

A CRANKY HEADMASTER COMES TO ST. JIM'S THIS WEEK !

(Read the extra-long school story—inside.)

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

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**MRS. CRANKLEY'S "DOUBLE" MAKES
A BOLT FOR IT !**

(A dramatic moment in this week's school story of
Tom Merry & Co. at St. Ji n's, entitled : "Under
Faddist Rule !")

CRANKY—BUT GOOD SORTS, FOR ALL THAT! This is how the boys of St. Jim's sum up their new headmaster and his wife. But the "cranky" ideas these individuals bring along to the old school, and, moreover, put into practice, are irksome in the extreme!



UNDER FADDIST RULE!

A Humorous Extra-Long Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's, dealing with the arrival of a temporary headmaster whose ideas of running a school are weird and wonderful, to say the least of it!

By
Martin Clifford.

CHAPTER 1. Unpleasant News!

"**F**IVE bob!"
"Eh?"
"Five bob—that's a bob each!"
"Bai Jove!"

"What the thump?" Jack Blake fairly blinked at Baggy Trimble of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's. "What's this game, Trimble?" he demanded.

Baggy Trimble chuckled and rattled the rather grubby-looking tin he held in his fat fist. The tin had once been a syrup-tin; but it was badly dented, whilst a narrow and jagged slit had been cut in the lid. Apparently the grubby, mutilated tin was supposed to be a kind of collecting-box. At all events, from the rattling sound that came from its interior, there was something in the box now.

"Yaas, what's this game?"
"I should think you fellows could guess that," grinned Baggy Trimble, rattling the box again. "Shell out, you men—a bob each is the minimum! In a jolly good cause, you know! Shell out!"

Again the fat Fourth-Former rattled the box; the sound seemed to give him a great deal of pleasure.

But his explanation—if it could be called that—brought no enlightenment to Blake & Co. Those young heroes of the Fourth at St. Jim's were puzzled. Blake blinked, and Herries blinked, and Digby blinked, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy blinked—the latter elegant youth jamming his monocle more firmly into place to aid him in the process.

Why Trimble of the Fourth should be parading the quad armed with a dirty-looking syrup-tin with a jagged hole torn in the lid was quite beyond them. Certainly the inference suggested by his words and the rattling tin were unmistakable. Trimble was obviously collecting money—or trying to collect money! That much was very evident. But why? And for what?

"You fat ass!" said Jack Blake, in measured tones. "What's this game, Trimble?"

"Yaas, wathah! What game are you up to now, Twimble, you fat wascal?" inquired Arthur Augustus.

"Another of his wonderful schemes for raising the wind, I suppose," remarked Herries, sniffing. "I bet he's boned that tin out of the dustbin."

"Looks like it!" agreed Digby.

"And smells like it!" snorted Herries. "Take the rotten thing away, you fat rotter!"

"Oh, I say, Herries—"

"Take it away!" roared Blake. "Think we want a thing like that shoved under our noses, you fat ass!"

"Oh, really, Blake—"

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"Buzz off with it!"

"But, look here: listen— Yarroooooogh!"

Rattle, rattle! Chink, chink!

Trimble howled as the toe of Blake's boot struck the bottom of the tin, sending it whirling from the fat junior's grasp.

The tin described a whizzing curve through the air and fell, rattling and chinking on the gravel path. Trimble sucked at his fingers and danced and howled.

Though he had been holding the tin by the top, the sudden jar and wrench had been painful, whilst the jagged edges of the slit had cut his hand slightly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was rather too bad of Blake to laugh, but he did laugh, as did his chums.

"You rotten chump!" roared Trimble. "Wharrer you do that for? You've jolly well cut my hand and nearly busted my fingers! Yah! Rotters!"

Herries made a movement towards the still rolling tin, and Trimble yelled and jumped for it. He snatched it up, and finding the lid still on he jammed the tin under his coat. Then he glared at the laughing juniors.

"Yah!" he snorted. "Mean, mingy beasts! A fat lot you care about the Head!"

"Eh?" said Blake, his expression changing. "Why, what about the Head, Trimble? He isn't worse, is he?"

"Bai Jove! I weally twust not!" added Arthur Augustus, looking suddenly serious. "Have you heard any fwesh news of the Head, Twimble?"

Blake & Co. looked at Trimble rather anxiously. For some little time now the health of Dr. Holmes, the kindly old headmaster of St. Jim's, had been causing no little anxiety at the school; masters, boys, and staff—all shared in that anxiety. There were few, indeed, at St. Jim's—if any—who did not respect and revere the venerable Head. If Trimble had news—

Apparently Trimble had. He grinned at Blake & Co. His expression had changed from anguish to glee just as swiftly as the expressions of Blake & Co. had changed from hilarity to anxiety.

"I thought you fellows would change your tune when you heard about it," he grinned. "Yes; I've got news—straight from the gee-gee's mouth, you know! I heard Railton himself telling Kildare of the Sixth."

"Well, what is it?" said Blake warmly. "If it's anything to grin about, well and good, Trimble; if it isn't, then I'm going to kick you hard for grinning, you fat worm!"

"Yaas, wathah! Let us hear it, Twimble!"

Trimble's expression changed with remarkable prompt-

ness. His news was certainly nothing to grin about—the very reverse, in fact. Yet it was necessary to tell the news for all that—necessary because of the “game” he had in mind.

“Oh, really, you know, Blake,” he said, trying to assume a hurt look. “I hope I’m not the fellow to grin over a serious matter like the Head’s illness. If I was grinning it was just a grin of pain—trying to hide my agony, you know. That’s me all over.”

“Oh, my hat!”

“You jolly well cut my hand, Blake!” said Trimble warmly. “I’m suffering agonies of pain now, in fact. But I just grin and bear it, you know! That explains why you thought I was just grinning. I’m not a fellow to make a song about it, though. It’s nothing to the pain I shall soon be suffering, you fellows!”

“And jolly soon if you don’t buck up and explain,” said Blake, raising a boot significantly.

“Ain’t I explaining?” grumbled Trimble, keeping a careful eye on Blake’s boot. “I said I shall soon be suffering more pain, and I mean it; another kind of pain, though—the pain of parting,” added Trimble sadly. “The—the thought of the dear old Head—the Grand Old Man of St. Jim’s—”

“Cut that out, you fat rotter!” snorted Herries. “We know what your sorrow’s worth, Trimble!”

“What’s the matter, anyway?” said Blake, eyeing Trimble with renewed interest. “Great Scott! You don’t mean that the Head’s leaving?”

“Just that!” assented Trimble. “I mean to say he’s not leaving for good, of course; just for a health holiday—that’s what I heard Railton tell Kildare, anyway.”

“Phew!” exclaimed Jack Blake, frowning. “When’s he going, and for how long? Know that, old fat man?”

“Going to-morrow morning—for a week or two, I think,” said Baggy Trimble. “I say, ain’t it rotten, you fellows? Fancy having that awful beast Ratty as Head? He’s senior Housemaster, and he’s been left in charge before when the Head’s been away. Ain’t it just rotten?”

Jack Blake and his chums looked at each other with faces suddenly glum and dismayed. They were glad enough to hear that the Head was to have a holiday—a holiday he needed, and which would, undoubtedly, do him good. But the prospect his going away opened up was not a pleasant one.

On former occasions Mr. Horace Rateliff, the senior Housemaster, had taken charge as a matter of course when the Head had been away. And the result had never been successful in any sort of way, either from the point of view of the St. Jim’s fellows or the domestic staff, or the rest of the scholastic staff. There had been trouble enough and to spare under the rule of Mr. Rateliff, the Housemaster of the New House. He was cordially detested by New House fellows and by School House fellows.

“Oh dear!” groaned Jack Blake. “I’m jolly glad the Head’s having a rest—he’s earned it. But—but Trimble’s right. Ratty’s bound to take charge as before. That means trouble all round.”

“Yaas, wathah! Wotten, bai Joye!”

“Stormy weather ahead,” opined Herries.

And with very gloomy faces Blake & Co. moved on, Jack Blake forgetting even to kick Trimble, though his news had proved to be nothing to grin about. Trimble had also forgotten Blake’s promise, but he had not forgotten the tin under his jacket, however. The fat junior had unburdened himself of his “news,” and he was never the fellow to give anything for nothing; and he had no intention of letting things go at that.

He jumped in front of Blake & Co., and once again the collecting-box was rattled under their noses.

“Hold on!” he gasped. “What about my collection, you know? Shell out, and do the decent thing. A bob at a time!”

Rattle, rattle! Chink, chink!

“You fat ass!” snorted Blake. “Collection? But what for?”

“For the Head, of course—a parting mark of our—our love and—application!” said Trimble, probably meaning appreciation. “I’m getting the fund up, see? It’s to buy the dear old Head a parting present. I want a bob each from you fellows. Shell out!”

And Trimble rattled the tin again. Blake & Co. stared at him. But they did not answer in words. Blake lifted his boot suddenly and the tin flew out of Trimble’s fat hand again, to the accompaniment of a wild howl from Trimble, Biff!

“Yooop!”

As the tin dropped and rolled again Blake made a rush at it, and Herries, Digby, and D’Arcy grinned and joined him. The next moment Trimble’s collecting-box was being used as a football.

CHAPTER 2.

Disappointing for Ratty!

“ON the ball!”
Biff, biff! Rattle, chink! Rattle!
“Stop it! Oh crikey! Oh, you awful beasts! Help!”

To the accompaniment of wild yells from Baggy Trimble, the precious collecting-box was dribbled along the gravel-path.

Cardew, Levison, and Clive of the Fourth happened to be passing, and they joined in with alacrity. On the path the footballers met the Terrible Three strolling along. Like Cardew & Co., the Terrible Three seemed to recognise the syrup-tin, and they joined in with a will. Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn came rushing across from the direction of the New House, and soon a merry tussle was in progress for possession of the “ball.”

Baggy Trimble yelled and yelled as he dashed in pursuit, many of his yells being yells of pain, as several kicks intended, possibly, for the tin struck his anatomy.

The fat junior had very evidently made the lid of the tin very secure indeed, but such treatment was bound to have its results, sooner or later.

“Go it, chaps!” called Blake. “Keep the ball rolling! Out of the way, Baggy! When the tin busts we’re going to start on you! Hallo! That’s done it!”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

A particularly hefty kick from Blake’s right boot sent the lid of the syrup-tin flying out. As the lid flew off small articles streamed out on to the gravel.

“Stop!” howled Trimble, dashing up breathlessly. “Oh, you awful beasts! Don’t you dare to touch a penny! Oh, crikey!”

Trimble’s eyes suddenly fell on the contents of the box, or, rather, what had been the contents a moment before, and he almost fell down.

There was a remarkable and varied collection of buttons, there was a neatly-folded slip of paper—exercise paper, and there were several foreign coins and a couple of bent farthings. From the strange and horrified expression on the features of the fat philanthropist of the Fourth it was only too clear that he was surprised at the sight. He had evidently—very evidently—expected something else to roll out of the collecting-box.

“Ow! Oh, crumbs!” gasped the fat youth, fairly blinking at the surprising collection. “Ow! What an awful sell! And I thought it was cash—bobs and a ten-bob note! Oh dear!”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

There was a roar. The expression of dismay on the face of Baggy Trimble was truly pathetic, yet the juniors roared.

“You cackling asses!” groaned Trimble, glaring round him. “You mingy rotter, Cardew! You said it was a ten-bob note you’d put in; it’s only a blessed folded bit of rotten exercise paper!”

“I didn’t say it was a ten-bob note,” said Cardew, smiling. “I just asked if you objected to a note, and you said not at all. That folded paper is a note—a note I had from Merry, asking me to play in the match to-morrow. See?”

“Beast!”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

Baggy Trimble glared and glared. He was deeply disappointed. He had spent nearly an hour touting for bobs, and he had received far more kicks than “bobs.” But some of the fellows had smiled, and had dropped things into the tin with musical chinks that made Baggy’s heart beat warmly within him.

Naturally Baggy had concluded they were shillings, just as he had concluded the note of Cardew’s was a ten-shilling note. Now he realised that he was mistaken—that he had been spoofed. Among the queer collection of articles on the gravel was not one single bob—not even a single coin that was of use to him.

Baggy felt like weeping.

“Oh, you awful beasts!” he groaned. “Fancy treating a fellow like this—a fellow who’s doing his best to make the dear old Head’s parting a happy one! A—a parting gift of application to lessen his bitter grief at leaving the—the stately old pile that—that loves him so much! A fat lot you rotters care about him. Yah!”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Oh, my hat!”

“You burbling fat fraud!” exclaimed Tom Merry, grinning despite himself. “D’you think we don’t know your game, you fat rascal? You’d blue all the cash on grub, and the Head wouldn’t see a present or anything else. You’ve tried these tricks before, Trimble.”

“Oh, I say, Merry—”

“You’ve said enough, you fat fraud!” said Tom grimly. “You need a lesson to teach you not to try on such spoofing.”

swindles. It beats me how you have the nerve to try it on when you've been bowled out so many times before."

"That is quite wight, Tom Mewwy," agreed Arthur Augustus, turning a frowning glance upon Trimble. "I considah it wank bad form, to say the vewy least of it, for Trimble to twy his twicks ovah such a sewious mattah! The little wascal needs a lesson."

"And he's going to get it!" said Tom. "On the ball, you fellows! But Trimble's going to be the ball this time!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Oh dear! I say, you fellows, it's all right. I tell you I never intend—Yarrooooooh! Oh crikey!"

Trimble roared as Tom Merry's boot took him forcibly in the rear. He yelled again, fiendishly, as a rush was made for him on all sides, and several boots clumped home on the seat of his trousers. Trimble once again had "tried it on," and had failed, as he usually did. He had expected "bobs," but all he was getting now was "kicks," which he richly deserved, undoubtedly. If Trimble's motive had really been to buy the Head a parting present, it certainly was an excellent and kindly motive. But the bobs—if he could have got them—would have eventually found their way into the till of the school tuckshop, and what they had bought would have found their way into Trimble's vast interior.

It was a sad fact known only too well to the juniors, and so they kicked Trimble in an attempt to raise his standard of morality.

They were still kicking him, and Trimble was howling for mercy when a sudden rustle sounded, and Figgins gave a gasp.

"Cave, chaps! Ratty!"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

The kicking process ceased as if by magic, and as it did so a master in cap and gown whisked on the scene. It was Mr. Ratcliff, and the sour-tempered Housemaster's face was more irritable and unpleasant than it usually was, which is saying a great deal. He fairly glowered at the suddenly silent jokers. Besides being a cross-grained tyrant, Mr. Horace Ratcliff was a consistent kill-joy; and he hated seeing others enjoy themselves.

Certainly, the juniors were carrying their notion of enjoyment a little too far on this occasion. They knew that, and they waited for the storm to break.

It soon did break.

"Stop that abominable disturbance instantly!" barked the master of the New House. "How dare you create such a disgraceful hub-bub under the very windows of the school? Outrageous! I am exceedingly thankful that there will soon be a competent person in charge of this school who will use authority as it should be used. Disgraceful!"

And Mr. Ratcliff glowered at the juniors in turn. The juniors groaned. They knew only too well whom the competent person was—in the Housemaster's view. Apparently Mr. Ratcliff already felt himself sitting in the Headmaster's chair, so to speak.

"Hooligans!" went on Mr. Ratcliff bitterly. "The lack of real discipline at this school is absolutely scandalous! It shall soon be rectified, however," went on the Housemaster, almost with a grin of anticipation. "Figgins, Merry, Blake, and Cardew—"

"Yes, sir." It was a grim chorus.

"You four boys are apparently the ringleaders!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff harshly. "You will go at once to my study and await me there. I propose to cane you severely. You will also do me two hundred lines—a punishment which each boy will share!"

There was a murmur. Tom Merry set his lips hard. Two hundred lines and a caning—a severe caning was a serious matter from "Ratty"—was an overwhelming punishment just for "larking" in the quad. But that was not the only point that made Tom's eyes gleam.

Mr. Ratcliff was the Housemaster of the New House. And though he was senior Housemaster he had no personal disciplinary power over the School House fellows—a fact for which the School House fellows always felt thankful. He could report them to Mr. Railton, of course, or to the Head. But beyond that he had no power to go.

Yet he had sentenced them to a caning and a stiff impot! It was too thick! Mr. Ratcliff saw the mischievous looks on the faces of the School House fellows, and his bushy brows met in a thunderous frown.

"You hear me?" he barked, pointing towards the New House doorway. "Go to my study without further delay."

Figgins turned slowly, and with a rueful and significant glance at Tom Merry he walked away towards that doorway. Figgie knew better than to disobey the New House tyrant. But the School House fellows did not stir.

"I'm sorry, sir," said Tom Merry respectfully. "But we must protest against being caned and punished by you! We do not belong to the New House, and I appeal to Mr. Railton, our Housemaster."

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"What-at?" bellowed the tyrannical Housemaster. "You refuse to obey my order? Very well—oh, very well! You are apparently ignorant of the fact that Dr. Holmes is leaving the school almost at once, and that I, even now, am virtually the headmaster of St. Jim's! I—"

"What is the matter, Mr. Ratcliff?"

It was Mr. Railton's calm voice, and the Housemaster of the School House, who had walked up unnoticed, joined the little group. Mr. Railton's voice was pleasant, as it usually was; but his face was grim.

Mr. Ratcliff wheeled round and glared at him.

"It is a matter with which I am quite capable of dealing, Mr. Railton," he answered, with a domineering note in his harsh voice. "Kindly refrain from interfering in this case, and in any future case with which I happen to be dealing."

"As most of the boys here are School House boys," said Mr. Railton tartly, "I am afraid it is my duty to interfere—as you term it. I saw what these boys were doing from my study window. They were creating an unseemly disturbance for which they should be punished. Each School House boy present will do me an imposition of fifty lines," added Mr. Railton, looking round.

Mr. Ratcliff's side whiskers fairly bristled. He gave his more youthful rival a spiteful glare.

"I have already sentenced these boys to be punished," he snapped acidly, "both New House and School House. You apparently forget, Mr. Railton, that Dr. Holmes has virtually ceased to be headmaster, and that, as the senior Housemaster, I will automatically take charge in his temporary absence."

Mr. Railton hesitated. He was far from wishing to snub his rival before boys. But Mr. Ratcliff had certainly deserved it, and Mr. Railton was "nettled" by his domineering tone and his words, which were certainly spiteful and insolent. He did not hesitate long.

"You are apparently labouring under a misapprehension, Mr. Ratcliff!" he retorted quietly. "I am certainly aware that Dr. Holmes is going away, and that you are senior Housemaster. But I am not aware that any member of this school will take over the duties of headmaster. In fact, I have just been informed by Dr. Holmes himself that such is not the case. A new headmaster has been appointed by the governing body of the school, and he will arrive here to-morrow before Dr. Holmes departs."

Mr. Ratcliff almost staggered. His face went a dull crimson with bitter disappointment and chagrin. He had not dreamed for one moment that a new Head—other than himself—would be appointed for such a short period. He realised now that he had been just a trifle too previous.

"I—I— Dr. Holmes has not acquainted me with that fact!" he stammered, utterly taken aback.

"He has only just informed me, Mr. Ratcliff. I believe he has just sent a message across to you, however, which possibly is to explain matters," said Mr. Railton. "I understand that Dr. Crankley—the new temporary headmaster—has just returned from abroad, and that the governors have only just received his acceptance of the post. They notified Dr. Holmes of their final decision this morning. Merry, and the rest of you School House boys, I shall expect your lines this evening, without fail!"

And with that the master of the School House strode away. Mr. Ratcliff glared after him speechlessly, and then, with a perfectly Hunnish glare at the juniors, he whisked away and fairly stamped back to the New House.

A chuckle followed him. All the juniors were grinning delightedly—all, that is, with the exception of Kerr and Wynn, who groaned and followed Mr. Ratcliff across to the New House.

But Tom Merry & Co. did not groan. They grinned and chuckled, and then, as Mr. Ratcliff's form vanished, they doubled up and fairly choked with suppressed mirth.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Tom Merry. "What a—what a scream! What price Ratty's chivvy when Railton told him!"

"It was weally worth a guinea a box, bai Jove!" chuckled Arthur Augustus. "But isn't it weally wippin'—no Watty atah all for Head!"

"Whoever comes he simply can't be worse than Ratty!" grinned Blake. "On, my hat! What an awful sell for Ratty! Won't the fellows chortle when we tell 'em! I bet the old hunk's busy kicking himself round his study now."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And, as the bell for afternoon class rang just then, Tom Merry & Co. trooped indoors, chortling gleefully. Ratty had fairly asked for it, and he had got it, and Mr. Railton could not be blamed for giving it him—in their view. And the only thing that rather damped Tom Merry's glee was the thought of the hapless Figgins & Co. Ratty would undoubtedly vent his bitter rage and disappointment on the heads of the hapless New House trio; he would undoubtedly "take it out" of them, as he usually did.

But for the rest of that day St. Jim's chuckled and laughed



With a soft fizz the match ignited, and Monty Lowther touched the bottom of Knox's paper with it. The newspaper flared up under the prefect's nose, and he gave a wild yell. "Yooooop!" (See Chapter 3.)

over the story of Ratty's expectation and disappointment. They could afford to laugh and chuckle now that they knew the unpopular New House master was not to be in charge. So busy indeed were the fellows congratulating themselves on their escape from the tyrannical rule of Mr. Horace Rateliff that few of them stopped to wonder whether the new Head would possibly be worse than Ratty. They were soon to wonder about that, however.

CHAPTER 3. Nice for Knox!

"JUST about do it!" remarked Tom Merry, glancing swiftly at his watch. "We've got a minute—better hoof it!"

"Yaas, wathah! Wun like anythin', deah boys!"

And Tom Merry & Co. followed the injunction of Arthur Augustus and ran.

It was the following afternoon—late afternoon, and the wintry dusk was just stealing over the town of Wayland. It had been a half-holiday, and after a visit to the cinema, followed by tea at a cafe, the chums of St. Jim's were now homeward bound.

The juniors had spent more time than they should have done at the cafe, and only on emerging had they realised how the time had flown and that they had barely time to catch their train.

As trains were few and far between on the local line from Wayland Junction to Rylcombe, Tom Merry & Co. did not want to miss that particular train. It would mean their missing call-over if they did.

It was certainly necessary for them to run, and they did run in a mad stampede along the quaint old High Street of Wayland Town.

They arrived at the station, panting and breathless, but relieved; though they were a couple of seconds behind time, the train was still standing at the station. A porter was slamming the carriage doors, however, and the juniors raced for a carriage and tumbled in in a scrambling heap.

Tom Merry was in the compartment first, and the press of his laughing chums behind sent him tripping over the feet of an elderly gentleman who was seated by the door. Next to him an elderly lady sat, and Tom only just saved himself from sprawling headlong at her feet.

"Steady, you fellows!" he gasped. "Steady, Gussy, you ass! Sorry, sir!"

"Yaas, wathah!" added Arthur Augustus, pausing to raise his glimmering silk hat to the elderly gentleman. "It was weally my fault, and I am exceedingly sorry— Oh cwumbs!"

"Go on, Gussy, you idiot!" bawled Blake, pushing behind. "What the thump— Oh!"

Arthur Augustus clutched at the luggage rack, only just saving himself—Blake realising why he had paused a trifle too late. The rest of the juniors swarmed in, but luckily they had seen now that the carriage was occupied.

"Sorry, sir!" panted Blake, turning to the elderly gentleman, as he dropped into a seat. "I hope I did not hurt—"

"Not at all, my boy," smiled the stranger, exchanging a glance with the lady. "Accidents will happen!"

The juniors settled themselves, and the elderly couple looked at their cheery, healthy faces with obvious favour. The porter was just closing the door when there was a shout, and a senior came scudding towards the carriage.

"Hallo! Old Knox!" grinned Blake. "Here he comes—look out!"

The porter wrenched the door back, and the next moment,

just as the train started, Gerald Knox (the Sixth) sprang into the compartment and sprawled over the feet of the elderly gentleman, just as Tom and Arthur Augustus had done.

The door slammed, and, steadying himself, the prefect moved along, holding on to the rack. But he did not trouble to make any apology to the gentleman. He glanced curtly at Tom and Lowther, who were occupying the two farther corner seats.

"Out of that, one of you!" he snapped impatiently. "Look lively now!"

"Can't he do it," said Lowther coolly. "We were in first, Knox!"

Gerald Knox glared. All the seats were occupied now, and he was not the fellow to stand while "fags" were seated.

"You hear me?" he said, his face flushing as he saw the old gentleman's eyes fixed on him. "Get out of that seat, Lowther!"

"Nothing doing, old chap!" said Lowther.

And Lowther sat tight. Tom Merry hesitated. There was no reason why he should give up his seat to Knox. Knox was a prefect, but he had no right to use his authority under such circumstances. It was grossly unfair. But Tom did not want trouble before strangers—even with the autocratic Knox.

But before he could make up his mind Knox had acted.

He grabbed Lowther savagely by the collar and whirled him out of his seat, sending him tumbling on top of Tom Merry.

"I'll show you if you can ignore the dashed orders of a prefect, you little sweep!" he snapped. "You can also take fifty lines for impudence to a prefect."

And with that Gerald Knox made himself comfortable in Lowther's seat and took a newspaper from his pocket. Then he took out a cigarette-case and lit up a cigarette.

Meanwhile, the elderly gentleman and the lady had both been watching his actions with some interest, and with obvious distaste. But as Knox lit up his cigarette the old gentleman's eyes gleamed a little, and his lips set. Like his lady companion he looked very mild and kindly in the extreme. There was a steely look in his eyes now, however.

The smoke curled up from Knox's cigarette, and the old lady began to cough a little; she was obviously not used to tobacco-smoke. She looked at the old gentleman, and he looked at Knox. The compartment was not a "smoker"—a little fact Knox seemed to have ignored, or overlooked.

Without speaking the old gentleman quietly opened the near window wide. Then he moved as if to open the farther one also. Tom Merry saw his intention, and he jumped up and opened it for him.

"Thank you, my boy!"

The old gentleman seated himself again. Knox looked up from his paper. He was seated opposite the engine, and the cold air was not pleasant.

"Shut that window again, Merry, you little fool!" he snapped angrily. "Dash it all, it's cold enough without that! Shut it at once!"

"This is not a smoker, Knox!" said Tom Merry, with a glance at the old lady.

"Weally, Knox—" began Arthur Augustus warmly; but Knox interrupted him.

"Shut up!" bellowed Knox. "Dash it all!"

He jumped up wrathfully, and slammed the near window up. Then he was about to cross to the further window when the old gentleman held up his hand.

"One moment, my boy!" he said quietly. "Please do not close this window. If you must smoke in a non-smoker, then I must insist upon this window remaining open."

Knox stopped, and glowered; but he merely contented himself with glowering. There was something in the steady look in the mild, bespectacled eyes of the elderly gentleman that bade him go no farther than that.

The look fairly cowed him, and he seated himself again, giving Lowther a vicious cuff as that junior grinned at him. Lowther fell back on Tom Merry's knees, and Knox picked up his paper again.

But it was obvious he was still determined to make himself unpleasant. He drew viciously at his cigarette, blowing cloud after cloud of pungent cigarette smoke into the compartment.

"The ill-mannahd wottah!" murmured Arthur Augustus, in disgust. "The cad is a disgrace to St. Jim's!"

Tom Merry nodded, his face dark. He could see plainly enough that the kindly old lady was becoming distressed with the smoke, and he could see that Knox was doing all he could to make more smoke. He was disgusted and ashamed that a St. Jim's fellow could act so abominably. Any decent fellow would have ceased smoking at once—whether it was a smoking carriage or not.

"Chuck that smoking, Knox!" he whispered indignantly. "Hang it all, be decent!"

Knox lowered his paper, and gave Tom a furious glance.

"Another word from you, Merry, and I'll double that imposition," he snapped—"and I'll throw in a licking, too!"

Tom subsided, frowning. Monty Lowther caught his eye and winked at him. Monty was standing up before the window, there being no seat for him. Knox had resumed his reading, and his face was hidden behind the paper again.

With a mischievous grin on his features, Monty Lowther drew a box of matches from his pocket, and gently drew one out. At the moment Knox had taken the cigarette from his mouth, and it was held loosely between the fingers that held the paper.

Lowther gently placed the head of the match against the glowing end of the cigarette.

"Monty!" breathed Tom Merry, in alarm. "Don't! Oh, you awful ass!"

Tom's alarmed warning came too late, for Lowther had "done it." With a soft fizz the match ignited, and Monty Lowther touched the bottom of the paper with it. In Monty's view, Knox needed a lesson. He got it.

The newspaper flared up under the prefect's very nose, and he leaped to his feet with a wild yell, and flung down the paper, and jumped on it.

Neither the old gentleman nor the old lady had seen Monty's rather dangerous trick, but as Knox jumped and stamped on the blazing newspaper the lady gave a little shriek, while her husband jumped to his feet in alarm.

Knox's face was a sight. He stamped on the paper, and all the juniors started to stamp on it at the same time—at least they tried to do so. But several stamps—whether by accident or design—landed on Knox's feet, and he howled furiously.

"Go it, chaps!" gasped Lowther, in pretended alarm. "Mind your bags, Knox!"

The flames were already stamped out, but Lowther continued to jump desperately on the charred remains of the newspaper. He stopped stamping with a wild yell, however, as Knox gave him a vicious box on the ear, sending him crashing against the window.

"Hold on, Knox!" snapped Tom Merry. "None of that!"

But Knox did not "hold on." His face was blazing with fury, and following up the mischievous Lowther, he started to punch and cuff him unmercifully. Lowther roared, and doubled up against the window to avoid the vicious assault.

"You little cad!" shouted Knox furiously. "You did that—it wasn't the cigarette, it was you, you cheeky little sweep! I'll give you the hiding of your dashed life!"

Thump, thump, thump, thump!

"Yoooooop!" howled Lowther. "Drag him off, you fellows! Rescue!"

"Stop that, Knox!" called Tom Merry.

He did not wish to cause further disturbance before strangers—certainly not before a lady—but Knox was exceeding the limit. Tom grabbed him and dragged at him, and Blake and the rest jumped to aid him. There was a furious, scrambling struggle at the end of the carriage, and Knox seemed to vanish completely under the rescuers. From beneath the scum somewhere came choking howls from the hapless Monty Lowther.

All the excited juniors seemed to have forgotten their travelling companion by this time. They were reminded when a sharp, authoritative voice rang out angrily.

"Stop! There has been quite enough of this, boys! Knox—if that is your name—release that junior at once!"

"Oh cwums!"

The juniors scrambled off the prefect and dropped breathlessly into their seats, their faces red. The elderly lady was looking frightened and dismayed. The old gentleman was looking exceedingly angry. The juniors stared at him. There

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had been something in his tone curiously authoritative and compelling.

Knox, however, did not obey at once, though he ceased pummelling the hapless Lowther.

"Do you hear me?" said the stranger, in calm tones. "Release that junior at once!"

"Why should I?" grunted Knox, though his eyes fell under the other's look. "It's no business of yours!"

"We will not discuss that now," said the other grimly. "I warn you, however, that unless you release that junior you will be sorry for it."

Knox released Lowther—giving him a final cuff as he did so. Who the elderly man was he neither knew nor cared, but he felt it wisest to obey. The old chap looked a nobody—indeed, he looked just a trifle shabby—but he had heard the prefect's name and might easily report him to the authorities.

So, releasing Lowther, Knox sank into his seat after dusting himself down, his features dark with suppressed fury.

"You'll be dashed well sorry for this, you grubby little fags!" he breathed, glaring at Tom Merry, who was straightening his collar. "I'll make the lot of you squirm when we get to St. Jim's."

Tom Merry did not answer, nor did his chums, and the next moment the train slowed up before the little platform at Rylcombe station. The old gentleman reached up for his luggage on the rack, and Arthur Augustus and Tom Merry jumped to help him. Knox gave a final glare at the juniors, and opening the carriage door he jumped out. But as he did so the old gentleman turned round swiftly and called to him.

"One moment, Knox! I wish to speak to you!"

Knox looked round and scowled. He hesitated, and then after a moment's reflection he decided to obey the queer old chap. He came back to the carriage, scowling. The old gentleman opened his wallet and took out a card. He handed it to Gerald Knox, of the Sixth.

"That is my card!" exclaimed the old gentleman quietly.

"As you will see, my name is Dr. Crankley, and to-day I take over the duties of the headmaster of St. Jim's. I do not desire to take any official notice of your actions this afternoon, my boy, but I should like to speak with you in my study some time this evening. That is all!"

He nodded to Knox. That astounded prefect stood as if rooted to the platform. He blinked at the card, and then he blinked at mild-looking little Dr. Crankley, and his face went suddenly white as a sheet. The fingers that held the piece of pasteboard fairly shook.

"I—I—I—" He stuttered and stopped. If ever a fellow looked completely bowled out, Gerald Knox did at that moment. He remembered the cigarette, and he remembered his insolence to the old lady, and he remembered his bullying treatment of the juniors.

At that moment Knox saw the sack staring him in the face. He knew that Dr. Crankley had been given complete authority—that he had the power to do as he willed at St. Jim's.

Knox shuddered.

Dr. Crankley stepped out and the juniors passed out his hand luggage as in a dream. They were as astounded, as was Knox, but they were not quite so horrified. Still, they were alarmed, remembering that unlucky scrimmage in the carriage.

The luggage was out at last, and Dr. Crankley helped his wife—the kindly-faced old lady was obviously his wife—out on to the platform. They looked a queer couple; but Tom Merry & Co., and the shaking Gerald Knox, looked at them with different eyes now.

"Oh crumbs!" murmured Jack Blake. "Who'd have thought it? Now for trouble!"

But no trouble materialised for Tom Merry & Co. The new Head turned to Tom with a smile.

"Thank you very much, boys!" he said. "My first meeting with boys of St. Jim's has not been, I am afraid, quite so happy as I should like it to have been. And our little journey together has not been quite so peaceable as it ought to have been. That, however, was scarcely your fault, and we will say no more about it, eh? Ah! I think this is my old friend Mr. Railton approaching!"

At that moment Mr. Railton came bustling up, and the juniors raised their caps and faded away—Mrs. Crankley giving them a sweet smile as they went. They left the Housemaster, Dr. Crankley, and his wife shaking hands warmly—evidently being old acquaintances.

Outside the station the juniors looked at each other with eloquent expressions on their dumbfounded faces.

"Well, I'm blowed!" remarked Tom Merry. "Fancy that turning out to be the new Head. Oh, my hat!"

"And what price Knox?" chorled Monty Lowther. "He's for it, and no mistake! He fairly asked for it, though!"

"Yaas, wathah! I considah that Knox has disgaced St. Jim's!" said Arthur Augustus warmly. "I weally trust

Dr. Crankley will give him a most feahful wiggin', bai Jove!"

"Jolly lucky to get off with a wiggling," commented Blake. "It might easily have been the sack for the blighter. The old chap seems a decent old bird."

"Vewy decent indeed!" agreed Arthur Augustus. "I considah they are a deah old couple. Wathah old-fashioned, pewwaps, but vewy kindly, you know! You are a wotten, weckless ass, Lowthah, to play that silly twick with the match and papah, with that deah old lady pwsent. How-eh-eh!"

"It was a silly-ass trick!" chuckled Blake. "But the new Head didn't spot it, anyway. He must have thought the cigarette did it."

"Jolly lucky for you, Lowther!" said Tom. "Hallo, here's dear old Knoxy-woxy!"

Gerald Knox came out of the station looking like a fend. His eyes glinted as he stopped and regarded the juniors.

"You—you little hounds!" he said between his teeth. "You let me in for that—it was all your fault! By jingo, I'll make the lot of you squirm for this, you see if I don't. I'll make you wish you'd never seen St. Jim's. As for you, Lowther—"

"Like a light-up, Knox?" asked Lowther sweetly, taking the match-box from his pocket.

Knox did not answer in words. He made a blind rush at the grinning juniors, and they scattered, roaring with laughter now.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

They could afford to laugh, feeling pretty certain that the Head would "say no more about it" in so far as they were concerned.

But Gerald Knox had no such comfortable feeling. To come "up against" the new Head on his first day in such circumstances was not a cheery beginning at all—far from it. He knew he had been abominably rude and ill-mannered, and he knew he had no right whatever to have bullied the juniors. On top of that he had been smoking—a serious enough offence without the added fact that he had set a very bad example, as a senior and prefect, by smoking before juniors.

It was a relief indeed to know that the Head intended to let him off with a "wiggling"—or it seemed so—but Knox knew perfectly well that he was now a marked man, and that he would have to go very, very carefully in the future.

The Sixth-Former's face was dark and worried as he strode back to St. Jim's in the deepening dusk. But the faces of Tom Merry & Co. were bright and cheery as they followed in his tracks. Just outside Rylcombe the Head's car overtook them, with Mr. Railton driving, and Dr. Crankley and Mrs. Crankley seated behind. Dr. Crankley gave them a grim smile, and Mrs. Crankley waved a gloved hand and gave them a sweet smile and a nod.

The juniors agreed that they were both jolly decent old "birds." And they returned homewards cheerily to tell all and sundry the glad tidings.

CHAPTER 4.

Grundy is Wrathy!

"GONE! Well—well, I'm blowed! Gone!"

It was a bellow. Tom Merry & Co., on their way to Study No. 10, stopped as they heard that bellow of wrath.

They also smiled.

The bellow proceeded from Grundy's study on the Shell passage. The door happened to be wide open, and through it Tom Merry & Co. caught a glimpse of three juniors standing by a tea-table in the lighted study. The table was set for tea, and on it was a cheery array of crockery and glass cake-dishes—most of the latter empty. A bright fire burned in the grate, and all looked bright and cheery—excepting the three fellows who were standing at the table.

One was Wilkins, the other was Gunn, and the third was the great George Alfred Grundy himself. Wilkins and Gunn looked astonished and wrathly; but George Alfred's rugged countenance was red with outraged wrath—he looked positively Hunnish!

Tom Merry & Co. could not help smiling. When Grundy was wrathly he never minced his words, and he never minded who heard him. He was evidently in a right royal rage just now.

"Hold on!" grinned Tom Merry. "Let's see what's up with old Grundy!"

The juniors crowded round Grundy's study doorway and grinned inside. They were in no hurry, having had their tea in Wayland, and there being heaps of time before prep. Evidently Grundy & Co. were having a very late tea. As a matter of fact, the chums had been back at St. Jim's some half-hour and more, and they had already visited their study

once. But the news that Dr. Holmes was just going—brought by the excited Baggy Trimble—had made them rush out of doors to give the old Head a parting cheer.

They were not alone in this, for half the Lower School had assembled at the gates, and Dr. Holmes had departed on his health holiday with a rousing series of hearty cheers ringing in his ears—cheers that brought a bright flush of pleasure into the white, drawn cheeks of the old Head. He had vanished along the dusky Rylcombe Lane, and then the breathless juniors had swarmed indoors again, not one of them but breathing a hope that Dr. Holmes would make a speedy return to health—and to St. Jim's.

And among them had been Grundy & Co. Tom Merry had noticed his excited face, and had heard his bellowing voice above the rest of the cheering. He and his chums had evidently just returned to their study, and why they should now be in such wrath was a great mystery at first sight.

At second sight it did not require the deductive ability of a Sexton Blake to reason out what exactly was wrong.

Grundy & Co. had been interrupted in their tea by the news that the Head's car was just going, and they had rushed out, leaving the tea-table just as it was. They had returned less than five minutes afterwards, and now they were staring at the table in great astonishment and wrath. Very obviously they did not find the tea-table in the same state as that in which they had left it.

That much was clear to Tom Merry & Co. They read the signs, having experienced such remarkable happenings themselves in their study more than once. In the brief absence of Grundy & Co. someone—and they could guess whom—had raided the tea. The empty cake-dishes spoke eloquently.

So that Tom Merry really asked a quite needless question when he said:

"What's the trouble here, Grundy?"

The great George Alfred looked round and glared at the grinning juniors.

"What's the good of asking silly questions?" he bellowed. "Can't you see what's wrong? Look at those dashed cake-dishes!"

"They look very nice," remarked Monty Lowther, squinting down at them. "A bit empty, but—"

"Empty!" bawled Grundy, spluttering. "I should jolly well think they are empty. They were full when we left the dashed study four minutes ago—piled up with cakes and tarts. Now look at 'em—look at 'em!"

"We're looking, old chap! Looks to me as if you've said good-bye to the cakes and tarts as well as the Head!"

"It's nothing to laugh about, you cackling dummies!" howled Grundy, in great wrath and exasperation. "They were there five minutes ago, and now they're gone!"

"Gone like a beautiful dream!" sighed Lowther. "Likewise Trimble! Don't worry, though, Grundy, you'll find them all right."

"Eh? Don't talk rot! How—where—"

"You'll find them inside Trimble!" chuckled Lowther. "But you'll have to find Trimble first, old chap. I suppose it must have been Trimble—"

"Of course it was Trimble!" snorted Grundy, almost frothing at the mouth with rage. "Can't you tell by the dirty mess of crumbs and jam on the blessed table? I know it was that fat thief—it always is that fat thief! He came in here shouting about the Head's car being at the front, and we went out like silly asses, leaving the things just as they were. I see it now. I noticed the fat thief didn't follow us. He stayed here and scoffed the grub, he—the—"

"Good old Trimble!" grinned Blake. "He's the man for grasping opportunities!"

"I'll grasp him!" hissed Grundy. "I'll smash him, I'll spifficate him, I'll burst him! Where is the fat villain?"

He rushed to the corner of the study and snatched up a fives bat. It was a fives bat that had been used on Baggy Trimble more than once. From Grundy's terrific expression it was going to be used again.

"Where is the fat thief?" he bellowed. "Out of the way there, you cackling asses! If you've seen him—"

"I saw him," said Lowther thoughtfully. "Yes, it was Trimble, right enough!"

"Where? Why the thump didn't you tell me before, Lowther? Where—"

"He was going into the Fourth Form-room, Grundy. But—Hullo! He's gone!"

Grundy had gone. He fairly flew out of the study, and they heard his flying feet thumping along the passage outside, and then go clattering down the stairs beyond.

"What a pity!" remarked Lowther regretfully. "Why didn't the ass wait for me to finish? I was going to add that it was this morning I saw Trimble going in the Fourth Form-room—at first lesson. What an impulsive chap Grundy is!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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"It's nothing to laugh at, you fellows!" said Wilkins, though he was grinning a bit himself. "It's a bit too thick this time. That rotter Trimble wants tarring and feathering. I'm hungry, and there's only bread-and-butter and a bit of toast and a couple of eggs left. That ass Grundy had a puncture coming back from Abbotsford this afternoon, and we had to walk a good bit on the way back. I'm famished!"

"Same here!" groaned Gunn, glaring at the empty dishes. "It beats me how that fat worm could have got away with the stuff in the time! There was a great big three-pound cake and a whole heap of tarts and cakes and things. He must have carted the lot away somehow. He couldn't have scoffed them in the time!"

"Here's Grundy back—the ass!" grinned Blake. "Better scoot, Lowther, while the going's good!"

But Lowther chuckled and held his ground. The humorist of the Shell wanted to see Grundy's face when it was explained to him where Monty had last seen Trimble. To clear out without seeing the effect his little joke would have upon Grundy did not appeal to Monty's humorous turn of mind at all. Really it was going to prove rather an unwise decision for Lowther.

There was a thump of feet in the passage, and Grundy came charging in, looking wrathier than ever.

"The fat ass isn't there!" he gasped. "I hunted in the cupboards and under the dashed desks. He's carted the stuff off somewhere else to scoff it, Lowther."

"My dear man, why didn't you wait for me to finish?" said Lowther blandly. "It was at first lesson this morning I saw Trimble going into the Form-room—not just now, you ass! Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy's face went red. It was time for the joker to laugh, and Lowther did laugh. He did not laugh for long, however, for, with a roar like unto that of a bull, Grundy went for Lowther, and his hefty fist landed on the humorist's nose.

Lowther roared in astonished pain, and sat down with a bump.

Crash!

"You—you funny ass!" yelled Grundy, jumping on Lowther and banging his head on the floor. "I'll teach you to play your rotten jokes on me! Take that!"

Bump!

"Yoooooop!" howled Lowther. "Oh crumbs! Dragging off! Oh great—"

Bump, bump, bump!

Grundy was very obviously not in the mood for Lowther's humour, and Lowther howled fiendishly as he banged his head again and again on the floor. Lowther shrieked for aid, and his grinning chums jumped at Grundy and tried to drag him off his victim.

But Grundy was fairly roused now, and as Tom Merry and Manners piled in he hit out right and left. In the ordinary way it took very little to make Grundy use his fists, and he really had quite a lot to upset him now. Like Wilkins and Gunn he was very hungry, and the sight of the empty dishes alone had been enough. Lowther's humour had proved to be the breaking-point.

In a moment the Terrible Three and Grundy were piled up in a struggling, yelling heap in the doorway of the study.

Grundy by this time was like a raving lion, and Tom Merry and his chums had more than their hands full.

"Help, you chaps!" panted Tom Merry. "Blake—D'Arcy, lend me a hand, for goodness' sake. The idiot's gone mad! Lend—Yooooop!"

One of Grundy's wildly-waving fists landed home on Tom's nose, and Tom reeled backwards and sat down hard, clutching his nasal organ convulsively.

"Wow!" he gasped.

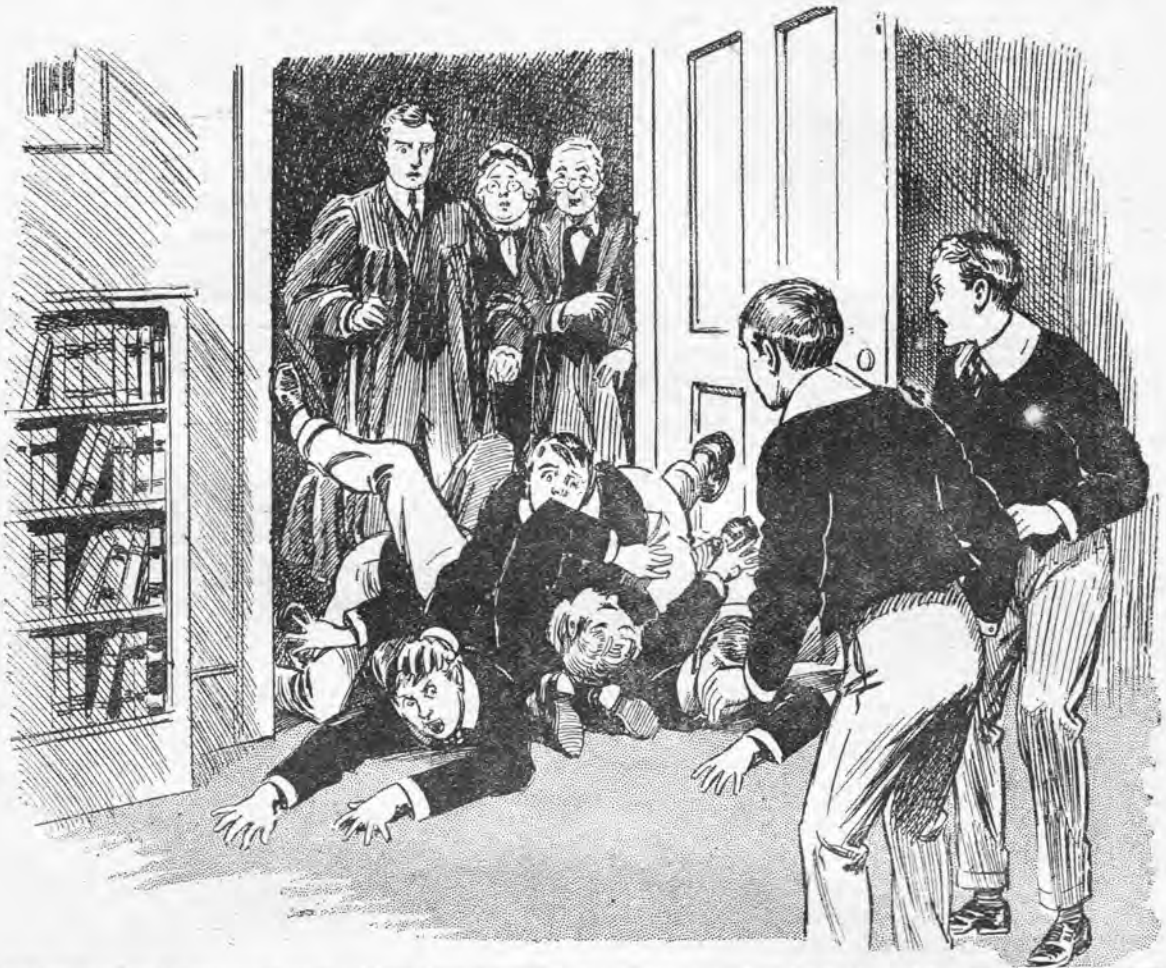
"Pile in, chaps!" grinned Blake.

It really was time for somebody to interfere, and Blake & Co. piled in with a will. Grundy vanished from sight beneath the scrum. Monty Lowther had already vanished from sight, but his wails of woe could still be heard. It was highly probable that Lowther had by this time deeply repented him of having desired to wait to see Grundy's expression on discovering that he had been spoofed.

There was a crowd of fellows on the scene now—the uproar was bringing them along every second. Wilkins and Gunn looked on with startled faces. Grundy was bellowing to them to lend a hand, but Wilkins and Gunn were wise in their generation. When Grundy was in a scrap his friends usually got from him just as many punches as his foes.

But they were alarmed, knowing that somebody in authority was certain to investigate the uproar before long. Nor could they close the door—the struggling mass of arms and legs prevented any such attempt.

There was a sudden alarmed cry of "cave," and the crowd of onlookers round the doorway, melted and parted like mist before the sun. Then came a well-known voice in scandalised and exceedingly annoyed tones:



The Terrible Three and Grundy were piled up in a struggling, yelling heap in the doorway of the study when a well-known voice reached their ears. "Boys! What—what— Good gracious!" In the open doorway stood Mr. Railton, together with Dr. Crankley, the new Head, and his wife. "Oh, my hat!" gasped Wilkins. "That's done it!"

(See Chapter 4.)

"Boys! Wh-a-a-t— Good gracious!"
"Oh, my only hat!" groaned Wilkins.

In the open doorway, above the struggling heads and arms and legs, Wilkins recognised the newcomers on the scene. One was Mr. Railton, the School House master; the other two persons, Wilkins had seen saying good-bye to the departing Dr. Holmes on the steps of the School House some few minutes ago. One was Dr. Crankley, the new Head, and the other was Mrs. Crankley, his wife. But while Mr. Railton merely looked scandalised and exceedingly annoyed, the good doctor and his wife looked absolutely horrified.

"Oh, crumbs!" groaned Wilkins. "Now for it!"

CHAPTER 5.

Too Much "Grub"!

IT was really most unfortunate.

Having seen Dr. Holmes glide away in his car, Dr. Crankley had expressed a wish to be shown over the school before dinner, a formality which both Mr. Ratcliff and Mr. Railton had been invited to attend. It was quite a natural wish. Since he had arrived at St. Jim's, Dr. Crankley had been closeted with Dr. Holmes, busily discussing affairs at St. Jim's, and there had been no time for the new Head to take his bearings, so to speak.

So he had suggested a brief and informal stroll round, and Mr. Railton had smilingly agreed. He wished now, as he glared at the scene in the doorway of Grundy's study, that the new Head had suggested some other method of passing the time away before dinner.

It was really doubly unfortunate, because Mr. Railton had only just been explaining what a peaceful and well-behaved House the School House was.

And quite naturally, as he glared at the unlucky scene, Mr. Railton felt very annoyed indeed. It rather made him look very much what the juniors would have called a "fibber."

There was certainly nothing peaceful or well-behaved in that corner of the School House, at all events.

It became more peaceful, however, as Mr. Railton's voice rang out. Even Grundy ceased to struggle then. Grundy might have gone on had it been Mr. Lathom, or even Mr. Linton. But he had a very wholesome respect for the authority that was vested in the person of the Housemaster of the School House.

In less than a couple of seconds the fight had ceased, and the juniors began to sort themselves out with varied gasps of alarm.

There came a little nervous scream from little Mrs. Crankley as she sighted Grundy and Lowther. Both of them had badly-damaged features—both sported eyes that were obviously booked for deep mourning, and both mopped dismally at streaming noses.

They were not the only ones either. Blake and Tom Merry also mopped crimson noses, while several others dabbed at cut lips, and caressed damaged eyes. And their clothes were in a sad state—collars and ties were torn adrift and jackets split and dusty and rumpled.

They all blinked at Mr. Railton and then, as they sighted the horrified faces of Dr. and Mrs. Crankley behind, they all but collapsed in sheer dismay.

"Oh, bai Jove!" groaned Arthur Augustus.

He went crimson and hid himself behind Tom Merry. That junior's one longing was, that the lights would suddenly fail.

But they did not fail.

"Grundy, Lowther, Merry—" gasped Mr. Railton.

"What—what ever does this disgraceful scene mean? I am astounded—disgusted! I—I—"

Mr. Railton, for once, was quite at a loss for suitable words. Actually, such scenes were not entirely new to his scholastic experiences. He had met them before and he knew exactly what to say and how to deal with them. Scathing remarks and a judicious use of a cane usually settled such little affairs.

But the circumstances were a little unusual now. Scathing remarks and a cane were out of place in the presence of a new headmaster—and especially in the presence of a lady.

"Really, boys!" he managed to stutter at length. "I am ashamed of you. Go at once and make yourselves respectable. Afterwards proceed to my study and await me there when I will inquire into this scandalous disturbance."

"One moment, Mr. Railton, please!"

It was Mrs. Crankley, and she looked eagerly and triumphantly at the Housemaster as she interrupted. Mr. Railton looked at her, and a slight expression of vexation overspread his face. He looked as if he was finding the new Head and his wife more than a little trying.

"Yes, Mrs. Crankley?" he asked.

"This," exclaimed Mrs. Crankley, glancing at the sheepish, dismal-looking juniors with more sorrow than horror, "is one more striking example in support of the dietetical theories both Dr. Crankley and myself hold. I trust, Mr. Railton, that you do not propose to punish these poor boys."

"Ahem! My—my dear madam—"

"It would be unjust indeed to punish them for what, I am convinced, is not their fault, Mr. Railton. The fault is in the system—a system that is brutalising instead of uplifting. Am I not right, Charles?"

"Er—Yes, my dear! Most certainly—most decidedly!" said Dr. Crankley, blinking through his big glasses at the hapless Tom Merry & Co. "The system is wrong—quite wrong! The diet at most public schools is one more suited to the needs of ditch-diggers or savages, than boys. It demoralises and brutalises instead of creating intelligence and encouraging moral uplift. This—this alarming and, er—horri-fying scene is certainly a striking example of the sad results of over-feeding and a diet over-rich in proteid and other toxic-forming properties. Meat and suchlike toxic-forming and over-stimulating foods and drinks debase, and arouse primitive passions that lead to quarrels, and also the desire to indulge in brutalising games and sports. I am sure, in the face of this evidence, that you will now quite agree with our views, Mr. Railton."

Mr. Railton did not look as if he did. He just looked extremely bored. But before he could frame a suitable answer, Mrs. Crankley went on with enthusiasm.

"The boys are certainly not to blame, Mr. Railton," she said, giving Tom Merry a pitying smile. "In the first place, they are away from home, and away from all feminine influence. The poor boys require someone to look after them—to look after their physical and moral welfare. I propose to give all my time and attention to their personal needs during my stay here."

"Oh!" said Mr. Railton; it was all he could say aloud!

"But that is not all," went on the lady firmly. "One must get down to the root of things, Mr. Railton. I am convinced from what I have already seen here, that there are many urgent matters crying out for reform at this school. And the most important is certainly the matter of diet. Both Dr. Crankley and myself are determined to bring about a much-needed reform in that direction without delay. Are we not, Charles?"

"Most decidedly, my dear!" agreed Dr. Crankley, nodding. "I am very thankful that I have been given a free hand to put my own scholastic ideas and theories into practice here. They have already proved a great success at the last school where I instituted them."

"Oh, indeed!" said Mr. Railton, a faint trace of sarcasm in his tone. "May I ask if it was a great success from the point of view of the staff and pupils, Dr. Crankley?"

Dr. Crankley coughed.

"Well, I must admit that the new regime did not meet with the approval of either scholastic staff, domestic staff, or boys. But the board of governors were delighted with the results. Ahem! It is a very difficult matter to change old habits and customs, however; but, as the boys will soon learn, it is for their own good, and they will very soon get used to it."

"I doubt it!" said Mr. Railton grimly. "However, if you will permit me, I will order these boys to go and make themselves respectable, and we can then proceed to look over the school, sir."

"Pray wait one moment, Mr. Railton," exclaimed Mrs. Crankley. "I am most anxious to prove my theories in this case. I am convinced that it was merely some simple, absurd little difference of opinion that resulted in this—this deplorable disturbance. Fed on an over-stimulating diet, brutalised by indulgence in violent games, with intelligence dulled and nervous systems irritated in consequence, the slightest thing rouses tempers and causes quarrels. It

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would be very interesting to discover what led to this—this sad scene."

"You wish me to investigate the affair here and now, madam?" said Mr. Railton, speaking as politely as he could.

"Most certainly!"

"Yes, indeed," added Dr. Crankley. "Yes, yes—if you would kindly. Thank you!"

Mr. Railton bowed.

"Merry," he said sternly, "you have heard Dr. Crankley's order. You will relate frankly the cause of this disgraceful happening!"

"It—it was only a lark, sir," stammered Tom. "Just a rag!"

"Who started it?"

"It—it was my fault, sir," murmured Monty Lowther. "I was pulling Grundy's leg—"

"You—you were what, boy?" gasped Dr. Crankley.

"Pulling—I mean, spoofing—that is to say I was joking with Grundy. He was asking for a certain fellow, and I told him I'd seen the chap going into the Fourth Form-room. That's what started it."

"But surely there was nothing in that to cause such a commotion?" said Mr. Railton.

"Ahem! I should have told him that it was early this morning when I saw the chap, you see," stammered Lowther. "Grundy rushed off to find the chap, and when he came back and I told him it was this morning he—he was rather annoyed. It was my fault, sir!"

"I think I understand," said Mr. Railton, half-smiling. "But even so, I see no reason why such a simple joke should cause Grundy to begin fighting. I presume Grundy began it?"

"He—he was very annoyed, sir," mumbled Tom Merry. "You see, somebody had boned his grub—"

"Had—had what?"

"Boned—I mean, pinched—that is to say, had raided his tea," gasped Tom, blushing. "It made him—ahem!—mad—"

"Well, wouldn't anybody be mad?" grunted Grundy indignantly. "I was only away five minutes, seeing the Head go, and when I got back with Wilky and Gunn every blessed thing had been boned off the table!"

"Grundy—"

"Look at it!" snorted Grundy, nodding at the table. "Look at the empty dishes! As if a fellow wouldn't be mad!" he added excitedly. "Cakes, tarts, everything gone! Over a quid's worth of grub gone!"

Dr. Crankley's eyes gleamed, and he stepped into the study to look. Mrs. Crankley followed, looking triumphant. Grundy, always frank, and never mincing his words, was supplying more support for their theories.

"I do not understand your extraordinary claims, boy!" said Mrs. Crankley, staring at the table. "You say everything had gone off the table. Why, there is an exceedingly excessive amount of food on the table now. There is enough toast for at least a dozen boys in addition to two eggs and bread-and-butter."

"Bai Jove!"

CHAPTER 6.

Poor Old Baggy!

"BAI JOVE!"

That reiterated remark came involuntarily from Arthur Augustus. There were at most twelve slices of toast on the table, and very little bread-and-butter.

"How many boys were you expecting in to tea?" asked Dr. Crankley, raising his eyebrows.

"Only the three of us, sir," said Grundy. "Wilkins and Gunn and me!"

"And—and you state that there was more foodstuffs on the table when you left the study, boy?" ejaculated Dr. Crankley.

"Yes, sir. Somebody had scoffed the lot—cleared it out!" snorted Grundy. "There was a three-pound plum-cake—"

"Wha-at?"

Mrs. Crankley gave a little scream.

"And about eighteen jam-tarts, and a dozen cream-buns, and some chocolate eclaires, and some sardines, and some bloater-paste, and a dozen eggs, and these two dishes were full of strawberry and raspberry jam, and there was some biscuits and some ham-sandwiches, besides some custard tarts!" grumbled Grundy. "Nearly every blessed thing has been boned!"

"G-good gracious!"

"Bless my soul! Terrible!"

Dr. Crankley and Mrs. Crankley looked at each other. They seemed to be absolutely horrified at Grundy's revelation. Mr. Railton looked merely irritated and bored.

"This—this is really far worse than I could have suspected," confessed Dr. Crankley, shaking his head regretfully. "And am I to understand, boy," he added, turning to Grundy, "that the appalling list of disgusting and demoralising foodstuffs you have just mentioned were intended for the consumption of three boys?"

"Well, we thought of keeping half of the plum-cake for supper," confessed Grundy. "Now it's gone! Wouldn't you be mad, sir?"

Evidently all Grundy was thinking about was the tragic loss.

"This, Mr. Railton," gasped Mrs. Crankley, "is a most deplorable state of affairs! It is far worse than I had feared. It is absolute cruelty to the dear little boys themselves to allow them to partake of such disgusting and exceedingly unhealthy orgies. They do not understand the importance of right food and drinks, and it is for us, their mentors, to teach them what to eat and drink, and to institute right habits of living. It is utterly beyond me why the authorities of any school can allow such disgraceful orgies!"

"I presume they have purchased these harmful comestibles secretly, and possibly are in the habit of partaking of them secretly," said Dr. Crankley.

"Not at all," said Mr. Railton calmly. "The boys are allowed to have tea in their studies, and are at liberty to consume whatever they desire."

"Most undesirable and pernicious!" murmured Dr. Crankley. "The village tradespeople must be forbidden henceforth to supply any member of the school with such unhealthy foodstuffs."

"The foodstuffs Grundy mentioned," said Mr. Railton grimly, "were doubtless purchased at the school tuckshop, sir."

"G-good gracious!"

Again Dr. and Mrs. Crankley looked at each other—aghast.

"This sort of thing must be stopped without delay," said the new Head firmly. "I was about to ask you to show me the school tuckshop, which, I am convinced, is quite unnecessary to any school and should be closed. Mr. Ratcliff, with whom I have already discussed the matter, fully concurs with my views. I trust you also agree with me, Mr. Railton."

"I am afraid I am unable to do so, sir," said Mr. Railton frankly. "The boys here are healthy and happy, and the school tuckshop, in my view, is an excellent institution. Occasionally some greedy fellow oversteps the limits. But a dose of medicine from the matron usually adjusts matters. The boys indulge in healthy and robust exercises, like foot ball and cricket, that counteract any evil effects which over-indulgence in pastries may possibly bring about. That is my view, sir, and is, I believe, the considered view of Dr. Holmes."

"I am sorry to hear that, Mr. Railton," said Dr. Crankley, frowning. "But I am still hopeful of converting you to my views. In any case, I feel it my bounden duty to bring about the reforms I have already decided upon. Colonel Meddly-Boomer, whom, as you know, is a governor of this school, fully shares my views, and he is most anxious for me to try the experiment at St. Jim's. I shall—What—what was that?"

Dr. Crankley started violently—everybody started violently. For at that moment a most distressing and extraordinary noise echoed round the study. It was a groan—not an ordinary common or garden groan, but a truly agonising groan as of a soul in torment.

"What—what?" gasped Mr. Railton. "What boy made that noise?"

"It—it was none of us, sir!" gasped Tom Merry. "It sounded like—"

"Groooooooooogh!"

Once again the groan rang out—louder and more acute this time. At the same moment the table shook.

With a sudden exclamation Mr. Railton stepped forward and raised the tablecloth. Then he jumped.

"Bai Jove! Twimble!" gasped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

It was Trimble undoubtedly—Baggy Trimble, the fattest, laziest and greediest boy in St. Jim's. He lay sprawling beneath the table, his hands clasped over his ample waistcoat. His fat face was almost green in hue, save for sundry crumbs and smears of jam and chocolate upon it.

"Groooooooooogh! Oooooooooogh!"

Trimble rolled and groaned in dire agony.

"Well," gasped Grundy, forgetting for the moment who was present. "Well, the fat, greedy thief! He's been here all the dashed time! Look at him! My cake—look what's left of it! Great pip! He's scoffed nearly—"

"Grundy!" thundered Mr. Railton. "How dare you? Trimble, come out from under that table this instant! You hear me?"

"Wow!"

But if Trimble heard he heeded not. He just writhed and groaned! Trimble was paying dearly for his latest sin. Had Trimble been in the position to take his time he would, doubtless enough, have been quite capable of disposing of the three-pound cake and the rest of the good things without any serious after-effects.

But the fat junior had had very little time—less than five minutes, in fact. And he had made the very most of that time. He had simply stuffed the things down him one after the other, and then, on hearing Grundy & Co. returning from the quad, he had stuffed his pockets full of tarts, and had dived under the table, taking what was left of the big cake with him.

While Grundy & Co., and Tom Merry & Co. had been in the room, the fat Fourth-Former had been seated beneath the table, munching away cheerfully. But even Trimble had his limit—and even he had stopped when Mr. Railton had appeared with Dr. Crankley and his wife.

And while Trimble had sat there, still as a mouse, queer, horrible feelings had begun to stir within him. He had "scoffed" the good things too fast—very much too fast even for Baggy. As the moments flew by this became more and more evident to the fat youth. He became dizzier and dizzier, and the inward pains grew more and more acute. The very floor under him and the table above him seemed to heave and sway.

He sat still with an awful feeling of trouble to come, strange and weird emotions shaking him inwardly. The conversation in the room, at first, was too vitally interesting to him even in those moments of agony to miss.

Closing tuckshop—no more decent grub!

But gradually Trimble's inward and painful emotions became far too acute for him to heed the conversation going on. And then, flesh and blood could stand the horrible pains no longer, and he had given vent to that first hair-raising groan.

As Mr. Railton and Dr. and Mrs. Crankley and the startled juniors gazed down at him blankly, Baggy Trimble gave vent to a whole series of dismal, heart-rending groans.

"Groooooooooogh! Oooooooooogh! Oh dear! Groooooooooogh! Ow! Oh-ahhhhhh!"

"Oh, dear, dear, dear! The—the poor, poor boy!" gasped Mrs. Crankley.

Mr. Railton set his lips grimly. He understood what was the matter, just as did Grundy & Co., and Tom Merry & Co., and the crowd of startled, staring fellows round the doorway.

"Trimble!" gasped the Housemaster. "Trimble—Bless my soul! The boy has gorged until he is ill! Trimble, come out, this instant!"

"Wow! Go away!" groaned Trimble. "Oh-ooooooooogh!"

"The poor little boy is certainly very ill!" said Mrs. Crankley in great alarm. "Please allow me to attend to him, Mr. Railton."

Mrs. Crankley stooped, and bending under the table, she laid a gentle hand on Trimble's perspiring brow. Trimble gave a strangled yelp that made the good lady jump away quickly in alarm.

"Groooooooooogh! G-go away!" he almost shrieked. "Leave me alone—don't touch me! Yah-oooooooo! I'm dying! Gug-gug-ooooooooogh!"

Trimble flopped down to the carpet again and fairly wallowed in dismal anguish.

"This—this is most distressing!" said Dr. Crankley. "Dear me! I am afraid this dreadful scene is yet another example of the deplorable results of the misguided—nay, wicked—system of allowing boys personal control of unhealthy foodstuffs. Mr. Railton—if you would kindly—ahem!—deal—"

"Certainly, sir!" said Mr. Railton. "I will—Ah! Here is Kildare! Kildare, will you kindly take Trimble up to his dormitory and put him to bed? He has made himself very ill by over-eating. If he should happen to be no better in the morning he must go to the sanatorium."

"Yes, sir!"

Kildare strode to the table and got a strong grip of Baggy. The fat junior howled and made frantic and pathetic efforts to free himself. But the captain of the school hung on, and next moment Trimble came fully into view—and a truly pathetic and woebegone figure he made.

The moment he was on his feet, however, he swayed, and then, with a convulsive jerk, he dragged himself free and fairly bolted for the door. Kildare hurried after him, and it was to the bathroom the hapless Trimble led him. A few seconds later, weird and woeful sounds were proceeding from behind the locked door. Trimble was paying dearly for his sins.

"Terrible!" exclaimed Mrs. Crankley, as Trimble vanished. "That unfortunate boy is a speaking example of the results of unfettered appetite and unwholesome food. He is the most unhealthy boy I have ever seen. His case

must certainly be dealt with without delay. He must be put on a strict diet at once. I will give instructions to that effect, Charles."

"It must be done, most decidedly, my dear!" said Dr. Crankley.

"It would certainly do good in Trimble's case," said Mr. Railton grimly. "And now—"

He led the way out of the study, and Dr. Crankley and Mrs. Crankley followed. They continued their tour of inspection, and as they went, the juniors looked at each other. It was a most eloquent look. They were dumb-founded, and they were more than a little dismayed.

"Well, I'm blowed!" ejaculated Gunn. "Did you ever see such—such a giddy pair!"

"Cranks!" mumbled Lowther. "Giddy faddists! Oh, my only hat! What's going to happen now?"

"Goodness knows!" said Tom Merry. "They mean well, of course. The old top is a decent sort, I should think, and so's the old girl. But—but—"

It was a most expressive "but."

Leaving Grundy growling and grumbling about his lost tea, the juniors dispersed, discussing the strange happenings excitedly and not a little glumly. What they had heard was certainly not comforting at all. Dr. and Mrs. Crankley might be kind and decent. But—but they were obviously an exceedingly queer couple with the queerest of ideas. And it was only too plain that they intended to put those queer ideas to a practical test at St. Jim's. The juniors had been congratulating themselves on having escaped the terrifying prospect of being ruled by the iron and unjust hand of a tyrant like Mr. Ratcliff. But they began to wonder now whether the new Head and his wife would not prove to be something possibly worse than Mr. Ratcliff at his worst. There were ways and means of dealing with a tyrant—the juniors of St. Jim's had found successful means of dealing with Mr. Ratcliff on former occasions, but it was a different matter dealing with a faddist headmaster and his wife, who were acting with the kindest and best of motives.

The prospect certainly did look a trifle disturbing.

St. Jim's went to bed that night in a buzz of conjecture and expectation regarding their new Head. And the masters in private shared in the general apprehension and foreboding if the truth were known.

Mr. Railton especially was very apprehensive. The new Head Mr. Railton felt he could deal with, and possibly reason with. But Mrs. Crankley was another matter. The Housemaster was more than a little afraid of that good lady. Mrs. Holmes, Dr. Holmes' wife, had never interfered in school matters—she was scarcely seen from one week's end to another by St. Jim's in general. But Mrs. Crankley had already shown that she intended to be seen, and heard. It was a distinctly disturbing thought to Mr. Railton.

When the Fourth went up to bed that night they found a very pasty and shaky Baggy Trimble lying awaiting them. He blinked at Jack Blake pathetically as he came up to his bed.

"I—I say, you fellows," gasped Baggy, "I'm awfully ill, you know! Keep that beast Grundy out if he comes, won't you, Blake? He seems to think I scoffed his spread, you know. Of course I didn't. It's all a mistake!"

"We'll see he doesn't barge in here," chuckled Blake, with unusual sympathy. "You go to sleep, Baggy. You'll be better in the morning, old chap."

Baggy Trimble grinned faintly.

"No fear!" he said. "I'm going to be worse in the morning. I say, that old girl seemed jolly decent, you know—soft, and all that. I'm going to play up to her. If I can get in the sanny I shall be all right—no lessons, no canings, or lines, or anything. And I expect she'll put me on special diet, you know—jellies, and ripping puddings, and all that. He, he, he!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake.

Trimble evidently found it funny, and the Fourth in general seemed to find it funny. They roared. But they did not tell Baggy what Mrs. Crankley had said. They took pity on the fat youth, and they left him to find out for himself in the morning what that "special diet" would be. Certainly it would not come up to Baggy's expectations. The Fourth felt sure of that.

CHAPTER 7.

The Limit!

"FEELING better, old fat man?"

Tom Merry asked Baggy Trimble that question as, with Lowther and Manners and Blake & Co., they met the fat Fourth-Former on their way downstairs after rising-bell the following morning.

Baggy Trimble was looking a trifle seedy, but he grinned.

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at the question. He had been thinking things over very deeply since the evening before. Sanny was a very nice retreat to a fellow who disliked lessons especially, and with a really kind-hearted—or "soft," as Baggy put it—lady like Mrs. Crankley to look after one it would be doubly and trebly pleasant. Baggy envisaged a delightful, lazy existence in a nicely-warmed ward, with Nurse Rivers to attend to every want and with Mrs. Crankley ever bringing extra delicacies for the invalid.

Whilst under the table in Grundy's study, in the throes of acute indigestion, Trimble had certainly heard something of the conversation between Dr. Crankley, Mrs. Crankley, and Mr. Railton. But he had a very hazy notion of what it meant. In any case, Baggy had forgotten all except the order that if he was no better by morning he was to go into sanny.

And Baggy had every intention of going into that quiet resting place, where masters ceased from troubling, so to speak, and the weary were at rest.

"I'm worse—much worse!" he announced. "I say, you chaps, I look jolly ill, don't I?"

"You certainly look a bit more like a white-washed lard-barrel than usual," said Blake. "You look seedy, Baggy!"

"Oh, good!" grinned Baggy. "It's a go, then! I'm going to have a jolly good brekker in Hall, and then I'm going to ask to go into sanny, as Railton said I could if I was worse. I'm going to be worse."

"You fat idiot!" said Blake bluntly. "If you'll take my advice, you fat spoofer, you'll be better, not worse! Drop it!"

"No fear!" said Baggy, looking round. "There's another thing, you know. That beast Grundy's after me, and if he knows I'm better he'll slaughter me! Just because of a few measly cakes and things, you know! As if I took 'em, anyway! But if I'm in sanny the beast can't get at me—see? I'm going!"

"You fat ass!"

"Rats!" retorted Trimble.

And he rolled away, grinning. Though he was far from feeling himself that morning, the fat junior seemed to be in quite cheery spirits.

Tom Merry & Co. went out into the quad for a stroll, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy suddenly gave vent to an exclamation on sighting his minor, Wally, with his chums, Jameson and Curly Gibson. All three fags looked exceedingly wrathful and disgusted.

"Bai Jove! What is the mattah, Wally?" demanded Arthur Augustus as the Co. came abreast of the trio. "You look like moulting owls, you know!"

Wally stopped. It was plain he was bursting to unburden himself of something.

"You fellows seen the new Head's wife?" asked Wally.

The juniors nodded and chuckled.

"She—she's a giddy coughdrop!" groaned Wally. "We're fed-up—absolutely fed-up! She came into the blessed Common-room last night and caught us toasting giddy herrings. She fairly went off at the deep end—mad, I think!"

"Potty!" said Jameson glumly. "It was awful! She called us little dears, and wanted to kiss old Wally here," he added, with a chuckle. "But it looks as if things are going to be awful, you fellows."

"Frightful!" groaned Wally. "She's going to look after us like a—giddy mother, she says—going to read fairy stories to us and knit blessed 'mitts' and rotten things like that for us."

"Great Scott!"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake.

The thought of the young rascals and scapegraces of the Third wearing mitts and having fairy stories read to them struck Tom Merry & Co. as being highly humorous.

"It's nothing to laugh at, you silly asses!" snorted Wally indignantly. "What price us, with her always hanging round slobbering over us? B-r-r-r-r! It's sickening! And now that cad Piggott's fairly let us down!"

"What's he done?" grinned Tom.

"He sneaked to old Selby about us—told him it was I who chucked an inkball in class!"

"Of course it wasn't!" said Lowther sarcastically.

"Well, it was, as it happened," grunted Wally. "But it was a pure accident that it happened to hit old Selby instead of young Levison. Anyway, Selby thought Piggott did it, and, instead of playing the game, Piggott sneaked, and I got it in the neck. But we took it out of Piggott—ducked him in the fountain."

"But where does Mrs. Crankley come in, Wally?" laughed Tom.

"Piggott—the silly ass!—got a cold, and he was coughing and snivelling like one o'clock when the old girl butted in. She fairly slobbered over him!"

"Weally, Wally—"

"Well, she did!" snorted Wally in deep disgust. "Said

we were little neglected lambs—needn't laugh, you silly asses!—and she said she'd see we came to no harm in future. She's going to dish out cod-liver oil—"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"And we've all got to wear red-flannel vests!" continued Wally in withering scorn. "Fancy us wearing flannel next to the skin! But we've got to do it. The old girl's going into Wayland this morning to get the blessed flannel, and she's going to get all the female staff on the job making chest-protectors. They're going to be dished out to us to-night to wear in the morning. Nice, ain't it? Treating us just like infants—us, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry & Co. roared with laughter. But it was evidently no laughing matter to the Third Form heroes. Wally & Co. glowered and marched away, snorting.

Tom Merry & Co. were still chuckling when they marched into breakfast. The sad state of affairs in the Third was certainly funny, and as the news was passed round the dining-hall grinning glances were focused on the Third Form table from every side.

But very soon the Fourth Form was the centre of attention.

For once Baggy Trimble was one of the last to take his place at the Fourth table for breakfast. Baggy was very crafty, and he had deemed it just as well not to appear too eager for breakfast that morning. A fellow who was feeling ill would scarcely be expected to rush for the grub as usual. That was Baggy's view, and he came slowly to his seat, trying to look faint and feeble.

He did not notice the fact that every fellow in the Form was eyeing him with a grin, and he only noticed that something was wrong when he sat down and looked at his plate.

It was not such a large plate as usual—in fact, it was a very small plate. And instead of the rashers of bacon, to be followed by bread-and-butter and marmalade, there was nothing on the plate but a couple of very small and distinctly unappetising-looking biscuits. And at the side of the plate was a small mug in which was a queer-looking concoction that closely resembled orange juice.

Baggy blinked at it. Then he looked round at the grinning faces. Then he looked at the plates. Every plate had its usual supply of rashers, excepting his.

"I—I say, you fellows!" he fairly gasped. "What—where's my thumping breakfast? Who's jolly well pinched my brekker?"

Baggy glared, and then, without waiting for a reply, he stood up in his seat. Mr. Lathom looked at him over his glasses.

"Sit down at once, Trimble! What is the matter, boy?"

"Matter, sir!" snorted Trimble indignantly. "What about my breakfast? Somebody's boned my breakfast!"

"Somebody's what?"

"Boned—I mean pinched—that is to say stolen my brekker, sir!"

"Nonsense, Trimble! Your breakfast is before you. Are you not aware that you have been placed on a restricted diet, Trimble?"

"G-good lor'!" gasped Trimble. "M-me placed on a—constructed diet! Certainly not, sir! What awful rot, sir! I say, sir, I'm famished! I want my breakfast!"

In his sudden, terrible fear that he was going to be deprived of his breakfast, Trimble forgot his intention to "go slow."

"Your breakfast is before you, Trimble!" said Mr. Lathom sternly. "It is all you will get, my boy. I understand that you made yourself very ill last night by over-indulgence. I consider that Dr. Crankley has done an excellent thing in putting you on a special diet. It may possibly restore your figure to more respectable proportions, and undoubtedly will be of inestimable benefit to your health. Kindly sit down and proceed with what is before you."

Baggy Trimble almost fainted.

"And is this all I'm going to have for my breakfast?" he gasped, staring down at the plate and then into the mug.

"It is your breakfast, Trimble; you will get nothing else. The biscuits are tasteless but very nutritious, I understand, and in that mug you will find a little fruit juice, unsweetened. That will be your breakfast every morning, Trimble."

"Oh dear! And—and what about my other meals?" burred Baggy in horror.

"Mrs. Crankley has arranged for you to have light meals—breakfast, dinner, and tea only," said Mr. Lathom. "For dinner you will have no meat whatever, only a small plate of green vegetables, with a slice of hygienic bread and a cup of malted milk. You are to have no puddings whatever. For tea you will have one or two slices of hygienic bread with unsalted butter, and a cup of barley-water instead of tea. You will be given no jam or cakes of any kind, of course. That is your diet for the day, Trimble!"

"Oh dear!"

Trimble flopped back into his seat, utterly overcome with emotion. He could have wept. He jumped up again.

"Look here, sir, it's awful. I shall jolly well starve—"

"You will certainly not starve, Trimble!" snapped Mr. Lathom. "In your case such a diet will do a great deal of good. Kindly be seated and proceed with your breakfast."

"But, sir!" babbled Trimble.

"Silence! Another word, Trimble, and I will order you to leave the Hall, and I will also give you an imposition."

"Oh! But—but—"

"Silence!" thundered Mr. Lathom.

Mr. Lathom was usually the kindest and easy-tempered of men, but, like Mr. Railton, he had already made the acquaintance of the Head and his wife, and he was feeling quite upset and disturbed that morning.

Trimble made no further attempts to protest—then. He sat down looking really and truly ill now. The fellows felt quite sorry for him, and most of them tried hard not to grin. Trimble seemed to be quite bewildered. The blow had fallen, and it had "flattened" him. He took up one of the biscuits, after a hesitation, and bit at it. Then he spluttered and put it down again, an expression of utter disgust on his fat face. But he grabbed at the mug, and, though it was unsweetened fruit-juice, he drank it cautiously.

But he did drink it, and then he looked round him with a pathetic and hungry look on his features. Blake and several other fellows scarcely dared touch their own breakfasts. Trimble's looks would have moved a heart of stone. Very stealthily, with his eyes fixed on Mr. Lathom, Blake slipped along a fork with half a rasher of bacon on it, and Trimble popped it into his mouth. Arthur Augustus passed him another whole rasher, and Trimble swallowed that. Unfortunately, Mr. Lathom caught him in the act of stuffing it into his large mouth.

"Trimble! How—how dare you? Who—what boy has dared to pass on food to Trimble?" gasped Mr. Lathom.

Nobody answered. Trimble groaned. He felt hungrier than ever.

"Trimble, I will not ask you who passed you that food," snapped the Fourth Form master, "but I will keep you under close observation for the remainder of the meal. If I see any boys daring to pass you food I will punish both you and them very severely."

Nobody wanted to be punished severely, and Trimble went hungry away from the breakfast-table that morning.

In the quad outside he joined Blake & Co. as they joined the Terrible Three. They gave him sympathetic looks. Despite the undoubted fact that Trimble had "asked" for it, and possibly deserved it, the juniors could not help feeling sorry for him in his sad plight.

"Hard lines, old chap!" said Blake. "Too bad!"

"Much too bad!" said Lowther, trying hard not to grin. "How we shall miss you if you happen to drop down a grid or through a crack in the floor, Baggy. You'll be reduced to a shadow, of course. That is, unless you peg out beforehand."

"It's awful—frightful!" wailed Baggy. "What is a fellow to do, you chaps? I shall write home about it, of course. Such rotten tyranny? I'm not jolly well going to stand it, I can tell you!"

"Not thinking of trying for the sanny, after all, then?" queried Digby.

"No jolly fear!" said Trimble, with a shudder. "Me go in there, and be at the mercy of that awful old girl! No fear! Oh dear! Fancy a fellow having to go until dinner-time without grub, and then having rotten grub like that! I hope you fellows will back me up in my—my desperate plight. I suggest that you all club together every day and buy me plenty of tuck from the tuckshop—just enough to keep body and soul together, you know."

"Well, we'd buy you some now, only the giddy tuckshop's closed, of course, until noon!" grinned Tom Merry. "Poor old Trimble! I shouldn't be surprised if they didn't put the tuckshop out of bounds for you next!"

"Oh dear!"

"Hallo! My hat!" said Blake, staring across the quad. "It's open now—at least, Mrs. Taggles' there. She's not supposed to serve fellows before noon, but we'll get round her somehow. Come on, Trimble, we'll stand you some sort of a feed between us."

And after a cautious glance about them, Tom Merry & Co. took the almost weeping Baggy across to the tuckshop under the elms. It was somewhat unusual for Dame Taggles to be in the tuckshop at that early hour of the morning, and they rather wondered at it.

The door was open, and inside they could see Mrs. Taggles moving about. She seemed to be busy packing up boxes. After a cautious glance round, Tom and Blake led the way into the little shop.

Mrs. Taggles looked round and frowned.

"Please stay outside, young gentlemen!" she said. "You

"knows I'm not allowed to serve anyone before noon at any time, unless by special permission. And now—"

"Oh, come, Mrs. Taggles," said Tom Merry, putting on his most engaging smile, "I'm sure you'll just sell us a bit of grub for once—just a bob's worth, say!"

"Not a pennyworth, Master Merry," said Mrs. Taggles flatly. "It's as much as my job's worth to sell any more food out of this shop after being ordered to put that there notice on the door. I s'pose you've seen it, young gentlemen?"

The juniors had not seen the notice. But they soon did see it. It was a short notice—very short and very much to the point. It read as follows, and was signed by Dr. Crankley, the new headmaster of St. Jim's:

"NOTICE!"

"After to-day, the School Tuckshop will be closed until further notice, when it will be reopened for the sale of Hygienic Health Foods and Juvenile Games, etc., only."

"(Signed) CHARLES FADLEY CRANKLEY, D.D."

That was all, but it was much more than enough for Tom Merry & Co. They stared at the notice, and then they stared at it again. Trimble gave a deep and hollow groan from the uttermost depths of his fat being. The sentence that had been passed upon him was serious enough in all conscience, but he had cherished the hope that the fellows would rally round him and keep him well supplied from the goodly things in the school tuckshop.

Now that hope had faded away, and as he stared at the awful notice the hapless Baggy Trimble felt absolutely floored.

But it was a clean "knock-out" also for the other juniors. "Tuckshop closed!" gasped Tom Merry. "Well, my only hat! What a—what a rotten shame!"

"It is a shame, Master Merry!" said Mrs. Taggles indignantly. "That's just what I says myself—it's a shame! The pastries and sweets I sell here won't harm nobody! And now the new Head and his wife means to stock this shop with goodness knows what! As if 'ealthy boys want to eat highgeenic foods, and want to play games like snakes and ladders and tiddlywinks! It's redicalous, I say!"

"Oh crumbs! You mean they want to sell us games like that?"

"Yes, Master Merry. Mrs. Crankley, she comes to me and says as no more football or cricket things and the likes are to be sold here. She thinks as them games are dangerous and—and brutal. She suggests as we stock harmless indoor games, and she wants me to stock wool and needles and things, in case any boys would like her to teach them how to make cork-wool things and knit socks! I say it's redicalous!"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"Great Scott!"

"Cork-wool!" gurgled Jack Blake. "Oh, help! Oh, great pip!"

"And now you'd better run away, young gentlemen, in case you're caught here," said the kind old dame. "I'm sorry as I can't serve you; but you see that notice."

The juniors thanked Dame Taggles and stumbled out with feelings too deep for words. They walked into the School House, with Trimble groaning in their midst, and soon the amazing news was all over the House. It was talked of among seniors, and juniors, and fags, and a continual swarm of fellows went across to the tuckshop to see the notice for themselves. They simply could not believe it until they did. And all St. Jim's went into their respective Form-rooms that morning full of dismay and apprehension. They wondered what would be the next sensation for St. Jim's now they were under faddist rule!

CHAPTER 8.

Worse to Come!

ST. JIM'S was full of growls and grumbles that day—both among scholars, and masters, and domestic staff.

The closing of that ancient and useful institution, the school tuckshop, was an act which filled the fellows with deep indignation and dismay. Yet it could scarcely be looked upon as an act of tyranny. Undoubtedly the new Head meant well, and had acted thus from the best of motives, believing it was for the physical and moral good of St. Jim's.

Had it been done under the authority of a tyrant like Mr. Ratcliff, there would, doubtless enough, have been something more than growls and grumbles. There would have been hostile demonstrations and possibly serious trouble.

But the fellows of St. Jim's were decent fellows, with few

exceptions, and in this case they looked at the motive as well as the deed, and though they grumbled and growled indignantly they contented themselves with doing that—for the time being. Moreover, they had scarcely yet had time to grasp the full extent of the calamity.

Only Baggy Trimble seemed to grasp the full seriousness of the situation. That day was a terrible day for Baggy. He was obliged to make the best of his new diet, and all his pleadings and protestations were of no avail—excepting in that they earned him a crop of lines instead of extra "grub."

All his spare time that eventful day Baggy spent haunting other studies, begging a bit of toffee here and a bit of chocolate there, and a stale, left-over cake somewhere else. But Baggy realised even that could not last. With



"Grundy, you impudent boy, leave the Hall at once!" snapped your insolence. Go!" "Well, I'm not missing much, any food on the table as he clambered

the tuckshop closed, the fellows would soon have no supplies left for themselves, much less to satisfy Baggy.

And the masters had their grumbles, too. Certainly, the closing of the tuckshop affected them little. But already the queer new Head and his good lady were getting on the nerves of the scholastic staff more than a little. To have Mrs. Crankley—kindly and well-meaning as she admittedly was—chipping into school matters at every turn, as she did that day, did not please Messrs. Railton & Co. Indeed, it made them inwardly fume with helpless irritation and wrath.

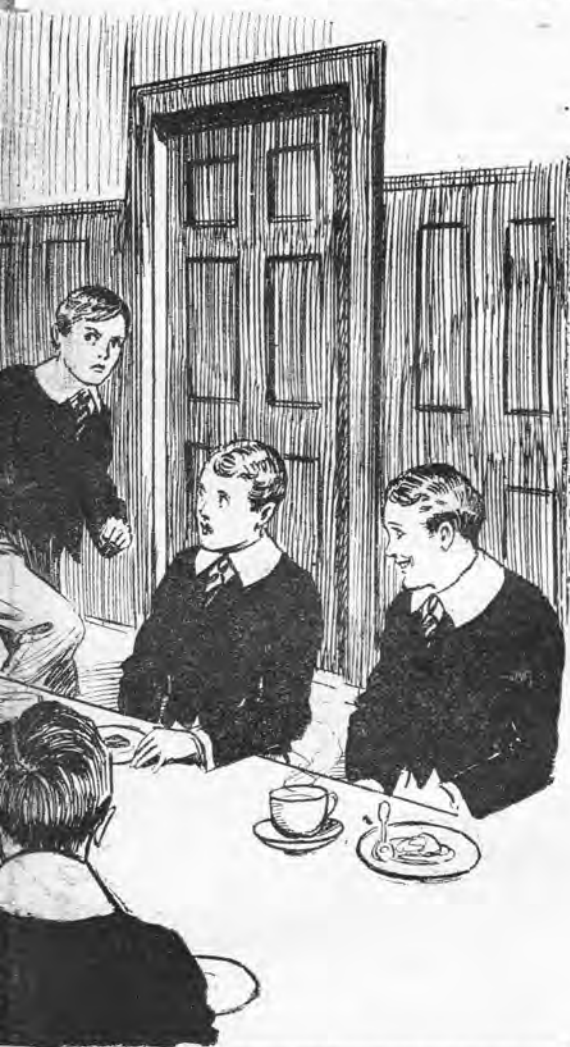
Scarcely had Form work started that morning when Dr. and Mrs. Crankley made a tour of the Form-rooms, criticising here and suggesting there. They complained of the "stuffy" rooms, and kindly but firmly insisted upon every window being flung open wide—to the wrath and discomfort of master and pupils. St. Jim's sat that day in

Form-room and study and shivered and fumed, realising their new rulers were fresh-air "fiends" in addition to food-faddists.

Moreover, Dr. Crankley very soon made it clear that he was contemplating still other "badly needed" reforms. The discovery that the cane was an article in daily use at St. Jim's filled him with horror. He soon made it known that he objected strongly to corporal punishment in any form.

This fact should have delighted the juniors and fags, at all events. But it did not—quite the reverse. Canings were preferable to lines and detention any day, and the fellows looked into the future dismally, contemplating spare time and holidays spent in wholesale lines and detention.

And protests from masters was as unavailing as from pupils. Meek and mild as he seemed, Dr. Crankley proved to be



Mr. Linton angrily. "And take one hundred lines for way!" grunted the Shell junior, sniffing at the meagre from his seat. (See Chapter 9.)

quietly firm and unyielding. Gerald Knox had already discovered that he was a distinctly "hard nut" to crack.

On the previous evening he had presented himself before the new Head at the time appointed, and though he had no excuse to offer for his rudeness and bullying in the railway carriage, he had ingeniously stated that the cigarette he had been smoking was a herbal cigarette for bronchial troubles!

Dr. Crankley had quietly told him not to add lies to his other sins, and after a scathing lecture he had dismissed the shaking prefect with a chill warning to be "careful" in future.

And Knox realised he would have to be very careful. Something in the mild grey eyes of the new Head told him that.

Altogether St. Jim's spent a very uncomfortable and apprehensive time that day.

Yet there was a certain amount of humour in the situation.

Stories of Mrs. Crankley's keen anxiety for the health and welfare of the "little dears" in the Third Form filled the rest of the school with joy and hilarity. At noon that day a very large consignment of red flannel and wool had arrived at St. Jim's, and it was known that the female staff were busily engaged—cheerfully or otherwise—in making chest-protectors and mitts for the unhappy fags. At breakfast-time the following morning half St. Jim's looked across at the Third Form table, anticipating a little harmless chipping at the expense of the unfortunate fags.

For some reason or other the Third were late in coming in, and the rest of the fellows were already seated when they turned up at last.

"Here they come!" chuckled Blake, as Wally D'Arcy suddenly appeared in the doorway of the dining-hall. "Get ready to give the dear little fellows a— Great pip!"

Blake broke off with a gasp.

"What the—"

"Bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The previous evening Wally & Co. had been loud in their indignant protests, and had made it known they did not intend to wear the red flannel chest-protectors. And the school in general had wondered if they would mutiny as they had vowed.

Now they knew. Wally & Co. were wearing their chest-protectors. But not next to the skin! They filed into the dining-hall in single file, Wally D'Arcy leading, wearing their red-flannel chest-protectors over their jackets!

The rest of the school had been expecting their arrival with grins and with humorous remarks all ready for use, as it were.

But now they just roared. A howl of laughter filled the usually quiet and sedate dining-hall at St. Jim's.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Marching in single file in the full glory of their red-flannel waistcoats, the young rascals of the Third took their places at the Third Form table amidst roars of laughter.

Even Mr. Railton could not help laughing.

Mr. Selby, the Third Form master, did not laugh, however. Indeed, it was said that he had never been known to laugh at anything. He was already annoyed at his Form's lateness, and now he stood up in his place and glared and glared!

"What—what— G-good heavens!" he gasped. "Upon my soul! You—you impudent young rascals!"

The last of the Third Form fags took his place, and the clatter of feet ceased. Mr. Railton came rustling up, his hand over his mouth.

"Boys!" he gasped. "How—how dare you?"

The fags ceased grinning. They looked at their House-master with very solemn faces.

"D'Arcy!" gasped Mr. Railton. "You are the head boy of the Form, I understand. What is the meaning of this farrago of nonsense? How—how dare you appear in the dining-hall in such ridiculous attire?"

Wally D'Arcy stood up. The young scapegrace looked very meek and surprised.

"Please, sir, what is the matter?" he asked. "We were given these chest-protectors last night, and were ordered to put them on. We understood that we were to wear them always!"

"Bless my soul! I—I— You impudent young rascal! You are perfectly well aware that chest-protectors are worn next to the skin, and not in that ridiculous manner. It is perfectly obvious that this is a daring and impudent joke."

"Please, sir, Mrs. Crankley didn't tell us how we were to wear them, sir. Don't you think they look nice like this, sir?"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"Now for fireworks!" murmured Blake.

Mr. Railton gasped and choked; whether in anger or in a desperate attempt not to laugh, was questionable.

"Take them off, this instant!" he gasped. "Do you hear me? Bless my soul! You shall be severely punished for this—this extraordinary affair! I—I—"

Mr. Railton broke off and frowned, for at that moment Mrs. Crankley sailed into the dining-hall on her usual visit of inspection.

"Any complaints?" murmured Lowther.

Mrs. Crankley sighted there was something amiss at the Third Form table at once, and she sailed across to it. As the old lady saw the chest-protectors she almost fell down in her astonishment.

"G-good gracious!" she gasped. "The—the poor little dears! They do not even understand how my chest-protectors should be worn. Such sad ignorance of vital hygienic matters—"

"Madam," exclaimed Mr. Railton grimly, "this is not ignorance, but a most daring and ridiculous attempt at a

practical joke! The young—young rascals will be punished most severely."

"Surely you are mistaken, Mr. Railton!" said Mrs. Crankley, smiling kindly at the meek-looking fags. "I am sure you are mistaken. It would be exceedingly unjust and heartless to punish them for what is undoubtedly their ignorance. It is entirely my fault in that I omitted to give them the necessary instructions as to how they were to wear them. It would hurt me very much to know that my thoughtless omission should cause the dear little boys to be punished. I beg of you, Mr. Railton, to give me your assurance that they are not to be punished in any way."

Mr. Railton frowned; Mr. Selby glared. But there was only one answer for the Housemaster to make. Mrs. Crankley was a lady—kindly and generous; she was also the headmaster's wife—a power in the school.

"Very well, madam," said Mr. Railton at length. "In the circumstances, I can do nothing else but agree. Boys, you will take off those—those things at once; after breakfast you will proceed to your dormitory and will put them on in the proper manner."

"Oh, yes, sir! Thank you, sir!"

There was a chorus of subdued chuckles as the fags started to untie the tapes that held the flannel squares across their jackets. It was done at last, and Wally & Co. stuffed their chest-protectors in their pockets, still looking meek and surprised. Then with a sweet smile at the young rascals Mrs. Crankley left the dining-hall with Mr. Railton.

It was then that the fellows of St. Jim's began to make the dreadful discovery—a discovery only a few of them had made up to now.

Scarcely any of them had missed, as yet, the usual appetising odour of bacon that usually greeted their nostrils on entering the dining-room, for they had been too taken up with the Third Form "red-waistcoat brigade," as Lowther termed it.

But now, as they all turned their attention to the tables before them, they all missed the appetising odour—they also missed the bacon.

It simply wasn't there. And neither were the customary eggs.

CHAPTER 9.

Food Faddists All!

"W HAT the thump—"

"Great Scott!"

"What the dickens does this mean?"

Exclamations of astonishment were going up from every part of the dining-hall. Staring at the plates

did not seem to make any change in the plates or what was on them.

The food at St. Jim's had always been ample and good. Breakfast at St. Jim's was a meal fit to start a brisk April day on for everybody. Nobody ever grumbled—unless it was Trimble, who always grumbled. But the fellows certainly felt they had something to grumble about now.

On the small plates were a few spoonfuls of a queer, flaky substance that looked like bran—only more so, as Blake put it. It was decidedly unappetising to look at. It also proved to be decidedly unappetising to smell and taste.

Tom Merry tried a little, and shuddered and grimaced. It tasted like sawdust.

There was nothing else on the plates. Nor was there any marmalade, or butter, or porridge on the table. Each fellow, however, had a cup and saucer, and in the cup was a strange, steaming milky-white liquid.

"What the dickens does it mean, chaps?" gasped Tom Merry, tasting the liquid. "I say, this is really the outside edge! This stuff tastes like cocoa without any cocoa in it, or sugar either. As for this sawdust stuff—"

"And no marmalade or butter!" said Lowther warmly. "Great pip! Is this a blessed change of diet for us, too?"

"Oh, crumbs!"

There were startled exclamations and horrified looks at Lowther's suggestion. Until then nobody seemed to have suspected the truth. Immediately a babel of indignant voices was heard.

"Silence!" called Mr. Linton. "Merry, why are you pulling that extraordinary face? Are you ill, my boy?"

"No, sir! But I'm afraid I soon shall be!" gasped Tom. "I've just swallowed some of the stuff in my cup, sir."

"Merry!"

Mr. Linton frowned as several fellows chuckled.

"Nonsense, Merry! The liquid in your cup is Spooner's Malted Cocoa—a highly nourishing and sustaining beverage. It contains, I understand, the body-building elements and vitamins necessary for health, and—hem—"

Mr. Linton broke off with a slight cough.

"But—but this stuff on our plates, sir?"

"That is Skinner's Patent Digestive Breakfast Food. It is, I am given to understand by Dr. Crankley, a most valuable and—hem—nourishing food, containing elements that give strength to the body without introducing toxins and poisons as do most ordinary articles of food. Kindly proceed with your breakfasts without so much noise, boys."

"But we—can't eat this stuff, sir!" objected Tom, speaking for the Form as a whole. "It's awful! There isn't even sugar in either food or drink. Are we to have nothing else, sir?"

"Nothing whatever, Merry!" said Mr. Linton uncomfortably. "In future this will be the staple breakfast for all at St. Jim's, varied occasionally by dried and fresh fruits

instead of the digestive breakfast food. Dr. Crankley has decided from to-day that the diet at this school shall be completely reformed. No meat or game of any kind, and no pastry whatever will be served, and their places will be taken by vegetables and fruits—er, er—hygienic foods."

"Oh, my hat!"

Tom Merry sat down, overcome in dismay. George Alfred Grundy, however, was not overcome—unless it was with wrath and indignation.

Though the old order might change, giving place to the new, George Alfred Grundy did not change.

"But, sir," he snorted, "does that mean this muck is all we're going to have for brekker?"

"Grundy, how dare you? How dare you characterise the food placed before you in such terms?"

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"Well, what else is it?" said Grundy indignantly. "Tuckshop closed, and now this—this rotten treatment! It's too thick, sir!"

"Grundy, you impudent boy!" gasped Mr. Linton. "Another word from you and I will order you out of the dining-hall."

"But look here, sir—"

"Silence! Sit down this moment, Grundy!"

"But I want my breakfast!" said Grundy sullenly. "And I'm jolly well not going to eat this—this awful stuff!"

Mr. Linton stood up and pointed to the door.

"Grundy, leave the Hall at once!" he snapped angrily.

"And take one hundred lines for impudence. Go!"

"Well, I'm not missing much, anyway!" grunted Grundy, with a sniff at the food on the table.

And with that Grundy clambered from his seat and marched out—still hungry.

Meanwhile, disturbances had taken place at every other Form table in the dining-hall excepting the Sixth—and those lofty individuals looked more than a little mutinous. The Hall was in a buzz of dissatisfaction and indignation at the new diet. Fortunately, Mrs. Crankley had departed, or she might have heard things that would have surprised and distressed her.

But the masters had expected hostility towards the new order of things, and on the whole they were tolerant towards the grumblers. As a matter of fact—though Mr. Railton and the rest of the staff did get through their breakfast—they ate their food with obvious distaste and irritation.

Only Baggy Trimble seemed at all pleased at the state of affairs. He was already on special diet himself, and he seemed to take an unholy delight in the fact that others were to suffer as well as himself.

That morning most of the St. Jim's fellows left their breakfasts untouched, while all the ones left the hall hungry.

"I'm not standing it for one!" scowled Aubrey Racke, as the Shell streamed out. "My pater pays big fees for me to be here, and he'll jolly soon kick up a fuss when I tell him the sort of grub we're going to get."

"The blessed governors are behind that old fool Crankley!" snorted Crooke. "It's not for our sakes they're cutting down the grub and shoving cheap, uneatable muck on us; somebody's putting money into his rotten pockets."

"That's it!"

"Don't talk rot!" said Tom Merry. "I'm up against this new grub as much as anyone. But it's plain for anyone to see that the new Head and his wife honestly believe their theories are sound and will benefit the school."

"Rot! Look here, Tom Merry, we ought to jolly well rebel against things!" snorted Racke. "I vote we start a barring-out, and that'll soon put paid to that old fool's game! Closing the dashed tuckshop, and now this! It's too thick! You're supposed to be skipper of the Lower School, and it's up to you to do something!"

"Hear, hear!" said Scrope.

"I'd do something quickly enough if the Head was a tyrant like old Ratty, for instance," said Tom, frowning. "But what the thump can we do in this case? The Head seems such a decent old chap, and one cannot treat him as a blessed tyrant. If we can think of a way to get it stopped without causing trouble, though, we'll jolly soon do it."

"Yah, funk!" said Racke. "You funk starting a rebellion! Nice skipper—I don't think!"

Tom Merry took a step towards the cad of the Shell, and Racke scuttled away. But Tom's face was glum as he went out into the quad with his chums, who were equally glum.

"Something will have to be done, though," said Blake. "It's too thick for words. And goodness knows whether this is the end of the giddy reforming bisney!"

"They'll be forcing the fags to wash their necks next!" said Lowther, with a grim chuckle. "Old Wally scored this morning, anyway. What price the red-waistcoat brigade!"

"The young imp certainly did get away with it!" grinned Tom Merry. "There'll be trouble in the Third before long! Those young—Hallo, Figgy wants us!"

George Figgins, the lanky leader of the New House juniors, came across to the School House fellows. His face was glum as were the faces of Kerr and Fatty Wynn, his chums. Indeed, Fatty Wynn looked absolutely in the depths of gloom and despondency.

"Cheerio, Figgy!" said Tom Merry. "How goes it with you chaps?"

"Rotten!" growled Figgins, his usually sunny face glum. "Every thumping thing's rotten! You chaps in the School House are jolly lucky, I can tell you! We're all in the same boat regarding these fooling new restrictions, but you haven't got a Ratty to deal with like we have."

"You don't deal with him—he deals with you!" grinned Lowther.

"But we're going to deal with him, for a change!" said Figgins grimly. "We're fed up to the chin with his rotten temper. Since he's known a new Head was coming

and that he wasn't going to have the job himself, he's been like a blinking wild bear! He knows everybody was laughing at him over the sell he got, and he's taking it out of us!"

"Hard luck!"

The School House juniors looked very sympathetic. They knew Mr. Horace Ratcliff of old. Many a time and oft had they thanked their lucky stars that they were not members of the rival House and under his tyrannical rule.

"But he doesn't cane you now, deah boys?" said Arthur Augustus. "The old tywant surely knows that the new Head and Mrs. Cwankley stwongly object to canings?"

"He's licking us more than ever!" snorted Figgins. "He's going about making things hum for everybody. But we're going to stop it. And that's why I wanted to see you chaps. We'd rather take lickings than lines, as a rule. But Ratty's lickings are too thick! He's a brute with a cane. I want to know if you chaps will lend us some clobber from the School House Dramatic Society's property box."

"Bai Jove!"

The School House fellows stared.

"But what for?" demanded Tom Merry. "You've got plenty of clobber of your own in the New House. Besides—"

"We don't happen to have just the clobber we want," grinned Kerr. "You see, we want an old lady's rig-out. I remember you had just the outfit I want at that last concert you chaps gave. Well, is it a go?"

"But what's the game?" asked Tom Merry.

"It was Kerr's idea," explained Figgy, with an admiring glance at his Scottish chum. "He's going to do it to save me. I'm to be licked at nine this morning. We were bunging pillows about in the dorm this morning, and Ratty heard the rumpus and rushed in. He was just in time to get a pillow in his chivvy, and it fairly bowled him over."

"Phew!"

"That did it! I had to own up I chucked it to save the other fellows getting it, too," said Figgy ruefully. "That's how the matter stands. I'm to be flogged; it's bound to be that, for Ratty was raving—and Ratty's going to deal with me at nine this morning, unless Kerr's wheeze comes off."

"It should do!" grinned Kerr. "It will be easy as pie to impersonate Mrs. Crankley!"

"Bai Jove! Weally, Kerr—"

"Impersonate the Head's wife!" gasped Blake. "Oh, my hat!"

"Just that!" smiled Kerr confidently. "Ratty knows the old girl is down on canings, and he takes jolly good care neither the Head nor she catches him at it. Well, I'm going to drop on him this morning—as Mrs. Crankley. And I'm going to wind his giddy clock up and make him sit up! Incidentally, I'll save old Figgy from a jolly stiff hiding."

"Phew! What a rattling good wheeze!" said Blake.

"You'll do it, too, Kerr!" said Tom Merry, with enthusiasm. "There isn't a fellow at St. Jim's can touch you at the game. Even Lowther can't! Jove, it should come off!"

Kerr nodded.

"It will come off all serene!" he said. "Figgy earned a licking, I suppose, though it was an accident. But he won't have earned the licking Ratty will give him. In any case, old Ratty needs a thumping stiff lesson, and he's going to get it!"

"Hold on!" said Blake. "How's it going to be worked, though? Lathom's gone sick—got a rotten cold through those giddy open windows yesterday. Linton's taking the Fourth, Ratty's taking the Shell, and Railton's taking the Fifth, the Head looking after the giddy Sixth!"

"Great Scott! Is that a fact, Blake?" gasped Tom Merry.

"Yes. I forgot to tell you chaps, I heard Railton telling Linton. You Shell fish had better look out this morning," grinned Blake.

"Oh dear!"

The Terrible Three groaned at the prospect.

"It makes no difference to our wheeze, though," said Figgy. "It's Ratty's study in the New House I'm to report at. It means I shall be late for lessons, I suppose. Thank goodness Ratty isn't taking the Fourth! He's a cad and a beast and a brute, and—"

"Oh, indeed!"

The juniors spun round as if they had been shot.

It was Mr. Ratcliff. He had come along, unobserved and unheard. Mr. Ratcliff, as was well known, could move about like a cat. It was one of his little failings to come unawares upon juniors when they least expected it, and it was a failing the juniors detested.

"Oh, bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus, in great dismay.

Mr. Ratcliff eyed the juniors with eyes glittering with spite.

"So I am a cad, a beast, and a brute, Figgins!" he said,

in biting tones. "Oh, very well—very well, Figgins! I shall make it a point of remembering your remarks when I deal with you shortly."

"Oh!" groaned Figgins. "I—I didn't hear you coming, sir, or I wouldn't have said it aloud like that!"

It was scarcely the sort of apology to please Mr. Ratcliff.

"No doubt, Figgins—no doubt at all!" he said, in a grinding voice. "I do not doubt for one moment that is the case. You would be scarcely likely to make such remarks had you known I was coming. I am very glad indeed that I did hear them. I am afraid that you, Figgins, will be very sorry, however, that I heard them."

Figgins undoubtedly was sorry, and he looked it.

"I am obliged," went on Mr. Ratcliff, "to go early into the Shell Form room in order to look up the Form work for morning lessons, as, in Mr. Linton's absence, I shall be taking that Form. Instead of reporting for punishment to my study, Figgins, I shall be obliged if you will kindly report to me in the Shell Form room a few minutes before nine o'clock. I will then deal with you."

"Ye-es, sir."

Mr. Ratcliff glared at each of the juniors, and rustled on hurriedly across to the School House, for it was already getting on for nine. The chums of the School House and their friendly rivals of the New House looked at each other.

"Well, that's done it!" said Tom. "Fancy the old bouncer sneaking up like that!"

"Just like him!" said Kerr. "He's always sneaking about trying to hear things. Well, I fancy that makes things easier, Figgy. Mrs. Crankley's more likely to visit the Form-room than Ratty's study, after all. I'll have to risk being late."

"You still mean to do it, then?" gasped Blake.

"Certainly!" said Kerr calmly. "Why not? I expect suspicion will fall on me if I'm the only fellow late in the Fourth. But that can't be helped."

"Yes, it can," said Fatty Wynn stoutly. "I'm going to be late, too, and if these Fourth chaps will back us up—"

"Like a shot!" said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!" grinned Arthur Augustus. "We'll all be late, and then nobody can dwp on you alone, Kerr."

"I wish we were in the Shell for this morning, after all," grinned Blake. "It would be worth it to see that bouncer ticked off."

"Well, never mind gassing about it now," said Kerr briskly, glancing up at the school clock-tower. "We've none too much time. If you really mean to back us up, Tommy, lead on to that clobber, old son. I shall change in—Nunno! By Jove! Let me change in your study, Tommy."

"Just the place!" said Tom Merry. "Come on! I wouldn't care to be in your boots, old chap! But if you really mean it, come on!"

And Tom Merry led the way indoors to Study No. 10, and the rest of the conspirators followed, grinning. Only Figgins was looking thoughtful. He did not like the thought of his chum taking such risks for his sake, and he hoped deeply that all would go well with the scheme. And soon, in Study No. 10, Francis Kerr, aided by willing helpers, was busily engaged in changing himself into a remarkably lifelike impersonation of Mrs. Crankley, the Head's wife. It was certainly a most daring scheme, but Kerr was a remarkably clever hand at the game, and as they looked at the finished result of their labours the chums felt that he was not taking so much risk after all.

CHAPTER 10.

Changing the Programme!

THE Shell were early to a man in entering their Form-room that morning.

The news that Mr. Horace Ratcliff, M.A., was to take the Form was the reason for that. It was really an excellent reason. Mr. Linton did not like unpunctuality, and he usually rewarded unpunctuality with fifty lines—sometimes less, rarely more.

But Mr. Ratcliff was not Mr. Linton. It was known that he usually came down very heavily on unpunctual Fifth-Formers. Moreover, it was well known that "Ratty" was on the warpath. The Form were looking forward with many misgivings to the morning's work under him. They

felt instinctively that it would not do to upset him at the very beginning of lessons by appearing late in the Form-room.

So nobody appeared late, excepting George Figgins, who, though not a member of the Form, had been requested by Mr. Ratcliff to attend there at nine.

Figgy had arrived late purposely; in the first place, because he wished to give Kerr plenty of time, and also because he desired an audience to witness the proceedings.

As Figgins walked into the room, Mr. Ratcliff fixed a pair of glittering eyes upon him, and, lifting the lid of the desk, he took out Mr. Linton's cane—a cane that had not been used lately at all.

"Figgins," he snapped acidly, "I believe I ordered you to appear here at nine o'clock! It is now two minutes past nine!"

"Sorry, sir!" said Figgins.

"Impudence will make matters worse for you, Figgins!" said Mr. Ratcliff, glaring. "I am now about to punish you most severely for an outrageous attack on your Housemaster."

"It was an accident, sir," said Figgins. "I aimed the pillow at somebody else."

"It was a deliberate assault!" said Mr. Ratcliff viciously. "As you must know, an assault on a master is a very serious matter—a matter that, in the ordinary way, would earn a boy expulsion."

"I'm quite ready to go before the Head, sir," said Figgins promptly. "I'm fairly certain I should then get justice. It was an accident, not an assault."

Mr. Ratcliff bit his lip. He was scarcely likely to take the matter before the Head. He would much rather deal with it himself. He would then be quite certain that Figgins did get punished. Dr. Crankley was a very queer gentleman—extraordinarily queer—and Mr. Ratcliff felt fairly certain that he would see justice done. But the New Housemaster did not wish to see justice done at all. He just was itching to flog George Figgins.

"I have no intention of taking you before Dr. Crankley, Figgins," he articulated, glowering. "I—I would not dream of bringing such a matter before his notice—a matter I can deal with quite satisfactorily myself. Figgins, touch your toes!"

Figgins hesitated a brief second, and then, making a quite unnecessary shuffling noise with his feet, he bent slowly and touched his toes.

Mr. Ratcliff raised his cane aloft, his spiteful eyes glittering.

At that moment the Form-room door swung quietly open and an elderly lady entered.

It was the rather portly, and rather short figure of Mrs. Crankley—or so everyone excepting Figgins himself and the Terrible Three supposed.

She closed the door gently and advanced into the room, adjusting her gold-rimmed spectacles on her nose—a little habit of hers. Francis Kerr was certainly remarkably clever, for he did it to the life.

Figgins remained as he was, touching his toes. Mrs. Crankley suddenly seemed to grasp the scene, and she stopped, raising her hands in horror.

"G-good gracious! Mr. Ratcliff!"

There was a wealth of horrified surprise in Mrs. Crankley's tone and the way she spoke the Housemaster's name.

Mr. Ratcliff muttered something—fortunately nobody heard it—under his breath and slowly lowered his cane.

"Mr—Mr. Ratcliff!" exclaimed the old lady in tones of shocked surprise. "Does this deplorable scene mean—am I actually to understand—that you were about to chastise this poor boy with the brutal implement you hold in your hand?"

Mr. Ratcliff opened his mouth and closed it again. The class looked on in gleeful anticipation. None of the conspirators had taken them into their confidence, but though they suspected nothing, all the Shell minors guessed that "Old Ratty" was booked for a "ticking off." Ratty had been fairly caught in the act at last!

"I—I madam!" stammered Mr. Ratcliff. "I—I beg of you to withdraw! I was about to chastise this boy—this young villain—for a dastardly assault on his Housemaster. He has richly earned severe punishment. He—he actually threw a pillow at my head in the dormitory this morning. I was sent crashing to the floor and was hurt most severely."

"It was an accident, ma'am!" Figgins spoke with his head between his legs, for he was still touching his toes.

"It was a pure accident. I was bunging the pillow at somebody else. I appeal to you for justice, ma'am!"

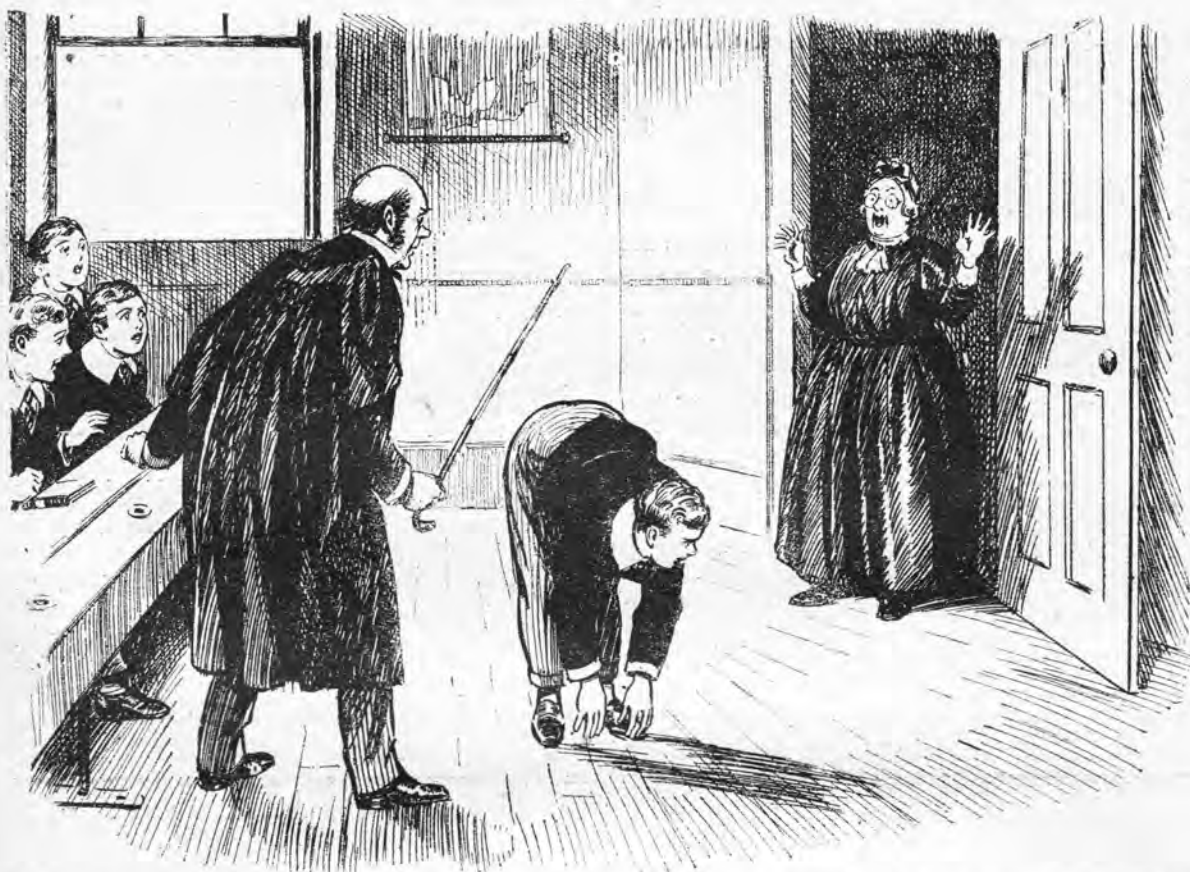
"Figgins!" thundered Mr. Ratcliff. "How dare you! Stand upright this instant! Be silent, boy! Madam—"

"Mr. Ratcliff," gasped Mrs. Crankley, patting Figgins on the shoulder kindly. "How—how can you be so unkind to the poor boy? I am convinced—he has such a frank, open face—that he is speaking the truth."

ANSWERS

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Figgins bent down slowly and touched his toes. But at the precise moment that Mr. Ratcliff raised his cane the Form-room door swung quietly open and a figure, resembling that of Mrs. Crankley, the new Head's wife, appeared upon the threshold. "G-good gracious! Mr. Ratcliff!" she gasped in horrified surprise. "Am I to understand that you are going to cane this poor boy?" (See Chapter 10.)

"And I, madam," gasped Mr. Ratcliff, "know that he is not! Believe me, madam—"

"I am afraid I cannot do that, Mr. Ratcliff," said Mrs. Crankley mildly. "You see, I am a very good judge of faces. And this poor boy has such a frank and truthful face."

"And—and do you suggest?"—Mr. Ratcliff almost frothed at the mouth—"do you suggest—I—I am amazed, astounded, madam! Before these boys—I—I—"

Words failed the Housemaster of the New House. To be called a liar before a class of boys by the headmaster's wife was really too much. It certainly amounted to that. Mr. Ratcliff glared and glared and stuttered.

Mrs. Crankley faced him calmly, her hand still patting Figgys's shoulder.

"Mr. Ratcliff," exclaimed the good lady, "I am very glad indeed that I arrived in time to stop this—this brutal—this appalling scene of cruelty!"

"M-mum-madam!"

"It is nothing less!" said Mrs. Crankley, touching her glasses again. "I am surprised—shocked, Mr. Ratcliff! And I am burning with indignation—indignation that you, a big, strong man, should have attempted to strike this poor boy. Caning—personal chastisement—is a relic of barbarism. It should hold no place in a modern, civilised school. It is debasing and demoralising, both to master and to the unfortunate pupil. I am determined to put a stop to the shocking and disgraceful practice at this school."

"Mum-madam—"

"I had hoped that my views would have been brought to the notice of the masters here—indeed, I understand that the other masters have ceased the practice—all excepting you, Mr. Ratcliff," said Mrs. Crankley chidingly. "I have heard with horror and dismay that you are still habitually using the cane."

"I—I—I—"

"The practice must stop, Mr. Ratcliff. I appeal to you. I forbid you to use the cane again on any of these poor darlings! I forbid you to punish this poor boy in any shape or form. He has already suffered enough, I am sure, in

dreadful anticipation of the brutal flogging you were about to administer, sir!"

"Madam," stammered Mr. Ratcliff, almost beside himself with helpless mortification and rage, "this—this—before these boys—is too much! Never in my scholastic career have I been subjected to such—such insulting—yes, insulting behaviour on the part of a lady. I—I protest—protest most strongly and—"

Mr. Ratcliff stopped, breathless. Mrs. Crankley held out her hand.

"Kindly give me the cane, Mr. Ratcliff," she said gently but firmly. "It should take its place among the relics of the past in the school museum. Thank you!"

As in a dream, the astounded master handed over the cane. His face was a sight. Mrs. Crankley seemed to hesitate, and then she held it out again.

"On second thoughts, Mr. Ratcliff," she said smoothly, "I think you had better take it and destroy it yourself. Have I your promise to destroy the cane and to inflict no further canings on these unfortunate boys?"

"Madam," panted Mr. Ratcliff, stretching out a hand to take the cane. "It is not for me to refuse you. I am bound to agree, though I must strongly protest against—"

Swish!

"Yow-ow!" yelled Mr. Ratcliff.

The Housemaster jumped back, wringing his hand.

There was a startled, horrified gasp, and the Shell Form stared as if thunderstruck.

Mr. Ratcliff, the Housemaster of the New House, senior Housemaster at St. Jim's, second in importance only to the Head, had been caned before their very eyes!

For as Mr. Ratcliff held out his hand to take the cane Mrs. Crankley had actually brought it down—hard—on his palm!

It was unheard of—almost unbelievable!

Yet it was true! Mr. Ratcliff, with eyes almost starting from his head—stood before them, wringing and claspings his burning palm convulsively. His face was a most alarming sight.

"There!" exclaimed Mrs. Crankley, breaking the cane across her knees with quite unladylike vigour. "You have now had a personal demonstration of what it feels like to be caned, Mr. Ratcliff. I hold the view that a little practical demonstration is worth any amount of theory. I am sure, my dear Mr. Ratcliff, that you will now understand how exceedingly painful a caning is to the victim, and I sincerely trust that the experience will deter you from inflicting such pain again upon the unfortunate boys placed in your care. Good-morning!"

And before the almost hysterical Mr. Ratcliff could give his views on the subject Mrs. Crankley sailed majestically towards the door.

But she never reached it. For at that moment there was a gentle rap at the door, and it opened to reveal an elderly lady, rather short and portly, and wearing a kind, benevolent smile, and a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles, which she touched gently as she entered the room.

It was Mrs. Crankley—the real Mrs. Crankley this time!

A sudden gasp—a gasp of utter bewilderment—went round the Form-room.

The fellows stared and stared. Mr. Ratcliff, still hugging his hand, stared as if transfixed, his jaw dropping in his sheer stupefaction.

The hapless impostor's jaw dropped, too. It was a most tragic moment for Kerr of the New House. He stood and blinked at Mrs. Crankley, and then, as that good lady gave a little shriek on sighting her double, Kerr awoke to electrified action.

In a blinding flash came a vision of a cab with his luggage piled on top, taking him away from St. Jim's for good and all, and, not liking the vision, Francis Kerr acted promptly.

In that terrible moment Kerr felt deeply thankful for the fact that Dr. Crankley and his wife were fresh air "fiends," and that the Form-room window was wide open.

In one bound he had reached it, and, pulling up his skirts, the New House junior leaped up on to a desk, scattering the fellows to right and left, and the next moment he had vanished over the gill.

A wild cry, like that of a wild beast, floated after him

from Mr. Ratcliff. But Kerr was already too far away to hear it. With his skirts held high, and his trousers showing beneath, he flew for his life.

Not until he had reached the wood-shed did he stop running. There, hoping against hope that he had not been seen—though it was scarcely likely with everyone in class—Kerr tore off his disguise. He had his own clothes on underneath, and in a very few seconds he was scudding for the School House again. But he gave the window of the Shell Form a very wide berth. As he scudded along the wall several heads suddenly showed out of the Fourth Form window, which was on the far side of the wing. The heads belonged to Fatty Wynn and Blake & Co., and Blake called desperately to Kerr.

"Here you are, Kerr—here, quick!"

Kerr stopped under the window. There was no time for questions, and as Blake and Wynn and D'Arcy reached down to him, he made a spring, and they dragged him over the window-sill into the Form-room.

He collapsed on to a desk, panting.

"Get into your place, old chap!" said Blake urgently, as the rest of the Form stared. "Old Linton's outside; he's been kept talking by the Head in the passage outside. Quick!"

"Oh, good!"

The daring impersonator dropped into his place, deep thankfulness in his heart. If Mr. Linton had not entered the Form-room yet, and if he had not been seen, then he was safe enough!

"How did you go on?" breathed Blake.

"All serene!" mumbled Kerr, still breathing hard. "I caned old Ratty—"

"Bai Jove! What?"

"Caned him!" grinned Kerr, his eyes on the door. "Gave him a rare lick with his own cane to show him what being licked was like. But just as I'd done it, in walks Mrs. Crankley herself. It was rotten luck. But I got clear. You'll hear all about it soon enough!"

"Phew!"

(Continued on next page.)



Address all letters: The Editor, The "Gem" Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Write me, you can be sure of an answer in return.

FARTHING!

A KEEN reader of the GEM wants to know if it's true that at one period British pennies were issued with two deep indentations across them which almost divided them into quarters. It is true; the idea being that a fourth part of the penny could easily be broken away should it be necessary. Hence we have the term "farthings" or "fourthings." This same correspondent wants to know, too, if farthings are legal tender. As far as I know they are legal tender, but only up to four at a time, so my chum, who has a hefty collection of farthings may find it a difficult job to dispose of them. I should be rather interested to hear how he gets on in this direction.

THE V.C!

"Cadet," of Southport, wants to know when the Victoria Cross was instituted. January 29th, 1856, is the date, my chum. It may interest this correspondent to know that all our Victoria Crosses are manufactured from the cannon taken from the Russians at the battle of Sebastopol.

HE WHO LAUGHS LAST!

"Ted," of Blackpool, writes and tells me that his school mates had a good laugh at his expense the other day, when he was speaking of the Dodo bird. His chums declared that there was no such bird, and there never had been. But they're wrong. The Dodo, a fairly large bird, used to be found in Mauritius; but it became extinct towards the close of the seventeenth century. Here's a case, then, of he who laughs last laughs longest! Good lad, Ted!

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GOOD NEWS FOR CYCLE BUYERS!

A bike of renown for half-a-crown down can now be obtained by any of my readers, as the Mead Cycle Company, Inc., of Birmingham, are willing to supply a high-grade cycle to anyone on these terms. The buyer pays the balance in small monthly instalments while riding the machine for business and pleasure purposes. Intending purchasers should write for the company's latest catalogue, which gives interesting descriptions and beautifully coloured illustrations of twenty-eight new season's models.

"ST. JIM'S IN A QUANDARY!"

By Martin Clifford.

That's the title of the next extra-long story of Tom Merry & Co. Now that Dr. Crankley has put into operation his peculiar reforms, the boys of St. Jim's find themselves up against it. Their one idea now is to get rid of these irksome reforms. See how they get on in next week's grand yarn, chums.

"BEYOND THE SILVER GLACIER!"

By Arthur S. Hardy.

Look out, too, for another ripping instalment of this amazing adventure story staged in the heart of Africa. It's bang full of thrills and exciting situations.

"THE WALKING MATCH!"

This is another jolly little poem from the St. Jim's Rhymester. All of you know the quality of these verses, so there's little need for me to praise them here. You'll like next Wednesday's poem, anyway. Order your copy of the GEM in good time.

Cheerio, chums!

Your Editor.

Write to me if you are in need of advice, chums—readers' letters are always welcome.—Ed.

"Cave!" whispered Herries.

From the passage outside came a sudden commotion, and the sharp, hysterical voice of Mr. Ratcliff could be heard, evidently speaking to Mr. Linton. The next moment the door was flung open, and Mr. Ratcliff, with the startled Mr. Linton behind him, came dashing into the room.

He glared round him, his face black with rage. He glared at Fatty Wynn, and then at Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy in turn. Then his face went red, and his eyes glittered with bitter disappointment.

"As I say, Mr. Ratcliff," exclaimed Mr. Linton, eyeing his colleague in great distress, "it is utterly impossible for the miscreant to have been any one of these boys. The only boy who is absent is Figgins. I have been talking in the passage with Dr. Crankley for several minutes, and nobody could have passed me unobserved."

Mr. Ratcliff clenched his fists—possibly one of them still throbbed and burned—and his face became fiendish.

"But I will find him!" he panted, his voice hoarse. "I will discover his identity, and either he or I will leave St. Jim's this very day. He shall not escape me, never fear! I have actually been caned—caned by a villain impersonating the headmaster's wife, Linton! You understand—caned! But I will find him, the audacious young rascal!"

And the New House master dashed out again—evidently still hoping to find the miscreant ere he vanished into thin air.

But Mr. Ratcliff was wrong—he did not find him!

Several minutes passed, and the juniors had commenced their Form work, when the door opened and Figgins entered. There was a cheery smile on Figgins' face as he sighted Kerr at his desk, and he winked at him.

"Ah! Here you are, Figgins!" exclaimed Mr. Linton, looking round. "Mr. Ratcliff has allowed you to come, I presume?"

"Yes, sir," said Figgins meekly. "Shall I go to my place now, sir?"

"Certainly, Figgins!" said Mr. Linton, eyeing Figgins curiously. "Kerr, kindly show Figgins the place."

"Oh, yes, sir! Certainly, sir!"

Kerr showed Figgins what they were working on, and under cover of the book Kerr was able to ask a question.

"Well, how did it go? What happened, Figgy?" he breathed.

"Nothing happened!" chuckled Figgins softly. "It worked like a charm, old top! Good old Kerr! The dear old girl demanded to know what it meant, and Ratty had to tell her. She actually as good as told him it served him right. Oh, it was a scream! The old girl may be cranky, but she's a decent old sport! Anyway, Ratty had to let me go—didn't even line me—he was too flattened. I bet—"

"Silence!" called Mr. Linton. "Kerr, if you have shown Figgins the place kindly leave him and get on with your work."

"Oh, yes, sir!"

And after that there was silence in the Fourth. But at morning break Blake & Co., and Figgins & Co., and Tom Merry & Co. heard all, and were told all. Very soon the story was all round the school, and it served to bring joy and hilarity to all who heard it.

Despite his vow, Mr. Ratcliff did not discover the miscreant—luckily for Kerr! The conspirators wisely kept their own counsel, and though many in the Fourth and Shell guessed whom the culprit was, they kept it to themselves, knowing what would happen to Kerr, if it did leak out.

And though Mr. Ratcliff did his utmost to find out the culprit, his investigations came to nothing. He caned nobody that day—and for many days afterwards. Kerr's little scheme had certainly been a success. Unfortunately it did not have any effect on the general state of affairs. The tuckshop was still closed, and the new diet and food restrictions were still in force. And St. Jim's, thinking of these things, went to bed that night seething with indignation and dissatisfaction.

CHAPTER 11.

A Wheeze at Last!

"I've got it!"

It was Monty Lowther who made the emphatic statement that he had "got it."

What that "it" was his chums could not imagine, and they stared at him.

The chums of the School House were strolling in the quad after dinner the next day. And though it was after dinner Tom Merry & Co. felt hungry and desperate; indeed, practically the whole of the school was feeling just the same. Certainly, the masters pretended to eat their food and like it; yet they obviously did not like it. But like the rest of the school they had either to eat it or go without.

Moreover, they had pledged themselves to support the

new reforms, and to give the new Head's theories on the question of diet and suchlike a thorough trial.

The juniors, and seniors, and fags, and the domestic staff, however, had given no pledge. They grumbled and they groused, and bolder spirits talked darkly of mutiny.

Yet how could they mutiny? The only fellows who really seriously demanded it, and who said nasty and spiteful things concerning Dr. and Mrs. Crankley, were fellows who dared not mutiny.

Fellows like Grandy, and Tom Merry & Co., and Figgins & Co. would have mutinied quickly enough had the faddist rulers of St. Jim's been other than they were.

But the doctor and his wife were so obviously sincere and well-meaning, so kindly and thoughtful of the welfare of their charges in other ways, so enthusiastic and keen, and so trusting in their belief that the fellows of St. Jim's would honourably support them, that decent fellows scarcely contemplated such a thing as mutiny.

Yet Tom Merry & Co. had no intention of sitting down and doing nothing. They realised, as did the seniors, that something had to be done to alter the unpleasant state of affairs. That morning the climax had come in regard to the matter of food. On the notice-board had appeared the new rules and regulations, signed and framed by Dr. Crankley.

They referred to matters of food chiefly, though many irksome rules were added, including an iron rule regarding open windows, the wearing of "fancy" clothes—a rule that brought dismay to Arthur Augustus—and other minor matters.

But the chief rules were in respect of food. After that day no foodstuffs whatever were to be brought into the school by scholars under grave penalties, if that rule was broken. After that day also masters only would be allowed tea in their studies when on duty in the dining-hall—seniors and juniors were to take tea in Hall!

These two rules alone proved to be the last straw.

It completely "knocked out" the intentions of all who had intended to bring stacks of "grub" from Rylecombe and to have gorgeous spreads in their studies to make up for what they did not get in Hall. Racke almost wept when he read the rules, whilst Trimble almost fainted in disappointment and dismay. He never had any money to buy "grub" with, but he had had great hopes of "planting" himself on the fellows who had!

But—that was not all. The notice also hinted at new regulations to come which would deal with sports and games and bounds. It was well-known that Mrs. Crankley objected to cinemas, and it was considered highly probable that Wayland would be placed out of bounds sooner or later.

Something had to be done!

The seniors held a meeting on the subject, but it came to nothing. And Tom Merry, before noon that day, likewise called a meeting. But that also came to nothing. Scores of suggestions were put forward from boffin the new Head in oil—Baggy Trimble's suggestion—to the suggestion that the whole school should go on hunger-strike—which was Grundy's notion. And as the meeting was composed of both School House fellows and New House fellows, it naturally ended up in a free fight as such mixed meetings usually did!

Hence the frowns of hopelessness on the faces of Tom Merry & Co. as they paced the quad just now. And really the position did seem hopeless!

Yet when Lowther suddenly whooped and announced that he had "got it," they did not understand for the moment.

"Got what?" demanded Tom Merry. "If you mean the pip, that's what we've all got, you silly—Oh, You don't mean you've got an idea, Monty?"

"Just that!" grinned Lowther. "Listen to your uncle! You remember what happened yesterday—Kerr's great wheeze? It came off a treat!"

"Well, what the thump—"

"Why shouldn't another wheeze like that, come off?" said Lowther, his eyes glimmering. "Look here. Supposing Dr. Short, the school doctor, came here and found us being fed on such muck, what would he do?"

"Goodness knows!" grinned Tom. "Go off at the deep end, I should think. He believes in beef-steak and suet-puddings—good, sound, substantial grub—for growing fellows! He isn't a chap who'd have any patience with fads or faddists."

"Just so!" said Lowther triumphantly. "Well, supposing he does come here? Supposing he comes along and roundly condemns the new diet?"

"No go!" said Tom, shaking his head regretfully. "Our new Head is a chap who doesn't believe in doctors at all—not ordinary doctors, anyway. He believes in nature-cure and all that rot. He wouldn't be likely to take any notice of old Short."

"But he would if Short threatened to expose the state of affairs—threatened to spin the yarn to the newspapers and to the chaps' parents," said Lowther enthusiastically.

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"Don't you see? Railton and the other masters would back him up, and the Head would be obliged to listen to him and take notice."

"H'm!" murmured Tom, looking interested at last. "I suppose he would. But—would Dr. Short do it—how would we get him to come? It wouldn't work there, Monty."

"I'm not suggesting he should come!" grinned Lowther. "What about me as Dr. Short—just as old Kerr was Mrs. Crankley, yesterday?"

"Phew!"

"Great!" yelled Tom.

He thumped Lowther on the back.

"By jingo! You've hit on it, Monty!" gasped Tom Merry. "It should work—but it would take some doing—a fellow with more cool nerve than you, Monty. You'd lose your napper, old chap, though you are good at the game. Kerr's the man!"

"Yaas, wathah! Leave it to Kerr, Lowthah!"

"But I want to do it," objected Lowther. "Blow Kerr!"

"Kerr's the man!" snapped Tom, his eyes glimmering. "I believe you've hit on the very wheeze, Monty, old nut! It can't make matters worse, anyway! I really believe that if Dr. Short came along playing steam as you suggest, it would make the old chap begin to think and go slow. Even Dr. Crankley won't want a fuss in the papers, and he certainly won't want our giddy parents getting the wind-up and coming buzzing round before he's given his ideas a thorough trial. Yes, I believe it really will put the kybosh on the old chap! Come—"

"Hold on, bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus, looking suddenly excited. "I have anothah gweat ideah, deah boys. Why not let a numbah of us become thoroughly ill—go sick, you know. That would give Dr. Short—or wathah Kerr—somebodin' to make a weal wow about!"

"Tophole!"

"We could chalk our faces, y'know, or wub ourselves with a stiff hair-brush and make a wash."

"A whatter?"

"A wash—"

"Oh, you mean a rash!" grinned Blake. "Good old Gussy; that's the wheeze. I know how to do it. I've heard of fellows doing that before, and they've been shoved in sanny, the beaks in a blue funk thinking they'd caught scarlet-fever or something."

"Yaas, that is the ideah!" grinned Arthur Augustus. "It is wathah painful, I believe, wubbin' oneself with a stiff brush, but it will be in a vewy good cause."

"Come on!" said Tom eagerly.

And he led the way at a rush across towards the New House. As it happened, Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn were just descending the New House steps, and they stopped and adopted a defensive attitude as their rivals rushed up.

"Pax!" panted Tom Merry. "It's pax, Figgy. We've got a wheeze at last—one after Kerr's own giddy heart. Hark to me! Let's get away from here first, though."

"All right!" grinned Figgy, dropping his fists. "If it's a wheeze, well and good. We need one badly—though it can't be much good, coming from the School House."

"Hardly!" grinned Kerr.

But they followed their School House rivals eagerly enough round to the back of the chapel, and there Tom expounded the great wheeze. Figgins whooped with glee as he heard it, and Fatty Wynn grinned his approval.

Kerr smiled and looked reflective.

"Well, it might come off!" he remarked coolly. "It would be rather difficult—especially if Railton comes floating round at the time. Anyway, it's worth trying, and I'm on!"

"You are? Good man!" said Blake heartily. "I always said the New House was nothing but a home for born idiots! I'll take that back now. At least, I'll look upon you as one of the keepers after this, Kerr, not an inmate like the rest."

"Look here, you School House cad—"

"Peace!" implored Tom Merry. "Don't be an ass, Blake! Now let's get our heads together and settle details. We've none too much time if we're to see it through this afternoon."

"Sorry!" grinned Blake.

And all was peaceful after that, as Tom Merry & Co. and Figgy & Co. put their heads together to settle details of the great wheeze—the wheeze that was put the "kybosh" on the faddist rulers of St. Jim's—perhaps!

CHAPTER 12.

Not a Success!

"BLAKE, sit up straight, boy!" thundered Mr. Linton. "Bless my soul! This is the third time I have had to speak to you, Blake! The Form-room is not the place for slumber, you utterly lazy boy! I sincerely trust that Mr. Lathom is not in the habit of—Why, good heavens, D'Arcy and Herries are also sprawling

over their desks! Sit up straight and attend to the lesson this instant!"

"I—I'll try, sir!" gasped Jack Blake faintly.

And he straightened himself slowly and painfully—or so it seemed. But the next moment he had flopped down again.

The next moment Arthur Augustus and Herries had followed his example, leaning with heads on hands.

Mr. Linton blinked at them in great and growing wrath. Then he came down between the desks and stared. As he stared, Blake lifted his head wearily and gazed dazedly up at him.

Mr. Linton jumped violently.

"G-good heavens! What—what is the matter with your face, boy? It is covered with spots! My—my dear boy!"

"Is—is it, sir?" murmured Blake stupidly, holding out his hands. "I—I think my arms have spots on them, too. Does—does it mean I'm unwell, sir? I feel I don't want to do any work this afternoon."

This was strictly true; it was the sad case with practically every fellow in the room. Nobody ever did want to do Form work! Then Mr. Linton suddenly noticed the spotted faces of D'Arcy and Herries. He gave another violent jump.

"Bless my soul—"

Actually those spots had been carefully brought about by the violent application of the business part of a stiff and bristly hair-brush; a decidedly painful proceeding, but one very efficient in making a rash on tender skin. Blake & Co. had done the job thoroughly, and those spots were not likely to wear off yet.

But Mr. Linton was quite ignorant of that, fortunately. He was somewhat short-sighted in any case, and he naturally jumped at once to the alarming conclusion that an epidemic of measles had broken out.

"G-good gracious! This is terrible!" he stuttered. "No wonder you boys do not desire to work."

"We—we're suffering from lack of really nourishing food, sir, I think!" breathed Blake, holding his head wearily. "I—you don't think it's anything worse, sir?"

"Bless my soul! I hope—I sincerely trust that it is nothing more serious, my boys. But you must come with me without delay. Pray keep well away from your fellow juniors, though I fear it is too late for such precautions. Come, follow me to the sanatorium without delay. It may not be measles—I devoutly hope it is not; but we must not take chances. Come!"

And Mr. Linton rustled out, looking very agitated. Blake & Co. followed; Blake stopping in the doorway to wink back at the startled Form.

Straight to the school "sanny" the alarmed master led the way without pausing, at great speed. Nurse Rivers met them and looked her surprise as she sighted the juniors.

"These boys must be put to bed without delay, nurse!" said the master breathlessly. "Do you see the rash on their arms and faces? I fear—I greatly fear it is measles. They must get to bed without delay, and meanwhile I will acquaint Dr. Crankley with my discovery."

"One moment, sir," murmured Nurse Rivers.

Nurse Rivers was plainly puzzled as she looked at the "invalids." The invalids looked back at her, the rest of their faces as red as were the spots. As a matter of fact, now they were "in it," Blake & Co. were feeling decidedly uncomfortable.

Nurse Rivers had a very keen pair of eyes, and she was looking at the juniors in perplexity. She felt their pulses, and then she took their temperature. Then she turned to the impatient Mr. Linton.

"Pulse normal and temperature normal," she reported. "It is most extraordinary, Mr. Linton. But if you wish it they can go to bed until a doctor can be sent for. I think—Oh!"

At that moment two other juniors came up. They were Tom Merry and Lowther, and they had a rash on their faces as bad, if not worse, than Blake & Co. sported. Mr. Linton stared at them.

"What—what—You also, Merry?"

"Mr. Ratcliff sent us, sir!" gasped Tom. "He—he seems to think we're ill with—with measles!"

Mr. Linton looked grim. He understood why Mr. Ratcliff had "sent" them instead of bringing them personally as he himself had done. Mr. Ratcliff had given them a very wide berth, fearing to catch anything himself.

"Very well," said Mr. Linton. "This is worse than I had supposed. You had better get to bed without delay. I will report the matter to Dr. Crankley, and will insist upon having the doctor here at the earliest possible moment."

He nodded to Nurse Rivers and rushed away. Nurse Rivers eyed the juniors curiously, and then she smilingly led them into one of the clean, bright wards and left them there to undress and get into bed.

And meanwhile, whilst taking the Sixth Form, Dr. Crankley had been interrupted by the arrival of Toby, the page-boy.



Swish! "Yow-wow!" Mr. Ratcliff yelled as "Mrs. Crankley" brought the cane down—hard—on his palm. His cry was followed by a startled horrified gasp, and the Shell stared as if thunderstruck. Mr. Ratcliff, the master of the New House, second in importance only to the Head, had been caned before their very eyes! (See Chapter 10.)

"Which Dr. Short 'as called, sir!" said Toby.

"Dr. Short?" echoed Dr. Crankley. "Ah, I believe Dr. Short is the school doctor! Is that not so, Kildare?"

"Yes, sir," said Kildare.

"Thank you! Will you kindly show— Ah!"

Dr. Short, apparently, had not waited to be shown anywhere. At that moment he walked briskly into the Form-room in his usual breezy manner.

"Is Dr. Crankley here? Ah, I presume you are Dr. Crankley, our new headmaster—what? Pardon me—"

"I am Dr. Crankley," said the new Head, a trifle coldly. "I am busy with this Form at the moment, doctor, but if you would not mind waiting one moment in my study I will join you there shortly."

"My dear doctor!" exclaimed "Dr. Short" in his rich, fruity voice. "Pray do not bother; I can say what I have to say here—what, what? I have heard strange and disturbing rumours in the village and I came here post-haste to investigate them, having the health and welfare of the pupils of St. Jim's very much at heart. It was but my bare duty, as the medical officer of this school, to investigate."

"Oh, indeed!" said Dr. Crankley stiffly, his mild eyes blinking.

"Yes, indeed," said Dr. Short. "I have heard that the ordinary school diet—a diet, sir, that I myself heartily approve of—has been superseded by a farrago of nonsense termed a hygienic diet; a clean and wholesome diet has been replaced by an absurd and ridiculous collection of weird and abominable rubbish unfit for human consumption."

"Sir!"

"As a medical man, I insist upon stating my convictions that such a diet, even in sufficient quantities, is fit only for invalids, old ladies, and babies!" said Dr. Short, with some heat. "It is entirely unsuited to healthy, growing boys, who require body-building foods—foods that build body and brain. Give them good old British beef and mutton; give them puddings and pastries. They will take no harm, but will work and play better!"

Dr. Crankley seemed to be thunderstruck. The startled seniors looked on in wonder, though many of them were grinning delightedly. The new Head blinked at his outspoken visitor without speaking. He seemed incapable of speech, though his eyes were gleaming now.

"Those, sir, are my views!" snorted Dr. Short. "If this wretched cranky food continues, I shall anticipate a very busy time at St. Jim's. I also understand that the school tuckshop has been closed. Absurd, wicked, monstrous—"

The "doctor" paused, and looked round as a newcomer appeared. It was Mr. Linton, and the excited and agitated master of the Shell fairly dashed into the room.

"Dr. Crankley," he exclaimed hurriedly, "it is my duty to bring to your notice the fact that half a dozen boys— Ah! Dr. Short, I am delighted to see you here at this moment. How exceedingly fortunate," added Mr. Linton, suddenly catching sight of the "medical man." "I was about to suggest that Dr. Crankley should phone for you."

"Is anything wrong, Mr. Linton?" asked Dr. Short.

"Most certainly—most decidedly, sir! I have just made the dreadful discovery that at least half a dozen boys have contracted measles—at least, they have a decided rash, and I am convinced they are suffering from measles!"

Dr. Crankley looked alarmed at that. Dr. Short puffed and looked triumphant.

"There," he snorted. "It is just as I feared—just as I anticipated! This wicked, rubbishy patent food and worthless concoctions have left the poor victims so enfeebled that their systems are left open and unprotected against the attack of the first disease that comes along—attacks that would have been in vain had their bodies been properly nourished. Bah! Lead on, Mr. Linton! I insist upon seeing those poor boys without delay!"

"Certainly, doctor!" said Mr. Linton, who was also feeling very indignant.

He started off, and Dr. Short politely stood aside for Dr. Crankley to follow. Dr. Crankley nodded to Kildare, and did so looking strangely grim. Dr. Short did not notice that grimness, however. He stopped a brief second to wink at the startled Sixth, and then he strode after the two masters.

They arrived at the sanatorium, and Nurse Rivers, looking a trifle uneasy, showed them into the ward where the "invalids" lay.

"Ah!" said Dr. Short, glancing with a professional eye over the juniors in their clean white beds. "So here are our invalids! They certainly look far from themselves. If it is not measles, it is obviously a case of lack of suitable food."

"I do not think so," said Dr. Crankley, stooping over each bed in turn, and blinking at the juniors rather closely. "No, indeed, I do not think so. In fact I think I can cure them without your aid, my friend."

The juniors in the beds looked at each other and Kerr started. But just then Mr. Railton hurried into the ward. The School House master was looking very grim indeed.

(Continued on page 26.)

A BAD START! It is said that good fortune smiles on the wearer of the charm known as Oyorara, but it has scarcely been in Adam Byrne's possession an hour or so when his three white companions are taken away from him by the Skeleton men, whose intention is to offer them as a sacrifice to their gods!



ADAM.

HARRY.

An Amazing Story of Perilous Adventure in the heart of the African Jungle.

By **ARTHUR S. HARDY.**

The Trap!

LYING some two to three yards away from the entrance to the inner part of the cave was the great boulder which Muta had so easily rolled back. It was a huge stone weighing many tons. How it had come there none could guess. It seemed impossible for human hands to have borne it into the cave. For one thing, it would never have passed the outer entrance. Yet there it was, so big that a dozen men could never have moved it.

"How are we going to get it back?" asked Harry.

"Dunno. A regiment of buck navvies could never lift it!" growled Jimmy Brown.

Muta grinned.

"See!" he said.

Leaning his great shoulder against the boulder, and spreading his big hands against its side, he pushed up from his feet, and as he did so the stone rolled over, dropping into its place with a dullish thud.

One man had moved with ease a great boulder which maybe, fifty men would have been unable to raise from the ground even.

Adam, moving forward, looked at the place where the entrance to the inner cave had been. There was no sign of it now. Instead, blocking up the way was this great boulder of stone which could be moved with ease if only one knew how.

"Someone may come and find the inner cave and steal the bag of stones, Mutt," said Adam.

"No," grinned Muta. "Look." He pulled the great boulder back, moving it from behind in a way he knew. Then he rolled it back again. "Try," he said.

Adam tried, then Harry, then Sandy McTavish, and

Jimmy Brown. They could not move it at all, let alone roll it away from the entrance leading to the inner cave.

Next they tried all together, but without the aid of Muta, who knew the secret, they were beaten.

Once again Muta showed them how simply it could be done.

The boulder having been finally set in its place, blocking up the passage-way, Muta moved towards the forest.

"None but those who know how would ever move that stone, oh, white flyer," he said, and Adam was satisfied.

Through the big outer cave to the arched entrance, and thence into the forest they made their way almost in silence.

The march to the cave, the burial of O-Kama, the witch, the finding of the map, and of the bag of jewels, had filled them with awe.

Adam's enterprise had progressed tremendously since the two aeroplanes had flown from Baruda.

They had now to get the ground cleared, so that in the one remaining aeroplane they might make a start—and then, when they had made up their minds in which direction to steer, they would take their chance and fly for the unknown land.

"We'll go straight back to the aeroplane, Sandy," said Adam. "And we ought to make it long before the day closes, don't you think?"

"Och hie!" answered the Scotsman. "And maybe—" He broke off suddenly and stared. "Why, what's the matter wi' Jamie Brown?" he added.

Sandy might well ask the question, for Jimmy Brown, who had reached the very threshold of the cave and had only

WHO'S WHO IN THIS STORY!

ADAM BYRNE, accompanied by his chum, HARRY FRANKLIN, and a band of trustworthy followers, set out in search of Adam's father and sister, news having been received that the great white explorer, GEORGE WILLIS BYRNE, and his daughter, ROSA, who left England four years ago to explore the African jungle, are alive and well, but prisoners in the hands of a strange people at Barcoomba, which lies north of the Silver Glacier and beneath the Mountain of the Hidden Crest.

Well equipped with guns, stores, provisions, two aeroplanes, and wireless apparatus, the party leaves Baruda for their journey into the

interior. The plane containing Adam and Harry, however, is wrecked in a terrific storm, and the stranded chums find themselves faced by a crowd of hostile Hekebus. Aided by MUTA, a native whose life they had saved, Adam and Harry are putting up a stout resistance, when Muta's mother, O-Kama, the witch, steps between the warriors and their white victims. She is, however, slain by the Hekebu chief and buried in a secret cave wherein Adam finds a pendant of peculiar design known as the Oyorara. This charm, according to the prophecy of O-Kama, brings good fortune to the man who takes it from its hiding-place.

(Now read on.)

to take three or four more steps to find himself in the forest, had come to a halt, and was craning his head forward and making signs to them to keep quiet.

"What's bitin' ye?" asked Sandy.

"Shurrup!" growled Jimmy Brown. "I thought I heard something move out there. I suppose it couldn't be any of them Skeleton men you spoke about, could it, Mr. Byrne?"

"Not likely!" replied Adam. "They were scared out of their wits. O-Kama has laid her curse upon them. I think we are safe now."

"Gang out wi' ye, ye daft loonie!" cried Sandy McTavish, giving Jimmy Brown a push from behind which sent him stumbling out into the green. And then a startling thing happened.

Two black forms sprang at Brown, and before he could pull a weapon or show fight strong hands seized him, whisked him away, and vanished as swiftly as they had appeared.

Jimmy Brown had gone! And as Sandy's jaw dropped right down he yelled:

"The Skeletons 'a'e got him, Mr. Byrne!"

There was no doubt whatever about that. The brownish-black men who had so suddenly taken Jimmy Brown prisoner were streaked and marked with their strange war paint in skeleton fashion.

Nor had Jimmy uttered a sound after his first choked ejaculation of surprise.

Sandy McTavish, with a cry of dismay, now leaped forward before Adam thought of stopping him.

"I must save wee Jamie!" he cried.

And as he burst into the open more of the weird Hekebu warriors leapt upon him, beset him, made him prisoner before ever he could attempt to shoot them down—and he, too, was whisked from sight.

It was Harry Franklin next who sprang out into the forest, loosening his automatic as he went.

"Stop, Harry! Wait!" warned Adam. "Or they'll get you, too!"

Harry replied with a defiant shout. What did he care?

He literally hurled himself out of the cave into the dull light of the forest, and as he went he saw gathered outside the cave and standing amid the forest trees a horde of the Hekebus.

For one second only did Harry hesitate. Then he swung

his arm and shouted at the men who were carrying Sandy and Jimmy Brown away, the two hapless prisoners having been tied up in a trice and rendered incapable of resistance.

Harry hated to kill, but he felt it to be necessary now.

"Stop!" he yelled, as if the Hekebus could understand.

"Drop 'em down, you fools! Drop 'em down!"

And then he levelled his weapon.

But the shot was never fired. Before ever his finger could pull the trigger, he was pounced upon from behind, dragged backwards and downwards, disarmed, and held and bound by four stalwart Skeleton men.

Harry Franklin also was a prisoner. He did not even cry out for help, so completely had he been surprised.

But Adam had followed him, and as he peered out into the open he saw Harry pulled down.

"Muta," he cried, swinging round, "they've got Harry—my friend as well. We've got to save them. Help me!"

His right hand strayed to the butt of his automatic, and he also sprang towards the forest. But as swiftly as he moved, so did Muta.

There is no doubt whatever that Adam would have been captured by the Skeleton men as well as the others had it not been for Muta. He freely admitted as much afterwards. But Muta, springing after him, caught him round the throat with his great hand and dragged him back into the cave.

Muta's strong arms crushed Adam's ribs, threatening to break them in.

Adam, furious with anger, fought and struggled to free himself. He believed at the moment that Muta intended to kill him. Had he been able to release himself, he might, in the frenzied state of his mind at having been forced to abandon Jimmy Brown, Sandy McTavish, and, above all, Harry, his chum, to their fates when they most needed him, have killed Muta.

But he was like a child in the hands of the amazing black man.

Muta crushed him till he could hardly breathe, and, lifting him as if he were a child, dragged him back into the blackness of the cave and down some unknown way where the walls were high and narrow, where the damp and cold struck to the marrow of their bones. The passage was so narrow that there was scarcely room to turn in it. It was so dark that they could not see.

Twice Adam, hurt by the strength of the brute, turned to



Before Harry could pull the trigger of his automatic he was pounced upon from behind, dragged backwards, and disarmed by four stalwart Skeleton men. (See this page.)

revile him, but each time Muta, without a word, forced him onward.

And there was not a doubt about it—Adam just had to go. It was humiliating, ignominious, damaging to Adam's pride.

Each time he turned and argued Muta answered in his native tongue, not one word of which could Adam understand, and pushed him on.

"Mutt, my friend," said Adam grimly, "just you wait until we get out of this! I'll pay you out!"

Muta did not answer—and the walls echoed Adam's words unnaturally.

At last Adam could see light ahead—a dim light which brightened as they went. Finally, they came to the end of the narrow, rocky way and emerged upon a platform high among the forest trees. Scared birds flew from it as they came. Creepers hung down upon it. A smallish, bright-hued snake wriggled its way to a crevice and vanished in a flash.

Adam, mad with anger, pulled out his automatic and, turning, pointed it at Muta.

"Now, Mutt," he cried, "what the deuce do you mean by this—eh? Answer me? By George, I've a mind to put a bullet through you!"

And then he felt inclined to laugh, for Muta stood before him, his sail-like ears seeming to shake, his arms dangling down like a gorilla's, his knees turned outward, his face expressing deepest contrition.

Down upon his knees he flopped, and, folding his arms across his tremendous chest, he answered:

"If thou dost wish to slay Muta with the tube which spits the fire of death—then let it be so, oh, great white flyer. But if thou hadst not been dragged back into the cave where the Hekebus dare not enter because it is a place made sacred by the dwelling there of O-Kama, my witch mother, then thou wouldst have been carried away into the forest by the Skeleton men and sacrificed."

"What the dickens do I care about my own skin, Muta!" growled Adam, lowering his weapon. "You have made me desert my friends! You have made me a coward! Now they will be killed—and then—"

"Why, no!" Muta looked up, grinning. "Muta know the Hekebus. They will practise their rites of sacrifice before putting the white men to the flames. The great white flyer can save his friends."

"All very well! But how can I save them when you have imprisoned me in this rocky place? I'm not a bird or a fly—to drop safely down from here!"

He peered over the edge of the ledge or platform and drew back shuddering. From the spot where they stood the wall of rock fell sheer down to the forest far below them. They stood upon a dizzy height—and it seemed to Adam that it would be impossible for anything but a bird to gain the spot from below. The only way to reach it would be down that narrow walled-in passage, which Muta knew so well that he could find it and walk it in the dark.

Adam had with difficulty choked back the desire to hurl himself into space, and now he lay flat upon his stomach.

Muta sprawled beside him, also lying flat. He wriggled onward on his stomach to the brink, signing to Adam to follow. And as they clutched the rock and thrust their heads out over the brink they could see figures so small as to seem almost like ants down below amid the trees.

Muta pointed.

"Hekebus taking white flyer's brothers to the place of sacrifice," he said.

Adam shouted at his impotency.

"I can't shoot them down from here!" he raved.

"No, no! But white flyer save his friends and brothers just the same."

"Will he? I wish you'd show me how!" groaned Adam bitterly.

They watched and waited till the Hekebus and their prisoners, even to a rear guard which followed after the main body, had vanished. Then Muta, springing up, searched for and brought into view a ladder made of sticks of wood and twisted fibrous grass, dried and tough.

One end of this had been securely fastened to a rock, so that it was ready for use in a moment. Muta threw the loose end over the rocky platform, and then, after testing it cautiously, he trusted his enormous weight upon it.

He dropped down till only his grinning head and his big sail-like ears remained in view.

"Follow, oh white master, and fear not!" he cried. "Muta show the way."

(Continued on page 27.)

"UNDER FADDIST RULE!"

(Continued from page 23.)

"One moment, Dr. Crankley!" he exclaimed, staring at Dr. Short. "Pray allow me to make this affair clear to you."

As he spoke Mr. Railton suddenly stepped forward and snatched "Dr. Short's" rather scanty hair away. It disclosed a very youthful head of sleek, black hair!

Mr. Linton gave a cry—a cry of stupefaction. Mr. Railton smiled grimly, Dr. Crankley also smiled grimly.

"Kerr!" exclaimed Mr. Railton. "I thought so! I heard that Dr. Short had arrived, and as I knew for a positive fact that Dr. Short was taking a brief holiday in the South of France, I knew that this fellow must be an impostor."

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"I think I can guess what this astounding imposture means," said the Housemaster. "But how to account for the spots—"

"Allow me to make that point clear, Mr. Railton," said Dr. Crankley mildly, his eyes twinkling curiously. "I suspect that the application of the stiff bristles of a clothes or hairbrush is responsible for those spots. You will notice that they have already practically disappeared."

"Bless my soul!"

"It is a trick, I regret to say, I once practised when a boy," explained the new Head. "As for this youth, your name is Kerr is it not?"

"Ye-es, sir!" groaned the hapless Kerr.

"Your disguise was very clever, my boy. Your acting was also very clever, though marred by the rude and unprofessional manner in which you spoke. In removing your hat you had also, apparently, dislodged your false scalp slightly, and I detected the dark hair underneath almost at once. Otherwise, your performance was very creditable—as an actor and mimic."

"Oh!"

"But it must not happen again," said Dr. Crankley mildly. "And now will you kindly undress and get into the spare bed there, Kerr?"

"In—into bed, sir?" stammered the unhappy Kerr.

"Certainly! We must make the punishment fit the crime, must we not, Mr. Railton? As you all appear to have become invalids voluntarily, we must keep you here for a time as invalids. I think a fast should do you a great deal of good. It is a half-holiday to-morrow afternoon, I think. You will remain here until to-morrow night on a diet of bread and water with a little fruit. And in order that the time will not hang heavily upon your hands, I will ask Mr. Railton to set you an imposition each that will keep you very busy indeed throughout to-morrow and for the remainder of the week in your spare time. I trust that will cure you."

With that Dr. Crankley smiled and led the way out of the sanatorium. Mr. Linton followed, looking rather blank, and Mr. Railton brought up the rear, the corners of his mouth twitching suspiciously.

The masters left behind them a dreadful silence. The ward of "invalids"—with the hapless Kerr to join them now—were completely bowled out. Tom Merry & Co. had met their Waterloo!

For the rest of that horrid day the conspirators lay in bed scribbling for dear life; they had little time for chatting, and they did not feel like chatting. Then came night, and all through the next day they continued the work on the terrific imposition Mr. Railton had set them. In the afternoon, through the open windows of the sunny came the click, click of cricket-bat meeting ball, and the invalids groaned. The horrid diet was bad enough and little enough. But the "impostor" and the confinement were worse. And the horrible prospect of endless chippings from the school in general was worst of all. It filled the conspirators with dismal apprehension. Bitterly did they repent themselves of having listened to Lowther's wonderful wheeze.

But perhaps the worst part of all lay in the fact that they had failed—failed dismally. The present state of affairs at St. Jim's was to go on, and nobody knew how it was going to end, least of all Tom Merry & Co. But worse still was to come, they felt sure of that.

THE END.

(Make sure you read the sequel to this magnificent yarn, entitled: "ST. JIM'S IN A QUANDARY!" which will appear in next week's bumper number of the GEM.)

"BEYOND THE SILVER GLACIER!"

(Continued from page 26.)

Still lying flat, Adam watched Muta descend with incredible swiftness till he dangled at the end of the ladder. Then Muta stepped on to another ledge of the rock, signing to Adam to follow.

There was nothing else to be done. Lowering himself, and finding the foothold of the ladder, Adam went down it, and within a couple of minutes he stopped beside Muta.

"What now?" he growled.

Muta pointed at a narrow way which seemed to be overgrown with creepers. He moved along it. Adam followed once more. They began to descend by easy stages, and where the drop was sheer there were steps and a rope of dried grass to hold on by.

Down they went, screened by trees and rank growth, with

insects buzzing about them, down—down till at length, breathing hard, they found themselves in the forest once more.

Muta, peering cautiously about him, darted across a glade. Adam went after him. Putting his finger to his lips as a sign of caution, Muta pointed among the trees.

"Muta guide the white flyer to the place where lies the ship of the air," he cried. "White master bring the tubes that spit fire and death. Muta and black men and white master go to the place of sacrifice and save the white men who are captives of the Hekebus. Muta know the ways of the Skeleton men. They burn by fire—but only after long, long time. Is it good?"

Adam, in spite of the risk he ran by doing it, gave vent to a shout of sheer joy.

"By gad, Muta," he yelled, "it is indeed good! G.O.O-D! GOOD!"

And then the forest swallowed them.

(Don't miss next week's ripping instalment of this amazing adventure serial, whatever you do, chums.)

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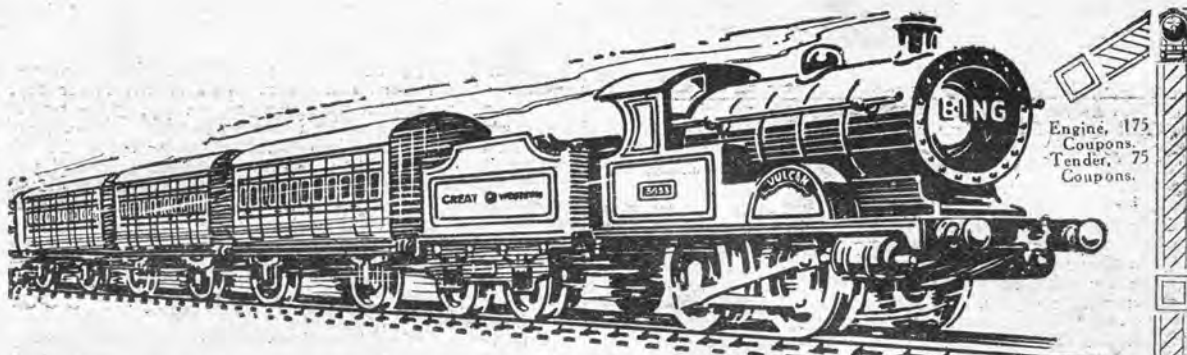
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