistcoat on," said Manners. "Now he's got the money all his worry is over."

"The operation will be performed at once, I expect," said the junior captain. "By jingo, I hope he won't be more than a fortnight, chaps! We shall be as thin as rails, as it is. Nobody on earth could stand much of this new merchant."

Suddenly there was a loud growl from outside, and Herries jumped up like a jack-in-the-box. As usual, he had been listening to everything without saying much himself.

"That's Towser!" he exclaimed. He looked out of the window. Yes, sure enough, there was Herries's prize bulldog moving slowly across the quad., while close in front of him, not daring to run, was Mr. Birch.

"My hat! The fat's in the fire now!"

"Hewies, I wegard you as extremely careless——"

"Oh, shut up, Gus!" growled Herries. "I didn't let him out of the kennels. It must have been one of the servants. It only proves that Towser ought to be kept in the study."

"I don't think," said Blake, with decision.

"You always were unreasonable, Blake. My aunt, old Towser's going for him, I believe!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors crowded to the window enjoying the sight immensely. Across the quad. they could see Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn looking on with equal relish. Somehow, Towser seemed to have taken a dislike to Mr. Birch, for he followed him up inch by inch, while deep rumblings proceeded from his throat. Mr. Birch, as a matter of fact, was extremely nervous of dogs, and it was for this reason that Towser had elected to sample him. When about twelve yards from the porch the House-master glanced rapidly round, shouted threateningly to Towser, then turned and dived headlong for safety.

But Towser was too quick for him. With a fiercer growl than ever he darted forward and made a really well-judged leap for Mr. Birch's trousers. The next instant a shout rent the air.

"Help! Take the brute off! He's biting me! Take him off!"

Mr. Birch really appeared to be frightened—a huge man like him yelling for help. It was undignified, to say the least of it.

"My only aunt, you'll be in for it now, Herries, old son!" grinned Blake. "That's just like Towser—he always makes for your bags!"

"Yaas, wathah!" agreed Arthur Augustus. "Towsah has no respect for a fellow's trowsers. I call it weally bwital of him, deah boys!"

"We'd better go and call the beast off!" cried Tom Merry. And the juniors rushed out. When they reached the hall they could hardly keep their faces straight.

The faithful Towser evidently had no intention of relinquishing his hold, for Mr. Birch was still in the same position, looking somewhat alarmed.

"Confound it! Take this brute away!" he cried, glaring at the juniors. "Do you hear me? Take it away at once!"

"But he bites, sir!" exclaimed Digby innocently.

"Who does it belong to?" fumed Mr. Birch. "By gad, I'll make somebody smart for this! The dog shall be shot this very hour—this very hour, I say!"

Herries turned pale. He was really fond of Towser, and the threat disconcerted him. The very thought of losing the bulldog was appalling.

"Shot, sir?" he echoed aghast. "You don't mean it, really, sir? I couldn't lose him——"

"So he's your dog, eh, boy?" cried the House-master. "Call him off at once—at once, sir! It is bad enough to suffer this indignity without being laughed at by a crowd of grinning fags!"

The juniors looked at one another in indignation. Fags, indeed! Herries ran forward and ordered Towser to release his hold. Very reluctantly the dog obeyed, and stood beside his young master. Mr. Birch, having twisted round to see the extent of the damage, then turned to his rescuer:

"Yes, I meant what I said!" he snapped. "That dog shall be shot; or, at least, drowned!"

"No, sir!" cried Herries frantically. "You can't——"

"You'll see, boy, whether I can't! And as for you yourself, you can write me a hundred lines of translation. I mean to show that I am master of this House! You may go!"

Herries didn't move, but Mr. Birch turned and strode away. He had taken no notice of the Head's wishes, for he had deliberately punished Herries when he ought to have commended him. The juniors were highly indignant.

"The utter rotter!" cried Tom Merry. "He ought to be slung out of the school!"

"But what's Herries got a hundred lines for?" asked Digby. "He hasn't done anything to deserve 'em."

"Oh, I suppose it's because Towser belongs to him," said Manners disgustedly. "Of all the absolute outsiders, I reckon he's the absolutest."

"Yaas, wathah! Mr. Birch is a wank wottah, deah boys! Besides being a beastly bully, he's unjust. He appeals to have no ideah as to what is wight or w'ong."

"What am I going to do about old Towser?" asked Herries worriedly. "He's not going to be shot."

"It would be a good thing in a way," said Blake, with a wink. "Still, for your sake, Herries, old man, we couldn't allow it. If Birch really means it, we shall have to hide the brute up——"

"In the study?" said Herries eagerly.

"Rather not!" exclaimed Digby, with warmth. "We're not going to have the giddy brute in the study, Herries."

"Don't be unreasonable, Dig!"

"I'm not, ass!"

"Yes, you are——"

"Here, dry up!" said Blake. "I've got an idea. Suppose we get Taggles to take charge of him? He's got a little outhouse he could shove him in. You could chain him up, you know, and go and feed him now and again."

"Good wheeze!" said Herries eagerly. "But how about when old Birch asks about him?"

"Oh, you can refuse to tell him," said Tom Merry. "You'd rather do another hundred lines than lose Towser, wouldn't you?"

"I should say so!" replied Herries. "He can't kill me, can he?"

So after breakfast an interview with Taggles, the school porter, soon disposed of Towser, and, incidentally, nearly all Blake & Co.'s spare cash. But Mr. Birch was foiled, for that was the main thing. When he asked Herries where his ferocious animal was, Herries was the victim of a strange loss of memory, and suffered in consequence to the extent of a severe caning, and another three hundred lines of translation to keep his spare time occupied.

Towser was saved, however, so Herries didn't mind so very much. It was hard, though, to be punished for absolutely nothing, and the boys grew bitter against Mr. Birch.

And the new House-master didn't improve, either. The next day he confiscated D'Arcy's monocle, and forbade him to appear in public with another. Poor Arthur Augustus was at his wits' end. He had never suffered such an indignity before, and grew quite excited about the matter.

"I wefuse to stand it, deah boys!" he declared. "What wight has Mr. Birch to confiscate my monocle? Bai Jove, I'll wite to the patah to-day and get him to send me a dozen down! I uttably wefuse to go about without my monocle! It would mean a great loss of dig., and I simply couldn't stand it. I wegard Mr. Birch as a feahful worm—the wankest outhsida I have evah met!"

But the thing which enraged the Fourth and the Shell more than anything was the fact that Mr. Birch had actually forbidden the boys to punt a football about in the quad. The indignation was intense. Nothing could have aroused the boys more, for it was considered a slight on the great game, and football was taken seriously at St. Jim's. To crown all, Mr. Birch "gated" Tom Merry until further notice for merely a trifling offence.

The juniors couldn't go to Dr. Holmes with their complaints, so a huge indignation meeting was held in the classroom. After much disagreeing, it was finally decided to show the new master that the boys didn't mean him to have things all his own way.

The tale of how this was done will be reserved for another chapter. The one immediately following this will deal with a much greater subject, and for a few minutes we will leave the boys of St. Jim's to take care of themselves.

CHAPTER 10.

A Bolt from the Blue.

"MY dear Mr. Railton, I tell you it can't be done for less than eighty! Two specialists will be absolutely necessary, and you know they will want high fees."

"I am afraid you're right, Dr. Everett," replied the other. "I am afraid you're right."

"You will get the money——"

"How can I——" began Mr. Railton helplessly.

"How can you, man? You must! I'd let you have it in a moment, only just at present I should find it a task to scrape as much as eighty shillings together. You have got friends——"

"I know," said Mr. Railton, resting his pale face in his hands; "but I've never borrowed a penny in my life yet, and it goes against the grain——"

"But think of your sister!" cried the doctor.

"I am thinking of her—always! And I realise what a fool

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I am, Everett. I shall go and see several men to-day, and scrape the money together somehow. I've waited too long as it is."

"You think you can get the required amount?"

"I can try; money is a peculiar thing, doctor. When you have plenty yourself, your friends have plenty, but when you have none, your friends seem to be the same."

Dr. Everett smiled.

"Very true," he said. "I can't stop now, but I'll call in again this afternoon and see how you have got on. I'm glad you have brought your sister to this address."

"Yes, Alice is better here: it is much quieter for her," said Mr. Railton. "The noises of the school she was at were many and great." He laid his hand on the other's arm.

"And you say the operation is a safe one?"

"Absolutely! Eighty pounds will save Miss Railton's life. There is no doubt about that."

"Then I'll get the money to-day, Everett, even if I have to pay double the amount back again."

After the doctor had gone, Mr. Railton—a very different man from the cheery master of the School House at St. Jim's—sat thinking over the situation. He might get the money, certainly. He had told Everett from friends, but the "friends" would have to be moneylenders.

The thought of getting into their hands was an appalling one, yet it was the only way. He would have to borrow eighty pounds somewhere—either that, or apply to the Head of St. Jim's for a loan, and that was the last thing Mr. Railton desired.

The position was not a pleasant one, review it whichever way he would, and Mr. Railton realised that it had been a good thing, after all, Dr. Holmes sending him away. He was on the spot now, by his sister's side, and if the eighty pounds was to be got at all, it could be procured here. Just at the time Mr. Railton wanted money most urgently he was worse off than he had ever been in his life.

A short time previous he had had a nice little sum put away in shares—several hundred pounds—but only a month before he had lost it all; every penny he had been worth had vanished. It was a blow, and the news of his fifteen-year-old sister's illness, while she was away at boarding-school, had brought things to a head.

The most bitter part of all was that he had had the money—had been worth ten times the amount—barely a month before. And now he would have to borrow for the first time in his life! It was hard, awfully hard, especially when Mr. Railton had worked so hard and saved so thriftily.

"Ah, well, it's no good giving way," he exclaimed, and pulling himself together. "I shall throw all my scruples aside and get the money. I think I know the man to go to."

He opened the door, and in the passage outside met the nurse.

"Is she awake?" he whispered.

"Yes, sir, and wants to speak to you, I think," the woman answered.

"I'll go to her," he said, continuing his way. He halted outside the door, and softly turned the handle.

It was a nice little room he found himself in. On the window-table a glass of flowers stood, and in the bed against the wall lay a pretty girl of fifteen. Her face was thin and pale now; and it could be seen that her illness was a serious one.

As Mr. Railton entered she opened her eyes and smiled. He crossed over to the bed and took her hand.

"How do you feel, sis?" he inquired anxiously.

"Oh, about the same, Harry," she answered weakly. "But tell me why you look so worried. It is because you cannot get the money, isn't it? Oh, Harry, I don't believe I shall have courage enough to undergo the operation!"

"But you must, little girl," he said tenderly. "Everett assures me you will feel no pain, and will come to yourself to find that the operation is over. After that your recovery is assured."

"So as soon as you get the eighty pounds I can be put under treatment? What a shame it was that horrid company smashed up, Harry! You would have been independent of everybody, then, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, Alice. But that's out of the question now," smiled the young master. "Never fear! I shall get everything settled by to-night."

"But it's an awful lot, Harry."

"And isn't it worth it, sis? Isn't it worth ten times the amount? What is a paltry eighty pounds?" He laughed lightly to reassure her. "Don't you worry your little head about it at all. I am trying to arrange the operation for the day after to-morrow."

"Oh, Harry, I'm frightened when I think of it, but I'm glad it's going to be so soon. It will be over quicker, won't it?"

"That's the way to look at it, sis!" he cried. "I'm going to the Gem Library.—No. 146.

out now, but I shall be back in an hour or two. Nurse will look after you."

She smiled up at him trustingly. She was only a child, after all, and the ordeal she had to go through was a terrible one. Mr. Railton loved his sister—his only sister—and because of this nothing that he could have done would have been too great.

He softly crossed the room, and was about to turn the door-handle, when the door opened, and the nurse appeared.

"There's a messenger-boy at the door, sir," she exclaimed: "and he won't deliver his letter to anybody but you yourself."

Mr. Railton looked surprised.

"A messenger-boy?" he repeated. "This is peculiar, Mrs. Roberts. I will go and speak to him."

Puzzled, the House-master descended the stairs, and strode to the hall-door. A smart-looking lad stood on the step.

"Are you Mr. Henry Railton, sir?" he inquired.

"I am, my lad," answered the other, noticing that the boy was giving him a close scrutiny. "Why do you wish to speak to me?"

"Well, sir, I was told to deliver this 'ere message into no one else's hands." The messenger-boy produced a bulky envelope, and handed it to Mr. Railton.

"I understand. Well, you can go away satisfied that you have carried your instructions out correctly," smiled the House-master, trying to guess who the strange packet was from.

He took it upstairs into the sitting-room, and broke the seal. The next instant he uttered a cry of amazement, and rose to his feet agitatedly. The expression on his face would be hard to describe, for several emotions were expressed there—wonderment, joy, and incredulity being the most apparent.

"I—I— Good heavens!"

Mr. Railton sat down again, and gazed at the sheaf of bank-notes in his hand as if they would suddenly vanish into thin air. It was too good to be true. And who were they from?

Mr. Railton turned the envelope over. It had been addressed by a boy, but it told him nothing, for Tom Merry had seen that the messenger-boy who delivered the note had written the address on the package.

"Sixty pounds! The very amount I wished to borrow!"

The master of the School House turned the notes over, and examined them closely. Who were they from? Who could they be from? He had told nobody of his trouble. Yet somebody must know—who was it? Mr. Railton paced the floor, flushed and excited. Already that strained, anxious look had vanished from his face.

In its stead had come an expression of eagerness and joy. Mr. Railton could not realise his great good fortune for the moment. He would have no necessity to borrow now—the moneylenders would never see him—he was independent!

"Thank Heaven!" murmured the master fervently. "The friend who sent this is a friend indeed! But I cannot imagine who would do it! It is inexplicable!"

He stuffed the notes into the envelope, and hurried to his little sister's bed-room. She was still awake, and, fortunately, the nurse was absent. Mr. Railton crossed over to the bed with quick, springy steps, and bent over her.

"Why, Harry," she said, "whatever's the matter? You look so excited and happy; so different to what you were just now!"

"Sis," he answered gently, "I don't know how to tell you! I sha'n't need to go out and borrow money now."

She opened her eyes wider.

"It's true, sis. Somebody—I cannot imagine who—has sent the money by messenger. And it's come without any word in it to say who it's from."

"Oh, Harry, I'm so glad!" she whispered. "I did hate

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to think of you getting into debt through me. But who can have sent the money. Hardly anybody knows of my illness."

"That's the puzzling part of it," said Mr. Railton. "Still, there's no need to worry our heads about that now. The wonderful facts remain that it is here."

He spoke in his old cheery manner now, and all the listlessness seemed to have gone from his voice and limbs. Without a moment's hesitation, he threw his coat and hat on, and rushed round to Dr. Everett's. That gentleman was overjoyed to hear the news, and wrung Mr. Railton's hand heartily.

"Your friend, whoever it is, is a true one—a friend worth having!" he cried. "Thank goodness, Mr. Railton, you have lost that expression of hopelessness! You can safely look upon your sister as on the road to recovery!"

"But the operation—"

"Will be performed to-morrow. I can arrange everything, and confidently assure you that there is no danger whatever!"

CHAPTER 11. The Study Meeting.

"BAI Jove!"

Arthur Augustus stopped in the middle of the road, and screwed a monocle into his eye.

"What's up with you, kid?" asked Blake.

"Bai Jove!" answered D'Arcy.

"Do you want a thick ear?" asked Herries crossly. "If you can't say anything but—"

"Bai Jove! Did you address me, Hewwies, old man? I just wanted to call your attention to the person who is huiwyyin' along the woad in fwoot of us."

"What, that girl?" said Digby. "I can't see—"

"By Jove!" ejaculated Blake.

Herries and Digby stared at him.

"Have you gone off your beastly rocker, too, Blakey?"

"No fear! Don't you recognise her, kids? It's Cousin Ethel! Come on!"

"Great Scott, so it is!" cried Herries and Digby, with a start of recognition, as they looked at the graceful figure of the young lady in front of them. They had not recognised her at first, because she had her back towards them.

"Bai Jove, Ethel!" cried Arthur Augustus, running forward. "Pway don't be in such a beastly huiwuy!"

D'Arcy's cousin turned in surprise, then stopped, as she saw the juniors hurrying towards her. She looked a picture of girlish beauty as she stood there with her white fur and boa.

"Why, Arthur, I didn't expect to see you to-day!" she cried. "And there's Blake and Herries and Digby! How are you all?"

"We're fine, thanks, Miss Cleveland!" said Jack Blake, as he shook hands. "Just a little bit fed up, you know—er, I should say, we're getting tired—"

"Getting tired, Blake!" said the girl, in a puzzled voice. "Whatever do you mean? Tired of what?"

"Tired of life, Ethel," said Arthur Augustus. "There's a beastly wotten new mastah at St. Jim's—"

"A new master!" cried Cousin Ethel in surprise.

"Wathah! And the othah day he had the uttah audacity to box my cabs! You see, Mr. Wailton's sis— Bai Jove, Blake, what did you do that foah?"

Blake had trodden on one of Gussy's pointed boots.

"You—you— You dummy—"

"I wufuse to be called a dummy in the pwesence of a lady," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "Blake, you are a wude boundah, and I shall have no option—"

"Oh, come, Arthur," laughed the girl, "surely you don't want to wrangle now!"

"Bai Jove, Ethel, pway accept my apologies! I will werve your fearful thwashin' for anothah time, Blake!"

"Right-ho, Gus!" grinned Blake. "You see, Miss Cleveland, it's this way—"

And the leader of Study No. 6 told Cousin Ethel all about the new master and his tyrannical nature. The girl was indignant when she heard of the things Mr. Birch had done, and quite agreed with the juniors that something would have to be done.

Promising to call over and see them on the following day—she was staying with friends close by—Miss Cleveland parted with her boy chums, and tripped off down the road.

She had hardly gone a hundred yards when she came face to face with Mr. Birch himself. He raised his hat.

"Pardon me, young lady"—he smiled a little pleasantly—"but do you think those boys are quite the proper company for—a young lady such as yourself? Perhaps you do not know that they are rough and slangy—"

"Am I speaking to Mr. Birch?"

"That is my name, Miss—er—"

Cousin Ethel looked at him coldly.

"I do not know why I should answer you," she said; "but the boys I have been speaking to are some of the best in the world. In spite of their slang, and rough manners, as you call them, they are as good and honest as anybody could be. I wish for no better friends than Jack Blake, or Tom Merry, or, in fact, any of them!"

Mr. Birch looked surprised.

"You have strange tastes—" he began.

"That is where you are wrong!" cried the girl. "I have heard about you, Mr. Birch, and it seems to me you are apt to punish the boys for doing nothing. If you would get to know them, instead of wishing to gain their enmity, you might perhaps get on with them better. There, you asked me if I thought them fit company, and that's my answer!"

Cousin Ethel looked at Mr. Birch squarely, then turned on her heel, and walked away. She wasn't afraid of him a little bit.

"Saucy little minx!" muttered Mr. Birch. "She seems every bit as bad as the juniors themselves!"

He walked up to the school, and was just in time to see the boys going in for afternoon lessons. There was a feeling of subdued excitement in the Shell that afternoon. The boys knew that Tom Merry & Co. had decided to hold a meeting that night, in order to decide how to treat Mr. Birch, and were eager to be present at the meeting.

It was to be select, however; nobody admitted except Blake & Co., the Terrible Three themselves, and Kangaroo & Co. The three parties were quite enough to decide the next move.

Immediately after tea, Tom Merry rushed to his study, and poked the fire into a cheerful blaze. When the boys congregated, the room glowed with genial warmth, and baked chestnuts and hot drinks added to the comfort of the meeting.

Tom Merry was chairman, and he rapped the table to restore order. His companions were looking on interestedly. They realised the importance of the meeting, and the issues that were to be decided.

"Gentlemen," began Tom Merry, "we are gathered here to-night to discuss a serious matter—a matter that must be attended to with all possible expedition—"

"Did you look that up in the dictionary?" asked Clifton Dane.

"Order!" cried Monty Lowther.

"Heah, heah!"

"Don't you start, Gus!" growled Herries.

"I have no ideah of starting, deah boy. I came to this meeting with the full intention of keeping quiet, and uttahnin' not a word, and I'm going to stick to my—"

"You ass," said Blake witheringly.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Oh, shut up! Go on, Tommy, old son! I'll keep this funny merchant quiet."

"The question to be decided is this—how are we going to make Birch take back his order? In other words, how are we going to gain my liberty?"

"That's it," said Lowther. "How are we going to gain Tom Merry's giddy liberty?"

There was silence for a moment.

"You can't openly defy the beast," said Glyn, "and you can't go to the Head. That would be too much like sneak-in'."

"Of course," said Kangaroo. "We shall have to bring old Birch to his senses—if he's got any—ourselves."

"Alone we must do it!" exclaimed Lowther.

"If we played a jape on him that would only make him wilder," remarked Digby. "It will have to be something that makes him do as we want—"

"It's easy enough to talk," said Blake, "but when it comes to it—"

"Look here," said Tom Merry, "who's chairman of this meeting? Because if any of you chaps want to come and spout, I've no objection to shifting. I'm quite hoarse with speaking, as it is."

"Oh, shut up, kids, and let Tom Merry continue," said Manners. "He's chairman, you know."

"Right-ho!"

Tom Merry cleared his throat.

"The only thing I can suggest is this," he said. "It's jolly certain I'm not going to be gated—"

"No fear!"

"Tyranny!"

"Therefore we must do something to release your humble. The best thing I can think of is to beard the lion in his den—"

"He's clean-shaven!" grinned Lowther.

"Oh, be quiet, Monty," growled Tom Merry, "especially if you can't think of anything better than that! As I said, we shall have to pay old Birch a visit."

"Who?" asked Herries.

"Don't be an ass, Herries. Birch-broom, I said."

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"No. I mean, who'll pay——"
 "I shan't," said Lowther; "I'm stony!"
 "Oh, dry up, fathead!" said Herries. "I meant, who'll pay the visit."
 "Oh, I see!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "I reckon we'd all better go. There's safety in numbers, you know."
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "I'm thinking of that cane," said the Shell captain.
 "By Jove, yes!"
 "It's a good idea, though," said Kangaroo. "When he sees the lot of us troop in he'll hardly refuse our simple request, will he?"
 "I'll talk to him," said Blake. "You can leave him in my hands——"

"Yes, they're big enough!" grinned Lowther.
 Blake glared at the humorist of the Shell wrathfully.
 "Look here, Lowther!" he said.
 "Cheese it, kid!"
 "Did you call me a kid?"
 In a moment Blake and Lowther were grasped, and forced into their seats.

"This is a meeting," said Tom Merry, "not a slanging competition. Why the dickens can't you chaps keep order? You're the cause of the trouble, Monty. Your rotten jokes are always upsetting somebody!"

"Rats!"
 "Well, do we go?" inquired Tom Merry. "Is it agreed that we all pay the gentle Birch a polite visit, and ask him in sweet tones if he'll let me off?"
 "Of course!"

"Yaas, wathah! I considah it a wippin'——"
 "There's nothing like doing it now," said the chairman.
 "I suggest we lose no time, but go and see the brute at once."

"Good idea," said Noble. "I second it!"
 "Hands up for those who say go now, and have it out." Everybody's hands were held aloft, and Monty Lowther, who seemed particularly merry to-night, grinned broadly.
 "Quite a nice selection," he said critically. "I think Herries and Glyn might keep theirs a little cleaner, though. Still, it's excusable in Herries' case; these Fourth Form kids——"

"Do you want to start a rag, Monty?" said Tom Merry.
 "No, you've already done that! It is called 'Tom Merry's Weekly!'"

The chairman glared.
 "I shall get wild in a minute," he said. "What's the good of wrangling? For the time being we're allied against the new master, and all our energies are taken up with attending to him, so rows are out of the question."

"Only my fun!" grinned the humorist.
 "It's very unfunny fun, anyhow," said Blake. "My hat, look at the blessed time! We'll just be able to do it before prep. Come along, kids!"

"Yaas, wathah!"
 The deputation crowded out of the room, and proceeded to Mr. Birch's study. Outside the door they halted for a whispered conference; then Blake, who was to be spokesman, tapped on the panel.

Now it had come to the actual thing, the juniors felt just a little bit nervous. Mr. Birch was not a very pleasant person to go and interview, especially when the subject was such a one as that at present in hand.

CHAPTER 12.

Matters Come to a Head.

"COME in!"
 Jack Blake grasped the handle, turned it, and walked into the House-master's study, the rest of the boys following behind him. Mr. Birch, who was seated at his desk, looked up in surprise.

"Well?" he demanded brusquely. "What do you want?"
 "Please, sir, we're a deputation," said Blake.
 "A deputation, boy! What do you mean? Explain yourself quickly!"

"Well, sir, it's like this! Tom Merry—that is to say, we—or rather——" Blake paused nervously. Mr. Birch's cold eye was distinctly disconcerting. The flowing words he had intended to utter had completely vanished.

"Confound it, boy, can't you do anything else but stand there and splutter? What is it you want? I object to having my study invaded in this manner. I give you one minute!" Blake pulled himself together.

"We don't like it, sir," he said bluntly. "We think Tom Merry ought to be allowed to—— I mean, it isn't fair that he should be gated, sir, and we've come to protest against it!"

Mr. Birch drew in his breath sharply. An angry gleam entered his eyes, and he rose to his feet.

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"Oh, you've come to protest, have you, Blake?" he said smoothly. "Go on!"

"That's all, sir," said Blake, looking round. "We think the punishment is too severe, and that he never ought to have been gated. We never heard of such a thing, sir—no other master would have done it!"

"I understand, Blake," said Mr. Birch, with ominous calm. "You have come here to ask me to let Tom Merry off?"

Blake looked the bully straight in the eye.
 "No, sir," he cried, with a flushed face. "We have come here to demand it! It was an unjust sentence—rottenly unjust! And if Dr. Holmes got to hear of it he'd jolly well agree with us!"

Blake staggered back. The new master had bent forward without warning, and landed him a terrific smack on the cheek, and the leader of Study No. 6 was taken completely by surprise.

"You coward!" he cried recklessly.
 Mr. Birch's florid face went crimson. With an exclamation he produced a cane, and grasped Blake's collar. Matters were beginning to get exciting.

"I'll teach you to speak like that to your master!" thundered Mr. Birch. "By Heavens, I'll half kill you!"

Blake gasped as the cane descended on his back with swishing force. He wriggled convulsively, but it was no use. The other juniors looked on aghast, too amazed to interfere. They had never expected anything of this sort.

"Let him alone!" cried Manners hotly.
 "Bully!"
 "Cad!"

Mr. Birch applied the cane harder, and Blake swung his fist round desperately. More by chance than anything else it arrived safely in the middle of Mr. Birch's waistcoat. With a gasp, the House-master doubled up and sank to the floor, pulling half the papers off the desk as he did so. Blake looked round wrathfully, saw the cane, and threw it into the fire. He was breathing hard, and his eyes flashed.

"My only Aunt Jane!" muttered Glyn, looking round nervously. "There'll be the very dickens to pay now!"
 "Serve the brute right!" said Tom Merry hotly. "If Blake hadn't let out at him just then I should have gone for him myself!"

"Rather!" said Lowther.
 "Mr. Birch has acted in a most unwarrantable mannah, deah boys!" exclaimed D'Arcy, in a loud voice. "Blake did quite right to let out as he did. Personally, I should have been vewy much moah violent——"

"Dry up, Gus—he'll hear you!" whispered Herries warningly.

"Wats, Hewwies, deah boy! I don't care if he does!"
 Mr. Birch scrambled to his feet. The boys had expected him to be nearly mad with rage. On the contrary, however, he had grown calm, terribly calm, and straightened his clothes for a moment in silence.

"By rights," he said, and his voice vibrated with passion, "I should take you all to the head-master! Instead, I am going to fight this matter out myself! Never, in all my experience as a school-master, have I been submitted to such gross behaviour as I have to-night!"

"It was your own fault, sir——" began Harry Noble.

"Silence! The very fact of your coming to see me with your insolent demand was enough in itself. What has happened since, however, forces me to take measures I should never have thought of. Every boy in this room will please understand that he is from this minute gated for the rest of the term!"

The juniors gasped.
 "In addition to that I want a thousand lines of German translation from each of you—and every boy will see that his translation is different to another's! Now go!"

"Look here, sir——" began Tom Merry and Blake at once.

"Go, I say!"
 Mr. Birch roared the words, and the deputation filed slowly out of the room, too amazed to say anything. Instead of releasing Tom Merry, they had only made matters ten times worse.

The hero of the Shell laughed.
 "My only Sunday topper!" he ejaculated.

"You seem happy about it!" growled Manners.

"I'm certainly not miserable," agreed Tom Merry. "The whole affair's funny, as a matter of fact. The punishment Birch has given is so utterly absurd that I shall refuse to take any notice of it!"

The deputation stared.

"But——" began Herries excitedly.

"Do you think I'm going to do a thousand lines of rotten German?" said Tom Merry. "Not me, my sons! Birch-broom can rip for all I care! There comes a time when the timidest will jib!"

The others grew excited.

"Do you mean to openly defy him?" asked Blake.

"That's the idea. As a preliminary, suppose we all go down to the village and be late for call-over?"

"My hat!"

The others stared at one another again. They were reckless now, and would do anything if Tom Merry led them. And the Shell captain meant to lead them. He had had enough of Mr. Birch, and meant to show him that they didn't intend to be treated as dirt.

"Don't you see, kids? If we openly defy the rotter, the Head's attention will be brought to the matter, and he'll get to know everything. Of course, we shall be punished for being cheeky and unruly, but nothing like being gated for the rest of the term!"

"When the other fellows get to hear of it they'll be in with us," said Blake; "and if we all defy him the doctor can't do very much, can he? Besides, look what a decent old sort the doctor is! He'd never do anything unjust!"

"Rather not!"

"Dr. Holmes is a brick!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The plan was certainly a daring one. Mr. Hichen Birch was getting unbearable—beyond bounds. It was the first time he had been to a really big school, and it was all due to his desire to make his weight felt. He was a great man, and he meant to show his authority. But even the worm will turn, and he was to find he had carried matters a little too far.

CHAPTER 13.

Mr. Birch Goes Too Far.

"**B**AI JOVE, deah boys, what a lovely afternoon!"

Arthur Augustus looked out into the quad. from the study window. The sun was shining brilliantly, and the air was quite warm. Out in the quad, the Terrible Three were talking thoughtfully with Cornstalk & Co.

"Huwwy up, Blake, deah boy! The othahs are in the quad. waitin' foah us!"

"All right, kid, keep your wool on," said Blake. "I'm ready!"

The occupants of Study No. 6 hastened outside and joined the others. The rest of the juniors looked at the ten curiously. They knew they were gated, but they knew that Tom Merry & Co. had decided to ignore the punishment, and go about as if none had been inflicted, and they were curious about the result.

Figgins & Co. had sent many expressions of sympathy across, bringing one of them personally. And now the School House combine were about to set off for the village. They had not gone the previous evening because it had rained, but now, in the full daylight, they intended setting out.

"Come on, my children!"

Tom Merry led the way out of the massive gates, and they had just passed through when they all started.

"Blake—Merry—Noble!"

It was Mr. Birch's voice.

"Don't look round," muttered Tom Merry. "Walk on just as if you hadn't heard him!"

The juniors did as advised, grinning rather nervously. It was a new experience for them to defy their House-master. It had never been done at St. Jim's before.

"Did you hear me? Come back immediately, all of you!"

But the juniors were seemingly deaf, and went on as if unconscious of the angry voice of Mr. Birch. The other boys in the quad, looked on with breathless interest.

Before Mr. Birch could call again, Tom Merry & Co. had disappeared and were beyond earshot. Muttering something and glaring furiously around him, Mr. Birch spun on his heel and re-entered the School House. He had resolved to make the boys pay dearly for their audacity when they returned.

It was an hour before they did so. They strolled in at the gates as unconcerned as ever, Tom Merry and Blake having an argument on some interesting football point. Mr. Birch saw them from his window, and unhooked a brand-new cane from the wall. The expression on his face did not look promising. Hurrying, he arrived in the quad, just as Tom Merry & Co. were half-way across. The other boys who were about opened their eyes. What was going to happen?

"Merry!"

"I tell you," said Tom Merry to Blake, "Reilly was decidedly off-side! Don't you think I know what I'm talking about, ass?"

"Blake!" The call was insistent.

"I should think not!" exclaimed Blake, turning his back to Mr. Birch. "You call yourself the captain of the Junior Eleven, and yet you go and stick out that Reilly was off-side! Well——"

"Did you hear me, Blake?"

Mr. Birch's voice had risen to a roar, and was getting nearer. Jack Blake made no sign that he had heard, but kept

up his argument with Tom Merry unconcernedly. Then suddenly he jumped. The cane had cut across his legs.

"You young puppy!" exclaimed Mr. Birch, grasping Blake's arm. "Why don't you answer me?"

Blake kept it up ruefully.

"You utter ass! If Reilly was off-side, Tom Merry, then my eyes must be off-side!"

Mr. Birch shook him violently, and glared around impotently. The boys were ignoring him! They refused to recognise him—had sent him to Coventry, in fact! It was intolerable—unheard of!

"By Heaven, I'll do something desperate in a moment!" he cried. "Answer me at once, Blake, or——"

"Have you read the Association rules, Tom Merry?" asked Blake.

"Of course I have, ass!"

"Then——Ow! Yah!"

The cane had descended twice on a tender spot, and Blake yelled involuntarily. Arthur Augustus stepped forward excitedly.

"Bai Jove!" he cried. "Let him alone, you wottah! You're a wank bully, Mr. Birch, and I considah you ought to be drummed out of the school, or, wathah, hissed out of the school."

"Are you speaking to me, D'Arcy?" gasped Mr. Birch in amazement.

"Yaas, wathah! And I must wequest you to put up youah hands, sir."

"You utter imbecile, Gussy!" whispered Herries in a half-frightened voice. But Arthur Augustus was highly excited, and almost as indignant. The new master treated the boys as slaves.

"Pway leave him to me, Hewwies, old man! Now, Mr. Birch, I must wequest you to eithah put up youah hands, or weceive the feahful thwashin' you deserve."

Mr. Birch forgot himself, and swore violently. The rest of the boys hissed, causing the House-master to almost lose his head.

"I'll teach you!" he shouted. "Don't dare to say another word, D'Arcy!"

Arthur Augustus danced up and down aggressively.

"Bai Jove, I am afraid I shall have to administah the——Gweat Scott! Oo! Yaroooh! Yow!"

Mr. Birch grasped D'Arcy's beautiful collar and literally swung the swell of St. Jim's round by his neck. The boy was utterly helpless in the big man's hands. Then, wildly, madly, completely unconscious of the terrific power of his blows, or where they fell, Mr. Birch commenced thrashing D'Arcy as he had never before been thrashed in his life.

"Cad!"

"Brute!"

"Skunk!"

Mr. Birch grew wilder than ever, and Arthur Augustus's cries began to get weak. The blows were delivered with terrific force, and were distributed indiscriminately all over the swell junior's body.

"Come on!" cried Tom Merry between his teeth. "We can't see old Gussy half murdered, chaps! Drag him off!"

But before the juniors could leap to their chum's assistance, a tall, manly form sprang forward, followed by a smaller one.

"You cowardly hound!"

The familiar voice rang out clearly, and Tom Merry & Co. flung their caps into the air excitedly.

"Mr. Railton! Hurrah!"

Yes, it was indeed their old House-master; and now he grasped Mr. Birch's arm firmly, and wrenched the cane from his grasp. Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, stood beside him, looking grim and stern.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "I do feel wotten, deah boys!"

He looked round him, his face screwed into an expression of agony, for he was suffering considerably. Suddenly he drew himself up straight, and fumbled for his monocle.

"Gweat Scott," he cried, "Mr. Railton! Bai Jove, I'm glad to see you, sir!"

"What does this mean?" raved Mr. Birch, turning pale as he saw the hostile faces of the boys around him. He realised that if he got into their hands he would have a distinctly hot time of it. "Who might you be, sir, and by what right do you interfere with matters that don't concern you? Who the dickens are you, I say, you meddlesome——"

"My name is Railton."

"Railton!" exclaimed Mr. Birch, taken aback.

"Yes, Railton, Mr. Birch, the master of the School House. You no longer hold that position."

Dr. Holmes came up, and his face was terribly stern. He had seen everything from the window, and had hurried out just in time to see Mr. Railton dash across the quad, to the rescue.

"Mr. Birch, you will oblige me by coming to my study

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for a short time. You, too, Railton. I will settle this matter immediately."

Dr. Holmes turned to the boys.

"I will see you ten juniors in half an hour," he said kindly. "I hope you are not seriously hurt, D'Arcy? I fear Mr. Birch must have lost his head—"

"Weally, doctah, I'm as wight as wain!" cried Arthur Augustus. "Has Mr. Wailton come home for good, sir?"

"I am pleased to say, D'Arcy, he has, and—"

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

The quad rang out with the cries, and Mr. Railton, standing there, smiled in his old genial fashion. The operation on his sister had passed off as safely as Dr. Everett had predicted, and she was now rapidly gaining health and strength. Consequently Mr. Railton was in better spirits than he had ever been before. He felt like a boy, and looked years younger. The lines had disappeared from his face, and he flushed now as he heard the boys shouting.

He had never fully realised until that moment exactly how much the lads liked him, or exactly how much he liked the lads. He looked at the crestfallen figure of Mr. Birch, and realised that his boys must have been having a really strenuous time of it while he had been away.

What transpired in the Head's study the juniors never knew, but after a long interview with Mr. Birch the kindly old doctor saw Tom Merry & Co., and freed them from all punishment.

Of course, they had a lecture about defying the new master—for, all said and done, he was a master—but at heart Dr. Holmes knew the boys were right, and agreed with them. Nobody on earth would stand such treatment as Mr. Birch had meted out.

And the next day Mr. Hichen Birch left St. Jim's forever, Mr. Railton reoccupying his old position as master of the School House. And there was much rejoicing.

The same day a little incident occurred that shed light in Mr. Railton's brain where darkness had previously existed. He had put his head in Study No. 6 to inquire how D'Arcy was getting on—for his bruises and weals were numerous—and the juniors had greeted him warmly.

"Bai Jove, Mr. Wailton," cried Arthur Augustus, when he had assured his old House-master that he was as "wight as wain," "you are lookin' like yoah old self again now!

That feahfully wowwied look has gone, and you appeal to be at yoah ease. I hope, sir, yoah sis—"

"There hasn't been much football since you left, sir," put in Blake hurriedly, giving D'Arcy a thump on the back that made the swell junior gasp. He had, in his unconscious eagerness, been giving the whole game away.

"No, Blake, I suppose not," smiled Mr. Railton, concealing his feelings, for he had distinctly heard D'Arcy's half-uttered word, and had seen Blake's subsequent action, which proved that he wasn't supposed to know that which D'Arcy had been about to say.

"You howling ass!" whispered Jack Blake when Mr. Railton had gone. "You utter imbecile!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"You frabjous luna—"

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"You burbling duffer!"

"Bai Jove, Digbay, I uttably wefuse to be chawacterised as a burbling duffah! Besides, I am at a loss to undahstand the meanin' of this gwoos attack on my—"

"You've given the whole game away, ass!"

And while Blake was explaining to the indignant Arthur Augustus, Mr. Railton sat in his study piecing together the parts of the puzzle that had for so long worried him.

"The money came from the boys," he murmured, with shining eyes. "They must have got to know somehow, and raised a subscription. But £60! The doctor must have had a hand in it—he must have had! And I cannot ask, I cannot mention a word about the matter, for they wish me to remain in ignorance—they wish their generosity to go unrewarded."

He sat for a time lost in thought.

"Ah, well," he said, looking round him, fully convinced that he had guessed the truth, "I sha'n't bother my head about it! They don't want me to know, so why should I worry? But I am suspicious—strongly suspicious."

And Mr. Railton, as he stood looking round his old study, realised that the juniors of St. Jim's were, taken as a whole, as true and honest a lot of boys as any in the land.

"And, by Jove," muttered the House-master, "what bricks—what stunning little bricks!"

(Another splendid, long, complete tale of the Chums of St. Jim's next Thursday entitled: "Binks, Millionaire." Order your "Gem" Library in advance.)

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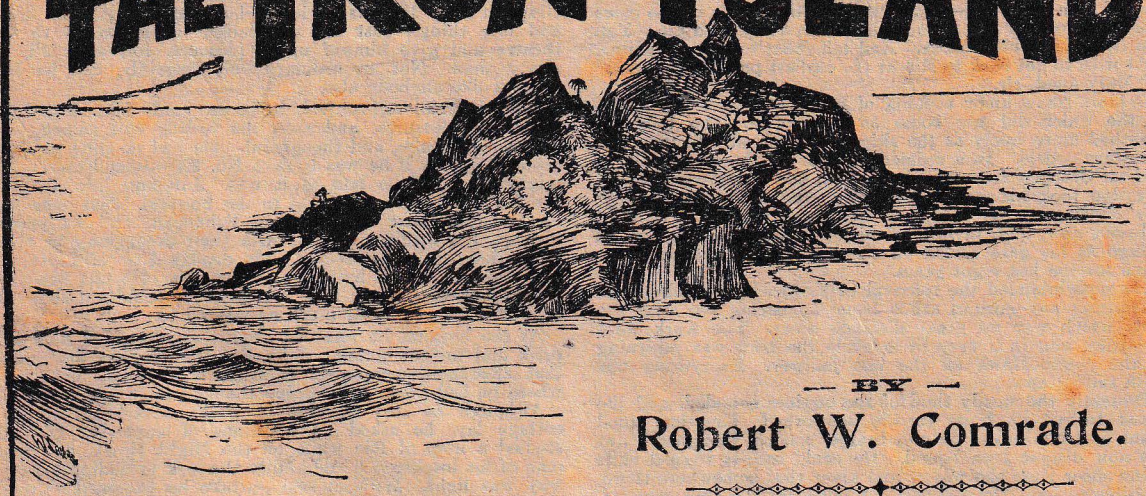
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THE IRON ISLAND



— BY —

Robert W. Comrade.

THE FIRST CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RE-WITTEN.

Philip Graydon is a young Englishman, who has been marooned for the last eight years on an uncharted island in the Pacific Ocean by a criminal society called the Brotherhood of Iron, of which Graydon is an ex-member. He is astounded one day to meet a fashionably-dressed young lady on the island of which he had for so long been the only occupant. The new-comer is Dolores de las Mercedes, an actress, who has caused serious disturbances in France by adopting the title of Queen of France for the sake of advertisement. The French Government had considered it necessary that she should retire from civilisation for a time, and had landed her, with a tent and complete equipment, on the Iron Island, little knowing that it had already an occupant. Dolores and Graydon put their heads together, and evolve a plan of escape. When Don Sebastian, the emissary of the Brotherhood, makes his annual visit to the island in his steam-yacht, he is overpowered, bound, and Graydon, with Dolores' help, makes himself up in exact representation of the Don.

Dolores is left in charge of the baffled Spaniard, while Graydon takes his place on the yacht.

"And now for the vengeance on the Brotherhood!" cries Graydon at parting. "Good-bye, Dolores, and don't forget that Philip Graydon must disappear. When I return for you, I shall be Graydon no longer, but Frank Kingston!"

At Rio de Janiero.

Graydon hurried down the path back to the banyan-tree. His mind was filled with a multitude of thoughts, the uppermost being an anxiety concerning Dolores. Would she be all right? Yet how could it be otherwise? It was impossible for her to leave the island with him, and it was equally impossible to kill Don Sebastian.

Before emerging from the trees past the arbour he paused for a moment, steadying himself. Yes, everything was all right. He was Don Sebastian sure enough; the likeness was unmistakable; nobody could possibly detect the deception. And when he walked his very gait was that of the Spaniard.

He came out into the open slowly, as if in no hurry, his head bent towards the ground. He was practically certain he couldn't be seen, for the banyan hid him from view, but there was a possibility, and if Graydon did a thing at all he did it thoroughly. As he drew up to his tree-house he paused for a moment, and entered. Then he swiftly placed some papers in his pocket, took a last look round, and emerged into the open again.

Closing the door after him, he walked briskly down to the beach. The sailors in the boat seemed in no way surprised at his long absence, but waited for his orders. He was so altered, and he acted his part so magnificently, that never a breath of suspicion crossed their minds.

"Back to the ship!" he said shortly, and scrambled into

the boat. What emotions he felt he kept strictly to himself, but for once his heart was beating swiftly. After eight years of exile he was escaping. His dream had come true at last, and soon he would be free to exact his vengeance on the men who were responsible for his maroonment. Don Sebastian was already receiving his punishment.

Graydon smiled inwardly as he realised the positions were reversed. The Spaniard was the exile now; when Dolores was taken away he would be left in a position exactly similar to Graydon's. He would be alone on the island, and the liberated man would be his keeper. It was a pleasant thought, and a fitting punishment for the sneering Spaniard. But the Brotherhood—would they not discover him, and set him at liberty?

No. How could they? It was Graydon's intention to take the hoard of gold away this very day—in the Brotherhood's own ship. He had thought of leaving it till he came a second time, but then another idea struck him. If he took it away in the Night Hawk, landed it at Rio, and instructed Captain Shaw to sail for home and report to Lord Mount-Fannell, it would make matters look black against Don Sebastian.

For, having got to Rio, Don Sebastian would mysteriously disappear, together with the gold. It would be absolutely impossible to trace them, and the Brotherhood would naturally conclude that the Spaniard had turned traitor and run off with the money. Captain Shaw would report that Graydon was dead, and therefore there would be absolutely nothing to take them to the island. This being so, Don Sebastian would have to remain there at Graydon's pleasure.

But, most important of all, this method of doing things would leave the Brotherhood in absolute ignorance as to who their enemy was, for Graydon intended devoting his life to wrecking the organisation. They would be under the impression that he was dead, and Graydon would take care not to enlighten them to the fact that he was very much alive.

If, on the other hand, he waited until his second visit to remove the gold, Captain Shaw would report that it was still on the island—there would be nothing against Don Sebastian, and the ship would go to the Pacific again and discover him. Then everything would be out, and they would be strictly on their guard against Graydon. No, the former method would be distinctly the better.

It was magnificent, and seemingly things were running smoothly. It would be strenuous work for Graydon, but he was capable of it—was capable of taking almost any risk to attain his object. The advent of Dolores had altered his whole life; his only anxiety was for her. He had plenty of confidence in himself.

The boat slid against the side of the yacht, and the pseudo Don Sebastian mounted the accommodation ladder. The captain was waiting on deck, and looked at him with an expression of inquiry. It was a trying moment for Graydon, but once passed there was little danger.

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"He's dead!" he exclaimed briefly.

"Dead, sir?" cried the skipper. "But how——"

"I came upon his remains almost at the far end of the island," replied Graydon, having little compunction at lying, for it was to aid a good purpose, and was justifiable. "Fever, I suppose. Anyway, I'm glad, for he won't trouble us any more now."

"Then we sail immediately, sir——"

"No, Shaw, not just yet. Give instructions for a boat-load of men to go ashore, and remove the whole of the cases from the storehouse. I am taking them away with me. You had better use the lifeboat. And tell them to waste no time, for I wish to get back to Rio at the earliest possible moment."

"Very good, sir."

Captain Shaw knew nothing of Don Sebastian's intentions, so the order did not come as a surprise. The impostor breathed more freely as the skipper moved off and gave the necessary orders. In a moment all was bustle, and the large lifeboat dropped from the davits into the transparent water. Graydon took his seat in the stern, and presently the boat was dancing across the bay. Somehow the island seemed different now, and, in spite of his exultation, Graydon felt a twinge as his gaze rested on the beautiful banyan-tree, his home for the last eight years.

He superintended the removal of the gold personally, thus preventing any curious sailor from wandering too near the tent, which was no great distance away. The work went on apace, and in a very little while the boat was returning to the Night Hawk on the last journey. Everything was plain sailing now.

Presently the steady thud of the engines sounded, and the vessel turned its bows to the southward. Graydon stood silent and motionless on the bridge, gazing thoughtfully at the now distant Iron Island. He could see its rugged cliffs rising sheer from the water, and knew that somewhere there, invisible to him, Dolores was looking after the ship, wondering whether he would ever return. He smiled just a little; there was no doubt on that point. He had carried things so far now that failure was almost impossible.

Not until the island had disappeared in a blur over the horizon did he move from his position. Then, with a word to the captain about pressing on all speed, he retired to his cabin. The first thing was to thoroughly acquaint himself with all of Don Sebastian's everyday articles of use. Then, exultant at his success, he sat down to an appetising meal.

Some people would have had no appetite under such circumstances, but Graydon was utterly unaffected in this way. He ate as hearty a meal as he had ever done in his life. Then, lolling on the couch, he went over in his mind all that had happened.

"And now," he thought finally, "I'm on my way to freedom. I can be back here very soon, and then—well, then I shall have to set to work in earnest. But there's this other matter first—this matter concerning John Fraser. So he's turned traitor, has he, and bolted with the proceeds of a robbery? He certainly oughtn't to have done that. And I am to get to Rio the day after he's murdered—I am to take the Walkley diamonds away from him."

Graydon smiled slowly.

"I don't think so," he thought. "I certainly don't think so. Not with regard to the former, at all events. If I don't arrive in time to save his life it will be Fate's fault, not mine. He's done wrong, but murder's a thing I've never believed in. If I killed a man I should feel like killing myself for having done so. No; if it's at all possible John Fraser's life shall be saved, and the Walkley diamonds shall go back to their rightful owners."

He pulled a notebook from his pocket and read the items it contained. The address of Fraser's cottage was written in it, and he stowed it away in his memory. Then the other matters claimed his attention. After that, the journey to Rio passed uneventfully enough. He chafed all the time at the thought of Dolores alone on the Iron Island with that scoundrel for company, but consoled himself with the further thought that she was as strong and determined as any man.

It was with feelings of triumphant success that he stepped across the gangway and set foot on Brazilian soil. Although the sight before him made his heart beat fast with excitement—the first sight of civilisation for eight years—his outward appearance was calm and collected. He still wore the bandages, and, rather than causing suspicion from the captain and officers, it only excited pity, for it was generally understood that the wound had re-opened, and was giving considerable trouble.

As it was late evening, Graydon had given orders that nothing was to be done until morning. Captain Shaw, eager after his own business, cared little where his superior went. He was a millionaire, and could do as he liked. It was dark and misty, and rain had fallen heavily during the day, making the roads, especially those round the docks, dirty and muddy. But to Graydon they were magnificent; every man

he passed he felt like grasping his hand and wringing it. He was free—free to do as he liked! What a glorious feeling it was—what a sense of lightness took possession of him, and made everything seem light and sunny, every jarring noise sound like music to his ears!

It was a feeling few people can imagine, except those, perhaps, who have been kept in their beds by a long illness, and emerge for the first time for months into the world again. And even then it could only convey a tinge of the exultation Graydon felt. He was let loose—he wanted to go into shops and buy things, just for the delight of it—to go to the theatre and give himself up to pleasure, for, after all, he was a man. Not an ordinary one, certainly, but he had feelings like anybody else.

His masterful self-control, however, made him deny himself these pleasures, and soon the feeling had passed, and he was cool, calm, and thoughtful. He had no time to spare—not a second, if he was to save No. 220—John Fraser. He might even be too late as it was. Jumping into a tram-car, he was swiftly conveyed to the hospital. Not once had he forgotten that he was Don Sebastian, and he passed through the brilliant streets, with their accompanying noise and gaiety, quite unaffected. He displayed no curiosity, no eagerness to see the buildings and people. He was not himself at present—he was Don Sebastian, so could not show his own character, however much he wanted to.

At the hospital he received news that electrified him into brisk and instant action. John Fraser had been discharged that afternoon, completely recovered. They did not know where he had gone, so Graydon thanked them and departed.

Although he had no idea in which direction No. 220's cottage lay, he asked no questions of anybody. He had studied a map of Rio while on the Night Hawk, and to a man of his intelligence and ability the task of finding his own way was light. Without one mistake he hastened through the streets. Apparently, at first sight, he was not hurrying, but another man would have had his work cut out to keep pace.

"Shall I be too late?" he thought anxiously. "The agents of the Brotherhood would hardly have done their foul work before dark. It isn't fair the man should die, and I wanted to save him. Well, I am doing my utmost."

Quite easily he found the cottage. It was only a small building, standing quite alone down a little, narrow roadway. Trees grew all around, and as a considerable wind had sprung up at sunset the foliage was rustling noisily. A light shone in one of the windows, and this somehow reassured Graydon. Then, as he stood undecided how to act, a faint cry rang out—a cry for assistance, only to be smothered almost immediately.

"By Heaven," thought Graydon, "they're at it!"

He dashed the gate open, ran up the short pathway, and endeavoured to open the door. It was locked, and a muttered curse made itself heard. There was a shuffling, struggling sound, then a terrified voice gasped frantically:

"Help! Oh, for Heaven's sake, help! Have mercy on me, you fiends! Don't do me to death like——"

"Get it over, Manuel! We can take our chance now; it must be done to-night!"

"Yes, you are right. Quick, hold him tightly!"

"You brutes, have mercy——"

Graydon set his teeth. Another minute, and it would be too late. It was plain the agents would not open the door to him, thinking him an enemy. And it was out of the question to see—or, rather, hear—Fraser murdered before him. So, stepping back a pace, he gathered himself together. The next instant he launched himself through the air straight at the door—a stout, heavily-made one.

Crash!

It burst open as though struck by a battering-ram—the force Graydon put into the charge must have been tremendous. The hinges gave way like rotten wood, and he found himself standing inside the cottage. His glance darted round swift as lightning, and he saw three men standing before him.

One wore a look of absolute terror on his features, and he was as pale as death—Fraser, the Englishman. The others were swarthy Brazilians. One held the victim's arms behind his back, while the other, bent forward ready to strike, held aloft a glittering dagger. Remembering he was Don Sebastian even in that exciting moment, Graydon cried out in his disguised voice, took two sharp strides forward, and struck the man's arm upwards, sending the knife clattering to the floor.

An Ally.

The Brazilian uttered an oath, and turned menacingly on the intruder. Then an expression of amazement entered his eyes, intermingled with fear. He stepped back a pace.

"Your Excellency?" he murmured tentatively.

"Yes, you fool!" exclaimed Graydon, in an excited voice.

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GRAND XMAS DOUBLE NUMBER OF THE NEW PAPER (The Enlarged EMPIRE Library) NOW ON SALE!



When Frank Kingston, clean-shaven and well-dressed—Philip Graydon no longer—came on the scene, Dolores was holding the Spaniard at bay at the muzzle of a revolver. "Thank goodness you've come!" exclaimed Dolores with a relieved laugh. (See next week's instalment.)

"Why didn't you open the door? You heard me there! Confound it, man, you are in too much of a hurry!"

"I had my orders, your Excellency—"

"That's enough! And as there's no harm done it is of not much consequence."

Graydon did not know whether these men knew him personally or not; they had recognised him quickly enough, at all events. As a matter of fact, the two Brazilians were only acquainted with a description of Don Sebastian, and had never before seen him. They knew he was a millionaire, and one of the chief members of the Inner Council of the Brotherhood, and now stood respectfully before him, fearful lest he should inflict some punishment for their disregard of his knock at the door.

"This is No. 220, I suppose?" asked 'Don Sebastian' sharply.

"Yes, your Excellency, that is the traitor. We understood we weren't to delay a moment, but secure the bag of diamonds—"

"Yes, yes, I know! But our plans have been altered; I am going to attend to the matter myself. You can leave him to me, and report in the morning. Now go; I will see the

matter is carried out properly," he added significantly, and a note in his voice reassured the Brazilians that Fraser was not to escape the just punishment.

"Very good, your Excellency. We humbly apologise—"

"I have no time to waste. Go!"

The agents, deferential and submissive, hastily took their departure, gazing rather wonderingly at the wrecked door as they passed out. What amazing strength the Spaniard must possess, they thought. Still, the matter was out of their hands now, so they shuffled off into the night, rather glad at having escaped the unpleasant work. Never for an instant did a suspicion enter their minds that the man was a fraud. Oh, no, he was Don Sebastian, right enough!

Immediately their footsteps had died away in the distance Graydon lifted the door and jammed it into position. Then he turned and looked at John Fraser. The man had almost collapsed. Who would not when, not more than five minutes previously, a dagger had been about to plunge into his heart? He was a short man—short and thick-set. Somehow he didn't appear to be a criminal, for there was a look about him that spoke of straightforwardness.

He was staring at the supposed Don Sebastian with horror.

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NEXT
THURSDAY:

"BINKS, MILLIONAIRE."

A School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.
By MARTIN CLIFFORD.



struck eyes. For a moment he had hoped help had come, but instead the very opposite was the case, and the shock had stupefied him. He was clean-shaven, and dressed with unusual neatness. As Graydon faced him he pulled himself together with an effort.

"I know who you are!" he exclaimed hoarsely. "You're that cursed Spaniard—one of the members of the Inner Council—"

"No, my friend, you are mistaken," interrupted Graydon, deciding to disclose himself immediately. There was no object to be gained in letting Fraser think he was Don Sebastian. He had saved the man's life, and nothing remained but to secure the Walkley diamonds and go. "I am not Don Sebastian!"

Fraser laughed hoarsely.

"Then why have you come here to murder me? Besides, you are Sebastian! What do you take me for, eh? D'you think I don't know you—me, who's been in your service—"

"Do you know Don Sebastian personally, then?" asked Graydon.

"What are you gettin' at?" growled the man, pale and defiant. "What are you actin' the fool like this for? If you're going to kill me, kill me, an' get it over!"

"But don't I tell you that I am not the person you think I am?" repeated Graydon. "Should I have saved your life if I had been? Use your senses, man, and be reasonable! Do you know Don Sebastian?"

"You fool," cried Fraser, "a-sittin' there asking me if I know you! I'm a desperate man, an' every bit as strong as you—"

"Ah!" interrupted Graydon quietly. "Just look here. You know Sebastian's strength, it seems. Could he have done this?"

A very thick ash-stick stood against the wall, and Graydon picked it up. Clapping it in his two hands so that they touched one another, he exerted himself just a trifle, and the stick snapped in two like a twig. The strength necessary for such a feat must have been stupendous. Graydon tossed the pieces into a corner and smiled.

"Could the worthy Sebastian have done that?" he queried. Fraser did not answer for a moment. He was altogether too surprised. He knew that Don Sebastian could never have displayed such strength, and it proved to him beyond doubt that the man before him was not the Spaniard. Yet the likeness was startling.

"No," he answered, looking at Graydon with wide-open eyes; "he couldn't have done that. But I don't understand. If you ain't Don Sebastian who are you?"

"That is nothing to you," returned Graydon coldly. "You ought to be thankful you're not dead. I know what you are, and feel that I ought to hand you over to the police—"

"No, not that!" cried Fraser. "You don't know! I ain't so bad as you think I am, sir. I'm honest—"

"With the Walkley diamonds in your possession? It won't do, my man!"

"Listen to me, sir!" begged the other. "I realise you've saved my life, though why you've done it I don't know, especially as you think me a bad 'un. I want to tell you everything, and let you judge for yourself—"

"I've no time—" began Graydon.

"It won't take a minute, sir, really! I don't want you to think I'm a criminal, though I'm despised by all honest folk. Five years ago I was running straight; then Don Sebastian engaged me as butler in his house. I was a weak fool then, easily led, and his lying tongue and oily manners began to turn my brain, until at last he enticed me to join the Brotherhood."

"Did you join knowing what its object was?"

"No, sir, I'll swear I didn't!" cried Fraser earnestly. "It wasn't until weeks after that I found it was a criminal society—I only thought it was political. But I couldn't do nothing, sir—it would have meant death if I'd blabbed. I hadn't the courage to bolt for it, nor the money. So I became a felon, and looked every honest man in the face with a wince. I got to be an expert in the art of safe-breaking, and all the time—although I was making miles more money than I could have done any other way—I wanted to be out of it. I wanted to be honest, and to be able to mix with honest people without realising I was unfit for their company."

Graydon listened interestedly. He had certainly never suspected this. Fraser was turning out quite different to what he had supposed. Possibly—probably—he would prove useful, for he knew all the ins-and-outs of the lower portion of the Brotherhood.

"You'd think that five years of it would have hardened me. I dare say it would have done to most men, but I wasn't cut out to be a thief, sir. It isn't in me, and at last I had had enough of it. So I planned for months to run away, and never had the courage to do so till a month or so ago. Then I scooped in the Walkley diamonds, an' like a fool ran away with 'em. I thought I could come out here, sell 'em, an'

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lead a quiet, honest life. For I didn't mind takin' the diamonds; if I hadn't done, another member would, an' then the money they fetched would have gone to Sebastian—him an' his fellow-councillors."

"It was a foolish thing to do," said Graydon, stroking his beard. "The Brotherhood's arm is a long one."

"I didn't realise it then, sir. All I wanted was to get away somewhere where they couldn't find me. I'd turned traitor, and it'd be death if I was copped. I'd heard of other chaps who'd done the same, an' shuddered to think of their fate. So you see, sir, although I belonged to the most murderous band in the world, I'm an honest man in spirit, if I ain't in anything else. I only took the diamonds so as to have the money to live on. I meant to stop somewhere, so I thought I might as well have 'em as that cursed Inner Council!"

Graydon looked at him through half-closed lids, and realised that he was speaking the truth—that this man, strange as it seemed, was in something of the same position as he himself. He was a traitor and an honest man; his hatred against the Brotherhood was as intense as his own. Graydon liked him, somehow. The very expression on his face spoke of straightforwardness. Yes, he would be decidedly useful.

"Is all this you tell me true?" Graydon asked slowly.

"True as I'm standing here, sir!" cried Fraser eagerly.

"I ain't a criminal—I've been against the Brotherhood all the time, sir, but I daren't do anything."

"You've got grit, Fraser, but you ought to have known that it was impossible to escape the Brotherhood. You have greatly surprised me by your story—pleasantly surprised me. I, as well as you, am deadly opposed to the Brotherhood of Iron, and my one object in life is to exterminate the organisation. My visit here to-night was to frustrate their plans in regard to you."

"I'm bewildered, sir! Everything seems upside-down! I don't know who you are, except that you are not Don Sebastian. But why are you here?"

"That I cannot tell you. Let it be sufficient to know that I have saved your life, and that I am entirely in agreement with you. You wished to see the Brotherhood smashed—knocked out of existence?"

"It would give me more pleasure than anything, sir."

"Then do as I tell you. I cannot explain anything, but I am your friend. Here is two hundred pounds. Take it, and return to England, disguising yourself before you go. On this piece of paper I am writing an address—it is a boarding-house in London. Stay there, if you would wish to serve me, until you see me again. It may be in two months—it may be in twelve—but I shall come. It is impossible for you to know who I am. Will you serve me?"

John Fraser strode forward resolutely. He hardly knew what to say; he hardly realised that his life was spared, and that this man—this mysterious unknown—was assisting him. Everything was changed now; a revulsion of feeling took possession of him. He was starting life over again, and this disguised man before him was his rescuer. Graydon need have no doubts. Fraser would do anything he was told; he owed his life to him, and it was in his keeping.

"Heaven bless you, sir, for this! You have saved my life, and given me a fresh start. I will do anything you say—absolutely anything. I hardly know what to do—how to thank you."

"Don't try," said Graydon briskly. "I have no time to listen to thanks. All you have to do at present is to follow my instructions. They are very vague, I admit, but if you do as I say you will have no cause to regret it."

"I—I— Why are you doin' this for me? Why have you come here disguised as Don Sebastian to save my life? I ain't nothing to you!"

"You are a fellow-creature," said Graydon quietly, "and, having got to know of your sentence, I immediately hurried here to defeat the vile plot. Don't you see, I want to frustrate the Brotherhood at every turn—to ruin them bit by bit."

"I'm grateful, sir, only I can't find words to say what I want to. I'll lead an honest life in future, but I'm afraid to go back to England. It don't matter what disguise I adopt, they'll be on the look-out for me."

"No, my friend, they won't!" exclaimed Graydon. "I came here to-night ostensibly to kill you. The two agents understand that their work is being done for them. You must not forget that I am not myself at present. I am Don Sebastian, and when I leave this house you will be dead—in name and appearance, at all events. There are plenty of boats crossing to England. Dress yourself as a tourist, and cross by the first that's leaving. You will be absolutely free from danger. The Brotherhood thinks that you are dead, so no watch will be kept. You see, it is quite safe!"

"But I don't see it, sir!" cried Fraser. "I don't see why you should be so good to me! But it's gone home, sir—it shows me that you are a good and honourable man! Some-

how I know I can trust in you, and I take an oath now that I'll be at this address in London, if Heaven is willing, until I hear from you again!"

"Good!" said Graydon, rising to his feet. "I'm very glad I came here. I don't mind admitting you have astonished me, Fraser. Now, I want to ask you one question. What have you done with the diamonds? I quite realise the force of your argument for having appropriated them yourself—you may as well have them as the Brotherhood. But they are not yours—they're certainly not yours. I intend to send them straight back to Sir Roger Walkley, the rightful owner."

"They're here, sir!" cried the rescued man eagerly. "You can take 'em. I know I oughtn't to have kept them, but if I'd given 'em up it wouldn't have made no difference. I want you to take them, sir. They are the only things that make me despise myself. And it's nice to think they're bein' returned to—"

"But how do you know I shall do as I say?" asked Graydon. "I might run off with them myself!"

"I know you won't do that, sir. If you had wanted them you wouldn't be doing what you are. A thief wouldn't want to bring about the ruin of a criminal society."

"Nevertheless, you have no proof. You can come with me to-morrow if you like, and see them despatched."

"No, no, sir!" cried Fraser. "If I couldn't take your word, it would be a pity! Here they are, and I'm glad they're going—more glad than I can say."

He produced a little leathern purse from the table-drawer and passed it over to Graydon, who, after a glance inside, slipped it into his pocket.

"Well," he exclaimed, "the campaign's started! But the real work will not come until I reach London. Then let the Brotherhood of Iron look after itself, for it will need all its wits if it is to hold itself together! Now, Fraser, I must be going. Do as I tell you, and all will be well."

"I shall, sir. I'll follow your instructions to the letter, and leave Rio by the first boat I can get. I am curious to know who you are. But I thank you, sir—"

"Really, Fraser, I haven't time to listen! Good-bye until we meet in London. When that time comes, I shall have plenty of work for you to do—so hold yourself in readiness!"

Before John Fraser could reply, his unknown rescuer had pulled open the wrecked door and passed out into the night. The man stood as if stupefied for a moment, unable to fully realise what had just occurred. Only one thing embedded itself in his brain—this mysterious stranger had saved him from an ignominious death, and, in consequence, he would serve him for all time.

— —

Back to the Iron Island.

Graydon, hurrying swiftly through the streets, was turning over in his mind all that had occurred. The Walkley diamonds were saved, Fraser's life preserved, and a valuable ally gained. For Graydon could see that his converted cracksmen would be immensely useful to him when he arrived in England, for he was a common member of the Brotherhood, and knew the haunts and meeting-places. And there was no risk, even if Fraser turned against him—which Graydon was assured he wouldn't. He had said no word as to his identity, and Fraser knew him not from Adam.

"But he'll prove true to his word," thought the escaped exile. "He'll do as I told him. His hatred of the Brotherhood is nearly as great as my own, and the opportunity of serving a master who is bent on wrecking it comes as a delight. Yes, Fraser will be in London when I arrive—of that I am certain. Now, the next thing is to interview Captain Shaw. The gold must be landed to-morrow without fail, and the Night Hawk started on her voyage to England. I mustn't lose a minute. The thought of Dolores on the Iron Island with Don Sebastian for sole company is terrible! Yet I can do nothing to-night."

This was true. It was too late for anything in the nature of business. But Graydon had accomplished much that evening already, and he put up at the best hotel in the city feeling fairly satisfied.

What a delightful sensation it was to feel himself among civilisation again! He enjoyed himself more that night than he had ever done in his life before. Everything seemed new and wonderful, yet it brought old memories back to him. And as he sat in the huge, electrically-lit supper-room, with the quiet hum of conversation going on all around him, the English waiters—it was a British hotel—noiselessly passing to and fro with trays and clinking glasses, it struck him with much force what a different man he was to when he last participated in these pleasures.

And he felt glad—yes, glad—that he had been marooned for eight years. Before, he had been a weak, commonplace young

man. Now, he was the very opposite. Every fine quality, both physical and mental, a man could possess he had. He was powerful, resolute, and determined—a leader among his fellows. An ordinary person was as a child in comparison. In short, he was a man in every sense of the word, inasmuch as his powers were double—treble—that of anybody else.

And when an individual such as this has a purpose to accomplish, it is absolutely certain that that purpose will be accomplished. The Brotherhood of Iron, in exiling Graydon on that isle in the Pacific, had, in a way, set the ball rolling which would ultimately end in their own ruin. Had not Graydon been exiled, he could never have set about what he was now contemplating—what he was now actually doing. For the campaign had begun, and although it was to prove a long—a very long—one, the infamous Brotherhood were doomed. It was one man against many, but that one man was to prove equal to them all.

At present, however, he was still Don Sebastian, but to-morrow he would throw his disguise off and become another personality altogether. And when the morrow came—a bright, hot, tropical day—Don Sebastian was one of the very first visitors to leave the hotel. Straight to the docks he went, and sought out the Night Hawk.

Captain Shaw was aboard, and received his orders respectfully—it was none of his business what the Senor did. The seven cases of gold did not appear to be what they were, for they were large and bulky—not very heavy for their size. This was owing to the fact that they were over half-full of light substance, the gold being in the centre.

In an hour they were landed and despatched to a Mercantile Service warehouse. Graydon had hit upon a really audacious scheme by which he could still retain possession of the gold after he became Frank Kingston. The matter had worried him greatly, for it was a difficult point. If he consigned the cases to Frank Kingston, the Brotherhood, when they made inquiries—which they would certainly do—would instantly trace a connection between the two, and this was the very thing Graydon wished to avoid.

So he calmly walked into the offices of the Anglo-Brazilian Steamship Company and consigned the whole batch of supposed merchandise to Don Sebastian in London, care of a common member of the Brotherhood—a man the Spaniard knew personally. Graydon gathered this much from certain notes in the pocket-book.

When he emerged from the offices, he had the satisfaction of seeing the Night Hawk being coaled as rapidly as possible. Before nightfall she would be gone—and before night also Don Sebastian would be gone, and no trace would remain to say where, how, or when he went.

At present, however, he had other business to attend to. Two cables had to be despatched in the name of Don Sebastian. The first was to Lord Mount-Fannell, saying that Graydon was dead and that the Fraser affair had passed off without a hitch, and that he, Don Sebastian, had been delayed at Rio owing to a disagreement between the Brazilian members. The cable was only intended to keep the Brotherhood off the track for a short time.

The second one was to the consignee of the seven cases of "merchandise," telling him to hold them until the Spaniard himself arrived. For Graydon intended playing a bold game. It was the only way, and the very cheek of it ought to insure success. When he arrived in London he would disguise himself as Don Sebastian, go and secure the gold, and take it to a place of his own, removing his disguise on the way. After that it could be banked quite safely in the name of Frank Kingston—for Kingston would arrive in London as a wealthy young man just fresh from the gold-mines.

Graydon employed an old, but a really effective ruse to effect the change in his appearance. It was impossible to do it in his hotel, so he made preparation to depart to Buenos Ayres. He took care that everybody in the hotel knew his destination, and drove to the station in style. After some little difficulty he secured a compartment to himself, and settled down to read.

But as soon as the train was fairly going—the first stop was not for a couple of hours—he awoke into activity. Quietly and coolly, with no appearance of hurry, he opened his portmanteau, set to work, and gradually Don Sebastian faded away, and in his place appeared a very languid-looking young man. The clothes were entirely changed, even to the collar and tie. The moustache and beard, with surprising rapidity, were done away with—Graydon had taken care to provide himself with scissors and safety-razor before starting. Finally, with a snap, the portmanteau closed up again, and Don Sebastian had vanished.

(A further long instalment of this thrilling serial story next Thursday, describing the rescue of Dolores from the Iron Island, the return to England, and how the campaign against the Brotherhood commenced.)

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NEXT THURSDAY: "BINKS, MILLIONAIRE." A School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD

Concluding Chapters of this Great Sea Story.

In the Service of the King.

By **LIEUTENANT LEFEVRE.**

Read this First.

Oswald Yorke, a young ex-highwayman, joins the Navy as a midshipman under the name of John Smith. His ship, the *Cynthia*, is dispatched to the Island of San Andrade, to investigate the conduct of a certain family of planters named Wilson, who are suspected of complicity with the notorious pirate, Kester. Searching the island, and discovering that the Wilsons have fled, the warship puts out to sea again. They give chase to a brig which they sight in the distance, and, finding it to be flying the French flag, the crew prepare for action.

(Now go on with the story.)

The Slaver.

In a very few minutes the brig presented a most warlike and dangerous appearance.

"Beat to quarters!" sang out the captain from the quarter-deck. "All hands stand by to shorten sail! What do you make of her now at close quarters, Mr. Lancing?" he asked, turning to the first lieutenant.

"I should say that she is a slaver, sir, and so I should suggest that we keep our guns as elevated as possible, to prevent pinning some of the poor wretches below deck."

The brig, or slaver, was now within musket-shot, when suddenly the captain put his helm to port, with the intention of passing under the frigate's stern.

"Luff!" roared the captain.

He could see that to prevent being raked by that ugly-looking customer he would have to luff up in the wind and fire a broadside.

As the smoke cleared it was seen that the sides of the slaver were specked with white, while from below her deck rose the most unearthly screams and shrieks of pain.

"By Heaven, we have knocked over some of the poor fellows!" muttered Mr. Lancing.

"Down with the helm, and let her come round!" cried the captain.

The *Cynthia* now ran right across the brig's stern, and poured a volley of musketry and cannon into her. But the fire was returned from the brig with a will. Her rigging was black with men, who clung on with one hand and fired their pieces with the other. It was a very inferno of noise and smoke. The fire of the frigate was telling; but she herself was not coming out of the ordeal unscratched. Half a dozen had fallen on her decks, as many more on the deck of the brig. Then, with a crash, down toppled the brig's main topmast, burying a score of her crew under the wreckage.

"His flag's down, but it's none of his doing!" cried the captain. "Don't cease firing!"

The *Cynthia*'s men had no wish to cease firing; and while the brig's crew were bothered and confused by the fall of the wreckage, they peppered them unmercifully.

"Put the helm down, and lay her alongside!" ordered Captain Garvin. "Stand by with the grappings, my lads. Now we have it! Main-chains are our chance. Boarders, stand by to follow me!"

He turned and spoke two words to Mr. Lancing, who nodded in reply. Then, with

a spring, followed by two score of yelling bluejackets, Captain Garvin leaped into the brig's mainchains.

There were the nettings yet to negotiate; and as Captain Garvin and his men were getting over them, the enemy, who for a moment had given way, rallied once again, and poured a volley from their small-arms, which sent three of the boarders to their account.

But there was no standing the impetuous rush which Captain Garvin led in person. Over the nets they swarmed, pistol in one hand, cutlass in the other.

The crew of the brig, composed mainly of swarthy, yellow-skinned Spaniards and negroes, fought like maniacs.

A greater part of the crew of the *Cynthia* had got a footing on board the brig, Captain Garvin was in the van, with Oswald, Maxwell, and young Garvin in close attendance.

Captain Garvin was in the act of cutting down a negro who had run one of the *Cynthia*'s men through with a curiously old-fashioned-looking rapier, when a big Spaniard aimed a blow at the skipper's head which would have cleaved him to the chin. But Oswald, seeing his danger, leaped forward, and caught the weapon on his own sword, and so turned the blow aside.

The next moment the Spaniard was down, with two inches of steel peeping out between his shoulder-blades.

Captain Garvin gave Oswald a quick glance with a nod; there was no time for words. Again and again the crew of the brig rallied, urged on by their captain. The resistance they offered was desperate.

For long the issue of the battle was doubtful. The captain of the slaver shouted and cursed, and urged his men on to greater efforts. He used English, French, and Spanish indiscriminately, for his crew was composed of men who understood one or other of these tongues.

But his undisciplined crew, who had been induced to fight only because of their naturally savage inclinations, began to waver at last.

"One rush, and all together, my lads," shouted Captain Garvin hoarsely, "and we carry her deck!"

Burgoyne and Brabazon.

They made the rush. They had flung aside their pistols, and, using their cutlasses, they cleaved their way into the very heart of the brig.

The captain of the brig, surrounded by about five-and-twenty men, held the quarter-deck, and there they made their last stand.

They gave no quarter, and asked none. The gallows of Port Royal loomed up before their vision.

Oswald had kept his position close beside the captain throughout, and Maxwell was on his heels. Now, suddenly, from the throat of both came a shout of surprise. Simultaneously they had caught sight of two familiar faces among the dark-skinned ruffians who were clustered round the slaver captain.

And the two familiar faces were those of Burgoyne and Brabazon.

Even as they recognised the men, Burgoyne levelled his musket and fired point-blank at Oswald's head.

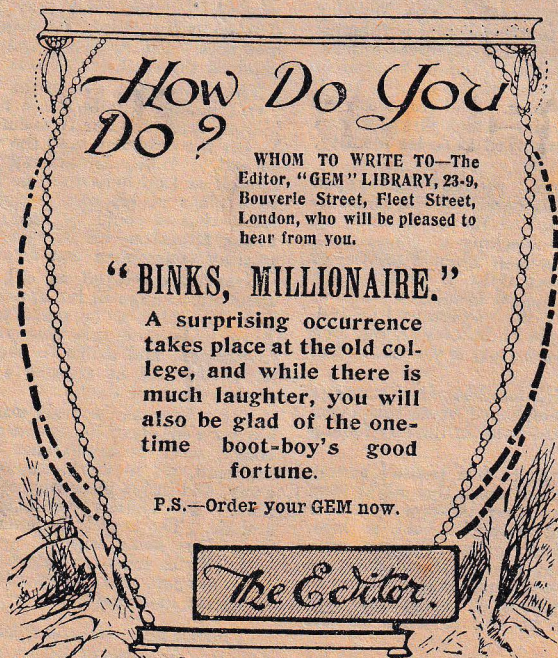
Oswald saw the action, and sprang aside, and the bullet intended for his brain deeply scored his arm.

He was scarcely conscious of the fact that he had been wounded. He felt a smart sting, and that was all. The next moment he was fighting for his life.

An unearthly silence had followed on the yelling and shouting—a silence broken by the short, hard breathing of the men, and the rattle of their weapons, and further broken now and again by the hoarse scream of some luckless wretch going to his account.

The captain of the slaver was a huge man. He wore only a shirt and loose trousers, and his bare arms disclosed a mass of knotted muscles gnarled like the roots of some old oak.

(This splendid serial story will be concluded shortly.)



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