

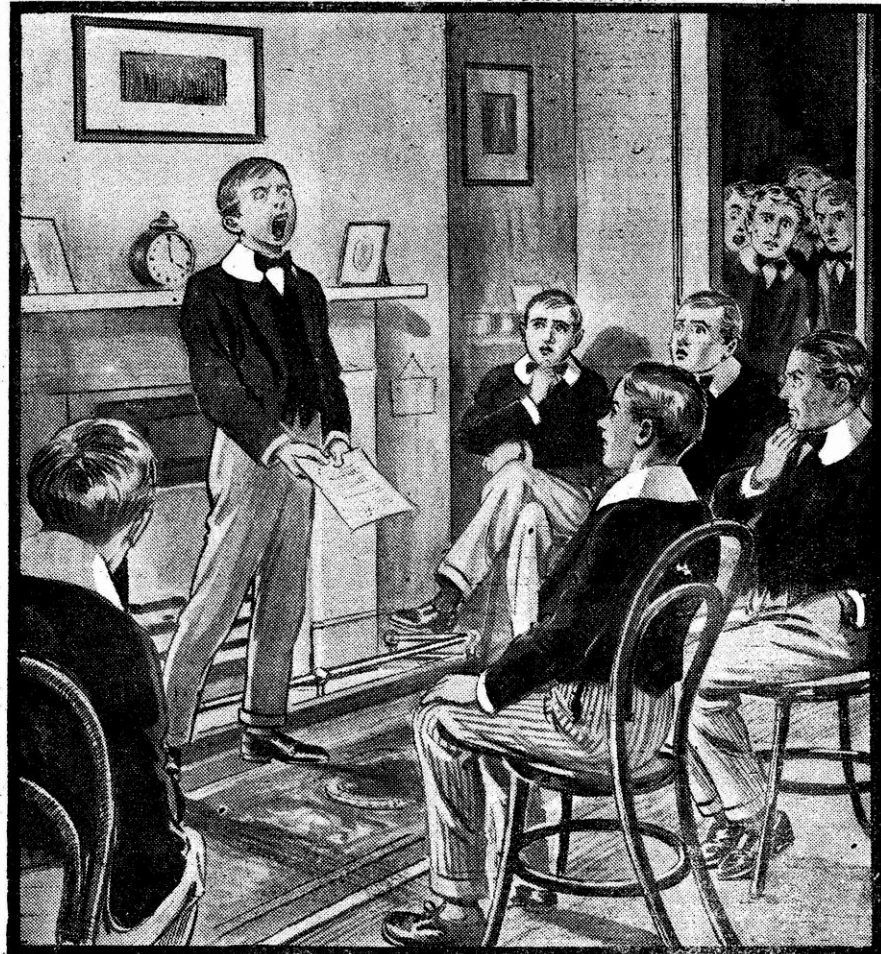
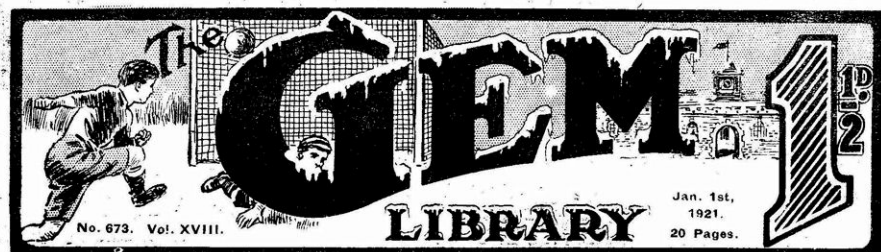
THE BEST PAPER FOR BOYS!

The GEM **1** **P. 2**

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"CHAMPIONS OF THE CAUSE!" (GEORGE ALFRED GRUNDY AS THE STAR TURN.)

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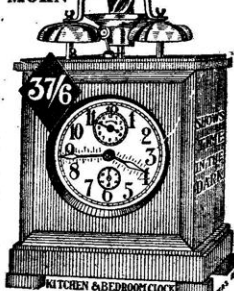
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CHAMPIONS OF THE CAUSE!

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.



A Splendid, Long, Complete School Tale of the Chums of St. Jim's, telling how they came to the rescue of an old schoolfellow in distress.

CHAPTER 1.

When a Man's Down.

"**F**RIENDS, Romans, and countrymen," said Monty Lowther, "I think you'll agree that we've deserved well of our country?"

"Hear, hear!"
"We've licked Reddylfe on their own ground, in spite of the fact that Gussey played for us!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jammed his celebrated monocle into his eye, and bestowed upon the humorist of the Shell a glare which ought to have crumpled him up.

"Weally Lowthah, I stwongly wesen't that we mark! An' if you wepeat it, I shall have no alternative but to admistah a feahful thwasin'!"

"Help!" gasped Monty Lowther.
And he squeezed himself between Tom Merry and Jack Blake for protection.

Arthur Augustus clenched his hands; then, after a moment's reflection, he dropped them to his sides.

"Seein' that we licked Weddylfe by such a handsome margin," he said, "I can afford to ovahlook your conduct, Lowthah! It was a wippin' game, wasn't it, deah boys?"

"Topping!" said Tom Merry.
The members of the St. Jim's junior eleven were in great spirits.

Reddylfe was a stubborn side to defeat on their own ground, and most visiting eleven came away with their tails between their legs, so to speak. But St. Jim's, playing with great dash and spirit, had won by five goals to two. And the juniors' faces were glowing with satisfaction as they returned from Rylcombe Station to the school.

They proceeded by way of the towing-path which skirted the Ryll. And they were obliged to pick their way with

caution, for the early winter dusk had set in, and anyone who made a false step might be precipitated into the river.

Tom Merry and Talbot, the heroes of the match—for the former had scored three goals, and the latter two—were walking in front.

Ernestly Talbot caught his chum by the arm.

"Look, Tom!"

The captain of the Shell followed Talbot's gaze.

A few yards ahead of them stood the little boathouse, which was seldom used in winter.

From the small window of the barn-like structure came a wreath of smoke.

"My hat!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "There's somebody there!"

Talbot nodded.

"Who can it be, Tom?"
"Racko, no, perhaps, enjoying a smoke on the quiet," suggested the captain of the Shell.

The rest of the juniors had caught sight of the wreath of smoke by this time, and they stopped short with surprised exclamations.

For it was strange that the boathouse should be occupied on this cold, January evening.

"Bai Jove, deah boys! I wondah who's inside!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Some weary and despairing house-hunter, I expect," said Monty Lowther. "After all, the boathouse makes quite a decent detached residence."

"Wats!"

"The place isn't on fire, is it?" said Jack Blake anxiously.

"Better come and see," said Figgins. The juniors went up to the boathouse to investigate.

Tom Merry opened the door, and looked within. Then he uttered a low exclamation of astonishment.

There was an oil-stove standing close to the window, and it was the smoke from this stove that had attracted the juniors' attention.

A number of punt-cushions had been spread out on the floor, and on the cushions lay a young man, shabbily attired, with features pale and drawn.

He was asleep.

The beam of light from the stove clearly revealed his face, and the face was familiar to the onlookers.

"My only aunt!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "It's Mason!"

"Dick Mason!"

The juniors were thrown into a flutter of excitement.

They remembered Dick Mason well. He had formerly been a prefect at St. Jim's, and on his last day at the old school he had distinguished himself by a brilliant achievement on the cricket-field. He had covered himself with glory, and had won the match for his side.

The name of Richard Vernon Mason would ever be remembered in the school annals.

But what was he doing here? What had induced him to seek the shelter of the boathouse beside the Ryll?

Dick Mason seemed to be sleeping the sleep of utter weariness. The St. Jim's juniors gazed down at his shabby form in sympathy and wonder.

When they had last seen him he had been an officer in the Leamshire Regiment—a smart, well-set-up young fellow.

What a transformation now!

"It—it's a fair corkah, deah boys!" gasped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Fancy Dick Mason turnin' up like this!"

"Shall we wake him?" murmured Talbot.

"He's already waking," said Jack Blake.

Dick Mason opened his eyes.

At the same instant a stalwart, athletic figure brushed past the group of juniors in the doorway.

It was Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's.

"What's going on here?" he inquired sharply.

And then he gave a violent start.

"Why, great Scott! It's Dick Mason!"

The Old Boy, now fully awake, gave a wan smile.

"Hallo, Kildare!" he murmured.

"Dick—Dick, old chap, what does this mean?"

Mason sat up.

"I'm sorry you should have found me like this," he said. "I was hoping that nobody would come near this place. My wanderings happened to have brought me to this part of the world, and I crawled into this shanty and went to sleep. To

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tell the truth, I didn't particularly care whether I ever woke up again."

Kildare gave a gasp.
"What makes you talk in that despairing way?" he asked.

"Life holds nothing for me," said Mason dully. "I've come to the end of my tether. Since I came out of the Army it's been one continual struggle. And I'm beaten—"

"Don't say that!"
"But it's true, Kildare. I'm not the sort of fellow to give up easily, as you know. Until lately I've always believed in the saying that 'While there's life there's hope.' But there's no hope now—none—none!"

And the speaker shook his head despairingly.

Kildare stooped down, and assisted Dick Mason to his feet.

"You're not yourself, Dick," he said quietly. "I can see that you've been badly bowled over by something or other. But as for saying there's no hope for the future—why, that's all tommy-rot!"

"Heah, heah!" chimed in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Twy an' bwing the silly daffah to weason, Kildare."

"Come up to the school, Dick," said the captain of St. Jim's.

"No, no!" said Mason hastily. And his pale cheeks flushed. "I can't show myself at the school like—like this."

And he pointed to his shabby clothing, and to the boots which, like their owner, seemed to have been having a continual struggle with adversity.

"You simply must come up to the school, old man!" insisted Kildare.

"I can't!" I can't let the masters see me like this!"

"But you'll get your death of cold if you stay in this place! Where do you live?"

"Live?" Mason laughed mirthlessly. "I don't live; I exist. I've been lodging in Wayland—at a place called Croft Cottage. But I've been staying there at somebody else's expense, and I can't go on doing that."

"Rot!" said Kildare. "I know where Croft Cottage is. Come along!"

Mason was persuaded at length.

"We'll walk with you as far as the main road," said Tom Merry. "Unless you want to be alone with Kildare, that is."

"Oh, no! Come along by all means," said Dick Mason. "I've no objection to your hearing my story. But it's not a pleasant one!" he added, grimly.

And the party set off along the towing-path in the deepening dusk.

CHAPTER 2.

Mason Tells His Story.

"I WAS in khaki when you fellows saw me last," said Dick Mason.

"I had quite a good time in the Loamshires, and enjoyed myself no end. Came through the war with hardly a scratch. But from the day I was demobbed everything went wrong."

"I thought it had been arranged that you should help your pater in the business," said Kildare.

"That's so. But I—I lost my pater, and the business went to pot. I was obliged to fend for myself."

"Oh!"

"If I had been demobbed earlier I might have been able to get a decent job somewhere. But I'd been kept with the Army of Occupation, and when I got to England I found that jobs weren't as plentiful as blackberries. Still, I didn't sit down and black my arms. I got busy answering advertisements, and presently I got into touch with a man who wanted a business partner."

"And then—"

"And then—" said Kildare.

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"Why, I swallowed the man's bait, invested my gratuity in the business, and was swindled. I fell into one of the many snares that are set for ex-officers."

"But couldn't you bring the rotter to book?"

Mason shook his head.

"He did the vanishing-trick, and so did my gratuity!"

"Rough luck!" said Kildare sympathetically. "What did you do then?"

"Tramped the London streets in search of a job. It was a hopeless, heartbreaking business. I hunted here, there, and everywhere, but there was nothing doing. For the first time in my life I knew what it was to be properly up against it. I tell you, old man, it isn't until you're absolutely down and out that you realise what a bitter place the world is. Nobody wants you, nobody cares a fig whether you sink or swim."

Kildare nodded.

"It must have been pretty awful," he said.

"Awful! It was ghastly! Do you know, I've been without food for days together? I've slept out under the sky. A novel experience in the summer, but a wicked ordeal at this time of the year! I've known hunger and hardship and want. There have been times when I've been tempted to—to take to rank dishonesty, to go to the bad!"

Dick Mason's listeners were greatly impressed, especially Talbot of the Shell, who, having been through all that Mason had been through, realised only too well what a ghastly nightmare it was.

"I should never have thought it possible that a fellow who has served in the Army with distinction, like you did, could come to such a pass," said Kildare.

"Cut the Army out!" said Dick Mason. "The war counts for nothing now."

Whether you were a V.C. or a Conchy makes no difference nowadays. It's no use saying to an employer of labour, 'I helped to lick the Huns. I did my bit in Flanders.' That's no recommendation. You might as well say, 'I'm no good for anything!' or 'I've worked in a Government office!'

Mason's tone was bitter.

"I think it's a dreadful shame," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a burst of indignation, "that our fightin' men should be treated like this!"

"Hear, hear!"

Little though they knew of such matters, the St. Jim's juniors could not help thinking that the ex-officers and the ex-Tommies were being scurvily treated.

Here was a man who had held the King's commission, who had gone forward gladly to answer his country's call. He, like thousands of his comrades, had been promised that when he came back, when the shouting and tumult had died, he would be rewarded and recompensed by a grateful Government.

And this was his reward! To tramp the country in a vain quest for employment, to be denied food and shelter.

No wonder that Mason was bitter. No wonder that the iron had entered into his soul.

"Something ought to be done about it," said Tom Merry.

But his tone was doubtful.

What could a number of juniors at a public school do to remedy such a state of affairs?

"A few days ago," Dick Mason went on, "I thought the tide had turned. I saw a job advertised in Wayland, and I wrote for it. A letter came by return, granting me an interview. I came down here post-haste, and found that over thirty others were after the same job!"

"My hat!" gasped Kildare.

"Even so, I very nearly got it," said

Dick Mason. "The applicants were weeded down until there were only two left. And the other fellow was in an even worse plight than myself. He was a family man, had a wife and kiddies to support. I knew him slightly. He was a subaltern in the Loamshires. In the circus, there was only one thing to do, and I did it. I stood down, and let him have the job."

Mason did not speak boastfully or piously. He had made a big sacrifice, but he didn't shout about it. He went on quietly:

"That same day I happened to meet Mr. Railton in Wayland. I told him my story, and he insisted on getting me lodgings in the town. He fixed me up at Croft Cottage, and he's paying all expenses. It was jolly decent of him; but then, Railton's always been a thundering good sort. Other masters, like Ratty and Selby, would sneer at a fellow who was down. But that's not Railton's way."

There was a chorus of approval from the juniors.

"Good old Railton!"

"He's one of the very best!"

"He certainly is!" agreed Dick Mason.

"But I felt that I couldn't go on living on his charity. It wouldn't be fair. For one thing, Railton's not a rich man. And for another, I hate being a sponge! And so, after a good deal of deliberation, I decided to—to—"

"To clear out!" said Kildare quietly.

"Yes."

"You were a fool, Dick—a champion fool!"

"But—but things looked very black, and I could see no prospect of ever repaying Railton!" protested Mason.

"I know. But it's always the blackest hour that heralds the approach of dawn. Forgive me if I seem to be talking a lot of high-flown stuff; but what I say is true."

"You mean that my luck will change?"

"I do. Things can't always remain as they are. You've had a long spell of atrocious luck, and now it's time for the tide to turn."

"By Jove! If only it would!" said Mason, with a sigh.

"It will!" said Kildare, with emphasis.

"I'm sure it will! Keep your pecker up, old man, and you'll win through, in spite of everything!"

They had reached the main road by this time.

"Let me help you, Dick," urged Kildare. "I'm not a Rothschild, but I can let you have sufficient to tide you over for a few weeks."

Mason shook his head vigorously.

"It's immensely good of you, old man, but I can't put myself in your debt as well as Railton's."

"Rats!"

"We'll all help, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus eagerly.

"Yes, rather!"

The juniors eagerly gathered round the Old Boy who had fallen upon troublous times. Their anxiety and willingness to help him was plainly written in their expressions.

"Do let's do something, Mason!" entreated Jack Black.

A lump came into Dick Mason's throat. He was strongly moved.

"I shan't forget this, you kids!" he said quietly. "But I—I can't let you help me. I'll paddle my own canoe. I'll get out of this ghastly mess somehow!"

"And you'll give up this mad idea of—clearing out without a roof to cover you?" said Kildare.

"Yes. You're right in saying it was mad. It was the maddest course I could

have taken! I promise you that I sha'n't think of such a thing again."

Dick Mason held out his hand, and Kildare grasped it warmly.

"Au revoir, old man!" said the captain of St. Jim's. "Keep a stiff upper-lip, and depend upon it that your luck will change before long."

With those cheering words ringing in his ears, Dick Mason turned on his heel, and a moment later his tall form was swallowed up in the gloom.

CHAPTER 3.

For the Good of the Cause!

TOM MERRY & CO. were looking very thoughtful as they returned to St. Jim's.

"Heah we are again, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I say, isn't it a jolly shame about poor old Mason?"

Tom Merry nodded.

"He's fairly up against it," he said. "Gill, it's no good being sympathetic unless we show our sympathy in some practical way. Mason wants help, and it's up to us to help him."

"He won't hear of it!" said Jack Blake.

"In that case we shall have to help him on the q.t., without him knowing where the help has come from."

"Good!"

"We'll go round collecting things from the chaps," said Talbot. "They'll stump up willingly enough when they know the cirk."

The juniors lost no time in getting to work. They felt that it was a duty, as well as a pleasure, to assist Dick Mason in his time of adversity.

First of all, they went to the school tuckshop, and requested Dame Taggles to make up a big tuck-hamper.

This was Fatty Wynn's suggestion, and everybody agreed that Fatty showed sound common-sense for once.

Then they made a tour of the junior studies.

There was a generous response to the appeal.

All sorts of useful articles were collected, and Cardew of the Fourth volunteered a liver.

"We won't take any money just yet," said Tom Merry. "Later on, we may be able to think out some stunt for raising quite a big sum. In the meantime, we'll stick to grub and other things that Mason's likely to find useful."

"I've got a silk scarf that I never wear," said Cardew.

"Good!"

"And here's a pair of woollen gloves that are heaps too big for me," said Lawson. "They'll suit Mason down to the ground."

"Ripping!"

"I say, deah boys, I woudah if Mason would like a few of my spare toppahs!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

"Not unless he's thinking of starting a freak museum!" said Monty Lowther.

"I have also a numbah of fancy waist-coats—"

"Shut up, Gussy!" interrupted Monty Lowther again. "Go and eat coke!"

"Bai, Jove, Lowthah, you wottah, I'll—"

"And chop chips!" continued the humorous Monty.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Mason's not going to know where all these things have come from, I take it?" said Clive.

"No: that would spoil everything," said Tom Merry.

"But he'll guess—"

"He can guess what he likes. So long as he doesn't know for certain, it'll be

all right. He can't return the things, because he won't know who to send them to."

The Fourth Form studies yielded a rich harvest. And Kildare of the Sixth, when he heard what was under way, contributed a pair of boots.

"But you'll have to be very tactful about this, Merry," he said. "We don't want to hurt Mason's feelings. He's very sensitive about receiving help."

"That's all right, Kildare," said the captain of the Shell. "We'll send all the stuff to Wayland by carrier in the morning. Mason might guess that they've come from St. Jim's, but beyond that he'll know nothing."

The collection went on merrily. But when they came to Study No. 7 in the Shell passage, the collectors received a rebuff.

Aubrey Racke was deep in the arm-chair, and in the pages of a novel which would have been "banned" by the authorities.

The cad of the Shell lifted a scowling face as Tom Merry & Co. trooped in.

"What do you fellows want?" he growled.

"We're collecting on behalf of an Old Boy who is on the rocks through no fault of his own," explained Tom Merry.

"Oh, I see! The Good Samaritan stunt—what?" said Racke, with a sneer.

"Might I inquire who the Old Boy is?"

"Mason, who used to be in the Sixth—the fellow who went straight from St. Jim's into the Leamshire Regiment."

"I don't remember him—but he was a silly chump."

"Why?" demanded Jack Blake warily.

"For ever joinin' up at all. He could easily have steered clear of the Army. He could have discovered that he had a conscience, or somethin' of that sort."

"No doubt that's what you would have done, if you had been in his place,"

said Tom Merry scornfully. "But we won't argue about it. These are the facts. Mason was demobbed too late to be able to find a decent job, and he got no help from the Government."

Racke laughed.

"He didn't expect the Government to help him, surely?"

"He had a right to expect it."

"Then he's a bigger chump than ever! If he believed all the milk-an'-water promises that were made about what would be done for the fightin'-men when they came marchin' home, he was a glibbie idiot!"

"That's enough, Racke!" said Tom Merry sharply. "We're not asking for your opinion. All we want to know is, are you going to help, or not?"

"Not!" said Racke promptly.

His tone nettled Tom Merry.

"Why do you say that?" he demanded.

"Because I'm not goin' to pander to sickly sentiment," replied Racke. "The fellow's got himself into a mess, an' it's up to him to find a way out."

There was a chorus of disapproval.

"Shame!"

Aubrey Racke went on reading his novel. He was indifferent to the cause which Tom Merry & Co. had at heart.

But he was rudely interrupted before he had read a couple of paragraphs.

"Bump the fearful wottah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

And Racke was yanked out of the arm-chair, and bumped with a terrific concussion on to the carpet.

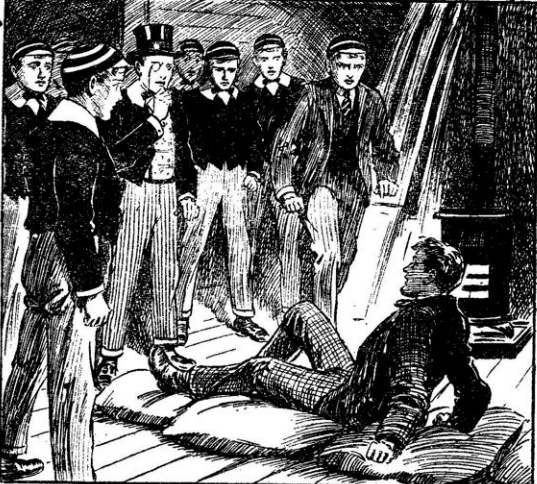
"Taroocoo!"

"And again!" panted Manners.

Bump!

Racke's yells of anguish might have been heard all over the School House.

His schoolfellows were righteously indignant, and they did not spare him. Three times in succession he descended to the floor, until he had scarcely a breath in his body.



"I am sorry you should have found me like this," said Dick Mason. "I was hoping that nobody would come near this place. My wanderings happened to have brought me to this part of the world, and I crawled into this shanty and went to sleep. To tell the truth, I didn't particularly care whether I ever woke up again." (See page 3.)

"He looks more like a wreck than a Racke now!" observed Monty Lowther. "Ha, ha, ha!"

The avengers left Aubrey Racke squirming on the floor, and continued their quest.

Contributions continued to pour in, and Tom Merry & Co. were delighted at the success of their undertaking.

Next morning, when the carrier called at Croft Cottage, Wayland, Dick Mason had the surprise of his life.

His landlady—a kind-hearted old dame—brought a huge tuck-hammer into his room, and before he had recovered from his astonishment, she returned with a huge cardboard box, which was crammed with all sorts and conditions of articles—some valuable, and all useful.

"Where on earth did these things come from, Mrs. Higgs?" gasped Dick Mason.

"Carrier brought 'em, sir."

"Yes, but who are they from?"

"Which 'e told me, as 'ow 'e 'ad destructions not to say," said the landlady.

Dick Mason surveyed the contents of the cardboard box in wonder.

There was a pair of boots, a silk scarf, several pairs of gloves, a woollen waistcoat, an array of neckties, and numerous pairs of socks; while the tuck-hammer was packed to overflowing.

"Seems to be several Good Samaritans knocking about, Mrs. Higgs," he remarked.

"Yes, sir. You've got quite a wardrobe there, to be sure."

A queer expression came over Dick Mason's face.

"I think I know where all these things came from," he muttered. "I must send them back."

"Don't you do nothin' of the sort, Mr. Mason, sir!" said the landlady.

"Think 'ow it would offend the good-hearted folks that sent 'em. They're of a werry generous temperature, to be sure"—the good dame meant "temperament." "They believes in the old sayin': 'Cast your bread upon the waters, for a stitch in time saves nine.'"

Dick Mason laughed.

"There's enough grub here to relieve a starving garrison," he said, "and enough gloves and things to set up a hosiery establishment. I don't like taking them; but as I don't know definitely who sent them, I can't very well return them."

"That's true," said Mrs. Higgs. "Things have took a brighter turn with you now, Mr. Mason. I always did say as 'ow every long lane 'ad a silver lining."

"All I want now is a job," murmured Dick Mason, half to himself. "And I shall stand a much better chance of getting one, now that I'm properly rigged out. This is awfully good of those fellows. Pr'aps I shall be able to repay them—some day."

It seemed as if the tide had really turned at last. And it was with a much lighter heart that Dick Mason resumed his quest for employment.

CHAPTER 4.

Arthur Augustus has a Brain-wave.

"I TS a weally wippin' wheeze!"

Thus Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. The Terrible Three of the Shell were at tea in their study when the swell of St. Jim's made his announcement.

Arthur Augustus had been perched on the window-sill, his noble brow corrugated with thought. He had declined the jam-tarts which Manners passed to him, and he had ignored Tom Merry's

request to polish off the prehistoric sardines. For some moments he had been thinking deeply, and the result of his cogitations was now made public.

"It's a weally wippin' wheeze!" he repeated—for the Terrible Three seemed to have become afflicted with deafness.

Monty Lowther looked up suddenly from his plate.

"Eh? Did you speak, Gussy, or was it Taggles sawing wood in the quad?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus frowned.

"I addressed an observation to you fellahs!" he said, with dignity. "I remarked that it was a weally wippin' wheeze. I have been thinkin'—"

"Impossible!" said Manners solemnly.

"You haven't the necessary apparatus!"

"Weally, Mannahs! I have been thinkin' of a stunt for helpin' Dick Mason—financially, I mean."

Tom Merry looked interested.

"Get it off your chest, Gussy!" he said.

"What do you say, deah boys, to gettin' up a weally line concert, an' devotin' the p'ceeds to settin' Dick Mason up in business?"

There was a grunt from Monty Lowther, and a snort from Manners. But Tom Merry looked quite hopeful.

"That's not a bad stunt," he said.

"But I'm afraid the takings wouldn't be nearly enough to set anybody up in business."

"We're not, deah boy? We could hink the Public Hall in Wayland, an' make a special charge for admishun. Say two shillin's. We shall get all the St. Jim's fellahs there, an' about a couple of hundred people from outside the school. That's five hundred times two bob—fifty pounds. An' then we could have a special collection inside the hall."

"We should have to serve up a rattling good show if we expected people to pay two bob for admishun," said Manners.

"They'll cheeahfully wally wound in such a worthy cause," said Arthur Augustus. "Besides, they'd pay two bob 'us to heah my tenah solo."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see any reason for wibald mewment!" said the swell of St. Jim's.

"If you continue to cackle like that, Lowthah, you'll bwreak a blood-vessel!"

"Ho, ho, ho!" roared Monty Lowther, leaping back in his chair and gawfawing violently. "You're too funny to live, Gussy! Why, people would expect to be paid to have to listen to one of your tenor solos! Think of the agony and torture it would be!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Do you want me to lose my tempah, Lowthah?"

"I'd much rather you lost your voice!" said the irrepressible Monty.

Arthur Augustus frowned darkly. He considered himself a talented vocalist, but he could never get anybody to see eye to eye with him on that point.

Tom Merry hastened to pour oil on the troubled waters.

"I think Gussy's wheeze is quite a workable one," he said. "He's a bit too optimistic about the amount of cash we shall raise. Still, it's well worth doing. We'll get to business at once. We ought to be able to raise quite a decent concert-party from the Shell and the Fourth."

"What are we going to call ourselves?" asked Manners.

"The Cheery Chumps" isn't a bad name for a concert-party," said Monty Lowther. "Or what do you say to the 'Frisolous Earheads'?"

At that moment Talbot came into the study. He was promptly appealed to for his opinion.

"The 'Merry-makers' or the 'Mirth-makers' would fill the bill," he said.

"But what's the game? Are you getting up a show?"

Tom Merry nodded.

"We're going to try to set Dick Mason on his feet again," he explained. "One evening next week—better make it Wednesday—we'll give a concert at the Public Hall in Wayland. Admishun two bob, and fellows can pay more if they've got the cash or inclination. In that way we ought to be able to raise quite a useful sum. What do you say?"

"Quite a brilliant brain-wave of yours, Tommy!" said Talbot.

"Wats! The cwedit belongs to me!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Alone he did it!" said Monty Lowther. "I thought Gussy's brain was fast asleep. But evidently it was merely dozing."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's no time to be lost," said Tom Merry. "We must get on with the washing at once. We'll get a dozen fellows together, and I expect Miss Marie will be willing to act as pianist."

"She'll simply jump at it!" said Talbot.

"I'll go and ask her now, if you like."

"Do, there's a good chap!"

Talbot hurried away, and a few moments later he returned with the information that Marie Rivers, the charming and popular school nurse, was quite agreeable to preside at the piano.

Tom Merry then selected his performers.

The Terrible Three, Talbot, and Arthur Augustus formed the basis of the concern; and the others who were invited to join in were Jack Blake, Henry Digby, Figgins, Kerr, Wynne, and Dick Redfern.

That evening an announcement appeared on the school notice-board as follows:

"NOTICE!
TOM MERRY'S MERRY-MAKERS
will hold

A GRAND CONCERT

in the Public Hall, Wayland, on Wednesday evening next at 8 sharp. A choice and varied programme of songs will be rendered, including several that will be specially written for the occasion.

MINIMUM PRICE OF ADMISSION—TWO SHILLINGS.

Proceeds to be devoted to helping a St. Jim's Old Boy out of a tight corner.

Captain 'Dick' Mason, who served his country faithfully and well, is now stranded. It is up to every loyal, patriotic fellow to rally round and support this deserving cause!

ROLL UP IN YOUR BILLIONS!

N.B.—The audience will be permitted to leave the hall for five minutes whilst Arthur Augustus D'Arcy is singing!

Needless to state, that announcement made a profound sensation at St. Jim's.

The note concerning Arthur Augustus had been added in a handwriting which bore a suspicious resemblance to Monty Lowther's.

Tom Merry's study was besieged all the evening by fellows who wanted to know whether or not they were to take part in the performance.

Among the invaders was George Alfred Grundy of the Shell.

"I suppose you've booked me as your star tenor," Merry?" he said, in his superior way.

"There's something wrong with your supposer, then!" replied Tom.

"Eh?"

"You're dead in this act. When we want a performing camel we'll let you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
But Grundy was not to be put off so easily.
"I'm just the man for this sort of stunt," he declared. "Have you heard me sing?"

"We have," murmured Monty Lowther. "Once heard, never forgotten!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"You can cackle!" said Grundy wrathfully. "I've got a voice that would do credit to—"

"The Bull of Bashan!" suggested Manner.

And there was a fresh peal of laughter.
"Look here," said Grundy, "this show of yours, Merry, will be a frost—a failure—a complete wash-out—if I'm not in it. And you can have my services for the asking."

"I'm not likely to go down on bended knees and implore you to join us!" said Tom Merry. "Oh, yes, I know you can sing—like a tin kettle! Your sort of singing would cause a riot in any audience!"

"When I was at Redclyffe," said Grundy, "I got second prize for melody!"

"And the kitchen cat got the first, I suppose?" said Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

George Alfred Grundy was very red in the face by this time. He flourished his fist under Tom Merry's nose.

"For the last time, am I coming in?" he demanded.

"No; you're going out!" was the prompt reply.

The next moment Grundy felt as if he was in the grip of a whirlwind. He travelled through the doorway at express speed, and alighted with a crash on to the linoleum in the passage.

"Yaroooooh!"

"Fare thee well, Caruso!" sang out Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

George Alfred Grundy picked himself up, and limped painfully away.

His mind was not very clear at that moment. But it was clear enough for him to realise the sad fact that Tom Merry's Merry-makers had no use for his services!

He wended his way down the Shell passage, muttering to himself.

He had suffered a great deal at the hands of Tom Merry & Co. in the past, and he thought it high time he had his revenge.

The glint in his eyes spelt disaster for Tom Merry's Merry-makers.

CHAPTER 5.

A Rival in the Field.

"B" EEN wrestlin' with a steam-roller, Grundy?"

It was Aubrey Racke who asked the question, as George Alfred Grundy came limping into view along the passage.

"Ow! Wow! That fathead Merry doesn't know a good singer when he sees one!" groaned Grundy.

Racke grinned.

"Won't he let you join his mirth-makin' mob?" he inquired.

Grundy shook his head.

"I went out of my way to offer him my services," he said, "and he rejected them with scorn! I tell you, Merry's blind and deaf to genius! It's just the same with footer. I ought to have been given a place in the eleven months ago!"

Racke became sympathetic.

"It's a jolly shame!" he said, with a show of indignation. "But you needn't upset yourself over it, Grundy! Merry's concert's not comin' off!"

Grundy stared at Aubrey Racke in astonishment.

"Eh? What are you talking about?"

"It's not comin' off!" repeated Racke. He spoke in low but decisive tones.

Grundy continued to stare.

"Who's going to prevent it?" he said.

"I am!"

"My hat!"

"I'm going to cut Tom Merry out," said Racke, with emphasis. "I'm gettin' up a little show of my own—Racke's Revellers—an' it's goin' to be the real goods!"

Grundy looked interested. At the same time, he was a little doubtful. Like the majority of the St. Jim's fellows, he distrusted Aubrey Racke.

"I'm a good judge of talent," Racke went on. "I know a good performer when I see one. An' I want you to join my party, old chap. It'll give a tone to it, you know!"

The flattery was not wasted on Grundy. He looked quite affable.

"I'll join your show with pleasure," he said. "But when's it comin' off?"

"Wednesday evenin', at eight, in the Public Hall."

"But—that's the same time and place that Tom Merry's chosen!"

Wilkins an' Gum will, when I ask 'em."

"I'll ask them for you," said Grundy.

"Good man!"

"And when shall we meet, to jaw things over?"

"After prep, in my study."

"Right you are!"

Aubrey Racke passed on. His face wore a covert grin.

"Another giddy recruit!" he muttered. "It won't be very difficult to queer Tom Merry's pitch."

In spite of his statement to Grundy that everything would be square and above-board, Racke was organising the concert-party in order to serve his own base ends. The fact of the matter was, he had been squandering money freely of late, and his father, the purse-proud profiteer, had temporarily cut off the supply.

Aubrey Racke stood in sore need of ready money, and he saw a splendid opportunity of making a good thing out of the concert, without the knowledge of his fellow-performers. Ostensibly,



"Bump the faithful wotiah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. And Racke was yanked out of the armchair, and bumped with a terrific concussion on the carpet. Racke's yells of anguish might have been heard all over the School House. His schoolfellows were righteously indignant, and they did not spare him. Three times in succession he decended to the floor, until he had scarcely a breath in his body. (See page 5.)

"True, O King! But, as I said just now, Merry's concert isn't comin' off!" Grundy reflected a moment.

"Dashed if I can see how you're going to wangle it!" he said, at length. "Still, you say you can, and I'm quite prepared to row in with you. But no dirty tricks, mind!"

"Everythin' shall be perfectly straight an' above-board, I promise you," said Racke.

"The proceeds of the concert will be given to charity, of course?"

"Yes—to the Cottage Hospital."

"Why not to Dick Mason?"

"Because it's far more sensible to help an institution than an individual," was Racke's ready reply.

"Have you asked any other fellows to join yet?"

Racke nodded.

"Crooke and Clampe and Scrope are comin' in," he said. "An' I've no doubt

the proceeds would be devoted to charity. But in reality Racke would retain a portion—and not a small portion, either—for his own use."

The cad of the Shell told himself that he would be able to kill two birds with one stone.

Not only would he acquire a sum of money for himself, but he would foil the fellow he disliked so intensely—Tom Merry, and prevent the rival concert-party from giving their performance. A scheme whereby he could bring this about had already been evolved in his cunning brain.

St. Jim's received a surprise later in the evening.

A further announcement appeared on the notice-board, side by side with Tom Merry's. It was to the effect that "Racke's Revellers" would give a grand concert in the Public Hall, Wayland, on Wednesday evening at eight.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 675.

It was emphasised, by means of large printed capitals, that the whole of the proceeds would be given to the Cottage Hospital.

To say that Tom Merry & Co. were annoyed when they saw that notice was to put it mildly. They were furious.

"What's Racke's little game?" growled Manners. "He knows jolly well that we've booked the Public Hall for Wednesday evening."

"It's bluff on his part, I expect," said Tom Merry. "I don't suppose he really intends to give a concert, for one moment. He's simply done this to annoy us."

"Let's come an' tackle the wotah, an' ask him what he means by it!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

And a deputation of juniors proceeded immediately to Racke's study.

Unearthly sounds came from within that apartment.

Tom Merry & Co. stopped short in the passage.

"What on earth is it?" gasped Manners, stopping his ears in order to shut out the appalling sound.

The juniors looked quite alarmed, until Monty Lowther explained with a chuckle:

"It's all right, you fellows. It's only Grundy singing."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors crowded into Racke's study, and they saw that Lowther was right.

There were seven fellows present—the whole of "Racke's Revellers." All were seated, with the exception of George Alfred Grundy, who was standing on the hearthrug and bawling at the top of his lungs:

"Sailors, beware!
Sailors, beware!
Many brave hearts are asleep in the deep,
So beware—beware!"

It was quite impossible for Tom Merry & Co. to address Aubrey Racke, with Grundy in full blast.

They waited as patiently as they could until Grundy had finished, and then they drew almost sobbing breaths of relief.

"Jove! That was terrible while it lasted!" gasped Manners. "I thought I should never live through it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy waved his hand towards the door.

"Get out, you cackling fools!" he growled.

For answer, Monty Lowther burst into song:

"Grundy, beware!
Grundy, beware!
Many mad chumps receive biffings and bumps,
So beware—beware!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What do you bounders want?" demanded Lowther Racke, starting to his feet.

"We want to know what you mean by putting that notice up on the board?" said Tom Merry. "What's the game?"

"Yess, what d'you mean by announcing that you're goin' to give a concert at the Public Hall on Wednesday evening?" demanded Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"There's nothin' to prevent my givin' a concert if I want to," said Racke. "It's a free country."

"Hear, hear!" said Crooke and Clampe together.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 673.

"But your arrangements clash with ours!" protested Tom Merry.

"I meant them to!"

And there was a chuckle from Racke's cronies.

"Look here, Racke," said Jack Blake wrathfully. "You know jolly well that we've booked the Public Hall for Wednesday evening. If you've honestly made up your mind to hold a concert, you must postpone it till some other time."

"Rats!"

"We can't have two shows the same evening," said Manners.

"Of course we can't," agreed Racke.

"There's only room for one show, and that show's goin' to be mine!"

Tom Merry & Co. were puzzled, as well as angry. They couldn't for their lives understand how Aubrey Racke was going to achieve his object.

"There's something fishy about this!" declared Monty Lowther.

Racke assumed a pious expression.

"You've no right to make a suggestion of that sort," he said. "My concert's bein' given in a worthy cause—the cause of charity!"

The juniors gasped. Aubrey Racke had never before been known to champion the cause of charity. This was quite a new departure for the cad of the Shell.

"A fat lot you care about the welfare of the Cottage Hospital!" growled Manners. "The hospital could close down through lack of contributions, for all you cared!"

"I take a keen an' active interest in the concern. I hope to raise over fifty quid on Wednesday, an' a sum like that will come in quite useful to the hospital authorities. Whereas if it was given to a down-at-heel outsider like Mason, he'd only squander it in riotous livin'."

"You cad!" exclaimed Tom Merry hotly. "Dick Mason's one of the best, and if you breathe another word against him we'll pulverise you!"

"Hear, hear!"

Even Grundy & Co. were looking annoyed on hearing Dick Mason spoken of in that way. And Racke hastily dropped the subject.

Tom Merry & Co. wasted no more words on the cad of the Shell. They were unanimously of the opinion that his talk of holding a concert was all bluff. For how could he possibly hold it when the hall had been booked by the "Merry-makers?"

"I think I'll try my song through again!" announced George Alfred Grundy.

Whereupon, Tom Merry & Co. stamped to the door. Not for whole hemispheres would they have lingered to listen to Grundy's singing. They felt that there had been quite enough discord for one evening!

CHAPTER 6. Racke's Ruse.

TOM MERRY'S "Merry-makers," and Aubrey Racke's "Revellers," went full steam ahead with their rehearsals.

The "Merry-makers" told themselves that it would be quite impossible for Racke's concert-party to queer their pitch. But as the days went on they became uneasy. For Racke showed no signs of abandoning his scheme.

"They're going right ahead," said Tom Merry to his chums. "I can't help thinking that Racke's got something up his sleeve."

Manners nodded.

"We'd better pop over to Wayland and make sure that there's no hitch

about the hiring of the hall," he said. "It's just possible that Racke may have tried to spike our guns by offering a better price than we did."

"That's so," said Monty Lowther. "Comrade Aubrey, bless his heart, is quite capable of a trick of that sort! Let us plunge forth on our punctured jiggers and make inquiries."

The Terrible Three were soon speeding over to Wayland on their bicycles. They called at the Public Hall, and asked if everything was in order.

The man who was responsible for the letting of the hall assured them that there was nothing to worry about.

"The hall's yours for to-morrow evening, Master Merry, as per the arrangement," he said.

"Has Racke been here to see you?"

"No!"

"That's queer!" said Tom Merry.

"We rather thought he would have gone over our heads, and offered you better terms for the hire of the hall."

The man shook his head.

"Master Racke hasn't been here," he said.

The Terrible Three cycled back to St. Jim's feeling more puzzled than ever.

Racke had entered into no negotiations for the hire of the hall, but he was still going ahead with his rehearsals, and his announcement concerning the concert was still displayed on the school notice-board.

What did it mean?

The day of the concert dawned at length, and St. Jim's was in a flutter of excitement.

Which band of performers was to give the entertainment—the "Merry-makers" or the "Revellers"?

The majority of the fellows were of the opinion that Tom Merry & Co. would hold the concert, and that Racke would withdraw at the last moment.

But the cad of the Shell showed no sign of withdrawing. He was in high good-humour, and he still declared that there would be only one show that evening—his own.

Racke's followers were naturally curious to know how this was going to be brought about. But their managing director kept his own counsel.

Practically everybody in the school had decided to patronise the concert.

Mr. Raiton, who took a keen personal interest in Dick Mason, stated his intention of going, and so did Mr. Linton and Mr. Latham. They were very anxious that the Old Boy should be set on his feet again, and given sufficient money to tide him over his troublous times.

It was to be Dick Mason's benefit, and practically everybody intended to rally round for the good of the cause.

There was one exception. This was Mr. Ratcliff, the sour, ill-tempered Housemaster of the New House.

Mr. Ratcliff didn't believe in concerts. He referred to them as "unseemly brawls."

As for the Old Boy who stood in sore need of help, Mr. Ratcliff held the same view as Aubrey Racke, namely, that it was "up to" Dick Mason to get out of his difficulties as best he could, without assistance from others.

Mr. Ratcliff was besieged that afternoon by applicants for late passes. At first he refused to issue them. But the Head got to hear of it, and he sent a curt message to the Housemaster to the effect that passes were to be given to everyone in the New House who wanted them.

As a result, "Ratty" was more ratty than ever. And when Racke of the School House tapped on the door of his

study, and entered, he was greeted with a joy-like frown.

"What do you want, Racke?" snapped Mr. Ratcliff.

"Tom Merry intends to give a concert this evening, sir."

The Housemaster gave a snort.

"I am sick and tired of hearing of this concert," he said irritably. "If you require a late pass, Racke, you should apply to your own Housemaster."

"I haven't come to you for that, sir," said Racke.

"Then what—"

"I've come to tell you something which I think you ought to know."

Mr. Ratcliff's frown melted a little. He was always willing to give encouragement to tale-bearers.

"Well, Racke?"

"You're going to be insulted this evening, sir—"

"What?"

"So are some of the other masters. But you're going to be the chief victim, sir."

"Boy! What do you mean?"

"I mean that Tom Merry and the others are going to sing a song about you, sir," said Racke. "It's an amusing song—but I don't think you'd find it amusing!" It contains unkind references to your face, sir, and your methods, and your temper."

"Good—good gracious!"

"If you'd care to hear the thing in detail, sir," continued Racke, "I'll just strum it over to you."

"No, no!" said Mr. Ratcliff hastily.

"I am quite willing to believe that the song is of a most offensive nature, and calculated to hold me up to ridicule. I am obliged to you, Racke, for giving me this warning."

"An' you'll deal with the matter, sir?"

"Of course. I shall forbid the concert!"

A malicious look of triumph spread over Racke's features.

"Good! I knew I should work the 'crack,'" he muttered to himself, as he emerged into the passage.

Mr. Ratcliff, fuming with rage, hurried across to the School House. He met Mr. Railton on the way.

"I am sorry you cannot see your way to attend the concert this evening, Mr. Ratcliff," said the School House master. Mr. Ratcliff was almost foaming at the mouth.

"Attend that some of discordant rowdiness?" he shouted. "I should not dream of it, sir! My name is being taken in vain—and your own, too! We are being made the butt—the target of the coarse witticisms of a so-called humorist!"

Mr. Railton looked astonished.

"I—I quite fail to understand the reason for this outburst, Mr. Ratcliff—"

He began.

"That impudent young rascal, Merry, intends to insult us this evening!" raved Mr. Ratcliff. "He has written songs about us—or, at any rate, he has caused such songs to be written. Do you not realise what it means? Why, we shall be made the laughing-stock of the whole school!"

Mr. Railton shrugged his shoulders.

"I cannot believe that the songs in question are of an offensive nature," he said. "Merry is merely indulging in a little harmless fun—"

"Fun!" almost screamed Mr. Ratcliff. "If you regard it as funny, sir, to be held up to public ridicule, then I cannot agree with you! This concert must be stopped. It must be nipped in the bud immediately!"

"Before taking such a drastic action," said Mr. Railton quietly, "would it not be better to see Merry, and to peruse the

songs which he proposes to render this evening?"

"We will see him at once!" said Mr. Ratcliff.

And the two Housemasters proceeded to Study No. 10 in the Shell passage.

Sounds of melody came from within.

The "Merry-makers" were rehearsing their opening chorus for the last time.

"We are the Merry-makers.

The kings of mirth and merriment!
And with jest and chaff we will make

you laugh—
It's a pop-u-lar experiment!

We've swotted each 'turn,' we've contrived to learn

The sort of merriment Merry meant!"

"You're flat, dear boys!" came in a remonstrating tone from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "You haven't got the wight pitch. Now, listen to me:

"We are the Mewwy-makahs,

The kings of mirth and mewwiment

—"

Before the swell of St. Jim's could proceed, the door of the study was thrown open, and Mr. Ratcliff flounced in. He was followed in a more leisurely manner by Mr. Railton.

The "Merry-makers" exchanged startled glances.

"Looks like trouble!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"Merry!" Mr. Ratcliff's voice resembled the detonation of a bomb. "I

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The two masters went through the songs together. And presently Mr. Ratcliff snatched up one of the sheets of paper.

"What is this?" he rumbled.

Tom Merry came close, and glanced at the sheet. Then he uttered an exclamation of astonishment and dismay.

For the song which greeted his gaze was entitled:

"RATTY, THE TYRANT!"

"M-m-my hat!" gasped the leader of the concert-party.

Mr. Ratcliff perused the song with eyes which seemed to bulge from their sockets. Then he passed the effusion to Mr. Railton.

"Read it, sir!" he shouted. "Read it—and tell me if you consider that is a proper sort of song to sing at a school-boy concert!"

Mr. Railton glanced at the song.

The first verse ran thus:

"Ratty is a tartar, Ratty is a brute,

When he's on the warpath, all the fellows scoot!

Ratty gives us castigations all the merry day,

Doesn't ask for explanations—that's his little way!"

Mr. Railton frowned when he read that verse. His frown deepened by the time he had read the second; and when he came to the end of the song he looked almost as wrathful as Mr. Ratcliff himself.

"Merry!" he thundered. "This is outrageous!"

"Oh crumbs! I—I—"

"Am I to understand that you penned this libellous effusion?"

"Nunno, sir!"

"Another lie!" snarled Mr. Ratcliff.

"You assured me, Merry," said Mr. Railton, "that your songs contained no allusions to the masters. Yet here is a most scurrilous piece of doggerel, the writer of which deserves to be severely punished!"

Tom Merry looked dazed, and so did his followers.

"I—I can't understand how that song came to be there, sir!" he stammered.

"It wasn't included in our repertoire at all. I don't know who wrote the thing, but I'm positive it wasn't one of us!"

"Lies! All lies!" interjected Mr. Ratcliff.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jumped to his feet.

"I strongly resent that remark!" he exclaimed.

"Be silent, D'Arcy!" thundered Mr. Railton.

"I cannot remain silent, sir, while Tom Mewwy's wacivity is questioned! We don't know how that song came to be written, and we don't know how it came to be in Mewwy's desk with the west of the nunnibals for this evenin's concert. None of us would ever dream of composin' such a song, Mr. Wailton! Of course, what it says about Watty—I mean, Mr. Watchliff—is perfectly true and—"

"What!" shouted Mr. Ratcliff.

"At the same time, we should not dare to run the risk of singin' such a song at our concert."

Mr. Railton looked very grave.

"There are other songs here of a similar nature," he said. "I am sufficiently broad-minded to be able to stand a joke, but this goes far beyond a joke. I cannot allow the concert to take place!"

"Oh crumbs!"

Blank dismay was expressed on the faces of the juniors.

They had everything cut and dried.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 673.

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LOOK OUT!

demand to know what you mean, you depraved young rascal, by—"

"Pardon me, Mr. Ratcliff," interposed Mr. Railton quietly, "but these boys belong to my House, and it is, therefore, my prerogative to address them. We have reason to believe, Merry, that several of the songs which you intend to render this evening contain certain allusions to the masters."

"That's not so, sir," said Tom Merry promptly.

"You are lying!" hissed Mr. Ratcliff.

And he reminded the juniors of an actor in a melodrama.

Tom Merry flushed.

"I'm not in the habit of telling lies, sir," he said warily. "You're quite welcome to look through our songs, and you'll see for yourself that no masters are mentioned in them."

"For my part, Merry, I believe you," said Mr. Railton. "At the same time, in order that this matter may be cleared up, you had better produce the songs."

Tom Merry went to his desk and took out a budget of manuscript, which he handed to Mr. Railton.

their arrangements were complete. And now the concert was not to take place!

They were so stunned by the events of the last few minutes that they were unable to think clearly. It did not occur to them that Aubrey Racke was at the bottom of the whole business.

Tom Merry looked appealingly at Mr. Railton.

"I assure you, sir, that we know nothing about those songs," he said. "We certainly shouldn't think of singing them at the concert!"

"You will not get the chance!" said Mr. Railton dryly.

"Think what Dick Mason will lose, sir, if the concert is cancelled!" said Jack Blake.

"I have already thought of that, Blake. No one was more anxious than I that Mason should be helped. The object with which this concert was promoted was a very commendable one. At the same time, I cannot allow masters to be ridiculed, and burlesqued in a public place; and I feel sure Dr. Holmes will share my views. I repeat, the concert cannot take place!"

"That is not enough!" chimed in Mr. Ratcliff. "These young rascals merit severe punishment for their outrageous conduct. The mere cancellation of the concert is nothing—noting!"

Mr. Railton did not seem to hear his irate colleague. He was looking at Tom Merry & Co.

"I understand that another concert has been launched by Racke," he said, "and I shall permit that to proceed. As for you boys, you will be detained for the evening in the junior Common-room!"

Monty Lowther groaned audibly.

"I insist upon a severe flogging being administered!" began Mr. Ratcliff.

Mr. Railton eyed his colleague coldly. "Your insistence carries no weight with me, Mr. Ratcliff," he said quietly. "I have already punished these boys!"

"You have erred on the side of mercy and—"

"On the contrary, I consider I have made the punishment fit the offence. But I am not prepared to argue with you on the subject!"

And Mr. Railton strode out of the study. Mr. Ratcliff wept, too. But before going he crumpled up the offending songs, and hurled them on to the fire.

When the two masters had gone, the juniors blinked at one another in consternation and dismay.

"This is the absolute giddy limit!" groaned Jack Blake. "The concert's off! Think of it! We've slugged at rehearsals for nothing!"

"It's a shame!"

"A beastly, wotten shame, deah boys!"

"Railton might have taken my word!" said Tom Merry bitterly. "He knows I'm not in the habit of telling whoopers! Goodness alone knows how those songs got into my desk!"

"And we're detained for the evening!" growled Manners. "We sha'n't even have the pleasure of pelting Racke's precious performers with rotten eggs!"

The "Merry-makers" were looking anything but merry now. They were fed up and exasperated.

Later in the afternoon there was a shock for St. Jim's.

Across Tom Merry's announcement on the notice-board the following words had been scrawled in blue pencil:

"PERFORMANCE CANCELLED!"

Aubrey Racke's announcement, however, had not been tampered with.

"What does Tom Merry mean by backing out, and letting Racke go ahead?"

Everybody was asking that question. And when the news leaked out that

Tom Merry & Co. had been debarred from giving their concert, there was a profound sensation.

Racke's prophecy that the only concert to be given that evening was his own looked like coming true.

It was an hour of triumph for the cad of the Shell. And it was an hour of gloom and consternation for Tom Merry's "Merry-makers," who had now abandoned all hope of being able to help Dick Mason.

CHAPTER 7.

Mason Takes a Hand.

"HERE we are!" said Racke. A motor-char-a-banc, specially hired from Wayland, rumbled to a halt in the dusty quadrangle.

The members of Racke's concert-party clambered into the vehicle.

They were in great spirits.

Racke had been true to his word. He had cut the grass from under the feet of Tom Merry & Co., and he now had the field to himself.

The "Merry-makers" would now have to take a back seat, while Racke's "Revellers" performed before a crowded house.

"It beats me how you wangled it, Racke!" said George Alfred Grundy, as the char-a-banc rumbled through the school gateway.

Racke chuckled.

"Trust your Uncle Aubrey to work the giddy oracle!" he said.

"But—how did you do it?"

"No time to go into details now," said Racke. "We've got to concentrate on the show. We've got to make it a real slap-up success!"

"Hear, hear!" said Crooke.

"It's going to be the biggest success of the year!" declared Clampe.

"My private song," said Grundy, "will fairly bring down the house!"

"I expect it will," said Wilkins. "But not in the sense you mean!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here," demanded Grundy wrathfully, "what's the matter with my voice?"

"Nun-nun-nothing—nothing at all!" said Wilkins hastily. "You ought to be a merry town-crier."

"Or a ship's siren!" suggested Gunn.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

As the motor-char-a-banc thundered along the road to Wayland, it passed scores of St. Jim's fellows who were proceeding on foot.

"There's goin' to be a record house!" said Racke, with great satisfaction.

"Absolutely!"

"How much cash do you think we shall take, old man?" asked Skorp.

"Oh, about thirty quid!" replied Racke.

The cad of the Shell knew very well that nearly twice that amount would be taken. It was his intention to send the sum of thirty pounds to the Cottare Hospital, and pocket the balance himself, without his associates being any the wiser. It would be perfectly easy, Racke reflected, to pull the wool over the eyes of such wooden-headed chumps as George Alfred Grundy.

Just before the char-a-banc reached Wayland, Crooke came and seated himself next to Racke.

The couple were out of earshot of everybody, save the driver. But the driver didn't count. He was a young fellow, whose face was not visible in the dusk; and his attention seemed to be concentrated upon the steering-wheel.

"I say, old chap," murmured Crooke, in Racke's ear, "tell me how you wangled it—how you managed to queer Tom Merry's pitch!"

Racke gave a furtive glance round. Then he chuckled.

"It was easily done," he said. "I wrote several sets of verses slangin' the masters. You didn't know I was a buddin' Byron, did you? Well, I did a song about Ratty, and another about the Head himself."

"My hat!"

"Then I smuggled the whole issue into Tom Merry's desk—"

"What?"

"After which I went an' had a jaw with Ratty. I told him that Merry's party intended to hold the masters up to ridicule, this evenin'." He was simply furious. Went again round to Railton, an' the two of 'em paid Tom Merry a visit. They discovered the songs in question, an' promptly put the kybosh on Merry's concert. Twigg?"

"Well, I'm figgered!" gasped Crooke. He was several sorts of a cad himself, yet he could not help feeling disgusted. And his disgust showed clearly in his expression.

"Why are you lookin' at me like that?" asked Racke.

"Well, of all the dirty tricks I've ever heard of," said Crooke candidly, "that takes the biscuit!"

"Shush!" muttered Racke. "I shouldn't have told you anything about it if I'd known you were goin' to take up this pious attitude."

"You could have told Merry out without stooping to that sort of thing."

"Rats. That was the only wheeze that occurred to me, an' I think you'll agree it was a jolly brainy one."

"And a caddish one into the bargain!" said Crooke.

"Oh, dry up! You haven't suddenly blossomed out into a Good Little George, I hope?"

There was a sneer in Racke's tone.

"I'm not sure whether I ought to take part in this show of yours," said Crooke slowly.

Racke looked alarmed.

"Here, I say, don't leave me in the lurch at the last minute!"

"I've a thundering good mind to repeat to these fellows what you've just told me," said Crooke.

"Don't—don't! Do you want to spoil the whole show? Do you want to upset all my plans? Don't be a mad fool! I'm sorry for Tom Merry, in a way, but I simply had to queer his pitch somehow. An' that was the only thing I could think of."

"Did you actually write those songs yourself?" asked Crooke.

"Yes. I disguised my fit, of course. If I hadn't, Railton would have twigged my handwritin' right away."

"This is awfully rough on Merry—"

"I know. But it can't be helped. Besides, we shall put up a much better show than Merry would have been able to give."

"That's true enough."

"We shall please the public. An', after all, it's the public we've got to study—not Tom Merry. You won't breathe a word about this, will you, Crooke?"

"I ought to," said Crooke, "but I won't."

"Honest?"

"Honest Injun!"

Racke heaved a sigh of relief. He had dreaded the thought of being exposed, for if Grundy & Co. knew that there had been trickery, they would promptly have backed out of Racke's concert-party.

The char-a-banc slowed up outside the Public Hall.

Racke's face glowed with satisfaction, for he saw a long queue of people waiting for admission.

"I shall make a small fortune over this stunt!" he muttered, under his breath.

But there was a surprise in store for

the schemer of the Shell—and a very painful surprise, too.

As he stepped down from the char-a-banc the driver stepped down, too, and placed a detaining hand on the junior's shoulder.

"One moment, Racke!" he said sternly.

Racke started violently. The light of the street-lamp clearly revealed for the first time the features of the driver.

It was Dick Mason!

"What—what are you doin' here?" gasped Racke uneasily.

"I've been given a temporary job at the Wayland garage, while one of the drivers is ill," explained the Old Boy.

"I did a lot of motor transport work in France, so I'm quite at home when it comes to driving a char-a-banc. But never mind about my war experiences. Get back into that char-a-banc!"

"E!"

"Hop in!"

"But—but why—"

"I'm going to take you back to St. Jim's."

"W-w-what for?" panted Racke.

"I overheard the whole of your conversation with Croke. And I'm going to take you before Mr. Railton!"

Racke turned pale.

"I—I was only joking, Mason!" he faltered.

"Then your peculiar sense of humour will have to be kept in check!" said Dick Mason grimly. "In you get!"

"But my concert!" said Racke wildly.

"The public are waiting."

"They'll have to wait!" was the curt rejoinder.

The situation was desperate. And Aubrey Racke knew that he was in a very tight corner.

There was still one possible way out, however, and Racke decided to take it.

"Look here, Mason," he said, lowering his voice. "I know that you're down and out, an' haven't a penny to bless yourself with—"

"What's that got to do with it?"

"If you'll let me carry on with the concert, an' keep your mouth shut about what you've heard, I'll make it worth your while. A fiver would come in jolly handy to you just now, wouldn't it?"

Smack!

Dick Mason's open palm came with stinging force across Racke's cheek.

"There's my answer!" said the Old Boy angrily. "You contemptible young worm! I may be down and out, as you say, but I haven't forfeited all sense of honour and decency!"

So saying, Mason lifted Racke bodily in his arms and bundled him into the char-a-banc.

Racke's followers looked on open-mouthed.

"I say, what's the little game?" asked Grundy.

Dick Mason vouchsafed no reply. Leaving the members of Racke's concert-party standing in an amazed group on the pavement, he jumped into the driver's seat, reversed the vehicle, and set off in the direction of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 8.

Champions of the Oppressed!

MR. RAILTON was in his study, debating whether or not he should attend Racke's concert in Wayland, when there was a tap on the door.

"Come in!" called the Housemaster.

The tall figure of Dick Mason appeared into view, closely followed by the cowering form of Racke of the Shell.

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated Mr. Railton. "Mason, what—what does this mean?"

"I have made a discovery, sir," said the Old Boy. "I hope you'll excuse me

for barging in like this, but it's most important. I understand that Tom Merry & Co. have been detained this evening!"

Mr. Railton frowned slightly.

"That is quite correct," he said.

"They have been accused of holding the masters up to ridicule!"

The Housemaster nodded.

"Well, they've done nothing of the sort, sir!"

"Really, Mason, I fail to see in what way this concerns you—"

"The songs that you took exception to, sir," went on Dick Mason, unheeding,

"were written by this cringing end here, and smuggled by him into Tom Merry's desk!"

"What?"

Mr. Railton looked thunderstruck.

"How—how did you come into possession of this information, Mason?" he gasped.

The Old Boy explained the circumstances. And Mr. Railton fixed his stern gaze upon Aubrey Racke.

"You have behaved abominably, Racke!" he exclaimed. "Little did I dream that any boy in my House could be guilty of so base and despicable a plot!"

"I—I—" stammered Racke.

It was on the tip of his tongue to deny everything, but he refrained. He knew that Dick Mason's word would be taken in preference to his own.

"You have done Merry and his friends a grave injustice," continued the Housemaster. "Have you any explanation to offer?"

Again Racke tried to speak, but articulate words would not come. He felt that he was fairly up against it.

"Very well," said Mr. Railton grimly. "You will remain within doors for the rest of the evening, Racke, and I will see that you are adequately punished in the morning. Go!"

And Racke went, looking very white and subdued. His whole precious scheme had come tumbling about his ears—thanks to Dick Mason!

"I am immensely obliged to you, Mason," said Mr. Railton, when the end of the Shell had gone. "Racke's rascally plot has been exposed in the nick of time. I will release Tom Merry and the others immediately."

"The Merry-makers" were writhing and chafing in the junior Common-room when Mr. Railton came in.

"Hallo! Here comes the giddy warden, to see that we haven't bolted!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"My boys," said Mr. Railton quietly, "I have done you a great injustice. I am now aware that you had nothing whatever to do with the writing of those objectionable songs. They were composed by Racke, who placed them in Merry's desk."

"My hat!"

"The end!"

"The awful outsider!"

"The details of this act of roguery have only just come to hand," continued Mr. Railton. "Racke shall be severely punished for his base conduct. Meanwhile, you are at liberty, my boys, to proceed with your concert. I trust it is not too late?"

"No fear, sir!" said Tom Merry, springing to his feet.

"We shall keep the audience waiting for half an hour or so," said Monty Lowther, "but that is a mere detail."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors trooped out of their place of detention with radiant faces.

"We're free, dear boys—we're free!" chorled Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "How wippin'! My tenah solo will be wendashed, aftah all!"

"And my hunting-song—"

"And my cornet solo—"

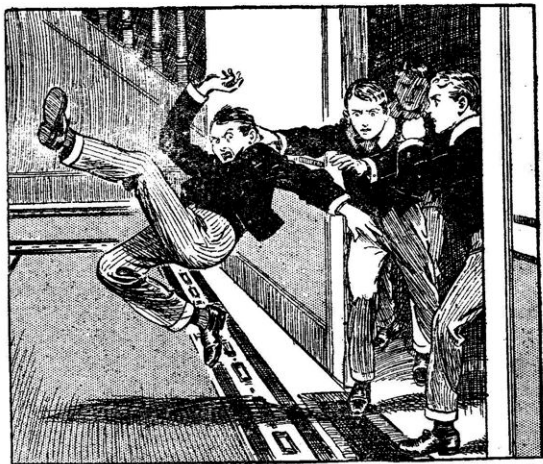
"Hurrah!"

Out in the passage the delighted juniors encountered Dick Mason.

"Buck up, you kids!" said the Old Boy. "I've got a char-a-banc waiting!"

"Oh, good!"

The juniors lost no time in boarding the vehicle, and they were soon being



George Alfred Grundy was very red in the face by this time. The next moment he felt as if he was in the grip of a whirlwind. He travelled through the doorway at express speed, and alighted with a crash on the linoleum in the passage. "Fare thee well, Caruso!" sang out Monty Lowther. (See page 7.)

whirled away in the direction of Wayland.

"When they reached the Public Hall they found that it was packed almost to overflowing. Outside on the pavement stood Grundy & Co., with bewildered expressions on their faces.

"What does this mean, you fellows?" demanded Grundy. "Where's Racke?"

"Back at St. Jim's, brooding over his sins," said Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He tried to get the better of us by a low-down trick," said Jack Blake. "Of course, you fellows knew nothing about it?"

"Nothing!" said Grundy promptly. "If I'd known there was any trickery in it I'd have backed out right away!"

"Same here!" said Wilkins and Gum together.

"What did Racke do?" asked Grundy. Tom Merry explained, and George Alfred listened in astonishment.

"My hat! I'm jolly glad the awful rotter's been bowled out!" he said at length. "It's put the kybosh on our concert, but never mind. We'll come in and applaud your show, Merry."

"Not with rotten eggs, I hope?" said Manners.

"Oh, no!" said Grundy, with a grin. "We'll reserve those for Gussy's tenor solo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Gwundum—"

"Come along, you fellows!" said Tom Merry briskly. "The audience is getting impatient. Can't you hear the stamping of their fairy hoods?"

There was quite an uproar going on inside the hall. The members of the audience were beginning to think that they were the victims of a hoax—that there was to be no concert, after all.

For ten minutes the din continued. And then the curtain rose, revealing Tom Merry & Co. seated in a semi-circle on the stage.

There was a buzz of astonishment from the crowd, who had not expected to see eyes on the "Merry-makers."

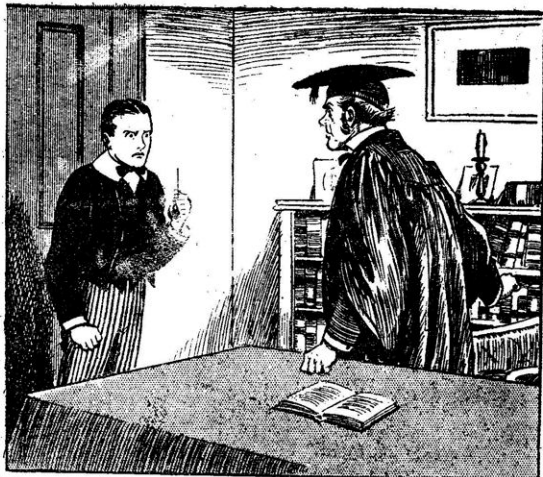
Then somebody started to cheer, and the cheering was taken up on every side.

"Hurrah!"

"Here they are!"

"Get on with the washing, you fellows!"

Tom Merry, whose countenance bore



Mr. Ratcliff's frown melted a little. He was always willing to give encouragement to tale-bearers. "Well, Racke?" "You're going to be insulted this evening, sir—" "Boy! What do you mean?" "I mean that Tom Merry and the others are going to sing a song about you, sir," said Racke. (See page 9.)

signs of a liberal application of grease-paint, rose to his feet.

"Sorry we're late, ladies and gentlemen," he said. "But better late than never! I must apologise, also, for the absence of our fair pianist— Why, here she is!"

For at that moment Marie Rivers stepped on to the stage. She had been informed of recent developments, and had come post-haste to the hall.

Marie's arrival was greeted with a fresh storm of cheering, and the girl blushed as she seated herself at the piano.

"The entertainment will now commence!" announced Tom Merry. "In order that the audience may get the worst over, I have arranged for D'Arcy to render the first song."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"On the ball, Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus flushed beneath his grease-paint.

"I wise to a point of ordah—" he began.

"No, you don't. You rise to sing 'Shriek to Me, Thora!'" said Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Marie Rivers played the opening accompaniment, and Arthur Augustus, clearing his throat, began to warble.

"I stand in a land of woses,

But I dream of a land of snow—"

The audience listened with patient good-humour. But when Arthur Augustus came to the chorus they stopped their ears.

Marie Rivers, realising the anguish of the audience, did her best to drown the singer's voice. And at last the song came to an end.

Arthur Augustus paused, waiting for the thunderous shout of "Encore!" But it never came, and the swell of St. Jim's resumed his seat, muttering something to the effect that the audience "didn't recognise a weally good singah when they heard one!"

"Now that Gussy's finished letting off steam, ladies and gentlemen," said Tom Merry, "we'll get on with the real business of the evening."

And the "Merry-makers" proceeded to chant their opening chorus in unison:

"We are the Merry-makers,
The kings of mirth and merriment!
And with jest and chaff we will make you laugh—

It's a pop-u-lar experiment!"

From that time onwards everything went without a hitch.

The concert was a great success—greater even than the most optimistic of the "Merry-makers" had anticipated. Tom Merry himself was in fine voice, and some of his numbers fairly took the "house" by storm.

Dick Mason, having returned the chair-bane to the garage, had a seat at the back of the hall. But he had no idea that the proceeds of the concert were for his benefit.

The entertainment proved a great personal triumph for Tom Merry, who was backed up in fine style by his chums. And when at last the curtain fell cheer upon cheer rang through the crowded hall.

A special collection was made to swell the takings, and the total sum amounted to fifty-five pounds.

"Quite a nice little nest-egg for Dick Mason," remarked Tom Merry. "When shall we give it to him?"

"We'll invite him up to the school to-morrow afternoon for tea," said Figgins, "and hand it to him then."

"Good! But supposing he won't take it?"

"We'll force him to!"

"Xaos, wathuh!"

The invitation was accordingly given, and Dick Mason responded to it.

When the Old Boy stepped into Tom Merry's study next day, he was bringing over with happiness and good-humour. The juniors could hardly believe that this was the same fellow

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whom they had discovered in the boat-house.

Tea was a merry meal. And as soon as the cover Dick Mason was handed a special envelope.

Mr. Merry & Co. hoped that he would not open it in their presence; but he did.

There was a bundle of notes inside, together with a slip of paper bearing the words:

"WITH THE COMPLIMENTS AND GOOD WISHES OF THE 'MERRY-MAKERS'!"

Dick Mason tried to speak. But for a moment words would not come. He was swayed with emotion.

Then, mastering himself at length, he handed the envelope and its contents back to Tom Merry.

"I shall never forget this," he said huskily—"never! But—but I can't accept this money."

"You must!" came in a chorus from the juniors.

"No, no! Things have happened since last night. I've secured a job—and a jolly remunerative job, too. I'm to be private secretary to a prominent M.P."

"Hurrah!"

"Therefore, I shan't need this money. But it's tremendously good of you, you fellows, and, as I say, I shall never forget it!"

Tom Merry's face fell somewhat. "Then our efforts have been in vain, after all," he said.

"Don't say that," said Dick Mason. "Might I make a suggestion?"

"Do."

"Very well. A fund has just been promoted in Wayland for the relief of unemployed ex-Service men. In Wayland alone there are dozens of deserving cases. I suggest that you send this money to the fund."

"Ripping!"

"A perfectly stunnin' idea, bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Accordingly, the money was forwarded to the fund. And the juniors felt satisfied that it could not have been given to a more worthy cause.

As for Racke of the Shell, he was soundly flogged for his dastardly conduct. And as he squirmed beneath the Head's birch he realised only too well the truth of the old saying that the way of the transgressor is hard!

THE END.

(Another grand long story of Tom Merry & Co. next week is entitled "THE MYSTERY OF THE MINOR" by Martin Clif f. d. Order your copy EARLY.)



Billy Bunter

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in which he gives his own ideas on how a paper should be run "Billy Bunter's Weekly" is a so amazingly funny feature no one should miss. See TO-DAY'S issue of

Magnet 1½

The Famous School Story Paper.

WHO'S WHO IN THIS WEEK'S "GEM" STORY.

MR. VICTOR RAILTON, M.A., Sixth Form-master, and Housemaster of the School House. Thoroughly liked and respected by the majority at St. Jim's. Always ready to give a helping hand, and a real good fellow in every way. His aim is to lead, and not to drive. Different in every way to Mr. Ratcliffe, the tyrant of the New House.

REGINALD TALBOT has been mentioned as the "Toff"—a nickname by which he had been known in the older days—days when he had followed the calling of a cracksmen. Is now a somewhat quiet and reserved fellow of the School House Shell, and one of the very best. Standfast and true. A staunch chum of Marie Rivers, the School House nurse, who was also connected with the "gang" in the older days.

MISS MARIE RIVERS, as mentioned previously, the School House nurse. Her father, John Rivers, was the leader of the famous "Angel Alley" gang. Like the kind and considerate soul she is, she is liked and respected by all at the school. A real good chum of Talbot's. Many of the attacks of the old gang to kidnap Marie have been frustrated by Talbot at the peril of his own life.

RICHARD VERNON MASON, formerly a prefect of St. Jim's. A smart, well-set-up young fellow. Had since left St. Jim's, and served as an officer in the Loamshire Regiment. On his last day at the school he had distinguished himself by a brilliant achievement on the cricket-field, covered him with glory, and won the match for his side.

ERIC KILDARE, the captain of St. Jim's, and head prefect. A general all-round good sport, and a splendid athlete. Captain of both the cricket and football elevens. Is respected by all, with the exception of the rotters, on whom he lays a heavy hand. Fearless and brave. Will pit himself against anyone at fist-cuffs, or any other undertaking.

GEORGE ALFRED GRUNDY, a rather bumpy fellow, and self-opinionated. Fancies he has the capabilities of a great detective. Is a fairly good boxer, but could not stand up against such as Tom Merry, Talbot, or Noble. Is very liberal at giving tips, being well supplied with pocket-money by his rich uncle. Honest, brave, and fearless, and is a rare stickler. Always ready to offer his services for the good of the cause.

GEORGE GERALD CROOKE, a rotter of the first water. Plays a part with Racke in all shady escapades. Dislikes Tom Merry, and all the decent fellows at the school. Unlike Racke, he is very timid.

GEORGE FRANCIS KERR, a Scot from the Highlands, and a real nice fellow. A real good sportsman, and excellent at impersonating. A staunch friend of Piggins and Patty Wynn, his two study-mates. Always ready to assist in a jape upon the School House, in which he nearly always takes the prominent part. Irrespective of his japing, he is greatly liked by the School House fellows.

ANSWERS TO READERS

"LIFTBOY" (Liverpool).—So, after searching through a telephone directory for half an hour, you failed to find the number of Trimble Hall! Now you want me to answer 385 questions! Well, here's a few. Monty Noble is all right; Aubrey Racke all wrong. When George Alfred Grundy plays—or, rather, tries to play—football, the best position he could occupy would be "left-outside"—in the true meaning of the term. How well could Baggy Trimble sit and eat? Well, until he is—But perhaps you can guess when he will leave off.

SKYSCRAPER. (New York).—You have been a reader of the GEM since 1916. Good! Talbot's father's name was Captain Crow. That was what he was called in the underworld of crime in which he previously existed.

SCREEN MAD. (Exeter).—I always like to oblige a loyal reader when possible, and I have shown Mr. Martin Clifford your letter. He gives the following answers to your questions: Cardew's favourite movie stars are Stewart Rome, James Lindsay, and Pauline Frederick. They act for Broadwest, Samuelson, and Golden Films. George Figgins likes stars with plenty of bric movement. His favourites are Douglas Fairbanks and Charles Hutchinson. Eric Kildare likes Tom Mix and Bill Duncan. Jack Blake, "Winkle," Fatty Wynn's great hero can easily be guessed. It is Fatty Arbuckle. Nearly all St. Jim's turned out to see Douglas Fairbanks in "Knickerbocker Buckaroo," "Arizona," and "Americano," and for quite a long while afterwards the juniors were very broad smiles. The fags delight only in the doings of Charlie Chaplin, and not others who do the funny business. When the big piece is being shown they usually try to play a revised version of the comedy—until they are shown the way out!

"ASTON VILLA" (Birmingham).—More will be heard of Harry Noble before long. A yarn of Mulvaney minor will appear as soon as possible. Kildare is captain of the school. He is also head prefect. Monteth is the same in the New House.

"MILICENT OF SEVENTEEN" (Richmond).—You are "fair quizzzy on friend Cardew!" "Why, on earth doesn't he appear every week?" you impatiently ask. Well, last week's yarn was about him entirely, so that will have given you some consolation. Some readers don't like Cardew; others could stand Cardew yarns till further orders.

HARRY B. (Windsor).—Jack Blake was the first character to come to St. Jim's, but he did not appear with Tom Merry. Yes, there will be another splendid story next week.

"BUSTER" (Birmingham).—Yes, you can write and ask me as many questions as you like about the characters. But letters such as those dealing with medical fitness and health should be written on another sheet of paper, and addressed to the Health Editor. I am glad you like the "Boys' Herald" so much.

"ADMIRER OF THE 'GEM'" (Hull).—Yes, I think Doris Levison can play the piano. Monty Lowther is the best pianist in the junior school. Tom Merry's guardian is Miss Priscilla Fawcett. The story when Tom arrived at St. Jim's is in the first "Holiday Annual" (1920). The article of Harry Wharton has already been printed twice—in the "Popular" in 1917, and in the "Dreadnought" some time earlier. Both now are unobtainable. You need have no fear of Jack Drake and Tom Foddies leaving the "Boys' Herald". Owen Conquest will see to that!

"SCHOOLBOY BOXER" (Cardiff).—No, your pal Cardew does not turn out for footer and the Form sports. He is far too lazy to stand the gruelling practice. At such times he whistles away the time by inviting himself to the evening parties. Cutts or Racke. Monteth of the New House is now as straight as a die. He no longer hates Kildare or torments fags, but plays all games like a real sportsman. Glad you are in approval of our latest features. You are just half as heavy as Billy Bunter, whose actual weight is fourteen stone twelve and a half pounds. Sammy goes a little over eleven stone. His weight and height I will tell you the next time you write.

**VERY POLITE!**

A stout old country lady, carrying a large parcel, got into a first-class carriage in Scotland. She was rather shabbily dressed. A porter put his head in at the window. "First-class, ma'am?" he asked. "Well, I'm not exactly first-class, but I am pretty well, considering," replied the old lady, with a smile. She turned to her fellow-passengers as the train glided out. "They say a good deal against them porters," she said, "but that's a nice, civil-spoken young man, anyway!"—P. J. Hooker, 108, Collingdon Street, Luton, Bedfordshire.

TIT FOR TAT.

Smith, who lived in the North, received a letter which was unstamped. All the missive contained were the words: "I am well—George." Smith was annoyed at having to pay for news like that, so he packed a large stone in a wooden box, and sent it to George, carriage forward. The recipient paid 3s. 6d. carriage, and found a letter inside with the stone. "Dear George," ran the note, "when I heard you were well, this great load rolled off my mind!"—Gilbert McDonald, 6, Russel Street, Partick, Glasgow.

SHE SAW HIM.

Two cyclists set out the other day in Scotland for a spin. One got a long way ahead of his companion, but, turning an awkward corner, collapsed over a heap of stones, smashing his machine, and getting hopelessly mixed among the spokes. An old woman chanced to come down the road, and the second cyclist asked her if she had seen a young man on a bicycle. "Na, na," was the reply. "I've seen nae bicycle, but there's a man up by these sittin' mendin' umbrellas!"—Herbert Best, 17, Winding Road, Halifax, Yorks.

TRACING IT BACK.

A little fellow, who had just felt the hardest side of the slipper, turned to his mother for consolation. "Mother," he asked, "did grandpa thrash father when he was a little boy?" "Yes," answered his mother impressively. "And did his father thrash him?" "Yes." A pause. "Well, who started the thing, anyway?"—G. Gibson, 20, Hackworth Street, Dean Bank, Ferryhill, Co. Durham.

JUST HER MISTAKE.

Golfers were a novelty in the neighbourhood, and when a young visitor, laden with clubs, was making his way down a side street towards some newly-prepared links, he was amazed by a lady accosting him with: "You be main late this mornin'!" "Rural familiarity," thought the golfer, but he replied pleasantly that he hoped to be in time for one round. "But there be a couple," said the lady, "the settin'-room and the kitchen." "Sittin'-room and kitchen?" queried the astonished golfer. "Ay. Aren't you come to sweep the chimbleys?"—J. R. Barnes, 2, Rosebery Place, Penarth, South Wales.

WISE SAYINGS.

If ignorance were bliss a lot of people would be supremely happy. Some folks worry so much about to-morrow that they forget to-day. The really strong man never depends on the weakness of others. Many a natural born fool would never be suspected if he kept his mouth shut. It's the economical man who never wastes any words. If virtue is its own reward, it is all to the good. Some men ask for a job as though they were afraid they might get it. The man who makes hay while the sun shines is in a position to lend money to the fellow who writes poetry about it. Keep telling a boy that he will never amount to anything, and he probably won't. The rock of adversity generally has a little rye on the sides.—Lewis Smith, 92, High Street, Reigate, Surrey.

A SMART RUN.

An old lady hurried up the station platform. "Porter," she cried, "can I catch the 2.15 train?" "Let me see, madam," replied the official. "The train has been gone two minutes, and is travelling about forty miles per hour. If you make a little calculation, and reckon how fast you can run, you will be able to answer your own question, madam!"—Stanley Külnar, 74, Manchester Road, Kearsley, near Bolton, Lancs.

Teacher: "Tommy, write me an essay on a football match." Tommy wrote a minute, then laid down his pen. Teacher: "But you've only done three lines!" Tommy: "Ye miss, his half-time!"—Eric Starkey, 80, Parade, Birmingham.

CATCHING CRAYFISH.

Along the Kennet, the Lambourne, and other South of England rivers, you will see a man setting small hoop-nets, which are fixed on iron rings a foot or so across. The net is baited with liver and let into the water. It is then tied to a peg. This is the way of catching crayfish. Crayfish make a soup, the famous bisque d'écrivi, which is one of the very best soups in the world. Crayfish flourish in any brook with a good current.—Miss M. Robins, 171, Roumanny Road, West Norwood, S.E. 27.

NOT HIS WORK.

Tom Merry had stood his Form-fellows a grand feed, and it was arranged that each guest should do his own washing-up afterwards. Trimble returned with his borrowed plates only half-washed. "You grubby rotter!" gasped Tom Merry. "Look at that plate!" "Well, I own to those thumb-marks," replied Baggy, "but that mustard was there before I used the plate!"—E. Shand, 38, Gorsefield Road, Prenton, Birkenhead.

THE EXPLANATION.

"What happened to that pretty little kitten of yours, George?" "Didn't you hear?" "Oh, no. Did you lose it?" "No." "Was it stolen?" "No." "What did happen to it, then?" "Why, it grew up to be a cat!"—Stephen Wood, 53, Durban Road, Margate, Kent.

FAME!

No man is so well known as he thinks he is. This is the opinion of Enrico Caruso, the world-celebrated tenor. While motoring through a quiet country district the singer's motor-car broke down, and Caruso sought shelter in a farmhouse. In the course of a friendly chat with the farmer, the singer mentioned that he was Caruso. The farmer leaped to his feet and seized him by the hand. "Little did I think," he said, "that I would see such a great man as you in this poor, humble kitchen, sir—the great traveller, Robinson Crusoe!"—J. Miller, 76, Littledale Road, Sencombe, Cheshire.

Contributions are invited from readers on the "GEM" for publication on this page. Anything *well* 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. "Par" 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."

THE FEUD at St Katie's

BY
Michael
Poole



Red Rebellion Reigns.

AT various times in its history the Transitus Form had held meetings of protest, or had gathered together to consider different problems affecting them all.

But there had never been a meeting where feeling ran quite so high as the one which took place to-day. In times gone by they had felt hurt and pained, or even annoyed, about lots of hardships thrust upon them, but this affair was really the outside edge.

Just think of it! There was no more reason why the Transitus should be mixed up in the Grimsditch business than any other Form. No inquiry had yet been made, and nothing at all had been done. Yet Roger promptly came down on the Transitus and put them in strict detention right away.

Football matches would have to be cancelled, there would be no trips to Dulchester. Apparently Roger wasn't going to let them have even five minutes off, but was going to keep an eye on them from the time they got up till lights out.

Standing on the chair, Dickie Dexter explained to the crowd all about the feud against Jolly Roger, and how they had to work it.

"It isn't a scrap of good getting up a denutation to the Beak," he pointed out. "He's bound to be up against us, and we should be more in the soup than ever. We've all got to stick together over this, and deal with Roger himself. First of all—"

Everybody began to agree with the Kid, and also to point out just what their views were. You wouldn't have called it a peaceful, quiet sort of meeting, yet somehow everyone got the main hang of the thing. They would all turn up at two o'clock this afternoon, and probably to the outward eye they would all be just as usual. On the other hand, the fun might begin quite early on.

The dinner-bell went unheeded while they were discussing the details. When, eventually, everyone knew just how the game was going to be played they marched off in a body to the dining-hall, a full fifteen minutes late.

Mr. Gladridge happened to be the master in charge. The Transitus went

to him for mathematics, and during the past few months he had formed the opinion that the Transitus thought he was an ass. He meant to make them sorry for having thoughts of that kind, and he began to-day.

"Stop! Strong!" Mr. Gladridge jumped up from his table and marched towards the late-comers. "Why are you and the rest of the Form so late? Have you any excuse?"

"No, sir!" Strong just snapped it out, and then someone at the back of the mob could be heard telling Bill Strong to push on. To Mr. Gladridge this was a definite proof that they hadn't the slightest respect for him, and it was plain that he had to do the strong-man act now or never.

"Bellinger!" Mr. Gladridge called on one of the prefects. "Take the name of every one of these boys! No boy is to be allowed to proceed to the table till his name has been taken. Any boy who has an excuse may come forward and give it to me now."

There were murmurs from the crowd, but no one came forward.

"Very good, Bellinger! Proceed with your task!" Old Gladridge became really very dignified, and Bellinger looked like a new brand of the Lord High Executioner as he took out a notebook and began to ask fellows whom he knew perfectly well what their names were.

It was an assinine performance. Anyone with half an eye could see that the whole crowd was the Transitus Form. Yet they had to file solemnly past Bellinger, and then past Mr. Gladridge, before they could get to their table.

"There will be a full inquiry into this rank insubordination!" Mr. Gladridge raved. "You are all from the Transitus, the Form which is a disgrace to the school!"

"Sir!" said Bill Strong, feeling that it was up to him to protect the honour of the Form. "Please, sir!"

"Don't dare to interrupt me, Strong!" Old Gladridge stamped. "I repeat that the whole matter will be reported to the headmaster! You may now proceed with your meal."

Even the servants were grinning. Everybody was smiling, and it was just like putting salt into an open wound, so far as the Transitus was concerned.

"The Form which is a disgrace to the whole school," Mr. Gladridge had said, and as they came out from dinner various fellows from other Forms made it quite plain that they guessed what he was driving at. As a matter of fact, of course, Mr. Gladridge had merely been expressing a personal opinion; but the rumour about the Trans being in detention over the Grimsditch affair had leaked out, and everybody connected his remarks with that.

At two o'clock they were in their Form-room, while the rest of the school were making ready for a pleasant holiday. Prompt to the minute Mr. Blunt came marching in.

"We will begin work at once!" he rapped out. "I may as well tell you that I had frankly expected the persons concerned in the Grimsditch trouble to have honoured me by taking me into their confidence. However, they have not done so. We will proceed to the subject upon which we devoted so little time this morning—English literature. Half a sheet of foolscap, please. Three points to a line. Ready!"

That was Roger's method, and he knew the Form didn't like it. Yet he could almost be sworn that he saw a faint smile touch the face of every boy as he took out the half-sheet of foolscap and prepared for the test.

Away Roger went with his ten questions, and each question was really three small ones. That was one of Roger's own patent inventions, and he called it "Three points to a line." If you got one point wrong out of the three, then the whole answer was wrong.

"Collect the papers, Dobbin!" Roger rapped out almost as soon as he had given the last point.

"While I am examining your efforts," Roger said, when the papers had been duly collected and handed to him, "you will proceed to read through the next chapter. Later we will discuss it together."

Roger drew the papers towards him. The Form opened their text-books. And at that moment the feud against Jolly Roger really began.

Actually, Rover himself didn't quite grasp it for about forty seconds. In that space of time he examined three or four

of the test-papers. He was a bit of a marvel in this—as he was in most things—and he could examine and mark thirty papers in less time than most masters would have taken to put them in order.

At the first paper the smile on Roger's face grew hard. It was Bunting's, and there wasn't a single answer correct. The next was Grubb's, and he scored just as many marks as Bunting. When he looked at the third, Roger began to get a queer feeling somewhere round his heart.

He went through the rest rapidly, but with concentrated attention. Thirty boys had each given answers to thirty points. Final result, nine hundred answers totally and completely wrong!

Roger looked at the papers again, and considered some of the answers. "Who wrote the 'Idylls of the King'?" had been one of the simple questions to which even the bottom boy of the Form couldn't have given a wrong answer, so Roger thought.

But here, staring him in the face, were the different answers: "Tom Mix," said Bill Strong; "Charlie Chaplin," Dexter had written; "C. Hooke" was Debbin's guess, while Curtis had put down "H. G. Wells." Nearly everyone had chosen a different name, and the only point where they all agreed was in the fact that they were all just as hopelessly wrong. No one, even by luck, had put down "Tennyson."

Very quietly Roger looked up at his Form. You know, of course, that he had an eagle eye, and could spot things with remarkable rapidity. It took him just four-fifths of a second to note the fact that every boy's book was open somewhere near the middle. The chapter he had told them to read was the last but one in the book.

This was deliberate, sullen, bare-faced rebellion, and the sort of thing that Roger didn't mean to have at any price.

Swiftly his eye ran over the Form. He chose the biggest fellow, who happened to be Duff. Of all the fellows in the Form, it was quite obvious that Duff wasn't even making the faintest attempt to read. He was looking back in his seat, and on his face was that calm, contented smile of perfect indifference to everything and everybody. The fact that he was also one of the crowd Roger was expecting to do the confession act didn't influence the Form-master in the least.

"Duff!" He called the name very quietly.

"Sir," said the Duffer, calmly and serenely.

"What are you reading, Duff?" Roger asked gently. "What were the last words you read exactly?"

"Haven't read anything, sir," said Duff.

"May I ask why you have not read anything, Duff?" Jolly Roger asked, and the Form began to sit up and take notice. There was that quiet, steely calmness in Roger's voice which was a dead certain warning of the coming storm.

"Because it is a holiday afternoon, sir," Duff answered. "I—w—w—the Form, sir—we don't agree with working on holidays, especially when—it's so unfair, sir!"

There was about two and three-quarters seconds' dead silence. You could have heard a pin drop. Roger simply sat like a statue, but his eagle eye roved round the Form, and every fellow in the Transitus met it quite fairly. The feud had begun in real earnest now! Roger had jumped suddenly to his feet and his eyes were blazing.

The Transitus began to tremble. But they knew that this would come—and they were ready for it!

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 673.

Roger Tackles the Task.

WHEN Jolly Roger decided on drastic measures with the Transitus, he didn't do it lightly or without good reason. You want to grasp his point of view before deciding that he'd really gone too far.

In the first place, of course, he had excellent grounds for believing that Dexter & Co. had been out of the school somewhere about midnight on the eventful night. He had equally sound reasons for believing that they had a grudge against Grimsditch.

As soon as he possibly could he went along and saw Grimsditch himself, and asked a few questions. The first thing he grasped was that Grimsditch knew a good deal more about the attack on himself than he wanted to talk about. Being an absolutely straight sort of fellow himself, Roger came to the conclusion that Grimsditch didn't want to say all he thought, because he didn't want to get anyone else into trouble.

"I see, Grimsditch," Roger told the prefect gently. "I quite understand your feelings. As a matter of fact, you'd very much prefer to let the whole matter drop, I suppose?"

Yes, sir! Grimsditch said, with pathetic sadness. "I mean it's all over and done with now, sir, and there's no sense in growling about it. I hope you are not going to make any inquiry, sir?"

"You mustn't worry yourself about it at all, Grimsditch," Roger said kindly. He'd really never thought much about Grimsditch until this affair, but it was obvious that the prefect preferred to suffer without dragging anyone else into trouble. Roger's opinion of Grimsditch went up several points.

"I'm not worrying, sir," Grimsditch assured him. "Only I would like to feel quite sure that no one in the school was being blamed!"

"I see," Roger nodded. "You know, of course, that one or two fellows are rather annoyed with you because you happened to tell me about the rag when they fastened you up in the prefect's room?"

Yes, sir! Grimsditch said, very slowly, and turned his eyes fearfully to Roger. "You don't think, sir—You are not going to ask them—I mean—Oh, I do hope you'll let the whole thing drop, sir! After all, if I have done anything wrong, I've been punished for it!"

Jolly Roger smiled and nodded again. After that he didn't say very much more because he disliked trying to press any fellow into admitting the truth. But before he left Grimsditch, Roger had suggested that he knew who the fellows were who had played this trick on him. Further, he mentioned casually the names of Dexter, Curtis, Strong, and one or two others.

Grimsditch begged him, then, not to say anything more about it.

"I don't think they meant—I'm quite sure, sir, they didn't plan the thing. If you take me to the Head, I shall swear that I didn't recognise anyone! I didn't recognise anyone! It was too dark, sir!"

All of which simply made it quite clear that Grimsditch knew perfectly well that it was Dexter & Co. who had tied him up and left him out in the cold all night. A fellow whose brain wasn't nearly so bright as Roger's could see quite clearly that Grimsditch was just sticking out against admitting the truth because he didn't want to sneak on the chaps who had done it.

And, of course, Roger also appreciated the fact that if it became known in the school that Grimsditch had sneaked on

Dexter, Strong, Curtis & Co.—well, it wouldn't do Grimsditch any good! He'd be a jolly sight more unpopular than ever.

So Roger merely smiled upon Grimsditch, and assured him again that he had nothing to worry about, and went out. Mr. Blunt meant to manage this affair in his own way, and the outcome of it all would be that Grimsditch would get due credit for refusing to speak or sneal, and Dexter & Co. would get due credit for coming forward and confessing their part in the business, rather than let anyone else suffer.

But the main thing was for Dexter & Co. to come forward and do the confession business. That was why Roger appeared to be suddenly vindictive. He knew Dexter and his friends, and he guessed that the moment they realised somebody else was going to suffer for a lark of theirs, they'd simply come running to him with their sad story.

Actually, Roger never believed that the Transitus, as a Form, would go through one afternoon's detention, so sure was he that the practical jokers would confess. You can guess what a shock he got when he found there wasn't any sign of sorrow about Dexter and his friends. It was a double shock when he realised that the whole Form was in open rebellion, and that Dexter, Strong, Duff, and the other three were among the ringleaders.

You really ought to have seen Jolly Roger when he stood up and faced the Form. Think of Wellington, Napoleon, Nelson, Beatty, and Haig, all rolled into one, standing up and casting an eagle eye on the thirty schoolboys!

The Transitus trembled. Then they shivered and felt trickling icicles dribbling slowly down their backs. They wished and wished—but they made up their minds to go through with it! Any other Form would probably have caved in right there and then. But the Transitus had declared a feud, and they were going on with it.

"Duff!" Roger uttered the name in a way which made the poor old Duffer get a horrible sinking feeling somewhere just behind his watch. "Stand up, Duff!"

Duff stood up. The smile on his face had withered away until it was no more than a faint shadow. But old Duff had got the right stuff in him, and he wasn't down and out just yet.

"I observe from your paper that you have made no attempt to answer the questions set," Roger said. "Was that done purposely, Duff?"

"Yes, sir," Duff got it out all right, though it wouldn't be quite right to say that he flashed forth.

"Curtis," Roger suddenly switched round. "Did you also give purposely incorrect answers? Stand up, sir!"

"Yes, sir," Curtis was standing upright like a young soldier, and he did get a little more vim into his answer, than Duff; but, of course, Duff had been the one to break the ice.

"Remain standing," Roger commanded. "Strong!"

And by one he tackled the whole lot. Duff, Curtis, Strong, Dexter, Dobbin, and Bunting went through the hoop. In about three minutes the six of them were all standing upright, and the rest of the Form were getting ready to face the music.

But Roger didn't tackle anyone else. "Before I go any further into this matter," he said, very calmly, "I will again ask that anyone who can throw any light on the Grimsditch affair will now come forward."

He was standing perfectly upright, and no one could have told that his eyes were taking in every slight change that might

take place on the faces of the six who were also standing.

"Very good!" Roger snapped out at last, when the silence had become painful. "Sit down!"

He nodded to the six boys who were still standing up in their places. They sat down.

"Now!" Roger flashed it out. "What does this mean? Benson! You are the monitor for the week. I will take your explanation first!"

Benson was on his feet, but it was very plain that he didn't like the job. He said "Please, sir," about three times, and then simply stood like a stuffed owl and stared at Jolly Roger.

"Go on, Benson!" Roger said at last. "I am waiting for your explanation."

If Roger or anyone else thought that old Benson was faking the job they found out their mistake inside the next few minutes. He'd only been getting his wind, and when he started he went ahead like a hundred horse-power engine.

"It isn't fair, sir! No other Form in the school punished. Nothing to punish anyone for, and we aren't even asked. The Transitus didn't have anything to do with Grimsditch. We're ready to give our word, and if we're not to be trusted—It's a feud, sir!"

He said a lot more than that, but these were the main points, and you could tell by the way other fellows nodded, and yet kept very steady and upright in their places, that they agreed with every word Benson said.

Of course, most masters would have gone off at the deep end there and then, and talked hot air about not caring what they thought, and their word being law and so on. Roger didn't do that. He simply nodded sharply and spoke quietly.

"I understand, Benson! I do not agree with the methods you are adopting, but I have always expressed my willingness to assist the Form in any way whatever. They desire a proper inquiry. It shall be done at once. Quarter-sheet of foolscap, please!"

Everyone felt in a sort of dream as they took out a quarter-sheet of foolscap. Jolly Roger still stood up, just as calm and dignified as ever.

"Ready? Number the first three lines. One, two, and three. Name in the top right-hand corner. Each boy will take each question as though it were addressed to him personally. One: Did you take any part whatsoever in the Grimsditch hoax? 'Yes' or 'no' only. Two: Were you in your dormitory at midnight on Tuesday when the attack is alleged to have taken place? 'Yes' or 'no' only. Where were you between eleven-thirty and twelve-thirty on that same night? If in bed, simply write 'bed.' Ready? Collect the papers, Benson!"

Roger never gave you very much time to think about the questions, because he reckoned that if you knew the answer there wasn't any need to start thinking it over. And in this case everybody in the Form had written the three answers quite easily: "No," "Yes," "Bed."

Even Dexter, Strong, Curtis, & Co. had given those answers. You see, the little midnight feast with old Scrimgore had been absolutely forgotten in the excitement of the Grimsditch affair and then the feud. They were quite clear in their own minds that they'd had nothing at all to do with it, and they were so dead keen on this that they never even thought for an instant about the trickiness of the questions.

The papers were handed in. Roger took them, sat at his desk, and went through them with lightning-like rapidity. They could see him putting most of them on the left-hand side, but

now and again he seemed to put an odd one on the right-hand side.

"I have examined your papers quite carefully," Roger said, and stood up again. "Twenty-four boys, I believe, have given absolutely correct answers to all three questions. Six boys have given incorrect answers to, at least, two questions each. Will those six boys now stand up and tell me the truth?"

There wasn't a sound when he finished speaking. Everyone began to think. In about two seconds a horrible, queer, ghastly sort of feeling began to steal into Dickie Dexter's mind. Tuesday night? Last night? Wasn't that the night they'd been down to old Scrimgore's place? Supposing—Oh, my giddy aunt! What had he better do about it? Couldn't give old Scrimgore away whatever happened—

He dared to turn his eyes towards Jimmie Curtis. Into the Kangaroo's mind the same ghastly idea had just begun to trickle.

"Very well!" Roger wasn't one of the

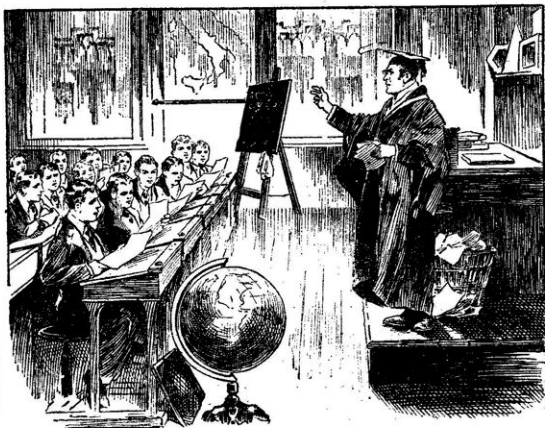
alongside him, and faced the wrath of many masters calmly and nobly.

But there wasn't one of the six who had ever found themselves in such a nasty tangle as the present mix-up. Not for a single instant had it flashed into their minds while they were writing the answers to Roger's questions that their little spread had got anything to do with it.

Now, how on earth could they explain that they didn't know just what Roger had meant? In any case, they all recalled quite clearly how they'd sworn a solemn oath before old Scrimgore that whatever happened they'd never drag him into the business.

"You say on this paper that you were in bed in your own dormitory at midnight last night, Dexter?" Roger was asking the question in his best ice-cold manner. "I will ask you before the whole Form, Dexter! Were you in bed at midnight last night? Yes or no, please!"

"No, sir!" Dexter gasped it out, and



Everyone felt in a sort of dream as they took out a quarter-sheet of foolscap. The master stood up, as calm and dignified as ever, as he addressed them. "Each boy will take each question as though it were addressed to him personally. One: Did you take any part whatsoever in the Grimsditch hoax? 'Yes' or 'no' only. Two: Were you in your dormitory at midnight on Tuesday? 'Yes' or 'no' only. Three: Where were you between 11.30 and 12.30 on that same night?"

kind to give you half an hour to think about a thing. And he had caught sight of the uneasy look on the faces of Dexter, Curtis, and one or two others. They knew, but they did not intend to confess!

"Six boys have given wrong answers!" Roger repeated once again. "Stand up, Dexter, Curtis, Strong, Bunting, Duff, Dobbin! Now, as you all refuse to tell the truth of your own accord, I will tell the Form. Despite the answers you have given here you were not in your dormitory at midnight on Tuesday. Exactly where you were is a matter which, doubtless, you will tell the Form in due course. But you were not in bed! What have you to say, Dexter?"

Turning the Tables.

IN the course of his school career Richard Dexter had been in awkward corners a good many times. On quite a number of occasions Bill Strong and Dobbin had toed the line

it came as a sudden shock to the rest of the Form.

You can imagine how they felt. Here was Dexter solemnly saying that he knew nothing at all about the Grimmy business, and had been in bed all the night, and then, as soon as he tumbles to the fact that Jolly Roger knows the truth, he just admits that he's been lying!

And Bill Strong and Curtis! Roger was rapping out his questions to them, and they were answering just as Dexter had done. No wonder they all looked so frightfully sick! Now you could understand why Dexter didn't want any deputation to the Head, but wanted the whole Form to start a feud against Jolly Roger!

In about two minutes the Form felt they wanted to cheer Jolly Roger. There wasn't going to be any feud against Roger after this, but there would be a jolly old feud against Dexter, Strong, Curtis, & Co. for landing the whole Form into such a rotten mess!

You could see quite plainly now why Roger had taken the line he had. He'd played quite fair and straight and given them a decent chance to go and tell him the truth. You'd never have thought that Dexter and Strong would play a dirty trick of that sort! My giddy aunt! Wouldn't the rest of the school have some sense enough to say about the Transitus!

Everyone was listening to Roger, and they could almost hear their own hearts beating as he commanded the six to come to the front of the class. Then he lined them up for the whole Form to see.

"I hope that the Transitus understands that this is a matter which affects their name just as much as it affects mine," Roger said, very firmly and without any fuss. "It is not my wish that we should parade this sort of thing in public, but I feel very strongly that we must get the truth and the full truth. Dexter!"

He swung round and faced Dickie Dexter, who was now standing at the head of the row of six. You couldn't help admiring Dickie just a little bit at that moment, because he certainly had heaps of pluck.

"Yes, sir?" he answered Roger. "Will you now answer before the whole Form the first question I put to you? Have you any knowledge whatsoever of the practical joke which was played on Grimsditch last night?"

Of course, Roger and all the fellows who were sitting down in the Form felt dead certain now that Dexter would do the confession business.

But Dexter didn't do what they expected. He spoke quite clearly and firmly, and it only made it all the more difficult to understand.

"I know nothing whatever about the attack on Grimsditch, sir!" he said.

Just for half a dozen seconds or so you could see that Roger was either annoyed or puzzled, or both. Then he turned to Strong, and put the same question to him.

"No, sir," said Bill definitely.

Roger shrugged his shoulders, and went on to Curtis. He asked exactly the same question of every one of the six, and he got quite clear and straightforward answers from them all.

"Then will you tell us exactly where you were last night at the hour of midnight?" Roger demanded.

And again the Form began to feel a bit excited. Now they would begin to learn something interesting.

"We were out of our dormitory, sir," Dexter began slowly. "I—I think we all forgot about that when you asked the question before, sir. That's because we were thinking of the Grimsditch affair, and we'd really forgotten about last night, sir. We were not in bed, sir."

"I know that," Roger said. "Go on, Dexter. Tell me just what happened?" Again there was a horrible pause, till at last Dexter looked up into Roger's face quite squarely.

"We can't tell you that, sir," he said. "We were just on a little jaunt of our own, but it hadn't anything to do with Grimsditch. I can tell no more, sir."

"Can any of you tell me?" Roger flashed out, and looked down the line.

No one moved. No one spoke till Bill Strong simply jerked out:

"No, sir!"

It was quite sharp and definite, and as though Bill had got to the stage where he simply didn't care a rap. Jolly Roger, or the rest of the Form either.

Roger tackled them again. He made

a bit of a speech, pointing out once more that he was quite willing to accept their word, and that he even understood how it was they'd put down wrong answers.

He would let bygones be bygones, and do his best to help them; but they must understand that at present there was a good strong suspicion that they knew a good deal more about Grimsditch than they had admitted.

It's only fair to Roger to say that he really gave them every chance. He still had it in his mind that they did know something about Grimsditch, just as the rest of the Form had the same feeling.

Otherwise, if it had been just a little lark on their own, why couldn't they own up to it now that it was so plain that Roger knew they'd been out of the dormitory?

But Roger couldn't move them.

"Very well," said Roger, still quite calm, and turned to the rest of the Form. "The detention, so far as the Form is concerned, is now at an end. So far as you six boys are concerned"—he turned to Dexter & Co.—"I will allow you until to-morrow morning to consider your position. If you will then tell me the full story of what took place during the time you were absent from the dormitory last night I will do whatever lies in my power to help you. If you decide not to tell the full truth, I shall have no choice but to report the whole matter to the headmaster, and leave him to deal with the question. You quite understand what that will mean?"

They did understand. So did the rest of the Transitus, and on the whole they felt it was the only fair ending. If these chaps had been out of the school, and couldn't say what they were doing at the very time when old Grimsditch was attacked by six fellows, what could you expect folks to believe?

"You may all go!"

With a wave of his hand, Jolly Roger dismissed the whole Form. Dexter & Co. hung back from the rest. They wanted to talk this over, but all their talking only brought them back to the same point.

Whatever happened, they couldn't drag old Scrimgeour into the mess. He'd get the sack, for a certainty; and, anyhow, they'd given him their solemn word.

"It's up to you, Kid, to find some way out of it," Bill Strong said cheerfully. "Else the whole lot of us will be for the long long trail to-morrow. The Head won't stand it. We'll get sacked as sure as fate!"

"And the fellows will be up against us, too!" Jimmy Curtis groaned. "That's what I hate. Listen!"

They had all gathered quietly in Study No. 10, and so far had seen little or nothing of the other fellows. But the news had spread over the whole school.

A story soon gets a bit twisted, and the yarn most fellows heard was that Jolly Roger had spotted Dexter & Co., and found out that they had trussed old Grimmy up, and he'd given them till to-morrow to confess of their own accord.

And some of the fellows decided that they'd have the confession to-night. A crowd of them gathered together and marched to Study No. 10. There was still a feud on at St. Katie's, but it wasn't against Jolly Roger now.

The real feud at St. Katie's had got turned round, and it was now concentrated against Dexter and his chums.

(Another splendid instalment of this great school story in next week's GEM.)

BOTTLED BUZZES.

It is Rumoured—

That Mrs. Taggles gave Baggy Trimble sixpence for clearing away the snow from her shop-front. The number of pedestrians who now deliberately loiter in the neighbourhood is causing a great nuisance to the traffic.

That in an article in "Tom Merry's Weekly," commenting on the recent Skating Carnival, it stated that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy cut a fine show on the ice. (Figuratively speaking, he did.)

That a concert, to be held in the Rag, is being got up by the juniors for Christmas. Taggles has kindly consented to oblige with, "Wines of the Times" and "Doby, the school page, 'My Old Shako!'"

That in a recent well-contested boat-race between the School House and the New House the former won by a breadth of the coat of paint.

That Dr. Holmes, the Head of St. Jim's, has some two hundred patients under his care. It needs "patience" to cope with such "patients."

That when Percy Mellish asked Baggy Trimble if he knew where flies went in the winter-time, Baggy replied in a "horse" voice, "Neigh!"

That both Jack Blake and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy have both been the recipients of new suits. The former's purchase price was only a mere "Song," but the latter's cost half a dozen "notes."

That Cutts is likely to leave school in the near future to start in business. A responsible position is said to be awaiting him at the local tailor's.

That Arthur Augustus D'Arcy has made a generous offer to any person or persons giving information as to who "blows" the water with water. No information has yet leaked out, neither has the water.

That Toby, the page, is quite an "attractive" member of the Staff at St. Jim's.

That Crooke was recently caught by Knox, the prefect, cutting out of the "Black Bull" in Wayland. He has recently felt the pinch of being nipped in the bud.

That, irrespective of the fact that Baggy Trimble has only three inches of tongue, its sting can be felt a great distance away.

That Fatty Wynn's weight has increased something like three stone since 1914. Has the Local Food Controller any recollection of the fact?

That Arthur Augustus D'Arcy suggests the renaming of Herries' building, Towser, to Puttens, as it is so attached to a "fella's trousers!"

YOUR EDITOR'S CHAT.

Address: Editor, The GEM, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4.

My Dear Chums—

The time is steadily drawing nearer when the issue of the "Gem" containing the opening chapters of our astounding new serial will be in your possession. "The story of a thousand thrills" aptly describes "The Invisible Hand," for no mere exciting narrative has ever been written. I do not desire to spoil your interest by unfolding the plot now, but I am positive that "The Invisible Hand" will interest you to an extraordinary degree. Sensation follows sensation, and

the interest in the story increases with every chapter. The characters you will read about in "The Invisible Hand" are some of the most amazing ever created. There is, for instance, John Sharpe, the great scientific detective, nicknamed the "Needle," whose very name is breathed with fear and hatred by every denizen of the underworld. Another astonishing character you will meet in the story is Iron Hand, the mystery man. Iron Hand is the leader of a secret organisation who stops at nothing to obtain his ends. When I let you into a secret and tell you that "The Invisible Hand" has also been filmed, and that you will be able to see this magnificent story on the screen week by week, I am sure your interest will be greater than ever.

For next week's "Gem" I have secured a really magnificent story entitled: "The Mystery of the Manor." It is something

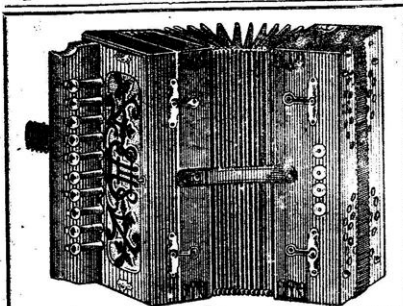
"extra," and I hope and believe that all my readers will come to the same conclusion when they have read it. There will be another splendid art portrait also in our next issue. I am glad to say that this feature has proved immensely popular with you all, and I think that our next portrait will be highly appreciated. Many chums have written to thank me for introducing the Greyfriars "Boys' Herald" to them. "It is a splendid paper" is the general opinion of everybody. I can assure those who are interested that the present issue of the "Boys' Herald" is an excellent one, and well worth the 1d. charged for it.

Your Editor



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PICTURES FOR YOUR DEN.

(Photo: Central News.)

No. 4. **GEORGES CARPENTIER.**

(Another splendid portrait of a popular hero next week. Don't miss it!)