

DON'T MISS CUSSY'S WAISTCOAT ON PAGE 21.

Every

Wednesday.



Complete Stories for All, and Every Story a Gem

THE SCHOOLBOY FIRE-FIGHTERS



A Splendid, New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co., at St. Jim's.

BY MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER I.

An Alarm in the Night.

TOM MERRY roused restlessly in his sleep, and awoke.

It was very dark in the Shell dormitory in the School House at St. Jim's. It was long past midnight, and the house was very still. Tom Merry lay half awake on his bed, blinking at the dim, high windows, and wondering what had awakened him. There was a sound of steady breathing from the other beds. Nothing was moving in the dormitory; nothing stirring in the House.

Suddenly Tom Merry shifted, and sat up in bed.

He shifted again suspiciously. Then he knew what had awakened him. There was a smell of smoke in the dormitory—a smell of burning!

"My hat! What's that! Something's on fire!"

He groped in the pockets of his clothes beside the bed and found a matchbox. The match stretched, and flared out. Tom Merry held it up and looked towards the dormitory door. There was a dim haze in the dormitory. Under the door a curl of white smoke was crawling. The match went out.

Tom Merry leaped out of bed, his face pale with excitement. There was a fire somewhere—two in the old school House of St. Jim's! Tom Merry's voice rang through the sleeping dormitory.

"Wake up, you fellows! Manners! Lowther! Kangaroo! Wake up!"

He ran to the switch, and turned on the electric light. The dormitory was flooded with illumination in an instant. Fellows sat up in the long row of beds, blinking in the sudden light, and asking:

"Whichever horror?" murmured Manners sleepily.

"Lecture alone?" gasped Lowther.

Tom Merry shook his two chums in turn.

"Got up! Fire!"

"Gosh! I can't breathe in this stuff!" came a muffled voice from the interior of the live chum. "I can't get any further. Gosh! Yessh!" [See chapter I.]

"What?"

"FIRE!"

Manners and Lowther did not need any more than that; they were wide enough awake now. They tumbled out of bed in the twinkling of an eye, and grasped their clothes. Kangaroo jumped up, and Gibson Daise and Bernard Glyn and Biskopole turned out, and then the other fellows, one by one, as they realized what was the matter.

Tom Merry stayed only for his trousers and boots, and then rushed to the door and threw it open.

A thicker roll of smoke came in as he did so, and he started back, coughing.

"Fire!" yelled Crooke of the Shell. "Oh, we shall be burnt to death! Ow!"

"Sherryp!" gasped Lowther.

"Fire! Help! Fire!"

Tom Merry ran out of the dormitory. On the stairs the smell of smoke was thicker. He dashed down the stairs, and down the study passage. But on the lower staircase there was no smoke. It was evident that the fire had not originated below stairs. Tom Merry turned back, and ran to Kildare's door. He thumped at the door and threw it open.

"Kildare!"

The captain of St. Jim's started up in bed.

"Hallo! What the—?"

"Something's on fire!" interrupted Tom Merry.

"Great Scott!"

Kildare ran out of bed in a moment.

Tom Merry did not wait. He dashed away to the door of Mr. Radlett's room, and hammered at it, calling to the Housemaster. Mr. Radlett's

reply in a moment:

"Coming."

Mr. Radlett came whisking out of the room in a moment.

The smoke was rolling along the passage now; the smell of burning was stronger, and Tom Merry thought he could hear a crackling of wood.

But he could see no flame as yet; the fire was not far advanced, wherever it was.

Next Wednesday: "HONOURS DIVIDED!" AND "SIR BILLY, OF GREYHOUSE!"

"Where is it, Merry?" asked Mr. Bailton.
 "I don't know, sir; the place is in fire somewhere. It's not downstairs, though. In one of the studies, I think."
 "Ring the alarm-bell, Merry."

"Yes, sir."
 Tom Merry dashed off to the alarm-bell. He grasped the rope, and tugged, and the clang of the bell rang through the silent night. There were loud voices on all sides, shouts of inquiry and alarm. Fellows were turning out on all sides now. Across the quadrangle, lights flashed in the windows of the New House. The fellows over there were startled out of slumber by the clanging of the bell.

"Fire! Fire! Fire!"
 The cries of alarm rang through the House.
 "Fire! Fire! Fire!"
 "Keep your heads!" rang out Mr. Bailton's steady voice. "There is no danger. The prefects will see that all the juniors get out into the quad at once."
 "Yes, sir," said Kildare.

Fellows were streaming downstairs now, in nightdresses and pyjamas, or half-dressed, or carrying their clothes on their arms.

The great door on the quadrangle was thrown open, and the night air rushed into the house, blowing the clouds of smoke along the passages.

Out into the quadrangle the juniors swarmed, and the seniors, too, but all of them did not go. Tom Merry was still ringing the alarm-bell.

"Clang, clang, clang!"
 He left the bell at last; if St. Jim's was wide enough awake now, Messers and Lowther joined him on the stairs. The prefects were filing the fire-bricks; they were kept banging up at the end of each passage. The smoke was thickest in the third passage, and the smell of burning was strongest there.

"It's one of the Shell studies," said Tom Merry. "Some one left his burning coat there. Come on!"

"All jackets into the quad!" shouted Kildare.
 The Fourth, Third of the Shell appeared first. They ran into the Shell passage, and four other jackets joined them there—Blake and Harries and Dyer and D'Arcy of the Fourth. The smoke was thick in the passage, and they gasped for breath.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Aggraves D'Arcy of the Fourth. "This is frightful! But look up, dear boys. I'm with you, you know; don't be scared."

Tom Merry threw open the study doors in turn, as he passed them.

The door of Gore's study, next to Tom Merry's own, was heated to the touch. As Tom Merry threw it open a thick volume of smoke rolled out, and there was a glimmer of light, and the juniors reeled back, almost suffocated.

"Oh!"
 "Ah!"
 "Grooh!"
 "Bai Jove!"
 Tom Merry dashed down the passage again.
 "Here it is!" he shouted. "It's in Gore's study. Bring the water here!"
 "Right!"

A dozen seniors with fire-buckets ran along the passage. Tom Merry & Co. slung up buckets and any other vessel they could find, and hurriedly filled them at the tap at the end of the passage.

Water was hurled into Gore's study by the bucketful. The study was a mass of flame and smoke, and little tongues of flame licked out into the passage; now that the door was open. If the fire had been great some time it would probably have obtained too firm a hold to be quenched. But fortunately the alarm had been given before it was too late.

"Water! Water here!"
 All the masters were on the scene now; even the Head, half-dressed, had arrived. Seniors from the New House joined those of the School House in carrying water.

There was a death of fire-buckets, but jugs and basins and even silk hats served the turn. Water was swamped into the study in floods.

Tom Merry & Co. worked with the seniors, and no one said they were. The rest of the juniors were out in the quadrangle, a long crowd was gathering there, curiously calling and talking. The window of Gore's study was the object of all eyes; the heat had cracked the panes now, and smoke was pouring out into the night in a dense volume.

"Bai Jove, we're going!" it wasn't D'Arcy exclaimed, as he lifted a pail of water into the study, and caught Monty Lowther a smack with the empty pail as it swung back. Lowther snarled.

"Oh, you are!"
 "Wendy, Lowther!"
 "Low! You've hurt me, you dangerous one!"
 "This is no time, to think of trifles, Lowther!"
 "More to be said!" shouted Kildare. "Don't waste time jostling you both!"

"Wendy, Kildare!"
 Kildare was inside the study now, in the thick smoke. The flames were out, but the smoke was still thick. It rolled out of the window into the quad, and out of the door into the passage. Water was swamped into the room again and again, till Mr. Bailton called halt.

"The fire is out," he said.
 "Bai Jove!" gasped D'Arcy. "We've had a fearful narrow escape, dear boys. Lucky I was here!"

"Wendy, Tom Merry!"
 Mr. Bailton examined the study carefully. There was not a spark left, and the smoke was clearing off. The study was gutted; furniture, books, everything, was a charred mass, and the walls were burnt and discoloured, the ceiling blackened, the ceiling cracked. The School House had undoubtedly had a narrow escape. Mr. Bailton clumped of the burnt study, smoke-begging and blackened, gasping for breath.

"There will be an inquiry into this tomorrow," he explained. "Something has been very careless here. It is very fortunate that the fire was discovered in time. Who was it gave the alarm?"

"Tom Merry, sir," said Messers.

"You have done as all a great service, Merry. The boys can return to their dormitories. There is no more danger."

CHAPTER 2.

Tom Merry Has An Idea.

S T. JIM'S was in a state of the most intense excitement.

The fellows who had extinguished the fire were blackened with smoke, with starting eyes, and some of them scorched by the flames.

The fellows came in from the quadrangle to stare at the room where the fire had originated. Gore, the owner of the study, was furious. The loss fell upon him and the fellows who shared the study with him—Vavasour and Skirpale. Vavasour did not seem to mind much; he was a rich fellow, and could afford to lose a few books and articles of furniture. But Skirpale seemed inconsolable. Skirpale flunked into the gutted study through his big spectacles, and scowled on the verge of tears.

"Have you lost anything valuable?" asked Blake of the Fourth.

Skirpale nodded miserably.
 "Yes, yes! It is terrible—irreparable!"
 "What have you lost, then?" asked Tom Merry. "Money?"
 "Money? Oh, no; I haven't any money."
 "What is it, then?" demanded Lowther.

"My book!"
 "What?"
 "My book on Socialism," said Skirpale tearfully. "I had written three hundred and seventy-four chapters, and—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 Skirpale blinked indignantly at the juniors. Skirpale was a genius, and he had transferred a great deal of his mighty thoughts to that book, which he had intended to revolutionise the whole action of modern thought. And Skirpale's book had ended in—smoke!

"Lucky you hadn't got on very far with it," grinned Blake.
 "It would have been worse if you had written three thousand chapters!"

"Yes, walloh!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "And my volume upon Determinism, by Professor Balmey-croquet, that also is destroyed," said Skirpale.

"I should have thought that was too solid to burn!" said Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Jolly lucky you weren't all toasted in your little beds, you

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fellows!" said Figgins of the New House. "You School House chaps do get into scrapes, and no mistake!"

"Well, Figgins!" asked Keen.

"How did it start?" asked Keen.

"Tom Merry shook his head.

"I don't know! Perhaps Gave left his fire burning, and—"

George Gave started.

"I didn't," he said. "I wasn't in the study after I did my prep. I suppose it was Skimpole—he was there!"

"Dear me!" said Skimpole. "I should not be surprised. I remember there was a good fire here when I went to bed, and I forgot to take it out. I had been writing some new paragraphs in my book, and I had thrown some sheets of paper into the grate, and so—"

"Perhaps, you boiled out!" booted Gave. "It's a wonder you didn't burn as all to death, you dangerous fellow!"

"My dear Gave—"

"Get off to bed, you kids!" called out Kildare from the passage. "You New House fellows go back to your own House at once!"

"Right-as-rainy!" said Figgins cheerfully.

The janses returned to their quarters. Tom Merry and Muzzen and Leather washed off the grime as well as they could before turning in. The janses were not inclined to sleep; the excitement had made them too wakeful for that.

"We've had a narrow escape!" Tom Merry remarked.

"If that fire had got a firmer hold, we shouldn't have been able to put it out with those giddy brackets. We've been jolly lucky!"

"We want a giddy fire brigade in the school!" Leather remarked. "Some schools have 'em—amateur fire brigades, you know."

Tom Merry started.

"My hat!"

"What's the matter now?"

Tom Merry clapped his hands on the shoulder.

"A witness, my son—a giddy witness! A big score over the New House—the biggest score we've ever made!"

"But what?"

"Shush! Can't talk here—too many to hear!" said Tom Merry, lowering his voice. "Crooks would give us away—and the other fellows might jaw."

"Yes, but what?"

"Whisper, and I shall hear," grinned Mosey Lowther.

Tom Merry laughed and whispered:

"What price an amateur fire-brigade for the School House?"

We can work it up, and get it into going order without letting the New House knowers get a whiff of it. Then when it's started, out it comes—ready for business! What?"

"My hat! What a smashing scheme!"

"And when it's working order, we can get Mosey to set his study on fire again!" grinned Muzzen. "Just to show what we can do!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you fellows chattering about?" demanded Cooke.

The Terrible Three did not answer the question.

They had no intention of telling the end of the Shell into the secret. It would have to be kept a dead secret, if they were to score over the New House by having an amateur fire brigade taken to Figgins & Co. The janses turned in, and the Shell dormitory got to sleep at last—and the Shell fellows showed a great disinclination to rise when the ring-bell clanged out on the morning air.

Skimpole of the Shell was called into the Head's study in the morning, and he received a severe lecture on the subject of carelessness with fire, and a warning to drive the lesson home; with the additional intimation that the bill for damages would be sent to his father. But Skimpole did not worry over the lecture, the warning, or the bill. He was thinking of those three hundred and seventy chapters of his great book that had been destroyed—no, nothing of the great volume of Professor Bismarckstepet on the thrilling subject of Determinism.

During morning lessons, Tom Merry was thinking very much of the new scheme. Meanwhile, painters and glaziers quartered in other studies along the Shell passage. The study was not likely to be habitable again for a day or two; and meanwhile, Gave and Vasquez and Skimpole were quartered in other studies along the Shell passage. The Terrible Three had the pleasure of roosting Skimpole—a very doubtful pleasure.

But Mosey Lowther warned him solemnly that he could be severely punished if he ventured to utter the word "Determinism," and the genius of the Shell held his peace.

After lessons that day, Tom Merry called a meeting in his study. The chaps of Study No. 6 came to the meeting, and Kangaroo and Bernard Glyn of the Shell, and Bolly of the Fourth. To the meeting Tom Merry presided at the arm-chair.

"Be! Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I



Scam! The rope had been burnt through in the burning room above. The severed rope came fastening down and Tom Merry fell like a stone! Would he miss the blanket? (See Chapter 16.)

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ward it as a 'vippie' ideal! We shall want a captain of the fire brigade, Tom Mewey."

"Oh, that's settled; the most suitable chap takes that job," said Tom Merry, modestly.

"Good! If you fellows back me up—"

"Eh?"

"I repeat that if you fellows back me up, we shall make a 'vippie' success of it, and make Figgins & Co. turn green with envy."

"Ho, ho, ha!"

"I fail to see any cause for laughter, you shall be careful. I suppose it's understood that I am going to be fire-captain?"

"Something wrong with your understanding, then?" said Monty Lowther, with a shake of the head. "When we start a tailor's shop, Gussy, we'll make you head of it. But a fire brigade is a different matter."

"Well, Lowther—"

"Of course, I am fire-captain," Tom Merry remarked, casually. "I said the most suitable fellow, you know."

"What is required for a post of that kind, Tom Mewey, is a fellow of back and judgment," said Arthur Augustus, firmly. "I am not the kind of chap to get myself forward in any way, but I would consider that you had better leave it to me!"

"All right—I'll leave the job to you—"

"Good?"

"In my will!" added Tom Merry, pleasantly.

"Ho, ho, ha!"

"Well, you see—"

"Now, that important point being settled," said Tom Merry, "we've got to consider ways and means—"

"But it isn't settled, Tom Mewey."

"Your wishes, it is?"

"I go in to be all the fellows," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, inserting his fingers into his eyes, and looking round at the printing press with a great deal of dignity. "I am willing to learn it to the possibility, Gentlemen, hands up for me as fire-captain!"

The lads put their hands into their pockets. D'Arcy looked round through his famous monocle in search of a hand elevated, but he failed to find one.

"Well, are you satisfied?" grinned Blake.

"No! Upon the whole, I am inclined to agree with those that say they are always in the wrong," he said. "A match of this kind ought to go by the majority. Therefore—"

"Order!"

"I consider—"

"Order!"

"I refuse to order—I mean—"

"Never mind what you mean," said Blake. "I move that if Gussy doesn't step up immediately, we tramp him following!"

"Carried unanimously!" said Monty Lowther.

Arthur Augustus snuffed and relaxed into indignant silence. And then the Fire Committee of the School House proceeded to the discussion of ways and means.

CHAPTER 3.
And So Has Figgins!

FIGGINS, of the Fourth, was looking very thoughtful. Figgins sat in his study in the New House, his feet resting gracefully upon the table, his hands thrust deep into his pockets.

There was a deep wrinkle on the youthful brow of the great Figgins, showing that his brain was unusually hard at work.

The Co. were in the study; and they were repeating the silence of their great leader. Fatty Wynn was thoughtfully cracking and eating nuts. Kerry was completing an article for 'Tom Merry's Weekly.' Both of them glanced occasionally at the great Figgins, wondering what was the subject of his meditations.

Figgins broke the silence at last.

"It will work!"

"Go home!" said Kerry.

"It's a good idea!"

"What is?"

"The one I've been thinking out. Put that out away, and listen!"

"It isn't put—it's an article for the 'Weekly'—"

"Well, shove it away and listen to me. Leave those nuts alone, Fatty, and lend me your ears!"

"I'll lend you my ears," said Fatty Wynn, cracking another nut. "But you don't want my jaw, I suppose? These nuts are prize?"

"Yes, you know there was an outbreak of fire in the School House last night!" said Figgins.

"I believe I've heard something of the sort," said Kerry, sympathetically. "Is that what you've been thinking about?"

"Yes."

"It's been put out," said Kerry, still in a sympathetic vein.

"And! Suppose it hadn't been put out—"

"Then I suppose the School House shops would have been put out!" chuckled Kerry.

"Good!" said Fatty Wynn. "That will do for the Comic Column in the 'Weekly.'"

"Show the comic column in the 'Weekly!'" said Figgins.

"I tell you I've got a scheme—a first-class, first-class, A-1 scheme!"

"This is it?"

"Suppose the fire had caught a real hold on the house. Those School House shops would have been burnt out of brass and bone; they couldn't handle a fire!" said Figgins.

"Might have been burnt right out."

"I shouldn't wonder. But—"

"What this school wants," said Figgins, impressively, "is an amateur fire brigade, all ready to deal with an outbreak of that sort."

"Oh!"

"The nearest fire brigade is at Wayland," remarked Figgins. "Suppose there was a really terrific fire—that would be a lopper. The place might be burnt down, especially if it was in the School House, with those shops over there dealing with it. It is up to the New House to take time by the forelock. What?"

"Hear, hear!"

"That's the idea," said Figgins. "We'll keep it really dark, of course—not a hint of it to those School House bosses. We'll make up a fire brigade—put buckets and shovels and things down from London—and form the thing here. Then when the necessity arises, we'll—"

"Don't be funny. That's where we shall come over the School House!" said Figgins, sympathetically. "Tom Merry & Co. wouldn't consent of a thing like this in a dog's age. And when we've got our own shovels with us, they, those bosses will have to own up that the New House is cock-horse of St. Jim's, I fancy!"

"It's not half a bad idea," said Kerry thoughtfully. "Those giddy knaves in that shop in a House rack, after all. An amateur fire brigade will be a jolly useful thing—good exercise, and plenty of fun—and it would be useful, too, in case of fire," he added innocently.

"Figgins, order!"

"We'll assume of the fire thinking of, instead! Now, about ways and means. It will cost money."

"Aha!"

"Aha!"

"We'll get all the New House chaps into it," said Figgins eagerly. "There can be a subscription from every member. If it's a lot of chaps the subscriptions won't be very heavy—and what does it matter, anyway? It's for the good of the school."

"Hear, hear!"

"We shall have to get supplies down—unknown to the School House, of course. We can practise with the pretent fire-escape from the back windows. We can test those things with Fatty. If they stand his weight they'll stand anything!"

"Ho, ho, ha!"

"Good egg!" said Kerry heartily. "Let's call a meeting of the fellows, and put it to them. They're mostly in the common-room now."

"Figgins jumped up."

"Come on, then—let's strike the iron while it's hot."

"What about tea?" suggested Fatty Wynn.

"See-o-see!"

"Yes, we haven't had tea yet, you know, and—"

Figgins caught his hat chain by the shoulder and ran him out of the study.

"Blow tea!" he said. "Blowed if you're not like Nero fiddling while Rome was burning! Come on!"

And the famous Co. descended to the junior common-room in the New House.

Figgins closed the door when they were inside, and that action caused all eyes to turn upon him.

"What's the matter?" asked Peat of the Fourth.

"School House raid!" asked Thompson of the Third.

"No; I've got something to say to you chaps," said Figgins.

"Something awfully important?" growled French of the Sixth.

"Yes."

"Go ahead!"

Figgins went ahead.

He explained his idea in many words, and some of the New House juniors nodded seriously, and some of them grinned. Evidently there was a diversity of opinion as to the excellence of the idea.

"Now, I think it's a ripping idea," said Figgins, in common room LIBRARY.—No. 270.

glasses, "and if there's any chap here who doesn't, I'm willing to meet him in the gym, with or without gloves."

No one accepted the generous offer. Perhaps Figgins's method was not so easily logical, but at all events it had the advantage of saving argument.

"Every justice in the New House ought to be a member of the fire brigade," went on Figgins. "It's up to us, you know—the call of duty, and so forth. England expects every man to do his duty."

"I shouldn't wonder if she gets disappointed, then," remarked Thompson.

Figgins did not heed that remark.

"All fellows present being enrolled in the New House Fire Brigade, the subscription is subscriptions," he said.

"Oh," said the justices. And fellows who had looked humorous before looked serious enough now.

"We shall want a lot of things," said Figgins. "Of course, we can't afford fire-engines, and ladders and things. But we can get buckets, for chipping a way into burning buildings—all fellows have them, you know—and we can get portable fire-hooks, for sliding down from windows, and ropes, and things. Then we're going into training as fellows. Any chap who wants to be a slacker can keep out, but he will be expected to subscribe. Slackers can't expect to be protected by other chaps doing all the work for nothing."

"Hear, hear!" said Kerr.

"I'll write out an order for a London fire this evening, and post it," said Figgins. "The tin can be raised to-morrow. All fellows who want to pay in more than their regular subscription will be at liberty to do so."

"If it is—"

"But how much is the jolly subscription going to be?" asked Thompson of the Shell.

Figgins considered.

"I think an excessive fee of half a crown for every member would cover the initial expenses," he remarked. "We can raise more afterwards if we need it. It's worth that to cover over the School House, I should say."

"Hear, hear!"

And Figgins, having taken down the names of prospective members of the New House Fire Brigade, and collected as many subscriptions as were obtainable on the spot—the number was not large—returned to his study, to write out the order for the London firm to supply the requisites.

The order was carried and written out, and Figgins sealed it and addressed it and stamped it. Then he rose.

"Nothing like striking while the iron's hot," he remarked, with great satisfaction. "There may be a few members for all we know, but slip out and post this letter first, and they'll get into the morning."

"Mind none of the School House bouncers get wind of it," said Kerr.

"Figgins," said Figgins.

And the New House tender captain slipped out of the house, inched across the dusky quadrangle to the school letter-box. Through the chink of the quadrangle another figure was making for the same spot, from the direction of the School House. They met at the letter-box, and Figgins gave Tom Merry a feeble grin and a nod, keeping his letter behind him in case the Shell fellow should accidentally see the address. Tom Merry nodded gently, and also kept his hand behind his with a letter in it. Of course, he knew that Figgins wouldn't actually look at the address on another fellow's letter, but he might see it by accident, and if he did he would suspect that Tom Merry was also sending off an extensive order for coming to a big London firm for supplies.

"Hallo!" said Figgins, keeping his hand carefully behind his.

"Hallo!" said Tom Merry. "Collection's not gone yet, I think."

"I think not."

"Nice evening," said Tom Merry.

"Oh, slipping."

"Got a letter to post?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yes; have read."

"Yes. Shrove party is."

"After you," said Figgins, with great politeness.

"Not at all; after you, Figg."

But Figgins had become suddenly penitential. He retreated a step.

"It's all right," he said. "You post your letter."

"You post yours."

"You're jolly polite all of a sudden, Tom Merry," said Figgins unexpectedly.

"Well, so are you, if you come to that," said Tom Merry, Figgins coloured. He didn't want Tom Merry to suspect that there was anything unusually important about the letter he was going to post. But he would not risk showing it.

"I'm waiting for you, Figg."

"Now, look here, Tom Merry, don't be as as—"

"My dear Figgins—"

"Nothing like manners," said Figgins finally. "After you."

And then looked at each other.

Of course, either could have carefully concealed the address on the letter while slipping it into the box. But that would have implied a suspicion that the other might look at the address, which would have been involving. It would also have raised suspicion in the other.

"Oh, shove your letter in, Figg, and don't be as as."

"After you."

"But I'm off!"

Tom Merry walked away. Figgins slipped his letter into the box with a chuckle, and ran away towards the New House. Then Tom Merry returned to the letter-box and put his letter in, and walked away smiling towards the School House. The letter was posted safely, and the New House had been given no clue. And Figgins at that precise moment was congratulating himself that his letter had been posted safely, and the School House given no clue! And so both were satisfied.

CHAPTER 4.

Full Inside.

THERE was a great deal of subdued excitement among the juniors of both Houses at St. Sign's the next day.

The idea of the fire brigade had caught on.

Quite unknown to one another, two amateur fire brigades were being formed in the school, and the secret was being kept so carefully that they seemed likely to flourish side by side, as it were, without knowing of one another's existence.

Indeed, the juniors of both Houses were too busy just now to be looking out for the secrets of the rival party. If Figgins & Co. were unusually busy among themselves, and kept very much to their own quarters, that only made it easier for Tom Merry & Co. to keep their secret, and if Tom Merry & Co. had something to keep them occupied in the School House, that made things easier for Figgins & Co.

Both the amateur fire-captains had received replies from London, to the effect that the consignments of articles required would be delivered that day by goods train to Rykeville, and then by carrier to the school. The consignments had been asked for at the earliest possible moment, and they were coming—just in time, Tom Merry suspected a huge packing-case immediately after tea. Figgins had the same blissful expectation, and both of them were considering ways and means of getting the packing-cases in without the observation of the other.

Tom Merry thought about it a good deal during lessons that day, and received fifty lines from Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, without heading. What were lessons, and even lines, at such a time as this, when it was on the cards to score over the New House the biggest triumph the School House had ever scored! This was something better than a House raid—better than a football victory. For Figgins & Co. generally kept up their end on the football field, and, in spite of the efforts of the School House, lessons were easy as a rule. But Figgins & Co. would have to admit themselves beaten when the School House Fire Brigade was in full going order—or so Tom Merry believed, at all events.

"We'll walk down to the station, and get the packing-cases ourselves," said Tom Merry to his chums, when they came out of the Shell class-room. "We can get it here in Dobby's trap, and sneak it in the back way. Toby will help us, as if it were a consignment from some tradesman in the village."

Then we can unpack the cases in the shed, and get the things into the School House without any of the New House bouncers smelling a rat. But if a big packing-case is delivered here addressed to Tom Merry, the bouncers will be sure to get on the scent of it."

"Good egg?" said Misty Lowthion.

Toby, the School House page, was approached on the subject, and gave his assistance readily. He would have the tradesman's gate open ready, and would help to shove the case into the trucked as soon as it arrived, and would take charge of it, in answer to questions being asked. Stuffed on this point, the terrible Three walked cheerfully down to Rykeville to claim their packing-case at the railway station.

Mr. Boggs, the procurer, readily got his trap, for the usual authorization, and the packing-case was lifted into it by the station postmen, and the chums of the Shell drove off with it in triumph. Had they waited half an hour they might have seen another and similar packing-case loaded upon the carrier's

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ANSWERS

cut, addressed to Master Figgins of the New House at St. Jim's College School. But they did not wait half an hour—they did not waste a minute.

Tom Merry took the reins, and drove away cheerfully to St. Jim's. Leather and Masey sat down in the room which was left by the packing-case—which was not much.

The trap bowed down the lane under the red sunset. There was a sudden yell from a group of juniors in motor-board caps standing by the old style half-way to St. Jim's. Three or four of them ran out into the road and seized the horse's head, and the trap was brought to a sudden halt. Gordon Gay, of Rylands Grammar School, looked up at the St. Jim's juniors with a grin.

"Stand and deliver!" he said.

There were also or ten of the Grammarians, and they surrounded the trap. Gordon Gay stood inside it, with one foot on the step; Meek and Lane and Carboy held the horse, and Wootton major and minor caught hold of the tail-board. The Terrible Three pushed back their cuffs, ready for trouble.

"Keep all, you bounders!" said Tom Merry. "It's pay!"

The Grammarians chuckled.

"Who said it's pay?" demanded Gordon Gay. "This is where we come in! It takes you to make a bargain."

"What have you got in the case?" demanded Wootton major. "Not grub, I suppose!"

"No."

"What is it?"

"Things."

"Go home! To the victor the spoils," said Gordon Gay, sentimentally. "I'll tell you what, you chaps—we'll have the case down here and fast it open—"

"Yes, won't!" roared Tom Merry.

"And show out the things, and put these bounders into it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Stand back! We're going on!" shouted Tom Merry.

The horse started on; but Meek and Lane and Carboy hung on to his head, and he stopped again. Mr. Baggs, the groomer's horse was not a fey charger, and he was not equal to the strain. He stopped contentedly, and did not even try to lift his head again—he browsed on the grass beside the lane. And the Grammarian juniors swarmed into the trap on all sides.

"Look it to 'em!" shouted Masey.

"Back up, St. Jim's!"

"Rouse, St. Jim's!" roared Tom Merry, in the faint hope that some other St. Jim's fellows might be within hearing.

But there was no help at hand. The Terrible Three got up a terrific fight, quite worthy of their peculiar reputation. Gordon Gay was knocked out of the trap, and Wootton major and minor rolled over him in the road. Gustave Blane, the French Grammarian, was pinned into the ditch, which was fortunately dry, but he rolled there and skinned in about French among the nettles.

"Help! Eat you help me! A nail! A nail! A nail!"

But the other fellows were too busy to help Mont Elong. They swarmed to the attack. Gordon Gay was pinched out again, but he clung to Tom Merry, and dragged the Shell fellow out with him, and they rolled over in a loving embrace. Wootton major succeeded in getting a grip on Masey Leather, and they rolled out of the back of the trap together, and rolled in motion as they bumped on the road. Masey was still defending himself manfully; but the odds were too great, and he was yanked out.

Amid clouds of dust and flying legs and arms, the Terrible Three still struggled in the road, but they were overcome at last. Each of them was firmly grasped and sat upon by two of the Grammarians, and they were reduced to helplessness.

Gordon Gay, gasping, snugged his streaming nose with a crumpled handkerchief.

"Not 'em!" he chortled.

"Hurray!" roared Frank Meek.

"Lather go, you bounder!" roared Masey Leather.

"Ha, ha, I don't think!"

Mont Elong struggled out of the ditch, and waved his battered hat in triumph.

"Victoire! Victoire!" he yelled. "Ye have conquered, 'snot-ot-pat! Victoire! Ze is vere vo kill! Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll be-be-be you, if I get up!" growled Tom Merry.

"Hurray for us!" grinned Wootton major. "Now for the packing-case!"

"Bring the trap round the corner, so that we shan't be interrupted!" said Gordon Gay.

"Right-ho!"

Close by there was a turning that led between high hedges towards Glyn House. It was a very quiet lane, only used by vehicles going to the residence of Mr. Glyn. Meek led the horse round the corner, and the Grammarians followed with their prisoners. They had tied the Terrible Three

hand and foot with handkerchiefs, and the unfortunate Scuits had no chance of resisting. They were dumped down in the grass beside the lane, still wanted, as Gordon Gay remarked. Then the great packing-case was dumped down into the road.

"What on earth have they got in here?" said Gordon Gay, looking at the huge case in perplexity.

"What is it, Tom Merry?" asked Meek.

"Find out!" growled Tom.

"Ha, ha! That's what we're going to do!"

"May we open it, Mr. Jim's junior?"

"No!" roared the St. Jim's junior.

"Won't you let us?"

"No!"

"Persuade him, Meek."

"Certainly!" chuckled Frank Meek.

He took Tom Merry's nose between finger and thumb.

"Grouch!"

"May we open the case?"

"Grouch! Nope! Grouch!"

"May we?" Meek's finger and thumb closed like a vice.

"No!"

"Grouch-jeb-you head-jeb!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He doesn't speak very clearly, but he means you," grinned Meek.

Gordon Gay, having thus obtained permission, untied the cords with which the packing-case was secured. Then he took out a pocket-knife which was a miniature tool-box in itself, and opened the portion which served as a screw-driver, and unscrewed up the nailed top of the case. He uttered an exclamation of amazement.

"M—only hat! Choppers—saw—ropes—bags—What on earth—"

"Great Scott!"

"Are you going to open a shop, Tom Merry?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shove the things out," said Meek. "There won't be room for these things and the other articles!"

The contents of the packing-case were piled in the grass beside the road. The Terrible Three looked on furiously, unable to interfere.

"What do you want with all this stuff, Tom Merry?" Gordon Gay asked. "Looks like an outfit for a young air brigade."

Tom Merry sneered.

"That's what it is, you ass. And look here, we're keeping it dark from the New House chaps at St. Jim's, so don't let us to them."

Gordon Gay roared.

"That's a compact," he said. "Honor bright—not a word! We'll leave the stuff packed here, under the feet out of sight in the back—and you can fetch it by a bit at a time, if you like. You won't be able to take it with you now, because there won't be room in the packing-case!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here—!" began Tom Merry.

"Shove the case back into the trap," said Gay, "and then shove them in!"

"Look here—!"

"Nuff said!"

The empty case was lifted into the trap again. Then the Terrible Three were lifted into it. There was just room for the three, but it was very close quarters. They struggled vainly in their bonds, and in the grasp of the Grammarians. They sat close together in the huge case, and Gordon Gay replaced on the split-up lid. They glared up at the huzzaroot Grammarians from the interior of the case.

"We—we'll hold you for this, some day!" rumbled Monty Leather.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll leave an opening for you to breathe," said Gordon Gay kindly. "Is there anything else we can do for you?"

"Yes—!"

Gay hammered in the nails again, leaving a long crack in the lid for air. Then the cords were tied once more round the packing-case. Gordon Gay took a pencil from his pocket, and wrote on the label: "WITH GREAT CARE!"

The Grammarians chuckled joyously. It was the biggest joke they had ever worked off on Tom Merry & Co. Gordon Gay took up the reins, and Meek led the horse out into the road again. And the victorious Grammarians gave Gay a ringing cheer as he drove off towards St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 5.

With Care.

FIGGINS & CO. strolled down to the school gates about six o'clock, with an air of exaggerated carelessness which would have excited suspicion at once, if any one had observed them.

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The carrier was not due yet, but Figgins & Co. wanted to be sure of being on the spot when he arrived. They intended to tip Taggles, the porter, to take the packing-cases quickly into the stables, and keep it quietly there. Then the contents could be smuggled into the New House passage without observation. Without the slightest suspicion that a packing-case was waiting for Tom Merry—with Tom Merry inside it as it happened—Figgins & Co. watched for the carrier. There was a sound of wheels on the road.

"Here he comes!" said Fatty Wren.
Figgins shook his head.
"That isn't the carrier," he said. "It's a trap—Boggy's trap, I think. And my hat—it's Gordon Gay of the Grammar School driver!"

"Liken his cheek, to come along here for a drive," said Kerr.
"Let's collar him and bump him!"
"No time for ragging Grammar case now—we don't want to get a crowd round the gates," said the cautious Figgins.
"Bury down it."

"Right—that's so!" agreed Kerr.
Gordon Gay drove up to the gates, and turned the horse in. The three New House juniors jumped back.
"He's coming in!"
"What do you want here, you Grammarian boaster?"
Gay brought the trap to a halt outside Taggles's lodge.
"Packing-case for St. Jim's," he said. "I've brought it."

Figgins was stupefied for a moment.
"Our packing-case!" he shouted.
Gay grinned.
"Not for you!" he said. "It's addressed to Tom Merry!"
"What!"

"However, you can do as you like with it," said Gay, jumping down from his trap. "I'll leave it here. I dare say Boggy will want his trap back some time—you can settle that. An' good-bye!"

"Look here, Gay—"
"Sorry, can't stop! Good-bye, Ebenezer!"
Figgins, considered, made a rush at Gay, but the elusive Cornish dodged him, and escaped into the road. He walked away whistling, while Figgins & Co. and Taggles gathered round the trap, and stared at the packing-case. Inside it there was not a sound.

The Terrible Three were seeping as silent as mice. They knew that a yell of laughter would go up if they were discovered huddled up in the packing-case; and they kept perfectly silent. There was a chance that the case, being addressed to Tom Merry, might be taken into the School House, and that the Terrible Three might be released by their own chance, without the adventures becoming known. Blake and Horrie and D'Arcy and Digby and Kanganoo, and a good many more fellows, were eagerly awaiting the arrival of the case.

"It's addressed to Tom Merry!" said Figgins, reading the label. "But it can't be for him! There's some mistake!"
"Queer that he should be getting a packing-case the same time that we're expecting one," said Kerr. "Besides, how did Gordon Gay get hold of it? He must have got it away from the carrier somehow!"
"And changed the label, very likely," said Figgins, eagerly. "That's what's happened. He has collared our packing-case, and addressed it to Tom Merry to give us a bribe. If he looked into it he would have seen the fine biggame things, and then very likely he tumbled to the whole."

"Hallo!"
"What's the matter?"
"I thought I heard a sound inside the case," said Kerr, with a puzzled look. "There can't be anything alive in it, can there?"
Figgins laughed.

"Of course not, an'. Hatchets and ropes and things aren't alive. They're our five biggame things, that's all."
"There is was again!"
Figgins jumped.

"My hat! I thought I heard something then!" he gasped.

"Oh, well," said Fatty Wren. "It's our case right enough. Get it into the stables before some of those School House bradders spot us."

"Taggles!"
"Well, that, Master Figgins!" said the school-porter.
"This case is for me—"

"It's addressed to Master Merry," said Taggles, scanning the label.
"Too—that's a little joke of that boaster Gay—he's changed the labels," Figgins explained. "The case belongs to us. I was just going to tell you that we expected one, and to ask you to get it round to the stable quietly. You see, we don't want the School House chaps to spot us."
Taggles grinned. Taggles had seen enough of the rivalry

between the Houses of St. Jim's to be suspicious. He had not the slightest doubt that Figgins intended to raid a packing-case belonging to Tom Merry of the School House. He shook his head.

"That's good enough, Master Figgins," he replied. "This 'ere case is addressed to Master Merry, on plain as anything."
"It's a joke of Gordon Gay's!" Figgins explained.

Taggles shook his head again.
"I've got half-a-crown here, Taggles," said Figgins, insistently.

"Can't be done, Master Figgins. The thing is addressed to Master Merry; though what he wants with a packing-case this size, is none of I can say."

"Look here, Taggles—"
"You can't 'ave it, Master Figgins, and that's flat. Fetch Master Merry 'em, and see what he says, if you like."
"No, no!" exclaimed Figgins, hurriedly. "It's a giddy secret."

Taggles chuckled. He without the reason of Figgins's desire to keep the School House fellow out of sight of the packing-case.

"Besides, Tom Merry's gone out," said Kerr. "I saw him go out with Messers and Loetzer more than an hour ago."

"I'm afraid you can't 'ave it, Master Figgins."
"Five bob, Taggles—"

"Hallo, what's that?" demanded Goss of the Shell, coming up and staring at the trap.

"Mind your own business!" snapped Figgins. He was getting anxious now. Several fellows were coming up to see what was going on.

"Bal Jore!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as he caught sight of the packing-case. "Here it is, dear boys."

"Shurup!" remonstrated Blake, with a glance towards the New House juniors.

"Woolly, Blake—"
"Get it out quick, and drag it away!" whispered Figgins to his chaps.

The 'O's looked rather doubtful at the huge case. It did not look as if it would be easy for three juniors to drag it away. But it was evidently the only chance. Figgins firmly believed that it was his packing-case—and, if that was so, and it was delivered to Tom Merry, the secret would be out.

"Shere it out!" said Figgins.

"Look 'ere—!" began Taggles.

Taggles was interrupted. There was a sudden rill from inside the packing-case. The Terrible Three had heard all that was said; and the prospect of being bumped out of the trap to the ground alarmed them.

"Stop!"
Figgins, who had his hands on the case, jumped back in amazement.

"Merry hat!" he gasped. "There's—there's somebody in it!"

"Bal Jore!"
A crowd was gathering round now. A dozen fellows had heard that unexpected voice within the packing-case, and they were staring at it in blank amazement.

"My only hat!" exclaimed Jack Blake. "It—it's got somebody inside!"

"Well, my hery!" said Taggles.

"Open it and look in!"
"It—it can't be ours after all!" murmured Figgins.

"But what—?"
"Let us out, you silly wren!" roared a voice from within the packing-case. Concomitant was impossible now, and the Terrible Three wanted to get it over.

There was a shout of astonishment.
"That's Tom Merry's voice!"

"Great Scott!"
"Tom Merry!"
"How on earth—"

"Will you let us out?" came a muffled voice from the packing-case. "You fishyish wren, leanna gerrout?"

"CG!"
"Bal Jore!"

Figgins opened his pocket-hair and out through the cord. They were wrestled off the loosened bolts on top of the packing-case. Fellows clambered on the trap on all sides to stare into it. There was a wild yell at the sight of the Terrible Three sitting there, with crimson faces, amid the stars.

"Tom Merry!"
"Loetzer!"
"Messers!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Great Scott!"

The Terrible Three glared at the yelling juniors. They were not in a mood to laugh, themselves; the comic side of the matter did not appeal to them at all. They gasped and

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glared, and the other fellows, School House and New House alike, rolled with merriment.

"With care?" gasped Gere, reading the label. "Oh, my hat! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bei Jove! What did you fellows get in there for?" exclaimed D'Arcy, in astonishment.

"It was Gordon Guy brought it here!" roared Figgins. "Ha, ha, ha! It's one of the Grammarian's odd little jokes—and the School House boarders have got done in, as usual! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Help us out, you fatherless!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Terrible Three had struggled to their feet. Blake, weeping with laughter, cut the handkerchiefs that were knotted round their wrists. The chorus of the Shell noticed their feet, while the crowd thickened round the trap, and roared.

Tom Merry and Minners and Leather scrambled out of the packing-case at last, red and dusty and furious. Figgins staggered against the gate, shrieking with laughter. The roars of the jokers brought fellows from all sides to witness the scene, and they roared in chorus. A curious crowd gathered there, eager to hear how they had got into the packing-case. But Figgins called back the Co. to the school gates.

"That ain't our packing-case, after all," said Figgins, wiping away his tears. "It's a giddy joke of the Grammarian. They've sent those boarders home in a packing-case—the axle up with care! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Co.

"Here comes the carrier!" grinned Figgins. The carrier had arrived. He dropped down the packing-case addressed to the chief of the New House janitors; and in a few minutes it was safely directed at in the stable—Tom Merry & Co. being too much occupied just then to have an eye on Figgins and the New House fellows.

CHAPTER 6.

Blake Does Some Scouting.

"H A, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shut up!" roared Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shut up, you silly ass!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yes—you—yes—"

"I may come in, dear boy—it was wishful fancy, you know."

"Gorram!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Quite a crowd of School House fellows had followed the Terrible Three into the Shell dormitory. They wanted to know how it had happened—and apparently they wanted to laugh, too—at all events, they did laugh! They roared! The hapless class of the Shell had gone to the dormitory to wash and brush their clothes after their confinement in the narrow limits of the packing-case. And a dozen or more fellows watched them and yelled with laughter as if they would never stop.

Mentz Leather grasped a jug of water and waved it in the air.

"This is for the next fellow that cackles!" he shouted.

"Waddy, Lowland!"

"Shut up!"

"I can't help it, dear boy—it was wry fancy—ha, ha, ha—you!"

"Spish!"

"A-roop!"

Arthur Augustus received the contents of the water-jug. He roared down-set with laughter. His beautiful blue jacket and his speckled shirt were wrunged.

"Ow! You wretch and! Gooch!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Terrible Three, in their turn.

"It's funny! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yes—you wretch wretch—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus made a rush at Mentz Leather, Leather picked up another water-jug, and stood ready for his grinning. The woad of St. Jim's suddenly halted.

"You—you foolish beast! Put down that jug, and I will give you a faithful thwack!"

Leather shook his head.

"Not good enough, Gooch!" he replied.

"Yes—you wretch—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I will give you a faithful thwack! when I have changed my clothes, you foolish beast. Gooch! My collar is wet—go away! This is swiping—you! Be-er-er!" And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy hurried away to the Fourth-Floor dormitory to change.

The Gun Linnant.—No. 370.

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"THE PENNY POPULAR," Every Friday.

"But how on earth did you get into that packing-case, you fellows?" asked Jack Blake, when his excitement had calmed down somewhat.

Tom Merry smiled.

"The Grammarians worked us on the road. They shared the things out of the packing-case, and showed us in. That's all! Be-er-er!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, you cackling chaps—"

"Are the things safe?" asked Kangaroo.

"Yes—we can betch them on all right. The resters played the game, so far as that goes. The things are all secure, blow them!"

"And Figgins hasn't caught us—that's the great thing," said Blake. "He doesn't know anything excepting that the Grammarians sent you here in a packing-case, with one—ha, ha—"

"Oh, leave off cackling!" said Tom Merry crossly. "I'm fed up!"

"All right—ha, ha—all secure! I won't cackle—ha, ha, ha!"

"Figgins doesn't know our little game," went on Tom Merry. "But I know his! They've got the same wince over in the New House—and they were keeping it dark—just as we were! Only they don't know that we're working it too."

"Wha-er-er!"

"We heard them jowling over the packing-case," Tom Merry explained, bursting into a chuckle. "Figgie thought that the packing-case was for him, and that Gordon Guy had changed the address for a lark. He was expecting a packing-case, with things in it for an amateur fire brigade."

"My hat!"

"They must have got on to the where," said Blake, thoughtfully.

"Might have thought of it on their own," said Kangaroo. "But the game's up now—if they're working the same dodge."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"They don't know that we're doing it, too," he said. "We've got to stop there. Whether they've heard our wince, or thought of it themselves, it all comes to the same thing—there's room for only one fire brigade at St. Jim's."

"Yes, rather!"

"Figgie must have ordered a lot of things at the same time that we did," Tom Merry said, scratching his brows in thought. "Well, when his packing-case comes, it's got to be got hold of somehow. And the things will have to disappear."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And mind, not a word! We've got to make the things vanish, if we can, without Figgie suspecting us. We don't want him to know that we're starting the same dodge."

"What-ko! We shall have to roam round the New House, and get on to the packing-case somehow," said Digby.

"That's a wince! They can't get a big packing-case into the House. They'll have to shove it somewhere, and get the things in by themselves. Figgie will know when it comes, and we can get it out of him."

"I'll go and see Taggles now," said Blake.

"Good egg!"

Blake left the dormitory, leaving the Terrible Three still brushing their clothes.

Taggles, the porter, was sitting outside his lodge in the sunset, talking to his mastiff, when Blake rode down upon him. There was no sign of a New House junior near the gate. Figgins & Co. were gone.

"Good evening, Taggles!" said Blake affably.

Taggles looked at him suspiciously. He had had his ribs with the strains of Study No. 2; and he was suspicious of Blake when he was polite. Like the gentleman of olden days, he feared the Greeks when they came with gifts in their hands.

"Evening!" said Taggles shortly.

"Nice weather for the time of year, Taggles?"

"None of your larks, Master Blake."

Blake assessed an injured air.

"Taggles, old man, you're growing suspicious in your old age. The fact is, I'm expecting a packing-case."

"Hairybody inside it?" asked Taggles, with a grin.

Blake grinned, too.

"Seems to be missing packing-cases," said Taggles. "Fast these comes one addressed to Master Merry, with Master Merry shut up in it, and then one for Master Figgins, so 'ery that it could 'ardly be opened!"

Blake's eyes gleamed.

"Oas for Figgins?" he said curiously.

"Yes," growled Taggles. "And previous 'ery it was, too!"

"You didn't have to say it, I suppose?" said Blake.

"I'd 'ad to 'elp," growled Taggles.
 "Poor old Taggles!" said Blake. "Must have been a big job getting a packing-case upstairs in the New House!"
 Taggles grunted.
 "That's in the New 'Oase," he said. "Too big to take into the 'Oase."
 "Oh, I see! Got it in your lodge, I suppose?"
 "Course I ain't, Master Blake! No room for blooming packing-cases in my lodge—even if Mrs. Taggles would allow it, which she wouldn't neither!"
 "I don't see it short here," said Blake, glancing round.
 "I've took it into the stable-yard," said Taggles. "Master Figgins wants it to be left there a bit."
 "Oh," said Blake, "didn't the carrier have anything for me, Taggles?"
 "No, Master Blake."
 "Not a lamp?"
 "No."
 "Tell him he's a rotter when he comes again then, will you?" said Blake obediently; and he strolled away, careless outside, but inwardly checking with glee at having discovered Figgins's little secret.

He burst into the School dormitory a few minutes later. The Terrible Three had finished rearranging the dust from their persons and their garments, and they were once more, as Monty Leather put it, clothed, and in their right minds.
 "Got it?" chorused Blake.
 "Got what—the packing-case?"
 "I know where it is. It's come, and Taggles has put it by the stable-yard for Figgins; and it's there now."
 "—Hah!"

The Terrible Three executed a war dance round the bed.
 "The New House matters will be trying to assuage the things into their House after dark," said Blake. "They won't want us to do anything. I've got an idea! Some of us are going to pay Figgie a visit—a nice, parental visit as nice schoolboys like us ought to do to their dear schoolmates—regular like bloater!"

"And while they're doing it, some others of us will be looking after the packing-case for Figgins, and save him any trouble. It's ought to save our dear schoolmates trouble, you know—Eric always did."

"Ho, ho, ha, ha!"
 "You see," went on Blake sagely. "Figgie won't make a move to get anything in from the packing-case while these are School House fellows laughing about the place. You fellows can keep him in talk, while I—"

"Good egg!"
 "Take some grub over for Fatty Wynn. Stand them a feed in their own study—anything you like. Keep 'em busy while we get the packing-case done. There's a parcel over the stable lot that's never used. We can take the things up there and hide them, and break up the packing-case, and hide the bits there, too. When Figgie goes to look for it, he'll find that the whole bag of tricks has vanished!"
 "Ho, ho, ha, ha!"

And the chorus of the School House proceeded to carry out their plan. There was no time to waste, for already, as a post would have observed, the shades of night were falling fast.

CHAPTER 7.

Editorial Duties.

FIGGINS looked at his watch. The gas was slight in the Co.'s study in the New House; but it was not yet quite dark in the study.

"Better wait another half-hour," said Kerr. "If we've seen cutting things into the House, it will make those rotters over the way smell a rat. There's lots of time."

Figgins nodded, and replaced his watch.
 "Yes, better be on the safe side," he agreed.
 "Might as well have a stank now," Fatty Wynn remarked thoughtfully.

Figgins grunted.
 "You've had two once, you fat boulder!"
 "Well, I had to load a hand with that packing-case, you know; and work always makes me hungry. I'll eat down to the talk-shop, and—"

"Come in!" called out Figgins.
 He expected to see Brewster or Thomson or one or another of the New House lizards when the door opened. He started a little at the sight of Tom Merry and Messers and Lowther. The Terrible Three came into their study with friendly smiles.

"Hallo," said Figgins, not very amiably. "What do you School House boys want?"

"We've come over to see you," said Tom Merry. "I suppose you know that the 'Weekly' is due on Saturday?"

"Oh, bother the 'Weekly'!" said Figgins.
 "The fact is, we've come over to do a little editorial work,"

explained Tom Merry, laying a pile of paper on the table.

There are giddy workmen in the study next to us, peeping, you know—doing overtime to get the piece finished. You know Figgins was bent out. You've said sometimes that the editorial office of the 'Weekly' ought to be in the New House, so we're giving you a turn."

"Not putting you out in any way, I hope?" said Monty Leather blandly.

Figgins bowed a little nod.

"Well, fact is, we—we're rather busy," he stammered.

"Get something special on this evening?" asked Messers.

"Oh, I don't know about anything special, but—"

"Standing a feed—"

"No; we're not standing a feed."

"Get lines to do?"

"No, we're not doing lines."

"Then we may as well do our editorial work here," said Tom Merry, pulling a chair up to the table. "It will only take about half an hour."

Figgins & Co. exchanged glances.

The visit of the Terrible Three was decidedly awkward at that moment.

As soon as it was completely dark, the New House juniors intended to convey into the house, in separate lots, the contents of the packing-case now reposing in the stable-yard. But that could certainly not be done secretly, while the chairs of the School House were on the spot. The Terrible Three were keen enough, and if they had the least suspicion that anything unusual was going on, they would be upon the spot live at once. But it was impossible to turn them out either, without making their suspicions. If Figgins refused to have the editorial work done in his study, it would look as if he had some special reason for wanting to get rid of the Terrible Three, at least, he had. And they might keep an eye on the New House to find out what it was suspecting some secret of the evening.

There was only one thing to do—to be polite to the obstinate visitors, and get rid of them as soon as possible without raising their suspicions.

And that, after a taste exchange of glances, was what Figgins & Co. decided upon. The Terrible Three appeared to see nothing of the preoccupation of their involuntary hosts.

They sat down at the table, and dipped post in the ink, ready to start upon the valuable luminations required for the current number of "Tom Merry's Weekly."

"Finished your article yet, Kerr?" Messers asked.

"Not yet."

"Why not get on with it now then? It will have to be ready for Saturday, you know. Not doing your prop, yet, are you?"

"No, not yet."

"Well, wire in and get your copy done!"

Kerr gave Figgins a hapless look.

"Might as well," said Figgins, inwardly raging, and outwardly smiling sweetly. "No time like the present, you know. I'll get on with my serial, the 'Bloodstained Brigand of the Blue Mountains.'"

"Good egg!" said Tom Merry affably. "That brigand serial of yours is jolly interesting, Figgie! Perhaps a little bit highly coloured, but it's awfully exciting! I want to read the next instalment right—really! What does he do when he finds himself in the cave with the water rising over his napper?"

Figgins looked gratified. Figgins's ideas in fiction were a little hard; but Figgins was rather proud of his powers as a sensational novelist. Black chiefs and gory probes and bloodstained brigands flourished in the serial stories Figgins contributed to the pages of "Tom Merry's Weekly," and many of the editors, said they were better than Monty Leather's comic page.

"I don't quite know exactly how he gets out of it," said Figgins amiably. "But it was a jolly good situation for ending up the last instalment, wasn't it?"

"Ripping!" said Tom Merry heartily.

"Make a chap come in in an aeroplane and rescue him," suggested Messy Leather, "that would be up to date. The aeroplane could turn out to be the aeroplane's longest arm, and—"

"Oh, don't be an ass!"

"Make it a jolly good instalment this time," said Tom Merry encouragingly. "If we haven't enough rows to go round, we'll have out some of Monty Leather's jokes."

"Oh, will you?" said Monty Leather benignly.

"Yes, if the fellows want them, they can turn back to the first number for them. They're much the same, you know," said Tom Merry innocently.

"I'm sorry too!"

"Order!" said Messers. "Contributors are not allowed to tell an editor what they think of him! Get on with the writing!"

"Fatty Wynn might do us an extra article on making coffee," said Tom Merry. "A good many readers have spoken about his recipe for toasted cheese."

"Oh, good! I don't mind it I do," said Wynn. And the six juniors scolded down to editorial work.

A little later Redfern of the Fourth looked into the study. "I say, Figgins, isn't it time to go—Oh—!" Redfern broke off at the sight of the School House janitor. Figgins made him a rapid sign.

Tom Merry looked toward innocently. "Hallo, Heady! Got something for the 'Weekly' this time?"

"None!" stammered Redfern.

"You were asking Figgins—"

"Oh, no—no—no—no—no!" said Redfern. "It's all right! I'll look in again some time, Figg!"

And Redfern retired in confusion, and closed the study door. He had very neatly given the game away to the School House juniors.

Tom Merry had said that the editorial work would George half an hour; but it was more than an hour before the pages finished. Perhaps they would not have finished then, if Tom Merry had not heard someone whistling "Auntie Lizzie" in the quadrangle. It was a signal from Blake of the Fourth.

Tom Merry rose.

"Well, I think that's about done," he said. "Mick's obliged to Figg, old man. There's a bit more to do for the number, but you fellows can come and work in my study to-morrow evening; nine and four about, you know."

"Right-o!" said Figgins. "We'll stroll across the quad with you then if you like. We've got to call at the tick-shop anyway."

"Right you are!"

Tom Merry did not give a sign of knowing that Figgins was anxious to see him late into his own house. The juniors left the study together, and Figgins & Co. walked over to the School House with the Terrible Three.

"Good-bye, Figg," said Tom Merry affably. The three New House juniors disappeared into the kitchen.

The Terrible Three exchanged smiles, and went on to Study No. 6. Blake and Morrison and Digby and D'Arcy and Kanganoo were there; and they were smiling.

"Well!" said Tom Merry.

Blake checked.

"It's all serene."

"You're done."

"Yes, wotnot?" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "It's all right!"

"The packing-case was in a corner of the stable-ward," grinned Blake. "We got it open, and carried the things up into the garret over the loft, and they're hidden under a lot of old straw. We made rather a row breaking up the packing-case; but we've tipped Walsburn, and he's going to keep quiet. The bits of the packing-case are hidden under the straw along with the fire brigade outfit."

"Good egg!"

"And you haven't let them spoil you!" said Monty Leathers.

Blake smiled.

"Of course we haven't, fished! What do you take us for?"

"I was there, Leathers, dear boy," said Arthur Augustus, gently but firmly.

"Yes, that's why I asked," said Leathers blandly.

"Wotnot, you see—"

"There will be a jolly surprise for Figgins & Co. when they go to look for the packing-case," grinned Tom Merry.

"This is where the School House scores. What about our own things?"

"That's all right," said Kanganoo. "Half a dozen of the fellows went out for them, and they have been snatched in—well, scenes. There are a few of them left—they couldn't get them all in—but they're hidden in the old barn, ready to be brought in to-morrow."

"Right as rain!"

And the Terrible Three went on to their own study to do their preparation. They were in a mood of great satisfaction; as Leathers remarked, the only drawback was that they would not be on the spot to see Figgins's face when he found that the packing-case had vanished!

CHAPTER 8.

A Startling Disappearance.

FIGGINGS drew a deep breath of relief as he reached the New House, after having said good-night to Tom Merry & Co. at their door.

"God did of those bumpers at last!" he remarked.

"Messed if I didn't think they were never going!" said Kerr.

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"Same here. But the best of it is that they didn't need a mouse," said Figgins, with a shrug. "I think we played up very well—they didn't see that we were anxious to show them to go, I fancy."

"Not a bit!"

"What do you think, Figg?" asked Figgins, noticing that the fat Fourth-Former's brow was corrugated with thought.

"I think we'd better have a snack at the tick-shop before bothering about the packing-case, Figg," said Fatty Wynn, coming out of a hazy study.

Figgins started.

"How the tick-shop! Come on!"

"Don't say, Darned Figgins will be closing soon, and—"

"Where the tick-shop?" roared Figgins. "There's something more important than gurgling tacks to do now."

"There isn't anything more important than eating, when you're hungry," said Fatty Wynn, with conviction. "And I'm hungry!" he added, as a clincher.

"Poof!" said Figgins.

And he looked arms with his fat chin to cut off his escape. Fatty Wynn sighed and resigned himself to his fate.

Figgins called his comrades together—Redfern and Cronin and Morrison and Kanganoo and Frett and several others, and a wretched noise was made for the stable-ward.

"It's here," remarked Figgins, glancing round the stable-ward in search of the packing-case.

Then he looked puzzled.

"It's not here now. I suppose they've moved it."

"Must be here somewhere," said Kerr, anxiously. "Look round, you fellows."

The New House fellows looked round.

But the packing-case was not to be seen. They examined the stable-ward, the stable door, and the adjoining cubicles; but there was no trace of the packing-case. They did not trouble to look into the loft over the stable; the packing-case, of course, could not have been taken up the ladder there, it was far too large. And it naturally did not occur to Figgins & Co. that it had been taken up in pieces.

"Wahoon!" the stablemen, was not to be seen; but Figgins found the coachman and asked him questions. But the coachman knew nothing. He had seen Figgins look at the packing-case on the road before dark, and since then he had not been on the spot, and had not seen it.

Figgins & Co. stared at one another blankly.

The packing-case had disappeared—as completely as if it had vanished into space.

"What had become of it?"

"Must be a School House trick," said Redfern of the Fourth, at last.

"But they don't know anything about it," said Figgins, in perplexity.

"They mean have found out. I'll bet you Tom Merry ought to know that jolly packing-case is," said Redfern, with conviction.

Figgins shook his head.

"He can't! Tom Merry was in my study—he was there just before dark, and he stayed until I called you fellows to come here. Leathers and Morrison were with him. They were doing stuff for the 'Weekly.'"

Redfern was a little staggered by the information.

"I remember, now seeing the bundles in your study," he remarked. "Sure they didn't slip one at a time—"

"Of course I am sure they didn't, fished!" said Figgins, irritably.

"Keep your wool on," said Redfern. "This is jolly queer. It might be Blake and the Fourth-Form lads did it—"

"But I tell you they don't know anything about the wheeze!"

"What about Gordon Gay?" exclaimed Kerr, suddenly.

"The Gymnasium bundles have been on the warpath lately. Gay sent Tom Merry home in a packing-case, only a little while before the octave came—so he must have passed the carrier on the road going back. If he spotted the case, he might—"

"He might have got in here," said Figgins. "The wotnot, said the School House once, you know. But Gordon Gay couldn't take away a big packing-case under his arm."

"Ha, ha! No!"

"Might have hidden it somewhere," said Fatty Wynn.

"But where could a thing that size be hidden?" demanded Figgins, with an utterly mystified look round him.

"I simply can't understand it!"

"If there were a pair of them, they might have carried it right away—perhaps dumped it into the old chapel ruin," said Redfern.

"Well, it's possible."

"Get a bike-bonus, and let's have a look," said Figgins, shrilly.

The New House juniors ought to have been doing their



Tyrell was feeling in his pocket, and Harry Wharton & Co. were not touching him. For the moment the juniors were off their guard. Suddenly, with startling suddenness, the man made a spring, and Bob Cherry went flying in one direction, and Wharton in another. (An incident taken from the long, complete school tale of Harry Wharton & Co., entitled "BOB CHERRY'S CHASE" by Fossil Richards. This grand story is contained in the current issue of our popular companion paper, THE MAGNET Library, and is one that all "Gem" readers will enjoy. Ask for this week's "Magnet" Library. On sale everywhere. Price One Penny.)

preparation. But they did not even think of it. Mr. Latham and Mr. Linton might go on the wayback in the morning; but at present, the business was to find the parking-case containing the outfit of the New House Five brigade. Kerr lighted his scotchlike bike-lamp, which gave a brilliant light, and they searched the naked chapel, even looking into the crypt. It was quite possible that the festive Greenmansians, if they had spotted the parking-case and raised it, might have dumped it there for a last. But it was not to be seen. The jaspers searched the old tower; and it was drawn blank. They stopped at last, disappointed and in doubtfully had temper. There were a hundred rooms and corners in and around St. Jim's where even a very large article might have found hiding, not to be unearthed until daylight.

"It's no good!" groaned Figgins, finally. "We can't find it. It's been hidden somewhere. The only question is whether the School House banders or the Greenmansians did it. I think it must have been Gordon Gay. Look here,

we'll go and see Tom Merry—a friendly visit about the Weekly—and pump him. I shall jolly soon spot whether he knows anything about the parking-case or not."

"Good!" said Kerr. "I'll come with you."

"I'll wait for you in the tug-shop," said Fatty Wren. Figgins started and walked away towards the School House. Kerr handed his bike-lamp to Redless, and followed his leader. They entered the School House, and unheeding several cat-calls from the School House juniors who sighted them, they made their way to Tom Merry's study. Figgins knocked at the study door and opened it. The Terrible Three were sitting round their table, at work, and looking very serious and good. They glanced up with stable expressions at Figgins and Kerr.

"Bury!" asked Figgins.

"Well, yes," said Tom Merry. "But you can't come in. What is it—something to do with the Weekly?"

"I—I can do a bit longer instalment of the Brigand story, if you like," said Figgins, hesitatingly, scanning the

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By MARTIN CLIFFORD.
Order Early.

aces of the Terrible Three in search of a clue. But their faces were perfectly innocent.

"Good!" said Tom Merry, heartily. "You shall have two whole pages, Figgis. But Kerr got anything extra?"

"I'm thinking of doing a description of the Kyle of Bute," said Kerr.

"Good again—that will be interesting."

"Well, that—that's about all," said Figgis. "Good-night!"

"Good-night, Figgis."

Figgis and Kerr departed from the study. The Terrible Three exchanged a wink, and grinned slyly. They knew that Figgis had missed the packing-case and had come over to pump them. He was not likely to get much change out of the Terrible Three.

Figgis and his chum exchanged a hopeless look in the passage.

"They don't know anything about it," murmured Figgis.

"Or else they're feeling us," said Kerr. "Let's drop into Study No. 6. The chaps will be there doing their prep."

"Right-as!"

The New House chums knocked at the door of No. 6 in the Fourth-Ferms quarters. Blake and Herries and Digby and D'Arcy were all there, at their preparations. They smiled and nodded cordially to Figgis and Kerr.

"Hallo, you New House benders," said Blake. "What are you doing out of your House at this time of night?"

"Just dropped in to see you," said Figgis, affably.

"Well, that's kind of you. Have some chestnuts?" said Blake, hospitably.

"Thanks. I will."

Figgis and Kerr ate chestnuts. The Fourth-Ferms chanted about football, and the coming cricket season, and about Tom Merry's adventure with the Grammarians. Their remarks were innocently ordinary, and it was quite impossible for Figgis, and even the keen-witted Kerr, to tell whether they knew anything about the missing packing-case or not.

The New House fellows leaped to ask the direct question—but they could not do that without giving the matter away—if Blake & Co. did not know of it already. Figgis and Kerr feigned the chestnuts, and said good-night, and retired. When they were gone, the four chums of Study No. 6 exchanged a bitter grin.

"I must have been the Grammarian!" said Figgis, as he looked back at the New House with Kerr.

And Kerr nodded. He thought so, too!

CHAPTER 9. D'Arcy Leads.

TOM MERRY & CO. were very busy the next day and they felt more than ever that, as Monty Lowther remarked, lessons at school were a mistake—they interfered so much with other occupations. Lessons, however, had to be gone through; but when they were over, the chums of the School House turned all their attention to that new and brilliant scheme, the School House Junior Fire Brigade.

The rival scheme of Figgis & Co. had been ripped in the bud. During the day Blake had paid a surreptitious visit to the grassed garret over the stable-lift, and he found the New House implement where he had hidden them under the stairs. They were not likely to be unearthed until the School House fellows chose, which was not likely to be for a long time. Meanwhile, all the paraphernalia of the School House Fire Brigade had been brought in, and was ready for use. There was to be training that day; quite unknown to the New House, of course.

Figgis will have lots to think of, without bothering about what we're doing," Tom Merry remarked to the Co. "I dare say he will be raising fresh subscriptions to send for a new lot of things. We must keep our eyes open for a new packing-case; and it will have to perform the vanishing trick when it comes, the same as the other."

"Yess, wotah!"

"I dare say Figgis will get fed up in the long run, and drop the idea," Tom Merry said cheerfully. "Later on we'll buy all the things from him for our brigade, so that he won't be out of pocket. That's only fair."

"Hear, hear!" said Monty Lowther. "Now, we've got to get to practice. Figgis & Co. have gone out—a crowd of three went out together soon after last lesson."

"All the better. We'll practice with the patent fire-escape from the box-room window," said Tom Merry. "That can't be seen from the New House."

Tom Merry unravelled the patent fire-escape. The juniors looked at it with great interest as they crowded round the table in Tom Merry's study. It seemed to be a lengthy, curious mechanism. Tom Merry explained as he opened it out.

"You fancy this end to the window, you see, and get THE OWN LIBRARY.—No. 270.

inside and slide down. You reach the ground without hurting yourself at all!"

"Wotah!—those quartals inside that thing, Josh boy, I fancy," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, regarding the escape through his fingers nervously.

"Better than being tossed in a burning building," said Tom Merry severely. "We've all got to go through this in turn, so as to be in practice. Come along!"

The amateur firemen proceeded to the box-room at the end of the Shell passage. There was no one in sight at the back of the house, and a big elm-tree shut off the general view. It was an ideal place for trying the fire-escape. Tom Merry unravelled it out of the window, and the end dropped on the ground. He secured it to the window with the fasteners, and placed rods at the leaders. No one appeared to be particularly anxious to slide down through the current pipe.

"Who's going first?" asked Tom Merry.

"Leader look," said Blake.

"Amen!"

"Yess, wotah! Go ahead, Tom Merry, Josh boy!"

"Well, you see—"

"We're all waiting for you, Tommy," remarked Kangaroo. "Are fire-captain, I have to superintend the practice. I shan't lead! You Tom Merry severely. "I think Gassy had better go first."

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"I'm afraid—"

"Now, don't be a funk, Gassy!"

"Wotah, you see—"

"Pile in, Gassy!"

"I'm afraid—"

"Shame!" said Monty Lowther. "I'm surprised at you, Gassy!"

"I'm afraid—"

"I wouldn't own up to it, anyway," said Lowther.

"You attack us, I was going to say that I'm afraid—"

"Yes, you're said it, and I think—"

"I'm afraid it would wangle my clothes!" stammered D'Arcy.

"Oh, I see! Well, never mind your clothes," said Tom Merry. "At a time like this clothes don't matter. Besides, you'd have to take your turn, anyway. Now, it's a D'Arcy's the lead. I've heard you say so yourself. Take the lead, and look some as your ancestors did at the battle of Bunker's Hill!"

"You mean us, it was the Battle of Hastings!"

"My mistake. Never mind, one battle's as good as another! Take the lead, Augustus! Pile in like your giddy ancestors you've said us about so often!"

"I suppose it is wotah up to me to take the lead," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully.

"Certain!" said Monty Lowther solemnly. "In case of danger, a D'Arcy would naturally be the first to get away!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Lowthah, you attack us—"

"We're waiting for you to show us how it's done, Gassy darling," said Reilly of the Fourth.

"Very well! Pray mind my monoco, Blake!"

"Right-as!"

Arthur Augustus climbed rather gingerly upon the window-sill. He was not thinking of any possible danger, but of his clothes. He put his feet into the tube, and they passed.

"Everwags I had better go and change my clothes first!" he suggested.

"I suppose it is the fire-captain. "In case of a fire, you wouldn't have time to change your clothes, would you?"

"No, but—"

"Besides, you can change them afterwards. I dare say they'll need it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go it, Gassy!"

D'Arcy did a little feather down into the enveloping canvas.

"I suppose it's all right," he said. "I feel wotah queerish in this."

"It's all right! Let go, and slide!"

"We want to see how it's done," said Lowther. "Of course, if you break your neck, that doesn't count."

"Wotah, Lowthah—"

"Stick a pin into him, somebody!" said Kangaroo.

"I refuse to have a pin stuck in me!" said D'Arcy, holding on to the window-sill, while his legs thrashed about in the canvas tube. "I wouldn't—"

"Back up!" urged Blake. "If your ancestors had been as big as yours, you would have come off yet!"

"Yess, but—"

"Here's a pin!" said Reilly.

"Good! Stick it in his neck!"

"Do it!"

Arthur Augustus let go.

The canvas tube belled out as the hidden form of the elegant junior slid down inside it. The junior watched his progress with great interest from the window. D'Arcy did half-way down, and then stopped. The canvas jibbed out in a curious fashion as he struggled inside.

"Go on!" Tom Merry shouted encouragingly.

"Gwooh!"

"Back up—er, rather, back down!"

"I—I—can't!" came a muffled voice from the interior of the patent fire-escape.

"Why can't you?"

"I'm caught!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gwooh! I can't breathe in this thing! I can't get any fresh air!" came the muffled voice. "Gwooh! Yawooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gwooh! This is horrid! You?"

"There must be some stitches in it, or something!" said Tom Merry pointed. "Perhaps we ought to have examined it first!"

"Yes, perhaps!" grunted Blyth.

"Shake it," said Lovelock. "If you shake it hard enough, it's bound to go through!"

They shook the canvas tube from the top. Muffled expostulations came from inside. But the shaking had the desired result, and a foot suddenly shot downwards through the escape.

A foot came out of the lower end, shed in the elegant boot of the swell of St. Jim's. A beautiful sock was seen above the boot; but that was all. The rest of the swell of the School House remained enveloped from sight.

"My hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "It's not open at the lower end! It ought to have been unfastened!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gwooh-o-oh!" came painfully from the interior of the escape.

"Somebody will have to cut down and open it!" said Tom Merry. "I'll go! You fellows wait here!"

Tom Merry left the back-pass and ran downstairs. He came running round the back of the house a few minutes later. The fire-escape was thrumming about like a ship in a storm. Inside it, the swell of St. Jim's was straggling for freedom. His leg had become to the hose now; but the rest of his remained inky. The fire-escape certainly ought to have been open at the end; but things are not always as they ought to be in a world full of defects. Quaver sounds came from the interior, and the canvas jugged out into all sorts of queer shapes.

"All right, Gwooh!" said Tom Merry. "I'll have you out in a jiffy!"

He dragged open the end of the escape. Arthur Augustus groined out, mangled and red-faced and red. He sat on the ground and gasped, and the junior at the window yelled with laughter. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's forebodings had not been without grounds. Most decidedly he had rumbled his clothes. D'Arcy staggered up, passing in bench, and frozen.

"You utter ass, Tom Merry!" he raved.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Tom Merry. "It's all right!"

"It's not all right!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You frog-like ass!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus, forgetting the discipline necessary in any well-organized fire brigade, hoisted himself upon his fire-escape. He snote the Shell (olive hip and thigh. Tom Merry roared again—not with laughter this time—and rolled over. Arthur Augustus marched away with his aristocratic nose very high in the air, and Tom Merry sat on the ground and gasped. From the window above came a howl of resentment.

"Tom Merry blinked up at the junior.

"What are you cackling at, you silly ass?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's nothing to snigger about in this!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly ass!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—your—your—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Tom Merry gave it up. Arthur Augustus, having about the way, the junior bowed the patent fire-escape in scorn; but D'Arcy did not see him in the practice. He was busy with a cloth-break and a hair-brush, and he remained busy with these for a considerable time.

CHAPTER 10. Somehat Hasty.

"MY mind went, this is back!" said Figgins.

"Good egg! How he comes!" said Koor.

"Quiet!"

Figgins & Co. watched with all their eyes. Gordon Gay, of the Fourth Form at Rykecote Grammar School, came

down the lane whistling. Gordon Gay usually had all his wife about him; but just now he had no suspicion of the quiblet ahead of him. The New House jesses from St. Jim's were crouching in the hedge, ready to pounce not upon the Grammarian as he passed.

It was, as Figgins had said, luck. The New House junior had gone out to look for Gordon Gay to inquire into the mysterious disappearance of the packing-case. Search that day at St. Jim's had failed to discover it, and the New House fellows conjectured that they would find its disappearance to the Grammarian, had determined to learn from Gay what had become of it. If necessary, they were prepared to go to the Grammar School, and board the lion in his den; but Figgins hoped to catch Gordon Gay outside the red-brick walls of the Grammarian's house. And here he was coming back from the back-shop in the village, evidently, in Judge by the parcel under his arm. Gordon Gay, unsuspecting of danger, was walking straight into the arms of the avengers.

"No, a golden whistler!" murmured Figgins.

The junior crumpled as still as stone.

Suddenly Figgins shouted, and sprang out into the road.

"Collar him!"

"The St. Jim's junior were round the Grammarian.

Gordon Gay made a rush, but their grasp closed upon him as all sides, and he was caught.

"Got him!" shrieked Koor.

"Hurrah!"

Gordon Gay was cool again in a moment.

"Yes, you've got me," he said, cheerfully. "Mind how you bump that parcel. There's eggs in it. Now, what do you want?"

"We want to know what you've done with our packing-case," said Figgins.

"Your what?"

"Don't understand English!" said Figgins, pleasantly.

"Our packing-case. Pack-it-in-g-w-a-s-e—packing-case!"

"Oh your rucker!" asked Gordon Gay, calmly. "I haven't got any packing-cases about me. I should think you could see that for yourself!"

"Bring him through the hedge," said Figgins. "We don't want any of the other Grammarian rotters to sight to—and we're jolly close to their quarters."

"Look here—" began Gordon Gay.

"Shut up! We do the talking in this act."

"But, I say—"

"Hut!"

The captured Grammarian was yanked into the field. Inside the hedge was a muddy pond where cattle were wont to drink. The edge of the pond was trampled up by many hoofs, and the mud was thick. Gordon Gay began to look alarmed.

"Look here, what are you up to?" he demanded.

"Get to get you to the toilet," said Figgins, anxiously.

"Get to look here—"

"Where's our packing-case?"

"What packing-case?"

"The one you muddled last night at St. Jim's."

"Do you mean the one I sent your chaps home in?" asked Gordon Gay, with a grin.

"No; I don't," said Figgins. "I mean the other one."

"What other one?"

"Oh, you're going to be funny, I see!" said Figgins.

"Check him in!"

"I—E—ok—yah!"

Eyaaah!

Gordon Gay was plunged into the margin of the pond. Water and mud came up to his knees. He struggled in the mud, and shook his fists at the grinning St. Jim's juniors on the banks. He came squashing out through the mud, with clanks of it clinging to his trousers, and his boots had quite disappeared from view.

"You silly ass!" roared Gordon Gay. "Look at my boots! Look at my legs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You'll be in the news state all over, soon," said Figgins, warningly.

"I can tell you we mean business. Now, where is our packing-case?"

"I don't know!" roared Gordon Gay. "And I wouldn't tell you if I did. Blow your old packing-case, and blow you!"

"In with him again—a bit deeper this time!"

Gordon Gay struggled furiously in the grasp of the St. Jim's juniors. But it was in vain. He was whirled back to the pond, and squashed in, a little farther out than the bank, and the water and mud came up to his waist now. He heaved in the water, and struggled it with his arms in his efforts to keep his balance, and gasped.

"Now, then, where's that packing-case!" demanded Figgins.

"Gwooh!"

"Are you going to answer?"

"Grooch!"

Gay scrambled out of the water. He made a desperate rush to get through the New House juncos. But they were too many for him. He was grasped and whirled back. Figgins & Co. were in deadly earnest. Figgins and Kerr and Wyan, Thompson and Lawrence and Punt and Owen—all the party, in fact—had a strong grip upon Gordon Gay, and the Christlike, muscular as he was, was helpless. He gasped and spluttered in the hands of his enemies.

"Are you going to tell us where that packing-case is?" asked Figgins, pleasantly. "You'll go in up to your neck next time!"

"Grooch!"

"That isn't an answer! Speak English!"

"Verrooch!"

"Ho, ho, ho!"

"In with him!" said Figgins, exasperated. "Blowed if I ever saw such an obstinate beseeke. Chuck him in!"

Splash!

Gordon Gay whirled out over the water, and plunged in. He disappeared under it for a moment, and came up spluttering. His cap floated away, and his hair was tangled with mud, and water streamed down his face. He gorged it out of his eyes, and glared at the juncos of St. Jim's.

"Grooch! You rotten! Grooch!"

"—I'll—grooch!"

"You can grooch as much as you like," said Figgins. "But you're jolly well going to tell us where that packing-case is! Savvy?"

"Grooch!"

"Where's that packing-case?"

"I don't know!" gasped Gordon Gay. "I haven't seen it. I don't know anything about it. I didn't know you had a rotten packing-case! Yes!"

"The truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth!" said Figgins, vigorously. "We know that you sailed it last night at St. Jim's!"

"Yes, rather!" said Kerr.

"I didn't!" cried the hapless Greenstarian. "If I did I'd cut up, you fatheads. I don't know anything about your disgusting packing-case! Yes!"

"My hat!" said Figgins. "Perhaps he's telling the truth, you know. Look here, Gay, will you give us your word you don't know anything about the packing-case? I'll take your word, of course!"

"Yes," yelled the Greenstarian, "you fathead! I don't know anything about it, and I don't want to! I want to punch your eyes out!"

"You didn't do the thing last night at St. Jim's?"

"No! Blaw St. Jim's! Blaw you! Grooch!"

"Honor bright!" persisted Figgins.

"Yes, fathead—honor bright, you sile out!"

Gordon Gay scrambled out of the pond, the juncos leaving him free now. It was evident that a mistake had been made. Gordon Gay shook the water off like a Newfoundland dog, but the mud was not so easily parted with.

The St. Jim's juncos gazed at each other as they looked at him. Gay was in a terrible state.

"Well, it seems that we've been rather hasty," admitted Figgins. "But if it wasn't you, it must have been those School House boys—eh?—and they don't seem to know anything about it. Sorry!"

Gordon Gay snorted.

"Sorry—ho, ho!" said Kerr. "You're rather wet, Gay. You'd better run home, dear boy."

"Ho, ho, ho!"

"I—I—I'll squawk you for this some day!" growled Gordon Gay.

The Greenstarian junior shook his fist at the St. Jim's fellows, and dashed away across the field. It was high time he dried himself. Perhaps he was thinking, too, of getting reinforcements, and returning before the St. Jim's fellows got away. His Figgins & Co. did not linger near the rival school. They hurried back towards St. Jim's at once. It was pretty clear now that the Greenstarians had had nothing to do with the mysterious disappearance of the packing-case from the stable-yard; and if the disappearance was not to be attributed to the Greenstarians, it could only be attributed to the School House fellows. Amazing as it seemed, the New House whom you had known in the School House, and Tom Merry & Co. had made away with the supplies of the

New House Junior Fire Brigade. Figgins & Co. breathed vengeance as they hurried back to the school.

"Must have been those rotten, and they've been pulling our leg and laughing in the sleeves all the time," growled Figgins. "Blowed if I know how they got on to the where's—but they have—it must have been them!"

"Must have been, I think," said Kerr, sagaciously. "And those boudens were keeping us in our study last night, doing that rot for the 'Weekly,' while the other rotten were raiding the packing-case?"

"My hat! We've been taken in, and no mistake!"

"They're on to the where's, then," said Fatty Wyan. "I shouldn't wonder if they borrow it themselves. We're jolly to come down hairy!"

"I suppose it must be them," said Figgins, indignantly.

"Who else could it be?" said Lawrence.

"You—but we'll scout first," said Figgins, cautiously. "If they're not on to the where's, we don't want to give it away—and if they've got the things, we'll get them back by strategy. Don't say a word when we get in—but we'll scout!"

"Good egg! They've pulled our leg, and now we'll pull theirs!" grinned Kerr. "Use good boys deserves another!"

And the New House juniors, when they came to St. Jim's, restrained their desire to march on the School House and slaughter Tom Merry & Co. on the spot.

**CHAPTER 11.
Redfern Reports!**

REDFERN came into Figgins's study after tea that evening, with a grimace on his poor face. Redfern had evidently never heard anything that tickled him very much. The Co. looked at him intently. Some coming back to St. Jim's, Figgins & Co. had been doing some scouting, but without success. If the School House fellows had a secret, they were guarding it well. But Redfern of the Fourth was looking now as if he knew something.

"Well," said the Co., with one breath.

"I've got it!" he said.

"Eh?"

"I've found them out!"

"Good!" said Figgins, rubbing his hands. "What have you found out?"

"They're starting a rival fire brigade in the School House."

"My hat! They've been our where's!" exclaimed Fatty Wyan, indignantly.

Redfern shook his head.

"No, it seems that they hit on it themselves, and started it quite on their own—it was a case of great minds running in groove, Fatty."

"Well, after the fire, I daresay it would occur to those that one chap."

Redfern smiled a superior smile.

"I've been scouting," he said.

"Well, we've been scouting, too, but we haven't found anything out," Figgins remarked.

"Quite so!"

"Look here!" said Figgins. "None of your cheek, you're Redfern. If you'd found anything out, get it off your chest, and sharp—and don't cackle!"

Redfern grinned. Redfern was a rival leader in the New House, and feeling was sometimes sore between Figgins & Co. and the New Firm. But they were shoulder to shoulder, of course, against the School House. Still, it was a considerable satisfaction to Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence that Reddy had been the one to find out the dark doings of the School House fellows.

"You fellows have been behind the School House!" asked Redfern.

Figgins snarled.

"What on earth for!" he demanded.

"Scouting."

"No, there was nothing to go there for that I know of. We looked round there last night for the packing-case, and it wasn't there. What do you mean?"

Redfern wagged a warning forefinger at Figgins.

"When you're scouting, you should never leave a stone unturned," he remarked, in an admonitory tone.

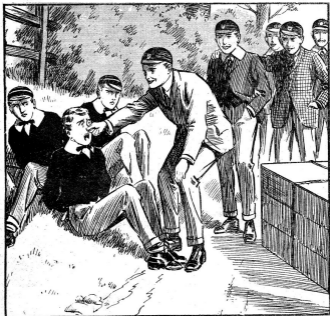
"If you're looking for a thick egg, Reddy—!" began Figgins, exasperated.

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"May we open the case?" chuckled Frank Wrenk, taking Tom Harry's nose between finger and thumb. "Grough! Nope! Grough!" growled the unhappy St. Jim's leader. The circumlocutor's finger and thumb closed like a vice. "May we?" he asked again. "Grough!—yeh—yeh—yeh!" (See Chapter 4.)

"What have you found out, Reddy, you see?" demanded Kerf.

"The whole bag of tricks, my lad," said Redfern solemnly. "Never leave a stone unturned when you're—"

"Oh, get on with the washing!"

"Well, they've got a patent fire-escape—one of those canvas bag things, you know—hung up to the box-room window, behind the big elm."

"Oh! One of ours, I suppose?" said Figgins. "That's where our things have gone to."

"I don't know. Anyway, there it was. I found it, though it was quite dark when I was crawling there. Never leave—"

"We've had that. Get on!"

"I was feeling it over, to make sure what it was, when I heard them jawing at the window," said Redfern. "They're arranging practice as firemen, else dark. It seems they've been at it this afternoon, but we never spotted them. Of course, under the circumstances, as a scout in war time, I felt that I was entitled to overhear the enemy's plans."

"I dare say you were. Go on."

"I dare say you'd do," said Redfern faintly. "I was entitled, and there's no dare say about it. I hope you don't think I would listen to a conversation!"

"Get on!" roared Figgins.

"That point's got to be settled first," said Redfern calmly. "If they were simply chaps talking at a window, it would be foolish to stay down there in the dark listening to what they said, wouldn't it?"

"Yes, it would," growled Figgins.

"But as we're in a state of war, and I was the first across the enemy, I considered that it would be quite justifiable to stretch the point."

"Well, you seem to have stretched it, anyway," said Figgins rather sarcastically. "Are you ever getting on with the story?"

"Unless I was justified in stretching a point to hear it all, I'm not justified in telling you," said Redfern loudly.

"Get on, you fathead!"

"Was I justified—"

"Yes!" roared Figgins. "YES! Now get on!"

"That's all right," said Redfern. "Nothing like having the points settled as you go on, you know. It saves argument afterwards. They jawed a lot, and I kept close in the dark under the window and heard them, being justified under the circumstances—"

"Good gracious, we don't want that all over again!" yelled Figgins. "Are you going to tell us what you've found out?"

"I'm coming to that. They jacked about the wheels, and Tom Merry said—I heard his voice quite distinctly—but perhaps I'd better not tell you what he said."

"You'll tell us, or you'll get a thick ear, you silly cheap!" said Figgins, getting excited.

"No, I think upon the whole I—"

Figgins pushed back his ears.

"Tell him, Reddy," said Lawrence, with a chuckle. Lawrence was looking in at the study doorway with Owen.

"Very well," said Redfern suavely. "For the sake of peace, being a peaceful chap myself, I'll tell you, Figgins—"

"Come to the point, you rumbling idiot!" said Figgins.

"What did Tom Merry say?"

"Tom Merry said, 'That fathead Figgins—'"

"H!"

"That fathead Figgins—"

"Look here, Redfern—"

"That fathead Figgins—"

Figgins rushed across the study at the Fourth-Former. Redfern dodged round the table, warning Figgins off.

"I'm only telling you what Tom Merry said," he protested.

"He said, 'That fathead Figgins—'"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Owen and Lawrence, and Kerr and Wynn could not help chuckling. Figgins glared across the table at the innocent Redfern.

"You can't clear out, you sily ass!" he roared.

"Do let me talk," said Redfern plaintively. "What a fellow you are for interrupting a fellow! Tom Merry said—"

"Never mind what Tom Merry said!" roared Figgins. "Blow Tom Merry!"

"Certainly blow him as much as you like. He said, 'That fathead Figgins thinks it was the Greenambers collected his parking-cash, most likely, and he won't find out that it was in a dog's age!'"

"Blow Lawther!"

"Lawther said—"

Figgins rushed round the table. Redfern dodged him again.

"Let's hear what Lawther said, Figgins," urged Kerr. "It doesn't matter if they called you rascal, you know. Go on, Reddy."

"Right-ho!" said Reddy cheerfully. "Lawther said, 'Kerr's an awfully nice Scotch terrier, but we've stuffed him up just as easily as Figgins.'"

It was Figgins's turn to grin, and Kerr turned red.

"Ha, did he?" said Kerr.

"Yes, and then Blake said—"

"Blow Blake! I don't want to hear what the sily ass said," growled Kerr.

But Fatty Wynn chimed in:

"Dash it all, Kerr, let's hear what Blake said. This is getting interesting. What did Blake say, Reddy?"

"Blake said, 'As for Wynn, there's no danger of his spotting anything except a jaw tart or a pork pie,' and then Manners said—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fatty Wynn turned pink.

"Hang Manners!" he said crossly. "I don't know what we're listening to all this sily jaw law. If you haven't got any better news than that, Redfern, you can travel."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lawrence and Owen.

"But I have," grinned Redfern. "They're going to practise in the fire-escape this evening, so as to be in practice for an emergency. They're going to have a race down the tube, one after another, to see how long it takes for half a dozen of them to get out."

"Well, what the—"

"I think it will very likely turn out to be a funny sight," said Redfern positively.

"Why?"

"Because after they were gone I fastened up the bottom of the canvas tube."

"Eh?"

"And if they slide down into it one after the other at top speed, I shouldn't wonder if they get mixed up in it!"

Figgins & Co. roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It will be worth seeing, I should think!" grinned Redfern.

"I think he ought to be on the spot!"

"Whoo-ho!" said Figgins.

And he gave Redfern a heavy slap on the back, instead of upon the nose, as he had intended a few minutes earlier.

CHAPTER 12. A Little Mixed.

"RADDY, you cheap!"

"Quite ready!"

"Yess, wathah!"

The analyzer frozen was gathered in Tom Merry's study. It was the time for the training, and they were all ready. Tom Merry said—

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Every Friday.

Merry had a manner of importance that befitted the captain of a fire brigade.

"You understand, I suppose?" he said. "We've got to do this thing in order. The test is to see how long it takes the lot of us to get out of the house, in case of fire. Of course, as firemen, our business is to save others, not to save ourselves, but this is good practice, and may be useful next time Blanche sets the house on fire. You have got to start when I give the word, and all of you to be outside the house in one minute."

"Yess."

"Come on, then!"

Tom Merry led the way to the box-room. The patent fire-escape had been left fastened to the window, and was all in readiness. It was quite dark outside, but that was all the better. Practice after dark was none like the real thing, as, of course, fire generally happens at night. It had the additional advantage of being safe from the observation of the New House janitors—or so Tom Merry & Co. thought, as all were asleep.

Tom Merry glanced down the open window. All was dark and silent without. If there were any jokers concealed in the shadows, they could not be seen, and Tom Merry did not suspect their presence.

"Start when I give the word," said Tom Merry. "Lawther first, then Manners, Blake, Herries, Dig, Gussy, Kanger, Reddy, myself last. Got that?"

"Right-ho!"

"Yess, wathah!"

"Go!"

Tom Merry plunged into the canvas tube, and went sliding down. It was easy enough, especially as he had practised that afternoon. Down he went, and Manners plunged in and did after him. The moment he had disappeared Blake plunged in, and after him went Herries.

There was a rattled roar inside the fire-escape.

"Yah! Oh!"

"Gerroff my neck!"

"Yowp!"

"Yeh!"

"Help!"

Tom Merry looked out of the window in surprise. He could not see the lower end of the patent shaft in the darkness, but it was evident that something was wrong.

"They're not getting out!" he exclaimed. "Are you out, Lawther?"

"Grough!"

"Yeeh!"

"Help!"

"My hat! What's the matter?"

"Bad Jews!"

Tom Merry slid into the tube, and shut downwards. His feet came into contact with something hard, and a roar like rattled thunder announced that the something hard was Herries of the Fourth.

The fire-escape wobbled and sagged to and fro, as the jokers tumbled and struggled in its folds.

There was no crowing at the end, and they were bunched together struggling.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "It's got stuffed up somehow! Oh!"

"Yeh!"

"Lemme gerroff!"

"Grough!"

There was a yell of laughter from the shadows. Figgins & Co. gathered round the wavy tube, yelling.

"Bad Jews!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, at the window. "It's the New House basketball, dear boys. They've fastened up the end!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The awful wostahs! How very lucky that I didn't get in, loi Jews!"

"Yow!"

"Help!"

"Yeh!"

"Oh! Help! Yowp!"

"Hessco!"

"Figgins & Co.," roared Digby. "Come on—we've got to get out these!"

"Not down the shaft, ho jabert!" grinned Reddy.

"No—down the shaft."

Digby, Reddy, D'Arcy and Kangeroo rushed out of the box-room and down the stairs. They called for reinforcements as they went, and quite a crowd of School House jokers came rushing round the house to the rescue of the unfortunate amateur frozen in the tube.

A yell of laughter from the distance announced that Figgins & Co. had succeeded in safer quarters.

The jokers dragged at the fire-escape, and opened it, and the imprisoned frozen rolled out one after another, red and frozen, and frozen.

"Oh! Oh! Mean-my aunt!"

"Geebo! Some silly as put his boot in my eye!"
 "Somebody's teased my ribs!"
 "Yarcock! Oh! Oh! What the dickens—"
 "It's all right, dear boys," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy
 consolingly. "The New House boarders had fastened it up,
 but it's all right now."

"Oh!" groaned Harrie. "I don't feel all right. Some
 frightful idea cramped his silly boot on my head!"

"I'm awfully!" gasped Lowther. "I felt like a nutcracker,
 with all those tinkering chaps rolling on me! Or?"
 There was a yell from the distance.
 "Who's cock-house of St. Jim's now? Ha, ha, ha!"
 The School House juniors breathed fury.
 "This is where we smile!" yelled Figgins. "Ha, ha, ha!"
 And the New House juniors smiled—loudly.
 "Come on!" gasped Tom Merry. "They've got on to
 the where, somehow—but we can search them bald-headed,
 anyway! Collar the rascals!"

"Yess, watah!"
 Tom Merry & Co. rushed in the direction of the voices.
 There was a sound of chinkles dying away in the distance.
 Figgins & Co. had beaten a retreat to their own House, and
 in the doorway they turned to kiss their hands to their
 baffled pursuers.

Tom Merry & Co. shook their fists in return, and departed.
 In the School House, they exchanged glances.

"It's all out now!" growled Tom Merry.
 "Yess, watah! They've bowled out the where, dear
 boys."

"Hotten!"
 "Never mind—we bowled them out fast!" said Tom
 Merry. "There's only one thing to be done now—"

"What's that?"
 "We shall have to amalgamate, and form a united fire
 brigade," said Tom Merry. "After all, that's a jolly good
 idea! And we'll let Figgins have his things back if he
 agrees to a School House chap being first-captain—what?"

"Good egg!"
 "Yess, watah! And watah the cize, I watah think
 it would be a good idea to choose the next suitable chap
 for the post—"

"We've done that!" said Tom Merry.
 "Really, Tom Merry?"

"Sure!"
 "I refuse to say—I mean—"
 "Never mind what you mean, Gussy," said Tom Merry,
 kindly. "I'll see that bettered Figgins in the morning, and
 we'll settle it!"

And they did!

CHAPTER 13.

In Training.

FIGGINS & CO. were grinning when they met the
 School House fellows the next day.

"I fancy you rather did you in the eye that time,"
 remarked Figgins, cheerfully.

Tom Merry laughed.
 "Yes—as we did over the giddy packing-case, Figg!"

"So it was you, after all!"

"Whom did you think it was?"

"We're glad you're to the fore to make him own
 up when he had done with it," grinned Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We seem to have hit on the same where at the same
 time," Figgins remarked. "It's all out now—and I propose
 that we join forces. After all, a thing of this kind would be
 better run by the whole school than by separate Houses,
 don't you think so?"

"Just what I was going to suggest to you, Figg!"

"Good!" said Figgins heartily. "We'll join, and make
 the United St. Jim's Fire Brigade, and you shall be vice-
 captain, Tom Merry," Figgins added generously.

"I was just going to offer you that job!"

"Me! But I shall be captain," said Figgins, innocently.

"That you jolly well will!"

"Now, look here, Tom Merry—"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"You ought to be jolly glad to get in as vice," said
 Figgins, warmly. "Kerr ought to have it; but we want
 to do the fair thing by your old House."

"Can't be done! I'm opposed to vice in any shape or
 form," said Tom Merry, solemnly. "We leave the vice to
 the New House."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't be funny," said Figgins. "Leave that for
 Lowther's painful page in the 'Weekly.' We had the idea
 first—I thought of it the very day after the fire—"

"We thought of it the same night," said Tom Merry,
 spontaneously.

"Athen!"
 "So if it goes by majority—"
 "But it doesn't," said Kerr, quickly. "We've just one
 vote goes by majority."

"But in, ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if you oughtn't to be a lawyer, Kerr!" said
 Figgins, admiringly. "It takes a Sophocles to think these
 things out, I must say. You see that Kerr's quite right,
 Tom Merry?"

"Blessed if I do," said Tom Merry.

"Now, look here, it do be reasonable!" urged Figgins. "It
 stands to reason that a New House chap will have to be
 captain, because—because we're cock-house at St. Jim's,
 you know!"

"Looking for a thick one!" asked Tom Merry, pleasantly.

"I'll put it to the vote, if you like—every chap in the
 brigade to vote."

Figgins started.

"You've got the majority, you boulder!"

"Exactly. Otherwise—"

"You up for choice of cook," suggested Fatty Wynn.

Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, that's one way of settling it!" he said. "And
 we shall never settle it by argument, anyway!"

Figgins nodded, and the important question was settled
 that way: and Tom Merry won the vote. Figgins granted,
 but he gave in with a good grace.

"You're vice-captain, Figg," said Tom Merry, consolingly.

"Now, we'll practice all together to-day—and
 you can have these things back, too. They've hidden under
 straw in the garret over the stable-left."

"Good!" said Figgins.

And after school that day, the juniors went in for firmness
 practice, the two Houses joining on the best of terms for
 the purpose. It was really better, as they all admitted on
 reflection, to make a School instead of a House affair of
 it. The New House fellows were certainly a little doubtful
 how the brigade would get on under School House leader-
 ship; but they legally resolved to do their best to make the
 thing go in spite of that obvious defect.

There being no further need for secrecy, fellows were
 enrolled on all sides in the amateur fire brigade. Most of
 the juniors of both Houses were eager to join. A few, like
 Loxton and Moffish of the Fourth, and Crooks of the Third,
 sneered and kept out of it; but they were not wanted
 anyway, as a good many fellows explained to them. The
 idea of a junior fire brigade was generally voted to be a
 ripping one, and members paired in—subscriptions pouring
 in a little less rapidly.

Quite a large number of fellows were willing to be captain;
 even Skimpole of the Third offered his services for the post
 —declined with thanks.

But Skimpole joined the brigade. When the amateur
 forces trained, a hatchet was served out to Skimpole with
 the rest, and Tom Merry warned him not to chop anybody
 with it. He was rather strong about the scientific junon.
 Skimpole looked at him seriously through his big spectacles.

"My dear Merry," he said. "I consider that you would
 have been better advised to entrust the command into my
 hands. Intellectual attainments are more requisite to a
 commander than mere muscular development, and—"

Tom Merry stopped his ears.

"Don't Skimpole?" he implored. "Keep 'em for that
 book of yours. Talk to me in words only of three syllables!"

Skimpole smiled indolently.

"However, intellect can always find an outlet," he said.

"I shall do my best to make the fire brigade a success.
 You will see?"

"Oh!" pined Tom Merry, suddenly leaping into the air.
 Skimpole had almost unthinkingly dropped his hatchet, and it
 had alighted on his captain's foot.

"Dear me!" said Skimpole. "What is the matter?"

Tom Merry was dancing on one leg, and clapping the
 other foot with both hands. Skimpole looked at him in
 mild astonishment.

"Yarcock! Oh!"

"My dear Merry—"

"Geeek! You've teased my toes, you silly ass!"

"Dear me! I have allowed my hatchet to fall," said
 Skimpole. "I did not observe it, my dear Merry—"

"Tom Merry did!" grinned Monty Lowther.

"It's all right, Tomsey!" said Manners. "The thing
 admits of an easy scientific explanation, as Skimpole would
 say. When an article becomes detached from the hand that
 holds it, the centrifugal attraction of the earth causes it to
 descend in a perpendicular line, and so alight with a con-
 cussion proportional to the impetus caused by the rapidity
 of the descent. When a fellow's foot is in the way—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" growled Tom Merry.

"The best thing under the circumstances," remarked

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Moments, "is to project the jet in a horizontal line towards the respiratory apparatus of the silly one who dropped the thing."

"Good egg!" said Tom Merry, and he projected his jet in a horizontal line towards Skimpole's nose, and the scientific youth sat down quite calmly in the quadrangle.

"Oh!" said Skimpole.
 "Then, my young fellow," said Momens, in a delighted intonation of the learned rector cultivated by Skimpole; "thus are the first principles of scientific knowledge easily demonstrated. A force acting horizontally upon a perpendicular object causes that object to assume a horizontal position on the surface of the earth."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Come on," said Figgins. "I say, Taggles has been using the garden-hose, and he's left it out. It's a good chance to get some hose water."

"Hear, hear!"
 And the assenter freshmen rushed off, leaving Skimpole still sitting on the ground and rubbing his nose in a surprised manner.

Taggles had been using the hose, and he had left it unattended; not knowing anything of the assenter freshmen of St. Jim's. The freshmen seized upon the hose with joy. Tom Merry directed operations, sweeping water in all directions, and there were rolls of remonstrance from the other freshmen as they deluged one of the way.

"Yarrah!" roared Arthur Augustus, as he jumped a foot from the ground, the jet of water sweeping round his legs. "You silly one, do you see what you're doing?"

"Yes," said Tom Merry cheerfully.

"You—you foolishness dofish, stop it! Oh!"

"Here, you lot that there-hose about!" roared Taggles, coming on the scene. "Giro that to me at once, Mister Merry!"

"Certainly!" said Mister Merry, turning the hose upon Taggles.

"Whit! Whoooh!"
 "Oh!" roared Taggles.

"Whit! Whoooh!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 Taggles roared at the jet of water caught him, and nearly

boiled him over. He dashed in the playing stream, trying to avoid it; but it followed every movement. His hat was swept off, and he sat down at last, gasping.

"That all right?" asked Tom Merry.

The juniors yelled.

"Oh!" gasped Taggles. "Oh! I'll report you!"
 Tom Merry looked surprised.

"But you asked for it," he said.

"Oh! Asked for the 'ose, you young hump, not for the water!" said Taggles.

"You should make yourself clear, Taggles," said Tom Merry, with a shake of the head. "You can't expect me to guess what you mean."

"Oh! I'll report you! Gimme that 'ose!"

"Here you are!" said Tom Merry, passing the nozzle again as he handed it to Taggles.

"Whit! Whoooh!"
 "Yarrah-coop!"

Taggles fairly fled; and the juniors roared. Taggles did not appear; he was too wet, and the juniors enjoyed him as long as his nose poked out, and the end of which they were very nearly as wet as Taggles. Indeed, Mister Lovelace remarked that they were rather qualifying for watermen than freshmen.

CHAPTER 14.

Fire!

CLANG! Clang!
 Taggles started up in bed in the New House.

Clang! Clang!
 Figgins rubbed his eyes and listened.

"It can't be going bell," he muttered. "It's the middle of the night. Unless Taggles has got up, and started ringing the bell in his sleep. Kerr, old man!"

"Hallo!" came drowsily from Kerr's bed.

"Do you hear that bell?"

"Yes."
 "It can't be the ringing bell!"

"Of course it ain't, ferbend!" said Kerr. "It's a nail awry. I should think! It's an alarm-bell of some sort!"

Figgins jumped.
 "Might be a fire!" he exclaimed.
 Kerr yawned.

**CINEMATOGRAPH
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"Shouldn't wonder!"

Figgins was out of bed in a twinkling. He ran to the window, and clambered up and looked out. Only the dark sky, with stars twinkling there, met his gaze. But the sound of the bell came to his ears more clearly. It was evidently ringing at a distance, and it could be nothing but an alarm-bell.

"It must be fire, Kerr!" exclaimed Figgins excitedly.

"Long way away, if it is!" said Kerr.

"Come from the direction of Ryloombie," said Figgins.

"There's no fire brigade nearer than Wayland, except—"

"Excepting ours," checked Kerr.

"Just so! This is where we came in!" said Figgins.

Heading to his clothes in a hurry, "I'm going out to see what's the row, Kerr! If it's a fire, we're on!"

"But we shall have to break bonds!"

Figgins stifled.

"How, bonds! Firemen can't stop to think of such things as bonds when there's a gobby fire raging, can they, Tailor?"

"But I say, Figgins—"

But Figgins was gone.

The New House janitor was out of the house in a minute more. He dashed across the quad. From the top of the school wall he would be able to see if there was any reflection of a fire in the sky towards Ryloombie. He had almost reached the wall when he ran into a dark figure, and there was a startled exclamation.

"Oo? Who's that?"

Figgins checked.

"Tom Merry!"

"Is that you, Figg?"

"Yes, rather."

"You see," said Tom Merry, greatly relieved, "I thought you was a prefect for a moment!"

"What are you doing out here this time of night?"

demanded Figgins, pointing at the School House janitor, in the gloom.

Tom Merry grinned.

"Same as you, I expect," he said. "I've heard an alarm-bell, and I've come out to see if it's a fire."

"Same here," said Figgins, groping at the wall. "Give us a bunk up!"

They were on top of the wall in a few seconds. The two janitors stared in the direction of Ryloombie. There was a red flare in the sky. It was a fire, undoubtedly.

"It's in Ryloombie," said Figgins.

"This side of Ryloombie, a bit south," said Tom Merry.

"I believe it's the Grammar School, Figg."

"My bet!"

"Anyway, it's a fire, and we're going to be off the scene!"

said the assistant fire-captain promptly. "Get your chaps set. Figgins, and I'll get the School House fellows."

"Right-ho!"

Figgins raced back to the New House.

Tom Merry dashed off in the darkness, and clashed into the wicket he had left open in the school House. He rushed into the Shell dormitory.

"Wake up, you chaps!"

"Oullo!"

"Whatever happens?"

"Fire!"

"My only bet," said Mowls Lanthier, sitting up in bed.

"An alarm-bell been setting fire to his study again! He'll never get that book finished!"

"It's not St. Jim's," said Tom Merry hurriedly. "And it's not a mere serious thing than the fire we had. The sky's red for miles! I think it's at the Grammar School!"

"Great Scott!"

"Wake up! Tumble up, firemen!"

The Shell fellows tumbled out of bed. Tom Merry dashed away to the Fourth-Fourth dormitory to call up Blake & Co. Some of the Fourth were already awake. They had heard the alarm-bell clanging in the distance through the next night.

"Firemen wanted!" Tom Merry called, into the dormitory.

"You fellows awake?"

"Yess, wutah?"

"Tumble up! We're going!"

"Good!" said Blake.

"And quiet," asked Tom Merry warningly. "We're going to have lives and property and things; but the prefects might approve, if they knew. We've got to get out of the House without a sound."

"Vess, wutah?"

"Get your things!" said Tom Merry. "We may need the blankets and the fire-escape and the ropes! Don't forget anything!"

"Right-ho!"

"Well, Tom Merry, we are not likely to forget anything!"

"Back up!"

"Dash the fire!"

But Tom Merry was gone. He returned quietly to the Shell dormitory, and found the amateur firemen ready. They had dressed hastily in the first things that came to hand. Some of the fellows, indeed, were sleeping, or appearing to. Not all of the juniors were anxious to leave their warm beds for the cold night outside, with the additional penalty for breaking bonds to be faced in the morning. But most of the firemen were keen and eager, and they followed Tom Merry from the dormitory, with their hats and ropes and other appurtenances in their hands, all ready for business. The Fourth-Fourths joined them in the passage; and the juniors dropped from the Hall window, one by one, into the dark quad.

"What about Figgins & Co.?" asked Blake.

"They're out!"

"Oo, good!"

"Here we are," sang out Figgins, from the school wall, "waiting for you, boys! Hurry up, slow coaches! We've been here nearly a minute!"

"Well, Figgins—"

"Over the wall—quick!" said Tom Merry. "Somebody else is awake! I can see a light in Kildare's window!"

The juniors scrambled over the wall in hot haste. The light in Kildare's window showed that the captain of St. Jim's had heard the alarm-bell, and risen from his bed. As they looked back at the House they saw a light from Mr. Hilton's window, too.

Good as the intentions of the junior-firemen were, they felt pretty certain that if the masters and prefects knew they were out of their dormitories they would be ordered back there at once. Orders from masters and prefects could not be disobeyed; so it was wiser not to risk receiving them. The juniors scrambled down into the road in hot haste. The race in the sky was redder now, and the clang, clang! of the alarm-bell came to their ears on the night wind.

"Come on," shouted Tom Merry. "Follow your leader!"

"Right-ho!"

And the amateur firemen of St. Jim's dashed away through the night at top speed.

CHAPTER 18.

Fighting the Flames.

A RUDDY glare of light danced over the Grammar School.

The alarm-bell was clanging out loudly; the Cloak was crowded with fellows, half-dressed, turned hastily out of their beds.

A whole wing of the school was in flames and smoke.

The alarm-bell rang far through the night, and two messengers had been sent off at top speed for Wayland to summon the fire brigade. But there was no sign of the fire brigade to say. Dr. Mook, the Head of the Grammar School, was in the Cloak, looking dazed and almost helpless. DeLanere, the captain of the school, was shouting to the fellows to keep back from the fire. Mr. Hilton, the second master, had just brought out a bag from the burning building, and deposited him in the Cloak. The crowds of Grammarians looked on at the fire with fascinated eyes.

"I think we've all out," Gordon Gay remarked. "Jolly lucky the alarm was given in time! It was jolly tricky when I got out!"

"How on earth did it start?" said Frank Mook.

Gay shook his head.

"Blamed if I know! I smelt gas—might have been an escape of gas in a room where there was a fire left burning, perhaps. I say, it is certain that everybody's out!"

The juniors looked at the building, wringed in smoke and flames, and shivered. If anybody was in the burning wing, it would be bad for him. The senior boys were hurrying to keep the fire in check. The garden-hose was working, and was pouring water into the flames, but with little effect. Crowds of fellows carried buckets to and from the fountains, sweeping water into the fire, but their puny efforts counted for little. It was doubtful if the fire brigade would have much success if it did not arrive soon.

Dr. Mook, in great agitation, tapped Mr. Hilton on the arm.

"Please call over the boys at once," he said. "We must make sure that no one is left in the building."

"Quite so, sir."

The boys ranged up for the calling-over. As Mr. Hilton was calling their names in turn, and the Grammarian answering "adam" to their names, there was a shout as a crowd of fellows came pouring in at the gates.

Tom Merry & Co. had arrived.

"Mr. Hat!" exclaimed Gordon Gay. "Here's the St. Jim's chaps!"

"Here we are!" gasped Tom Merry. "We're the St. Jim's Fire Brigade!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Please keep back from the building," said Mr. Hilton, apparently not impressed by any idea of great assistance to be rendered by the St. Jim's brigade. "You must not get into danger."

"Weally, sir," said Arthur Aggroles D'Arcy, not forgetting his steady dignity even at that moment of excitement—"weally, sir, it is the bimey of a fire brigade to go into danger, sir. That's what we're here for."

"Good old Garry!" chuckled Figgins.

"Weally, Figgins—"

"Lias up with the ladders," ordered Tom Merry. "Get anything you can, and shove water in. Help to carry things out of the part that's not on fire."

"And the St. Jim's firemen set to work. They worked hard. They carried out things from rooms that were not in the slightest danger of being reached by the fire, and piled them in the Close. Figgins and Harry, who came staggering out under the weight of a big armchair, and other fellows followed with all sorts and conditions of things. Scores of them forced buckets and pails, and helped to swamp water on the flames. The fire was raging with terrible violence now, and heat fanned the faces of the crowd in the Close. The roar of the flames could be heard at a great distance, and people were arriving from Hylcombe to lend aid.

Mr. Hilton was rapping out the names of the boys. He believed that everybody was out of the house, but it was necessary to make sure. But suddenly there was a pause.

"Blare!"

No answer!

"Gustave Blanc!"

Silence!

"My only hat!" exclaimed Gordon Gay. "Must Blang hain't got out! I remember his getting out of the dorm. I thought he came down with me."

"Must Blang! Must Blang!" shouted the juniors.

But there was no reply to them.

The French junior was evidently still in the house.

Gordon Gay raised white.

"He's inside!" he exclaimed. "The smoke must have done it—I know he started from the dorm."

Gay made a rush towards the house. Mr. Hilton caught him by the shoulder and swung him back.

"Stop!" he commanded sternly.

Gordon Gay struggled in the master's grasp.

"Must Blang's in there, sir?"

"Say where you are. I am going in."

"But, sir—"

"Silence! I order you to stay there."

Mr. Hilton released the junior, and ran into the house. The thick, rolling volumes of smoke swallowed him up in a moment.

There was a dead silence in the Close, broken only by the hurried breathing of the crowd and the roar of the flames and the dull bang of the alarm-bell.

"Good heavens!" murmured Dr. Monk. "He has gone to his death!"

And the old gentleman wrung his hands.

The crowd waited for Mr. Hilton to reappear.

A minute passed.

Then another!

Mr. Hilton did not appear.

The faces were white now; the fellows looked at one another in horrified silence.

Must Blang was in the building—overcome by the smoke, evidently—and the Form-master—what had become of him?

Another pause!

"I'm going in!" said Gordon Gay desperately. "I'm not going to stand here while poor old Must Blang is burned!"

He dashed towards the house.

"Come back, Gay!" cried Dr. Monk.

But the Australian junior did not hear, or heed. He disappeared into the rolling smoke that was thick and opaque in the doorway.

Another long minute—seemingly a century long.

"It's his death to go in!" sobbed Frank Monk.

Tom Merry set his teeth.

The St. Jim's Fire Brigade had not bargained for this. Bad duty was duty, and Tom Merry was not afraid.

He tied a handkerchief over his mouth, and dashed himself with water. Figgins caught his arm, his face chalky white.

"You're not going in, Tom?"

Tom Merry nodded without speaking.

"You can't! You sha'n't! It's death!"

"I'm going in."

"But—"

"You can't, Tom!" muttered Louthen. "You sha'n't! It's death!"

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"Firemen needn't be afraid," said Tom Merry, with a faint smile. "Let's me go, Monty."

"You're coming, too," said Louthen.

"Stand back. I'm captain," said Tom Merry sharply.

"But—"

"Stand back, all of you."

"I'm coming," said Figgins grimly. "Unless the School House can go the New House can follow. Don't jaw—I'm coming."

"Nax, waitah! And I—"

"Stop!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "If there's anything to be done, two can do it. Fuggy can come with me; the rest keep back."

"Weally, Tom Merry—"

"He's right," murmured Blake lightly. "Keep back, Garry. But if they don't come out again, I'm going in for them, and chance it."

"Come back—come back, boys!" cried Dr. Monk. "You can do no good—come back!"

They did not heed.

The crowd watched them fascinated as they ran into the snare of the doorway.

Tom Merry knew the way inside. He had paid many visits there to Gordon Gay & Co. At the foot of the staircase he stumbled over something that lay prone.

He grasped Figgins by the arm, and stopped him.

It was an incredible man who lay there, overcome by the smoke. The two juniors grasped him, lifted him by a great exertion of strength, and staggered out into the open air.

There was a shout as they appeared.

"They've got Hilton!" roared Wootton major.

Scores of hands received the inanimate master from the stretcher bearers.

"Now for the others!" pointed Figgins.

They plunged in again.

They groped their way to the stairs. The smoke was thick about them, and from the lavatory rooms as their light was left came the dull roar of flames and the crash of falling wood-work.

But the staircase was not yet burning, and they scrambled up through the blinding smoke. They had not handicapped their feet over their mouths, but the smoke seemed to be choking them. Tom Merry felt his breath reeling, but he kept an iron grip on himself.

Up through the blinding vapour, into the dormitory passage. Here the smoke was thinner, and they could see. A fair lay huddled under the door of the dormitory, and Tom Merry recognized Gordon Gay. The Australian junior had reached so far when the smoke overcame him.

Tom Merry and Figgins raised him up. Tom pushed him into the arms of the New House janitor.

"Get him out, Figgz—there's another yet."

Figgins nodded; he was past speaking. He scrambled down the stairs with Gordon Gay in his arms, hanging invisible over his shoulder. How he reached the ground floor, Figgins never knew. A fall and blinding struggle through the smoke—with the heat searing to melt the very marrow in his bones! There was a rush of flame—and it scroched him—he groined with the pain—but fought on! Thicker and thicker smoke—a crash—crash—crash! He reeled—but the smoke was thinner—the cool air of heaven blew upon his scorched face. There was a roar!

"How he is!"

They seized Figgins and his inescapable burden, and bore them far from the flames.

But Tom Merry!" muttered Louthen, hoarsely.

Figgins nodded.

"He's looking for Must Blang!"

Then he faded.

There was a rush of fellows towards the house. But a spear of flame in the doorway, a rush of boiling blast, stopped them. The staircase and the hall were on the now—and no living being could have passed that fearful barrier. They scrambled back, scowled and panting. Flame—flame everywhere—cutting off the retreat of the brave junior who had gone in—cutting off help from him!

Where was Tom Merry?

CHAPTER 16.

A Fight for Life!

TOM MERRY, fighting against the heat, the smoke, the darkness that was closing upon him, struggled on in his search. He knew from Gordon Gay that the French junior had got out of the dormitory; but where was he. He groped in the passage—on the stairs! He stumbled at last over an inanimate form.

He stooped down and grasped it.

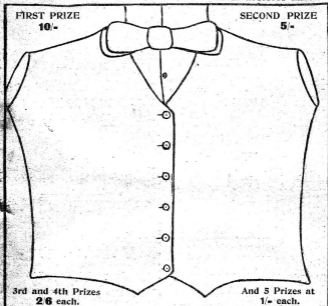
(Continued on page 293.)

A MESSAGE FROM THE SWELL OF ST. JIM'S.

Dear gals and boys,—

I find it so difficult to get hold of a weally decent waistcoat nowadays—these tailah fellahs are such duffahs, you know—that I thought peywwaps you would kindly come to a chap's assistance and design a weally wippin' waistcoat for me. Will you please try, and so do me a great favah? Montay Lowthah says it's wot, but I'es goin' to give him a feahful thwashin'—yass, wathah!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY.



When you have designed a Pattern on this Waistcoat and Tie, Tear out the Whole Page and send it in an envelope to the Editor, Gem Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C. You must put a Penny Stamp on your Envelope.

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Our Weekly Prize Page.

LOOK OUT FOR YOUR WINNING STORYLETTE!

FROM "BASS" MOTIVES.

Two o'clock a.m., and a fine, driving rain, as P. C. 6155 eyed the suspicious lobster. For half an hour had the shabby stranger paraded stealthily about the quiet road under the dripping trees.

"As long as the policeman felt he must act,"
 "Here, my man," he said, coming on the suspect seaward, "what are you doing loafing about here?"
 "Nothing at all, mate," was the reply, which failed to appease the constable.

"Nothing—eh?" he asked sarcastically. "Then why have you been hanging round here for the best part of an hour?"
 "Nothing wrong, I assure you," said the stranger. "You see, I sing tenor in our church, and the bass soloist is ill."

"But what's that got to do with your being here?" interrupted the constable.

"Quite a lot. I've got to take the bass solo to-morrow night, and I'm hanging round here trying to catch cold to lower my voice."

Rantaway: "I'm going to leave the stage."
 Friend: "You'll be missed if you do, old man."
 Rantaway: "That's just the reason I'm retiring. I'm tired of being hit!"

JUST TWINS.

They were delightful children. Their mother's only joy, and so well behaved. Nicely spoken, too.

The stranger had come to tea, and the children were invited forth.

"And what is your name?" asked the visitor of the little boy.

"John William Waters?" came the prompt reply.
 "And what is yours?" the little girl was asked.

"Phyllis Evelyn Waters?" was the equally quick response.

"Ah, I see," remarked the guest pleasantly, "that you're mother and sister?"

The children looked at each other, then glanced at their interloper.

"Oh, no," they replied scornfully in chorus, "we're only twins!"

Casey: "Now, what w'd'ya do in a case like that?"

Casey: "I like phew!"

Casey: "The Union tells me to stroke an' rub cold women when me to ke-ape on wurkin."

DOWN TO ZERO.

Three months of matrimony hadn't taken the gilt off the gingerbread for Mrs. Youngwile. She loved her husband very dearly, and didn't mind saying so.

"When baby was good, she said he was "chocolate cake, three layers deep." If he was extra nice, it was "chocolate cake, four layers deep," and so on.

"One day—how many others?—I stopped in to see her. The young lady was silent and gloved, but the nice mother pretended not to notice it.

"And how's George to-day?" she asked presently.

"Chocolate cake, three layers deep, or four!"

"No," said her daughter.

"Two layers, then?"

"No."

"One layer, then?"

The bride shook her head.

"Then what is he?" asked her mother.

"Dog-biscuit!" snipped Mrs. Youngwile.

PAID IN ADVANCE.

The boatman was smoking his cigar-pipe, lulled by the lap of sad sea waves, when he was wakened by the tramp of a policeman's regulation boots.

"Have you let out a boat called the Alice to-day?" demanded the officer of the law, an edacious toter.

The boatman looked up in mild surprise.

"That's right, mister. A couple took it 'bout an hour ago," was the longshoreman's reply, as he turned the cog in his mouth.

"Then," said the man in blue, in his best police-court manner, "that boat has been found floating bottom up."

He of the sea paled.

"What has happened to the sculls and the cushions?" demanded in hasty tones.

"Sculls and cushions!" said the policeman indignantly.

"Sculls and cushions, indeed! Where are the occupants?"

"Oh, the occupants!" drawled the boatman, in a disinterested voice. "Never mind about them. They paid in advance!"

"I say, old man, I need ten pounds today, and haven't the best idea where I can get it."

"Glad to hear that. I thought perhaps you had an idea you could borrow it from me."

THE ARTFUL SALESMAN.

She was an old lady from the country, clad in shawl and bonnet, and she wanted to buy a pair of bellows.

He was a merry boy, but a smart salesman, and though they hadn't bellows at the price suggested, he was determined that the old lady should become a customer.

"No, madam," said he pattingly, "we have no bellows at half-a-crown; but here is the very article you're needing."

The elderly party ungraciously seized the bellows and scouted over them. Then her eye fell upon the price-ticket.

"Five shillings, indeed!" she cried. "Stuff and nonsense!"

"But, madam," continued the salesman, "when you buy a pair of bellows at this shop we fill them with air free of charge!"

The concession was so alluring that the old lady took the bait, and another bargain was clinched.

"Why are you so nice with that eminent millionaire? He has done some good things."

"He has. I was one of them!"

DENTISTRY BELOW STAIRS.

Mrs. Sabiche had not been married very long, and her Bill would was not much better than a schoolboy. One day Mr. Sabiche's mother sent round a shawl's head as a present, and the unknown delicacy was dispatched to the kitchen for care and attention.

The lady of the house returned from her morning walk, and was rather surprised to find that no dinner was ready. She rang the bell, and the maid appeared.

"Mary," said she, "why isn't the dinner ready?"

The lady of the kitchen was flustered, and obviously ill at ease.

"If you please, ma'am," she said, "I'm sorry the dinner is so late. I can't get on with that shawl's head as all. Why, it took me two hours to draw its teeth!"

MONEY PRIZES OFFERED!

Readers are invited to send ON A POSTCARD Storyettes or Short, Interesting Paragraphs for this page. For every contribution used the senders will receive a Money Prize.

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THIS OFFER IS OPEN TO READERS IN ALL PARTS OF THE WORLD.

In the smoke he could not see—but he knew that it must be Mont Blong. The French junior was quite inassailable. Tom Merry lifted him in his arms—fortuitarily Gustave Blanc was a sturdy-built fellow, and no great weight. The junior of St. Jim's staggered towards the staircase. A rush of flame past him and drove him back. Before him was a sea of fire!

Tom Merry groined, and staggered back. There was no worse discomfort; he was shut up in the burning building! He staggered towards the upper stairs. He knew the way; he could not see as such with his starting eyes.

The upper stairs, hissing, stinging. But he reached the upper stairs, and scrambled up with his burden.

Higher and higher!

There was a door before him now—he grasped at it—it did not open. He knew that it was the door of a room looking on the Close—and it was locked!

If he could get to the window, there was a chance yet! He tugged at the door—he realised that it was locked. But his hatchet was at his belt—and he felt a wave of thankfulness that the St. Jim's firemen had come prepared for work! He dragged out the hatchet, and crashed it open the door.

Crash! Crash! Crash!

Mont Blong hung heavily upon his left shoulder, as he kicked the axe with his right hand.

Crash! Crash! Crash!

Smoke issued him, thicker and thicker, wrapping him like a blanket in its folds. Flame was licking along the floor, along the walls. The heat was fearful. His face and his skin scorching; his hair was singed—he laboured on.

Crash! Crash! Crash!

The lock gave at last! The door swung open—he was through. The room was thick with blinding smoke. He staggered across to the window; it was shut. His hatchet worked upon it, sending glass and splinters out—and he breathed once more the pure air!

Crash! Crash!

The window was smashed out in a few seconds. He could lean out into the air and look down into the Close now.

The crash of the breaking window had drawn all eyes upward. There was a shout from below as Tom Merry was seen:

"There he is!"

The juniors waved their hands to him. They had seen him! But—before him was a sheer wall—fifty feet of sheer descent to the ground.

Behind him the smoke ebbed, the flames ceased!

He left Mont Blong upon the window sill, his legs in the room, his head in the open air. Then, with steady hands, he reached the long rope that was wound about his body under his jacket. Again he thanked his good fortune that he had come ready—that he had forgotten nothing. He uncoiled the rope steadily, and he fastened one end to Mont Blong, round his body under the armpits.

From the ground below—strongly far away it seemed—they watched him intently in terrible silence. They could see almost every movement of the junior at the window. They knew that, even in that fearful moment, he was thinking only of saving the boy he had come to save, and not of himself. He knitted the rope carefully round Mont Blong, with hands that did not tremble. Then he lowered the unresisting junior carefully from the window.

Now, there was a shout below. Fellows rushed forward to take the inassailable junior when he was lowered. They stood ready to catch him if he fell.

Tom Merry paid out the rope steadily. Lower and lower went Mont Blong—lower and lower—till the hands that were reaching upward grasped him, and he was carried back.

Tom Merry turned back into the room. The door of that room was burning now; flames were licking through the walls and the floor. Under him was the terrible and roar of the conflagration. The floor trembled beneath his feet. At any second, as he well knew, it might yield, and precipitate him into the flames below. But he fastened the rope to the bars of the grate with a firm hand. It was the only thing to secure it to. And the flames were licking round it; might burn through it at any moment. But it was his only chance, and he took it.

He climbed out on the window-sill, grasping the rope. His brain was reeling; he was getting now like a fellow in a dream. His senses were leaving him, and he knew it. The flames roared dully in his ears. Below, the ground and the sea of upturned faces seemed to swim.

But, keeping a grip upon himself, he grasped the rope with both hands, and swung clear of the window. Down the rope

was, head below hand. They watched him in hushed terror from below. Down, lower and lower.

The rope cut and bruised his hands. From a lower window the flames licked at it. They scorching him as he passed. Would he lose his hold and fall—fall to a horrible death on the hard stones below?

Hands were raised up to receive him. A blanket had been obtained from somewhere, and half a dozen fellows were holding it for him, if he fell.

Snap!

Rope and junior fell together. The rope had been burnt through in the burning room above. The severed rope came hissing down, and Tom Merry fell like a stone. But he was only a dozen feet from the ground now, and the blanket was ready. He fell into it heavily, dragging it down, but not quite to the ground.

There was a husky shout.

"Safe!"

"He's saved!"

They bore him back in triumph.

Saved!

Tom Merry rolled out of the blanket upon the ground, scorched, blistered, and panting. Lawther and Massens were sobbing over him, unashamed of tears that were rolling down their cheeks.

"Oh, Tom—Tom!"

"I—I'm all right," muttered Tom Merry thickly.

And then he sank back into unconsciousness.

Tom Merry recovered his senses, to find himself at length in bed in the old Shell dormitory at St. Jim's. Figgins was in the next bed to him, and fellows were all round them. Tom Merry opened his eyes, and Figgins grinned at him with his blistered face, and nodded.

"All right, Tommy!"

Tom Merry sat up.

"Yes," he said. "How are you, Figg?"

"Blessed!" said Figgins. "Never mind, the St. Jim's Fire Brigade is a giddy success."

"What do! What about the fire—?"

"The fire brigade got there from Wayland soon after you got out," said Blake, who was sitting beside the bed. "They've saved most of the school; but—but if it hadn't been for you, Tommy, it would have been terrible. Poor old Mont Blong!"

"He's not badly hurt!" asked Tom Merry anxiously.

"No; less than you are, it was only the smoke. He's in a sanatorium now along with Gap. They're both scorched, that's all. And you?"

"Oh, I'm all right," said Tom Merry cheerfully. "And I can't imagine I'm jolly well not going to be made an invalid of."

"I've afraid you will have to stay in the school hospital for a time, Merry," said Dr. Short; and Tom Merry blinked at the medical man. "You have been scorched, and your hair is burnt."

"And you haven't any giddy epidemics left?" grinned Figgins.

Tom Merry put his hand up to his face.

"Oh, my hat! Never mind; they'll grow again!" Then he grinned at Figgins. "You don't look much better, old chap! You look like a parakeet that's dropped into the fire!"

Both Tom Merry and Figgins, in spite of their doctored to be considered as invalids, had to pass a week in the school sanatorium before they were allowed to rejoin their Form. And when they appeared among the fellows again, they were very visible marks of their experience as amateur firemen. It was many weeks before all traces of that adventure left them. But they did not mind. They had proved that the St. Jim's Fire Brigade was a success—a hoisting success, as Figgins jocularly said. And all St. Jim's agreed that the scars they bore were a distinction that any fellow might have envied. And they were not called over the coals for breaking boards that night; that was not likely. When they were recovered, the whole school was assembled in the Hall, and the Head of St. Jim's publicly complimented and thanked the two juniors, and the old Hall rang with cheers for the school's fire-fighters.

THE END.

(Another episode, long complete school tale again in next Wednesday's "Gem" Library, entitled "HONOURS DIVIDED," by MARTIN CLIFFORD. Don't forget to order your "Gem" in advance.)

THE GEM LIBRARY—No. 270.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD, Editor Daily.

NEXT WEDNESDAY!

"HONOURS DIVIDED!"

Great New Public-School Serial!



Sir Billy, of - - - - Greyhouse!

A Magnificent New Serial Story
dealing with Public-School Life.

By R. S. WARREN BELL.

WHAT HAS HAPPENED.

Sir William Percival Yarwood, Bart., to give him his full title—is a slight, fair lad of twelve when he is first sent to "Fighting Greyhouse" by his guardian. His fellow-pupils in the Lower Fourth are considerably older than "Sir Billy," as the youngster is soon nicknamed, and he has to put up with a good deal of bullying. His great hero is Wandour, the captain of the school.

Under the stern rule of Mr. Patterson, the new headmaster, Greyhouse is growing restless, and one memorable night, when the Head, with most of his staff, are absent for the evening, and Wandour is on the sick-list, the school breaks out in open revolt.

Under the orders of a reckless Fifth-Form senior named Bannerman, the rebel baronets themselves in Big School, which they afterwards evacuate, by a stratagem, in favour of the pavilion in the playing-field. Here they successfully resist all the attempts of the masters and succeed in dislodging them. Even the attack of a force of police hurriedly summoned from the neighbouring town of Hallow, fails, and for the time being Bannerman is master of the situation.

(Read on from here.)

The End of the Revolt!

About breakfast-time, when the furnished beds in the pavilion were discovered what was left remained, the look-out on the balcony announced that the enemy was again on the move.

Immediately the balcony was crowded with fellows. The enemy! Hardly. Soon approaching was a party of four—the Head, Mr. Dodson, Mr. Forbes, and an erect, military-looking old gentleman, not at all big, but of tough build and alert step.

He had a kindly face—the little white tuft under his lower lip adding strength to a firm chin; the eyes shining fiercely beneath broad, level brows. Those eyes had gazed on scenes too horrible to describe; had watched pitifully over scenes of dying and death—in times of real warfare. Now, on this pavilion, holding a mob of refractory schoolboys.

As the party drew nearer, the boys recognized the old gentleman with the beaver eyes. It was the chairman of the School Committee—the most brilliant son Greyhouse ever gave to the world. It was, in short, Field-Marshal Lord Chivers, V.C., as well as the idol of the public as of the school which had bred him.

The four gentlemen stepped within a few paces of the pavilion. The famous old soldier lifted his stick.

"Open this door!"

He was obeyed—by Bannerman, who came out into the square with his head bowed.

Lord Chivers gazed at him with interest.

"You're named in Bannerman, is it not?"

"Yes, my lord."

"You organized this business?"

"I did."

"Why?"

"Because, sir, we did not wish Mr. Patterson to remain headmaster."

The Game Library.—No. 270.

NEXT WEDNESDAY!

Lord Chivers gazed sternly—and yet not so very sternly—at the bearded boy before him.

"Let twenty minutes assemble in the schoolroom," he said at length, turning away.

Twenty minutes later, the great general stood by the entrance and faced Greyhouse.

"He made a little speech. He told them, briefly, that it cut him to the heart to find his old school rebelling against those set in authority over them. No excuse could be offered—none would be accepted. He and his fellow-governors would discuss the case of the englanders during the vacation.

"My boys—boys of my dear old school," he concluded, "I believe you regret your action. You were, I grant, led away by your elders, but you are still to blame. I ask you, in the future, by hard work and good conduct, to do all you can to wipe away this blot on the fair fame of Greyhouse School."

That ended the great rebellion.

In the holidays, the governors met and decided that the instigators of the rebellion may be "withdrawn" from the school. Then they were saved the crowning disgrace of absolute expulsion. As for Bannerman, in his disgust his great uncle did not look lightly on his offence, but after a very brief vacation despatched him to one of the strictest schools in Germany. A school conducted by ex-army officers, whose discipline was of the severest.

But Lord Chivers had not forgotten him, and when, on his year of penance expiring, the leader of the Greyhouse rebels returned to England, Lord Chivers advised him to enter the army, and ever afterwards took the kindest interest in his career.

"He's a bit of aascal," he said to his great-uncle, "but he's a born fighter. Verb. sup."

Mr. Sommes Consents.

Mr. Patterson did not resign the headmastership of Greyhouse, in spite of the rebellion; so Bannerman failed to achieve the object he had in view when he let loose the dogs of war on masters and masters.

It was said that the headmaster, whose real foe before had pointed Greyhouse into a state of insurrection never before experienced, was invited to spend part of his Christmas holidays with Lord Chivers; and it may readily be supposed that the recent hostilities were discussed by them at some length during the visit. At any rate, the beginning of the Lent term displayed a distinct change in the Head's policy; no doubt, Lord Chivers had professed some kindly hints which his age, experience, and position as chairman of the governing body of Greyhouse, fully qualified him to give.

Nevertheless, Mr. Patterson's role was firm without being despotic, and in consequence, he ceased to be "lets out" in the eyes of Greys big and little. Indeed, it seemed quite on the cards that in time he might become popular with the boys.

Waydour layd out of hospital on Hallow's arm, some days before the school broke up for Christmas.

He said very little about the rebellion, though it must be confessed there was a strange glow in his eyes when Hallow described the fighting round the pavilion. Even a head-

"HONOURS DIVIDED!"

By MARTIN CLIFFORD,
Great Earl.

manager must be excused for exciting pride in the wretched qualities of his fellows.

None as to Sir Billy.

His hosts, too, may have been labouring under the delusion that the beauty of that white flag was a glory, most appreciable and circumstanced, in whose mouth, in fact, no better would exist.

By way of clearing your mind of this very erroneous impression, a little story shall now be related—just a little story of the Christmas holidays—which will show Billy up in a new light.

On the day Wardour was released from hospital, Mr. Scamozzi was at Greyhounds. He had a habit of driving ever there from Petershall, calling on the Head, looking up his warts, exchanging a word or two with those of the masters he knew, and otherwise spending a pleasant two hours inside the walls of the old school. Sir Billy's guardian was a relation favourite with the Sixth, to whom he could hold forth on politics, sport, agriculture, and education. He held that modern boys put in far too much play, and he often told the Sixth that if he were "their master" he'd keep their noses to the gridstones and turn out "scholars, sir, scholars—not playing truant."

The kindly Sixth listened to Mr. Scamozzi with amusement, and forgave his hisses, because otherwise, he was "such a good old sort, you know."

Mr. Scamozzi, however, really meant what he said. He regarded Billy's various vacations as so much shocking waste of time.

"Why, speak he," when I was a boy I went home twice a year—for a month. Pocket-money! Precious little pocket-money I ever got. Ah! We did work. Now, you neatly play. Three weeks at Easter, seven or eight in summer, and four or five at Christmas—messengers, I call it."

Mr. Scamozzi was feeling like this when he looked in at Greyhounds just before term ended.

"Hallo, young man?" he observed to Billy; "how's things?"

"As usual and guardian were getting to know each other much better as time went by, and were on good terms with one another, ward slipped his hand inside guardian's arm, and proposed to ask guardian something very particular.

"Well, what is it?" demanded guardian, "hard up?"

"No, sir."

"Feel you've been a bad boy, and want to say so?"

"No, sir. I think I've been a very good boy this term."

Mr. Scamozzi smiled.

"Good boy, eh? Call fighting good, or trespassing, or getting five hundred lines for breaking bounds—all that's signs of goodness—eh?"

"On the whole, I mean, sir," explained Billy.

"Mergh! Well, and so, having been a good boy on the whole—you—hallo! Who's that? Why, it's—sir—Parrett, was it your name? How d'ye do, Parrett?"

"Parrett, sir," corrected Sir Billy, bursting into a laugh; "you remember, sir, he was in the trap with Wardour and me."

"Of course!" cried the solicitor, shaking Parrett by the hand very vigorously. "I remember now. You, after that specious business. Well now, look you here, you two, you run away and play. Mr. Mallam, of the Sixth Form, has invited me to take tea with him—on off you go. And—ah! just forgetting you—you wanted to ask me something, didn't you?" he concluded, turning to Billy.

"Yes, sir, if you don't mind, sir—you see, we thought that perhaps you would not mind—"

"Oh, with it," interrupted Mr. Scamozzi; "not so much outside, eh?"

"Well, sir," said Billy, giving his guardian's arm a more affectionate tug than usual, "would you mind very much if I were to come to stay with us these holidays?"

Mr. Scamozzi stroked his chin gravely, as if he were engaged in weighing the pros, and cons, of the suggestion. Had Sir Billy only known it, the solicitor had intended to bronch this very idea to his ward, but his wand had averted him the trouble. It had struck Mr. Scamozzi that Billy might appreciate some holiday society a trifle more youthful than that afforded by himself and his wife.

"I'll think it over," he said at length, "and let you know."

Mr. Scamozzi left Billy knee before he left Greyhounds that evening.

"You can have Retrospect—I mean Parsnip—to stay with you," he said his wand, "but—"

"Oh, thank you, sir."

"Wait a bit, I said 'but.' This is the 'but'—I think these long holidays are a mistake, and so I've asked Professor Pultrevey, your foreign-language master, to come and look after you both. He'll spend the vacation with us, and give you two some lessons every day, just to keep your hand in a bit."

Sir Billy looked glum enough, but he knew that when his

guardian said a thing of this sort he meant it. Mr. Scamozzi was firmly convinced that his wand simply wanted a good portion of his year in what were called holidays, and he was determined to evade some of that waste. If Retrospect—the recent Parsnip—were to stay at Petershall—well, he would have to go in along with William and do lessons with him.

"Shame and shame alike," said Mr. Scamozzi, "being school-fellows and in the same Form."

You can imagine, then, that Billy looked glum—very glum. As for Parsnip, he felt so put out that he really felt it to be his duty to lick some kid, and scoured away on that errand. Certainly, he was getting the better of his bullying propensities by degrees—thanks to Billy's influence—but you can't knock all the bad old Adam out of a chap in five minutes. It takes time, my friends, time!

The Professor.

Professor Pultrevey was not a popular master. He was a German, of course, and a very learned man, but he had not the easy good-nature of most Teutonic instructors. People couldn't tell you why they didn't like Professor Pultrevey; they felt that they didn't. Hidden away at the back of his salience was a certain craftiness—an sly craftiness—that rose to the surface when least expected. The professor did not deal with the boys in the straightforward English way that was common to the other Greyhound masters. He had various unobtrusive methods of causing a fellow cut which the Greys didn't like. He would propose to show off while a Form was doing an exercise, but, as a matter of fact, he was keeping one eye open all the time, and dicking down names for the following day's "deten." Another thing—the professor, full of Continental ideas, had no faith in the honour of an English schoolboy. Going on this system, his peered suspicions jarred on the nerves of many a pup, and there were hot words, long expostions, and reportings to the Head. Professor Pultrevey had to admit—to himself—that he was the most unloved master at Greyhounds.

Personally, he was an immense man, being both great in height and bulk—a pugilistic pugilist, indeed. He had small eyes, a roused, close-shut head, beard and moustaches, and—this was his most prominent feature—a gigantic nose.

In course of conversation with Mr. Scamozzi the professor had hinted to the solicitor on more than one occasion that he was open to take a holiday interspersing. He particularly wished to stay at Petershall, because—oh, frail human nature!—there was a wee, bird-like lady in that town on whom the professor had cast the sidelong or more than one occasion that he was open to take a holiday interspersing. He particularly wished to stay at Petershall, because—oh, frail human nature!—there was a wee, bird-like lady in that town on whom the professor had cast the sidelong or more than one occasion that he was open to take a holiday interspersing. He particularly wished to stay at Petershall, because—oh, frail human nature!—there was a wee, bird-like lady in that town on whom the professor had cast the sidelong or more than one occasion that he was open to take a holiday interspersing.

So when Mr. Scamozzi asked the professor to come and be holiday tutor to Billy and Parsnip that Christmas, the professor accepted with alacrity.

When the trunk and belongings of Professor Pultrevey were deposited in Mr. Scamozzi's hall, Billy's teeth closed with a vicious snap. As soon as he fancied nobody was looking on he gave the trunk a cruel kick, and invited Parsnip to do the same. Parsnip followed his leader meekly, and then the two sativants, bearing a step in the outer vestibule, looked round to find that the professor's mouth grew hard, and a steady glitter came into his bearded eyes. He mentally determined that the Christmas holidays of these two gentlemen should answer strongly of well-thumbed Greyhound class-books.

They held a council of war that night in their bed-rooms.

"The beast!" cried Billy.

"Fat old cod!" chimed in Parsnip.

"He saw us!"

"He'll be 'g for us when he can."

"If we don't make it too hot for him."

"What can we do?"

Billy struck a dramatic attitude.

"I'll tell you—we will refuse to do a stroke of work!"

But Parsnip was more cautious.

"Your guardian," he observed, as he took a spring at his bed and alighted heavily in the middle of it, "was't in any way out. No good refusing to work. Think of something else."

Parsnip, who had an amazing respect for Billy's brains, always left the thinking to him.

"He'll mean that'll something turns up," was Billy's decision, which coincided with this bit of philosophy; "something always seems to turn up, you know."

Well, wasn't it strange? Something did turn up. The professor went regularly to see Miss Duppy, and Miss Duppy, like the modern Niobe, was all smiles. The professor joggled ponderously to her, and Miss Duppy gave pleased little giggles. This encouraged the professor who was largely sarcastic concerning the good Petershall folk, concerning his young charges, concerning even Mr. Scamozzi, whose guest he was.

This was bad form, but Miss Duggy didn't recognize it as such.

No, although the bird-like maiden lady had every wish to remain at Peterhall for the present—she had visions of becoming Mrs. Professor Palmeyer, and holding her head very high among the other masters' wives at Greyhouse—she was under promise to pay a visit to London. It was only for a week, and she couldn't get it off. So she decided to go the day after Boxing Day, and get it over, and so back to Peterhall to her dear professor.

As she was expected in London soon after noon, she forced herself obliged to leave Peterhall quite early—before breakfast, indeed. She bemoaned this fact to the professor.

"Bill," he replied, "if I may, you'd go and see your loaf, Mrs. Duggy. It will give you no small pleasure, I assure you. I feel sure how I feel you—like a little lark I feel spring out of your bed, and be at the station to take your luggage!"

"Oh, Professor!" cried Miss Duggy, all blushes.

"Not a word," murmured the professor—though it was not quite clear why he should forbid his lady-love to speak. "I will be there. I go to make some arrangements."

So, after dressing her tiny hand, he stalked out, waddling the cat under his large foot as he went, emitting a yowling and squawking which almost gave the cat's mistress hysterics.

"Always in the way," murmured the heartless professor.

"Making his arrangements," spent going to bed early. Like most people afflicted with a sluggish liver, the professor slept for a very long time, and very heavily. No sooner had he laid his head on the pillow than a tremble-like noise would announce the fact that he was asleep. No amount of knocking could awake him. You had to let him slide his

time. In order to make sure of being aroused at a certain hour, the professor at times used to adopt the primitive method of tying a piece of string to his great toe, and then getting somebody to pull the string about the hour he wished to arise.

On reaching Mr. Seaman's house, this Boxing Night, therefore, the professor went to his bed-room, and rang the bell.

"Up came Jane, the pretty housemaid.

"Ach, Jane," said the professor, "get in only a couple of minutes. I wish to arise at seven o'clock—work"—with a little shiver—"so early. Nonsense! It can't be done—"

"So shall I call you, sir?" interrupted Jane.

"No need—no need at all. I will not wake if you call a thousand times! So 'ere is mine, professor. No, my dear, do it now. At seven o'clock you will find a little piece of string under my door. Nonsense! set it. Pull that string. Do you see?"

"Yes, sir. At seven o'clock pull the string—hard, sir!"

"No, for goodness sake! Very soft indeed. Pull till I say 'Awake! Jane!'"

"Very good, sir," said Jane.

"But, my dear, Good-night!"

When Jane had gone, the professor undressed and retired to rest. But, alas! on the landing Jane was talking very confidentially to Parsnip and Billy. She was telling them about the little bit of string, and they were listening with mouths and ears well open. You can hear much better if you open your mouth, you know.

The Plot.

As soon as Jane had gone flinging down to the kitchen, Billy hit Parsnip in the chest, and executed a waltz-dance. A Parsnip gazed solemnly at his companion, Billy danced up to him, and hit him in the back. The three Parsnips let go with his right, but Billy was out of range in a twinkling.

"Yes, and, don't you see?" he cried.

"No," said Parsnip shortly.

"Our chance—our chance!" cried the boy who, six months previously, had been wishing himself dead. "Just what we want!"

"That is!" rejoined Mr. Seaman, from the hall.

"Nothing, sir!" replied Billy.

"Then don't waste your time in such foolish talk," observed the adductor. "Go and do some history or geography!"

But the two conspirators retired to their bed-room.

"A long bit of string, please," said Mr. Williams.

Parsnip went off in search of it, and got it from Jane, who handed it to him with a demure innocence which might have led anyone to suppose that she knew no more than the moon what mischief the "young gentlemen" were brewing.

Armed with a great length of string, Billy led the way to the professor's bed-room. There, just shortly under the door, was the "little piece" the professor had spoken of. Billy opened the door, and, looking in cautiously, listened.

"Fast asleep!" he whispered to his companion in gait.

"Come on!"

They crept into the room. Having viewed the eyes of Billy couldn't see the bath anywhere at first; soon he spied it, and gently drew it out from beneath the bed, and placed it just by the side of the bed. Then he quietly supplied the contents of the professor's water-jug into this, and deposited Parsnip for their own jugs, which, having emptied, he rolled Parsnip off, and then crept that into the bath as well.

"That was Part I."

Having very, very gently the piece of string which was attached to the slumbering professor's toe, Billy used to it the great length of string Parsnip had borrowed from Jane. Then, opening the window a fraction of an inch, Billy lowered the string until the end of it dangled on the garden-path.

"This was Part II."

Then Billy led Parsnip down to the room which Mr. Seaman had made over to them as a play-work-work-play-room.

"Good boys!" said Mr. Seaman, putting his head in about 10.30. "You can go to bed now, though."

While they undressed, Parsnip and his friend could hardly contain themselves for laughter. The thought of what Professor Palmeyer would tumble into when he awoke—very cold bath—tickled them immensely. Then that string on his toe!

"How he'll follow!" shouted Parsnip.

"Won't he hop?" screamed Billy, falling off his bed in his merriment.

"We shall be square with him," said Parsnip.

"Quite!" cried Billy joyfully. "Touch the old cod to come here, and make an oval just because he wants to wash Mother Duggy!"

Then, solemnly, they spun a coin in the air to determine which should steal forth into the cold morning and pull the string which was to arouse the professor. Parsnip lost the toss, and so it was arranged that Parsnip should go upon his errand about the time the professor had told Jane to wake him.

The two conspirators were in great haste; they lay awake till midnight glancing over the probable results of their machinations, and arose several times in the course of their sleepiness to explode with mirth.

It was great!

Just before seven, Billy awakened Parsnip.

"Who's murrer?" inquired Parsnip sleepily.

"Come on," said his friend, "get out! You've got to go and pull the string, you know!"

"So, I have?" rejoined Parsnip. "What a fog!"

"Henry up!" said Billy.

With much grumbling Parsnip departed. A few minutes later, while Billy was chuckling between the warm clothes, Parsnip dashed into the room drenched from head to foot—a sorry spectacle indeed!

"Ugh! Look here! Ugh! Oh, I pulled the beastly string, and— Ugh! I don't see there's anything to laugh at!" he concluded, savagely seizing a hot bath-towel, and beginning to rub himself.

Billy, controlling his mirth with an effort, asked his friend many questions, but could only elicit this information. Parsnip had given the string "an awful tug," when it flew down came a torrent of water. Then, asked Parsnip, there was a laugh—it was the professor's beauty, only laugh. He didn't want to hear any more; he came in to get dry.

On examining the scene afterwards, Billy found, attached

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to one end of the string, which had come away in Parmpip's hands, a tin. But Sir Billy couldn't understand how that tin had come there.

Now, as to the instructions the professor leaned over tight.

About seven o'clock, Jane went to the professor's bedroom, and gave the string which she found projecting from under the door a little tug.

"Thank you, Jane," she heard the professor say; "you didn't pull again, Jane, I am awake."

Jane retired, feeling a trifle disappointed. She had treacherously told the two Gveys all about the professor's piece of string, and she had quite expected that they would make use of this information. But evidently they hadn't.

Fifteen minutes later, the professor went quietly out of the house, and in about an hour's time he returned with a good appetite for breakfast. He had seen Miss Duppy off at the station, and was in great good-humour with himself.

When his two girls came down he greeted them to their wonder—in a most affable manner. Then they learnt something was happening. Something was.

The recent breakfast was over he bade them go to the schoolroom and do a German exercise. This took them a good hour. For half an hour he lectured them on the mistakes they had made, and then made them do another exercise. So till lunch. After this usual he came more highly than of his information. But evidently they hadn't.

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Neither answered, but they looked at each other.

The professor walked to the door, changed his mind about going out, and came back.

"I think," he said softly, "I think you feel 'ave 'ave 'oliday to-morrow, as I am going to London."

He turned to Billy.

"I've got obliged to you, you've visiting to make sure I would awake at seven o'clock. You're obliged, and do have to do cold bath—very thoughtful of you to put it by say had so that I should not 'ave to walk to it. You are very obliging young gentlemen."

Billy coughed, and shuffled about uneasily.

The professor looked at them aside.

"I thought," he murmured, "I thought I would not wait do cold bath, so I put it on chest of drawers, and it'll be under it, and when do the you pull, do bath tip up, and so somebody down below 'ad cold bath all at once, but not me. You, you may bring all day to-morrow—'ave 'ave 'oliday. You 'ave been very good boys—I feel tell Misses Scames you good boys you 'ave been."

And smiling once more with irresponsible candour, the professor withdrew.

When his footsteps had died away, Billy looked at Parmpip.

"He must have been awake when we went in," he whispered.

"Talk about wily," returned Parmpip, with gloom, "he's the wisest old beggar I ever met."

"No good trying to get quits with him," said Billy.

"No good at all," chimed in Parmpip.

But they went to bed doubtfully agreeing that Professor Palsweyer had been one too many for them.

Another good instance of the splendid proof which they give out of themselves, when "Gosker" will be introduced to another famous character at Gosker, by name J. O. Jones. Order your "GEM" at once. Price One Penny.

A NEW FREE CORRESPONDENCE EXCHANGE.

The only names and addresses which can be printed in this column are those of readers living in any of our Colonies who desire Correspondents in Great Britain and Ireland.

Colonists sending in their names and addresses for insertion in the columns of this popular story-book must state what kind of correspondent is required—boy or girl, English, Scotch, Welsh, or Irish.

Those who correspond must send with each notice two stamps, one taken from "The Gem," and one from the same week's issue of its companion paper, "The Magnet" Library. Coupons will always be found on page 2 of both papers, and requests for correspondents not containing these two coupons will be absolutely disregarded.

Readers wishing to reply to advertisements appearing in this column must write to the advertisers direct. No correspondence with advertisers can be undertaken through the medium of this office.

All advertisements for insertion in this Free Exchange should be addressed: "The Editor, 'The Gem' Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C."

B. J. Eld, 2, Bird Avenue, Toronto, Canada, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in England, age 14-17.

Mrs. E. Gillespie, care of Post Office, Oshkosh, near Maroon, North Island, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with readers living in the British Isles.

H. Correll, care of R. Row, Queen Street, Auckland, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in England or Ireland, age 17-20.

A. G. Gillman, care of W. Brittain, Valley Farm Dairy, Hurstford, Ontario, Canada, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in London, age 16-20.

A. Handman, 623, City Hall Avenue, Montreal, Canada, wishes to correspond with readers living in any part of the world.

J. Gibcox, Charles Hotel, Madison Street, Japan, Johannesburg, South Africa, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in the British Isles, age 13-20.

R. Bonceller, Railway Crescent, Maryborough, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader, age 16.

Elmasa Burgeat, 23, Light Street, Woodstock, Ontario, Canada, wishes to correspond with a girl reader about 20-27.

N. J. Ewert, 12, Mulgrave Street, Kensington, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl or boy reader of "The Gem" living in England or Ireland, about 20-27.

S. F. Cross, care of J. Newell, dentist, High Street, Christchurch, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in England, about 16.

E. G. Johnson, care of Box 42, Port Elizabeth, Cape Colony, South Africa, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in England, age about 17.

M. Murray, 120, Queensland Street, North Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader, age about 12-15.

C. Turner, 25, Mathews Road, Toowoomba, Melbourne, Australia, would like to correspond with girl readers or school-boys living in England.

C. Day, care of Box 2425, Johannesburg, South Africa, wishes to correspond with boy or girl readers living in any part of the world.

C. Matfield, Ngatimau Street, Nelson, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with a girl friend, especially those living in India.

H. Higgs, General Delivery, Sioux City, Iowa, U.S.A., wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in England.

Miss V. Harding, 43, Strada Moadelli, Valletta, Malta, wishes to correspond with a boy reader living in the United Kingdom, age about 15.

F. G. Sverds, Bonetta Gold Mines, Meedias, Barbeton, Transvaal, S. Africa, wishes to correspond with a boy or girl reader.

C. Frade, care of G.P.O., Hastings, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with a boy or girl reader, especially one working in a G.P.O., or interested in stamps.

H. G. Willis, 10, Cavendish Street, Perth, West Australia, wishes to correspond with a boy reader, age about 13, with a view to exchanging stamps.

The Editor specially requests Colonial Readers to kindly bring the Free Correspondence Exchange to the notice of their friends.

OUR SPECIAL WEEKLY FEATURE



THIS WEEK'S CHAT

WHOM TO WRITE TO :
**EDITOR,
 "THE GEM" LIBRARY
 THE FLEETWAY HOUSE,
 PARSONS GREEN, LONDON, E.C.**

OUR TWO COMPANION PAPERS
**"THE MAGNET" LIBRARY,
 AND EVERY MONDAY
 "THE PENNY POPULAR,
 EVERY FRIDAY.**

For Next Wednesday.

"HONOURS DIVIDED!"
By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Our next grand, long, complete tale of Tom Merry & Co. tells of the tremendous rivalry which springs up between the juniors of the two Houses at St. Jim's for the possession of a new boat. Now days are not specially sought after as a rule; but Cedric Lacy is an exception, owing to the simple fact that his reputation as a brilliant cricketer has preceded him to St. Jim's. The struggle between the rival Houses is fierce and victory hangs in the balance until Tom Merry & Co. by a bold stroke, succeed in turning the scale in favour of the School House. Then, and not till then, is a staggering discovery made, regarded by Lacy's critics, which considerably spoils the celebration of Tom Merry & Co.

"HONOURS DIVIDED!"

is full of interest and excitement, and every Gemite should make a special point of getting next week's special number, which contains many other good things besides the long complete Tom Merry story.

EAST LONDON AND SWANSEA LEAGUES FORMING.

Every week my post-bag contains evidence that new "Gem Leagues" are springing into existence all over the country, and it is evident that my loyal readers are not for one moment relaxing their efforts to make the good old "Gem Library" and its worthy companion papers, "The Magnet Library" and "The Penny Popular," the best-known and most widely-read school story books in the country. This week my chairs of East London and of Swansea are offered the opportunity of joining local Leagues, which are being formed in their midst, and I have pleasure in giving here the names and addresses of the two enthusiastic Gemites who are getting them up. All readers of "The Gem," "Magnet," and "Penny Popular" who wish to join a League in the East End of London should send to their issues and addresses to J. Schwartz, 25, Princess Square, Cable Street, London, E.; while Swansea readers wishing to join a local League should communicate with E. Lobb, 35, Vinson Street, Swansea. Stamped, addressed envelopes should be enclosed when writing for information.

EXPENSIVE STAMPS.

Stamp-collecting is becoming more and more a hobby of the great and rich. For at a recent exhibition, where 300,000 rare stamps were on view, the fact was revealed that the collectors included, besides kings—King George V. is an enthusiastic philatelist—many hundreds of well-known officials from all over the world, not to mention several famous millionaires.

Indeed, many of these exhibitors travelled from such distant spots as Russia, Norway, Sweden, Japan, China, and elsewhere just to be present at this exhibition.

The finding of some of these rarities is particularly interesting. An exceedingly precious series of old Swedish stamps was discovered in the stamps decorating the invitations of an old couple, written between the years 1855 to 1858. Others of almost the same value had been rescued from lumber-camps and worn duffles.

But one of the rarer and most expensive stamps recently exhibited was valued at \$2,000. It was a primitive Hawaii stamp, used in the '60s.

Realize in Brief.

"A Constant Reader" (Australia).—While I feel much flattered by your request, I am afraid I am too busy to comply with it.

"A Harbourside Reader."—I want thank you for your very kind wishes. I am afraid Mr. Richards is too busy at present. Perhaps later as I can arrange something.

G. (Cardiff).—I am sorry I cannot undertake to supply the thousands and thousands of my readers with badges.

HOW TO BECOME A MOTOR-DRIVER.

Should you wish to become a motor-driver, you will require to special qualifications beyond an excellent sight and good health. If you possess no knowledge of mechanics, it will be necessary for you to undertake a course in a school of motoring, of which there are a very large number in all parts, but the best varying from four pence upwards. A very good school with excellent fees is to be found in The British School of Motoring, Coventry Street, Finsbury, London, W.C.

At these schools, amongst other important things, you will learn the complete working of a motor of any type and, hailing from any country. At first you will be shown of the "fit and comely" of a small engine possessing but one cylinder, and after having become thoroughly acquainted with this engine, you will pass along to a car boasting of four cylinders. After a comprehensive course of mechanical instruction, the more interesting part of the course will be entered upon—that of driving and street work.

An instructor will take you out on a modern car and explain all the niceties of driving. Then, under his direction, you will be required to take the wheel and pilot the car yourself, gradually working from supervision by-way to the leader throughout. This course of road-driving will be repeated on different cars of varying powers and types until you are an accomplished driver and thoroughly familiar with all the rules and usages of the road. It is usual then for the pupil to come for the examination for motor-car drivers instituted by the Royal Automobile Club, of Pall Mall, S.W. Should you fail, most schools will continue to instruct you without further fees.

Should you wish to become a driver of a car belonging to a private individual, you should look at the advertisements in the daily papers. A good paper to watch is "The Daily Telegraph." Positions vacant are often advertised in the motoring papers, such as the "Motor," "Automotor," etc.

To become a motor-bus driver, application should be made by letter to the London General Omnibus Company, Limited, Grosvenor Square, London, S.W.

A bus driver can obtain as much as £2 2s. per week, according to the particular work he is doing.

To obtain a post as a driver of a Royal Mail van (motor, of course) application should be made by letter to the G.P.O., King Edward Street, London, E.C.

To become a driver of a taxicab car, a special examination has to be undertaken. This examination is set by the police, and consists of, amongst other things, a test of your knowledge of the laws, where you are intending to ply for hire as a "taxi." Should you satisfy the police authorities you will be granted your licence, and now it only remains for you to obtain your car. Some men own their cars, others hire them for a certain period; but information on this point can be obtained from any large motor-car firm, such as the General Motor Car Company, Limited, of 1, Brixton Road, London, S.W.

THE EDITOR.