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EVERY WEDNESDAY.

The GEM

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SCHOOL AND SPORTING STORIES

No. 881.
Vol. XXVI.
December 27th,
1924.



A "HANSOM" TURN-OUT !

Tom Merry & Co. of the School House at St. Jim's are fairly "put through it" by their rivals of the New House !
(An exciting incident from the grand long complete school story inside.)

"Get down all, and pile in where the lamp fell!"

Down dropped Jimmy to the concrete floor of the engine-shed. Men hustled and hustled close round him, buffeting him here and there. But the youngster pressed forward with the rest towards where the attackers had received the check. Wildly, Jimmy exulted in the thought that Soper, Webber, and Snaith were in that direction. If he could only meet them face to face!

Hunted!

SOON the boy was in the thick of the fighting. Fighting? It was more of a maddened clash—men with men. Blows were taken stolidly and given freely, and Jimmy found himself in a whirlpool of humanity, scarcely knowing which of the savage faces round him belonged to friends, and which to enemies.

For upwards of an hour that desperate struggle went on in the flickering glare of the flarelamps. And Sam's gallant band was being pressed closer and closer to the wonder locomotive, the child of Sam Blundell's brain. Jimmy found himself with his back against one of the huge outside cylinders, and he gasped at the nearness of the end of the fight. And how would it end?

Hitting out blindly, Jimmy struck at all who tried to get nearer to the locomotive. He seemed surrounded by the enemy. Where was Sam? Where were others of the loyal railway workers? Was the Wolf now at the mercy of the wreckers?

Suddenly a cry rang out—a frenzied yell:

"Police! Back entrance an' front! Make for the side doors!"

Jimmy swayed where he stood. Had they saved the Wolf, after all? Was this ghastly attempt to ruin Blackhampton for ever really frustrated? Or was the cry a false alarm—another of Sam Blundell's clever tactical moves?

The boy soon found out. The police were real enough—and plenty of them. Also, crowds of loyal railwaymen who had hurried to the scene at first news of the attempt to wreck the Wolf. The tide of battle was indeed turned, and as Jimmy leaned, dazed, against the huge cylinder of the locomotive, he was conscious of a boring charge, and police, with batons drawn, hewed a pathway for themselves towards the engine.

The Wolf was saved! In a flash Jim saw Sam Blundell, heading a group of about ten men, fighting their way to cut off numbers of the would-be wreckers, so that the police could make arrests. Jim's one thought was Soper! If only Soper could be captured! He would be out of Sam's way for ever, then—out of the way of the G. S. C. and its struggle for supremacy—indeed, in its struggle for very existence. For the great Wolf locomotive was to be the salvation of the G. S. C., if only Soper and his kind would let it!

"I'll spot the oily beast and dog him!" muttered Jim to himself. "I'll find where he goes, then lead the police there. Or, if I spot him, I'll call to any police at hand and denounce him as one of the prime movers in the raid!"

Little did Jimmy know that the police knew all about Soper without his own evidence on the subject! The boy knew nothing of Soper's latest oratorical activities in the park. But the police knew of it, and they wanted Soper as an agitator. To find the man red-handed was just what they desired, and other eyes than Jimmy's were searching for Soper that night.

Young Speed pushed forward into the frantic throng—men struggling to get out with three times the frenzy with which they had struggled to get in. The boy forced his way over to the goods depot, for he judged Soper, having been a foreman shunter there when in the G. S. C. employ, would make for that part. He would know the ground very thoroughly, and would thus stand a better chance of escape.

Outside the engine-shed, where a big electric arc-lamp threw a sickly white light over the metals, across which numbers of men in a ragged line ran for the town, Jim caught a glimpse of his man. Two policemen were near the boy at the time, and they whipped round instantly at Jim's cry.

"There he is—there! Soper, the agitator!"

"Where? Which man?" rasped one of the policemen, gripping Jim's shoulder.

Jim pointed, and he and the policemen started off in pursuit. Jim led, for he was used to the metals, the maze of points, the wagons, and the various obstructions met with in a chase across a railway siding. Round heaps of coal, in and out amongst the goods offices, across a weighbridge, the chasers growing in number by the addition of clerks, shunters, and other railwaymen, Soper was hounded through the night.

Jimmy kept the man in view, marvelling at Soper's extraordinary show of agility. But desperation was lending the

man strength and speed, and he sprinted along one of the loading platforms at a pace that would not have brought discredit on a professional runner.

But the chase went on. The now numerous chasing party beat up the goods sidings thoroughly, keeping in touch with each other by shouting. If ever a man was hunted, Soper knew it that night. It was rather pitiful, and Jimmy began to feel sorry for the fugitive.

They caught him in the shadow of a wall of the "outwards" shed, cowering in trembling fear between the wheels of a cattle-truck. He had been arrested and taken away by the time Jimmy reached the spot, and the boy felt thankful that he had been spared the sight of that white, terror-stricken, flabby face.

When Jimmy arrived in his attic lodging he was surprised to find Sam Blundell in bed and sleeping. Sam turned as Jimmy arrived and lit a candle. He opened his eyes.

"That you, Jim? Thank goodness you're back! So they got Soper, I heard?"

"Yes! And he gave us all a pretty chase in the goods depot—"

"You'll be interested to hear they've got Webber and Snaith, too!"

"By Jove, that's good!" replied Jim. "And the Wolf's quite safe?"

"Safe as a bank! There's a big guard round her. I got back here for some shut-eye, ready to take her down to London to-morrow—to-day, that is! What's the time?"

"Half-past two!"

"Whew! Well, you'd better turn in, too, chum. If you'd like to be on the Wolf for a part of the trip, I'll pick you up below Old Quarry Signal Cabin. It's against the rules, I know, but I'll risk it. You can get off near Leicester and catch the morning express down—"

Jim took a swift step to Sam's side, his eyes shining.

"Sam, d'you mean that?" he asked quickly.

"Mean it? 'Course I do! Who has more right to ride on the footplate of the Wolf than you? Yes, I mean it, chum. But turn in now, or you won't be fit for a run on the Wolf and your ordinary work to-morrow."

Jimmy began to chatter excitedly, but Sam turned a deaf ear to his chum. So at last Jim climbed into bed, and, despite the excitement of his mind, soon fell into the sleep of utter physical exhaustion.

"There she comes, sailin' along like a grand lady! Gee, isn't she a beauty!"

Jimmy, having garaged the motor-cycle at a village nearby, stood up on the embankment of the line and watched the great blue-and-gold locomotive sliding towards him. A beautiful monster was the Wolf—perfection—a thrilling picture of might and efficiency, and withal the beauty of line and colour which is the pride of English railways.

The hope of the G. S. C.! The child of the brain of a clever young fireman! The last word in steam railway locomotives! Except for her great size, the Wolf was like other huge express locomotives. But she was very different "inside," as Jimmy had explained to some of his young pals at Blackhampton, who could do no more than love the railway and watch it from station platform or the coping of a railway bridge. To them, Jim was a hero—a lucky fellow who, instead of dreaming railways and locomotives, lived them every day of his life!

The Wolf began to slow down, and then dropped to a creeping pace when near Jimmy. Sam Blundell was looking over, and Jim, with a look up and down the embankment at that lonely country spot, lightly jumped the signal wires, and ran towards the cab. He clambered up, and Sam Blundell, clad in a natty new blue suit of overalls, gripped his hand.

"Here you are, old son! Well, don't faint with joy, or anything like that, or we'll have to tip you out. You're coming to London with us! Ay, it's true, so don't look so dazed. What's more, you're coming on the great race, with all the big nobbs—Sir Richard Grant and other directors, Mr. Steel, and the traffic chief. You'll be with 'em—in the same coach. This is how, son. Hold on, what's up?"

Jim gulped.

"I—I feel faint, that's all, Sam," he said, blinking at the grinning fireman—Sam's fireman—for Sam was a driver now.

"I—is it true—not a ghastly joke?"

"Thought it would stun you, chum! No, it's no joke, and this is how. Let's get up some speed first, and I'll tell you."

Sam moved over the regulator near at hand, and the mighty Wolf, respondent to the delicate touch of the man who knew her inside out, began to speed onwards towards the starting-point of the greatest race Great Britain had known for many many years.

(The two chums were filled with excitement. What will be the result of the great race? Don't miss the concluding chapters of this thrilling serial next week, chums.)

There is a great misunderstanding in the New House. George Figgins is captain, but he slacks. Richard Redfern is something of a hustler, and when he once gets going many interesting events take place!



RIVALS OF THE NEW HOUSE!

An Extra-Exciting Double-Length
Story of Popular Tom Merry &
Co., at St. Jim's.

BY

Martin Clifford.

CHAPTER 1. Trouble Brewing!

WHEREFORE the worried brows, my sons?"

Jack Blake of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's asked that question in cheery tones, as he entered Study No. 10 in the Shell passage.

His chums, Herries, Digby, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, came in behind him. The heroes of Study No. 6 looked pleased with themselves and with all the world.

Tom Merry, Monty Lowther, and Manners—popularly known as the Terrible Three—did not look so cheerful as Blake & Co. On the contrary, they looked quite worried as they sat round the fire. Their brows were wrinkled, as though in deep thought.

"Yaas, you fellows look wathah like a set of boiled owls, I must say!" remarked D'Arcy. "What's the twouble? Are you twyin' to solve the puzzle Cardew put in the Christmas number of the 'Weekly'?"

"No!" grunted Tom Merry.

"Linton set you some ticklish problem in Euclid?" inquired Herries.

Tom shook his head.

"No; we're trying to think of a wheeze to score off Figgins and his gang!" he said. "Those New House bounders have been getting too jolly cheeky lately—"

"Agreed!" said Blake. "School House is cock House at St. Jim's, of course, and it's time Figgins & Co. had that fact impressed on 'em. But what about tea? Gussy's in funds, and we've come to invite you to join us in a bit of a blow-out—"

"Good egg!"

The Terrible Three cheered up wonderfully at that news. They arose with great willingness and accompanied Blake & Co. downstairs. Digby had a large cricket-bag. This was for the tuck which was to be purchased at Mrs. Taggles' tuckshop.

Dusk had crept over St. Jim's, and the snowflakes were falling down merrily upon the already thickly-laden ground. The real, glorious Christmas weather was still prevailing, and the snow lay several inches deep in the Close. Taggles had swept clear the entrance to his lodge, and the front of the tuckshop was also clear, but every other part of St. Jim's was shrouded in the white mantle of winter.

"This is ripping!" said Tom Merry, as they plodded their way through the darkness towards the tuckshop. "I hope it doesn't thaw yet—we shall be able to have some skating on the Rhyl."

"Yaas, wathah!"

The St. Jim's juniors crowded into the cosy tuckshop, and proceeded to rap out orders thick and fast. Mrs. Taggles beamed, and her smile expanded as her stock of good things dwindled. The cricket-bag was full almost to bursting-point by the time the last order had been given, and the last tin of pineapple had been crammed in.

"Well, that's the giddy lot, I think," said Blake. "We've got a roaring fire in our study, and we shall have a topping feed."

"Hear, hear!" said the others heartily.

"Whew! The bag's heavy!" said Tom Merry, as he lifted it off the counter. "Who's going to carry it?"

"I'll take it," said Herries, who was the hefty man of the party.

"Mind how you go," said Monty Lowther anxiously. "Shall I lend you a hand, old chap? With feet like yours you may get stuck in the snow—"

"If you're looking for a thick ear, Lowther—!" began Herries wrathfully.

"Peace, my infants!" said Tom Merry chidingly. "Let brotherly love continue—especially when there's a glorious feed on board. Carry on with the bag, Herries!"

The juniors left the tuckshop, Herries staggering under the godly weight of the bag.

No sooner had they got outside the threshold than Tom Merry gave a loud cry.

"Yow!"

A snowball, whizzing at him suddenly out of the dusk, had smashed on the side of his head, knocking his cap at an angle.

Next minute a perfect fusillade of snowy missiles burst forth in the School House juniors' midst. Gussy's topper went whizzing under the impact of a particularly large snowball, whilst Blake staggered as another struck him forcibly on the nose. Herries yelled when a snowball hit him in the nape of his neck and melted down his back, and Manners, Lowther, and Digby dodged about wildly.

"Yow! Who the dickens is pelting us?" moaned Blake, caressing his nose and blinking round in the snowy gloom.

"I—Ow-woop! Look out! New House rotters!"

A party of New House fellows could now be seen under the old elms, and it was from them that the barrage of snowballs was proceeding.

Tom Merry, ducking desperately, gripped Herries' arm.

"The rotters are after the tuck!" he gasped. "Get it back into the tuckshop, and we'll defend the door till help arrives. We couldn't possibly let Figgins' crowd raid our grub—Ooooooh! Look out!"

Tom Merry & Co. were all gathered in front of the tuckshop door in a group. And from the tuckshop roof there came a sudden swishing noise. Looking up in horror, Tom had seen a huge avalanche of snow falling directly over their heads.

Swooooooosh!

The load of snow from the sloping roof of the tuckshop fell right on top of Tom Merry & Co. and enveloped them. Smothered, blinded, and confused, they lost their footing on the slippery ground and fell in a heap, with a series of loud concussions and yells.

Swooooooh! Flop!

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Another cataract of snow descended upon them as they struggled wildly together.

From beneath the heap of snow wildly kicking legs and waving arms protruded, and sounds of weird gurgles and gasps arose.

"Yerrrooooooch!"

"Gerr-ragh!"

"Oooooogh! Gug, gug, gug!"

A fat figure ran round from behind the tuckshop, and at the same instant a rope came down from the tuckshop roof.

The newcomer was Fatty Wynn of the New House.

The cricket-bag lay half buried in the snow, where Herries had dropped it. Swiftly Fatty Wynn grasped the end of the rope and tied it securely round the handle of the bag.

"Up, Figgy!" he called.

The rope tightened, and a minute later—before Tom Merry & Co. could extricate themselves from the snow—the cricket-bag was swept up into the air to disappear from view.

CHAPTER 2.

Tom Merry Has an Idea!

"**W**OW! Oooooogh! Lemme gerrup!" said Blake's voice.

"Gerroff my chest! Ow-wow-wow!" moaned Manners.

Tom Merry was the first out of the depths of the snowy avalanche. He staggered to his feet and gouged snow out of his eyes and ears and mouth. One by one the others crawled up. They looked sorry spectacles indeed.

"Gwoooooogh! Bai Jove! This is awful!" gurgled D'Arcy, jamming a snowy monocle into his eye. "Oh deah! I'm drenched! Ooogh! My clobber is 'utally ruined! Gwoooooogh!"

"Wh-what happened?" said Monty Lowther dazedly.

"It must have been—gerroow!—a fall of snow from the roof," gasped Tom Merry, blinking about him. "Nearly a ton fell, by the look of things. Grooogh! I— Oh, my hat! Where's the bag?"

"The—the bag!" stuttered Herries.

"Yes, the bag!" howled Blake. "What's happened to our bag of tuck?"

"Oh crumbs!" ejaculated Herries. "I—I let go of it when the snow dropped on me!"

"Then it must be buried," said Tom Merry swiftly. "We'll have a look."

The seven juniors turned over the snow anxiously and with growing desperation. They raked within it with their hands and feet, and thoroughly probed its depths. That heap of virgin whiteness was reduced to a mass of grey slush by the time they finished with it. But no sign of the cricket-bag could be found.

"It—it's gone!" said Blake dazedly.

"Bai Jove! It's disappeared, deah boys!"

Tom Merry & Co. exchanged wild, horrified glances.

Suddenly Blake seemed to stiffen, and he gazed with terrible intentness towards the New House, the lighted doorway of which could be seen across the quadrangle.

"Look!" he muttered hoarsely.

The others looked, and they saw what Blake had seen.

Four figures were silhouetted in the distant doorway—one of them of marked rotundity, and another of long, lanky legs—and they were carrying something between them. That "something," even at that distance, could be recognised as the missing cricket-bag.

"New House rotters!" gasped Monty Lowther.

"They've got our bag!" howled Blake.

His voice was like unto that of the bull of Bashan.

The rotund figure was undoubtedly Fatty Wynn, and the lanky-legged one was Figgins. The horrible, ghastly truth dawned on Tom Merry & Co.

Their deadly rivals had robbed them of their tuck!

"Then—then it was all a worked-out affair!" gasped Tom Merry. "The rotters waited for us to come out of the tuckshop, and they snowballed us so that we stood together in front of the door. Then some more of them must have been on the roof, and they shoved all that snow on us—"

"Groooooogh!"

"I knew it wasn't an accidental snowslide!" moaned Lowther.

"And while we were floundering in the snow the rotters crept up and boned the bag!" said Tom wrathfully.

"How on earth did they get it away?" said Digby. "Surely we should have seen them! It wasn't a light thing to run away with. They must have spirited it away somehow."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"It beats me hollow!" he exclaimed. "But what are we standing here like a set of idiots for? Figgins & Co. have got our tuck, and we've got to get it back. Come on!"

"Afiah the wottahs, deah boys!"

The luckless School House juniors dashed through the snow.

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and they arrived some minutes later at the door of the New House, in a breathless and infuriated state.

The tall figure of Monteith, the New House prefect, appeared in the doorway. Monteith grinned at them.

"My word! Have you kids been wallowing in the snow?" he said. "What are you doing here, anyhow? You can't come into this House in your present condition!"

"Let us pass!" bawled Blake. "We want our tuck!"

"Rats! You can go and eat coke, old tops!"

That reply came, not from Monteith, but from somewhere up above.

Gazing upward, Tom Merry & Co. beheld a row of grinning faces at a window over the doorway.

Figgins, Kerr, and Fatty Wynn—their hated rivals—and Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence were gazing down at them, smiling sweetly.

The School House juniors glared at them in unutterable wrath.

"You—you—you rotters!" spluttered Blake. "You've got our tuck!"

"Go hon!" grinned Figgins. "Well, we're like George Washington, we cannot tell a lie. We have got your tuck. And, what's more, we jolly well mean to stick to it!"

"Yes, rather!" said Fatty Wynn with great relish. "It's a really ripping consignment of grub, and you chaps are to be congratulated on your choice."

"Hear us smile!" chortled Figgins. "Ha, ha, ha!"

The smile of Figgins & Co. could be heard all over the quad.

Tom Merry turned to his chums. They all realised the utter futility of charging into the New House when all the juniors were apparently at home.

They made their way dolefully back to the School House, with the laughter and triumphant shouts of Figgins & Co. ringing in their ears.

"We're done!" moaned Blake. "Dished, diddled, and done brown by those New House worms! And they—they've got our tuck!"

The School House juniors repaired unto Study No. 6, and, like Rachael of old, they mourned and would not be comforted.

Talbot was the only one who came in to condole with them. Whilst the luckless seven went upstairs to have a much-needed rub down and a change, Talbot made up the fire, refilled the kettle, and then went across to the tuckshop for a further supply of provisions.

Quite a good spread awaited Tom Merry & Co. and Blake & Co. when they returned from the bath-room. Their spirits thawed a little under the influence of the feed, but the remarks that were passed over the tea-table in Study No. 6 concerning Figgins & Co. might have made those youths writhe had they heard them.

"It isn't the loss of the tuck so much—we've raided their tuck many a time, anyhow—but it's the thoughts of being done so easily!" growled Blake. "The New House will be chortling over this, and the rotters will get more out of hand than ever. We've got to do them in the eye somehow. Can't you think of something, Tommy?"

"Something to make Figgins sing small!" said Herries. "And it's got to be done quickly, too!"

Tom Merry appeared thoughtful.

"I—I think I've got a wheeze!" he said. "It's just occurred to me—"

"Well?"

The other juniors were all eagerness at once.

Tom's serious face took on a smile, and he chuckled.

"Well, what is it?" yelled Blake impatiently. "Get it off your chest, you ass!"

"Well, Ratty isn't back from his Christmas vac yet, is he? The news was that he caught a chill, or something, over Christmas, and his return to St. Jim's has been delayed."

The others stared at their leader, seemingly mystified. "Yes, we know that Ratcliff's not back yet, and that the Head's been taking the Fifth, and Monteith is in charge of the New House," said Blake. "But what has Ratty got to do with it? Besides, we heard this afternoon that he comes back to St. Jim's to-morrow night."

"Exactly!" smiled Tom Merry. "That's just the point. Ratcliff returns to-morrow night to resume his position as Housemaster in the New House. There's where my wheeze comes in. Now, I heard from Kildare that it's certain that Ratty won't arrive until late to-morrow night—he's got a long way to come, you know. I think he went to relations in Scotland for Christmas. Anyway, the point is, that Ratty is returning to-morrow evening, and it won't be till late, and that gives us just the opportunity for a priceless jape on those New House bouncers."

"But how the dickens—" began Blake.

"Supposing Ratcliff were to turn up unexpectedly early to-morrow evening?" said Tom, with a chuckle. "Or, I should say, supposing somebody dressed up as Ratty turned up here



"Up, Figgins!" cried Fatty Wynn. The rope tightened, and a minute later—before Tom Merry & Co. could extricate themselves from the snow—the cricket bag was swept up into the air to disappear from view. (See page 4.)

and said he was Ratty? Nobody would suspect. And the chap claiming to be Ratty would have a chance of giving Figgins & Co. a high old time till the real Ratty turned up. Now do you twig?

The others drew deep breaths.

Blake's eyes danced.

"Mum-my only hat!" he exclaimed. "I—I begin to tumble now, Tommy. You mean, that one of our chaps should dress up as Ratty and palm himself off on Figgins & Co. to-morrow evening, before Ratty himself arrives?"

"That's the giddy notion!" said Tom Merry. "Don't you think it's a top-notch?"

"Bai Jove! I wergad that as a weally bwiliant ideah, Tom! Mewwy," said Arthur Augustus. "I couldn't have suggested anythin' bettah myself, deah boy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry chuckled.

"It's a wheeze that's bound to work!" he said. "Monty has impersonated Ratty before, and he got away with it for a little while. To-morrow, though, he will have a better chance to spoof the New House. Ratty, according to all reports, caught a cold on his Christmas holiday, and therefore it will be safe to assume that he's still got a touch of it. So if Monty dresses up as Ratty, he won't have to worry much about getting his voice exact, because any hoarseness in the voice will be attributed to Ratty's cold. Now, Monty, it's up to you!"

Monty Lowther rubbed his hands with glee.

"Try me," he said. And Tom Merry & Co. proceeded with their tea with many chuckles.

CHAPTER 3.

In the Toils of the Trickster!

"TEA'S ready!"

Thus said George Figgins of the New House.

The warm glow of the fire, the appetising smell of frying sausages, and the sight of the wonderful array of tuck, the remains of which had been raided from

Tom Merry & Co. the night before, all served to put fresh spirits into Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn.

Fatty was by the fireside, tending the sosses with loving care, whilst Figgins and Kerr had laid the table. Fatty brought over a huge plate of brown sosses and crisp chip potatoes from the fireplace, and his plump face glowed with pleasure when he looked at the festive board.

"My word!" he chuckled. "This is prime! I feel like doing full justice to this feed!"

Figgins grinned.

"This is where we do ourselves well—at those School House bounders' expense!" he said. "They're still raving over the way we got hold of their bag of tuck last night, and—Oh, come in, fathead!"

A short tap had sounded at the door, and in response to Figgys' carelessly-spoken words it opened to admit a terrible-looking figure in cap and gown.

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn gave gasps of horror when they saw the newcomer.

It was Mr. Ratcliff—at least, so they thought. And he had returned much sooner than expected.

"Ratty's" eagle eye roved over the tea-table.

"It made Figgins & Co. tremble. They noted, too, that "Ratty" had a cane in his hand.

"I do not appreciate the manner of your greeting to me, Figgins," said the bogus Housemaster tartly. "Kindly hold out your hand."

"Mr. Ratcliff's" voice sounded husky, apparently due to his recent cold.

Figgins obeyed his order, with a helpless look at the others. He wished now he had thought before saying, "Come in, fathead!"

Swish, swish!

"Ow-wow!" yelled Figgys.

"Mr. Ratcliff" glared at the festive board.

"So you are indulging in this disgusting orgy of foodstuffs!" he exclaimed. "That is what you have been doing during

my absence, I suppose. You are aware that I do not approve of juniors in my House over-gorging in their studies?"

"We—we're hungry, sir!" gasped Fatty Wynn desperately. "You are more likely to be ill, Wynn, if I allow you to proceed with this orgy!" was the sharp response. "You eat far more than is good for you. I will not, however, deprive you of your tea."

Figgins & Co. brightened considerably at that. "But you will take the meal apportioned by me. You may have tea, but without any sugar in it. You boys consume far too much sugar in every way, and I do not approve of the indiscriminate use of it. Your tea will consist of tea without sugar and dry toast."

"Oh crumbs!" said Fatty Wynn in horror. Figgins & Co. could hardly believe their ears. "In order to make certain that you do not consume anything more than what I have specified, all this—the 'Housemaster' indicated the good things on the tea-table—"all this array of indigestible comestibles shall be taken away."

"Mum-mum-may only hat!" said Figgins, in a faint voice. Blake's cricket-bag was lying in a corner, and the disguised Monty soon spotted it.

"Ah! That bag will be very useful!" he said, in the harsh tones of Mr. Horace Ratcliff. "Kindly deposit all these comestibles, with the exception of the dry toast, into the bag!"

Fatty Wynn's look was wild and tragic. "But, sir—" he spluttered. "Do not argue with me, sir!" roared "Ratty." "Obey me this instant!"

Figgins & Co. moaned and obeyed. All their cherished tuck, so brilliantly raided from Tom Merry & Co. yesterday, was placed in the cricket-bag. The table, when they had finished, presented a bare and barren aspect. Fatty Wynn was on the verge of tears. It was only by superhuman efforts at self-control that he subdued his wild desire to fall on Mr. Ratcliff and do unto him battle, murder, and sudden death.

"Ratty's" eyes gleamed. "No doubt the other juniors in this House have accumulated provisions such as these during my absence," he said. "I perceive another bag by the cupboard, Figgins. Kindly bring that along, will you? I will now make a round of the junior studies and empty them, also, of all the indigestible viands I find."

"Oh jeminy!" muttered Kerr. "Ratty's started well, and no mistake!"

Figgins picked up his own cricket-bag, whilst Kerr lifted the other bag, which was now well loaded with tuck. At "Ratty's" command the three juniors left the study, the bogus Housemaster stalking after them.

The other junior studies were visited in turn, and the cupboards turned out. All the tuck discovered—and it was a goodly amount, as the juniors were in funds after Christmas—was deposited in the bags.

To say that the New House juniors were wrathful would be to state matters very mildly. They raved at "Ratty's" tyrannical edict. Not a cake, or a bun, or a biscuit, or a solitary tin of sardines escaped the tuck-collecting Housemaster's sharp eyes. All the available tuck was collected in the two cricket-

bags, and then another was fetched, and this Fatty Wynn was ordered to take charge of.

It cut Fatty to the heart to see all those good things going into the cricket-bag. His eyes dwelt longingly on them, but "Mr. Ratcliff" would brook no hesitation. And once, when he saw Fatty stealthily stuff a tart in his jacket-pocket, the pseudo Housemaster came down heavily on him with the cane.

At last not a scrap of tuck was left in the cupboards.

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn each carried a bag that was full of commandeered provender.

"Now, these comestibles have to be disposed of," said "Ratty," halting the three raging juniors at the top of the stairs. "I will not allow them in the House. For the time being, you lads can take these bags downstairs and deposit them in the quadrangle outside the door."

"Wha-a-at!" gasped Figgins. "Do as I ask!" was the cutting rejoinder. "I will come down and see that my instructions are carried out."

Figgins & Co. carried the bags limply down to the hall door. A crowd of wrathful juniors followed at a respectful distance, to watch.

At "Ratty's" command, Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn took the three bags out into the open and dumped them in the snow a short distance away from the New House door.

There they were left in the gloom. Fatty, on his way back to where "Mr. Ratcliff" was waiting, cast many an anguished look over his shoulder at the three solitary bags which, to him, were bags of priceless treasure.

"No boy will touch those bags!" rapped the pseudo Housemaster. "Now, Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, I will come up with you to your study and see that you have your tea."

"We—we don't want any tea!" said Figgins furiously.

"Indeed, boy! I object to over-eating, but I do not approve of boys missing their meals! Accompany me upstairs at once! I will make you have your tea!"

Groaning, the three hapless juniors followed the tyrant upstairs to their study.

Fresh tea was made, and they sat down to a repast of tea without sugar, with dry toast as the only eatable.

Figgins & Co. felt impelled to throw the tea at "Ratty," but they restrained themselves.

Mr. Ratcliff left the door wide open, and a crowd of juniors, with Redfern & Co. in the forefront, stared in to watch the interesting spectacle of Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn drinking their bitter tea and munching the cold, dry toast. "Ratty" did not seem to mind the crowd.

Fatty Wynn's face was a picture of unutterable woe. "We—we've finished, sir," said Figgins, with a last gulp.

"Very well. I warn you that unless you boys stop your greedy habits, I shall order you a similar tea every day."

Mr. Ratcliff swept away, and as he disappeared a rumble of wrathful voices arose.

"The rotter!"

"The beast!"

"Ratty must be mad!"

"Oh dear!" Fatty Wynn collapsed in the armchair in a miserable heap. "Oh dear! I feel ready to die! Groogh! I've had no tea! There isn't a bit of grub in the House! Ratty's raked it all out! And the tuckshop's closed! I shall waste away! Oh dear! Find me something to eat, Figgys!"

"There's some dry toast left, Fatty," grinned Redfern. "Gerrooooooh!" moaned Fatty.

Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence had suffered less than the others. They had had no tuck in their study—that was the reason they had taken tea in Rylcombe.

Suddenly there was a whoop from Pratt, who came rushing up the passage.

"School House rotters! They've taken the bags of tuck!" he yelled.

"Great pip!"

Figgins & Co. rushed madly downstairs. They went to the hall door and blinked out into the moonlight. The three bags of tuck were not where they had been left. Three dents in the snow were all that marked the spot. And, in the dim, dark distance a crowd of juniors were dashing to the School House.

"Mum-my hat!" gurgled Figgins dazedly. "They've pinched all that tuck! Oh jeminy! Won't there be a row over this! Ratty will tear his hair!"

"He must be off his rocker to order us to leave the tuck out there," said Kerr, with a puzzled look. "There seems to be something different about him—"

"He's come back a worse rotter than ever he was before!" said Fatty Wynn. "Oh dear, I'm in a very serious state, you chaps. Anyone got anything to eat on 'em?"

"Here's a bit of toffee, old chap!" said Redfern. Fatty took the toffee eagerly.

"Look here, kids, we're not going to put up with Ratty's tantrums!" exclaimed Figgins in exasperation. "We can stand a lot, but the rotter will have to draw the line somewhere."

"Hear, hear!" said the others in chorus. "Ratcliff's a bully and an unreasonable cad!"

"Rather!"

"And so say all of us!"

"Boys!"

That sharp, spiteful voice breaking out suddenly caused them all to wheel round.

The figure of "Mr. Ratcliff" stood in the rear doorway. The juniors—and there were over twenty in the hall—wished that the floor would open and swallow them up.

"So, boys, you are discussing me!" rapped the bogus

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Housemaster, outwardly appearing angry but inwardly bursting with glee. "It seems that you all badly need a lesson on the respect that is due to your Housemaster. You will all line in single file, and come up to me one by one for a caning."

"Oh crumbs!"

"I say, sir, I wasn't—" exclaimed Cyril Chowle. But he was waved back.

The New House juniors looked helplessly at each other.

What could they do but obey orders? They lined up, with Figgins at the head, whilst Mr. Ratcliff stood by the door with an ashplant held in readiness.

"Come on, Figgins!"

Figgins went first to the slaughter, and received four hard strokes. Then after him came the others one by one. "Mr. Ratcliff" did not seem to tire. He dealt out swipes with the cane with vim and vigour. Soon the only sounds to be heard in the hall of the New House were the constant swishes of the cane and the moans of its luckless victims.

The "Housemaster" had caned over fifteen when, happening to glance through the open hall doorway, he gave a start.

The station cab had driven up at the gates, and a gentleman in top-hat and frock-coat was descending.

The real Mr. Ratcliff had arrived!

"Ahem!" coughed the disguised Monty, lowering the cane. "I will deal with you others another time, as I—I must go. Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, kindly go up to my study and await my arrival there. I will see you later."

He hurried away, his gown whisking behind him.

The suffering New House juniors shook their aching, smarting fists after him.

"Oh, the unspeakable cad!" moaned Figgins. "He's got his back up against us, and no mistake. I—I suppose we'd better go up to his study. Yow! The beast is getting quite an athlete in his old age. He laid it on with that stick like a two-year-old!"

The three chums went upstairs and along to Mr. Ratcliff's study.

"Well, I—I'm jiggered!" gasped Figgins when they arrived there. "Ratty must be right off his rocker. I—Oh!"

He broke off as a step sounded at the door and a figure appeared on the threshold.

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn fell back with amazement when they saw the newcomer.

It was Mr. Horace Ratcliff, but a different and a more natural-looking Ratty.

He looked vastly changed from the man they had not long ago seen in the hall. His face was narrower and his eyes a little more foxy, but his nose was not quite so red, and—well, he seemed more like Ratty.

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated Mr. Ratcliff, on seeing the three juniors in his study.

Figgins & Co. were more amazed. He spoke differently—more naturally. Mr. Ratcliff's voice had recovered marvellously from its huskiness.

"Figgins, Kerr, Wynn! Whatever are you doing here?" demanded Mr. Ratcliff, for it was really he.

"You told us to come here, sir!" stammered Figgins.

Mr. Ratcliff raised his eyebrows.

"Bless my soul! You little rascals have had the brazen effrontery and impudence to enter my room during my



REGINALD MANNERS.

A member of the Third Form at St. Jim's, commonly known by the Shell and Fourth Forms as the "inky tribe." Reggie Manners is the cheery young minor of Harry Manners, of the Shell Form. A spoilt and wayward youth is Manners minor, but he is nevertheless good at heart. He has been a great source of trouble to his major through being easily led astray by some of the older and lesser lights of the school. Has a faithful friend in Walter Adolphus D'Arcy, one of the "chiefs" of the Third. In company with "Curly" Gibson, D'Arcy minor, and Joe Frayne, young Manners has played many a prank on his Formmaster, Mr. Selby, who deems it wise to keep a careful eye upon the youngster.

absence!" he exclaimed angrily. "How dare you!"

"B-b-b-but, sir—" "How dare you!" roared Mr. Ratcliff, his temper not improved by the long railway journey he had just undergone. "You have been taking liberties during my absence and—"

"But you told us to come here, sir!" yelled Figgins in exasperation.

"Figgins! Have you taken leave of your senses, boy? I suppose this is your idea of a joke?" rapped Mr. Ratcliff angrily. "I have never heard of such a thing in all my life! You little scoundrels will write a thousand lines each by mid-day to-morrow. Now go!"

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn blinked at Mr. Ratcliff unbelievably.

"Don't stand there staring at me!" roared the angry Housemaster.

"But, sir—" "Go!" thundered Mr. Ratcliff.

His look was so warlike that the juniors felt nervous, and almost flew from the room.

Outside the door they paused.

"Well, if that doesn't take the cake!" muttered Figgins. "Ratty must be stark, star ag, raving mad! I suspected it a little while ago."

"I—I say, Figgys, let's get off before he comes out," said Fatty Wynn tremblingly. "He—he may get violent."

"Yes, come on!" said Figgins hastily.

The three New House juniors hurried away to their study.

Redfern, Owen, Lawrence, and Kibnor Rao looked in a little later.

"My hat!" said Redfern. "Who's been dealing out punishment?"

"Ratty!" gasped Figgins. "He's gone potty. He first of all tells us to go to his room, and the next minute thrashes us for being there. What on earth can you make of it?"

"Great pup!" ejaculated Redfern. His gaze was fastened on a placard that was lying against the clock on the mantelpiece.

The others followed the direction of his glance, and they, too, gave vent to expressions of amazement.

The placard bore these words, written in large, glaring characters in ink:

"DONE AGAIN! THIS IS WHERE YOU NEW HOUSE DUFFERS SING SMALL! THANKS FOR THE TUCK, OLD BEANS! STICK TO WEAK TEA AND DRY TOAST—IT'S GOOD FOR LITTLE BOYS! WHEN NEXT WE MEET I SHALL CANE YOUR KNEES! T-A-T-A! YOUR OLD PAL,

"MONTY LOWTHER."

(Alias Mr. Ratcliff II.)

Figgins & Co. almost fell down when they read that notice. For several minutes they were wholly incapable of speech. "Mum-mum-my only hat!" gurgled Figgins at length, in a faint, far-away voice. "Mum-my only hat! We—we've been spoofed!"

"It wasn't Ratty at all, but Lowther in disguise!" ejaculated Kerr. "Oh, great Scott! Carry me home to die, somebody!"

"Then we've been taken in by Lowther!" roared Fatty Wynn fiendishly. "Ratty's only just arrived! It was Lowther who confiscated our grub! He—he licked us! He made us drink bitter tea and eat dry toast! Oh, Figgys! Oh—oh dear!"

Fatty fell limply into the armchair, quite overwhelmed. Figgins' look was almost wild. "Done!" he shrieked. "Done by those School House rotters! And they've got all our tuck—every bit of it! I—I—I—"

Words failed George Figgins. By that time a crowd had gathered. All looked at Monty's placard, and howls of rage arose from the poor, deluded New House juniors.

Dick Redfern laughed—he could not help it. "Well, of all the giddy japes!" he gasped. "This is a real corker! Figgy, old man, I'm sorry for you, but you won't be able to hold your head up again. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Owen and Lawrence. They staggered away through the angry, bewildered crowd, and went into their own study, still giving vent to their mirth.

Nobody else laughed. Realisation of the deep and thorough manner of their ragging was a tragedy to Figgins & Co. They looked at the bare cupboard and moaned.

"Oh jeminy! Won't the School House crow over this!" gasped Kerr. "No wonder Ratty was wild when he found us in his room without permission. Lowther's got well away by now—he must have spotted the real Ratty come in. And to think that we've been done so easily, too!"

Gloom, deep and unutterable, reigned in the New House that night, whilst in the School House there was revelry and great rejoicing over the glorious success of the jape on Figgins & Co.

CHAPTER 4.

Reddy Takes A Hand!

THE next day there were clouded brows and doleful faces in the New House.

The juniors there were singing small—very small. Tom Merry & Co. had been crowing over their victory, and the deluded New House fellows had become the laughing-stock of the school.

The story of the jape had judiciously gone its rounds, and Figgins & Co. could not appear in public without being chaffed about it. The fact that they had been caned—a whole fifteen of them actually caned—by Monty Lowther was chortled over by juniors and seniors alike, and everyone roared at the manner in which Tom Merry & Co. had got their tuck back—with interest.

The continual chipping and laughter was like gall and wormwood to the souls of the New House fellows.

Vengeance—swift and sudden—was what they craved. They hung about in groups, humiliated and savage, and telling each other that it was "up" to Figgins to think of something to take retaliation on Tom Merry & Co.

They gathered in the Common-room in the New House that afternoon to find, painted on the window, this cryptic message:

"WHO'S COCK HOUSE AT ST. JIM'S?

SCHOOL HOUSE, OF COURSE!

NEW HOUSE MICROBES NOW KNUCKLE DOWN!

YAH!"

Redfern wiped off those galling words and turned to Figgins.

"What are you going to do about it?" he demanded. Figgins grunted.

He had been puzzling his brains all day for an idea to get his own back on Tom Merry & Co., but inspiration had not come.

"What can I do?" he asked. "Well, that's your business. You're leader."

"Bow-wow!" "Something's jolly well got to be done!" said Pratt. "Why, we sha'n't be able to hold our heads up in the school unless we get one over on the School House somehow. The honour of our House is at stake, and it's up to you, Figgins, to think of a wheeze—a real corker!"

"Hear, hear!" said the other juniors. Figgins frowned.

His defeat had made him irritable, and he was not in a mood to be badgered.

"Why can't you silly asses think of something?" he demanded. "You seem to expect everything done for you. You think that all that's necessary is to come to me and say, 'Think of something,' and it's as good as done. That's all piffle."

"You're leader, Figgins!" said Lancelot French. "We look to you to put the kybosh on Tom Merry & Co. All the time you take in thinking, we're hiding our diminished heads and the whole school is cackling at us."

"Give Figgy a chance," said Kerr quietly. "Rome wasn't built in a day, you know."

"We shall think of something," said Fatty Wynn, although not in a very convincing voice.

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"If you fellows can't find a way of getting back our good name, I'm going to!" said Redfern. "After all, we're top study in the New House. I've always said so."

"You've always talked out of your silly hat!" growled Figgins.

"Look here, Figgins—" "Look here, Reddy—"

"Cheese it!" said Kerr pacifically. "It's no good you two ragging one another. When you start thinking, Reddy, you'll find that it's easier said than done."

"Oh, rats!" sniffed Redfern. "I reckon that you chaps are played out as leaders of the New House. What the fellows here want is a new brain department at the head of things. That's where our study comes out strong."

"Hear, hear!" said Owen and Lawrence heartily. Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn glared.

There had often been good-natured strife between them and the three scholarship boys of the Fourth, who, when they had come to St. Jim's, had styled themselves the New Firm.

Dick Redfern & Co. had always been ready to back up Figgins & Co., and they were on the best of terms with the leaders. Keen rivalry, however, existed between the two studies, and this often led to chaffing, and sometimes a "row."

Reddy was a good sort, and Figgins put down his aspirations to the leadership as "sheer fatheadedness" on his part.

Figgins felt really aggrieved on this occasion, however. "You come out strong in piffle, you mean," he said. "You can go and eat coke, Redfern."

"I'd rather do that, in secret, than eat dry toast and drink unsugared tea in front of all the chaps—at Lowther's orders!" retorted Reddy.

This brought grunts of approval from the other juniors, and Figgins went crimson.

"Look here—" he began.

"Blessed if you weren't a set of chuckle-headed cuckoos to allow yourselves to be spoofed like that!" said Redfern. "You ought to have tumbled that it wasn't Ratty in the first place, Figgins."

"Go hon!" snapped Figgins angrily. "You've got the brains and discerning power of a Sherlock Holmes, I suppose, Redfern—I don't think! Why didn't you spot Lowther, then?"

Redfern shrugged his shoulders. "I never had much to do with the spoof Ratty," he said.

"You see, we had no tuck in our den to turn out, and we were busy writing impots for Monteith, you remember, when he came in to search the cupboard. We knew there wasn't anything there, so we left him to it. We were at the end of the line in the hall, too, and didn't get a licking from him like you other poor beggars."

Growls from the "poor beggars."

"Of course, had we been in your place, Figgy, we should have spotted Lowther at once and turned the tables on him properly," said Redfern. "I can't understand you three allowing him to pull the wool over your eyes so beautifully."

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

They found a little comfort in laughing at Figgins and his chums.

After all, those youths had been the chief sufferers at the japers' hands.

Figgins' face was crimson with humiliation and wrath.

"So you reckon you'd have seen through the trick—eh?" he snorted. "You're a confoundedly clever chap, Redfern, in your own estimation. I reckon you're a silly, chortling chump. If you think you can do better than me, you're welcome to try, that's all."

"Thanks!" said Redfern cheerfully. "I will! As I said before, you're a decent chap in spite of your fat head, but you're hopelessly played out, Figgy. Something's got to be done about putting the School House chaps in their places, and it's up to us, as top study. I'm going to have a big think."

"With what?" said Figgins scornfully. "Oh, rats!"

Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence walked away. Reddy's face wearing a wrapt expression and his brows deeply wrinkled. Apparently he had already started on the "big think."

"Cheeky ass!" growled Figgins. "I've a jolly good mind to dot Redfern on the nose!"

"Leave Reddy alone, old chap," said Kerr in a quiet voice, laying a hand on his chum's arm. "You shouldn't let him get your rag out."

"He's jolly well not worth it!" snorted Fatty Wynn.

"Well, he'd better not get too cheeky, that's all!" said the lanky-legged New House leader hotly. "Redfern thinks he can do wonders, and if he starts riding the high horse over me—"

"If Redfern thinks out a good wheeze for getting our own back on the School House, we'll back him up!" said Pratt.

There were nods and murmurings of assent from the other juniors.

"You chaps ought to have spotted Lowther, as Redfern



Whiz! Zip! Plonk! "Yaroooooh!" howled Figgins, commencing a wild and hazardous dance on the wall. With snowballs and peas whizzing at him from all directions, the leader of the New House found it impossible to stay on the wall. (See page 10.)

said," remarked Digges. "We expect our leaders to be wideawake, you know, Figgins."

"Go and chop chips!" growled Figgins, and he turned away.

Kerr and Wynn followed him to the study, looking troubled and concerned.

That Figgins had taken matters to heart was apparent.

His usually sunny brow was clouded at tea-time, although a good spread had been prepared by Fatty, who had received a large remittance that morning. Figgins hardly spoke a word.

Kerr watched his chum closely and did his best to cheer him up.

"It's no use moping, old chap," he said. "That won't bring forth wheezes, will it?"

"Who's moping?" said Figgins glaring. "I've been thinking. If we can get Lowther into our hands somehow, the chaps will be satisfied. They'll be able to rag the rotter baldheaded for his jape on us yesterday."

Kerr nodded.

"That's a good wheeze, Figgy," he said. "The whole House is thirsting for Lowther's blood, and if we got him here—"

"We'll do it!" said Figgins, his eyes gleaming. "We'll scout round the School House and watch our opportunity. Come on!"

He and Kerr rose, but Fatty Wynn remained at the table, busily engaged on a pork-pie.

"Leave that alone, Fatty!" exclaimed his leader. "We've important work on hand!"

"Half a mo', Figgy! This pie is really prime, and—"

"Leave it alone!" howled Figgins.

Fatty thought it best to obey, considering Figgy's mood. He cast a lingering look at the pie, however, as they left the study.

Redfern & Co. and a group of juniors were at the end of the passage. They glanced curiously at the three leaders.

"Got a wheeze yet?" asked French.

"We're going out to work a wheeze, if you must know," said Figgins.

"What's the idea, Figgy?" asked Redfern.

Figgins gave him a glare.

"Find out!" he snapped. "You'll see, perhaps, when we come back."

With that he strode downstairs, and Kerr and Wynn followed.

They hurried across the dark quadrangle in the direction of the School House.

"Postman's just about due," said Figgins. "Merry and his crew usually go down to the gates to wait for Blagg—especially if they happen to be hard up. My hat! Here they come! Let's hide by Taggles' lodge!"

The Terrible Three and Levison came into view that moment on the School House steps, and behind them Jack Blake & Co. appeared.

The School House juniors made their way to the gates to wait for the postman, as Figgins had surmised.

Secreted behind Taggles' lodge, within a stone's throw of their rivals, Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn watched and waited.

"We've got to get Lowther into our House by hook or by crook," muttered Figgins. "We shall have to decoy him somehow. I— Ha, ha, ha! I've got it! This will do the trick!"

The New House leader took from his pocket a large cannon cracker.

"It's left over from the fireworks we had at Christmas," he said. "I discovered it in my pocket this afternoon. Look here, this is the wheeze. I'll get on the wall, light this giddy thing, and throw it in the road. It will explode with a terrific bang, and those blighters will run out of gates to see what's up. That will be our chance. Fatty can stand at the gates while you and I, Kerr, rush out, grab Lowther, and run him into the gates. As soon as we're in, Fatty can close the gates and shoot the bolt, so that the others won't be able to get in. The trick can be worked if we're quick. In

any case, we needn't get caught—we can run back without Lowther if we don't happen to be quick enough. Are you game for that wheeze?"

"Rather!" said Kerr and Fatty Wynn.

Figgins clambered up the ivy at the back of Taggles' lodge and at last reached the top of the school wall. Then, sitting there with his legs dangling over the wall, he took out the cannon cracker and stealthily struck a match, applying the flame to the wick of the cracker.

Fizz-zzzzzzzzz—BANG!

There was a deafening explosion, and Figgins nearly fell off the wall. The cracker had exploded before he had time to throw it. He had not expected it to go off so soon.

Startled exclamations came from Tom Merry & Co. below.

"Bai Jove! What's that, deah boys!"

"Look!" yelled Blake, and his voice struck chill to Figgins' soul. "There's someone on the wall letting off fireworks—and it's Figgins!"

"Figgins!"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Figgins.

Rushing footsteps sounded, and two yells rang forth in the dulcet tones of Fatty Wynn and Kerr. They had been caught!

Figgins stood on the wall, and looked down, panting.

Fatty and Kerr were struggling in the grasp of the School House fellows.

"You might as well surrender, too, Figgy," said Tom Merry calmly. "We've got you in a cleft stick, you know. Coming down like a good little boy?"

"No fear!" exclaimed Figgins. "I—"

"Watch him from the outside, Blake and Herries!"

The two juniors thus addressed ran off through the gates, and stationed themselves on the other side of the wall, underneath where Figgins stood, like a stag at bay.

"Now get out your peashooters, kids!" chuckled Tom.

He and Lowther, Levison and Digby had peashooters and heaps of ammunition. They raised their deadly weapons to their lips and took aim at Figgins.

"Whiz! Zip! Plonk!"

"Yaroooh!" howled Figgins, commencing a wild and hazardous dance on the wall.

Blake and Herries made snowballs on the other side of the wall, and treated Figgy to an independent barrage of their own.

With snowballs and peas whizzing at him from all directions Figgins found it impossible to stay on the wall.

He gave a wild and desperate leap over the other side, hoping to elude Blake and Herries, but those two youths pounced on him like panthers.

A few minutes later Figgins was brought in, fighting furiously, but a prisoner.

"So we've got you three beautifully!" grinned Tom Merry. "Fancy you trying to frighten us with your fireworks, Figgy! I say, Blake, just fetch that bag of soot from the woodshed, will you? I saw Taggles put it there this afternoon after he had cleared out the Lecture-room flue."

Blake dashed off, and returned a short while later with a bag containing a quantity of soot. Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn gazed at this in horror. They yelled and struggled, but to no purpose. They were held firmly whilst Tom Merry and Blake proceeded to adorn their faces with the soot. They looked for all the world like Christy minstrels by the time the fell work was completed.

"Now we'll take 'em back to their old casual ward!" chuckled Tom. "This way!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yeroooh!" choked Figgins, who had a considerable quantity of soot in his mouth.

Fatty Wynn and Kerr also spluttered.

They were rushed away across the quadrangle, up the New House steps and hurled one by one into the hall. Bump! Bump! Bump!

Tom Merry & Co. saw a crowd of juniors in the hall, so they beat a hasty retreat, roaring with laughter.

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn lay on the floor of the hall in ungraceful attitudes, moaning dismally.

Redfern, Owen, Lawrence, Pratt, French, and a score of other juniors gathered round. They gave cries of astonishment when they saw the black visages of those sudden newcomers.

"What the merry dickens—" gasped Reddy.

"Who are they?" exclaimed Digges.

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Lawrence. "Don't you recognise Fatty's lovely form, if not his face! And Figgy's legs? The other one's Kerr for a cert! Look at their chivvies! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Grooooooh!" moaned Figgins, rising to his feet and blinking round dazedly. Fatty and Kerr struggled up, shedding soot from their faces and hair.

"Ooooooh!"

"Yah!"

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"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the New House juniors.

Figgins & Co. really presented a comical aspect.

"Poor old Figgy!" gasped Redfern. "Is this the way you get your own back on Tom Merry & Co.? What happened, old chap—did they sweep the study chimney with you?"

"Yerrugh! Ow! Oh dear! Ooogh!" moaned Figgy.

"There's nothing to laugh at—"

"Your mistake, Figgy—there is!" grinned Redfern. "We thought you chaps had gone out to work giddy miracles. And this is how you come back—chucked in at the door, with your chivvies smothered in soot. Oh, it's too rich! Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, with sooty glares at their hilarious schoolfellows, strode away and made tracks for the bath-room.

"More for the School House rotters to crow over!" snorted Pratt. "What can Figgins be up to, I wonder, to let 'em score over him like that? Where's our prestige going to? It's positively sickening!"

Redfern chuckled.

"I've got an idea," he chuckled. "I thought of it this afternoon, and I want you chaps to back me up."

"Let's hear it," said French. "If it's any good we'll back you up like anything, Redfern."

"Gentlemen," said Redfern, looking round upon the eager and excited juniors. "I heard this afternoon that to-morrow half-holiday Tom Merry, Blake, and Gussy are making up a party to visit the Rylcombe cinema. All the gang will be at the cinema, and my wheeze is to capture the lot—lock, stock, and barrel—and rag them baldheaded!"

"Gee-whizz!"

"It can be done, if my idea works," said Reddy impressively. And he proceeded swiftly, and in a soft voice, to outline his plan.

The wondering faces of his listeners gradually took on broad grins; and when Redfern finished his explanation a long, loud roar of laughter burst forth.

"Jolly fine wheeze!"

"We're with you, Reddy!"

The New House juniors were all enthusiasm.

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn appeared in the opposite doorway, their faces red from the scrubbing they had just undergone.

"What's all the excitement?" asked Figgins gruffly.

"Redfern's got a wheeze!" cried Digges jubilantly. "He's going to do what you've failed to do, Figgins—lead us to victory over the School House!"

"Hurrah!" roared the others excitedly.

"Oh, rot!" exclaimed Figgins. "Redfern couldn't think of a wheeze—"

"Couldn't he?" said Pratt warmly. "That's just where you make a bloomer, Figgy! Redfern's got a corking wheeze, and we're all backing him up!"

"Hear, hear!"

Figgins & Co. looked blank, and Redfern chuckled.

"Trust the New Firm to take the helm in time of trouble!" he said. "We're going to show you how to put the kybosh on the School House, Figgy!"

"More likely show us how to play the giddy goat!" snorted Figgins. "That's more in your line!"

"Well, we shall see!" grinned Redfern cheerfully. "I've got all the chaps behind me, and top study's going to do things! You watch us!"

Figgins strode away with a clouded brow.

CHAPTER 5.

Something Like a Rag.

THE cinema in the High Street at Rylcombe was well filled on the following afternoon, and the audience numbered many St. Jim's juniors among it—and not a few seniors.

A "super" film of the wild and woolly West was being shown, and it was an attraction not to be missed by the boys.

Wally D'Arcy and his fellow fags of the Third were conspicuous—mostly by their noise—in the fivepenny seats in front, whilst Kildare and a number of the lordly Sixth and Fifth were in the select seats at the back. Tom Merry & Co. occupied the rows in the centre of the hall. The Terrible Three and Blake & Co., of Study No. 6, were there, and with them were Levison, Talbot, Clifton Dane, Kangaroo, Kerruish, Lumley-Lumley, Reilly, and Baggy Trimble.

The cinema was in darkness, and the thrilling scenes of the big picture were flickering on the screen, to the accompaniment of the orchestra. This consisted of a piano, which rattled away furiously, a violin, which scraped shrilly, a mournful cello, and a noisy drum.

The performance was at its height, and Tom Merry & Co. were wrapt intently on the picture.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed D'Arcy breathlessly, as the hero

(Continued on page 12.)

GRAND "ERRORS" COMPETITION

BIG MONEY PRIZES

1ST. PRIZE £10 2ND. £5. 5 PRIZES OF £1 EACH
and
6 FOOTBALLS.

WHAT a splendid offer, chums! £10 First Prize; £5 Second Prize; 5 Prizes of £1 each, and consolation prizes of Six Footballs!

This easy competition is only open to readers of the GEM, and the opportunity afforded should not be missed.

If you do not win the First Prize you may be the successful winner of one of the smaller awards.

It is a competition in which keenness counts. And who could be keener than readers of the GEM?

This is the Third Picture in our easy contest, and all readers who have not yet obtained the First Two Pictures should get them through their newsagent, or if he cannot supply, from our Back Number Department, Bear Alley, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

ALL YOU HAVE TO DO

is to study carefully the picture below—an illustration in which the artist has purposely made mistakes—and see how many "Errors" you can find in the incident.

For instance, one mistake is pretty obvious; the boat is too near land.

There are several "Errors" like this that the keen observer will soon discover.

Don't be satisfied with the most obvious mistakes, but look into the drawing until you are satisfied that no "Error" has escaped your attention.

Remember there are other readers competing against you, and it is up to YOU to beat them, if possible.

As you find the mistakes, jot them down neatly upon a piece of paper, then, when you have satisfied yourself that you have discovered all the "Errors,"

count them, put the Grand Total—that is, the exact number of all the "Errors" found—in the space provided in the top right-hand corner of the Entrance Form.

Having followed these simple instructions, sign your name and address in the space provided on the Entrance Form. Then pin the Entrance Form to your neatly written list of "Errors," and put both in a safe place until next Wednesday, when the next picture containing "Errors" will appear.

In all, there will be six of these pictures, and readers are asked to study each in turn, making a SEPARATE LIST OF "ERRORS" for each picture.

After the last picture in this "ERRORS" COMPETITION has appeared you will be informed when and where to send in your complete six lists of errors.

Remember, all the above prizes **MUST BE WON**—the First Prize of £10 being awarded to the sender who has found the largest number of "Errors" throughout the whole competition. The decision of the Editor of the GEM will be absolutely final.

There is always this fact to remember, too—that if you only find a fair amount of "Errors" in one picture you may bring yourself on level terms with others in another picture.

Keenness is the key to success, so **GET BUSY NOW** with this **THIRD** picture.

Every attempt must be complete in itself—that is, your six lists of "Errors" and the six coupons all properly arranged and filled in as directed.

A regular weekly delivery of the GEM from your newsagent will ensure you against missing any one picture in this **NEW** and **Novel** Contest.

"ERRORS" COMPETITION—ENTRANCE FORM. THIRD PICTURE.

I accept the Editor's
decision as final.

Number of
"Errors."

Name

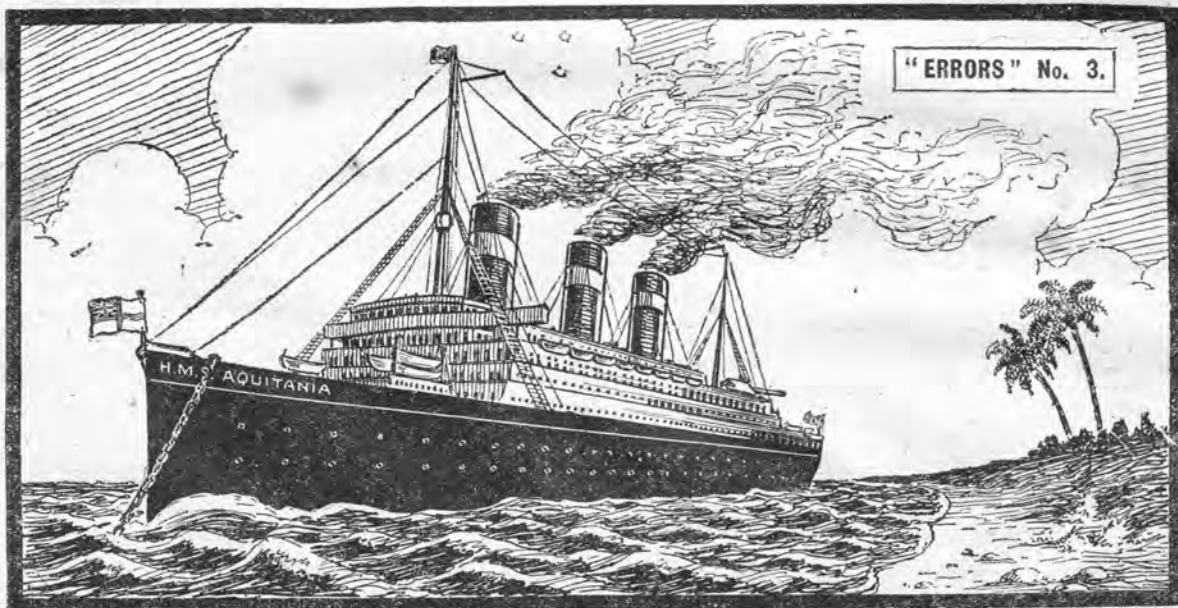
Address

GEM.

And don't forget the fourth picture in this Great Competition will appear in next week's GEM—SO DON'T SEND

ANY ENTRIES YET.

Employees of the proprietors of this journal may not compete.



dashingly rescued the pretty heroine from the villain's shack with much vivid gun-play and whisked her away on his bronco. "How wippin'! I wathah admire the way he gwasped the deah girl's hand and—"

"Shurrup!" said Blake's deep voice, next to him.

"Weally, Blake, as I was sayin'—"

"Don't jaw so much, Gussy!" hissed Lowther on the other side. "We want to look at the picture!"

"Yaas, but did you notice how the horse—"

"Ring off, Gussy!" came in sulphurous tones from Kangaroo at the back. "If you must make a row you'd better join young Wally and his gang down in the front!"

"Bai Jove! I wegard that wemark as most oppwobwious, Kangaroo, and—"

"Excuse me, young gents!"

Blinking round in the gloom of the cinema, Tom Merry & Co. saw the uniformed figure of an attendant standing in the gangway.

"Sorry to disturb you, young gents," said the newcomer, "but is there anyone o' the name o' Jerry, Jammers, and Jowther 'ere?"

Tom Merry grinned.

"I'm Merry, if that's the name you mean," he said. "And Manners and Lowther are 'ere."

"Them's the names, sir!" said the attendant. "Which them three is wanted rather particular outside."

The Terrible Three looked at each other in the dark.

"My hat! Someone wants us!" said Manners. "Who can it be, I wonder? The Head, perhaps, or Railton?"

"We'd better go and see, I suppose," said Tom, with a rueful glance at the screen.

The three clumps rose from their seats.

"This way, young gents!" said the attendant, leading them to the back of the hall.

Tom Merry looked surprised.

"Aren't we wanted at the entrance in the High Street?" he asked.

"No, sir," was the reply. "The motor's waitin' round the side, and if you goes out by the emergency door you won't disturb no one."

"There's a motor waiting for us! My hat!"

Greatly wondering, the Terrible Three followed their guide to the emergency door, which he quietly opened.

They walked behind the thick curtain and out into the daylight.

They blinked for a few seconds at the unaccustomed light, and saw the waste ground at the rear of the cinema stretched out before them.

"Follow me, young gents!" said the one in uniform.

The Terrible Three had not gone far before a number of joyful whoops arose, and looking round they beheld, to their horror, a score or more New House juniors rising out of ambush.

"Mum-my hat!" ejaculated Tom, falling back. "This is a trick! We—oh, look out!"

They tried to run, but the next minute Lawrence, Owen, French, Pratt, and a dozen more juniors flung themselves at them, and they went down among the weeds and grass.

After a short, sharp struggle the Terrible Three were made prisoners and securely roped up and gagged. Then they were carried out into the street beyond the fence and dumped into the open body of a dilapidated motor-lorry that was waiting at the kerb, with a grinning driver at the wheel.

The attendant who had decoyed the School House trio from the cinema strode up to the lorry and smilingly removed his moustache and peaked cap.

Tom Merry, Lowther, and Manners drew back in amazement as Dick Redfern's cheery features were revealed.

"Wonderful what a little bit of make-up will do—what?" chuckled Redfern. "It was the simplest matter in the world to get into the cinema unchallenged and work this giddy trick. Digges is at the front keeping the real attendant in conversation, you see."

Gurgles of wrath came from the Terrible Three.

"Now for the rest of the gang!" chuckled Redfern, replacing his false moustache.

The bogus attendant re-entered the cinema by the emergency door, and he made his way to the rows where Blake & Co. and the others were seated, again engrossed in the picture.

"Pardon, young gents!" he said with a cough.

The School House juniors looked wonderingly at him.

"Which I've come to ask all you young gents to go out to Master Merry," he said, "I'm and the other two are hout-side, waitin'!"

"Geat pip!" said Blake. "They want the lot of us to leave—in the middle of the picture! What the dickens for?"

"I did 'ear 'em say somethink about a new 'ouse, young gents," said Redfern.

"New house?" said Blake. "Oh, he means New House, chaps—the New House at our school. We're wanted out—"

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side, and it's something to do with the New House. It may be important, so I—I think we'll go."

"Yaas, wathah! Pewwaps those New House boundahs are up to some more mischief, deah boys."

Redfern chuckled, and led the way to the emergency door.

Like lambs going to the slaughter the twelve juniors followed the "attendant" to the back of the hall and out into the waste ground.

Before they had time to realise what was happening the New House horde was upon them. They were taken completely by surprise, and were bowled over like ninepins, with Redfern & Co. piling on top of them.

"Bai Jove! Ow! Gwoogh! What the—"

"New House rotters!" howled Blake, who had two of the enemy on his chest as he rolled among the weeds.

"Sock it to 'em—yow!"

The amazed juniors stood absolutely no chance against the large odds. One by one they were overpowered, trussed up, and taken to the lorry.

The schoolboy cargo on the lorry writhed and gurgled.

"You—you rotters!" howled Herries. "Let us loose!"

"Not much!" chuckled Redfern. "You are in our hands now, old sons, and we're going to put you through the hoop, just to remind you that it doesn't pay to take liberties with the New House, which is really Cock House at St. Jim's."

"You—you—you—"

Words failed the captured School House fellows, but their looks spoke whole volumes.

The Terrible Three's gags were removed, and Reddy & Co. swarmed on the lorry.

"Right away, driver!" chuckled Redfern.

Honk! Honk!

With a great clatter and a grinding of gear the lorry moved away. Digges, summoned to the spot by Owen's whistle, jumped aboard while it was going. The lorry bumped over the uneven road and out into the High Street amid choruses of merriment from Redfern & Co. and howls of wrath and dismay from their luckless captives.

"Now for the jobmaster's yard!" said Redfern to the lorry driver.

"Right you are, sir!"

The lorry clattered on through the High Street, where its load of schoolboys created a great sensation, and at length it drew into the Rylcombe jobmaster's yard.

It was a spacious yard, surrounded by stables, and here the lorry halted, and Redfern & Co. disembarked.

Mr. Tilley, the hale and bluff little jobmaster, came forward rubbing his hands, and with a smile on his red face.

"You wanted my old 'ansom cab, Master Redfern?" he asked. "It's all ready, sir, that's if you was serious."

"I was never more serious in my life!" chuckled Reddy. "We'll pay you well for the loan of that cab, Mr. Tilley. It's not often you get a chance to let it out on hire nowadays, is it?"

"No, sir," replied the jobmaster. "'Ansom cabs 'as 'ad their day. This one's a bit of a crock, too, and I was thinkin' about 'avin' it broken up. You can do what you like with it, Master Redfern, for a pound."

A whip-round was made, and over thirty shillings was collected. Kouni Rao, the noble Jam of Blundepore, responding nobly to the call for funds.

Mr. Tilley was paid his pound, and an ancient 'ansom cab was brought out of its stable in triumph by the New House boys.

Tom Merry & Co., who had been dumped out in the jobmaster's yard, looked askance at this vehicle.

"We've got some cash in hand, so we'll dress these dear little boys up nicely," said Redfern. "Come along, Owen and Lawrence, we'll get off and make a few purchases."

The New Firm strolled away, and returned shortly after laden with parcels. These, on being opened, were seen to contain a motley collection of old clothes, picked up at a bargain price by Reddy at the village second-hand emporium.

Paints and brushes and other necessary articles were brought to light, and Reddy instructed his followers to sit their victims in a row.

This was done, and Redfern & Co. proceeded to paint the faces of the hapless School House fellows.

Black circles were painted round their eyes, their noses were given a brilliant crimson hue, and their complexions tinted with vivid yellow and vermilion.

Then Reddy brought forth a pot of liquid glue, and this was applied to Tom Merry & Co.'s hair with wondrous effect.

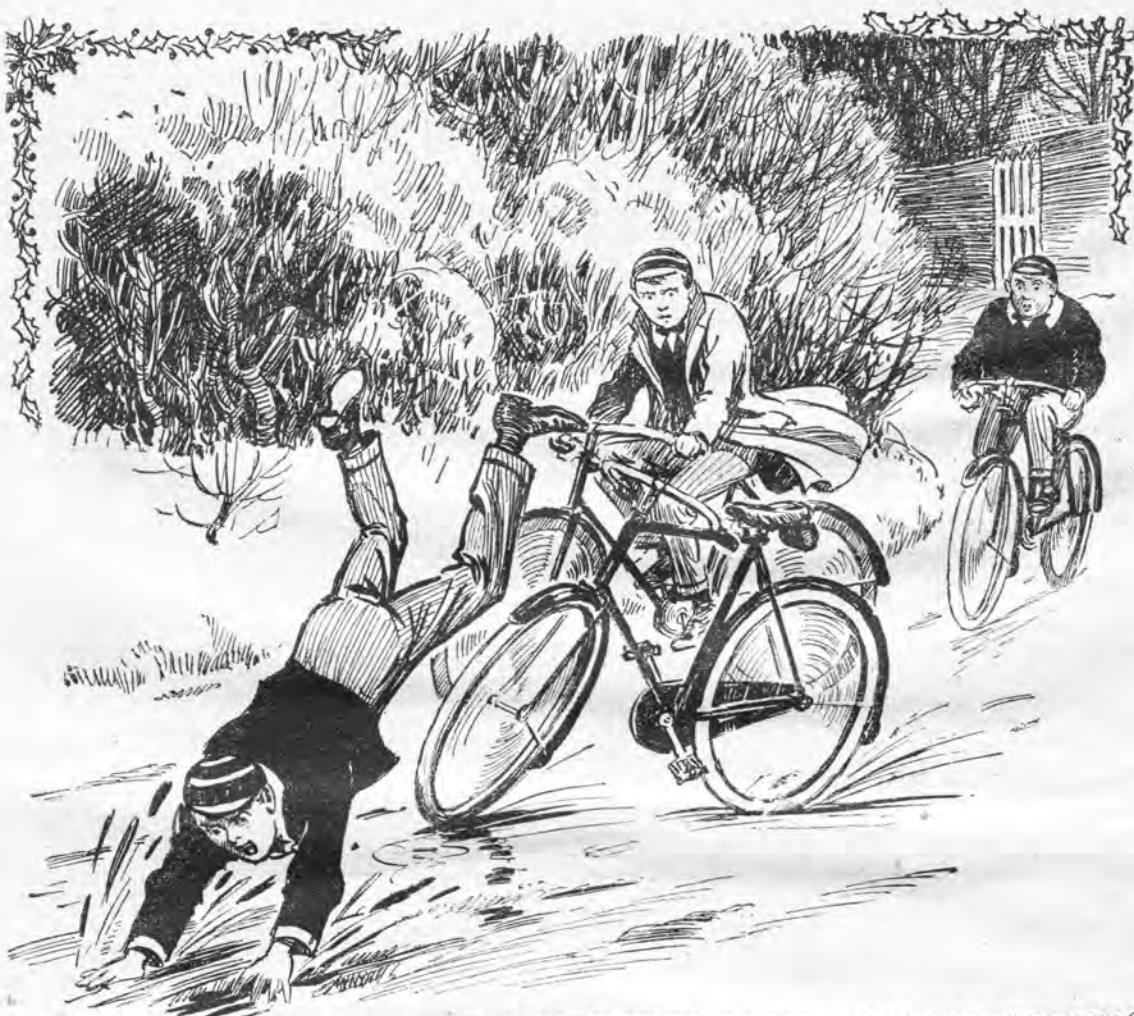
"Now to dress 'em up nicely!" chuckled Redfern.

Tom Merry & Co. were on the verge of apoplexy already.

"You—you awful rotters!" howled Blake. "We'll make you smart for this! Ow! Wait till we get free—"

"That won't be for some time yet, old son!" replied Redfern cheerfully. "Meanwhile, you've got to go through the hoop!"

The dressing-up of Tom Merry & Co. proceeded apace. Mr. Tilley and his employees gathered round with the



"Ooooooogh!" Figgins gave a loud cry as his machine suddenly lurched sideways. The back wheel had skidded, and despite his efforts to maintain his balance, Figgins fell heavily into the road. (See page 17.)

New House boys, and they roared with laughter at the proceedings.

A huge feather boa was stuck in D'Arcy's topper, and he was draped in a lady's skirt of a yellow-and-black striped pattern, and hobnailed boots which completely encased his own neat, box-calf shoes.

Gussy really looked a sight for gods and men and little fishes by the time Redfern had finished with him.

"Haw, haw, haw!" roared the stable attendants.

Tom Merry presented a wondrous spectacle in an old post-man's jacket, a billycock hat, a voluminous pair of "plus-fours," and gaudy purple-and-pink stockings.

Blake was put into a tight-fitting, bob-tailed coat and baggy trousers of the type made famous by Charlie Chaplin. With a pair of lady's high-heeled boots on his feet, he looked very comical indeed.

All manner of weird and wondrous articles of apparel were placed upon the helpless and infuriated School House juniors.

They howled, and roared, and yelled, and threatened, whilst Dick Redfern & Co. and the people in the yard fairly shook with laughter.

"Now, there are fifteen of 'em," mused Redfern at length, when the dressing-up operation was completed, to the great amusement of all but Tom Merry & Co. "We can get six on the cab, and the others can pull it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, great Scott!" moaned Tom Merry, blinking in horror at the cab. "If they're going to make us appear in the streets with that—"

"That's just the identical idea!" grinned Redfern. "The neighbourhood in general, and St. Jim's in particular, are going to be treated to a real funny sight this afternoon. Now, kids, I think we'll have Gussy on the box. Up there he will be on view to the best advantage."

"Bai Jove! You howwid wottahs! I wufuse to go on the box— Yawooooogh! Leggo! Weflease me— Ow-ow!"

D'Arcy was thrust up into the box of the hansom cab. He wriggled there, but, with his hands tied, was unable to get out. He blinked down in dire wrath at the laughing crowd below.

"Wedfern, I considah this most infwa dig! I demand to be wefleased at' once, or I shall give you a feaful thwashin' when—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Load up the cab, old sons!"

Tom Merry and Baggy Trimble were deposited on the cab-roof and tied there, whilst Blake, Lowther, and Kangaroo were roped in the body of the cab below. Baggy's feet were left dangling through the trap-door at the top of the cab, and he raised the echoes with his howls.

"Lemme go! I-I shall f-f-fall, you beasts— Yow-wow wow—"

"Hope the cab-roof doesn't give way under Baggy's weight!" grinned Owen. "The whole giddy caboodle seems on the verge of collapse!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The rest of the School House prisoners were roped between the cab-shafts. They struggled and wrenched at their bonds, but could not get free. Redfern then produced a huge bell from another parcel, and this was suspended in a prominent position on top of the cab, in front of D'Arcy. And a huge, glaring placard was attached to the cab, reading thus:

"WATCH US SIT UP! SCHOOL HOUSE IS LICKED TO THE WIDE!"

"Now, right away through the High Street and on to St. Jim's!" commanded Redfern, cracking a whip.

(Continued on page 16.)



EDITORIAL.

By Tom Merry.

THERE have been certain issues of the "St. Jim's News" which have given me little trouble in producing. Some, indeed, have been quite a pleasure. But I may tell you that this "Fifth Form" Edition isn't numbered among them.

It's the first issue of its kind that we've had, and I hope to goodness it's going to be the last!

I had thought that wangling contributions out of the lordly Sixth was the toughest job that I'd ever be called upon to tackle, but I've had good cause for changing my opinion since I started out gathering copy for this issue. Talk about getting blood out of a stone—that would be child's play compared with the task of getting copy out of the supercilious Fifth.

Even Lefevre, the skipper of the Fifth, and a decent enough fellow in the ordinary way, nearly booted me out of his study when I asked him to write a short article. It was only by the exercise of infinite tact, and after a tremendous amount of persuasion, that he consented to favour me with the column I am publishing this week.

St. Leger was highly amused at the request. I didn't expect to get anything from their study, but I had to at least make the attempt. I felt, because Cutts, Gilmore, and St. Leger are truly representative of the Fifth. I took precautions before venturing to their den, because relations between us are anything but cordial, and there was every likelihood of my being pitched out on the back of my neck.

Greatly to my surprise, St. Leger expressed himself willing to write an article, and I'm exceedingly glad of it, because he's turned in enough for a full page, which, with the contributions of Lefevre and Cutts, just fills the space at my disposal.

It was entirely due to St. Leger's persuasion that Cutts contributed. His article is far from being complimentary, but I have passed it for publication, partly because I had nothing to take its place, partly because I don't care a hoot what Cutts says, any-old-how, and I can well afford to be impartial towards contributors, even when they include fellows of his type.

St. Leger is really a very decent sort of fellow. It beats me why he allows Cutts to influence him. I fancy he's got very little respect for his study-mate, but he's so easy-going he takes the road of least resistance, and lets Cutts call the tune. His opinions of Cutts' personal appearance are the reverse of flattering, and I wonder if there's going to be some unpleasantness in the study when this issue appears. However, that's St. Leger's affair, and I fancy he can look after himself, if necessary.

Tom Merry

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HOW TO TREAT 'EM!

By Gerald Cutts.

WRITE for that dashed fags' rag, the "St. Jim's News"? Oh, yes, I'll write for it, all right! And we'll see whether the young hounds have got the neck to have it printed. I'll tell them a few things about themselves that'll make their hair curl; and even if they don't print what I write—and I know jolly well, before I start, that they won't—it'll be some satisfaction to let them read a little of my opinion about them.

In the first place, the Lower School ought to be abolished altogether, lock, stock, and barrel. It's more dashed nuisance than it's worth—though that's not saying much, for it's worth precious little, I'll give you my word! St. Jim's would be a fairly decent place if there were no blessed fags running about all over the show.

If we've got to have a Lower School at all, then let's have proper arrangements made whereby they can be kept in their place. One of the most idiotic rules at St. Jim's is that which forbids Fifth-Formers to have fags. Every Fifth-Former ought to have, not one fag, but two, and, by gad, I'd like to see a rule of that sort come in! It would mean that the Fourth and Shell would have to toe the line. That would take the cheeky young sweeps down a peg or two!

The Sixth don't know how to treat fags. They're too dashed easy with the young reptiles. They want kicking and cuffing till they don't know whether they're on their heads or their heels. That's what would happen if I had a couple of the Fourth or the Shell to deal with!

If I had my way, there'd be no domestic staff at the school. The fags, including the Fourth and Shell, ought to do all that kind of work. They would be yanked out at 5 a.m., winter and summer alike, and kept hard at it until late at night, with no time for fooling about.

They should be made to prepare all the vegetables for dinner before they were allowed to have breakfast. Then during the morning they should do what scrubbing was necessary. We Fifth-Formers could watch over them, and every time they slacked we could thrash them with an ashplant.

That sort of treatment would take some of the conceit out of them, and I'd help to take out what was left.

Fifth-Formers ought to be allowed the use of ashplants, as the Sixth are. Gad, I'd find plenty of use for mine! I keep one now, on the quiet, but I have to be dashed careful how I use it, because there'd be no end of a stink about it if the fact came out. To the Head, or Railton, I mean. The Lower School know all about it. I'm only living for the chance to get a few of those young sweeps, Merry, Blake, D'Arcy, Wildrake, Cardew, and the rest of them into this study, one at a time, so that I can use my ashplant on them. Let them look out!

(Thanks for the tip, Cutts. We will! —T. M.)

CHEEK!

By Philip Lefevre.

I SUPPOSE I ought to consider myself as highly complimented in having been requested to contribute to the pages of the "St. Jim's News," but I must really confess that I'm more than a little bewildered.

Why should this great honour thus be thrust upon me? I am not one of the celebrities of St. Jim's, and I'm certainly not a leading literary light. I understand that this is a special Fifth Form issue, so I presume that as the skipper of the Fifth I am temporarily in the limelight.

As a general rule, the relations between the Lower School and the Fifth are of anything but a cordial nature. Why this should be so I am at a loss to explain. Personally I have no complaint against the Lower School or the members thereof, and I don't think I've ever given them the least cause for bearing me any animosity.

There is no denying, however, that a good proportion of the Fourth and Shell are possessed of more than their share of cheek. Why, only a few days ago I heard a terrific row going on in the corridor, and went out to investigate.

Judge of my amazement, when I stepped out into the corridor, to see Grundy and Cutts rolling about in each other's arms, punching wildly whenever either managed to get a hand free.

I went forward and bent down, catching hold of a shoulder of each of them. I stopped several hefty blows myself—not that they were hitting at me, but they were both so excited they didn't seem to care where their blows landed. I had the dickens of a job to separate them, but with the aid of two or three fellows I managed it at last, and proceeded to hold a court of inquiry.

It was obvious that Grundy must have been the aggressor, for he'd no right whatever in the Fifth Form corridor. Besides, he was yelling all the time, and trying to get free from the fellows who were holding him, to get back at Cutts.

"I'll teach him to bully kids!" he was roaring. "Lemme go! I'll smash the rotter! I'll—"

Somebody shoved a handkerchief in his mouth by way of a gag, and the inquiry proceeded.

Well, Cutts didn't come out of it very creditably. It appeared that he'd been laying into some Third Form kid with an ashplant, and Grundy had met the kid, who was blubbing, and had got hold of the facts. Whereupon he had marched up to Cutts' study and commenced reprisals.

Pretty cool, for a Shell fellow to undertake correction of a Fifth-Former. I had Grundy slung out of the corridor, after favouring him with a concise account of what was likely to happen to him if he came there again on that sort of stunt, and then I took Cutts into my study and had a few minutes' heart-to-heart talk with him.

Of course, Cutts deserved all he got, but, hang it, when it comes to the Shell adopting high-handed tactics of that kind, things are becoming a trifle steep.



RATS!

By Arthur St. Leger.

SO the Fifth are to be immortalised in the pages of our famous little junior rag, it seems. Very kind of Tom Merry and his unruly little gang of ink-slingers, I'm sure! The Fifth ought to be beside themselves with delight at this signal mark of Lower School favour. Now that the Shell and Fourth have kindly consented to recognise our existence we shall be able to feel that we really have some right to it—which will, no doubt, have the effect of bucking up the humble Fifth no end.

The strange and incomprehensible part about it is that the Form of which I am an unworthy member don't seem to fully appreciate the great and overwhelming honour that has been conferred upon them. They have awakened to find themselves famous—or, at least, on the brink of fame, as it were—and they are content to turn over and go to sleep again.

However, I will waste no more sighs in bootless lamentation. Instead of that I will up and fill the breach. I will sing the song of the doughty Fifth. I will hold the mirror up to Nature, affording you a reflection of the Fifth as it really is, carefully avoiding turning it upon Cutts, however, for obvious reasons. Cracked mirrors mean seven years' bad luck, they say.

Not that Cutts can help his face, of course. It's his misfortune that he was landed with it. Still, he's lucky in one respect. He only has to look at it now and again when he's tying his tie and so on. Still, after all, we're getting pretty used to it by now, and it's not so bad when you're prepared for the jar. It's the first view that upsets a fellow's meals.

In that respect Cutts rather reminds me of Knox. I don't know whether I ought to talk about Knox, because he's not in the Fifth. After all, when you come to think of it, there are many things to be thankful for in this world, aren't there? But, as I was saying, if I'm not out of order in speaking of Knox in this article, I should like to give you a little verse that I wrote about Knox some time ago. It goes like this:

"That handsome young prefect named Knox
Once murmured while combing his locks:
"My face, I don't mind it,
For I am behind it;
The chaps who're in front get the
shocks!"

I thought it was rather beautiful myself. Of course, perhaps I was a trifle prejudiced, because I wrote it. Anyway, it didn't seem to appeal much to Knox. He was quite rude about it when I showed him a copy. I had been thinking it would please him no end. In fact, I was just on the point of offering to have it set to music at my own expense when he snatched it out of my hand in a very unmannerly fashion. Ah, well! There's no pleasing some people, is there?

As far as Cutts is concerned, his features aren't so bad, really. I mean to say, they're all there and that sort of thing. It's the way they're arranged that produces that sort of nightmare effect. And I don't know that I was quite right when I said he couldn't help his face. Because if he'd stop scowling he'd be quite passable, I'm sure. You scarcely ever see Cutts when he isn't scowling. I rarely have done so, and I see as much of him as most people, because I

share a study with him. In fact, he's something of a pal of mine, really—at least, he says he is. In fact, he absolutely insists on it when he's in a hole for money and he thinks I've got some.

Poor old Cutts is always in trouble. If it's not with Banks down at the Green Man, it's with Ratty in the Form-room, or Railton. When he's clear of these for a while—which isn't very often, and never for long at a time—he's stirring up a hornet's-nest in the Shell or the Fourth. I can't understand why he won't leave the Lower School alone. He always comes out at the wrong end, so I don't see what satisfaction he gets from it. Sometimes he drags me into these affairs, but I keep out of them if I can possibly do so.

I've got quite enough to do looking after myself, thank you! Life isn't all jam and pickles in the Fifth. You see, Ratty's our Form master. Comment would be superfluous.

He leads us a dog's life in class, and we do our best to return the compliment. But we don't find it by any means an easy task.

Gilmore once livened the place up for a few minutes with a little jape, for which he'd have got it in the neck had it been traced to him.

Gilmore isn't over bright mentally. Not that he's exactly a duffer, but he's made such a habit of wasting his time and acting the fool ever since he came to St. Jim's that I suppose his brain-box hasn't developed as it ought to have done. He's slacked so long that it's become second nature to him, and, of course, Ratty's got a perpetual down on him. He always shuffles through his prep, and Ratty's particularly hot on testing prep. He always manages to get round the Form with it, and nobody has a chance of being overlooked. It's a marvel how he does it in the time, but, marvel or not, he does the trick.

Gilmore's continually in hot water. When he's called upon, he makes a series of wild guesses, which get wilder and wilder as he gets more and more flustered, until he's talking absolute drivel, and the Form is yelling with laughter. The procedure is always the same, and Gilmore invariably comes back to his place—near the bottom of the Form—glowering with pent-up rage and muttering lurid threats directed at Ratty—but not audible to him, I might add.

He cribs his verses out of the Gradus, cooking them up so that they don't resemble the originals, by which time they don't resemble anything in particular, Latin verse least of all.

Then Ratty lets himself go. He has an acid tongue, and if there's anything that really gets under Gilmore's skin it is sarcasm.

Ratty wades through a heap of papers, sniffs contemptuously at nine out of ten, tossing them aside as though they had contaminated his fingers, and finally pulls up short at one.

"Ha! Gilmore!" he says, his eyes glittering. "We have now reached Gilmore's effort! Stand up, Gilmore, please! I said stand up, not hunch up! Let us all see you! Now let us consider this masterpiece."

And he forthwith proceeds to tear over Gilmore's paper, dwelling on every error as if it was a mouthful of something pleasant to the taste, and purring over it like a tiger over his kill.

Gilmore stands fidgeting and shuffling, sullen and vicious-eyed.

"Only slips of the pen," he mumbles.

"What's that?" snaps Ratty, looking up from his feast.

"Only—only slips of the pen, sir," repeats Gilmore doggedly.

"Ah, is that so, Gilmore?" purrs Ratty. "Only slips of the pen. Are you sure that is all, Gilmore? Don't you think the ink might have been a little to blame as well?"

"I didn't mean that, sir," says Gilmore, running his finger round the inside of his collar.

"No? Then what did you mean, Gilmore? Come, let us hear what you did mean."

Gilmore shuffles on his feet and looks down at his desk.

"I am being forced to the conclusion, Gilmore, that you don't really know what you do mean. That is not at all surprising. Nobody who had the remotest idea what he was talking about could possibly have perpetrated that vile rubbish."

Now, when that sort of thing happens nearly every day you can understand Gilmore's getting a bit restive. It can't be pleasant to be flayed alive in public like that.

Anyway, Gilmore decided that it was becoming a trifle monotonous and that if he couldn't put a stop to it altogether, he'd at least introduce a little variety into the proceedings.

He made friends with a rat-catcher down in Rylcombe, and procured half a dozen fine specimens of the genus muridae.

He shoved them into a box underneath Ratty's desk, and ran a fine thread from the catch on the box lid to his own desk. A jerk on the thread would cause the lid to open and liberate the rodents.

It certainly wasn't a very intellectual trick for a member of the Fifth, but Gilmore had been held up to ridicule for so long, and had suffered such a lot at the hands of Ratty, that he wasn't inclined to be fastidious.

With the jape on his mind, and knowing that he could create a diversion any time he wished, Gilmore took even less trouble with his prose paper that evening, with the result that it fairly staggered even Ratty when he came across it.

He fetched Gilmore to his feet, as usual, and proceeded to pull him to pieces, joint by joint. Only about two of us knew what Gilmore had up his sleeve, so that his unconcerned demeanour while Ratty was roasting him was more than a surprise to the rest of the Form.

When Gilmore decided that he'd had about enough of Ratty's tongue he gave the thread a sly jerk.

There was a faint noise from underneath Ratty's desk, and then the first of the rats appeared.

It had reached the middle of the space between the front desks and Ratty's throne before anybody spotted it, and by that time the others were out.

Lefevre sling a Latin grammar at the first rat, and missed. The effort wasn't wasted, however, for the book hit Ratty on the shins.

In another five seconds the Fifth Form room was in a state of pandemonium. I won't attempt to describe it, because I know jolly well I should fail. All manner of missiles were hurled at the rats, which ran in all directions.

Ratty stood on the top of his desk, his gown wrapped round him, like a girl with a mouse in the room.

In the excitement Gilmore dragged the box from beneath the desk and shoved it into a cupboard, out of the way. He wasn't giving clues away.

Cutts dug a pen-nib into Ratty's leg, and the old idiot immediately started to dance and yell blue murder, swearing that a rat had run up the leg of his trousers.

The opportunity was too good for Gilmore to miss. He immediately grabbed the pointer from the desk and proceeded to belabour Ratty on the shins, explaining that he was trying to kill the rat. I don't think he was likely to do much harm to any rat, but he certainly did a fair amount to Ratty. So much so, indeed, that by the time the last rodent had been either killed or chased out of the Form-room Ratty wasn't feeling in a condition to continue the lesson.

In fact, he was limping slightly for several days afterwards.

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"RIVALS OF THE NEW HOUSE!"

(Continued from page 13.)

"We won't!" yelled Herries, who was leader of the cab "team." "D'you think we're going to appear in public like this! Why I—Yah! Wow! Stoppit! Yarooooogh!"

Crack! Crack! went the whip round the "team's" legs, and they started forward with a chorus of dismal howls. "That's the idea—get a move on!" chuckled Reddy.

The hansom bumped and rocked perilously, the bell clanged, and the luckless passengers on the cab howled at the tops of their voices.

CHAPTER 6.

Hansom Is As Hansom Does!

REDFERN & CO. drove the "team" out into the High Street, and they followed behind it in a hilarious crowd.

The appearance of Tom Merry & Co. and the ancient cab in the High Street at Rylcombe attracted more attention than a Lord Mayor's Show. Villagers and hordes of urchins gathered round and shrieked at the remarkable sight.

"Gee up, old hosses!" grinned Redfern, plying the whip.

"Yow-wow!"

"Yah!"

Bump! Bumpity-bump! Bump! went the old hansom as it reeled and rocked over the cobblestones.

Clang! Clang! Clang! went the bell, and its ringing clamour woke the echoes in the village.

Lefevre of the Fifth and his chums, Smith major and Lee, came rushing out of the bunshop to find out what the clanging of the bell meant.

They stopped short and blinked when they beheld the amazing spectacle that came down the High Street.

"My word!" ejaculated Lefevre. "What a giddy rag! Look at D'Arcy on the box! Ha, ha, ha!"

Monteith, Baker, Rushden, and North of the Sixth came strolling along, and they, too, burst into roars of laughter on seeing the cab and the weirdly-bedecked School House fellows.

Even the majesty of the law could not restrain itself from laughter at the funny spectacle. P.-c. Crump leaned against a lamp-post and fairly rocked with mirth.

The village was agog with merriment, and the appearance of the hansom evoked shrieks of laughter wherever it appeared. Redfern & Co. paraded their "show" round the streets of Rylcombe, and then they headed for St. Jim's, leaving the village in convulsions.

Meanwhile, most of the other boys were back at St. Jim's. Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn had not gone out at all, and they spent some time in the tuckshop, where Fatty Wynn, at least, enjoyed himself.

Figgins was moody and his brow clouded. All the other New House juniors had followed Redfern to a man, and had disappeared out of gates. The New House leader felt that he had been slighted and left in the cold, and this intensified his resentment towards Redfern. Kerr, watching his chum closely, read his thoughts and felt troubled.

"I wonder where the bounders have gone, and what they are up to?" muttered Figgins, after some time had elapsed. "It's getting late now, and they aren't back."

"Reddy had some scheme on against the School House," said Kerr. "He offered to let us into it, you know, at dinner-time."

"Yes, I can see myself following Redfern's lead in his scatter-brained schemes—I don't think!" snorted Figgins. "I don't care a hang what Redfern is up to. He and the others can go and eat coke!"

Figgins, in spite of himself, did care. He was intensely curious to know what Redfern & Co. were doing. He sat at the tuckshop counter with a frowning brow and quite a dejected look on his face.

"Let's go for a stroll in the village. I'm fed-up with this!" he exclaimed suddenly, jumping up. "You can leave those tarts, Fatty. You've scoffed enough for a regiment already."

"Look here, Figgy, I—"

"I'll ram them down your back, you greedy bounder, if you don't come on!" said Figgins crossly.

Fatty followed his leader and Kerr from the tuckshop, still protesting, and the trio made their way towards the gates.

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"Hark!" said Kerr suddenly. "Can you chaps hear a bell?"

They stopped to listen, and heard the distant clanging of a bell over the school wall.

"Wonder what it is?" said Figgins.

The noise of the bell came nearer, and mingled with its raucous strains could be heard various shouts of laughter. Other fellows were attracted by the sounds, and quite a crowd went to the gates.

The St. Jim's fellows looked down the lane, and shrieks of merriment arose when they saw the cab rocking and bumping towards them.

"It's Reddy and the others!" gasped Kerr. "They've got the School House chaps in that cab!"

"Oh!"

"Mum-my hat!"

Fellows dashed up from far and near to greet the appearance of Redfern's procession at St. Jim's. Taggles almost fell down as the cab jostled in through the gates.

"My heye!" he gasped.

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

"Look at Gussy on the dickey-seat!"

"Look at their natty get-up!"

"Gaze at 'em and weep!"

"Ho, ho, ho!"

Kerr and Fatty Wynn roared with the rest. Figgins was the only one who did not laugh at the comic sight. He seemed to be dazed and overcome.

Redfern wagged his whip cheerily under Figgins' nose.

"How's this for a rag, old top?" he inquired. "We've got Tom Merry & Co. in our hands now—the complete gang! This will make 'em sit up rather, I'm thinking. Gee-up, you bounders! You've got to make a tour of the quad!"

"Yow! Wow-wow!"

Round and round the quadrangle the "team" pulling the old hansom was driven, and the walls of St. Jim's echoed with the shrieks of laughter of the onlookers.

Never before had a party of boys been so completely ragged and made to look small! Tom Merry & Co. roared for release, but no succour was at hand, although Wally made a valiant attempt to rescue his major from his undignified position on the cab-box.

A tall, gowned figure came dashing out of the New House. It was Mr. Horace Ratcliff, and Ratty's lean, meagre face was angry.

He planted himself in the path of the cab and waved his arms wildly.

"Boys, how dare you create this disgraceful scene here!" he thundered. "Redfern, Owen, Lawrence, Pratt! Come to my study in half an hour's time for a caning! Take this—this ridiculous vehicle away from the school precincts at once! Take it away!"

"Yes, sir!" gasped Redfern.

He cracked the whip round the "team's" legs and drove them at the double for the gates.

Bump, bump, bump! went the cab, and the bell clanged merrily.

A rush was made after the cab, and a horde of yelling juniors followed it through the gates.

Redfern drove his hapless victims farther up the lane, in the opposite direction from Rylcombe. Soon they reached the top of a steep hill, the surface of which was still covered with hard snow.

As Reddy drove the cab down the hill the "team" began to slither on the slippery ground, and the cab itself developed marked skidding tendencies.

"Look out!" yelled St. Leger of the Fifth. "The whole giddy lot will be sliding down there in a tick—Ah! there it goes! Ha, ha, ha!"

The cab wheels refused to hold the snowy ground, and the vehicle slithered down the hill like a giant toboggan, dragging along the hapless juniors between its shafts.

Howls rent the air, both of laughter and of horror.

"Bai Jove! Stop the cab! We're goin' down sideways! Oh ewumbs! Yarooooogh!" shrieked D'Arcy.

Rocking dizzily from side to side, and with the bell clanging noisily, the cab continued in its hectic career down the hill. When it reached the bottom it took a plunge through a gap in the hedge and collapsed in the snow in the field beyond.

Crash! Cr-r-r-rack!

"Yarooooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Redfern. "That's done it! The whole giddy cab has broken up!"

When the juniors arrived on the scene they found the cab just a ghastly heap of debris. The slide down the hill and the concussion at the bottom had proved too much for the decrepit vehicle. And, amongst the ruins, Tom Merry & Co. lay, sprawled in all their glory.

They were unhurt physically, except for minor bumps and bruises, but their moans were heartrending.

It was some time before they escaped from the hands of the New House raggars.

By that time they were utterly spent and humiliated, and they felt that life was really not worth living.

And in the New House there were happy faces once again. The ragging of Tom Merry & Co. was, in essence, a triumph for Redfern, whom Figgins, in the heat of sudden impulse, had challenged to do better than he.

Reddy had done it, and in the New House he was regarded as the hero of the hour.

CHAPTER 7. Crocked!

"WHAT about footer?"

Dick Redfern asked that question, looking into Figgins' study the following afternoon.

Kerr and Wynn were sitting round the fire, roasting chestnuts, whilst Figgins stood by the window, his hands thrust deep into his trousers pockets, staring moodily out into the quad.

He wheeled round on hearing Redfern's voice.

"What do you want?" he asked, glaring.

He had, against Kerr's advice, avoided Reddy all that day.

"There's no need to bite a chap's head off," said Redfern, stepping farther into the study. "I came to ask you about the footer, Figgins."

"Oh!" said Figgins, and an angry flush crept over his face. "I suppose you think you'd make a better footer captain than me, and have come to ask for the job?"

The colour mounted in Redfern's cheeks.

"I haven't come to ask anything of the sort, Figgins," he replied. "But, of course, if you'd like to hand over the captaincy—"

"I'll hand over a thick ear if I have any more of your cheek!" exclaimed Figgins. "Why, the awful nerve—"

"Here, steady on, old chap!" said Kerr quietly, laying a hand on his chum's arm. "There's no need to go off the deep end. Reddy's only chipping you!"

Redfern grinned. He was quite good-humoured, and he knew that Figgins, who was inclined to be "touchy" at times, had taken to heart his victory over the School House yesterday.

"Don't get in a wax, Figgy," he said. "I told you the top study would do the trick, didn't I? And you invited me to try my hand against Tom Merry, you know."

"Yours isn't top study, you rotter—not by a long chalk! You've got too much blessed cheek, Redfern, and for two pins I'd chuck you out of this room on your neck."

Reddy bristled at this.

"You're welcome to try it on!" he said promptly.

"You cheeky duffer—"

"You blithering idiot—"

"Oh, shut up!" said Kerr. "There's no call for a row, I tell you. Make it pax, you fatheads, and try to be a bit reasonable, Figgy!"

"Who's unreasonable?" demanded Figgins, glaring at his chum.

"You are, old son," replied Kerr calmly. "Try and cool off a bit, you know."

Figgins restrained himself from uttering the angry words that came to his lips.

Kerr was a quiet, hard-headed fellow, and he had a good deal of influence with his chum.

"All—alright!" said Figgins, with a gulp. "What do you want, Redfern?"

"I just wanted to know whether you had made out the list for the School House match on Saturday, that's all. It's practically only a day off now, and the chaps ought to get in some practice. If we can follow up our win yesterday by licking the School House at footer on Saturday, it will be ripping!"

Figgins coloured.

"I—I had forgotten about the footer," he said, in a low voice. "I'll get out a list to-day."

"Right-ho!" said Redfern cheerily. "I just wanted to know, that's all. You see, the other chaps are wondering about it, and there's talk about you being slack in your duties as leader."

The angry colour returned to Figgins' cheeks.

Redfern walked away, and Kerr managed to appease his chum's wrath.

That evening Figgins got out the list of players for the match with Tom Merry & Co. Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence were all included, of course. Next to Figgins, Dick Redfern was the best junior forward in the New House, and both his chums were valuable members of the team.

The footer ground had been cleared of the snow, and the following day Figgins kept his men hard at practice on Little Side.

Fatty Wynn was in great form as goalkeeper, despite his heavy gastronomic activities during Christmas and since. Figgins, too, excelled, and his fleetness of foot and precision with his shooting, brought great admiration from the others.

Dick Redfern also gave a splendid show at practice, and the New House juniors had high hopes of beating their rivals on the morrow.

The roads cleared that day, and after tea, Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn took out their cycles for a run to Wayland, where they had some shopping to do.

Whilst at Wayland, they visited the Christmas bazaar, which was still open, and there they enjoyed themselves for over an hour. Then Fatty Wynn made the inevitable announcement that he was hungry, and hied himself off to the cakeshop in the High Street. Figgins and Kerr, who lingered at the moving model show at the bazaar, afterwards had some difficulty in locating Fatty, and by the time they had routed him out of the bunshop, it was very late indeed.

"We shall have to hustle going back, or we shall be locked out!" said Figgins. "If we weren't pushed for time, we'd bump you, Fatty, for being such a little cormorant. How many more times am I to warn you not to stuff before a footer match?"

"Oh, really, Figgy, a chap must lay a solid foundation, you know!" expostulated Fatty peevishly.

"Oh, rats! Come on!"

The three chums mounted their cycles and pedalled away swiftly.

They made record time across the heath, and fairly made the fur fly—or, rather, the slush—through Wayland.

"Better go steady up here," said Kerr, as they struck the first patch of road in the Wayland Lane. "The surface is jolly slippery—"

"Oooooooooogh!"

Figgins gave a loud cry as his machine suddenly lurched sideways. The back wheel had skidded, and, despite his efforts to maintain his balance, Figgins fell heavily into the road.

"Oh! Oh!" he moaned.

Kerr and Fatty dismounted and hurried over to their chum, who was lying prostrate in the road.

"What's up, Figgy?" asked Kerr anxiously. "Are you hurt?"

"Oh, yes! My leg is twisted, and my foot bashed on the crank. Oh! I c-c-can't get up!"

"Oh crumbs!"

Kerr and Wynn lifted Figgins, who was gasping with pain. Figgy was as hard as the proverbial nails, so they knew that the pain must have been excruciating to make him gasp and moan.

He leaned heavily on them.

"It's no use—I can't stand!" he muttered. "I shan't be able to ride the jigger, either. Perhaps you could get me on the saddle and shove me, like you would if you were teaching me to ride. Oh, my foot!"

"Right-ho, old chap; we'll manage!" said Kerr, as cheerfully as he could.

Figgins' machine was picked up and found to have suffered no damage beyond a bent mudguard and brake. Kerr and Wynn assisted him to the saddle, and then Kerr pushed his chum back to St. Jim's, with Fatty walking alongside wheeling the other two machines.

The gates were locked when they arrived, and Taggles grumblingly opened them.

"Which H've reported yer to Mr. Ratcliff!" he growled. "Over a quarter of an 'our late! Young rips!"

"Oh, go and fry your face!" snapped Fatty Wynn crossly.

When Figgins appeared in the New House, hobbling between Kerr and Wynn, a crowd gathered. Cries of dismay and consternation arose when they heard what had happened.

"Poor old Figgy!"

"He's crooked for the match, too!" said French glumly.

"What beastly rotten luck! Figgy won't be able to play to-morrow, that's a cert! Tom Merry & Co. will simply walk over us!"

Figgins' accident was a great blow to the New House fellows who had great hopes of winning the match on the morrow.

Mr. Ratcliff could hardly punish the chums for being late, of course, but he listened to their account of the accident in a very ungracious spirit. Figgins was sent to Marie Rivers, the school nurse, at once to have his foot bathed and attended to. He had to be assisted into bed that night.

Next morning all the juniors looked inquiringly at Figgy.

"How's your foot, old chap?" asked Kerr, with real concern in his voice.

Figgins' face was white and drawn with pain.

"It—it hurts!" he said simply. "There's no hope of my being able to play this afternoon, chaps!"

"Hard cheese!"

The doctor saw Figgins that morning and pronounced that he would have to remain in bed until further orders. So Figgins lay in the dormitory all the morning, fretting over his bad luck.

Directly lessons were finished, Kerr and Fatty came up to

see him, and they stayed with him till dinner-time. After dinner they again visited their chum in the dormitory—this time with startling news.

"There's been a ballot for footer captain, Figgy, and Redfern has been elected," said Kerr quietly.

Figgins started up in bed.

"What! Redfern elected captain?"

His chum nodded.

"After all, Figgy, the team's got to have a captain," said Kerr quietly. "You may be laid up for days, you know, although I sincerely hope not. Anyway, Reddy's a decent chap, and the team will be all right in his hands."

Figgins did not reply. He looked fiercely towards the door, his fists clenched tight, and his chest heaving with emotion.

Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence walked in.

"How are you, Figgy?" said Redfern cheerily. "Your hoof's getting better, I hope?"

"Strange you should hope so, Redfern, now that my laying-up has given you a chance to sneak into the leadership!" said Figgins between his teeth.

Kerr darted his chum a quick, troubled glance, but Figgins did not see it. Redfern coloured to the roots of his hair.

"I haven't sneaked into the leadership at all, Figgins!" he said, with an effort at composure. "The chaps elected me after dinner—"

"That's right, Figgy; it was all fair and square," said Fatty Wynn. "Kerr was the other candidate in the election, and Reddy got in!"

Figgins turned to Kerr.

"You'll back up Redfern, I suppose?" he muttered.

Kerr shrugged his shoulders.

"Of course, Figgy. He's been elected temporary leader, and we're out for the good of the New House."

"While that cheeky bouncer is out for his own ends—to filch the leadership from me!" said Figgins bitterly.

"I'm sorry if you think that, Figgins," said Redfern quietly.

"Yah!" said Digges. "Figgins is jealous of Redfern! I don't like hitting at a chap when he's crooked. But what an example of the sporting spirit—my hat!"

The pain in Figgins' leg and the fretfulness of having to lie in bed when the football field called to him brought out all that was impetuous and unreasoning in his nature. He turned away from Redfern with a bitter look, and Redfern, biting his lip, strode out of the dormitory.

An angry murmur arose from the other juniors in the room.

"That's not the way to treat Redfern, Figgins!" said Pratt warmly. "He's a decent chap, and he's proved that he can lead—"

"Then let him lead you!" burst out Figgins passionately. "If you prefer Redfern to me, you can have him, and be hanged to you!"

"Figgy! Figgy!" exclaimed Kerr, in concern.

"Oh, rats! If I wasn't laid up in bed like this, I'd jolly soon deal with that cheeky rotter!" said Figgins. "Why can't you chaps leave me alone now?"

Kerr turned to the others.

"Figgy's a bit overstrung," he said. "I think we'd better go!"

"He's like a bear with a sore head!" growled Pratt. "He's making a rotten impression, anyway, if he wants to stick to the captaincy!"

These words reached Figgins' ears, and he started up in bed angrily.

But the dormitory door had closed, and he was alone.

The afternoon wore on, and later he knew, from the distant shouts that carried to his ears through the window, that the match on Little Side had commenced. He sat up in bed and listened, eager to catch any sound that might tell him of the happenings on the field.

At length a shout, louder than the rest, rose on the crisp air:

"Goal!"

"Bravo, Merry!"

The School House had won first blood!

Figgins writhed in bed with exasperation. He heard the referee's whistle blow, and followed the match as closely as he could from the sounds that came to him from the distance. D'Arcy had got off-side. He heard that. Redfern was playing well; that much was evident from the frequent plaudits that were shouted to his name. "Well saved, Fatty!" was another frequent cry; and he heard Merry's, Blake's, Talbot's, and Kerr's names shouted many times.

Then came a second jubilant howl of "Goal!" from the distance.

"Played, Redfern!"

Figgins' blood ran quicker. The New House had equalised. Redfern had scored a goal!

That thought brought a cloud to Figgins' brow. He was a sportsman through and through, yet somehow Redfern's

name rankled in him. He could not shake off the belief that Redfern had deliberately set himself up against him and was doing his best to assume the leadership of the New House by crafty means.

The match was in progress again, and before long he heard from the shouts that Talbot had added another goal to the School House score.

Then came the interval and the resumption. Play was evidently getting more exciting, to judge by the shouts. Figgins, lying helplessly in bed, chafed that he was unable to take his part in the game. He would have given anything to have been able to join his Form-fellows in the muddy arena in their tussle with Tom Merry & Co.

As the second half progressed he was as excited as though he were an actual spectator. He could see the game in his mind's eye, and he thrilled when another roar arose:

"Goal!"

"Bravo, Lawrence!"

The New House had equalised.

Figgins glanced at his watch on the locker beside the bed. Only ten more minutes to play! Would a victory be won?

The minutes seemed to fly by, and he listened eagerly to every sound that came to his ears from the football field. The game was wavering between School House and New House. Then Figgins gave a groan. A cry of "goal" arose, and shouts of "Played, Lowther!" But next minute he heard somebody shout "Hard luck!" and the referee's whistle did not blow, which indicated that Lowther had not scored, after all.

Four more minutes to go! Figgins almost forgot the pain that was wracking his leg. Would there be a decision? Then—

"Goal!"

That loud, lifting roar came so suddenly, after a few seconds' hush, that it almost made Figgins jump in his bed.

"Goal!"

"Good old Reddy!"

"New House wins!"

Figgins drew a deep breath.

Then Redfern, in the nick of time, had kicked the winning goal!

The game was all over bar shouting, and a short while later Kerr, Fatty Wynn, and Jimson burst into the dormitory.

"We've won, Figgy!" roared Kerr.

"Three—two!" gasped Wynn, who looked for all the world like a very fat mudlark, so liberally was he bespattered.

"Reddy scored two, and Lawrence one!" said Jimson eagerly.

Figgins gave a bitter smile.

"Quite a feather in the cap for the New Firm—what?" he said.

Kerr looked at his leader aghast.

"Figgy," he exclaimed, "aren't you glad?"

"Of course I'm glad that our House has won," said Figgins. "But—but I can't bear to think that that upstart cad Redfern—"

"Draw it mild, Figgins!" Pratt's voice sounded at the door and he entered the dormitory with a number of other juniors. "You've got no right to call Redfern names—especially after what he's done!"

"Hear, hear!" said Cyril Chowle, with an unpleasant leer. "You see now, Figgins, that we can get on very well without you. We've licked the School House without you in the team!"

The New House fellows were coming in one by one to acquaint Figgins with the news.

Redfern's face was flushed with victory, and he gave Figgins a cheery smile.

"All serene, Figgins!" he exclaimed. "We won!"

Redfern's smile vanished, and he looked curiously at Figgins.

"I'm blessed if I can make you out, Figgins!" he said. "I never thought you capable of being such a fatheaded mule! What have you got to get your back up against, anyhow?"

"Oh, nothing!" said Figgins. "Don't let me interfere with you, Redfern! You get on with your job as the newly-elected captain of the New House."

Redfern bit his lip, but turned away without replying. The other juniors, with the exception of Kerr and Wynn, left the dormitory, looking very unfriendly towards Figgins.

CHAPTER 8.

Tom Merry and Co. Retaliate!

TWO days elapsed before Figgins was able to walk about, and during his enforced stay in the dormitory the only boys who troubled to visit him were Kerr and Fatty Wynn and Jimson, Koumi Rao and Contarini.

He stood in bad grace with the rest of the juniors.

When he resumed his old place in the school he hardly



Bump! Crash! "Yaroop!" "Wow! The New House Juniors were falling and slithering all over the floor, crashing into each other and into the beds. Their howls awoke the night echoes. A quick step sounded at the door, which opened next minute to admit Mr. Ratcliff, the sour-tempered master of the Fifth. (See page 20.)

spoke to Redfern at all, and Redfern, who had been piqued by Figgins' attitude towards him, did not display any inclination to "make it up."

Kerr tried his hardest to pour oil on the troubled waters, but relations between Figgins and Redfern remained strained.

Redfern did not press any claim to the leadership of the juniors, and Figgins was still captain. But it was apparent to all that Redfern's popularity was on the increase, and this Figgins resented.

Honours were now fairly evenly divided between the New House and the School House, but Redfern had announced that he would not let matters rest there. He was out to prove the fact that New House was Cock House at St. Jim's.

Tom Merry & Co., however, felt the same—that it was up to them to drive home as soon as possible on the New House fellows that the School House was Cock House. Tom, moreover, had been thinking, and the result of his thoughts was an expedition which crept stealthily out of the lower box-room window in the School House that night, when the rest of the school had retired.

"Shushsh!" said Tom Merry hoarsely, as he dropped into the soft, yielding snow below.

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy, who scrambled down behind. "We dare not make a wow, deah boys, or the whole game will be spoiled—"

"Shurrup, Gussy!" hissed Blake. "I— Ow!"

"Yawwooooh! You've twodden on my head, you clumsy wottah!"

Tom Merry glared up in the moonlight.

"You silly cuckoos, you'll wake the House!" he exclaimed.

"Gwooooh! That wuff ass Blake—"

"You shouldn't hang about there gassing, Gussy!" snorted Blake. "How was I to know your fat head was in the way?"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Oh, gag him, somebody!" moaned Blake.

"I refuse to be gagged— Yow!"

Manners and Lowther grasped Gussy's legs and pulled him down from the window-sill. The swell collapsed in an ungraceful attitude in the snow.

"Hurry up, you others!" said Tom desperately. "And careful with that stuff, Glyn!"

"All serene!"

Blake, Herries, and Digby dropped down, and last of all came Bernard Glyn, the inventor of the Shell.

Each of the juniors had bulky pockets, but Glyn's were the bulkiest of all. They contained two bottles of his latest preparations, and these were to form the nucleus of the night jape on Figgins & Co.

Bernard Glyn was for ever dabbling in weird chemicals and wonderful apparatus, and he had evolved many fearful and marvellous concoctions in his time. His two latest were voted by Tom Merry & Co. real "corkers." One was a powder called "Radium Spray," and the other was a white liquid which Glyn had christened "Slippery Mixture."

The properties of Glyn's Radium Spray and Slippery Mixture were unique and interesting. The former powder, when sprayed on any article, however thinly, adhered to it "like the paper on the wall," as Monty Lowther picturesquely termed it, and made it luminous in the dark. The beauty of it was that the Radium Spray was harmless to human flesh, as Glyn had proved the previous night in the Shell dormitory, when he had sprayed his own face with it, thereby giving himself the appearance of a spook in the dark.

The Slippery Mixture had truly remarkable properties. A slight amount of it sprayed on any floor made it as slippery as ice in a very short time. Glyn had spent weeks in perfecting that fearful fluid, and he was now satisfied that it was the "real goods."

The Terrible Three, Jack Blake & Co., and Glyn were out on mischief bent, and their objective was the Fourth Form.

dormitory in the New House. They were about to treat their rivals to the Radium Spray and the Slippery Mixture—if fortune favoured them. As Tom Merry had pointed out, it all depended upon whether they would be able to effect an entrance into the New House without disturbing anybody. They had high hopes of managing that part of the affair, however.

Midnight boomed from the old clock-tower at St. Jim's as the night raiders moved across the quad to the New House.

"The side window's the best," said Tom. "It will be locked, of course, but with luck I shall be able to force it. This way!"

They crept round to the west side of the House and halted underneath the window indicated by Tom.

It was rather high up, but it was accessible from a drain-pipe that ran up the wall close by. Tom Merry grasped the pipe and clambered carefully up it.

The juniors, eagerly waiting below, heard a soft exclamation of astonishment from Tom.

"My hat! How jolly lucky! The window's open, you chaps!"

"Good egg!"

Tom clambered into the darkness of the New House beyond, and one by one the others came up the pipe and joined him in the corridor.

"I wonder how that window came to be open?" said Blake. "Ratty makes it a strict rule that all windows are locked at night from the inside. It's jolly rummy!"

"Lucky for us—what? Now, be careful, kids!" murmured Tom. "We don't want to run into a trap, you know!"

They traversed the dark, silent corridors on tiptoe and arrived at last at the Fourth Form dormitory. Sounds of slumber came from within. Tom Merry crept silently inside and announced the coast clear.

"They're all asleep—dear little boys!" he said. "Out with that stuff, Glyn. We've got to do this thing quickly!"

Half the juniors armed themselves with squirts containing Radium Spray, whilst the others had squirts full of Slippery Mixture.

The faces of all the slumbering boys were gently sprayed with the radium powder, and the dormitory floor was swamped with Slippery Mixture.

"I say, Figgins isn't here!" said Blake, coming up to Tom Merry. "His bed's empty!"

"Great pip! Perhaps that accounts for the window being open," said Tom. "If Figgy catches us here he'll rouse the others like a hornet's nest about us. We're finished, anyway, so we'd better cut."

"Yaas, wathah!"

The School House juniors promptly "cut."

They left the New House without mishap, slithered down the pipe, and stood in a group in the quadrangle.

"Now to wake 'em!" chuckled Tom Merry. "The Slippery Mixture has hardened by now, I suppose, Glyn?"

"Rather!"

Tom took the risk of returning to the interior of the New House via the open window. He crept to the Fourth Form dormitory, where all was still and quiet, and shouted in at the door.

"Wake up, New House asses!"

Startled cries and sleepy grunts sounded in the gloom.

"Yaw-aw-aw!"

"Whassermarrer?"

Having performed the task of waking the New House fellows, Tom took a hurried departure.

Kerr sat up in bed and blinked round him in the darkness. Then he gave a terrific start. He could scarcely believe the evidence of his own eyes. Rows of evil, ghost-like faces glowed in the darkness of the dormitory all around him.

"Mum-mum-my hat!" he stuttered. "What the—"

A frightened howl came from Jimson, who had also seen the apparitions of the night.

"Oooooogh! Help! Ghosts!"

By this time the whole dormitory was awake.

Glowing, ghostly faces bobbed up and down with hideous effect. Most of the juniors, newly wakened from their beauty sleep, were scared out of their wits.

Some dived under the bedclothes, whilst others roared.

The whole dormitory was in a panic—and small wonder.

Their faces, radiant with Glyn's phosphorescent powder, were a truly ghastly sight in the darkness.

"It's all right, you asses!" exclaimed Kerr. "There aren't any spooks at all! It's our own faces! We've got something on 'em that shows up in the dark!"

"Gug-gug-great Scott!"

"Oh jeminy!"

"Light a candle, somebody!"

Kerr jumped out of bed; but as soon as his feet touched the floor they slid in opposite directions from under him, and he landed on the linoleum with a terrific concussion.

Bump!

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"Yoooooogh!"

Startled voices were demanding a light. The expressions on the boys' faces showed with gruesome effect as they glowed vividly in the gloom.

Some sprang from their beds, to go slithering ungracefully along the floor a moment later. They cannoned into one another in the centre of the dormitory, and came to a full stop, and the yells they gave re-echoed on the night air.

"Yarooooogh!"

"Ow!"

"Wow!"

"Who's got a light?"

Koumi Rao at last found his torchlight in his locker and he switched on the beam. It showed Pratt, Owen, and Chowle lying in a muddled heap on the floor.

"You chumps!" roared Digges. "What are you sprawling down there for? Get up and turn on the light!"

"Yah! We can't!"

Digges gave a leap out of bed, and his legs flew up in the air as soon as his feet touched the floor. Digges slid under Chowle's bed, and he gave a fiendish howl as his head cracked against one of the posts.

By this time several others had essayed to walk across the floor; but, to their utter amazement and bewilderment, they found themselves unable to keep their feet, and the evolutions they performed were weird and wonderful in the extreme.

Bump! Bump! Crash!

Boys were falling and slithering all over the floor, crashing into each other and into the beds. Their howls awoke the night echoes. The Fourth Form dormitory was like unto a Bedlam.

Kerr grasped his bed for support and stood up. The surface of the floor was as slippery as a skating-rink. He tried to get to Fatty Wynn's bed, but overbalanced en route and fell with a crash on top of Redfern, who was crawling down the centre of the dormitory on hands and knees.

"Yarooooogh!"

"Wow! Ow!"

A quick step sounded at the door, which opened next minute to admit Mr. Horace Ratcliff.

The Housemaster held a lighted candle and he stood stock-still in the dormitory doorway.

"Gug-good heavens!" he gurgled. "Gug-goodness gracious!"

The sight of those glowing faces moving hither and thither in the dark—most of them near the floor—was sufficient to startle any man.

Mr. Ratcliff was astounded. He almost dropped the candle.

Then Koumi Rao's light flashed round, and Mr. Ratcliff beheld the boys sprawling on the floor, holding on to their beds and slithering wildly to keep their balance.

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated Mr. Ratcliff. "The place is like a bear-garden! The young rascals have actually put radium paint, or some similar substance, on their faces, and are indulging in some ridiculous game! I will take them in hand immediately!"

His thin features working with wrath, Mr. Ratcliff took a quick stride into the dormitory.

He had not gone many paces before his feet began to part company and he lurched forward. At that moment Lawrence reached the electric light switch and snapped it on, flooding the dormitory with light.

The juniors were treated to the amazing spectacle of Mr. Ratcliff performing weird evolutions on the slippery floor, his long legs striking out wildly in all directions. At last they got tangled altogether; the candle flew one way, and Mr. Ratcliff's legs flew the other, and he sat down with a bump.

"Yah! My goodness! Ow-wow-wow!"

The juniors looked on in petrified horror.

Ratty sprawling in an undignified attitude on the floor was a funny sight, really, but to them the situation had its terrors.

"Grooogh! Oh dear!" moaned Ratty, attempting to regain his feet. "The f-f-floor h-has l-l-lubricous tendencies—Ow!"

The Housemaster's legs escaped him again, and he went down at full length with a roar.

"Oh jeminy!" gasped Redfern. "Won't there be a row now? Look at Ratty! Ha, ha!"

Redfern, in spite of himself, had to laugh.

Mr. Ratcliff's gyrations on the floor were too funny.

At last he gained a perpendicular position by grasping a bed, and he carefully persuaded his feet to keep together.

Ratty's look was like a gargoye.

"Boys—boys!" he choked. "You shall suffer for this outrage! I have never been more—yow!—grossly treated in all my life! Grooogh! Who—who—ow!—greased this—yow!—floor?"

"We don't know, sir," said Digges. "It's a mystery to us, sir."

"Indeed!" rasped Mr. Ratcliff. "And am I to—yow! understand that the placing of that—ow!—radium substance on your faces is also a mystery?"

"Yes, sir!" said a dozen voices.

"Groooh!" said the Housemaster, looking spitefully round him. "I will deal with this matter in the morning. You boys will wash your faces and return to bed. I will see you first thing after rising-bell."

Mr. Ratcliff crawled carefully to the door, proceeding in the manner of a tight-rope walker. He disappeared with another baleful look at the juniors. He left the dormitory in a foment.

The japed juniors were busily engaged in washing their faces at the washstands when the door opened again and Figgins came in.

The first thing that Figgins did was to sit down hard on the floor.

"Ow!" he gasped.

His Form-fellows glared at him.

"Where've you been all this time, Figgins?" demanded Pratt.

"Yow! I've been down to my study, if you want to know, writing an impot for Ratty which I had forgotten all about," replied Figgins, struggling to his feet. "What silly ass greased the floor?"

"You ought to know!" burst out Owen. "Do you mean to say you know nothing of this, Figgins?"

It has all the appearances of a School House rag!"

"My hat!" said Figgins.

Kerr explained all that had happened. Figgins looked dumb-founded.

"Well, if that doesn't take the cake!" he exclaimed. "So Tom Merry and his gang have been here and japed you like this! Oh, my hat! Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors glared wrathfully at Figgins.

"That's rich—really rich!" gasped the New House leader hilariously. "Who's singing small now, Redfern—eh? Ha, ha, ha!"

Redfern looked furious.

"Do you mean to say you've been out of the dorm all this time and knew nothing of the jape?" he demanded.

"Why should I have known anything about it?" said Figgins.

"Well, it looks rammy—especially as you seem so highly tickled over it!" said Pratt.

"What I want to know is, how did the School House bounders get in? The windows and doors are all locked."

"You'd better get Redfern to find it out," said Figgins with heavy sarcasm. "He's leader here, you know. It's up to you, Reddy, as head of the top study!"

"You—you boulder, Figgins!"

Figgins turned in, still chuckling, amidst the wrathful glares of his Form-fellows.

Their ablutions finished, they also returned to their beds and the light was switched off.

But it was far into the wintry night before slumber and peace once more settled down on the Fourth Form dormitory in the New House.



Make sure of this Christmas present, boys, by ordering the "Magnet" early!

& Co. were the perpetrators of that jape in the dormitory, but to "sneak" on their rivals was farthest from their minds.

Mr. Ratcliff rapped out his questions spitefully, and waited for information. But no information came. Darker and darker grew the brow of the Housemaster.

"Very well—very well indeed!" Mr. Ratcliff was infuriated and chagrined, and his voice was like the harsh rasping of a file. "As nobody here seems to know anything about the outrage I will have inquiries instituted round the school. The guilty party—or parties—shall be punished severely!"

Mr. Ratcliff swept away to find Monteith, and he instructed the prefect to enact the role of amateur detective.

Pratt brought the news into the Common-room after lessons that Monteith had made a discovery. The side window had been opened during the night—from inside!

"My hat!" said Redfern. "Then that's how the scallywags got in! They must have had an accomplice inside the New House—our House!"

"Impossible!" said Kerr. "Who would be traitor enough to let them in like that?"

There was a pause, and then Pratt exclaimed:

"Figgins! He was up last night, and he seemed to have kept well away from the rag. He seemed pleased, too, at our plight. I wonder if Figgins had anything to do with the opening of the window?"

"You're talking out of your hat, you ass!" exclaimed Kerr.

"Why should Figgins want to let the School House chaps in? He's the last person who'd think of such a thing."

"Oh, I don't know!" said Pratt obstinately.

"He's got his back up against Redfern, you know, because he put the kybosh on the School House. We've been making a lot of Reddy since then, and Figgins has been jealous. Wouldn't it be a good thing for him if Tom Merry & Co. retaliated while Reddy was in favour, and gave us a licking? Figgins would have the laugh of Redfern then, especially if he escaped the ragging himself—which he did! You remember how amused Figgins was last night, too, when he came in."

"Oh, rats!" said Kerr angrily. "You're a cad to think that of Figgys. What you say is all bosh!"

But Pratt's words, he could see, had made an impression on the others. The juniors wore black, angry looks.

"If Figgins is a traitor, he'll get scalped," said Redfern quietly. "Maybe, though, one of the School House chaps hid in here overnight, and opened the window for the others. Let's go over and have a plain talk with Tom Merry. They'll make it pax for the time being."

Redfern, Owen, Lawrence, and Kerr crossed to the School House and went up to Study No. 10. The Terrible Three were at home, and they reached for cricket-stumps and other weapons when they saw who their visitors were.

"Pax!" said Redfern hastily. "We want to know about last night—"

Tom Merry & Co. burst into roars of laughter.

"Look here—"

"Did you have a few fits when you woke up, old sons?" laughed Tom. "And what do you think of your dorm as a skating-rink? You must have had a lovely time. As a matter of fact, we heard all about it from Hankey. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, cut the cackle!" growled Redfern. "We want to know how you got in. Look here, Tom Merry, I want you to be straightforward about it. Who let you into our House?"

"Well, that I can hardly say," replied Tom. "But we're awfully obliged to the chap who opened the window."

"Then it wasn't one of your fellows?"

"Of course not, ass! We found the window open, and that

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CHAPTER 9. Figgins is Accused!

"RATTY'S raving!" That was the announcement which Hankey of the New House Third brought up to Figgins & Co. next morning.

And those youths discovered, not long afterwards, that Hankey had by no means exaggerated Mr. Horace Ratcliff's condition.

The Housemaster paraded the whole Fourth before him and questioned them as to the midnight affair.

They were all morally certain, of course, that Tom Merry

saved us heaps of trouble," said the young School House skipper. "We presumed it had been left open by mistake."

"Monteith swears he locked it on his usual rounds last night," said Redfern quietly. "That means it was opened afterwards by someone in our House, and left open for the benefit of our chaps."

"Whew!"

Redfern & Co. did not linger in the School House. As a matter of fact they were glad to take their departure, for they were laughed at and chipped unmercifully there. By this time the news of the midnight affair in the New House had gone round, and the whole of the School House was chortling over it.

Figgins was alone in the Common-room when his Form-fellows found him. They surrounded him with hostile looks.

"There's a traitor in this House, Figgins, and we mean to find out who he is," said Redfern quietly. "You mustn't mind us asking, Figgins, but was it you?"

Figgins went crimson with anger.

"You—you insulting cad! You dare ask me that?"

"I'm sorry, Figgins, but I must ask you!" was Redfern's calm retort. "You were out of the dorm last night, and you didn't return until after the rag. You seemed highly amused, too, when you did come in. Now, did you open the window?"

Smack!

Figgins' hand flashed across Redfern's cheek with a sound like a pistol-shot.

"That's my answer, you insulting hound!" he panted. "Take it as the coward's blow for a fight, if you like!"

Redfern staggered back, a livid mark showing on his cheek. Next minute he sprang at Figgins, who stood, with shoulders squared and fists up, ready to meet him.

The two rivals of the New House were soon fighting hammer and tongs. Kerr attempted to stop them, but he was dragged back by the excited juniors.

Figgins and Redfern fought grimly, but the contest did not last long. Monteith came into the Common-room in the midst of it, and he separated the combatants.

"You little sweeps know you can't scrap in here. The gym's the place for that sort of thing!" he rapped. "What's the trouble about?"

"We think that Figgins opened the window last night, Monteith!" said Chowle.

"Oh!" exclaimed the prefect. "I had an idea that the perpetrator of that rag came from outside—from the School House, to be precise. So you kids think the same—eh? The window was certainly opened by someone inside the House. Was it you, Figgins?"

"Of course it wasn't!" shouted Figgins angrily. "I—"

"We reckon it was him, anyway!" said Chowle, with a grin of derision at Figgins. There was no love lost between Figgins and the black sheep of the New House. "He was out of the dorm last night, and he escaped the ragging. That looks queer, especially as he had a grudge against us, and nothing would have been better, from his personal point of view, than for us to have been ragged by the School House."

Monteith turned to Figgins.

"Why did you leave the dormitory last night?" he asked curly.

"To do an impot for Mr. Ratcliff," said Figgins sullenly. "He wanted it by dinner-time, and I didn't do it yesterday."

"Have you delivered the impot yet?"

"No," said Figgins, in a low voice.

"Then it is in your study," said Monteith. "May I see it?"

Figgins eyes flashed angrily.

"Why shouldn't my word be taken?" he cried. "Am I such a liar that you must require proof of everything I say?"

"He doesn't want you to look in his study, Monteith!" cried Chowle. "He's funky—see?"

"I want to see that impot, if you've done it," said Monteith. "And I'm going to look in your study, Figgins, if you won't show it to me."

"Go and look, and be hanged, then!" said Figgins passionately.

Monteith went to the study, followed by Figgins and a crowd of excited juniors. The prefect searched the room, but no imposition was forthcoming. Figgins' expression underwent a change. He went white, and he gave a cry.

"The impot is here! I wrote it during the night! I left it in my desk!" he cried hoarsely. "It must be there, Monteith!"

"Well, it isn't!" said the prefect bluntly. "It looks very much as though you never wrote it at all, Figgins, in spite of what you say. This is no affair of mine, of course. All I am concerned with is in finding out who actually played that trick in the dormitory last night. But I frankly don't like the way you—"

"I did write the impot, I tell you! That's why I left the dormitory last night!" shouted Figgins desperately. "Some—"

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one must have taken the papers from my desk to make things look black against me—"

A chorus of scoffing laughs interrupted him, and Monteith, with a curious look at Figgins, strode away.

"That yarn won't wash with us, Figgins!" exclaimed French. "We're not so soft as all that, you know! It's pretty plain to us now that you are the traitor. In my opinion, you either got to know of the School House jape beforehand, and prepared to help those rotters, or else you woke up and happened to see 'em coming across the quad, and you nipped out and opened the window for 'em, and kept out of the way while we put up with the ragging."

"Hear, hear!"

"That's about the size of it, Frenchy!"

"You're mistaken!" cried Figgins. "I knew nothing about it, I tell you! I—"

"Rats!"

"You're a traitor, Figgins!"

"You got your back up against Redfern and all of us, and that's the way you got your own back! You thought it would be one in the eye for Reddy!"

"I didn't!" Figgins' voice was hoarse and imploring.

"Can't you chaps believe me?"

"No; we jolly well can't!"

The accused junior turned to Redfern, his eyes blazing.

"Now you're satisfied, I suppose!" he exclaimed passionately. "Everyone's against me, and you will be able to step into the leadership! I suppose you know nothing of my missing impot, Redfern?"

Redfern clenched his fists.

"Why, Figgins, you dare accuse me—"

"You've accused me of something I never did, you cad!"

"I don't like to think it of you, Figgins, but—"

"Bah! Think what you jolly well like!" cried Figgins angrily. "And clear out of my study as soon as you like—all of you!"

"Don't worry, Figgins. We wouldn't stay here to be contaminated!" said Chowle, with a sneering laugh.

Kerr and Fatty Wynn remained in the room with their chum when the others had gone.

Figgins sank into an armchair and passed a hand dazedly across his brow.

"They think I'm a traitor!" he muttered brokenly. "Everyone has turned against me! Kerr—Fatty, you don't accuse me—"

"No, Figgys. We believe in you. We know you wouldn't have done such a thing," said Kerr, laying a kindly hand on his chum's bowed head. "The others think they're right, and things look black against you. But nothing will ever convince us that you're a traitor to the New House."

"No jolly fear!" said Fatty Wynn vehemently. They were the only two in the New House, however, who believed in Figgins. He was universally condemned.

Mr. Ratcliff saw Mr. Raitton, the Housemaster in the School House that afternoon, and Tom Merry & Co. were questioned. Mr. Raitton soon elicited the truth of the midnight affair from them, and the culprits underwent a caning. The caning was a pretty severe one, but it was not as severe as Mr. Ratcliff wished. He left the School House snorting his disgust at Mr. Raitton's "lenient" methods with his pupils.

As for Tom Merry & Co., they unanimously agreed that the licking was worth the jape they had "worked off" so successfully on their rivals across the way.

CHAPTER 10.

"Bravo, Kerr!"

KERR appeared worried and thoughtful that evening, and during the following morning.

He was concerned, of course, with George Figgins.

Figgins was shunned by the majority of his school-fellows in the New House, and, to all intents and purposes, he was barred. He displayed a defiant front at first, and was more angry than otherwise affected by the disbelief his Form-fellows had in him. But as the time went on, Figgins' spirit broke. He could not endure the scorn and contempt that met him on all sides; the bitter words and looks of the boys of which he was still virtually the leader, struck him to the heart.

He was miserable and despondent, and he shunned all company.

And, through all his mental suffering, he preserved a bitter antipathy for Dick Redfern, whom he regarded as the cause of the trouble.

Redfern met Kerr standing alone in one of the upper corridors, and he stopped.

"I say, Kerr, I—I'm sorry about Figgins," he said. "It must be jolly rotten for him, and since I've recovered my temper I've been thinking it's so unlike Figgy—that business the other night."

"Yes, it is unlike Figgy, and I don't believe for a moment that he had anything to do with the opening of that

window," said the Scots junior quietly. "It's my opinion, Redfern, that there's somebody in this House who knows more about that window affair than he cares to tell. And that person is lying low, content to have the suspicion shifted to Figgins."

Redfern drew a deep breath.

"You're a pretty shrewd chap, Kerr, and I believe you're right," he said. "Figgys hasn't been himself lately, and his mood has created a wrong impression among the chaps. I'm going to beg his pardon."

"You can't—Figgys gone out on his own," said Kerr. "He didn't want company, so Fatty and I let him go. Half a mo', Reddy—get into this cupboard, quick!"

Kerr grasped Redfern's arm and almost dragged him into the large cupboard that stood in an alcove behind them. Redfern wondered whether the Scots had suddenly taken leave of his senses.

"Not a sound!" breathed Kerr. "Here comes Chowle! I've been watching for him!"

Stealthy footsteps sounded on the passage outside, and, peeping through a niche in the cupboard door, the two hidden juniors saw Cyril Chowle approach.

Chowle's whole demeanour was crafty and suspicious. He went to the end of the corridor and halted at the window there. It was the window through which Tom Merry & Co. had entered the New House on that memorable night.

Chowle gave a cautious look about him and then climbed up on the window-frame. Standing on tiptoe there, he was able to run his hand along the wide ledge at the top of the window.

Kerr and Redfern watched him wonderingly from the cupboard.

"Oh, good!" they heard Chowle mutter.

He vaulted down lightly from the window, and the two watching juniors saw that he had taken down a box from the upper ledge.

Kerr's teeth came together with a click.

"We'll take that rotter by surprise as he passes here," he muttered. "Grab him and rush him away to the Form-room. He mustn't escape. It's important."

Chowle had thrust the box into his jacket pocket, and was sauntering leisurely along the corridor the way he had come.

As he came up to the cupboard the large door suddenly swung open, and Kerr and Redfern dashed out at him.

Chowle's face blanched, and he sprang back with a yell.

"Here, wh-what the— Yaroooogh! Leggo! Yah!"

"This way!" exclaimed Kerr. "Hold his legs, Reddy!"

"You bet!"

"Leggo! What's the game? Ow-wow-wow!" roared Chowle.

He was lifted bodily and rushed into the Form-room. Kerr locked the door, and then took the mysterious box from Chowle's pocket while Redfern held him.

"Golden Dawn Virginia!" read Kerr aloud. "So this is a box of cigarettes you have been hiding up there, Chowle?"

Chowle's thin, pasty features were white, his eyes gleaming like a trapped fox's.

"Give them to me—they're mine!" he panted.

"No doubt!" said Kerr quietly. "I've been watching you yesterday and to-day, Chowle, and have seen you make at least half a dozen attempts to climb up that window. Each time, until just now, you have seen someone come along and have had to give it up. Now, when did you hide that box of fags on the ledge?"

Chowle gave him a quick look.

"What do you mean?" he exclaimed. "I don't see how—"

"I've worked it all out, Chowle, and I'm pretty well satisfied that what I am going to tell you is correct," said Kerr grimly. "The other night, when Tom Merry & Co. carried out that raid, you had left your bed and come to this window before Figgins left the dorm. You were going out on one of your little night trips to the School House with Racke, Mellish, and Scrope to have a smoking bee in the upper box-room."

"Who—who told you?" gasped Chowle.

"Oh, I got it out of Mellish—by indirect questioning, you know!" said Kerr. "Well, as I was saying, Chowle, when you got to the window, you opened it ready to slide down the drainpipe, when you heard someone coming. You thought it might be a master or a prefect, so you stood up on the window-frame and hid the box of cigarettes you had with you on the ledge, so that if you did happen to get caught the smokes wouldn't be found on you."

"My hat!" said Redfern, looking at Kerr in wonder. "You've figured it out right, of course, Kerr!"

"You bet I have!" said the Scots junior grimly. "The person you heard in the corridor, Chowle, was not a master or a prefect, but Figgins. You nipped back to bed, giving up your plan for a little night jaunt, and went to sleep. That is how the window came to be open—you left it open."

"But only by mistake!" whined Chowle, who now stood limply in Redfern's grasp. "I didn't leave the window open with the idea of letting Tom Merry & Co. in. They didn't arrive till some time afterwards, I was asleep when they came, and I didn't know anything about the jape."

"But you do know something of Figgins' missing impot!" rapped Kerr angrily. "You saw how suspicion could be shifted on Figgins, so as to make things look further black against him. You went down to the study early yesterday morning, took out the impot, and burned it!"

"I didn't!" yelled Chowle defiantly.

"You did!" said Kerr calmly. "I looked in your study grate yesterday afternoon, and saw fragments of burnt paper that had been pushed right underneath out of the way. Now, Chowle, you've got to confess that that was the remains of Figgins' impot which you had burnt."

"I won't!"

"Hold him down across that desk, Reddy," said Kerr, taking up Mr. Ratcliff's pointer from the desk. "We'll soon bring this cad to reason!"

"Yow-wow! Ow! Leggo!" roared Chowle.

He struggled wildly, but was no match for the athletic Reddy.

Redfern held him down across the desk, and Kerr commenced operations with the pointer.

Chowle's roars of anguish rose crescendo.

"Will you confess?" demanded Kerr.

"Yowp! No! Yarooogh!"

Whack! Whack! Whack!

"Ow-wow-wow! I'll confess! I did burn the impot! Ooooooh!"

"Hurrah!" roared Redfern, releasing his grasp of Chowle and thus allowing him to fall with a bump to the floor. "So the truth's out! It wasn't Figgys, after all! Kerr, old chap, you're a cute beggar, and I admire the way you thought it all out. I'm glad Figgys' name's been cleared. You tell the other chaps while I go out to find Figgins. I want to be the first to tell him—and to beg his pardon."

"Right-ho!" said Kerr. "Now, Chowle, you rotter, you've got to tell the truth before all the chaps in the Common-room."

He yanked the unhappy "blade" of the Fourth away, whilst Redfern fetched his cap and overcoat and hurried away from St. Jim's to look for Figgins.

Not finding him anywhere in the lane or the village Redfern wended his steps towards the river.

The Rhyl, which bubbled and sang among the green rushes in summer-time, was frozen hard and gleaming in the afternoon sun. The sound of cheery voices floated over the ice and echoed among the leafless trees. Redfern, walking to the river's edge, saw the Terrible Three and Blake & Co. gliding merrily on their skates.

"New House microbe!" exclaimed Blake, spotting Redfern.

Redfern grinned.

"Hallo! Are you skating, Gussy?" he called cheerfully.

"Bai Jove! Can't you see I'm skatin'?" said Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, I see! You call that skating?"

Arthur Augustus gasped, and his chums turned a little pink.

"Wedfern, I wegard you as a diswespctful wotah, and were I not on skates I should give you a feaful thwashin'!" said the swell.

"Go hon!" chuckled Reddy. "I say, Blake, that ice isn't safe, you know. I thought I'd warn you."

"Not safe!" said Blake, looking alarmed. "How do you know, Redfern?"

"Well, how can it be, with Herries' feet on it?"

"Buzz off, you cheeky rotter!" roared Herries. "I'd give you something if I wasn't on skates!"

"Oh, rats!" said Reddy. "I suppose you chaps haven't seen— Oh! What the dickens, you blighter!"

Reddy gave vent to those cries as Monty Lowther swooped swiftly up on the ice and, with a deft movement, snatched his cap from his head.

Monty was speeding away up the river like lightning before Redfern quite realised what had happened.

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

"Catch me if you can!" called Monty, waving the cap tantalisingly. "I'm going to take this back to the School House as a trophy!"

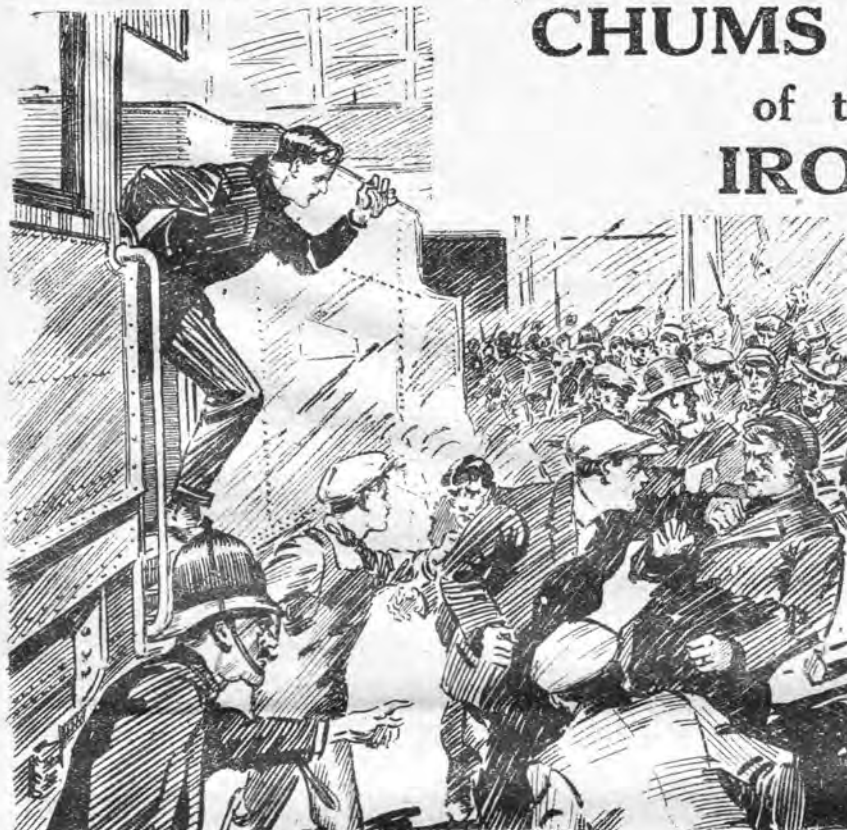
"You—you boulder! Come back with my cap!"

Reddy made a rush on the ice, but soon lost his footing. He sat down with a bump, and Tom Merry and the others came speeding towards him.

Glaring up the river after Monty, Redfern saw a school-boy figure standing on the towing-path. There was no mistaking those lanky legs. It was Figgins.

(Continued on page 28.)

Against great odds, Sam Blundell and his staunch followers put up a stout fight in defence of the "Wolf,"



CHUMS of the IRON WAY!

A Thrilling Yarn of Exciting Adventure on the Railroad.

By
ROLAND SPENCER
and
FRANCIS WARWICK.

WHAT HAS HAPPENED.

It was a day of days for plucky Jimmy Speed when he rescued Sir Richard Grant, the managing-director of the G.S.C. Railway, from a terrible death, for it meant the realisation of his long-cherished ambition—to get a job in the great workshops of the G.S.C.

But he was soon up against it when he crossed the path of "Granite" Langrish, chief director of the G.E.N. Railway, and a rival of Sir Richard Grant. He finds a friend, however, in Sam Blundell.

Langrish's craftiness knows no bounds, and, having failed in his endeavours to bring about the downfall of the G.S.C., he throws out a challenge that his electric trains will beat any steam trains the G.S.C. care to put up.

It is a great blow to the G.S.C., but brings about the chance Sam Blundell has been waiting for. The giant engine, Wolf, of which he had supplied plans, is put under way, and the great workshops of the G.S.C. are busy bringing to life what Blundell hoped would bring success to the G.S.C. and him!

(Now read on.)

Building the Wolf!

JIMMY SPEED saw Sam more often now, for his chum had been relieved of his ordinary duties, and was always in and out of the railway-shops with the chief mechanical engineer. It was with a thrill of pride that Jim felt that this was his own chum, this fellow who was stared after everywhere in the railway-shops, followed by the whisper, "That's Sam Blundell, y'know—the fireman what designed the Wolf!"

And then came the day when all the miscellaneous parts began to reach the erecting-shop.

Jimmy, to his huge delight, was told off to work with the fitters upon it.

Day by day the Wolf grew before his eyes—a pair of frames first, brought in by crane, and placed on trestles. When these had been connected the four huge cylinders—two outside, two inside the frames—were attached. Axle-boxes, too. And then at last, from the boiler-mounting shop, the long boiler was brought, already tested and fitted with its various appliances.

With the boiler in position, the "lagging" of asbestos was formed around it, and the thin iron sheets to cover all fitted above. The cab was built into position, and Jimmy, though the half-finished engine was yet but a rusty, wheel-less thing, could imagine well enough what this giant champion of steam would look like upon the Iron Way.

Night and day the work went on, and every minute of feverish toil was sheer joy to Jimmy Speed.

Everything was ready at last for the wheels, and the

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whole engine was raised by powerful cranes while the great wheels and axles—4-8-2 was the wheel type of the Wolf, being one pair of driving-wheels more than the great Pacific express locomotives—were rolled into place.

When the engine had been lowered on to them all was ready for the valves to be fitted and set—perhaps the most important process of all. In a locomotive, so much depends on the absolute accuracy of minor valve adjustments that only the most skilled men undertake the work.

There was huge excitement in both Blackhampton and Carnborough on the day that the Wolf, completed in record time, left the erecting-shop, still rusty and unpainted, for her steam trials.

Everyone wanted to know as to the success or otherwise of the trials. But a complete silence was the only satisfaction both Blackhampton and Carnborough had. The capabilities of the Wolf were to be kept a closely-guarded secret, if possible, till the great race was run.

Carnborough grew uneasy at that mysterious silence. What Langrish and the other heads of the G.E.N. were thinking was not known, but it could be guessed that they were not quite so confident now of the victory of their 4-10-4.

But Jimmy Speed was one of the few people in the know, for Sam had told him everything.

"Not a word, of course, Jimmy. But she's wonderful, Jimmy—wonderful! The feel of power! I know I've not had the experience of some; but during the time she's been in the shops they've put me through a good deal of driving on various types, as you know; and even the biggest express locos we've got—the Pacific class—aren't in the same street! It's not that I want to shout because it's

my engine—I'm so mad about her that I can't help saying it since I think it's true!"

"She'll have to be worked in, I suppose?" said Jimmy. "Of course," answered Sam. "There are just one or two adjustments to make—after which she goes to the paint-shop. Then they are going to get her into proper working trim on the Blackhampton-Calborne local service. I shall drive her, of course. But, as far as I can see, she won't have any little tricks that'll need getting used to. And by the thirteenth she'll be running sweet as honey—sweeter!"

"Jolly short time, y'know," said Jimmy, a little doubtfully. "It usually takes three months to run a loco sweet, doesn't it?"

"Don't you worry, old son!" grinned Sam Blundell. "She'll be ready, you see! I won't make any rash promises about licking Langrish's new 4-10-4, but I'll guarantee the Wolf will put up a grand fight!" He laughed again. "When the Wolf toes the line on the thirteenth—"

But Sam might have done better to use the word "if." For there were others who were grimly determined that the Wolf should not "toe the line" on the thirteenth!

Soper's Last Card.

THE day of the great railway race grew nearer and nearer. And with each day the excitement grew, till finally, on the Wednesday before—the race was to take place on Friday—both Blackhampton and Carnborough were roused by excitement to something very like delirium.

Jimmy was working on the "back turn" that night on one of the big Pacifics that had come in with a "hot-box." He knew that in the sheds the Wolf was being cleaned after her duties on the local line ready for her run down to London to-morrow, where she would pass the night before the race. But Jimmy was almost past excitement now. He had even ceased to speculate as to the result of the race.

"What's the good of thinkin'?" he said to another of the apprentices. "We sha'n't know before the race is run, so I'm waiting for the result before I jaw any more about it." "Wish to goodness we weren't on the back turn," grumbled the other. "There's huge excitement in the town, you know. Wish I were in the thick of things!"

But there was to be excitement in plenty for them both that night, had they only known it!

For in the big Blackhampton Park something ugly was afoot.

"Starvation!" shrieked a voice. "Starvation! It's coming, I tell you—poverty and starvation in this town! D'you think, men, that there's money enough to throw to the four winds, to chuck away at some chief director's fancy, and pay you all a living wage as well? It means starvation if the railways squander all the cash on these tom-fool races, just to give amusement to a few bloated directors! Something to have a flutter on, that's what it is! But it'll bring starvation!"

It was Soper's voice. Harold Soper, his fat, flabby face working with excitement, was hoarsely shouting as he waved his podgy hands.

Langrish had paid Soper well, and Soper did not mean to fail. There was a lot more money to come his way if he could accomplish the task he had been set. He bawled on, his lips opening and shutting tirelessly. The crowd was with him—an ugly crowd, indeed.

Hoarse shouts applauded Soper's words. Soper was talking nonsense, but it was cleverly worded nonsense, and the scores of hooligans around, of the type always ready for any ruffianism, were only too ready to listen.

"There it is, men—over there!" Soper flung out a hand dramatically. "See 'em—the railway sheds? In there it is, new an' clean an' spick an' span as a new toy, which is all it is! The Wolf's there still, but it goes to London to-morrow—if it gets there! If you let it get there! But are we? Why should we let this wicked waste of money go on? Nip the danger in the bud! Show that we won't stand for seeing our money squandered like water before our very eyes—the money we need to live by!"

There was a roar from the crowd, and Soper, pausing for breath, smiled an oily smile. He glanced down to where half a dozen burly Carnborough hooligans were waiting for his signal. With them were two Blackhamptonians—Webber and Uriah Snaith.

"Are we goin' to stand for it?" shrieked Soper.

"No!" howled the crowd. "We ain't standin' for it!"

Again Soper smiled. He glanced down at his immediate supporters, and nodded. It was a signal.

Instantly the half dozen ruffians in his pay, Webber and Snaith among them, surged into the crowd.

"To the sheds!" they shouted. "To the sheds! We won't stand for it! Smash it! Smash the Wolf, and show we won't let the bread-an'-butter be snatched out of our very mouths!"

"To the sheds! To the sheds!"

The crowd took up the cry.

"To the sheds! To the sheds! Wreck the Wolf! To the sheds!"

Out of the park entrance they poured. The thunder of their feet drew nearer and nearer to the great shed where loving hands were hard at work on the gleaming blue-and-gold monster that meant everything to the G. S. C.

In Defence of the Wolf!

"WHAT'S that blooming row?" demanded the fitter with whom Jimmy was at work in the repair and erecting shop.

The man straightened himself, listening. Jimmy, between the great driving-wheels of the locomotive they were at work upon, also listened.

"Rum!" muttered the fitter. "What a thundering rumpus there is goin' on out—"

He broke off suddenly, and the faces of the men about them went suddenly startled. For from somewhere in the erecting shop, by one of the doors, a hoarse shout had rung out.

"My heavens—"

Jimmy scrambled out from beneath the locomotive on which he had been working. It was clear that there was something wrong somewhere. The noise of rushing feet grew louder. Then, past the opening in the wall not far away, only dimly revealed by the lamps outside, a sudden army of running men went streaming, a phantom procession, running, running—whither?

"Is it a fire?" cried Jimmy.

But already the fitter had dropped his tools and was racing towards the big doorway. Hoarse shouts came to Jimmy's ears, clear and sharp above the muffled thunder of running men. And by those shouts, wild and half-articulate though they were, Jimmy suddenly realised the truth.

"It's the Wolf—they mean to wreck the Wolf!"

And in a moment Jimmy Speed was racing down the concrete floor towards the open air.

How the hooligans knew where to find the Wolf was a mystery. But doubtless Soper had seen to that. Webber and Snaith, at any rate, could have led the men, being the only G. S. C. employees in the mob.

When Jimmy reached the Wolf's shed, a wild, grim scene met his eyes.

Shoulder to shoulder, a solid phalanx of tight-lipped men encircled the huge wonder-locomotive, and among them Jim saw his chum, Sam Blundell. High above the heads of that gallant little band towered the beautiful blue-and-gold engine, with its squat funnel and mighty wheels, with its great fire-box less than a foot above the rails, arching in handsome lines against the deep cab, its paint glittering in the glare of electric light. The beautiful child of Sam Blundell's brain, which these shouting hooligans meant to leave a broken, shattered wreck!

From all sides the railway workers were pouring in to the rescue. But could they hope to be in time?

How he did it Jimmy never knew. But somehow he fought his way through, smashed his way to Sam Blundell's side.

"I'm here, Sam! Standin' by!"

Blundell, his face white and set, glanced down at Jimmy. He smiled a trifle wanly.

"Good lad, Jim! It's to be a fight! By Jove, it'll be a fight! That mob will have to wreck two-score determined men before they wreck the Wolf!"

"They sha'n't wreck the Wolf, Sam! How can they? Look at the faces of our men—"

The swelling volume of sound from the surging crowd which closed in round the engine-shed where the great Wolf rested in preparation for her tremendous fight, increased to a menacing roar. In they poured towards the Wolf's shed—hundreds of maddened men—over the sidings, dropping from walls, surging in through forced gateways, dodging under loaded trucks, a few, even, running across the main line towards the Goods Department. And many of the men as they proceeded stooped and filled their pockets with stones from between the sleepers of the permanent way!

"Stand by, men!" shouted Sam Blundell, his strong voice ringing out with the authoritative note of a born commander. "Dispute every inch of ground you have to give. Work like one man to the command of your section commanders!"

The electric lights went out.

Hoarse cheering greeted Sam's words, and strong men clenched their fists to defend that to which they pinned all their hopes.

"Jimmy, back here with me!"

Jim Speed stepped back, responsive to Sam's gentle pulling.

"Reserves, stand by close round the engine!"

Men began to press backwards towards the great Wolf locomotive, and as Sam led Jim up into the cab of the engine Jimmy stared round in wonder.

So Sam had organised the defences! Already he had told off commanders for the different sides of the locomotive. The railway workers who had flocked to the scene at the alarm had been roughly told off into sections—one for the defence of the front, another for the defence of the back, and other sections for the defence of the "on" side and the "off" side.

And these men pressing back close to the locomotive! Sam had called them reserves. And here in the cab! Who were these chaps standing immediately behind Sam, surveying the advancing crowd?

Sam turned to one of the men.

"You got there safely?" he asked.

"Ay, ay!" grunted the man, with satisfaction. "The mob were surging past the signal-cabin; but we got to one of the offices, burst in the door, an' I telephoned from there. The police gave me an O.K., so they'll be here in force soon they can!"

"Good!" returned Sam, with satisfaction. "Then let 'em all come! We can hold our own against any rabble of this sort for an hour or so, I should hope!"

"We will that an' all!" muttered a big fellow, whom Jimmy recognised as the engine-driver alongside whom they had fought in the disgraceful riot at the football ground of the Carnborough Rovers. "But what are we doin' skulking back 'ere, Sam Blundell? We oughter be in front!"

"You'll be in front quick enough!" returned Sam grimly. "Don't you see, man? I'm here directing things. Being high up in the cab I can see all round. Fresh men—you an' these others—standing by as reserves. I see where the crowd's going to break through. A word to you and you're in the thick of the hottest fighting, to reinforce! What's the good of having you and a big bunch of other fighters in the line before we know where the hottest fighting's goin' to be? Understand?"

"I got yer, mate!" The big man guffawed loudly. "No blinkin' slap-dash dog-fight this, eh? And arter we've 'relieved the situation,' as they said in the War, in one spot, then we withdraws and waits for your wire where the next 'ot spot is!"

"Exactly!" said Sam. "And the 'on-side' section's engaged already. Stick it, boys! Make 'em fight for it!"

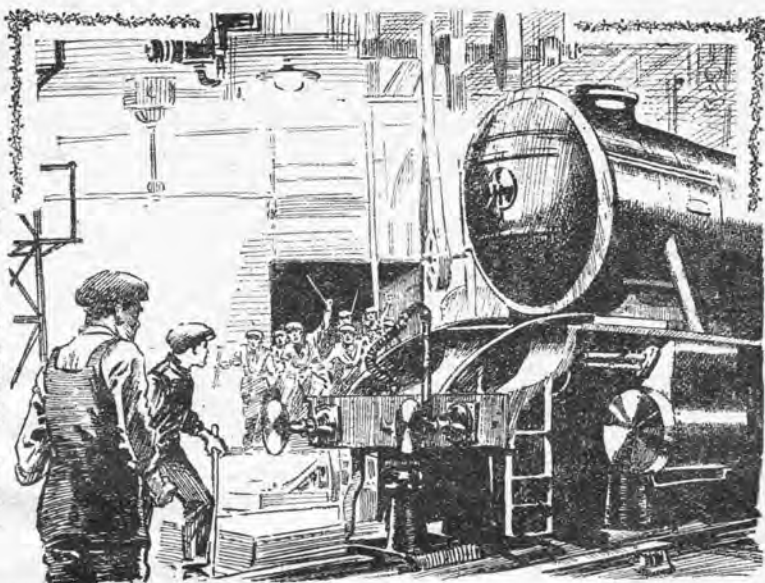
A loud cheer went up from the men who were already beginning to feel the pressure of the surging crowd. The encouraging shouting of the section commander was heard above the roaring and derisive yells of the attackers.

Stones began to fly, most of the missiles directed towards the cab of the locomotive where Sam Blundell stood in full view. One of the glasses cracked right across, and the stones clanged against the steel sides of the cab, to the detriment of the beautiful paint-work. But hurtling stones could do little damage. The thing was to keep the mad-dened crowd from getting to close quarters with sledge-hammers!

That lofty engine-shed resounded with the shouts of the attackers and defenders. Darkness was falling rapidly, but some of the attackers had got hold of flare-lamps from somewhere. One or two of these began to splutter and spit here and there, and were soon burning brightly. If Sam in his defence was using a bit of method, the attackers, too, realised the value of organisation.

The flare-lamps intensified the grimness of the scene. The hearts of the attackers became more inflamed at the sight of the darting forms, the flickering of the red light, the hurtling missiles, the sight of savage faces, mouths open in maddened shouts, coming and going in the glare from the lamps; forms hurtling backwards, hurled to the rails of the shed; sticks and stones flying through the air; men leaping up on to the backs of others in a mad endeavour to get to the front in the fight!

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No 861.



By the hoarse shouts of the men, Jimmy Speed realised the truth.
"It's the Wolf they're after—they mean to wreck the Wolf!"

Jimmy felt sick as he watched, chafing at the inactivity enforced by Sam.

"Wait!" Sam had said. "You'll be in it soon enough—too soon. And it'll be the hottest part of the fight we'll be wanted for before it's over!"

The attack was being pressed now on all sides. The reserves round the locomotive crouched low to Sam's command to miss the stones and sticks which were hurtling through the air. Those in the cab took cover, but occasionally a stone reached its target, and one of Sam's particular five had been struck so hard on the head that he was rendered useless.

The fight was now being pressed on all sides, and Sam's gallant little square bulged in here and there. But the loyal railwaymen were fighting for right, with law on their side, not intent on illegal destruction; they were fighting with a determined enthusiasm, not a mad frenzy; they were well led and deadly calm, not a rabble urged on by rating and swearing leaders. Thus it was that Sam's gallant defenders held in check for twenty minutes the frenzied efforts of ten times their number.

"Look out, back's giving!" snapped Sam at last. "In and smash 'em, some of you reserves!"

With a yell that might have been an echo of the battle-cry of his ancestors, the big locomotive driver leapt down from the cab, and, with a dozen strong men at his back, he threw himself into the fray at the weak spot, where frantic railwaymen were heaving and pushing and smashing at the attackers.

Jimmy thrilled through and through as he gripped the rail round the tender of the great Wolf. He saw the mad rush of the reserves reinforcing, felt the crash as defenders met attackers, then, the shouts of the fighters dinning in his ears, he saw the tide of battle turned, and the square began to bulge outwards where before it had been bulging inwards.

One of the flarelamps came adrift, somehow, and descended, spluttering into the midst of the attackers. The red glare of the lamp lit up the terrified faces of the men as they leapt sideways, yelling in their fear. A great sheet of red flame shot upwards, lighting up the whole scene with its lurid glare for one ghastly instant. In that second Jimmy saw Soper, face distorted and frightful-looking in its expression of half fear and half hate, and beside him Webber and Smith, the latter cringing behind the bully of the cleaners.

Then the flame died suddenly down, and the gap caused by the falling lamp was filled with a wild surge of men, like cross-waves meeting each other behind a blown-up dam-gate.

Jimmy's brain reeled. But he heard a voice—the voice of his chum.

"Get down all, and pile in where the lamp fell!"

Down dropped Jimmy to the concrete floor of the engine-shed. Men hustled and bustled close round him, buffeting him here and there. But the youngster pressed forward with the rest towards where the attackers had received the check. Wildly, Jimmy exulted in the thought that Soper, Webber, and Snaith were in that direction. If he could only meet them face to face!

Hunted!

SOON the boy was in the thick of the fighting. Fighting? It was more of a maddened clash—men with men. Blows were taken solidly and given freely, and Jimmy found himself in a whirlpool of humanity, scarcely knowing which of the savage faces round him belonged to friends, and which to enemies.

For upwards of an hour that desperate struggle went on in the flickering glare of the flarelamps. And Sam's gallant band was being pressed closer and closer to the wonder locomotive, the child of Sam Blundell's brain. Jimmy found himself with his back against one of the huge outside cylinders, and he gasped at the nearness of the end of the fight. And how would it end?

Hitting out blindly, Jimmy struck at all who tried to get nearer to the locomotive. He seemed surrounded by the enemy. Where was Sam? Where were others of the loyal railway workers? Was the Wolf now at the mercy of the wreckers?

Suddenly a cry rang out—a frenzied yell:

"Police! Back entrance an' front! Make for the side doors!"

Jimmy swayed where he stood. Had they saved the Wolf, after all? Was this ghastly attempt to ruin Blackhampton for ever really frustrated? Or was the cry a false alarm—another of Sam Blundell's clever tactical moves?

The boy soon found out. The police were real enough—and plenty of them. Also, crowds of loyal railwaymen who had hurried to the scene at first news of the attempt to wreck the Wolf. The tide of battle was indeed turned, and as Jimmy leaned, dazed, against the huge cylinder of the locomotive, he was conscious of a boring charge, and police, with batons drawn, hewed a pathway for themselves towards the engine.

The Wolf was saved! In a flash Jim saw Sam Blundell, heading a group of about ten men, fighting their way to cut off numbers of the would-be wreckers, so that the police could make arrests. Jim's one thought was Soper! If only Soper could be captured! He would be out of Sam's way for ever, then—out of the way of the G. S. C. and its struggle for supremacy—indeed, in its struggle for very existence. For the great Wolf locomotive was to be the salvation of the G. S. C., if only Soper and his kind would let it!

"I'll spot the oily beast and dog him!" muttered Jim to himself. "I'll find where he goes, then lead the police there. Or, if I spot him, I'll call to any police at hand and denounce him as one of the prime movers in the raid!"

Little did Jimmy know that the police knew all about Soper without his own evidence on the subject! The boy knew nothing of Soper's latest oratorical activities in the park. But the police knew of it, and they wanted Soper as an agitator. To find the man red-handed was just what they desired, and other eyes than Jimmy's were searching for Soper that night.

Young Speed pushed forward into the frantic throng—men struggling to get out with three times the frenzy with which they had struggled to get in. The boy forced his way over to the goods depot, for he judged Soper, having been a foreman shunter there when in the G. S. C. employ, would make for that part. He would know the ground very thoroughly, and would thus stand a better chance of escape.

Outside the engine-shed, where a big electric arc-lamp threw a sickly white light over the metals, across which numbers of men in a ragged line ran for the town, Jim caught a glimpse of his man. Two policemen were near the boy at the time, and they whipped round instantly at Jim's cry.

"There he is—there! Soper, the agitator!"

"Where? Which man?" rasped one of the policemen, gripping Jim's shoulder.

Jim pointed, and he and the policemen started off in pursuit. Jim led, for he was used to the metals, the maze of points, the wagons, and the various obstructions met with in a chase across a railway siding. Round heaps of coal, in and out amongst the goods offices, across a weighbridge, the chasers growing in number by the addition of clerks, shunters, and other railwaymen, Soper was hounded through the night.

Jimmy kept the man in view, marvelling at Soper's extraordinary show of agility. But desperation was lending the

man strength and speed, and he sprinted along one of the loading platforms at a pace that would not have brought discredit on a professional runner.

But the chase went on. The now numerous chasing party beat up the goods sidings thoroughly, keeping in touch with each other by shouting. If ever a man was hunted, Soper knew it that night. It was rather pitiful, and Jimmy began to feel sorry for the fugitive.

They caught him in the shadow of a wall of the "outwards" shed, cowering in trembling fear between the wheels of a cattle-truck. He had been arrested and taken away by the time Jimmy reached the spot, and the boy felt thankful that he had been spared the sight of that white, terror-stricken, flabby face.

When Jimmy arrived in his attic lodging he was surprised to find Sam Blundell in bed and sleeping. Sam turned as Jimmy arrived and lit a candle. He opened his eyes.

"That you, Jim? Thank goodness you're back! So they got Soper, I heard?"

"Yes! And he gave us all a pretty chase in the goods depot—"

"You'll be interested to hear they've got Webber and Snaith, too!"

"By Jove, that's good!" replied Jim. "And the Wolf's quite safe?"

"Safe as a bank! There's a big guard round her. I got back here for some shut-eye, ready to take her down to London to-morrow—to-day, that is! What's the time?"

"Half-past two!"

"Whew! Well, you'd better turn in, too, chum. If you'd like to be on the Wolf for a part of the trip, I'll pick you up below Old Quarry Signal Cabin. It's against the rules, I know, but I'll risk it. You can get off near Leicester and catch the morning express down—"

Jim took a swift step to Sam's side, his eyes shining.

"Sam, d'you mean that?" he asked quickly.

"Mean it? 'Course I do! Who has more right to ride on the footplate of the Wolf than you? Yes, I mean it, chum. But turn in now, or you won't be fit for a run on the Wolf and your ordinary work to-morrow."

Jimmy began to chatter excitedly, but Sam turned a deaf ear to his chum. So at last Jim climbed into bed, and, despite the excitement of his mind, soon fell into the sleep of utter physical exhaustion.

"There she comes, sailin' along like a grand lady! Gee, isn't she a beauty!"

Jimmy, having garaged the motor-cycle at a village nearby, stood up on the embankment of the line and watched the great blue-and-gold locomotive sliding towards him. A beautiful monster was the Wolf—perfection—a thrilling picture of might and efficiency, and withal the beauty of line and colour which is the pride of English railways.

The hope of the G. S. C.! The child of the brain of a clever young fireman! The last word in steam railway locomotives! Except for her great size, the Wolf was like other huge express locomotives. But she was very different "inside," as Jimmy had explained to some of his young pals at Blackhampton, who could do no more than love the railway and watch it from station platform or the coping of a railway bridge. To them, Jim was a hero—a lucky fellow who, instead of dreaming railways and locomotives, lived them every day of his life!

The Wolf began to slow down, and then dropped to a creeping pace when near Jimmy. Sam Blundell was looking over, and Jim, with a look up and down the embankment at that lonely country spot, lightly jumped the signal wires, and ran towards the cab. He clambered up, and Sam Blundell, clad in a natty new blue suit of overalls, gripped his hand.

"Here you are, old son! Well, don't faint with joy, or anything like that, or we'll have to tip you out. You're coming to London with us! Ay, it's true, so don't look so dazed. What's more, you're coming on the great race, with all the big nobbs—Sir Richard Grant and other directors, Mr. Steel, and the traffic chief. You'll be with 'em—in the same coach. This is how, son. Hold on, what's up?"

Jim gasped.

"I—I feel faint, that's all, Sam," he said, blinking at the grinning fireman—Sam's fireman—for Sam was a driver now. "It is it true—not a ghastly joke?"

"Thought it would stun you, chum! No, it's no joke, and this is how. Let's get up some speed first, and I'll tell you."

Sam moved over the regulator near at hand, and the mighty Wolf, responsive to the delicate touch of the man who knew her inside out, began to speed onwards towards the starting-point of the greatest race Great Britain had known for many many years.

(The two chums were filled with excitement. What will be the result of the great race? Don't miss the concluding chapters of this thrilling serial next week, chums.)

"RIVALS OF THE NEW HOUSE!"

(Continued from page 23.)

"Figgins!" shouted Redfern at the top of his voice. "Figgy! Grab Lowther! He's got my cap! Yooooooop!" He broke off with that yell as the other School House fellows swooped down on him.

Figgins had heard the cry and turned with a start. He saw Monty skating towards him, waving the cap, and he took in the situation at a glance.

Without more ado Figgins clambered down on the ice, and, skating in his boots, planted himself in Lowther's way. Monty ceased to grin when he saw the New House leader.

"Here, you keep off!" he roared, as Figgins made a dive at him. "I—Yow! Ow! Yaroooooh!"

Bump!

Monty and Figgins sat down on the ice together.

Figgins snatched Redfern's cap, and then, sitting up, he gave the prostrate Monty a shove that sent him whizzing on his chest into a thick clump of rushes.

"Yaroooooh!" howled Monty as he disappeared.

Meanwhile Redfern was surrounded by the grim-looking School House fellows.

now. I see he's up there, and he's got your cap from Monty."

"Good egg!"

Redfern skated swiftly along the ice and went up to Figgins.

The New House leader met him with a cold stare.

"You've come for your cap, Redfern?" he said shortly.

"Here it is!"

He tossed it over to Redfern, who caught it, flushing.

"Hold on, Figgins!" he exclaimed, as the other turned away. "Don't be so hasty, old chap. I've come to tell you that everything's all right. Kerr's discovered the truth. It was Chowle, after all, who opened the window."

"What!" cried Figgins, turning sharply. There was a quick, glad note in his voice, and an eager light came into his eyes.

"It was that rotter, Chowle, Figgy. He was going out on a smoking bee with Racke's shady clique in the School House that night, but you disturbed him, and he went back to the dorm, leaving the side window open," said Redfern. "He took your impot from your desk afterwards and burnt it, so as to make things look worse against you. That's the truth, old chap. Kerr got at it, and Chowle has confessed. And—and I'm sorry, old man! I want to apologise for the

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"Bai Jove! Now we've got you, you boundah!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "I vote we fwogsmarch him along the wivah, deah boys."

"Ha, ha! Not a bad wheeze, Gussy."

"Here, make it pax, you chaps!" said Redfern hurriedly. "I don't want to get out of a rag cheaply, but—but I want to see Figgins very particularly. It's urgent. You know there's been a bit of a row in our House—about that window you found open the other night?"

"Yes, we heard about that," said Tom. "Figgy's accused of letting us in, isn't he, just to get his own back on you and the others? That's all rot, of course."

"Yaas, wathah! I have a great respect for Figgins, deah boys, although he is wathah an ass, and I don't believe he'd play a wotten twick like that, bai Jove!" said D'Arcy.

"Well, he didn't!" said Redfern eagerly. "The truth's come out. Kerr did some detective work, you see. You know what a clever chap Kerr is."

Reddy explained hurriedly, and Tom Merry & Co. gasped.

"Well, if that doesn't beat the band!" exclaimed Blake.

"Good old Kerr! I'm glad Figgy's name is cleared."

"So am I—jolly glad!" said Tom Merry quietly. "We'll make it pax, of course, Reddy. Buzz off and tell Figgy

rotten things I've thought and said about you. Will you shake hands?"

Figgins was silent for a little while, his lips twitching and his chest heaving with emotion. Then he grasped Redfern's hand impulsively.

"I'm sorry, too, Redfern," he said huskily. "I—I realise now what an unreasonable ass I've been. I brought most of the trouble on myself. I never meant what I said about you, Reddy."

"I know you didn't, Figgy," said Redfern softly, and he pressed his rival's hand. "So we'll let bygones be bygones, eh? And you can always rely on the New Firm to back you up like—like anything!"

And Monty Lowther, crawling dolefully out of the rushes, was just in time to see the rivals of the New House stroll away arm-in-arm across the snow-clad fields towards St. Jim's.

THE END.

(There will be another magnificent yarn of Tom Merry & Co. in next week's GEM, entitled: "THE NEW BOY'S SECRET!" By Martin Clifford. Don't miss it—it's extra-special!)

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