

1301
"CAPTAIN TOM MERRY!" A Sparkling Long Story of the Chums of St. Jim's— **INSIDE.**

The **GEM** 2^d



'SIX' FOR A SENIOR!

TOM MERRY MAKES HIS PRESENCE—AND HIS ASHPLANT—FELT AMONG UNRULY SIXTH FORMERS!

CAPTAIN TOM MERRY!



"Throw him out!" yelled the exuberant juniors. "Hurrah!" Darrell wondered whether he was on his head or his heels. Hands grasped him on all sides, and in a breathless and dishevelled state, the senior was bundled out of the study.

CHAPTER 1. Unprecedented!

ST. JIM'S was in a state of excitement.

A stranger looking in on the old school that Saturday afternoon would have wondered what was on. It was only too evident that something was "on."

The Lower School was in a state of extraordinary exuberance. Junior fellows slapped one another on the back when they met, or shook hands, or burst into cheering without any apparent rhyme or reason.

The senior fellows, it might have been noticed, did not seem to share in the general exuberance. They looked serious and solemn.

Whatever was on, it was evidently something that pleased the Lower School very greatly, and was not regarded with favourable eyes by the Upper School.

In the Shell passage in the School House there was a terrific crowd, all of them noisy, and all of them joyous. Tom Merry's study was crowded.

Tom Merry was holding a reception. Juniors of both Houses—School House and New House—came in swarms. The rivalry between the two Houses of St. Jim's seemed to be entirely suspended. Figgins & Co. of the New House THE GEM LIBRARY.—No 1,501.

were grinning with joy; and so were the Terrible Three of the School House—Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form wore an unusually expansive smile, though he was so squeezed by the crowd in Tom Merry's study that his elegant clothes were in great danger of being crumpled.

"It's simply whippin'!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy declared for the twentieth time, at least. "I wogard it as simply whippin', deah boys!"

"Gorgeous!" said Jack Blake.

"Topping!" chimed in Figgins of the New House.

And all the fellows crammed in the study and the passage burst into a cheer.

"Hurrah! Hip, hip, hurrah!"

The din in the Shell passage must have been heard all over the School House, and on most occasions it would have caused some exasperated prefect to come along with a cane. But just now the prefects seemed to be keeping off the grass, so to speak.

For it was election day.

And the crowd of juniors were celebrating the election of their candidate—Tom Merry of the Shell.

It is said that it is always the unexpected that happens; and certainly nothing could have been more unexpected than the election of a Shell fellow to the captaincy of St. Jim's.

A junior captain of the school! It seemed impossible; but it had happened.

Tom Merry had beaten his rival, Cutts of the Fifth, by a huge majority.

And naturally the Lower School rejoiced.

Tom Merry himself was looking very elated. It was natural, in the circumstances. Naturally, too, he was holding a reception of the electors, and every fellow who had voted for him came to the reception, with the result that the study and the whole passage were crammed with an uproarious throng.

Refreshments had been provided on a generous scale. The Co. had gaily clubbed together to their last sixpence to celebrate that unique and never-to-be-forgotten occasion.

The fellows in the study, lucky to be on the spot, demolished the good things with great heartiness, and passed out helpings to their less fortunate comrades in the passage.

Fatty Wynn of the New House stood at the table, tucking into a huge pie, his plump face shining like a full moon. There was no room to sit down. There wasn't very much room to stand, for that matter.

Every now and then the feed and the talk was interrupted by bursts of cheering. On election day the fellows were entitled to make a row, if they

ST. JIM'S HAS NEVER KNOWN SUCH EXCITING TIMES AS WHEN THE SHELL JUNIOR IS SKIPPER OF THE SCHOOL!

By MARTIN CLIFFORD

liked. They took full advantage of the privilege.

Besides, now that Tom Merry was captain of the school, they could do as they liked. The new captain would see them through.

And they wanted the seniors to hear them rejoice. They wanted the prefects to understand that there was a new regime now.

In fact, they wouldn't have been sorry to see some interfering prefect come along. Under the orders of the captain of the school, they would have been justified in ejecting the said prefect "on his neck." And to eject a prefect on his neck would have been bliss to the juniors.

"Hurrah, hurrah, hurrah!"

"We shall have Darrell or somebody along here soon if we don't put the soft pedal on," Kangaroo of the Shell remarked.

"Let 'em all come!" said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "We'll jolly soon show them that we don't care a wap for them!"

"What-ho!"

"Prefects have no right to interfere with the captain of the school," said Tom Merry seriously. "I've been going over the ordinances of the school—"

"The which?" ejaculated Piggins.

"The ordinances," said Tom Merry. "They're in a book in the library—the laws of the school, you know, that even the Head has to respect. I've copied out the ordinances that affect the captain of the school, and I know my rights. I'm going to live up to them. I'm sure all you fellows will back me up in exercising my proper authority."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Hurrah!"

There was a shout from the crowded passage:

"Here comes Darrell!"

"A blessed prefect!"

"Who are you shoving, Darrell?"

"You get off! We don't want any of the Sixth here!"

"Get out!"

Tom Merry struggled to the door, and looked out into the passage. Darrell of the Sixth, with a very red face, was pushing his way through the throng, amid roars and protests of indignation. He was making his way to the study, but it was slow work.

Tom Merry waved his hand to his excited backers.

"Let Darrell pass, you fellows!" he called out.

"We don't want any prefects!" howled the crowd.

"Darrell's a good sort. Let him come in. If Knox comes along you can chuck him out—or Cutts—on my authority."

"Hear, hear!"

Darrell squeezed through, and arrived in the study in a somewhat breathless and dishevelled state. Darrell was a very popular fellow, only second in that respect to old Kildare himself, the captain of St. Jim's, who had left suddenly, and whose place as captain Tom Merry had taken.

But, popular or not, Darrell couldn't

be allowed to interfere with the rights and duties of the new captain. That wasn't to be thought of for a moment.

"You kids must make less noise,"

Darrell gasped. "Do you know you can be heard over the whole House and across the quadrangle?"

"I shouldn't wonder," said Tom Merry calmly.

"Well, you've got to shut up!"

"Rats!"

"What!" shouted the prefect, grasping his cane.

"But that cane down, Darrell!" said Tom Merry, raising his hand warningly.

"Wh-what!"

"Don't you know that I'm captain of the school?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Listen to this, By-law No. 67 of the Ordinances of St. James' Collegiate School. 'The captain of the school, by virtue of his position, takes precedence of all prefects, who are under his direction.' Got that, Darrell?"

"You—you cheeky young ass—"

"Hold on!" said Tom Merry sternly.

"No slanging. Listen to this: By-law No. 79. 'Any disrespect to constituted authority shall be punished by flogging, detention, or caning upon the hands, as may be deemed fit and suitable.'"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's nothing to laugh at," said Tom Merry, looking round severely.

*Lordly seniors caned like fags!
Sixth Formers compelled to bow
down to the authority of a mere
junior! Prefects ragged with
impunity by Lower School boys!
Thus does Tom Merry uphold
his new position as captain of
St. Jim's!*

"This is a serious matter. I don't want to flog you, Darrell—"

"What!"

"Or detain you or cane you—"

"Wh-what!" stuttered the Sixth Former.

"But I must insist upon proper respect for constituted authority. Kindly lay down that cane at once!"

"You—you—"

"Take that cane away from Darrell," said Tom Merry.

The cane was whipped out of the prefect's hand in a second. Darrell clenched his fists, but unnumbered fists were clenched round him at once.

"Kindly return to your study, Darrell, and consider yourself detained there for one hour!" said Tom Merry.

Darrell stood transfixed.

"Do you hear me, Darrell?"

"I—I hear you! I'll thrash you!"

"Remove that insubordinate person!" said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Throw him out!"

"Hurrah!"

Darrell wondered whether he was on his head or his heels. Hands grasped him on all sides, and he was bundled out of the study. In the passage the crowd hustled him on. He was breathless, his collar was torn out, and his jacket was split up the back by the time he reached the stairs. He went back to his study in a dazed state. In

Tom Merry's study and the parts adjoining the celebration continued with undiminished din.

CHAPTER 2.

A Difficult Situation!

DR. HOLMES, the Head of St. Jim's, sat in his study, with a worried brow.

Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, was with him, and he, too, was looking decidedly worried.

The state of things at the old school was extraordinary; it was a state that could not possibly be allowed to continue; and yet there did not seem to be any ready means by which it could be put an end to.

A junior captain of the school!

It was unthinkable.

But what was to be done? Without what everybody in the Lower School would have considered an utterly unjustifiable and tyrannical exercise of authority, the Head could not quash the result of the election. He shrank from taking such a step as ordering Tom Merry to resign the captaincy to which he had been elected.

But unless Tom Merry was directly commanded to do so by the Head, it was plain that he wouldn't even think of resigning. He was quite satisfied with himself as captain of the school.

"It is an unheard of state of affairs," the Head said, with a troubled frown. "Of course, it is impossible to allow it to continue."

"Impossible!" agreed Mr. Railton.

"Yet it seems equally impossible to interfere."

"It would certainly be difficult."

"I confess, Mr. Railton, that I really do not know what is to be done in such extraordinary circumstances."

Mr. Railton nodded. He did not know either.

"It is very unfortunate," he agreed.

"There were four candidates, Monteith and Knox of the Sixth, Cutts of the Fifth, and Merry of the Shell. Unfortunately, it is the junior who has been elected."

"Of course, I could not foresee that contingency when I directed Monteith to withdraw from his candidature," the Head remarked. "I had no alternative, when it was revealed to me that at one time he had been mixed up in disgraceful proceedings with a set of betting men."

"Quite so," agreed the Housemaster. "But the juniors had a suspicion that it was Cutts of the Fifth who made that revelation to you, in order to spoil Monteith's chances for the election, and they all turned against him at once."

"It is possible, of course, that they were right."

"Probably. And as Knox withdrew also, I think by some arrangement with Cutts, only the two remained; and Cutts being so extremely unpopular, Merry was elected by an overwhelming majority. It is not as if the majority had been small. In that case a new election might be considered. But the majority was nearly seventy; and a new election would certainly have the same result."

The Head drummed on the table with his fingers.

"Of course, this is an entirely unex-

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valuable extracts from the ordinances of the school: "By-law No. 98.—In the event of misconduct on the part of the captain of the school, the head-master shall have the right and power to dismiss him from his post, but otherwise the free choice of electors shall be exercised, and shall be considered in-

"That hits the nail on the head!" said Tom Merry. Mr. Railton's face was a study. "You see, sir, that settles it," said Tom Merry. "The Head can't dismiss me excepting for misconduct—and I'm not in any way. In fact, I'm going to be jolly careful. I'm sure Dr. Holmes wouldn't transgress his authority in that way; but if he did, I should have to appeal to the board of governors."

"Hear, hear!" Mr. Railton compressed his lips. "So you refuse to resign from this ridiculous position to which you have unfortunately been elected?" he said tartly. "I shouldn't put it like that, sir. But I certainly feel it my duty to live up to the position to which my school-fellows have elected me, and to do my duty by them and by St. Jim's," said Tom Merry.

"Then I have nothing more to say," And the Housemaster quitted the study. "Bai Jove!" remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "That looks as if the powers that be don't quite like the way things are going, dear boys!" "They can jump it, then!" said Tom Merry emphatically. "One thing's jolly certain—I'm captain of St. Jim's, and I'm going to remain captain!"

"Hurrah! Hip-hip-hurray!" And that roar accompanied the Housemaster as he went downstairs.

CHAPTER 3.

The New Captain!

WHAT was going to happen was a mystery so far. Tom Merry of the Shell was he could be allowed to remain captain of St. Jim's, but that seemed impossible to the seniors, at least. Most of the juniors, too, expected the chopped to come down, as Monty Lowther put it.

But it did not come down. Whether the Head as well as Tom Merry, had been looking up the by-laws of the school, or whether he was simply hesitating in doubt—whatever the reason, the hat did not go forth for the junior to stand out of the captaincy. On Monday, Tom Merry was still captain of St. Jim's, and showed every intention of sticking to his post and living up to it.

The Sixth Form had held a council on the subject in the privacy of the prefects' room; and, although the result was not known to the juniors, they guessed easily enough that the top Form of the school had decided to be "up against" the new regime. That, of course, was only to be expected. The Sixth and the Fifth would "kick," but, however hard they kicked, they could not kick Tom Merry out of the captaincy. And that was the important point.

It was known that Cutts of the Fifth was especially furious. It was not only his defeat in the election, but his defeat at the hands of a junior that rankled

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in the breast of the black sheep of the Fifth. He had outwitted Monteith of the New House, he had bought off Knox of the Sixth, and he had been beaten at the finish by a Shell fellow!

It was no wonder that Cutts was furious, but Tom Merry & Co. did not care twopence for his fury. The new captain of St. Jim's felt quite equal to dealing with the Fifth Former if he turned rusty. Gerald Cutts could scheme revenge as much as he liked; the captain of St. Jim's went on his way unregarding.

Indeed, instead of waiting for Cutts to "go for" him, it was quite likely that Tom Merry would begin by "going for" Cutts.

Tom had some inside knowledge of his little ways—of his betting on races, his visits to a certain public-house in Rylcombe; the bridge parties that he gave with locked doors in his study. Cutts had tried on one occasion to get Tom Merry into his rascally ways, and so the Terrible Three knew all about Cutts—much more than old Kildare had known in his time.

Such practices as those of Cutts and his friends were, of course, strictly forbidden in the school, and it was the duty of the captain to put them down. Tom Merry intended to do his duty in that respect as soon as occasion should arise.

But, as captain of St. Jim's, Tom Merry found that he had a good many new duties on his hands. In standing for election he had made many promises in the exuberance of the moment. He might have forgotten them—as candidates sometimes do after election—but the other fellows did not intend to let him forget them.

Wally—D'Arcy minor of the Third—brought to his recollection the fact that he had promised to abolish fagging. That was to be one of the reforms under the new regime. Knox's fag reminded him that he had undertaken to stamp out bullying, Knox's fag having had great experience of that. All the junior footballers remembered—and mentioned—the circumstance that he had agreed to play junior members in the first eleven.

That was rather a pressing matter. On Wednesday one of the most important fixtures of the football season was to take place—the match with the first eleven of Rylcombe Grammar School. As captain of St. Jim's, Tom Merry was football skipper, and he would naturally take command.

And something like forty or fifty juniors were looking forward to places in the team. Unless Tom Merry decided on something like the old-fashioned Rugby game, with half a hundred a side, it was difficult to see how he was to satisfy all claimants. The way of the new captain of St. Jim's evidently did not lie through beds of roses.

But Tom Merry faced all his difficulties calmly and courageously. And, so far, the juniors were united in backing him up against all comers.

After lessons on Monday, while Tom was chatting with a group of his supporters on the footer ground, discussing the coming first eleven match, Wally of the Third dashed up in great excitement.

"Where's Tom Merry?" he shouted.

"Here I am!" said Tom Merry.

"What's wanted, kid?"

"Kid!" said Wally, forgetting Rule No. 79 for a moment. "Whom are you calling kid? Kid yourself, and be blown!"

"None of your cheek!" said Tom



Curly Gibson removed his clothes and showed his back to Mr. Railton. "Look at those marks, sir!" said Tom Merry. Mr. Railton gazed at the deep marks made by the thrashing Knox had inflicted upon the fag, and uttered an exclamation of anger and indignation. "Good heavens, the boy has been brutally punished!"

Merry, frowning. "I'm carrying an ashplant now, to keep cheeky kids in order. Look out!"

And, indeed, Tom Merry had taken to carrying that symbol of authority, which he was certainly entitled to use, as captain of the school.

"Yaas, wathah, tweek your skippah with pwopah wespect, Wally," said Arthur Augustus. "I expect my minah to set a pwopah example to the othah fags, you know."

"Oh, rats!" said Wally.

"Wally, you young wascal—"

"Oh, don't you begin, Gus!" implored Wally. "Tom Merry, you're wanted. You're captain of St. Jim's, aren't you? And you promised to put down bullying."

"Who's bullying whom?" asked Tom.

"Knox. He's licking young Curly in his study!" howled Wally. "Curly's my chum, and that beast, Knox, isn't going to lick him—"

"What has Curly done?"

"What does it matter what he's done?" howled Wally. "Aren't you going to keep your blessed election promises, and put down bullying? Knox is licking him with a cricket stump!"

"I must inquire into this," said Tom Merry, in a stately way. "Some of you fellows had better come with me to Knox's study, in case there's trouble."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hear, hear!"

"We'll back you up!"

Tom Merry walked off towards the School House, with quite an army at his back. The juniors were very keen to try conclusions with the worst bully in the school, and this was the first time they had had the chance of doing so under the lead of a captain of the school. Judging by the looks of the

juniors, it might have been predicted that there was a high old time in store for Knox of the Sixth.

CHAPTER 4.

The Hand of Authority!

"YOW-OW-OW!"

That Knox was putting in a good deal of energy with the cricket stump was evident from the howls of anguish that proceeded from his study as Tom Merry & Co. came up the Sixth Form passage. "Yow-ow-ow! You beast, Knox! I'll tell Tom Merry! Ow!"

Knox's angry voice could be heard in reply as the army neared the door of the study.

"You'll tell Tom Merry, will you? Take that! Tell him, too, that I'll give him some of the same if I have any of his cheek. Take that—and that—and that!"

Whack, whack, whack!

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"You hear him?" yelled Wally.

Tom Merry threw open the door of Knox's study and strode in. Knox had Curly Gibson by the collar, and was larruping him with energy and a cricket stump. He paused in the castigation, however, to glare furiously at Tom Merry and the excited juniors at his back.

"Get out of my study!" he snapped.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"The captain of the school has a right to enter any study to put down malpractices of any kind," he replied. "I refer you to By-law No. 45."

"You cheeky cad! If you don't get out I'll boot you out!" roared Knox.

"Put down that stump!" said Tom

Merry sternly. "I don't allow bullying."

"What?"

"Are you going to put down that stump, or are you not?"

"Not!" shrieked Knox.

"Take that stump from him, you fellows!" ordered the captain of St. Jim's.

"You bet!"

"What-ho!"

The juniors were only too keen to obey. They swarmed at Knox. The bully of the Sixth whirled the stump above his head.

His face was crimson with rage.

"Stand back!"

"Collar him!"

"Down with the bully!"

Knox might have done some damage with the stump, but Tom Merry chopped in with his ashplant and knocked the stump out of Knox's hand. The next moment the bully of the Sixth was struggling in the grasp of the juniors.

"Bump him if he resists," said Tom Merry calmly.

Knox did resist. He was struggling like a lunatic, but the juniors were too many for him; they simply swarmed over him. Knox was whirled off his feet and bumped on the floor with a concussion that shook the study.

"Sit on him, two or three of you!"

They sat upon Knox.

"This insubordination will do you no good, Knox," said Tom Merry loftily. "Resistance to constituted authority has to be put down with a strong hand. I shall now proceed to inquire into this matter. Now, Curly, let me see whether he's hurt you. Take your jacket off."

"I'm half-flayed!" gasped Curly.

"Let's see."

Curly Gibson stripped off his jacket and shirt. There were livid marks across his back where he had been thrashed, and there was a buzz of indignation from the juniors at the sight.

"You hound!" said Tom Merry,

fixing his blazing eyes upon Knox.

"You ought to be boiled in oil!"

"Boiling in oil for bullies isn't in the by-laws, is it?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shut up, Monty! Don't be funny, now! This is serious."

"It's going to be serious for Knox!" growled Wally.

"You shut up, too! Don't you jaw when your captain is talking. Knox, kindly explain what you were licking Curly for. I'm going to judge this case on its merit."

But Knox did not explain why he had been licking Curly Gibson; instead of that, he burst into a torrent of language that would have done credit—or discredit—to an intoxicated bargee.

"Stop him!" said Tom.

Blake pressed his boot on the mouth of the bully; Knox's voice died away in a suffocated growl.

"Bad language is punished by flogging or caning, according to circumstances—see Rule No. 33," said Tom Merry. "Is there a cane in this study?"

"Here's one," said Digby.

"Good! Knox will sit up and hold out his hand. You hear, Knox? You won't? Very well. Cane him across his shoulders."

Knox was jammed face downward on the carpet, then Digby started it with the cane. The bellows of Knox resembled those of a maddened bull, but Digby did not cease to lash till Tom Merry held up his hand at the twelfth stroke.

"Nuff!"

"I'm not tired yet," panted Digby.

"I could go on, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That is enough for bad language," said Tom Merry. "We must be just, but not vindictive. Now, Knox, will you have the great kindness to explain why you were licking Curly?"

"Gro-oogh!"

"Every time he doesn't answer, Dig, give him another cut."

"Oh, rather!" said Digby.

Whack!

"Stop it!" shrieked Knox. "I—I'll

answer. I licked him for burning my toast and cheeking me. Ow!"

"You thrashed a kid in that brutal manner for burning your toast, you brute!"

"He's my fag, isn't he?" howled Knox.

"You won't have a fag in future. For your present misconduct you are deprived of the right of fagging from anybody. I order that, as captain of St. Jim's."

"Bravo!"

"And you will receive twelve cuts with the cane for bullying and ill-treating Curly Gibson. If you are tired, Dig, Herries can lay them on."

"Give me the cane," said Herries at once.

"Oh, I'm not tired!" said Dig.

"Leave it to me."

"Pile in," said Tom Merry. "I'll say when."

Digby piled in. Knox roared and squirmed under the heavy lashes of the cane. Digby put so much energy into the last cut that the cane broke in two. Knox's uproar was heard the length of the passage and beyond. Voices could be heard in the passage now, and the door of the study was hurled open. Darrell and Rushden and several other Sixth Formers thrust their way in.

"Rescue!" half sobbed Knox. "These young scoundrels are ragging me."

"How dare you come here!" exclaimed Darrell angrily. "How dare you lay hands on a Sixth Former!"

"I'm acting by my authority as captain of the school."

"Don't talk rot! Get out of the study!"

"Rats!"

"I order you, as a prefect, to get out of this room!" roared Darrell.

"I refuse, as captain of St. Jim's, to do anything of the kind!" retorted Tom Merry with perfect coolness.

"Throw the cheeky young beggars out!" said Langton of the Sixth.

"Better not try it," said Manners.

"You'll go out on your necks if you do. We're all backing up the captain of the school."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Order!" said Tom Merry calmly.

"I trust you'll have too much good sense to interfere with the captain of the school in the execution of his duty, Darrell." Tom Merry's flow of language was unusually impressive, as befitted his new and exalted station. "If it is necessary to use force, I shall use force, and I shall call up all the juniors to help me enforce my commands if necessary."

"Do you mean to say that you're trying to make a riot in the school?" said Rushden.

"You are making the riot."

"Us! Why?"

"If you don't clear out of this study at once, I shall call in Mr. Railton!" said Darrell, compressing his lips.

"Call him, and be blown!"

"I mean it, you young idiot!"

"And I mean it, too, you old idiot!" said Tom Merry independently.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"D'Arcy minor, go and ask Mr. Railton if he will kindly step here."

Wally did not stir.

"Do you hear me?" asked Darrell angrily.

"I hear you," said Wally cheerfully. "but I don't take orders from any of the Sixth! Fagging is abolished! I'll take orders from my captain—Tom Merry!"

"Quite right!" said Tom approvingly. "Darrell, I object to your giving orders in my presence! It savours of

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Darrell gasped. He could do nothing else.

"However, we'll have Mr. Railton on the scene if you want him," said Tom Merry. "I'm not afraid to act openly. Wally, will you cut along and call Mr. Railton. Tell him that the captain of the school will be glad if he can step here for a few moments."

"Right-ho!" grinned Wally.

And he cut off.

Then there was a pause in the study as the crowd of fellows waited for the arrival of the Housemaster.

CHAPTER 5.

Quite Justified!

TOM MERRY waited with perfect calmness.

Some of the juniors were feeling uneasy, not quite knowing what view the Housemaster might take of the matter, but Tom Merry did not share their uneasiness. He was acting within his rights as captain of the school. What was there to be uneasy about? Mr. Railton, as a Housemaster, was bound to back up the captain of the school in the exercise of his just authority. That was how Tom Merry looked at it.

Knox stood gasping and groaning, and rubbing his injuries. His little eyes were gleaming with malice. He felt sure that he would be avenged as soon as the Housemaster arrived on the scene.

The heavy tread of the Housemaster was heard in the passage at last. Mr. Railton's form appeared in the doorway. His face was very grave.

"I am wanted here, I understand?" he asked.

"You are, sir," said Darrell. "I—I—"

"Hold on, Darrell!" said Tom Merry steadily. "It's for the captain of the school to speak!"

"You young rascal—"

"Silence!"

"Why, I—I—I—" stuttered Darrell.

"Silence! Mr. Railton, I report to you what has happened, as captain of the school reporting to his Housemaster!" said Tom Merry, with dignity. "Play up, Tommy!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"What has happened?" asked Mr. Railton quietly.

"Knox has been discovered in the act of bullying and thrashing a Third Form boy in a very brutal way. I have administered punishment to him as was my right and duty. Darrell has interfered, but I am sure that Darrell will apologise for chipping in when he has had time to think calmly about it. I excuse him."

"You—you—you excuse me!" stuttered Darrell. "Oh, this beats everything!"

"They've been ragging me, sir!" howled Knox. "The whole crowd of them piled on me!"

"The juniors obeyed my orders as captain," said Tom Merry. "They were bound to do so by Rule No. 23."

"If these young cads are to be allowed to invade a Sixth Form study and rag the seniors, sir—" began Knox passionately.

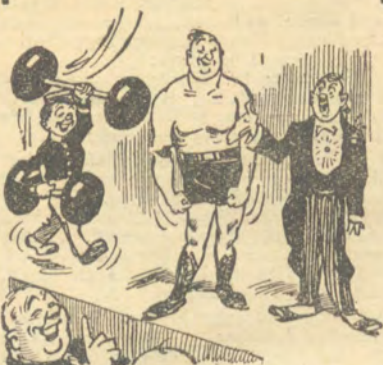
Mr. Railton pursed his lips.

"Show him your back, Curly!" sang out Wally.

"Yes; I want Mr. Railton to see that I was bound to interfere, since the prefects have thought it fit to report the matter!" said Tom Merry, with dignity. "Go it, Curly!"

"Oh, all right!" said Curly.

GIVING THE GAME AWAY!



"And now, ladies and gentlemen, Professor Muscle will do his world-famous weight-lifting act!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to P. Ball, "Linley," Quarry Road, Hartshill, Stoke-on-Trent.

And his shirt came off again.

"Look at those marks, sir!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

Mr. Railton gazed at the deep marks made by the thrashing Knox had inflicted upon the fag, and uttered an exclamation of anger and indignation.

"Good heavens, the boy has been brutally punished! Did you do that, Knox?" he asked, fixing his eyes upon the bully of the Sixth.

Knox bit his lip. The matter was not turning out so well for him, after all.

"I licked him, sir," he admitted.

"You made those marks?"

"I—I suppose so."

"Then you have acted in a brutal manner!" said Mr. Railton sharply.

"You have no right to use a fag in that way! But for the fact that you have apparently been punished, I should report this matter to the Head! You are certainly not fit to hold any authority at all! Darrell, I trust that you do not uphold Knox in treating a boy of the Third Form in this way?"

Darrell flushed uncomfortably. Certainly he disliked Knox's methods as much as anybody did, and his feelings towards the bully of the Sixth at that moment were anything but amiable.

"No, sir," he said. "I had not seen that. I suppose someone ought to have interfered."

"I should think so!" the Housemaster exclaimed. "And it seems that the prefects do not interfere, and yet they find fault with Merry for doing so!"

The Sixth Formers exchanged glances, and so did the juniors. The glances of the latter expressed satisfaction. Tom Merry's exercise of authority was evidently justified in the eyes of the Housemaster.

"Merry has certainly done right in interfering in this matter," said Mr. Railton. "Knox appears to have been punished—certainly not more severely than he deserved, otherwise I should punish him myself."

"Bwavo!" chirruped Arthur Augustus.

"Silence!" said the Housemaster, frowning. "Knox, if you are guilty of such conduct again I shall report it to the Head. Merry, you know that I do not approve of your holding the captaincy of St. Jim's, but in this matter you have acted quite rightly."

"Thank you, sir!"

Mr. Railton strode out of the study. There was a brief silence. The Housemaster had delivered his judgment, and he had delivered it in favour of Tom Merry.

There was nothing more to be said. Darrell and the other seniors followed the Housemaster without a word. Then Tom Merry spoke severely.

"Are you satisfied, Knox?"

Knox ground his teeth.

"I'll make you smart for this yet!" he muttered.

"Dwy up, Knox! You mustn't threaten the captain of the school; it's against all the rules," said D'Arcy chidingly.

"You have been punished, Knox," said Tom Merry, wagging his forefinger at the bully of the Sixth. "The matter is now closed. You will not, however, be allowed to have a fag again so long as I am the captain of the school. Kindly remember that!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Wally, will you please tell the Third and Second that they are not allowed to fag for Knox. Any fellow fagging for Knox will be licked."

Wally chortled joyously.

"That's all right," he said. "I'll tell 'em. I say, skipper, can we wreck the study before we go?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Order, you young bouncer! Gentlemen, our business here is now finished. I thank you for supporting me in the exercise of my just authority as captain of the school."

"Don't mensh, deah boy! You can always wely on us."

"Yes, rather!"

And Tom Merry walked off, followed by the juniors in a grinning and hilarious crowd, leaving Knox alone in his study—very sore in body and in mind.

CHAPTER 6.

Not Easy!

MADE up the list?" Monty Lowther asked the question.

It was Tuesday, the day before the Grammar School match, and Tom Merry sat in his study with paper and pencil.

His youthful brow was corrugated with thought.

He had about forty names on the paper before him, and he had been crossing them out one after another, trying to reduce the list to manageable proportions.

"I've more than made it up," said Tom ruefully, looking up from his task. "The trouble is to cut it down. Lots of the fellows expect to play in the Grammarian match to-morrow. Of course, I must play, as captain of St. Jim's."

"Of course!" assented Manners and Lowther, at once.

"I have heard from Darrell that all the Sixth refuse to play under a junior captain," said Tom.

"All the better," said Lowther, at once. "That makes all the more room for juniors in the first eleven."

"Yes; but a senior eleven composed wholly of juniors would be rather—rather a novelty," said Tom Merry. "I don't know what the Grammarians will think, playing the same team that their junior eleven meets."

"Let 'em think what they like. We'll lick 'em, and that will give them something to think about."

"But can we lick them?" said Tom.

"After all, they're seniors, and a good team. They used to give old Kildare and his eleven a tussle."

"Oh, we'll lick 'em!" said Lowther. "If we don't, it will be the fault of the seniors for standing out, and we can't help it."

"I'm willing to play six seniors out of eleven players," said Tom. "I think that's a good enough concession to the Sixth."

"I should jolly well say so!"

"But Darrell doesn't see it, and the others don't. They won't be satisfied with anything but a Sixth Former captaining the team, which is—"

"Rot!"

"Exactly—rot!" agreed Tom. "Not to be thought of for a moment. I've got to consider my personal dignity as captain of the school."

"Well, if the seniors are understudying Achilles, and sulking on their tents, the team will have to be all juniors, that's all," said Manners. "After all, we've got plenty of players to choose from, Tommy."

"Oh, plenty!" said Tom. "Too many, in fact. You see, such a blessed lot of the fellows expect to be put in. You two chaps ought to be in as—members of this study."

Manners and Lowther nodded emphatically.

"That goes without saying," assented Lowther.

"Quite so!" agreed Manners.

"Then Study No. 6 expects to go in, all four of them."

"That's rather a cheek!"

"Awful nerve!"

"Then Kangaroo, Clifton Dane, and Glyn all expect places."

"Better put in Kangy, and give the others the go-by."

"Then there's the New House chaps. After the splendid way Figgins & Co. backed me up in the election I can't very well leave them out."

"Well, I suppose there ought to be one or two of the New House," admitted Monty Lowther, rather grudgingly. "Say Figgins."

"Figgys says we can't possibly beat Fatty Wynn as goalkeeper, and he's really right, you know."

"Yes, I suppose Wynn had better go in."

"And then Kerr—"

"Oh, never mind Kerr!"

"And then there's Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence, all good men, and they all backed us up like Trojans over the election."

"You can't put the whole blessed New House into the eleven," said Lowther warmly.

"Then, besides the New House chaps, there are the fags."

"The fags!" said Manners and Lowther together.

Tom Merry nodded.

"Yes; the Third Form stood by me over the election, you know. Young Wally wants to go into the team—"

"Oh, rats!"

"He says he'll be satisfied with three places for the Third—himself, young Frayne, and Jameson."

"Cheeky young beggar!" said Lowther. "I suppose the Second Form will be wanting places next."

"Well, they haven't asked for any, so far, thank goodness!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "Of course, we can't play fags of the Third, either."

"Of course we can't!"

"The team must be made up of the oldest fellows possible, if the seniors are going to sulk."

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"All Shell fellows would be best," agreed Manners.

"Only, you see—"

"Well, put in Figgins, Fatty Wynn, and Blake, and make up the rest from the Shell," Monty Lowther suggested.

"There will be a row."

"Let there be. I suppose you expect some rows before you've been captain of St. Jim's long? Beside, what's life without a row every now and then?"

"Ahem! Only, you see, if the juniors don't stand together, the seniors will get the upper hand over us. It's only by the Lower School being solid behind me that I can keep my ground. If they could make out that the school is dissatisfied with me as captain all round, the Head would chip in."

"Jolly difficult bisney, I admit," assented Lowther. "There's something in that. But you can't play more than eleven chaps in a Soccer team; that's a dead cert."

"And the other fifty or so will get their backs up," Manners remarked.

There was a tap at the door, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came in. He grinned at the Terrible Three in a very genial manner.

"I hear that the seniahs are standin' out of the match to-morrow," he remarked.

"That's so," said Tom.

"I wegard it as weally a stwoke of good luck. It would have been wathah wuff to push them out, but as they're standin' out of their own accord, it will give us a good opportunity of showin' what the juniahs can do."

"Or what they can't do."

"Oh, that will be all wight! I intend to play the game of my life to-morrow," said Arthur Augustus confidently.

And the chums of the Shell exchanged glances. The difficulties were beginning.

"Ahem!" said Tom Merry. "Speaking about the match to-morrow—ahem!"

"I suppose you'll have to play a New House chap or two?" Arthur Augustus remarked. "Figgins and Fatty Wynn, and pewwaps Weddy. Are you fellows playin'?"

The Terrible Three glared at him. Were they playing, indeed!

"We are!" said Tom briefly.

"That's three," said D'Arcy. "Our study makes it seven, as there are four of us; and I pvesume you'll put in Kangawoo; then three New House chaps will make up the team."

"The fact is—"

"Oh, don't wun away with the idea that I'm twyin' to wun the show!" said Arthur Augustus generously. "I'm only givin' you advice, you know, as a sort of expert. You can't do better than take advice from a fellow of tact and judgment—"

"The fact is, I'm afraid your study won't be able to go in."

"Eh?"

"Can't play the lot of you," said Tom Merry.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy carefully and calmly extracted his eyeglass from his waistcoat-pocket, jammed it into his eye, and fixed a freezing and withering glance upon the captain of St. Jim's.

"Pway wepeat that remark, Tom Mewwy!" he said, with crushing dignity. "I'm not at all sure that I have undahstood you awight."

"Can't put in all four of you."

"And why not?"

"Only eleven players wanted, and as

the oldest fellows possible. Must be mostly Shell chaps, you see."

"I don't see at all."

"Well I'm sorry for that. I see myself, and that really is enough, isn't it?"

"I do not wegard it as enough, Tom Mewwy. In fact, I wathah think that Study No. 6 will wefuse to be left out."

"I shall be playing one of you—"

"Well, of course, in that case, I will do my best to make Hewwies, Dig, and Blake take it weasonably."

"The one I shall be playing is Blake."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"And you're going to take it like a sport, Gussy, and back me up, all the same," said Tom Merry. "We've got to stand together against the seniors, you know."

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"I am certainly weady to back you up against the seniahs, or anybody else, deah boy, in all weasonable things, but when I see you delibewately awwagin' to throw away an important match, I must beg leave to pause and considah."

"Now, look here, Gussy—" began the Terrible Three together.

Arthur Augustus waved his hand in a lofty manner.

"It's no good talkin' wot to me, Tom Mewwy. I will go and consult Blake and the othahs about it, and we will see what is to be done. The best thing I can think of is for you to wesign the captaincy into my hands."

"Fathead!"

"I wefuse to be called a fathead!"

"Ass!"

"I will not entah into a slangin' match with you," said Arthur Augustus loftily. "I may wemark that I am disappointed in you, Tom Mewwy. That is all. I will now wetiah."

"Time you did!" growled Lowther.

"I will weturn—"

"Oh, don't trouble about that!"

Slam!

The study door closed, and the swell of the School House was gone. The chums of the Shell exchanged glances.

"Trouble!" groaned Tom Merry.

"Looks like it. Can't be helped!" said Lowther. "After all, if we beat the Grammarians to-morrow, that will rally the fellows round us again!"

"If we beat them?"

"I mean, when we beat them," said Monty Lowther. "We must beat them. Now, get that blessed list done, and let's stick it up in the Hall, and then the fellows will know where they stand, and they'll know it's no good talking."

"Right-ho!" said Tom Merry, not very cheerfully.

And the list was finished at last, after much mental effort on the part of the Terrible Three, and was duly posted up on the notice-board in the School House, where it was read by the juniors with the keenest interest, and with many signs of an approaching tempest.

CHAPTER 7.

The New House Cuts Up Rusty!

"NEW HOUSE bounders!"

"What's the row?"

"Looks like a blessed raid!"

It did.

Quite an army of New House juniors came marching into the School House, with faces that were grave and determined.

There were Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, the famous Co., and Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence, and Pratt and Digby, and Thompson of the Shell.

left, but marched for the stairs, and made their way up to the Shell passage in state.

Such an invasion at any other time would probably have led to a "rag"; but just now the juniors of the rival Houses were on terms of peace, so Figgins and his party were allowed to pass unchallenged.

They marched down the Shell passage, and stopped at Tom Merry's study door. Upon that door George Figgins bestowed a heavy thump.

"Come in!" called out Tom Merry's voice in somewhat weary tones.

Figgins opened the door, and the army marched in. The Terrible Three were doing their preparation, but they suspended that labour as the New House crowd appeared. They knew that the long-foreseen trouble was coming.

But Tom Merry worked up an affable smile for his visitors.

"Hallo, glad to see you!" he said, not very heartily. "How do you do—ahem?"

"We've come on bisney!" said Figgins grimly.

"Something to do with me as captain of the school?" asked Tom Merry amiably. "All right. Go ahead! Always willing to hear you!"

Figgins grunted. "You've put up a silly list on the notice-board," he remarked.

"I've put up a list!" agreed Tom Merry.

"I suppose it's a sort of joke?"

"No; it's quite serious."

"I've read the names," said Figgins.

"Yes; they were put up there to be read, you know," said Tom mildly.

"Merry, Manners, Lowther, Noble, Dane, Glyn, Thompson, Figgins, Wynn, Blake, Herries!" enumerated Figgins solemnly.

"That's right!"

"That's three New House, and eight School House."

"Quite so."

"That's what we've come to talk to you about," said Redfern.

"Nothing to talk about," said Tom Merry. "The matter's settled."

"Then it had better be unsettled again, and jolly quick!" said Kerr.

"You can't deal with the New House in that way!"

"No fear!"

"Or with the Fourth," said Lawrence.

"Only four of the Fourth, and seven of the Shell!"

"Rotten!"

"Out of the question!"

"If that's the way you're going to run things, Tom Merry, it seems to me there was a big mistake made in the election!"

"That's what I was thinking!"

"Same here!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Well, I don't know about playing any more of the Fourth," remarked Thompson of the Shell; "but certainly there must be some more chaps of our House in the team, either Fourth or Shell. I think we can leave that point to Merry."

"Thank you!" said Tom sarcastically.

"Not at all," said Thompson. "So long as you play the game, we recognise that you are captain of St. Jim's, but our House has got to have a show."

"Yes, rather—you bet!"

"I'll help you revise the list, if you like, Tom Merry," Figgins suggested generously.

"Thanks; it doesn't need revising."

"We don't want to cause any trouble, especially at a time when the seniors are only waiting for a chance to jump on us. For that reason, we're ready



to make really big concessions. We shall be satisfied with six New House chaps in the eleven."

"Ahem!"

"As Cock House of St. Jim's, we ought to have more, but—"

"As what?"

"Cock House of St. Jim's," said Figgins firmly.

"Rats!"

"Ass!"

"Fathead!"

Figgins' brow began to grow wrathful. After practically electing the captain of the school, Figgins & Co. felt that they were entitled to a show. But it wasn't merely that. They had a serious conviction that the eleven wouldn't be any good without themselves in it. And they didn't want the new regime to start with a serious defeat at football. It was necessary, therefore, for Tom Merry to see reason from a New House point of view, which made all the difference.

"Now, look here, we came here for a friendly talk," said Figgins. "We're willing to give you any amount of advice to save you from coming a mucker in this matter!"

"I'm not looking for advice, as a matter of fact," Tom Merry explained. "If I wanted to be advised, there are plenty of silly asses in my own House with yards of it all ready for me."

"Well, I'll tell you what," said Figgins. "For the sake of peace, and to keep shoulder to shoulder, and so on, we'll be satisfied with five New House chaps in the eleven. That's risking losing the match."

"It wouldn't be risking it," said Monty Lowther sweetly. "It would be giving it away."

"Look here—" roared Figgins.

"Yes, look here—"

"What I think is—"

"Gentlemen," said Tom Merry. "I'm sorry I can't meet your wishes in this matter. As captain of St. Jim's, it's my duty to pick out the best eleven possible to beat the Grammar School. I've done it."

"Rats!"

"Bosh!"

"Piffle!"

"Tommy-rot!"

"And as captain of St. Jim's, I cannot allow myself to be dictated to by

juniors," said Tom Merry, with great dignity.

"Juniors!" yelled Redfern. "And what are you, pray?"

"I am captain of St. Jim's, Redfern, and I request you to speak more respectfully to your captain."

"Then the sooner St. Jim's gets a new skipper, the better," said Redfern.

"Hear, hear!"

"This interview is now over," said Tom Merry.

"Then you decline to talk sense?" demanded Figgins. "You won't do the sensible thing? You won't take advice from the fellows who know?"

"What I have said, I have said!" retorted Tom Merry firmly.

"What you have said is blithering piffle, and you know it."

"Gentlemen, there is the door."

"Bust the door!"

"If you prefer the window as a means of exit—"

"I'd like to see the chap who could put me out of the window, or the door, either!" said Figgins truculently.

"You will kindly retire from my study, and please learn better manners before you call on your captain again."

Figgins looked round at his followers.

"Gentlemen, chaps, and fellows," he said, "I think we're all agreed. We backed up this School House boulder to keep that cad Cutts out of the captaincy. We agreed to back the silly duffer up like men and brothers. But we can't back him up in throwing away football matches and making St. Jim's a guy. This is where we draw a line."

"Hear, hear!"

"We can't be parties to throwing away matches and things of that sort. It's our duty to draw a line. You understand that, Tom Merry?"

"Oh, rats!" said Tom Merry warmly.

"What I understand is that if you don't clear off, you'll be booted out."

"Get on with the booting, then," said Figgins grimly.

"Wreck the blessed study as a warning to them," suggested Owen.

"Hurrah!"

Tempers were very excited by that time on both sides. It needed only a word, and the word had been spoken. The New House juniors were looking very dangerous; and at that moment Manners gave Figgins a gentle push towards the door. The next moment Manners was lying on his back on the carpet, and in one more moment the Terrible Three and the New House were mixed up in a wild and whirling struggle.

CHAPTER 8.

Keeping Order!

"KICK them out!"

"Give 'em socks!"

"Down with the School House!"

"Pitch the table over!"

"Hurrah! Wreck the blessed place!"

"Tramp, tramp, tramp, tramp!"

"Ow, ow! My eye!"

"Rescue, the School House!" shouted Tom Merry.

There was a rush of feet in the passage. A crowd of School House juniors had gathered there in anticipation of trouble as raised voices were heard from Tom Merry's study. At the sound of conflict and the shout for rescue, they rushed in.

The study was crammed with fighting juniors.

There wasn't much room for a big crowd to struggle in the study. In a few minutes the room was a wreck. The furniture was hurled in all directions, and struggling juniors rolled on the floor and on one another.

More and more School House fellows rushed upon the scene, and the New House invaders were extracted from the room one by one, and rushed away, struggling and yelling, each in the grasp of two or three self-constituted chuckers-out.

Along the passage and down the stairs they went, roaring and wriggling, and one by one they were hurled forth from the School House into the quadrangle.

It was a House row now with a vengeance.

Darrell of the Sixth came on the scene as the last of the invaders were sent rolling down the School House steps into the dusky quad.

His face was angry.

"Are you going to stop this confounded row?" he shouted.

Tom Merry turned upon him. Tom was excited, and he was not inclined to take any nonsense from anybody at that moment.

"We shall suit ourselves about that!" he exclaimed. "And I'll thank you to speak more civilly to your captain, Darrell."

"You cheeky young scamp—"

Tom Merry raised his hand.

"Go back to your study, Darrell!"

"Why, you—you—"

"I order you to go back to your study."

"You—you—you order me!" spluttered Darrell.

"Yes; and if you don't go you'll be put!"

That was enough for Darrell of the Sixth. He made a jump at Tom Merry and grasped him. It would have gone hard with the captain of St. Jim's at that moment, but for his faithful followers. His New House backers were gone, breathing vengeance and fury, but the School House juniors were still loyal.

"Back up!" yelled Monty Lowther; and he rushed at Darrell.

A dozen other fellows rushed at the prefect at the same moment.

Darrell was whirled away from Tom Merry, whipped off his feet, and rushed back to his study, and tossed in like a sack of coke.

He sprawled on the floor, breathless and enraged, and Lowther slammed the study door.

"That settles Darrell!" chuckled Lowther.

"I'll keep order in this House!" panted Tom Merry. "I'll have order kept, if we have to have a row every five minutes!"

"Hear, hear!"

Mr. Railton, who had been with the Head, came upon the scene just after the sudden disappearance of Darrell. The excited voices died away at the appearance of the Housemaster.

"What is this riot about?" asked Mr. Railton.

"There isn't any riot, sir," said Tom Merry steadily. "I have had to use somewhat severe measures with one of the Sixth, that is all, sir."

"We can't allow them to cheek our captain, sir," said Kangaroo.

Mr. Railton seemed about to say something exceedingly emphatic, but

he changed his mind, and walked away to his study.

Tom Merry hurried to the notice-board with a crowd of juniors behind him. He took out a pencil to make some alteration in the football list.

There was a cheer as he drew the pencil through the New House names on the list.

"Gentlemen," said the captain of St. Jim's, "after the insubordinate conduct of Figgins & Co., it is impossible to play any New House fellows tomorrow."

"Bravo!"

"I have, therefore, scratched Thompson, Figgins, and Wynn. I shall play Digby, Reilly, and D'Arcy instead."

"Hear, hear!"

"Perfectly wippin' ideah, deah boy!"

"Good egg!" said Jack Blake heartily. "That lets in the whole of Study No. 6, and I must say you're not such an ass as I was thinking, Tom Merry. I think you make a jolly good captain of the school."

"Yaas, wathah!"

The Terrible Three returned to their own quarters. Their quarters required some renovating before they could get on with their preparation. There was a somewhat humorous expression on Monty Lowther's face as he sat down to work at last.

"Not all plain-sailing, is it?" he remarked.

Tom Merry dabbed his nose with his handkerchief. The nose of the captain of the school ought to be sacred, but it had been punched hard.

"No," agreed Tom. "But we're going to keep order. I suppose it was bound to come to a row sooner or later with those New House kids. They were bound to kick over the traces. We shall teach them manners in time."

"Ahem! I hope so!"

"Anyway, I'm going to keep on in the way I've started," said Tom. "I'm captain of St. Jim's, and St. Jim's is going to toe the line. That's flat!"

And the Terrible Three settled down to work, only pausing every now and then to dab a nose, or caress a discoloured eye.

CHAPTER 9.

A Painful Duty!

"I WEGARD it as a captain's duty."

Thus Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

The swell of the School House was laying down the law in the Junior Common-room when the Terrible Three came in, after finishing their preparation.

Tom Merry, as captain of the school, was entitled to use the prefects' room if he chose. But his friends were not entitled to admittance there, so Tom forbore to make use of that privilege. Solitary state was not at all to his liking. And the atmosphere of the prefects' room would certainly have been rather freezing.

Tom Merry heard Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's remark as he came in, and he looked inquiringly towards the elegant Fourth Former.

"Hallo! What's up now, Gussy?" he inquired.

"It's Cutts, deah boy."

"Gussy's hungry for the warpath," explained Jack Blake. "You know Kildare used to be down on Cutts' little games, though Cutts kept them pretty dark from Kildare. Old Kildare did not know all we know."

"Wathah not, or he would have jumped on Cutts like anything."

"The fact is," said Blake confidentially, "it wouldn't be a bad idea to make an example of Cutts. Some of the kids are beginning to slack already, and making an example of a senior would buck them up."

Tom Merry laughed.

"What's the matter with Cutts, though?" he inquired.

"It's one of his blessed bridge-parties in his study!" said Blake. "He's got Knox of the Sixth, and Gilmore and Sefton of the New House, and they're playing bridge. They play half-a-crown a hundred."

Tom Merry frowned.

"Gambling!" he said.

"Well, we all know that Cutts gambled," said Blake. "When you come to think of it, it is your duty, as Gussy says, to put it down."

"No doubt whatever about that," said Arthur Augustus. "I wegard it as bein' up to Tom Mewwy to step vewy hard upon such disgwaceful pwceedings."

Tom Merry looked thoughtful.

There certainly couldn't be any doubt that it was the duty of the captain of the school to put down such practices, if he knew about them, and Tom did know about them. He had known about Cutts' little ways long enough, for the matter of that.

And there was something, too, in the suggestion that, "making an example" of a senior would have the effect of bucking up the juniors.

Tom was somewhat in the position of a revolutionary leader, who must always do something or other to excite and dazzle the crowd, in order to keep them from wavering.

Gerald Cutts, in fact, was standing his little bridge party in the very nick of time.

"Not a bad idea," said Monty Lowther, looking at Tom. "It's a jolly good maxim, you know; always do your duty when there's nothing else on."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Lowthah, a chap ought to do his duty at all times, whethah there's anythin' else on or not. If you only do your duty when you've got nothing on—"

"Your first duty would be to put something on, I should think," remarked Lowther thoughtfully, "unless, of course, you are in the swimming-bath."

"You uttah ass—"

"Quite sure about Cutts' little party, Blake?" asked Tom Merry, with a chiding gesture to Lowther, as a warning to him that it was not a time to be funny.

"Oh, yes!" said Blake. "They've been making great preparations. And Mellish has just been saying that he passed Cutts' door, and heard Cutts say 'Two hearts.'"

"What on earth did he say two hearts for?" demanded Tom.

"They're playing auction bridge, of course," said Arthur Augustus. "They play at home, and I've seen them, though the patah doesn't let me play. Two hearts means that he makes hearts trumps, and undahtakes to get two twicks."

"And then Knox said two lily," added Blake. "I don't know what it means, but it's something to do with bridge."

"Weally, Blake, two lily means—"

"Never mind what it means," said Tom Merry. "It's plain that they're gambling. But I don't know about acting upon information received from Mellish. It's caddish to listen at a

door, and Mellish must have listened. Where is he?"

"Mellish, you're wanted."

Mellish came forward, rather pleased to find himself in demand.

"It's a fact," he said; "they're playing bridge. They often do—for money, too. Cutts has notes on the table."

"How do you know?"

"Ahem! You see, I—I—"

"You looked through the keyhole!" said Tom sternly.

"Well, suppose I did?" said Mellish sulkily. "They're breaking the rules, aren't they, in playing cards at all, especially for money? If the Head knew there was a pack of cards inside the school he'd come down like thunder!"

"Quite so; and as captain of the school I am going to put an end to such things. But I am also bound to be down on eavesdropping and spying!"

"Oh, rats!" said Percy Mellish.

"Bump him!" said Tom.

"What!" howled Mellish.

"Bump him twice!"

"Look here, you needn't take any notice of what I told you if you don't want to."

"I'm bound to take notice of it as captain of St. Jim's. I'm bound also to punish you for spying!"

"You silly ass—"

"Bump him three times!"

"Look here, you idiot—"

"Four times!" said Tom Merry sternly. "The extra bumps are for lacking respect in addressing the captain of the school!"

"You—you burbling dummy—"

"Five times!"

Mellish left the rest of his choice names unuttered. His punishment was going up by leaps and bounds, and five

bumps were more than enough. He was collared, and he descended upon the floor with a loud concussion, and a louder yell. Five times in succession he was bumped by Tom Merry's faithful followers, and each time he let out a yell that would have brought a prefect into the room at any other time. But the prefects did not appear now. They were evidently learning their lesson!

"Oh, you rotters!" groaned Mellish, as he escaped from the hands of the bumpers. "Oh, you beasts! Yow-ow-ow!"

"I think that pewpaws one more—"

But Percy Mellish fled before Arthur Augustus could finish.

"Now for Cutts!" said Blake briskly.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We'll jolly well bump him and rag his study, bedad!" chuckled Reilly.

"Hurrah!"

"Down with the Fifth!"

Tom Merry raised his hand.

"Order!" he said. "No rags and no larks. This is serious business. I am standing up for the good name and reputation of the school, and you fellows are backing me up as in duty bound."

"Hear hear!"

"Follow me, and keep order!"

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy!"

And Tom Merry led the way to the Fifth Form passage—with about fifty juniors after him. They did not really look as if they were going to keep order; they looked rather as if they were going on the warpath, and anticipating heaps of fun. In spite of the really serious business in hand, somehow the juniors seemed to have the idea that they were simply "going for the Fifth," and to go for the Fifth seemed to them a most exhilarating and joyous proceeding.

Lefevre of the Fifth met the army en route. Lefevre of the Fifth stopped to stare at them, not amiably.

"Hallo! What do you fags want here?" he demanded.

Tom Merry waved his hand.

"Kindly stand aside, Lefevre!"

"You kids have no business in the Fifth Form passage," said Lefevre. "That's what I say. You just cut off—do you hear?"

"Go to your study, Lefevre, and stay there!"

"What!"

"Take Lefevre to his study!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Why, what—how—who—yow—yaroooh!"

Lefevre was swept off his feet and hurled into his study before he knew what was happening. He came rushing out again a second later like a mad bull, and he was promptly collared and hurled in again. This time he stayed.

Then Tom Merry & Co. walked on to Cutts' study. As they reached it, a voice—the voice of Sefton of the Sixth, a New House fellow—was audible.

"Three hearts!"

"Three no trumps!" said Cutts' voice.

Tom Merry knocked at the door of the study, and there was a sudden silence in the study.

CHAPTER 10.

The Gamblers!

KNOCK!

Silence.

Whether another of the bridge players had intended to go something better than "three, no trumps" or not, the knock on the study



"Down with the School House!" yelled the New House juniors. "Wreck the place!" In a moment the Terrible Three were mixed up in a terrific struggle with their rivals. "Rescue, School House!" shouted Tom Merry. At the shout for help School House juniors came pouring into the study.

door effectually put a stop to the "auctioning."

The thought that it might be a master, and that he might have overheard their incautious voices, was enough almost to freeze the blood in the veins of Cutts & Co.

Knock!

Tom Merry turned the handle of the door. The door was, as he had expected, locked. Cutts did not run unnecessary risks.

As Tom turned the handle, he heard sounds in the silent study—a drawer being opened, and money clinking into pockets.

Cutts was a quick-change artist in that way. More than once he had had to conceal tell-tale traces in a marvellously short space of time to avoid discovery. "Who's there?" called out Cutts' voice, cool and bland, as usual.

It was very seldom that Gerald Cutts lost his nerve.

"The captain of the school!" Tom Merry called out, in reply.

He heard a muttered curse. Cutts was both relieved and enraged to find that it was only a junior outside the door.

"Go away, hang you!" he said, between his teeth.

"Open this door, Cutts!"

"What do you want?"

"You are gambling there, and I'm going to put a stop to it!"

"You cheeky young hound!" roared Cutts, in a fury. "If you don't clear off at once I'll come out and lick you!"

"Come on, then!"

"I—I—"

"If you don't open this door, Cutts, we shall fetch the bench along the passage and burst it open."

"You hound! You don't dare!"

"You will see," said Tom Merry calmly. "You know very well you've no right to lock out the captain of the school. Are you going to open this door?"

"No."

"Get the bench, you fellows," said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hurrah!"

The roar of voices told Cutts that Tom Merry had plenty of backers with him. The black sheep of the Fifth was pale with rage, but he did not want his study door burst in. It would lead to too much talk on the subject of the bridge party. Cutts did not want talk on that subject. Even if he cleared himself, it would cause the eye of authority to be directed upon him, and would make his peculiar proceedings more difficult and dangerous in the future.

It was wiser to temporise with the juniors, and get out of the affair without such a terrific disturbance, if possible.

Cutts promptly decided.

"Hold on!" he exclaimed. "I'll open the door."

"You'd better," said Tom briefly.

Cutts strode to the door, unlocked it, and threw it wide open, and surveyed the crowd of juniors outside with a scowling brow.

"Now, what do you want here?" he snarled. "Don't come into my study. I don't want a gang of fags here."

"It isn't a question of what you want, but of what you're going to get!" chuckled Monty Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I am here as captain of the school," Tom Merry explained. "I'm coming in. Will you kindly stand aside, Cutts?"

"No, I won't!" roared Cutts.

"Put him aside!" said the captain of St. Jim's.

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Cutts jumped aside as the juniors advanced upon him. It was only too plain that Tom Merry & Co. meant business, and the odds were too great. The Fifth Form passage was swarming with juniors, all eager for a row with the Fifth.

Tom Merry strode in.

The four bridge players regarded him with savage scowls. Cutts and Gilmore of the Fifth, and Knox and Sefton of the Sixth, formed the party. The table was clear; the cards had disappeared, and the markers, too. The ashtrays had been whisked out of sight. There was not a cigarette to be seen, but in the atmosphere there hung a scent of tobacco—that was the only trace Cutts had not been able to get rid of in a hurry.

"You have been smoking," said Tom Merry, raising a magisterial hand.

"Mind your own business," said Knox savagely.

"It is my business, as captain of the school."

"Yaas, wathah! I recommend Tom Mewwy to make an example of the boundahs!"

"And you have been gambling," went on Tom Merry. "I will thank you to produce the markers and the bridge cards."

"The what?" said Cutts.

"You heard what I said."

"Never had such things in my study," said Cutts calmly. "I really don't know what you are talking about!"

"You were playing bridge when I knocked at the door."

"Not at all. We were talking about the Grammar School match to-morrow. Sefton thinks your team will make a record for St. Jim's. Don't you. Sefty?"

"Oh, don't bandy words with the young cad!" growled Sefton. "What business is it of his? Chuck them out of the study!"

"Things are coming to a pretty pass when seniors are ragged in their own quarters!" said Gilmore. "Get out, you cheeky kids!"

"Silence!"

"Why, you—you—"

"If you interrupt me again, Gilmore, I shall order you to be bumped!"

Gilmore gave Tom Merry an almost homicidal look. But there was no help for it. He had to give in. The Fifth Formers could have been called in to eject the intruders, but that would have led to a general scrimmage—and publicity. And Cutts knew that a search of his study would reveal what was wanted. He wanted to get out of the matter without a row, if possible.

"Cheese it, Gilly," he said. "We've got to recognise the fact that Merry has been elected captain of the school."

"I don't!" growled Gilmore.

"Nor I!" snarled Sefton.

"Same here!" said Knox. "I'll never recognise a Shell kid as captain of the school. I think that's rather too funny!"

"Silence! Cutts, I know you've been gambling, and I've come here to put a stop to it, and inflict suitable punishment."

"Hear, hear!" chorused the juniors. Cutts almost panted with rage, but he contrived to keep cool.

"I tell you—" he began.

"On this occasion," said Tom Merry, "I shall not report your conduct to the Head. That is really my strict duty. But I don't want to be hard, even on you. You would be sacked from the school, and you know it!"

"You'd have to prove it," remarked Knox.

"I can prove it quite easily by searching the study. And that is what I'm going to do now, if you don't hand out the cards!"

"You're going to search my study?" said Cutts, his teeth setting hard.

"Certainly—as captain of the school. You know Kildare would have done the same when he was here if he'd had information that you were gambling. Only he would have brought the Housemaster with him. Would you prefer me to fetch Mr. Railton to be present at the search?"

Cutts turned almost green. He was quite in the junior's hands, and he could not help realising it. Mr. Railton had only to be told what was going on to make him search the study more rigorously, and then all would be up.

"You can do as you like!" said Cutts at last. "I've told you that there are no cards here."

"I'm sorry I cannot take your word, Cutts."

"Wathah not! I feah vewy much that you are tellin' awful whoppahs, Cutts, deah boy!"

"Ananias was a little joker to that chap!" remarked Blake, with a shake of the head.

"Are you going to stand this cheek, Cutts, in your own study?" howled Sefton.

"He's got to," said Manners.

"It can't be helped, you fathead!" muttered Cutts. "Do you want the Housemaster brought here? You know what that would mean."

"Well, I'm not going to be jawed by juniors! I'm off!"

And Sefton strode towards the door.

"Come back, Sefton!" rapped out Tom Merry. "You're to stay here until the investigation into this scandalous matter is finished!"

Sefton made no reply and took no notice. He strode on. But, at a sign from Tom Merry, half a dozen juniors grasped him and whirled him back into the study. The Sixth Former struggled furiously, but the juniors jammed him down into Cutts' armchair and held him there by main force.

"Help me, you rotten funks!" Sefton yelled furiously to the rest of the bridge party.

But they did not help him. The odds were too great against them.

"Keep that fool quiet!" said Tom Merry. "If he makes a row, Lowther, pull his ears!"

"Certainly!" said Monty Lowther.

"Leggo!" roared Sefton. "I— Oh! Ow! Let my ear alone, you young beast! Yaroooh!"

"Shush!" repeated Lowther chidingly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Sefton of the Sixth had "shushed" at last, his ears feeling as if they had become semi-detached. Lowther had been very energetic.

"And now," said Tom Merry calmly, "we will proceed with the investigation of this scandal. Cutts, do you still deny that you have been gambling?"

"Yes!" said Cutts, livid with rage.

The pride of the Fifth Former was cruelly humiliated by the necessity of answering stern questions put to him by a junior. But there was no help for it. Tom Merry mightn't be a school captain like Kildare, but in such a matter as this he had all the authority of the college behind him. It was better to put up with anything from the juniors than to have the Housemaster or the Head there.

"Very well!" said Tom. "As I cannot accept your word, Cutts, the study must be searched!"

"Let's wreck the place intirely!" exclaimed Reilly.
 "Order!"
 "Yaas, ordah, Weilly deah boy! Modewate your twan-sports, old chap!"
 "Blake," said Tom Merry.
 "Adsum!" grinned Blake.
 "Kindly turn out the table drawer, for a start."
 "Right-ho!"
 And Blake started the investigation under the stern directing eye of Tom Merry, watched by the bridge players with scowling brows, and by the crowd of juniors with joyous grins.

CHAPTER 11.

The Captain's Warning!

JACK BLAKE was perhaps a little rough-and-ready in his methods. Perhaps he did not consider it necessary to stand upon ceremony with the Fifth Formers. Cutts & Co. had never stood on ceremony with him, and Study No. 6 had all sorts of old scores against Cutts.

Blake piled in cheerfully and unceremoniously. He turned out the table drawer by pulling it clear out of the table.

Crash!
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 The drawer went to the floor, and the contents were scattered over the study carpet. There were papers, and pens, and ink-bottles, and indiarubbers, and all sorts and conditions of things of quite an innocent character.

There were no cards or bridge-markers to be seen, or cigarettes, either.

Tom Merry was a little puzzled. He was certain that he had heard a drawer open and close before the study door was unlocked. But he guessed at once that an astute blackguard like Cutts would have some secret place of concealment for the telltale paraphernalia of gambling.

"Nothing here," said Blake, surveying the scattered articles.

"Nothin' of a suspicious chawactah," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked, turning his eyeglass upon the strewn carpet.

"Examine the drawer," said Tom Merry.

"It's quite empty."
 "Quite empty, deah boy."
 "Nothing there," said Kangaroo, with a shake of the head.

"See if there is a false bottom in it," said Tom quietly.

"Bai Jove!"
 "My hat, I shouldn't wonder!" said Blake.

And he picked up the drawer and shook it. There was a rattling sound. The drawer evidently was not as empty as it looked.

Cutts bit his lip hard.

He knew that the little secret was discovered now. A master searching the study could hardly have thought of such a contrivance, but the juniors knew Cutts—knew him only too well.

"Somethin' here, deah boy, aftah all!" Arthur Augustus exclaimed excitedly. "Bai Jove, you know, I nevah thought of that!"

"Blessed if I did, either," said Blake. "But here we are! There's a false bottom to the drawer—it's two inches shallower inside than it is out. How do you open this thing, Cutts, old pal?"

"Find out!" snarled Cutts.

"Good! I will!"

Blake found out. He found out by crashing the drawer against the table with a most terrific crash. It flew into four or five pieces, and then the contents of the hidden receptacle were strewn on the carpet also.

There was a howl of excitement from the juniors then.

Four or five packs of cards, half a dozen bridge-markers, two or three ashtrays, packets of cigarettes, and a box of cigars—it was a find indeed!

The bridge party looked at the discovered proofs, and then at the open doorway. They were in a state of terror now. The noise might bring Darrell or Rusden along the passage at any time. And the prefects, much as they might dislike the captaincy of Tom Merry, would have no hesitation in bringing Cutts to book if they saw what had been revealed by Jack Blake's drastic method of searching.

The fate of the wretched gamblers trembled in the balance. Already, in their mind's eye, they saw the crowded Hall—the Head's stern face—heard his stern voice telling them that they were expelled from the school they had disgraced.

"Looks like business, doesn't it?" remarked Manners.
 "I suppose you have these things here simply to look at, Cutts, and never to play with?"

(Continued on next page.)

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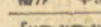
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"Bai Jove! You are discovahed now, Cutts, you wottah!"

"A clean bowl-out!" chuckled Blake.

"Report him to the Head!"

"Fetch Railton here!"

"Have him sacked!"

"Hurrah!"

"Order!" said Tom Merry. "As this is the first exercise of my authority as captain of the school, so far as Cutts is concerned, I am going to be lenient. Cutts!"

"Well?" said Cutts, in a choking voice.

"You know what would happen, I suppose, if I reported you?"

Cutts ground his teeth.

"Answer me, Cutts!"

"Yes!" murmured the Fifth Former.

"Very well. I am going to take your punishment into my own hands. I leave you the choice, however, of being reported to the Head instead, if you choose. Which would you prefer to deal with the matter—the Head or myself?"

"You!" muttered Cutts.

"As captain of the school?"

"Ye-es."

"In that case, you recognise my authority officially?"

"Ye-es," ground out Cutts, between his teeth, pale to the lips with fury.

"Very good! Take those cards and markers away and put them in the fire."

Cutts, almost suffocating with rage, obeyed. The packs of cards and the bridge-markers blazed up.

"Now the cigars and the cigarettes."

Those valuable articles followed the others. Quite a bonfire blazed up the chimney. Enraged as the seniors were, they were greatly relieved to see the proofs of their delinquency destroyed. It was worth anything to them to get the things out of sight.

"And now," said Tom Merry severely, "you will tell me what you have won from one another. Who has been winning?"

The seniors did not answer.

"Each fellow will state his exact winnings and losses immediately," said Tom Merry. "If you refuse to answer, I shall have no alternative but to call in the Housemaster."

"I've won ten shillings!" muttered Cutts.

"I've won five!" snarled Sefton.

"I've lost seven-and-six," said Knox, his voice barely audible.

"Same here!" said Gilmore.

"Very well. Lay the winnings on the table, Cutts and Sefton."

They obeyed. Tom Merry separated the half-crowns.

"There's your seven-and-six, Knox and Gilmore," he said. "Put the money in your pockets. Do you hear?"

They put it in their pockets.

"That's done," said Tom cheerfully. "Now, there's to be no more of this gambling, do you understand? I won't make you promise, because I don't believe you would keep your word. But I warn you that I shall keep a very strict eye on this study in the future, and the next case of gambling will be reported directly to the Head. I'm letting you off lightly this time."

The seniors did not answer. They were too enraged to speak.

"We are finished here now," said Tom Merry. "Upon the whole, I shall not cane you!"

"Cane us?" stuttered Cutts.

"Yes—I have the authority to cane you, as captain of the school. I suppose you know that."

"I—I—you—you—"

"Do you know it, or don't you?" demanded Tom Merry.

"I—I— Yes, I suppose so."

"Very well. I shall let you off this time; but I shall not be so lenient the next time. I leave you now to meditate on your sins," added Tom Merry loftily, as he turned to the door.

"I say, aren't we going to wreck the study, bedad?" said Reilly of the Fourth, in tones of deep disappointment.

"No!"

"Faith, and I think—"

"Yaas, wathah; I should certainly recommend bumpin' the boundahs, Tom Mewwy!"

"Bettah give 'em a licking."

"Just a few whacks!" urged Kangaroo.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"What I have said, I have said!" he replied, with dignity. "Gentlemen, you will kindly follow me. We are finished here!"

And the crowd departed. The door was closed; and then Cutts & Co. looked at one another. Their looks were almost murderous.

"And we've got to stand this?" Knox muttered.

Cutts shrugged his shoulders.

"What could we do?"

We should have been sacked to-morrow morning if that young villain had brought Mr. Railton on the scene!"

"We've got to get rid of him somehow," said Sefton, between his teeth. "How is it going to be done?"

"How?" said Cutts, with another shrug.

And that was the question the black sheep of St. Jim's could not find an answer to.

CHAPTER 12.

The Match That Didn't Come Off!

ON the following morning there was only one topic in the School House at St.

Jim's.

It was the Grammar School match of the afternoon.

The seniors having retired, like Achilles, to sulk in their tents, so to speak, and the New House fellows having been scratched off the list, the match was left to Tom Merry & Co. It was entirely a School House affair, and an affair of the juniors.

Tom Merry & Co., on their own, were to meet and defeat the Grammarian seniors—if they could.

As they generally found it difficult enough to keep their end up against Gordon Gay & Co., the juniors of the Grammar School, it might have been supposed that their chances against the senior eleven would be slight.

But they were very sanguine. So the junior eleven were full of keen anticipations for the afternoon—anticipations that were destined to be disappointed most severely.

After dinner the School House fellows began to gather on the football ground. As it was the senior match, the

The seniors were conspicuous by their absence. But Figgins & Co. turned up in great force.

The truce between the rival Houses was at an end; the lion and the lamb no longer lay in peace.

Figgins & Co. had come to see the School House junior team wiped off the ground by the Grammarians, and to condole with one another over the disgrace that the School House was bringing upon St. Jim's.

They greeted Tom Merry's eleven with deep groans.

The eleven looked very fit and well in their red-and-white shirts as they came out on the field and started punting a footer about.

But the remarks of the New House



Blake crashed the drawer against the table and smashed over the carpet, and there was a yell of excitement from the spectators.

spectators were not complimentary. They passed their remarks in loud tones for the footballers to hear. Figgins & Co. were very much on the warpath now.

"It's going to be the joke of the season," Redfern remarked. "Blessed if I know whether to laugh or to weep!"

"I say, Gussy, you've forgotten your eyeglass!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The Grammarians don't seem to be hurrying themselves," Thompson of the Shell remarked presently, looking at his watch. "Time they were here."

"Time for the circus to begin," said Fatty Wynn.

the Grammarians? I wonder if they've heard?"

"Heard what, you silly asses?" demanded Tom Merry, turning round at last upon the New House fellows.

"Heard that they're expected to play a parcel of silly duffers," explained Figgins. "If they have, they mayn't come, you know."

"They mayn't have such a taste for comedy in football as you kids have," Kerr remarked.

"A screaming joke if they don't come!" grinned Owen. "Ha, ha, ha!"

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

"Oh, shut up!" said Tom Merry crossly. "Of course they're coming!"

"Well, they're not here yet."

didn't turn up, evidently the match would not come off, and then they knew what a howl of laughter there would be from all the school, especially the New House.

Figgins & Co. were already chuckling with great enjoyment. As Figgins said, it was the very best thing that could have happened if the Grammar School team didn't turn up. It would be a lesson to those cheeky School House kids, and it would save St. Jim's from the disgrace of recording an overwhelming defeat.

But the School House view was different. The looks of the junior footballers grew glummer and glummer as the big hand crawled round the dial of the clock in the tower.

"Half-past three!" said Monty Lowther. "They're frightfully late!"

"Feafully late, deah boys!"

"I can't understand it!" said Tom Merry, his brow wrinkled in puzzled thought. "Why aren't they here? Yorke isn't the kind of silly ass to be half an hour late for a footer match. It isn't as if they had to come a long way by train!"

"Is it possible——" began Herries doubtfully.

"Is what possible, ass?"

"I mean, suppose they have heard that they've got to play a junior team, and—and don't choose to come?"

"Oh, rot!"

"Figgins thinks so——"

"Blow Figgins!"

"They wouldn't tweat us with such wotten diswpect," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a shake of the head. "It would be wotten bad form. They would send us a note, at least."

"Of course they would!" said Tom Merry. "It can't be that!"

"Then what the deuce is it?" said Blake. "Hallo, Wally! Is there any sign of the silly goats?"

Wally had just come up from the gates. He shook his head.

"I've been as far as the corner," he said. "No sign of them."

"Suppose we send them a telegram?" suggested Arthur Augustus.

"They must have started already, if they're coming at all," said Digby.

"Yaas. But if they're not coming?" "It's nearer to go to the Grammar School than to the telegraph office," said Manners. "One of us might cut over on a bike."

Tom Merry shook his head. "If they don't choose to come, we're not going to go hunting them," he said. "We've got to consider our dignity as the St. Jim's first eleven."

"Yaas, wathah! We're the first eleven now, you know. We're bound to considah our personal dig in this mattah."

"Then what on earth's to be done?" asked Kangaroo.

"Nearly a quarter to four," said Clifton Dane.

"Bai Jove, it's wotten! Look at

Blake turned a wrathful glance towards Figgins & Co. The New House fellows undoubtedly were cackling. They seemed to be enjoying the afternoon famously.

"Let's clear those cads off the ground, anyway!" Blake exclaimed.

"Good! Let's go for them!"

"Sure, it will pass the time, anyway," Reilly remarked.

"No rags now," said Tom Merry. "It's not a time for it. Let the beasts cackle. But I wish I knew what we'd better do. It's ridiculous to stand here like this!"

"Yaas, wathah; quite widiculous!"

"There must have been some trick played," said Monty Lowther thoughtfully. "Yorke wouldn't do a mean thing like this without letting us know."

"What price the telephone?" asked Manners.

"Oh, good!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "The Grammar School is on the telephone, and we can use the phone in the prefects' room."

"Ahem!" said Bernard Glyn dubiously. "This isn't exactly the time for asking the prefects a favour, is it?"

"No favour about it. The captain of the school has a right to use the prefects' room and the telephone as much as he pleases."

"Good! I forgot that."

"You fellows may as well come with me, though, in case there's any rot," said Tom Merry, as an afterthought.

And the footballers put on their coats and mufflers, and walked in a body off the ground. Loud yells from the New House contingent followed them:

"Are you going to play?"

"You've forgotten the match!" "Going to play marbles instead? More in your line!"

Tom Merry & Co. walked on with lofty heads, disdaining to take the least notice of their old rivals. But their cheeks were burning. They felt keenly the absurd side of the matter. The most crushing defeat at the hands of the Grammarians would not have been so ridiculous as this. They were glad enough to get inside the School House, leaving Figgins & Co. in possession of the field, laughing like hyenas.

CHAPTER 13.

Pure Cheek!

TOM MERRY threw open the door of the prefects' room and strode in, with his followers at his heels.

The prefects' room was a tremendously sacred apartment. It was devoted to the use of the prefects solely—common-or-garden members of the Sixth not being tolerated there. The Fifth did not use the room; and, as for the juniors, mere juniors could not possibly enter it, except for fagging purposes, or when some good-natured great person allowed them to use the telephone there.

But Tom Merry & Co. marched in now as if the place belonged to them.

At the big window overlooking the quadrangle, several prefects were standing in a group chatting and smiling. They turned and bestowed freezing stares upon Tom Merry & Co., ceasing to smile as if by magic.

"What do you kids want here?" asked Darrell.

"Silence!"

"Look here——" Rushden exclaimed.

Tom Merry pointed to the door.

"Get out!" he said.



om. The contents of the hidden receptacle were strewn
iors. Playing cards, bridge-markers, and cigarettes
e indeed bowled out!

"Sister Anne—Sister Anne, do you see anybody coming?" piped Redfern; and the New House juniors roared again.

Tom Merry & Co. looked rather anxiously at the clock tower.

The Grammarians were certainly late. Kick-off was timed for three o'clock, and it was already turned three. It was certainly very odd that the team from the Grammar School should be so unpunctual. Blake cut down to the gates to look for the Grammarian charabanc, but he returned with the news that there was no sign of it.

Tom Merry & Co. ceased punting the footer about and gathered in a group to talk the matter over. Their brows were growing anxious. They hardly knew what to make of the Gram-

"Eh?"

"Get outside! I'm captain of the school, and I want this room for a bit. I don't want you fellows bothering me here. Travel off!"

"Yaas, wathah! Hop it, deah boys!"

The prefects started at the juniors, looking as if they would eat them. For the prefects to be ordered out of the prefects' room by a junior was quite the limit—in fact, it was miles past the limit. It was unbelievable, incredible, impossible. But there it was. Tom Merry did not intend to let the seniors overhear his talk on the telephone. He knew there would be a chorus of chuckles as it went on. And he was in a mood just now to give the Sixth all the trouble they wanted.

"You cheeky sweep—" Langton was beginning.

But Tom Merry interrupted him sharply without the least ceremony.

"Outside! If you don't go, you'll be put! See those fellows out of the room, you chaps!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Come on!" said Kangaroo.

"Kick them out!"

The juniors advanced to the attack. The prefects exchanged helpless glances. To be involved in an undignified scrimmage with the juniors, and finally ejected by force—for the odds were too great for them—would never do. Darrell settled the matter by walking out of the room, and the others followed him. Jack Blake slammed the door after them victoriously.

"Bai Jove, we're teachin' the Sixth mannahs alwady!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked, with a chuckle. "The boundahs are learnin' to toe the giddy line!"

"Now pile in with the phone!" said Blake.

Tom Merry took up the receiver. He called up the exchange, and was put on to the Grammar School at Rylcombe in a few minutes.

"Through?" asked Blake.

"Yes," Tom Merry spoke through the phone. "Is that Rylcombe Grammar School?"

"Yes," came the reply. "Who is that?"

"This is St. Jim's—Tom Merry speaking. Is Yorke of the Sixth there?"

"I will call him. Hold on!"

"Right!"

Tom Merry waited. Yorke of the Sixth, the Grammar School footer captain, was evidently at home. The Grammarian team had not yet started for St. Jim's, and it was close on four o'clock. Clearly, they did not intend to play, as it was too late now for them to reach St. Jim's and play the match before dark.

Tom Merry's brows knitted darkly as he waited. Something must have happened to cause the Grammarians to act in this unaccountable way—he was sure of that; and he was about to learn what it was. And if it was a trick on the part of anybody belonging to St. Jim's, that person would feel the full weight of the wrath of the captain of the school. Tom Merry was determined upon that.

Yorke's voice came through the telephone at last:

"Hallo!"

"Hallo! Is that Yorke—Grammar School?"

"Yes. What's wanted?"

"This is St. Jim's—captain of the school speaking!"

"Yes?"

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"You didn't turn up for the match to-day! I want an explanation!"

"What!"

"Why didn't you turn up this afternoon?"

"Who's speaking?"

"Tom Merry—captain of St. Jim's!"

"Look here, if this is a jape—"

"It's not a jape. I've been elected captain of the school!"

"My only hat!"

"We expected you for the match to-day. You didn't come!"

"The match was scratched."

"What!"

"We had a letter from your secretary, Darrell, scratching the match, owing to unavoidable circumstances."

"From Darrell?" yelled Tom Merry.

"Yes; your secretary. Wasn't it in order?"

"No, it wasn't! It was a rotten trick!"

"Oh—crumbs! Of course, we didn't

this!" said Arthur Augustus, with a sad shake of the head.

"It's because the blessed Sixth have got their blessed backs up!" said Manners. "And we had better show them that they can't do these things!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Why, it's an awful cheek!" said Lowther. "Fancy scratching the match without consulting the captain or any of the team!"

"They don't look on Tommy as the captain, or us as the team, you see," Digby remarked.

"Then they've got to learn to!" said Tom Merry grimly.

"Hear, hear!"

"Darrell's done this—and Darrell's got to undo it!"

"H'm! I don't quite see how that's going to be worked," said Blake thoughtfully. "It's too late for the Grammarians to play us now!"

"They can play the match another day—their first vacant date," said Tom. "Darrell, as secretary, will write to them and explain, and ask them to."

"I fancy he'll refuse to act as secretary, then."

"Refusals won't be allowed. He's taken it upon himself to write once, and now he's got to write again!"

"But if he won't?"

"If he won't, he'll be made to!"

"But how?"

"I shall order him to do so, as captain of the school and head of the sports!" said Tom Merry, with dignity. "Ahem! But he won't, all the same."

"Then we shall use force. A licking will do him good!"

Blake gasped.

"A licking! Darrell!"

"I suppose Darrell can be licked as well as anybody else?" said Tom, with asperity.

"I—I—I don't know about licking a prefect!"

"Well, I do. If we stand this, we may as well chuck the whole thing up. If the Sixth are to be allowed to scratch first eleven matches, what's the good of our being the first eleven at all?"

"Not much, certainly," agreed Blake.

"And they'll be doing it, too," said Lowther. "I shouldn't wonder if Darrell has written other clubs already, scratching matches."

"The cheeky beast!"

"The fidgetful wottah!"

"It's got to be nipped in the bud!" Tom Merry declared. "I suppose all you fellows are ready to back me up in enforcing discipline?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Then come on!" said Tom Merry. "We're going to see Darrell!"

"Hurrah!"

And Tom Merry & Co. marched off.

CHAPTER 14.

Caned by the Captain!

DARRELL of the Sixth had retired to his study after his inglorious retreat from the prefects' room.

Darrell was not in a good temper.

The late happenings at St. Jim's had exasperated him, and that morning he had received a letter from Kildare, informing him that there was no immediate prospect of the return of the old captain of the school.

Apparently, the reign of the junior captain was to continue, and things were to go from bad to worse, unless the Head interfered. And as yet the Head had given no sign.

(Continued on page 18.)

UNREHEARSED!



"Is there a blacksmith in the house, please?"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to E. Holland, 38, Talbot Street, St. Helens, Lancs.

know that. We answered the letter. Isn't Darrell your secretary now?"

"Ye-es; but never mind. Darrell scratched the match?"

"Yes."

"All right. We only wanted to know. Sorry to bother you. Of course, it's too late for you to come over now?"

"Well, yes, rather!"

"Sorry! Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!"

Tom Merry hung up the receiver. Then he turned to his companions with blazing eyes.

They had not heard what the Grammarian skipper said, but they had heard all Tom Merry had said, so they were fully enlightened. Their looks were grim and threatening.

They understood now only too clearly. Darrell, the secretary of the senior football club, had taken it upon himself to scratch the match, deliberately ignoring the authority of Tom Merry as captain of St. Jim's.

"Well," said Blake, with a deep breath, "this beats the band!"

"Rotten!"

"Dished and done!"

"Scratched, by Jove!"

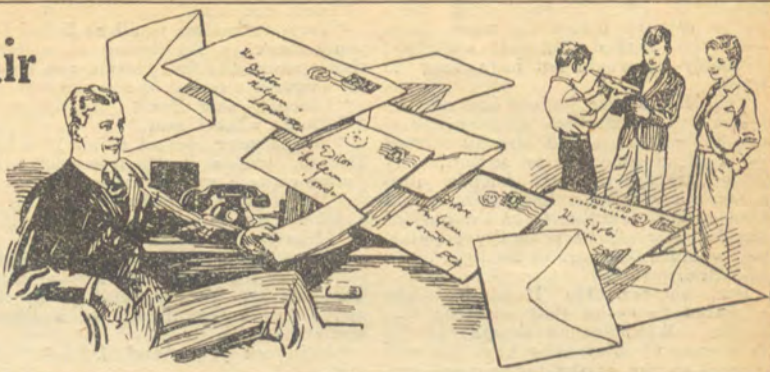
"And Darrell's done it!" said Blake, in a tone more of sorrow than anger.

"I always thought Darrell was a decent chap!"

"Yaas, I shouldn't have suspected old Dawwell of plavin' a wotten twick like

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! There's still more than five weeks yet to Christmas, but thus early I have found myself in an atmosphere of Yuletide festivity, mystery, and fun, and, I can tell you, I greatly enjoyed myself.

As you probably know, the GEM is "put to bed"—that is, it goes to press, several weeks in advance; hence I am already busy on the Christmas Number of the old paper, which will be out on December 9th. Make a note of the date.

I have just finished reading the extra-special St. Jim's yarns which will appear in the Christmas Number, and the one following it, and, believe me, they are just what the doctor ordered! Martin Clifford has really beaten his best with these great stories. I can just imagine the excitement of readers when they read them. I shall not give the game away yet as to what you may expect, but I shall have more to say about Tom Merry & Co.'s Yuletide adventures later on.

DON'T FORGET THE OLD FAVOURITE!

Mention of Christmas reminds me of presents, and presents call to mind that grand old favourite with all school-story loving boys and girls—the "Holiday Annual." It's a splendid gift-book which no GEM reader should miss. After all, a book—one that you can be sure of thoroughly enjoying—is as good a present as any, and better than most. And, without a doubt, the "Holiday Annual," with its ripping school tales of St. Jim's, Greyfriars, Rookwood, and Packsaddle, and its sparkling verse, humorous articles, etc., represents a bargain which every reader will find just to his or her liking.

So when Christmas presents are mentioned at home during the next few weeks, bear in mind the "Holiday Annual."

HE'S GOING TO TREAT HIMSELF!

Failing which, just remember what Stephen Porter, of Aldershot, wrote to me the other day: "No kind uncle or aunt has ever presented me with the 'Holiday Annual' for Christmas, so this year I am making sure of it by buying it as a present to myself!"

Well, Stephen, you couldn't treat yourself to a better gift if you paid double the five shillings the "H. A." costs.

TWENTY YEARS A READER!

Apologising my remark last week that I should like to hear from old readers, I had a letter from W. J. C., a Newquay reader, who tells me that he has taken the GEM and "Magnet" for over

twenty years, and hopes to for a good many more. He says: "I have had a three-years' collection of the GEM made into one volume, and I shall have the 'Magnet' done the same. I think they are just the books for my little son—who is five—when he gets older. I should like to see the GEM and 'Magnet' with fifty pages, but I suppose I am asking too much."

Thanks for your letter, W. J. C. I should like nothing better than to give readers a fifty-page GEM, but I think they would want most of the paper devoted to the St. Jim's story, and from the point of view of the author, that would, of course, be rather difficult. In addition, the cost of production would be double, and so the price would have to be raised, and that would hit the pockets of most readers too hard. If the GEM ever reaches a million circulation, then perhaps we shall be able to do something about doubling its size without increasing the price!

"A BULLY AT THE HELM!"

Now I think it's time I told you a little about next Wednesday's grand programme. The St. Jim's yarn bears the above title, and it is the third exciting story of the "captaincy" series.

As you have read in this number, Tom Merry, under pressure from the Head, has had to relinquish the captaincy of St. Jim's. The position thus passes to Gerald Cutts, the black sheep of the Fifth, and the enemy of Tom Merry & Co.

Tom called the tune when he was captain, but with Cutts in authority he now has to pay the piper! In other words, the Fifth Former takes advantage of his power to pay off many scores against Tom and his chums. Cutts comes down heavy with a vengeance, but in such a cunning way that the juniors have no appeal to their Housemaster. However, as someone so elegantly puts it, "there are more ways of killing a cat than by choking it with cream," and Tom Merry & Co. are not slow to find ways and means of getting their own back on the bully.

"THE STAGE-STRUCK SCHOOLBOYS!"

Next on the programme comes the further exciting chapters of Frank Richards' rollicking Greyfriars yarn.

The Wharton Dramatic Society, after surmounting several obstacles in arranging the cast of their new play, and

altering the play to suit the convenience of one or two of the cast, at last find the stage all set for the dress rehearsal of "By Order of the Tyrant!" All goes well until the piece de resistance of the play is reached. It is a fight scene, and, to the amusement of a privileged audience, it develops a realistic touch which is disastrous for the dress rehearsal! Like the audience, you will be greatly amused by the efforts of the amateur actors of the Remove.

Readers' prizewinning jokes, for which more half-crowns are awarded, round off the next number of the GEM. If you haven't a standing order with your newsagent, don't forget to book your copy early.

"THE SCHOOLBOY SMUGGLER!"

And while you are at your newsagent's, take a look at the copy of the "Magnet," now on sale. It contains a magnificent, cover-to-cover yarn of Harry Wharton & Co., introducing a newcomer with a secret to hide. There was a sinister purpose in the coming of Valentine Compton to the Fifth Form at Greyfriars, and, as you can gather from the title, it is not unconnected with smuggling. I can thoroughly recommend this exciting story of school, mystery, and adventure.

A GRAND FILM SHOW.

By the kindness and courtesy of Gaumont British, the Henry Edwards British Film Club are holding a film show in Finsland's own private theatre on Sunday evening, November 29th, in aid of the Cinematograph Trade Benevolent Fund. Three favourite films will be shown, thanks to the kindness of Twickenham Films, Herbert Wilcox Productions, and Gaumont British.

London readers who would like to spend an enjoyable evening at this show should apply for tickets, price 2s. 6d., to the Hon. Secretary, 32, Ambury Avenue, Streatham Hill, S.W.2, all applications being accompanied by a stamped, addressed envelope. As only a limited number of tickets are available to non-members of the club, it is advisable to apply early.

TAILPIECE.

Teacher: "How old is your father, Smith?"

Smith: "Forty, sir!"

Teacher: "H'm! I shall have to set you homework more suited to one of his age!"

PEN PALS COUPON
21-11-36

THE EDITOR.
THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,501.

Perhaps he was waiting for the school to get "fed-up" with their junior captain before he came down with the mailed fist of authority. Probably he would not have long to wait.

The New House juniors had already fallen away from their allegiance, and the School House had already showed signs of division. After a time, only Tom Merry's personal friends, probably, would be standing by him, and then an act of authority on the part of the Head would be generally popular, and would not appear in the light of an injustice.

But, so far, the Head had not appeared to notice that anything was amiss. Whatever he thought of the new state of affairs, he kept his own counsel so far as the boys were concerned.

Darrell was usually a very good-tempered fellow, but his voice was quite snappish as he rapped out "Come in!" in answer to a knock at his door.

Tom Merry & Co. came in.

The juniors were still in their coats and mufflers, over footer garb. They had not lost any time in coming to see Darrell.

Eleven sturdy fellows crowded into the study, and Darrell rose to his feet, with an angry frown upon his brow.

"Get out of my study!" he exclaimed. "I'm fed-up with your nonsense! Get out at once!"

"All in?" said Tom Merry, without heeding Darrell.

"Yaas, watah!"

Tom Merry turned the key in the lock. Then he faced the angry Sixth Former.

"We've come here on business, Darrell—"

"Will you get out?" shouted Darrell.

"No, I won't!"

"Then I'll—"

"You'll shut up and listen to what I've got to say, or there'll be trouble!" said Tom Merry determinedly.

"Heaps of trouble, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus cheerfully. "Pway listen to weason, Dawwell, and don't play the giddy ox!"

"We don't want to hurt you," Monty Lowther explained. "We like you all right, Darrell, only we can't allow you to kick over the traces!"

"That's how it stands, Darrell."

"I have nothing to say to you," said Darrell, biting his lips. "I refuse to recognise Tom Merry as captain of St. Jim's. You know that!"

"Then you've got to be taught to toe the line!" said Tom.

Darrell laughed angrily.

"I have just been on the telephone," went on the captain of the school. "I rang up Yorke of the Grammar School to ask why they hadn't been over today."

A smile flickered over Darrell's face for a moment.

"Well?" he said.

"Yorke explained," said Tom Merry. "You wrote to him as secretary, and scratched the match for this afternoon."

Darrell nodded.

"Well, as you chose to write as secretary, you're to write as secretary again," said Tom. "You'll tell Yorke it was a mistake, or tell him you were playing the giddy ox, just as you like—and ask him to fix up the match for another date."

"I shall certainly do nothing of the kind," said Darrell.

"You will!"

"Nonsense!"

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"Do you refuse?"

"Most decidedly!"

"Very well—then you'll be licked for your cheek in interfering in matters that concern the first eleven, you being no longer a member of the eleven."

"Licked!" said Darrell faintly.

"That's what I said."

"Is this your idea of a joke?" asked Darrell, unable to believe that the junior captain was in earnest.

"You'll jolly soon find that it isn't a joke. Give me that cane, Gussy."

"Here you are, deah boy!"

Arthur Augustus picked the prefect's cane from the table, and handed it to Tom Merry. Tom swished it in the air, in quite the manner of a Form-master.

"Hold out your hand, Darrell!" he said.

"Wh-what?"

"Getting deaf? I'm going to cane you, and I told you to hold out your hand."

Darrell stared at Tom Merry as if his eyes would start out of his head. It evidently wasn't a joke; none of the juniors laughed, or even smiled. They were all looking as serious as judges.

"M-my hand!" stuttered Darrell.

"Yes."

"Not your foot, you know!" murmured Monty Lowther, who could never repress his troublesome sense of humour for long. "It's the cane, you know; not the bastinado. Put out your little paw!"

"And buck up!" said Tom Merry.

Darrell breathed hard through his nose.

"It can't be possible that you're lunatic enough to think that you can cane a prefect!" he exclaimed.

"I am going to cane you, unless you immediately write that letter to the Grammar School, and apologise for your unwarranted interference."

"You—you—you—"

"Will you write the letter?"

"No, you young idiot!"

"Will you hold out your hand?"

"No, you fool!"

"Then it will be held out for you," said Tom Merry. "Collar him!"

It seemed like a dream to Darrell; it really seemed that it couldn't possibly be anything but a dream. But the hands that grasped him and dragged him before Tom Merry were real enough. Darrell was so overcome with astonishment and rage that for the moment he did not even resist.

"Put his paw out for him," said Tom Merry.

Then Darrell began to struggle. The Sixth Former was a powerful fellow, and he could probably have accounted for any three or four of the juniors. But eight or nine of them at once were too many for him.

He swayed to and fro in the midst of a clinging throng of them, and went over, sprawling on the floor of the study, with the juniors sprawling over him.

"Sit on him!" panted Blake.

"Sit on his beastly head, deah boys!"

"Jump on his legs!"

"Hold him!"

"Let me go!" roared Darrell.

"Rescue, Sixth! Rescue!"

"No good yelling," said Tom Merry calmly. "The door's locked. The Sixth can't get in. Besides, I shouldn't allow them to interfere."

"Help! Rescue!"

"Hallo! What's the row in here?" called out Rushden's voice from the passage, as the handle of the door was tried on the outside.

"Nothing that concerns you," said Tom Merry. "Buzz off!"

"Eh? What's going on?"

"Go to your study at once, Rushden!"

"You young idiot—"

"Go to your study and stay there, or I shall cane you!"

"M-my hat!"

"Never mind that duffer," said Blake.

"Get on with the washing. Are you going to keep still, Darrell, old fellow?"

"No!" roared Darrell, struggling violently. "Rushden, bring the fellows here! These rotten fags are ragging me!"

"Right-ho!" shouted back Rushden, and his footsteps could be heard hurrying away down the passage.

Blake whistled softly.

"There's going to be a glorious rumpus with the Sixth now," he said. "I shouldn't wonder if they bust in the door."

"Let them," said Tom Merry. "For the last time, Darrell, are you going to write that letter to the Grammar School, as directed by your captain?"

"No!" shrieked Darrell.

"Hold out his hand, if he won't hold it out himself," said Tom. "I'm going to give him three on each hand, as a warning."

"Hear, hear!"

Darrell was still struggling, but his struggles were unavailing. He was yanked to his feet, and five or six juniors held him round the body. His left arm was held as in a vice; his right arm was forcibly extended, and his hand was forcibly held out for the cane.

"Open your hand, Darrell!"

"I won't!"

"You'll get it across the knuckles, then."

"Hang you!"

Swish!

The cane came down, and it came across Darrell's clenched hand, and there was a yell of pain from the prefect. He writhed and struggled in the grasp of the juniors; but he could not get loose, and neither could he withdraw his hand.

"Better open your hand now," said Tom Merry grimly. "You're going to have six cuts, and it hurts less on the palm. I've been there, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas, don't be a silly obstinate ass, Dawwell, deah boy!"

Swish!

Darrell opened his hand now. As he was going to be caned, he felt it was more sensible to have it in the least painful way.

Swish again!

"Now the other hand," said Tom Merry.

Darrell's other hand was forced out. Thrice the cane came down upon it with a heavy and sounding swish.

The prefect was white with anger.

"And now you've been caned," said Tom Merry calmly, "you'll apologise for your interference in the business of the first eleven, or I shall give you lines."

"Hang you!"

"Very well, you will take five hundred lines from Virgil, Darrell, and you will bring them to my study this evening, or I shall cane you again."

Bump, bump!

It was a loud concussion at the door. Rushden had returned with a party of the Sixth.

CHAPTER 15.

The Vials of Wrath!

TOM MERRY unlocked the study door.

The punishment of Darrell had been finished—unless he refused to do his lines, as was very probable

indeed. In that case there would be another caning for him in the evening. But for the present Tom Merry's duty was done. He opened the study door, therefore, and revealed a crowd of angry seniors in the passage outside.

Darrell was stuttering with rage.

"What have they been doing?" asked Langton.

"Ragging me!" exclaimed Darrell. "Collar the young cads! Thrash them soundly!"

"What-ho!"

"Stand back!" exclaimed Tom Merry sternly. "As captain of the school—"

"I'll captain of the school you!" growled Rushden.

The seniors rushed upon Tom Merry & Co. There was a dozen of them, and they had, of course, all the advantage on their side. There was a wild scrimmage in the study, the juniors putting up a desperate fight. But the powerful seniors made short work of them.

They were rushed and kicked out of the study, bundled along the passage in the roughest possible manner, and kicked out of it.

In the next corridor, eleven breathless and dishevelled juniors sprawled at full length, feeling as if they had been smitten suddenly by a particularly powerful hurricane.

The seniors retired and left them there.

Tom Merry was the first to sit up. He felt his head, to ascertain that it was still on his shoulders, and gasped.

"Oh, my hat!"

"Ow, bai Jove!" groaned Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Ow! My nose!"

"Groogh! My eye!"

"Oh dear!"

"Faith, and it's kilt intirely I am!"

The juniors staggered up. Other fellows were gathering round, seeming to take rather a humorous than a sympathetic view of the case.

"Bitten off more than you can chew, eh?" Levison of the Fourth inquired.

"Looks like a giddy captain of the school, doesn't he?" Gore wanted to know.

"Who handled you like this?" asked Kerruish.

"Darrell and the seniors!" gasped Tom Merry. "But they're going to have a lesson about it. Call up the fellows."

"What's the little game now?" asked Blake.

"All the School House juniors to meet here in a quarter of an hour," said Tom Merry, panting. "The Sixth have got to be brought to their senses. We are going to rag the Sixth Form passage from end to end."

"Bai Jove!"

"Hurrah!"

"Pass the word round," said Tom Merry. "I'm going to bathe my eye."

"It needs it," grinned Gore.

"Both yours will need it if you don't ring off," said Tom Merry. "Get the fellows here—every kid in the House, mind!"

And the badly used eleven went up to their dormitories to change and bathe their injuries, while the word passed round for the gathering of the clans, as it were.

There were many groans as the juniors bathed darkened eyes and swollen noses, but they had one consolation, and that was the thought of the heavy punishment that was to fall upon the Sixth.

Seniors, and big fellows as they were, the Sixth Form, of course, would have no chance in a pitched battle with the juniors, who outnumbered them im-

mensely. It was only a question of starting on them. In ordinary circumstances, such a proceeding would have been impossible, and undreamed of, but the circumstances were not ordinary.

Tom Merry, a junior, was captain of St. Jim's, and the juniors were bound to obey their captain's orders. The Sixth were the rebels. Ragging the Sixth was now the only means of restoring order and discipline, according to the idea of the captain of the school. And his intention was to rag the Sixth so effectually and thoroughly that they would toe the line without giving any further trouble. It was a case for the mailed fist, as Monty Lowther remarked; and Tom Merry intended that the mailed fist should come down very heavily.

"Ready?" demanded Tom Merry.

orders of the captain of the school. Are you all ready to back me up?"

There was a roar.

"Yes. Buck up!"

"Bravo!"

"Hurrah!"

"Lead on, Macduff!"

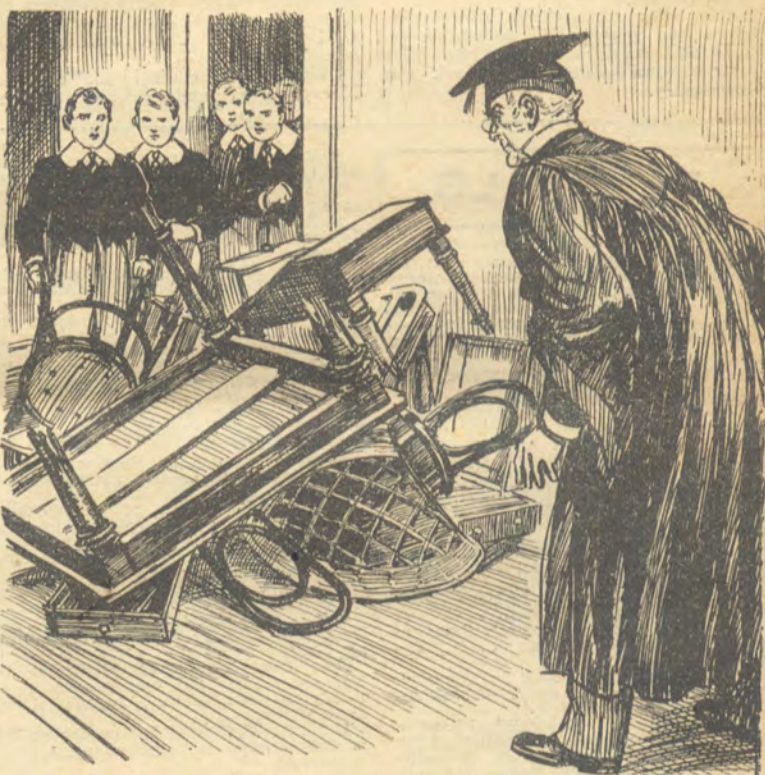
"Follow me!" shouted Tom Merry.

And, with another excited roar, the army of juniors marched into the Sixth Form passage. The Sixth were mostly indoors now, for tea, and some of them came out of their studies at the sound of the uproar, to see what on earth the matter was. They stared at the sight of the swarming juniors.

"What is it now?" gasped Langton.

"You'll see!" said Tom Merry.

"Darrell's study first, you fellows. Darrell was the worst of them, and we'll start by making an example of him."



Dr. Holmes looked at the pile of furniture in the passage as if he could scarcely believe his eyes. "Boys!" he gasped. "Have you taken leave of your senses? I demand to know who is responsible for this riot!" "It isn't a riot, sir!" said Tom Merry. "We're keeping order in the Sixth!"

"Quite ready!"

"Follow your leader, then."

And Tom led the way downstairs to the wide, flagged corridor, where the juniors had already gathered at the word of command. A hundred fellows were already there, all of them eager and excited. To "go for" the Sixth, under the orders of the captain of the school—which, of course, secured them from punishment at the hands of the masters—was a great joy to the Lower School.

Shell and Fourth, Third and Second, had turned up in great force. Some of them had brought pillows from the dormitory, some of them had cricket stumps or knotted towels, in case weapons should be wanted.

Tom Merry ran a gleaming eye over the numerous and eager force.

"Gentlemen, it's up to us to teach the Sixth to toe the line, and obey the

"Hear, hear!"

Kangaroo kicked Darrell's door open. Darrell was at tea with Rushden, both of them looking decidedly glum as they discussed the parlous state into which things in general at St. Jim's had drifted since old Kildare went away.

They jumped up angrily as the juniors swarmed in, but Tom Merry & Co. did not waste a word of explanation. They started business at once.

"Over with the table!" said Tom.

Crash!

The table, seized by half a dozen hands, was hurled bodily into the fender. There was a terrific crashing and smashing of crockery ware. Darrell and Rushden gave a simultaneous roar of rage.

They rushed at the invaders, but they were collared and tossed out of the way without the slightest ceremony.

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"Pitch them into the passage!" said Tom Merry.

"Out they go!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bump, bump, bump!

Darrell and Rushden rolled along the passage. The juniors proceeded to wreck the study in a thoroughly workmanlike manner. Tom Merry intended that it should be a lesson never to be forgotten by the Sixth; and certainly it was likely to be remembered.

There was crash on crash as the furniture went flying in all directions. Crash on crash answered from the other studies, where the raggers were already busily at work. Yells from the raided seniors sounded along with the crashing of furniture and breaking of crockery.

In the Sixth Form passage senior after senior sprawled, gasping with rage as he was tossed out of his study by the invaders.

After them came chairs and carpets, tables and books, and bedclothes—all sorts and conditions of things. The juniors were doing their work conscientiously.

The din was terrific.

Cutts of the Fifth came along to see what was the matter, and he was greeted with a shower of missiles, and fled again immediately. He fled in the direction of the Head's study. Mr. Railton was out that afternoon, or he would have been on the scene before. Cutts of the Fifth rushed into the Head's study with the startling news that the juniors had all gone mad and were wrecking the House.

Meanwhile, the ragging went on unabated. The excitement grew, and the damage done was greater than had been originally intended, as is generally the case in a riot.

In the midst of the wild uproar there was a sudden shout from the passage.

"Cave!"

"The Head!"

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Monty Lowther. "Here comes the Head! Blessed if I hadn't quite forgotten that there was such a thing as a Head!"

"Bai Jove! There will be a wow now!"

"Nothing to be afraid of," said Tom Merry, with undiminished calmness.

"You are acting under my orders as captain of the school—in keeping order here!"

"Keeping order!" murmured Blake, surveying the strewn passage. "Keeping order! Oh, my hat!"

The Head advanced majestically. Tom Merry stepped to meet him, picking his way among chairs and carpets and broken cups and saucers and books turned inside out. And there was a breathless hush.

CHAPTER 16.

How It Ended!

DR. HOLMES looked round him, as if he could scarcely believe his eyes.

Certainly no such scene had ever met his reverend gaze before within the precincts of the old school.

The Sixth Form passage looked as if a horde of vandals had descended upon it and done their worst.

In the midst of the wreckage stood juniors in crowds, dusty and flushed and
(Continued on the next page.)

PEN PALS

A free feature which brings together readers all over the world for the purpose of exchanging topics of interest with each other. If you want a pen pal, post your notice, together with the coupon on page 17, to the GEM, Fleetway House, Farringdon St., London, E.C.4.

J. Day, 453, Forset Road, Walthamstow, London, E.17; aeroplanes.

T. G. Jones, 3, The Terrace, Camden Square, London, N.W.1; Rugby, cricket.

Harold Openshaw, 46, Kingsford Street, Weaste, Salford 5, Lancs.; age 14-16; overseas; stamps, cricket, Rugby.

John Murphy, 20, Power St., St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada; stamps, cycling, boating.

L. K. Banbury, 24, Beechwood Avenue, Cross Roads, P.O., Jamaica; stamps, films, radio.

Ernest Volstin, Gonseland, La Mayo, Jersey; age 15-17; stamps; overseas.

A Reader, 12, Pelham Terrace, Gravesend, Kent; age 10-12; stamps; U.S.A., West Indies, South Africa.

Selika Barbagabata, Avenida Agraciada, Montevideo, Uruguay; age 35-45; stamps, books, cinema, sports.

Cyril Jacobs, 18, Inglewood Rd., Plumstead, London, S.E.18; pen pals; "Magnet" and GEM.

Miss Margaret Rutland, 29, Piccadilly, Tunstall, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffs.; girl correspondents; age 14-16; books, sports, politics.

William E. Collier, Jun., 80, Coppice St., Oldham, nr. Manchester; age 17-18; cycling, radio, films; U.S.A. especially.

Morris Oakley, Quarndon, nr. Derby; age 16-18; films, autographs.

Frank W. Threader, 44, Highbury Rd., Luton, Beds.; age 20-25; films, dance music, woodwork; China, Japan, U.S.A.

S. Mortimer, 72, East Street, Baker Street, London, W.1; age 14-17; music, sports, films.

Arthur Lawrence, 40, Connaught Avenue, Kensington, Port Elizabeth, S. Africa; age 15-17; cycling, sport.

Miss Jean Lubbrook, 63, Railway St., Pietermaritzburg, Natal, South Africa; girl correspondents; age 17-20; sports, films; America, China, Japan.

Louis Purcell, City Hall Hotel, Darling St., Cape Town, S. Africa; age 16-18; postcards, sports.

Miss H. Currie, Queen Mary Hostel, 123, Hoxton St., London, N.1; girl correspondents; First Aid; age 17-20.

A. J. Ansell, Syringa, Ockley, nr. Dorking, Surrey; age 12-16; cacti, pets; overseas.

Jim Brooksbank, 74, Reuben St., Carlton Hill, Leeds 7, Yorks.; age 17-19; London, India; dance music, sports, films, books.

Miss Kathleen Hughes, 5, Cottenham Rd., Holloway, London, N.19; age 11-13; films; girl correspondents.

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Fred Brooksbank, 74, Reuben Street, Carlton Hill, Leeds 7, Yorks.; age 11-13; cig. cards. E. Fitz Henry, The Elms, Cowley, Oxfordshire; pen pals; overseas.

R. B. Williams, 18, Queen's Gate, Kensington, London, S.W.7; age 16-18; sports, films, swimming.

William Baldmond, 160, Kenrick Rd., Mapperley, Notts.; age 11-14; codes, films; correspondence club.

Miss Joan Howard, 259, Stockport Rd., Longsight, Manchester; age 14-16; girl correspondents; sports, films.

George Herring, 70, Huntswood Rd., Sunderland, Co. Durham; age 12-14; overseas; stamps, sports.

Miss Ida Rowley, 41, Crompton St., Derby; age 18-25; girl correspondents; books, films, music, walking.

Maurice Atkinson, 13, Furness Park Rd., Barrow-in-Furness, Lancs.; age 14-16; football, films, autographs.

N. Davies, Rex Villa, 27, Oarside Drive, Wallasey, Cheshire; correspondent in United States.

Miss Dorothy Pownell, 83, Ashley Rd., Tunworth, Staffs.; girl correspondents; age 16-18; Scotland, Canada, London; films, sports, autographs.

Miss Mielke Halse, 1517, Cote St., Luke Rd., Montreal, Canada; girl correspondents; age 17-21.

Miss Esme Haigh, 22, Heslington St., Manchester 14; girl correspondents; age 15-17; America, France, Japan; stamps, films, photos.

G. Martin, 85, Conlts Rd., Bow, London, E.3; musical correspondents, passed exams in any instrument.

Miss Joan Knox, 54, Ashton Rd., Droyliden, nr. Manchester; girl correspondents; age 13-14; overseas.

Leslie Cattle, Riverstone Rd., Gordonvale, North Queensland, Australia; stamps.

Ronald Damelin, 126, Quartz St., Hillbrow, Johannesburg, Transvaal, South Africa; age 13-15; sports, engineering.

Ray D'Alguen, c/o J. Jewhurst, 3, Trilby Road, Forest Hill, London, S.E.23; age 15-20; films, swimming, sports.

Sydney Soong, Hin-Ham, 290, MacAlister Road, Penang, Straits Settlements; stamps, snaps, radio, films.

Miss Margaret Averay, 13, West Exe South, Tiverton, Devon; girl correspondents; age 16-18; stamps, sports.

A. Turner, 35, Ninfeld Road, Acocks Green, Birmingham; age 12-16; stamps; overseas.

Miss Lila M. Carnell, Tea Tree Gully, via Adelaide, South Australia; girl correspondents; age 20-25; London and Wales or any part of England.

Arnold Rubin, 1,340, Merriam Avenue, Bronx, New York, U.S.A.; age 10-14; stamps.

Sidney Wyatt, 374, High Street North, Manor Park, London, E.12; members for a dance band.

Bertram King, Kilheen Yeovil Chase, Westcliff, Essex; age 10-12; stamps.

D. Coe, 5, Coopers Lane, Potters Bar, Middlesex; age 12-15; stamps; overseas.

Joseph E. Vaz, 1, Dundas Court, Penang, Straits Settlements; age 14-17; coins, stamps, snaps.

Miss Elsie Hammond, 34a, Matilda Street, Bethnal Green, London, E.2; girl correspondents; overseas; age 20 up.

Herbert Harris, 51, Douro Street, Newton Heath, Manchester 10; age 15-20; sports, stamps, amateur theatricals.

Miss M. Young, 8, Lawman Road, Holloway, London, N.9; girl correspondents; age 19-21; films, sports.

Stuart K. Hamilton, 46, Woodhouse Street, Anniesland, Glasgow; age 13-15; cycling, snapshots, films; Africa.

Thomas R. E. Atkins, 15, Bennett Street, Lewisham Road, S.E.19; age 14-20; drawing, codes, stamps.

J. P. Turnham, 19, George Row, Bermondsey, S.E.16; stamps.

Seymour Friedman, 865, Stuart Avenue, Outremont, Montreal, Canada; stamps.

Arthur Friedman, 865, Stuart Avenue, Outremont, Montreal, Canada; stamps.

Miss Constance Heeley, 64, Landswood Road, Langley, near Birmingham; girl correspondents; age 15-18; Guides, films, pets, sports.

R. W. Smiles, 12, Coquet Terrace, Heaton, Newcastle-on-Tyne 6; age 15-16; billiards, football.

P. H. Josland, 28, Barnett Way, Mill Hill, London, N.W. 7; age 13-15; Africa; stamps, cigarette cards, films, sports.

Ho. Yok Kaal, 60, Kampong Attap, Kuala Lumpur, Selangor, Federated Malay States; pen pals; America, Australia, Africa.

Maurice Atkinson, 13, Furness Park Road, Barrow-in-Furness, Lancs.; age 14-16; football, films, autographs.

Norman Stewart, 12, Cook Street, Randwick, Sydney, N.S.W., Australia; stamps, snaps, football, cycling; age 12-16.

S. J. Fraser, 30, Park Grove, Portway, West Ham, London, E.15; correspondence club.

Miss Edna Lowe, 64, Cox Street West, Balsall Heath, Birmingham; girl correspondents; age 13-15; films, autographs, swimming.

Norman Ross, 101, Brydges Street, Moncton, New Brunswick, Canada; stamps, sports.

Miss Sheila Turner, 35, Ninfeld Road, Acocks Green, Birmingham; girl correspondents; age 11-16; especially Malta, S. Africa, Kenya.

Philip P. Ryan, Geraldton Hall, 20a, Mount Street, Coogee, N.S.W., Australia; stamps, postcards; age 14-17.

Kenneth H. Buckler, 25, Walford Street, Tivdale, Tipton, Staffs.; age 12-14; organs, music, scientific detection.

Ronald Damelin, 126, Quartz Street, Hillbrow, Johannesburg, Transvaal, South Africa; age 13-15; engineering, sport.

Robert Armstrong, Erika, via York, Western Australia; age 14-17; tennis, cricket.

Bruce F. Livie, Rosela, Perth Road, Blairgowrie, Perthshire, Scotland; age 11-16; Mexico, Spain.

Miss M. Young, 200, Dean Road, South Shields, Co. Durham; girl correspondents; overseas; age 15-17.

excited, and seniors stuttering with rage.

"Boys!" gasped the Head. "Boys! Have you taken leave of your senses? What does this mean? I demand to know who is responsible for this riot!" "It isn't a riot, sir," said Tom Merry.

"Wathah not, sir!"

"We are keeping order, sir," the captain of St. Jim's explained.

"Keeping order!" exclaimed the Head.

"Yes, sir!"

"What do you mean, Merry?"

"The Sixth have refused to recognise my authority as captain of the school, sir," said Tom Merry steadily. "They have acted with disrespect and violence towards me on the occasion of my caning Darrell for insubordination."

"Wank insubordination, sir!"

"Caning Darrell!" gasped Dr. Holmes. "You caning a prefect!"

"In the execution of my duty, sir, as captain of the school."

"Merry!"

"The Sixth chipped in, and as captain of St. Jim's I had no alternative but to administer a severe lesson to them to keep order. After this they will understand better!"

"Merry! If you intend to be impertinent—"

"Not at all, sir. I have done my duty as captain of the school. I hope I shall always do so, so long as I am captain."

"Bwavo!"

"So this is your idea of your duty as captain of the school, and your idea of keeping order in this House?" said the Head.

"A fellow can only do his best, sir."

"And this is your best?"

"Certainly, sir!"

"Then I fear, Merry, that some alteration will have to be made. You will kindly follow me to my study. You other juniors will go to your quarters at once, and stay there!"

"Pway allow me to point out, sir, that—"

"I will allow you to be silent, D'Arcy. Follow me, Merry!"

"Yes, sir!"

Tom Merry followed the Head. The raiders dispersed with somewhat glum looks. The Head was evidently very angry; and it was equally evident that he did not approve of the junior captain of the school's method of keeping order.

Tom Merry, however, held his head high as he followed Dr. Holmes to his study. He had acted within his rights, he considered, and he had nothing to fear.

In the study, the Head was silent for a full minute, regarding thoughtfully the handsome face of the junior.

Then he smiled slightly.

"Merry," he said at last, "I am not angry with you. I think you have acted from a sense of irresponsibility, natural in a very young lad placed in a position for which he is not fitted. But this cannot continue!"

"I hope the Sixth will see reason now, sir!"

"I am afraid they will never see the reason of submitting to the authority of a junior," said Dr. Holmes, with a shake of the head. "I have not interfered hitherto, Merry. I hesitated to do so, because you were duly elected by a majority of the voters in the school."

"A very large majority, sir. Cutts

WHAT'S IN A NAME ?



Servant: "Yis, sor, Mrs. Jones is in. What's yere name, sor?"

Visitor: "Professor Vandersplinkenheimer."

Servant: "Begorra! Sure, ye'd better go right in and take it wid ye!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to E. Harrigan, 34, Hosier Street, Reading, Berks.

"Quite so. But it cannot continue, Merry."

"What cannot continue, sir?"

"Your captaincy of St. Jim's."

Tom Merry's lips tightened.

"The fellows won't think it just, sir, to override a free and independent election," he said. "They had the right to elect me if they chose."

"I do not dispute that, Merry. On future occasions some new rules will be made on that subject. For the present, Merry, I fear that I cannot allow you to hold a post which is only suitable for a senior. But"—the Head's voice was very gentle—"Merry, I do not wish to appear to act harshly."

"I am sure of that, sir."

"I prefer to make an appeal to you, to your good sense and right feeling, my boy."

"Oh!" murmured Tom Merry.

"I think you should resign, and allow the captaincy to go to the senior candidate—Cutts of the Fifth. It is understood that when Kildare returns he will resume the captaincy of the school, and I hope it will not be long that he remains absent. Meanwhile, Merry, I ask you, as a personal favour to myself, to resign."

Tom Merry was silent.

It was rather hard to give up the post he considered he had filled in a very able manner, especially when he was having such marked success in keeping order.

But it was impossible to refuse the Head. It was better to yield to a request than to submit to a command, and if the request was refused, there was no doubt that the command would follow.

But the Head was very gentle and amiable about it.

"Come, Merry," he said, "I am sure that the duties of this unaccustomed position have interfered with your usual amusements and occupations. You will probably not be sorry, upon the whole, to be rid of the trouble and responsibility. Come, now, will you do as I ask?"

"Very well, sir."

"You resign?"

"If you wish it, sir."

"I do wish it," said the Head.

"Then I resign the position of captain of St. Jim's, sir."

"Thank you very much, Merry," said the Head gravely.

"If there's going to be another election, sir—"

"I do not think we need have the excitement and disturbance of another election," said the Head, very hastily.

"For the time that Kildare remains absent, Cutts of the Fifth will fill the post very well. I understand that he is acceptable to the Sixth. After what has happened, they will be glad to have a senior for captain, at all events. As you resign, the captaincy goes to the next candidate. I am very much obliged to you, Merry, for relieving me in this way, and I shall not forget it. Now you may go. Kindly put a notice on the board to the effect that you have resigned."

"Very well, sir."

And the Head shook hands with Tom Merry and dismissed him.

Tom's brow was very thoughtful as he walked away from the study. After all, he was not wholly sorry that his brief period of authority as captain of the school had come to a termination. It had brought him very little but trouble; and possibly he had had an inward feeling himself that, in the long run, it would not do.

His chums met him in the passage.

"Well?" asked a dozen voices together.

"The Head asked me to resign," said Tom Merry quietly. "I've done it. I'm going to post it up on the board."

Monty Lowther grinned a little.

"Well, that's over," he remarked. "After all, it was fun while it lasted."

"Yaas, wathah. We have given the seniahs a wippen' time, at all events. If there is anothah election, I shall put up!"

"There isn't going to be another election," said Tom Merry. "The captaincy goes to Cutts of the Fifth."

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"I wish the fellows joy of him when they get him," said Tom. "Blessed if I'm quite sorry it's over."

And Tom Merry posted up a notice on the board to the effect that he resigned the captaincy—a notice that was read with mixed feelings by the juniors, and with pure joy by the seniors.

A little later, Darrell of the Sixth dropped into Tom Merry's study. The Terrible Three looked at him rather grimly. But Darrell was good-humoured and friendly. He held out his hand to Tom Merry.

"I think you've done the right thing, kid," he said, "and I've looked in to tell you that I don't bear any malice for what's happened. We'll let bygones be bygones, and start afresh. What?"

Tom Merry smiled, and shook hands cordially enough with Darrell.

"Right-ho!" he said. "It's a go!"

And so—after a time of excitement such as the old school had seldom or never seen before—ended the reign of Captain Tom Merry.

(But the excitement is redoubled when Gerald Cutts takes over the captaincy. He's all out to get his own back on Tom Merry & Co. Look out for next Wednesday's great story, "A BULLY AT THE HELM!")

BILLY BUNTER FANCIES HIMSELF AS THE WELL-BUILT, HANDSOME HERO IN THE NEW PLAY OF THE WHARTON DRAMATIC SOCIETY!

THE STAGE-STRUCK SCHOOLBOYS!

"The Play's the Thing!"

"UNHAND me, villain!"
"Eh?"
"Or by my troth—"
"What?"

"Hallo, is that you, Wharton?" said Billy Bunter, turning rather red and blinking at Harry Wharton through his big spectacles.

"You young ass!" said Harry Wharton. "What are you talking that piffle for?"

Billy Bunter had been reading when Harry Wharton entered Study No. 1 in the Remove at Greyfriars. His eyes had been glued upon the book, and Harry had tapped him on the shoulder. "You see, Wharton—"

"I don't see what you are driving at," said Harry. "What's that you've been reading?"

"I'm studying up my part in the play," said Billy Bunter. "It rather gets hold of a chap, you know."

Harry Wharton laughed. He understood now. For the moment he had feared that the Owl of the Remove had taken leave of his senses.

Of late there had been a wave of enthusiasm for amateur theatricals passing over the Remove—the Lower Fourth Form at Greyfriars.

It had really been started by an attempt of Harry Wharton and his friends to give a performance of an opera, music and all. The attempt had not turned out exactly as the Wharton Operatic Company had intended, the result being more comic than tragic; but, in a certain sense, it could be regarded as a success.

The Wharton Operatic Company realised that the task of producing an opera in a foreign tongue was not lightly to be undertaken, and a second representation of "Carmen" had been indefinitely postponed.

Bob Cherry had suggested taking up a play instead, and had promised to secure a regular "ripper," to use his own words, from his cousin in Manchester, who was of a theatrical turn of mind, and had a large store of such things.

Wharton was rather inclined to patronise Shakespeare, whom he justly regarded as quite worthy of the attention of the Greyfriars Remove. Nugent was in favour of "Peter Pan," while Hazeldene suggested a drama. It was agreed, however, to look at the play sent by Bob Cherry's cousin before deciding upon anything.

"Has Cherry's play come, then?" asked Harry.

The Owl nodded.

"Yes, here it is. Bob Cherry opened it, and then Hazeldene called for him and they went out. I thought I'd better look at it, you know. There's a part in it that will just suit me."

"What's the part?"

"It's Valentine, the hero. He has a splendid part, and as he's supposed to be a well-built, handsome sort of chap, the part will suit me down to the ground."

"Does he talk that rot I heard you spouting?"

"Yes; that's part of his speech. The villain grasps him by the throat and

By Frank Richards.

(Author of the grand long yarns of Greyfriars appearing every Saturday in our companion paper the "Magnet.")

says: 'Aha—aha! I have thee in my clutch!'

"Ha, ha!"

"No, not 'ha, ha!' but 'aha, aha!'" said Billy Bunter. "Then Valentine—that's me—says: 'Unhand me, villain!'"

"Ha, ha!"

"Or by my troth I will cleave thee to the chine!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't see what you want to laugh at," said Bunter. "It's not a comedy, it's tragedy, and you are supposed to thrill at the part. Just you hear me roll off the hero's speech, and you'll see how good it is."

"Don't!"

"Oh, it's no trouble! 'Ah, Colonel Koffdropski, at last we meet—'"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, coming into the study. "Is that my play you're spouting?"

Encouraged by success, the amateur actors of Greyfriars get going on a new play. But arranging the cast presents not a few difficulties—everyone wants to be the hero!

"Yes, Cherry. I've been learning my part so as not to lose time."

"Your part? That's the hero's part. I say, you chaps, what part do you think Bunty has cast for himself?" asked Bob Cherry, as Nugent and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, the Nabob of Bhanipur, followed him into the study.

"Oh, the hero, of course!" grinned Nugent. "That's like Bunter's cheek."

"I don't see where the cheek comes in," said Bunter. "My idea is to cast for each character the most appropriate person."

"The cheekfulness is terrific," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, in his purring voice. "The cheekfulness of our Bunterful friend is only equalled by the fatfulness of his honourable and esteemed head."

"Look here, Inky—"

"My dear chap," said Bob Cherry, "apart from the fact that you are a silly ass, you can't have that part. I had already cast myself as hero."

"Oh, don't be an ass, Bob!" exclaimed Nugent. "There's one chap here, at least, who's more suited to play the principal role."

"If you're speaking of Wharton—"

"Rats! I'm speaking of myself. I think—"

"No, you don't, or you wouldn't get an idea like that in your head," said

Bob Cherry. "We shall have Inky saying next that he ought to act the hero."

"And wherefore not?" asked the nabob gently. "If it is a question of the ableness to perform the part, certainly the allotment should be to my esteemed self."

"Oh, rats, Inky!"

"Wait a bit," said Harry Wharton, holding up his hand. "Before we argue about the hero's part let's see if the play will suit us."

"Oh, it will suit us ripingly!" said Bob Cherry emphatically.

"What's it about?"

"Oh, lots of things! The hero, Valentine, thrashes Colonel Koffdropski in the second act. Nugent can play Koffdropski."

"Can I?" said Nugent, looking rather warlike. "Then you'll have to make a bit of an alteration in the part, and make Colonel Koffdropski thrash Valentine."

"Of course, that's rot!"

"I don't see it. I'm not going to be thrashed by anybody, if I know it."

"It's only in the play!"

"That's all very well, but—"

"Then there is the part of Gloxiana's brother; that will suit Wharton," said Bob Cherry. "Gloxiana is the sister of Albert and the heroine of the play. We may get Hazeldene's sister to take the part. Albert and Valentine have rows, but they are great friends. In the first act they thrash Colonel Koffdropski and his lieutenant, Bunkoff. The part of Bunkoff will do for Hurree Singh. He can whiten his face for it."

"The thrashfulness would be a boot on the other foot if I take the part of the esteemed Bunkoff," purred Hurree Singh.

"It's in the play!" howled Bob Cherry. "You have to play what's in the play."

"There can be an alteration in the playfulness."

"Rats! If I took the part I should take the licking."

"Take the partfulness, then."

"Oh, that's rot! It's already settled."

"That it isn't!" said Harry Wharton. "We've got to have a discussion over this before we can settle whether to produce this play at all. What's the name of it?"

"By Order of the Tyrant."

"H'm! It sounds to be rather blood-and-thundery," said Harry Wharton, shaking his head. "And it's a comedy down for the Wharton Operatic Company. I don't see any objection to giving a Shakespearean representation, myself."

Bob Cherry shook his head.

"Not up-to-date enough. I'd rather adopt Nugent's suggestion and give 'Peter Pan.' This is a regular ripper of a play."

"I have some suggestfulness to add to the discussion," said the nabob. "It would be a rippingful novelty to give a Hindu play."

"Didn't know there were such things."

"I can translate you a play written by a very learned babu in Bengal," said Hurree Singh. "There are fifty leading characters, and each has a very long sneaking part, so—"

FRANK RICHARDS IS IN GREAT FORM AGAIN WITH THIS SPARKLING STORY OF THE EARLY SCHOOLDAYS OF THE REMOVE CHUMS.

"My hat! Hands up for Hurree Singh's Hindu play!"

Not a hand was raised.

"It is extremely goodful," said the nabob, "and I could execute the translatefulness with the promptness of dispatch."

"Don't bother, Inky; we couldn't give you all that trouble."

"The troublefulness is nilful."

"Oh, you see, we must support home industries," said Bob Cherry. "There are lots of English plays which don't want the trouble of translating. This one I've got here is a regular ripper!"

"I'd rather try 'Peter Pan.'"

"Oh rats, Nugent! 'By Order of the Tyrant' sounds ripping!"

"Well, we'll see," said Harry Wharton.

"But as for the hero," said Bunter, "I really don't see how Bob Cherry is going to take that part!"

"Why not?" demanded Bob Cherry.

"Well, there's your face, and—"

Bob Cherry took a gentle grip on Bunter's ear.

"There's what?" he asked.

"Your—ow—ow— Leggo!"

"There's what? What's that about my face?"

"I—I didn't mean that your face wasn't very nice, Cherry—and, besides, I know that you can't help being like that, and I know you would if you could, and— Ow!"

"Still, Bunter's right," said Nugent. "The part really belongs to me."

"Not exactly that, either, Nugent,"

said Harry Wharton thoughtfully.

"The manager of the theatrical company has first choice. The actor-manager always takes the hero's part."

"He always takes all he can get, I suppose!" growled Bob Cherry. "That's all very well, Wharton—"

"Of course it is."

"But if you're going to take Valentine's part, I shall have to have Albert's. I'm not going to be one of the lot that are licked in the first act!"

"Albert's or Valentine's, I don't care which for me," said Nugent. "But don't put me down for a licking in the first act, because I won't stand it!"

"The sameful sentiments are also mine," said the nabob. "The lickfulness is not flattering to the dignity of a Nabob of Bhanipur, my esteemed chums."

"Now, look here, you're talking rot!"

"If my esteemed chum intimates that I utter rotful remarks, he is in danger of receiving the dotfulness on his honourable nose!"

"Hullo, here, what's the row?"

It was Hazeldene's voice at the door. The junior who had once been known as the cad of the Remove looked in.

"What's the argument, you chaps?"

"Look at that play, Vaseline," said Bob Cherry warmly, "and just tell me who ought to have the part of Valentine."

"Certainly!"

Hazeldene took the play and glanced down the list of the dramatis personae.

"That's according," he said thoughtfully. "Am I going to be in this?"

"Of course you are," said Harry Wharton.

"Well, then, I really think—"

"Oh, don't say you think Wharton ought to have it!" said Bob Cherry.

"Anyway, don't say Nugent, for that's rot, on the face of it!"

"I wasn't going to say either, Bob Cherry."

"I always said Hazeldene was a jolly sensible chap. Who do you think ought to have the part of Valentine, Vaseline?"

"Well, I think it would about suit me," said Hazeldene.

Bob Cherry gave a jump, and the rest chuckled.

"What?"

"I think it would about suit me," repeated Hazeldene. "You asked for my opinion, and there it is!"

"And a jolly rotten opinion it is, too!" growled Bob Cherry, in great disgust.

"Well, you asked for it."

"Of all the silly asses—"

"Oh, cheese it, Bob!" grinned Nugent. "You always said Hazeldene was a jolly sensible chap, you know."

"Oh rats!" grunted Bob Cherry.

"Here's another fathead!" remarked Nugent, as a broad German face looked in. "I say, Hoffman—"

"I hear te noise, and I looks in mit meinself after," said Fritz Hoffman.

"Well, look at that lot and pick out the chap in this room that's most suitable to take the part of Valentine," said Nugent.

Hoffman obeyed.

"Dere is only vun here tat is goot for te part," he remarked, "and tat vun is meinself."

"Well, you conceited German bouncer!"

"I punches te head of te chap who call me a Sherman pounder!"

"Bosh! But I say, you chaps, we might work Hoffman in as a comic character. He's comic enough, goodness knows."

"I haf sometings to tell you."

"Hullo, any news?"

"There haf been fresh arrival at te school."

"New kid?"

"Nein. Old kid who come pack mit himself—Adolphe Meunier, te French poy."

"Oh, is Meunier back?"

"Oui, mon garcon!" A good-natured Gallic looked in at the door. "I am back viz you vunce more, mes amis. I see zat Hoffman still ze same fat prize cochon!"

"You vas French peeg!"

"You vas Sherman rottair!"

"Ach! I gif you peans!"

"I give you zem back!"

The next moment the German and the French boy were staggering in the passage in a close embrace, and pommelling each other frantically. Nugent laughed as he slammed the door shut.

"Now both those foreign asses are back, I suppose we're going to have their rivalry starting all over again," he remarked. "My hat, what a row they're making in the passagel! But get on with the washing!"

"We all want to be heroes," said Bob Cherry. "It can't be fixed like that, so some of us will have to sacrifice ourselves for the good of the cause. You can withdraw your claims, and—"

"Is that what you mean by sacrificing oneself?"

"Yes, you will be sacrificing—"

"What about yourself?"

"It isn't necessary for us all to make sacrifices and play the beastly thing



From the top of the stone steps came a dull thud. Bunter looked up in sudden alarm. "Wh—what was that? Bulstrode—Bulstrode!" But there was no reply. The heavy slab of stone had fallen into place, and he was shut in the vault!

without a hero at all," said Bob Cherry.

"Then we'd better put it to the vote," said Harry Wharton.

"Good!" said Hurree Singh. "The settlefulness will be satisfactory if the votefulness of the dramatic society be taken on the question. But we must have all the members present for the esteemed votefulness."

"Yes," said Bob Cherry, "and then—"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Then we'll put it to the vote, and we'll all abide by the decision," said Cherry. "It's the only way."

"I say, you fellows—"

"The four principal parts once settled, it will be easy to cast the minor characters," Harry Wharton remarked. "There are lots of supers to be had."

"Ha, ha! Rather!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"There's Billy Bunter talking. Have you got anything to say, Bunter?" asked Bob Cherry, allowing the Owl of the Remove to have a word at last.

"Yes, I have, Cherry; and I've been trying to speak—"

"Buck up!"

"I was going to suggest that we should postpone further discussion till after tea, and have some grub now, as I'm awfully hungry."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"It's a good suggestion," he said. "Let's have tea by all means, and the cast of 'By Order of the Tyrant' can wait."

"It is a wheezy good idea, my worthy chums."

And the good idea was forthwith carried out.

Good News!

"LETTER for you, Wharton." Micky Desmond of the Remove came into the study and tossed a letter upon the tea-table. It alighted in the butter.

"I saw it in the rack and thought I'd bring it up," explained Desmond. "I knew you were having tea, you see. Those cream puffs look ripping."

"They are ripping," said Harry, laughing. "Take a seat if you can find one and wire in."

"Oh, that's all right! I'll sit on Bunter's knees."

"That you won't!" said Bunter. "You'll be in the way. I'm awfully hungry, and I'm very busy at the present moment."

"Very well. Sure, and I'll have half your chair, then!"

"There isn't room!"

"Oh, we'll find room!" said Desmond cheerfully, and he squeezed Bunter to one side and sat down. "Pass the cream puffs, Hazeldene. Anything good in that letter, Wharton?"

"I haven't looked at it yet," said Harry, picking the letter out of the butter and wiping it as clean as possible. "Oh, it's in my uncle's hand."

"You can read it," said Bob Cherry. "We'll excuse you, and I'll have your cup of tea to save you time."

Harry opened the letter. He ran his eye over the contents, and a smile broke out over his face. It was evident that there was good news in the letter from Colonel Wharton.

Harry's relations had been very strained with his uncle till of late, but since Colonel Wharton's visit to Greyfriars, uncle and nephew had been on the best of terms. With all his wilfulness and waywardness Harry could not help liking the kind-hearted soldier, when he came to know him, and neither

could he forget that Colonel Wharton had risked his life to save him from drowning.

"Good news?" asked Nugent, noting Harry's expression.

"Yes, rather!"

"Uncle coming down again?"

"No; but he wants us to go to Wharton Lodge for a holiday."

Bob Cherry whistled.

"The whole family?" he queried.

"Yes; he says he's obtained the Head's permission for me to go to Wharton Lodge and to take my friends."

"Sure, we're all your chummy friends," said Micky Desmond. "I've always loved you like a brother, Wharton."

"The lovefulness on my part has been great," purred the Nabob of Bhanipur. "The esteemed Wharton has been the lightfulness of my existence."

"And I worship the ground he walks on, and the grub he stands in the tuck-shop," said Bob Cherry.

"What-ho!" said Nugent. "You'll find yourself the most popular fellow in the Remove soon, Harry."

"But is the number of your friends specified?" asked Hazeldene.

"No. The colonel says he has obtained permission for me to go and take my friends with me, and that's how it stands."

"Sure, and the whole Remove will be round your neck as soon as that gets out!" said Micky Desmond. "Are you going to ask me, Wharton? Remember how I tended you with a mother's care from the first moment ye came to Greyfriars."

"I remember that you were one of the lot that ragged me on a dozen occasions or more," Wharton remarked.

"Sure, it was all for your own good!"

"I've got rather a good idea, you chaps!" said Harry, looking round. "We're getting up a play, and if we rehearse it thoroughly, there's no reason why we shouldn't give a performance at Wharton Lodge, while we're there for the holiday."

"Bravo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"That will be rewarding the colonel for his hospitality, won't it?"

"The rewardfulness will be great."

"Ahem!" said Nugent. "The colonel may or may not enjoy it. But we can't help his troubles. We ought to give the performance."

"I think it's rather a good idea," said Wharton thoughtfully. "We shall have a better chance of giving a really good show there than here, and it will be one way of killing time, you know. We can get into good form before we go."

"Ripping!"

"In that case, we shall have to take the whole cast along."

"Sure, and I'm to be the heroine."

"Not this time, Micky."

"But didn't I play 'Carmen' intirely, and—"

"Yes, but this isn't 'Carmen.' This is 'By Order of the Tyrant,' and Hazeldene's sister is going to take the part of Gloxiana."

"Faith, and it's a stunning name."

"But there's a second girl in the play," said Bob Cherry. "We shall want Micky for that part. It's Maria, the comic waiting-maid."

"Sure, and I'd rather do the heroine."

"I dare say you would, but the lady's maid is more your mark," said Bob Cherry. "Anyway, that's your part."

"Oh, I don't mind! Pass the jam tarts, Hazeldene."

"I say, Desmond, you're pushing me off this chair!"

"Never mind, Bunter. What's the odds, so long as you're happy? Thank

you, Vaseline. These tarts are really good."

"I think we can settle on the lot of us going," said Harry Wharton. "We may want one or two other characters, too."

"The Head will be a bit surprised when he sees how long a list of personal friends you can make up," grinned Bob Cherry.

"He will have to pass it, though, as he's promised my uncle. Let's see—self and Bob, and Nugent, Billy Bunter, Hazeldene, Desmond and Inky—that's seven."

"We are seven," said Bob Cherry. "and a nice little party. Now, gentlemen of the operatic and dramatic society, I rise to suggest that—"

"You're pushing me off this chair, Desmond!"

"Sure, and you're always complaining about something, Bunter!"

"You've dropped some jam on my trucks."

"Then don't squeeze so close to me."

"Shut up, you two—"

"But I say, Cherry—"

"Dry up; I'm talking! I rise to suggest that as Wharton will be our host on the auspicious occasion of this holiday at Wharton Lodge—"

"Hear, hear!"

"We shall therefore waive—"

"I say, Desmond, will you stop pushing me? I shall be off the chair in a minute."

"Sure, and it's a nice carpet to fall on, Bunter!"

"I tell you—"

"Order!" shouted Bob Cherry. "I was going to suggest that we should all waive our claims to represent the hero of 'By Order of the Tyrant,' in favour of our esteemed host—"

"Hear, hear!"

"And, therefore, I beg to propose Harry Wharton for the part of Valentine in the giddy drama," said Bob Cherry.

"Hear, hear!"

"The hear-hearfulness is terrific," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Harry Wharton coloured a little.

"I say, I don't want it settled like that!" he exclaimed.

Bob Cherry waved his hand.

"My dear chap, it's settled. As a matter of fact, I have no doubt that you will perform the part almost as well as I could myself, and much better than any of the others."

"I was thinking the same," said Nugent. "I have a feeling that I could handle the part better than any of you chaps, but if I don't have it, Wharton is undoubtedly the second best."

"Hear, hear!"

"The questionfulness is passed with unanimous resolution," said Hurree Singh. "The esteemed Wharton can only reply with the graceful acceptance."

The esteemed Wharton grinned.

"Oh, if you fellows really want me to take the part—"

"We insist upon it."

"The insistfulness is only equalled by the hearty approbation of the honourable and esteemed company."

"Then I accept," said Harry Wharton. "I'll take Valentine's part."

"And I'll be satisfied with the part of Gloxiana's brother," said Bob Cherry.

"Will you?" said Nugent. "Of course, if I give up the hero I take the part of the next chap."

"Now really, Nugent, don't be an ass!"

"You're the one who's playing the giddy ox."

"I'm going to play Albert—"



"Look out—she's going over!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. The juniors promptly got to the safe side of the tree, which was falling directly upon the slab which closed the entrance to the vault. Crash! With a terrific concussion the tree-trunk crashed upon the flag stones.

"Rats!"

"You see, chaps," said Bob Cherry, appearing to the company, "Gloxiana has to faint in Albert's arms in one scene, and so you want to have an Albert who can deal with the situation. Nugent would let her flop on the floor."

"Rot!" said Nugent. "I don't see why Gloxiana couldn't faint in my arms as well as in anybody else's arms."

"Don't you?" said Hazeldene. "Well, I do. Look here, if Marjorie is going to take the part of Gloxiana I'd better take that of Albert."

"Well, of all the cheek——"

"Hazeldene's right," said Harry Wharton. "Gloxiana has to faint in her brother's arms, and a real brother would make it more realistic."

"That's all very well, but——"

"I vote for Hazeldene," said Harry Wharton decidedly. "Put it to the vote."

"Good!" said Micky Desmond. "I don't want the part, so I vote for Hazeldene."

"So do I," said Billy Bunter. "I really ought to have the part, but there's a lot of selfishness shown in these amateur theatricals. If I'm not to have it, Hazeldene will do as well as anybody."

Bob Cherry grunted.

"Well, you've got the majority, Vaseline," he said.

Hazeldene grinned.

"That's all right. I'll go lightly when I start licking you in the second act."

"If you start licking me in the second act there'll be ructions," said Bob Cherry.

"Oh, you'll have to play the game!" said Wharton.

"That's all very well——"

"Of course it is. Let's go for a stroll out in the Close."

And the discussion was postponed for a time.

Bunter Looks for Hidden Treasure!

"WHARTON, old chap!"

Harry Wharton stopped. It was Bulstrode who spoke, and as he did so he tapped Wharton familiarly on the shoulder. Harry had reason to be surprised. Bulstrode had been cock of the Remove before Harry Wharton had come to Greyfriars, and it was he who had caused his fall from the high estate. There had been very little love lost between them since.

"What is it, Bulstrode?" asked Wharton.

"I hear you are going home for a holiday."

Wharton understood.

"Yes, I am."

"And taking a party of friends with you?"

"Yes."

"Your uncle is going to let you take as many as you like?"

"Yes."

"I was thinking that I should like to take a part in the play you're getting up," said Bulstrode. "I hear you're going to give it at Wharton Lodge."

"That's so."

"Well, would you like me to join the operatic and dramatic society?"

"Not particularly."

"I hope you're not keeping up that old quarrel," said Bulstrode, with great friendliness. "Let bygones be bygones."

"I'm perfectly willing to do that, but I don't think we can chum up together, Bulstrode," said Harry quietly. "We should never get on——"

"If you're going to put on side——"

"Nothing of the sort. But you are a domineering bully, and my temper isn't the gentlest in the world, so the less we see of one another the better."

And Harry Wharton walked on.

He left the bully of the Remove scowling. The glint in Bulstrode's eyes

showed how little there was of genuineness in the overture of friendship he had made.

"Hang him!" muttered Bulstrode.

"I——"

"I say, Bulstrode!"

The bully of the Remove looked round at Billy Bunter.

"What do you want?" he growled.

"I hear that they've discovered an old vault in the excavations down by the river," said Billy Bunter. "I was thinking of going down and looking at it. Do you know where it is?"

Bulstrode grinned.

"Yes. Would you like to see it?"

"You're very obliging, Bulstrode. I'm sorry Wharton won't ask you to come down to the Lodge with us——"

"Who wants him to?" growled Bulstrode.

"Why, you do, don't you?" said Billy Bunter innocently.

"No, I don't."

"I'm sorry; my mistake. I thought you were giving him a hint to ask you—— Ow! Let go my ear, Bulstrode—it hurts!"

"You young idiot——"

"I'm sorry if I've said anything to offend you, Bulstrode," said Bunter, rubbing his ear. "Will you show me where that vault is?"

"Oh, certainly!"

Bulstrode had an ill-natured grin on his face. Any junior more wide-awake than Billy Bunter might have suspected that he intended to play some trick, but Bunter was not suspicious.

The two Removites left the school grounds and skirted the wall towards the spot marked out for the erection of the new building, close to Greyfriars.

Many trees had been cut down, and the ground was being cleared for the new building, which was to be run by Herr Rosenblum as a foreign academy when it was completed, in connection with Greyfriars College.

In clearing the ground the workmen had come upon many traces of an ancient building which had once occupied the site.

The old weapons of the Middle Ages had been turned up, and lately a vault had been discovered. It was one of a series extending for some distance under the ground, the full extent as yet unknown.

Bunter blinked round him as they entered the ruins. The workmen had left the place, and wheelbarrows and ladders and implements lay about amid felled timber and heaps of earth.

"Where is the vault, Bulstrode?"

"There it is."

Bulstrode stopped at a spot where a pavement of flagstones had been uncovered, and pointed to a dark opening in the centre.

One of the great stones had been raised by means of an iron ring fastened in it, and laid beside the opening it had covered for probably centuries. It needed only a push, however, to send it crashing back into its place.

Billy Bunter adjusted his spectacles and blinked down into the dim orifice.

The air had been foul when the opening was first discovered, but the foulness had now cleared off, and only a faint, musty odour came up from the vault.

"Looks jolly dark, doesn't it?" said Bunter.

"It would be fun to explore it," said Bulstrode. "I shouldn't wonder if there were some treasure hidden down there."

Bunter's eyes glistened.

"Do you really think so, Bulstrode?"

Bulstrode winked at the beech-trees with the eye that was farthest away from the Owl of the Remove.

"Why not?" he replied. "You know what miserly fellows those old monks were. The old building was a priory, or something, in connection with Greyfriars. I think it's very likely that a vault like this would be used to store treasure in."

"But the workmen haven't seen anything."

"They haven't been down yet. The air was too foul when the vault was opened."

"I see. I say, Bulstrode, there are steps leading down," said Billy Bunter, peering into the opening. "It would be ripping to discover a treasure!"

"Well, it would be rather good, wouldn't it?"

"I should say so. I'm stony-broke just now," said Bunter. "I've been expecting a postal order for some time past, but there's been delay, and it hasn't come yet. It would be ripping to find a treasure, and be in funds for the rest of the term."

"Jolly ripping!"

"Suppose we go down there and look, Bulstrode?"

"Not a bad idea," said the bully of

the Remove. "But how are we going to get a light?"

"I can get Wharton's bicycle lamp." "Right-ho! You go and get the lamp."

Billy Bunter departed on his errand, leaving Bulstrode looking round the ruins. In five minutes the Owl of the Remove was back again with Wharton's bicycle lamp.

"Got the lamp?" said Bulstrode.

"Good!"

"Will you come down with me?" asked Bunter.

"Perhaps I'd better stay up here and see that nobody comes along and shuts down the slab," said Bulstrode. "It would be no joke to get shut up in that vault."

Billy Bunter shivered.

"You're right there, Bulstrode."

"Look here, you can go down and look round, and I'll keep guard," said Bulstrode. "We'll go halves in the treasure."

"Well, if I take the trouble of going down, I think I ought to have more than half."

Bulstrode grinned.

"Well, you shall have two-thirds, then."

"I suppose there's no danger?"

"Of course there isn't, so long as I keep watch and see that nobody comes along and plays tricks with the slab."

"Then I'll go."

With the lamp in his hand, Bunter stepped towards the opening.

The stone steps were strong and secure. Billy Bunter flashed his light before him as he descended, and Bulstrode watched him from the top, the evil grin still on his face. Bunter reached the bottom of the steps. Dark and dreary looked the vault as he flashed the light round him.

"Seen any treasure?" called out Bulstrode.

"Not yet."

"Have a good look."

"Oh, rather! Mind that slab doesn't get closed."

Bulstrode chuckled.

Billy Bunter looked round the vault in the lamplight. From the top of the stone steps came a dull thud. Bunter looked up in sudden alarm.

"What was that? Bulstrode—Bulstrode!"

But there was no reply, and Billy Bunter did not need telling what had happened. The square of daylight had been blotted out at the top of the steps.

The slab of stone had fallen into place. He was shut in the vault!

With a gasp of alarm the Remove dashed up the steps and thrust his hand upon the stone that closed the opening, but it did not move.

The strength of four or five fellows of Bunter's build would have been required

to shift that massive slab from below.

"Oh dear! Bulstrode—Bulstrode!" The bully of the Remove had walked away, laughing, and only the echo of his own voice replied to the victim of the cruel joke.

The Rescue of Bunter!

"WHARTON!"

"Hallo, Hoffman!"

The German boy stopped Harry Wharton in the Close, poking him in the chest with a fat forefinger.

"I want to speak to you."

"Well, go ahead!"

"I think to myself tat I likes to join te operatic and dramatic society pefore, and take principal parts in te play, after."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Is that all you want, Hoffman?"

"Ja, tat is all. Tat French ass, Meunier, tink he can act, and he tink of asking you. I tells him he is ass!"

"Did he tell you you were another?"

"Ja, ja!"

"Quite right, too. You were both right," said Harry Wharton. "We might possibly find you a comic part in the play."

"I takes der hero."

"You take the cake—or cheek, at any rate!" said Harry. "I've accepted all the heroes who have offered their services we should have a cast full of heroes, and no minor characters."

"Ten you picks out te pest—"

"The pest? What do you mean?"

"You picks out te pest—"

"What on earth are you driving at?"

A pest is a plague, isn't it? What do you mean by picking out the pest?" demanded the amazed Wharton.

"Te pest for te part."

"Oh, the best!" said Harry, comprehending. "Yes, we've picked out the best already. I'm taking the part myself."

"I tink I takes it petter."

"You can go on thinking so, Hoffy," said Harry Wharton; and he put his hands in his pockets and strolled away. He left the German junior shaking his head solemnly.

A dozen paces farther on a youth with a Gallic cast of features buttonholed the manager of the Wharton Operatic and Dramatic Society.

It was Adolphe Meunier, the French junior.

"Mon ami," he said, in his persuasive voice. "I zink zat I speak to you a few words. I hear zat you give dramatic representation."

"That's it," said Wharton, with an inward groan.

"I zink I act for you, mon garcon. I have had great success in ze amateur

(Continued on the next page.)

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theatricals, and I zink I am ze person to take ze part of ze hero."

"Rats!"
The French junior stared.
"You say 'rats' to me, Wharton, when I am offer my services for ze play viz you?"

"Yes. We're not looking out for any heroes. I might find you a part as a comic footman."

"Ciell! Zat is ze insult!"
"Well, you can put it in your pipe and smoke it. That's the best offer I can make at present," said the manager of the operatic society.

"I am insulted! I punches nose!"
"Get on, then. I'm ready for you to start!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, coming up with Nugent and Hurreo Jamset Ram Singh. "What's the row? What's that about punching noses?"

"Meunier is going to punch my nose because he can't play the hero in 'By Order of the Tyrant,'" grinned Wharton.

"Non, non! I punches nose because I am insulted."

"Let's insult him some more," said Bob Cherry. "Suppose we take him by the hair and the heels and duck him in the fountain?"

"That is a wheezy good idea. The cheekfulness of the Frenchful kid will be washed out in the cold water."

"Lend a hand, then! Why, he's gone!"

Adolphe Meunier had not waited for Bob Cherry's good idea to be carried out. He was gone; and Bob, who had not been quite in earnest, grinned.

"We were just going to stroll down to the site of the new school," said Nugent. "Are you coming along, Harry? The workmen have discovered an old vault in the foundations of the building that used to be there hundreds of years ago."

Harry Wharton nodded.
"Yes; I was thinking of going down. Come on!"

The chums of the Remove strolled down to the site of the new building. Nugent stopped at the closed slab of stone.

"Hallo! This was open when I looked this way before. Somebody has shoved the stone in its place."

"There's an iron ring in it," said Bob Cherry. "We'll soon have it up again. We can shove one of these poles through the ring."

"Hallo! What on earth's that?"

"Help!"
It was a faint far-away cry, and it seemed to come from beneath the stone. The chums of the Remove stared at one another, startled.

"My hat! There's somebody in the vault!"

"Somebody got shut up in it!" said Harry Wharton, in a low voice. "Great Scott! It's lucky we came out here! Get the stone up, for goodness' sake!"

The Removes lost no time. The pole was thrust through the iron ring in the stone, and the juniors grasped it and bent their strength to the task. With an effort, they wrenched the great slab out of its place, and it thudded back.

There was a gasp from below. A white face, with a pair of spectacles, looked out of the darkness of the vault steps, and the chums recognised Billy Bunter.

"Bunter!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "Here, let me help you out!"

Bunter was white and shivering. He had not been ten minutes in the vault, but it had seemed like centuries to him. He had been thoroughly frightened by

the darkness and the terrible thought that perhaps the stone could not be moved again.

Wharton helped him out, and he sank down helplessly upon the stone, trembling in every limb.

The juniors gathered round him anxiously. Bunter had evidently had a nasty shock, but they could only wait for him to recover from it.

"I—I say, you fellows—" he gasped.

"You're all right now, Bunter?"

"Ye-es. But—oh dear! I've had a fearful time the last few hours!"

"The last what?"

"The last few hours. I've been shut up in that vault for hours and hours!"

"But it's not half an hour since we had tea in the study!"

"You must be mistaken, Wharton. I've been in that horrible place for hours," said Bunter, with a shudder. "I began to think I should never get out alive!"

Harry Wharton smiled.

"My dear chap, if you had been there for hours it would be dark now."

"H'm! I suppose it would, when you come to think of it," said Billy Bunter, recovering himself a little. "I suppose it seemed longer than it really was. But I had a fearful time. all the same."

"How on earth did you get into that vault, Bunter, and close the stone over you?"

"I didn't. Bulstrode said there might be treasure there—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I thought I might as well look, and Bulstrode stayed at the top to see that nobody came by and closed the stone. Then the rotter closed it himself."

"Bulstrode shut you up in the vault?"

"Yes. It's his idea of a joke, I suppose. I don't see where the joke comes in, myself," said Billy Bunter. "I might have starved to death there."

Bob Cherry grinned.

"If Bulstrode shut you up there, Bunter, he wouldn't leave you to starve to death. He'd come and let you out, after a bit."

"Yes, I suppose so. But it was a dirty trick to play, when I trusted him. I might have gone off my dot, you know!"

"Well, he was sure to let you out."

"You wouldn't feel so safe about it, though, if you were inside the vault instead of outside it!" retorted Billy Bunter.

"Well, there's something in that."

"It was a silly and dangerous trick to play," said Harry Wharton. "Suppose something had happened to Bulstrode himself, for instance—nobody would have known that Bunter was shut up in the vault. And a silly ass like Bunter might really have gone off his rocker in the dark!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"The bully ought to be punished," said Bob Cherry. "Suppose we wait here till he comes to let Bunter out, and shove him in himself, and drop the stone shut?"

"Good wheeze!" exclaimed Nugent.

"The wheezefulness is excellent."

Harry Wharton shook his head.

"I think I've got a better plan than that, you chaps—one that will really make the brute sit up!"

"Expound it, then."

"Look at that tree," said Harry Wharton, pointing to one that had been half-sawn through by the workmen, and

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left in that state by the call of the hooter, which announced the close of the day's work. "How much do you think would be wanted to make it fall?"

"Not much," said Bob Cherry. "The saw's still there, and we could give it another five minutes to make it come down. But what good would that do?"

"Don't you see? When it falls it will fall directly across this trap as it's leaning this way."

"The workmen will have ropes on it to pull it the way they want it."

"I know; but we want it to fall this way."

The chums of the Remove stared. They could not understand in the least what their leader was driving at. "What do you want a big tree to fall on the trap for?" asked Nugent. "Can't see anything in it myself."

"Bulstrode will come along later to let Bunter out, or send somebody else to do it. If the tree's down, he'll think that it fell on its own accord. The opening will be blocked up for good and all. It would take twenty men to move that tree when it was once down. Bulstrode won't be able to open the vault, and he'll think that Bunter is in it. Bunter will have to keep out of sight, of course."

"Good!" said Bob Cherry. "It will give the brute the fright of his life."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Nugent. "It's a ripping idea! I fancy Bulstrode will be in the bluest funk of his natural."

"I fancy so," said Wharton. "It will be a punishment for his bullying, and we can let him know the truth when we first inclined, after he has been through the trap. You will have to keep dark for a time, Bunter."

Bunter grinned gleefully.

"I'll take jolly good care of that, Bunter. I'll go up to the school now, and get into the study."

Harry Wharton gripped him by the arm.

"That you won't, you young ass! Bulstrode will very likely meet you on the way."

"I never thought of that. I should be sorry to give the game away."

"You'll stay with us. Don't let him out of your sight, you chaps. Now then, some of you lend a hand with this saw."

The huge, two-handed saw was under a tarpaulin. The juniors soon had it out, and they put it in the deep cut already made in the tree.

"Saw away!" said Harry cheerfully.

"I say, this is a jolly lot like work," grunted Bob Cherry, as he slaved away with the heavy, slow-moving saw.

"Never mind; it will do you good."

"The goodness of the exercise is great!"

"Lend a hand, then, Inky, and get some of the goodness yourself."

"Not at all, my worthy chum. I would not willingly deprive you of the beneficence of the esteemed exercise."

"Wouldn't you?" said Bob Cherry, grasping him by the collar, and jerking him to the saw. "Now you take hold, or I'll knock your inky head against the tree!"

"Don't promote the excitement," said Hurree Singh. "I am willing to take my sharefulness of the honourable labour at the request of my worthy chum."

"Do it, then, you lazy boulder!"

"All together!" said Nugent. "We'll soon be through. Mind you keep out

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of the way of the tree when it falls. It would crush you as flat as a pancake."

"By Jove, it would! Keep your peepers open!"

"Where are you going, Bunter?" roared Harry Wharton, suddenly perceiving the Owl of the Remove was strolling away.

Bunter looked back.

"I'm rather peckish, Wharton. I'm going to get some grub."

"Stop where you are!"

"But, really, Wharton—"

"Fetch him back, Inky—quick!"

The nabob darted after Bunter, and dragged him back. The Owl protested vigorously, but the nabob was not to be denied.

"Really, Wharton, I should have taken great care not to let Bulstrode see me. If I had seen him coming, I should have dodged very quickly."

"If you had seen him, you Owl! Do you ever see anything?"

"But, really, I'm expecting a postal order by every post now. And the post is in, and I want to go and see if it has arrived."

"Oh, rats!"

"If my postal order has come, I should like to stand a feed to all you chaps for helping me out of the vault," said Bunter. "We'll have a feed, anyway, and if my remittance hasn't come, you chaps can have a whip-round to settle. Suppose we let Bulstrode off, and leave him to his conscience? It's a good idea to leave a villain to his conscience. And I'm awfully hungry."

"Mind he doesn't go, Inky."

"He will not be able to take the departure without leaving a portion of his car to me," said the nabob. "You are hurting my car, Inky."

"I offer the profound and sincere apologies, my worthy chum."

"Yes; but let go."

"That is impossible, my esteemed Bunter. I have got the right pig by the ear this time, you know, and the let-gofulness is impossible."

"Owl! I—"

"Look out! She's going over!"

"Buck up!"

The tree was sagging. The juniors scuttled back. They were all on the safe side of the slant of the trunk, but

The tree was going at last, the slant causing it to fall directly upon the slab which closed the entrance to the vault. Crash!

With a terrific concussion the tree trunk crashed upon the flagstones. The juniors ran forward.

"My hat! The vault is safe enough now!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "The workmen won't be able to remove that trunk without sawing it up into pieces. And now, shove that saw out of sight, and let's get out of sight ourselves, and wait for Bulstrode."

There was plenty of cover close at hand, among the impedimenta of the clearing. The juniors took shelter behind a heap of displaced earth, small ladders and wheelbarrows, whence they could look out without much risk of revealing themselves. And there they waited for the bully of the Remove.

(Bulstrode's booked for a big shock, but it's no more than he deserves. Read what happens in next week's sparkling chapters of this grand yarn.)

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Printed in Great Britain and published every Wednesday by the Proprietors, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Advertisement offices: The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Registered for transmission by Canadian Air Mail. Post Subscription rates: Inland and Abroad, 11s. per annum; 5s. 6d. for six months. Sole Agents for Australia and New Zealand: Messrs. Gordon & Gotch, Ltd., and for South Africa: Central News Agency, Ltd.—Saturday, November 21st, 1936.