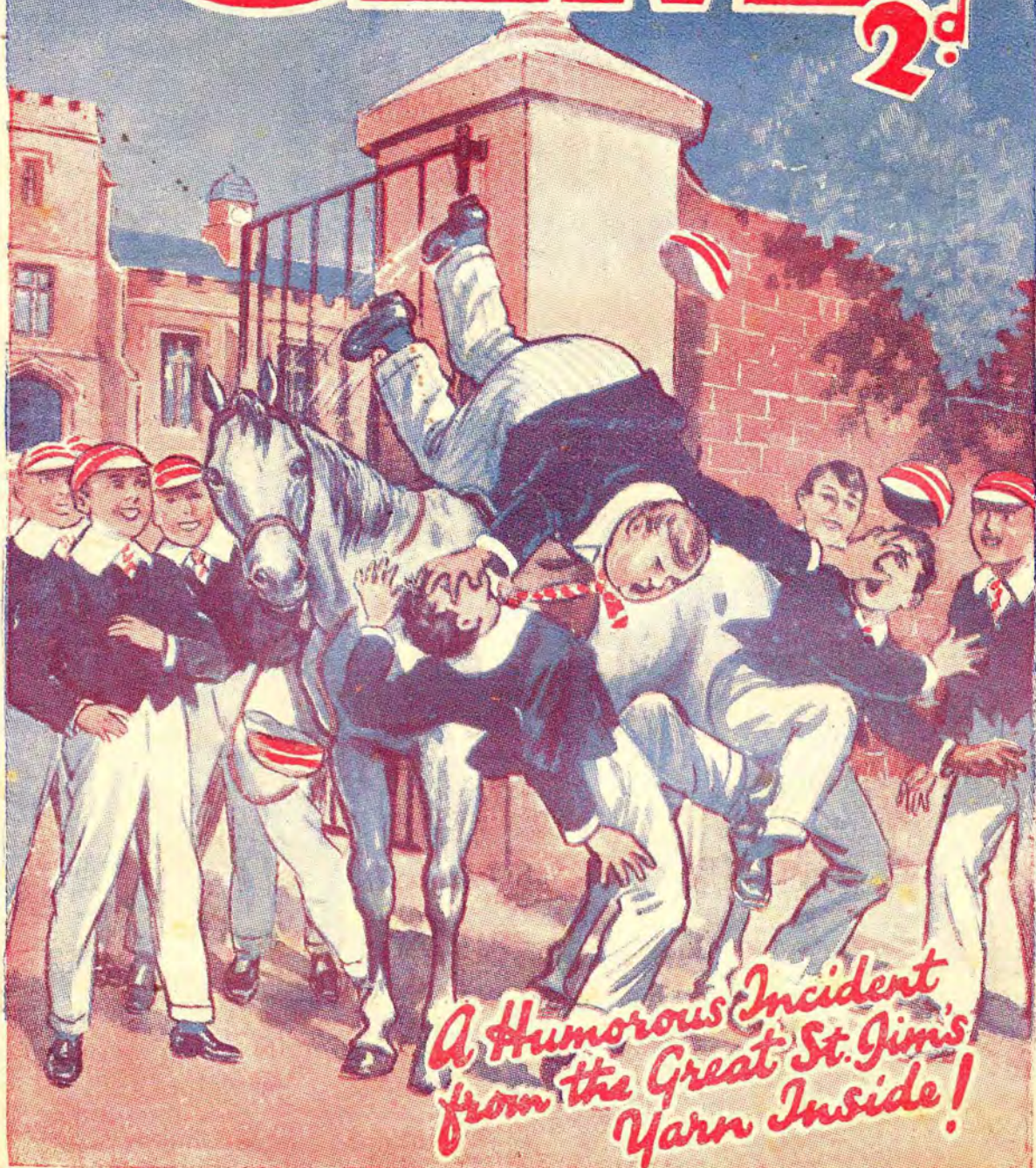


"THE MYSTERY OF TOM MERRY!" —SENSATIONAL STORY OF THE CHUMS OF ST. JIM'S— **INSIDE!**

The **GEM** 2^d



*A Humorous Incident
from the Great St. Jim's
Yarn Inside!*

**TOM MERRY FINDS HIMSELF THE CENTRAL FIGURE IN THE MOST AMAZING SCANDAL
ST. JIM'S HAS EVER KNOWN!**

The MYSTERY OF



Arthur Augustus stared in amazement as he came towards the junior leaning on the gate of the Green Man. The boy had a cigarette between his lips and was in the act of lighting it. But there could be no mistaking his well-known features. "Bai Jove!" gasped the swell of St. Jim's. "Tom Mewwy!"

CHAPTER 1.

Fatty the Horseman!

"**W**HOA!"
"Steady!"
Clatter, clatter, clatter!
"Hold him in!" roared Fatty Wynn vociferously.

"Whoa!"
Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther of the Shell Form at St. Jim's, grinned as they heard the clattering and shouting outside the school gates. They strolled down to the gateway to look on.

In the wide, white road outside the gates three juniors were clustering round a horse, and one of them, a particularly plump junior, was trying to mount him. The horse apparently was not having any. He backed away every time Fatty Wynn made an effort to heave himself into the saddle, and Fatty Wynn hopped beside him on one leg in a way that made even his chums, Figgins and Kerr, chuckle.

It made Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther roar.

The Terrible Three of the Shell were School House fellows, and, naturally, they were glad of an opportunity of chipping Figgins & Co., the heroes of THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,483.

the New House. And they proceeded to chip!

"That horse knows something," said Monty Lowther. "If Fatty gets on its back he'll break into two, and he objects."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why don't you get a ladder, Fatty?" asked Tom Merry. "Or you might get a lift in an aeroplane and drop on him!"

"Whoa!"

"Woe is me!" grinned Manners.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins and Kerr chuckled, and then tried to look serious as Fatty Wynn glared at them. The fat Fourth Former was red with exertion. He had one foot in the stirrup and one on the ground; one hand on the saddle and the other buried in the horse's mane, and he pranced round after the restive horse in a way that must have exercised all his muscles at once.

"What are you kik-kik-cackling at, you asses?" panted Fatty Wynn. "Can't you attend to the business in hand, you dummies? Can't you lend a fuf-fuf-fellow a hand, instead of cackling like giddy gig-gig-geese?"

"Sorry!" murmured Figgins. "I can't help it. Hold the beast in, Kerr."

"I'm trying to!" said Kerr. "He's afraid of Fatty. Perhaps he knows that his back won't stand the strain."

"Oh, shurrup!" gasped Wynn. "Hold him tight! Can't one of you get hold of his beastly tail?"

"Hang on to his ears!" suggested Monty Lowther. "Sit on his head, Figg."

"Oh, go and eat coke!" growled Figgins. "I say, Fatty, you'd better buck up. We shall have the whole giddy school looking on soon!"

The clattering of hoofs on the hard road sounded far and wide, and the fellows were coming up from all quarters to watch the proceedings. A dozen or more had gathered round the Terrible Three in the old gateway. They chuckled and cackled without restraint, and Fatty Wynn snorted with wrath.

Fatty Wynn had hired that horse for a ride that afternoon, and the man who had brought it had said that he was a nice, quiet animal, and that a baby in arms could ride him. Fatty Wynn was not a baby in arms, and perhaps that accounted for it. Certainly, he did not seem able even to mount him, let alone to ride him.

"Whoa!"

THIS POWERFUL LONG YARN OF A SCHOOLBOY'S FIGHT FOR HIS HONOUR WILL GRIP
YOUR INTEREST FROM FIRST LINE TO LAST!

TOM MERRY!

By
**MARTIN
CLIFFORD.**

"Steady, the Buffs!" grinned Tom Merry. "Mind you don't push him over, Fatty. If you fell on him and killed him, you'd have to pay for him, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Clear out, you silly School House chumps!" roared Fatty Wynn. "What are you hanging round for? Go and practise cricket, so that you can keep up a wicket or two when we play you again!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Make an effort, Fatty, old man," said Kerr. "Now, when we shove him towards you, heave yourself up. Go it!"

Figgins and Kerr held the horse, and pushed him hard towards Fatty. Fatty, with a grip on the saddle and a grip on the mane, heaved himself up. He expected the horse to back away, as before, but Figgins and Kerr were shoving him so hard on the other side that he couldn't, and so it came about that Fatty Wynn overshot the mark. Right over the saddle he went, head-first, and he sprawled across the horse and rolled down on top of his two devoted chums, his hands smacking in their faces.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Kerr.

"Yaroooh!" roared Figgins.

Bump!

Figgins and Kerr rolled in the dusty road, and Fatty Wynn rolled over them, wondering whether an earthquake had happened.

The horse blinked down at the three juniors, and backed away, and began browsing on the grass beside the road, apparently unconcerned and unrepentant.

"Oh!" groaned Figgins. "Ow!"

"Groogh!" groaned Kerr. "I'm killed!"

"Oh, scissors!" murmured Fatty Wynn. "You silly asses! Why didn't you hold him?"

The crowd in the gateway shrieked as the three New House juniors sat up in the dust and growled at one another.

"Oh, my hat!" said Tom Merry, almost weeping. "This is as good as a circus! Try again, Fatty!"

"Ow!"

"Catch that beastly horse, somebody!" roared Fatty Wynn. "He's going!"

Tom Merry ran out of the gateway and caught the horse by the bridle.

"Bring him here," said Fatty Wynn.

"Oh, you can't ride, Fatty!" chuckled Tom Merry. "You had this gee-gee brought here to be ridden, didn't you?"

"Of course I did, you fathead!"

"Well, he won't be ridden the way you're doing it. Better let me ride him, then the money won't be wasted."

"Good egg!" exclaimed Manners and Lowther.

"Oh, you cheeky rotter!" howled Fatty Wynn, scrambling up. "Give me my horse!"

"Rot!" said Tom Merry. "You can do what you've been doing in the gym, on the parallel bars, you know. No need of a horse for that kind of exercise. Good-bye!"

He vaulted lightly into the saddle.

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, realising that the School House junior intended to raid their horse, made a desperate rush at him.

But they were too late.

Tom Merry was in the saddle, and he gave the horse a touch with his heel, and the steed broke into a canter.

"He—he—he's taken my horse!" roared Fatty Wynn. "After him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors in the gateway shrieked with merriment.

Figgins & Co. bolted down the road after the horse and its rider. Tom Merry looked back, and kissed his hand to the New House juniors as they panted after him.

"Stop, you beast!" roared Figgins.

"Stop, you rotter!" roared Kerr.

"Gimme my horse!" yelled Fatty Wynn.

"Good-bye, Bluebell!" sang Tom Merry.

The New House juniors put on a desperate spurt. But Tom Merry kept his steed just ahead of the panting trio, and they were still labouring breathlessly behind when the village of Rylcombe came in sight. As he passed the Green Man, at the entrance of the village, Tom Merry waved his hand to the dusty juniors behind, and urged the horse into a gallop, and disappeared

Tom Merry's worst enemy would never have thought him guilty of any shady action. So it causes a big scandal in the school when his best friends accuse him, on the strongest of evidence, of disgracing himself and St. Jim's!

into a winding lane beside the road. Figgins and Kerr panted on to the corner, but the rider and the raided horse were gone.

Fatty Wynn mopped his streaming face with his handkerchief.

"The beast!" he gasped. "He's got my horse! I'll slaughter him! I'll scalp him! I'll—"

Figgins burst into a laugh.

"Well, he's done us this time," he said. "Never mind, Fatty—"

"Never mind!" snorted Fatty Wynn. "I tell you I'll scalp him! I'll—I'll—"

"It's all in the game," said Kerr cheerfully. As Figgins and Kerr had not been going to ride the horse, they could naturally take a more impartial view of the matter than Fatty Wynn could. "It's one up for the School House this time. Don't be waxy, Fatty."

Fatty Wynn grunted.

"Come and have some ginger-pop," said Figgins. "We're close to Mother Murphy's, and I've got a five-bob postal order to change. We'll look for that bounder as he comes back and scalp him! Come on, Fatty! We can have some tarts, too!"

Fatty Wynn brightened up.

"Good egg!" he said heartily. "Now you're talking!"

And the New House chums adjourned to the village tuckshop, where they discussed ginger-pop and jam-tarts, till Figgins' five-shilling postal order had vanished, and happy smiles were once more wreathing the plump countenance of the Falstaff of the New House.

CHAPTER 2.

Friends in Need!

"HIST!"

"Hallo!" said Fatty Wynn. "What's the matter?"

"Shurrup! I believe I've sighted him!"

"Oh, good!"

It was deep dusk now, and Figgins & Co., who had looked round the lanes and by-roads for Tom Merry for some time after leaving Mother Murphy's, had almost made up their minds to return to St. Jim's without catching the raider.

Fatty Wynn and Kerr were sitting on a stile, and Figgins had mounted to the top rail, holding on to a tree, to take a last survey in the gathering gloom. And he suddenly jumped down, with the warning to his chums to "Hist!"

"He's coming!" said Figgins.

"Good egg!" said Fatty Wynn.

"We'll make him sorry he raided our gee-gee. We'll frogmarch him back to St. Jim's, and give him a ducking, and then we'll call it square."

"Hear, hear!" said Kerr.

"Hist!" said Figgins.

He peered through the dusk along the lane. A solitary lamp at the cross-roads shed light in the lane, and into the radius of light from the lamp came a figure. It was that of a boy in Etons, with a silk hat pushed back on his head, and his hands in his pockets. The light fell upon the face of the newcomer. The face was strangely flushed, but Figgins & Co. were not likely to be mistaken in the well-known features of Tom Merry of St. Jim's.

"The bounder's changed his hat," murmured Kerr. "He was wearing a cap when he went off on the gee-gee."

"Bought a new one, perhaps, as he came back through Rylcombe," said Figgins.

"Sure it's Tom Merry?" asked Fatty, who had not left his seat upon the stile.

"It's Tom Merry, right enough," said Kerr. "Looks as if he's been hurrying; his face is very red."

Figgins and Kerr stared hard at the approaching lad.

It struck them both at once that there was something very peculiar in his aspect.

He had both hands in his pockets, and was swaying queerly from side to side as he came down the lane, as if he was not quite certain of his footing.

"Something's wrong with him!" muttered Kerr.

"He's ill," said Figgins.

Fatty Wynn slid off the stile.

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"What's the matter with him?" he asked.

The newcomer was quite near now, and they could see his flushed face and his eyes, which seemed to be glazed. He did not see them, though they were in full view. He came on unsteadily, his gaze fixed strangely ahead of him, as if he saw nothing.

"May have had a fall from the horse," Figgins muttered.

"Let's speak to him," said Kerr.

Figgins called out:

"Tom Merry!"

The boy did not answer. He tramped on, swaying, and was about to pass the juniors, when Figgins stepped out into the road, caught him by the arm and stopped him.

The lad gazed at him dully.

"Lemme go!" he murmured.

"What's the matter?" asked Figgins kindly.

"Norrin'!"

"Are you ill?"

"No!"

"Have you had a fall?"

"Fall! Who's had a fall? I can walk all right!" said the lad, and he glared at Figgins with sudden anger. "Get away! I don't know you!"

Figgins & Co. looked at one another in utter horror.

There was no mistaking the junior's condition.

The flushed face, the glazed eyes, the uncertain movements, the swaying gait—all told the same tale!

He was the worse for drink!

And if Figgins & Co. could not believe their eyes, they could have believed their noses. There was a strong odour of spirits about the junior, and his breath, as he spoke, was laden with it.

"Great Scott!" said Figgins in utter dismay.

They gazed at the junior, spellbound.

If it had been Levison of the Fourth, or Crooke of the Shell, or Knox of the Sixth, they could have understood it. Though even the black sheep of St. Jim's would hardly have been reckless enough to appear upon a public road near the school in such a condition. For, if discovered, it was an offence that would have been followed by a flogging and instant expulsion from the school. And Tom Merry of the Shell, the junior captain of the School House—the cricketer, the athlete, the good chum they knew so well—it was incredible!

Figgins stared into the flushed face before him.

If he had not known the handsome features, the curly hair, the blue eyes, so well, he could never have believed that it was Tom Merry.

But there was no doubt possible.

"Somebody must have been larking with him!" said Figgins. "Putting something into his ginger-beer, or something. I've heard of tricks like that!"

"Must be something like that," said Kerr.

The junior shook himself free from Figgins.

"I say, kid, don't you know me?" said Figgins anxiously.

"I dunno you!"

"He can't recognise us!" said Kerr.

"We're your old pals," said Figgins.

"We'll stick to you, and see you through this, old son. Lean on me!"

"Gerraway!" said the junior angrily. "Wharrer you taking hold of me for? Gerraway, can't you? Lemme alone!"

"Look here, kid——"

"I'll punch yer head!" muttered the other. "Lemme alone! Who says I'm squiffy?"

"No, only a bit tired," said Figgins.

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coaxingly. "For goodness' sake, come out of the road. Somebody might pass and see you, you know!"

"Don't care!"

"But we care for you, old son!" said Figgins. "You're not going to be sacked if I can help it. Take his other arm, Kerr, and we'll get him over the stile into the footpath. He won't be seen there if anybody passes."

"Right-ho!" said Kerr.

They led the incapable junior to the stile and lifted him over. He did not resist. He seemed too far gone for that. Figgins & Co. were almost sick with dismay and horror. There was no thought of House rivalry now. They only remembered that they were St. Jim's fellows, with a St. Jim's fellow to save from serious trouble.

The New House juniors felt relieved when they had the helpless lad on the other side of the stile. He was safe from observation there, at all events.

"Now, what are we going to do with him?" muttered Figgins. "He can't go back to St. Jim's in this state."

"He won't come round for a bit," said Kerr.

"He doesn't look like it, certainly!"

"We shall be late for calling-over if we don't get in," Fatty Wynn remarked.

Figgins wrinkled his brows in thought.

To abandon a schoolfellow in such a state was impossible; but it would be the worst thing they could do for Tom Merry if they took him back to St. Jim's in such a condition. He was leaning on the stile now, with an angry glare in his eyes, evidently resenting the handling he had received.

"You lemme alone!" he muttered. "I'm going home!"

"You can't go back in that state," said Figgins, with a worried look.

"Mind your own business!"

"Look here——"

"I'm not squiffy, I tell you!"

Figgins gave a short laugh.

"I fancy you are!" he said. "Look here, kid, we'll stick to you. But——"

"You lemme alone!"

The junior suddenly detached himself from the stile and started down the footpath into the dark wood.

Figgins caught hold of his shoulder to stop him.

The next moment he uttered a cry and reeled back as he received a blow full in the face.

The intoxicated junior staggered on and disappeared into the shadows.

Kerr and Fatty Wynn caught Figgins as he reeled back.

"The rotter!" exclaimed Kerr wrathfully.

Figgins dabbed his nose. His fingers came away red.

"The spiteful beast!" said Fatty Wynn. "It would serve him right to leave him alone, to look after himself!"

"He doesn't know what he's doing," said Figgins quietly. "He doesn't even recognise us. We must look after him, you chaps."

"Oh, all right!"

Figgins, holding his handkerchief to his nose, ran down the footpath after the intoxicated junior. The darkness was thick under the trees.

"Tom Merry!" he called out.

There was no reply. The juniors heard a crashing in the bushes farther down the path, but when they reached the spot there was no further sound. And the junior they were looking for had disappeared.

"He's gone into the wood!" said Kerr.

"Tom Merry!" shouted Figgins. "Speak up, old man! We want to look

after you. I don't mind that dab on the nose. Where are you, old fellow?" Only the echo of his voice replied.

"We've got to find him!" said Figgins desperately.

"Not much chance of that," said Kerr. "I expect he's curled up in the thickets somewhere and gone to sleep."

"Let's look for him!"

"Right-ho!"

The New House juniors plunged into the thickets, and searched for the fellow who had vanished from their sight. But the darkness was thick there, under the heavy trees, and there was no sound to guide them. They might have passed within a couple of feet of the junior without seeing him. They were in danger, indeed, of losing one another in the darkness. Figgins came back to the path at last, and started shouting to his chums.

Kerr and Wynn came out of the wood and joined him.

"Seen him?" asked Kerr.

"No. Have you?"

"Not a sign of him. I fancy he's gone to sleep. It won't hurt him," said Kerr. "The ground's dry enough, and when he comes to he'll find his way back to St. Jim's."

"I suppose we can't do any more," said Figgins miserably.

"Nothing."

"Let's get back."

And the chums of the New House, giving up the search, turned their steps in the direction of St. Jim's. What had happened had cast a gloom over their spirits. They wondered what Tom Merry would say and do when he met them again—and remembered. How would he be able to look them in the face? How would he be able to look anybody in the face, for the matter of that?

Figgins & Co. were late for calling-over in the New House, and Mr. Ratcliff, their Housemaster, gave them lines. But they did not mind the lines. As they came out of Mr. Ratcliff's study they were thinking of Tom Merry and wondering whether he had returned to the school.

"We ought to let his pals know about it," said Figgins. "I think I'll cut over to the School House and see Lowther and Manners and warn them. He may have to be smuggled into the House and hidden."

And Figgins crossed over to the School House.

CHAPTER 3.

Figgins' Warning!

"MERRY!"

No answer.

"Merry!" repeated Mr. Railton, who was taking

call-over in the School House. But Tom Merry's name was not replied to. Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, glanced over to the ranks of the Shell.

"Is Merry not there?" he asked.

"No, sir," said Monty Lowther. "He went out for a ride after school, sir, and he hasn't come in. I suppose he's been delayed getting back, sir."

"Very well, Lowther!"

Mr. Railton marked down Tom Merry's name as absent, and the calling-over finished.

Monty Lowther and Manners left together after calling-over, and stopped in the passage, looking out into the dusky quadrangle.

"Where on earth has that bouncer got to?" said Monty Lowther, when they had waited at the door for about half an hour, and there was no sign of

their chum. "Has that blessed gee-gee bolted with him?"

A figure suddenly loomed up in the gloom, and Lowther uttered an exclamation of relief.

"Here he is!"

But it was not Tom Merry.

It was Figgins of the Fourth who came into the light of the doorway. Lowther and Manners looked at the New House junior inquiringly.

"Hallo!" grunted Lowther. "What do you want on the respectable side of the quad, you New House bouncer?"

"Looking for a thick ear?" suggested Manners.

"Pax!" said Figgins quietly. "Has Tom Merry come in yet?"

"No."

"He missed call-over, then?"

"Of course he did! Haven't you seen anything of your gee-gee?" grinned Lowther. "How far did you follow him?"

But Figgins did not grin.

"I came over to speak to you fellows," he said. "It's serious—and it's about Tom Merry. Better get up to the study."

Lowther and Manners stared at him. "Nothing's happened to him—no accident?" asked Lowther.

"Let's get up to the study," said Figgins evasively.

Lowther grasped him by the arm.

"Is Tom Merry hurt?" he demanded.

"No; it isn't that."

"Oh, all right, then! Come on!"

Manners and Lowther led the way to the study in the Shell. Figgins followed them without a word; and he did not speak when they were in the study, with the door closed. He seemed to be seeking for words.

"What's the matter?" asked Manners.

"Why don't you speak?"

"It's horribly serious!" said Figgins.

"We—we waited about Rylcombe to catch Tom Merry, if we could, as he came back from the ride. We meant to scrag him for raiding Fatty's horse. Well, we met him in the lane."

"Then you've seen him!" exclaimed Lowther.

"Yes."

"Well," said Manners and Lowther together, "why don't you get on? Did you have a row?"

"No. He was drunk!" said Figgins, getting it out at last.

The Shell fellows jumped.

"Tom Merry! Drunk! What on earth do you mean?" demanded Lowther angrily.

"I mean what I say!" said Figgins quietly. "It was a shock to us, I can tell you! He had been drinking, and he couldn't walk straight!"

"Rot!"

"Why hasn't he come back?" said Figgins quietly.

"I suppose he's been delayed."

"Look here!" said Figgins. "I'm not telling you this to score over you. Goodness knows, I'd give anything if it wasn't true. But it is true. Kerr and Wynn were with me. He was so drunk he could hardly walk. It may have been a trick—he may have had the stuff planted on him somehow. I don't know. I hope so. But he was so far gone that he did not know me—he said so!"

Lowther and Manners stared at Figgins blankly. The troubled, worried face of the New House junior was proof enough of his sincerity. It was evidently not a "rag."

"You must be dreaming!" said Manners at last.

"You must have been mistaken," said Lowther. "Perhaps it wasn't Tom Merry at all. You may have mistaken somebody else for him."

"I'm not likely to do that."

"But—but—"

"We got him over the stile into the footpath to keep him out of sight, in case anybody should pass and see him. You know what it would mean if it were known here. He punched my nose, and bolted into the wood, and we lost him. We had to come back without him."

"He must have been fooling you!" said Lowther incredulously. "He was pulling your leg!"

"He smelt of spirits!"

"It's all rot!" said Lowther uneasily.

Figgins flushed.

"I don't mean I doubt your word, Figgy!" said Lowther. "But it must be a mistake. It can't have been Tom Merry—squiffy!"

"It was Tom Merry, and he was squiffy!"

"It will be all over the House now!" he said hopelessly.

"And it's all rot!" said Lowther savagely. "I suppose you mean well, Figgins, but you're talking rot!"

"Very well," said Figgins. "I told you, so that you can do your best for Tom Merry. It's up to you fellows to see that he doesn't get into trouble. That's all!"

And Figgins quitted the study.

Manners and Lowther looked at one another grimly.

"It can't be true!" said Manners.

Lowther shook his head.

"It's some rotten mistake, of course!" he said.

"All the same," said Manners, hesitatingly, "I—I think we may as well get down to the gate and wait for him there. Figgy believed what he said. Of course, it's a ghastly mistake, but—"



"You know it's true that Figgins saw Tom Merry the worse for drink," said Levison, "and—Ow!" The cad of the Fourth broke off as a potato, deftly hurled by Blake, caught him under the chin and burst into his collar. "Oh, you rotter! Yow!"

"Oh, rot!"

"I thought I'd warn you fellows, so that you can look for him as he comes in," said Figgins quietly. "Goodness knows what state he will come back in. If he's still squiffy, you must smuggle him into the dorm quietly—make out he's ill, or something. If the prefects see him, it will be all up!"

"I can't believe it!" said Manners. "I—" Manners broke off suddenly and wrenched open the study door.

Mellish of the Fourth almost fell into the study.

Manners, his face flaming with anger, kicked the sprawling junior, and Mellish roared.

"You cad!" shouted Manners.

"You've been listening!"

"Ow!" roared Mellish. "Ow!"

He squirmed out of the doorway into the passage, and picked himself up and fled.

Manners slammed the door.

"Come on!" said Lowther shortly.

The two Shell fellows went downstairs and slipped out into the quadrangle. Meanwhile, Mellish of the Fourth had gone to his study—with news!

CHAPTER 4.

Spreading the Scandal!

LEVISON of the Fourth and Jerrold Lumley-Lumley were in their study doing their preparation when Mellish came in.

The expression upon Percy Mellish's face attracted their attention at once.

"What's up?" asked Levison.

"Something rather thick!" said Mellish, with a chuckle. "I was just passing Tom Merry's study when I heard voices—"

"Anywhere near the keyhole?" asked Lumley-Lumley caustically.

"Mind your own business!" said the

cad of the Fourth, with a scowl. "I'm not talking to you, Lumley. Figgins was over here talking to Manners and Lowther in the study, and I couldn't help hearing."

Levison grinned. He knew just how much Mellish couldn't help hearing. The sneak of the Fourth was always playing the eavesdropper. It was his nature to!

"Well, what did you hear?" asked Lumley-Lumley gruffly. "Blessed if I like listening to this tattle. Get it over."

"You can get out of the study if you don't like to hear," suggested Levison.

"I guess I've got my prep to do, or I wouldn't stay here to enjoy the delights of your company!" growled Lumley-Lumley.

"Oh, go and eat coke! Get on with the washing, Mellish!"

"Figgys came to warn Manners and Lowther that he'd seen Tom Merry squiffy on the road outside—too tipsy to take care of himself!" said Mellish. "Squiffy! What do you think of that? Tom Merry, too—the chap who's always setting himself up as a shining example to us rotters! What?"

"It can't be true," said Levison.

"Figgins thought it was, and he was urging Lowther and Manners to get Tom Merry in quietly, as soon as he comes back, so that the prefects shan't stop him."

"I don't believe a word of it," said Lumley-Lumley. "I guess Figgys's off his rocker if he thinks anything of the sort!"

"I can't quite swallow it," said Levison. "He wouldn't be silly ass enough to be found like that. He's not a fool!"

"I suppose Figgins ought to know as he's seen him."

"Well, it's certainly queer."

"Let's go down to the gates and wait for him," said Mellish. "Manners and Lowther are going there, I think—and we may as well be on the scene. If Tom Merry comes home squiffy, he may want helping to the House—and I don't mind taking one leg!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Levison rose from the table, leaving his work quite cheerfully. To see Tom Merry in such a state and do his best to bring it to the notice of the prefects would be a real pleasure to the cad of the Fourth.

He left the study with Mellish. They called in the Shell passage for Crooke, and Crooke of the Shell, when he heard what was on, was as eager as either of the Fourth Formers.

"My hat! What a show-up for the Terrible Three if it's true!" grinned Crooke, with great enjoyment. "I'm afraid it's too good to be true, you fellows, but anyway, we'll be on the scene. Let's get a crowd there to see him, so that they can't hide it!"

"Good egg!"

And the cads of the School House lost no time in carrying out that amiable scheme.

Gore of the Shell and several other fellows joined them immediately they heard the story, scoffing at it for the most part, but very curious to see whether there was anything in it. Quite a little crowd of curious inquirers into Tom Merry's state came down the passage past Study No. 6, and it occurred to Levison to call for Blake & Co. of the Fourth. If Tom Merry had disgraced himself, it would be an added triumph to cause him to be seen by his friends at the time.

The chums of Study No. 6, Blake, Herries, Digby and D'Arcy, were having

their supper. They looked round as the door opened.

"Heard the news?" asked Levison.

"What news?" asked Blake, without showing much interest. Levison and Mellish were generally full of news, but it was not news that could be relied upon.

"You know Tom Merry's missed call-over?"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Hasn't the boundah come in yet? There will be a wow when he does."

"I fancy there will!" grinned Levison. "It's all over the place now—Figgins saw him on the road the worse for drink, and he can't walk home."

"What!"

"Gweat Scott!"

"We're going to wait for him at the gate, to help him into the House, so that the prefects won't see him," said Levison. "Of course, he ought to be sacked for disgracing St. Jim's in this way, but we're going to look after him, you know."

"You uttah wottah!" said D'Arcy. "I don't believe a word of it. I wegard you as a scandalmongahin' cad, Levison."

"It's Figgins that said so," said Levison, with a shrug of the shoulders. "If it's not true, you can put it down to Figgins."

"Wats!"

"We're not coming," said Blake shortly. "Get out of this study, or I'll come and kick you down the passage."

"Yaas, wathah! I wefuse to listen to backbitin' remarks about a fwiend," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy severely. "Get out, you wottah!"

"Oh, go to the dickens!" growled Levison. "You know it's true, and—Ow!" Levison broke off as a potato, deftly hurled by Jack Blake, caught him under the chin and burst into his collar.

"Oh, you rotter! Ow!"

"Have another?" asked Blake, raising his hand with a potato in it. Levison backed quickly out of the study and slammed the door with a slam that rang to the end of the passage. And the chums of the Fourth chuckled and went on with their supper. They did not believe a word of the story. Levison and Mellish always had some unpleasant story to tell about somebody, but this one seemed to Blake & Co. the most absurd the scandalmongers of the School House had ever invented.

Levison extracted the fragments of the potato from his collar the best he could, and the investigating party proceeded downstairs to the quad. They were stopped at the door of the School House by Kildare of the Sixth, the captain of St. Jim's.

"Time's up for going out of the House," said the St. Jim's captain. "Get in!"

"I say, Kildare, we're going down to the gates to meet Tom Merry," said Gore. "He hasn't come in yet, and we're expecting him."

"Oh, all right, then!" said Kildare, after a moment's consideration. "You can go."

And they went.

Manners and Lowther were already at the school gates. They looked round in the dusk of the quadrangle as the little crowd of juniors arrived.

"What do you want here?" demanded Lowther angrily.

"We've heard a yarn about Tom Merry," said Gore.

"Well, what's it got to do with you?" growled Lowther.

"Is it true, then?" asked Gore.

"Of course it isn't, fathead!"

"Well, I think there ought to be some witnesses when Tom Merry comes in,"

remarked Crooke. "If he's sober, we'll bear witness to it, and prove that there's nothing in the yarn. It's for Tom Merry's benefit to have us here."

"Yes, you've come for Tom Merry's benefit; I'm sure of that!" said Monty Lowther sarcastically.

"Well, we're stopping here, anyway," said Crooke. "We've got Kildare's leave to be out of the House, and we're going to see it through."

"Yes, rather!" said Levison.

Manners and Lowther turned their backs upon them. They were looking through the bars of the gate into the road, where the lamps upon the gateposts shed a bright light. The two Shell fellows did not speak again. They could not get rid of the curious crowd if the fellows chose to remain. And as the minutes of waiting passed, more fellows came and joined the waiting crowd. It was amazing how soon the rumour had spread that Tom Merry was expected to return to the school "squiffy."

"We shall have the whole blessed school here soon," said Lowther savagely, "and then the prefects will want to know what it's about, and they'll come on the scene."

"Well, what does it matter, if Tom Merry's not squiffy?" chuckled Crooke, who overheard the remark. "Blessed if I don't think you believe he is, Lowther!"

"Br-r-r!" said Lowther.

There was a step in the road at last, and a ring at the bell. The figure of a junior came into the light outside the gate. It was Tom Merry at last.

CHAPTER 5.

A Curious Reception!

TOM MERRY rang the bell and waited. He did not see the crowd within the gates in the gloom. Taggles, the porter, came growling out of his lodge with the keys in his hand.

Taggles did not like being disturbed by junior boys who had overstayed their time. The school porter stared at the crowd of waiting juniors in surprise.

"It's all right, Taggy," said Levison. "We're waiting for Tom Merry. He may want some help back to the House, and we're all going to lend a hand."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Taggles unlocked the gate.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Tom Merry, as he caught sight of the juniors.

"Hallo!" grinned Levison. "Catch him, Manners! Hold him up, Lowther! He'll be over in a minute!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry stared at Levison. The captain of the Shell was looking very red and flushed and out of breath. He looked as if he had been running, but some of the juniors chose to attribute the flush in his cheeks to another cause.

"Squiffy, right enough!" said Crooke.

"Drunk as a giddy lord!" said Mellish.

"Horrible example to us bad boys!" said Levison. "What shall we do for a shining light now?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What on earth are you silly asses gassing about?" demanded Tom Merry. "Is it a joke?"

"Jolly serious joke for you if the prefects drop on you," said Crooke, with a chuckle. "Get him into the House, quick, you fellows. I saw Knox in the quad as we came out, and he'll be down on him like a ton of bricks."

"Yes, rather!"

"Have you all gone dotty?" asked Tom Merry. "What's the matter?"

Manners and Lowther were looking at him queerly. They drew up on either side of him, to walk back to the School House with him.

"Help him!" exclaimed Levison. "Let's get him into the House. Lend a hand, all of you."

There was a rush for Tom Merry. "Hands off!" shouted the Shell fellow. "What are you up to? I don't want any help!"

He shoved Levison back roughly.

"He's quarrelsome drunk," said Levison. "But we're going to stand by him."

"Drunk?" repeated Tom Merry.

"What on earth are you talking about?"

"Oh, come, don't play the innocent!"

urged Levison. "We know all about it."

Figgins saw you on the road, reeling and staggering."

"Figgins!"

"Yes. You were so tight you didn't know him!" chuckled Mellish.

Tom Merry took a step towards Mellish, and his right arm shot out.

His fist crashed in Mellish's face, and the cad of the Fourth dropped as if he had been shot.

Tom Merry's eyes blazed at the juniors.

"Anybody else want the same?" he demanded. "If that's a joke, I don't like that kind of joke!"

"Oh!" groaned Mellish, on the ground. "Ow! Collar him, you chaps! He's fighting drunk!"

"Hold him!" shouted Crooke.

"Stand back, you rotters!" exclaimed Lowther.

But they did not stand back. Five or six fellows caught hold of Tom Merry, and he hit out angrily. Lowther and Manners backed him up, and in a moment there was a wild and whirling combat going on. The Terrible Three stood shoulder to shoulder, and fought their way through, and marched on to the School House, leaving four or five combatants gasping on the ground.

Levison picked himself up, with his hand to his eye. He blinked out of the other eye and groaned:

"Ow, ow! I shall have a black eye in the morning! Ow!"

"Groogh!" groaned Mellish. "My nose is swelling! Yow! I'm hurt!"

"I believe half my teeth are loose!" said Crooke savagely.

"I've got a black eye," said Gore.

"The beast was drunk; there's no doubt about that!"

"Bosh!" said Reilly of the Fourth.

"He was wild at being called squiffy, and it serves you right if you've got hurt, ye spalpeen!"

"He was all right," said Kangaroo of the Shell. "And if he hadn't given you a black eye, Gore, I'd have given you a thick ear!"

Gore ground his teeth.

"You all saw that he was squiffy and he came home fighting and quarrelling," he said. "Figgins was telling the truth!"

"I don't believe Figgins said anything of the sort!" said Kangaroo.

"It's true!" growled Mellish.

"Rats!"

And the juniors followed the Terrible Three to the House, warmly discussing the question as to whether Tom Merry was or was not "squiffy." Whether his outbreak of temper was due to drink, or to a natural anger at an insulting accusation, was a question every fellow had to answer for himself, and the way they answered it depended upon their feelings towards Tom Merry.

Meanwhile, the Terrible Three had reached the School House, and Manners and Lowther hurried Tom Merry

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upstairs, their arms linked in his. Tom attempted to stop on the stairs.

"I'd better report myself to Mr. Railton," he said. "He won't know I've come in."

"I'll tell him," said Lowther hurriedly. "Come up to the dorm."

"The dorm," repeated Tom Merry, in surprise, giving way as his chums hurried him up the stairs. "Why not the study? I'm hungry!"

"I'll get you something in the dorm."

"But what—" Tom Merry attempted to stop on the second flight of stairs, but his chums rushed him on.

"Come on!" said Manners.

And they took him into the Shell dormitory. Manners turned the light on, and then they looked at Tom Merry's flushed face. Tom Merry met their gaze with astonishment and rising exasperation.

"What on earth is the matter?" he asked.

"You're all right?" asked Lowther doubtfully.

"All right? Of course I'm all right! What do you mean?"

"There isn't any niff of spirits, anyway," said Manners. "Figgins was mistaken in that, Lowther."

"What makes you so red?" asked Lowther.

"I've been running. I ran all the way from Rylcombe," said Tom Merry. "I was jolly late!"

"Where have you been?"

Tom Merry's frowning face broke into a smile.

"I had a regular scamper on Patty Wynn's gee-gee," he said. "I took him round Wayland Moor, and right over past Abbotsford. Then he fell lame. Of course, I had n't foreseen that. I had to walk back leading

him, I couldn't ride the poor beast when he was lame. I took him back to the stable—I knew where Patty had hired him—and then I ran back all the way to St. Jim's. I'm pretty fagged, I can tell you, and jolly hungry!"

"You didn't meet Figgins & Co.?"

"No. I lost sight of them near Rylcombe, soon after I started. I gave them a run down the lane after me," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"And you didn't see them afterwards?"

"No. They've come in, surely?" said Tom Merry. "I had an idea that they would wait about to catch me coming back; but they wouldn't wait all this time."

"They came in long ago," said Lowther, "and Figgins came over to see us. He said—"

Monty Lowther paused.

Tom Merry started.

"You don't mean to say that Figgins really said what those cads were saying at the gate?" he asked.

"Yes. He came over to tell us, and Mellish was listening at the door. That's how it got out," explained Lowther.

"Figgins said so!" exclaimed Tom Merry dazedly. "Figgins! But Figgins isn't a cad—he must have been dreaming! He said he met me?"

"Yes; and that you were so tipsy you didn't know him!"

"He's dotty!" said Tom Merry, with anger. "But, dotty or not, he's not going to tell a yarn like that about me! I'll go over to the New House—"

"Hold on!" said Lowther, catching Tom Merry by the shoulder, as he swung towards the door. "You can't go over to the New House now; it's too late!"

"But if Figgins said—"

"He believed it," said Lowther. "I told him there must be some mistake, but he believed it."

"And you believe it, too?" demanded Tom Merry indignantly. "Is that what you call sticking to a pal?"

Manners and Lowther flushed uncomfortably.

"We didn't believe it," said Lowther haltingly. "If it had been any fellow but Figgins who said so, we—we shouldn't have taken any notice. But you know Figgins isn't a liar, and he believed it. He came over to warn us to look after you, so that you wouldn't be caught by a prefect. He meant well—"

"And you came down to the gates to carry me in?" said Tom Merry sarcastically. "Thanks! If ever I come

(Continued on the next page.)

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home tipsy, I shall know that I can rely on you now!"

"You needn't get ratty about it!" said Lowther tartly. "We simply didn't know what to think, and we came down to meet you in—case there was anything in it. But, of course, we didn't believe it!"

"Figgins must have been dreaming," said Manners. "He was in earnest, too. And he wouldn't have imagined that he met you, would he?"

"I don't see how he could," said Tom Merry. "We've had lots of rows with Figgins, but I shouldn't like to believe that he was taking this kind of way to get even. It wouldn't be like him—as we've known him."

"It's some ghastly mistake," said Lowther. "I don't see how it came about—but it's a mistake, somehow. Better come down now and let the fellows see you're all right."

"So that's why you brought me up here!" said Tom Merry angrily. "You thought I was tipsy, and wanted to hide me."

"We thought it best—"

"I suppose it would have been best, if I was that kind of chap," said Tom. "But I think you might wait a bit before you treat me as a blackguard."

"Well, you see—" stammered Lowther. "If there'd been anything in it—"

"Oh, rot! You ought to have known there was nothing in it. Do you think I'd believe a tale like that about you?" demanded Tom Merry.

"If it had been anybody but Figgins—"

"Oh, blow Figgins! I'll jolly well talk to him in the morning about this!" said Tom Merry wrathfully. "I understand now what that crowd was there for—and they'll say that the yarn was true, as I knocked Mellish down. Figgins must be dotty. He was always a silly ass, but he seems to be quite dotty now."

"But—but he said Kerr and Wynn were with him, and they helped you over the stile, and you bolted into the wood—"

"Are they all gone mad?" exclaimed

Tom Merry, in utter amazement. "Do you mean to say that Kerr and Wynn tell the same tale?"

"We haven't seen them—but Figgins says so—"

"They can't all be mistaken," said Tom Merry, setting his lips. "Figgins may have dreamed it—but three of them couldn't dream it. If the three of them tell the same story, there's only one explanation—and that is that it's a plot, and we've been mistaken in them. It's a rotten plot that Levison or Mellish may have thought of; but we'd never have believed it of Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn. But it's all lies from beginning to end—I didn't meet them. They didn't help me into the wood—and I haven't been in the wood to-day at all! That's plain enough, isn't it?"

"Yes, that's plain enough," said Lowther with a short laugh. "I don't understand it, that's all!"

"You believe me, I suppose?" snapped Tom Merry. The usually sunny temper of the Shell fellow seemed to be failing him now.

"Of course I believe you!" said Lowther, in a curt voice. "But what I believe is, I can't believe that Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn would make up a scandal about a fellow. It's altogether too thick!"

"It seems a bit too steep," said Manners, with a shake of his head.

"Either Figgins or I must be speaking falsely," said Tom Merry, after a pause. "There's no two ways about it. He says something happened—and I say it didn't happen!"

"I give it up," said Lowther.

"I'll see Figgins first thing in the morning," said Tom Merry, between his teeth. "There's got to be an explanation of this!"

"Let it rest till then."

Tom Merry nodded, and the chums of the Shell quitted the dormitory. Tom Merry's face was pale now with anger; and Manners and Lowther were lost in amazement. They could not but believe in Tom Merry's categorical denial. It was impossible to doubt their chum's word. But—to believe that three

fellows like Figgins & Co. had deliberately made up a wretched tale about their chum—that was too staggering. Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn were the deadly rivals of the school House fellows; but they were open and honest as the day—the very last fellows in the world to invent or to repeat anything in the shape of a scandal. Lowther and Manners simply did not know what to think. It was a dilemma from which there seemed to be no escape.

The Terrible Three went downstairs, and Tom Merry left his chums to report his return to Mr. Railton, and to explain how he had been delayed, and he was let off with a light imposition.

But for the rest of that evening, Tom Merry's face wore a clouded expression. The scandal worried him. It was a tit-bit for his enemies in the House, and it was not likely to die down if they could help it.

Tom Merry went to bed in grim silence that night, and he did not join in the usual chatter before the juniors went to sleep. He saw Gore and Crooke whispering together, and he knew he was the subject of their whispers.

He was the last asleep in the dormitory; he lay long awake, thinking of what Figgins had said. He would have an explanation with Figgins in the morning—and he was very anxious for that explanation to come!

CHAPTER 6.

Face to Face!

"FIGGINS!"

Figgins halted, and flushed. It was nearly time for morning lessons, and Figgins & Co. were coming into the wide, flagged Form-room passage, with some more of the Fourth.

Tom Merry stepped in his way as he came in, and Figgins stopped. The look in the Shell fellow's face showed that there was trouble to come.

Lowther and Manners were near Tom Merry; Kerr and Wynn drew closer to their leader at once.

"Hallo!" said Figgins.

"I want you to explain what you told Lowther and Manners about me last night!" said Tom Merry, with a glow of suppressed anger in his eyes.

Figgins' flush deepened.

"I don't want to talk about it," he said.

"I dare say you don't!" said Tom Merry, his lip curling. "A fellow who's told a yarn like that about another chap isn't likely to want to hear of it again!"

"I don't understand you," said Figgins. "I didn't tell that to Manners and Lowther as a yarn about you. I wanted them to look after you when you came in."

"Why should you want them to look after me when I came in?"

"You know why, surely!"

"I know the reason you gave," said Tom Merry.

"Well, then—"

"But it wasn't true."

Figgins looked at him steadily.

"I don't know what made you do Tom Merry," he said. "But it's true, and you know it. You didn't know me when I met you, but you must remember it now. Kerr and Wynn were both there."

"That's so," said Kerr. "We don't want to talk about it, Tom Merry. We only interfered to help you."

"That's all," said Fatty Wynn.

"Are you mad?" said Tom Merry, between his teeth. "You never got

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me over the stile. What time was it?"

"Between half-past seven and eight," said Figgins.

"I didn't get back to Rylcombe from Abbotsford till half-past eight," said Tom Merry. "And then I ran all the way from the village to St. Jim's, after I had taken the horse back."

Figgins & Co. stared at him blankly. "What do you mean?" asked Figgins.

"I mean what I say!"

"You—you deny that you met us in the lane?"

"Yes, totally."

There was a long pause.

"Very well," said Figgins, at last, with a deep breath. "Let it go at that. It was a—mistake."

The bell rang for classes, and there was no time for more. Several fellows who had gathered round to hear what was said exchanged significant glances as they went into the Form-rooms.

Blake nudged Figgins as they took their places in the Fourth.

"Did you say it was a mistake, Figgy?" he asked.

"No. I said it could go at that," said Figgins shortly.

"You mean you don't want to say anything more about it?" asked Blake. "Exactly!"

"Tom Merry won't let it rest there."

"He'll have to!" said Figgins curtly. And the matter dropped. But Figgins wore a worried look during morning lessons.

He knew that there was more trouble to come. Tom Merry had taken the line of denying the whole story; and Figgins had either to let the denial pass, thus admitting that he had not spoken the truth, or else to take up the position of an accuser. Neither course was a pleasant one.

When morning lessons were over, Figgins went out into the quadrangle. A good many fellows kept their eyes on him, for they knew that his meeting with Tom Merry would not be long delayed.

The Shell was released soon after. Tom Merry looked for Figgins at once. He spotted him in the quadrangle.

"Here comes the giddy toper," murmured Fatty Wynn, as Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther bore down upon the New House Co.

"Let him come," said Figgins.

Tom Merry halted directly in front of the trio.

"I suppose you know that that matter can't rest where it is, Figgins," he said abruptly.

"It's just as you like," said Figgins. "I don't want to say anything about it. Not a word would have been known if Mellish hadn't spied on us and listened. I hadn't any intention of accusing you. I was acting like a friend."

"Ripping kind of friend to make an accusation like that," said Tom Merry. "I don't want it kept a secret. If it is true, I should deserve to be kicked out of the school!"

Figgins' lip curled.

"Do you want to jaw it over before all these fellows?" he asked.

"The more the better," said Tom Merry. "It's being jawed all over the School House; and I want the fellows to know the facts."

"They know the facts already," said Figgins.

Tom Merry compressed his lips.

"You say that you met me in the lane yesterday evening before eight

o'clock, and that I had been drinking?" he demanded.

"Yes."

"Now I tell you that the horse fell lame near Abbotsford, and that I had to walk him home," said Tom Merry. "It was half an hour later than that time when I came through the lane, and I was running all the way, and didn't stop till I got to St. Jim's."

Figgins was silent.

"Do you admit that that's true?" asked Tom Merry.

"How can I?" said Figgins. "I know I met you, and that settles it. Kerr and Wynn were with me at the same time."

"You two fellows say the same?" asked Tom Merry, fixing his eyes upon the Co.

"Yes," said Kerr and Wynn together.

"You say that you met me in the lane, and I was the worse for drink?"

HE'D TOUCHED HIS TOE!



Dentist: "There's no need to make all that fuss, sir. Why, I haven't touched your tooth yet!"

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"We don't want to say anything about that."

"Why not let the matter drop?" urged Figgins.

"I'm not likely to let a slander drop."

"A what?" said Figgins.

"Slander," said Tom Merry. "Don't you like the word?"

Figgins clenched his hands.

"You dare to call me a slanderer?" he said, between his teeth.

"I can't call you anything else. It may be possible that you met somebody who looked like me, and made a mistake in the dusk."

"If it was somebody else, he was your twin," said Figgins. "That's all rot! I suppose I know your face by this time."

"Then," said Tom Merry, raising his voice, "you say that it was I, and that I have told a lie in saying that I was at Abbotsford?"

"I don't want to say anything about it," said Figgins.

"You've got to say something about it," retorted Tom Merry sharply.

"You've got to back up your accusation, or admit that you were lying."

"I'm not likely to admit that I was

lying, when I was telling the truth," said Figgins, his anger rising now. "If you want it out before all the school, you can have it. We met you in the lane, and you were reeling and staggering, and couldn't walk straight, and you smelt of spirits. We got you over the stile to keep you out of sight, and then you dodged us in the wood, so we had to come back without you. I came over to tell Manners and Lowther so that they could take care of you. That's all."

There was a pause, and all eyes were on Tom Merry. Figgins had spoken directly enough now; he had not minced his words this time.

And Tom Merry's answer came just as directly.

"It's a lie!"

"You call me a liar, then?" said Figgins.

"Yes."

"And Kerr and Wynn, too—all three of us?"

"If you all tell the same yarn—yes."

"We all tell the same yarn," said Kerr quietly.

"Then you are three liars!"

Tom Merry's hands were clenched—and Figgins was pushing back his cuffs. Monty Lowther and Manners caught hold of their chum, and Redfern of the Fourth grasped Figgins by the shoulder.

"Let me go, Reddy!" roared Figgins.

Redfern tightened his grip.

"You're not going to fight here, under the giddy windows," he said. "If you want a mill, you can come round to the old chapel."

"I'm ready!" said Tom Merry. "No fellow shall say that I was tipsy without standing up to me afterwards!"

"I'm ready to stand up to you, you squiffy cad!" said Figgins disdainfully.

"Then come along!" said Tom Merry.

And the whole crowd moved off in the direction of the old chapel of St. Jim's. On the secluded grass plot behind the chapel, little troubles were often thrashed out by the juniors, secure from the interference of prefects.

CHAPTER 7.

A Battle Royal!

TOM MERRY strode away towards the old chapel, looking straight before him, careless whether the crowd followed or not, and careless of what they thought.

Looking at him, at his angry face and gleaming blue eyes, it was impossible to think that he had lied—that he was about to fight in a wrong cause. And yet Figgins' face was equally angry—equally sincere and earnest. Was there some strange mistake—some mystery which none of the juniors could fathom? How could Figgins & Co. have mistaken a stranger for a fellow they knew so well? It was incredible; and yet, if Figgins & Co.'s story were true, Tom Merry was far from being the kind of fellow his friends had always supposed him. It was a problem that seemed to be without a solution, and most of the fellows did not know what to think. Most of the School House fellows were inclined to back up Tom Merry, while Figgins, of course, had the following of his own House. In the absence of certain proof on either side, the fellows could only decide according to how they felt on the matter—Figgins' friends for Figgy, and Tom Merry's friends for Tom Merry.

"I'm afraid we've been wathah deceived in Figgins, deah boys,"

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Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked as they walked with the crowd round the School House. "I've always regarded him as vewy decent, but I suppose it's pvetly clear that this stowey isn't twue." Blake nodded.

"It can't be true," he said. "But I hope it's only a mistake."

"But how could Figgins be mistaken?" said Digby.

Blake gave a hopeless shrug of the shoulders.

"Oh, don't ask me!" he said. "It beats me!"

"Yaas, I feah we have no wescource but to wegard Figgy as a wottah," said D'Arcy, with a mournful shake of the head.

Kerr caught the words, and he swung round towards the swell of the School House with flashing eyes.

"What's that?" he demanded.

"Nothin', deah boy."

"I heard what you said."

"Did you weally?" said D'Arcy, jamming his eyeglass into his eye with a haughty gesture. "Vewy well, what then?"

"You're a cad, that's what then!" said Kerr hotly. "Figgins has told the truth, and Wynn and I are witnesses to it!"

D'Arcy shook his head.

"I am afraid you have not told the twuth, deah boy!"

"Liar!"

"You uttah wottah! I shall give you a feahful thwashin' if you have the awful cheek to chawactewise me as a liah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly.

"I'm ready!" said Kerr.

"Bai Jove! Hold my jacket, Blake, and—"

Jack Blake pushed the excited swell of St. Jim's aside.

"You can leave this to me, Gussy!" he said. "I'll tackle Kerr, as he's got such a lot to say for himself!"

"I don't care which it is!" said Kerr scornfully. "I could lick anybody in Study No. 6—and I'll take you all on in turn, if you like!"

"You can leave one of them to me!" said Fatty Wynn, whose Welsh blood was at boiling point now. "I'll wallop one of the cads!"

"I'm your man," said Herries promptly.

The crowd had stopped now on the grass plot behind the chapel. Trees and buildings screened them from the view of the House. Wally & Co. of the Third Form had already taken possession of the chapel rails, and were waiting in a row on the top rail to see the fun—as they considered it. The crowd of juniors formed a ring for the combatants.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy carefully took off his elegant Eton jacket and folded it as carefully, and then removed his eyeglass. Blake tapped him on the chest.

"Get out, Gussy!" he said.

"Weally, Blake—"

"You're going to leave this to me."

"I wefuse to do anything of the sort!" said D'Arcy indignantly.

Kerr snorted.

"Look here, Gussy—"

"Look here, Blake—"

"Clear off, both of you," said Kangaroo of the Shell. "One fight at a time!"

"Rats!" said Kerr. "I'm going to lick one of them. I don't care which!"

"So am I!" said Fatty Wynn.

"Nobody's going to call Figgy names while I'm around, I can tell you that!"

"Weally, Wynn—"

"Shut up!" said Fatty Wynn. "I'm

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sick of you School House gas-bags! You're all jaw, and nothing else. Why don't you come on, some of you!"

"I'm coming on, you rotter!" roared Herries.

"Well, I'm ready!"

And Herries and Fatty Wynn were hammering one another in a moment more. Kerr and Jack Blake faced one another and started, and Digby dragged the indignant Arthur Augustus D'Arcy back.

"Leave it to Blake, Gussy," he said. "Blake will lick him. You don't want a black eye to show Cousin Ethel when she comes on Wednesday."

"Bai Jove, I nevah thought of that! Pewwaps I had better leave it to Blake." Arthur Augustus assented thoughtfully. "Howevah, I will second him, and give him some tips ffrom my expewience."

"Hear, hear!" grinned Digby.

Meanwhile, Tom Merry and Figgins had removed their jackets, and rolled up their sleeves. Both of them were bitterly angry, and it was evident that the fight would be a hard one.

"Are you going to have rounds?" asked Kangaroo. "I'll keep time, if you like."

"Oh, bother rounds!" said Tom Merry.

"I don't care, either way!" growled Figgins. "I know I'm going to lick that tipsy loafer, and that's all!"

"Come on!" said Tom Merry, between his teeth.

And they started.

The crowd round looked on with eager interest. Three fights at once was a decidedly unusual sight—and very interesting to the spectators. And there really was not much choice between the combatants—they were all athletic, and in the pink of condition. Fatty Wynn was certainly very plump, but he was active enough, and unusually strong for his age. Figgins and Tom Merry were very evenly matched, and both were so exasperated that they would certainly fight as long as they could stand.

Tom Merry had the advantage at first. He attacked fiercely, and drove Figgins back, and the New House junior was floored by a terrific right-bander.

"Time!" called out Redfern.

Tom Merry stepped back.

Figgins staggered to his feet.

"You can take a rest if you want one, rounds or not!" said Tom Merry.

"I don't want a rest, hang you!"

"Then come on!"

And they were at it again in a second.

"Go it, ye cripples!" sang out Wally from the railing of the chapel green.

"Buck up, Blake, deah boy! Twy the uppah cut!"

"Pile in, Kerr!"

"Put your beef into it, Fatty!"

"Buck up, New House!"

"Go it, School House!"

"Sure, and I'm not going to look on at an illegant fight without having a hand in it!" exclaimed Reilly of the Fourth. "Redfern, you howling ass, you're a boulder—you're a worm—you're a New House spalpeen! Come on!"

"You silly ass!" roared Redfern.

"What do you want to fight me for?" Reilly squared up to him.

"Sure, it's the School House that's Cock House of St. Jim's, and if ye say it's not, you're a liar!"

"Come on, then, you fathead!" said Redfern. "The New House is Cock House of St. Jim's, and the School House is a home for inebriates!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the New House fellows.

"Inebriates, is it?" yelled Reilly. "I'll inebriate ye entirely!"

And he rushed at Redfern, and clasped him round the neck; and the next moment Reilly had his head in chancery, and they fought with terrific vim.

By this time the fighting was furious, and blood was flowing freely from noses and lips. And the feeling of combativeness spread among the juniors, and they exchanged jeers and catcalls and derisive yells, and more and more of them proceeded from words to blows, till the scene behind the old chapel resembled a battle royal.

It was School House against New House, and very few of the juniors were averse to settling the old feud once more.

The shouting, yelling, and trampling of the free fights made a terrific din; and it was not likely that it would pass unnoticed for long, even in that secluded spot.

There was a sudden yell from Wally:

"Cave! Here comes Linton!"

Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, came hurrying round the School House towards the scene of the combat, his gown flying behind him in the wind.

"Cave!"

"Hook it!"

Most of the combatants separated at once and fled in various directions, scattering among the trees, or scurrying round the chapel, hoping to escape unnoticed—though most of them carried signs by which they might have been recognised afterwards as participators in the combat.

But Tom Merry and Figgins did not separate. They did not even see the master of the Shell; and they were hammering each other furiously when Mr. Linton arrived.

"Merry! Figgins! Stop this disgraceful scene at once!" almost shouted the Form-master.

Thud!

Tom Merry's fist crashed into Figgins' face even as Mr. Linton spoke, and Figgins fell, rolling with a gasp at the feet of the Form-master.

CHAPTER 8.

Rough on Figgins!

"MERRY, how dare you!"

Tom Merry panted.

"I—I beg your pardon, sir! I didn't see you."

Figgins sat up dazedly.

It was difficult to tell which of the juniors had had the worst of the unfinished combat. Both of them looked decidedly the worse for wear.

"Ow!" mumbled Figgins. "Ow!"

"Get up, Figgins!" said Mr. Linton sternly.

Figgins staggered to his feet.

"This is perfectly disgraceful!" said Mr. Linton.

The juniors were silent save for their hard breathing. They had nothing to say.

"A fight with gloves on would not be so—so reprehensible," said the Form-master. "But this is simply disgraceful! Figgins, as you are not in my Form, I shall report you to your House-master. Merry, you will follow me to my study!"

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry.

Tom Merry put on his jacket, and followed Mr. Linton.

When they had gone, Kerr and Fatty Wynn came round from behind the chapel wall and rejoined Figgins.

"Unfinished match, after all," said Fatty Wynn, with doleful humour.

"What did Linton say to you, Figgins?"



"Merry! Figgins! Stop this disgraceful scene at once!" exclaimed Mr. Linton. Thud! Tom Merry's fist crashed into Figgins' face even as the Form-master spoke, and Figgins fell, rolling with a gasp at the feet of Mr. Linton.

"He's going to report me to Ratty!" "This is what comes of trying to do that School House rotter a good turn," said Kerr, as they walked away towards the New House. "If we'd left him to get caught by a prefect we shouldn't have had all this trouble."

"He can look after himself the next time he gets squiffy!" grunted Fatty Wynn.

"I'd never have believed it of him," said Figgins slowly. "The awful nerve to stand up before all the fellows and tell a whopper like that—a deliberate whopper! I was willing to let the matter drop, and say nothing more about it; but he wasn't satisfied with that. He wanted me to tell a lie, and eat my words. The awful cheek!"

"Oh, I've done with him!" said Kerr. The three juniors went up to their dormitory in the New House, and bathed their injuries. In spite of all his care, Figgins was looking very battered when he came down. One of his eyes was discoloured, his nose was swollen and red, and his lip was cut.

Monteith of the Sixth, the head prefect of the New House, met the juniors as they came downstairs. He looked queerly at the marked countenances of the trio.

"Mr. Ratcliff wants to see you in his study, Figgins," he said. "Mr. Linton has been over here from the School House with a complaint about you."

"All right," said Figgins. "You seem to have been going it strong, by the look of you," said Monteith. "What is it—some more of your blessed House rows?"

"Something of that sort," said Figgins. And he made his way to Mr. Ratcliff's study.

Mr. Ratcliff, the Housemaster of the New House, was waiting for him with a cane on the table. Mr. Ratcliff was never in danger of spoiling the pupil by sparing the rod. He had taken out his stoutest cane for the benefit of Figgins, and his looks showed the junior that he was "in for it."

Mr. Ratcliff stared hard at Figgins' disfigured face.

"You have been fighting with Merry of the School House, Figgins?" he said.

"Yes, sir."

"A most disgraceful scene, Mr. Linton tells me."

Figgins was silent.

"Mr. Linton informs me that he has severely caned Merry," said Mr. Ratcliff. "It is my duty to do the same to you, Figgins."

"Yes, sir."

"I must say that you seem to have carried ruffianism to an unusual extent, even for the most unruly junior in the House," said Mr. Ratcliff.

Figgins was silent.

"You will hold out your hand, Figgins."

Figgins obeyed.

Mr. Ratcliff gave him four on each hand, and Figgins set his teeth tight to keep back the cry of pain that rose to his lips.

"You may go, Figgins," said Mr. Ratcliff. "If there is any renewal of this ruffianism, I shall punish you more severely."

Figgins left the study without a word.

Kerr and Wynn were waiting for him in the passage, and they took him up to his own study, where Figgins sat down for some minutes in silence, waiting for the stinging pain in his palms to pass off. He was very white now.

"Better?" asked Kerr sympathetically, as Figgins made a movement at last.

"Yes," said Figgins, with a deep breath. "Ratty laid it on hard. I don't think Tom Merry had it quite so bad from Linton. Never mind; it's all in the day's work."

"It's beastly hard lines!" said Kerr.

"We'll take it out of the School House rotters somehow! I must say I never thought we should get on terms like this with Tom Merry, though. Shows how you can be mistaken in a fellow."

Figgins nodded.

"It's rotten!" he said. "All his House will be backing him up, of course!"

"Of course!"

"You've been fighting with Study No. 6 yourself?"

Kerr grinned.

"Yes. Blake had a round or two with me."

"It's simply rotten for all this to happen now," said Figgins. "You know D'Arcy's cousin is coming on a visit here."

"Cousin Ethel," said Kerr, with a nod.

"Yes. It's rotten that we should be on fighting terms with Study No. 6 when Cousin Ethel is coming here."

"Very rotten," agreed Kerr. "I suppose they won't tell her anything about it?"

"No. But—but we can't go over to the School House. I suppose we shan't see her this time?" said Figgins.

"I suppose not," agreed Kerr.

Figgins was looking very thoughtful and glum when he went down to dinner. Figgins took a very great interest in D'Arcy's Cousin Ethel. Indeed, Arthur Augustus had often declared that Figgins seemed to regard Ethel as his cousin, and not D'Arcy's at all. But it was clear that what had happened would not be without effect upon Figgins' friendship with Cousin Ethel. The pleasant little tea-parties in Study No. 6 were evidently over.

When the New House trio turned up in the Form-room for afternoon lessons, they met Blake, Herries, Digby and D'Arcy there. The chums of Study No. 6 elaborately took no notice of them. Figgins hesitated for a moment, and then he came over to them as they were going to their places.

"I say, you chaps," said Figgins awkwardly. "I hope you're not going to mix yourselves up in my row with Tom Merry. It really doesn't concern you fellows, you know."

Blake looked at him straight in the face.

"We back up our own House," he said.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"This isn't a House affair," said Figgins. "It's just a bit of trouble between Tom Merry and me. No need for other fellows to take it up."

Blake laughed shortly.

"Kerr and Wynn have taken it up, and most of the New House chaps," he said. "It's no good, Figgins. If you make an accusation like that against a School House chap, and a friend of ours, it's up against us, too."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I didn't make an accusation," said Figgins. "I was chipping in for Tom Merry's sake. I wanted to do him a good turn."

"You mean that you still stick to your yarn?" asked Herries.

Figgins flushed.

"Of course I do! It's true!"

Blake shook his head.

"You tell one tale and Tom Merry tells another. We stand by Tom Merry. You can't both be telling the truth, that's certain!"

"I was telling the truth, and Tom Merry was telling lies!" said Figgins hotly.

"Well, that isn't how we look at it, that's all."

Mr. Latham came into the Form-room, and the Fourth Formers took their places, and the talk ceased. One thing was clear to Figgins—he had Study No. 6 against him as well as Tom Merry & Co. They had taken sides in the dispute, and it was natural enough that they should back up a School House fellow. Figgins sat through the lesson that afternoon with a glum face and an unusual bitterness in his heart, and his anger against Tom Merry did not leave him for a moment.

CHAPTER 9.

Crooke Eats His Words!

TOM MERRY was feeling as "rotten" as Figgins as he went in to lessons in the Shell Form Room that afternoon.

He was feeling the reaction after the excitement of the fight, and he was troubled, too, by the shadow of the charge against him—the shadow of disgrace.

Figgins was backed up heartily by all the New House fellows, but the same was not the case with Tom Merry in the School House.

Levison, Mellish, Crooke, and Gore and their set had taken the view that Figgins' statement was true, and they declared that they were entitled to their opinion. Many other fellows were doubtful on the subject. The worst of it was that there was no prospect of clearing the matter up.

Tom Merry could call no witnesses to prove his story of having had to walk home with the lame horse from Abbotsford, and, naturally enough, many fellows said that Figgins' word was as good as Tom Merry's. There were many circumstances, too, on Figgins' side. He had not accused the Shell fellow. He had told Manners and Lowther quietly, and the story would never have got out but for Mellish's listening at the door. If Figgins was slandering the School House fellow, that was not the way he would have set about it. That was a strong point in Figgins' favour.

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Tom Merry was puzzled and worried. As he took his place in the Form, his eyes fell on a paper pinned on his desk. He started and his face flushed.

There was one word written on the paper, in large letters daubed with a brush:

"PUB-HAUNTER!"

Tom Merry's eyes blazed.

He looked round the Form and caught a grin upon the face of Crooke. He did not need further evidence of the authorship of the insult.

He rose to his feet, with the intention of taking vengeance upon Crooke there and then, but Lowther dragged him down again.

"What's the matter, Tom?" he whispered.

"Look at that!" said Tom Merry angrily.

Lowther nodded.

"I saw it!" he said.

"It was Crooke put it there!" said Tom Merry.

"I dare say it was, but you can't punch his head here," urged Lowther. "You'll have old Linton down on you in a second. Cheese it!"

Mr. Linton looked round sharply.

"You were talking, Lowther," he said. "Take fifty lines!"

"Oh!" murmured Lowther.

Tom Merry kept his place; it was hardly feasible to go for Crooke there and then. He waited until lessons were over. When the Shell were dismissed, Tom Merry left the Form-room with the slip of paper in his hand, crumpled in his palm, and he looked out for Crooke.

Crooke was moving very quickly, but Tom Merry overtook him in the passage. "Hold on a minute, Crooke!" he said quietly.

"Sorry!" said Crooke. "I'm in a hurry!"

Tom Merry caught him by the shoulder.

"Stop!" he said.

"Hands off, you tipsy rotter!" said Crooke, facing round.

"Hallo! Have you been drinking again, Tom Merry?" called out Gore.

Tom Merry's teeth came hard together. Some of the Shell fellows chuckled—especially the New House members of the Form.

"Did you write this paper and put it on my desk, Crooke?" said Tom Merry quietly.

"Yes, I did!" growled Crooke. "You're a pub-haunter, and I've called you one. That's all there is about it!"

"That isn't quite all!" said Tom Merry grimly. "You are a liar, Crooke, and you're going to eat your words. See?"

"I—"

Tom Merry held out the paper. "You're going to eat that!" he said. Crooke backed away.

"I—I jolly well won't!" he exclaimed. "Look here—"

"Enough said!"

Tom Merry grasped the cad of the Shell. Crooke struggled and yelled, but he had no chance in the iron grip of the athletic captain of the Shell. Tom Merry passed his left arm round Crooke's neck and forced his head back, and as the cad of the Shell opened his mouth to roar for help, Tom Merry jammed the inky paper into it.

"Groogh!" spluttered Crooke.

"Get it down!" said Tom Merry.

"Groogh! Ow! Ow! Help! Rescue!"

George Gore made a movement forward, and so did Monty Lowther, and Gore changed his mind and backed away again.

Tom Merry held Crooke's chin in an

iron grip, and closed his mouth upon the paper.

Crooke glared at him helplessly.

"Lemme go!" he mumbled. "You beast! Ow!"

"I'll let you go when you've eaten it!" said Tom Merry.

"Groogh!"

"File in, Crooke!" grinned Monty Lowther. "Take it like a pill."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Crooke writhed in anguish in the hard grasp of the Shell captain. There was no escape for him; and he made an effort and masticated the inky paper and swallowed it.

"Got it down?"

"Groogh! Yes!"

Tom Merry released him.

"That's going to happen every time I find anything of the sort on my desk," he said. "I tell you that as a warning!"

"Ow! Ow!" gasped Crooke, and he slunk away.

"I don't think you'll find any more papers on your desk, Tom," grinned Monty Lowther, as the Terrible Three strolled out into the quadrangle.

Tom Merry laughed.

"Not from Crooke, at all events," he said.

The Fourth Formers were coming out. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came across to Tom Merry and gave him a benevolent glance through his famous monocle.

"It's all wight, Tom Mewwy, deah boy," he remarked.

"What's all right?" asked Tom Merry.

"I'm takin' the mattah up, you know," D'Arcy explained.

"Oh, you're taking it up, are you?" said Tom Merry, apparently not very much impressed by the statement.

"Yaas, wathah! I'm goin' to look into it, and find out a pwoof of the cowwettness of your statement to satisfy all the chaps."

"It's very good of you, Gussy, but I don't see exactly how you're going to do it."

D'Arcy nodded his head sagely.

"You leave that to me, deah boy," he said. "What is required in a case like this is a fellow of tact and judgment. I'm goin' to look into it, and it will be all wight. I can assure you on that point!"

"Thanks awfully!" said Tom Merry gravely.

"Not at all, deah boy. I wegard it as a duty."

Arthur Augustus walked away, leaving the Terrible Three grinning. They had not very much faith in the result of Arthur Augustus' investigations. Blake put his arm through D'Arcy's as he came out of the House.

"Come down to the cricket, my son," he said.

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"Imposs, deah boy. I'm goin' to investigate this affair of Tom Mewwy. You know he told us he walked that gee-gee back to Abbotsford because the beast fell lame?"

"What about that?"

"That's it, my boy!" said D'Arcy, with a smile of superior wisdom. "I'm goin' to the lively-stable where Fatt Wynn hired that horse, and I'm goin' to ask the man to substantiate Tom Mewwy's statement."

"Well, that's a good word," said Blake, with a nod. "Did you get that word from Skimpole of the Shell?"

"Pway don't be an ass. The man will beah out Tom Mewwy's statement that the horse was lame, you see, and he may have some pwoof that Tom Mewwy went as far as Abbotsford. See? I shall weport when I come in!"

And Arthur Augustus nodded and walked away towards the gate. Blake grinned and went down to the cricket ground.

CHAPTER 10.

D'Arcy's Discovery!

"TOM MEWWY, bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy uttered that exclamation. He was on his way back to the school. The swell of St. Jim's had made his investigations, with eminent success. The livery-stable keeper had given him all the information he could. Tom Merry had brought the horse in about half-past eight the previous night, and the horse was dead lame, and had evidently been a long way. That was all the man could tell D'Arcy; excepting that Master Merry had mentioned to him that he had had to walk back from Abbotsford. All this most decidedly bore out Tom Merry's statement, and D'Arcy could not doubt that it would have effect upon the fellows at St. Jim's. If Figgins & Co. met the Shell fellow the worst for drink before eight o'clock, Tom Merry must have recovered himself in time to take the horse in at half-past eight or thereabouts. That was an exceedingly unlikely supposition, and D'Arcy's investigations had certainly thrown the gravest doubts upon Figgins' version.

The swell of St. Jim's was just leaving the village, feeling extremely satisfied and elated, when he caught sight of a lad in Etons and a silk hat lounging outside the gate of the side entrance of the Green Man Inn.

D'Arcy frowned at the sight of him; the thought immediately occurring to him that it was a St. Jim's junior in forbidden precincts. The Green Man had a bad reputation, and it was strictly out of bounds for the St. Jim's boys; but it was an open secret among the juniors that Levison and Crooke sometimes went there. He came up, expecting to recognise Levison or one of his set. And then an amazed exclamation dropped from his lips.

"Tom Mewwy!" he repeated dazedly.

The boy leaning on the gate had a cigarette between his lips, and was in the act of lighting it.

Arthur Augustus could not mistake the well-known features.

Those handsome, clear-cut features, the blue eyes, the curly hair, and the wide forehead—he was not likely to mistake that face!

"Tom Mewwy!" he repeated dazedly.

"Bai Jove!"

The match went out.

The junior at the gate blew out a stream of white smoke, and then pushed the gate back, and moved up the path beside the inn. He walked along like one perfectly familiar with the place, and quite at home there. He disappeared as he went round to the back of the house, leaving Arthur Augustus standing in the road, rooted to the ground with astonishment and dismay.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "If I hadn't seen him, I couldn't have believed it! Then—then what Figgins said was true!"

That was another staggering thought. D'Arcy had come to the village to investigate the matter, and prove that Tom Merry had told the truth. And the result of his visit was the clearest possible proof against—not Figgins, but Tom Merry.

What he had learned at the livery stable had certainly seemed to tell in favour of the Shell fellow.

JUST MY FUN



Monty Lowther Calling!

Hallo, Everybody! A reader says his closest friend is a Scot. Quite! "Is it true that the Irish are always after a fight?" inquires another reader. No, old chap, they get there before it.

I had a joke to tell you about the Welsh, but somehow it "leaked" out. Ow!

You heard about the chap who gave buns to the lions? He was a nice fellow!

"Guilty or not guilty?" demanded the judge. "Work it out for yourself," snapped the prisoner; "that's what you're paid for!"

A reader tells me he loves gardening. He's going full spade ahead!

Headline from the "Wayland Courier": "Hedgehog Fights Two Dogs." He won on points!

I hear a lorry ran into a snack bar in Wayland. Sosses and smash!

Story: "Before you hit a Form fellow always count up to fifty," admonished Mr. Selby. Later, he found Wally D'Arcy sitting on young Piggott. "Just making sure he's here when I've

But what he had seen at the Green Man was a crushing proof that Tom Merry had been deceiving his school-fellows. There could be no doubt of what he had seen with his own eyes!

"Figgy was wight," said D'Arcy to himself. "And I've called him a liar, bai Jove! I shall have to apologise to Figgy!"

D'Arcy hesitated as to what he should do. He was inclined to follow the fellow into the inn, and fetch him out by force. But that was evidently not practicable. If he inquired for Tom Merry there, Mr. Jolliffe would certainly deny that there was a Shell fellow on the premises at all, and D'Arcy could scarcely insist upon searching the house for him.

But Arthur Augustus wanted very much to see Tom Merry at that moment. He wanted to tell the Shell fellow what he thought of him. He resolved to wait until Tom Merry came out, and, with that idea in his mind, he sat on a rail under the trees beside the road. But half an hour passed, and the junior did not appear.

"Bai Jove, the awful wottah may be makin' an evenin' of it!" muttered Arthur Augustus. "I'm late for callin'-ovah as it is!"

And the swell of St. Jim's reluctantly turned his steps in the direction of the school.

The gates were closed when he arrived there, and he had to ring for Taggles to open them. And Taggles came, grunting, out of his lodge.

D'Arcy hurried across the quadrangle to the School House.

"Hallo, here you are!" exclaimed Jack Blake, as he entered. "Do you know you're late for calling-over, you ass?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

finished counting, sir!" explained Wally.

"More baby cars are built in England than in any other country," we read. Ah, the Mother Country!

Driving through traffic isn't all honesty, continues the above authority. No, it's mostly jam!

I hear a famous comedian is buying racehorses. Presumably he has a partiality for "chestnuts"!

Snipped from young Gibson's essay: "Noah was the very first arkitect." Help!

I hear that by packing your loud-speaker with cottonwool you can get a better tone. An easier way is to pack your ears.

"Pickpockets cost the country £10,000 a year," says a judge. Yes, they do run away with the money!

I hear Crooke and Lennox had a terrific row because Lennox snores. A "sound" reason!

I see a fellow rang a bell continuously for eighteen hours. Then the waitress arrived!

"What is the underworld?" asks Skimpole. The place where men are menaces, Skimmy!

"My dog Towser always wants to carry anything I buy," says Herries. Well, you'd better not buy a grand piano, old chap!

Stop Press: "My son wants to become a racing motorist," writes an agitated parent. "What is your advice?" "Don't stand in his way, Toot, toot, fellows!"

"You've got to go in and tell Railton."

"All sewene!"

And Arthur Augustus reported himself to the Housemaster, and was given lines. But he was not thinking of lines as he came out of the study. Blake had noticed the suppressed excitement in his elegant chum's face, and he was waiting, with Herries and Digby, for D'Arcy outside Mr. Railton's study.

"Well, what is it?" asked Blake.

"I've made a discovery about Tom Mewwy, deah boys!"

"Good!" said Blake. "What is it?"

"Let's get up to the study. I don't want to talk about it here," said Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, all right!" said Blake resignedly. "I suppose there's nothing in it."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Lead on, Macduff!" said Digby.

Arthur Augustus led the way to Study No. 6 with his aristocratic nose in the air. He consoled himself with the reflection that the news he had to communicate would astonish the chums of the Fourth. Blake, Herries, and Digby were grinning—a proof that they were far from realising what a discovery D'Arcy had made.

They followed him into the study, and Blake closed the door, and set his back against it dramatically.

"Now unfold that dread tale!" he said.

And Herries and Digby chuckled.

"Pway don't wot, deah boys!" said D'Arcy. "This is a sewious mattah! I have discovered pwoof—conclusive pwoof—about Tom Mewwy, and it settles the question between him and Figgins!"

Blake became serious as he saw the

earnestness in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's face.

"You've really found something out?" he asked.

"Yaas."

"And it proves that Figgins was telling whoppers?"

"No, deah boy," said D'Arcy gravely. Blake started.

"You don't mean to say—" he began.

"Yaas, I do! What I've found out proves that Tom Mewwy was tellin' whoppahs, and that Figgins was in the wight!"

And a dead silence in Study No. 6 followed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's startling statement.

Jack Blake was the first to speak.

"That's jolly serious, Gussy! Tell us what you've found out!"

"I had been to the livewy stable," D'Arcy explained. "As I came back I saw Tom Mewwy—"

"I didn't know he had gone out," said Blake.

"He must have, for I met him, and he's still there."

Blake shook his head.

"He was at calling-over, Gussy."

D'Arcy jumped.

"He was at callin'-ovah!" he exclaimed.

"Yes; I saw him with the Shell fellows."

"Bai Jove, then he must have got in before me, aftah all!" the swell of St. Jim's exclaimed excitedly. "I thought he hadn't seen me; but, as a mattah of fact, he must have known that I was waiting for him outside the Gween Man, and he must have slipped out anothah way and bunked home."

"The Green Man!" exclaimed Blake, Herries, and Digby, with one voice.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Do you mean that you saw Tom Merry there?" Blake demanded, in amazement.

"Yaas," said D'Arcy. "He was outside the gate lightin' a cigawette."

"Lighting a cigarette?" said Blake.

"Yaas; and he was smokin' it as he went up the path wound to the back of the public-house. I waited half an hour for him to catch him comin' out, so that I could tell him what I thought of his wascally conduct; but he must have gone wound anothah way—most likely by the garden and the towin'-path."

"He had seen you, then?"

"Yaas, I suppose so, though he didn't let on. I dare say he will deny the whole stow, same as he did with Figgins."

Blake wrinkled his brows.

"This is jolly queer!" he exclaimed. "If you've made a mistake—"

"How could I make a mistake, deah boy? I suppose I know Tom Mewwy's face?"

"Yes, I suppose so," said Blake.

"Well, if this is correct, it's pretty clear that Figgins & Co. were telling the facts. If Tom Merry's in the habit of going to that den, there would be nothing surprising in his being seen squiffy near the place."

"Nothin' at all."

"We've taken Tom Merry's side in the matter," said Digby.

"If it turns out that he was in the wrong, we'll jolly soon stop that," said Blake. "We're not going to back up a blackguard against a decent chap like Figgins, simply because he's in our House."

"Wathah not!"

"Blessed if I know what to make of Tom Merry breaking out like this!"

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said Blake. "There was a suspicion of the sort against him once before, but he explained it away to everybody's satisfaction. He was straight enough then, I'll swear! But I suppose you never can tell what a fellow's coming to."

"He's coming to the order of the sack, if he keeps on like this," said Digby. "Are you going to speak to him about it, Gussy?"

"Yaas, wathah!" said the swell of St. Jim's promptly. "I wegard it as bein' up to me to explain to him what I think of his conduct. Also, if we're not goin' to back him up, we owe him an explanation why."

"That's so," said Herries.

"We'll go and see him now and find out what he's got to say," said Blake.

"Come on!"

And the chums of Study No. 6 quitted the room, and went along to the Shell passage. Blake opened the door of the Terrible Three's study and entered, followed by his chums.

CHAPTER 11.

No Alibi!

"HALLO!" said Monty Lowther hospitably. "You fellows come to supper?"

"Ahem!" said Blake.

"Wathah not!"

"We've come to tell Tom Merry that we think Figgy's word is ever so much better than his," said Blake bluntly.

"What's that?" said Tom Merry.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, you undahstand perfectly well!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy severely. "You need not pwetend to mis-undahstand."

"What do you mean?"

"You know perfectly well what I mean," said the swell of St. Jim's coldly.

Tom Merry breathed hard.

"I haven't the faintest idea what you are driving at," he said. "Will you explain, or will you go and babble somewhere else?"

D'Arcy flushed.

"Weally, you wottah—" he began indignantly.

"D'Arcy saw you this evening," said Herries, in his direct way. "Do you understand now?"

"I suppose that makes it clear," said Digby.

The captain of the Shell looked astounded.

"I don't see what D'Arcy's seeing me has to do with it," he said. "Anybody might have seen me, I suppose. Are you dotty? I haven't been hiding myself."

"You know where D'Arcy saw you?" said Blake curtly.

"I don't. I thought D'Arcy had gone out."

"You know he'd gone out, and you know he saw you outside the Green Man, and saw you go into the place," said Blake crisply. "Or, if you didn't know it, you know it now, and that settles it."

"Does D'Arcy say he saw me do that?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It's not true."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"I suppose you know it's no good telling us that Gussy has been telling whoppers?" said Blake. "We're not likely to doubt Gussy's word."

"Bai Jove, I should wathah think not!"

"I don't doubt his word," said Tom Merry, "but I doubt his eyesight, if he thinks he saw me near the Green Man this evening. For I certainly was not there. It looks to me as if there is some fellow like me hanging about in this neighbourhood, if Gussy thinks he saw me there."

"The fact is, you may as well own up," said Herries. "We took your side against Figgins, but now D'Arcy has the same story to tell. If you want to do these things without being found out, you should be more careful."

"Yaas, wathah!"



As Tom Merry took his place in the Form, his eyes fell on a
There was one word wri

Tom Merry caught his breath.

"I don't want to hit you," he said. "This matter won't be improved by our hammering one another; but I tell you there's some mistake. D'Arcy didn't see me go into the Green Man, because I haven't been outside the walls of the school since afternoon lessons."

The chums of Study No. 6 looked at one another. Tom Merry spoke quietly and steadily that they could not help being impressed by his words. Even Arthur Augustus was taken aback.

"But I saw you, deah boy!" he exclaimed.

"But you didn't," said Tom Merry. "You must have mistaken somebody else for me."

"Imposs!"

"Look here!" said Blake abruptly. "It isn't a question of taking your word now, Tom Merry. I'd have taken

it yesterday, but I'd have taken Figgins, too, if it comes to a question of proof. You say you haven't been outside the school walls since lessons?"

"Yes."
"Then it ought to be easy to prove it. If you can prove that you've been inside the school ever since lessons, we shall have to believe that there's a chap in Rylcombe so exactly like you that fellows who know you well can't see any difference. Gussy, what was the time exactly when you saw him there?"

"I'm afraid I didn't notice the exact time, dear boy," said D'Arcy; "but I got in at half-past seven, and I had been waitin' there about half an hour, and it took about a quarter of an hour to walk home."

"Then it was a quarter to seven," said Blake. "Can you produce somebody who was with you here at that time, Tom Merry?"

the Form-room—the lines I got last night for being late, you know."

"Manners and Lowther weren't with you, then?"

"No; I did the lines in the Form-room, and Manners and Lowther were going to the tuckshop. I looked in at the tuckshop for them, but the place was empty. Then I walked round the quad, and came in to calling-over."

"Nobody in the Form-room with you while you were doing your lines?" asked Blake.

Tom Merry made an irritable gesture. "How should anybody be there?" he exclaimed. "Fellows don't stay in the Form-room after lessons, unless they've got lines to do."

"Well, that's so," said Blake. "But how it works out is that you can't prove by any witness that you were inside the school at the time D'Arcy says he saw you smoking a cigarette outside the Green Man."

"It doesn't need proving," said Tom Merry fiercely. "My word's good enough for my friends, and I don't care twopence for others!"

"We are among the others, then," said Blake, his own temper rising. "You seem to want fellows to take your word, and condemn other fellows as liars. Why should anybody believe you rather than Figgins? Figgins is as straight as a die! Now D'Arcy has seen the same kind of thing that Figgins saw."

Tom Merry fixed his eyes upon Blake.

"You mean that you believe Figgins' story now?"

"Yes."
"It follows that you look on me as a liar, then?"

"I've got nothing to say about that," said Blake. "I want you to understand that we're not up against Figgins any more, that's all. I felt I ought to tell you so. I don't want to quarrel with you. No need for us to talk about it any more. Come on, you chaps!"

"Yes, you can go!" said Tom Merry bitterly. "And don't speak to me again until you are prepared to apologise for what you've said."

"That won't happen soon!" said Blake.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—it's up to you to apologise for havin' been such an awful wotah, and taken us all in like you've done!" Arthur Augustus exclaimed indignantly.

Tom Merry clenched his hand, but it fell to his side again.

"You'd better go!" he said very quietly.

Blake & Co. quitted the study. Tom Merry sank into a chair when they had gone, his face pale.

"This is getting rather thick, and no mistake!" said Monty Lowther restlessly. "It's jolly queer that D'Arcy should fancy he saw you, Tom!"

"Say out plainly that you believe that he did see me!" said Tom Merry bitterly.

"I don't," said Lowther.

"But it's very queer," said Manners. "I can't make it out at all. Gussy is an ass, but he wouldn't lie."

"You know I wasn't out of doors!" said Tom Merry.

"I don't see how you very well could be," said Manners. "But you've given us your word that you were at home and that's enough. There's only one possible explanation, and that is, that there's a chap in Rylcombe like you to look at—and the fellows have taken him for you. Pretty sort of rotter he must be, too, by the way he's been seen—the worse for drink, and smoking, and going into a pub. That's the only explanation I can think of—but—"

"But it sounds too awfully steep," said Lowther.

Manners nodded. "It does," he said. "It's good enough for us, but I'm afraid the other fellows won't put much faith in it. What do you think, Tom?"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"I don't know what to think," he said miserably. "I came to believe that it was a plot of Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, but I can't think anything of that sort about Gussy. He's too big an ass to plot against a fellow, even if he was bad enough—and we know he isn't. But if this goes on, I shan't have a pal left in the school—I can see that!"

"You'll have two, whatever happens," said Monty Lowther quietly.

And Manners chimed in: "What-ho!"

"It's jolly good of you two fellows to stick to me like this," he said. "After all, the evidence is against me—you've got nothing but my word!"

"And that's quite enough!" said Manners quietly.

CHAPTER 12.

Kildare is Puzzled!

THE next day was a half-holiday at St. Jim's, and it was a fine clear day.

The juniors of both Houses turned out to cricket practice with keenness. The junior House match between the rival Houses was nearly due, and the juniors were very keen about it. The senior House match, between senior elevens captained respectively by Kildare and Monteith of the Sixth, was not half so important—from a junior point of view.

But the late unpleasant happenings had taken Tom Merry's thoughts, at least, away from the House match. Tom Merry was captain of the School House junior eleven, and as keen a player as any in the school. But his keenness seemed to be gone now. His usually sunny face was gloomily clouded. The scandal in the school, on the subject of Tom Merry and his delinquencies, real or supposed, was growing. When it became known in the School House that Study No. 6 had turned against Tom Merry, it caused a large desertion of his cause.

Blake & Co. certainly said nothing on the subject, but it was easily to be seen that they avoided the Terrible Three, and did not speak or nod if they chanced to meet.

The scandal was talked of up and down both Houses; and Kildare, the head prefect of the School House, felt bound to take notice of it. Prefects and masters had heard the story in some shape or form by this time; it could not be discussed in studies and the passages without reaching all ears sooner or later. And that afternoon, after dinner, Kildare stopped Tom Merry as they came out of the dining-room, and signed to the junior to follow him to the prefects'-room.

The room was empty just then, and Kildare and Tom Merry had it to themselves. Tom Merry waited quietly for the captain of St. Jim's to speak.



paper lying on his desk. He started and his face flushed. Written on the paper: "PUB-HAUNTER!"

Tom Merry reflected.

"I was here at calling-over," he said. "You saw me come in out of the quad, Blake. I remember passing you in the passage."

Blake nodded.

"That's quite right; I remember it! I told Gussy you hadn't missed calling-over when he told us this queer yarn. Call-over was at seven. If you went into the Green Man when Gussy saw you, and out again the back way, and ran home by way of the towing-path, you could get here by seven, and you'd come in out of the quad to go to call-over," added Blake.

"Where were you a quarter of an hour before that?" asked Digby.

"I'd been taking a stroll round the quad," said Tom Merry. "There were some other fellows out there, too. I went out there to look for Manners and Lowther. I'd been doing my impot in

He could guess easily enough from Kildare's expression what was coming. "What is this story that's going round about you, Merry?" he asked abruptly. "Is it true?"

Tom Merry's eyes met Kildare's fearlessly.

"No," he said quietly.

"Figgins seems to be accusing you of something, from what I've heard," said Kildare.

"Yes."

"What is it precisely?"

"He says he saw me on Monday evening in Rylcombe Lane, under the influence of drink," said Tom Merry, a flush of shame coming into his cheeks involuntarily as he spoke.

"Why should Figgins say such a thing if it isn't true?"

"I don't know."

"Of course, there's no truth at all in it?"

"None at all!"

"You were not gammoning him—pulling his leg?"

"I was not there at all. I was at Abbotsford at the time."

"It's very queer," said Kildare, puzzled. "I must take your word for it; I think I had better see Figgins."

And the School House prefect crossed over to the New House, and found Figgins in his study—bathing his eye, which was beginning to assume a paler shade of purple now.

Figgins looked up with a dripping face as Kildare came into his study. Kerr rose to his feet, but Fatty Wynn went on munching the tarts with which he was supplementing his dinner.

"Hallo, Kildare!" said Figgins cheerfully. "Have you come over to inquire how my eye's getting on? It's cooling down a bit. Thanks!"

Kildare laughed.

"I've come to ask you what is this story you've been spreading about Tom Merry," he said.

Figgins became grave at once.

"Has Tom Merry spoken to you about it?" he asked.

"I questioned him."

"Well, he can tell you more than I can," said Figgins.

"I want your account. You accuse him—"

"I don't," said Figgins quickly. "It's not fair to put it that I accuse him. I went over to tell Lowther and Manners on Monday night, so that they could look after him."

"You didn't tell anybody else, then?"

"No. Mellish listened at the door; otherwise, it would never have got out."

"You declare that you saw Tom Merry under the influence of drink?" Kildare asked in amazement.

"I'm not giving information against him," said Figgins sturdily.

"No sneaking here!" said Kerr.

Kildare smiled.

"I'm not asking as a prefect, for Merry to be punished," he said. "I only want to see if there is anything in the matter."

"Oh, in that case I don't mind speaking out!" said Figgins. "Of course, it's understood that I don't bear witness against Tom Merry, in case of trouble with the Head."

Kildare nodded.

"Well, then, I did see him squiffy, and so did Kerr and Wynn," said Figgins.

"You are sure of that?"

"Quite sure!"

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"He denies the whole story," said Kildare.

"He would!" said Figgins.

"I gather that you are not on friendly terms now?" said the captain of St. Jim's.

"No fear!" said Figgins promptly.

"I'm not likely to be on friendly terms with a chap who gets tipsy, and tells lies about it afterwards."

"Not likely!" said Kerr emphatically.

"It's a queer business," said Kildare. "The worst of it is, that if there's much more jaw on the subject, it will get to the Head, and then there will be an investigation and a regular scandal."

"Well, we don't talk about it," said Figgins. "I'm bound to stick to what I said, that's all; and, after all, it's Tom Merry's fault. He shouldn't have done it."

Kildare gave Figgins a searching glance, and then, with a nod, he turned and left the study. The cap-

Kerr's kindly assurance. Figgins looked very serious.

"Beastly awkward that this should have happened now!" he said. "Do you think Cousin Ethel will notice it?"

Kerr manfully suppressed a chuckle. Unless Cousin Ethel became suddenly afflicted with blindness, she could not very well help noticing that black eye if she met Figgins at all. But Kerr comforted his chum as well as he could.

"Well, you never can tell," he said. "Keep it on the starboard side while you're speaking to her—look at her out of the other eye, you know—"

Figgins sighed. "It's rotten!" he said. "And it all comes of trying to do Tom Merry a friendly turn. Blessed if I'll make a mistake like that again!"

And Figgins went on bathing his eye.

CHAPTER 13.

Called Before the Head!

TOM MERRY passed the door of Study No. 6 in the Fourth Form passage a little later in the afternoon, and he saw great preparations going on there. The door was open, and it revealed Blake, Herries, and Digby at work, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy superintending operations.

Cousin Ethel was visiting St. Jim's again, and the chums of Study No. 6 were evidently intending to celebrate the visit. The study was getting into a most unusual state of tidiness; there were flowers in the vases on the mantelpiece, and Blake was mending the study chairs. Blake was an amateur carpenter, and very useful at mending furniture—the only drawback to his repairing being that it generally made the article a little more insecure than it was before.

There were parcels on the table that contained groceries—supplies enough for a most extensive feed.

In other circumstances, Tom Merry would have been called into the study to help.

The Terrible Three would have been asked to meet Cousin Ethel at tea as a matter of course. But now all was changed.

Blake glanced at him as he passed the open door, and then turned his head away. Tom Merry coloured, and went on down the passage.

Monty Lowther and Manners were waiting for him downstairs.

"Coming down to cricket?" asked Manners.

"Don't feel up to it," said Tom Merry. "It's not a match, either."

"Well, it's a half-holiday," said Manners. "What are we going to do with our noble selves?"

"I think I'll go out," said Tom Merry. "I suppose you know Cousin Ethel is coming?"

"Yes; I've heard so!"

"Well, as we're on bad terms with Study No. 6, it will make it awkward if we meet her. We don't want her to know we're all on fighting terms."

"By George, no!" said Lowther.

"Might go out for a stroll, then," said Tom Merry; "that will save all trouble. Let's take a walk over to Wayland—or we might have our bikes out. It's a ripping afternoon."

Kildare came along the passage and beckoned to Tom Merry.

"Head wants you, Merry," he said.

"Wants me?" said Tom Merry. "Is anything the matter?"

"It concerns that yarn about you."

(Continued on page 18.)



The Editor's Chair

Let the Editor be your pal !
Drop him a line to-day,
addressing your letters :
The Editor, The GEM,
Fleetway House, Farring-
don Street, London, E.C.4.



HALLO, chums! Last April a very funny story appeared in the old paper, and I have had scores of letters from readers praising it. Perhaps you remember the yarn. It featured Billy Bunter, who paid a visit to St. Jim's and played some amusing ventriloquial tricks on the juniors. Well, I decided that, as it was so popular, another story of this type was indicated. Therefore, in next Wednesday's GEM you will find an even more humorous story than the one which was published some time back. It's called:

"GUSSY, THE VENTRILOQUIST!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of St. Jim's, has tried some funny stunts from time to time, but his funniest ever is when he takes up ventriloquism. Of course, he keeps his latest wheeze a secret from his chums, for he hopes to mystify them with his "voice-throwing." But all he succeeds in doing is to make them think he's gone dotty!

He engages Billy Bunter of Greyfriars to help him master the art, but this proves an all too expensive method of learning to ventriloquise. So, in the face of discouragement and failure, Gussy seeks other help. He advertises for a professional ventriloquist to give him instruction. But the response to the advert is as amazing as it is amusing—giving the would-be ventriloquist of St. Jim's the surprise of his life, and the juniors the laugh of a lifetime!

If you like a good laugh—and who doesn't?—you simply must not miss this sparkling, highly amusing yarn of the one-and-only Gussy in the role of a ventriloquist.

"HARRY WHARTON'S CHALLENGE!"

Frank Richards is again in one of his brightest and best moods in the next exciting chapters of his great Greyfriars yarn. The French and German boys have certainly made things hum since they joined the Remove. But in next week's instalment they are responsible for the most amazing riot a Greyfriars

Form-room has ever witnessed—a riot which is only quelled when the Head himself comes on the scene!

In addition to our great fiction programme, our laughs section will be well up to its usual high standard—rounding off another tip-top number of the old paper. Look out for it!

NATURE'S COMPASS I

A reader has written to ask if there's a certain kind of plant which acts as a compass, and whether it could be relied upon to direct anyone who happened to be lost. Yes, there are such plants, and the Australian eucalyptus, or "gum-tree," is one example. They are called compass plants because their leaves always point to the north and south so as to obtain the necessary light essential to their growth. There is a compass plant which also grows on the prairies in North America, where it is often relied upon to guide travellers who miss their way.

A PROBLEM FOR YOU!

Here is an interesting little poser which I heard the other day. A school-boy possesses four pairs of brown stockings and four pairs of black. He goes into his bed-room at night to get out a pair, but as he switches on the electric light the filament in the bulb breaks, and he finds himself in darkness. However, he gropes his way to the drawer containing his stockings. Now, the problem is: What is the least number of stockings he will have to take out of the drawer before he can be sure he has got one pair? Think it out—and then look at the answer which is given at the end of this chat.

THE BITER BIT!

Jack Bone, of Atlanta, Georgia, is only a seventeen months' old baby, but,

young as he is, he certainly made news recently. Jack was playing in the garden of his home when an eight-inch-long snake came on the scene. Was Jack scared of the reptile? Not a bit! He promptly showed his contempt for the snake by giving it a good hard bite with his teeth—getting his bite in before the snake, as it were! Jack's parents hurriedly took him to hospital, no doubt anxiously wondering whether he was poisoned. But at the hospital it was soon found that the boy was unharmed. The snake, however, was not so fortunate. The bite it had received proved fatal. The biter had been bitten with a vengeance!

AN UNUSUAL HOBBY!

I have heard of some curious hobbies, but collecting buttons, I think, wants a bit of beating. This is the hobby of a man in Sweden, and he has been following it for forty years. He tramps round the streets of Stockholm, his eyes ever on the ground, seeking for buttons which have come adrift from people's clothes. You might think it a slow way of making a collection, but no less than three thousand buttons have been found by this button collector! He has buttons of all shapes and sizes and colours in his collection. They are all in categories and stored away in dust-proof cupboards.

PROBLEM SOLUTION.

How many stockings did you puzzle out the boy would have to remove from the drawer to be sure of getting a pair—nine? That's the answer our office-boy gave. But the correct answer is three. Whichever three stockings he takes out he's bound to have either a pair of black or a pair of brown among them.

TAILPIECE.

Playwright: "I have written a new play with a sad ending, and I was told it wouldn't be popular."

Friend: "Well, it will certainly come to grief!"

THE EDITOR.

PEN PALS COUPON
18-7-36



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.

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"So that's got to the Head?" said Tom Merry.

"Yes; one of the prefects has reported it to the Head. As a matter of fact, Merry, the matter ought to be looked into and cleared up," said Kildare. "You're to go to the Head's study."

"All right," said Tom Merry shortly. "You chaps get the bikes out and wait for me."

"Right-ho!"

Tom Merry walked away to the Head's study. His heart was beating faster. He had been expecting this sooner or later, and now it had come. The scandal had shown no signs of dying away, and Dr. Holmes was bound to hear of it in the long run. And he was not likely to let such a matter pass uninvestigated.

Tom Merry tapped at the Head's door, and the pleasant voice of the Head of St. Jim's bade him enter.

The captain of the Shell entered the study with a firm step.

Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, and Mr. Linton, Tom Merry's Form-master, were in the study, evidently in consultation with the Head. All three of the masters looked at the Shell fellow as he came in.

Dr. Holmes coughed.

"You know why I have sent for you, Merry?" he asked.

"Kildare told me, sir."

"There is a most unpleasant story going about the school concerning you," said Dr. Holmes. "It has come to my knowledge now. It appears that you are accused of having been seen under the influence of drink. I need not say that, if such a charge were proved, you would be instantly expelled from the school."

"I should deserve it, sir, if it were true," said Tom Merry quietly.

"That is a very proper answer," said the Head. "I cannot believe that it is true. These gentlemen share my opinion."

"Certainly I should not believe such a thing without the clearest proof," said Mr. Railton at once.

"I may say the same," said Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell. "Merry has faults; but, so far as I have observed, they are not of that kind. You must understand, Merry, that it is in your interest that this matter should be investigated and cleared up."

"I understand that, sir," said Tom Merry.

"Are you aware of how this story was started?" asked the Head.

"Yes, sir. Some New House boys said they had seen me staggering along Rylcombe Lane on Monday evening," said Tom Merry, flushing. "It was not true. I was not there."

"Who were the boys who state that they saw you?"

"Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn."

"Dear me!" said the Head, in surprise. "This is extraordinary! Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn are not the kind of boys to bring a false accusation against anyone."

"They have done so in this case, sir."

"It must be a mistake of some sort," said Mr. Railton. "I cannot believe that those three boys would utter deliberate untruths."

Tom Merry was silent.

"Do you think it is a mistake, Merry?" asked the Head.

"I don't know, sir. I would never have thought that those three chaps would have lied. I always believed them to be straight. But I certainly wasn't where they said they saw me."

"Where were you?"

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"Coming home from Abbotsford at the time they mentioned."

And Tom Merry explained the incident of the horse falling lame.

The Head and the two masters listened attentively, their keen gaze upon Tom Merry's face. Keen as their gaze was, it could discover nothing but sincerity in the face of the Shell fellow.

"It is extraordinary!" said the Head at last. "So Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn are the only boys who have made any accusation of this sort, Merry?"

Tom Merry coloured and hesitated. The Head's glance grew sterner.

"I can see that there is something more, Merry!" he exclaimed. "Pray keep nothing back! If you are innocent, it is for your benefit to have everything brought out into the light."

"Very well, sir! Figgins & Co.—I mean, Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn—were the only fellows at first, but since then, D'Arcy of the Fourth—"

"Indeed! What does D'Arcy say?"

"He says that he saw me last evening go into the Green Man public-house," said Tom Merry reluctantly. "He says he saw me light a cigarette outside the place."

"And it is not true?"

"No, sir."

"Do you suggest that D'Arcy has spoken falsely?" asked Mr. Railton, with a stern note in his voice.

"I can't think that old Gussy would tell a lie, sir," said Tom Merry. "He made a mistake, that's all. It must have been somebody like me that he saw."

"Ahem!" said the Head. "Are you aware of any boy resembling you living in this neighbourhood, Merry?"

"I've never heard of one, sir."

"It would be a very curious coincidence."

"I know that, sir. But it's the only way I can account for what D'Arcy says he saw, unless he was dreaming."

The three masters were looking very grave now.

"This is a most unpleasant matter, Merry," said Dr. Holmes. "You are accused of most disgraceful conduct, and the evidence against you rests upon the word of four boys—four boys who have the best characters, and whom I firmly believe to be incapable of falsehood."

"I know it looks bad, sir."

"It looks so bad, Merry, that if I did not have the highest opinion of you, I should have no hesitation in condemning you to be expelled on such evidence," said Dr. Holmes.

Tom Merry's face paled.

"I hope you won't do that, sir," he faltered. "I repeat that there isn't a word of truth in it all."

"I can only let the matter stand over for further investigation," said the Head. "You may go now, and I will consider what is to be done."

"Yes, sir."

Tom Merry left the study. The three masters looked at one another with grave faces when the junior was gone.

"This is worse than I thought," the Head said.

"I cannot understand it," said Mr. Railton. "The evidence is clear enough to condemn anyone, yet I cannot quite believe such a thing of Merry of the Shell."

"There must be an investigation," said Mr. Linton. "And if there is some boy who resembles Merry, and who is in the habit of disgraceful indulgence, I suppose the fact can be ascertained and proved."

"The boy's future is at stake, and we cannot be too careful," said the Head.

And Mr. Railton and the master of the Shell assented.

Tom Merry's face was clouded as he rejoined his chums in the quadrangle. Manners and Lowther were waiting for him with the bicycles.

"Well, what has his nibs got to say?" asked Monty Lowther, thus disrespectfully alluding to the Head of St. Jim's.

Tom Merry shrugged his shoulders.

"He's heard the yarn, and he more than half believes it. He's giving me a chance because I've got a good character, that's all, otherwise I should be sacked without further trouble."

Lowther whistled.

"That's jolly serious, Tommy! I wish we could get to the bottom of it!"

Tom Merry did not reply. He mounted his bicycle, and the Terrible Three pedalled away from St. Jim's in the bright sunshine. They were silent as they rode on under the green trees, between leafy hedges. It was a glorious afternoon, and in other circumstances the chums of the Shell would have enjoyed their spin immensely. But they were not in a mood for enjoyment now. The scandal in the school was weighing too heavily upon their spirits.

CHAPTER 14.

A Shock for Cousin Ethel!

COUSIN ETHEL stepped from the train at Rylcombe Station.

The girl's face was very bright and cheerful, and looked very charming under her pretty hat.

If Study No. 6 had known that Ethel was coming by train, and by what train, there would have been an escort waiting for her at the station. But they had not known, and so there was no St. Jim's junior on the platform.

Cousin Ethel left the station, and glanced round the quaint old High Street. As it was such a pleasant afternoon she started to walk to the school. The girl left the old village High Street and turned into the leafy lane that led to St. Jim's.

Just outside the village, where the lane began, stood the Green Man Inn. On the gate of the side entrance, a junior in Etons and a silk hat was sitting. He glanced at Cousin Ethel as she passed, evidently attracted by the bright face and graceful looks of D'Arcy's cousin. Cousin Ethel caught sight of him and stopped, with a smile.

She had recognised Tom Merry.

The girl was a little surprised that he did not raise his hat. Tom Merry, though he was not so punctilious as D'Arcy, was never known to neglect any act of politeness or good manners. The boy on the gate stared at Cousin Ethel as she stopped.

"Good-afternoon!" said Cousin Ethel cheerfully.

The junior stared harder.

"Good-afternoon!" he replied.

Ethel looked at him rather quickly. His voice was pleasant enough, but it did not have the tone in it she was accustomed to in Tom Merry's voice.

"Did you know I was coming?" asked Ethel.

The boy shook his head.

"I can't say I did," he replied; "but I'm jolly glad to see you, all the same. Which way are you going?"

"To the school, of course!" said Ethel, in surprise.

"Oh, to the school! May I have the pleasure of walking with you?"

"Why, of course, if you like!"

"Oh, good!"

The junior slipped off the gate, and fell in beside Cousin Ethel, as she resumed her way. The girl was a little surprised. There, was something very

curious about him, as she could not help thinking. Why had he not saluted her, and why had he stared at her as if she were a stranger?

"Staying down here?" he asked.

"Why, yes," said Ethel. "I'm staying with Mrs. Holmes."

"Mrs. Holmes?"

"The Head's wife," said Ethel.

"Oh, yes, the Head of St. Jim's! If you're staying down here for a few days, I suppose I shall see you again," said the boy.

"Of course you will!" said Ethel.

"Oh, good!" said the junior, though he looked a little puzzled. "I shall be down here a few days longer myself."

Ethel glanced at him.

"Are you going away, then?" she asked.

"Yes, next week."

"You are leaving school?"

"I've left."

"Left!" said Ethel, in surprise.

He nodded.

"Yes. There was trouble with the headmaster, and I was hooped out," he said, laughing—"order of the boot, you know."

Ethel looked surprised and shocked.

"I am very sorry," she said.

"Oh, it's nothing! I was sick of the place, anyway!" he said. "I'm going to Eton now—at least, I hope so."

"Why don't you go home, if you have left school?" asked Ethel.

He laughed.

"I've been home, and a jolly row I got into over being sacked," he said.

"You should have seen them—regular family funeral party. I couldn't stand it. I cleared out on my own to the Green Man, and I'm not going back till they come round."

"You are staying at the Green Man?" asked Ethel.

"Yes."

"Isn't it a very disreputable place?"

"I dare say. It suits me."

Ethel walked on in silence. She could not understand; indeed, her brain seemed to be in a whirl. Was this the Tom Merry she had known—this fellow who talked so lightly of having been compelled to leave school, evidently for some disgraceful conduct, and who was staying at the most disreputable place in that part of the country? She could guess the kind of time a boy would have at a place like the Green Man. She was shocked and hurt.

"I am very sorry," she said, breaking the silence at last.

He nodded, and looked at her curiously.

"Nothing to be sorry about, that I can see," he remarked. "I'm having the time of my life, as a matter of fact. But, I say, it's awfully jolly meeting you! I don't see why we shouldn't be good friends—eh?"

"We shall always be friends," said Ethel; "but I am very sorry that you are in disgrace. Couldn't you tell the Head you're sorry, and ask him to give you another chance? I'm sure he would."

The junior chuckled.

"Not much chance of that. You see, I was squiffy in school."

"You were—what?"

"Squiffy—tipsy, you know!"

Ethel made an involuntary gesture of disgust.

"So I had to leave," he explained.

"I wasn't sorry—I'm having a good time. I say, we can have some good times, if you'll come out and meet me. I suppose you'll be able to get out?"

"Yes," said Ethel.

"We can go to the theatre over at Wayland," said the junior. "They've got a musical play there, and I've been

going to see it. Ripping thing, they say."

Ethel flushed.

"I should not care to see it," she said.

"Oh, what rot!" said the junior.

"Look here, if they don't allow you to get out in the evening, it could be worked."

"I should be allowed to go out if I wanted to; but I shouldn't want to," said Ethel.

He grinned.

"Oh, that's all spoof, you know! Look here, you could get out quietly, and I'd meet you at the corner of the place, with a cab, and we could bowl over to Wayland in next to no time."

What do you say?"

"I should certainly not do anything of the sort!"

"Why not?" demanded the junior.

"It would not be right, for one thing; and I don't want to for another."

"Wouldn't be right!" he repeated.

"But you're not so particular as all that?"

Ethel's face crimsoned.

"I don't understand you," she said.

"You—you had better not come with me any farther!"

Ethel quickened her pace. She would never have imagined, before that day, that she would have been shocked and disgusted with Tom Merry, and anxious to get away from his society. But it was certainly the case now. She did not understand what had happened to him; but he had evidently changed—and very much for the worse. What had come over him to make him like this?

The junior quickened his pace to keep level as she hurried on. He had evidently no intention of letting her leave him.

"Don't hurry!" he said.

"I must hurry."

"Do you want to get away from me?" he demanded.

"Yes," said the girl, with frankness.

"I do!"

"Then what did you speak to me for?" he demanded.

"I don't know—I did not know what you were like!" Ethel almost gasped.

"I—I never thought you were like this. It is a surprise to me."

He laughed.

"Oh, don't come the high and mighty!" he said. "I know girls, you know—precious few things I don't know, I can tell you. When shall I see you again?"

"You will not see me again at all!"

"Would you like me to come up to the school?"

"No."

"Then you'll see me outside?"

"No."

The smile left his face. He looked angry and puzzled.

"Blessed if I can make you out," he said. "Don't hurry; the school's in sight when you turn the next corner, but I don't want you to leave me yet. You look a jolly girl, and there's no reason I can see why we shouldn't have a good time. And, dash it all, you spoke to me first; you can't get out of that!"

Ethel made no reply; she hurried on, almost running now, only anxious to get away from him. He scowled angrily and ran after her, caught her by the arm, and forced her to stop.

"Look here, what does this game mean?" he demanded. "You spoke to me, and led me on, and now you're pretending to come the goody-goody bisney. I don't understand it, and I don't like it. See?"

"Let me go!"

"Oh, rats!" he said coolly. He glanced round; the country lane was



"Let me go, you coward!" cried Cousin Ethel. "Stuff!" exclaimed the junior. "Look here—!" There was a ring of bicycle bells, and three cyclists came whizzing round the bend in the lane. "Hallo!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "Cousin Ethel!"

quite solitary save for themselves, and the bunch of trees at the corner of the bend in the lane hid St. Jim's from sight. "I'm not going to have my walk for nothing, to be thrown over at the end of it. You can't expect it!"

"Let me go!" Ethel panted.

He tightened his grasp upon her wrist.

"You needn't meet me again if you don't want to," he said. "I'm not specially keen on it. But you're not going to play me for a fool like this. I think it's like your cheek, if you want to know my opinion. Now, you're going to drop the goody-goody game and kiss me for good-bye. See?"

"You—you coward!" gasped Ethel.

He tightened his grasp again and grinned into her startled, frightened face. There was an aroma of spirits and tobacco upon his breath, and the girl made a movement of disgusted repugnance. His eyes glittered with anger.

"Let me go, you coward!" cried Ethel.

"Stuff! Look here——"

There was a ring of bicycle bells round the corner of the road. It was like music to the ears of the frightened girl. She did not know who was coming, but whoever it was he was coming in the nick of time.

"Help!" cried Ethel.

"Oh, cheese it!" growled the junior.

"Look here——"

"Help!"

Three cyclists came whizzing into sight round the bend in the lane.

"Hallo!"

"Cousin Ethel!"

Three lads leaped down, letting their cycles go spinning where they would. Three pairs of hands grasped the boy who was holding Ethel's wrist; and he was wrenched away from her and hurled into the ditch beside the road in the twinkling of an eye. Ethel, with a gasp of relief, turned to her rescuers—and then she staggered—astounded! For she recognised them—Monty Lowther, Manners, and—Tom Merry!

CHAPTER 15.

Clearing Up the Mystery!

"TOM MERRY!"

Cousin Ethel cried out the name in amazement.

The Shell fellow looked at her in surprise.

"Yes, here I am," he said. "Jolly glad we came along just then. Was that cad annoying you?"

"Oh!" panted Ethel. "I—I have been mistaken, then! I am so glad! It—it is really you! It seems like a dream!"

"You've been scared," said Tom Merry, wondering at the girl's strange agitation. "By Jove, I'll make that cad suffer for it! You two fellows take Ethel away while I look after that beast!"

"Right-ho!" said Manners.

"Give him one for me!" said Monty Lowther.

The boy in the ditch was scrambling out, his face dark with rage. Fortunately for him, it had not been full of water. But there was enough water and mud in it to make him a sorry-looking object. His boots were caked with mud, and his trousers thick with it, and he was splashed all over.

"Don't go!" exclaimed Ethel. "Tom Merry! I—I— Look at that boy!"

Tom Merry, surprised, fixed his eyes upon the boy. He started as he looked at him. The fellow's face looked

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familiar, though Tom Merry did not know where he had seen it before. The clear-cut, handsome features—the blue eyes and curly hair—he knew them well!

"Great Scott!" shouted Monty Lowther, as he looked at the junior's face. "Great Christopher Columbus and Aunt Jemima! Look at him, Manners!"

"Oh, my hat!" said Manners, with a whistle. "That's the giddy mystery, is it?"

"I—I seem to know him," said Tom Merry. "I've seen his chivvy before, somewhere."

"In the looking-glass!" chuckled Lowther.

"What!"

"He's your giddy double!"

"My—my double!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Yes. Blessed if I should know one from the other, only your face is healthier to look at," said Manners.



"That rotter looks as if he's had a good many late nights!"

"I—I thought it was you, Tom Merry, and spoke to him outside Rylcombe," said Cousin Ethel. "I—I never dreamed that it was somebody else, though he spoke as you would never have spoken to me. I—I—"

Tom Merry stepped closer to the stranger. He scanned the scowling face with keen eyes. There was no doubt about it; the boy was Tom Merry's living image. No wonder his features had appeared familiar to the Shell fellow.

"Might be a giddy twin!" said Lowther. "Blessed if I knew you had any twins lying about loose, Tom Merry."

"I haven't, that I know of," said Tom. "That chap certainly looks like me enough to be my brother, but I haven't any brothers."

"I—I am so glad it wasn't you, Tom!" faltered Ethel. "I was surprised when he spoke as he did—I could not understand it!"

"The rotter has insulted you!" said Tom Merry. "Go on with Manners and Lowther—"

"No, no! I spoke to him first," said Ethel, crimsoning. "Of course, I took

him for you; but he did not know that; so—so he misunderstood, I suppose."

"Still, he was a cad to——"

"Pile it on," said the junior, with a disagreeable grin. "If the young lady spoke to me by mistake, I'm willing to apologise; but naturally, I thought she wanted me, or she wouldn't have spoken to a stranger. That's all!"

"You are a rotten worm!" said Tom Merry.

"Thanks!"

"What's your name?" demanded Tom Merry. "You've been taken for me before; by several fellows who've seen you playing the rotten blackguard, and I've got into trouble over it. Who are you?"

The junior chuckled.

"Well, I didn't know that!" he said. "My name's Reggie Clavering, if you want to know. And you can go and eat coke!"

The junior swung away. Monty Lowther grasped him by the shoulder and swung him back.

"Hands off!" said Clavering angrily.

"We're not done with you yet!" grinned Lowther.

Ethel made a gesture of appeal.

"Lowther—don't——"

"He ought to be licked!" said Manners.

"No——"

"Well, let him go, then," said Tom Merry. "The cad isn't worth licking!"

"Hold on!" said Lowther. "It explains now about Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, and Gussy making that mistake. But when we tell the yarn at St. Jim's, there will be a good many fellows jib at it—Levison & Co., you know, and some more. We're going to prove it!"

"But—but how——"

"By taking this fellow to St. Jim's with us, and showing him to the fellows," said Monty Lowther.

"My hat, that's a jolly good idea!" exclaimed Manners.

"I'm jolly well not coming with you," growled Clavering. "Hands off!"

Lowther smiled sweetly.

"You can walk, or you can be carried," he said. "I don't want the trouble of carrying you, and if I have to do it, I shan't handle you gently. Tommy, my son, take Cousin Ethel on to the school, and we'll follow with our giddy friend who has had the cheek to go about with the same set of features as a pal of ours. If he doesn't come quietly, I shall alter his features so much that there won't be any chance of a mistake again."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Right-ho!" he said.

And Tom Merry walked on with Cousin Ethel.

Manners picked up the bicycles and wheeled them; and Monty Lowther, with an iron grip on the stranger's arm, forced him to walk towards the school. Clavering resisted fiercely.

"I'm not coming, I tell you!" he shouted.

"Shove those bikes against a tree, Manners; you can fetch them in afterwards," said Monty Lowther. "Lend me a hand now with this rotter!"

"Certainly!" said Manners.

Clavering struggled savagely; but he was swung off his feet. Manners took his shoulders and Lowther his legs, and he was carried bodily in the direction of the school. And as he still resisted, he was bumped down once or twice upon the hard road. Then he left off resisting, and resigned himself to his fate.

Tom Merry and Cousin Ethel entered the gateway of St. Jim's.

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn were waiting there. Figgins, in spite of his black

eye, did not mean to miss seeing Cousin Ethel, and Kerr and Wynn kept him company. The New House Co. raised their caps at once; and looked grimly enough at Tom Merry. But Tom Merry's face was bright and friendly now.

"It's all right, Figgy!" he exclaimed. "What?" said Figgins, as he shook hands with Cousin Ethel.

"So glad to see you again, Ethel!" "Hallo!" shouted Kerr. "What's that?"

Lowther and Manners came in with their burden.

Figgins & Co. stared at Clavering blankly.

"Tom Merry's double!" said Lowther blandly. "The chap you fellows met and took for Tom Merry."

"Great Scott!" "Let me go!" howled Clavering.

"Not just yet, my pippin," said Lowther. "You're on view, you know. Every chap at St. Jim's has got to see you before you're allowed to go loose again. Bring him in, Manners."

"What-ho!" said Manners.

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn stared blankly at the junior who strangely resembled the captain of the Shell. They understood now. It was only too clear that Tom Merry had a double—and this was the fellow; and the New House chums understood the mistake they had made.

"I—I'm sorry, Tom Merry!" Figgins faltered. "I—I suppose this was the fellow we found squiffy in the lane—"

"And helped over the stile," said Kerr.

"We thought it was you, Tom Merry," said Fatty Wynn. "Blessed if I'd have dreamed there could be two fellows so like one another! I'm sorry!"

Tom Merry smiled.

"It's all right," he said. "I'm jolly glad the mystery is cleared up, that's all. My hat, they're getting a crowd round now!"

Manners and Lowther had stopped before the School House with their victim.

Fellows were gathering round from all quarters to look at him and to demand to know what it all meant.

The chums of Study No. 6 had seen Ethel from their study window, and they were coming out to meet her in the quad when they spotted Clavering.

They stared at him blankly.

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy. "What are you holdin' Tom Mewwy like that for, you fellows?"

"Tom Merry's over there with Cousin Ethel and Figgins," said Lowther.

"What!" "My only hat!" yelled Blake. "Then he's got a double, and this is the giddy double! Who'd have thought it?"

"Yaas, wathah," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, his gaze going from Clavering to Tom Merry, and then back again to Clavering, in helpless amazement. "Bai Jove! This must be the fellow I saw outside the Gween Man—and I took him for Tom Mewwy! Tom Mewwy, deah boy, I beg to offah my most sincere apologies!"

"Accepted!" said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Come and look at him, Levison!" shouted Lowther. "And you, Crooke, and Gore, and Mellish! Bring those rotters over here; they're not going to have any excuse for pretending they don't believe it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Levison was pushed forward by the juniors and forced to take a survey

of the scowling Clavering, and to admit that he was indeed Tom Merry's double. The news had spread far and wide by this time, and pretty nearly all St. Jim's had collected upon the spot.

There were exclamations of amazement on all sides, and of delight and relief from Tom Merry's friends. Kildare of the Sixth came off the cricket field to see the stranger, and the roar of voices brought the Head of St. Jim's to his study window, and Mr. Railton out into the quadrangle.

"Bless my soul! What is the cause of this extraordinary disturbance?" exclaimed Dr. Holmes, as he leaned out of the window and looked over the surging crowd in the quad.

"Show him to the Head!" shouted Blake.

Clavering was dragged forward under the Head's window.

"Bless my soul! Tom Merry—"

"It isn't Tom Merry, sir—here's Tom Merry!" called out Figgins.

"Bless my soul!" repeated the amazed Head.

"It's the chap who's been taken for Tom Merry, sir!" Monty Lowther explained. "Three silly duffers took him for Tom Merry on Monday evening, and—"

"Look here—" began Kerr.

"And another silly ass took him for Tom Merry yesterday, sir!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"So we've brought him here to show all the fellows, sir, and show them what asses they've been!" said Lowther.

The Head coughed, and then smiled.

"Very good idea, Lowther. Indeed, the resemblance is most remarkable—and I think I should have been deceived (Continued on page 28.)"

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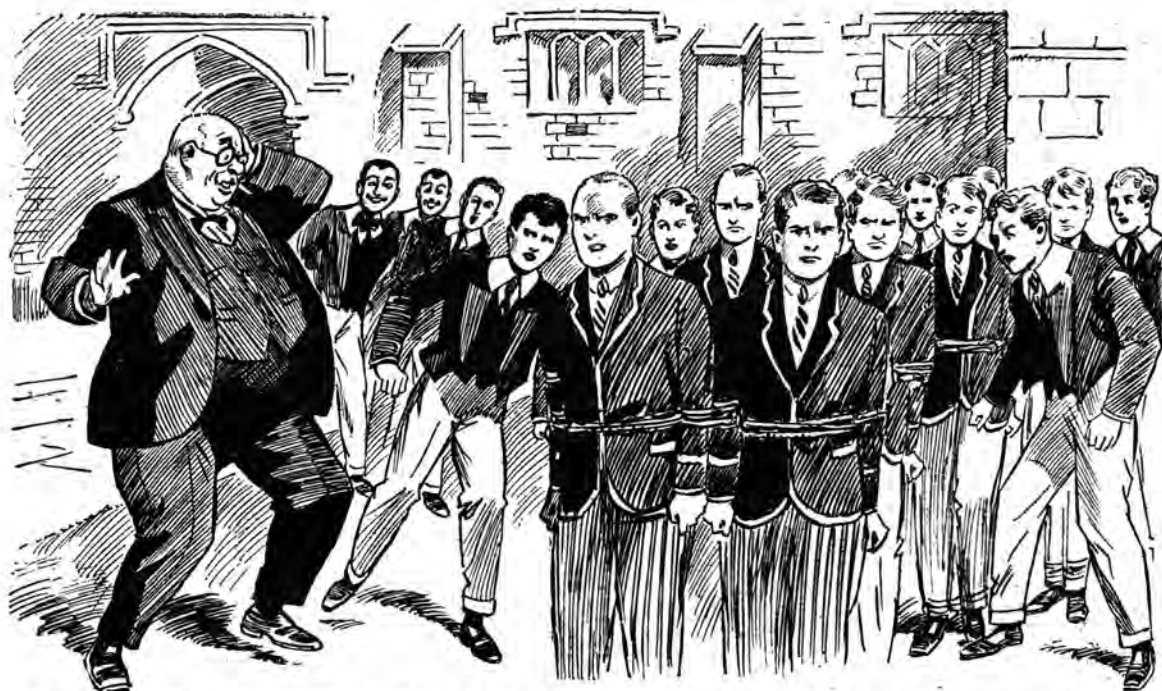
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"Poys!" gasped Herr Rosenblum, staring at the procession in amazement. "Vat does dis outrage mean after, ain't it? Vat are dese poys doing tied up mit rope mit demselves?" "It's all right, sir," said Nugent. "Only a little fun, you know!"

English and German!

QUICK, Wharton!" Nugent of the Remove dashed into Study No. 1 at Greyfriars in a state of breathless excitement and gasped out the words. Harry Wharton started to his feet.

"What on earth's the matter?"

"Hoffman and his lot are after me!"

"But—"

"Hark!"

There was a sound of rushing feet in the passage, a howl of guttural German. Harry Wharton sprang to the door and locked it just in time. Nugent had sunk breathlessly upon a chair. The moment after the key had turned there came a violent kick on the door from without.

"Open tat door pefore!"

"Rats!" gasped Nugent. "And many of 'em!"

There was a terrific thumping on the outside of the door.

"Open it, ain't it! Open tat door pefore!"

"Go and eat coke!"

"Ve vill preak in te door after mit ourselves!"

"You're welcome to try," grinned Nugent. "It's thick oak, as thick as your napper, Fritz Hoffman, which is saying a great deal."

"Mein gootness! I vill preak it in!"

And there were thumps and kicks upon the door in deafening succession.

"What's the cause of all this, Nugent?" asked Harry Wharton.

Nugent gave a breathless laugh.

"In a row," he said. "We've had enough lately to get used to them, I think. I don't believe there's been an hour's peace in the Remove since the foreign chaps came to Greyfriars."

"Well, you're right there," said THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,483.

HARRY WHARTON'S CHALLENGE!

By Frank Richards.

(Author of the grand long yarns of Greyfriars appearing every Saturday in our companion paper the "Magnet.")

Wharton, with a smile. "Between Hoffman and the German kids, and Meunier and the French ones, we've had lively times the past week or two."

Thump, thump, thump! Crash, crash, crash!

"By Jove, they'll have the Form-master on the scene if they don't shut up!" said Wharton anxiously. "Mr. Quelch has been in a state of lunacy lately about the rows we've had, and he'll come up in a raging temper."

"The asses ought to know better."

"Open tat door pefore!"

"Rats!"

"Den ve vill preak it in!"

Thump, thump, thump! Bang, bang, bang!

"But what's it all about?" asked Wharton.

"It was just a word I said to Hoffman in the Form-room," said Nugent. "I only asked him what price German

sausages were, and he got as ratty as anything. Then I punched his nose—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Then the whole gang wanted to frog-march me, so I bolted. I tell you, Harry, things are getting too lively at Greyfriars with those foreign bounders here!" exclaimed Nugent.

Harry Wharton nodded.

"I've been thinking so myself."

"You see, we are bound to be the heads of the Form," said Nugent. "As English chaps and native Friars we naturally take the lead."

"Naturally."

"But Fritz Hoffman will never see that."

"He's an obstinate ass."

"And Adolphe Meunier can't see it, either."

"He's another."

"And the French and German kids don't even agree among themselves," said Nugent. "When they're not rowing us, they're going for each other."

"Exactly."

"They only agree on one point, and that is that the home-grown article—that's us—shan't be the head of the Remove."

"Which is mere rot, of course."

"Only they can't see it."

"They must be made to see it," said Harry Wharton quietly. "We're going to be top dogs of the Remove, Frank, and put the aliens in their places."

"Well, we've tried," said Nugent, rather ruefully, while the hammering at the door continued without cessation. "Bob Cherry has had two fights with Fritz Hoffman, and it was a draw each time."

"Yes; they were about equally matched," said Harry. "And Hurree Singh came to the same conclusion in his fight with Meunier—they both went to the end and couldn't stand—and neither was licked."

THERE'S EXCITEMENT GALORE IN THESE SPARKLING CHAPTERS OF THE EARLY ADVENTURES OF HARRY WHARTON & CO.

"Besides, the beggars have pluck," said Nugent. "If we licked them, they'd come up smiling again as soon as they got over it."

"I suppose they would." Thump, thump, thump! Bang, bang, bang!

"By Jove, they're going it! I wonder Quelch doesn't come up."

"Perhaps he's gone out."

"I shouldn't wonder; he usually goes out early in the afternoon on a half-holiday," assented Nugent. "I dare say he's gone out, and they know it, and none of the other masters would interfere with the Remove. Hoffman knows that, too." Thump, thump, thump! "They've got to be licked and put in their places once and for all," said Nugent; "but the question is, how is it to be done?"

"A rather difficult question to answer," said Harry Wharton, laughing.

"Yes, there's the rub."

"I say, they'll bust that lock if they go on like this," said Wharton, after a pause. "That's a stool or something they're banging it with."

"Sounds like it."

"No good opening the door and letting in seven or eight howling Deutschers, either. They would wreck the study."

"That's what they intend to do."

"Well, they'll be disappointed this time," Harry Wharton walked to the study window and opened it. It looked out on the Close of Greyfriars, shaded by the old elms, quiet and deserted on the half-holiday. A fat little junior, wearing an enormous pair of spectacles, was eating jam tarts under one of the elms, and Harry's glance at once turned to him.

"Bunter!"

Billy Bunter, otherwise known in the Remove as the Owl, on account of his extremely short sight and the owlish appearance his big spectacles gave him, looked round him on hearing his name called.

He seemed rather surprised to find that there was nobody in sight.

"By George! I thought I heard someone call," he murmured, and then resumed eating his jam tarts.

"Bunter!"

Bunter gave a start and blinked round through his spectacles, and this time he saw Wharton at the study window.

"Hallo, Wharton! Is that you?"

"Yes, ass! I want you to go and find Bob Cherry and Hurree Singh!" called out Harry. "Tell them the Germans are besieging us in our study, and we want them to bring some of the fellows to the rescue."

"Certainly, Wharton!"

"And buck up!"

"I shan't be a minute or two finishing these tarts—"

"Go at once!" roared Harry. "They'll have the lock in in a minute or two."

"Now, don't get into a bad temper, Wharton—"

"You—you worm! Go at once! They'll wreck the study if they get in!"

"Oh, very well!" said Billy Bunter resignedly. "I suppose I had better go, Wharton."

"I suppose you had, if you don't want me to break you into little pieces presently."

Billy Bunter disappeared among the trees, but once out of sight of the study window he halted under an elm to finish his tarts at leisure. Not till the last

crumb had vanished did he proceed to carry out Harry Wharton's directions and go and find Bob Cherry and Hurree Singh.

English and French!

"MON Dieu—"

"Rats!"

"Ciel!"

"More rats!"

"I tell you viz my own tongue—"

"Well, you couldn't very well tell me with anybody else's—"

"Cochon!"

"Ass!"

"Beast!"

"Lunatic!"

The argument was growing warm in the gymnasium of Greyfriars. Bob Cherry of the Remove was talking to Adolphe Meunier, and the conversation was growing decidedly personal. Behind Meunier stood half a dozen youths of his own nationality, all looking very excited, while a number of fellows belonging to the Remove—the Lower Fourth Form at Greyfriars—were grouped round Bob Cherry. Close by him, and evidently ready for war, stood a dusky-complexioned youth, generally known at Greyfriars as "Inky," but more properly called Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, Nabob of Bhanipur.

The aliens of Greyfriars make no secret of their intention to be top dogs in the Remove. But Harry Wharton & Co. prove themselves more than equal to the challenge of the foreigners!

Matters had long been lively in the Greyfriars Remove.

Greyfriars had been invaded by aliens. A foreign academy kept by Herr Rosenblum at Beechwood had closed its doors for financial reasons, and Herr Rosenblum had come to Greyfriars as German master, and many of his boys had come with him.

Dr. Locke had hardly foreseen the result, although he had expected that there would be some friction at first.

Hurree Singh, the Hindu, had chummed up with Wharton, Cherry, and Nugent in Study No. 1 as a true British subject. But the German and the French boys had made no secret of their intention to keep top dogs from the start. And, as Nugent had put in, when they were not rowing with the native members of the Remove, they were disputing among themselves. Their old feud at Beechwood had been brought with them to Greyfriars, and the rows on the subject were endless.

"Vat you call me?" asked Meunier excitedly, shaking a fist in the face of Bob Cherry.

"I called you a lunatic—a giddy lunatic!"

"Ciel! For zem words I chastise you."

Bob Cherry grinned.

"Right-ho! Chastise away, Froggy!"

"Go aheadful!" exclaimed Hurree Singh, in the beautiful English he had learned from his native instructor in Bengal. "We are readyful for the

rowfulness, my esteemed friends. We shall return as good as you deliver."

"Nigger!"

The Indian's eyes flashed.

"My worthy Frenchful friend, I shall bestow upon you the dustfulness of the floor—"

"He, he, he!" cackled Meunier. "Commence-vous, and I vill—"

Bob Cherry held the excitable Indian back.

"Leave that to me, Inky!" he exclaimed.

Hurree Singh shook his head.

"It is to me to wipe up the floor dustfully with him, Cherry. It is impossible for the Nabob of Bhanipur to submit to the insultfulness."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Cochon!" shrieked Meunier. "Come on viz you!"

"Oui, oui, come on!" shouted Gaston Artois. "Ve vill wipe up ze floor viz you!"

"They wou't be happy till they get it," said Bob Cherry. "So here goes."

And he rushed at Adolphe Meunier.

The two closed at once and went staggering about the gym, clutched in deadly embrace. The next moment Hurree Singh was struggling with Gaston Artois, and then the French and English boys were mixed up in a wild scrimmage.

It was not the first by many a one which had occurred since the foreigners came to Greyfriars.

Although there was no real ill-feeling at the bottom of the disputes, the rivalry was keen, and seldom slept.

The din in the gymnasium was terrific.

The excitable French boys shouted and shrieked as they fought, while the English boys were mostly silent, but all the more determined for that.

The odds, as it happened, were against the French, and they were soon driven into a corner of the gym and penned there. But they were not beaten yet.

Bob Cherry called his followers on.

"Rush the rotters!" he exclaimed.

"We'll take 'em out into the Close and frogmarch them round the school."

"Bravo!" shouted Trevor. "Come on!"

"Good! The rushfulness is the good wheeze!" exclaimed Hurree Singh.

The combatants had paused for a moment to take breath.

Now the English lads rushed forward again, and the French were fighting like wildcats with their backs to the wall.

The uproar was terrific, when Wingate, the captain of Greyfriars, stepped into the gym. He stared at the scrambling, yelling juniors, and started towards them with a wrathful brow.

"Stop that, you young rascals!"

But the young rascals were too excited to heed him.

They did not even hear him as they fought and struggled in the corner of the gym. Wingate strode on and came among them, cuffing right and left. Then they heeded his presence at last.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Trevor, as he reeled away from a hearty cuff.

"What's the matter?"

"Stop it, I say!"

"Hollo, Wingate! Is that you?"

"Yes; stop this rowing, you young hooligans!"

The combat ceased at last.

There had been severe damage on both sides, and there was scarcely a

face there that did not bear very plain traces of the fray.

Black eyes and swollen noses and thick ears were plentiful, and torn collars and ripped jackets were not scarce.

The rivals of the Remove glared at each other in unappeased hostility, but the captain's word was law.

"What does this mean, Cherry? I suppose I am not far wrong in taking you for the ringleader, as Wharton does not seem to be here."

Bob Cherry grinned.

"Right-ho, Wingate! I dare say you're about correct," he said cheerfully.

"What do you mean by rowing in the gym like a set of hooligans?"

Bob Cherry looked inquiringly at Hurree Singh.

"What do I mean by it, Hurree Jampot?" he asked.

The Indian shook his head.

"I have not the knowledgefulness to reply," he said. "The meaningfulness is—"

"You see, Wingate—"

"Yes, I see," said the Greyfriars captain grimly. "I see a cheeky young rascal and I see that he needs a lesson!"

And his finger and thumb closed on Bob Cherry's ear like the grip of a vice.

The Removite wriggled.

"I say, Wingate, let go! You're hurting my ear."

"How curious," said Wingate, with grim humour. "Strange as it may appear to you, Cherry, that is actually my intention."

"Ow! Ow!"

Wingate let him go. Bob Cherry put his hand ruefully to his crimson ear.

"Now, then, what is all this about?" said Wingate.

"Oh, it's only a row, you know."

"Do you mean to say that you were quarrelling for nothing?"

"Yes, I believe so. One must do something on a half-holiday, you know," said Bob Cherry cheerfully. "What were we rowing about, Meunier?"

The French junior grinned.

"Pour passer le temps," he chuckled.

"It is really nozing, Wingate. Ve row because ve row, vous comprenez. Zat is all—Ciel! Let go my ear!"

Wingate gave the French boy's ear a twist.

"Do you think that is enough?" he asked, releasing it.

"Oui, oui," groaned Adolphe Meunier. "Zat is quite enough—in fact, it is ze too mooch."

"No more of this," said Wingate sternly. "If I catch you scrapping again I'll speak to your Form-master about it, and get you a hundred lines apiece. Remember."

And the captain of the school walked away.

The juniors looked at one another and grinned.

"Rows are off for the present," said Bob Cherry, taking Hurree Singh's arm. "Come along, my black tulip."

"With pleasurefulness," said the nabob.

And they strolled out of the gym. They were met at the door by Billy Bunter. He looked at them curiously.

"Hallo, have you been having a row, Cherry?"

"Looks like it, doesn't it," said Bob, dabbing his nose with a crimsoned handkerchief.

"Yes, rather. I say, you fellows—"

"Oh, don't bother us now, Bunter."

"But I say—"

"I'm going to get a wash," said Bob Cherry. "You look as if you could do

with one as well, Jampot, and a clean collar into the bargain."

"I'm going to seek the wash and the cleanful collar," said Hurree Singh.

"Come along, then."

"But I say, you fellows—"

"Oh, don't bother!"

"The botherfulness of the fat sahib is extremeful," said Hurree Singh. "Shall I bestow upon him the punchfulness on the nose, my worthy chum?"

"Certainly!"

Billy Bunter retreated.

"But I say, Cherry," he called out from a safe distance, "Wharton sent me to tell you that the German kids are besieging him in his study."

"Is that true, you young ass?"

"Of course it is. Wharton sent me to tell you—"

"Oh, dry up! Get the fellows together, Jampot, and follow me."

"Certainly!"

Bob Cherry dashed off, and the nabob was not long in gathering the heroes of the fight in the gym and following him.

The Remove to the Rescue!

THUMP, thump, thump!

Bang, bang, bang!

The din outside Study No. 1 was continuing without cessation. Eight or nine German juniors were gathered in the passage, and Fritz Hoffman, the burly leader of the German faction, was wielding a heavy stool, which he was crashing against the lock of the study door.

Crash! Bang! Crash!

The door gave an ominous groan.

"It's giving in!" exclaimed Karl Lutz, Hoffman's chum, gleefully.

"Ja, it is giving in," he said. "A few more plows like tat, and ve shall be in te study mit ourselves after."

The lock was evidently yielding.

The German boys stood prepared to make a rush as soon as the door should open. The absence of the Form-master gave them an opportunity, long desired, of bringing their rivalry with Study No. 1 to a head.

"Ve vill wreck te study," grinned Karl Lutz. "Ve vill preak eferyting, and rag te pounders till dey do not know veder dey are on deir head or deir heel."

"Mein gootness! You vas right, ain't it!"

"Te lock is preaking."

Bang! Crash!

With a snap the lock parted.

The door flew violently open, and Hoffman, with an exclamation of triumph, dropped the stool.

"Come on!" he shouted.

"Ach! Rush tem!"

The German boys made a forward movement.

But within the study stood Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent, each with a bottle of ink raised in his hand.

"Stop where you are!" said Wharton calmly.

Fritz Hoffman hesitated.

The bottle of ink looked rather dangerous, and he had no desire to be drenched from head to foot in its contents.

The fellows pushed him on, and he had to enter the study.

He made a virtue of a necessity, and, shouting to his comrades to follow, he dashed straight at Harry Wharton.

Harry gave a jerk of the wrist, and a stream of black ink shot into the German's face, and he reeled back with a yell. Nugent discharged his bottle at the same moment, and Karl Lutz received the ink and staggered away, gasping.

The other German lads burst into a laugh as they saw their leaders suddenly transformed into niggers. But they rushed right on.

Wharton and Nugent stood shoulder to shoulder. There was nothing for it but to fight now.

Two or three of the Germans rolled over under their blows, and then the odds told, and they were borne back right across the study by the rush.

Fritz Hoffman rubbed the ink from his eyes and glared about him.

"Hold dem!" he roared. "Ve vill drench dem mit ink demselves after."

"Ha, ha! Ach! We haf dem!"

Wharton and Nugent were struggling vainly in the grasp of the Germans. The numbers against them were too great. They were borne to the floor, and secured by the simple process of being sat on by their adversaries.

With two or three stout Germans sitting on each of them they were powerless, and had to give up the struggle.

"Rescue!" bawled Nugent, at the top of his voice.

Fritz Hoffman grinned.

"Ach, dere is no rescue!" he remarked. "Te oder poy's are in te gym, and dey hear you not. Ve vill ainoit you mit te ink."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hold dem tight!"

"Ve haf dem, ain't it!"

"I vill soon get te ink."

Hoffman began rummaging about the study, and the two chums recommenced a desperate struggle to get free. But it was useless. The enemy were too many for them.

"I wonder if that little rotter Bunter gave Cherry my message?" murmured Harry Wharton breathlessly. "If not, we're done in."

"Rescue!" yelled Nugent.

There was a sound of pattering feet in the corridor.

"What-ho, Remove!" shouted the well-known voice of Bob Cherry.

"Help!" yelled Nugent.

Bob Cherry came dashing into the study.

"Look out!" yelled Karl Lutz.

The German boys were looking out. Two or three of them flung themselves upon Bob Cherry in an instant, and he went reeling back, fighting like a tiger against the odds. But other running feet sounded along the passage now.

"Rescue, Remove!" shouted Bob Cherry.

And a familiar voice answered:

"The rescuefulness is coming!"

And Hurree Singh dashed in, with a crowd of Removites at his heels. The Germans at once jumped up from the prisoners and faced the new enemy. But the tables were fairly turned now. The odds were on the British side.

The Removites dashed into the fray, and the Germans were knocked right and left.

Wharton and Nugent sprang to their feet and joined in with hearty goodwill, and the German party would have given a great deal just then to have got safely out of Study No. 1. But escape was cut off.

Hurree Singh had slammed the door behind the Removites when they were all in, and was standing with his back to it now. There was no escape for the invaders.

The room was not a large one, and there was hardly space for the combatants to move when the rescuers had crowded in.

The furniture was knocked right and left. The table went over with a crash, scattering books and papers on all

sides, and the chairs were hurled to and fro.

The Germans were soon mostly on the floor, with victorious juniors sitting on them, keeping them pinned down. Hurree Singh surveyed the scene with a beaming smile.

"The foreignful bounders are prisoners now," he said. "They have wrecked the study; but that is of little importantfulness. We have captured them, and I think the ripping wheeze will be to make the example of them."

"Hear, hear!" gasped Hazeldene.

"Let us go! Ach, you peasts!"

"Mein gootness! You vas crush my chest, ain't it."

"Ach! I cannot preathee mit meinself!"

"I was choke, ain't it!"

"Never mind!" said Bob Cherry. "If you choke, we shan't miss you much, and we'll see you comfortably buried, you know."

"Ach! You vas a prute!"

"You vas vun peeg!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Now, Wharton, what are we going to do with them?"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"I think Hurree Jampot's idea is a good one!" he exclaimed. "We'll make an example of them."

"Good! What's the wheeze?"

"Of course, we don't want to hurt them!"

"Ha, ha, ha! They're looking rather hurt already!"

"Are you hurt, Hoffman?"

"Ach! You peast!"

"They are suffering from considerable hurtfulness," said Hurree Singh, in his purring voice. "The duckfulness in the fountain would revive them, my worthy friends."

"Ha, ha! Good idea!"

"Mein gootness! You vas not—"

"Dry up, Dutchy! You're licked, you know. And this is where we do the talking," said Bob Cherry, giving Hoffman a gentle poke in the ribs with his boot.

"Ach! I tink—"

"You can tink or tinkle as much as you like, but do it quietly," said Bob Cherry. "You're dead in this act. Now then, Wharton, what's to be done with them?"

"I don't think the ducking in the fountain would cure them of their cheek," said Harry. "I've got a rather good wheeze. The German kids must be taught that our study is sacred territory."

"Rather!"

"And that it mustn't be invaded by any aliens."

"Mein gootness! I tink—"

"Tink away, but shut up!" said Nugent. "Go on, Wharton."

"Well, they will have to be given a lesson. I think it would be a good idea to tie them up two and two, and march them round the Close, as a sort of exhibition of funny animals captured by us—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Then all Greyfriars will be able to see that we are top dogs of the Remove," explained Wharton. "If we make an example like that of these German bounders—"

"Ach! I vill gif you Cherman pounders—"

"Shut up, Dutchy!"

"It will show that they're of no account in the Form," said Wharton. "And after that we'll handle the French in the same way, and show them up. When both lots have had a good licking we may get a little peace."

"Good!"

"Somebody go and find some ropes



As Fritz Hoffman and Karl Lutz dashed at them, Wharton and Nugent jerked, their bottles of ink at the same moment. Two streams of black ink shot into the German boys' faces, and they reeled back with wild yells.

somewhere," said Harry Wharton rather vaguely, "and we'll start the procession."

"Mein Himmel! You vas nefer—"

"Dry up, Dutchy!"

"I vill not dry up! I say—"

"No, you don't! Sit on his head, Hazeldene, and make him shut up!"

"Certainly."

And Hazeldene obeyed, and Fritz Hoffman gasped and perforce was silent.

The Procession!

"HERE'S the giddy rope!"

"Good! Now to business."

Harry Wharton gave directions, and the Removites carried them out promptly. Fritz Hoffman and Karl Lutz were the first two to be secured. Their ankles were bound so that they could only walk with short steps, and Hoffman's right arm was tied to Lutz's left. Then their other arms were bound down to their sides. They stood, quite helpless, glowering with rage at the grinning Removites.

"They look nice, don't they?" said Bob Cherry, gazing at them. "Hoffman looks rather ill-tempered, though. Are you feeling annoyed about anything, Hoffman?"

"Ach! You peasts!"

"Is there anything disturbing your equanimity?"

"Peast! Prute! Pounder!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Do you know what a peast, prute, pounder is, you chaps?"

"Ach! I vill—"

"Oh, ring off, Dutchy!" said Nugent. "You've had your turn. Now for the others."

"Back up!" said Wharton. "The masters are off the scene now, but we never know when they may come along.

We want to get the procession over without being interrupted."

"Right-ho! Shackle them up!"

The German juniors struggled and protested, but it was of no avail. Two by two they were shackled, till the four pairs of them were fastened up, and all was ready for the procession.

The juniors were red with rage and indignation, and they naturally shrank from the intended exhibition in the Close, but there was no help for them.

They had entered the lions' den in invading Study No. 1, and now the time had come to pay for their temerity.

"Form them in line," said Wharton.

"Come along, you bounders!"

"Ve vill not come!" shrieked Hoffman. "Ve vill not come, you peasts! We defy you to make us come pefore."

"Ha, ha, ha! Push them along!"

"Ach! Peegs! Prutes!"

The Removites, laughing, crowded round the prisoners, and they were shoved and hustled out of the study into the passage.

There, in spite of their resistance, they were bundled along helplessly towards the stairs, surrounded by Removites.

The House seemed to be deserted, and it was well for the chums of Study No. 1 that it was so.

It was a fine afternoon, and the weather had tempted out all who could go, and there was not a master left in the House.

With plenty of noise and struggling, the Germans went surging down the stairs in the midst of their captors.

Down into the Hall and then out into the bright sunny Close.

"Shove them along!"

"Make the beggars march!"

"Ach! I tells you tat I vill not march!"

"And I tell you that you will, Hoffy!"

"I vill not! I—Ow!"

"Shove 'em along!"

"Ve vill not! Ow—ow!"

The more obstinate Germans were pinched when they halted, and hustled and shoved along. In the midst of the laughing Removites they went forward on their forlorn march round the quadrangle.

"My only hat! What is that?"

Carberry of the Sixth was coming towards the House, and he stopped in amazement at the sight of the procession.

Harry Wharton laughed.

"It's only an exhibition," he explained. "We are exhibiting these curious animals which we have captured."

"Ha, ha, ha! What have you got them tied up for?"

"They're dangerous at close quarters. It's safer to keep them tied up in a state of captivity."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ach! Ve vill preak all your peastly bones—"

"Come alone, Dutchy!"

Carberry stood laughing as the procession passed on. A good many other fellows stared at it in amazement and mirth. Windows opened in various parts of the school buildings, and curious faces looked out.

"Ciel! Vat is zat, zen?"

Adolphe Meunier and his friends came crowding round.

The French juniors were far from pitying the plight of the Germans. They yelled with laughter at the predicament of Hoffman and his companions, and the furious glares of the prisoners only increased their mirth.

"He, he, he!" cackled Meunier. "Zat is ver' funny!"

"Ach, you peastly pounders!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bring them along!"

"March, you beggars—march!"

The procession wound on round the Close, the accompanying crowd growing larger every minute.

Bob Cherry suddenly uttered an exclamation of dismay.

"Cave!"

"What's the matter?"

"The Herr!"

"My only hat!"

It was too late for retreat. The Removites stood their ground, and the procession came to a disorderly standstill.

Herr Rosenblaum, the German master of Greyfriars, was bearing down on the procession, his fat face blank with astonishment.

Herr Rosenblaum, formerly headmaster of Beechwood Foreign Academy, had brought his foreign pupils with him to Greyfriars, and the endless disturbances that had followed had since worried him considerably. He was accustomed to rows at his old school, but national rivalry seemed to have taken a new lease of life among the Beechwood boys since they had come to Greyfriars. There had been disputes and fights without limit, but nothing quite so outrageous as the German master now beheld.

"Poys!" Herr Rosenblaum could only gasp out that one word. He stood gazing at the prisoners and their conductors in utter amazement. "Poys!"

"Yes, sir?" said Harry Wharton, with his usual calmness, though he felt an inward tremor.

"Poys!"

The German master gasped like a

fish out of water. At last he found his voice.

"Poys, vat does dis mean after, ain't it?"

"What does what mean?" asked Harry Wharton demurely.

"Dis—dis, outrage!" shouted Herr Rosenblaum. "Vat are dese poys doing tied up mit rope mit demselves? Vat does it mean, I say?"

"It's only a procession, sir."

"Himmel! Vat?"

"Merely a procession, sir, that's all."

"You—you—you—"

"It's all right, sir," said Nugent.

"Only a little fun, you know, sir!"

"So tat is vat you call fun, Nugent?"

"Yes, sir. Isn't it funny, Hoffman?"

Fritz Hoffman grinned in a sickly way.

He had been far from regarding the affair in a comical light, but he was true blue, and he had no idea of not playing the game. He had got the worst of the row with the Remove, but he was not one to complain because of that.

"Tat is all right," he said. "It is only a choke, sir."

"Only a choke, Hoffman?"

"Ja, ja mein herr!"

"You vas not complain of tat treatment?"

"Certainly not, sir."

"Hoffman is trueful blue, my worthy friends," murmured Hurree Singh.

"Yes, rather!"

"Hoffman! Lutz! Do you tell me tat you do not complain of dis usage—tat you haf notting to say?" demanded Herr Rosenblaum.

"Ja, Herr Rosenblaum," said Hoffman stolidly. "Tat is only a liddle game vich te Remove poys play mit demselves after, und ve not mind it at all."

Herr Rosenblaum gasped.

"Hoffman, you vas not telling me te troot."

"Ach, mein herr!"

"You vas try te excuse dese poys."

"It is de troot, sir," said Hoffman obstinately. "It is a game vich ve play, und if ve haf got te vorst of it, it is all right."

"Do you all say te same?"

"Ja, ja!"

The German boys all said the same.

Herr Rosenblaum looked them over and he understood, and his face cleared somewhat.

"I tink I know vat you mean, poys. You vill not vat you call sneak."

"There is no sneakfulness about Hoffman," purred Hurree Singh. "I shall stand him the treatfulness at the tuckshop after this."

"But such a scene as dis cannot be made in te Close," said Herr Rosenblaum sternly. "Wharton, I know fery vell tat dis is anoder row—"

"All in good part, sir."

"Perhaps; put it is a row und a disturbance of te peace, und I tink tat Hoffman is as mooch to plame as you are."

"If you please, sir—"

"Silence, all of you! You vill take fifty lines each for dis conduct—all of you!"

"Oh, sir—"

"All of you, mind! Now you vill immediately set dese poys loose."

"With pleasurefulness, sahib."

"Let me see it done at vunce."

The juniors soon had the prisoners untied.

"Now," said Herr Rosenblaum, with a warning wave of the hand, "if dere is any more rows to-day, I cane you all mit yourselves after, ain't it."

And he marched away with a stern brow; but when he was within the

House a smile came over his fat face in place of the frown.

Harry Wharton gave Hoffman a thump on the back.

"Ach, you peastly pounder!"

"It's all right!" said Wharton hastily, as the German squared up to him.

"Rows are off. I was only backing you up."

"Mein gootness! You almost preak mine pack."

"You're a good sort, and true blue, and it was decent of you to speak as you did."

"Ciel! Zat is quite true," said Adolphe Meunier. "Even ze Sherman may have ze good quality sometime—"

"Vat tat you say, you French pounder?"

"I say zat ze Sherman vas peege," said Meunier defiantly.

"Ach! Rotter!"

"Rottair yourself!"

"I vill poonch your head!"

"Mon Dieu! I vill vipe up ze ground viz you!"

"Peast!"

"Rottair!"

The German and the French junior were rushing at one another by this time. But the English boys moved between them.

"Here, keep off the grass!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "You heard what Herr Rosenblaum said—no more rows to-day."

"I do not care for zat Sherman—"

"I vill trash tat French peege—"

"Ciel! I vill—"

"Ach! Let me reach tat—"

"Take it steady," said Harry Wharton, pushing the excited French junior back. "I tell you you shan't row now."

"Duck 'em in the fountain if they won't be reasonable," said Nugent. "It will do them good—both of them."

"Right-ho! That's a good idea."

But the prospect of a ducking was apparently not enticing to either the French boy or the German.

They gave in and walked away in different directions, glowering at one another over their shoulders as they went.

"Nice lot of tiger-cats," said Bob Cherry. "Come along, you chaps; we're well out of that. And I'm jolly glad it was Herr Rosenblaum that dropped on us, and not Mr. Quelch or the Head."

"Yes, rather. It was a good jape; and as for the fifty lines—who cares?"

"Nobody!"

"Hallo, what's that fearful row?"

said Nugent, looking back.

There were sounds of strife from under the elms. Harry Wharton burst into a laugh.

"French and German!" he exclaimed. It was true.

The foreigners had only waited for the departure of the interfering Removites, and then they had met in strife again under the elm-trees.

"No business of ours," yawned Nugent. "We've done our best to keep the peace. But I say, you chaps, things will be lively at Greyfriars if those foreign chaps stay here. I don't believe there's been a day quiet since they came here."

"I don't think they will remain," said Harry Wharton quietly. "The Head certainly never expected anything like this. I shouldn't be surprised any time to hear that they were going to leave Greyfriars. They're a bit out of place here."

"Well, that's so."

"There is truefulness in what you remark," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, in a thoughtful way. "But I should be sorry to leave Greyfriars

itself. If the time is short let us have as many rows as possible, so that it will be merryful."

And the chums of the Remove laughingly assented.

New Prospects!

DR. LOCKE, the Head of Greyfriars, wore a worried look. He had just come into his study. He had been absent from the school that afternoon, and had returned to find the French and German boys fighting like wildcats in the Close. He had stopped the fight and relieved his feelings somewhat by imposing a hundred lines on each of the offenders. But he was worried.

"Dear me!" he murmured, as he stood by the wide study window and looked out into the Close, with its high trees and greenward. "What has become of the peace and repose which once belonged to Greyfriars? Since the foreign lads came the school seems to have been in a continual uproar."

He stroked his chin thoughtfully. "I really do not know what is to be done," he murmured. "Although I fully believe that the rivalry in the Remove is not at all bitter or ill-natured; still it is so extremely noisy and incessant that really—"

There was a tap at the door. Dr. Locke turned away from the window with a sigh, and called out to the individual to come in. It was Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, who entered the study.

The Form-master was looking very grave, and he closed the door after him with an air of deliberation which showed that he had something important to say, and meant to say it.

"Well, Mr. Quelch?" said the Head, looking at him inquiringly.

"I wish to speak to you, sir." "Pray sit down." "Thank you. I am afraid I must broach a rather troublesome subject, sir. It is the presence of the foreign lads in my Form."

Dr. Locke looked more worried than ever.

"What is the matter?" "The endless friction, sir, between the boys of different nationalities in the Remove," said Mr. Quelch. "Even in the Form-room during classes this breaks out."

"Indeed!" "They are incessantly what they call ragging one another, and if the English boys let the French alone for a time the Germans begin ragging them, and if the Germans are quiet the French are certain to commence hostilities."

Dr. Locke smiled slightly. "It is a very difficult position, Mr. Quelch."

"So difficult, sir, that it makes it practically impossible to maintain good government in the Lower Fourth Form," said the Remove master.

"So bad as that, Mr. Quelch?" "Quite as bad as that, sir. The boys seem to have been accustomed to this ragging at their former school, and they seem to be making it a point of honour to keep it up at Greyfriars."

"I'm afraid your own lads are none too backward in entering disputes, Mr. Quelch."

The Remove master nodded. "That is quite true, sir; but it only makes matters worse. Of course, I should take no notice of a few fights or riots out of doors. Boys will be boys, and a little horseplay does not make them any worse. But the latest escapade—"

"What has happened?"

"The door of one of the Remove studies has been burst in."

"Is it possible?" "It is only too true. The lock has been smashed and the study apparently wrecked. I have questioned the occupants of the study, and they refuse to disclose who were the perpetrators of the outrage."

"They refuse a Form-master, Mr. Quelch?" exclaimed the Head.

"Yes, sir." "Indeed!" Dr. Locke's eyes glinted. "I shall have to see into this."

"It is evidently another of the usual disturbances, sir. Either the French or the German boys broke in the door to attack Wharton and his friends."

"I suppose so." "It will be useless to punish the juniors; it is a point of honour with them not to betray their rivals. Sneaking, they would call it."

"I understand a schoolboy's sense of honour very well, and there is certainly something to be said for them in this case; but I cannot allow disobedience of a Form-master for any consideration whatever."

"I suppose—" Mr. Quelch paused and hesitated.

"Go on, Mr. Quelch." "Well, sir, I suppose there is no chance of the new boys leaving Greyfriars," hinted the Remove master. "I am afraid the discipline of the school will continue to suffer while they remain."

The Head looked very thoughtful. "You see, Mr. Quelch, as there is no fault to be found with the lads themselves, save the natural high spirits of youth—"

"I know the case will be a difficult one, sir."

"I must think it over. You are aware that Herr Rosenblum's Foreign Academy at Beechwood failed for financial reasons. The place was paying well, I believe, but the Herr was unable to meet a mortgage made on the place when it started. Had he applied to me for aid in time, I should have helped him, on the ground of old friendship; but he did not wish to trouble me. I gladly offered him the post of German master here when I learned how matters stood. It was natural that he should bring with him the boys whose parents did not wish them to return to France or Germany."

"Yes, I suppose so; but—" "I foresaw some trouble, but of course, nothing like what it has turned out to be." The Head pursed his lips. "I don't know whether anything can be done, but I shall turn it over in my mind."

And Mr. Quelch nodded and withdrew. He left the Head in a thoughtful and troubled mood.

Dr. Locke paced to and fro in the study till another knock at the door interrupted his reflections.

"Come in," he said resignedly. It was Herr Rosenblum who entered this time. The fat, good-natured face of the German was unusually grave in expression.

"I have to express to great sorrow, Herr Locke!" he exclaimed.

"What is the matter, Herr Rosenblum?"

"I am speaking of the trouble which has been made since mein boys arrive at the school," said the German master,

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with a dejected look. "Dere haf been no peace."

"My dear herr—"

"At Beechwood dere vas rows," said Herr Rosenblum, shaking his head. "But nothing like vat is going on now. At Beechwood te parties vas about equally matched in numbers; und dey keep each oder in order to some extent, but here, Herr Locke, it is different. Te French and te German poyas are so outnumbered by te English poyas, dat dey haf no real chance." When te Remove unite against dem, dey go to de vall at vunce."

"I suppose so. But surely that should make for peace in the long run," said Dr. Locke.

Herr Rosenblum shook his head.

"But not at all, Herr Locke. It only makes te poyas more determined to vat dey call keep deir end up, and so te row's nefer at an end."

"Yes, I dare say that is the natural result."

"I tink I haf given you great trouble by pringing mein poyas to Greyfriars."

"Oh, not at all! You must not look at it in that light, Herr Rosenblum!" exclaimed the Head at once.

"I tink I must, Herr Locke. I really wish tat I had been able to keep Beechwood going, and in tat case—"

The Head looked very thoughtful.

"What if you reopened the school at Beechwood, Herr Rosenblum?" he said suddenly.

The German master shook his head. "Te mortgagees have closed on it."

"But the payment of the amount required—"

"Ja, tat vould make all te difference, of course; but I haf not te money."

"How much vould be required, if I may ask?"

"Five tousand pound," said the German, with a hopeless shake of the head.

"Yet the school was paying its way?"

"So! And in two-free years I should haf paid it off. But te mortgagees knew dere vas coal on te land, and it fery valuable, so dey gif me no time. But it is not yet too late if I found te money. But—"

The German made a hopeless gesture. "I haf not te tenth part of it."

"But if it were advanced to you?"

Herr Rosenblum coloured.

"Ach, Herr Locke, I did not gome to Greyfriars as a peggar."

"I wish you had told me when te difficulty arose, and I vould haf aided you at once!" exclaimed the Head.

"Perhaps I should haf done so; put te poor Sherman master has paid," said Herr Rosenblum.

"But this loan I am speaking of."

"Ach, nein, Herr Locke!"

"You could repay te money if the school, as you say, is really a success. You could give me interest if you liked."

"Ach, dat is anoder matter, of course!"

"We will talk it over, Herr Rosenblum. I vould gladly help you now."

The German master was almost overcome with gratitude, and he grasped Dr. Locke's hand. It was easy to see how dear to his heart his school had been, and how gladly he vould revive Beechwood Academy if the opportunity came. And it was coming!

(But there are more riotous times before the foreigners leave Greyfriars. Look out for next week's exciting chapters.)

THE MYSTERY OF TOM MERRY!

(Continued from page 21.)

myself. Is this boy a relation of Merry?"

"Not that we know of, sir. His name's Clavering."

The Head fixed his eyes upon the sullen-looking junior.

"Clavering!" he said. "Your resemblance to a boy belonging to this school has caused a most unhappy mistake to be made. But it vould not haf mattered if you had been a decent and properly behaved lad, like the boy to whom you resemble outwardly. But your disgraceful and degraded conduct caused a great amount of trouble to Tom Merry; and, indeed, brought him within danger of being expelled from the school. This disgrace which you have so nearly brought upon a stranger should be a warning to you. I trust you will reflect upon it and mend your ways! As

for you, Merry, you are, of course, clear of every shred of suspicion, and I hope your schoolfellows who have misjudged you will express their regret."

"Yaas, wathah, sir!"

"We've done that, sir!" said Figgins.

"Let that boy go!" said the Head.

"Merry, I am very glad that this matter has been cleared up so satisfactorily."

And Dr. Holmes, looking very relieved, turned back into his study.

The juniors released Clavering. That unpopular youth made his way out of the school gates and disappeared. He was not seen in Rylocombe or near St. Jim's again. In spite of the "good time" which, according to his own words, he was having at that delectable hostelry the Green Man, he had apparently had enough of the neighbourhood of St. Jim's. He left—probably going back to his home—but wherever he went, the chums of St. Jim's were glad that he had gone.

Tom Merry was surrounded by a cheering crowd.

Tom Merry's eyes were very bright, and his face was cheerful, as he walked into the School House with Cousin Ethel and surrounded by his friends.

Arthur Augustus slipped his arm through Figgins'.

"That eye of yours looks awfully swollen, Figg," he remarked. "But I suppose Cousin Ethel has seen it now, so it doesn't matter if she sees it again—"

"What ho!" said Figgins heartily.

And the New House Co. gladly came to tea in Study No. 6—Cousin Ethel being the distinguished guest. And the Terrible Three came, too; all the clouds had rolled away now, and they were on the best of terms with Blake & Co. The mystery of Tom Merry was a mystery no longer.

(Next Wednesday: "GUSST, THE VENTRILOQUIST!" You'll simply yell with laughter when you read about the amusing antics of Arthur Augustus, the St. Jim's ventriloquist! Don't forget to order your GEM early.)

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