

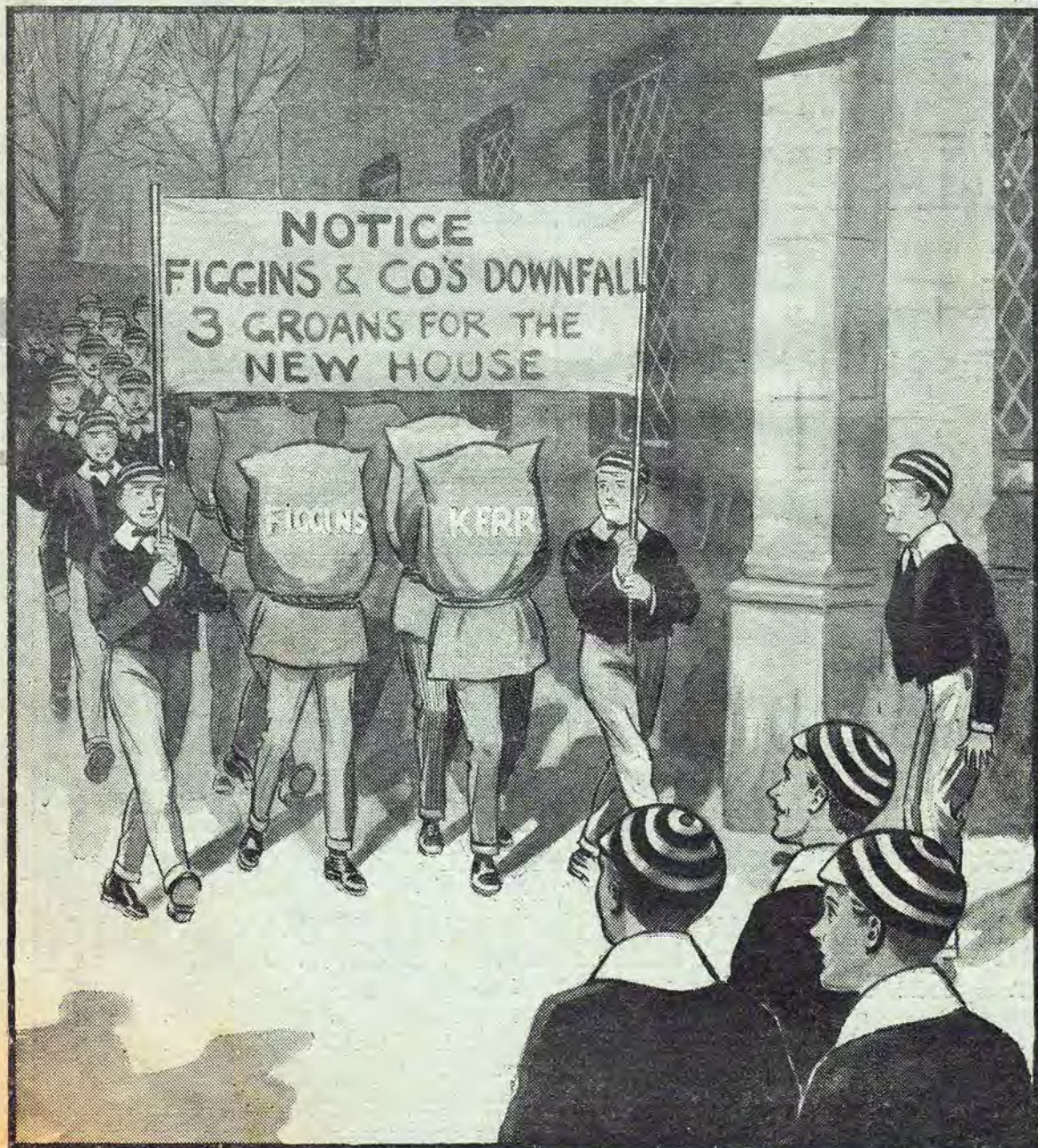
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Tale of Tom Merry & Co.
at St. Jim's.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

Check!

"PIFFLE!"

"Look here, Manners——"

"I repeat—piffle! Utter piffle!"

"You—you chump! You weren't there! You don't know anything about it!"

"That doesn't matter! I've got some sense, I should hope!"

"Not much good hoping!" said Tom Merry sarcastically.

"I tell you Figgins was off-side, if ever a chap was! I wasn't ten yards off!"

Tom Merry, Manners, and Monty Lowther—the Terrible Three—of the Shell Form at St. Jim's, were standing in a group on the steps of the School House, and the two former were having a heated discussion concerning a junior football match which had taken place the previous day. Monty Lowther stood looking on, grinning.

"I wasn't ten yards off!" repeated Tom Merry warmly.

"Then you saw twice!"

"I tell you, Manners——"

"Bosh!" said Manners politely.

"Look here, you ass, do you want a flat nose?"

"Yes, if you can give me one!"

"I jolly soon will——"

"Hullo, what's the giddy rumpus?" exclaimed a voice suddenly. "What are you kids rowing about?"

The Terrible Three looked round in surprise at the sound of the cool voice. It was a strange voice, and the words were spoken in a decidedly familiar tone. In a moment the argument was forgotten, and the Shell fellows found themselves facing a boy of about their own age. He was slim and apparently wiry, and under a tuft of light-brown hair a pair of merry blue eyes twinkled. He stood regarding Tom Merry & Co. with a cool smile on his face.

"Were you talking to us?" asked Tom Merry very politely.

"Yes. What are you chaps——"

"You said 'kids' just now," interrupted Manners.

"Did I? Well, kids, then!" said the newcomer cheerfully.

"I want to ask you a question or two!"

The Terrible Three exchanged glances. Whoever this fellow was, he didn't lack nerve, anyhow. Tom Merry stepped forward.

"Half a mo!" he said. "You're a little too fresh! Let me tell you we don't allow strangers to call us what they like!"

"No offence meant. I apologise!"

"Oh, well if you put it that way——"

"All serene now? Good!" exclaimed the newcomer coolly.

"I only said kids as a figure of speech, you know. I should have said the same to anybody else if I'd seen them before you. I'm the new fellow in the Shell—School House," he added confidently.

"New fellow!" repeated Tom Merry.

"Shell!"—ejaculated Manners.

"School House!" put in Monty Lowther.

The Terrible Three glanced at one another again.

"Yes; haven't you heard? Do you mean to say I've been allowed to come to St. Jim's unannounced?" asked the new boy in surprise. "Well, I call that too bad! I can understand now why there wasn't a crowd of chaps and a brass band waiting for me at the station!" he added thoughtfully.

"You cheeky young ass!" said Manners warmly, looking at the other with renewed interest. "Are you really a new kid?"

"Yes, really!"

"And you're for the Shell?"

"So I've been told," said the new junior. "I'm to be a boarder in the School House."

"What's your name?" demanded Monty Lowther.

"Denton—Philip Edgar Denton!"

"Oh, is it?" said the humorist of the Shell. "Well, Denton, you'll get a dent on your nose if you're not a little more polite to your betters! We're members of the Shell, and we don't allow new rotters to ride the high horse!"

"All right, my son, don't get your rag out," said Denton cheerfully. "Well, I'd better be getting indoors to—— By-the-bye, where does a kid named Tom Merry hang out?"

Tom Merry stepped closer to the new boy.

"Where does Tom Merry do what?" he asked ominously.

"Hang out! Which is his study?"

"It may interest you to know that my name is Tom Merry," said the captain of the Shell. "And it may interest you to know that I don't allow any new fathead to call me a kid! Understand that?"

Denton grinned.

"Well, I admit it interests me a little," he replied casually.

Next Wednesday:

"WINTER SPORTS AT ST. JIM'S!" AND "BIRDS OF PREY!"

"But, my dear kid, you seem to have an exaggerated idea of your own importance!"

Manners and Lowther glared, and Tom Merry drew his breath in sharply.

The new fellow was asking for it!

"My hat!" said Tom Merry. "My hat!"

"Bump him!" said Manners, finding his voice. "Bump the young rotter for his rotten nerve!"

And the Terrible Three advanced on the new junior threateningly. For a moment it looked as though Denton were about to be bumped, and bumped hard, for he had certainly provoked the chums of the Shell to an unwarrantable extent. But Denton was apparently an extremely cool customer, and well able to take care of himself. He backed a little, and grinned.

"It's all right," he said hastily. "I was only giving you a piece of necessary information—"

"What!" roared Tom Merry, pushing back his cuffs. "Look here, funny face, are you going to apologise for your beastly cheek, or do you want to be used as a mop to wipe up these steps?"

"You see—"

"Are you going to apologise?" yelled the hero of the Shell.

"Oh, rats to that—"

"What!"

The Terrible Three gasped. Even if Figgins, the great chief of the New House "Co." had spoken to them in that manner it is probable he would have been used as a mat for them to wipe their feet on. But a new fellow! A boy who hadn't been inside the school gates five minutes! It was unheard of.

"Rats!" repeated Denton coolly. "I may be a new kid, but I don't see—"

"You won't see in a minute, when I've closed both your eyes up!" roared Tom Merry wrathfully. "Come on, chaps, let's teach the nerry boulder a lesson!"

"Rather!"

"Scrag him!"

Tom Merry, Manners and Lowther advanced upon Denton with very warlike expressions upon their faces. To their surprise, the new boy did not even back away, except to plant himself firmly at the bottom of the steps. Tom Merry was foremost, and he lunged out at Denton's smiling face, with the intention of giving it a decided buff. But somehow that buff never got home, and before the hero of the Shell realised what was happening, he found himself picked up like a feather and flung, bodily, into the arms of Manners and Lowther!

"Ow!" yelled Manners, as Tom Merry hit him in the chest.

"I say—"

"Look out—"

More than that Lowther could not get out, for he and his two chums rolled into the School House door in a struggling mass, the new boy looking on chuckling merrily. As it happened, another junior was, at that moment, emerging from the School House, and the Terrible Three hit him with considerable force, sending him flying.

"Bai Jove! You uttah wuffians—"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the School House at St. Jim's, was the junior who had received the three Shell fellows in his chest. As usual, he was resplendent—exceptionally resplendent, as a matter of fact. His topper shone like a mirror, his boots rivalled it in brilliance, and his clothes were brushed with scrupulous care. In a word, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was elegant.

And then he was sent flying!

His topper crashed in one direction, his gold-mounted cane in another, and his monocle jerked from his eye and dangled at the end of its silken cord. D'Arcy sat on the School House mat, dazed.

"Gweat Scott!" he gasped.

"You silly ass! What did you get in the way for?" shouted Manners.

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"My hat!"

"You wuff boundahs!" yelled Arthur Augustus. "Look what you have done to my toppah! Bai Jove, I wegard you as a set of dangewous lunatics!"

"Oh, shut up, Gussy!"

"I uttally wefuse—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The four juniors looked round at the sound of that laugh, and beheld Philip Edgar Denton standing at the bottom of the School House steps laughing like a hyena.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he yelled.

CHAPTER 2. A Cool Customer.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY scrambled to his feet, jammed his monocle into his eye, and surveyed the new boy with a cold glare, which should have withered him up into nothingness, really. Apparently, however, the glare was wasted on Denton, for he returned D'Arcy's look with a smile and a nod.

"Sorry! Ha, ha!" he gasped. "I couldn't help laughing, though. You went over a treat. Ha, ha, ha!"

"I see no weason why you should stand there cacklin' in that wiculous fashion," said D'Arcy frigidly. "My twousahs are fwightfully dusty, and my toppah has the nap wubbed the w'ong way!"

"Sorry!" grinned the new boy. "I was only teaching that kid over there that I'm not made of jelly. He came for me, so I just returned him to his pals with thanks! It was your own fault for coming out at that moment."

The Terrible Three scrambled to their feet, and looked at one another.

"Well," murmured Tom Merry. "Did you ever!"

"No, I never!" agreed Manners.

"Hardly ever!" ejaculated Monty Lowther, putting his collar straight. "The chap's got the strength of a bullock."

"Yes, rather!"

"Look here, Denton—"

"Sorry—can't stop," said Denton, coolly pushing past Tom Merry, and entering the School House.

"Collar him!"

"Cheeky brute!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy excitedly. "The fwightful wagamuffin has uttally wuined my twousahs—"

"Oh, blow your giddy trousers," growled Tom Merry.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Oh, shut up, Gussy, this is our show," said the hero of the Shell. "Now, look here, you new kid," he went on, facing Denton, "I don't want to be rough with you—"

"Go hon!"

"But you're evidently on the look-out for a row!"

"I'm not particular," grinned the new junior coolly.

Tom Merry bit his lip. He hardly knew how to deal with Denton. The newcomer seemed to be quite at home, and was ready with an answer for everything that was said to him. Manners and Lowther were fairly itching to grasp him with a firm grasp and bump him hard. They stepped forward threateningly. Denton didn't move.

"Want some, too?" he inquired genially. "Perhaps I'd better warn you that if you come too close you'll be served in the same way as your little chum."

And before Manners and Lowther could recover from their astonishment, Denton turned and calmly walked into the School House. He strolled along the corridor, chuckling.

"Hallo! Who are you? And what's the cackle for?"

It was Jack Blake of the Fourth who asked the question. He had just turned the corner with his chums, Herries and Digby, and they were on their way to join D'Arcy. The famous chums of Study No. 6 had arranged to make a trip down to Rylecombe.

They stared at Denton curiously, and he nodded cheerfully.

"Hallo!" he said. "I'm the new chap."

"New chap!"

"Yes. Can you kids—"

"Us what?" interrupted Blake.

"Fellows, if you like it better. Can you tell me which is Tom Merry's study?"

"Yes, it's in the Shell passage."

Blake mentioned the number, and the new boy walked on.

"Half a mo!" said Herries. "Tom Merry's in the quad."

Denton grinned.

"I know that!"

"You know it, eh?" remarked Blake puzzled. "Then what do you want to go to his study for? Manners isn't there, either, or Lowther."

"I know that, too, my son, but it happens I'm to dig in Tom Merry's study while I'm at St. Jim's, so I want to see what sort of a hole it is!"

And Denton walked on, leaving Blake, Herries, and Digby looking at one another.

"My hat!"

"Talk about nerve!"

"Beastly!" said Blake indignantly. "Let's tell old Tommy."

G

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"THE PENNY POPULAR,"
Every Friday.



"Come on, chaps!" roared Tom Merry; and the next moment the cottage door was burst open, and the whole troop of juniors crowded in. There were exclamations of rage and fear from the two men, while Levison turned as white as chalk. "By Heavens! The young rascal has betrayed us!" cried Wright. (See Chapter 15.)

"Come on!"

Blake & Co. raced down the passage and found the Terrible Three on the steps, looking angry and indignant.

"If he thinks he's going to do as he likes, he's jolly well mistaken!" Monty Lowther was saying. "Redfern & Co., of the New House, were bad enough when they came, but this giddy dummy is ten times worse!"

"Got sauce enough for fifty!" ejaculated Manners.

"Yaas, wathah!" put in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I heartily agree with you, dear boys, that the new boundah has run away with himself. He will have to be stwictly wepwimanded!"

"What's that?" demanded Blake, giving D'Arcy a slap on the back.

"Weally, Blake, pway do not be so wuff! I was just wemarking that Denton, the new boundah——"

"Denton, eh? Don't think much of his name, anyhow!"

"Hewwies, you are intewwuptin' me," said Arthur Augustus severely. "I was just saying——"

"You generally are saying something, Gussy," said Blake.

"Weally, Blake——"

"We just passed the new chap in the passage," went on Blake, "and he called us kids!"

"Yes; and said he was on his way to your study, Tom Merry," said Digby.

"Our study?" chorused the Terrible Three.

"Said he's going to dig there with you——"

Tom Merry snorted.

"I know he jolly well isn't!" he shouted wrathfully.

"My only Aunt Malilda!" exclaimed Manners excitedly.

"Have we got to have that funny-faced beggar in our study with us? Come on! We'll chuck him out on his neck if he's dared to enter our study!"

"Rather!"

And Tom Merry, Manners, and Monty Lowther hurried into the School House with determined looks on their faces, leaving Arthur Augustus to explain to his study mates what had occurred. Other juniors had strolled up—Bernard Glyn, Dane, Kangaroo, and some others—so D'Arcy had quite an audience. It was a half-holiday at St. Jim's, and the winter sun shone with exceptional brilliance on the old school.

It happened that there was no football on that afternoon, so the juniors found the time hang somewhat on their hands. Of course, Tom Merry & Co. had put in an hour on the field immediately after dinner, and so had the chums of Study No. 6; but now the time was getting on. In fact, the Terrible Three had

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NEXT
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"WINTER SPORTS AT ST. JIM'S!"

been discussing whether their funds would run to one of Dame Toggles' famous steak-and-kidney pies for tea, when Manners had started the argument about Figgins being off-side. Then Philip Edgar Denton had put in an appearance, and since that moment tea had been entirely forgotten.

Tom Merry & Co. hurried upstairs to the Shell passage. They burst into their study.

Denton was there, calmly seated before the open window, looking out on to the old quad, with a thoughtful expression in his eyes. As a matter of fact, he was reckoning up how much money he had spent on his way to St. Jim's, and seeing if his balance was correct. Denton was nothing if not methodical.

"Hallo!" he remarked, looking up abstractedly. "You three again!"

"Yes, us three," said Tom Merry ungrammatically. "We want to know what the dickens you mean by walking into this study as if you owned it? This is our study, you understand—our study!"

"Our study!" chorused Manners and Lowther, like an echo. "And we're not going to have any blessed outsiders interfering when they're not wanted!" shouted Tom Merry, exasperated by the new junior's cool, self-possessed smile.

"My hat! I believe you're wild," murmured Denton.

"Yes, I am wild!" roared the hero of the Shell. "And you're going to get it in the neck, you cheeky rotter! Will you get out of this study quietly, or shall we give you a hand?"

"Or a foot?" suggested Lowther grimly.

"Well," said Denton thoughtfully, "it would be easier if you helped me, wouldn't it?"

"Oh, collar him!" yelled Manners, in exasperation.

"Here, I say—"

"Rats!"

And the Terrible Three rushed at the new boy with one accord. They weren't quarrelsome boys in any way, but they weren't going to stand unlimited cheek from a new boy without chastising the incautious one. Denton might be one of the best chaps in the world at heart, but that didn't make any difference.

In a second he was on his feet, and he deliberately put his hands behind him.

"Half a minute!" he said hastily. "I—Ow!"

Tom Merry, unable to stop himself, had landed his right fist with considerable force on the new boy's nose. Denton staggered back, collided with a chair, and sat on the floor with a crash, the "claret" oozing from his nose in a crimson stream.

"Serve you right!"

"Rather!"

"Chuck him out!" yelled Lowther excitedly.

The study door opened, and Knox, the prefect, looked in.

"What's all this confounded row?" he demanded, looking round with a scowl on his face. "Who's that fellow on the floor?"

"New chap, Knox," said Tom Merry.

"And you've been knocking him about, eh?" asked the bully of the Sixth, with an unpleasant grin. "Well, you're a nice set! Three of you bullying one—"

"Don't talk rot!" said Lowther warmly. "We—"

"Well, you'll take fifty lines each for creating a disturbance."

"Oh, go easy, Knox—"

"A hundred lines, Lowther, for cheek!" snapped Knox.

And he banged the door.

"Nice-tempered chap, evidently," remarked Denton.

"The beast!" muttered Tom Merry. "And all your giddy fault!" he added wrathfully, glaring at Denton as he rose to his feet. The new boy grinned as he tenderly dabbed his nose.

"All right! I'll do the lines!"

The Terrible Three stared.

"I'll do the lines," repeated Denton cheerfully. "I fully admit it was my fault for acting the giddy ox. I didn't put up my hands just now because I don't want to fight with you chaps—"

"Afraid?" asked Manners.

Denton flushed.

"No," he said quietly. "I'm not afraid, but I've got no quarrel with you, and it would be a silly trick to get rowing. Perhaps I riled you a little too much, and, if so, I apologise. I ought to have explained matters straight away downstairs, but I thought we'd have a little fun first."

"That's all very well," growled Tom Merry.

"I'm sorry for getting you wild," went on Denton. "You seem to be jolly decent chaps—"

"Thanks!" exclaimed Monty Lowther.

"And as I'm to share this study with you—"

"Who said so?" demanded Manners.

"One of the St. Jim's masters. As I was walking through the village from the station, I met the master of this House," explained the newcomer. "Fine-looking chap he is, and I'll bet he's popular!"

"Rather! He's a brick!"

"Well, Mr. Rail—Rail something—"

"Railton!"

"That's it—Railton. Well, he said he'd forgotten to tell you

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that I was coming, and that I was to go straight to a kid—ahem!—chap named Tom Merry, and tell him that I had to share his study with two other fellows, all the rest being full up."

"That's right, too," said the captain of the Shell. "This is the only study with room to spare. Like your cheek, though, coming in the middle of term, and putting three quiet studious chaps like us to a blessed lot of inconvenience!"

Denton grinned.

"Don't worry!" he said. "I shall only be here a month."

"Only a month at St. Jim's?"

"Just about."

"Well, that's one consolation, anyhow!" growled Monty Lowther.

The new arrival grinned again. Evidently he did not take offence easily. To tell the truth, the Terrible Three were rather beginning to like him, with his free-and-easy ways, and frank apologies.

"But what's the idea?" asked Tom Merry. "Do you mean to say your people have sent you to St. Jim's just for a month—that you're going to clear out then?"

"Something like that," answered Denton; "but I can't stop to explain now. There's my box to see to, and it's nearly teatime. I suppose you have tea in the studies at St. Jim's?" he added.

"Rather!"

"Good, I'll stand treat to-night," said Denton generously.

"Here's half a quid. You know how to lay in the grub best. All serene?"

"Well, that's really sensible," said Monty Lowther heartily. "We can get a ripping feed for half-a-quid, with plenty to spare for to-morrow. Denton, you're shaping better than I thought, though you'll have to learn your place, you know! Tommy's the leader of this study, and he won't stand any nonsense."

"Right-ho! I won't kick," said the new boy, crossing to the door.

"How about that dot on the boko I just gave you?" asked Tom Merry.

"Oh, that's nothing! I'm paid back for chucking you about on the steps!"

"Yes, that reminds me," said the hero of the Shell wonderingly. "Are you a giddy Hercules, or what? You lifted me up like a blessed feather!"

"How did you do it?" asked Manners.

Denton winked as he opened the door.

"Jiu-jitsu, my sons," he grinned. "Simple trick!"

"My hat!"

"Great Scott!"

"That explains it, then!"

"Yes," grinned Denton. "I know plenty more tricks in case you kids get cheeky!"

And before the Terrible Three could move, the cool new fellow had shut the door, and they heard his footsteps in the corridor. They looked at one another, and breathed hard. Then Tom Merry burst into a laugh.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What's up with you, ass?"

"I can't help grinning," chuckled Tom Merry. "The chap's got the nerve of a dozen! He'll be a jolly good addition to this study, kids, when he's properly broken in!"

"Yes, when he is!" said Manners doubtfully.

And the others looked doubtful, too. If Philip Denton continued as he had started, there didn't seem much likelihood of his ever being "broken in" as Tom Merry expressed it.

CHAPTER 3.

Levison Gets it Hot!

D R. HOLMES, the Headmaster of St. Jim's, sat in his study. He looked up expectantly as a tap sounded on the door. In response to his invitation to enter, Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, came in.

"Ah, Railton, thank you for coming!" exclaimed the Head.

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I just wanted to ask you about the new boy, Denton. He arrived this afternoon, I believe?"

"Yes, sir," replied Mr. Railton. "I met him in the village, and spoke with him for a few minutes. Apparently he is sharp and intelligent, and ought to get on well."

"I do not think he will have much chance of getting on at St. Jim's," smiled Dr. Holmes. "He will only be with us for a month, or a little over."

Mr. Railton lifted his eyebrows.

"A month?" he inquired, in surprise.

"That is all, Mr. Railton. I should not have considered his entering St. Jim's had not the circumstances been unusual. It appears that Denton's father went out to Alaska—the Klondike—just over a year ago, leaving his son in England, in charge of a Mr. Robert Barratt, an old friend. Not a month since, news came from Alaska that poor Denton had met with a serious accident, and died in consequence."

"How terrible!" ejaculated Mr. Railton.

"Yes, it was very sad," agreed the Head, "for it left his son an orphan. But Denton had been so long away that the boy did not feel the shock nearly so much as he would have done under other circumstances. Mr. Barratt did not tell me the full details, but I gathered from his conversation that Denton left a considerable sum of money, making it necessary for someone to go out to Alaska to clear the matter up. This duty Mr. Barratt decided to do himself, and requested me to take charge of young Denton until his return, Mr. Barratt being a bachelor."

Mr. Railton nodded.

"I understand, sir," he said. "It is a pity the boy will have to leave just when he is nicely settled down; but that, I suppose, is his guardian's business."

"Exactly, Mr. Railton. We have merely to take charge of the boy until Mr. Barratt's return from America."

After a few more minutes' conversation Mr. Railton left the presence of the Head, and made his way to his own study in the School House. As he passed along the Shell passage he smiled. From Tom Merry's study came the sound of many voices, intermixed with laughter.

"I do not think the new boy could have been placed among better companions," murmured the Housemaster to himself. "I expect he has already made himself at home with Tom Merry and his friends."

The new junior had! In the Terrible Three's study tea was just over, and the festive board was still loaded with good things. Monty Lowther leaned back and sighed.

"Blessed if I can eat another crumb!" he said contentedly. "After all, it wasn't such a sensible thing to lay in so much grub all at once."

"It'll do for to-morrow," said Denton.

"It will if it's still here. I know for a fact Figgins & Co. are stony, and if they get wind of this feed they'll raid the study, if we're not jolly careful."

"We shall have to be jolly careful, that's all," said Manners, who had finished his tea and was busy making some adjustment to his camera.

"We've been careful other times," said Tom Merry, "and it hasn't been any good. Lately, Figgins & Co. have been going it strong. It's those scholarship bounders who are the cause of it all. Since Redfern & Co. came to St. Jim's the School House has had its work cut out to hold its own."

As a matter of fact, during the last week or two the School House had been getting decidedly the worst of it. There always had been the keenest of keen rivalry between the School House and New House at St. Jim's, and lately the New House had been gaining victory after victory, and in consequence the New House juniors were going about highly elated, and, as Tom Merry described it, "a dashed lot too cocky!" Not that Tom Merry & Co. would admit for a moment that their rivals had gained the lead.

The hero of the Shell took pains to describe to Denton at length how Figgins & Co. had been working off jape after jape with complete success, and how they had been assisted in their triumphs by Redfern, Lawrence and Owen—three Board School boys who had come to St. Jim's on scholarships. The New Firm—as Redfern & Co. described themselves—were thorough sportsmen and good sorts, but it didn't alter the fact that they had been devising the most elaborate japes, and carrying them out at the expense of the School House.

"It's got to be put a stop to!" declared Tom Merry firmly.

"That's what you said last week, Tommy," murmured Monty Lowther.

"Yes: and what's come of it?" demanded Manners, looking up. "You haven't done a blessed thing! Figgins & Co. are going about more inflated than ever!"

"It would be a job to inflate Fatty Wynn any more!" murmured Lowther, with a chuckle.

"Oh, don't start any of your rotten jokes now, Monty!" growled Tom Merry crossly. "Can't you see I'm worried?"

"Don't wonder at it, either. You're the leader here, and yet you let those New House bounders do just as they like! We shall have to have a change!"

"That's about it," said Manners.

Tom Merry jumped to his feet.

"What's that?" he roared. "Are you chaps going to jib against my leadership?"

"Well, you see—"

"No, I don't see!"

"Oh, it's no good talking to you when you're in that mood, Tommy!" said Manners. "You know as well as we do that if the School House is to ever hold up its head again something will have to be done, and done jolly quick, too!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Well, haven't we done our best?"

"Yes; but—"

"Look here," interrupted the new boy practically, "slanging one another won't do any good, will it? You say Blake & Co., of the Fourth, are just as much up against Figgins & Co. as you are—or rather, as we are?"

"Yes; but the little beggars won't submit to our leadership!"

Denton grinned.

"We can all pull together," he declared. "Now I've come to St. Jim's I mean to take part in this giddy feud between the two Houses, and between the lot of us we'll make things hum. I propose to hold a meeting in this study after prep. this evening, with Blake & Co., as you call them."

"What for?"

"To discuss an idea I've got at the back of my head," said Denton coolly.

The Terrible Three looked doubtful for a moment. The new boy was going it strong, and it wouldn't do to let him have his head too much. But there was no denying Denton was "all there," and it struck Tom Merry that he might very possibly have a batch of really good wheezes to suggest. At such a time as this they couldn't afford to refuse even the faintest suggestion of help. So the leader of the Shell gave Denton a hearty slap on the back.

"Right, my son!" he exclaimed. "Only if you're rotting, and haven't got any wheeze at all, you'll jolly well get bumped for your cheek!"

"Oh, I'm safe enough!" grinned Denton, pushing his chair back. "Suppose we go out into the quad. for a bit before prep. It's a lovely evening."

"Just as you like."

The Terrible Three and their new chum left their study and strolled down the stairs arm in arm. The heroes of the Shell were even surprised at themselves, for not so long before they had evinced the strongest animosity towards Denton. Certainly, he had come round to their views in a most humble manner, and had apologised for his former cheek. Besides, he had turned up trumps with regard to the tea, and as he seemed to be decent right through, Tom Merry & Co. had no hesitation in counting him as a chum.

In the hall they met Jack Blake and D'Arcy. Both the Fourth-Formers stared.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus, screwing his monocle into his eye.

"My giddy aunt!" said Blake.

"Bai Jove, that wude boundah Denton is actually walkin' arm in arm with Tom Mewwy and Mannahs!" said the swell of the School House, in surprise. "Weally, Tom Mewwy, I am surprised that—"

"It's all right, Gussy," said Denton cheerfully. "We've made it up, and I've promised to be a good little boy in future."

"Bai Jove!"

"I've apologised for my unbearable cheek."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you know—"

"And I crave your pardon for being the unintentional cause of your taking a seat on the mat this afternoon," went on Denton gravely. "I beg of you to forgive me."

The Terrible Three grinned, and Blake joined in. But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy took the new boy quite seriously, and beamed his approval. He removed his shiny topper and performed an elaborate bow.

"I call that weally decent of you, Denton," he said graciously. "I sincerely trust I should be the last fellow in the world to act in a mannah unbecomin' a gentleman. I accept your apology, and regard you as a friend. Pway shake hands, deah boy!"

"Certainly!"

Denton held out his hand, and D'Arcy shook it heartily.

"It's all right, Blakey," explained Tom Merry; "the new chap has turned out trumps. He was only ragging us this afternoon. I admit it was beastly nerve on his part, but it's all right now."

"Oh!" said Blake.

"He wants you two, and Herries and Digby, to come to a meeting after prep. in our study. He's got a wheeze to work against Figgins & Co."

"The dickens he has!" ejaculated Blake, in surprise. "Started early, hasn't he?"

"Well, rather early. Will you come?"

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"Yass, wathah! The New House wottahs need takin' down 1 peg!"

"That's so," remarked Blake. "But why not hold the meeting in Study No. 6?"

"Rats! Our study's bigger than yours!"

"That doesn't matter—"

"Yes, it does," said Manners. "There'll be eight of us, at least."

"Oh, all right! Have it your own way. We'll be on hand."

"Good!"

And the Terrible Three and Denton strolled out into the quad. It was bright moonlight, and the brilliant glow from the illuminated windows made the quad, quite light. Fellows of the Fourth and Shell who were out there looked at them curiously, for the news of the new boy's arrival had got about, and the juniors hardly expected to see Tom Merry and his chums on such good terms already. Kildare, the popular, manly captain of St. Jim's, passed and nodded good-naturedly.

"Glad to see you've chummed up already, you kids," he remarked.

"Oh, we're all right, Kildare!" said Tom Merry. "The new chap was a bit fresh at first, but since we've salted him he's been as meek as a lamb."

"You young rascals!"

Kildare smiled and walked on.

"Fine chap, Kildare," said Tom Merry—"one of the best in the school. Suppose we show the new chap over the gym?"

"Good idea."

So they marched towards the gym.

Suddenly a squeal sounded, but it was cut short immediately. It sounded like one of the Third Form fags in trouble, and Tom Merry looked round with a frown.

"I'll bet that's Crooke or Levison bullying some fag or other," he said.

"Came from behind the gym," said Lowther.

They hurried round, without making any noise in their approach, and found Tom Merry's words to be true. Levison, the cad of the Fourth, was standing over Fane of the Third, with a cruel grin on his unpleasant features. He had hold of Fane's wrist, and was twisting the fag's arm unmercifully. Fane's face was screwed up with pain, but he saw the newcomers.

"Rescue!" he yelled, in agony.

"You beastly cad!"

Before the Terrible Three could interfere with Levison, Denton had sprung forward, indignant and angry. Levison released Fane with a start, but a dark frown gathered on his brow when he saw who the newcomer was.

"You beastly cad!" exclaimed Denton hotly.

Levison scowled.

"Better mind what you're saying, you new bounder!" he said darkly. "What's it got to do with you, anyhow? Why can't you mind your own affairs?"

"Because I'm not going to stand by and see a rotten bully do just as he likes!" retorted the new boy angrily. "Clear off, before I lay hands on you! I may be a new kid, but I'm not going to have any nonsense from cads like you!"

"Better mind what you're saying," muttered Levison.

"Clear off!"

"Go and eat coke!" snarled the cad of the Fourth savagely.

"For two pins I'd knock you down!"

"If you don't get out of my sight in ten seconds, I'll give you something to remember me by!" said Denton wrathfully.

"And leave this kid alone in future!"

Levison stepped forward.

"You'd give me something?" he sneered.

"Yes, and jolly quick, too!"

"I'd like to see you!" Levison shouted, lunging forward at the same time, hoping to catch Denton off his guard.

But somehow the lunge was parried instantly, and the new junior's fist shot forward.

Levison staggered back, and clapped a hand to his left eye.

"Ow!" he yelled. "You beastly—"

Then he seemed to go mad for a moment, for he suddenly flew forward at Denton like a whirlwind. The new boy didn't move. Up came Levison's right foot, with the evident intention of giving Denton a cowardly kick. And if Denton had not been as nimble as a squirrel he would have received a nasty blow on the kneecap. But he stepped aside like lightning, and grasped Levison's foot as it shot upwards. Levison let out a wild yell.

Crash!

The cad of the Fourth measured his length on the ground with a thud which knocked all the wind out of him. He lay on his back, gasping.

"Ow!" he groaned. "Ow!"

CHAPTER 4.

The Mysterious Stranger.

PHILIP EDGAR DENTON stood over Levison with a grim expression on his face.

"That serves you right for playing a brute's trick!" he said hotly.

"Rather!" agreed the Terrible Three in chorus. "The rotter meant to kick you!"

"Oh!" groaned Levison painfully. "You beast!"

"Better mind what you're saying!" exclaimed Denton warningly. "Get up and clear off before I biff you again. Here, youngster," he added to Fane of the Third, who stood by rubbing his arm ruefully, "you'd better buzz off, in case you get in the wars again."

"Yes, I will," said Fane gratefully. "Thanks awfully for—"

"That's all right, kid. Cut!"

And Fane cut.

Levison picked himself up, glared at Denton for a moment in bitter hatred, and muttered something under his breath. Then he strode off.

"I shouldn't think the fags at St. Jim's like that chap," remarked Denton thoughtfully.

"They hate him," said Tom Merry.

"Like poison," added Monty Lowther.

"He's the meanest, most caddish beast the school's ever seen," supplemented the amateur photographer of St. Jim's. "Levison takes a delight in wringing the arms of some poor kid who can't retaliate. He— Pah!" Manners added disgustedly, "let's talk of something decent."

"That's it—change the subject."

And the four Shell fellows dismissed Levison from their minds and entered the gym. But Levison didn't forget the encounter. He was still aching from his violent fall, and his left eye was beginning to look red and puffy. A dark scowl marred his brow when he came face to face with Mellish of the Fourth under the old elms. Mellish was his study mate and constant companion.

"Hallo," said Mellish, grinning, "you look happy!"

"Shut up!"

"Oh, go easy, Levison—"

"Shut up, I say!" growled Levison fiercely.

Mellish backed a little, and in the moonlight noticed the dusty condition of Levison's clothes. He also saw the angry state of his left eye, and grinned again. The sight of anyone in pain was always particularly edifying to Mellish. He delighted in jeering at anyone who happened to have received a severe caning.

"Don't get wild," he said. "What's happened? Tom Merry or one of his set found you teaching one of the Third Form kids a lesson, and biffed you? I must say you look as though you'd been through a mangle—"

"Shut up, hang you!" roared Levison.

"My hat, that eye will be a nice colour—Ow! Ooooop!"

Mellish sat down in the quad, with terrific suddenness. Levison's fist had landed on the sneak of the Fourth's nose with considerable force, and Mellish staggered back with a wild yell.

"Yow-ow!" he howled. "Oh, you rotter!"

"That's to warn you to keep your confounded remarks to yourself," growled Levison, with an unpleasant grin. And, without waiting for Mellish to answer, he walked off across the quad.

Levison made his way in the direction of the woodshed. It was his custom to pay visits to the woodshed when he felt inclined for a smoke. Not that Levison enjoyed it; he made himself think he did, for it was, of course, "manly" to smoke.

"Just what I want to buck me up," thought Levison, as he crossed the quadrangle.

The cad of the Fourth wore an angry scowl as he entered the dark woodshed. His eye was giving him considerable pain, and his feelings towards Denton were not very loving. Levison's nature was a peculiar one, and he would remember little injuries weeks after the other boys had forgotten them.

"I'll pay the brute out!" he thought vengefully. "Pay him out in a way he won't like! Hang him, this eye'll be black to-morrow!"

He sat down on a pile of old sticks, tenderly caressing his left eye, and trying to think out a way of getting even with Denton. Then he remembered the object of his visit to the woodshed, and fumbled in his pockets.

"Hang!" he muttered, after a moment. "Blow!"

He discovered that he hadn't a cigarette on him, having smoked the last one earlier in the day. Levison sat there undecided for a minute or two, savagely kicking the twigs about which lay at his feet. Then he glanced at his watch, and came to a decision.

"Just time before locking-up if I hurry," he muttered. "I must have some cigs. for to-morrow!"

He emerged from the shed and hurried across the quad, to the entrance gates. Lumley-Lumley, Clifton Dane, and Reilly

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were lounging there in the moonlight, talking football. They looked up as Levison brushed past.

"Going down to Rylcombe?" inquired Dane. "You'll have to hurry."

"I know that!"

"Anything urgent?"

"Mind your own bizney!"

Levison walked on, and the three juniors grinned at one another.

"Nice-tempered beast, if you like," remarked Lumley-Lumley. "I'll bet he's going into the village to get some ointment for that eye of his. Did you see it?"

"Hardly; it was just about bunged up!" chuckled Reilly.

"Sure, he's more likely bound for the Green Man!"

Levison was known to be a visitor to the Green Man, a disreputable public-house in the village, but he would hardly venture there so early in the evening. Levison's visits were usually paid after lights-out, and when every decent boy was asleep.

He hurried down Rylcombe Lane at a half trot, for there was not much time. The thick woods, with their leafless trees, lay on one side of the road, and the shadows were thick among the branches.

Levison hurried down the long hill. He almost wished he hadn't started now, for, on reflection, his object in Rylcombe didn't seem worth the double journey. But he had covered half the distance now.

Suddenly the bushes parted, and a figure appeared in the road. Levison paused, and his heart beat faster.

He knew that tramps sometimes spent the night in the woods, and before now had waylaid the juniors from St. Jim's. The memorable occasion when Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had been robbed and stripped of his clothes rose in Levison's mind, and he tried to hurry past the man who had just appeared.

"Not so fast, young shaver!"

Levison stopped. He was forced to, for the man barred his path. The cad of the Fourth was by no means a coward, whatever his other faults. When it came to a pinch, Levison could be remarkably cool and self-possessed. Once, when Jerrold Lumley-Lumley was thought to be dead, and was lying in the vaults under St. Jim's, Levison had ventured down there in the middle of the night, and the experience had not affected his nerves in the least.

He stared at the man who had suddenly appeared from the woods in surprise, and with a quickening of his pulse. The fellow was short, well dressed, and he wore a dark beard and moustache.

"Not so fast, young shaver!"

"What do you want?" said Levison, between his teeth.

The stranger placed a hand on the junior's shoulder, but Levison shook it off, and stepped back a pace.

"Hands off!"

"What's the matter, you young fool?" asked the man, in an amused tone. "I'm not going to harm you. I simply want you to answer a question. Is there a boy up at the school yonder named Levison—Ernest Levison?"

The cad of the Fourth started.

"My hat!" he ejaculated, in surprise. "How do you know my name?"

It was the stranger's turn to start.

"What's that?" he exclaimed quickly.

"I'm Levison," said the junior, recovering himself rapidly.

The short man grasped his arm again, and looked into his face searchingly.

"You're Levison?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'm hanged, if this isn't funny!" exclaimed the dark-bearded man. Then he saw a figure in the dusky distance, and went on hurriedly: "Look here, do you want to earn a few pounds for yourself?"

The question startled Levison.

"Because, if you do," went on the stranger, "be here, at this spot, at eleven o'clock to-night—after lights-out."

"I—I—" hesitated Levison.

"That's all. And don't tell a soul you've seen me, and come alone. If you bring any other boys with you, I sha'n't be here. Understand?"

"Yes; but—"

"Then be here at eleven sharp!"

And the man with the dark beard left Levison's side and disappeared among the trees of Rylcombe Woods. The cad of the Fourth looked after him uncertainly. But a couple of seniors were hastening up the hill, and Levison didn't want to meet them just then. So he turned and made his way towards St. Jim's.

His mind was in something of a whirl. Who could the stranger be, and how had he got to know of Levison's name? The object of Levison's journey was entirely forgotten. He puckered his brows as he hurried along.

The man was aware, too, of his character at the school, or he would not have told him to be out in the lane after lights-out.

What could it mean? But, whatever it meant, it looked decidedly shady and underhand.

Not that Levison cared for that: he was accustomed to performing underhand tricks, and had more than once escaped expulsion by the skin of his teeth. He thought of the strange meeting the whole way to St. Jim's.

"I'll go!" he decided, a gleam of anticipation in his eyes. "There's no telling, it might be something simple that I could do without a soul suspecting me. And I want four-pounds-ten just now to pay that confounded Joliffe at the Green Man. If I don't dub up soon he'll get nasty, the beast!"

Mr. Joliffe was the landlord of the Green Man Inn, and it was no unusual occurrence for Levison to break bounds at night and spend an hour or two in the little back room at the public-house playing cards.

But who the mysterious stranger could be the cad of the Fourth hadn't the slightest idea, and he felt impatient for the hour of eleven to arrive.

Taggles, the school porter, was at the gates with a bunch of keys in his hand when Levison slipped in. Taggles looked at the junior sternly.

"Another 'arf-minute, Master Levison, an' you'd have bin locked hout. I ain't sure now but what I ought to report yer!"

"Oh, rats!" said Levison. "The gates aren't locked!"

"Which it's the fault of my clock bein' slow—"

"More rats!"

"You young himp!" roared Taggles. "I'll—"

"Go and eat coke!" snapped Levison crossly. And he strode across the dusky quad., leaving Taggles speechless.

CHAPTER 5.

Declaration of War.

FIGGINS, the leader of the New House juniors, and chief of the famous "Co.," walked thoughtfully along the Fourth Form passage in the New House at St. Jim's.

Prep. was over, and Kerr and Fatty Wynn were already in their study. Figgins had stopped behind in the Form-room for a few minutes, trying to find a lost Euclid. Now he walked along the passage wearing a thoughtful frown.

He entered his study with a faraway look in his eyes, and closed the door. Kerr and Fatty Wynn glanced up from their occupations, and wondered what was troubling their chief. The Scottish junior was engaged in inflating a football, but Fatty Wynn had something far more important to attend to. A pile of ham sandwiches and a plate of tarts stood before him, and he was causing them to disappear at a surprising rate.

Wynn had received a postal-order the day before, and, in consequence, he had been a good customer to Mrs. Taggles, at the school shop, ever since. Whenever the fat junior was in funds he spent money liberally on grub; that couldn't be a better way to dispose of it.

"Hallo, Figgy!" he said, with his mouth full. "What's the trouble?"

"Yes," added Kerr, "wherefore that worried look?"

Figgins looked at his chums abstractedly.

"Oh, nothing," he replied. "I'm all right."

"No you're not, Figgy; you're worried over something," said Fatty Wynn seriously. "Now, whenever I'm worried I find there's nothing bucks me up better than a good feed. I was worried just now about—about lessons, but since I've had some of these ripping sandwiches, I've felt as happy as a lark!"

"Oh, dry up, you giddy porpoise!"

"Now, Figgy, don't get ratty," said Wynn, patiently. "Have a sandwich, old man?"

"No!" growled Figgins, sitting down.

"Oh, come on, do!"

"I don't want any. I'm not hungry, you ass!"

"Oh, that's rot," said Fatty Wynn warmly. "Not hungry! Why, this time of the year I seem to want more grub than ever, and I'm jolly sure you're the same! These sandwiches are simply scrumptious—"

"Oh, rats! Chuck them in the fireplace!"

"My giddy aunt, what's up with you, Figgy?" asked Wynn in alarm.

"Nothing, you fathead!"

"There must be! Have a jam tart, then?"

"No!" roared Figgins.

"Just one! They're small, and—"

"B-r-rrr!"

"My hat, he must be ill, Kerr!"

Kerr grinned.

"Rot!" he said. "Figgy's not hungry, that's all. You can't expect us two to gorge ourselves like you do. Supper'll be ready in three-quarters of an hour."

"Three-quarters of an hour! Great Scott, I should be faint by that time, if I didn't have this snack!"

And Fatty Wynn attacked the ham sandwiches with renewed vigour.

Figgins sat down, and for a few moments no words were

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spoken in the study. Then the long-limbed chief brought his fist down with a thump on the table. There was a yell.

"You chump!" roared Wynn. "Look what you've done—spoiled the last tart!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Kerr.

"You—you utter ass!" shouted Figgins, gazing at the sticky mess on his hand. In his abstracted mood he had not noticed that a tart was on the table where he thumped it.

"Look at this mess on my hand!"

"Oh, you careless idiot!" howled Wynn. "That was the biggest tart of the blessed lot, and I was saving it till the last!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You've ruined it!"

"Rats!"

"It's jolly serious," declared Wynn, almost tearfully. "I shall feel half empty now right till supper time!"

"Ring off, Fatty," grinned Figgins, wiping his hand. "I couldn't help it."

"Why didn't you look—?"

"Shut up! We've had enough jaw about grub, I should think. I've got something far more important to discuss. I've been thinking."

The faithful "Co." were all attention.

"Yes, Figgy."

"There's a new beast in the School House to-day, as you know," said Figgins, "and he's been shoved into Tom Merry's study. Now, according to all reports, as they say in the newspapers, this new chap's been going it strong."

"Cheeky bouncer!"

"And I heard just now that a meeting had been called between Blake & Co. and the Terrible Three to jaw over a wheeze the new chap's got in his napper. Now, if this image thinks he's going to come to St. Jim's and set himself against the New House, he'll find himself in the wrong basket!"

"Rather!"

"We won't stand it!"

"Whoever heard of such a thing?" went on Figgins, waxing indignant. "A new fellow arrives at St. Jim's in the afternoon, and calls a meeting in the evening to discuss a wheeze up against the New House! It's—its unheard of!"

"Preposterous!" agreed the faithful "Co."

"And we won't put up with it—"

"Hear, hear!" said Wynn.

"Shut up, Fatty! We won't put up with it! Which is cock-house at St. Jim's?"

"New House!" roared Kerr and Wynn in unison.

"Exactly! Well, we're going to remain cock-house," declared Figgins, jumping to his feet. "Now this new chap's come, Tom Merry & Co. may buck up, and I think it's time we issued a declaration of war!"

"A—a what?"

"A declaration of war," repeated Figgins firmly. "We'll draw out a notice warning the School House rotters that if they try any tricks on us, they'll jolly well get bumped for their pains! We're cock-house and we're not going to stand any nonsense!"

"Rather not!"

"No fear!"

Figgins & Co. were decided on that point. They had been gaining many victories lately over the School House juniors, and the effect produced was one of careless confidence in Figgins & Co. They looked upon it that they had ample cause to be indignant if the School House dared to think of retaliating. It is to be feared the continued run of successes had tended to make Figgins and his followers just a little over-confident.

"It's going to be war if that new image doesn't submit quietly," went on Figgins. "He may have some good wheezes, and the only thing for us to do is to forestall the School House bouncers in every case. We've got to keep our eyes skinned, kids!"

"Why not see Redfern & Co. and hear what they have to say?" asked Kerr thoughtfully. "They've pulled with us jolly decently lately, and they could help us to draw up the—declaration, as you call it."

"Good egg!"

And the three juniors left their study for the room next door, where resided Redfern, Lawrence and Owen. The Scholarship boys were in, and they looked up inquiringly as Figgins & Co. entered.

"Hallo!" remarked Redfern. "Why this invasion?"

"They look as solemn as judges," added Owen.

"Fatty just heard that Dame Taggles isn't going to make any more pastry?" inquired Lawrence innocently.

"Look here, Lawrence—"

"Dry up, Fatty," interrupted Figgins, "we didn't come here to rag these bouncers. We want your advice, Redfern."

"All serene!"

"Yours for the asking," added Owen.

"No charge made whatever!"

Figgins laughed.

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"Well, look here, it's about that new chap in the Shell."

"Denton?"

"That's his name, I think. Well, he's showing a dashed lot too much nerve for a new kid, and he might incite Tom Merry & Co. to—to break out in a fresh place, as it were, and jape us!"

"Awful!" murmured Redfern.

"So we're going to issue a declaration to the effect that if the School House doesn't keep in its place, the New House, as cock-house at St. Jim's, will immediately get on the war-path!"

"My word, that's a good speech!" exclaimed Lawrence. "I'll bet you thought it out before you came in! Still, it's a good idea of yours, Figgy."

Figgins explained it at greater length.

"Why not go out into the quad, and yell out the declaration under Tom Merry's window?" suggested Redfern. "If we draw up a notice, and pin it on the School House notice-board, we stand a good chance of getting chucked out on our necks! It would be going right into the enemy's country."

"There are six of us."

"And about twenty of them might be about," said Redfern. "No, my children, we'd better stick out in the quad. Besides, it would be more effective! We could tell Tom Merry a few home truths from the safety of the quad."

Figgins grinned.

"Perhaps so, Reddy," he said. "Anyhow, the main thing is to let the bouncers know we're not going to stand any nonsense! We're cock-house—"

"And we're going to crow, eh?" grinned Owen.

"Well, it isn't exactly crowing. It's sticking up for our rights!"

"Of course."

"We'll get across, then."

"All serene!"

And Figgins & Co. and the New Firm left the study and sallied out into the moon-illuminated quad.

CHAPTER 6.

The Battle.

"HA, ha, ha!"

"Gorgeous!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Ripping! Simply ripping! Ha, ha, ha!"

The Terrible Three and Blake & Co. roared. Denton, the new boy in the School House, had just explained his wheeze, and the idea of it had tickled the juniors to such an extent that they held their sides and shrieked with laughter.

"Bai Jove, you know," gasped D'Arcy, groping for his monocle, "bai Jove, deah boys, the ideah's simply wippin'! Denton, I weward you as a wondah, for thinking of such a weally wippin' wheeze!"

Denton grinned.

"Oh, it's nothing," he said modestly.

"Figgins & Co.'ll be done as brown as a berry," chuckled Tom Merry, looking round the ring of grinning faces in his study. "My hat, Denty, you're going it strong and no mistake! But we'll forgive you for your cheek this afternoon!"

"Rather," said Manners heartily. "We never thought you had it in you! I don't see how the wheeze can fail!"

"Not a word to the other chaps," warned Jack Blake. "They mustn't know anything about it till it's all over. Then they'll simply scream!"

"One moment, deah boys!"

"Hallo, Gussy! What's up with you?"

"An ideah has just struck me—"

"Where?" asked Blake curiously.

"Weally, Blake, I fail to see the weason for that question," said Arthur Augustus severely. "I wemarked that an ideah had just struck me—"

"And I asked you where?" said Blake, with a wink. "Whereabouts did it strike you? In the waistcoat?"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Or in the neck?"

"You uttah ass!"

"Well, you should make yourself clear, fathead," said Blake. "You say an idea just struck you. How should we know where, unless you tell us?"

"I wefuse to argue with you, you uttah wottah," said D'Arcy frigidly. "An ideah just flashed into my bwain—"

"My hat!"

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"My hat!" repeated Herries.

"I wepeat, an ideah flashed into my hat—or, wathah—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"An idea flashed into his hat!" chuckled Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you wottahs—"

"That's all right, Gussy," said Monty Lowther soothingly, "we know you're talking out of your hat, and can't help yourself."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors.
 "You feahful duffah, Lowthah!" shouted Arthur Augustus wrathfully. "It was a slip of the tongue— Yow-ow!"

The indignant swell of the School House sat down suddenly as Blake put his foot out. He was on his feet again in an instant. "You uttah ass!" he shrieked. "What was that for?"

"That was a slip on the floor!" grinned Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wegard you as a dangewous wuffian, Blake!" said D'Arcy deliberately, smoothing his ruffled collar.

"Go hon!"

"And, undah the circs., I am going to administah a feahful thwashing—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake.

"Bai Jove, put up your hands, deah boy—I mean, you wottah!" yelled D'Arcy, dancing up to Blake in a very warlike attitude. Blake dodged behind Tom Merry.

"Save me!" he wailed. "Oh, dear, what shall I do!"

"Bai Jove, Blake, pway cease wotting!"

"Please, Gussy, don't hit me!" moaned Blake.

"You uttah fathead!" shouted Arthur Augustus, wildly.

"Stand up so that I can give you a feahful thwashing!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake grovelled at D'Arcy's feet, and the swell of the School House gazed down upon him indignantly. He knew quite well that Blake was only rotting.

"Are you goin' to get up, you feahful ass?"

"Yes, when you've forgiven me, Gussy," replied Blake. "I apologise for having been so rude to you, and as one gentleman to another, I hope you'll let me off without administering the feahful thwashing."

D'Arcy looked at Blake suspiciously.

"Vewy well, deah boy; since you have apologised, I will let the mattah dwop," he said graciously. "Pway get up, and cease this widiculous wotting!"

Blake got up.

"If I've said anything I'm sorry for," he remarked seriously, "I'm glad of it!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What's the idea, though?" asked Tom Merry.

"Well, deah boy, as we have come to a decision to go for the New House wottahs, I suggest we should issue a challenge to Figgins & Co. that we will work more japes on them duwing Denton's stay at St. Jim's, than they will on us. You are goin' to be heah about a month, aren't you, Denton, deah boy?"

"About that," answered the new boy cheerfully.

"Vewy well," said Arthur Augustus. "The challenge will be that we defy Figgins & Co. to do their worst; that we will keep our end up, and pprove to Denton that the School House is the cock-house at St. Jim's."

"Hear, hear!"

"It would noval do to let mattahs west as they are," went on D'Arcy seriously. "Denton may have got the ideah that the New House is cock-house, and that, of course, is perfectly widic. Denton must say, when he leaves St. Jim's, that he wesided in the cock-house duwing his stay. The honour of the School House is at stake, deah boys!"

"Gussy's right," said Blake thoughtfully. "I admit it's surprising, his suggesting such a good wheeze, but there it is. We'll issue the challenge, just to show Figgins & Co. that we're still alive and kicking."

"And we'll have to jape them right and left," added Tom Merry. "Denton's idea, to start with, is simply top-notch, and that alone will cause Figgins & Co. to hide their diminished heads."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"The meeting's over now," said Lowther. "Suppose we sally out into the quad, and make some nice, polite remarks under Figgy's window?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Good!"

The juniors crowded out of the study, and clattered down the stairs in a body. They emerged into the quad, at the exact moment as half-a-dozen juniors were seen leaving the New House doorway.

"There they are!" shouted Tom Merry. "Figgins & Co. and the New Firm!"

A yell floated across the quadrangle.

"Who's cock-house at St. Jim's?"

And a chorus of voices yelled:

"New House!"

"Cheeky bounders!" roared Blake. "School House for ever!"

"Yah, you're afraid to come over here!" yelled Figgins defiantly.

The School House juniors let out a roar of indignation, and rushed across the quad, in a body.

A chorus of shouts rent the still air.

"School House, cads!"

"New House rotters!"

"Go for 'em!"

"Teach the cheeky bounders a lesson!"

"Sock into 'em!"

"Yah!"

"School House for ever!"

In a moment the two parties were a struggling mass, and the din which arose was surprising. Backwards and forwards the juniors swayed, shouting at the top of their voices, giving as good as they received. Tom Merry was engaged with Figgins in a deadly embrace, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, forgetting in the excitement his elegant clothing and patent-leather boots, was sitting forcibly on Owen's chest.

"Oh!" gasped Owen. "Gerroff!"

"Weally, Owen, you are my pwisonah!"

A wild yell sounded near D'Arcy's ear, and he saw that Fatty Wynn had just dropped upon the stomach of Monty Lowther. All around the fight was at its height.

Thump, thump, tramp, tramp, scuffle, scuffle!

Then a trio of tall forms appeared in the porch of the School House.

"You young rascals!"

Kildare, Baker, and Darrel hurried out into the quad.

Thump, tramp, scuffle!

"Silence!" roared Kildare sternly.

The excited juniors didn't even hear the captain of St. Jim's, and he made a sign to the other two prefects. The three sallied among the combatants, and commenced laying about them with a will. All the prefects carried canes, and a different sort of yell rent the air.

"Ow!" howled Digby. "Who did that?"

"Weally, Dig, I— Ooooooop! Bai Jove, it's Kildare!"

"Get indoors, you young ragamuffins!" shouted Kildare sternly, though his eyes twinkled. "And take fifty lines each, for creating this disgraceful disturbance! Indoors with you!"

The combatants separated with alacrity, and retreated to their own Houses. A crowd gathered round Tom Merry & Co. as they came, dusty and dishevelled, into the School House. They all showed signs of the struggle, and black eyes and torn clothing and swollen noses were general.

"Don't worry!" grinned Bernard Glyn. "It was a jolly good fight!"

"Yaas, wathah!" agreed D'Arcy. "But I shall weally have to change this collah befoah supper, deah boys. And I shall be obliged if you will give me a bwush down, Blake!"

Denton went off with the Terrible Three. He had entered into the battle as heartily as anyone, and had accounted for himself well. He grinned cheerfully as he dabbed a tender nose.

"Never mind!" he chuckled. "I gave Redfern a beautiful black eye!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry patted the new boy on the back.

"My giddy aunt, Denton, you've started well, I must say!" he said heartily. "Keep it up while you're at St. Jim's, and those New House bounders won't be able to lift their heads again for months!"

Clang—clang!

"Supper!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "We shall have to buck up!"

They hurriedly washed and made themselves presentable, then slipped down to the dining-hall, where supper was already in progress.

CHAPTER 7.

Out of Bounds.

TEN-THIRTY chimed solemnly on the still night air.

The Fourth Form dormitory in the School House was still and quiet. The long rows of beds contained soundly-sleeping forms—all save one. At the stroke of ten-thirty, one of the boys had sat up and looked round.

It was Levison.

He remembered the appointment he had to keep in Rylcombe Wood at eleven o'clock. The cad of the Fourth felt rather curious. Lately he had been keeping to himself, for a narrow escape from being expelled from St. Jim's had made him more cautious. But there was no harm, he argued, in slipping down Rylcombe Lane to see what the man with the black beard wanted. So Levison sat up in bed and looked round him.

"I say, you fellows!" he whispered cautiously.

No answer.

"Blake! You asleep, Blake?"

Snore!

Levison grinned in the darkness.

"I'm safe enough," he thought.

He rapidly dressed, then, with his boots in his hand, he crept towards the door. Levison was quite accustomed to walking about in the dark, and he lost no time in slipping out of the School House by means of the little window at the end of the Fourth Form passage.

The night was dim, for clouds had appeared. A cold breeze swayed the leafless branches of the old elms. The school buildings stood out clear against the sky, and one or two brightly

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NEXT
 WEDNESDAY:

"WINTER SPORTS AT ST. JIM'S!"

illuminated windows told that Dr. Holmes and Mr. Railton, perhaps, had not yet retired.

The cad of the Fourth stole across the quad, quietly, and in a few minutes was out in Rylcombe Lane. He grinned to himself as he strode rapidly down the road. The adventure appealed to him, and he didn't feel at all nervous.

"This is the place, I reckon."

Levison stopped, and tried to pierce the darkness of the wood. The lane was absolutely deserted, and the only sounds which reached the junior's ears were those caused by the wind swaying the branches of the trees. Levison pressed forward.

"Hist!" he whispered. "Anybody there?"

No answer.

Levison stamped impatiently.

Then eleven o'clock chimed out.

There was a crackling of twigs, the trees parted, and a dark form appeared.

"You are alone?" inquired a voice abruptly.

"You can see that, can't you?" said Levison, looking at the short, black-bearded man before him. "What's the game—what's all the giddy secrecy for? Why couldn't you have come out just now, when I spoke?"

"Steady on! Don't get impatient. I wanted to make sure that you were alone," said the stranger coolly. "I've taken pains to learn all I can about you, my young friend, and I shouldn't trust you more than I could see!"

"What do you mean?" growled Levison.

"I mean that you are quite a character at St. Jim's—and not a very excellent character at that. Still, you'll do for what I want—"

Levison stepped up to the other.

"Look here," he said warmly. "If you're not jolly careful what you say, I'll go back, and then tell the police to-morrow that some shady character is—"

"Don't get excited, and don't talk rubbish!" interrupted the man. "I want you to do a little job for me—a job that won't take you more than ten minutes. I'll pay you well, and you won't stand the slightest chance of being found out."

"Well, I'm not going to get myself sacked from St. Jim's," said Levison.

The man laughed.

"Don't you worry about that," he said. "The risk will be nil, and when you've done what I want I'll hand you a liberal sum. I'll give you a fortnight, so that you won't have to hurry. But there's a chance of our being overheard here. Follow me."

"Where to?" asked Levison.

"You'll see soon enough."

And the man turned, and made off into the heart of the wood. Levison followed without hesitation, for he was decidedly interested. So far he knew absolutely nothing, but the chance of raking in a few pounds for performing a five-minute job was distinctly inviting. Levison had no particular scruples, and it would be something to relieve the monotony. The cad of the Fourth was getting a bit "fed up" with Mellish and Crooke, and the rest of the school regarded him with more or less indifference.

"I wonder who the merchant is, and what he wants me to do?" Levison asked himself, as he followed the bearded man through the woods. "Anyhow, I mean to find out, whether he tells me or not."

They tramped on until at last they stood upon the edge of Wayland Moor. The dreary stretch of open country lay before them, and the wind blew coldly. Levison shivered a little, but his curiosity was aroused, and he followed his strange companion without hesitation.

A little cottage lay near the edge of the wood—a ramshackle place which had stood empty for months. It was called Moor Cottage, and there was probably no other habitation for a mile. The River Ryll flowed between steep banks close by, and the soft gurgle of its waters could clearly be heard. Once, months past, Dr. Holmes had been kidnapped, and held to ransom in the old cottage by a gang of villains.

"What's the idea?" asked Levison curiously.

"You'll see in a minute."

The man hurried forward, and a minute later pushed open the creaking gate, and walked up the grass-grown path to the cottage door. A soft whistle left his lips, and the door opened, letting out a streak of light. The shutters of the windows were up, so no light had been visible until now.

"Got the kid with you?" asked a voice.

"Yes, it's all serene."

And the black-bearded man entered the cottage, Levison following, feeling more curious than ever.

He found himself in a bare room, the only furniture of which consisted of a couple of old boxes, a gladstone bag, and some blankets. A badly-smelling paraffin lamp burned on the tiny strip of mantelpiece.

"This young gentleman is Master Levison," said the man who had met the cad of the Fourth in the lane. "I reckon he'll suit our purpose to a tee, Wright."

"You're in a beastly hurry," growled Levison. "I want

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to hear what the game is before I consent to do anything for you. I'm jolly well not going to take any risks, so I tell you straight off!"

He stared at the two men defiantly, half wishing he had had nothing to do with the business. The man who had been in the cottage wore a heavy beard, and he stood a good six feet in his shoes. He looked at Levison searchingly, then laughed.

"My dear boy," he said, "there are no risks for you to take. Surely my friend Smith has explained to you that—"

"I haven't explained anything yet," said the black-bearded man.

"Ah, that accounts for our young friend's hesitation, then," said the man named Wright. "We'll be perfectly frank with you, Levison. When we came to Rylcombe we set ourselves the task to find out the sharpest and cutest junior at St. Jim's: one we could trust, and one who hadn't any namby-pamby scruples. We hit on you immediately."

"Oh!" said Levison.

"We know that you are acquainted with the excellent Mr. Joliffe at the Green Man, and that you owe the gentleman something like five pounds—"

"Four pounds ten," said Levison sullenly.

"I wasn't far wrong," proceeded Wright easily. "Well for that reason we requested your company here to-night. There's a little matter of business we want transacting, and you—"

"I've heard that before," interrupted Levison. "What's the game?"

"Simply this. There's a new boy arrived at St. Jim's, a youngster named Philip Denton—"

Levison started.

"Denton!" he exclaimed quickly.

"Exactly. I gather you've met the new boy?"

Levison frowned darkly.

"Yes, I have," he muttered, with vivid recollections of the moonlight encounter with Denton behind the gym. "The rotten outsider! I—"

"Ah, you don't like him?" asked Smith eagerly.

"He's a priggish cad," said Levison, "and I mean to make him jolly well sit up for sticking his rotten nose into my affairs!"

The two men exchanged glances.

"Well, our business is connected with this Denton," said Wright, bending close to the cad of the Fourth. "As you are at loggerheads with the new boy your task will be more congenial. It's a very small matter indeed."

Levison looked up. His eyes were shining eagerly. Here he saw an opportunity of getting even with Denton, and doing himself a bit of good at the same time. He nodded.

"Well, what's the simple matter?"

"We want you to procure for us a little package which Denton has among his property," said Wright eagerly. "It is nothing; merely an ordinary foolscap envelope, pale blue in colour, with a black seal. It is sure to be knocking about in Denton's box—"

"Half a mo!" interrupted Levison cautiously. "If you want me to bone this envelope, and I'm found out doing it, I should be sacked from St. Jim's."

"But, my dear boy, there's no possibility of your being found out," declared Wright earnestly. "There'll be plenty of opportunities when Denton is out. You can do the business as simple as winking!"

"And what's in the envelope?" asked Levison cunningly.

"That's our business."

"I don't think! It's mine as well as yours, anyhow, especially as I'm going to get the blessed thing."

"You are too curious," said Smith sternly. "All you have to do is to hand the envelope over to us, and ask no questions."

"That's all very well—"

"Come, boy, don't be obstinate," said Smith impatiently. "We have no time to waste over you. If you do not wish to avail yourself of our offer you can return to the school, and we will accomplish our end in some other manner."

"Will you?" sneered Levison. "I could warn Denton—"

Wright gripped Levison's shoulder firmly.

"You had better not try!" he said ominously.

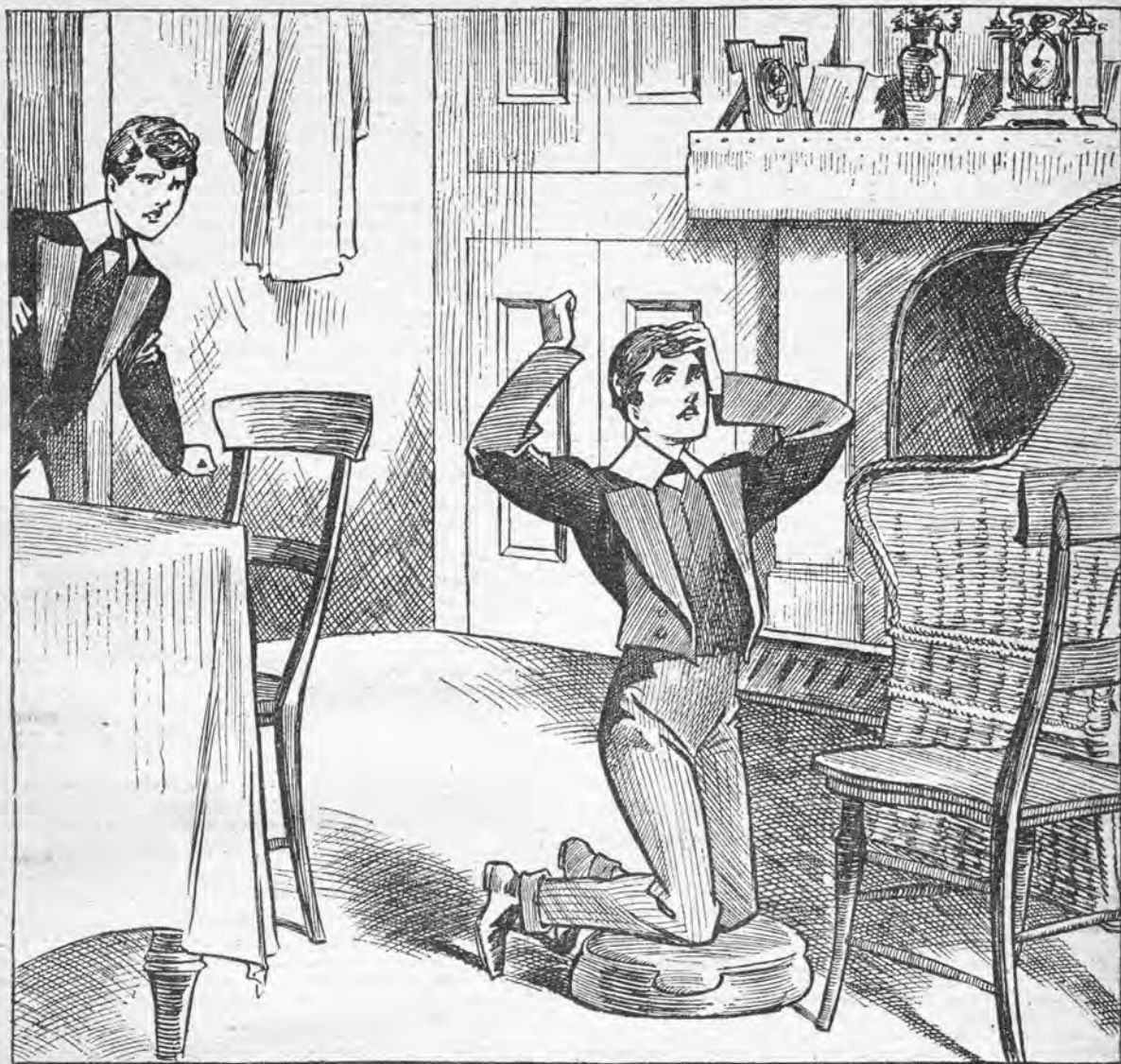
"Why not?"

"Because we should know immediately. Then it would be a simple matter for us to write to your Headmaster, and tell him that you are in Joliffe's debt to the extent of several pounds."

"I—I—" Levison turned pale. "Of course, if—"

"You think you see matters in a different light, eh?" said Wright, with a laugh. "If you act square with us, Levison, we will act square with you. The job is a small one, with no risks attached to it, and with the money we pay you you will be able to pay Joliffe his debt."

"Oh, all serene!" growled Levison. "I don't want to know what's in the giddy envelope. How much are you going to give me for the bizney?"



"My hat!" gasped Temple in amazement, gazing at Frank Nugent, who was kneeling before a chair in the study. "Are you off your rocker?" Frank Nugent took no notice. "Darling, as long as life lasts I will die for thee!" he said dramatically. (An incident taken from the long, complete school tale of Harry Wharton & Co., entitled "THE GREYFRIARS' PANTOMIME," by Frank Richards. This grand story is contained in the current issue of our popular Companion Paper, "The Magnet" Library, and is one that all "Gem" readers will enjoy. Ask for this week's "Magnet" Library. On Sale everywhere.)

"Ten pounds—if you carry it through satisfactorily."

"Ten pounds!" echoed Levison. "My hat!"

"It is extremely liberal payment," went on Wright, "and you ought to jump at the chance. There's no hurry; you can await your opportunity, and earn the money in a few minutes. Will you agree?"

"Rather!" said Levison instantly. He had certainly expected no more than five pounds. With the ten he could pay the landlord of the Green Man, and still have a big sum of money in hand. The cad of the Fourth didn't hesitate now. "I'll do the job for you," he said.

"Good!" said Wright, knowing full well that Levison would not play them false. "Remember, the envelope is a foolscap one, pale—"

"Pale blue with a black seal," said Levison. "All right, I sha'n't make a muddle of it. I suppose I'd better not come here again until I'm able to bring the envelope?"

"No; there is no necessity to take unnecessary risks."

"All right; I'll get the bizney through as quickly as I can," said Levison, quite at his ease. Taking an envelope couldn't be called stealing, he argued, and anyhow he was doing it for someone else. Levison's conscience was quite clear. "And about the tin?" he asked.

"Ah, yes," Wright felt in his pocket. "I'll give you

two pounds now, and eight pounds when you hand over the envelope. That's fair enough; and remember, Levison, we trust you to do your best."

Levison pocketed the sovereigns.

"Don't worry," he said coolly; "you'll see me again in a day or two."

And two minutes later the cad of the Fourth was hurrying to St. Jim's under the clouded sky.

CHAPTER 8.

Denton's Little Jape.

PHILIP EDGAR DENTON opened his eyes and blinked. He blinked because the morning sun shone full upon his pillow. The new boy sat up in bed, and looked round him. Various snores arose on all sides of him, and he saw that all the Shell fellows were blissfully sleeping. Rising-bell had not yet rung, and it was an unheard-of thing for a junior to get up before rising-bell.

Yet Denton hopped out of bed, and went to the window.

"So this is St. Jim's," he thought rather regretfully. "Jolly place, if you like; but as soon as I've got settled down here I shall have to clear out. Mr. Barratt will be back from Alaska before many weeks have passed, and then— Oh, bother!"

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"I'll have a jolly time while I am here, anyhow! No good meeting trouble half-way. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof, or—or something like that. My hat, there's old Waggle—no, Taggles—the porter! Hi, Taggy!"

Denton leaned out of the window, and cheerfully waved his hand to Taggles, who was crossing the quad, with a pair of steps on his shoulder. The porter turned, and gazed upwards.

"My heye!" he ejaculated.

"Why, what's up, Waggy?" asked Denton.

"My heye, if one o' them young ribs ain't up already!" mumbled Taggles.

"You referring to me?" asked Denton cheerfully.

"Which I can't believe my eyes," answered Taggles.

"There's 'alt an hour afore rising-bell, an'—"

"Well, I can get up when I choose, can't I, Baggy?"

"My name's Taggles, Master Denton," growled the porter.

"Oh, is it? Sorry, Waggy!" grinned Denton.

"You warmint!" grunted Taggles under his breath, and he continued his way across the quad.

Denton turned, and surveyed the rows of sleeping forms. It was half an hour to rising-bell yet, but the morning was fine, and Denton meant to get up at once. He smiled as he looked at the sleeping juniors, then his smile changed to a grin.

"Sleepy lot of bouncers!" murmured the new boy to himself. "I'm not going to get up on my own and leave them there until the rising-bell rings!"

He crossed the dormitory, bent over Tom Merry, and shook him.

"Tumble out, Merry!" he exclaimed, in an urgent tone.

"Hallo, what—" mumbled Tom Merry, blinking. "Gerr away! 'Tain't time to get up yet, fathead!"

"My dear chap, didn't you hear the rising-bell?"

"Rising-bell!" ejaculated Tom Merry, sitting up.

"Of course, you ass!" said Denton. "The bell! Didn't you hear it? You'll be jolly well late if you don't buck up! Everybody seems to have slept on, although I hopped out of bed straight off. Don't want a row first day I'm here, you know!"

Tom Merry looked round him.

"Rising-bell hasn't gone yet, Denty," he said. "You ass! Br-r-r! It's cold! Why, all the chaps would have been up if—"

"That's what I thought," said Denton blandly, hurriedly dressing. "Must be something in the air. My giddy aunt, there go the corks in the dining-hall!"

There was certainly a sound of clattering crockery somewhere, and Tom Merry hopped hurriedly out of bed. He really thought now that the Shell had somehow slept through the din of the rising-bell, and that the whole Form were blissfully sleeping, unconscious of the fact that they were late. Tom Merry didn't think of glancing at his watch. The main thing was to get dressed, and hurry down.

"My hat!" he exclaimed. "Old Linton'll be tearing his hair out! Hi, Manners! Lowther!"

"Hallo!" grunted Manners, opening his eyes.

"Warrer-marrer?" inquired Monty Lowther lazily.

"Fatheads!" shouted Tom Merry. "Rising-bell's gone hours ago, and we've slept through it all! Wake the other chaps up, for goodness' sake!"

Monty Lowther and Manners hopped out of bed in alarm, and looked round them sleepily.

"My only topper!" ejaculated Manners. "It's not late, is it?"

"Late? They're having brekker!" gasped Tom Merry.

Monty Lowther whistled.

"Rout the fellows out, then!" he said. "Hi, Kangy, Dane, Glyn!"

In a minute the rest of the Shell were awake, gazing wonderingly at the Terrible Three as they slipped at lightning speed into their clothes.

"What's the giddy game?" inquired Kangaroo.

"You clump!" gasped Manners, tugging at a sock. "Rising-bell's gone long ago! Didn't you chaps hear it? We shall all be late!"

"My hat!"

"Tumble out!"

The Shell tumbled out in double-quick time.

"Where are my beastly bags?"

"Blow it, my back stud's vanished!"

"Hi, Skimpole, hand over that tie! That's mine!"

The juniors nearly fell over themselves in their hurry to dress. Denton's face was as grave as anyone's, and he dressed without even a twinkle appearing in his eyes. The rest of the Shell had caught the fever from the Terrible Three, and the whole Form was firmly convinced that they were late.

Nobody thought of asking if anyone had heard the rising-bell. The main thing was to get down in the smallest possible space of time. Had Tom Merry paused to think, he would have realised that it was very unlikely that the whole Form should sleep on while the bell changed out.

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But Tom Merry didn't stop to think; neither did the others. The bulk of the Shell woke up when seven or eight juniors were scrambling into their clothes, and all their time was occupied in trying to catch up to the others.

"There'll be a row!" declared Clifton Dane.

"My hat, yes!" agreed Manners.

"Rather!"

"What's the giddy time, somebody?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Blessed if I know!"

Nobody felt inclined to waste precious seconds looking at a watch, so the hour was not revealed. Denton chuckled inwardly.

He had hardly expected such success as this.

The Shell had never got up so early in the history of St. Jim's!

For, term in and term out, there were always some bed-loving juniors who lay until the last possible moment, and then scrambled into their clothes.

"Rotten, caddish trick!" growled Crooke.

"What is?"

"Why, someone must have woke up—"

There was a shout from the door. Tom Merry was ready, and he turned, with his fingers on the door handle.

"Ready, you chaps?" he inquired.

"All serene!"

"Come on!"

And the bulk of the Shell crowded out into the passage. The Terrible Three were in advance, and they expected to come across some of the housemaids, who generally got to work while the school was at breakfast and prayers. Denton was in the crowd, hugely enjoying himself.

"Why, good gracious! Boys, what is the meaning of—of this?"

The Terrible Three halted, flabbergasted.

They had turned the corner of the passage, and, to their intense surprise, had come face to face with Mr. Lathom, the mild little master of the Fourth Form. Mr. Lathom was without a collar, and he held a steaming shaving-pot in one hand and a razor in the other.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Lathom, gazing at the Shell fellows over the tops of his glasses. "What is the meaning of this early morning escapade?"

"W-what, sir?" stuttered Tom Merry.

"Of course, you are perfectly at liberty to rise at what hour you choose, my boys," said Mr. Lathom, "provided, of course, that the hour is within reason—"

"W-within reason?" ejaculated Manners. "Ain't it breakfast-time, sir?"

"Breakfast-time, Manners?" said the Fourth-Form master in surprise. "Of course, not! How can you ask such an absurd question? The rising-bell will not ring for twenty minutes yet—"

"What?"

There was a roar. All the fellows heard Mr. Lathom, and they gazed at one another in surprise and indignation. The little Form-master pushed his way past, and entered his room. The door closed, and there was instantly a babble of voices.

"What's the game?"

"Who said rising-bell had gone?"

"My hat! The whole school's asleep yet!"

Tom Merry scratched his head.

"I can't make it out—" he began.

"I should jolly well say you can't, you frabjous lunatic!" roared Manners wrathfully. "It was you who logged us out!"

"You bounder!" said Monty Lowther. "All our beauty sleep—"

"Half a tick!" shouted Tom Merry, as the fellows made for him. "I—"

"Collar the bounder!"

"Bump him!"

"My giddy aunt, what cheek!"

Tom Merry dodged.

"You silly asses!" he roared. "It wasn't me who started it!"

"Wasn't you? Who was it, then?" demanded Clifton Dane warmly. It wasn't that the juniors minded getting up early. It was the thought of how they had been spoofed into thinking they were late.

Denton stood against the wall, roaring.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling for, fathead?" asked Manners crossly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you imbecile!"

"Ha, ha! How do you like getting up early?" yelled Denton.

"It was that awful bounder who started it!" shouted Tom Merry, pushing forward. "He woke me up, and said rising-bell had gone! I never thought a chap would tell whoopers like that—"

"I didn't!" exclaimed Denton, grinning. "I merely asked you if you'd heard the rising-bell! Of course, I couldn't prevent

you taking it for granted that the rising-bell had been rung. I hadn't heard it myself—"

"You—you rotter!"

Denton grinned.

"No need to get wild," he said. "You ought to be pleased—"

"The awful spoofer!"

"The cheeky bouncer!"

"Pile on to him!"

"Bump him!"

"Bump him jolly hard!"

The Shell fellows were exasperated. The bulk of them didn't like rising before the bell went, and to be hurried out of bed as they had been—for nothing—was a bit too thick. In a body they bore down upon the humorous new junior.

"I say, hold on—" said Denton hastily.

"Rats!"

"We're going to bump you!"

"Rather!"

"Collar him!"

And before Denton could resist, he was collared. Even if he had resisted, he wouldn't have had a chance to defend himself. He was lifted off his feet by sheer force of numbers, and then dropped to the floor.

Bump!

"Here, I—I say!" gasped Denton. "I—ow!"

Bump!

Twice more the new junior was bumped, and then the Shell, their feelings relieved, allowed Denton to scramble to his feet. Denton was dusty, dishevelled, and sore, but he grinned cheerfully. Not many fellows would have looked so pleasant.

"Well, I'm glad that's over!" he panted. "Phew! you do know how to bump a chap, and no mistake! I suppose I deserved it—"

"You did!" said Tom Merry.

"Like your cheek!" growled Manners.

"Still, it was a jolly good jape, wasn't it?"

Tom Merry's face broke into a grin.

"Well, yes," he agreed. "It wasn't bad! You're the first chap who's ever succeeded in getting the entire Shell up before rising-bell! Ha, ha, ha! You spoofer us clean!"

Denton put his collar straight.

"Well, now we are up, suppose we have half an hour at punting a footer about before brekker?" he suggested.

"Good egg!" exclaimed Tom Merry heartily.

"Show those Fourth-Form bouncers that we're not slackers!"

"Rather!"

And the Terrible Three marched off down the passage with Denton in their midst, and a crowd of Shell fellows in the rear.

Five minutes later, they were on the field, rather glad, after all, that the new boy had got them out early. The jape had been against the Shell, but it was a jape that could easily be forgiven.

CHAPTER 9.

The Great Wheeze.

"BAI JOVE!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stood in the Fourth Form dormitory attired in his immaculate pyjamas. He had just got out of bed, and he happened to glance out of the window. The rising-bell had gone several minutes before, and some of the Fourth-Formers were sitting up in bed, yawning.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated D'Arcy.

"Hallo, Gussy! What's up?" inquired Lumley-Lumley, hopping out of bed. "Discovered an awful crease in your best pyjamas?"

"Weally, Lumley—"

"Or s it that a piece of fluff has happened to alight on your socks?"

"Pway don't be an ass, Lumley!" said Arthur Augustus stiffly. "I was merely uttewin' an exclamation of surprise! Tom Mewvy and the west are actually in the playin'-fields, puntin' a footer about—"

"Rats!" said Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies, if you do not believe me, you can come to the window and see for yourself," said D'Arcy. "It is surpwin', I admit; but Tom Mewvy & Co. are already up."

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Lumley-Lumley, crossing to the window. "Gussy's right for once."

"I wedgad that remark as dispawaging."

"Go hon!"

"Tom Merry already up!" ejaculated Blake.

"Yes, and all the blessed Shell with him!" said the one-time Outsider. "Who said the age of miracles had passed? I guess there must be something radically wrong with the Shell."

"Can't make it out," said Herries.

The Fourth-Formers were certainly rather mystified.

The wintry morning was exceptionally fine, and the sun shone into the dormitory almost with the brilliance of spring.

From the playing-fields came the thud of boot meeting ball—a most unusual sound so early in the day.

"It is wathah wemarkable, you know, deah boys," said D'Arcy.

At breakfast-time the Shell came into the dining-hall, looking flushed and hungry. Their early morning exercise had given them all a keen appetite, and they weren't a bit sorry Denton had got them up early. In fact, they rather regretted bumping him.

"It's all right," said Monty Lowther. "Denty's a good sort, and although we bumped him this morning, we take it all back now."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Denty, consider yourself not bumped!" grinned Tom Merry.

Denton grinned back cheerfully, being too busy with fried bacon to answer at the moment. The new boy was quite popular already with the majority of the Shell fellows, and the Terrible Three, who had taken him under their wing—as they expressed it—realised that Denton would prove a powerful addition to the School House forces.

Mr. Linton noticed a slightly apparent air of suppressed excitement in the Shell that morning, especially in the direction of the desk where the Terrible Three sat. But Tom Merry & Co. took care to behave themselves; they didn't want lines that morning. They didn't want lines any morning, of course, but this occasion was exceptional. A meeting was to be held immediately after lessons in Blake's study, and it wouldn't do to be detained.

At last morning lessons were over, and the Shell trooped in.

"Good!" said Tom Merry. "Hurry up!"

The Terrible Three and Denton hastened down the passage. They turned the corner, and came face to face with Figgins & Co. and the New Firm. The Fourth had just been dismissed.

"Hallo!" said the long-legged chief of the New House juniors. "What's the giddy hurry?"

"That's our bizney, my son."

"Oh, is it?" said Figgins.

"Anything important?" inquired Redfern.

"Well, rather—"

Tom Merry gave Manners a nudge.

"Shut up, you ass!" he muttered.

"Oh, sorry!" said Manners. "I forgot!"

And the Terrible Three and their new chum hurried on. Figgins & Co. looked after them thoughtfully.

"There's some game on," said Lawrence, shaking his head.

"Perhaps that jape of Denton's—"

Fatty Wynn shook his head.

"More like a feed," he said. "That would account for his hurry. I know jolly well I always hurry when I'm going to a feed!"

"Oh, dry up, Fatty!" growled Figgins. "Tom Merry doesn't gorge like you do—"

"Look here, Figgy—"

"Peace, my children," interrupted Kerr, the shrewd Scottish member of the "Co." "I reckon Lawrence is right. There's something on, and we'd better keep our eyes skinned. I vote we go over to our study—"

"And have a snack before dinner," suggested Wynn.

"No, you fat bouncer!" roared Kerr. "I vote we go over to the New House and keep watch. There's half an hour before dinner, and a lot could happen in that time."

"All serene."

And Figgins & Co. and the New Firm—in perfect harmony and agreement now that they were all "up against" the School House—strolled out into the quad. and made for the New House.

Meanwhile Tom Merry & Co. had joined the chums of Study No. 6. Blake & Co. were already in the little apartment.

"Oh, here you are!" said Jack Blake.

"Yes, here we are. We passed Figgy in the passage, and I think he guesses there's something on. Manners nearly let it out, like a fathead!"

"They'll be on the watch," grinned Denton.

"Weally, you know," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, "the New House boundahs will get it in the neck this time, deah boys! I sincerely twust I shall not spoil these new twucks of mine."

"That would be awful," said Monty Lowther solemnly.

"You are quite-wight, Lowthah."

"Besides, there might be some dust in the woodshed."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Which would alight on your spotless linen," added the humorist of the Shell.

"Look here, there's no time to waste," exclaimed Tom Merry. "If we're to work Denton's giddy wheeze this morning, we shall have to buzz off straight away. I suppose you all know what you have to do?"

"Rather!"

"Got it all off by heart?"

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy."

"You're sure you can do your bit, Gussy?"

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"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I considah that question unnecessary," said D'Arcy frigidly. "You know that a fellow of tact an' judgment is required for a ticklish job like this—"

"Then it's no use relying on you," said Lowther.

"Bai Jove, Lowthah, I shall get my wag out—"

"Dry up!" said Blake impatiently. "Look here, I'll go first, as we arranged. You chaps follow at intervals."

"Good!"

"Lead on, Macduff!"

Blake left the study, and the others talked excitedly over the wheeze, which was to bring about the utter downfall of Figgins & Co. Lately the New House juniors had been gaining endless victories, and, as Monty Lowther remarked, "they were now going to be jolly well paid back in full at one fell swoop!"

Over in the New House the New Firm were with Figgins & Co. in the latter's study. They had a clear view of the quad., and they stood at the window, quite confident that something was "on" in the School House.

"Manners nearly let something out," said Figgins thoughtfully. "Tom Merry only just stopped him in time. It's up to us to see that we don't get taken on the hop. Our policy is to nip their giddy game in the bud and give them the kybosh!"

"Hear, hear!"

"If you ask me, it's a feed," said Wynn firmly. "Tom Merry was afraid of Manners letting it out in front of us, in case we raided it."

"Hallo," said Kerr suddenly, "here's Blake!"

"So he is!"

They crowded to the window. Jack Blake had just sauntered out of the School House. He paused carelessly for a moment on the steps, then lounged across the quad., apparently aimless in his choice of direction. Finally he disappeared round one of the old elms.

Figgins & Co. looked at one another.

"He's gone to the woodshed," declared Figgins.

"What on earth for?"

"How should I—"

"My hat!" interrupted Owen. "Tom Merry has just come out!"

The hero of the Shell had certainly appeared at the door of the School House. Like Blake, he paused for a short space, looking round; then he, too, wandered across the quad. in the direction of the woodshed. He disappeared from view.

"Something fishy about that," said Lawrence thoughtfully.

"Rather!"

"There'll be another of the bounders out directly—"

"Here's Monty Lowther!"

Monty Lowther came out briskly, and made straight for the gates. Figgins & Co. and the New Firm crowded round the window, watching. The humorist of the Shell seemed to be in a hurry. He hastened across to the gates, but before he reached them he dodged to one side, and vanished behind the trees.

"Woodshed!" said Figgins firmly.

"My hat! There must be a secret meeting on!" said Owen.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Redfern. "I

like that! Secret, eh? Why, the silly chumps have absolutely given the game away by going across singly! There's Herries now! There he goes, look, trying to make himself inconspicuous!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The New House juniors chuckled.

"I still stick to my first opinion," said Fatty Wynn.

"What's that?"

"Why, that the bounders have got a feed on! If they hadn't—why—"

"Oh, ring off, porpoise!" said Redfern.

"Well, I believe I'm right," said Wynn obstinately. "And I say we ought to make a raid. Look, what an opportunity!"

The grub's sure to be all there, and—"

"Hallo, here's the one and only!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy lounged elegantly down the School House steps, and seemed to take a great deal of interest in Fane and Gibson, of the Third, who were strolling round the quad. arm in arm.

For quite half a minute the swell of St. Jim's stood contemplating them, then he moved off across the quadrangle.

Figgins grinned.

"Same direction," he chuckled.

D'Arcy paused half-way across the quad., and took his handkerchief out to flip off a piece of fluff from his immaculate jacket. And as he did so a slip of paper fluttered to the ground. Arthur Augustus walked on, unconscious of his loss.

"We'd better buzz out and pick that piece of paper up," suggested Kerr.

"Might be a fiver!"

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Figgins and Kerr decided to go, and they hurried out of the New House. In a minute they were bending over the piece of paper. Figgins picked it up.

"It isn't a fiver," he said. "It's— My only summer hat!"

"What's the matter, Figgy?"

Figgins chuckled.

"Look at this! Don't worry; it's nothing private."

Kerr looked, then he grinned broadly.

"Just like Gussy," he said. "Fancy dropping that piece of deadly evidence!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The paper was an half-sheet torn from an exercise book, and on it were the words: "Immediately after morning lessons. Woodshed. Saunter across quad. three minutes after Herries. Secret meeting." The writing was very obviously Tom Merry's.

"Secret meeting, eh?" chuckled Figgins. "My hat, those School House fathheads are as soft as jelly! We'll jolly well break their giddy meeting up!"

"This is Denton's wheeze!" grinned Kerr.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Still laughing, Figgins and Kerr hurried back to the New House. As they did so Manners appeared with his camera. The New House juniors affected not to see him, but Figgins gave Kerr an expansive wink. Manners hurried between the old elms.

He had hardly disappeared when Denton came down the School House steps.

"Hi, Manners!" he called.

Manners reappeared from behind the elms.

"Half a tick!" called Denton; and he hurried across.

"All part of the giddy scheme," said Figgins. "They think they're absolutely putting us off the scent by all this elaborate preparation. Come up and tell the others!"

And Figgins and Kerr hurried upstairs.

But they weren't the only ones who had noticed the peculiar behaviour of Tom Merry & Co. At the window of one of the School House studies a junior stood looking out with a thoughtful expression on his face.

It was Ernest Levison.

CHAPTER 10.

Figgins & Co. on the Track.

LEVISON was thinking. The cad of the Fourth wore a faraway expression. He was thinking of his interview with the two men on the edge of Wayland Moor. He had been at the window for some little time, looking absently into the quad.

Then he had noticed the juniors crossing one after another in the direction of the woodshed. Finally, Denton had appeared, and a gleam came into Levison's eyes.

The Terrible Three's study was deserted now!

"I'll go and look for that envelope now!" muttered Levison crossing the room. "By Jove, what an opportunity! I—"

He paused, and walked slowly back to the window. "No; it would be too risky," he decided. "Besides, the thing wouldn't be there. It would be in the box-room, and I couldn't go there now. I've got over a week, so there's no hurry."

Levison thrust his hands into his pockets and stared before him.

His task was a ticklish one; a mistake, and it would mean expulsion. But Levison did not intend to make any mistake. He had only just escaped being sarked from St. Jim's once before, and he wasn't going to run the risk again.

The thought of what his act would be did not affect Levison in the least. He did not regard it in the light of a criminal act, which would be punishable by arrest and a year or two in a reformatory.

It was only an envelope, anyhow!

An envelope, with some document or other, perhaps, inside it. Levison had no qualms whatever: his need for money just at the moment dispersed any doubts which may have occurred to him.

"I'm not going to back out of it," Levison muttered. "I can't, anyhow. The brutes would show me up if I jibbed. That ten pounds will come in jolly handy, too. Ten pounds, eh?"

The cad of the Fourth grinned knowingly. "My name isn't Levison if I don't get twenty pounds before I've done!"

The thought had entered his head of enlisting the services of Mellish of the

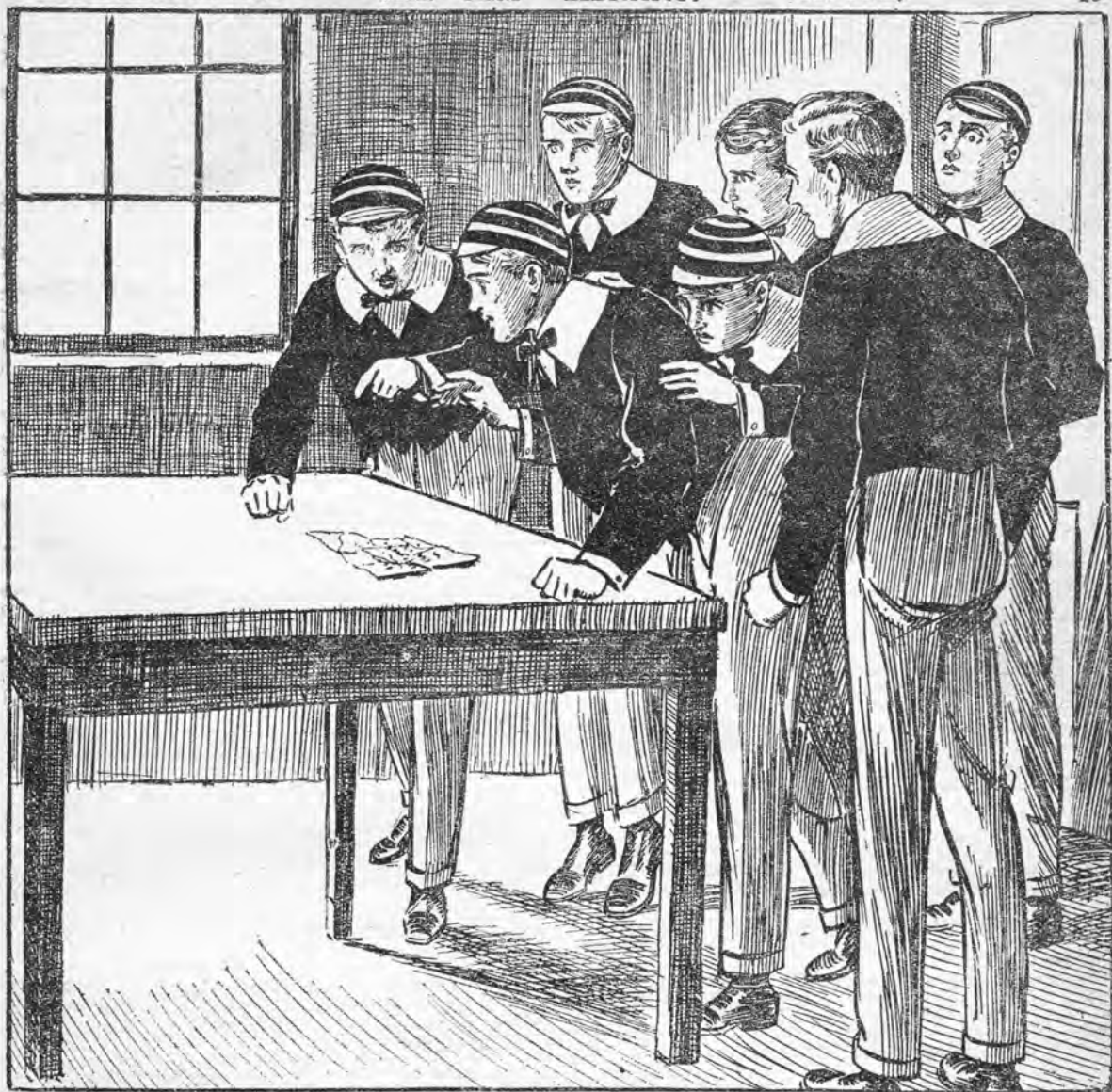
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Figgins bent over the table excitedly. The words on the paper were easy to read now, and stood out quite distinctly. They were in Tom Merry's handwriting, and read thus: "In woodshed. Tell chaps to be ready for jape against Figgins & Co. immediately after tea. Castle ruins. Meeting time, 6.15 exactly." (See Chapter 10.)

Fourth. A few moments' careful thought, however, had told Levison that such a course would be disastrous.

Mellish was the tell-tale of the School, and couldn't keep a secret for more than half an hour. If Levison took Mellish into his confidence the scheme would be the common property of a good many juniors before many hours had passed.

"No; I'll wait," decided Levison. "I'll wait, and work it off my own bat. It ought to be easy enough. Denton's a careless sort of rotter, and I expect I shall be able to lay hands on the giddy envelope without any trouble."

He walked back to the window again, and looked out thoughtfully.

Meanwhile, Figgins & Co. were busy.

The long-limbed chief and Kerr had raced upstairs and shown the half-sheet of paper to Wynn and the New Firm.

"Secret meeting!" grinned Redfern. "My hat, I like that!"

"They think we little innocents wouldn't notice anything."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"So we'll just prove that we're not quite green."

"Yes, rather!"

"How?" asked Owen.

"By putting the giddy kybosh on their little game," said Figgins. "We——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins turned.

"What's up with you, Lawrence?" he demanded.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ass! What are you cackling like that for?"

"Ha, ha! Sorry!" gasped Lawrence. "Something tickled me, that's all!"

Figgins glared.

"Oh, did it?" he said warmly. "Something tickled you when I was in the middle of a sentence, eh? Like your blessed cheek! You'll——"

"Ease up, old man," grinned Lawrence; "it's a wheeze."

"Oh!"

"Look here," went on Lawrence, "all those School House chumps are in the woodshed, aren't they?"

"Well?"

"Well, why shouldn't we creep up unheard and lock them in? There's a lock to the door, and the key's always on the outside. That would be killing two birds with one giddy stone. We should jape the bounders and show them that we're up to their little dodges."

"Lock them in?"

"That's it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Jolly good!" chuckled Redfern. "When they're nicely cooped up we could fetch a crowd of our fellows and show 'em how the School House chaps work off their japes! It would be rich!"

"Rather!"

"Come on, then," said Figgins, glancing at his watch. "Only ten minutes before dinner, so we'll have to buck up."

The six juniors crowded out into the passage. They crossed the quad, quietly, then, separating, approached the woodshed from different quarters. The door was closed, and no sound came from within.

"They're jolly quiet, anyhow," murmured Kerr.

Figgins nodded.

"They're in there, though," he said. "I—"

As he spoke the door of the woodshed blew slightly open with the breeze, then closed again. It certainly looked very much as though the place was deserted.

Figgins and Kerr looked at one another.

"That's rummy!" began Figgins uneasily.

Then a couple of voices made themselves heard from the direction of the old oaks; they belonged to Tom Merry and Lowther!

"Well, I'm jiggered!" exclaimed Figgins blankly.

"They're not there!"

"My hat!"

"It's a giddy frost!" said Redfern, coming up.

The New House juniors looked at one another rather sheepishly.

"They were jolly quick over the meeting, anyhow!" growled Fatty Wynn.

Figgins snorted.

"How the dickens were we to know they'd be so quick?" he demanded crossly. "Mucked up a jolly good jape, that's what they've done!"

Redfern chuckled.

"Can't blame them for that," he said. "How were they to know we were on their giddy track? It's your rotten idea, Lawrence, anyhow. Just like you to go and suggest a silly wheeze like—"

Lawrence gave a sniff.

"Rats!" he said. "You needn't have come! And I wasn't to know, anyhow. Let's have a look round the shed, and see what they've been doing."

"Fat lot of good that'll be!" growled Figgins. "I don't believe the silly asses have been to the woodshed at all. Yet they all came in this direction, one after the other. There's something fishy somewhere."

"It's something connected with a feed," began Fatty Wynn firmly.

"Oh, dry up, you giddy porpoise!"

"Look here, Owen—"

There was a shout from the woodshed. While the others had been talking, Lawrence had strolled into the empty building. He appeared at the door now, and beckoned to the others.

"I say, you fellows, come in here!" he exclaimed.

The tone of his voice caused the juniors to hurry into the woodshed. They looked at Lawrence inquiringly, then glanced round the building.

"Well, what have you found out, Sherlock Holmes junior?" asked Kerr.

"Nothing; but—"

"Why, you ass, you called us as if you'd unearthed some deadly piece of evidence!" said Figgins crossly. "Look here, I'm fed up—"

"Half a minute!" exclaimed Lawrence. "Look over in that corner!"

He turned and pointed to an obscure corner, where a pile of old faggots were resting. The New House juniors looked. Nothing was visible except the old pile of sticks, a rotten piece of sacking, and some torn scraps of paper.

"Well," demanded Figgins, "what's the good of looking there?"

"Explain yourself, fathead!" added Redfern.

Lawrence grinned.

"Are you chaps blind?" he asked politely.

"Look here, if you're going to act the giddy ox, I'm off," said Figgins sulphurously. "The things a frost, anyhow—"

"Half a tick!" put in Kerr. "Lawrence means those pieces of paper. Don't you see, Figgy? They're bits out of a sheet of exercise-paper—fresh, too. Looks as if they'd been chucked down there by the School House bounders."

"My hat!" ejaculated Figgins.

Kerr stepped forward and bent down. In a minute he had collected the scraps of paper up. He had seen at a glance that some of Tom Merry's handwriting was upon them, and the keen Scot knew that the ink had not been dry for more than half an hour. The papers, pieced together, might easily prove to be a clue.

"There's a chance of us finding out the reasons for their blessed flying visit here yet," said Kerr. "Come on, we'll cart these up to the study and fit them together."

The juniors crowded out of the woodshed, eager to see if the scraps of paper would lead to anything. Figgins was as excited as anybody. To tell the truth, he had been feeling rather done. As leader of the New House juniors, it was his duty to uphold the honour of the House, as it were. Tom Merry & Co. were

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up to some little game, and Figgins couldn't catch on to it. Perhaps the torn paper might lead to something.

"Here we are!" exclaimed Kerr, as he flung open the study door.

"Now to ferret out the giddy secret!" grinned Redfern.

Fatty Wynn sniffed.

"There isn't any secret," he declared.

"How do you know?"

"Why, it's as plain as—as my face—"

"Well, that's pretty plain," agreed Lawrence.

"Oh, don't be funny! The blessed paper's simply a list of grub Tom Merry's made out to get at the tuckshop."

"Grub again!" roared Figgins. "Look here, Wynn, you'll get a thick ear if you shove that record on again! You've got grub on the brain!"

"Well, it's nearly dinner-time now. The bell will go in about two seconds. I say, Kerr, we'd better give it up till—"

Kerr turned from the table, and his eyes were sparkling.

"Give it up be blowed!" he said. "I've got it!"

"Got it!"

"Rather, my sons!"

"My hat! Is it anything good?"

"Let's have a squint!"

The juniors crowded round the table, where Kerr had laid out the scraps of paper. The Scotch junior let out a yell.

"Look out, you chumps, you'll have the blessed lot disarranged!" he roared. "It's a giddy clue! We've got the School House rotters absolutely on toast!"

Figgins bent over the table excitedly. The words on the paper were easy to read now, and stood out quite distinctly. They were in Tom Merry's handwriting, and read thus:

"In woodshed. Tell chaps to be ready for jape against Figgins & Co. immediately after tea. Castle ruins. Meeting time, 6.15 exactly."

The words were only scrawled, and were evidently jotted down to remind Tom Merry as to what he had to tell the meeting. Having no further use for it after the meeting had assembled in the woodshed, he had naturally torn the paper up, never dreaming that the cute New House juniors would get on the track.

"My only summer hat!" ejaculated Figgins. "This means the bounders are going to the castle ruins after tea to work off some jape on us! The meeting in the woodshed was to tell the chaps what to do!"

"Of course!"

"The little innocents!" grinned Redfern. "We'll forestall them, and show them that it won't do to play monkey tricks with the cook-house of St. Jim's!"

"It'll be the jape of the season!"

"Rather!"

Clang-clang!

"Hallo, dinner!" said Figgins. "Kerr, you're a wonder! If it hadn't been for you—"

"For me, you mean," interrupted Lawrence warmly. "I found the giddy paper, and chance it!"

"Of course," said Owen. "We found it, Figgy—"

Figgins waved his hand.

"Dry up," he said. "I don't care a jot who found it. The main thing is we've succeeded in getting on the track! We'll be blessed detectives, and show Tom Merry & Co. that they're absolutely out in the cold! They'll want to hide their diminished heads when we've done with them!"

And Figgins & Co. and the New Firm quitted the study and descended to the dining-hall, where dinner was just on the point of commencing.

CHAPTER 11.

Figgins & Co.'s Triumph.

DURING afternoon lessons little Mr. Lathom could scarcely help noticing that certain of his pupils were rather restless and impatient. Blake & Co. seemed equally as restless as the New House combine. Every now and again Figgins would catch Redfern's or Lawrence's eye, and a slow lowering of his left eyelash became noticeable.

"I say, you know," murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, when Mr. Lathom's back was turned, "Figgins seems remarkably pleased over something. I have seen him wink across the room several times!"

"Figgins is hugging himself for being so smart," chuckled Blake. "My only aunt, we'll knock those New House bounders into the middle of next week to-night! The little innocents have been getting a jape or two home lately—by fluke, of course—but to-night they'll catch it fairly in the neck!"

"Wathab, deah boy!"

"They're as easily diddled as Gussy," chuckled Herries.

"Weally, Hewries—"

Mr. Lathom turned from the blackboard.

"Silence!" he said mildly. "I really cannot allow this talking. Please wait until lessons are over!"

The murmur of voices died away, and the afternoon's work

proceeded, the juniors being particularly careful to avoid getting lines.

Time for dismissal came at last, and Figgins & Co. and the New Firm hurried over to the New House.

"Now we shall jolly well have to buck up," said Figgins, as they entered the study and closed the door. "We don't know what Tom Merry's plans are, but we won't give him time to carry the giddy plans out!"

"No fear!"

"This is Denton's great wheeze, too," chuckled Lawrence. "My hat, it's as transparent as water."

"Ha, ha, ha! Yes!"

"Six-thirty is the meeting-time," said Figgins. "I suggest we go right off—"

"No jolly-fear!" put in Fatty Wynn hastily. "How about tea, you ass?"

"Blow tea!"

"That's all very well! I'm starving!"

"Well, as you're starving," said Figgins, "it won't hurt if you starve a little longer!"

"You chump!" yelled Wynn. "I should never hold out—"

"Oh, dry up!" growled Kerr. "How about us? You've eaten about six times as much as anybody else to-day, so you can easily hold out till supper-time!"

Fatty Wynn snorted.

"I shan't risk it!" he said. "I shall take a pocketful of jam sandwiches, and one of Dame Taggles' pies! You and Figgie might as well fill your pockets too, in case I get peckish—"

"Are you going to ring off?" roared Figgins, grasping his fat chum by the shoulders. "Do you think we've got nothing better to do than eat grub about for you to gobble up? If you mention grub again we'll sling you out of the study!"

Wynn relapsed into silence.

"Now, about going?" said Figgins, looking round at the grinning New Firm. "The School House bouders have arranged to be in the ruins at half-past six. I vote we go right off, and be there to welcome them!"

"Warmly!" said Redfern.

"With open arms!" added Lawrence, grinning.

"Of course, they won't expect us, so we shall have 'em absolutely on toast," chuckled Figgins. "The question is, what shall we do with the asses when we have collared them? We ought to make them realise that it's no good trying to jape the New House!"

"Not a bit of use!"

"Mere waste of time!"

"Of course!"

"Therefore," went on Figgins, "it would be rather neat if we took our weapons—"

"Weapons?" ejaculated Redfern.

"Just so, my son! Weapons of war, in the shape of sticks of grease-paint," grinned the long-legged chief. "We'll tie the prisoners up, and send them back to St. Jim's like Fifth of November guys!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ripping!" chuckled Owen.

"It'll show Tom Merry & Co. that cheeky new chaps are barred," said Figgins. "It's just like Denton's sauce to come here and immediately plan a jape on the New House! We'll prove that we're equal to the occasion, and—take a rise out of the School House which can never be redeemed!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Jolly good," said Redfern. "And now that we've listened to the phonograph we'll make a move! Get the grease-paints out, Kerr, old man!"

Figgins was too excited to take any notice of Redfern's deadly insult, and in a few minutes the juniors were armed with their deadly weapons. Then, reinforced by Pratt, French, Jimson, and three other New House juniors, they all trooped out into the dusky quad, and slipped out of the gates.

It was nearly dark, and a cold breeze blew down the lane. But the juniors were well wrapped up, and warm. Fatty Wynn munched ham sandwiches as he walked. It would have been simply unheard-of to wait until supper-time without a "snack." Wynn almost shuddered when he thought of it.

By the time the New House juniors were in the vicinity of the Castle ruins, six o'clock had struck. It was as well to be in good time, for the School House contingent might turn up before their appointed hour.

"My hat! They're coming already!" exclaimed Owen suddenly.

"Oh, blow!" said Figgins regretfully. "They've seen us, then!"

The juniors turned, and looked away to the left, where a footpath led on to Wayland Moor. Faintly in the dim light two figures could be seen coming towards them. Kerr eyed them keenly.

"They're not School House bouders," he said.

"Who are they, then?"

"Blessed if I know! Anyhow, they're men. Anybody can

see that with half an eye. They're coming this way. My hat! They might be Ratty and some other man. I know Mr. Ratcliff's out!"

"Dodge down behind these giddy bushes!" whispered Figgins.

In a moment Figgins & Co. and the other juniors had vanished behind the thick bushes. They had no wish to be seen by their ill-tempered Housemaster. Mr. Ratcliff was quite capable of giving them lines and sending them all back to St. Jim's. Therefore the New House juniors lay low, and said nothing.

The two men came onwards. They passed along the path quite close to the concealed boys, and Figgins breathed a sigh of relief when he saw that they were both strangers. The men were, in fact, Wright and Smith, the two scoundrels who had commissioned Levison to steal the blue envelope from Denton's box.

"Wonder who they are?" muttered Figgins.

"Strangers of some sort," said Kerr. "Don't like the look of them, either!"

The men passed by and disappeared behind some trees. Then, feeling somewhat relieved, the Fourth-Formers continued their walk to the ruins. Kerr was looking rather thoughtful. He was wondering who the strange men were, and what they were doing so far from the village.

The moon broke through a bank of clouds presently, and cast a weak radiance over the countryside. Until it rose higher, and gained power, it did not give very much light. The ruins stood out clear against the sky, and as the New House juniors picked their way round the familiar tumbling piles of masonry, they saw that they were the first arrivals.

"All serene!" chuckled Figgins. "The coast's clear!"

"Good!" said Redfern. "Now, as leader, I'll place my men—"

"As what?" demanded Figgins.

"Leader! I'm chief of this expedition—"

"You're jolly well not!" said Figgins warmly. "You'll just do as I tell you, or you'll buzz off! Like your check!"

"Look here—"

"Rats!"

"You long-legged fathead—"

"What?" roared Figgins. "I'll jolly soon show you—"

Kerr pushed Figgins back.

"You ass!" he said quickly. "Do you want to give the whole giddy show away with your rowing? The School House bouders might be coming up any minute, and if they heard your voices they'd be warned."

"Well, Redfern shouldn't—"

"Well, Figgins shouldn't—"

"My only topper!" ejaculated Pratt suddenly. "They're coming!"

The others turned abruptly, and gazed down the slope. Quite distinct in the moonlight a small group of figures could be seen approaching. Figgins ducked behind a chunk of masonry.

"Hide up somewhere, you chaps!" he said in an urgent whisper. "Anywhere, as long as you're out of sight! Directly the bouders get near rush out and collar them!"

Redfern did not question the leadership now. In five seconds there was not a sign to show that a dozen very alert juniors were on the watch. They lay as still as logs, and waited. Voices could now be heard, and Figgins grinned hugely as he listened.

"Weally, you know, deah boys," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was saying, "I considah we shall take a wipping wise out of Figgins & Co. this time!"

"I don't think!" muttered Figgins.

"Oh, they'll be simply mopped up!" declared Tom Merry cheerfully. "Once we get in the ruins we shall be able to lay our plans, and then nothing can save them!"

"They're doomed!" grinned Blake.

"Yes; I think the wheeze will pan out all right," said Denton cheerfully.

The clump of School House juniors entered the ruins, and marched straight to the centre. There they stopped, and gathered in a little crowd. The possibility of their being watched never seemed to enter their heads. Apparently Tom Merry & Co. were so confident of their scheme working correctly that they didn't even take ordinary precautions.

Figgins crept from behind his pile of masonry.

He made a sign to the other New House juniors.

"On 'em!" he roared.

"Wipe the bouders up!" shouted Redfern excitedly.

Tom Merry & Co. started round with amazed faces, and before they could move an inch, the twelve New House juniors simply flung themselves at the common enemy. Arthur Augustus found himself bowled over like a ninepin. He lay flat on the grass with Lawrence sitting astride of him.

"Bai Jove!" gasped D'Arcy indignantly. "You uttah wottah, Lawrence! You have simply ruined my twousahs!"

"That's all right, Gussy!" grinned Lawrence. "Plenty more where they came from!"

"Let me get up!" shrieked D'Arcy excitedly. "Bai Jove,

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NEXT WEDNESDAY: "WINTER SPORTS AT ST. JIM'S!" By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Order in Advance.

"I'll give you a feahful thwashin' if you do not instantly release me! I——"

Figgins let out a whoop.

"Got 'em absolutely clean!" he shouted triumphantly. "Now, Mr. Swankey Denton, how about your wheeze now?"

Philip Edgar Denton grinned sheepishly, and took a sidelong glance at Tom Merry. The captain of the Shell was looking decidedly wrathful for, apparently, their whole elaborate jape had failed, and Figgins & Co. had once again scored.

CHAPTER 12.

Luminous!

"THIS is where we crow!" grinned Redfern, sitting more comfortably upon Monty Lowther's chest. "Fancy these bounders thinking they could bring off a jape against the New House!"

"The cheek!" said Figgins.

"The utter nerve!"

"Fork out the grease-paint!" grinned Kerr. "We'll paint 'em up like African war chiefs!"

Tom Merry struggled.

"Grease-paint!" he gasped.

"You—you rotters!" roared Manners. "You don't mean to say you're going to bung some rotten grease-paint all over our chivvies!"

"We are!" chuckled Figgins. "We is!"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Herries breathlessly. "I've had Fatty Wynn squashing me flat for five minutes! You might let me off the rest! I've been half killed already!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove, deah boys, give the alarm!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "I weally cannot allow Lawwence to smothah me any longer! I am jollay glad I put on these wotten old togs befoah I came out!"

Figgins waved a stick of grease-paint in his hand.

"Now for the medical treatment," he grinned.

"Yes," shouted Tom Merry, with a yell of laughter; "now for the medical treatment! That's a jolly good idea, Figgy! School House ahoy! Rescue! Rescue! Kangy, Dane, Glyn——"

"What's up with the ass?" asked Kerr, looking round.

Figgins looked startled.

"I—I don't know!" he stammered uneasily. "Looks as if——"

"Bosh! He's only kidding!"

"Kidding!" exploded Jack Blake. "Figgy, you're absolutely dished!"

"Yaas, wathah!" gasped D'Arcy.

The next second the place seemed to spring into life. From every corner of the old ruins the form of a School House junior broke into view. Before Figgins & Co. could realise what had happened, they found themselves beset by a dozen determined foes. Naturally, the New House juniors released their prisoners to combat with the new enemy, and Tom Merry & Co. scrambled to their feet, and assisted their rescuers.

In three minutes every one of the dozen New House juniors lay panting and breathless, secure prisoners. Figgins breathed hard. He realised now that he had been a little too previous. At the moment of victory had come defeat. Figgins had never been more surprised in his life.

"You—you rotters!" he gasped. "You wouldn't have escaped if these other School House bounders hadn't turned up." The Terrible Three yelled.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "Who's crowing now?"

"How do you like 'em done?" chuckled Manners.

"Ever been had?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove, Figgy is quite in a fluttah!"

"He'll be in something else before long," grinned Blake.

The New House juniors couldn't make it out. How had Kangaroo & Co. got on the scent? How had they known of their chums' capture? It seemed altogether mystifying to Figgins.

Several long coils of rope appeared from somewhere, and in five minutes the New House juniors were securely bound. Their legs were left free, and they were placed in a row against one of the old walls. In the moonlight Tom Merry & Co. stood grinning.

"What do you think of the jape now, Figgy?" asked Denton calmly.

"Why, it's only by accident that you're not painted up like a set of Red Indians!" said Figgins savagely. "If Kangy and the rest hadn't come along——"

"But they did come along!" chuckled Tom Merry. "That was part of the jape, my son!"

Figgins started.

"Part of the jape!" he ejaculated.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"My—my hat!" gasped Kerr. "The bounders led us into it!"

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"THE MAGNET" LIBRARY.
Every Monday.

The Terrible Three roared.

"Oh, my only summer bonnet!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "And you thought we were as green as grass! Look here, Figgy, I'll tell you how utterly and absolutely you've been diddled!"

"Dished and done brown!" added Blake.

"It was a put up job from the very first," grinned Tom Merry.

"We knew you were watching from the New House when we all strolled across the quad, to the woodshed. That's why we did it—we wanted to take you in!"

"And we did it!" said Herries.

"You—you rotters!" ejaculated Figgins, glaring.

"When D'Arcy dropped that piece of paper, with the message written on it, we knew you'd come and pick it up. Gussy worked the thing first-rate—rather to our surprise——"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"And those torn bits of paper were shoved in the woodshed for the special purpose of luring you to the ruins," grinned Tom Merry. "You thought you were on the track of our jape, when you were walking right into the giddy trap all the time!"

Figgins glared round helplessly. The other New House fellows looked about as sheepish as possible. They had been so sure of themselves that it came as a shock to learn that they had fallen into Denton's trap like inexperienced fags.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the School House juniors.

"You grinning idiots!" shouted Redfern. "You couldn't——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You burbling jabberwocks!" yelled Owen.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry & Co. let themselves go. The whole thing had passed off so smoothly, that they could afford to grin now. Figgins & Co. had been completely defeated.

"Bai Jove!" chuckled D'Arcy. "I weally must say that it is a jollay good jape of Denton's. It has taken some of the cheek out of Figgay——"

"Has it?" grunted Figgins, glaring round impotently.

"It will do pweesently, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus cheerfully. "Lawwence, I will overlook the fact that you wolloed me in the dirt. I put on old duds especially for the occasion, you know, so I don't mind."

D'Arcy looked round triumphantly. The fact of his wearing old clothes seemed an exceedingly cute dodge to the swell of St. Jim's. The others, however, weren't so particular about their clothes, so didn't appreciate D'Arcy's forethought.

Tom Merry turned.

"Got the sacks there, Glyn?" he asked.

"Every one of them!" grinned Bernard Glyn.

The Liverpool junior dived behind a pile of masonry, and reappeared with an armful of big sacks. The New House juniors eyed them with trepidation.

"I—I say," asked Figgins, "what's the game?"

"No larks, you know!" said Redfern.

"Oh, no! We're going to let you loose now—I don't think!", chuckled Denton.

"He's a treasure!" grinned Blake, slapping the new boy on the back. "Denty, you've proved yourself worthy of being a School House chap! We're proud of you——"

"Fall on his neck!" said Figgins, with a sniff.

"Weally, Figgay, Denty has proved his worth!" said D'Arcy.

"I should kiss him, if I were you!" advised Lawwence.

"You ass, Lawwence——"

"Gussy leaves all the kissing to Miss Bunn!" chuckled Figgins.

Arthur Augustus turned a beautiful pink.

"You wottah!" he shouted indignantly. "How dare you insinuate that I am in the habit of kissin' Miss Bunn, Figgins, Bai Jove, I'll give you a feahful thwashin'——"

Four pairs of hands grasped the excited swell of St. Jim's.

"Hold on, Gussy!" said Blake, grinning. "Figgy's bound to. You can't hit him now!"

"I shall make a point of wipin' up the quad, with him to-morrow!" shouted D'Arcy excitedly. "Bai Jove——"

"Hurry up with those sacks!" said Jack Blake.

"Blake, you are intewwupin' me!"

"I know that, Gussy. We can listen to you all night!"

"You ass! I wepeat——"

What Arthur Augustus repeated wasn't heard, for the juniors were busy after something more important.

Struggling and protesting, Figgins & Co. were, one by one, enclosed in sacks which reached to their knees. The sacks were reversed, so that they hung over their heads. The fact that some of them contained a little flour was a mere detail. The unfortunate New House juniors did not think so, however. They spluttered and sneezed violently, as the flour descended their necks, and got up their nostrils.

Their roars were drowned by the yells of laughter from the triumphant School House juniors. The sacks were tied securely round the waist, so that any attempt to get loose would be futile; for Figgins & Co.'s arms were bound securely.

"Now for your giddy paste!" grinned Tom Merry.

Denton came forward. In his hand he held a large tin of

phosphorus paste. He opened the lid, and the contents glowed luminously.

"What a wheeze!" chuckled Blake. "Denty, you're a marvel!"

"Absolutely a gem!" grinned Monty Lowther.

With a big brush Denton proceeded to write, in big, broad letters, the word FIGGINS right across the sack which imprisoned the chief of the New House juniors. Then, in turn, the others were treated to the same proceeding, until the whole dozen had their names emblazoned on the sacks.

The effect was extremely ludicrous.

In the darkness the letters glowed brilliantly, causing the forms of the sacks behind them to be almost blotted out. Seen from a distance, it looked exactly as though a series of names were written on nothingness, glowing in the darkness like spirit writing.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The victorious juniors roared.

"Oh, my hat!" sobbed Manners. "Isn't it simply gorgeous!"

"You beastly rotters!" mumbled Figgins from within his sack.

"Good old Figgy!" grinned Blake. "Hope you're nice and warm!"

Tom Merry and Denton were busy with a large banner—one which had to be carried by two juniors. On it Denton proceeded to paint the words, in huge size:

"NOTICE!"

"FIGGINS & CO.'S DOWNFALL!"

"THREE GROANS FOR THE NEW HOUSE!"

The three groans were uttered heartily, almost before the banner was raised. Tom Merry looked round at the crowd of grinning faces.

"All ready for the procession to start?" he asked.

"Ready and waiting!"

"Good egg!" said Tom Merry. "Rope the bounders up!"

In two minutes Figgins & Co. were roped together in a long line, each junior being about four feet apart. Protestations and angry threats were uttered on all sides, but they were one and all ignored.

"Now," said Denton, walking to the front of the line, "quick march!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Denton tugged at a length of line which had been left over, and the New House band were forced to walk onwards, one following the other. They were like a long snake moving along. The sacks prevented them from seeing, and they simply had to follow Denton, who was acting as guide. At first one or two of the prisoners jibbed, and refused to walk, but they soon realised that the agony and humiliation would be over sooner if they went quietly.

The victors were almost in a state of hysterics when the gates of St. Jim's hove in sight. Glyn and Herries had cut on in advance, and a whole crowd of juniors were waiting in the quad.

A roar of laughter went up as the procession entered the gates. Each name stood out clear and distinct in the darkness. Over the heads of the unfortunate New House champions the huge banner fluttered, with its wording quite distinct and readable.

"My only topper!" gasped Lumley-Lumley. "What is it?"

"Sure, an' it's an illigant jape intirely!" exclaimed Reilly, chuckling.

The New House section of the juniors roared forth their disapproval and chagrin. But they were drowned in the shouts of laughter which arose from the School House boys. Juniors and seniors alike were doubled up at the ludicrous procession.

"Little bounders!" said Cutts of the Fifth.

"It's simply ripping!" chuckled Lefevre, "that's what I say!"

Kildare pushed his way through the laughing crowd. "Look here, you young rascals," he said laughingly, "this won't do!"

"Only a harmless little jape, Kildare," said Tom Merry.

"That's all," added Denton.

"Well, there's been enough of it," said the skipper sternly, although his eyes twinkled. "Cut those ropes at once, Merry, and stop this nonsense."

"Right-ho!" grinned Blake. "The show's over now, anyhow."

"Yaas, wathah! Figgay & Co. have been shown up wippinly!" said D'Arcy.

The ropes were cut, and Figgins & Co. stood revealed, gasping, red, and sheepish. The long-limbed chief glared round at the crowd of grinning faces, and shook his fist.

"You bounders," he roared, "we'll make you sit up for this!"

"If you can," grinned Tom Merry. "Hear us smile!"

And the smile could be heard almost in Rylcombe. The New House juniors stood round, silent and glaring. They couldn't see anything to laugh at at all. But the rest could. They roared.

CHAPTER 13.

Levison Gets to Work.

FIGGINS & Co. were chipped unmercifully that night and the next morning. There was no doubt that they had been very completely and very thoroughly taken down a peg. They had been so confident that they had almost began to think the School House would never bring off another successful jape. But, as Tom Merry remarked, this great wheeze of Denton's had completely turned the tables.

The New House stood defeated and beaten.

No amount of argument made any difference. Figgins and Co. had not merely been captured and sent home; they had gone to the ruins of their own accord, had actually made prisoners of Tom Merry & Co., and had then fallen into the carefully laid trap. The whole thing, from beginning to end, had been planned beforehand—and the New House had taken the bait like mere novices.

And while all the chipping was going on Ernest Levison was thinking of his commission. He sat in his study immediately after breakfast wondering how he could gain possession of the blue envelope. It ought not to prove such a difficult task. After all, the letter was probably knocking about in Denton's box.

But it was a risky game. Levison was none too popular at St. Jim's, and everybody knew what an underhand, character he was. If he were discovered searching through Denton's box it would probably mean expulsion. And Levison had escaped being sacked once or twice before by the skin of his teeth. He didn't want to get into another scrape.

"I must do the thing carefully," he decided. "Of course, it would be best to take the blessed envelope in the daytime. There's nothing like cheek in a matter of this sort."

He paced his study thoughtfully for a few moments; then a gleam came into his eyes, and he paused in his stride.

"Yes, that ought to work," he muttered. "Anyhow, there'll be no harm in trying it on."

When morning lessons commenced Levison was looking as cool and self-possessed as usual. Nobody, to look at him, would have guessed the object he had constantly in his mind. The class settled down to work after a while, although Figgins and Co. came in for a good deal of whispered chaff. Little Mr. Lathom put a stop to it, however, by giving Blake a hundred lines to do.

Half-way through the second lesson Levison was called upon to construe. The cad of the Fourth stood up, and passed a hand across his brow. For over half an hour he had been looking rather ill, and Mr. Lathom had glanced at him once or twice.

"Now, Levison," said the Form-master, "you will proceed—"

Levison stood up, then swayed dizzily. The book fell from his hand. Levison pulled himself up with a jerk, and grasped hold of the desk.

"Are you ill, Levison?" asked Mr. Lathom concernedly.

"I'm all right, sir," muttered Levison.

Suddenly he swayed again, and fell heavily against the next desk. Clifton Dane sat there, and he held Levison up. The rest of the Form looked on in surprise.

"What's up with you, fathead?" whispered Dane.

"Good gracious, I trust you are not going to be ill!" ejaculated the little Form-master anxiously. He knew that Levison had been subject to peculiar trance-like fits in the past, and he wondered if this was another of them coming on.

Mr. Lathom walked across the room, and bent over Levison. The cad of the Fourth was certainly looking very queer.

"I'm all right, sir," muttered Levison.

"Would you like to lie down for a little while, Levison?" asked the master. "If you feel unable to continue your work you are at liberty to lie down in the dormitory or in your study—"

"I don't think so, sir," said Levison, pulling himself together. His voice was hoarse, and Mr. Lathom was anxious.

"Yes, Levison," he said sternly, "you must leave the Form-room."

"But I'm—"

"You are unwell, my boy. Either go to the matron and tell her you are feeling unwell, or lie down in your study for a little while. I insist, Levison!"

"Very well, sir," said Levison unsteadily.

He rose to his feet, swayed a little, then crossed rather uncertainly to the door. All eyes followed his progress. The door opened, and Levison passed out.

"The boy looks positively ill," said Mr. Lathom concernedly. "Now, boys, we will proceed."

"The giddy swanker!" muttered Digby, with a sniff.

"Yaas, wathah, Digbay," agreed Arthur Augustus. "Levison was shammin'. I expect the boundah wants to do somethin' private, an' so pwetended to be ill. Bai Jove, I don't twust that wottah!"

"D'Arcy, you are talking!" exclaimed Mr. Lathom mildly.

"Yaas, sir."

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NEXT WEDNESDAY: "WINTER SPORTS AT ST. JIM'S!" By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Order in Advance.

"Take fifty lines, D'Arcy!"

"Vewy good, sir," said Arthur Augustus resignedly.

But the swell of St. Jim's had been very near to the truth in his surmise. Levison certainly had been shamming, and he certainly wanted to do something private. As soon as he had reached his own study a crafty smile broke out on his dark face. He had remarkable control of his features, and it had been a simple matter for him to feign illness.

"Now to do the business!" he muttered.

He left his study, and passed down the deserted passage. Being mid-morning, everybody, masters and boys alike, were in the class-rooms, and this part of the house was quite deserted.

In three minutes Levison was in the box-room. His eyes gleamed as he saw Denton's box there in the corner. He crossed over to it, and tried to raise the lid. It refused to budge.

"Locked!" murmured Levison.

He grinned. The lock was of the ordinary common type, and should not prove a very formidable obstacle. Levison dived a hand into his pocket, and produced a bunch of little keys. He always carried them about, and had found them useful on more than one occasion.

For two or three minutes he tried various keys, but none turned the wards of the lock. At last he had gone through the whole bunch. One key had almost succeeded in turning, and he inserted this again. He turned it and twisted it, but it refused to unlock the box.

"Really, my dear Levison, you are having quite a job with that key!" said a voice suddenly.

Levison dropped the key as though it had been red hot, and turned a pale face towards the door. It had opened silently, and Skimpole, the genius of the Shell, stood just inside the door. Skimpole stared down at the Fourth-Former through his big spectacles.

"What are you doing here?" demanded Levison fiercely.

"If you will listen, I will explain," said Skimpole. "You see, my dear Levison, I happened to tip my ink-pot over a short while ago, and the ink unfortunately spilled itself on to Crooke's trousers. Of course, you will understand that it was no fault of mine. I was not to blame in any way. As a matter of fact, the accident was predestined, and nothing I could have done would have averted it. Crooke, however, became highly incensed, and immediately flung the whole contents of the ink-pot in my face. Of course, it was most

ungentlemanly of him, and I can only put it down to environment during his youth. Crooke could not be blamed for throwing the ink. Mr. Linton immediately——"

"You silly idiot!" cut in Levison. "What are you doing here?"

"Really, Levison, there is no necessity to become enraged," said Skimpole, blinking. "I was ordered to go and wash myself. I have, as you can observe, already performed that task, and thought that it would be a fitting opportunity to search for a great book on Determinism—by the famous Professor Balmcrumpet—which is in my box. I had no idea you would be here. However, since you are here, perhaps you will allow me to read you a few lines of my new book on Socialistic Reform——"

"Clear out!" said Levison, between his teeth, startled at being disturbed in such a delicate task as he was attempting. "Buzz off, you fatheaded chump!"

Skimpole backed a pace.

"Really, Levison——"

"Can't you see I'm busy?" roared Levison angrily.

The amateur Socialist of St. Jim's blinked at the box with the key sticking out of the lock.

"Dear me," he exclaimed, "I am afraid you are making a mistake, Levison!"

"A mistake, you ass——"

"That box belongs to Denton, the new boy in the Shell," said Skimpole. "I presume you are endeavouring to open it while under the impression that it is your own."

Levison bit his lip. But he had perfect control of his features, and looked surprised. He took the key from the lock, and gazed at the name on it.

"Why, so it is Denton's!" he exclaimed, in surprise. "That's funny! I wondered why the key wouldn't fit."

Skimpole beamed.

"I am glad to have been of some slight service to you, Levison," he said. "Nevertheless, it is rather peculiar that you should mistake Denton's box for your own. The Fourth Form boxes are in the next room."

Levison laughed easily.

"Oh, that's nothing," he said. "I came along the passage, and thought I had entered the Fourth Form box-room. I say, there's no need to say anything about this to the fellows, you

(Continued on the next page.)

New Year Programme

of the new star story paper "The Wonder" includes some of the most thrilling and absorbing stories ever written. The number out on Tuesday includes the following exciting yarns:

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know. They wouldn't understand like you. They might think I was trying to open Denton's box deliberately!"

"Oh, surely not!" said the genius of the Shell.

"I don't know. You won't say anything, will you?" asked Levison. "By the way, you may as well show me this new book of yours on Socialism—"

"My dear Levison, I assure you I shall say nothing about this little matter," beamed Skimpole, forgetting all else except his Socialism. "If you will come to my study I shall have much pleasure in showing you the manuscript of my great new book. You realise, of course, that it is not yet published in book form, but I am sending it to a big firm in London this week, and I confidently expect them to accept it immediately."

And Skimpole led the way to the Shell passage.

Ten minutes later Levison flung himself into his own study and slammed the door. A black frown was on his brow, and he scowled as he savagely kicked the fire.

"The interfering brute!" he muttered fiercely. "Just when I was on the point of getting the box open! Hang it! Hang Skimpole, and his rotten Socialism as well! The silly ass ought to be shoved in a lunatic asylum!"

CHAPTER 14.

Like a Thief in the Night.

"FEELING better, Levison?"

"Oh, dry up!" growled Levison savagely.

Mellish grinned. It was bedtime, and Levison was still feeling savage at having been foiled in his object. He had been forced to keep up his pretence of feeling ill, and had eaten sparsely in consequence. He was hungry now, and it did not tend to improve his temper.

The rest of the Fourth Form dormitory were still discussing the great jape against Figgins & Co. The big room rang with laughter at the New House juniors' expense.

Levison got into bed without delay. His mind was made up. He would go down to the box-room at about eleven o'clock and obtain the letter then. After all, it would perhaps be the least risky plan. If he took special pains there was no reason why he should be discovered.

"I'll get the beastly thing, and take it straight to the house on the moor," he decided, as he lay in bed. "It'll be done with then, and I shall have my ten quid—or more!"

After the usual animated conversation in bed the Fourth Form gradually dropped off to sleep. But Levison was wakeful enough. He lay there and listened to the school clock chime the quarter-hours. It was a tedious enough task, and Levison was impatient to get the matter settled and done with.

Eleven!

Levison sat up, and cautiously looked round. A creak sounded from Blake's bed, but Blake lay perfectly still, breathing regularly.

"Any of you chaps awake?" asked Levison in a low voice.

"Yes, I am," mumbled Herries. "Whatser matter?"

"Oh," said Levison, a little confused, "n-nothing, only I thought I heard a noise!"

"Oh, rats! Go to sleep!" grumbled Herries. "Wonder if Towser's all right?"

Levison lay back on his pillow with a muttered exclamation of annoyance. He had confidently expected the dormitory to be asleep, and Herries' ready answer had disconcerted him a trifle.

Fifteen minutes later he again put the murmured question. Silence!

"Isn't there anybody awake?" asked Levison.

Not a sound.

"Good!" muttered the cad of the Fourth. "I'll go right off!"

He slipped out of bed. In a very few minutes he was dressed in his trousers, shirt and coat. Then, with his boots in his hand, he crept to the door. It opened without a sound, and closed again.

Jack Blake sat up like a spring.

"The beauty!" he murmured. "Off to the Green Man, I expect!"

Levison had been quick in getting into his clothes; Blake was about half the time. He simply jumped into his things, then crept from the dormitory. He had heard Levison the first time, and had guessed that he had some game on. Therefore Blake had kept himself awake.

The passage was deserted. Blake popped into the Shell dormitory and shook Tom Merry's shoulder. Tom Merry opened his eyes, and blinked.

"Hallo, what—who's that? What's the giddy game?"

"It's me!" whispered Blake urgently.

"Blake! Well, of all—!"

"S-s-s-sh!" murmured Blake. "Levison's just gone out of the dorm. with his boots in his hand!"

"Phew! Do you mean to follow him?"

"Yes. Buck up!"

"I'm on!" said a voice behind Blake.

Philip Edgar Denton slid out of bed and coolly commenced to dress.

"I say——" began Blake.

"What you say won't make any diff., my son," said Denton calmly. "I'm going with you chaps to see what game Levison's up to. I don't like that chap!"

In less than a minute Tom Merry and Denton were ready. Tom Merry or Blake didn't object to Denton accompanying them. They rather enjoyed the new junior's company, in fact.

They crept cautiously along the corridor. When they examined the little window which was usually used by the juniors when breaking bounds at night, however, they found that it was securely fastened on the inside.

"He hasn't been through here!" muttered Blake.

"How could he have got out, then?"

"Blessed if I know," said Blake. "Let's look at the side-door."

The three juniors carefully descended the stairs. They crept along the passage to the side-door. It was pitch dark there, and Tom Merry cautiously struck a match. All three examined the door. It was locked and bolted on the inside.

"You fathead, Blake!" said Tom Merry wrathfully, carefully stamping the match head out. "Levison hasn't gone out at all!"

"Then he's still in the house," grinned Denton.

"Go hon!" said Blake. "I can't make it out, though. Levison had his boots in his hand. If he didn't mean to go out, why did he carry his boots with him?"

"Perhaps he was going to clean 'em!" suggested Denton.

"Oh, don't be funny, Denty, old man!" said Tom Merry impatiently. "Come on, we'll go back and see if we can see any sign of the rotter."

They found their way back to the Fourth Form passage. Moonlight entered the windows in a stream, and suddenly Tom Merry pointed.

"My hat!" he murmured. "Look there! They're Levison's boots!"

A pair of boots had been placed close to the skirting. They had certainly not been there when the Fourth Form went up to bed, therefore it was quite obvious that they were Levison's. The three juniors stood for a second looking at them. Then a creak on the stairs sounded. Tom Merry tugged at his companions' arms.

"Look out!" he whispered. "He's coming!"

They scurried back into the dark passage, and stood there waiting. In another moment Levison appeared, and he paused before the window. The moonlight shone in and clearly lit up Levison's form and features. The cad of the Fourth had not the least idea that he was being observed.

There was a smile of contentment on his face, and he held a blue, oblong envelope in his hand. He looked at it for a second, then stuffed it into his pocket. Fortunately, the blue envelope cracked in the process, and so made a slight noise. But for this slight noise Levison would have heard something in the other passage.

For, at sight of the envelope, Denton took half a step forward, his eyes blazing excitedly and wrathfully. He was just on the point of crying out when Tom Merry clapped a hand over his mouth.

"Shut up!" he breathed. "We'll see what Levison's going to do."

Denton controlled himself with an effort. His eyes were still blazing, and his breath came in quick gasps.

"The—the—the awful thief!" he muttered. "That letter's mine——"

Tom Merry pinched Denton's arm.

The new boy took the hint and relapsed into silence. Less than a minute later Levison, with his boots on, cautiously made his way to the little window. He clambered out quickly, without a sound.

"The rotten thief!" said Denton fiercely. "He's pinched that envelope out of my box. He must know what's in it! It's worth thousands of pounds!"

"What?" gasped Tom Merry.

"Eh?" ejaculated Blake.

"It's true! The contents of that letter are worth thousands," said Denton, his voice quivering with emotion. "Quick! We must follow him!"

Excited now, Tom Merry and Blake followed Denton up to the window. Suddenly Blake paused.

"I'll rush back and get some of the other fellows!" he said quickly. "I'll tell you what. You follow behind Levison, Tom, and Denton'll follow you. Then Denty will still be in sight when I come along. The others will follow me. There'll be a giddy procession of us!"

"Good idea," said Tom Merry. "Come on, Denton!"

The two scrambled out of the window. Meanwhile Blake hurried back to the Fourth Form dormitory. Rules and regulations were totally forgotten, and in practically less than no time Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, Herries, Digby, Lumley-Lumley and Reilly had scrambled into their clothes. Then they rapidly slipped out of the window after Blake. Blake was at the other side of the quad, for he had gone out a minute or two before. He beckoned to the newcomers to hurry.

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By MARTIN CLIFFORD,
Order in Advance.

They did so. Once out in Rylcombe Lane, Blake pointed down the moonlit road.

"There's Denton!" he said quickly. "He's keeping Tom Merry in sight—and Tommy's following Levison! You see, that way Levison won't have a whole crowd following him and giving the show away."

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy. "That's jollay smart, you know."

"My idea," said Blake modestly.

"Weally, Blake, you needn't crow about it——"

"Oh, come on!"

They hurried down the lane, for there was no necessity for them to spread out now. They were so far behind Levison that the cad of the Fourth could have no possible suspicion of their presence. Levison would have received a considerable shock had he known that no less than eight juniors were hot upon his track! Undoubtedly Blake's idea was an extremely good one, and admirably suited to the occasion, for it enabled the whole eight juniors to follow the cad of the Fourth without his being aware of it.

"Bai Jove, they've turned into the footpath leadin' through the woods!"

It was true, and very soon the crowd of juniors were following fairly close behind Denton. The new boy himself was feeling very indignant. He felt like hurrying on and forcing Levison to give up the valuable paper. Such a course, however, might end in Levison's object remaining undiscovered for ever. Therefore Denton curbed his impatience and kept Tom Merry in sight.

Suddenly the hero of the Shell stopped.

Denton came up to him breathlessly.

"Where is he?" he asked quickly.

"Just gone in that old cottage," said Tom Merry. "My hat, Denton, there's some underhand game going on here. Look, there's a light in that cottage! What the dickens is Levison doing there?"

"I mean to find out!" said Denton, through his set teeth.

"Bai Jove, heah they are, deah boys!"

"Sure, and you're right intirely!"

The others came up quickly, and Tom Merry rapidly told them what had happened.

Denton stamped about impatiently.

"I'm going!" he exclaimed firmly. "You chaps can——"

"We can go with you!" said Tom Merry. "Look here, it looks to me as if there's some danger in this. I vote we spread out and approach the cottage from different directions. Then, if it comes to a row, we can rush in and rescue that letter."

The suggestion was acted upon immediately. Without loss of time the juniors, now thoroughly excited, spread out and crept towards the cottage. Denton, Tom Merry, and Blake were the first to arrive, and they cautiously crept over the low fence and approached the window.

The blind was down, but there was about an inch slit left at the bottom, so that the occupants of the room were quite distinctly visible. Denton and Tom Merry peered in cautiously. The two men, Wright and Smith, were standing before the fire, and Levison was on the other side of the table, looking hot and flushed.

"I want twenty pounds!" the watching juniors heard him say. "I very nearly got copped pinching that rotten letter, and it's worth twenty!"

Wright had the contents of the blue envelope spread out before him.

"This—this is the thing," he said, with keen satisfaction.

"Well, Levison, since you have been so prompt, I'll spring five pounds more than I offered, and let you have fifteen."

"What's it all about?" breathed Tom Merry, mystified.

"I can't explain now," said Denton quickly. "But we must get that letter back, Merry. We must! Good heavens, it'll be terrible if that thing's stolen——"

There was a sudden stumble in the darkness close by.

"Bai Jove!" gasped a voice audibly.

The sound of a startled exclamation came from within the cottage.

"Gussy's given the show away!" cried Tom Merry loudly. "Come on, chaps!"

And the next second Tom Merry burst the cottage door open, and the whole troop of juniors crowded in.

CHAPTER 15.

The Secret Out.

THE two men started back with exclamations of rage and fear. The dramatic interruption had been so sudden that they had been totally unprepared for it. Levison, twirling round, turned the colour of chalk as he saw who the newcomers were.

"By Heavens!" he muttered blankly.

"Thunder!" shouted Wright. "The infernal young rascal has betrayed us! Quick, take these papers——"

A lithe form shot forward.

"I'll take them!" cried Denton. And, almost before the

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blackbearded man could realise what had happened, the new boy at St. Jim's had sprung forward and snatched the precious papers from Wright's hand.

"You little thief!" snarled Wright. "They're——"

"Collar them!" shouted Tom Merry, in the confusion. "Pile on to 'em!"

The juniors complied with a will. They literally flung themselves at the two men, and by sheer force of numbers both Wright and Smith were bowled over like ninepins. They rolled on the floor, roaring out threats.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, utterly regardless of consequences to his elegant trousers, rolled breathlessly on the floor in a tight embrace with Smith. Finally, Lumley-Lumley and Reilly came to the rescue, and D'Arcy sat up and groped for his monocle. He jammed it into his eye, and took a survey of the surroundings.

"Bai Jove," he said excitedly, "we've got them, deah boys! We've got the wottahs!"

Arthur Augustus had spoken truly. Both of the men were on the damp floor of the cottage, with juniors literally swarming over them. Levison stood close by, pale and trembling. All his cheek and boldness seemed to desert him, and he gazed at the triumphant juniors with consternation and alarm.

"You young scoundrels!" spluttered Wright furiously.

"What is the meaning of this outrage? By thunder, you shall suffer——"

"Bai Jove," ejaculated D'Arcy suddenly, "look at the boundah's whiskahs! Gweat Scott, they are comin' off!"

Blake leaned forward and gave Wright's whiskers a tug. They came off in Blake's hand. Denton uttered a cry of amazement, and turned white.

"Mr. Barratt!" he cried incredulously.

"Yes, Phil!" said the now clean-shaven man hoarsely.

"Order these ruffians to release me! I have been working in your interests, and——"

Denton recovered himself with his customary swiftness.

"Good heavens," he exclaimed, in an even voice, "I think I can see through it all! You will have to tell your story to the Headmaster, Mr. Barratt, and then to the police!"

"The police!" cried "Wright" wildly. "You don't mean to say——"

"I mean to say that you have tried to rob me!" flashed back Denton hotly. "Do you think you can bluff your way out of it after this? Come on, chaps, we'll take these rotters to the school and have it out before the Head!"

And in a very few minutes the pair of dejected and startled scoundrels were being marched through the moonlit woods. Levison, in a whirl of fear, followed close behind. The gates of the school were reached, and Tom Merry pulled the porter's bell. It pealed out loudly, and after some little delay Taggles appeared, grumbling. He gazed through the bars at the crowd of juniors.

"Open the gates, Taggy!" said Tom Merry. "Buck up!"

"My boye, what's the meanin' of this 'ere?" demanded Taggles. "I never see such goin's on! You young rips ought to be in bed——"

"Open the gates!" roared Blake.

Taggles grumbled, but the gates were opened. As it happened, Dr. Holmes had only just left his study to retire for the night, having been kept up by some important examination papers. He was amazed to see the crowd of juniors at his door, and still more amazed when he heard Tom Merry's account of the fight in the cottage.

"Good gracious," said the Head, "you might have been injured, my boys! But I fail to understand it all! One of these men is Mr. Robert Barratt, who is your guardian, Denton."

"I know, sir," said the new boy. "He's a treacherous rotter!"

Dr. Holmes turned to the shrinking scoundrel.

"What is the meaning of this, sir?" he asked sternly. "I understood you to say, in my former interview with you, that you had gone to Alaska?"

Robert Barratt looked up wretchedly.

"That was my intention, Dr. Holmes," he said earnestly. "Heaven forgive me! I was tempted, and proved too weak to resist it! I will make a full confession."

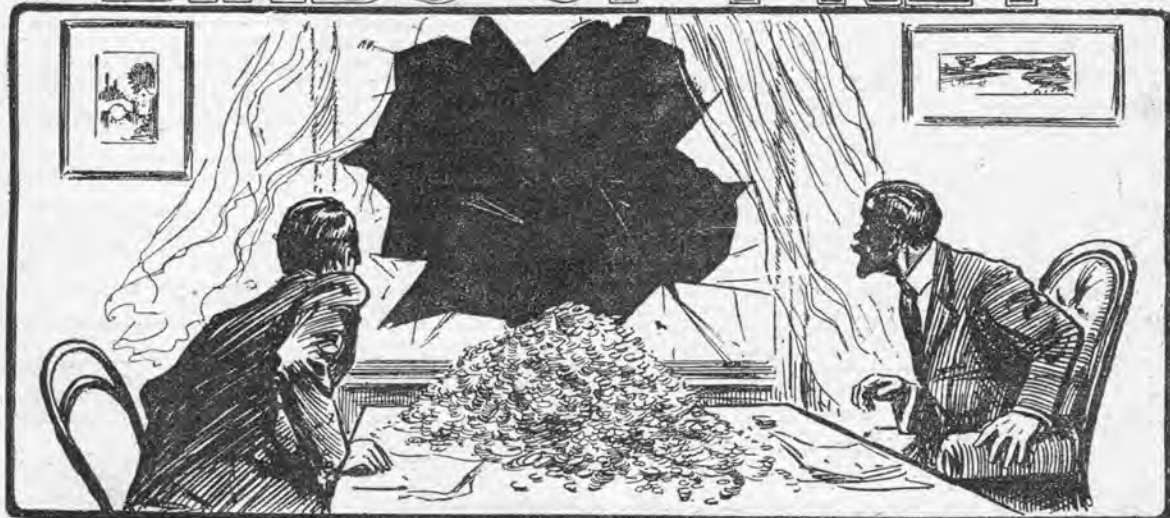
And, now thoroughly cowed, Barratt told the Head how he had given way to temptation. It seemed that when Denton's father had died—or, rather, before he had died—he had made out a plan of a cache in the hills where he had hidden a considerable fortune of gold dust and nuggets. This plan he had managed to send to Robert Barratt, an old friend in England who had charge of his son. Barratt had shown the plan to Denton, and had told the boy that it was necessary for him to go out to Alaska to clear up some minor points concerning Mr. Denton's death.

Barratt had left the plan with the boy, thus disarming Denton of any vestige of suspicion. Barratt had sent Denton to a public school, because it seemed to be the safest place for the boy to be at. Then, while Denton was at St. Jim's, Barratt had come to the district with a confederate—both of them in

(Continued on page 26.)

OUR SPLENDID SERIAL.

BIRDS OF PREY



A Thrilling Story Dealing with the Adventures of Nelson Lee, Detective.

By MAXWELL SCOTT.

WHAT HAS HAPPENED SO FAR.

Nelson Lee, the world-famous detective, is devoting all his energies to the task of breaking the power of a gigantic criminal organisation, known as the Order of the Ring. The infamous secret society is under the leadership of a man who is known to all the members as "The Chief," but who also passes under the name of Mr. Stephen Meredith. His principal lieutenants are known as "The Squire," "The Doctor," and "Lady Ursula"—a beautiful young girl with the heart of a tiger.

With the intention of forcing him to join the Order, the Chief kidnaps Jack Langley, a young engineer, and Miss Aylmer, his fiancée. Jack proves obdurate, and so the two young people remain the captives of the Order. Their only hope of release comes from Nelson Lee, who is hot on the track of the Chief and his associates.

In following up a clue, however, the detective falls into a trap, and in the subsequent fight, is stabbed and left for

dead by the roadside. A kindly colonel discovers him there, and takes him into his house near Elstree. There the detective is well cared for, and slowly recovers his shattered strength. He is strongly advised to go abroad for a rest, but will not hear of it. Despite the perils he has already encountered, he is firmly resolved—and not only resolved, but positively eager—to resume his task of hunting down the villainous birds of prey who masquerade under the name of the Order of the Ring.

"I have sworn to devote every moment of my time to exterminating this rascally society," he says. "I have vowed to rest neither night nor day until I have brought its leaders to justice, and have cleared up the mystery which at present enshrouds the fate of Jack Langley and Ethel Aylmer."

(Now go on with the story.)

On the Track Again—Recognised.

"Then what are you going to do, Mr. Lee?" asked the colonel. "Are you going back to your rooms in Gray's Inn Road?"

"Not likely!" said Nelson Lee with a laugh. "I've no desire to be murdered just yet. After what has happened, my enemies will be more vindictive than ever. My only chance of safety lies in keeping my whereabouts an absolute secret."

"Then you intend to disappear again?"

"Exactly. The last time I disappeared I assumed the character of a respectable working man, and afterwards that of a footman. This time I propose to go a step lower in the social scale. I am going to become the associate of pick-pockets, burglars, and gaol-birds. I am going to live with them, to eat with them, to drink with them. In other words, I'm going to disguise myself as a low-down, out-at-elbows tramp, and I'm going to take up my quarters at a certain so-called 'model' lodging-house which is well known to the police as the rendezvous of the lowest dregs of the criminal world. Do not ask me where this lodging-house is, for I wish you to be able to say with perfect truth that you do not know where I have gone."

"I see the idea," said the colonel. "You are going to take up your residence amongst the scum of the criminal world, in the hope that by listening to their conversation you may be able to pick up some information which will put you on the track of the Order of the Ring."

"Exactly!" said Nelson Lee, for the second time.

In that part of the great metropolis which bears the name of Bermondsey, and almost opposite St. Katherine's Docks, is a narrow, ill-paved alley known as Dobbler's Court. It is entered from the main street by a low, dark archway, which is also the only means of exit, for the alley is a blind one, and is closed at the end by a rather large and very grimy house, the back of which overlooks the River Thames.

In the whole of London it would be hard to find a viller or less inviting spot than Dobbler's Court. So evil is its reputation, so ruffianly its denizens, that no policeman ever dares to invade its squalid precincts single-handed. Its condition has somewhat improved since the date of our story, but at the time of which we write every house in the court—and there were seven all told—was a hotbed of crime.

Jemmies, dark-lanterns, skeleton-keys, and all the paraphernalia of the burglar's art could be purchased or hired at No. 2 and No. 6; stolen property could be readily disposed of at No. 1 and No. 3; moulds and presses for the manufacture of counterfeit coin were on sale at No. 5; No. 4 was an opium-den and gambling-hell combined; and No. 7, the big house at the end of the court, was Danzy's Model Lodging-house for Single Men.

"Danzy's," as it was usually called, was a veritable harbour of refuge for those who had broken the law. Escaped convicts, ex-gaolbirds, men who were wanted by the police for murder, theft, or any other form of crime, all these took shelter in Danzy's Model Lodging-house, where no questions were asked, and where they were allowed to "lie low" for just as long as they were able to pay the modest sum of a shilling a day for board and lodging.

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"WINTER SPORTS AT ST. JIM'S!"

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.
Order in Advance.

To this vile den, at half-past nine on a moonless night in April, came an unwashed, unshaven, beery-looking tramp. His clothes—save the mark!—were little more than an assortment of rags, held together with string; his feet were encased in the remains of an odd pair of boots; and between his tobacco-discoloured teeth was a short clay pipe, charged with foul-smelling shag.

As the reader has doubtless guessed, this ill-favoured tramp was Nelson Lee. Partly for the purpose of hiding from the scoundrels who were thirsting for his life, and partly in the hope of obtaining some clue to the Order of the Ring, he was going to seek lodgings at Danzy's, though no one knew better than he that by venturing into Danzy's, he was practically carrying his life in his hands. His fellow-lodgers would be the scum of the criminal classes. Most of them would probably have been in prison at one time or another, and some of them would doubtless have been sent there by Nelson Lee himself. What would be likely to happen if he were recognised? The bare idea made him shiver. A stab in the back, a blow with a life-preserver, a splash in the river, and Nelson Lee would have disappeared—this time in reality and for good.

He shuffled through the archway which gave admittance to the court. He hobbled up to the door of Danzy's. He opened it, and entered. He then found himself in a short and narrow passage, at the end of which was another door. This latter door was closed and locked. He rapped upon it with his knuckles, and in the twinkling of an eye a voice from out the darkness said:

"What do you want?"

"A night's lodgings," said Nelson Lee, in a thick, unsteady voice.

"Ever been here before?" asked the voice.

"No."

"I thought not, or you'd ha' known the signal. Who's your reference?"

"Hair-oil Dick," said Nelson Lee, quoting the name of a notorious burglar whom he had once assisted to arrest.

"That's good enough," said the voice. "Any pal of Hair-oil Dick's is welcome here."

As the voice ceased speaking, a small trapdoor was opened in the passage wall, for all the world like a ticket-office at a railway-station. Through this door the detective saw the evil-looking face of Ebenezer Danzy, the proprietor of the house. He favoured Nelson Lee with a long and searching stare, then he nodded his head.

"You'll do," he said. "Let's see the colour of your money."

"How much?" asked Nelson Lee.

"A bob."

The detective produced a sixpence and six coppers, and passed them through the trap.

Danzy raked them into a till, and then stooped down and pulled at an iron ring in the floor. As if by magic, the door at the end of the passage flew open.

"First door on the right if you want any supper," said Danzy.

The detective passed through the open door, which immediately closed behind him with a harsh, metallic clang.

Danzy pulled down the trap, then turned to a coarse-looking ruffian, who was toasting his toes at the office fire.

"Do you know who that was?" he asked, his voice vibrating with suppressed excitement. "It was Nelson Lee, the 'tec.'"

"Nelson Lee!" gasped the man, leaping to his feet with a startled oath. "It was him wot got me lagged for that little affair at Norwood!"

"I know it!" said Danzy. And his eyes glittered with malignant triumph. "You're not the only man in the house that owes him a grudge, and, by hokey, he shall be paid in full! Come with me!"

Nelson Lee at Bay.

All unconscious of the storm which was gathering round his head, the detective turned, as Danzy had directed him, into the first room on the right of the passage.

It was a long, low-roofed, stone-flagged room, with an iron-barred window at one end and a door at the other. On one side was an empty fireplace, with a flaming gas-jet immediately above it. On the other side, opposite the fireplace, was a low, arched doorway, leading into the kitchen. A rough deal table, long and narrow, ran down the middle of the room, and was flanked on each side by wooden forms. Seated at this table were a dozen or fifteen of the vilest and dirtiest blackguards which the City of London could produce. Some of them were playing farthing nap with a greasy pack of cards; others were having supper, which, on this particular evening, consisted of a sickly-looking broth, served in small tin mugs. On a form in front of the fireplace were a couple of men who had recently "done time" for a burglary at

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Hampstead, and who were now comparing notes as to likely "cribs to crack."

All this, and more, impressed itself on Nelson Lee's mind the moment he entered the room. The result was somewhat disquieting. Amongst the men who were playing cards, he recognised two who were wanted by the police for burglary, and one who had escaped from Dartmoor after murdering a warder. Both the men who were sitting in front of the fireplace had been hunted down and sent to penal servitude by Nelson Lee himself. The rest were strangers to him, but if their faces were anything to judge by, they were quite as bad as their companions, and would, doubtless, be equally willing to slit the detective's throat if they found out who he was. Truly it was a pretty little hornets' nest into which Nelson Lee had thrust his head!

Having obtained a mug of soup and a chunk of bread, he shuffled to the far end of the room, and seated himself at the table.

Scarcely had he done so, ere the door was suddenly flung open, and Danzy appeared. He was armed with a couple of revolvers, one in each hand, and, levelling these at Nelson Lee, he cried out in a ringing voice:

"Gentlemen, allow me to introduce you to the famous Nelson Lee!"

At the mention of the great detective's name, every man in the room immediately leapt to his feet, and the rafters rang with a deafening chorus of startled oaths and vindictive yells. Knives flashed into sight as if by magic, their steely glitter mingling with the duller hues of life-preservers and knuckledusters. One man snatched up the poker, another seized the tongs, a third whipped out an antiquated Colt.

To everybody's surprise, the detective never stirred. He was seated at the end of the table which was farthest from the door, and his head was exactly in a line with the muzzles of Danzy's revolvers. Behind him was an iron-barred window, and between him and the door was a yelling mob of infuriated ruffians, thirsting for his blood. His life was literally trembling in the balance—was hanging by the slenderest thread. Yet his face remained as calm and impassive as when he had entered the room, and he munched away at his chunk of stale bread with an air of the utmost unconcern.

Such phenomenal coolness staggered them. If he had risen to his feet, if his hand had stolen a single inch towards his pocket, the occupants of the room would have flung themselves upon him in a trice, and would have doubtless made short work of him. But the very fact that he treated them with such undisguised contempt completely took their breath away, and they gazed at him and at each other and at Danzy in sheepish indecision.

"It's all right, my lads!" cried Danzy, still standing in the doorway with the two revolvers in his outstretched hands. "He knows it's all U P with him, and that it's no use showing fight! Stand out of the line of fire, and leave him to me. We may as well have some fun with him before we put his light out!"

The crowd divided itself into two, leaving a clear space between Danzy and the detective.

"Prisoner at the bar, you are charged with being Nelson Lee!" said Danzy, with a wink at his accomplices. "Are you guilty of this serious offence?"

A roar of laughter greeted this clumsy attempt at wit. But the detective made no response. He broke off a piece of bread, and deliberately popped it into his mouth. Then he raised the tin mug to his lips, and slowly swallowed a draught of the soup.

"Silence gives consent," continued Danzy. "Gentlemen of the jury, the accused has pleaded guilty. I will now proceed to cross-examine him. Prisoner at the bar, why have you come to Dobbler's Court?"

The detective drained the last of the soup, and pushed away the mug.

"Do you hear what I say—you at the end of the table?" roared Danzy, beginning to lose his temper.

"I beg your pardon!" said Nelson Lee, looking up with a start of affected surprise. "Are you speaking to me?"

"Of course I am!" said Danzy. "Why have you come to Dobbler's Court? Who are you after?"

The detective glanced round the room, and stifled a yawn.

"Nobody in particular," he drawled.

"That's a lie!" said Danzy curtly. "We aren't fools, and you don't come over us with a tale like that. What's your little game?"

The detective shrugged his shoulders, but vouchsafed no reply. Danzy's drink-sodden face grew purple with rage and chagrin. The "fun" which he had promised seemed a long time coming. He began to feel that he was making himself a trifle ridiculous in the eyes of his lodgers.

"Ere, cut it short, guv'nor!" cried one of the latter

impatiently. "We've had enough of parley-vo! You've got the drop on him. Shoot him and 'ave done with it, or else let us 'ave a go!"

"You mind your own business!" snarled Danzy viciously. "I'm boss of this 'ere shanty, and I'm going to see the thing through in my own way. He's had his fling at us in the days gone by, but it's our turn now, and, by hokey, we'll make the best of it! He'll find his tongue before I've done with him, you bet!"

He turned to one of the men on his left.

"Fetch a rope!" he said. "You'll find one in the lumber-room upstairs."

The man withdrew, and presently returned with a coil of hempen cord.

"Stand up, and hold up your hands!" said Danzy, calling across the room to Nelson Lee.

The detective eyed him coolly, but did not stir.

"What for?" he asked.

"Stand up!" roared Danzy, with a menacing flourish of his revolvers.

Once more the detective shrugged his shoulders. He placed his hands on the edge of the table, as though he were going to drag himself to his feet. Then he suddenly slid down from the form on which he was sitting, and vanished beneath the table.

Quick as thought, Danzy pressed the trigger of one of his revolvers. But the action came too late. The bullet merely ruffled the hair on the detective's vanishing head, and, before the rest of the scoundrels could recover their presence of mind, the detective whipped out his revolver, thrust his arm between the table and the form, and fired at the gas-bracket over the fireplace.

True to its aim, the bullet struck the bracket an inch or two behind the burner, and cut it clean in two. As a natural consequence of this, the light went out, and the room was instantly plunged into utter darkness.

"The kitchen—the kitchen!" yelled Danzy, dancing with excitement. "I'll look after this door, and one of you strike a light!"

Shouting, cursing, stumbling over each other in the darkness, the crowd made a rush for the low, arched doorway already described. In the meantime, however, the detective had crawled from under the table, and, charging into the thick of them from behind, under cover of the darkness, he scattered them to right and left, and sprang through the archway into the kitchen.

The kitchen was a small and evil-smelling apartment, on a slightly lower level than the room from which he had escaped. The embers of a dying fire were still in the grate, and by means of their ruddy glow he perceived a couple of doors. One of them, apparently the outer door, was locked and chained. The other stood slightly ajar, and in less time than it takes to tell the detective dragged it open, and took to his heels down a narrow, stone-flagged passage, which led to the rear of the house.

At the end of this passage was an iron-sheeted door, which gave on to the river. It was the only door in the passage, except the one through which he had entered from the kitchen.

To his dire dismay, he discovered that it was not only locked and bolted, but was also barricaded by a couple of iron bars, secured by massive padlocks.

In other words, he was caught like a rat in a trap. To continue his flight was impossible, for nothing less than dynamite would have sufficed to burst open the door. To retrace his steps would have meant immediate capture and death, for his pursuers—he could not see them, but he could hear them—had already entered the passage, and were making it re-echo with their yells of execration.

It was not a time to be over-scrupulous. Without a moment's hesitation, he levelled his revolver, and emptied a couple of barrels into the darkness. A scream of pain told him that one at least of the shots had taken effect. The uproar doubled and trebled itself. For a moment his pursuers hung back, then they plucked up their courage and made a concerted rush.

Mystery of mysteries! They reached the end of the passage, and flung themselves on the door. They fumbled around in the darkness, and laid hold on—nothing! The door was still shut, and locked and barred and bolted, but the man they sought had disappeared.

One of them struck a match. Another ran back to tell Danzy, who was still mounting guard on the supper-room door.

"He's gone!" he gasped, with more than a suspicion of awe in his voice.

"Gone!" roared Danzy, with a furious oath. "Where?"

"Dunno!" said the man. "He ran down that passage which leads out of the kitchen. We started to go after him, but he drew a bead on us, and shot poor Dolan in the leg.

We stopped for a second to see who it was that was hurt; then we made a rush, and found that he wasn't there. It's the most mysterious—"

"Mysterious be hanged!" said Danzy scornfully. "I'll show you where he's gone."

He crossed to the kitchen, and strode to the end of the passage. He called for a light, and pointed to a small square opening in the passage ceiling, which was not more than seven feet from the ground.

"That's where he's gone, you idiots!" he growled. "But you needn't excite yourselves. He can't escape, if we only look spy. Half of you stay here, to prevent him coming down again. The rest of you come with me."

Danzy's explanation of the detective's disappearance was perfectly correct. When the latter fired his two revolver shots, as already described, the flashes revealed the opening in the ceiling, and, with characteristic promptitude, he thrust his revolver into his pocket, made an opening with his hands, and hauled himself through.

Owing to the all-pervading darkness, he was unable at first to make out where he was. But when one of his pursuers struck a match, the light, streaming up through the open trapdoor, showed him that he was in the lumber-room, a whitewashed apartment, crowded with boxes and crates of every size and shape.

He glided to the door, and found that it was locked and bolted on the outside. He stole to the window, which overlooked the river, and discovered that it had been boarded up. And whilst he was standing hesitating what to do, he heard the voice of Danzy in the passage underneath.

"He can't escape if we look spy!" he heard him say. "Half of you stay here, to prevent him coming down again. The rest of you come with me."

This could only mean that Danzy and half a dozen of his lodgers were coming upstairs, with the object of breaking into the lumber-room and overpowering him. To remain where he was meant certain death; to escape, seemed out of the question. Yet never for a moment did the thought come into his mind of resigning himself to his fate. On the contrary, he flattered himself that, with average luck, he could keep them at bay until he made good his escape.

In feverish haste he dragged a number of the heaviest boxes across the room, and piled them up against the inside of the door. Then he set to work with savage desperation to wrench away the rotten boards which had been nailed in front of the window.

When half his task had been accomplished, his pursuers arrived outside the door. Finding that they could not open it, they procured an axe, and proceeded to make matchwood of the panels. When a large enough hole had been made, a log of wood was pushed into the room, and used as a battering-ram on the barricade of boxes.

One by one the boxes were overturned or pushed aside. And one by one the boards in front of the window were wrenched away by Nelson Lee.

Inch by inch the door was forced back on its rusty hinges. And inch by inch the breach which Nelson Lee was making increased in size.

It was a grim and desperate race, and it was won by Nelson Lee. For, just as the last of the boxes was overturned, just as the door flew open, just as Danzy and the rest burst into the room with a cry of triumph, just at that moment the detective threw up the window-sash, leaped on to the sill, and dived into the river.

Half mad with baffled rage, Danzy rushed to the window and fired. But the night was dark, and the river was flowing rapidly, and his bullet found its billet in the bottom of the Thames.

And before he could fire a second shot the detective was out of range.

On the Track.

For a minute or two Nelson Lee was content to drift down-stream; then he struck out for the opposite bank, and in due course came to the foot of a flight of wooden steps, which led up to one of the wharves on the north side of the river. As he dragged himself out of the water, he heard the sound of voices on the wharf, and a moment later the light of a lantern flashed into his face.

"I told you so," said a gruff but not unkindly voice. "Hallo, you there! What's your little game?"

"It's all right, mister," said the detective, in a feigned voice. "I've had a bit of an accident, that's all."

He shook himself like a Newfoundland dog, and scrambled up the slimy steps. Upon reaching the top, he perceived that the man with the lantern was the night watchman employed by the owners of the wharf. With him was another man, whose dress proclaimed the sailor.

"My! What a sight you are!" said the watchman. "What on earth has happened?"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 256.

NEXT WEDNESDAY: "WINTER SPORTS AT ST. JIM'S!" By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Order in Advance.

The detective opened his mouth to reply, but before he could speak the sailor suddenly exclaimed, in a startled voice:

"Great Scott! Why, it's Nelson Lee!"

A look of vexation crossed the detective's face, for his intention had been to keep his identity a secret.

"Yes, it's Nelson Lee," he said, turning to the sailor. "And who are you, pray?"

"I'm—I'm a friend of the watchman's," stammered the sailor, in some confusion. "I saw you once at Bow Street, and that's how I knew who you were."

The detective favoured him with a keen and penetrating start. Something in the man's appearance struck him as familiar. He had seen him before—of that he was absolutely certain—but where or when he could not for the life of him remember.

"You look as if you'd been in the wars, Mr. Lee," said the watchman, who was dying to hear the detective's story.

"I have," said Nelson Lee. "I've been paying a visit to Danzy's Model Lodging-House, but, in spite of my disguise, the worthy Ebenezer recognised me, and, in order to escape his too-pressing attentions, I had to take to the river."

"You were a brave man to venture into Dobbler's Court, even in disguise," said the watchman. "You were after one of the lodgers, I suppose?"

"No. The fact of the matter is that I decided to retire into hiding again, just as I did a couple of months ago, and I selected Danzy's place because I thought it was the last spot in the world where my enemies would think of looking for me."

"Your enemies?"

"Yes. The Order of the Ring, you know."

"Then where are you going now?"

"I don't exactly know. I don't want to go to my rooms in Gray's Inn Road, for if I do the probability is that I shall be murdered before to-morrow morning. On the other hand, I can hardly hope to obtain any other lodgings in these wet and filthy rags."

"Come with me, then," said the sailor eagerly. "I only live a couple of streets away, and there's nobody lives with me but a deaf old woman, who keeps house for me. I could lend you a suit of clean clothes, and you could stay with me for just as long as ever you wished. Do come! I should be awfully glad to have you; and I'd never breathe a word to any living soul about you being at my house."

Again the detective stared at him. Such open-handed generosity excited his suspicions. Who was this fellow, and why was he so eager to persuade him to go with him? Where had he seen this fellow before?

The answer came like a flash of inspiration. He remembered now! When last he had seen this sailor he was standing on the Dolphin's deck, with a rifle in his hand. In other words, he was one of the Dolphin's crew—one of those who had escaped from the wreck with the Chief and the Doctor, and, as all the Dolphin's crew were members of the Order of the Ring, it followed as a matter of course that this man was a member too.

In the twinkling of an eye the detective's mind was made up. He would accompany the sailor to his home, in the hope that he might thereby find some clue to the whereabouts of the rest of the scoundrels he was hunting down.

"I am much obliged to you, Mr.—er—what is your name, by the way?" he asked.

"Knight," said the sailor promptly.

"I am much obliged to you, Mr. Knight," continued Nelson Lee. "If you really think that you could do with me for a day or two I should only be too delighted to accept your offer. But you are sure that I shall not be putting you to any inconvenience?"

"Not in the least," said Knight. And his face beamed with delight. "I should consider it an honour to have you under my roof, and to feel that I was helping you, in ever such a slight degree, to carry out the difficult task on which you are engaged."

"Then lead the way," said Nelson Lee.

(Another long instalment of this thrilling serial next Wednesday, when it is related how Nelson Lee once more gets on the track of the principals of The Order of the Ring, is within an ace of running them to earth, but is again baffled at the critical moment.)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 256.
"THE MAGNET" LIBRARY,
Every Monday.

THE NEW BOY'S SECRET.

(Continued from page 22.)

disguise—and planned to rob Denton of the plan. In this way Denton would simply miss the plan, and know nothing about how it came to be lost. He could not possibly dream of implicating Mr. Barratt. The guardian would return home after a month or two and would say that all was ready for him to go out and fetch the gold. Denton would then have told him that the plan was stolen. How could Denton have guessed that Barratt himself was the culprit?

The scheme was certainly ingenious, and but for the cure juniors of St. Jim's, would have been successful.

"It is a miserable story," said the Head sternly, when he had heard all. "In addition to robbing this young lad, you deliberately dragged into your plot another junior of this school—Levison. I will not say that Levison was not greatly to blame, but I have no doubt that you intimidated him into working out your rascally scheme."

"Yes, sir; that's right!" said Levison eagerly.

"Silence!" exclaimed Dr. Holmes sternly. "Levison, you may go to your dormitory. I will deal with you to-morrow. I shall not expel you, because I believe you have been practically forced to do this man's will. Nevertheless, I shall give you a severe flogging. Go, sir!"

Levison went, feeling quite relieved.

"As for you, you scoundrels, I shall immediately send for the police—"

Denton interposed.

"Don't you think, sir, it would be best to let the matter drop?" he asked quietly. "We don't want a public scandal about St. Jim's, sir; and, after all, I've got the plan. Barratt's had all his trouble for nothing, so why not let him go? I'm sure I don't want to give him in charge of the police, although he deserves it."

Dr. Holmes lifted his eyebrows.

"You have a generous heart, my boy," he said. "But the story would get about. All these boys here know about it—"

"We shouldn't say a word, sir!" said Tom Merry quickly.

"Rather not, sir!" added Blake.

"Bai Jove, the affair would be kept a stwict secwet, doctah!"

"Sure, an' so it would!"

All the juniors were agreed upon it. They would keep the matter a dead secret. Robert Barratt and his wretched companion listened with anxious ears. The doctor thought for a moment, then he looked sternly at the two miserable men.

"Owing to this lad's kindness—the lad whom you tried to rob—you are being given a chance to escape," said the Head coldly. "Go! And never allow your faces to be seen in the vicinity of St. Jim's again! If they are, or if you try to molest this lad further, I will immediately take steps to have you arrested. That is all. Go!"

Dr. Holmes pointed to the door.

A minute later the two scoundrels slunk out and vanished into the night.

The juniors kept their word. Not a word was breathed about the midnight adventure, and the rest of St. Jim's never knew about that exciting hour. Taggles was given a liberal tip to hold his tongue, and everything turned out satisfactorily.

Denton stayed at St. Jim's another ten days, then Dr. Holmes learned that a relative of one of the seniors—a nobleman's son—was travelling out to Alaska. Dr. Holmes arranged that Denton should go out to Alaska with this gentleman, and both were more than agreeable.

A big feed was given to Denton on his last night at St. Jim's, and Tom Merry's study was packed to overflowing. And the following morning Tom Merry & Co. were given leave to see Denton off at the station.

It was a rather regretful little crowd of juniors who tramped back to St. Jim's in the keen morning sunlight. Denton had made himself thoroughly at home while he had been at the old school, and the School House was very sorry to part with the junior who had been known so recently as the Terrible Three's new chum.

THE END.

Admirers of Tom Merry should buy our new Companion Paper THE PENNY POPULAR, just out, and read the splendid tale dealing with the famous junior's early schooldays.—
EDITOR.

Our Companion Papers. "THE PENNY POPULAR." Every Friday.

DO YOU WANT TO GO TO SEA?

By AN OLD SALT.

SO you want to be a sailor, do you? Faith, then, it's only natural that you should! It's in the British blood, and we are all proud of our nautical predominance, or, in other words, our knack of holding our own. To be a sailor means that you possess pluck and physical qualities second to none; and when you are a sailor, then you can throw out your chest, hitch up your trousers, let the winds of heaven beat on your manly form, and say, as you look in the face of the world: "Tis such as I who feed and clothe you, protect your happy shores, make it possible for you to go from one end of the world to the other in ease and comfort."

I say when you are a sailor!

But to become a sailor is not quite so easy as you may imagine. Jack ashore is a very different being from Jack aboard. I mean, in his appearance and surroundings.

We have been told by numberless singers that "All the nice girls love a sailor." Quite right, too! Well, you have seen scores of our splendid lads in their natty uniforms attracting the female eye, as the magnet does the needle.

Now, which do you prefer? Do you wish to join the Navy or the Merchant Service? You don't know? Well, I'll explain how to join the Navy first; then you can see how to go about it.

Any Naval recruiting station will supply all the information you may require on your making application. But if under age, you will have to have your parent's or your guardian's sanction for the step you intend taking before the authorities will listen to you.

Well, let's suppose you are found fit and your character is good. You will then be sent to one of the training depots—Chatham, Devonport, or Portsmouth.

Here you will find all sorts of decent fellows, and some of the other sort. The doctor at the depot will again put you through a strict and searching examination, for no weaklings are wanted in the Service. It is not a nursery, but a hard school.

Early in the morning—so early, indeed, that you wonder if the bugler has not made a mistake in the time—you will hear the voice of the watch ringing around the hundreds of hammocks, shouting:

"Show leg—show leg!" and "Now, you lubbers, jump up and stow hammocks!" If you are not quick enough, you will find yourself playfully tumbled on to the cold deck, and wonder, as I did, how on earth you come to be there.

But you have no time to sit and rub that little bump, for as you look around, you wonder how the dickens those hundreds of hammocks disappeared. And as you sit and think, another sound falls on your ears:

"Swabbers on deck! Ahoy, you lubber! What are you doing there in the middle of the day? Stow that hammock and get to quarters!"

Up you jump, but you are all behind. The "mess" you are in have all stowed their hammocks, and are now well on their way scrubbing the decks, polishing the brasswork, or washing the paintwork. You have failed to answer your name at "muster," and when it is time to go ashore, you will probably find that you are docked for your shore leave for any time up to a week.

But, on the other hand, the fact of your being a recruit may get off with a caution.

But let us suppose again that you are as smart and able as the rest of your mates. The work is hard—hard, mind you! You will find plenty to eat—if you are quick. No allowance is made for the fact that you are new—at the mess-table! The sea air gives you an enormous appetite, and a little spare cash, spent at the canteen, is very necessary for your comfort until you find your way about ship, and about the mess-table in particular.

You will be drilled for about five hours each day, besides doing other work necessary to the cleanliness of the ship.

You will be allowed a portion of rum, well mixed with water, every day; but if you are a total abstainer—which I would strongly advise you to become if you are not so already—you may draw money instead. The same way with the one pound of tobacco allowed you once a month. If you do not smoke, you can have ready money for your share from any of the ship's company.

You must not take the tobacco ashore. You will find yourself searched by the dock police on your leaving the dockyard.

(This breezy and interesting article will be continued in next Wednesday's "Gem" Library.)

A NEW FREE CORRESPONDENCE EXCHANGE.

The only names and addresses which can be printed in these columns will be from those readers living in any of our Colonies who desire Correspondents in Great Britain and Ireland.

Colonists sending in their names and addresses for insertion in the columns of this popular story-book must state what kind of correspondent is required—boy or girl, English, Scotch, Welsh, or Irish.

Would-be correspondents must send with each notice two coupons, one taken from "The Gem," and one from the same week's issue of its companion paper, "The Magnet" Library. Coupons will always be found on page 2 of both papers, and requests for correspondents not containing these two coupons will be absolutely disregarded.

Readers wishing to reply to advertisements appearing in this column must write to the advertisers direct. No correspondence with advertisers can be undertaken through the medium of this office.

All advertisements for insertion in this Free Exchange should be addressed: "The Editor, 'The Gem' Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C."

Miss Olive Ball, Hastings, Parramatta Road, Concord, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with a schoolboy living in England or Scotland.

B. Burns, Cesnock Street, Kurri-Kurri, via Maitland, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with a boy reader of "The Gem" living in the British Isles, about 15 or 16 years of age.

Miss V. Tanner, 19, Service Street, Glebe, Hobart, Tasmania, wishes to correspond with a reader, age about 14 years.

W. Halliday, 90, Mount Alexander Road, Flemington, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader, age about 17.

C. A. Dignum, Truroville, King William Road, Hyde Park, S. Australia, wishes to correspond with a young lady, age 17-18, residing in England.

Miss G. Clark, age 17, 28, Columbus Street, Toronto, Canada, wishes to correspond with a boy reader in the Army or Navy.

H. Channing, 171, New Gower Street, St. John's, Newfoundland, wishes to correspond with a reader of "The Gem," age 16 or 17.

L. G. Williams, 401, Coristine Buildings, Montreal, Canada, wishes to correspond with a boy or girl reader about 15 years of age.

C. H. Phillips, P.O., Alberton, via Germiston, Transvaal, South Africa, wishes to correspond with a boy or girl reader living in England or Wales, age 17-9.

Miss R. Morgan, 27, Ackland Street, Adelaide, South Australia, wishes to correspond or exchange picture postcard views with two public schoolboys in Ireland, Wales, or India, age 16-7.

G. L. Shakespeare, 115, Crystal Street, Petersham, Sydney, Australia, wishes to correspond with a young English lady, about 19.

G. Sturlese, 3, Main Street, Johannesburg, South Africa, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in England.

P. E. Tate, 9, Rose Street, Beaconsfield, South Africa, wishes to correspond with a reader—boy—living in the British Isles or Canada.

N. Doyetone, 42, Railway Cottages, Volksrust, South Africa, wishes to correspond with a boy or girl reader living in the British Isles, age about 12 or 14.

H. D. Love, 71½, Windsor Street, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, wishes to correspond with readers living in the British Isles.

J. Reed, 367, Bourgeois Street, Montreal, P.Q., Canada, wishes to correspond with a girl reader in England. Age about 15.

The Editor specially requests Colonial Readers to kindly bring the Free Correspondence Exchange to the notice of their friends.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 256.

NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"WINTER SPORTS AT ST. JIM'S!"

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.
Order in Advance.

OUR SPECIAL WEEKLY FEATURE



For Next Wednesday.

"WINTER SPORTS AT ST. JIM'S,"

By Martin Clifford.

The title of this, our next long, complete tale of Tom Merry & Co., is self-explanatory, and it is enough to say of it here that it is packed from beginning to end with fun, adventure, and frolic amidst snow and ice. The iron grip of King Frost is upon the land, and Tom Merry & Co. are not slow to take advantage of the fact in their own vigorous way. For the time being, football is at a discount, and

"WINTER SPORTS AT ST. JIM'S"

are all the rage. Don't miss this jolly, exhilarating, and seasonable school story, whatever you do!

Cash Prizes for "Gem" Readers.

I have great pleasure in announcing to my chums this week a simple and interesting little competition in connection with our grand companion paper, "The Penny Popular." I am offering eight cash prizes to be won in this contest, for which there is no entrance fee whatever. The only condition of entrance being that every competitor should buy an extra copy of "The Penny Popular" for one, two, or three weeks.

Considering the value for money which our grand companion paper gives, I do not think my chums will regard this condition as being very severe! Now, to explain the idea to my reader-friends. All you have to do is this: When buying your copy of "The Penny Popular," on Friday—of course, you all read our jolly little companion paper—buy an extra copy, and give it to one of your friends or acquaintances who has not seen "The Penny Popular" before. Ask him—or her—to read it through carefully, and next time you meet him, ask him the question: "Well, what do you think of 'The Penny Popular'?"

It is your friend's answer to this question that I want you to write down on a postcard and send to me. In this way I shall get a large number of straightforward and unbiased opinions—exactly what I want, of course! I shall specially look out for postcards which give a short, pithy summing-up, fair, helpful criticism, briefly expressed, and terse and very-much-to-the-point comments. To the senders of what I consider to be the four best postcards, containing the most neatly-expressed opinions of hitherto non-reading friends, I shall award cash prizes of 10s. each; to the senders of the four next-best postcard-opinions, cash prizes of 5s. each. This contest applies only to three numbers of "The Penny Popular"—Nos. 13, 14, and 15 respectively. Buy an extra copy of either, or each, of these issues of our famous companion-paper, give it to a non-reading friend, write down that friend's opinion on a postcard, and post it to "The Editor 'The Gem' Library, the Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C." By buying extra copies of "The Penny Popular," readers may send in as many friends' opinions as they like, and this applies to either or all of the three issues of that paper, Nos. 13, 14, and 15. The last day for sending in postcards is Monday, January 20th, 1913—that is, the Monday following the day of issue of No. 15 of "The Penny Popular."

Now, in connection with this interesting little competition, I have a special word for my numerous Colonial readers. I have decided to institute a

SPECIAL COLONIAL SECTION

for their benefit, and to award

FOUR ADDITIONAL CASH PRIZES

—two of 10s. each, and two of 5s. each—for this section alone. Only my "Overseas" chums, who live outside the British Isles, will be eligible to compete in this section, which will be kept open long enough to give "Gemites" living in the very furthest corners of the world a chance to take part in it. The actual date of closing the Colonial section of the competition will be announced later. The rules for Colonials are exactly the same as those for home readers—send your postcards in to the Editor, and don't forget to put your name and full address on them.

This competition will only be open to readers of "The Gem" and its companion paper "The Magnet" Library.

A Record Feat.

J. S., of Nottingham, asks me a football question, telling me that my answer will settle a very heated argument that he has been having with a friend. I have pleasure in publishing my Nottingham chum's question and the answer, since, curiously enough, I have had several other queries from readers lately on the same subject. J. S. asks me whether a goal has ever been kicked from goal in First League football. The answer is, "Yes." Charley Williams, the goalkeeper of Sunderland, Norwich City, and Brentford fame, once performed this record feat. I have the famous goalkeeper's own authority for the statement. He was playing for Sunderland, took a goal-kick, and a powerful wind carried the ball well to the opposition goal, where it glanced off a player, and passed between the posts. I have an idea that this wonderful performance has never been repeated in First League football, although I understand it has been done in minor leather-chasing circles. If any readers can furnish a similar instance with particulars of the match in which it occurred, I shall be glad to hear from them.

Replies in Brief.

H. Stovell (N.W.).—Thanks for your criticisms and suggestions. I leave the "Penny Popular" to speak for itself.

L. S. C. (Barnsley).—Thanks for letter. You will no doubt have seen by now the article in "The Gem" Library giving hints on increasing the height.

"A Gemite," G. J. F. (N.).—By the time you read this answer it will be quite safe to let your birds loose.

M. J. Heaven (Wynnad, Tasmania).—Thanks for letter. I am sorry it is impossible for me to insert your request for back numbers now that the column is closed. No. 1 of the "Gem" Library is now out of print and therefore unobtainable.

THE EDITOR.

"THE GEM" CALENDAR FOR 1913.

Cut this out and put it in a small photograph frame. Useful for your bedroom mantelpiece.

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Jan.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Feb.	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Mar.	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
Apr.	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
May	29	30	31				
June							
July							
Aug.							
Sep.							
Oct.							
Nov.							
Dec.							

"I'll take it somewhere and lose it!" said Blake wildly. "Can't be did. Remember, you promised Kildare!"

"The horrid boulder! Did he know what it was like, I wonder? Oh dear! We can't kill it, I suppose; and I've promised to take it to the school. Here goes!"

Blake walked up to the stranger. The latter was looking annoyed. The sleepy Rylcombe porter was in no hurry to come at his call. He stared at Blake.

"Hallo!" said Blake. "Marmaduke Smythe, I suppose?"

"That's my name," said the youth; "but I don't know you."

"My name is Blake. I belong to the School House at St. Jim's. Kildare asked me to come down here and meet you."

"Oh—ah! Who is Kildare?"

"Captain of the School."

"Oh! I don't know much about public schools. I have been educated by a tutor!" said the new boy loftily. "I should have thought Dr. Holmes would have sent a carriage—or, at least, a trap—for me! This is very negligent of him, and I shall speak plainly on the subject when I reach the School."

Blake stared at Herries. Herries leaned against an automatic sweet-machine and gasped.

"Mad," murmured Blake—"mad as a giddy hatter!"

"Are you alluding to me?" said Master Smythe, frowning. "I warn you that I require none of your impertinence, Hake or Shake, or whatever your name is! Where is that porter? Ah, here is the fellow at last! How dare you keep me waiting like this?"

The porter stared and grinned.

"Beg your pardon, sir!" he said. "I didn't know it was a blooming hemperor who was a-calling me! If I'd ha' known it was a Tsar who wanted me I'd—"

"Don't be insolent! I intended to give you a shilling, but now I'll give you nothing! You may not be aware who I am. I am Marmaduke Smythe; and my father is Smythe, the millionaire. I am accustomed to being treated with respect. Chake, or Blake, or whatever you are. You say you were sent to meet me? Very good. You can help the porter place my trunks upon some vehicle!"

And the new boy walked haughtily away.

"I am dreaming!" said Blake feebly. "I shall wake up presently. It can't be real. That thing can't really be coming into our study!"

"Where can he come from?" gasped Herries. "He says he doesn't know much about public schools, and I think he's right there. I can foresee a high old time for that merchant in the School House."

"If he puts on any side there," said Blake darkly, "he's doomed! He'll be slain, as sure as his name's Marmalade—I mean Marmaduke! Where's he getting to now? Come on. I've promised Kildare to take the thing to St. Jim's, and I'll do it, or die in the attempt!"

The chums hurried out of the station after Marmaduke. He stood outside, surveying the shabby old station hack, with a decidedly disapproving expression upon his pasty face.

"Really, this is most inconsiderate of Dr. Holmes!" he exclaimed. "I cannot ride in that absurd and antiquated vehicle. Blake, here's half-a-crown for you. Go and find me a cab!"

Blake looked at the half-crown extended towards him, and then at Marmaduke. It says much for his self-command that he did not exterminate the new boy upon the spot.

"Do you hear me?" said Smythe irritably.

"Ye-es," said Blake slowly; "I hear you. I won't say what I think about you, Marmaduke, because it would take too long, and I should have to use shocking language. Get into that hack!"

"I shall certainly do nothing of the kind!"

"Get into that hack!"

"How dare you address me in that manner? You are insolent! I have half a mind to chastise you!"

"I don't believe you have half a mind, or a quarter of one," said Blake. "Look here; I can see you're a funny merchant, and I don't want to hurt you. I suppose you've been in the habit of bossing people about at home in Shore-ditch—"

"Fellow, my father's mansion is in Park Lane!"

"Petticoat Lane would be nearer your mark; I should think! I suppose you're rolling in money, and it's got into your head. For your own sake, I warn you that that sort of thing won't go down at St. Jim's. I've promised our captain to take you straight to the School. I'd rather take you out and drop you into a ditch, but a promise is a promise. Get into that hack!"

Blake seized Marmaduke by the shoulders, and swung him round.

"Open the door, Herries!"

The grinning Herries opened the door of the hack. Marmaduke was struggling wildly, but he was as a child in the hands of the champion junior athlete of St. Jim's. Blake sent him into the despised vehicle like a bullet from a gun, and Marmaduke went down on his hands and knees there.

"Come on, Herries! Porter, shove that trunk on!"

Marmaduke, rumpled and dusty and furious, lay still, but it was only to get his breath back. As Blake had guessed, the heir of millions had been cock-of-the-walk at home, and had "bossed" his tutor and everybody else, and he had come to St. Jim's with the idea of doing the same there. He was to be woefully undeceived.

The hack rolled away towards the School. The porter grinned after it, and the driver was chuckling on the box. All sorts and conditions of boys came to St. Jim's, but they had never seen one like this before.

Blake's anger never lasted long, and in a few minutes he allowed Marmaduke to rise and sit down. The heir of millions looked far from grateful for this concession. He glowered at Blake like a demon, but he had already learned that it did not pay to come to close quarters with him.

His whole thoughts were bent upon escape. As Blake was not anticipating such a move, it was not difficult. Blake had entered into conversation with Herries, and the hack was passing along the lane bordering the castle wood, when Marmaduke suddenly tore the door open and leaped out.

"Stop!" shouted Blake. "After him!"

He leaped out of the hack. His word was at stake. He had promised Kildare to bring the new boy straight to St. Jim's, and it had to be done somehow.

Marmaduke, with a howl of defiance, bolted into the foot-path through the wood. He did not know this was a short cut to St. Jim's.

"Come on, Herries!"

Blake sprinted after the flying Marmaduke, with Herries at his heels. The driver of the hack stared after them in astonishment, and then, chuckling hoarsely, drove on to the school. Marmaduke was certainly not in good condition, but he ran very well, and he had a start. He was almost through the wood when Blake's outstretched hand dropped on his shoulder from behind.

"Got you!" gasped Blake.

But he had not quite got him. Marmaduke put on a spurt and broke away, and ran out into the road. Here the school was in sight. Blake was after him again like a flash, and Marmaduke dashed across the road and tried to leap the ditch on the other side. At the

same moment Blake clutched at his jacket behind and caught it.

The result was that Marmaduke pitched head foremost into the ditch, which was a deep one and full nearly to the top, and Blake, jerked forward by his fall, followed him in.

"Lend a hand!" roared Blake.

Herries lent a hand, and dragged Blake out, not without difficulty, and between them they landed Marmaduke, gasping like a newly-caught fish.

"Well, this is a go!" said Herries.

"Now, forward's the word!" said Blake, taking a tight grip on the new boy's arm. "I said I'd take him to the school, and I'm a chap of my word. I think Kildare will be pleased. We'd better take the thing to his study, I suppose."

Herries chuckled.

"He won't be pleased if you do!" he exclaimed. "Better shove him under a pump or something first, and yourself, too, old chap."

"Stuff! I've got to report to Kildare, and he ought to know what I've been through for the sake of keeping my word."

And Blake marched the sullen and furious, but now subdued, Marmaduke, up to the school gates, and, still with an iron grip upon him, marched him in.

[You have now seen how Marmaduke Smythe arrives at St. Jim's. In No. 12 of our grand new companion-paper "The Penny Popular," now on sale, you can finish reading the story, and see how Marmaduke gets on at St. Jim's. Besides being an extra-long, complete tale of the famous schoolboys, "Jack Blake's Recruit" is also the best school tale which has yet appeared in "The Penny Popular." Get your copy to-day.]

THIS GRAND TALE WILL INTEREST ALL "GEM" READERS!

JACK BLAKE'S RECRUIT

Or, The Misadventures of Marmaduke Smythe.

A Splendid, Long, Complete Tale of the Chums of
St. Jim's.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.



"Now!" said Figgins warningly. "Any more rot, and out of this study you go!" Marmaduke Smythe's education had commenced with a vengeance. (See page 11.)

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The Arrival of Marmaduke Smythe.

JACK BLAKE sat upon the table in Study No. 6, in the School House at St. Jim's, with a thoughtful expression upon his face. Herries sat on the window-sill, his hands in his trousers pockets, staring at him.

"The question is," Blake remarked reflectively, "what are we going to do with the afternoon? The ground's not fit for anything like practice. Figgins & Co. have gone off somewhere, so we can't get up a row with the New House fellows. What are you going to do, Herries?"

"Don't know," said Herries.

Blake drummed with his heels on the leg of the table.

"There's poor old Arthur Augustus and Tom Merry still in the sanatorium with colds," he said, "and Dick's gone off to see a sick relation. I don't know what his relations want to fall sick on a half-holiday for. I feel quite lonely without 'em. Hallo, Kildare!"

Kildare, captain of St. Jim's, put his head in at the door of Study No. 6. He nodded pleasantly to the two juniors.

"I see you're not busy," he remarked. "Will you do me a favour?"

"Rather!" said Blake promptly. "A million, if you like!"

"One will be enough," laughed Kildare. "I want you to go down to the railway-station at Rylcombe and meet a new boy who is coming to St. Jim's. Will you go?"

"Like a bird!"

"The train will be in at three. The Head asked me to send someone, as the new kid is coming into our House. You youngsters could meet him all right, and bring him up."

"School. You don't mind?"

"Not a little bit," said Blake. "What's the new chap's name?"

"Marmaduke Smythe."

"What a stunning name! And he's coming into the School House?"

"Yes; and I expect he'll be put into this study at first—at least, for the time being. Some of the studies are being papered out now, and there's nowhere else to put him at present. Now, you'd better cut off, as it's a long walk to Rylcombe. You'll see to him all right, Blake? I can trust you?"

Blake looked hurt.

"I say, Kildare, you ought to know."

"Come, Blake," laughed the captain; "you know what I mean. You are as full of tricks as a monkey. You'll bring the new boy straight to St. Jim's?"

"Straight as a string!" said Blake seriously. "You can rely on me. Now, Herries, if the train's coming in at three, the sooner we buzz off the better."

He slid off the table. The captain of St. Jim's was looking at him rather dubiously. He knew Blake of old.

"Mind, no larks, Blake!" he said.

"You're to bring the new boy straight to the School."

"Honour bright!" said Blake.

Kildare was satisfied.

"Very well. Now you'd better be off."

And the captain, with a nod, left the study.

"Seems sorter uneasy in his mind, doesn't he?" Blake remarked. "Just as if we would play any giddy game—serious and solemn chaps like us. Come on, Herries. I wonder what the new chap will be like? If he's anything like his name, he must be a ripper!"

The juniors took their caps and sallied out. They sauntered across the quadrangle and passed out at the big bronze gates of St. Jim's. It was a good walk to the village, so they set off at a good pace.

"Lots of time," Blake remarked, glancing up at the clock as they entered the railway-station. "Ten minutes to three. Let's go on the platform, and wait for the train to come in."

They went on the platform. The train was late, as it usually was at Rylcombe, but it came puffing and snorting in at last. Blake and Herries watched the passengers alighting. They were curious to see the new boy who was coming into their House at St. Jim's, and who was to share their study for an undefined period.

Half a dozen persons alighted from the train. Most of them were country people, and only one was youthful in years, so the chums were forced to the conclusion that this was the new boy for St. Jim's. We say forced to that conclusion. They did not come to it willingly or cheerfully, for they were not charmed with the stranger.

He was a youth of a lanky and somewhat ungainly form, very expensively dressed, with a thick gold watch-chain and diamond studs. His face was pasty in colour, and not especially good-looking; but there was an expression of lofty haughtiness upon it which showed that Marmaduke Smythe's opinion of himself and of his own importance was an exceedingly good one.

"Porter—porter!" His voice was not musical, and he was evidently accustomed to speaking in the imperative mood. He stared about him as if amazed at not being instantly attended to. "Porter! Fellow, where are you?"

Blake and Herries looked at each other and at the stranger, and then at each other again, and breathed hard.

"And that's coming into the School House!" gasped Blake.

"And into our study!" murmured Herries.

"If it gets to St. Jim's," said Blake, "and if it gets into the School House, the New House chaps will chip us until our hair turns grey. We can't have it."

"What can we do with it?"

(Continued on page IV, cover.)