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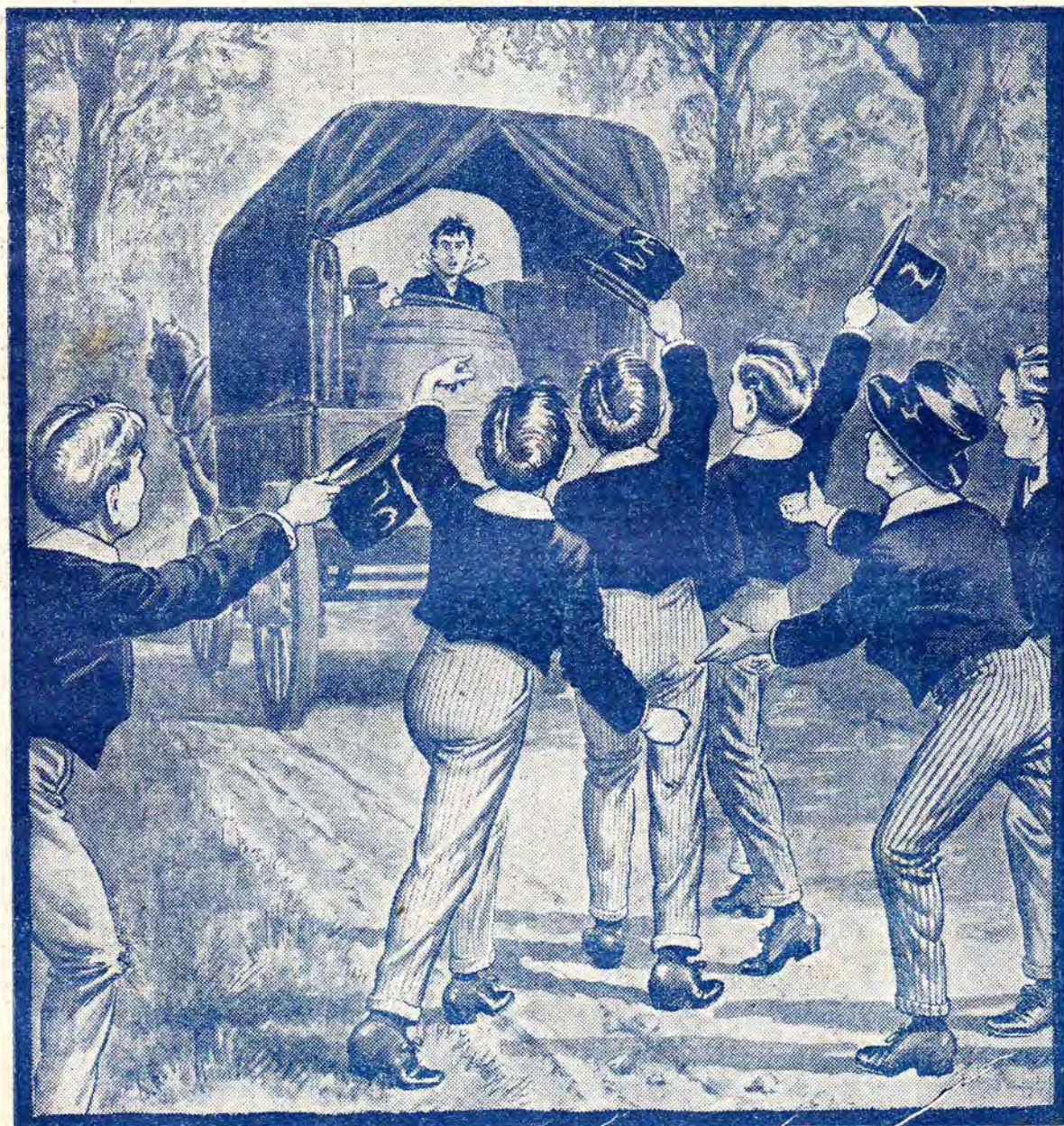
**SEE
INSIDE!**



TWO SCHOOL STORIES.

SPOOFING THE SCHOOL! AND BLIND JUSTICE!

IN THIS NUMBER.



THE GRAMMAR SCHOOL "SPOOFER" IS SENT HOME!

(A Screamingly Funny Incident from this week's Grand School Story.)

IS YOUR CONTRIBUTION ON THIS PAGE?



NOTE.—Half-a-crown will be awarded to the sender of every paragraph published on this page.

Gratitude!

Most unnatural is the manner in which the young of the American wolf-spider treat their mother. After the little creature has laid her eggs she envelops them in a silken covering so as to make a ball about the size of a pea, and this she carries about with her wherever she goes, and will defend it with her life. When the young are hatched they climb on her back, giving her a most distorted appearance, and ride about until nearly half-grown; but as soon as they discover their strength they destroy and devour their mother.—Leo. H. Cotton, 4, Elderton Road, Sydenham, S.E. 26.

A Riddle.

My first is rather refreshing, you see,
My second sets work for the memory,
My third, one finds in any place,
And my fourth subject is a serious case.
And, if you study this with studious care,
The name of a boy you'll surely find there.

1. R-ai-N
2. E-nigm-A
3. G-ir-L
4. I-nvali-D
(Reginald).

—R. F. Morton, 64, Mornington Street, Stockport Road, Longsight, Manchester.

Canada.

Canada is often thought of as a vast stretch of unexplored country over which herds of bison, or buffalo, and great tribes of warlike Indians roam. That is all wrong. Canada is settled and explored almost as much as England. Of course, there are the vast North-West territories, but there it is nearly all barren land, where it is hard for anything or anybody to live. There are no large quantities of animals. The great plains of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta, which at one time were covered with millions of buffalo and thousands of Indians, are now under cultivation. The first two are famous for wheat, and the last for its immense horse, cattle, and sheep ranches. The Government parks in British Columbia and Alberta show specimens of the types of animals which once roamed from the Atlantic to the Pacific, free from the dread of the hunter and trapper. There are numer-

ous reserves for the Indians, especially in the western provinces. Canada is one of the most civilised countries of the world, with many big cities.—Stanley D. Rooke, 24, McMillan Avenue, Winnipeg, Canada.

Newfoundland's V.C.

Sergeant T. Rickets, Newfoundland's V.C., is well away since he won the great honour. Ten thousand dollars was collected for him, and this sum, with other money given him, has been invested at six per cent., bringing interest of about seven hundred dollars per annum—quite a good salary. Rickets is going to college. He was only seventeen when he distinguished himself, a matter of four years since.—Arthur Wheeler, 84, Duckworth Street, St. John's, Newfoundland.

The Leopard-wood Tree.

In the West of Australia many of the native trees and shrubs are used as fodder for stock that are starving during a drought. One of the most ornamental of the trees so employed is the leopard-wood tree, so called because of the variegated spots on its stem. These spots, which change every year, are caused by the growth of the trunk, forming a hide-bound bark. This splits off in patches, and new surfaces of different colours are formed. The tints range from silvery-white to green. The leopard-wood tree starts off by being a straggly bush with small, angular branches with blunt spines. The leaves grow well within the protecting spines. When the bush is five foot high a trunk is formed, and gives it a willow-like appearance. The tangled mass slowly dies off, after having done its work of keeping grazing animals off the stem. The timber is light yellow in colour, and its toughness and elasticity render it valuable for shafts.—Miss Kitty Porter, Station Hotel, Station Street, Sutton Coldfield.

Out of the Past.

The clothing of a man found embedded in a Caithness moor a few miles north of Wick has been forwarded to the Antiquarian Museum in Edinburgh. From an examination of the coins found in the

pockets it was manifest that the man was buried during the latter years of the 17th century. He wore a coat and undercoat, knee-breeches, and under-breeches, but not a vestige of under-clothing—a habit prevalent among the Scottish peasantry of the period.—Alex. Weir, care of Mrs. McNichol, 552, St. Vincent Street, Glasgow.

Baggy Again.

Bagley Trimble strolled into the Rylcombe bunshop and asked for a jam-tart. This he was given, and he was about to leave the shop, when he asked if they would mind changing it for a custard-tart. This was done, and as Trimble was quitting the place the shopkeeper exclaimed, "You haven't paid me for the custard-tart!" "Well, I gave you a jam-tart for it!" cried Baggy. "But you never paid for the jam-tart!" persisted the shopman. "Well, I haven't got the jam-tart, have I?" said Trimble, in an aggrieved tone, as he marched out of the shop.—S. E. Phillips, 20, Tudor Road, Leicester.

The Largest Tree.

The largest tree in the world is said to be one at the foot of Mount Etna, in Sicily. It is called the "Chestnut of a Hundred Horses." It has five branches, rising from one trunk, which is two hundred feet in circumference. Part of the main stem is broken away, and the gap is wide enough to permit of two good-sized carriages to pass abreast.—F. G. Avis, 4, Ladbroke Road, Notting Hill Gate, W 11.

Paisley's Museum.

Paisley possesses one of the finest museums in the country, and has tremendous appeal for the antiquary. I have studied the various subjects dealt with. There are many ancient weapons, with their story of old fighting days, while the place is noted for its specimens of animals, these ranging from the mouse to the elephant.—Among the exhibits of a personal interest should be mentioned the Victoria Cross won by the valiant Captain Henderson. There is also a wonderful model of Clark's world-famous thread-mills.—Thomas S. Duncan, 2, Love Street, Paisley, Scotland.

Contributions are invited from readers of the "GEM" for publication on this page. Anything will do, so long as it is interesting, short, and concise—a good joke, a description of a holiday, a bright idea for increasing the popularity of the "Gem," a good anecdote. "Pars" should not be more than three hundred words long—the shorter the better. They can be sent in on a postcard. Address all contributions to The Editor, The "Gem" Library, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4, and mark them "Readers' Own Corner."

A HIGHLY AMUSING COMPLETE SCHOOL TALE!



"SPOOFING THE SCHOOL!"

By Martin Clifford.

A Magnificent, Long Complete Story dealing with the Adventures of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 1. Startling News!

"WALN!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, made that expressive remark as he stood at the foot of the School House steps with Jack Blake, George Herries, and Robert Arthur Digby, his chums.

The heroes of Study No. 6 were looking across the school quadrangle, which looked very pleasant with the bloom of summer. But the rain was falling, and the juniors viewed this inclement state of the weather with despondency.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Monty Lowther, that select circle known as the Terrible Three, bore down upon the chums of the Fourth.

The Shell fellows were looking despondent, too.

"More rain!" said Tom Merry. "Oh, blow the rain! I'm fed up!"

"Doesn't look much like cricket," remarked Jack Blake. "What are we going to do this afternoon, my sons?"

"Who says tarts?" said Tom Merry, who only that morning had received a handsome remittance from his loving guardian, Miss Priscilla Fawcett.

"Tarts!" responded six voices, with great heartiness.

"Come on, then!"

And Tom Merry led the way to Dame Taggles' tuckshop.

"Bai Jove, it's wathah wet!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, turning up his coat-collar as they marched together across the quadrangle.

"It often is in rainy weather," remarked Monty Lowther seriously. "I've noticed it before, Gussy."

"Pway don't be an ass, Lowthah!" said the noble swell of St. Jim's. "Bai Jove, heah we are at the tuckshop, deah boys!"

The School House party marched into the time-honoured establishment kept by Dame Taggles, feeling rather wet, but cheerful.

A number of other fellows were in there when the chums of the School

House arrived. The tuckshop was quite crowded.

Hammond and Reilly and Talbot were seated at the counter, partaking of ginger-beer and doughnuts. Kangaroo of the Shell, and Clifton Dane and George Gore and Dick Julian were there also.

"You chaps all keeping out of the rain?" said Tom Merry. "Make room for a few more!"

"Going to stand treat, Tom Merry?"

"All serene!" said Tom cheerfully.

"I'm in funds, you fellows, so pile in!"

"Must have come into a fortune entirely," remarked Reilly. "But we'll pile in, bejabbers!"

Dame Taggles was soon busily engaged fulfilling the orders given her by the juniors.

Tom Merry, seated on an upturned ginger-beer crate, picked up a copy of the "Rylcombe Gazette" from the counter, and glanced through it carelessly. The "Rylcombe Gazette" was a local newspaper, published weekly, and it contained most of the news of the countryside in the neighbourhood of Rylcombe and St. Jim's.

As Tom's glance wandered over the pages his attention suddenly became arrested by a headline, and he read the paragraph below with wondering eyes.

"My giddy aunt!" he ejaculated.

"What's wrong, Tommy?" inquired Monty Lowther.

"Well, I'm jiggered!"

Tom Merry's chums looked at him in considerable surprise.

"What are you looking like a boiled owl for, you chump?" asked Jack Blake.

"Anything exciting in the paper?"

"Yes, rather! Great pip!"

"Then what is it, you burbling cuckoo?" howled Blake, rather impatiently. "A strike of schoolmasters?"

"Not much!" grinned Tom Merry.

"Just feast your eyes on that merry little paragraph!"

He handed the newspaper to Blake, who gazed wonderingly at the paragraph indicated. The other fellows crowded

round, and necks were craned forward to read the paper.

A gasp of astonishment arose as they read the following paragraph:

"CLUE FOUND TO THE BURIED TREASURE OF ST. JIM'S! AMAZING DISCOVERY BY A LOCAL VICAR!"

"The discovery of a number of ancient documents, together with a key of antique design, by a local vicar in the vaults of his church, revives the hope that the buried treasure of St. James may still be unearthed. The documents are believed to reveal the location of a secret vault wherein the monks of the old abbey of St. James concealed their treasure when the abbey was menaced by troops, and the key, no doubt, will open the vault. Many attempts have previously been made to find the buried treasure, but so far none have succeeded. The information given by these newly-discovered documents may throw light upon the mystery of the treasure's hiding-place, and it is confidently believed that the treasure, which has been so effectively concealed for centuries past, will eventually be found."

"My only sainted Aunt Maria!" gasped Jack Blake.

"Gwout Scott! How vewy stwange!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, polishing his monocle. "I wondah if thah is anythin' in this wepport, deah boys?"

The heroes of the School House looked at each other, thunderstruck.

They all knew the story of the buried treasure of St. Jim's. Centuries ago St. Jim's had been an abbey, wherein existed all manner of secret vaults and passages. At the time of the Reformation the abbey was suppressed, and, so the story ran, the good abbot was murdered. But he died without revealing where he and his faithful monks had hidden the abbey's treasure, and until this day nobody had succeeded in finding it. Some people regarded the existence of the treasure as a myth; but it

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was popularly believed at St. Jim's that there was a buried treasure somewhere, and that some day somebody would discover it.

"Well, this beats the band!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "So there's a chance of our giddy treasure being found after all! If only we had that key and the documents—"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy enthusiastically. "We'd find the treasure, wouldn't we? It would be wathah a good notion to spend this afternoon down in the vaults lookin' for that secwet vault, deah boys!"

"Whew!"

Tom Merry & Co. looked at each other eagerly.

"Good idea, Gussy!" said Jack Blake heartily. "What do you say, Tom Merry?"

The captain of the Shell nodded. "Ripping!" he said. "There's not much to do on a wet afternoon, so we might as well go treasure-hunting in the vaults as anywhere else. Are all you fellows game?"

"What ho!"

"We'll come, old son!"

"Good!" said Tom Merry enthusiastically. "It's on, then. When I've squared the bill we'll get pocket-torches, and we'll spend the afternoon exploring the vaults!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry settled with Dame Taggles, and a whole army of juniors crossed the rain-swept quadrangle to the School House.

Pocket-torches were procured, and the treasure-hunting party went into the cloisters, and made their way down into the vaults beneath St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 2.

In the Vaults!

"GROOOOOH!" It's jolly creepy down here!"

Jack Blake made that remark as the little party threaded their way between the old stone pillars of the vaults.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I've already ewushed my new toppah against the wof, and my twousahs are quite dustay, bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Keep your pecker up, Gussy!" chuckled Monty Lowther. "When we discover the merry treasure we'll allot you a few golden guineas for a brand-new rig-out, in the latest Mallaby-Deeley style!"

"Oh, wot!"

The juniors chuckled, and proceeded farther into the gloomy depths of the vaults.

All was dark and eerie, and silent as the grave except for the footsteps of the St. Jim's juniors. The boys could not help conjuring up visions of ghosts and spook-like marauders down there in the pitch blackness of the vaults.

They flashed their lamps about them, and proceeded until they reached a spot where Tom Merry announced their investigations would commence.

"We've got to discover a secret vault," he said. "It doesn't matter if we haven't the key, for we can soon bust the vault open if we find it. There must be secret springs which operate sliding stone panels—you know the sort of thing. Let's tap the walls, and perhaps we might strike lucky!"

"Perhaps!" grinned Monty Lowther. "Carry on, old sons!"

The treasure-hunters commenced operations, and industriously tapped the walls

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of the old vault, working by the fitful light of their pocket-torches.

For half an hour they tapped away, working in parties, but, if there was a secret vault existing they did not succeed in discovering it.

They all assembled at the farther end of the vaults, feeling rather tired and dusty.

"No luck!" grunted Jack Blake. "I'm afraid there's nothing doing, Tommy. If we only had those documents and the key— But we haven't, so there you are!"

"And here we are!" grinned Monty Lowther. "I'll tell you what, chaps, let's play hide-and-seek in the dark. Gussy can be 'he'—"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No, we won't risk breaking our necks down here in the dark," said Tom Merry. "Br-r-r! Rain or no rain, I shall be rather glad to get out of this!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hark!" exclaimed Jack Blake suddenly. "Can you fellows hear footsteps?"

The St. Jim's juniors listened. Sure enough, from far away among the vaults there came the hollow echoes of footsteps approaching.

Tom Merry & Co. looked at each other in surprise.

"There's somebody else down here!"

muttered Tom Merry in a low voice.

"Another fellow treasure-hunting, perhaps—"

"Or it may be a ghost!" said Monty Lowther solemnly. "Look at old Gussy's chivvy—isn't it pale!"

"Lowthah, you uttah ass!" exclaimed D'Arcy indignantly. "I wufuse to believe that my face is pale. I wegard your theowy of a ghost as wank stupidity!"

"Now, don't get excited, Gussy, there's nothing to be frightened at. A ghost won't hurt you!"

"Bai Jove, you fwabjous chump!" gasped the noble swell of St. Jim's. "If you do not cease wotting, Lowthah, I shall considah if my painful dutay to administrah a feahful thwashin'!"

"Oh, Gussy!"

The eyeglass of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy glimmered in the eerie light of the juniors' pocket-torches. He looked quite wrathful, and the others grinned.

"Don't be an ass, Monty," said Tom Merry pacifically. "We don't want you two to start ragging down here. We've

got to find out who this merchant is who is prowling about down here!"

"Hear, hear!"

D'Arcy glared expressively at Monty Lowther, and subsided.

The St. Jim's treasure-hunters concealed themselves behind the stone pillars of the vaults, and waited with bated breath whilst the mysterious marauder drew nearer.

Suddenly the footsteps ceased, and there was silence still as death. The juniors blinked round in bewilderment in the darkness.

Then, from the impenetrable gloom of the vaults, there came a long-drawn, hollow sound, as of some disconsolate soul stricken in sorrow.

Groan!

Tom Merry & Co. fairly gasped. They stood rooted to the ground, spellbound, their hearts thumping wildly.

Moan!

Jack Blake turned towards his chums. His face had gone quite pale.

"I—I say, you chaps," he muttered awkwardly. "Did—did you hear that?"

The others nodded, and stood stock-still as another heartrending groan pulsated forth upon the lonely gloom of the vaults.

Clank, clank! Rattle! Clank!

Sounds as of chains and tin boxes being dragged along the ground smote upon their ears, and struck dismay and concern into the hearts of the St. Jim's juniors.

Groan!

"Gweat Scott!" gasped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, allowing his monocle to fall limply from his eyes. "I wegard this as most howwid, deah boys. It is weally supahnatural, bai Jove!"

"Rats!" grunted Jack Blake. "Hark at those giddy tins rattling. They sound natural enough!"

Groan! Moan! Clank! Rattle!

Tom Merry, in spite of himself, felt a chill feeling run down his spine. In his inward eye he saw a grisly ghost perambulating the region of the vaults, bemoaning its lot and dragging heavy chains behind it. He had never seen such a ghost, but had read about them in story-books.

Jack Blake and the others were equally awe-inspired.

The heroes of the School House were not troubled with nerves, but they could not repress their shudders.

Digby's light went out. Probably that was because the battery was exhausted, but the juniors could not help being impressed.

"I—I say," said Kerruish tremulously. "I don't like this, you chaps. If it's a ghost—"

"Oh, bosh!" said Tom Merry. "It's somebody having a lark with us—Figgins & Co., I expect. Turn your lights out, chaps, and when the prowler comes along we'll nab him!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, pushing back his cuffs in a business-like way. "Ghosts are all wot, you know, deah boys. It's some howwid practical jokah, and I shall considah if my painful dutay to give him a feahful thwashin' when we catch him!"

"Shurrup!" hissed Blake. "Here he comes, and— Oh, lor!"

Clank! Rattle! Groan!

A weird, mysterious figure, glowing with an eerie, phosphorescent light, loomed up. The figure was draped in robes of flowing white, and dragged behind it a length of chain, to which were attached a number of metal boxes. It was an apparition warranted to strike fear into all beholders.

Tom Merry & Co. fell back and clutched each other in alarm, gazing at their

NEXT WEDNESDAY.

**GREAT
BUMPER
and
FREE GIFT
NUMBER**

Wonderful Attraction.

SEE PAGE 20.



Tom Merry fixed his eye on the white-robed marauder, took aim, and sent the cricket-ball whizzing towards it. Thud! "Yaroooh!" came a distinctly human voice from the "ghost." "Oh crumbs! Ow!" (See Chapter 2.)

ghostly visitor with eyes that almost goggled from their heads.

Groan!

"Good heavens!"

"Wh-what is it?"

Groan! Rattle! Clank! Moan!

Tom Merry set his teeth.

"It's all spoof!" he muttered. "Gimme that cricket-ball you've got in your pocket, Monty; I'll soon bowl this joker out!"

Monty Lowther extracted a cricket-ball from his pocket and handed it to his leader.

Tom Merry fixed his eye on the white-robed marauder, took aim, and sent the cricket-ball whizzing towards it.

Thud!

"Yarooooh!" came a distinctly human voice from the "ghost." "Oh crumbs! Yah! Ow!"

The ball had hit home well and truly, and the white-robed figure gave a wild leap into the air.

"Now," said Tom Merry grimly, "put on the glim, you chaps, and nab that awful spoofer!"

"What-ho!"

Lights were switched on, and the juniors made a simultaneous dash towards their ghost-like visitor.

This individual was groaning now in real earnest. The chains and tin boxes he flung from him, and, gathering the

white gown about him, he ran for dear life.

"After him!" yelled Blake. "We've got the fathead now!"

"Yaas, wathah!" gasped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Wun like anythin', deah boys!"

Tramp, tramp, tramp!

The footsteps of the boys echoed hollowly in the gloomy, lonely vaults. The white-robed person in front had had a good start, and was running like a deer.

Tom Merry & Co. pounded after him, running as though they were on the cinder-path.

Their quarry seemed to know his way, for he made straight for the staircase which led up to the ruined tower.

Tramp, tramp, tramp!

He dashed up the steps and dragged open the old oak door. Tom Merry and D'Arcy and Kangaroo reached the door just as he flitted through it.

"Stop, you rotter!" panted Tom Merry. "I— Oh, my only hat! It's Gordon Gay!"

"Gordon Gay!"

In the fitful daylight that penetrated through the doorway the St. Jim's juniors beheld the well-remembered features of Gordon Gay, the enterprising leader of the juniors of Rylcombe Grammar School, a rival institution to St. Jim's, situated about a mile away.

Gordon Gay hung on grimly to the

door, and tried to shut it in the faces of Tom Merry & Co.

"Gay, you—you awful spoofer!" gasped Tom Merry, wrenching at the door. "We—we'll spifficate you when we catch you!"

"You won't catch me—not if I can help it!" retorted Gay quite cheerfully. "I gave you a fright at first, didn't I, old beans? You see, I and my pals got caught in the rain on Wayland Moor, and we dived into the shepherd's hut for shelter. We discovered the secret passage which leads from the shepherd's hut to these vaults, and, what is more, we found this old sheet, some luminous paint, and these chains, which had probably been left there by some practical joker a long time ago. I guessed that some of you chaps would be hunting round the vaults in search of the buried treasure. I had also seen that notice in the paper, you see. So I rigged myself out as a ghost, and trotted down here to scare you. And I succeeded—eh, what?"

"You—you spoofer!"

Tom Merry, Kangaroo, and the other simply wrenched at the door.

Gordon Gay hung on grimly, and then all of a sudden he let go.

The St. Jim's juniors at the top of the steps staggered backwards as the door was suddenly released, and, losing their balance, they floundered on top of each other down the stairs.

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"Yarooogh!"

"Look out!"

"Gerroff!"

These were some of the expressions that arose as Tom Merry & Co. fell back in a heap on the old stairs.

A triumphant yell of laughter came from Gordon Gay, who, gathering his white sheet about him, scampered off.

Tom Merry & Co. were up in a trice. They dragged the door open, and dashed in pursuit of the humorous Gordon Gay.

"He can't escape!" gasped Tom Merry between his teeth. "Oh, won't we rag him when we do catch him!"

"After the Grammar School waster!" Through the ruined chapel they dashed, and out into the cloisters.

The rain had ceased to fall, but the ground was wet and slippery, and numerous puddles bestrewed their path.

They could see the fleeing figure of Gordon Gay in front, and, like hounds on the scent, Tom Merry & Co. pounded after him.

Gordon Gay, flinging all caution to the wind, made a wild break across the quadrangle of St. Jim's towards the gates. He trusted to luck that he would not be stopped.

His lanky legs ate up the ground, and he did not heed the puddles he splashed into.

Neither did Tom Merry & Co. Even Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was oblivious to the fact that every time his foot landed in a puddle his beautifully creased trousers became splashed with muddy water.

Tom Merry & Co. were grimly determined that Gordon Gay should not escape.

Across the Close he dashed, looking quite an extraordinary figure with his white sheet floating like a huge sail behind him.

Tom Merry & Co. were gaining now, and as they neared the gates Tom Merry, Kangaroo, and Talbot were almost upon Gay's heels.

Gordon Gay looked round, and saw his pursuers behind him. He put on a desperate spurt, and simply tore through the gates.

Then a series of startled yells arose as Gordon Gay collided with a party of gentlemen who were at that moment about to enter the gates.

Gay and the gentlemen went down in a muddled heap, and Tom Merry & Co., who were pelting up at breakneck speed, were unable to arrest their progress.

They ran full-tilt into the others in the gateway, and collapsed upon the heap with wild howls.

CHAPTER 3.

More Trouble!

"YAROOOGH!"

"Yow-ow-ow-ow!"

"Gerroff my chest!"

"Lemme get up!"

"Yerrrugh!"

These and other equally weird and wonderful cries arose from that heap of struggling humanity in the gateway of St. Jim's.

Taggles, the school porter, rolled out of his lodge, and gazed upon the scene of tumult with amazed and bleary eyes.

"Ho!" he gasped. "Wot the dickens is—Haw, haw, haw!"

Taggles burst into a loud roar of laughter as he witnessed the wild and whirling struggle that was taking place.

Tom Merry was the first to regain his feet.

He struggled up, rubbing a bump on his forehead which had been inflicted by somebody's boot. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, his collar wrenched from its stud, and his beautiful Eton jacket creased and

bespattered with mud, also struggled to his feet. His topper was somewhere beneath that mass of heaving bodies and kicking legs.

"Gwoooogh! Oh deah!" gasped the noble swell of St. Jim's, mopping his nose with a soiled cambric handkerchief. "I am in quite a flutah, bai Jove!"

One by one the boys extricated themselves from the melee, and stood up, rubbing their several bruises. Gordon Gay was promptly seized by Tom Merry.

The juniors were amazed when they saw three gentlemen struggle to their feet. These gentlemen were, as Monty Lowther remarked, extremely "queer merchants."

One was tall and bony, and was arrayed in an extremely tight-fitting frock-coat and trousers. His hands and feet were large, and so were the spectacles that adorned his nose. Another gentleman was short and stumpy, and wore a voluminous bob-tailed coat and a pair of very baggy trousers. The third gentleman was neither tall nor short, but seemed to have struck the happy medium as regards stature. But his taste in dress was weird and wonderful, for he wore a suit of yellow and green stripes, a white waistcoat, and green-hued knickerbockers.

Tom Merry & Co. stared at these extraordinary visitors in breathless astonishment as they groped for their toppers, all of which were battered and bent, like D'Arcy's.

"Groooogh!" gurgled the tall, thin one, blinking at the boys. "You clumsy young rascals—"

"Preposterous outrage!" spluttered the fat, stumpy gentleman, rubbing an aching bump upon his forehead. "The boys of this school are unmitigated young scoundrels!"

"I agree with you, sir!" said the knickerbockered gentleman, glaring homicidally at Tom Merry & Co. "I am shocked at such horseplay!"

"Weally, my deah sirs," expostulated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, "pway do not use such opprobrious expressions! It was a pure accident—"

"Bah!" snorted the fat man. "I shall report this to your headmaster. This is St. James' School, is it not?"

"Yes, sir," replied Tom Merry, stifling his laughter. "The porter here will attend to you."

"Wot I says is this 'ere!" said Taggles, coming up. "Them young imps should be punished. Which it's my opinion that all boys should be drowned at birth, and—"

"Bother your opinions, man!" snapped the tall, elongated gentleman, whom Monty Lowther humorously designated "The Human Hairpin." "If this is St. James' School, I wish to see your headmaster. We have called concerning the buried treasure. We are representatives of the Antique Academy of Acton, and—"

"Which you will kindly follow me!" growled Taggles, by no means impressed by the learned representatives of the Ancient Academy of Acton.

The three gentlemen stalked after Taggles, leaving Tom Merry & Co. grinning hugely.

Even Gordon Gay was grinning, although he felt rather exasperated with the Ancient Academicians. Had it not been for their untimely arrival he might have made good his escape. As it was now he was a prisoner in the grasp of Tom Merry and Blake.

"Well," said Tom Merry, turning to Gordon Gay, "we'll deal with you now, you spoofer. Blessed if I've heard of such nerve as you have, prowling round our vaults, disguised as a giddy spook. Of course, you didn't frighten us!"

"Oh, no!" grinned Gordon Gay. "It's only a rumour, Tom Merry. Why, I heard D'Arcy's knees knocking like a pair of clappers—"

"Weally, Gay—"

"And the whole giddy crew of you were stammering with fright!" said Gordon Gay relentlessly. "Talk about blue funk—why, you—"

"Oh, rag him!"

The St. Jim's juniors, exasperated beyond measure, grasped Gordon Gay and whirled him off his feet.

"Yooop!" shrieked Gay. "Hands off, you—"

"Carry him over to the ditch and duck him!" said Tom Merry grimly. "We'll give him ghost! There'll be only his ghost left by the time we have finished with him!"

"Yarooogh!" roared Gay, struggling desperately as he was borne into the Rylcombe Lane towards the ditch that bounded the bank. "Leggo, you frabjous chumps! Yow-ow-ow! Stoppit! Yoo-ooop!"

Splash!

"Yerrrugh!"

Gay gurgled incoherently as he whizzed into the murky waters of the ditch. Tom Merry & Co. roared with merriment.

Gay's head reappeared above the surface of the water. His hair was plastered down upon his head, and green slime and weeds clustered lovingly over him. He gouged water frantically out of his eyes and ears and mouth, and he emitted a long, loud, spluttering gurgle.

"Yerrrugh! Gug, gug, gug!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry & Co.

"You—you rotters!" gurgled Gay, finding his voice at last. "Lemme get out! Groooogh! I'm wet!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gordon Gay crawled out of the ditch and up the bank, gasping and spluttering in a manner that was truly marvellous. Jack Blake and Herries would have hurled him back again, but Tom Merry detained their arms. His sharp eyes had detected the village carrier's cart emerging from the trade entrance to St. Jim's.

"Don't chuck him in again," he said. "Nuff as good as a feast, you know. I think we'll send old Gordon Gay home now—by carrier!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry beckoned to the carrier to stop, and the cart rumbled to a halt.

Gordon Gay was held very gingerly but effectively by Kangaroo and Herries, whilst Tom Merry addressed Bodger, the carrier.

"I say, Bodger," he said affably, "is that an empty barrel you have in your cart?"

"Yes, Master Merry," replied Bodger in wonder. "Which I'm takin' it back to the village—"

"Oh, but will you take something over to the Grammar School for us?" asked Tom Merry. "We want to put it in the barrel, you know!"

"Certainly, Master Merry," said Bodger, grinning good-humouredly. "Anything to oblige a gent!"

"All serene!" grinned Tom Merry. "Let's have some of that rope in your cart, and we'll soon have the load ready!"

Gordon Gay viewed Tom Merry's next exploit with fear and apprehension.

Tom climbed up into the cart, and picked up a whole pile of stout rope. Then he rolled the empty barrel to the tailboard, and called to Jack Blake to catch it.

Jack Blake took hold of the barrel, and Tom Merry jumped down from the tailboard of the cart.

"Here, wharrer you going to do?"

gasped Gordon Gay, eyeing the barrel and the rope apprehensively. "If you dare shove me into that barrel, Tom Merry—"

"Just what we are going to do, my pippin!" replied Tom Merry sweetly. "Hold the beggar tight, boys, while I truss him up. Never mind the mud and the weeds upon him, you are all dusty enough already. That's the style!"

"Leggo!" howled Gordon Gay, as violent hands were laid upon him. "I won't go into that barrel! You—you horrid cads, I—I won't!"

"Hold him!"
Despite Gay's violent protests and struggles, he was bound securely by means of the rope. Then Tom Merry & Co. lifted him and consigned him to the barrel, which was a commodious one, and deep enough to allow just his head and shoulders to protrude above the rim.

"You—you cads!" shrieked the luckless Grammarian. "Lemme out! I'll mangalise you! Lemme out!"

"Rats!" retorted Tom Merry, grinning blandly at Gay. "We are going to send you back to the casual ward where you belong, old sport. Haul the barrel up into the cart, chaps!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
The barrel was raised in many strong arms and dumped into the cart. The carrier viewed these proceedings in great mirth.

"You—you burbling cuckoos!" spluttered Gordon Gay sulphurously, glaring most homicidally at his foes over the top of the barrel. "Oh, won't I pay you out for this! I'll make you squirm!"

"Wats!" replied Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, quite forgetting, in his excitement, the elegance of expression which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere. "St. Jim's is neval conquered, deah boy. I wathah fancy that we have a funnier taste in pwaetical jokes than you, bai Jove!"

"Hear, hear, Gussy!" chuckled Monty Lowther. "Old Gay's in the cart properly!"

The St. Jim's juniors laughed dutifully at Monty's little pun.

"What's the freightage for this little load of trouble?" inquired Tom Merry of Bodger.

"Two bob, Master Merry!" grinned Bodger. "I'll deliver 'im at Rylcombe Grammar School, sir!"

"Right-ho, Bodger!" said Tom Merry. "Swear, on your honour, that you won't let him out half-way."

"I swear!" said Bodger solemnly, and he grasped two shillings in a horny palm.

"Right away!" chuckled Tom Merry. "Good-bye, Gay, old sport! I hope they'll give you a nice welcome when you reach the Grammar School!"

"You—you—you—" stuttered Gay sulphurously.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The carman whipped up his ancient steed, and the cart rumbled on its way. And from the barrel inside the cart the luckless leader of the Grammar School juniors glared at his chortling enemies in the Rylcombe Lane, and howled blood-curdling threats at them until they were out of sight.

CHAPTER 4. Quite an Invasion!

"GREAT Scott!"
Tom Merry gave vent to that astonished exclamation as he and his chums crossed the quadrangle of St. Jim's towards the School House, after having dealt so effectively with the humorous Gordon Gay.

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus

D'Arcy, adjusting his monocle and gazing in the direction of the School House steps. "It looks vewy much like a wumpus, deah boys!"

"It's a row of some sort!" said Jack Blake, grinning. "Come on, chaps, we must be in this!"

Quite a crowd had gathered round the School House steps. At the top of the steps stood the imposing figure of Dr. Holmes, the venerable Head of St. Jim's. On the steps were the three strange representatives of the Ancient Academy of Acton. They appeared frantically excited, and were gesticulating wildly in the air with their arms and umbrellas. At the foot of the steps were a number of St. Jim's fellows, who seemed to be taking great interest and delight in the proceedings.

"I tell you we have come to search for the buried treasure!" hooted the elongated one furiously. "Sir, as a member of the Ancient Academy of Acton, I have a right to investigate—"

"Pray do not raise your voice to me, sir!" retorted Dr. Holmes majestically. "As headmaster of this school, I cannot allow strangers to wander at random through the precincts. Such a suggestion is impossible and absurd!"

"But, my dear sir, pray listen to reason—"

"I have made known my decision, and that is final!" said the Head, frowning angrily. "If search is going to be made for the alleged treasure, it shall be made under authorised supervision, and not by strangers. I must ask you gentlemen to depart, and not bother me again with your immoderate requests to search this school for hidden treasure!"

"My dear sir—"

"Not another word! Please go!"
The Ancient Academicians glared.

Suddenly there came sounds as of a wild disturbance at the gates, and, turning round, Tom Merry & Co. beheld the strange spectacle of Taggles chasing four strange individuals across the quad.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jack Blake. "Here come some more treasure-hunters, sir!"

Tramp, tramp, tramp!

Taggles was by no means a good runner, and the four intruders soon out-distanced him. They arrived at the School House steps, breathless but triumphant, and the boys made way for them.

Dr. Holmes regarded these new arrivals in amazement over the rims of his spectacles. They were musty-looking individuals arrayed in drab garments of faded black.

"Are you the headmaster of this school, sir?" bleated one of these drab gentlemen, glaring up at the Head through a pair of huge horn-rimmed spectacles. "I am Professor Barnacle, of the Banstead Brotherhood—"

"I am Timothy Taper, of the Tiddlewick Club—"

"Cornelius Crimper, of the College of—"

"I represent the Islington Institute of Itinerants, my name being Ignatius Idyott—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Doctor Holmes staggered back in horror and amazement.

"What is the reason of this intrusion?" he demanded. "What do you—er—gentlemen require?"

Immediately there was a wave of hands and newspapers, and a chorus of eager yells.

"I have come to search for the treasure which—"

"As an archaeological expert, I wish to unearth the buried treasure—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Monty Lowther.

"What price treasure-hunters, chaps? St. Jim's is famous at last!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" boomed Dr. Holmes, in thunderous tones. "I command—"

"But—"

"Sir—"

"Really—"

"I insist—"

"Nonsense!" cried the Head of St. Jim's. "This affair is most absurd, and I cannot assist you gentlemen at all in the matter. Please leave the school premises, otherwise I shall have to summon assistance to have you forcibly removed!"

But the enthusiastic treasure-hunters simply would not go. They clung to the Head, and bombarded him with loud expostulations and earnest entreaties. Dr. Holmes struggled away from the treasure-hunters' grasp, and waved them back with his arm.

"Taggles," he cried, "show these gentlemen out immediately!"

Taggles blinked dubiously at the assembly of excited men.

"Which I hain't goin' to attempt to tackle that 'ere mob, sir," he said shaking his head. "Why, they'd murder me!"

Dr. Holmes beckoned to Kildare, the stalwart captain of St. Jim's, who had just come up.

"Kildare, will you and the other prefects kindly remove these intruders? Such an affair is unprecedented. I have never been more astounded in all my life. Boys, do not allow any others to enter this school!"

And Dr. Holmes, with a frowning brow, rustled indoors.

Kildare and Darrell and North and Rushden and Monteith waded in among the crowd of treasure-hunters and steered them to the gates.

These ubiquitous gentlemen protested and struggled, until at last Tom Merry & Co. took a hand in the proceedings.

They backed up Kildare and his fellow-prefects right nobly, and soon the party of treasure-seekers were hustled away from St. Jim's.

"My word!" gasped Jack Blake, as they saw the treasure-hunters disappear down the Rylcombe Lane. "This is a merry adventure, and no mistake! Why, here are some more johnnies, by the look of it!"

Another party of learned-looking gentlemen were hastening up the lane towards St. Jim's.

"And still they come!" grinned Monty Lowther. "We'll have to hold the fort, chaps, and drive these merchants away!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The three new arrivals blinked at the boys as they halted outside the gates.

"St. James' School?" inquired one, in a high-pitched voice.

"Yes, sir," replied Tom Merry. "Have you come about the buried treasure?"

"Yes, yes, my boy!" chuckled the old gentleman. "I and my colleagues have come to propose to your headmaster that we buy up the college, and pull it down, so as make sure of finding the buried treasure."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the boys of St. Jim's hilariously.

The treasure-seekers glared.

"How dare you laugh in such a ridiculous manner, boys!" exclaimed the first old gentleman. "Will you have the goodness to direct me to your headmaster?"

"Sorry, sir," grinned Tom Merry, "but the Head is seeing no callers at present. You see, there have been so many that he is rather—ahem!—fed up!"

"Nonsense! I demand to see him!"

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Tom Merry signalled to the others, and they stationed themselves in formidable array in the school gateway.

"No admittance except on business!" grinned Monty Lowther. "We're here to hold the fort against all comers!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The treasure-hunters waxed wildly indignant, but Tom Merry & Co. would not let them pass.

At last they returned to the village, baffled, and Tom Merry & Co. chuckled nightly.

Later on that day a notice appeared on the school gate to the effect that no callers would be permitted inside unless upon legitimate school business.

And for the rest of that day Taggles was kept very busy turning away enthusiastic treasure-hunters who had been attracted to St. Jim's by that announcement in the "Rylcombe Gazette."

CHAPTER 5.

News for Trimble!

NEXT day quite a number of people called to make inquiries about the buried treasure of St. Jim's. They were confronted by the notice on the school gate, and firmly persuaded by Taggles that Dr. Holmes would not see them.

Tom Merry & Co. derived much amusement in pulling the legs of the fortune-hunters, and many were the scenes of excitement outside the gates of St. Jim's during that day.

On Friday, when afternoon lessons were over, the Terrible Three strolled down to the quadrangle to meet the postman.

Funds were at a low ebb in Study No. 10, but Manners was expecting a remittance from his uncle. Monty Lowther was living in hopes that a certain maiden aunt would remember him, as he had not received a "tip" from her for three weeks.

Jack Blake & Co. of the Fourth strolled up and joined Tom Merry & Co. at the foot of the School House steps.

"Waitin' for the postman, deah boys?" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy genially. "I'm expectin' a wemittance fwom my patah, too. I wote on Wednesday expwessly statin' that I was stonay, and wequestin' a fivah immediately."

The Terrible Three chuckled.

"Good old Gussy!" grinned Monty Lowther. "Who wouldn't have a pater like his? Why, I'd swop my maiden aunt and half a dozen uncles for your governor, Gussy!"

"Oh, wats!" responded the noble swell of St. Jim's. "Heah comes Blagg, deah boys!"

Blagg, the Rylcombe village postman, hove into view, and he rolled laboriously up to the School House steps.

Fellows ran up from all directions to meet the postman.

"Good-afternoon, Blaggy, old scout!" said Monty Lowther, raising his cap and bowing low to the ground. "It does us good to see your merry old chivvy again! You are as welcome as the flowers in May, Blaggy! Got a letter for me?"

Blagg groped in his bag and withdrew a bundle of letters.

The boys waited eagerly for letters. Some were lucky, some were disappointed.

Baggy Trimble rolled up, a look of hopeful expectancy on his fat countenance.

The fat youth of the Fourth had vague expectations of a remittance from Trimble Hall, and had come along to see what the postman had for him. Generally Baggy was disappointed, but by being on the spot when the postman

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came he got to know what fellows had remittances, and was thus enabled to indulge his "sponging" proclivities, until the liberal donations of "thick ears" and bumpings discouraged him.

Baggy blinked enviously at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy as Blagg handed that aristocratic youth an envelope. Gussy tore it open, and a chortle of delight arose from his chums when he withdrew a crisp, rustling banknote.

"Huwah!" cried Arthur Augustus. "We shall be able to have tea in the studay now, deah boys!"

The Terrible Three looked anxiously at the postman. Monty Lowther's face was wreathed in smiles as he took a missive from Blagg. Upon opening the letter Monty's smiles faded as if by magic. It was a letter from his aunt, but no "tip" was enclosed—unless an injunction to keep out of the wet be a "tip" worth receiving.

"Master Trimble!"

Baggy Trimble pricked up his ears, and the others looked round curiously.

"Letter for me?" demanded Baggy eagerly. "Gimme it, Blagg!"

The postman handed Baggy the letter, and the fat boy of the Fourth ripped it open eagerly.

A blank look of astonishment crossed his features as he read the letter. Percy Mellish dashed forward and grabbed Baggy's letter. Mellish was Baggy's study-mate, and he had no scruples. The cad of the Fourth read the letter, and then burst into a chuckle.

"Listen to this, chaps!" he exclaimed, and then he commenced to read:

"Dear Baggy.—Just a line to say that I will pay you a visit at your school to-morrow afternoon. I don't believe you have heard of me before—indeed, you have never seen me. Having come from Australia to the Homeland, I wish to see my nephews, and will arrive at Rylcombe by the two-forty train. I should like you and Teddy to be there to meet me.—Your affectionate

"UNCLE JERRY."

Baggy Trimble's face was red with indignation.

"You rotter, Mellish!" he howled.

"Gimme back my letter! I'll smash you!"

"Here's your letter, Baggy!" chuckled Mellish, returning the missive. "So your unknown Uncle Jerry is coming to see you to-morrow. My hat!"

Tom Merry & Co. and Jack Blake & Co. looked grimly at Mellish.

"Rotten trick to pinch a chap's letter and read it in public!" growled Jack Blake. "You ought to be scragged, Mellish!"

Percy Mellish backed hastily away.

"Oh, I only did it for fun, you know!" he said peevishly. "Besides, there was no harm done, was there?"

"All the same if there was!" said Blake-gruffly. "I say, Baggy, it's jolly queer that this unknown uncle of yours should turn up so suddenly. Haven't you ever heard of him before?"

Baggy Trimble shook his head.

"No, I haven't!" he said. "But the Trimble family is a big one, you know, and its members are distributed all over the world. I expect Uncle Jerry is another of my rich relations!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Baggy Trimble glowered at his laughing schoolfellows.

"Oh, really, you know," he said peevishly, "there's nothing at all to laugh at! I suppose Uncle Jerry emigrated to Australia when he was young, and now he has made a fortune in

the diamond-mines he's coming back to see us all—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "There are no diamond-mines in Australia, you fat chump! I expect your giddy uncle is a retired bushranger who has found Australia too hot for him!"

"Why, you—you rotter—"

"I wonder if Uncle Jerry is anything like Baggy?" grinned Blake. "I reckon uncle will be worth seeing to-morrow—eh, what?"

"Ha, ha! Rather!"

"I say, you fellows, I'm stony!" howled Trimble wrathfully. "Ain't you going to lend me a quid to stand my uncle some tea when he comes? He's sure to give me a good tip when he leaves, and I'll pay you back, then!"

"Oh rats!"

Tom Merry & Co. and Jack Blake & Co. turned away, but Baggy Trimble fastened on to them.

"Look here, you rotters, lend me some tin!" he yelled. "I must stand my uncle a feed—Yarooooooop!"

Trimble uttered a wild howl as he was grasped in many hands and bowled off his feet.

Bump, bump!

"Yarooooooogh!" wailed Trimble. "Stoppit, you rotters! Wharrer you at? Yow-ow-ow-ow!"

"Sit him down!" said Tom Merry, winking at his chums. "That's the ticket! Now, we'll all stand six feet away, and when I say 'Go!' make a run all together and jump on him. Come on, chaps!"

Baggy, sitting on the ground, blinked at the grinning juniors as they stationed themselves in a row six feet away from him.

"I—I say," he said nervously, "don't play the giddy goat, you know!"

"We're not playing the giddy goat; we're serious!" said Tom Merry solemnly. "Now, don't forget, chaps, when I say 'Go!' jump on him. One—two—three—"

"Yarooooooogh!" howled Trimble, springing to his feet and dashing off as fast as his fat little legs would carry him. "Help! Murder! Fire! Yoooooooogh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry & Co.

The rotund form of Baggy Trimble disappeared in the distance, and, with deep chuckles, Tom Merry & Co. turned away.

"I say, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, turning to his companions. "I'm goin' to stand a wippin' tea in Studay No. 6. Would you like to join us?"

"Oh, wouldn't we just!" said Monty Lowther enthusiastically. "Come to my arms, Gussy!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Let me fold you to my bosom and weep!" said Lowther affectionately. "Dear old Gussy—"

"You uttah ass! Welease me, you fwabjous chump!"

But Monty Lowther insisted upon embracing the swell of the Fourth, and D'Arcy struggled vainly in his strong embrace.

"You uttah ass, you are wumplin' my waistcoat!" yelled Arthur Augustus. "You are tweadin' on my boots, you feahful ass!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you do not welease me, Lowthah, you scweamin' chump, I shall stwike you—"

Bump!

Monty Lowther released the noble swell of St. Jim's so suddenly that

Arthur Augustus sat down heavily on the hard, unsympathetic ground.

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"To hear is to obey," said Lowther solemnly. "Gussy, old man, you're a giddy hero! When you've finished resting we'll go up and have tea."

Arthur Augustus struggled painfully to his feet, and pushed back his spotless cuffs. His eye gleamed vengeance, swift and sudden, through his eyeglass.

"Lowthah, you wuffianly ass—"

"Ready?" asked Lowther calmly. "We've accepted your kind invitation, and we're ready for tea, Gussy!"

"I'm goin' to give you a fearful thrashin'!"

"Do you always give a chap a fearful thrashing when you invite him to tea?" asked Lowther innocently.

"Ahem! I shall thrash you if you play any more of your wuffianly twicks, Lowthah! I wegard you as a wuff ass! Tom Mewwy, deah boy, are you comin'?"

"What-ho!" said Tom Merry. "Any port in a storm!"

And the chums of the School House went indoors chuckling, Digby having been despatched to expend a portion of Gussy's fiver in the tuckshop upon provisions for tea.

CHAPTER 6.

Uncle's Arrival!

"W H O'S coming down to meet Uncle Jerry?"

Monty Lowther looked in at the Common-room after dinner next day, and asked that question cheerfully.

A chuckle arose from the juniors congregated in the Common-room.

"Faith, an' we'll all go down!" said Reilly. "We wouldn't miss Baggy's Uncle Jerry for a pension, entoiely!"

"No fear!"

"Come on, then!" grinned Monty Lowther. "Tommy says we can miss cricket practice if we like, as there are no important fixtures for a week. We've agreed to stand Baggy Trimble a high tea in his study for the privilege of meeting his uncle in state at the station. Gussy's supervising the giddy welcome. He reckons that we ought to extend a cordial welcome to the giddy stranger, even though he is Baggy Trimble's uncle. The poor chap can't help that, and we're going to show him that he's welcome to St. Jim's, and all that, you know!"

"Ha, ha! Rather!"

Quite a crowd of juniors assembled in the school quadrangle.

Baggy Trimble was there with Teddy, his minor. Teddy was rather dubious as to the genuineness of his alleged Uncle Jerry, but had obtained leave from Wally D'Arcy to stop out of the Third Form cricket team in order to meet Uncle Jerry at Rylcombe Station when he arrived.

Baggy Trimble was looking unusually spotless and clean. Under pressure from Jack Blake he had washed his neck and put on a clean collar in honour of the auspicious occasion.

Teddy Trimble, too, had rid himself of the numerous inkstains that had adorned his hands and face that morning. In a neat new collar and well-brushed shoes he was, as Monty Lowther remarked, quite respectable for a fag.

Baggy Trimble was looking extremely important, but Teddy seemed "fed up," to use a vulgar expression.

"I say, you fellows, no rotting, you know!" said Baggy peevishly, as the party moved through the gates and made their way down the Rylcombe Lane

towards the village. "My uncle is jolly particular, and—"

"Oh, keep your hair on, porpoise!" said Tom Merry. "We're going to extend the right hand of fellowship to your giddy uncle, and weep salt tears of welcome on his breast!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hands across the sea, you know!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "But I sincerely trust, Twimble, that your uncle is not like you!"

"Oh, really, D'Arcy—"

"As he is most likely a retired bush-ranger, perhaps he'll have a few guns, and give us some excitement for our money," remarked Monty Lowther. "It would be rather rotten, wouldn't it, Baggy, to see your merry uncle in chokey to-morrow morning?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

At length, Rylcombe Station was reached, and the boys of St. Jim's assembled on the platform to await the train.

Half-past two had struck from the village church tower when Herries announced the approach of the train.

It rounded the bend and puffed into Rylcombe Station, drawing in at the platform with a series of breathless grunts and rattles.

Tom Merry & Co. and the Trimble brothers eagerly scanned the faces of the passengers as they descended from the train. Several farmers and yokels emerged, and one old lady. Then, from a first-class compartment, there descended a gentleman the appearance of whom fairly took the St. Jim's juniors' breath away.

He was of medium height, but he had an ample waist-line. From beneath his dilapidated-looking top hat there protruded a mop of long, straggly hair of quite a ginger hue. His whiskers were of the same bright variety, and profuse in the extreme. His face was florid, his eyebrows bushy, and his nose of a distinct ruby tint. He was arrayed in a suit of a glaring and vivid check pattern, which made Tom Merry & Co. blink to gaze upon it. His trousers were baggy, and extremely short. He wore white but soiled spats over his immense brown boots, which Monty Lowther at once condemned as being "bilious."

This extremely strange gentleman wore a rose in his buttonhole, which, like its wearer, looked rather faded. He carried a knobby walking-stick, and had rather a jaunty air about him.

"Mum-my hat!" gurgled Tom Merry.

"Can this—this awful merchant be Baggy Trimble's uncle?"

"Bai Jove!"

They were not kept long in doubt, for the faded-looking individual, on seeing the boys, walked up to them, hailing them in a high-pitched voice.

"Ho, ho, my lads! Have you all come down to welcome me? Ha, ha, ha! Bless my soul, here's Baggy, and Teddy as well! My word, aren't they fat!"

Baggy Trimble and Teddy Trimble went red, and the others chuckled.

Uncle Jerry went up to Baggy, seized that youth by the hand, and fairly wrung it.

"How do, Baggy?" he chuckled. "I recognise you by your photo at home. A regular Fat Boy of Peckham, aren't you? And how's Teddy?"

"Groooogh!" gasped Teddy, as his uncle vehemently grasped his hand.

"Leggo, you—you—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Whew!" gasped Uncle Jerry, withdrawing a flaming-red handkerchief from his breast-pocket, and mopping his brow. "Ain't it hot! I suppose these are your school-chums, Baggy, eh?"

"Ahem!" coughed Baggy Trimble. "Ye-es, unde. They—they're all my pals, you know. They've come down to welcome you to St. Jim's."

"Good enough!" said Uncle Jerry, bestowing upon the assembled boys an affable grin. "Gimme an intro, Baggy. Who is that aristocratic-looking young gentleman in the top hat and monocle? A pal of yours?"

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, going quite pink.

"Ye-es, unde!" stammered Baggy Trimble.

"Nobby young swell, ain't 'e?" said Uncle Jerry, smirking. "Carry on with the intros, Baggy!"

Baggy Trimble, his face quite red, introduced Tom Merry & Co., and each of these juniors received a most violent handshake from Baggy's peculiar uncle.

Teddy Trimble seemed to regard his uncle with aloofness and suspicion. The other fellows were amused, and grinned at each other as in a party they made their way from the platform.

Uncle Jerry tendered a third-class ticket to the station-porter, and bestowed a sly wink upon Tom Merry & Co.

"I always travel first!" he grinned. "But a third-class ticket is good enough for me! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, regarding Uncle Jerry in horror through his monocle.

The noble swell of St. Jim's had prepared a long speech of welcome, which he had intended to deliver to Baggy Trimble's alleged colonial uncle; but, as Gussy himself would have put it, "undah the cires," he did not think it necessary!

The St. Jim's juniors, with Trimble's Uncle Jerry in their midst, passed out into the High Street.

Uncle Jerry glanced up and down the old-fashioned thoroughfare.

"I'm dry and peckish!" he said, with a chuckle. "I see a tuckshop over there. Would you young fellows care to join me in a feast?"

"What-ho!"

"We'll come, sir!"

"Like a shot!"

Uncle Jerry's suggestion was received with joyous acclamation—especially by the Trimble brothers, who were always in a hungry state.

The party, headed by Uncle Jerry, crossed the High Street to the village tuckshop, and they crowded inside.

Dame Tucker, the keeper of the tuckshop, regarded this invasion of customers in gratified astonishment.

The boys and Uncle Jerry took their seats, and, at uncle's invitation, proceeded to rap out orders thick and fast.

Soon there were sounds of festivity in the village tuckshop, and the popping of corks and the jingling of glasses and the champing of jaws mingled with the merry laughter of the boys.

Uncle Jerry was a brilliant conversationalist. His tales of Australia were weird and peculiar. Kangaroo of the Shell, who also came from Australia, listened to uncle's stories in high amusement. Kangaroo knew that uncle must have an intimate knowledge of Australia, but it was also apparent to him that Uncle Jerry was mercilessly pulling the schoolboys' legs.

"This is ripping!" chuckled Monty Lowther, who was discussing a glass of currant-wine and some meringues. "Trimble, old scout, your giddy uncle is one of the best! I appreciate his good taste in asking us to partake of this scrumptious feed!"

"He, he, he!" giggled Baggy Trimble, who was making vast inroads into a pork-pie. "I told you he was rich, didn't I? He's worth pots of

money. You silly asses won't be able to make fun of my relations now!"

Uncle Jerry seemed to be a great trencherman, like his nephews. The manner in which he demolished the good things simply astounded Tom Merry & Co. Verily, he had a schoolboy's appetite, and he devoured jam-tarts, cream-buns, meringues, pastries, pies, and ginger-pop with avidity, and with a relish that was truly remarkable to behold.

At last, when he could eat no more, Uncle Jerry sat back with a sigh of deep content. The others were full up, too. Even Baggy and Teddy Trimble had ceased to eat, having become rather shiny in the countenance.

"Well, my lads, that was a real good feed!" chuckled Uncle. "I suppose I'd better settle the bill, and then go to St. Jim's and have a look round the school. I— Oh dear! I—I believe I've left my pocket-book at home!"

"Great pip!"

Uncle Jerry searched in all his pockets, a look of deep concern on his face. When he had felt in every one, he shook his head, and regarded the boys mournfully.

"What a nuisance!" he remarked. "I've got no money to pay for this feed! I must have accidentally left my pocket-book at my hotel!"

"Bai Jove!"

The St. Jim's juniors looked hard at Uncle Jerry. It began to dawn upon them that uncle was somewhat of a fraud.

"Mum-my hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "Can't you settle the bill, sir?"

Uncle Jerry shook his head, and smiled with philosophic resignation.

"No, it's a fact I can't!" he said flippantly. "How careless of me to leave my cash at the hotel! I'm afraid I must ask you lads to square up, and I'll settle with you later!"

"Oh crumbs!"

Grim looks were cast at Uncle Jerry. Baggy Trimble looked dismayed, and Teddy's face was red with shame.

"Sorry, boys!" said uncle, rising. "If you all put a little the amount will soon be made up. Whew! I feel rather full, and I'm sure I couldn't walk all the way to St. Jim's, Master D'Arcy, sir, I suppose you couldn't lend me five shillings for my cab fare to St. Jim's?"

Mechanically Arthur Augustus D'Arcy groped into his trousers-pocket, and withdrew two half-a-crowns. These he extended to Uncle Jerry, who seized them with alacrity.

Jack Blake clenched his fists hard, and glared at Arthur Augustus. The others darted black looks at uncle.

This gentleman, quite unperturbed, affixed his shabby topper at a jaunty angle upon his head, picked up his knobby walking-stick, and turned to his nephews.

"Are you coming in the cab with me, Baggy?" he asked. "You can come, too, Teddy, if you like."

"Ahem!" coughed Teddy, looking askance at his uncle. "If you don't mind, uncle, I—I'll come on later. I don't like cabs!"

"All serene!" chuckled Uncle Jerry. "Baggy will come—won't you, Baggy? You look pretty full up, and I'm sure you'd rather come in the cab with me than walk all the way to St. Jim's."

"Ye-es, uncle!" muttered Baggy. "I'll come in the cab."

Uncle Jerry bestowed upon Tom Merry & Co. an affable grin, and walked out of the tuckshop, followed by Baggy.

The boys watched the pair charter the

station hack, and drive away up the High Street towards St. Jim's.

They drew deep breaths as the cab rattled out of sight.

"Well, of all the nerve," gasped Tom Merry, "that boulder is the limit! If I had an uncle like that I—I'd disown him!"

"What can you expect of a Trimble specimen?" said Jack Blake disparagingly. "Oh, wouldn't I like to push that merchant's chivvy back a fortnight!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't believe he is my uncle!" hooted Teddy Trimble furiously. "I've never heard of him before, and—and— Oh, it's jolly queer!"

Tom Merry & Co., with rueful faces, whipped round for funds, and managed to settle for the large quantity of tuck that had been consumed.

And as they walked slowly back to St. Jim's they discussed Baggy Trimble's Uncle Jerry in animated and far from flattering tones.

CHAPTER 7.

An Awful Spooner!

"MY heye!" gasped Taggles.

The school porter was amazed when he beheld Uncle Jerry arrive at the gates of St. Jim's in the old station hack.

"Here we are, uncle!" said Baggy Trimble, rolling out of the cab after his uncle. "This is St. Jim's!"

"My heye!" gasped Taggles again. He was taking stock of Uncle Jerry's loud check suit, his dilapidated topper, his gingery hair, and his boots of the same brilliant hue.

"Who's that old fossil, Baggy?" inquired Uncle Jerry pleasantly, indicating Taggles with his thumb. "He looks like a retired Russian cavalry officer!"

"He, he, he!" giggled Baggy Trimble. "That's the school porter, uncle."

"Oh!"

Taggles fixed Uncle Jerry with a stern eye, and regarded him with an air of dignified importance.

"Which can't you read that notice?"

NEXT WEDNESDAY

GREAT BUMPER and FREE GIFT NUMBER.

Wonderful Attraction.

For full particulars

SEE PAGE 20.

he demanded, waving a grimy hand to the notice on the school gate. "Strangers is not admitted to this 'ere school except on business!"

"That so?" inquired Uncle Jerry blandly. "Where's the notice you refer to?"

"Hup there!" hooted Taggles, waving his arm furiously. "Can't yer read?"

"That's not a notice!" said uncle solemnly, shaking his head. "You're suffering from delusions, my man. Why, anybody can see that that is a pair of trousers!"

"Wot!" gasped Taggles.

"You're dreaming, my good fellow! Fancy mistaking a pair of trousers for a notice! Great Scott!"

Taggles blinked at Uncle Jerry like one in a dream.

"You—you meaner tell me that's a pair of trousers 'agin' on the gate?" stammered the amazed porter. "A pair o' trousers on the gate?"

"Gate?" said Uncle Jerry sharply.

"What gate? I see no gate!"

"Good 'evings!" gurgled Taggles faintly.

"You mean that clothes-horse, surely!" said uncle, with an impassive countenance. "If you were not intoxicated, my man, you would perceive that there is a clothes-horse before you with a pair of trousers hanging on it. Go indoors and sleep it off, and take more water with it next time! Come on, Baggy!"

Uncle Jerry walked in at the gates, followed by Baggy Trimble, who was grinning. They left Taggles standing spellbound, blinking dazedly at the gate, wondering whether he was on his head or his heels.

Many curious glances were cast at Uncle Jerry as he crossed the quadrangle with Baggy Trimble, and many were the facetious remarks passed in secret, concerning his appearance.

They mounted the School House steps, and at the top they came face to face with Mr. Railton, the Housemaster.

Mr. Railton gasped when he saw uncle.

"Good-afternoon, sir!" bleated Uncle Jerry, raising his battered topper, and, with a hand upon his heart, making a sweeping bow to the ground. "Pardon my intrusion, but I am the uncle of Master Trimble!"

"Ahem!" coughed Mr. Railton, looking askance at Uncle Jerry. "Are you, indeed? I heard from Trimble that you were paying him a visit this afternoon. I trust you will like St. Jim's, sir. Good-afternoon!"

And Mr. Railton swept indoors abruptly.

Uncle Jerry chuckled.

"Stand-offish gent, isn't he, Baggy?" he said. "Lemme see, I won't go indoors just yet awhile. Let's have a walk round, shall we?"

"If you like, uncle," said Baggy Trimble, who was beginning to feel rather bored with Uncle Jerry.

So down the steps they went again, and uncle made his way towards the old elms in the Close.

Beneath the shade of the trees Baggy piloted his uncle until the cloisters were reached. Then Uncle Jerry turned abruptly to Baggy.

"Baggy," he said mysteriously, "I have startling news to tell you. Is it safe here to speak? Are there any listeners?"

"It—it's all right, uncle!" replied Baggy, beginning to shiver. "Wh-what's the news?"

"Have you heard of the buried treasure of St. Jim's? How it was hidden in a secret vault beneath the abbey?"

"Yes," said Baggy, pricking up his



Gordon Gay hung on the door grimly, and then, all of a sudden he let go. The St. Jim's juniors at the top of the steps staggered backwards as the door was released, and, losing their balance, they floundered on top of each other down the stairs. (See Chapter 2.)

ears eagerly. "The key and documents showing where the vault is were found last week!"

Uncle Jerry nodded, and patted his breast-pocket.

"Quite so, Baggy!" he chuckled. "I have both key and documents!"

"Wh-a-a-at!" gasped the fat youth of the Fourth, quite faintly.

Uncle Jerry withdrew some aged-looking parchment and a still more aged-looking key from his pocket. Baggy's eyes feasted on them eagerly.

"These," said uncle, patting the parchment and the key—"these will divulge the secret vault! Baggy, my boy, you and I have only to follow the directions on this parchment, open the secret vault with the key, and—"

"My word!" breathed Baggy Trimble.

Uncle Jerry took Baggy by the arm.

"Come on, my boy!" he chuckled. "We'll find the secret vault now, shall we?"

"What-ho!" said Baggy Trimble, his little round eyes gleaming with excitement. "We'll share the treasure, uncle. My word, what luck!"

And Baggy led the way along to the ruined chapel, which was the way to the vaults.

They descended through the secret entry, and gained the vaults at length.

It was so lonely and dark down there that Baggy Trimble shivered. He was not of the stuff of which heroes are made, and the eeriness of the vaults made him nervy.

Uncle had a pocket-torch, and from time to time he consulted the parchment documents he had with him. The way led through a perfect maze of underground passages, which had probably never yet been explored.

Baggy Trimble quite lost his bearings, but at length overcame his fear. His heart was beating with excitement over the prospect of finding the buried treasure of St. Jim's, and with that all-consuming thought he forgot all else.

Finally, after what seemed an endless journey through dark, winding passages and gloomy, hollow vaults, Uncle Jerry came at last to a halt outside an old oak door.

"This," he said dramatically, "is the door of the secret vault, Baggy. The key fits the lock—see!"

He inserted the key in the lock, and turned it. With a dull click the door opened slightly.

"Oh, how ripping!" breathed Baggy impatiently. "Shall we find the treasure in there, uncle?"

"Go inside and see!" said Uncle Jerry.

Baggy Trimble needed no second bid-

ding. He dragged the door of the secret vault open and walked within.

Then Uncle Jerry did a most amazing thing.

He gave Baggy Trimble a violent push from behind, which sent him sprawling inside the vault.

"Yarooooogh!" roared Baggy Trimble, in sudden terror. "Wharrer you at? Help! Murder! Yooogh!"

Uncle Jerry dragged some stout rope from his capacious pockets, and, after gagging Baggy Trimble with a handkerchief, he proceeded to bind him securely.

Within quite a short space of time Baggy Trimble was trussed up helplessly. He was dumped down in a corner, where he lay, gurgling incoherently, and gazing at Uncle Jerry with horror-stricken eyes.

Visions of battle, murder, and sudden death floated before Baggy's inward vision. He imagined himself being kept a prisoner in that vault, far away from his schoolfellows, until he perished with hunger.

Then, as Uncle Jerry proceeded to remove his hair and whiskers, Baggy Trimble's eyes almost goggled out of his head. Now that Uncle Jerry had removed those hirsute adornments, Baggy recognised Gordon Gay, of Rylcombe Grammar School.

CHAPTER 8.

When the Cat's Away!

"YAW-AW-AW!" gurgled Baggy Trimble, making frantic efforts to chew an outlet through his gag.

Gordon Gay chuckled, and replaced his false hair and whiskers.

"Properly taken in, weren't you, Baggy?" he grinned. "But this is not all the giddy joke yet. I'm going to jape Tom Merry & Co. as they have never been japed before. Now, don't gurgie like that, it sounds so horrid. You won't be kept down here all night, if that's what you're funky of, Trimble. I'll leave a little note for your rescuers to find when they come. I promise you they won't be long!"

Gordon Gay withdrew a fountain-pen from the pocket of his loud check waistcoat, also a sheet of paper. He scribbled a letter, and then pinned the paper to Baggy Trimble's breast.

Baggy was quite unable to give utterance to his many thoughts, but his looks were eloquent. They spoke volumes. The disguised Gordon Gay bestowed upon Baggy the sweetest of smiles, and then skipped from the vault.

Baggy groaned as he heard the key grate in the lock and the footsteps of his pseudo Uncle Jerry die away in the distance.

The practical joker from Rylcombe Grammar School chuckled to himself as he made his way out of the vaults beneath St. Jim's. He had explored these regions many times lately, and knew his way quite well.

At length he reached the cloisters, and made his way beneath the elms in the Close to the school quadrangle.

Tom Merry & Co. were crossing from the gates at that moment. They had just returned from Rylcombe.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, on catching sight of the disguised marauder. "Heah's Uncle Jewwy, deah boys!"

"Oh, bother Uncle Jerry!" grunted Jack Blake. "He can go and eat coke!"

But Uncle Jerry came up to the boys and planted himself in their way.

"Hallo, boys!" he said affably. "Have you seen Baggy?"

"No, sir," said Tom Merry. "We thought he was with you."

"So he was," replied the fraudulent uncle, shaking his head solemnly; "but he seems to have quite disappeared now. I wanted him to help me search for the buried treasure of St. Jim's."

Tom Merry & Co. jumped.

"Wha-a-a-at!" gasped Jack Blake. "You—you're after the buried treasure? Oh, my hat!"

Uncle Jerry nodded, and withdrew from his pocket the documents and the key with which he had deluded Baggy Trimble.

"These are the documents and key relating to a secret vault," he said solemnly. "Don't ask me how they came into my possession, but you can see I've got 'em!"

"Well, I'm jiggered!" gasped Tom Merry at last. "You—you've got the clues to the buried treasure of St. Jim's? My only Sunday topper!"

"Gweat Scott!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, his eyeglass glimmering with excitement. "It seems almost too good to be true, deah boys!"

"It is true!" said Uncle Jerry vehemently. "Now, my lads, I'm going to leave these in your charge, and you can find the vault and the hidden treasure. These documents are easy to read, and you'll have no difficulty in find-

ing the secret vault. When you find it the key will open the door, and then—and then—"

"We shall discover the buried treasure of St. Jim's!" breathed Jack Blake ecstatically.

Gordon Gay, so effectively disguised, had great difficulty in keeping back his mirth. The manner in which he was deluding his St. Jim's rivals was highly gratifying to him, and he suffered inward spasms.

Tom Merry & Co. looked at each other with excited, eager faces. Their hearts were beating wildly, and they were all eagerness to be off on the hunt for the secret vault and the buried treasure of St. Jim's.

"Master Merry, as you are the captain of the juniors, I will place the documents and key in your charge!" said Uncle Jerry. "I think I can safely trust you with them, and rely on you to find the buried treasure. I myself will not come. I'm going up to Baggy's study to see if he is there!"

"Oh, how ripping of you, sir!" gasped Tom Merry joyfully, taking the parchments and the ancient key from the hands of his disguised rival. "We'll all go down into the vaults now and find the treasure. We'll be able to follow the directions on these documents, don't you worry!"

"Yaas, wathahf!"

"Very well, boys," said Uncle Jerry. "Here come some more to join your party. You won't be lonely down there in the vaults!"

By this time a whole crowd of juniors had assembled, and great was their amazement and excitement when they heard the news.

All were eager to join in the search for the secret vault, and Gordon Gay chuckled softly.

"Well, boys, good luck!" he said. "I'll see you presently!"

"Right-ho, sir!"

A whole pack of excited, eager juniors dashed into the cloisters, Tom Merry & Co. leading the way.

The pseudo Uncle Jerry, chuckling softly, walked up the School House steps, and made his way up to the Shell passage.

"Now for a giddy lark!" he chuckled.

"While the cats are away this merry mouse is going to play. I've sent 'em all out on a treasure-hunt, and while they are roaming about the vaults following up the fake documents I'll be busy up here. It will be the jape of the term!"

Thus saying, Gordon Gay stepped into Study No. 10, the headquarters of the Terrible Three.

It was a long time since the Grammarians had had an opportunity to raid St. Jim's, and Gordon Gay resolved to carry out his rag in real earnest, now.

First he rolled up the study carpet, and stuffed a cushion up the chimney. Then he overturned the table, and, withdrawing a hammer and nails from his pocket, he nailed the table securely to the floor. Inside the upturned table he flung the study chairs, nailed them together, and then nailed them to the table. He turned the bookcase up on end, and emptied all the books out on to the floor in a heap. To this heap he added sundry other articles of furniture, such as the coal-scuttle, fender, fireirons, ornaments, and sports tackle.

Then Gordon Gay turned his attention to the study pictures. He took them down and removed the glass from the frames. Then he withdrew from his pocket sundry tubes of paint, brushes, and pencils. By means of these he proceeded to alter the appearance of the pictures in a vivid and startling manner.

One picture had previously represented a stirring battle scene, but by the time Gordon Gay had finished with it the picture seemed to represent a street fight of the most violent and disorderly character.

Having hung these pictures upside-down on the walls, Gordon Gay opened the study cupboard. The Terrible Three had evidently laid in provisions for tea, and the Grammarian marauder had plenty of material upon which to practise his humorous proclivities.

He emptied a jar of pickles into a half-filled jar of strawberry jam, and stirred the mixture well. The condensed milk he poured beneath the crust of a rabbit-pie, and filled the tin thus emptied with paste.

Into the pie also he emptied the contents of the mustard-pot, and added salt and pepper ad lib. to give it an added flavour. The large Madeira cake he cut in half, hollowed out the inside, and placed half a pound of sausages within. Then he glued the cake together again with liquid glue.

That done, Gordon Gay raked down some soot from the chimney and mixed it with the treacle. He imbued the contents of a bottle of currant wine, and refilled the bottle with red ink.

He also filled the study clock with ink, and tied it to the gas-bracket. As there still seemed to be plenty of soot in the chimney, Gay took a duster and a jar of soot, stood upon the heap of furniture in the middle of the room, and proceeded to plaster the ceiling with soot. He accomplished this quickly and in a manner that was truly remarkable. There was hardly a white patch left upon the ceiling by the time his work of art was completed.

Then Gay, taking a piece of black crayon, scrawled these words in large, glaring characters upon the wall:

"WHO ARE A GANG OF LOPEARED LUNATICS? WHY, YOU!"

WHO HAVE BEEN HOPELESSLY SPOOFED AND DISHED AND DIDDLED AND DONE BROWN BY RYLCOMBE GRAMMAR SCHOOL? WHY, YOU!"

WHO ARE THE BOTTOM DOGS? THE ST. JIM'S JACKASSES, OF COURSE!"

"Good!" chuckled the Grammarian raider, surveying the results of his handiwork with immense satisfaction. "Now I'll nail the giddy carpet over the window and slide!"

Gordon Gay nailed the carpet over the window, obscuring all light, and then, chuckling in high glee, he walked out of the wrecked study.

He then visited each study along the Shell passage in turn and proceeded to wreak havoc therein. Furniture was piled up in heaps on the floors, and ink and soot distributed over them with great liberality.

Having completed his round of the Shell studies, Gordon Gay passed on to the Fourth Form passage.

Study No. 5 received attention first, and when Gay left it, there was a scene of tumult and wreckage within.

He passed down the passage like Attila of old, devastating wherever he went. The coast was clear for him, because the juniors were roaming the vaults in search of the buried treasure of St. Jim's.

When he had ragged the junior quarters to his own satisfaction, Gordon Gay went upstairs to the Shell dormitory and placed a basin of water in Tom

Merry's bed. Monty Lowther's pyjamas he cut short to the knees, and added to his bedclothes the clothes from Manners' bed.

In the Fourth Form dormitory Gordon Gay performed similar humorous tricks, and then, as the clock from the clock-tower was booming forth five o'clock, he deemed it time to make his departure.

"My word!" he chuckled softly as, still in the guise of Uncle Jerry, he went downstairs. "I reckon Tom Merry & Co. will have a series of blue fits when they come in again. Nothing like the fits they'll have when they find the buried treasure of St. Jim's. Ha, ha, ha! This is where the Grammar School scores over St. Jim's and no mistake! And now to do the disappearing trick!"

Thus soliloquising, Gordon Gay went downstairs, chuckling over the manner in which he had "spoofed" Tom Merry & Co.

CHAPTER 9. Done Again!

"HERE we are!" said Tom Merry.
"At last, thank goodness!" said Jack Blake.

After half an hour spent roaming through numerous dark and gruesome passages, and traversing pitch-black, eerie vaults, Tom Merry & Co. had arrived outside the door of the secret vault which Gordon Gay had discovered.

It had been comparatively easy to follow the direction on the parchment, but the way had been a roundabout one, and Tom Merry & Co. were feeling rather tired.

Gordon Gay had purposely designed that route so that his rivals would take some time in arriving at their destination.

Tom Merry & Co. brightened considerably when they saw the old oak door before them.

"Heah is the secwet vault, deah boys!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy enthusiastically. "I am in quite a fluttah, deah boys, to see the buwied treasure! Have you got the key, Tom Mewwy?"

"You bet!" chuckled Tom; and, dragging it from his pocket, he inserted it in the lock.

The juniors crowded in the subterranean passage held their breath in expectation. With a dull creak the door swung open, and the boys crowded inside the secret vault.

There was a moment of tense silence whilst Tom Merry endeavoured to switch on his pocket-torch, which he had put out.

"Groooooogh!" came from inside the vault.

Tom Merry jumped violently, and the others drew back with gasps of fear.

"Yerrrugh! Gug-gug-gug!"

"Mum-my only hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "W-what on earth is that? There's somebody in here!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Yooooooogh! Gerrugh!"

Those weird and wonderful noises, coming from the dark depths of the secret vault, positively astounded Tom Merry & Co.

"It—it can't be a ghost!" muttered Tom Merry. "We've been spoofed once already. Keep a stiff upper-lip, boys, while I get this torch alight."

At last Tom Merry managed to switch on his electric torch.

A beam of radiance pierced the thick gloom, lighting up the old stone blocks which comprised the walls of the vault, now crusted with the dirt of centuries.

"Groooooogh! Gug-gug!" came in hollow accents from the far corner.

Tom Merry directed the beam of light

towards that corner, and as a fat, huddled figure became visible a loud, gurgling gasp of amazement arose.

"Gug-good heavens!" stuttered Jack Blake faintly. "Who—who is it?"

"Baggy Trimble!" yelled Manners, making that startling discovery suddenly.

"Wha-a-a-t!"

"It's Baggy!"

"Holy smoke!"

Tom Merry & Co. fell back flabbergasted, and stood spellbound, gazing at the trussed-up Baggy like boys in a dream.

"Yerrrugh! Oooooogh!" came from Baggy, and he rolled his eyes in a manner that was fearful to behold.

"Well, carry me home to die, somebody!" gasped Tom Merry, in astonishment. "How the merry dickens did Baggy get here?"

"Huwwy up and welease him, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Pewwaps he'll tell us what has happened."

Baggy Trimble was grasped in many hands, and his bonds taken from him.

Tom Merry seized the note pinned upon his chest, and, opening the missive, he read as follows, to his utter and complete astonishment:

"Dear Old Beans.—Uncle Jerry—otherwise Gordon Gay, Esquire, of Rylcombe Grammar School—has put the kybosh on you. Baggy Trimble is the treasure, and the only treasure of St. Jim's you'll ever find, I'm thinking, because the documents and the keys that the merrybold vicar discovered turned out to be snares and delusions after all, as they refer to his own vestry. However, so as not to disappoint you, I discovered this secret vault the other afternoon, and faked up a document and a key of my own, and worked the 'Uncle Jerry' trick as you already know.

"Cheer up, old sons; there's worse than this to follow, believe me.

"Your old pal,
"GORDON GAY."

Tom Merry blinked at this letter, and blinked again, and stood spellbound until the dread news had sunk in.

Then he emitted a queer, gurgling gasp.

"My—my only sainted Aunt Jane!" His chums looked at Tom Merry, astonished.

"What's up, Tommy?" gasped Blake. Tom Merry extended Gordon Gay's letter.

"Read it!" he gasped.

Jack Blake read it, and the others read it, and when they had read it a chorus of wild howls of rage and chagrin arose.

"Gordon Gay! The spoofer!"

"We've been done again!"

"By that Grammar School rotter!"

"There was no Uncle Jerry after all!"

"It's all a horrid hoax!"

"Dished, diddled, and deluded!" groaned Tom Merry, grinding his teeth savagely. "Trimble, how—how did it happen?"

Breathlessly Baggy Trimble explained Gordon Gay's little jape. As they listened, the eyes of Tom Merry & Co. opened wider.

"Gweat Scott!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, groping for his monocle, and screwing it into his eye. "I wondah wheah the howwid boundah is now, deah boys? Still woamin' wound the school, pewwaps!"

"Goodness knows what the spoofer is up to!" moaned Tom Merry. "He—he says in his letter that there's worse to follow!"

"Great pip! What the merry thunder—"

"Let's scoot out of this, quick!" said Tom Merry grimly. "I'm blowed if I know my way out, but we shall have to follow the directions of this blessed parchment backwards. But we'll get out, and, my hat, if we lay hands on Gordon Gay—"

"We'll annihilate him!" said Jack Blake.

"We'll scrag him!"

"Slaughter the beggar!"

And, breathing blood-curdling threats upon the devoted head of the Grammarian japer, Tom Merry & Co., with Baggy Trimble trotting with them, dashed back the way they had come.

CHAPTER 10.

Gay Makes His Escape!

"THERE he is!"

"After him!"

"Don't let the cad escape!"

A chorus of wild, savage howls arose as Tom Merry & Co., emerging at last from the cloisters, saw the figure of Trimble's pseudo Uncle Jerry crossing the quadrangle.

Setting their teeth, and vowing vengeance swift and sudden, the deluded St. Jim's juniors made a simultaneous rush at their rival.

Gordon Gay saw them coming, and he promptly bolted for the gates.

As he ran, he dragged his false whiskers and hair from him and flung them down. He stopped a moment to bestow upon his pursuers a tantalising grin, and then he was away like a hare.

Gordon Gay had evidently pre-arranged his escape, for a little way up the lane a party of Grammar School juniors were waiting with bicycles.

"Hurrah!" roared Harry Wootton excitedly, as he saw his leader emerge from the gates of St. Jim's with Tom Merry & Co. a good hundred yards behind. "Put the speed on, old man, and you'll do 'em! We've got your jigger here for you!"

"Oh, good!" panted Gordon Gay. He dashed up and seized his machine from the hands of Carboy. His chums mounted, and Gordon Gay followed suit.

Tom Merry & Co. gazed at these exploits with rage, and when they saw Gordon Gay & Co. move off down the lane on their bicycles they stopped, and sent up a wild howl of disappointment.

"Stop, you rotters!"

"We'll give you a feahful thwashin', bai Jove!"

"You—you shrieking chumps!"

Gordon Gay turned round and kissed his hand sweetly to his vanquished rivals.

"Good-bye, Bluebells!" he chortled. "This is where the Grammar School scores—eh, what?"

"You—you—you—"

"Good-bye-see-eeee!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Gordon Gay & Co., chortling with victory, sped on their way back to Rylcombe Grammar School.

Tom Merry turned to his chums, and ground his teeth.

"Kyboshed properly!" he moaned. "It's no use chasing the bounders now, my sons. Let's get indoors and see what damage Gordon Gay has done."

They went indoors, vague fears assailing them. Those fears were realised when they discovered the havoc that the humorous Gordon Gay had wrought in their studies.

The Terrible Three opened their study door, and saw that all was dark. They walked in, and immediately three wild, fiendish howls arose as they cannoned into the pile of furniture in the middle of the room.

(Continued on page 19.)

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A NEW CHUM IN AUSTRALIA!

By "COOEE."

IN a small net which the diver brought up were some pearl-shells, but these were thrown carelessly on the deck, and the Malay began a furious word-battle with his two countrymen at the pump. He had suffered before through their quarrels and neglect, and this time, as he said to the skipper, "Me nearly choke—no air." Captain Duncan explained to him that he had punished the fellows, and although the diver looked ill, and went away to rest, he did not do so without giving his mates to understand that he would pay them out for their stupidity and cruelty. No more diving was to be done that day, so Jack had plenty of time to question the skipper about the romantic and dangerous business.

"Do you get many pearls in these parts?"

"No, not a great many, but that does not matter so much. We make our living generally out of the pearl-shell. Hundreds of shells may be opened without one pearl being found, but the mother-of-pearl in the shell brings a great price for buttons and ornaments."

"I suppose the diver gets better pay than the other fellows?"

"Oh, yes; he gets a share in the returns. If we did not reward him well he would not work well, or stick to it for any length of time."

"Did you ever go down in a diving-dress, Captain Duncan?"

"I did, my boy, just once, and that was enough for me—at least, in these waters, and on this business. I had a bad time. Like all other new hands at the game, I was a bit scared. My first feeling was that I was in a green world, then my ears buzzed painfully, and I felt as if my head were too large for the helmet. Lower down I began a strange performance. I whirled round with my feet as centre and my head describing an ellipse. Then it bumped against a mass of coral, and the shock steadied me. Only for a bit, however, for my head began to bob like a football on the bottom. This extraordinary turn passed away, and when I stood right side up I saw I was in a beautiful marine forest, with graceful branches, fern-like plants, and rocks of showy-white coral. The branches of those trees seemed to sway as if in a gentle breeze. I tried to walk, but my feet were a frightful weight. I found one pearl oyster, and put it in my net. Tug, tug! went the line round my body. The ship was drifting onwards, and this was the sign for me to follow. Just then my feet lifted clear from the bottom, and I was floating on the horizontal, and feeling queer and faint. I pulled the signal-rope, and began to shoot up, spinning like a minnow, and was soon pulled on board. When they took my helmet off they found it had been leaking. I had been nearly drowned."

"It's dangerous work," said Jack. "What if the Malays forget to pump air, or your line breaks, or the air-tube gets punctured?"

"Well, you see," said the captain, "the shells don't usually lie close together, and the diver is supposed to keep pace with the ship as she drifts. In doing so he may have to climb over rocks."

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The air-tube may sag against a sharp rock, get cut, and then—no hope."

"I have often heard of beachcombers," said Jack—"what are they?"

The men looked at each other and laughed.

"Oh, well, the beachcomber is a man who picks up pearl-shells on the beaches when they are washed up by a storm. Some of these men once owned boats, but lost them, and now they make their living on the beaches."

When they came up on deck after tea, they found the lugger surrounded by beautiful sea-snakes, nicely mottled, and quite harmless.

One of the Malays pointed to the beach and shouted:

"Crocodiles!"

"Here is your chance, Jack! We'll give you first shot to-day. Aim under the forearm of that fellow!"

Jack took very steady aim, fired, and—"Good shot, my boy! You've hit him, but he's not dead. Give him a second dose!"

Jack took Mr. Maldon's rifle and finished the crocodile's career.

"There, now, Jack, you can write to your aunt and your friends in the Old Country and tell them you shot a crocodile."

A few days later he got some claws and teeth as a memento of his first success in big-game shooting.

On the way home that night Jack asked Mr. Maldon how it happened that pearls were in oyster-shells. The answer was that a little parasite—a tiny worm—gets inside the shell, and the oyster, to save

Cinderella of Australia, and other names more or less correct. Next week a tribe of natives are to hold a great corroboree somewhere south; and if we can manage it we must go to see it, and at the same time see a bit of inland Australia."

"What's a corroboree, Mr. Maldon?"

"Oh, sometimes it's a great ceremony by which young lads are admitted to the position and privileges of manhood. In that case it is very long and very serious. But the corroboree as usually conducted is more of a kind of entertainment—a concert and dance. The other and more serious form is one which neither woman nor white people are allowed to see."

When the day came Mr. Maldon and his friends went about fifty miles south by motor-car, and found that quite a large party of white people had gathered for the occasion. The first thing to catch Jack's eye was a number of little huts, or "gunyahs," made of boughs and bark. White people call them "humpies," and they are pitched or built just anyhow, so far as position is concerned. There was no order, no plan. Houses of this kind, run up in an hour, would be abandoned in a day or two, and were merely shelters, and poor ones at that, from the heat of the sun. The simplicity of some, called "mia-mias," was astonishing. Two sticks were driven into the ground, six feet apart, and another, at the height of about four feet, was tied to them like a ridge-pole. On the cross-piece great slabs of tree-bark leaned at an angle, and in the shade of the bark the natives sat or slept.

Water-bottles made of pumpkins hung from the poles, and so also baskets made of rushes, with here and there a hatchet or a gay-coloured blanket.

Looking inside the miserable gunyahs, Jack saw some old rags on the floor, old women smoking dirty pipes, while everywhere were mangy, mongrel dogs. The old women are called "gins," and Jack saw ones of them rescuing a piece of meat from a thieving dog, and, simply taking the meat out of the dog's mouth, put it in her own.

A body of natives stood together, and as Jack passed them he noticed that their colour was really coffee-brown. An evil smell came from them, and Mr. Maldon asked Jack if he could guess why they smelt so vilely.

"No," answered Jack. "Why is it?" "They rub their bodies with fish-oil whenever they can get it."

"Where did these people come from?"

"It is believed they came originally from Melanesia, perhaps New Guinea; but successive waves followed on from India and the Malay Peninsula. Hallo! Here is a fellow come to show us how to throw the boomerang."

Jack had never seen this done, and he watched closely the way the native held the weapon, how he threw it, and how it circled round at a great distance, and, coming back again, fell at the thrower's feet. This "return weapon," as it is called, is an interesting study both to scientists and ordinary people.

"Try it, Jack," said Mr. Thornton. "But mind you don't hit anybody."

Jack took hold of it and, after a few trials, managed to throw it fairly well, to the amazement and amusement of the blacks.

Harry laughed, and declared he would not like to tackle it.

"There, now, Harry," said his uncle, "you will be able to write a book about your experiences. Many a scribbler has seen less than you saw to-day."

THE END.

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himself from irritation, coats the parasite over with white, smooth matter in layers just like an onion. When he has finished his job he has produced a pearl which may one day adorn a princess.

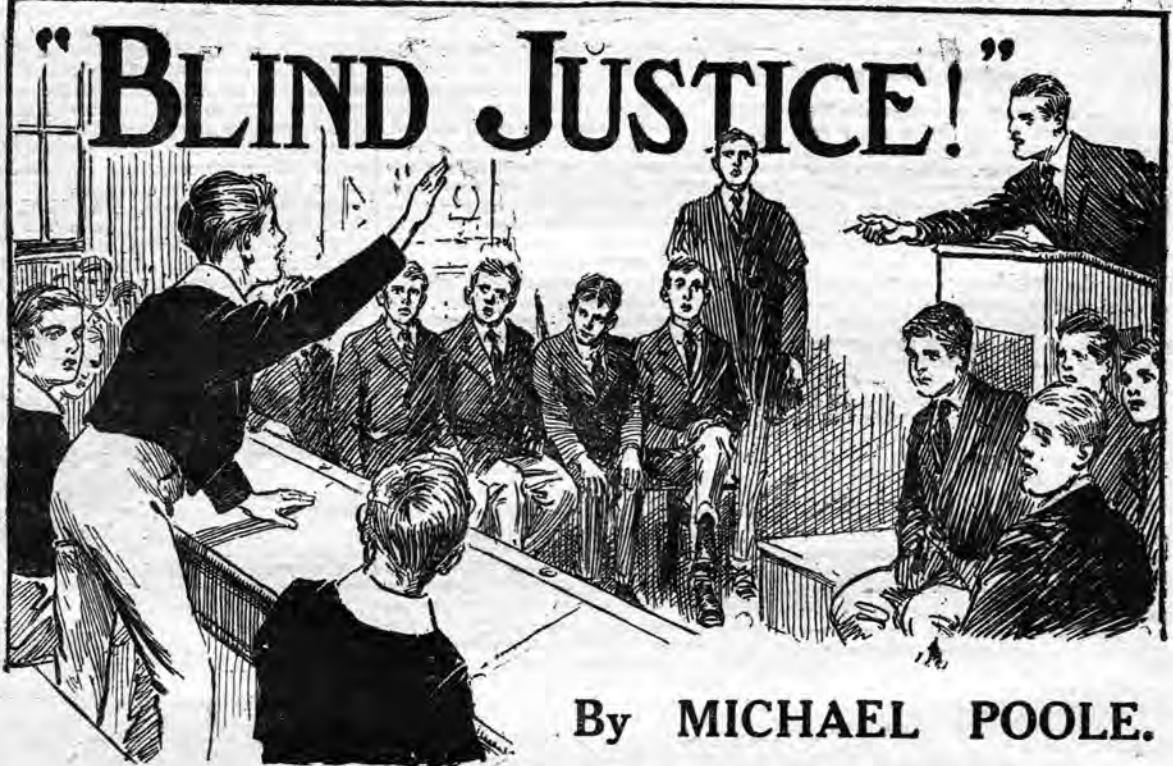
"Mr. Maldon, I notice on the map that Darwin lies very near Japan. Is that why some people call it the front door of Australia?"

Jack was continually asking questions, and Mr. Maldon kept encouraging him to do so.

Lying back in his chair, he answered:

"Well, Jack, sometimes Darwin is called the front door because it is the natural entrance to the great district called the Northern Territory, which is the size of Belgium, France, Germany, Switzerland, and Italy all put together. In these two million square miles there are only about two thousand people; and, as a little child once said, 'there's a great deal of nothing in the centre of Australia.' Sometimes the Territory is called the Great Lone Land, the

A Splendid Long Tale of Dickie Dexter & Co., the Chums of St. Katie's,



By MICHAEL POOLE.

CHAPTER 1.

Smithy Solves a Mystery!

"IT'S a queer business," said Smithy of the Fifth.

"Jolly queer!" agreed Bill Strong. "You don't think any of your chaps are pulling your leg?"

"I've got a list here," said Smithy very definitely and decidedly. "It's a complete list of every fellow in the Fifth. Against each name you will perceive an exact statement of where each fellow was between the hours of two and four yesterday afternoon. Moreover, my dear Strong, I can prove each fellow's statement by other witnesses—absolutely. The question is—who did it?"

"It couldn't be anyone in the Transitus," Bill said slowly. "I mean—well, it couldn't be!"

When you come to think of it, both Smith and Strong were right in saying it was a queer business. Yesterday there had been a most gorgeous rag. It began with the Transitus discovering that the Fifth had wrecked half their studies, and it ended up with the Transitus and the Fifth having a battle royal in the Fifth corridor.

The Head had said the last word, and both the Fifth and the Trans were gated for a full week. Further, all the proposed removes in the Transitus were washed out.

Of course, it didn't really matter very much now who actually started the row. Nothing could alter the fact that both the Fifth and the Transitus had created a frightful shindy, and the Head was fully justified in taking the steps he did.

Smithy had assumed, just as swiftly as Bill Strong had assumed, that it was some of the Fifth fellows who had gone first to the Transitus studies. His only regret, in a way, was that he hadn't shared in the first stages of the fun.

Nor was he altogether surprised when no one in the Fifth answered Mr. Steed's request for the culprits to stand up and

confess. After all, it was a Form row, and the whole Form was in it.

But as captain and head boy of the Fifth, Smithy felt that he ought to know who had started the business. He didn't mean to go and sneak about it, or anything of that sort, because from the point of view of the Head and the masters generally the thing was now officially finished. The Fifth and the Transitus would do their punishment week without any grousing. In a way, yesterday's scrap had done a lot of good to everybody, and they had all enjoyed it!

Still, Smithy inquired discreetly amongst his own Form. And it ended up in a bit of a mystery, because it was quite clear that not a single Fifth fellow had been in the school between two and four o'clock, and it was equally certain that the Transitus studies had been wrecked in those two hours.

"I'll ask all the Transitus chaps," Bill agreed, and just then he saw Curtis and Dexter in the distance. "I've got a list here of all the fellows in the Form. Strong, W.—well, I was at cricket all the afternoon, as anybody will tell you. Curtis and Dexter—I know they were in Dulchester, and didn't get back until I was in the school, but you can ask them yourself. Hi! Curtis! Kid!"

Dickie Dexter and Jimmie Curtis turned and strolled over to the pair. They had also been talking of the rag, because, as you know, they had planned and arranged the whole affair, secretly, and with great cunning, and it had panned out exactly as they hoped. There weren't going to be any removes from the Transitus, and dear old Study No. 10 wasn't going to be broken up—not for a long time!

And nobody had the vaguest suspicion that they were behind it all, nor the faintest inkling of what the game had been, and nobody knew how much everybody owed to the Kid and Curtis! Nor were they likely to know for quite a long time yet!

"You were in Dulchester yesterday afternoon?" Smithy asked, as soon as the two strolled up, and he spoke in his best official manner, which, in the circumstances, rather annoyed the Kid and Curtis straight away.

"I beg your pardon?" Curtis answered. "But what's happened? Been made captain of the school, Smithy? Or do you want to know what we bought and why? Is this a new game?"

"It's all right, Jimmie!" Bill Strong interposed quickly. "But we're just making inquiries. Nothing in it so far as you're concerned, but the idea is to find out who really ragged the Transitus studies yesterday—"

"And you're trying to suggest—Oh, my hat!" Curtis gasped. "I suppose the Fifth are trying to wriggle out of it now? Feeling sorry for themselves and trying to push it on to the Transitus—"

"No, no!" Smithy interrupted. "Do dry up, Curtis, and let me explain."

He explained, and both the Kid and Curtis stood aghast for a moment. This was going to need some bluff!

"I've put you down as being in Dulchester," Smithy went on. "Or, at least, Bill's keeping the Transitus list. Nobody's doubting you were there, only we've got to ask you just to have your word for it."

"Oh, that's all right, then," Curtis answered airily. "So long as you shove the Kid and me down as being in Dulchester we're not going to start arguing. You go ahead with your giddy inquiry, but, naturally, when you begin to talk like a bobby, and suggest things—Wouldn't you get a bit excited, Smithy?"

"Don't put me down as having wrecked my own study, will you, Bill?" said the Kid calmly. "Things like that always annoy me! I've done some queer things in the days of my youth, but I never—Sure you don't want to ask me any more questions, Smithy?"

"Run away, dear babe," said Smithy quite kindly. "You're a sweet child, but just at this moment you're interfering with the progress of justice. Come along, Bill! We can't waste all the day in talking to the children!"

The two investigators passed on, and Curtis winked at the Kid.

"Quite amusing!" remarked the Kangaroo pleasantly. "They're quite sure they asked us—but they didn't! We'll tell Bill one fine day. It'll amuse him!"

"It will keep them good for a week!" laughed the Kid. "They'll go nosing round and getting told off, and in the end they'll have to drop it. Quite a good joke!"

But the Kid wasn't quite correct. J. O. Smith wasn't the sort of fellow to waste much time. Long before the close of the day he had the two lists complete, and there wasn't the faintest doubt regarding any name on either the Fifth or the Transitus list. Once it was explained to them what the object of the inquiry was no one offered the slightest objection.

The Transitus studies had not been wrecked by any member of the Fifth Form nor yet anyone in the Transitus!

That was the firm and decided conclusion reached by Detectives Smith and Strong after their exhaustive and careful inquiry.

This put the matter on a totally different footing. If it had been anyone in the Fifth, it wouldn't have mattered very much; if it had been anyone in the Transitus—some sort of explanation would have been due from them. But the idea that it was anyone outside the two Forms made both Smithy and Bill Strong jumping wild.

"I'll find out!" decided Smithy. "We'll get 'em, Bill! Then we'll have a regular old trial. We're going to do this thing properly! A hundred to one it's somebody in the Mugs or the Civvies. I'll start on the job at once!"

That evening, when the Transitus were in prep, and the Fifth were supposed to be swotting in the studies, Smith called on Winthorpe, captain of the Science Fifth. Winthorpe was really a very decent chap, and it was a pity he was head of such a mixed crowd as the Mugs. He listened patiently to all Smithy told him, and slowly a look of wonder, mixed with perplexity, came into his face.

"It's queer," said Winthorpe, when Smith had finished. "You know there's been a fuss on in our crowd for some time past? I've had official warning from the prefects that I've got to stop a certain little crowd playing cards, and all that sort of thing. Well, it's a rotten job, but I've warned five of 'em yesterday, and I've reported the whole business to the prefects. I'll tell you!"

He explained. Winthorpe's job as captain of the Mugs wasn't a pleasant one. He was up against a certain little clique, because it was quite certain they were going to land the whole Form in trouble, and a good deal had happened before yesterday's affair.

But yesterday afternoon Winthorpe had waited until after two-thirty before going out to the playing-fields. Then he had gone along the Science Fifth corridor, and discovered that every study was empty—except one. Entering this, Winthorpe had found five fellows obviously just about to settle down to cards.

Winthorpe had delivered an ultimatum. They'd got to get out, or he would report the whole business to the prefects, which would eventually mean a serious business before the Beak, because the Head wouldn't stand any nonsense about cards in the afternoon.

So Winthorpe laid the law down and left them. He hated the job, but he

didn't intend to budge this time, and he had waited at the main entrance door for nearly half an hour. About three o'clock he went back, only to find the door locked.

"I banged and knocked, but nobody came," Winthorpe explained to Smithy. "I must have waited till a quarter-past three; but there wasn't a sound from inside the room, so in the end I cleared. Then I came back again just after four, and went straight up to Snell's study again. The whole bunch of 'em—Snell, Dorling, Gates, Rackman, and Fennell—were all there, and the place reeked of smoke, and it was only too plain they'd just cleared away the cards."

"We had a row, and I told 'em flat they could explain to the prefects. I'd given them fair warning. They said they hadn't been in the study all the afternoon, but had been down to see Gore in the Transitus, and gave some silly excuse for locking the room door. They're no right to do it, anyway. When they saw I was dead serious, they said they hadn't been playing cards, and they could prove it, and told me not to make an ass of myself by reporting it to the prefects. I said they could tell the prefects that yarn; and I've reported the whole business to Hallam to-day. It's rotten, and I'm sick about the whole thing, but I'm captain of the Science Fifth, and I'm going to cut that card-and-smoke business right out!"

"Good for you!" said Smithy cordially. "But—By Jove! They told you they'd been to Gore's room? They were in the Trans corridor from three o'clock onwards, they say? Five of 'em? This is a clue, Winny! Do you mind if I ask you one or two more questions, old son? I'm not butting in on your business, but this may explain everything."

He asked Winthorpe quite a number of questions, just as a first-class lawyer would have done, for Smithy knew quite a lot about the legal world.

Then, with a glad smile on his lips and a gleam of cheery confidence in his eyes, Smithy went out with the intention of calling on Big Hallam, captain of the school.

You might wonder why Smithy was so pleased. For a long time J. O. Smith had been trying to fix up a first-class trial for the Upper School Debating Society, but there were a good many difficulties in the way. It wasn't very easy to get anyone with a serious crime up against them—serious enough for the sort of trial Smithy wanted, yet not the sort of thing to take up before the masters, or even the prefects. But here was the very thing, and already Smithy could see himself as counsel for the prosecution bringing out one by one the deadly points which proved that Snell & Co. had with malice aforethought ragged the studies of the Transitus, thereby causing ill-feeling between two Forms, and involving them in several pains and penalties.

It would be a great trial, and Smithy revelled in the thought.

CHAPTER 2.

The Great Rag-Makers' Trial!

THERE were several people in St. Katie's School who were worried that night.

Winthorpe was worried, for one, but he felt better after Smithy had left.

Big Hallam was worried because the Head had been talking to him about the necessity for stopping ragging, and urging him to do something towards finding out who really began the trouble. The Head didn't propose to interfere any further, but he felt that it was Hallam's duty to throw his weight about a little.

Another thing which worried Hallam was the fact that Winthorpe of the Science Fifth had been to him, and laid the full facts of the case concerning Snell & Co. of his Form before the head-prefect and captain. Hallam felt that Winthorpe had done quite the right thing, and told him so; but it was a bit awkward to know how to act, because Hallam didn't want to worry the Head with a complaint; but, obviously, card-playing and smoking was something Hallam had either got to prove or disprove.

Then Smithy came in. He laid all his facts before the captain quite clearly. The Fifth hadn't started the rag; the Transitus hadn't started it. It must be someone in Science Fifth or in the Civil Service Fifth. Everybody in the Civil Service Fifth was attending a lecture in a different part of the school, and the only fellows who were in the particular section of the School House at the time were Snell and his four friends. Therefore, Snell & Co. were responsible for the ragging.

"So I propose we have a proper trial—do the thing in first-class style, and make it an Upper School job?" suggested Smithy. "That's fair, and they'll have a chance of explaining. What do you think, Hallam?"

The captain thought for just ten seconds, then the worried look began to lift from his face, and he smiled.

"It's a great idea, Smith," he said. "Come and see me after morning school to-morrow, and we'll go into the whole business."

You see, it settled quite a lot of difficulties for Hallam. It would show that he was taking prompt action about the ragging; it would clear the air about the card-and-smoking business. It would satisfy the Head, the masters, the two Forms who felt aggrieved, the prefects who were worried over the card question, Winthorpe, who was troubled about playing the game to the school and his Form, and it would be perfectly fair to the five fellows concerned.

About an hour or so later Snell and his friends of the Science Fifth were hopelessly worried. Hallam had paid them a visit, and asked them a point-blank question. Had they really been out of their room when Winthorpe had knocked yesterday afternoon and found their door locked?

Snell and Dorling looked at each other quickly, and decided to plunge on the question.

"We weren't in the room, Hallam," they stated. "We went down to Gore's room for an hour or so—not to play cards, if that's what you're getting at. Just a little lark of our own, you know."

"Right-ho!" said Hallam. "I'll cut you out of the card business."

He said it in a queer way, which made Snell sit up and take notice. Snell had heard, like everybody else, about the ragging business, but it had never entered his mind that there was any doubt on the matter that the Fifth had done it; and, further, Gore's was one of the few studies that wasn't wrecked.

"But we'd better collar Gore as soon as he comes out of prep," Snell said to Dorling. "He'll have to stick to us that we were in his room. That's that!"

Just to lift the veil, so to speak, it can be said right here that Snell & Co. were in their study when Winthorpe knocked, but had lain low until they were quite sure he had gone. At the time they didn't believe he'd report them, and it came as a shock to them when they found that Winthorpe had really put the whole story before Hallam.

The big thing for them was to get out of being questioned and cross-examined about playing cards. You can take it

from me that Snell, Dorling & Co. were five of the brightest rotters ever seen at Katie's, and believed in doing just what they liked. But they began to get the wind up pretty badly when they realised that they'd got to prove to the prefects that Winthorpe's accusations about playing cards the whole afternoon were not true.

They collared Gore on his way up from prep, and rushed him away. The study Gore occupied with two other Transitus fellows hadn't been touched yesterday because not one of them was down for a move, and, anyhow, not to hide the real truth, the Kid hated Gore so much that he wouldn't touch anything of his.

When Gore heard that he'd got to swear that Snell and his friends were in his study with him from about a quarter to three until four o'clock, he became excited.

"I can't, you silly asses!" he told them. "Why, I've already told the truth that I was down on the river yesterday with Wilson. Smithy and Bill Strong have been getting out a list of where everybody was, just to prove that no Transitus or Fifth fellow was in the School House yesterday afternoon when the Transitus studies were ragged! I've proved I wasn't there!"

Snell and Dorling rushed off at that to consult with Gates, Rackman, and Fennell.

"We were in Gore's room—we've got to stick to that!" Snell decided. "Door shut—never heard a sound! They can't drag us into the ragging business because we don't know anything about it!"

You can see that Snell was making a little mistake there! He was so keen on proving that he hadn't done something which he really had done that he couldn't imagine it was possible to prove that he'd done something else which actually he hadn't done! Quite a lot of folks have made the same mistake long before Snell & Co.

And, anyway, Snell and his friends were scarcely interested in the ragging business. What they were concerned about was the possibility of the prefects being satisfied that they hadn't been playing cards in one of their own studies that afternoon, of locking the door to keep all intruders out, of refusing to carry out the wishes of their Form captain to drop playing cards, and of having all these facts laid before the Head by the prefects. This was the big black-fear in their minds and the thing they had to avoid.

They felt they wanted to slay Winthorpe. Just in case you think Winthorpe had been a little mean over the business, it is only fair to say that he had done everything he could, and that the Science Fifth were getting a rotten name in the school because of Snell & Co. Every decent fellow who knew something of the facts wondered why old Winny hadn't put the whole job on to the prefects before.

On the following afternoon matters happened quite swiftly. The Transitus and Fifth were, unfortunately, engaged in their respective Form-rooms, but even before then the news had spread.

Smithy, aided by Bill Strong, had done the detective stunt in great style. He had tracked down the fellows who called themselves the Secret Five and had been responsible for wrecking the Transitus studies. They were in the Mugs! You can guess who they were right away.

And Big Hallam knew all about it, and he had ordered that there should be a proper trial—jury, judge, and counsel, and all that sort of thing. It was going to be one of the best stunts ever arranged, and everybody in the Upper School could attend if they wished.

You can guess quite a number of people

were surprised when they heard the news. Dexter and Curtis could do nothing more than gasp, because it was Bill Strong who told them. Later they retired to a quiet corner to discuss the matter together.

Sammy Speed, the master of the Fifth, was delighted when Smith asked that the Fifth should be excused for one afternoon in order to be present at the trial. Smith told Sammy, unofficially, as it were, just what the trial was about, and Sammy was very glad that, after all, it had been proved so clearly that the boys of his Form had not started the row.

He told Jolly Roger so, and Roger was tremendously surprised. As a matter of fact, Roger had his own theories on who had been responsible for the ragging of the studies, but when he heard that the boys of the Fifth and the Transitus had taken the matter up, he decided that, for a time, at all events, he would go dead slow. He was a great believer in letting the boys settle this sort of thing among themselves was Roger.

But it gave him a shock when he learned that Snell & Co. of the Science Fifth were accused of the ragging. His theories hadn't led him in that direction at all. Somehow, he had it firmly fixed in his mind that Dexter knew everything there was to know, and that Curtis could also have told an interesting story.

However, this was an affair for the boys themselves. So Roger never said a word; but, like other people, waited expectantly for the trial. Masters would not be present, of course, but they would doubtless hear the verdict and judgment.

Snell nearly had several kinds of a fit when Big Hallam broke the news to him.

"You needn't make any comment just yet," Hallam said; "but I'm warning you now that you and certain friends of yours, are wanted in the Chemistry Lecture-room at two-thirty to-morrow sharp. You're accused of having ragged certain studies of the Transitus Form on the afternoon of the twenty-second. You'll get a proper trial, and if you want anyone to defend you, that'll be quite all right. If you didn't do it—well, you'll be able to explain all about it to the jury, which will be composed of Sixth Form men. I'm the judge. Smith of the Fifth is the prosecuting counsel. You'll be there?"

"But I don't know anything about the ragging!" Snell cried. "I never—"

"Don't tell me now!" urged Big Hallam. "Keep it for to-morrow! You will come without any fuss, Snell?"

There was just a little hint of something unpleasantly firm in Big Hallam's voice, and it impressed Snell. He thought of the card-and-smoking business, and nodded quickly. Just as well to keep up the bluff.

"Of course I'll come, Hallam!" he laughed. "I didn't do any ragging, and I'll jolly well prove it, too!"

Hallam nodded and walked away. Personally the captain of the school visited each of the five in turn and warned them. They tried to protest, or laughed at the very idea, or pointed out that they had never had anything to do with the ragging. And Hallam just asked them again whether they proposed to come of their own accord, or would they prefer to be dragged there by twelve prefects?

Wherefore they said quite meekly that they proposed to come all on their own and quite quietly.

Just what they talked about among themselves doesn't matter. At first they were quite confident that they could bluff it through, and it was decided that Snell, who was fairly good when it came to talking, should act as counsel and leading spokesman. They felt it would be wiser to have no outsider, as he might ask awkward questions.

At two-thirty on the following after-

noon the five of them went quietly enough to the Chemistry Lecture-room. The place was already crowded, and the Transitus and the Fifth were in full force, for both Roger and Sammy had excused their respective flocks for this event—on condition that they put in an extra half-day later on!

Big Hallam sat at the desk where the chemistry master usually sat. Just below him had been arranged three forms, and on these sat the jury, chosen from the Sixth, the Science Sixth, and the Civil Sixth, just to make it quite impartial.

Across the side was another form, and as soon as Snell entered he was told that he had to go over there with his friends, as that was the dock. If he had a counsel he could sit on the front row of the lecture-room somewhere near Smithy.

One or two prefects in their gowns were stalking round as court officials, and Smithy had gathered all his "witnesses" near him on the front row. Then there were several big fellows hanging round who had strict orders to keep quietness and to throw anyone out who tried to interrupt the proceedings.

Smithy had been responsible for the arrangements, under Big Hallam, of course. This wasn't going to be any sort of an affair, but a real, genuine trial, conducted on correct and modern lines!

Hallam rapped the desk, and the two prefects called out "Silence!" and everyone stopped talking at once, because you had the feeling that there wasn't going to be any nonsense about this!

Then Hallam made a little speech, still sitting at his desk, because, of course, judges don't stand. He told the jury that they were here to try a very serious case, but that it was far better they should deal with it than let it go to a higher court, and he hoped that they would do all in their power to assist him in seeing that justice was done.

"I now call upon Mr. Smith, who is acting on behalf of the Fifth and the Transitus Forms, to state the case against the prisoners," Hallam said.

Smithy was on his feet at once, and he held several sheets of foolscap in his hand.

"My lord! Gentlemen of the jury!" he said, just as though Big Hallam were really a lord, and this was a proper court.

The Great Trial of the Rag-Makers, as it came to be known, had begun.

CHAPTER 3.

Big Hallam Pronounces Sentence!

EVERYBODY said afterwards that Smithy was a star turn! When it came to spouting, J. O. Smith was a bit of a genius, and he never did anything better than his speeches at the Rag-Makers' Trial.

He went right through the whole history of the Big Rag between the Fifth and the Transitus, and made it sound something like a thrilling sea-fight. Then he paid compliments to the Head for the way in which he'd handed out penalties to both Forms, and after that he came to the part about Bill Strong and himself hunting round to try and find out who really had ragged the Transitus studies on the afternoon of the 22nd.

"I have here, gentlemen of the jury, a list of all the members of the Transitus and the Fifth Forms. It states exactly where they were and what they were doing on the afternoon in question. It proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that no member of either Form took any part in the ragging of the Transitus studies. I propose to put this list in as evidence, and I propose to call William Strong as first witness for the prosecution."

Snell's first speech was very short. He simply said that he didn't know why on

earth he and his friends had been dragged here. They didn't know anything about the ragging, and didn't want to know.

Bill Strong proved that he had personally assisted Smith in his examination of all the members of the Transitus. He was quite satisfied that no member of the Transitus Form was in the School House at the time named.

"If you would like me to call any or all of the men named on these lists I shall be only too pleased to do so," Smithy told the jury.

The jury thought about it for a moment, but decided that they could take the statements as set down on paper by Smith and Strong.

"The next point, gentlemen," Smithy went on, when he had thanked them, "is just this: Who was in that portion of the School House occupied by the Fifth, the Science Fifth, the Civil Service Fifth, and the Transitus on the afternoon in question. On that point I propose to call Guy Winthorpe as a witness!"

The spectators observed that the prisoners in the dock looked at each other anxiously when this was announced.

Winthorpe gave his evidence. He kept clear, as far as possible, of the fact that he had reasons to suspect the five prisoners of playing cards and smoking; but, of course, he had to give a jolly good hint to explain why he was hanging round himself, and why he knew everything that he did.

Boiled down it amounted to this: Winthorpe was quite positive that Snell & Co. were in the School House the whole of the afternoon. He was equally confident that everybody else was out of the place by two-thirty. Somewhere about three o'clock Snell's study was locked up, and he could not say whether anyone was inside or not; but Snell himself had asserted that he had been down in Gore's study at that time, with Gore himself.

At four o'clock Winthorpe had gone back again, but had not noticed anything wrong as he passed the Transitus corridor. He found Snell and his four friends in their own study. They were looking hot and flushed, and tried to hide something from him. They were also very pointed in their remarks about his interference, and told him to get out and try and keep his silly mouth closed.

At this stage Snell and his friends began to look pretty uncomfortable. The judge asked whether Snell wished to ask the witness any questions. Snell flushed, stood up quickly, stared at Winthorpe for a few moments, and then said he didn't want to ask him anything.

Young Gore was called after that. He was a silly young ass, but Smithy got all that he wanted out of him. He hadn't seen Snell and his friends that afternoon, but he had an idea they had been in his study.

Other witnesses were called, and they made one or two points Smith was anxious that the jury should note. Then the judge said that it was Snell's turn to call any witness, but Snell said that he hadn't got any.

This disappointed Smithy as well as quite a number of the audience, because it was generally expected that Snell would make a pretty stiff fight when it came to the point.

"Perhaps Mr. Snell will himself explain just what happened that afternoon," Smith suggested. "Or it may be that one of the other prisoners will go into the witness-box and give the jury his story of what took place?"

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When the other fellows gave Snell credit for having a fair share of quickness and intelligence, they weren't far wrong. Snell had suddenly realised during this afternoon just what a queer position they were in.

They hadn't ragged the Trans studies, but if he managed to prove it the chances were that he would tie himself up over the question of the cards. Anyhow, he'd give Hallam and the other prefects something to be suspicious over, and the case regarding the cards was only held up because of the present case.

Snell leaned forward to his fellow-prisoners.

"Let it go!" he whispered. "They can't do much, anyhow, and it'll prove we weren't playing cards and smoking, and weren't trying to keep that ass Winthorpe out! Got the idea?"

The others had also perceived something of the same sort. They had the choice of two evils: Admitting they had ragged the Trans studies for a lark, or proving they hadn't by confirming the suspicion about staying indoors for cards.

The first was a case which would be dealt and finished with in this court. The second would assuredly land them before the Head, and might easily cut short their careers at St. Katie's! It made Snell tremble now he began to think of the possibilities of the latter!

"Have you any witnesses to put forward, Snell?" asked Big Hallam.

"No," said Snell abruptly.

"Then the case is finished!" Hallam announced. "You now have the right to address the jury in your defence, Snell."

Snell got up, but he was obviously uneasy and afraid.

"I don't know that I've got anything to say at all," he said, with a hint of bravado. "We admit we were in the school all the afternoon, and we admit we were in Gore's study; but we don't admit ragging the Transitus studies. And if this is a court of justice I'd like to point out to the jury that a thing has got to be proved, not guessed at! Smithy hasn't proved anything, except the fact that we were in the School House. If he can prove we actually did the ragging, what's the use of it all? Nothing! And that's all I've got to say!"

He sat down, and everybody felt disappointed. Somehow, he hadn't kept up the idea of a court in the same way that Smithy did, and, anyhow, it was a rotten defence.

Smithy showed them how rotten it was when he addressed the jury for the last time! He seized on Snell's defence and absolutely made it look like an admission of guilt. Here was a fair chance to prove that they were innocent of this charge, and what had they done? asked Smithy. Simply urged that nobody had actually seen them do the ragging.

Why couldn't they say exactly what they were doing in Gore's study? Why were they in that study? Surely they appreciated the seriousness of the situation? They were the only fellows in the School House. They were the only possible people who could have carried out the rag. They even had the audacity to sign themselves the Secret Five! And yet they said that nothing had been proved!

Smithy said a lot more, and when he wound up in his real, top-hole orator style, and begged the jury to return a verdict of "Guilty," and thus remove the stigma which was now resting on

the fair name of the Fifth Form, you could see the jury were impressed.

When Smithy sat down the applause was great, and it was quite a long time before Big Hallam could get quietness. The only two who didn't clap were Dexter and Curtis.

They had come here fairly certain that somehow Snell would prove he hadn't had anything to do with the ragging. But apparently Snell didn't want to prove it, and didn't care twopenny if he and his pals were found guilty.

The jury had retired while the mob clapped, and they were coming into the lecture-room again by the time the row had quietened down.

"They'll say Snell and his gang did it!" Curtis whispered to the Kid.

"I shall tell—about myself—leave you out, Kangy!" the Kid whispered. "It isn't quite fair—"

"If you do, I'm in it!" Curtis whispered.

"Silence!" one of the prefects yelled out, and glared at the Kid and Dexter.

Then Hallam asked the jury if they had considered their verdict, and would they be good enough to tell everybody what it was.

"Guilty!" said Bellinger, and stood up and faced everybody. "And the jury consider that there isn't the slightest doubt about it. And there isn't any recommendation to mercy, or anything of that sort, thrown in. Just guilty!"

"Hear, hear!" Someone started to clap; but the prefects got in first this time, and stopped the game.

"Snell, Dorling, Rackman, Gates, Fennell!" said Big Hallam very clearly. "You have been found guilty of a most serious crime, and there is not the slightest doubt in the mind of anyone here present—"

"Hallam! I want to speak! They didn't do it! I did it!"

The Kid was up on his feet, and rattled out the short sentences like shots from a quick-firing gun. Smithy jumped up in the same instant, and glared at the Kid.

Curtis was sitting by the Kid, and waiting his turn. If anyone had been watching him they would have seen that he had his hands on the front of the desk ready to pull himself up swiftly. But nobody was looking at Curtis.

"My lord!" Smithy cried out, in his absolutely correct manner. "I protest against this unseemly interruption! You know the interrupter, my lord—a youth with a weakness for notoriety! I crave your lordship's permission to have him ejected from this court!"

Nobody laughed at Smithy, because he carried the thing off so well. Hallam smiled very slightly, and nodded his head sharply.

"Quite right! You've no right to make your funny jokes here, young Dexter! You are ejected! Ushers! Just sling him outside!"

"I want to explain—" the Kid shrieked out; but strong arms were laid upon him, and he was being forcibly dragged over the desk.

"Chuck it!" The Kid wasn't easily beaten. "I can tell you—"

Snell had been watching the business, of course. Did I tell you he was rather a smart chap, even though he was a blackguard? Well, he grasped like a shot that if the Kid did confess, he and his little crowd would be in the soup pretty thoroughly, because, obviously, if Snell hadn't done the ragging, then he was trying to keep something worse

back. Snell jumped to his feet, and cried out to Smithy, then to the jury, and then to the judge.

"He didn't do it!" he said. "We admit it now. Fair trial. Nothing to say!"

By this time everybody near the Kid had taken a hand in the job of slinging him out. Before he quite realised it Richard Dexter was being bumped on to the hard, stone floor of the corridor outside the lecture-room, and the door was being closed upon him.

Inside the room, Curtis decided to sit still and do nothing, especially after he heard Snell yell out his extraordinary confession. A good many others heard it, too, and they decided that the Kid was a silly ass to try and interrupt at that juncture. Probably, of course, he'd got some bright stunt up his sleeve; but he ought to have worked it before. And that was about all they did think.

The row was quickly settled again after Dexter had been removed. The dignity of the court had been upheld, and Big Hallam went on with his judgment. But, first of all, he asked whether Snell or any of his fellow-prisoners had anything to say, whereupon Snell murmured something about having said all that was necessary and he was quite satisfied.

Then Hallam pronounced judgment, after a few remarks on the fairness of the trial, and about the troubles which had ensued because of the prisoners' wrong-doing. It was his painful duty to sentence them to be removed from this court to the prefects' room, where he and his fellow-prefects would administer six of the best to each of them with the young ash-plant which they reserved for that purpose.

Loud applause again greeted the close of Hallam's remarks, though it was

observed that Snell and his friends did not join in. They were arguing among themselves; but Snell seemed to be doing most of the talking, and apparently was trying to keep the others quiet.

Anyhow, there was no particular fuss when three or four prefects stepped forward and informed the prisoners that there wasn't going to be any waiting about the final act. Snell and the others went quite quietly, and the crowd followed them to the prefects' room.

But the general public was not admitted to the last performance. Only prefects were there, and even Smithy had to hang round in the crowd and listen. Still, they all felt that Big Hallam would see the job through properly.

Dickie Dexter wasn't in the crowd; but he heard afterwards from Bill Strong that the trial was over, and that sentence had been duly carried out.

Curtis had already seen the Kid, and they'd talked it over. Why had Snell shouted out that he had done it?

"It's a jolly mystery, Kid," Curtis said. "But it's no use our interfering. They must have been up to some game that afternoon, and reckon they've got off lightly. We'll forget it!"

You may think that, after all, justice wasn't fairly and squarely administered. But if you weigh it up you'll see that it pans out just about right, and quite fair all round, because Snell & Co. got the shock they needed to keep them from trying old Winthorpe's temper any further.

And there wasn't any unpleasant scandal. Dickie Dexter got just about what he deserved by being made to look a bit of an ass and getting slung out. After all, what he'd done in the ragging department was for the benefit of the whole Form—and they had the fun of

the scrap with the Fifth, and both the Fifth and the Transits all got galed for a week. Curtis got off better than Dexter, in a way; but, then, he didn't originate the idea of the rag, so it was just about square.

Big Hallam settled several problems quite nicely, and kept up his reputation all round, because the Head and some of the masters learned all about the trial, and were quite satisfied that proper justice had been done.

So altogether justice panned out very well for everybody—or nearly everybody, anyhow. The only person who wasn't altogether satisfied was a certain master who never liked to be quite satisfied, and preferred to have a little problem to occupy his mind. Jolly Roger heard the whole story from different people, and was very interested in Dexter's sudden attempt to make a confession about something which everyone knew he hadn't done.

"Ah, Dexter!" mused Roger to himself, as he thought over it all. "No one believed you did it even when you tried to tell them! But I'm inclined to believe you! I wonder what on earth really did happen?"

And as Jolly Roger was never so happy as when he was wondering ever some queer problem, you can put him down also as one who was well satisfied with the way in which Blind Justice had dealt with one of the perplexing little problems at Katie's.

THE END.

"SPOOFING THE SCHOOL!"

(Continued from page 13.)

Tom Merry groped his way to the window, and, by dint of great exertion, pulled down the study-carpet which was nailed there.

Then, as they viewed the wreckage, and read the writing on the wall, they almost fell down with horror.

Jack Blake & Co. arrived just as they were recovering from the effects of the shock, to inform them that Gordon Gay had devastated the whole of the Shell and Fourth Form passages.

Loud and many were the complaints, and vows of bitter vengeance were made by the St. Jim's juniors.

"What a giddy fiasco!" moaned Jack Blake, gazing mournfully at the ruin in his study. "We shall have to spend the whole evening clearing up!"

"Gordon Gay ought to be sawaged, bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, his eyeglass glimmering with indignation.

All that evening the juniors were busy setting their house in order. The climax was reached at bed-time, when the results of Gordon Gay's little japes in the dormitories were made known.

When at last Tom Merry & Co. and Jack Blake & Co. got settled, the remarks they made concerning Rylcombe Grammar School in general, and Gordon Gay in particular, were sulphurous and thrilling. They writhed over the manner in which this latter enterprising youth had japed them, and succeeded so neatly in Spoofing the School!

THE END.

(Another grand long story of Tom Merry & Co. next week, entitled "THE SHADOW OF THE PAST." Avoid disappointment by ordering next week's GREAT BUMPER AND FREE GIFT NUMBER right now!)

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The Editor's Chat.

SPLENDID NEWS FOR NEXT WEEK! GREAT BUMPER AND FREE GIFT NUMBER!

As I have ample evidence of the great interest the majority of my readers take in football, I am next week going to give away a

GRAND FOOTBALL ANNUAL!

It will appear in four sections, and will contain all the fixtures, laws of the game, dozens and dozens of photographs, extra-special articles, valuable and interesting information to all followers of the great winter game, contributed by a number of the first-class writers. Needless to say, the Annual has not been compiled without great expenditure of money, and with the splendid photos of scenes from some of the famous "grounds," and other features which are included in the pages, it makes the finest Free Gift ever presented to readers. The first eight pages of the booklet will appear next week, and eight pages in each of the three subsequent numbers, will complete the Annual.

THE "GEM FOOTBALL ANNUAL"

will be the best of its kind ever published, and I am sure that all my loyal friends will greatly appreciate the grand treat.

NEXT WEDNESDAY'S GREAT BUMPER NUMBER WILL ALSO CONTAIN the opening chapters of a new sporting serial entitled:

"RENTON OF THE ROVERS!"

By PAUL MASTERS,

a story dealing with the adventures of a budding young footballer and newspaper reporter and his fight for fame. There are sporting stories and sporting stories—I mean, good ones and bad. This is not only a good one, but it bids fair to rank as the finest and best—and

that's saying a tremendous lot. Mr. Paul Masters' knowledge of sport is very extensive, and his stories are unsurpassed, and in this latest of his we have "sure" got him at his best.

I have been very lucky in securing this splendid "footer" yarn, and I feel sure that when you have read the first instalment you will view it in the same light as I do. It would be a great help to your Editor if you passed the news around among your friends who do not happen to be readers to show them what a treat is in store for next week. And don't forget the title is—

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THE 1921 HOLIDAY ANNUAL. COMPILED BY YOUR EDITOR.

The new volume of this popular annual is issued this week, and is on sale everywhere, price six shillings. The phenomenal success of last year's book prompts me to think that all records will be broken this year. The Holiday Annual did come to stay. The question whether this was to be the case or not has often been asked me. My chums need be in no doubt.

I want you all to see the book. It is, of course, of special interest to all readers of the Companion Papers; likewise to everybody else, for the new volume offers such a record budget of fiction that even last year's triumph is surpassed.

Among the stories will be found the best which Frank Richards, the chronicler of Greyfriars, Martin Clifford, the historian of St. Jim's, and Owen Conquest, who acts in a similar capacity for Rookwood, can possibly offer. There is, too, a magnificent complete tale by Morton Pike. "Winning His Name" takes us back to the days of the Great Plague and the Fire of London, when Charles II. was King, and it is a genuinely fascinating romance.

It would be quite impossible for me, in the limited space at my disposal, to enumerate a tithe of the good things the Holiday Annual contains. I do not want there to be disappointments this year. Some of my friends failed to get their copies last season through not ordering the book at once. It is obtainable now, and my advice is, make sure. It is infinitely better to be sure than sorry.

Your Editor

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