

READ "THE MAKING OF HARRY WHARTON!" THE STORY THAT EVERYONE'S
TALKING ABOUT—INSIDE.

The GEM ^{2^d}



*'The Sign of
Three' Strikes
at Tom Merry!*

The SIGN of THIRIE!



Just as Tom Merry stepped backwards from the knife that was descending upon him, Monty Lowther came up with a rush on his bike. He rode straight into the Hindu with terrific force, and Tom's attacker was hurled to the ground.

CHAPTER 1.

The Mysterious Letter!

"TOM!"
"What on earth's the matter, Tom?"

Monty Lowther and Manners both spoke at once. Their voices expressed surprise, not unmixed with alarm.

Tom Merry shook his head. He was standing near the doorway in the School House at St. Jim's, with a letter in his hand. The letter was open, and Tom Merry's eyes were fixed intently upon it.

"What's the matter?" demanded Manners. "Is it bad news from home?"

Tom Merry shook his head. "Then what is it?" demanded Monty Lowther. "Has Miss Fawcett written to you, and forgotten to enclose a postal order?"

Tom Merry did not smile. He simply shook his head again. It was evident that the letter in his hand had exercised a strange effect upon him.

"Is that the letter from India?" asked Manners. "I heard that there was one for you with an Indian postmark."

"This is it," said Tom. "Is it from your uncle over there?" "I thought it would be, but it isn't."

"Well, what is it?" asked Manners, puzzled. "Is there anything wrong?" "Blessed if I know!" said Tom Merry, with a deep breath. "If I were in India, I should think there was something jolly wrong, from this; but

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—but I suppose it must be a lark. But the letter came from India, right enough. The postmark and the stamp prove that. I don't see how anybody so far off as that could be larking with me."

"Give us a squint at the giddy epistle," said Monty Lowther.

Tom Merry handed him the letter. Lowther took it, and Manners looked at it over his shoulder. Then both the chums of the Shell uttered exclamations of amazement.

There was nothing written on the letter. It was of thin Indian paper, and upon it three red spots were inscribed in the form of a triangle.

That was all.

Manners looked at Lowther, and Lowther looked at Manners, and then they both looked at Tom Merry. Tom Merry's face was full of blank astonishment.

Manners and Lowther were as astonished as the captain of the Shell.

"Is that all there was in the letter?" asked Lowther at last.

"That's all," said Tom Merry.

"Somebody's got out of a lunatic asylum, and started as a funny letter-writer, I should think," said Lowther. "Have you got any lunatics in the family, Tommy?"

"No, ass!"

"Is your Indian uncle the kind of a chap to play practical jokes on a simple kidlet like you?"

"Of course he isn't, fathead! That rot can't be from my uncle, though, as I know nobody else in India, I'm blessed if I know who it is from!" said Tom Merry. "It's a giddy mystery. If it hadn't come from India, I should think it was some idiotic jape of the New House fellows."

"But it must be a joke, and I don't quite see where the humour comes in myself," said Monty Lowther. "A letter containing three dots and nothing else—unless it means that the writer is dotty, I don't see what it possibly can mean?"

Tom Merry laughed, but not very heartily. The letter, meaningless as it apparently was, troubled the junior. Why should anyone in the far-off land of India take the trouble to send him a letter with no meaning in it? How had anyone there known his name, or that he was at St. Jim's?

The letter must be from someone who had come into connection with his uncle, the general, and learned something of



—IN THIS GREAT YARN OF THRILLS AND LAUGHTER AT ST. JIM'S.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD

his affairs. Was it some veiled threat from an enemy? Tom Merry, from having relations in India, had read a good deal about that country, and he knew something of the strange Oriental customs—of crime and vengeance curiously mixed up with a childish theatricality.

Was that strange letter a threat?

But, if so, from whom—from what?

The thought of it was enough to bring a cloud to the sunny brow of Tom Merry. But he drove the thought from his mind. If that letter spelled danger for him, he was no coward, and it could not frighten him.

"Well, it's no good taking any notice of it," said Tom. "I certainly can't make anything of it. I'll keep it, though."

He put the queer letter into his pocket-book.

"Hallo! Here comes Toby!" said Monty Lowther, as the School House page approached with a telegram in his hand. "Is that for me, Toby?"

"Master Merry, sir," said Toby.

"Sure it isn't for me?" said Lowther anxiously. "My uncle might be wiring me a remittance, perhaps."

Toby grinned, and handed the telegram to Tom Merry. Tom opened it, and uttered an exclamation.

"Hallo! Not more from the dotty individual, I hope?" exclaimed Lowther.

Tom laughed.

"No; it's from Southampton, from my uncle."

"I thought your uncle was in India."

"So he was, but this wire is to say that he's landed at Southampton. He's home on leave," said Tom Merry, his eyes shining, "and he's coming here to see me on his way to London. Isn't that ripping?"

"That's according," said Monty Lowther cautiously. "There are uncles and uncles. What kind of a Johnny is he? Liverish, I suppose, after being in India—with a malacca cane to lay round his dutiful nephew, eh?"

"No, ass! I haven't seen him for years, but he's a ripping chap—sends me tips from India. He's stood a good many of our study feeds."

"Good egg! We'll welcome him like a long-lost son, and perhaps he'll stand another," said Lowther. "Wire back: 'Welcome home—and don't forget your cheque-book.'"

"Ass!" said Tom.

He wired back, though not on the lines Lowther suggested.

"Lucky it's a half-holiday tomorrow," Monty Lowther remarked, after the telegram had been dispatched. "We shall be able to entertain the respected Johnny."

"What are you scowling about, Tom?" asked Manners.

Tom Merry's brows knitted.

"I wasn't scowling," he said mildly. "I was thinking. It's jolly odd that that letter should reach me from India the same day that my uncle gets home. I wonder—"

Tom Merry did not finish. He was wondering whether there was any connection between that mysterious letter from India and the strange sign of three, and his uncle's return. He decided at once that he would show General Merry that strange letter and

hear what he thought about it. If it meant danger—

But, after all, how could it mean danger?

CHAPTER 2.

Checks—and a Cheque!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY of the Fourth Form came into Study No. 6, where Blake, Herries, and Digby were getting tea.

"Heard the news, deah boys?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"No," yawned Blake. "Had a fiver from your governor? If you have it's just come in the nick of time—there are only three sardines left."

"I have not had a wemittance fwom my guv'nah, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus. "Tom Mewwy has had a wire fwom his uncle."

Blake grunted.

"Well, we can't eat wires," he said. "Blow his wires and blow his uncle! How are we going to make three sardines into a tea for four?"

"His uncle has come home fwom India, aftah servin' there a gweat many years," said Arthur Augustus. "He is home on leave, and he is comin' here to-morrow to see Tom Mewwy."

"Oh, good!" said Blake, showing some slight interest. "He's a general or something, isn't he? Must be rolling in rupees and things. Some fellows have

Just three dots in the form of a triangle was all that was written on the mysterious missive Tom Merry received from India. What message was the strange sign intended to convey? Tom Merry was far from guessing that it was a warning of death!

all the luck. I never get any uncles from India."

"The old chap is a vegulah sport," continued D'Arcy. "He's seen service, you know, on the fwoontiah, and waggin' the thugs and things. He was engaged in puttin' down a wewolutionaw society somewhere out there. I wegard General Mewwy as havin' deserved well of his country. He is a vegulah hewo, and he's got the Victowiah Cwoss."

"Has he, by Jove?"

"Yaas. Now, we don't have a V.C. come to the school ewvery day, do we?" said D'Arcy. "I was thinkin', deah boys, that this is a time for us to wally wound."

"Hear, hear!"

"I think that St. Jim's ought to wise to the occasion," continued Arthur Augustus. "We'll give General Mewwy a weception that will impress him. There ought to be fireworks and things, and I was thinkin' of a triumphal arch."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see any cause for wibald laughtah in that suggestion, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus, jamming his eyeglass into his eye and surveying his chums severely. "On a gweat occasion like this, with a celebawted gernewal visitin' the school, I weally considah that St. Jim's ought to spwead itself a bit."

"I don't know whether it would run to triumphal arches," grinned Blake,

"but we might have the fireworks—some crackers, at any rate, say sixpenny-worth."

"Weally, Blake—"

"And a squib or two," said Digby. "We could let them off under the general's chair and give him a pleasant surprise."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wegard you as asses," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I stick to my ideah of a triumphal arch. We could wig it up just inside the gates, you know, and it would look simply wippin'! Of course, it would wequire money, and, as it happens, I am wathah short of tin. Howevah, we could make a sub-scription. How much can you fellows give?"

"I'll give you my best wishes," said Blake generously.

"I'll give you some good advice," said Herries.

"I'll give my kind regards," yawned Digby.

"Wats! If you fellows do not wally wound I shall go oval to see Figgins & Co., and then the New House will get the cwedit of ewectin' a triumphal arch to the general," said Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, don't!" implored Blake, looking dreadfully alarmed.

Arthur Augustus was firm.

"I should have no othah wesource," he said. "I'm keepin' the ideah fwom Tom Mewwy. It is to be a pleasant surprise to him, as well as to his uncle. If you fellows don't back me up I shall have no wesource but to bwing Figgins & Co. into the ideah."

"Then you'd better buzz off," said Blake more cheerfully. "Now I come to think of it, there isn't a sardine for you, and Figgy may give you some tea."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Good-bye!" said Blake. "You don't mind if I have the sardine, do you? But if I get a remittance in time I'll put sixpence towards the crackers."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus walked out of the study, closing the door with unnecessary force. The chums of Study No. 6 chuckled. They could guess how very likely Figgins & Co. were to lend their aid in carrying out D'Arcy's idea of a triumphal arch.

"Hallo, whither bound?" asked Monty Lowther, as D'Arcy ran into the Terrible Three in the passage. "Wherefore that dreadful frown?"

"Pway excuse me, you fellahs," said D'Arcy. "I'm in wathah a huvwty to see Figgins. The chaps in my study have wefused to wally wound me, and I'm goin' to see Figgins about the triumphal arch."

"The what?" demanded Tom Merry, Manners and Lowther together.

"The triumphal arch, deah boy, to welcome the general to St. Jim's. I wasn't weally goin' to tell you, but—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Terrible Three.

Arthur Augustus stared at them.

"What are you cacklin' at?" he demanded.

The chums of the Shell did not reply. They staggered away, still laughing, and Arthur Augustus sniffed with great scorn. Then, with his noble nose very high in the air, he quitted the School House and walked across the quad.

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn of the Fourth were outside their House. They were in flannels, having just come off the cricket field. The swell of St. Jim's nodded to them affably.

"I've just come ova! to see you fellahs," he said.

"Well, here we are," said Figgins genially. "No charge."

"You have heard that Tom Mewwy's uncle is comin' here to-morrow?" said Arthur Augustus.

The three New House fellows exchanged a quick glance. Figgins nodded.

"Yes; the whole school knows," he said.

"Quite a stranger to St. Jim's, isn't he?" said Kerr. "Tom Merry hasn't seen him for a thousand years or so."

"He hasn't seen him since he was quite a kid," said Arthur Augustus.

"Then he'll hardly know him by sight."

"Hardly, deah boy."

"I wonder what he's like?" said Kerr thoughtfully.

"I have heard Tom Mewwy say that he is a little man, vewy sunburnt," said Arthur Augustus. "But we shall all see what he is like to-morrow aftahnoon when he awwives. He is a bwave man, and has won the Victowiah Cwoss, and I have thought of a wippin' ideah for doin' him honah. I was thinkin' of a whip-wound to waise the cash, and ewectin' a triumphant arch."

"Oh, my hat!"

"With an inscription on it, you know. 'This arch is ewected to a man whom St. Jim's delights to honah,' or something like that."

"Ripping!" exclaimed Figgins.

"The chaps in my own study won't back me up," said D'Arcy. "I wegard it as wotten."

"Horrible!"

"Even Tom Mewwy cackles at the ideah, though the old sport is his uncle, you know."

"Rotten!"

"I'm glad to see you chaps have more sense, though one wouldn't weally expect that of New House chaps, eithah," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "Howevah, I'm glad to see it. You're goin' to back me up, deah boys? I don't know how much it will cost, but I dare say it can be done on ten pounds."

"Ten pounds! Oh crumbs!"

"Is that enough?" asked Fatty Wynn anxiously. "Don't stint yourself for a pound or two in a matter of this sort. Better do the thing well."

Arthur Augustus beamed upon the fat Fourth Former.

"Quite wight, Wynn, deah boy. Suppose we say fifteen pounds?"

"Better make it twenty," said Figgins solemnly.

"Yaas, that will be bettah still, if you chaps have plenty of tin. I will wire to my patah for a fivah, and if you three chaps could stand a fivah each, there are the twenty pounds. What do you say?"

The New House trio smiled at one another. Five pounds represented a whole term's pocket-money or more to most of the juniors at St. Jim's. They did not all have noble paters like D'Arcy. And the idea of devoting so much money to the erection of a triumphal arch to Tom Merry's uncle from India struck Figgins & Co. as funny.

"Take the money now?" asked Figgins.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I suppose a cheque will do?"

"Certainly, deah boy. I didn't know you had a bankin' account," said Arthur Augustus, somewhat surprised.

"A cheque will be all wight. I can

get Mr. Wailton to cash it for me. Can you dwaw me a cheque?"

"My dear chap, nothing's easier. I don't happen to have a cheque-book in my pocket; but a cheque on the leaf of a pocket-book is all right, so long as you've got the money to meet it," said Figgins.

"Yaas, wathah! You will have to put a stamp on it, then, to make it legal."

"Got a stamp?" asked Figgins.

"Yaas."

"Stick it here, then."

Figgins held out his pocket-book, open. Arthur Augustus took his note-case from his pocket and selected a stamp from a little compartment. He wetted it and placed it on the leaf of Figgins' pocket-book. Figgins gnawed at the end of a pencil.

"Must be in ink," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I'll lend you my fountain-pen, if you like."

"Thanks awfully!"

Figgins took the fountain-pen, rested the pocket-book on Kerr's shoulder, and wrote. He waved the cheque in the air to dry it, and folded it carefully in four, and handed it to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"That's the contribution from the lot of us," he said. "Good-bye!"

Figgins & Co. walked rather quickly into the New House, leaving Arthur Augustus D'Arcy with the folded cheque in his hand. Arthur Augustus was not a suspicious fellow. But it was rather surprising that a New House junior should be able to draw a cheque so easily for such a sum as fifteen pounds, and D'Arcy unfolded the cheque to make sure that all was right. He read it and gasped.

For Figgins' cheque was worded:

"Bank of Allan Water.—Pay Arthur Augustus Adolphus D'Arcy the sum of fifteen thick cars.—G. FIGGINS."

The swell of St. Jim's gazed at the cheque, and wrath came into his aristocratic face. He realised that the humorous Figgins had been gently pulling his noble leg.

He crumpled the cheque in his hand, and rushed towards the New House, with the intention of taking summary vengeance upon Figgins & Co. He dashed up the steps and ran right into a thin, sour-faced gentleman in cap and gown, and there was a gasp.

"Ow! D'Arcy, how dare you!"

"Bai Jove! I'm sowwy, Mr. Ratcliff! I—"

"How dare you rush into this House in that manner?" roared Mr. Ratcliff. "Take fifty lines, D'Arcy, and return to your House at once! Do you hear?"

"But, sir—"

"Go!" thundered Mr. Ratcliff.

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy went!

CHAPTER 3.

The Midnight Raiders!

"HUSH!"

Tom Merry uttered that warning word. The Shell fellows had gone up to bed in the dormitory in the School House, and there was a buzz of voices in the dormitory when Kildare of the Sixth came in to see lights out.

The voices died away at once, and the Sixth Former glanced at the juniors somewhat suspiciously.

Cheerful and innocent faces met him on all sides, however, and the captain of St. Jim's was disarmed.

"Tumble in!" he said.

The Shell tumbled in. Kildare, after

another glance round the dormitory, turned out the lights and retired.

Then there was a buzz of voices again. There was evidently something "on" among the Shell fellows in the School House.

"You can go to sleep if you like, you chaps," said Tom Merry. "I'll wake you up at eleven o'clock."

"And who'll wake you up?" asked Kangaroo, the Australian junior.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Not too much row," said Monty Lowther. "Kildare looked as if he smelt a rat. The way the prefects suspect us innocent kids is something shocking. How many of us are going?"

"Say a dozen chaps," said Tom Merry. "We won't let the Fourth into it. Those kids would be bound to make a muck of it, and there are enough of us to rag Figgins & Co. baldheaded."

"Hear, hear!"

"Us three," said Tom Merry, "and Kangy, Dane, Glyn, Vavasour, Gore, Murphy, and three more. Skimpole wouldn't be any good, and I suppose Crooke doesn't want to come."

"No fear!" said Crooke. "Ratty will be bound to catch you, and you'll get it in the neck, and serve you right for playing the giddy ox!"

"Thank you!" said Tom Merry. "Then that's settled."

The dormitory was buzzing with suppressed excitement. A raid on the rival House had been planned for that night. Raids and rows between the juniors of the two Houses at St. Jim's were of common enough occurrence; but it was a little out of the common for the parties to be raided in their own quarters. At night the Houses were barred and locked securely, and entrance was not easy.

There was a long passage leading from the School House to the New House by way of the other buildings at one side of the quadrangle, but this passage was closed by a great door that was always locked.

Tom Merry had made the discovery that the lock could be opened. It was old and rusty, and Monty Lowther, who was an amateur carpenter of great prowess, had operated on the lock with success.

The way into the quarters of their rivals was open—for once—and the School House juniors intended to take advantage of it.

All the raiders were fully determined to keep awake until eleven o'clock sounded from the clock tower. But by half-past ten they were all asleep.

Tom Merry was the last to nod off. He awoke as the clock was chiming out, and lay half-asleep, counting the strokes.

Twelve!

"My hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry, sitting up in bed. "Twelve o'clock. I say, are you awake, you chaps?"

There was no reply, save the sound of deep and steady breathing. Tom Merry jumped out of bed, and dipped a sponge into a water-jug, and proceeded to wake up the Shell fellows. There was a muffled roar from Monty Lowther and a yell from Manners. Then there was a yelp from Crooke, whom Tom Merry had dabbed by mistake in the darkness.

"Ow! Wharrer marrer? Groogh!" he yelped.

"Hallo! Is that you, Crooke?"

"Groogh! Yes, you beast! You knew it was me!" howled Crooke.

"Sorry. I meant it for Noble!"

"I don't want it!" chuckled Kangaroo, slipping out of bed. "Never mind, Crooke. Now you're awake, you can come."

"I'm not coming, hang you!" snarled Crooke. "You rotter, Merry! You did it on purpose."

"I didn't," said Tom. "I forgot Kangy was in the next bed."

"Liar!"

Tom Merry's eyes gleamed in the darkness. He took up a jug of water and groped towards Crooke's bed. There was a sudden swamping of water, and a wild yell from the cad of the Shell.

"Ow, ow, ow! Yah! Oh! You rotter!" yelled Crooke.

"Quiet!" said Manners. "You'll wake up the prefects!"

"I don't care if I wake up the whole House!" roared Crooke. "Yah! I'm wet! I'll wake up the prefects, too, and get you a licking! Ow!"

"Bump him!" said Kangaroo. "He'd like to muck up the raid, the cad!"

"If you make another sound, Crooke, you'll be ragged," said Tom Merry, between his teeth. "If you're looking for trouble, turn over, and I'll give you a licking before we go."

"That's a fair offer!" chuckled Monty Lowther.

Crooke subsided into silence. It dawned upon him that if he woke the prefects, and the raid had to be abandoned, it would have painful results for himself.

"Oh, go and eat coke!" he growled.

And the cad of the Shell said no more. But his eyes were glittering with rage as he watched the Shell fellows dressing themselves in the darkness.

Tom Merry & Co. were soon ready. They put on slippers instead of their boots in order to make less noise.

The raiders left the dormitory cautiously.

The House was buried in silence and slumber. At midnight the last light was out, and all the masters were in bed. Tom Merry led the way along the passage, and down the stairs, and into

the broad-flagged passage that led from the House. This was one of the oldest parts of St. Jim's, and was never used, and was not provided with lights. The darkness was intense.

"Got your torch, Glyn?"

"What-ho!" said Bernard Glyn.

A sudden light gleamed out. Glyn led the way with the electric light, and the raiders followed him. Most of them had brought weapons with them—stuffed socks and twisted handkerchiefs, and pillows. They reached the huge oaken door that barred the passage.

Monty Lowther handled the lock. The great door swung open as he pulled it. Beyond was deep darkness. After the juniors had passed through, Lowther carefully closed the door, leaving it unfastened.

Then the raiders, chuckling gleefully, pressed on their way.

There were several doors on the passage, but they were never used, and they were bolted or barred, and covered with cobwebs. The juniors reached the end of the passage, after several windings, till they were stopped by another door.

"We're there!" said Lowther.

"Not fastened?" asked Kangaroo.

"No fear. The door is only fastened with bolts on the inside, and I slipped down and drew them when I was in the New House to-day."

And Lowther proved his words by pushing open the door. On the other side there was a flight of four stone steps, and the juniors mounted them, and found themselves in a passage near the kitchen and cellars. They knew the way well enough, and Glyn switched off the light. With cautious footsteps the raiders ascended from the lower regions into the upper part of the New House.

They paused in the dormitory passage, and Tom Merry cautiously opened the door of the dormitory which accommodated the New House portion of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's.

There was a glimmer of starlight from

the windows of the dormitory, and it glimmered upon a row of white beds, where Figgins & Co. lay in sound slumber. There was no sound in the dormitory save the steady breathing of the New House juniors, and the deeper snores of Fatty Wynn.

"Caught napping!" chuckled Monty Lowther.

The Shell fellows marched in, and the door was closed. Gore bumped against a bed, and there was a startled exclamation in the gloom.

"Hallo! What's that?" demanded Figgins.

"Only us," said Tom Merry calmly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins jumped up in bed.

"My hat! School House cads!"

Wake up, you chaps!"

"Pile in!" shouted Tom Merry.

And the raiders piled in with gusto.

CHAPTER 4.

Rough on Figgins & Co.!

"O H!"

"Ow!"

Biff, biff, biff! Bump, bump, bump!

"Yaroooooh!"

"Great Scott! Yah!"

"Line up!" yelled Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha! Sock it to them!"

The raiders were smiting right and left, choking with laughter as they smote. The sleepy and astonished New House fellows had no chance. The odds were on their side, if they had been on the alert, but they weren't.

They were rolled out of bed, bumped on the floor, smitten with pillows and socks, amid gasps and howls of laughter. Figgins, who was first to recover his presence of mind, grasped a bolster.

"Line up!" he gasped.

"Yaroooooh!"

"Ow, ow, ow, ow!"

"Who's Cock House at St. Jim's?" yelled Monty Lowther. "This is where



Smiting right and left, Tom Merry & Co. piled into the sleepy and astonished New House fellows with gusto. Figgins & Co. were rolled out of bed, bumped on the floor, and biffed with pillows and stuffed socks, amid gasps and howls of laughter.

the New House gets it in the neck! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hear us smile!" gasped Manners.

"Ha ha, ha!"

Smite, smite, smite!

The combat was terrific, but it was all on one side. The New House fellows were simply overwhelmed. They hadn't a chance. And in the confusion and the darkness what fighting they put up was as much among themselves as against the raiders. In a few minutes the dormitory looked as if a whirlwind had struck it—bedclothes were sprawling on the floor, and gasping juniors sprawled among them. One or two of the beds had been pitched over.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "I think that will do. We don't want to get Ratty and the prefects here."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Retreat!" ordered Tom Merry.

"Stop 'em!" roared Figgins.

But the scattered and bewildered and smitten New House fellows were in no condition to stop the retreat of the raiders.

Tom Merry & Co. retreated in good order into the passage. Figgins jumped up and rushed after them, and was collared and hurled back. He rushed on again, and caught somebody round the neck in the darkness, and held on to him fiercely, pommelling him hard. The fellow he collared pommelled with equal energy. Then there was a chuckle in the passage, and the door closed.

"They've gone!" howled Redfern.

"I've got one of them!" gasped Figgins, who had his enemy's head in chancery now. "Get a light, some of you, and stick at the door. This rotter isn't going to get away."

Redfern and Lawrence jammed their feet against the door. Owen fumbled in the pockets of his jacket, when he found it, for matches.

Scratch! A light glimmered out.

It glimmered upon a scene of wreck and confusion, and the New House juniors snorted with rage as they saw it.

"My hat!" gasped Fatty Wynn. "They've done us in the eye this time! The rotters must have sneaked in through the locked passage somehow."

"I've got one of them!" gasped Figgins. "We'll make an example of him. Bring the light here, and lend me a hand."

Owen rushed forward with another match. The light glimmered on Figgins' prisoner. Figgins gave a gasp of dismay as he recognised Kerr.

"Oh, my hat! Kerr!"

"Groooh!" groaned Kerr, rubbing his nose which was streaming red.

"Oh, you ass!"

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Figgins. "I'm sorry, Kerr, old man! I thought it was one of those rotters. Why didn't you say?"

"Say, you ass! How could I say anything when you were suffocating me, you fathead? Ow, ow! My nose! Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Redfern.

"What are you cackling at, you dummy?" demanded Figgins. "I hope you didn't get hurt, Kerr?"

"Fathead!" groaned Kerr. "Do you think you can punch a fellow's nose like that without hurting him? Ow!"

"Better get this cleared up," said Lawrence.

"Let's go after the beasts!" exclaimed Pratt.

"No good! They'll have fastened the door in the passage by this time. We'll make 'em sit up to-morrow!" growled Figgins.

The dormitory door was opened.

"Hullo, they're coming back! Collar the cads!"

"Hold on!" said the voice of Thompson of the Shell. "Don't you pile on me, you asses! Have the School House bounders been here?"

"Yes, ass!"

"Ha, ha, ha! You look a pretty sight!" gasped Thompson. "You've been making a pretty row, too. I heard it in the Shell dorm. I came to tell you that I can hear somebody moving downstairs. You've woke Ratty up."

"Oh, crumbs!"

The Fourth Formers set to work with desperate haste to get the dormitory into its normal state before the arrival of Ratty on the scene. Thompson, having

given his warning, vanished with a chuckle. Figgins & Co. worked like Trojans to get the beds in order, and they turned in and covered themselves with the bedclothes, just as a step was heard in the passage.

"Quiet!" murmured Figgins.

Fatty Wynn began to snore. The juniors all closed their eyes as the door opened, and Mr. Ratcliff appeared with a lamp in his hand. The Housemaster looked suspiciously into the dormitory. He was certain that he heard a disturbance, but he was not quite sure from which dormitory it had proceeded.

"Are you asleep, boys?" asked Mr. Ratcliff, in his thin, sour voice.

No reply; only steady breathing, and a deeper and more emphatic snore from Fatty Wynn. Mr. Ratcliff glanced at the juniors frowningly, and then reluctantly retired and closed the door. He would have been more pleased if he had found a pillow-fight in progress; and he had thoughtfully brought a cane with him. But there was no excuse for using the cane, and the Housemaster retired disappointed—much to the relief of the juniors.

"Narrow squeak," murmured Figgins. "And he won't catch the School House chaps, either. They're in bed by this time."

But Figgins was mistaken in that. Mr. Ratcliff went back to his own room; but if he had suspected the raid and looked for the raiders, he would have been successful, for Tom Merry & Co. were not back in their own House. The raid had been a great success; but the retreat had not worked according to programme.

The School House juniors, retreating chuckling along the disused passage, had reached the big oaken door that gave admittance to their own House—and they stopped there.

The door did not open to their touch.

And then the chuckles died away, and the raiders looked at one another in great dismay. Bernard Glyn flashed his light upon the big door, and the juniors tried it one after another. Lowther had left it unlocked, and it was unlocked still. There was no visible reason why the door should not open. They pressed upon it, they lined up against it all together, and jammed themselves at it, but it did not budge. It was fast!

"My only hat!" said Tom Merry at last. "It won't open!"

Lowther shoved desperately at the door.

"What the dickens is the matter with it?" he grunted. "It's not locked; you can see that!"

"It's got jammed somehow," said Manners.

"Couldn't get jammed."

"There are bars on the other side," said Kangaroo.

Lowther snorted.

"I know there are. But a door can't bar itself, can it, fathead?"

"But it can be barred," said the Cornstalk junior, "and that's what's happened. Somebody must have followed us and barred the door."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Crooke!" muttered Tom Merry.

"He's cad enough," said Kangaroo. "Might be Levison of the Fourth, if he knew we were out, or Mellish, for that matter. Not that it matters much who did it. It's done. And how the deuce are we going to get back into the School House?"

It was a problem that had to be solved.

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CHAPTER 5.

An Alarm in the Night!

TOM MERRY & CO. stood in the shadowy passage and looked at one another. Glyn's electric lamp glimmered upon their dismayed faces, and upon the cold stone walls, and the cobwebs in the corners.

Tom Merry glanced at his watch. "We've been here half an hour," he said. "Figgins & Co. will be in bed again now. They can't guess that we're shut out of our House."

"I suppose we can get through the New House?" said Manners doubtfully.

"We shall have to. We've got to get out of a window into the quad, and then cross over and get into the School House somehow," said Tom. "It's the only way. I can climb into the dormitory window, and come down and open the window on the ground floor for you chaps. The dormitory windows aren't fastened. All the lower ones are."

"It's the only thing to be done," said Kangaroo.

It was, evidently. With uneasy looks and murmured threats of vengeance upon the unknown trickster who had fastened them out of their House, the School House juniors turned back.

They traversed the passage again, and re-entered the New House, finding all dark and quiet there. They stole silently to a kitchen window at the back and opened it, and one by one dropped out. Tom Merry went last, and closed the window behind him, but he could not refasten it.

They were safe out of the New House now, at all events, and in no danger of being caught by the New House master, Mr. Ratcliff.

The difficulty before them was getting back into their own House by way of a window. They stole round the buildings, and gathered under the wall of the School House.

In the faint glimmer of starlight they made out the dormitory window high above, with the clinging masses of ivy underneath.

"It's jolly risky, Tom," said Manners uneasily.

"There's a rainpipe under the ivy here," said Tom. "It passes within a foot of the window. I've done it before."

"Yes; but then the window was open at the bottom. You've got to get on the sill and push it up somehow. It's only open at the top."

"My only hat!" ejaculated Lowther suddenly. "The window's open at the bottom."

"What!"

Monty Lowther pointed.

"Look!" he said.

The juniors stared upwards in amazement. Gloomy as it was, they could see the glimmer of the stars on the panes, and they saw that the sash had been raised. The windows in the dormitory were left open at the top for ventilation. But they were never left open at the bottom. And the juniors knew, too, that when they had quitted the dormitory to start on the raid the window had been closed down.

The bottom sash of the window had been pushed up since they had left.

"That's jolly queer!" said Kangaroo.

"Crooke must have opened it for us," said Tom Merry, after a pause. "Might have been a master who found the door open in the passage and closed it, and then Crooke might have spotted him and opened the window for us."



Diner: "Are you sure this is beef steak?"

Waiter: "Oh, yes, sir! Anything wrong?"

Diner: "Well, when I see a horsefly buzzing around it, darned if I don't get mighty suspicious!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to R. Hill, West Cottage, Loads Road, Holymoorside, near Chesterfield.

"Yes, I can see Crooke serving us a good turn like that! I don't think!" said Monty Lowther, with a sniff.

"Well, Skimpole's there, too. He might—"

"Skimpole's an ass; he wouldn't have sense enough."

"If it was one of our chaps opened it, he must be awake now," said Manners. "Give him a whistle. He's bound to hear it with the window open."

"Good egg!"

Tom Merry put his fingers to his lips and whistled the signal whistle well known to all the School House juniors. The sound rose in the still silence of the night. The juniors watched the open window with tense gaze.

"Look!" muttered Lowther, catching Tom Merry's arm.

A head had emerged from the window. But it was not a boy's head.

It was the head of a man, and the face was dark. The head was wrapped in a linen headgear of some sort, and two eyes that seemed to glitter like diamonds looked down at the startled juniors.

"My only hat!" muttered Lowther.

"It's a black man!"

"A nigger!" muttered Gore.

"A Hindu!" said Tom Merry. "That thing on his head is a turban."

Tom's face had gone suddenly white. Back into his mind rushed the mysterious missive he had received only that day—the Sign of Three. That had come to him from far-off India, and now— But for the raid on the New House he would have been in the dormitory at that moment. And the Hindu was there—for what?

The dark face was looking steadily down. A sudden movement of the head showed that the man had discerned the crowd of fellows in the shadows below. The head disappeared.

"It's a burglar!" muttered Gore.

"Or—or worse!" said Tom Merry, between his teeth. "The villain! And Crooke and Skimpole are in there with him."

"We've got to get in!"

Tom Merry made a movement towards

the ivy. Lowther caught him by the arm and dragged him back.

"You can't climb now, Tommy. That fellow would only have to give you a shove from the window, and— Don't be an ass!"

"He's got to be nailed!" said Kangaroo. "Wake the House!"

"We shall get an awful ragging for this!" muttered Gore.

"Not if we nail the burglar," said Kangaroo. "That's bound to please the Head. We can lay the rotter by the heels now."

"Good egg!"

The discovery of the dark-skinned intruder left only one thing for the juniors to do—to give the alarm. And there was no time to be lost. If Crooke or Skimpole awoke with the midnight thief in the room, there was no telling what might happen.

Tom Merry ran round to the door of the School House and dragged at the bell. The peal of the bell rang with startling loudness, through the silent House.

In less than a minute a light gleamed out in Mr. Railton's room, and the Housemaster threw up the window. He gave a jump at the sight of the Shell fellows in the quadrangle.

"Manners! Lowther! Noble! What are—"

"Burglars, sir!" shouted Lowther.

"What!"

"There's a burglar in the Shell dorm, sir! We've just seen him!"

Mr. Railton disappeared from the window. Tom Merry was still ringing the door-bell. The alarm was spreading quickly in the House. Lights flashed to and fro, doors were heard opening, and voices calling. The great door of the School House swung open, and Kildare appeared with a poker in his hand, half-dressed, his face flushed with excitement. He had turned on the electric light, and the House was lighted from end to end.

"We'll see that he doesn't get away, Kildare!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Have you seen him?"

"Yes; he's in the Shell dorm. We'll watch the window here in case he gets out."

"Good! Don't go into danger. Call if you see him."

Kildare dashed up the stairs. Mr. Railton was dashing up, too, and Mr. Lathom had come out of his room, and Herr Schneider, the German master. Half the Sixth were out, with pokers or cricket bats in their hands, and the juniors were swarming out of their dormitories. There was a babble of voices in the School House.

"He's had time to get out of the dorm," said Lowther. "He'll try to get away from one of the other windows, and we'll nab him."

"Scatter and watch for him!" called Tom Merry.

Other fellows were swarming out into the quadrangle now, half-dressed, and armed with all sorts of weapons. If the burglar fell into their hands, he was not likely to have much chance against such odds. Mr. Railton looked out of the window of the Shell dormitory, and called to the juniors below.

"Have you seen him again?"

"No, sir," called back Tom Merry.

"Isn't he there?"

"No."

Tom Merry ran into the House. He was very anxious that the Indian should be caught. He could not help suspecting that the dark-skinned intruder had visited the school on his account, and his

alone. But there was no sign of the Hindu in the House.

High and low masters and boys hunted, and every room and passage was searched, the whole House joining in the hunt. In the quadrangle and the gardens, even in the cricket pavilion, and on the playing fields, the search went on, Taggles, the porter, bringing out his mastiff, and Herries his bulldog Towser to help. But no sign was found of the midnight visitor.

Short as the time had been, it was clear that he had taken advantage of it, and had escaped from a back window before the searchers could find him. Kildare had found a back window open, and if the man had escaped it was doubtless by that window that he had gone.

The Shell fellows, disappointed and fatigued, came back to their dormitory. They questioned Crooke and Skimpole, but Crooke and Skimpole could tell them nothing. They had both been asleep till the alarm awakened them; and when they awakened they had seen nothing of any stranger in the room.

"The beast didn't lose any time!" growled Lowther.

Mr. Railton came into the dormitory. The Housemaster's brows were knitted. He was evidently in an uncertain state of mind, and did not know whether to be angry or not.

If the man had been there, he was gone. But had he been there? In the absence of any sign of an intruder, it was only natural that the Housemaster should have his doubts. And Tom Merry & Co., as they saw Mr. Railton's frowning face, realised that there was trouble in store for themselves.

CHAPTER 6.

A Startling Discovery!

MR. RAILTON fixed a stern glance upon the chums of the Shell.

There was a crowd of fellows of all Forms round him, most of them being half-dressed, with their pyjama jackets tucked into their trousers, and their braces tied round their waists; some with bare feet, others in slippers or unlaced boots. All of them were in a state of great excitement.

Tom Merry & Co. were fully dressed, in contrast to the odd attire of the rest. "I shall require an explanation of this, Merry," said the School House master. "You gave an alarm of a burglar, but no trace whatever of a burglar has been discovered."

"He had time to get away, sir," said Tom Merry. "It was some minutes before he was looked for, and he had time to get out of a window and bolt."

"There was a window found open at the back, sir," said Kildare.

"Probably opened by these juniors in leaving the House," said Mr. Railton. "They were out in the quadrangle, fully dressed, when the alarm was given."

"That's very queer, sir."

"It will be inquired into. There certainly is no trace of a burglar. I fear that it is some trick, which I shall discover," said the Housemaster sternly. "Merry, you will explain how you and your companions came to be out in the quadrangle at such an hour."

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who was there with a cricket stump in his hand. "Bai Jove! The boundahs to be bweakin' bounds at such a time! If it was a waid, Tom Mewwy, you should have called me."

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"Pray be silent, D'Arcy. I am waiting for your reply, Merry."

Tom Merry exchanged a grim look with his chums. There was nothing for it but a clean breast now. The unfortunate incident of the burglar had spoiled everything. If the man had been captured, things would have been all right. Such a success would have condoned the breaking of bounds. But he had not been captured, and Mr. Railton evidently suspected that the juniors had invented him. The whole story had to come out now.

"We had been raiding the New House chaps, sir," said Tom Merry reluctantly.

"Indeed! The New House! You've been there?"

"Yes, sir."

"How did you enter that House?"

"By—the passage, sir."

Mr. Railton raised his eyebrows.

"The door in the passage is kept locked," he said.

"The—the lock got unfastened, sir," murmured Monty Lowther.

"How did it get unfastened, Lowther?"

"I—I helped it, sir."

Some of the fellows grinned, and Kildare turned away his head. But Mr. Railton's frown did not relax.

"This is very curious," he said. "If you went to the New House by the

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locked passage, you could have returned the same way, and need not have gone into the quadrangle at all. Why were you out of doors, then?"

"Because we couldn't get back through the passage, sir. Somebody sneaked after us and fastened the door, and we couldn't open it from the New House side."

"Bai Jove, what a wotiah!"

"Silence!" said Mr. Railton. "Who could have done that, Merry?"

Tom Merry's eyes rested on Crooke for a moment. The cad of the Shell curled his lip. He might be suspected, but there was no proof.

"I don't know, sir," said Tom. "It was some cad who wanted to get us into a row. We had to go back again into the New House and get out of a kitchen window, and come over here across the quad. I was going to climb into the dorm window, and come down and let the fellows in. Then we spotted the burglar."

And Tom Merry explained how they had detected the lower sash of the window open, and how, on giving the signal whistle, the dark-skinned man had looked out.

"This seems simply extraordinary," said the Housemaster. "You say it was not a white man?"

"It was a nigger," said Gore.

"Not a negro," said Tom Merry. "A Hindu, sir—or somebody from India, anyway."

"He was wearing a turban," said Manners.

Mr. Railton scanned the faces of the juniors searchingly. They bore his scrutiny well. They understood what was in his mind. That, finding themselves shut out in the quad, they had raised an alarm of a burglary in the hope of getting into the House in the confusion, without questions being asked as to how they came to be out of doors. That was the not unnatural suspicion in Mr. Railton's mind, and but for the knowledge of the honourable character of Tom Merry & Co. he would have come to that conclusion without hesitation.

"It is a strange story," said Mr. Railton. "The man can hardly have been a burglar—a burglar would not be foolish enough to get into a dormitory. There was nothing to tempt him there. And what business would a Hindu possibly have in a school? How many of you saw him?"

"All of us, sir!"

"And you are sure it was a black man?"

"Yes, sir!"

Tom Merry wondered whether he could tell the Housemaster of the strange letter from India, and the queer suspicion that was in his mind. Had that letter been a warning of the intended visit? Had the black man come there for him, with some hidden purpose—perhaps intending violence? How had he known which was Tom Merry's dormitory? Had the school been watched already? Strange and vague suspicions were stirring in Tom Merry's mind, but he felt that the whole matter would appear absurd to the practical mind of the Housemaster.

What had the black man wanted there? What was his purpose?

Tom Merry's eye wandered inquiringly round the dormitory, as he wondered whether the man had left any sign of his visit. But he could see none. If he had found Tom Merry there, what would have happened?

"I cannot understand this," said Mr. Railton. "I must accept your word, Merry, but it is all very strange. You will take two hundred lines each for breaking bounds at night. But for what has happened, your punishment would be more severe. And now you may all return to bed."

Mr. Railton left the dormitory.

The fellows dispersed to their sleeping quarters, excitedly discussing the strange happening. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy tapped Tom Merry on the shoulder, and looked at him reproachfully.

"You should have called me, deah boy," he said. "I would have led the waid into the New House with pleasuah, and then this wouldn't have happened."

Tom Merry laughed.

"I'd find out who bolted that door and scalp him, if I were you," said Jack Blake. And then the Fourth Formers departed.

"That's my idea," said Monty Lowther, turning to Crooke. "Did you bolt the door after us, Crooke?"

"No, I didn't!" growled Crooke.

"You were awake when we left the dorm, Skimmy?" said Tom Merry.

"Yes, my dear Merry," said Skimpole, blinking at him through his big spectacles. "I was certainly awake then, though I returned to my interrupted slumber afterwards."

"Do you know whether Crooke left the dorm after us?"

"I certainly did not see him, my dear Merry, but I remember that I heard him come in a short time afterwards. I heard someone come in, I mean, and

get into bed, and as it was not any of you fellows, I presume it was Crooke."

"Might have been the chap getting in at the window you heard," said Gore, "That is really not probable, Gore," said Skimpole wisely. "For in that case the sound I heard would have proceeded from the window, whereas, as a matter of fact, it proceeded from the door."

"I think that settles it," said Kangaroo. "It was Crooke. What did you go out of the dormitory for, Crooke?" "Oh, Skimpole was dreaming!" said Crooke. "I fell asleep after you had gone, and I didn't wake up till I heard the bell ringing."

The juniors looked at him scornfully. They knew that he was lying—but Tom Merry did not feel inclined to "rag" him without absolute proof. Crooke returned to bed unmolested, but the remarks some of his Form-fellows passed on him made even the cad of the Shell's ears burn.

Tom Merry undressed in a very thoughtful mood. The black man had been there, and he was not likely to return that night, at least, after the alarm. If there had been danger, the danger was over for a time. Had that strange visit any connection with the mysterious letter from India and the Sign of Three?

"Hallo!" exclaimed Kangaroo suddenly. "What on earth's this?"

The Cornstalk junior was holding up a card in his hand. It was a small slip of cardboard, and the Cornstalk had picked it off the washstand. He held it up in the light, and Tom Merry uttered a sharp cry as he looked at it.

The card was blank save for three dots in red ink in a triangular form.

It was the Sign of Three again!

CHAPTER 7.

The Sign of Three Again!

TOM MERRY sprang forward and took the card from the Cornstalk's hand.

He stared at it, his heart beating wildly.

The card was of the same material and texture as the rice-paper upon which the mysterious letter had been inscribed, but thicker. The three dots were exactly the same. It was evidently the work of the same hand.

That much was certain now; his suspicions had become a certainty. The visit of the Indian to the School House had been followed up by the letter from India.

Had the black man's intentions simply been to leave this warning where it was bound to come to Tom Merry's knowledge? Or had he left it because, finding Tom absent, he had been baffled in his original purpose?

Monty Lowther and Manners stared at the card in blank astonishment. They had almost forgotten the letter Tom Merry had received. The Sign of Three upon the card recalled it abruptly to their mind.

"My only hat!" said Lowther.

"My word!" murmured Manners. "That again!"

"Hallo! You know it, then?" said Kangaroo, in astonishment. "You know what it means?"

"No, we don't know that."

"Somebody must have put it here," said Kangaroo. "What is it—a lark? Blessed if I see where the joke comes in—if it is a joke!"

"I don't think it is a joke," said Tom Merry quietly. "But I can't quite understand what it is. But this card is intended for me."

"How do you know?"

"I've had one like it before by post. It's either an idiotic joke, or somebody's trying to scare me," said Tom. "I can't make it out."

The Shell fellows had gathered round in eager inquiry. Tom Merry took the letter from his pocket. He had to explain the matter now. The letter passed from hand to hand.

"Well, that takes the cake!" said Clifton Dane. "If it wasn't for the postmark on the envelope, I should think it was a New House jape."

"The letter came from India."

"Yes, it's a twister, isn't it? Then that nigger came here to-night on your account?" Kangaroo remarked.

Tom Merry nodded.

"I believe so," he said.

"How the dickens did he know which dorm to get into?" said Bernard Glyn.

"I don't know—he certainly did know."

"Oh, he might have a plan of the school," said Kangaroo. "There's a history of St. Jim's published, you



know, and there's a plan of the school printed in it. If the man knew that Tommy was in the Shell, he could find out his dormitory easily enough."

"Yes, that's so."

"But what can the little game be? You didn't make any enemies when you were in India, Tommy, did you?"

Tom Merry smiled.

"I was born in India," he said, "but I was brought home by Miss Fawcett when I was only a year old. I could hardly have made any enemies at that age. I simply can't understand the matter at all, but I shall ask my uncle about it to-morrow. And I'm going to bed now, black men or no black men!"

The Shell fellows slept soundly enough for the remainder of that night, and there were sleepy looks in the dormitory when the rising-bell clanged out in the morning.

Monty Lowther rubbed his eyes as he sat up in bed and blinked in the morning sunshine that streamed in at the high windows.

Clang, clang, clang!

"Groogh!" yawned Lowther. "I believe Taggles gets up earlier every

morning to buzz that rotten bell at us! Groogh!"

"Yaw-aw!" echoed Manners. "I'm sleepy!"

"Tain't all lavender raiding the New House of a night," yawned Kangaroo. "I've lost my beauty sleep. I shall be nodding over Latin this morning."

"Never mind; we made Figgins & Co. sit up," said Tom Merry, with a chuckle. "And they won't be able to get back at us. That blessed door will be fastened up safe enough after this. Figgins & Co. will have to take it lying down."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was satisfaction in that thought to the Shell fellows. When they went downstairs, they found the Fourth Form fellows less satisfied. Jack Blake & Co. were sore at not having been included in the raid, and it was useless for the Shell fellows to explain that fags would have "mucked up" the whole affair.

Tom Merry pointed out that only a dozen fellows were wanted, and he had a dozen of the best in his own dormitory, so what was the use of coming along to the Fourth for an inferior article? That mode of reasoning did not convince the Fourth at all.

"You made a jolly muck of it, anyway," said Blake scornfully. "You wouldn't have found me getting shut out of my House."

"I don't see how you could have helped it," said Tom Merry.

Blake reflected.

"I'd have left a scout on the watch at the door," he said finally.

"Ha, ha, ha! Yes, now; but you wouldn't have then. Anybody can be wise after the event," grinned Tom Merry. "You'd have got shut out just the same, and you'd have been licked by the New House chaps, which would have made matters worse."

"Why, you silly ass—" began Blake warmly.

"Same to you, and many of 'em!" said Tom Merry affably.

"I considah that you have acted the giddy ox, Tom Merry!" said Arthur Augustus severely. "You ought to have called us in."

"Well, if it was a question of playing the giddy ox, I suppose we ought to have called you in," admitted Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha ha!"

"Weally, Lowthah, you ass—"

The bell for classes stopped the discussion, which was getting warm.

After lessons, Figgins & Co. met the Terrible Three as they came out of the Form-room. Figgins & Co. had heard all about the happenings of the previous night, of course, and Figgins felt that he would never be able to forgive himself for not having followed the School House raiders.

"We should have found you bottled-up in the passage, you bounders!" said Figgins, wagging a lean forefinger at the Terrible Three. "We should simply have slaughtered you!"

"And you had the cheek to come back through the House!" said Kerr. "If we'd only known—"

The Terrible Three chuckled in chorus.

"You were caught napping a second time," Monty Lowther remarked. "The best thing you chaps can do is to go out of business, and admit that the School House is Cock House at St. Jim's."

"I don't think," said Figgins. "By THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,476.

the way, I hear that you are expecting an uncle, or a grandfather, or something, to-day, Tommy? Gussy was talking about erecting a triumphal arch in honour of him."

"Ha, ha, ha! It's my uncle from India," Tom Merry explained.

"I'd like to see him, if he comes before we go out," said Figgins.

"Expecting him early?"

"I don't know his train," said Tom. "I shouldn't wonder if he gets here about five. There's an express from Southampton stops at Wayland about that time."

"Too late," said Figgins. "We're going out earlier. Well, if we don't see him, you can give him my kind regards, and tell him I'm sorry he hasn't much to boast of in the way of nephews!"

And Figgins & Co. walked away, grinning. As they crossed the quadrangle to their own House, Kerr chuckled softly.

"Expecting him about five!" he murmured.

"Lots of time," said Figgins.

"Hasn't seen him for years and years. A little chap, burnt up with the sun. Ahem!" said Kerr. "Easier thing than I have ever taken up before since I was an amateur actor. It will be simply like rolling off a form."

"You could do it on your head!" said Figgins admiringly. "They are chipping us no end about that blessed raid. What's a raid, anyway? They did have the best of it last night, in a manner of speaking. But to-day—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

After dinner Figgins & Co. strolled out of the school gates, not turning up to cricket as usual, though it was a half-holiday.

Tom Merry was thinking of the expected visit of his Indian uncle, and of the strange news he had for him, and he did not give much thought to Figgins & Co. Had he known the destination of the New House trio, he might have given them some thought.

Figgins & Co. had walked down to Rylcombe, and they had entered the establishment of Mr. Wiggs, the outfitter and dealer in costumes, who supplied most of the accessories for the New House junior dramatic society. And the three young rascals were very busy for an hour or more in Mr. Wiggs' private room, with the assistance of Mr. Wiggs himself, and their business was interrupted by many chuckles.

But Tom Merry had other matters than Figgins & Co. and their little devices to think of, chief among which was the expected arrival of General Merry and the mysterious message of the night—the Sign of Three.

CHAPTER 8.

Warm Work!

TOM MERRY & CO. were very busy during the first half-hour of that half-holiday in writing lines they had earned by their exploit of the previous night.

They wrote them out in the Form-room and conveyed them to Mr. Railton, and then they were free for the afternoon. The Terrible Three were coming away from the Housemaster's study when Arthur Augustus D'Arcy met them.

Blake and the rest were on the cricket field, but Arthur Augustus had been waiting for Tom Merry.

"Uncle not awwid yet, deah boy?" he asked.

"Not yet," said Tom. "Most likely not till five."

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"Then there is still time."

"Time for what?"

"Eweefin' the triumphal arch," said the swell of St. Jim's, with some severity. "If you fellows like to back me up, I'll undertake to manage the whole affair. I vegard it as bein' up to us to give the genewal a greet weception. We don't have a Victowiah Cwoss johanny come here ewevy day."

"We don't," agreed Monty Lowther solemnly. "But I heard Figgins had given you a cheque for that triumphal arch. I sincerely hope that you have not been embezzling Figgins' cheque, Gussy?"

"That was a wotten joke! It was a wotten cheque on the Bank of Allan Watah, you know, which is not a weal bank at all," explained Arthur Augustus.

"Ha, ha, ha! That reminds me of the cheque that Pharaoh got," said Lowther.

"Wats! There were no cheques or banks eithah in the days of Phawaoth," said Arthur Augustus.

"Fact," said Lowther. "Pharaoh received a check on the banks of the Red Sea, crossed by Moses."

"You uttah ass!"

"Chestnuts!" groaned Tom Merry and Manners.

"If you fellows like to subscwibe a substantial sum—"

"Oh, I could let you have a cheque!" said Lowther. "Play me at chess, you know."

"What has chess got to do with this, you ass?"

"Why, then I could give you a check-mate!"

That was too much for Arthur Augustus. He sniffed and walked away, and from that time forth nothing was heard of the proposal for erecting a triumphal arch in honour of General Merry, V.C.

The Terrible Three walked over to the tuckshop for liquid refreshment, in the shape of ginger-beer, after their arduous labours in writing out so many lines from Virgil. They were still discussing ginger-beer and doughnuts under the big elm outside the tuckshop in the corner of the quadrangle when there was a shout from the direction of the gates:

"Tom Merry!"

"Buck up!"

"Here's your uncle!"

Tom Merry jumped up from his stool and set down his glass.

"My uncle already! My hat! Come on, you chaps, and back me up!"

And Tom Merry hurried down to the gates, and Lowther and Manners loyally followed him to back him up in greeting his honoured relative from India's coral strand.

A little old gentleman had halted in the stone gateway of St. Jim's, and he was talking to Taggles, the porter, in a crusty voice. Taggles was treating him with the great respect due to a general, a V.C., and a man rolling in rupees.

He was a man barely as tall as Tom Merry himself, with a face as brown as a berry, and a white moustache that gleamed in startling contrast with his mahogany face. His eyebrows were also white, and very bushy and beetly, and shreds of white hair escaped from under his hat. He was not in his general's uniform, somewhat to the disappointment of the juniors, who had hoped to see him arrive covered with glory and medals. Not even his V.C. was to be seen; but perhaps the general did not consider it the thing to wear a V.C. unless he was in uniform. He carried a malacca cane in his hand.

"Huh!" the visitor was saying as the

Terrible Three arrived, letting out that ejaculation with almost the sharpness of a pistol-shot. "Huh! Is my nephew here? Huh! So this is St. Jim's—hey? Huh!"

"Looks a rather terrifying old boy!" murmured Monty Lowther, as they drew near. "Did you know he was like that, Tommy?"

"Haven't seen him since I was a kid," said Tom Merry. "But he's all right; he's often sent me tips and presents from India."

"Well, we'll back you up," said Manners. "Lucky we're in funds. We can have him to tea in the study, if he'll come, and make much of him. Looks as if he'd lived a thousand years or so on curries and brimstone and hot brandy, doesn't he?"

The Terrible Three raised their caps very gracefully as they came up to the old gentleman.

"Uncle!" said Tom Merry.

The brown-skinned veteran raised his eyeglass, jammed it into his eye, and surveyed Tom Merry critically.

"You are my nephew, hey?" he demanded.

"If you are General Merry, I'm your nephew, sir," said Tom Merry demurely. "I'm Tom."

"Huh! You're Tom, hey?" said the general, surveying him through the eyeglass, and then allowing the monocle to drop to the end of a silken cord. "Huh! Come here, and shake hands with your uncle, Tom."

Tom Merry shook hands dutifully with his uncle.

The general reached out, after shaking hands, and gave the junior a sudden rap under the chin.

"Chin up!" he growled.

Tom Merry started back.

"Wh-what!" he gasped.

"Chin up! Don't go hanging your head like a week-old recruit!" rapped out the general. "Chin up!"

"Oh crumbs! I—I mean, all serene, uncle," said the dismayed junior.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who had joined the crowd round the gateway. "Watah a peppewy old sport, bai Jove!"

"I can foresee a high old time for Tommy," murmured Blake in delight. "I'm going to keep an eye on nunky."

The general put up his eyeglass again and scanned Tom Merry, who was growing rather red as the other fellows grinned.

"That's better!" he growled. "Chin up, and shoulders back. Don't be a slacker, hey?"

"I'm glad to see you, uncle," faltered Tom.

"Won't you come into the House, sir?" said Lowther suavely. "We've been looking forward to your visit, sir."

"My chum, Lowther, and this is Manners, uncle," said Tom Merry. "I've mentioned them in my letters to you, you remember."

"Hey! If they're your friends, I'll do as much for them as for you," said the veteran. "Chins up, you slacking civilians!"

Rap, rap!

Manners and Lowther jumped back in alarm as the general's knuckles rapped their chins up.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Lowther, rubbing his chin.

"Oh crumbs!" murmured Manners.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the rest of the juniors.

The general looked round, with the suspicion of a smile upon his mahogany face.

"Huh! Let's get into the House," he

grunted. "I'm shivering here. Is it always as cold as this in England?"

The juniors chuckled. It was a blazing summer afternoon; some of the fellows thought it too hot for cricket, and some that it was too warm to breathe. But, apparently, the general found it cold after India.

"Oh, no, sir!" said Lowther, who was never at a loss. "This is one of our bad days. But we'll get a fire going for you if you like."

"Good!" said the general. "And the sooner the better. Come on, Tom. Chin up!" he roared suddenly, rapping Tom Merry's chin with the head of his malacca.

"Oh crumbs!"

"March!"

They marched. Tom Merry escorted his uncle to the School House, and half St. Jim's followed them. Tom Merry's military uncle had made a sensation. Tom's face was a study. He had not known very clearly what he expected his Indian uncle to be like, but certainly he had not expected him to be quite like this.

The afternoon was not likely to be so pleasant as he had anticipated. Indeed, unless the general improved on acquaintance, the Terrible Three were "in" for a decidedly bad time. For Lowther and Manners, dismayed as they were, had no intention of deserting their chum. It was "up" to them to stick to Tom Merry in this emergency.

"Well, if that old boy doesn't take the giddy cake!" murmured Jack Blake, as he followed the Terrible Three and the terrible uncle. "I don't envy Tommy this afternoon with him."

"Bai Jove, no! Of course, a chap would be proud of an uncle like that, but—I—I'd wathah be proud of him at a distance," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully.

"Would you like to see the Head, uncle?" asked Tom Merry submissively, as he led his relative into the School House.

The general waved his hand.

"That can wait," he said. "Take me to your study. Where you have the study feeds, hey? You are going to feed your old uncle, hey?"

"Oh, yes; rather, sir! We've got a ripping tea—"

"You haven't forgotten the curry, hey?"

"They—they don't keep curry at the tuckshop, uncle," Tom Merry faltered.

The general snorted.

"Huh! Well, let's get a fire—that's the chief thing," said the general, with a shiver. "Don't you boys feel the cold?"

"Ahem! No!"

"We're used to the rigours of an English summer, sir," said Monty Lowther blandly. "We can stand the frozen iciness and chilling winds of May, sir."

"Hey? Well, that's right—grow up strong and hardy—quite right," said the general. "But I'm an old boy, and I must have my fire in this dreadful climate, what?"

"We'll have a fire going in two ticks, sir," said Manners.

"Good! Huh! So this is your study, hey?" said the general, as the juniors showed him into the famous apartment in the Shell passage in the School House.

"Yes, sir."

The general put up his monocle and blinked round the study. As the juniors had not expected the visitor till some hours later, they had not had time to put the study in order for him, and it must be confessed that the Terrible



"Look!" muttered Lowther, pointing to the dormitory window. A head, wrapped in a linen headgear, had emerged from the window, and a dark, evil face looked down at the startled juniors. "A Hindu!" said Tom Merry.

Three were not the tidiest youths possible. The general grunted.

"You want three months in my regiment to teach you order!" he growled. "Huh! If a man in my regiment had his quarters in this state I'd court-martial him, sir! Gad, I would!" He turned on Tom Merry. "Chin up!"

Tom Merry dodged away just in time. "I—I forgot!" he gasped. "All right, uncle. Will you take the armchair?"

The general sat down, with his back to the window.

"Light the fire!" he grunted.

The juniors hesitated. The sun was streaming in at the window, and the study was decidedly warm. But the general was not to be denied. He pointed to the grate with his malacca. And the Terrible Three, with an inward groan, set to work bringing in wood and coals, and lighted the fire.

"Pile it on!" said the general, getting a little nearer to the open window, however. "More coal! Make it roar!"

The juniors obeyed. There was soon a roaring fire in the study, and the atmosphere grew insufferably hot. The Terrible Three grew crimson in the face.

All the fellows who had intended to have tea with Tom Merry and his uncle had cleared off. They might have stood the general, but they couldn't stand the heat. But the general purred with satisfaction.

"That's better—hey?" he said.

"Yes," gasped Tom Merry, fanning himself with an exercise-book.

The general gave a howl.

"Don't make that draught here!" he roared. "Do you want me to catch my death of cold—hey? When I want you

to act as a punkah-wallah, I'll tell you."

"Ye-es!" gasped Tom Merry.

"I—I think I'll go down to the tuckshop and—see about the grub!" gasped Manners.

"I'll come and help you get it," murmured Lowther.

But for Tom Merry there was no escape.

CHAPTER 9.

The Terrible Uncle!

"WARMER now—hey?" said the general.

"Yes, rather!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Too warm for you—hey?"

"Oh, I'm all right!"

"Put some more coals on, then."

The fire was already roaring up the chimney, and the study was like an oven. Coals were piled high in the open grate, and were blazing away. Tom Merry cast a look of alarm at the chimney, down which sparks were dropping. He was seriously afraid of setting the chimney on fire.

But the general was not to be denied. He pointed to the fire with his malacca, and Tom gasped and obeyed. The roar of the fire could be heard outside the study now, and the heat made the very air swim. The general, seated close to the open window, perhaps did not feel it as much as Tom Merry did.

There was a thump at the door, and it flew open, and Kildare of the Sixth strode in, with a knitted brow.

"You young ass!" he shouted. "Are you trying to set the school on fire? You've got sparks and a mountain of

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,476.

smoke coming out of the chimney! What the— Oh!" Kildare broke off suddenly at the sight of the little old gentleman with the fierce white moustache. "Oh! I—I didn't know you had a visitor!"

"It's my uncle!" panted Tom Merry. "Is this another of your friends, Tom—hey?" demanded the general.

"It's Kildare, the captain of the school, uncle."

The general reached out with his cane, and gave the astounded Sixth Former a rap on the chin with the head.

"Chin up!" he thundered.

Kildare staggered back, clasping his chin.

"Wh-what!" he gasped.

"Chin up! Don't come into the presence of an old soldier with that hang-dog look!" exclaimed the general.

"Gad, sir, I wish I had you in my regiment for a week! I'd make you as stiff as a ramrod, sir!"

"My only hat!" ejaculated Kildare. And he retreated incontinently from the study. He did not want to be unkind to a general with a V.C. And Tom Merry's terrible uncle was evidently not to be argued with politely. Kildare rubbed his chin ruefully as he went down the passage.

The general chuckled.

"I'd make you young slackers sit up if I were here for a week!" he growled. "You are an awkward squad, at the best, in this House! What?"

"I—I suppose you would, uncle."

"There's another House at this school, isn't there?" demanded the general.

"Yes; the New House. Would you like to see it?" asked Tom Merry, who would have given all his uncle's rupees to get out of that study just then. He felt that the heat would make him faint soon, and the general, in his arm-chair barred him from the window.

"Yes," said the general. "I hope it's a little more orderly than this House appears to be. Lead the way!"

Tom Merry gladly led the way.

The general followed him from the study, and outside the School House they met Manners and Lowther returning, laden with good things for tea.

"Hallo! Not going to have tea yet?" asked Lowther, with relief. He was glad not to have to go into the study again.

"No. My uncle's going to have a look at the New House," said Tom; and he added in a whisper: "Get somebody to go up and put that awful fire out!"

"Right-ho!"

"Something for tea—hey?" said the general, surveying the packages with which the chums of the Shell were laden.

"Yes, sir," said Manners.

"Bring it into the other House. I'll have my tea there. I dare say Figgins will take us in—hey?"

"You know Figgins, sir?" asked Manners, in surprise.

The general hesitated for a moment, but only for a moment.

"I know something of this school's record in sport," he explained. "Figgins is the champion junior athlete, isn't he?"

"No fear!" said the Terrible Three together.

"The New House is the Cock House here, I understand—hey? All the best athletes and the best of everything—what?"

"Not much!" said Monty Lowther warmly. "Why, it's a regular old

casual ward. The School House is Cock House, and always has been. Figgins isn't bad for a New House chap; but he isn't up to School House form. No fear!"

"Huh! Bring the stuff over to the New House. I'm not accustomed to having my orders questioned, sir!" roared the general.

"Come on, you fellows!" muttered Tom Merry imploringly. He was feeling ashamed of his uncle, and his chums could feel for him. And Lowther repressed the desire to remark that he wasn't under the general's orders, at all events. The chums of the Shell accompanied the general across the quadrangle.

"Well, my hat!" said Kangaroo, as he watched them go. "If I had an uncle like that I'd boil him in oil and scalp him afterwards."

"Yaas, wathah! I'm not sowwy, on the whole, that I drowped that ideah of a triumphal arch," said D'Arcy thoughtfully. "He appeals to me to be a most iwascible old bounder!"

"Horrid!" said Blake. "Lowther's asked me to go and put the fire out. Some of you fellows come and lend a hand! Anybody going to tea over there with Tom Merry's uncle?"

And the reply came like a chorus:

"No fear!"

The Terrible Three and the general reached the New House. There was no denying the Anglo-Indian veteran; but Tom Merry could not help wondering how Figgins & Co. would receive such a fearsome guest. If the general rapped New House chums with his cane there might be trouble, for they were now in the enemy's country, so to speak. But, fortunately, the general seemed to get into a great good-humour the moment he entered the New House.

He glanced round him with an expression of satisfaction.

"Huh! This is better!" he exclaimed. "These boys look more fit—hey? They ought to be an example to you young wasters—what?"

Quite a crowd of New House juniors had gathered to see the visitor, and they grinned assent to the general's observation. Figgins and Fatty Wynn were prominent among them, but Kerr was not to be seen.

"Figg, old man," murmured Tom Merry, "my uncle's got a fancy for having tea in your study."

Figgins rose to the occasion.

"Delighted!" he exclaimed. "Come in, sir!"

"Huh! Is that Figgins?"

"Yes, sir, I'm Figgins."

"Good! I like your looks, Figgins. And I hope you will take these School House kids in hand, and teach them things. Make them keep their chins up and toe the line generally."

"Certainly, sir!" said Figgins. "We do keep the School House kids in order now, sir. When we have time, we'll teach 'em lots of things."

The Terrible Three looked daggers at Figgins. The New House juniors burst into a chorus of chuckles.

"This way, sir!" said Fatty Wynn.

And the general wheezed up the stairs and strutted into Figgins' study, with the Terrible Three and a crowd of juniors in his wake.

CHAPTER 10.

A Free Feed!

THE terrible visitor seemed satisfied with Figgins' study. He did not ask for a fire to be lighted, much to Tom Merry's relief. Tom did not know how Figgins and Fatty Wynn would have taken it.

The general sat with his back to the light, as before, and his keen eyes peered at the juniors from under the thick, white brows.

"This is better!" he announced. "Now then, I'm ready for tea! Ask some of your friends in, Master Figgins—hey? The more the merrier!"

"Certainly, sir!" said Figgins. "How many, sir?"

"As many as the study will hold," said the general. "My nephew is standing treat—what? Hospitality was always the great trait of the Merry family, Tom. If you haven't enough stuff there for a large party, go and get some more—hey?"

"Oh, yes, uncle!"

"And be quick about it!" added the general, giving Tom Merry a lunge with his cane. "Chin up, you young slacker!"

"Ow!"

Figgins obligingly laid the cloth. There were an unexpectedly large number of chairs in the study, and an unusually good allowance of crockery—a circumstance that was very fortunate for the occasion. The Terrible Three were too bothered and worried just then to notice how peculiar that circumstance was. It was really as if Figgins and Fatty Wynn had expected the feed to be held in their study.

The good things Lowther and Manners had purchased from Dame Taggles were spread on the table. But as Figgins' friends came crowding in, it was evident that there would not be enough for the party. Figgins was a popular fellow, and he had many friends; but Tom Merry would not have suspected him of possessing so many pals as now proved to be the case. Figgins' list of friends seemed only to be limited by the size of the study.

Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence came in, smiling. Pratt of the Fourth and Thompson of the Shell, and then French, Dibbs, and Jimson followed them in. Then came more and more fellows. The study was simply crammed. But more were coming. Chairs were brought from the other studies and arranged in the passage to accommodate the endless flow of juniors. Even Jameson of the Third came along with a crowd of fags. It seemed that Figgins' friends included every junior that belonged to the New House.

The Terrible Three gasped in dismay and worry. A feed for that tremendous crowd was a strain upon their financial resources—a strain those resources were not quite calculated to bear.

As the general was Tom's uncle, and known to be rolling in riches, he might naturally have been expected to hand out a tip of a pound or two, or even a fiver. Nothing, however, seemed further from his thoughts.

He contented himself with making complimentary remarks about the New House and the juniors of the House, which seemed to the Terrible Three to be in the worst of taste.

Above all, he exhorted Figgins to remember to take the School House boys in hand, and teach them to come up to the form of the New House. And Figgins promised that he would—a promise that earned him deadly glares from Tom Merry & Co.

"We shall have to get more stuff," Lowther whispered to Tom Merry. "This won't be a bite all round—especially with Fatty Wynn here! He's scoffing all the cold chicken already, the fat bounder!"

"You two chaps buzz off to the tuck-shop and get all you can," said Tom.

"What about the tin?"

"Haven't you got any?" groaned Tom. "I'm stony now."

"Only a bob left." "Oh crumbs! Borrow some of Gussy and Blake and Kangaroo. Explain to them, and they'll help us out."

"Right-ho!"

Manners and Lowther departed.

The general was generously inviting the New House juniors to fall in; but they hardly seemed to need inviting. They were falling in with great gusto. Most of them were laughing and chuckling and whispering, as if regarding the whole matter as an excellent joke—and doubtless it was, from a New House point of view. But it did not seem funny to Tom Merry. He was kept hard at work handing out things to the fellows who were picnicking in the passage. He had not time to eat anything himself. And, indeed, his terrible uncle had taken his appetite away.

And the general gave him no rest. When Tom ventured to refresh himself with a glass of ginger-beer, the general asked him whether he was going to neglect his guests; and Tom resumed his duties as a waiter. The throng in the passage increased. Every junior in the New House, with the exception of Kerr, seemed to be present.

Lowther and Manners were breathing hard as they emerged from the New House, and tramped furiously across the quadrangle.

"What do you think of him?" asked Manners.

"Beast!" said Lowther. "Horrible blighter!" said Manners. "Frabjous old chump!" "Poor old Tommy!"

"Well, we shall have to stick to Tommy. But if he wasn't Tommy's uncle, I'd—I'd— Oh, I'd scalp him!"

Somewhat relieved by that expression of opinion, the chums of the Shell arrived at the School House. The crowd of curious fellows there greeted them with questions. They were all deeply interested in Tom Merry's Indian uncle, though none of them wanted to enjoy the pleasures of his company.

"How are you getting on with Nana Sahib?" asked Blake.

"Havin' a good time, deah boys?"

Monty Lowther brandished a clenched fist. Manners sparred the air as if he could see before him a sunburnt face, with white moustache and eyebrows. The School House juniors grinned.

"That's what I think of him!" said Lowther. "The beast is having tea in Figgins' study. He's buttering up Figgins & Co., and running down the School House. He's asked Figgins to take us in hand—us!—and teach us things."

"Bai Jove!"

"He's asked the whole blessed New House to tea. They're cramming in Figgy's study, and camping in the passage," groaned Manners. "They think it's a joke."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake.

"What are you cackling at?" demanded Manners and Lowther together ferociously.

"Well, it is a joke," grinned Blake. "It's the joke of the season. I suppose the old johnny's mad."

"Must be as mad as a hattah. It's the sun in India that's done it," said D'Arcy sagely. "I've heard of lots of chaps there goin' off their wockahs. I've got a cousin there who's as potty as—"

"As his cousin at home," grunted Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

JUST MY FUN

Monty Lowther Calling!



Hallo, everybody!

If there's one thing I like better than a nice rosy apple, it's two of them!

Wayland residents complain that the town's statues are unsightly. Agony columns?

Then there was the painter who left a space above the clock because he didn't believe in working over time! One!

Do you know how much Taggles, the porter, earns? About half what he is paid!

According to Wally D'Arcy, Mr. Selby has only two faults. Everything he says and everything he does!

Yes, and it was young Gibson who thought you got lather from a volcano. "Eruption" in the Third!

In parts of Russia workmen are paid in vegetables. Imagine asking for an increase in celery!

News: Tall men suffer more from rheumatism than short men. Big stiff!

Third Form flash: "Give me an example of uplift," commanded Mr. Selby. "A motor-car jack," replied Wally D'Arcy.

"To read present-day English, you need a knowledge of American," says a student. And to read American, you

need a knowledge of every language under the sun!

Did you hear about the burglar who never took a bath? His sack was only big enough for silver and small articles!

It's no good being mean, you know. A mean chap ends up by "giving himself away"!

Reflection: A leopard may hide, but he's always spotted.

I hear Mr. Ratcliff didn't grumble when pulled up in his runabout by a policewoman. It was a "fair cop."

News: A sailor has gone on the films. Now he's a films tar.

A cousin of mine has a flat so small that even his milk has to be condensed. "Can" it be true?

"Billions of germs cling to a pound note," says a scientist. Wish they'd tell us how!

I heard of a hiker who boasted that he had carried a kit weighing fifty pounds over three hundred miles. That's carrying it too far!

I hear a new Chinese bowler is causing a sensation. "Breaks" from China?

Blake says Gore would be a wonderful dancer but for two things. His feet!

Buck Finn says it's possible to entrain in Texas and still be in Texas after twenty-four hours travelling. We have trains like that here!

"You can get very attached to a mule," writes a reader. But it's easier to get detached!

"Look here," complained the actor, "I've got simply nothing to do in this play!" "Well, you're equal to it!" retorted the producer.

Be back next Wednesday, chums!

"We've run out of tin," said Lowther. "Will you chaps lend us some money? We'll settle up next week, somehow. We shall want pounds and pounds to feed that crew. Every blessed worm in the New House has crawled up for the feed. It's like magic. Not a chap of them gone out, as it happens. All ready to pile in, the beasts! Lend us some money, for goodness' sake! If we don't get back with the grub, Tom's life won't be safe with that uncle of his."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't cackle! Hand out the tin!"

"Yaas, wathah! Anythin' to help a chap out of a beastly awkward posish," said Arthur Augustus kindly. "I've got a couple of pounds."

"I've got half a quid," said Blake. "And here's five bob."

"And a quid."

"And half-a-crown."

"Small contributions thankfully received; larger ones in proportion," said Monty Lowther, gathering the generous offerings in his hat. "We'll settle it all up next week, unless the old ruffian stands Tommy a good tip. He may, but he doesn't look it. If he were my uncle, I'd boil him in oil. Thanks, you chaps! I think, this will see us through."

And Manners and Lowther trotted off to the tuckshop with nearly five pounds in their possession—a sum which was quickly transferred to Mrs. Taggles' till. And then the Shell fellows

dragged heavy consignments of tuck over to the New House.

Their arrival in Figgins' study was timely. The supply was running short, and the general was already beginning to shout at his nephew.

"Oh, here you are!" exclaimed Tom Merry, in great relief.

"Here's the stuff!" said Manners.

"My aunt! That looks good!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn, with glistening eyes. "I'll trouble you for the chicken."

"Jam tarts for me, please," said Redfern.

"Cream puffs this way," said Lawrence.

"Where's the ginger-beer?" howled Owen.

"Lemonade, please. Now, then, stir your stumps!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The feed proceeded gloriously. It was the time of their lives for the New House juniors. Seldom, or never, had such a feed been stood in Figgy's study—and the passage adjoining. Even some Fifth Form fellows, hearing what was on, had come to join in. The fresh supply of tuck, numerous as it was, was not more than adequate for the numerous and hungry company.

The general surveyed the scene with satisfaction through his eyeglass. He was eating with a good appetite himself, and his diet was remarkable for a veteran fresh from India. He had as good an appetite for jam tarts,

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,476.

marmalade tarts, cream puffs, and ginger-beer as any other junior present.

"Quite a merry party—hey?" he said.

"Ripping!" groaned Monty Lowther.

"Enjoying yourself entertaining your friends—hey, Tom?"

"Awfully!" murmured Tom Merry.

"Figgins has promised me to show you how to play cricket," said the general. Tom glared at Figgins.

"Has he?" he gasped.

"Yes. And Redfern is going to show you how to row."

"Oh!"

"Huh! Haven't you a word of thanks for their kindness?" demanded the general in a voice of thunder.

"What?"

"Th-thank you, Figgins!" stuttered Tom Merry.

"Not at all, dear boy," said Figgins airily. "Always willing to show you School House kids how to do things."

"Oh!"

There was a sudden interruption in the passage. Toby, the School House page, came pushing his way through the feasters, amid many loud objections.

But Toby persisted in advancing, and he reached the study doorway at last. Toby's round, pink face was illuminated with a broad grin as he looked in.

"Master Merry here?" he said.

"Here I am!" said Tom Merry dismally. "What's wanted?"

"You are, Master Merry. Your uncle's come."

Tom Merry stared at Toby blankly.

"What?" he said faintly.

"General Merry has arrived, sir," said Toby.

CHAPTER 11.

Spoofed!

TOM MERRY stared at Toby as if he were dreaming.

Manners and Lowther gasped.

There was a momentary silence in the study. It was broken by a wild yell of laughter from the New House juniors.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The laughter rang through the study and through the passage. Fellows choked over their ginger-beer and their jam tarts. Fatty Wynn ceased his operations upon his second cold chicken to join in that exuberant roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Toby grinned broadly. The little brown-faced general chuckled. He had risen now, and his eyes were warily upon the Terrible Three. Figgins and Redfern drew closer to him.

"My uncle?" panted Tom Merry at last.

"Yes, sir," grinned Toby.

"He—he's arrived?"

"Yessir."

Tom Merry turned a dazed look upon the white-moustached veteran in the study.

"But my uncle's here!" he exclaimed.

"Are you dotty, Toby?"

"I'm afraid not, sir," said Toby.

"General Merry 'ave arrived, sir, and he's with the 'Ead now, and I've been sent to fetch you."

Then, for the first time, a glimmering of truth dawned upon the Terrible Three. They fixed their eyes upon the white-moustached face.

The general put his hand up to his white moustache, and it came off in his hand. Then he cheerfully removed his wig and his white eyebrows. And then, in spite of the dark complexion and the skilfully done wrinkles, the juniors recognised him.

"Kerr!" roared the Terrible Three in one voice.

The disguised junior—recognisable now—bowed calmly over his moustache and eyebrows and wig. The New House juniors shrieked with merriment.

"Huh!" said Kerr, in the crusty voice he had adopted as appropriate to General Merry. "Huh! Rather a take-in, hey? Who's Cock House at St. Jim's now, hey?"

"Oh, my hat!"

"You—you fraud!"

"You villain!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Figgins & Co. "Thanks for the feed! Ha, ha, ha! Who's Cock House at St. Jim's? Who's been done right in the eye? Ha, ha, ha!"

"Huh!" said Kerr. "Hear us smile, hey? Ha, ha, ha!"

The Terrible Three glared at the impostor. Kerr had played his part wonderfully well, though it was really not a difficult part for the amateur actor of the New House to play. The School House had not had a single suspicion. Tom Merry's first feeling, as he recovered from his shock, was relief—deep and great relief that this terrible uncle was not really his uncle at all.

But Manners and Lowther were simply furious. That they had borrowed money right and left to stand a feed for the New House; that they had slaved away half the afternoon playing waiter, while Figgins & Co. fed; that they had been utterly thoroughly, and hopelessly taken in, naturally made them wrathful.

The Terrible Three made a wild rush for Kerr.

They wanted, more than anything else at that moment, to collar the practical joker, to bump him and roll him over, and jump on him hard.

But Figgins and the rest closed round Kerr, and the School House three were seized in a dozen pairs of hands.

Kerr grinned at them serenely.

"Chuck the young ruffians out, hey?" he said.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Lemme get at him!" roared Monty Lowther frantically. "Lemme gerrat the beast! I'll smash him! I'll squash him! I'll pulverise him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Chin up, hey?" said Kerr.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Terrible Three struggled wildly to get at Kerr. But the odds were too great. Figgins & Co. almost suffocating with laughter, whirled them off their feet and bore them bodily, kicking and struggling, out of the study.

"Chuck them out, hey?" said Kerr.

"Chin up! Who's Cock House at St. Jim's, hey? Gad, if I had you in my regiment for a week—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther, dishevelled and breathless, were whirled down the stairs in the grasp of the chuckling New House juniors, and rolled down the steps into the quadrangle. There they picked themselves up, gasping, and shook their fists at the grinning juniors that packed the doorway. Figgins waved his hand to them.

"Go home!" he said.

"Yah! Go home!"

"Thanks for the feed!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Terrible Three charged furiously up the steps. They still wanted to get at Kerr. But Kerr was not get-at-able just then.

"Come on!" cooed Figgins invitingly.

"Coming to see your uncle, Tom? Hey?"

Dishevelled, dusty, and crimson, the chums of the Shell tramped away towards their own House, followed by yells of laughter from Figgins & Co. From the study window Kerr waved a white wig after them.

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Tom Merry.

"All the fellows know it now. Look!"

Outside the School House was a hilarious crowd waiting for them. The arrival of the real General Merry was known to all the fellows there, and that



The general reached out and gave Tom Merry a rap on the back. "Wh-what!" he gasped. "Chin up!"

had, of course, enlightened them. The School House crowd seemed to be in hysterics as the three dusty and dragged juniors limped in.

"Here's another uncle for you, Tommy!" roared Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! A much bettah one, deah boys."

"You've been taken in!" hooted Kangaroo. "Who was it? Who was the giddy impostor?"

"Kerr!" groaned Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove! Might have guessed it, you know. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, stop cackling!" growled Lowther. "Let's get in and tidy before we see the real article, you chaps."

"Yes, rather!" Tom Merry gasped.

But that was not to be. As the dusty and dishevelled trio limped into the School House they were met by a sturdy, broad-shouldered gentleman with a deeply sunburnt face and a humorous twinkle in his eye.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,476.

"By Jove!" ejaculated the sunburnt gentleman, in surprise.
 "Your uncle, Tommy!" giggled Blake. "Oh, my hat!"
 "Is one of you my nephew?" asked General Merry.
 "Yes," gasped Tom Merry. "I'm the chap! Oh crumbs!"
 The general gazed at him, and the smile became a laugh, and the laugh a roar.
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

CHAPTER 12.

The Genuine Article!

GENERAL MERRY laughed, and laughed again, and the crowd of School House juniors laughed, too.
 The dusty Shell fellows looked at one another sheepishly, and then they joined



he chin. "Chin up!" he growled. Tom Merry started a general. "Don't go about hanging your head like a cruit!"

in the laugh. After all, it was funny—and certainly the appearance they presented was calculated to excite risibility. They were torn and rumpled and ruffled, and smothered with dust, and looked more like three hooligans fresh home from a very specially rough "scrap" than three nice boys at school.

And Tom Merry was glad to hear his uncle laugh—especially that hearty roar. It relieved him of his terrors. It showed that the real uncle was not at all like the spoof uncle.

"I—I'm afraid I look a bit dusty, uncle," said Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha! You do, my boy, you do!" said the general. "What is it—one of the House rags you have told me about in your letters?"

"That's it, uncle," said Tom Merry. "We've just been ragging with Figgins & Co., and—and we've got it in the neck!"

"Ha, ha, ha! It looks like it. Never mind, my boy, you must take the downs

with the ups. But what is this I've heard about someone having arrived already calling himself by my name?"

"Oh!" murmured Tom. "You've heard!"

"Yes, bedad!" said the general. "What does it mean?"

"It was a New House jape," Tom Merry explained reluctantly, for he did not know how the general was likely to take it. "They knew you were coming, uncle, and—and as I hadn't seen you for so long they palmed off a fellow on me—disguised as a general—a blessed amateur actor—"

The general gasped.

The sunburnt face grew purple with merriment, and he burst into that hearty roar again.

"Ha, ha, ha! The young rascals! And they took you in?"

"Yes," confessed Tom Merry. "Of course, the rotter wasn't anything like you, only I didn't know just what you were like, you see. He was made up jolly well, and we never bowled him out till Toby brought us the news you had come."
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry was very glad to see the general take the joke with such hearty good humour. When the old gentleman had recovered from his merriment, which was not for some time, the Terrible Three went to put themselves in order, and General Merry strolled in the quadrangle with some of the fellows with whom he had made friends already. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was very attentive to him, and, finding the general such a really ripping old boy, he was mentally regretting that he had not erected that triumphal arch, after all.

The general showed the keen pleasure of a boy in roaming over the historic old school. He looked at the cricket pitch and the gym, and chatted to the seniors and the juniors and the masters whom he met. He explored the ruined chapel, and looked into the old tower. Then he walked over to the New House.

"Nothing worth seeing over there, sir," said Jack Blake.

"That's the New House, rotten old show!"

"Wegulah casual ward, sir," said D'Arcy.

"Mouldly old barn," said Kangaroo.

"Awful young ruffians dig there," remarked Herries.

The general grinned.

"Yes, I've heard about it from Tom in his letters to me. I take a great interest in the question which is Cock House at St. Jim's. Which is Cock House, by the way?"

"School House, sir," said all the juniors together.

"Rats!" came a voice from Figgins' study window. They were quite near the New House now. "New House is Cock House. Who's been done in the eye?"

"School House!" yelled Kerr and Fatty Wynn.

"Who's been taken in and done for?" yelled Figgins.

"School House!" hooted the chums.

Blake shook his fist at the juniors at the window, withdrawing a little behind the general to do so, unseen by the veteran.

Figgins & Co., at the window, grinned at him, and bowed politely to the general.

"Welcome to St. Jim's, sir!" said Kerr and Fatty Wynn.

"Is that right you young rascals have been using my name and disguising yourself as myself?" demanded the general.

"Ahem! Only one of us, sir," said Figgins.

"Which one was it?" demanded the general, with a terrific frown.

"Ahem! It was I, sir," said Kerr.

"Oh, it was you! Come down here at once!" said General Merry.

Figgins & Co. looked at one another in dismay. If the general was going to take it like this, there was trouble in store. But Kerr had to go; for if the general wanted to cause trouble, he had only to speak a single word to Mr. Ratcliff.

"Oh, come on!" said Figgins. "After the feast the reckoning, you know. We've called the tune, and now we've got to pay the giddy piper."

And Figgins & Co. descended into the quadrangle. The School House fellows were grinning, but Figgins & Co. looked serious enough as they faced the broad-shouldered, sunburnt veteran from Hindustan.

The general shook his finger sternly at Kerr.

"So it was you—hey?"

"Yes, sir," said Kerr meekly.

"You made up as a general?"

Kerr grinned.

"I made up as a stage Anglo-Indian johnny, sir, good enough to take in the School House chaps. They're not very keen, you know."

"Weally, Kerr—"

"Kerr, you cheeky ass—"

"Well, you are a young rascal, sir," said the general, the frown disappearing from his face as he burst into a laugh.

"A regular young rascal! It was like your impudence! Ha, ha, ha! Give me your fist, sir."

And the general shook hands with Kerr, and, to the junior's astonishment, left a couple of pounds in his palm, then he sailed off with his escort.

"My hat!" ejaculated Kerr. "Look here!"

"Quids!" said Figgins.

"Two quidlets!" gasped Fatty Wynn.

"Well, he is a ripping old johnny, and no mistake! I'd swap all my uncles for him!"

"Good old sport!" said Figgins.

"Let's go and change 'em at the tuckshop, Kerr!"

"My hat! Haven't you fed enough this afternoon, Fatty?"

"Well, that's half an hour ago, and—"

"Come on!" said Kerr.

And one of the pounds was forthwith changed; and Figgins & Co. declared with conviction that General Merry was a ripping old johnny—and undoubtedly they were right.

The general strolled back to the School House with the juniors of that House and found the Terrible Three clothed in their right minds again, as Blake expressed it. They had washed and brushed-up and changed their clothes, and certainly looked a great deal more presentable.

"Tea's ready in the study, uncle," said Tom.

"Good!" said General Merry.

It was a merry party that sat down to tea in the Shell study. A further

loan had been raised among the School House juniors, and a good repast was spread on the study table, and a select company invited to tea with the distinguished guest.

General Merry made a great impression upon the juniors. He was affability itself, almost boyish in his good-humour; and yet the juniors knew that the keen old eyes looking out of the bronzed and scarred visage had looked upon fearful scenes of danger and death.

The trouble given him by the "spoof" New House general had driven the Sign of Three out of Tom Merry's mind, but he thought of it again now. When tea was over and the guests departed, leaving the Terrible Three alone with the general, Tom determined to speak on the subject.

General Merry had lighted a big, black, pungent cigar, and was filling the study with smoke from a railway engine. He was sitting contentedly in the armchair, his eyes on the open window and the quad and the green playing fields beyond.

"I've got something to tell you, uncle," said Tom Merry. "I want to ask your advice."

"Certainly, my boy!" said the general, with a chuckle. "I think I can guess the difficulty."

Tom looked surprised.

"You can guess it, uncle?" he said.

"I think so. When I was at school I always found that the expenditure outran the income to an alarming extent."

Tom Merry laughed.

"No, it isn't that, uncle. If it were, I'd tell you like a shot. But my other uncle makes me a good allowance, as you know, and you have always been generous. No, I'm not in any difficulty of that sort."

"Glad to hear it, my boy!" said the general. "A boy can't be too careful. But what is the trouble, then? You want me to ask the Head for an extra holiday?"

"Well, that's a good idea, too; but it isn't that. I've had a letter."

"And not a dunning one?"

"No, sir; a letter from India."

"From me, do you mean?"

"No. Since your last letter, uncle; I received it yesterday."

The general sat up in his chair.

"I wasn't aware that you had any other correspondents in India, Tom."

"Neither was I, sir," said Tom ruefully. "I can't make head or tail of it. I suppose whoever wrote the letter must have got my name and address from you somehow. I don't see how it could be got there otherwise. Have you ever seen anything like this before, uncle?"

He laid the card and the letter upon the table beside the general.

General Merry glanced at them, and a sudden change came over his face at the sight of the three red dots in the form of a triangle.

He started to his feet, with a sudden, sharp exclamation. For a moment the colour had wavered in his bronzed cheek.

"The Sign of Three!"

CHAPTER 13.

For Life or Death!

TOM MERRY, Manners, and Lowther stared at the general. It was evident that he knew the mysterious sign.

General Merry remained standing, and his brows were knitted. His glance

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,476.

was almost stern as it rested upon his nephew.

"What does this mean?" he demanded. "What do you know about this, Tom?"

Tom shook his head.

"Nothing, sir. I received the letter by post from India, that's all, and—"

"And the card?"

"That was placed in my dormitory last night."

"By whom?"

"A Hindu."

"Good heavens!"

The general sank into his seat again. His hand went to a pocket behind him, and the juniors realised, with a thrill, that the old soldier carried a revolver. The movement was instinctive. He withdrew his hand in a moment.

"Tell me all about it, Tom," he said curly.

Tom Merry explained the circumstances of the mysterious visit the un-



Householder (nervously): "We had a visit from one of your friends last night."

Burglar: "Yus, guv'nor. I've just dropped in to see if you've got any complaints!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to "A Reader," Longnor, Pembroke Park, Ballsbridge, Dublin.

known Hindu had made to the school the previous night.

The general drew a deep breath when he had finished.

"It was a great mercy that you were not in the dormitory," he said.

"You think that he came there for me, sir?" asked Tom.

"I know it."

"And—what did he intend to do, sir?"

The general was silent. The three juniors exchanged startled glances. They had been puzzled and mystified by the Sign of Three. But the general's look showed that there was cause for alarm. A trifling matter would not have disturbed the equanimity of the old soldier in this way.

"Do you mean that he meant to—to injure me, sir?" asked Tom Merry.

"I don't know," said the general, after a long pause. "It is likely enough. Whether he intended real mischief, or simply to scare you and me, I cannot be sure, but I know the character of the man."

"Do you know him, sir?"

"I know them all—three," said the general quietly.

"All three?" repeated Tom Merry.

"There were three of them. I will

explain to you," said the general. "I had no idea that you knew anything about the affair, and it is not a matter I should have told you; but now you had better know. You may have heard that I was engaged last year in suppressing a revolutionary movement in Bengal?"

"Yes, I heard about that, sir."

"There were three leaders—three ringleaders who were at the bottom of the whole mischief—three Indians educated in England, and as full of mischief as an egg is of meat," said the general, knitting his brows. "They had the usual babyish ideas of the Indian revolutionaries—a new mutiny, and the expulsion of the British. There was some fighting and some bloodshed before their nonsense was suppressed—not much, but some. Two of them were caught and hanged—two of the leaders, I mean."

"Oh!" murmured the juniors.

"The third—Hurree Das—escaped. They were the three. That was the Sign of Three secret society—the three red dots in the triangle. It was the secret signal that was sent to all the accomplices before the outbreak. After it was over, and Hurree Das had been hunted out of the country, that sign was sent to me."

The general's lip curled in a grim smile.

"It was to let me know that the vengeance of the Three was awaiting me. Two of them were hanged, and the other would be sent to the Andaman Islands if he was caught. Hurree Das was more fool than rascal. The other two were the worst. But he is a revengeful scoundrel. Two attempts were made upon my life in Calcutta. But—but I did not think that the villain would have the nerve to come to England. Yet he is here, that is certain, from the visit you received last night."

"And that was Hurree Das?" asked Tom Merry breathlessly.

The general nodded.

"Then he came to—to—" Tom Merry faltered.

"I fear so. They had found me too tough a nut to crack, and the cowardly villain thought of reaching me another way. By gad, it was a cunning thought, too!" The general's brows contracted in wrath.

"But why send that warning if he meant mischief?" asked Tom Merry. "It was like placing me on my guard."

The general smiled.

"You know what Kipling has said of the black man, my boy—half devil and half child. That was a theatrical flourish—the Oriental can do nothing without that. All their revolutionary schemes are like stage plays—luckily their revolts are very much like stage fighting, too. The Sign of Three was to mystify and terrify you, and so to gratify the conceit of the miserable rascal, to make him feel himself terrible and terrifying."

Tom Merry laughed.

"I think I understand," he said. "It's jolly lucky for me I was out of the dorm last night, then."

"Very lucky indeed. Hurree Das may intend to take his vengeance through you, or it may be a warning to me to cease the pursuit. The police are hunting for him, and when he is caught, he goes to a penal settlement for life in the Andaman Islands. By threatening danger to you, he may hope to induce me to hold my hand."

"He knew, too, that you were returning to England, and guessed that I should tell you—"

(Continued on page 18.)



**Let the Editor be your pal. Write to him to-day, addressing your letters:
The Editor, The GEM, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Fleetway House,
Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.**

HALLO, chums! It's some little time since we had a St. Jim's story featuring George Gore, the bully of the Shell, so it comes as a refreshing change to find him featured in the principal role in next Wednesday's grand yarn, entitled:

"FOR THE HONOUR OF ST. JIM'S!"

Also playing a leading part in the story is Jerrold Lumley-Lumley, who used to be known as the "Outsider," one of the most popular characters Martin Clifford ever originated.

The story, which has a thrilling mystery theme, opens with Tom Merry & Co., who are out cycling one afternoon, being caught in a thunderstorm on Wayland Moor. They take refuge from the rain in the old Manor House, a derelict, uninhabited ruin on the moor. But much to their astonishment, they find Cutts of the Fifth Form there, while later, Knox and Sefton of the Sixth also turn up. Thereupon, Tom Merry & Co. are ordered out of the place by Knox, and they are compelled to obey the prefect.

But the curiosity of the juniors is aroused, for it is obvious to them that they are not wanted in the house for some reason by the three seniors. Something is going on in the old Manor House which will not bear the light of day. What it is Tom Merry & Co. mean to find out. But they little guess the nature of the shady game being carried on at night in the old ruin—a game which involves George Gore as well as Knox & Co., and threatens to bring disgrace upon St. Jim's.

Martin Clifford has struck a new note with this great story, and it will be sure to appeal to all readers.

"THE MAKING OF HARRY WHARTON!"

Of no less appeal are the next rousing chapters of the great yarn by Frank Richards dealing with the early days of the Greyfriars chums.

The Remove take the warpath against Hazeldene, the cad of the Form, for the trick he played on Wharton over the Seaton-D'Arcy exam, which is described in this number. But curiously enough, when Hazeldene is threatened by the

vengeance of the Removites, the one junior to stand by him is the fellow he wronged—Harry Wharton! This leads Harry into more trouble—resulting in a fight with Bulstrode, the Form bully. Whatever you do, chums, don't miss this gripping instalment.

By the way, don't forget that some useful pocket money is still to be picked up by providing other readers with a laugh. Send in to the GEM Jester that funny joke you heard the other day. It may bring you half-a-crown.

A POWDER DIET!

How would you like to sit down to a portion of powder at dinner-time instead of succulent roast pork or beef? You wouldn't fancy it a bit? Neither would I. All the joy and satisfaction of eating a hearty meal when you are hungry would vanish if one had merely to spoon up a little powder and eat it. But science, ever seeking to improve things for us, has been making steady progress in the production of foodstuffs in concentrated form. Now someone has produced meat in the form of powder, which yet retains all the necessary vitamins. Just a small quantity of the powder is all that is necessary to feed you for a week!

All that can be said for this form of diet is that it saves time in cooking and eating, and might be less expensive. But are these advantages worth the loss of the pleasure we get from eating our meals as they are now served up to us? No; I for one would rather sit down to a nice juicy steak than all the powdered forms of nourishment science could put before me!

FOOD WITH A KICK!

But science, however, has been better employed in other directions connected with food. An important discovery in the nourishing value of vitamin D has recently been made. Experiments tried out on rats have proved that when fed

on food lacking in vitamin D, they have become very sluggish. But foods rich in this particular vitamin have had the reverse effect on the rats, giving them plenty of vitality.

So if you are at all inclined to be sluggish, you are not getting enough of vitamin D. Therefore, change your diet to milk, eggs, and fish, particularly halibut. I shall have to recommend it to our office-boy!

RATS AND TAXES!

Mention of rats reminds me that in a quarter of Bombay a novel method of paying taxes has been adopted to assist those people who are in arrears with their payments. Instead of cash, they are now permitted to pay their taxes with—rats! If the tax owing amounts to, say, twenty rupees, you just go out and catch two hundred rats. Then you take them along to the local health institute, where you will receive a credit note for twenty rupees. Thus your tax is paid.

Apparently this part of Bombay has a plague of rats. But the authorities have adopted the right method of exterminating them. Killing two rats with one stone, so to speak! Rats are having a very lean time of it, and thousands of them have already paid for people's taxes with their lives.

MEN OF MUSCLE!

A brewer's dray is no light weight to pull about, but there's a strong man in Cologne who thinks little of the task. He gave a demonstration of his immense strength the other day by pulling a brewer's dray, which normally it takes two horses to haul along, for half a mile, through the streets!

That calls to mind the astonishing feat of a Scotsman who once resisted the pull of two cart-horses by the strength of his arms. Ropes were passed over his arms and hitched to the horses, which faced in opposite directions. The horses were started, but they were unable to move any farther once the slack of the ropes had been taken up! The strength of the strong man's arms was more than equal to the strain of the horses pulling in different directions!

SOCCER SUPERSTITION.

By the way, here is an interesting if belated story of the last Cup Final. Most of those watching the match were a little surprised when Alec James, the Arsenal skipper, having won the toss, decided to kick against the wind. His reason was one of superstition. If James wins the toss he always chooses to kick into the opposite goal from the one in which the Arsenal players take shooting practice before the game starts.

TAILPIECE.

Teacher: "What ever have you got in your mouth, Jones? Take it out at once!"

Jones: "I can't, sir—it's the toothache!"

THE EDITOR.

PEN PALS COUPON
30-5-36



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.

Joel Alsawang, 29, Gordon Road, Bertrams, Johannesburg, South Africa; age 14-16; stamps, sports, autographs.

Miss Dorothy Hubbard, P.O. Box 389, Pretoria, Transvaal, South Africa; age 20 up; girl correspondents.

Samuel H. Griffiths, 33, Argyle Street, Woodstock, Cape Town, South Africa; age 14-17; sport, photos.

Miss Peggy Halse, 39a, Goldreich Street, Hillbrow, Johannesburg, South Africa; girl correspondents.

Fred Fisser, Rosedale, Orange Street, Cape Town, South Africa; age 15 up; swimming, Rugby, snaps.

Stanley Kaplan, 2, Woodland Villa, Inez Road, Sea Point, Cape Town, South Africa; age 10-12; sports.

W. Hicks, 33, The Grove, Swanscombe, Kent; age 14-16; (Continued on page 26.) THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,476.

"Exactly."

"And will he come again?"

"That is what we shall see," said the general grimly. "But I can promise you that you are in no danger now, Tom, whatever you may have been in last night. He must be in this neighbourhood still, and Hindus are not common on the countryside here. It will not be difficult to run him down, I should think. Don't talk about this matter in public, my lad—least said the better. I will go now and ring up the police. I shall ask the Head's permission to stay at the school to-night."

And the general quitted the study.

The Terrible Three looked at one another. They were feeling strangely thrilled and excited. Into their quiet life at St. Jim's there had come an element of danger. The Sign of Three seemed to bring them into contact with that far-away land where the millions lay in uneasy subjection to the rule of a few thousand white men, where any day or night might come a terrific explosion of rage and hate and bloodshed.

"Well, this takes the cake!" said Manners, at last.

"The whole giddy biscuit factory!" said Monty Lowther, who was never serious for long. "Tommy, my son, you are playing a leading role in a giddy melodrama."

Tom laughed, but a little uneasy.

"It's a melodrama that may become a real thing," he said. "That Hindu chap last night didn't look a pleasant customer. I'm jolly glad I wasn't in the dormitory when he got there, whether he meant business or not."

"The police will soon have him now," said Lowther, "and they have a delightful establishment in the Andaman Islands where they keep 'em; the place is chock full of noble patriots who have left their country for their country's good. Master Hurree Das will be laid by the heels soon."

"I don't think I shall sleep very soundly until he is," said Tom Merry.

"The general thinks there is danger," said Manners. "He's going to stay here to-night, and I believe he's got a pistol about him. Jolly, ain't it?"

The Terrible Three left the study. They went downstairs, and as they emerged into the quadrangle, a messenger from the post office was crossing towards the School House. He had a letter in his hand—evidently an express letter.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy bore down upon him in the quad.

"For me, dear boy, I resume?" he said. "It's all wight, Blake. My patah has sent that fivah by expwess."

The post office boy grinned.

"You General Merry, sir?" he asked. "Bai Jove! It's for your uncle, Tom Merry."

"Come in," said Tom Merry to the post office boy. "General Merry is here."

He hurried in to tell his uncle that a message had come for him. His face was excited. He felt that it was a message in some connection with the Sign of Three. The general came out to take the letter.

He opened it immediately and read it, his brows knitting over it. Tom Merry waited quietly until he had finished.

"Is it Hurree Das, sir, may I know?" he asked.

"Yes, Tom."

"And—and might I see it?"

The general smiled and handed him the letter. At the top of it appeared

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the sign Tom Merry was beginning to know well.

Three red dots in the form of a triangle headed the letter.

Underneath was written the message, but it was unintelligible to Tom Merry. It was written in the Deva-Nagari characters used in India, and was as incomprehensible to the St. Jim's junior as Runic or Chinese would have been.

"My hat!" said Tom. "Can you read it, uncle?"

"Yes," said the general, with a smile. He lowered his voice. "It is as I suspected, Tom. Hurree Das wishes to make terms. If he is pardoned, he will spare you," he says; "but if his pursuit continues, he will strike at me through you. His visit here last night was to prove that he holds your life in the hollow of his hand."

Tom Merry drew a deep breath.

"You won't let that make any difference to you, sir?"

"What do you say, Tom?" asked his uncle, looking at him with searching eyes.

Tom reflected.

"That depends," he said. "If the man is harmless, I'd let him clear off; but, if not, it depends on what use he'll make of his pardon."

"He will return to India, and begin his mischief over again—more carefully this time," said the general. "He will induce better and braver men than himself to risk their lives while he stays in the background, ready to profit by their success if they succeed, and ready to fly if they fail."

Tom Merry set his lips.

"Then he ought to be put where he can't do any more harm, sir."

"Exactly."

"Then if it depended on me, I should say let him do his worst, and don't make any terms with the scoundrel!"

The general's face lighted up.

"Spoken like your father's son," he said. "It was the answer I expected from you, Tom; but unless I give him the assurance he demands, your life is in danger until he is laid by the heels."

"I'm not afraid."

"Right, my boy. I expected that of you!" The general set his teeth. "This is the last round between Hurree Das and me, and I think he will finish in the Andaman Islands. But until he is safe in shackles, Tom, you will keep your eyes open. It is a matter of life or death!"

But there was no sign of faltering in Tom Merry's face.

CHAPTER 14.

The Shadow of Peril!

GENERAL MERRY remained at St. Jim's.

The distinguished officer stayed as the guest of the Head, and few of the fellows knew of his reason for remaining.

The Terrible Three kept his counsel, and other matters, of more interest to the juniors, had almost made the fellows generally forget the mysterious visit of the unknown Hindu to the school.

The Head, of course, had been taken into the general's confidence, and General Merry had offered to remove his nephew for a time from the school in order to save any unpleasant happenings there, if the Head wished.

But Dr. Holmes would not hear of that. He was as anxious about Tom Merry's safety as the general himself, and he wished him to remain, with proper precautions taken.

Precautions enough were taken. The

general was in communication with Scotland Yard, and the school was being watched. If Hurree Das reappeared, it seemed certain that he would be taken, and, meanwhile, the search for him was going on.

That he was still in the vicinity the general felt assured; but, if so, he was lying very low, and was not to be found.

The next day, and the next, there came a letter for Tom Merry, with widely different postmarks on each; and each of them contained nothing but a slip of paper bearing the now familiar sign.

If the intention of the hidden enemy was to wear down the nerves of the marked victim, he did not succeed. Tom Merry was made of too stern a stuff for that. He was the son of a soldier who had fallen in battle for his country, and he was not easily frightened. He only wished that, instead of sending his threats by post, the black man would come within hitting distance. In that case, as he confided to his chums, he felt fully equal to putting a stop to his tricks.

The general was very popular with the Co. He witnessed the cricket matches, and applauded the good hits and the good catches as loudly as the juniors themselves. He stood a "feed" in the Common-room, to which the heroes of the New House were invited, and he made Kerr adopt his famous disguise as an Anglo-Indian officer, and go through a performance of "General Merry," and laughed heartily over it.

Several days had passed, and apart from the threat of the Sign of Three, nothing had been seen of the Hindu.

"I expect he's cleared off," Monty Lowther remarked one afternoon. "He knows he's being looked for, and he won't come round this way any more."

"Looks like it to me," said Manners. "What do you think, Tommy?"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"My uncle doesn't think so," he said.

Afternoon lessons were over, and the chums of the Shell were coming in from cricket practice. They came up to their study to tea.

"Well, my idea is that we shan't see any more of him or his blessed Sign of Three," said Lowther. "Still, the longer the general stays, the better. He's a jolly old boy. I—my only hat!"

"What's the matter, Monty?"

"Look!"

Monty Lowther, his face suddenly white, pointed to the table.

Tom Merry and Manners looked, and their own faces became pale, too.

For in the centre of the table lay a sheet of paper, and upon the paper were inscribed, in red ink, three dots in the form of a triangle. It was the Sign of the Three again!

The chums of the Shell looked quickly round the study. They half expected to see the dusky face and glittering eyes of Hurree Das glaring from some corner. But the study was empty. There was no one in the room but themselves, and no trace of a visitor, save that threatening sign on the table.

Tom Merry drew a deep breath.

"Well, this beats everything!" he exclaimed. "He's been here!"

"In broad daylight," said Manners.

"The nerve of it! How could he get into the House without being seen? Blessed if it doesn't look like magic."

There was something terrifying in the thought that the Indian was able to penetrate into the very House, undiscovered, in broad daylight, with the House, the quad, and the playing fields

swarming with people. How had he come? How had he gone?

"This wasn't here an hour ago," said Tom in a low voice. "I came here after lessons for my bat, I know it wasn't there then."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked in at the open doorway.

"Coming to tea, you chaps? Bai Jove, what's the mattah?"

His eye had fallen upon the fatal sign. Study No. 6 had been told the secret in confidence, of course, so D'Arcy knew all about the Sign of Three. The general had considered it safer for Tom to let his nearest friends into the secret, as their vigilance added to his safety.

"Gweat Scott!" ejaculated D'Arcy. "Has the wottah been here?"

"That card was put here during the last hour," said Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove! And you haven't seen him?"

"Nobody has, or there would have been an alarm. If a Hindu were seen inside the school, the fellows would give the alarm," said Tom. "Though how on earth he got in here and out again without being spotted, is too deep for me."

"It is vewy wemarkable. I have been in Study No. 6 for the last half-hour, and the door was open, and I didn't see him," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy thoughtfully.

The swell of St. Jim's picked up the paper and scanned it carefully, adjusting his famous monocle for the purpose.

Then he grinned.

"Bai Jove! Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at?" demanded Monty Lowther indignantly.

"It isn't a laughing matter, you ass!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared D'Arcy.

"You silly chump!" shouted Manners.

"Where's the joke?"

"You frabjous ass—" began Tom Merry.

Arthur Augustus chuckled.

"My deah boys, it's all wight. The black boundah hasn't been here. I suppose this gave you a fright—what?"

"No, it didn't," said Tom Merry. "It startled us."

"It's a wotten jape, deah boys. Look!"

Arthur Augustus held up the paper to the light. It was half a sheet of ordinary impot paper, and there was the watermark on it to prove it. The paper belonged to the school, and had evidently been inscribed with three dots in the School House itself.

"My hat!" said Tom Merry, as a new thought struck him. "That's not the same paper that I've seen before—that black bounder uses a kind of Indian rice-paper. If he came here he wouldn't chance finding paper in the study. It's a rotten jape of some fellow in the House."

Manners and Lowther looked greatly relieved.

"Asses not to think of it before," said Monty Lowther. "But who was it? We've got to put a stop to little jokes of this kind."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It wasn't one of Study No. 6—they wouldn't do it," said Manners.

"Wathah not!" said D'Arcy warmly. "Some mean wottah has been spyin' it out. Pewwaps it was Cwooke; I know he has been vewy cuwious about the mattah."

"Croke, of course," said Manners. "He was looking over your shoulder when you opened the letter yesterday, Tommy, and found that dotty paper in it."

"We'll go and see Croke," said Tom Merry grimly.

"Wight-ho!"

The four juniors hurried along the passage, and entered Croke's study without ceremony. The cad of the Shell was alone there, and he was bending over a paper on the table and chuckling softly. He had a pen in his hand, and a bottle of red ink before him, and he was in the act of inscribing dots in a triangle upon the paper.

He sprang up with an exclamation of alarm, as the juniors came in.

His hand was thrown over the paper on the table at once, but not before the juniors had seen it.

"Caught in the act!" said Monty Lowther blandly.

Croke. "Have you taken to prying into fellows' private correspondence among your other nice ways?"

Tom Merry did not answer that question. He grasped Croke by the shoulder, and whirled him away from the table. The paper fluttered to the floor, and Arthur Augustus picked it up, and held it aloft for the fellows to see.

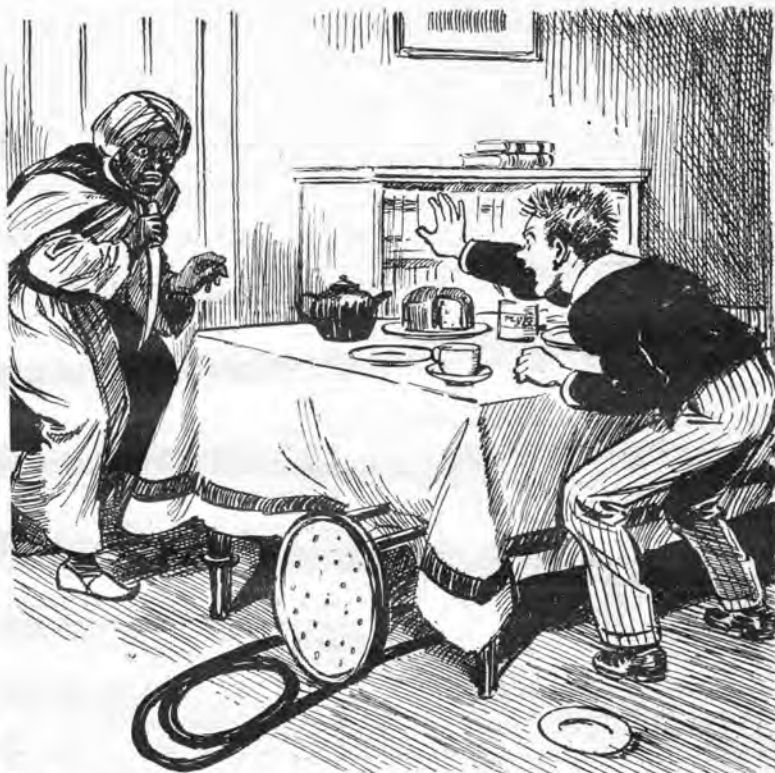
"The Sign of Three!" said Manners. Croke jerked himself away from Tom Merry, and burst into a laugh.

"You put a paper like that on my table," said Tom.

"Suppose I did?" growled Croke.

"What did you do it for?"

"A lark, of course," said Croke. "You have been scared out of your



Croke gave a yell of horror and fear as the fierce-looking black man advanced across the study, a large knife in his hand. "Oh! Help!" "Bang-kickibidy-bang!" hissed the black man. "Silence!"

CHAPTER 15.

The Courage of Croke!

CROKE glared angrily at the chums of the Shell.

He had, indeed, been caught in the very act, and the juniors did not need any further proof than the paper on the table, upon which he had clapped his hand so quickly as they entered. Croke had evidently been planning further little jokes of the same kind, but his misdirected humour was likely to be nipped in the bud now.

"Can't you knock before you come into a fellow's study?" demanded Croke.

"Not when we want to catch him napping," said Lowther. "What are you covering up with your paw, Croke?"

"Mind your own business!"

"Will you let us see it?"

"No, I won't!"

"Why not?"

"It's a private letter," growled

wits by some ass sending you things like that, and I thought I'd give you another fright. Did it make you shudder? Ha, ha, ha!"

"It was a rotten trick to play," said Tom Merry. "You couldn't know so much about it, unless you'd been spying, and if you've found out what is the matter, you know that it's serious."

Croke shrugged his shoulders.

"Rats!" he said. "You're in a state of nerves, and getting frightened at shadows. Blessed if I'd allow a nigger to scare me!"

"Oh!" said Lowther. "You wouldn't be scared if the black bounder came after you—eh?"

Croke laughed mockingly.

"I should say not."

"I think it was a rotten joke," said Tom Merry. "I don't like that kind of joke. Will you put the gloves on with me, or shall I pour your precious red ink down your neck? You can take your choice."

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,476.

Crooke backed away round the table. He did not want to choose either of those unpleasant alternatives. But Monty Lowther unexpectedly intervened.

"Come away, Tommy! Tea's ready, and you're not going to keep us waiting for tea while you hammer Crooke. Come on!"

"Look here, Monty—"

"Peace, my child—peace!" said Lowther; and he dragged Tom Merry from the study, much to Crooke's relief. "Let dogs delight to bark and bite—"

"Look here, you ass—"

"It is their nature to," said Lowther. "Come into the study and listen to your uncle."

He dragged his reluctant chum back into their study. Monty Lowther's eyes were gleaming with humour. He carefully closed the study door, and chuckled gleefully.

"Crooke says he isn't afraid of any old black man," he remarked. "We'll give Crooke a chance to prove his giddy words."

"What do you mean?" growled Tom.

"I mean that this is where Kerr comes in."

"Kerr? What's the New House bouncer got to do with it?"

"Everything. If he can make up as a general from India, he can play the giddy role of a black man from the same country—much easier, in fact."

"Oh, bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy.

"The props used for 'Othello' in the dramatic society will come in useful," said Lowther calmly, "and Crooke will enjoy himself, and show how brave he is."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Buzz over to the New House and fetch Kerr, Manners, old man, and whisper in his little ear what we want. He'll come like a shot."

Manners departed, grinning. Five minutes later Kerr was in the study, and the School House fellows greeted their old rival of the New House with effusion.

Meanwhile, Crooke of the Shell was having tea in his study. Murphy, his study-mate, was gone to tea in the end study with Kangaroo, and Crooke was alone. Being alone he had laid in some extra nice supplies, and was "doing himself" remarkably well. He was almost at the end of his tea when the study door was softly and cautiously opened from without.

Crooke turned his head carelessly.

"Is that you, Murphy? My hat!"

Crooke leaped to his feet with a shout of alarm.

A black face was looking in upon him—a face as black as the ace of spades, with a white turban wound round the head above it.

Crooke gazed at the dreadful apparition in horror.

The black man advanced into the study, and closed the door behind him. Crooke gave a yell of horror and fear.

"Oh, help!"

"Bang-kickibidy-bang!" hissed the black man. "Silence!"

From under the soiled white robe that enveloped the form of the black man his hand emerged, and Crooke turned sick with terror at the sight of a gigantic knife.

The black man deliberately locked the door, and then fixed his rolling eyes upon the cad of the Shell.

"Shuckabang-bang!" he hissed.

"You understand?"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,476.

"No!" panted Crooke. "I—I—keep off! Oh, help! I—I say, it's not me you're after! I—I—"

"Bang-whoosh!" said the black man in Hindustani, or, at least, in some language that Crooke could not understand. "You're the young Sahib Merry?"

"No!" gasped Crooke.

"What? Bangawiddy! Pong chum gum—gum!" hissed the black man.

"Can you understand me?"

"N-no. I—I—I don't speak Hindustani!" gasped Crooke. "I—I say,

Tom Merry's study is the next but one. I'm Crooke."

"You lie! You are Tom Merry!"

"I'm not!" panted Crooke. "Tom Merry's room is farther up the passage.

Wh-what do you want?"

"Shackaback gum—gum chicka-biddy!" snarled the black man.

"I—I don't understand."

"Blood!" hissed the dreadful visitor.

"Wh-a-at!"

"Blood! I come to slay! Look at this knife! Ere I leave this room this blade must be imbrued in thy heart's blood, base Feringhee."

Crooke dodged round the table as the black man made an advance towards him. His heart was thumping with terror.

"I—I'm not a Feringhee!" he gasped. "I don't know what it is, but I ain't anything of the sort. I'm Crooke of the Shell. Oh, crumbs!"

"You swear you are not Sahib Tom Merry?"

"Yes, yes."

"Swear it on your knees!" shouted the ferocious black man.

Crooke dropped on his knees. He would have sworn it on his head to get rid of that dreadful visitor.

"Swear!" hissed the black man.

"I—I swear!" stammered Crooke.

"It is well. Yet it would be safer to plunge this blade to thy heart, that thou keepest silence."

And the black man flourished the knife.

"Mercy!" howled Crooke, almost howling with fear. "Mercy!"

"Dog!"

"Groogh! Keep off! Mercy!"

"Thou diest!"

"I—I swear I'm not Tom Merry. I—I'll show you to his study if you like. Keep off!"

"Slave! Wilt thou keep silence while I go to his room and slay him?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Swear!"

"I—I swear! Oh, scissors!"

"Crawl under the table, dog that thou art, and do not appear until the deed is done!" said the black man. "Remain silent while this dread blade drinks the gore of the victim."

"Yes, yes!" exclaimed Crooke. He crawled under the table; he would willingly have crawled up the chimney.

"Remain there in silence, or, chack-shackawang-bang!" hissed the black man. "You understand?"

"Yes, yes."

"Bhang-woosh, koosh, ping-pong, and solo whist!" hissed the Hindu. "Silence, on your life, while the deed of blood is done—I mean done."

And he unlocked the study door, and left as stealthily as he had entered. Crooke gave a gasp of relief as the door closed after him. He made a bound to the door to lock it, but the key had been taken away. There was a footstep outside, and he bolted under the table again like a scared rabbit, in dread of the Indian's return.

The door opened.

From under the tablecloth Crooke

could only see trousers, but they evidently belonged to juniors, and he ventured to put his head out from under the table. Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther, and D'Arcy, Blake, Herries, and Digby came into the study, and they stared at the head protruding from under the tablecloth.

"What on earth are you doing under the table?" demanded Lowther.

"Have you seen him?" panted Crooke.

"Him! Whom?"

"The black man."

"You're dreaming," said Tom Merry.

"There isn't any black man here."

"He's just been here," panted Crooke.

"Help me barricade the door, for goodness' sake! He made me get under the table, and he's gone to your study to murder you!"

"And you were going to let him do it without trying to warn me?" asked Tom Merry contemptuously.

"He's got a knife."

"You cowardly hound!" said Tom.

"You couldn't risk buzzing out when he had gone to give me a call, eh?"

"He—he—I—I—he may come back any minute. Help me barricade the door!" howled Crooke, dragging the table towards the door.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It isn't a laughing matter, you fool! You may all be murdered as well as me!" shrieked Crooke.

"As well as I," corrected Lowther gently. "Don't forget your grammar, Crooke, even in the hour of danger!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The door opened as Crooke was jamming the table against it. The black face looked in, and Crooke, with a yell of fright, fled back behind the juniors.

"Aha! Shack-bang-chicken-soup-flop-flop!" hissed the black man. "I have thee now!"

"That's Tom Merry!" yelled Crooke.

"Art thou Tom Merry of that ilk?" demanded the black man.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Looks pretty, doesn't he?" went on the black man, in quite a different tone of voice, grinning at Crooke, who was trying to hide himself behind the burly Herries.

"Crooke, old man, buck up! Get under the table again!"

"What—who—what—I—oh—" stut-tered Crooke.

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

It dawned upon Crooke's mind at last that he had been japed.

"You rotter!" he roared. "Who are you?"

"Chick-a-biddy, bang-bang, wallop, bang—"

"I know your voice now," hissed Crooke. "You're Kerr! You beast! You rotter! You—you—"

Words failed Crooke. He snatched up the poker and ran at Kerr, but Tom Merry & Co. seized him, and he was bumped down promptly.

The juniors, almost in hysterics, staggered from the study. Crooke scrambled to his feet, panting with rage. Outside in the passage there was a roar of laughter. The whole Shell and Fourth seemed to be in the joke. Fellows opened the door and grinned into the study, and asked Crooke if he had seen any black men lately, till the cad of the Shell was almost frantic.

CHAPTER 16.

Hurree Das' Last Blow!

TOM MERRY jammed on his brake with a frown.

It was getting dark, and Tom had been over to Wayland on his bicycle, and was in a hurry to get back to the school before locking-up.

He was following the bridle-path that skirted Rylcombe Wood, and in the dusky shadows of the trees he had suddenly caught sight of a branch thrown across the narrow path.

If he had ridden into it in the dark, it would certainly have overturned him; but, fortunately, it was still light enough for him to see the obstacle.

"What silly ass chucked that there?" muttered Tom angrily. "Idiotic idea of a joke, I suppose! Might have busted some chap's jigger!"

He jumped off his bicycle, and dragged the loose branch to the side of the road.

There was a rustle in the underwood and a dark form leaped out, and Tom Merry was borne with a crash to the ground.

The suddenness of the attack and the heavy fall almost stunned him.

He rolled in the grass under the weight of his assailant, gasping for breath.

With a great effort he twisted over, so that he could look up at the man who had so suddenly attacked him.

A chill ran through his veins as he saw a brown face looking down upon him—the same brown face, with the glittering black eyes, that had looked down upon him from the window of the Shell dormitory at St. Jim's a week before.

He knew the man at once.

It was Hurree Das.

And he realised that the scoundrel, lurking in the woods and awaiting his opportunity, must have seen him in the distance on his machine and laid that trap for him upon the lonely bridle-path.

The Indian was above him, with a knee planted on him, pinning him down with cruel force to the ground.

Two savage brown hands were grasping him, and the strength of that grasp showed Tom Merry how little chance he had in a struggle with the last of the Three.

His eyes looked up into the glittering orbs of the Hindu. The cruel mouth above him curved in a smile of mockery.

"The sahib knows me?" muttered the Hindu in English.

Tom Merry tried to calm his throbbing heart. He realised his terrible danger, but his courage did not desert him.

"I know you!" he said. "You are Hurree Das!"

"I am Hurree Das!"

"What do you want with me?" said Tom Merry, as quietly as he could.

He wondered whether Manners and Lowther had ridden to meet him. It was probable that they would, as he was late for calling-over.

If they or his uncle came, if there was time—he had not told the general that he was going out; he had intended to return before dark. He was courageous, but he had not intended to be foolhardy. But he had been delayed in Wayland, and now he was in the hands of his foe.

"What do I want?" the black man grinned. "You know what I have asked the sahib general and what he has refused?"

"Yes."

"You will die to pay for the lives of Nalouth and Swadi Das," said the Hindu, showing his white teeth. "I shall leave you lying here like a dead dog, with the Sign of Three upon your forehead!"

Tom Merry shuddered.

The man looked desperate. He was travel-stained, torn, and dusty. Evidently the hunt for him had been close,



and he had been for days in the open air. Yet, with fanatical persistence, he had remained in the vicinity of the school, resolved upon his revenge before he fled.

As he looked into the savage face, the fierce, rolling eyes, Tom Merry realised how little mercy he had to look for.

Even as he spoke the Hindu was feeling for a weapon.

Tom Merry half-closed his eyes and sank back limply in the ruffian's grasp. He looked as if he were fainting with terror. And so the rascal believed. His grasp unconsciously relaxed.

It was Tom Merry's chance.

He was not fainting; never had he been more alert, more resolute. He had his life to fight for, and he knew it.

He made a sudden tremendous effort, and the unprepared Hindu reeled sideways from him. Tom Merry's fist, clenched and as hard as iron, came with a thud upon his jaw, and Hurree Das uttered a shriek of pain and rolled in the grass.

Tom Merry leaped to his feet.

His glance went to his bicycle, but it was lying on its side. Before he could reach it and mount, the man would be upon him—and he was unarmed.

Tom turned and dashed away at top speed.

There was a fierce cry behind him, and then the sound of heavy footsteps pounding in pursuit.

Tom Merry ran on desperately.

He could never reach the school. He felt it, but he dashed desperately on. If only his chums had come to meet him—

Ting-aling-aling!

It was the ring of a bicycle-bell on the darkened road.

Two cyclists loomed up in the dusk, and Tom Merry ran desperately towards the oncoming machines, shouting:

"Help! Rescue!"

"We're coming!"

Manners and Lowther shouted back as they scorching on.

But ten yards still separated them from Tom Merry, when the bounding form of the pursuer leaped upon the captain of the Shell.

Tom Merry felt him coming, and

swung desperately round and faced him. There was a glimmer of steel in the gloom.

"Stand back, Tom!"

It was Lowther's voice.

Tom Merry made a backwards spring, and the blow that was descending upon him missed him.

Then there was a terrific crash.

Lowther had ridden right at the ruffian, and his front wheel struck the Hindu and hurled him to the earth.

The bicycle buckled up in the collision, and Monty Lowther went sprawling into the road.

He was up in a second, and Manners was off his machine, rushing forward. The Hindu lay in the road.

His right leg was twisted under him, and his head lay like a log on the ground. The back of his head had struck the earth with stunning force in his fall, and he was insensible.

"Stunned!" gasped Manners.

Tom Merry panted for breath.

"You came just in time!" he gasped.

"Jolly lucky we came to meet you!" said Monty Lowther. "Let's make sure of the scoundrel while we can. Tie the brute up."

The Hindu was stirring.

But long before his senses returned the juniors had bound him, hand and foot, with strips torn from the Hindu's clothes.

When Hurree Das came to himself he was a prisoner, and he wriggled helplessly in the tight bonds upon his limbs.

Tom Merry looked down upon him grimly.

"You hound!" he said. "You're laid by the heels now, and you won't get away in a hurry! One of you chaps scorch to the police station and get the bobbies here. I'll stay and look after him. One of you fetch the general!"

"The general's coming!" grinned Manners. "He was in a way when he found you were out alone and hadn't come in, I can tell you!"

"I'll go for the police," said Lowther. "I'll take your jigger, Manners." And Lowther rode off.

Ten minutes later General Merry was upon the scene. He gave the bound Hindu a grim look, but did not speak to him.

"Thank Heaven you are safe, Tom!" said the general huskily. "You should not have taken the risk, but it is over now. That scoundrel will be safe for life."

And when the police arrived, Hurree Das, with handcuffs on his wrists, was taken away, and General Merry went with him. He did not mean to lose sight of the prisoner until he was disposed of in safety.

The Terrible Three walked their bicycles back to St. Jim's.

"I'm jolly glad they've got that chap!" said Tom Merry. "It was touch and go for me, and but for you fellows—"

"All's well that ends well," said Monty Lowther. "He'll be safe enough for the future, Tom, and you're done with him."

But it was likely to be a long time before Tom Merry forgot the terrible peril that he had so narrowly escaped, or the Sign of Three!

THE END.

(Next Wednesday: "FOR THE HONOUR OF ST. JIM'S!" What was the mystery of the old derelict house on Wayland Moor, where St. Jim's fellows gathered at night in secret? Don't miss next week's gripping yarn of Tom Merry & Co.)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,476.

THE BUTTON THAT CONVICTED THE CAD OF THE REMOVE OF TREACHERY!—

THE MAKING OF HARRY WHARTON!

WHAT HAPPENED LAST WEEK.

Harry Wharton enters for the Seaton-D'Arcy prize, a Latin exam for the Remove Form which carries with it an award of twenty guineas for the winner. His only rival in the exam is Peter Hazeldene, the cad of the Remove, a clever Latin scholar who is fully expected by his Form-fellows to win.

The two juniors complete the written work, the first part of the exam. In the second half each entrant has to go before Dr. Locke, the headmaster, and answer a number of Latin questions—an ordeal which is as much a test of nerves as of knowledge.

Harry Wharton is the first to be called upon to face the Head. He has a nervous habit of fumbling with a button on his jacket when he is being seriously questioned—a habit of which the Remove is aware. As soon as the Head starts to question him Wharton's hand goes to that comforting button—to find it gone! It so confuses his mind that his answers to the Latin questions are hopelessly wrong. At the end of the test he leaves Dr. Locke's study knowing that he has failed!

Suspicious!

HARRY WHARTON left the Head's study with a heavy heart and a sullen feeling of anger against Fate surging within him. What wretched ill-luck that that button should have become lost from his jacket just before he was to undergo the Latin exam in Dr. Locke's study! It had been there while he was talking to Nugent just before going in. What had become of it now?

Hazeldene glanced at Harry as he went to take his turn. Wharton's pale and disappointed face was enough to tell the cad of the Remove how the examination had gone. Hazeldene walked on, with a glitter of triumph in his eyes.

"I say, you're looking rotten, Harry!" exclaimed Nugent, as he met his friend in the passage. "Has anything gone wrong?"

"Yes; I have lost it!"

"You don't know yet," said Bob Cherry. "The result isn't made known until to-morrow."

Harry Wharton smiled bitterly.

"There's no need for me to wait for that to know!" he said. "I know that I made a fool of myself, and it's all up with my chance of the Seaton-D'Arcy prize!"

"But how—why?" asked Nugent. "You looked all right when you went in. Have you made some fearful blunder?"

"I have answered almost everything incorrectly!"

"Why?" demanded the amazed Nugent.

"Oh, it's not worth talking about!"

"You may as well tell me."

"Well, it's that fool's habit I have of fumbling with my jacket button when I'm a little agitated," said Harry, turning red. "It happened to come off before I went into the Head's study, and that little thing threw me right out."

"Happened to come off? Why, you were fumbling with it when you were talking to me just before you went in!" Nugent exclaimed.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,476.

By Frank Richards.

"I know; but it's gone now."

"I say, that's very curious!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Was it loose?"

"No. I never touched it."

"Let me have a look at your coat."

Bob Cherry took hold of Wharton's jacket and looked closely at the spot from which the troublesome button was missing. Then he gave a whistle.

"It's plain enough!" he exclaimed. "It's been cut off!"

"Cut off?" repeated Nugent and Wharton together.

"Yes. See how clean-cut the thread is? It wouldn't look like that if it were broken. The button was snipped off with scissors or a knife."

Harry looked bewildered.

"Impossible!" he exclaimed. "How could it have been done without my knowing it?"

"Well, it was done, plain enough."

"I remember now. Hazeldene fell against me and clung hold of me as I

halted and changed colour a little as three determined-looking juniors closed round him.

"Hallo!" he said, in a tone of rather strained cordiality. "You want to know how I've done? Pretty well, I think."

"Where's that button?" asked Bob Cherry.

Hazeldene turned white.

"That—that what?" he gasped.

"The button you snipped off Wharton's jacket just before he went into the Head's study."

For a moment guilt had gleamed in the eyes of Hazeldene. But he recovered himself, and burst into a laugh.

"Is that meant for a joke?" he asked.

"What the dickens should I want to snip off Wharton's button for?"

"To put him off his form for the exam."

"Cheese it, Cherry!"

"Where is the button?"

"I don't know what you are talking about."

"Have you got it with you now?"

"Really, Cherry—"

"Hand it over, you cad," exclaimed Nugent fiercely, "or we'll search you for it!"

Hazeldene took a step backward.

"Look here," he exclaimed, "I suppose you're joking—"

"You'll see that we're not if you don't—"

"If Wharton has lost any of his buttons, it's nothing to do with me! If he has a silly habit and suffers for it, that's his own look-out!"

"Where is that button?"

"I haven't the faintest idea."

"You snipped it off Wharton's coat!"

"I didn't do anything of the kind!"

"Very well," said Bob Cherry quietly.

"Come into one of the studies and let us look through your things for the button, and if it isn't on you, we'll consider about the matter. If you are innocent, we don't want to make a row."

Hazeldene changed colour again.

"I won't do anything of the kind!" he muttered. "It's an insult—"

"I don't think a cad like you could be insulted!" exclaimed Harry Wharton angrily. "I know perfectly well that you fell against me for the purpose of snipping off that button, because you knew how it would bother me. You were talking it over with Hughes the other day."

Hazeldene gave a start.

"If Hughes says that, he's a—"

"Hughes did not say it, but I heard about it. Now, then, Hazeldene, you're bowled out! Are you going to own up?"

"Certainly not!"

"Then we shall search you for the button!"

Hazeldene cast a hunted look round. But there was no one in sight in the passage, and he had no chance against the three juniors.

"Oh, very well!" he exclaimed, with the look of one making a virtue of necessity. "If you insist—you're three to one—"

"Well, we do insist!" said Bob Cherry.

"Then let's get into a study, and you can search, if you like."

"Come along, then."

Bob Cherry linked his arm in Hazeldene's, and they went up the

Harry Wharton has done little to deserve the friendly help of Frank Nugent and Bob Cherry; yet it is these two juniors whom he has most to thank for frustrating his rival's scheme to cheat him of the Seaton-D'Arcy prize!

was going in!" Wharton exclaimed. "Is it possible—"

"You've hit it!"

"He must have been jolly quick about it," said Nugent.

"Well, he was quick about it," said Bob Cherry practically. "It was cut off, you can see that, and Hazeldene is the chap who had the strongest interest in putting Wharton off his form."

"Yes. And, by Jove," Nugent said excitedly, "you remember what Billy Bunter was telling us the other day. Harry. Hughes said to Hazeldene that if you should lose that button on the day of the exam, you would be done in. Bunter said Hazeldene seemed to be greatly struck by the idea."

Wharton nodded.

"I remember. I suppose it was Hazeldene."

"The cad!" exclaimed Bob Cherry wrathfully. "If he gets the Seaton-D'Arcy prize by a mean trick like that, he shan't keep it! I'll explain to the Head first. Let's wait here for him till he comes out, and then we'll talk to him. If he stole the button, he's probably got it about him still."

And the three juniors, with set faces, waited for the cad of the Remove to come out from the exam.

Accused!

HAZELDENE came along the passage with a light step and a cheerful face. A glance at him was sufficient to show that he believed that he had won. He

—GREAT STORY OF HARRY WHARTON'S EARLY DAYS AT GREYFRIARS.



With Bob Cherry and Nugent in pursuit, Hazeldene hadn't time to stop and open the garden gate. He vaulted over it, and next moment there was a wild yell as he crashed into George Wingate on the other side!

passage. To get into a junior study it was necessary to go up the staircase, and Hazeldene's eyes gleamed as they drew near it. He knew that he would find help there if he needed it. As it happened, Carberry of the Sixth, a prefect who had a great dislike for Bob Cherry and Harry Wharton, was standing near the stairs talking to another senior.

Hazeldene made a sudden effort to tear himself loose from Bob Cherry. Bob stuck to him, however, and they began to struggle, and this brought the attention of the Sixth Formers to them at once.

"Stop that row there, you young sweeps!" called out Carberry.

"If you please, Carberry, Cherry won't let me go—"

"Let him go at once, Cherry!"

"He says I've stolen a jacket button belonging to Wharton," said Hazeldene, taking the bull by the horns, as it were, "I haven't done anything of the kind."

"He has!" exclaimed Bob wrathfully. "He cut—"

"Don't talk such rot to me, Cherry," said Carberry angrily. "Let him go at once!"

"But I tell you—"

"Let him go at once, and shut up, or I'll give you a licking, you cheeky young monkey!" exclaimed Carberry, striding towards the juniors.

There was nothing for it but to obey. Bob Cherry reluctantly released Hazeldene.

"Now clear off, if you don't want a hiding!" exclaimed Carberry threateningly. "You can come with me, Hazeldene. I shall want you to fag."

"Certainly, Carberry!"

Hazeldene would have fagged willingly for anyone just then to keep out of the way of the chums of the Remove. He grinned mockingly at Bob Cherry as he walked away with Carberry. The three Remove fellows looked at one another.

"What's to be done?" said Nugent, looking perplexed.

Wharton gritted his teeth.

"I'll give him a hiding, at all events!" he muttered. "That will be some satisfaction. I'm certain now that he did the trick."

"Not much good giving him a hiding," remarked Bob Cherry. "We want to show him up—that's the thing. I think we ought to ask the Head to let you have a fresh exam—"

"I don't see how we could. The whole thing seems so ridiculous."

"And we couldn't betray even Hazeldene," Nugent remarked.

Bob Cherry rubbed his chin in a thoughtful way.

"Well, no, I suppose not."

"I've lost the exam," said Harry gloomily. "The whole confounded Form will be glad of it! But I'll get even with them all yet."

"That's not the way to talk," said Bob Cherry, who was a favourite in the Remove, and inclined to think well of the Form in consequence. "The Form treat you quite as well as you allow them to treat you, Wharton."

Harry gave him a bitter look.

"I didn't ask for a lecture, Cherry."

"You can have it unasked," said Bob coolly. "You want it, and a good many more, too. If you'd only have a little more sense—"

"You'd better measure your words when speaking to me."

"Rot! I shall speak as I like!"

Harry Wharton's hands clenched hard. Bob Cherry's eyes were gleaming, too, and Nugent looked very uneasy. But Harry turned abruptly on his heel and walked away.

Bob Cherry breathed hard through his nose.

"It isn't easy to stand him, Nugent," he remarked. "But for the sake of fair play we must see this thing through."

Nugent nodded.

"And so, before the Head decides about the matter, I think we ought to speak to him," said Bob Cherry decisively.

"But—" Nugent hesitated. The idea of facing the Head in his study upon such an exceedingly curious business was not attractive to Nugent.

"Oh, come along!" said Bob Cherry. "I'll do all the talking. I'm always pretty strong in that line. Come along!"

And he led the way to the Head's study and knocked upon the door with enviable coolness, and entered, followed more slowly by Nugent.

Bob Cherry Explains to the Head!

DR. LOCKE looked curiously at the two juniors.

"You wish to speak to me?" he asked. "I am rather occupied just now, so lose no time. What is it?"

"It's—it's rather an important matter, sir," said Cherry. "It's about the exam for the Seaton-D'Arcy."

The Head looked at him in astonishment.

"What can you possibly have to say to me about that, Cherry?"

"You see, sir—"

"No, I'm afraid I do not see. I shall be pleased if you will explain as quickly as possible," said the Head.

Bob Cherry coloured a little.

"Yes, sir. This is how it is—Wharton has failed."

"The result of the examination has not been announced to the school yet, Cherry," said Dr. Locke coldly.

"I know, sir; but—but I know Wharton made a rotten show—I mean, that he failed, and it was because—"

"In the presence of the Head, Bob Cherry's coolness and nerve were not quite so conspicuous. He was put off his form. He wasn't up to the mark."

The Head started a little.

"I do not quite understand you, Cherry. I noticed that Wharton did not seem quite himself, and I asked him if he were ill, and he replied that he was quite well."

"So he was, sir, only—only he was put off his form."

"How do you mean? Do you imply that some harm was done to him so that he would fail in the examination?" asked the Head.

Bob Cherry rubbed his chin. How to say enough without saying too much was rather a puzzle; but he was in for it now.

"Not exactly that, sir, but—something like that. The worst of it is that we know what was done, but we haven't any proof yet, and when we have we can't sneak on the rotter who—"

"On the what?"

"The fellow, sir, who played that trick on Wharton."

The Head's brow grew stern.

"You say that a trick was played on Wharton by someone who wished him to fail in the examination for the Seaton-D'Arcy prize?"

"Yes, sir."

"This is a very serious allegation, Cherry."

"I know it is, sir. I shouldn't have said a word about it, only I want justice to be done. It doesn't seem fair for Wharton to lose the prize simply because—"

"You were quite right to speak to me, Cherry, if there is anything in what you say. But are you sure you have not been led away simply by regard for your friend?"

Bob Cherry grinned.

"But he's not my friend. Wharton hasn't any friends in the Remove, excepting Nugent, who is friendly to him because Wharton saved his life, not because there's anything in the chap to like."

"Oh, drop all that!" said Nugent, turning red.

"Ahem! Am I to understand, Cherry, that you are championing the cause of a boy with whom you are not on friendly terms?" asked Dr. Locke, looking with new interest at the frank, if not exactly handsome face of Bob Cherry.

"Well, yes, sir; we want fair play, you know. I don't get on very well with Wharton, but I've seen his work, and I've seen Hazeldene's, and it doesn't need much keenness to see which of them ought to get the Seaton-D'Arey."

The Head's brows were puckered in thought.

"This is a very curious matter, Cherry. I observed that Wharton did not seem quite himself, but that is not unusual in an examination. Hazeldene was nervous to some extent. You say you suspect a certain person of having played this trick upon Wharton?"

"Yes, sir."

"But you have no proof?"

"Not as yet, sir."

"Then it would not be fair to mention his name. I cannot listen to any accusation made without proof, and neither would you wish to make one."

"Certainly not, sir. I—I thought you might be able to put off the award of the prize for a little, so as to give Wharton a chance. If another exam were held, I know he would knock Hazeldene into a cocked hat!"

The Head shook his head slowly.

"I don't see how that can be done, Cherry, unless proof is forthcoming. Hazeldene will naturally expect the award. You do not accuse Hazeldene himself?"

"I don't accuse anybody," said Bob Cherry hastily.

Dr. Locke looked at him keenly.

"Well, well, in the circumstances, I will leave the announcement until to-morrow evening; but that is the latest. If you find anything to bear out your suspicions by then, you can acquaint me with it; but I can take no notice of vague surmises. It is quite possible that, with the best intentions, you may be making a great mystery out of nothing."

"Oh, no, sir!"

"Well, we will leave the matter at this, and if there is anything in what you suspect, Cherry, I have no doubt that you will be able to discover some fact I can take notice of."

"I will do my best, sir."

"Very good; you may go."

The juniors left the study.

"Haven't done much good there," Nugent remarked, as they went down the passage. "The Head half-believes that we're making a mountain out of a molehill."

"It was something to get him to listen to us at all," said Bob. "We've got to get to work and bowl Hazeldene out, that's all."

"We can't give him away to the Head."

"N-no," said Bob Cherry thoughtfully. "Whatever dirty trick he has done, we can't play the sneak."

"Then I don't see what good—"

"Oh, we can show him up to the Form; that's something. Then we can make him own up to the Head."

"Catch Vaseline doing that!" ejaculated Nugent. "Why, he would be expelled!"

"H'm, yes! Still, if another exam were held on fair terms, Wharton would get in all right, and we may manage that. Anyway, the first thing is to get at the truth, and make Hazeldene own up before the Form."

"Right-ho! I'm with you there!"

"The question is—what has he done with that button? Of course, he would keep it about him until he could safely get rid of it. He wouldn't care to be seen ridding himself of it, and he hasn't had much chance yet. We've got to watch him. If it hadn't been for that beast Carberry—"

"Hullo! What's that?"

Carberry was coming along the passage, and he had heard the uncomplimentary reference to himself. He made a dive straight at Bob Cherry, but the junior was not easily caught. He dodged the bully of the Sixth, and darted along the passage with Nugent at his heels. Carberry soon gave up the chase, and the two Removites went out into the Close to look for Hazeldene.

The Way of the Transgressor!

"I SAY, you fellows—"

"Hallo, Bunter! What's the matter with you?"

"Nothing's the matter with me, Cherry, except that I'm rather hungry. If you're going to the tuck-shop now—"

"But I'm not."

"Well, never mind. Of course, if you stood treat for a dozen tarts or so, I should settle up. I'm expecting a postal order by the first post in the morning."

"Is that what you were going to say when you stopped me?"

"Oh, no! As I was saying, there's nothing the matter with me, but I believe there is something the matter with Vaseline," said Billy Bunter mysteriously.

"Hazeldene! Have you seen him? We're looking for him."

"Yes, I've seen him. I suppose it was working for the exam so hard that has turned his brain, or else there's insanity in the family."

Bob Cherry and Nugent stared at the Owl in amazement. Bob seized him by the shoulder and gave him a shake.

"What are you driving at, Bunter? Do you mean to say that Hazeldene has gone off his rocker?"

"I wish you wouldn't shake me like that, Cherry!"

"Yes; but tell me—"

"You might make my spectacles fall off, and they might break, and then—"

"Blow your spectacles!"

"It's all very well for you to say blow my spectacles, but I can't see without them, and I can't afford to keep a second pair by me, so it would be a serious matter if they got broken."

"Would it be a more serious matter if your neck got broken?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Well, yes, I suppose it would; but I'm in no danger—"

"That's your mistake—you are. Your neck will be broken in the next two minutes if you don't explain yourself!"

The Rookwood Barring-in!



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What makes you think that Hazeldene has gone off his dot?"

"Why, the way he behaves, you know. I saw him a few minutes ago; he came out of the House and took something out of his pocket and threw it—"

"Was it a button?" asked Nugent eagerly.

"How did you know it was a button, Nugent?"

"Then it was one?"

"I don't see how you could guess—"

"Oh, let him get on!" said Bob Cherry resignedly. "I suppose if he goes wandering on long enough he will come to the point."

"I don't see how you can say that I'm wandering from the point, Cherry. Only I was curious to know how Nugent could guess that it was a button."

"Oh, get on with the washing!"

"Very well. I saw Hazeldene take something out of his pocket and throw it as hard as he could over towards the Head's garden. I was rather curious to know what it was he was throwing away, so I went and looked. And what do you think it was?"

"I know what it was—a button."

"Yes, it was a button; but I really don't see how you guessed. You weren't there—at least, I didn't see you if you were."

"There are heaps of things you don't see, Bunter. Have you got that button now? If you have, hand it over, and I'll stand you a dozen tarts at the tuckshop."

Billy Bunter looked utterly dismayed. "Would you really stand a dozen tarts, Cherry, for a rotten old jacket button?" he asked in amazement.

"Yes, I would—and I will. Where is it?"

"But what good is it to you?"

"Never mind that; I want it."

"I don't see what—"

"How can an Owl like you expect to see anything? Hand over that button and come and feed on the tarts, like a good ass."

"But I haven't it now."

"You haven't it?" roared Bob Cherry, shaking him.

"Don't shake me, Cherry; you will make my glasses fall off, and then you will have to pay for them."

"What have you done with the button, you horrid image?"

"I haven't told you all."

"Oh, get on, then, and let's have the rest!"

"I didn't know that the button would be of any value to you, Cherry; I never suspected that you were collecting old buttons. By the way, what do you do with them?"

"I know what I'll do with you if you don't come to the point!" howled Bob. "I'll take you by the neck and wipe up the ground with you, spectacles and all! Get on!"

"I'm getting on as fast as I can. I had just picked up the button, and was looking at it, and then Hazeldene must have spotted it, for he came running up; and it was curious, you know, but he looked quite pale."

"What did he do?"

"He tried to snatch the button out of my hand, but I wouldn't let him. Then he asked me to give it to him, and I asked him what he wanted it for. He said that it was his; and I said that it wasn't his after he had thrown it away. He said he threw it away by mistake for another. I suppose there is some value attached to that button, Cherry, as he was so particular about it, and you want to give a dozen tarts for it."

"There is. But get on!"

"Well, I wasn't going to give up the



While Wingate, Bob Cherry, and Nugent looked on, Glenn made a careful search in every pocket in Hazeldene's clothes, but the missing button, which would have convicted the cad of the Remove, was not to be found.

button, but he said he would lend me sixpence if I did till my postal order comes; and as there's a chance that the postal order may be delayed, I thought I'd accept, so I gave him back the button. Of course, I thought he was off his rocker, you know. A chap doesn't throw an old button away and then give a tanner to get it back again unless he's wrong in the upper story, does he?"

"He must have known that you saw him throw it, and could prove that it was he who had had the button."

"Well, so I could. But that doesn't make any difference, does it? It's not wrong to have an old jacket button and throw it away, is it, Cherry?"

"It's wrong to be a howling ass!" growled Bob Cherry. "If I were in the same study with you, Bunter, you'd turn my hair grey. Where is Hazeldene now?"

"I really don't know, Cherry. I wish I could tell you, as I'd like to oblige a chap I like as much as I like you. And I suppose you'll stand those tarts, all the same, as—"

"Can you tell me which way he went when he left you, Bunter?" asked Bob Cherry with all the patience he could muster.

"Oh, yes, Cherry, I can tell you that much! But you asked me where he was now; and, of course, I don't know, as I can't see—"

"Which way, then, you fat villain?"

"Over towards the Head's garden."

Bob Cherry waited for no more; he dashed off towards the Head's garden, with Nugent at his heels. Billy Bunter stared after him in amazement; then he shook his head solemnly, probably coming to the conclusion that insanity was in the air, and that Bob Cherry and Nugent were equally afflicted with Hazeldene.

"Lucky we met that aggravating little beast!" panted Bob Cherry, as he ran on. "Vaseline is trying to get rid of the button, and Billy Bunter was the right ass in the right place, for once!"

"Yes; and it must have been a bit of a shock to Vaseline when he saw the button in the hands of a little chatter-box like Bunter!" chuckled Nugent.

"Here we are!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, stopping at the gate of the Head's garden. "I suppose Hazeldene has gone in."

The gate was not fastened; but none of the boys of Greyfriars used the garden, excepting a select few in the Sixth Form, who sometimes walked there in state.

But it was pretty certain that Hazeldene had gone there to get rid of the button as the safest place, as it was little frequented by the boys.

Juniors had no business in the Head's garden, but that little circumstance did not trouble Bob Cherry.

He opened the gate and entered, followed by Nugent, and looked round for Hazeldene.

"There he is!"

Beyond a belt of rhododendrons a figure could be seen, and the two juniors cut across to it at once. It was Hazeldene—as they knew at a glance, in spite of the dusk that was deepening over the garden. The cad of the Remove saw them coming, and his hand went quickly into his pocket.

Bob Cherry saw the motion and knew what it meant. Hazeldene had been looking for a hiding-place for the tell-tale button, and, not expecting to be interrupted, he was taking his time about it to make all secure. The sight of the two chums made him put the button quickly back into his pocket. He dared not part with it where they might find it.

"Stop, you cad!" shouted Bob Cherry as Hazeldene darted off.

But Hazeldene did not stop. He dodged among the bushes, and came out by another path to the gate, and, without stopping to open it, he vaulted over it.

Bob Cherry and Nugent came racing up the next moment, and they heard a terrific crash and a wild yell on the other side of the gate.

Bob Cherry burst into a roar.

"Ha, ha! He's landed on somebody! Come on!"

He tore open the gate and darted through. In the dusk of the Close Hazeldene was squirming in the grasp of Wingate, the captain of Greyfriars.

Cornered!

"YOU young rascal!" roared Wingate, shaking the cad of the Remove violently. "What do you mean by jumping on me all of a sudden like that?"

"I—I—I—"

"You've planted your silly hoofs on my trousers! Look at the mud!"

"I'm sorry, Wingate!"

"You've been trespassing in the Head's garden!"

"I—I—I—"

Wingate shook him again.

"Now then, have you got anything to say before I lick you, you young sweep?"

"If you please—"

"Hold him, Wingate!" panted Bob Cherry, coming up breathless. "Don't let the young beast wriggle away!"

The captain of Greyfriars turned on him sharply.

"So you have been trespassing in the Head's garden, too, Cherry? And Nugent! By Jove, you want a licking all round!"

"I went in for Hazeldene; he's got something that belongs to me—or, rather, to Wharton."

"What is it?"

"A jacket button."

Wingate stared.

"If this is one of your little jokes, Cherry, you are playing it on the wrong

person," he said sternly. "You ought to know better than to cheek me!"

"But I'm not cheeking you, Wingate," said Bob earnestly. "Hazeldene has got a button he snipped off Wharton's jacket just before the exam for the Seaton-D'Arcy—"

"I haven't!"

"Well, if he has, what is there in a jacket button to make a fuss about?" Wingate demanded, still keeping hold of the wriggling Hazeldene, however.

"If you'll let me explain—"

"Look sharp, then!"

Bob Cherry explained. An expression of incredulity came over Wingate's face as he listened, but when Bob told him how he had seen the Head on the subject, he seemed more impressed. He was quite grave when the junior finished.

"I suppose you're not romancing, Cherry?" he said at last, with a frown on his brow and his grasp tighter on the wretched Hazeldene.

"Certainly not!" broke in Nugent eagerly. "I know as much about it as Cherry does, Wingate, and I'll vouch for every word he's said."

"And then there's Billy Bunter," said Bob Cherry. "If you ask him, he'll tell you that he saw Hazeldene fling the button away, and then give sixpence to get it back when he found that it had been picked up."

"What have you to say, Hazeldene?"

"It's a string of lies. They've got this up between them to try to do me out of the Seaton-D'Arcy prize!" said Hazeldene savagely. "It's all a game to get the twenty guineas for Wharton; and I suppose he's going to share out with them if they bring it off. That's the truth of the matter."

Bob Cherry turned red.

"Why, you worm!" he exclaimed, making a stride towards the cad of the Remove.

Wingate pushed him back.

"None of that," he said quietly. "I'm going to look into this matter!"

"Of course, we don't want to sneak," said Bob Cherry hastily. "It can't be taken before the Head. We only want to show up Vaseline before the Form, so as to get a second exam for the Seaton-

D'Arcy, and give Wharton a fair chance."

"I understand. I don't want to put you in the position of sneaking, and I shall look into this matter simply as George Wingate, and not as a prefect."

"Thank you, Wingate!" said Bob Cherry, with great relief.

As a matter of fact, in the excitement of the moment he had forgotten all about Wingate being a prefect, but the captain of Greyfriars was not the fellow to make a junior regret a confidence.

Wingate looked sharply at the junior wriggling in his grasp.

"You deny this, Hazeldene?" he asked.

"Every word of it."

"You did not snip the button off Wharton's coat?"

"I did not."

"And you haven't such a button about you now?"

"Nothing of the kind."

"Have you any objection to a search to prove that point?" asked the captain of Greyfriars, his eyes still fixed keenly on the face of Peter Hazeldene.

Only for a brief instant was there a sign of hesitation in the face of Hazeldene. He knew, of course, that it would be useless to refuse.

"I have no objection at all, Wingate."

"Very well, come to my study, then. You youngsters come, too."

Still keeping a hand on Hazeldene, in case he should be inclined to bolt, the captain of Greyfriars walked him into the House and into his study. Bob Cherry and Nugent followed them, somewhat uneasy in their minds. Hazeldene's confidence was not reassuring to the two investigators. It was possible that during that hurried flight he had thrown the button away.

Still, a search through the Head's garden might, in that case, discover it, and Billy Bunter's evidence would be all that was required to bring the act of treachery home to the cad of the Remove.

Wingate called to a fag in the passage as he went to his study. The fag happened to be a Remove fellow named Glenn. He followed the school captain into the study and the door was closed.

"I want you to search Hazeldene, Glenn," said Wingate quietly. "I have reason to think that he has a jacket button somewhere about him which does not belong to him. See if you can find it."

Glenn was utterly amazed. But he obeyed without question.

Hazeldene stood silent and sullen while Glenn, with a good deal of gusto, went through his clothing in a really scientific manner. Bob Cherry and Nugent looked on.

Wingate had, of course, called in a third party to make the search in order that it might be absolutely above suspicion. Glenn could not be suspected of placing the button in a pocket if he found it in one.

But, as it turned out, the button was not found. Every pocket was searched by Glenn's nimble fingers, and he seemed to enjoy his task as an amateur detective. But he had to give it up at last. The missing button was not to be found.

Bob Cherry looked nonplussed as Wingate's eye turned questioningly upon him.

"It's not there," said Glenn.

"I can see it isn't," said Wingate. "Do you still hold to your accusation, Cherry?"

"Certainly I do!" said Bob emphatically. "He has managed to throw the button away, that's all. We'll find it in the morning."

"Very well, the matter will have to be left over until then. If you are innocent, Hazeldene, I am sorry for this trouble you have been put to. It is quite possible that I should have attached no importance at all to such a story had I not known you to be of a mean and deceiving nature. You have nothing to say, I suppose?"

Hazeldene shook his head.

"You still persist that you know nothing about the button?"

Hazeldene nodded.

"Very well, we shall see. You may go."

Hazeldene walked to the door.

"Stay a moment!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Stay, I—"

Hazeldene quickened his pace and

PEN PALS

(Continued from page 17.)

Miss Sheila Harrison, 19, Paget Road, Great Yarmouth; girl correspondents; age 12-14; overseas; books, pictures, films.

Miss Antoinette Matthews, Rosehaugh, Penn Road, Wolverhampton; girl correspondents; overseas; age 12-14.

Geoffrey F. Harrop, 19, Westbourne Avenue, Burnley, Lancs.; age 12-15; Companion Papers and Schoolboys' Own.

F. W. Devonshire, 19, Fore Street, Northam, Devon; age 12-20; aviation, scale models.

J. Butler, 21, Quinn Buildings, Popham Street, Islington, London, N.1; New York; Companion Papers.

Allen Johnson, 91, Daubney Street, Cleethorpes, Lincs.; age 17 up; cycling, aviation, photography, sport.

Miss Betty Metcalfe, 317, Eyre Street, Ballarat, Victoria, Australia; girl correspondents; age 15-16; stamps, autographs, sports.

Alan Britten, 69, Haig Road, Plaistow, London, E.12; age 11-12; acting, reporting, sketching.

Tan Chek, 27, Main Road, Lunas, S. Kedah, Malaya; pen pals.

Selwyn I. K. Howard, 42, St. John's

Road, Ely, Cambs; British Empire, U.S.; old ruins, operas, music, shooting.

D. Myers, 29, Brook Street, Tottenham, London, N.; Australia, U.S.A.; football, tennis, drawing, films.

Miss Lilian Meta White, Married Quarters Artillery Barracks, Kildare, Ireland; girl correspondents; overseas; age 15-19; films, snaps.

Stewart Kenyon, 46, Kenneth Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, Canada; stamps.

Ronald M. Stevenson, 90, George Street, Paisley, Scotland; age 13-15.

Miss Margaret Bakkon, Fort France, Ontario, Canada; girl correspondents; age 11-12.

Chem Thiam Chit, 26, Wilkinson Road, Singapore, Straits Settlements; pen pals.

J. Parks, 63, Stockton Street, Middlesbrough, Yorks; stamps, matchbrands.

Geoffrey Pepperell, 29, Harrington Street, Prospect, Adelaide, South Australia; stamps, boys' papers.

Glen Phippard, Newington College, Stanmore, Sydney, N.S.W., Australia; age 15-17; swimming, photos, model planes, cycling.

Miss Cicely Spooner, 41, Beech Avenue, Alvaston, Derbyshire; girl correspondents; age 16-20; radio, films, snaps.

A. Tew, 38, Essex Park, Finchley, London, N.; age 13-15; aviation, books.

Andrew Bondville, 49a, Kelawei Road, Penang, Straits Settlements; stamps, sports, gardening, photos.

John Dohne, 22, Lyell Street, Ladysmith, Natal, S. Africa; age 14-15; stamps.

E. Glaser, 25, Rosmead Avenue, Cape Town, S. Africa, wants members for his philatelic club; age 14-17.

Aetion Philip, 79, Havelock Street, Port Elizabeth, S. Africa; age 15-16.

Cecil Spence, 15, Western Avenue, P.O. Cambridge, East London, S. Africa; stamps, photos.

Eric C. Marsh, 14, Kingsdale Road, Hillary, near Durban, Natal, South Africa; age 11-13; stamps.

Bob Morrison, 20, Brown Street, Dunedin C.2, Otago, South Island, New Zealand; age 13-15; stamps, swimming, football, cricket.

Miss Joan Haslemore, John Street, Riverton, Southland, New Zealand; girl correspondents; age 16 up; sports.

Archie D. Luke, 8, Paradise Place, Devonport; age 22-27; stamps.

George Burberry, Gate Pa Tauranaga, New Zealand; stamps, birds, football.

Alan T. Smith, c/o, G.P.O., Invercargill, New Zealand; age 18 up.

Miss Gladys Williams, 22, Bruton Street, Moss Side, Manchester; girl correspondents, films, snaps, riding; Arizona, California.

Miss Nora Welch, 12, Daffodil Road, Wavertree, Liverpool; 15; girl correspondents; age 16-18.

Miss J. Crosland, 40, Warren Road, Leyton, London, E.10; girl correspondents; old St. Frank's tales.

S. D. Turner, 88c, Salisbury Road, Kilburn, London, N.W.6; age 14-16; Secret Service work.

passed hurriedly through the doorway. Bob Cherry sprang towards the door.

"Glenn didn't look in his mouth!" he exclaimed.

Glenn started.

"My hat, no! I never thought—"

"That's it! I wondered why he didn't speak! Come on, Nugent!"

And Bob Cherry rushed from the study.

Hazeldene was running along the corridor towards the stairs as fast as he could go. Bob broke into a run, and went down the corridor like a champion sprinter. Hazeldene cast a glance of terror behind him as he heard the pattering footsteps, and raced down the stairs.

Fast behind came Nugent, and Wingate was following. The captain of Greyfriars had no doubt that Bob Cherry's surmise was correct. On the way to the study Hazeldene had contrived to slip the button into his mouth, and it was there still.

Bob sped down the stairs three at a time and came in sight of Hazeldene again as he darted across the hall-way to the open door on the Close.

"Stop, you rotter!"

Hazeldene dashed out into the shadowy Close, with Bob Cherry close at his heels, his hand outstretched to seize him.



"Got you!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, as he grasped Hazeldene from behind. The cad of the Remove suddenly threw up his hand, and something flew through the air. It was the missing button!

Justice at Last!

"GOT you!" Bob Cherry's hands dropped upon Hazeldene's shoulder from behind, and the cad of the Remove made a desperate attempt to tear himself loose, in vain.

"Got you! Come on, Nugent!"

Hazeldene suddenly threw up his hand, and something flew away from it through the air. Bob uttered a sharp exclamation as he saw the action.

"You cad! You've thrown it!" He broke off suddenly.

From the distance came the sharp crack of something striking upon glass, and Bob knew that the whizzing button had struck a window. He gazed in the direction of the sound.

There were several windows there, and it might have been any one of them. Most of them were lighted, it now being quite dark at Greyfriars. Hazeldene wriggled in his grasp.

"Let me go, Cherry!"

"No fear!"

Nugent came panting up. He at once grasped hold of Hazeldene to make sure of him. Wingate had remained indoors.

"Got the beast!" exclaimed Nugent triumphantly. "Where's the button?"

"He's thrown it away."

"Where did it go?"

"It struck a window. Ah, look there!"

Bob Cherry pointed. One of the lighted windows showed a dark shadow across the blind. There was a movement of the blind within, and it ran up.

"The Head's window!" gasped Nugent.

Hazeldene gave a whimper.

"Let me go!"

The Head's window slowly opened. Dr. Locke himself looked out. In the light from the interior of the room the boys saw him clearly, but they were themselves swallowed up in the darkness of the Close, and he did not observe them. The Head looked into the gloom searchingly.

"Dear me!" The muttered words came clearly to the ears below in the silence of the evening. "Dear me, I distinctly heard a clink on the glass! It sounded like someone throwing stones. Surely no boy would have the unheard

of impertinence to throw stones at my window!"

The juniors remained silent.

The Head stared out into the Close for some moments more, and then he glanced at the flower-box on his window-sill. A sharp exclamation was heard.

"Dear me, a button—a jacket button! That undoubtedly was what was flung at my window. What a surprising circumstance!"

Hazeldene made a supreme effort, and tore himself away. Bob Cherry made a grasp at him, but the cad of the Remove was too quick for him, and vanished into the darkness before he could be seized.

Dr. Locke heard the sounds below, and he called out sharply:

"Who is there?"

"It is I, sir," said Bob Cherry—"Nugent and I!"

"It is Cherry's voice, I think?"

"Yes, sir."

"Come up to my study immediately, Cherry."

"Certainly, sir!"

The window closed down, and the blind was drawn. Bob Cherry and Nugent turned back to re-enter the House.

"I suppose we shall have to go up," muttered Nugent.

"Of course we shall; and I want to. I'm going to explain to the Head," said Bob Cherry coolly.

"You won't give Hazeldene away?"

"No; it would serve him right, but it can't be done. I can explain without mentioning names, and call upon Wingate, if necessary."

"Good!"

And the two juniors made their way to the Head's study. Dr. Locke was waiting for them with a curious expression upon his face. Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, was in the room with him. The clink of the button on the glass had startled both the masters, who had been discussing the Seaton-D'Arcy examination.

"A most peculiar circumstance," said the Head as he held up the button

between his finger and thumb to show it to Mr. Quelch. "What do you make of that, Mr. Quelch?"

The Remove master adjusted his glasses and stared at the little object held up for his inspection.

"It is an ordinary jacket button," he replied.

"Yes, yes," said the Head. "The singularity of the matter is that it should have been hurled at my window."

"Yes; that is certainly very surprising."

"Cherry and Nugent were in the Close, and I have called them up; yet I hardly think either of them is the boy to play such a foolish and disrespectful trick."

"I quite agree with you, sir."

"Yet— Ah, here are the boys! Come in!"

Cherry and Nugent entered the study. Nugent was looking a little nervous, but Bob Cherry was as cool as the proverbial cucumber.

"Now, Cherry, kindly explain what this means," said the Head. "This button was thrown at my window, was it not?"

"Yes, sir. It was flung away, and it struck your window by chance."

"Indeed! And why was this button thrown away in the Close?"

"The fellow wanted to get rid of it."

"And who was the boy?"

"The fellow who had it," said Bob Cherry evasively. "If you please, sir, we've discovered about that trick that was played on Wharton to make him lose the exam."

"Ah," said the Head with interest. "I shall be glad to hear about that! But what has that to do with this button being flung at my window?"

"Everything, sir. If you will allow me to explain—"

"Certainly, you may go on."

Bob Cherry made his explanation. Like Wingate, Dr. Locke was inclined to be incredulous at first. But Mr. Quelch nodded complete assent.

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"What do you think of this, Mr. Quelch?"

"I think it is quite correct, sir, I have myself noticed that odd habit of Wharton, and have once or twice spoken to him about it. I think it is quite probable that this button being missing from its place at the critical moment may have thrown him into a confusion of mind. A disturbance of one's habit is calculated to have that effect."

The Head pursed his lips thoughtfully. It was a strange story, but stranger things had happened. And he had himself been struck by the confusion shown by Harry Wharton during the examination—a confusion for which he had been at a loss to account—till now.

"If the button was found in the possession of the boy whom Cherry suspected, sir," Mr. Quelch went on, "that must be regarded as proof." Cherry offers to call Bunter and Wingate as witnesses, if required. We have his word that the button was flung away by the rascal just as he was seized, and then it struck your window."

"But there is one point not touched upon," said the Head. "You have not told me the name of the boy in question, Cherry."

Bob Cherry turned red.

"Speak!" said the Head, looking at him curiously. "You know whom the boy is, and you need have no hesitation in telling me."

But Bob Cherry was still silent.

"I think I understand," said Mr. Quelch quietly. "You wish to keep the name secret, Cherry, in order not to be accused of sneaking by your fellows."

"Bob" gave the Remove master a grateful look.

"That is exactly it, sir, if Dr. Locke will pardon me."

The Head's face was very grave. "But don't you see, Cherry, that this casts a grave doubt upon the whole story?"

"Oh, no, sir! Wingate knows the fellow, and he will answer for it that I have told you the truth."

"Of course," said the Head, "I can fully rely upon Wingate. I will speak to him about the matter."

"He has promised not to give the fellow away, sir."

"I shall not ask it of him; but the culprit ought to be punished."

"I could give him a hiding, sir," said Bob Cherry eagerly.

The Head tried hard not to smile.

"That would be rather informal, Cherry. But I will not ask you the culprit's name. Yet I do not think he ought to pass unpunished. However, I will say no more on that point. You may go, my boys, and tell Wharton he may come here and fetch his button."

"Certainly, sir!" said the delighted juniors.

And they left the study and hurried up to the Remove quarters. Harry Wharton was in Study No. 1, sitting alone with a book in his hands, which he was reading. There was a shade of deepest gloom on his face. Bob Cherry gave him a resounding slap on the back.

Harry started up with an angry exclamation.

"What the dickens—"

"It's all right, old fellow," said Nugent, before Bob Cherry could speak.

"We've found the button and bowled Hazeldene out."

Harry Wharton's face brightened.

"You've got proof?"

"Heaps of it."

"But—Harry's face fell again—what's the good? You can't give the cad away to the Head."

"I've arranged all that, my son," said Bob Cherry serenely. "We've told the Head everything but the fellow's name, and he believes us."

"Good! But what—"

"You're to go to him and fetch your button," said Nugent. "Of course, he's going to tell you something about the exam. Buck up, and get back as quickly as you can. We're dying to know."

"Buzz off!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"I'll have the gloves on with you while he's gone, Nugent. I want a little practice, as I'm going to ask Hazeldene to come along to the gym to-night."

"Ha, ha, ha! I'm ready."

And Nugent and Cherry were soon sparring away cheerily enough. Bob had driven Nugent into a corner, and was keeping him there, when Harry Wharton came back into the study with a radiant face.

"Hallo, what's the news?" asked Bob Cherry, ceasing his attack and turning round eagerly.

"The best. The exam is to be held over again, and this time—"

"This time take care not to lose any of your buttons."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"I will, by Jove!"

Bob Cherry peeled off the boxing gloves, and Nugent jammed the tea-kettle down on the fire.

"I fancy I'm in pretty good form for Hazeldene," said Bob Cherry.

"You're going to meet him?" asked Harry.

"Yes," Bob Cherry grinned. "The Head let me off telling him the name of the chap, but he gave a broad hint that if the rotter were punished he wouldn't have anything to say against it. I said I've given the fellow a hiding, and he didn't say I wasn't to. A nod's as good as a wink. I'm going to put Vaseline through it this evening."

"It's really my business."

"Oh, that's all right! I make it mine," said Bob Cherry coolly.

"I'm really very much obliged to you, Cherry, for what you've done."

"I should say so. It's as good as twenty guineas in your pocket," said Bob Cherry coolly. "You're bound to win this time. I shall expect you to stand ripping feed out of the Seaton-D'Arcy prize."

"And I will, too. Meanwhile—"

"Meanwhile, I'll join you at tea. In looking after your interests I've neglected my own, and I'm pretty certain the fire's out in my study. I'll stay to tea with you, with pleasure."

"That's right."

Billy Bunter looked into the study.

"I say, you fellows, are you going to have tea? My postal order hasn't come yet, and I'm stony. I should like to have tea with you, if you don't mind."

"Oh, come in!" said Nugent, smiling.

"So the four sat down to tea. It was an unusually jolly meal in Study No. 1, and the four juniors enjoyed it, and for the first time since he had been at Greyfriars Harry Wharton realised what good-fellowship meant."

That he would win the second exam was a foregone conclusion. He had no doubts upon that point. He owed it to his friends, in a place where he had done little to deserve friendship, and he realised that now.

There were no signs of the perversé temper which had made him so many enemies. Bob Cherry realised with some wonder that Harry Wharton was rather a pleasant fellow, after all.

After tea the juniors went down to the gym, where Hazeldene, much against his will, was forced to put on the gloves with Bob Cherry. His act of treachery had been exposed to the whole Remove, and the Remove were in a ring round him to see that he did not get out of paying the penalty. He had to face Bob Cherry; and although they had the gloves on, he received a thrashing that he remembered for many a long day.

The discovery of Hazeldene's treachery caused something of a change in the feeling of the Remove towards Harry Wharton—at least, for a time. And when it was known that Harry had won the Seaton-D'Arcy prize, after the second test, Hazeldene's disappointment found no sympathisers. But there were cheers for Harry as he received his reward at the hands of the Head in the presence of the whole school.

(Harry Wharton at grips with the bully of the Remove! Backing up the fellow who has tried to cheat him of the exam prize! These are but two of the highlights of next week's great chapters. Don't miss them!)

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