

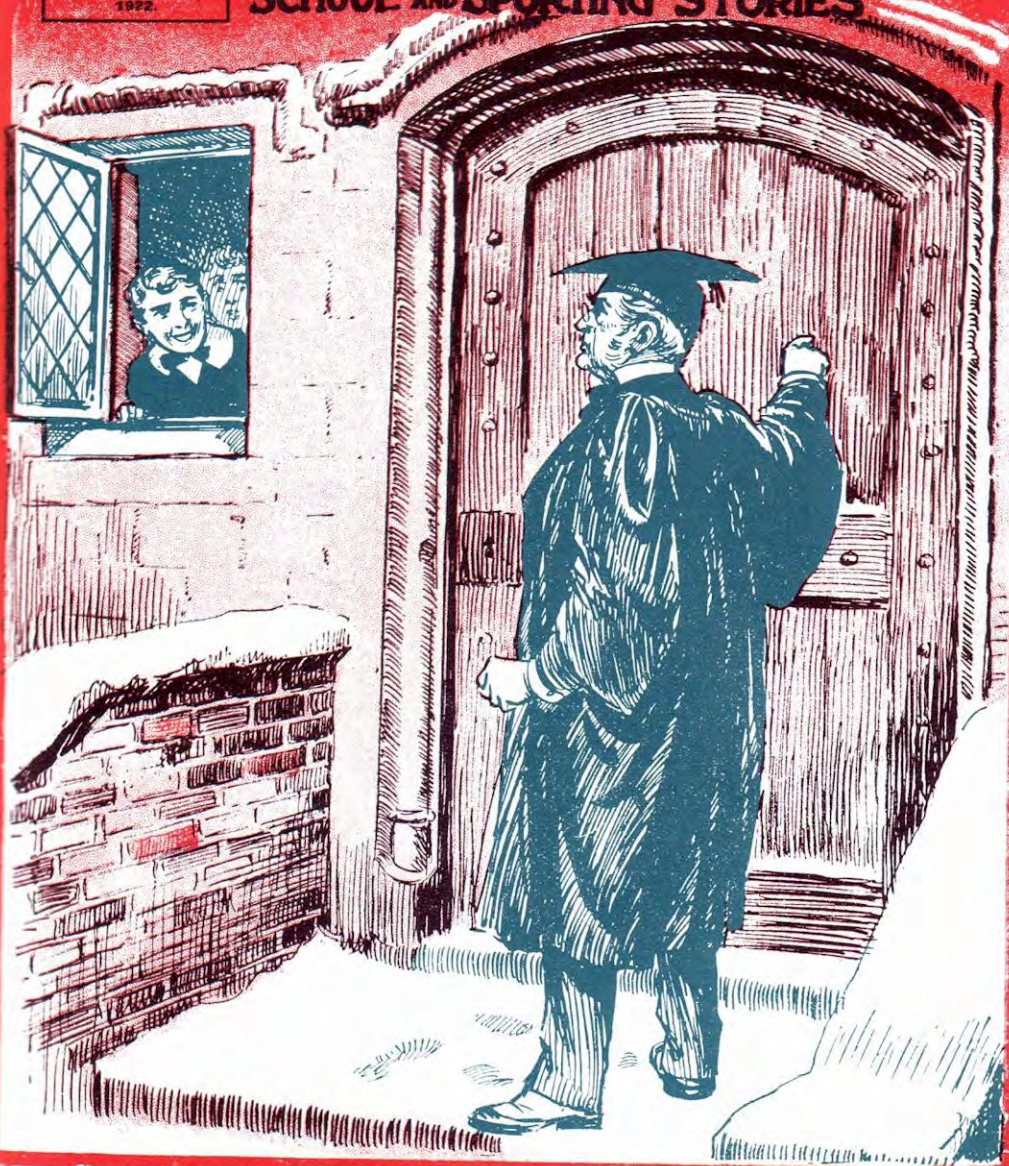
DON'T MISS OUR CHRISTMAS BARRING-OUT STORIES!

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SCHOOL AND SPORTING STORIES



THE HEAD BARRED OUT AT ST. JIM'S!

A Dramatic Situation in the Great Complete School Story Inside.

Published by Howard Baker Press Ltd, 27a Arterberry Road, Wimbledon, London, S.W. 20.





My Readers' Own Corner

Let Me Hear Your Latest Joke!

**Tuck Hampers and Money Prizes Awarded for Interesting Paragraphs.
(If You Do Not Win a Prize This Week—You May Next.)**

All Efforts in this Competition should be Addressed to: The GEM, "My Reader's Own Corner," Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C. 4.

THIS WINS OUR TUCK HAMPER :— A COMPLETE OUTFIT.

A small and somewhat ragged schoolboy told his mother one day that he had been playing football for his school, and that his teacher had told him he was such a good player, and if he stuck to it he might some day be an International. The lady was quite ignorant as regards football, and was not at all impressed by this statement. "Oh," she said. "And what does an International mean?" "Why," the proud lad replied, "it means that I should play for my country and get a cap." "A cap! Pshaw!" quoth the mate mother. "You go back and tell your teacher that if it isn't worth a whole football outfit you are not going to play any more!"—A Tuck Hamper filled with delicious Tuck has been awarded to W. Freeman, 1, Clarendon Road, St. Cross, Winchester, Hants.

SOUND ADVICE!

A lonely American, during his Christmas stay in England, went into a tea-shop. The waitress, after a short interval approached him. "I want two boiled eggs and a kind word, please," said the customer. The waitress disappeared for a time, then returning, placed the eggs before the customer and went away in silence. "Say," said the American, "what about the kind word?" The waitress turned round. "Don't eat the eggs!" she said, and passed on.—Half-a-crown has been awarded to H. Whittingham, 1936, Esplanade Avenue, Montreal, Quebec, Canada.

SHORTSIGHTED VERY!

A rather short-sighted man was completed all the tests but one, and in endeavouring to enlist in the Army. He the eye test he failed miserably. "What's this?" asked the instructor, impatiently, holding up at the same time a large circular tray. "Er—er—half-a-crown or two-shilling piece," answered the man.—Half-a-crown has been awarded to W. Williams, 34, Market Street, Hanley, Staffs.

HAIR RAISING!

"My sister won't be able to see you to-night, Mr. Jones," said little Betsy Brown. "She's had a terrible accident." "Is that so?" inquired Jones, very much upset. "What's happened?" "All her hair has been burnt up!" "Good heavens," said Jones. "Was she badly hurt?" "No, not a bit," answered the little girl, "she wasn't there!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to E. Corris, 43, Lily Road, Litherland, Liverpool.

OUT OF THE COMMON!

A golf tournament was in progress, and most of the villagers had turned up to witness the game. All went well until General Hotstuff took his turn on the tee. The general looked determined, and prepared for a mighty stroke. He braced himself and let fly. Something hit the club-house roof, but it wasn't the ball. It was a huge tuft of the common. "Extraordinary!" grunted the general. "Yes, it was a bit out of the common!" replied his sarcastic rival.—Half-a-crown has been awarded to J. S. Greene, 109, Belmont Road, Anfield, Liverpool.

ARTFUL SANDY!

It was the third time Sandy had been late at school that week, and his teacher inquired the reason. "Weel, sir," said Sandy, "the road was so slippery, that every time I took one step forward, I slipped two steps back." "Well," said the teacher, "and how did you manage to reach here at all?" The wily Sandy was not at a loss, but immediately replied: "I pretended to go the other way, sir!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to J. W. Harradine, 29, Pages Walk, London, S.E.1.

ATTEMPTED FRAUD!

In the market-place a "cheap-jack" was trying hard to dispose of his bargains, but the townspeople were slow to purchase. "Look 'ere," he shouted despairingly, "ere's a bargain—twenty-five postcards for a penny." A

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young fellow in the front row eyed the tempting bait, and began feeling in his pocket for the necessary coin, when his old mother put a restraining hand on his shoulder. "Don't you, Jim," she whispered, "it's a fraud. I've seen 'em, and there ain't no stamp on them!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to W. G. Furze, 23, Dalrymple Road, Ashley Road, Bristol.

LADIES FIRST!

Little Tommy and his sister were just going to bed without a light. Reaching the foot of the stairs, Tommy looked into the darkness, then, feeling a little nervous, turned round to his mother and said: "Ma, is it polite for a gentleman to go before a lady?" "No, my son," replied the mother. "The lady should always take the lead." "I thought so," said Tommy delightedly. "Go ahead, Susie!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to J. Proctor, 29, Wood Street, Penzance, Auckland, New Zealand.

RETORT COURTEOUS!

A navy entered a railway carriage and took his seat opposite a very affected and overdressed dandy who was nursing a strange-looking dog. The navy was very interested, and asked: "Excuse me, guv'nor, but what sort of a dorg is that?" "Well, if you must know," replied the dandy, annoyed at being spoken to by the navy, "it's a cross between a navy and a monkey!" "Oh," replied the navy quick as lightning, "related to both of us, then!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Ernest C. Higgs, Globe Works, Clapton, E. 5.

AND HE MEANT IT!

"My boy, you have saved my life!" exclaimed the gentleman, as he tried to reclaim the water out of his clothes. "Let me reward you." He thrust his hands into his trousers-pocket and brought out a threepenny-bit. "There, my boy, this is for you, but don't spend it foolishly." "No, sir, I can't take it," replied the lad, as he pushed the generous hand aside. "I didn't earn it." "Why, you saved my life, boy," said the man. "Yes, I know," answered the lad, "but it ain't worth threepence!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Miss M. Hughes, Northgate, Hessele, near Hull.

A Christmas Barring-Out!

Read How The Rebellious Chums of St. Jim's Hold the Fort
Against All Comers.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

A Surprise for the School!

"TOM MERRY!"

"Sacked!"

"Rot!"

"Utah wot!" declared Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

A bombshell dropping into the middle of the old quadrangle at St. Jim's could not have caused a greater sensation.

The fellows simply could not believe it.

Tom Merry, the captain of the Shell, the best of fellows, kindest friend and noblest foe, expelled from the school!

It was incredible!

The school buzzed with the news. In both Houses—School House and New House—it was the single amazing topic.

Tom Merry—sacked!

So incredible was the tale, that when Baggy Trimble of the Fourth rushed into Study No. 6 with the exciting news, Blake & Co. promptly collared Baggy, and bumped him out, as a reward for spinning so incredible a yarn.

Then Study No. 6 went out to look for news—and found that it was true.

There were grave faces in the School House—grave and startled faces. Fellows who had been thinking chiefly of the Christmas holidays, forgot now that break-up was at hand. Tom Merry and the disaster that had befallen him, filled all their thoughts.

That it was true there was soon proof, for Talbot of the Shell marched up to Mr. Railton in the passage, and demanded the facts. Mr. Railton, Housemaster of the School House, was looking grave and troubled. A score of fellows gathered round breathlessly as Talbot of the Shell bearded the don, as it were.

"They're saying that Tom Merry is expelled, sir," said Talbot quietly and respectfully, but with a glint in his eyes. "It can't be true."

"I am sorry to say that it is perfectly true, Talbot!" answered the Housemaster.

"Tom Merry—expelled!"

"Yes."

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Then it is true—unless Waiton has gone off his wackah."

"What has he done, sir?" asked Talbot, still quietly.

The juniors hung on the Housemaster's reply. They wanted to know, with breathless keenness.

Not that it was any use for even so respected a gentleman as Mr. Railton, to tell them that Tom Merry had done anything rotten. They knew Tom too well to believe that, if the Head himself told them. The faith of the St. Jim's fellows in the junior captain was likely to come as a surprise to the Headmaster who had condemned him.

"The whole school must know," said Mr. Railton, after a brief pause. "Merry, I am sorry to say, has brought the deepest disgrace upon himself and upon his school."

"Impossible, sir!" said Talbot.

"Rubbish!" said Blake.

Mr. Railton glanced at Jack Blake.

"What did you say, Blake?"

Blake had not exactly intended his Housemaster to hear his comment. But the sturdy Yorkshire junior stood to his guns. "I said it was rubbish, sir," he answered. "Nobody at St. Jim's will ever believe that Tom Merry has disgraced the school."

"No fear!" said Levison of the Fourth.

"Wathah not!"

"Kindly be silent," said Mr. Railton, with a frown. "I

will explain the matter. The Head would be greatly grieved if it should be supposed that Merry has not received the strictest justice. There was a robbery in the New House last night."

"Nothing to do with Tom Merry, sir, surely?" said Talbot, with a stare.

"Tom Merry was the thief."

"Impossible!"

"Wats!" yelled Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, in great excitement and indignation.

"D'Arcy!"

But the swell of St. Jim's did not heed his Housemaster's frown.

"I wepest, wats!" he shouted. "You are makin' a vevy sewious mistake, Mr. Waiton. I am survised at you!"

"Silence!" thundered the Housemaster.

There was a deep murmur from the crowd of juniors. More and more fellows were gathering in the wide corridor as the news spread that Mr. Railton was explaining about Tom Merry.

There was disbelief in every face.

Evidence that would satisfy the headmaster, that might have satisfied a judge and jury, was not likely to have any effect on fellows who knew Tom Merry well, who lived with him daily and knew his ways, and knew that he was incapable of a rascally action. Even fellows like Racke and Crooke looked incredulous; even Baggy Trimble did not believe a word of it.

"Mr. Ratcliff's study in the New House was forcibly entered," said Mr. Railton. "His desk was broken open and money taken. Merry has confessed that he was there at the time—"

"What?"

"Bai Jove!"

"We knew that Tom was out of House bounds last night, sir," said Kangaroo of the Shell. "But we know he never robbed Mr. Ratcliff."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"The case is proved," said Mr. Railton sternly. "Merry has admitted more than enough to condemn him."

"Wats!"

"D'Arcy, if you dare—"

"It's no good tellin' us that Tom Merry has confessed to a wobbewy, sir, because we know he couldn't have done it."

"Has he confessed, sir?" asked Talbot.

"He has not confessed to the theft. He has told an incredible story that he entered Mr. Ratcliff's study by a window already forced open, and that he found a burglar there."

"That's true, sir."

"What! What do you know about the matter, Talbot?" exclaimed Mr. Railton, startled.

Talbot smiled slightly.

"Only what you have just told me, sir! I say that is true, because you say Tom Merry said so."

"Hear, hear!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Mr. Railton made an impatient gesture.

"I have explained the matter in order that there may be no misconception," he said. "The Head desires all the school to know that justice has been done. Tom Merry will leave St. Jim's. If any of you boys have any influence with him, I beg you to exert it in inducing him to return the money he has taken before he is turned out of the school. In any case, he goes."

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Mr. Railton walked on.

"Shame!" roared Blake.

The Housemaster spun round.

"Blake! You—"

"I said shame, and I mean shame!" shouted Blake, too enraged to care what he said; or to whom he said it. "Tom Merry never touched old Ratty's filthy money—more likely old Ratty stole it than Tom Merry!"

"Blake!"

"It's a rotten shame—a rotten shame!" yelled Blake. "And—and I don't care if you do lick me!"

It was fortunate that Jack Blake did not care if Mr. Railton licked him; for the Housemaster grasped him by the collar, marched him into his study, and licked him there and then. As a matter of fact, Blake looked as if he did care, when he emerged from the study, rubbing his hands.

But he was quite unsubdued.

"It's a shame!" he said to the excited mob of juniors.

"Tom Merry's as innocent as a baby."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Tom Merry steal!" said Digby, with ineffable contempt.

"I don't believe he could if he tried!"

"Utter rot!" said Herries.

"It's about time this school got a new headmaster!" said Cardew of the Fourth. "Dr. Holmes is losin' his grip!"

"Must be off his rocker!" said Clive.

"Wight off, bai Jove!"

"It's a shame!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with his eyeglass gleaming in his noble eye, marched up to Mr. Railton's door and knocked.

"Come in!"

Arthur Augustus threw the door open and strode into the study. The crowd of juniors watched him breathlessly, wondering what this might portend.

"What is it, D'Arcy?" snapped the Housemaster.

"You have caned Blake for sayin' it was a shame!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"I have!"

"Then you had bettah cane me, too, sir!"

"What!"

"Because I say it's a shame, as well as Blake!" said Arthur Augustus. "In fact, sir, I say it is a wotten shame! And I wepeat, sir, that it is a beastly wotten shame!"

Mr. Railton gripped his cane.

"Hold out your hand, D'Arcy!"

"Certainly, sir! If you are goin' to be unjust to Tom Mewwy and to Blake, I may be unjust to me also!"

"Bravo, Gussy!" came in a roar from the passage.

Swish, swish!

"Now you may go, D'Arcy!" said the School House master, laying down the cane.

Arthur Augustus rubbed his hands. His aristocratic palms were burning.

"Vewy well, sir. I will go. But I wepeat that it is a shame—"

"Go!"

"An uttally wotten beastly shame— Yawoooooooooh!"

Arthur Augustus' eloquence was suddenly cut short as the angry Housemaster grasped him by the collar. D'Arcy flew out of the study like a stone from a catapult. And Mr. Railton's door slammed behind him, hiding a very troubled Housemaster from the sight of half a hundred excited and indignant schoolboys.

CHAPTER 2.

Tom Merry's Resolve!

"TOM!"

"Tom, old fellow!"

Manners and Lowther looked, as they felt, utterly wretched. Tom Merry, though it was he upon whom the disaster had fallen, looked less utterly dismayed and despondent than his chums.

The Terrible Three were in their study—No. 10 in the Shell. They knew that the School House was in a ferment, but they hardly heeded it. For the first time in their history the Terrible Three of St. Jim's were feeling "down and out."

Tom Merry could hardly realise it yet.

He was sacked, expelled from the old school, in a deep ignominy from which his stained name could never recover. The Head's stern words still rang in his ears, yet he could scarcely believe that this thing really had come to pass.

He sat silent in the study, his hands in his pockets, his handsome face pale, thoughtful, and growing grim.

Manners sat on the corner of the table, restlessly swinging

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his legs. Monty Lowther moved about the study, unable to keep still, like a wild animal in a cage.

Tom Merry had been silent for a long time, trying to think out this catastrophe, and to decide what he must do—what he could do. And the more he thought, the more grim and determined grew the expression on his face. The terrible disaster had overcome him at first; he had felt completely knocked out. But Tom was not the kind of fellow to bow his head meekly to misfortune.

He looked up at last. Manners met his glance hopelessly. Lowther came to a standstill, and looked at him miserably.

"What's going to be done?" muttered Lowther. "It's a shame! It's rotten! You can't leave St. Jim's like this, Tom! If you do, I'll jolly well leave, too."

Manners nodded.

"Sink or swim together!" he said. "Wherever we go, Tom, we're all going together! Sink or swim!"

"The Head must be potty!" said Lowther. "What's the matter with him? To think that you—you, Tom—"

Lowther's voice broke.

"Let's be fair to the Head," said Tom Merry quietly. "The evidence is all against me. Ratty's study was broken into, his desk robbed, and I was there; and I suppose that any fellow caught in such a fix, who was a thief, would have spun a yarn about seeing a burglar there. So they think I was spinning a yarn about the man I saw. But they ought to know me better—the evidence is good enough to convict in a court of law, I believe—but they've no right to believe that a fellow who has always been decent has turned thief. If it were a fellow like Trimble or Mellish or Chowie, it would be a question of evidence, because their word can't be taken, and that's well known. But nobody's ever said before that

my word can't be taken. The evidence would be good enough for a judge, I believe; but the Head knows me, and he ought to believe in me. That's how I look at it."

"That's how we look at it," said Manners. "And I think that's how all the Lower School will look at it."

"I fancy most of the fellows will believe in me," said Tom.

"All, or nearly all," said Monty Lowther. "But—but you're to leave, Tom; that's fixed now."

Tom raised his head proudly.

"If I'd laid a finger on money that didn't belong to me I'd leave fast enough," he said. "I'd be glad to hide my head in any corner where any fellow that had known me couldn't ever see me again. But I'm not going to leave St. Jim's!"

"Tom!"

"I've thought it out," said Tom, quietly and calmly. "It's not only my self I've got to think of. There's my old governess and guardian, Miss Fawcett. Think of the effect of this on her if I go home in disgrace! I'd face anything sooner than that!"

He paused a moment.

"I'm not going!" he repeated. "If I were guilty, that would be a different matter. I'd be glad to sneak away quietly then, and the less talk there was the better it would be. But I am innocent, and I don't care if the whole affair becomes public! I don't care if it rings from one end of the kingdom to the other! I'm going to put up a fight!"

His chums stared at him.

"But, Tom—"

"How—"

"If I'm pitched out by force, I shall hang on somehow afterwards!" said Tom. "But I shan't be pitched out easily! There was a barring-out in this school once!"

"A—a barring-out! But—"

Tom smiled faintly.

"I'm not going to drag my friends into this," he said. "I'm going to stand up for myself on my own. I'm going to stay at St. Jim's, as I've a perfect right to do. I haven't thought it all out yet, but I'm going to fix it up somehow—perhaps in the clock-tower, somewhere they can't get at me easily, and I'm holding on!"

Lowther whistled softly.

"Good egg, old man! We're standing by you!"

"What-ho!" said Manners.

Tom Merry shook his head.

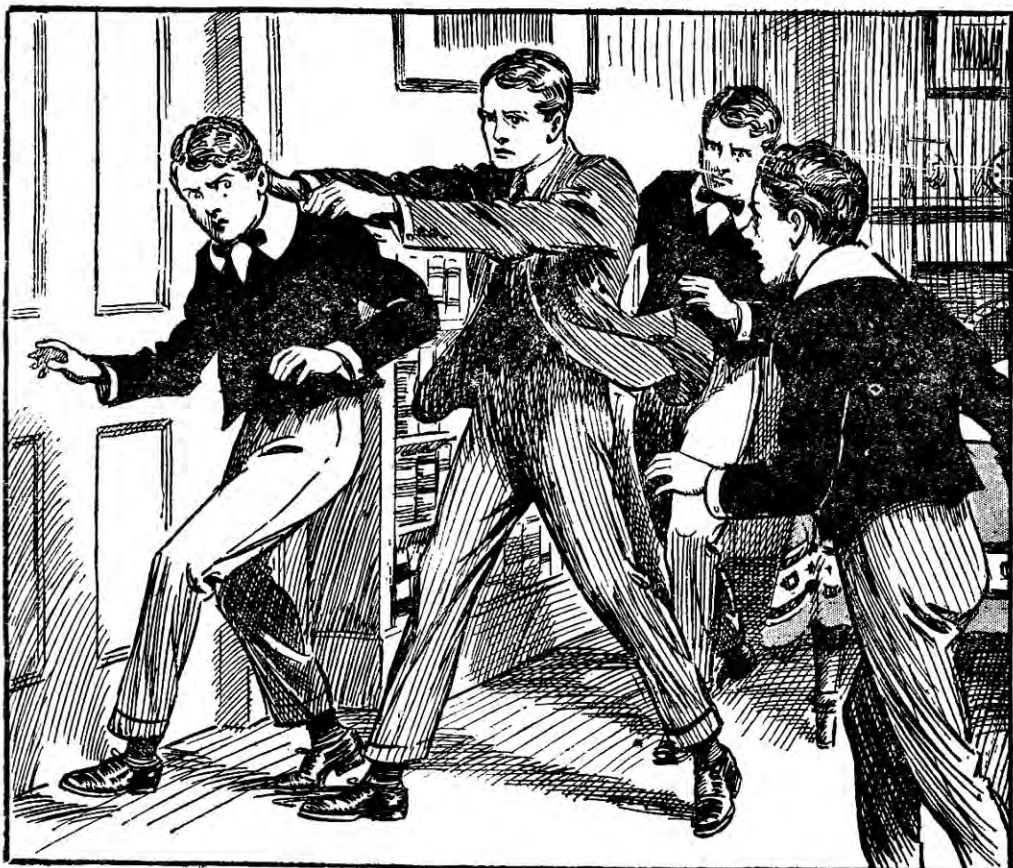
"I'm not dragging you into it, old chaps," he said.

"You can't help yourself," said Lowther coolly. "We're standing by you, whether you like it or not!"

"Don't be an ass, Tom!" said Manners. "It's sink or swim together for us three! If you go, we go! Our people might

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Kildare grasped Tom Merry by the shoulders with both hands and swung him to the doorway. As he did so Manners and Lowther, as if moved by the same spring, leaped at the captain of the school and dragged him back. There was a terrific crash as the Sixth Former went to the carpet, with the three Shell fellows scrambling and sprawling over him. (See page 6.)

raise objections to our leaving with you. So if you go, we'll all be kicked out together!"

"That's it!" said Lowther. "We hang on till the Head comes to his senses, or they can sack the whole giddy family!"

Tom Merry's shadowed face brightened. In this extremity, with his fortunes at their lowest ebb, he could count at least upon the loyalty of his two best chums.

"But—" he said slowly.

"Blow your butts!" said Lowther. "Now we've decided what we're going to do, let's make the plans. It won't be easy."

"I believe lots of the fellows will join up," said Manners. "We'll make a real barring-out of it!"

"Hold on, old fellow," said Tom. "We're just on break-up for Christmas. Your people will be expecting you home—"

"That's all right!"

"You can't spend Christmas here, in a giddy row," said Tom. "I'm not going! If I go home for Christmas, I can't come back for the new term. That's surrender. I'm sticking on. But you—"

"We're sticking, too, like glue!" said Lowther. "Blow the holidays! Think we could do the holiday bizney with you kicked out of the school! We'll have our Christmas here!"

"But—"

"Rats! Hallo, here comes somebody!"

There was a footstep in the Shell passage, a knock at the door, and it opened to reveal Kildare of the Sixth. The captain of St. Jim's looked into the study, his face very grave.

"You're here, Merry!"

"Here I am, Kildare," said Tom.

"The Head has sent me to speak to you," said Kildare.

"It's about the money that was taken from Mr. Ratcliff's study last night."

"I know nothing of that."

Kildare looked at him curiously.

"I won't pass any opinion on that," he said. "The Head's decided, and the Head's word is law here. He has ordered you to return the money before you leave the school. Are you doing so?"

"I cannot return money I have not taken."

"Yes or no?" said Kildare sharply.

"I cannot answer either 'Yes' or 'No,'" answered Tom steadily. "I simply cannot return money I have not touched. That's all!"

"That means 'No,' I suppose?" said Kildare. "Very well, your things will be searched for it."

"You can search where you like. You will not find any of Ratty's hoard among my things."

"Have you packed your box?"

"No."

"You had better do so. You are, of course, excused from lessons this afternoon," said Kildare. "I am to take you to the station at five o'clock for the train."

"I am not going."

Kildare stared.

"What?" he exclaimed. "What's that?"

"I'm not going."

"Don't be a young ass!" said Kildare impatiently. "You had better go and pack your box."

"I shall do nothing of the kind!"

Kildare breathed hard.

"Do you know that you are talking to a prefect?" he asked.

Tom Merry smiled bitterly.

"You can't expect an expelled thief to care much about prefects," he answered. "I'm stating facts. Tell the Head, from me, that I am innocent, and that, being innocent, I refuse to leave the school."

"Yes; I'm likely to give the Head that message," said Kildare, with a shrug of the shoulders. "This sort of cheek won't do you any good, Tom Merry."

"It's not cheek, Kildare. I've made up my mind."

"We shall see," said the captain of St. Jim's grimly. "Come with me now, Merry. I have orders to see that you pack your box, and then to lock you in the punishment-room till you leave."

"Why?" asked Tom.

"So that you can't get at the money you have hidden somewhere," answered Kildare. "Come!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Search for the money, if you like," he said. "I shall not pack my box. I shall not be locked in the punishment-room. I don't want trouble with you, Kildare—I've always liked you. But if you lay a finger on me I shall resist."

"I don't think that will help you much," said Kildare grimly. "Now, are you coming?"

"No."

"Then I must take you!"

Kildare strode towards the captain of the Shell. Tom Merry clenched his hands hard, and his eyes gleamed. He was no match for the stalwart Sixth-Former; but he was quite capable of giving even Kildare of the Sixth a tussle.

"Hands off!" he said, between his teeth.

Kildare smiled grimly, and dropped his hand on Tom Merry's shoulder with a grip that was like iron.

"Come along," he said.

The next instant Tom struck at his wrist, and Kildare's grasp relaxed. He uttered a cry of pain.

"Merry! You young ruffian!"

"I told you to keep your hands off."

Kildare did not answer that. He grasped Tom Merry by the shoulders with both hands, and swung him to the doorway.

As if moved by the same spring, Manners and Lowther leaped at the captain of the school.

They grasped Kildare savagely, and dragged at him, and there was a terrific crash, as the Sixth-Former went to the carpet with the three Shell fellows scrambling and sprawling over him.

CHAPTER 3. Rank Rebellion!

CRASH!
"Oh!"

There was a shout from the passage. A score of fellows had seen Kildare of the Sixth on his way to Study No. 10 in the Shell, and had followed on to see what would happen.

The passage outside study No. 10 was crowded now. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's eyeglass gleamed in at the door. "That's wight!" shouted Arthur Augustus. "Wag him! We're backin' you up, Tom Mewwy."

"Pile in!" roared Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Back up Tom Merry!" shouted Talbot.

There was a rush into the study.

Kildare, struggling in the grasp of the Terrible Three, gained his feet, still struggling with the three angry juniors. Before he could shake them off, however, the rush from the passage fairly overwhelmed him.

The captain of St. Jim's went down again with a crash, and a dozen fellows swarmed over him.

Kildare gasped and wriggled under the excited mob of juniors. Law and order in the School House at St. Jim's seemed to have come to a sudden end. The head prefect of the House was sprawling under rebellious juniors, and the study rang with rebellious shouts.

"Wag him, dear boys!" roared Arthur Augustus. "Down with the prefects!"

"Sit on him!"

"Hurrah!"

Tom Merry gasped for breath. His face was very bright now. That demonstration on the part of the School House crowd showed that he had plenty of friends left. He did not need to ask the fellows whether they believed in his innocence.

Kildare struggled breathlessly.

"Let me go, you young rascals!" he shouted. "Hands off at once! You'll be flogged for this."

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"Wats!"

"Bosh!"

"Kick him out!" roared Kangaroo.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I'm sorry for this, Kildare," said Tom. "Don't handle him roughly, you fellows—Kildare's a good sort. But he's got to go."

"Woll him out!" said Arthur Augustus. "Don't kick him—just woll him out and woll him downstairs, you know."

"Good egg!"

"You young sweeps!" roared Kildare, struggling furiously but in vain. "Let me go at once!"

"Bow-wow."

Kildare of the Sixth was the most popular prefect at St. Jim's. But the juniors stood on little ceremony with him now.

In the grasp of a dozen pairs of hands, he was dragged headlong out of the study, and rushed along the passage to the stairs. By the time he reached the stairs, his collar and tie were gone, his coat was split up the back, and his hair was like a mop, his face crimson with rage and exertion.

"Now woll him down!"

"Hurrah!"

There was a shout from the staircase. Knox of the Sixth came running up, his ashpit in his hand. The bully of the Sixth could scarcely believe his eyes at the sight of Kildare struggling desperately in the grasp of a wild mob of Lower boys.

"What's this?" shouted Knox. "My hat! Why, I'll—"

Knox rushed into the mob with lashing cane.

"Yawwoooo!"

"Oh crumbs!"

"Collar him!"

The juniors fell back for a moment from the lashing cane. But it was only for a moment. Tom Merry rushed in, heedless of the lashes, and grasped Knox round the waist and rushed him backwards.

Knox crashed on the wall, and in a second Blake and Herries were on him, followed by Manners and Lowther. Talbot wrenched away the cane. Kildare, neglected for the moment, staggered up; but another rush sent him spinning, and he staggered over the landing and went down the stairs.

Knox struggled furiously, but the juniors handled him much less considerately than they had handled Kildare. They were not sorry to have their hands on the bully of the Sixth.

"Down with him!" roared Blake.

"Give him some of his own cane!" shouted Levison.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You young demons!" gasped Knox. "I—I— Ow-ow-woooo!"

Down went Gerald Knox with a crash, and he was rolled over, and Cardew caught the cane from Talbot's hand and laid it on.

Whack, whack, whack, whack!

"Hurrah! Go it, Cardew!"

"Yooop!" roared Knox. "Help! Oh crumbs!"

"Stand clear, dear boys!" said Ralph Reckness Cardew, perfectly cool in the midst of wild excitement. "This is the first time I've ever flogged a prefect. Let's make a good job of it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pile in, Cardew!"

Whack, whack, whack!

"Yow-ow-ow-woooo! Help!" roared Knox.

Kildare came scrambling up the stairs in a dazed and breathless state. He was collared at the landing and hurled down again. And Cardew, with a steady hand, laid on the cane scientifically, till Gerald Knox howled for mercy.

"Had enough, old bean?" asked Cardew genially.

"Yow-ow-ow-ow!"

"That's no answer."

Whack, whack!

"Yow-ow-ow! Yes!" screamed Knox.

"Then you can go. I'll keep the cane as a souvenir of this happy meetin'."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Knox was glad enough to go. He had rushed into the trouble, expecting to carry all before him, as a prefect of the Sixth, exemplifying the old proverb that fools rush in where angels fear to tread. But he was glad enough to go now, and he fairly fled down the stairs when he was released, followed by hoots and cat-calls from the juniors.

"Bai Jove! There's the dimmah-bell, dear boys."

A bell was ringing below.

"Bless dinner!" said Kangaroo of the Shell. "Never mind time! I say, Tom, old man, what's the programme?"

"We're backing you up, Tommy," said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hurrah!"



In the grasp of a dozen pairs of hands, Kildare was dragged headlong out of the study and rushed along the passage to the stairs. "Woll him down!" cried Arthur Augustus DiArcy. There was a sudden shout from the staircase as Knox, armed with an ashplant, came rushing up. "What's this?" he shouted. "My hat! Why, I'll— He rushed into the mob with lashing cane. (See page 6.)

"Here comes Railton!" called out Durrance.

"Let him come!"

But there was rather a hush in the excited crowd as Mr. Railton appeared on the stairs. The juniors looked at him rather grimly, and Tom Merry faced the Housemaster with the crowd of his followers behind him.

Mr. Railton eyed them sternly.

"What does this riot mean?" he demanded.

"It means that we're backin' up Tom Mewwy, sir," said Arthur Augustus. "We're backin' up old Tom all along the line, sir."

"Hurrah!"

"Silence! You have assaulted two prefects——"

"We'll assault them again fast enough if they try to lay a finger on Tom Merry!" retorted Lowther.

"Are you boys out of your senses?" exclaimed the Housemaster. "Merry, you are responsible for this. Are you not satisfied with bringing the blackest disgrace upon your school, without leaving St. Jini's in a state of riot at your departure?"

Tom Merry returned the Housemaster's stern glance fearlessly.

"My friends are standing by me, sir," he answered. "I'm not in a position to refuse their help. I'm not leaving St. Jini's!"

"You are leaving by the five o'clock train!"

"I refuse to do so!"

"Are you mad, Merry?" exclaimed the astounded Housemaster.

"I hope not, sir! I think I should be mad to allow myself to be turned out of the school and branded as a thief. I refuse to go!"

There was a roar from the crowd.

"Bravo, Tom Merry!"

"We'll back you up!"

"Hurrah!"

"Yaas, wathah!" yelled Arthur Augustus, waving his eyeglass in wild excitement. "We'll stand by you, old chap. Don't go, and we won't let the silly as-es turn you out!"

"Silence!" roared Mr. Railton, his brow dark with anger. "Merry, follow me at once; and the rest of you go down to the dining-room!"

"Rats!"

"Go and eat coke!"

"What—what?" stuttered the Housemaster.

"I shall not follow you, sir!" said Tom Merry. "There's a limit, and we've got to it. If the Head chooses to do me justice I'll obey his orders and yours. But I refuse to leave the school, and my friends will see me through."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Mr. Railton seemed utterly at a loss for some moments. There were two score of fellows in the passage, every one of them ready for the fray, excited up to the fighting pitch. And other juniors were gathering on the staircase and in the lower passage behind the Housemaster.

But it was scarcely possible for Mr. Railton to retreat. He strode towards Tom Merry.

"Merry, if you refuse to obey I shall use force!"

"I warn you not to do so, sir," said Tom steadily.

"You will scarcely venture to lay hands on your Housemaster, I think," said Mr. Railton scornfully.

"That is a mistake, sir. I shall resist."

"Come!"

Mr. Railton grasped the junior's collar.

"Back up!" shouted Monty Lowther.

What followed seemed like a nightmare to the School Housemaster. How he got there he hardly knew; but a minute later he was sitting on the lower landing, his nose-boards gone, his gown tangled round his neck, and every

ounce of breath knocked out of him. For a minute or two he sat and gasped.

When he staggered up, utterly amazed and dismayed, he did not even look at the rebels of St. Jim's. He walked away to the Head's study, to consult Dr. Holmes, realising that the expulsion of Tom Merry from the school was not the simple matter it had seemed, and that the School House was very much out of hand.

CHAPTER 4.

Ratty Asks For It!

DINNER at St. Jim's was generally a quiet and sedate function. Talking at the table was discountenanced. Even remarks in subdued voices were not regarded with approval. But dinner in the School House on this eventful day bore a strong resemblance to Babel.

Every fellow in the School House turned up. Tom Merry of the Shell coming in with a crowd of his loyal supporters. Masters and prefects were amazed to see Tom enter at all.

IF TOM MERRY WERE NOT TRUE-BLUE—

All the school knew now of Tom's resolve to resist expulsion, a resolve that made those in authority rub their eyes and wonder whether they were dreaming. Expulsions were rare at the school, very rare. But it was not on record that such a sentence had ever been resisted before. It was reserved for Tom Merry & Co. to break the record.

For a fellow who was under sentence of expulsion, and was now free only in defiance of all authority, to walk into the dining-hall to dinner with his head erect, was startling. But Tom Merry came in, erect and fearless, and sat in his accustomed place at the Shell table.

Mr. Linton, at the head of the table, looked at him expressively, but did not speak. The master of the Shell was a strict disciplinarian, but he did not know how to deal with this strange state of affairs. It was, after all, the head-master's business to deal with it, and Mr. Linton elaborately took no notice of the rebel who sat at his table.

Kildare and Knox sat among the other prefects at the Sixth Form table, the latter eyeing Tom savagely from a distance. But Kildare ate his dinner calmly. The matter was in Dr. Holmes' hands, and Kildare had nothing to do but to await orders from the Head. Probably, deep down in his heart, was a doubt whether justice had been done. Tom Merry's conduct was not that of one who was guilty, unless, indeed, he was gifted with the most colossal impudence; and that had never been supposed to be a part of Tom's character.

There was a ceaseless buzz of voices in the room, which the masters sought in vain to repress. They finally gave up the attempt. Authority was trembling in the balance now, and an injudicious exertion of it might have brought on another outbreak. So the juniors talked as loudly as they chose.

What the Head would do, what steps he would take, was a very interesting problem to juniors and seniors and masters alike. He could scarcely rescind his sentence—but carrying it out was evidently going to be a matter of difficulty.

It was quite certain that a crowd of fellows were ready to back up Tom Merry if he was touched; and the prefects were by no means keen on a free fight with a mob of juniors.

Possibly the Head was sagely waiting for the effervescence to pass, unwilling to take stern measures unless they proved to be absolutely unavoidable.

So far, at least, the honours were with Tom Merry & Co. Even fellows like Racke and Crooke, generally "up against" Tom Merry, felt it judicious to go with the crowd. It would not have been safe for any fellow to express the opinion that Tom Merry was guilty.

Dinner passed in a buzz of excited voices.

After dinner the St. Jim's fellows crowded out, a numerous body of Tom Merry's supporters keeping him company. Tom walked out into the snowy quad with a crowd of them.

Some of the prefects eyed him from a distance, but they did not make any motion to interfere with him.

"I wathah think this is our game, deah boys?" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked jubilantly. "Pwobably the Head has weakised by this time that we shall not allow Tom Mewwy to be sacked!"

Tom smiled faintly.

"I'm afraid it won't end so easily as all that, Gussy," he said.

"But the Head can see that we are wresolved, deah boy! I weally do not see what he can do."

"You see—" began Talbot.

"I don't, deah boy!"

"It will be time for lessons soon," said Talbot, with a troubled brow. "I rather think that the idea is to deal with Tom when we're all in class. Tom isn't in class again to-day!"

"Bai Jove!"

Tom Merry nodded.

"That's the idea, I think," he said.

"Then we jolly well won't go into class," said Blake.

"Wathah not!"

Some of the juniors looked serious at that. They were prepared to back up Tom Merry through thick and thin. But staying out of class in a body was rebellion with a vengeance.

"Better than that," said Talbot. "It's understood that we're standing by Tom to the bitter end—"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"So far as we can, we ought to play up and keep the rules," said Talbot.

"Oh, blow the rules!" said Cardew.

"Wats! Talbot is quite wight," said Arthur Augustus. "This isn't a Bank Holiday beano, Cardew—we are standin' up for wight an' justice! Go ahead, Talbot, deah boy!"

"The position is that we refuse to let Tom be sacked, as we believe in him," said Talbot. "Well, Tom being still a member of the school has a right to attend class. Let him come into the Form-room as usual, taking no notice of the order to stay out. All the Shell will be there, and if there's a row, the Fourth can turn out fast enough. We don't want to rebel if we can help it—"

"Don't we?" murmured Cardew.

"Weally, Cardew—"

"No," said Talbot. "We only want to make it clear that Tom shan't go. Let's keep to that if we can."

"Right enough!" said Levison. "Don't you be such a giddy firebrand, Cardew!"

Cardew laughed.

"It's bound to come," he said. "May as well go the whole giddy hog at once. It's us against the Head, and it's goin' to be a trial of strength. I'm for goin' right on the jolly old warpath with a jump!"

"You would be, you ass!" said Clive. "Talbot's right."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Cardew was alone in his opinion, so far; but most of the fellows felt that, in the long run, Cardew would prove to be right. It was scarcely possible to run a rebellion combined with law and order; but it was agreed that the attempt should be made.

Figgins & Co. of the New House came scudding across the quad. Some of the School House juniors picked up snowballs, but Figgie held up his hand in sign of peace.

"Pax!" he exclaimed. "No House rows now! We're standing by you in the New House, Tommy!"

"Thanks!" said Tom gratefully.

"Of course!" said Kerr. "We've heard that there's been trouble in your House already, and you're staying on—"

"That's so."

"Well, if there's more trouble, we're in it," said Figgins emphatically. "If it comes to a barring-out, count on us!"

"Yes, rather!" said Fatty Wynn.

—WOULD HIS CHUMS STAND BY HIM?

The Most Exciting Part Has Yet to Come In This Rollicking Series of Barring-Out Stories.

"Bai Jove, that is vewy decent of you, deah boys, consid'win' that we are always givin' your House the kybosh!" remarked Arthur Augustus.

"Fathead" was Figgie's reply to that.

"Weally, Figgins—"

"Old Ratty is no end wild at this," said Kerr. "He thinks you had his money, Tom—the utter idiot!"

"Here he comes!" grinned Cardew.

The lean, angular form of Mr. Ratcliff, Housemaster of the New House, came striding up to the crowd of juniors. They eyed him grimly. Mr. Ratcliff was regarded as being the cause of the whole trouble. Certainly if the miserly man had not hoarded sovereigns in his study, the robbery could not have taken place at all.

"Merry!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff.

"Yes, sir!" said Tom, as respectfully as he could.

"I have heard—it seems incredible, but I have heard—that you are resisting the Head's sentence of expulsion from the school!"

"That is correct, sir," said Tom calmly.
 "Have you no sense of shame?" rasped Mr. Ratcliff.
 "Can it really be your desire to remain among boys who know you to be a thief?"

Tom Merry's lip curled.
 "Look at the fellows, sir! Do they look as if they believed me to be a thief?"

"Doubtless you have succeeded in deceiving them, but I—"

"Nonsense!"
 "What!" roared Mr. Ratcliff.
 "Rubbish!" said Blake.
 "Yaas, wablah—wubbish!"

"You had better mind your own business, Mr. Ratcliff," said Tom Merry coolly. "You've done harm enough already. Now shut up!"

"Wha-a-at!"
 "Go and eat coke!" shouted Monty Lowther. "We're fed up with you! Mind your own bizney for the first time in your life!"

Mr. Ratcliff fairly spluttered. He made a jump at Tom Merry, with the obvious intention of boxing his ears right and left.

But he never carried out his intention. A dozen hands grasped him as he jumped, and Mr. Ratcliff went spinning over in the snow.

He rolled there and spluttered.
 "Snowball him!" roared Grundy of the Shell.
 "Good egg!"

The juniors clutched up snow in handfuls. Snowballs whizzed at Mr. Ratcliff in showers, smashing on him on all sides.

The New House master sat up dazedly.

"Groogh—ooch—wooooh!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Give him some more!"
 "That's for your nose, Ratty!"
 "Ooooooooh!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Ratcliff scrambled to his feet. Snowballs still smashed on him, and, to his horror and rage, he found that even New House fellows were joining in the fusillade. The Housemaster fairly ran for it, scudding back to the New House with snowballs smashing on his back as he fled.

"So much for Watty!" grinned Arthur Augustus.
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hallo! There's the bell!" said Bernard Glyn, as the bell for classes rang out sharply through the winter air.

"Come on!"
 "Why not stick it out?" urged Cardew.
 "No end of a game! Grasp the giddy nettle, you know!"
 "Wats!"

Cardew was still alone in his opinion. The juniors started for the Form-rooms, and the dandy of the Fourth yawned and followed.

CHAPTER 5. No Surrender!

MR. LINTON stared at Tom Merry as the captain of the Shell came in with the rest of the Form. Tom Merry's manner was quiet and subdued, perfectly respectful to his Form master. But there was a look of unmistakable determination on his quiet, handsome face.

The master of the Shell coughed.

"Merry!"

"Yes, sir!" said Tom.

"Did not the Head give instructions that you were not to attend class this afternoon?"

"I believe so, sir."

"Then why are you here, Merry? You should now be occupied in making your preparations for returning home."

"I am not going home, sir."

"The Head's instructions are, Merry, that, at all events, you do not attend class this afternoon. Kindly leave the Form-room!"

"I am very unwilling to disobey your orders, Mr. Linton," said Tom quietly. "But, as a member of the school, it is my right to be here."

"You know the Head's orders?"

"I am forced to resist the Head's injustice, sir!"

"Merry!"

"You asked me, sir," said Tom. "I've no desire to rebel in any way; but I refuse to leave St. Jim's, and I refuse to be excluded from my class!"

"This matter is in Dr. Holmes' hands," said Mr. Linton at last. "I will not personally order you to leave the Form-room, Merry. Doubtless the Head will send for you when he requires you. You may sit down, but you will not take part in the lessons!"

"That is as you wish, sir."

Tom Merry sat down in his place. Lessons started in an atmosphere that seemed charged with electricity. The Shell fellows were thinking much less of lessons than of the strange state of affairs that now obtained in the school. Tom Merry was in his class in defiance of the headmaster's authority, and it was impossible that matters could be left at that.

Lessons in the Shell-room that afternoon were certain to be interrupted, and thinking of that, in scarcely suppressed excitement, the Shell fellows gave Mr. Linton scant attention.

But the master of the Shell for once ruled with a slack hand. He did not try to drive his class; he was only too well aware that it was only the more sober and thoughtful fellows in the Form who were restraining an outbreak even now.

So lessons were rather nominal, Mr. Linton feeling only too pleased that peace and quietness, at least, were preserved.

It was after half an hour that the Form-room door opened, and Kildare appeared.

"Merry is here, sir?" said Kildare.

"That is so."

"I have orders from the Head to remove him."

"Very well," said Mr. Linton. "You will, of course, carry out your headmaster's instructions. Merry, I advise you to submit quietly."

Tom Merry was on his feet, his eyes glinting.

"I am sorry I cannot take your advice, sir!" he answered. "I warn you, Kildare, to keep your distance!"

Of all the Shell, only Racke and Crooke and Scrope kept their seats. All the rest of the Form, School House and New House fellows alike, were up, with excited faces.

"My boys," called out Mr. Linton, "you will not interfere in this matter! Sit down!"

Not a fellow sat down.

"You hear me?" exclaimed the master of the Shell.

There was no doubt that the Shell fellows heard him, but, like the gladiator of old, they heard, but they heeded not.

"Sit down at once!" thundered Mr. Linton. "Kildare, do your duty!"

"We're standing by Tom Merry, sir!" said Talbot.

"Silence, Talbot!"

"Very well, sir. But we mean it!"

"We do, rather!" said Kangaroo.

Kildare advanced towards the class. He fixed his eyes upon the captain of the Shell.

"Will you come quietly, Merry?"

Tom's answer was short and sharp.

"No!"

Kildare glanced round towards the door.

"Come in, you fellows!" he called out.

"Phew!" murmured Manners. "There's a crowd of them on the job! Well, the more the merrier!"

Kildare had not come alone this time; the Sixth Form prefects were in force. Darrell and Rusden, Langton and Knox and Jones major, came into the Form-room in a body.

The Shell fellows were serious enough now. There were six big and muscular Sixth-Formers for them to deal with, and each of the prefects had his ashplant under his arm.

Kildare smiled slightly.

"You can see now that it is useless to give trouble, Merry!" he said.

"Possibly," said Tom. "But I intend to give all the trouble I can, Kildare! And I've got friends to help me!"

"You kids had better not interfere!" said Kildare, with a glance at the war-like faces in the Shell.

"Better not, we're going to!" said Talbot. "We're standing by Tom Merry!"

"Sticking to him like glue!" said Grundy. "I don't think much of Tom Merry, as a rule. He's never put me in the football, and he's rather an ass, in my opinion! But it's no good telling me he's a thief! He isn't!"



THE "HOLIDAY ANNUAL."

"Good old Grundy!" grinned Wilkins.
 "That's enough!" said Kildare. "I warn you to keep clear!"

"You can warn me till you're black in the face," said George Alfred Grundy truculently, "but it won't make any difference! I've had rows with Tom Merry often enough; but I'm backing him up—just as he would back me up, I jolly well know, if the Head made a silly mistake about me!"

"Hear, hear!"

Kildare made no further reply. He came round the desk at one end to take hold of Tom Merry, Darrell coming round the other end. Neither of the prefects liked the task, but they had no choice about obeying the explicit instructions of their headmaster. They had their duty to do, and they did it. As in so many human disputes, it was not a struggle of right against wrong, but a conflict of two rights that were not compatible. The Sixth Form prefects were bound to support the Head, and Tom Merry's friends undoubtedly

DO YOU KNOW FERRERS LOCKE?

felt that they were bound to support a chum who was wrongfully condemned.

The rest of the prefects stood ready to help Kildare and Darrell if their help were needed. And it was soon needed.

"Back up!" shouted Talbot.

Talbot, generally the quietest and most orderly fellow in the Shell, was foremost in the fray. He rushed right at Kildare as the captain of St. Jim's collared Tom.

"Keep these fags in order, you fellows!" called out Kildare, as he fairly dragged Tom across his desk.

But it was not so easy for the prefects to keep the fags in order. A scene followed that seemed like a vision of pandemonium to the eyes of Mr. Linton, watching, horrified, at his high desk.

Nearly every fellow in the Shell crowded out of his place, came to their grasping rulers or inkpots or folded exercise-books. The prefects closed round Tom Merry to force him to the door. But Talbot was dragging at Kildare, and Manners and Lowther were hanging on to Darrell. Grundy and Wilkins and Gunn had collared Langton, and had him down among the desks, and were pinning him there.

"Stand back!" shouted Kildare breathlessly.

Instead of standing back, the Shell fellows rushed on.

The cries lashed out on all sides, and there were loud yells as they lashed. But the juniors came on, in overwhelming numbers. Rusden and Jones major, in the grasp of many hands; went struggling downward, and were hurled into the passage, and Knox backed out and retreated untouched. Kildare and Darrell almost disappeared under the crowd of juniors, and Tom Merry was wrenched away from their grasp.

"Boys!" gasped Mr. Linton, holding up his hands.

"Boys!"

But the Form master's voice was not heeded.

The Shell Form room rang with tramping feet, excited voices, and gasping and yelling. For some minutes it was pandemonium. And then Kildare, fighting gamely, was driven to the door by an overwhelming rush, and hurled out.

"Chuck them out!" roared Grundy.

Langton went whirling out after his leader. Darrell was the last to go, and he went with a crash.

There was a roar in the Shell-room.

"Hurrah!"

"Our win! Hurrah!"

"Boys!" shrieked Mr. Linton.

"Lock the door!" shouted Manners.

Kildare's voice was heard in the corridor, calling on his followers to back him up. The door slammed, and Tom Merry turned the key. Outside, the prefects hammered on the panels and shouted for admittance; within, the juniors answered them with yells of defiance.

CHAPTER 6.

Back Up!

"KEEP your seats!"

Mr. Latham rapped out that order in the Fourth Form room. From the Form-room corridor came a terrific din, and every fellow in the Fourth was looking round and listening, and most of them were rising to their feet. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy hurriedly polished his eyeglasses, jammed into his noble eye, and jumped up.

"Wesene, deah boys!" he exclaimed. "They're afah Tom Merry!"

"D'Arcy!" exclaimed Mr. Latham.

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"Sowwy, sir——"

"Sit down at once!" exclaimed the master of the Fourth.

"Vewy sowwy, sir, it's imposs."

"D'Arcy!" gasped Mr. Latham.

Headless of the Form master, Arthur Augustus was crossing to the door at a run. Blake and Herries and Dig were after him at once. And after them went Levison, Clive, and Cardew, and Wildrake, and Roylance, and Piggins & Co.—in fact, nearly all the Fourth Form of St. Jim's, wildly excited. Trimble and Mellish and Chowle were the only members of the Form that kept their seats, in obedience to the Form master's command.

Mr. Latham blinked at the excited exodus helplessly. He shouted, and he commanded—he waved his hands and his cane. But the Fourth-Formers did not heed him. They were standing by Tom Merry, and Tom was in need of their help. The row in the corridor proved that. Like a flood the Fourth-Formers poured from the Form-room into the passage, leaving Mr. Latham wringing his hands, and wondering why the skies did not fall.

"Come on!" shouted Arthur Augustus. "Wesene, deah boys! Wun like anythin'!"

With a rush the Fourth came up to the door of the Shell-room. They found six enraged prefects hammering on a locked door, and shouting furiously for admittance.

"Bai Jove! They're turned out!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

"They look as if they've been through it!" grinned Redfern.

Kildare stared round.

"Clear off!" he shouted. "What are you fags doing out of your Form-room? Get back at once!"

"We're lookin' afah Tom Mewwy, deah boy."

"Go back!"

"We're staying!" said Blake. "Cut it out, Kildare! If you're after Tom Merry, we're after you! You're not touching Tommy!"

"You cheeky young sweep——"

"Rats!"

"Play up, Tom Mewwy!" shouted Arthur Augustus.

"We're heah to lend a hand, deah boys! It's all wight!"

"My hat! That's the Fourth!" came Lowther's voice from inside the Shell-room. "Good old Gussy!"

"Open the door!" called out Blake. "We'll help you clear these Sixth-Form bouncers off!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The door of the Shell Form room was unlocked and thrown open. Within appeared a dense crowd of Shell fellows. Kildare & Co. made a movement to advance, but they hesitated. Behind them now were the Fourth, ready for the fray. The prefects were taken between two fires.

But Kildare's hesitation was only momentary. He had his duty to do—if it could be done!

"Follow on!" he rapped out.

And he rushed into the Shell-room.

"Afah him!" shouted D'Arcy.

The prefects followed Kildare, and the whole crowd of the Fourth followed the prefects. The Shell stood up to the attack, and the Fourth closed in behind the attackers.

The half-dozen Sixth-Formers had simply no chance.

They were overwhelmed, and floored, and the juniors

—SEE THIS WEEK'S MAGNET!

swarmed over them, a good deal like the Lilliputians over Gulliver.

Kildare & Co. disappeared under the swarm.

"Victory!" shouted Arthur Augustus, waving his eyeglass. "Thwow them out! Thwow out the wotahs!"

"Boys!" shrieked Mr. Linton, hoarse and husky with attempting to make his voice heard above the din.

"Sowwy, sir—you are dead in this act," said Arthur Augustus.

"Upon my soul!"

"Thwow them out!"

"Let go!" roared Darrell. "You young scoundrels, let go!"

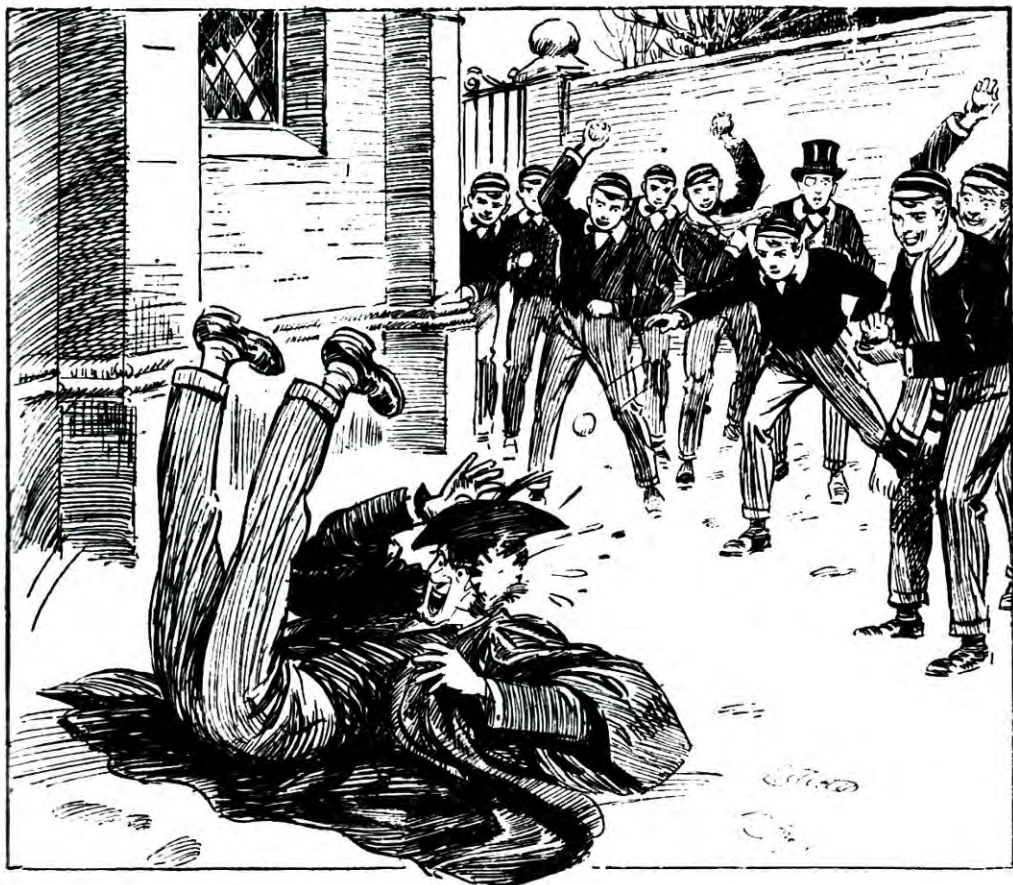
"Sorry, Darrell," said Tom Merry. "You've asked for it, you know."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"One at a time!" grinned Lowther. "Kildare first, as he's captain of the school, and entitled to lead."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Kildare, resisting desperately but in vain, was dragged to the doorway, and hurled headlong into the passage.



Mr. Ratcliff made a jump at Tom Merry, but a dozen pairs of hands grasped him and sent him spinning over in the snow. "Now snowball him!" shouted Grundy. The juniors clutched up snow in handfuls, and soon snowballs were whizzing at Mr. Ratcliff in showers, smashing on him on all sides. "Grooh-ooch-wooch!" gasped the unfortunate Fifth Form master. (See page 9.)

He sprawled on the floor there, gasping for breath.

Then one by one the prefects, helpless in the hands of so many assailants, were hurled out of the Form-room.

One after another they landed, sprawling, in the corridor.

Loud yells of derision followed them as they went.

Six Sixth-Formers, usually so lofty and dignified, sprawled in the passage, with split coats and torn collars, and tousled heads. It was a scene unprecedented in the history of St. Jim's.

They sat up dazedly, breathless, panting, wondering whether it was an earthquake. From the doorway of the Shell-room the excited crowd of juniors looked after them, and shouted defiance.

"Come back and have some more!" roared Grundy.

"I guess they've had enough for a bit," chuckled Wildrake of the Fourth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Kildare staggered up.

"You—you young rascals!" he gasped.

"Go home!" roared the juniors.

"After them!" exclaimed Cardew. "Give them some more! Kick them out of the House!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

All eyes turned on Tom Merry. He was leader; and he did not hesitate.

"Come on!" he exclaimed.

Tom Merry led the way, and the Shell and the Fourth followed him fast. The prefects in the corridor tried to stem the torrent; but they were fairly swept away by the rush.

"Outside!" shouted Manners. "Out into the quad! Turn them out!"

"Yes, rather!"

Struggling, panting, breathless, the struggling prefects

went whirling away, to the great door of the School House. But they did not stop there—they went spinning out, to roll down the stone steps, and land in the carpet of snow at the bottom.

The hall inside was crammed with victorious juniors. But the roar of triumphant voices died away as word passed that the Head was coming.

Something like a thrill ran through the excited mob of rebels as Dr. Holmes swept down upon them.

They faced him, their voices hushed. They were not thinking of surrender; but their old respect for the Head was still strong upon them.

The awe-inspiring figure of the headmaster came to a halt. His eyes gleamed at the rebels of St. Jim's.

"Boys!" His deep voice rang through the hall. "Boys! What does this riot mean?"

There was no reply for a moment. Then Tom Merry stepped forward. His manner was respectful, but cool and determined.

"It means that the school is standing by me, sir," he said. "You—a convicted thief!" exclaimed the Head contemptuously.

The crimson burned in Tom Merry's cheeks.

"These fellows don't think me a thief, sir," he answered quietly.

"Wathah not!"

"And never will, sir!" said Talbot of the Shell.

"I guess not!"

"Rubbish!"

"Rot!"

The Head started back a little. The faith of the St. Jim's THE GUN LIBRARY.—No. 777.

fellows in Tom Merry came as a surprise and a shock to him. It was with pain that he had come to the conclusion that the evidence against Tom Merry was too strong to be disregarded. It was with a heavy heart that he had sentenced the most popular fellow in the school to expulsion. But it had never occurred to him that his will would be disputed; he had never dreamed of resistance to the decree. The first outbreak in Tom Merry's favour had amazed him—he had waited for the effervescence to pass—but he realised now that in doing so he was imitating the rustic in the story, who sat down on the riverside and waited for the stream to run dry.

Instead of evaporating, the movement in Tom Merry's favour was growing in strength. It grew with success, too; the juniors had felt their strength in the first encounters, and those who had been dubious at the start, were quite resolute now.

Dr. Holmes was at a loss for words. Outside the School House, Kildare & Co. picked themselves up, and they stood now on the steps looking in. But they did not enter. In spite of the Head's presence, they could see that if they stepped into the House, they would be hurled out again without ceremony.

The doctor found his voice at last.

"Boys! Is it possible that you venture to support Merry against the authority of your headmaster?"

"Yaas, wathah, sir!"

"I guess that's about the size of it, sir," said Wildrake. "We're not letting Tom be expelled on a false charge."

"Boy! The charge is proved."

"Wats!"

"A lie can't be proved, I guess," said Wildrake.

"Wildrake! Another such word, and I will expel you as with this iniquitous boy!" thundered the Head.

"You can't expel the whole school!" roared Grundy. "And if you do, we jolly well shan't go!"

fellow there thought of laying hands upon the headmaster. The old habit of respect was too deep for that. But they closed round him and shoved and hustled, and the Head was forced away from the captain of the Shell.

With his brain in a whirl, the Head reeled and tottered among the hustling crowd of juniors, scarcely knowing what was happening. Mr. Railton came hurrying from the direction of the Sixth Form room. But his intervention was futile; the juniors were not so particular about the House-master as about the Head—hands were laid upon him fast enough. In a struggling mob, Mr. Railton and a dozen fellows went whirling together.

"Help the Head!" shouted Kildare desperately.

He rushed in.

The prefects followed, only Knox hanging back. But they were met and hurled back, overwhelmed by numbers, and they went whirling down the steps again. After them came Mr. Railton, rolling. Dr. Holmes, in a state of utter mental confusion by this time, almost convinced that he was dreaming, found himself hustled out upon the steps.

There he stood and gasped for breath.

"Boys!" he panted feebly.

"Sorry sir, but—"

"Awfully sorry, Dr. Holmes. P'way do not suppose for a moment that we mean anythin' like disrespect," said Arthur Augustus anxiously. "But you are not goin' to expel Tom Mewwy!"

"Bang the door!" said Grundy.

Three or four juniors were already grasping the great oaken door of the School House. It swung slowly on its great hinges. Crash!

The School House door shut. The Head, the Housemaster, and the School House prefects were outside—shut out of their House.

NEXT WEEK'S STORY—

RIOT, REBELLION, & PANDEMONIUM!!

—MAKE SURE OF YOUR "GEM" EARLY.

"Hear, hear!"

"Wildrake is only sayin' the same as all of us, sir!" said Arthur Augustus. "No good talkin' to us about poof. We know that Tom Mewwy is all wight."

"Hurrah for Tom Merry!" roared Wilkins.

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

The roar rang through the School House from end to end. In the Fifth Form room the Fifth-Formers looked at one another; Mr. Ratcliff, who was master of the Fifth, bit his thin lips and frowned. In the Third Form room, Mr. Selby laid hard work to keep his Form in hand.

"Silence!" thundered the Head.

"Any old thing," said Grundy. "But you're not expelling Tom Merry!"

"No jolly fear!"

Dr. Holmes raised his hand.

"You have dared to resist the Sixth Form prefects, acting under my orders," he exclaimed. "We shall see whether you dare to resist me personally. Merry, I command you to leave this unruly mob, misled by you into rebellion, and come with me."

Tom did not stir.

"You hear me, Merry?"

"I hear you, sir!"

"Come!"

"I refuse!"

The Head seemed to doubt the evidence of his ears. He blinked at Tom Merry as if dazed.

"You—you refuse?" he stuttered.

"Yes, sir!"

"Bravo, Tom Mewwy!"

"Then I shall take you to the punishment-room with my own hands, and lock you in till you can be removed from the school!" exclaimed the Head, and he advanced grimly upon the captain of the Shell.

Tom Merry drew a deep breath.

"Hands off, sir!" he exclaimed. "Goodness knows we all want to treat you with respect, sir! But I shall not submit."

The Head did not reply. He dropped his hand on Tom Merry's shoulder to lead him away.

"Rush him!" roared Grundy.

The juniors crowded round. Even at that moment no

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CHAPTER 7.

Join Up!

TOM MERRY drove home the big bolt on the School House door, and jammed the chain in its place. His eyes were glinting now. The final struggle had come—it was the school against the Head, and Tom Merry was leader of the school. All hesitation was thrown aside now; it was neck or nothing, and Tom Merry was the right leader in the crisis.

He jumped on the old oak settee in the hall.

"Gentlemen—"

"Hear, hear!"

"We've not asked for this trouble—it's been forced on us—you all see that—"

"Yes, rather!"

"Good old Tommy!"

"Some are born for trouble, some achieve trouble, and some have trouble thrust upon them," grinned Lowther.

"We're the last lot."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gentlemen!" Tom Merry raised his hand. "You're standing by me, as I'd stand by any fellow here who was in the same boat."

"Hear, hear!"

"We're up against it, now. We're not giving in."

"Never!"

"Hands up for a barring-out."

"Hurrah!"

Every hand went up. It was a forest of hands. Evidently the idea of a barring-out was popular with the rebels of St. Jim's.

"Passed unanimously!" said Monty Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah!"

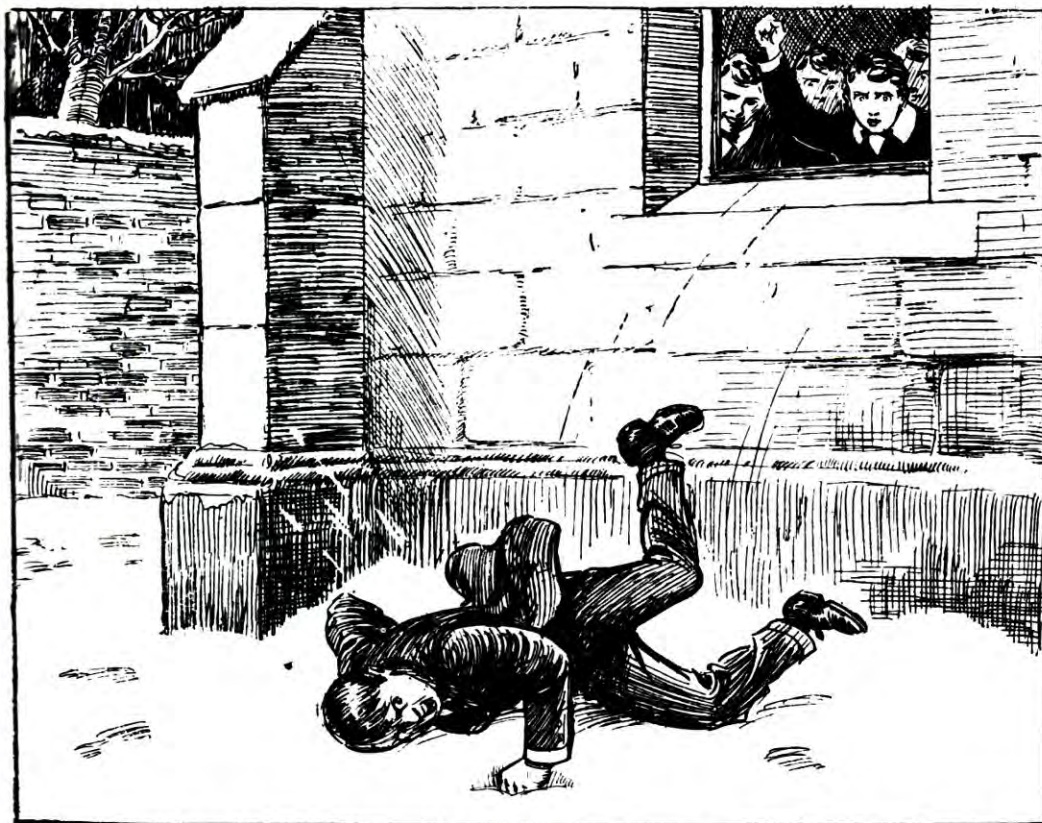
"Bravo!"

"Then it's a barring-out," said Tom Merry. "We've got the School House. What we have we hold."

"Bravo!"

"All New House fellows who don't want to join up can drop out of the window," said Tom.

"Rot!" roared Figgins. "Let me catch any New House chap trying to back out. I'll jolly well make shavings of him!"



Tom Merry turned to the Form-room window and threw it open. "Now, you Fifth-Formers," he cried, "jump out of here and clear!" "We're not going out of the window!" howled Cutts angrily. "Your mistake," cried Tom Merry. There was a sudden rush for Cutts, who changed his mind in quite a hurry, and jumped for the window. "Now the rest of you, sharp!" ordered Tom Merry. (See page 17.)

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Both Houses shoulder to shoulder!" said Kerr.

"Hurrah!"

"Good!" said Tom Merry. "It's the whole Lower School against the Head—till the Head comes to his senses!"

"Hear, hear!"

"House rows are off till this trouble is over," said Tom.

"Shoulder to shoulder—all St. Jim's."

"Bravo!"

"And now to get to work," said Tom. "We've got to hold the School House, and there's no time to be lost. The Sixth will be against us, most likely the Fifth! Every fellow that's not for us is against us, and those who are against us have got to get out of the School House."

"Yes, rather!"

"Get round and fasten up all the doors and windows for a start," said Tom. "Get hold of the canes, rulers, cricket-stumps—anything that comes to hand. If anybody tries to shove into the House keep him out. Don't stand on ceremony. Wherever you see a head hit it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry jumped down from the settee. Wild excitement reigned on all sides, but Tom Merry had a cool head, and he was a born leader. He knew that there was no time to be lost in useless demonstrations.

So far the rebels had had it all their own way, but the forces on the other side were strong, perhaps irresistible when gathered and rallied. The position of the rebels had to be put into a state of defence before the enemy could rally and unite their forces.

Not a moment was lost.

The rebels were swiftly divided into parties, under appointed leaders. Wildrake and one party went round seeing to doors and windows. Talbot and a band of Shell fellows kept guard at the door of the Sixth Form room, in case the Sixth should issue forth to join on the side of the

perfects. Lowther and Manners and another party kept guard on the Fifth Form room.

Meanwhile, Tom Merry and a crowd of fellows proceeded to the Form-room of the Third.

Lessons had stopped in that room. Even with a liberal use of the cane Mr. Selby was unable to keep order. Wally of the Third was barely restrained from rushing out to join the mob in the corridors. The whole of the Third were fairly trembling with excitement.

Tom Merry hurled the door open and strode in.

Mr. Selby fixed him with a basilisk eye.

"Merry, how dare you enter this Form-room? Leave it at once!"

Tom Merry eyed him coolly. He had dealt with masters whom he liked and respected with a firm hand, and he neither liked nor respected Mr. Selby.

"It is you who have to leave this Form-room, sir!" he answered.

"What? What?"

"It's a barring-out—"

"Nonsense!"

"Nonsense or not, that's what it is!" said the captain of the Shell. "You're to get out, Mr. Selby!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You impudent young rascals!" shrieked the master of the Third.

Tom Merry turned to the breathless fags.

"Are you joining up?" he called out. "You can get out of the House if you like. If you choose to join in the barring-out you're welcome."

"What-ho!" roared Wally.

"That's right, Wally," said his major, with a glance of approval. "Wally wound the old flag, you know."

"Is my major in it?" asked Frank Levison.

(Continued on page 16.)

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THE SANTA MARCIAN STAMP!

Another of the Amazing Exploits
of ANTHONY SHARPE—Investigator.

(Even at Christmas-time this Great Detective
is not allowed to be Idle.)

CHAPTER I.

A Rare Purchase—and a Stunning Surprise!

"The Cedars, Glenminster,

December 10th, 19—

"My dear Sharpe,—Knowing that before crime and criminals claimed most of your valuable time you took a keen interest in philately, I should like to show you a very rare specimen I have recently obtained. As it happens to be none other than the Blue Oval of Santa Marcia, I think this should tempt you from your lair. Will you run down? At any time you like, but the sooner the better.—Yours ever,

"TOMMY LANHAM."

Anthony Sharpe laughed as he threw the letter on his desk and picked up a railway guide. He had just handed over the final throats of a rather tricky case to the "regulars" at New Scotland Yard, and expected to be free for the next few days.

"The Santa Marcian 'Blue'!" he repeated, as he hurriedly scanned the time-table. "Yes, I should just like to see it! By Jove, but Lanham's a lucky beggar!"

Santa Marcia is one of those little South American republics which seem to think it compulsory to have at least one revolution every three months or so. Some time before Sharpe received the above communication, a certain Don Carlos del Rio had been elected president by an admiring populace, and new stamps—large oval ones, coloured blue, and bearing his illustrious figure-head—had been issued. The day after they had made their appearance, however, the president had been assassinated by irreconcilables of the opposition party, and the stamps were at once recalled, but not before three of them had been disposed of and passed through the post in the ordinary way. Two of these were in the possession of celebrated collectors, and the third, as already stated, had just been acquired by Sir Thomas Lanham, a life-long friend of Sharpe's. On account of its rarity, a genuine specimen was undoubtedly one of the most valuable stamps in the world—its price already running into three figures, and increasing every day.

The December evening was setting in as Sharpe reached Glenminster and sought out the Cedars, where he was greeted effusively by Sir Tommy.

"Good man!" cried his host. "I knew the news would fetch you pretty sick. Come along! Dinner's waiting!" and afterward—

"I'll show you the beauty!" queried Sharpe doubtfully, suddenly recollecting that Lanham had always been something of a practical joker who occasionally carried his jokes to extremes. "You didn't send that note purely with the object of enjoying my society for a day or so?"

Sir Tommy, quite untruffed at the suspicions he seemed to have aroused, winked good-humouredly.

"I'm afraid you're hungry after that infernal journey," he returned. "That's what's wrong with you! D'you think I'd drag you all the way from London to merely spoof you?"

"No. But—well, I remember the trick you played on—"

"Hush! Oh, hush, my dear man!" Lanham laughed. "Don't open old sores!"

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Seriously, though, this is no joke; it's the real thing. I've got the Santa Marcian 'Blue' right enough, and— But, as I tried to impress on you—dinner's waiting." During the excellent meal—a bachelor one, by the way, for Lanham, in spite of his wealth, had never married—the conversation waxed fast and furious on the subject of stamps in general. Sharpe's host had the history of every known specimen at his finger-tips, and the investigator, who had himself been an ardent collector when he had had more time on his hands, made a good listener.

After dinner, cigars were lighted and the pair adjourned to Sir Tommy's particular "den," where the latter produced a bulky album—one of a set of seven—from a small safe in the corner. He turned the pages rapidly, finally stopping at a particular spot, and held the book out to Sharpe.

"There you are!" cried Lanham, with all the excitement of a child over a new toy. "Now, septic, was I fooling you? See that one at the bottom of the third row—Good heavens!"

The album slipped from his hands, and he sat staring stupidly at his guest. Sharpe stared back, mystified, then stooped and picked the book up.

"What on earth's wrong, old man?" he asked anxiously. "Are you ill?"

The other pulled himself together with an obvious effort.

"No, no!" he gasped. "I'm all right! But look—look at the stamp! It's a fake!"

"Eh?"

"A fake, I tell you!" the philatelist repeated furiously. "Examine it for yourself

and you'll see, for you know almost as much as I do about these things."

The detective bent forward, scrutinising the specimen closely through a powerful pocket-lens, and his knowledge of philately soon told him that it was indeed a forgery, though a rather clever one.

"When did you look at this last?" he asked suddenly, glancing up.

"Not half an hour before you arrived," replied Lanham sourly. "And the genuine specimen was there then."

"You're sure of that—quite sure?"

"Positive! I'll swear to it! Otherwise, I'd have noticed it at once."

"Has anyone got access to these albums but yourself?"

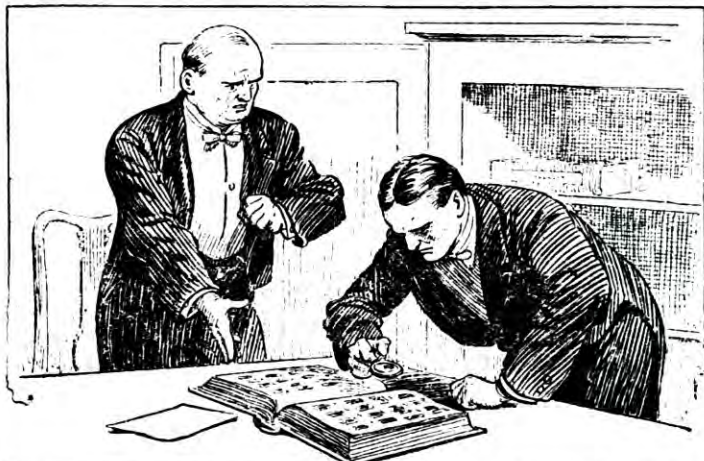
"Oh, yes! My secretary, Jones, gives me a hand now and then with the arranging and classification of them. I've a big collection, and the job's often too much for me."

"H'm! Does he know what the Santa Marcian is worth from an enthusiast's point of view?"

"He does. I told him I was buying it. But look here, old man, don't start suspecting Jones, for goodness' sake! He's been in my employ for years, travelled with me everywhere, and—and I'll stake my life on his honesty!"

"Very likely he's as honest as the day. I know nothing against him," returned Sharpe, with a slight smile. "But has anyone made you an offer for it so far?"

"Yes, Monsieur Jules Varlet, the great French collector, wanted it badly. In fact, his persistency almost amounted to annoyance until I wrote firmly telling him that I was not having any."



"That stamp's a fake!" cried Lanham. "Examine it yourself and you'll see." Anthony Sharpe bent forward and scrutinised the specimen closely through a powerful pocket-lens. It was indeed a clever forgery!

"I see. You refused to carry on a further correspondence."

"Of course," responded Lanham. "I spent a good deal of time and money getting the stamp for myself, and I don't make a job of 'exchange and mart' out of my pocket."

Sharpe again examined the album and replaced the lens in his pocket.

"Well, so far, I must confess I'm altogether in the dark," he said at length.

There doesn't seem to be the faintest trace of a clue—not even a decent finger-print. The only advantage I can see at the moment is that the scent is practically fresh, since you tell me the genuine specimen was in its place so recently."

Sir Tommy looked despondent.

"But you'll do your best, won't you?" he pleaded. "It's not the cash value of the thing I mind so much, of course, but its almost unique rarity."

"Oh, yes! You can rely on me," returned Sharpe, yawning. "Heigh-ho! I think I'll turn in now, if you don't mind, and get at it again first thing in the morning. Artificial light isn't too suitable for this kind of work."

They left the room and passed down the corridor. When they got about half-way, a door opened on the right and a tall man emerged, carrying a bundle of letters in his hand. He paused as he drew level with the pair.

"I'm just going to the post, Sir Thomas," he said, "and I want a breath of air badly. Have you anything else for the last collection?"

"No, Jones, nothing else," Lanham replied. "And take a stroll, by all means. I shan't need you to-night."

He showed Sharpe to his room and then passed on upstairs. The detective took off his boots and waited a minute or so. Then, cautiously opening the door, he retraced his steps along the corridor towards Jones' room—the one he had seen the secretary emerge from.

"Our friend may be the soul of honesty," Sharpe mused, but, on the other hand, he may not be. Queer things have happened before now!"

He took out an electric pocket-lamp and shined it round the apartment, which was furnished as a bed-sitting-room. A coat was hanging upon a peg behind the door, and something white was sticking out of the breast pocket. The detective fished this out and saw that it was an envelope addressed to Jones. It bore the Boulogne postmark over a French stamp.

Inside was a letter, the import of which puzzled him not a little. It ran:

"As arranged, I now enclose half, together with likeness, and trust you can deliver republic to me at once. Rest follows when all settled. Reply to Jardine, Post Restante, Boulogne."

Sharpe read the communication twice; then looked again at the envelope, which he saw was directed to the Glenminster post office to be called for. He pursed his lips, staring at the thing in complete bewilderment.

"Republic?" France, of course, was one, and the post-mark was that of Boulogne. "As arranged, I now enclose half. . . Rest follows when all settled." Those were suspicious words, surely. Who was Jardine, and what was his connection with Jones?

With a disquieting grunt Sharpe replaced the letter and shone the light round the room. A fresh piece of blotting-paper was in a pad on the desk beneath the window, and a few lines of writing were visible on its surface. He held it before the mirror over the mantelpiece, and read:

M. JARDINE.

Poste Restante.

"H'm!" muttered the detective. "This is probably Jones' reply, and likely it's amongst those letters he's posted to-night! And I feel most anxious to see that reply—most anxious!"

The sound of the hall-door shutting caused him to switch on the light and hear a hasty retreat. As he turned into his own bed-room, he saw the returning secretary reach the bend of the corridor, presently disappearing into the apartment he had recently left.

CHAPTER 2.

A Sudden Decision—A Trip Across Channel—The Man With the Blue Glasses!

Anthony Sharpe was astray very early the following morning. In fact, his cheerful

humming out in the garden beneath Sir Tommy's bed-room window roused that worthy a full hour before his usual time of rising, and, knowing the futility of trying to compose himself to sleep again, Lanham dressed and came down.

"I'm sorry, old man," was Sharpe's greeting, "but I'm afraid I must go back to town at once. When is the first train up?"

Sir Thomas looked vastly surprised, not to say annoyed.

"But—but what about the stamp, Sharpe?" he asked, crest-fallen. "You know you promised to see the matter through for me, and—well, a promise is a promise—"

"Yes, so I did, and I'm not letting it slide, you may be perfectly sure," was the other's response. "Er—by the way, do you happen to know if Jones has any friends in the neighbourhood of Boulogne?"

"Not that I'm aware of," answered Lanham. "But, surely, you don't suspect he took—"

"You're very anxious to hear my personal opinion of Jones!" laughed the investigator. "But, you know, we detectives are terribly suspicious beggars, who go about like cats

what was inside. The message was brief, and bore the same air of mystery, as did the letter he found in Jones' pocket on the night of his arrival at the Cedars. It ran:

"Republic under England.—J."

Presently the man with blue glasses walked swiftly by, his face wearing a puzzled frown. He had evidently learned at the post-office that he had been forestalled, and was mystified to know the identity of the individual who had had the impudence to commandeer his letter.

"Ah," muttered the detective, as he watched the other's passing from the tail of his eye, "I think I'll see where you go, for future reference! The mere fact that you're disguised is suspicious in itself, and—well, there's no harm in following you, anyway, this being another free country!"

Keeping some distance behind, he tracked his quarry to the outskirts of the town, where the man finally passed through a gateway, and disappeared round the bend of a long avenue leading to a large house. An old peasant was coming down the road, and Sharpe accosted him.



Unaware of the fact that Anthony Sharpe was watching him, the man with the blue glasses walked swiftly by. "Ah!" muttered the detective as he watched him out the corner of his eye. "I'll just follow you and see where you go!"

and trust nobody! However, please don't mention the theft to him till I come back. I have a special reason for asking this favour."

Lanham seemed utterly mystified, but promised to keep mum, and saw his friend off at the station.

Sharpe travelled up to London, then on to Folkestone, where he caught the cross-Channel boat; and some hours later he walked into the post-office at Boulogne.

The English mail had just been delivered, and Sharpe boldly asked if there were any letters for M. Jardine. One was handed to him, and, with a feeling of satisfaction, he noticed that it bore the Glenminster post-mark.

He was just on the point of leaving the office, when a low-sized man with a dark moustache—a false one, as Sharpe's keen eyes perceived at a glance—and blue glasses came hurrying in. He almost collided with the detective, who apologised politely, and stood on one side.

"Pardon, m'sieur! My fault, I think!" The newcomer brushed past without a word, crossing over to the counter and inquiring if there was a letter addressed to M. Jardine. Sharpe slipped through the doorway, and entered a small shop a little further down the street.

There he opened the envelope, and read

"Can you tell me who lives there?" he asked in French. "It is a fine place, and I could not help noticing it as I passed." "Oh, oui, m'sieur!" was the instant reply. "That is the house of M. Jules Varlet. He is very wealthy, and has much property about here, to say nothing of more in Paris."

"Thanks—" said Sharpe hastily, interrupting what looked like developing into the family history of the said M. Varlet, and slipping a coin into the peasant's hand. "Yes, I guessed the owner of such a fine place must be wealthy. Bon soir!"

Sharpe passed slowly on, then turned and retraced his steps back towards the town, his satisfaction apparent by his cheerful humming as he walked. M. Jules Varlet was the great philhellene who had offered to buy the missing stamp from Sir Thomas Lanham, but had been refused. Had he then, bribed Jones to steal the stamp and send it to him? If so, what was this correspondence about a republic—

Sharpe suddenly stopped short, smacking his knee lustily. How easily a simple thing may escape a keen intellect which is capable of solving far more tricky problems! "What a hopeless idiot I am!" he muttered, with a grin at his own stupidity. (Continued on page 28.)

"A CHRISTMAS BARRING-OUT!"

(Continued from page 13.)

Tom Merry laughed.
"Here's your major to answer for himself," he said.
"We're all in it, Frank!" said Levison of the Fourth, looking in at the Third Form door.
"Then I'm jolly well in it, too!" exclaimed Frank. "I'm with you, Ernie!"

"Same here!" shouted Reggie Manners. "I suppose my major's sticking to you, Tom Merry?"

"Yes, rather!"
"I'd punch his silly nose if he didn't!" said Reggie.
"Hurrah! No more blessed lessons! Hurrah!" And Manners minor hurled "Caesar" across the Form-room with a crash.

"Boys!" raved Mr. Selby.
"Rag old Selby!" yelled Hobbs of the Third. "He's ragged us often enough. Now rag him!"

"Good egg! Collar old Selby!" yelled the fags.
Mr. Selby turned quite white. His Form did not love him; he was too heavy-handed for that. There was a rush of the excited fags towards him.

"Hold on!" exclaimed Tom Merry.
"Rats! We're going to bump Selby!" shouted D'Arcy minor. "If we're going to rebel let's have our money's worth."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Bump him!" yelled Joe Frayne.
"Hurrah!"

"Boys, stop! Good heavens!" panicked Mr. Selby, wishing that he had not been quite so liberal with the cane, as the yelling fags surrounded him. "I—I command you—I—I entreat you—I—I beg—Goodness gracious!"

"Draw it mild, you wild young beggars!" exclaimed Levison of the Fourth. "If he goes quietly—"

"I—I will go!" gasped Mr. Selby. "Certainly, I—I will go! I—I desire nothing better. I— Yarooooooh!" Mr. Selby broke off, spluttering, as a whizzing book smote him on the nose. "Goodness gracious!"

Tom Merry & Co. closed round the Form master, and escorted him from the room, with the fags howling wolfishly round him. Only too gladly did Mr. Selby make his exit from the School House by a back door, which was immediately fastened after him.

Then the fags, yelling and cheering, spread over the House, rejoicing in their freedom. It was a considerable accession of force to the rebels, in numbers at least.

Meanwhile, Mr. Linton and Mr. Lathom had been interviewed in their respective Form-rooms, and they realised the judiciousness of retreating quietly from the House. It was far beneath their dignity to struggle with a mob of rebellious juniors, and they walked out with all the dignity they could muster, the juniors escorting them with great

respect to a door. The Fifth and the Sixth Forms remained to be dealt with, and Tom Merry, without losing a moment, proceeded to deal with them.

CHAPTER 8.

The High Hand!

OUTSIDE the School House the December dusk was closing in, and there was a light fall of snow. Within, there was a blaze of light. Every electric light in the House was turned on. Dr. Holmes, utterly bewildered by the amazing turn of events, retired to the New House with Mr. Railton, utterly at a loss to know how to deal with the situation that had arisen. Kildare and his fellow-prefects, after standing about in the snow for some time, followed them to the New House for shelter. For the time the School House was abandoned to its own devices, and Tom Merry was not losing a second. Before the barring-out could become effective, the School House had to be cleared of all possible enemies, and the Fifth were dealt with first. In the Sixth Form room there was a buzz of voices and hammering on the door. But the door was fastened on the outside now. Talbot had secured it with a rope from the handle across the corridor. If the Sixth thought of joining forces with the Fifth, and attempting to turn the tables on the rebels, there was no chance for them now.

Tom Merry threw open the door of the Fifth Form room and entered, with a determined band at his heels, armed with rulers and cricket-stumps and canes. The Fifth-Formers stared at them, some of them grinning. Mr. Ratcliff glared. The New House master, who was also master of the Fifth, was no more popular in his Form than in his House, and he was well aware that the Fifth would not raise a finger in his defence if the rebels had come there to rag him.

"What does this mean?" asked Mr. Ratcliff huskily. "You—you—"

"You're to get out!" said Tom Merry.

"What! I—"

"I want to speak to the Fifth. Dry up just now, Mr. Ratcliff!" said Tom Merry.

"Bless my soul!"

"By gad, we're comin' to somethin'!" murmured Cutts of the Fifth.

"Looks like it!" grinned St. Leger. "What does your lordship of the Shell want with us?"

"It's a barring-out," said Tom Merry. "We're holding the School House against the Head and the wide world. We're keeping up Christmas here—it's going on over the Christmas vac, and next term, if necessary. Are the Fifth joining up? That's what I want to know."

There was a chuckle from some of the Fifth.

"Under your orders?" grinned Cutts.

"Yes!" rapped out Tom Merry.

"Well, hardly."

"You cheeky young beggar!" said Lefevre, the captain of the Fifth. "Cut off before I pull your ears! Sharp!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Do you all say so?" he asked.

"Yes, rather, you young ass!" said Gilmore.

"Then you get out of the School House!"

"Perhaps you will put us out if we don't go?" suggested Cutts, with a mocking grin.

"Exactly!"

"Oh gad!"

"Yaas, wathah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus warmly. "We're not standin' any cheek from the Fifth, I can assure you."

"Well, we're not goin'," said Cutts.

"Hold on!" said Prye. "We don't want scrappin' with a gang of fags. What does Mr. Ratcliff say?"

"Turn those insolent boys out of the Form-room!" exclaimed Mr. Ratcliff, encouraged by the signs of support from his Form.

"Line up!" shouted Tom Merry.

"Give them socks!"

"Go for the Fifth!" roared Grundy.

"Hurrah!"

A swarm of juniors poured in at the doorway. The Fifth-Formers looked at one another. The odds against them were tremendous, and the stumps and rulers looked decidedly dangerous. It occurred to Cutts that a scrap with the rebellious fags was not likely to turn

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out well for the Fifth. On their own, without help from the other seniors, the Fifth, in fact, had no chance at all.

"Collar Ratty!" shouted Grundy.

"Boy! Rascal— Oh! Oooooop!"

Five or six fellows collared Mr. Horace Ratcliff without ceremony. The New House master went whirling over.

"Help!" he shrieked.

The Fifth-Formers looked very uncertain. Cutts burst into a laugh.

"No bizny of ours!" he said. "It's for the Head to keep these dashed fags in order, and the giddy prefects. We're not prefects."

"Just what I was goin' to say," yawned St. Leger. "I'm for a quiet life. Keep the peace, you slaughterous microbes, we're not hurtin' you!"

"You couldn't!" roared Grundy.

"Clear, then!" said Tom Merry. He crossed to a window, and threw it open. "Here you are! Jump!"

"We're not goin' out by the window!" howled Cutts angrily.

"You are! Jump, or you'll go out on your neck!"

"And jolly sharp, too!" exclaimed Blake impatiently.

"We've no time to waste on you, Cutts!"

"Chuck him out!" bellowed Grundy.

There was a rush for Cutts of the Fifth. Cutts changed his mind in quite a hurry, and jumped for the window. He scrambled out, and rolled in the snow beneath.

"Now the rest of you, sharp!" said Tom Merry tersely.

The Fifth-Formers looked rather sickly. It was immensely against their dignity to take orders from a Shell fellow like this. But the Fifth Form room was fairly swarming with juniors now, not at all anxious to avoid a fight with the Fifth—in fact, rather spilling for a fight. The alternative for the Fifth was to go upon their feet or upon their necks; and they wisely decided to go upon their feet.

One by one they dropped from the window into the quadrangle, amid cheers and catcalls from the triumphant rebels.

Mr. Ratcliff remained till the last. He was trembling now in the grasp of the juniors who held him. Like most tyrants, Horace Ratcliff was a coward at heart.

"I—I beg of you!" he panted. "No—no violence! I—I will depart with—pleasure! I will go, certainly—no violence, I beg!"

"Bai Jove, what a wotten funk!" said Arthur Augustus. "However, he is a membah of Dr. Holmes' staff, so we are bound to treat him with respect. Leave off pullin' his yabs, Wally!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Would you mind getting out of the window, sir?" asked Tom Merry, with great politeness.

"Yes—yes—certainly! Bless my soul!"

Horace Ratcliff was glad to scramble out of the window, though acrobatic exercises were not much in his line. He dropped in the snow and howled; and the window closed above.

"So much for the giddy Fifth!" chuckled Blake.

The victorious rebels crowded out of the Fifth Form room. There remained only the Sixth to deal with, and the staff below stairs. Wildrake joined Tom Merry in the corridor.

"Every pesky door and window tight, I guess," he said. "What about the kitchen staff?"

"Go down and request them politely to get away to the New House," said Tom. "Be very polite to Mrs. Mimms—she's a good sort. Request them to go."

"And if they don't—"

"Help them!"

"Ha, ha! All O.K."

Wildrake led his followers away to the kitchens. Tom Merry and the rest of the rebels proceeded to the Sixth Form room. Talbot was on guard there, and the rope across the passage was straining as some of the Sixth tugged at the fastened door within.

Tom Merry cut the rope loose, and the door flew open. There was a roar as three or four seniors tumbled over. Then the doorway was crowded with rebels, with Tom Merry at their head.

CHAPTER 9. Barred Out!

THE Sixth glared at Tom Merry. With the exception of Kildare & Co., all the Sixth were there, including the New House prefects. And the great men of the top Form were evidently in a bad temper.

"You young rascal!" roared Monteith. "How dare you monkey with our door!"

"Wats, deah boy!"

"My dear man, we're going to monkey with the Sixth, as well as the Sixth Form door," said Tom Merry coolly.

"Yes, rather!" bawled Grundy.

"We're barring-out the Head and the masters," said Tom.

"If you fellows choose to join up—under my orders—"

"Don't be a young idiot!" said Baker.

"Does that mean no?" asked Tom, unmoved.

"Yes, it does! I've a jolly good mind to take you by the neck—"

"Better not!" Tom Merry pointed to the window. "You've got to get out. We're holding the School House against all comers. We've turned out all the masters, and the Fifth, too!"

"You've turned out the Fifth!" exclaimed Monteith.

"Yaas, wathah!" chuckled Arthur Augustus.

"And they let you?" yelled Monteith.

"They hadn't any choice—any more than the Sixth have," said Tom Merry coolly. "We're making you the same offer; you can go out on your feet or on your necks. Choose—sharp!"

"Get out of our Form-room!"

"I've already told you it's you that are getting out," said Tom. "Don't waste time! Are you going?"

"No!" roared Monteith.

"Then you'll be put!"

"Yaas, wathah! Wush them, deah boys!"

"Forward!" shouted Tom Merry.

It was evident that the Sixth intended to put up a struggle. It did not consist with their lofty dignity to take orders from junior rebels. The Fifth might stand it—the Sixth never! And even yet the Sixth could not believe that the juniors would venture to tackle them.

But they were quickly undeceived upon that point. Tom Merry shouted to his followers, and led the rush.

The next moment a terrific scrap was raging in the Sixth Form room. Desks were knocked right and left—papers and books scattered over the floor and were trampled upon.

It was a terrific struggle for every fellow in the Sixth was a match for two or three juniors, and the big seniors were putting their beef into it. There were never fewer than fifteen or sixteen juniors sprawling on the floor at any one time, hurled there by the hefty blows of the seniors. But numbers told.

Shell and Fourth and Third swarmed into the fray, and brandishing rulers, did considerable damage in the reckless scrap. In spite of a fierce resistance, the Sixth were driven into a corner of the room, and one by one they went down under the onslaught.

Any senior who went down had no chance of rising again—he was pounced upon at once and dragged away and held. Blake had opened the window, and even while Monteith and his comrades were still resisting, Sixth-Formers were being shoved out.

They were shoved out without ceremony, and rolled in the snow outside, yelling. Some of them rushed round to the door and other windows, seeking to re-enter. But there was no ingress to be found. Doors and windows were closed and fastened. Two or three enraged seniors tore away to the back entrance to the kitchens; but even there there was no ingress. Wildrake and his comrades had cleared the regions below stairs, and bolted and barred. Tom Merry's whole force was now swarming in the Sixth Form room, and the seniors simply had no chance.

But they would not give in, and one by one they were collared by overpowering numbers, dragged to the window, and dropped out.

Monteith was the last to go, and he went struggling to the very last. He landed outside, and Tom Merry closed and fastened the window, and then dabbed his nose with his handkerchief. His nose was streaming with crimson.

A good many of the rebels showed severe signs of damage. But in the excitement of the moment they hardly noticed it.

The whole house was now in the possession of the rebels. From every window electric light blazed into the December darkness of the quadrangle. The hour was approaching when Tom Merry was to have left the school, in charge of a prefect, to take the train for home. There had been a change in the programme, with a vengeance. Instead of leaving St. Jim's in disgrace, Tom Merry was master of the situation in the School House, at least. Over in the New House the Fifth and the Sixth gathered disconsolately, with the amazed and bewildered masters, wondering what was to be done.

But Tom Merry & Co. had no doubts. They were holding the School House till they won the victory; they were determined upon that, and there was no room for doubt.

"I guess we come out on top, just a few!" remarked Wildrake. "But this isn't the finish, you galoots. We've got a fight before us!"

"No doubt about that!" said Talbot. "We're going through with it."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"What about break-up for Christmas?" asked Racke of the Shell. "We're jolly well not sticking on here through Christmas—I know that!"

"We are!" said Tom Merry. "You can clear out if you

like, Racker. The same applies to any fellow that's got cold feet."

"Well, I shall go," said Racker, and Crooke nodded agreement. Jack Blake quietly opened the hall window.

"Go!" he said.

"The sooner the better, you wettah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy disdainfully.

And as Racker and Crooke hesitated, they were collared and dropped from the window to the School House steps. The slackers of the Shell were not likely to be missed by the garrison.

"What about you, Trimble?" asked Monty Lowther, with a grin.

"Oh, I'm backin' you fellows up," said Baggy Trimble. "So long as the grub holds out, of course."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I've had an eye on the grub," said Fatty Wynn, with a grin of satisfaction. "We shan't run short for a bit."

"Trust you for that, dear boy!" grinned Arthur Augustus. "But I'll tell you what," said Baggy Trimble, blinking round. "After dark some of us could cut down to the village and get in no end of tuck. Tom Merry can stand ten pounds—say twenty—"

Tom Merry stared at the fat Baggy.

"Where on earth am I to get twenty pounds from, you fat duffer?" he demanded.

Baggy gave a fat wink.

"Oh, come off, you know!" he murmured.

Tom's eyes blazed. He understood now.

"You fat rascal—" he began.

"Bai, Jove! You howwid wettah!" shouted Arthur Augustus. "Are you hintin' that Tom Mewwy has old Watty's money all the time?"

Trimble backed away in alarm.

"Nunno! Of—of course not!" he exclaimed. "Nothing of the kind! We all believe Tom Merry's innocent, don't we? Of—of course!"

"Then what do you mean?" growled Tom Merry.

"My dear old chap, I'm backing you up, ain't I?" said Baggy. "I'm sticking to you through thick and thin. Of course, you never touched old Ratty's money—that's agreed. But—"

"But what?" snapped Tom.

"Well, in the circumstances, you know, you might as well hand out a tanner, for tuck—"

"What?" gasped Tom.

"Between ourselves, you know," said Baggy, with a fat wink.

The next moment Baggy Trimble's head was knocking against the wall with loud knocks. And Trimble's unmusical voice was raised in anguish.

"Yow-ow-wooooo! Help! Leggo! I didn't mean—Yow! I never said—Yoop! Whooooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Kick the fat wettah out!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly. "I refuse to allow that howwid worm to join up!"

"Outside with him!"

Blake opened the hall window again. Baggy Trimble, yelling protest, was jerked to the window.

"Leggo! I'm on your side!" he roared. "I'm against the Head, ain't I—against everybody—yoooooh—oh, my hat! I say, I—I was just going down to the larder—yow-ow-woooooop!"

Baggy went through the window bodily, and rolled on the steps outside. He sat up and roared.

"Good riddance to bad rubbish!" said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"There's something you chaps seem to have forgotten," remarked Fatty Wynn.

"What's that, dear boy?"

"Tea!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"We've got a lot to do yet," he said. "We've got to barricade windows, and set watches. But we'll begin with tea. Fatty is appointed chief of the commissariat—head cook and bottlewasher."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tea was rather like a picnic in the School House. Fellows had their tea in the passages and the Form-rooms and the masters' studies—everywhere where it was necessary to keep a

watch. That the rebels would long be left in possession of the School House was not to be supposed for a moment—peaceably, at all events. But so far there came no sign from the Head. The struggle must come, and the rebels were ready for it—but it had not come yet. And the rebels enjoyed their tea—which was unusually plentiful with the supplies from the pantry.

Tea was over when Wildrake, who was on watch at the hall window, called out:

"The Head!"

"Ready!" sang out Blake. "Give 'em socks!"

"I guess he's coming alone!" said Wildrake.

Tom Merry stepped to the window and opened it. Dr. Holmes was coming up the School House steps, his face pale and grave and troubled. His brows contracted in a dark frown as he saw Tom Merry standing at the window.

"Open the door!" he rapped out.

Tom shook his head.

"The door's barred and bolted, sir!" he answered. "It's a barring-out, and we're holding the School House!"

"I do not desire to speak to you, Merry—a boy condemned and expelled, who has no right in this school at all!" said the Head icily. "I desire to speak to the other boys, misled and misguided by you."

Tom flushed.

"You shall judge for yourself," he said quietly. "D'Arcy, come here and answer the Head."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"D'Arcy—and the rest of you," said Dr. Holmes. "I appeal to you to allow this riot to cease—"

"It's not a riot, sir—it's a bawwin'-out."

"Nonsense!"

"Weally, sir—"

"If the boys concerned in this riot submit and return to their duty at once, I will pardon them," said the Head.

"And Tom Mewwy?"

"Merry is expelled from the school. He must go!"

"Wats!"

"D'Arcy!"

"We're standin' by Tom Mewwy to the bitter end, sir!"

"Yes, rather!" came a roar of voices.

Dr. Holmes compressed his lips.

"Boys! Reflect—the school is about to break up for Christmas—your relatives are expecting you home—"

"That's all right, sir! Can't be helped! Of course, if you will admit that you have made a mistake about Tom Mewwy—"

"Own up, sir, like a man!" said Grundy encouragingly.

"Everybody makes mistakes, sir. We shan't think any the worse of you for owning up. Why, I've made mistakes myself, sir, before now."

There was a subdued chuckle among the garrison of the School House. At a tense moment, George Grundy could be relied upon to provide a little comic relief.

The Head did not reply to Grundy. He paused for a moment, and then went on.

"This must end! You must surely know that you cannot remain here over Christmas—"

"Yaas, wathah, sir!"

"It's going to be a Christmas Barring-Out," said Blake. "We're going through with it to the finish!"

Dr. Holmes drew a deep breath.

"Unless you boys return to your duty, force will be used," he said. "I am reluctant to use force—but you leave me no choice. I will give you till the morning to reflect upon your reckless conduct. If the door is not thrown open at nine o'clock in the morning, you must take the consequences, which will be serious."

"We're ready, sir!" said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

The stately figure of the Head disappeared in the gloom of the quadrangle. Tom Merry & Co. looked at one another. Blake closed the window.

"We're in for it, dear boys," said D'Arcy.

"No surrender!"

"No fear!"

Tom Merry & Co. were resolved—but it remained to be seen what would be the outcome of the Christmas Barring-Out!

THE END.

Read how the chums of St. Jim's stick to their leader in next week's rattling fine school story entitled:

"BACKING UP TOM MERRY!" By Martin Clifford.

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