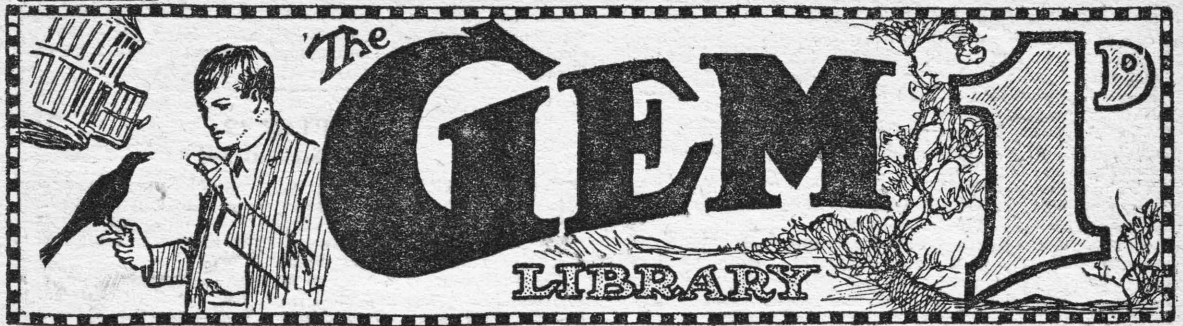


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Jack Blake & Co., Figgins & Co.,
—and Three Scholarship Boys.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

Arthur Augustus Regards it as Caddish.

"OBJECT!"

"Look here, Gussy—"

"I wepeat, I object!"

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy spoke as if he meant it. His tone was very firm, and he had jammed his monocle into his eye in a very determined manner.

The juniors gathered in Study No. 6, in the School House of St. Jim's, looked at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in great exasperation.

They were all agreed upon the matter under discussion, with the exception of the swell of the Fourth, and it really was too bad of D'Arcy to set himself up against an overwhelming majority in this way.

But Arthur Augustus never stopped to count the odds against him, either in argument or in fistical encounters.

"I wepeat," he said firmly, as he surveyed the exasperated juniors through his famous monocle—"I wepeat once more, I object."

"Ass!"

Every voice in the study chimed in with the word. The fellows seemed all agreed that D'Arcy was an ass. It was one of the few points of agreement between them. As a rule, the seven fellows in Study No. 6 did not find it easy to agree.

They were Blake, Digby, Herries, and D'Arcy, of the Fourth, to whom the study belonged. The other three fellows were Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther, of the Shell—known as the Terrible Three. The Terrible Three had come into the Fourth Form study to take counsel with Blake & Co. in the matter, and Blake and Digby and Herries were in hearty agreement with them. Arthur Augustus wasn't, and he did not hesitate to say so.

"Look here," exclaimed Tom Merry warmly, "what have you got to object to, you ass?"

"I wefuse to be called an ass."

"We've all agreed about it," said Blake.

"I haven't, Blake, deah boy."



"Well, you don't count, anyway," Monty Lowther remarked.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Let Gussy state his objections, and we'll argue him out of them, and if that's no good, we'll bump him," said Herries.

"Hear, hear!" said all the juniors together.

"I should wefuse to be bumped," said D'Arcy, with a great deal of dignity. "I have no objection, howevah, to statin' my objection. It appears that three Board-school chaps are comin' to St. Jim's—"

"That's it," said Blake, "three of 'em! Since St. Jim's agreed to take in chaps on the County Council scholarships, I suppose it can't be helped."

"Yaas, wathah! I have not the slightest doubt that the three chaps will be all wight—"

"Who said they weren't?" demanded Tom Merry.

"You have certainly hinted that they mightn't be all wight."

"I haven't said anything of the sort. I only said that as we don't know the chaps, or anything about them, we don't want them in the School House," said Tom Merry warmly. "There is room for them in the New House, and Figgins & Co. are welcome to them. That's what I said."

"In case they should turn out to be no class, you know," explained Blake. "Why shouldn't the New House have them, just as well as the School House?"

"Certainly, deah boys; but you were pwoposin' to—"

"To see the Head, and ask him to put them into the New House," said Tom Merry. "Why not? If they're all right, Figgins & Co. are welcome to them. If they're not all right, we don't want them here. Don't you understand logic?"

Next Thursday:

"THE GREAT BARRING-OUT AT ST. JIM'S!" AND "WINGS OF GOLD!"

No. 211 (New Series). Vol. 6.

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"I object!"

"Why," roared Blake, "what objection have you got, you ass?"

"It is puttin' a slight on fellows who have nevah done us any harm," said the swell of St. Jim's firmly. "If they get to hear of our action, it will hurt their feelin's."

"Oh, rats!"

"If you say wats to me, Tom Mewwy—"

"Rats!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy pushed back his cuffs in a business like manner, and turned his eyeglass upon the hero of the Shell in a warlike way.

"You uttah wottah—"

"Oh, ring off!" exclaimed Blake. "You don't look at it in a reasonable way, Gussy. These three new chaps—what are their names?—Redfern and Thingummy and Whatshisname—are strangers to us, and they come from goodness knows where. I suppose they are clever chaps to win scholarships. But that isn't the point. We don't know what they're like, and they may be frightful ragamuffins for all I know. We don't want them in the School House. If we speak to the Head, and point out how the junior studies are crowded, he may think it best to put 'em in the New House. That would be better?"

"Certainly," said Tom Merry. "We're thinking of you chaps, really, as these new kids have got scholarships in the Fourth Form, and we're in the Shell—we three. You'll see more of them than we shall."

"They might even be put in our study, or some of them," observed Digby.

"Bai Jove!"

"We've no room for them, even if they weren't objectionable otherwise," said Herries. "If we can get them shoved into the New House, then it will be all right."

"I admit that, deah boy, and I shall wogard it as a stwroke of luck if they are put into the New House. But as for askin' the Head—"

"It's a jolly good idea!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "I've spoken to a good many fellows in the Shell, and they agree. Kangaroo and Dane and Glyn and Gore have promised to come to the Head with us."

"And Reilly and Hancock and Lumley-Lumley have agreed, too," said Blake.

"You see, Gussy—"

"Everybody's against you."

"So shut up, and come along with us to the Head!"

"I wefuse to shut up, and I uttably decline to come with you to the Head upon such an ewwand," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I object!"

"Oh, bump him!" exclaimed Blake, exasperated.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Look here," bawled Manners, "what is your objection? Why shouldn't we try to shift the new kids into the New House?"

"Yaas, all wight, if they were ordinawy new kids," said D'Arcy; "but the fact that they come from a County Council school makes all the difference in the world. It is bound to get to their eahs aftahwards, and they will think that we have a wotten, snobbish objection to them because they come from a Board-school. I should stwongly object to bein' wogarded as a snob."

"So you think—" began Lowther belligerently.

"Yaas, deah boy. I think that what you are wpososin' would be snobbish, not to say caddish," said the swell of St. Jim's firmly.

The juniors glared at him.

"Well, you cheeky ass!" gasped Tom Merry.

"I wefuse to be called a cheeky ass. I considah that you are a set of wemarkable asses yourselves. I'm afwaid I cannot waste much more time on this discush, as I have to go down to Wylcombe to see my tailah. Pway give up the whole ideah. In a delioate case of this kind, you can always depend upon the opinion of a fellow of tact and judgment."

"Are you coming to the Head?" roared Blake.

"Wathah not."

"For the last time!" shouted Lowther.

"I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort. I wogard it as caddish!"

"Oh, bump him!"

"Bai Jove, I wefuse—I—oh! OOOOOOop!"

Arthur Augustus was at liberty to refuse, but his refusal did not make any difference. The exasperated juniors seized him, and he was swung off his feet, and bumped on the floor of Study No. 6 with such force that the dust rose in little clouds from the carpet.

"Yawwooh!"

Bump!

"Ow! Welease me, you feahful asses! You are simply wuinin' my twousahs! Ow!"

Bump!

Then the juniors, laughing loudly, crowded out of the

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study, leaving Arthur Augustus sitting in a little cloud of dust gasping for breath.

"Ow! ow! The uttah wottahs!" murmured Arthur Augustus, as he scrambled to his feet a few minutes later, when his head ceased to turn round. "Bai Jove! Ow! I shall have to go and change my twousahs befoah I go out! Ow!"

CHAPTER 2.

Rival Deputations!

TOM MERRY & CO. crowded out of Study No. 6, and down the passage. They were joined in the passage and on the stairs by a good many more juniors. The news of the impending arrival of the three scholarship boys had stirred St. Jim's very deeply.

The juniors were not given to reflecting very deeply, as a matter of fact; but like most boys, they were very conservative in their ways of thinking, when they thought at all. They were fond of the old school they belonged to, and they disliked any idea of change in the old customs. Even changes that were made for their comfort did not always meet with their approval.

At the period in the history of St. Jim's when bacon and eggs were substituted for thick bread-and-butter as a morning meal, many grumbles had been heard, and complaints that the school was growing "soft." Not that the lucky juniors would have changed back the eggs and bacon for the thick bread-and-butter. But it is in the masculine nature to grumble; and boys are not much different from men in that respect.

It was related at St. Jim's that when the New House was built, a hundred years before, the fellows of that day had complained loudly at the innovation, though at the present day a great deal of fun and occupation was derived by the juniors from the keen rivalry between the two Houses.

The fact that St. Jim's, like many other public schools of the present day, had been thrown open to scholarship boys from the County Council schools, was a sore point with some of the fellows. That snobbish fellows like Levison and Melish and Crooke should object was natural, but it was rather surprising to find Tom Merry & Co. on the same side.

But the juniors had not thought much about it. They only knew that it was a great change, and they objected to change on principle. St. Jim's had done very well as it was for a good many centuries, and why couldn't the Board of Governors let well alone? That was what the juniors wanted to know.

Besides, if the three new boys turned out to be "rotters," it would be the rippingest of ripping wheezes to plant them upon Figgins & Co. in the New House! That was an idea which appealed to the School House fellows very much.

Quite a crowd of fellows followed Tom Merry & Co. to the passage which led into the Head's house. As they drew near the door of the Head's study, three juniors were sighted coming down the passage from the opposite direction, and evidently with the same destination.

"Figgins & Co.!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

The two parties met outside the Head's study, and regarded one another very suspiciously.

"Hallo!" said Blake.

"Hallo!" said Figgins.

"What are you doing here?"

Figgins grinned.

"What are you doing here, if it comes to that?" he replied.

"We're going to see the Head."

"How odd!" grinned Kerr. "So are we."

And Fatty Wynn chuckled.

"Just so," he said.

Tom Merry stared at them in surprise.

"Look here," he exclaimed warmly, "if you've heard about—"

"The three new fellows!" grinned Figgins. "Yes, we've heard. Redfern and Locke and somebody or other—they're coming this afternoon. So you know?"

"Well, yes, we know."

"Look here, what are you going to the Head for?" demanded Monty Lowther.

"Tell us what you're going for?"

"Fair play, you know," said Kerr.

"Well, we're going to speak to the Head about the new kids," said Tom Merry cautiously.

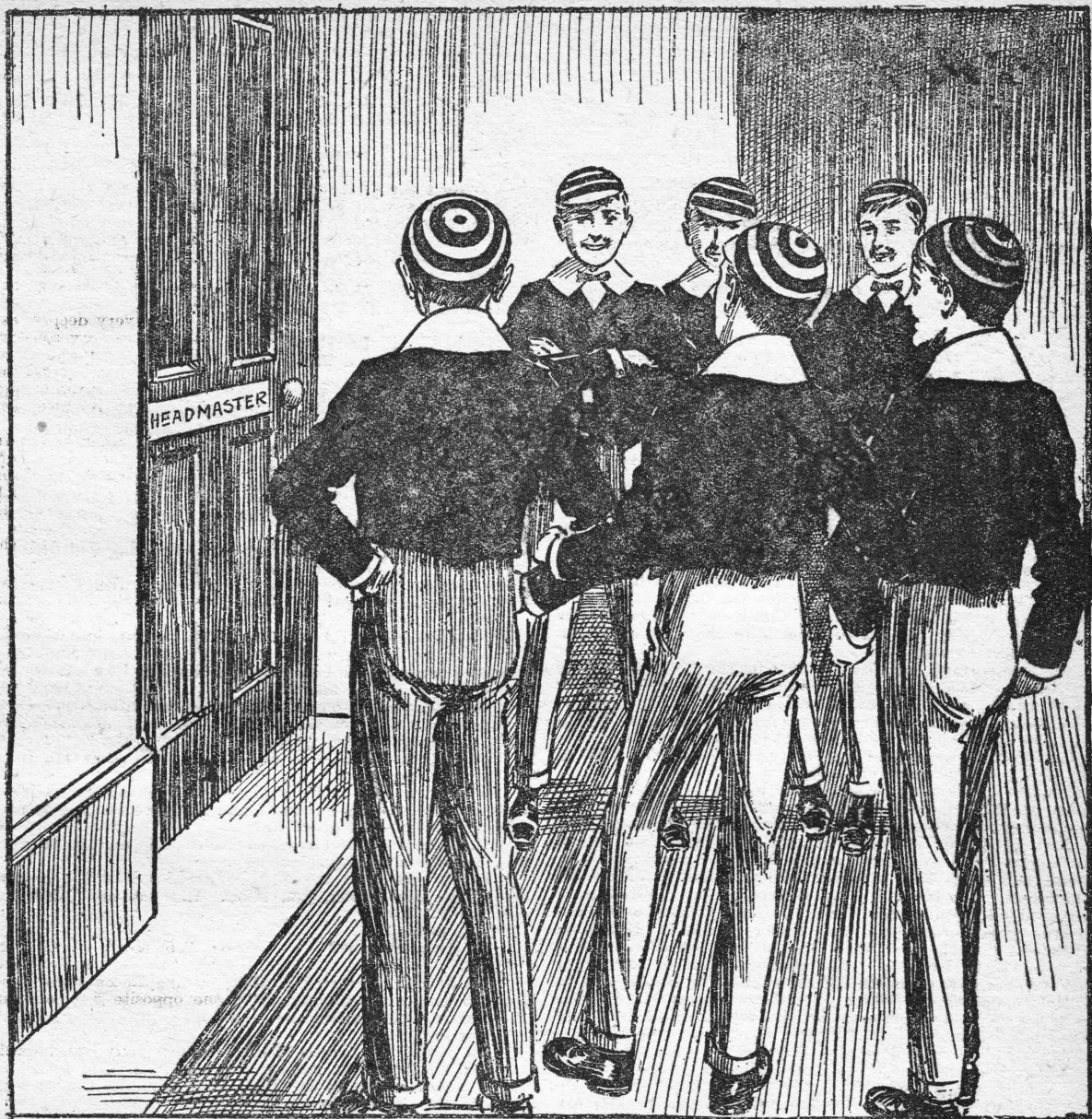
"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins.

"What are you cackling at, you ass?"

"Why, so are we, that's all!"

And Kerr and Wynn chuckled. The coincidence seemed to strike them as extremely comical. But the School House juniors looked wrathful.

"Look here, we're not having that," exclaimed Blake; "it was our idea first."



Tom Merry & Co. and Figgins & Co. met outside the Head's study, and regarded one another very suspiciously. "We're going to see the Head about the new kids," remarked Tom Merry. Figgins & Co. chuckled. "How odd, so are we!" (See Chapter 2.)

"What was?"

"To—to see the Head, and ask him to—to—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins. "To put the new bounders into our House, I suppose?"

"Well, yes."

"It was our idea at the same time, then. We talked it over, and came to the conclusion that the School House was the place for them!" chuckled Figgins.

"We were here first!"

"We were here second, if you come to that!"

"You've got to travel!"

"Rats!"

"Now, look here, you New House rotters—"

"Rats! Encore rats! Millions of 'em!" said Figgins cheerfully. "We're not shifting. We're going to see the Head, and ask him to put the new chaps into the School House!"

"You're not!" roared Blake.

"We are! Ha, ha, ha! We are! Hear us grin!"

"We'll jolly well shift you first!" said Tom Merry. "Come on, you chaps, and rush 'em out of the passage."

"Good egg!"

The School House juniors, nothing loath, rushed on to the

attack. Figgins & Co. were outnumbered, but they did not think of retreating. They put up a splendid fight, and in a moment a wild and whirling combat was raging in the passage. In the excitement of the moment, the juniors had forgotten that they were outside the Head's study—and the probable effect upon Dr. Holmes of a scrimmage just outside his study door!

"Go it, kids!"

"Give 'em socks!"

"New House cads!"

"Yah! School House rotters!"

Tramp, tramp, bump, bump!

Tom Merry and Figgins, locked in a deadly embrace, reeled and bumped against the door of the study. It was opened from within at the same moment, and the Head, his face pink with anger, looked out. The opening of the door was fatal to Figgins and Tom Merry; they rolled into the study fairly at the feet of the headmaster.

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated the Head, amazed.

"Cave!" shrieked Monty Lowther.

Up and down the passage the juniors fled wildly. Like the vision of a dream, they vanished from the astounded

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gaze of the doctor. But Figgins and Tom Merry had no chance to vanish. They separated, and scrambled to their feet, with the eye of the doctor fixed sternly upon them.

"Merry! Figgins! How dare you!"

The culprits hung their heads. They realised the enormity of their offence—too late! And if the Head had flogged them they could hardly have complained. They stood before him shamefaced, with hardly a word to say.

"I am surprised and shocked," said Dr. Holmes severely. "Hold out your hands!"

He picked up a cane.

Tom Merry and Figgins exchanged a rueful glance. It was not much use stating to the Head now what they had come for in the first place. They took their caning, two on each hand, with grim fortitude, and the Head dismissed them with a gesture.

The two juniors closed the door, and looked at one another grimly in the passage, folding their hands under their armpits and squeezing them.

"Ow!" said Tom Merry.

"Oh!" said Figgins.

"Groo!"

"Oop!"

And then they went their ways.

CHAPTER 3.

Arthur Augustus Finds Friends.

"Bai Jove, this is wotten!"

Thus Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of St. Jim's, arrayed spotlessly as usual, with the beautiful shine of his silk hat only exceeded by the brilliancy of his shirt-cuffs, had reached the old High Street of Rylcombe. While Tom Merry & Co. had gone on a deputation to the Head of St. Jim's, with such disastrous results, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was walking down to the village upon a most important visit to his tailor.

Most important, indeed, was that matter to the swell of St. Jim's. Most of his clothes were made in London. But if he wanted anything in a hurry, he would have it made at the local tailor's, giving very particular instructions as to cut and fit. D'Arcy's last waistcoat had been sent home with nearly an inch too much space under the arms. The swell of St. Jim's was going down to have a very serious talk with his tailor—a talk which would afford him some satisfaction, if none to the tailor—and which would certainly be charged for in the bill, under the head of "lining" or "extras."

Just as Arthur Augustus entered the village two youths in mortar-board caps came out of Mother's Murphy's tuck-shop, and three boys stepped from the railway-station up the street. The latter D'Arcy did not notice. The former engaged all his attention. For the two youths in mortar-boards were Gordon Gay and Frank Monk, of Rylcombe Grammar School; and they turned towards D'Arcy the moment they saw him. The gleam of fun in their eyes showed that they meant to rag the swell of St. Jim's—a little harmless amusement which the Grammarians were much addicted to, and which was heartily repaid in kind by the St. Jim's fellows.

"Gussy!" ejaculated Gordon Gay.

"The great and only!" murmured Monk.

"Weally, you fellows—"

"Shall we duck him in the horse-pond, or make him eat his silk hat?" said Gordon Gay, with an air of meditation.

"Both!" said Monk.

"I am due at my tailah's now, and I shall pwobably have to stay there a long time," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "I have therefore no time to thwash you now, you Gwammah boundahs!"

"Jolly lucky for you, Gussy!" grinned Gordon Gay.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway let me pass."

"Go hon!"

Arthur Augustus strode by with his nose very high in the air—too high in fact, for it prevented him from seeing a foot held out for him to trip over—and he promptly tripped over it.

"Oh—ah!"

Arthur Augustus staggered wildly forward, but he did not reach the ground. Two strong pairs of arms caught him, and he was lifted off the ground in the grasp of Gordon Gay and Frank Monk. They held the swell of St. Jim's in a horizontal position, kicking and struggling spasmodically.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Welease me, you wottahs!" gasped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, screwing his neck round to look up at the Grammarians. His silk hat had rolled off, and his eyeglass was dangling at the end of its cord. "You uttah wottahs—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I ordah you to welease me—put me down at once—ow!"

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The Grammarians lowered the swell of St. Jim's suddenly to the ground, and his nose tapped on the path. Then they raised him again, still wriggling and struggling.

"You fwightful wottahs—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wescue, St. Jim's!" yelled D'Arcy, in the hope that some St. Jim's fellows might be in the village street. "Help! Wescue!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Grammarians.

The three youths who had come out of the railway-station had crossed the road, and they were looking on at the peculiar scene with grins of amusement. They were three very quietly-dressed lads, not in Etoas, and they wore cloth caps. They stood looking on in great amusement, till Arthur Augustus called for rescue. Then the trio exchanged quick glances.

"That's a St. Jim's chap, Reddy," said one of them, a fair-haired lad with a handsome face and very pleasant blue eyes.

"Looks like it, Lawrence."

"Let's lend him a hand, then," said the third.

"Right-ho!"

And the three lads ran towards the struggling Arthur Augustus. Reddy collared Gordon Gay, and Lawrence seized upon Monk. The third fellow caught Arthur Augustus to keep him from falling as the Grammarians were wrenched away, and set him safely upon his feet.

"Bai Jove!" gasped D'Arcy, groping wildly for his eyeglass. "Bai Jove! Thank you, deah boys! I don't know you, but I wegard you as fwriends. Pway, bump those boundahs!"

"Here, leggo!" roared Gordon Gay, struggling with Reddy.

"Leggo! Who are you, you bounder?"

"Going to St. Jim's," said the stranger, with a cheerful grin. "Down you go!"

"Ow! Yow!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jammed his eyeglass into his eye, and stood looking on with great delight as his three rescuers proceeded to bump the Grammarians. Gordon Gay and Frank Monk had no chance against the three. They were bumped, and they were rolled on the rugged pavement, and then they scrambled up and retreated. The odds were against them now, and they did not want any more ragging.

"Bump them again, deah boys!" shouted Arthur Augustus D'Arcy excitedly.

But Gordon Gay and his chum were retreating. They dodged across the village street, and the three rescuers turned grinning to the swell of St. Jim's.

Arthur Augustus had replaced his silk topper, but he now raised it with a most graceful bow.

"Thank you vewy much!" he exclaimed. "I'm awf'ly obliged to you fellows, you know. Did you say you were goin' to St. Jim's?"

"Yes, rather!"

"All thwee of you?"

"Yes."

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated D'Arcy, turning his eyeglass upon the trio with renewed interest. "Is it possible that you are the three new chaps who are comin' on giddy scholarships?"

"Just so!"

"Bai Jove! I'm weally pleased to meet you, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus, holding out his hand. "Pway allow me to welcome you to St. Jim's and to intwduce myself. I am D'Arcy, of the Fourth."

The three new fellows shook hands with D'Arcy in turn. The kindness and courtesy of the swell of St. Jim's evidently pleased them.

"We're going into the Fourth," Reddy explained. "My name's Redfern. This chap is Lawrence, and that's Owen."

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"Jollay glad to make your acquaintance, deah boys," said D'Arcy. "I welcome you to the coll. in the name of the Fourth."

"Thanks!" said Redfern. "It's jolly good of you. I had an idea that some of the chaps at the school didn't care about scholarship fellows from the County Council schools coming there."

Arthur Augustus coloured a little. He remembered the meeting in Study No. 6, and the intended deputation to the Head upon that subject.

"Ahem!" he said slowly. "You see, the fellows don't quite gwasp it yet. Some of them may cut up wusty, but you may wely upon my standin' by you, especially aftah the wippin' way you have come to the wescue when those Gwam-wah bounders were waggin' me. If you chaps like to wait a bit while I go to my tailah's, I shall be vewy pleased to take you to the school and look aftah you. I sha'n't be more than an hour."

Redfern grinned.

"You're very good," he said; "but, you see, we'd better get on to the school. We're expected there, too. Shall be glad to see you again."

"My studay's No. 6 in the Fourth-Form passage," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Pway come and see me. But weally, you had bettah take my advyce and wait till I can go with you. I will see you thwough."

"Through what?" asked Lawrence.

"Well, there might be some waggin'."

"Oh, I dare say we could see ourselves through that!" said Owen.

Redfern chuckled.

"We'd try!" he remarked.

"Bettah let me pwotect you. You see, I can see that you are decent chaps—I'm a fellow of tact and judgment, you know; but the other fellows haven't my experience, and I'm afraid there will be twouble for you. They have an idea that you chaps will be awful wagamuffins or somethin' of that sort, you know."

Redfern's eyes glimmered.

"I see," he said.

"So you will wealaise that it will be bettah—"

"No, I think we'll go on, and chance it," said Redfern.

"Oh, vewy well! Just as you like; I shall see you latah!"

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy raised his silk hat very politely, and walked down the street in the direction of the tailor's.

CHAPTER 4.

Something Like a Jape.

REDFERN, Lawrence, and Owen looked after the elegant figure of the swell of St. Jim's, and then looked at one another. Lawrence seemed somewhat serious, but Owen was grinning, and Redfern chuckling audibly.

"My only aunt!" said Redfern. "This is good!"

"May be rotten for us!" said Lawrence.

"Best thing going," said Redfern confidently. "Look here, the chaps at St. Jim's are expecting three awful bounders. You can see that."

"Looks like it," grinned Owen.

"It would be a pity to disappoint them."

"Eh?"

"Are you chaps game for a jolly good rag?" demanded Redfern

To which his two companions replied immediately:

"What-ho!"

"Well, then, I've got an idea. We've got all our traps here, and we were going to put on our toppers before going to the school, but I've got a better idea than that. We can leave all our luggage to be sent on, if we like."

Owen and Lawrence looked puzzled.

"Blessed if I can see what good that will do!" said Lawrence. "Where does the rag come in?"

"There's a second-hand clothes-shop in this street," said Redfern.

"What on earth—"

"We could hire some things there, and leave our own to be sent on. Same chap who brings 'em could take back the hired togs when we're done with them."

"What are you driving at?"

Owen tapped his forehead significantly.

"Off his rocker!" he said.

"Quite off!" agreed Lawrence.

Redfern, who was evidently the leading spirit of the trio, chuckled gleefully.

"It's a rag," he said. "A great and gorgeous rag. The St. Jim's fellows are expecting three frightful outsiders. Like their rotten choek, of course, but there you are. Well, why should the little dears be disappointed? My idea is to dress ourselves in rags and tatters, or something like that, and go to the school as if we were fresh from the slums."

"My word!"

"Oh!"

"We can speak in the giddiest Cockney dialect, you know, and they will think that's the way we generally talk," went on Redfern, grinning. "You can mention that your father's in prison for burglary, Owen—"

"What?" yelled Owen.

"Only for the jape, you ass! Lawrence can say that his father is a rag-picker—"

"Oh!" ejaculated Lawrence.

"And I'll let it be discovered that I haven't any parents at all, but was found in the gutter and brought up by a tripe merchant."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If that doesn't give the aristocratic St. Jim's persons an electric shock, I'll eat my new topper!" grinned Redfern.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The three new boys roared in chorus. Arthur Augustus had meant well by the little warning he had given them, but it had nettled the scholarship boys a little, all the same. The "rag" Redfern had thought of seemed a ripping way of out-raging the aristocratic prejudices of the natives of St. Jim's, and it appealed to them very much.

"You see, we're sharper, all along the line, than these public school chaps, and we shall take them in easily enough," said Redfern. "I suppose they fancy themselves a great deal, but as a matter of fact they won't be up to our form. We've roped in scholarships that they couldn't take to save their lives. We've lived in a town where people are really alive, and they've vegetated in a sleepy hollow. I haven't the slightest doubt that if we stick together we shall be able to keep our end up at St. Jim's, and a little rag of this kind to begin with will show them that we are up to snuff. What?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Let's get the togs, then."

And the three chums walked down to the second-hand clothes dealer's, and entered the musty, stuffy little shop.

Mr. Wigge had often supplied clothes and costumes of various sorts to the St. Jim's juniors, for use in their amateur theatricals, and he was not surprised by the order the strangers gave him. He rolled out his stock at once, and Redfern & Co. selected the most impossible kind of garments they could find.

Mr. Wigge allowed them to change in his little parlour.

Redfern dressed himself in a pair of man's trousers, many sizes too large for him, and pinned up the ends over a pair of big, thick boots. He donned a waistcoat that was three sizes too large, and a jacket that was a little too small. He put a greasy old cap on the back of his head, and ruffled up his brown hair.

Owen and Lawrence shrieked.

"My hat! You wouldn't be admitted to a casual ward in that rig!" yelled Owen.

"They've got to admit me at St. Jim's," said Redfern serenely. "I'm booked there for a year, at least."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ain't I orlright?" demanded Redfern. "Carn't I speak as well as you young toffs, eh? 'Oo yer getting at?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gimme any of yer lip, and I'll dot you on the smeller!" said Redfern, in the broadest of Cockney.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Git them togs on," said Redfern; "and you'd better begin to practice talking, too. You've got to git inter the 'abit of it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Orlright," grinned Lawrence. "'Ow's that?"

"Oh, that's orlright. Crikey, you do look a 'orrible sight!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The trio dressed themselves, Lawrence and Owen looking even more outrageous than Redfern. They surveyed each other and roared. Mr. Wigge surveyed them, too, and laughed till the tears rolled down his fat face.

"We'll do, I think," chuckled Redfern.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Send the clothes on presently, and you can have this stuff back," said Redfern to Mr. Wigge. "And here's the cash for the hire."

"Thank you, sir."

"Nah, then, kummerlonger me," said Redfern. "We shall 'ave to 'op it to get to the school before D'Arcy gets there to give us away."

"Yes, rather—I mean wotto!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the three young rascals quitted the shop, leaving Mr. Wigge chuckling. They walked down the street, practising a slum slouch ready for their arrival at St. Jim's. They strolled along the lane to the school, making their boots and trousers as dusty as they could.

"That's St. Jim's, I suppose," said Redfern, as a grey old tower rose into view behind the trees.

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"'Ere we are!" said Owen.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The big gates of St. Jim's rose before them. Taggles, the school porter, was standing in the gateway, looking out into the road. He did not condescend to take any notice of the three young tramps, as he naturally imagined them to be.

At the sight of the stately old buildings, and the imposing arch of the gateway, perhaps a momentary doubt fell upon the three practical jokers. But it was too late to retreat now. They marched up to the gates, and Taggles the porter glared at them.

"You pass hon!" he said. "There ain't nothing to be given away 'ere, and we don't admit tramps. Pass hon."

"Crikey!" ejaculated Owen.

"Go and eat coke, cocky!" said Lawrence.

"Get yer 'air cut!" said Redfern.

Taggles gasped.

"You cheeky young himps!" he roared. "I'll——"

"You'll be civil, cocky, or we'll report yer," said Redfern, wagging a forefinger at the angry school porter. "We're new boys for this 'ere school——"

"What?"

"We're the three Board-school boys that are comin' 'ere to disgrace yer," Redfern explained sweetly. "I'm Redfern. This 'ere bloke's Lawrence. That cove is Owen. And if you give us any of yer lip, we'll report yer to the 'Ead."

Taggles staggered back. He knew about the three County Council schoolboys who were to come that afternoon, and Taggles had even greater aristocratic prejudices on the subject than the St. Jim's fellows had. Taggles had, in fact, sniffed a great deal over it, and he had confided to Mrs. Taggles that, "the school was comin' to somethink!" But his worst anticipations had been nothing like the dreadful reality. He stared blankly at the trio, and they left him leaning against the gate and gasping as they walked cheerfully on into the green old quadrangle of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 5.

A Surprise for St. Jim's.

TOM MERRY stood on the steps of the School House gently caressing his left eye. Figgins's fist had been planted there a short time before. Monty Lowther leaned against the porch, occasionally dabbing his nose with a handkerchief. Manners was the only one who felt inclined to talk, of the Terrible Three, so he was doing all the talking. But Manners's voice died away all of a sudden as he caught sight of three disreputable figures crossing the quadrangle towards the House.

"My only hat!" ejaculated Manners.

Tom Merry left off caressing his eye for a moment.

"What's up?" he asked.

"Look!" said Manners.

"Phew!"

"My only respected maternal aunt!" murmured Lowther.

The Terrible Three gazed at the strangers. How Taggles had allowed three such disreputable young ruffians to enter the precincts of St. Jim's puzzled them for a moment. Then they realised the truth.

"The three!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"The scholarship boys!"

"The County Council chaps!"

And the Terrible Three looked at one another.

They were deprived of the power of speech for some moments. They had had only a very hazy idea of what the scholarship boys would be like, but they had never dreamed in their wildest moments that they would be anything like this.

Redfern & Co. came up to the School House.

"'Allo!" said Redfern.

"Hallo!" said Tom Merry faintly.

"This 'ere is St. Jim's, ain't it?"

"Yes!" gasped Manners.

"'O's that old bloke at the gate?" asked Owen.

"Eh? Oh, that's the porter."

"Cheeky old cove!" said Lawrence solemnly. "I jolly near come to givin' 'im a welt on 'is tater-trap!"

"His—his what?" murmured Manners.

"'Is tater-trap," said Lawrence. "Don't you know wot a tater-trap is? I meant 'is kisser, you know."

"Oh!"

"Don't think much of this 'ere place," said Redfern, looking round disparagingly. "It must be very old, I think."

"It is very old," said Tom Merry. "Hundreds of years."

"Why don't they rebuild it, then?" asked Owen.

"What?"

"Our Board-school in Slum Alley is built of noo red brick," said Redfern proudly. "None of yer old stone and hivy for us! No fear!"

"We wouldn't stand it!" said Lawrence.

"Not much!" said Owen. "I don't fink!"

"Wot standard are you blokes in?" asked Redfern.

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"We don't have standards here," said Manners, somewhat haughtily. "We have Forms. We're in the Shell."

"Wot's that?"

"The Shell? Oh, it's the Form next above the Fourth."

"Queer name for a standard, the Shell!" said Redfern meditatively. "I suppose you coves ain't pullin' our leg, hey?"

"No!" gasped Manners. He had never been called a cove before, and it gave him quite a shock.

"We bin told you blokes would play tricks on us," said Redfern, shaking his head, and apparently quite regardless of the crowd of amazed fellows gathering round. "We ain't takin' any of yer old buck, you know."

"We ain't ashamed of bein' brort up in a Board-school in Slum Alley," Lawrence declared, "and I don't mind hevery-body knowin' that my father is a rag-picker."

"I wouldn't deny that my father was in prison for punchin' a bobby, not if I was talking to a dook," said Owen.

"My only chapeau!" ejaculated Kangaroo, of the Shell, staring at the new boys. "So you are the County Council chaps, are you?"

"We is!" said Redfern gravely.

"We har!" said Owen.

"That's about the size of it," said Lawrence. "We've kum 'ere on a scholarship. We're goin' into the Fourth Standard——"

"Fourth Form," said Manners.

"All the same thing, cocky. If this 'ere place was under the County Council, they'd soon 'ave it down, and rebuild it respectable with brick."

"Wot!" said Redfern.

The St. Jim's fellows looked at them. Words seemed to fail in an emergency like this. But Jerrold Lumley-Lumley, of the Fourth, came to the rescue.

"You chaps are going into the New House, I believe," he remarked.

Lumley-Lumley did not know, as a matter of fact, which House the trio were destined to enter, but he thought it was worth while making an attempt, at least, to plant the new boys upon Figgins & Co.

"Dunno," said Redfern. "Wich is the Noo 'Ouse?"

"Over the way!" said Blake. "Come on, I'll show you!"

"Thanks!"

Jack Blake led the way, and the trio followed him. They left the crowd of School House fellows in a buzz. Tom Merry forgot his eye, and Lowther his nose. They were thinking only of this latest and most astonishing addition to St. Jim's.

"Did you ever!" ejaculated Manners.

"Never!" murmured Tom Merry.

"Well, hardly ever!" gasped Monty Lowther.

"It's amazing!" said Herries. "I can't understand such chaps being let in."

"Looks to me as if St. Jim's is let in for something," said Digby.

"My word!"

"Great Scott!"

"Blessed if I can quite believe it," exclaimed Kangaroo. "It's extraordinary that their people should let them come here in that state."

"I guess it's a puzzle," remarked Lumley-Lumley.

"Oh, what can you expect of Board-school chaps?" said Levison, of the Fourth, with his sneering laugh. "They don't know any better. We shall have to rag the cads, and make them get out, that's all."

"If they don't know any better, it wouldn't be cricket to rag them," said Tom Merry, rather sharply.

Levison sneered.

"Oh, of course you would back them up!" he said. "I remember you stood up for young Frayne when he came into the Third. He was a chap of the same class."

"It's too thick!" said Glyn.

"Too thick intirely," said Reilly. "I wouldn't want to be a snob like Levison; but I think it's too thick intirely."

"Oh, rotten!" exclaimed Gore.

"There must be some mistake about it, I guess," said Lumley-Lumley. "Anyway, I hope they are going into the New House. It would be ripping to plant a crew of scare-crows like that on Figgins & Co."

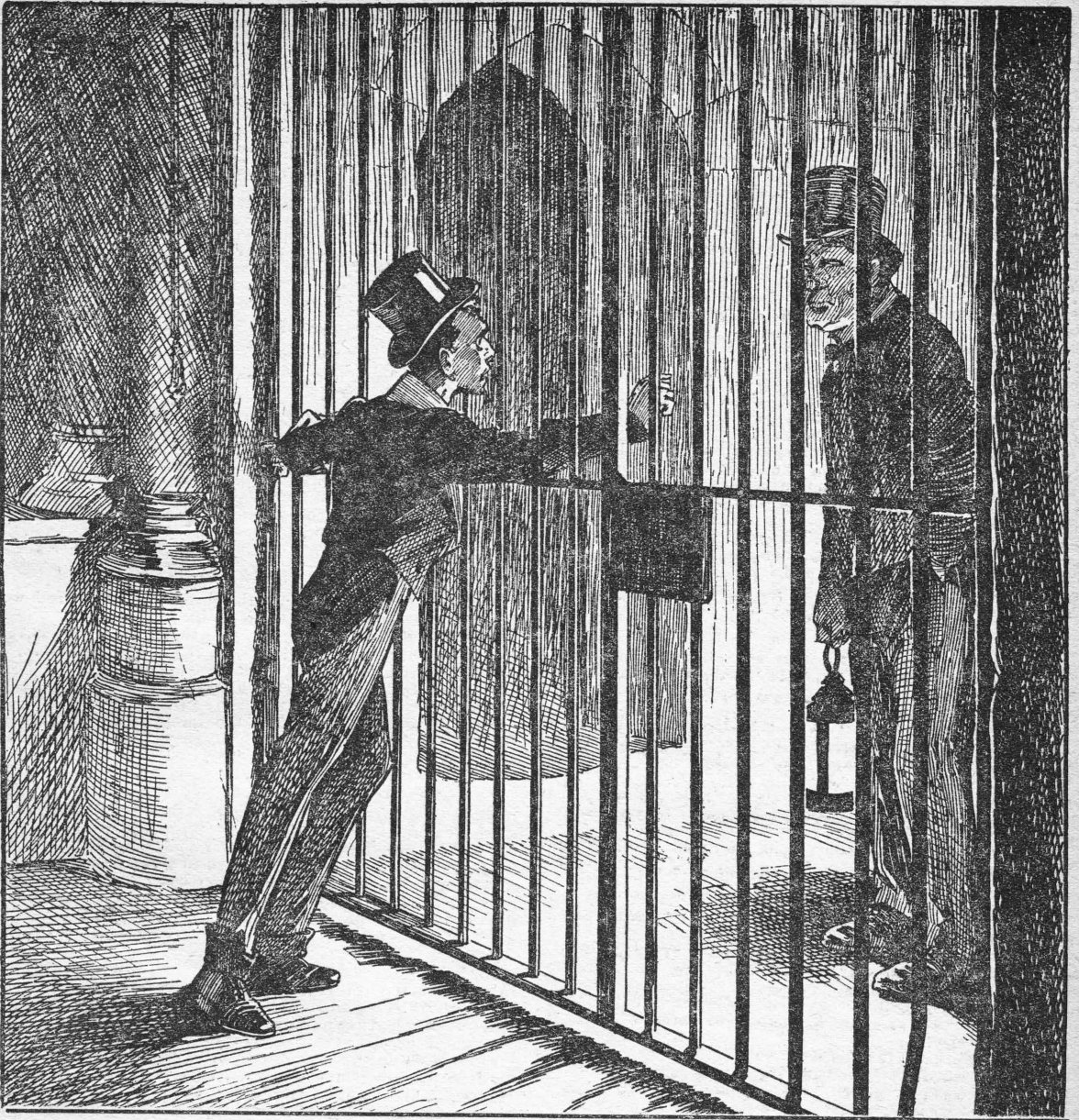
"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wonder what Gussy will say when he sees them?" grinned Gore.

"Phew!"

"I think he won't object to getting them out of the School House by hook or by crook, when he makes their acquaintance," grinned Digby.

And the talk ran on in growing excitement. The amazing appearance of the new boys was a topic that was likely to last the School House for some time. Meanwhile, Jack Blake had guided the trio to the New House. Redfern & Co.



LOCKED OUT! The Indian junior's dash to vote for his chum in the Captain's election is checked by the scheming of the rival candidate! (For the above incident see the grand, long, complete tale of Harry Wharton & Co., at Greyfriars, entitled "A RACE AGAINST TIME," which is contained in this week's issue of our grand companion paper, "The Magnet" Library. On sale at all newsagents. Price One Penny.)

appeared to be more pleased with the aspect of the New House than with that of the School House.

"This 'ere is somethin' like!" said Redfern. "This 'ere show is built properly of brick. It's noo."

Blake gave a sniff.

"Oh, it was run up the other day!" he said. "The New House is less than a hundred-and-fifty years old."

"Pooh!" said Owen. "Our Board-school in Slum Alley is only two years old!"

"Quite noo, with 'ot water pipes!" said Lawrence.

Blake marched the trio into the New House. Fellows gathered round in the passages to stare at them blankly as he conducted them upstairs to the Fourth-Form passage.

"What have you got there, Blake?" yelled Pratt, of the Fourth.

"What are they?"

"Where did you dig them up?" demanded Dibbs.

Blake stopped with his charges outside Figgins's study. Figgins & Co. were there, attending to the damages they had received in the combat outside the Head's study. Blake knocked at the door and opened it. Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn looked at him, and then their gaze became fixed, as it rested upon the three new boys.

"My hat!" breathed Kerr.

"Oh!" said Fatty Wynn.

Figgins only stared.

"Here they are!" said Blake cheerfully. "Come in, you chaps. These are the new chaps, Figgy. I hear they're going into your study. You're welcome."

And Blake stepped out, and closed the door, leaving Redfern & Co., in the study. He retreated from the New House chuckling.

DON'T MISS "A RACE AGAINST TIME!" The Splendid, Long, Complete School Story appearing in this week's number of the

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CHAPTER 6.

Too Bad!

FIGGINS, Kerr, and Wynn had not even risen. They could not. The three juniors of the New House seemed glued to their seats. The three new boys stood in the study, grinning with very pronounced grins.

"You call this 'ere a study?" asked Redfern.

"Yes," gasped Figgins.

"Ow many fellers 'ave it?"

"Three, so far," said Figgins, recovering himself a little, "and there's not going to be any addition to the number, if I can help it."

"Wot standard are you in?"

"We belong to the Fourth."

Redfern nodded.

"That's our Form!" he said. "Mighty pleased to meet yer. That there bloke 'oo brot us 'ere says we are to be in 'ere."

"That's 'ow it is," said Owen. "I think it will be a rotten crush, if there are six of us 'ere."

"Wot!" said Lawrence.

"Look here, you chaps," said Kerr, "I don't believe you're to be stuck in this study at all. It's some rotten joke of those School House bounders."

"There's a new study been opened at the end of the passage, partitioned off from the box-rooms," said Fatty Wynn. "If you're coming into the New House at all, it stands to reason that you'll be put in there."

"Crikey!" said Redfern.

"Where do you come from?" demanded Kerr.

"Slum Alley," said Redfern innocently. "We've been to a Board-school, you know, and they are all like the likes of us there. I 'spose you blokes think we're low."

"Oh, no," said Kerr, "low isn't the word for it!"

"We're orlright, you know."

"Yes, you look it."

"We've put on these 'ere togs specially to come 'ere," Redfern explained. "We thort we'd better be a bit decent?"

"That's 'ow it is."

"Decent!" gasped Figgins. "Is that what you call decent?"

"Wot's the matter with our togs, cocky?"

"Oh, nothing—nothing at all!"

"If you coves are goin' to put on 'any side, there will be trouble," said Redfern. "We ain't goin' to be put on because we come from Slum Alley."

"We can't 'elp our fathers bein' in prison," said Owen indignantly.

"Prison!" murmured Figgins. "Oh!"

"Blokes gets into trouble," said Redfern; "they puts 'em in chokey for pinchin', you know. As if a bloke can't pinch a watch when 'e's 'ard up!"

"Not that we're goin' to pinch any of your tickers," said Lawrence generously; "we know 'ow to play the game."

"Wot! Orlright among friends," pursued Redfern. "I say, wot kind of grub do you git to eat 'ere? Good bloaters, I 'ope?"

"And 'addicks?" asked Owen, with interest.

"Course, we don't 'ave much to eat at 'ome," went on Redfern. "Sometimes we 'ave only a bit 'o' crust when we takes the washin' 'ome."

"And I 'spose a chap wouldn't be allowed to git a job in a fried-fish shop out o' school hours 'ere," added Lawrence.

"Crikey! I don't know wot we're to do for pocket-money, then! I'm thinking of gettin' a job in the village to take 'andbills hout."

Figgins rose to his feet. He was almost overcome.

"There's a—a mistake about you chaps coming into this study," he gasped. "Have you seen the Head yet?"

"No, we ain't seen no blessed 'Ead."

"You ought to see—to see—somebody," said Figgins haltingly. "Do you mean to say that those clothes are the best you've got?"

"We got 'em special to come 'ere."

"My hat! What were their old ones like, then?" murmured Fatty Wynn.

"Come with me," said Figgins. "I'll show you where you are to go, if you're going to be in this House at all."

"Thanks!"

The three new boys, with great gravity, followed the unhappy Figgins out of the study. They left Kerr and Wynn gasping helplessly.

"What's St. Jim's coming to?" murmured Kerr.

"Oh, don't ask me!" said Fatty Wynn wildly. "If those bounders are put into this study, I shall leave St. Jim's."

Redfern & Co. followed Figgins down the passage. Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, met them. The big Sixth-Former stopped to stare.

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"What does this mean, Figgins?" he exclaimed sharply.

"How dare you bring fellows like this into the house?"

"I didn't bring 'em in," groaned Figgins. "They're the new kids."

"What?"

"They're the scholarship boys."

"Impossible."

"Ask 'em."

The prefect glared at the new-comers.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

"I'm Redfern," replied the owner of that name cheerfully. "This 'ere bloke is Lawrence. That there bloke is Owen."

"Do you mean to say that you are the scholarship boys from the County Council school?" yelled Monteith, unable to believe his eyes.

"Yus."

"It's—it's impossible."

"That's wot we are, cocky," said Redfern.

"Great heavens!"

Monteith staggered away.

Figgins and trio went downstairs again. Quite a crowd had collected in the lower passage, and the quartette ran the gauntlet of a fire of comment. Figgins hurried the three fellows out of the house.

"'Ere, 'old on!" exclaimed Redfern, as they emerged into the quadrangle, "where are you a-takin' of us?"

"This 'ere is our 'Ouse," said Owen.

"There's a—a mistake," said Figgins. "You don't belong to this House, you know. You are really going into the School House. That's how it is."

"Crikey!"

"Wot!"

"My heye!"

And with those ejaculations the three new-comers followed Figgins across the quad. Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, and Darrel of the Sixth encountered them outside the School House, and they were as amazed as Monteith had been.

"What on earth is this?" Kildare exclaimed.

"The three new kids," said Figgins.

"What?"

"That's kerrect!" said Redfern familiarly. "We're the Board School boys, you know. We've jest come from Slum Alley!"

"Oh!"

"They're going to enter the School House," Figgins explained hurriedly. "Come on, you fellows! We shall have a crowd round in a minute."

"I don't mind 'avin' a crowd rarnd," replied Redfern.

"I like a crowd, I does! I'm used to a crowd on Saturday nights in the Mile End Road, when we goes out to get the beer for farver. I always used to fetch 'is beer on a Saturday night, afore he was sent to chokey for pinchin' a toff's watch!"

"Oh!" said Figgins.

He led the new boys on. Tom Merry & Co. were crowded in the doorway of the School House, and there was an addition to the crowd there in the shape of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who had returned to St. Jim's by this time.

A shout greeted the appearance of the new boys. The juniors lined up in the doorway, evidently prepared to resist by force any attempt to introduce them into the School House. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jammed his monocle into his eye, and regarded the trio with blank astonishment. He recognised the faces of the three fellows he had met in Rylcombe, but he did not recognise their clothes.

"Bai Jove!" he ejaculated.

Redfern made a grimace.

"There's that blessed D'Arcy!" he murmured to his comrades. "The game's up!"

Lawrence and Owen chuckled.

"Never mind. It's been a lark."

"There you are, Gussy!" roared Blake. "There's the family you were standing up for. There's the giddy crew you wanted to have in the School House!"

"Gweat Scott!"

"How do you like 'em now you see 'em, you ass?" yelled Blake.

"Yes, rather. Going to chum with 'em, Gussy?" demanded Monty Lowther.

"Bai Jove!"

"Don't you dare to bring 'em in here, Figgins! We'll roll the lot of you out if you come in here!" shouted Kangaroo.

"Look here, they belong to this House, not to the New House!" shouted Figgins excitedly.

"Rats!"

"Rot!"

"You can have 'em!"

"Take 'em out and drown 'em!"

"Go and bury them!"

"They're not coming in here!"
 "Blimey!" said Redfern. "What's all the excitement about? Anybody drunk?"
 "Reg'ler crew of 'ooligans, ain't they?" said Lawrence.
 "Peaky blinders, and no mistake!" said Owen.
 "Bai Jove!"
 "What do you think now, Gussy?" roared the incensed juniors.

To the surprise of the crowd, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy burst into a shout of laughter. As he had seen the heroes of the County Council school before, he knew, of course, that their present guise and present manner of speaking must be a "rag."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 The juniors stared at him, exasperated.
 "You cackling ass——"
 "Where's the joke?"
 "What are you cackinating at?"
 D'Arcy's eyeglass dropped from his eye, and his silk topper slid to the back of his head, in the excess of merriment.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he roared.
 "You frabjous ass——"
 "Chuck it, you dummy——"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Oh, bump him!" roared Tom Merry.
 "Hold on, deah boys! Pway hold on! You've been done!" shrieked the swell of St. Jim's. "I've seen these chaps before, and they're all wight. Ha, ha, ha!"

"What?"
 "Hey?"
 "What do you mean, fathead?"
 "Ha, ha, ha!" yelled D'Arcy. "It's a wag! Ha, ha, ha! You've been taken in. They're pullin' your leg, deah boys! Ha, ha, ha!"

"The game's up," said Redfern. "I didn't expect to see you 'ere, D'Arcy. You've bin an' gorn and spoiled a good joke, you hass!"

"Crikey!" said Lawrence. "Rather! It's 'orrid!"
 "Wot a shame!" said Owen.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Look here, Gussy——"
 "What is this disturbance?" It was the voice of Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, as he came from his study towards the big doorway, crowded with excited juniors. "What does this mean? Bless my soul! Who are these boys?"

CHAPTER 7.

Gussy Knew,

MR. RAILTON gazed at the three new boys in amazement, as well he might. Half St. Jim's was gathered round the steps of the School House now, but the angry voices had died away. The fellows felt that Mr. Railton would be able to deal with the situation. No doubt he would order the three dreadful young ruffians to be sent away from the school at once. But he did not seem to be able to find his voice for a moment. He stared blankly at Redfern & Co., and Reddy was the first to speak.

"If you please, sir——" he began.
 The crowd stared blankly at him. The change in his voice was astounding. There was no trace of the exaggerated Cockney accent now.

"We're sorry, sir," said Redfern penitently. "It's only a joke, sir."

"Just a little joke, sir," said Lawrence.
 "No harm intended, sir," said Owen.

The juniors were silent now with astonishment, with the exception of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. That elegant youth found it difficult to suppress his merriment at the way St. Jim's had been taken in. He was trying not to laugh, by stuffing a cambric handkerchief into his mouth; but he was almost choked in the effort, and his aristocratic face was getting quite crimson.

"I do not understand this," said Mr. Railton at last. "Who are you?"

"I'm Redfern, sir; and these chaps are Lawrence and Owen."

"The new boys?"
 "Yes, sir."

"Why have you come to the school in those ridiculous clothes?" asked Mr. Railton, with a stern look.

Redfern & Co. looked at one another. They realised that the "jape" was over now, and that they might have to pay dearly for it. They had plunged into it recklessly, without much thought as to the consequences; but now that the consequences had arrived, they were prepared to "face the music."

"If you please, sir——" faltered Redfern.

Arthur Augustus controlled his merriment at last. "Pewwaps you had better leave it to me to explain, deah boys," he remarked. "It is weally partly my fault."

Mr. Railton looked at him sharply.
 "What do you mean, D'Arcy?" he exclaimed. "Have you anything to do with this absurd jest?"
 "Yaas, wathah, sir! You see, I met these boundahs in Wylcombe——"

"These what?" rapped out Mr. Railton.
 "These fellows, sir," said D'Arcy, a little abashed. "I met them in Wylcombe, sir, and I wanted them to wait while I went into my tailah's, sir, so that I could bwing them to St. Jim's undah my pwotection. I warned them that some of the chaps might wag them, you see, sir. I suppose that put the ideah of this wag into their heads, and so it was weally my fault, sir."

"You see, sir," ventured Redfern, "we thought that if the fellows were getting ready to receive three frightful ragamuffins, sir, that—that it would be a pity to disappoint them, sir. It—it was only a joke, sir."

"And we're sorry, sir, if we've given offence," said Lawrence penitently, but with a twinkle in his eye.
 Mr. Railton smiled in spite of himself.

"It was an absurd joke," he said. "You will go and change into something more respectable at once. Where are your clothes?"

"They're being sent on from Rylcombe, sir."
 "Indeed! Then you had better go to the dormitory, and take those things off, and wait in the dormitory until your own clothes arrive."

"Certainly, sir."
 Mr. Railton went back into his study. As soon as he was inside, with the door closed, he burst into a laugh. It occurred to the Housemaster that the three new fellows from the County Council school were likely to carry on the very best traditions of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's.

The crowd of fellows stared at the three heroes, still amazed.

"Well, my hat!" Tom Merry exclaimed at last. "I never heard of such a giddy rag in all my born days!"
 D'Arcy chuckled.

"I knew they were the wight stuff, deah boys!" he remarked.

"Oh, rats!" said Blake.
 "Weally, Blake——"

"Then—then you're not hooligans at all, you chaps?" ejaculated Kangaroo.

Redfern & Co. burst into a roar.
 "Ha, ha, ha! Not exactly!"

"Awfully sorry, for your sakes, but we're quite respectable!" said Owen blandly. "It's not our fault, you know, but we were brought up quite respectable. But we've been trying to please you for the last half-hour."

"Bai Jove! Ha, ha, ha! I wegard it as a wippin' wag, and I told you fellows all along that they were all wight. They wescued me fwom the Gwammawians in Wylcombe, and I knew they were the wight stuff. And I twust they will be put into the School House. I knew——"

"Oh, never mind what you knew!" said Monty Lowther. "What you knew, and what you didn't know, would fill two volumes, and the second volume would be the bigger of the two!"

"Weally, Lowthah——"
 "Well, I'm sorry," said Figgins shame-facedly. "You took me in, and so you can't blame me for treating you as I did."

"It's all serene," said Redfern. "By the way, my father isn't in chokey, you know, and I've never really fetched beer on a Saturday night in the Mile End Road."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Owen and Lawrence.
 "Come on, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "The sooner you get out of those feahful clothes the better. I'll show you the way to the Fourth-Form dorm."

"Thanks!"
 The new boys followed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy into the House. The crowd of fellows remained in excited discussion. Arthur Augustus turned at the bottom of the stairs, as Redfern & Co. started up, and fixed his monocle upon the juniors.

"I must weally remark, deah boys, that I told you——"
 "Oh, cheese it!"

"I knew all along——"
 Five or six fellows made a rush at D'Arcy, and the swell of St. Jim's rather hurriedly followed the new boys upstairs.

He chuckled to himself as he guided them to the Fourth-Form dormitory. Arthur Augustus took a personal pride in the exploit of the new-comers. He felt that he had stood up for them all along, and that he was the first to recognise their quality, and he reflected with considerable satisfaction upon the tact and judgment he had displayed. He looked

upon Redfern & Co. as being under his wing, and he was so kind and considerate that Redfern did not give a hint that he had no intention of being under anybody's wing.

While the new boys were changing their ridiculous attire in the junior dormitory, the discussion in the growing dusk at the door of the School House continued with much animation. The fellows were very much divided in opinion as to the new boys, but they could hardly help admitting that it had been a rag worthy of the best days of Tom Merry & Co. There was evidently something in the new chaps.

"As a matter of fact," said Tom Merry, in his candid way, "I'm afraid that Gussy was in the right, just as he says, and—and our deputation to the Head wasn't in the best possible taste. And I'm glad it never came off."

"I've been thinking something of that sort myself," Blake remarked, with a nod. "Gussy said it was caddish, and—and I certainly didn't mean to be so, but I'm afraid that was really the right word. Gussy hits the right nail on the head sometimes."

"Anyway, I'm not up against them, for one," said Tom Merry. "They seem to be decent enough, and I vote for giving them a chance."

"Hear, hear!" said Blake.

CHAPTER 8.

Tea in Study No. 6.

REDFERN and his comrades removed the garments they had hired in Rylcombe, and then they turned in, in three of the junior beds, to wait for their own garments to arrive. The latter were not long in coming; and Toby, the School House page, brought the messenger up to the dormitory. Toby was grinning very broadly as he ushered Mr. Wigge's boy in.

The parcel was delivered, and Mr. Wigge's property was despatched, and then the three new boys dressed themselves. Arthur Augustus kept them company all the time—perhaps with the idea that otherwise some of the School House fellows might be tempted to "wag" them. But it was extremely probable that if anybody had attempted to rag Redfern & Co., the trio would have taken the best possible care of themselves.

"You don't know which house you are going into?" the swell of St. Jim's asked, as the three new boys—looking much nicer now—put the finishing touches to their attire.

Redfern shook his head.

"No. I didn't even know you had more than one house till we got here," he replied.

D'Arcy stared a little.

"Bai Jove! Is it poss., deah boys?"

"Quite possible," grinned Lawrence. "What's the dodge, anyway?"

"Why, you see, some time ago—about a hundred and fifty years or so—the school grew too large for the School House to accommodate everybody," D'Arcy explained. "The School House was enlarged from time to time, evah since the weign of King John, but at the time I mention they decided to build a new house—and it was called the New House, because—because—"

"Because it was the new house?" suggested Owen.

"Yaas, pweicely. Of course, the School House is the pwpincial house at St. Jim's—it is twice as big as the New House, and has twice as many fellows in it. The School House is also cock-house of the school. We beat Figgins & Co. hollow in evewy way, you know. Of course, Figgins & Co. don't admit it. But that's how it is, you know."

"I see."

"I twust you are coming into the School House," said D'Arcy cordially. "But it depends on the Head. You ought to go and weport yourselves to the Head. I will show you the way if you like."

"Thanks, very much!"

"Not at all. Follow me, deah boys."

And Arthur Augustus showed the three new boys to the Head's study.

"By the way, you haven't had your tea, I suppose?" he asked.

"Been too busy," grinned Owen.

"Ha, ha, ha! Yaas, that was a wippin' wag. Tea in Hall is ovah now," the swell of St. Jim's remarked. "Pewwaps you will do me the honah of havin' tea in my study—No. 6, in the Fourth-Form passage. Come there as soon as you've finished with the Head. I don't suppose he will keep you long, as your Housemaster will make all the awwagements."

"Is that chap who slanged us the Housemaster here?" asked Redfern.

"Yaas; that's Mr. Wailton. The Housemaster of the New House is Mr. Watchliff, master of the Fifth Form.

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Watty is a wottah! I twust, for your own sakes, that you will be put into this House."

"I hope so," said Redfern, very cordially.

And the new boys tapped at the Head's door and entered, while Arthur Augustus D'Arcy walked away to make preparations for a tea upon a somewhat more magnificent scale than usual in Study No. 6.

Tea was already being prepared there when the swell of St. Jim's came in. The fire was burning brightly, and Digby was making toast, and Herries was making the tea. Jack Blake was scraping out the remains of jam from a jar with great care into a nice clean soap-dish.

"Hallo! You've come in at last?" growled Blake.

"Where have you been?"

"Lookin' atfah the new kids, deah boy."

"Well, now you've come, make yourself useful. Cut some more bread for Dig'."

"What have you got for tea, deah boys?"

"Toast, said Blake, "and one egg each."

"I'm afwaid that won't be much good, Blake."

"Why not?" demanded Blake warmly. "Are you going to understudy Fatty Wynn, and eat enough for forty?"

"Certainly not, deah boy! But I have invited some fellows to tea."

"How many?"

"Thwee."

"Tom Merry and the rest, I suppose. We'll——"

"Not Tom Mewwy, deah boy."

"Figgins & Co.?"

"No."

Digby turned a ruddy face from the fire.

"You don't mean to say that you've invited those new bounders?" he exclaimed.

Arthur Augustus nodded calmly.

"Yaas, wathah!" he replied. "That is pweicely what I have done, deah boy."

"You ass!" growled Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies——"

"Ass! We don't know anything about the fellows, excepting that they came here in old rags and japed us."

"I know them vewy well."

"Oh, rot!"

"I made their acquaintance in Wylcombe," said D'Arcy calmly. "I was bein' bothahed by the Gwammah School boundahs, and they wescued me and gave Gordon Gay and Fwank Monk a good bumpin'. I wegarded that as playin' the game."

Blake granted.

"Well, if you've asked them, I suppose they'd better come," he said.

"Yaas, wathah! I twust you are goin' to be civil to my visitahs, Blake," said Arthur Augustus somewhat severely. "I certainly should wefuse to wegard you as a fwied if you cut up wusty to a chap whom I had invited to tea."

"Oh, rats!"

"Go and get in some more provender, then, you ass," said Digby. "We can't ask three fellows to share four eggs and a few rounds of toast."

"Quite wight, deah boy! I'll huwvy like anythin'."

And Arthur Augustus departed, taking a cricket-bag with him. He evidently intended doing some shopping on a large scale.

The three juniors looked at one another when he was gone.

"Just like Gussy!" growled Herries.

"Well, they won't hurt us," said Blake. "After all, we don't know anything about them yet, and that jape of theirs was really a good one, and clever, and wanted some nerve, too. If it had been Ratty instead of Railton who interviewed them——"

Digby chuckled.

"They would have been sorry for themselves," he remarked.

"Shows they've got nerve, anyway. I'm not up against them," said Blake, "but I don't know that I want to fold them to my bosom and weep over them. But there's no stopping Gussy. I wonder which House they are going into?"

Tap!

"Come in!" called out Blake.

Three cheerful-looking juniors entered the study. The chums of the Fourth looked at them in surprise. The change that had taken place in Redfern & Co. was amazing. They looked as clean as new pins, very neatly dressed, and decidedly good-looking. Lawrence especially, with his blue eyes and curly, fair hair, was a handsome lad.

"My hat!" ejaculated Blake.

"Well, here we are," said Redfern. "Where's D'Arcy?"

"He's gone to the tuckshop."

"This is his study, isn't it?"

"Yes, that's right—No. 6."

"You fellows guests as well?"

Blake grinned.

"No; we belong to the place. You see, we're in pretty close quarters at St. Jim's; we usually go three or four to a study. This is rather large for a junior study, and there are four of us in it."

Redfern nodded thoughtfully.

"I see," he remarked. "I didn't know that when we accepted D'Arcy's invitation to tea. We are quite willing to slide out, if you don't want us, and you won't hurt our feelings by saying so. Nothing like straight talk, is there?"

Blake laughed. He began to think that Redfern was a fellow very much after his own heart. There was certainly no humbug about him.

"As a matter of fact, too, we've just seen the Head, and he says that we're to belong to the New House," said Redfern cheerfully.

"New House—eh?" said Digby. "Then you'll belong to Figgins's flock."

"I don't think that I shall belong to anybody's flock, as far as I'm concerned."

"Figgins is leader of the juniors in the New House," Blake explained.

"I'm not looking for a leader at present."

"Better mind how you tell Figgins so," said Herries warningly. "Figgins won't allow two junior leaders in his House. You can bet on that. Figgy has always bragged that there's only one junior captain over there, and not a row between two of them, same as in the School House."

"Oh, never mind Figgins!" said Redfern. "The question is, do you want us to stay to tea, or don't you? Don't mind talking plain English; we like it."

"We'll be glad to have you to tea," said Blake.

"Hear, hear!" said Digby and Herries cordially enough.

"Good enough! We'll be glad to stay. I hear that tea in Hall is over, and I've got a prize appetite after my journey down."

"Same here," said Lawrence.

"Bai Jove, here you are, deah boys!"

Arthur Augustus came in, with the cricket-bag filled almost to bursting. He seemed very pleased at finding the new boys on such good terms with his three chums.

"I twust you are goin' to belong to this House, deah boys?" he added.

Redfern shook his head.

"Sorry!" he said sincerely enough. "The Head says we're going into the New House. It seems that there's a new study there, and we're going to have it."

"Bai Jove, I'm awfully sowwy! Howevah, we'll have a feed togethah, and then we'll see you ovah to your new quartahs," said D'Arcy.

And the contents of the cricket-bag being disclosed, the seven juniors sat down to tea with good appetites, and they did full justice to the sumptuous fare provided by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

CHAPTER 9.

Something for Levison.

THE tea in Study No. 6 was a very cheerful one, not to say merry.

Tea in Blake's study was generally cheerful when the juniors were in funds. If anybody had told Blake that afternoon that he would be sitting down to tea in his study with the three County Council Scholarship boys, and cracking jokes with them on the best of terms, he would have considered the statement wild in the extreme. But here he was, and it was so.

The chums of the Fourth had to admit that there was nothing wrong with Redfern & Co. They were just three decent, healthy British boys, and there was no reason why anyone should not be able to get on with them. And as they were not coming into the School House, there was no fear of their being planted upon the already crowded quarters in No. 6; so that trouble was off Blake's mind. He was very civil to the new-comers, and before tea was over he found himself on quite friendly terms with them.

Arthur Augustus was beaming all the time. He felt that his tact and his judgment had been justified by events. He looked upon the new-comers as his own special proteges, and he was very proud of their turning out so well.

Several fellows who looked into Blake's study, having heard what was going on there, went away astonished. Gore confided to Kangaroo that the new chaps were quite clean, and had clean collars on, and hadn't even dirty finger-nails. Dane and Glyn and Kangaroo all looked in on the feasters, and so did the Terrible Three. Arthur Augustus, who had laid in sufficient provisions for a siege on a small scale, invited them all in the most cordial manner to join in the feed. Most of them accepted the offer; good feeds were not common enough to be lightly refused.

Study No. 6 was soon crowded to the limits of its capacity. Tom Merry and Blake and Lowther sat in a crowded row on the window-ledge. Glyn sat on the locker, and the sturdy

Cornstalk leaned against the bookcase. Clifton Dane stood by the mantelpiece, and Reilly sat on the fender. Good things were handed round, and there were still untouched stores in the cricket-bag. Levison, of the Fourth, looked into the doorway, which was left wide open, for with so many occupants the study was somewhat warm.

"Hallo! Feeding the poor?" asked Levison, with his unpleasant sneer.

Redfern & Co. did not appear to hear. They would have been quite prepared at any other time to bump Levison the length of the passage; but they did not want a row in other fellows' quarters. That was a delicacy of feeling which Levison was very far from comprehending.

Blake flushed angrily, and made a gesture to the cad of the Fourth.

"Get out, you cad!" he said.

Levison grinned.

"I want to see the animals feed," he explained. "I've never had the honour of having friends from a Board-school before."

"Shut up, you wottah!" exclaimed D'Arcy.

"Rats! Can't I watch the animals, if I like? It's cheaper than paying to see 'em at the Zoo, and more amusing," said Levison.

Smack!

A soft jam tart, jerked deftly by Redfern, caught the cad of the Fourth fairly upon the nose, and squashed there. Levison staggered back into the passage with a muffled yell.

"Groo! Oh! Ow! Yaroop!"

There was a roar of laughter from the juniors.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Please excuse me for wasting your tarts," said Redfern cheerfully.

"Bai Jove, you're vewy welcome, deah boy!" grinned Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Levison, if you make any more of your wotten wemarks I shall give you a feahful thwashin'!"

Levison, with a face crimson with fury, scraped the sticky tart off his face, and dabbed his jammy features with his handkerchief.

"You low cad!" he roared. "How dare you touch me, you slum bouncer? Lemme get at him, that's all!"

"Keep out, Levison!"

"I'm going to lick that Board-school cad!"

Levison dashed into the crowded study. Three or four feet were put into his way, and he tripped over and came down with a bump.

"Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Levison scrambled to his feet. Blake's boot crashed behind him, and he rolled over, and three or four more boots helped him into the passage again. A yell of laughter followed him. The cad of the Fourth rolled on the linoleum.

"Now, buzz off!" said Blake. "You'll get it hotter if you come into this study again, you howling cad!"

Levison jumped up furiously, his fists clenched and his eyes aflame. He did not attempt to force his way into the study again, but brandished his fists in the doorway.

"Let that cad come out, then!" he roared.

"Rats!"

"Let him come out into the passage! I'll smash him! Yah! Cad! Coward!" yelled Levison.

Redfern rose to his feet.

"I can't let a chap talk to me like that," he said. "I don't want a row in your study, D'Arcy; but you don't mind if I step into the passage, do you?"

"Pway leave it to me, deah boy! I will give the fwrightful wottah a thwashin'!"

Redfern shook his head.

"I can manage him," he said.

"He's bigger than you are, deah boy—"

"If he were as big as Goliath, he shouldn't call me those fancy names without putting his fists up," said Redfern quietly.

"Come out!" roared Levison. "Come out into the passage, if you're not afraid. I'll give you a hiding, you slum rotter!"

"Well, I'm coming."

Redfern stepped out into the passage.

The feed was suspended while the crowd of juniors watched him. Redfern was certainly neither so old nor so big as Levison, but he looked a very sturdy junior, and he certainly was in better condition than the cad of the Fourth.

Levison sprang at him like a tiger.

But his thrashing fists did not reach the cool, serene face. Redfern's left swept up, and Levison's hands were knocked into the air, and then Redfern's right came out in a smashing blow.

Levison caught it full on the nose, and he staggered back blindly, the water starting to his eyes, and fell upon the floor with a crash.

"Ow!"

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I regard that as weally wippin, you know. Didn't I tell you fellows—"

"Hurrah!" shouted Blake.

"Bravo!" yelled Tom Merry.

Redfern stood rubbing his knuckles. He had hit very hard. Levison lay dazed for some moments, blinking up at the new junior.

"Ow-w-w-w!" he groaned.

"Do you want any more?" asked Redfern calmly.

Levison staggered to his feet. But he was careful to keep at a safe distance from Redfern. It was pretty clear that he did not want any more.

"Ow!" he grunted. "Oh! Oh!"

"Now, don't be in a hurry to go, Levison, old man," said Monty Lowther persuasively. "You are going to smash the new chap, you know, and we're all waiting for the smashing to begin."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Levison scowled savagely, and tramped away down the passage. The encounter had been very brief, but it had been quite long enough for the cad of the Fourth. He was not likely to attempt fisticuffs again with the new junior.

Redfern stepped back into the study, and sat down at the tea-table again. He was as cool as a cucumber.

"I'm sorry for this," said Blake. "But you needn't mind that chap; he's a howling cad, you know, and the whole House knows he's a rotter."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Redfern nodded cheerfully.

"I don't mind him," he said simply. "Pass the jam-tarts!"

And the feed continued quite merrily.

Levison was forgotten in two minutes; but the cad of the Fourth, nursing his swollen nose in his study, could not forget so easily.

When the tea was over, quite a crowd of School House fellows, cheery and friendly, escorted the three new boys over to the New House, and gave them a cheer when they left them at the door. Redfern & Co. had certainly started well at St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 10.

Redfern & Co.'s First Day at St. Jim's.

FIGGINS & CO. looked somewhat queerly at the new trio when they came into the Fourth Form dormitory in the New House at bedtime. New boys at St. Jim's, in either House, were sometimes ragged, but no one wanted to rag Redfern, Lawrence, and Owen. The trio had given an impression that ragging would be a difficult business with them. Figgins & Co. hardly knew what to make of them so far. But the thought crossed their minds that their reign as leaders of the juniors in the New House was in danger of ending. And at that thought the three heroes of the Fourth felt themselves very much "up against" the new trio.

"They seem decent enough," said Figgins. "I'm the first chap to admit that. But we can't have any insubordination in this House."

Kerr and Wynn nodded with cordial assent.

"Just so!" said Fatty Wynn. "It's all very well in the School House. Tom Merry and Blake have never settled which is junior captain. But we can't have anything of that sort over here."

"Rather not!" said Kerr emphatically. "Figgy is junior skipper in the New House, and Figgy is going to remain junior skipper."

"Yes, rather!"

"I think we'll give 'em a plain talking to to-morrow on that subject," Figgins observed thoughtfully. "Of course, being new chaps, they don't know the ropes, and I wouldn't be rusty with a new chap. As soon as they understand how matters are here, I dare say they'll toe the line with the rest."

"They'd better!"

"Yes; I shall point that out to them."

Redfern & Co. slept soundly enough their first night at St. Jim's.

In the morning, when the rising-bell clanged out, awaking School House and New House fellows to a new day's work, Redfern sat up in bed and blinked round him.

"Hallo!" called out Dibbs, from his bed. "I suppose this feels a bit strange to you new chaps, doesn't it?"

There was a hint of patronage in Dibbs's voice, but Redfern was never quick to take offence. He nodded cheerfully.

"Yes, it's a bit new," he said.

"Yes; especially after what you're used to," Dibbs remarked.

Redfern looked at him.

"Yes; I've never woke up before to see a face like yours THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 211.

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near me," he replied. "I've seen 'em in nightmares, of course, after having pie for supper, but—"

There was a chuckle from some of the juniors, and Dibbs glared.

"Look here, I don't want any of your slum cheek," said Dibbs. "I don't like it."

Redfern grinned.

"Well, I don't like your manners, if you come to that, or your features either," he remarked. "We have to put up with these unpleasant things, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Whiz!

Dibbs's pillow flew through the air straight at Redfern's head. Redfern put up his hands and caught it as it came, and in a flash it was hurled back straight at Dibbs. Dibbs wasn't expecting that smart return, and the pillow caught him upon the chest, and he rolled out of bed with a bump.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Pratt. "Well caught!"

"Caught and bowled Redfern!" grinned Fatty Wynn.

Dibbs jumped up in a rage.

"I'll smash you for that, you County Council bounder!" he yelled.

"Come on, then," yawned Redfern; "I'm waiting to be smashed!"

Dibbs came on with a rush. He simply hurled himself upon the junior sitting up in bed. Redfern did not roll over under the rush. He grasped Dibbs, swung him off his feet, and flung him over the other side of the bed. Dibbs crashed into Fatty Wynn, who was getting out of bed, and they rolled on the floor together.

"Yaroo!" roared Wynn.

"Ow!" gasped Dibbs.

Figgins gave a low whistle.

"My hat! You must have been developing your muscle, Redfern!" he exclaimed.

Redfern laughed.

Fatty Wynn pushed Dibbs off and jumped up. Dibbs rose to his feet more slowly, gazing at Redfern in astonishment and dismay. He did not offer to come to close quarters again, but dressed himself very quietly indeed.

Redfern turned out cheerfully and calmly. The Fourth-Formers regarded him with a new interest. They had had an impression, based chiefly upon inexperience, that athletic fellows were only to be found in public schools. They were beginning to realise that the new boy who had come to St. Jim's with a County Council scholarship was very "hot stuff" indeed.

Redfern & Co. were quite new to St. Jim's, but they did not seem at all abashed as they took their places at the breakfast-table with the Fourth-Formers who belonged to the New House. Mr. Ratcliff, the Housemaster, was at the head of the Fifth Form table in the dining-room, and he glanced at the new boys with a sour expression. The trio had had a brief interview with their Housemaster before going to bed the previous night; but at that time Mr. Ratcliff had said only a few words. He had been absent from the school the previous evening, and had not heard of the peculiar manner of the new boys' arrival at St. Jim's. But his expression showed that he had heard it since, and that he did not take it good-humouredly, as Mr. Railton had done.

Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, usually took the head of the Fourth Form table at meal times in the New House. After breakfast, the prefect signed to the three new boys as they went out, and Redfern & Co. stopped.

"You are to go into Mr. Ratcliff's study after morning lessons, you three," said Monteith.

"Oh!" said Redfern. "Anything wrong?"

Monteith grinned.

"Yes; your silly jape yesterday."

"But—but that's all over, you know," said Owen.

"I dare say it would have been all over if you'd gone into the School House," said the prefect, "but we don't allow monkey tricks in this House. Mr. Ratcliff wants to see you about it, and you're to go into his study immediately after morning lessons, and wait for him there."

"Oh, all serene!" said Redfern.

The trio looked at one another in some dismay after Monteith had left them.

"Looks to me as if we've got into the wrong shop," said Owen.

Redfern nodded.

"Yes; I'd rather be in the School House," he said. "The Housemaster over there is an angel beside Ratty, and the head prefect—Kildare, I think his name is—is a better sort of animal than Monteith. The School House chaps have all the luck."

"I suppose it can't be helped," said Lawrence. "We shall have to stand it."

"Well, yes," Redfern said slowly; "but I don't see being canded for that little jape yesterday. There was no harm in it, and the master who took notice of it passed it over. I think it's utterly rotten of Ratty to drag it up again to-day."

CHAPTER 11.

Facing the Music.

F IGGINS & Co. met the new trio in the New House, and stopped them.

"I want a few words with you chaps—" Figgins began.

"Come to the study, then," said Redfern; "we're engaged now. Got to take a licking, but we'll come up as soon as it's over."

"Oh!" said Figgins.

"Ratty's not in his study yet, is he?" asked Owen.

"No; he's with the Fifth, and they're not out yet."

"Good! We were told to wait for him in his study, and so I supposed we should get there before he did," Redfern remarked. "Ta-ta!"

Redfern & Co. made their way to the Housemaster's study and entered it. The room was empty. Mr. Ratcliff's chair was at the table, and across the blotter that lay there was a cane, ready to the hand of the master. Mr. Ratcliff always kept a cane ready to his hand—he had very frequent use for it.

Redfern closed the door carefully.

"Now to bizney!" he said cheerfully.

Owen and Lawrence grinned.

"Good for you, Reddy! If he finds out that you've done it—"

"I don't suppose he will."

"But if he does—"

"Well, if he does, it will be another licking," said Redfern, busily engaged in setting the birdlime upon the end of the cane. "But as we seem to be booked for lickings in any case, it doesn't matter so much."

"H'm!" said Lawrence dubiously.

Redfern was occupied only a few moments. Then the trio stood by the window, and waited with very innocent and demure looks for the Housemaster to come in. There was nothing to indicate that they had been near the table where the cane lay.

And certainly their looks were demure enough.

They had to wait more than five minutes more—Mr. Ratcliff was in no hurry to come. Perhaps he was not sorry to leave the juniors some time anticipating their fate. They would, of course, have preferred to have it over at once.

But the Housemaster's steps were heard in the passage at last, and the three culprits braced themselves to face the ordeal.

"Here he comes!" murmured Redfern. "Look out!"

Like three statues of innocence the trio stood as the handle was turned, and the study door flew open.

Mr. Ratcliff strode into his study with rustling gown.

Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence were standing in a row, and the New Housemaster's eyes glistened as he caught sight of them. Their presence seemed to afford him peculiar satisfaction.

Redfern & Co. looked at him with extreme simplicity as he riveted his keen little eyes on them. They looked the most innocent of youths.

"I suppose you know why I have sent for you, boys?" began Mr. Ratcliff.

"Yes, sir," said Redfern.

"Why, then?"

"To cane us, sir," said Redfern.

Mr. Ratcliff smiled grimly.

"Probably your penetration will carry you a little further, Redfern," he said. "Perhaps you can tell me why I am going to cane you?"

"Because you are in a bad temper, sir—"

"Boy!" thundered Mr. Ratcliff. "You dare to be impertinent—"

"I do not know of any other reason, sir," said Redfern simply. "We have not done anything so far as we know—"

"Silence, sir!" said the angry Housemaster.

Owen made a movement as if he would speak.

"If any of you utter another word I shall double your punishment!" said Mr. Ratcliff.

The three culprits looked at him, and they held their tongues. But there was a gleam in Redfern's eye. He reflected with peculiar pleasure on the birdlime on the cane.

"You have been guilty of disorderly conduct," said Mr. Ratcliff, looking round for his cane. "Your foolish travesty of humour on making your appearance at this school is altogether unpardonable. It is perfectly disgraceful—"

ANSWERS

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"He looks like a cad," Owen remarked.

"The fellows in the House don't seem to like him much, I've noticed. But we shall have to grin and bear it," said Lawrence.

Redfern's eyes glimmered.

"I suppose he's going to cane us," he said. "If he does, I think he ought to be made to feel sorry afterwards."

"Better not jape a Housemaster, Reddy, old man."

"I don't know; we shall see."

And Redfern was very thoughtful after that.

Tom Merry & Co. did not see the new boys again till the whole Form met in the Fourth Form class-room for morning lessons. Redfern & Co. took their places in the Form, and there was a good deal of curiosity among the juniors as to how they would shape there. Mr. Lathom, the Fourth Form-master, gave them some special attention, perhaps curious himself to see whether the scholarship boys would be able to keep their end up in the Form.

If he had any doubts upon the subject, they were soon resolved. Redfern & Co. showed that they could work as well as play, and before the morning was out they were given good places in the Form, passing up above Levison and Mellish, and a dozen more fellows, much to the astonishment of the latter.

Levison was prepared to denounce them as dunces if they did not get on well; but as they showed up in such an unexpected manner, he decided to sneer at them as being "swots" instead.

"Just what you might expect of these County Council school bounders," he whispered to Mellish. "Swotting half the night, of course, to get ahead."

"Just like them!" agreed Mellish. "Wouldn't catch me doing anything of the kind!"

And certainly Mellish was right there. Nobody ever caught Mellish working, if Mellish could help it.

"They don't seem to be duffers, either," Jack Blake remarked, as the Fourth Form were dismissed, and they crowded out into the Form-room passage. "We shall have to look out, or they'll pass us, you chaps."

"I should wefuse to be passed, Blake, deah boy; but certainly they deserve gweat cweedit," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I am quite sowdy that they are not in the School House."

Blake nodded cheerfully to Redfern in the passage.

"Getting on all right in the New House?" he asked.

"Yes, all serene," said Redfern. "We're just going in for our first licking, that's all."

"Bai Jove!"

"What's the trouble?" asked Blake. "Ratty started on you already?"

"That's it!"

"It's wotten!" said D'Arcy sympathetically. "Watty is wathah a beast, you know. You will have to keep your weathah eye on Watty."

"We've found that out already," said Redfern ruefully.

"I wish I could swap him for your Housemaster."

"Yaas, I dare say you do."

"But what's the row?" asked Digby.

"That little jape yesterday—Ratty's dragged that up," said Owen. "The old bounder doesn't seem to know what's ancient history and what isn't."

Blake laughed.

"Well, it was rather thick," he said. "Railton would have passed it over, but Ratty wouldn't. You'll be caned, but you'll have to get used to that. Better give Ratty as wide a berth as you can."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Redfern's eyes gleamed.

"I don't see it," he replied. "If Ratty picks on us for nothing, or next to nothing, he will get as good as he gives."

Blake looked a little alarmed.

"You'd better be jolly careful how you jape a Housemaster," he said. "We generally draw the line at that."

"Ever heard of putting birdlime on a cane?" Redfern asked.

Blake jumped.

"No, I haven't," he replied.

"Then you'll hear of it to-day for the first time," grinned Redfern, and he walked away with his chums towards the New House.

The School House fellows looked at one another without speaking for some moments.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy at last.

"My word!" ejaculated Digby.

"They're hot stuff!" said Blake, with a shake of the head.

"If they go on as they've begun, Figgins & Co. will have to look out for their laurels. I rather think that those new kids will be difficult to handle."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Blake was right. St. Jim's was destined to make the discovery that the three new fellows were very "hot stuff" indeed!

"Please, sir, it was only a little joke," said Lawrence.

"Silence, sir!" thundered Mr. Ratcliff. "We do not permit such jokes at St. James's. I am sincerely glad that it has fallen to my lot to be the instrument of your correction, and if in future you are tempted to repeat such folly, I shall deal more severely with you. Hold out your hands, all of you!"

Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence looked at one another as Mr. Ratcliff turned to take up his cane. They knew their punishment would be severe. But the thought of what was to follow nerved them to bear it with a good grace.

"Now, sir!" snapped the New Housemaster, advancing towards Redfern, cane in hand. "Your hand!"

Redfern held out his hand, looking the Housemaster firmly in the face the while.

Mr. Ratcliff smiled almost maliciously as he brought the cane down with a swish.

Redfern felt the sting keenly, but he did not even wince.

"Now the other, sir!"

Swish!

Four times Mr. Ratcliff repeated this performance. But his heaviest cut failed to bring a murmur from Redfern. Then he turned to Owen.

Owen stood his punishment bravely. Mr. Ratcliff exerted himself a little more with Lawrence. But Lawrence did not fail where his friends had succeeded. The Housemaster's hardest cuts failed to wring a murmur from him, though he, like Redfern and Owen, tried to assuage the ache in his hands by doubling himself up like a pocket-knife once the process was over.

"Go!" said Mr. Ratcliff, angry at not raising a single cry from any of the three. "Now you may go!"

Redfern & Co. lost no time in quitting the Housemaster's presence. In a moment they were in the passage outside. Once out of Mr. Ratcliff's sight their contortions assumed greater proportions. Figgins & Co. were there, and they came up to express sympathy at once.

Any fellow who came under the ban of Mr. Ratcliff's displeasure was sure of sympathy from the whole House.

"Hard cheese, old kid!" said Figgins, as he came up.

"Ratty is a bit of a coughdrop, you know."

"Yes, rather!" said Fatty Wynn.

Redfern tried to grin, but it was a failure. He could bear it, but it was hard to grin.

"It's all right, Figgins!" he said, nodding towards the Housemaster's study. "It's not all over yet."

Figgins looked puzzled.

"What's up?" he asked.

Redfern looked pleased with himself in spite of the caning.

"You'll see!" he said.

"But look here!" exclaimed Figgins abruptly. "Have you been ass enough to jape old Ratty?"

The new boys exchanged a painful grin.

"Ever heard of birdlime on a cane?" inquired Redfern, in a soft and cooing voice.

Figgins & Co. stared.

"Birdlime!" ejaculated Figgins.

"On a cane!" murmured Redfern.

There was a sudden sharp exclamation from within Mr. Ratcliff's study.

"Time to travel!" said Redfern.

And they travelled.

CHAPTER 12.

Sticking to It.

MONTEITH paused. He was passing Mr. Ratcliff's study, from which strange sounds were issuing. With a start Monteith recognised that they were hardly expressions to be expected of a Housemaster.

He stood irresolute outside the door for a moment.

"Confound the thing!" came a subdued roar from inside.

Monteith knocked.

"Go away! I mean, who are you? Come in!" came a shout from the other side of the door.

"Mr. Ratcliff!" exclaimed Monteith, opening the door.

"Oh, Monteith—"

"Yes, sir. Are you ill?"

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"No. I'm not!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff. "What makes you ask such a ridiculous question?"

Monteith hesitated. Mr. Ratcliff was in a bad temper. And well he might be! The cane which he had lately used on Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence was apparently glued to his hand. He seemed to have been engaged in trying to release it for some minutes. It refused to budge. As Monteith entered the study he was wrenching at it.

"You did not seem like yourself when I passed the door, sir," said Monteith politely. "That is all. Pray what is the matter with your hand, sir?"

Mr. Ratcliff made an impatient gesture.

"I have been punishing three boys, Monteith," he said, "and apparently there is some trick played with the cane I have used. I cannot get it away from my hand."

Monteith tried not to grin. He did not feel very sorry for Mr. Ratcliff.

"Can I assist you, sir?" he said, after a pause.

"Yes, Monteith. Be careful. My fingers are apparently glued together round the cane."

"Just so, sir," said Monteith. "It—it looks like it, too."

And taking hold of the cane Monteith tried to prise it out of the Housemaster's hand.

Mr. Ratcliff roared.

"Monteith, you are very clumsy to—"

"Really, sir—"

"Cannot you take it more gently?" shouted Mr. Ratcliff.

"Perhaps I could, sir," said Monteith, "if you could manage to free your fingers a little, sir. Please try."

"If I could free my fingers I should not need to ask for your assistance!" ejaculated the New Housemaster. "Have some sense!"

Monteith bit his lip. Mr. Ratcliff was not a pleasant-tempered gentleman, and his temper was a little more unpleasant than usual just now.

He seemed to have forgotten that Monteith was the head prefect of his House, and that it was not customary to speak to a prefect as if he were a clumsy fag. The prefect's somewhat thin lips came very tightly together.

He tried his best to release Mr. Ratcliff's hand, but his touch was not particularly gentle, in spite of the Housemaster's exhortations. Mr. Ratcliff was perspiring, and his eyes gleamed with rage and pain.

"What is it, Monteith?" he gasped. "What is it? It cannot be glue, I suppose?"

"I don't know what it is, sir," said the prefect tartly, and he added to himself: "And I jolly well don't care, either!"

But he did not allow Mr. Ratcliff to hear that.

"Take care, Monteith! You are hurting my hand!"

"I am taking care, sir," said the prefect, giving another jerk at the cane. "Did that hurt you, sir?"

"Yow-how!" roared Mr. Ratcliff.

It seemed that it had hurt.

"Sorry, sir—"

"Ow! Let go! You are clumsy! I believe you are hurting my fingers on purpose, Monteith!" howled the New Housemaster.

Perhaps Mr. Ratcliff was not quite wrong in that supposition. Monteith released the cane, and drew back.

"Perhaps you could manage better without my assistance, sir?" he said stiffly.

"Oh! I—I cannot imagine what is the cause of this!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff. "I had three juniors to cane, and I held the cane tightly. There must have been something sticky placed on it, I suppose?"

"It certainly looks like it, sir," said Monteith. "I'm sorry I cannot be of any assistance to you."

And he went towards the door. Mr. Ratcliff shouted after him: "Monteith!"

The prefect turned his head.

"Yes, sir?" he said acdily.

"Pray try to assist me!"

said Mr. Ratcliff, trying to control his temper. "I cannot get my fingers unclasped from round the cane. It is very extraordinary! What would you advise me to do?"

Monteith looked at the cane embedded in the clenched hand of the Housemaster. Mr. Ratcliff had taken a very

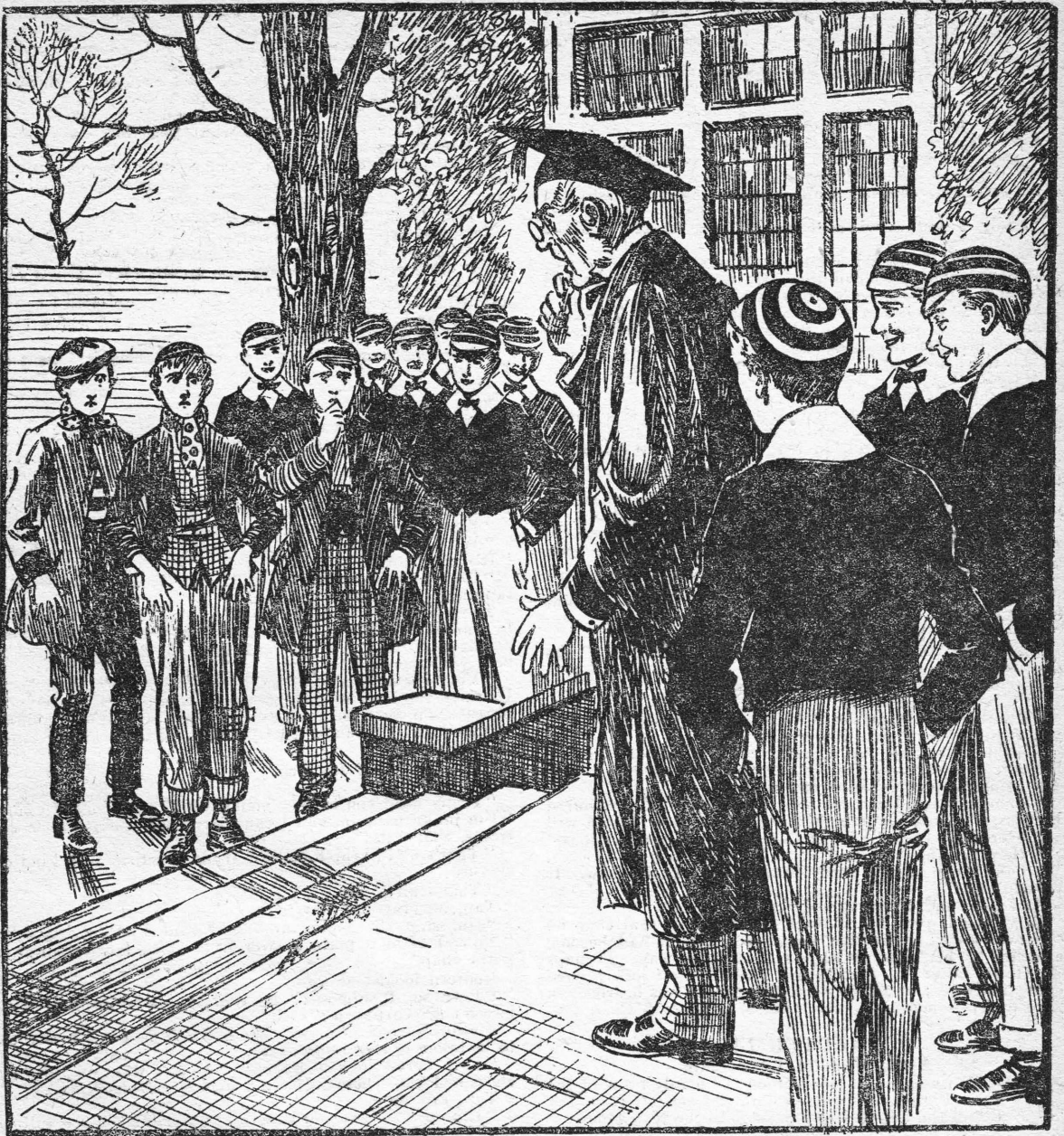
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"Bless my soul!" gasped the astounded master, "Who—who are these boys? Why have they come to the school in those ridiculous clothes?" "If you please, sir," said Redfern, the leader of the new Co., "We—we're the new boys, and—and it's only a little joke, sir!" (See Chapter 7.)

businesslike grip upon that cane, to administer punishment to Redfern & Co. He began to wish now that he had not been in such extremely deadly earnest about it.

"If you know anything that will be of assistance, please say so at once, Monteith!" the Housemaster rapped out.

"Perhaps a little hot water would loosen the sticky substance, sir."

"Yes, yes! Get some at once!"

Monteith stepped into the passage.

Redfern and his chums had vanished, but Figgins & Co. were there. Even Mr. Ratcliff could hardly connect Figgins & Co. with his misfortune, and they wanted to see the fun. It was not fun from Mr. Ratcliff's point of view, but to Figgins & Co. it seemed very funny indeed.

"Get some hot water, Figgins! Quick!" said Monteith hastily. "It's for Mr. Ratcliff! Buzz off!"

"Right-ho!" said Figgins.

There was a glimmer in Figgins's eyes as he ran off.

Figgins, like most of the New House juniors, had many an old score against the unpopular Housemaster.

He was back in two minutes with a basin of steaming water.

Monteith took it into the study, and placed it upon the table.

"Here it is, sir!"

Mr. Ratcliff plunged his hand into the basin.

In his excitement he did not stop to reflect.

The next moment a terrific yell rang through the study.

"Ow! Yaroo!"

Monteith jumped back.

"You—you stupid dolt!" yelled Mr. Ratcliff, forgetting again that he was talking to a prefect.

"Sir!"

"Ow! Ow! The water is hot! Ow! Oh!"

"You asked for hot water, sir—"

"I did not ask to have my hand scalded!" shouted Mr.

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Ratcliff. "I shall begin to think that you are the author of this trick! Ow! Oh!"

"I was about to warn you, sir, but you didn't give me time," said the prefect. "I—"

"Ow! Don't argue with me, Monteith! Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was a very distinct chuckle from the passage outside.

Mr. Ratcliff made one stride to the door.

But that stride was heard. By the time he looked out into the passage it was empty. There was an echo of flying feet in the distance, and that was all.

Mr. Ratcliff, crimson with rage, swung back into the study.

"Shall I put some cold water into it, sir?" asked Monteith.

"Yes, yes! Don't ask idiotic questions!"

Monteith compressed his lips. He was sorry that he had entered the Housemaster's study at all.

Mr. Ratcliff was not a pleasant man to help. The New House prefect cooled the water, and the Housemaster plunged his hand into it again.

"Is that better, sir?" ventured Monteith.

"Groo! Yes."

"I think it is coming looser now——"

"Ow! You can go, Monteith! I will manage this matter without your assistance!" growled the Housemaster.

Which was ungrateful, to say the least. But Monteith was glad enough to go. He walked out of the study, closing the door behind him with an audible slam.

As he walked down the passage he could still hear peculiar ejaculations proceeding from the Housemaster's study.

There was a sound of chuckling round the corner, as Monteith came down the passage. He came suddenly upon Figgins & Co.

They tried to restore gravity to their features as the prefect came upon them. Figgins seemed upon the point of choking.

Monteith eyed the juniors sternly.

"Did you play that trick upon Mr. Ratcliff?" he demanded.

Figgins giggled joyously.

"Oh, no, Monteith! Ha, ha, ha!"

"You had better not let Mr. Ratcliff hear you laughing, you young rascal!" said the prefect.

And he walked on. As a matter of fact, he was laughing himself.

Figgins & Co. grinned at one another.

"Somebody said those new kids were hot stuff," murmured Figgins. "I really think they are. The whole House will yell over this. Only——" Figgins's face became more serious—"if they get their ears up about it, there will be trouble. We can't have a new study running the whole show. It wouldn't do!"

And Kerr and Wynn agreed that it wouldn't.

How long it took Mr. Ratcliff to get rid of that cane no one ever knew, or whether he guessed how it had become attached to his hand in such a mysterious way. Perhaps the Housemaster felt that he had made himself look absurd enough already; at all events, nothing more was heard upon the subject—somewhat to the relief of Redfern & Co.

CHAPTER 13.

A Question of Leadership.

HERE was a slight frown upon the manly brow of the great Figgins as he came into the new study at the end of the Fourth Form passage in the New House.

Figgins was not exactly pleased.

Kerr and Wynn, who followed him in, looked a little grim, too.

The new trio were there, busy putting their study to rights. Dinner was over in the New House, and the new juniors were utilising the time before afternoon school in getting their things unpacked, and the study in order.

The study being quite a new one, it was unfurnished, save for the table and chairs provided by the school. The St. Jim's fellows furnished their studies themselves, if they wanted anything more than that. New boys generally found a study partly furnished, at least, but Redfern & Co. were rather unlucky in that respect. They had little or no furniture so far, but it could not be helped.

They unpacked books and personal belongings, and made the most of them, in the empty room, and they were very cheerful about it.

Redfern was tacking up a gorgeous picture on the wall when Figgins & Co. came in. He was standing upon a chair, and Owen was handing him tacks. Lawrence was kneeling beside a box, unpacking it.

Redfern's picture was a very highly-coloured sheet given away with some magazine, and did not rank high as a work of art; but it certainly helped to brighten up the bare walls of the study, and Redfern seemed very pleased with it.

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"Hallo, kids!" said Redfern cheerily. He had apparently forgotten already the caning in Mr. Ratcliff's study. Perhaps the subsequent sufferings of Ratty had helped to alleviate the pain. "Come to lend a hand?"

"We'll lend a hand, if you like," said Figgins. "But that isn't what we've come for. I want to talk to you."

"Go on talking, then!" said Redfern. "You don't mind my hammering in these tacks while you talk, do you? I won't make much row."

Perhaps Redfern had read a suggestion of latent hostility in the manner of Figgins & Co., and was prepared for war.

"Well," said Figgins, "you see——"

Tap, tap, tap! went the hammer.

"We're not up against a new chap in any way. In fact, we're quite ready to welcome you to the New House, and that was really a good jape on Ratty. I don't mind admitting that."

Tap, tap!

"Oh, good!" said Redfern.

"The fellows are talking a great deal about it," went on Figgins.

"Yes; are they?"

Tap, tap!

"Of course, you mustn't think that I could feel jealous, or anything of that sort," said Figgins hastily.

Redfern grinned.

Tap, tap! went the hammer.

"But one must consider things in a proper light," went on Figgins. "Look here, I am junior captain of the House!"

"Elected by the fellows, I suppose?" said Redfern.

"We never had an election on the subject," said Kerr. "It's understood."

"Oh, it's understood, is it?" said Redfern cheerfully, tapping away with the hammer.

The picture was getting a kind of dado of tacks round it by this time. There was no danger at all that it would fall. So far as putting in tacks was concerned, Redfern seemed to be a very thorough workman.

"Yes; it's understood," said Figgins. "Now, look here, I'm not the sort of silly ass to get my ears up at you because you come from a County Council school, or anything of that sort. I mean to treat you just the same as any other new boys."

"Thanks!" said Redfern.

Tap, tap!

"I only want you to keep your place!" explained Figgins. "I'm junior captain, and I can't have kids kicking over the traces, that's all!"

"That's all!" said Kerr and Wynn together, in a kind of chorus.

"That's all?" repeated Redfern.

Tap, tap, tap, tap, tap!

"Oh, stop that silly tapping!" said Figgins irritably. "Now, I want a plain answer from you. I always was a plain chap."

Redfern looked at him.

"Born so, I suppose?" he said sympathetically. "You haven't grown like it?"

Figgins turned crimson. He had not meant his remark to be taken in that sense at all.

"Look here," he said warmly, "I don't want any of your cheek! I came here to have a perfectly friendly talk!"

Tap, tap, tap!

"I'm putting it to you how things are. If you are willing to take your proper place in the House, I'm willing to take you into the Co."

"Good!" exclaimed Redfern, in an accent of the greatest satisfaction.

"Oh! You agree to that?" asked Figgins.

"Eh?"

"You agree to what I was saying?"

"I was referring to the picture," explained Redfern blandly. "I was remarking that it's fixed up all right."

Lawrence and Owen chuckled.

"Look here!" roared Figgins. "I came here to talk sense to you."

"Why don't you begin, then?" demanded Lawrence.

Figgins almost choked.

"I'm willing to take you into the Co.," he said. "But it will have to be understood that discipline must be maintained. I lead, and you follow. See?"

"No, I don't quite see," said Redfern. "Suppose we both lead, and everybody else follows?"

"What rot!"

"Or suppose I lead, and you follow?" suggested Redfern amicably. "I shouldn't mind taking the trouble. Anything for a quiet life."

Figgins glared.

"I'm fed up with your cheek," he exclaimed. "If I have

any of your rot, I warn you that I shall be up against this study."

Tap, tap, tap!

"I think a few more tacks would improve it," Redfern remarked thoughtfully.

"Will you listen to me?" roared Figgins.

"I'm listening!" Tap, tap!

"What do you intend to do?"

"Put a few more in at the edges."

"What!"

"It makes a kind of ornament round the picture, you see," Redfern explained, cocking his head on one side, and regarding the picture thoughtfully. "Don't you think so?"

Figgins seemed on the point of an explosion.

"I was referring to what you mean to do, about taking up your proper place in this House!" he said sulphurously.

"Oh, I see!"

"What are you going to do?"

Tap, tap, tap!

"There seem to be two leaders in the School House," said Redfern. "I think it would be a good dodge to establish the same thing here. Suppose we agree to differ. I was thinking that we three are quite good enough—"

"Look here! Are you going to follow my lead or not?"

"Not!" said Redfern promptly. "I don't like the idea of following, and you don't impress me as a ripping sort of leader, anyway."

"Why, you—you—you—" stuttered Figgins.

"I'm thinking of starting a new Co.," Redfern explained simply. "I've got into the hang of things here already, you see. What do you think of the New Firm?"

"Eh?"

"The New Firm," said Redfern. "That's us."

"What!"

"We're the New Firm," said Redfern calmly. "We're willing to give you fellows a chance, though I must say that you would really do better to follow our lead."

"Follow your lead?" said Figgins, as if he could hardly believe his ears.

"Yes. Why not?"

"Why, you—you cheeky rotter—"

"I don't see it," said Redfern. "Is that picture quite straight, Lawrence?"

"Look here!" yelled Figgins.

Tap, tap, tap!

"I'm not going to stand any of your rot!"

Tap, tap, tap!

"Look out for squalls, that's all," said Figgins, and he departed from the study with his two chums, slamming the door behind him.

A sound of tapping, mingled with a soft chuckle, followed Figgins & Co. down the passage.

Tap, tap, tap, tap, tap!

CHAPTER 14.

Kerr Has an Idea.

TOM MERRY met the New Firm in the Form-room passage as the juniors of St. Jim's were going in to afternoon school. Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence were walking with linked arms down the Form-room passage, and looked very much as if they believed that the whole of St. Jim's—School House, New House, and Head's house—belonged to them personally. The hero of the Shell nodded to them with a grin.

"I hear you're in the wars," he remarked.

"How so?" asked Redfern, pausing at the door of the Fourth Form-room.

"You have been ruffling the crest of the mighty Figgins."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Better go slow, though," said Tom Merry warningly. "Figgins is leader of the New House juniors, you know, and you will have to toe the line."

Redfern shook his head.

"Thanks for the warning!" he said airily. "But I'm not used to toeing lines. I'm sorry to ruffle his Majesty King Figgins, but we've decided to start an independent Republic in the new study."

"My hat!" said Monty Lowther, with a whistle. "You'll have a war of independence, then, like most giddy Republics."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, chiming in. "Upon the whole, though, I wathah think it's a good ideah. Of course, you new chaps mustn't forget that the School House is cock-house of St. Jim's."

Redfern grinned.

"We're going to make the New House cock-house of St. Jim's," he explained.

"What!"

"Bai Jove!"

"We're the New Firm," said Redfern cheerfully. "You

seem to have a set of names for one another at this giddy college, so we're following the fashion. We thought at first of the Terrible Three—more terrible than you chaps, you know—"

"Oh, did you?" said Lowther, rather warmly.

"Yes; but upon the whole the New Firm will suit us," said Lawrence. "Of course, we're going to give Figgins & Co. a chance to come into line if they like."

"They can back us up," said Owen.

Tom Merry laughed.

"They're more likely to knock you down," he remarked.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, we shall be there when the knocking down begins," said Redfern. And he went into the Form-room and took his place.

Tom Merry gave a soft whistle as the chums of the Shell went on to their own Form-room. Tom Merry was of opinion that there were stormy times ahead for Figgins & Co. in their own House.

"Figg will have to hustle to keep his end up against those chaps," Tom Merry remarked. "They're all there, and no mistake."

"I expect we shall have to put them in their place before long," Lowther said. "But we'll leave them to Figgins's tender mercies first."

In the Fourth Form-room, Figgins & Co. looked rather grimly at the New Firm, and then took no further notice of them. But Figgins was thinking very seriously during afternoon lessons. He was thinking that unless he put his foot down very heavily, his position as junior leader of the New House was endangered. And Figgins resolved to put his foot down, though exactly how and where it was to be put down did not seem quite clear to him, so far. He was thinking more about the New Firm than about his work that afternoon, and Mr. Lathom came down rather heavily upon him several times, and when the Fourth were dismissed, Figgins was the richer by a hundred and fifty lines. But he gave the lines hardly a thought as he walked away with his chums after lessons.

"Those kids have got to be put in their place," Figgins announced, after a long silence.

"Let's go and talk it over in the tuckshop," suggested Fatty Wynn. He made a start in that direction, but Figgins jerked him back.

"Blow the tuckshop!" said Figgins. "Look here—"

"But, I say, I'm hungry, you know!"

"Rats!"

"Now, look here, Figg!" said Fatty Wynn, in a tone of exhortation. "It's no good going hungry. If you want to think anything out clearly, you must lay a solid foundation."

"Hallo!" said Kerr. "There go the new chaps!"

Redfern, Lawrence, and Owen had just turned into the tuckshop.

"Come on!" urged Fatty Wynn. "Let's see what they're up to, you know. Besides, Mrs. Taggles has got in her new steak-and-kidney pies, you know."

"Oh, all right!" grunted Figgins.

The famous Co. looked into the tuckshop. Redfern was negotiating with Dame Taggles for one of the steak-and-kidney pies for which Dame Taggles was famous. The pie stood on the counter, and it was a really tempting-looking pie, very large, and with a handsome, browned crust, the mere sight of which made Fatty Wynn's mouth water.

Redfern looked round at them with a cheerful grin.

"Just laying in something for tea," he remarked. "I hear that you chaps are allowed to have your tea in your studies here."

"Yes," growled Figgins.

"These are ripping pies," said Lawrence. "We never had pies like these in Slum Alley."

And the three new juniors roared.

Figgins & Co. turned red. It had dawned upon them more and more clearly how hopelessly they had been taken in by the New Firm upon the latter's arrival at St. Jim's.

"Oh, cheese it!" said Figgins.

"I'm jolly well going to have one of those pies," said Fatty Wynn. "Hand out another one just like that, Mrs. Taggles!"

"Certainly, Master Wynn!"

"Send that up to our study, won't you, ma'am?" said Redfern.

"Yes, Master Redfern."

Redfern & Co. strolled out of the shop. Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn drew up to the counter, while Mrs. Mimble was gone into the rear regions for another steak-and-kidney pie. A gleam of fun had darted into Kerr's eye.

"Quick!" he muttered. "We'll take a rise out of those bouncers. Lend me your knife, Figg. Mrs. Taggles will be some minutes after that pie."

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"What are you going—"

"Lend me your knife!"

Figgins handed over the knife. Kerr opened it quickly, and made an incision round the dish, so that the large pie-crust came off whole in his hands. A most luscious pie was disclosed. Fatty Wynn's round eyes glared.

"My word!" he murmured. "I'll begin on that—"

"No, you won't," said Kerr quickly. "Shove it into the ashbin! Empty the giddy dish, quick! Quick, you ass!"

Fatty Wynn stared.

"Waste that lovely pie!" he gasped. "You must be off your dot, Kerr. Why, it would haunt me if I wasted a pie like that."

"Quick, fathead!"

Figgins took up the big piedish, and obeyed Kerr's directions. The contents of the piedish disappeared into the receptacle for rubbish, and Figgins replaced the dish on the counter.

"Sawdust and raw potatoes, quick!" murmured Kerr, still holding the crust of the pie carefully in his hands.

"Quick! Before Mrs. Taggles comes back!"

Figgins burst into a chuckle. Even Fatty Wynn had to grin, though his eye was following sorrowfully the wasted pie.

Raw potatoes from a sack beside the counter, and handfuls of sawdust from the floor, were quickly jammed into the piedish, till it was as full as it had been before, though the contents now were hardly so tempting!

Then Kerr replaced the crust. Dame Taggles had not yet returned, and Kerr had time to take a tube of seccotine from his pocket, and stick down the edges of the crust upon the piedish, so that it was quite as firmly fixed as before, probably a little more firmly. The seccotine probably would not improve the flavour of the piecrust, but that was a matter to which Kerr had no time to give any consideration.

The pie presented exactly its former appearance, and the three juniors were looking the picture of innocence when Mrs. Taggles came back from her kitchen with a tray in her hands, upon which reposed a pie exactly the same in appearance as the one upon the counter. The interior, naturally, was very different.

Fatty Wynn looked at the new pie with glistening eyes.

"Oh, ripping!" he said. "I say, you chaps, we'll take it with us; I can manage to carry it all right."

"I will send my son with it, if you like, Master Wynn," said Dame Taggles. "He can take both the pies to the house in his basket, and deliver yours to you, and Master Redfern's into his study."

"Yes, come on," said Kerr, dragging Fatty Wynn away. "We don't want to get mixed up with pies, Fatty. The less we're supposed to have to do with them the better now."

"But suppose they get mixed—"

"By Jove, yes!" said Figgins.

"Oh, that doesn't matter!" said Dame Taggles. "The pies are exactly the same."

The juniors chuckled. Mrs. Taggles did not know it, but it mattered very much indeed.

"I'll mark ours," said Kerr, and he scribbled upon a piece of paper "No. 3 Study," and stuck it in the round hole in the top of the pie-crust. "Don't let that be moved, Mrs. Taggles, will you? We're very particular about having that pie."

"Certainly, Master Kerr. This one perhaps is a little more done—"

"We like 'em well done, Mrs. Taggles," said Figgins.

"Very well. I will send them up to the house at once."

"Thanks!"

And the three juniors quitted the tuckshop, chuckling. Outside, Figgins & Co. burst into a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We'll ask Tom Merry and the rest over to that pie," said Figgins. "There's enough to go round, and we owe them a feed. And we want them to be on the spot to see that we know how to put our foot down on those new bounders."

"Oh, good!" said Kerr.

And the three chums walked away in the direction of the School House, to bid the chums of the Shell to the feast.

CHAPTER 15.

A Change for the Better.

REDFERN cocked his eye in a peculiar, thoughtful way he had, as he stood at his study window in the New House. He was looking out of the window, and between the trees he had a view of the school tuckshop. Lawrence and Owen were laying the study table. The new fellows had succeeded in raising a loan of a tablecloth, and some crockery and cutlery, from below stairs, by the simple process of tipping the house-page. They had had no time as yet to lay in supplies of their own.

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"Ahem!" said Redfern.

Lawrence looked round inquiringly.

"What's the row?" he asked.

"Got a cough?" queried Owen.

Redfern grinned.

"No," he replied. "I've got an idea."

"Well?" said Owen and Lawrence together, suspending their operations on the tea-table.

"You remember Figgins & Co. saw us buy that pie—"

"What about it?"

"They've just come out of the tuckshop, grinning like a set of pantomime demons," said Redfern. "They've gone off towards the School House."

"Well?" said Lawrence, puzzled.

"Oh, nothing; but I've got my suspicions about the pie."

"Oh!"

Redfern remained in thought. A few minutes later there was a sound of footsteps in the passage, and the youthful scion of the house of Taggles knocked at the door. Redfern opened it.

"Got the pie?" he asked.

"Yessir, both of 'em," said Charles Sidney Taggles. "Yours and Master Figgins's, sir. This 'ere one is Master Figgins's, but they're both the same."

Redfern cocked his eye at the two pies.

He noted the paper stuck in the crust of Figgins's pie, and he drew his own conclusions from it.

"Right-ho! Wait a minute, and I'll give you the basket," he said.

"Yessir!"

Redfern took the basket into the study, and placed it on the table. He put his hands into it to lift out the pie, and, unseen by the unsuspecting Charles Sidney Taggles, he changed Kerr's label from one pie to the other.

Then he lifted out the pie that Kerr had so carefully marked for himself, and handed the basket back to the boy at the door.

"Thank you!" he said. "There's your basket."

Master Taggles took the basket, and walked along the passage to Figgins's study, and knocked at the door. There was no reply. Figgins & Co. were not yet in their quarters.

The boy opened the door, lifted the pie out of the basket, and placed it upon the table.

As he came out of the study, Redfern called to him along the passage.

"Will you go over to the School House, and ask Master Blake and Master D'Arcy and Herries and Digby, if you can see them together, to come over here. Tell 'em I shall be pleased if they'll come to tea."

He tossed a sixpence along to Master Taggles. Master Taggles caught the sixpence, and bit it to make sure that it was a good one. He had not expected tips from fellows who came to the school on County Council scholarships. But the sixpence was perfectly good, and Charles Sidney was very much pleased at the prospect of raiding the parental establishment to the full value of that coin.

"Thanky, sir; I'll go at once," he said.

And he departed.

Redfern stepped back into his study, and raised the crust of the pie a trifle to look into it. A most appetising smell came forth, and it made the juniors feel hungrier.

"The pie's all right," said Lawrence.

"This one is," Redfern assented.

"What about the other?"

Redfern chuckled.

"Well, if both pies were exactly the same, I don't see what they wanted to mark that other one specially for," he observed.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If it's all right, it's all right," said Redfern oracularly; "and if it isn't all right, they can have the benefit of it. I don't think they'll find us easy chaps to jape, when they try it."

And Lawrence and Owen roared. The three juniors continued their preparations for tea, putting the pie in the fender to keep it warm. There was a sudden trampling of feet on the stairs, and a knock at the door, and it was thrown open. Quite a crowd of juniors looked in from the passage. The message to Blake & Co. had found the heroes of Study No. 6 about to get tea in their study in the School House, and they had willingly come over to see Redfern instead. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther were coming over with Figgins & Co. at the same time, and they came up the stairs of the New House in a crowd.

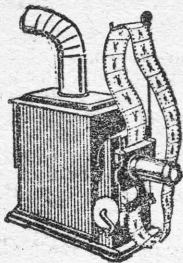
"Oh, here you are!" exclaimed Redfern. "Come right in, my sons. You got a tea-party on as well, Figgins?"

"Yes," said Figgins, with a chuckle. "These Shell chaps have come over to have a steak-and-kidney pie with me."

"What a giddy coincidence," said Redfern, looking

(Continued on Page 20.)

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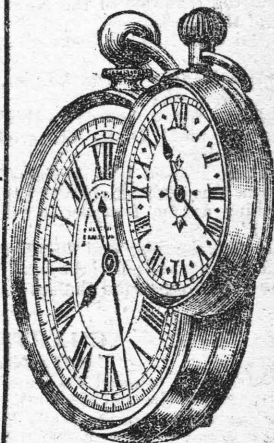
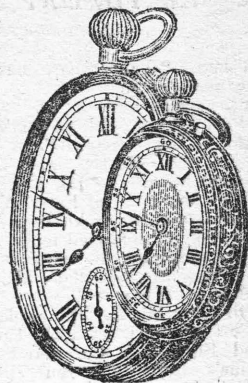
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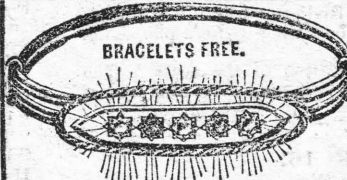
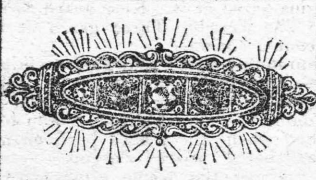
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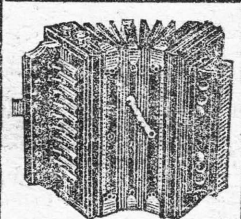
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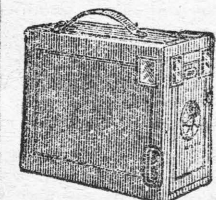
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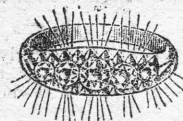
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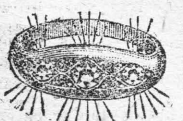
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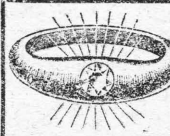
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THE NEW FIRM AT ST. JIM'S.

(Continued from Page 13.)

astonished. "These chaps have come to have a steak-and-kidney pie with me."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, I'm sure I hope you'll enjoy it," said Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Fatty Wynn.

Blake and Herries and Digby and D'Arcy looked in astonishment at the fat Fourth-Former. They could not make out the cause of Fatty Wynn's merriment.

"What are you cackling at?" demanded Blake.

Fatty Wynn appeared to be choking.

"Oh, nothing," he said—"nothing at all! I only hope you'll enjoy the pie, that's all. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Wynn—"

"Oh come on, Fatty!" exclaimed Figgins.

"Certainly—ha, ha, ha!—I'm coming."

And Figgins & Co. marched the Terrible Three off to Figgins's study. The four chums of Study No. 6 gathered round the tea-table of the New Firm. Redfern lifted the pie out of the fender.

"Bai Jove! That looks all wight," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Mrs. Taggles can make pies," Blake remarked.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Fatty Wynn seemed to think there was something wrong with the pie," Digby observed, looking at the pie rather suspiciously.

"Some blessed jape, perhaps," said Herries.

"Oh, this pie's all right!" said Redfern easily. "If there's anything wrong, I expect it will be with Figgins's pie. Look here!"

He cut the pie, and lifted a portion of the crust. The pie certainly was all right; and in a minute more the juniors were very busy round the tea-table.

CHAPTER 16.

Not a Nice Pie.

FIGGINS ushered the Terrible Three into his study, and lifted the pie from the table and placed it in the grate before the study fire. Kerr stirred the fire, and Fatty Wynn put the kettle upon the spirit-stove to boil for tea. Tom Merry & Co., as became distinguished guests, sat down and looked on.

The chums of the New House were chuckling as they laid the table. Tom Merry & Co. were considerably puzzled.

"Look here!" exclaimed Monty Lowther, at last. "What's the giddy joke? What do you keep on going off for like a set of giddy squibs?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, in chorus.

"Look here you asses—"

"It's a giddy jape," Figgins explained breathlessly. "We've got a pie just the same outside as those new chaps, but inside— Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Kerr and Wynn.

"Inside, it's a bit different. You see, we've pitched out the inside of that pie, and put in raw potatoes and sawdust," grinned Figgins.

"My hat!"

"There will be a howl up the passage when they find it out," chuckled Fatty Wynn. "It was Kerr's idea; Kerr always thinks of these things."

"Well, you chaps helped me carry it out," said Kerr modestly. "We had to be pretty quick working the oracle while Mrs. Taggles was out of the shop, you see."

The Terrible Three roared.

"They'll be heating up the pie, and making it nice and warm for their visitors," said Figgins, with a yell of laughter. "I wish I could see Gussy's face when they open it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Made the tea, Fatty?"

"Yes, just done."

"The pie looks ripping," said Figgins, regarding it as it warmed before the study fire. "It is warm, you know; but better let it get quite hot."

"Oh, certainly!" said Tom Merry. "I say, you'll have a row with the New Firm over this giddy jape."

Figgins chuckled gleefully.

"Well, I've explained to Redfern already that he's got to toe the line," he said. "If he sets himself up against this study, he's going to be japed and japed, you see, till he climbs down."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This is only a beginning," said Kerr. "We shall give 'em something of this sort every day, till they come to see reason."

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"That's the programme," said Fatty Wynn.

"I think this is warm enough now," said Figgins. "You fellows ready?"

"Quite!" said Tom Merry.

"Hungry as a giddy hunter," said Monty Lowther.

And Manners lent a hand in helping Figgins lift the big pie safely from the fender to the table. Figgins took up a knife, and stood over the pie in an attitude of an experienced carver with a really good thing before him.

He plunged the knife into the crust, but there was no flow of juice and savoury steam following the blade as he drew it out, as he had expected there would be. Figgins looked a little puzzled.

"Must have dried up," he remarked; "and the kidneys inside seem to be rather hard, judging by the way the knife biffed. But it's a jolly good pie!"

"Oh, jolly good!" said the Terrible Three together, very politely.

"Got the plates ready, Wynn?"

Fatty Wynn pushed the plates forward in a warm and shining pile.

"Here you are, Figgy."

"Good!"

Figgins plunged the knife in again, and cut out a section of the crust. The knife turned in his hand as it encountered something very hard in the interior of the pie. Figgins jabbed a little viciously, and drew out the knife with something hard and round adhering to the point.

There was a gasp from all the juniors at once.

It was a raw potato, coated with sawdust, that Figgins had drawn out of the steak-and-kidney pie!

Figgins gazed at it. Kerr gazed at it. Fatty Wynn gazed at it. The Terrible Three gazed at it, and broke into an irrepressible chuckle.

"M-m-m-y hat!" said Figgins faintly.

"S-s-something's gone wrong!" muttered Fatty Wynn.

"You put the label on the wrong pie, Kerr, you ass!"

"I didn't!" shouted Kerr. "You both saw me do it!"

"Then—then—the label's been changed since!"

"Look here!" roared Figgins.

He dragged the whole crust off the pie. Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther burst into a roar as the contents of the piedish were disclosed. A heap of potatoes, raw, and in their skins, and about a pound of sawdust, met the astounded gaze of the juniors.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins & Co. gazed at the pie, and then gazed at one another with sickly expressions.

"The pie's been changed!" murmured Figgins.

"Redfern must have tumbled!"

"Oh, dear!" groaned Fatty Wynn. "That lovely pie! Oh, dear!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't see what you Shell bounders are cackling at!" growled Figgins. "There's nothing funny in a chap having his pie spoiled."

"You thought there was a few minutes ago!" shrieked Monty Lowther. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Nicely warmed up for the visitors, too!" murmured Manners.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fatty Wynn gave a yell.

"They've got the real pie. They'll have about finished it by this time. Come on!"

Fatty Wynn threw the study door open, and raced along the passage. Figgins and Kerr dashed after him. Tom Merry staggered against the study wall, and laughed till the tears streamed down his cheeks.

"Come on!" gasped Lowther. "We want to see the fun! Didn't I say that Redfern & Co. were hot stuff!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the Terrible Three dashed after Figgins & Co. Fatty Wynn was the first to reach the new study, and he burst open the door without waiting to knock. Seven juniors were seated round the teatable, eating tarts. In the centre of the table stood an empty pie-dish. Justice had evidently been done to that steak-and-kidney pudding. There was hardly a trace of it remaining.

Redfern looked up innocently.

"Hallo, Wynn!"

"Where's our pie?" bawled Fatty Wynn.

Redfern looked surprised.

"Your pie! In your study, I suppose, unless you've eaten it."

"You've scoffed our pie!" yelled Wynn. "That idiot, Kerr, put potatoes and sawdust in your pie. He's always thinking of those rotten wheezes, and that's what we've found in our study. You've got our pie."

"Bai Jove!"

Blake burst into a yell of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha! That was why you said you hoped we should

enjoy the pie, Fatty!" he exclaimed. "Well, it's all right. We have enjoyed it! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas, wathah! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Where's our pie?" roared Figgins.

"We've eaten our pie," said Redfern. "You can have a jam-tart if you like."

"You—you—you—"

"Bai Jove! I wegard this awf'ly funnay, you know! Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins & Co. raved. The seven juniors in the study were yelling with laughter, and the Terrible Three in the passage were laughing like hyenas. Figgins & Co. had been hoist with their own petard, with a vengeance, and they had seldom been so utterly, completely, and thoroughly "done."

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Blake. "It's only a case of the biter bit. You'd better let this study alone, Figgy. It's a bit above your weight."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Come on, Figgy, you can take a joke," urged Tom Merry. "You must admit that it's jolly funny."

Figgins gave a ghastly grin.

"Oh, yes, it's horribly funny," he said. "Extraordinarily funny, by George! But I'll make these new bounders look funnier yet, before I've done with them."

And Figgins & Co. departed, to hide their diminished heads in their own study. From the new study in the Fourth Form passage came incessant yells of laughter. There was no doubt that Redfern & Co. had scored.

CHAPTER 17.

Not a Success.

"**A**HEM!" said Tom Merry.

"H'm!" said Manners.

"H'm!" remarked Monty Lowther.

And the Terrible Three looked very thoughtful.

It was a day or two later, and the chums of the Shell were standing by the footer-ground, talking to Figgins & Co. Figgins was looking very serious, and so was Kerr. Fatty Wynn, standing with his hands thrust deep into his trousers pockets, looked most serious of all; but his mind was not occupied with the subject under discussion. Fatty Wynn's thoughts had wandered across the quadrangle to the tuck-shop, but he did not venture to say so. In the present mood of his great leader, even Fatty Wynn felt that questions of mere feeding had better not be mentioned.

"The bounders are running the blessed place as if it belonged to them," said Figgins. "It's as much up against you as up against us."

"Exactly," said Kerr.

"Of course, when they come into line I should back them up against the School House every time," said Figgins. "But we really represent the old firm, you know, against the giddy new firm, and we ought to put the stopper on them."

Tom Merry nodded.

"It won't be so jolly easy," he remarked. "What do Blake and the rest say about it?"

Figgins snorted.

"Oh, they only grin," he said, "and Gussy backs up those new bounders all along the line. He says they're under his protection."

Tom Merry burst into a laugh.

"They don't seem to me to need much protecting," he remarked.

"They don't!" said Kerr. "They need sitting on, and if you like to join force with us to do it, we'll sit upon them in good style. When they've been properly sat upon they'll know their place, and then it will be plain sailing. What do you think, Fatty?"

"A little more gravy," said Fatty Wynn.

"Eh!"

"I think the steak-and-kidney pies ought to have a little more gravy. Not that Mrs. Taggles doesn't cook 'em jolly well, as it is—"

"You ass!" roared Figgins. "Thinking about grub again!"

Fatty Wynn coloured.

"I—I'm rather hungry," he remarked apologetically. "I always seemed to get extra hungry in this February weather, but—"

"Br-r-r-r!" said Figgins.

"Well, I agree with you chaps that the new bounders want showing that they don't own the whole school," said Tom Merry. "We'll sit on them with pleasure, only I can't help thinking that it won't do them much good."

"We can try," said Monty Lowther. "After all, kids in the Fourth ought to be made to be civil to the Shell."

Figgins glared.

"What's that?" he demanded belligerently. "Look here, if Lowther is going to talk rot—"

"Shut up, Monty!" said Tom Merry. "Now, look here, suppose we go over to the New House, and look in on the New

Firm, as the bounders call themselves, and explain to them peaceably that they've got to bow down to the Old Firm—that's us? If they don't see the point—well, try to impress it upon their minds by giving 'em the frog's march up and down the passage. I've often noticed that the frog's march is a convincing sort of thing."

"It's not a bad idea," he said.

"Come on, then!"

From the window of the new study, a pair of keen eyes watched the half-dozen juniors as they strolled towards the New House. Redfern grinned, and turned to Lawrence and Owen, who were working at the table. The three heroes of the Fourth had already won the kindly attention of their Housemaster in the shape of lines. Mr. Ratcliff apparently considered that too much leisure might not be good for them, and he had given them impositions enough to use up a considerable portion of their leisure hours.

"I rather fancy that Figgins is on the war-path," Redfern remarked.

Lawrence grunted.

"Oh, blow Figgins!" he said. "I've got these lines to do. Lock the door, Owen."

"Hold on!" said Redfern.

"Now, look here, Reddy—"

Redfern chuckled softly.

"I've been expecting a study ragging from Figgins & Co. for some time," he remarked. "That is why I have bored a hole through the wall into the box-room, and laid in a garden syringe and a supply of violet ink. If they are going to oblige us by coming to the study, we are not going to disappoint them."

"But about the lines—"

"Blow the lines!"

"Ratty will be ratty!"

"Let him!"

"Oh, blow!" said Lawrence.

But he rose, and put his papers away. Redfern changed the key to the outside of the lock, and the three juniors stepped out of the study, closing the door behind them, and passed into the adjoining box-room. Most of the studies had been full up on Redfern & Co's arrival at St. Jim's, and the new study which had been assigned to them had been partitioned off from the box-room at the end of the passage.

The wall between the box-room and the study was made of wooden boards, and it had been quite easy for Redfern to bore a good-sized hole through the centre of it. The hole was covered with paper, which could be poked through at a moment's notice. Redfern locked the door of the box-room, and from a cupboard took a small pail, which was half-full of a weird-looking liquid. It appeared to be made in equal portions of water and purple marking-ink, with a slight admixture of soot. From the same cupboard he drew a small garden syringe. He had hardly done so when there was a trampling of feet in the passage.

Redfern broke the patch of paper that covered the aperture in the wall, and looked through into the study. He had a full view of the interior—of the table and chairs, and the blazing fire and the coal-scuttle. The new study contained very little else, so far.

But it contained a great deal more in the space of another minute. Six juniors tramped in, and stared round the study.

"Not here!" exclaimed Figgins.

"They were here a quarter of an hour ago," said Kerr.

"They were doing lines. Ratty has been rather heavy on them with lines lately. I think he has an idea who is responsible for the birdlime jape, though he let the matter drop."

Tom Merry closed the door softly.

"Looks as if they've only just gone out," he remarked. "We'll ambush the bounders, and collar them as they come in."

"Good egg!" chuckled Monty Lowther.

"Of course, we're not going to hurt them," said Manners magnanimously. "But we are called up, as members of the Old Firm, to show this giddy New Firm that they can't run St. Jim's as if it were their own private property."

"Exactly," said Fatty Wynn. "I wonder if there's any grub in the cupboard—"

"Oh, rats!" growled Figgins. "Let the grub alone."

"But—but it would really give a finishing touch to the jape to collar their grub!" urged Fatty Wynn. "Besides, I'm hungry. At this time of the year I always get—"

"Shut up; they'll hear you when they come."

"But really, Figgy—"

"Quiet!"

Every word was perfectly audible to the three juniors in the box-room. Redfern, Lawrence, and Owen grinned at one another. Redfern gently inserted the nozzle of the syringe into the purple pail, and drew it full of liquid. The slight gurgling sound it made penetrated into the study, and the juniors there looked round in surprise.

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"What the dickens was that?" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"Blessed if I know," said Figgins.

Monty Lowther yawned.

"If they don't come soon—" he began.

"Oh, stick it out, Monty—a compact is a compact," said Tom Merry. "We've agreed with Figgins to put these cheeky young bouncers in their place—"

"Yes, but—yaroop!"

Swish!

From somewhere unknown a stream of violet liquid shot through the air, and it caught Monty Lowther full in the ear. It splashed and spurted over his face, and in a second he was transformed into a most startling-looking personage. He put his hands up to his face in amazement, and they came away dyed purple, and he gave a yell.

"Ow! Who threw that stuff at me? Ow!"

"My hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

Swish!

Figgins gave a roar.

The purple stream caught him on the nose, and his face was purple from chin to forehead in a moment, and the stream ran down over his collar and tie and waistcoat.

Click!

Tom Merry sprang to the door.

But it was too late!

The key had been turned in the lock outside.

The six juniors gazed at one another in alarm and dismay. They were locked in the study, and they knew that Redfern & Co. must have been on the watch for them, with the key in the outside of the lock ready. They realised instinctively what was going to happen; and even as they realised it, it happened.

Swish, swish!

The purple stream smote Tom Merry on the side of the head, and then caught Manners on the neck. They roared.

"Ow, ow! Groo! Grooogoo!"

"What is it—"

"Where is it coming from?" Fatty yelled. "Where—og—og—ogogogh!"

It caught him over the mouth as he was speaking. Kerr was the only one who had escaped so far, and he glared round the study wildly in search of the hidden assailant. He caught sight of the nozzle of a syringe sticking through the end wall, and gave a shout as he rushed towards it.

"It's a trap! There are the—yow—yow—yow!"

Swish!

Kerr reeled back as he received the stream fairly in the neck.

Wild exclamations filled the study.

"Ow! Oh! Yow! Groo! Hoogogh!"

From the box-room came a soft chuckle.

Swish!

Another stream of purple fluid traversed the study. There was a wild rush of the imprisoned juniors to escape it. The chairs were knocked over, and the table hurled aside. But the stream followed them and found them out.

"Ow! Oh!" roared Tom Merry. "Stop it, you rotters—"

"Yaroooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Redfern & Co. "Hear us grin!"

"Yow-ow! Stop it!"

"Grrrooooh!"

Whizz, whizz, swish!

The juniors dashed round the study like rats in a trap. Tom Merry wrenched at the door, but it refused to budge. Lowther rushed at the orifice in the wall in a valiant attempt to stop it up with a book. Streams of purple caught him in the face, and he staggered back.

"Do you surrender?" asked Redfern, with cheerful calmness, from the other side of the wall. "Do you give in to the New Firm?"

"No!" roared Figgins.

"Never!" yelled Tom Merry.

"All serene! I've got quarts left yet," said Redfern.

Lawrence and Owen yelled.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Swish, swish, swish! Whizz! Splash!

"Ow!" gasped Tom Merry. "It will take hours to get this stuff off—ow! We shall have to be washing all the afternoon instead of playing footer—yow—gerrooh!"

"We've got to get at 'em somehow!" roared Lowther.

"Gerrooooh! We're locked in—yow!"

"Bung the table against the wall!" yelled Figgins. "It's only boards, anyway; it hasn't been put up a week! Go it!"

"Look out!" yelled Redfern. He had not quite expected such desperate measures as that. "Look out—you'll smash the wall—"

"We'll smash you, too!" roared Figgins.

The juniors, streaming purple, gripped the table, and rushed it against the wooden partition.

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Next Thursday's Grand, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.

Crash!

The boards split right and left, and a gaping aperture opened in the wall, and there was a startled yell from Redfern & Co. With vengeful shouts the half-dozen juniors scrambled through the broken boards.

"Collar 'em!" roared Tom Merry.

"Line up!" yelled Redfern.

The New Firm lined up. But it was not much use lining up against six furious juniors. They were bowled over in a moment, and the whole crowd went rolling wildly on the floor of the box-room. Tom Merry staggered to his feet. He caught sight of the pail, still half full of the dreadful compound manufactured by Redfern.

"Hold 'em!" roared Tom Merry. "There's enough for them, too!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" gasped Figgins breathlessly. "Sock it to 'em!"

"Here, hold on—stop that!" shrieked Redfern. "Stop it—oh!—ow—yaroooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Swish—sloosh!

There was quite enough of the compound. It drenched Redfern, it drenched Lawrence, it drenched Owen. In the twinkling of an eye they were as empurpled as their victims.

There was a crash as the box-room door was flung open. Monteith and Baker of the Sixth strode into the room, cane in hand. The terrific uproar had brought the prefects to the spot, and they had hurried up to the Fourth-Form passage, but not in such a hurry as to forget to bring their canes with them.

They started back in amazement at the sight of the empurpled juniors.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Monteith. "What the—how—"

Redfern gasped.

"Ow! This—is this quite accidental, Monteith, you know! We didn't intend to get this stuff over ourselves—ow!—only over those bouncers—yow!"

"You've done it pretty well, I think!" said Monteith, grinning in spite of himself. "You'd better go and wash—and as washing is cold work, we'll warm you up a little first. You take one side of the doorway, Baker, and I'll take the other. Now get out and get yourselves cleaned, you young sweeps!"

"I—I say, Monteith—"

"You see—"

"Get out!" rapped out the prefect.

There was no help for it. The juniors had to get out, and they had to run the gauntlet of the ready canes as they went.

Swish, swish, swish!

"Ow! Ow!"

"Yowp!"

"Yah!"

"Oh!"

From the crowd of juniors in the passage yells of laughter greeted the purple heroes as they fled. But the purple heroes did not laugh, as they rubbed and scrubbed away in the bath-rooms to clean themselves. Which of the combatants could be considered to have scored was a question—but certainly there had been ample damage done on both sides.

In the School House Tom Merry rubbed and scraped at his face under the steaming taps in the both-room, and gaped with exertions.

"A compact's a compact—blow this stuff—and I don't mind lending Figgy a hand—ow!—this will never come off—but in future—grooo!—I think we'll leave Figgins & Co. to handle the New Firm by themselves—ow!"

"Groo!" said Monty Lowther. "I think we will! Ow!" And they did.

THE END.

Next Thursday:

"THE GREAT BARRING-OUT AT ST. JIM'S."

A Splendid, New, Long Complete School Tale of the Rival Co's at St. Jim's.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

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The Story of the Most Terrible and Amazing Journey Ever Made By Man.

Edited from the Notes of Maurice Fordham, Esq.

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CHARACTERS IN THIS GRAND STORY.

MAURICE FORDHAM and **LANCE MORTON**—Two healthy and wealthy young Britons, owners of the yacht Foamwitch, and the wonderful aeronef, Wings of Gold.
PROFESSOR LUDWIG VON HAAGEL—The famous German scientist, also noted for his clumsiness.
MATTHEW REDLAND—The talented inventor of a wonderful airship. He is drowned at the entrance of the ice barrier.
JOSEPH JACKSON or **SHOREDITCH JOSE**—A Cockney member of the crew, whose constant companion is a game bantam named the Smacker.
TEDDY MORGAN—Ship's engineer.
WILLIAM TOOTER—The hairy first mate.

exploring the strange land which is believed to lie beyond the barrier of eternal ice near the South Pole.

As soon as the first land is reached the construction of the aeronef, Wings of Gold—which has been carried in pieces on the Foamwitch—is proceeded with, and in it begins a wonderful voyage into the heart of the Antarctic.

Fearful creatures, thought to be extinct since prehistoric times, are encountered when the adventurers reach a mysterious mountain country never before trodden by the foot of man. Attracted by a wonderful lake, Wings of Gold hovers just above the water, while Professor Von Haegel tries his luck with a stout rod and line. He has scarcely made his first cast when the rod is almost jerked from his hold. Jammed against the rail, however, the man of science sticks grimly to the tossing rod, while Lance shouts:

"Hold him, dad! Don't let him go!"
 (Now go on with the story).

The Foamwitch is on an expedition with the object of

Fishing—Von Haegel has a Bite.

"Ach! Never!" puffed the professor. "Oh, never I shall him let go! Pouf! Ach! Der strong brute!"

Teddy Morgan laughed, and sunk the vessel lower, until her keel almost grazed the water. Lance put on a fresh bait, and, taking the gaff, Maurice descended the ladder, and waited. Von Haegel rose to his knees, and then to his feet. The perspiration was pouring out of him. Teddy Morgan swung a shot gun under his arm, and leaned forward.

"Should I let drive at him, sir, if I see him on top?" he asked.

"Yes; but don't cut the line, Teddy," answered Fordham. "It's our best chance."

"That's what I thought, sir."

There was not the remotest hope of the unskilled professor bringing the fish within reach of the gaff. Cool and quiet as he always was, Morgan pushed back the catch of the twelve-bore. The water boiled. A mass of gold, crimson, and silver leapt high into the air. The engineer's gun sprang to his shoulder. The great fish fell back, and lashed the water madly into foam.

"You've baffled him, Teddy," said Lance. "Wind up gently, dad. Bring him towards me."

He thrust down the gaff, and fastened it under the gaping gills, but he could not lift it alone. At last it lay on the deck, an armour-plated iridescent monster of ninety pounds, and Von Haegel danced round it and shouted like a maniac.

It was a ganoid fish, but a mere baby. The giant sturgeon of the Volga is one of its poor miserable descendants.

"Beautiful, suplime, vunderful!" panted Von Haegel. "Oh, Maurice, dear lad, vunderful, vunderful!"

He flung his fat arms round Fordham, and, entering into the spirit of the thing, Fordham performed a polka round the capture with him, to the vast delight of Crooks, Jackson, and Tooter. Jackson was so pleased that he whipped out his mouth-organ to find a suitable tune, and the bantam stood on one leg and crowed its approval.

It was not long before Von Haegel was making a mess of himself, and everything round him, as he dissected the ganoid fish. A cannon fired close to his ear would not have disturbed him. He wielded the scalpel, stared through his magnifying glass, scratched his head with his fishy fingers, and made fishy notes in a book.

"You won't get anything out of the professor for an hour or two," said Fordham. "He's a fixture."

"Looks like it!" said Lance, grinning. "And won't he hum! There he sits, deliberately spoiling a good suit of clothes, and messing up the whole show. Hallo, what is Teddy playing at?"

Morgan was lashing three sharp hooks together with copper wire.

"I'm goin' to try for a big 'un!" he explained. "They'll be welcome to break this if they can."

"What about a bait?"

The engineer soon provided that. He cut a large fish out of bright tin.

Lance and Maurice put down their rods and helped the engineer. Their own tackle was too flimsy to use against such armour-plated monsters.

Teddy Morgan used pliant insulated wire for his line, and put a swivel between it and the bait. He gave the tin a curve to make it spin, and threw it overboard, fastening the wire firmly to the upper bar of the rail.

Then he set the engines going, and the aeronef glided over the lake.

"Hooked!" shouted Fordham, as the wire jerked taut. "Go easy, Teddy!"

The water behind seethed and frothed and creamed with the mad struggles of some unseen creature.

"Easy, Teddy, or you'll lose the lot!" cried Lance. "Great Scott, you'll swamp us!"

The aeronef dipped under a sudden terrific pull until her stern sank a yard under water. She lifted herself clear, then sank again. The wire parted with a loud report. A long, sinuous thing writhed up and lashed up over the heads of the horrified men, and a hissing shriek rang through their ears. They heard the report of the engineer's gun. Teddy's hands dragged at the levers, and Wings of Gold sprang skyward.

Pale and shaken, Lance leaned against an upright.

"Phew!" he gasped. "What was it, Maurice?"

"I can't tell. It wasn't pretty, anyhow, the brute! It looked like a snake," said Fordham, his voice strained.

"I'll stake my life it was a plesiosauros,"* said Lance, shuddering.

Jackson and Tooter were shuddering. Crooks seemed to

* Plesiosauros—an extinct marine monster, resembling a turtle threaded through with the body of the snake. Its remains are frequently found in Dorsetshire.—ED.

have a wonderful nerve, for he had not even dropped his pipe. Morgan, from the wheelhouse, had the clearest view of the creature.

"It was a sort of thing to give a chap dreams," he said, "with its great bleeding jaws open, and my tackle stuck in them. Thunder, I hope I peppered him up! I nearly turned sick, and I don't care much about fishing in these waters."

The shining lake was unruffled, hiding its fearful inhabitants. Lance showed Morgan one of the professor's drawings of the plesiosauros, with its paddle-like fins and snaky neck and tail.

"That's his photo," said Teddy wonderingly; "at least, that's his neck and head. He was bright green, except his mouth, and the eyes looked bigger. It staggers me how a man who'd never seen one could draw the thing to life."

"Ach, Himmel! Murder! Help, dear lads, help! I shall of him be the death! Come back, villain! Ja, ja! Oh, dear lads, help! He has stolen mein wonderful eye!"

The professor's frenzied yells startled them; but their fear was speedily changed to mirth as they saw Von Haagel, with brandished scalpel, in pursuit of the bantam. Von Haagel had carefully removed one of the fish's eyes, and the bantam had taken a fancy to it. The bird ran like a hare with the eye in its beak, until Crooks skillfully skimmed his cap over the bird, and made him drop its prize. Then, as the professor stooped to recover his property, the bantam attacked his head tooth and nail.

"Ach!" puffed the professor, when Jackson seized his pet. "dot bird is ein demon! I shall kill dot bird! I shall wring der neck!" His anger faded as he saw Lance's grinning face. "Nein, nein; I do not mean dot. He is ein grand bird, Jackson, and I could not hurt him. Laugh at der boor old professor, dear lads! He does not mind. He loves you to laugh at him. Yes, yes."

He went back to his labours beaming, and quickly converting himself into a mass of fish, learning, and good-nature. The aeroplane sailed on slowly, but still there was no sign of a pass. They began to despair. Nature seemed to have locked up her secret with locks that no human strength or skill could break.

Wrecked.

"We'll pitch out a couple of ropes to-night, Teddy, and sleep in the air," said Fordham.

The engineer gave a nod as he polished away at the brass-work.

"I think so, too, sir," he answered. "The weather makes me a bit nervous. It's nasty to think that a wind would blow us into tin-tacks. You see, Mr. Maurice, that if it blew hard we wouldn't have an earthly. We'd be slapped into the rocks before we could rise. I'm talking of a blow like the last one. We could beat up against any ordinary gale well enough."

"Well, let us hope that it won't blow, Teddy," said Fordham.

It was still daylight. Fordham chose a rocky spur as their anchorage. Its three sides fell almost sheer, and it was clear verdure. A mountain forest sloped towards it inwards. The Wings of Gold dropped towards it slowly.

"That looks a snug berth," said Lance, "and a pretty safe one. I'll go down and fix the grapnels."

The two grapnels swung overboard, and Lance went down the ladder and made them fast. Then Morgan raised the aeroplane until the ropes hung loosely, and the vessel floated some eighty feet off the ground. The night shadows began to roll down the peaks in ghostly folds.

"Better have a regular watch, sir, I think," said Mr. Tooter. "It's more regular and shipshape. I'll take the first one with pleasure."

"Ain't he kind?" said Jackson witheringly. "He'll be giving something away soon; not 'alf, he won't. Little Willy would always like to take first watch if he could. He'd chase himself to do it. You haven't got to get out of no warm bed to do it. Oh, no; not 'alf! Our little Willy is so kind!"

Mr. Crooks brought down his gleaming eye, then brought up his voice.

"He was too 'airy," he growled. "He has too much whiskers and too much cheek."

"Order, gentlemen!" chuckled Fordham. "We're not going to argue about it. I don't see that we want to watch at all, except to keep eye on the weather. We'll draw lots for first, second, and third. Write down the names, old chap."

The slips were shaken up. Mr. Crooks' eye twinkled as his name came out on top.

"His name was Crooks," he growled, "and Crooks was on top. He was a gentleman. His name is always on top. Why not? His family came over with William the Conqueror. Why not? It's written in 'istory books."

"Can't you let my 'air alone, you one-eyed telegraph-post?" said Tooter angrily.

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"I was not touching it," growled Crooks. "If I had a lawn-mower, I'd mow it for you. Why not? It was long and thick and gingery. It was not beautiful. It was not useful, except for a doormat. Was not? Trees is pruned. Tie pink bows on the corner, and make your face a pin-cushion. There's 'air!"

Mr. Crooks wandered away whistling, and Jackson sniggered.

"He doesn't chase yer features at all, does he, Bill?" he asked. "Yer beauty seems to worry him."

"Oh, blackbirds!" snapped the first officer. "I'll lose my temper one of these times, and tie him into forty thousand knots. He ain't fit for nothing except bootlaces. I'll twist him—"

"Why not?" thundered the cook's voice.

A long arm darted over Jackson's head, and a huge, clenched fist appeared under Tooter's nose. The fist opened, and a long finger pointed at Tooter's nose, and the cook's eye glowed in the darkness like a lump of coal.

"There's 'air!" growled the cook. "Why not? This is a fist; that is a face. Will he twist me? Try it! Why not?"

Lance, Maurice, and Teddy Morgan laughed heartily as the fist and eye vanished.

"I believe he could eat you, Willie," said Maurice.

"I believe he could, too, sir," said Tooter, joining in the mirth. "He's a good chap is Crooks, and as smart as they can be made. I only saw him fight once, and I was jolly glad he wasn't fighting me. Even Josh would find him a tough egg to crack."

"Rats! I'd chase himself off the face of the earth in two rounds," said the little Cockney. "Me not lick Crooks? Why, I'd eat him; not 'arf, I wouldn't!"

Again two long arms shot into the wheelhouse out of the gloom; two hands pinned Jackson from the elbows. Amid shouts of laughter, Jackson found himself in mid-air. The cook's unwinking and unwavering eye stared at him as he held Jackson up above his head.

"He was to eat me!" grunted Crooks. "Ave a bite, Jose! Why not?"

"Let me get at yer!" shouted Jackson. "I'll swallow yer!"

"That'll do!" said Maurice. "Put him down, Crooks, and get on duty. Here, my revolver! As I come next, I'll turn in. Good-night, Lance, old boy! Good-night, lads!"

Morgan took a last glance round the engine-room, and went into the saloon. Hot water and soap had not succeeded in removing the fishy odour from Von Haagel. But he was supremely happy, and his good-tempered face shone like a harvest moon.

"Ach, Morgan!" he puffed. "You have come again to learn and read my poor books? So I am not so mad as you once did think me, eh? We shall make a fine scholar of you yet. And everything you shall not understand when you read you shall ask me, and I shall try to make it plain."

"Thank you, sir!"

"And you shall fill my pipe once, dear lad," said Von Haagel.

Von Haagel wrote up the log, and the fascinated engineer read the story of the wonderful world of the pre-Adamite times. Lance slept in his chair, lulled by the ceaseless droning of the suspensory screws. After a few games of cribbage Tooter and Jackson went to bed.

For an hour Crooks paced up and down. The night was warm and windless and drowsy. Crooks found it hard to keep his only eye open. Crooks chuckled to himself as he thought that a man with two eyes would certainly have slept, for it would have been twice as difficult to keep both eyes open. A strange, musty scent arose. It reminded the cook of the smell of a warm, damp cellar or a mushroom-house. Several times he fancied he heard strange sounds in the distance, but when he listened he could hear nothing.

"Half-time!" he muttered, as the wheelhouse clock struck musically.

Smoking on duty was not forbidden, so the cook smoked. Oddly enough, after their experience with the hideous pterodactyl, it had never occurred to anyone that it was a dangerous thing to put a man on watch.

Crooks had no uneasy qualms. If he had been born with nerves he had outgrown them. He leaned over the stern and amused himself by pulling at the rope until he dragged the aeroplane to the full stretch of the front cable.

Presently the colourless moon lifted herself, and the black outline of the sloping moss forest came slowly and faintly into view.

"Ain't it warm?" murmured the cook, unbuttoning his shirt. "It was 'otter than the galley fire. Why not?"

As he pulled and relaxed the rope the aeroplane swayed gently to and fro with a lazy, rocking motion.

Crooks watched a star trembling on the crest of one of the peaks. It was an immensely brilliant constellation. He had

never seen a brighter star. It held his attention for some minutes, and then his eye hovered downwards.

So accustomed had the men become to the fr-r-r of the suspensory screws that the noise was almost imperceptible. The cook could hear the steady ticking of the clock quite distinctly.

He stood up erect and alert as he heard a sound quite foreign and unusual. It was like the rattle of rain among dry leaves. It shuddered through the night and quavered away behind him.

But it was not raining. The sky was jewelled by stars, and unmarred by any cloud. A ring of primrose light encircled the moon.

"Funny!" said the cook. "And that's a bird. Why not?"

A hoarse trumpeting broke the silence. It was difficult to locate the sound, but he felt sure that it had come from among the trees.

"Oh! Why not?"

The revolver leapt from his pocket. A shadowy object was gliding between the aeronef and the shore.

No hawk-eyed redskin had better eyesight than the one-eyed cook, but the light was treacherous.

Crooks sidled away, looking over his shoulder, and took down Teddy Morgan's twelve-bore. He dropped the breech, and saw the shining ends of two unexploded cartridges. Then he went aft again.

A shriek awoke the echoes of the hills.

Crooks sprang round. For an instant the moon was hidden from him. It shone out again, and silhouetted against the sky he saw a black monster dropping towards him on outstretched wings. It swayed, and dropped like a stone.

Crooks fired both barrels and yelled. A heavy blow on the side felled him to the deck. There was a hideous flapping, a blood-curdling volley of shrieks.

Though half dazed, the plucky cook emptied his revolver at the quivering, struggling mass above him. Then came a rending crash, and Crooks rolled over and over.

Terrified voices were shouting. Crooks sat up and rubbed his eyes. Everything seemed topsy-turvy.

A star was winking at him through what seemed a forest of tree-trunks.

He could not make it out. Some of the trees had three branches on the top, while others had none. Then the truth flashed upon his brain.

The aeronef was no longer perpendicular. What he had taken for trees were the vessel's columns. The queer-looking branches were the screws that had ceased to revolve.

The Wings of Gold had fallen, and was lying on her side.

"Crooks! Where are you? Crooks!" shouted Lance.

"'Ere, sir!" growled the cook. "Why not?"

"Thank goodness! Teddy, can you get a light?"

"No, sir," answered Morgan coolly. "Everything seems bust up. It's a case of lamps."

"Call out the names, old chap, for mercy's sake! Are you right, Maurice?"

A hurricane lamp blazed in the engineer's hand.

Tooter and Jackson clawed their way up the ladder like flies.

Then Fordham shouted from below.

"Where's the professor?" yelled Lance.

"Ach, I am here, dear lad," puffed a voice; "but I am in danger. Ja, ja! I shall fall. I can no longer hold. Help, dear lad, help! I am falling! Help, help!"

Morgan slid down the rope and extended the lamp.

Von Haegel's nightcapped head protruded between the steps of the almost inverted ladder. He was clinging on for dear life, and his face was purple.

Morgan put a strong arm round him, and, aided by Lance, pulled him into safety.

Fordham came up, his pyjamas crimsoned with blood. He had been hurled out of his bunk against his little dressing-table, and his shoulder was badly gashed.

"Are we all safe?" he asked.

"I think so," said Lance. "How did it all happen?"

"Look, sir!" said Morgan grimly.

Something like a torn and wrenched tarpaulin was stretched between five of the columns.

"And look again, sir!" said Morgan, lowering the lamp.

They shrank away involuntarily. Great clots of blood lay on the deck, mingled with more shreds of leathery black.

"I shot him, anyhow!" growled the cook. "Seeing is believing. Why not?"

Morgan crawled down, followed by Lance and Maurice.

Crooks was standing beside a mangled and huddled brute. It was a ghastly pterodactyl that had fouled their suspensory screws.

"Do you think it is all over with us, Teddy?" whispered Lance. "Are we broken to bits?"

"Nothing can cross that ice, sir, that hasn't got wings,"

said the engineer. "That's all I know. If our wings are crippled, well—"

"Shoot—shoot!" cried Tooter.

Another monster soared above them. They had no gun. They clambered wildly up the deck.

"Get below—get below!" shouted Morgan.

He stood bravely holding the lamp until all had passed him; then, hanging by one hand, he closed the sliding door.

Through the metal plates they could hear the snarling and hissing of the horrid brute, as it tore the mangled carcass of its comrade.

And then Von Haegel put his arms round Lance's shoulder, and began to cry and sob.

"Oh, dear lad, dear lad!" he wailed. "What have I done to bring my dear lads here to die? Oh, I care not for mine self! I care not only for mine gallant boys!"

"Hush, dad, hush!" said Lance. "We're pretty lively yet. Pot the brute, Maurice. Do something, anyway."

"Show a light, Teddy."

"Let it alone, sir," said Morgan. "What's one more or less to us? There's only one science that can save us now, and that's engineering. Come and look at the engines."

"That was sense," growled the imperturbable Mr. Crooks; "and sense was always sensible. For'ard! Why not!"

Morgan's lips were compressed when he left the engine-room.

"You may shoot the beast now," he said.

"It's hopeless, then, Teddy?"

Morgan nodded grimly.

After the Disaster—A Night of Misery—Waiting for Daylight.

They took the dreadful news bravely, and even hopefully. Morgan was perhaps mistaken. Until morning came, however, nothing could be done to estimate the exact damage. One thing was plain, from the aspect of the engine-room, that the machinery had suffered badly. The electric light plant was utterly wrecked. For light they had to depend on petroleum and candles, and their supply of both was limited. As yet they could not realise the true horror of the position.

A rush of smoke from the galley gave them work to do. The stove had been upset, and the matting that covered the floor had caught fire. It was quickly put out. Mr. Crooks surveyed the broken crockery, and sighed.

"It was like a bull in a china shop," he growled; "and bulls is more useful as steaks and sirloins. Why not? All my precious old china was busted, barrin' a teapot which has no handle. No matter! Life is short, and Bill's whiskers is long, so don't worry. Why not?"

The vessel lay at an unpleasant slant, and they had to walk carefully.

"Come along, and see if we can clear the saloon," said Morgan. "Get some more lights, Tooter."

It was a long time before they could force their way in, for the bookcase had fallen across the door. Maurice and the engineer well knew that their best plan was to keep the men busy. The list of the floor made the saloon uninhabitable, but there were plenty of planks from the hold, brought for the purpose of making packing cases for specimens.

All worked with a will to lay a false floor, and so level the room. When the work was over they were compelled to laugh at the result.

"It's a sort of room you see in a nightmare," said Lance. "You can walk in comfort, so appearances don't much matter. We'll forgive your ugliness if you can bring us some tea, Crooks. Bring the oilstove in here and boil your kettle on that. Buck up, dad, and don't look so weebegone. We'll get out of this mess if pluck will do it. Come, cheer up!"

Von Haegel tried to smile. He blamed himself bitterly and quite wrongly that he was responsible for their plight.

"Ach, yes!" he said. "You are dear, brave lads, and when der milk is spilled to cry is foolish. Ja, ja! We must make der best of bad bargains at all times. Oh, you are good lads!"

The professor wiped his eyes on his nightcap, and picked a volume of Shakespeare from a pile of books. The kettle was soon boiling, and enough cups and saucers had escaped to go round.

"This a nasty business for us, boy," said Fordham. "We can't tell yet how nasty it's going to be. A bit of daylight may put a better complexion on it. We're men, and as men we are not afraid of looking squarely at it. The real truth always pays best in the end.

(This grand serial story will be continued in next week's issue of "The Gem" Library. Order now, Price 1d.)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 211.

A Grand, New Series of Short Complete Stories, introducing Frank Kingston, Detective, and Dolores—his pretty Lady Assistant.



CHAPTER 1.

Terror!—A Startling Narrative.

"I THINK we shall just be able to catch the eleven-thirty train nicely," remarked Frank Kingston, glancing at his watch in the light of a street lamp. Overhead a few fleecy clouds were being driven swiftly by the strong wind across the face of a pale moon.

"It is later than I thought," said Dolores, gripping Kingston's arm tighter as they walked against the wind. "You know, Frank, we should have started away earlier. But what a lonely road this is! I had no idea that a well-populated suburb of London like this could seem so deserted."

The great detective had taken his fiancée to visit some friends at Blackheath, and had been unable to get away until a few minutes after eleven. There was a train from Blackheath Station at eleven-thirty, however, and as they had plenty of time, the pair decided to walk.

As Miss O'Brien had said, the road was extremely deserted. Away on the right stretched the bleak heath, while on the left a row of large, residential houses stood out black against the sky. Not a soul was visible. Considering the lateness of the hour, and the fact that the night was an uncommonly raw one, this was not surprising.

"Blackheath at night nearly always bears this appearance," remarked Kingston. "I am sure— By Jove, look at that fellow!"

The latter part of Kingston's sentence left his lips as a rather strange incident occurred. A hundred yards up the road, on the same pavement, a man had suddenly dashed from one of the large front gardens. He was hatless, and Kingston distinctly heard a low cry escape his lips—an unnatural cry, which told Kingston that everything was not as it should be.

For a second the man hesitated; then, as though spurred on by an unseen horror, he literally flew towards the wondering onlookers. Kingston and Dolores had halted beneath a lamp, and they drew against the wall as the stranger drew near. He was running madly, unseeing, and dashed past them without even knowing of their presence.

His breath was coming in great sobs, and while his face was drawn and deathly pale, his eyes shone with absolute terror. And, most remarkable of all, his right hand, plainly visible in the gaslight, was torn and bleeding. It was quite evident that something had occurred which had caused him for a few moments to lose complete control of his reason.

"Oh, Frank!" exclaimed Dolores, shrinking back. "Whatever can have happened? I don't think I've ever seen a man look so frightened before! And did you see his hand?"

"Yes," replied Kingston grimly; "and I mean to find

out what the trouble is! There's no telling what the fellow might do to himself in that condition."

And before Dolores could reply the detective was sprinting up the road with all the marvellous speed he was capable of. He literally flew, and the other man, although he was moving rapidly, was overtaken in a very short time. Kingston grasped his shoulder, and swung him to a standstill.

"Don't!" panted the man, in a horrified voice. "Let me get away from them! Let me blot them from my mind! Let me go, I say!" And he struggled with a frenzied fury.

Kingston gripped him hard.

"Calm yourself, man!" he said sternly. "There's nothing to fear. Calm down, and tell me what reason you have for acting in this manner."

The stranger gazed into Kingston's face for a moment with the same horror-struck expression; then, with great suddenness, he seemed to realise that he was in no danger. He came to his senses once more, and clung to Kingston with quivering hands.

"Thank Heaven, I am safe!" he moaned, in a weak voice. "I was mad—mad with the horror of it! But where am I?" he added, gazing round him. "On the heath— Ah, my hand is paining me!"

The knowledge that his hand was injured suddenly came to him, and he held it up for inspection. It was bleeding profusely, and Kingston at a glance saw that it bore several deep gashes as though made by the sharp fangs of some animal.

"This is bad!" declared Kingston gravely. "You must have it bandaged up immediately. Where do you live?" he added, as he proceeded to wrap a handkerchief round the stranger's bleeding member.

"No. 56," said the other, his voice now weak with agony and exhaustion. "I am sorry to cause you all this trouble, sir, but—"

He staggered slightly, and Kingston, holding him in his strong arms, assisted him along the pavement back to the spot where Dolores was waiting. It could be seen that the man was of slight build, that he was clean shaven, and that his age might have been anything from thirty-five to forty.

Dolores asked no questions when the pair came up, but silently followed them until they reached No. 56. This proved to be a large, semi-detached house, with a somewhat straggling garden.

"Is there nobody at home?" inquired Kingston.

"Nobody except myself. My wife and children are in the South of England, and both the servants are day-girls—they left at nine o'clock."

They passed into the house, and were soon in an expensively-furnished dining-room. The gas was full up, and a bright fire burned in the grate. Beside this an easy chair was set, and a magazine lay on the floor. Plainly the owner had been suddenly startled.

Soon the bandaged hand was thrust in water, washed, and re-bandaged with clean linen. After that a stiff dose of brandy worked wonders with the injured man.

"It is very good of you to do all this for me," he said gratefully, in a quiet, refined voice. "Had you not stopped me I honestly believe I should have killed myself in my frenzied condition."

"You have received some sudden shock?" asked Kingston quietly.

"Shock! Great powers, man, I doubt if I can explain what has occurred, and I doubt that you will credit my story even when I do. But my name—you do not know that yet. It is Herbert Lester."

"Well, Mr. Lester, I must return the compliment, and introduce my companion and myself. This is Miss Kathleen O'Brien, and my own name is Kingston—Frank Kingston."

Herbert Lester leaned forward eagerly.

"Frank Kingston!" he exclaimed. "Not—not the same man who exterminated the Brotherhood of Iron?"

The detective nodded with a smile.

"How very strange!" said Lester wonderingly, and with genuine pleasure. "I have read much about you, Mr. Kingston, and you, Miss O'Brien, and it is indeed remarkable that you should be my Good Samaritans to-night. Mr. Kingston," he added quickly, "there's something happening in this house which will prove to be just in your line. You saw yourself what a fearful state I was in. I assure you I had every cause to be."

"I am anxious to hear your story, Mr. Lester—we both are."

"That is where I feel reluctance. Somehow I fear you will not credit my remarkable story. I am a nervous man by temperament, and that may explain why I so completely lost my nerve. I was sitting in this very chair quietly reading and smoking when I heard a peculiar scuffling noise outside in the hall."

"A scuffling noise—such as what?"

"I cannot liken it to anything, and I laid my book down

with a feeling of dread. At last I gained enough courage to cross the room and open the door, and I saw something creeping down the stairs."

Herbert Lester paused a moment, and moistened his dry lips.

"I tell you, Mr. Kingston," he went on, "I stood there absolutely transfixed with fear—unable to move. For the thing that was slowly approaching was like nothing on earth. I screamed aloud, and made as if to re-enter this room, but it was too late!"

CHAPTER 2.

Dr. Werner Drummond.

FRANK KINGSTON looked interested. "Too late?" he inquired. "What happened to you?"

"I will tell you," said the other grimly. "Before I could place my hand on the door-knob the object which had been descending the stairs made a peculiar, guttural noise, and immediately two other of the fearsome creatures bounded down after it, and all three of them sprang at me. I could do nothing but fight for my life. Good heavens, Mr. Kingston, it makes me shudder to relate it. I screamed again and again, beating down the dreadful things with my bare hands."

Mr. Lester paused for a moment, trembling violently.

"There was a fetid odour in the air that made my scalp creep," he went on, "and the touch of the things was cold and clammy. I kicked, struggled, and fought like a mad person. Then, like a red-hot iron, I felt something sink into my hand. The pain was excruciating, and I honestly believe that for the time I took leave of my senses. All I can remember is that I managed to fling the dining-room door open and flood the hall with light. The very instant I did so my assailants dropped from me like magic and scuttled away. For a moment I stood gasping; then, panic-stricken, I dashed from the house. You stopped me, Mr. Kingston, or I should have been on the heath even now."

There was silence in the room for a short space.

"I fully appreciate your reluctance to remain alone in the house," said the famous detective quietly, "and for that reason, Mr. Lester, I have a suggestion to offer. This affair has interested me greatly, and if you wish it I will remain with you throughout the night."

The other man looked up eagerly.

"Thank you!" he cried. "I had the same thought in my own mind, but I hesitated to give voice to it. Find out what this mystery is, Mr. Kingston, and I will pay you anything you like to name!"

Five minutes later the two men were by themselves, Kingston having advised Dolores to walk back to her friend's, and there stay the night. In the morning he would call for her, and escort her home.

"I am afraid I shall be of very little use to you," said Lester, with a faint smile. "My nerves, always rather weak, are at present all to pieces, and— Ah, my hand!"

An expression of agony crossed his face, and he nursed his bound up right hand.

"It is getting worse," he said; "and burning me fearfully. I am afraid that cold water was scarcely sufficient. Yet I have no ointment in the house, and the chemists are all closed."

"But there is a doctor near by, surely?"

Lester's face lit up.

"Ah, yes; of course! How forgetful of me! There is a doctor lives next door, even. I have never seen him professionally, but doubtless he will be able to help me. Do you think it will be too late to pay him a visit?"

"Not a bit of it!" replied Kingston, rising. "We'll go at once."

They did so, leaving the lights full up. Dr. Werner Drummond was in, and ushered them into his consulting-room. He was a small, wizened-up little man, with neatly trimmed black whiskers. And when he smiled, his face resolved itself into a mass of genial smiles.

"Too late?" he cried. "Nothing of the sort, gentlemen. A bitten hand, eh? Dear me; I hope it is nothing very serious."

He soon had the bandages off, and applied some ointment to the wounds. The soothing effect was immediate, for Lester sighed with relief. Kingston watched interestedly, and noticed that the doctor had a long scratch, newly made, on his left wrist.

"I observe you, too, have been in the wars," he smiled, indicating the scratch. For a second Dr. Drummond endeavoured to hide the scratch, then, slightly confused, and with an unpleasant glitter in his eyes, he turned to Kingston.

"Quite so," he said shortly. "I had a rough-and-tumble a few moments ago with my spaniel, and, as you see, came off worst." He turned abruptly. "I think that will be all

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right now, Mr. Lester," he said. "If you will come to me in the morning, I will apply fresh bandages."

For some reason the doctor seemed anxious to get rid of his visitors, and Kingston was not slow to notice this fact. And as they passed out under the bright incandescent light in the hall, the detective also saw a few coarse, reddish hairs, which were clinging to Drummond's black coat.

"I'll warrant that man knows more of this strange affair than even Lester himself," Kingston mentally decided. "We shall see for certain before long."

He gave no indication of his suspicions to Lester, although he questioned him with regard to Dr. Werner Drummond.

"From your remark a short time ago, to the effect that you had never consulted the doctor," he said, "I presume he is a newcomer to Blackheath?"

"Quite new," agreed Lester, as they entered his own brilliantly-lighted dining-room. "He moved in a little less than a month ago, and his practice, so far as I know, is very limited. My wife tells me he hardly ever stirs from the house. I believe he comes from America, but I couldn't say for sure."

Kingston remained silent for a few moments.

"Suppose we have a search round the house?" he suggested presently. "Of course, there will be probably no signs of your attackers, but we may obtain some clue or other. You say they are unlike anything else in the world? It is not possible that in your excitement, your vision became somewhat distorted?"

Lester shook his head decidedly.

"I made no mistake," he cried. "The objects I saw in the hall were something which no man has ever described. They were not painted up men, but real, loathsome creatures of a—another world, I was almost going to say!"

The search of the house revealed nothing—nothing to Lester, at all events. The detective, however, had seen on the hall floor several hairs of a brown, reddish hue. They were exactly similar to those on Dr. Werner Drummond's coat.

CHAPTER 3.

A Fearsome Battle—The Mystery Solved.

HERBERT LESTER lit a cigarette. "I am feeling better now, Mr. Kingston," he exclaimed, kicking the fire into a blaze—they had just entered the dining-room after their search. "I don't know what that ointment is, but it's eased the pain tremendously. Now, how do you intend setting to work? Did not I hear you tell the doctor that you weren't going to stay all night?"

"Did I do so?" said Kingston abstractedly. "Ah, yes; I told him I was planning to catch the last train from Blackheath, and that you were going to sleep alone in the house. Well, as I do intend to stay, it doesn't matter."

Lester looked at his companion curiously, but said nothing. Then the two men commenced a vigil. The lights were extinguished, and the dining-room door closed. Then, taking two easy chairs, they placed themselves at the top of the stairs, and waited in utter silence. Conversation was impossible, for they wished their presence to be unknown.

The light from the street-lamp outside shone through the glass door and fanlight into the hall below, making the latter quite clear and distinct to the watchers. Now and again the wind would freshen a little, and moan mournfully round the building and through the leafless trees.

In this manner an hour passed, and although Kingston sat perfectly still and quiet, his companion was decidedly restless. He continually shifted in his chair, and made whispered comments. Then, at last, the detective laid a firm hand on Lester's knee.

"Why, what—?"

"Hush; I can hear something!" warned Kingston.

Lester drew his breath in sharply, and also sat listening intently. At first he could hear nothing, but after a minute a soft, stealthy pattering made itself heard—the same sound he had heard earlier in the night.

"They're coming, Kingston!" he murmured excitedly. "They're coming!"

The pattering grew louder still, and with it came a peculiar scratching sound, as though something sharp was being scraped along the linoleum. Kingston sat perfectly still. He knew, the instant he heard those sounds, that Lester's story had been true, but he sat there as calm as ever.

Then suddenly the hitherto soft, whispering sounds grew in intensity, and something black and shapeless emerged from the kitchen door. At the same second Kingston gripped his companion's knee tightly, just preventing him from crying out.

After the first object came three others of similar size, and moved by the same impulse they entered the body of

the hall. And even Kingston, with his nerves of steel, caught his breath in sharply at what he saw.

The things were not an inch taller than three feet, were partially covered in hair, and walked upright. Their arms were of abnormal length, nearly touching the ground, and as one of them momentarily passed in front of the shaft of light Kingston saw a horrible, half-human half-animal face, with hideous, pinkish eyes, and long, protruding teeth.

They were like nothing else on earth, and although they were covered with hair, and stood only three feet high, there was no getting away from the fact that they were human! Kingston felt a mighty curiosity to know what they were. Fear he knew not.

Suddenly one of the creatures gave utterance to a low, guttural sound, and together the quartette commenced ascending the stairs. The detective allowed them to get half-way up before he acted.

"Now!" he cried, springing to his feet.

For a second the hideous dwarfs hesitated. Then, with fierce cries, not unlike those of a snarling dog, they bounded up the stairs. Kingston had a revolver in his hand, but before he could fire, the things were round him, scratching, clawing, and biting. Lester, in his injured condition, was worse than useless, and watched the fight fascinatedly.

He saw Kingston grasp one of the struggling objects and literally hurl it at the others. Two of them were sent flying headlong down the stairs, but they were on their feet again like cats. Their strength was terrific, and their courage undoubted. But Kingston had seen his opportunity.

As the dwarfs came bounding up the stairs again, he pulled the trigger of his revolver. A soft click sounded, and one of the creatures fell backwards without a sound. Another followed the same road, while a third was grasped in Kingston's arms and flung upon his one remaining companion. The lower one struck his head with terrific force upon the bottom stair, and lay still. For a second the other hesitated, gesticulating wildly. Then, with a shrill scream, he darted away through the kitchen.

Kingston stowed his revolver away—it was the one made specially for him by old Professor Polgrave, a scientist friend of his, and it was filled with tiny darts coated with a drug which brought on immediate insensibility. Like lightning the detective was down the stairs, and he was just in time to see the horrible visitor dart down the cellar stairs. With his electric torch showing, Kingston followed, but no sign of the dwarf remained. But a grating stood open, and through this the pigmy had evidently made his way.

"As I thought!" murmured Kingston. "Dr. Drummond will receive two surprises to-night," he added, as he swiftly mounted the stairs; "two surprises in quick succession!"

"Yes, Dolores," exclaimed the detective languidly, as they made their way Citywards the following morning. "The affair was certainly rather startling. After the fight I dashed from the house, came face to face with a policeman, and we both entered Dr. Drummond's house. The capture was a tame affair."

"But what was the motive?" asked Dolores interestedly. "And what were these awful creatures?"

"That's the peculiar part of it. Drummond had travelled a good deal, and while out in Arizona heard of the mysterious cliff-dwellers of the Verde Valley, which many people are sceptical about, but which I myself know to be true. The hideous pigmies are a type of Albino dwarfs—meaning they are unable to see in a strong light. In some manner Drummond captured four of them, and, placing them in a closed cage, brought them over to England as wild animals.

"But you haven't told me the motive yet?"

"The motive was one conceived by a diseased mind, for Drummond, although seemingly sane, is mad on one subject. Years ago he was in love with Lester's wife, but when she got married to the man she loved, Drummond made a mad resolve to kill his more fortunate rival. He conceived the horrible scheme you have just learnt of, and it was, indeed, only by a chance that the unfortunate man escaped with his life. But the idea was absurd from the beginning, and only worthy of a madman. Exposure would have been certain, sooner or later."

"But once his object was gained he would not care about death," said Dolores. "And, besides, I very much doubt whether the police would have found an explanation for the death had you not been upon the scene. Oh, Frank, you don't know how glad I am that no harm came to you!"

"Harm?" echoed Kingston placidly. "Why, my dear girl, the incident was merely a few hours' recreation—and very entertaining recreation at that!"

(Another Thrilling, Complete Story of Frank Kingston and Dolores next Thursday.)