

"THE FIGHTING PREFECT!" GREAT ST. JIM'S STORY OF BOXING, INSIDE.
FUN AND ADVENTURE

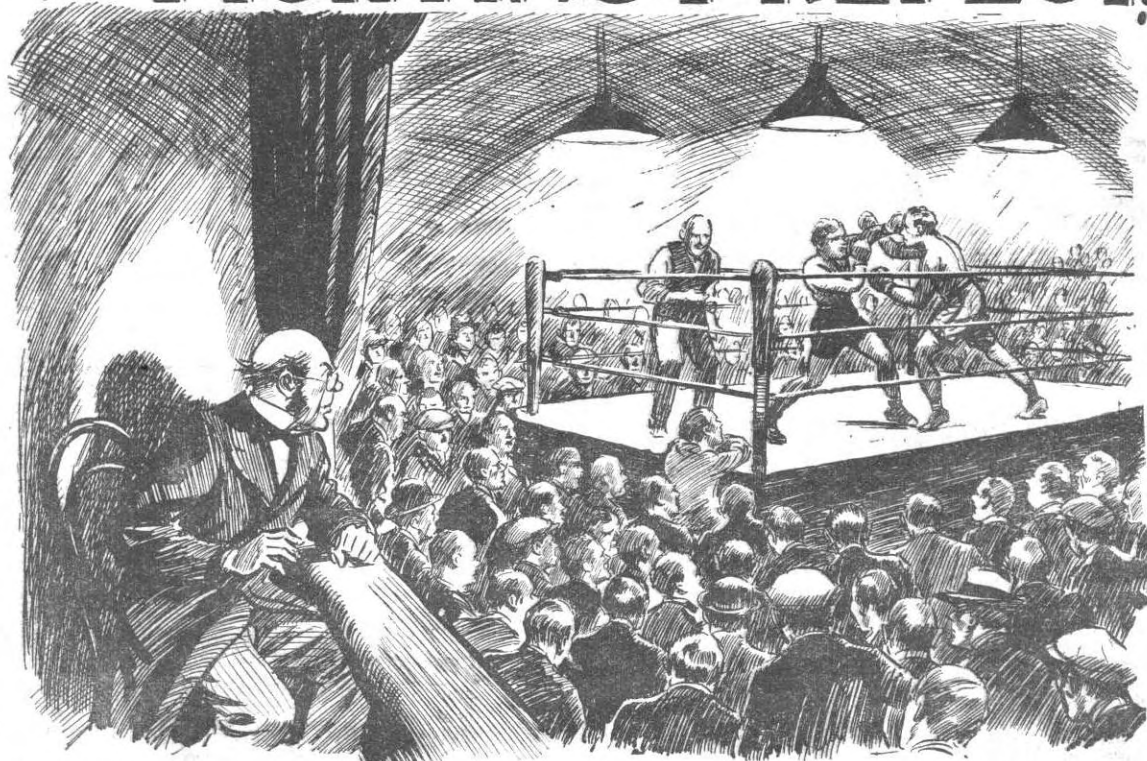
The GEM ^{2d}



"BEND OVER!"

THE OLD ST. JIM'S BOY WHO CAME BACK TO SCHOOL TO LICK HIS FORM-MASTER!

The FIGHTING PREFECT!



Mr. Ratcliff started as he recognised one of the boxers in the ring. It was George Darrell, the prefect of St. Jim's! The Housemaster's eyes gleamed. Revenge on the senior who had defied him was in his hands now!

CHAPTER 1.

"Ratty" in a Rage!

"Ow!"
"Ow!"
"Wow!"
Those seemingly unintelligible but extremely expressive remarks were made by Figgins & Co.—Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn of the New House at St. Jim's.

Figgins & Co. were under the elms in the old quadrangle; and while they made those expressive remarks they were squeezing their hands under their arms and apparently trying to fold themselves up like pocket-knives.

Three juniors who came out of the School House paused to regard them with sympathy and surprise.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther, as leaders of the School House juniors, were usually on terms of deadly warfare with Figgins & Co., their rivals of the New House.

But just now they were all sympathy. Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn had evidently been "through" it.

"Hallo!" said Tom Merry. "Been catching it?"

"Ow!" said Figgins.

"Ow-yow!" said Kerr.

"Gro-ooogh!" groaned Fatty Wynn.

"Seems to be a severe case," remarked Monty Lowther. "Who has been and gone and done this, my unfortunate infants?"

"Ratty!" growled Figgins. "The GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,513.

beast! All for nothing, too! Ow! Ow!"

"We're always catching it for nothing!" Monty Lowther agreed. "There never was such nice, innocent kids as we are. Yet we're always catching it—and always for nothing! It's a hard world for really nice boys!"

"Oh, don't be funny!" growled Figgins. "It was really for nothing this time. Ratty has been in a frightful temper ever since brekker."

"Something's gone wrong," groaned Kerr, "and he's taking it out of us! He's taking it out of the Fifth, too!"

"Somebody rang him up on the telephone this morning," mumbled Fatty Wynn. "He came out of his study in a ramping temper. He cuffed Reddy in the passage for nothing at all. He gave Lawrence a hundred lines—all for nothing."

"And now he's picked on us!" said Figgins. "We hadn't done anything—hadn't said a word. He was rung up a second time on the phone, and we happened to be in the passage when he came out of his study. That's all. We didn't even look at the beast; but he said we were making a noise, and caned us."

"We might have been making a bit of a row," admitted Kerr reflectively. "You can't play leap-frog in a passage without a slight row. But he gave us four each—four corksers."

"And he's been ragging the Fifth all the morning," said Figgins. "I saw

Cutts looking like a regular demon when he came out of the Form-room."

"But what is the matter with him?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Blessed if I know! Only somebody was ringing him up on the phone. Somebody bothering him, perhaps," said Figgins.

"Here comes Ratty!" murmured Kerr viciously.

The tall, angular form of Mr. Ratcliff, the New House master, came out of the New House and strode towards the gates. He had to pass very near to the spot where the juniors were standing. He glanced grimly at Figgins & Co. as he came up.

The three juniors avoided his glance. They did not want any more. But Tom Merry & Co., being School House boys, were not under the jurisdiction of Mr. Ratcliff, so they treated the Housemaster to a steady stare as he approached.

Mr. Ratcliff was plainly in an extremely bad temper. He was a very severe and sharp-tempered master at the best of times. Now he was at one of the worst of times. His thin lips were tightly set, his brow was dark, and his eyes glinted with a greenish light. What had happened to disturb him so the juniors could not guess; but, whatever it was, it had painful results for the Fifth Form, of which he was master, and the boys in his House.

Apparently, the cool and independent manner of the Terrible Three had an

A FULL-OF-PUNCH LONG YARN OF BOXING, FUN AND ADVENTURE, FEATURING GEORGE DARRELL IN KNOCK-OUT FORM.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD

irritating effect upon Mr. Ratcliff, for he flushed and paused, and fixed a bitter look upon the three Shell fellows. They raised their caps in a perfunctory way. They were bound to "cap" a Housemaster, but they put as little respect as possible in the salute.

"What are you doing here?" said Mr. Ratcliff harshly. "The less you three boys have to do with the boys of my House the better I shall be pleased."

"Yes, sir," said Lowther demurely. "Of course, we want to please you, sir. You are always so kind."

"Your remarks are impertinent, Lowther! If you belonged to my House I should cane you!"

"Yes, sir. Rather lucky for me I don't belong to your House, sir, isn't it?" said Lowther cheerfully.

"Mr. Railton may approve of your insolence!" said Mr. Ratcliff bitterly. He disliked the master of the School House as much as he disliked the Terrible Three. It was decidedly not good form for a master to utter detracting remarks concerning another in the presence of the boys; but Horace Ratcliff did not observe that wholesome rule. "You three boys are a very good specimen of the results of Mr. Railton's system. I should deal with you very differently."

"Thank you, sir! We are quite satisfied with Mr. Railton, sir," said Tom Merry, entering into Lowther's little scheme of pulling the Housemaster's leg. "We don't want to change, sir, thanking you all the same."

"I don't think," said Manners seriously, "that Mr. Railton would like us discussing his methods with Mr. Ratcliff. He might think it sheer cheek."

"He might!" agreed Lowther.

And the Terrible Three nodded their heads solemnly. Mr. Ratcliff understood their meaning very clearly—that it was sheer cheek on his part to make remarks about Mr. Railton.

"You insolent young rascals!" said the Housemaster, between his teeth. "Although you do not belong to my House, I shall take it upon myself to punish your impertinence. Hold out your hand, Lowther!" Mr. Ratcliff was carrying a cane under his arm, and he grasped it grimly.

"What for, sir?"

"I am going to cane you."

Monty Lowther deliberately put his hands behind him. Mr. Ratcliff was outrageously overstepping the limits of his authority, and Lowther knew he was quite within his rights in refusing to obey.

"Do you hear me, Lowther?" said Mr. Ratcliff, in a grinding voice.

"I hear you, sir."

"Will you obey me?"

"No, sir."

"What—!"

"My Housemaster would not approve of your caning me, sir," said Lowther, with the utmost calmness. "I am willing to be taken to him, if you choose, sir."

Mr. Ratcliff turned almost purple with rage.

"If you do not hold out your hand at once, Lowther, I shall thrash you severely!" he exclaimed, making a step towards the Shell fellow.

"Sorry, sir, but it can't be done."

Mr. Ratcliff said no more, but made a jump towards the junior, with the cane upraised in the air.

Lowther backed away.

A big Sixth Former of the School House, who was passing under the elms, had paused to look on at the scene, with a frown upon his face. It was Darrell, the prefect. Lowther had seen him, and now he called to him.

"I say, Darrell!"

Darrell came striding up.

"I appeal to my prefect, sir," said Monty Lowther sweetly. "If Darrell says I am to be caned, I'll be caned."

"Really, sir—" began Darrell quietly, but with a gleam in his eyes. Darrell naturally resented Mr. Ratcliff's assumption of authority over the juniors of his House.

"Don't interfere here, Darrell! I shall not allow it," exclaimed Mr. Ratcliff passionately.

"Excuse me, sir, I am bound to interfere," said Darrell quietly. "If you have any complaint to make against Lowther, Mr. Railton is the proper person to take it to. You have no right to touch a boy belonging to the School House, sir."

"Hold your tongue!" rapped out the angry Housemaster.

Darrell's eyes glinted.

"Lowther," he said, "go to your House at once."

"Very well, Darrell."

Lowther turned to walk away, closing one eye at Figgins & Co. as he did so.

When Mr. Ratcliff is threatened with a hiding by an old St. Jim's boy it is George Darrell of the Sixth who steps in to save him. But the sour-tempered Housemaster's treatment of his rescuer is mean and ungenerous—until danger menaces him once more!

Mr. Ratcliff made a stride after him—and Darrell made a stride, too, and planted himself directly in the Housemaster's path.

Mr. Ratcliff had to stop—he could not go on without running into the big prefect. And Darrell evidently did not intend to give ground. There was a pause—the two looking at one another—Darrell cool and determined, and Mr. Ratcliff in a flaming and most undignified rage.

CHAPTER 2.

The Housemaster's Predicament!

"DARRELL! Stand aside!" "Excuse me, sir! The juniors of my House are under my authority, not yours," said the prefect calmly.

"I order you to stand aside!"

"So that you can cane Lowther?"

"Yes."

"Then I refuse, sir."

The Terrible Three were walking slowly away towards the School House. But they contrived to keep an eye on the scene behind them. Mr. Ratcliff had "bitten off more than he could chew," as he sometimes did when he allowed his temper to outrun his discretion. Darrell stood like a rock in

his path, without the slightest intention of giving way.

Figgins & Co. moved off, too. They had an idea that Mr. Ratcliff's fury would probably turn upon them as soon as he found that he could not bully Darrell.

The angry Housemaster was left face to face with the School House prefect. There was a long pause.

Mr. Ratcliff looked for a moment as if he would use the cane upon Darrell himself, but a shred of common sense remaining to him prevented him from doing that. The New House master was nothing like a match for the big prefect, who was a champion athlete in his House, and one of the best boxers at St. Jim's. Mr. Ratcliff could not possibly have removed Darrell by force, and such an encounter would be too undignified, as Mr. Ratcliff realised in spite of his fury.

His hands clenched with rage upon the cane, till his bony knuckles showed white.

"Darrell—this insolence!" he muttered.

"I don't mean to be insolent, sir," said Darrell. "But I cannot allow my proper authority to be taken out of my hands, even by a master. I am quite willing to refer the matter to the Head."

Mr. Ratcliff bit his thin lips. That was the last thing in the world he would have wished.

The Head could certainly not have approved of his interference with School House boys. In fact, Dr. Holmes would have spoken to him very plainly, if the matter had been brought to his notice.

The New House master gave Darrell a bitter look.

"Very well, Darrell, rather than make a scene, I will allow this matter to drop for the present," he said in a low voice that trembled with rage. "I shall not, however, forget this insolence."

"As you please, sir!"

Mr. Ratcliff turned away and strode from the spot.

Darrell turned away quietly.

There was nothing like triumph in the prefect's handsome face. He had done what he believed to be his duty, and he was sorry there had been a scene that was calculated to lower a master in the eyes of his juniors. His look was very grave as he walked towards the School House.

Meanwhile, Mr. Ratcliff had gone on his way to the porter's lodge. Taggles, the porter, looked at him curiously as he came in. The Housemaster's angry face showed how deeply he was disturbed, and Mr. Ratcliff was not an adept at hiding his feelings.

"Taggles," said the Housemaster.

"I—ahem!"

"Yes, sir," said Taggles wonderingly.

Mr. Ratcliff cleared his throat.

"The fact is, Taggles, a visitor will probably arrive in the course of the afternoon—a man—ahem!—whom I do not wish to see."

"Yes, sir," said the school porter, with increasing surprise. He, too, had noticed Mr. Ratcliff's extraordinary state of disturbance that morning, and he wondered whether the unwished-for visitor had anything to do with it.

"You will probably know the man by sight—it is quite possible," pursued Mr. Ratcliff. "His name is Stoker."

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"Stoker!" repeated Taggles reflectively. "I've knowed that name afore, sir."

"He used to be at this school."

"Oh, I remember now—there was a young gentleman named Stoker in the New House, but that was a long time ago," said Taggles. "He must be quite an old boy by now, sir."

"Quite so. He was in my House ten years ago," said Mr. Ratcliff. "A most unruly, disobedient, and worthless boy, whom I had occasion to correct many times."

Taggles coughed. He knew Mr. Ratcliff's methods pretty well, and he knew that the Housemaster frequently "corrected" fellows most severely, without their being unruly, disobedient, or worthless.

"This person Stoker has telephoned me that he is coming here to-day," said Mr. Ratcliff. "He has rung me up twice on the telephone to tell me so. It may be simply a piece of insolence, but it is possible that he may come, and if he does, you are not to admit him, Taggles."

"Not admit an old boy!" said Taggles in astonishment.

"Certainly not!"

"But—s'pose he asks to see the Ead, sir?"

"He will ask to see me," said Mr. Ratcliff. "The fact is—I may as well tell you, in order that you will know how to deal with the man—the fact is, this person appears to owe me a grudge for correction administered while he was a schoolboy here, and he intends to—ahem!—to make a scene."

Taggles passed his hand over his mouth to hide a grin. He began to understand. More than one fellow had left St. Jim's with the fixed determination of coming back, when he was grown up, and giving Horace Ratcliff a terrific licking. Such intention, of course, faded away as the fellows grew older, and they forgot all about the old grudges of their schooldays.

But Stoker was evidently a person who had a long memory for injuries. It was ten years since he had shaken the dust of St. Jim's from his feet, and he still remembered his old grudge against his Housemaster.

Stoker would be about twenty-five or twenty-six now, Taggles reflected, and there was no doubt that he would be able to give the Housemaster the long-promised licking, if he could get at him.

"What are you laughing at, Taggles?" demanded Mr. Ratcliff savagely.

"Larling, sir! I wasn't larling!"

"Pray take this matter seriously."

"Suttingly, sir!"

"I do not want a disgraceful scene in my House," said Mr. Ratcliff. "Kindly remember that this person, when he arrives, is not to be admitted."

"Very well, sir."

Thompson of the Shell, a New House boy, came hurrying down to the lodge.

"If you please, sir—" he began.

"What do you want, Thompson?" snapped Mr. Ratcliff.

"The telephone bell's ringing in your study, sir," said Thompson.

Mr. Ratcliff's brow became as black as a thundercloud. To Thompson's utter astonishment, he gave him a cuff that sent him staggering, and then strode away towards the New House.

Thompson put his hand to his ear, and stared after him blankly.

"Oh, the beast!" he muttered. "The

utter beast! When I'm grown up I'll make him suffer for that!"

"Haw, haw, haw!" laughed Taggles. "What are you cackling at, you old ass?" snorted Thompson.

"Haw, haw, haw! That was just what Master Stoker said!" grinned Taggles. "I can 'ear 'im now, just as if it was yesterday. The day he went he says to me, says he, 'I'm comin' back in a few years' time, Taggles,' says he—'coming back to give Ratty a thunderin' good hidin'!' says he."

"Who's Stoker?" asked Thompson. "He was afore your time, Master Thompson. A very independent young gent was Master Stoker," said Taggles. "He'll be quite a man now. Haw, haw, haw!"

Thompson looked at him breathlessly. "You don't mean to say an old boy is coming back to whop Mr. Ratcliff?" he asked.

"Which I've got horders not to admit him!" said Taggles.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Thompson, forgetting all about his smarting ear now. "Oh, my only Aunt Mary Jane! What larks!"

And Thompson rushed off breathlessly to spread the glorious news.

CHAPTER 3.

Great Expectations!

"H A, ha, ha!"

"Oh, gorgeous!"

"Ripping!"

"Top-hole!"

Tom Merry & Co. were in great spirits. Figgins & Co. were rejoicing. School House and New House juniors joined in happy anticipation.

Thompson had imparted the information he had extracted from Taggles.

An old boy who had suffered under Mr. Ratcliff's tyranny ten years before was coming back to St. Jim's to "whop" the Housemaster.

It was simply glorious news!

The juniors were delighted. All their sympathies were with the old boy. If Mr. Ratcliff had treated him as he had treated Figgins & Co. and other fellows in the New House there was no doubt that he deserved a "whopping."

"Bai Jove!" grinned Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the School House. "As a wule, I do not approve of this. It cannot be regarded as respectful. But considewin' what an awful beast Watty is, I must say I wish good luck to Stokah!"

"Yes, rather!"

"So that's why the beast has been so ratty all day," said Figgins, rubbing his hands. "That is why he was ragging the Fifth in class, and whacking us all round in the New House. Old Stoker has got on his nerves. Ha, ha, ha!"

"How jolly lucky it's a half holiday to-day," said Tom Merry. "We can be on the scene and see all the fun!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I'll hold his coat for him," said Kangaroo of the Shell. "Ratty won't be able to put up much of a fight, though. He's not in condition."

"He won't put up a fight at all if he can help it!" grinned Figgins. "He hasn't got the pluck of a bunny-rabbit! He will try to get out of it."

"Well, it would be wathah infwa dig for a Housemasteah to fight with an old boy," Arthur Augustus remarked. "The Head would be wathah shocked, too."

"It may make Ratty a bit more careful," said Kerr. "If once an old boy goes for him and wallops him, it will be a lesson to him. We shall all be old

boys in time, and then we may go and do the same."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I wonder when old Stoker is coming?" said Manners. "Better keep a watch on the gate, like Sister Anne. We simply mustn't miss it."

"No jolly fear!"

"This chap Stoker seems to be a bit of a joker," Tom Merry remarked. "He's rung Ratty up on the telephone several times, it appears, in order to give him all the pleasures of anticipation."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Nobody here knows him," said Lowther. "He was gone before the oldest inhabitant came here—excepting the Head, Ratty, and Taggles and the House dame. I dare say he was quite a nice chap, and Ratty was down on him."

"He's always down on nice chaps," said Fatty Wynn.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The dinner-bell rang, and the excited crowd of juniors broke up. New House and School House fellows streamed off towards their own House to dinner. But even Fatty Wynn did not think so much of dinner as of the possible happenings of that afternoon. An old boy coming back to whack Ratty! No wonder the Housemaster was disturbed and angry; no wonder his bad temper was blacker and more bitter than ever! And no wonder the juniors were unusually and remarkably cheerful!

Figgins & Co. looked very curiously at Mr. Ratcliff in the dining-room in the New House. Mr. Ratcliff's face was like thunder. During dinner a maid looked in, to say that the telephone-bell was ringing in Mr. Ratcliff's study. The Housemaster snapped out that it did not matter, and the maid retired wonderingly. Mr. Ratcliff had evidently had enough of talking to Stoker on the telephone.

After dinner Mr. Ratcliff left the New House and crossed to the other House. Figgins & Co. watched him with grinning faces. They guessed that he had gone to consult the Head concerning the threats of the old boy.

It certainly placed the Housemaster in a ridiculous and uncomfortable position. Owing to the instructions he had given Taggles, the secret was already out; but in any case it would have been out when that truculent old boy arrived.

"Poor old Ratty's in a blue funk!" chuckled Figgins. "He doesn't like the posish, not a little bit. Hallo! There's that blessed telephone-bell again."

The sharp buzz of the bell came from Mr. Ratcliff's study. Figgins winked at the Co.

"Ratty won't answer him," he said. "Now, it isn't polite to leave an old boy unanswered when he's phoning to his beloved Housemaster. I think we ought to answer that bell for Ratty, and give Stoker our kindest regards."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

As Mr. Ratcliff was safe in the School House, it was easy enough for Figgins & Co. to slip into his study and answer the telephone. Kerr kept an eye on the study window to watch for the return of the Housemaster, while Figgins took up the receiver.

"Hallo!"

"Hallo! Is that St. Jim's?"

"Yes."

"New House—Mr. Ratcliff?"

"You've got the right number," said Figgins.

"I'm coming to-day."

"Who are you?"

"You know well enough who I am, you old rascal!" said the voice. "I'm Herbert Stoker. And I'm coming back

to St. Jim's to give you that hiding I promised you."

Figgins chuckled. The one-time Stoker of the Fifth was evidently under the impression that he was talking to Mr. Ratcliff.

"You remember when I left St. Jim's," went on the voice. "You caned me for fighting with Snoop, who was a sneak and your favourite. You were always down on me because I wouldn't knuckle under. You were a beastly tyrant and a cad."

"Seems to know Ratty awfully well," murmured Figgins. "He hasn't changed a bit since Stoker left."

"I promised you a hiding when I was grown up," went on the voice. "I haven't had time to attend to you yet. I've been abroad a long time. Now I'm in the neighbourhood, and I'm going to pay you that call."

Figgins was glad to hear it.

"It may interest you to know that I'm a boxer now, Ratty—a professional boxer. It will show you what to expect when I come."

"Good egg!" murmured Figgins.

"This is the fourth time I've rung you up, Ratty. The last time you didn't answer me. I want you to understand thoroughly what's in store."

"I'll bet Ratty understands well enough," murmured Figgins.

"Why don't you speak, Ratty?"

"It isn't Ratty," said Figgins, speaking into the receiver at last. "I'm a New House chap. Ratty doesn't mean to answer the phone any more. I say, you are really an old St. Jim's chap, and you're coming to whop Ratty?"

"Yes."

"Good luck to you! He's a beast! He's been caning and cuffing everybody since you first rung up this morning."

"Same old Ratty," came from Mr. Stoker.

"Yes, rather! Look here, Stoker, I'll give you a tip! We all want you to come and whop Ratty. We'd give a term's pocket-money to see you do it. The Head's going out this afternoon. He goes over to a local meeting at the vicarage at four. Come after four, and there won't be any trouble with the Head."

"Thanks—I will!"

"Mr. Railton goes out with the Head, so you'll have Ratty all to yourself," pursued Figgins. "The other masters won't be able to help him—they're not fighting men. Come after four, and everything in the garden will be lovely."

"Right-ho!"

"Here comes Ratty!" murmured Kerr.

Figgins promptly rang off, and the three young rascals scuttled out of the study. They were at a safe distance when Mr. Ratcliff came in; and the Housemaster sat down in his study without a suspicion of the peculiar conversation that had been carried on there during his absence.

CHAPTER 4.

Darrell's Difficulty!

KILDARE came into Darrell's study in the School House with a smile upon his face. Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, and Darrell were great chums. The St. Jim's skipper had just heard the talk among the fellows concerning Mr. Ratcliff and his truculent old boy—hence his smile.

Darrell was seated at his table, with his head leaning on his hand, and a



Too dazed to know what was happening to him, Taggles was carried into his lodge and set down in the armchair. Perhaps it was simply absent-mindedness that made Mr. Stoker place the porter there on his head! The juniors looking on roared with laughter.

worried look on his brow. He looked up as Kildare came in, but with the frown still on his brow. The captain of St. Jim's gave him an inquiring look.

"Anything wrong, Darrell?" he asked, forgetting Mr. Ratcliff for the moment.

Darrell shook his head.

"Look here!" said Kildare. "You've been looking jolly down in the mouth for the last two or three days, Darrell, old man. What is it? Get it off your chest. Two heads are better than one, you know."

"It's nothing," said Darrell slowly. "I want to raise some money if I can, that's all, and I don't quite see how to do it."

"Is that all? If a couple of quid would be any good—"

"It wouldn't. I want twenty quid."

Kildare whistled.

"Twenty quid! That's a good round sum."

"It isn't for myself," explained Darrell; "it's—it's for somebody else—somebody who's had bad luck—somebody I used to know." A shade crossed his handsome face. "I don't mind telling you, Kildare. You remember once there was an actress I knew—she was older than I—but I thought an awful lot of her. I've never forgotten her. I—I was rather inclined to make a fool of myself. I suppose that's what it would be called. And she talked to me sensibly, and after that she went to America."

"I remember," said Kildare.

"I've heard from her once or twice," said Darrell, in a low voice. "She—she married. Well, I haven't heard from her lately. But I've had news of her from another quarter—and it's bad news. She's had bad luck. They—she and her husband, you know—

started a touring theatrical company, and they've gone broke."

"They were almost on their uppers, and there's a subscription being raised among the people who knew them, to help them on their feet again. They don't know that I know anything about it. But—but I wanted to help. You see, I could send a subscription to the fund without their knowing that it came from me. Lots of the subscriptions will be anonymous. I'm going to whack out what I can, anyway; but if I could raise a lump sum, it would be ripping. I don't see any prospect of it, though."

Kildare nodded sympathetically.

"I understand," he said quietly. "I wish I could help you out, old chap. I knew there was something amiss when you wanted to be left out of the match to-day. You still don't want to come over to Abbotsford?"

"Not if you can do without me."

"Oh, that's all right! I'll put in Cutts. He's a jolly good player when he chooses to be. But if you're staying here this afternoon, Darrell, I thought I'd mention to you about Ratty."

"Mr. Ratcliff!" Darrell coloured a little. "I had a bit of a row with him, this morning. Meddling with School House kids as usual. I had to stand up to him."

"Well, he's in hot water this time," said Kildare, the smile returning to his face. "Have you ever heard of a chap named Stoker—Herbert Stoker—who used to be here? He was in the Fifth Form when he left, after a row with Ratty, I hear."

"Never heard of him."

"Well, the fellows are saying that he's telephoned to Ratty, threatening him. It seems that he promised to come back to St. Jim's when he was grown up and give Ratty a hiding."

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Darrell laughed. "I've heard that kind of thing before," he remarked. "They never do it, though."

"This chap seems to be an obstinate boulder, and it seems that he's going to do it. I don't know how it got out, but all the juniors are chuckling over it. They don't see how serious it is. Between ourselves, Darrell, a good hiding wouldn't do Ratty a bit of harm."

"I quite agree with you."

"Only it would never do," pursued Kildare. "An old boy coming back and thrashing his Housemaster—it would make too fearful a scandal. Why, it would very likely get into the papers, and the Head would be awfully cut up. The school governors would hear of it, and there would be no end of talk."

"And Stoker would get into some trouble, too, very likely."

"We don't want such an awful scene here, you know. If you're staying in this afternoon, Darrell, I was going to suggest to you to keep an eye open, and interview this chap Stoker when he comes. The Head and Railton will be out, and all the prefects will be over at Abbotsford with the first eleven, excepting you. Talk to the chap nicely, and make him see that it won't do. And if that isn't any good, for goodness' sake make him keep his hands off Ratty. You're about the best boxer in the school, and I've no doubt you could handle him. It would be too utterly rotten to have the police called in here to chip in between a master and an old boy—don't you think so?"

"I should say so," said Darrell, with a laugh. "All right; I'll keep my eyes open, and if Stoker comes I'll see to him."

"Thanks, old man. I've got to be off with the eleven now, or I shall be late."

And Kildare quitted the study.

Soon after, Kildare and the rest of the first eleven rolled away from the gates of St. Jim's. They were going

over to Abbotsford to play an important match. As a rule a good many fellows accompanied the first eleven to watch their performances, but on this special afternoon the following was few in numbers. The news of Mr. Ratcliff's predicament had spread through the school, and most of the fellows preferred to stay in the school to "see the fun," as the juniors regarded it.

Tom Merry & Co. went down to the football ground for a punt-about to while away the time till Mr. Stoker should arrive. Figgins had told them of that talk on the telephone, and they knew that the redoubtable Stoker would not arrive until after four o'clock.

About four, the Head and Mr. Railton crossed the Close to the gates, and walked away down the road to Rylcombe. The fellows were glad to see them go. The presence of the Head would have spoiled all the fun. As for the School House master, he was an athlete and a boxer, and he would certainly have interfered to prevent Mr. Stoker from carrying out his intentions if he had been present. And the juniors did not want Mr. Stoker to be prevented. They wanted Ratty to be thoroughly "whopped."

"The coast is clear now," grinned Jack Blake, as the two masters disappeared. "Now Ratty can look out for squalls."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus, polishing his eyeglass. "I am gettin' very anxious to see Mr. Stokah. Old Watty is in a blue funk. I wonder that he does not go out for the afternoon."

"Probably expects to find Stoker waiting for him on the road if he does," grinned Figgins. "Stoker says he's in the neighbourhood, you know."

"Yaas, I suppose Watty is safah here," agreed Arthur Augustus. "But there is nothin' now to prevent Stokah fwom whoppin' him. The Head and Mr. Wailton are out, and all the prefects are gone except Dawwell."

"Darrell won't interfere, I should

think," said Tom Merry. "Ratty was going for him this morning. Besides, Darrell's off colour, anyway. He's sticking in his study, instead of going over with the first eleven to Abbotsford."

"And the other masters can't chip in," said Manners. "Little Lathom isn't a fighting man—what? Selby isn't a giddy hero, either. And our respected Form-master, Mr. Linton, has gone out."

"And Herr Schneider wouldn't take up the cudgels for Ratty, and I'm sure Monsieur Morny won't!" chuckled Kerr.

"Not likely."

"Everything in the garden is lovely," said Tom Merry. "It's well past four now. Let's get down to the gates and wait for him."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And the juniors streamed down to the school gates in an excited crowd to wait and watch for Mr. Stoker.

Meanwhile, Darrell remained in his study, turning his problem over in his mind, and utterly forgetting all about Mr. Ratcliff and the old boy.

CHAPTER 5.

The Old Boy!

"HERE he comes!" It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy who spotted him first.

The swell of St. Jim's was in the road, his eyeglass gleaming down the lane, when the figure of the old boy came into sight.

There was a rush out of the juniors to look.

Of course, they could not be sure that the young man who was now striding up the road from the direction of Rylcombe was indeed Stoker.

But they felt pretty certain that he was; and they hoped he was, anyway.

He was a young man, about twenty-five or twenty-six, with a well-built figure, and evidently very strong. His sturdy form was full of muscular power. He walked with a firm and heavy stride. He was dressed in lounge clothes, and wore a black bowler hat.

His face was clean-shaven, his features sharp and clear cut. His nose had been very straight—quite a Greek nose—but apparently a heavy punch had alighted on it at some period in his career, which had changed it almost into a nose of a Roman variety. This gave his face a somewhat striking appearance, and hinted at the profession of which he had spoken on the telephone—that of a boxer.

The young man came on steadily, quite aware of the fact that the crowd of juniors were staring at him, but apparently not in the least discomposed by it. In their intense interest in the stranger, indeed, Tom Merry & Co. had quite forgotten their manners, and their fixed gaze would have caused considerable discomfort to anyone who was troubled at all with bashfulness. But the young man was not troubled in that way—not in the least.

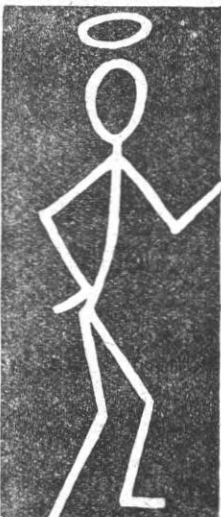
He halted outside the gateway of St. Jim's and looked at the juniors with an amused smile.

"Hallo!" he said. "You'll know me again next time you see me—what?"

"Ahem!"

"Do you generally stare at a visitor in this way?" the young man went on, quite good-humouredly.

Arthur Augustus coloured, and the other fellows coughed.



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"Pway excuse us, deah sir," said the swell of the Fourth. "We are weally vewy sowwy if we have been wude; but we are twemendously intewested in you. May I inkuiah whethah you are Stokah, who used to be in the Fifth?"

The young man laughed. "I was Stoker of the Fifth when I left here, ten years ago," he replied. "Now I'm Stoker of Stoker's Flying Ring."

"You used to be in our House here?" asked Figgins.

"If your House is the New House, yes."

"Oh, good! Ratty's still here, and he's still the same old Ratty. It was I who talked to you on the phone," explained Figgins. "Of course, don't mention that to Ratty. He would scalp me if he knew."

"Mum's the word," said Stoker. "I've come here to see Mr. Ratcliff. I want to see him very particularly. Is he at home?"

"Yes, in the New House."

"Good! I've rung him up several times to-day from Wayland."

"You're staying in Wayland, Mr. Stoker?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yes, this week in Wayland, next week in Bunchester, week after that, Luxford," said Mr. Stoker. "The Flying Ring stays only a few days in any place. I was glad to be doing Sussex with the Flying Ring, as it enabled me to pay a call on my old friend and kind master, Mr. Ratcliff. I've been in Australia for years, and couldn't pay him that call; but I never forgot him. There are some things a fellow doesn't forget. When I brought the Ring to England I thought of Ratty at once!"

"But what on earth is a flyin' wing?" asked Arthur Augustus. "Somethin' to do with aeroplanes?"

Mr. Stoker laughed.

"No; it's a boxing ring."

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"Might do a little business with you young fellows," said Mr. Stoker briskly, taking some cards from his pocket. "Take these—read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest. If you want to see a good show—a really good boxing show—come over to Wayland Hall any evening this week. When I was at St. Jim's I was a mug at lessons, but first chop in the gym, and I could box any fellow in the school. I never found a market for Latin or mathematics, but I turned my boxing to good account—see?"

The juniors read the cards with interest. They ran:

"THE FLYING RING!"

The Finest Travelling Boxing Show in the British Dominions!

The Manly Art at Its Best!

H. Stoker is open to box all comers, and to forfeit a Purse of Twenty Guineas to any amateur who stands up to him for Ten Rounds.

Come and see H. Stoker, the Champion Light-Weight, and Wallaby Bill, the Celebrated Cornstalk Boxer!

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ADMISSION ONE SHILLING!

"THE FLYING RING!"

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus. "So you are a champion boxah, deah boy?"



"You bet!"

"Champion of where?" asked Blake, with a grin.

"Everywhere," said Mr. Stoker cheerfully.

"Bai Jove, we'll get leave, and go ovah and see this!" remarked Arthur Augustus. "I'm wathah a boxah myself, you know, and I'm awfully intewested in this!"

"Yes, rather!"

"St. Jim's fellows especially welcome," said Mr. Stoker. "The free list is unfortunately suspended, owing to the rush of the public to see our celebrated show. Otherwise, I should ask you all to drop in on the nod. But you can't afford to miss the Flying Ring, anyway—greatest show on earth of its kind. However, to get to business, I've got to call on Mr. Ratcliff now. If you kids care to look on, you'll see a good entertainment free of charge!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What-ho!"

The juniors made way for Mr. Stoker, and he swung in at the gates. He found Taggles planted in his path.

"Hallo! You still here?" said Mr. Stoker, looking at him with a grin. "Same old Taggles! You haven't changed a bit!"

Taggles stared at him.

"And you ain't changed much, Master Stoker," he said. "You've growed, that's all. Otherwise, the same cheeky young hump that always was. Which it's my duty to ask you wot you want 'ere this arternoon?"

"I've come to pay a call on my old master," explained Mr. Stoker, with an agreeable smile. "Finding myself in the neighbourhood, Taggles, I felt bound to call and pay my respects to Mr. Ratcliff."

Taggles grinned. "Which Mr. Ratcliff has spoke to me about that," he said. "And his horders is that you ain't to be admitted."

Mr. Stoker looked pained.

"Doesn't Mr. Ratcliff want to see an old boy, who has made a special point of calling on him after being away for years in Australia?" he asked.

"No," said Taggles gruffly, "he don't! And, what's more, I know your little game, Master Stoker, and

you can't come in. So I asks you to get horf!"

Mr. Stoker shook his head. "Can't be done, Taggles!" he said cheerfully. "I've come here specially to see Mr. Ratcliff. Let me pass!"

"I ain't letting you pass," said Taggles. "Not if I knows it, Master Stoker! There ain't goin' to be no row 'ere, I can tell you! You 'ook it!"

"I should be sorry," said Mr. Stoker gently, "to lay hands on a respectable gentleman a hundred years of age—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I ain't a 'undred," roared Taggles angrily, "and well you knows it!"

"I repeat, I should be grieved to have to chuck a gentleman of a hundred years of age into his lodge on his neck," said Mr. Stoker; "but if you don't let me pass, my dear Taggles, that is exactly what I shall do!"

Taggles brought out his right hand from behind him, and a thick oaken stick was revealed. Probably Taggles remembered the exploits of Stoker as a boxer in the old days, and so he prepared himself for emergencies.

"You lay a 'and on me," said Taggles, "and you'll get 'urt! I don't want any trouble with an hold boy. But you ain't comin' in! Horders is horders, and—Yow-ow-ow!"

Before Taggles could finish, Mr. Stoker made a lightning movement, and the old porter found his arm grasped by a muscular hand, while a sinewy arm was thrown around his body. The oak stick dropped to the ground, and Taggles was swept off his feet. Taggles was too dazed to know what was happening, but the juniors roared as they looked on. The porter was rushed to the open doorway of his lodge. Mr. Stoker did not "chuck" him in; he carried him in, and set him down in his armchair. Perhaps it was simply absent-mindedness that made him place Taggles there on his head, with his feet dangling over the back of the chair.

Then he walked calmly out of the lodge.

Taggles remained upside-down for a few moments, gasping and spluttering, and then rolled off the chair and sat on the floor, still gasping wildly.

"Oh, my heye! Why, the young villain is as strong as a 'orse!" spluttered Taggles. "Which I ain't goin' to 'ave nothin' more to do with 'im. I knows that; and Mr. Ratcliff can look after 'im 'imself! Which he gives a man a job like this, and never thinks 'ow 'e's goin' to do it. Which I'm done with it!"

And Taggles, who if not quite a hundred years old, was at least old enough to know that discretion was the better part of valour, remained in his lodge, and left that truculent old boy to his own devices.

CHAPTER 6.

Bend Over!

"HE—he is coming, then!" Mr. Ratcliff muttered those words as he looked out of his study window in the New House. His eyes were fixed upon a stalwart figure that was advancing across the quad, followed by a grinning crowd of juniors of both Houses.

Although ten years had passed since he had seen Stoker of the Fifth, and though Stoker had changed somewhat—especially about the nose—Mr. Ratcliff knew him at once.

It was the old boy—the boy he had cuffed and bullied and caned when he was in the New House at St. Jim's, and who had remembered his old grudges

after he had grown up, and had come back to square accounts.

Taggles had evidently failed to keep him out, and Mr. Stoker was marching on the New House—advancing to the attack.

Mr. Ratcliff turned quite white.

For a gentleman of nearly fifty years of age, in a far from fit condition of health, to encounter the muscular young man was impossible. Even if Mr. Ratcliff had been of the stuff of which heroes are made he would not have stood much chance against Mr. Stoker. If they came to close quarters it would not be a fight—nothing like it. It would be a licking! The Housemaster who had so often licked Stoker would be helplessly licked in his turn.

Perhaps at that moment Mr. Ratcliff regretted and repented him of the methods that made him so unpopular in the school.

After all, he had been very hard on young Stoker. There had been a breezy independence about that young gentleman which made the stiff, precise, irritable Housemaster take a special dislike to him.

It was a rule at St. Jim's that seniors could not be caned, unless, in special circumstances, by the Head himself; but in Stoker's case Mr. Ratcliff had broken that rule. He had disliked the boy so much that he never would leave off persecuting him.

Mr. Ratcliff had known what the boy's feelings were like when he left St. Jim's. But he had never dreamed that this would come of it. He knew that it was not uncommon for a lad to leave school with a deadly determination of coming back when he was grown up and licking his master; but such a thing had never happened in his experience.

But it had happened now. Here was Stoker of the Fifth, grown up into a powerful fellow who could handle the Housemaster as easily as an infant.

It was an exceedingly awkward predicament for Mr. Ratcliff. As a matter of fact, he was in a blue funk.

He thought wildly of telephoning for the police.

But certainly Mr. Stoker would have finished with him long before P.-c. Crump could arrive from Rylcombe. He regretted now that he had not had a constable on the spot to deal with the old boy when he came. Yet it would have been scarcely feasible to keep a policeman stationed in the New House on the chances of the old boy turning up there.

If Mr. Ratcliff had been a popular master he would have been in no danger. He realised bitterly that if Mr. Railton had been in a similar predicament the redoubtable old boy would never have been able to get at him. The School House fellows would have risen as one man to "chuck out" anybody who dared to affront their popular Housemaster.

But Mr. Ratcliff knew only too well that the boys of his House would not interfere. They would be only too glad to see him "put through it."

The unhappy Housemaster had not much time to think about the matter. Stoker was coming along with big strides, with a crowd at his heels, and in a few minutes he would be knocking at the study door.

To lock his door, and refuse to let the man in, that would be a ridiculous situation, and would lower him in the eyes of everyone in the House. But it was better than being licked by that terrible old boy, and Mr. Ratcliff made up his mind.

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He whisked across the study to the door and slammed it, and felt for the key.

Then he trembled.

The key was not there!

The key should have been in the lock—it always was in the lock—but on this occasion, when Mr. Ratcliff wanted so very badly to lock his door, the key was missing.

He ground his teeth with fury. He knew that some boy of his House had removed that key deliberately, so that he could not lock himself in when Stoker came.

The Housemaster glanced wildly about the study.

He thought in a terrified way of piling up furniture against the door—the table, the chairs, the bookcase. But there was little time. He thought of jumping out of the open window, and escaping across the quadrangle. But there was a crowd outside, and he shrank, very naturally, from such an extremely undignified and ignominious flight. He would never hear the end of it, that was certain.

There were steps in the passage. Stoker was coming! Mr. Ratcliff pulled himself together with a tremendous effort. He drew himself to his full height, mustered all his dignity, and awaited the entrance of the old boy, outwardly calm, but inwardly in a state of the bluest funk.

Knock!

"Come in!" said Mr. Ratcliff, in a voice that he vainly endeavoured to render firm.

The door opened.

Herbert Stoker entered the study.

He took off his bowler hat and laid it upon the table. Then he looked round the study, as if in search of something. He found what he was in search of—a cane. He picked it up, and swished it in the air. That deliberate preparation made the Housemaster turn cold all over.

Stoker was going to cane him!

"Sir!" exclaimed the Housemaster.

"Good-afternoon, Mr. Ratcliff!" said Stoker, with deadly politeness.

"G-good-afternoon!"

"I dare say you recognise me?"

"You are—are Stoker?"

"Exactly! I rang you up this morning—several times in fact. I trust I made it quite clear to you that I was going to call this afternoon?"

"I—I—I am glad to see you, Stoker," faltered the wretched Mr. Ratcliff.

"It—it is always a pleasure to see an old boy, and to—to renew old acquaintance. I—I trust you will stay to tea, and—and we can talk pleasantly over old times."

Mr. Stoker smiled.

"I'm afraid I shan't be able to stay to tea, Mr. Ratcliff, but we will talk pleasantly over old times—very pleasantly, I hope. You remember me well?"

"Quite well," said Mr. Ratcliff, licking his dry lips. "Very well indeed! You—you were a credit to your House, Stoker."

"You must have found that out after I left, sir," said Stoker, with a shake of the head. "You didn't seem to think so while I was here. But after I had left, I suppose, all my splendid qualities dawned upon you all of a sudden."

"I—I always had an extremely good opinion of you, Stoker."

"You took a remarkably queer way of showing it, then, sir. As a man says in his poem: 'Perhaps it was right to dissemble your love. But why did you kick me downstairs?' You have heard of those expressive lines?"

"I—I—I—"

"I always intended to give you a look

in when I grew up," said Stoker pleasantly. "I couldn't possibly forget your kindness to me while I was here. I've been in Australia a long time, or I should have called on you before. I hope you will excuse my apparent neglect. I really came as soon as I could."

"I—I certainly—I—"

"You remember when I was a fag in the Third," pursued Stoker cheerfully, "you licked me on an average every other day. In the Fourth, you kept on the same game. When I was in the Shell, you got me seven separate and distinct floggings from the Head, by making reports which were, to say the least, exaggerations."

"Ahem! I—"

"I was the only fellow in the Fifth who was ever caned. You devoted quite a lot of attention to me, Mr. Ratcliff."

"Ahem! That is all over now. I—I trust, Stoker, that you bear no ill-will for what is long past. A—A Housemaster has painful duties sometimes, and—and—"

"Quite so! And an old boy has painful duties sometimes," assented Mr. Stoker.

"I—I— Surely you do not remember old grudges for so long a time, my dear Stoker? It—it is really unworthy of your character—"

"Never was there a more forgiving chap than I am," said Mr. Stoker. "But, you see, I made a solemn promise to lick you in your turn, and I'm a slave to my word."

"I—I—I—"

"The lesson will be painful, but very valuable," said Mr. Stoker calmly. "It will let quite a new light into your mind, I sincerely believe. You are so awfully handy with the cane, because you don't know what it is like to be licked yourself. Now you are going to know."

The Housemaster breathed hard.

"If—if you have come here intending to make a disturbance. I—I can only say—"

"Bless your little heart, I'm not going to make a disturbance!" said Stoker in surprise. "You're going to do that. I don't expect you to take it quietly. You can yell as much as you like. I remember you've made me yell often enough in this very study. Now it's your turn."

"I—I shall prosecute you for assault, and—"

"Yes; it will make quite an amusing case for the papers, won't it?" smiled Mr. Stoker. "An old boy coming back to the school and caning his Housemaster. The British public will be vastly interested. And it will be a splendid advertisement for Stoker's Flying Ring. My dear sir, you can't do me a bigger favour than by prosecuting me for assault. Not that I'm going to assault you; I'm going to cane you."

"You—you blackguard—"

"Nuff said!" said Mr. Stoker. "Bend over that chair."

"What!"

"I'm going to dust your trousers, as you often did to me," said Mr. Stoker calmly.

"Mr. Stoker, I—I entreat you—I—"

"Bend over!" thundered Mr. Stoker, swishing the cane in the air.

There was a chuckle down the passage. Many youthful ears heard that thunderous command, which Mr. Ratcliff had so often addressed to his boys, and which was now addressed to himself.

Mr. Ratcliff backed towards the window; he was almost sick with terror.

"Mr. Stoker, calm yourself, I beg! If—I erred upon the side of severity, I—I express my regret most sincerely! I—I—"
 "Bend over!"
 "I—I beg of you—"
 "Bend over!"

CHAPTER 7. Darrell to the Rescue!

MR. RATCLIFF gasped as if mesmerised at the swishing cane as Stoker advanced upon him. He did not bend over. In his terror, most of his dignity had vanished, but he would not bend over like a junior schoolboy, to be caned. That was a little too much.

"If you do not bend over that chair, Ratcliff, I shall thrash you severely," said Stoker.

"Stoker, I—I beg—"
 "Bend over!" repeated Stoker inexorably.
 "I—I will not! I—I—"
 "Then—"

The cane sang in the air, and Mr. Ratcliff made a desperate plunge through the open window just in time.

The cane came down, and caught Mr. Stoker across his own leg, and he gave a yelp of pain.

Mr. Ratcliff plumped down breathlessly outside the window. There was a crowd of juniors in the quadrangle, and they stared in amazement at the sight of Horace Ratcliff's unexpected acrobatic performance. Then they burst into a yell of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Bravo!"

Mr. Ratcliff did not heed them. He picked himself up and fled, his gown flying behind him in the breeze caused by his rapid flight.

But Mr. Stoker was hardly a few seconds behind him.

Out of the study window came the old boy, cane in hand, and he alighted on his feet, and dashed away in pursuit of the fleeing Housemaster.

Mr. Ratcliff had never been anything like an athlete—he disliked athletic exercises—but the speed with which he crossed the quadrangle would have done credit to a champion of the cinder-path.

After him went Stoker, cane in hand, at top speed, breathing vengeance.

And after Stoker went a crowd of delighted juniors, yelling with laughter.

"Go it, Stoker!"
 "Catch him—catch him!"
 "Put it on!"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Tom Merry, with tears of laughter running down his cheeks. "Oh, my only summer hat! This is better than a circus! Who'd have thought that old Ratty could put it on like that?"

"Two to one on Ratty!" shrieked Lumley-Lumley of the Fourth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "After them!"
 "We've got to be in at the death!" grinned Figgins.

Close behind the ferocious Stoker, the juniors rushed on. It was an extraordinary scene—nothing like it had ever occurred at St. Jim's before. It was unprecedented, and yet it was a happening that might have been looked for at any time.

Mr. Stoker was the only old boy who had kept his schoolboy resolve. That was all.

Right across the quadrangle went Mr. Ratcliff with flying gown trailing



behind him, his long, thin legs going like clockwork.

He had no clear idea of where he was to find safety; his only thought was to reach some refuge where he could lock himself in from the old boy, who was breathing vengeance and reprisals on his track.

He ran up the steps of the School House and rushed in, nearly knocking over Toby, the House page, who was looking out of the doorway with great interest at the scene.

"Ow!" gasped Toby, as he staggered away from the impact.

Mr. Ratcliff stammered and gasped.

"Toby, keep that ruffian out! I—I will give you a shilling if you keep him out!" And he rushed down the passage.

"Ketch me!" murmured Toby; and he discreetly disappeared before the pursuer made his appearance in the doorway of the School House.

Mr. Ratcliff rushed into the Sixth Form passage. He knew that the first eleven were away that afternoon, but there was a vague idea in his mind that some of the Sixth Formers might have stayed in that half-holiday, and might help him in his extremity.

Cutts of the Fifth came along the passage, and stepped aside to allow him to pass. Mr. Ratcliff caught him by the arm.

"Cutts, pray help me!"

Cutts smiled grimly. He had seen the chase from his study window, and he had no intention whatever of helping his Form-master. He had not forgotten how he had often writhed under the bitter, sarcastic tongue of his Form-master.

"Indeed! What is the matter, sir?" asked Cutts, with the benevolent intention of delaying Mr. Ratcliff until his pursuer could get hold of him.

Perhaps Mr. Ratcliff guessed Cutts' object, or perhaps the heavy footsteps behind freshened his alarm; anyway, he did not stop to answer, but tore on.

Darrell's door opened as he was passing it.

Darrell had seen the chase from his window, and he remembered rather late what Kildare had asked of him. He was coming out to interfere.

Mr. Ratcliff ran right into him as he stepped into the passage.

Darrell stood the shock like a rock,

and put out a strong hand to steady the Housemaster.

"Mr. Ratcliff—"

The Housemaster panted wildly.

"Help me, Darrell!"

"Certainly, sir!" said Darrell, with an involuntary curl of the lip, which Mr. Ratcliff remembered bitterly enough afterwards. Darrell was quite ready to defend the New House master, much as he disliked him; but he felt scorn for a coward, and he could not help showing it.

"That—that ruffian is following me! He—he is armed with—with a cane! I—I—"

"Please step into my study, sir," said Darrell, as respectfully as he could. It was a little difficult to show respect in the circumstances.

Mr. Ratcliff did not step into the study—he bounded in.

"Lock the door, Darrell!" he panted.

Darrell shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't think that is necessary, sir."

"Lock the door!" Mr. Ratcliff's voice rose to a shriek. "That man—that ruffian is desperate! He is a criminal—a hooligan! Lock the door! He is coming!"

Darrell did not touch the door. It might suit Horace Ratcliff to cower behind a locked door, but it did not suit the School House prefect. Darrell contented himself with standing between the breathless Housemaster and the doorway, ready to defend him in case of need.

Then Mr. Stoker's stalwart form was framed in the doorway. His glance went past Darrell to the miserable figure of Mr. Ratcliff.

"Run to earth!" said Mr. Stoker pleasantly.

"Keep him off!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff.

"Might as well have taken it calmly, Ratty," said Mr. Stoker, swishing the cane. "You're going through it, you know. I've come here to cane you, Ratty—and I'm going to cane you. And if anybody gets in my way, that body will get hurt, Ratty! Stand up and take it like a man! Now, then, bend over!"

"You cannot come in here, my man," said Darrell quietly.

Mr. Stoker gave him an amused look. The big Sixth Former was very nearly as tall as Mr. Stoker himself; but he was, after all, only a boy, and Herbert Stoker was an extremely powerful man. It did not seem to Mr. Stoker that it would take him long to rid himself of the School House prefect if he interfered. But Mr. Stoker was good-natured; he did not want to hurt Darrell, and he admired the young fellow's pluck in standing up to him in defence of a master whom he certainly could not like or admire.

"Who's going to stop me?" inquired Stoker.

"I am!"

"Oh, don't be funny!" urged Mr. Stoker. "Run away and play, and leave me to deal with Ratty! Be a good boy!"

Darrell smiled, but he did not stir. A single glance at Mr. Stoker showed him that the boxer would be a formidable proposition to tackle, and certainly Darrell's heart was not in the matter. But he had his duty to do, and he was going to do it.

And he had confidence in himself, too. But Mr. Ratcliff hadn't. He did not think for a moment that Darrell would be able to stand up to the old boy, and he shrieked for help.

"Help! Help!"

"Mein gootness! Vat is all tat, den?" Herr Schneider, the German master at St. Jim's, looked in at the doorway through his large spectacles in great astonishment. "Mein gootness, vat is der mattair, after?"

"Get out!" said Mr. Stoker, with a swish of the cane; and Herr Schneider jumped back into the passage as if he had received an electric shock.

"Mein gootness!"
"Help!" babbled Mr. Ratcliff.

"Dear me! What ever is the matter?" It was little Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, this time. He looked into the study in great alarm. "My dear sir, who are you? What ever does this mean? Dear me, I remember you now! You were once in my Form here. Is not your name Stoker?"

"How do you do, Mr. Lathom?" said Stoker genially. "I'm glad to see you!"

"I'm glad to see you, Stoker. But what is the meaning of this scene? What is the matter with Mr. Ratcliff?"

"Help!"
"Nothing, sir, so far—only funk!" said Stoker cheerfully. "I'm going to cane him, that is all, sir."

"Cane him?" gasped Mr. Lathom. "Cane a Housemaster? Are you out of your senses, Stoker?"

"Not at all, sir."
"Then pray give up such a ridiculous idea, and retire at once," said Mr. Lathom with a great deal of dignity. "I am surprised at you, Stoker."

"Sorry, sir, but I'm keeping an old promise I made to Ratty. I must request you to step out of this room, sir," said Mr. Stoker respectfully but very firmly.

"I refuse to do so, Stoker. I will not permit violence—"

"Excuse me, sir—"

"Bless my soul—oh!"

Mr. Lathom found himself lifted by his shoulders and dropped gently into the passage. He staggered against the wall, out of breath, and in a state of great bewilderment.

"Mein gootness!" repeated Herr Schneider. "Dis takes vot you call de gake! Mein gootness!"

The two masters looked on blankly. Herbert Stoker could have knocked either of them into the middle of next week, if not the whole length of the calendar, with one hand, so it was evidently impossible for them to restrain him. After all, it was up to Mr. Ratcliff to look after himself.

Stoker turned to the shivering Housemaster again with a grim smile.

"Now, Mr. Ratcliff, if you are ready—"

"Help!"

"Bend over!"

"Keep him off!" moaned the New Housemaster. "Keep him off!"

"For the last time, Mr. Ratcliff—"

"Keep him off!"

Stoker strode forward. Darrell stood like a lion in his path. Mr. Stoker had to pause.

"Get aside, my lad!" he said kindly enough.

Darrell shook his head.

"You mustn't touch Mr. Ratcliff," he said quietly.

"I don't want to hurt you, my boy," said Mr. Stoker, slowly and deliberately. "But if you don't stand aside I shall throw you out of the study."

"Throw away!"

"What?"

"You can't touch Mr. Ratcliff," said Darrell. "I don't say that I don't sympathise with you to some extent, Stoker. But I've got my duty to do."

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as a prefect of the school. You won't lay hands on Mr. Ratcliff!"

Mr. Stoker laid the cane down upon the study table, and pushed back his cuffs.

"I'm sorry!" he said. "I don't want to hurt you. But I came here to cane Ratty, and I'm going to cane Ratty. I give you one minute to step out of the way!"

"Don't go, Darrell!" quavered Mr. Ratcliff.

"I don't intend to go, sir."

"Time's up!" exclaimed Mr. Stoker, beginning to get angry. "Now, my lad, out you go! Be sensible! I warn you that I am a boxer by profession, and I shall wipe up the floor with you in a few seconds. I'm rather a hard hitter, but I don't want to hit you. Now, will you go?"

"No!"

"Then here goes!" said Mr. Stoker. And he advanced upon Darrell in a scientific attitude. Evidently he expected to wipe Darrell off the face of the earth at the first onset.

But Darrell was a somewhat tougher customer than Mr. Stoker anticipated. His hands went up like lightning, and Mr. Stoker was met with a left and a right that sent him reeling back towards the doorway.

"My hat!" gasped Mr. Stoker, more surprised than hurt—though he was, as a matter of fact, hurt, too.

Outside the study doorway the juniors were crowding, and from fifty fellows there came a roar:

"Go it, Darrell!"

"Go it, Stoker!"

And in another moment Darrell and Stoker were "going it."

CHAPTER 8.

Something Like a Fight!

TOM MERRY & CO. looked on eagerly.

There was much crowding and shoving for places in the passage. The show was better, as Monty Lowther remarked, than any film. The Terrible Three had good places, almost in the doorway, and Figgins & Co. and the chums of Study No. 6 were close behind. Kangaroo, Clifton Dane and Bernard Glyn, and Redfern, Owen and Lawrence, and Reilly and Lumley-Lumley and Levison, were pressing on behind them, shoving for a view. And behind them again were dozens more, all eager for the merest glimpse into the study. Herr Schneider and Mr. Lathom were surrounded and almost overwhelmed by the deluge of juniors.

That Darrell would take up the cudgels for the unpopular Housemaster was quite unexpected, at least, by the juniors. Their sympathies were all with Mr. Stoker against Mr. Ratcliff; but their feelings were divided when Darrell stepped into the matter. Darrell was very popular. So they looked on eagerly, and shouted encouragement to both sides, in the certain and happy prospect of seeing a good "mill."

And a good "mill" it was.

Mr. Stoker was attacking hotly, and Darrell was standing up to him in a way that showed that he deserved his reputation as the best boxer at St. Jim's.

Hammer-and-tongs they went at it.

Mr. Ratcliff jumped out of the way as Darrell was driven back, and Mr. Stoker came close to him. But Mr. Stoker was too busy to think of his old enemy just now. The prefect recovered his ground, attacking in his turn, and

Mr. Stoker had to recede. Mr. Ratcliff had dodged to the window, which was open, and he remained there, apparently ready to repeat his acrobatic performance in case of need.

Leaning on the window, he watched the conflict breathlessly, palpitating.

Crash!

Darrell staggered back from a heavy right-hander that caught him on the jaw, and he bumped into the study table. Books and papers were scattered over the floor and a stream of ink from the inkpot. Mr. Stoker could have delivered a knock-out blow at that moment, but he didn't. He dropped his hands and stepped back to give Darrell time.

"Good man!" said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah! I told you fellows that Stokah was a sportsman! Bwavo, Stokah!"

Darrell recovered himself, panting.

"Won't you chuck it now, young 'un?" asked Mr. Stoker appealingly. "It isn't your business, you know. Chuck it! I say it as a friend!"

"Can't be done!" said Darrell.

"You'll get hurt!"

"Very likely. Can't be helped!" said Darrell cheerfully. "You're not going to touch a master of St. Jim's while I'm here!"

"Then I shall have to finish you!" said Mr. Stoker regretfully. "I'm sorry to do it, for you are a good plucky chap. I'd like to have you in my ring. You'd make a splendid second to Wallaby Bill, and you could go on in his place when he's squiffy—as he often is. Remember, when you leave St. Jim's, if you haven't another opening, there's a job waiting for you in the Flying Ring."

Darrell laughed.

"I'll remember," he said. "But won't you chuck it now, Mr. Stoker? I've no quarrel with you, only I can't let you touch Mr. Ratcliff."

"I've waited ten years for Ratty," said Mr. Stoker, "and I'm not missing the chance. It may be years before I'm in this neighbourhood again, and I'm too busy a man to come here specially for Ratty. If you won't get out, young 'un, come on!"

And they started again. This time Darrell had the advantage. Much to his surprise, Mr. Stoker was treated to a tremendous upper-cut that lifted him from the floor, and he staggered back, and sat down upon the study carpet with a heavy bump.

"Ow!" he ejaculated.

"Well hit!" roared Figgins.

"How's that?" chuckled Tom Merry.

"Not out!" snorted Mr. Stoker, scrambling to his feet.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The pugilist rushed at Darrell, hitting out furiously. Darrell had to give ground before the rushing attack, but he guarded well, and Mr. Stoker drove him round the room without getting in a single blow. Then Darrell feinted with his left, and caught Mr. Stoker napping, bringing in his right with a swift and tremendous drive that sent the pugilist to the floor once more.

This time Mr. Stoker was not in such a hurry to rise. He sat blinking rather dazedly at the prefect of the School House.

"Well, you are a corker, I must say!" he exclaimed, after a breathless pause. "You'd make a topping boxer, you would indeed! But I'm going to lick you. I'd rather lick you than Ratty now!"

Darrell smiled.

The conflict was telling upon him, but he was beginning to enjoy it. He

had no equal as a boxer at St. Jim's. Even Kildare was not quite up to his form. Mr. Stoker was the toughest opponent he had ever tackled, and he felt that he was getting the better of the combat, and he was exhilarated. As the poet has expressed it, he felt the "stern joy that warriors feel in foemen worthy of the steel."

Mr. Stoker rose a little heavily, and came on again.

His Roman nose looked more Roman than ever, and there was a little trickle of red from the corner of his mouth. He was a little unsteady on his "pins," too.

But he was as full of pluck as a bulldog, and he was determined not to be beaten by a boy.

They closed in combat again, the crowd in the passage watching the

"Stoker wants some new teeth, I think. Anyway, he wants a new nose!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Darrell's gaining ground. Stand up to him, Stoker!"

"Go for his nose, Darrell! His nose can't stand much more!"

"Well hit—oh, well hit, sir!"

"He's down!"

"Count—count!" yelled Lowther.

Arthur Augustus jerked out his famous gold ticker, and began to count as if he were counting time in the ring:

"One—two—three—four—five—six—seven—Up again, bai Jove!"

"Pile in, Stoker! You're not beaten yet!"

"My hat, Darrell's getting it hot!"

"There goes Stoker's nose again!"

"Is it a nose? It doesn't look like a nose now!"

with a painful grin, as Tom Merry helped him to rise. "Ow! I'm done, anyway. You've beaten me fair and square, young 'un, though I'd never have believed there was an amateur who could do it. I wish I could get you into my ring. You'd be worth quids to me. You've won fair and square, and Ratty doesn't get his licking."

"Shame!" came several voices from the passage.

The juniors were delighted with old Darrell's performance as a pugilist, but they were keenly disappointed that Mr. Ratcliff had not received his licking. They had been looking forward to it nearly all day.

Mr. Stoker grinned faintly.

"Perhaps I'll find another opportunity, Ratcliff," he said. "I shan't forget you. But this lad has saved you



The cane sang in the air, and Mr. Ratcliff made a desperate plunge through the open window just in time. There was a crowd of juniors in the quadrangle, and they stared in amazement as the New House master came leaping through the window.

scene with breathless eagerness. Other fellows were crowding along the passage, shoving wildly for a place, but there was no place to be had. They yelled out to the fellows in front for news of what was going on, and the fellows in front shouted to them at every fresh turn of the conflict.

"Stokah's gettin' it hot, bai Jove! Don't shove, Kewwuish! Stokah's just got a feahful cosh on the nose!"

"How's Darrell getting on?" roared Wally D'Arcy of the Third, from behind.

"Dawwell's nose looks twice its size! Bai Jove, that was a stunnah!"

"Stoker's down again! No, he ain't! Well done!"

"Go it!"

"My hat, Darrell's down!"

Bump!

"Darrell's finished—no, he's up again! Go it, Darrell!"

"Great Scott, that was a thump!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, this is ripping! Go it!"

Crash!

"Stoker's down again!"

"Down and out! Bravo, Darrell!"

"One, two, three, four, five, six,

seven, eight, nine, out—"

Mr. Stoker did not rise. He sat dazedly on the floor, with his back against the study wall, gasping.

Darrell, looking decidedly groggy, but good for another round or two, stood panting for breath. Tom Merry ran into the study and bent over Stoker.

"Finished, old chap?"

"Yes," said Mr. Stoker faintly. "I'm finished. I didn't know I was going to run up against a boxer here. Oh, my nose!"

"I'm sorry!" gasped Darrell.

"You've given me pretty nearly as much as I've given you, Stoker."

"I think I have," said Mr. Stoker,

this time. Darrell, you're a plucky chap, and I don't bear any malice for a licking fair and square in a fight. There's my fist on it!"

He held out his hand and Darrell grasped it with cheerful friendliness. Darrell's face was darkly bruised; his nose was swollen, and his left eye was closing; he was aching all over. But his feelings towards the redoubtable old boy were quite friendly. He shook hands with Mr. Stoker in the most cordial manner.

Mr. Ratcliff seemed to recover from a sort of trance as he realised that his enemy was defeated, and that he had nothing to fear. He made a stride towards Darrell.

"Darrell, I am surprised to see you shaking hands with that ruffian! I forbid you to do anything of the kind."

Darrell looked at him without troubling to conceal his contempt.

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"I shall please myself in that, Mr. Ratcliff!" he said coldly.

Mr. Ratcliff gritted his teeth. He had been saved from a licking, and from being made to look utterly ridiculous in the eyes of the whole school, and he might have been grateful. But gratitude did not enter into Mr. Horace Ratcliff's composition.

"That man must be detained," he said, as Mr. Stoker turned towards the door. "I will telephone at once for the police, and give him in charge for assault."

CHAPTER 9.

Darrell's Defiance!

"SHAME!"

It was a yell from the fellows crowded in the passage. That Mr. Ratcliff, who had fled ignominiously from the old boy, and who had not been hurt at all, should think of such a mean revenge upon the boxer, disgusted all who heard him.

They forgot, for the moment, that he was a master, and expressed their feelings loudly.

Mr. Ratcliff gave the juniors a withering glare.

"Silence! You juniors go at once—go, I say! I will be obeyed! Darrell, detain that man here while I telephone for the police."

Darrell looked at him fixedly. "I will do nothing of the sort," he said.

"Good old Darrell!"

"This way, Stoker!"

"Hook it!"

"Darrell!" Mr. Ratcliff almost choked with rage and chagrin. "I command you! However, I will detain him myself. Herr Schneider, perhaps you will have the kindness to ring up the Rylcombe police station and ask for a constable to be sent."

Herr Schneider blinked at him through his glasses.

"Nein," he said briefly. "I will not do that, Herr Ratcliff! Let the man go!"

"Mr. Lathom, then—"

"Really, Mr. Ratcliff, Stoker has done you no harm, and he is an old boy of St. Jim's," said Mr. Lathom mildly. "Pray let the matter end here!"

"I refuse to let the matter end here! I will give him in charge, and I will detain him myself!" exclaimed Mr. Ratcliff.

Mr. Ratcliff was brave enough now. The licking Herbert Stoker had received had been so tremendous that he could hardly keep on his feet. One of his eyes was closed, the other blinking painfully. Stoker had kept up the fight till his last ounce of strength had gone, and he could hardly see. Mr. Ratcliff would not have had the slightest difficulty in handling him in that condition, as he well knew; hence his sudden outburst of courageous determination.

The old boy gave him a bitter look. "Same old Ratty!" he remarked. "Bully, tyrant, and coward! Same old Ratty!"

"Silence, you ruffian! I will not allow you to leave this study," said Mr. Ratcliff, planting himself in the pugilist's way. "You will remain here until a constable comes to take you in charge."

"Think of the scandal, Mr. Ratcliff," murmured Mr. Lathom feebly.

"I refuse to consider that for a moment. This ruffian shall suffer for his outrageous conduct."

Darrell's eyes glinted.

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"Let Mr. Stoker pass, sir," he said quietly.

"Hold your tongue, Darrell!"

"I will not hold my tongue, sir, and I will not hold my hands, if you do not get out of my study immediately," said Darrell, flaming out. "I have protected you when you fled to me like a coward for protection, Mr. Ratcliff."

"Darrell, how dare you!"

"You are forcing me to say what I think, sir. And I repeat that I will not allow Mr. Stoker to be detained here."

"You—you will not allow!" Mr. Ratcliff spluttered with enraged astonishment. "You will not allow! You dare to address me in that manner, Darrell! You are out of your senses! I will report this to the Head when he returns."

"Report and be hanged!" said Darrell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's wight, Dawwell. Stand up to the wottah!"

"You shall be expelled from the school, Darrell, if you dare to interfere with me in the slightest degree!" howled Mr. Ratcliff.

Darrell's lips curled scornfully.

"I don't think the Head would expel me for acting like a decent chap, sir," he said. "But I am quite willing to risk it. I will not have Mr. Stoker interfered with. If you wanted to deal with him yourself you should have done so without calling me into the matter at all. You have placed the matter in my hands now, and I shall say the last word. Let Mr. Stoker pass at once."

Darrell's patience was exhausted. He advanced upon Mr. Ratcliff, looking as if he would knock him flying if he refused. The Housemaster weakened at once. Darrell was very nearly done in by that tremendous scrap, but he had plenty of vigour left to deal with Mr. Ratcliff. The Housemaster backed away promptly.

"I—I will not enter into any vulgar scene of violence with you, Darrell. But I shall report this to the Head immediately he returns."

"I have told you what I think about that," said Darrell contemptuously.

Mr. Ratcliff, choking with rage, strode from the study. The crowd in the passage gave him a deep groan as he disappeared.

"You can clear now, Stoker," said Darrell, with a grin. "You had better go before the Head comes back."

Mr. Stoker's bruised and battered countenance wore a look of distress.

"I hope this won't get you into trouble with Dr. Holmes, young 'un," he said.

"I don't think so," said Darrell. "Anyway, you'd better hook it. I think I'll go and bathe my face. It needs it."

Tom Merry gave the exhausted Mr. Stoker an arm, and helped him out of the study. The young pugilist leaned heavily upon Tom Merry as they went down the passage. A crowd accompanied them into the quadrangle.

"Awfully sorry you got licked, Stokah, old chap," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "It was beastly bad luck Dawwell chippin' in like that. Of course, he was bound to do it, as Watty thwew himself undah his pwotectioun."

"It's all right," groaned Mr. Stoker.

A crowd of juniors helped the old boy down to the gates, and out into the road. The pugilist sank down on the grassy bank beside the lane. He was recovering a little, and after a rest he felt a lot better. Tom Merry fetched

him a drink of water, and then, thanking the juniors for their kindness, he set off for Wayland.

"Well, this has been a day," Monty Lowther remarked, as the juniors walked back into the quad.

"But what do you think of Ratty?" asked Kangaroo in deep disgust. "He's going to get Darrell into trouble with the Head, after the splendid way old Darrell stood by him. 'He's a—a—well, there isn't a word!'"

And all the fellows agreed that there was no expression in the English language strong enough to describe Mr. Horace Ratcliff and his conduct.

CHAPTER 10.

Mr. Ratcliff Is Not Satisfied!

"SHOCKING!" exclaimed the Head.

Mr. Ratcliff had lost no time. As soon as Dr. Holmes returned to St. Jim's, the New House master presented himself with his report of the unprecedented happenings of the afternoon.

The Head was greatly shocked. Sometimes he had considered the Housemaster a little too severe, and had, indeed, told him so. But he was far from knowing Mr. Ratcliff as the boys knew him. And, to his mind, it was outrageous that an old boy should ever have dared to come back to the school to whop his Housemaster.

The scene in the School House, as Mr. Ratcliff described it, made the Head greatly indignant. But when Mr. Ratcliff went on to report Darrell, and pressed for him exemplary punishment, Dr. Holmes' expression changed.

"Really, Mr. Ratcliff—" he said.

"The boy defied me openly, in the presence of several masters and a crowd of juniors," said Mr. Ratcliff. "But for him, the ruffian would have been detained, and given into the custody of a constable."

"Which would have caused a terrible scandal," said the Head dryly. "I am afraid, Mr. Ratcliff, that in this you allowed your natural indignation to outweigh your good judgment."

Mr. Ratcliff set his thin lips hard.

"But the rascal should be punished, sir—"

"It seems that he has been punished," said the Head. "I think it would be more judicious to let the matter drop. After all, you have received no hurt. As for punishing Darrell, surely it would look a little ungrateful on your part, Mr. Ratcliff, when the boy, on your own showing, defended you from attack."

"But the example of his insolence—"

"I will send for him," said the Head. He rang, and sent Toby to fetch Darrell.

Darrell was having tea with Kildare and Langton when the House page came to find him. The footballers had returned, and Kildare and Langton were listening with keen interest to Darrell's story of the afternoon's happenings. They had noticed the state of his face at once.

"Please, Master Darrell, the Head wants you," said Toby, putting his shock-head in at the door.

Darrell smiled quietly as he rose.

"Is Mr. Ratcliff with the Head, Toby?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Very well; cut off!"

"Means trouble, I suppose?" said Kildare anxiously.

"Ratty won't forgive me for not letting him jump on Stoker when he was down," said Darrell. "Stoker is a thoroughly decent chap, and I like him. Ratty would have piled on him with pleasure when he couldn't defend himself, and I stopped him."

"And the beast has reported you, after what you did for him?" said Langton.

"Yes; I expected that."

"I hardly think the Head will be down on you," remarked Kildare. "He's a bit more of a sport than Ratty. But if there's trouble, we'll stand by you. We'll get the whole of the Sixth to go to the Head about it."

Darrell nodded and quitted the study. He could not help feeling a little uneasy as he made his way to the Head. He had acted rightly, according to his views; and Mr. Ratcliff had certainly been guilty of the blackest ingratitude and meanness. But the prefect could not be sure how the Head would look at the matter.

But he need not have been alarmed. The moment the Sixth Former entered the Head's study, Dr. Holmes uttered an exclamation of concern.

"Darrell! My dear boy! Your face—"

"It's all right, sir," said Darrell, with a rather twisted smile. "I got rather knocked about this afternoon, but Mr. Ratcliff will tell you I was not to blame for getting into the fight."

"You are terribly bruised," said the Head. "You received these injuries in defending Mr. Ratcliff?"

"I got them in the fight with Stoker, sir."

Dr. Holmes looked at Mr. Ratcliff. His expression made the mean-souled man feel a little uncomfortable.

"Darrell has been injured in this manner in your defence, Mr. Ratcliff," said the Head in a cutting tone. "Yet you report him for punishment. I fail to understand this."

"I do not deny that Darrell did his duty, so far as that went," said Mr. Ratcliff. "What I complain of is his insolence to me afterwards."

"I think you might make some allowance for the boy, considering what he has gone through," said the Head tartly. "As for doing his duty, Darrell has done more than that. It is not generally considered a regular part of a

prefect's duties to protect a House-master from assault, and to face a grown-up man in a personal conflict. I think Darrell has acted very bravely and nobly, and I certainly cannot entertain for one moment the idea of punishing him. You may go, Darrell; and I compliment you upon your conduct to-day."

"Thank you, sir!" said Darrell. And without glancing at the New House master, the prefect left the study.

Mr. Ratcliff's face was almost green. The Head's words had humiliated him in the presence of the School House prefect; and his feelings towards Darrell were bitter indeed at that moment. But the Head was not finished yet.

"I must add, Mr. Ratcliff, that I consider Darrell showed more judgment than yourself, in not wishing the police to be called into the matter," he said. "I would not say so before the boy; but I must say so to you. And after he had faced such injuries in your defence, when only his own generous nature called upon him to defend you at all, I must say that a complaint of his conduct comes very ungratefully from you. I must ask you to let me hear no more of the matter."

Mr. Ratcliff rose to his feet. He suppressed his feelings with difficulty.

"Very well, sir," he said, in a gasping voice. "It is, of course, for you to decide."

And he left the study, afraid to trust himself to say more.

But his expression, as he crossed the quadrangle to his own House, was observed on all sides, and the fellows exchanged grins of satisfaction.

They knew that Ratty had been trying to make trouble for Darrell; and his look showed that he had not succeeded. Whereat there was general rejoicing.

Mr. Ratcliff entered his own House, boxed the ears of Redfern and Lawrence in the passage, and went to his study in a most unenviable frame of mind.

He had passed through a terrible afternoon, and he was feeling bitter and revengeful. Mr. Stoker's visit, certainly, was not likely to be repeated. He did not feel in any further danger from that quarter. But he had been made to look utterly ridiculous; and he had been defied.

He ground his teeth as he recalled his hurried and ignominious flight across the quadrangle, with Stoker at his heels. And Darrell had defended him, and saved him from the licking he richly deserved, but his feelings towards Darrell amounted to positive hatred. Even while defending him, Darrell had not disguised his contempt for his pusillanimity; and afterwards he had robbed him of his intended victim, and defied him successfully.

Mr. Ratcliff, as he sat with a black brow and a bitter heart in his study, was thinking chiefly of ways and means of punishing his enemies. And chief among his enemies he counted Herbert Stoker, once of the Fifth, and Darrell, who had stood up in his defence.

CHAPTER 11.

N. G.!

"WE'VE all got to get leave, somehow!" said Tom Merry. It was the following day, and the chums of the School House were in council.

After making the acquaintance of Mr. Stoker, in such peculiar circumstances, Tom Merry & Co. were naturally anxious to go over to Wayland and see Mr. Stoker's show, the Flying Ring, as he called it.

The show was nothing more or less than a travelling boxing show; but Mr. Stoker had hit upon "The Flying Ring" as a more striking title. But the juniors were interested in boxing, and especially interested in Mr. Stoker. They were interested in him as a boxer, as an old boy of St. Jim's, and above all as the fellow who had given the whole school such an exciting time.

They wanted very much to see the show; but there was a difficulty in the way. For the school gates were closed at dusk, and after that it was necessary to obtain a special pass from a master or prefect to go out of gates. And the ring in Wayland Hall did not open till eight o'clock.

And Tom Merry & Co. had a strong suspicion that their object would not exactly be approved of by the powers that were.

They themselves quite approved of (Continued on the next page.)

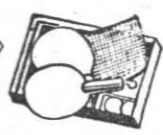
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WRITE TO-DAY FOR FREE ART LIST.

Mr. Stoker and the intention with which he had visited St. Jim's on the previous day. But they knew that the masters took quite a different view.

The Head and all the masters regarded Mr. Herbert Stoker's conduct as shocking to the last degree. Certainly it had been a little out of the common. And any connection with Mr. Stoker would probably be frowned upon by the Head.

"We shall have to be awfully diplomatic about it," said Monty Lowther thoughtfully. "No good saying we want to see Stoker's show. That would nip it in the bud at once."

"Then what are we going to ask leave for?" said Blake.

"We must think of a jolly good reason."

"Yaas, wathah! At the same time, it is impos to pwevawicate on the mattah in any way," remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

So the matter was a difficult one. Leave had to be obtained somehow without disclosing its real object, and at the same time without departing from the truth. It was a difficulty that gave the juniors much food for thought.

Monty Lowther was the fellow who hit upon the solution. The thoughtful frown suddenly departed from his face, and he burst into a chuckle.

"I've got it!" he exclaimed.

"Brooke!"

"Brooke!" repeated Tom Merry.

"What about Brooke?"

"Brooke's the chap to help us."

"Blessed if I see how a Fourth Form kid—a day-boy, too—can help us," said Manners a little peevishly.

"Of course you don't see it," agreed Lowther. "That's why I've got to point it out to you, old chap. Brooke is, as you remark, a day-boy. He goes home to his house near Wayland after lessons. Ergo—that's Latin—"

"Oh, get to the point!"

"Ergo," repeated Monty Lowther calmly, "or therefore, to put it in the vulgar tongue, Brooke's the chap to help us. It isn't uncommon for a fellow to go home to tea with Brooke and stay a few hours with him, is it?"

"But half a dozen fellows can't suddenly go home to tea with Brooke and stay the evening, ass! Brooke doesn't give evening parties."

"One at a time," said Lowther. "It takes a fellow with brains to think these things out, and I've done it. You see, there are a variety of masters and prefects at St. Jim's, and we're not all bound to ask the same one. For instance, I'll go to my respected and honoured Form-master, Mr. Linton, and ask for leave to go home to tea with Brooke and stay a few hours with him. No reason why he should say no."

"Quite so; but—"

"Tommy goes to Mr. Railton and asks leave to go home to tea with Brooke and stay a few hours with him," pursued Lowther. "No reason why he should say no."

"Yes; no—"

"Manners goes to Kildare and asks leave to go home to tea with Brooke and stay a few hours with him—"

"Oh, cheese it!"

"Blake goes to Darrell and asks for leave to go home to tea with Brooke and stay a few hours—"

"Ring off, you ass!"

"Herries goes to Langton and asks leave—"

"Look here—"

"Digby goes to his Form-master, Lathom, and asks leave to—"

"Pathead!"

"D'Arcy goes to Rushden, and—"

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"Shut up!" roared all the juniors together, and Monty Lowther at last kindly consented to ring off.

"It's a jolly good idea!" said Tom Merry thoughtfully, when Lowther had been reduced to silence at last. "If we all go to different masters and prefects we can all get leave—or nearly all of us. I wonder how such a jolly good idea came into your head, Lowther?"

"Some fellows have brains," explained Lowther modestly.

"Yes; but as you're not one of that sort—"

"Look here, you ass—"

"Pway wait a moment," said Arthur Augustus. "If we say we are goin' home to tea with Bwooke, to stay a few hours with him, how can we go to Wayland Hall to see Stokah? That would weally amount to pwevawication."

"Ass!" said Monty Lowther politely.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"We're going home to tea with Brooke," said Lowther. "I suppose we can ask Brooke to take us home to tea, can't we?"

"Yaas; but if we say we're goin' to stay with him for the evenin' we shall be bound to stay with him for the evenin'."

"Well, ass, that's what we're going to do."

"But how are we goin' to see Stokah's show if we stay the evenin' with Bwooke?" asked Arthur Augustus excitedly.

"By the simple process of taking Brooke to the show with us," said Lowther.

"Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that!"

"Naturally you didn't! A certain mental apparatus is required for thinking of things, and it's not in your line at all."

"Weally, you ass—"

"Jolly good!" said Blake. "We can get leave and go to the show, and keep it dark and still stick to the truth like Georgie Washington. It's all serene all along the line. Let's go and see Brooke and put it to him. I don't know whether he's prepared to have an army home to tea with him, but he'll have to stand it, for the good of the cause."

"Oh, that's all wight! Bwooke is a bwick."

And the Co. hurried out in search of Brooke. They found the day-boy of St. Jim's, and put the matter to him, and Dick Brooke entered the scheme wholeheartedly. As a day-boy, it was not necessary for Brooke himself to ask for leave. The Co. proceeded to carry out the scheme for obtaining passes from different quarters, and they were successful beyond their hopes.

They had all been extremely good that day, in the hope of getting leave after locking-up that evening, and they found masters and prefects in a most amenable mood.

As each fellow went to a different master or prefect for leave, the said master or prefect had no suspicion of the fact that a whole army was going out, and leave was granted to each individual junior to go home to tea with Brooke and stay a few hours in the evening with him.

The Co. met in the tuckshop after their successful round, to celebrate their success with ginger-pop. Figgins & Co. came in, looking very glum. The chums of the New House seemed to be in a very despondent mood.

"Watty been goin' for you again, deah boys?" Arthur Augustus asked sympathetically.

Figgins grunted.

"I believe Ratty's got second sight, or else deals in black magic, or something of the sort," he said. "How else could the awful rotter have guessed that we meant to go to Stoker's show?"

"Bai Jove! Are you goin', too?"

"No. We were going, but Ratty's knocked it on the head. We were going to think of some dodge for getting leave for the evening; and Ratty must have guessed it somehow for he's put up a notice in our House that Wayland Hall is out of bounds."

"The awful wottah!"

"Oh, the beast!" exclaimed Tom Merry indignantly. "I suppose he guessed that some of the fellows would like to go over, and he's dropped on it to stop 'em. Lucky he isn't our House-master!"

"We're all going, Figgy," said Blake. "We've all got leave to go home to tea with Brooke; that was our way of putting it, and we're going to take Brooke with us to see the show. See?"

Figgins grinned.

"I'm sorry for you," he remarked.

"Nothing to be sorry about that I can see," said Blake. "Of course, if they knew we were going to the Flying Ring, it would be U P—but they don't know."

"Ratty's gone to see the Head," grunted Kerr. "After posting up that notice in the New House he went over to your old House, and my belief is that he's gone to see the Head about this very matter. He's just as much down on you chaps as he is on us, and the Head will be twisted round his finger. You see, the old boy doesn't approve of Stoker. He can't see what a jolly



Suddenly Darrell fainted with his left and caught Mr. Stoker which connected with the pugilist's jaw

good thing it would be for an old boy to come here and give Ratty a whopping."

"Bai Jove!"

Dismay fell upon the chums of the School House.

They had carried out their little scheme so successfully, and all difficulties seemed to be over, and it had not occurred to them that any interference from Mr. Ratcliff was to be looked for.

Yet they might have expected it. It had been only too easy for the New House master to guess that the juniors would want to visit the Flying Ring, and only too easy for him to put the matter to the Head so that Dr. Holmes would come down heavily on the bare idea.

"My hat!" said Blake, breathing hard. "If—if that rotter has chipped in and queered our evening we'll scalp him!"

"I'll bet you that's just what he's done, though," said Fatty Wynn. "Ten to one you'll find a notice up in your House soon, same as we have in ours."

Fatty Wynn's prediction was right.

Half an hour later Tom Merry & Co. were gathered round the notice-board in the School House, upon which was a new paper in the well-known handwriting of Dr. Holmes.

"For the remainder of this week Wayland Hall is out of bounds."

"H. HOLMES
(Headmaster)."

The juniors gazed at that notice with feelings too deep for words. They recognised the hand of Ratty in it, of course. Their deep-laid scheme went for nothing. As Monty Lowther dolefully remarked, it was N. G.—no good.

"Oh," said Tom Merry at last, with a deep breath, "this simply beats it, Figgy, old man! Don't be surprised if your Housemaster gets lynched some day."

"No such luck!" said Figgins sadly.

"Bai Jove! Are you goin' to stand this, deah boys?"

"We've got to!" growled Blake. "We can't cheek the Head. The place is out of bounds, and that settles it. The remainder of this week! Of course, Stoker's show is only there for this week; it finishes on Saturday. It'll be at Bunchester next week, and that's fifteen miles away. And I'll wager that next week Bunchester will be out of bounds. There's no keeping one's end up with Ratty."

"The awful wottah!"

"He's a blessed thought-reader," groaned Digby, "and he's done us brown! Brooke, old man, you won't have an army home this evening, after all!"

The great scheme was off—very much off—and the feelings of Tom Merry & Co. towards the New House master were simply indescribable.

CHAPTER 12.

A Surprising Proposition!

BUZZ! The telephone bell in the prefects' room in the School House was buzzing. It was Saturday afternoon, and nearly everybody was out of doors. The prefects' room was empty.

The telephone-bell buzzed in vain. Tom Merry heard it as he came along the passage and paused to look in. The juniors sometimes used that telephone with special permission. As there was no one in the room, Tom Merry felt bound to answer the telephone and ascertain who was wanted, with the good-natured intention of calling that person in. So he took the receiver off the hook.

"Hallo!"

"Hallo!" came a voice along the wires, which Tom Merry recognised at once as the voice of Herbert Stoker.

"My hat! Is that you, Stoker?"

"Stoker it is!" came the reply.

"Then you're on the wrong number. This is the School House, not the New House, Stoker. And Ratty's not here. I'm Tom Merry."

"That's all right. It's the School House I want this time," replied Mr. Stoker; and Tom Merry thought he detected a chuckle.

"Right-ho!" said Tom. "Who do you want? By the way, I want to tell you, now I've got a chance, that we were coming over to see your show, only we've been stopped. Ratty persuaded the Head to put Wayland Hall out of bounds, the other day."

"Sorry!" said Mr. Stoker. "I should have been glad to see you and your pals. Though perhaps it's all the better, as matters have turned out. I want to speak to that chap who whopped me the other day—Darrell. Is he there?"

"There's nobody here at present," said Tom; "but if you'll hang on a few minutes I'll call Darrell as quickly as I can."

"Thanks! I'll hang on." Tom Merry hurried out of the prefects' room and looked for Darrell. He

found the prefect under the elms in the quadrangle. Darrell was seated on one of the oak benches, his hands in his pockets, and a thoughtful frown upon his brow. Probably he was thinking out the little problem he had confided to Kildare, being no nearer now to the solution of it.

"You're wanted, Darrell," said Tom Merry. "There's a chap ringing you up on the telephone. I answered the call as there was no one in the prefects' room, and the chap says he wants to speak to you."

Tom Merry did not mention that the "chap" was Mr. Stoker. He was not sure whether Darrell would want to speak to the proprietor of the celebrated Flying Ring, and he did not want Stoker to be disappointed.

"Thank you," said Darrell, rising. "I'll go at once."

Tom Merry could not help wondering what Mr. Stoker wanted with Darrell. But it was no business of his, and he dismissed the matter from his mind, and went to join his chums. Darrell hurried to the prefects' room, and found the caller still waiting on the telephone.

"Hallo! Are you there?" he asked into the receiver.

"Yes, I'm here. Is that Darrell?"

"I'm Darrell. I think I know your voice."

"I'm Stoker."

"I thought so. What's wanted?"

"In the first place, how are you? Got over the scrap?"

"Pretty well," said Darrell good-humouredly. "My eye is still a little off-colour. How is your nose?"

"Still like an overripe strawberry," said Mr. Stoker cheerfully. "I suppose nobody can hear what I'm saying to you?"

"No; I'm alone here."

"Good! Now I'm going to make a business proposition to you."

"Indeed?"

"You don't bear any malice, of course, for that scrap the other day? You had the best of it, anyway."

"Not in the least," said Darrell. "Whether I had had the best or the worst of it wouldn't make any difference. I assure you I feel quite friendly."

"Good enough! I suppose you wouldn't mind helping an old St. Jim's fellow out of a hole?"

"I'd be glad to, if there's anything I could do."

Darrell wondered for a moment whether Mr. Stoker was hard up, and wanted to borrow something. In the present circumstances, Darrell was the last person in the world to be able to help him in that case.

"You could if you would," said Mr. Stoker. "You're the only chap who could, too. To come to business, would twenty pounds be any good to you?"

Darrell started.

"Twenty pounds!" It was the sum he wanted—the precise sum he had mentioned to Kildare. Certainly twenty pounds would be of the greatest "good" to him. But what Mr. Stoker was driving at was a mystery beyond his powers to fathom.

"Well?" came Mr. Stoker's inquiring voice.

"Yes," said Darrell. "I don't understand what you're driving at, but certainly twenty pounds would come in very handy to me just now. As a matter of fact, I'm in bad want of it. What do you mean?"

"Would you like to earn twenty pounds?"

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...rapping. Then he brought over his right in a terrific drive and sent him reeling to the floor.

"Yes, rather!"

"And do an old St. Jim's boy a good turn at the same time—what?"

"Certainly, if possible."

"Good!" said Mr. Stoker. "Then it's all plain sailing. Lemme see. You're in the Sixth, aren't you, and a prefect?"

"Yes."

"Then it would be quite easy for you to walk out of the school this evening, and no questions asked?"

"Quite easy," said Darrell, his wonder increasing. "No difficulty at all about that. As a prefect, I have a key of the side gate, and I keep what hours I like—within reason, of course."

"You could get out this evening, then?"

"Yes. I could ask Langton to see lights out in the Fourth. It's my turn this week, but I could arrange that all right. But what—"

"Then I'll put it to you. You are a first-class boxer. You knocked me out once, and you could do it again."

"I don't know," said Darrell, laughing. "I'd try, if necessary. I hope you're not thinking of coming here to see Mr. Ratcliff again. Enough is as good as a feast, you know."

Mr. Stoker's chuckle was quite audible on the telephone.

"No," he said. "I'm not a hog, and I know when I've had enough. I'm going to see Ratty some other time—when a fellow about your size isn't knocking about, you know. But never mind Ratty now. This has nothing to do with Ratty. I'm in a hole, and you can help me out. You know I'm giving a show here—a boxing show?"

"Yes. I'm sorry to say that it has been put out of bounds for the school."

"Not out of bounds for you, I hope?"

"No; that doesn't apply to prefects," said Darrell. "But—"

"Then it's all serene. I'm in a hole, as I said. My boxing partner, Wallaby Bill—you've heard of Wallaby Bill?"

"No," said Darrell, with a smile.

"Well, Wallaby Bill is a good man, but he's got one weakness—he goes on the flowing-bowl a lot. And now he's been nailed."

"Nailed!" repeated Darrell, puzzled.

"Yes. Last night, after the show, some friends of his took him on a spree, and the silly chump finished up by fighting a policeman. The result—they yanked him off to the stone jug, and he's there for three days, and I'm in a hole. Of course, it serves him right, but it doesn't serve me right, you see. I've got the whole house booked up for this evening. Every seat taken. Saturday night's our great night, you know. The place will be crammed, and if the show doesn't come off I shall have to hand the money back—a good round sum—at the box-office, and the loss will be awful. Besides that, some of the audience are a tough lot from the river—barges and so on—and they may wreck the place if they think they're twisted out of the show after paying their money. You see what an awful hole it is."

"It does seem pretty bad," agreed Darrell.

"I tell you. I was tearing my hair this morning when I heard about Wallaby Bill making a fool of himself like that. I've been trying to bail him out, but it's no go. They won't let him go for love or money. He's blacked the bobby's eye, and the man seems upset about it."

"No wonder!"

"Well, you see, I couldn't help it; but I'm completely done in. Even if the audience don't get ratty and wreck the place, I shall have to give the

money back. I've no time to get any other man to take his place—not a man who's good enough—in a sleepy hollow place like this. I telephoned far and wide, but I've had no luck. I simply can't get a boxer good enough in the time. I'm landed."

"Sorry!"

"Well, will you help me out?" demanded Mr. Stoker.

"I," said Darrell. "I can't help you."

"Yes, you can, if you will. You put up a topping fight when I tackled you the other day, and you could do the same again. You don't mind a hard knock or two. And, you see, the fight in my show has to be the real thing, to give the audience their money's worth. I want you to come over here this evening and take Wallaby Bill's place."

Darrell gasped.

"I? My hat!"

"You could do it," urged Mr. Stoker. "You're the only chap who can help me out of this awful fix. I shall lose sixty solid quid if I have to give the money back at the box-office; and if I put on a 'dud' and a rotten show, the audience will scalp me. And if I don't give a show, and give the money back, they may scalp me all the same. You can do it if you like. Twenty quid for the evening! Not a bad screw, eh, for an hour or so with the gloves on?"

"By George!"

"Nobody need know," went on Mr. Stoker. "The place has been put out of bounds, you tell me, for your school, so there's no danger of any St. Jim's fellow seeing you there. Masters don't go to boxing shows, so there's no danger in that quarter. It will be as safe as houses."

"Safe enough," admitted Darrell.

"And there's no harm in it. A bit against school rules, I'll admit; but there's no harm—not a scrap of harm. You'll help me out of a fearful hole; and one St. Jim's fellow ought to stand by another—what?"

"Ye-es."

"You'll come on in fighting trim. I've got all the things ready for you, and nobody will suspect for a minute that you're a schoolboy. I'll present you to the audience as the Bunchester Bantam, or something like that—see? You'll save me sixty quid and a scalp. And, you'll earn twenty of the best. You needn't mind taking it. You'll have earned it fair and square when you've stood up to me for fifteen rounds."

Darrell drew a deep breath.

"Well, what do you say?" asked Stoker.

"I—I hardly know what to say!" stammered Darrell. "To tell the truth, I'm in great need just now of a sum of money—twenty pounds would do nicely. I want it very specially. And I'd like to do you a good turn. But—the Head—well, it's against all the rules, you know, and I should run the risk of being sacked from the school if it came out. Not that I'm thinking only of that; but—but it isn't exactly in keeping with my duties as a prefect, you know."

"I understand, my boy; but it's doing a good turn to an old boy of St. Jim's, and that will be a sort of make-weight—what?"

Darrell laughed.

"Yes, in a way."

"And the risk's nil. Nobody will know you—not a soul. And you'll look a bit different, too, in boxing rig. And I'll put a touch of make-up on your chivvy to alter you a bit. Safe as houses!"

"Looks like it," agreed Darrell. "I'll run the risk, I think. What I'm thinking of is the breach of rules. Being a prefect, you know—"

"Yes, I know; there's the rub," admitted Stoker. "Still, there's no harm in it, and you'll be doing an old boy a good turn."

"Give me time to think it over," said Darrell, after a pause. "I suppose I needn't answer at once?"

"Right! Ring me up in an hour's time," said Mr. Stoker. "Wayland 101—that's my number. I'll wait."

"Good enough! In an hour, then."

Darrell rang off, and walked out of the prefects' room. His brain was almost in a whirl. The matter required thinking out, and as yet he could not decide what he would do.

Twenty pounds—the sum he needed for a kind and friendly purpose! Twenty pounds—fairly earned by his own efforts! It was a great temptation. And then—to help an old boy out of a desperate difficulty—an old boy whom he had handled severely, and to whom he owed some reparation for that. From one point of view, Mr. Stoker's sudden offer came like manna in the desert. But there was his duty as a prefect of the school!

That he could get permission for such an escapade was, of course, out of the question. And the Head, if he came to hear of it, would be angry—justly angry. It was quite on the cards that Darrell would be "sacked" for it, though his excellent record would stand him in good stead. Yet there was no real harm in it. It was breaking the school rules, certainly; but no harm could be done to a single soul. After all, it would be only a technical fault. And a good turn would be done for a man to whom he owed some reparation, and—

Darrell thought it out, shut up in his study for an hour.

And at the end of that hour the rights and wrongs of the matter seemed to be still equally balanced. But the prefect felt that he would be justified in doing as Mr. Stoker asked him. He could not expect the Head to think so, but the Head would not know. Least said soonest mended! And he thought of the sweet, kind-faced friend he had not seen for so long, who was now in the grip of undeserved poverty, to whom the fund meant so much; and, however generously that fund was subscribed to, there would not be any contributions of twenty pounds. That decided him.

He returned to the telephone, rang up Mr. Stoker, and accepted the offer; and if he had any inward misgivings, they were driven away by the warm gratitude and thanks of the old boy. It was settled now; he had given his word, and Mr. Stoker depended on him, and there was no further room for debate.

CHAPTER 13.

Mr. Ratcliff Means Mischief.

"HALLO!" Darrell's going it again!"

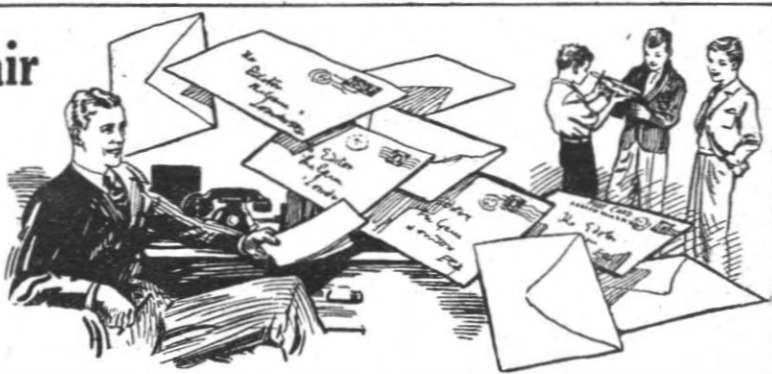
Tom Merry made the remark as the Terrible Three entered the gymnasium later in the afternoon.

A ring of fellows had gathered round to see Kildare and Darrell with the gloves on. Though several days had elapsed since the encounter with Mr. Stoker, Darrell's face still showed very plain traces of it. But physically he was perfectly fit, as he showed now that

(Continued on page 18.)

The Editor's Chair

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



HALLO, Chums! Since the GEM published that great series of stories last year, featuring Reginald Talbot, the schoolboy cracksman, I have had numerous requests from readers for the return of this popular character. In consequence, I have been very busy in this direction. I told you a few weeks ago that the "Toff," as Talbot is known, would be coming back, and now I have more definite news for you.

In a fortnight's time, a magnificent series dealing with the return of Talbot to St. Jim's will be starting in the old paper. It is one of the best series Martin Clifford has ever written, and I am sure readers will enjoy it more than they have ever enjoyed any series which has appeared in the GEM. I shall have more to tell you about the first gripping story next Wednesday, so don't forget to make a "date" with your Editor on this page.

Meantime, Martin Clifford scores another triumph with his next exciting yarn of the St. Jim's chums. It is called:

"THE SECRET SOCIETY OF ST. JIM'S!"

Mr. Clifford strikes a new note with this story, for it tells of the amazing but effective way in which Tom Merry & Co. deal with a difficult and painful situation. The trouble arises from the fact that with the Head ill, and Mr. Railton away, Gerald Knox, the bullying prefect, seizes the opportunity to get his own back on the juniors he dislikes. Lines and lickings fall fast upon Tom Merry & Co. for the slightest offence, and life becomes unbearable under the tyrannical prefect.

Mr. Linton is acting as Housemaster, but not knowing Knox as the juniors do, the Shell master upholds the senior in everything. To stop the prefect's persecution of them without landing

themselves in more trouble, is the aim of Tom Merry & Co., and it is Figgins who hits on the big idea for solving the problem. Thus the Secret Society of St. Jim's is formed—a society whose members, in suppressing bullies and sneaks in the school, are as elusive as they are mysterious to the rest of St. Jim's.

There's not a dull moment in this powerful yarn, and it gets my vote as the best story of the year, so far.

"THE FADDIST FORM-MASTER!"

In this grand Greyfriars yarn Harry Wharton & Co. are in a difficult position, too. Their first taste of the new Remove master, Mr. Chesham, has made them wish for the rapid return of Mr. Quelch, who is away. But there is worse to come for the Removites. Mr. Chesham, the food and health faddist, imposes other and more cranky rules in looking after the health of his Form. Food is cut down to a minimum, medicines and lotions are dispensed for certain juniors, and, to crown everything, Mr. Chesham orders sandals for the Remove to wear! Naturally, Harry Wharton & Co. are not submitting tamely to these impositions, and one result is that they "walk out" on their Form-master in protest!

You'll be greatly amused and entertained by this sparkling effort of Frank Richards. With more illustrated jokes, for which readers are awarded half-crowns, our next fine number is complete. Wednesday is GEM day, chums, and an order to your newsagent will ensure that you are not disappointed.

PEN PALS COUPON 13-2-37

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 this page, to the address given above.

G. Bridgewater, 30, Constance Road, Leicester; age 15-18; overseas.
F. H. Grundy, Estelle, Slade Road, Roughley, Sutton Coldfield, Birmingham; stamps; England, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Japan, U.S.A.
G. Nobleman, 879, Stuart Avenue, Outremont, Montreal, Canada; stamps.
P. Road, 3, Longley Road, Rochester, Kent; age 10-13; views; Australia.

G. Shaw, 12, St. John's Road, Brixton, London, S.W.9; age 11; stamps; Canada or Australia.

K. Harvey, Dublin Road, Lisburn, N. Ireland; stamps.

E. E. Parker, Sea View House, Winneba, Gold Coast; stamps, football.
Bunty Atkinson, "The Pines," Roila, B.C., Canada; pen pals.

Miss A. Jocelyn M. Lockyer, "Southwick," Mark, Highbridge, Somerset; girl correspondents; age 19-20; motor-bikes, books, music, writing, sketching; overseas.

Miss Helena I. M. Lockyer, "Southwick," Mark, Highbridge, Somerset; girl correspondents; age 14-16; interested in old "Gems," "Magnets," "Schoolboys' Owns," "Nelson Lee Library," drawing, cricket.
T. Low, Station House, Church Lenton, Yorkshire; stamps, railways, motor-cars; South Africa (Orange Free State and Transvaal) or Australia.

Edwin Lunn, 9, Victoria Road, Bletchley, Bucks; correspondents in Peterborough.

"HOLDING THE FORT!"

The stay-in strike at Greyfriars is still going strong! The latest adventures of the strikers, who are holding out against their tyrant headmaster, Mr. Hacker, makes very exciting reading in this week's grand cover-to-cover yarn in the "Magnet." In addition, there is a splendid Free Gift for readers—a ripping photogravure postcard. Make sure of the "Magnet" to-day, on sale now, price 2d.

REPLIES TO READERS.

E. Young, Small Heath, Birmingham.—I do not put readers in touch with the "Pen Pals" they select. It is up to you to drop a line direct to the readers you have chosen.

J. Harrison, Morden, Surrey.—There is no weekly publication in which stories of Nipper & Co. appear. The "Schoolboys' Own Library," price 4d., publishes on the first Thursday in every month a grand book-length story of the adventures of the chums of St. Frank's. The yarn on sale now is called: "The Spendthrift of St. Frank's!"

D. L. Naidoo, Durban, Natal, South Africa.—If you wish to correspond with Reader S. D. Briggs, of 27, Stockfield Road, Streatham, S.W. 16, write to him direct. I do not introduce readers to each other by letter.

R. Jackson, Ilford, Essex.—If you are keen to become an author, I shall be only too pleased to read your first story, and let you know whether you have any aptitude for story-writing. I cannot tell you what sort of articles to write and where to send them. You must choose your own subjects, with a definite market in view for the articles.

Chin, chin, chums!

THE EDITOR.

J. E. Cook, 37, Hobmoor Road, Small Heath, Birmingham 10; pen pals. Canada, Australia, Egypt, India, Japan.

Kenneth Morris, 663, Abbey Lane, Park Head, Sheffield 11; age 17-20; sports, motor-cars, photography; England.

C. J. R. Gallant, Tigh-Ban, 20, Gladwin Road, Colchester, Essex; pen pal; age 15-16; America or British Empire.

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Edward Fieldsend, 13, St. Paul's Ave., Hyson Green, Nottingham; age 15-16; stamps, postcards; overseas.

Stanley Goh, 3, Sungei Pinang Lane, Penang, Straits Settlements; age 18; snaps, correspondence, swimming, films, autographs; any part of the world except Malaya.

Sandford Kline, 295, Wright Ave., Toronto, Canada; age 14-18; stamps, sports, coins.

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ne stood up fearlessly to the captain of St. Jim's.

Kildare, big and athletic, and good boxer as he was, found it extremely difficult to keep his end up against Darrell.

The chums of the Shell joined the crowd of onlookers. A mill with the gloves on between Kildare and Darrell was always worth watching. Darrell seemed to be putting more keenness than usual into the contest. As a matter of fact, he was testing his form for the boxing match that night in the ring at Wayland Hall.

He was glad to realise that he was in first-class form. He had never boxed better, and had seldom been more fit. He would do justice to Mr. Stoker's selection of him, and he would fairly earn his twenty pounds.

Now that the matter was decided, Darrell had given up pondering over it; but he felt no misgivings now. Without the twenty pounds to come, he knew that he would have decided in exactly the same manner, for the sake of helping Mr. Stoker out of a hole. And knowing that his motives were disinterested, he was satisfied with what he was going to do.

"Bai Jove, Dawwell's in toppin' form!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, watching the contest with great interest through his eyeglass. "He could make wings wound Mr. Stoker now!"

"My hat! Kildare's down!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

Kildare grinned rather ruefully as he jumped up.

"I'm sorry!" said Darrell. "I didn't mean to drive out like that. I—I—I was thinking—"

"Thinking you were tackling Stoker again—what?" said Kildare, laughing, as he peeled off the gloves. "I'm rather sorry for Stoker that you hadn't the mittens on the other day. Thanks, I'm done. You're too good for me!"

And the two prefects strolled away out of the gym.

The Terrible Three called in at the tuckshop for supplies for tea, and found Figgins & Co. there. They were also laying in supplies—Fatty Wynn laying them in thoroughly on the spot, in the safest place.

"Anything new from Ratty?" asked Tom Merry, as Dame Taggles carried out his somewhat extensive orders.

"Not so far as we're concerned," said Figgins. "But there's something deadly in store for somebody."

"How do you know?" asked Tom, with interest.

"Ratty has been quite good-tempered this afternoon, and I saw him smiling," said Figgins, with a shake of the head. "That means bad business for somebody. I can't quite understand him. He came into the school library while I was there, and, of course, I thought he was after me. But he didn't even look at me. Took out a big law book and marched out with it under his arm."

"A law book!" said Tom Merry, puzzled. "What the dickens does Ratty want with a law book? He isn't studying law, I suppose?"

"And he was poring over it when I took some lines into his study," said Kerr. "And he's told Monteith to keep order in the House this evening, as he's going out, and may be back late."

"Something on," said Figgins. "Luckily it isn't our poor little selves this time. Even Ratty can't go to law with us."

"Trying to work up a case against Stoker, perhaps," said Monty Lowther.

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"But he can't charge him with assault and battery, for he didn't assault and batter him. There isn't any legal punishment for an old boy making a Housemaster hop out of his study window."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Besides, I don't believe the Head would allow him to make the matter public, and make a scandal of it," said Tom Merry. "If anything was going to be done against Stoker, it would have been done already. I suppose Ratty's up to something, but—"

"Oh, he's deep," said Kerr, "very deep! But he can't hurt us with his blessed law books. And I can't see how he can hurt Stoker. I only hope Stoker catches him out some evening, and gives him a jolly good hiding, that's all!"

And the Terrible Three heartily concurred in that pious wish.

Figgins & Co. returned to their House with their supply of provisions. Figgins had some lines to do—lines had been plentiful in the New House of late. While the Co. were getting their tea Figgins did his lines, and took them to Mr. Ratcliff's study. He tapped at the door, but the Housemaster was apparently deeply occupied, for he did not answer. Figgins rapped again, and then Mr. Ratcliff's acid voice snapped out "Come in!"

Figgins went in.

Mr. Ratcliff was seated at the table, with a huge and musty volume before him. It was the big legal book Kerr had seen him poring over an hour before. He was still busy with it.

"My lines, sir!" said Figgins meekly.

"Put them on the table and go!" said Mr. Ratcliff irritably.

And Figgins did so, and left the study, greatly wondering. Why Mr. Ratcliff should be taking legal studies at his time of life was a mystery.

Mr. Ratcliff pored over the volume for some time longer, and then paced up and down the study, his lips set tight and his eyes glinting.

"It is possible," he murmured. "Quite possible! These prize-fighting shows—for they are nothing less, whatever they may be called—frequently pass the limits imposed by the law, and nothing is said or done. This man Stoker is a barbarous villain—an utter brute and hooligan. I have every reason to believe that his show consists of a mere prize fight, thinly disguised under the form of a boxing match. The police do not move in such matters unless the flouting of the law is very flagrant indeed; but if any information is laid by a gentleman in a respectable position they will have no choice but to act."

Mr. Ratcliff gritted his teeth.

"I will visit that brutal show to-night—I will see it with my own eyes. I will watch it from beginning to end. And if Herbert Stoker transgresses the law in a single particular he is open to prosecution, and I will see that information is laid in the right quarter, and that prompt action is taken. I shall not appear in the matter at all, excepting as the person giving information." Mr. Ratcliff did not use the word "informer"; it had an unpleasant sound, even to his ears. "Let his disgraceful exhibition of brute force and hooliganism pass the legal limit for such displays, and he is in my power, and he shall suffer!"

And Mr. Ratcliff smiled—that same smile that Figgins had seen upon his face, and which the sapient Figgy guessed to mean mischief for somebody.

It did mean mischief!

Mr. Ratcliff expected—and hoped—

that Herbert Stoker's display in the Flying Ring at Wayland Hall would exceed the legal sanction for such shows. In that he was extremely likely to be disappointed, for Herbert Stoker was a business man, and not at all likely to get himself and his ring into trouble with the law.

But, all unknown to himself, Mr. Ratcliff was about to make a discovery dangerous enough to one whom he disliked more than he disliked Herbert Stoker. For that evening Darrell was to appear in the boxing-ring at Wayland Hall, never dreaming that Horace Ratcliff, who detested boxing and boxing men and athletes of every sort, would pay a visit to such a place.

From a quarter whence he could not possibly have expected it, there was danger ahead for Darrell, and, all unconscious of it, the School House prefect was making his preparations for his evening show at the Flying Ring.

CHAPTER 14.

The Fighting Prefect!

"GOOD man!" said Mr. Stoker, as he gripped Darrell's hand at the stage-door of the Wayland Hall.

The prefect of St. Jim's, in a long overcoat, with his cap pulled down over his brows, had arrived. Mr. Stoker met him at the door with irradiated face. He was extremely glad and relieved to see Darrell.

"I was afraid something might turn up to stop you," he explained, as he drew Darrell into the house. "But it's all serene!"

"Right as rain!" said Darrell cheerfully. "If you're sure I'll do—"

"You'll do all right. And you're in good time, too. Feeling fit?"

"Fit as a fiddle!"

"Good! The people are coming in already," said Mr. Stoker. "Nearly every seat in the house taken—all excepting a box or two—and a big crowd waiting for the unreserved seats. There will be a record house to-night. I don't dare to think of what would have happened if I'd had to tell the people that the show was off! They're a pretty tough crowd get here, you know; good men enough, but liable to break things if they think they've been spoofed. Give 'em what they've paid for, and they're all right; but if they think they're being spoofed, then the band begins to play. But you're far and away better than Wallaby Bill at his best."

Darrell smiled.

"Glad to hear it!" he said. "When do we go on?"

"An hour's time," said Mr. Stoker. "The show isn't all boxing, you know. That's the piece de resistance; but I have to give them trimmings. I've a trick cyclist and a conjurer and a funny man, and they all do their little bit before the boxing begins. Come along. I'll take you to your dressing-room and show you your outfit. I've got everything ready. And, mind, I'll never forget your kindness, Darrell! You've done me a thumping good turn by coming here, and if I can ever do the same for you, I'm yours to command!"

"Oh, that's all right!"

"The twenty quid is as good as in the bank," said Mr. Stoker. "But I know very well that that isn't your reason for coming. Far as that goes, I'd willingly make it thirty if you asked for it."

The St. Jim's prefect shook his head. "Twenty is the figure," he said. "I wouldn't take a shilling, only I happen

to want the money, and I was hard put to it to raise it. But if you really think I shall have earned it fairly, I'll take it with pleasure, not otherwise."

"Earned it," said Mr. Stoker, with a grin. "I should say so! You've saved me sixty solid quids for a start, and if I went halves with you it would be no more than fair."

"Then I'll take the twenty after the show!" said Darrell.

"Good enough!"

They reached the dressing-room, and Mr. Stoker looked after Darrell there with anxious care. The Sixth Former of St. Jim's changed into boxing garb, and certainly his appearance was very different when he had changed. Then Mr. Stoker opened the make-up box.

"It isn't in the least likely that anybody will be in the audience who's seen you before," he observed, "and nobody would guess that the Bunchester Bantam was a Public schoolboy. But my maxim is—you can't be too careful!"

"Quite right."

Mr. Stoker gave a few artistic touches to the prefect's face, which made a considerable difference. The touches were few and light, but Herbert Stoker had a skilled hand. Darrell, looking in the glass, smiled at the result. He looked as if he had an incipient beard and moustache, badly shaved. And his eyebrows and eyelashes were darker than was natural.

"I think I shall pass," he remarked. "Nobody would know me now, unless he was very well acquainted with me indeed. And as nobody from St. Jim's can be here, I shan't have any acquaintances in the place—only people who may have seen me casually, at the most."

"That's so," agreed Mr. Stoker. "Safe as houses."

From the dressing-room, Darrell could hear the noise of the audience applauding the trick cyclist. The prefect was not feeling in the least nervous. The affair was easier than he had anticipated. He was going into the ring to do what he could do well, and there was no occasion for nerves. And the risk was nil, so far as he could see.

After the boxing show, he would return to St. Jim's with twenty pounds in his pocket, as if he were returning from an evening's saunter; and no questions would be asked of a prefect. Langton had taken on his duty of shepherding the Fourth Form to their dormitory that night, and Langton had asked no questions. It was usual enough for the prefects to do one another those little services.

Now that he was fairly in for it, indeed, Darrell felt a certain amount of keenness for the task before him. He was a fine boxer, and he was devoted to boxing, and this was the first chance he had had of facing a good-class pugilist in the ring with the "mittens" on. He was feeling extremely satisfied that Mr. Herbert Stoker had had the happy thought of ringing him up and making that startling proposition to him.

"Only a few minutes now," said Mr. Stoker, as a bell rang. "Feeling pretty fit—what?"

"Quite!"

"Pity you aren't in the business," said Stoker regretfully. "There's room for you in my show. Room for a good man anywhere. When you leave St. Jim's, think of me. Nothing to laugh at. I was a St. Jim's fellow once, and I had to live, and I turned to this, and I'm making a good thing of it. Better than competing with a crowd for a rottenly paid job at tutoring, I think. Well, come on!"

Darrell caught his breath as he

entered the lighted ring with Mr. Stoker.

The ring had been roped off in professional style, and the seconds were ready at the corners, and the referee was in his place. The house was crowded. Saturday night, as Mr. Stoker had said, was his great night. The expensive seats were all filled, and in the cheaper seats the people were crammed.

Some of the audience, certainly, were rough-looking fellows enough; but quite easy to deal with so long as they were given what they had paid for. But Darrell, as he looked over the sea of faces, realised that Mr. Stoker had been

before they formed an opinion. If they had their money's worth, they would be satisfied; if not, there would be trouble. That was the attitude of the audience, and Mr. Stoker knew it; and he was more glad than ever that he had captured Darrell of St. Jim's for the show, and had not attempted to pass off a "dud" fight before that critical gathering.

The fat and florid man who acted as the referee and timekeeper took out a watch.

Darrell had been a little dazzled at first by the glare of light and the sea of faces; but during Mr. Stoker's speech he had had time to pull himself



Mr. Ratcliff felt sick with fear as Stoker's iron grip was laid on his shoulder. "Darrell!" he shrieked. "Darrell! Come back! I promise I will not make that report! Darrell, help me!"

quite right in his fear that if the audience were disappointed there would be "trouble." If that rough-and-ready crowd had fancied themselves tricked or bamboozled, there would probably have been very serious trouble indeed.

Mr. Stoker addressed a brief speech to the audience. There was some growling as he explained that Wallaby Bill had met with a slight accident, and was not able to appear as usual that evening. But it quieted down on his further announcement that he had engaged the Bunchester Bantam to take the place of the absent Wallaby, and declared that the Bantam was a better man than Wallaby Bill any day of the week. He added that the proof of the pudding was in the eating, and that the ladies and gentlemen had only to watch the exhibition of the great British art of boxing to see for themselves whether the Bantam was a good man or not.

There was a cheer or two, probably from Mr. Stoker's own friends judiciously posted "in front," and for the most part the audience accepted Mr. Stoker's statements in a non-committal way. But they were good-humoured, and evidently resolved to see the fight

together. He was quite cool and collected now.

"Seconds out of the ring!"

The audience settled down to watch with keen interest. There were audible and complimentary comments upon Darrell's appearance. He looked splendidly fit and well in the scanty garb which showed off his well-developed form to advantage.

"Time!"

They started.

The first round was quite exciting. The audience were soon in a state of breathless attention. This was no dud fight—the blows were real enough, and only the gloves prevented them from being extremely painful. And the boxing was splendid—a joy to the eyes of sporting men.

While the first round was in progress, a thin, angular gentleman entered a box and sat down, and fixed his eyes upon the figures in the ring.

Darrell was too busy now to have eyes for the audience, and he did not notice the newcomer, but the newcomer noticed him.

For it was Mr. Horace Ratcliff, the THE GEN LIBRARY.—No. 1,513.

Housemaster of the New House at St. Jim's.

Mr. Ratcliff started as his eyes fell upon the young boxer.

He had come there specially for Mr. Stoker's benefit, in the hope of seeing something that would enable him to play, with success, the discreditable part of the common informer.

But as he watched Darrell he forgot all about his intentions towards Mr. Stoker.

That a prefect of St. Jim's could be there, in the ring, boxing with a pugilist before a rough audience, seemed so utterly impossible that Mr. Ratcliff's first belief was that it was only a case of a chance resemblance.

The changes Mr. Stoker had made in Darrell's appearance, too, puzzled him at first. The appearance of a mottled chin and a budding moustache, and the dark eyebrows, did not disguise Darrell, but they made his aspect very different from what was usual.

Yet Mr. Ratcliff, though he did not actually think that it was Darrell, watched the young boxer with an intent gaze, his eyes glinting. If such a thing had only been possible—if it had only been Darrell, playing so wild a prank—what a complete revenge would have been in his hands. That was his spiteful thought. A report to the Head—and instant expulsion from the school for the unlucky prefect—and Horace Ratcliff would have been very satisfied indeed.

"Time!"

The first round was over. Darrell retired to his corner of the ring, and allowed his seconds to fan his heated face. He glanced over the sea of faces, over the keenly interested crowd. It was quite by chance that his eyes fell upon a thin, hard face looking from a box, with gaze intent upon him.

He started violently.

For a moment the colour wavered in his cheeks. Then he pulled himself together. In that moment his eyes had met Mr. Ratcliff's, and he knew that the Housemaster recognised him.

But it was evidently not Mr. Ratcliff's intention to interfere with the fight. He had no authority over a School House prefect; and it would have been scarcely safe for him to step between that rough audience and their entertainment. That was not Mr. Ratcliff's idea at all. He settled down in his box to watch, with a grim smile upon his face. He held the fate of the boy he hated in the hollow of his hand, and there was no mercy in his hard heart.

Darrell did not tell Mr. Stoker of his discovery. It was too late to be of any use. And he would not spoil the show at the last moment. Matters would not be any worse if he finished the fight. That much he could do, at all events; and then he could go home to St. Jim's and face the music. There was no need for Stoker to be distressed about the matter. He could do nothing.

And Darrell, holding himself with an iron hand, stepped forward at the call of time, and faced Herbert Stoker for the second round as coolly and composedly as if he had not been under the gloating eyes of his enemy.

CHAPTER 15.

Mr. Ratcliff Makes Terms!

"BRAVO!"

"Good man!"

"Well done, the Bantam!"

Round after round had been fought out, and the audience were growing enthusiastic. Mr. Ratcliff watched

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"Hey! What are you doing with that fife?"

"Oh, excuse me, warder! I hope you don't mind if I manicure my nails!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to R. Smith, 24, Glasgow Street, Dumfries.

the fight in silence from his box, with a grim smile on his thin lips. He was happy. He had given up the hope of catching Mr. Stoker out on a legal point.

Mr. Ratcliff could regard the boxing contest as a prize fight if he chose, but the law would not regard it so, and he was helpless in that direction. But he felt that his visit to Wayland Hall was well repaid. One whom he disliked much more than he disliked Stoker—one who had coolly defied him—one who had shown open contempt for him—was at his mercy. That was more than enough to make Mr. Ratcliff feel that his money and his time had been well spent.

Darrell was putting up a splendid fight. As if to show the spying master that he cared nothing for him, he was fighting his very best, with cool disregard of the gloating eyes that watched him. Round after round, and the audience cheered and yelled. They favoured the Bantam now, as they called him, little dreaming that the boyish champion was a prefect of a Public school a few miles away.

Ten rounds had been fought out, and a good deal of punishment had been given and received. As Darrell's face still bore the marks of his former combat with Mr. Stoker, the punishment he had received made little difference to his appearance.

He was still going strong after ten rounds. The fight was to be fifteen rounds. But it looked as if Mr. Stoker would not last the full contest.

Not that Mr. Stoker minded. He was only keen on giving his audience a first-class boxing show, and he was assuredly doing that.

Twelve rounds—thirteen; and Mr. Stoker looked very groggy indeed as he stepped up at the call for the fourteenth.

Bump!

Mr. Stoker was down, and the referee began to count. The audience hung breathless on the counting.

"One—two—three—four—five—six—seven—eight—nine—out!"

Mr. Stoker had not risen.

There was a thunderous burst of cheering. Mr. Stoker's seconds raised him and helped him out of the ring. Darrell

retired, with the cheers of the enthusiastic onlookers ringing in his ears. He had done well. In the dressing-room, Herbert Stoker, looking already somewhat recovered, gripped his hand warmly.

"Your fight!" he said. "And a splendid fight, too! I could have got up, but I'd had enough. I've given them good enough value for their money—what? But you'd have knocked me out in the next round. It was your fight. And here's something for you to put in your pocket."

Darrell smiled a little bitterly as he took the four five-pound notes. He had fairly earned them, and now he could send that subscription he longed to send, for the benefit of an old friend in distress. But he had paid dearly for it. He had not the slightest doubt that Mr. Ratcliff would return directly to St. Jim's with a report to the Head; and the prefect pugilist would be called into Dr. Holmes' presence the moment he reached the school.

He did not say so to Mr. Stoker. It was no use distressing him. He rubbed down, and bathed his face, and changed into his own clothes, stuffing the bank-notes into his pocket.

Mr. Stoker had changed, too. He was feeling extremely cheerful.

"You're not walking back to the school," he remarked. "I'm going to drive you there. I've ordered a taxi, and I'll see you to the gates, or nearly. No good being seen together, of course."

Darrell nodded, and they left by the stage-door together, and stepped into the taxi.

Darrell was silent as the taxicab drove away through the night.

His thoughts were very painful ones. He was going back to be "sacked," there was not much doubt about that. Mr. Ratcliff had gone home, doubtless by train, but he would have to walk from Rylcombe; in the taxi, Darrell would be home first. But the Housemaster would not be long after him. It would be impossible for the prefect to deny an accusation that was true. That night would probably be the last he would ever spend under the roof of St. Jim's.

"Fagged a bit, I suppose?" said Mr. Stoker, who was far from understanding the cause of Darrell's silence. "Naturally, old chap. You get used to it in time, of course. I shall be as right as rain to-morrow. Well, here I'd better leave you; no need to let the taximan know where you're going."

The taxicab stopped in Rylcombe Lane, half-way between the village and the school. Darrell stepped out.

He shook hands warmly enough with Mr. Stoker. The old boy had, unintentionally, landed him in fearful trouble; but it was not Stoker's fault. The taxicab turned back, and Darrell, instead of walking on to the school, leaned upon the stile to think. His head was still buzzing from the fight in the ring, but the cool night air was refreshing, and he leaned on the stile trying to think over what he should do. What could he do? His fate was in Horace Ratcliff's hands, and the Housemaster would have no mercy.

He had done no wrong. But there was only one view the Head could take of the matter, and he was certain to take it.

"It's all up," muttered Darrell miserably. "It's good-bye to St. Jim's. I suppose I've been a fool—a dashed fool! But who'd have expected to see that cad there? What did he come there for? What utterly rotten luck!"

There was a step in the lane. An

angular form loomed up in the starlight. It was Mr. Ratcliff, walking home from the station. He paused as he saw Darrell, upon whose pale and troubled face the starlight fell.

"Ah, you are here!" said Mr. Ratcliff, in an acid voice. "I thought I should be in first. However, it does not matter. You may accompany me to the Head, and hear what I have to report to him."

"You intend to report me, sir?" asked Darrell, in a low voice.

"Can you ask?"

"Considering that I've done no harm, and that I defended you the other day when you needed defence, it is not much to ask."

"I cannot allow considerations of that kind to interfere with my duty," said Mr. Ratcliff loftily. "I shall decidedly report you, and I have not the slightest doubt that you will be expelled from the school. My opinion is that you thoroughly deserve it. Don't ask me to conceal your flagrant wrongdoing. I refuse."

"I have done no wrong," said Darrell. "I have broken rules, that is all, and not for a bad motive. And I ask no favours at your hands, Mr. Ratcliff."

"Follow me!" said the Housemaster harshly.

"By gum!" exclaimed a voice. "Ratty! Ratty, by the thumping gum!"

Mr. Ratcliff jumped.

From the shadows came the figure of Mr. Stoker, striding towards him. The Housemaster would have fled, but a hand of iron dropped on his shoulder.

"No, you don't," said Mr. Stoker pleasantly. "No, you don't, my pippin! Blessed if I didn't think it was you when I passed you in the taxi. And I stopped, my dear sir, and ran back to see whether I was mistaken. And I wasn't mistaken; it's my dear old Housemaster Ratty, all ready to take the licking I owe him!"

And the old boy of St. Jim's grinned gleefully.

Mr. Ratcliff turned almost faint.

"If—if you dare to touch me—" he faltered.

Mr. Stoker glanced at Darrell. He had not expected to see him there.

"Hallo, young 'un!" he exclaimed. "What are you doing out of school this time of night? You buzz off to bed!"

Darrell smiled. He understood Mr. Stoker's intention.

"It's no use! Mr. Ratcliff knows that I was in the ring to-night, and he's going to report me to the Head and get me sacked! It can't be helped!"

"Oh, by gum!" Stoker muttered.

Darrell turned to go. Mr. Ratcliff uttered a cry.

"Darrell, don't go! Darrell, I forbid

you to leave me here alone with this—this ruffian!"

Darrell turned round and faced the New House master, with a bitter smile upon his lips.

"I shall not stay!" he said. "You are going to report me to Dr. Holmes for fighting with Mr. Stoker at the Wayland Hall! Now you ask me to fight him again in your defence! I shall not lift a finger for you!"

"Darrell—"

"Good-night, sir!"

Darrell strode away.

"Now, Ratty!" said Mr. Stoker, between his teeth, his eyes blazing as he looked at the cowering, shrinking Housemaster. "Now, you rat! Now, you cur! You're going through it! You dirty spy! You've been spying on a lad who's worth fifty of you, and you're going to get him sacked—same as you'd have got me sacked, if you could, when I was at St. Jim's! By gum, I'll make you wriggle for it! It's a licking this time—not a caning, Ratty! You're going through it, and if your headmaster knows you when I've finished with you, it will be surprising."

And Mr. Stoker's iron grip was laid on the Housemaster's shoulder. He evidently fully intended to carry out his threat. Mr. Ratcliff felt sick with fear.

"Darrell!" he shrieked. "Darrell!"

(Continued on page 28.)

Thrill of a lifetime



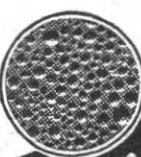
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THE FADDIST FORM-MASTER!

News For the Remove!

"I SAY, you fellows, have you seen the notice on the board?"

The Remove at Greyfriars School had just come out of their class-room after morning lessons. It was a sunny day, and most of them had made at once for the Close and the wide green playing fields. Four of the Form, however, stood near the corner of the passage chatting, when Billy Bunter came up with his excited question.

"I say, you fellows—"

"No rain to-day, after all," Harry Wharton was saying. "It looked like this morning, but it's all right. We shall be able to get in some practice before dinner."

"I say, you fellows—"

"The pitch will be all right," said Bob Cherry. "Let's get along then. Hallo, hallo, hallo! Is that you, Bunter?"

"Yes; I was saying—"

"Keep it till dinner-time, old chap," said Frank Nugent. "We're going out to cricket now."

"I say, you fellows—"

"The interval till dinner must be occupied cricketfully to improve our formfulness," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, the Hindu chum in the Greyfriars Remove. "The esteemed remarks of the honourable and revered Bunter can wait till we meet again dinnerfully."

"I say, you fellows, have you seen the notice on the board in the Hall?"

"What is it?" asked Wharton. "Does it concern the Remove?"

"I should jolly well say it does!" exclaimed Billy Bunter. "It's about Quelch—a new master!"

"A new master for the Remove!" exclaimed four voices at once.

"Exactly!"

Four faces wore expressions of concern. Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove—the Lower Fourth Form at Greyfriars—was a stern master sometimes, but he was always just and generally kind. He was greatly esteemed by the Removites, and they would have been genuinely sorry to lose him.

"Let's go and see the notice," said Wharton. "I've noticed for the past few days that Quelch looked seedy, and his missing class this morning looks as if he were ill. I hope he's not going for good."

The juniors walked down the passage to the notice-board, upon which all sorts of information for the school generally was posted. One in the well-known hand of Dr. Locke caught their eyes at once.

"That's it," said Billy Bunter.

And the chums of the Remove eagerly read the notice through together.

"Owing to indisposition Mr. Quelch is compelled to leave Greyfriars for a few days. During his absence the Remove will be taken temporarily by Mr. Chesham."

The notice was signed by the Head of Greyfriars.

"So that's how the matter stands, you chaps," said Harry Wharton. "Quelch is seedy, and he's going away for a bit. That accounts for Wingate having

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By Frank Richards.

(Author of the grand long yarns of Greyfriars appearing every Saturday in our companion paper, the "Magnet.")

taken the Remove this morning. I wonder who Chesham is? Ever heard of him, anybody?"

"There was a general shaking of heads. 'He's not a master at Greyfriars, anyway,' said Nugent.

"Some chap coming along to take Quelch's place temporarily, that's all," Bob Cherry remarked. "I wonder what he'll be like?"

"Yes, rather!" said Bulstrode of the Remove, stopping before the notice-board. "Let's hope he'll suit us, or he'll get ragged by the Remove."

"Yes, ratherfully," agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The Remove has its reputation to keep up fully as the roughest Form at the honourable school, and the advent of a new master may furnish an opportunity to pull his august leg ragfully."

Bob Cherry grinned.

"Good idea!" he exclaimed. "We're looking for some fun, too."

"But, I say!" Harry Wharton remarked thoughtfully. "Let's give the

Harry Wharton & Co. are willing to make welcome their temporary Form-master. But he is not so welcome when they find out he is a food faddist and health crank!

new chap a chance, you know. He may be all right, and we don't want to jump on him too suddenly."

"Certainly—give him a chance," agreed Bob Cherry, the most good-natured as well as the most restive of juniors. "No harm in that."

"Oh, take him under your wing, Wharton, and coddle him!" said Bulstrode, with a sneer. "That's what you'd better do while you're about it."

"Oh, rats to you!" said Harry politely. "Come along, you chaps, and let's get out to cricket practice."

"Right-ho!"

The chums of the Remove went down to the door. A cab from Friardale was outside, and a gentleman with a pale face and worn look was going down the steps, leaning on the arm of Wingate, the athletic captain of Greyfriars.

He caught sight of the juniors and beckoned to them to approach. Harry Wharton & Co., with grave faces, came up to the side of the cab.

"I dare say that you know I am going away," said Mr. Quelch quietly.

"Yes, sir; we have just read the notice," said Harry Wharton. "We're very sorry that you are ill, sir."

"We're very sorry indeed, sir," said Nugent, sincerely enough.

"The sorrowfulness is terrific," murmured Hurree Singh.

The master of the Remove smiled faintly.

"I am sure of that, my boys. I want to ask you a favour before I go. I do not expect I shall be away long. My place will be taken by Mr. Chesham. I know very little of him, but you will find him a kind-hearted man, and I hope you will give him as little trouble as possible. You are the heads of the Form, and the other boys look to you to lead. You can do much if you will. That is all."

"We'll do our best, sir," said Harry Wharton respectfully. "We all say the same, sir."

"The samefulness is terrific."

"Thank you, my boys. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye, sir, and I hope you'll soon be back among us again."

"Thank you!"

The Remove master shook hands with the juniors in turn, and the cab rolled away. Wingate of the Sixth looked rather grimly at the juniors.

"I hope you are going to live up to that," he said. "The new master will be here some time this afternoon."

"Do you know what kind of a merchant he is?" asked Bob Cherry.

"No, I don't. I hope he's a fellow accustomed to rowdy boys, though, and then he will get on with your precious Form," said the captain of Greyfriars.

"Oh, I say, Wingate! Don't you start being complimentary in your old age," said Bob Cherry. "We gave you a good time this morning, now didn't we?"

"Yes, you did. If you hadn't I should have lammed you, and you jolly well knew it," said Wingate. "Carberry is taking you this afternoon till the new master arrives—"

"Carberry! That rotter—"

"If you speak of a prefect like that, Cherry—"

"Well, I won't then, Wingate; but he's a rotter. I only hope he won't get ragged by the Remove, that's all!"

Wingate grinned, and walked away. Carberry of the Sixth was the worst-tempered prefect at Greyfriars. It was extremely likely that he would not have a quiet time with the Remove that afternoon. But that was his own business, and it did not trouble Wingate very much.

A Remove Riot!

"I SAY, do you know Carberry's taking us this afternoon?" said Billy Bunter as the Remove came in for afternoon lessons.

"Knew that before you were born, Bunter," said Bob Cherry. "Tell us something new. Have you seen Carberry?"

"No; he's not in the class-room."

"Sure, and he isn't in a hurry to take the Remove," said Micky Desmond. "Perhaps he thinks 'we are not going to be good boys entirely.'"

"And he won't be far wrong, if he starts his usual methods," said Harry Wharton. "He won't find it all lavender if he begins bullying. And he's pretty certain to."

"I tink tat ve gifs him as good as ho

READ ALL ABOUT THE RIOT IN THE REMOVE IN THIS GREAT YARN OF THE EARLY SCHOOLDAYS OF HARRY WHARTON & CO.

sends, ain't it," grinned Fritz Hoffman, the German boy of the Remove.

"I zink zat it vill be so," remarked Adolphe Meunier. "I zink zat Carberry is a rottair. Ow, ow, ow!"

A finger and thumb had fastened on Adolphe Meunier's ear, and he yelled in anguish, and twisted round to find himself looking at Carberry, who had overheard his remark.

"You think what?" asked Carberry grimly.

"I zink zat you vas rottair!" gasped Adolphe Meunier.

"Oh, you do, do you, you young frog-eating alien? Take that, then!"

Carberry boxed Meunier's ears right and left, and sent him staggering into the class-room. The French junior reeled on to a seat, and the Remove slowly took their places. Carberry closed the door and glared at them.

"I've got to look after you young rotters for an hour and a half," he began. "Mind you don't rouse my temper, that's all! I don't intend to be bothered by a set of lazy young scoundrels—"

"We're not a set of lazy young scoundrels, and you've no right to call us anything of the kind," said Harry Wharton.

"Are you looking for a licking, Wharton?"

"No."

"Then you had better shut up. I've got Quelch's cane here, and I shall use it, I promise you, if I have any of your impertinence. Now then, where are you in the book, and what book is it?"

"I'm at Chapter II, in this week's MAGNET, if that's what you mean," said Hazeldene.

Carberry scowled.

"I don't mean anything of the sort, Hazeldene, and you know it. What book are you doing under Quelch?"

"First book of the 'Æneid,'" said Russell.

"Where are you in it?"

"Æneas' speech to Dido."

"You go on from there, Wharton—construe."

Harry Wharton rose in his place. Wharton, although he gave up a great deal of time to athletics, was by no means behindhand with his school work. His Latin was the best in the Remove, with the possible exception of Nugent's, and Mr. Quelch had often commended it. But Carberry was not satisfied.

"Do you call that construing?" he demanded rudely, interrupting Wharton at the third line.

Harry Wharton coloured with anger. "Yes, I do," he said.

"Then I can only say that your master must have been very easily satisfied," said Carberry. "A slovenly class, and a slovenly master, I suppose."

"Do you mean to call Mr. Quelch's methods slovenly?" said Wharton. "If you do, you are not speaking the truth, and you know it."

Carberry took a quick, deep breath. He picked up the cane from the desk and made a step towards Wharton. The junior did not flinch. For a moment it seemed that the Sixth Former would lash out with the cane.

But he restrained himself. If he came to blows with the captain of the Remove he felt that it had better be on some other question. If it came out that he had referred disparagingly to Mr. Quelch it would not be well for him.

"I shall remember that, Wharton," he said. "I will not interrupt the work of the class by punishing you, but I shall not forget."

"Remember it as long as you like," said Harry Wharton, with a contempt he did not take the trouble to conceal.

"Is that the way you speak to a prefect?"

"Yes, to a prefect who doesn't know

how to make himself respected," was the unexpected reply.

And the Remove giggled.

Carberry gave Harry a hard look, and then turned to Bob Cherry.

"You will continue construing, Cherry."

Bob Cherry construed, and now there were real blunders for Carberry to take hold of, if he wished. But he passed most of them unnoticed. It did not take the Remove long to discover that the prefect was extremely weak in Latin. He was, as a matter of fact, not capable of taking the Remove in classics, at all; and that discovery added the final touch to the Form's contempt for him.

"You can go on, Bunter."

"Certainly, Carberry! Where is the place?"

"Don't you know the place?" roared the prefect. "You haven't been attending to the lesson."

"Yes, I have been attending to it very carefully, Carberry. I have, really! But I've lost the place."

"Come out here, Bunter!" said Carberry, feeling that in the Owl of the Remove he had a victim upon whom he could safely wreak his savage temper.

Bunter eyed the bully of the Sixth with uneasiness and dismay. He did not like the gleam in the prefect's eye at all.

"If you please, Carberry—"

"Do you want me to fetch you?"

"Oh, no, certainly not; but—"

Carberry rushed towards the desk, and the hapless Owl skipped out before the class just in time to escape being dragged out. The prefect gave him a savage look.

"You young rascal, how dare you disobey me?"

"I—I didn't exactly disobey you, Carberry. I'm sorry, but— Ow! Leggo



The door of the class-room suddenly opened, and a figure in cap and gown appeared before the startled eyes of the Remove. Carberry was dropped as if he had become red hot, and there was a gasp of consternation. "The Head!"

my ear, Carberry! Ow! Wow! You beast! You rotter! Leggo!"

"A beast and a rotter, am I?"

"N-no, I really didn't mean that. I think you're the nicest chap in the Sixth. Ow! You beast! I like you awfully, but—leggo, you rotten beast!"

Carberry, red with rage as the Remove burst into a roar of laughter, seized Billy Bunter by the collar and lashed him with the cane. Bunter hopped and yelled.

"Ow! Stop it! I say, you fellows, stop him, you know!"

The appeal was not made in vain. Harry Wharton's brow darkened at the sight of the wanton bullying, and, as Bunter called out, he rose in his place. Bob Cherry and Nugent rose, too, and then Hurree Singh, Hazeldene, and Micky Desmond followed suit.

"Stop that!"

Harry Wharton's voice rang out clearly. Carberry stopped, in sheer surprise, and stared at the junior.

"Wharton, you! What!"

"You are not going to bully Billy Bunter like that. Stop it, I say, or we'll jolly soon make you, prefect or no prefect!"

Carberry could scarcely believe his ears. He raised the cane again and lashed out, and the unfortunate Billy Bunter gave a howl of anguish. It was too much for Harry Wharton. With a bound he was over the desk; with another he was on Carberry and wrenching the cane from the bully's hand.

Carberry staggered back. Wharton faced him with flashing eyes. The Sixth Former and the Remove junior each had a grip on the cane. Carberry strove to wrench it away, but Harry Wharton held it tightly.

"No, you don't!"

Carberry did not speak. He dropped the cane, and, clenching both fists, rushed straight at Harry Wharton. For the moment he had forgotten where he was. He remembered only that he was defied by a junior, and that junior one who had often crossed him before, whom he had always disliked.

Harry did not flinch. He threw up his fists, and drove aside the savage punches of the senior. But he would have fared badly at the hands of the powerful Sixth Former if he had been left to face him alone. Bob Cherry and Nugent were on the scene, and the prefect staggered in their grasp, with their weight hanging on him.

"Buck up!" shouted Nugent. "Rescue, Remove!"

It was a shout that was never passed unheeded by the most reckless Form at Greyfriars.

The Remove scrambled out of their places. Carberry was surrounded and dragged to the floor. He sprawled there with the juniors scrambling all over him. He gasped and struggled and yelled threats, but without avail. The Remove was fairly roused now. Carberry had provoked the storm, and he had to bear the brunt of it.

"Frogmarch him!" shouted Nugent.

"Hurrah!"

The suggestion was taken up unanimously. The Remove had broken all bounds now, and they felt that they might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb. In spite of his furious struggles, the prefect was frogmarched, and he went up and down the classroom enjoying that unhappy experience. The shouts and trampling feet made a terrific din.

"My hat!" gasped Bob Cherry.

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"We're going it this time, and no mistake!"

"All his own fault. He——"

There was a sudden yell.

"Cave!"

The door of the class-room opened. A figure in cap and gown appeared before the startled eyes of the Remove. The juniors who were frogmarching Carberry dropped him so suddenly that he bumped on the floor and gave a yell of pain.

There was a general gasp of consternation:

"The Head!"

The New Master!

DR. LOCKE, the headmaster of Greyfriars, stood looking in on the disorderly scene with a brow like thunder.

So startled and dismayed were the Remove that they could only stare at him, and they did not for the moment notice that he was accompanied by a second gentleman, a slim, mild-faced man.

"Boys!"

The Head's voice was not loud, but it was deep. The Removes stood, silent and confused, while the Head's eyes roved over the crowd of culprits, and finally settled on Carberry.

"Carberry, what is the meaning of this riot in a class-room?"

"You'd better ask Wharton, sir," said Carberry, between his teeth. "He started it. He's the ringleader, as he always is in any trouble in the Lower Forms."

"Wharton! Stand forward!"

Harry Wharton came quietly forward. His face was somewhat pale, but it was very quiet and determined.

"You hear what Carberry says, Wharton?"

"Yes, sir. But what he says is not quite correct. He started this uproar himself by bullying Bunter in a way that forced us to interfere."

There was something about Harry as he spoke that carried conviction. The Head glanced at Bunter, who was rubbing himself ruefully in the places where Carberry's cane had taken most effect. Then he looked at the prefect.

"I am sorry to see that you could not keep order in this class-room for an hour, Carberry."

"It was a riot planned by Wharton and his friends, sir."

"There was no riot when Wingate had charge of us this morning," said Harry Wharton quietly.

"That is true. Whoever is to blame, it is quite clear that you cannot keep order, Carberry, and I shall take care that you are not placed in such a position of trust again. You may leave the room."

And Carberry, scowling with rage, went.

"Take your places, boys."

The Remove silently resumed their seats. They had gone further in the riot than had been intended at the start, the excitement very naturally carrying them away. The rebuke of the Head's grave, cold manner was felt by all.

"Boys, this is your new master, Mr. Chesham, who is temporarily to take the place of Mr. Quelch. Mr. Chesham, I am presenting you to your class at an unfortunate moment; but you must believe that the Greyfriars Remove is not always in a state of revolt and riot."

The juniors winced under the words. Mr. Chesham's mild blue eyes roved over the class, and he ran his fingers

through his flaxen hair, which was rather long.

"I am quite sure of that, sir," he replied. "A moment of excitement, that is all. I am sure I shall get on excellently with the Remove. Firmness—er—combined with kindness will work wonders. My boys, I am very happy to make your acquaintance, and I hope that we shall become very good friends by the time your master returns to relieve me of my duties here."

The new master's words made a good impression upon the Remove. There was a slight murmur of applause as Mr. Chesham finished.

"Very good!" said the Head. "I will leave you now, Mr. Chesham. There will not, I think, be any repetition of that scene of disorder."

Dr. Locke's voice was very significant. It implied that if there were any repetition of the riot somebody would suffer for it.

The Head withdrew from the class-room and closed the door.

"Now, my boys, we will commence work," said the new master genially. "What—er—lessons were you engaged in when you—er—left off to remonstrate with your prefect in that emphatic manner?"

The Remove grinned at the new master's way of putting it.

"The head boy of the class will answer me," said Mr. Chesham.

Harry Wharton rose in his place and gave the required information.

"Very good!" said Mr. Chesham. "Will someone have the kindness to lend me a book for the present? Thank you, my boy. Now, you may construe, Wharton. I think your name is Wharton?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very good! Construe, please."

Wharton construed, and Mr. Chesham gave him a word of praise. As he sat down, the new master glanced at him more carefully, and came a little nearer, his eyes fixed on the junior's face.

"Ah! Wharton, are you given to coughing?" he asked.

"No, sir," said Harry, looking surprised.

"Then appearances are deceptive. I should judge, from the hectic hue of your cheeks, that you are liable to coughs and chest complaints. You must be careful not to exert yourself too much, Wharton, until I have had an opportunity of more carefully ascertaining your state of health. Do you play cricket?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ah! For the present I think you had better give up cricket. It is an exertion somewhat too heavy for you."

"But, sir——"

"I may mention, my boys, that I am an authority on this subject," remarked Mr. Chesham. "I have studied it very deeply, and can speak with confidence. If any of you require advice on hygiene at any time, I shall be only too glad to give it to you."

"But about the cricket, sir," murmured Harry Wharton.

"That is most important, my boy."

"If you please, sir——"

"Come, Wharton, you must not argue with your Form-master! The next boy will construe!" said Mr. Chesham.

Harry Wharton was silent. Bob Cherry gave him a glance of sympathy as he rose to construe. This was an unexpected development on the part of the new master, but there was more to come.

When it came to Billy Bunter's turn to construe, the eyes of Mr. Chesham were fixed upon him anxiously. Bunter

blundered, as he always did. But the new master did not take note of his blunders. He seemed to be taking more interest in his looks.

"Are you feeling quite well, my boy?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," said Bunter.

"You do not look well. You have the appearance of a boy who suffers from indigestion due to overfeeding. Are you reckless in the matter of diet?"

"No, sir; not in the least. As for overfeeding, I never get really enough to eat," said Billy Bunter. "I have a healthy appetite, sir, and the college fare is not quite up to it. We eke it out by feeds in the study, but I never really get enough."

"A very singular fact," said Mr. Chesham, looking attentively at Bunter. "The symptoms are all of overfeeding, certainly not of underfeeding. I shall see that this is remedied. What is your name?"

"Bunter, sir—William Bunter."

"Well, Bunter, this shall be seen to."

"As a matter of fact, I am very hungry now, sir," said Bunter, pushing his advantage.

"Dear me! To exercise the mind while insufficient nourishment is supplied to the body is likely to cause serious injury to the health," said Mr. Chesham. "This cannot be allowed. You must not be hungry in class."

"I often am, sir," said Bunter pathetically.

"I will give you a note to the housekeeper," said Mr. Chesham, scribbling at the desk. "Take this to the housekeeper from me, and she will provide you with some food at my request."

Bunter rose from his place with alacrity.

"Thank you, sir!"

"You are excused the rest of the lesson."

"Oh, thank you, sir!"

Billy Bunter left the class-room, with the note in his hand and a seraphic smile on his face. The Removites looked at one another.

"What do you think of the merchant?" murmured Nugent.

"A health faddist," muttered Bob Cherry, in return. "Fancy his being taken in by Bunter like that! The Owl ate enough at dinner to last him the rest of the week—if not the rest of the term!"

"Ha, ha! Bunter has come off better than Wharton!"

"I wonder whose turn it will be next?"

Micky Desmond rose in his place and held up his hand. Mr. Chesham's mild blue eyes turned upon him.

"If you please, sir—"

"Yes, my boy? What is your name?"

"Desmond, sir—Michael Patrick Shamus Desmond, sir!"

"What do you want, Desmond?"

"I am feeling faint, intirely, sor! I—I get so hungry in class, and I—"

"Dear me!" murmured Mr. Chesham. "I am afraid that the health of this Form has been very carelessly neglected. You are hungry, Desmond?"

"Sure, and it's an aching void I've got, sor!"

"Are you usually hungry in class?"

"Yes—er—sometimes."

"It is a pity for the lesson to be interrupted," said Mr. Chesham; "but this will never do. I will give you a note to the housekeeper."

"Thank you, sir!"

"Take this to the housekeeper. She will furnish you with some refreshment. You are excused the rest of the lesson."

And Micky Desmond left the class-room, grinning.

The next boy to construe was Levison,



"You will stand there, Levison," said Mr. Chesham, "and slowly raise and lower your arm for the rest of the lesson!" The Remove burst into an irresistible chuckle. Levison's attempt to fool the new master had not turned out a success!

the new junior in the Remove. He put his hand to his side as he rose, and gave a gasp.

"What is the matter with you?" asked the Form-master.

"Only a stitch in the side, sir," said Levison. "It's rather painful, sir, that's all. It would be all right if I could take a turn in the Close."

Mr. Chesham shook his head. The Remove were giggling, but the new master was too much in earnest to notice it.

"Is it a sharp pain you feel, my lad?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. It always goes off if I can take a walk."

"I do not think a walk would be much use. A gentle exercise indoors would be better. Come out here before the class."

Levison hesitated. The stitch in the side was purely imaginary; but as two boys had already imposed on the simplicity of Mr. Chesham, he did not see why he shouldn't escape the Latin lesson also. But it looked just now as if the Form-master were catching on to the joke.

"Come out here!" said Mr. Chesham. "What is your name?"

"Ernest Levison, sir."

"Well, come here, Levison!"

The new boy slowly went out before the class. But Mr. Chesham's face showed that he was far from suspecting that he was the victim of a jape. He scanned the junior's flushed face carefully.

"You do not look quite well," he said. "A stitch in the side may be nothing, but it may be serious. Stand near the wall there, Levison, and raise your arm slowly in the air, and lower it again."

"But, sir—"

"Do as I tell you!"

Levison rather sullenly obeyed. The

Remove was still in a state of suppressed merriment, but the joke was up against Levison now. His attempt to follow in Billy Bunter's footsteps was not, turning out exactly a success.

"Now," said Mr. Chesham kindly, "do you find that the pain is better, worse, or just the same, Levison?"

"Worse, sir," said Levison promptly.

"Ah, that shows that it is really severe, and that a walk in the Close would not relieve the pain," said Mr. Chesham sagely. "You will stand there, Levison, and slowly raise and lower your arm during the rest of the lesson."

The Remove burst into an irresistible chuckle. Mr. Chesham looked round, with a frowning brow.

"Silence in class!" he exclaimed. "The pain suffered by your Form-fellow is not a fit subject for merriment!"

The Remove suppressed their mirth. Levison was scarlet. The Form-master turned to him again with a kindly expression.

"Raise your arm and lower it, slowly and incessantly," he said. "You will then find the pain gradually abate."

"If you please, sir—"

"You must do as I tell you, my boy!"

Levison sulkily obeyed.

The lesson continued. There were no more complaints of any kind from the Remove. They did not want to risk a cure like Levison's. He was standing in full view of the class, with his arm sawing up and down as if he were working away at an imaginary pump-handle.

"If you please, sir—" he began, in the first pause in the lesson.

Mr. Chesham turned round.

"Do you feel better, Levison?"

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"Yes, sir. The pain is quite gone now."

"Ah! You see the wonderful efficacy of the remedy," said Mr. Chesham, with a beaming smile. "You were unwilling to undergo it at first, Levison. You did not think it would cure you."

"N-no, sir."

"But you see that it was exactly what you needed. If you had been allowed to take a walk in the Close, instead of this simple exercise, the pain would not have abated yet."

"You can bet on that," murmured Bob Cherry.

"But you had better continue the exercise for another ten minutes," said Mr. Chesham. "This will prevent a return of the pain."

"I feel perfectly well now, sir."

"Yes; but the pain may return, and that is what I wish to prevent. Continue the exercise for another ten minutes, Levison."

Mr. Chesham turned back to the class. Levison had no choice but to obey, and he went on sawing away with his arm, with a sullen and furious face.

It was not till the lesson was over that he was released from his ridiculous position. Then Mr. Chesham inquired solicitously how he felt, and Levison, in terror of some new cure, declared that he was perfectly well.

A Faddist Form-master!

"I'VE seen some masters in my time," said Nugent reflectively, in the study at tea-time, "but I don't think I ever came across a specimen like Chesham before!"

The chums of Study No. 1 nodded assent. The afternoon lessons had been

an experience for the Greyfriars Remove. The new Form-master had taken them all by surprise.

"I've heard of health faddists before," said Hazeldene, who was taking tea with the chums of Study No. 1, "but this chap takes the cake!"

"Fancy making Wharton give up cricket practice!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

Harry Wharton looked rebellious.

"I don't know about that," he said. "I'm not going to be off my form for the match with the Upper Fourth to please any faddist that ever fadded!"

"Ha, ha ha! The only thing is to hope for Quelch's recovery, and that he'll soon be back to shift this funny merchant!"

"He's not a bad chap at all!" said Nugent. "He's got a kind heart. He doesn't rag us over the lessons like Quelch. He knows a lot, too."

"He rags us over our health, and that's worse. Fancy thinking I've anything wrong with my chest!" exclaimed Wharton, half-angry and half-laughing. "It's as sound as a bell!"

"I say, you fellows, I like the new master," said Bunter. "I got a nice snack this afternoon from the house-keeper. She sniffed when she read the note, but she gave me a chunk of cold steak-and-kidney pie, and it was ripping!"

"Mind he doesn't find you out, that's all!" laughed Harry Wharton.

"What do you mean by finding me out, Wharton? I suppose you don't think I was imposing on Mr. Chesham, do you?"

"Oh, no! But when he finds out what a human cormorant you are, Bunter,

he'll very likely put you on a starvation diet to bring down your fat."

Billy Bunter was so alarmed at that suggestion that he stopped his teacup half-way to his mouth, and stared at Wharton over it.

"I say, Wharton, do you think that's possible?" he asked.

"Rather!"

"I—I say, that would be awful!" said Billy Bunter. "It—it's rotten that a Form-master should be allowed to interfere with a fellow's feeding!"

"Ha, ha! You liked the interference this afternoon."

"That was different, of course."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now that we have finished the tea-ful refreshment, I opine that we should go out and practise cricketfully," the nabob suggested, rising from the table.

"I say, Inky, I haven't finished my tea."

"I wasn't speakfully alluding to you, my worthy Bunterful chum. You do not play cricketfully. Are you fellows coming alongfully?"

"I'm coming," said Bob Cherry, taking a bat out of the corner of the study.

"So am I," said Nugent. "What about you, Harry?"

Harry Wharton looked troubled.

"Blessed if I know," he said. "It's impossible to disobey a Form-master, and bad form, too. But I can't miss the cricket practice, can I?"

"Suppose you tried to explain to Chesham?"

"Well, I did, in class; but he's a howling faddist, and he wouldn't listen then, so he wouldn't listen now."

"I know!" exclaimed Hazeldene suddenly. "Why not speak to Wingate, and he could put it to Mr. Chesham? As a matter of fact, you'll soon have Wingate on your track if you cut cricket."

Harry's face brightened up.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "That's a ripping idea. Chesham is bound to pay some attention to the captain of the school, and Wingate is sure to chip in for me in a matter like this. I'll look for Wingate and put it to him."

The chums of the Remove sallied out. Wingate was standing near the cricket pavilion, talking to another Sixth Former, when Harry came up to him. Wingate gave the captain of the Remove a cheerful nod.

"May I speak to you, Wingate?"

"Go ahead, kid!" said the captain of Greyfriars in his laconic way.

"You know we've got a new Form-master, Wingate. He thinks there's something wrong with my health, and he's told me to give up cricket practice till further orders."

Wingate stared.

"What utter rot!"

"I was thinking that you might speak a word for me, Wingate, if you wouldn't mind. Of course, there's nothing wrong with my health!"

"I don't quite understand that," said Wingate, looking at the junior in amazement. "Why should Mr. Chesham fancy there is something wrong with you?"

Harry shrugged his shoulders.

"He has found something wrong with Bunter and Levison," he said. "I'm afraid it's a hobby of his."

Wingate laughed.

"Well, I'll certainly speak to him, Wharton," he said. "It's absurd. I'll do my best for you, at any rate."

"Thank you, Wingate."

The captain of Greyfriars, with a curious expression on his face, walked



For long, Vernon-Smith, the Bouncer of Greyfriars, has cast covetous eyes on the captaincy of the Remove. And when trouble falls on Harry Wharton, the skipper, the Bouncer seizes his chance. Look out for this great yarn—it grips the interest from start to finish.

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towards the House. Two minutes after his talk with Harry Wharton, Wingate was tapping at the door of Mr. Quelch's study, now occupied by the new master of Greyfriars.

There was no reply for a moment. The Greyfriars captain tapped again, and then the voice of the new Remove master called to him to come in. Wingate entered the study and started a little as a pungent odour assailed his nostrils.

The master of the Remove had a fire in his study, and he was bending over it in his shirtsleeves, attending to a little pot that was bubbling and boiling, and sending off the pungent odour that Wingate had noticed. The captain of Greyfriars stared at the boiling liquid and then at Mr. Chesham.

"You are busy, sir," he remarked.

The Remove master turned a crimson countenance to the Greyfriars captain. He was perspiring from the heat of the fire.

"Yes, I am rather busy," he said. "I cannot trust this into the hands of the school cook, as you may be certain."

"May I ask what it is, sir? There's a laboratory here for chemical experiments, and I should think you would find it cooler than having a fire in your study."

Mr. Chesham laughed.

"This is not a chemical experiment, Wingate. I am making a decoction of herbs to prepare a medicine known only to myself. I can safely say that this medicine has saved more lives than any other in existence."

"Indeed, sir!" said the amazed Wingate.

"Yes, indeed. Have you noticed that any of the juniors are attacked by a curious kind of hunger, a desire to eat between meal-times, although the last meal has been a satisfying one?"

Wingate grinned.

"Yes; I think that is a common case at Greyfriars, sir."

"I thought so. This medicine will cure that hunger. It is what we call habit-hunger, and does not really exist, being, in fact, only an effect of the imagination. The medicine is good for other things, such as rheumatism and lumbago."

"Is it really, sir? I came here to speak to you about Wharton, Mr. Chesham, if you will allow me."

"Certainly!" said Mr. Chesham. "It is more for Wharton than anybody else that I am taking the trouble to prepare this medicine. It is invaluable in cases of chest trouble. Have you noticed any fresh symptoms in Wharton's case?"

"The fact is, sir, Wharton is quite well—"

Mr. Chesham smiled indulgently.

"You do not read the symptoms aright, Wingate. It is impossible for Wharton to be well now, considering the state he was in only this afternoon."

"But he's one of the most athletic fellows in the Form—"

"Muscular strength, that is all."

"He is never ill—"

"That is the most alarming symptom of all. It shows that the disease is eating its way inwardly. I only hope Wharton's case will not turn out too serious. I trust it will not be necessary to send him to a sanatorium."

"I think a good game of cricket—"

"Would probably be fatal."

"But, sir—"

"You must allow me to know best about this matter," said Mr. Chesham. "I have made a long study of it. I suppose you would not like to see Wharton become a chronic invalid for the sake of a game of cricket?"

"But I think—"

Hiss-s-s-s!

"Dear me, it is boiling over!" exclaimed Mr. Chesham in an annoyed tone, turning back to the pot on the fire. "This is really exasperating."

Wingate grinned, coughed, and retreated. The smell was terrible now that the boiling herbs had boiled over into the fire. The captain of Greyfriars gasped as he ran along the passage.

"My hat!" he exclaimed, as he emerged into the Close and drew in a deep breath of pure air. "I pity the Remove if they have to take that stuff. It's rough on Wharton, but it can't be helped."

Harry met him in the Close with an eager look. Wingate shook his head.

"I'm afraid nothing can be done, Wharton. He seems to have made up his mind that you are a human wreck, and—there you are."

"Then I can't play cricket?"

"You can't disobey your Form-master," said Wingate.

"But what am I to do?"

"Grin and bear it till Quelch comes back," said Wingate; and he walked away, leaving Harry Wharton looking decidedly rebellious and wrathful.

"Any success?" asked Bob Cherry, as Wharton came down to the cricket ground.

Harry shook his head disconsolately.

"No; I'm not to play."

"Sorry, old chap! I wish Quelch were back!"

And Harry Wharton, with a wrathful brow, stood by the ropes while the chums of the Remove played cricket, and the things he thought about Mr. Chesham would have shocked the master of the Remove if he had known them.

A Change For the Remove!

THE next morning Mr. Chesham presided at the Remove breakfast-table in the accustomed place of Mr. Quelch. His mild blue eyes smiled genially at the Removites, and roved from face to face, apparently seeking traces of ill-health in the juniors.

"Ah, good-mornings, Levison! Have you had any return of that pain you suffered from yesterday afternoon?" he asked.

"No, sir," said Levison tartly.

"I am glad of that. How are you feeling this morning, Wharton?"

"First-rate, sir!"

Mr. Chesham shook his head.

"I am afraid that is a deceptive sign, Wharton. I do not wish to alarm you, of course, but it will be necessary for you to take care of your health. You will feel worse before you are really better, I think. How are you, Bunter?"

"Very hungry, sir!"

"You are usually hungry, I believe?"

"Well, sir, as I explained to you, I very rarely get really enough to eat."

"This breakfast seems to me to be a very substantial one for juniors," said Mr. Chesham, glancing along the well-spread table. The food at Greyfriars, except perhaps at tea-time, was generally very good.

"Yes, sir, if I have time enough to eat," said Bunter. "May I have a second helping of bacon, sir, please?"

"Certainly!"

The breakfast proceeded. Fellows of other Forms were glancing curiously towards the Remove. A hint had got abroad of the peculiar ways of the new Remove master, and the fellows were interested, especially Temple, Dabney & Co. of the Upper Fourth. They were the rivals of the Remove, and always

on the look-out for a chance of chipping them.

"May I have another helping, sir?" said Bunter, with a joyful smile.

Mr. Chesham eyed him attentively.

"Are you still hungry, Bunter?"

"Yes, sir."

"You have eaten three rashers of bacon, four eggs, and five slices of bread-and-butter," said Mr. Chesham, referring to a pencilled note he had made.

Bunter looked dismayed, and the Remove chuckled.

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

"I am afraid, Bunter, that this hunger of yours is merely habit-hunger, and founded upon a peculiar illusion of the mind," said Mr. Chesham. "You could eat another rasher?"

"Oh, yes, sir!"

"Then I am quite certain that something is wrong. If you remind me when lessons are over this morning, Bunter, I will give you something better than bacon."

Billy Bunter beamed. Something better than bacon meant to him something especially choice in the way of comestibles. At the same time, he kept a longing eye on the dish on the breakfast-table.

"Thank you, sir! But mayn't I have a little more bacon now?"

"I think not, Bunter."

"Or a couple of eggs, sir?"

"Nothing more at all, Bunter."

Mr. Chesham rose from the table, a signal for the boys to do the same. The Remove filed out of the dining-hall. Billy Bunter was looking a little disconsolate. He gave a jump as Bob Cherry slapped him on the shoulder.

"Really, Cherry, you startled me."

"How do you like the new master now?" grinned Bob Cherry.

"Not so well as at first," said Bunter. "He really doesn't improve on acquaintance."

When the Remove went into their class-room after prayers, Mr. Chesham was observed to wear a thoughtful expression on his face. Instead of commencing the morning's work, he referred to some notes in his hand, and cleared his throat with a cough. The Remove were all alert at once. Something was evidently coming.

"My boys, I have something rather important to say to you this morning," said Mr. Chesham. "I regard it as quite as much a part of a Form-master's duty to look after his boys' health, as to give them instruction. I am going to lay down a few rules which I shall expect you to follow."

The Remove waited.

"I wish you all to drink a glass of warm water before breakfast every morning," said Mr. Chesham. "This will assist the digestion. As it is better to begin the day with a light meal, there will be, in future, no bacon on the Remove breakfast-table."

The whole Form gasped.

Even fellows who were not particularly given to eating looked blank at having their accustomed meal swept away in this manner.

"But do not imagine for a moment that I wish to deprive you of proper sustenance," went on Mr. Chesham, with a good-humoured smile. "In place of the bacon will be provided a plate of porridge, which will be better for your health, and which will be made under any supervision, and very palatable to the taste."

"My only hat!" murmured Nugent.

"That is the only change that will

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be made in the diet at present," said Mr. Chesham. "Your present diet is injudicious, but a sudden change would not be beneficial. For the present we will content ourselves with the change I have specified. Now, as to your lessons. I believe it is not good for the health of growing boys to be confined to the classroom for hours at a time."

The Remove brightened up wonderfully. They were quite in agreement with the new master on that point, at least.

"Therefore," said Mr. Chesham, "at intervals of half an hour all through the time devoted to school work, we shall leave the classroom, and walk round the Close for exercise and fresh air. I shall lead you, and you will

be careful to walk in a quiet and orderly manner, without any larking or horseplay."

The Removites' faces fell again. A relaxation of the school rules would have been welcome to the restive Lower Fourth, but to be marched round the Close in orderly array was by no means so welcome. They could imagine how they would be chipped by the other fellows, and alluded to as a flock of sheep, and so forth.

"We will now proceed," said Mr. Chesham. "I will close my book when it is time for the first recess."

The lesson commenced. The Removites were grumbling to one another in low tones, and several of them had to be called sharply to account by the new master. Less inattention would

have produced a crop of canings and impositions from Mr. Quelch. But the new master was made of gentler stuff. He contented himself with words.

There was a sudden snap as the Form-master closed his book. It was the signal.

"You will follow me, my boys," The Remove rose from their forms. Mr. Chesham put on his hat, opened the door, and led the way into the Close. After him went the Greyfriars Remove.

(Pity the poor Remove! But there's worse to come! Make sure you read what happens next week when Harry Wharton & Co. defy their Form-master!)

THE FIGHTING PREFECT!

(Continued from page 21.)

Come back! Help! Darrell, I promise you that I will not make that report! I will be silent! Darrell, help me!"

Mr. Stoker paused, stopping his heavy fist just in time from a blow that would have knocked Mr. Ratcliff into a cocked hat. It was only just in time.

"By gum!" said the pugilist. "By gum! You've thought of a way of saving your skin, Ratty, cunning hound that you are, and always were!"

"I—I—I—" roared Mr. Stoker. "Come back!"

The athletic form of the prefect came striding back. He had heard the House-master's despairing call, and there was a new hope in his breast. Mr. Ratcliff fixed a haggard look upon the prefect's face.

"Darrell, I entreat you—" Darrell interrupted him.

"You do not deserve that I should raise a finger in your defence, Mr. Ratcliff! You intend to ruin me, who have done you no harm! You seek to be revenged upon me, after I defended you from what was, after all, a just punishment! I will not raise a finger in your defence now! Look after yourself, as I must do when you betray me!"

Mr. Ratcliff gasped.

"Darrell, I—I will withhold that report! I shall not speak to the Head! Save me from this brutal ruffian, and I give you my word of honour that the matter shall be buried in oblivion!"

Darrell looked at him searchingly.

"You mean that, sir?"

"You have my word!"

"I will take your word, sir," Darrell turned to Stoker. "Stoker, old man, it can't be done. You must let him alone.

If he acts like a decent man, it's my duty to defend him, as it was before. Don't let's quarrel."

Mr. Stoker laughed.

"Wasn't he always a cunning hound, by gum?" he said. "He's wriggled out of it, the rat! I've fought you twice, Darrell, my infant, and I'm not looking for a third licking. Take the rotter home! He's safe from me as long as he keeps his word to you! But if he breaks his word then he can look out for squalls, by gum! Good-night, and good luck!"

Darrell shook hands with the pugilist, and they parted. Mr. Stoker strode away towards the taxicab waiting down the lane, and Darrell and Mr. Ratcliff walked towards St. Jim's. They walked on in silence, Mr. Ratcliff's heart full of hatred and all uncharitableness, but terror predominating. He did not feel safe till he was within the walls of St. Jim's, and a locked gate was between him and the old boy. Then, without a word to Darrell, he crossed the dark quadrangle to his own House.

Darrell drew a deep breath. He had feared that Mr. Ratcliff's word of honour was but a rotten reed to lean upon, backed up as it was by Mr. Stoker's truculent threat. But the Housemaster did not go towards the Head's house, and Darrell's heart beat more lightly. Mr. Ratcliff disappeared into the New House, and Darrell went on his way to his quarters with a lighter heart.

Tom Merry & Co. observed the next day that there was a cloud upon Darrell's brow. They were much interested in Darrell, and they wondered what was the matter, but they were far from guessing.

Darrell was wondering whether Mr. Ratcliff would keep his word. Mr. Ratcliff did keep it. Whether his sense of

honour was acute enough to keep him from breaking it—whether he had a natural repugnance to telling the Head that he was disregarding a solemn promise—which would certainly not have increased the Head's good opinion of him—or whether he feared the fulfilment of Mr. Stoker's terrific threats if he betrayed Darrell; whatever his motive, he kept his word. Probably his motives were mixed, and, altogether, they were strong enough to keep his tongue silent.

The next day the twenty pounds were dispatched to the fund anonymously, and Darrell's handsome face wore a smile as he came back very cheerfully from the post office.

Mr. Stoker rang him up that day to ask whether it was "all O.K.," and Darrell replied cheerfully that it was ripping, much to the satisfaction of the old boy.

"Dawwell's quite his old self again," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked to his chums that evening in the Junior Common-room. "I was afraid that that awful wotah Watty had got a down on him somehow; but it seems all tight!"

"I wonder if we shall ever see Stoker again!" Tom Merry remarked regretfully. "It seems a thousand pities that he didn't get a chance of giving Ratty that licking before he left Wayland! I suppose he'll never come and do it now."

Tom Merry was right; he never did. But the juniors never guessed that Mr. Ratcliff had been let off the long-promised licking because he was keeping Darrell's secret—the secret of the fighting prefect!

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