

"THE TYRANT!" SENSATIONAL COMPLETE
SCHOOL STORY INSIDE!

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An exciting incident from this week's fine school story of St. Jim's,

YOU WILL FIND THAT THIS ROUSING LONG ST. JIM'S STORY—

The TYRANT!

By Martin Clifford

Up till now, if the juniors of St. Jim's had been asked to select the world's worst master, they would have plumped solidly for Mr. Horace Ratcliff, the tyrannical Housemaster of the New House. But that's before the appearance of Ratcliff the Second!

CHAPTER 1.

Footprints in the Snow!

"**B**LOW the snow!"

"Sno use grouching!" said Lowther, with a dismal attempt at humour.

"In any case, the wind's blowing it enough!" groaned Blake. "Ugh! It's cold!"

"And it's coming down harder than ever!" said Tom Merry.

The wind was cold, and the snow certainly was coming down harder than ever. It swept into the faces of the St. Jim's juniors with icy, cutting gusts.

In the ordinary way snow did not trouble Tom Merry & Co. Indeed, they greeted its advent with delight. Snow meant snowballs, snow-fights, and heaps of fun.

But just at present they were not enjoying it.

To begin with, they were tired, having had a busy and exciting afternoon. There had been a light fall of snow that morning, and before leaving St. Jim's for Wayland they had a brisk snow-fight with Figgins & Co. of the New House. At Rylcombe station they had another snow-fight with Gordon Gay & Co., of the Grammar School. And at Wayland, after a visit to the pictures, they had had a fierce encounter with a crowd of cheery Wayland youths.

This final encounter, indeed, had been the cause of their missing the train back. And, rather than wait another hour, it had been suggested that they should walk across Wayland Heath.

Who had made the suggestion was a moot point—a point over which the juniors had been arguing somewhat heatedly for the last ten minutes. At all events, it was agreed now that it was a rotten idea. They all wished heartily that they had not decided to walk back.

For scarcely had they left Wayland when it had started to snow again—stinging flakes that grew thicker as they trudged over the desolate heath.

At first the juniors had grinned and borne it lightly. In Wayland the winter sun had been shining brightly, and Arthur Augustus had given it as his valuable opinion that the snow would not be much. Now, however, Arthur Augustus was proving wrong. Though the sun was still shining, the sky was growing rapidly overcast with promise of a heavy downfall.

Herries, especially, was tired—very tired. For he was carrying Towser, his big, ugly bulldog, snuggled under his coat. Towser did not like the cold, and he hated the snow. Just outside Wayland he had gone on strike—had refused to walk another inch.

All agreed that it was Herries' own fault. In bringing him on the excursion, Herries had gone against the general wishes. Now Herries himself was wishing heartily that he had left his pet at St. Jim's.

Towser was fat and he was heavy. He whined dismally under Herries' protecting coat.

"Here, let me have a turn with him, Herries!" said Tom Merry.

"He won't let you carry him!" grunted Herries. "This beastly snow's upsetting him!"

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"Let the brute have it!" yelled Herries.

Tom Merry & Co. willingly obeyed and sent a shower of snowballs whizzing after the man as he dashed across the plank bridge.

"You shouldn't have brought him!"

"I know that!" snapped Herries.

"We told you not to!" said Digby.

"I know that, too! Don't begin again!"

"Well, affah our tellin' you so, Hewwies—"

"Dry up! Shut up!"

"Bai Jove!"

Herries' temper was obviously beginning to suffer. His tone was ferocious.

The juniors trudged on, Herries and Towser bringing up the rear.

Tom Merry glanced about him somewhat anxiously as he trudged through the snow. The path across the heath had long ago been obliterated, and all he could see was a wide expanse of white, with here and there a white hummock, where the hoarse wind was already piling the drifting snow. Soon the winter sun would be gone, he knew, and they were still two miles, at least, from St. Jim's. Well as they knew the wide, wind-swept heath, it would be an easy matter for them to get lost upon it. With path obliterated and dusk coming on—

Tom Merry shivered, and looked about anxiously for familiar landmarks. He could recognise none now. All the snow-covered slopes and hillocks seemed the same, and every snowy boulder unfamiliar to his misty eyes. All around

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the silence was deathly, broken only by the crunch of their trudging feet in the snow.

There was a sudden cry from Lowther:

"Wayland Castle!"

"Oh, good!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The juniors brightened up as Lowther pointed across the snow-swept heath. On a tiny rise of ground loomed up a square, snow-clad building, with shattered battlements and towers. It was Wayland Castle, a ruined relic of bygone days and a familiar landmark to the St. Jim's juniors.

"Oh, good!" repeated Tom Merry, all his anxiety fading suddenly. "Now we know where we are. Let's get home. I'm hungry!"

Manners smiled and patted his camera which he wore slung in its canvas carrier over his shoulder.

"We'll be able to see St. Jim's from the castle!" he said. "You chaps can climb on one of the walls and spy out the way while I take a few snaps!"

"Bai Jove! Wathah not!"

"No fear!" grinned Tom Merry. "No need to spy out the way, old bean! We know where we are now. We're making for home as fast as we can, Manners!"

"Well, I'm stopping at the castle for a bit!" said Manners, glancing up at the sky reflectively. "Just a bit of sunlight left—quite enough, anyway. A time-exposure—"

"You can come again for that, old chap!"

"Ass! May not get the chance!" said Manners. "I want a few snowscapes! I only got the church and High Street in Wayland. One or two snaps of the castle, with snow on it, is just what I want. Good!"

"Blow the snaps, and blow you! You're coming home now!" snorted Tom.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I'm not!" said Manners doggedly. "You chaps go on if you like. 'I'm not missing this chance. The giddy castle looks ripping even from here. A time exposure—'"

"Rats! Look here, you ass—"

"What the thump's the matter with Towser?" grinned Blake.

Something was obviously the matter with Towser. He was struggling and wriggling in Herries' grasp. As Blake finished he broke free abruptly and dropped to the ground. Then he started off, as if making for the castle.

"Seems to want to get to the castle," said Herries excitedly, making a grab at Towser's lead. "Here, Towser—"

But Towser had soon had enough of the snow; he ambled on for a yard or so, and then

he stopped and looked back at his master, whimpering as he did so.

"You fellows see that?" gasped Herries, his eyes gleaming. "Something's wrong at the castle!"

"Wha-what?"

"Something's wrong—perhaps someone lost there, or lying there injured," said Herries excitedly. "Towser knows! You fellows know what an intelligent dog he is. The old boy knows—he's scented it!"

"Bai Jove! Weally, Hewwies—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake. "You silly chump! Towser wants to get out of the cold wind and snow, you ass! He's spotted the castle, and knows it means shelter!"

"Yaas, wathah!" grinned Arthur Augustus.

But Herries knew better. His belief in the abilities and intelligence of his pet was as touching as it was amazing.

"You—you unbelieving asses!" he gasped, picking up Towser again. "I tell you Towser scents it—"

"A red herring? No fish at the castle, at all, old chap!" said Monty Lowther.

Herries went red. On one famous occasion Towser had tracked down a red herring—after leading the juniors to believe he was tracking down a criminal, and Herries was often reminded of it.

"You—you fatheads!" he snorted. "I'm going to investigate, anyway. In any case, I could do with a rest for a bit. Plenty of time before looking up!"

"Look here—"

"I'm off, too!" said Manners, with an anxious glance at the sky.

He plunged away towards the castle with his camera. Herries hesitated a moment, but as Towser continued to whine he gave a grunt and started to trudge after him.



"The—the chumps!" gasped Tom Merry. "We'd better go after them!"

"Spose so!" chuckled Blake. "Old Towser has to be given his head, in any case, or he'll lead us a fine dance. The snow's easing up, and I could do with a rest!"

"Well, I could myself," admitted Tom. "Come on, then!"

All the juniors were feeling like a rest—though they would scarcely have chosen the desolate castle for one. But Manners, Herries and Towser, obviously had to be given their heads. With many growls Tom, Blake, Digby, D'Arcy, and Lowther followed towards the castle. The snow, certainly, was thinning a little, and it was certainly a relief to get out of the cutting, biting wind.

They soon reached the castle, and Tom Merry stopped as they were crossing the plank bridge that spanned the dried-up moat. In far-off days a drawbridge had spanned the moat, but now there was only a plank bridge.

"Hallo, someone's been here before us," he remarked, somewhat surprised, pointing to the snow-covered planks. "Look!"

On the bridge were faint, half-obliterated footprints in the snow.

"Somebody sheltering!" suggested Digby.

"Hardly likely," said Tom. "Only asses would cross the heath in this weather!"

"Asses like us!" groaned Blake. "It was you who suggested it, Gussy—"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Oh, don't start that all over again," said Tom wearily. "Buck up and take your thumping snaps, Manners!"

Manners grinned, and finished unstrapping his tripod. Then he fixed his camera and started back across the footbridge with it over his shoulder. Manners would go through fire and water to get a good photograph.

Herries sat down on a mass of broken masonry in the shelter of the ancient gateway of the castle, and his chums joined him there. After a moment Tom Merry left them and began to examine the faint footprints in the snow again. There was a puzzled frown on his face when he rejoined the others.

CHAPTER 2. A Surprise!

"THAT'S queer!" he muttered. "The footprints lead into the castle, but they don't lead out again. Looks as if the man's here, whoever he is!"

"Phew! So they do!"

The juniors glanced round the square courtyard of the castle, its grass and mossy stones now covered in glimmering snow. But there were no signs of footprints—until Tom Merry pointed them out.

They led through one of the shattered holes in the wall at one side of the entrance archway—a hole that had once been a doorway. But they did not lead back again.

Almost as excited as Tom now, the rest followed him as he stepped through into the dark chamber beyond. Faint light came in through a small slit of a window, and through jagged holes in the ceiling. A broken stone stairway led upwards, but the footprints, wet and clear on the stone flags, led through a gaping hole opposite them into a chamber beyond.

"The vaults, I bet!" breathed Tom.

They passed through into a still darker chamber beyond. In the floor showed a black, yawning gap which a large stone flag that now stood on one side a yard away had evidently covered. It was the entrance to the castle vaults—vaults that extended, as the chums knew, far under the earth.

Sure enough the wet footprints led down the dimly-seen stone steps that faded away into deep blackness.

"Only a tramp sheltering," said Lowther, with a sudden chuckle. "He's down there having a snooze. I bet! Let's leave him to it!"

"Funny place for a snooze, anyway," said Tom. "Though it certainly might be warmer down there! Not our bizney, anyway!"

After listening a few moments without hearing anything, Tom led the way back to the archway, and joined Herries and Towser. Since reaching the shelter of the gateway Towser had settled down quite comfortably, showing no desire to explore farther. It was clear to all—excepting Herries—that all Towser had wanted was shelter from the snow and wind. He was getting it now, and was quite satisfied.

"Anything wrong?" said Herries. "Old Towser doesn't seem keen now—"

"Nothing wrong, as far as we know," smiled Tom. "Some tramp down there, I fancy—no affair of ours. Towser's all right now?"

"No, he's—"
There was a chuckle.

"You needn't cackle!" sniffed Herries. "Depend upon it, Towser knew the tramp was there, and wanted to let us know. Towser was right—"

He paused. Towser had suddenly stiffened, and given a deep-throated growl.

At the same moment quick footsteps reached the ears of the juniors. They came from the inner chamber the juniors had just left.

"My hat! Somebody coming!"

Scarcely had Blake spoken when a man emerged from the gaping hole that had once been a doorway. He started back in sudden alarm at sight of the juniors. Towser snarled, and Herries grabbed him just in time. Old and usually good-tempered as he was, there were times when Towser needed watching. Obviously, he did not like the look of the stranger. He struggled, snarling and growling, in Herries' grasp.

Tom Merry & Co. were as much startled as was the stranger. They had expected to see a tramp. Instead, they saw a young man in a thick, tweed suit and cap—a man of thirty or so, with dark eyes set in a thin, sharp face, and carrying a thick stick. Though well-cut, his clothes seemed a trifle shabby, and he gave the impression of a man who had known more prosperous times.

"My hat!" murmured Blake. "Hold that dashed dog, Herries!"

"I'm holding him!" sniffed Herries.

That Towser had taken a dislike to the stranger was quite enough for George Herries. He eyed the stranger suspiciously. For his part the strange young man stared at the juniors, first in alarm, and then with glinting eyes.

"What are you boys doing here?" he snapped.

"Any business of yours, old top?" asked Herries.

"Dry up, Herries!" said Tom Merry. He resented the tone of the man himself, but he did not want trouble. "We happen to be partly sheltering, partly resting," he told the stranger.

"You will go back to your school at once!" blazed the man. "At once! Do you hear?"

"Bai Jove! What fearful cheek!"

"Yes, we hear you," said Tom Merry calmly. "But we'll go when we feel like going. I fancy we've as much right here as you."

The man's lips tightened ominously. He made a jump for Tom Merry, grabbed him by the shoulder, and twisted him round. Then he brought his stick into play.

Whack, whack, whack!

Three times the stick came down, but that was all the stranger had time for. Then the juniors woke to life, and piled on him as one man, and brought him crashing down.

They rolled over and over in the gateway, struggling and fighting furiously. Herries did not take part—it was all he could do to hold in the raging Towser, who had received a savage kick from the infuriated man. Suddenly Manners appeared on the scene, attracted by the commotion.

He lowered his camera carefully, and then he also lent a hand.

Shouting threats and savage imprecations, the fellow gave in at last.

"You little fiends!" he panted, his eyes burning with rage. "I—I'll make you suffer for this! I shall know you again! I'll report you—"

"Shut up!" snapped Blake, ramming a handful of snow into the man's mouth. "We've had enough choice language from you!"

"Too much!" gasped Tom Merry. "Kick the brute out of this! Let him go, chaps! Any more trouble, you rotter, and we'll pitch into you again!"

But the stranger gave no more trouble. They gave him little chance, in fact. As he staggered to his feet, Blake grabbed another handful of snow and flung it. The snowballs were bursting all over him. He started as if to charge the juniors, and then he turned abruptly and fairly ran for it.

"Let the brute have it!" yelled Herries.

They obeyed, willingly enough. There was a deep pile of snow against the ancient gateway, and the juniors sent snowballs whizzing after the man as he dashed across the plank bridge.

With snowballs bursting all over him, the man drew out of range at last. He halted, turned, and shook a savage fist at the juniors. Then he tramped away in the snow.

"Good-bye, Bluebell!" called Lowther after him.

"Good riddance to the rotter!" panted Tom Merry.

"What a brute the chap is!"

"And a rough handful!" groaned Blake, hugging a swelling eye ruefully. "He was very nearly too much even for six of us!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Wonder who he is?" gasped Lowther.

"Hallo, someone's been here before us!" exclaimed Tom Merry in surprise, pointing to the snow-covered planks of the bridge that spanned the castle moat. "Look!" On the bridge were faint, half-obliterated footprints. (See Chapter 1.)



"And what he was after here?" said Tom, frowning. "It looks rather queer to me. Anyway, let's be getting back now! Towser all right, Herries?"

Herries, who had been anxiously examining his pet, nodded grimly.

"Luckily the brute hasn't damaged the old boy!" he said. "But it's upset him—he's such a highly-strung dog, you know! No need to cackle, you asses! Anyway, you can't deny that Towser was right—he knew! He'd scented something was going on here! That ruffian was up to no good!"

"He certainly was ratty when he spotted us!" admitted Tom Merry, smiling. "Still, Towser—"

"Towser knew!" said Herries, eyeing his ugly pet admiringly. "I expect that brute was up to something shady in the vaults. I think we'd better search the vaults, you fellows! Towser will soon get on the scent of—"

"I think we won't!" grinned Blake. "I'm going to get on the scent of some tea!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"That fellow was an out-and-out rotter!" said Tom, frowning. "There's probably some simple explanation of his being here. He might have been sheltering, and thought he'd take a look round while doing so. Anyway, blow the outsider! Finished mucking with that camera, Manners?"

"Yes. Luckily I'd just got all I wanted when I heard you yell!" said Manners, in great satisfaction. "The light was none too good, but I fancy they'll be O.K. I suppose you fellows wouldn't care to have your giddy photo taken—in a group in the gateway there?"

"Quite right; we wouldn't!"

"Wathah not, you ass!"

"Some other time!" chuckled Tom Merry. "Come on, you fathead?"

And the juniors started off again for St. Jim's. They were hungry, and they wanted their tea, so for the time being the mysterious stranger was forgotten!

"Hold on!" said Tom Merry, with a grim chuckle. The captain of the Shell stopped when within sight of the old gateway or St. Jim's. His chums eyed him in surprise, but they also stopped.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"What's the matter?" demanded Blake.

"No need to be in a hurry, old chap!"

"Plenty of need!" said Blake. "I'm hungry!"

"Same here!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"If you want more excitement go ahead!" chuckled Tom.

"I've had as much as I want for one afternoon."

"But—"

"Didn't you spot him?" asked Tom Merry, his eyes fixed on the school gateway. "I did—a long-legged bird. He slipped out of the gateway a second ago, glanced this way and then bolted back again!"

"Phew! You mean old Figgy—"

"The very chap!" smiled Tom. "The giddy enemy are abroad, you men! Figgy and his pals are watching for us. They speeded our departure for Wayland with snow-balls, and now they want to welcome us home again with some more. We should have run into a giddy ambush if I hadn't just spotted Figgy!"

"Bai Jove! I don't feel up to anothah scwap, deah boys!"

None of them did for that matter.

"We've got to get in, though!" said Tom grimly. "You fellows wait here a sec. We want to know how many there are before making a rush for it!"

"Yes, rather!"

Tom gave a spring and got his fingers on top of the wall near at hand. A shower of snow smothered him, but he got a grip, shook himself, and then dragged himself astride. At that spot the wall screened the Head's garden, and was much lower than the actual school wall. A moment later Tom had dropped down into the garden.

Laurels and other bushes, covered in snow, hid him from the house as he trod swiftly along until he reached the fence that divided the garden from the quadrangle.

He swarmed over the fence and dropped down into the

"Hold on!"
"What the thump—"

quad. The porter's lodge and outbuildings still hid him from the gateway. A few seconds later he was peering cautiously round the corner of the lodge.

Then he chuckled softly. It was an ambush right enough. Close by the wall, in the shelter of the lodge coalhouse, were five juniors. All were stooping down, kneading snowballs as fast as they could, and all were keeping one eye on the gateway.

Tom recognised Figgins, Kerr, Wynn, Redfern, and Owen of the New House.

"The giddy enemy!" murmured Tom Merry. "I was right, then!"

He watched a moment, and when he hurried back to his chums his eyes were gleaming.

Very soon he had made his report to them.

"Only five of 'em!" chuckled Blake. "Well, we'll soon handle them, now we know they're there. Come on! We'll give 'em ambush!"

"Hold on!" said Tom. "I've got a better wheeze than that. You hang on outside the gateway with Towser, Herries. You can chip in when you hear the rumpus. The rest of you follow me!"

"Wight-ho, deah boy!"

Tom Merry was a leader to be trusted, and his chums followed without hesitation. As they went Tom told his little plan. This time, when the fence was reached, Tom gave a sharp glance about him, and then swarmed over it into Taggles' kitchen garden. A moment or two later all six were grouped behind the coalhouse.

From inside the garden toolshed Tom produced a step-ladder and various tools—a rake, a shovel, a broom, and a long pole.

Armed with these, Tom, Blake, Lowther, and Digby swarmed up on to the roof of the coalhouse, and began to work their way up it, scarcely daring to breathe.

Headless of the snow, they reached the ridge at last, and peered over. They could only see Redfern and Wynn, the rest were obviously nearer the coalhouse. They could hear Figgins' voice.

"We'll give 'em socks this time, you men!" he was chuckling. "We really must score over 'em before break-up! I'd like the dear kids to remember us over the Christmas hols! Mind, wait until I give the word, and then—Hullo! What's that noise?"

The noise was made by Tom Merry & Co. pushing at the snow on the sloping roof with their implements. It only lasted a few brief seconds, and Redfern and Wynn heard it just as Figgy did.

Figgins looked upwards swiftly, and then he gave a startled yell.

"What the— Oh, my hat! Look out!"

His yell came too late—much too late! Three or four pushes at the thick mass of snow were enough. It began to move almost at once, and the next second it was shooting over the edge.

Swoooooh!

Figgins & Co. had no chance to escape. Even as they looked up, the avalanche descended upon them.

For a few brief, whirling seconds Figgins & Co. vanished from sight, only Redfern and Wynn escaping the full force of it.

Yells and gurgles and gasps came from the mountain of snow at the foot of the outhouse. Little of Figgins & Co. could be seen save arms and legs and heads.

Redfern and Wynn gasped helplessly, but only for a moment. At a word from Tom Merry the juniors on the roof let themselves go.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Laughing uproariously, they slid down the roof, landing safely on the piled-up snow. Recovering themselves swiftly, they rushed at the startled Redfern and Wynn and sent them whirling into the snow-heap to join their hapless companions.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "What price the ambush, Figgy?"

"Yaas, wathah! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yow-ow! You—gurgle, gurgle—"rotters!" choked Figgins, floundering desperately in the heap.

One by one the New House jokers scrambled out, smothered from head to foot in snow, only to be brought down again by their laughing School House rivals. Herries came rushing through the gateway, and leaving Towser to his own devices, he joined the melee. Soon Figgins & Co., panting and breathless, were flat on their backs, with School House fellows sitting on their chests.

"Rescue!" howled Figgins frantically. "Oh, you—groogh!—rotters! Gerroff me chest, Tom Merry!"

"Some other time, old bean!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Rotters!" panted Figgins. "Oh, crumbs! How did you—groogh!—know it was an ambush, you bounders?"

"We spotted a long-legged bird who gave the game away, old chap!"

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"Oh! You spotted me?"

"Just that, old bean! School House wins—what?"

"Ow! You bounders!" gasped Figgy, spluttering snow from his mouth. "Look here—let us go now; you've scored for once!"

"Dear man—"

"Let us go!" gasped Figgy. "We'll make it pax, Merry. We've got something else on. We've been waiting for a chap who'll be coming through the gates soon, as well as you fellows. We want to snowball him!"

"One of our men—what?"

"No. Old Ratty's beastly nephew! He went out hours ago, and we want to catch the brute when he comes back!"

"Ratty's nephew?" echoed Tom. "Who— Oh, I remember hearing he was expecting a giddy visitor! Who is he—a kid?"

"No, worse luck! We'd smash him if he was!" snorted Figgins. "He's a grown man, and a beastly outsider!"

"A brute!" said Fatty Wynn. "Worse than Ratty himself!"

"Then he must be bad!" grinned Blake. "Still, he's good enough for that casual ward, the New House!"

"He's a sweep!" said Figgins. "Goodness knows how long he's staying with Ratty! But he's already shown what a brute he is. He boxed Fatty's ears just for bumping into him accidentally. Then he sent me spinning because a snowball happened to hit him—a blessed accident, too!"

"Started well, anyway!" chuckled Tom.

"We're going to snowball him!" said Figgy. "Not content with hitting me like a brute, he reported the lot of us to Ratty—got us a caning. What d'you think of that?"

"Rotten! Must be an outsider," agreed Tom. "We'll help you snowball him!"

Figgins scrambled up, and the rest were released. It was pax now.

"Why not hiss him, instead?" said Fatty Wynn, slowly shaking his head. "He's lame—"

"That's the trouble," said Figgins, with a grunt. "Think it's quite playing the game, Tommy? You see, the chap's got a gammy leg."

"Oh! Then—then—"

"It's rather awkward," said Figgins. "He limps—got wounded in the War, I believe. Captain Rateliff, old Ratty calls him, so I suppose he must have. Think it's O.K. to snowball him?"

Tom frowned.

"Better not, perhaps," he said. "Hardly the thing, is it? Hiss him instead, if you want to. Perhaps he isn't so bad—"

"If you'd seen him cuff Fatty and thump me—" Figgins was beginning, when he stopped short as a man came through the gates. He was walking with a pronounced limp. Figgins instantly started to hiss, and his New House chums joined in.

The man looked round. His face darkened as he sighted the juniors. He started off towards them, and then he turned abruptly and went limping off towards the New House.

Tom Merry had been about to join in the hissing. But suddenly, like his chums, he gave a start. The man certainly limped. But he was no stranger to the juniors. They recognised instantly the thin, hard features, and the tweed suit and cap.

It was the man they had had trouble with at the castle! Tom Merry & Co. were thunderstruck.

"Well, my hat!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Is—is that Ratty's nephew?" breathed Blake. "Figgy, you ass—"

"That's the chap," said Figgins. "And a rotter he is—worse than his dashed uncle, I fancy! What's bred in the bone—"

"My hat! Is that Ratty's nephew?"

"That's him! You fellows haven't come up against the cad?" said Figgins, staring.

"Haven't we just! We've mobbed him and snowballed him!" groaned Blake.

"You—you did that?" yelled Figgins.

"Yaas, wathah!"

They told Figgins & Co. of their adventure at the castle. Figgins' eyes gleamed.

"The rank outsider!" he gasped. "But what on earth was he doing at the castle?"

"Goodness knows! He was in the vaults, anyway. But—but it's queer! The beggar didn't limp when we saw him—at least, I never noticed it," said Tom Merry, frowning. "He fairly bolted like a chap on the cinder-path!"

"Fear lent him wings, and made him forget his giddy limp!" said Lowther. "Anyway, it's done now. No good troubling trouble until trouble troubles you! Besides, Ratty's blessed nephew isn't likely to report us," he added shrewdly. "He'd be shown up in a pretty rotten light if he did!"

"Bai Jove! Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry & Co. saw the sense in that remark, and after

exchanging chaff and cat-balls with their defeated rivals they went in to tea.

CHAPTER 3.

Standing Up to Ratty !

"SCANDALOUS!"

Mr. Horace Ratcliff stood on the New House steps and glared out into the snowy quadrangle.

It was the following day, just after dinner.

That night had been rather an anxious one for the juniors of St. Jim's.

Before bed-time there had been signs of a thaw, and the young gentlemen of St. Jim's did not want a thaw—far from it! They wanted slides and snow-fights, and all the fun snow brought in its wake.

But they had no need to fear. When rising-bell rang out that morning it had rung lustily on frosty air. Looking out of the frost-coated windows, the Lower School had been overjoyed to see that, apart from thawing, it had been snowing again. Moreover, it was now freezing—freezing hard.

And freezing meant skating—it kept on! And it certainly looked like keeping on. It was still freezing hard as Mr. Ratcliff, like Good King Wenceslaus, looked on a snowy world. Frost glistened on the window-panes, and on the leafless old elms. Thick snow lay everywhere, piled up against walls and tree-trunks. And it was cold!

Mr. Ratcliff did not like snow, frost, or cold of any kind. His long, thin nose had been upped almost blue, and he sniffed as he blinked into the quad. But it was not the cold that he described as "scandalous." He was referring to the behaviour of a swarm of cheery, happy fags and juniors in the quadrangle.

Some were snowballing amid yells and shrieks of merriment; others were sliding on a long, glassy slide, shooting along it, one after another, at a speed that made Mr. Ratcliff feel positively dizzy.

"Scandalous!" repeated Mr. Ratcliff. "Perfectly abominable!"

Mr. Ratcliff, being a very irritable, cross-grained old gentleman, was a kill-joy. He hated to see others happy—especially the unlucky juniors under his control. And, unfortunately for them, the fags and juniors were breaking the

(Continued on next page.)



Fish is good for the brains, and a young reader whose dad is a doctor has written in to say that our famous old Oracle should also try spaghetti. 'Sno good, chum, he's tried it; it

all gets entangled in his whiskers!—ED.

Q. What is an Abraham-ma ?

A. This, Tom Shaunesy, of Belfast, is the slang term for a vagabond. Not long ago a newspaper was founded at Birmingham entitled the "Abraham-man's News," and exclusively for a public consisting of tramps and beggars. This unique paper is produced on a single sheet, and is printed in the slang of the vagrants, which is quite unintelligible to the ordinary person. The price of it is a "flack"—one ha'penny.

Q. What is the Cap of Maintenance ?

A. No, Freddie, this is nothing to do with a school cap worn by monitors. It is, in fact, worn by someone of very much greater importance. The Cap of Maintenance is a low cap of crimson velvet with a broad brim of ermine, worn by the British sovereign at one part of the coronation ceremony.



You couldn't wear this cap at school, but a British sovereign wears it during some part of the coronation ceremony.

Q. What English King dropped the Great Seal into the Thames ?

A. Here's an easy one for a start, lads! It was James II.

Q. What is gallipot ?

A. A kind of hardened turpentine, J. S. S.

Q. Who is the brainiest man on earth ?

A. Modesty forbids me to get down the answer to this question, "Regular Reader," of South Africa. I was born in 1832, on November 5th, to be precise. My birthday is a movable feast; that is, I sometimes move it forward a bit if I am hard up.

Q. Who was Ranjitsinghi ?

A. This question has been sent in by a reader in Toronto, Canada, who signs himself "Ten-year-old." The man to whom he refers is a famous Indian prince, the Maharaja Jamsahib of Nawanagar, otherwise Lt.-Col. His Highness Shri Sir

Ranjitsinghi Vibhaji. He first earned fame at Cambridge and played cricket for Sussex from 1895, in which year he topped the Sussex batting averages. In 1896 and 1900 he was champion batsman of all England. His nephew is Duleepsinghi, who is almost certain to be chosen for the Tests against Australia next year.

Q. Does a marble bust ?

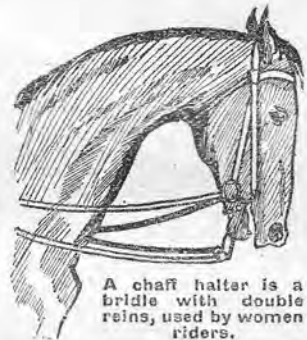
A. Can't tell you, "Funny Fred." But I do know that iron sinks, jam rolls, grass slopes, music stands, time flies, sulphur springs, moonlight walks, rubber tyres, and the organ stops!

Q. What is the meaning of "sub rosa" ?

A. The literal meaning of this Latin term, Arthur Twining, of Leicester, is "under the rose." It means privately or telling something in secrecy. The expression originated with the Romans, who were in the habit of hanging a white rose over the banquet table as a hint to the guests that all conversation was in confidence and must not be repeated elsewhere after the feast. My regards to your aunt, "who first turns to the Oracle columns in the good old Gem each week before reading the school and other stories."

Q. Is a chop boat a ship that carries meat ?

A. Oh, friend William, you are really off the rails here! I can quite see how you have made the mistake in your supposition, but you are not quite right. A chop boat is a Chinese cargo boat, or a lighter licensed to carry goods to and from a vessel in harbour. I hope this will "meat" your question. (Joke. Ha, ha, ha!)

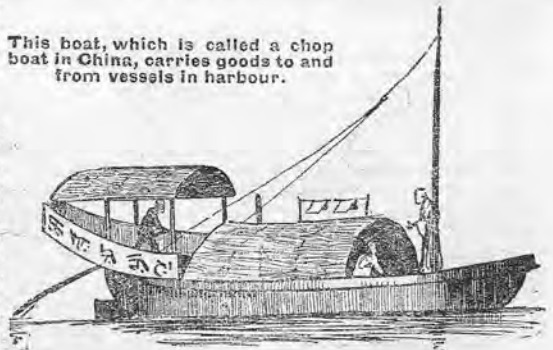


A chaff halter is a bridle with double reins, used by women riders.

Q. What is the meaning of chaff halters ?

A. I think, O. S., of Peekham, you should have said in your letter: "What is a chaff halter?" However, that is being too precise. A chaff halter, my friend, is a bridle with double reins, used by women riders. Our Gem artist shows you one in his sketch.

This boat, which is called a chop boat in China, carries goods to and from vessels in harbour.



rules; sliding and snowballing in open quadrangle was against the rules of the school.

Everybody at St. Jim's was fully aware of it. The Head was aware of it, yet he made no attempt to stop the revellers as he heard the uproar from his study. Indeed, he had been known to watch, smilingly. Mr. Ratcliff had also turned a blind eye and a deaf ear to what was going on in the quad.

But Mr. Ratcliff was a wet-blanket and a kill-joy. He glowered at the revellers for several seconds. He saw Arthur Augustus D'Arcy saunter gracefully out of the School House. Within the space of twenty yards Gussy's elegant silk hat was knocked off half a dozen times. But he picked it up again, and ambled on cheerily towards the juniors sliding on the slide. Gussy had put on an old hat for the occasion, and so he did not mind much.

"Scandalous!" murmured Mr. Ratcliff.

He started off across the quadrangle, making a bee-line for the sliders. Nobody saw him—all were far too busy on slides and with snowballs, and the noise was terrific. Arthur Augustus certainly did get a brief glimpse of a cap and gown, but just as he saw it another snowball whipped off his ill-used topper.

"Bai Jove!" gasped Gussy. "The—the cheeky young wottah!"

The snowball came from his minor, young Wally D'Arcy of the Third, this time, and it was really too much for Gussy.

He stooped and hastily kneaded a snowball—thus making an easier target still. Another ball of snow whizzed through the frosty air. Luckily it just missed Arthur Augustus—luckily for that youth, but very unluckily for Mr. Horace Ratcliff.

The Housemaster of the New House had just reached the slide—or to within a yard of it. He was just about to open his mouth to address the hilarious sliders, when Wally's snowball struck him right in the neck.

Mr. Ratcliff gasped and jumped convulsively, and the next instant his legs and arms were performing weird evolutions as he strove to regain his balance on the slippery snow. Somehow his legs carried him that short yard to the slide, and that finished it!

His legs went up, while the rest of him went down with a bump, just as a fresh gang of rule-breakers came whizzing along the glassy slide.

Tom Merry's frantic yell of warning was too late.

"Look out! What— Oh, my hat!"

Crash!

What happened next Mr. Horace Ratcliff had no clear recollection of—not even a muddled recollection, in fact.

It might have been a dozen mad bulls, or an earthquake, that caught him, for all he knew at the moment.

But it was only the sliders. The first one—Tom Merry—went headlong over him with a wild yell, and the rest followed, like a herd of wild buffaloes rushing to destruction over an unseen precipice.

They swarmed over Mr. Ratcliff amid a confused medley of waving arms and legs, and an uproar of howls and yells.

Most of them were hurt, but it is safe to say that Mr. Ratcliff was more hurt than any of the sliders.

"Oh, bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

He had witnessed the effect of Wally's snowball, and he rushed forward in the greatest alarm.

"Get off him, you fellows!" he gasped. "Quick, deah boys! It's old Watty!"

"Yes, it is! Buck up!" gasped Tom Merry, staggering to his feet dizzily. "Oh crumbs! Now for it!"

"Ratty!"

"Oh, my hat!"

Amid gasps and groans and startled exclamations, the scrum broke, and the sliders sorted themselves out, rubbing their many hurts.

Mr. Horace Ratcliff was revealed at last.

He sat up and blinked about him dazedly. His gown was torn in a score of places—indeed, it hung from him in strips. His mortar-board was gone, and altogether he looked a wreck of his former self. He sat on the slide and gasped and gurgled.

"Ow, ow! Gwoogh! Gug-good heavens! What—what— His remarks ended in a spluttering gurgle.

"Oh, bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, quite shocked. "Pway allow me to help you up, Mr. Watch!"

He held out a helping hand.

With his aid, and the aid of Tom Merry, Mr. Horace Ratcliff staggered to his feet. The fall was somewhat severe for a man of his years. He stood upright at last.

For several seconds he stood thus, still gasping. Then, quite suddenly, without warning, he repaid Gussy's kindness by giving that youth a most ferocious box on the ear.

Smack!

"Ow! Oh, bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus, astonished and hurt, gave a yell.

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"You—you young rascal!" hissed Mr. Ratcliff, his eyes blazing with fury. "Take that—and that!"

Arthur Augustus took them—long before he thought of getting out of the way. And before he did, Mr. Ratcliff grabbed him with one hand, and started to box his ears in right earnest with the other.

Smack, smack, smack!

Mr. Ratcliff's hand seemed to be worked by clockwork—or the luckless Arthur Augustus got that impression. He wriggled and yelled as the enraged Housemaster kept it up as if he would never stop.

"Hold on, sir!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

But Mr. Ratcliff had quite lost control of himself. Just as Tom spoke, however, there was the sound of a window going up, and an angry, excited voice reached the ears of the crowd.

"Stop! Mr. Ratcliff—sir, I beseech of you, I beg of you to stop!"

Mr. Ratcliff gasped and stopped breathlessly. He whirled round and snorted as he sighted little Mr. Lathom, the meek and good-natured master of the Fourth, at his study window.

As he stopped, Mr. Lathom's head and shoulders vanished abruptly from the window.

"There!" panted Mr. Ratcliff bitterly, turning to glower at the dazed and bemused Arthur Augustus. "That—that will teach you a lasting lesson, I trust! That will teach you to throw snowballs at me—a Housemaster of this school!"

"Gug-gug-gwoogh!" gurgled Arthur Augustus. "Whoop! Ow, ow! Oh, bai Jove! You—you feahful wuffian!"

"What—what— You dare—"

"Ow, ow, ow!" groaned Gussy, almost speechless with indignation and pain. "Ow, wow! Oh, my yahs! Gwoogh! You—you feahful wuffian, Mr. Watch!"

"What—what— You dare to use such language to me!" stuttered the Housemaster.

"It wasn't me!" shrieked Arthur Augustus, rubbing his red and burning ear frantically. "It wasn't I who thwew that snowball!"

"How dare you tell such abominable untruths!" booted Mr. Ratcliff. "I saw you making the snowball—I—I saw you throw it!" he added heatedly. A statement that was certainly not quite true. "I saw you—"

"Mr. Ratcliff! Sir!"

It was little Mr. Lathom. He came stumbling through the snow, his face almost crimson with emotion.

"Mr. Lathom! What—what—"

"I beg of you not to touch that boy again!" gasped Mr. Lathom, breathless with hurrying, and red in the face with deep indignation. "How—how dare you strike one of my boys in that brutal manner, Mr. Ratcliff—how dare you, I say!"

"What—what—"

Mr. Ratcliff's eyes glittered as he eyed his colleague. To be addressed thus—before the boys—

"Mr. Lathom," he stuttered, "are you actually addressing me—the Housemaster of the New House? Do you not forget yourself, sir?"

But little Mr. Lathom was built of stern stuff, and the Housemaster's rage did not daunt him.

"I repeat what I said, Mr. Ratcliff!" he almost shouted in his indignation. "How dare you strike one of my boys—or any boy, for that matter—in that brutal manner! Are you not ashamed of yourself, sir?"

"What—what— Good heavens! Lathom—Mr. Lathom! Sir! Before the boys—in open quadrangle! What—"

Mr. Ratcliff nearly exploded with outraged wrath and dignity. To be spoken to thus by the master of the Fourth—he, a Housemaster—was too much. His sour features grew crimson, and he fairly trembled.

The scared juniors were silent with startled amazement. This was something quite outside their experience. The situation had the makings of a first-class row, at least.

"I—I am astounded, scandalised, Mr. Lathom!" choked Mr. Ratcliff at last, getting back his breath. "You—you forget yourself! I—I shall insist upon Dr. Holmes taking action in this—this unheard-of matter! You have—have insulted me—have called me names before juniors in open quadrangle! Sir—"

"And I will repeat what I have said to Dr. Holmes if necessary, sir!" gasped Mr. Lathom breathlessly and heatedly. "I witnessed the whole affair, Mr. Ratcliff! Possibly I should not have spoken thus in open quad. But your—your actions forced me to do so. You were punishing an innocent boy, Mr. Ratcliff—punishing him far, far too severely, and in a manner not—usual at this school, or in any other school. I refused to stand by and allow an act of injustice to take place, in any case!"

"Mr. Lathom, I—I am astounded! I have punished that young ruffian as he deserves to be punished. He has assaulted me—subjected me to grave physical injury—and made me look ridiculous before the school! He threw that snowball at me, causing me—"

"D'Arcy did not throw that snowball at you, Mr. Ratcliff! I witnessed the whole incident—I was watching the proceedings through my window!"

"Yet you attempted in no way to stop such scandalous breaking of rules!" said Mr. Ratcliff, with a bitter sneer. "You—you watched, and did not interfere! Had you done so this would never have happened; I should not have been struck by the snowball D'Arcy flung at me!"

"This boy did not fling the snowball at you, Mr. Ratcliff!"

"And I say that he did!" hooted Mr. Ratcliff.

"Pardon me, but he did not, sir!"

"And I say that he did!" bellowed Mr. Ratcliff, his face scarlet. "I—I saw the boy do so myself—with my own eyes!"

"Mr. Ratcliff—sir—you are mistaken! You could not have seen—"

"How dare you, sir—how dare you throw doubt upon my

quadrangle! He has thrown doubt upon my word; he has held me up to scorn and contempt before these boys, sir! He has dared to charge me with brutality—"

"Impossible, Mr. Ratcliff! I beg of you to be calm, sir! One moment!"

Mr. Railton seemed to grasp the situation at once. He whirled round upon the gaping crowd.

"Boys, how dare you stand there! Go—disperse at once! Any boy found in the quadrangle in two minutes will be punished severely by me! Go!"

"Oh crumbs!"

"Oh, my hat!"

The crowd dispersed—like mist before the sun. Mr. Railton turned again to the two raging masters.

"I—I am surprised, shocked at this, gentlemen!" he gasped. "I beg of you to accompany me to my study. Possibly I can clear up any misunderstanding—"



"What the— Oh, my hat! Look out!" Too late, Figgins gave a yell of warning. Tom Merry & Co. gave three or four pushes at the mass of snow on the outhouse roof, and they were enough. Even as Figgins & Co. looked up, the avalanche descended upon them, and for a few whirling seconds they disappeared from sight. (See Chapter 2.)

word, Mr. Lathom!" spluttered Mr. Ratcliff, almost beside himself with rage. "Dr. Holmes shall hear—"

"I do not doubt your word, Mr. Ratcliff! But you are mistaken—"

"I am not mistaken, sir! D'Arcy—"

"Gentlemen! Mr. Ratcliff—Mr. Lathom! Bless my soul! What—"

Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, rustled up, scandalised, horrified. The tones of the two masters could be heard half-way across the quadrangle. He waved the crowd aside with his hands—or tried to do so. The crowd ignored him completely; they were too scared to hear or heed anything but the quarrel between the two masters. Sensation was scarcely the word for it.

"What ever is the matter, Mr. Ratcliff?" demanded Mr. Railton, in great alarm. "Is it possible—"

"I will very soon acquaint you with that, Mr. Railton!" panted Mr. Ratcliff, quivering with passion. "Mr. Lathom has—has thought fit to insult me before the school in open

"You can do nothing whatever in the matter, Mr. Railton!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff. "I shall proceed at once to lay the facts before Dr. Holmes!"

He was turning away, when there was a step on the snow. Captain Ratcliff came limping up. His face showed serious concern.

"Please forgive me if I am wrong in butting-in!" he said, with a faint smile. "But possibly I can help, if the matter concerns the cause of my relative's accident."

"It does concern that, Gilbert!" said Mr. Ratcliff. "But—but—"

He paused. Raging as he was, bitterly angry as he was, Mr. Railton had a doubt—a big doubt—at the back of his mind as to whether Arthur Augustus was actually the culprit. And he did not wish Captain Ratcliff to state all that he had seen.

But he need not have feared. Captain Ratcliff had been

on the fringe of the crowd, had heard all that had passed, and had no intention of telling the facts.

"I happened to be passing and I saw the whole thing," said the captain, smiling grimly. "This boy—D'Arcy, I think his name is—was the boy who threw the snowball. But I think this gentleman is mistaken in supposing that Mr. Ratcliff struck the boy with undue severity. So far as I could see, he merely cuffed him lightly—far more lightly than I myself should have done in like circumstances, I am afraid."

"Sir!" gasped Mr. Lathom. "Really, sir—" "Mr. Railton, you have heard that!" spluttered Mr. Ratcliff. "The evidence of Captain Ratcliff settles the matter; though my word should be more than enough."

"Mr. Ratcliff—" "Really, gentlemen!" exclaimed Mr. Railton, just as Mr. Lathom was beginning again. "I beg of you not to continue this—this unfortunate dispute in the quadrangle. If you will accompany me indoors to my study—"

"I shall do nothing of the kind!" barked Mr. Ratcliff. "This is a matter for Dr. Holmes to deal with, Mr. Railton!"

With that the Housemaster of the New House stamped away towards the School House steps in a towering rage. Mr. Railton and Mr. Lathom—the latter in a state of fluttering agitation—walked after him in silence. And Captain Ratcliff limped away, a curious smile on his hard features.

CHAPTER 4. Rough on Gussy!

"**B**AI JOVE! Ow, ow, ow!" "Hard cheese, Gussy! That rotter Ratty—" "Ow, ow, ow! Gwreat Scott! Gwooooh!"

"It was young Wally who threw it—the young idiot!" said Blake sympathetically, brushing the snow from Gussy's clothes. "Ratty was lying! He isn't particular about the truth or anything else, the rotter! Good old Lathom! He wasn't afraid of Ratty, anyway!"

"Hear, hear!" "Yaas, wathah! Ow, ow! Lathom played up jolly well, deah boys!" panted Arthur Augustus. "Ow, ow! I still feel quite dizzy, you know!"

As he stood in the hall-way Arthur Augustus certainly did look dizzy. Mr. Ratcliff was thin and bony, but the unfortunate Arthur Augustus had had positive proof that his bony hand was strong enough to hurt severely.

"It's a rotten shame!" said Tom Merry, frowning. "Ratty will make things hot for Lathom after this. If it comes to trouble the Head's bound to back up a Housemaster's word. Lathom's short-sighted, too, and the Head will think of that."

"You bet there will be trouble!" grunted Blake, peering cautiously out into the quad. "Hallo! That rotter Captain Ratty's there now! I bet he's gone to back up his giddy uncle!"

"Better clear before they come in!" said Tom. "My hat! I never thought old Lathom had it in him! He's a good sort!"

"Here's Ratty now!" said Digby excitedly. "Looks in a fearful rage! Cave!"

But the juniors had no time to get away. There was a sudden rustle in the doorway, and Mr. Horace Ratcliff came in. He fairly whirled in, gave the juniors a glare, and then strode on towards the Head's study.

"That's done it!" said Tom Merry. "Gone to the Head, I bet! Better look out, Gussy!"

There was another rustle in the hall doorway, and Mr. Railton came in, followed by Mr. Lathom. Mr. Railton was looking disturbed, and the two masters crossed the hall in grim silence.

It was nearly time for afternoon classes, and the juniors went to their studies for their books, buzzing with the latest sensation. A serious quarrel between two masters was something quite new and startling. As Blake & Co. left their study, Toby, the House page, came up to them.

"Which Master D'Arcy's wanted by the 'Ead!" he said.

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"Just what I expected!" grunted Blake. "Buck up, Gussy! We'll back you up if it comes to trouble!"

But this assurance was small comfort to Arthur Augustus. Handing his books to Blake, he made his way to the Head's study.

Mr. Ratcliff was there, his face flushed and bitter. Mr. Lathom stood on the opposite side of the room, and one glance at the little master of the Fourth told Gussy that the Head had not taken a favourable view of Mr. Lathom's side of the affair.

The Head gave the swell of the Fourth a worried, angry look.

"I have sent for you in connection with a very serious matter, D'Arcy!" he began sternly. "Mr. Ratcliff states

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that you threw a snowball at him in the quadrangle, causing him to fall and hurt himself severely!"

"That is not the twuth, sir!" said Gussy calmly.

"What—what—D'Arcy!"

"I did not throw a snowball at Mr. Watcliff—as Mr. Watcliff knows vewy well, sir!" said Gussy. "He has charged me unjustly—"

"Silence, D'Arcy! How dare you refer to a master in those terms! I am questioning you because Mr. Lathom considers that a mistake has been made!" snapped the Head. "If you deny that you threw it—"

"Yaas, I do, sir!"

"Do you know who did, then?"

"Bai Jove!"

It was the question Arthur Augustus had feared. He had no intention of giving away Wally, his young brother. Throwing a snowball at a master was a serious matter, and though Wally had not intended it for Mr. Ratcliff, he would have the greatest difficulty in proving that. And now that it had led to all this trouble—

Arthur Augustus set his lips and did not reply.

"You have heard my question!" snapped the Head.

"You state that you know, and yet—"

"I vegwet that I cannot ansawah, sir!"

"Answr me at once! If you did not throw that snowball, then tell me the name of the boy who did!"

Silence!

The Head waited a moment, and then pursed his lips and exchanged a glance with Mr. Ratcliff.

"Very well!" he snapped. "The matter is quite clear to me. D'Arcy does not answer for the simple reason no other boy did throw it but himself. His silence is enough!"

"Dr. Holmes—I beg of you to hear me—" began Mr. Lathom excitedly.

"Kindly allow me to deal with this matter, Mr. Lathom!" said the Head coldly. "This boy is undoubtedly the culprit!"

"Sir—"

"Obviously you were mistaken, Mr. Lathom!" said the Head, with a majestic wave of the hand. "It is impossible for me to doubt the word of Mr. Ratcliff, a Housemaster of this school. He was, unfortunately, on the spot, and he has assured me that there can be no doubt that D'Arcy threw the snowball. He surely should know the facts. He states that he saw the boy with the snowball in his hand just before it happened!"

"That is quite twue, sir," said Arthur Augustus indignantly. "I had a snowball in my hand, but I did not throw it. Wathah not! Mr. Watcliff is not—"

"Be silent, D'Arcy!" thundered the Head. "I have heard enough. You admit that you had a snowball in your hand, and Mr. Ratcliff states that he actually saw you throw it. I accept his statement."

"Dr. Holmes—really, sir—" stammered Mr. Lathom, pink with angry indignation. "Am I to understand, therefore, that you doubt—"

"Be good enough to keep calm, Mr. Lathom!" said the Head icily. "I do not for one moment throw doubt upon your word—most certainly not. My suggestion is that you are mistaken! Your eyesight—if you will forgive me mentioning the fact—is not good, and possibly—"

"I saw the whole affair most clearly, sir! I—I—"

"You were mistaken, Mr. Lathom!" was the Head's cold answer. "From the window of your room it would be difficult, I am sure, for you to see what was happening with any clearness. The whole affair is most regrettable! But D'Arcy is undoubtedly the culprit, and I am quite satisfied. I shall punish him severely!"

"Dr. Holmes, I beg of you—"

"So far as this boy is concerned, the matter is closed save for his punishment, Mr. Lathom! D'Arcy, you have behaved in a scandalous manner! Not only have you caused serious hurt to a Housemaster of this school, but you have insulted him openly—have applied outrageous epithets—"

"I have called Mr. Watcliff a wottah, and I still considah that he is one, sir!" said Arthur Augustus calmly. "He tweated me with bwutal—"

"Enough! Be silent! How dare you, D'Arcy!" gasped Dr. Holmes. He stood up and reached for his cane.

"Hold out your hand!"

"Weally, sir—"

"Hold out your hand, boy—at once!"

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus hesitated. Mr. Lathom, his kindly face crimson, stepped forward in great agitation.

"Dr. Holmes—one moment! I cannot stand by and see an injustice—"

"Mr. Lathom!" gasped the Head, almost crimson with wrath. "I have already requested you to allow me to deal with this matter. D'Arcy, your hand at once!"

This time Arthur Augustus obeyed—the look on the Head's face was terrific. The cane came down with a swish.

It was a stinger—and the three that followed it were

(Continued on page 12.)

As a footer reporter, Mr. Parker, our special football representative, reckons he leads the field. Certainly "Nosey" gets a "kick" in his reports, and serves up some first-class "histories" of the famous clubs he has visited, as you will agree when you have read his latest effort below.



Mr. Parker POPS IN

TO SEE
WEST HAM UNITED!

wriggled out of his grip and ran back to keep goal again till half-time. And it was only by taking his goal-keeper's jersey away during the interval that the trainer prevented Ted from going back on to the field for the second half of the match.

Local Talent First!

JOHN BALL, now getting goals for the Hammers from inside-left position, is another of the cheap finds of the West Ham team. Bury thought he was nearly finished, so they let him go. In the first six matches of the present season Ball scored more goals for West Ham than he had scored for Bury all last

THOSE of you who have been with me—in spirit—to the football grounds into which I have already poked my nose, will remember that we have been in some queer places. We have hob-nobbed with the "nobs" of the game: we have been into places where we have had to walk warily so as not to disturb the velvet pile on the board-room carpet.

And now we poke our noses into a different sort of place altogether. We will go and see the democrats of football. They are in the first-class, of course, but there is nothing highbrow about West Ham United. There are no knights or lords on the board of directors here: in fact, I think we shall be best attired if we put a scarf round our necks. They will then think we have really come on business, because they are always ready to do business at West Ham. And those who hope to catch them out and get the best of a bargain have another think coming.

You know that West Ham is in the East End of London, so obviously our mutual learned friend, Rudyard Kipling was wrong when he said that East is East, and all that sort of thing. East and West meet at the ground they call Upton Park.

Inseparables!

LET us look up Mr. King first, but in doing so I think we had better make up our minds not to call him Mr. King. He would prefer to take us by the hand and be greeted with a hearty: "How are you, Syd?" That gives the real democratic atmosphere.

There are folk who are in truth managers of football clubs, but the man in charge at West Ham is never more than "Syd." And let it be confessed that Syd is likely to get more out of the players than are the managers who sit on lofty thrones. Anyway, Syd King and West Ham go together; they are inseparable, and what Syd says in his friendly way goes.

What a storehouse of memories is conjured up by a look into the West Ham offices. How the club has risen by careful steps from the obscurity of Thames Ironworks to a place in the First Division of the Football League.

There are the originals of some cheques which are really landmarks in the history of the club. There is one on the wall made out to the West Ham club for £6,365 is. 7d. It seems a funny amount. "That," Syd King told me, "was the amount we received as our share of the Cup Final of 1923."

THEN there is a cheque for five hundred pounds, made out by the West Ham Club. That was the amount of

the fine which the Southern League imposed when West Ham decided to leave that organisation. There is another cheque for five thousand pounds. This represents the greatest fee West Ham have ever received for any player—and the player concerned with this cheque was Syd Puddefoot.

But though West Ham have received five thousand pounds for one player, they have never given anything like that amount for any player they have bought. Buy in a cheap market and sell in an expensive one might be the motto placed alongside those souvenirs.

Born Boxers!

THAT'S enough of the office, however. Let us go and have a look at some of the players. "You'll find them in the gymnasium," Syd King told me. I poked my nose into the gymnasium and then wished I hadn't. I just caught the full force of a punch-ball as it came swinging outwards. One of the Hammers had hit it with his fist. I think it was the centre-half, Jimmy Barrett. The punch-ball knocked my nose out of shape, and not being used to that sort of treatment, I "put up my dukes" as soon as I had rubbed the stars out of my eyes. But what a hornet's-nest I found I had dropped into! I never saw such a ready lot of fighters as these West Ham fellows. They all seem to be born boxers. Barrett, the fellow who had hit the punch-ball, was the boxing champion of his school.

VIC WATSON, the centre-forward, is another who knows how to use his fists, and in the days of the War he did a lot of exhibition boxing. On the same lines is Teddy Hufton, the goalkeeper. Of course Ted ought to be the best boxer of the lot, because he gets good practice punching out shots.

Ted is also the wireless expert of the side. He talked valves, wave-lengths, and that sort of thing to me until I was quite giddy. This goalkeeper of West Ham is just typical of the bargains which the club has picked up. While he was a soldier in the Coldstream Guards, Hufton played an odd game or two for West Ham, though he was then on the Sheffield United books. When the War was over, Sheffield United weren't particularly keen to keep him. So Manager Syd King picked him up for a very small fee, and since then Hufton has played for England.

And the pluck of this fellow is tremendous. Two years ago he played for England against Ireland at Belfast. In the first half he fractured two bones in his arm in making a flying save as an opponent kicked the ball. The trainer of the team wanted to carry him off, but Hufton

season. That shows how they have a knack of getting the best out of their players when they come under trainer Charlie Paynter's eagle eye.

Charlie isn't one of the new-fangled sort of trainers. He doesn't believe in this and that sort of rays; in electrical treatment and so on. He believes in good honest hot water, and embrocation rubbed in with plenty of elbow grease.

And these democrats of the First Division are certainly to be admired for one thing particularly. They never go hunting round the country for players until they are quite sure they haven't got the goods they want on their own doorstep. There are more local lads on the West Ham staff than on the staff of any other First Division club.

The clubs of the East End of London are combed first of all, and the schools of West Ham and East Ham are watched, as well as encouraged with donations now and again. Perhaps you don't know that West Ham have produced, in the last twenty years or so, five different centre-forwards who have played for England—Stapley, Hilsdon, Webb, Puddefoot and Watson. That's a record worth having.

AND though West Ham are democrats in one sense, they are aristocrats in another, for they have two earls on the staff. One of them—Stanley Earle—plays in the forward line and is the captain of the side. He does his training in the evenings, because he is a commercial traveller by day.

The other is Arthur Earle, the left full back, and a mighty long fellow, too. I got a bit mixed up between these two Earls, and was still feeling a bit groggy because of the blow on my nose when William Wade, the full back, put this one across me:

"It's no Yews getting Ruffled." This

little reminder that two wingers of West Ham are named Yews and Ruffell was more than I could stand. I yelled back something about old iron and got out as quickly as I could.

"NOSEY."



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"The Tyrant!"

(Continued from page 10.)

was in a ferocious mood. Mr. Lathom stepped forward again twice, but the Head, majestic in his wrath, waved him back. The Head finished with the cane, and pointed with it to the door. Arthur Augustus tottered out, crimson in the face with indignation and anguish.

The door closed upon him, and the Head turned to the two masters.

"This is most regrettable, gentlemen!" he said grimly. "I must say, Mr. Lathom, that I—I am surprised at your conduct in the matter. The evidence is overwhelming that D'Arcy was the culprit—even Captain Ratcliff, I understand, has made that fact very clear!"

"Captain Ratcliff, sir, did not speak the truth!"

"You—you see, Dr. Holmes!" stammered Mr. Ratcliff.

"Mr. Lathom even charges my nephew—"

"Mr. Lathom had no right to make that statement in the circumstances!" said the Head, giving little Mr. Lathom a stern, surprised look. "I do not wish to hear anything further in the matter, however. In speaking as you did to the boys in the quadrangle, Mr. Lathom, you were gravely at fault, and I sincerely trust such a thing will never happen again. I think that an apology is due from you to Mr. Ratcliff!"

"I shall insist upon it!" said Ratty, giving his colleague a bitter, vengeful glare. "Otherwise, I shall feel bound to—resign my post here!"

Dr. Holmes started.

"Really, there is no need to talk of resignations, Mr. Ratcliff. Mr. Lathom will apologise—"

"Pardon me, Dr. Holmes, but that—that is impossible, sir!" stammered Mr. Lathom. "I refuse to do any such thing, sir!"

Dr. Holmes sat down. There was silence. It was a deadlock, and even the angry Head saw that Mr. Lathom meant what he said. Good-natured and mild as he was, Mr. Lathom, evidently, was not the man to climb down. His face was pale, but, nevertheless, set and determined. Mr. Ratcliff bit his lip. He did not want to keep his word by resigning now that the apology was not forthcoming. There was a possibility that the Head might assent. Mr. Ratcliff decided to be content with his victory over Mr. Lathom and let matters rest where they were.

"I do—do not desire an apology, Dr. Holmes!" he gasped at last. "All I desire is that the matter should end here," he said in his grandest manner. "Possibly my colleague, Mr. Lathom, will think better of his attitude when he has reconsidered the situation! As the senior member of your staff, Dr. Holmes, I consider that I am entitled to an ample apology from Mr. Lathom. But if he does not see fit to make it—if he does not realise the harm he has done to discipline, and to my personal prestige in the school, and does not wish to make amends, then I can do nothing to make him. In the circumstances, for the sake of the school, I desire that the matter shall go no further!"

With that Mr. Ratcliff bowed to the Head and sailed to the door.

The Head returned the bow, and began to busy himself with the papers on his desk. Evidently, like Mr. Ratcliff, he desired that the matter should end there. Mr. Lathom turned to him, hesitating. The Head did not look up. Obviously he did not desire to reopen the matter. And Mr. Lathom slowly followed the Housemaster out, his kindly face still crimson with angry indignation and mortification.

That afternoon the fellows in the Fourth were as good as gold! They did not fail to see the distress and dismay on their Form master's face, and after what they had heard from Arthur Augustus, they did not need to be told what it meant. Mr. Lathom had lost his case—had been severely "ticked off" by the Head. It was a rotten shame—all were agreed upon that, and were determined not to give Mr. Lathom further cause for worry that afternoon.

After lessons Arthur Augustus talked of going to the Head about it, but his chums promptly dissuaded him. It was clear that nothing they could do would alter the state of affairs, but probably earn them a licking instead. If they had only known it, however, the affair was to have its results.

CHAPTER 5.

Tricky Trimble!

CRASH!

Wilkins and Gunn jumped.

But they soon realised what it was. They were startled, but being study-mates of George Alfred Grundy of the Shell, they were used to shocks of every kind.

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description. When the study door flew back with a crash they knew it was only Grundy coming in without troubling to look round.

Grundy was a somewhat boisterous, clumsy youth. He prided himself on being what he called a hearty, bluff, rough-and-ready fellow, a fellow who called a spade a spade, and who therefore never minded hurting anyone's feelings or upsetting anyone's nerves.

It was tea-time in Grundy's study, and the day following the quarrel between Mr. Ratcliff and Mr. Lathom. Naturally enough, the affair had caused no little stir in both School House and New House—especially when it was known that the two masters were not now on speaking terms. And the sympathy of nearly every fellow was with little Mr. Lathom. Like Arthur Augustus, Grundy, in fact, had talked of visiting the Head and putting the facts, as they knew them, before him. But—fortunately, perhaps, for the great George Alfred—his chums had managed to talk him over. Fellows like Tom Merry would have done that quickly enough had they thought it would have been any use to reopen the matter. But they didn't.

Wilkins and Gunn were not discussing the Ratcliff-Lathom affair at the moment. They were occupied on the subject of the junior footer eleven's next match.

Then the door had flown back, and Grundy had appeared. It went back with a truly terrific crash, and Wilkins and Gunn were more than usually startled.

"You silly owl!" hooted Wilkins, glaring at Grundy. "What the thump d'you want to come charging into the study like that for?"

"Frightening fellows out of their wits!" snorted Gunn.

"You silly ass! Why—"

"Shut up!"

"That's all very well, but—"

"Shut up!" roared Grundy, who appeared to be in a terrific rage. "Shut up! Where's a dashed fives-bat? Quick! Help me find a fives-bat!"

"What the thump—"

"What the dickens—"

Grundy's chums stared at Grundy. He was rushing about the study like a madman, opening and shutting cupboard doors, and peering frantically into corners and on shelves—apparently in search of a fives-bat.

What Grundy wanted with a fives-bat was a mystery.

"But what's the matter?" shouted Wilkins. "Have you gone potty? Never mind a dashed fives-bat, Grundy! What about that chocolate you went for?"

"Have you got it?" demanded Gunn.

"Blow chocolate!" yelled Grundy. "Where's that fives-bat—there's one here somewhere! Where is it?"

Wilkins looked at Gunn, and Gunn looked at Wilkins. Grundy had finished his tea before them, and he had gone over to the tuckshop to get some chocolate—or so his chums had understood. They had agreed that a little chocolate would be a nice finish to tea. Grundy had been quite normal when he had gone! They wondered if he was normal now, however.

"Hold on!" gasped Wilkins in some alarm. "What do you want a fives-bat now for, Grundy?"

"Trimble!" yelled Grundy.

"What—"

"The fat rotter's done me down—me!" hooted Grundy. "I'll smash him. I'm going to make mincemeat of him when I find him. Where's that fives-bat—quick! Before he gets a chance to hide! I'll root him out, though, if I have to chase the fat little beast all over the school!"

"But what's he done?"

"He's collared my chocolate!" roared Grundy, still hunting round. "That New House rotter Figgins snowballed me just as I was coming out of the tuckshop. I shoved the packet of choc on the window-sill and let Figgy and his pals have a few good ones back. When I looked round again the choc had gone. So had Trimble! He was standing near when I came out—I saw him. He took it. I spotted him vanish into the House! I—I'll smash him!"

"Oh!"

"The—the cheeky fat worm!"

Wilkins and Gunn understood now. Such a trick was just what Baggy Trimble would do—especially if he happened to be exceptionally hungry. Baggy had bagged the chocolate—the chocolate they were waiting to share with Grundy. In a moment Wilkins and Gunn were helping to find the fives-bat—very willingly indeed.

They found it at last—in the fireplace where Grundy had been using it as a fire-shovel!

Grundy grabbed it and rushed from the study. A moment later there sounded a fiendish howl from the direction of the Fourth passage.

"All serene!" said Wilkins, as he heard it. "That was Trimble! Grundy's got him! Good! We can leave him to it!"

"Yes, rather!"

Wilkins and Gunn went on with their tea. The chocolate was gone, like a beautiful dream, but Grundy would

see that full payment was exacted from Trimble's fat person.

But Grundy had not "got" Trimble!

Certainly he found him all right. A glance into Trimble's study was enough. The fat Fourth-Former was there with a smear of chocolate on his fat cheeks.

"Now, you young rotter!" yelled Grundy.

He rushed at Trimble. Wildrake jumped up from the table in some alarm, but Wildrake was ignored. Trimble dodged round the table—he was not caught so easily as that. Then he leaped for the door. Wildrake sent his foot out—either by accident or design—and Grundy went over it with a crash.

Trimble vanished.

Grundy leaped up. By this time he was raging. He dashed after Trimble. There was no sign of him in the passage, but Grundy had heard his flying feet, and went rushing in that direction. As he reached the end of the Fourth passage he heard a sudden click—the click of a lock.

It came from the box-room door at the end of the passage, and Grundy knew the chase was ended—or he fancied it was!

But Trimble was not caught yet. Grundy twisted the doorknob. Then he shook it wrathfully. It remained shut.

"Open this door, you little beast!" roared Grundy.

"Open—"

"Rats!"

Apparently Trimble felt himself safe.

"Oh, won't you!" bellowed Grundy. "Well, I'll thumpin' soon have you out of that! There's more keys than one to fit that lock, my lad!"

"Oh crumbs!"

In the box-room Trimble gasped in sudden alarm. He knew well enough that Grundy was right—there were other keys that would fit the lock of the box-room door. Unless he did something he was caught like a rat in a trap.

He looked wildly about him. Only a few small boxes and an empty trunk met his gaze—nothing suitable to ram against the door to secure it. He thought of opening the door swiftly and rushing out, but dropped that idea instantly as too dangerous.

Then another idea occurred to him as he glanced at the window, and he grinned. Rushing to the window, he opened it and threw up the sash. Then he clambered through and dropped on to the leads outside—the leads of the outhouse.

It was a favourite way of breaking bounds, and the snow-clad leads and ground made it safer and easier than ever.

Trimble chuckled as he thought of Grundy's surprise when he did open the door. But sudden alarm gripped him as he heard—or fancied he heard—a sound at the window behind him.

"Oh crumbs!" he panted.

With amazing speed for one of his bulk he swarmed over the edge of the ledge and dropped down into the snow. It was not a big drop, and the soft, deep snow below broke his fall. In a moment he was up again and bolting for his life.

He did not bolt far.

He reached the corner of the outhouse, rushed round it, and then—

Crash!

There was a startled exclamation in a man's voice—an exclamation which Trimble, fortunately, did not hear. He was wallowing in the snow at the side of the gravel-path, winded and hurt—very much hurt.

"Ow, ow, ow!" he gurgled. "Yow-ow! Grooogh!"

He sat up, breathless and gasping, and it was only then he realised who he had barged into. It was not a master—it was Captain Ratcliff, Mr. Horace Ratcliff's nephew!

"Ow-yow! Oh crumbs!" gurgled Baggy.

Captain Ratcliff had obviously not come out of that terrific collision unhurt. He sat in the snowy gravel and gasped, his face fiendish, his eyes glittering with fury. Being charged full tilt by a fellow of Trimble's bulk was no light matter.

"Ow!" he gasped. "You—you little fiend! You—you careless, infernal little scoundrel!"

The military gentleman staggered to his feet, raging. Trimble, despite his winded state, scrambled up desperately. Something—a nasty gleam in the captain's steely eyes—frightened him. He felt it as well to go while the going seemed good.

The going was not good, however. Before he could move a step Captain Ratcliff's hand closed upon his shoulder like a vice.

Then the captain's other hand got busy on Trimble.

Smack, smack, smack!

Like his scholastic relative on the previous day, Captain Ratcliff, obviously, had lost control of an ungovernable temper. He easily exceeded his relative's ferocity, however—to Trimble's cost. Being charged by a fellow like Trimble was no joke, certainly, but only a brutal ruffian would have handled a junior as Captain Ratcliff did just then.

He cuffed him viciously, and then he grabbed up his stick from the snow and started in with that. Trimble howled. Finally, the man planted a kick behind Trimble, and sent him whirling headfirst into the piled-up snow.

"There!" he panted. "There, you—you little—"

He suddenly paused, and glanced swiftly about him, sudden fear in his eyes. But it was a quiet spot—no windows overlooked it, and nobody had seen that thrashing. He breathed hard in relief, and, without another glance at Trimble, limped quickly away.

Trimble sat up, and then he staggered dizzily to his feet. He was aching all over. He was dazed, bewildered, and he was blubbering. Rarely had Baggy Trimble had such a hammering. He could scarcely believe what had happened even now. His head sang, and he was trembling.

"Ow, ow, ow, ow!" he mumbled. "Ow! Oh, the—the awful beast! Ow, ow!"

He started to stagger towards the School House steps, still blubbering. He had quite forgotten Grundy now. But he turned another corner to find Grundy rushing towards him, fury in his eyes.

Clearly he had not heard Grundy at the window, 'after all. Here he was—he had probably not been able to open the door at all, and had rushed downstairs and out of the House, hoping to catch him that way. He came up, raging, but he stopped short as he sighted Trimble's white, tear-stained features.

George Alfred was a heavy-handed youth, but he was no bully; in fact, he was almost as tender-hearted as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. His wrath fled as he stared at the luckless Trimble. The thought came to him that Trimble had had a bad fall from the leads of the outhouse.

"Here, what's the matter, kid?" he demanded gruffly. "You haven't fallen—"

"Ow, ow, ow! Leave me alone!" mumbled Trimble.

(Continued on next page.)



The Bull-dog Breed

Eric Milvain, famous flying ace and fearless fighter, is in his element when he is right up against trouble. From the moment when, after crashing behind the German lines, he is taken prisoner, his life hangs by a thread. The desperate hardships of a prisoner of war, the hairbreadth escapes from death—all the thrilling action and excitement of the Great War are present in this real-life story of fighting on the Western Front. George E. Rochester will keep you gasping for breath throughout the pages of this thrilling War book.

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EACH

"I've just been—ow, ow!—hammered by that awful beast, Ratcliff!"

"What? Old Ratty—"

"That chap Ratcliff!" snivelled Trimble. "He thrashed me and kicked me just because—"

"Ratty kicked you!" yelled Grundy. "Well, my hat! Here, come inside, kid—we'll jolly well see about that! I'm not going to lick you now—that can wait, Trimble! This won't do!"

He actually helped Trimble up the School House steps. The Terrible Three were just crossing the hall-way, but they stopped as they sighted Trimble.

"What's the matter?" demanded Tom Merry. "You've been through the mill, Trimble, by the look of you! Have you been hammering him, Grundy?"

"Of course not!" snorted Grundy warmly. "Think I'd make the fat ass snivel like this! It's Ratcliff—the rotter's been hammering him!"

"Ratty has?"

"Yes; and kicked him! So Trimble says."

"Ratty kicked him!" yelled Tom, in his turn. "Trimble—"

"It's true!" wailed Baggy, still whimpering. "The awful beast knocked me about—just because I rushed into him by accident. Ow, ow, ow!"

"Bless my soul! Trimble—boy—what ever is the matter?"

Little Mr. Lathom rustled up.

"Trimble's been getting it hot from somebody!" said Tom Merry quietly. "Look at his face, and—"

"It was Ratty!" said Grundy indignantly. "I can tell you who it was. Trimble barged into Mr. Ratcliff and howled him over, and Ratty set about him—kicked him, so Trimble says!"

"G-good gracious! Impossible! Trimble—"

Mr. Lathom was thunderstruck. Yet someone, obviously, had been handling Trimble roughly. His tear-stained face still showed a vivid red mark—as if a heavy hand had struck it.

"It was that chap Ratcliff," snivelled Trimble. "He went for me like a—like a madman, just because I ran into him by accident. He slapped my face and head, and then he pitched into me with a stick and kicked me!"

"G-good heavens!"

Little Mr. Lathom was scandalised. That Trimble meant Captain Ratcliff he did not suppose for one moment—he did not even think of him. Naturally, with recent events still in his mind he supposed the fat junior was referring to Mr. Horace Ratcliff.

The master of the Fourth fairly seethed with intense wrath and indignation. He could scarcely believe such a thing—even of Mr. Horace Ratcliff, whose temper was notorious. Yet Trimble's face—his white appearance—bore out his story.

"Bless my soul!" stuttered the master. "This is—most serious! It must be looked into without delay. I will not allow this sort of thing—"

"Mr. Ratcliff's no right to touch a School House chap!" snorted Grundy. "And by the look of things he's been hammering the kid—"

"Kindly do not speak of Mr. Ratcliff in that manner, Grundy!" gasped Mr. Lathom. "Rest assured this matter will be inquired into. Trimble—are you quite sure that Mr. Ratcliff—"

"Ow, ow, ow! Of course I am, sir!" blubbed Trimble, who was far too dazed even yet to gather the drift of Grundy's remarks or anyone else's. "It was that rotter Ratcliff—he whacked me like a brute—"

"Then I will see into the matter without delay. You must go and lie down for a time, Trimble!" Mr. Lathom spoke kindly, but he was trembling with wrath and indignation. It was too much—far too much! He would not allow it! No master, save himself, Mr. Railton, and the Head, had any right to thrash his boys; no master at St. Jim's was permitted, indeed, to strike a boy on the head. As for kicking a boy—good Heavens! Mr. Lathom was absolutely scandalised. "Lie down, my dear boy! You other boys must keep your own counsel in regard to this matter!"

And in a state of intense agitation Mr. Lathom rustled away.

"Well, my only hat!" breathed Tom Merry. "Did you ever? More trouble with that rotter, Ratty! Better go and lie down, Baggy! You bet Lathom will make Ratty squirm over this. The rotter can't wriggle out of this."

With sympathetic nods to Baggy the Terrible Three passed out into the quadrangle. Grundy also gave him a nod and went up the stairs, breathing hard with indignation. He had quite forgotten and forgiven Baggy now. Baggy started for the stairs, and it was just then a limping figure came up the steps and entered the School House.

It was Captain Ratcliff, and he sighted Trimble at once.

"One moment, my boy!" he called.

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Trimble halted, and he gave a startled gasp. He would have bolted in his fright had not the captain stepped forward swiftly and grasped him.

"Don't be afraid—I am not going to touch you, my boy," said the young man, in quite a genial tone.

"Lemme go!" gasped Baggy.

Captain Ratcliff glanced swiftly about him. But the hall-way was deserted now save for themselves. He bit his lip and then he smiled at Baggy. But he only smiled with his lips—his eyes were hard and steely as ever.

"I wanted to say how sorry I am that I—I lost my temper just now, my boy!" he said quite regretfully. "I am afraid that I went too far—having suffered from shell-shock my nerves are not what they were! I should not have acted so hastily, so roughly—I see that now!"



"D'Arcy!" thundered the Head. "Hold out your hand!" "Well, Augustus hesitated, Mr. Lathom, his kindly face crimson, stepped forward, and justice did."

He paused and eyed Baggy rather anxiously.

As a matter of fact the captain was anxious—very anxious lest the junior brought the matter to the ears of the school authorities. Whither anyone had witnessed the affair he did not know. But he hoped nobody had, and he was determined the authorities should not hear of it if he could help it. He had had scholastic experience himself, and he knew that if his handling of Trimble became known he would very soon be requested to leave St. Jim's. And Captain Ratcliff did not want that to happen yet!

Baggy blinked at him, little dreaming of the captain's thoughts. He gasped, but before he could speak the captain went on—he had already summed up Baggy pretty accurately.

"I am afraid I should have restrained my anger, my boy!" he went on smoothly. "I feel I must offer you some little recompense. Here, this is something to spend in the school tuckshop; if you will come to my room to-morrow you shall have a similar amount then! I am quite sure that you are not a boy to talk unnecessarily, and this affair is just between ourselves, eh? I trust we shall become great friends after this—what?"

And after handing five shillings over into Baggy's fat palm, Captain Ratcliff turned about and limped out of the School House again.

Baggy blinked after him, thunderstruck. Yet there it was—in his hand were two half-crowns. And he was to have two more by asking for them!

Baggy's snivelling ceased as if by magic. His aches and pains were nearly gone now, and the five shillings served to banish them almost completely. He gave a feeble chuckle as he slipped the half-crowns into his pocket. Then he left the House and rolled across to the tuckshop under the dusky leafless elms.

He had had a terrific hammering, but now it was over he felt it was worth five bob—especially as there was another five to come on the morrow. Really, Baggy was



"Weally, sir—" "Hold out your hand, boy—at once!" While Arthur stepped forward. "Dr. Holmes—one moment! I cannot stand by and see an injustice done." (See Chapter 4.)

beginning to be quite glad it had happened. If Captain Ratcliff had so willingly forked out five bob and promised another, he might easily—with judicious hints—be persuaded to provide more. Baggy felt sorry that he had told Grundy or anyone else anything of what had happened in the quad. He was anxious now to keep the affair between himself and Captain Ratcliff—and to become friends with that queer young man!

CHAPTER 6.

Ratty Scores Again!

RARELY had the good-natured, mild-mannered Mr. Lathom been in such a "wax." Meek and in-offensive as he was, the master of the Fourth, in a general way, objected strongly to any interference to his flock by other masters. On more than one occasion Mr. Ratcliff had interfered, and had caned School House Fourth-Formers—or had tried to do so. On more than one occasion Mr. Lathom had felt obliged to drop more or less gentle hints to Mr. Ratcliff that he objected to this.

There was a big difference, however, between an ordinary chastisement and what had occurred in the quadrangle the previous day. Mr. Lathom was not the man to stand that. He himself, possibly, was just a little too lenient with his Form. He hated punishing them, even when they had amply earned punishment. All the other Forms envied the Fourth their Form master.

And as he rarely punished his own flock himself, Mr. Lathom was not likely to allow other masters to work their wills upon his class—not with undue severity, at all events.

Now this had happened. Yesterday, with his own eyes, he had seen Mr. Ratcliff treating a member of his Form in a manner as brutal as it was unjust. To-day, from Trimble's evidence and appearance, Mr. Ratcliff had repeated the heinous offence.

Mr. Lathom seethed.

His first intention had been to rush to Mr. Railton with his complaint, and to demand that the headmaster should investigate it. But on the way to the Housemaster's study he paused. He did not like making complaints. And he could not forget yesterday! This time he would not act so impetuously!

He would act calmly, judiciously. This time he would keep his temper, and restrain himself, and make his complaint calmly and with due restraint. He would make it quite clear, however, that he required an explanation, and an assurance that such a thing would never happen again.

Mr. Lathom turned and retraced his steps, intending to walk over to the New House to interview Mr. Ratcliff. By that time he hoped to gain control over his emotions.

Unfortunately he did not get the time. As he crossed the hall-way Mr. Horace Ratcliff came up the School House steps.

He would have passed the master of the Fourth with grim, unseeing eyes, but Mr. Lathom wanted something more from Mr. Ratcliff than the "marble eye"! He wanted satisfaction.

"One moment, Mr. Ratcliff!" he said, in tones that trembled despite all his efforts. "I desire to have a few words with you, sir!"

Mr. Ratcliff would have passed on unheeding, but it suddenly occurred to him that Mr. Lathom wished to make his apology at last.

Very well! It would be an opportunity to humble Mr. Lathom at all events!

He halted, giving his colleague a frozen glance.

"I am ready to hear what you have to say, Mr. Lathom!" he said icily. "Pray proceed!"

"I do not wish to say it here, sir!" said Mr. Lathom, determined not to repeat his mistake of the day before. "If you would be good enough to come to my room—or I will accompany you over to the New House, if you prefer it!"

Mr. Ratcliff smiled frostily. Mr. Lathom had his back to the stairs, and was obviously unaware that a group of juniors was descending them at the moment. Mr. Ratcliff saw them, and he was determined to humble Mr. Lathom all he could—to make him make his apology in public.

"I decline to do either, Mr. Lathom," he said loudly and pompously. "If you desire to make your apology to me—"

"I desire to do nothing of the kind, sir—far from it!" said Mr. Lathom, quite forgetting his good intentions. "I—I am surprised, sir—"

"Oh, indeed!" rasped Mr. Ratcliff, taken aback. "Then any communication you wish to make must be made here and now, sir!"

"So be it!" gasped Mr. Lathom, his indignant wrath swelling at the Housemaster's bitter tone. "Yesterday, Mr. Ratcliff, I had occasion to question your right to chastise a member of my Form and House! Yesterday, I considered it my duty to interpose when I saw you treating a junior with undue severity—to use a very mild term! In my view your conduct then was unbecoming a master and a gentleman, Mr. Ratcliff!"

Mr. Ratcliff crimsoned. He wished now that he had allowed Mr. Lathom to have his say in private. It was too late now, however. On the stairs four juniors stood, undecided whether to turn back or to crush past the two heated masters. They were Blake, Herries, D'Arcy, and Digby, and they were quite scared.

Mr. Ratcliff caught sight of them and choked.

"Sir," he gasped, "yet again you have—"

"Yet again I find it necessary to protest—to protest most strongly against your—your treatment of one of my boys!" gasped Mr. Lathom, quite ignorant of the juniors behind him. "I am amazed—shocked! Trimble, of my Form, has just made an astounding report—a shocking complaint, sir. He—he states that not only did you strike him with your hand, but you finally thrashed him with a stick, and also kicked him—kicked him, I repeat with horror, sir!"

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Mr. Ratcliff almost fell down. "Wha-what?" he articulated, astounded. "You—you dare—"

"I dare to stand up for right, sir!" said little Mr. Lathom, with deep indignation. "I dare to protest against tyranny and injustice, Mr. Ratcliff. In treating Trimble thus you have exceeded your duty—have misused your authority as a master here. And though you are a senior member of Dr. Holmes' staff I refuse to submit to such conduct—I refuse to stand aside and ignore such monstrous behaviour!"

"Good heavens! Are—are you mad, Mr. Lathom?"

"Not mad—only burning with righteous indignation, Mr. Ratcliff!" gasped Mr. Lathom excitedly. "I cannot allow—"

"Good heavens! You—you dare to charge me—me—"

"I do, sir! Yesterday—"

"This—this is too much! You—you dare to bring this false charge—"

"Nothing of the kind, sir! I have seen this boy Trimble with my own eyes! His face—his whole appearance, sir—"

"But I have not seen the boy to-day!" almost shrieked Mr. Ratcliff. "It is utterly false—it is monstrous! This—this is too much! It is beyond all bearing, Mr. Lathom! I—I—I—"

He choked. Then, spluttering like an expiring squib, Mr. Ratcliff almost rushed away—towards the Head's study!

"M-my hat!"

"Bai Jove!"

Mr. Lathom became suddenly aware of the juniors at the bottom of the stairs.

"Boys, how dare you stand there!" he gasped. "Go away! Depart at once! Go!"

"Bai Jove!"

The juniors went, quite startled at this latest evidence of the feud between the two masters. Mr. Lathom followed Mr. Ratcliff to masters' corridor, and began walking up and down there, as if expecting a summons to the Head's study.

Meanwhile, Mr. Ratcliff had charged into the Head's sanctum, almost startling the reverend headmaster of St. Jim's out of his wits. Dr. Holmes had been enjoying half an hour with the Classics, but the book dropped out of his hands as Mr. Ratcliff appeared, his features crimson with emotion.

"Mr. Ratcliff, what—what—what ever is the matter now?"

Between gasps and gurgles of wrath and indignation, the Housemaster of the New House spluttered out his story. Dr. Holmes was thunderstruck.

"Bless my soul! This is indeed serious, Mr. Ratcliff—most distressing!" he gasped. "And there is no foundation—"

"It is utterly false, sir!" hooted Mr. Ratcliff. "I have not even seen this boy Trimble to-day. I have had no occasion whatever to punish him. It is abominably false—utterly untrue from beginning to end. It is monstrous—wicked, sir! That man—Mr. Lathom, sir—is unbearable! Do you wonder that I am angry, distraught, and agitated! Such wicked enmity—such brazen evidence of unreasonable hatred, sir—"

"Outrageous!" gasped the Head. "Perfectly monstrous, if the facts are as you state, Mr. Ratcliff! Really, Mr. Lathom must have taken leave of his senses! I must confess that I am astounded and distressed beyond measure, Mr. Ratcliff! I will most certainly investigate this matter at once!"

He touched a bell on his desk, and Toby appeared after a short wait. Toby had scarcely departed on his errand when Mr. Lathom appeared in a flushed, excited state. He did not look at Mr. Ratcliff.

"You sent for me, sir," he exclaimed, his voice trembling. "I was expecting the summons."

"Yes, indeed, Mr. Lathom!" snapped the Head, eyeing the master of the Fourth with chilly sternness. "Yes, indeed, sir! I had hoped that the trouble of yesterday was at an end! Now I learn, with amazement, that you have made yet another grave complaint against your colleague, Mr. Ratcliff. I wish to hear what you have to say in the matter, Mr. Lathom!"

To begin with, Dr. Holmes was annoyed at being disturbed from his classical enjoyment. His annoyance had been increased a thousand-fold by Mr. Ratcliff's story, and that annoyance was now directed against Mr. Lathom.

But little Mr. Lathom was not terrified by the Head's obvious displeasure and chilly reception. Mr. Ratcliff had chosen to bring the matter before the headmaster again. So be it!

He told his story with a voice that shook with indignant emotion.

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Dr. Holmes looked very grim indeed when he had finished. Either Mr. Ratcliff's denials were false, or Trimble's story was a string of lies. Naturally, the headmaster of St. Jim's did not hesitate in deciding which story was to be believed. In any case, Trimble was notoriously untruthful. Mr. Lathom had made another careless, unforgivable mistake. Dr. Holmes was decided upon that even before he sent for Trimble.

Still, in common justice to Mr. Lathom, he felt obliged to hear what Trimble had to say.

He touched the bell, and once again Toby was dispatched on a journey—this time in search of Baggy Trimble. He was much longer away this time, but the fat Fourth-Former entered the study at last.

His fat cheeks were shining and smeared from his visit to the tuckshop. Captain Ratcliff's five shillings had already gone into Dame Taggles' till on jam-tarts and mince-pies and currant-wine. Baggy was looking very comfortable and cheery indeed now.

Mr. Lathom fairly blinked at him. Was this the same unhappy, ill-used, whimpering junior of five or ten minutes ago? It seemed impossible.

Yet it was so. The jam-tarts, etc., had had a wonderful effect upon Trimble. He blinked at the Head quite calmly as he was motioned before the desk.

"I wish to ask you a few questions, Trimble," said the Head, glancing grimly from Trimble to the bewildered Mr. Lathom. "I understand that you have, within the last half-hour, brought a complaint before the notice of your Form master—a complaint that you have been chastised somewhat severely by Mr. Ratcliff, the Housemaster of the New House."

Baggy Trimble jumped.

"N-nunno, sir!" he gasped, with a startled blink at Mr. Ratcliff. "N-nothing of the kind, sir! Mr. Ratcliff hasn't touched me to-day!"

"Trimble!" gasped Mr. Lathom, shocked beyond measure by such—as he supposed—wicked perfidy. "You—you told me—you said—"

"Not at all, sir!" said Trimble, blinking a trifle uneasily at Mr. Lathom now. "I d-d-didn't mention Mr. Ratcliff!"

"What—what—"

"I meant the other Mr. Ratcliff—Mr. Ratcliff's nephew, sir!" gasped Trimble, understanding the mistake now. "Captain Ratcliff I think he's called, though Figgy says—I mean it's a mistake, sir. It was Captain Ratcliff I meant, sir! Mr. Ratcliff hasn't touched me, sir!"

"Good heavens!"

Poor Mr. Lathom almost collapsed. This time he had put his foot in it with a vengeance. He had spoken stinging to Mr. Ratcliff—had spoken to him in scathing terms; had charged him with an offence he had never committed, and he had done so—Mr. Lathom remembered now with a gasp of dismay—before several juniors of his Form.

The world seemed to drop away under the hapless master. He went crimson as he felt the Head's icy glance fixed upon him. He had been a little too impetuous, after all. And this time—

Mr. Ratcliff was speaking—triumph and gloating scorn in his rasping voice.

"You—you heard, Dr. Holmes!" he articulated. "You have heard what the boy himself states! Mr. Lathom—"

"Mr. Lathom has made a most inexcusable mistake!" gasped the Head. "Why—why Captain Ratcliff should chastise this boy I do not know; he had no right to do so! But—"

"It wasn't much, sir!" said Trimble, cheerful again now he realised it didn't mean trouble for him. "Just a few cuffs—I scarcely felt 'em, sir! I butted the captain in the tummy, you see, sir! But it's all right now, sir! I don't mind! The captain and me laughed about it afterwards, sir! We're awfully good friends, sir!"

"Bless my soul! You—you may go now, Trimble!"

Trimble went—cheerfully. Of Mr. Lathom's position Baggy Trimble did not trouble his head to think. But he knew that if he got Captain Ratcliff into a "row" the horn of plenty would dry up suddenly—there would be no more five bobs from his new "pal" the captain!

There was a sudden silence in the study after he had gone. Mr. Lathom was looking absolutely crushed. Mr. Ratcliff's glittering eyes showed gloating triumph over his humbled enemy. Mr. Ratcliff had all the dislike of a mean nature for a generous one. Dr. Holmes broke the silence.

"I think there is no need to go further into this matter!" he said. "It is most unfortunate—most unfortunate indeed! I will not add to my remarks of yesterday, Mr. Lathom! I trust, however, that there will be no more of this—this this unpleasantness! Your charge against Mr. Ratcliff was obviously made without taking any trouble to ascertain the true facts!"

"Sir—" faltered Mr. Lathom.

(Continued on page 18.)



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"The Tyrant!"

(Continued from page 16.)

"You have also," said the Head, with icy politeness, "once again spoken to Mr. Ratcliff before juniors in terms that were utterly uncalled for, and calculated to bring upon him disrespect—more than disrespect! Your conduct has not been at all satisfactory in the matter, Mr. Lathom, I regret to say. I trust we shall have no more of this distressing kind of thing! I am sure you will agree, in this unfortunate case, that an ample apology is due to Mr. Ratcliff!"

"I must insist upon that!" exclaimed Mr. Ratcliff bitterly. "I insist also, Dr. Holmes, that I shall be protected from any further acts of enmity and persecution from Mr. Lathom!"

"Mr. Lathom, you have heard! I trust you will make amends for your conduct to your colleague without delay!" Mr. Lathom flushed, but he nodded.

"In this case I will apologise!" he said quietly, with dignity.

And he did. On this occasion he was in the wrong—entirely in the wrong—and he realised it. Whether Captain Ratcliff had actually treated Trimble with brutality he did not know now; but he did know that Mr. Ratcliff had not done so.

He apologised quietly, bowed to Dr. Holmes, and left the study, his head drooping. He suspected—he strongly suspected that, in some way, Trimble had, to use a boyish term, "let him down." And it was this that hurt the kindly little master more than anything else.

Outside the study he almost fell over a fat figure who was crouching there in a suspicious attitude. It was Trimble, and the fat youth scuttled away; but his Form master scarcely noticed him.

He suddenly remembered that he had left his spectacles behind. In moments of high mental tension Mr. Lathom was wont to take off his spectacles and polish them nervously. He recollected having laid the spectacles on the Head's desk after doing so.

He turned back, tapped on the door, and opened it. As he did so he heard the Head's deep voice:

"I fear—I very much fear that Mr. Lathom finds his Form too much for him. Ratcliff! Possibly he is too old—a younger man is needed for such a turbulent Form!"

"I entirely agree!" came Mr. Ratcliff's emphatic reply—when both gentlemen caught sight of Mr. Lathom in the doorway.

"I—I left my spectacles on your desk, Dr. Holmes!" faltered Mr. Lathom, a tremble in his voice. If you will permit me—"

"Yes, yes! Pray get them, Mr. Lathom!" murmured the Head, in some confusion.

The little Form master took his spectacles from the desk and left the study, closing the door very softly after him. Then he stumbled away, his face quite white.

"Too old!"

Had the Head meant what he said? Had recent unfortunate events emphasised a view the Head had already held?

A sudden wild impulse to rush back and hand in his resignation on the spot seized Mr. Lathom. But he checked it. It would be madness! He was almost entirely dependent upon his post at St. Jim's. And he was most certainly at an age when it would be difficult indeed to obtain another such post.

Mr. Lathom stumbled blindly back to his study, and shut himself in there.

In the Head's study Dr. Holmes coughed uncomfortably after the master of the Fourth had departed.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed uneasily. "I fear—I gravely fear, Mr. Ratcliff, that Mr. Lathom unwittingly overheard what I said. How very unfortunate!"

"Most decidedly he did!" said Mr. Ratcliff, smothering an inclination to grin.

"Extremely unfortunate!" said the Head, coughing again. "I have a very high personal regard for Mr. Lathom, both as a master and as a friend. It was most injudicious of me to make that remark—a remark I fear was thoughtless and quite without actual foundation in my mind. At the moment, of course, I felt very angry indeed with him over recent events!"

"You have every reason to be, Dr. Holmes!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff, not at all liking the Head's change of front.

"None the less, I have no desire whatever—no thought or intention, of parting with Mr. Lathom!" proceeded the Head, quite upset now. "Indeed, it would grieve me very much indeed did such an extreme course become necessary."

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I trust he has not taken my careless words seriously, or to heart. I will seek an early opportunity of seeking his company, in order to clear his mind of any such idea."

The Head turned to his desk again, as if to end the interview, and a moment later the Housemaster of the New House had followed Mr. Lathom out, scowling blackly. He was bitterly disappointed. He had obtained an apology from his enemy; he had humbled Mr. Lathom before the Head. But Mr. Ratcliff was far from being satisfied with that. He would have been more satisfied if the Head's remarks regarding Mr. Lathom's being too old for his job had been made seriously, for he knew of a younger man who would have been very glad indeed to take over the School House Fourth!

CHAPTER 7

The Schemer!

"SCANDALOUS! Perfectly abominable!"

Thus Mr. Horace Ratcliff.

He was not alone. With him, in his study in the New House, was Captain Ratcliff, his nephew. Both had just finished tea, and Mr. Horace Ratcliff had been indignantly relating his outrageous treatment at the hands of Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth.

The very fact that Mr. Lathom, a subordinate master at St. Jim's, had dared to oppose him, was enough to enrage the autocratic Housemaster. It filled him with seething indignation.

Now he really had something to be indignant about. Mr. Lathom had been entirely in the wrong—had charged him unjustly. In bitter, wrathful tones Mr. Ratcliff had related all to his nephew. Captain Ratcliff had sympathised with him, and had inwardly smiled. He understood the situation better than his uncle dreamed he did. His five shillings had not been wasted on the fat junior! He had escaped from a rather awkward predicament by acting quickly.

"Perfectly abominable!" repeated Mr. Ratcliff, as he wound up his story. "Still, it has undoubtedly had good effect. Dr. Holmes is now aware, in some measure, that Mr. Lathom is not a fit person for the post he holds at St. Jim's. I must confess, however, that I was disappointed—very disappointed. I had hoped— But no matter. It may come in time. I understand that you have made various applications for posts recently, Gilbert?"

"Quite so. You may be sure I have made every possible effort to obtain suitable work," said the captain, a lurking smile round his thin lips. "But posts are difficult to obtain since the War."

"You have had no favourable replies to your applications, then?"

"None!"

"Very unfortunate!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff.

It was—for him! The fact of the matter was that his nephew's presence at St. Jim's was not very welcome to Mr. Horace Ratcliff. Had Captain Ratcliff been in possession of means, or had he had work in view, it would have been a different matter. But the captain was "on his beam ends" financially. And, so far, he had no work in prospect. Already Mr. Ratcliff had been obliged to make him various loans—a very unpleasant state of affairs to Mr. Horace Ratcliff, who was notoriously mean and close-fisted. Already he was tired of doing so, and the prospect of having to do so indefinitely was not pleasant to him. He was very anxious indeed that the captain should get a post of some sort.

For another thing, the captain was actually not a nephew—he was a very distant relative. Mr. Ratcliff himself was scarcely certain of the exact relationship. In any case, he had only seen him once before, and that many years ago, when the captain had been a child. Since then, the Housemaster had heard nothing whatever of him until now. And with scarcely a penny in his pocket, and with no prospects in view, he was not at all a welcome visitor to Mr. Horace Ratcliff.

Still, here he was, and the Housemaster was obliged to do what he could for him.

"It is very unfortunate!" repeated Mr. Ratcliff grimly. "I am very pleased—ahem!—indeed, to have you as my guest here, Gilbert. But, really—"

He paused again.

Captain Ratcliff's mouth set curiously. He knew exactly what his uncle wished to say, but did not to put into words. Mr. Ratcliff had made his meaning clear without saying more. As a guest, the captain was not welcome at St. Jim's!

And Captain Ratcliff did not wish to leave St. Jim's yet. He was very comfortable there, and would have preferred to remain as a guest. If not, then— He shrugged, and rose to his feet.

"I would suggest that you have a few more chats with Dr. Holmes," said Mr. Ratcliff meaningfully. "You are a good conversationalist; you have travelled extensively, and

the headmaster is already favourably impressed with you, Gilbert. It may be useful to mention that—er—you have had some considerable scholastic experience!"

"I'll talk to the old fool——"

"What—what?"

"I mean I will certainly make such matters clear," corrected the captain hastily. "I think I will walk over now, sir."

"Do so, by all means!" snapped his uncle.

The captain limped from the study and crossed the quadrangle to the School House. His hard face was thoughtful now, and he bit his lips as he made his way to masters' corridor. He reached it just in time to see little Mr. Lathom come out of his study and vanish into another room higher up the passage, closing the door after him.

A moment later, Toby, the School House page, came along

however, Toby would undoubtedly have changed that opinion.

For, instead of taking the letter along to Mr. Linton's study, Captain Ratcliff turned about and retraced his steps, leaving masters' corridor altogether. He seemed to have forgotten his intention of calling upon the Head. And the note for Mr. Lathom was in his pocket.

But round the corner the captain paused under an electric light, and glanced cautiously about him. The corridor was deserted, and he took out the envelope and tore it open coolly.

"It may be of use—or it may be nothing of consequence!" he murmured. "We shall see. Ah!"

Apparently it was of consequence. Yet it was merely a personal note from the Head to Mr. Lathom—surely of no interest to Captain Ratcliff!



Drawing ink and pen towards him, Captain Ratcliff began upon a very peculiar task. He began to copy the Head's handwriting, slowly, carefully, with a firm and practised hand. Sheet after sheet he covered, paying special attention to Dr. Holmes' signature, until he seemed satisfied at last. (See Chapter 7.)

to Mr. Lathom's room, and paused uncertainly in the doorway. In his hand was a white envelope.

Captain Ratcliff limped up to him swiftly. He noted that Mr. Lathom's door was open, though the room was lit only by the firelight.

"You want Mr. Lathom, my boy?" he inquired, pausing.

"Yessir! Which the 'Ead's sent this 'ere note for him, sir—private and confidential, it is!"

"Ah! Mr. Lathom has just gone into another room there—Mr. Linton's, I think. I will——"

"Thank you, sir! Then I'd better take it along, as he plays chess most nights with Mr. Linton, sir!"

The captain's eyes glittered, but he smiled the next moment.

"I will save you the trouble, my boy!" he said genially. "As it happens, I am just visiting Mr. Linton. As it is confidential, you did quite right in not throwing it carelessly on the table, as most boys would have done."

With that genial word of praise for Toby, Captain Ratcliff held out his hand for the letter. Toby passed it over, and disappeared towards the servants' quarters, where a minute later he confided to the cook that "that there Captain Ratty weren't so bad a gent, arter all!"

If he had seen the captain's actions after he left him,

"My Dear Lathom," it ran,—"It has occurred to me that recent unhappy events may have led you to suppose that my personal feelings towards you have undergone a change, especially in view of certain words of mine which I fear you inadvertently overheard this afternoon. May I take this opportunity of assuring you, my dear Lathom, that such is by no means the case, and that the words I used were thoughtlessly uttered, and did not actually represent my opinions or attitude towards you. I beg that you will forget them."

"Mrs. Holmes and I should be pleased if you would have tea with us to-morrow afternoon.—Yours, etc.,

"RICHARD HOLMES."

It was the amende honourable, indeed! Captain Ratcliff grinned unpleasantly as he reflected what a lot of dignity it had cost the stately old Head to pen that note. It was clear that Dr. Holmes did not wish little Mr. Lathom to take his reprimand too seriously, and had hastened to make that quite clear.

A sneer curled round the thin lips of Captain Ratcliff.

"The old fool!" he muttered, gritting his teeth. "And I had hoped—— But we shall see!"

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He placed the letter in his pocket, and limped hurriedly back to the New House. Carefully avoiding his uncle's study, he made for the room that had been placed at his disposal in the New House. There he switched on the light, and took a handful of the school notepaper from a drawer in the table—the same notepaper as that used by the Head.

Drawing ink and pen towards him he began upon a task that would have made Mr. Ratcliff open his eyes wide in horror could he have seen it.

He began to copy the Head's handwriting, slowly, carefully, with a firm, practised hand.

Sheet after sheet he covered, paying particular attention to Dr. Holmes' signature. He worked on slowly, unhurriedly. He seemed satisfied at last. Carefully placing the used sheets into an inside pocket, he started to write on a clean sheet—this time a brief note. He signed it with the Head's signature, wrote Mr. Lathom's name on an envelope in a remarkably exact copy of the Head's handwriting, and, after slipping the note inside, sealed it carefully.

Then he burnt the blotting-paper he had used, removed all traces of his work, and left the study. In a few minutes he was in masters' corridor again. His eyes glinted as he noted the door of Mr. Lathom's room was still open, and the room in semi-darkness.

He stepped inside, and placed the envelope on the master's desk.

Then he went out, smiling, and almost bumped into Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Bai Jove! I am sorry, sir!" gasped Gussy.

He started back, alarmed by the sudden rage in the captain's hard, steely eyes.

But the look of rage vanished instantly, and a smile came to his thin lips.

"Quite all right, my boy!" he said smoothly. "It was my fault! I wish to see Dr. Holmes, but he appears to be out!"

"Bai Jove! That—that is Mr. Lathom's study, sir!" said Arthur Augustus. "The Head's study is at the far end of the cowwidah, Captain Watch!"

"Ah! Yes, yes. I remember now! Thank you, my boy!"

And the captain limped on to the Head's study, knocked on the door, and vanished inside.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Gussy, frowning. "I do believe the wottah knew vewy well that this was not the Head's study! How vewy queerah! I thought he was goin' to stwike me at first! I do not like to be suspicious of anyone, but weally I cannot twust that man!"

And, being aware that Mr. Lathom was out, Arthur Augustus laid his lines on the table and went out. He noticed the envelope lying there addressed to Mr. Lathom, and he recognised the handwriting—or thought he did. He little dreamed of the cunning, unscrupulous plot that lay behind it.

CHAPTER 8.

A Bolt from the Blue!

MR. PHILIP LATHOM left Mr. Linton's study much earlier than he usually did in the evening. It was the custom of the two friends and colleagues to play chess in the evening for an hour and sometimes more. On this occasion Mr. Lathom found one game quite enough. He could not settle his mind upon chess or anything else but the unhappy events of that afternoon.

The Head's sharp reprimand rankled; he still seethed with what he considered the injustice of it all. He had tried to do his duty, that was all. He had no personal enmity against Mr. Ratcliff. Yet he felt certain Dr. Holmes held the opinion that he had!

But that was not all. If the Head's reprimand rankled, his remarks regarding his age filled the little master of the Fourth with disquieting fears.

He could not concentrate upon chess, and he had given it up at last, despite Mr. Linton's sympathetic urgings to continue. He wanted to be alone to think matters over. Would it be wiser to let the matter rest where it was, or should he approach Dr. Holmes to explain his motives in opposing the tyrannical Mr. Ratcliff?

Mr. Lathom, indeed, was amazed and disturbed beyond measure at what he had so unfortunately overheard when leaving the Head's sanctum. It was common knowledge in the school that Dr. Holmes was none too fond of Mr. Horace Ratcliff. Indeed, Mr. Ratcliff, by his autocratic methods, his interfering ways, and his mean-spirited nature, had made himself unpopular with masters as well as with boys and servants. On the other hand, Mr. Lathom knew that the kind old Head regarded him as a friend—at least, he had, until now, cherished that belief. Now, however, he knew differently.

Dr. Holmes regarded him as too old for his work—he had

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even said as much to Mr. Ratcliff. It was bitter knowledge to the kindly little master of the Fourth. He trembled with indignation as he thought of the many happy hours he had spent with the Head, discussing scholastic matters and Classical studies.

Yet Dr. Holmes had no real regard for him. Officially he regarded him as too old to manage his Form! Was it possible that he contemplated removing him from his position of master of the Fourth—that he intended to dismiss him?

Mr. Lathom was thinking of this as he went back to his study and switched on the light. Almost at once he saw the envelope lying on the desk.

He picked it up, and as he recognised the handwriting a curious feeling of fear—of foreboding—took possession of him.

His fingers trembled as he tore it slowly open. Then he read the note, and as he did so the colour ebbed slowly from his cheeks.

The note was brief, and it was not begun with "My dear Lathom," as was usual with the Head's notes to him. That alone was sufficient to alarm Mr. Lathom. He read on, with growing dismay and utter amazement:

"Sir,—In view of the unfortunate happenings of late, and especially of our unpleasant interview this afternoon, I am somewhat surprised that I have not, as yet, received any offer of resignation from you. I feel sure that, on due reflection, you will realise the necessity of such a course in the circumstances. Having regard to our former friendly relations, it will be advisable, I would suggest, that you do not seek an interview, as further discussion would serve no useful purpose.

"RICHARD HOLMES (Headmaster)."

"G-good heavens!"

Mr. Lathom choked—sudden anger, bitter despair welling up within him.

This was a bolt from the blue!

Though he had feared, though he had felt a vague uneasiness and disquiet, he had not expected this, despite the words he had overheard in the Head's study. It came as a blow—a sudden, crushing blow, to the little gentleman.

And the Head did not wish to see him again—did not desire to discuss the matter! He was afraid—ashamed to face his old friend and colleague, and had sheltered himself behind that—that brutal note! The humbled, deeply-wounded master almost wished that the Head had dismissed him outright, though this was the same in effect.

Mr. Lathom dropped the note and sank back into his chair. He was utterly broken by the sudden blow. Dismissed! He was to leave St. Jim's, the school he loved—the staff, nearly every member of which was a personal friend as well as colleague: he was to leave his boys, severing the bond of affection he felt for them.

And all for a mistake—a misunderstanding!

The fact of his actual dismissal was nothing, however—grave as it was to him—in comparison to his bitter hurt at such treatment from a man he had grown to love and respect as a friend as well as headmaster.

It was monstrous—unbelievable! Yet there it was. And he could do nothing; he was not to be allowed to protest or plead.

Nor would he do either.

Burning resentment and indignation took possession of him. He gripped the arms of his chair, and burning spots of colour in his cheeks showed the anger that gripped him. He would show Dr. Holmes that he was not the man to humble himself, to plead for mercy. He would not show how deeply wounded he was; he would resign at once, and he would shake the dust of St. Jim's from his feet at the earliest possible moment. For the present he could get rooms in the village—cheap rooms that would not tax his resources for the moment. Afterwards, when his savings began to go—if he failed to obtain a post—

Mr. Lathom shivered. Then he set his lips and picked up a pen with trembling hands. A moment later he was inditing his answer to the Head.

"Sir,—I have received your note. In the circumstances, I can only believe that your remarks this afternoon were intended for my ears; if they were, they have served their purpose. I now realise that my resignation is desired, and I have no hesitation in submitting it herewith. I do not desire an interview with you, and it is clear that further discussion on the subject would serve no useful purpose. I will leave St. Jim's at the earliest possible moment.

"PHILIP LATHOM."

The usually mild and gentle Form master fairly slashed off that note and crammed it into an envelope. He was just sealing it up when Herries of the Fourth tapped on the door and entered with lines. Despite their good

intentions, the chums of Study No. 6 had been in trouble with their Form master that day, after all.

Herries was quite alarmed at the look on Mr. Lathom's face.

"My—my lines, sir!" he stammered. "I—Are you ill, sir?"

Mr. Lathom tried to smile, though it was a pitiful attempt. His lips trembled as he spoke.

"No, I am not ill, Herries! But something has upset me very much, my boy. Will you be good enough to take this note to your headmaster? You will most likely be required to bring back an answer."

"Very well, sir," said Herries, giving his Form master a sympathetic glance.

He hurried away, naturally believing Mr. Lathom was still upset at the trouble that afternoon. He little dreamed of the truth!

Dr. Holmes was in the study, chatting quite pleasantly to Captain Ratcliff, who reclined at ease in an armchair. The captain certainly was an interesting talker. The Head's face showed pleasure and interest, at all events.

But there was a change when he opened Mr. Lathom's note.

It was as severe a shock to Dr. Holmes as was the forged note to Mr. Lathom.

His face first grew pink and then crimsoned with anger.

"Good heavens!" he articulated. "Bless my soul! What—what—"

He staggered.

Then a deep, majestic frown of anger appeared on the Head's brow.

So this was the answer to his kindly, friendly note!

He had humbled himself—he, the august headmaster of a great public school, had humbled himself to apologise—it was really nothing less—to a subordinate because he had felt that he had rebuked him a trifle harshly; because he feared to cause any slight breach in their friendship.

And this was his reward—this was the result! Mr. Lathom still cherished animosity for the rebuke; he believed that his apology was insincere, obviously; that his thoughtless words regarding his age had been intended for his ears. Mr. Lathom had, in fact, openly shown thus that he disbelieved him. He actually had the impudence also to state that further discussion on the subject would be useless.

Further discussion, indeed! As if he, Dr. Holmes, was likely to seek further discussion after this—this insolent missive!

Dr. Holmes seethed with outraged wrath. He had apologised where few men in his position would have done so. He had asked for the unfortunate affair to be forgotten, and had held out the hand of friendship, believing it would be accepted gladly by his old friend. Yet this was the response his apology had called forth. It was scandalous, outrageous!

Well, Mr. Lathom should have his desire; his resignation would be accepted, and there would be no further discussion! Yet how small, how childish! But it only served to prove, after all, that he was too old; that he was unfit for a position of responsibility. So be it!

With a word of apology to Captain Ratcliff, the Head grabbed paper, ink, and pen and began to dash off his answer. It was brief—very brief indeed:

"Sir,—I accept your resignation, and understand that you are leaving St. Jim's at the earliest possible moment. Rest assured that I will not permit any further discussion on the subject.

"RICHARD HOLMES (Headmaster)."

Sealing the note in an envelope, the Head handed it to the bewildered, wondering junior with a majestic flourish.

"Kindly deliver that to Mr. Lathom, boy!" he snapped. "There will be no answer."

Herries took the note and backed out, catching a gleam in Captain Ratcliff's eyes as he did so that made him wonder still more. He hurried back to Mr. Lathom's room. The master was seated as he had left him. He held out a shaking hand for the note. Even now Mr. Lathom hoped—hoped that it was all a nightmare; that it had no reality. But as he opened the envelope and read the contents he realised the truth as he had not done before.

It was all ended! The die was cast! His anger fled, and his face went white as chalk now.

After all these years! He was leaving—leaving St. Jim's where he had been so happy, so contented. What a terrible wrench it would be! He shuddered as he thought of it. But it was done; nothing could undo it now. He had burned his boats—even supposing Dr. Holmes could have relented if he had not sent that bitter note!

He became aware that Herries was still standing there, too scared to go.

"You—you wished to see me, Herries?" he faltered brokenly.

"I—I brought my lines, sir!" gasped Herries. "Then—then you sent me to the Head! I—I—"

"You may go, my boy! You—you may tell all boys in my Form that all lines are cancelled; I shall not require them, Herries! I—I have a great deal of work to do this evening, and do not wish to be disturbed in any case. I—I am extremely upset, my boy. Kindly leave me!"

He led the astounded Herries to the door, and gently pushed him out with a final, almost affectionate pat on the back. Then the door closed.

"Oh, m-mum-my hat!" gasped Herries.

Something was wrong, he could see that, but he did not grasp even yet the import of Mr. Lathom's strange words and conduct. So Herries rushed off to tell his chums about it, and to ask their opinion of the queer proceedings; also to spread the glad tidings that all impositions were cancelled.

CHAPTER 9.

Good-bye to Mr. Lathom!

"B AI Jove! How vewy queeah!" "Queer!" yelled Blake. "Can't you see what it means?"

"It's pretty clear to me," said Tom Merry gravely. "There's been serious trouble, and it means—"

"That old Lathom's got the push!" gasped Lowther.

"Looks like it, I must say; or that he's been asked to give his resignation in! Can't see any other reason for the old chap to act like that and cancel all impots!"

Blake, Digby, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and the Terrible Three were absolutely dumbfounded at Herries' startling news.

They had known there had been a row; that there had been unpleasantness between the Head and Mr. Lathom over Mr. Ratcliff. But they had never dreamed for one moment that it might turn out seriously.

Yet it looked as if it had. To suddenly cancel all impositions was an extraordinary thing for Mr. Lathom to do—unless he was leaving!

"But it simply can't be true!" stuttered Herries. "I know the old chap was upset about something; and those notes—"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Sheer off, Trimble—"

"But, I say—it must be true!" gasped Trimble, in great excitement. "I spotted Lathom leaving Linton's study a few secs ago; he was absolutely blubbering!"

"You fat ass!"

"Tears were streaming down his cheeks!" said Trimble, laying it on a trifle. "I say, what a jolly good job I didn't do my lines!"

"Oh, scat, you fat rotter—"

"I'm going to see it it's true, anyway!" grinned Trimble.

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He was back in a few minutes, nearly wild with excitement.

"I say, you fellows, it is true—absolutely the genuine goods!" he yelled. "He's going—going in the morning! He's packing his books now. I took a squint round the giddy door. Fact! He spotted me and told me himself!"

"Bai Jove! Twimble—"

"It's true!" panted Trimble. "Told me with tears in his eyes. Shook hands and said farewell, you know! It was—was touching! Said that parting with us was like—like a mother parting from her child—or words to that effect."

"Very much to that effect, I fancy!" said Lowther. "Still—"

"He's absolutely broken-hearted!" grinned Trimble. "Hard lines, of course! Good thing I didn't do my lines, though! Think there'll be any lessons in the morning?"

"Kick that fat ass, somebody!" gasped Blake.

"Oh, really—Yoooop!"

Evidently somebody had obliged Blake. Trimble yelled and rushed off to find a more appreciative audience.

"Look here, you fellows, this looks jolly bad!" said Blake thickly. "Fancy losing old Lathom! We're not standing it, chaps! If Lathom's been sacked just because of that old rotter Ratcliff—"

"Wotten! A wotten injustice, bai Jove!"

"I'm going to find out for certain!" said Blake grimly.

He hurried away to Mr. Lathom's study and tapped at the door, which was closed now. His first glance showed him the truth.

Mr. Lathom was on his knees before the bookshelves, busy packing his precious volumes into a box. His kindly face was lined and careworn—indeed, haggard.

"What is it, my boy?" he mumbled.

"I—I—I— Is it a fact you're leaving us, sir?" gasped Blake.

He had intended to make some excuse—to ask about his lines before leading up to personal matters. But the words would not come; in his confusion he blundered out the question direct.

Mr. Lathom nodded.

"It is quite true, Blake, I am sorry to say," he answered quietly. "I have handed in my resignation this evening, and the headmaster has been pleased to accept it."

"I—I say, sir, how awfully rotten! We—we're frightfully sorry, Mr. Lathom!" stammered Blake. "You—you've been awfully decent to us all—"

"I have tried to do my best for my boys always," said Mr. Lathom in a voice that trembled slightly. "And I am thankful to know that they appreciate it and think well of me. It is a bitter wrench to—leave St. Jim's, Blake."

"I—I'm awfully sorry, sir! The fellows are all terribly upset—or will be when they know it's really true—"

"It is kind of them to think of me, Blake!" murmured Mr. Lathom, blinking rapidly through his spectacles at the junior. "I have always tried to be a good friend to my boys; and I hope they will remember me when I am gone."

"You—you're packing already, sir—"

"I am leaving to-morrow morning, Blake. I shall not be able to say good-bye personally to all my Form. I intended to send for you, in order to say good-bye to them through you, as the head of the Form. Indeed, it would upset me too much, I fear, to do so publicly."

Blake set his teeth; there was a lump in his throat, but burning indignation in his heart.

"If this is through that—that rotter Mr. Ratcliff, sir—"

"You must not speak like that, Blake."

"But it's a shame, sir—"

"It is very unfortunate, and I am very sorry to leave you, Blake. I have handed in my resignation, and it has been accepted. But I have a great deal to do this evening, my boy—"

"Can I do anything, sir—help—"

"Thank you, no," said the master, smiling faintly. "Marsh is coming in to help me shortly. Good-bye, my boy! I shall be staying in the village for some days, and possibly shall see more of you."

"I hope so, sir!"

The master shook hands with Blake and gently closed the door after him.

"It's true!" breathed Blake.

He walked back to his chums and broke the news—news that settled the matter. There was an angry outburst at once.

"It's that cad Ratty—"

"It's his rotten fault!"

"We're not standing it!"

"Wathah not!" said Arthur Augustus, who was quite upset. "It is a wotten injustice! We must do somethin' to stop it, deah boys!"

"Blessed if I know what we can do!" said Blake helplessly.

"Nothing that I can see," said Tom Merry, shaking his head. "I'm as sorry as you chaps are about it, though I am in the Shell. If Lathom had been actually sacked it

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would be different. But it looks as if he chucked up his job himself."

"He said so—said he'd handed his resignation in himself," said Blake.

"But he may have been asked by the Head to do so," said Levison quietly.

"That's true; but— Oh, it's rotten!"

It certainly was rotten! It was not only from a selfish point of view that the Fourth were sorry to lose Mr. Lathom—far from it. Certainly he was the most easy-going master in the school. But they were genuinely fond of the kindly little gentleman; even fellows like Trimble and Mellish were genuinely sorry that he was going. They knew they were unlikely to get an easier master. But they also knew they were unlikely to get such a kindly, considerate, and helpful one.

St. Jim's buzzed with the news that evening. It shocked the rest of the scholastic staff—with the exception of Mr. Horace Ratcliff, who seemed to be quite pleased—and it came as a blow to the rest of St. Jim's generally. Little Mr. Lathom was a popular figure; he would be missed by juniors and seniors alike. Naturally, the Fourth felt it most; they were dismayed and, for the most part, seething with resentment and anger.

CHAPTER 10.

The Head Chips In!

KILDARE came into the Fourth Form-room the following morning looking very grim. Under his arm he carried an ashplant.

The captain had been appointed to take charge of the Fourth—for that morning. Why only for that morning, seeing that there was no likelihood of another master being appointed for two or three days at least, was a mystery to Kildare himself. But the Head had said for that morning only, and there it was.

Kildare was expecting to have a troublesome morning. He had come prepared for it—with his ashplant. It was plain to all that the Fourth—always rather a troublesome, unruly Form—were seething with resentment at the loss of Mr. Lathom. So far as they knew, Mr. Lathom had resigned. None the less, they felt morally certain that he had not wanted to leave; that he had been forced to hand in his resignation, and that Mr. Ratcliff, the detested master of the New House, aided by his equally detested nephew Captain Ratcliff was responsible for it all.

As a matter of fact, Kildare himself shared that opinion. He liked little Mr. Lathom, and he was very sorry indeed that he was going. Nevertheless, duty was duty; he had been sent to keep order in the Fourth that morning, and he intended to do so to the best of his ability.

He knew it was not going to be an easy job.

He smiled very grimly as he came in and found the Form in an uproar. All the fellows were in an excited state, and all seemed to be talking at once—at the tops of their voices. Kildare had no need to be told what the subject of their excited discussion was.

"That's quite enough row, you kids!" he called. "Time for lessons! Get a move on—sharp!"

"Rats!"

"What!"

Kildare looked round for the culprit—the fellow who had dared to say "Rats!" to him. He did not find him. He set his lips.

"I'll give the Form one minute!" he rapped. "Any fellow not in his place at the end of that time will get a few licks of my cane! And I shall lay it on, my lads!"

There was a scuffling of feet at once—a rush for places. The Fourth had no quarrel with Kildare, and they were not anxious to get his ashplant, in any case.

Kildare smiled. He had heard that the Fourth were ripe for trouble, and he had fully expected trouble at once. But evidently there was going to be no trouble—while he had his ashplant, at all events!

"Now, let us have no more row, kids!" he said amiably. "I'm sorry Mr. Lathom's gone—or going! He was a decent sort, and you won't get another like him. Still, it can't be helped, and it's no good sulking and scowling. In any case, I don't want to use my ashplant," he added ominously, "so take my tip and mind how you step!"

"Lathom didn't want to go!" said Blake boldly. "He's been dismissed, and that rotter Ratcliff's at the bottom of it. It's a howling shame, Kildare!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"He was only doing his duty—sticking up for us and for our rights!" said Blake savagely. "If we only knew for certain that he was dismissed—"

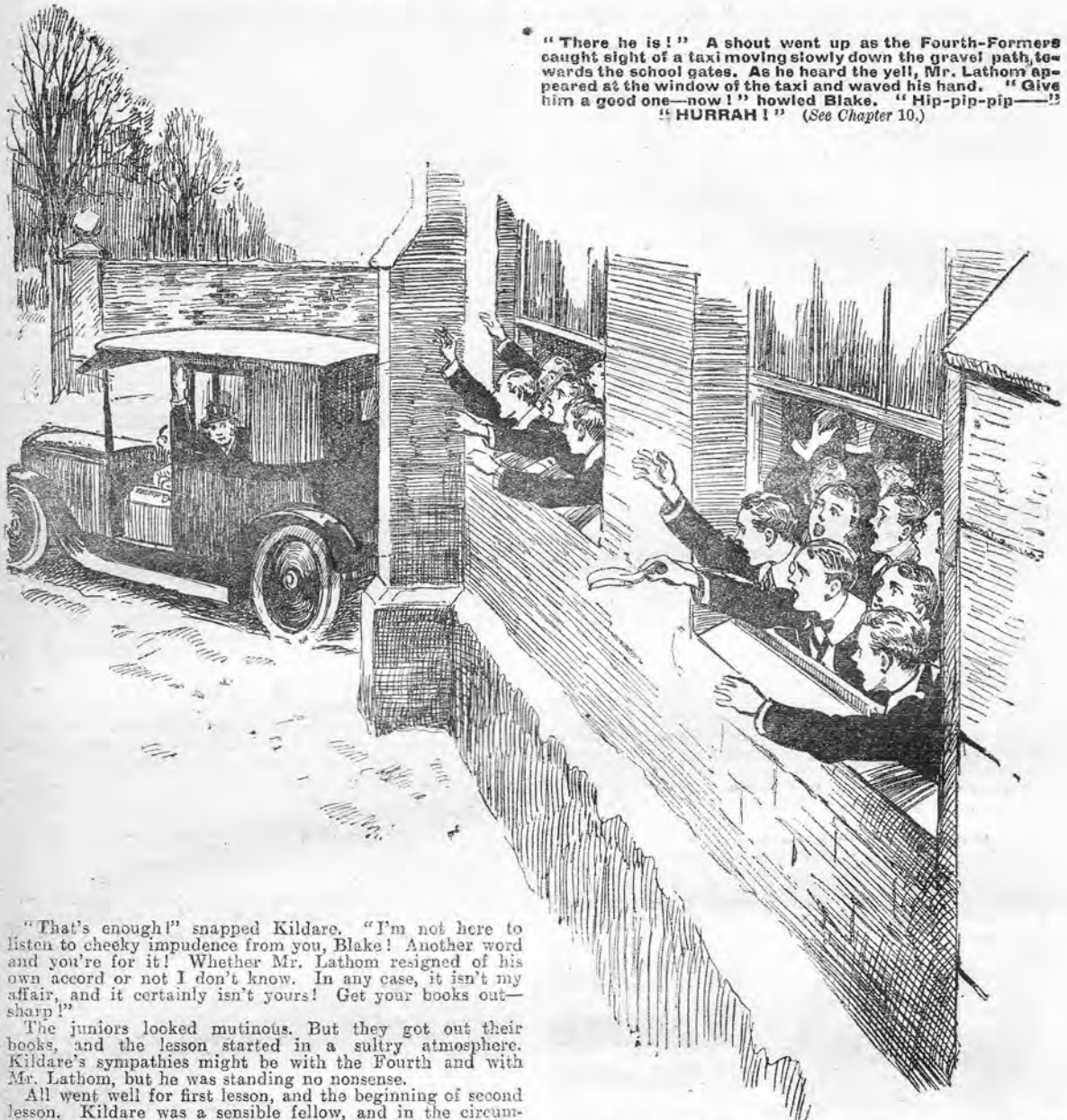
"Go and ask the Head!" suggested Kildare, with biting sarcasm. "It will save me using my ashplant!"

"Rats!"

"What?"

"If we knew Lathom hadn't resigned of his own accord we'd jolly soon show you what we think about things, Kildare—and the Head, too!" said Blake defiantly.

"There he is!" A shout went up as the Fourth-Formers caught sight of a taxi moving slowly down the gravel path towards the school gates. As he heard the yell, Mr. Lathom appeared at the window of the taxi and waved his hand. "Give him a good one—now!" howled Blake. "Hip-pip-pip—" "HURRAH!" (See Chapter 10.)



"That's enough!" snapped Kildare. "I'm not here to listen to cheeky impudence from you, Blake! Another word and you're for it! Whether Mr. Lathom resigned of his own accord or not I don't know. In any case, it isn't my affair, and it certainly isn't yours! Get your books out—sharp!"

The juniors looked mutinous. But they got out their books, and the lesson started in a sultry atmosphere. Kildare's sympathies might be with the Fourth and with Mr. Lathom, but he was standing no nonsense.

All went well for first lesson, and the beginning of second lesson. Kildare was a sensible fellow, and in the circumstances he thought fit to be lenient and overlook a great deal he would not otherwise have done.

Then something happened that altered the state of affairs. It was a sound from the quadrangle—the crunching of wheels on gravel, and then the hoot of a motor-horn.

"Lathom!" shouted Blake, heedless of Kildare.

"He's going!" yelled Herries.

"Yaas, wathah! Give him a cheeah, deah boys! Quick!"

There was confusion and uproar at once. Kildare yelled, but in vain. Amid a clattering of feet the Fourth left their places and rushed for the windows.

They swarmed, almost fighting for "front seats," so to speak, at the big windows. The lower sashes were flung up, and the luckier ones leaned out. Then they yelled.

"There he is!"

A taxicab was moving slowly towards the gates, crunching over the gravel, which had only been half-cleared of snow. As he heard the wild yell, Mr. Lathom's head appeared in sight of the window of the taxi.

"Give him a good one—now!" howled Blake. "Hip-hip-hip—"

"Hurrah!"

"HURRAH!"

"Good old Lathom!"

"Good-bye, sir!"

"Good luck, sir!"

"Hurrah!"

The yells could have been heard all over St. Jim's. Mr. Lathom waved his hand.

Then the taxi vanished through the gates, and he was gone.

"Gone!" panted Blake, a lump in his throat. "He's gone, chaps!"

"What a howling shame!"

"Yaas, wathah! I suggest, deah boys, that— What— Oh, bai Jove! Yawooooop!"

Whack, whack, whack!

Kildare was at work with his ashplant.

Amid a medley of howls the crowd broke up round the window.

"You young idiots!" hooted Kildare. "What did I tell you! The Head must have heard you. He'll be here in a second! Take your dashed places—sharp!"

"Rats! Go and eat coke, Kildare! We want Lathom!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You—you mad young idiots!" gasped Kildare. "Get to your places at once!"

"Yes, we are mad—mad at losing old Lathom!" yelled Herries. "Pitch Kildare out, chaps!"

"Hurrah! We want Lathom! Go it!"

Kildare found himself surrounded by a yelling swarm of excited juniors. He stared, thunderstruck, and then he got busy again with his cane.

Whack, whack, whack, whack!

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Amid yells and howls a scene of wild confusion followed, in the midst of which someone rattled at the door. Then:

"BOYS!"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"The Head!"

It was the Head. He stared at the scene in majestic, Jove-like wrath.

"Boys, what does this—this riot mean? Bless my soul! Kildare—"

"They—they were cheering Mr. Lathom, sir!" gasped Kildare.

"Oh, indeed! Yes, I heard them, Kildare! Monstrous! Disgraceful!"

The Head came into the room, his brow thunderous. As a matter of fact, he himself had watched Mr. Lathom drive away—had watched with strangely mingled feelings. He was angry—his offer of friendship, his apology—for it was nothing less—had been spurned. His majestic dignity was injured. None the less, he could not help feeling the wrench—the sadness and tragedy of it all. He would have liked—he would have given a lot to be able to call Mr. Lathom back even now. But there was his dignity—his wounded dignity.

In any case, Mr. Lathom had brought about the crisis—he might only spurn and throw in his teeth a further offer.

Now this—this abominable riot had banished all feelings of regret from the Head's mind. It was an expression of loyalty to Mr. Lathom—of disloyalty and disrespect to himself.

The Head sizzled with righteous indignation. "Monstrous!" he repeated. "Boys—Blake—", "We were cheering Mr. Lathom, sir!" said Blake doggedly. "He ought never to have gone!"

"What—what—", "It's a rotten injustice, sir!" said Blake recklessly. "We want him back again—we want nobody else! He was standing up for us—for our rights against Mr. Ratcliff's tyranny. We're backing up Mr. Lathom—"

"Silence!" thundered the astounded Head. "How—how dare you, Blake! Kildare!"

"Yes, sir!" "Hand me your cane!" gasped the Head. "This—this rebellious conduct, this outrageous behaviour must be checked—checked instantly with the utmost severity! Blake, bend over that chair!"

"Look here, sir—" "Put yourself in a suitable position for punishment this instant, Blake, otherwise you will pack your box and leave this school this afternoon, sir!"

Blake gasped, and his face paled. There was something in the Head's voice that compelled him to obey.

He bent over the chair, and the cane came down. Swish!

It was a terrific cut, and it was followed by three more.

"Now the next boy!"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

Evidently it was to be wholesale execution. It was!

The Head pointed to Herries, and Herries groaned and obeyed. There was no help for it. One by one the rank and file bent over the chair and received two severe cuts. Trimble made a desperate attempt to prove his innocence, but he was cut short.

Trimble got four cuts like Jack Blake!

It ended at last, and the Head handed the cane back to Kildare. He was in a breathless state.

"That should be a lesson to you!" he gasped. "Any further acts of insubordination will be very sternly dealt with. Mr. Lathom has evidently been too lenient with his Form. This afternoon a new master will take you for lessons. He is entitled to your respect and obedience. He will be instructed to report any further act of rebellious conduct to me! That is all!"

CHAPTER 11.

The New Master of the Fourth!

"I SAY, you fellows—"

Baggy Trimble could scarcely speak for excitement.

Dinner was over in the School House. In the Fourth Form passage the members of that Form, now in the limelight with a vengeance, were standing in groups, discussing recent affairs, when Trimble came rushing up.

The Fourth were puzzled—uneasy. The Head had mentioned that a new Form master was to take them that afternoon. So far they had seen nothing of a new Form master. Indeed, it seemed very strange that a new man to take the Fourth had been found so soon.

Who was he? That was the burning question of the moment.

Then Trimble appeared like a fat thunderbolt. And he obviously had news—great news.

"Hallo! What's the matter now, old fat bean?" snapped Blake, grabbing him by the shoulder to steady him.

"Something about the new man—"

"Yes; you fellows will have a fit when you hear!" yelled Trimble. "It—it's Ratty's nephew—Captain Ratcliff. He's got Lathom's job! He used to be a master before the War—I heard him gassing about it to the Head! Fancy that!"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"That brute—"

"That rotter!"

"He, he, he!" sniggered Trimble. "I say, you fellows, it's all right—he's a good sort, really! He's a pal of mine, you know. I'm jolly glad, I can tell you! I'll make him toe the line, you see!"

"You fat ass—"

"He gave me five bob yesterday—I mean, he didn't give me five bob yesterday!" amended Trimble hurriedly, realising he was saying too much. "That is—"

"So that was it, you fat little worm!" hissed Jack Blake. "He paid you five bob to keep your fat trap shut about—"

"Nothing of the kind!" gasped Trimble in alarm. "He didn't pay me anything at all for saying he hadn't jammed me. And as for giving me another five bob to-day, he never even mentioned it. He just asked me to look in on him as a friend—a pal, you know."

"Well, my hat! Trimble—"

"It's all right!" grinned Trimble. "I'll put in a word for you chaps if you treat me decently, you know. I'll have him eating out of my hand! I think I'll give him a look in now. Ripping!"

And Trimble hurried away in high feather to pay a call on his pal, Captain Ratcliff.

"Come on!" breathed Blake. "If it's true—"

There was a rush for masters' corridor. They were just in time to see Trimble vanish into Mr. Lathom's old study. He was in less than a minute when a sudden sound of swishing came from the room—followed by fiendish yells.

"Phew!" breathed Blake. "If that's how he treats a pal, then—"

"Here he comes!"

Trimble came out of the study—with a rush. He was blubbering openly, and his fat face was screwed up in dire anguish. He tottered out, doubled up like a pocket-knife.

"Trimble—"

"Oooooow!" wailed Trimble. "Oh, the awful brute! Swears that he never touched me yesterday, and that he never promised me another five bob! Oh, the treacherous beast! Yow, ow, ow, ow!"

(Continued on page 27.)



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THE WORST FORM AT CODRINGTON!

(Introduction on next page.)

A Narrow Shave!

"THERE'S your dose," said the stranger quietly; "be a little more careful with your tongue next time. You're a very smart young gentleman; but there's such a thing as being too clever!"

And without another word the man strode away.

Ferguson dropped on the hedge bank and lay there, rubbing his bruises wherever he could reach them, while the other pair stood looking on gloomily. Ferguson was too busy at this to attend to anything else till the man was out of sight over the next stile, and then he sprang up, with a yell.

"The beast!" he cried, hoarse with rage. "Why didn't you stop him, you two cowards?"

"We did try, but he knocked us endways!" growled Kempe. "I warned you to let him alone!"

"Don't talk to me or I'll take it out of you instead!" shouted the infuriated Ferguson.

"Shall we get you a little embrocation to rub on? Capital thing for bruises," said Taffy, coming up at that moment with his two friends.

"Look here!" shouted Ferguson, striding towards them, his clenched fists quivering. "I tell you what it is, you three blackguards will jolly soon be laughing on the other side of your faces. You're going to find yourselves in the cells in less than a week, as well as your thieving pet Lambe! I—I—"

"Here, come away!" said Kempe quietly, drawing his arm through Ferguson's. "Don't waste any breath on 'em—they'll get their deserts soon enough."

The rival leader, who was quite done up, suffered himself to be led away, growling; and so the redoubtable trio departed. But the roars of laughter which followed them from Taffy & Co. were certainly hard to bear.

The afternoon was a "half," and the chums spent the first hour in practice on Little side, in which Birne proved himself a good enough half-back to be chosen for the first team in the forthcoming Withington match. Taffy, as one of the best forwards in the school, already had his cap.

"Bully for the Remove!" said Dereker, as they made their way back to the house after changing in the pavilion. "There's only one Fifth Form chap in the eleven to five of ours. We've earned a little refreshment, my dear young comrades. What about a brew?"

"I'm rather sick of the tuckshop stuff," said Taffy, as Jellicoe joined them. "Walsh says there's a new shop in Fordbury, where they turn out an American thing called hot waffles, with maple syrup. Walsh swears they're beastly good. There's time to go and try 'em!"

"Anything in the interests of science," agreed the other two. "Jelly, are you up to goin'?"

"Oh, yes!" said Jellicoe. "I did not feel quite equal to football to-day, but I can walk all right. It is only sitting down that is somewhat trying."

They set out at once on the road to Fordbury, and in due course arrived at the new pastrycook's. The hot waffles, done in New York style, were tried and voted quite worth coming for. The chums started back after polishing off a couple of dozen of them.

"What a giddy eyesore that thing is!" remarked Taffy, as they overtook an extra large traction-engine that was rumbling slowly along the road, making a thunderous noise and emitting dense clouds of smoke. "It oughtn't to be allowed on the roads at all."

The sound of hoofs was heard in a by-road that opened on to the highway near the point where the traction-engine happened to be, and a gentleman riding a big Irish hunter came in view, and with him a decidedly pretty girl of about sixteen, on a rather skittish pony.

Exactly what it was that happened the boys were rather too far off to see, but both horse and pony took fright at the traction-engine, and the girl's pony, after shying violently right across the road, bolted madly in the direction of the boys.

"By Jove!" cried Dereker, in alarm, running back.

Many attempts have Ferguson & Co. of Codrington Remove made to expose their new Form master as an escaped criminal, but each time they have been met with dismal failure. This week, however, a real good chance presents itself—and they seize it with both hands!

"Help! Stop her, you chaps, or she'll be through the fence and over the quarry!"

It did not need more than a glance to see the danger. Fifty yards beyond the boys the road made so sharp a bend that the maddened pony was certain to come to grief in trying to round it. Just at the

curve was an old quarry, fenced off by rather flimsy posts and rails, which beast and rider would be all but sure, barring a miracle, to cannon against and break right through. There was a thirty-foot drop beyond on to rocks.

Taffy, just then some way behind his companions, saw the danger in a moment, and sprang to the rescue, holding himself ready to stop the maddened pony.

"Get out of the way!" cried the girl. "You'll be knocked down!"

Taffy had no idea of shirking. As the flying beast reached him he caught the bridle with a quick, skilful spring, and the next moment was being dragged along bodily, bruised, winded, and his arms nearly pulled out of their sockets by the jerk. But he hung on doggedly. The pony had to slacken speed, and Dereker and Birne quickly coming to the rescue, it was pulled up altogether.

"Oh, how good of you!" cried the girl. "How smartly you stopped him! I never thought it could be done, and I was afraid you would be knocked down. How can I thank you?"

"Never mind about thanks!" said Taffy, laughing, thinking the girl looked uncommonly pretty—as girls go. "As to being knocked down, we're used to that at Codrington. We're glad to have been of any use."

"Well done, young gentlemen!" cried the rider of the hunter, who had got his mount under control and ridden up at full gallop. "I don't know how to thank you!" he said fervently, jumping down from his horse, and grasping Taffy by the hand. "I made sure my daughter would be into that terrible quarry!"

"Oh, we didn't do much, sir!" said Taffy, feeling embarrassed. "The pony was easy to stop. It wasn't any—"

"Not a word! You saved my daughter's life, sir! I won't hear a word to the contrary. Never saw anything done smarter. Just in time, too! Might have been brained by the pony's hoofs yourself, as easily as anything, if you hadn't been sharp. You're used to horses, I can see. These your chums, eh? They all helped?" said the old gentleman, shaking hands heartily with the others. "You're all Codringtonians, I see, by your caps. I am Sir Harry Beckford, and this is my daughter Dorothy."

Taffy knew the speaker well by sight, and that he lived at Roydon Hall, and was one of the governors of the school. He was a fine-looking old man, tall and upright, with a bronzed face and white moustache. He asked the boys their names, and they told him.

"I'm uncommonly pleased to meet you," he said, "and so are you, Dorothy, eh? Folks who meet, as we did not need any introductions. Eh, what? They grow the right sort of stuff at Codrington still, I see. I was there myself once. Gad, rather! I remember three terms in a Form called the Remove especially. I believe they've still got it?"

"Yes, it's still there, sir," said Taffy, adding: "We're in it ourselves."

The girl laughed.

"We were on our way to the school," said Sir Harry, "to call on Canon Wyndham. Are you going back there? We may as well go together, then. The horses can walk."

It was not far to Codrington, and Sir Harry, who was a most cheerful old gentleman, chatted the whole way. Taffy walked beside Dorothy's pony.

"I've heard that Form of yours, the Remove, is the worst in the school," she said, laughing.

"You've got the wrong word," said Taffy. "Best in the school."

"The person who told me said it was the worst."

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"Oh, you must have been talking to the masters about it, or absurd people of that sort!" said Taffy.

"I wish you'd tell me some more of your stories," she said. "By the way, have you ever been to Roydon? I know my father's going to ask Canon Wyndham to come over and dine with him to-night, and I shall make dad ask you and your friends, too. He'll be glad to, of course."

"We'd like to awfully, of course," said Taffy, rather astonished; "but there's no chance of it. The Head would never let us dine out late after lock-up."

"Oh, yes, he will! Canon Wyndham can't refuse dad anything, and dad can't refuse me anything," said Dorothy Beckford cheerfully. "You leave it to me, I'll fix it up!"

Taffy's surprise at this passed all bounds, but before he could say any more they found themselves at the school. The party rode into the quadrangle, and many of the seniors being present, there was a good deal of sensation on seeing the illustrious visitors Taffy & Co. had picked up. The sound of the horses' hoofs brought the Head out.

"How are you, canon?" said the baronet cheerfully, dismounting from his horse, while Taffy helped the girl off her pony. "Vastly glad to see you. Will your groom put these horses up?"

"Come in, Sir Harry!" said the Head, shaking hands with him. "You're just in time for tea. How d'ye do, Dorothy? Your pony's well splashed!"

"We've had a precious narrow shave," said the baronet—at least, Dorothy has. If it hadn't been for these smart youngsters of yours being at hand, there'd have been a bad smash," he added, and forthwith related how Taffy had stopped the bolting pony. The Head looked both surprised and pleased.

"I'm very glad Wynne was able to render you such a service," he said, while Taffy backed away, feeling very uncomfortable. "A wild youngster, Sir Harry—one of the biggest handfuls we have in the school—but I know well enough he has courage."

"Wild!" snorted Sir Harry. "I like 'em wild. Always the best sorts. I was a bit of a rip myself when I was here," he added, with a chuckle, and came very near poking the Head in the ribs with his whip-handle. "What I want to ask you, Wyndham, is to come and dine with me to-morrow at Roydon, if you've nothing to do."

"Charmed!" said the Head.

"And let these youngsters come, too—the ones who came in with me. I'll give them the run of the house, and show 'em some sport."

"Very well," said the Head. "As your daughter has had a narrow escape, we must make an occasion of it. Their records are fairly clear of late, I think, only they must be back at the school before ten."

"That's all right. My chauffeur will motor them back. Whom have we here?" said Sir Harry, turning sharply, as the Woolly Lambe, on his way to his quarters, came past them up the steps.

"Our new Remove master," said the Head. "Mr. Lambe, let me introduce you to Sir Harry Beckford, the chief governor of the school, and chairman of the board."

"Glad to meet you," said Sir Harry affably, as the Woolly Lambe bowed, and then he looked keenly at the Remove master. "I've met you before somewhere, haven't I?" he said. "Where was it?"

"In the prisoner's dock, I should say," muttered Kent-Williams grimly in Ferguson's ear. "Old Beckford's on the bench of magistrates."

Ferguson Sees an Opening!

THE Woolly Lambe returned Sir Harry's keen gaze perfectly calmly, and Taffy, who alone had heard Kent-Williams' remark, held his breath for a moment in suspense; for the baronet was evidently

trying to remember where he had seen the Remove master.

"Possibly you've seen me in some match or other, if you are interested in cricket," said Mr. Lambe pleasantly. "I used to play a little in past summers."

"That's a modest way of putting it," said the Head, smiling. "Mr. Lambe used to play for Leamshire same seasons ago, and was accounted a first-class bat."

"Ah, that must be it!" said Sir Harry, though he still looked in a puzzled way at the master. His face cleared up,

however, and he shook hands with Mr. Lambe heartily. "County cricketer, were you? What a deuced pity to give it up! Grand game! Never miss a good match if I can help it, though I'm a shocking hand at remembering people's names. Always get 'em mixed up. So you're the new master of the Remove, eh?"

"Yes," said Mr. Lambe pleasantly.

"Always glad to meet new Form masters. There aren't many changes at Codrington, except in the Remove," said Sir Harry, his eyes twinkling. "A cricketer's what they want, begad—a good slogger, by what I remember of the Form, eh? Come and dine with me to-morrow night, won't you? Canon Wyndham's coming."

"Thanks, I shall be very glad to!" said the Woolly Lambe, after a glance at the Head; and then the company parted.

The old gentleman and his daughter rode out through the gates and went off down the road at a sharp trot. Mr. Lambe and the Head were left conversing on the steps, and the four chums retired together.

Ferguson and his two inseparables passed by, with black and bitter sneers on their faces.

"It's extraordinary what a taste Sir Harry has for low company!" said Ferguson. "He'll be sorry for it when he finds half his spoons missing after the dinner! Come up to the study."

Ferguson & Co. went gloomily into the House.

"Now's the time to put a spoke in the Lambe's wheel, then!" said Kempe, shutting the door of the study. "We ought to give Beckford a word of warning."

"Not a bad idea," said Ferguson thoughtfully. "No; by gum, it's a real good chance!"

"You saw how Beckford stared at the Lambe," suggested Kempe. "He'd seen him somewhere—and I'll bet it wasn't any place as creditable as a cricket field. The old boy's got a bad memory, that's all."

"He's got something else," said Ferguson. "One of the finest sets of gold plate in the county. Roydon Hall's full of valuable things."

"I wish Lambe'd prig some of 'em!" put in Kent-Williams viciously.

"So do I; but that's no good if he isn't caught. Why not send Sir Harry an anonymous letter?"

"What's that?"

"A letter without any signature, you ass, in a disguised hand—or signed 'A Friend'—warnin' him what Lambe is, and giving Beckford the tip to watch him."

"Good! Send it by express post, so that it reaches him when Lambe's there at the house!" said Kempe eagerly. "It'll show him up, anyhow!"

"We'll do it!" agreed Ferguson, with a nod. "Dispatch it just at the proper time. The fat'll be in the fire then. Sir Harry's the chief governor, you know, and he's an old terror when he's roused."

"Besides being a magistrate!" exclaimed Kent-Williams. "We've got it at last! Meet later on and let's put the letter together. There goes the tea-bell!"

Nothing more happened until shortly before tea-time, when Dereker, alone in the quadrangle, caught sight of Ferguson and his chums watching him out of the box-room window. Just before, he had seen Kempe going up to the room with an ink-bottle and a package of some kind. The rival firm pointed Dereker out to each other and leered, and directly afterwards they all disappeared back into the room.

"That lot are as sick as pups because they are not asked to Sir Harry's!" thought Dereker. "Wonder what Kempe wanted with an inkpot? That reminds me I haven't thanked the governor for the last postal-order. It doesn't do to forget these little things."

He went upstairs and wrote an epistle to his father—and if the spelling had been equal to the gratitude in it it would have been a model letter. There was just time to catch the post if he went straight to the village office, so he slipped out and did so.

While buying a stamp he noticed Kent-Williams at the counter, but Kent-Williams did not choose to notice him. The Fergusonite had just handed an express letter to the postmistress. Dereker, not being in such a hurry, posted his own outside, with a mere three-halfpenny stamp on it, and hurried back to tea without troubling to wonder what the other boy's letter could have been about to need "expressing."

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE.

Convinced that Mr. Wollaston Lambe, their new Form master, is an escaped convict, Taffy Wynne & Co. and Ferguson & Co., rival factions in the Remove, the most unruly Form at Codrington, determine to bring pressure to bear to rid the school of the new master's presence. Their efforts prove of little avail, however, for the Woolly Lambe not only shows that he is capable of taking care of himself and his Form, but proves a hero and sportsman by saving Wynne's life and catching a cracksmen in the act of looting the school's strong-room. Although Wynne & Co. are still ready to back up the Woolly Lambe, Ferguson and his cronies are still determined to expose the new Form master. Shortly afterwards, they see an athletic-looking man watching the School House, and taking him to be a detective, Ferguson informs him of his suspicions concerning Mr. Wollaston Lambe. To the burly Remove's amazement, however, the stranger seizes him in a powerful grip and with the aid of a hazel wand gives him the swelling of his life.

(Now Read On.)

Word came from the Head immediately after tea that Taffy and his three allies were to get ready at once, and make themselves as presentable as possible. There was not room for them in the Head's old family brougham, but it so happened that Sir Harry had arranged to fetch the boys, as he was sending them back afterwards.

The Head and Mr. Lambe started, therefore, about a quarter to seven, in the brougham, and the boys waited till the hour struck, when Sir Harry's station motor-omnibus turned up at the gates and took them along.

Very stiff about the collars—the three senior boys were wearing "stick-ups"—and beautifully brushed, the four Removites walked in rather sheepishly behind the Head, and Sir Harry, who was old-fashioned in courtesy, and did not care who knew it, welcomed them in the great armour-hung hall.

"Delighted to see you, canon!" he said. "Good-evening. Mr. Lambe! Ah, there are the young rescuers, eh? Welcome to Roydon."

He shook hands all round, and at once made the boys feel at home.

"Come to my library, canon, I've got an old edition to show you and Mr. Lambe. You youngsters don't care for that, eh? Roam round and amuse yourselves—get the head gardener to show you over the hot-houses. Pick anything you like! There's Dorothy; she'll look after some of you."

Dorothy Beckford welcomed the Removites, laughing, and at once all five were on the best of terms. The Beckfords knew how to put guests at their ease. The boys rambled about the great house, looking at the armour and the ghost chamber and the panelled galleries, and then made a tour of the famous hot-houses outside, where, despite the season, nectarines and peaches were ripe and ready. They sampled several of these, and then went back to the house.

There was a large side room by the stairs at the back of the hall, which was used, as Dorothy said, to hold the larger dishes for the dining-hall as they came in from the kitchen. A long metal stand, heated underneath by a spirit-lamp, kept them warm.

Hanging on a set of pegs were some old-fashioned dish-covers, and one of these was of enormous size. It had the Beckford coat-of-arms on it, and was nearly as big as a hip-bath.

"What a whacking cover!" said Dereker. "What's it for?"

"That's our biggest meat-cover, and was made in Queen Anne's time," said Dorothy. "It was made for covering a whole roast sheep at the tenants' dinners."

Jellicoe stood and gazed at the big cover with tears in his eyes. Jellicoe was a vegetarian, and he was thinking it the emblem, so to speak, of the dreadful sin of meat-eating. He followed the others out, and as they made their way towards the dining-hall a thought shot through his peculiar brain, and he made a desperate resolve. Quick as lightning he acted on it.

Slipping back through the curtains of the portiere, he made his way back to the room by the stairs. Bells jangled below, and the footsteps of servants were heard coming up. Looking round in desperation, he saw a dark recess at the far end of the room, where coats and rugs were hanging. He glided in amongst them, and concealed himself.

(The meek and mild Jellicoe is going to give the Head and Taffy Wypine & Co. the surprise of their lives. If you want a hearty laugh you'll make sure of reading next week's splendid instalment by ordering your copy to-day!)

The Tyrant!

(Continued from page 24.)

"Well, the brute—the howling brute!" breathed Blake. "And he's going to take the Fourth, is he? We'll see about that! We'll show him he can't treat the Fourth like that! Captain is he—we'll give the brute 'captain'!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Oh, indeed!"

The juniors jumped. Behind them was Captain Ratcliff, his thin lips twisted into a mirthless smile, his eyes steely. He had limped up unnoticed in the general excitement.

"So you'll give me 'captain,' my young friends!" said Captain Ratcliff smoothly. "We shall see! I have tamed schoolboys before to-day. We shall see if I can succeed in taming the Fourth Form here! My methods are somewhat stern, I fear! But I shall succeed!"

His eyes turned upon Blake again, and Blake shivered unconsciously at the pitiless gleam in them.

"I have met you before!" he remarked. "Your name is Blake, I think! I had the pleasure of making your acquaintance at the old castle some days ago. I will remember that. You will oblige me by reporting to me, your new Form master, immediately afternoon class starts, Blake, for a caning. I fear Mr. Lathom has allowed you to become somewhat unruly. But we shall soon change all that!"

In a dead silence, save for Trimble's snivelling, Captain Ratcliff limped away.

"So—so it's true!" breathed Blake, breaking the silence again. "And he's started already! And he's going to tame us!" He paused, and his eyes gleamed dangerously. "Are we going to knuckle under to that brute, you fellows?" he asked, in a voice trembling with rage. "We've lost poor old Lathom, and that brute's at the bottom of it—I feel certain of that now! He and his uncle between them have done it. Well, it's war to the knife! Is he going to tame the Fourth?"

"Wathah not!"

"No fear!"

It was a yell—a fierce, determined answer that came at once from every fellow present.

Captain Ratcliff was in charge of the Fourth, and had stated his intention of taming them—and they already knew his methods. But the Fourth at St. Jim's were a stiff proposition, had he only known it. It remained to be seen whether he would succeed. When the Fourth went into their Form-room that afternoon they were outwardly calm; but it was the calm before the storm!

THE END.

(Whatever you do, chums, don't miss reading the sequel to this splendid yarn, entitled: "NO SURRENDER!" It's a feast of fun, thrills and unusual situations. You can only make sure of it by ordering your copy WELL IN ADVANCE!)

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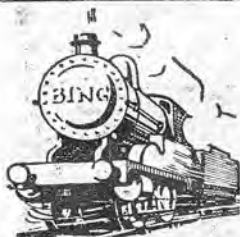
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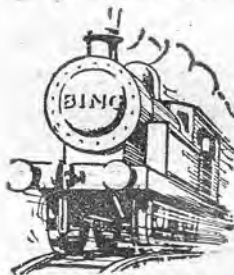
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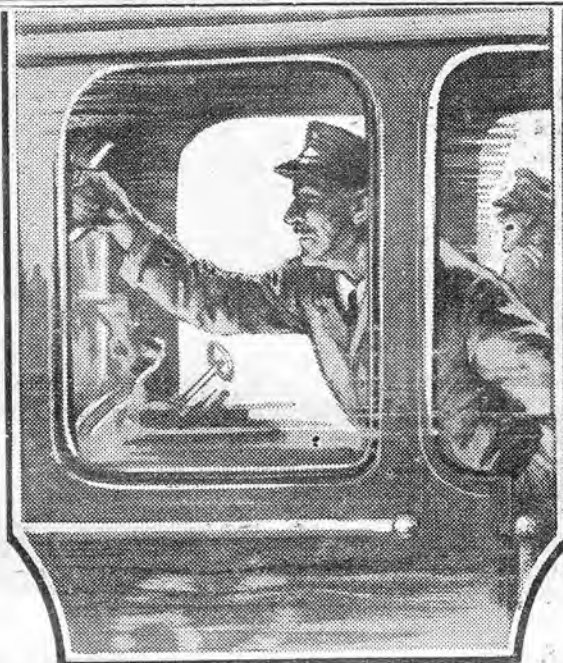
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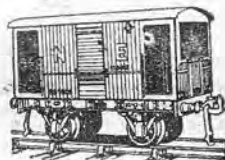
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