

WHAT DID FIGGINS PUT IN THE FIG PUDDING?

(SEE THE RIPPING LONG COMPLETE SCHOOL YARN WITHIN!)

The **GEM** 2^D



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HERE IS A SCREAMINGLY FUNNY LONG SCHOOL YARN—

PUDDINGS AND



CHAPTER 1.

Trouble in the New House.

TOM MERRY looked at Figgins, gave a low whistle of surprise, and then looked again.

Figgins was crossing the quadrangle at St. Jim's with long strides, his hands thrust deep into his trousers pockets, and a frown of the darkest gloom upon his face.

Figgins had never been called handsome by his best friend, but there was usually an expression of cheerfulness and good humour upon his face that made it very pleasant to see. But cheerfulness and good humour were gone now, and Figgins wore a frown more suited to the heavy villain in a melodrama than to the junior captain of the New House at St. Jim's.

Tom Merry was surprised.

There was evidently something wrong in the New House.

"I say, Figgy!"

Although Tom Merry was the leader of the School House juniors, and perpetual warfare reigned between the two Houses at St. Jim's, he had a ready sympathy, and nobody would have gone more quickly to Figgy's aid if Figgy had been in real trouble.

Figgy did not look up as Tom Merry called him.

He evidently did not hear, being too deeply enwrapped in gloomy reflection.

"I say, Figgy!"

Tom Merry bawled out the words, and Figgins gave a start and looked at him. But the gloom upon his visage did not relax.

"Hallo, Merry!"

"What's the trouble?" asked Tom Merry, coming nearer to the leader of the New House. "Got anything on your mind, Figgy?"

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"Yes," said Figgins. "There's that old casual ward you call a School House, and a lot of silly duffers living in it who ask idiotic questions—"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Joking aside, Figgy, is anything the matter?"

"Well, yes," said Figgins, thrusting his hands deeper into his pockets, his frown becoming more gloomy and portentous than ever. "I'm beginning to think that life at St. Jim's isn't worth living."

"Oh, rot!" said Tom Merry warmly. "I admit that it isn't nice to be in the New House, with the rotten set of wasters you have there; but—"

"Are you looking for a thick ear, Tom Merry?"

"No; I'm sympathising with you."

"Well, don't! As a matter of fact, there is something wrong in the New House. The House dame has gone away to see a sick sister, or a sick uncle, or a sick something—blessed if I know which—but it's sick—and she's gone to see it."

"Well?" grinned Tom Merry. "You don't mean to say that those terrible frowns are because Mrs. Kenwigg has gone away? I didn't know you had a soft spot in your heart for Mrs.—"

"Oh, don't rot!" said Figgins, without the least relaxation of his grim visage. "Mrs. Kenwigg has gone away, and Mr. Ratcliff's sister is acting as housekeeper in her absence."

"Well, why shouldn't she?" was Tom Merry's natural question. "As Mr. Ratcliff is your Housemaster it's only natural that his sister should come and keep the House while the House dame is away."

"Yes, I know it is."

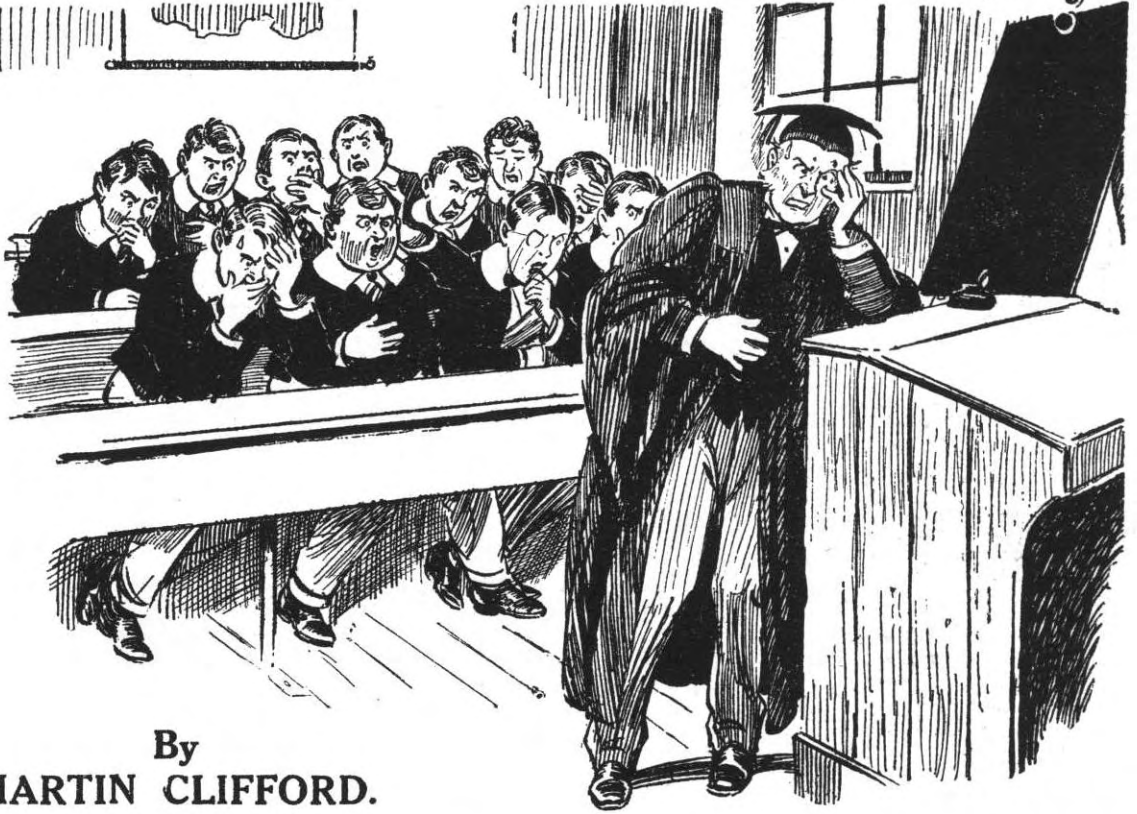
"Then what are you complaining about?"

"You know Ratcliff," said Figgins gloomily. "You've got a decent Housemaster in Ratcliff; we've got a regular rotter in Ratcliff!"

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—STARRING FIGGINS & CO. OF THE NEW HOUSE AT ST. JIM'S!

PAINS AT ST JIM'S!



By
MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"Yes, I know; but there's nothing nice about the New House, and so a nice Housemaster would be out of place."

"His sister," went on Figgins, without heeding Tom Merry's remark, "is himself over again, only thinner and sharper and meaner. Since Mrs. Kenwigg went the grub has gone down in the most alarming way."

"My hat! That's too bad!"

"There isn't enough, and it isn't good," said Figgins. "Mind, I'm not a particular chap about grub; I don't care what it is so long as it's nice and there's plenty of it."

"Ha, ha, ha! That's not being particular, of course."

"But there's Fatty Wynn," said Figgins. "You know how he'd feel a thing like that. I couldn't stand his grumbling all day long, even if I could put up with the beastly grub myself."

"It's hard cheese!"

"We're not going to stand it!" said Figgins emphatically. "If it had only been for a day or two we could have stuck it out. But Mrs. Kenwigg has been gone for three days now, and we don't hear of her coming back yet. Why, those two Ratcliffs will starve us to death between them."

"Awful!"

"It's all very well for you to grin, Tom Merry—it's a serious matter. It's no good complaining to the Head; it would look like sneaking, and, besides, you know the Head would never listen to complaints against a Housemaster."

"Probably not."

"Besides, complaining is a rotten game, anyhow. That's barred. What can we do? We're not going to be famished like this," said Figgins, rather excitedly. "I came out

into the quad to have a quiet think over it. It's getting too thick!"

"Well, I wouldn't stand it!" said Tom Merry, encouragingly.

"What would you do?"

"We had something of the kind happen in the School House once," Tom Merry remarked. "It was when Railton became our Housemaster, and things hadn't got into good working order. We were bothered with the grub, and we went on strike. I dare say you remember."

Figgins grinned at last.

"Yes, I remember. And a nice muck you made of it!"

"Oh, I don't know! It was fun while it lasted. But the Housemaster was away. I don't know how it would answer with the boulder at home. Besides, Ratty isn't like Mr. Railton—he hasn't any sense of humour. He would be more likely to wade in with a cane and give you a variety of beans."

"I should say so. He's a beast, and there's no getting out of that," said Figgins.

"And if you remonstrate he's just beast enough to pick on the leader and send him up to the Head for a flogging," said Tom Merry thoughtfully.

"That's the rab."

"But, I say, why not get up a round robin?" exclaimed Tom Merry, a new idea striking him. "You know the trick—you all sign your names in a circle, so that nobody's first and nobody's last, and all are equally responsible."

"Good wheeze!" exclaimed Figgins heartily. "That's real good advice, and I'm much obliged to you, Tom Merry."

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**Figgins made a pudding
That St. Jim's remembers still,
For everyone who ate a piece
Was very, very ill!**

"I always said that you were the least fathcaded of all the silly duifers in the School House!"

"Thank you, Figgy! I like to help you youngsters when you are in a difficulty——"

"Youngsters!" said Figgins, glowering; but then he grinned. "Never mind; you've given me jolly good advice. So-long!"

And Figgins, with a less clouded brow and a much sprightlier step, strode off towards the New House, evidently bent on immediately acting on Tom Merry's advice.

Tom Merry went into the School House. His chums, Manners and Lowther, met him in the Hall, and at once remarked upon the grin on his face.

"What's the wheeze?" asked the two together.

"Nothing; only there's trouble in the New House," said Tom Merry. "The New House master is cutting down the grub, and Figgins & Co. are on the warpath. They're going to send a round robin to Mr. Ratcliff on the subject!"

"Ha, ha, ha! I should like to be there when he gets it!" chuckled Lowther. "I've been hearing things lately about the grub in the New House. I believe some of the kids have got an idea of grubbing themselves in their studies, as we did when we went on strike."

"Good idea, too," said Manners. "It's fun, but it costs money."

"And you remember how those New House bouncers chipped us at the time?" went on Lowther. "We'll do the chipping now—we'll make 'em sit up!"

"Oh, I don't know!" said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "I think we ought to back on Figgins & Co., you know, as——"

"Rats!" said Monty Lowther emphatically. "Aren't we at war with the New House? Aren't we going to give them the giddy kybosh? Rats!"

"Yes, but——"

"I agree with Lowther," said Manners. "Rats!"

So Tom Merry, being in a minority of one, gave it up, but he kept to his opinion, all the same. For the first time there appeared something like a rift in the lute, as it were, a slight jarring in the hitherto perfect harmony of the Terrible Three.

CHAPTER 2.

The Round Robin.

FIGGINS came into his study in the New House with an expression of new resolve upon his face that at once attracted the attention of his chums, Kerr and Wynn. Kerr, the canny Scotsman, and Wynn, the plump youth from gallant little Wales, were the famous Co., and Figgins & Co. reigned undisputed leaders of the juniors of the New House. Whatever Figgins & Co. decided upon in the present emergency was pretty certain to be acted upon by all the juniors of the House.

It was very different over the way in the School House, as Figgins sometimes remarked proudly enough. There, Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy, of Study No. 6, disputed the leadership of the House with the Terrible Three. Nothing of that sort in the New House, you know, Figgins would say.

"Got a new idea?" asked Kerr, as he looked at Figgins.

"You look as if you have found something."

"If he has, I hope it's something to eat," said Fatty Wynn dismally. "I feel as if I'd been in an open boat at sea for three months. I'm growing so thin that I shall be wasted to a shadow soon!"

"You don't look it!" growled Figgins, surveying disparagingly the plump proportions of his chum. "I can't notice any difference."

"Appearances aren't everything," said Fatty Wynn pathetically. "I don't know how I'm standing this awful trial. I had hardly any dinner, and since then I've only had some toffee I found in Pratt's desk, and some chocolate Jimson gave me, and a pie I bought at the tuckshop, and the tarts we had in the cupboard here——"

"The tarts!" roared Figgins. "Do you mean to say that you've scoffed all those tarts? Why, there were nine of them, and we were going to have them for tea!"

"You can't expect a chap to starve with provisions under his very nose," said Fatty Wynn. "Talk about the tortures of Tantalus! Don't be brutal, Figgins!"

Figgins grunted.

"Something must be done," said Wynn. "Things are going from bad to worse. Some of the seniors have been grumbling, but they have money enough to get things for themselves. I know Monteith and Baker have been talking it over. But they won't do anything; they think it would encourage the juniors to get their backs up. I tell you, Figgins, if anything is done against this beastly tyranny it will have to be done by us."

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"Exactly!" said Figgins. "And I've thought of a plan. At all events, Tom Merry has suggested one to me, and we're going to act upon it."

"What's the wheeze?" asked the Co. together, with great interest.

"A remonstrance to the Housemaster in the form of a round robin," said Figgins. "The cad would pick on a leader to make an example of him. There's no leader in a round robin. We'll shove every name in the Fourth on it—in the New House, I mean—and when he knows we're solid in the matter it's bound to make some difference."

Fatty Wynn brightened up.

"Well, it's worth trying, anyway!" he exclaimed.

Figgins looked at Kerr. The Scottish partner in the firm did not look over hopeful.

"Well, what do you think of the wheeze, Kerr?"

"We may as well try it, Figgy. I don't suppose it will lead to anything, though. It isn't as if Ratcliff didn't know what was going on, you see. He knows perfectly well, and it's his idea of running a House economically. I believe he's glad that Mrs. Kenwigg has gone, and that he'd be gladder if she never came back. He's quite at one with Miss Ratcliff in the matter, and I believe remonstrance will only get a crop of canings all round."

"If you're afraid of a caning——"

"Rats! I'm with you. I only say that I don't think it will do any good. But we'll try it—I'm game."

"If it doesn't do any good," said Figgins, "we'll try something else. We'll start feeding ourselves in the study, and boycott the Hall. If we all march out of the dining-hall without tasting our dinner some day that will wake Ratty up."

"Perhaps," said Kerr dubiously. "He might wake us up afterwards."

"Well, let's get the round robin going, anyway," said Figgins. "We'll draw up the document, and I'll get a School House boy to copy it out, so that Ratty won't know the writing."

"That's well thought of."

Figgins sat down at the table, and drew pen, ink, and paper towards him. He wrinkled his brow in deep thought.

"I suppose we had better begin 'Respected Sir'?" he suggested.

"Well, we oughtn't to tell a whopper, Figgy. We don't respect him, and that's the truth. I know we ought to, but we don't."

"That's his own fault. We'd respect Mr. Railton if he were our Housemaster. Suppose I say 'Dear Sir'?"

"He's not dear," said the unscrupulous Kerr. "I don't believe in calling a chap dear if you don't like him."

"It's only a matter of form, you know," said Figgins.

"One must say something."

"Yes, I know; but——"

"Well, he is dear," said Fatty Wynn, coming to the rescue. "He's dear at any price—he'd be dear at twopence-halfpenny. In that sense——"

Figgins chuckled.

"That's right! In that sense we should be perfectly correct in calling him 'Dear Sir.' We'll say 'dear,' and 'at any price' is understood. 'Dear Sir,—We, the undersigned, the juniors of the New House, hereby beg leave to protest against the——'"

"The grub," said Fatty Wynn.

"Grub's vulgar. The provisions—no—the provender—the quality and quantity of the provender supplied to us since Mrs. Kenwigg left the House."

"That sounds well," said Kerr.

"We beg to request that the status quo——"

"The what?" asked the Co.

"The status quo," said Figgins—"that's the previous state, you know. It's Latin, and will go down very well in a round robin—that the status quo be returned to, and grub—no, provender be supplied on the same scale as heretofore—that's a jolly good word, and sounds legal—as heretofore. In witness whereof we——"

"In witness whichof," it ought to be," said Fatty Wynn.

"Where" implies a place, and "which" implies a thing. "In witness whichof——"

Figgins scratched his forehead with the handle of his pen.

"There's something in that, Fatty," he agreed. "But I believe it's 'whereof,' all the same. I don't think 'whichof' is a word."

"Well, if it isn't, it ought to be."

"I suppose it ought," Figgins assented doubtfully. "I don't know about putting it in, though. Ratty might not understand."

"He's more likely to understand if you say what you mean than if you say what you don't mean. There's not the slightest doubt that 'whichof' expresses the thing better than 'whereof,'" said Fatty Wynn.

"What do you say, Kerr?"

"Well, I am rather inclined to agree with Fatty, Figgy. I know 'whercof' has a more legal sound, but 'whichof' is a more sensible word, and it sounds very impressive."

"Well, we want to impress Ratty," said Figgins. "I don't mind. 'Whichof' it is, then. 'In witness whichof we append our signatures.'"

"That's all right," said Kerr. "Get that written out on a blank sheet by a School House kid, and then we'll get every junior in the New House to sign it. Hallo, there's D'Arcy! He'll do!"

Kerr was glancing from the window as he spoke. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the School House, was coming round the corner of the House, after a visit to the "menagerie," as the boys called the place where their pets were kept.

Figgins leaned out of the window and hailed him.

"Good! Then I will come as quickly as poss, deah boy." And Arthur Augustus disappeared into the House.

A minute or two later a wild pattering of feet was heard in the passage, and the door of the study was burst violently open. Arthur Augustus came pelting in, with a couple of New House juniors at his heels.

"Cornered!" yelled Pratt. "Collar him, Figgins!"

"Yah! School House cads!" shouted Jimson. "Got him!"

"Pway kick those wuff and wude boundahs out, Figgy, deah boy," said D'Arcy. "They have caused me to wun at a most exhaustin' pace, and I am quite wuffed and fluwvied."

"Outside!" said Figgins laconically. "D'Arcy has come here to see me, kids, and if a hair of his coconut is harmed look out for tornadoes, that's all!"



Figgins threw himself gallantly on to the School House juniors and dragged Lowther and D'Arcy to the ground, while Kerr and Fatty ran on with the provisions!

"Hallo, Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus stopped and adjusted an eyeglass in his right eye, and stared languidly up at Figgins.

"Hallo, deah boy!" he replied. "Did you address me?"

"Yes. Will you do me a favour?"

"Yaas, wathah," said D'Arcy, who was all politeness, even to Figgins & Co., who usually chipped him unmercifully. "What can I have the extweme pleasuah of doin' for you, deah boy?"

"Come up into the study."

D'Arcy hesitated.

"I should have gweat pleasuah in doin' so, dear boy, but I am afwaid that you may be plannin' some wuff and wude joke," he replied. "If you pwomise as gentlemen to tweek me with pwopah respect, I shall be vovwy pleased to come up into your quartahs."

"My dear Gussy, we'll treat you with as much respect as if you were our cwn grandfather," said Figgins. "It's pax!"

"That's all very well, Figgins—" began Pratt wrathfully.

"Of course it is," said Figgins. "Are you going?"

"No, I'm not. I—"

Figgins started towards the intruder, and Pratt changed his mind. He whipped out of the study in no time, and Jimson followed him. Figgins closed the door.

"Sorry you have been chased, Gussy," he said. "I'll see you off the premises, or Kerr will, when you go, so that's all right. Are you quite recovered?"

"Yaas, Figgins, thank you vevwy much. I feel somewhat exhausted, but I am at your service, deah boy. What can I do for you?"

"You can copy out that document for us," said Figgins. "We don't want it in a New House handwriting, or else Ratty will have somebody to pick on. See?"

D'Arcy read through the manifesto of Figgins & Co.

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"Yaas, wathah!" he assented. "But will you allow me to make a remark, with your permish?"

"Certainly. What is it?"

"I weally think there is no such word in the English language as 'whichof,'" said D'Arcy. "It sounds to me like a Wussian word."

"Oh, that's all right! You copy it out, whiskers, and don't teach your grandmother," said Fatty Wynn, who was rather proud of the word D'Arcy took exception to.

"I will copy it out with pleasuah," said D'Arcy, "but I weally wish you would not apply such a widiculous expwession to me, Wynn. As I am perfectly cleah of anythin' like a hirsute growth on my face, such a term as whiskers is simplay widiculous."

"Oh, get on with the washing," said Kerr.

"That's it, Gussy—get on, and don't talk so much," said Figgins, placing a pen in the hand of the swell of St. Jim's.

"Blessed if you wouldn't talk a dumb man blind."

"Pway do not be personal, Figgins. I think—"

"Get on, I tell you."

"Unless I am addressd with gweater wespsect I must decidedly wefuse to get on," said Arthur Augustus with dignity. "I—"

Figgins contained himself with an effort.

"Pray have the kindness to proceed with the copying of that document, Master D'Arcy," he said, with elaborate politeness.

Arthur Augustus beamed.

"Certainly, with the gweatest of pleasuah!" he exclaimed.

And the manifesto was written out.

"Good!" said Figgins. "Thank you, Gussy. Kerr, see that tame lunatic off the premises while I get this document signed in the Common-room."

D'Arcy rose to his feet and surveyed Figgins through his monocle.

"Pway, Figgins, what did you allude to me as?" he inquired frigidly.

"Tame lunatic," grinned Figgins. "Harmless variety of howling lunatic. Get him out of the House, you kids, while I—"

"I shall not leave this woom, Figgins, until you have eithah apoligised for those diswespsectful words, or weceived a feahful thwashin'."

"Won't you?" said Figgins. "March him off, kids!"

Arthur Augustus made a rush at Figgins, but the Co. seized him.

Vainly protesting, the swell of the School House was run down the stairs and out of the New House with such swift-ness that he finished by sitting down in the quadrangle.

He rose to his feet, with an air of extremely offended dignity.

"I weward that conduct as diswespsectful and wuff," he murmured. "I shall certainly thwash Figgins when I meet him again outside the New House."

And the swell of the School House marched off in a state of swelling indignation. Meanwhile, Figgins & Co. were busy.

CHAPTER 3.

Mr. Ratcliff Cuts Up Rough.

F IGGINS had no difficulty in getting plenty of signatures to the round robin. All the juniors of the New House were in the same state of indignation, and, besides, Figgins would certainly have licked any recalcitrant person who had refused to sign. The juniors signed fast enough, and some of the seniors would have done so but for the consideration that their dignity would suffer by their being mixed up in any affair with the juniors.

Figgins, indeed, made one attempt to gain the support of Monteith, the head prefect of the New House. The circle of signatures was only half filled when the long-limbed chief of the New House juniors presented himself at Monteith's door.

Monteith was busy, and he looked up, far from amiable.

"What do you want, Figgins?"

"I should like your signature to this, Monteith, if you don't mind," said Figgins.

"That! What on earth is it?"

"A round robin," said Figgins importantly. "A remonstrance to Mr. Ratcliff on the subject of the beastly feeding we've had lately."

Monteith stared at him without speaking.

"All the juniors are signing it," went on Figgins. "A prefect's name would give the thing weight. I should like to be backed up by a prefect's name—"

"You'll be backed up by a prefect's boot if you don't get outside this study in two seconds!" said Monteith.

"But—"

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"Outside!" said the prefect sharply.

"But you see, Monteith—"

The prefect half rose from the table, and Figgins thought that he had better go. He went out of the study and shut the door rather hard.

Kerr and Wynn met him in the passage.

"Monteith won't sign it," said Figgins, shaking his head. "The seniors are afraid of their precious dignity, you know, which simply means that us juniors have got to take all the risks. Well, I don't care, for one! Come on, and let's hunt up the rest of the Form and get the names filled in."

It was a lengthy task, and it took up most of what was left of that Wednesday afternoon. But at length the name of every member of the Fourth Form who had the honour of residing in the New House was filled in, and the round robin was complete.

The question now arose as to the precise moment when it would be most judicious to present the round robin to Mr. Ratcliff.

"If we take it to him in his study only a few of us can go, and he'll pick on 'em for a licking," said Kerr.

"True enough. That won't do. Suppose we put it under the plate in the dining-hall?" suggested Fatty Wynn.

"Or on his desk in the class-room," said Pratt.

Figgins shook his head.

"That's no good. We must be present when he has the document. As Ratty takes the Fifth, we shouldn't be there when he had the paper. I rather favour the idea of sticking it in his place at the tea-table this evening. We must make it a point of being in the Hall before he comes in, and then it will be simple."

This expedient was finally adopted.

Figgins folded the paper up and put it in his pocket, and at an unusually early time the juniors went into the dining-hall of the New House.

Mr. Ratcliff was not yet there, and Figgins had no difficulty in placing the round robin half under the master's plate at the head of the seniors' table.

Several seniors saw him do it, but, imagining that it was a note sent to Mr. Ratcliff by means of a junior, possibly from the Head, no one thought of interfering with it.

The Fourth-Formers took their places at the table, which was presided over by a prefect, the master of the Fourth being a resident in the School House.

Tea in the New House was certainly of the sparest.

It was a meal which the juniors frequently took in their studies, but on this occasion the whole of the New House contingent of the Fourth Form had turned up in the Hall.

They wanted to see what would happen when the House-master read the manifesto.

The fare that was on the table did not take up much of their attention. It was what Figgins described as bread-and-scrape, with a liquid which was like warm water with a very faint flavouring of tea. The head and front of the new housekeeper's offending was the substitution of salt butter for the fresh the boys had been accustomed to. They believed it was in order to make them eat less, as perhaps it was. Miss Phoebe Ratcliff had, it was whispered, been the manageress of a boarding-house in a London suburb. It was natural that she should be a saving soul.

Mr. Ratcliff came in and took his seat. Every eye at the Fourth Form table was turned towards the festive board of the Sixth-Formers.

The paper lying by his plate at once caught Mr. Ratcliff's eye, and he picked it up and glanced at it. The Housemaster was a tall, thin, sour-featured man, with a prominent nose, slightly red at the tip, and cold, fishy eyes. When he was angry the tip of his nose became redder, and it was popularly regarded in the New House as a danger signal.

The tip of the Housemaster's nose became very red indeed as he glanced at the precious manifesto of the New House juniors.

"He's reading it," whispered Figgins.

Mr. Ratcliff certainly was reading the round robin. Not a word of it escaped him. He did not smile when he came to "whichof." He seldom smiled.

He glanced over the names, too, and Figgins saw that he was counting them. He turned his head and glanced at the Fourth Form table, and caught the anxious glances of twenty pairs of eyes fastened upon him.

Then he turned to his meal, thrusting the crumpled paper into his pocket.

The juniors looked at one another.

"I wonder what he's going to do?" murmured Figgins.

"He looks annoyed."

"Furious, you mean."

"Look how he's biting his lips, and his nose is awfully red."

"There's going to be a row."

"Shut up there, you youngsters!" said Baker, who was at the head of the table. "None of that buzzing!"

"Right-ho, Baker! Can we have something to eat?"

"You can have what's on the table."

"That's not fit to eat."

"You'd better tell Mr. Ratcliff so," said Baker dryly. "But shut up now."

The juniors made some kind of a tea. As most of them had provisions waiting in their own studies, they did not mind much. It was breakfast and dinner being equally scanty that they objected to.

They left the Hall at last. Still no sign had come from Mr. Ratcliff. The juniors were growing rather worried. Even Figgins & Co. looked uneasy. Mr. Ratcliff reminded them of some wild animal of a feline species, which lay low till the time came to make a sudden spring. When would the Housemaster make his spring?

Figgins & Co. went to their study. The tea they had made in the Hall left them hungry, and they had a little feed in the study. It was not yet finished when a prefect looked into the room.

"You're wanted," he said laconically.

"Are we?" said Figgins, looking up. "Where, and why?"

"Mr. Ratcliff wants to see you in his study."

And the prefect passed on.

Figgins looked at the Co. dismally, and rose to his feet. "I suppose the round robin business has been a bloomer," he remarked. "Of course, Ratty knows we're the leaders of the House. He's picked us out on suspicion. Any other master would wait for proof. Ratty won't. We're in for it! Come on!"

And Figgins & Co. left the tea in the cosy study, and made their way with considerable apprehensions towards the Housemaster's quarters.

But they soon found that they were not alone in their misfortunes.

Boys of the Fourth Form and the Shell were going the same way, in two and threes, and it soon became evident that the prefect had been sent round to gather in all the signatories of the round robin. Some had already reached the study. The door was open, the light streaming out, and Figgins saw that many of his Form fellows were in the room. The rest crowded in.

Mr. Ratcliff was seated at his writing-table near the fire. He was writing, and did not seem to observe the presence of the juniors filling up the room. It was a large room, but it was pretty well crowded by the time the signatories of the round robin had all crowded into it. Mr. Ratcliff looked up from his writing at last.

His eye ran over the groups of waiting boys, all with their eyes fixed upon him anxiously.

"I think you are all here now," he remarked. "Is anyone absent, Figgins, who put his name to this precious document?"

And Mr. Ratcliff indicated with a gesture the round robin that lay on his desk.

"I'm sure I don't know, sir," said Figgins.

"Then you will kindly take the paper and call the roll, Figgins. You may close the door, Kerr. Now, Figgins."

Figgins, with rage in his heart, took the round robin and called the names. Everyone was answered to. No junior of the New House was likely to stay away when the Housemaster sent him a special injunction to come to his study.

"Good!" said the Housemaster, with a sour smile. "I see you are all present. Now, my boys, tell me who was the leader in this piece of gross impertinence and disrespect?"

There was no reply.

"Answer me!" thundered Mr. Ratcliff.

"If you, please, sir," ventured Figgins, "we didn't mean it for anything like impertinence or disrespect—"

"I have formed my opinion about that," said Mr. Ratcliff. "I do not intend to argue the point. I regard this document as grossly impertinent, or rather insolent. Who was the author of it? I demand an answer to that question."

An almost deadly silence reigned in the study.

"I understand this device of signatures in a circle," went on Mr. Ratcliff. "It is done, I presume, in order to equally apportion the blame, and keep secret from me the name of the boy who was the leader in this disrespectful manifesto. But the name of that leader I am, nevertheless, determined to discover. I demand to know it."

Chilly silence!

The veins of Mr. Ratcliff's forehead stood out. His eyes had a savage gleam in them. It was evident that he was in such a passion that he could hardly remain calm. That

fact alone was enough to banish any rag of respect the boys might have had left for him. A man who could not command his own temper was not likely to command anything, and certainly not respect.

"Will you answer me?"

Not a sound, save a slight, uneasy shuffling of feet, broke the silence.

"Very well," said Mr. Ratcliff thickly—"very well. Every boy who has signed his name on this paper will be caned, and given an imposition of two hundred lines to do on the next half-holiday."

There was a murmur of dismay.

"Now," said Mr. Ratcliff, "will you give me the name of your leader?"

Still silence!

If any boy had been inclined to sneak the terror of what would come afterwards would have kept him silent. If anyone had given Figgins away then his life would not have been worth living at St. Jim's afterwards.

"Very well," said Mr. Ratcliff. "You know your punishment. Stand—"

"One moment, sir," Figgins stepped out. "I was the chap who started this wheeze, sir, if you want to know."

Mr. Ratcliff stared at him.

He was certainly not prepared for this frank avowal on the part of the juniors, and still less for what followed. For Kerr and Fatty Wynn stepped immediately up to Figgins' side.

"It's all rot," said Kerr. "We were in it as much as Figgins, sir."

Mr. Ratcliff smiled sourly.

"Very well. You three are detained for the next three half-holidays, and you will take a thousand lines each. Now hold out your hands."

Mr. Ratcliff selected an extra strong cane with great care. He gave Figgins six on each hand and bestowed the same attention upon the Co. Then every other junior in the room was called forward to take four cuts.

There was dismay and apprehension in every face, and something like scorn in some of them. Figgins hardly troubled to conceal the contempt he felt. It had been implied by Mr. Ratcliff's words that if the leaders in the movement were discovered the rank and file would be pardoned, or let off lightly. To punish them as severely as if Figgins & Co. had not confessed was very much like a breaking of faith. But Mr. Ratcliff had never been known to have a nice sense of honour.

The unhappy signatories of the round robin went through the ordeal, and after the caning filed dismally out of the study, each with the prospects of a confiscated half-holiday and two hundred lines ahead of them.

"I think," said Mr. Ratcliff, "that that will be a lesson to you."

Figgins & Co. thought so, too, as they made their way disconsolately to their study.

Their own spirit was undaunted, but it was doubtful what following they would be able to muster in another attempt to set matters right in the New House. The lesson had been a severe one. But whatever the rest of the juniors might think about the matter, Figgins & Co. were unconquered, and as determined as ever.

CHAPTER 4.

Tom Merry's Treat.

TOM MERRY spotted Figgins & Co. in the quadrangle the next morning and stopped to inquire as to the success of the round robin.

"You tried the wheeze?" he said.

(Continued on the next page.)



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Figgins smiled a sickly smile.

"On, yes, we tried it!" he replied,

"And what was the result?"

"Oh, r:ping!" said Figgins. "Six on each hand, and a thousand lines, and gated for three half-holidays each."

"My hat! That is coming it strong. Didn't the rest of the Form back you up?"

"Oh, yes, they backed us up!"

"And it didn't have any effect?"

"Yes, it did. It got them two hundred lines apiece and four cuts. You see, as we owned up, we got the worst of it. Nice, isn't it?"

"If we had a Housemaster like that," said Monty Lowther, "we'd scrag him! We'd—"

"We'd jump on his neck," said Manners.

"No, you wouldn't," said Tom Merry, before Figgins could speak. "If you had a Housemaster like that you'd grin and bear it—just as Figgins does."

"Who says we would?" demanded Manners and Lowther together wrathfully.

"I do!" said Tom Merry.

"Look here, Tom Merry, if you're going to take the side of these New House bounders in everything it's about time you stopped setting up as a leader of the School House."

"Oh, rats!" said Tom Merry cheerfully.

Manners and Lowther stalked away in great indignation. "Hallo! A rift in the lute?" said Figgins, with a grin.

"Knock their heads together, my boy. Never allow insubordination. I never do."

"Perhaps I will," said Tom Merry, laughing. "But I say—what are you going to do? You're not going to knuckle under to the Ratty-least, are you?"

"Not if we know it," said Figgins emphatically. "We're trying to get up a boycott—to leave the grub alone, you know, and feed in our studies."

"Are the fellows backing you up?"

"Some of them. Of course, we can't absent ourselves from the meals—that's against the rules. But we're not compelled to eat if we don't want to. If the whole table goes out at dinner-time without touching the grub, that will be a strong hint to Ratty. We're going to lay in a feed at the tuckshop after."

"What about funds?"

"Oh, we're making this a question of the House," said Figgins. "Supplies are pooled, and chaps who have money have to treat those who haven't. Of course, it would be no good expecting a chap who was stony to go without his dinner and have nothing at all to eat."

"I suppose not. I wish I could back you up, Figgy. I say, if there's any shortage of funds, you know where to come. I've had a remittance from Miss Fawcett, and a pound—"

Figgins slapped him on the shoulder appreciatively.

"That's jolly handsome of you, Tom Merry, but I couldn't accept it. It's an affair of the New House, and we couldn't accept help from the School House. I've got to fight it out on our own. Thanking you all the same."

Tom Merry nodded. He understood Figgins' feeling on the point.

The rival leaders parted on unusually good terms, but when Tom Merry rejoined Manners and Lowther, he found them rather huffy. But he didn't mind.

Figgins & Co. went into the New House for breakfast. It was a keen winter's morning, and they were pretty sharp set.

Figgins had had some idea of starting the boycott at once, but he decided otherwise on the spot. It was as well to leave it till dinner-time, when the juniors would have plenty of time afterwards to fill up at the tuckshop.

Dinner-time came, and the boys took their places in the dining-room of the New House. Mr. Ratcliff was there, as usual. Figgins & Co. and their backers had agreed upon the plan of campaign. After the experience of the previous night some of the juniors had been rather dubious about rousing the Housemaster's wrath again. But, as Figgins pointed out, he might be angry, but he couldn't very well come there for leaving their dinners.

Figgins' influence was great, and he had his way—at least, in his own Form. The members of the Shell who had followed him before, fought shy of the new proposal. But if every dinner on the Fourth Form table was left untasted it would be sufficient for Figgins' purpose.

The prefect in charge of the Fourth Form table looked along it, puzzled.

"Why aren't you eating, kids?" he asked good-naturedly. "I should think you were pretty hungry on a keen day like this."

"Yes, we're pretty hungry, Baker," said Figgins.

"Then why don't you eat?"

"There's nothing here fit to eat."

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"Come, Figgins! Better buckle to before the grub's cleared off," said Baker good-naturedly.

But the juniors did not touch the food.

Figgins knew that Mr. Ratcliff, in his place, had caught something of the talk, and that his eye was glancing over the untasted portions.

Not a plate was touched. The dinners were cleared off untasted, and the second course—which consisted of a thin, streaky sort of a suet pudding, took its place. That was not touched, either, and it remained in full view when the boys rose.

Mr. Ratcliff gave a look at the table, but said nothing. He scribbled in his pocketbook, and gave the note he had written to Sefton, a New House senior, and the worst bully in the House.

Sefton was Mr. Ratcliff's favourite, and to a very great extent a fellow after his own heart. Sefton listened respectfully while the Housemaster spoke to him in a low tone, and then left the Hall.

"You have not touched your dinners, my boys," said Mr. Ratcliff, in a very smooth tone—so smooth that the juniors scented danger at once.

"No, sir," said Figgins respectfully.

"Are you not hungry?"

"Yes, sir."

"How strange that you should leave your dinners if you are hungry! I hope you are not ill, Figgins?"

"No, sir."

"Perhaps this means that some unhealthy feast of sweets and sticky things is planned to take place?" Mr. Ratcliff remarked. "I hope not. If you are looking forward to anything of the kind, you will be disappointed."

Figgins wondered what the last speech really meant as he went out.

The juniors at once swarmed away towards the school shop, kept by Dame Taggles.

They met Sefton coming out of it. The bully of the Sixth grinned at them as he passed, and his grin gave Figgins a vague feeling of uneasiness.

The juniors swarmed into the tuckshop. Dame Taggles was there, looking somewhat surprised and worried. The youngsters gave a dozen orders at once.

"I am sorry, young gentlemen," said Mrs. Taggles.

"What are you sorry about?" asked Fatty Wynn. "Hand over some steak-pies, and tell us about the sorrow afterwards."

"I am sorry—"

"Yes—yes; but we're hungry," said Kerr. "Back up, Mrs. Taggles, there's a good soul!"

"I am sorry, but I cannot serve you."

A bombshell falling into the tuckshop could hardly have surprised the juniors more. Dame Taggles was usually only too willing to sell.

"Why, what's the matter, ma'am?" said Figgins, in astonishment. "We're not broke, you know. We're not asking for tick."

"I know," said the dame, with a worried look.

"But—"

"Come, hand over the grub! Here's the tin!"

"I have just received a note from Mr. Ratcliff, and he says that no boys belonging to the New House are to be served until after afternoon lessons."

"He says what—what—"

Dismay fell upon the hungry juniors.

Figgins understood now what the Housemaster had meant. He knew what Sefton's presence in Dame Taggles' little shop had meant.

The Housemaster had forestalled them.

This was Mr. Ratcliff's answer to the boycott in the Hall.

"My word!" murmured Kerr. "This is fearful! What are we going to do?"

"I must have something to eat," said Fatty Wynn wildly. "I think I shall die if I don't have anything to eat till tea-time. I'm sure I shall perish! Oh dear!"

"Horrible!" said Figgins. "Who would have thought that Ratty was such an artful old bird? I believe he's the sharpest old knife-blade—"

"Hallo! What's the trouble?" exclaimed a cheery voice, as Tom Merry came into the shop. "Whence those frowns?"

"Oh, don't rot!" said Figgins. "It's awful! We've missed our dinner, as a hint to Ratty, and he's given orders that no New House juniors are to be served at the shop till after school. Of course, we depended on getting a feed here."

Tom Merry became serious at once.

"My hat, that's bad!" he remarked. "Ratty is up to snuff. Keen old bird. You'll all expire in fearful agonies before last lesson."

"I believe I shall," groaned Fatty Wynn. "Oh, Figgins,

how could you think of such a thing? How could you take this fearful risk—"

"Seems to me to be a bit fatheaded of Figgins," Pratt remarked. "He ought to have foreseen something of this kind."

"That's right, blame me!" said Figgins. "How could I foresee it?"

"I'm not a blessed leader, so I can't tell you! I tell you what it is, kids. I've had about enough of this blessed movement! The grub in the House is bad enough, but it's better than starving in this beastly cold weather. Ugh!"

"I say—" began Tom Merry.

"Oh, shut up!" said several voices crossly. "We don't want a beastly School House bounder talking to us now!"

And the "grub" was accordingly trotted out.

The New House juniors fell to. Fatty Wynn did not speak, but he attacked a steak-pie with an expression on his face that was more eloquent than words.

Figgins tapped Tom Merry on the shoulder.

"This is awfully decent of you, Merry," said the New House chief, with great feeling. "I really don't know how we should have got through the afternoon. This keen air makes one so beastly peckish. Thanks, muchly!"

The feed was a great success.

Tom Merry's financial resources being limited, there was not quite so much to go round as the hungry juniors might have liked, but after the prospect of famishing all the afternoon, it was a godsend.

The School House leader parted with the New House



"You lazy bounder!" yelled Figgins in alarm. "You aren't looking after my pudding at all!" And he rushed to the saucepan and whipped off the lid. "Yaroooh!" A cloud of steam shot out, causing Figgins to splutter violently!

"Wait a bit," said Tom good-naturedly. "I'm in funds to-day and there's no law against a School House boy buying grub here. I owe Figgins a feed, too. It's my treat. Walk up and take what you like, up to ten bob. I'm settling this, Dame Taggles."

"Good wheeze!" cried a dozen voices.

"That's jolly decent of you, Merry!"

Dame Taggles hesitated.

"I don't know whether I ought—"

"Oh, yes, you do!" said Tom, with his sweetest smile. "You mustn't sell anything to the New House kids. Well, you're not going to. You are going to sell it to me. I'm standing a feed. No law against that, is there?"

Dame Taggles had to admit that there was no law against it.

"Then trot out the grub," said Tom Merry, in a tone of finality.

juniors on unusually good terms. As he walked away from the tuckshop he met Monty Lowther and Manners.

Lowther linked his arm in Tom Merry's.

"Come on!" he said.

"Where?" asked Tom Merry.

"To the tuckshop, of course. Didn't you tell me this morning that you were in funds—and am I not going to help you to blow your wealth like a Briton?"

Tom Merry turned red.

"Sorry," he said; "you're too late. I'm stony."

"What on earth have you been doing?"

Tom Merry explained.

Monty Lowther gave a sniff of great disgust.

"It's all very well to help a lame dog over a stile," he said "but to stand treat to a lot of guzzling New House wasters, when I—"

"I'd forgotten about you, Monty. You didn't say—"
 "Oh, rats! I'm getting fed-up with your love for Figgins & Co. You'd better go and join the New House, I think, and cut this show!" said Lowther.
 "Looks like it," Manners agreed.
 "Oh, rats!" said Tom Merry. "Never knew such a pair of grumblers. Go and eat coke!"
 And the hero of the Shell walked away whistling, leaving his chums staring after him somewhat glumly.

CHAPTER 5.

Ratty is Not Pleased.

MR. RATCLIFF was disappointed. He had expected to see the New House section of the Fourth Form in the dolfullest dumps that afternoon; but he saw nothing of the kind. So far from looking hungry and miserable, the juniors seemed contented enough, and the Housemaster was puzzled.

Mr. Ratcliff, as well as being Housemaster in the New House, was Form master to the Fifth, and he had little time to give to the Lower Forms that afternoon. But he saw them go into their class-room, and noted the absence of the signs he had expected to see. During the afternoon he looked into the Fourth Form room for a few minutes, and spoke to Mr. Latham, out of sheer curiosity to see how Figgins & Co. were getting on, minus their dinner.

"I am afraid you have a troublesome class this afternoon, Mr. Latham," he observed to the master of the Fourth.

Little Mr. Latham blinked at him inquiringly through his big spectacles.

"Not at all," he replied. "The class is very well conducted; indeed, unusually so."

"I was thinking that the boys belonging to my House would be a trouble, as they are in a very discontented mood."

"Indeed! I have not noticed it."

Mr. Ratcliff's sour glance swept over the class.

Truly, the Fourth Form looked much the same as usual, except that there was a very noticeable demureness in the looks of Figgins & Co.

Mr. Ratcliff's eyes rested upon Figgins, who kept his down respectfully upon his desk and did not meet the glance.

"Well, I am glad they are giving you no trouble, Mr. Latham," said the Housemaster, after a pause. "I feared that some of them would be unruly. As a matter of fact, some of the discontented spirits refused out of rebellious obstinacy to eat any dinner to-day."

"Dear me!" said Mr. Latham.

"As I gave instructions at the school shop that their wants were not to be supplied there, they are probably very hungry by this time," the Housemaster remarked grimly.

"I should think so," said Mr. Latham.

"But if they have been unruly at all—"

"Not in the least."

"I am glad to hear it."

And Mr. Ratcliff left the class-room. He had said that he was glad to hear it, but he did not look glad; he looked very sour and annoyed.

He was decidedly puzzled. He returned to his Form-room, but he was thinking more of the Fourth Form than of the Fifth for the rest of the afternoon. He was glad when the class was dismissed, and he had an opportunity of inquiring further into the matter that puzzled him.

He knew that it was useless to question Figgins & Co., but it was not necessary. He bent his steps towards the tuckshop, and as soon as he saw Dame Taggles he noted signs of confusion in that good old lady's face. His brow grew stern as a suspicion came into his mind that his orders had been disregarded.

"Ah, Mrs. Taggles! I sent you instructions by Sefton that no food was to be served to juniors of my House till after school to-day," he said.

"Yes, sir," said Mrs. Taggles meekly.

"I hope that my instructions were carried out."

"Certainly, sir," said the dame, bridling a little. "I hope as how—"

"Exactly. Yet the boys appear to have obtained supplies from somewhere. You are sure, Mrs. Taggles, that you did not serve anything to any New House boys in this shop?"

"They didn't buy anything here, sir."

Mr. Ratcliff smelt a rat at once.

"I did not ask that. I said, did you serve anything to any New House boys here?" he said sternly. "Don't prevaricate, please."

"Which I never did, and it's a thing I never would do, not if it was ever so," said Mrs. Taggles indignantly.

"Did any New House junior obtain refreshments of any

kind in this shop after the note I sent you was placed in your hands?" the Housemaster rapped out.

"I sold nothing, only to Master Merry, bless his generous soul," said Dame Taggles.

A light dawned upon the Housemaster's mind.

"Do you mean that Merry, of the School House, bought food and gave it to the boys of my House?" he demanded angrily.

"There's no rule against a boy standing treat that I know of," said Mrs. Taggles, rather aggressively. "If it's forbidden, I've never heard of it, and if you like to speak to the Head about it, sir, I'm quite ready to answer for my conduct."

Mr. Ratcliff set his thin lips.

"It was a practical evasion of my instructions," he said; "but I need not speak to you about it. Did Merry know that the order had been given?"

"You had better ask him, sir," said Mrs. Taggles, with growing tartness.

"Don't be impertinent, woman!"

"Who are you calling a woman?" demanded Mrs. Taggles indignantly. "My word! That I should live to be called a woman to my face! What do you call yourself?"

Mr. Ratcliff was about to rap out a sour reprimand; but as Dame Taggles showed strong symptoms of falling into hysterics the Housemaster thought better of it, and strode out of the shop without another word.

Mrs. Taggles recovered with wonderful celerity from the threatened hysterics as soon as he was gone.

"The old himage!" she murmured. "The himage! Nice life he leads his boys, I don't think! Which I hope as Master Merry won't get into a bother—but that's not likely. If that hold himage goes to the School House, Mr. Railton will answer him sharp enough. Which he's a gentleman, he is, and I'd say so anywhere if it was ever so."

Mr. Ratcliff, deeply incensed, was indeed making his way to the School House to interview Mr. Railton. There was no love lost between the two Housemasters. Each had a very low opinion of the other's ability in managing a House, and their natures were in almost everything diametrically opposed. But an almost painful politeness was always maintained between them.

"Come in!" said Mr. Railton cheerily, as he heard a knock at his door. But a cloud passed over his face as the master of the New House entered.

There could hardly be a greater contrast than that between the cordial, athletic master of the School House, and the tall, weedy, sour-visaged Mr. Ratcliff.

"Ratcliff, my dear fellow," said Mr. Railton, as cordially as he could, "pray sit down—"

"I have not come to stay," said Mr. Ratcliff, in his iciest tone, with his snowiest look.

Mr. Railton coughed.

"Indeed! To what then—"

"I have come to make a complaint, Mr. Railton."

"Yes?" said Mr. Railton, looking rather weary.

Mr. Ratcliff seldom was without a complaint of some kind to his lips.

"Yes," repeated Mr. Ratcliff. "My authority has been defied, and my measures frustrated, by a boy of your House, and I hope that will be sufficient to cause you to visit him with exemplary punishment."

"I should certainly severely punish any boy of my House who was guilty of such conduct as you describe," said Mr. Railton. "May I ask particulars?"

"Certainly, if my assurance is not sufficient for you!" sneered the master of the New House.

"I could hardly punish a boy in ignorance of his offence," said Mr. Railton quietly.

"Very well. The boy I allude to is Merry, of the Shell Form. You may or may not be acquainted with the fact that there has been some discontent in the New House of late, owing to the new housekeeping arrangements. That discontent I am determined to crush. I know your method would be conciliation—"

"That need hardly enter into the discussion. What has Tom Merry done?"

"Some of the juniors in my House refused to eat their dinner. I consequently gave orders that they were to be refused food at the school shop. Knowing this, Merry treated them all to eatables, thus completely setting my order at naught. Dame Taggles was, of course, glad of the excuse to elude my command. I blame Merry."

"Are you sure that Merry knew what your orders were?"

"I have not the slightest doubt about it. But I am quite willing that he should be asked, and the point cleared up satisfactorily."

Mr. Railton appeared to ruminate.

"I don't know exactly what can be done in the matter," he replied. "It is far from being my province to criticise

(Continued on page 12.)

SEE WHAT'S IN—



Address all letters: The Editor, The GEM, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

HALLO, chums! I have received so many letters in praise of the "extra long" St. Jim's story which was published in our last special Christmas number, that I am convinced a good many of you would prefer to have the yarns of Tom Merry & Co. twice as long as they are at present. As I have said, so many enthusiasts have written me on this subject that I have decided to publish another extra long St. Jim's yarn very shortly. Keep an eye open for our Chat next week wherein will be given further details. In the meantime, all of you are strongly urged to read

"TOM MERRY THE SECOND!"

next week's complete school adventure story by popular Martin Clifford. Those of you with a preference for

"THE PUNCHER PALS!"

will find them "on parade" again next Wednesday, better and more entertaining than ever. Jimmy Silver & Co. of Rookwood, too, are up to some more lively larks and stunts in

"PEELE PAYS THE PENALTY!"

You'll enjoy this latest yarn from the gifted pen of Mr. Owen Conquest, so be sure and read it. By way of a quick laugh Potts, the one and only office boy, duly obliges again with another howler. Don't forget, chums, make certain of your GEM by ordering it in advance. That's the simplest way of dodging the demon Disappointment. Ready for the notebook? Right! Here we go!

THE BANK RAIDERS!

A pretty problem was put before the authorities of South Carolina recently when two men gave themselves up to the police. Their offence was holding up the bank cashier of their town at the point of the revolver, and relieving the bank of £400. That doesn't seem much of a problem, you say. Obviously the bandits ought to be sent to prison. But here's the pith of the problem: These two fellows had only "pinched" their own money! Before you get annoyed with me for writing this par, let me hasten to add that the bank in question had closed its doors against further payment; that the two "bandits" were depositors in that bank to the extent of £413. They claimed, it is alleged, that their only method of getting the money which belonged to them was by taking a leaf out of a real bandit's book, so to speak, and helping themselves. Having forced the cashier to open the vaults, they helped themselves to the £400 and hid it in a wood. That done, they calmly went and told the sheriff of their dirty deed. What-

ever the outcome of this unusual resource, it seems pretty certain that the lawyers of South Carolina will have a headache or two before they decide of just what crime the two depositors have been guilty.

A HOME-MADE GLIDER!

"I'll make a glider myself!" That seems a somewhat "tall" statement to come from a lad of sixteen, but a Lancashire youth with an ambition for things aerial set about making one. Now, roughly eighteen months later, his home-made glider is practically completed. Its wing-span stretches to thirty-two feet, its weight is in the region of one hundred and sixty pounds, and the whole job has cost him only £15. Day in and day out, after work and between night classes, this clever youngster has toiled away, making the various parts in his bed-room and then carting them to a loft over a garage more than a mile away from his home. In the loft the big task of assembling the parts has gone on without a break. Many a time this enthusiast has worked at his glider until as late as three in the morning; but he considers it's been worth while. And so would you; for he has made every part himself. The finished glider contains more than five hundred feet of wooden ribs, supports and stays. And as a tit-bit to a well-turned-out job, he has added a natty contrivance of his own for turning the glider when it takes the air. All GEM-ites will wish this hard-working youngster a successful trip when his glider makes its maiden flight.

KNOCKED OUT—CAUGHT OUT!

Whis! The cricket ball came down the pitch like a rocket. The batsman shaped up to it, and by one of those freaks of circumstance played the ball on to his face. The blow was hard enough to render him unconscious; in fact, he had to be taken to hospital. But another blow was the fact that the ball, bouncing from his face, was caught by one of the fieldsmen. And the umpire, whatever his sympathies may have been, had to give the batsman out. The above paragraph is a true account of what happened in a cricket match between New South Wales and Queensland recently. And Hansen of Queensland was the unlucky cricketer.

IT'S AN ILL WIND—

The gale was raging furiously. The people of Perranporth, in Cornwall, are fairly used to gales, so they didn't worry any too much. But after the gale had subsided a bit they got a real surprise. On the beach were no less than eight whales! They were youngsters as whales go, but each of them measured between twelve and sixteen feet long. Five of these hefty fellows were dead, but

the remaining three were very much alive. It is assumed that the stray "eight" were members of a "school" which had interfered considerably with the fishing in the neighbourhood of Plymouth recently, and that the mighty gale had swept them ashore. The local coastguards are all for burying the carcasses, but already enterprising folk have cut themselves choice steaks from the whales and have announced their intention of eating them—after they have been kept a few days to improve them! I'm quite expecting to hear from a GEM reader in Perranporth that he has now sampled his first whale steak!

SCHOOLBOYS ON TOUR!

A few weeks ago twenty-one schoolboys, looking very fit and bronzed, returned from their two months' tour of Australia and New Zealand. They've seen a lot of life in that short time—from learning from the aborigines, first hand, how to throw a boomerang to rounding-up cattle on farms. In between that they have explored a gold mine three thousand three hundred feet below the surface of the earth, done their best at sheep-shearing and branding, and picked up useful knowledge of timber work, fruit and general farming. As souvenirs these lucky merchants brought back with them an assortment of white rats, live opossums, lizards, arrows, boomerangs, and even gold nuggets! Their educational holiday has made such an appeal to some of them that they intend to return to Australia to settle there.

NEW YORK AND BACK!

The latest ambitious stunt of three famous airmen is to cross the Atlantic from England to New York and then back again in record time. Some time in June or July this daring attempt is to be made, and the machine chosen will be similar to that in which the Americans, Messrs. Post and Gatty made their successful flip across the Atlantic. The names of the daring three are Mr. J. A. Mollison, who holds the Australia to Britain record, Captain J. Saul, the Irish airman whose name is perhaps best remembered in connection with Kingsford Smith, and Colonel Fitzmaurice, who has already flown the Atlantic. On the outgoing journey, that is from England to New York, it is planned that Captain Saul and Mr. Mollison should fly the bus. From New York back to England, Colonel Fitzmaurice and Captain Saul will take control. It won't be from want of experience or courage if anything should go amiss with this spectacular attempt, for each of the trio has proved himself just as safe and comfortable up aloft as we are on the ground.

HEARD THIS ONE?

First Pedestrian, in a lonely country lane: "Can you tell me if there is a policeman about?"

Second Pedestrian: "Well, the nearest policeman is about a mile and a half away, if that's any use to you."

First Pedestrian, pulling out a revolver: "It is. Kindly hand over your money and any other valuables you've got about you."

—OR THIS?

"What's the difference between a schoolmaster and an engine-driver?"

"One trains the mind—the other minds the train!"

YOUR EDITOR
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Puddings and Pains at St. Jim's!

(Continued from page 10.)

your management of your own House, my dear sir. But I must say that it is decidedly harmful for growing boys to be deprived of food for a whole afternoon after missing their dinner, and doubtless Tom Merry was aware of that. He seems to have acted very generously."

"In defying my commands!"

"There is no rule about treating juniors at the tuckshop. The fact that Figgins and the rest were hungry probably seemed to Merry an additional reason for treating them, not a reason against doing so. I repeat that I don't see what is to be done."

"I can advise you. Merry should be severely caned."

"I cannot think so," replied the School House master tartly. "It is true that your orders, unfortunately, were set aside by this treat in the school shop. But Merry has broken no rule of the school, and it is impossible to punish him for nothing."

Mr. Ratcliff's face was like a thundercloud.

"Then you refuse to punish him?"

"I must certainly decline to do so until he is guilty of some offence."

Mr. Ratcliff seemed inclined to burst into a torrent of angry words. But he met the calm eye of the School House master and restrained himself.

"Very well," he said, with lips white with anger. "I shall not forget this, Mr. Railton. I shall not forget that you have deliberately supported a junior in open defiance of my authority."

"I am sorry you should look at it in that light, Mr. Ratcliff. I am sorry that—"

"You have said quite enough, Mr. Railton."

And Mr. Ratcliff quitted the room, closing the door with a very audible bang.

Mr. Railton looked worried for a moment, and then his face broke into a smile.

"How very like Merry!" he murmured. "I shall certainly not punish a boy for a kind action. It is hard, very hard indeed, to live on amicable terms with Mr. Ratcliff."

Mr. Ratcliff went back to the New House in a black fit of rage.

As Mr. Railton refused to take the matter up, Tom Merry was beyond the reach of his vengeance. Mr. Ratcliff would have given a great deal to have the hero of the Shell in the New House for a term.

CHAPTER 6.

A Raid in the Rain!

FIGGINS & Co. gathered in the study after school. They had lines enough to do to keep them going for some time, but they had no intention of doing lines now. More important matters claimed their attention.

"Ratty is cutting up uncommonly rough," said Figgins.

"After that row on Wednesday the chaps were very doubtful about backing us up. The affair to-day is a finishing touch to most of them. They're crying off."

"We came out of it to-day pretty well," Kerr remarked.

"Yes; owing to Tom Merry standing treat. That won't happen every day. Ratty will give more precise instructions at the tuckshop next time. The fellows are afraid of missing meals altogether. And, really, it would be no joke to do so."

"Rather not," said Fatty Wynn, with a shudder. "When I think of the agonies of mind I suffered to-day before Tom Merry came on the scene, I—"

"The agonies of tummy, you mean," said Figgins disdainfully. "Don't talk any more about your unearthly appetite, Fatty. You made me feel hungry. As I was saying, Ratty is a wary old bird, and a tough customer to deal with. He's got no scruples. It's not the kind of joke we like, to have to miss meals—"

"I should say not. When I think of the—"

"Don't think of it, Fatty. Don't talk of it, at any rate. Most of the fellows are afraid of having to go through lessons hungry. Only a few who are able to feed in their studies are sticking to the idea. But whoever gives in or cries off, we, as leaders of the House, have got to stick it out."

Fatty Wynn looked alarmed.

"I say, Figgy, would you mind if I changed into some other study for a bit? I don't want to desert the cause, but when it comes to going without one's dinner—"

"Ring off, Fatty! I don't want you to go without your dinner. Blessed if I should care to sit next you in class if you did, in case you turned a cannibal! We're going to feed ourselves in the study, and cut the feeds in Hall—that's the wheeze. I had two pounds from my father yesterday, and you two fellows are in funds. We're going to be fearfully economical, and make the money last a long while. We'll lay in a supply of provisions, so that no order Ratty may give will make any difference to us. I can cook—"

"Oh, come, Figgy! You can't cook!" said Fatty Wynn, remonstrating. "You'd better make me head cook, and I'll do the things to a T."

"Who says I can't cook?" demanded Figgins.

"I say you can't cook!" retorted Fatty. "If you don't remember how you burnt the bacon and sausages last time you tried in that line, why, I do. They were spoiled!"

"You managed to eat 'em, I remember, all the same, spoiled or not."

"Of course, I did. There wasn't anything else. I had already eaten the pie and the pudding and the boiled eggs and the bacon, and I should have had to go to bed hungry if I hadn't tackled the stuff. But it was horrid—"

"Look here, if you think I can't cook—"

"You can't! I appeal to Kerr. Wasn't the smell of burning in the study something fearful? You burnt the bacon and the sausages, and—"

"I'll burn what I like," said Figgins, rather excitedly. "Perhaps the sausages were browned a little too much, but—"

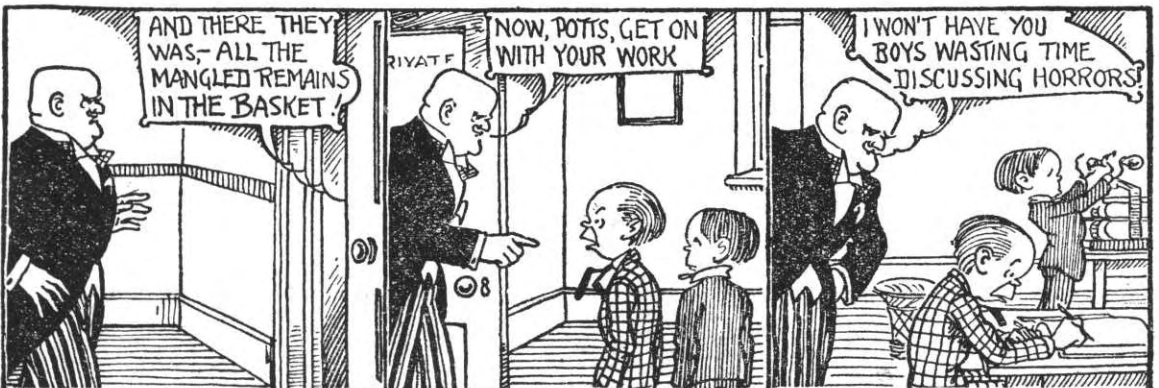
"Brown! The smell of burning in the study was—"

"But the bacon was done to a turn. I—"

"The smell of burning—"

"Besides, I've got an idea. When I was home last we

Potts, the Office Boy!



had a fig pudding, and I watched the cook make it so that I should be able to do it myself here. Now's the time!"

"Fig pudding!" said Fatty Wynn, his eyes glistening. "I like that. I don't know how I should like one you made, though."

"I say, don't start ragging, you two," said Kerr, the peacemaker. "Suppose Figgins attends to the pudding department, and Wynn to the other department. It's an equal division of labour. There's no denying, Figgy, that Fatty cooks bacon and sausages like an angel. But, at the same time, I'd like to have some of that fig pudding."

"Well, I don't mind," said Figgins. "I'm not denying Fatty's abilities in that line. He can cook some things, I know."

"Good!" said Fatty. "I'm satisfied."

And so it was arranged. Ways and means were the next subject of discussion. Fortunately, money, for once, was not lacking in the study. A list of requirements was made out, most of which could be obtained from Dame Taggles. An order was sent to the village shop for the rest.

Figgins was very keen about the fig pudding. He had specially posted himself in the way the cook at home made one, and, naturally, was anxious to air his knowledge.

It was arranged that Kerr and Fatty Wynn should go down to the village for the supplies that were not to be obtained from the school shop.

While they were thus occupied, Figgins was to do some scouting in search of the utensils required for instituting a cooking department in the study. Some, of course, the juniors already had. But they would want more if they were to go in for such things as fig puddings.

"Mind you don't forget the figs," said the New House chief, "and the pudding-cloths at Mrs. Hogg's. And a large-size bottle of syrup of figs."

Kerr looked rather doubtful.

"What's that stuff?" he asked. "Did the cook at home shove that in, Figgy?"

"Well, I remember the pudding was very syrupy, and it stands to reason that if you want a syrupy fig pudding, you have to put syrup of figs in it."

"Yes, I suppose so."

"Get the biggest bottle they make. If it's expensive it can't be helped. We're not going to spoil the pudding to save a little expense. Mind none of the School House rotters see you getting the things in, you know. They'd raid you in a moment, if they had the chance. Don't take any bags, or they may suspect. You'll be wearing your overcoats, as it's raining, and you can stuff all the things in your pockets."

"Right you are!" said the Co.

And they departed upon their errand.

As it happened, Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy were looking out of Study No. 6 in the School House, and they saw the New House juniors go. The state of affairs in the New House was well-known to the juniors of the rival buildings.

In spite of Figgins' great caution, Blake was not long in putting two and two together. He wasn't likely to think that the Co. had gone out for a walk for pleasure in a drenching downpour of rain.

"Those kids are going down to Rylcombe," said Blake, as he turned from the window. "What do you think they are going for, kids?"

"Blessed if I know!" said Herries. "Giddy asses to go out in this weather, whatever it is."

"Gwub, most likely," said Arthur Augustus, after some reflection. "I know there is a movement o'ah the way to cut the school gwub and feed in their studays. Yaas, wathah, I should certainly say that they are going to bring in a supply of gwub, Blake."

Blake gave the swell of the School House a slap on the shoulder to signify his approval which made the eyeglass drop from his eye.

"You're growing quite bright, Gussy!"

"Pway do not be so beastly wuff, Blake! I wegard it as neither respectful nor fwriendly to stwike me so suddenly, and wuffle my coat."

"We're on this," Blake continued, unheeding. "When these innocent youths return with a supply of grub we're going to wolf it. It will be a lesson to them not to butt against the authority of their kind teachers."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"There may be some of the New House rotters on the look-out to meet them coming in," said Herries. "Better get some more in the game."

"Right-ho! We'll ask the Terrible Three."

"Yaas, wathah! I weally think that—"

"Come along, Gussy, and do your thinking afterwards."

And the chums of the Fourth marched out of Study No. 6 in quest of the Terrible Three. They found them in the Hall staring gloomily out of the window into the pouring rain.

"Hallo!" said Monty Lowther dismally. "Nice jolly sort of weather, ain't it? I was wondering when the snow would melt, and it's melted now. I wonder if we shall ever get a game of football again?"

"I've got something on better than football," said Blake.

"Are you fellows game for a raid on Figgins & Co?"

"Rather!" said Lowther and Manners at once.

Tom Merry did not speak.

Blake explained the circumstances. Lowther and Manners caught on at once.

"We'll meet 'em at the gate, and kindly relieve 'em of their burden," said Lowther. "I like showing kindness to my dear school-fellows. Six of us—"

"I say—" began Tom Merry hesitatingly.

Five pairs of eyes stared at him like gimlets.

"What's the matter with you?" demanded Blake. "You don't mean to say that you're not game, Tom Merry?"

"Of course I am," said Tom indignantly. "It's not that. But I was thinking that it's hardly cricket to jump on Figgins & Co. just now."

"Rats!" said Blake. "Why not?"

"Well, they've got their hands full at present, and—"

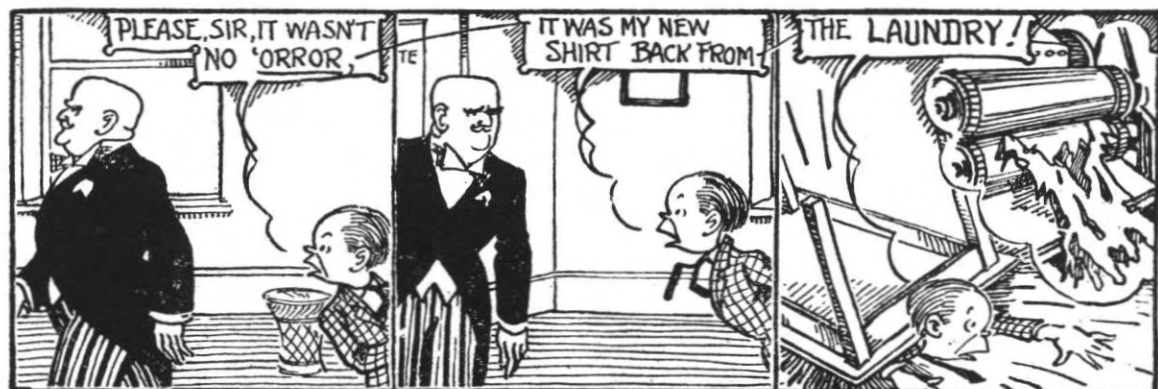
"My dear kid, when we were in a similar plight did anybody ever get chipped so much as we were chipped by Figgins & Co? Why, they used to call the School House the Casual Ward, and Figgins sent us an old mouldy loaf by parcel post."

Tom Merry laughed.

"I know that; but he'd have stood by us like a brick if we'd wanted him to, all the same."

"No doubt; but we didn't want him to, and he doesn't

Shocking!



IN TWO PLACES AT THE SAME TIME! TOM MERRY DETAINED IN FORM-ROOM AND

want us to stick by him, either. You're talking out of your hat, and that's what's the matter."

"I'm not talking about sticking by him," said Tom, "and I dare say I'm wrong. But I'd rather let the ragging stand over a bit till Figgy has settled his present difficulties."

"Rats!" said Blake again. "I think you take the wrong view, but I'm willing to leave it to the majority. Everyone who doesn't agree with Tom Merry, say rats!"

"Rats!" came five voices simultaneously, including Blake's.

"There you are!" said Blake. "Are you convinced now, Merry?"

"Not quite," said Tom, smiling. "I dare say I'm wrong, and I don't want to impose my opinion on you. I'll stand out of the raid."

"That's not chummy," said Lowther. "You ought to come."

"Yaas, wathah! I honah and wespect any honowable scwuples in any gentleman, but I weally think Tom Merry cawwies the mattah too far, don't you know?"

"The great Gustavus has spoken," said Monty Lowther. "Listen, O ye common mortals—"

"Oh, don't wot, Lowthah! I weally considah that Tom Mewwy is quite in ewwah on the pwesent occasion," said Arthur Augustus.

"You'll come, Tom?" said Manners.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Why don't you go and join Figgins & Co., and ask them to let you live in the coal cellar in the New House?" asked Monty Lowther acidly.

Tom Merry might have made a warm retort and for the first time in history a quarrel arisen among the Terrible Three. But he had too much good sense for that.

"Can't a chap keep his own opinion?" he said. "Let's agree to differ. I'll go and do some of your latest lines, Monty. Lathom won't know my writing from yours."

And the hero of the Shell walked away whistling.

"Is he often taken like that?" asked Blake, looking after him. "If I had a chap like that in my study I'd—"

"Well, what would you do?" demanded the Terrible Two at once aggressively.

They were evidently not inclined to allow anyone but themselves to run down Tom Merry.

Blake grinned good-humouredly.

"I'd smooth his baby brow and call him Algy," he replied. "Don't begin to rag now, when we're on the scent of a House raid. Tom Merry's all right. Every chap's entitled to his opinion. I am entitled to mine, and if it weren't respected in my study there would be some thumping, I can tell you."

"Oh, weally, Blake—"

"We five can handle the matter," said Blake. "We'll shove on our macintoshes and get down to the gates in time to greet those innocent kids when they come in."

Blake's suggestion was adopted, and the five juniors were at the gate in good time. The wintry afternoon was thickening into dusk when the New House Co. came in sight on the road, and Blake nudged his companions.

"They're coming!"

"Yaas, wathah! I can see them. We had bettah wush upon them—"

"Shut up! They'll hear you. Get back into the shadow!"

"I wefuse to shut up! You intewwupted me, Blake!"

"Silence, image! I—"

"I wefuse to be chawactewised as an image. I distinctly—"

Blake put his hand over D'Arcy's mouth as the figures of Kerr and Wynn came dimly in at the gate. The New House heroes were in overcoats and caps, and the way their overcoat pockets bulged showed that extensive purchases were crammed therein.

"Come on!" shouted Blake suddenly.

The School House five made a rush. Kerr and Wynn, on the alert, dodged and ran for the New House. Two or three figures loomed up out of the dusk, and the voice of Figgins was heard.

"Lucky I thought of coming down! Cut it!"

"Right-ho," said the Co. with one voice.

They ran on swiftly. Figgins threw himself gallantly upon the School House juniors, and, grasping hold of Lowther and D'Arcy, dragged them to the ground. The contact with the soaked and muddy earth did not improve their macintoshes.

Blake and Herries and Manners were also gripped and held; but Blake tore himself loose and dashed on in desperate pursuit of the Co.

He came up with Fatty Wynn and seized hold of him.

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"Got you!" he yelled. "Now then, hand over, or—"

Fatty Wynn turned and closed with him. They struggled, and in the struggle a packet came out of Fatty's filled pocket and rolled in the rainy quad. Kerr turned back to his comrade's aid, and Blake was seized by the muscular Scotsman and dragged from Fatty. He was no match for the two, and the Co. speedily left him sprawling in the rain and ran on again to the New House.

A low whistle from Kerr announced that the Co. were safe in their own domain. Figgins and his companions ceased the struggle and fled after them. Five disconsolate School House juniors gathered in the rain.

Blake had a torn and half-emptied packet of figs in his



As Blake watched from behind the screen, Fatty Wynn came and escaped the Falstaff's

hand. It was the sole prize. The juniors looked at one another.

"Might have known you Fourth Form kids would make a muck of it," Monty Lowther remarked.

"Whose fault was it?" demanded Blake. "If you clumsy duffers—"

"Who are you calling duffers?"

"I'm calling you two duffers!"

"Then I'll jolly soon—"

"Oh, don't quawwel!" said D'Arcy. "Let's get in out of the wain. I am feelin' in a muddy and howwible dis-

weputable condition, and I am quite exhausted by that severe stwuggle. Pway let us get in out of the wain."

The counsel was too good to be neglected. The juniors went in out of the rain. Blake handed round the packet of figs, and shared up equally. The figs were very good and fat, and it was something, after all.

"Jolly nice!" said Lowther, somewhat mollified. "But I say, what a feed we've missed! Those kids had their pockets fairly bulging with food. We've lost a ripping spread."

"Perhaps we've not lost it," said Blake. "I know what Figgins wanted these figs for. I expect Wynn had a lot more, besides these few. Figgy has told me about his idea of making a fig pudding often enough, and I expect he means to do it now that the young asses are starting feeding in the study. He fancies himself a cook. Well, let him make his fig pudding, if that's what he's going to do—and we'll eat it!"



... and went to the cupboard. An exclamation of satisfaction
... the huge fig pudding!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hallo!" said the voice of Tom Merry. "You sound awfully jolly, so I suppose you've made a successful raid. Hard cheese for Figgins! Why, what on earth's the matter? Have you been trying to wipe up the rain in the quad with your macintoshes?"

"Oh, rats!" said Lowther.

"Have you got the grub?"

"No, we haven't."

And then it was Tom Merry's turn to laugh. And he did!

CHAPTER 7.

Figgins Makes the Pudding.

F IGGINS grinned as he joined the Co. in the study in the New House. Kerr and Wynn were unloading their pockets and placing the purchases in a heap on the table.

"Good!" said Figgins. "We might have guessed that those School House bounders would smell a rat and try to get hold of the tommy. It was lucky I thought of coming down with French and Pratt to meet you. Everything's safe?"

"All except some loose figs," said Fatty Wynn. "I dropped a packet of them when Blake collared me in the quad."

"Well, that's not much. We've got off lucky. I suppose you've got plenty of them."

"Oh, yes! Two pound packets of loose figs, and four boxes of them."

"Good! Did you get the suet?"

"Yes, Kerr got that. Where is it, Kerr?"

"It's in my pocket somewhere," said Kerr. "Hang! There's a hole in the lining, and the suet's slipped out. Here's the paper."

"Oh, I say, I hope you haven't lost it!" said Figgins anxiously. "You can't make a fig pudding without suet, you know."

"Oh, I've got it here!" said Kerr. "That's all right. But it's in several pieces, and they are in the lining of my coat."

"Hunt them up, old fellow."

Kerr proceeded to hunt up the pieces of suet, following them in a rather exciting chase through the crannies and crevices of the coat's lining, and fishing them out one by one through the hole in the pocket.

"Moist sugar wanted," said Figgins. "I can't get that from Dame Taggles. I hope you've got it."

"Blessed if I have," said Wynn. "I had a feeling that there was something else. It was the moist sugar."

Figgins' face fell.

"Oh dear! How am I to make a fig pudding without moist sugar?"

"Soak some lumps in water. That will make it moist."

"Good idea. I don't see why that shouldn't do as well. Have you got that suet yet, Kerr? You're having a lively time with that coat."

"I shall get it all out soon enough," said Kerr. "Got on with the washing. There's no hurry for the beastly suet, is there?"

"Yes, certainly there is. It's got to be chopped fine for the pudding."

"Have you got a chopping-board?"

"No," said Figgins dubiously. "But the top of the table is smooth enough, and we can scrub it clean."

The last of the suet was finally extracted from the lining of the coat, and Kerr sat down to rest in a rather flushed and exhausted condition.

Figgins looked at the suet in a rather gingerly manner. It certainly looked fluffy and dusty.

"It will want washing," he remarked.

"They always wash suet," said Fatty Wynn.

"Do they? Well, that's all right, then. I've been busy while you've been gone. I've borrowed a big iron saucepan of the cook, big enough to hold two fig puddings. It's a good idea to make two, you know, so as to have a good supply. We can either eat it cold, or else warm it up with some new syrup of figs, whenever we want any. I've got eggs from Dame Taggles, and flour."

"Do you put flour in a fig pudding?" asked Fatty Wynn doubtfully.

"Oh, just a little!" said Figgins airily. He didn't know, as a matter of fact, but he could not admit that without losing all his prestige as a chef. "Along with the bread-crumbs, you know. I've got a very stale loaf for the bread-crumbs. It's a bit mouldy in places, but I've been chopping out the mouldy parts with my pocket-knife. I've got a basin out of the dormitory for a pudding-basin, to mix it in, you know."

Figgins took off his jacket and rolled up his sleeves, and tied on a white apron.

He flattered himself that he looked very like a chef, and certainly his appearance was most businesslike.

"We'll get on with the pudding part of the business first," he explained; "as for the more solid grub, we can have cold ham and eggs for to-night and to-morrow morning, and then we shall have the grate free for cooking. The fig pudding will be done to-night."

"I'm quite looking forward to it," said Kerr.

Figgins beamed upon the Scottish partner in the Co.

"And you're right, old chap," he said. "It's something to look forward to. It's going to make a bit of a stir in the House, this fig pudding is. I know lots of people make fig puddings, but a good many of them can't afford to spend money on it and shove in all the ingredients for a really good one. Very few fig puddings have syrup of figs in them, I believe. That's a little idea of my own, to tell you the exact truth. I'm going to take a lot of trouble about this fig pudding, and I believe it will make a bit of a stir-up."

And Figgins was quite right; but we must not anticipate. Figgins washed his hands carefully, and proceeded to crumble the bread into the basin, which was also washed and dried in the most cleanly manner. Most of the mouldy bits, as Figgy said, had been cut out, and if a few had escaped his eagle eye, what did that matter? There would be plenty of flavour in the pudding to disguise anything.

There was a cry of horror from the Co. when Figgins, who was earnestly studying a cookery book, started to pour red ink into the pudding, instead of treacle! Luckily they spotted his error before much damage was done.

Fatty Wynn had not forgotten to get a very large bottle of the valuable syrup of figs. Figgins poured it into the breadcrumbs, and added flour. Then he plunged his hands into the sticky mess and began to mix it.

"It's going well," he said. "Buck up with that suet, kids. Chop it up with your pocket-knife, Kerr. Never mind about cutting the table, only don't get more splinters in the suet than you can help."

"Right-ho!" said Kerr, working away.

"Break a couple of eggs into this, will you, Wynn?"

"Certainly. I say, these eggs are—well, a trifle talkative, Figgy."

"I know; but I've heard the cook say that you can put

any eggs in a pudding if it had a strong flavour," explained Figgy. "I bought those cheap of Dame Taggles on purpose. Never mind the niff. Shove 'em in!"

The eggs were shoved in. A lingering aroma hung round the study for a few minutes, till Kerr pushed the door open wide. It died away as the eggs were absorbed in the pudding, which was growing under Figgy's hands.

"Now the figs," said the New House chef. "Shove 'em in."

"Is that the right way to stick the figs in—"

"Of course it is. It's my way, anyhow. Shove 'em in, and plenty of 'em. Why, you greedy rotter, you've been wolfing them!"

"I've only eaten about a pound—"

"Grr-r-r-r! Shove the rest in, Kerr, before he starts on them."

The figs were put in the basin.

Figgins, with the perspiration gathering on his noble brow, kneaded and kneaded away.

It was hard work, really, but it was a labour of love, and Figgins stood it out manfully. The admiring Co. lent all the aid they could.

"Lay out the pudding-cloths, Fatty," said the chef, "and you stick the saucepan on the fire to boil, Kerr. These puddings have to go on in boiling water, I—I believe—I mean, I'm certain. Is that lump sugar melted yet?"

"Yes; it seems to be crumbling up."

"What about the water?"

"Let me see. This seems to be getting a bit thick. Shove the water in, too."

Sugar and water were precipitated into the basin, which was now pretty full. The addition of liquid made the kneading much easier for Figgins. He worked away and gave directions.

"Got the pudding-cloth ready, Wynn? They have to be—to be somethinged. You have to rub 'em with something—I'm blessed if I remember whether it's butter or marmalade! Have we got any marmalade?"

"No," said Kerr. "I put the last in Sefton's silk hat last night."

"Well, I dare say it was butter. Yes, now I come to think of it, it certainly was butter. Rub some butter over the pudding-cloths, Wynn."

Fatty Wynn obeyed. Kerr poked the fire under the saucepan. It was an enormous saucepan, and it covered the whole of the open firegrate of the study. It was beginning to bubble, and a cloud of steam rose as Kerr removed the lid.

"Is it boiling?" asked Figgins anxiously.

"Just on," Kerr said.

"Good! I'm nearly ready. Those cloths finished, Fatty?"

"Quite finished, Figgy!"

Figgins took out a double handful of the fig pudding and plumped it into the middle of one of the greased cloths. He added to it till the half of the mass was there, and then he wiped his hands and tied up the cloth round the pudding.

The ends of the cloth he drew together and fastened with a string, sticking in a safety-pin for additional security.

"There!" he said, surveying the results with great satisfaction. "There, my pippins! What does that look like—hey?"

Kerr cocked his eye at it in a thoughtful way.

"Something like a football," he ventured.

Figgins gave him a withering glance.

"A—football? You silly ass! It looks the nicest and most workmanlike pudding I've ever seen. A football! Groooch!"

Figgins turned to the basin again.

"Shall I heave it into the saucepan, Figgy?" asked Kerr, anxious to atone for his unfortunate remark.

"No. They both have to go in together, or else we shan't know which is done and which isn't," said Figgins.

"Ah, yes, of course! You think of everything, Figgy."

The placated Figgy smiled benignantly.

"Wouldn't be of much use setting up as a cook if I didn't, Kerr, old son. Now I'll have the second one tied up in a jiffy. That's safe! Now you can shove them in. Mind the saucepan doesn't stop boiling!"

Kerr slid the two big puddings, one after the other, into the bubbling saucepan. As a natural result, the cold contact stopped the water boiling.

"Oh, hang it!" said the chef. "I told you not to let it stop boiling, Kerr! I suppose I ought to have done it myself. What could you be expected to know about fig puddings? Stir up the fire under it, for goodness' sake!"

The obedient Kerr stirred up the fire, and the saucepan soon began to boil again. Figgins washed his hands and towelled them with the air of one who had deserved well of his country, and knew it!



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"How do you know when they are done, Figgy?" asked Kerr, anxious to gather up useful knowledge.

"Oh, you watch 'em!" said Figgins, rather vaguely. "You have to be very careful in watching fig puddings, you know."

"Yes. But when they're done, how do you know?"

"Well, that is a silly ass' question, old chap!" said Figgins, in a tone of mild remonstrance. "Of course, when they're done, they're—done, and then you take them out of the saucepan. It's perfectly simple!"

Kerr looked a little bewildered.

"Yes; but how do you know when?"

"My dear fellow, I've explained twice, and you must really excuse me a third time. They say you have to use a mallet to get things into a Scotsman's head, and really—"

"But you haven't explained—"

"My hat! How much more do you want? Let the subject alone, Kerr, old fellow. It's a bit above your intellect, perhaps," said Figgins. "I'm making the fig pudding, and I'll see that it's done to a turn."

"I can't believe you know how to—"

"Now I'm going to get a wash," said Figgins. "That stuff is awfully sticky! Keep an eye on the fig pudding while I'm gone. It's got to be kept on the boil!"

And Figgins escaped further argument by quitting the study.

CHAPTER 8.

On the Track of the Fig Pudding!

FIGGINS looked into the study again later to see how his pudding was getting on. Kerr was patiently watching the saucepan, which was nicely bubbling. Figgins removed the lid, and a cloud of steam rose in his face, and he coughed.

"That's all right," he said; "getting on A1! Keep an eye on it, though, Kerr. It would be no joke if a saucepan that size boiled over. Don't leave it unwatched for a moment."

There was a very peculiar expression upon Kerr's face as he received these instructions.

"I thought you were going to watch it," he remarked meaningly.

Figgins shook his head.

"My dear chap, I have had the trouble of making the pudding. It isn't much for you just to watch it boil."

"Still, I thought you might be anxious about it."

"Oh, no; not at all! I know I can trust you," said Figgins heartily. "Just keep your eye on it, that's all, you know. It's stopped raining, so I think I'll go and have a blow in the quad after my labours."

And Figgins walked out of the study.

"Cool!" ejaculated Kerr. "I'm to sit here all the evening watching a beastly saucepan! I think you had better take your turn, Wynn."

"Can't be done, Kerr. You know I always fall asleep when I'm watching anything."

Kerr grunted.

"Well, get the chessmen out, then, and let's have a game. I don't see why we can't play while we watch the saucepan."

Fatty Wynn did not see it, either, and the chums were soon busily engaged in a game of chess on the table, while Figgins fondly imagined that his fig pudding was being watched with loving care.

Figgins was taking a turn in the quad. The study was very hot with the huge fire that had been built up to boil the fig pudding and the steam that escaped from the saucepan. The coolness of the quadrangle was very grateful after it, in spite of the wet ground and the raindrops sprinkling from the drenched branches of the elms.

"Hallo, Figgy!"

It was Tom Merry's voice. He came full tilt through the gloom, and stopped just in time to avoid running into Figgins.

"Hallo!" said Figgins. "What are you buzzing about like that for—Schneider after you?"

"No," said Tom Merry laughing. "Only a little sprint, you know, to see what sort of form I'm in. You know it's the match with the Flyers pretty soon, and I'm captaining our juniors. I thought I'd have a little run as the rain has stopped."

"Where are Lowther and Manners?" asked Figgins curiously, for the Terrible Three were usually seen together.

Tom Merry made a grimace.

"They're chumming up with Study No. 6," he said, with perfect good humour. "They didn't like my not taking part in that raid. We differed on the advisability of it, you see!"

"Oh, I see! They didn't get much—only a few figs. I say, Merry, it's very decent of you to back us up as you've

done lately, and I should like to show you that I feel it. I'm making a first-class, A1, regular ripping fig pudding, and I'll send you over a big lump of it in the morning. It's on the fire now, but it won't be done until the House is closed up for the night."

"That's good, Figgy! If there's anything I'm fond of it's fig pudding!" said Tom Merry heartily. "I'm much obliged to you!"

"Oh, after that treat you stood—Hallo, hallo! What's that?"

They were nearly under the window of Figgins' study, and the window was open on account of the heat. A terrific buzzing and fizzing and spluttering was suddenly audible.

Figgins tore his hair.

"Those lazy bounders have let the pudding boil over!" he explained.

"That's too bad!"

But Figgins had gone. He tore into the New House like one demented. Tom Merry continued his little run round the quadrangle.

Five shadowy forms loomed up in the gloom from behind the corner of the House, close to the spot where the two juniors had been talking.

"Good luck!" said the voice of Monty Lowther. "Heard every word. I thought it was a fig pudding, as I said."

"As I said, you mean!" remarked Blake. "You'll remember—"

"Yaas, wathah! But don't start waggin' now, deah boys. The question is, how are we going to get hold of that fig pudding?"

"That's the idea," explained Herries. "It's all very well for Figgins to send Tom Merry a slice of it. We want to go the whole hog!"

"You would," Manners remarked in a friendly way, "Like unto like—"

"Look here, Manners, if you—"

"Shut up!" said Blake authoritatively. "No rows—at least, till we've captured the fig pudding!"

"Yaas, wathah! But how are we going to accomplish that extremely difficult task, deah boy? It's no use captahin' the fig puddin' before it's cooked, is it? We mightn't be able to get a saucepan in the study big enough to cook it?"

"True enough! We must wait till the pudding is done, and then scoff it. If it won't be done, as Figgy says, until the House is closed up for the night—"

"Then we can't get hold of it to-night," said Lowther. "We shall have to have it cold."

"I don't see how we're to burgle the New House after daylight to-morrow," said Blake, with a shake of the head. "Besides, Figgins & Co. might scoff the thing to-night. You know Fatty Wynn. Put him in the same room with a fig pudding and how much fig pudding would there be left in that room the next morning?"

"Precious little."

"Ergo—that's Latin—we must scoff the thing to-night, and I know how."

"Well, if you know how," said Lowther, "you've got more sense than I've ever given you credit for, and I'm willing for you to take the lead."

"Whether you are willing or not, I reckon—"

"Oh, cut the cackle and come to the horses—that is to say, the fig pudding!" said Lowther.

"Well, then," said Blake, rather aggressively, "we can't get into the New House after it's locked up for the night, but we could get out of it all right, so my idea is for one of us to sneak in and hide himself in the box-room—"

"My hat! I never thought of that!"

"Naturally, you wouldn't! It requires a brain like mine—"

"Oh, get on!"

"Lathom sees lights out in our dorm to-night. He's as blind as an owl. You can stick the bolster and pillows in my bed, to make it look as if I'm there, and that will be all right. If I'm missed going up to bed he'll only suppose that I was sleepy and went up early. I've been going to bed early lately—"

"Weally, that is a swango statement. How can you possibly have been goin' to bed early lately, Blake? If you were early you could not be late—"

"Ass!" said Blake politely. "The last few nights I have been going to bed early on account of the football, to be in good form for the match with Frampton Flyers when it comes off. So that won't excite any remarks. I can easily nip into the New House in the dark and lay low somewhere. Then your fellows will be ready to let me into your House when I come back with the fig pudding."

"Bravo!" said Lowther. "I never thought you had brains enough to think out a thing like that, Blake. We'll do our part right enough."

"Mind you do. Your part's easy enough."

"Better cut into the New House now, while there's a chance," suggested Manners. "There's nobody about at present, and it won't be long now before the door's locked."

"It'll be a bit dark and lonely in the box-room," Lowther remarked. "I've heard that there are rats there, too. But you won't mind them, Blake?"

"And if you should be discovered, old Ratty will march you across to Raiton for a good licking," observed Herries. "But you'll be careful?"

"Yaas, wathah! If the New House juniors get hold of you when you're collarin' the puddin', Blake, they will be wathah wuff, but—"

"Oh, shut up, can't you?" said Blake, rather uneasily.

"Nice set of Job's comforters you are, anyway. I'm off!" And Blake, without waiting for any more observations, disappeared into the darkness.

The four juniors returned to the School House. The plan was carried out without a hitch. It was easy for Herries and D'Arcy to arrange Blake's bed to make it look as if a sleeper was there, and Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, was too dreamy and short-sighted to note any difference.

The Fourth Form and the Shell went to bed. As Blake had not returned, it was evident that he had found a safe hiding-place in the New House, and was waiting his opportunity there.

At the appointed time the juniors left the dormitories and met in the passage. Tom Merry was fast asleep when Manners and Lowther left, and they did not wake him. Tom Merry was "dead" in that act, as Lowther expressed it.

As the school clock struck eleven four juniors were waiting at a certain window—often used as a means of egress and ingress—and looking for Blake!

CHAPTER 9.

Blake Makes a Capture.

BLAKE was not idle in those same moments.

He had remained hidden in the box-room of the New House, while the time dragged wearily by, and more than once during that dreary wait he had half-regretted his enterprise. The fig pudding seemed hardly worth it.

But when the quarter to eleven chimed out from the

clock tower his vigil ended, and, with a sigh of relief, he quitted the box-room.

It was the earliest hour upon which it was safe to venture forth, for though the juniors had long been in bed, the seniors were not so early as the Lower Forms, and some of the masters had not retired yet.

When Blake passed a door from under which the light gleamed, showing that the occupant was up and awake, he trod very lightly indeed.

The House was dark and silent, and the feeling of being in a strange building at such an unearthly hour gave Blake a strange eerie sensation. But he kept a strong control of his nerves, and made his way swiftly to Figgins' study, thinking resolutely only of the fig pudding and not of the creaking boards and nodding shadows.

He reached the study and entered. The atmosphere was still warm, and there was a faint glow of red among the ashes in the grate. The air was heavy, too, with the clammy warmth of steam, and redolent of figs.

Blake silently closed the door and lighted the gas, turning it up ever so little. Then he looked for the fig pudding. The saucepan was gone, and had doubtless been returned to its owner. The pudding was not in sight. But Blake opened the cupboard, and then a warm and delicate aroma smote upon his nostrils.

There was the fig pudding—or, rather, two fig puddings, for there were two of them. They were still wrapped up in the cloths, and lay in the cupboard just as they had been taken from the saucepan. Blake understood the reason for that. The boiling had taken a long time, and Figgins—who, as a matter of fact, did not know the length of time required—had left them on till the last possible minute. Just before bed-time he had nipped into the study and taken them off the fire.

Here they were untouched, untasted! A wide grin of contentment overspread Blake's face. Then he looked puzzled.

Both puddings were of huge size. One would not be easy to carry, and to carry the two would be more difficult still. Blake regretted that he had not brought a chum with him in the adventure. But two would have found it harder to dodge unseen into the box-room. Then a generous thought came into Blake's mind.

After all, Figgins & Co. were in difficulties at present. He would leave them one of the fig puddings! He would take one and leave one. That would be generous, and, after all, only playing the game. Blake felt quite a glow of virtuous satisfaction in his breast as he came to this decision.

"That's the idea," he resolved. "We'll have one each, and Figgins can consider that he is getting off lightly."

He took one of the puddings from the cupboard. He found a newspaper to wrap it in, and picked up a silk handkerchief belonging to Kerr to make a sling to carry it. He closed the cupboard door, and turned out the gas. Then he stepped silently to the door of the study.

A sudden shudder of surprise ran through him. He was about to turn the handle when it was turned from the other side.

For a moment the sudden alarm thrilled Blake from head to foot. Then he was himself again. As the door opened in the darkness it nearly struck him in the face; but with great presence of mind he stepped back quickly, and felt his way behind the screen with which the artistic Figgins adorned his study, and which was used to conceal the grate when there was no fire.

It wasn't a very big screen, but it was big enough to conceal the junior if he crouched down, as he was ready to do if a light was struck.

Scratch!

He heard a match scrape along a box, and crouched down. A glimmer of light flicked out, and revealed the plump form and features of Fatty Wynn.

Blake grinned to himself.

He had been half-afraid that it was a master. He understood now. The puddings had been taken up too late to allow them to be eaten, or even tasted overnight. But Fatty Wynn was made hungry by the mere thought of them. He had been unable to rest. He had come down while his comrades were sleeping to attack the fig pudding, and gorge himself to his heart's content.

Blake wondered what he would think when he saw only one pudding instead of two. Fatty lighted the gas and closed the door, and went to the cupboard. An exclamation of satisfaction escaped his lips at the sight of the fig pudding.

"Hallo!" Blake heard him murmur the next moment. "Where did Figgy put the other? Never mind, one's enough for to-night. I shan't eat more than half of this."

Blake nearly giggled aloud at the idea of Fatty Wynn eating half the enormous pudding. Fatty took a knife



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and cut the string, and began to unfold the cloth. His eyes were glistening. But he had scarcely started unfastening the cloth when he gave a sudden jump, and whirled round in amazement and alarm. The door of the study had been thrown open.

Fatty's eyes nearly started out from his head as he gazed at the form that strode into the room. It was that of Mr. Ratcliff!

The Housemaster's brows were contracted in a sour frown, and there was a glint of malice in his narrow eyes, half-hidden under the puckered brows.

"Ah, I thought I heard someone leave the Fourth Form dormitory!" he remarked. "And I was not wrong in thinking that I should trace the delinquent to this study."

Fatty Wynn could not speak. He stood with the knife in his hand, his lower-jaw drooping, apparently frozen with terror.

"This study," resumed Mr. Ratcliff, with a disparaging glance round the quarters of Figgins & Co., "from which most of the mischief proceeds. I presume that you have come here to eat some of that huge pudding, Wynn?"

"Ye-e-e-es, sir," stammered Wynn.

"You are hungry, I suppose?"

"Ye-e-e-es, sir."

"Indeed! Then why did you not eat the supper provided by the House? I particularly noted that you left your food untasted, as did your study-mates."

Poor Fatty did not reply. He had not willingly left his supper untasted. It was because Figgins had made up his mind about it. Nor could he explain that he had made up for the deficiency by eating a couple of pies immediately afterwards.

"It is, I suppose, a fresh step in the incipient insubordination here, which I am determined to crush," said Mr. Ratcliff. "You will go back to bed, Wynn, and you will come into my study to-morrow morning for a severe caning. This pudding I will take, and place in the house-keeper's quarters. Since you have taken the trouble to cook a pudding, it shall be added to the House supplies. You will doubtless have the pleasure of tasting it," said Mr. Ratcliff grimly. "But so will every other boy at the junior table. Now go!"

Fatty Wynn, without a word, quitted the study.

Mr. Ratcliff, with a grim smile still upon his narrow face, picked up the pudding, turned out the gas, and followed him.

Blake had remained quite silent and motionless. If Mr. Ratcliff had discovered him there, he knew that he would have the warmest of warm times. But the New House master never dreamed that a School House boy might be there at that hour, and he did not once glance towards the screen.

Blake drew a long breath as he was left alone in the darkness.

"If I had a Housemaster like that," he murmured, "I'd—I'd— My hat! He ought to be jumped on, and boiled in oil! I'd better get out of this!"

Blake waited till the sound of Mr. Ratcliff's footsteps had died away, and then he silently left the study.

With great caution he made his way downstairs, and let himself out of the window, which he closed behind him, but could not fasten.

He felt a great sense of relief when he stood in the open quadrangle again. The knowledge that Mr. Ratcliff was awake and on the prowl made the New House a dangerous quarter for the School House junior. But he was safe now, and he cut across the quad cheerfully enough towards his own House.

The rain was over, and the moon was peeping out through a rift in the banks of dark clouds. The light glimmered on the little window where Blake's comrades had agreed to wait for him and help him into the School House.

Blake, breathless with his rapid run, came to a halt under the window, and tapped on the glass.

CHAPTER 10. Eating the Pudding.

MONTY LOWTHER opened the window cautiously. "Lend me a hand," whispered Blake, looking up as Monty Lowther looked out.

"Got it?"

"Yes."

"Good! Hand it in!"

Blake handed in the pudding, and Monty Lowther, with a grin of satisfaction, passed it to Herries, and then held down his hand to Blake.

With Lowther's assistance, Blake soon climbed in at the window.

"Everything go off all right?" asked Herries.

"Yes; first rate—for us. There were two puddings, and I left one for Figgins & Co. But while I was there, Fatty Wynn came down to feed—"

"Ha, ha, ha! Might have looked for that!"

"And Ratty spotted him and collared the pudding. It's coming up in the menu to-morrow in the New House. Sorry for Figgins & Co.; but it's their luck. They'll have their share of the pudding at table, I suppose."

"Well, so long as we've got ours, that's all right," said Lowther, closing the window after Blake, and fastening it. "Come on, and let's get back to bed. It's jolly cold here."

"Yaas, wathah! My feet are quite frozen," said D'Arcy. "And I feel a howid chilly feelin' cweeeping down my back, don't you know."

"Quiet!" whispered Lowther. "Railton's not gone to bed yet. I saw the light under his door as we came down. Better give me the pudding to take care of, Blake."

"Rats! I suppose I'm capable of taking care of a pudding?"

"Well, I don't know. Most likely you young monkeys will start scoffing it—"

"Us what?" asked Blake, stopping in the passage, and speaking in a tone of dangerous politeness.

"You young monkeys!" said Lowther. "Why can't you hand it over to the keeping of a chop in a Higher Form? When you get into the Shell, if you ever do, you'll understand how annoying it is for kids in the Fourth to have such a thundering good opinion of themselves!"

"I object to being chawactewised as a young monkey!" said D'Arcy, after a pause, interrupting Monty Lowther.

"I request you to withdraw that remark, Lowther!"

"Oh, go and eat coke! Are you going to hand over that pudding, Blake?"

"No, I'm not going to hand over that pudding, Lowther! Keep hold of it, Herries!"

"I mean to," said Herries grimly.

"You Shell-fish can come and feed in our study to-morrow," said Blake. "Like your cheek to think I'm going to hand over Figgins' fig pudding when I had all the trouble and risk of capturing it. But you fellows in the Shell have no end of cheek."

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard it as distinctly impertinent to chawactewise young gentlemen in the honourable Fourth Form as young monkeys—"

"Shut up!" whispered Lowther suddenly, as he caught the sound of a footfall. "Shut up! I—"

"Who is there?"

The deep voice of Mr. Railton, the master of the School House, sounded through the gloom. A match was struck, and the Housemaster looked at the boys by its glimmer, and the boys looked at the Housemaster.

"Ah," said Mr. Railton quietly. "I thought I knew the voices! So this is a midnight feed, I presume. I observe that Herries is carrying a large pudding. Herries, will you kindly hand that pudding over to me?"

Herries, with a grin of dismay, obeyed. Mr. Railton took charge of the famous fig pudding. He smiled grimly.

"You will go back to bed," he said in his sternest tones. "You will also take a hundred lines each, and show them to me by to-morrow evening. Not a word! Go to bed!"

The juniors scuttled into their dormitories, and the argument, which was growing exciting, was suddenly terminated.

Tom Merry woke up as his chums came into the Shell dormitory.

"Hallo, kids!" he yawned sleepily. "Where have you been?"

Lowther grunted out an explanation as he took off his boots. He expected sympathy, but Tom Merry seemed to see the occurrence in a comical aspect, for he laughed heartily.

"Blessed if I know what you're cackling about!" growled Lowther. "I'm going to bed. I shall be as sleepy as a dog to-morrow morning. Good-night. Manners! Oh, do stop that cackling, Tom Merry, and let a fellow get to sleep!"

They got to sleep at last and slept like tops till the rising-bell went in the morning. There was a great deal of speculation in the Shell when the night's adventure was known as to what Mr. Railton would do with the fig pudding.

It was confiscated, but it was too good to be destroyed. No doubt it would be added to the House supplies, and would appear on the table in due course. The juniors hoped so. It would be too bad to lose it altogether.

But if the School House chums were annoyed by the fate of their fig pudding and the hundred lines each which had to be turned out that day, Figgins & Co. were in a still more exasperated frame of mind.

Ratcliff had confiscated one pudding, and they soon learned from the School House youngsters where the other had gone to.

Figgins was rather excited about it. He had taken the trouble to cook two magnificent puddings, and his rivals of the School House had scoffed one, and the unearthly appetite of Fatty Wynn had caused the other to fall into the clutches of Mr. Ratcliff. It was really too bad, and Figgins and Kerr seriously discussed the advisability of giving Fatty Wynn a study licking. But Fatty Wynn was punished enough. The evident anguish he suffered at the loss of the pudding softened the heart of his indignant chums.

Figgins' fig pudding had gone from his gaze like a beautiful dream, and he was likely to see very little of it again. And it was not only the loss of the expected treat, but the expense was a considerable item. Four-and-sixpence for a bottle of syrup of figs alone as Figgins said, made the loss heavy enough without counting the other ingredients.

"Still, it's some comfort that it's coming up at dinner-time," said Fatty Wynn hopefully. "Don't ask me to miss dinner to-day, Figgy. I couldn't do it—I couldn't, really."

Figgins shook his head.

"Certainly not. We must get as much of our own fig pudding as we can, of course. We'll be more careful to keep the next one out of Ratty's clutches."

And the juniors waited anxiously for dinner-time; so did their rivals over in the School House. The fame of Figgins' fig pudding had gone forth, and everyone was expecting a regular treat. When it was known for certain that the fig pudding had been warmed up, and was to be put on the table at dinner-time, the satisfaction was general. Even Blake, though he was disappointed about the study feed, beamed.

"After all, it's a treat for the whole House," he said. "We mustn't be selfish. So long as the fellows enjoy the pudding, I don't care."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus, fully endorsing this generous view.

Dinner-time came at last. Most of the masters of St. Jim's dined with the boys. Mr. Railton was in his usual place at the head of the Sixth Form table. Little Mr. Lathom was in charge of the Fourth. Upon the latter, when the more solid part of the meal was over, appeared a goodly portion of the pudding. It looked nice; it smelt delicious. Perhaps by chance Figgins had boiled it the exact length of time. The fig pudding was a success—it was a dream. The boys looked at it, and exchanged glances of satisfaction. This was better than duff—rather!

Some of the fellows had second helpings, the pudding was so nice. Undoubtedly the syrup of figs imparted a richness of flavour to it. There was hardly a vestige of the pudding left, except about the mouths of some of the smaller boys, when the School House trooped out of the dining-room.

"Jolly nice!" said Tom Merry heartily. "Much obliged to you, Blake, and to Figgins, too. I noticed rather a curious flavour about the pudding, but I suppose Figgins used some spices. I never knew that chap could cook like that."

"Neither did I," said Monty Lowther. "It was prime!"

"Ripping!" said Manners, with great heartiness.

"Yaas, wathah! I weally think Figgins ought to weceive a testimonial, you know, from the whole school," remarked Arthur Augustus.

The verdict on the fig pudding was generally hearty. It was the same in the New House. Every fellow had eaten as much as he could get of it; and Mr. Ratcliff, in his sour way, had eaten with unusual heartiness because it pleased him to devour Figgy's pudding before Figgy's eyes.

But in the Shell class-room that afternoon Tom Merry suddenly noted that Monty Lowther started and turned pale.

"Anything wrong, old fellow?" he muttered, immediately forgetting their late little differences as he thought that Monty might be ill.

"N-no; ye-e-es," muttered Lowther. "I've got a pain."

"Curious; I had one just now. There it is again!" Tom Merry twisted in his seat. "My word! Is your pain anything like a dagger?"

"Yes, and something like a—like a burning iron."

"Then I've got it, too. What can it be?"

There was a gasp from Manners.

"Oh—ow!"

"What's the matter, Manners, old chap?"

"I've got a—pain! I—I feel as if I have been eating Chicago tinned meat," said Manners, turning quite pale.

"I believe I'm poisoned."

Tom Merry glanced rather apprehensively at the Form master. Mr. Linton usually had his eyes and ears wide

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open for talking in class. But on the present occasion he seemed to be deaf and dumb. He was leaning one hand on his desk, and had laid down his book. Tom Merry could see that his face was chalky, and the beads of perspiration were thick upon his brow.

"My only aunt! He's got it, too!"

"Boys," said Mr. Linton hurriedly, "I must leave you. I—er—I shall quickly return. In the meantime, I leave the class in charge of—"

The master of the Shell hurriedly went out without finishing. He twisted as he went, like one in deadly pain. On ordinary occasions the class would have gone in for a general riot; but now they were twisting and screwing about. The Terrible Three were not the only sufferers. Every boy in the Shell was equally afflicted, New House boys as well as those of the School House.

A flash of illumination darted into Tom Merry's mind.

It was the fig pudding!

"The fig pudding!" cried a dozen voices.

"Yes, there was something wrong with it."

"Ow!" groaned Monty Lowther. "There's something wrong with me, I know that. I'm not going to stick here. I wonder if those kids in the Fourth have got it, too?"

The Shell turned out of their class-room. Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, shot past them in the passage, with a face like chalk. He almost ran into the Head, who was coming out of the Sixth Form room, looking pale and perturbed.

"Dear me, Mr. Lathom! Are you ill?"

"Ye-e-es, sir," gasped the master of the Fourth. "And strange to say, most of my Form appear to be ill also. And you look—"

"I am strangely unwell," said the Head, shivering.

"Dear me, what is that?"

It was a very audible groan from the Fifth Form class-room.

Dr. Holmes opened the door in alarm, and looked in. Most of the Fifth Form were twisting uncomfortably in their seats.

"Dear me!" exclaimed the doctor. "The Sixth are similarly afflicted. It must be some poisonous matter in the water supply. Look at Mr. Ratcliff!"

Mr. Ratcliff, indeed, seemed to be in a bad state. It was from Mr. Ratcliff that the groan had proceeded, and he was sitting on the floor, and groaning again, his face twisted into a ghastly semblance of a Guy Fawkes mask. What was the matter?

Tom Merry thought he knew. He looked into the Fourth Form room.

Figgins looked weakly at Tom Merry.

"Have you got it, too?"

"Yes," mumbled the hero of the Shell. "You—you—you image, what did you put in the fig pudding?"

"The fig pudding!" said Figgins vaguely.

"Yes; that's what's done it. You've poisoned us all!"

"Rot!" said Figgins, with some spirit. "It couldn't have been the pudding. It was a first-rate pudding. You should have seen old Ratcliff scoffing it."

"And you should see him now," said Tom Merry, grinning, in spite of himself. "He's trying to shut himself up like a pocket-knife. You—you villain! What did you put in the pudding?"

"Only the proper things," said Figgins obstinately. "Figs and flour and breadcrumbs and sugar and suet and syrup of figs—"

"And what?"

"Syrup of figs—"

"Ow, ow! Gr-r-r-rooh! Syrup of figs! That accounts for it! You—you villain! You horrible assassin! Syrup of— Ow!"

But let us draw a veil.

There was one good result of that terrible experience. It brought to the Head's notice the state of dissatisfaction existing in the New House, and although the Head did not exactly find fault with the management of Mr. Ratcliff's sister, he wired in haste to Mrs. Kenwigg to return at the earliest possible moment, which that good lady did. Glad enough were Figgins & Co. to see the House dame again.

So good came out of evil, as it often does. But it was a long, long time before the boys of St. Jim's forgot Figgins' fig-pudding.

THE END.

(Next week's *St. Jim's yarn* is a real rip-snorter! Tom Merry and Co. spend a day in London, and have the most amazing adventures. Mind you read "*St. Jim's On The Spree!*" next Wednesday.)

TOM RAWSON'S ENEMY!

By OWEN CONQUEST.



CHAPTER 1.

Trouble With Peele!

"HELP!"

Tom Rawson, the scholarship lad of the Fourth at Rookwood, looked up from his work with a start.

"Help! Peele, you rotter, lemme go! Help!"

Tom Rawson compressed his lips and put down his pen.

It was Wednesday—a half-holiday at Rookwood—and the House was almost empty, most fellows having taken advantage of the bright winter sunshine to get out of doors.

Tom Rawson had remained in to do a little extra "swot." Most Rookwood men regarded "swotting" as an evil to be avoided at all costs; but it came naturally to the junior who had had to battle his way from a humble home to a famous Public school.

The yells which had interrupted his work rang out again as he listened.

"Help! Ow, you cad! Help!"

Rawson recognised the voice. It was that of Cecil Adolphus Muffin, the Porker of the Fourth.

For the fat and egregious Tubby Muffin the scholarship lad had but scant respect. He was not the kind, however, to let that fact stand in the way of his lending a helping hand when required—and it certainly sounded as if a helping hand were required on this occasion.

As the last yell reverberated through the empty passages of the School House, Tom Rawson jumped to his feet and crossed to the door.

A few strides down the passage brought him to the study from which the noise was coming. The apartment was the one tenanted by Peele and Gower, the two leading members of the "Smart Set" of the Fourth.

Without standing on ceremony, Tom Rawson flung open the door and entered. It needed only a glance to show that, for once in a way, Tubby Muffin had ample cause for yelling. The fat junior was struggling furiously in the hands of his captors, but between them they had him well secured. Gower was pressing Tubby's head down on to the study table, and while he did that, Peele was twisting the fat junior's arms behind his back in such a way as to cause the maximum amount of pain.

"Give him the jolly old works, Peele!" Gower was

saying, as Tom Rawson entered. "If we hadn't come along when we did, the fat cad would have wolfed up every particle of grub in the cupboard."

"Leave it to me!" grinned Peele. "Up you come, Fatty! This is just the exercise you've been needing!"

Tubby Muffin uttered another yelp of pain.

Tom Rawson decided that it was high time for action. He took a step forward and grabbed the two "gay dogs" of the Fourth by the scruff of the neck.

Another howl rent the air of Peele's study. But this time it came from the owners of the study. Tom Rawson brought their respective heads together with a bump that echoed across the study, and Peele and Gower both emitted a simultaneous roar of pain and rage.

"Yooooop! What the thump—"

"Whoooo! Look here, you rotter—"

"Thought I'd better chip in before it became a case of manslaughter," said Rawson coolly. "What do you think you're doing to Muffin?"

"You—y o u interfeerin' cad—" stuttered Gower, as he rubbed his head.

"What's it to do with you, hang you?" exclaimed Peele furiously. "The fat cad was in our study, startin' on our tea, when we came in. Do we have to ask the Form pauper for a permit before we teach him a lesson?"

Tom Rawson flushed at the sneering reference to his status as the Form scholarship boy.

"Nobody minds your keeping Muffin up to scratch," he said, controlling himself with an effort. "But when it comes to arm-twisting and low-down games of that kind, then you're going to answer to me about it, whether you like it or not."

"I say, Rawson, that's jolly decent of you, considering you're only a blessed scholarship cad!" remarked Tubby Muffin, between the groans he was still uttering. "Wade in and give 'em a pasting now. I'll hold your coat."

"I shan't do that this time. But I warn you two that next time anything like this occurs and I happen to be about, there'll be trouble."

"And I'll warn you, too, since we're flinging warnings about," said Peele savagely, "that if you think you're goin' to play the part of unofficial beak in this passage, you're goin' to find that you've bitten off more than you can chew."

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The biggest slacker at Rookwood wins a scholarship—but only to spite another fellow who is desperately in need of it!

Rawson bit his lip.

"That's not my intention, and you know it. All I am doing is—"

"Interferin' with your-betters. Exactly!" finished Peele. "You're only a blessed scholarship cad here—a giddy pauper, who ought to be glad he's allowed to breathe the same air as us. Unless you learn to keep in your place, you may find one of these days that you'll be sent back to the slum you came from!"

Tom Rawson's eyes blazed.

"You dare to say that—"

"All that and plenty more!" said the infuriated Peele. "A fellow of your class is out of place among gentlemen. If you had any sense of decency, you'd get back among the common crowd you belong to—"

"Put 'em up!" said Rawson, between his teeth.

The scholarship lad was rarely roused. But Peele's sneering scorn had whipped him into a white heat of anger now. He advanced on the black sheep of the Fourth, fists clenched.

Peele, though not much of a fighter, was no coward. He met his opponent half-way, and his fists flew out in furious attack.

A moment later they were going it, hammer and tongs. Gower and Tubby Muffin hurriedly backed away to the door.

Round and round the study went Rawson and Peele. Peele's impetuous rush gave him the better of the exchanges for a time, and he landed one or two jarring blows before Rawson brought him to a stop with a good straight left.

Then the tide quickly turned, and Rawson drove back his adversary under a rain of blows. Peele retreated, his face white with passion, and Rawson followed up every advantage until the retreat had become a debacle.

A right hook to the chin finished the fight. Peele went down with a crash, well beaten, and Rawson, panting, dropped his hands and turned away.

Four juniors, in the shape of Jimmy Silver and Lovell and Raby and Newcome, arrived in the passage just in time to see the finish. The Fistical Four looked through the open doorway in considerable curiosity.

"Well hit, Rawson!" grinned Jimmy Silver. "But what's the idea of turning the place into a giddy slaughter-house?"

"Better ask Peele!" replied the scholarship lad. "It wasn't my choice."

"I say, you chaps, it serves Peele right for going for me!" said Tubby Muffin. "Look here, Rawson, old chap, better make a job of it and do the same to Gower!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Peele staggered to his feet, nursing his chin. He fixed a venomous look on his victorious opponent.

"Now get out, you hooligan!" he said thickly. "You've licked me; but that doesn't finish it. I'll make you sorry for it before I've finished!"

"Sounds as if Peele's not in his merriest mood!" remarked Arthur Edward Lovell. "Shouldn't stay long in this inhospitable atmosphere, Rawson, if I were you."

Tom Rawson smiled.

"I don't intend to. Look here, Peele, I've no wish to be at loggerheads with you. If the rotten things you said were said in the heat of the moment—"

"They weren't!" snarled Peele. "I meant every word I said. You're a rotten pauper, unfit for the society of gentlemen, and I'm goin' to make you sit up! Get out!"

Rawson shrugged and departed, with Tubby Muffin scuttling after him.

Jimmy Silver & Co. looked at Peele rather grimly. They felt strongly inclined to make active response to the black sheep's furious jibes themselves. But it was pretty obvious that Peele had had enough; and after a moment's indecision, the Fistical Four also departed, leaving Peele to vent his feelings on Cuthbert Gower.

CHAPTER 2.

Peele Springs a Surprise!

"UNCLE JAMES calling! Put away that Latin junk and open your ears for good news!"

Thus Jimmy Silver, as he burst into Rawson's study a week after the encounter between Rawson and Peele.

Tom Rawson looked up with a smile.

"Good news? Well, I'm in need of good news just now, as it happens. What is it?"

"You're selected to play against St. Jim's next Saturday, old bean," replied Jimmy Silver. "You've been looking pretty down in the mouth lately, Rawson, if you don't

mind my saying so. 'This ought to buck you up no end.'"

"I— Well, it does, of course. I'm delighted!" said Tom Rawson, his eyes dropping to his books again. "But perhaps I don't altogether deserve a place in the team, Jimmy. I haven't played much lately—preparing for the maintenance scholarship I've gone in for, as you know. Don't you think you ought to give somebody else a chance?"

"Just the reverse," said Jimmy Silver cheerily. "You're always reliable, and it's my opinion that you want taking out of yourself—that's partly why I'm doing it. Now, what about giving the Latin a rest for once, and turning out for practice after lessons to-day?"

"I'd like to, of course, but— Well, it'll mean burning the midnight oil to-night to make up for it. I've simply got to win the Howberry Schol!"

"Rats to the midnight oil wheeze, anyway!" said Jimmy Silver decidedly. "I'd like to see how you shape this afternoon, anyway."

"All serene then, Jimmy! I'll turn out."

"Good man!" Jimmy Silver regarded the scholarship junior keenly. "Look here, Rawson, you've been working yourself to death lately. Does this Howberry Scholarship mean so much to you?"

Tom Rawson winced.

"I'm afraid I have been rather overdoing it. But it does mean a lot. It means more than that. It means everything to me, in fact. You see—"

"Don't think I'm prying into your private affairs, old bean," put in Jimmy Silver quickly. "I'm only advising you for your own good."

"I know that. But there's no harm in your knowing why I'm so keen. My people are not well off. Matter of fact, they're not so well off as when I first came to Rookwood. Although the scholarship that brought me here pays my school fees and provides books, it's still an expense to them to keep me here. And unless something happens, I shall have to leave—very shortly."

Jimmy Silver frowned and nodded.

"Too bad, old bean! So you've gone in for the Howberry Schol—"

"To be able to relieve them of that expense so that I can stay on," nodded Tom Rawson. "That's why I'm so keen on it. Unless I win it, I shall have to go."

"You'll win it all right," declared Jimmy Silver confidently. "Why, there's nobody else in the Lower School to touch you! Who else has entered for it?"

"The lists haven't been made up yet. Dalton will ask in class this morning, I fancy. Dodd of the Modern House is having a shot, I believe, and Hooker and Erroll on this side."

"Well, you'll be able to lick that lot," said the leader of the Fourth. "Why worry? By the way, I heard Tubby Muffin say he was putting his name down. He's not the one you're scared of, is he?"

Rawson laughed.

"Good old Tubby! No; I'm not scared of anyone particularly, but it means so much to me that I can't afford to take a chance."

"Well, cheer up, old scout, anyway!" grinned Jimmy Silver. "You'll walk away with it, or I'm a Dutchman! Don't forget to turn out for footer this afternoon, or there'll be trouble!"

The bell went for morning classes at that moment, and Jimmy went off to get his books.

As Tom Rawson had forecast, Mr. Dalton took the names of intending candidates for the Howberry Maintenance Scholarship Examination that morning.

The formalities were not expected to produce any surprises in the way of candidates, for the fellows who were seriously competing had been putting in extra study for months before. But Mr. Dalton and the Fourth were destined to receive a slight shock when the applicants handed in their names.

Mr. Dalton briefly explained the nature of the scholarship before the names were taken.

"The scholarship takes the form of quarterly cash payments to the successful candidate," he said. "The subjects are Latin, Roman History, and English History. The questions, which are prepared by myself in collaboration with the headmaster, are of a standard applicable to boys belonging to the Fourth Form. Will all those who intend to sit for the examination hold up their hands?"

There was a chuckle as Tubby Muffin's fat hand shot up. Even Dicky Dalton could not repress a smile at the idea of the Porker of the Fourth winning a scholarship.

The master of the Fourth glanced round at the rest of the entrants, and nodded as he noted that Rawson, Erroll, Dodd, and Hooker were among them. Then he started.

Simultaneously, there was an audible gasp of surprise from the Fourth.

Another hand had appeared in the air—a hand which nobody in the Fourth had dreamed of seeing on this occasion.

It belonged to Cyril Peele.

"Well, my hat!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver, sotto voce.

The Fourth stared at Peele in open-mouthed astonishment. Peele, the elegant, moneyed slacker—Peele, the gay dog of the Form, who professed an interest in gee-goes and games of chance, and a contempt for school work of any kind, entering for a maintenance scholarship!

It seemed incredible—fantastic. But it was undoubtedly true. Peele was holding his hand aloft with an air of complete unconcern.

Mr. Dalton blinked at Peele.

"You wish to sit for this examination, Peele?" he asked.

Peele nodded.

"No objection, sir, is there?" he asked coolly. "I know my pater's not a pauper—but I suppose I'm entitled to enter, the same as anyone else?"

scholarship. The reason was to prevent Rawson winning it, and thereby to force the scholarship lad to leave Rookwood.

Whether it lay in Peele's power to achieve that end remained to be seen.

CHAPTER 3.

In the Night!

"GOAL!"

"Well played, Rawson!"

"Couldn't have done it better myself, old bean!" said Jimmy Silver, giving Tom Rawson a hearty thump on the back. "Bung one or two like that at Fatty Wynn when we play St. Jim's, and we'll beat 'em all hands down!"

Pheep!

Bulkeley, who had been refereeing the junior practice match, blew a long blast on his whistle signifying the end of the game, and the footballers crowded off the field to the pavilion.



While Tubby Muffin sat howling on the floor, Tom Rawson seized Peele and Gower and banged their heads violently together!

All eyes were instinctively turned on Rawson. The scholarship lad paled a little, but he gave no other sign that he had observed the vicious thrust of the fellow who had chosen to be his enemy.

Mr. Dalton regarded Peele keenly, and rather suspiciously. But the cad of the Fourth met his look without flinching. Peele had a gift for showing a bold front to those in authority.

"Very well, Peele," said the master of the Fourth eventually. "I must admit that I am a little surprised, for you have not impressed me this term with a desire to shine in school work. But you undoubtedly have ability if you care to apply it, and I am quite pleased to put your name down."

"Thank you, sir!" said Peele demurely.

There the incident ended. Mr. Dalton noted the names of the entrants, and went on with the lesson.

But the matter had not ended from the point of view of the Fourth. Many curious glances were turned in Peele's direction that morning, and an equally large number were directed to Tom Rawson. That there was more in it than met the eye was the opinion of most of the fellows. And a good many of them had a pretty shrewd idea why Peele had entered. How he could hope to win the Howberry Schol against Rawson was a puzzle. It seemed fairly certain, anyway, that one reason, and one reason only, had impelled Peele to make a bid for the

Cyril Peele was among the small crowd that had been watching from the pavilion. Peele's lip curled at the handclapping that greeted Tom Rawson on his return.

"Nothin' like trainin' in the back streets for a footballer!" he remarked loudly to Gower. "They say there's many a pro who played his first game in a slum."

"Tone it down a bit, old bean!" muttered Gower, a little uneasily. "Doesn't matter much if a fellow does learn in a street, does it?"

"Not a bit," yawned Peele. "He can pick it up in any old back alley he likes, provided he doesn't expect to mix on level terms with me. Oh, hallo, Rawson! Had a good game?"

Tom Rawson regarded the cad of the Fourth steadily.

"You seem to be doing your best to force me to quarrel with you again, Peele," he said quietly. "In case it's likely to save you any trouble, I may as well tell you that it's not my intention to respond."

Peele registered pretended surprise.

"Quarrel? Dear man, you must be dreamin'! I was merely makin' a few general remarks about fellows who learned Soccer in back alleys. I suppose you don't come into that class, do you?"

"I do, and you know it!" was Rawson's swift reply. "What's more, I'm not ashamed of it!"

"Hear, hear!" chimed in Jimmy Silver. "Pity you didn't have the same training, Peele—you might have learned better manners than you've got to-day!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Peele scowled.

"There are some people on whom I don't intend to waste good manners!" he said savagely. "If it's of any interest to you to know it, Rawson's one of 'em! Come on, Gower!"

And Peele, having demonstrated his resolve to remain at war with the scholarship lad, turned on his heel and lounged away, followed by his faithful, but by no means comfortable, ally.

* * * * *

Boom!

It was the first stroke of midnight, chiming out from the old clock-tower at Rookwood.

In the wan light of a crescent moon the grey school buildings were shadowy and still; nothing remained to indicate that anyone was out of his bed.

But, though nothing showed from the quadrangle, there was at least one room in the School House where a light burned.

That room was Mr. Dalton's study. The light in it, carefully prevented from showing by a table-cover pinned up at the window, revealed a stealthy figure bending over Mr. Dalton's desk.

That stealthy figure belonged to Cyril Peele of the Fourth. What Peele was doing in Mr. Dalton's study at midnight was a problem which would have puzzled a good many of the Fourth, had they been able to see him. But there was nobody to see him, which was just as well for the blade of the Fourth, for Peele's intentions would not have stood a very critical analysis.

In the light from the chandelier in the centre of the room could be seen a small glittering article in Peele's hand. It was a new key.

Peele inserted it in one of the drawers underneath the writing-top, and turned it without difficulty.

The drawer came out, and the black sheep of the Fourth surveyed the contents, which consisted of tidily arranged bundles of papers, with a grin of satisfaction. Then he sat down on Mr. Dalton's swivel chair and began to examine them one at a time, taking care to put back each bundle into its proper place after he had finished with it.

Ten minutes passed without a sound, save for an occasional soft rustling of paper.

At the end of that time Peele suddenly uttered an exclamation of satisfaction. His search had ended successfully.

His eyes gleaming excitedly, Peele unfolded the sheaf of papers he had found and glanced at the heading to the first sheet. It was written in Mr. Dalton's neat hand, and consisted of the words: "Examination Questions for Howberry Scholarship Candidates. Submitted to the Head-master January 15th."

Mr. Dalton would have been exceedingly interested to see what Peele did after that. The cad of the Fourth, who had evidently come well prepared, got out an exercise-book from his jacket pocket, and, with great deliberation, started to copy out the examination questions.

The Fourth had been surprised when Cyril Peele put his name down as a candidate for the Howberry Schol. They would have been more surprised still, had they been there, to see what method Peele was adopting to ensure success in the examination.

For the best part of half an hour Peele was busy at Dicky Dalton's desk. Then, with a sigh of relief, he transferred the exercise-book back to his pocket, and rose.

The Form master's suggestions to the Head for questions to be submitted in the approaching examination—suggestions which were almost certain to be adopted—went back into the drawer. Peele carefully locked it again, turned out the lights, and took down the screen he had fixed up over the window. Then he opened the door of Mr. Dalton's study, and stepped out into the passage.

An instant later Peele received a shock.

So confident had he been that nobody was about at that late hour of the night that he walked out without even pausing to reconnoitre. But Peele, as it turned out, was mistaken. Somebody was about. At the very moment that Peele closed Mr. Dalton's door behind him a dark form loomed up from the direction of the Fourth quarters.

There was a thud as the two collided. Simultaneously both gasped. Peele staggered against the wall of the passage, his heart thumping madly with fear. But only for a moment. After that he had turned round and was racing wildly off towards the stairs.

Up the stairs raced Peele.

He suddenly became aware that the nocturnal prowler into whom he had bumped was racing up the stairs with

him. In an agony of fear he faced round on the landing, where a dim patch of moonlight showed things up more clearly. Then he stopped dead. He had recognised the fellow who was with him.

"Rawson!" he gasped.

Tom Rawson stared at the panting Fourth-Former in amazement.

"Peele! What on earth—"

The scholarship lad broke off, his question unfinished—for the reason that the answer had already occurred to him.

"So you—you've been in Dalton's room in the night!" he said slowly. "I've been up studying for that exam to-night. But you're going to do it an easier way!"

Peele began to regain his composure again. He eyed Rawson with an assumption of indignation.

"You're suggestin' that I went into Dalton's room to crib? Well, you're wrong; I went to get some old lines of mine, with the idea of palmin' them off on him again. If you don't believe me—"

Tom Rawson shrugged.

"I'm not going to argue about it. I shall try to win the Howberry Schol on my merits. If you cheat me out of it by foul play I shan't complain; it'll just be a matter for your conscience. Good-night!"

Peele winced a little. Black sheep as he was, he did not feel altogether satisfied with himself at that moment.

But his enmity for Tom Rawson still dominated his better feelings, and as he ascended the stairs after the scholarship lad his face hardened.

Peele had decided to go through with it.

CHAPTER 4.

The Winner!

"SIX-POUND-FIVE!"

The Fistical Four stopped.

A fortnight had passed and the chums of the Fourth were crossing the quad, discussing the Howberry Scholarship examination, the result of which was expected now at any time, when a familiar voice smote on their ears.

"Tubby!" grinned Raby, pointing to a seat under the tree near which they had been walking. "And he's doing arithmetic in the quad! My hat!"

"Six-pound-five!" came Tubby Muffin's voice again from beneath the tree. He looked up instantly and nodded to the Fistical Four. "Lemme see, where was I? Oh, yes, six-pound-five!"

"What the thump—"

"Six-pound-five a quarter!" said Tubby, frowning thoughtfully over the scrubby piece of paper on which he was scrawling. "That's nearly ten bob a week, ain't it?"

"Something like it!" agreed Jimmy Silver. "Who cares, anyway?"

"Ten bob a week is nearly one-and-six a day," said Tubby Muffin, quite dreamily. "Not bad when it comes in every day without a miss! I say, you chaps—"

"No good, old fat man!" said Jimmy Silver hurriedly. "Stony!"

Tubby Muffin stared.

"Oh, really, Silver? Who said I was going to ask you for money?"

"Nobody. I just spotted that 'delayed-remittance' look in your eye!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast!" sniffed Tubby Muffin. "If you think I'd ask you for a loan, you're jolly well mistaken; I wouldn't! Matter of fact, though, I did intend asking you for a mortgage!"

"A whatter?"

"Mortgage—'m-o-r-g-a-j-e'!" explained Tubby. "That means an advance of cash in return for a part-share in something valuable."

Lovell grinned.

"If it means lending you money for a part-share in your next remittance, then taking out a mortgage must be the same thing as doing a bit of cadging."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What have you got to mortgage, anyway?" asked Newcome critically. "Far as I know, your property consists of what you stand up in. Even that's doubtful. I fancy I last saw those trousers of yours on Mornington."

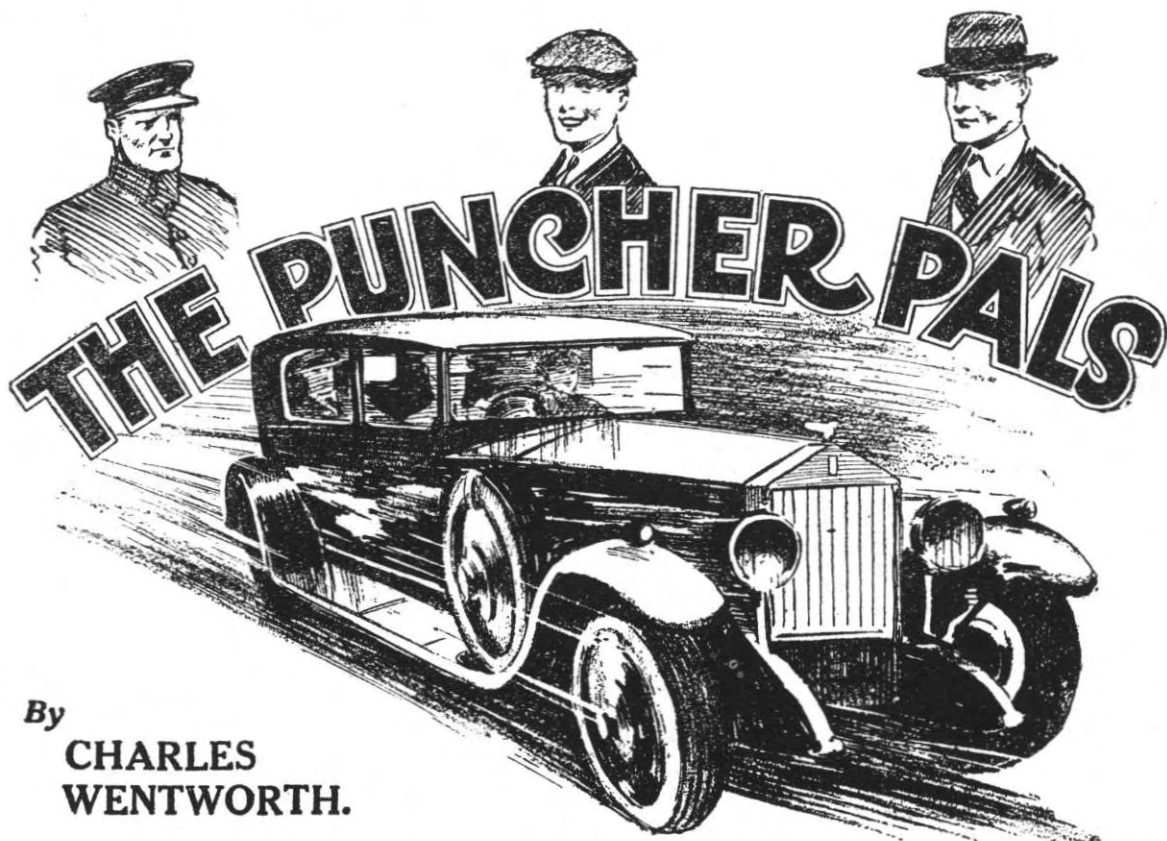
"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beasts!" snorted Tubby Muffin. "If you want to know, the thing I'm thinking of mortgaging isn't property at all. It's a scholarship!"

"Eh?"

(Continued on page 28.)

COMPLETE ADVENTURE-THRILL YARN!



By
**CHARLES
WENTWORTH.**

CHAPTER 1.

The Bells of St. Aubin's!

AS Sprouts Martin pulled the great black Rolls-Royce to the side of the road, Percy Vere jumped out. Beckoning to Sprouts and Skid Collins to follow he moved to the fall of a grassy slope, and focused a pair of powerful Zeiss glasses on the town. He could see crowds of people thronging the flagged streets, bunting everywhere.

The City Square was black with people, and in its middle the Priory Church of St. Aubin's reared its square, central tower high above the cross-like shape of the great main building. As Percy Vere looked, the bells of St. Aubin's rang a joyous peal, and his powerful glasses brought the bell tower quite near. He could see the bells swinging backwards and forwards.

Ding dang, ding dang, ding dang! they rang. Ding dang, ding dang, ding dang dong. Then burst into a merry tune.

"Coo!" gasped Skid, struck by the mellow tone of the bells and the amazing skill of the ringers. "What bells!"

"Those bells were cast hundreds of years before we were ever dreamt about, Skid," said Percy Vere. "They are almost as old as the Priory Church itself, and are the finest in the world. A' Becket has preached in the old Priory Church. Sprouts, this is fete day in the town." Percy Vere continued, as he dropped into his seat. "People flock in from miles round for the fair and the races. After the morning service the Priory Church is open to visitors at sixpence admission. You will drive the car into the City Square, and I shall inspect the glorious church. If you and Skid don't want to come in, you can remain outside," said Percy Vere.

"Sight seein' alwus gives me a' eadache, sir," answered Sprouts. "I've bin like it since a kid. It's constitutional."

"Then," said Percy, "I'll trouble you for a half-crown for the Church Restoration Fund. Skid, you will want to

Mr. Butcher thought he was in clover. And so he was—until the Puncher Pals arrived on the scene—and then he was in the horse-trough!

stay with Sprouts, and your contribution will be sixpence. Thank you!"

"I could go into the church for a tanner, and yet Dumps stings me for a half-crown, Skid. It's—it's blinkin' black-mail!" moaned the fighting chauffeur.

Percy Vere ran the windows up.

"St. Aubin's is the cleanest town you ever saw," he told Sprouts and Skid. "There is no litter in the streets, and no advertisements are stuck up on the houses. The rates are low; there is plenty of employment; but there is one drawback to the beauty of the square—it is too small."

With unerring judgment Sprouts found the City Square.

"Set me down at the south door of the church, Sprouts," said Percy. "That is the one which we shall find open. Why, what the— Hi, stop!"

Sprouts pulled the car up close to the south door of the Priory Church. It was not the door of the church which had attracted Percy Vere's attention, but a great black-and-yellow poster which covered the whole of one side of a house. The poster hit you smack in the eye so that you could see nothing else. It killed the ancient beauty and dignity of the church. It yelled at you:

"TRY MORE DUMPS!

BUY MORE DUMPS!

EAT MORE DUMPS!

THE WORLD'S GREATEST SWEET!

PERCY VERE & VERE & CO., LTD."

And sprawling over three-quarters of the poster was a kid sucking a piece of luscious Dumps toffee.

With feet spread wide apart Percy Vere glared at the
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poster through his monocle. Then he turned solemnly to Sprouts and Skid.

"It was a great feat for my advertising manager to have booked that site," he remarked; "but that poster is an outrage. It offends the eye. It destroys the beauty of the church. Skid—Sprouts, while I explore St. Aubin's go into that sweetshop, and ask the proprietor how much he receives for letting the wall to the billposter?"

Sprouts drew his heels together with a military click, and brought his hand up to the salute.

"Right you are, guv!"

CHAPTER 2.

The Sweetshop!

MOST of the fine old houses round City Square were lived in. The only group of shops belonged to a row of cottages, the sweetshop coming at the corner of a street. The poster was on the side wall.

"Mrs. Paxton," Skid read above the windows, as Sprouts opened the shop door. A bell rang, but a little, white-haired woman behind the counter was talking to a customer over a row of bottles set upon the counter. Skid eyed the labels on the sweet bottles, and his mouth drooped as he read Loadbetter's Tiddy-Bits, Loadbetter's Acid Drops, Loadbetter's Cough Candy, Loadbetter's Raspberry Drops, Loadbetter's Mixed Fruits, Loadbetter's Sherbet Shifters, and so on, and on, for every bottle of sweets in sight, on counter or shelf or side table, had been supplied by the firm of Loadbetter, one of the biggest trade rivals of the firm of Dumps.

It might have been imagination, but Skid fancied the little lady with the white hair was worried, and that her eyes were moist as if she had been crying. Yet she managed to find a smile. The man did not smile; he scowled as if he were annoyed, because Skid and Sprouts had come in.

"What can I do for you, please?" asked the white-haired lady.

"It's about that poster artside," Sprouts began; but winding him with a jerk of the elbow in what is known as the bread-basket, Skid said loudly:

"We saw by the poster outside, ma'am, that you sell Dumps, the finest sweet in the world, and I'd like half a pound of toffee Dumps, and half a pound of mixed fruit Dumps, and my friend—"

Before the little lady with the white hair could say a word the man rose and butted in pugnaciously, his lower-jaw stuck out.

"Your friend can speak for himself!" he cried. "And let me tell you that you won't get any Dumps 'ere! Dumps are the rottenest, lowest down muck ever turned out of a glucose fac'ry. If you want to kill yer kids, give 'em Dumps; if you wanta give yerself lockjaw, stickjaw, hydrophobia, 'oopin' cough or measles, suck a Vere & Vere Dump once day! You'll be dead in less'n a week!"

Sprouts glared at the man, and then on tiptoe spied over the counter, his eyes taking in many things.

"Ma'am," he said, "give my boy friend 'ere what 'e asks fer, and gimme a one parnd-box er Dumps mixed chocolates with soft fillin' and fruity flavours, and one parnd of armind rock—all nutty."

The little lady's eyes half-closed in fear, and her lips trembled.

"I am sorry—I'm afraid—"

"Don't you be afraid of what this loud-mouther gey barks, ma'am," said Sprouts encouragingly. "I can see you've got the goods. They're on the shelf over there. What we want is Dumps' sweets, and not Loadbetter's jaw-breakers."

"Waiter minute!"

The stranger hustled forward, slinging Skid out of the way, and sticking his face close to Sprouts' with the under-jaw thrust out viciously.

"If you think yore funny," he grated, "come outside and show me! And before we goes, let me tell you that Mrs. Paxton entered inter a bindin' agreement with me, never to sell any more of Dumps poison sweets, but ter sell Loadbetter's 'olsome an' 'armless, digestive beauties. And in case you should be dull of understanding, let me tell you that I am Loadbetter's agent in this town. You'll buy no Dumps sweets 'ere!"

"Oh, Mr. Butcher, please!"

The little lady was wringing her hands distressfully.

Skid stepped forward to interfere, but Sprouts motioned him back.

"Now, Mr. Butcher," he cried, "let me tell you that when I ask for a thing, I expect to git it, and also by that same token whenever a man sticks his nose inter my

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face I usually punch it. Missis, don't you mind 'im! Give us the suckers!"

"Mrs. Paxton won't serve any Dumps while I'm 'ere!" said Mr. Butcher. And to point his words he seized the big bottle of toffee Dumps, which the little white-haired lady had lifted on to the counter, and hurled it crashing into splinters far across the room. Then, with arms akimbo, and nose stuck out, he grinned at Sprouts. "Ow's that?" he asked, with a laugh of triumph.

"Jist where I like it," retorted Sprouts, as he smacked his clenched right fist flop on Mr. Butcher's bulbous nose, and crashed him in a sitting position on the floor.

For a second he sat there dazed; but the moment he could locate Sprouts' head among a million dancing stars, he got up and punched at it. In grips they staggered, landing punch for punch all over the floor, and every now and then Sprouts' elbow would jerk into a big bottle of Loadbetter's sweets, and send it crashing to the floor. They trod on splintering glass, and crushed Loadbetter's tiddy-bits to powder.

"Gentleman, please—please!" wailed the little lady.

"Go it, Sprouts!" encouraged Skid, as he jerked the door open to a ring of its bell.

Out of the shop the two men stumbled, locked in a tight embrace. As they reached the pavement in the full glory of the sunshine Sprouts whirled his enemy round and got his head in chancery—the first time in all his boxing career that he had ever managed to get an opponent's head there.

Your skilful boxer can soon turn such a position to his own advantage, but Mr. Butcher was not skilled; he was just a rough-and-tumble, up-and-down fighter, possessed of tremendous physical strength, unbounded stamina, and a weight several stones above the average. He had forced this fight on Sprouts because in all his little affrays he had usually got in the first punch, and laid his man out inside a minute. That was the sort of thing he loved. But this time he had tackled an ex-middle-weight champion. Sprouts might be ageing in years and running to seed, but he knew how to act, and the moment he had room in which to move he rammed a dozen upper-cuts into Butcher's chanciered head which dyed Butcher's dial crimson, and then flung him a purler.

From all directions boys came running. With sparkling eyes they swarmed round Skid.

"What's it all about?" they panted.

"Sweets!" grinned Skid. "My chauffeur pal drives for Percy Vere, Dumps, you know, and the other guy with the bashed-up face, he's for Loadbetter's."

Just then the Loadbetter champion arose. His rush was deadly, so that Sprouts could only hit him twice as he came in. Then with a kick he doubled Sprouts Martin up.

"Ouch!" yelled Sprouts, as he staggered in agony; but as Loadbetter's man tried to repeat the cowardly foul, Sprouts dodged in and caught him each side of the head with left and right, dropping him heavily.

Sprouts did not let him lie, but, picking him up, carried him bodily to a horse-trough set just outside Mrs. Paxton's sweetshop.

"Your face wants a wash!" said Sprouts, as he shoved the man's head and shoulders under, washed his face thoroughly, and then turned his legs in after, and pushed those under, too.

It was a minute before Mr. Butcher, dripping water at every stride, staggered round the City Square, with a crowd of shouting kids behind him.

"Coo! You did lick him, Sprouts!" said Skid, with a grin.

"That was nothing!" answered Sprouts, as he mounted the steps to the sweetshop door. "Didn't he arst for it, Skid? An' 'e got it! Now let us go and soothe the little old lady and buy those sweets."

CHAPTER 3.

Skid Listens to a Story!

WHEN they re-entered the shop they found the little white-haired old lady sitting on a chair crying her eyes out. Sprouts choked.

"You talk to 'er, Skid!" he cried. "I can't, for she reminds me of my little old mother, and—"

Skid sidled to the crying woman's side.

"Don't take on so, missus!" he pleaded. "My pal Sprouts has cleaned him right up, and he won't trouble you any more!"

Mrs. Paxton dabbed at her eyes with a tiny handkerchief, and tried to smile.

"You say that because you don't know," she sighed. "You and your friend have ruined me!"

"Deuce," said Skid, "you can't mean it!"

"But it's true. Once I—I used to sell twenty bottlesful



"Your face wants a wash!" said Sprouts, as he picked Butcher up in his arms, and carrying him to the horse-trough, pushed him in.

of Dumps' sweets to one bottle of Loadbetter's. I thought Dumps' sweets were so wonderful that I let the side walls to the poster people—

"For how much?" asked Skid eagerly.

"For twenty-five pounds a year. But the time has very nearly run out, and I am so worried I am going to sell the site outright."

"Worried, ma'am?"

"My daughter has been ill for more than three years. I am afraid there is no hope for her unless I can take her abroad for a long rest. The doctor advises Madeira."

"But, ma'am"—Skid wanted to get to the bottom of a mystery—"you say you like Dumps' sweets so much, and yet you have Loadbetter's jars and boxes stuck all over the shop, and not a Dumps' glass in sight!"

"That was Mr. Butcher—"

"Oh, was it?"

"After I had spent all my savings—I had to have specialists in to see my daughter, and other doctors, too—I didn't know what to do for money. I spoke to Mr. Butcher about it one day, and he lent me money, then more money, and then he asked for a mortgage on the property as a security. It was after he had taken the mortgage and I owed him eight hundred pounds—all spent—that he forced an arrangement with the Loadbetter firm, by which I was compelled to put aside the Dumps' sweets and push Loadbetter's tiddy-bits. Then he began to press for the return of his money. He had lost a lot buying stocks and shares, he said. He wanted that Dumps' poster taken down. He was threatening to sell me up because I was behind with the mortgage money, when you and your friend came into the shop."

"Where izzzy?" yelled Sprouts, making a dive for the door. "Tell me his address, ma'am, and I'll heave him out for another sloshin'!"

Then the doorbell tinkled and Percy Vere came in. Behind him strode a tall man, with white hair and mutton-chop whiskers, who carried a grey pot hat in his gloved hand, and whose clothes were of Bond Street cut.

"Good gracious," cried Mrs. Paxton, leaping to her feet in alarm and bobbing a curtsy, "it's the mayor!"

"And this is Mr. Percy Vere—Dumps!" said Skid, introducing the gov'nor; whilst Sprouts lifted the Loadbetter bottles and jars off the counter and replaced them with Dumps' bottles and jars, the little lady offering no protest.

"Mrs. Paxton," said Percy, smiling below his monocle and bowing gracefully from the waist, "the mayor has been telling me your story. I hope sincerely that your daughter will soon be better."

"Not until she has gone abroad; and I can't take her, sir!"

The little white-haired lady's lips trembled.

Then Skid told the gov'nor what had happened.

"Mrs. Paxton," said the mayor, "is it true that that man holds a mortgage on these premises, and that you can't pay him the money owing?"

"It is true. And now he will sell me up!" she cried.

Just at that moment a man bustled up to the door and banged it open. He had changed his clothes, but still looked wet. He banged a paper on the counter.

"Now, Mrs. Paxton," he yelled, "you owe me over sixty pounds, which you can't pay, and before a month is out I'll fling you and your daughter out into the street! This house and shop are mine."

Miraculously a pile of banknotes appeared upon the counter.

"What you didn't know, Butcher by name and nature," drawled Percy Vere, "is that Mrs. Paxton has money enough to pay off the mortgage you hold."

"And what you did not know, Mrs. Paxton," said the mayor, "is that it has been decided by the town council to enlarge the square on this side, and that in order to do this we shall have to buy your property. Mr. Butcher knew we had such a plan in contemplation. He hoped to get a high price for the site. That is what he was aiming at."

"That and pushing Loadbetter's throat-drying rubbish on a long-sufferin' public!" said Sprouts.

With a howl of rage Butcher made a dive at Sprouts, who, planting his feet firmly, met him with a punch, square on the nose, that floored him among the sawdust. Sprouts carried him through the door, hanging limply from his right arm, and dumped him for the second time in the horse-trough.

As he re-entered the shop he heard Percy Vere saying in gentle tones to the little old lady:

"And so, ma'am, you will be able to take your daughter to Madeira. And, in order that the town may soon be rid of an eyesore, I'll get the poster people to haul down that Dumps' poster to-morrow. But you shall sell my Dumps without fear; indeed, ma'am, I intend to appoint you an agent at—ahem!—advantageous terms!"

Skid plucked Sprouts by the arm and whispered hoarsely:

"Now ain't that just like the dear old gov'nor?"

(There's another topping adventure of the Puncher Pals in next week's special number of the GEM!)

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Tom Rawson's Enemy!

(Continued from page 24.)

"The Howberry Schol!" explained Tubby seriously. "You chaps know I went in for it. Well, the Head's going to announce the winner to-day. I fancy there's not much doubt about who's won it. It'll be me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Dashed if I see anything to grin at!" exclaimed Tubby warmly. "I'm pretty sure I've won that six-pound-five a quarter, anyway. Question is, what can I get for it by way of a mortgage? I suppose you chaps are prepared to make an offer?"

"Certainly!" said Lovell promptly. "I'll give you cash for your chance here and now if you like."

Tubby Muffin rubbed his fat hands.

"Now you're talking, Lovell! If there's one thing I do like about you, it's your businesslike way. What's your offer?"

"A jolly generous one, old fat bean, and one you'd be well advised to accept," said Lovell seriously. "I'll offer you a ha'penny!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you—"

Words failed Tubby Muffin. He glared at the hilarious juniors in speechless indignation till the bell for morning prayers deprived him of the chance of rendering his feelings in intelligible English.

"Prayers, Tubby!" said Jimmy Silver, linking arms with the fat junior. "Soon know who's right now. Kim on!"

And the Fistical Four marched the inarticulate Tubby off to the Hall in the School House, where the brief prayers preceding classes were held.

Prayers ended, and the Head's eyes turned in the direction of the Fourth.

"Before we dismiss, boys, I have an announcement to make," he said. "The papers submitted by the candidates who sat for the Howberry Scholarship examination have now been checked, and I am in a position to announce the name of the successful candidate."

The Fourth waited in expectant silence. Peele's face was strained. Rawson, though calm, was quite white.

"The winner of the scholarship," said Dr. Chisholm, reading from the paper in his hand, "is a Fourth Former—Cyril Peele!"

It was out!

Peele had won! Peele, the slacker and ne'er-do-well, had gained the Howberry Scholarship! The crowd in the Hall looked surprised; as to the Fourth, they were staggered.

"I congratulate Peele on an altogether excellent paper," went on the Head. "I cannot let the opportunity pass also of adding a word of praise for Rawson, whose paper was very good indeed. In the absence of Peele, Rawson would most certainly have been the winner. That is all, boys."

The assembled school broke up, and from the Fourth came a buzz of excited comment as they swarmed out of the Hall.

"Hard luck, old scout!" said Jimmy Silver sympathetically, as he came out with Tom Rawson. "Perhaps it won't be so bad as you thought. You may not have to leave, after all."

Tom Rawson shook his head sadly.

"I'm afraid that's impossible. It's rough; but it can't be helped. I shall have to go."

Jimmy Silver's eyes strayed to an animated group of cronies that had surrounded the successful candidate to congratulate him.

"I suppose this is all fair and square?" he asked dubiously. "Don't see how it can be otherwise; but—well, Peele has been known to play it pretty low before to-day! What do you think, Rawson?"

Rawson's fists clenched for a moment. Then he unclenched them.

"I shan't complain, anyway," he said. "If Peele had won this scholarship by a trick, then I'd wait for him to put things right himself before I'd do anything."

"Then you'd wait a thumping long time!" remarked Jimmy Silver grimly. "He went in for it just to do you out of it, and he's done what he set out to do. I, for one, am dashed sorry!"

Had the Fourth known what the scholarship lad knew about Peele's success that morning, there would have been something approaching a riot after the Head's announcement.

But Tom Rawson remained silent. And Cyril Peele enjoyed his foully-won triumph in peace.

(Will Peele get away with his rotten trick? Rawson won't tell anyone, but . . . See next week's thrilling *Rawwood Yarn!*)

EASTWOOD LEAGUE SHIELD

We regret that owing to pressure of space it is impossible to include a report of this week's matches. Below, however, is a list of results up to date.—Ed.

Results.

ST. JIM'S .. 0 HIGHCLIFFE .. 0

Teams: ST. JIM'S: Wynn; Figgins, Herries; Manners, Redfern, Lowther; Talbot, Levison, Merry, Blake, D'Arcy. HIGHCLIFFE: Smithson; Wilkinson Major, Wilkinson Minor; Roberts, Benson, Lewis; Yates, De Courcy, Courtenay, Jones Minor, Derwent.

BAGSHOT .. 0 REDCLYFFE .. 2

Judd, Mills.

BANNINGTON .. 0 GREYFRIARS .. 8

GRAM. S. Cherry (2) Todd,

Hurree Singh,

Vernon - Smith,

Wlarton, Nugent,

Linley.

ST. FRANK'S .. 4 ABBOTSFORD .. 1

Tregellis - West,

Watson, De Valerie,

Pitt.

ST. JUDE'S .. 2 ROOKWOOD .. 2

Raleigh, Lane. Silver,

Mornington.

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