

"FIRE-FIGHTERS OF ST. JIM'S!" GREAT SCHOOL YARN AND FREE GIFTS INSIDE.

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8

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Inside



A GRAND LONG YARN OF FUN AND FIRE-FIGHTING THRILLS—



FIRE- FIGHTERS of St. Jim's !

By
MARTIN CLIFFORD.

With Gordon Gay hanging insensible over his shoulder, Figgins scrambled down the stairs. Flames licked at the plucky junior and scorched him, and the blinding smoke stung his eyes. But fighting against the faintness that was seizing upon him, he struggled on.

CHAPTER 1.

An Alarm in the Night!

TOM MERRY moved restlessly in his sleep and awoke.

It was very dark in the Shell dormitory in the School House at St. Jim's. It was long past midnight, and the House was very still. Tom Merry lay half-awake in bed, blinking at the dim, high windows, and wondering what had awakened him.

There was a sound of steady breathing from the other beds. Nothing was moving in the dormitory; nothing stirring in the House.

Suddenly Tom Merry sniffed, and sat up in bed.

He sniffed again suspiciously. Then he knew what had awakened him. There was a smell of smoke in the dormitory—a smell of burning!

"My hat! What's that? Something's on fire!"

He groped in the pockets of his clothes beside the bed and found a matchbox. The match scratched and flared out.

Tom Merry held it up, and looked towards the dormitory door. Under the door a curl of white smoke was crawling. The match went out.

Tom Merry leaped out of bed, his face

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pale with excitement. There was a fire somewhere—a fire in the old School House of St. Jim's. Tom Merry's voice rang through the sleeping dormitory.

"Wake up, you fellows! Manners! Lowther! Wake up!"

He ran to the switch, and turned on the electric light. The dormitory was flooded with illumination in an instant. Fellows sat up in the long row of beds, blinking in the sudden light, and sniffing.

"Wharrer marrer?" murmured Manners sleepily.

"Lemme alone!" mumbled Lowther.

Tom Merry shook his two chums in turn.

"Get up! Fire!"

The forming of rival fire brigades at St. Jim's was the cause of endless fun and ragging between the School House and New House juniors. But when it came to fighting the flames the St. Jim's firemen stood the test and proved their worth!

"What!"

"Fire!"

Manners and Lowther did not need any more than that; they were wide awake now. They tumbled out of bed in the twinkling of an eye, and grasped their clothes. Kangaroo, otherwise known as Harry Noble, jumped up, and Clifton Dane, Bernard Glyn, and Skimpole turned out, and then the other fellows, one by one, as they realised what was the matter.

Tom Merry stayed only for his trousers and boots, and then rushed to the door and threw it open.

A thicker roll of smoke came in as he did so, and he started back, coughing.

"Fire!" yelled Crooke of the Shell. "Oh, we shall be burnt to death! Ow!"

"Shurrup!" growled Lowther.

"Fire! Help! Fire!"

Tom Merry ran out of the dormitory. On the stairs the smell of smoke was thicker. He dashed down the stairs to the study passage. But on the lower staircase there was no smoke. It was evident that the fire had not originated below stairs.

Tom Merry turned back, and ran to Kildare's door. He thumped at the door and threw it open.

"Kildare!"

—FEATURING YOUR OLD FAVOURITES OF ST. JIM'S—TOM MERRY & CO.

The captain of St. Jim's started up in bed.

"Hallo! What the—"

"Something's on fire!" interrupted Tom Merry.

"Great Scott!"

Kildare was out of bed in a moment. Tom Merry did not wait. He dashed away to the door of Mr. Railton's room, and hammered on it, calling to the Housemaster.

Mr. Railton's voice replied in a moment:

"Coming!"

Mr. Railton came whisking out of the room in a dressing-gown.

The smoke was rolling along the passage now; the smell of burning was stronger, and Tom Merry thought he could hear a crackling of flames. But he could see no flame as yet; the fire was not far advanced, wherever it was. "Where is it, Merry?" asked Mr. Railton.

"I don't know, sir; the place is on fire somewhere. It's not downstairs, though. In one of the studies, I think."

"Ring the alarm-bell, Merry."

"Yes, sir."

Tom Merry dashed off to the alarm-bell. He grasped the rope and tugged, and the clang of the bell rang through the silent night. There were loud voices on all sides, shouts of inquiry and alarm. Fellows were turning out of bed in the dorms. Across the quadrangle, lights flashed in the windows of the New House. The fellows over there were startled out of slumber by the clanging of the bell.

"Fire! Fire! Fire!"

"Keep your heads!" rang out Mr. Railton's steady voice. "There is no danger. The prefects will see that all the juniors get out into the quad at once!"

"Yes, sir," said Kildare.

Fellows were streaming downstairs now, in pyjamas, or half-dressed, or carrying their clothes on their arms.

The great door on the quadrangle was thrown open, and the night air rushed into the House, blowing the clouds of smoke along the passages.

Out into the quadrangle the juniors swarmed, and the seniors, too, but all of them did not go. Tom Merry was still ringing the alarm-bell.

Clang, clang, clang!

He left the bell at last; all St. Jim's were wide enough awake now. Manners and Lowther joined him on the stairs. The prefects were filling the fire-buckets that were kept hanging up at the end of each passage. The smoke was thickest in the Shell passage, and the smell of burning was strongest there.

"It's one of the Shell studies," said Tom Merry. "Come on!"

"All juniors into the quad!" shouted Kildare.

The Terrible Three of the Shell appeared deaf. They ran into the Shell passage, and four other juniors joined them there—Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy of the Fourth.

The smoke was thick in the passage, and they gasped for breath.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth. "This is feashful! But buck up, deah boys. I'm with you, you know; don't be scared!"

Tom Merry threw open the study doors in turn as he passed them.

The door of Gore's study, next to Tom Merry's own, was warm to the touch. As Tom Merry threw it open a thick volume of smoke rolled out, and

there was a glimmer of flame, and the juniors reeled back, almost suffocated.

"Oh!"

"Groogh!"

Tom Merry dashed down the passage again.

"Here it is!" he shouted. "It's in Gore's study. Bring the water here!"

"Right!"

A dozen seniors with fire-buckets ran along the passage.

Tom Merry & Co. clutched up buckets and any other vessel they could find and hurriedly filled them at the tap at the end of the passage.

Water was hurled into Gore's study by the bucketful.

The study was a mass of flame and smoke, and little tongues of flame licked out into the passage now that the door was open. If the fire had been given more time it would probably have obtained too firm a hold to be quenched; but, fortunately, the alarm had been given before it was too late.

All the masters were on the scene now; even the Head, half-dressed, had arrived. Seniors from the New House joined those of the School House in carrying water.

There was a dearth of fire-buckets, but jugs and basins served the turn.

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AND

MORE TO COME!

(Turn to page 13.)

Water was swamped into the study in floods.

Tom Merry & Co. worked with the seniors. The rest of the juniors were out in the quadrangle. A huge crowd was gathered there excitedly, calling and talking. The window of Gore's study was the object of all eyes; the heat had cracked the panes now, and smoke was pouring out into the night in a dense volume.

"Bai Jove! We're gettin' it undah!" D'Arcy exclaimed, as he hurled a pail of water into the study and caught Monty Lowther a crack on the head with the empty pail as it swung back.

Lowther roared

"Oh, you ass!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Yow! You've hurt me, you dangerous ass!"

"There is no time to think of twifles, Lowthah!"

"More water here!" shouted Kildare.

"Don't waste time jawing, you kids!"

"Weally, Kildare—"

Kildare was inside the study now, in the thick smoke. The flames were out, but the smoke was still thick; it rolled out of the window into the quad and out of the door into the passage. Water was swamped into the room again and again till Mr. Railton called a halt.

"The fire is out," he said.

"Bai Jove!" gasped D'Arcy. "We've had a feashfully nawwow escape, deah boys! Lucky I was here!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

Mr. Railton examined the study carefully. There was not a spark left, and the smoke was clearing off. The study was gutted; furniture, books—everything was a charred mass; and the walls were burnt and discoloured, the flooring blackened, the ceiling cracked. The School House had undoubtedly had a narrow escape. Mr. Railton came out of the burnt study, smoke-begrimed and blackened, gasping for breath.

"There will be an inquiry into this to-morrow," he said. "Someone has been very careless here. It is very fortunate that the fire was discovered in time. Who was it gave the alarm?"

"Tom Merry, sir," said Manners.

"You have done us a great service, Merry. The boys can return to their dormitories; there is no more danger."

CHAPTER 2.

Tom Merry Gets an Idea!

ST. JIM'S was in a state of the most intense excitement.

The fellows who had extinguished the fire were blackened with smoke, with smarting eyes, and some of them scorched by the flames.

The fellows came in from the quadrangle to stare at the room where the fire had originated.

Gore, the owner of the study, was furious. The loss fell upon him and the fellows who shared the study with him—Vavasour and Skimpole. Vavasour did not seem to mind much; he was a rich fellow, and could afford to lose a few books and articles of furniture. But Skimpole seemed inconsolable. Skimpole blinked into the gutted study through his big spectacles and seemed on the verge of tears.

"Have you lost anything valuable?" asked Blake.

Skimpole nodded mournfully.

"Yes, yes! It is terrible—irreparable!"

"What have you lost, then?" asked Tom Merry.

"My book!"

"What?"

"My book on Determinism," said Skimpole tearfully. "I had written 370 chapters and—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Skimpole blinked indignantly at the juniors. Skimpole was a genius, and he had transferred a great deal of his mighty thoughts to that book, which he had intended to revolutionise the whole school of modern thought—and Skimpole's book had ended in smoke!

"Lucky you hadn't got on very far with it!" grinned Blake. "It would have been worse if you had written 3,000 chapters!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I should have thought that book was too solid to burn," said Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Jolly lucky you weren't all toasted in your little beds, you fellows!" said Figgins of the New House. "You School House chaps do get into scrapes, and no mistake!"

"Weally, Figgins—"

"How did it start?" asked Kerr.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"I don't know. Perhaps Gore left his study fire burning and—"

George Gore snorted.

"I didn't!" he said. "I wasn't in the study after I did my prep. I suppose it was Skimpole—he was there!"

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"Dear me!" said Skimpole. "I should not be surprised. I remember there was a good fire here when I went to bed, and I forgot to rake it out. I had been writing some new paragraphs in my book, and I had thrown some sheets of paper into the grate, and so perhaps—"

"Perhaps, you boiled owl!" hooted Gore. "It's a wonder you didn't burn us all to death, you dangerous fat-head!"

"My dear Gore—"

"Get off to bed, you kids!" called out Kildare, from the passage. "You New House fellows go back to your own House at once!"

The juniors returned to their quarters. Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther washed off the grime as well as they could before turning in. The juniors were not inclined to sleep; the excitement had made them too wakeful for that.

"We've had a narrow escape," Tom Merry remarked. "If that fire had got a firmer hold, we shouldn't have been able to put it out with those buckets. We've been jolly lucky!"

"We want a giddy fire brigade in the school!" Lowther remarked. "Some schools have 'em—amateur fire brigades, you know."

Tom Merry started.

"My hat!"

"What's the matter now?"

Tom Merry clapped his chum on the shoulder.

"A wheeze, my son—a giddy wheeze! A big score over the New House—the biggest score we've ever made—"

"But what—"

"Shush! Can't talk here—too many to hear," said Tom Merry, lowering his voice. "Crooke would give us away—and the other fellows might jaw!"

"Yes. But what—"

"Whisper, and I shall hear!" grinned Monty Lowther.

Tom Merry laughed and whispered:

"What price an amateur fire brigade for the School House? We can work it up, and get it into going order, without letting the New House bounders get a whisper of it. Then when it's wanted, out it comes—ready for business! What?"

"My hat! What a stunning wheeze!"

"And when it's in working order, we can get Skimpole to set his study on fire again!" grinned Manners. "Just to show what we can do!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you fellows cackling about?" demanded Crooke.

The Terrible Three did not answer the question.

They had no intention of taking the cad of the Shell into the secret. It would have to be kept a dead secret if they were to score over the New House by forming an amateur fire brigade unknown to Figgins & Co.

The juniors turned in, and the Shell dormitory got to sleep at last—and the Shell fellows showed a strong disinclination to rise when the rising-bell clanged out on the morning air.

Skimpole of the Shell was called into the Head's study in the morning, and he received a severe lecture on the subject of carelessness with fire, and a caning to drive the lesson home; with the additional information that the bill for damages would be sent to his father.

But Skimpole did not worry over the lecture, the caning, or the bill. He was thinking of those three hundred

and seventy chapters of his great book that had been destroyed—to say nothing of the great volume by Professor Balmcrumpet on the thrilling subject of Determinism.

During morning lessons, Tom Merry was thinking very much of the new wheeze. Meanwhile, painters and glaziers got busy on the gutted study. It was not likely to be habitable again for a day or two; and, meanwhile, Gore, Vavasour, and Skimpole were quartered in other studies.

The Terrible Three had the pleasure of receiving Skimpole—a very doubtful pleasure. But Monty Lowther warned him solemnly that he would be severely bumped if he ventured to utter the word "Determinism," and the genius of the Shell held his peace.

After lessons that day Tom Merry called a meeting in his study. The chums of Study No. 6 came to the meeting, and Kangaroo and Bernard Glyn of the Shell, and Reilly of the Fourth. To the meeting Tom Merry propounded the new scheme.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I vegard it as a wippin' ideah! We shall want a captain of the fire bwigade, Tom Mewwy."

"Oh, that's settled! The most suitable chap takes the job," said Tom Merry modestly.

"Good! If you fellows back me up, we shall make a wippin' success of it, and make Figgins & Co. turn green with envy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see any cause for laughtah! I suppose it's undahstood that I am goin' to be fire captain?"

"Something wrong with your understander, then," said Monty Lowther, with a shake of the head. "When we start a tailor's shop, Gussy, we'll make you head of it. But a fire brigade is a different matter."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Of course, I am fire captain," Tom Merry remarked casually. "I said the most suitable fellow, you know."

"What is vequiahed for a post of that kind, Tom Mewwy, is a fellow of tact and judgment," said Arthur Augustus firmly. "I am not the kind of chap to put myself forward in any way, but I weally considah that you had better leave it to me."

"All right—I'll leave the job to you—"

"Good!"

"In my will!" said Tom Merry pleasantly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you ass—"

"Now, that important point being settled," said Tom Merry, "we've got to consider ways and means—"

"But it isn't settled, Tom Mewwy!"

"Your mistake—it is!"

"I put it to all the fellows," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, jamming his eyeglass into his eye and looking round at the grinning meeting with a great deal of dignity. "I am willin' to leave it to the majowity. Gentlemen, hands up for me as fire captain!"

The juniors put their hands into their pockets.

D'Arcy looked round through his famous monocle in search of a hand elevated, but he failed to find one.

"Well, are you satisfied?" grinned Blake.

D'Arcy shook his head.

"No; upon the whole, I am inclined to agree with Ibsen that majowities are always in the wong," he said. "A matter of this kind ought to go by the minowity. Therefore—"

"Order!"

"I wefuse to ordah—I mean—"

"Never mind what you mean," said Blake. "I move that if Gussy doesn't shut up immediately, we bump him forthwith!"

"Carried unanimously," said Monty Lowther.

Arthur Augustus sniffed, and relapsed into indignant silence. And then the fire committee of the School House proceeded to the discussion of ways and means.

CHAPTER 3.

And So Does Figgins!

FIGGINS of the Fourth was looking very thoughtful. Figgins sat in his study in the New House, his feet resting gracefully upon the table, his hands thrust deep into his pockets.

There was a deep wrinkle on the youthful brow of the great Figgins, showing that his brain was unusually hard at work.

The Co. were in the study, and they were respecting the silence of their great leader. Fatty Wynn was thoughtfully cracking and eating nuts. Kerr was completing an article for "Tom Merry's Weekly." Both of them glanced occasionally at the great Figgins, wondering what was the subject of his meditations.

Figgins broke the silence at last.

"It will work!"

"Go hon!" said Kerr.

"It's a good ideal!"

"What is?"

"The one I've been thinking out. Put that rot away, and listen!"

"It isn't rot—it's an article for the 'Weekly'!"

"Well, shove it away, and listen to me. Leave those nuts alone, Fatty, and lend me your ears!"

"I'll lend you my ears," said Fatty Wynn, cracking another nut. "But you don't want my jaws, I suppose? These nuts are prime!"

"You know there was an outbreak of fire in the School House last night?" said Figgins.

"I believe I've heard something of the sort," said Kerr sarcastically. "Is that what you've been thinking about?"

"Yes."

"It's been put out," said Kerr, in a sarcastic vein.

"Ass! Suppose it hadn't been put out, but had caught a real hold on the House? Those School House duffers would have been burnt out of house and home; they couldn't handle a fire!" said Figgins. "Might have been burnt right out!"

"I shouldn't wonder. But—"

"What this school wants," said Figgins impressively, "is an amateur fire brigade, all ready to deal with an outbreak of that sort."

"Oh!"

"The nearest fire brigade is at Wayland," resumed Figgins. "Suppose there was a really terrific fire—what would happen? The place might be burnt down—especially if it was in the School House, with those duffers over there dealing with it. It is up to the New House to take time by the forelock—what?"

"Hear, hear!"

"That's the idea," said Figgins. "We'll keep it deadly dark, of course. Not a hint of it to those School House bounders. We'll make up a fire brigade—get hatchets and chutes and things down from London—and fairly make

the thing hum. Then, when the necessity arises, we—"

"We arise, too!" suggested Kerr. "Don't be funny. That's where we shall score over the School House!" said Figgins triumphantly.

"Tom Merry & Co. wouldn't dream of a thing like this in a dog's age. And when we've covered ourselves with giddy glory, those bounders will have to own up that the New House is Cock House of St. Jim's, I fancy!"

"It's not half a bad idea!" said Kerr thoughtfully. "More giddy kudos in it than in a House raid, after all. An amateur fire brigade would be a jolly useful thing—good exercise and plenty of fun."

"We'll get all the New House chaps into it," said Figgins eagerly. "There

"What about tea?" suggested Fatty Wynn.

"Br-r-r-r!" "Well, we haven't had tea yet, you know, and—"

Figgins caught his fat chum by the shoulder and ran him out of the study.

"Blow tea!" he said. "Blessed if you're not like Nero, fiddling while Rome was burning! Come on!"

And the famous Co. descended to the Junior Common-room in the New House.

Figgins closed the door when they were inside, and that action caused all eyes to turn upon him.

"What's the matter?" asked Pratt of the Fourth.

"School House raid?" asked Thompson of the Shell.

"All fellows present being enrolled in the New House Fire Brigade, the next question is subscriptions," he said.

"Oh!" said the juniors. And fellows who had looked humorous before looked serious enough now.

"We shall want a lot of things," said Figgins. "Of course, we can't afford fire engines, and ladders and things. But we can get hatchets, for chopping a way into burning buildings—all firemen have them, you know—and we can get patent fire-escapes, for sliding down from windows, and ropes, and things. Then we're going into training as firemen. Any chap who's a slacker can keep out, but he will be expected to subscribe. Slackers can't expect to be protected by other chaps doing all the work for nothing!"



The study was a mass of flame and smoke, and Tom Merry & Co. swamped water through the doorway in floods. "Bai Jove, we're gettin' it undah!" exclaimed D'Arcy as he hurled a pail of water into the room. But as he swung back the pail he caught Monty Lowther a crack on the head. "Ow!" roared Lowther. "You dangerous ass!"

can be a subscription from every member. If there's a lot of chaps the subscriptions won't be very heavy. And what does it matter, anyway? It's for the good of the cause!"

"Hear, hear!"

"We shall have to get supplies down—unknown to the School House, of course. We can practise with the patent fire-escape at the back windows. We can test it with Fatty. If it stands his weight it'll stand anything!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good egg!" said Kerr heartily. "Let's call a meeting of the fellows, and put it to them. They're mostly in the Common-room now."

Figgins jumped up.

"Come on, then—let's strike the iron while it's hot!"

"No; I've got something important to say to you chaps," said Figgins.

"Go ahead!"

Figgins went ahead.

He explained his idea in many words, and some of the New House juniors nodded seriously, and some of them grinned. Evidently there was a diversity of opinion as to the excellence of the idea.

"Now, I think it's a ripping idea," said Figgins, in conclusion. "Every junior in the New House ought to be a member of the fire brigade. It's up to us, you know—the call of duty, and so forth. England expects every man to do his duty!"

"I shouldn't wonder if she gets disappointed, then," remarked Thompson. Figgins did not heed that remark.

"Hear, hear!" said Kerr.

"I'll write out an order for a London firm this evening, and post it," said Figgins. "The tin can be raised tomorrow. All fellows who want to pay in more than their regular subscription will be at liberty to do so."

"H'm!"

"But how much is the giddy subscription going to be?" asked Thompson of the Shell.

Figgins considered.

"I think an entrance-fee of half-a-crown for every member would cover the initial expenses," he remarked. "We can raise more afterwards if we need it. It's worth that to score over the School House, I should say."

"Hear, hear!"

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And Figgins, having taken down the names of the prospective members of the New House Fire Brigade, and collected as many subscriptions as were obtainable on the spot—the number was not large—returned to his study, to write out the order for the London firm to supply the requisites.

The order was carefully considered and written out, and Figgins sealed it, addressed it, and stamped it. Then he rose.

"Nothing like striking while the iron's hot," he remarked, with great satisfaction. "There may be a fire to-morrow, for all we know. I'll slip out now and post this letter, and they'll get it in the morning."

"Mind none of the School House bounders get wind of it," said Kerr.

"What-ho!" said Figgins.

And the New House junior captain slipped out of the House, and scuttled across the dusky quadrangle to the school letter-box. Through the dusk of the quadrangle another figure was making for the same spot, from the direction of the School House. They met at the letter-box, and Figgins gave Tom Merry a feeble grin and a nod, keeping his letter behind him, in case the Shell fellow should accidentally see the address.

Tom Merry nodded genially, and also kept his hand, with a letter in it, behind him. Of course, he knew that Figgins wouldn't actually look at the address on another fellow's letter, but he might see it by accident, and if he did, he would suspect. For Tom Merry was also sending off an expensive order that evening to a big London firm for supplies.

"Hallo!" said Figgins, keeping his hand carefully behind him.

"Hallo!" said Tom Merry. "Collection's not gone yet, I think?"

"I think not."

"Got a letter to post?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yes. Have you?"

"Yes. Shove yours in."

"After you!" said Figgins, with great politeness.

"Not at all; after you, Figgy!"

But Figgins had become suddenly punctilious. He retreated a step.

"Oh, shove your letter in, Figgy, and don't be an ass!"

"After you!"

"Rats!"

Tom Merry walked away. Figgins slipped his letter into the box, with a chuckle, and cut away towards the New House. Then Tom Merry returned to the letter-box and put his letter in, and walked away, smiling, towards the School House.

The letter was posted safely, and the New House had been given no clue. And Figgins at that precise moment was congratulating himself that his letter had been posted safely and the School House given no clue! And so both were satisfied.

CHAPTER 4.

Tom Merry & Co. Boxed!

THERE was a great deal of subdued excitement among the juniors of both Houses at St. Jim's the next day.

The idea of the fire brigade had caught on.

Quite unknown to each other, two amateur fire brigades were being formed in the school, and the secret was being kept so carefully that they seemed likely to flourish side by side.

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as it were, without knowing of each other's existence.

Indeed, the juniors of both Houses were too busy just now to be looking out for the secrets of the rival party. If Figgins & Co. were unusually busy among themselves, and kept very much to their own quarters, that only made it easier for Tom Merry & Co. to keep their secret; and if Tom Merry & Co. had something to keep them occupied in the School House, that made things easier for Figgins & Co.

Both the amateur fire captains received replies two days later from London to the effect that the consignments of articles required would be delivered that day by goods-train to Rylcombe, and then by carrier to the school.

The consignments had been asked for at the earliest possible moment, and they were coming—together. Tom Merry expected a huge packing-case immediately after tea. Figgins had the same blissful expectation, and both of them were considering ways and means of getting the packing-cases in without the observation of the other.

Tom Merry thought about it a good deal during lessons that day, and received fifty lines from Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, without heeding. What were lessons, and even lines, at such a time as this, when the School House were about to score their biggest triumph over the New House?

"We'll walk down to the station, and get the packing-case ourselves," said Tom Merry to his chums, when they came out of the Shell class-room. "We can get it here in Boggs' cart, and sneak it in the back way. Toby will help us, as if it were a consignment from some tradesman in the village—see? Then we can unpack the case in the yard, and get the things into the School House without any of the New House bounders smelling a rat. But if a big packing-case is delivered here, addressed to Tom Merry, the bounders will be sure to get on the scent of it."

"Good egg!" said Monty Lowther.

Toby, the School House page, was approached on the subject, and gave his assistance readily. He would have the tradesmen's gate open ready, and would help to shove the case into the woodshed as soon as it arrived, and would take charge of it, to prevent questions being asked.

Satisfied on this point, the Terrible Three walked cheerfully down to Rylcombe to claim their packing-case at the railway station.

Mr. Boggs, the greengrocer, lent his cart, for the usual consideration, and the packing-case was lifted into it by the station porters, and the chums of the Shell drove off with it in triumph. Had they waited half an hour they might have seen another and similar packing-case loaded upon the carrier's cart, addressed to Master Figgins, of the New House at St. James' Collegiate School. But they did not wait half an hour—they did not waste a minute.

Tom Merry took the reins, and drove away carefully to St. Jim's, with Lowther and Manners sitting behind with the large packing-case.

The cart bowled down the lane under the red sunset. There was a sudden yell from a group of juniors in caps standing by the old stile half-way to St. Jim's. Three or four of them ran out into the road and seized the horse's head, and the cart was brought to a sudden halt.

Gordon Gay, of the Rylcombe Grammar School, looked up at the St. Jim's juniors with a grin.

"Stand and deliver!" he exclaimed.

There were nine or ten of the Grammarians, and they surrounded the cart. Gordon Gay stood beside it, with one foot on the step. Monk, Lane, and Carboy held the horse, and Wootton major and minor caught hold of the tailboard. The Terrible Three pushed back their cuffs, ready for trouble.

"Keep off, you bounders!" said Tom Merry. "It's pax!"

The Grammarians chuckled.

"Who said it's pax?" demanded Gordon Gay. "This is where we come in! It takes two to make a bargain."

"What have you got in that case?" demanded Wootton major. "No grub, I suppose?"

"No."

"What is it?"

"Things."

"Go hon! To the victors the spoils," said Gordon Gay, sententiously. "I'll tell you what, you chaps! We'll have the case down here and burst it open."

"You won't!" roared Tom Merry.

"And shove out the things, and put these bounders into it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Stand back! We're going on!" shouted Tom.

The horse started on; but Monk, Lane, and Carboy hung on to his head, and he stopped again.

Mr. Boggs' horse was not a fiery charger, and he was not equal to the strain. He stopped contentedly, and did not even try to lift his head; he browsed on the grass beside the lane. And the Grammarian juniors swarmed into the cart on all sides.

"Sack it to 'em!" shouted Manners.

"Buck up, St. Jim's!"

"Rescue, St. Jim's!" roared Tom Merry, in the faint hope that some other St. Jim's fellows might be within hearing.

But there was no help at hand. The Terrible Three put up a terrific fight, quite worthy of their reputation. Gordon Gay was knocked out of the cart, and Wootton major and minor rolled over him in the road. Gustave Blanc, the French Grammarian, was pitched into the ditch, which was fortunately dry; but he rolled there, and shrieked in shrill French.

"Help! Zat you help me! A moi! A moi! A l'aide!"

But the other fellows were too busy to help Mont Blong. They swarmed to the attack. Gordon Gay was pitched out again; but he clung to Tom Merry, and dragged the Shell fellow out with him, and they rolled over in a loving embrace. Wootton major succeeded in getting a grip on Monty Lowther, and they rolled out of the back of the cart together, and roared in unison as they bumped in the road.

Manners was still defending the cart manfully; but the odds were too great, and he was yanked out.

Amid clouds of dust and flying legs and arms, the Terrible Three still struggled in the road, but they were overcome at last. Each of them was firmly grasped and sat upon by two of the Grammarians, and they were reduced to helplessness.

Gordon Gay, gasping, mopped his streaming nose with his handkerchief.

"Got 'em!" he chortled.

"Hurrah!" panted Frank Monk.

"Lemme go, you beasts!" roared Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha! I don't think!"

Mont Blong struggled out of the ditch, and waved his battered hat in triumph.

"Victoire! Victoire!" he yelled.

(Continued at foot of next page.)

Champions of Speed and Sport

Facts to Interest You About the Record-Breakers Forming the Subjects of This Week's Splendid Set of Pictures.

He Did the "Hat Trick"!—The Mannin Moar (meaning, in the Manx language, "Big Man") Motor-Car Road Race has been held three times—and every time it has been won by the same man, the Hon. Brian Lewis! In 1933, the first year the event was held, he slashed around the 202 miles course at an average of 64.23 m.p.h. in his supercharged Alfa-Romeo. The following year he added 10 m.p.h. to his winning speed, and crossed the finishing line in another Alfa at 75.34 m.p.h. Last year, Lewis pushed the average still higher—75.57 m.p.h., in a Bugatti—thus becoming the first man to win an international motor-car road-race three years in succession. It is the 1935 winning Bugatti that you see in our picture this week.

Winning Every Record!—A few years ago, nobody had ever heard of Tom Farndon. He was then a worker in a Coventry motor-car body-building firm. To-day, he is honoured as the greatest speedway rider Britain has produced since the dirt-track sport came to us from Australia, and his tragic death from injuries received in a crash in August, 1935, robbed the world of one of its finest sportsmen. Farndon was the only speedway rider to hold the National League Championship, the London Riders' Championship, and the British Individual Championship at the same time; in

addition, there was a period when he held every rolling-start record in the country, and every record at New Cross Stadium, his home track.

Britain Beats the World!—On a misty October morning in 1934, a huge crowd gathered at Melbourne Airport, Australia, cheered themselves hoarse as a red monoplane came winging out of the sky, landed, and disgorged two tired airmen. Those airmen were Charles William Anderson Scott and Tom Campbell Black, co-pilots of the plane that had brought them from Mildenhall, England, in 2 days 4½ hours, winning the England-Australia Air Race against the fastest planes and finest pilots the rest of the world could produce. Two days and a bit to reach Australia—think of it! It had meant averaging over 200 m.p.h. in the "Comet" between stopping places, and it beat the previous record by well over four days! Their gallant effort won for Scott and Black the £10,000 first prize in the race, and gave British aviation a filip that earned the admiring congratulations of the whole world.

From Messenger Boy to World Champ.—Less than twenty years ago, James Braddock was a messenger boy running errands in an American town. To-day, after a life of hard knocks and many rough times, he's sitting on top of the

world as champion heavyweight boxer of the world. It was on June 13th, 1935, that Jimmy set the seal to his boxing fame. He was matched against Max Baer, reckoned to be the toughest fighter ever seen in the ring. In about half an hour, Jimmy had Baer flopping against the ropes—and was richer by £100,000, and the world's championship!

The World's Biggest Battleship.—It cost over six million pounds to build H.M.S. Hood, giant of the British Navy, and biggest warship afloat. On top of that, another half-million goes in her upkeep every year, and as she's been afloat since 1920 you can reckon it out that she's cost Britain over thirteen million pounds up to date. Three and a half years were taken to build the Hood. She's 860 feet long, with a beam of 105 feet. Her hull is covered with armour plating 15 inches thick, and it would go hard with any enemy ship which "tickled" her with shells, for she mounts no fewer than eighty guns of various types, including six that can knock the bottom out of the enemy at a range of over 20 miles!

Hughie Gallacher—£300 an Inch!—Hughie Gallacher, Scottish International footballer and Derby County's centre-forward, has only been playing first-class Soccer for fifteen years, and in that time he has cost various clubs a total of £20,000 in transfer money. He's only a little fellow, 5 feet 6 inches in height, so that works out at round about £300 an inch for this footballing wizard. Nineteen times he's been "capped" for Scotland, the first occasion being way back in 1924. Last year, when he was transferred from Chelsea to Derby, Hughie only played in 27 matches for his new side, but even then he managed to notch 23 goals.

"Ve have conquered, n'est ce pas? Victoire! Zis is vere ve laff. He, he, he!"

"I'll he, he, he, you if I get up!" growled Tom Merry.

"Hurrah for us!" grinned Wootton major. "Now for the packing-case!"

"Bring the cart round the corner so that we shan't be interrupted," said Gordon Gay.

"Right-ho!"

Close by there was a turning that led between high hedges towards Glyn House. It was a very quiet lane, only used by vehicles going to the residence of Mr. Glyn. Monk led the horse round the corner, and the Grammarians followed with their prisoners. They had tied the Terrible Three hand and foot with handkerchiefs, and the unfortunate Saints had no chance of resisting. They were dumped down in the grass beside the lane, till wanted, as Gordon Gay remarked.

Then the great packing-case was lifted down into the road.

"What on earth have you got in here?" said Gordon Gay, looking at the huge case in perplexity.

"What is it, Tom Merry?" asked Monk.

"Find out!" growled Tom Merry.

"That's what we're going to do."

"May we open it, Merry?"

"No!" roared the St. Jim's junior.

"Won't you let us?"

"No!"

"Persuade him, Monkey."

"Certainly!" chuckled Frank Monk. He took Tom Merry's nose between finger and thumb.

"Groogh!"

"May we open the case?"

"Groogh! No! Groogh!"

"May we?" Monk's finger and thumb closed like a vice. "Now—"

"Groogh! Yeb—you beast—yeb!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He doesn't speak very clearly, but he means yes," grinned Monk.

Gordon Gay, having thus obtained permission, untied the cord with which the packing-case was secured. Then he took out a pocket-knife which was a miniature tool-chest in itself, and opened the portion which served as a screwdriver, and wrenched up the nailed top of the case. He uttered an exclamation of amazement:

"My only hat! Choppers, saws, ropes, bags! What on earth—"

"Great Scott!"

"Are you going to open a shop, Tom Merry?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shove the things out," said Monk.

"There won't be room for those things and the other articles!"

The contents of the packing-case were piled in the grass beside the road. The Terrible Three looked on furiously, unable to interfere.

"What did you want with all this stuff, Tom Merry?" Gordon Gay asked.

"Looks like an outfit for a young fire brigade."

Tom Merry snorted.

"That's what it is, you asses! And look here, we're keeping it dark from the New House chaps at St. Jim's, so don't let on to them."

Gordon Gay nodded.

"That's a compact," he said. "Honour bright—not a word! We'll leave the stuff packed here under the tree, out of sight in the bush—and you can fetch it in a bit at a time, if you like. You

won't be able to take it with you now because there won't be room in the packing-case."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here—" began Tom Merry.

"Shove the case back into the cart," said Gay, "and then shove them in!"

"Look here—"

"Nuff said!"

The empty case was lifted into the cart again. Then the Terrible Three were lifted into it. There was just room for the three, but it was very close quarters. They struggled vainly in their bonds. They sat close together in the huge case, and Gordon Gay replaced the split-up lid. They glared up at the humorous Grammarians from the interior of the case.

"We—we'll boil you for this some day!" mumbled Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll leave an opening for you to breathe," said Gordon Gay kindly. "Is there anything else we can do for you?"

"Br-r-r-r-r!"

Gay hammered in the nails again, leaving a long crack in the lid for air. Then the cords were tied once more round the packing-case. Gordon Gay took a pencil from his pocket and wrote on the label:

"WITH GREAT CARE!"

The Grammarians chuckled joyously. It was the biggest joke they had ever worked off on Tom Merry & Co. Gordon Gay took up the reins, and Monk led the horse out into the road again. And the victorious Grammarians gave Gay a ringing cheer as he drove off towards St. Jim's.

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CHAPTER 5.

With Care!

FIGGINS & CO. strolled down to the school gates about six o'clock with an air of exaggerated carelessness which would have excited suspicion at once if anyone had observed them.

The carrier was not due yet, but Figgins & Co. wanted to be sure of being on the spot when he arrived. They intended to tip Taggles, the porter, to take the packing-case quickly into the yard by the tradesmen's entrance and keep it there. Then the contents could be smuggled into the New House piecemeal without observation. Without the slightest suspicion that a packing-case was coming for Tom Merry—with Tom Merry inside it, as it happened—Figgins & Co. watched for the carrier.

There was a sound of wheels in the road.

"Here he comes!" said Fatty Wynn. Figgins shook his head.

"That isn't the carrier," he said.

"My hat, it's Gordon Gay of the Grammarians driving Boggs' cart!"

"Like his cheek to come along here," said Kerr. "Let's collar him, and bump him!"

"No time for ragging Grammar School cads now—we don't want to get a crowd round the gates," said the cautious Figgins. "Easy does it!"

"Right! That's so!" agreed Kerr.

Gordon Gay drove up to the gates and turned the horse in. The three New House juniors jumped back.

"He's coming in!"

"What do you want here, you Grammarian bounder?"

Gay brought the cart to a halt outside Taggles' lodge.

"Packing-case for St. Jim's," he said. "I've brought it."

Figgins was stupefied for a moment.

"Our packing-case!" he shouted. Gay grinned.

"Not for you!" he said. "This is addressed to Tom Merry!"

"What!"

"However, you can do as you like

with it," said Gay, jumping down from the cart. "I'll leave it here. I dare say Boggs will want his cart back some time; you can settle that. Au revoir!"

"Look here, Gay——"

"Sorry, can't stop! Good-bye, blue-bell!"

Figgins, mystified, made a rush at Gay; but the elusive Cornstalk dodged him and escaped into the road. He walked away, whistling, while Figgins & Co. and Taggles gathered round the cart and stared at the packing-case.

Inside it there was not a sound.

The Terrible Three were as silent as mice.

They knew what a yell of laughter would go up if they were discovered bottled up in the packing-case, and they kept perfectly silent. There was a chance that the case, being addressed to Tom Merry, might be taken into the School House, and that the Terrible Three might be released by their own chums without the adventure becoming known.

Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy, and Digby, Kangaroo, and a good many more fellows were eagerly awaiting the arrival of the case.

"It's addressed to Tom Merry," said Figgins, reading the label. "But it can't be for him. There's some mistake."

"Queer that he should be getting a packing-case the same time that we're expecting one," said Kerr. "Besides, how did Gordon Gay get hold of it? He must have got it away from the carrier somehow!"

"And changed the label very likely," said Figgins eagerly. "That's what happened. He has collared our packing-case and addressed it to Tom Merry to give us away. If he looked into it he would have seen the fire brigade things, and then very likely he tumbled to the wheeze."

"Hullo!"

"What's the matter?"

"I thought I heard a sound inside the case," said Kerr with a puzzled look.

Figgins laughed.

"Of course you didn't, ass! Hatchets and ropes and things aren't alive. They're our fire brigade things, that's all!"

"There it is again!"

Figgins jumped.

"My hat! I thought I heard something then!" he ejaculated.

"Oh, rot!" said Fatty. "It's our case right enough. Get it into the yard before some of those School House bounders spot us!"

"Taggles——"

"Wot's that, Master Figgins?" said the school porter.

"This case is for me——"

"It's addressed to Master Merry," said Taggles, scanning the label.

"Yes, that's a little joke of that bounder Gay—he's changed the labels," Figgins explained. "This case belongs to us. I was just going to tell you that we were expecting one, and to ask you to get it round to the stable quietly. You see, we don't want the School House chaps to spot us."

Taggles grinned. The old porter had seen enough of the rivalry between the Houses of St. Jim's to be suspicious. He had not the slightest doubt that Figgins intended to bag a packing-case belonging to Tom Merry of the School House. He shook his head.

"Tain't good enough, Master Figgins," he replied. "This 'ere case is addressed to Master Merry, as plain as anything."

"It's a joke of Gordon Gay's," Figgins explained.

Taggles shook his head again.

"I've got half-a-crown here, Taggles," said Figgins insinuatingly.

"Can't be done, Master Figgins. The thing is addressed to Tom Merry; though wot he wants with a packing-case this size is more than I can say!"

"Look here, Taggles——"

"You can't 'ave it, Master Figgins, and that's flat. Fetch Master Merry 'ere, and see wot 'e says, if you like."

"No, no!" exclaimed Figgins hurriedly. "It's a giddy secret!"

Taggles chuckled. He mistook the reason of Figgins' desire to keep the school fellows out of sight of the packing-case.

"Besides, Tom Merry's gone out," said Kerr. "I saw him go out with Manners and Lowther more than an hour ago."

"I'm afraid you can't 'ave it, Master Figgins."

"Five bob, Taggles——"

"Hullo! What's that?" demanded Gore of the Shell, coming up and staring at the cart.

"Mind your own business!" snapped Figgins.

He was getting anxious now. Several fellows were coming up to see what was going on.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as he caught sight of the packing-case. "Here it is, deah boys!"

"Shurrup!" murmured Blake, with a gesture towards the New House juniors.

"Weally, Blake——"

"Get it out, quick, and drag it away!" whispered Figgins to his chums.

The Co. looked rather doubtful at the huge case. It did not look as if it would be easy for three juniors to drag it away. But it was evidently the only chance.

Figgins firmly believed that it was the packing-case—and if that was so, and it was delivered to Tom Merry, the secret would be out.

"Shove it out!" said Figgins.

"Look here——" began Taggles.

The Boy who Wouldn't Make Friends!

By FRANK RICHARDS



In the opinion of Harry Wharton & Co., the cheery chums of Greyfriars, one Hacker in the school is enough and to spare. Now, like a bolt from the blue, comes the Shell master's nephew, Eric Wilmot, whose room is better than his company! Here's a school yarn every GEM reader will enjoy—written specially by Frank Richards for our companion paper—

Be sure you ask to-day for

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Taggles was interrupted. There was a sudden yell from inside the packing-case. The Terrible Three had heard all that was said; and the prospects of being bumped out of the cart to the ground alarmed them.

"Stop!"

Figgins, who had his hands on the case, jumped back in amazement.

"My only hat!" exclaimed Blake.

"It—it's got somebody inside!"

"Well, my heye!" said Taggles.

"Open it and look in!"

"It—it can't be ours, after all," murmured Figgins. "But what—"

"Let us out, you silly asses!" roared a voice from within the packing-case.

Concealment was impossible now, and the Terrible Three wanted to get it over.

There was a shout of astonishment.

"That's Tom Merry's voice!"

"Gweat Scott!"

"How on earth—"

"Will you let us out?" came a muffled voice from the packing-case.

"You frabjous asses, lemme gerrou!"

"Oh!"

"Bai Jove!"

Figgins opened his pocket-knife and cut through the cords. Then he wrenched off the loosened boards on top of the packing-case.

Fellows clambered on the cart on all sides to stare into it. There was a wild yell at the sight of the Terrible Three sitting there, with crimson faces, amid the straw.

"Tom Merry!"

"Lowther!"

"Manners!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gweat Scott!"

The Terrible Three glared at the yelling juniors. They were not in the mood to laugh themselves; the comic side of the matter did not appeal to them at all. They gasped and glared, while the other fellows, School House and New House alike, yelled with merriment.

"With care!" gasped Gore, reading the label. "Oh, my hat! Ha, ha, ha!"

"It was Gordon Gay brought it here!" roared Figgins. "Ha, ha, ha! It's one of the Grammarians' little jokes—and the School House bouncers have got done in, as usual. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Help us out, you fatheads!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Terrible Three had struggled to their feet. Blake, weeping with laughter, cut the handkerchiefs that were knotted round their wrists. The chums of the Shell untied their feet, while the crowd thickened round the cart and roared.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther scrambled out of the packing-case at last, red and dusty and furious. Figgins staggered against the gate shrieking with laughter.

A curious crowd followed Tom Merry & Co. to the School House, eager to hear how they had got into the packing-case, but Figgins called back the Co. to the school gates.

"That isn't our packing-case," said Figgins, wiping away his tears. "It's a giddy joke of the Grammarians! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Co.

"Here comes the carrier!" grinned Figgins.

The carrier had arrived. He dumped down the packing-case addressed to the chief of the New House juniors; and in a few minutes it was safely deposited in the yard—Tom Merry & Co. being too

much occupied just then to have an eye on Figgins and the New House fellows.

CHAPTER 6.

Blake Goes Scouting!

"H A, ha, ha!"

"Ho, ho, ho!"

"Shut up!" roared Tom

Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shurrup, you silly asses!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you—"

"Pway excuse me, deah boy! It was wathah funny, you know—"

"Gerrou!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Quite a crowd of School House fellows had followed the Terrible Three into the Shell dormitory; they wanted to know how it had happened. The hapless chums of the Shell had gone to the dormitory to wash and brush their clothes after their confinement in the narrow limits of the packing-case.

And a dozen or more fellows watched them and yelled with laughter as if they would never stop.

Monty Lowther grasped a jug of water and waved it in the air.

"This is for the next idiot that cackles!" he shouted.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Shurrup!"

"I can't help it, deah boy; it is vewy funny! Ha, ha, ha! Yow!"

Splash!

"Yaroop!"

Arthur Augustus received the contents of the water jug. He roared now—not with laughter. His beautiful Eton jacket and spotless shirt were swamped.

"Ow! You uttah ass! Gwoogh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Terrible Three in their turn. "It's funny! Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you uttah wottah—"

Arthur Augustus made a rush at Monty Lowther. Lowther picked up another water jug and stood ready for him, grinning.

The swell of St. Jim's suddenly halted.

"Put down that jug, Lowthah, and I will give you a feahful thwashin'!"

Lowther shook his head.

"Not good enough, Gussy!" he replied.

"You—you wottah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I will give you a feahful thwashin' when I have changed my clothes, you feahful beast! Gwoogh! My collah is wet—my shirt is dwippin'! Br-r-r-r!" And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy hurried away to the Fourth Form dormitory to change.

"But how on earth did you get into that packing-case, you fellows?" asked Jack Blake, when his merriment had calmed down somewhat.

Tom Merry snorted.

"The Grammarians waylaid us in the road. They shoved the things out of the packing-case and shoved us in. That's all! Br-r-r-r!"

"Are the things safe?" asked Kangaroo.

"Yes. We can fetch them all right. The rotters played the game, so far as that goes," said Tom Merry. "The things are all serene."

"And Figgins hasn't caught on—that's the great thing!" said Blake. "He doesn't know anything, excepting that the Grammarians sent you here in a packing-case, with care! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, leave off cackling!" said Tom

Merry crossly. "I'm fed-up!"

(Continued on the next page.)



Make the Jester Smile and Win a MATCH FOOTBALL!

Send your Joke to The GEM Jester, 1, Tallis House, John Carpenter Street, London, E.C.4 (Comp.).

FLATTERY!

"Dad," said Tommy, "a boy at school to-day told me I was very much like you."

"Oo!" said his father, with a smile.

"And what did you say?"

"Nothing!" came the reply. "He's a lot bigger than me!"

A football has been awarded to W. Leitch, 87, Mansfield Place, Torry, Aberdeen.

A SCOT'S DILEMMA!

Wally D'Arcy: "I say, Joe, what's a dilemma?"

Joe Frayne: "I dunno, Wally."

Wally: "A dilemma, my dear chump, is a superstitious Scot seeing a sixpence under a ladder!"

A football has been awarded to C. McKendrick, 54, Nith Street, Riddrie, Glasgow.

SOME PLAYER!

Football Manager. "I've found the very player we want. Eye like a hawk, body like a bullock, speed of a race-horse, and a kick like a mule!"

Director: "It's a forward we want, not a farmyard!"

A football has been awarded to P. Pascoe, 75, Eastcote Road, Ruimsip, Middlesex.

INCONSIDERATE!

Doctor: "Look here, don't you know my consulting hours are from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.?"

Patient: "Yes, but the dog that bit me didn't!"

A football has been awarded to R. Smith, 24, Glasgow Street, Dumfries.

A "SOUND" SLEEPER!

Lodger: "I slept like a log last night."

Landlady: "Umph! Sounded as though a saw was going through it!"

A football has been awarded to T. Shadgett, 10a, Louisville Road, Tooting Bec, London, S.W. 17.

AN OUTSIZE POULTICE!

Circus Attendant: "I want fifty loaves, please."

Baker: "Giving a party?"

Attendant: "Party be blowed! The mule's kicked the elephant, and I've got to make a bread poultice!"

A football has been awarded to F. Coackley, 13, Jackson Street, Chaddle, Cheshire.

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"All right. Ha, ha, ha! All serene. I won't cackle— Ha, ha, ha!"

"Figgins doesn't know our little game; but I know his. They've got the same wheeze over in the New House, and they were keeping it dark—just as we were."

"Wha-a-a-at!"

"We heard them jawing over the packing-case," Tom Merry explained. "Figgys thought that the packing-case was for him, and that Gordon-Gay had changed the address for a lark. He was expecting a packing-case, with things in it for an amateur fire brigade."

"My hat!"

"They must have got on to the wheeze," said Blake thoughtfully.

"Might have thought of it on their own," said Kangaroo. "But the game's up now—if they're working the same dodge."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"They don't know that we're doing it, too," he said. "We've got to stop them. Whether they've boned our wheeze, or thought of it themselves, it all comes to the same thing. There's room for only one fire brigade at St. Jim's."

"Yes, rather!"

"Figgys must have ordered a lot of things at the same time that we did," Tom Merry said, wrinkling his brows in thought. "Well, when his packing-case comes, we've got to get hold of it somehow. And the things will have to disappear."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And, mind, not a word! We don't want the New House bounders to know that we're starting the same dodge."

"What-ho! We shall have to scout round the New House and get on to the packing-case somehow," said Digby.

"That's a wheeze! They can't get a big packing-case into the House; they'll have to shove it somewhere, and get the things in by themselves. Taggy will know when it comes, and we can get it out of him."

"I'll go and see Taggles now," said Blake.

"Good egg!"

Blake left the dormitory, leaving the Terrible Three brushing their clothes.

Taggles, the porter, was outside his lodge with his mastiff when Blake bore down upon him.

There was no sign of the New House juniors near the gate. Figgins & Co. were gone.

"Good-evening, Taggles!" said Blake affably.

Taggles looked at him suspiciously. He had had his rubs with the chums of Study No. 6, and he was suspicious of Blake when he was polite.

"Hevenin'!" said Taggles shortly.

"Nice weather for the time of year, Taggles!"

"None of your larks, Master Blake."

Blake assumed an injured air.

"Taggles, old man, you're growing suspicious in your old age. The fact is I'm expecting a packing-case."

"Hanybody hinside it?" asked Taggles, with a grin.

Blake grinned, too.

"Seems to be raining packing-cases," said Taggles. "Fust there comes one addressed to Master Merry, with Master Merry shut up in it, and then one for Master Figgins, so 'eavy that it could 'ardly be moved."

Blake's eyes gleamed.

"You didn't have to carry it, I suppose?" he said.

"I 'ad to 'elp!" growled Taggles.

"Poor old Taggles!" said Blake.

"Must have been a heavy job getting

a packing-case upstairs in the New House."

Taggles grunted.

"Tain't in the New House," he said.

"Too big to take into the 'Ouse."

"Oh, I see! Got it in your lodge, I suppose?"

"That I ain't, Master Blake! No room for bloomin' packin'-cases in my lodge!"

"I don't see it about here," said Blake, glancing round.

"I took it into the garage yard," said Taggles. "Master Figgins wants it to be left there a bit."

"Oh!" said Blake. "Didn't the carrier have anything for me, Taggles?"

"No, Master Blake."

"Tell him he's a rotter when he comes again, then, will you?" said Blake cheerfully; and he strolled away, inwardly chuckling with glee at having discovered Figgins' little secret.

He burst into the Shell dormitory a few minutes later. The Terrible Three had finished removing the dust from their persons and their garments, and they were once more, as Monty Lowther put it, clothed, and in their right minds.

"Got it!" chorled Blake.

"Got what—the packing-case?"

"I know where it is. It's come, and Taggles has put it in the garage yard for Figgins; and it's there now."

"Good egg!"

"The New House rotters will try to smuggle the things into their House after dark," said Blake. "They won't want us to see anything. I've got an idea. Some of us are going to pay Figgys a visit—a nice peaceful visit, as nice schoolboys like us ought to do to their dear schoolmates. And while they're doing it, some others of us will be looking after the packing-case for Figgins, and save him any trouble. We ought to save our dear schoolmates trouble, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You see," went on Blake eagerly. "Figgys won't make a move to get anything in from the packing-case while there are School House fellows hanging about the place. You fellows can keep him in talk, while I—"

"Good egg!"

"Keep 'em busy while we get the packing-case done. There's a garret over the garages that's never used. We can take the things up there and hide them, and break up the packing-case, and hide the bits there, too. When Figgys goes to look for it, he'll find that the whole bag of tricks has vanished."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the chums of the School House proceeded to carry out their idea. There was no time to waste, for already, as a poet would have observed, the shades of night were falling fast.

CHAPTER 7.

Editorial Duties!

F IGGINS looked at his watch. The light was on in the Co.'s study in the New House; but it was not yet quite dark in the quadrangle.

"Better wait another half-hour," said Kerr. "If we're seen carting things into the House, it will make those rotters over the way smell a rat. There's a lot of time."

Figgins nodded, and replaced his watch.

"Yes; better be on the safe side," he agreed.

"Might as well have a snack now," Fatty Wynn remarked thoughtfully.

Figgins grunted.

"You've had tea once, you fat boulder!"

"Well, I had to lend a hand with that packing-case, you know, and work always makes me feel hungry. I'll cut down to the tuckshop, and—"

Tap!

"Come in!" called out Figgins.

He expected to see Redfern or Thompson, or some other New House junior when the door opened. He started a little at the sight of Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther. The Terrible Three came into the study with friendly smiles.

"Hallo!" said Figgins, not very amiably. "What do you School House bounders want?"

"We've come over to see you," said Tom Merry. "I suppose you know that the 'Weekly' is due on Saturday."

"Oh, bother the 'Weekly'!" said Figgins.

"The fact is, we've come to do a little editorial work," explained Tom Merry, laying a pile of paper on the table. "There are giddy workmen in the study next to us, papering, you know—doing overtime to get the place finished. You've said sometimes that the editorial office of the 'Weekly' ought to be in the New House, so we're giving you a turn."

"Not putting you out in any way, I hope?" said Monty Lowther blandly. Figgins turned a little red.

"Well, the fact is, we—we're rather busy," he stammered.

"Got something special on this evening?" asked Manners.

"Oh, I don't know about something special, but—"

"Standing a feed—eh?"

"No; we're not standing a feed."

"Got lines to do?"

"No, we're not doing lines."

"Then we may as well do our editorial work here," said Tom Merry, pulling a chair up to the table. "It will only take about half an hour."

Figgins & Co. exchanged glances.

The visit of the Terrible Three was decidedly awkward at that moment.

As soon as it was completely dark, the New House juniors intended to convey into the House, in separate lots, the contents of the packing-case now reposing in the garage yard. But that could certainly not be done secretly while the chums of the School House were on the spot.

The Terrible Three were keen enough, and if they had the least suspicion that anything unusual was going on, they would be upon the qui vive at once. But it was impossible to turn them out, either, without making them suspicious. If Figgins refused to have the editorial work done in his study, it would look as if he had some special reason for wanting to get rid of the Terrible Three, as, indeed, he had. And they might keep an eye on the New House to find out what it was, suspecting some move of the enemy.

There was only one thing to do—to be polite to the visitors, and get rid of them as soon as possible without raising their suspicions.

And that, after a mute exchange of glances, was what Figgins & Co. decided upon.

The Terrible Three seemed to see nothing of the preoccupation of their involuntary hosts.

They sat down at the table and dipped pens in the ink, ready to start churning out "copy" required for the

current number of "Tom Merry's Weekly."

"Finished your article yet, Kerr?"

asked Manners.

"N-not yet."

"Why not get on with it now, then? It will have to be ready for Saturday, you know."

Kerr gave Figgins a hopeless look.

"Might as well," said Figgins, inwardly raging and outwardly smiling sweetly. "No time like the present, you know. I'll get on with my serial, the 'Bloodstained Brigand in the Blue Mountains.'"

"Good egg!" said Tom Merry affably. "That brigand serial of yours is jolly interesting, Figgy. Perhaps a little bit highly coloured, but it's awfully exciting. I want to read the next instalment myself—really! What does he do when he finds himself in the cave with the water rising over his napper?"

Figgins looked gratified. Figgins' ideas in fiction were a little lurid; but Figgins was rather proud of his powers as a sensational novelist. Black chiefs and gory pirates and bloodstained brigands flourished in the serial stories Figgins contributed to the pages of "Tom Merry's Weekly," and many of the juniors said they were funnier than Monty Lowther's comic page.

"I don't quite know myself how he gets out of it," said Figgins candidly. "But it was a jolly good situation for ending up the last instalment, wasn't it?"

"Ripping!" said Tom Merry heartily. "Make a chap come in an aeroplane to rescue him," suggested Monty Lowther. "The pilot could turn out to be his long-lost uncle, and—"

"Oh, don't be an ass!"

"Make it a jolly good instalment this time," said Tom Merry encouragingly. "If we haven't enough room to go round, we'll leave out some of Monty Lowther's jokes."

"Oh, will you?" said Monty Lowther belligerently.

"Yes. If the fellows want them, they can turn back to the first number for them. They're much the same, you know," said Tom Merry blandly.

"You silly ass!"

"Order!" said Manners. "Contributors are not allowed to tell an editor what they think of him! Get on with the washing!"

"Fatty Wynn might do us an extra article on making toffee," said Tom Merry. "A good many readers have spoken about his recipe for toasted cheese."

"Oh, good! I don't mind if I do," said Wynn.

And the six juniors settled down to editorial work.

A little later Redfern of the Fourth looked into the study.

"I say, Figgins, isn't it time to— Oh—" Redfern broke off at the sight of the School House juniors.

Figgins made him a rapid sign.

Tom Merry looked round innocently.

"Hallo, Reddy! Got something for the 'Weekly' this week?"

"N-no!" stammered Redfern.

"You were asking Figgins—"

"Oh, n-n-nothing!" said Redfern.

"It's all right. I'll look in again some time, Figgy!"

And Redfern retired in confusion, and closed the study door.

He had very nearly given the game away to the School House juniors.

Tom Merry had said that the editorial work would occupy half an hour; but it was more than an hour before the juniors finished. Perhaps they would not have finished then if Tom Merry had not heard someone whistling in the quadrangle. It was a signal from Blake.

Tom Merry rose.

"Well, I think that's about done," he said. "Much obliged, Figgy, old man. There's a bit more to do for the number, but you fellows can come and work in my study to-morrow evening; turn and turn about, you know."

"Right-ho!" said Figgins. "We'll stroll across the quad with you chaps, if you like. We've got to call at the tuck-shop, anyway."

"Right you are!"

Tom Merry did not give a sign of knowing that Figgins was anxious to see him safe into his own House.

The juniors left the study together, and Figgins & Co. walked over to the School House with the Terrible Three.

"Cheerio, Figgy, old man!" said Tom Merry affably.

The three New House juniors disappeared into the darkness.

The Terrible Three exchanged smiles, and went up to Study No. 6. Blake, Herries and Digby, and D'Arcy and Kangaroo were there, and they were smiling.

"Well?" said Tom Merry.

Blake chuckled.

"It's all serene!"

"You've done it?"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "It's all wight!"

"The packing-case was in a corner of the garage yard," grinned Blake. "We got it open, and carried the things up."



Fellows clambered on the cart on all sides as the contents of the packing-case were exposed. There was a wild yell at the sight of the Terrible Three sitting there, with crimson faces, amid the straw. "Tom Merry! Lowther! Manners!" roared the juniors. "Ha, ha, ha!"

into the garret over the loft, and they're hidden under a lot of old straw. The bits of the packing-case are hidden under the straw along with the fire brigade outfit."

"Good egg!"

"And you haven't let them spot you?" said Monty Lowther.

Blake sniffed.

"Of course we haven't, fathead! What do you take us for?"

"I was there, Lowthah, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus gently but firmly.

"Yes; that's why I asked," said Lowther blandly.

"Weally, you ass—"

"There will be a giddy surprise for Figgins & Co. when they go to look for the packing-case," grinned Tom Merry. "This is where the School House score. What about our own things?"

"That's all right," said Kangaroo. "Half a dozen of the fellows went out for them, and they have been smuggled in all serene. There are a few of them left—they couldn't get them all in—but they're hidden in the old barn ready to be brought in to-morrow."

"Right as rain!"

And the Terrible Three went on to their own study to do their preparation.

They were in a mood of great satisfaction. As Monty Lowther remarked, the only drawback was that they would not be on the spot to see Figgins' face when he found that the packing-case had vanished.

CHAPTER 8.

A Startling Disappearance!

FIGGINS drew a deep breath of relief as he reached the New House after having said good-night to Tom Merry & Co. at their door.

"Got rid of those bounders at last!" he remarked.

"Blessed if I didn't think they were never going!" said Kerr.

"Same here. But the best of it is that they didn't smell a mouse!" said Figgins, with a chuckle. "I think we played up very well. They didn't see that we were anxious for them to go, I fancy."

"Not a bit!"

"What do you think, Fatty?" asked Figgins, noticing that the fat Fourth Former looked thoughtful.

"I think we'd better have a snack at the tuckshop before bothering about the packing-case, Figgy," said Fatty Wynn. Figgins snorted.

"Blow the tuckshop! Come on!"

"But, I say, Dame Taggles will be closing soon, and—"

"Blow the tuckshop!" roared Figgins. "There's something more important than gorging tarts to do now."

"There isn't anything more important than eating when you're hungry," said Fatty Wynn, with conviction. "And I'm hungry!" he added, as a clincher.

"Poof!" said Figgins.

And he linked arms with his fat chum to cut off his escape.

Fatty Wynn sighed and resigned himself to his fate.

Figgins called his comrades together—Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence, and Thompson, Pratt, and several others, and a strategic move was made for the garage yard.

"We put it here," remarked Figgins, glancing round the dusky yard in search of the packing-case.

Then he looked puzzled.

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"My hat! It's not here now. I suppose they've moved it."

"Must be somewhere," said Kerr anxiously. "Look round, you fellows."

The New House fellows looked round.

But the packing-case was not to be seen. They examined the garage yard and the garages and the adjoining out-houses, but there was no trace of the packing-case. They did not trouble to look into the loft over the garages; the packing-case, of course, could not have been taken up the ladder there, it was far too large. And it naturally did not occur to Figgins & Co. that it had been taken up in pieces.

Figgins & Co. stared at one another blankly.

The packing-case had disappeared—as completely as if it had vanished into space.

"Must be a School House trick," said Redfern of the Fourth at last.

"But they don't know anything about it," said Figgins in perplexity.

"They must have found out. I'll bet Tom Merry could tell us where that giddy packing-case is," said Redfern, with conviction.

Figgins shook his head.

"He can't. Tom Merry was in my study—he was there just before dark, and he stayed until I called you fellows to come here. Lowther and Manners

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were with him. They were doing stuff for the 'Weekly.'"

Redfern was a little staggered by the information.

"I remember now seeing the bounders in your study," he remarked. "Sure they didn't slip out at any time—"

"Of course I am sure they didn't, fathead!" said Figgins irritably.

"Keep your wool on," said Redfern. "This is jolly queer. It might be Blake and the Fourth Form kids who did it—"

"But I tell you they don't know anything about the wheeze!"

"What about Gordon Gay?" asked Kerr suddenly. "The Grammarian bounders have been on the warpath lately. Gay sent Tom Merry home in a packing-case only a little before the carrier came—so he must have passed the carrier on the road going back. If he spotted the case he might—"

"He might have got in here," said Figgins. "The rotters raided the School House once, you know. But Gordon Gay couldn't take away a big packing-case under his arm."

"Ha, ha, ha! No!"

"Might have hidden it somewhere," said Fatty Wynn.

"But where could a thing that size be hidden?" demanded Figgins, with an utterly mystified look round him. "I simply can't understand it!"

"If there were a gang of them they might have carted it right away—perhaps dumped it into the old chapel ruins," said Redfern.

"Well, it's possible."

"Get a light, and let's have a look," said Figgins shortly.

The New House juniors ought to have been doing their preparation. But they did not even think of it. Mr. Lathom and Mr. Linton might go on the war-path in the morning; but at present the business was to find the packing-case containing the outfit of the New House Fire Brigade.

Kerr switched on his electric bike-lamp, and they searched the ruined chapel, even looking into the crypt. It was quite possible that the festive Grammarians, if they had spotted the packing-case and raided it, might have dumped it there for a lark. But it was not to be seen.

The juniors searched the old tower, and it was drawn blank. They stopped at last, disappointed and in decidedly bad tempers. There were a hundred nooks and corners in and around St. Jim's where even a very large article might have been hidden, not to be unearthed until daylight.

"It's no good," grunted Figgins finally. "We can't find it. It's been hidden somewhere. The only question is whether the School House bounders or the Grammarians did it. I think it must have been Gordon Gay. Look here, we'll go and see Tom Merry—a friendly visit about the 'Weekly'—and pump him. I shall jolly soon spot whether he knows anything about the packing-case or not."

"Good!" said Kerr. "I'll come with you."

"I'll wait for you in the tuckshop," said Fatty Wynn.

Figgins snorted and walked away towards the School House. Kerr handed his bike-lamp to Redfern, and followed his leader. They entered the School House, and unheeding several catcalls from the School House juniors who sighted them, they made their way to Tom Merry's study.

Figgins knocked at the study door and opened it. The Terrible Three were sitting round their table at work, and looking very studious. They glanced up with affable expressions at Figgins and Kerr.

"Busy?" asked Figgins.

"Well, yes," said Tom Merry. "But you can come in. What is it—something to do with the 'Weekly'?"

"I—I can do a bit longer instalment of the brigand story if you like," said Figgins hesitatingly, scanning the faces of the Terrible Three in search of a clue. But their faces were perfectly innocent.

"Good!" said Tom Merry heartily.

"You shall have two whole pages, Figgy."

"Well, that—that's about all," said Figgins. "Good-night!"

"Good-night, Figgy!"

Figgins and Kerr departed from the study. The Terrible Three exchanged a wink, and grinned silently. They knew that Figgins had missed the packing-case and had come over to pump them. He was not likely to get much change out of the Terrible Three.

Figgins and Kerr exchanged a hopeless look in the passage.

"They don't know anything about it," murmured Figgins.

"Or else they're fooling us," said Kerr. "Let's drop into Study No. 6. The chaps will be there doing their prep."

"Right-ho!"

The New House chums knocked at the door of Study No. 6 in the Fourth Form quarters. Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy were all there, at their preparation. They nodded and smiled cheerfully to Figgins and Kerr.

"Hallo, you New House bounders!" said Blake. "What are you doing out of your House at this time of night?"

"Just dropped in to see you," said Figgins affably.

"Well, that's kind of you. Have some chestnuts?" said Blake hospitably.

"Thanks, I will."

Figgins and Kerr ate chestnuts. The Fourth Formers chatted about football, and about Tom Merry's adventure with the Grammarians. Their manners were perfectly ordinary, and it was quite impossible for Figgins, and even the keen-witted Kerr, to tell whether they knew anything about the missing packing-case or not.

The New House fellows longed to ask the direct question, but they could not do that without giving the matter away—if Blake & Co. did not know of it already. Figgins and Kerr finished their chestnuts, and said good-night, and retired.

"It must have been the Grammarians!" said Figgins, as he walked back to the New House with Kerr.

And Kerr nodded.

He thought so, too.

CHAPTER 9.

D'Arcy Leads!

TOM MERRY & CO. were busy the next day, and they felt more than ever that, as Monty Lowther remarked, lessons at school were a mistake—they interfered so much with other occupations.

Lessons, however, had to be gone through; but when they were over, the chums of the School House turned all their attention to that new and brilliant wheeze, the School House Junior Fire Brigade.

The rival scheme of Figgins & Co. had been nipped in the bud. During the day Blake had paid a surreptitious visit to the unused garret over the garage loft, and he had found the New House implements all where he had hidden them under the straw. They were not likely to be unearthed until the School House fellows chose, which was not likely to be for a long time. Meanwhile, all the paraphernalia of the School House Fire Brigade had been brought in, and was ready for use.

There was to be training that day; quite unknown to the New House, of course.

"Figgins will have lots to think of without bothering about what we're doing," Tom Merry remarked to the Co. "I dare say he will be raising fresh subscriptions to send for a new lot of things. We must keep our eyes open for a new packing-case, and it will have to perform the vanishing trick when it comes, the same as the other."

"Yaas, wathah!"

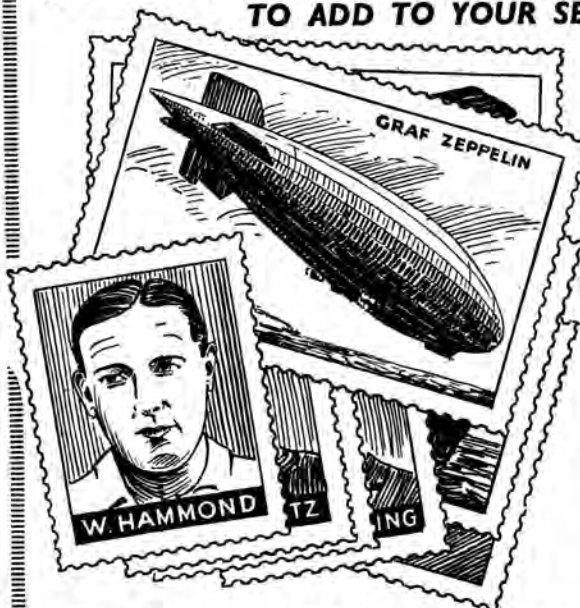
"I dare say Figgins will get fed-up in the long run, and drop the idea," Tom Merry said cheerfully. "Later on we'll buy all the things from him for our brigade, so that he won't be out of pocket. That's only fair."

"Hear, hear!" said Monty Lowther. "Now we've got to go to practise. Figgins & Co. have gone out—a crowd of them went out together soon after last lesson."

"All the better. We'll practise with the patent fire-escape from the box-room window," said Tom Merry. "That can't be seen from the New House."

Tom Merry unrolled the patent fire-escape. The juniors looked at it with great interest as they crowded round the table in Tom Merry's study. It seemed

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to be a lengthy canvas sack. Tom Merry explained as he opened it out:

"You fasten this end to the window, you see, and get inside and slide down. You reach the bottom without hurting yourself at all."

"Wathah close quartahs inside that thing, deah boy, I fancy," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, regarding the escape through his monocle.

"Better than being toasted in a burning building," said Tom Merry severely. "We've all got to go through this in turn, so as to be in practice. Come along!"

The amateur firemen proceeded to the box-room at the end of the Shell passage. There was no one in sight at the back of the House, and a big elm-tree shut off the general view. It was an ideal place for trying the fire-escape. Tom Merry unrolled it out of the window, and the end dragged on the ground. He secured it to the window with the fasteners, and glanced round at the juniors. No one appeared to be particularly anxious to slide down through the canvas pipe.

"Who's going first?" asked Tom Merry.

"Leader leads!" said Blake.

"Ahem!"

"Yaas, wathah! Go ahead, Tom Mewwy, deah boy!"

"Well, you see—"

"We're all waiting for you, Tom Merry," remarked Kangaroo.

"As fire captain, I have to superintend the practice, fathead!" said Tom Merry severely. "I think Gussy had better go first."

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"I'm afraid—"

"Now, don't be a funk, Gussy!"

"Weally, you ass—"

"File in, Gussy!"

"I'm afraid—"

"Shame!" said Manners. "I'm surprised at you, Gussy!"

"I'm afraid—"

"I wouldn't own up to it, anyway!" said Lowther.

"You uttah ass, I was goin' to say that I am afraid—"

"Yes, you've said it, and I think—"

"I'm afraid it would wumple my clothes!" shrieked D'Arcy.

"Oh, I see! Well, never mind your clothes," said Tom Merry. "At a time like this clothes don't matter. Besides, you'd have to take your turn, anyway. Now, it's a D'Arcy's place to lead. I've heard you say so yourself. Take the lead, old man, same as your ancestors did at the Battle of Bunker's Hill!"

"You uttah ass, it was the Battle of Hastings!"

"My mistake. Never mind, one battle's as good as another! Take the lead, Gussy! Pile in like your giddy ancestors you've told us about so often!"

"I suppose it is weally up to me to take the lead," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully.

"Certain!" said Monty Lowther solemnly. "In case of danger a D'Arcy would naturally be the first to get away!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Lowthah, you ass—"

"We're waiting for you to show us how it's done, Gussy darling!" said Reilly of the Fourth.

"Very well. Pway mind my monocle, Blake!"

"Right-ho!"

Arthur Augustus climbed rather gingerly upon the window-sill. He was not thinking of any possible danger, but of his clothes. He put his feet into the tube, and then paused.

"Pewwaps I had better go and change my clothes first," he suggested.

"Rats!" said the fire captain. "In case of a fire, you wouldn't have time to change your clothes, would you?"

"No; but—"

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"Besides, you can change them afterwards. I dare say they'll need it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go it, Gussy!"

D'Arcy slid a little farther down into the enveloping canvas.

"I suppose it's all wight," he said.

"I feel wathah queeah in this."

"It's all right! Let go, and slide!"

"We want to see how it's done," said Lowther. "Of course, if you break your neck, that doesn't count!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Stick a pin into him, somebody!" said Kangaroo.

"I wefuse to have a pin stuck in me!" said D'Arcy, holding on to the window-sill, while his legs thrashed about in the canvas tube. "I considah—"

"Buck up!" said Blake. "If your ancestors had been as long getting to business as you are, the Battle of Hastings wouldn't have come off yet!"

"Yaas, but—"

"Here's a pin," said Reilly.

"Good! Stick it in his neck!"

"Ow!"

Arthur Augustus let go.

The canvas tube bellied out as the form of the elegant junior slid down inside it.

The juniors watched his progress with great interest from the window. D'Arcy slid half-way down, and then stopped. The canvas jabbed out in a curious fashion as he struggled inside.

"Go on!" Tom Merry shouted encouragingly.

"Gwoogh!"

"Buck up—or, rather, buck down!"

"I—I can't!" came a muffled voice from the interior of the patent fire-escape.

"Why can't you?"

"I'm caught!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gwoogh! I can't bweathe in this thing! I can't get any farthah!" came the muffled voice. "Gwoogh! Yawwooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gwoogh! This is howwid! Yow!"

"There must be some stitches in it, or something," said Tom Merry, puzzled. "Perhaps we ought to have examined it first."

"Yes, perhaps!" grinned Blake.

"Shake it," said Lowther. "If you shake it hard enough, he's bound to get through!"

They shook the canvas tube from the top. Muffled expostulations came from inside. But the shaking had the desired result, and D'Arcy suddenly shot downwards through the escape.

A foot came out of the lower end, shod in the elegant shoe of the swell of St. Jim's. A beautiful sock was seen after the shoe; but that was all. The rest of the swell of the School House remained enveloped from sight.

"M-my hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "It's not open at the lower end. It ought to have been unfastened!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gwoo-oo-oooh!" came painfully from the interior of the escape.

"Somebody will have to cut down and open it!" said Tom Merry. "I'll go. You fellows wait here!"

Tom Merry left the box-room and ran downstairs. He came running round the back of the House a few minutes later. The fire-escape was thrashing about like a ship in a storm. Inside it the swell of St. Jim's was struggling for freedom. His leg had emerged to the knee now, but the rest of him remained inside. Queer sounds came from the interior, and the canvas

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bulged out into all sorts of queer shapes.

"All right, Gussy," said Tom Merry, "I'll have you out in a jiffy!"

He dragged open the end of the escape. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy rolled out, ruffled and rumped and red. He sat on the ground and gasped, and the juniors at the window yelled with laughter.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's forebodings had not been without grounds. Most decidedly he had rumped his clothes.

D'Arcy staggered up, pumping in breath.

"You uttah ass, Tom Mewwy!" he roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Tom Merry.

"It's all right!"

"It's not all wight!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You frightful ass!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus, forgetting the discipline necessary to any well-constituted fire brigade, hurled himself upon the fire captain. He smote the Shell fellow hip and thigh.

Tom Merry roared again—not with laughter this time—and rolled over.

Arthur Augustus marched away with his aristocratic nose very high in the air, and Tom Merry sat on the ground and gasped.

From the window above came a howl of merriment. Tom Merry blinked up at the juniors.

"What are you cackling at, you silly asses?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's nothing to snigger about in this!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly asses!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Tom Merry gave it up. Arthur Augustus having shown the way, the juniors tested the patent fire-escape in turn; but D'Arcy did not join in the practice. He was busy with a clothes-brush and a hair-brush, and he remained busy with them for a considerable time.

CHAPTER 10.

Somewhat Hasty!

"MY sainted aunt, this is luck!" said Figgins.

"Good egg! Here he comes!" said Kerr.

"Quiet!"

Figgins & Co. and Redfern & Co. and Pratt and Thompson watched and waited keenly. Gordon Gay, of the Fourth Form at Rylcombe Grammar School, came down the lane, whistling. Gordon Gay usually had all his wits about him, but just now he had no suspicion of the ambush ahead of him.

The New House juniors from St. Jim's were crouching in the hedge, ready to pounce out upon the Grammarian as he passed.

It was, as Figgins had said, luck. The New House juniors had gone out to look for Gordon Gay to inquire into the mysterious disappearance of the packing-case.

Search that day at St. Jim's had failed to discover it, and the New House fellows, convinced that they

owed its disappearance to the Grammarians, had determined to learn from Gay what had become of it. If necessary, they were prepared to go to the Grammar School, and beard the lion in his den; but Figgins hoped to catch Gordon Gay outside the red-bricked walls of the Grammar School. And here he was coming back from the tuckshop in the village, evidently, to judge by the parcel under his arm.

Gordon Gay, unsuspecting of danger, was walking straight into the arms of the avengers.

"Not a giddy whisper!" murmured Figgins.



"In with him!" exclaimed Figgins. "He won't tell us where he went! Whirled out over the water and plunged in. Splash! 'Goo Oooh!'"

The juniors crouched as still as mice. Suddenly Figgins shouted, and sprang out into the road.

"Collar him!"

The St. Jim's juniors were round the Grammarian in a moment.

Gordon Gay made a rush, but their grasp closed upon him on all sides, and he was caught.

"Got him!" chuckled Kerr.

"Hurrah!"

Gordon Gay was cool again in a moment.

"Yes, you've got me," he said cheerfully. "Mind how you bump that parcel. There's eggs in it. Now, what do you want?"

"We want to know what you've done with our packing-case," said Figgins.

"Your what?"

"Don't you understand English?" said Figgins pleasantly. "Our packing-case. P-a-c-k-i-n-g c-a-s-e—packing-case!"

"Off your rocker?" asked Gordon Gay calmly. "I haven't got any packing-cases about me. I should think you could see that for yourself!"

"Bring him through the hedge," said Figgins. "We don't want any of the other Grammar School rotters to sight us—and we're jolly close to their quarters!"

"Look here——" began Gordon Gay. "Shurrup! We do the talking in this act!"

chaps home in?" asked Gordon Gay, with a grin.

"No; I don't!" said Figgins. "I mean the other one."

"What other one?"

"Oh, you're going to be funny, I see!" said Figgins. "Chuck him in!"

"I—I—oh—yah!"

Squash!

Gordon Gay was plumped into the margin of the pond. Water and mud came up to his knees. He struggled in the mud, and shook his fist at the grinning St. Jim's juniors on the bank. He came squelching out of the mud, with chunks of it clinging to his trousers, and his boots had quite disappeared from view.

"You silly asses!" roared Gordon Gay. "Look at my boots! Look at my bags!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You'll be in the same state all over soon," said Figgins. "I can tell you we mean business. Now, where is our packing-case?"

"I don't know!" roared Gordon Gay. "I wouldn't tell you if I did. Blow your old packing-case, and blow you!"

"In with him again—a bit deeper this time!"

Gordon Gay struggled furiously in the grasp of the St. Jim's juniors. But it was in vain.

He was whirled back to the pond and squashed in, a little farther out from the bank, and the water and mud came up to his waist now. He lurched in the water, and thrashed it with his arms in an effort to keep his balance.

"Now, then, where's that packing-case?" demanded Figgins.

"Groogh!"

"Are you going to answer?"

"Groogh!"

Gay scrambled out of the water. He made a desperate rush to get through the New House juniors. But they were too many for him. He was grasped and whirled back. All the New House party laid a strong grasp upon Gordon Gay, and the Cornstalk, muscular as he was, was helpless. He gasped and spluttered in the hands of his enemies.

"Are you going to tell us where that packing-case is?" asked Figgins pleasantly. "You'll go in up to your neck next time."

"Groogh!"

"That isn't an answer! Speak English!"

"Groo-hoogh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"In with him!" said Figgins, exasperated. "Blessed if I ever saw such an obstinate bounder. Chuck him in!"

Splash!

Gordon Gay whirled out over the water and plunged in. He disappeared under it for a moment, and came up spluttering. His cap floated away, and his hair and face were covered with mud. He gouged it out of his eyes, and glared at the juniors of St. Jim's.

"Groogh! You rotters! Ooosh!"

"You can groogh as much as you

like," said Figgins. "But you're going to jolly well tell us where that packing-case is! Savvy?"

"Groogh!"

"Where's that packing-case?"

"I don't know!" gasped Gordon Gay. "I haven't seen it. I don't know anything about it. I didn't know you had a rotten packing-case! Yow!"

"The truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth!" said Figgins warningly. "You know that you raided it last night at St. Jim's!"

"Yes, rather!" said Kerr.

"I didn't!" roared the hapless Grammarian. "If I did, I'd own up, you fatheads. I don't know anything about your rotten packing-case! Yow!"

"My hat!" said Figgins. "Perhaps he's telling the truth, you know. Look here, Gay, will you give us your word you don't know anything about the packing-case? I'll take your word, of course!"

"Yes, you fathead!" yelled the Grammarian. "I don't know anything about it, and I don't want to! I want to punch your silly head!"

"You didn't raid the thing last night at St. Jim's?"

"No! Blow St. Jim's! Blow you! Groogh!"

"Honour bright?" persisted Figgins.

"Yes, you fathead—honour bright, you silly owl!"

Gordon Gay scrambled out of the pond, the juniors leaving him free now. It was evident that a mistake had been made. Gordon Gay shook the water off like a Newfoundland dog, but the mud was not so easily parted with. The St. Jim's juniors grinned as they looked at him. Gay was in a terrible state.

"Well, it seems that we've been rather hasty," admitted Figgins. "But if it wasn't you, it must have been those School House bounders—and they don't seem to know anything about it. Sorry!"

Gordon Gay snorted.

"You're rather wet, Gay," said Kerr.

"You'd better run home, old chap."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I—I'll squash you for this some day!" growled Gordon Gay.

The Grammarian junior shook his fist at the St. Jim's fellows, and dashed away across the field. It was high time he dried himself. Perhaps he was thinking, too, of getting reinforcements, and returning before the St. Jim's fellows got away.

But Figgins & Co. did not linger near the rival school. They hurried back towards St. Jim's at once. It was pretty clear now that the Grammarians had had nothing to do with the mysterious disappearance of the packing-case from the garage yard; and if the disappearance was not to be attributed to the Grammarians, it could only be attributed to the School House fellows.

Amazing as it seemed, the New House wheeze must be known in the School House, and Tom Merry & Co. had made away with the supplies of the New House Junior Fire Brigade. Figgins & Co. breathed vengeance as they hurried back to the school.

"Must have been those rotters, and they've been pulling our leg, and laughing in their sleeves all the time," growled Figgins. "Blessed if I know how they got on to the wheeze. But they have. It must have been them!"

"Must have been, I think," said Kerr sagaciously. "And those bounders were keeping us in our study last night, doing that rot for the 'Weekly,' while

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us where the packing-case is, so chuck him in!" Gordon Gay
"Groogh!" yelled the Grammarian junior. "You rotters!
Ooosh!"

"But, I say——"

"Rats!"

The captured Grammarian was yanked into the field. Inside the hedge was a muddy pond where cattle were wont to drink. The edge of the pond was trampled up by many hoofs, and the mud was thick.

Gordon Gay began to look alarmed. "Look here! What are you up to?" he demanded.

"Going to put you to torture," said Figgins amiably.

"But—but look here——"

"Where's our packing-case?"

"What packing-case?"

"The one you raided last night at St. Jim's."

"Do you mean the one I sent your

the other rotters were raiding the packing-case."

"My hat! We've been taken in, and no mistake!"

"They're on to the wheeze, then?" said Fatty Wynn. "I shouldn't wonder if they borrow it themselves. We've got to come down heavy!"

"I suppose it must be them?" said Figgins musingly.

"Who else could it be?" said Lawrence.

"Yes. But—we'll scout first," said Figgins cautiously. "If they're not on to the wheeze, we don't want to give it away—and if they've got the things, we'll get them back by strategy. Don't say a word when we get in—but we'll scout!"

"Good egg! They've pulled our leg, and now we'll pull theirs!" grinned Kerr. "One good turn deserves another."

And the New House juniors, when they reached St. Jim's, restrained their desire to march on the School House and slaughter Tom Merry & Co. on the spot.

CHAPTER 11.

Redfern Reports!

REDFERN came into Figgins' study after tea that evening, with a grin upon his rosy face.

Redfern had evidently seen or heard something that tickled him very much.

The Co. looked at him inquiringly. Since coming back to St. Jim's, Figgins & Co. had been doing some scouting, but without success. If the School House fellows had a secret, they were guarding it well. But Redfern of the Fourth was looking now as if he knew something.

"Well?" said the Co., with one breath.

"I've got it!" he said.

"Eh?"

"I've bowled them out!"

"Good!" said Figgins, rubbing his hands. "What have you found out?"

"They're starting a rival fire brigade in the School House!"

"My hat! They've boned our wheeze!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn indignantly.

Redfern shook his head.

"No; it seems that they hit on it themselves, and started it quite on their own—and it was a case of great minds running in grooves, Figgy."

"Well, after the fire, I dare say it would occur to more than one chap," admitted Figgins. "But how did you know?"

Redfern smiled a superior smile.

"I've been scouting," he said.

"Well, we've been scouting, too, but we haven't found anything out," Figgins remarked.

"Quite so."

"Look here!" said Figgins. "None of your cheek, Redfern. If you've found anything out, get it off your chest, and sharp—and don't cackle!"

Redfern grinned. Redfern was a rival leader in the New House, and feeling was sometimes sore between Figgins & Co. and the New Firm. But they were shoulder to shoulder, of course, against the School House. Still, it was a considerable satisfaction to Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence that Reddy had been the one to find out the dark doings of the School House fellows.

"You fellows been round behind the School House?" asked Redfern.

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Figgins stared.

"What on earth for?" he demanded.

"Scouting."

"No; there was nothing to go there for, that I know of. We looked round there last night for the packing-case, and it wasn't there. What do you mean?"

Redfern wagged a warning forefinger at Figgins.

"When you're scouting, you should never leave a stone unturned," he remarked, in an admonitory tone.

"If you're looking for a thick ear, Reddy—" began Figgins, exasperated.

"What have you found out, Reddy, you ass?" demanded Kerr.

"The whole bag of tricks, my infants," said Redfern serenely. "Never leave a stone unturned when you're—"

"Oh, get on with the washing!"

"Well, they've got a patent fire-escape—one of those canvas bag things, you know—hung up to the box-room window, behind the elm-tree."

"Oh, one of ours, I suppose?" said Figgins. "That where our things have gone to?"

"I don't know. Anyway, there it was. I was feeling it over to make sure what it was, when I heard them jawing at the window," said Redfern.

"They're arranging practice as firemen after dark. It seems they've been at it this afternoon, but we never spotted them. Of course, in the circumstances, as a scout in war-time, I felt that I was entitled to overhear the enemy's plans."

"I dare say you were. Go on."

"Dare say won't do!" said Redfern firmly. "I was entitled to hear enemy plans, and there's no dare say about it. I hope you don't think I would listen to a conversation?"

"Get on!" roared Figgins.

"That point's got to be settled first," said Redfern calmly. "If they were simply chaps talking at a window, it would be caddish to stay down there in the dark listening to what they said, wouldn't it?"

"Yes, it would!" growled Figgins.

"But as we're in a state of war, and I was the scout among the enemy, I considered that it would be quite justifiable to stretch a point."

"Well, you seem to have stretched it, anyway!" said Figgins rather sarcastically. "Are you ever getting on with the story?"

"Unless I was justified in stretching a point to hear it all, I'm not justified in telling you," said Redfern blandly.

"Get on, you fathead!"

"Was I justified?"

"Yes!" roared Figgins. "Now get on!"

"That's all right," said Redfern.

"Nothing like having the points settled as you go on, you know. It saves argument afterwards. They jawed a lot,

and I kept close in the dark under the window, and heard them, being justified in the circumstances—"

"My hat! We don't want that all over again!" yelled Figgins. "Are you going to tell us what you've found out?"

"I'm coming to that. They jawed about the wheeze, and Tom Merry said—I heard his voice quite distinctly—but perhaps I'd better not tell you what he said."

"You'll tell me, or you'll get a thick ear, you silly chump!" said Figgins, getting excited.

"No, I think, upon the whole, I—"

Figgins pushed back his cuffs.

"Tell him, Reddy," said Lawrence,

with a chuckle.

Lawrence was looking in at the study doorway with Owen.

"Very well," said Redfern resignedly. "For the sake of peace, being a peaceful chap myself, I'll tell you, Figgy—"

"Come to the point, you rambling idiot!" said Figgins. "What did Tom Merry say?"

"Tom Merry said, 'That fathead, Figgins—'"

"Eh?"

"That fathead, Figgins—"

"Look here, Redfern—"

Figgins rushed across the study at the Fourth Former. Redfern dodged round the table, waving Figgins off.

"I'm only telling you what Tom Merry said," he protested. "He said, 'That fathead, Figgins—'"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Owen and Lawrence, and Kerr and Wynn could not help chuckling.

Figgins glared across the table at the innocent Redfern.

"You can clear out, you silly ass!" he roared.

"Do let me finish," said Redfern plaintively. "What a fellow you are for interrupting a fellow! Tom Merry said—"

"Never mind what Tom Merry said!" roared Figgins. "Blow Tom Merry!"

"Certainly; blow him as much as you like. He said, 'That fathead, Figgins, thinks it was the Grammarians who collared his packing-case most likely, and he won't find out that it was us!'"

Lowther said—

"Blow Lowther!"

Lowther said—

Figgins rushed round the table. Redfern dodged him again.

"Let's hear what Lowther said, Figgy," urged Kerr. "It doesn't matter if they called you names, you know. Go on, Reddy!"

"Right-ho!" said Redfern cheerfully.

"Lowther said, 'Kerr's an awfully keen Scotch terrier, but we've stuffed him up just as easily as Figgins.'"

It was Figgins' turn to grin, and Kerr turned red.

"Oh, did he?" said Kerr.

"Yes; and then Blake said—"

"Blow Blake! I don't want to hear what the silly ass said!" growled Kerr.

But Fatty Wynn chimed in:

"Dash it all, Kerr, let's hear what Blake said! This is getting interesting."

What did Blake say, Reddy?"

"Blake said, 'As for Wynn, there's no danger of his spotting anything except a jam tart or a pork pie.' And then Manners said—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fatty Wynn turned pink.

"Hang Manners!" he said crossly. "I don't know what we're listening to all this silly jaw for. If you haven't got any better news than that, Redfern, you can travel."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lawrence and Owen.

(Continued on page 18.)

HAPPY WINTER EVENINGS

What to do during the long winter evenings is very often a problem. But one solution of it will be found in "Home" Billiards. Every member of the family, young or old, will speedily discover "Home" Billiards has a wonderful fascination.

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The Editor, The GEM, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Fleetway House,
Farrington Street, London, E.C.4.**

HALLO, chums! Another ripping set of coloured pictures comes to you with this number, and, of course, there are more on the way. Stick them in your picture-card album or scrapbook as you get them, along with the pen portraits which appear on another page. Thus, when the set is complete, you will have an interesting pictorial record of popular personalities in speed and sport, and famous ships, trains, and planes which have made history—a record you will always prize. Next week's set is a particularly good one—don't miss it!

"GETTING EVEN WITH RATTY!"

This is the title of the sparkling long St. Jim's yarn you can look forward to next Wednesday. As probably you can guess, it features the irascible Mr. Ratcliff. I always thoroughly enjoy a story about the unpopular New House master, for it usually contains lots of fun and japing, with "Ratty" the victim of the japers.

In next week's story Tom Merry & Co. fall foul of Mr. Ratcliff, and so they promptly proceed to get their own back. Then it is that Monty Lowther works off the jape of the term on the New House master, nearly driving him into a frenzy and setting the whole school roaring with laughter at his discomfort. Ratty has strong suspicions as to who are the japers, but he fails to prove it until he descends to the meanest of tricks. But then, much to his chagrin, he finds that he has delivered himself into the hands of the japers, after all!

You will enjoy every word of this lively long yarn.

"THE SUSPECTED STUDY!"

Owen Conquest, whose stories of Jimmy Silver & Co. are tremendously popular, has written another thrilling

yarn for next week. The mystery man of Rookwood is an intriguing character, but by now, I think, many of you have guessed who he is. He is still as big a puzzle to everyone in the school, however, as when he first started his series of outrages. But in next week's thrilling yarn his trail seems to be nearing an end. Suspicion is at last narrowed down to five juniors. One of them is definitely the unknown. It's a big surprise to Rookwood, for the five suspected juniors are among the most popular in the school! Who is the guilty one?

This grand yarn, together with more readers' football-winning jokes and Monty Lowther's wisecracks, completes the next Free Gift number. Look out for it!

ROWING THE "HERRING POND"!

When I was reminded recently of the record time taken by the Normandie to cross the Atlantic—4 days 3 hours 2 minutes, it was—it brought to mind also another record crossing of the "Herring Pond." This happened nearly forty years ago, and was by no means a voyage to beat the clock. Actually it took fifty-five days, and was accomplished by two Norwegians in an open rowing-boat! They set sail—or, rather, bent their backs to the oars—from New York, and all went fairly well until the two adventurers were twenty-eight days out. Then they struck a gale, and after a long struggle in heavy seas the boat capsized. By terrific efforts, however, the two plucky oarsmen righted their boat again and continued the voyage. Many passing vessels took them for survivors of a shipwreck and offered

PEN PALS COUPON

18-1-36



A free feature which brings together readers all over the world for the purpose of exchanging topics of interest to each other. If you want a pen pal, post your notice, together with the coupon on this page, to the address given above.

Miss Patsy Thompson, 11, Byron Street, Cambridge, Cape Province, South Africa; girl correspondents; age 15-17; Ireland, U.S.A.

Edward Lipman, 13, Bruce Street, Hillbrow, Johannesburg, Transvaal, South Africa; sports, films.

J. A. Harding, 8, Bickerton Road, Birkdale, nr. Southport, Lancs; age 10-13; aviation, racing cars.

British and Dominion's Film Club, 8, Cordelia Street, South Grove, Mile End, London, E.3; more members wanted.

assistance; but they declined help and rowed on their way, reaching Plymouth safe and sound after a thrilling trip of fifty-five days on the water.

THE LAUGH'S ON THE GIRLS!

So much notice has always been given to schoolboy howlers that it has almost become an accepted fact that they are the only culprits of prize mistakes. But now it is the schoolboys' turn to laugh, for publicity has been given to some funny howlers that schoolgirls recently made in essays. Here are a few: "A blue stocking is something with which to cure a wasp-sting"! "A red-letter day is a pillar-box"! Beat that one, boys! "R.S.V.P. means the Royal Society of Virtuous People"! "A.D. means Armistice Day"! That's the lot, and I think they are as funny as some of those which have been levelled against boys.

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING!

Outside a closed pet shop in Washington a crowd began to gather, and, as crowds do, quickly increased. Someone then rang the fire alarm and someone else phoned for the police. In double quick time four police cars were on the scene, eleven fire-engines rushed up, and many policemen and detectives gathered. The traffic became jammed, and there was chaos for some time. And the cause of all this bother? A wire-haired terrier on show in the window took a dislike to three Boston bull-pups and started a scrap! Eventually a fireman broke into the shop and parted the contestants—and that was that!

THE HOMELESS MONGREL.

A dog also played the chief part in another sort of incident which happened in Memphis, U.S.A. This animal, a mongrel, limped into the local hospital, "carrying" one of his legs. No one paid the dog any attention, and he left. Some time later back he came again. Still there was nothing doing for the dog. The following morning he appeared at the hospital for the third time. A doctor noticed that he was injured, and had his leg X-rayed. The poor old mongrel had a fracture. It was put in splints, and he's all right again now. And as a reward for his patience and sagacity he's no longer homeless. The hospital have adopted him.

TAILPIECE.

Patient: "And what is your bill, doctor, for curing my deafness?"

Doctor: "Two guineas."

Patient: "Three guineas?"

Doctor: "Four guineas!"

THE EDITOR.

Miss Dorothy Roberts, 23, Fordel Road, Catford, London, S.E.6; girl correspondents; age 15-17; music, autographs, sports; overseas.

Albert Woolley, 10f, Peabody Buildings, Manor Street, Chelsea, London, S.W.3; stamps.

B. Tait, c/o W. Rodgers, Thaba N'ehu, Orange Free State, South Africa; age 14-16; "Magnet" readers.

L. Meyer, 64, Beckenham Lane, Bromley, Kent; age 15-16; London, France, U.S.A.

Donald Macrae, 50, Rutland Street, Christchurch, New Zealand; stamps.

D. H. Thorpe, 51, Belvedere Road, Wallasey, Ches; international radio club.

Alex. Walton, 29, The Ravine, Shiregreen, Sheffield 5; old copies of Companion Papers.

Cornac Daly, 26, Wilton Road, Cork, Ireland; age 11-15; stamps, Esperanto, photography.

Andy L. Chambers, 208, North East Belt, Ashburton, South Island, New Zealand; South Seas, Borneo.

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"But I have," grinned Redfern. "They're going to practise in the fire-escape this evening, so as to be ready for an emergency. They're going to have a race down the tube, one after another, to see how long it takes for half a dozen of them to get out."

"Well, what the—"

"I think it will very likely turn out to be a funny sight," said Redfern pacifically.

"Why?"

"Because after they were gone I fastened up the bottom of the canvas tube."

"Eh?"

"And if they slide down into it one after the other at top speed I shouldn't wonder if they get mixed up in it."

Figgins & Co. roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It will be worth seeing, I should think!" grinned Redfern. "I think we ought to be on the spot."

"What-ho!" said Figgins.

And he gave Redfern a hearty slap on the back instead of upon the nose, as he had intended a few minutes earlier.

CHAPTER 12.

A Little Mix-up!

"READY, you chaps?"

"Quite ready!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The amateur firemen were gathered in Tom Merry's study.

It was the time for the training, and they were all ready. Tom Merry had a manner of importance that befitted the captain of the fire brigade.

"You understand, I suppose?" he said. "We've got to do this thing in order. The test is to see how long it takes the lot of us to get out of the

House in case of fire. Of course, as firemen, our business is to save others, not to save ourselves, but this is good practice and may be useful next time Skimmy sets the House on fire. You have got to start when I give the word, and all of you be outside the House in one minute."

"Yaas."

"Come on, then!"

Tom Merry led the way to the box-room. The patent fire-escape had been left fastened to the window, and was all in readiness. It was quite dark outside, but that was all the better. It had the advantage of being safe from the observation of the New House juniors—or so Tom Merry & Co. thought, at all events.

Tom Merry glanced from the open window. All was dark and silent without. If there were any juniors concealed in the shadows they could not be seen, and Tom Merry did not suspect their presence.

"Start when I give the word," said Tom Merry. "Lowther first, then Manners, Blake, Herries, Dig, Gussy, Kangy, Reilly, myself last. Got that?"

"Right-ho!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Go!"

Monty Lowther plunged into the canvas tube, and went sliding down. It was easy enough, especially as he had practised that afternoon. Down he went, and Manners plunged in and slid after him. The moment he had disappeared Blake plunged in, and after him went Herries.

There was a muffled roar inside the fire-escape.

"Yah! Oh!"

"Gerroff my neck!"

"Yowp!"

"Yah!"

"Help!"

Tom Merry looked out of the window in surprise. He could not see the lower end of the patent chute in the darkness, but it was evident that something was wrong.

"They're not getting out!" he exclaimed. "Are you out, Lowther?"

"Groogh!"

"Yoogh!"

"Help!"

"My hat! What's the matter?"

"Bai Jove!"

Tom Merry slid into the tube, and shot downwards. His feet came into contact with something hard, and a roar like muffled thunder announced that the something hard was Herries of the Fourth.

The fire-escape swayed and sagged to and fro as the juniors rolled and struggled in its folds.

There was no opening at the end, and they were bunched together, struggling.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "It's got stuffed up somehow. Oh!"

"Yaroo!"

"Lemme gerrou!"

"Groogh!"

There was a yell of laughter from the shadows. Figgins & Co. gathered round the swaying tube, yelling.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy at the window. "It's the New House boundahs, deah boys. They've fastened up the end."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The awful wottahs! How vewy lucky that I didn't get in! Bai Jove!"

"Yow!"

"Help!"

"Yah!"

"Oh! Help! Yowp!"

"Rescue!"

"Figgins & Co.!" roared Digby. "Come on! We've got to get at them!"

"Not down the chute, bejabbers!" grinned Reilly.

"No; down the stairs."

Digby, D'Arcy, Reilly, and Kangaroo rushed out of the box-room, and down the stairs. They called for reinforcements as they went, and quite a crowd of School House juniors came rushing round the House to the rescue of the unfortunate amateur firemen in the tube.

A yell of laughter from the distance announced that Figgins & Co. had retreated to safe quarters.

The juniors dragged at the fire-escape and opened it, and the imprisoned firemen rolled out one after another, red and flustered and furious.

"Oh, oh! M-m-my aunt!"

"Groogh! Some silly ass put his boot in my eye!"

"Somebody's busted my ribs!"

"Yaroooh! Oh! What the dickens is—"

"It's all wight, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy consolingly.

"The New House boundahs had fastened it up, but it's all wight now."

"Ow!" groaned Herries. "I don't feel all right. Some frightful idiot plumped his silly boot on my head!"

"I'm squashed!" gasped Lowther. "I felt like a pancake, with all those blithering chumps rolling on me! Ow!"

There was a yell from the distance.

"Who's Cock House of St. Jim's now? Ha, ha, ha!"

The School House juniors breathed fury.

"This is where we smile!" yelled Figgins. "Ha, ha, ha!"

And the New House juniors smiled—loudly.



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"Come on!" gasped Tom Merry. "They've got on to the wheeze somehow; but we can rag them bald-headed, anyway! Collar the rotters!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry & Co. rushed in the direction of the voices. There was a sound of chuckles dying away in the distance. Figgins & Co. had beaten a retreat to their own House, and in the doorway they turned to kiss their hands to the baffled pursuers.

Tom Merry & Co. shook their fists in return, and departed. In the School House they exchanged glum looks.

"It's all out now!" growled Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah! They've bowled out the wheeze, deah boys!"

"Rotten!"

"Never mind; we howled them out first," said Tom Merry. "There's only one thing to be done now."

"What's that?"

"We shall have to amalgamate, and form a united fire brigade," said Tom Merry. "After all, that's a jolly good idea. And we'll let Figgins have his things back if he agrees to a School House chap being fire captain—what?"

"Good egg!"

"Yaas, wathah! And in the cires, I wathah think it would be a good ideah to choose the most suitable chap for the post—"

"We've done that," said Tom Merry.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Scat!"

"I wufuse to scat—I mean—"

"Never mind what you mean, Gussy," said Tom Merry kindly. "I'll see that bounder Figgins in the morning, and we'll settle it."

And they did!

CHAPTER 13.

In Training!

FIGGINS & CO. were grinning when they met the School House fellows the next day.

"I fancy we rather did you in the eye yesterday," remarked Figgins cheerfully.

Tom Merry laughed.

"Yes; as we did over the giddy packing-case, Figgy."

"So it was you, after all?"

"Whom did you think it was?"

"We put Gordon Gay to the torture to make him own up what he had done with it," grinned Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We seem to have hit on the same wheeze at the same time," Figgins remarked. "It's all out now—and I propose that we join forces. After all, a thing of this kind would be better run by the whole school than by separate Houses—don't you think so?"

"Just what I was going to suggest, Figgy."

"Good!" said Figgins heartily.

"We'll join, and make it the United St. Jim's Fire Brigade; and you shall be vice-captain, Tom Merry," Figgins added generously.

"I was just going to offer you that job!"

"Me! But I shall be captain!" said Figgins innocently.

"That you jolly well won't!"

"Now, look here, Tom Merry—"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"You ought to be jolly glad to get in as vice," said Figgins warmly. "Kerr ought to have it; but we want to do the fair thing by your old House."

"Can't be did! I'm opposed to vice in any shape or form," said Tom

JUST MY FUN

Monty Lowther Calling!



Hallo, everybody!

Gore says he could write a song in a couple of hours and think nothing of it. Other people would probably think the same.

Then there was the heavyweight boxer who felt so small after a defeat that he entered his next fight as a featherweight.

"What can beat Llanffyrn as a winter resort?" asks Fatty Wynn. We find it hard to say.

P.-c. Crump says his runner beans have made no progress. Why not arrest them for loitering?

Funny how railway porters always seem to be able to turn their hands to profitable enterprise. Palm upwards!

I hear "Peas in a Pod" is the title of a new novel. It ought to be a "best sheller."

I also hear a motor-lorry is being used as a school. Pretty alarming for truants to find the school chasing them along the road!

A man left £60,000 to a poor house which had helped him. No "poor" return!

"Two Steamers Bump at Clyde,"

reads a headline. "Clyding" on the Clyde!

I hear a Chinese hangman felt dizzy after forty-three executions. "Noose-reel"!

Mr. Rateliff has been having extensive repairs to his car. "Automobills."

Then there was the tar-buyer who took a tuning-fork with him so that he could get the right pitch.

Story: "Did that last bottle do you any good?" asked the doctor.

"Yes," replied the patient, "I got twopence on it!"

It is stated that the ancient Egyptians wore very tight shoes. Thus the saying: "Cornus in Egypt."

As young Gibson wrote: "A sculptor is a man who makes faces and bursts."

From Wally D'Arcy's essay: "Sir Walter Raleigh introduced tobacco, and it was soon a burning topic."

Quickly, now: Which is the coldest English river? The ice is (Isis).

"What steps should be taken to reduce the number of street accidents?" asks Blake. Rapid, long ones.

"Some men are fired with ambition," says the Head. And others by the boss.

To finish: "I'm sorry the fags had a bit of a shindy, ma'am," said Kildare to the Head's guest. "I hope they didn't disturb you?"

"No," beamed the old lady; "it was the first thing I've heard for years!"

Listen in next week, chaps!

Merry solemnly. "We leave the vice to the New House."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't be funny!" said Figgins. "Leave that for Lowther's painful page in the 'Weekly.' We had the idea first—I thought of it the very day after the fire—"

"We thought of it the same night," said Tom Merry triumphantly.

"Ahem!"

"So if it goes by seniority—"

"But it doesn't," said Kerr quickly.

"We're juniors, so it goes by juniority."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if you oughtn't to be a lawyer, Kerr," said Figgins admiringly. "It takes a Scotsman to think these things out, I must say. You see that Kerr's quite right, Tom Merry?"

"Blessed if I do!" said Tom Merry.

"Now, look here, do be reasonable!"

urged Figgins. "It stands to reason that a New House chap will have to be captain, because—because we're Cock House at St. Jim's, you know."

"Looking for a thick ear?" asked Tom Merry pleasantly. "I'll put it to the vote, if you like—every chap in the brigade to vote."

Figgins snorted.

"You've got the majority, you bounder!"

"Exactly! Otherwise—"

"Toss up for choice of ends," suggested Fatty Wynn.

Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, that's one way of settling it," he said. "And we shall never settle it by arguments, anyway."

Figgins nodded, and the important question was settled that way; and Tom Merry won the toss.

Figgins grunted, but he gave in with a good grace.

"You're vice-captain, Figgy," said Tom Merry consolingly. "Now, we'll practise all together to-day—and you can have those things back, too. They're hidden under the straw in the garret over the garage."

"Good!" said Figgins.

And after school that day the juniors went in for fire practice, the two

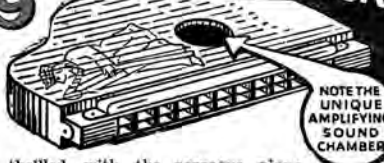
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Houses joining on the best of terms for the purpose. It was really better, as they all admitted on reflection, to make a school instead of a House affair of it.

The New House fellows were certainly a little doubtful how the brigade would get on under School House leadership; but they loyally resolved to do their best to make the thing go, in spite of that obvious defect.

There being no further need for secrecy, fellows were enrolled on all sides in the amateur fire brigade. Most of the juniors of both Houses were eager to join. And they were keen to practise, too, as a good muster in the quad after lessons showed.

"Come on!" said Figgins. "I say, Taggles has been using the garden hose and he's left it out. It's a good chance to get some hose practice."

"Hear, hear!"

And the amateur firemen rushed off.

Taggles had been using the hose, and he had left it temporarily, not knowing anything of the amateur fire brigade of St. Jim's. The firemen seized upon the hose with joy. Tom Merry directed operations, swooping water in all directions, and there were yells of remonstrance from the other firemen as they dodged out of the way.

"Yawwooh!" roared Arthur Augustus, as he jumped a foot from the ground, the jet of water swooping round his legs. "You silly ass! Do you see what you're doing?"

"Yes!" said Tom Merry cheerfully.

"You—you fwabjous duffah, stop it! Oh!"

"Here, you let that there hose alone!" roared Taggles, coming on the scene. "Give that to me at once, Master Merry!"

"Certainly!" said Master Merry, turning the hose upon Taggles.

Whiz!

Swoosh!

"Oh!" roared Taggles.

Swoosh!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Taggles roared as the jet of water caught him and nearly bowled him over. He danced in the playing stream, trying to avoid it, but it followed his every movement. His hat was swept off, and he sat down at last, gasping.

"That all right?" asked Tom Merry. The juniors yelled.

"Ow!" gasped Taggles. "Ow! I'll report yer!"

Tom Merry looked surprised.

"But you asked for it!" he said.

"Ow! I asked for the 'ose, you young himp, not for the water!" said Taggles.

"You should make yourself clear, Taggles," said Tom Merry, with a shake of the head. "You can't expect me to guess what you mean."

"Ow! I'll report yer! Gimme that 'ose!"

"Here you are," said Tom Merry, pressing the nozzle again as he handed it to Taggles.

Whiz!

Swoosh!

"Yaroop!"

Taggles fairly fled, and the juniors roared. Taggles did not reappear; he was too wet; and the juniors enjoyed half an hour's hose practice, at the end of which they were very nearly as wet as Taggles. Indeed, Monty Lowther remarked that they were rather qualifying for watermen than firemen.

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CHAPTER 14.

Fire!

CLANG, clang!
Figgins started up in bed in the New House.

Clang, clang!

Figgins rubbed his eyes and listened. "It can't be rising-bell," he muttered. "It's the middle of the night. Unless Taggles has got squiffy and started ringing the bell in his sleep. Kerr, old man!"

"Hallo!" came drowsily from Kerr's bed.

"Do you hear that bell?"

"Yes."

"It can't be rising-bell?"

"Of course it isn't, fathead!" said Kerr. "It's a mile away. I should think! It's an alarm-bell of some sort."

"Might be a fire!" exclaimed Figgins.

Kerr yawned.

"Shouldn't wonder."

Figgins was out of bed in a twinkling. He ran to the window and looked out. Only the dark sky, with stars twinkling there, met his gaze. But the sound of the bell came to his ears more clearly. It was evidently ringing at a distance, and it could be nothing but an alarm-bell.

"It must be a fire, Kerr!" exclaimed Figgins excitedly.

"Long way away, if it is," said Kerr.

"Comes from the direction of Rylcombe," said Figgins. "There's no fire brigade nearer than Wayland, excepting—"

"Excepting ours," chuckled Kerr.

"Just so! This is where we come in!" said Figgins, bundling on his clothes in a hurry. "I'm going to see what's the trouble, Kerr. If it's a fire, we're on!"

"But we shall have to break bounds!" Figgins sniffed.

"Blow bounds! Firemen can't stop to think of such things as bounds when there's a giddy fire raging, can they, fathead?"

"But, I say, Figgins—"

But Figgins was gone.

The New House junior was out of the House in a minute more. He dashed across the quad. From the top of the school wall he would be able to see if there was any reflection of a fire in the sky towards Rylcombe. He had almost reached the wall when he ran into a dark figure, and there was a startled exclamation.

"Ow! Who's that?"

Figgins chuckled.

"Tom Merry!"

"Is that you, Figgy?"

"Yes, rather!"

"You ass!" said Tom Merry, greatly relieved. "I thought it was a prefect for a moment."

"What are you doing out here this time of night?" demanded Figgins, peering at the School House junior in the gloom.

Tom Merry grinned.

"Same as you, I expect," he said. "I've heard an alarm-bell, and I've come out to see if it's a fire."

"Same here," said Figgins, groping at the wall. "Give us a bunk up."

They were on top of the wall in a few seconds. The two juniors stared in the direction of Rylcombe. There was a red flare in the sky. It was a fire—undoubtedly.

"It's in Rylcombe," said Figgins.

"This side of Rylcombe, a bit south," said Tom Merry. "I believe it's the Grammar School, Figgy."

"My hat!"

"Anyway, it's a fire, and we're going to be on the scene!" said the amateur fire captain promptly. "Get your chaps out, Figgy, and I'll get the School House fellows."

"Right-ho!"

Figgy raced back to the New House. Tom Merry dashed off in the darkness and climbed into the window he had left open in the School House. He rushed into the Shell dormitory.

"Wake up, you chaps!"

"Warrer marrer?"

"Fire!"

"My only hat!" said Monty Lowther, sitting up in bed. "Has Skimmy been setting fire to his study again? He'll never get that book finished!"

"It's not in St. Jim's," said Tom Merry hurriedly. "And it's a more serious thing than the fire we had. The sky's very red. I think it's at the Grammar School!"

"Great Scott!"

"Wake up! Tumble up, firemen!"

The Shell fellows turned out of bed. Tom Merry dashed away to the Fourth Form dormitory to call up Blake & Co.

Some of the Fourth were already awake. They had heard the alarm-bell clanging in the distance through the silent night.

"Firemen wanted!" Tom Merry called into the dormitory. "You fellows awake?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Tumble up! We're going!"

"Good!" said Blake.

"And quiet!" said Tom Merry warningly. "We're going to save lives and property and things; but the prefects mustn't know. We've got to get out of the House without a sound."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Get your things!" said Tom Merry. "We may need the hatchets and the fire-escape, and the ropes. Don't forget anything!"

"Right-ho!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, we are not likely to forget anythin'!"

"Buck up!"

"In the circles—"

But Tom Merry was gone. He returned quietly to the Shell dormitory and found the amateur firemen ready. They had dressed hastily in the first things that came to hand. Some of the brigade, indeed, were sleeping, or appearing to. Not all of the juniors were anxious to leave their warm beds for the cold night outside, with the additional penalty for breaking bounds to be faced in the morning. But most of the firemen were keen and eager, and they followed Tom Merry from the dormitory, with their hatchets and ropes and other appurtenances in their hands, all ready for business. The Fourth Formers joined them in the passage, and the juniors dropped from the hall window, one by one, into the dusky quad.

"What about Figgins & Co.?" asked Blake.

"They're out!"

"Oh, good!"

"Here we are!" sang out Figgins from the school wall—"waiting for you bouncers! Hurry up, slow coaches! We've been here nearly a minute!"

"Weally, Figgins—"

"Over the wall—quick!" said Tom Merry. "Somebody else is awake! I can see a light in Kildare's window!"

The juniors scrambled over the wall in hot haste. The light in Kildare's window showed that the captain of St. Jim's had heard the alarm-bell and risen from his bed.

As they looked back at the House they



saw a light flash in Mr. Railton's window, too.

Good as the intentions of the junior firemen were, they felt pretty certain that if the masters and prefects knew that they were out of their dormitories, they would be ordered back there at once. Orders from masters and prefects could not be disobeyed; so it was wiser not to risk receiving them.

The juniors scrambled down the road in hot haste. The flare in the sky was redder now, and the clang, clang! of the alarm-bell came to their ears on the night wind.

"Come on!" shouted Tom Merry.

"Follow your leader!"

"Right-ho!"

And the amateur firemen of St. Jim's dashed away through the night at top speed.

CHAPTER 15.

Fighting the Flames!

A RUDDY glare of light danced over the Grammar School.

The alarm-bell was clanging out noisily: the Close was crowded with fellows, half-dressed, turned hastily out of their beds.

The whole wing of the school was in flames and smoke.

The alarm-bell rang far through the night, and the fire brigade at Wayland had been summoned. But there was no sign of the fire brigade so far.

Dr. Monk, the Head of the Grammar School, was in the Close, looking dazed and almost helpless. Delamere, the captain of the school, was shouting to the fellows to keep back from the fire. Mr. Hilton, the second master, had just brought out a bag from the burning building, and deposited him in the Close.

The crowds of Grammarians looked on at the fire with fascinated eyes.

"I think we're all out," Gordon Gay remarked. "Jolly lucky the alarm was given in time. It was jolly smoky when I got out!"

"How on earth did it start?" said Monk.

Gay shook his head.

"Blessed if I know! I smelt gas—

The canvas chute swayed and sagged to and fro as the juniors rolled and struggled in its folds, and muffled shouts came from it. "Yaroooh!" "Lemme gerrouit!" "Grooogh!" There was a yell of laughter from the shadows. "Bai Jove!" exclaimed D'Arcy, at the window. "The New House boundahs have fastened up the end!"

might have been an escape of gas in a room where there was a fire left burning, perhaps. I say, is it certain that everybody's out?"

The juniors looked at the building, wrapped in smoke and flames, and shivered. If anybody was in the burning wing, it would be bad for him. The senior boys were labouring to keep the fire in check. The garden hose was working, and was pouring water into the flames, but with little effect.

Crowds of fellows carried buckets to and from the fountain, swamping water into the fire, but their puny efforts counted for little.

It was doubtful if the fire brigade would have much success if it did not arrive soon.

Dr. Monk, in great agitation, tapped Mr. Hilton on the arm.

"Please call over the boys at once," he said. "We must make sure that no one is left in the building."

"Quite so, sir."

The boys ranged up for the calling-over. As Mr. Hilton was calling their names in turn, and the Grammarians answering "adsum" to their names, there was a shout as a crowd of fellows came pouring in at the gates.

Tom Merry & Co. had arrived.

"My hat!" exclaimed Gordon Gay.

"Here's the St. Jim's chaps!"

"Here we are!" gasped Tom Merry.

"We're the St. Jim's Fire Brigade!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Please keep back from the building," said Mr. Hilton, apparently not impressed by any idea of great assistance to be rendered by the St. Jim's brigade. "You must not get into danger!"

"Weally, sir," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, not forgetting his stately dignity even at that moment of excitement—"weally, sir, it is the bisney of a fire brigade to go into dangah, sir! That's what we're here for!"

"Good old Gussy!" chuckled Figgins.

"Line up with the buckets!" ordered Tom Merry. "Get anything you can, and chuck water in. Help to carry things out of the part that's not on fire!"

And the St. Jim's firemen set to work.



They worked hard. They carried out things from rooms that were not in the slightest danger of being reached by the fire and piled them in the Close.

Figgins and Patty Wynn came staggering out under the weight of a big armchair, and other fellows followed with all sorts and conditions of things. Some of them found buckets and pails, and helped to swamp water on the flames.

The fire was raging with terrible violence now, and heat fanned the faces of the crowd in the Close. The roar of the flames could be heard at a great distance, and people were arriving from Rylcombe to lend aid.

Mr. Hilton was rapping out the names of the boys. He believed that everybody was out of the House, and it was necessary to make sure.

But suddenly there was a pause.

"Blanc!"

No answer.

"Gustave Blanc!"

Silence.

"My only hat!" exclaimed Gordon Gay. "Mont Blong hasn't got out! I remember his getting out of the dorm. I thought he came down with me."

"Mont Blong! Mont Blong!" shouted the juniors.

But there was no reply to the call.

The French junior was evidently still in the House.

Gordon Gay turned white.

"He's inside!" he exclaimed. "The smoke must have done it—I know he started from the dorm."

Gay made a rush towards the House. Mr. Hilton caught him by the shoulder and swung him back.

"Stop!" he commanded sternly.

Gordon Gay struggled in the master's grasp.

"Mont Blong's in there, sir!"

"Stay where you are. I am going in."

"But, sir—"

"Silence! I order you to stay here!"

Mr. Hilton released the junior and ran into the House. The thick, rolling volumes of smoke swallowed him up in a moment.

There was a dead silence in the Close, broken only by the hurried breathing of the crowd and the roar of the flames amid the dull clang of the alarm-bell.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Dr. Monk. "He has gone to his death!"

And the old gentleman wrung his hands.

A crowd waited for Mr. Hilton to appear.

A minute passed.

Then another.

Mr. Hilton did not appear.

The faces were white now; fellows looked at one another in horrified silence.

Mont Blong was in the building—overcome by the smoke, evidently—and the Form-master—what had become of him?

Another minute.

"I'm going in!" said Gordon Gay desperately. "I'm not going to stand here while poor Mont Blong is burned!"

He dashed towards the House.

"Come back, Gay!" cried Dr. Monk.

But the Australian junior did not hear, or heed. He disappeared into the rolling smoke that was thick and opaque in the doorway.

Another long minute—seemingly a century long.

"It—it's death to go in!" sobbed Frank Monk.

Tom Merry set his teeth.

The St. Jim's Fire Brigade had not

bargained for this. But duty was duty, and Tom Merry was not afraid.

He tied a handkerchief over his mouth, and drenched himself with water.

Figgins caught his arm, his face chalky white.

"You're not going in, Tom?"

Tom Merry nodded without speaking.

"You can't! You shan't! It's death!"

"I'm going in!"

"But—but—"

"You can't, Tom!" muttered Lowther.

"Firemen mustn't be afraid," said Tom Merry, with a faint smile. "Let me go, Monty!"

"Then I'm coming, too!" said Lowther.

"Stand back! I'm captain!" said Tom Merry sharply.

"But—but—"

"Stand back, all of you!"

"I'm coming!" said Figgins grimly.

"Where the School House go, the New House can follow. Don't jaw—I'm coming!"

"Yaas, wathah! And I—"

"Stop!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "If there's anything to be done, two can do it. Figgie can come with me; the rest keep back."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"He's right!" muttered Blake huskily. "Keep back, Gussy! But if they don't come out again, I'm going in for them, and chance it!"

"Come back—come back, boys!" cried Dr. Monk. "You can do no good. Come back!"

They did not heed.

The crowd watched them fascinated as they ran into the smoke of the doorway.

Tom Merry knew the way inside. He had paid many visits there to Gordon Gay & Co. At the foot of the stairs he stumbled over something that lay prone.

He grasped Figgins by the arm, and stopped him.

It was an insensible man who lay there, overcome by the smoke. The two juniors grasped him, lifted him by a great exertion of strength, and staggered out into the open air.

There was a shout as they reappeared.

"They've got Hilton!" roared Wootton major.

Scores of hands received the insensible master from the amateur firemen.

"Now for the others!" panted Figgins.

They plunged in again.

They groped their way to the stairs. The smoke was thick upon them, and from the burning rooms on their right and left came the dull roar of flames and the crash of falling woodwork.

But the stairs was not yet burning, and they scrambled up through the blinding smoke. They had wet handkerchiefs over their mouths, but the smoke seemed to be choking them.

Tom Merry felt his brain reeling, but he kept an iron grip on himself.

Up through the blinding vapour, into the dormitory passage. Here the smoke was thinner, and they could see. A form lay huddled close by the door of the dormitory, and Tom Merry recognised Gordon Gay. The Australian junior had reached so far when the smoke overcame him.

Tom Merry and Figgins raised him up. Tom pushed him into the arms of the New House junior.

"Get him out, Figgie—there's another yet."

Figgins nodded; he was past speaking. He scrambled down the stairs with

Gordon Gay hanging insensibly over his shoulder. How he reached the ground floor, Figgins never knew. A wild and blinding struggle through the smoke—with the heat seeming to melt the very marrow in his bones. There was a rush of flame—and it scorched him—he groaned with pain—but he fought on! Thicker and thicker the smoke—he reeled. But the smoke suddenly became thinner—the cool air blew upon his scorched face. There was a roar:

"Here he is!"

They seized Figgins and his insensible burden, and bore them far from the flames.

"But Tom Merry!" muttered Lowther hoarsely.

Figgins panted.

"He's looking for Mont Blong!"

Then he fainted.

There was a rush of fellows towards the House. But a roar of flame in the doorway, and a rush of licking blaze, stopped them. The staircase and the Hall were on fire now—and no living being could have passed that fearful barrier. They stumbled back, scorched and panting. Flame—flame everywhere—cutting off the retreat of the brave junior who had gone in—cutting off help from him!

Where was Tom Merry?

CHAPTER 16.

A Fight for Life!

TOM MERRY, fighting against the heat, the smoke, the faintness that was seizing upon him, struggled on in his search.

He knew from Gordon Gay that the French junior had got out of the dormitory; but where was he? He groped in the passage—on the stairs. He stumbled at last over an inanimate form.

He stooped down and grasped it.

In the smoke he could not see—but he knew that it must be Mont Blong. The French junior was quite insensible.

Tom Merry lifted him in his arms—fortunately Gustave Blanc was a slimly built fellow, and no great weight. The junior of St. Jim's staggered towards the staircase.

A rush of flame met him and drove him back.

Before him was a sea of fire!

Tom Merry groaned and staggered back. There was no escape downwards; he was shut up in the burning building!

He staggered towards the upper stairs. He knew the way; he could not see an inch with his smarting eyes.

The smoke was intense, blinding, stinging. But he reached the upper stairs, and scrambled up with his burden.

Higher and higher!

There was a door before him now; he grasped at it; it did not open. He knew that it was the door of a room looking on to the Close—and it was locked!

If he could get to the window, there was a chance yet!

He tugged at the door; he realised that it was locked. But his hatchet was at his belt, and he felt a wave of thankfulness that the St. Jim's firemen had come prepared for work. He dragged at the hatchet, and crashed it upon the door.

Crash, crash, crash!

Mont Blong hung heavily upon his left shoulder as he wielded the axe with his right hand.

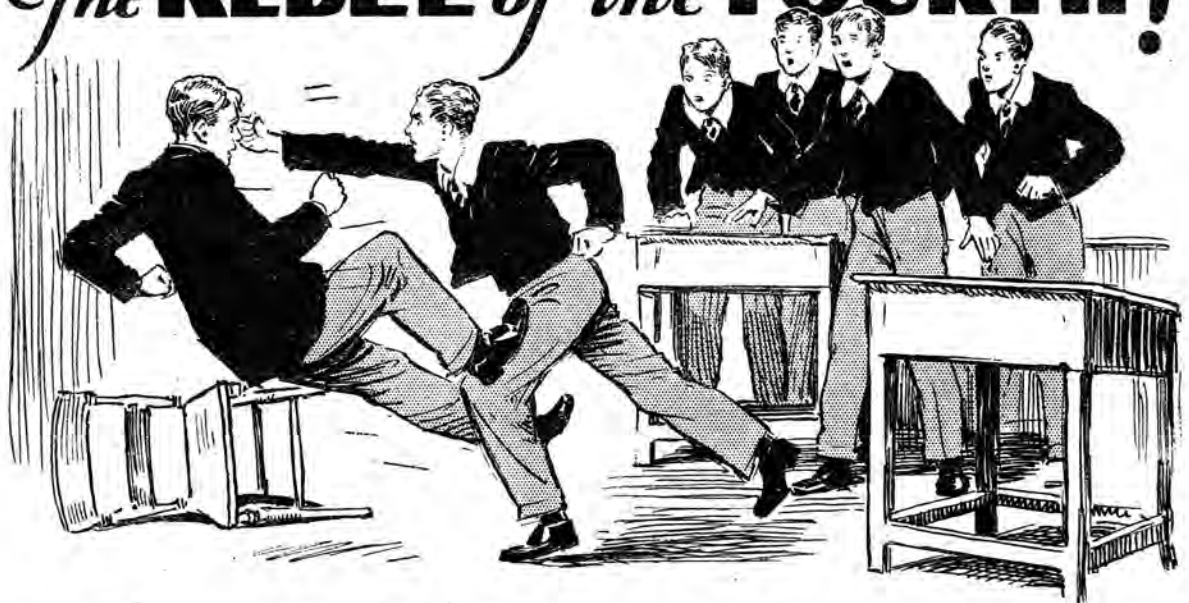
Crash, crash, crash!

Smoke round him, thicker and thicker, wrapping him like a blanket in its folds. Flames were licking along the floor, along the walls. The heat was fearful.

(Continued on page 28.)

WHEN THE HEAD WAS SMOKED OUT AND A PREFECT KNOCKED OUT!

The REBEL of the FOURTH!



Under the amazed, staring eyes of the Fourth, Vane stood up to the Sixth Former. The angry junior dashed Carthew's lashing fists aside and hit out, sending the senior crashing to the floor!

Another Gripping Mystery Story of Rookwood. By OWEN CONQUEST.

The Last Hope!

JIMMY SILVER drew a deep breath.

"Gone!" he said.

A taxi turned out at the school gate, watched by a crowd of fellows in the quad. In it sat Mr. Dalton, the master of the Fourth, and, by his side, Valentine Mornington.

Mornington of the Fourth, sacked from the school, was starting for the station under the charge of his Form-master.

Morny had always been cool, and he was cool now. His face was a little pale, his lips were set, and his eyes gleamed under his knitted brows. But he was cool as ice, and he turned his head and waved his hand to the crowd of Rookwooders watching him go.

The taxi turned into the road.

By the gate a junior stood—Erroll of the Classical Fourth. Morny's chum looked as if he felt the blow more severely than Morny did. He made a step towards the taxi as it was passing him and held up his hand. Mr. Dalton frowned, but he signed to the driver to stop. If Erroll wanted to say a last good-bye to his expelled chum, Dicky Dalton was not the man to prevent him. And the misery in Erroll's face touched his heart.

The taxi halted, and Kit Erroll came to the door. Mornington gave him a rather wry grin.

"Better to have cut out the jolly old last farewells, old bean," he said lightly. "You look rather sick, old fellow."

"Morny!" muttered Erroll.

"You're not losin' much in losin' me," said Morny, "and there will be a fearful lot of dry eyes in the Fourth! Look at Dicky! Jolly glad to get shut of me, aren't you, Dicky?"

Richard Dalton started a little. Probably he knew that he was called "Dicky" in his Form. But this was the first time that a Fourth Former had addressed him as Dicky.

"Please do not be impertinent, Mornington!" he said sternly.

"Why not?" drawled Mornington. "I'm sacked—and that's the limit. You can't do anythin' more, Dicky, except see me off at the station. And you're goin' to render me that last favour, whether I call you Dicky or whether I call you silly ass. And you are a silly ass, you know," went on Morny in quite a casual tone. "Only a silly ass would fancy that I was the sportsman who knocked out Tommy Dodd in the dark last night!"

Mr. Dalton compressed his lips.

"If you desire to say good-bye to Mornington, Erroll, be brief!" he snapped. "We have a train to catch."

It was Dudley Vane, the rebel of his Form, who gave the bullying Carthew a licking—but who was it who laid him clean out?

The "mystery man" again!

"Mr. Dalton," breathed Erroll, "can't you see—Morny never did it! Morny's as innocent as I am. He went out of bounds last night, like the silly, reckless ass he is—but it was a mere chance that he was out of the House when Dodd was attacked in the dark—"

"That matter is closed, Erroll."

"It was not Morny, sir! He's not the fellow they call the 'mystery man' who's been ragging in the school for weeks—he's not! You know, sir, Lovell was suspected at first, and it was proved that he was not the fellow! Morny's as innocent as Lovell was—it's somebody else—"

"I cannot listen to this, Erroll!" said Mr. Dalton. "Mornington has been judged guilty by his headmaster and

expelled—and I fully concur in the judgment. Stand back and let me proceed."

Erroll's hand was on the taxi window. He did not stand back. It seemed as if he were unable to let his chum go.

"Bite on the jolly old bullet, kid!" said Mornington. "They've got the wrong man—but they don't know it! Can't expect much in the way of sense from a schoolmaster, you know."

"Be silent!" rapped Mr. Dalton.

"Morny," gasped Erroll, "be quiet, you ass! The game's not up yet. I tell you, the facts will come out and the Head will let you come back. I'm certain—as certain as I stand here—that you'll be cleared, and very likely before you reach home."

Morny blinked at him. Mr. Dalton stared.

"What do you mean, Erroll?" asked Richard Dalton. "If you have any knowledge of the identity of the reckless rascal who has committed a series of outrages in the school—"

"I have not, sir. Nobody knows who the fellow is. But I know that the fellow, brute as he is, is not all bad, and that he will not let Mornington be sacked for him!" said Erroll earnestly. "Don't you remember, sir, when your study was wrecked, and Lovell was supposed to have done it, another outrage happened while Lovell was in the punishment-room—"

"What of it?" snapped Mr. Dalton.

"A lot of the fellows thought, sir, and I did, that the mystery man wouldn't let Lovell be sacked for what he hadn't done, and deliberately made it clear that Lovell was not the man!"

"Very possible!" said Mr. Dalton dryly. "Mornington, no doubt—"

"It was not Morny—and I feel certain that the rotter, whoever he is, will never stand for this," said Erroll. "I believe he will do as he did before—and after

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Morny's gone, sir, you'll find that the mystery man isn't gone."

"By gad!" ejaculated Mornington. His face brightened. "Erroll, old bean, I believe you're right! That blighter, whoever he is, is a bit of a sportsman in his own way. Sorry I called you Dicky, Mr. Dalton—I take it back! Mustn't call you Dicky if I'm coming back to Rookwood."

Mr. Dalton gave him a grim look. "You need not flatter yourself that you will come back to Rookwood, Mornington!" he said. "Erroll, stand back at once. Driver, proceed."

Morny gripped his chum's hand. "Thanks, old man!" he said. "You've bucked me no end! I hope that sportsman will play up as you expect. Say au revoir, but not good-bye—what?"

The taxi rolled on towards Latcham. Kit Erroll walked back into the gateway. His face was white; he seemed almost dazed by the blow that had fallen and taken his chum from him. Yet there was hope in his heart.

In all Rookwood there were only two fellows who declared their belief that Mornington was innocent—his chum, Kit Erroll, and Dudley Vane, the new fellow in the Fourth. Some of the others might doubt—Jimmy Silver doubted a little—but the general belief was that the chopper had come down in the right place. Morny had always been reckless and rebellious, often near the limit, and now he had gone over the limit. Certainly there was no hope for him unless the mystery man proved to be still in the school after he was gone.

To that Erroll pinned his faith.

A Rag on the Head!

DR. CHISHOLM, headmaster of Rookwood, sat in his study. There was a thoughtful expression on his face, but he was, upon the whole, in a satisfied mood. The series of mysterious outrages in the school, culminating in the brutal attack on a Modern junior in the dark, had been a deep worry and problem to the Head, and it was a relief to his mind to have discovered the culprit and turned him out of the school.

Mornington, judged guilty on evidence that seemed complete enough, was on his way home in Mr. Dalton's charge—and the matter was at an end. At least, so the headmaster believed. Sitting before his study fire, he gazed into the glowing coals with a thoughtful brow, waiting for the bell to ring—when he was to take Mr. Dalton's Form during the Fourth Form master's absence.

A sudden gust of smoke from the fire made him start and cough. He rose to his feet, spluttering.

Another and another gust came from the chimney. It was surprising, for the day, cold and frosty, was not windy, and even a high wind should not have caused the chimney to smoke to such an extent.

Dr. Chisholm backed away from the fire, surprised and angry, coughing and spluttering. Volumes of smoke followed him.

Something evidently was wrong with the chimney! In a couple of minutes the room was so thick with smoke that the Head could hardly see his way to the window to open it.

He grabbed at the casement to jerk it open. To his further surprise and wrath, it did not open.

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated the Head.

He wrenched at the window. But it remained fast. Something was wrong with it, as well as with the chimney.

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It was at that moment that it flashed into the Head's mind that he was the victim of a "rag." With gleaming eyes, he bent his head to examine the window, peering through curling smoke. He made out the head of a screw, driven deep into the wooden frame.

The expression that came over Dr. Chisholm's face might have scared the unknown ragger could he have seen it.

Someone, it was clear, had entered the study while the Head was at breakfast, and screwed up the window. The same someone, it was equally clear, was responsible for the smoky chimney.

Breathing hard, Dr. Chisholm whipped across the study to the door. He fairly tore at the door-handle.

The door did not open.

The key was gone. He had not noticed that the key was gone when he entered the study. The door was locked on the outside. Incredible as it seemed, someone had tiptoed along the passage after he was in the study and locked him in.

"Upon my word!" gasped the Head. The smoke was thickening. It was plain that the chimney had been blocked above. Swirling masses of smoke filled the room, rolling round the Head in clouds.

There was another door to the study—a small one beside the fireplace. Dr. Chisholm groped to it—he could no longer see his way. He reached it—and wrenched at it. It was locked—and the key gone.

Dr. Chisholm stood spluttering for breath, half-choked by the vapour thickening round him. He was a prisoner in his study, with the smoke rolling thicker and thicker.

He groped to the bell and rang. Then he groped back to the door. There was a tap—and the door-handle turned.

"Is that you, Tupper?" called out the Head, in gasping tones.

"Yessir! You rang, sir!" came the page's answer.

"Open the door, Tupper!"

"Eh, sir?"

"It has been locked on the outside!" hooted the Head. "Unlock it at once!"

"There ain't no key here, sir!" answered the surprised Tupper. "I say, sir, there's smoke coming out under the door, sir! Is the room afire, sir?"

"Gurrrrrgh!" gurgled the suffocating headmaster.

"Did you speak, sir?"

"Urrrrgh!"

"I didn't ketch that, sir!" said the astonished Tupper.

"Wurrrgh!"

Dr. Chisholm staggered across the study to the window again. Only a faint glimmer through the thick smoke showed where it was. He groped for something to break the glass. There was no help for it—he had to have air. He found a Greek lexicon, and dashed it through a pane.

Crash! Smash!

Almost the whole pane went under the crash. Fragments of glass scattered like hail in the quadrangle outside. Dr. Chisholm put his face to the gap, and gasped in the fresh air.

There was an astonished yell in the quad. It was not yet time for class, and plenty of fellows were there—most of them discussing the departure of Valentine Mornington. The crash of the headmaster's breaking window drew a hundred eyes to the spot.

"That's the Head's window!" yelled Arthur Edward Lovell. "I say, Dicky

Dalton's window was smashed yesterday. Now the Head's—"

"Can't be the jolly old mystery man again," said Raby. "He's gone!"

"It's the Head himself!" yelled Newcome. "Look! The study's on fire!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. rushed towards the Head's window. Fifty fellows at least rushed after them.

Through the jagged gap smoke was pouring out from within, and in the midst of it the headmaster's face could be seen—gasping for air. Bulkeley of the Sixth came rushing up.

"Fire!" yelled Tubby Muffin. "I say, fire! Somebody ring up the fire brigade!"

"Bulkeley," panted the Head through the gap, "I have been locked in my study, and the chimney has been blocked! Tell Sergeant Kettle to come at once, and bring his tools, and force the lock of my door!"

"Yes, sir!" gasped the Rookwood captain.

He cut off at once.

More and more fellows gathered under the Head's window. Even the expulsion of Mornington was forgotten now in the new excitement.

Crash! Smash! Two more panes went, under smites from the Greek lexicon. Smoke poured out in heavy volumes. Jimmy Silver came up to the window-sill.

"Shall I try to open the window, sir?" he asked. He supposed that it was jammed, somehow, as the Head broke the glass instead of opening it.

"The window has been screwed, Silver!" answered Dr. Chisholm. "It cannot be opened, or I should not be breaking the glass, you foolish boy!"

The Head's temper was not at its best. "It's a rag," breathed Lovell. "Some rag, believe me! Fancy any man ragging the Head!"

"A rag," repeated Kit Erroll. His eyes danced. "Yes—a rag! I jolly well knew it would come!"

Lovell stared at him.

"You knew—"

"Yes, I knew," said Erroll. "It's the mystery man again—after Morny's gone! They can't have got to Latcham yet—and the fellow is at his tricks again, with Morny away!"

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "If that's it—"

"The fellow's a sportsman in his own weird way," said Erroll. "He's barged in to see Morny clear—"

Lovell whistled.

Sergeant Kettle came hurrying up with Bulkeley. He went into the House, and a sound of knocking and clanging was soon heard. Nearly all Rookwood had gathered under the window, where the smoke was pouring out.

"I never believed that Morny was the man," said Dudley Vane. "This looks to me like proof of it!"

The same thought was in every mind. Whoever was guilty of that amazing rag on the Head was the same fellow who had perpetrated the previous outrages. That there could be another fellow, so madly reckless, was unbelievable. One of them was surprising enough; two of them was incredible. It was the mystery man again, and the mystery man was not Valentine Mornington—it could not be Morny, who in those very moments was seated in a taxi with Dicky Dalton, heading for Latcham Station.

The Head disappeared from the broken window. It seemed that Sergeant Kettle had got his study door open at last.



In a moment a crowd of fellows gathered round the Head's study window. A pane of glass had been broken, and as smoke rolled out Dr. Chisholm's face appeared in the jagged gap, gasping for air! "Fire!" yelled Tubby Muffin. "Ring up the fire brigade! Fire!"

The bell rang, and the Rookwood fellows trooped away to the Form-rooms in a state of buzzing excitement. Morny was gone—the mystery man was still at Rookwood—and all the fellows wondered what was going to happen next.

A Startling Outbreak!

CARTHEW of the Sixth came in to take the Fourth in first lesson. Mr. Dalton was still absent, and the Head, who had intended to replace the Fourth Form master with his majestic self, was otherwise occupied. Bulkeley and Neville and other prefects were also busy, hunting for the mysterious unknown who had blocked the headmaster's chimney. So Carthew was assigned to carry on in the Fourth—not much to the satisfaction of that Form. He was the least popular prefect at Rookwood, and the most unpleasant in his manners and customs.

As soon as Carthew appeared, all the Classical Fourth knew that they had to mind their step, as it were—which was not easy, for the whole Form was buzzing with excitement. Carthew had his official ashplant under his arm, and it was well known that he needed very little excuse to handle it.

So far as work went, things were easy with Carthew; he did not like work, and was not likely to bother much about what the juniors did, or did not do. As no prep had been set the previous evening—the first of the term—there was no "con." Carthew set the Form a Latin paper, by the easy process of giving them a section of the *Æneid* to write out and translate.

To save himself trouble he gave them the beginning of the first book, which most of the fellows knew almost by

heart, so all was easy so far. But when Arthur Edward Lovell whispered to Jimmy Silver that he wondered what the big beak was going to do about Morny, a sudden whop on the knuckles made Arthur Edward jump and utter a yell that woke the echoes of the Form-room.

"Don't talk in class!" said Carthew genially.

Lovell gave him a glare.

"Look here—" he bawled.

"Silence, Lovell! If you speak again I'll have you out to give you six of the best."

Lovell controlled his feelings with difficulty. The scratching of pens was resumed in the Form-room, and Carthew strolled about, his cane under his arm, waiting for another excuse to handle it.

He went to the window and looked out into the quad. His back was to the class for the moment.

In that moment there came a sudden whiz, and something smote Carthew on the back of the head. He gave a howl, and his nose tapped on the glass.

There was a gurgling of merriment from the Classical Fourth. But as the bully of the Sixth spun round from the window, with a furious face, all the juniors bent sedulously over their desks. An apple rolled on the floor—the missile that had clumped on the back of Carthew's head.

"Who threw that apple?" roared Carthew.

No answer.

"Stand up, Lovell!"

Arthur Edward stood up.

"I never threw it, Carthew!" he said meekly.

"I believe you did!"

"Well, I didn't!" grunted Lovell.

"You did—and I'll jolly well teach

you not to buzz apples at a prefect!" snarled Carthew. "Bend over your desk."

"It wasn't Lovell, Carthew," said Dudley Vane. "He never moved."

"Perhaps you saw who it was!" snapped Carthew.

"Oh, quite!" assented Vane.

"Who was it, then?"

It was like the bully of the Sixth to ask a fellow to "sneak" about another fellow. No man in the Fourth was likely to do so, least of all, as it happened, Dudley Vane—for it was Vane who had buzzed the apple!

"Do you hear me, Vane?" hooted Carthew.

"I'm not deaf!" answered the new junior.

"You say it was not Lovell who threw that apple, and that you saw who it was! Give me his name at once."

"Look here, Carthew—" began Jimmy Silver.

"Hold your tongue, Silver! Vane, stand out before the Form!"

Vane hesitated a moment, and then stepped out. Carthew stood before him, his ashplant gripped in his hand.

"Now give me the name!" he said savagely.

"I won't!" answered Vane coolly.

"You won't! Bend over that desk, then!"

"I won't do that, either."

There was a deep breath in the Fourth. Carthew stared at the new junior as if hardly able to believe his ears.

"You—you won't!" he gasped.

"No! You've no right to ask a fellow to sneak or to cane him for refusing. Mr. Dalton wouldn't—"

"Never mind Mr. Dalton now. Bend over that desk!" roared Carthew.

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Vane stood motionless. Carthew made a stride at him, gripped him by the collar with his left hand, and wrenched him towards the desk. A blaze came into Dudley Vane's eyes.

He twisted in the prefect's grasp, turned on him, and grappled with him. Carthew, taken by surprise, went rocking back in the junior's grasp.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Lovell. "Vane, old man, chuck it!"

All the Classical Fourth were on their feet now. It was an amazing scene in a Rookwood Form-room.

Carthew, rallying, exerted his strength and bore the junior back. But, to his amazement, and to the amazement of the Form, Dudley Vane held his own. Carthew was no great athlete, but he was a Sixth Form man, head and shoulders bigger than Vane, and all the fellows expected to see Vane crumple up in his grip. Instead of which, the new junior not only held his own, but more than his own. Carthew rocked back again and struggled frantically in a grasp that was too strong for him.

He went staggering back, and was flung headlong to the floor. He landed there on his back with a terrific crash.

Vane stood over him, panting, white, with flashing eyes, his fists clenched. The Fourth stared at him, dumb-founded.

Carthew lay gasping. He could hardly believe that he had been flogged by a junior of the Fourth Form.

He scrambled up. The cane had flown from his hand. He rushed at the rebel of the Fourth with his fists clenched. Carthew's temper, too, was out of control now.

Under the amazed, staring eyes of the Fourth, Vane stood up to the towering Sixth Form man. The juniors could scarcely believe their eyes as they saw him dash Carthew's savage, lashing fists aside and hit out, knocking the Sixth Form man backwards.

Crash!

Carthew of the Sixth went down again, more heavily than before. As he sprawled Vane jumped at him, grasped him by the collar, and dragged him by sheer strength to the door. He tore the door open, rolled the gasping, spluttering bully of the Sixth into the doorway, and kicked him into the passage.

"Vane!" shrieked Jimmy Silver in helpless dismay.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Tubby Muffin. "Vane, you mad ass—" roared Lovell.

Dudley Vane did not heed. He kicked and kicked till Carthew, yelling, rolled out into the passage. Vane slammed the door on him.

Then he looked round at the staring juniors. He seemed suddenly to recollect himself. Crimson flushed into his white face. He went quietly back to his place and sat down.

"You utter ass!" said Oswald. "You'll be sacked for that!"

Vane did not answer. He did not look up. Quietly he took up his pen and resumed his task. Carthew did not come back. The Fourth remained undisturbed till suddenly there came the sound of a taxi outside the House. Erroll ran to a window.

"It's Dicky!" he shouted. "And—Morny's come back with him! Hurrah!"

as ever. All the fellows were out of their places—except one. Dudley Vane, with a dark, depressed look on his face, sat still at his desk, his eyes on his Latin paper. He gave Morny only one quick glance as he came in, and then went on writing. But the rest of the Classical Fourth crowded round Mornington, and Erroll thumped him joyfully on the back.

"Anybody glad to see me again?" yawned Morny. "I know Muffin's missed me—he hasn't borrowed anything of me this term yet."

"Yah!" said Tubby Muffin. "So you're back again!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Looks like it, doesn't it? Turned up again like a jolly old bad penny!" grinned Mornington. "You were right, Erroll, old man! I gather that the mystery sportsman started his pranks again after I went?"

"That's right!" said Lovell. "But how did you know?"

Mornington chuckled.

"When we got to Latham the station-master sorted Dicky out, and told him the big beak had rung up and wanted to speak to him on the phone," he explained. "You should have seen Dicky's face when he had taken the call! It seems that the mystery man broke out again, and the Head jumped to it that I wasn't the bloke, as I was miles away—remarkably intelligent deduction for a schoolmaster to make—the old bean's brain must have been working at double pressure—what? So instead of slamin' me in the train for home dear old Dicky hiked me back in the taxi—and here I am."

"And the expulsion's washed out?" asked Erroll.

"Sort of," agreed Morny. "In fact, I score all along the line. As the wronged victim of unjust suspicion, I'm rather an object of sympathy. Dicky's forgotten that I cheeked him in the cab—and the Head has pardoned me for breaking House bounds last night—in view of my jolly old narrow escape from getting it in the neck. All fearfully excitin', my beloved 'carers, but I'm glad it's over!"

"Gratters, old bean!" said Lovell. "I thought they'd got the right man."

"You would!" assented Morny. "With a brain like yours, old man, you might think anythin'."

"Look here, you cheeky ass—"

"Speech may be taken as read!" yawned Mornington. "Dicky's gone to the Head to jaw. I understood there was a prefect in charge here—has he left you on your jolly old own?"

"Vane kicked him out," said Raby. Mornington jumped.

"Eh—what? Pulling my leg?" he ejaculated.

"Honest Injun!"

"Kicked a prefect out?" said Morny. "Well, by gad, that's outside even my limit! Looks to me as if there's goin' to be another expulsion—without the happy victim bein' recalled this time! Are you potty, Vane?"

Dudley Vane did not answer or look up. With a black brow, he gave all his attention to his task—the only fellow in the Classical Fourth who was doing so.

"But tell me what happened," went on Morny. "What jolly old larks has the mystery man been playin' while I was off the scene and couldn't enjoy the fun?"

A dozen voices told him. Morny whistled.

"Blockin' up the Head's chimney—lockin' the old bean in his study!" he said. "Some lad, that chap! I hope they won't spot him. He's a wild

beggar, and no mistake—but I tell you men, he's a good bit of a sportsman."

The Form-room door opened again, and Richard Dalton came in. There was a scamper of the juniors to their places.

Mr. Dalton eyed them with a frown. "Is not a prefect in charge here, Silver?" he asked.

"He—he left the Form-room, sir!" stammered Jimmy.

"Indeed! That is no excuse for disorder. Take your places at once!" said Mr. Dalton severely.

Evidently Richard Dalton had not been informed of what had happened to Carthew of the Sixth. Nobody in the Fourth was likely to tell him. Second lesson followed, and matters went on more or less normally; but few in the Classical Fourth were giving much thought to the lesson. It had been an exciting morning at Rookwood, and there was going to be more excitement when Dudley Vane was called to account.

The Fourth were dismissed for break at last. Valentine Mornington was looking very bright and cheerful as he went out with Erroll. With all his assumption of cool indifference, there was no doubt that the dandy of the Fourth was immensely relieved by the way matters had turned out for him.

A man from Latham was seen repairing the broken window of the Head's study. But it was soon learned that no discovery had been made of the mysterious ragger. A garret window that gave access to the roof had been found open, and a folded blanket had been fished out of the chimney-pot; but to the fellow who had done the deed, there was no clue whatever.

It was the mystery man, that was certain. That the Head believed so was clear from his action in recalling Mornington. The secret ragger was still at Rookwood, and nothing was known about him for certain.

Who was he?

That was as perplexing as ever.

Dudley Vane took no part in the discussion on the subject. He walked in the quad, with his hands driven deep into his pockets, and a black cloud on his brow. Evidently he was thinking of what must follow his fierce outbreak of temper in the Form-room. Neville of the Sixth came out of the House, glanced round, and called to him:

"Vane! You're wanted in your Form-master's study!"

"Very well, Neville," answered Vane quietly.

He went into the House, and slowly made his way to Richard Dalton's study. Carthew of the Sixth was there, with the Fourth Form master. His eyes glittered at Vane as he came in.

The new junior took no notice of him. He looked at Mr. Dalton.

"You sent for me, sir?"

"I have received a most extraordinary report from Carthew, Vane," said Mr. Dalton severely. "Is it possible that you so far forgot yourself as to attack a Sixth Form prefect placed in charge of my Form by the head-master?"

Vane breathed hard.

"I'm sorry, sir! Carthew ordered me to sneak, and I wouldn't. No fellow in the Form would have done it!"

"I ordered him to give the name of the fellow who threw an apple at my head, sir," said Carthew, as Mr. Dalton's glance turned on him. "As he refused, I was going to cane him, when he—"

"You should have given no such

Called to Account!

VALENTINE MORNINGTON walked into the Fourth Form Room with his hands in his pockets and a cheery grin on his face. He nodded to the juniors, as cool

order, Carthew. To cane a boy for refusing to accuse another boy was an act of tyranny!" snapped Mr. Dalton. "In other circumstances, a junior would be expelled for striking a prefect—but you appear to have acted wrongly in the first place."

Carthew set his teeth.

"The Head—" he began.

"The Head would not uphold your action any more than I do," said Richard Dalton. "I shall not report this to the Head. But you, Vane, will be severely punished for your action. I can scarcely understand such extraordinary and uncontrolled violence on the part of a boy usually so well-behaved—a boy I have always considered a credit to my Form."

"I'm sorry, sir!" said Vane, in a low voice. "I lost my temper when Carthew laid hands on me."

"No doubt! You must learn to control your temper better," said Mr. Dalton sharply. "You refused to be caned by Carthew. You will now be caned by him in my presence, and at my order. Refuse, and I shall take you to Dr. Chisholm, and I warn you that you will be sent home by the next train."

"I should never refuse to obey you, sir!"

"I am glad of that!" said Dicky Dalton dryly. "Carthew, take that cane! Vane, bend over that chair!"

Dudley Vane, silently, with compressed lips, bent over. There was no sign about him now of the fierce, passionate temper he had displayed in the Form-room. He had himself well in hand.

Carthew gripped the cane, his eyes gleaming. He would have preferred to see the junior "sacked," but he was going to make the most of the tanning. He swished the cane in the air, and brought it down with a tremendous swipe.

Six times the cane rose and fell, and every cut was as hard as the bully of the Sixth could lay it on. Mr. Dalton looked on grimly. Not a sound came from Dudley Vane. His face was white, and his eyes burned, but he shut his teeth hard, and bore the infliction in stony silence.

"That will do, Carthew!" said Mr. Dalton sharply, as the prefect seemed disposed to continue after the "six" had been administered.

Carthew laid down the cane, and left the study. Dudley Vane rose, breathing very hard. His eyes dropped before Mr. Dalton's steady gaze.

"You may go, Vane!" said the Fourth Form master quietly.

Dudley Vane left the study.

Richard Dalton sat with his eyes fixed on the door that had closed behind the new junior, a deep line of thought on his brow. He remained plunged in a brown study till the bell rang for third school. His brow was still clouded as he made his way to the Form-room.

By Whose Hand?

"MUFFIN, old man, what's the time?"

Tubby Muffin blinked at Dudley Vane.

They were in the end study, after prep. In Study No. 4, along the passage, Valentine Mornington and Erroll were holding rather a celebration. Mornny was standing a study supper to celebrate his happy return to Rookwood after so narrow an escape of the "sack," and he had invited as many fellows as the study would hold—and a few more.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were all there, with a crowd of other fellows. Dudley Vane had been asked, but he had politely declined, which did not matter a bean to Mornny. Study No. 4 was crammed, anyhow. And there was, alas! no room for Cecil Adolphus Muffin.

In which circumstances it was grateful and comforting to Tubby, when Vane came strolling along the passage, for the new junior to ask him to step into the end study and share a cake.

Vane sat down with his back to the fireplace. The study clock was on the mantelpiece, behind him.

Still, it rather surprised Tubby for Vane to ask him the time. He could have seen the clock by turning his head.

"It's just nine, old chap! I say, this is a jolly good cake!" said Muffin, with his mouth full. "I say, you're not eating any!" Muffin blinked sympathetically. "Still feeling that whopping—what?"

"I've got some work to do," remarked Vane. "Like to take the cake to your study and finish it, Muffin?"

"I say, you're awfully decent, old chap!" said Muffin. There was nothing that Tubby would have liked better.

"Sure you don't want any?"

"Quite!" said Vane, with a smile.

"Right-ho, then!"

Don't Forget, Chums—

Next Wednesday the GEM will contain another grand set of coloured pictures for you.

Tubby Muffin rolled out of the end study with the cake.

Ten minutes later there was a tramp of feet in the passage, and the door flew open, and the Fistical Four tramped cheerily in.

"Hallo, swotting?" asked Lovell, as he saw Vane seated at the table with his books.

"Just giving this the once-over," said Vane carelessly. "Mornny's little party over?"

"Yes," said Jimmy Silver. "You were rather an ass not to come, Vane. Jolly good spread and the best of company—ours!"

Dudley Vane laughed.

"I wasn't feeling like it," he said. "And I've had a cake with Muffin—he was here a little while ago. Well, I'd better chuck this."

He snapped his books shut and rose to his feet.

"Hallo! What does Dicky want?" ejaculated Raby.

He was standing in the doorway, and he had a sudden view of Mr. Dalton coming hurriedly up the passage from the stairs.

The Fourth Form master came up to the end study with rapid strides. He looked in at the door, the expression on his face startling the chums of the Fourth as they saw it.

"Oh, you are here, Vane!" exclaimed Mr. Dalton.

"Yes, sir," answered Vane.

"Has anything happened, sir?" ventured Jimmy Silver.

"Yes, Silver," said Mr. Dalton quietly. "Carthew of the Sixth Form has been attacked in his study."

"Oh!" gasped Jimmy.

"The mystery man again!" exclaimed Lovell.

"Vane," said Mr. Dalton, in the same quiet tone, "I cannot help recalling your extraordinary outbreak in the Form-room this morning and the fact that

Carthew punished you severely in my presence. Where were you at nine o'clock?"

"Nine o'clock!" repeated Vane.

"At nine o'clock," said Mr. Dalton, "Carthew went to his study. It was, of course, dark, and before he could switch on the light he was struck down by some person concealed in the study. The weapon used was a heavy ruler—which has been found. Carthew was stunned and—"

"Stunned!" breathed Jimmy.

"He remained unconscious for some time," continued Mr. Dalton. "He has, in fact, only just recovered sufficiently to make known what has happened."

The juniors stood silent and horrified. Carthew was a brute and a bully, but this was terrible news. Of all the outrages that had occurred at Rookwood School since the mystery man had begun his lawless career, this was the very worst!

"Carthew remembers the exact time he went to his study," went on Mr. Dalton. "He heard the hour strike—it was exactly nine. Vane, I require to know where you were at nine o'clock?"

"I was in this study at nine o'clock, sir, with Muffin," replied Vane.

"Muffin!" repeated Mr. Dalton.

"Yes; he came in to help me with a cake. Lucky he did, if you suspect me of having knocked Carthew out in his study!" added Vane, with a contemptuous curl of the lip.

"Silver, fetch Muffin here."

Jimmy Silver left the end study without a word. He came back in a few minutes with Cecil Adolphus Muffin. Tubby was looking a little alarmed.

"Muffin, you have been in this study with Vane since preparation?" asked Mr. Dalton.

"Yes, sir!" gasped Tubby. "Vane asked me to have some of his cake, and then—"

"At what time were you here, Muffin?"

"Nine o'clock, sir, when I noticed the time."

Mr. Dalton glanced at the clock and at his watch. The clock was right.

"How long had you been here, Muffin, when you noticed that it was nine o'clock?"

"Only a few minutes, sir—five or six, I suppose," said the mystified Muffin.

Mr. Dalton stood silent. Arthur Edward Lovell winked at his chums with the eye farthest from the Form-master. According to Tubby's evidence, evidently sincere, Vane had been in the study before five minutes to nine—and it was at nine that Carthew had been knocked out.

An alibi could hardly have been clearer. Whoever had knocked Carthew out with the ruler, it seemed impossible that it could have been Dudley Vane.

"Very well," said Mr. Dalton, at last, "I must regard you as cleared of suspicion, Vane! I regret that such a suspicion occurred to me—your own outbreak of ungovernable temper was the cause. So far as you are concerned, the matter ends here."

And the Fourth Form master strode away down the passage. Jimmy Silver & Co. looked at one another—Vane shrugging his shoulders. It was one more mystery added to the already long list, and it looked as if no investigation would ever be able to penetrate the mystery of Rookwood.

(The mystery of Rookwood takes a sensational turn in next week's great yarn. Make sure you read "THE SUSPECTED STUDY!")

FIRE-FIGHTERS OF ST. JIM'S!

(Continued from page 22.)

His face and his skin were scorched; his hair was singed—he laboured on unheeding.

Crash, crash, crash!

The lock gave at last!

The door swung open—he was through. The room was thick with blinding smoke. He staggered across to the window; it was shut. The hatchet crashed upon it, sending glass and sashes out—and he breathed once more the pure air!

Crash, crash, crash!

The window was smashed out in a few seconds. He could lean out into the air and look down into the Close now.

The crash of the breaking window had drawn all eyes upward. There was a shout from below as Tom Merry was seen:

"There he is!"

The juniors waved their hands to him. They had seen him. But below him was a sheer wall, thirty feet of sheer descent to the ground.

Behind him the smoke eddied, flames roared!

He laid Mont Blong upon the window-sill, his legs in the room, his head in the open air. Then, with steady hands, he uncoiled the long rope that was wound round his body under his jacket. Again he thanked good fortune that he had come ready—that he had forgotten nothing. He uncoiled the rope steadily, and fastened one end to Mont Blong, round his body under the armpits.

From the ground below—strangely far away it seemed—the crowd watched him intently in terrible silence. They could see almost every movement of the junior at the window. They knew that, even in that fearful moment, he was thinking only of saving the boy he had come to save, and not of himself. He knotted the rope securely round Mont Blong with hands that did not tremble. Then he lowered the unconscious junior carefully from the window.

Now there was a shout below. Fellows rushed forward to take the insensible junior when he was lowered. They stood ready to catch him if he fell.

Tom Merry paid out his rope steadily. Lower and lower went Mont Blong—lower and lower—till the hands that were reaching upward grasped him, and he was carried back.

Tom Merry turned back into the room. The door of that room was burning now; flames were licking through the walls and the floor. Under him was

the rumble and roar of the conflagration. The floor trembled beneath his feet. At any second, as he well knew, it might yield and precipitate him into the flames below.

But he fastened the rope to the bars of the grate with a firm hand. It was the only thing to secure it to. And the flames were licking round it; might burn through it at any moment. But it was his only chance, and he took it.

He climbed out on the window-sill, grasping the rope. His brain was reeling; he was acting now like a fellow in a dream. His senses were leaving him, and he knew it. The flames roared dully in his ears. Below, the ground and the sea of upturned faces seemed to swim.

But, keeping a grip upon himself, he grasped the rope with both hands, and swung clear of the window.

Down the rope now, hand below hand. They watched him in hushed terror from below. Down, lower and lower!

The rope cut and bruised his hands. From the lower window the flames licked at it. They scorched him as he passed. Would he lose his hold, and fall—fall to a horrible death on the hard stones below?

Hands were raised up to receive him. A blanket had been obtained from somewhere, and half a dozen fellows were holding it for him if he fell.

Snap!

Rope and junior fell together. The rope had been burnt through in the burning room above. The severed rope came lashing down, and Tom Merry fell like a stone. But he was only twenty feet from the ground, and the blanket was ready.

He fell into it heavily, dragging it down, but not quite to the ground.

There was a husky shout.

"Safe!"

"He's saved!"

They bore him back in triumph.

"Saved!"

Tom Merry rolled out of the blanket upon the ground, scorched, blistered, and panting. Lowther and Manners were bending over him anxiously.

"Oh, Tom—Tom!"

"I—I'm all right!" muttered Tom Merry thickly.

And then he sank back into unconsciousness.

Tom Merry recovered his senses, to find himself at home in bed in the old Shell dormitory at St. Jim's. Figgins was in the next bed to him, and fellows were all round them. Tom Merry opened his eyes, and Figgins grinned at him, with his blistered face, and nodded.

"All right, Tommy?"

Tom Merry sat up.

"Yes," he said. "How are you, Figgy?"

"Blistered," said Figgins. "Never mind; the St. Jim's Fire Brigade is a giddy success!"

"What—ho! What about the fire?"

"The fire brigade got there from Weyland soon after you got out," said Blake, who was sitting beside the bed. "They've saved most of the school; but if it hadn't been for you, Tommy, it would have been horrible! Poor old Mont Blong!"

"He's not badly hurt?" asked Tom Merry anxiously.

"No; less than you are. It was only the smoke. He's in the sanatorium now with Gay. They're both scorched, that's all. And you?"

"Oh, I'm all right!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "And I can tell you I'm jolly well not going to be made an invalid of!"

"I'm afraid you will have to stay in the school hospital for a time, Merry," said Dr. Short. And Tom Merry blinked at the medical man. "You have been scorched, and your hair is burned."

"And you haven't any giddy eyebrows left!" grinned Figgins.

Tom Merry put his hand up to his face.

"Oh, my hat! Never mind; they'll grow again!" Then he grinned at Figgins. "You don't look much better, old chap! You look like a pancake that's dropped into the fire!"

Both Tom Merry and Figgins, in spite of their desire not to be considered as invalids, had to pass a week in the school sanatorium before they were allowed to rejoin their Forms. And when they appeared among the fellows again, they bore very visible marks of their experience as amateur firemen. It was many weeks before all traces of that adventure left them. But they did not mind. They had proved that the St. Jim's Fire Brigade was a success—a howling success, as Figgins jubilantly said.

And all St. Jim's agreed that the scars they bore were a distinction that any fellows might have envied. And they were not called over the coals for breaking bounds that night. When they were recovered, the whole school was assembled in the Hall, and the Head of St. Jim's publicly complimented and thanked the two juniors, and the old Hall rang with cheers for the fire-fighters of St. Jim's.

THE END.

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