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THE NEW HOUSE "BARRING-OUT!"

(An Incident from the Grand Long Complete School Story Inside).

The NEW HOUSE BARRING OUT

One of
MARTIN CLIFFORD'S
Best Stories.



Grand Long Story of
the Great Barring-Out
at St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 1. Figgins' Reply.

"P OOR old Figgins!"

"It's rotten!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry & Co., of the School House at St. Jim's, were looking, and feeling, quite concerned. As a rule, they were "up against" Figgins & Co., of the New House—their ancient rivals and foes.

But on this especial morning the chums of the School House were feeling very concerned for Figgins, and very sympathetic towards him.

They all agreed that it was "rotten." Indeed, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy averred that it was remarkably rotten.

"Flogging at nine!" said Monty Lowther. "About time we rambled into Hall, you fellows, if we're going to see it."

"Blessed if I want to see it!" growled Manners.

"Wathah not!" said D'Arcy of the Fourth. "In fact, dear boys, I am thinkin' vewy sewiously of wefusin' to see it."

"Can't be done!" said Blake. "We're ordered into Hall to witness a public flogging. The prefects will round us up if we don't turn in."

"I should wefuse to be wounded up by the pwefects, Blako."

"Bow-wow!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Look here, what about staying out?" asked Levison of the Fourth. "If Ratty is going to flog Figgys and Kerr and Wynn, he can do it without our assistance. He wouldn't dare to play the tyrant like this if the Head was here——"

"While the cat's away the wats will play!" said Arthur Augustus.

Tom Merry reflected.

The scene that was going to take place in Big Hall that morning was certainly a most unpleasant one.

Mr. Ratcliff, the Housemaster of the New House, was going to enjoy himself in his own peculiar way; but it was safe to say that nobody else at St. Jim's would be pleased.

The Head being absent, on the sick list, Mr. Ratcliff, as senior Housemaster, was temporarily Head of St. Jim's.

Mr. Railton, of the School House, was to some extent under his authority; though he had sharply declined to tolerate any interference from "Ratty" in the affairs of his House.

If Mr. Ratcliff had undertaken to flog any School House fellow, Mr. Railton certainly would have intervened.

But Figgins & Co. belonged to the New House, and in that House there was no one to say Mr. Ratcliff nay.

The whole school had been commanded to assemble for the flogging, which was to be a very impressive scene. But there were few, if any, who were willing to be present.

The School House juniors looked at one another as Levison of the Fourth made his suggestion. Cardew and Clive. Levison's chums, nodded assent at once.

"Let's chance it," said Clive. "It will be one in the eye for Ratty if he doesn't get a crowd."

"Yaas, wathah! But——"

"I'm stayin' out, for one," said Cardew. "Let's clear."

"But Mr. Wailton has ordained us into Hall!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy doubtfully. "I was thinkin' of wefusin' to attend, but——"

"Railton shouldn't toe the line to that extent," said Cardew. "But if he does, we won't! I'm off!"

Kildare of the Sixth looked out of the School House doorway.

"Time for Hall, you kids!" he called out.

"Are we bound to turn up, Kildare?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yes, of course!"

"But, I say——"

"Housemaster's orders!" said Kildare, and he turned away.

"Housemaster be blowed!" said Cardew cheerfully. "I'm off!" And Ralph Reckness Cardew shoved his hands into his trousers-pockets and strolled away, whistling.

"Same here!" said Levison.

Tom Merry nodded.

"Let's risk it!" he said.

"Yaas, wathah! I'm willin' to wisk it."

"Come on!" said Blake.

The crowd of School House juniors moved off. Other fellows were crowding into the House. But a good many of them joined Tom Merry, and moved off with him, catching on to the idea at once.

The juniors were very much down on Mr. Horace Ratcliff and his tyrannical ways, and the idea of boycotting the flogging caught on at once.

Big Hall gradually filled.

Mr. Railton, the School House master, was there, his face very grave. The other masters were present. All of them wore serious looks. None approved of Mr. Ratcliff's methods; but they felt that they were bound to support his authority in the absence of the Head.

The Sixth Form were all in their places, likewise the Fifth. None of the seniors had thought of "boycotting" the affair.

But less than half the Shell and the Fourth turned up, though the Third were all there.

And it was noticeable that the New House portion of the Shell and the Fourth was represented only by half a dozen fellows—Clampe, and Chowle, and two or three more.

Figgins & Co., the prospective victims, were not there—Redfern and Owen were not there—a crowd of others were not there.

There was a slight buzz in Hall, as the tall, angular figure of Mr. Ratcliff entered.

The New House master glanced round him sourly. He came across to where Mr. Railton was standing.

"It is nine o'clock!" he said sharply.

"I am aware of it, Mr. Ratcliff."

"The school has not assembled."

"No doubt the boys are coming in."

"I shall see that the boys of my House attend, Mr. Railton. You will kindly see to the boys of your House."

Mr. Railton seemed to swallow something with difficulty. But he nodded his head.

"I will see to it!" he said. He glanced round at Kildare of the Sixth. "Kildare, will you kindly see that all members of the School House take their places?"

"Certainly, sir."

The St. Jim's captain left the Hall.

It was some little time before he returned. The truants were scattered about the school, and apparently did not want to be found. The prefect had to hunt them far and wide.

But they were rounded up at last. The Terrible Three—Tom Merry, and Manners, and Lowther of the Shell—came in, looking rather grim. Their idea of boycotting the affair

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had been nipped in the bud. They had to obey the orders of their head prefect.

Blake and Herries, Digby and D'Arcy, came in next, looking very ruffled. Levison and Clive and Cardew followed.

Then the others came in, and Kildare brought up the rear, looking considerably annoyed. The truants had given him a good deal of trouble.

The School House fellows were all in their places at last. But the New House places were not filled.

Monteith of the Sixth, the head prefect of the New House, had been despatched to round them up. He was long in returning, and Mr. Ratcliff waited with great impatience. In this delay, Mr. Ratcliff discerned a new slight to his authority, and it incensed him. He picked up the birch, which was to be used on Figgins & Co. Taggles, the porter, who had come in to "hoist" the culprits, stood waiting with a stolid face. Still the absentees of the New House did not come.

Monteith came at last, and he came alone.

Mr. Ratcliff fixed an angry, glittering eye upon him.

"Where are the boys, Monteith? Why have you not sent them in?"

Monteith coughed.

"They refused to come, sir."

"What?"

"They refuse—"

"Nonsense!" shouted Mr. Ratcliff.

"They said so, sir."

"Nonsense! Go and fetch them here at once."

Monteith gave an almost imperceptible shrug of the shoulders and quitted Big Hall again. Tom Merry & Co. looked at one another.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "It's a webbellion, you know!"

"Good for them!" murmured Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

It was full five minutes before Monteith of the Sixth reappeared. Again he came alone.

"Well, Monteith?" snapped Mr. Ratcliff.

"They won't come, sir," said Monteith. "I've ordered Figgins, Kerr, Wynn, and the rest to come, and they refuse, and the other juniors are standing by them."

There was a buzz of excitement in Hall.

"Silence!" thundered Mr. Ratcliff. "Monteith, return to the New House, and tell those impertinent young rascals that if they do not obey me instantly I will flog every boy in the House!"

"Very well, sir."

Monteith departed once more.

There was a breathless hush while he was gone. Some of the School House crowd were grinning. There was a faint flicker of a smile even on Taggles' stolid face.

Every neck was craned forward as Monteith's footsteps were heard returning. The New House prefect came in—alone.

"You have not brought the boys, Monteith!" said Mr. Ratcliff in a grinding voice.

"I gave them your message, sir."

"Well?"

"And—and—and Figgins' answer was—was—"

"What did Figgins say, Monteith?"

"I—I hardly care to tell you, sir—"

"Tell me at once, Monteith! I command you!"

"Very well!" Monteith's eyes glimmered. "Figgins said that you could go and eat coke, sir!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came in an echoing roar from the crowd in Hall. Figgins' reply to his Housemaster quite spoiled the gravity of the proceedings.

"Silence!" shrieked Mr. Ratcliff.

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

"Silence!" exclaimed Mr. Ratcliff.

There was silence then. Mr. Ratcliff gave a furious look round the crowded Hall.

"The school will remain assembled while I deal with this matter!" he snapped out.

And then Mr. Ratcliff whisked out of Big Hall with a thunderous brow to deal with the rebels of the New House himself.

CHAPTER 2.

Rank Rebellion.

"WE'VE done it now!"

Fatty Wynn made that remark.

"We have—" said Kerr.

"No doubt about that!" said George Figgins.

"And I'm jolly glad! The giddy die is cast, my infants!"

"Jacta est alca!" said Kerr, with a grin.

"And now for trouble!" remarked Pratt of the Fourth.

"Ratty will come for us himself."

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"Let him come!"

"But I say—" murmured Digges doubtfully.

"Don't say anything, old bean," said Redfern of the Fourth. "We're all standing by Figgins—and that's enough!"

"Shoulder to shoulder!" said Owen.

"Hear, hear!"

There were a score or more of New House juniors grouped about the doorway of the New House.

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn—the famous Co.—were the leaders in the revolt, and they had plenty of supporters.

During the few days that the Head had been absent Mr. Ratcliff had made himself obnoxious enough to the School House fellows, but in the New House he had fairly made life not worth living.

The sentence of a flogging for Figgins & Co. had been the limit. That sentence the famous Co. were determined not to submit to, and the flame of revolt spread far and wide as soon as it started.

Certainly it was a risky proceeding, a revolt in the House. If the Head had been at home the fellows would never have dreamed of it. But, as Figgins pointed out, if the Head had been at home there would have been no occasion for it.

It was because the Head was away and Mr. Ratcliff's petty tyranny was unrestrained that the revolt had come about.

Figgins & Co. were in a determined mood; but their hearts were beating rather fast as they waited for the rejoinder to the message they had sent their Housemaster through Monteith of the Sixth.

They were determined to resist; but it was no light matter to resist a Housemaster, even in the absence of the Head.

From the doorway they watched the quadrangle in the clear sunlight of the winter morning.

"Here he comes!" murmured Kerr.

"Here comes Ratty!"

"Stand up to him!" said Figgins.

"Yes, rather!"

The angular figure of the New House master came across the quad with quick, jerky strides. His face was dark with passion as he came. The juniors watched him grimly as he jerked across the quad and jerked up the steps of the New House. He came jerking in.

"Boys, go into Hall at once!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff.

No answer.

"You hear me, Figgins?"

"I hear you, sir," said George Figgins quietly.

"Then obey me!"

Silence.

"Figgins, Kerr, Wynn! You are the ringleaders in this!" exclaimed Mr. Ratcliff in a choking voice.

"Certainly, sir!" said Kerr.

"I shall send you home as soon as your punishment has been administered," said Mr. Ratcliff. "I doubt whether you will be allowed to return to this school. Now, go to Hall at once."

"Rats!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"Rats!"

"Go home, Ratty!" yelled a voice from the rear of the crowd.

Mr. Ratcliff stood and panted.

Rebellion—rank rebellion—had come, and now that he had provoked it, now that it had come, Horace Ratcliff did not know how to deal with it. Like most weak natures, Mr. Ratcliff had a strong leaning to tyranny—he delighted in taking what he considered a strong line. His idea of upholding authority was to nag and bully and crush. But when he had provoked resistance he was quite at a loss.

He stood and blinked at the rebellious juniors.

"Do—do—do I hear you aright?" he gasped at last.

"That depends, sir," said Figgins coolly. "If you heard me say 'Rats!' you heard me aright."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Figgins! You insolent young scoundrel—"

"Oh, can it!" said Figgins.

"Wha-a-at?"

"Can it!"

Mr. Ratcliff spluttered. He had never been told before to "can" his remarks; perhaps he did not think they were worthy of being canned.

There was a loud chortle from the New House crowd.

"Figgins! You—you—you—"

"Buzz away, little fly!" said Fatty Wynn.

"Eh?"

"Go home, Ratty!" roared a dozen voices.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Ratcliff pulled himself together. He did not quite know what to do, but it was clear that something had to be done.

He made a jump at Figgins, and grasped him by the collar.

Perhaps he hoped that if he dragged off the ringleader by main force the rest would follow.

But if that was Mr. Ratcliff's hope, he was disappointed. Figgins did not submit tamely. He struggled.

"Back up, you fellows!" he shouted, as Mr. Ratcliff tore him towards the doorway.

"Play up, you fellows!" roared Kerr.

There was a rush. A leg was hooked in Mr. Ratcliff's as a dozen hands grasped his gown.

Greatly to his surprise, Mr. Ratcliff found himself rolled over on the floor. He rolled and roared.

"Down with Ratty!" yelled Redfern.

"Hurrah!"

"Oh! Ah! Ow! Ooooch! Help!" shrieked Mr. Ratcliff.

"Roll him out!"

"Kick him out!"

Many hands were laid on Horace Ratcliff, and many hands made light work. Mr. Ratcliff was rolled out of the doorway, and rolled down the steps. He landed in the quadrangle with a bump.

"Pelt him!" yelled Owen.

"Oh dear! Oh! Ah! Oh! Ooooop!"

Two or three missiles came whizzing from the House. Mr. Ratcliff picked himself up, spluttering. He had been kicked out of his own House—kicked out by rebellious juniors! It was incredible, but it was true! He lay panting and palpitating, glaring furiously at the crowd of excited faces in the doorway.

"You—you—you—" he spluttered. "You—you—Ooooch!" An apple smote Mr. Ratcliff on his prominent nose. "Yaroooh!"

"Goal!" roared Redfern.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Ratcliff turned and fled.

CHAPTER 3. In Garrison.

TOM MERRY & CO., over in the School House, went in to lessons that morning in a state of great excitement.

There was rebellion at St. Jim's—rank rebellion, though it was fortunately confined to the New House.

In the School House all was orderly.

But there was tremendous excitement. All the sympathy of the juniors was with the rebels; and probably the seniors agreed with them more or less, though they did not say so.

There were many vacant places in the Shell and the Fourth that morning; the New House portion of those Forms did not turn up to lessons. The New

House Third were in their places; Figgins had refused to allow the fags to take part in the risky proceedings, though many of them had been willing. And the New House Fifth and Sixth-Formers, of course, being seniors, could not think of such a disordering proceeding as joining in a revolt. But nearly all the New House Shell and Fourth were in it; they had locked the big door of the New House, and bidden defiance to the universe generally.

Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, made no remark on the vacant places in his Form; neither did Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth. It was Mr. Ratcliff's business to attend to the rebels.

Mr. Railton, who was taking the Sixth, found his Form complete; so did Mr. Ratcliff, who was master of the Fifth. Mr. Ratcliff was very late in taking the Fifth Form that morning, however. And the Fifth found him in one of his most savage and ratty tempers.

He had been compelled to "let up" on Figgins & Co. for the present. He had had to let the rebellion go on its own way—and the knowledge that the rebels were so far triumphing was gall and wormwood to the tyrant of St. Jim's.

Lessons went on in the Form-room; but there was an intense excitement that the Form-masters could scarcely suppress.

In the New House the state of affairs was strange enough.

The Form-rooms being all in the School House, the New House was generally deserted during lessons. Now it was buzzing with animation. More than a score of fellows were backing up Figgins & Co.; and so far, at least, they were all united and

determined. Only a few weak-kneed characters like Chowls and Clampe refused to take part in the revolt.

Figgins proved himself a good general.

After the "booting out" of Mr. Ratcliff, Figgins slammed the big door of the New House, locked and bolted it, and put the chain on. He anticipated that Mr. Ratcliff might return with the New House seniors to support him; and in that case a hand-to-hand combat was very likely to go against the juniors. Figgins was prompt in taking precautions.

"Get round and lock and bar all the doors," he directed, "and all the downstairs windows! Sharp!"

And his orders were promptly obeyed.

The anticipated attack did not come, however. Either Mr. Ratcliff was biding his time, or he simply did not know what to do. Possibly he hoped that if the rebels were given time to reflect the rebellion might "peter out" of its own accord. At all events, he had taken the Fifth as usual, and the New House was left to itself for the morning.

But the rebellion was very far indeed from petering out. Their early success had encouraged the rebels, and they were more determined than ever.

"It's a barring-out!" Figgins explained to his enthusiastic followers. "We can't let Ratty spring the prefects on us—and he might get the School House prefects to back him up, too. We're going to bar him out of the House."

"Hear, hear!" roared the rebels.

"If he chooses to come to terms, well and good," said Figgins. "If he does not, we bar him out till the Head comes home."

"Bravo!"

"I—I say, Figgins—"

"Well, Fatty?"

"What about grub?" asked Fatty Wynn anxiously.

"Bother grub—"

"But, I say, we can't hold the House without grub!" said the fat Fourth-Former. "We shall have to have meals, you know."

"There's most likely grub enough for a week in the House," said Figgins. "We shall have to see about provisions, of course. Let's go and see Mrs. Kenwigg now."

Figgins & Co. proceeded to interview the house dame.

They found Mrs. Kenwigg in her room, in a state of great hurry and excitement at the unprecedented events that were going on around her.



Many hands were laid on Horace Ratcliff, and many hands made light work. Mr. Ratcliff was rolled out of the doorway, and rolled down the steps. He landed in the quadrangle with a bump. "Oh dear! Oh! Ah! Oooop!" he roared. He lay panting and palpitating, glaring furiously at the crowd of excited faces in the doorway.

"You—you dreadful boys!" was Mrs. Kenwigg's greeting. "Not at all, ma'am," said Figgins politely. "It's all Ratty's fault—"

"You must not speak of your Housemaster like that, Figgins," said Mrs. Kenwigg severely.

Figgins laughed.

"Never mind Ratty, ma'am," he said. "We're taking control of the House now. There will most likely be a lot of scrapping later on, and you had better get across to the School House, ma'am. Mrs. Minnys will take you in. Hand me your keys before you go."

"Master Figgins!"

"I'm taking charge of the tommy," explained Figgins. "The garrison will be put on rations."

"Oh, I say, Figgy—" began Fatty Wynn. The prospect of rations did not seem to please the fat Fourth-Former.

"Shut up, Fatty! Now, Mrs. Kenwigg—"

"Master Figgins—"

"Better clear off before the enemy attacks," said Figgins. "There may be windows broken, and things flying about. Take the servants away with you. Only the garrison is to remain in the House."

"Bless my soul!" murmured Mrs. Kenwigg.

But the good dame saw the wisdom of complying with Figgy's suggestion. A door was unbarred for the exit of Mrs. Kenwigg and her astonished staff, and barred again behind them.

Then George Figgins made a careful inventory of the provisions in the house, and established a system of rationing—with deadly threats to Fatty Wynn should he be found exceeding the limit.

After that, a football was produced, and the rebels of the New House played footer up and down the passage, which they regarded as a distinct improvement on lessons as an occupation for the morning.

Dinner, in the dining-room of the New House, was a much more free and easy meal than was customary.

Without Mr. Ratcliff's grim face, or the presence of the prefects, the New House juniors found themselves decidedly more at their ease. They were quite enjoying themselves, when there was a loud knock at the door, and the alarm was given.

"Ratty again!"

"Line up!" shouted Figgins.

And the rebels crowded to the Hall window, most of them with cricket-stumps or prefects' ashplants in their hands, ready to resist an attack if the attack came.

CHAPTER 4.

The Attack on the New House.

MR. RATCLIFF came up the steps of the New House, and knocked at the locked door.

Morning lessons were over, and the quadrangle was crowded with School House fellows. Most of them had drawn near the New House, to observe the rebels' stronghold. Every fellow at St. Jim's was keenly interested in Figgins & Co.'s revolt.

Mr. Ratcliff was calm now—with a deadly calmness. Only the glitter in his eyes told of the rage within.

At the big window beside the door Figgins & Co. crowded, looking through the glass at their Housemaster.

Mr. Ratcliff raised his hand with a commanding gesture.

"Open the door, Figgins!" he called out.

"We're keeping it locked, sir."

"I command you, Figgins!"

Figgins threw open the window. Mr. Ratcliff came closer to it, his eyes glittering at the juniors within. Figgins eyed him coolly. He was not in the least afraid of Mr. Ratcliff, especially after the weakness the Housemaster had already shown in dealing with the revolt.

"Are you ready to come to terms, sir?" he asked.

"What—what—"

"We're prepared to state our terms—"

"You insolent young rascal—"

"You insolent old rascal!" retorted Figgins undauntedly.

"What—what—"

"Better take it calmly, sir," suggested Kerr. "We mean business. We don't want this to go on if you don't!"

"I command you to return to obedience at once!" thundered Mr. Ratcliff.

"Only on our own terms," said Figgins. "We want a clear understanding. No floggings, no canings, and no punishment of any kind for what's happened this morning. On those terms we'll chuck it. But they'll have to be written down, and signed by Mr. Railton as a witness. It's your own fault if we don't trust you, sir."

Mr. Ratcliff choked.

"Figgins, I make no terms with disobedient young rascals! I shall punish you all severely for this outrageous conduct! You three will be flogged and sent home, the rest severely caned—"

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"Oh, cut it out!" said Figgins contemptuously.

"Go home, Ratty!" roared the rebels.

"Go and chop chips!"

Mr. Ratcliff gasped. There was a loud laugh from the School House crowd standing at a little distance. They were enjoying the scene.

"Figgins," gasped Mr. Ratcliff, "you—you are aware that it is dinner-time?"

"We were having our dinner when you butted along, sir," assented Figgins.

"And I'm jolly well going to finish mine!" said Fatty Wynn. "I'm not staying here to listen to Ratty's gas." And David Llewellyn Wynn rolled back to the dining-room.

"The—the boys must return here to dinner—I must do so!" said Mr. Ratcliff. "I command you to open the door, Figgins!"

"Command away!" smiled Figgins.

"Unless you admit me to the House at once, I shall order the prefects to deal with you by force!"

"Go ahead! If the prefects take a hand, I dare say we can give them as good as they give us," said Figgins.

"For the last time, Figgins—"

"Rats!"

Mr. Ratcliff, beside himself with rage, struck at the junior through the open window.

Kerr lunged forward with a bat, and knocked his hand aside, and there was a yell of pain from the Housemaster.

"Have some more, sir?" asked Kerr invitingly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Redfern lunged out with a stump, and Mr. Ratcliff jumped back from the window just in time. Figgins slammed it down as the Housemaster stumbled back into the quad.

"Now look out for the merry performance!" he said.

"We're ready!"

"Ready, ay, ready!" grinned Kerr.

Mr. Ratcliff turned to a group of New House seniors who had followed him across the quad. Monteith and Baker and Gray of the Sixth, all prefects, were there, and some of the New House Fifth. They were looking very troubled and undecided. They wanted their dinner—which was in the New House. But they did not particularly want trouble with the rebels. Indeed, they were very much down on Ratty and his methods in their own minds, though they did not venture to say so.

"Monteith," rapped out Mr. Ratcliff, "you and the other prefects will effect an entrance into the House, and reduce those young rascals to obedience!"

"Oh!" said Monteith.

"I give you free leave to use any amount of force that may be necessary."

"That's all very well, sir," said Baker; "but—"

"You will not argue with me, Baker; you will do as I direct you!" snapped the Housemaster.

Baker bit his lip.

"Kindly lose no time," added Mr. Ratcliff.

"There will be some damage done, sir, if they refuse to open the door," said Monteith. "We shall have to break in a window."

"Do so."

"Very well, sir."

Monteith of the Sixth walked away, and returned with a hammer borrowed from Taggles, the porter. He came up the steps of the New House, hammer in hand, with Baker and Gray at his heels, and two or three Fifth-Formers.

The juniors eyed him from within.

"Now, open the door, and quit this fooling, Figgins!" Monteith called through the hall window.

"Rats!"

"We shall force a way in, Figgins—"

"You jolly well won't!" retorted Figgins. "Because, you see, we jolly well sha'n't let you!"

"That's enough!"

Having been given leave by his Housemaster to do as much damage as was necessary, Monteith wasted no further time. He was hungry, and he wanted his dinner, and that spurred him on much more than devotion to Mr. Ratcliff.

Crash!

A pane of glass flew out, and scattered into fragments in the Hall within.

Crash, crash, crash!

The juniors crowded back from the splintering glass.

Some of them were looking very grave now. Matters were taking a decidedly serious turn, and they realised it.

When the glass was knocked out Monteith put his hand through to feel for the window-fastening.

Crack!

A cricket-stump caught him across the wrist, and the prefect jerked out his hand with a howl of pain.

"Sorry!" said Figgins politely. "But you've got to keep your paws to yourself, Monteith!"

"You young rascal!" roared the Sixth-Former.

"If you're backing up Ratty, you must look out for trouble, Monteith. You're not coming in here!"

Monteith rubbed his aching wrist and glared at the juniors. His temper was never very sweet, and it was positively ferocious now. He gripped the hammer, and crashed blows upon the window sashes. Under that hefty attack the sashes were knocked out in a very short time, and the way was open to the assailants.

"Now stand back, you young scoundrels!" exclaimed Monteith. "If you dare to lay a finger on me while I'm getting in, I'll skin you!"

"You'll get something more than a finger laid on you if you butt in here," said Redfern.

Heedless of that, Monteith drove his head and shoulders through the window-frame, and began to clamber in. His comrades backed him up.

Figgins gripped his stump; but he hesitated to bring it down on James Monteith's unprotected head. But Redfern, who had brought a pillow from the dormitory, rushed forward.

He delivered a terrific swipe, and the pillow smote Monteith full in the face, and swept him back out of the window again. Monteith stumbled over Baker and Gray, spluttering breathlessly.

"Well hit, Kerr!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh! Ah! Ow! I—I—I'll— Groogh! I'll—"

"Keep out, Baker!" shouted Figgins, as Baker of the Sixth thrust himself in at the window.

Baker came on valiantly, heedless of two or three painful lunges from the business ends of cricket-stumps. Redfern swiped him with the pillow, but still he came on, and dropped inside the window.

"Collar him!"

Baker went down on the floor in the grasp of five or six juniors. He was rolled over and sat upon and pinned securely. Gray was in the window now, and Figgins, feeling that the crisis was too pressing for ceremony now, swiped at him with his stump. Gray of the Sixth yelled and jumped back. Monteith came on again, and a cricket-bat jammed on his chest, and he reeled away. The rebels were in deadly earnest now.

Monteith & Co. hung back from the window. If the rebels defended it resolutely in this way they knew that they could not get in—and there was no doubt any longer about Figgins' resolution.

"Go in at once!" shouted Mr. Ratcliff, who, like a prudent general, was surveying the proceedings from the rear. In his military tactics Mr. Ratcliff resembled the celebrated Duke of Plaza Toro, who led his regiment from behind because he found it less exciting. "Monteith! Gray! I command you to enter at once—"

"We can't!" howled Monteith.

"I order you—"

"Can't you see that we can't?" yelled Monteith. He was bruised in several places rather severely, and his temper flared him.

"Monteith, how dare you—"

"Oh, rot!"

With that disrespectful rejoinder James Monteith stalked away, openly and evidently giving up the matter as a bad job.

Baker of the Sixth inside the fortress suddenly appeared to view at the window—in the grasp of many hands. He was rolled out, and he rolled over on the steps, yelling.

The broken window was crammed with victorious juniors, yelling and cat-calling.

"Come on, Ratty!" shrieked Pratt of the Fourth. "Put your long nose in here, Ratty, and see what you'll get!"

"Why don't you come on, Ratty?"

"Yah! Funk!"

Mr. Ratcliff spluttered. His prefects were stalking away, only too plainly fed up with the affair, and deaf to his commanding voice. There was nothing for Mr. Ratcliff to do but to stalk away in their wake. Which he did, after shaking a furious fist at the yelling rebels.

The School House crowd yelled with laughter as he retreated. Tom Merry & Co. had enjoyed the scene immensely.

CHAPTER 5.

Ratty's Last Resource.

"B Al Jove!"

As soon as the assailants were gone Tom Merry & Co. crowded up on the broad steps of the New House and looked in at the smashed Hall window. But they did not come as enemies, and they were greeted cheerfully by the garrison.

"B Al Jove! Goin' stwong—what?" asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, grinning.

"Looks like it!" said Figgins cheerfully.

"How the thump is this going to end?" asked Tom Merry.

"Blessed if I know! Ratty will have to give in!"

"If he doesn't, we're keeping it up until the Hoag comes home, anyhow!" said Kerr.

"More power to your elbow!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "But look out for Ratty. He was mumbling something about the police as he passed us in the quad."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Figgins whistled.

"The police! My hat! He couldn't call in the police to deal with a school row! They haven't any authority here."

"Let him call them!" said Redfern recklessly. "They jolly well won't make us give in!"

"No fear!"

"Sorry to shut off your view, you School House bounders," said Figgins politely. "But we've got to barricade this window. Yank Ratty's desk out of his study, you fellows!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a rush of the rebels to Mr. Ratcliff's study. A dozen fellows trundled out the big desk.

"My hat!" murmured Tom Merry. "I wonder what Ratty would think of that? It won't do his giddy desk much good!"

"Wathah not!" chuckled Arthur Augustus.

The New House rebels apparently were not worrying about doing Mr. Ratcliff's desk much good. They trundled and rolled and banged it along the hall. Several drawers fell out and papers were scattered and trampled underfoot. The desk crashed up against the window, pretty effectively barring it against further attack. A number of chairs were dragged from studies, and a form or two from the dining-room added to the barricade. Interstices in the barrier were filled with large volumes brought from Mr. Ratcliff's bookshelves.

Tom Merry & Co. strolled away and left the rebels to their work. The dinner-bell was ringing in the School House.

In the School House dining-room that day there were a number of guests. Dinner in the New House was an impossibility for anyone outside the ranks of the rebels, so Mr. Ratcliff had had to arrange for it in the other House. The tables were rather crowded, as all the New House seniors were present, as well as the Third Form fags and a few juniors. Mr. Railton had raised no objection—indeed, he could scarcely do so in the peculiar circumstances. But his face was very grim at the Sixth Form table. Mr. Ratcliff also lunched at that table, with a face like a basilisk. He did not utter a word during the meal; he was too furious to speak. He was keenly conscious, too, of the ridicule of his position.

He had "started in" to govern St. Jim's with a strong hand, and the result was that he was turned out of his own House, and that his quarters were in the possession of a gang of rebels—junior schoolboys, who ought to have trembled at his frown—but wouldn't and didn't! It was a very painful and humiliating position for any Housemaster, and the knowledge that he had brought it upon himself was no solace.

After the School House dinner Mr. Ratcliff followed Mr. Railton to his study.

It was as much as he could do to assume an outward aspect of civility towards the School House master. In his usual suspicious way, he suspected Mr. Railton of secretly gloating over his difficulties—of feeling, in fact, as Mr. Ratcliff would have felt had the positions been reversed.

"Pray sit down, Ratcliff," said the School House master politely.

Mr. Ratcliff sat down.

"This is a very unfortunate state of affairs, Mr. Railton," he began.

"Very unfortunate!" agreed the School House master dryly.

"I cannot help thinking that these rebellious young rascals have been encouraged by your attitude, Mr. Railton."

"Really, sir—"

"Your conduct towards me, sir—"

Mr. Railton raised his hand.

"I have declined to allow you to interfere in my House," he said. "I am bound to hold to that. If there has been trouble, it was you that sought it, not I, Mr. Ratcliff. But I hardly think that that incident has affected the boys of your House. They have revolted against what they consider injustice."

"And what you also consider injustice, no doubt!" sneered the New House master.

"I will express no opinion on that point."

"In such a state of affairs," said Mr. Ratcliff, "I imagine that I am at least entitled to the support of my colleague."

"Quite so!"

"I intend to bring these young rascals to reason. Force is the only remedy. The prefects of my House cannot deal with them unaided. I require the assistance of the School House prefects. I shall, therefore, order them to support Monteith and the rest in dealing with the rebels."

"I fear, Mr. Ratcliff, that I cannot permit it. Kindly do not give such an order to my prefects. I shall be obliged to countermand it."

Mr. Ratcliff gritted his teeth.

"You refuse me your support, then?"

"In that respect, yes. This is not a matter, in my opinion, to be dealt with by violence."

"You would advise me to give way to a set of insolent and rebellious schoolboys?" sneered Mr. Ratcliff.

"I would advise you to deal with them justly. It is unfortunate that the affair has gone so far, but it is not beyond remedy yet. You intended to flog Figgins and his friends for an offence already forgiven by the Head. I am not surprised that they have rebelled. There is still time to—"

Mr. Ratcliff rose to his feet, with a bitter look on his thin face.

"I am aware that you are only too glad to see my authority defied, and the school in a state of turmoil, Railton," he said.

"You have no right whatever to say so; I deplore the present state of affairs quite as much as you do," rejoined Mr. Railton tartly. "But I repeat that force and violence cannot possibly settle the matter, and that they will only drive the affair from bad to worse. Rescind your sentence upon Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, and—"

"That is enough! As you refuse me your support, I shall give no orders to the School House prefects, being well aware that you would incite them to disobedience. I shall have recourse to the police."

Mr. Railton started.

"The police!" he exclaimed.

"Certainly. That is my only resource now."

"You cannot intend to disgrace the school, Mr. Ratcliff, by calling in the police to deal with the boys!" exclaimed the School House master.

"The responsibility rests upon you, sir, for refusing me your aid!" said Mr. Ratcliff, with a sour smile. "I am now about to proceed to the police-station in Rylcombe."

And Mr. Ratcliff stalked out of the study, and nearly fell over Baggy Trimble, of the Fourth, who was suspiciously near the door. He paused a moment to box Trimble's ears, and strode on.

"Ow! Rotter!" gasped Trimble.

The fat junior rolled away in search of Tom Merry & Co. with startling news. He came up to the chums of the School House in the quadrangle, rubbing his fat ear.

"Ratty's gone for the peelers!" he gasped.

"Bai Jove!"

"Then the brute meant it!" said Monty Lowther.

"How do you know, Trimble?" demanded Blake.

"I heard him—"

"Bai Jove! You have been listenin' again, Twimble, you woltah!"

"Nothing of the sort," said Baggy warmly. "That beast Ratty thought I was listening, and biffed me as he came out! But I wasn't! I just happened to hear the old hunks say—"

"Wats!"

"The bobbies!" said Jack Blake, with a deep breath. "My hat! We're going to have a giddy afternoon! How jolly lucky it's a half-holiday! It would be simply awful to be stuck in a Form-room missing this!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry cut across to the New House, and rapped on the barricade at the broken window.

"Figgy!"

"Hallo!"

"Ratty's gone for the peelers!"

"Thanks, old infant! Let 'em all come!"

Tom Merry rejoined his chums. It was, as Blake had remarked, lucky that it was a half-holiday. It was likely to be the most exciting half-holiday that had ever been experienced at St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 6.

Too Polite!

FATTY WYNN wore a worried look.

Figgins and Kerr were cool and calm; there was keen excitement in the New House, but the example of the leaders encouraged the rank and file. So long as Figgins was cool and determined, there was little danger of his followers falling away.

But Fatty Wynn looked worried.

He "mooched" about in the Hall of the New House, with a wrinkle in his fat brow, greatly troubled. Some of the garrison noticed it at last, and some of them bestowed sniffs on David Llewellyn Wynn.

"Cold feet, what?" said Jimson of the Shell.

"Worryin' over Ratty fetchin' the peelers!" said French.

"Dash it all, keep your pecker up, Wynn!"

Fatty Wynn did not heed; he did not seem to hear. He rolled to the barricaded window, and looked out through a

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slit in the barrier, with a deeply wrinkled and worried brow.

Smack! Figgy's hand smote him on the shoulder, with great heartiness, and the fat Fourth-Former gave a yelp.

"Ow! What—"

"Cheerio!" said Figgins. "What are you looking down in the mouth for, Fatty? Is that your way of setting a giddy example to the rank and file?"

Fatty Wynn rubbed his shoulder.

"I'm a bit anxious!" he confessed.

"What rot!"

"You see, Figgy—"

"Blessed if I ever expected you to show the white feather, Fatty!" said Kerr, in wonder.

David Llewellyn Wynn glared at the Scottish junior.

"Who's showing the white feather?" he bawled.

"Looks as if you are, old bean."

"You silly owl—"

"Well, what are you worrying about, then?" demanded Kerr. "We know Ratty's gone for the bobbies. He'll bring along P.-c. Crump, of Rylcombe! Are we afraid of old Crump?"

"No jolly fear!" said Figgins emphatically.

"Bother old Crump!" said Fatty Wynn irritably. "Who's bothering about old Crump? What rot!"

"Then what's the trouble?" asked Figgins, realising that it was not a case of "wind up," and that Fatty had some other matter on his plump mind.

Fatty Wynn gave him a serious and almost mournful look.

"Mind, I'm not thinking of giving in," he said.

"I should jolly well think not," said Figgins warmly.

"Not for worlds," said Fatty. "We're in for it now, and I'm for going right through with it. But—"

"But—"

"What about grub?"

"Grub!" repeated Figgins.

"Yes, grub. I'm hungry!" said Fatty Wynn pathetically.

"You've had your dinner," growled Figgins. "You've scoffed up your rations to the last crumb."

"I know! That wasn't enough."

"It will have to be enough, old top, so long as the giddy siege lasts," chuckled Figgins; "and if it goes on a long time we shall soon come down to half-rations."

Fatty Wynn shuddered.

"I've only had a packet of toffee and some apples and a chunk of butterscotch since dinner," he said. "Just staved off starvation, you know. But—but what shall we feel like presently?"

"Bow-wow!"

"That's what I was trying to think out, Figgy," said Fatty Wynn earnestly. "We simply must have enough grub. You can't run a rebellion, or anything else, without laying a solid foundation. There's grub in the tuckshop—if we could get at it. What do you think?"

"We can't," said Figgins. "If one of us nips out of the House, he will be bagged at once by the prefects."

"That's a cert!" remarked Redfern.

"And if Ratty gets hold of one of us on his own, he will make a giddy example of him," said Kerr. "There'll be a record flogging. We've got to be jolly careful to stick all together."

Fatty Wynn sighed.

"You're right," he assented. "I know! But—but I wonder if some of those School House bounders would hand us some grub in."

"Railton wouldn't let them chip in," said Figgins. "But you can try if you like. There's Gussy wandering about yonder. I'll give him a call, and if he'll bring you a bag of tarts from the tuckshop, Fatty, you shall be made happy, old fat bean!"

And Figgins howled from the window!

"Gussy! Gussy! Gustavus!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was strolling quite near the New House, waiting for the exciting development when Ratty should return with official forces.

He turned his eyeglass on the window inquiringly.

"Bai Jove! Did you call, deah boys?"

"This way, Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came up the steps of the New House, and stopped outside the dilapidated Hall window—stepping very carefully among fragments of broken glass.

"Yaas, deah boy! Anythin' I can do for you?"

"Fatty wants you to smuggle him some grub from the tuckshop."

"Bai Jove!"

"I'll pass the tin out to you, D'Arcy," said Fatty Wynn.

"I'm awfully sowwy, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus.

"Mr. Wailton has vewy stwictly forbidden us to back you fellows up in any way. Tom Mewwy was goin' to bwing you some tuck, and our Housemastah nabbed him and was down on him like a ton of bwicks. I'm awfully sowwy!"

"Bother your Housemaster!" growled Fatty.

"Weally, Wynn—"

"Tell your dashed Housemaster to go and eat coke, same as we've told ours!" snorted the fat Fourth-Former.

"Wats! Mr. Wailton is vewy different fwom old Watty, and I should certainly nevah dweam of tellin' him to go and eat coke," said Arthur Augustus warily. "I wegard the suggestion as widiculous, Wynn."

"Will you fetch me some fuck, you image?" roared Wynn.

"Undah the circs, deah boy, it is imposa."

"Fathead!"

"It is wathah wude to call a fellow a fathead, Wynn, when he is expressin' his wegwets—"

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

"I'm awfully sowwy—"

"Br-r-r-r!"

Arthur Augustus retired gracefully, Fatty Wynn glaring after him. Figgins and Kerr were carrying several pails of water into the Hall, to be used in the defence, and Figgy tested a large garden squirt, which was going to be used in the way of defensive artillery. But Fatty Wynn could not take an interest in such matters. He was prepared to fight to the last ditch; but he wanted to be fed. Fatty Wynn, at least, realised to the full the truth of the old saying that an army marches on its stomach.

His gloomy face brightened as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy suddenly turned back and remounted the House steps.

Fatty eyed him eagerly as he returned. He hoped that the swell of the School House had repented, and was going to offer to disregard his Housemaster, and smuggle in supplies.

"Are you still there, Wynn?" asked Arthur Augustus, peering through a slit in the barrier of desk and chairs and heavy volumes.

"Yes, here I am!" said Wynn eagerly.

"I thought I would return and tell you—"

"You'll get the stuff?"

"Nunno! I—I only came back to express my vewy sincere wegwet that I should not be able to do so, deah boy."

Fatty Wynn breathed hard. That polished politeness on the part of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy ought to have gratified him. But it didn't! It exasperated him, by dashing his hopes to the ground a second time.

He did not answer. He glared round and caught the garden squirt from Figgins' hand, and drew it full of water. Then he took aim through the slit in the barrier, his eyes gleaming.

"D'Arcy—"

"Yaas—"

"Look here—"

"Yaas, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus unsuspectingly, and he pressed his noble countenance quite close to the opening.

Sqooooooooosh!

"Gwooch! Yawooop! Ow cwumba!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy leaped back with a terrific yell as the flood caught him full on his aristocratic features.

Fatty Wynn grinned ferociously.

"Gwoogh! You howwid wotah! You feahful New House boundah!" Arthur Augustus gasped and spluttered, and almost jazzed. "Bai Jove! If I could get at you, Wynn, I would give you a feahful thwashin'!"

There was a sound from within of the squirt refilling. Arthur Augustus backed away and retreated. He did not want any more. He crossed the quad, mopping his noble face with a dripping handkerchief. And a little later he confided to Jack Blake that he had rather changed his opinion of the New House revolt, and that it was his fixed conviction that what the rebels really wanted was a thumpin' good lickin'—especially Fatty Wynn.

CHAPTER 7.

Official.

"HERE he comes!"

Baggy Trimble, at the gates, was watching like Sister Anne.

He gave out the news; and the School House crowd, in the quadrangle, buzzed with suppressed excitement.

Mr. Ratcliff was returning—with official aid. And a hundred pairs of eyes were turned upon him as he stalked in at the school gates, with P.-c. Crump of Rylcombe at his side.

Mr. Crump had a very serious expression on his plump face. It was probable that he had not been keen to interfere in the internal affairs of St. Jim's. He had probably been surprised by the request that he should do so. And it was pretty certain that Mr. Ratcliff had had to offer him inducements of a financial nature to bring him along to St. Jim's.

No doubt Mr. Ratcliff hoped that the sight of the policeman's official uniform and helmet would scare the rebels into submission.

But the rebels were made of sterner stuff than he supposed. And although Mr. Crump certainly represented law and order, the legal position was far from clear—it was extremely doubtful whether he had a right, legally, to force a way into the New House, even at the Housemaster's request. Kerr, who was extremely canny, and who was supposed to know "no end" about the law, assured his fellow-rebels that Crump would be going entirely outside his official duty if he took a hand in this affair, and could safely be treated simply as a private citizen who had wedged into matters that did not concern him. In any case, the New House rebels did not intend to be overawed by Mr. Crump, in spite of his uniform and helmet.

Mr. Crump crossed the quadrangle to the New House with a steady and ponderous tread.

Under the eyes of more than a hundred School House fellows, Mr. Crump did not care to betray the dubiety which inwardly assailed him. But as a matter of fact, Mr. Crump was very dubious. If the rebels yielded to the terror of his eye, so to speak, all would be well. But if they didn't—

If they didn't, Mr. Crump did not quite see what was to be done. However, he had one of Mr. Ratcliff's pound notes in his pocket, and he was dutifully determined to earn it if he could.

Monty Lowther began to hum "See the Conquering Hero Comes" as Mr. Crump passed him. There was a chortle from the School House crowd. Mr. Crump marched on unheeding, though his ears burned a little.

Mr. Ratcliff swung round on the School House throng.

"Go away at once!" he snapped. "Return to your own House! You hear me, Merry, Blake, Noble—all of you!"

"We hear you, sir!" said Tom Merry politely.

"Go, then!"

Tom looked coolly at the irritated Housemaster.

"We're allowed in the quadrangle on a half-holiday, sir," he said. "We'll stay here if you don't mind."

"Yaas, wathah!"



Mr. Ratcliff, beside himself with rage, struck at Figgins through the open window. Kerr lunged forward with a bat, and knocked his hand aside, and there was a yell of pain from the Housemaster. "Have some more, sir?" asked Kerr invitingly.

"I have already said that I mind, Merry."

Tom did not answer; but he did not move. He had not the slightest intention of being ordered into his House by Mr. Ratcliff.

"I have commanded you to go!" said Mr. Ratcliff, in a rumbling voice.

"We're stayin' here, sir," said Cardew.

"You dare to disobey me?"

"You're not our Housemaster, sir," said Levison, of the Fourth.

"Wathah not, sir!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "We have a wight to wemain heah, sir, unless Mr. Waiton instwucts us othahwise."

Mr. Ratcliff suppressed his feelings. Once more he had bitten off more than he could masticate, so to speak. With the New House in open rebellion, even the obstinate Ratty realised that it was not a favourable time for attempting to assert authority over the School House.

He turned his back on the grinning juniors, and whisked on after Mr. Crump.

"Dear old Ratty!" murmured Monty Lowther. "Always playing the giddy goat, and always getting called up short."

"Cheeky ass!" growled Grundy of the Shell. "Catch me letting him order me off! More likely to biff him in the waistcoat."

P.-c. Crump halted at the steps of the New House. Half a dozen windows were lined with faces, and there was a yell of greeting from Figgins & Co.

Mr. Crump reddened.

"Impudent young rips!" he murmured.

"You will now make them open the doors, and return to submission, Crump!" said Mr. Ratcliff.

P.-c. Crump blinked at him. It was easy enough for Horace Ratcliff to give that direction. It was a little more difficult to say how it was to be done. However, Mr. Crump meant to do his best.

He marched ponderously up the wide stone steps, and knocked heavily on the door with an official fist.

"Hopen this 'ere door," he called out, "in the name of the lor!"

"Bow-wow!" came from within.

"Is that you, Master Figgins?"

"Little me, old bird!"

"Hopen this 'ere door!"

"Rats!"

"Hutherwise," said Mr. Crump sternly, "I shall force a hentrance, and take you into custody, Master Figgins, on a charge of obstructing an officer in the execootion of his dooty!"

Figgins chuckled.

"Dear old bird," he said cheerfully, "you can't, won't, and couldn't! You haven't studied the law, Crumpy. Do you know that you're a trespasser here?"

"Wot?" ejaculated Mr. Crump.

"I'm not at all sure that you haven't come here to burgle the spoons—"

"Eh?"

"You'd better get off, Crump! Otherwise I shall report you to your superiors."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Crump gasped.

"You are wasting time, Crump!" said Mr. Ratcliff acidly.

Mr. Crump gave the Housemaster a far from pleasant look. A pound note was a pound note; but Mr. Ratcliff was a decidedly unpleasant gentleman to work with. Mr. Crump began to wish already that he was back in the police-station at Rylcombe.

He drew his truncheon, hoping that the sight of it would strike the rebels with a salutary terror, and rapped on the door.

So far from a salutary terror being the result, there was a laugh from within. Mr. Crump's red face grew redder.

"Will you hopen this 'ere door, Master Figgins?" he bawled.

"No fear, Crumpey!"

"Then I shall force a hentrance!"

"Go ahead!"

Bang, bang, bang!

Mr. Crump's truncheon bruised the paint on the door. But it had no other effect.

He looked round at Mr. Ratcliff rather helplessly.

"Blessed if I see what's goin' to be done, sir!" he mumbled.

"You see, them young rips won't hopen this 'ere door!"

"You are here to compel them to do so!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff.

"Um!" murmured Mr. Crump.

"Force your way into the window."

"They've got it blocked up, sir!"

"Smash away at the desk, Crumpy!" called out Figgins. "It's Mr. Ratcliff's desk, so you can damage it as much as you like!"

"You—you young scoundrel, Figgins!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff.

"Oh, cheese it, Ratty!"

"What? What?"

"Cheese it, Ratty! You talk too much!"

Mr. Ratcliff spluttered. There was a faint grin on P.-c. Crump's weather-beaten face.

"That looks a rather vallyble desk to be smashed up, sir," said Mr. Crump, blinking at the barricaded hall-window.

"Do nothing of the kind!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff. "I will send Taggles with a ladder, and you can effect an entrance at an upper window."

"Oh, lor!"

Mr. Ratcliff whisked away for the porter. Figgins & Co. exchanged glances within the House.

"Coming to business now," said Figgins. "Mind, Crumpy isn't to be allowed inside. Some of you cut off upstairs and be ready to line up at the window he picks out. Keep a good look-out!"

"You bet!"

A dozen juniors scampered up the stairs. In five minutes or so Taggles was seen grunting his way towards the New House with a ladder over his shoulder.

He handed it to Mr. Crump, who received it in a very gingerly way.

"You'll 'old it for me?" said Crump.

"I'll 'old it!" said Taggles. "But I ain't a-going hup it, and don't you think it. Them young rips might chuck it down with a man on it. I'm too hold for sich monkey-tricks!"

"Mind you 'old it safe," said Mr. Crump uneasily.

"Leave that to me," said the porter. "Only I tell you plain I shall dodge if you come a-walloping down on my 'ead, Crump."

"Oh, lor!" murmured Crump. The prospect of "walloping" down on Taggles' head was dismaying; though it was not Taggles' head that he was worrying about.

"Lose no more time," came Mr. Ratcliff's acid voice.

"Oh, orlright, sir!" said Mr. Crump wearily.

Between the porter and the policeman, the ladder was reared against the New House, and the top end planted against a window-sill. And with the porter holding it, Mr. Crump swarmed up, hoping to get in by a rush attack before the rebels could gather at the window to defend it.

But that hope was very ill-founded. Mr. Crump mounted the ladder as fast as he could; but he had a good weight to carry up. By the time he arrived at the window, he found half a dozen faces grinning out at him. He halted on the ladder and flourished his truncheon. George Figgins threw up the window, as if to make things easy for the assailant.

"Come in, old top!" he said.

"You young rip—"

"If you fall on your napper, that doesn't count as a goal!" remarked Kerr.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 721.

Mr. Crump, conscious that he was watched by a swarm of fellows in the quad, felt that retreat was impossible. Besides, he was a plucky man, and he was angry. He plunged forward, and his head and shoulders went through the window, and he clambered desperately in. And there was a yell of encouragement from the quad.

"Bwavo, old Cwump!"

CHAPTER 8.

A Gallant Defence.

SWISH!

Figgins had the big garden squirt in his hands. As Mr. Crump's head and shoulders came through the window, Figgie let fly.

There was a gasping gurgle from the unfortunate representative of law and order.

He was drenched and choked by the stream of water, and he lay half in the window gasping spasmodically.

"Time to go, Crumpy!" chuckled Redfern.

"Give him another!"

Swoosh!

Figgins reloaded and fired again, so to speak. The unhappy Crump ducked his official head to the stream. It ran down his back and swamped all over him.

"Now are you going, cocky?" asked Figgins. "You'll have a painful next if you hang on."

"Grooogh!"

"Give him the pail!" yelled Pratt.

"Get out, Crump! We don't want to lose you, but we think you ought to go!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, my heye!" gasped Mr. Crump. "I'll smash yer!"

His official blood was up now. Instead of retreating, he clambered furiously in, and got a knee over the sill. There was a loud "swoosh" as a pail of water was upended over him. But even that did not deter the determined constable. He clambered on furiously.

"Collar him!"

Three or four pairs of hands seized Mr. Crump. His helmet was jerked off, and he came in at the window faster than he intended. He landed with a terrific bump on the floor, with five or six juniors sprawling over him and clutching him.

"Sit on him, Fatty!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ooooh!" gasped Mr. Crump, as Fatty Wynn's avoidupois was planted heavily upon him. "Gerroff! Git up! Lemme alone! Ooooh! I'm being blooming sufficed! Ooooooooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Crump struggled spasmodically and in vain. Two pairs of hands grasped each arm and leg, and Fatty Wynn was sitting on his neck. Hercules himself would have found it a difficult thirteenth task to get loose from that position; and it was altogether too much for Mr. Crump. He collapsed.

Figgins picked up the helmet and looked out of the window. Taggles was staring upward. With a swing of his arm, Figgins sent the helmet whirling downwards with good aim, and it fairly bonneted the astonished Taggles.

"Ha, ha, ha!" came in a yell from the School House crowd, as Taggles let go the ladder and staggered away, with the policeman's helmet jammed on his ancient head.

"Oh, lor!" gasped Taggles, clutching at the helmet. "I've ad enough of this 'ere! I'm hoff!"

Taggles clutched off the helmet, threw it aside, and stalked away in the direction of his lodge. Mr. Ratcliff shrieked after him:

"Taggles! Come back! Come back at once! Are you deaf? Come back!"

Apparently Taggles was deaf, for he stalked on without replying or turning his head. Taggles was not greedy, and he knew when he had had enough.

Mr. Ratcliff almost danced with rage. He approached the ladder, and made a step upward, and caught sight of a garden-squirt above, and retreated just in time. The stream of water fell a foot short of him as he whisked away.

"Come on, sir!" yelled Figgins.

"You—you rascal!"

"Don't you want a wash, sir?"

"I—I—I—" spluttered Mr. Ratcliff. "Crump! What are you doing, Crump? Why do you not come down and open the door, Crump?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Crump was not in a condition to descend the stairs of the New House and open the door to Mr. Ratcliff. He was gasping and groaning under a swarm of yelling juniors.

"Lemme go!" he pleaded. "I've 'ad enough! For mercy's sake take that fat lump off my poor neck! Young gents, don't be 'ard on a man!"

It was abject surrender.

"Poor old Crumpy!" chuckled Figgins. "Giving in?"

"Ow! Ah! Ow! Groogh! Yes! Oh lor!"

"Pitch him out of the window!" yelled Pratt.

"Might break his neck!"

"Never mind his neck!"

"Oh, lor!" gasped Mr. Crump. "I'll go quietly—I will really, young gents! Jest you let me out, and I'll go, glad!"

"Shove him out!"

Mr. Crump was allowed to reach the window again, still in the grasp of a dozen hands.

But he was thinking only of a safe retreat. Not for all the pound notes in Mr. Ratcliff's pocket-book would he have continued the unequal combat. He plunged out of the window, and gasped with relief to find himself on the ladder again.

"One minute to get clear!" grinned Figgins. "Then we're going to chuck the ladder down!"

"Back up, Crumpy!"

"Oh crumbs!" spluttered Mr. Crump.

He slid down the ladder at terrific speed, and did the descent well under the minute.

"Stand from under!" roared Figgins.

Mr. Crump darted away. The ladder, hauled away by the juniors above, tottered in the air, and crashed to full length on the ground, with a terrific crash.

"Hurrah!" yelled the New House juniors.

Mr. Crump mopped his streaming face. He was drenched with water and with perspiration, and he was winded. He was in no mood to be ragged by Mr. Ratcliff for his failure; but Ratty never made allowance for moods. He strode up to Mr. Crump quivering with rage.

"What does this mean?" he shouted. "Why have you allowed them to turn you out? Why did you not open the door for me? Why—"

"Oh, ring off!" snarled Mr. Crump savagely.

"What!"

"I'm fed up with this 'ere!" roared the enraged officer. "If you can't manage your own boys yourself, Mr. Ratcliff, you can find somebody else to manage 'em for you! I ain't taking any more, and so I tells you. I'm going out of this!"

"Crump—"

"Oh, shut up!"

With that emphatic reply Mr. Crump gathered up his helmet and his truncheon, and stalked away towards the gates. Mr. Ratcliff stared after him, spluttering. Evidently there was no more aid to be obtained from the representative of law and order.

"Bless my soul!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff.

"Try again, Ratty!" came in a derisive yell from the New House.

Mr. Ratcliff shook a furious fist at the grinning faces in the window. He was defeated—utterly defeated. His last resource had failed him.

He turned his back on the scene of his defeat, and tramped away, quite at a loss. Loud yells and catcalls followed him from the New House. From the School House crowd, as Mr. Ratcliff passed them, came loud chortles. Mr. Raiton had forbidden his boys, sternly, to take any hand in the proceedings. But he had not forbidden them to laugh, and they couldn't help laughing. The New House master turned on them like a spiteful cat. Figgins & Co. were safe from him, but the School House fellows were within his reach, and Mr. Ratcliff was yearning for a victim. There was a sudden loud smack, like the report of a pistol-shot, as his open hand caught Arthur Augustus D'Arcy on the ear.

"Bai Jove!"

Smack, smack, smack!

Finding solace in it, Mr. Ratcliff proceeded to box ears right and left.

Smack, smack!

"Hold on, you silly old fool!" roared Grundy of the Shell, as he was smitten.

"Stop him!"

"Collar him!"

"Wush him!" yelled Arthur Augustus.

There was a swarming of the indignant School House juniors round the angry man. Mr. Ratcliff's hat was knocked off, and he was rushed and hustled on all sides. Once more he realised that he had awakened a hornets' nest that he could not deal with when aroused.

"Bump him!" yelled Grundy.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Collar the old hunks—"

"Stand back!" panted Mr. Ratcliff. "How dare you! Do you dare— Good heavens! Help, help!"

There was quite an ugly rush, and Mr. Ratcliff took to his heels and fled for the School House for shelter.

"Affah him!"

"Collar him!"

"Help!" shrieked Mr. Ratcliff, as the excited juniors rushed in hot pursuit. "Mr. Raiton! Police! Help! Goodness gracious! Ow! Oh!"

"Collar the ead!"

Mr. Ratcliff crossed the quadrangle like a racer, with a mob of juniors yelling in pursuit. He reached the steps of the School House, winded and panting, and reeled there, with the clutch of the pursuers almost upon him.

"Boys!"

Mr. Railton appeared in the doorway! The pursuit stopped suddenly. Tom Merry & Co. melted away with remarkable swiftness, and Mr. Railton took the arm of his unhappy colleague, and led him into the safety of the School House.

CHAPTER 9. The Night Attack.

THERE was tense excitement within the ancient walls of St. Jim's, as the wintry sun went down, and darkness fell upon the old school.

The sun had gone down upon Figgins & Co.'s rebellion, and the rebellion was still going strong—stronger than ever, in fact, for the rebels were encouraged by victory.

It was an extraordinary state of affairs, and Tom Merry & Co. wondered what the Head would have said—if he had known. But the Head did not know; and as he had left St. Jim's unwell, he could not be told. In the present state of his health he could not be informed of what was going on in his absence—and so matters had to take their course. And what course they would take now was a question of thrilling interest.

The School House was rather crowded that evening. It had to accommodate the New House seniors and the New House fags. Mr. Railton had quietly made his arrangements to that end—receiving no thanks from Mr. Ratcliff.

Mr. Ratcliff was in an unenviable mood. He had quartered himself in the Head's study, where he brooded over his wrongs, and planned vengeance on the rebels, but seemed unable to come to any decision for dealing with them.

He did not consult with Mr. Railton. His bitterness towards his colleague was almost as great as towards the New House rebels. Deep down in his heart, probably, was a consciousness that he was himself to blame—that his own high-handed tyranny had brought affairs to this pass. For all the trouble that had followed the Head's departure had happened in the New House. Mr. Railton had had no trouble with his boys. Mr. Ratcliff could not help knowing that had the younger Housemaster been left in supreme command this outbreak would not have occurred. But that knowledge only added to his bitterness.

The knowledge that he was being laughed at all through the School House, where he had taken refuge, made him more bitter still. Whenever he was seen smiling faces greeted him. But Ratty did not venture upon boxing ears again. He had had a severe lesson on that subject, and he did not want it to be repeated.

In the School House, under the protection of the colleague he detested, he was safe enough, so long as he behaved himself. And it was borne upon his dull and obstinate mind that he had better behave himself.

Not for a moment, however, was he thinking of making any concessions to the rebels. To punish, and punish still more, was his only thought. His mind revelled in the thought of flogging Figgins & Co. till they howled. And alone in the Head's study, in a black and bitter mood, the vengeful man planned and schemed, and schemed and planned.

Meanwhile, the New House was a blaze of light. Electric-light bills did not trouble the happy rebels; and in every room of the New House the light was turned full on. Figgins was wary of an attack in the dark. He did not know what forces Mr. Ratcliff might bring against him. And so the lights blazed out into the winter gloom of the quadrangle. As bed-time approached, Figgins gave his orders for the night.

"Just like Ratty to sneak in in the dark," said Figgins. "We're going to keep watch, of course. Turn and turn about!"

"That's the idea!" agreed Redfern.

The New House juniors were rather late to bed that night. In the School House Tom Merry & Co. turned in at half-past nine, as usual. But at ten o'clock there was a merry chorus ringing out from the New House into the silence of the night. The rebels were rejoicing in their unaccustomed freedom.

Mr. Ratcliff, prowling in the dusk of the quadrangle, heard the merry voices, and gritted his teeth.

He was waiting and watching for sleep to descend on the rebels, waiting with savage impatience, consumed with rage. Once the New House was buried in slumber, Mr. Ratcliff considered that he would be able to deal with the rebels. He had warned his prefects to be ready to give him their support. Monteith & Co. were far from keen on it; but they could not refuse. And once the invaders were inside the New House in a body Mr. Ratcliff considered that the matter would be as good as finished. A Housemaster and half a dozen big Sixth-Formers, armed with stout canes, would soon make an end of the junior rebellion once they were at close quarters.

So Mr. Ratcliff prowled and watched and waited, a good deal like a cracksmen looking for an opportunity to crack a crib.

He was not aware that several pairs of eyes sighted him from the New House when occasionally his long, ungainly figure loomed into the radius of the electric-light from the windows.

"The old bird's ready to spring," remarked Redfern. "What is he mooching about there for, Figgy?"

"Watching for a chance!" grinned Figgins. "There's going to be a giddy night attack when he catches us asleep."

"When he catches a weasel asleep!" chuckled Kerr. "I hardly think he will catch us napping," remarked Figgins serenely. "Wait and see!"

The merry chorus in the New House died away. Most of

MY READERS' OWN CORNER.

UN-BEET-ABLE.

The American: "Talking about large vegetables, I grew a pumpkin of such a size that the children used a half each for a cradle." The Englishman: "That's nothing. In the town where I live we often have as many as three policemen asleep on one 'beet'!"—J. H. Manners, 12, Escomb Road, Bishop Auckland, Co. Durham.

MISTAKEN.

Little Willie was playing with his kittens in the street when a gentleman passing by asked him their names. "Joe and Jerry," was the prompt reply. "Why not call them Cook and Peary?" the stranger asked. "Go on!" said Willie. "These ain't pole cats!"—V. S. Cianci, 1777, 7th Avenue, E. Vancouver, British Columbia.

TELLING THE TALE.

A cat has one more tail than no cat; but no cat has two tails. Therefore, one cat has three tails, because, as stated, a cat has one more tail than no cat.—"GEM Reader," 132, Court Street, Blaenclydach, Rhondda.

RATHER MIXED.

A house-party were indulging in amateur theatricals, and a shy young man was given a part in which he had to rush on the stage, and cry: "The King is dead! Long live the King to follow!" Unfortunately, he got nervous and confused, and cried out: "Long live the King! He's dead!"—Harold Percival, 15, Orchard Place, Southampton.

HOW TO KNOW THEM.

The soda-water man—by his phiz.
The temperance man—by his no's.
The conceited man—by his I's.
The military man—by his arms.
The miserly man—by his chest.
The dairy man—by his calves.
The iron man—by his nails.
The tourist—by his trunk. — Miss Thelma Chapman, 1, Sulgrave Road, Hammersmith, W. 6.

BOYS' MANNERS.

There is a good deal of roughness between boys in their bearing to one another, but, as a rule, it is not intended. All the same, the churlishness is frequently overdone. It is often due to excessive high spirits, but the very best humour, unrestrained, may become a positive evil. It is often said of a fellow who barges round and makes himself obnoxious, "Oh, he means well," but, all the same, the rough-and-ready individual is dropping into the manners, or want of them, of a lout. It is never too late to learn politeness, and never too early. Hurting other people's feelings is just

what should be avoided all the time. There is no snobbishness in being, or trying to be, a gentleman—that is, a fellow who thinks of others before himself.—A. E. Bramwell, 5, Douglas Place, Bordesley Green, Birmingham.

QUITE CORRECT.

A youth had just been appointed to a post in the tax-office of a country town. One day a farmer rushed into the office, and declared he had been wrongly charged ten shillings for keeping a goat. The youth insisted that it was all correct, and showed the clause to the angry farmer—"For all property bounding and abutting on the highway, 2s. 6d. per foot."—K. Cook, 1, Coniston Road, Muswell Hill, London, N. 10.

ONE SHORT.

A woman entered a photographer's studio, and asked him the price he charged for taking children's pictures. "Ten shillings a dozen," was the reply. "Dear, dear!" said the caller sadly. "I'll have to call again later on. I have only got eleven."—Stanley Webber 18, Granville Square, King's Cross Road, W.C. 1.

"NECKS," PLEASE!

Park Orator: "My friends, if we were each of us to turn and look ourselves squarely in the face, what should we each find we needed most?" Voice from the crowd: "An india-rubber neck, mister!"—Miss C. Rea, 40, Melrose Street, Lisburn Road, Belfast.

the fellows found themselves sleepy at half-past ten, and turned in of their own accord. The first watch was taken by Figgins & Co. and Redfern. The lights still blazed all over the House. Figgy was not taking chances. Only in one room—Mr. Ratcliff's own study—was the light out. Apparently that room had been overlooked by the rebels.

And in that room by the window George Figgins watched.

The astute Figgy felt pretty certain that if the night attack came, the assailants would choose the window of the room that was unlighted. It would, of course, be safer for the attack, as they could not be seen. And it was precisely for that reason that Figgins had left the light out in Mr. Ratcliff's study. He wanted to draw the attack to that spot to deal with it.

It was past eleven o'clock, and the house had long been silent, when Figgy, watching from the window, discerned several shadowy forms in the gloom without.

He chuckled softly.

Stepping silently to the door he whispered into the passage, and Kerr, Wynn, and Redfern joined him in the study.

"Shall I call the fellows?" breathed Fatty Wynn.

"No need. They won't get in. We're ready for 'em!"

There was a soft sound at the window. In the darkness of the study Figgins & Co. waited breathlessly.

Dim as the night was outside, they could discern the shadowy forms; but it was, of course, darker in the room, and they could not be seen from without. They discerned a hand gliding over the window. Then, in the stillness, they heard a whispering voice.

"I think you can force the catch, Monteith."

"I think so, sir."

"Lose no time."

Figgins & Co. gave no sign. A knife was forced up between the sashes, and the catch was driven slowly back. It clicked back at last, and the window was unfastened.

Slowly and cautiously the lower sash was pushed up.

In the darkness within George Figgins was grasping a pail of water. He was ready!

The angular form of Mr. Ratcliff stood outside the opened window. He was peering into the darkness within, and listening intently.

"Nothing could be simpler," said Mr. Ratcliff, in tones of satisfaction. "The rascals are fast asleep, and we shall enter without difficulty. You will keep close behind me. You are authorised to use force to any extent that may be necessary. Now help me in, Monteith."

"Yes, sir."

The prefect "bunked" the House-master up, and Mr. Ratcliff's head and shoulders came in at the study window.

Figgins swung the pail through the air.

Swoooooosh!

In an instant the pailful of water was drenching over the New House master, soaking him to the skin.

There was a startled, gasping yell from Mr. Ratcliff.

An instant more, and the pail was jommed on his head with a crash, and Mr. Ratcliff staggered back into the quad bonneted.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was a yell from Figgins & Co.. In a flash Figgins slammed the window shut and shot the catch.

"Groogh! Oh dear, I am wet, drenched! Oh—oh! Ow! Oooop! Atchoo, atchoo! Choo, choo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You young rotters!" roared Monteith.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ooooch! They—they were awake, watching for us! Oooch! Atchoo, atchoo!" Mr. Ratcliff sneezed spasmodically. "Oh dear! Oooch! I—I shall catch cold! Ooooooch!"

"Come on!" roared Figgins.

Put Mr. Ratcliff was not thinking of coming on, and certain Monteith & Co. had no desire to force a way through broken glass to face pails of icy water and cricket-bats. The surprise attack had failed. Mr. Ratcliff, shivering and shuddering and sneezing, was already in retreat, and his prefects followed him, taking advantage of the darkness to grin and even to wink at one another!

"I fancy there won't be any more giddy night attacks!" chuckled Figgins.

And Figgy was right.

Tom Merry came across the quadrangle in the early morning, as the winter sun glimmered down on St. Jim's. Figgy's voice hailed him from a window of the New House.

"Hallo, Tommy! How is Ratty getting on?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"He's laid up with a cold——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What happened here last night?" asked Tom.

Figgins explained, and the captain of the Shell gave a chuckle.

"That accounts for it," he remarked. "I hear that Ratty's had to stay in bed this morning. The doctor was sent for at dawn. He's going to have a happy time."

"Let's hope it's 'flu!" said Redfern charitably.

"Anyhow, he will be laid up," said Tom. "I suppose Mr. Railton will take control in that case?"

"Oh!" said Figgins.

"And you fellows will chuck it, of course!" said Tom.

"Don't bet your socks on that!" said Figgins coolly. "The New House isn't going to be run by a School House master!"

"No jolly fear!" said Fatty Wynn emphatically.

"We're out for our rights!" explained Figgins. "It's Ratty we've got to make terms with. We like old Railton, but we're not having him chipping in in this bizney! Better warn him off!"

"Fathead!" said Tom Merry. "If Mr. Railton takes control you'll have to toe the line!"

"Rats!"

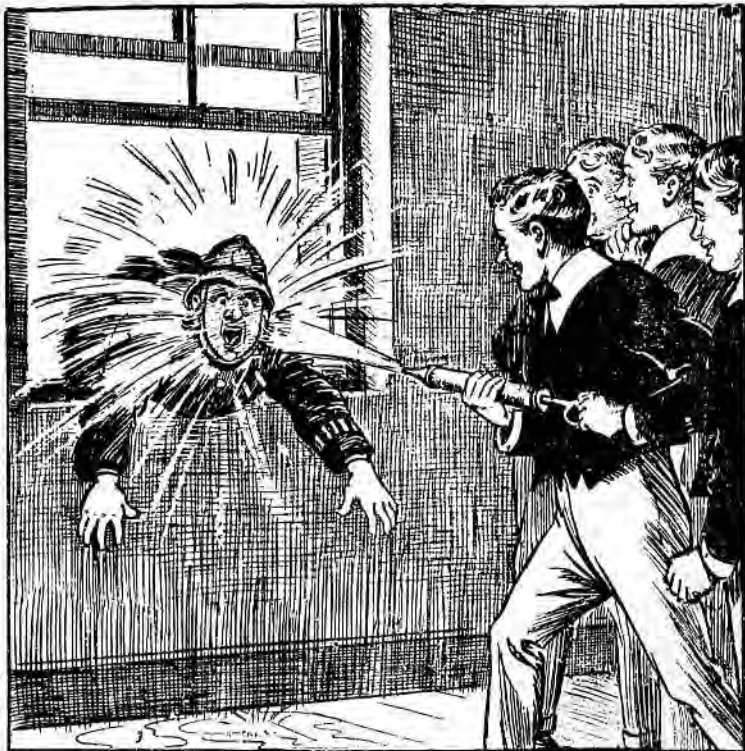
"We'll jolly well see that you do!" roared Tom Merry wrathfully.

"Get out, you cheeky School House chump!"

An over-ripe apple whizzed from the window. Figgins picked up the garden squirt. Tom Merry hastily retreated. That morning Mr. Ratcliff was not to be seen. He was laid up with a severe cold, and not in a condition to take further measures against his rebellious House. Circumstances had changed now, but the New House rebellion was going on. On that point Figgins & Co. were emphatic, and there was not a dissentient voice in the New House.

THE END.

(Another grand long "Barring Out" story of the chums of St. Jim's, entitled: "Tom Merry's Conquest," in next week's issue of the GEM Library. Don't forget to read the long complete story, dealing with Frank Sturdy & Co., in this week's "Boys' Herald.")



Figgins held the big garden squirt in his hands. As Mr. Crump's head and shoulders came through the window, he let fly. Swish! There was a gasping gurgle from the unfortunate representative of law and order. He was drenched and choked by the stream of water, and lay half in the window gasping for breath.

The ST JIM'S NEWS

Edited By TOM MERRY.

George Figgins to the Fore.

THE SACK FOR LUCAS SLEATH.

FIGGY PROVES JACK BLAKE INNOCENT.

By ETHEL CLEVELAND.

THE sentence of expulsion hovered over the head of Jack Blake. Money had been missed from a New House senior's cashbox, and through many peculiar circumstances the leader of the Fourth Form had apparently been proved guilty of the theft. Only the intervention of Eric Kildare had saved Jack Blake from an untimely expulsion. As it was, the leader of the Fourth Form was "on bail," so to speak. The Head was waiting for something to "turn up," which would prove Blake's innocence. Time was passing very fast, and if nothing turned up soon Blake would have to go.

George Figgins came over to sympathise earlier in the evening. For the time being the ancient hostility between the two Houses was suspended, so far as the leaders of the rivalry were concerned. Figgy put on his thinking-cap when he left Blake, and resolved to do all in his power to prove Jack's innocence.

For some time George sat in Study No. 4. He reposed on the table, his long legs gracefully resting on a chair. Kerr and Fatty stood by the fireplace with their hands in their pockets, waiting for him to speak.

"I never thought," said the great New House chief at last, "that we should have to commence business as giddy detectives, but you never know your luck, you know. We know old Blake's as innocent as a stuffed magpie. Therefore, we've got to prove one of our own House chaps a thief. It'll be a bit of a disgrace, I know, but we can't stand by warbling Christmas carols while an innocent chap is being given the boot which he didn't ask for!"

"That isn't the chief reason," said Kerr. "You see, if Blake went, all the giddy fun would go. We could walk clean over the mouldy School House in every row that took place, without Blakey. And there wouldn't be the slightest bit of fun in that."

"Just what I say," agreed Fatty Wynn. "The rest of the crew are all duds. It's old Blake who keeps things alive, and makes them hum."

Figgins then brought the subject round to the time when he, Kerr, and Fatty had seen Sleath sneaking into the Green Man.

"Let's look at the facts," said Figgins. "Sleath loses twelve guids. If it had been Baker, or Webb, or even Pig Monteith, we could take his word for it. But we can't trust Sleath an inch farther than we can see him!"

The Co. then came to a decision, as Figgins said. Sleath had been seen entering a low public-house, evidently for the purpose of gambling. The Co. would keep watch on him for a period, and find out some particulars.

At eleven o'clock that night, there was a faint sound in the rear of the New House as a window was softly opened, and a dim form dropped lightly to the ground outside. The Form stood still for a moment, listening, and then hurried away into the gloom.

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ON THE TRACK.

Kerr and Wynn remained at the school, while Figgy went out on the track of Lucas Sleath. Figgins soon caught up the senior's trail, and, as he expected, it led to Abel Jolliffe's dingy establishment, the Green Man. By means of clever scouting, George managed to get round to the back room in which Jolliffe was receiving Sleath. Realising that to save Jack Blake, he would necessarily have to eavesdrop, Figgy heard all that was said within.

The conversation dealt chiefly with the turf, and the horrid betting which some boys indulge in. The essence of the talk was that Sleath owed Jolliffe twenty-five pounds. He had paid him ten. Now he wanted Jolliffe to place a five on a horse called Blue Cloud. Jolliffe refused until Sleath handed over some more money. The fatal chat ended with Sleath learning that Jolliffe had still retained one of the fivers he had paid him with the idea that it "might be useful."

Figgins then left his place of hiding, and raced back to the school. When he went off to sleep that night, George's plans for saving Jack Blake were well mapped out.

There was, of course, another side of the question. As space is limited, I can but briefly refer to it here.

Dr. Holmes told Blake if he was granted a respite he would also have to put up with the unpleasantness so long as the proofs against him remained so strong. A half-hearted sort of election was to take place shortly in the School House Fourth. Percy Mellish made a great bid for the leadership of the Fourth, and it ended in absolute disaster. And then the School House juniors, who had concurred in thus detroning their leader were quickly made to realise that their loss was a serious one. The Fourth felt the want of a real leader badly, for in all the skirmishes with the New House, the School House obviously got the worst of it. Whenever a New House fellow passed a member of the School House, he was heard to remark about "the thieves' kitchen," or "Pentonville."

The taunts of the New House became very exasperating, and Percy Mellish became more and more determined to make a bid for the giddy eminence. Of course, all this time Figgins was not blind to what was occurring; he was busy laying a snare.

The first part of George's plan was to borrow ten pounds from Gussy. Next, he sent Fatty Wynn, who was Sleath's fag to the senior's study. Fatty was immediately instructed to cut. Before he left he glibly asked Sleath whether he could manage to change ten pounds for him. Fatty told him the money belonged to George Figgins, and that it was his birthday.

Sleath regretted that he was unable to do it at the moment, but advised Fatty to put the money in a very safe place until the next morning. David Llewellyn Wynn innocently confided to Sleath that Figgins would place the notes under a loose board in the right-hand corner of their study.

At ten o'clock that same night, Eric Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, was surprised by a visit to his study from George Figgins. Figgy gave the captain of St. Jim's a long account of what he had discovered. Convincing proof of Figgins' statements was forthcoming when the captain of St. Jim's left the School House, made his way to the rear of the New House, and saw a light in Figgins' study.

Kildare then went and repeated Figgins'

statements to Mr. Kidd, the Housemaster of his side.

When Lucas Sleath strode down the lane in the direction of Hylcombe a quarter of an hour later, three figures suddenly detached themselves from the gloom and stepped directly in his path.

Sleath was collared before he had one chance to escape, and, like a captured wild animal, was borne back to St. Jim's—to Dr. Holmes.

There is little more for me to tell about this grand episode. The notice the Head pinned on the board in Hall next morning tells all we want to know. It ran:

"The truth concerning the theft in the New House has fortunately been discovered. The money was not taken by the Fourth-Former, Blake, who was hitherto unjustly suspected, but by Lucas Sleath, the treasurer of the College Clubs, himself. Sleath has confessed, and is expelled from St. Jim's—Richard Holmes."

I need not add, that after the significant paragraph had been read, "everything was lovely in the garden" for Jack Blake. Apologies came in on all sides, and later my cousin made a great suggestion.

"I insist that the two Houses make it pax for a couple of days!" said Gussy. "I will blow both fivials on a woyal feast at the tuck-shop. Every junior in both Houses is invited to celebrate the great occasion. In short, we'll have a high old time, and then most likely go on the wurpath again!"

Of course, Gussy's proposal was simply another proof that he isn't nearly such a silly ass as he looks. There was quite a lot of horse-sense in his suggestion, and the idea was passed unanimously. The feast came off in the Fourth Form room in the School House. It was a gloriously-successful occasion, and was certainly remembered for many a long day afterwards.

COUSIN ETHEL.

Personal Correspondence.

By TOM MERRY.

May Barrow (Brook Street, Chester).—I don't think you would like to be in my place at St. Jim's for very long. A Form captain certainly appears to have a very enviable time; but I don't mind telling you there are occasions when he'd willingly let another have a taste. So you have seventeen of St. Jim's juniors for your favourites. You seem to revel in the prospect of having them all for your brothers! Well, yes, they'd be quite all right—for about five minutes! After that time I expect it would be anything but glorious for you. There is every chance of your seeing a reply from Figgins in the "Gem." Poor old Merries! I really would like you to be able to come along and see him blast on his cornet. But I'll give him your regards, by all means. As you like Cousin Ethel so much, what do you think of her articles in the "St. Jim's News" on early St. Jim's? Please write and let me know.

James C. Milne (Arbroath).—I don't expect Mr. Editor will allot a whole Special Number to your humble, my chum. You see, I usually figure in all the stories. Miss Ethel Cleveland will, however, describe my early adventures at this big college when she deals with that period. At present she has quite a lot more to say about Jack Blake, Figgins, Monteith, and Mr. Ratcliff. I am glad to hear you approve of the "St. Jim's News."

Arnold Foster (Old Ham, Lancs).—The first "Gem" story published was called "Scuttled!" Its author was Mr. Lewis Bird. The serial was a school yarn called "Stormpoint." Tom Merry did not appear until No. 3. I am afraid there is not the remotest possibility of your being able to get it. My height is 5 ft. 6 ins. Reginald Talbot is a little over 16 years old. Well, I think Gussy would probably down Cardew in a fight; but there is also every chance of a scrap terminating the other way round. Towser has seen about five summers and winters. St. Jim's is twice as large as Rookwood, and a good deal larger than Greyfriars. Mr. Martin Clifford is about 5 ft. 10 ins. in height. There is a possibility of obtaining his signature if you write to Mr. Editor again. Ah, Johnny Gogga! Now you are dipping deep into our editorial secrets. All I can tell you is, watch our next big story dealing with Pepper's Barn and Rylcombe Grammar School, and watch out for Johnny!

Alwyn W. Dunn (Ovingdean, Monkseaton, Northumberland).—How Gussy is related to Cardew was explained in last week's issue, I think. Fatty Wynn is 12 st. 4 lbs. Baggy Trimble is a trifle over 14 st. Electric light is in quite a large number of rooms at St. Jim's. Particularly the laboratories, workshops, and Common-rooms. The Shell passage and many others used to be lighted by gas. Electricity has now been installed. Mr. Victor Railton was formerly the headmaster of a school called Claverling. This place closed down, and he then came to St. Jim's, together with Herr Schneider, and a number of his boys—Tom Merry, Manners, Lowther, Gore, Skimpole, etc.—and took up the position of Housemaster in the School House. Some of Harry Manners' photography would make one smile. Some might win prizes, and some might not. How are the juniors' studies furnished? Well, Racke's, Cardew's, and Lumley-Lumley's can only be described as luxurious. Gussy's, Harry Hammond's, and Bernard Glyn's might be called sumptuous. Matthew Lucas' and Percy Wynth's can only be correctly described as pigsties. (The remainder of this reader's questions, together with several hundred others, are unavoidably held over.)

TOM MERRY.

Wild-West News.

SCHOOLBOYS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA.

By KIT WILDRAKE.

I GUESS I'm real pleased Tom Merry's given me a little breathing-space in his slick, dandy journal. I've collected a heap big pile of intelligence during the last few months to which I'm yearning to enlighten you. In my recent article, if you recollect, in which I broke the ice, as it were, I gave a description of life on the open prairie. Well, quite a few readers praised it, and asked me to give a slightly more graphic account of school life, school ways, habits, customs, and rules in my little grey home at Boot Leg Ranch.

Boot Leg Ranch, British Columbia, is to be found on the map about fifty miles north-west of Telegraph Creek. An ordinary atlas will have Telegraph Creek marked, so you will then have no difficulty in planting your pencil on where you reckon my ranch to be. Boot Leg Ranch has a population of about 1,800.

I used to go to school before my popper decided to send me along to this education factory. We had two "falls" every year—they call them "terms" here. Well, the first fall used to commence on the second week in September, and run till Christmas. Second fall started shortly after the New Year arrived, and continued until about the third week in May. Then we are "let out"—St. Jim's calls it "breaking up"—and our summer vacation lasts for roughly three months.

Of course, most folks gotta get hold of some work during those three months. For myself, I used to look after my popper's cattle. A galoot soon picks up the style of handling a lasso and a gee when he's dealing with Western cattle. It's a trifle different from tracking down rabbits and other tiny animals,

which seems to be considered exciting in this island, I can assure you.

I have learned quite a lot of things since I came to St. Jim's. Swimming was one of them. I reckon you'll be surprised to know that I couldn't swim before I came to England. It was due to the circumstances which made it almost impossible for a feller to learn. There was only one pool near Boot Leg Ranch, and all the mountain streams emptied into it. I guess I've never seen anyone enjoying a wash in that refrigerator.

In July, the blueberries and salmonberries ripen. A little later the lagoon and wild strawberries become fit to pick. A chap can gather a bagful of salmonberries in about ten minutes, if he gets busy.

Before I came to this island I'd never seen any nuts, or high-class confectionery and pastries, or any British newspapers or boys' books. I'd never heard of such a game as cricket, and never ridden a bicycle.

On the other hand, quite a lot of my favourite stunts were fresh to the galoots in this establishment. I told them one of our favourite games was basket-ball, and the porky boy (Trimble—Ed. who shares my shack asked whether it was something to do with wastepaper-baskets and footballs. I reckon his brains want inflating some!

I was in the eighth grade when I left to come over to England. Several readers asked what means they had of punishing us when we gave offence.

The general method of checking misconduct was to hand the pupil a pink slip, on which was written the time they were to be detained after school. Detention usually meant lines, or something equally unpleasant. On the whole, it was a poor idea for keeping boys out of mischief. The way Dr. Holmes wields his ashplant made me stare when I first saw it. I must say, however, it is very effective.

Our winter sports are great. Bob-sleighing, tobogganing, and skating are the great things Canada is noted for. Bob-sleighing is about the best, in my opinion. The bob-sleigh is a long arrangement, made to hold a dozen passengers. They are very like English charabancs, in appearance. We had quite a mild winter at Boot Leg Ranch last year. I left my home on January 2nd, 1921, to start for St. Jim's. There was only three feet of snow on the ground, and I had just built myself a bully great shack, about six feet in height, when I was told to get ready for England.

KIT WILDRAKE.

Things Which Might Improve St. Jim's.

Some Opinions Gathered By Monty Lowther.

BAGLEY TRIMBLE.—For the Fourth Form to have breakfast in bed every morning, and every pupil at St. Jim's to be given a tuck-ticket which would enable him to get a jolly big whack of tuck at Mrs. Taggles every week for nil!

EPHRAIM TAGGLES (the School Porter).—Which as how I thinks this college would be very greatly improved were the young rips which be learning their eddication here not to strew the place all over with smashed



"Football Ferdie" Pays a Visit to St. Jim's.

horse-chestnuts, or what is more commonly known as conkers. Which as how another very good improvement would be brought about were there to be a daily allowance of beer and 'baccas distributed to such important officials as the porter.

AUBREY RACKE.—I think the sons of gentlemen—myself, for instance—ought to be allowed to have a couple of funkeys, a lueky, a butter, a valet, and a page. If one could also afford it, he ought to be allowed to have his own private telephone installed, for the purpose of communicating with Turf accountants in the neighbouring village when desired. If a fellow won a tennor, look how nice it would be to get telephoned up at tea-time and informed the glad tidings. Another thing, a fellow in such a position as myself ought to be allowed to have a suite of rooms instead of one mouldy little study.

GERALD CUTTS.—Seniors should have a pass to visit London every week-end. There ought to be servants to get our tea, and look after our wants. What do our people pay our fees for?

KIT WILDRAKE.—Sure, I guess the one chief thing which would shine up this education factory a trifle is a riding-school. With the exception of Fatty Wynn and a few others, not a galoot knows how to handle a nag. If Dr. Holmes would buy up a few dozen bronchos from over my way, and plant some of the children here on their backs, to teach 'em how to ride, I guess that would be what I should call an improvement.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY.—A vewy gweat improvement would be brought about if the young gentlemen in the Fourth Form were permitted to weah mornin' coats and topkaps on evwy occasion. And if the junior boys would give just a twifle more considabwation to their dweas, and a twifle less to the weghon behind their waistcoats. Another gweat improvement would be made if a certain numbah of juniors and a less numbah of seniors were admitted to join in the quahthahly debates and discushes of the governors. I will not mention any names, but I am quite certain theah would then be one person pwecent possessing sufficient

(Continued on page 17.)
THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 721.

Recent Football Results

By HARRY NOBLE, (Special Football Correspondent.)

CENIOR.	Results.
St. Jim's v. Rookwood	3 1
Rylcombe v. St. Jude's	4 2
Redcliffe v. Greyfriars	2 5
Bagshot v. Highcliffe	7 1
Abbotsford v. H.M.S. Thundercloud ..	2 3
("Boys' Herald.")	

JUNIOR.	
St. Jim's v. Abbotsford	3 1
Greyfriars v. Rookwood	3 2
Highcliffe v. Redcliffe	1 0
Bagshot v. St. Jude's	3 2
Rylcombe v. Courtfield	0 0

INTER-HOUSE.	
Rookwood Shell v. School House Second Team	0 9
Bolsover's Bashers v. Greyfriars Middle School	8 6
Horace Coker's XI. v. Grundy's Growlers	16 9
New House Second Team v. Remove Second Team	2 2
Highcliffe Select v. St. Jim's Shell Second Team	2 21
St. Jim's Fifth v. Rookwood Fifth	6 5

OTHER MATCHES.	
Bunter Minor's XI. v. Rookwood Fags ..	2 33
Redcliffe Fags v. St. Jude's Fags	8 9

INTER-HOUSE MATCHES.

For an afternoon's entertainment of real fun one has only to witness a House match in which Bolsover, Ponsonby, or Smythe figure. There certainly isn't a dull moment from the "kick-off" till the time when hostilities cease!

This week, chiefly because Bolsover challenged the Greyfriars Middle School team, under the captaincy of James Hobson, nothing very terrible occurred. Skinner, Bolsover's goalkeeper, was knocked clean through the net by the force of the ball on two occasions. Bolsover scored all the goals his side got. In doing so he brought down one of the uprichts.

THE BUNTER MINOR COMEDY.

Sammy Bunter, although the full-blown captain of a team, knows about as much on the subject of football as a pig does about lying.

Sammy's goalkeeper failed to turn up, so they did without one. I expect that had something to do with the number of goals which were netted. The glorious site of the play—Courtfield Gasworks—had many attractions. The chief thing the players seemed to attract were stray cats and dogs—not to mention bricks and tin cans, and squashy apples, and such-like.

Halfway through the match the Bunter team decided that the game had been in progress long enough, and at a word of command from their podgy captain, skeddaddled. The Rookwood Fag team were rather wrathful at this—they had only scored thirty-three goals, and had made up their minds to get a century each. So Silver, Wegg, and the other nine players gave chase. They chased the luckless ten o'er hill and dale—about twelve miles in all. But they failed to catch Bunter minor. That lump of mischief was brought back to Greyfriars by two soldiers, eleven o'clock at night. He had been discovered hiding on top of a haystack, near Wapshot Camp.

HARRY NOBLE.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 721.

Editorial News.

I expect you have already noticed that this issue of the "Gem" is considerably enlarged. This is a little surprise for you all.

GET READY TO SHOUT! GET READY TO SHOUT!

Full details of the Bumper Christmas Number of the "Gem" have just arrived! Half this grand news came from Mr. Editor in London, and half came from Lord Eastwood, the pater of our great and bosom pal, Gussy.

D'ARCY'S DISAPPOINTMENT OUR DELIGHT!

Gussy has been indulging in some more new clobber—quite a new thing for Gussy to do, isn't it?—and as the cash to pay for them was lacking, Gustavus' only alternative was to write to his worthy pa. Lord Eastwood replied promptly: but there was nothing of any cash value in the envelope—simply the glorious tidings that A. A. D'Arcy could bring home twenty of his chums from St. Jim's to Eastwood House for the Christmas vacation.

Gussy has already decided that he will take the Colonials and the occupants of Study No. 10 and No. 6 of the Shell and Fourth Forms, respectively. He has also handed out invitations to the Levisons, Talbot, Kerr, and Fatty Wynn. Several fags are sure to be present—and, of course, my champion girl contributor, Ethel Cleveland, will be there. As circumstances are bad at the Levisons' home, Doris is expected to join her brothers at D'Arcy's ancestral home.

Well, that's for the first half of my tidings!

WEDNESDAY, DEC. 21st. THE GREAT DAY!

I feel quite positive this great number of the "Gem" will be the best that has ever been published. A gorgeous-coloured cover, by a favourite boys' artist, and an increase in pages are the outstanding facts about this great Christmas budget of stories. The literary contents are perhaps, even more important. An extra long narrative by Mr. Martin Clifford, describing our Yuletide adventures at Eastwood House, will be the first great feature. Then there are three which will make a fight for the second place in popularity. The first will be a LARGE PLAN OF ST. JIM'S, showing clearly how the River Ryl, the New House, School House, playing-fields, chapel, and everything of any possible interest is situated. There will also be a plan of the SIXTH FORM PASSAGE. If any more room is available, I expect there will be another plan, showing the ground floor of the School House, and part of the Cloisters. Over this will be superimposed a diagram of THE SECRET PASSAGES! Look out for it!

"TOM MERRY'S WEEKLY" COMING!

Companion for the "St. Jim's News." The above is by no means a complete list of all the splendid features in this great number. There will be the usual pages of the "unbeatable news," as one of my eager supporters described it. In addition to this, No. 1 of my other world-famed publication, "Tom Merry's Weekly," will make its appearance, in a similar form to the "News."

Now, if this stunning news doesn't make you yell with delight, then nothing will.

In conclusion, I might say this is not a secret I am disclosing. I want you to spread the news to all your chums. By doing this you will be helping to prevent any possible chance of disappointment. I'm doing my best to give you grand reading matter for Christmas; you do your bit in return, and oblige your best chum, TOM MERRY.

A Scheme that Went Wrong.

BAGGY'S GREAT DISAPPOINTMENT.

SNORE!

A bag of tarts slipped from the lap of Baggy Trimble, as, with a nod of the head, he fell into a deep sleep. He rested there, just beneath the porch of the old gate of St. Jim's.

Suddenly he was startled from his dreams

by a carman, who was entering the school bearing a large packing-case on his shoulders, and who requested to be directed to the home of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

It cannot be said that Baggy Trimble is always ready to oblige, but he did on this occasion. Possibly a cunning scheme had entered his head, whereby he could obtain the good things necessary for a right royal feed at the expense of another.

"Delighted to help you!" Baggy said to the carman. "And is that tuck you have aboard there?"

"I said, could you direct me to the study of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, please?" thundered the carman, rather upset by the inquisitive Baggy.

Baggy shook at the knees somewhat. He had a little pluck in him, but when it came to standing up to a great burly fellow like this fat carman, it seemed too much for him.

He stepped back a pace.

"Oh—oh, yes, sir!" he stammered. "I will show you the way. Follow me!"

The fat carman humped the box on to his shoulder once again, and followed in the wake of Baggy Trimble.

Right up to the Fourth Form corridor they went, the porter puffing and grunting like a grampus.

George Alfred Grundy, who was hurrying along the corridor at that moment, was brought up by a sudden bump on the shoulder. The carman, unable to see where he was going, was relying on chance; but in this case chance did not favour him.

George Alfred Grundy staggered back, and grasped at his shoulder, which had suffered not a little.

"Get up!" he shouted. "And why the hang don't you look where you are going?"

"Sorry, sir!" was the only explanation the hard-worked carman could offer. "And why don't you go where you are looking?" he added, as an afterthought.

"Sorry he banged!" exclaimed the great George Alfred, who was very much nettled. He could not bear the thought of being knocked about like this. Even if any of his schoolfellows knocked him about, a set-to usually followed.

The porter, seeing he could get no further, dropped his load on the floor with a bump. Unfortunately, Dr. Holmes came along at that moment, and that worthy caught his flowing gown on the corner of the box, causing a sudden rent in it.

Luckily for the old carter, the Head did not notice the accident to his garment, so he passed on. Baggy saw it, and grinned.

A few more words passed between Grundy and the carman, but they were of no consequence Grundy, still rubbing his shoulder, walked away.

The porter was mopping his brow with a handkerchief, and turned to pick up the box, when he was further enraged by the sound of a soft whistle behind him to the tune of "Pack Up Your Troubles In Your Old Kit Bag, and Smile, Smile, Smile."

He turned upon the grinning Baggy, and would have wreaked vengeance upon the offender; but Baggy tactfully sidled towards an approaching junior, and escaped his punishment.

"Come along, Fatty!" he said afterwards. "Get a move on, right away!"

Baggy sped along to the box-room, with the carman following in his wake.

Baggy was already aware of the fact that some thoughtless boulder of a prefect, probably Knox, who had been a party to a little flutter with some of his pals, had carelessly left the key of the box-room in the lock when departing.

He pushed open the door, and beckoned the carman to enter.

"This is the store-room," he said to the delivery man. "If you just leave the package here I will sign for it, and inform Mr. D'Arcy of its arrival. Of course—er—you know he is absent at the moment, having gone down to the village to make inquiries about his box, which he said should have arrived yesterday."

"Ho!" said the carter, dropping his load and wiping his perspiring brow again with his handkerchief. "I wasn't aware of the fact that the goods were late."

Baggy Trimble's hand went nervously to his trousers-pocket, and the jingling of a French coin, together with Baggy's peepknife, changed the old man's face from one of anger to one of expectancy.

"It's like this 'ere, mister," he said quite affably. "I saw as 'ow this trunk was for one o' the young men at this 'ere school, so

I thought I'd just put myself out a little by bringing it along quickly, which I've done." Baggy then withdrew his podgy hand from his pocket, but it was empty.

"Hang!" he muttered. "I've left my cash in my study. How annoying!"

The carter could now see that his chances of a tip were very remote, so, with a grunt, he handed his docket to Baggy for that worthy's signature.

Baggy, with a grubby hand, obliged with the signature "G. F." and with a curt good-afternoon opened the box-room door for the carman to pass out.

As soon as he was alone a smile flitted across his fat face, and he thought of the warm time George Figgins of the New House would have at the hands of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, when he found that it was he who had confiscated his goods. For the initials "G. F." stood for George Figgins. He broke into a loud laugh, and, removing the key from the outside of the lock, he pushed the door to, and locked it on the inside.

"Now for it!" mumbled Baggy, rubbing his fat hands together in delight, and making towards the big case. "Now for a real big feed. I shall get off scot-free, so what's it matter?"

It was not long since that Baggy had had a good dinner, but his appetite could not be satisfied.

He withdrew a penknife from his pocket, and, opening the blade, prepared to cut through the cord of the big box. In spite of the bluntness of his knife, he managed it at last. And then, with a sigh of relief, he prised open the lid.

"Gosh!" Baggy nearly fell back with surprise. Even if the heavens had opened and swallowed him up there and then, he could not have been more awkwardly placed.

For there before him, to his horror and surprise, was the opened box, the contents of which comprised a number of fancy waistcoats, a few pair of socks, ties of a brilliant hue, and two hat-boxes which apparently contained "toppats."

Hastily Baggy groped further into the box. Perhaps there would be something in the way of tuck at the bottom, he thought. But he was to be disappointed.

"Done!" he muttered to himself, as he sank dejectedly on a chair.

After all the trouble Baggy had taken, this was his reward.

There was still one hope left. Tying up the box as best he could, the fat porpoise unlocked the door, and, lifting the great load upon his shoulders, he bumped it along the corridor to Study No. 6, the haunt of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. If nothing else, he was sure of a tip for this undertaking.

He kicked open the door and entered, but to his astonishment who should he find in the company of D'Arcy but the very carman who had delivered the box which he now held. He did not get far, however, before he was caught, and dragged back to Study No. 6.

The carman had been told to collect a parcel at the same time as he was delivering Gussy's box; but he had quite forgotten until he had reached the school gates. And it was there that on mentioning the fact to Ephraim Taggles, the school porter, he came upon the noble swell of St. Jim's himself.

"Pway follow me to my study, deah boy!" had been D'Arcy's words. "So that you can tell me wleash you have left my box."

And so it came to pass that the truth came out. George Figgins got to know of his signature being forged, and he, too, came over to Study No. 6 in a towering rage, ready to thump the podgy form of Baggy Trimble.

Baggy got a good deal more for his trouble than he expected; but let us hope it will teach him a lesson to let other people's things alone in the future.

THINGS WHICH MIGHT IMPROVE ST JIM'S.

(Continued from page 15.)

tact and judgment to make things hnm. What do you think, deah boys?

HARRY NOBLE.—A rattling fine improvement at St. Jim's would be for the Shell Form to be raised into the Fifth. I have an idea it's about time this was done.

TOM MERRY.—A good improvement would be for Dr. Holmes to appoint a few prefects from the Shell Form. I have an idea they would be better able to keep the troublesome Fourth Form kids in order than the Sixth Form prefects.

GEORGE GORE.—I think airgun shot should be provided by the school authorities. It comes a bit too expensive on a fellow's pocket for my liking.

FRANK LEVISON.—I think an elm-tree ought to be chopped down so that it would fall across the entrance to the quadrangle. Then we could construct a spanking fort, and barricade out all the New House fags, and stop them from entering our side at all.

DR. RICHARD HOLMES (Headmaster).—A capital improvement would be effected were the boys who control this publication to fully understand that persons like myself do not like being bothered with such trivial little matters which can be attended to easily by persons whose time is of less importance than the headmaster's.

WALLY D'ARCY.—If the Third Form could be taught by a man, for once, in the place of the monkey who is in charge at present.

HARRY MANNERS.—I should say the kicking out of George Alfred Grundy would be by far the greatest improvement that could be made at St. Jim's.

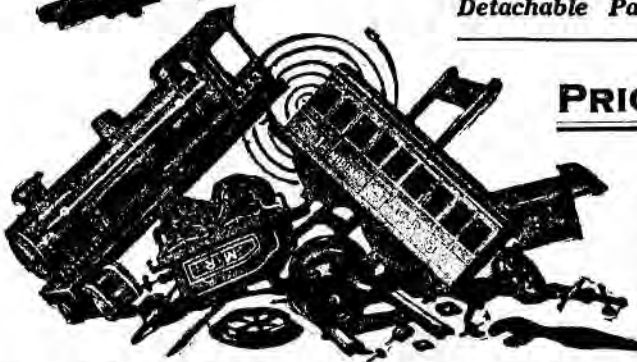
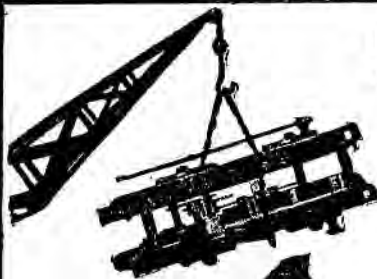
GEORGE ALFRED GRUNDY.—Improvements! By James, there are so many improvements which could be made that I can scarcely give utterance to the first. To begin with, why haven't I been made captain of the Shell? (Echo answers why!—M. L.)

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An extraordinary story, dealing with incidents in the life of Dr. Brutell, the well-known scientist. Brutell, in his normal moods, is a highly respected man, but he is afflicted with a strange malady which alters his whole character.

(Continued from last week.)

HAMMER looked curiously at Dr. Brutell, as though asking for an answer to the problem which so puzzled him, but the doctor merely smiled. He did not intend to give away his precious scientific secret.

After all, he had performed what he had promised, and that was sufficient. It would now be easy to release the prisoners.

Brutell ordered Pinchers to make his way through the opening, and inform the captives that their liberty was within reach once again. He had not been gone long before a number of other men came bundling out of the hole at something like express speed.

There was no time to be lost, and everyone set off at top speed in the direction of the Stanton Ranch, which was some miles distant from the prison.

Fortunately for the gang, they got clear away before their little scheme had been discovered, and owing to the hilly and wooded nature of the surrounding country in that district, it would be hopeless for any but a very large force of men to pursue the fugitives from justice.

For the present, at any rate, they were perfectly safe. Later on, no doubt, the sheriff and his deputies would scour the countryside, but the Black Circle gang were not likely to allow themselves to be captured again so easily. Liberty was very sweet to them, and the majority of the villainous gang had many serious crimes to answer for.

Brutell himself was the last man to wish to run into any unnecessary danger, so now that his task was accomplished, he intended to part company for the present with the rank and file of the gang.

Before departing, the doctor gave his men final instructions. The gang had a secret lair of their own in the mountains, not very far away from the Stanton Ranch, and Brutell instructed them to go there.

The next moment this strange personality had gone. Brutell had not proceeded very far on his way, however, before the evil spell left him, and his normal nature returned once again.

With the departure of the evil influence, all knowledge of his recent escapades left him, for the doctor, of course, when in his good self, does not know what has happened under the spells.

He at once made his way to the ranch-house where Madeleine was staying; and, of course, he reached there long before any of the gang, who were not due until the morning.

Dawn—and Peril.

WHEN Dr. Brutell reached the friendly fireside of the ranch-house that night he received a great welcome from Mr. Stanton's daughter. Madeleine was delighted to see her father's friend safely back again.

The table was set for the evening meal, and the small party, which included Jack Regan, the popular ranch foreman, was a very happy one indeed. There was very little ceremony in the western ranch district. Everyone met on equal terms, and did their

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 721.

The Queer Case of Dr. Brutell

Written by Professor Hector Gordon, Science Master of St. Jim's.

best to entertain one another, for apart from the amusement which they made for themselves, there was very little to do in the evenings when work was done.

But, in spite of the merry little circle which Madeleine had around her, the young hostess did not feel quite at ease. She seemed to have a foreboding that something or other was going to happen, although she had no very definite idea what this would be.

The dinner passed off quite well, and then it was proposed that another entertainment should be given by members of the party. The previous one had been a great success, and the scientific experiments which were performed by Dr. Brutell were very much appreciated. The unfortunate sequel in which the Chinese cook Kwang played the chief part was by now almost forgotten, and Madeleine felt none the worse for the shock she received.

A Surprise Attack I

AT the entertainment Jack Regan, the ranch foreman, gave an exhibition of trick shooting which fairly astonished Madeleine and the rest of the people who made up the small but happy circle that evening. One of his little stunts, in particular, drew a round of applause from the excited audience.

Jack placed a dozen lighted candles in a row in front of the large windows in the room. The windows opened outwards, and the cowboy sharpshooter took the precaution to open these before he started on his little performance. Then, picking up his favourite revolver, he took aim at candle number one in the row.

There was a loud crack as the bullet left the weapon, and the next instant the first of the candles was minus its light. So deadly was Jack Regan's aim that not the smallest part of the wax of the candle was damaged in the slightest.

Almost before the spectators had got over their surprise the revolver barked out again, and the light of the second candle went out. Crack! Crack! Crack!

Ten times more the report of the revolver was heard, and then the whole row of candles were extinguished. Not one error had the sharpshooting ranch foreman made.

It was an exhibition of wonderful shooting. In this unruly wild West the majority of cowboys were fairly hands with the shooting-irons. It was necessary, for a man was never quite sure when he would be called upon to protect his life from an outlaw or handit.

But although these men were quick enough "on the draw," and sure in their aim when the emergency arose, it is doubtful if many of them would dare to challenge Jack Regan to a shooting match.

Everyone present congratulated the handsome and popular young foreman on his clever display. Madeleine clapped her hands in delight, and she could not help thinking at that moment that should any of the members of the Black Circle gang venture in the vicinity they would receive a warm welcome at the hands of the ranch foreman.

Dr. Brutell was also greatly impressed by the display he had just witnessed. He walked across the floor to where Jack Regan was standing, and held out his hand.

"Well done!" he said, as he gripped the hand of the other man. There was a smile on the kindly face of the doctor.

"I am sorry I can't shoot like that," he murmured; "but I can do something with my double X-ray, if you care to see it!"

The members of the party remembered the interesting show which Dr. Brutell gave them on a previous occasion, and they pressed upon him to do something more for them. Needless to say, the clever scientist granted their request, and in a few moments he held them all spellbound with a demonstration of his electrical powers.

The feats which he accomplished were almost uncanny, and far surpassed those which he performed recently. All eyes were

directed towards the wonder scientist, and not the slightest sound disturbed the stillness of the room.

Indeed, the attention of those present was so concentrated upon Dr. Brutell and his double X-ray battery, that nobody in the circle dreamed that at that very moment a terrible peril was swooping down upon them all.

Dawn was breaking over the lonely ranch-house, and with the coming of the morning there came also the sinister figures of the Black Circle gang. The strangely hooded and masked men were swooping down upon the unsuspecting members of the party, and soon their happiness would be turned to consternation and dismay.

Nobody in that room imagined that the forces of evil were drawing nearer and nearer towards them with every moment that passed.

The Black Circle gang were skilled in the art of strategy, and they were not likely to do anything which would arouse the suspicions of their enemies. Nearer and nearer they crept towards their unsuspecting victims.

Soon the leader of the band of villains was able to peer through one of the windows. All was going well with their plan. The villainous scoundrel chuckled to himself with glee as he thought of the surprise which the party within were about to receive.

He waited a moment or two longer, and quite satisfied himself that it was perfectly safe for him to proceed. The fools in the room, he thought, were too interested in something or other to give thought to his presence.

Then this leader of villains gave the signal to his men. It was a long, low whistle which they knew perfectly well. Immediately there was tremendous activity. Men in long, black robes and masks seemed to be everywhere.

They had been hiding in readiness in the vicinity, and at the signal sprang into action without a second's delay. Almost before Jack Regan, Dr. Brutell, and the others inside the room had realised that anything was amiss, a number of the gang had forced admission to the room.

Revolvers and guns were levelled at their heads, and they were powerless to act. The shooting skill of Jack Regan was of no avail. So sudden had been the attack that his revolver lay on a table at one end of the room, and any attempt to reach it would mean that he would be shot dead on the spot by one of the gang.

These men were desperate. They had come to the ranch-house for a definite purpose, and anyone who was so bold to attempt to frustrate their scheme would soon be disposed of.

For the moment, at any rate, Madeleine's friends were defeated. Her father's enemies had struck again, and the unfortunate girl had a pretty good idea what their purpose was. She concluded that they had come in order to recapture the valuable package of bonds and papers which had been returned to her by the police.

Madeleine was filled with bitterness as she gazed at the hideous-looking men who stood in the room before her. Unable to control her feelings any longer, she stretched forth her hand and snatched at the mask which was worn by one of the gang. Then she tugged at it for all she was worth.

Even if the man had shot her dead on the spot the plucky girl would not have minded at the moment. Her heart was filled with hatred towards these despicable men who had robbed her of her beloved father. Before he could get away, Madeleine had succeeded in wrenching off the mask which hid his face from view.

"I'll know your evil face again!" she screamed with excitement, as she looked at the face of the foremost member of the gang. "And one of these days I will make you pay dearly for the evil crimes you and your men have committed!"

A hoarse roar of laughter filled the room, and the next minute the man had regained his mask. It was an easy matter for him

to overpower the defenceless girl, and unfortunately nobody could render her assistance, for they were all well marked with loaded revolvers.

The man whose face had been revealed by Madeleine was Pinchers, the second in command of the Black Circle gang. He walked a step nearer to Madeleine.

"Now that you have seen my face your life is in danger," he growled. "There is only one way in which you can save it. We have come here to get back the packet of papers which were recently restored to you by the police, and we demand to have them. You had better hand over the key of the combination lock to your safe!"

The man's threats made no impression on the girl. She refused to give Pinchers the information he desired, and nothing he said made her alter her mind.

"Well, there is only one way to do the trick," announced the second in command at last. The words were addressed to his followers.

"You must blow open the safe with your guns!"

The members of the gang got to work immediately. A moment later there was a series of loud explosions, and soon one of the men announced that the task had been accomplished.

All this time Dr. Brutell, like the rest of the company, had been standing with his hands above his head. The situation was a most extraordinary one.

In his evil moods the doctor was the leader of this sinister gang of outlaws, but while he was in his normal moods he knew nothing whatever about them. These men were just as complete strangers to him as they were to Madeleine and Jack Regan.

On the other hand, neither Pinchers nor any of the rank and file were aware that this quiet-looking man who had been entertaining the company with what appeared to be conjuring tricks was their chief.

Dr. Brutell at that moment looked anything but the stormy leader of the Black Circle gang. Like the rest of the band of outlaws, he always wore a mask and cloak at the meetings, and nobody had ever seen him without it. Just then the doctor was not

feeling at all sympathetic towards these unwelcome intruders.

If it were possible for them to read thoughts, they would have learnt that although the man with the beard was apparently taking very little interest in the proceedings, his mind was really most active. Brutell was waiting anxiously for an opportunity to overthrow the gang.

If only the man who had the pistol levelled at his head would faint or even look away for a moment, the doctor would be able to set his double X-ray in motion again, and the position would then be rapidly reversed. But the chance which Brutell longed for did not come.

The Black Circle gang were not going to take any risks, and no doubt the slightest movement on the part of anyone in that room would be instantly answered by the crack of a revolver.

Pinchers gave a few hurried words of instruction to his followers, and soon one of them announced that the package which they so ardently desired had been captured again. The second in command was very pleased to hear this news, and he repeated it to Madeleine. There was an ugly leer on his face, but this was effectively hidden by the mask which the man wore.

Now that the object which had brought the gang to the house was attained there was no reason why their departure should be delayed. They knew well enough that the sheriff and his men were on their tracks, and for this reason they did not consider it wise to stay in any particular spot longer than was necessary.

Once again Pinchers gave an instruction, and the men moved in the direction of the door. One of them was carrying the package of bonds.

"Do we let all these people go?" one of the gang asked Pinchers.

The second in command paused for a moment.

"All except this one," he replied, pointing to Madeleine. "I think we had better bring her along with us. It will be safer!"

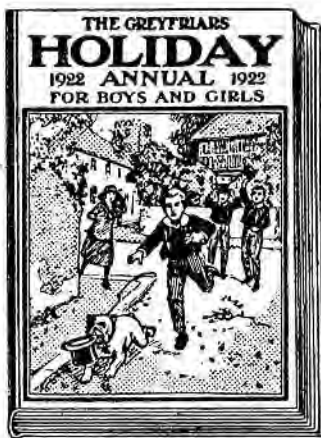
And one of the men caught Madeleine by the wrists and dragged her with him.

Dr Brutell could not stand still and see the poor girl treated in this cruel manner.

"Let me go with you instead," he said. "I'd give my life to save Miss Stanton from harm!"

But his appeal was dismissed by a laugh. There was no way of saving Madeleine!

(To be continued in next Wednesday's GEM.)



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THE VALLEY OF SURPRISE

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dealing with the adventures of
three chums in a strange
country.

By REID WHITLEY.

THE OPENING CHAPTERS.

Hobby Tarrant and Tony Matthews, with Billy Kettle, a trusted negro servant, are on an expedition in the Andes. A volcanic eruption, causing a tremendous tidal wave, carries their canoe into the Valley of Surprise. The party explore the valley, and meet many weird and wonderful animals, and experience many adventurous times. Reaching a village, they are confronted by a race of strange primitive men, who show great hospitality, and make friends. But Maxla, the medicine-man, hates the newcomers, and through a dastardly scheme which he hatches, they very nearly lose their lives. Following this, their path is barred by a number of red-haired, semi-human brutes, who engage them in conflict. The fight is stopped by the appearance of a huge bear, which makes straight for the adventurers.

The Battle of Giants.

TONY let drive two shots. Both hit the brute in the shoulder, but they appeared not to affect its rate of speed. It only growled, and came on. To stay was to fight at the worst advantage, huddled in a crevice with no room to move freely nor any way of escape. Without a word they swung into the narrow crack running down to the gully, and descended as swiftly as possible.

This move nonplussed the bear for a moment. Perhaps he would have turned away and followed the Mangas, had it not been for the pain in his shoulder. He was not crippled, but the bullets hurt and roused his temper. He was determined on revenge.

With a coughing roar, he lowered himself into the chimney—and stuck. The way that availed for humans was of no use to a beast as big as a large bullock. He hauled himself up, surveyed the rocks, and finding another path, made for it.

Meantime, the three had reached the head of the gully. Stones encumbered it, its sides were very steep and covered with thickly-growing thorn bushes, while trees arched above it. It was like a tunnel. Anything might be lurking at the other end, but they had no choice. At the best pace they could make over the rough ground, where every trail of greenery was a snare to hasty feet, they hastened down.

Billy led. The rope he always carried round his waist was coiled in his hand, ready for use on the first tree that offered a refuge, for Billy was a firm believer in the policy of getting above an enemy.

They had come almost to the end of the gully. Before them they could see an open glade surrounded by thin scrub. The saplings were shaking as though something had just passed them. Billy halted. He pointed.

What they had taken for a grey boulder moved at sound of their footsteps. It swung round. It showed a tremendous head with two huge horns, a pair of wickedly-gleaming little eyes, fierce and malicious. In short, it was a rhinoceros—and, moreover, a rhino in a bad temper—thoroughly enraged by being roused from its slumbers.

"My aunt!" babbled Hobby. "We're canned!"

And assuredly they would have been, but for Billy. That resourceful nigger seemed to have foreseen the situation. His arm whirled. Up flew his noosed rope, to fall over

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the end of a broken branch of a tree that overhung them. A pull, and it drew tight. "I've going to pull you up!" he barked, and swarmed up the rope at a rare rate.

He was on the branch in a twinkling. The rhino, rumbling his wrath, was pawing at the ground and behaving very much as a bull does before charging. From the head of the gully came the angry whoof of the bear.

"You first, Hobby!" cried Tony. "Quick!" Hobby grabbed the rope, heard Billy grunt, and shot aloft. In a few seconds he was astride the bough, and the rope dropped beside Tony. At which precise moment the rhino began to move, and the bear came in sight, fifty yards up the trail.

Tony loosed one shot at the bear, gripped the rope, and was moving upwards almost before the crash of the explosion had time to echo down the gully. Then he felt Hobby claw at his arm, lug him on to the branch, and as he wriggled himself to a safe seat saw a huge grey mass whirl below—to encounter a smaller but very active mass of brown-grey fur which leapt to meet it.

Battle was joined, a battle of giants, a battle of claws and teeth, and the terrible, crushing swing of iron-hooked paws, against tough hide, huge horns that could pierce anything mortal, and the pounding drive of enormous strength and weight.

The bear had avoided the first scythe swing of the horned head by a side leap, but the impetus of the rhino's charge was not to be withstood. Over went bruin as the plated shoulder struck him. Yet he was agile as a cat, clawed himself free of the pounding feet that would have sliced his hide to ribbons, and flung himself on rhino's quarters, where he clung, biting furiously.

In a regular contest, with referee and timekeeper, this might have been called the first round, with honours even. But the battles of the wild are waged without rules or breathing spaces or any hint of mercy. The contest went on remorselessly.

Rhino felt the biting teeth sink in his flesh, and, like some huge pig, flung himself on his back. Bruin let go, but not quite soon enough. The rhino's weight fell partially on his hinder legs as he rolled clear. One was crushed. But the movement exposed a vulnerable spot in the rhino's armour, an uncovered crease of its throat.

In a flash the bear's mighty forepaw had swung out the blunt claws tore a great furrow, from which the life-blood began to flow. Perhaps the monster knew that it had received a mortal wound, or else pain put all caution to flight. It swung its head once more, the huge horns met the brown-grey fur—and sunk home. Down went bruin! No flesh or blood could withstand such a thrust.

Yet, game to the last, its paw swept out and down once more, clawing away a strip of hide and flesh from one side of rhino's head. Then, with a roar that died away in a plaintive whimper, the great beast died.

Rhino tried to rise. He got upon his forelegs, wavered a moment, his dreadful head swaying helplessly, then he, too, sank to rise no more. Neither had conquered. Honours were still even.

The fight had occupied but a short minute from the instant of the rhino's charge to the moment of its fall, and the combatants had made but little noise. Also the leaves of the overhanging trees hid the battle from any watchers of the air. Therefore, none of the scavengers that would have been at once on the spot had the battle taken place in the open, put in an appearance. Few creatures had cared to linger in the rhino's neighbourhood, and most were deep in the noontide nap.

Hobby breathed a deep sigh as the fight finished.

"Phew!" he breathed. "That was a fight! I think we'll remember it all our days. What a pair!"

"Very fine scrap dat, gemmen!" agreed Billy. "But we've got to be going before de others comes to pick up de pieces. How we going to do it? It looks mighty bare and lonely to me, alone that way."

He was right. They could see enough of

the country beyond the mouth of the gully to be sure that it offered no safe refuge for a considerable distance. There was a great deal of thick cover, but not many trees of any size, for they were still far from the forest where was their camp. It would be sheer madness to attempt to cross country where every thicket might hold some monster eager to sample them.

"There's nothing for it but the cliff road," said Tony. "It isn't likely that two bears would live near each other at this time of year. As for the Mangas, we must chance them. We'll keep our eyes open, and shoot at sight. Let's move!"

They descended from the tree, hurried up the gully, and climbed the chimney, seeing nothing of the Mangas. Warned by experience, they sought the higher ledge where the enemy had been, and found it broader and more convenient, so that they were able to proceed at speed.

Soon they found that the path divided some ledges leading up the cliff-face, while others dropped almost to the ground. At one place, where a creek of the lake ran up to the cliff-foot, the rocks were worn by generations of feet. Evidently it was the spot where the Mangas drank.

But never a red appeared as they passed on by another well-beaten trail to where a tall tree leant against the cliff, its branches intertwined with several others, which in turn communicated with the forest they had left so dramatically the day before.

Not till they had reached the branches, and moved some distance along the airy road, did they halt to rest. By this time they were ravenous, but it was not the thought of food alone that set them thinking of the Ariki village.

"I break de neck of dat dog Maxla!" growled Billy. "Him done dat because he jealous of me."

"Of all of us, I think," said Tony. "He is afraid that the tribe won't fear him any more. With us out of the way it would be easy enough to regain his old supremacy. I think he has already told them some yarn about us going back to the sun—by steggy, back! I think he'll curl up when he sees us!"

"I'll curl him up!" said Hobby. "I feel as though I had never eaten anything in my life! I think I'll make a hobby of meals for the rest of my days!"

"There won't be many of them if you do," jeered Tony. "You'll die of indigestion!"

"Then the sooner I set about it the better!" retorted Hobby, and set off at his best gait.

But they had still a long way to go, and though the path was well marked, the Ariki had set many traps in it which had to be avoided, so the afternoon was well advanced ere the smell of the midden, mingling with the more savoury odours of the cooking-pots, warned them that they were close to the village.

As before, there was a humming, chanting noise, rising and falling amidst the tree-tops.

"Maxla is making a heap big medicine!" murmured Tony. And with that they turned the corner, and came into view of the medicine-man himself and the whole tribe assembled on the platform.

The Raiders.

AT the sight of them the chant broke off. Maxla stared as though he could not believe his eyes. He had seen the three carried off by the beast which spared nothing living that came within its reach, yet here they were back again to plague him! Most probably he swore. At all events, he sought safety.

Doubtless he had reasons for keeping a way of retreat open. Now he used it. With a swift movement, he swung himself over the edge of the staging, fumbled for an instant at a coil of rope that hung there, then shot downwards as the line uncoiled. A swing, and he had crossed the gap, gripped a bundle of lianas, and was out of sight on the instant while yet his tribesmen stood spellbound.

Not till the sound of his crashing retreat began to die away did they wake up. A

(Continued on page 22.)

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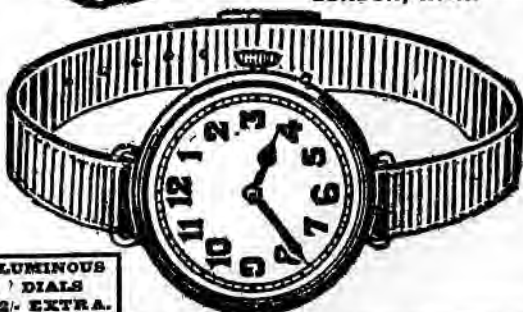
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THE VALLEY OF SURPRISE.

(Continued from page 20.)

long sigh of relief burst from them, which rose to a shout as Lalo swung the bridge that the three might cross. Though no one had seen the medicine-man's treacherous deed on the day before, some had no doubt suspected that he had had a hand in the sudden disappearance of the benevolent, strange gods.

Lalo had given them up for lost. He was a practical man, and he knew that even if the three were endowed with wonderful powers, they would need them all, and a good deal of luck to boot, if they were to escape from the position in which he had had his last sight of them. He had not expected them to return.

Yet here they were, a trifle the worse for wear, maybe, yet whole and hearty. As they reached the staging he prostrated himself in worship, an example followed by the whole tribe.

"Tell him that we have come back from looking over the valley," said Tony. "Tell him that Maxla would have killed us, but that we were too powerful. Tell him that Maxla is not to be allowed to return. He has shown that he has the heart of a Manga. Let him live with the Mangas, if they will have him!"

Billy translated this speech, and the chief's reply was:

"Maxla is a bad man. He has oppressed the Ariki for a long time. But he is our medicine-man. If we have no medicine-man to say the proper words and make the proper sacrifices, the fish of the lake will come no more to the places where we can catch them. The birds which we snare will desert the forest, and all the creatures which we hunt through the branches will go away, and we shall starve!"

"And the beggar believes it, too!" said Tony to Hobby. "What shall we say?"

"Tell him that we will all be their medicine-men," suggested Hobby. "They'll have three times as much luck. If they want us to make a ceremony, we'll oblige!"

Maxla must have heard the shout of joy with which the Ariki greeted this announcement. They knew that they were in for a good time. With three god-like beings for their medicine-men, everything was possible!

Then Tony bade them rise, and bring food, which was speedily forthcoming. With two days arrears to make up, the trio ate prodigiously, and since it was too late to venture back to their own camp, they lay

down in the hut prepared for them, and were at once asleep.

Tony awoke with the first light. A couple of drowsy sentries prostrated themselves as he appeared; but no one else was stirring, so he climbed aloft among the higher branches, till at last he was swaying on the topmost. From that lofty perch he could see far over the forest clear to the cliffs which he and his companions had traversed in their perilous journey.



Tony loosed one shot at the bear, gripped the rope, and was moving upwards almost before the crash of the explosion had time to echo down the gully. Then he felt Hobby claw his arm and tug him on to the branch.

He could even guess at the whereabouts of the gully in which they had so narrowly escaped from bear and rhino, for the sky above the place was dotted with carrion birds, wheeling, hovering, stooping, then rising to fly off with some fragment of the monsters.

But it was not these that held his attention. Much nearer, in the forest itself, he could see birds flutter up from the tree-tops, circle about, and settle again. They looked like puffs of smoke against the clear morning sky.

Something was disturbing them—something which moved in a line that would bring it at last to the empty camp. Could it be a jaguar? The obvious solution of the problem flashed across Tony. Maxla had succeeded in making friends with the Mangas. But since he had left his tribe in a hurry, he went to them empty-handed, with no presents wherewith to ingratiate himself.

The Mangas were almost brutes, of course, but no doubt they desired gifts even though they might make no use of them. Since Maxla dared not return to his own folk, what better could he do than lead his new friends to the camp of the strangers, and present them with the loot?

Tony lingered no longer, but descended in a hurry, shouting an alarm as he went. The village woke with a buzz, Billy Kettle yelled, Hobby grunted, yawned, and demanded what all the racket meant.

"I think the Mangas are going to loot our camp," replied Tony. "If Maxla is with them he will show them how to get across. Here's Lalo! Tell him, Billy, and say we want some of his chap's to come along, too. Hurry up! We haven't a moment to lose!"

Lalo's eyes kindled when he heard what was wanted of him. Any chance of killing Mangas was welcome, and if he could put an arrow into the renegade Maxla as well, so much the better. Cupping his hands about his mouth, he bellowed the war-whoop, which brought the warriors running to him.

Five minutes after the alarm had been given, Tony, Hobby, and the negro set out with a score of copper-coloured followers, headed by the chief himself.

They moved as silently as possible, with scouts ahead to give warning of any ambush, and they made good time. Soon the scouts halted, peered, and returned. Lalo whispered to Billy.

"Him say dem fellows near us. Dem going to our camp. Dat fellow Maxla wid dem."

At that moment a guttural roar from the cover ahead announced that the Mangas had discovered their foes were close at hand. A shower of heavy stones came crashing through the leaves, injuring one of the Ariki and making the rest skip to the cover of trunks and branches.

Then, bellowing like so many bulls, the Mangas charged.

(To be continued in next Wednesday's "Gem.")

EDITORIAL.

My Dear Chums,—

This great barring-out series of ours is proving just the triumph I felt would be the case. It is a long time since we have had a series of the kind, but it has been asked for time and again.

There is something about a barring-out which appeals. That sounds like favouring rebellion, but it is not. A barring-out is only to be welcomed when the cause in question has the right with it, and is up against definite wrong. It is on such occasions that rebellion changes into justifiable warfare.

Lots of unfortunate things lead up to a barring-out. It was the very essence of ill-luck that the Head should catch a cold, worse still even that he should have fallen a victim because of the disastrous mistake in the garden.

But the very unluckiest fact lay in the position of Mr. Ratcliff. "Ratty" as senior Housemaster seems unthinkable. The same gentleman as substitute for the Head passes reasonable belief.

Yet there it was, and nobody could

blame Dr. Holmes for letting the supreme authority in the school be wielded by the most unpopular master who ever held a pointer in the old school. It was not the fault of the dear old Head. He does not do unfair things, not knowingly. If you watch life itself you see cases of the sort. Some miserable, small-minded tyrant with a vile temper, a heap of jealousy, and a cartload of spite and ignorance, gets into a berth for which he is no more fitted than a green-eyed toad. Then comes trouble.

There is no doing anything with such a man. We all know that reason and calm sense do not appeal to Mr. Ratcliff. He has a shabby soul.

One thing stands out—namely, the splendid attitude of Mr. Ralston. He was amply justified in his action, though an extreme one.

Coming to another matter, I should like to remind readers of the "Gem" that they are not too late to enter the "Boys' Herald" £200 competition. Now is the time to secure some extra cash for Christmas.

The "Gem" Christmas Number will maintain all the grand old traditions of the paper, make sure of that. Mr. Martin Clifford is writing a magnificent story, and there will be heaps of extra attractions.

YOUR EDITOR.

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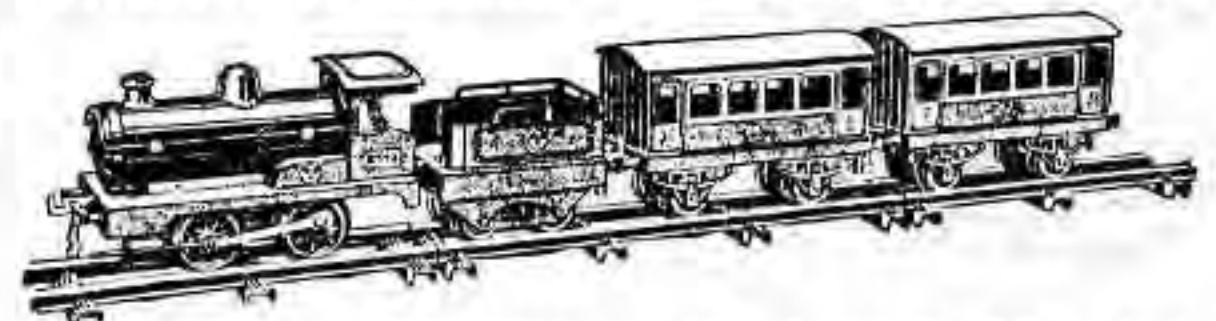
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