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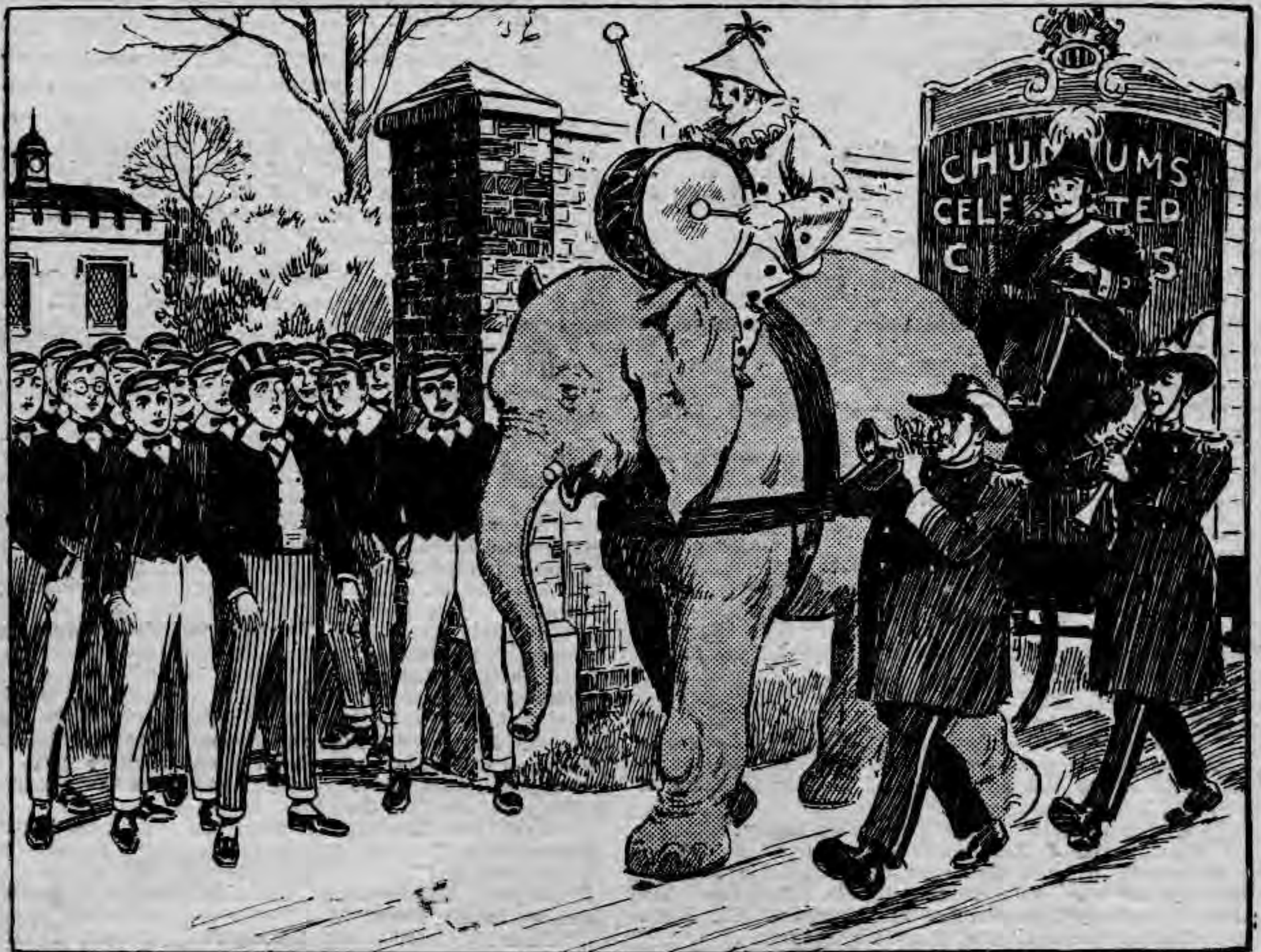


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THE PRIDE OF ST. JIM'S!

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Story of Tom Merry & Co.

By **MARTIN CLIFFORD.**



The old gateway was crammed with juniors. Down the road came a gorgeous procession of horsemen and caravans, and weird and wonderful animals. Seated on the back of a gigantic elephant was a little clown, who was beating a big drum with great gusto. (See Chapter 1.)

CHAPTER I. Old Pals.

POM! Pom! Pom!
"Bai Jove! What's that wow?"
Pom! Pom! Pom!

Ta-ra-ra-ra!

Tom Merry & Co. looked towards the gates of St. Jim's in astonishment. From the high-road that ran past the gates of the old school came that sudden blare of musical instruments—instruments, at all events, if not very musical.

Pom! Pom! Pom! POM! Blare!

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form. "It sounds like a dwum, deah boys."

"And it sounds like a cornet, too," said Tom Merry. "Like Herries' cornet—only a little more so!"

"Must be recruits marching," said Jack Blake. "Let's go and give 'em a yell!"

Pom! Pom! Pom!

Tom Merry & Co. rushed down to the gates at once. If recruits of Kitchener's Army were marching past the gates of St. Jim's the least the juniors could do was to give them a cheer. Tom Merry was the first to reach the gates, and he gave a shout.

"My hat! 'Tain't recruits!"

"What is it, deah boy?"

"A giddy circus!"

"Bai Jove!"

In a minute or less the old gateway was crammed with juniors. Down the road came a gorgeous procession of horsemen and caravans and weird and wonderful animals. Seated upon the back of a gigantic elephant was a little clown, who was beating the big drum with great gusto.

Pom! Pom! Pom! Pom!

The clown, who was not much taller than one of the juniors, but considerably wider, grinned down at the schoolboys as they crowded at the gates. He was in the

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No. 388. (New Series). Vol 9

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full costume of the ring, with a cocked paper-hat, and his face whitened with chalk, and adorned with daubs of red. He gave an extra loud thump as the elephant lumbered up, and called out cheerily:

"Hollo, Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gave quite a jump. He jammed his celebrated monocle into his eye, and stared blankly at the little man on the elephant. Behind the elephant the procession was coming to a halt. The musical instruments blared louder than ever. Tom Merry & Co. chuckled at the expression on Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's aristocratic face.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated D'Arcy, "are you speakin' to me?"

"How is your noble lordship—what?" demanded the clown. "Fancy meeting you!"

"Gweat Scott! the person seems to know me, deah boys."

"Relation of yours, Gussy?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Gussy's long-lost brother, perhaps," grinned Figgins of the New House. "You never told us any of your people were in the circus business, Gussy!"

"You uttah ass, Figgins!"

"How do you do, Master Merry?"

Tom Merry jumped.

"Hollo! You know me too!" he exclaimed.

"Bless your little heart, know you like a book," said the rider of the elephant cheerfully. "Never forget an old pal."

Tom Merry looked astounded.

"Well, my hat!"

"Fwiend of yours, Tom Mewwy?" grinned Arthur Augustus.

"Blessed if I know him!"

"More people know Tom Fool than Tom Fool knows," chuckled Monty Lowther, quoting the old proverb.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hollo, you too, Master Lowther," went on the clown.

"Still the same funny merchant—what?"

Monty Lowther stared.

"Great pip! He knows me too!"

"And Master Blake too—how do you do? Bless my body and boots, and Herries and Digby—all the happy family!" grinned the clown.

"My word!"

"Who the dence—"

"Bai Jove!" shouted Arthur Augustus. "I know him now! Don't you wemembah, deah boye, one vacation at my place, there was a circus—and we played them at ewicket?"

"Chungum's Circus!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah! And that's Tiny Tony!"

The clown grinned down at them. In his striking make-up he was quite unrecognisable. But now that they looked at him closely, the chums of St. Jim's recognised his comical grin, if not his features.

"Tiny Tony, by George!" exclaimed Monty Lowther.

"And this is Chungum's Circus!" said Manners. "My hat! Are you staying near here, you funny merchant?"

Pom! Pom! Pom! Pom! Pom!

"Next village," said Tiny Tony, between the thumps on the drum. "Fancy meeting you young gentlemen! Hadn't the least idea you were here! Knew it was a school, that was all—so Mr. Chungum ordered a halt!"

"What for?" asked Blake, puzzled.

"Advertisement, dear boy," said Tiny Tony. "Don't you remember what Shakespeare says? 'Sweet are the uses of advertisement!'"

"Ha, ha, ha! Shakespeare said adversity!"

"Then Shakespeare was off-side," said Tiny Tony calmly. He thumped again with terrific energy on the big drum. "Mr. Chungum spotted the school, and ordered a halt, to let everybody know there was a circus coming—Chungum's Celebrated Circus, the best on earth—six nights only in Rylcombe! Play up, you beggars!"

Pom! Pom! Pom! Pom! Blare! Blare! Ta-ra-ra-ra!

The noise was terrific. It penetrated to every corner of St. Jim's, and fellows came flocking down to the gates.

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from far and near. If Mr. Chungum, the proprietor of Chungum's Celebrated Circus, wanted the school to know that there was a circus in the neighbourhood, he was certainly taking the most effective measures. From the din, nearly all Sussex might have known that they were there.

"To-night's the first night," said Tiny Tony, shouting to make his voice heard. "You young gents are coming, of course, as you are old friends. You've seen the show once—but once seen, always seen! After seeing Chungum's Circus, you never patronise another. New attractions, too—everything first-class and gilt-edged. You haven't seen the performing elephant Scipio—this giddy elephant. You should see him at his tricks! He will make your hair curl!"

Pom! Pom! Pom!

"Bai Jove! he doesn't look as if he could do any twicks," said Arthur Augustus, turning his eyeglass upon the big, sleepy-looking elephant.

Tiny Tony chuckled, and jabbed the elephant. The huge animal turned towards Arthur Augustus, who had stepped out into the road, and in a twinkling his trunk whipped round the swell of St. Jim's, and Arthur Augustus was whirled into the air, head-downwards.

"Bai Jove! Gweat Scott! Yawoooooh! Wescue!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus's elegant silk topper rolled in the road. His eyeglass streamed at the end of its cord. His legs thrashed about wildly.

"Wow-wow! Wescue!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Are you satisfied now that Scipio can perform tricks?" demanded Tiny Tony.

"Ow! Bai Jove! Yaas! Yaas, wathah! Gweat Scott! Yawoooooh!"

"Don't break his blessed neck, you duffer!" gasped Blake.

"Safe as houses," grinned Tiny Tony. "Put the gentleman down, Scipio."

Scipio landed Arthur Augustus safely upon his feet. The swell of St. Jim's stood gasping, and considerably rumpled.

"Oh, bai Jove! Weally, you wottah—where's my toppah? Oh cwumbs!"

"Give the gentleman his topper, Scipio!"

The elephant picked the silk hat up with his trunk, knelt before Arthur Augustus, and presented the hat to him. It was evidently one of Scipio's regular tricks. The swell of St. Jim's accepted his topper with a gasp.

"Oh cwumbs! Gweat Scott! I have been thwown into quite a fluttah. Oh deah!"

"Would you like Scipio to show you some more tricks, Master Gussy?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No feah! Bai Jove, no!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, backing hastily away.

"Hollo! Here's Mr. Chungum!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

Mr. Charley Chungum, the proprietor of Chungum's Celebrated Circus came along from one of the halted caravans. He was a very imposing gentleman, with a greater width than Tiny Tony, a white waistcoat, a shining silk hat with a curly brim, and an orchid in his buttonhole. His diamond pin must have been worth a thousand pounds—if it was worth anything at all, which was doubtful. There was an expansive smile upon his fat face. He had recognised the St. Jim's juniors.

"Happy meeting, young gentlemen!" exclaimed Mr. Chungum. "I did not know this was your school when I ordered a halt to let all the young gents know that Chungum's Circus was here. We shall see you at the performance this evening—what?"

"What-ho!" said Tom Merry.

"Yes, rather!"

"You bet!" said Figgins. "We don't get a circus every day. Hallo! What are you bounders shoving for?"

"Here comes Ratty!" murmured Kert.

"Ratty, with his rattiest scowl!" whispered Fatty Wynn.

The crowd of fellows in the big gateway parted to give passage to Mr. Ratcliff, the Housemaster of the New House at St. Jim's; and Figgins & Co., who had

the misfortune to belong to Mr. Ratcliff's House, made way for him very meekly. The School House fellows were not quite so obliging, but Mr. Ratcliff shoved through. There was an angry frown on his thin, acid face. The tremendous noise made by the circus procession for the purpose of advertising their presence had disturbed Mr. Ratcliff in his study in the New House, and he had come forth like a lion from his den.

"What is all this?" exclaimed Mr. Ratcliff, in his sharpest and snappiest tones. "Move on immediately! How dare you make this disturbance outside the school gates!"

Pom! pom! pom! pom!

CHAPTER 2.

Rough on Ratty.

MR. RATCLIFF put his thin fingers to his ears as Tiny Tony beat the big drum again with renewed energy. There certainly was a din; but all the St. Jim's fellows eyed Mr. Ratcliff with disgust. There was no reason why the bad-tempered Housemaster should make himself unpleasant in that way. The circus would have moved on in a few minutes. But it was Mr. Ratcliff's way to make himself disagreeable.

"Stop that noise instantly!" he shouted.

Pom! pom! pom!

"Do you hear me?"

Tiny Tony certainly heard him, but perhaps he did not like Mr. Ratcliff's tone; perhaps he wasn't inclined to take orders from the Housemaster. At all events, he put all his "beef" into beating the big drum.

Mr. Ratcliff clenched his skinny hands with rage. In his own House he was monarch of all he surveyed, and could play the tyrant almost as much as he liked, and he sometimes forgot that outside the New House at St. Jim's it was of no use to be dictatorial.

"Stop that drum at once!" he thundered.

Pom! pom! pom!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Chuck it, Tony!" said Mr. Chungum, who had been making signs that Tiny Tony did not choose to see. "Stop it at once, Tony! Don't you hear the gentleman?"

Tiny Tony reluctantly stopped.

"Good-afternoon, sir!" said Mr. Chungum affably, taking off his curly silk hat to the Housemaster. "Hope I see you well, sir? This is Chungum's Circus—Chungum's Celebrated Circus!"

"How dare you make a disturbance outside the school gates!" exclaimed Mr. Ratcliff.

"No offence, sir!" said Mr. Chungum mildly. He was as annoyed as the clown, but he had an eye to business. He could see that Mr. Ratcliff was a master in the school, and he did not want his boys to be forbidden to come to the circus. In the neighbourhood of a big school Mr. Chungum expected to do a thriving business. "No offence, sir! Simply to let the young gentlemen know we are here, sir."

"No boy in my House shall go to such a performance!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff.

"Ahem! First-class performance, sir! Performed before all the crowned heads of Europe—lots of crowned heads, and a still larger number of uncrowned! If I may suggest it, you would find a very pleasant relaxation yourself, sir, from your scholastic duties, in visiting Chungum's Celebrated Circus, and seeing Tiny Tony, the funniest clown on earth—"

"Yours truly," said Tiny Tony.

"And Texas Bill the broncho buster, and Sapolio the snake-charmer, and Rab Rabbi the juggler—"

"Go!"

"And Samsonio the strongest man on earth," pursued Mr. Chungum calmly, "and Captain Coke the lion-tamer—"

"Take your ridiculous procession away from these precincts at once!"

"And other attractions too numerous to mention," said Mr. Chungum unmoved, "including Scipio the performing elephant—"

"Will you move on?" shrieked Mr. Ratcliff, almost in

a frenzy. At a sign from Mr. Chungum the instrumentalists had started again.

Tom Merry & Co. grinned with enjoyment. They could see that the circus-master was pulling Mr. Ratcliff's leg. As the angry master had declared that all his boys should not go to the circus, there was no use in pleasing him; so Mr. Chungum was getting a little of his own back.

"And, above all, Chungum's latest turn," said the fat gentleman seriously. "You should really not miss that, sir—"

"Fellow!"

"It is the chance of a lifetime, sir, while we're in the neighbourhood—positively for six nights only. I really hope we shall see you there, sir. Boxes at half-a-guinea—"

"Will you—"

"But you can get in for sixpence—depends on the state of your exchequer personally," said Mr. Chungum, with unmoved calmness, while the juniors nearly exploded with merriment. "Don't miss Chungum's latest, whatever you do. Come, and bring all your boys, sir. Chungum's latest is IT—simply IT! A lifelike representation, sir, of the Prussian Guard doing the goose-step, the part of the Kaiser being taken by myself, sir. Screaming turn—"

"If you do not move on instantly—"

"The turn—Chungum's latest, sir—is known as 'The Bounders of Berlin,' and I really recommend you, sir, not to miss it. Bring all the boys. I can see that you are a kind-hearted gentleman, and simply brimming over with philanthropy, sir. I should not suggest it, sir, if you did not look so kind-hearted and good-tempered," said Mr. Chungum. "As for terms—"

"I—I—I—"

"Ah, that is where you stick, is it?" said Mr. Chungum pleasantly. "Well, sir, I'll meet you in a reasonable spirit. I'll make a reduction of one-third."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the juniors, unable to contain themselves any longer. Mr. Ratcliff's face during the circus-master's friendly address was "worth a guinea a box," as Monty Lowther described it afterwards.

The New House master glared at them.

"Go in at once!" he said harshly. "Do you hear me?"

Figgins & Co. reluctantly went in. They had to, as Mr. Ratcliff was their Housemaster. Tom Merry & Co. stood their ground. They were School House fellows, and the master of the New House had no right to give them orders. But Mr. Ratcliff had a little way of overstepping his authority, and being brought up sharp.

"Do you hear me, Merry, Blake, Herries?"

"Thank you, sir! We want to see the procession," said Tom Merry.

"Boy!"

"Yaas, wathah, sir!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy warmly. "May I beg to point out to you, Mr. Watchiff, that you are not our Housemastah, and have no wight to ordah us to go in."

"Hear, hear!"

Mr. Ratcliff bit his thin lips with rage.

"I shall report this to your Housemaster!" he thundered.

"Very well, sir," said Tom Merry.

Mr. Ratcliff turned his back on them. He was enraged enough to lick them all round, but that was scarcely feasible. The two Houses at St. Jim's were quite distinct, and he had no right whatever to interfere with School House boys.

"Now, sir," said Mr. Ratcliff, between his teeth, addressing the calm and smiling Chungum, "you are making a disturbance here. I order you to move on!"

Mr. Chungum's snorted.

"I should have already moved on, sir, if you had not cheeked me!" he replied.

"What—what!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff. For his lofty and haughty interference to be described as "cheek" took his breath away. The School House juniors smiled beatific smiles. They enjoyed hearing Mr. Ratcliff slanged like this.

"This is a public road, sir," pursued Mr. Chungum.

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"I have as much right here, sir, as you have! You are an old donkey!"

Pom! pom! pom!

"Go it, guv'nor!" said Tiny Tony. Pom! pom! pom! Tiny Tony backed up his "guv'nor's" remarks with thumps on the drum.

"You are an interfering ass, sir!" said Mr. Chumgum, showing some signs of excitement at last. "What are we fighting the Germans for, sir, if not in the noble cause of freedom? And do you think, sir, that we shall allow our freedom to be interfered with, sir, by an interfering jackass, sir?"

Pom! pom! pom!

Mr. Ratcliff turned purple. He had never been slanged like that in his life before. He had brought it entirely upon himself, and it served him right; but that did not make it agreeable.

"Fellow!" he gasped.

"Fellow yourself," said Mr. Chumgum independently, "and many of them!"

"I—I will telephone for the police!" stuttered Mr. Ratcliff. "I—I will give you in charge for—for your insolence!"

"Bow-wow!" said Mr. Chumgum.

Pom! Pom! Pom! Pom!

In his exuberance Tiny Tony missed the drum, and bestowed the last "pom" on the elephant. Evidently Scipio mistook it for the usual signal to perform his trick. He swung round on Mr. Ratcliff, seized him round the waist with his trunk, and whirled him into the air.

Mr. Ratcliff uttered a wild shriek.

"Ow! Help!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

His mortar-board went flying, his gown whisked in the air, his long, thin legs thrashed about frantically. The St. Jim's fellows almost doubled up with merriment. They knew that Horace Ratcliff was not going to be hurt, but Horace Ratcliff did not know it, and his thin face was blanched with terror.

"Help—help! Put me down! Oh dear! I shall be killed! Oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tiny Tony, grinning with glee, started the elephant, and Scipio marched on down the road, bearing the struggling Housemaster aloft in his trunk. The circus procession got into motion behind him. Mr. Chumgum jumped into his caravan again, chuckling loudly. The procession wound on down the road, headed by Mr. Ratcliff.

Tom Merry & Co. leaned helplessly against the school walls, doubled up and shrieking. The sight of Mr. Ratcliff heading the procession in the elephant's trunk was too much for them. They wept with merriment.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, bai Jove! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hold me, somebody!" moaned Jack Blake. "Old Ratty will be the death of me! Oh dear!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Five minutes later a dusty and dishevelled figure came dashing along the road, with a face purple with rage. Mr. Ratcliff bestowed a glare upon the howling juniors and rushed in, and sped away to the New House. He left Tom Merry & Co. weeping with laughter.

CHAPTER 3.

Prefect Wanted!

"Of course we're going!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Of course we are!" said Kangaroo of the Shell. "We'll back up Chumgum's show, if only for the way he slanged Ratty!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The New House kids won't be able to go," Tom Merry remarked thoughtfully. "It's a rotten shame; but Ratty will stop them, you bet. Still, he can't interfere with us."

The juniors were discussing the matter in the common-room in the School House. Those of them who were already acquainted with Chumgum's Circus naturally wanted to go and see their old acquaintances again, while

those who hadn't seen the show were still more keen. Mr. Charley Chumgum was certain to do good business in the neighbourhood of St. Jim's, if the juniors get leave. But Talbot of the Shell was wearing a very thoughtful expression.

"We shall have to get special leave; it's after locking-up," he remarked. "The sooner we see our Housemaster about it the better, I think. Ratty may chip in."

"He can't hurt us," said Blake.

"I fancy he may try to impress on Carrington that the circus ought to be put out of bounds," said Talbot.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "It's quite poss. And we don't weally know whethah Cawwington will play up, you know. Old Wailton would have given us leave like anythin', but——"

The juniors looked very thoughtful. Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, had always been very firm when Ratty attempted interference in the affairs of his House. But Mr. Railton was gone now—he was in the Army—and there was a new Housemaster in his place. Mr. Carrington, the new Housemaster, was a gentleman from Australia, and the juniors liked him, from what little they had seen of him so far. But it was quite possible that he would be amenable to the influence of the senior Housemaster, and the obnoxious Ratty might succeed in "mucking up" their intended excursion. If Chumgum's Circus was placed out of bounds it would certainly knock the intended expedition on the head most effectively.

And, as Monty Lowther remarked, Ratty was a deep beast, and he would assuredly try to twist the new master round his finger.

"Better go and see Carrington at once," said Tom Merry decidedly. "Of course, he won't give us all leave for the same evening. But after he's given leave for some of us he can't refuse it for others."

"Wathah not! Pewwaps I had bettah go and see him," said D'Arcy. "You can wely on me to put it to him tactfully. I will explain that Watty——"

"Fathead!" roared Blake.

"Weally, Blake——"

"Not a word about Ratty!" growled Blake. "We've got to ask for leave just as if Ratty didn't exist. If Carrington thinks Ratty is up against it he may leave it over till he's heard what Ratty has to say about it."

"Bai Jove, I nevah thought of that!"

"You wouldn't!" grunted Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies——"

"We'll go," said Tom Merry. "You kids can leave it to us. Talbot can do the thinking. Come on, Talbot!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

But Arthur Augustus was left to make his remarks to the desert air. The Terrible Three and Talbot proceeded to the Housemaster's study. Tom Merry tapped at the door, and a deep, pleasant voice bade him enter.

Mr. Carrington, the new Housemaster of the School House, gave the Shell fellows a pleasant nod.

"Go it, Talbot!" murmured Manners.

"Ahem! If you please, sir, we should like a pass out of gates this evening," said Talbot meekly.

"For what reason, Talbot?"

"There's a circus in the village, sir."

"A jolly good circus, sir," said Tom Merry. "It begins pretty early, and we could get back by bedtime, sir."

"Yaas, wathah, sir!" said a voice in the doorway, as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's eyeglass gleamed into the study. "It is a weally wippin' circus, sir, and we feel that we ought to back them up, sir, because they are vewy likely doing bad business in war-time."

Mr. Carrington smiled.

"I have no doubt one of the prefects would be willing to go with you," he said. "If so, you may certainly go."

"Ahem! Of course, even without a prefect, sir, we— we should be very careful to—to—not to get into any trouble, sir."

"The partay will weally be undah my charge, sir," said Arthur Augustus. "I shall look aftah them, sir."

"Why, you fathead——" began Tom Merry. And then he stopped and blushed. But the Housemaster only smiled.

"I should not care for you juniors to be out so late



Crash! The wooden sword came down on the seat beside Mr. Ratcliff, missing him by about an inch. "Help!" shrieked Mr. Ratcliff. "The man is drunk! Keep him off! Help!" (See Chapter 14.)

alone," he said. "If you can get one of the prefects to go with you, you have permission."

"But weally, sir—"

The Terrible Three hustled Arthur Augustus out, and Talbot closed the door. In the passage D'Arcy glared at the Shell fellows.

"You uttah asses! I was goin' to explain to Cawwington—"

"Fathead!" said Tom Merry. "We've got leave, and least said soonest mended. We'll persuade one of the prefects. Kildare's a good sort; we'll talk to him like Dutch uncles. Kim on!"

"But we don't want to be wowwied by a beastly pwefect!"

"Bow-wow! Kim on!"

The juniors proceeded to Kildare's study. They found the captain of St. Jim's at work. He did not look overjoyed at the interruption.

"Well, what do you young shavers want?" he asked.

"Weally, Kildare—"

"What is it?"

"I object to bein' called a young shavah!"

"Shut up, you ass!" said Talbot. "The fact is, Kildare—"

"I wefuse to be called an ass, Talbot!"

"The fact is—"

"Bettah leave it to me, deah boy. You see, Kildare—I twust we are not intewwuptin' you—"

"You are!" growled Kildare. "Why don't you come to the point, you young duffer?"

"I am comin' to the point, Kildare, deah boy, but I am vewy sowwy to intewwupt your work," explained Arthur Augustus. "I am quite awah of the annoyance caused by havin' one's work intewwupted. Blake and Hewwies and Dig fwequently intewwupt my work in Studay No. 6, and I find it most exaspewatin—"

"Clear off!" exclaimed Kildare, who apparently found it exasperating, too.

"But I haven't told you yet—"

"Don't bother. I'm busy!"

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"LOOKING AFTER MOSSOO!"

"Do shut up, Gussy!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "The fact is, Kildare, we've come to ask you a little favour. We want——"

"Pway don't take the words out of my mouth, Tom Mewwy. You can weally wely on me to explain the mattah to Kildare. This is how it is——"

"There's a circus——"

"You are intewwuptin' me, Tom Mewwy. Pway listen to me, Kildare. I weally sha'n't keep you ten minutes."

"Ten minutes!" howled Kildare. "No, you can be quite sure of that. You won't keep me one minute. Get out!"

"But I haven't——"

The captain of St. Jim's jumped up and picked up a cane. The juniors had just time to whip out into the passage, and the study door slammed behind them.

"Bai Jove," ejaculated Arthur Augustus, in astonishment, "old Kildare seems to be wathah watty this aftahnoon! I wondah what is the weason of that!"

"Oh, you crass ass!" grunted Tom Merry.

"It is all your fault for intewwuptin' me!"

"We'll try Darrel," said Monty Lowther. "One of you hold that idiot back!"

"I wefuse!"

Talbot and Manners laid violent hands upon Arthur Augustus, and held him forcibly, while Tom Merry and Manners proceeded to Darrel's study. Arthur Augustus struggled in the grasp of the two Shell fellows.

"You uttah asses, welease me!" he exclaimed. "Those boundahs will make a muck of it, and we sha'n't get a pwefect at all. Welease me!"

Arthur Augustus made a terrific effort, and wrenched himself loose, and rushed after Tom Merry. Talbot and Manners rushed after him.

Darrel and Rushden were at tea in the study, and Tom Merry and Lowther had just begun to explain the matter together, when Arthur Augustus rushed breathlessly in, with Talbot and Manners close behind in pursuit.

Talbot and Manners stopped in the doorway; but Arthur Augustus, who was going full speed, dashed right into the study, and brought up against the tea-table. Study tea-tables were not built to stand a shock like that. The table reeled as D'Arcy bumped on it. The teapot shot off, and landed on Darrel's knees, and a milk-jug was deposited on Rushden's waistcoat.

"Bai Jove! I'm awf'ly sowwy!"

"Oh, you fathead!" groaned Tom Merry.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

There was no more time for talk. Darrel and Rushden had jumped up, with a roar. They did not ask the juniors what they had come for. One of them was streaming with hot tea, and the other with milk. They came round the table like lightning, and Tom Merry and Lowther fled for their lives. Arthur Augustus did not flee in time, and two pairs of hands were laid upon him.

"Bai Jove! Weally, Dawwel—weally, Wushden—— Oh, yawwoh!"

Whiz! Arthur Augustus went whirling through the doorway, and there was a terrific crash as he collided with the Shell fellows in the passage.

"Oh crumbs!"

"Yaroooh!"

"Take a hundred lines each!" roared Darrel. And he slammed the door.

Arthur Augustus lay gasping on the floor. He sat up and groped for his eyeglass.

"Bai Jove, all the pwefects seem to be wemarkably bad-tempered to-day! Gwooh! I have been thwown into a fluttah! Gwooooh!"

"You—you—you——" gasped Tom Merry.

"It was weally all your fault! Howevah, we will go and twy Mulvaney next," said Arthur Augustus, scrambling up breathlessly. "Mulvaney is wathah a decent chap. I twust you fellows will leave it entirely to me this time."

The Shell fellows did not reply. They seized Arthur Augustus with violent hands, whirled him off his feet, and rushed him away, with arms and legs wildly flying. The swell of St. Jim's struggled and roared as he was whirled away. He was rushed into a Form-room and bumped down—hard—on the floor. Then the Shell fellows left him, locking the door on the outside. A few moments

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later Arthur Augustus was pounding furiously at the door.

"You uttah wottahs! Let me out! You feahful asses, you will make a muck of it without me! Open this dooah, you awful wottahs!"

But there was no reply. Tom Merry & Co. walked away, leaving the swell of the Fourth to hammer at the door. They proceeded, grinning, to Mulvaney major's study. Mulvaney of the Sixth was having tea with Langton when they presented themselves.

Without the assistance of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, Tom Merry & Co. succeeded in explaining what they wanted. Mulvaney major nodded good-naturedly.

"Sure, I'll come," he said. "Phwat time?"

"Leave here at half-past six," said Tom Merry, eagerly.

"All right."

"Thanks, Mulvaney! You're awfully good!" said Lowther. "You come, too, Langton? It's a ripping show—simply topping!"

Langton nodded and smiled, and the juniors left the study quite satisfied. They returned to the common-room to report success. From that moment a steady stream of juniors proceeded to Mr. Carrington's study to request permission to accompany "Mulvaney and Langton" to the circus. As two prefects were to be in charge of the party, and as he had already given permission to five juniors, the Housemaster had to consent, and the School House fellows rejoiced. They were rejoicing when Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came into the common-room, looking very dusty and very wrathful.

"By Jove," exclaimed Tom Merry, "blessed if I didn't forget that we'd left Gussy locked up! How did you get out, Gussy?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah wottahs!" shouted Arthur Augustus. "I had to get out of the window, and I have vewy neahly, wuined my clobbah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Never mind; we've got permission to go, and Langton and Mulvaney are coming," said Talbot, laughing.

"Oh," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity, "in that case I will let you off! I intended to give you a feahful thwashin' all wound."

"What a narrow escape!" gasped Monty Lowther, pretending to faint. "Hold me, somebody! The relief is too much!"

"Weally, you uttah ass——"

"Hallo!" exclaimed Blake. "Nothing like striking the giddy iron while it's hot! Here comes Ratty!"

The juniors grinned as they looked out of the common-room, and saw Mr. Ratcliff making for their Housemaster's study. They could guess what the New Housemaster had come for, and it was a great satisfaction to know that Ratty had come too late.

CHAPTER 4.

Mr. Ratcliff Has No Luck.

MR. RATCLIFF was frowning as he presented himself in the Housemaster's study.

The School House master rose politely to greet him.

So far Mr. Ratcliff had seen little of the new master, and he hoped to find him more amenable to reason, as he considered it, than Mr. Railton had been. Mr. Ratcliff was a gentleman who never could mind his own business, but Mr. Railton had always kept him in his place with politeness but firmness. As Mr. Carrington was a new man in the school, and, moreover, came from a distant Colony, Mr. Ratcliff was not without hope of getting the upper hand. The new master, naturally, was anxious to be on good terms with all the staff of the school, and quite ready to extend the hand of fellowship. Whether he was willing to play second fiddle to Mr. Ratcliff remained yet to be discovered. He offered Mr. Ratcliff a chair in the politest manner, and the New House master sat down. Mr. Ratcliff plunged into the subject at once.

"I have reason to believe, Mr. Carrington, that some of the boys of your House intend to visit a certain

disreputable show that is being held in Rylcombe," he said. "As you are new here, I thought it my duty to caution you on the subject."

"Thank you very much," said Mr. Carrington, looking a little surprised. "Of course, I do not know all my boys yet, but I hope there are very few, if any, who would wish to visit disreputable places. What is the place you refer to?"

"A circus."

"Oh," said Mr. Carrington, "a circus! As a matter of fact, I have already given leave to a large number of my boys to visit a circus that has recently come to Rylcombe. I did not understand that it was of a disreputable character."

"Only this afternoon, sir, I was myself treated with scandalous insolence by the circus people," said Mr. Ratcliff. "I was seized, sir, in the trunk of an elephant and carried for some distance along the road. I am considering whether it will be possible for me to take legal action for assault against the proprietor."

"Dear me!" said Mr. Carrington.

"I have already put up a notice in my House, sir, placing the circus out of bounds for all boys in the New House," said Mr. Ratcliff. "I trust that you will do the same on this side."

Mr. Carrington pursed his lips thoughtfully.

"As I have already given permission to quite a number of boys to go, in charge of two prefects, I could not very well do that without good reason," he said mildly. "Are you aware from your personal knowledge that this circus is not suitable for boys?"

"I do not believe in such nonsensical shows, Mr. Carrington."

"Ahem! But a circus is generally quite a harmless entertainment. Have you seen the performance yourself?"

"I am not likely to have visited such a place as a circus."

"You have received a report from someone who has visited it?"

"Certainly not!"

"Then how do you know that it is disreputable?" asked Mr. Carrington.

"Such shows are always more or less disreputable, sir. I have informed you that I have been treated with ruffianly insolence by the proprietor of the circus."

"That is very unfortunate, of course, but it is nothing against the character of the entertainment," said Mr. Carrington. "However, I shall certainly heed what you have said, and I will ask the prefects to see that the boys leave the circus immediately if there is anything of an objectionable character in the show."

Mr. Ratcliff set his thin lips.

"I have reason to believe that some of your boys, Mr. Carrington, have formed personal acquaintances among the tagrag of this circus," he said. "I presume you do not consider drunken clowns desirable acquaintances for your boys?"

"Scarcely," said Mr. Carrington. "What are the names of the boys you refer to?"

"D'Arcy of the Fourth is one, and Merry of the Shell another."

"I will send for them immediately and question them," said Mr. Carrington. And he touched a bell.

Toby, the page, appeared, and was sent at once in quest of Tom Merry and D'Arcy of the Fourth. The two juniors soon appeared, looking a little uneasy. They had an inward fear that Mr. Ratcliff might have succeeded in inducing their Housemaster to rescind the leave he had given them.

"You sent for us, sir?" said Tom Merry respectfully, looking at Mr. Carrington, and apparently oblivious of the presence of the New House master.

"Yes, Merry. Mr. Ratcliff tells me that you two boys have formed acquaintances among the members of the circus in Rylcombe—undesirable acquaintances. This is a very serious matter. What have you to say?"

"Only that it isn't true, sir," said Tom Merry.

"Merry!"

"Well, sir, you asked me."

Mr. Carrington coughed, and Mr. Ratcliff turned purple.

"You mean to say that Mr. Ratcliff is mistaken, and

that you are not acquainted with any member of the circus, Merry?"

"Oh, no, sir! We know some of them, but they are not undesirable acquaintances," Tom Merry explained. "That is what you asked me, sir."

"Opinions may differ as to the desirability of certain acquaintances," said Mr. Ratcliff, with a bitter look. "Clowns and circus-riders are not generally deemed desirable acquaintances for schoolboys, Mr. Carrington."

"Weally, Mr. Watchliff——"

"Silence, D'Arcy!"

"Weally, sir, I must wemark that Mr. Watchliff is talkin' out of his hat, sir."

"D'Arcy!"

"Pway allow me to explain how we met those chaps, sir——"

"You may do so."

"It was in the vacation, at my place, sir," said Arthur Augustus. "We went to the circus at Easthorpe, and we played the toupes aftahwards at cwicket. My patah, sir, saw nothin' whatevah to object to; and I twust that my patah's judgment may be welied upon."

"Ah! Your father Lord Eastwood was aware of your acquaintance with these persons, and knew that you played cricket with them?" asked Mr. Carrington.

"Yaas, wathah, sir!"

"We were staying at Lord Eastwood's place at the time, sir," said Tom Merry.

"Then I must conclude that the circus is quite a respectable entertainment."

"Bai Jove! I took my Cousin Ethel to the circus, sir. And if any person insinuates that I should take my Cousin Ethel to a show that was not perfectly wespectable, I can only say, sir, that that person is a wotten——"

"That will do, D'Arcy," said Mr. Carrington hastily.

"You may go."

"Yaas, sir, but——"

"You may go, D'Arcy!"

"Certainly, sir, but I considah—— Pway don't dwag at my arm like that," Tom Mewwy. "Weally, you know, you uttah ass——" The door closed behind Tom Merry and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"You see, sir, you have been——ahem!——misinformed," said Mr. Carrington gently. "I can scarcely refuse D'Arcy permission to act in a manner approved of by his father."

Mr. Ratcliff's thin lip curled bitterly.

"You are satisfied that these boys have told you the exact truth?" he asked sarcastically.

"Quite satisfied," said Mr. Carrington sharply.

"Am I to understand, then, that you intend to give your boys leave to visit this circus?"

"I see no reason to refuse it."

"I have plainly stated my opinion——"

"I thank you for doing so, Mr. Ratcliff, but you must really allow me to be the judge, in matters affecting my own House."

Mr. Ratcliff rose to his feet.

"As you are new here, I wished to give you the benefit of my experience," he said.

"It was very kind of you."

"You do not, however, think it worth while to defer to my judgment in any way. I am older than you, Mr. Carrington, and I have been a Housemaster in this school for more than twelve years. As a new-comer, I might have expected you to prove a little more accommodating. However, you will please yourself, of course."

And Mr. Ratcliff quitted the study, evidently in a huff. Mr. Carrington looked worried. He did not want to have any trouble with his colleague, but it looked as if he would have it whether he wanted it or not.

Mr. Ratcliff quitted the School House, his lips coming tightly together as he passed a crowd of grinning juniors in the hall. He crossed the quadrangle to his own House, with knitted brows. He had been defeated in his first attempt to take the upper hand of the new master, and he realised it, and it did not improve his acid temper.

He found three juniors waiting for him in his study—Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, of the Fourth. He looked at them grimly.

"Well?" he snapped.

Figgins coughed, and Fatty Wynn grunted. The

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chums of the New House had come there to ask a favour, but their Housemaster did not look as if he were in a mood for granting favours. Figgins nudged Kerr; and the Scottish junior threw himself into the breach, as it were.

"If you please, sir—" began Kerr, in his meekest tone.

"Come to the point!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff.

"Ahem! There is a circus at Rylcombe, sir," Kerr faltered, as he saw the thunder gathering on his Housemaster's brow, but he went on manfully: "If—if—if you please, sir, we should like to go."

"Have you not seen the notice I have posted up in the hall, placing that disreputable entertainment out of bounds for all boys of this House?" demanded Mr. Ratcliff, his voice like the rumble of thunder.

"Ye-es, sir, but—but—"

"Yet you come here and ask for leave?"

"We—we thought, sir—"

"It's a jolly good circus, sir," said Figgins feebly.

"And we—we thought—" stammered Fatty Wynn.

Mr. Ratcliff took up a cane from the table. The three juniors watched him in dismay. They had hardly expected that their request would be granted. But they had not quite expected this.

"Hold out your hand, Figgins," rasped Mr. Ratcliff.

"Mum-mum-my hand, sir," stuttered Figgins.

"I am going to punish you for this impertinent disregard of a notice, Figgins, written by me and signed with my name. Hold out your hand at once."

Swish!

"Now, Kerr"—swish!—"and you, Wynn"—swish!—"now you may go! You will kindly remember in future that your Housemaster's orders are not to be argued about, but obeyed."

Figgins & Co. retired from the study, speechless. After the door had closed, Figgins waved his clenched fists in the air, sparring at the door, displaying his feelings in dumb show. Kerr dragged him away.

"Come on, ass! Ratty may come out—"

"Ow!" groaned Figgins. "Ow! Oh! Wait till I'm grown-up. I'll come back here, then, and give Ratty such a whopping—such a thundering whopping—Ow!"

"Beastly tyrant!" mumbled Fatty Wynn. "Why shouldn't we go to the circus? I'll bet you the School House kids are going! They haven't such a beastly Housemaster as we have. Ow! Ow!"

"And we're going!" said Figgins determinedly.

"Draw it mild, Figgy!" murmured Kerr.

"We're going!" repeated Figgins obstinately. "There's no harm in it. If the School House kids go, we go! If you fellows ain't game, you can stay in. But I'm jolly well going."

"We'll go if you do, Figgy. But—but—"

"There'll be a fearful row with Ratty," said Fatty Wynn dubiously.

"Blow Ratty!" snapped Figgins.

"Blow him as much as you like," said Kerr. "But—"

"We're going," said Figgins.

"Ahem! But—"

"We're going!" roared Figgins. And that settled it.

CHAPTER 5.

Off to the Circus.

TOM MERRY & Co. were gathered in Study No. 6 in the School House, in very cheerful spirits. There was an unusually generous spread on the study table, and the study was crowded with fellows. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who had recently received one of his famous fivers, was standing treat, in honour of the victory over Ratty. For the Co. justly considered that they had scored over Ratty, after the interview in Mr. Carrington's study. The chums of Study No. 6 and the Terrible Three and Talbot and Kangaroo were there, and they were all rejoicing.

Arthur Augustus had just proposed a toast—"Con-

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fusion to Watty and all his Works," which had been drunk with enthusiasm in flowing ginger-pop, when the study door was kicked open, and three juniors presented themselves.

"Hallo! New House bounders!" said Blake. "What are you wasters doing on the respectable side of the quad?"

"Pway wing off, Blake," said Arthur Augustus reprovingly. "On an occasion like this, New House bounders are welcome. Pway twot in, Figgins. Vewy glad to see you, Kerr! You will like the wabbit-pie, Wynn. We are celebwtatin' a scoah ovah your wotten Housemastah, deah boys."

"Anything up?" asked Tom Merry, noting that the New House Co. did not seem in their usual spirits.

Although there was generally war between the juniors of the two Houses, in case of trouble they were always ready to stand shoulder to shoulder. And certainly Figgins & Co. looked as if they had been "going through it."

"Yes," growled Figgins. "We didn't come to tea; though Fatty looks as if he did."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, this is a jolly good rabbit-pie," said Fatty Wynn.

"Oh, blow the rabbit-pie!" said Figgins crossly. "Are you bounders going to the circus? That's what we want to know."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We've all got leave," said Blake. "What price you?"

Figgins snorted.

"Ratty's put the circus out of bounds for the New House," he said.

"Rotten!"

"He tried the same game here," said Tom Merry. "But old Carrington wasn't taking any. Carrington is a brick! It's rough on you, though, Figgy. That circus is a corker. We've seen it once, and they've got some new items—something about the giddy Kaiser. It's rotten if you fellows can't come!"

"We're coming!" said Figgins grimly. "As cock-house of St. Jim's, the New House can't be left out!"

"Of course, that's wubbish," remarked Arthur Augustus. "The School House is cock-house! But I weally think you have a wight to go, Figgay, and blow your Housemastah! As a wule, I wecommend wespect to all mastahs—I wegard it as good form. But Watty is an exception. Under the cires, I approve."

"Better tell Ratty that," suggested Monty Lowther. "He will take a back seat at once."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"We're going to hop out after call-over, and chance it," said Figgins. "Ratty won't be there, so it will be all right. And you fellows will keep it dark?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We've got a couple of prefects in our party," said Tom Merry; "Langton and Mulvaney major are coming. Carrington thought we needed 'em. Of course, that's all rot; but there you are. If they spot you—"

"They can mind their own blessed business," said Kerr. "They have no right to spot New House chaps."

"They might, all the same," said Fatty Wynn.

"We'll chance it. We can pull down our caps and turn up our coat-collars," said Figgins. "After all, there'll be a big crowd there, and we'll keep a good distance from you chaps, under the cires. I was thinking of coming along with you; but, if you've got beastly prefects, it can't be did."

"Sorry," said Tom. "I hope you'll get through all right. I dare say Mulvaney and Langton will keep their eyes shut, even if they do see you. They're decent chaps."

The rabbit-pie was finished, and Figgins & Co. departed. Their minds were fully made up. Tom Merry & Co. were going with the consent of their Housemaster, and so the New House chums felt that they were morally entitled to go, in spite of Mr. Ratcliff's attitude.

It was a case of sheer tyranny, and, as Figgins said warmly, Britons never should be slaves.

It was soon time for Tom Merry & Co. to prepare for the excursion. After call-over, the party gathered in the hall—quite an army of them. They put on their



Our artist depicts above a gallant deed which was narrated by a wounded officer now in hospital. During a hot engagement in Flanders, part of the barricade built before a British trench was blown away, leaving a wounded officer and two privates cut off from safety. At this point one of the Tommies, although practically exhausted, succeeded in reconstructing the earthworks, thus enabling the little party to rejoin their comrades without fear of German bullets.

coats and caps; Arthur Augustus, however, being resplendent in a silk topper, in honour of the occasion. Langton and Mulvaney major joined them, also in overcoats and mufflers.

"Bedad, and there's enough of yer!" Mulvaney remarked, as he scanned the army in the hall.

"Sure, and there's enough of us to look after you!" remarked Mulvaney minor, a remark which Mulvaney of the Sixth affected not to hear.

The parties sallied forth, and Tom Merry & Co. glanced round as they crossed the quad, upon which the winter dusk had fallen. There was no sign of Figgins & Co. The New House Trio had probably not started yet.

Tom Merry & Co. felt really concerned about their old rivals of the New House, and extremely savage towards Mr. Ratcliff. That there was no harm in going to the circus was proved by the fact that Mr. Carrington allowed his boys to go; and Ratty's action was, therefore, nothing but ill-nature. It was hard lines that Figgins & Co. should not be able to go without danger of a flogging if they were "bowled out."

Mulvaney and Langton stalked with dignity at the head of the army of juniors as they marched down the lane towards Rylcombe. A cold wind was blowing, bearing light flakes of snow, and thick banks of snow were piled end up against the hedges.

As they drew near the village they saw the naphthalene lamps flaring on the common, and heard the roll of the drum and the blare of the cornet. Crowds of villagers and countrymen were making for the big tents on the common, and the School House crowd joined them.

"Hallo, I know that toppe!" exclaimed a familiar voice, as a crowd of juniors from the Grammar School appeared in sight. "You kids going to the circus?"

It was Gordon Gay of the Fourth Form at Rylcombe Grammar School. There was a crowd of the Grammarians, and they did not seem to be in charge of a prefect.

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus.

"Rather risky, isn't it, Gussy?" asked Gay.

"No; we've got permish. It's wathah wisky for Figg—"

"Shut up!" said Tom Merry.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"But for you, Gussy," urged Gordon Gay. "Blessed if I'm not alarmed about you!"

Arthur Augustus turned his monocle upon the Grammarians.

"I weally fail to see why you should be alarmed about me, Gay."

"Suppose you get mixed up with the animals there!"

"What!"

"The circus chaps mayn't notice the difference, and may lock you up with the rest, and—"

"You uttah ass!" said Arthur Augustus witheringly.

"Bai Jove, if you thwow that snowball at me, Gay—Yawwooh! Oh, you wottah!"

Arthur Augustus's beautiful toppe went sailing, and Arthur Augustus made a wild plunge after it. Then he rushed after Gordon Gay.

"Come back, kid!" shouted Mulvaney major.

"I'm goin' to thwash Gordon Gay!"

"Fetch him back, some of you!" growled Mulvaney. Three or four juniors collared Arthur Augustus, and vanked him back into the ranks, loudly protesting. "You kids have got to keep order. No blessed hooliganism, D'Arcy!"

"Bai Jove! I was goin—"

"Cheese it!"

"But it was Gordon Gay who—"

"Dry up!"

"I wepeat that I—"

"Be jabbers, he's wound up, I suppose!" said Mulvaney major. "Dry up, you young sweep! Now, go in orderly and take your tickets. Don't shove, young D'Arcy!"

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"Pway allow me——"
 "Keep your place, you young idiot!"
 "Yaas; but I must go first——"
 "Stand back, or I'll lam you!"
 "Weally, Mulvaney majah——"
 "Will you keep back!" exclaimed the exasperated prefect. "Bedad, I'll——"

"But I'm goin' to take tickets for these chaps!" shrieked Arthur Augustus. "I'm standing tweat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Well, why couldn't you say so?" demanded Mulvaney, rather unreasonably.

"I was trying to say so, but you——"
 "Buck up!"

"Here we are again!" sang out Tiny Tony, who was beating the big drum outside the entrance to the tent. "Walk up, gents—walk up!"

Pom, pom, pom, pom!
 "How do you do, deah boy?" said Arthur Augustus.

"I've bwrought all these youngstahs, you see——"
 "Are you going in?" bawled Mulvaney.

"Yaas, deah boy, but—— Yawwooh! What are you takin' hold of my yah for, you ass? Ow!"

Mulvaney did not explain what he was taking hold of D'Arcy's ear for. He marched the swell of St. Jim's into the tent with a firm grip on his "yah," as D'Arcy called it, and held him all the time he was paying for admission.

The juniors looked on, grinning, and Arthur Augustus's face was crimson with wrath. Paying for admission was rather a lengthy process, as the number of juniors had to be ascertained, and then Arthur Augustus had to change a banknote. However, Mulvaney's grip on his "yah" certainly caused him to get through the proceedings more quickly than he would otherwise have done.

"Will you let me go, you wild Iwish ase?" asked Arthur Augustus, in a sulphurous voice, as they marched into the tent at last.

"Not till you're in your seat, you young omadhaun!" said Mulvaney major.

"Bai Jove, I—— Ow!"
 "Faith, and what's the matter with you now?"

"You're hurtin' my yah!" yelled Arthur Augustus.
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see anythin' to cackle at, you duffahs. I wegard Mulvaney as a beast, and I'm sorry I bwrought him! Aw, ow!"

"What is it now, bedad?"
 "Ow! My yah! Ow!"

When they were in their seats at last, Arthur Augustus sat and rubbed his "yah," and glowered. The other fellows chuckled.

The performance was not yet due, and the juniors looked round the tent, which was getting crowded, for some signs of Figgins & Co.

If the New House juniors did not come along soon they would not get front seats. Tom Merry spotted three spectators on the opposite of the ring, in the front row, who were keeping their coat-collars turned up and their caps pulled down, and he smiled. He could not see their faces, but he noticed that one of them was extremely plump, and he guessed that Figgins & Co. were there.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, as he turned his eyeglass upon the distant three. "It's all wight, deah boys!"

"What's all right?" asked Blake.

"They're there all wight. I mean—— Ow! What are you stampin' on my foot for, Tom Mewwy, you unspeakable beast?"

Mulvaney major looked round.
 "Can't you kids keep quiet?" he demanded.

"Ow! Wow! I was only goin' to wemark—— Leave off stampin' on my foot, Blake, or I shall stwike you! I was not going to let Mulvaney know anythin' about——"

"Bedad! What's that? What aren't you going to let me know?"

"Nothin', deah boy," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "Pwefects should not ask questions, and they will get no whoppahs told them. Pway don't glare at me, Blake. I suppose you know that I can be twusted to keep a secwet."

Fortunately, the horses started round the ring at that moment, and Mulvaney major's attention was drawn from the swell of St. Jim's. His chums looked daggers and bombs at him, and Arthur Augustus sniffed and turned his attention to the ring.

CHAPTER 6.

Figgins Chips In.

F IGGINS & Co. were there.

The great Figgins was not to be beaten. After call-over, the Co. had requested Mr. Ratcliff's permission to attend Mr. Lathom's lecture, which was due that evening. Even Mr. Ratcliff could not see any reason for refusing them that, and the three chums had left their House and started for the lecture-room.

They did not reach it, however.

While Mr. Lathom was personally conducting an audience of more or less interested seniors through geological epochs, and imparting really valuable information about the secondary and tertiary rocks and things, Figgins & Co. were sliding away into the darkness, and dropping over the school wall into the road.

They reached the circus before the School House party, running most of the way, as they did not have to accommodate their pace to the slow and stately stride of Sixth Form prefects.

They secured front seats, next to the barrier of the ring, in the full glare of the light. After they had secured them, and the seats behind were filling, it occurred to them that it might have been wiser to take back seats, under the circumstances. But they kept their collars turned up, and their caps pulled down over their brows. They spotted Tom Merry & Co. on the opposite side of the wide arena, and they felt that they were too far off to be easily recognised by the two School House prefects.

"We're all right," remarked Kerr. "Besides, they're decent chaps, Langton and Mulvaney. They wouldn't say anything, unless we fairly shoved ourselves under their noses. And nobody belonging to our House is here."

"The prefects could come, if they liked," remarked Fatty Wynn. "Out of bounds doesn't apply to them."

"Not likely," said Figgins. "That beast Sefton would report us, if he came and saw us. But it ain't likely. Anyway, we're in for it now."

The fact that they were present at the circus against orders lent a thrill of excitement to the excursion. If it came to Ratty's ears, they knew there would be trouble—very serious trouble. But it was not likely. Mr. Ratcliff supposed them to be attending the geological lecture, and he would never dream that they had "scooted" out of the school against his positive orders.

Some of the School House fellows had seen the circus before, but it was new to Figgins & Co. But they had heard of it, and they had heard how Arthur Augustus had ridden Texas Bill's horse, which had broken loose, and how Tom Merry had played the circus eleven at cricket with the party staying at Eastwood House for a summer vacation. So they were very much interested in Mr. Charley Chungum and his company.

Mr. Charley Chungum was in the ring, resplendent in evening-dress and gleaming topper, with a white waist-coat and his usual orchid, and a long whip in his hand, and his big diamond gleaming in the light. Tiny Tony was turning somersaults, and raising howls of laughter with his ancient "wheezes," which were new and original to the unsophisticated inhabitants of Rylcombe and the vicinity.

The rough-riding act, performed by Texas Bill—whose native county was Tipperary—was keenly appreciated by Figgins & Co.

"That's the geegee that D'Arcy rode. You remember they told us about it," said Figgins. "He prevented an accident. That School House duffer, you know. What are you blinking round for, Kerr?"

Kerr was scanning the audience behind. More people were coming in, and filling the unoccupied seats.

"Only keeping an eye open," said Kerr.

"Oh, rot!" said Figgins. "I tell you, Ratty hasn't a suspish. Anyway, we're in for it now, and we may as well enjoy ourselves. Here comes the giddy serpent-charmer!"

And Figgins & Co. devoted their attention to the brown-

skinned Rab Rabbi and his winding snakes. After the serpent-charming turn, Captain Coke, the lion-tamer, was the next item on the programme.

A huge iron cage was wheeled into the arena, through the bars of which the lions could be seen—two tremendous animals. The lioness was lying in a corner, but the lion was stalking to and fro in the cage, with bristling mane. The lion-tamer had not yet appeared. Figgins & Co. were at the end of their row, near the alleyway through the seats which gave access to the ring. Mr. Chungum came out of the ring, passed close to them, and went through the canvas screen at the back, behind which the performers vanished after each turn. Figgins & Co. heard the murmur of voices, and as the lion-tamer did not appear, they guessed that something was "up."

"Something wrong with the lion-tamer johnny," remarked Figgins.

The audience were beginning to murmur. Save for the cage and the clown, the ring had been empty for some minutes now, and there was evidently a hitch in the proceedings. Tiny Tony turned somersaults, and cracked jokes, "gagging" to fill up time, as in duty bound. But the murmuring deepened as the minutes passed, and the celebrated Captain Coke did not appear. The lion-taming turn was one of the most thrilling in the programme, and the audience were impatient for it. But the minutes passed, and Tiny Tony's wheezes fell flatter and flatter, and still Captain Coke did not appear. Figgins looked round along the alleyway towards the exit.

"You beast!" He heard Mr. Chungum's emphatic voice from behind the screen. "Beast! Pig! Chuck a bucket of water over him!"

A growling, angry voice responded.

"Trouble in the family," remarked Figgins.

Stamp, stamp, stamp! The audience were showing their impatience in the well-known manner. Stamp, stamp, stamp! Loud voices called to the unfortunate Tiny Tony, who was doing his best, to "go off," and "go and drown'd himself."

"The very next time—the sack!" came Mr. Chungum's voice from behind the canvas. "The very next time, you soaking beast! Don't talk to me! Get on!"

Mr. Chungum came stalking back into the ring, his eyes glittering, but with a genial expression on his fat face, for the audience to see. A yell greeted him.

"Ladies and gentlemen," announced Mr. Chungum, "the celebrated Captain Coke will be with you in one minute."

"Boooh!"

"Captain Coke has been called away to see a—a—a relative wounded at the front," said Mr. Chungum. "He has now returned, and is about to appear."

"Hurrah!"

"Blessed Ananias!" murmured Figgins, with a chuckle. "The man's been boozing, and they've had to chuck water over him to sober him."

Kerr whistled softly.

"Nice state for a man to be in for a lion-taming turn," he remarked. "I should say it was jolly risky."

"Oh, you bet they're tame lions," said Figgins carelessly. "Anyway, they couldn't cut the turn. The audience would have the tent down over their heads if they did."

"That johnny in the cage doesn't look very tame," said Kerr, glancing at the lion, which was stalking to and fro behind the iron bars, and giving at intervals a low roar. "Looks hungry, to me."

"Chap might have forgotten to feed him, if he's been on the booze," remarked Fatty Wynn. "'Nuff to make a lion waxy if he misses a meal. I know it would make me waxy."

"You don't suppose that lion's got your appetite, Fatty!" chuckled Figgins.

"Oh, really, Figgy, you know——"

Woof! came from the lion.

"They make 'em do that, to give us a thrill," said Figgins. "It's all in the tanner's worth, you know. Here comes the johnny. Looks rather bloated."

A short, stout man in tights and spangles came in, passing close to the three juniors. His face was daubed with make-up, but the juniors could see, as they scanned him, that his eyes were bleared and heavy, and his hands

trembling. It was also quite easy to see that he was in a savage temper. He strode through the tan towards the cage, and dropped his whip, and fell over as he picked it up. There was a laugh from the audience, who took that as part of the entertainment. The lion-tamer picked up himself and his whip, and strode on towards the cage. Figgins & Co. watched him curiously. They knew that the man was still under the influence of drink, and that his fall had not been intentional. The thought had come into their minds that there might be danger. Yet it was hard to think that Mr. Chungum would allow it to proceed unless all was safe. They did not know the exigencies of the public performer's life. The "turn" was booked to appear, and the turn had to appear, though the skies fell.

Woof! Captain Coke opened the iron door of the cage, entered it, and clanged it shut behind him. He was shut up in the cage with the lions now, and the three juniors felt a thrill.

"But he does that every day," said Figgins, in answer to his own thoughts, rather than to his companions.

"He's not tipsy every day," said Kerr.

"Oh, it's all right!"

The performance in the lion's cage was commencing. The lioness still lay in her corner, blinking. The lion had to jump over the whip held by the tamer. The whip was cracked, and held out for him, but he did not jump. He was not in a good humour. Perhaps, as Fatty Wynn suggested, his keeper had neglected his meals that day. The face of the lion-tamer flushed with anger, and the whip descended upon the bare flanks of the lion, with a crack that was heard through the big tent.

The crack of the whip was followed by a terrific roar; and then there was a shriek from the audience. The lion had turned savagely upon the man in spangles, and, with a single "lick" of his huge paw, sent him reeling to the floor of the cage.

Then he roared again, and stalked round the cage, evidently in a fury. The audience were all on their feet now, in wild excitement.

Captain Coke lay on the floor of the cage, where he had fallen, without movement. Where his face was not daubed with red, it showed a deathly white. His intoxication had vanished now, and the wretched man realised his terrible peril.

He remained perfectly still, while the lion stalked to and fro and roared. The female was growling now in low and savage tones. The lion laid his paw on the breast of the fallen man, and Figgins felt himself turn sick for a moment. If the man had moved the huge claws would have rent him as he lay; but he lay quite still, and the great beast turned from him again.

"Good heavens," muttered Figgins—"good heavens!"

Mr. Chungum had rushed to the cage. Several "hands" had run into the ring, and they were gathered round the cage. Texas Bill rushed in with a red-hot iron and opened the door of the cage. It was evident that, if the performer was not speedily rescued, the lion's fury would turn upon him, and he was helpless. The big Irishman advanced steadily into the cage, and the lion faced him with open jaws, but retreated from the glowing iron. The great beast, lashing his ribs with his tail and growling fiercely, retreated inch by inch backwards as Texas Bill advanced upon him, and reached the fallen man.

"Get out—quick!" muttered the Irishman.

The lion-tamer did not move. He was unconscious. The lion growled fiercely, and made a movement as if to spring, but again the glowing point of the iron drove him back. Without turning his head—for he dared not take his eyes from the great, yellow orbs before him—Texas Bill called out:

"Get him out—quick! I can't keep the brute back long!"

Mr. Chungum made a forward movement; and there was a deep roar from the lion, and the fat circus-master scudded back involuntarily. Whoever entered the cage to the rescue of the insensible tamer took his life in his hands. At any moment the fearful brute might spring, and the hot iron, though it scared him now, would be useless as a weapon in an encounter. The life

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of the brave rider hung on a thread, as well as that of the lion-tamer.

"Get him out!" muttered Mr. Chumgum, with the sweat pouring down his fat face.

But his "hands" very naturally hesitated to face the risk that their employer had so promptly backed away from.

"Are you coming?" called out Texas Bill, in a husky, strained voice.

From the seats a long-legged figure leaped into the tan, and sped towards the lion's cage. Kerr gave almost a scream.

"Figgins—Figgins, you mad duffer!"

Figgins did not heed. The long, lithe legs that carried him so swiftly on the football field at St. Jim's were going like lightning now as he rushed towards the lion's cage. His chums, white as death, rooted to the ground, watched him.

CHAPTER 7.

Figgy the Hero!

FIGGINS reached the lion's cage almost in a twinkling. He shoved the fat and unnerved Mr. Chumgum aside, and ran for the open door. In a flash he was inside the cage.

Woof!

The roar of the lion thrilled through every nerve in Figgins's body, but it did not make him hesitate. With a flourish of the glowing iron, Texas Bill forced the lion back once more. Figgins bent over the insensible man on the floor. Fortunately, the lion-tamer was not a heavy-weight, and in that moment of excitement the sturdy junior seemed to have the strength of two men.

Figgins dragged the insensible man from the floor, and staggered out of the cage with Captain Coke in his arms.

He reached the opened door, he staggered through, and Texas Bill, still keeping his eyes on the lion's flaming orbs, backed after him.

The great beast crouched to spring—a long shiver ran through his body. Texas Bill, with a backward leap, passed through the doorway, and slammed the iron door.

Crash!

The lion had leaped—a second too late! He roared with pain and rage as his muzzle crashed on the iron door.

The roaring of the infuriated brute rang through the circus. But the danger was past now. The iron door was closed, and the heavy bars caged the lion, and his fury was spent in roaring.

Texas Bill dropped the iron into the tan, and panted. Figgins had let his heavy burden slip into the sawdust. He was panting too.

"My 'at," murmured Mr. Chumgum feebly—"my 'at!"

Captain Coke was still unconscious. There was a streak of blood on his red tunic where the lion had struck him, but he was evidently not seriously hurt. Either his fall in the cage had stunned him, or he had fainted.

"Begorra!" ejaculated Texas Bill, in an accent that certainly did not belong to Texas. "Sure, and it's a broth av a bhoy ye are, as sure as my name's Bill Flaherty! Why didn't some of you gossoons come into the cage, entirely?"

"I—I was just coming!" stammered Mr. Chumgum.

"And so was I," said Tiny Tony, dropping from the trapeze upon which he had clambered for safety. "The young gentleman was too quick for us."

Figgins grinned.

"Yes, you were all coming," snorted Texas Bill; "but old Coke and me would have been torn into scraps and shavings while you was coming, but for this young gent! I'd be proud to shake you by the hand, sir!"

Figgins shook hands cheerfully with the big circus rider.

"Hurrah!"

The audience were cheering now—now that the fright had passed. Figgins's action had been seen by the whole crammed tent, and they were not slow to appreciate his pluck. And among the cheering voices could be recognised the accent of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Huwway! Bwavo, Figgins! I say, deah boys, it's Figgins—old Figgay, you know! Huwway!"

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Captain Coke was being carried out by a couple of the attendants. The lion's cage was wheeled away, the lion still roaring thunderously. Figgins walked quietly back to his place. Kerr helped him over the barrier into his seat.

"You fathead!" he gasped. "Oh, you silly fathead, Figgins! You might have been torn into ribbons! Oh, you ass!"

"Well, you see——" said Figgins apologetically.

"You awful chump!" said Fatty Wynn, with tears in his eyes. "You—you—well, there ain't a word for you! You—you've made me feel as if that last tart doesn't agree with me!"

Figgins grinned, and dropped into his seat. Tom Merry & Co. were waving their caps to him from the other side of the arena. They had forgotten, in the excitement of the moment, that Figgins's presence in the circus was a dead secret. Figgins remembered it, however, and he looked round anxiously. If there was any New House prefect in the crowded tent he had given himself hopelessly away.

Figgins gave a sudden gasp.

"My hat! Done in!"

"What's the row?"

"There's that cad Sefton watching us!"

Kerr and Wynn followed Figgins's glance. At some distance they could see Sefton of the Sixth, a New House prefect. Sefton was standing up in his place, staring towards Figgins & Co. Evidently the New House prefect had come to the circus—perhaps on a hint from Mr. Ratcliff—to see whether any New House juniors were there against orders. And Sefton, the bully of the Sixth, had a special "down" on Figgins & Co., and he was Mr. Ratcliff's toady and spy-in-chief. The grim smile on Sefton's hard, unpleasant face showed that he had recognised the Co. Figgins and his chums had escaped recognition up to that thrilling moment; but after that, of course, it was useless to expect it, especially as Tom Merry & Co. had hailed Figgins by name.

"All U P now!" muttered Figgins, rubbing his hands anticipatively. "That cad is going to report us; I can see it in his eye."

"All through your bolting into 'blessed lions' cages to rescue boozy lion-tamers!" said Kerr.

"I'm sorry, old chap!"

"Fathead!" said Kerr. "Do you think I wish you hadn't done it? Better for us to get a licking than for that boozy idiot to be yanked into strips. But we're done in, all the same. Any other prefect would keep his head shut after what you've done, but Sefton won't."

"Not him!" said Figgins, savagely and ungrammatically. "Look how the rotter's grinning at us! By Jove, he's coming here!"

"Going to order us out, I suppose!" growled Fatty Wynn.

"We won't go!" said Figgins. "May as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb! We're going to pay pretty dear for coming here, so we may as well cheek Sefton!"

The Sixth-Former was making his way among the crowded seats towards the Co. Mr. Chumgum was addressing the audience. He deplored the unfortunate ending of the lion-taming act, but explained that Captain Coke had been so upset by his feelings—which did him credit—when he visited his wounded relation from—from Belgium that he had not been in his usual form. The audience received that explanation good-humouredly, and, Mr. Chumgum having added that the lion-tamer was not really hurt, the next item on the programme was proceeded with. This was Chumgum's latest—the entertaining item, entitled "The Bounders of Berlin," introducing that august personage, the Kaiser, impersonated for the occasion by Charley Chumgum himself.

But Figgins & Co. were not listening to Mr. Chumgum's oration. They had to listen to Sefton of the Sixth. The bully of the New House had reached them, coming behind the row where they sat.

"So you're here, you young rascals!" said Sefton.

"Hear, hear!" said Figgins recklessly.

"You know Mr. Ratcliff's orders?"

"Bow-wow!"

"Why, you cheeky young hound!" exclaimed Sefton indignantly. "Get out of this at once! Go back to the school immediately! I shall report you!"

"Oh, you're going to report us?" asked Figgins.

"Yes, you young sweep!"

"Even if we go back to St. Jim's at once?"

"Yes, certainly!"

"Then we won't go!" said Figgins. "And you can go and eat coke, Sefton!"

Sefton of the Sixth turned almost purple.

"You—you—you young rascal!" he shouted. "Get out of this at once, or I'll sling you out on your necks!"

"Let the young gentleman alone," said a burly farmer, who was seated behind the Co. "Ain't you seen what he's done—saved a man's life?"

"Mind your own business, please!" retorted Sefton. "These boys are here against their master's orders."

"Well, you ain't their master, I s'pose, young shaver," said the big farmer. "And it's lucky they was 'ere, considering what the young gent has done. Let 'em alone."

Sefton sniffed contemptuously at the farmer, and laid his hand on Figgins's shoulder to yank him out of his seat.

"Let go!" howled Figgins.

"Will you come, you young villain?"

"No, I won't!"

"Sit down there!" roared the people at the back.

"You let that young gent alone!" exclaimed the big farmer angrily. "Ain't you ashamed to touch 'im after what he's done?"

"Mind your own business!"

"By gum, this 'ere is my business, and I ain't going to be cheeked by a whipper-snapper in a silk 'at!" exclaimed the burly gentleman, rising to his feet. "Don't you mind 'im, my lads. I'll look after 'im! Now take your 'and off that young gentleman's shoulder. You 'ear me?"

"You old fool!" howled Sefton, red with rage. "Mind your own business!"

"That's enough!" said the farmer; and he collared the bully of the New House and yanked him bodily away from Figgins. "Don't you mind 'im, young gents. I'll look after him!"

Figgins & Co. sat tight and grinned. They did not want to take the responsibility of "handling" so august a personage as a prefect, if they could help it, but they had no objection to the Rylcombe farmer doing so. Sefton of the Sixth was not in the least august in the eyes of that worthy agriculturist; and he was like an infant in the brawny arms that had closed on him.

"Let me go!" shrieked Sefton. "You—you ruffian—you—"

"Hout you go!" said the farmer.

Kicking and struggling furiously in the big man's powerful grasp, Sefton of the Sixth was carried out of the seats to the nearest exit, amid roars of laughter, and "chucked" out. The big farmer wagged a warning finger at him as he sprawled on the ground outside the tent.

"Now don't you make no more row, or I shall 'urt you next time!" he said. And he returned to his place, leaving the dishevelled Sefton writhing with rage.

"It's all right, young gents," said the farmer, as he dropped into his seat behind Figgins. "He won't bother you any more. I've put him hout. It's all right."

"Thank you, sir," said Figgins.

The New House Co. were much obliged to their burly friend, but they had considerable doubts as to whether it was "all right." Sefton of the Sixth, muddy and dishevelled, was stalking away towards St. Jim's to make his report to Mr. Ratcliff, and to make it as black as he could. And Figgins & Co., as they watched the performance of Chungum's latest, could not help their thoughts wandering to St. Jim's and to the terrific storm that would burst upon them when they returned there.

CHAPTER 8.

Straight from the Shoulder.

CHUNGUM'S latest was going strong.

In spite of their secret worries Figgins & Co. enjoyed it, and laughed as loudly as anybody. Tom Merry & Co. enjoyed it thoroughly. It was a comic turn. A crowd of circus "hands" were arrayed in imitation of men of the Prussian Guard, and Mr. Chungum was "got up" as the Kaiser, with a tremendous moustache and a brass helmet. The sight of the pseudo Prussians doing the "goose-step" across the arena made the audience shriek. Mr. Chungum, alias the Kaiser, reviewed the guardsmen, and gave them instruction in the goose-step, and, owing to his orders getting mixed, the Prussians goose-stepped into one another, and finally goose-stepped into the Kaiser, floored him, and goose-stepped over him. Each time that the Kaiser attempted to rise a Prussian came goose-stepping into him, and floored him again. Then there was a blast upon a bugle, and half-a-dozen small Belgians marched into the arena, amid loud cheers from the audience. The Prussians promptly retreated, but from force of habit still went on goose-stepping; so they were easily overtaken, and the Belgians, touching them up with wooden bayonets behind, they goose-stepped out of the ring and disappeared. It was an absurd scene, but it appealed to the audience's sense of humour, and was loudly cheered.

Chungum's latest was the last scene, and then the big tent began to clear. Figgins & Co. looked for the School House fellows when they came out. They saw nothing of Sefton, and it was pretty certain that the bully of the Sixth had already returned to St. Jim's. They found Tom Merry and Co. in the departing crowd.

"Oh, heah you are, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus. "Figgins, deah boy, we're pwound of you. I should think even old Watty would be pleased that you came, aftah all—what!"

"Now, then, you kids, get along!" said Mulvaney major. "Faith, and who's that? Isn't it against the orders for New House kids to be here?"

"Can't be helped," said Figgins. "We had to come."

"Well, get out of my sight!" growled Mulvaney. "Sure, if I see ye, I'm bound to report ye, you young ass; and if you keep right under my nose, how can I help seeing ye?"

"You'd better not let us see you, Figgins," said Langton, laughing. "After what you did I shouldn't like you to be licked. Clear off before we spot you!"

Figgins grinned ruefully.

"It doesn't matter now," he said. "Sefton's seen us, and he's gone back to report us to Ratty."

"Sure, that's rotten, after what you've done, young omadhaun as ye are!" said Mulvaney, knitting his brows. "I'll spake to Sefton, if I see him in time."

The St. Jim's party walked back to the school. Tom Merry & Co. had had a pleasant evening, but they were looking a little worried now. They could not help feeling concerned about Figgins & Co.

"But even Watty will go easy when you tell him about what you did, Figgay, deah boy," Arthur Augustus suggested consolingly.

"I'm not going to tell him," said Figgins shortly.

"Weally, Figgins!"

"It was nothing."

"You wisked your life, deah boy."

"Well, I'm not going to make capital out of it," said Figgins. "I can just see the sneer on the old brute's face if I told him. He would think I was making it up to get out of a licking. Besides, that's got nothing to do with it. I didn't come here specially to yank that silly ass out of the lion's cage. I came to see the circus."

"Yaas, but—"

"And I'm not going to tell Ratty," said Figgins obstinately. "I tell you I won't ask any favours of the beast!"

"But you'll vewy likely be weported to the Head for a floggin', deah boy."

"Can't be helped."

"Wats! If you don't tell him, I shall tell him myself, and wemonstwate with him."

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ANSWERS

NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"LOOKING AFTER MOSSOP!"

"Bow-wow!" said Figgins.

"Hallo! There's Sefton!" exclaimed Tom Merry, as they arrived at the gates of St. Jim's. The New House prefect was just letting himself into the side gate, to which he had a key, like all the prefects.

"After you, Sefton honey!" said Mulvaney major.

"Oh, you've got back!" said Sefton. "Ah! You've got those young scoundrels with you!"

"Same to you, and many of them," said Kerr.

Sefton gritted his teeth.

The crowd followed him in at the gate, and Sefton was stalking away towards the New House, followed by Figgins & Co., when Mulvaney major took him by the arm in a very friendly manner. Langton shepherded Tom Merry & Co. away to the School House. Sefton stared at Mulvaney, who was not usually given to being very friendly with him.

"Sure, I want to spake to you, honey," said Mulvaney, in his friendliest tone. "You were at the circus—phwat?"

"Yes," growled Sefton.

"Then you saw what Figgins did—a jolly plucky thing?"

"I saw that he was there against his Housemaster's orders," said Sefton coldly, "and I know he refused to leave the circus when I ordered him, and some hooligan he knows piled on me and pitched me out!"

"H'm!" said Mulvaney. "Hum! Ahem! Still, don't you think that you might—a hem!—considering the kid's pluck—might—might close one eye?"

Sefton jerked his arm free, and stared Mulvaney major in the face.

"Are you asking me to neglect my duty as a prefect?" he asked loftily.

Mulvaney major coughed.

"Sure, you needn't put it like that, Sefton. Don't mount the high horse, honey. Under the circumstances, I should look over the matter if those kids belonged to my house."

"You might!" said Sefton! "I believe most of the School House prefects are pretty slack. But I have a sense of duty, I hope."

Mulvaney's eyes began to glitter.

"You mean you won't let the young gossoons off?" he asked.

"Certainly not!"

"Now, look here, Sefton," said Mulvaney, lowering his voice. Figgins & Co. discreetly drew aside, not to hear; they knew that the good-natured

prefect was doing his best for them. "Look here, old chap! Between ourselves, we know that Mr. Ratcliff oughtn't to have put the circus out of bounds at all—it was only his ratty temper, because he fell foul of the circus people when they passed the school."

"I decline to hear you criticise my Housemaster, Mulvaney major!" said Sefton, in quite a loud voice.

Mulvaney major clenched his hands with rage. He was not on good terms with the bully of the New House; and Sefton, who had often smarted under his contemptuous remarks, was glad to get a little of his own back now.

"Well, I won't, thin," said Mulvaney, trying to keep his temper. "But I put it to you, as a decent chap, Sefton—"

"How long have you looked on me as a decent chap?" asked Sefton sarcastically. "You were talking in quite a different strain yesterday, Mulvaney. Quite a sudden change, isn't it?"

"Oh, you spalpeen!" murmured Mulvaney, under his breath. "You mean that you're going to report those kids, whatever I may say."

"Certainly. It is my duty."

Mulvaney major breathed hard through his nose.

"Don't talk to me of your duty, you cad. It's the first time you've ever worried about your duty. I think you're a rotter, and that's plain English for yez."

"Thank you! And now, if you've finished trying to corrupt me, and lead me into acting dishonourably, I'll get on," said Sefton.

"Why, you—you—dishonourably—me lead you—why—why—" Words failed Mulvaney major. His hand came up, and his fist was clenched, and it shot out straight from the shoulder, and Sefton of the Sixth rolled heels-over-head in the quad.

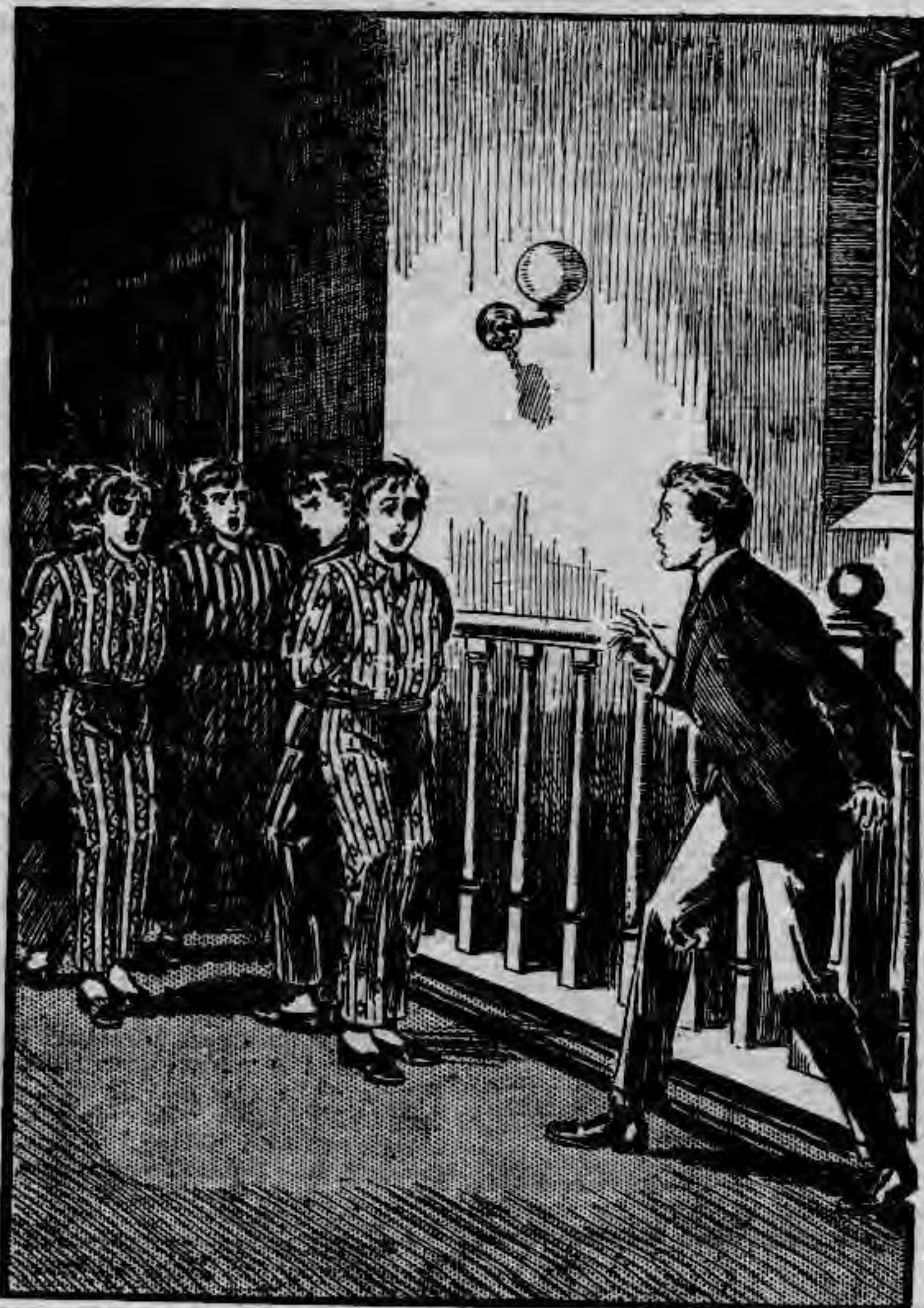
"Hurrah!" gasped Figgins.

Sefton sat up dazedly.

"Now, do you want some more?" snorted Mulvaney.

"Sure, it's against the rules for prefects to fight intirely, but ye'd provoke the patience of the Howly Saint Pathrick himself!"

Sefton did not get up, and Mulvaney, major swung off with a sniff, stamping away angrily towards the School House. He had done his best, but he had an uncomfortable feeling that he had made matters worse instead of better for Figgins & Co.



"What's this little game?" roared Bulkeley. "What are you kids doing out of your dormitory? What are you tied up like this for?" "Ahem!" replied Tommy Dodd, with a feeble grin. "It—it—it's only a la-l-l-lark. First night, you know, Bulkeley. We called on the classic chaps, and—and they fixed us up like this!" (An amusing scene in the magnificent new, long complete tale of school life contained in the issue of our companion paper, "The Boys' Friend," on sale everywhere to-day.)



Mr. Ratcliff uttered a wild shriek. His mortar-board went flying, his gown whisked in the air, his long, thin legs thrashed about frantically. "Help! help!" he gasped. "I shall be killed! Oh!" (See Chapter 2.)

He had indeed! Sefton rose to his feet as Mulvaney disappeared into the gloom, and he gave Figgins & Co. a deadly look. He knew that the chums of the Fourth had enjoyed his downfall, and he meant to make them pay for that enjoyment as dearly as he could.

"Follow me to your House!" he snapped.

And Figgins & Co., with glum faces, followed the prefect into the New House, and straight to Mr. Ratcliff's study.

CHAPTER 9.

Sentenced to a Flogging.

MR. RATCLIFF rose to his feet as Sefton of the Sixth entered his study. He did not appear surprised to see Figgins & Co. following the prefect in. As a matter of fact, Mr. Ratcliff had had his suspicions, and during the evening he had looked into the lecture-room, and had ascertained that Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn were not imbibing geological knowledge from Mr. Lathom.

"I have to report these juniors, sir," said Sefton. "They have been to the circus in Rylcombe, sir, contrary to orders."

"I imagined as much," said Mr. Ratcliff. "I am aware that they were not at Mr. Lathom's lecture, after asking permission to attend. You have deceived me deliberately, Figgins—or, rather, you attempted to deceive me."

Figgins flushed.

"I did not deceive you, sir," he said. "I intended to go to the circus, that is all. There was no reason why we shouldn't go if the School House fellows went."

"Indeed! You take it upon yourself, Figgins, to set up your judgment above that of your Housemaster," said Mr. Ratcliff, tightening his lips. "You actually saw these boys at the circus, Sefton?"

"Yes, sir," said the prefect venomously, "and I ordered them to leave at once, and they refused to do so. I was assaulted, and thrown out of the tent, by a ruffian whom they set upon me."

"That's a whopper," said Figgins.

"Silence!" thundered Mr. Ratcliff.

"But it isn't the truth, sir," exclaimed Kerr. "We didn't know the man who chucked Sefton out."

"I do not believe you. I accept Sefton's statement entirely. Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, you have disobeyed my orders, disobeyed a prefect, and caused him to be assaulted. This is too serious a matter for a mere caning. I shall report you to the Head for a flogging. To-morrow morning you will all three be publicly flogged in hall, in the presence of the whole school. Now you may go."

Figgins & Co. went.

There was nothing more to be said. It was close on bedtime now, and the three chums of the Fourth went up to their dormitory. They were not feeling happy. A public flogging was not only exceedingly painful, but it was disgraceful, and their cheeks burned at the thought of it. But they had placed themselves in Mr. Ratcliff's power, and their escapade had to be paid for.

Their gloomy looks attracted attention at once in the Fourth Form dormitory in the New House.

"Where on earth have you been all the evening—and what's the matter with you?" asked Redfern.

"Circus!" growled Figgins.

"My hat! After Ratty put it out of bounds?" exclaimed Lawrence.

"Blow Ratty!"

"Licked?" asked Redfern.

"Not yet! We're going to be flogged by the Head in the morning," grunted Kerr.

"Oh crumbs!"

"Well, you must have been duffers," remarked Owen. "Why, Ratty sent Sefton on purpose to see whether there were any of our House there. I saw the old brute talking to him before he went."

"We didn't know the beast was there," growled Figgins. "But it wouldn't have made any difference. We were bound to go if the School House fellows did! The New House wasn't going to take a back seat, Ratty or no Ratty."

Figgins & Co. turned in, in the lowest of spirits. Monteith of the Sixth came to see lights out. He glanced rather curiously at the three delinquents, but did not speak to them. There was a buzz of talk in the dormitory after Monteith was gone. But Figgins & Co. did not join in it; they were not inclined to talk about the circus. The thought of the flogging due on the morrow filled their minds, and it was some time before they went to sleep.

They turned out at the clang of the rising-bell in the morning, still with glum looks. There was snow in the quadrangle when they came down, and some of the School House fellows were already out, snowballing one another. Tom Merry & Co. were out of their House, and at sight of Figgins & Co. they rushed across to speak to them.

"How did you get on last night?" asked Tom.

"Rotten!"

"Ratty came over to the School House just after we came in," said Blake. "He went in to see the Head."

"We're down for a flogging," said Figgins, clenching his hands. "I'll come back and give Ratty the whopping of his life."

"Look heah, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus. "I am suah that the Head would go easy with you if he knew the weally pluckay way you played up last night."

"Oh, rats!" said Figgins.

"I pwopose that we go and see the Head," said Arthur Augustus firmly. "I will put it to him as an old sport—"

"Fathead!"

"Weally, Figgins—"

"I tell you we won't have it," said Figgins. "Besides, that wouldn't help Kerr and Wynn. They didn't go into the giddy lion's cage. I don't want to get off if they don't, fathead!"

"Yaas, but—"

"Besides, it wouldn't make any difference. A man got fed up with Sefton and chucked him out of the circus tent, and he makes out that we set him on. They call it assaulting a prefect. We're booked, you see."

"That's all vewy well, but suppose we ask Langton

and Mulvaney to speak to the Head—I am sure they would, undah the cires?"

"Oh, rubbish!" said Figgins morosely. "It's no good, I tell you. I'm not going to make capital out of a thing like that. Besides, it wouldn't get Kerr and Wynn off, and I'm sticking to them. If they go through it, I don't want to sneak out of it—especially as it was my fault they came to the circus."

"Better two than three, though," said Kerr.

"Rot!" said Figgins angrily. "I tell you, if you have it, I'm going to have it. Besides, I don't suppose it would make any difference. Cheese it!"

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus suddenly. "I've got an ideah!"

"Oh, go and bury it," said Figgins.

"I wefuse to go and buwy it. I think—lemme see, you will be flogged aftah pwayahs, you know—there's lots of time."

"Time for what?" demanded Tom Merry.

"My wippin' ideah, deah boys."

"But what—"

"Sowwy—no time to explain now. But it's a weally wippin' ideah. Pway excuse me, deah boys!" And Arthur Augustus sped away.

The juniors gazed after him in astonishment. The swell of St. Jim's disappeared at top speed round the School House.

"What the thunder——" said Fatty Wynn.

"Off his rocker, as usual," grunted Manners.

"Hallo, here he is again!"

Arthur Augustus came whizzing back on his bicycle. Juniors were supposed to wheel their bikes out of gates before they mounted them. But Arthur Augustus was evidently in a hurry. He came down the drive at top speed, ringing his bell loudly. He passed the group of astonished juniors, and whizzed out of the school gates—which Taggles had opened a few minutes before—and disappeared.

"The howling ass!" said Blake. "It's close on brekker——"

The breakfast-bell rang, and the juniors went back into their houses. Arthur Augustus's place at the Fourth Form table in the School House dining-room remained vacant. Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, was at the head of the table, and he blinked along through his glasses as breakfast proceeded. He had noted the absence of the swell of St. Jim's.

"Is not D'Arcy down yet, Blake?" he asked.

"I—I think he's gone for a spin on his bike, sir," said Blake.

Mr. Lathom shook his head seriously.

"Very irregular," he said. "I shall have to speak to D'Arcy."

But Mr. Lathom did not have an opportunity of speaking to D'Arcy during breakfast, for the swell of the Fourth did not reappear before the meal was finished. But as the juniors came out, Arthur Augustus entered the School House, looking rather flushed and breathless, and extremely satisfied with himself.

"You've lost your brekker, fathead!" said Digby.

"Wats! That is a mattah of vewy little moment!" said Arthur Augustus loftily. "I am not likely to think of bwekkah when old Figgins is goin' to be flogged. It is up to Study No. 6 to look aftah those New House boundahs, you know, when they are in an awkward posish, the School House bein' cock-house of St. Jim's."

"How in thunder can you help Figgins by missing your breakfast?" yelled Blake.

Arthur Augustus chuckled.

"I told you I had an ideah, deah boy."

"What have you been doing?"

"Lookin' aftah Figgins."

"You—you—you jabberwock! How have you been looking after Figgins by missing your brekker?" exclaimed the exasperated Blake.

"I wefuse to be called a jabberwock!"

Before the swell of the School House could be questioned further it was time for chapel. The order had gone forth that immediately after prayers the whole school was to assemble in Big Hall to witness a flogging. Most of the fellows knew that Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn were to be the victims, and there was a very general sympathy felt

for them. Still, as they had directly disregarded their Housemaster's orders, it was felt that the Head could not refuse Mr. Ratcliff's demand that a flogging should be administered. The juniors kindly exonerated the Head from blame in the matter, but the remarks they made about Mr. Ratcliff would have made that gentleman turn green if he could have heard them.

After prayers Big Hall was crowded.

Both Houses were there, ranked in their Forms, to witness the public punishment of the three delinquents.

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, looking the reverse of cheerful, came in, in the charge of Mr. Ratcliff himself. Ratty was looking very stern, and his hard jaw was set like a vice. Dr. Holmes entered the hall by the upper door, with a frown on his face. The good old doctor disliked administering corporal punishment, and floggings at St. Jim's were very rare. But there was really no choice about the matter in this case, and the Head was prepared to do his unpleasant duty.

There was a grim silence in the hall as the Head addressed Figgins & Co.

"Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, your Housemaster has reported you to me for an act of flagrant disobedience."

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn maintained a glum silence.

"After Mr. Ratcliff had forbidden you to leave the precincts of the school last evening you deliberately absented yourselves to visit a circus in the neighbourhood, which your Housemaster had placed out of bounds. You can have no excuse, I presume, to offer for your conduct."

The three culprits remained silent. They had plenty of excuses which were good enough for themselves and their friends, but none that would have been likely to satisfy the Head.

"Taggles!"

Taggles, the porter, came forward to "hoist" the condemned juniors in turn. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, from his place among the Fourth, turned his eyeglass anxiously on the door. The big door of the hall had been closed after the school was assembled.

"Bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy. "He must be comin—"

"Eh! We're all here!" said Blake.

"Wats! That boundah— Bai Jove, heah he is! Huwway!"

The big door swung open, just as Taggles was about to raise Figgins on his back for the first stroke of the birch.

There was a gasp of amazement from the School House juniors as they saw the new-comer.

He was a fat and ponderous gentleman in a fur-collared coat, adorned with an orchid, with a brilliant diamond in his tie, and a curly-brimmed silk hat a little on the side of his head. And there was a murmur of amazement.

"Chungum, by gum!"

CHAPTER 10.

Mr. Chungum to the Rescue.

MR. CHARLEY CHUNGUM bestowed a smiling nod of recognition upon Tom Merry & Co. as he advanced up the hall.

Figgins & Co. stared at him blankly.

Dr. Holmes, birch in hand, lowered the instrument of torture as he looked in amazement at the unexpected apparition.

He had never seen Mr. Chungum before, and what the resplendent stranger could want there at that moment was a mystery to him.

"Morning, sir!" said Mr. Chungum to the Head affably.

"Sir!"

"I 'ave the honour, sir, of speaking to the respected headmaster of this scholastic establishment?" asked Mr. Chungum, in his best manner.

"I am the headmaster of this school, certainly," said Dr. Holmes stiffly. "May I ask you to explain your presence?"

"Certainly, sir—certainly!" said Mr. Chungum. "Please don't blame young Buttons out there for letting me in. He said I couldn't come in, and did his duty, sir. I took the liberty of dropping him out into the quadrangle, sir. So don't blame him."

Dr. Holmes's face was a study.

"What—what do you want? Who are you?" he stuttered.

Mr. Ratcliff broke in savagely.

"Dr. Holmes, this is the ruffianly circus proprietor who, as I informed you, treated me with unexampled insolence yesterday at the gates of the school!" he exclaimed.

Mr. Chungum gave him a good-natured nod.

"How do you do, sir?" he exclaimed. "I hope you are feeling well this morning!"

"Fellow!" spluttered Mr. Ratcliff.

"Bless your little 'eart!" said Mr. Chungum. "I don't bear any malice for the way you cheeked me yesterday, sir. I put it down to indigestion, sir. I can see that you are a dyspeptic, sir. I assure you that I don't remember it against you in the least."

Mr. Ratcliff gasped with wrath. The St. Jim's fellows were all grinning now, in spite of the seriousness of the occasion.

"Sir," exclaimed the Head testily, "will you kindly explain what you mean by this unwarrantable intrusion?"

"That's what I'm 'ere for, my dear sir," said Mr. Chungum. "In me you behold Charley Chungum, proprietor and manager of Chungum's Celebrated Circus, which has performed, sir, before every crowned 'ead in Europe, and vast numbers of uncrowned 'eads. And although, sir, that was not the immediate reason of my callin' 'ere, I should be delighted, now that I have had the honour of making your acquaintance in sending you a box, sir, for the evening performance."

The Head looked at Mr. Chungum as he might have looked at some strange animal from the Zoo. Mr. Charley Chungum was quite a new experience for him.

"You—you are very kind, Mr.—er—Mr. Chewgum!"

"Chungum, sir—Charley Chungum!"

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Chungum. I have neither the time nor the inclination to attend circuses, and I am therefore compelled to decline your offer. May I now beg you to retire, as you are wasting my time?"

"Not at all, sir," said Mr. Chungum, with undiminished affability. "Although I should be delighted and honoured—honoured, sir—to see you at my show, that was not the immediate purpose of my visit here. I came, sir, to acquaint you with a circumstance reflecting great credit upon the school of which you are headmaster, and which I am sure you would be glad to know."

"Dear me!"

"Shall Taggles put this person out, sir?" asked Mr. Ratcliff.

Mr. Chungum wagged a fat forefinger at the New Housemaster.

"Naughty!" he said.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" shouted Mr. Ratcliff, looking round furiously. "As—as for you, fellow, if you do not immediately retire—"

"I beg you to retire, Mr. Chungum," said the bewildered and perplexed Head.

"Sir, I repeated that I have come here to acquaint you with a circumstance highly creditable to this scholastic institution," replied Mr. Chungum. "A number of your boys were present at my show last night. I trust," added Mr. Chungum, who seemed to suffer from a constitutional inability to keep to the point—"I trust they consider that they had full value for their money."

"Hear, hear!" sang out Monty Lowther, and there was a laugh.

"During the performance, sir," went on Mr. Chungum impressively, "there was an accident. My lion-tamer, sir, suffering from the emotions caused by a visit to a relative who had been wounded in the trenches in—in—in Belgium, was not his usual self, sir, and, to make a long story short, sir, he was so overcome by spirits—I—I mean by low spirits, of course—that he lost his nerve in the lion's cage, and was felled, sir—felled by a ferocious lion."

"Bless my soul!" said the Head. "I sincerely trust that he was not injured, though I quite fail to see why you should tell me anything about it."

"He was slightly injured, sir—only slightly—but he would have been torn into pieces but for the noble, gallant conduct of a schoolboy, sir, belonging to this school, who sprang out of his place in the audience, sir,

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rushed into the lion's cage at the risk of his life, and carried the insensible man into safety!"

"Bless my soul!"

"I repeat, sir, that I think you would like to be acquainted with that circumstance," said Mr. Chungum impressively. "That boy, sir, is a hero. I am glad that he was not hurt, but he came within an ace, sir, of being torn to pieces. He saved a man's life—the life of a perfect stranger to him, and ran a risk that makes me shudder now, sir, to think of it."

"I am truly glad that you have told me this, Mr. Chungum," said the Head quite cordially. "It was a very brave action."

"It was heroic, sir—heroic!" said Mr. Chungum. "That boy, sir, saved the life of a human being, and he also saved Chungum's Circus from a very unpleasant case in the papers. I shall always be grateful, sir, to that young gentleman as long as I live, and, if ever he wants a friend, he has only to call on Charley Chungum. There will be a full report of the case, sir, in the 'Rylcombe Gazette,' where you will be able to read it for yourself, the reporter having been present and witnessed the occurrence."

"Kindly tell me the name of the boy concerned, Mr. Chungum."

"I do not know his name, sir, but he is here present," said Mr. Chungum. "Like a true hero, sir, he was very modest, and he scuttled back into his place as quickly as he could after acting, sir, like a hero. This is the young gentleman!"

And Mr. Chungum pointed to Figgins.

"Figgins!" ejaculated the Head.

"This young gentleman, sir," said Mr. Chungum. "Master Figgins, may I have the honour of shaking you by the hand?"

Figgins grunted, and bestowed that honour upon Mr. Chungum. The fat gentleman gave him a grip that made him jump.

"If you will allow me to make one more remark, sir," said Mr. Chungum, who was evidently wound up, "I should like to say that the British Empire, sir, need fear no foreign foe while she produces lads like this to defend her! This school should be proud of Master Figgins!"

"Hear, hear!" roared Redfern.

"Bravo, Figgy!"

Figgins stood with a face like a beetroot.

The Big Hall rang with cheering. Figgins's exploit was news to most of the fellows, but they were not slow to show what they thought of it. It was observed that Dr. Holmes had laid down the birch.

"Bravo, Figgy!"

"Hip-pip-hurray!"

Dr. Holmes held up his hand for silence, but it was some minutes before silence could be restored. The St. Jim's fellows were fairly letting themselves go. The old rafters rang with it.

CHAPTER 11.

Thanks to Gussy.

"Figgins!" said the Head, when silence was restored at last.

"Ye-es, sir!" stammered Figgins.

Figgins's rugged face was crimson.

"I was not aware of this, Figgins."

"N-n-no, sir."

"Mr. Chungum, I am infinitely obliged to you for coming here and telling me this."

"Not at all, sir," said Mr. Chungum, with an airy wave of his fat hand. "Don't mench, sir. I regarded it as my duty, sir."

"I was about to punish this boy severely for attending the circus last night in disregard of the orders of his Housemaster. Under the circumstances, as his action was attended with such happy results, I feel that I cannot do so."

Mr. Ratcliff broke in. His eyes looked quite green, and glittered like a cat's.

"Really, Dr. Holmes—"

Dr. Holmes looked at him.

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"You were unacquainted with these circumstances, I presume, Mr. Ratcliff?" he asked.

"Quite, sir; and I am far from believing such a wild story now, sir. This man does not, in my opinion, deserve the least credit. I doubt his statements from beginning to end, sir."

"Oh!" said the Head.

"I know him to be an unscrupulous and insolent person!" said Mr. Ratcliff venomously. "I believe he has come here with this farrago of nonsense in order to advertise his wretched circus, sir!"

"Dear me!"

Mr. Chungum stared at the New House master.

"But for the respected presence of this worthy gentleman," said Mr. Chungum, indicating the Head, "I would take you, sir, by the scruff of the neck and rub your beak, sir, on the floor!"

Mr. Ratcliff started back, as if in fear of the indignant circus-master executing his threat.

"Pray calm yourself, Mr. Chungum," said the Head. "The matter is easily put to the test. There were others present at the time."

Langton and Mulvaney major had started forward, as if moved by the same spring.

"We were there, sir!" exclaimed Langton. "We saw it all!"

"And, faith, it was just as Mr. Chungum describes, sir!" said Mulvaney. "Sure, me heart was in me mouth, sir, when that young spalpeen whipped into the cage!"

"Yaas, wathah!" yelled Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "We all saw it, and Watty knows vewy well that it is all twue."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" exclaimed the Head, as a score of School House juniors began to shout at once, testifying to the truth of Mr. Chungum's narration. "Silence! Langton, you tell me that you were present?"

"Yes, sir," said the prefect. "Mulvaney major and I went in charge of the juniors of our House, at Mr. Carrington's wish. We saw the whole affair, sir. We were not aware that Figgins was there until he ran into the ring and entered the lion's cage. He did so at the risk of his life."

"And sure he saved the lion-tamer's life, sir," said Mulvaney. "The man had fainted, and the baste would have chawed him up, sir."

"I trust, sir, that you are satisfied now?" said Mr. Chungum, with a disdainful glare at Mr. Ratcliff.

The Head broke in before Mr. Ratcliff could speak.

"I am quite satisfied," he said. "I repeat, Mr. Chungum, that I am very greatly obliged to you for coming here and acquainting me with this. Under the circumstances, I shall certainly not punish these juniors."

"I am very glad to hear it, sir," said Mr. Chungum—"very glad indeed, sir. I will now retire, sir; but pray remember that, if you should care to see Chungum's Celebrated Circus, I shall always hold a box at your disposal. We are at Rylcombe for one week, sir—positively for one week only, though drawing crowded houses. I may specially mention our latest turn, sir, known as Chungum's latest, and entitled, 'The Bounders of Berlin,' which will especially appeal to you as a patriot. I have the honour, sir, to bid you good-morning!"

And Mr. Chungum retired.

A murmur of applause followed Charley Chungum as he went, and he turned in the doorway and bowed over his silk hat; and then set it a little sideways on his head and disappeared.

There was a buzz in Big Hall, but Dr. Holmes held up his hand for silence. Mr. Ratcliff, feeling very much like a cat who has seen a mouse escape, was biting his thin lips savagely. The flogging was evidently not coming off, after all.

"Figgins," said the Head.

"Yes, sir," murmured Figgins, whose face was very cheery now. He could hardly believe in his good luck. Mr. Chungum's unexpected arrival had been quite providential.

"Under the circumstances, Figgins, I feel that I must remit your punishment. After you have acted so gallantly, I feel that it would be out of place to administer a flogging. I am sure your Housemaster feels the same."

Figgins wasn't so sure of that.

"You agree with me, Mr. Ratcliff?" said the Head.

Put in that way, it would not have been easy for Mr. Ratcliff to dissent.

"Very good, sir," said Mr. Ratcliff. "Kerr and Wynn, however, did not share in this—this gallant conduct, but they were equally guilty of disobedience and defiance."

Dr. Holmes frowned. It would have been very much more graceful of Ratty to let the whole matter drop. But Mr. Ratcliff was greatly incensed at the idea of seeing all his victims escape him at one fell swoop.

"You are right, Mr. Ratcliff," said the Head, after a pause. And Kerr and Wynn exchanged a dismayed look. But they brightened up again as Dr. Holmes went on: "However, under the circumstances, I do not care to inflict severe punishment. These juniors undoubtedly did very wrong, but we must remember that their action was, happily, the means of saving a human life. Under these circumstances, I do not feel that severe punishment can be administered. Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn will express their regret for having contravened your orders, and then I think the subject may be dismissed."

"Certainly, sir, if—if you think so," said Mr. Ratcliff, almost choking.

"You hear me, my boys?" said the Head.

"Yes, sir," said Figgins. "We are very sorry, Mr. Ratcliff, if we have done anything that we ought not to have done—very sorry indeed."

This was putting it very diplomatically, and Mr. Ratcliff noticed it, though it escaped the Head.

"Awfully sorry, sir," said Kerr and Wynn together.

"Very well. Now that the boys have apologised, the matter is ended," said the Head. "But I will say a few words. You are pardoned, Figgins, but you must remember that disobedience is a very serious thing, and that it is very wrong indeed to treat a master with anything approaching disrespect. Mr. Ratcliff is my representative in the New House, and in disobeying him you disobey me."

"Oh, sir," exclaimed Figgins, "we'd never disobey you, sir! I'd punch any fellow's head who wanted to, sir!"

"Ahem! That will do, Figgins. Pray remember what I have said to you. Dismiss!" said the Head.

Mr. Ratcliff strode away, trying to hide his thoughts and feelings, but not succeeding very well. In the Fifth Form-room that morning the Fifth, who had the misfortune to possess Mr. Ratcliff as Form-master, found him almost unbearable.

Figgins & Co. marched out of Big Hall in the midst of a delighted and enthusiastic crowd. Figgins & Co.'s escape from the flogging delighted the juniors; and they also felt that it was "one in the eye" for Ratty, which delighted them still more. The chums of the New House were in the greatest of spirits.

"Jolly decent of old Chungum to hop in like that, wasn't it?" Figgins remarked. "And what a jolly good stroke of luck that he should hop in just at that minute, too! If he'd left it later in the day—Ugh!"

"Jolly early for him to turn out in the morning, too," said Tom Merry. "It was a stroke of real luck that he came early."

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus.

"What!" howled the juniors.

"I wepeat, wats!"

"Why, you—you fathead!" roared Blake. "Wasn't it a stroke of luck?"

"Nothin' of the sort!"

"Bump him!" yelled Kangaroo of the Shell. "Bump him baldheaded!"

"Weally, you fellows—I didn't mean—pway allow me to explain—I meant to say—Yawooh! Gwooooh! Oh cwumbs!"

Bump!

"Oh cwumbs! You uttah asses! Gwooooh!"

"Now, wasn't it a stroke of luck?" howled Blake.

"Did you want old Figgy to be flogged, you—you worm! Wasn't it a stroke of luck—what?"

"No, it wasn't!" shrieked Arthur Augustus. "It was not a stwoke of luck at all. It was my ideah, you sillay fatheads!"

"Your—your what?"

Arthur Augustus scrambled up wrathfully.

"You uttah asses! You feahful chumps! It was not a stwoke of luck at all; it was all awwanged. That was my ideah, you fwabjous duffahs!"

"Your idea?" exclaimed Figgins, in astonishment.

"How—"

"You fwightful asses! Didn't I wun down on my bike befoah bwekkah, and tell old Chungum all about it, you sillay chumps?"

"My only hat!"

"So that was where you went!" gasped Blake.

"Yaas, you ass! I wushed down like anythin', and woused old Chungum out of bed, and told him Figgy was goin' to be flogged for comin' to the circus!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "And old Chungum said he would wight off. I knew the Head wouldn't flog Figgy if he knew all the circs."

"By gum!"

"It was not a stwoke of luck at all, you uttah asses! The ideah flashed into my bwain, and I awwanged the whole thing," said Arthur Augustus indignantly.

"Oh!" said Blake. "Well, you duffer, you should have said all that before. You can consider that bumping off!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old Gussy!" chuckled Kerr. "Where does he get these brilliant ideas from? So it was Gussy's mighty brain that saved the situation!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas, wathah, you duffahs!"

"Well, we're awfully obliged," said Figgins. "You are a thumping good little ass, Gussy—"

"I wefuse to be called a thumpin' good little ass!"

"It was simply a stroke of genius," said Fatty Wynn.

"We're awfully obliged, Gussy—honest Injun!"

"Oh, don't mench, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "Of course, it is up to me to look aftah you youngstahs!"

And Figgins & Co., under the influence of gratitude, allowed that remark to pass.

CHAPTER 12.

Up to Figgins!

F IGGINS & CO. had come out of their scrape well, thanks to the brilliant inspiration of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in bringing Mr. Chungum on the scene.

But they fully expected that Mr. Ratcliff could contrive somehow to "take it out" of them.

The Housemaster had been unable to stand against the Head; indeed, if he had shown any persistence in desiring Figgins to be punished after his gallant exploit, he would have risked opening Dr. Holmes's eyes to the "true inwardness" of his character. Dr. Holmes was far from knowing Mr. Ratcliff as Figgins & Co. knew him, and Ratty was not at all desirous of enlightening him.

But the chums of the New House looked for squalls afterwards. There were many ways in which a Housemaster could make them "squirm," as Figgy expressed it, and they knew that Ratty had not let them off with a good grace.

But to the surprise of the Co., Mr. Ratcliff seemed to have forgotten them during the next few days. Either Figgy's noble exploit had touched his heart, or else he was, like the celebrated Brer Fox, "lying low." Figgins & Co. were inclined to suspect the latter. Kerr declared that Ratty was simply lying low, with the intention of catching them on the hop. Figgy was such a hero, so long as the story remained unforgetten, that it would have looked rather ungracious to pick upon him, and the canny Kerr's opinion was that Ratty was biding his time for a few days, and then would come down with a "whop."

For that reason Figgins & Co. were very good for the remainder of that week. No sliding down the banisters, no rows in the study, no rags in the Fourth-Form passage, no leap-frog in the common-room. Nothing at all that could give Ratty the slightest excuse for jumping on them.

Indeed, Figgins & Co. were so good that it began to get on their nerves a little, and they had to come over

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY!

"LOOKING AFTER MOSSOO!"

to the School House every now and then and rag Tom Merry & Co., just to liven things up.

But as the days passed on, and still Mr. Ratcliff seemed to be oblivious of their existence, Figgins & Co. began to feel more assured, and they relaxed somewhat their oppressive goodness.

"Blessed if I was born to be a good little Eric!" Figgins confessed, when Saturday came round. "I never quite believed myself in Good Georgie, the boy who loved his kind teachers. We've made jolly nearly a record this week, I think, and it's about time we began to breathe again—what?"

"Hear, hear!" said Fatty Wynn heartily. "What about a feed in the dormitory to-night?"

Figgins snorted.

"Trust you to think of that, Fatty!"

"Well, we haven't had a feed in the dorm for a jolly long time!" argued Fatty. "It seems like ages to me!"

"Bow-wow! Has it occurred to you chaps that it was jolly decent of old Chumgum to come to our rescue in the way he did?" said Figgins.

"Topping!" said Kerr.

"And we haven't even thanked him," said Figgins.

"Oh, I dare say he'll take that for granted! He knows that the circus is out of bounds for us."

"That's all very well," said Figgins, "but a chap ought to be grateful. Don't want to be taken for a 'unkless beast, you know."

"Might write to him," said Kerr.

"Too late. This is the last day of the circus at Rylcombe. They have a matinee performance this afternoon, and then bunk," said Figgins.

"Well, you should have thought of it before then," said Kerr. "I dare say some of the School House chaps will take a message. A lot of them are going down to see the show again this afternoon. In the daytime they can go without a giddy prefect."

"Well, I don't know about a message," said Figgins. "My idea is that a thing of that sort ought to be done personally."

"Look here, you thumping ass," said Kerr, "you're jolly well not going to break bounds again to go to that blessed circus! We had a narrow escape last time, and I'm fed up. The Head wouldn't look over it a second time. I suppose you don't expect to perform another heroic rescue, do you?"

"But just think a bit," argued Figgins. "Circuses can't be doing very well in war time, you know, and after the splendid way Chumgum came to the rescue it's only fair to back up his show."

"You mean you want to go to the circus?" growled Kerr.

"Well, I do," said Figgins. "We didn't really see the lion-taming turn, you know; it was thrilling, but quite unrehearsed, what we saw. There's that; and, besides, all the School House chaps are going out, and there's no footer on, and we don't want to stay here like a lot of moulting hens. Besides that, old Chumgum being so chumgummy—I mean so chummy—he'll let us behind the scenes, and we can see the circus people on their native heath—what?"

"Well, I'd like that all right," admitted Kerr, "but it's too jolly risky. Ratty would jump with joy if he spotted us."

"How can he spot us? We'll go out in our Scout rig. See? We'll make it a point to let Ratty see us got up as scouts, and he can't possibly smell a mouse then. You don't suppose Ratty will go to the circus himself, do you?"

"Besides, Ratty has quite come down off his perch," said Fatty Wynn, rather taken with the great Figgins's idea. "He seems to have forgotten all about us."

"Lying low!" growled Kerr. "I shouldn't wonder if he suspects that we might think of going to the last performance."

"Oh, come off!" said Figgins. "You're suspicious, Kerr; that's the worst of you Scotsmen—you're too canny. Just think of getting behind the scenes, and seeing the circus people making up, and all that. And I'll tell you what—if there are any New House prefects knocking about we won't go in to the show—see? I'll speak to Tom Merry, and he'll give the curlew call if there's danger."

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"Oh, all right!" said Kerr. "But it's jolly risky. My belief is that Ratty is simply biding his time, and hasn't forgotten us at all."

"Oh, bow-wow!" said Figgins carelessly. And he rushed away to give Tom Merry the "tip."

Early in the afternoon quite an army of juniors, all belonging to the School House, marched off to visit the circus. Chumgum's Celebrated Circus was still out of bounds for the New House, much to the chagrin of the New House juniors. But few of them were inclined to run the risk of what Figgins & Co. had so narrowly escaped, so they had to grin and bear it. But Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence were discussing the advisability of "chancing it"; and Figgins, having confided his scheme to Reddy, the trio determined to throw in their lot with the Co. So there were six New House juniors who turned out that afternoon in the garb of Boy Scouts.

Before they left the school Figgins and his comrades hung about the quadrangle awhile until they were sure that Mr. Ratcliff had noticed them in their scout rig. Then they started out.

"It'll be all serene, you see," said Figgins confidently. "I saw Ratty cocking his eye at us from his window. We're on a scout run—see? Ratty simply can't suspect anything. He won't think we want to see the same show twice; and he doesn't know we're taking these kids."

"These what?" demanded Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence, with one voice.

"Kids!" said Figgins. "Don't you kids begin to rag when we're taking you to a circus like kind uncles."

"Why, you cheeky ass—"

"Hallo, here's Tommy!" Tom Merry & Co. were waiting for them in the lane. "All serene, Tommy! Ratty is deep in exam papers, I think. Mind you don't forget, though. After the show's started, you give the Scout howl if it's all right for us to come in. You'll spot Sefton, if he's there."

"That's all right," said Tom Merry. "But you're running a lot of risk, Figgy. You won't get off so well a second time."

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy! I must wemark that I wegard this as somewhat weckless," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a serious shake of the head.

"Now, I put it to you, Gussy, isn't it up to us to thank Mr. Chumgum for standing up for us so rippingly?" said Figgins.

"Bai Jove, yaas. If that is your object, deah boy, I quite approve."

"So, you see, there's nothing more to be said," said Figgins. "Gussy approves. After that, I don't care for Ratty any more than I do for the Kaiser."

"Weally, Figgins—"

"We'll be listening for your howl, Tommy. One howl means that it's all serene. Two howls means that there's a rotten prefect snaffing about, and we'll keep dark."

"Right-ho!" said Tom Merry, grinning, as he wondered what the audience would think when he emitted two loud howls in the circus tent.

The two parties separated, the School House fellows going in at the entrance. The performance was not yet due, but Tiny Tony was outside beating the big drum, and the tent was open for early-comers. Figgins & Co. strolled round the tent, and as they did so Redfern uttered a sudden exclamation:

"Ware prefects!"

"Sefton, by gum!"

Sefton of the Sixth was strolling across the common, swinging a cane. He caught sight of the Boy Scouts at the same moment, and came towards them, with a very unpleasant expression on his face.

"Figgins! Redfern! You here—eh?"

"Why shouldn't we be here, Sefton?" asked Figgins innocently. "Tain't the first time we've come scouting on the common, is it?"

"You've come to the circus."

"Can't see much from here, can we?" said Figgins.

Sefton bit his lip. Certainly the scouts had a right to be on the common if they liked, and so long as they did not enter the circus, there was no fault to be found with them. But Sefton had a very strong suspicion what they were there for.

"Well, look out, that's all," he said, and he walked away.

"That does it!" said Redfern, in utter disgust. "No going into the show now, Figgy. That spying beast will be there!"

A few minutes later, from the interior of the tent, came the curlew call, the signal of the Boy Scouts, twice repeated. It was Tom Merry's signal that the coast was not clear. Sefton of the Sixth was in the tent.

CHAPTER 13.

Friends in Need.

"**C** HUCK it!" said Kerr.

The great Figgins was standing with his hands deep into the pockets of his short scout "bags," and with a wrinkle of deep thought in his brow. Figgins did not like to be beaten; and he felt that it was "up" to him, as chief of the New House juniors, to "work" it somehow or other for Redfern & Co. to see the circus. They hadn't seen the show yet, and it was up to Figgins to manage it for them.

"Come on," said Figgins at last.

"Look here!" said Kerr.

"Rats!" said Figgins. "Sefton's inside the tent now. He can't spot us. You follow your leader, and don't jaw."

And Figgins led the way round behind the big tent, to the canvas quarters of the circus company. Texas Bill was rubbing down his horse outside the dressing-tent, and he recognised Figgins at once, and greeted him heartily.

"Mr. Chumgum!" he called out.

Mr. Charley Chumgum came out of the dressing-tent, already in his gorgeous panoply for the ring. He greeted Figgins & Co. effusively, shaking hands with the six juniors all round.

"It does me proud to see you again, Master Figgins!" he exclaimed. "These young gentlemen friends of yours—what? Then you go in on the nod. Charley Chumgum won't allow you to pay a stiver. I'm afraid you'll miss the best bit this afternoon. Chumgum's latest is knocked sky-high, though we shall do our best."

"Anything gone wrong, sir?" asked Figgins, noticing that Mr. Charley Chumgum's fat face wore a worried look, in spite of the heartiness of his greeting and his cheery manner.

"Well, I don't complain," said Mr. Chumgum heroically. "When the British Empire, sir, wants her sons to fight for the old flag, it ain't for Charley Chumgum to complain if his 'ands goes off and joins the colours. No, sir! But it do leave a man in a 'ole when they goes off sudden, in a place where he can't get new 'ands for love or money. That's where it is, you see."

"Hard cheese!" said Figgins.

"No, I don't say that," said Mr. Chumgum. "Only—only it's awkward, you see. Here am I, advertising right and left Chumgum's Latest—a turn, sir, that simply knocks them. Screams of laughter. See local Press. Last matinee in Rylcombe—special occasion—and two hours, sir, before the performance along comes a recruiting-sergeant. Any objection to speaking to the hands, says he?" "Wot do you take me for?" says I. "I'm Charley Chumgum, and if I wasn't on the wrong side of fifty, I'd be with the colours myself, though it would be red ruin to the circus." So he speaks to the 'ands; and eight of my Prussian Guards enlisted on the spot, and went off with him—eight of the Prussian Guards what acts in Chumgum's Latest. I don't complain," said Mr. Chumgum nobly. "It's their dooty, and they done it. I don't mind saying, sir, that I stood 'em a week's wages all round, though by rights they owed me a week's wages in lieu of notice. 'Go and fight for your country, boys,' says I. 'We don't want to lose you, but we think you ought to go,' and so on. And they went. And I'm not denying," said Mr. Chumgum sorrowfully, "that it leaves me in the 'ole. Eight of my Prussians gone at one fell swoop. It mucks up Chumgum's Latest a fair treat."

And Mr. Chumgum shook his head. It was evident that his manly bosom was torn between his patriotism and his concern for that screaming turn, Chumgum's Latest.

"It's rough on you, and no mistake," said Kerr. "Can't you rope in some of the village chaps? They'd soon learn the goose-step?"

Mr. Chumgum smiled.

"I'm afraid they'd want a bit more learning than they could get in the time," he said. "No; I must do the best I can with the turn, and explain to the audience. Lucky it is the last show here."

"Hold on!" exclaimed Figgins, his eyes dancing. "My hat! I—I say, would you like me to suggest where you can get some new Prussians?"

"Wot to!" said Mr. Chumgum emphatically. "If you know any coves, Master Figgins, who could take the job on at a minute's notice, I'd be ever so much obliged to you; as much as I was t'other night, I reckon."

"Well, I know 'em," said Figgins. "Six of 'em."

"What the dickens—" began Redfern, in astonishment, while Figgins's chums stared at him blankly.

"You leave it to me," said Figgins. "The chaps I speak of, sir, are rather—ahem!—young, and they've never appeared in a circus, but they've had a lot of experience in amateur theatricals."

"Oh!" gasped Kerr. He understood now the idea that had come into the head of the great Figgins. It made him gasp.

"I dessay they'd do," said Mr. Chumgum. "There ain't much to do, really; only do the goose-step, and play the giddy goat, you know. But they wouldn't 'ave time to rehearse."

"They've seen the show—three of them," said Figgins. "They could do it as easy as falling off a form."

"Master Figgins, you're a friend in need," said Mr. Chumgum. "Where are they?"

"Here," said Figgins.

Mr. Chumgum looked round.

"Us!" explained Figgins.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Fatty Wynn.

Mr. Chumgum jumped.

"You!"

"Yes—us! We've played all sorts of parts in our amateur dramatic society, and we could do it quite easily," said Figgins; "I give you my word."

"But—but you young gents—"

"My hat! We'd be glad of the chance, sir," said Lawrence. "Oh, rather!"

Mr. Chumgum looked very thoughtful. He was "in a hole," as he had said; and the parts that were to be played were simple enough. He was evidently greatly inclined to accept Figgy's generous offer.

"And the fact is, sir," went on Figgins persuasively, "that we want to get into the show, and we can't, because there's a rotten cad in there spying, to get us into trouble at the school. I was going to ask you if you could fix it up somehow for us to see the show without being seen."

"I'm afraid I couldn't let you disobey orders, Master Figgins," said Mr. Chumgum, hesitating.

"Oh, that's all right!" said Figgins. "All the other fellows at the school have come to the show, but our Housemaster bars us, because you slanged him the other day. It's just beastly spite, you know. Under the circumstances, we feel we—we really ought to come."

"Oh, that worm!" said Mr. Chumgum, referring to Mr. Ratcliff by that disrespectful name. "If it's 'im, I don't mind. Which, if anybody says that Chumgum's Circus ain't a fit place for a young girl to bring her aunt to, it's a whopper, sir. Now, if you young gents really mean it—"

"What-ho! We've had heaps of experience in amateur plays," Kerr said eagerly. "We could do it on our heads, sir."

"Done!" said Mr. Chumgum, making up his mind.

"It's a go! And you shall see the show, too. I'll let the Prussian Guards parade round the ring fust thing, and then line 'em up at the entrance, and see that you young gents are in the front row. Then you'll see the whole show from beginning to end, and, as for recognising you, your own Uncle James wouldn't know you when you're got up in brass 'elmets and whiskers and Kaiser moustaches. You won't know yourselves!"

"Good egg!"

Mr. Chumgum wasted no more time in words. He led the six scouts into the dressing-tent, and rapped out in—

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structions to the dresser. Figgins & Co. soon changed their Boy Scout rig for the military costume, which more or less resembled that of the Kaiser's favourite regiment. In uniform, with their faces daubed with grease-paint, and adorned with false beards, whiskers, and moustaches, it was quite certain that they would never be recognised.

When their make-up was finished, they did not know themselves in the glass. They may not have looked very much like Prussian Guards, but they did not look anything at all like Figgins & Co. of the New House at St. Jim's.

Figgins chuckled gleefully as he surveyed the reflection of his daubed and whiskered face.

"I think that would beat Ratty himself!" he remarked. "Well, young Redfern, didn't your uncle say you should see the show—what?"

Redfern grinned—a weird grin with his made-up face.

"Hear, hear!" he replied. "I'll admit that even you have ideas at times, Figgy—real ideas, once in a blue moon."

"Why, you silly ass——"

"You young gentlemen ready?" asked Mr. Chumgum, looking in.

"Ahem! Yes," said Figgins. "Quite ready, Mr. Chumgum."

"Then kim on!" said the showman.

And Figgins & Co. joined the rest of the Russian Guards—there were six others, of a larger size—and marched into the lighted tent.

CHAPTER 14.

Unrehearsed!

"WOTTEN!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Horses were galloping round the ring, and Tom Merry & Co. and a crowd of schoolfellows had settled down to see the show. Tom Merry had given the curlew signal to Figgins & Co., causing a good many stares to be turned upon him as he did so. But the captain of the Shell didn't mind that. What he minded was, that the New House juniors were to be excluded, after all.

It was, as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy declared, rotten. Sefton of the Sixth had sat down in the front row, near the School House party. They did not believe that the bully of the New House wanted to see the show a second time. He was going to score off Figgins & Co.

He looked round very suspiciously when Tom Merry gave the curlew-call, and glared at the Shell fellow. Probably he guessed that it was a signal to Figgins, and that he had, therefore, taken his trouble for nothing. His only consolation was that the New House juniors would be debarred from seeing the show.

"It's a rotten shame," said Jack Blake. "Reddy and Owen and Lawrence haven't even seen it at all, and Figgins & Co. did see it the other night. I suppose Ratty gave that cad the tip to come along. But Figgy said that Ratty had been very good all the week. Lying low to catch them out, I suppose, the—the Prussian!"

"Heah come the boundahs of Berlin, deah boys!"

Into the ring came the Prussian Guards, goose-stepping along in a manner that made the audience yell.

Tom Merry looked at his programme.

"That was to be the last turn," he remarked. "They're putting it on first. Not the same chaps we saw the other night—half of 'em look like kids got up."

"Yaas, wathah!"

But it was not Chumgum's Latest yet. The Prussian Guards goose-stepped round the arena, amid loud laughter, and then lined up at the entrance. The half-dozen whom Tom Merry had noticed were smaller than the previous performers were in front, and had as good a view of the ring as Tom Merry & Co. themselves.

"Tain't the turn yet," said Blake. "They're going to ornament the landscape during the show, I suppose. Here comes Texas Bill."

The circus went on, in its usual course, the "Bounders of Berlin" keeping their place at the tent-entrance.

Under their whiskers and grease-paint and brass helmets the six amateur circus-performers were grinning. Across the ring they could see Tom Merry & Co. looking at them, but evidently without recognition.

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"They don't know us from Adam," chuckled Figgins. "See Sefton there, the rotter! He's seen us, but——"

"He's keeping a place empty beside him," said Fatty Wynn.

"Some other cad coming, I suppose," said Figgins.

"My hat, this is ripping!" said Redfern. "We've got about the best view in the place. It was really a stunning idea of yours, Figgy."

"Topping!" said Lawrence heartily. "We give you best this time, Figgy."

Figgins & Co. were enjoying themselves immensely. To be seeing the circus under the very eyes of the spying New House prefect gave the whole show an added zest. And the show was very good too. Mr. Chumgum's Celebrated Circus was quite a success.

Texas Bill led off his broncho amid cheers, and the lion-cage was wheeled in. This time Captain Coker was in great form, and the lion quite amenable to his trainer, and the turn went off amid great applause.

Then came Rab Rabbi, the Juggler; and after him Sapolio, the Snake Charmer; and then Samsonio, the Strongest Man on Earth, and the rest; and while Samsonio was lifting his tremendous weights and Tiny Tony was exciting roars of laughter by comical endeavours to lift them after him Figgins gave Kerr a sudden nudge.

"Look!" he muttered.

"I'm looking," said Kerr.

"I mean across the ring. Next to Sefton!"

Kerr looked, and started.

The empty place beside Sefton of the Sixth, in the front row, was occupied now.

"Ratty!" said Kerr, with a deep breath.

"The awful cad! That's why he's been so soft all the week!" whispered Figgins. "You were right, you keen Scotch beast, he was biding his time, and he guessed we should come here for the last lap. And—and we might——"

"He won't spot us now."

"Ha, ha! Not likely!"

Mr. Ratcliff was sitting bolt upright in his place. He was not looking at Samsonio. Weight-lifting and the hurling of a cannon-ball did not interest the New House master. He was there to catch Figgins & Co., and Sefton had told him that the juniors were not there.

Mr. Ratcliff was scanning the audience with keen eyes. He did not believe for a moment that the six juniors had gone out scouting. But he had to admit that there was no sign of them in the circus-tent, and he was angry and disappointed.

Figgins & Co. observed him scanning every quarter of the tent, and they chuckled silently. He was not likely to recognise them in their guise of Prussian Guards.

The Housemaster's keen eyes rested upon them for a moment, but only in passing. The whiskered and helmeted figures had no interest for him. He was looking for six juniors attired as Boy Scouts. And he could not find them.

"The uttah wottah!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "You see Watty there, dear boys. Comin' to a circus aftah stoppin' Figgins & Co.! I call it caddish!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"I don't suppose he's come for the circus, Gussy. He's come to spot Figgins & Co., if they're here."

"That is still more wotton. Bai Jove, I've a great mind to tell him what I think of him! A beastly, spyin' cad, you know!"

"Lucky they're not here," said Blake. "They might have been in the tent but for Sefton. Ratty's overdone it this time!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Here comes the last turn," said Blake.

It was Chumgum's Latest, at last. Mr. Charley Chumgum came in in his guise as the Kaiser, marching at head of Prussian Guard, who had been looking on during the performance. The Kaiser and the guards goose-stepped round the ring with great solemnity, every now and then tripping over their swords and coming croppers, amid loud merriment. The only face that was not smiling was Mr. Ratcliff's. That one was scowling.

"Hallo," murmured Tomy Merry, "this is a new bit!" It was!

One of the Prussian Guards came goose-stepping away

from the others, directly towards the spot where Mr. Ratcliff and Sefton of the Sixth sat side by side.

The juniors, who were close behind the Housemaster and the prefect, looked curiously at the performer.

He was one of the six whom Tom Merry had noticed were new since the last performance he had seen. He had very long legs, and his face was a mass of grease-paint, whiskers, moustache, and beard. One of his companions tried to stop him, but he jerked himself loose and goose-stepped right on to the edge of the arena, to the spot where Mr. Ratcliff sat frowning.

"What on earth is he up to?" muttered Blake.

Figgins—for, of course, it was Figgins—came goose-stepping on, till only the low barrier was between him and the Housemaster and the prefect.

They stared at him, without a hint of recognition.

"Ach!" said Figgins, in a deep voice. "Shentlemens, I shows you the sword-exercise of te Prussian Guards, ain't it? Mein Gott!"

"What! Keep off!" shouted Mr. Ratcliff, as Figgins drew his tremendous sword—which was, fortunately, made only of wood—and made a pass at him across the barrier.

The astonished Housemaster leaped to his feet.

Crash!

Mr. Ratcliff gave a yell as the wooden sword swept off his silk hat—with utterly ruinous results to the hat.

"Crash!"

The wooden sword came down on the seat beside Mr. Ratcliff, missing him by about an inch.

"Help!" shrieked Mr. Ratcliff. "The man is mad—or drunk! Help!"

"Ach! I shows you te sword exercise, ain't it!" growled Figgins.

"Yaroooh! Help!" yelled the Housemaster, as the end of the wooden sword jabbed upon his waistcoat. Groogh! Yow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the juniors behind.

That the performer was drunk was their impression, as well as Mr. Ratcliff's. Certainly he did not look as if he were in his senses. He was cutting and thrusting at the Housemaster over the barrier like a lunatic.

The rest of the performance had stopped, the performers staring at that unrehearsed interlude in amazement. Five of the Prussian Guards were yelling with laughter. Mr. Chungum stared at first, and then, as he recognised Mr. Ratcliff, he understood, and he collapsed against the centre-post in helpless merriment.

"Ow! Yow! Help! Take him away! Yaroooh!"

Cut and thrust—jab, jab, jab!

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the audience, taking it for a prearranged part of the performance and finding it very funny. "Go it, old gent!"

Mr. Ratcliff could not get out of reach. The barrier was in front, and the seat behind, and a thick crowd round him. He tried to defend himself with his umbrella, but the umbrella made a poor show against Figgins's tremendous sword.

Sefton introduced his stick into the performance to defend his Housemaster, but the Prussian turned on him quite ferociously, and Sefton yelled as he received a fearful clump on the head from the wooden sword.

He scrambled away over the back of the seat, yelling. Mr. Ratcliff tried to follow him, but a jab in the waistcoat brought him down on the seat again.

"Help! Murder! Help!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry & Co. were doubled up with merriment. What had induced the performer to attack the New House master they could not guess; but they enjoyed the scene thoroughly.

"Bai Jove! Go it, deah boy!" shrieked Arthur Augustus, jumping up and waving his hat wildly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Ratcliff tried to squeeze along the knees of his neighbours to get out, but a terrific thrust in the ribs sent him plump back into his seat.

"Help! Yaroooh! Oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the audience.

"Oh, dear!" gasped Mr. Chungum, with tears streaming down his cheeks. "Oh, my 'at! The young rascal! Oh hold me, somebody!"

"Yaroooh! Villain! Let me alone! How dare you! Police—police!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Ratcliff made a wild bound backwards at last, and tumbled over the back of the seat on to the knees of the juniors behind. He scrambled wildly through them, and they helped him—not gently.

Figgins chuckled gleefully, and goose-stepped back to join the rest of the performers, amid yells of laughter; and Chungum's latest proceeded to a triumphant conclusion.

Mr. Ratcliff, hatless, with his umbrella in ruins, found himself outside the circus tent. For ten minutes or so he did nothing but pump in breath. Sefton had cleared off. He did not want to see Mr. Ratcliff while in that humour. The Housemaster's fury would probably have turned upon him as the nearest victim.

"Infamous!" panted Mr. Ratcliff. "Horrible! I will take out a summons—ow!—for assault—yow—groogh!"

"Hallo! Here's another guy!" yelled a youth. "This way, boys! 'Ere's another guy!"

Mr. Ratcliff glared almost murderously at the village boys who gathered round him. In his present state he was very liable to attract attention—and he attracted it.

"You—you young wretches! Go away!"

"He, he, he! 'Ere's another guy! Where's your 'at, guv'nor? Wot 'ave you been doin' with your collar! He, he, he!"

Mr. Ratcliff strode away with as much dignity as was compatible with a torn collar, a rumpled coat, and a tousled head uncovered to the winds of heaven. The village boys followed him merrily, and he increased his pace, and at last fairly took to his heels. He reached the school breathless, gasping with rage; and Taggles almost fell down as he saw him come in. Mr. Ratcliff bolted into the New House, and was not seen again for some time.

An hour later Tom Merry & Co. came cheerfully home, and six Boy Scouts strolled in cheerfully, too. Mr. Chungum had been left very satisfied. Chungum's latest had been funnier than ever owing to Figgins's unexpected and unrehearsed turn. And from the way Tom Merry & Co. were chuckling as they came in, it appeared that they had been enlightened as to the true identity of the performer who had that extraordinary sword exercise with Mr. Ratcliff.

"Bai Jove, you know," Arthur Augustus remarked, "Figgay weally takes the cake this time, you know! Poor old Watty! And the vewy best thing is that Watty hasn't a suspish! I should weally nevah have known myself if Figgay hadn't told us! Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Ratcliff certainly hadn't a "suspish"—which was very fortunate for Figgins & Co. He thought at first of taking out a summons for assault and battery, but he thought better of it. Certainly it would have been a little difficult to find that performer whose remarkable sword exercise had given Ratty the time of his life. Mr. Ratcliff was a very suspicious gentleman, but he was not likely to suspect that that extraordinary performer was in his own House, and under his own nose—if he had only recognised him.

Chungum's Celebrated Circus departed from Rylcombe that day, but it was likely to be a long time before the chums of St. Jim's forgot it. For a long time they chuckled over the last performance of Chungum's Latest, and especially over the unrehearsed improvement by Figgins of the Fourth. Figgins & Co. rejoiced over their triumph, the only drawback being that they could not tell Ratty how they had scored. But Figgins declared solemnly that when he became an "Old Boy" he would pay Ratty a special visit to tell him all about it. Until that time came, Mr. Ratcliff was likely to remain in a state of blissful ignorance of the fact that he owed his discomfiture to Figgins on the warpath.

THE END.

(Another grand tale of the chums of St. Jim's will be published in next Wednesday's "GEM" Library. Order in advance at your newsagents', and make sure of getting it!)

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SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS INSTALMENTS.

Bob Hall, a fine, strapping young fellow, succeeds in joining a famous Hussar regiment, known as the Die Hards. After Bob has been in the regiment for some time, his no'er-do-well cousin, Captain Lascelles, joins also. Bob finds that, so far from being friendly, Lascelles is constantly endeavouring to get him into trouble, with the object of having him dismissed from the Service in disgrace. Bob, however, with the help of his many friends, is successful in defeating the villain's schemes. The Die Hards are ordered to Ireland, and while the regiment is in Dublin, Bob comes into contact with the Earl of Dalkey, who finds that Bob is some connection of his family, and promises to have investigations made. It transpires that Bob is heir to a large fortune, which Lascelles is in enjoyment. Bob's villainous cousin is just about to burn the proofs of his parentage, when they are seized by a book-maker named Brand, who hurries away with them. News is brought that the regiment is to be drafted to Edinburgh. A good-natured doctor, called O'Rafferty, promises to work in Bob's interest and endeavour to expose Captain Lascelles, and Bob Hall decides to stick to the regiment.

(Now go on with the story.)

Lance-Corporal Hall.

The Die Hards were back in Dublin from the camp, busy making their preparations for departure. Edinburgh was their destination, and all ranks looked forward eagerly to the life ahead in the beautiful capital of Scotland.

The news that Bob was a cousin of Lascelles had leaked out, and created great astonishment on all hands. The lad noticed the curious looks the officers gave him as he saluted and passed by. In his own barrack-room the men kept silence on the subject, but a constraint was evident on the part of his chums; the non-coms. were jealous, they showed that they were afraid.

Bob had been long enough in the Service to expect some change of an unpleasant nature, and it was for this reason that he had endeavoured to conceal his relationship with one of the officers as long as possible. Men resent patronage, and the privates did not know the sort that Bob was likely to be if the officers made much of him.

Besides, it is only fair that everyone in the ranks should have an equal chance of promotion, and they feared that, owing to his relationship with a captain in the Die Hards, the lad might be unjustly raised to a position of authority.

From being one of the most popular privates in the regiment, the lad now saw that his room was preferred to his company. He did not feel bitter on this account, nor did he misjudge his old friends, for he understood.

But it was hard not to be given an opportunity to explain what he felt; it was hard to have to wait for time to prove what he could so easily have shown if he had but a chance.

He was, of course, the same as ever, and always would be so, for the lad's character was sterling, and nothing could change his manly nature.

Yet proofs alone are convincing, and only as the days went on could Bob hope to show by his conduct that he was in no way altered. Those who did not know Lascelles might think it an honour to be his cousin. Bob, though, felt thoroughly ashamed that he was linked to such a scoundrel by the ties of relationship.

It was not that his old friends were unkind to the lad, or uncivil to him. Whenever he was with them they treated him much as before, only that they were slower to speak, and that they did not call him by his Christian name.

Also the lad noticed that they avoided being seen much in his company, for fear others might say that they were trying to curry favour with one who was likely to be a big swell before long.

The situation was extremely uncomfortable for all concerned, and Bob could only hope that it would change after a time. It was whilst things were this way that the regiment reached Edinburgh, and settled down in the neighbouring suburb of Portobello.

In the excitement of their new surroundings, and with so much to see when off duty, the Die Hards put aside their regimental interests, and, flocking together in numbers, they perambulated the streets, visiting Holyrood Palace, Edinburgh Castle, Dumfermline Abbey, and all the other historical buildings for which the city is so justly famous.

Laughing and joking, they enjoyed the first few days of their new station immensely, and accepted with proper pride and gratification the homage paid to their smart appearance wherever they appeared in public.

Not for a long time had Edinburgh been honoured by the presence of such a crack regiment, and from the very first the Die Hards became popular with all classes of the community.

They began to thaw as far as Bob was concerned, and the lad was delighted to find that his chums were disposed to put things on the old footing. He hoped that his ordeal was over; that he had been sufficiently tested, and that the Die Hards once again knew him for what he was.

He was going out of barracks one afternoon with Dent and Hosty to have a stroll on the sands, when he heard his name shouted, and, turning, he saw that Lieutenant Haines was following him.

"That you, Hall?" the young subaltern cried gaily. "Let me be the first to congratulate you. I made an application on your behalf, and I'm glad the colonel gave it his assent. You've been made a lance-corporal!"

Bob started.

"Oh, it's a fact! You needn't look so surprised," Haines continued cheerily. "You've earned promotion, and you nearly got it once already—you remember, of course. Besides—There, I'll not say too much. You're well up in the regimental standing orders and the King's regulations, so you'll pass the exam easily, and you'll have no difficulty in keeping the barrack-room quiet, I'm sure. Dent and Hosty will help you there."

"I got promotion on my merits, sir?" Bob inquired nervously. "It's not because—"

"Oh, yes, I recommended you because I thought you were a fit man for the post, and—er—I hope you won't disappoint me," Haines interjected, a trifle brusquely, for Bob had not shown the pleasure the good-hearted young subaltern had expected. "That's all about the matter at present. I'll talk to you again in the morning."

Haines wheeled round and strolled away, and Bob, in some confusion, turned and faced his chums. He knew that Haines was annoyed, and that at the beginning was a bad omen. Dent and Hosty were silent.

"What do you think of it?" the lad inquired, as the trio continued their walk. "You chaps ain't over-gushing, anyhow. Now, if one of you had got promotion, I should be

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jolly glad, and I wouldn't walk half a mile alongside you without saying so, either."

"Well, you asked Haines a straight question," Dent replied gravely, "and he says as you've got promotion on your merits, an' nothing can be fairer than that. Still, the chaps have been expectin' something like this, and there's a good few of 'em as will be disposed to think it's a job. Them as is jealous will say so, anyhow."

"And what do you think?" Bob demanded, feeling nettled at his old chum's cautious note.

"I think as you deserve promotion, an' that others do as well as you," Dent replied honestly. "That's the way in every case, an' I'm glad it's you as had the luck. All the same, mind you, I'm afraid things won't run smooth, and that's why I've been silent, not because I'm jealous, or any rot like that."

"I see. Well, Hosty, what do you say?"

"I agree with Bill Dent," Hosty explained at once. "It would have been better if Haines hadn't been so previous. If he'd waited a couple of months longer you might have reckoned on a kindly greeting from everyone in the barrack-room."

"Then I suppose you chaps think that I ought to refuse the offer?" Bob inquired.

"Well, you see how things are. We ain't talking except to let you know what to expect," Dent replied, a trifle tartly. "It's not what Hosty or I think. If we were the only two concerned, we'd be jolly glad that a chum of ours got the rise. It's you as we're worrying about. If you do accept the post there'll be rows, you may reckon on that, and it's as pals we tell you so beforehand, so that you may look afore you leap."

Bob's face had grown stern, and his jaws were rigid, as he tramped along between his old chums, pondering on what they had said.

For their part, they wished him, as always, nothing but what was well; yet each of them felt, of course, that they, too, were entitled to promotion.

They were both of longer standing in the Service than Bob, and both held unblemished reputations. They could not, of course, be expected to see that the lad had more character than either of themselves, and consequently was more fitted to command.

"I'm keen to get on, same as everyone else," Bob remarked at last, out of a deep reverie. "No chap worth his salt who joins the Service is content to remain a private always. I mean to go as far as ever I can, and time will show where I must be content to stop; but I want to work on the straight, of course. It wouldn't give me a scrap of pleasure if I got over the heads of other fellows by anything that wasn't manly and above board."

"That's right!" Dent agreed heartily.

Bob stopped in his stride, and his companions turned and looked at him. The lad's face was defiant.

"A chap shouldn't be a funk, should he?" he queried.

"No, of course not."

"Then why should I decline promotion, that's what I want to know? It's been offered to me openly, and because Haines thinks I'm fit to hold it. If a fellow is not to avail himself of his chances, how's he ever going to get on? There may be a row, and my life may be jolly uncomfortable. A lance-corporal's billet at the best of times is a pretty rough one, as we know, but it leads to better things. When I feel that I'm entitled to the post, why should I care what anyone thinks? Let 'em do what they like. I'd only be a coward if I held back for fear of what might happen."

"There's no reason as I know of," Dent replied. "I'm sure I wish you the best of luck, Bob. You'll be in for a bad time, but you're warned beforehand, so you know what you're about."

Bob shook his head contemptuously.

"Yes, some of 'em will try to make it hot for me, and it'll be a big stand-up fight; but I'll win in the end," he replied firmly. "At all events, you chaps and I will always be friends—won't you promise me that? I don't care how the others treat me, but it would go hard if my two best pals give me the cold shoulder!"

"You needn't be afraid of that," Hosty replied quickly, whilst Dent in silence held out his hand and gripped Bob's with a vigour that told more than words. "We three are chums, and though we'll have to stand aside whilst you fight your own battle, yet you may rest sure that you've got us behind you?"

Bob's eyes grew bright.

"As long as I know that my old pals stick to me and trust me, I don't much care what I have to face," he replied proudly. "Well, I've made up my mind; I'm a lance-corporal. Now I'll get back to barracks and see Sergeant Baxter. Perhaps he'll be able to give me a wrinkle worth having. He's been through the mill himself!"

Bob strode back to Portobello, whilst his chums went on to the sands. The lad's heart was thumping loudly; he had a foreboding that he was meeting trouble half-way. He schooled himself to face it, knowing that success comes only to those who do not shrink, and, clenching his teeth, he walked up to the barrack-room, for the good order and cleanliness of which he would in future be responsible.

It was empty. Not a private was resting there; all either were on fatigue duty, or they had gone for a walk.

The lad started back with an exclamation of dismay.

The room was in a state of the wildest disorder. The bunks were pulled out from the walls, the men's equipments were strewn about the floor, the crockery was lying broken on the tables, and facing Bob as he stood at the threshold was a large placard nailed to the wall. In big letters were written:

"OUR WELCOME TO OUR NEW LANCE-CORPORAL!"

The lad's face went ashy pale. By a supreme effort he pulled himself together and tried to master his scattered thoughts. His head seemed in a whirl; his arms lay limply by his sides; he knew that he had come to the crucial moment in his life. Had he the strength and force of character to master other men? Was it in him to compel obedience? All depended on that; and so in a few minutes he would know once for all whether he could rise to great heights, or must remain for ever amongst the crowd.

He paused for a moment. Then he wheeled round and strode firmly to the head of the staircase. There he stopped and waited.

Tried and True.

Clatter! Clatter! Clatter!

Quick footsteps were mounting the stone stairs, and Bob braced himself for the trial of strength that was at hand. A trooper named Gaydon turned the corner and paused irresolutely when he saw the new lance-corporal. Then, with a dogged light in his eyes, he came on, and, passing the lad, he went into the barrack-room. Bob followed and closed the door. He knew with whom he had to deal. Gaydon was one of the few bad characters in the regiment.

"Start round and tidy up!" Bob said quietly. "The chaps must be off their chumps to play such a mug's game as this! They've only given themselves extra trouble! Go on, and look sharp!"

Gaydon wheeled round quickly.

"Who are you talking to?" he rapped out. "It's you as is off your chump, I reckon. If the room ain't to your liking, you'd better put it straight."

"Do you see that placard yonder on the wall?" Bob inquired coolly.

"Rather!"

"You ought to know it, for it's in your handwriting. Who's the new lance-corporal?"

"Dunno!"

"I am. Just you pull that placard down, and then set to work, else I'll deal with you straight off."

"No fear! I'm not going to be bossed by a cub like you! Why, I've seen four times your service! Don't you fancy you're able to teach me anything! You a corporal! Yah!"

"You won't do as I order?"

"No!"

"All right! Which way will you have it? Either I'll put you under arrest straight off, or else——"

"You cur! If you try that game with us, we'll make it hot for you!" the other growled. "We're all in this business, I can tell you. The regiment ain't going to be put upon."

"I'm not going to be put upon, any way," Bob replied firmly. "When I was a private I could settle my differences with my knuckles; but that's a pleasure I must forgo now. You know what you get for insubordination, don't you? I give you ten seconds to make up your mind before I act. So there!"

For answer, Gaydon put his back to the door and grinned contemptuously. Bob's heart fluttered with delight. Any non-com. can report a man, but the surest way to instil respect is by worsting him as an equal; and Gaydon had given him the chance.

Bob strode straight up and looked the trooper between the eyes.

"Get out of my way!" he thundered.

Gaydon laughed scornfully, and Bob seized him by the shoulder. Instantly the trooper's fist shot out, and as the lad dodged the blow it caught him sideways on the head. Next moment Bob had seized Gaydon by the middle, and flung him a yard away. With a growl of rage, the latter rushed at the lad again and struck him on the chest, driving him back against the wall. So it was to be a fight to a finish! Gaydon had chosen that!

The trooper again let fly at Bob, who countered with his

right, catching his opponent under the chin as he flung himself forward. Gaydon staggered back, and the lad, following up, delivered a body blow which sent the trooper gasping backwards across the room. He tumbled over a bed, and Bob waited for him to rise.

"Come along now to the guard-room!"

"Garn! I'll smash you into a pulp afore I've done!"

As he spoke, Gaydon put his fists up again, and both combatants moved swiftly around one another. The trooper feinted, the lad dashed in, and his adversary clinched. Backwards and forwards they awayed, but Gaydon was the more powerful, and at last he pushed the lad down on a bunk and seized him by the throat. The private's eyes blazed ominously; he was in that condition of fury when all but a mad desire for vengeance is swept to one side. He raised one hand to strike his prostrate antagonist, but Bob, with a sudden turn had wrenched himself free, and once more was on his legs.

Hitting with all his force, raining blow on blow, the lad drove the trooper across the room and against the opposite wall. His sledge-hammer blows began to tell, but he kept on untiringly. Gaydon slogged blindly; his breath came in hoarse gasps. At last he cried hoarsely that he surrendered. The lad seized him by the wrist, turned his arm behind his back, caught him by the back of the neck, and pushed him out of the room and on to the landing without a moment's pause. He was shoving him at full speed down the stairs when half a dozen other privates appeared unexpectedly, and uttered a cry of rage.

"Hallo! What's the meaning of this?" one bawled. "What are you going to do with Gaydon? Why, the chap's knocked about something terrible!"

"He deserved what he got, and more," Bob panted, as he tried to get through. "Stand out of my way! I'm marching him off to the guard-room."

"No, you don't!"

"Stand back there! Don't you dare to interfere!"

The lad's blood was up. He cared nothing of the danger in which he stood. He was grimly resolved at all costs to make an example of the offender. He drove Gaydon with one tremendous shove right through the midst of his rescuers, and before they could stop him he was down the stairs, stumbling headlong, but still grasping his captive by his tunic. Both fell in a heap in the passage, but Bob was on his feet in a second, and had dragged the trooper out into the square. His enemies did not dare to follow where their insubordination could have been seen.

Hauling Gaydon along, the young lance-corporal made for the guard-room. A cry of astonishment from the direction of the stables brought two score heads at once from as many horse-stalls. The amazed troopers saw Bob, with tunic torn and face begrimed, forcing his exhausted captive before him. Looking neither to the right nor to the left, ignoring the shouts which grew in volume every instant, the plucky lad, with face now set firm as a rock, and eyes lit up with unconquerable resolution, marched the dazed and shaken trooper right past his old comrades and into the guard-room. In ten seconds the young lance-corporal was out in the open air again and returning with swinging strides back to face his enemies.

He mounted the stairs three steps at a time, and turned the handle. The door was locked, and a mocking laugh within told him that the troopers had recognized his footstep. He stepped back, flung all his weight against the door, the hasp gave way, and the door flew open with a bang. Bob strode in and raised his hand imperiously.

"No insubordination!" he cried. And had he known it he looked every inch a man as he spoke. "I'm master here, and I'll be obeyed! Fall to work at once, else I'll serve you all as I've served Gaydon!"

A boot hurtled through the room, and struck him on the head. He saw the quarter from whence it came.

"All right, Landrey," he cried; "you come along now!"

With one bound he sprang forward, and closed with his amazed assailant. Gripping him by the tunic collar under his throat, he flung him off his feet, and began forthwith to drag him across the room. Another private stepped forward and barred his way. Bob dropped his captive, and, planting a blow full on the rescuer's chin, sent him crashing to the ground. Next moment every hand in the room was raised against him.

He stood his ground unflinchingly, hitting at every face he could see. Men staggered back under his blows and rushed forward with yells again. He was knocked down, and rose to his feet. Once more he clutched Landrey, resolved to go through with the task, and again the troopers closed round him. They dragged the private away, and Bob again fought to recapture him. He was knocked down a second time, and for a couple of seconds he lay still. Then, dogged as ever, he rose slowly and painfully.

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The uproar in the barrack-room and the shouts of amazement in the barrack square had brought the non-coms. hurrying on the scene. As Bob a third time went for Landrey, Baxter burst into the room and took in the scene at a glance. Without a word he brushed past the lance-corporal, and, seizing Landrey, he flung him heavily on his back. Then, with clenched fists, the gallant sergeant faced the flushed and passionate troopers.

"Mutiny, is it?" he growled. "Then you'll know what punishment is, too! Stand to attention, the lot of you!"

Half a dozen more non-coms. had raced up the stairs, and each of them singled out a private.

"Now, Lance-Corporal Hall, what's the row about?" Baxter inquired.

Bob did not reply at once: he just strode over to Landrey, caught him again, and dragged him out of the group of troopers.

"This chap is coming to the lock-up," he remarked. "No, I don't want any help"—as Baxter stepped to his side. "I rather think he'll come without making more row."

"And what about this lot?" Baxter inquired, pointing his thumb at the remaining troopers.

"You can leave 'em to me. I'll be back afore long."

The young lance-corporal again appeared crossing the square, and marching another prisoner to the guard-room. A deep roar arose from the troopers on stable duty, but none ventured to interfere. Once more Bob mounted the stairs and entered the barrack-room. The non-coms. had withdrawn, and he was alone with the men under his command. He faced them boldly.

"I mean business, and the sooner you tumble to that fact the better," he began. "I've been made a corporal, and no one will bully me out of the promotion I've justly earned. Now clear up this mess!"

One of the privates cast a malicious glance at the lad. Then, with a dry laugh, he got to his feet and stretched himself.

"Come on, chaps!" he remarked. "He's got the whip-hand of us. Baxter will be back before long to help him; but we can bide our time."

Without more ado the other troopers got to work, and in ten minutes the room was fit for inspection. Bob watched the troopers in silence, and when satisfied that all was in order he wheeled round and walked away. He had won! But he was about the last to think the trouble was over. He knew that as soon as his back was turned fresh schemes would be plotted against him.

Yet to conquer in the first tussle was something to be proud of. The lad knew his own strength now, and so he faced the future unflinchingly.

The trumpet rang out through the barracks, and Baxter, emerging from his cubicle, hammered against the floor. The poise was enough to startle the heaviest sleeper into wakefulness; yet, with the exception of Bob, all the troopers under Baxter's authority lay placidly in their bunks.

The sergeant, uttering a growl of anger, strode along the room, yelling to each man to arise, and Bob, following him, pulled the bedclothes off those who did not obey the command. With surly grunts the men slowly stepped out on to the floor, and began to dress. Baxter looked at Bob, and the young lance-corporal nodded his head ominously. The privates were sulky, and possibly up to mischief.

The first thing, however, was to get them out of the room and down to stables, and Baxter set about this task without seeming to notice that anything was amiss. He shouted to the laggards, cracked jokes, playfully pushed some of the more good-tempered of the soldiers on ahead, and at last had the satisfaction of seeing that all had gone and on the way to their work without any display of friction.

Bob led the way to the stables, apparently unconcerned, and superintended the stable management. All soldiers love their chargers, and, once in the stables, the troopers bricked up and attended to the watering and grooming of their mounts. Satisfied that the work would be done well and thoroughly, the young lance-corporal went away to see the forage served out, and after a few minutes he returned again.

Something serious had occurred in his absence; he saw this at the first glance. The men looked defiant, dogged, guilt-conscious; there was an expression partly of bitterness and partly of shame on the faces of all. Bob took a hurried look round; then, without a remark, he stepped forward to examine the harness. The saddles were cut! That in extreme cases is the trooper's protest against what he considers injustice. Such an act is one of the greatest crimes of which a cavalry soldier can be guilty; it means that he has struck work, and refuses to go on parade.

(Another instalment of this fine yarn next week. Order your copy of the GEM now.)

A Cash Prize for Every Contributor to this Page.



A STRANGE BLESSING.

A gentleman who had the misfortune to lose his nose in a shooting accident had occasion daily, on his way to business in Dublin, to pass an old beggar-woman, who invariably saluted him with the good-natured, but, to him, incomprehensible, prayer:

"Hiven preserve yer Honour's eyesight!"

The gentleman, after vainly endeavouring to suggest to himself a satisfactory explanation of the curious wish, one day put it to the old woman.

"Why do you desire my eyesight preserved? There is nothing the matter with it."

"Well, your Honour," replied the old woman, "it will be a bad thing for you if ever yer eyesight gets wake, for ye'll have nothing to rest yer spectacles on."—Sent in by H. Smart, Gloucester.

RATHER MIXED.

A house-party were indulging in amateur theatricals, and a shy young man was given a part in which he had to rush on the stage and cry: "The King is dead! Long live the King!"

When the time came he promptly assumed the correct dramatic pose, but for a moment was so agitated that words failed him.

At last he pulled himself together, and exclaimed at the top of his voice:

"Long live the King! He's dead!"—Sent in by William Brown, Glasgow.

MAKING SURE.

"I say, old chap, just taste this, will you? It's supposed to be almond-paste, but I doubt it."

"Tastes like soda and margarine."

"Then it's rat-poison. I thought as much."—Sent in by Robert Greer, Belfast.

WHAT, INDEED?

"Ah!" said the poetical young man to his Irish friend, as they were standing gazing on the wonder of Niagara. "See the mighty torrent as it rushes with an unceasing roar into the bottomless chasm, sending up clouds of spray, and pouring its mighty bulk for ever over the lofty precipice!"

"An', sure," commented the Irishman, "what's to hinder it?"—Sent in by W. Pau jun., Glasgow.

HE BLEW FIRST.

A veterinary surgeon had occasion to instruct a stableman how to administer medicine to an ailing horse. He was to get a tin tube, put a dose of medicine into it, insert one end in the horse's mouth, and blow vigorously into the other end, thus forcing the medicine down the horse's throat.

Half an hour afterwards the man appeared at the door of the surgeon's office, looking very queer.

"What ever is the matter?" asked the doctor, with some concern.

"Why, boss, that hoss. He—he blew first!"—Sent in by Thomas Brierley, Oldham.

ORDINARY-LOOKING.

Servant: "A man called while you were out, sir."

Master: "Had he a bill?"

Servant: "Oh, no, sir! Just an ordinary nose."—Sent in by Miss J. Black, Melbourne, Australia.

IT BORED BILL.

Bill had a bill-board; Bill also had a board-bill. The board-bill bored Bill, so he sold the bill-board to pay the board-bill. After Bill sold the bill-board the board-bill no longer bored Bill.—Sent in by C. A. Kempster, East Ham.

AGONY!

An unfortunate altercation took place at a well-known City restaurant recently at dinner. One of the diners, wishing to be funny, asked for some Turkey, without Greece.

The waitress, straining at the pun, said:

"You must be a German."

"No," replied the diner; "but I'm Hungary."

His friend then nudged him, and whispered:

"Don't Russia, or she won't Servia."

"Do you intend to Roumania?" asked the waitress.

"Certainly! I want Samoa."

"Ring the Belgium," gasped the waitress, "and Denmark time till a policeman comes."—Sent in by C. Stewart, Bendigo, Australia.

AN IMPOSSIBLE FEAT.

An Irish schoolmaster noticed that one of his pupils was paying more attention to a piece of apple-pie he was eating than to his lesson.

"Arrah, there!" said the master. "Jack Bates, be listenin' to the lesson, will ye?"

"I am listenin', sir," said the boy.

"Listenin', is ut?" replied the master. "Then it's listenin' wid wan ear ye are, an' eatin' poi wid the other!"—Sent in by J. Clarke, Forest Gate, E.

THE NASAL ORGAN.

"I want my money back!" demanded the man who had listened to the lecturer's nasal drawing for the last half-hour.

"What's the trouble? Don't you like the lecture?" asked the man at the pay-box.

"Lecture!" howled the dissatisfied one. "D'yer think I don't know the difference between a lecture and an organ recital?"—Sent in by C. Griffiths, Neath, S. Wales.

THE BEST POSITION.

A detachment of German soldiers bound for the front were leaving Berlin. The colonel was at his post watching the men. Suddenly a woman sprang out from the crowd, clutched at her son, who was in the ranks, and clasped him to her bosom.

With intense emotion, she cried over him, and then, catching sight of the colonel, she said joyfully:

"My boy, stick close to the colonel. You'll be quite safe there."—Sent in by W. Williams, Walsall.

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As the "GEM" Storyette Competition has proved so popular, it has been decided to run this novel feature in conjunction with our new Companion Paper,

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THIS WEEK'S CHAT



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For Next Wednesday—

"LOOKING AFTER MOSSOO!"

By Martin Clifford.

In our next grand, long, complete story of St. Jim's, Monsieur Morny, the popular little French master, finds himself in a position of serious financial embarrassment, his people having been turned out of house and home by the ruthless Prussians. Mossuo, therefore, does what he can to alleviate their distress, and is compelled to visit a pawnshop in order to raise the necessary money. Levison, of the Fourth, whose reform seems to have been merely "a flash in the pan," gets wind of the French master's periodical visits to the pawnshop, and hopes to make a great deal of capital out of the affair. Monsieur Morny, however, has Tom Merry & Co. to champion his cause; and the methods employed by the School House juniors in

"LOOKING AFTER MOSSOO"

are alike effective and praiseworthy.

A CHALLENGE FROM SCOTLAND.

The following remarkable letter came to hand quite recently from a Scottish reader, who throws down the gauntlet in a manner so defiant that I fancy some of my chums in England, Ireland, and Wales, will speedily be up in arms against him. Here is his letter:

"Hamilton, near Glasgow.

"Dear Editor,—I really think that your splendid paper, the 'Gem' Library, is beyond all praise. It is head and shoulders above every other boys' weekly, and I cannot conceive how any fellow who likes to read a good school yarn can give it the go-by. It is hard to imagine what a dull day Wednesday would be if there were no 'Gem'."

"I am nearly nineteen years of age now, but, unlike many others, I refuse to be teased into giving up the paper on the plea that I am too old to read it. There is a good, sound moral in each of Martin Clifford's stories that many men of mature years would do well to lay to heart.

"But that is neither here nor there. What I want to write about is the tremendous feeling of loyalty which all the boys and girls of Scotland cherish for the good old 'Gem.' In no place have I seen such wonderful enthusiasm for your paper as that shown on my native heath. My occupation entails a great deal of travelling all over the British Isles, and I must say that your English, Irish, and Welsh readers are not half so enthusiastic over the 'Gem' as we in Scotland. Outside my own country I have met fellows so utterly ignorant as to be unaware of the 'Gem's' existence! In many cases, too, I have had to go miles out of my way to secure a copy of my favourite journal.

"There is nothing of this kind in the Highlands. Go where you will, you will never find a slacker, but all the lads and lassies will be seen working together for the good of the paper. In fact, I should not hesitate to say that there are more copies of the 'Gem' sold in Scotland each week than in any other country in the world. This may sound a bit bumptious, but it is none the less true.

"I consider it is 'up to' the readers in other nations to take a leaf out of our book, and be a bit more loyal to the paper which caters so largely for their interests.

"I am, your sincere reader,

"SCOTTIE."

It will be interesting to hear what my English chums have to say in reply to "Scottie's" remarks; and I fancy that Gemites living in Wales and the Emerald Isle will not be

slow in taking up the cudgels on behalf of their respective countries.

As to my Highland reader's assertion that the "Gem" has a greater circulation in Scotland than anywhere else, I have in mind a splendid scheme whereby I can prove the accuracy or otherwise of his statement.

This important subject will be referred to again when I have the opinions of my readers.

REPLIES IN BRIEF.

"Ardent Reader" (Cardiff).—A book dealing with birds' eggs can be obtained from Messrs. Glaisher & Co., 32, Charing Cross Road, W.C.

M. J. M. (Toronto).—I fear you must think I have forgotten you. Very many thanks indeed for the sensible and practical letter you wrote me some time back. Wynn and Kerr's Christian names are David and George respectively. My best wishes to yourself and friends on your side of the "pond."

Will the following readers please accept my best thanks for their most interesting letters and helpful suggestions: S. J. (Burn), W. H. B. (Robertsbridge), "Four Loyal Readers" (Manchester), A. Mitchell, and "A Regular Reader" (Dublin).

John Hulme (Lancs).—The Correspondence Exchange will reopen shortly. You can then write direct to one of the advertisers.

A. Robinson (Lyall's Mill).—The particulars you require are as follows: Tom Merry, 15; Monty Lowther, 15; Manners, 15; and Gore, 15½. The Christian names of the two last-mentioned are Henry and George respectively.

S. Jennesson (Port Melbourne).—I am dealing with your request for a correspondent. Many thanks for obtaining new readers. Bernard Glyn is the character you refer to. He will be in the limelight again shortly.

"Two 'Gem' Readers."—The St. Jim's Jingles may be supplemented at a later date, but this is a matter in which I shall be guided by the wishes of my readers. Wally D'Arcy is twelve years of age, and you will hear more of him before long. Very glad you liked the Talbot yarns. Best wishes.

Ella Cleminson.—The School House contains a larger number of boys than the New House. Pleased to hear you enjoyed "Foiling the Foe."

"Fulmar" (Stoke-on-Trent).—Your long and cheery letter gave me immense pleasure, and I should be glad of your full name so that I may write to you direct on the various matters you mention. Cannot you condense the storyette you speak of and send it in on a postcard?

W. J. (Tunbridge Wells).—Mulvaney minor is still at St. Jim's, and will reappear in due course.

"Cheyne".—Thank you for your interesting letter. Fatty Wynn's Christian name is David.

G. Horner (Manchester).—Many thanks for your postcard and for your efforts in obtaining new readers. Best wishes to you and your friends.

S. T. S. Ingham (Mitcham, Surrey).—I am sorry I cannot supply you with a photograph of Mr. Martin Clifford. Thanks very much for your expressions of appreciation.

G. Thane (Tufnell Park).—The persons and places you name are fictitious. Greyfriars was once a monastery.

H. A. Burge (Weston-super-Mare).—Am much obliged by your further letter, and thank you for getting new "Gem" readers.

J. M. (Chatham).—Talbot is fifteen years of age.

M. A. B. (West Ealing).—You were very unfortunate in not being able to obtain "Saving Talbot." I hope that by now you have succeeded in getting a copy of that tale.

THE EDITOR.

BUY THIS GRAND ISSUE OF OUR COMPANION PAPER!



In the dormitory, Johnny Bull found his chums. They were beginning his packing for him, and he realised sadly that it was his last day at the old School. Bob Cherry was sitting on a bed, wrinkling his brows over a time-table. "You've got half-an-hour, Johnny," he said.

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