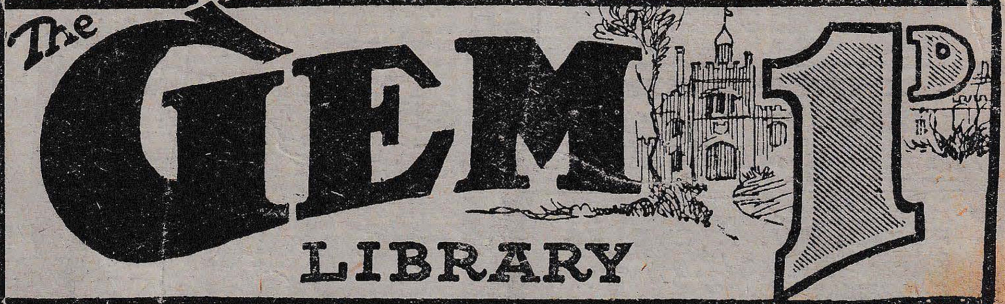


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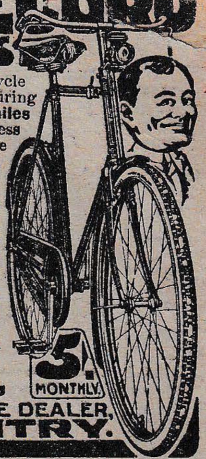
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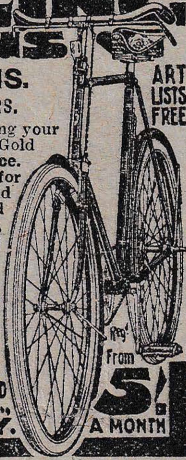
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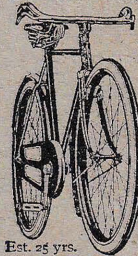
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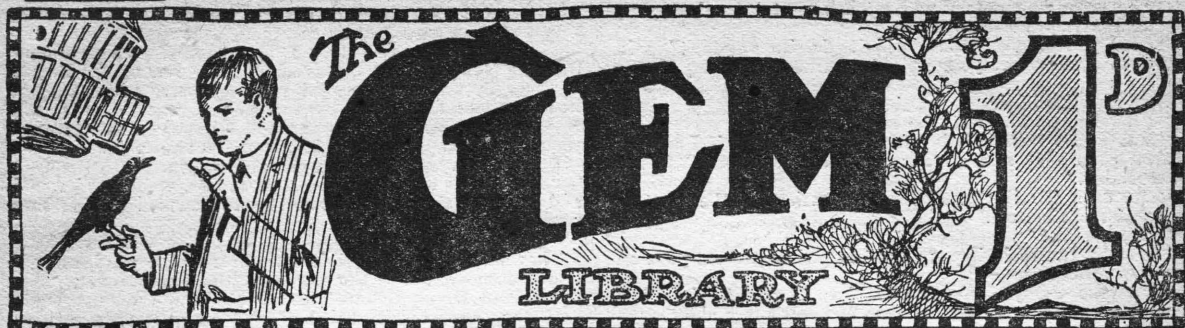
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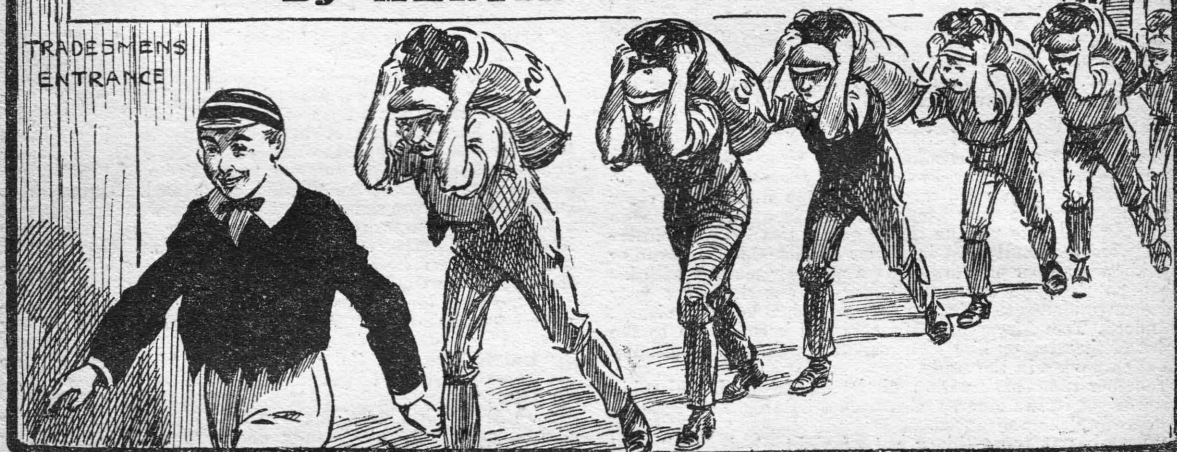
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CHAPTER 1. The Raiders.

"T'S rotten!" said Tom Merry.
"Simply rotten!" said Blake.
"Yaas, wathah!" chimed in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy dolorously. "Awf'ly feahfully wotten, deah boys!"
It was. For it was a half-holiday at St. Jim's, and the day of the junior House match, when Tom Merry & Co. of the School House had intended to give Figgins & Co. of the New House the licking of their lives, and Figgins & Co. of the New House had intended to give the School House fellows a never-to-be-forgotten whacking. One side must have been disappointed, in any case; but, as it happened, both sides were disappointed, for the ground was too wet for playing at all.

And Tom Merry & Co., as they stared out of the window into the quadrangle, where the old elms were still glistening with recent rain, grumbled.

It is an ancient British privilege to grumble at British weather, and the School House juniors were doing it. The sun had come out after the rain, and was shining merrily down in the quadrangle, making the rain-drops sparkle on the leaves and the grass. But the cricket-pitch was soaked, and play that afternoon was out of the question. If it had been merely the senior House match, concerning the Sixth and Fifth, it would not have mattered so much, as Monty Lowther thoughtfully observed. But it was the junior House match, and concerned their noble selves. That made all the difference, and Tom Merry & Co. agreed unanimously and emphatically that it was rotten.

Tom Merry had made a pilgrimage to the pitch to see whether there was a chance. He came to the conclusion that there wasn't. And he came back to the School House with muddy boots and a frowning brow, and pronounced that it was decidedly, undeniably, and exceedingly rotten.

"The question is, what are we going to do with the afternoon?" growled Lowther. "Cricket is off—right off!"

"Might be able to take some photographs!" Manners remarked, in a thoughtful way. "I'll let you fellows see me take some snaps, if you like."

"Br-r-r!"

"Pewwaps we might get up a little concert!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I should be vevy happay to contwibute a few tenah solos."

"You might be!" agreed Lowther. "But the happiness would be strictly limited to yourself, you see."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"What about a paper-chase?" asked Blake.

"Too warm."

"There's only one thing I can think of," said Tom Merry, after considerable thought. "We can rag the New House chaps. If we can't beat them on the cricket-ground, we can rag them. After all, that's what the New House chaps are for—to be ragged!"

"Hear—hear!"

"But the beasts are indoors, and we can't raid their House!" said Manners. "Ratty would be down on us! He has rheumatic pains in his little feet in rainy weather, and it makes his little temper ratty."

"Figgins & Co. are going to have a feed in their study!" growled Herries. "I saw Fatty Wynn taking in a pie from the tuck-shop!"

Tom Merry grinned. "What price screwing Figgins & Co. up in their study while they're having their feed?" he asked.

"Couldn't be done!" said Blake.

"You Fourth-Form kids couldn't do it!" agreed Tom Merry. "But I think we could!"

"Oh, rats!"

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

Next Wednesday:

"COWARD OR HERO?" AND "THE CHEER-OH CHUMS!"

"If I were a bettin' chap, Tom Mewwy, I would bet you a fivah that you couldn't do it!"

"The other bounders would catch you at it, and mop up the floor with you!" said Blake.

"And you Shell chaps couldn't do it, anyway!" said Herries. "It's above your weight, you know, a thing of that sort."

Tom Merry sniffed.

"I'll take Gussy's bet!" he said.

"But I didn't make a bet, deah boy! I said if I were a bettin' chap—" said Arthur Augustus. "Bettin' is not respectable."

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Monty Lowther. "We are told to respect our betters."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Lowthah, if you persist in makin' wotten puns on a wainy aftahnoon—"

"I'll take Gussy's offer!" said Tom Merry, firmly. "Of course, I couldn't permit him to bet. It's my duty as a member of a higher form to keep you kids from entering recklessly on the road to ruin. But if we succeed in screwing Figgins & Co. up in their study, Gussy spends his fiver in standing us a feed in our study. If we don't we stand you a feed in study No. 6. Is it a go?"

"Good egg!" said Blake. "Done!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Done!" said Herries and Digby together. "Gussy agrees."

"Weally, you know—"

"Right!" said Tom Merry. "Lowther, old man, get the screwdriver and a gimlet and some screws out of your tool-chest, and we'll start."

"And we'll hang round as near as we can," said Blake generously. "You'll want us to carry you home after the New House chaps have done with you."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Terrible Three of the Shell sniffed in chorus. Monty Lowther went up to the study for his screw-driver and the other requisites. Monty Lowther was the owner of a tool-chest, and sometimes did carpentry in the study. If a chair were damaged, Lowther would mend it in a way that made it quite possible to use the chair again. If a key were lost—keys were frequently lost in junior studies—Monty Lowther would open a door or a drawer in a masterly manner with his tools—so that the door or drawer in question bore very little resemblance to a door or a drawer when he had finished.

Indeed, Tom Merry and Manners had been driven to the point of threatening him with instant slaughter if he did any more carpentry in the study.

Lowther came back with a gimlet in one hand, and a big screwdriver in the other, and a pocket bulging with screws.

"Ready!" he announced.

"Bettah put those things out of sight, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus. "If Figgins & Co. see you comin' with a sewewdwivah, they'll smell a wat. Bettah dwop it!"

Arthur Augustus suddenly left off his remarks, and danced upon one foot in the passage, clasping the other with both hands.

"Yawwooh—yawwoop! Oh, you uttah ass! What did you dwop that wotten thing on my foot for? Ow! Yawwooh!"

Monty Lowther picked up the screwdriver, and regarded D'Arcy in surprise.

"You told me to drop it!" he said, with an air of injured innocence.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! Bai Jove! You silly ass! When I said dwop it, I didn't mean dwop it, you ass!" roared Arthur Augustus, still hopping on one leg. "I meant dwop it, you fathead."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, that's lucid, at all events," said Tom Merry. "I meant dwop the ideah, not the sewewdwivah, you fwabjous ass!"

"My mistake!" said Lowther blandly. "If you fellows are ready, we'll start."

Lowther put the screwdriver and the gimlet out of sight in his pockets, and the Terrible Three left the School House. They walked off with an air of great confidence; but inwardly they were not feeling quite so confident as they looked. They had, in fact, taken on rather a big order. To gain entrance into the New House unobserved, and to screw up the door of a study in the Fourth-Form passage there, without being discovered and captured by the enemy, was no easy task. But, having taken it on, the Shell fellows would not allow themselves to appear doubtful about the result.

Blake & Co. watched them go, with a grin.

"As soon as they're in the New House, we'll stroll round, and pick up the pieces when they're chucked out on their necks!" grinned Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

They watched the Terrible Three across the quad, and the trio disappeared into the porch of the New House. Then the School House fellows strolled out into the quadrangle, with the charitable intention of picking up the pieces when the Terrible Three were ejected with violence from the New House.

CHAPTER 2.

Not Quite a Success.

"Q U I E T!" murmured Tom Merry.

Manners and Lowther were not making a sound, but Tom Merry was leader, and as leader it was, of course, his business to give directions.

Lowther grunted.

"Quiet yourself, you ass!" he said. "Don't jaw!"

"Look here, Monty—"

"Look here, fathead—"

"Shut up!" murmured Manners. "Don't rag now! Looks as if we've really got a chance, if we're careful."

It did look like it. It happened that the New House fellows were holding a meeting of the New House Junior Dramatic Society in the common-room. From that apartment came a buzz of voices, but the door was closed. The passages and the stairs were deserted. The raiders were in luck.

They tiptoed up the New House stairs, and gained the Fourth-Form passage. There was no one in sight. Some of the study doors were open, and the juniors could see into them; but the studies were untenanted.

"They're holding some giddy meeting downstairs!" murmured Tom Merry. "This is simply a slice of luck, my infants!"

"Unless Figgins & Co. are downstairs with them, and we can't screw them up!" grunted Lowther.

"H'm!"

Tom Merry had not thought of that for the moment. He paused outside Figgins' study door. The fact that Fatty Wynn had been seen to take a pie into the New House was an indication that the Co. were at home. But the School House juniors did not want to screw up the study with the owners thereof outside it. At the same time, it was impossible to look into the study and see if Figgins and Kerr and Wynn were there. That would, of course, have given the alarm at once, and the raiders would have had a hornets' nest about them in a moment.

But they were soon reassured. As they listened outside the door, they heard a sound of someone moving inside the study. It was unmistakable—they could hear papers being moved on the study table, and a shuffle of feet.

"They're here!" murmured Tom.

And Manners and Lowther nodded.

"Buck up with the screws! They might open the door any minute!" murmured the captain of the Shell.

"Leave that to me!" said Lowther.

He produced a gimlet from his pocket, and began to bore into the door with a steady hand, silently. He drove the gimlet through the edge of the door slantwise into the jamb. Then he withdrew it, and inserted the screw, and applied the screwdriver. Lowther made hardly a sound as he worked. In a couple of minutes the screw was driven home to the head.

The Terrible Three chuckled silently.

It would have required a great deal of force to get that door open, without the screw being withdrawn. And the raiders were not finished yet.

Lowther knelt close to the door, and drove the gimlet in again, this time slanting through the door to the floor beneath. A screw was speedily driven into the hole made by the gimlet. Lowther, rather red with his exertions, rose to his feet with a triumphant grin.

"They won't get that door open in a hurry!" he murmured. "May as well give 'em a few more, to make sure, though."

"Cave!" murmured Tom Merry.

He had caught sight of a junior coming up the stairs. If

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(See column 2, page 26 of this issue.)

was Redfern of the Fourth, and he was coming up, all unconscious of the fact that there were School House fellows there. The Terrible Three backed out of sight, and slipped into a study of which the door was open. They hoped the junior would pass on; but as soon as they were in the study, Tom Merry made a discovery.

"I—I say, this is Reddy's study!" he murmured.

"Oh, my hat! You ass——"

"Well, you didn't notice——"

"I'm not leader!" grunted Lowther.

"I think——"

"Shush!" said Manners.

Redfern's footsteps came along the passage. It was possible, of course, that he was not coming to his study. If he passed on, all would be well. If he came in he was certain to discover the raiders. The Terrible Three crammed themselves behind the door and waited. If the alarm was given, it would not be easy for them to get out of the House; a single yell from Redfern would alarm the crowd of juniors below. They listened breathlessly to the approaching footsteps.

The footsteps paused outside the study, and Redfern came in. The door was half open, and Redfern pushed it wide open as he entered. There was the sound of a loud crack as the door collided with Manners' head, and a yelp from Manners.

"Ow!"

Redfern jumped.

"Why—what—who—Hallo! School House cads! My hat!"

"Collar him!" gasped Tom Merry.

The Terrible Three leaped at the New House junior. To collar Redfern, lock him in his study, and bolt—that was the programme. But matters did not go according to programme. Redfern was a particularly wide-awake youth. He made a backward spring through the doorway into the passage, and the Terrible Three tumbled over one another instead of Redfern. The next instant Redfern was tearing along the passage towards the stairs, and bawling at the top of his voice:

"Rescue! School House cads! Rescue!"

He went down the stairs three at a time.

"Run for it!" gasped Lowther.

The Shell fellows ran down the passage. They descended the stairs by means of the banisters, with a wild whiz, and rolled over one another in the hall below. Redfern had the door of the common-room open, and was shouting to the juniors meeting there.

There was a rush of feet.

"School House cads! It's a raid! This way!"

A crowd of New House juniors came swarming out. Foremost among them was a tall, slim junior, and after him came a decidedly plump youth—and the Terrible Three gasped as they recognised Figgins and Fatty Wynn. And Kerr, the other member of the famous Co., whom the raiders had believed to be screwed up in their study, came dashing out after them, followed by the crowd.

"M-m-my hat!" gasped Tom Merry.

They had screwed up Figgins's door. Somebody was in Figgins's study. But Figgins & Co. evidently weren't. Figgins & Co. were here—rushing at them with warlike looks. There was no time to think out the problem then. The Terrible Three made for the doorway; and the New House crowd made for the Terrible Three.

Three juniors bounded down the steps together—twenty boots came crashing behind to help them go! Three wild roars awoke the echoes.

"Oh!"

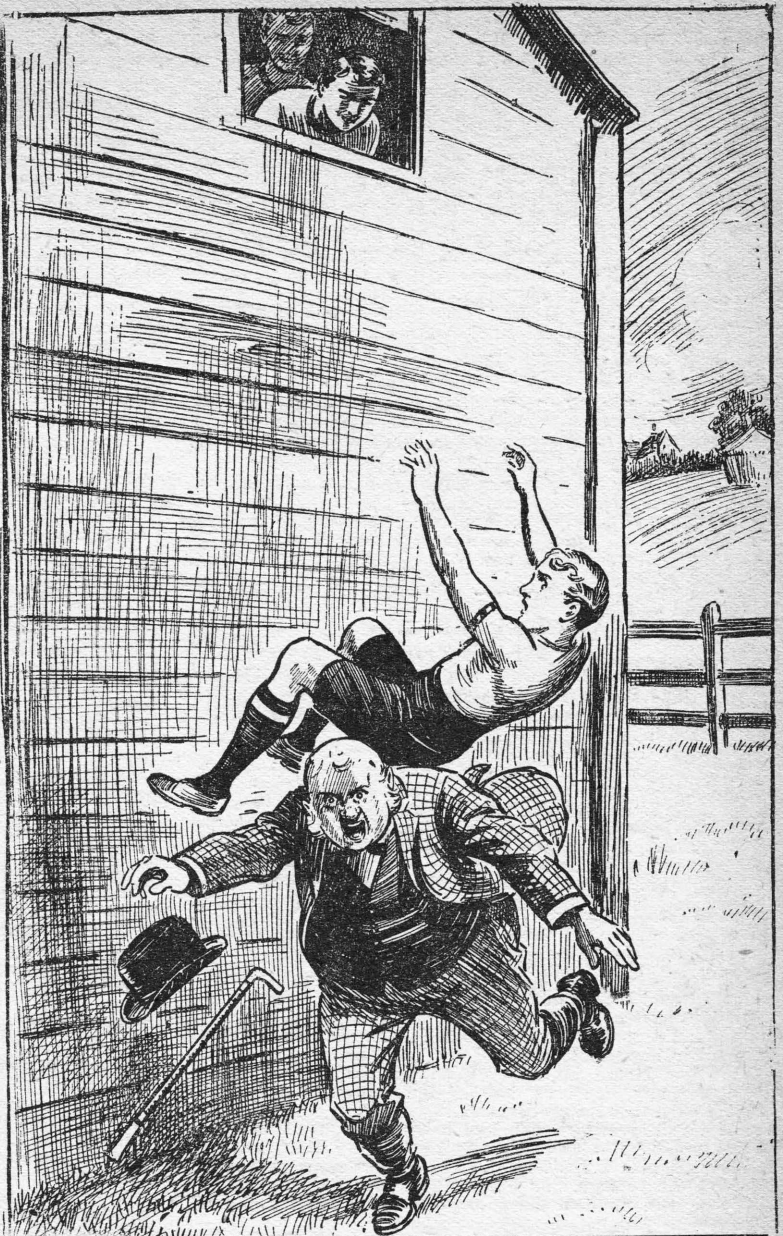
"Ow!"

"Yah!"

Three raiders rolled over one another outside the House.

"After them!" roared Figgins.

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther picked themselves up in a twinkling, and ran. After them rushed the New House crowd, determined to capture them and avenge the



As the portly farmer arrived beneath him, Tom Merry let go, and he fell—and landed fairly on Mr. Oates' broad shoulders. Mr. Oates rolled over, and Tom rolled over him. "Quick!" gasped Lowther. (See Chapter 6.)

raid of their quarters. The Terrible Three dashed across the quadrangle as if they had been racing on the cinder-path.

"Collar 'em!" yelled Figgins. "We'll teach 'em to raid our House! We'll——"

"Rescue!" shouted Blake, and the Fourth-Formers dashed to the aid of the Terrible Three.

There was a collision of the two parties in the quad., and the New House pursuers had to stop. For a few moments there was a tussle, and then the Terrible Three and their rescuers retreated into the School House; and the New House crowd, after delivering a series of yells and cat-calls, returned to their own side of the quad. In the School House, Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther gasped breathlessly, and Blake & Co. grinned.

"Lucky for you we were on the spot," chuckled Blake. "They'd have wiped up the ground with you! I told you so!"

"Yaas, wathah! And you will wemembah that I told you so, too, deah boys!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You owe us a feed!" grinned Herries. "I saw Figgins

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& Co. in that crowd! You haven't screwed them up in their study!"

"I can't understand it!" gasped Tom Merry. "We've screwed up Figgy's door—and there was somebody in the study! Of course we thought it was those bounders! It must have been somebody else!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's somebody at Figgy's study window!" said Kangaroo of the Shell, who was looking out of the window. "I can't see who it is—he's too far off—"

"Get your glasses, Gussy!"

The juniors rushed up to Study No. 6. They were very curious to know whom it was that the Terrible Three had screwed up in Figgins's study. Arthur Augustus produced his handsome opera-glasses and focussed them upon the study window in the distant House. Then he staggered back.

"Oh, cwumbs! Oh, scissahs! Oh, cwikey!"

"Who is it?" yelled Blake.

"Watty!"

"Oh!"

It was Mr. Ratcliff, the Housemaster of the New House, whom the raiders had screwed up in Figgins's study! And the silence of their utter dismay fell upon the hapless raiders! To screw up the rival juniors in their study was a howling joke. But to screw up a Housemaster, and a particularly bad-tempered House-master at that—

"Well," said Jack Blake, apparently essaying the role of Job's comforter, "well, I must say you chaps have really been and gone and done it now!"

CHAPTER 3: A Rat in a Trap!

FIGGINS & CO. returned hilariously to the New House. The School House raiders had been caught in the act, and they had been kicked out of the New House, and chased home to their own quarters.

Figgins & Co. had reason to feel triumphant.

"The bounders!" said Figgins. "Fancy having the cheek to raid us—in our own House! I wonder what they were going to do if Reddy hadn't spotted them?"

"Might have been after my pie!" said Fatty Wynn, with sudden anxiety. "Oh, Figgy! I told you it would be better to have the feed before the meeting—"

"They didn't take the pie away, anyhow," grinned Kerr. "They went in too big a hurry to think of taking anything with them."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Might have taken it inside!" said Pratt.

"But they were in my study," said Redfern. "That's where I found the bounders!"

"Might have eaten my pie all the same," said Fatty Wynn. "I think I'll go and see if it is safe! You can't be too sure in a really important matter."

The New House juniors crowded upstairs to see what damage, if any, had been done by the raiders. Figgins had half-expected that the uproar would have brought Mr. Ratcliff out of his study—which would probably have meant lines for all concerned. But there was no sign of the Housemaster, much to Figgins & Co.'s relief. The juniors came up to the Fourth-Form passage, and Fatty Wynn turned the handle of his door. But the door did not open. There was a sound of a movement within.

"My hat!" exclaimed Fatty, in amazement. "There's one of the bounders still here! He's locked himself in!"

"Phew!"

"Oh, good!" grinned Figgins. "There were more than three, then; and this chap couldn't get away in time. We'll make an example of him!"

"Yes, rather!"

Figgins knocked on the door, and shook the handle imperatively.

"Let us in, you rotter!" he shouted through the keyhole. "We've caught you, you waster! We're going to make an example of you!"

"Figgins! How dare you?"

Figgins staggered back in horror.

He knew that voice.

There was no mistaking the rasping tones of Mr. Ratcliff, the master of the New House.

Figgins simply gasped.

"RATTY!"

"Ratcliff!" murmured Redfern.

"Oh, my hat!"

There was an angry knock on the inside of the door.

"Let me out at once, Figgins! How dare you play this trick on your Housemaster? You wicked, ruffianly boy, I command you to let me out!"

"Mad!" murmured Redfern. "Quite dotty! How can we let him out when he's locked himself in? I've often thought Ratty was rather potty."

"Do you hear me, Figgins?"

"Ye-es, sir!" gasped Figgins. "I—I didn't know it was you in there, sir. I thought I was talking to some chap in the School House, sir."

"Nonsense, Figgins! You knew perfectly well that I was here! You deliberately locked me in the study!"

"I didn't, sir! I haven't been here at all—and the key's on the inside of the door," said Figgins. "I can see it in the keyhole! You must have locked the door yourself, sir."

"What! What! How dare you say anything so absurd? I——" Mr. Ratcliff broke off as he discovered that the key was indeed on the inside of the lock.

He tried to turn the key, and then made the further discovery that the door was not locked at all.

"Poor old Ratty!" murmured Kerr. "Fancy his going quite potty in his old age!"

Mr. Ratcliff shook his head from within.

"The door is not locked at all, Figgins! You are holding it from outside! I command you to open the door at once! I shall punish you severely for this!"

"The—the door won't open, sir!" stammered Figgins. "Are you sure, sir, that you haven't locked it? I don't see why it won't open if it isn't locked."

The screws that Monty Lowther had driven into the door were buried deep in the dark wood, and could not be seen without a special search for them. And it did not occur to Figgins for the moment that the door had been screwed up.

"You know very well that the door is not locked, Figgins! You are keeping it shut in some manner! You knew I was here, and you have fastened me in! I shall deal with you severely for this, Figgins! Open the door at once!"

Figgins turned back the handle and shoved the door hard. But it did not move.

"I can't open it, sir," he said. "It seems to be jammed somehow. Try if you can open it from inside."

"Figgins, how dare you lie to me!"

Figgins flushed with anger.

"I'm not lying!" he retorted. "There are a dozen fellows here, and they can all see that the door won't open. I didn't know anything about your being in the study, either. It's not usual for a master to be in a junior's study without the fellow knowing."

"Shut up, you ass!" murmured Kerr, catching Figgys' arm.

"Jolly good mind to tell him what I think of him!" growled Figgins.

The juniors all knew what to think of Mr. Ratcliff. The Housemaster had not gone to the study for any reason that would have done him credit. Mr. Ratcliff had stealthy, inquisitive ways that made him very unpopular. He had gone to Figgins' study during Figgins' absence from it for reasons of his own—to make an investigation, he would have said. To spy, the juniors would have said—among themselves, of course, and not to Mr. Ratcliff. It was particularly exasperating to the Housemaster to be caught in the act; for although he was satisfied with himself, he was not anxious to draw public attention upon his peculiar little ways.

The angry Housemaster shook the door-handle furiously. But the juniors either could not, or would not, let him out, and he crossed to the window in the hope of seeing some senior in the quadrangle whom he could call to his rescue. Fortunately, Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, was just coming in, and Mr. Ratcliff shouted to him from the window:

"Monteith! Monteith!"

The prefect looked up in surprise at hearing his name shouted from above.

He stared in astonishment at the angry face of Mr. Ratcliff staring down at him from the window of the junior study.

"Did you call me, sir?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, Monteith! The juniors have fastened me up in this room!" said Mr. Ratcliff, breathing hard. "Will you come and release me?"

"Certainly, sir!" said the astonished prefect.

Monteith hurried into the House, and up the stairs. He found a crowd of juniors all talking at once outside Figgins' door. The juniors were getting a little scared now. They could imagine what Mr. Ratcliff would be like when he was released.

"The young rascals!" Monteith exclaimed. "You will catch it for this! Open the door at once, Figgins!"

"I can't," said Figgins. "It seems to be fastened, some-

ANSWERS

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how. Ratty—I mean, Mr. Ratcliff—says he hasn't locked it; but it won't open."

Monteith tried the door. It remained fast.

"Are you sure it isn't locked, sir?" he said through the keyhole.

"Of course I am sure, Monteith!" rapped out the Housemaster. "Don't be foolish!"

Monteith turned red. He did not exactly like being told not to be foolish before a crowd of juniors. Some of the juniors grinned.

"Well, I can't open it, sir," said Monteith shortly.

"Are not the boys holding it?"

"No, they are not."

"Then it must be fastened in some manner from outside," said Mr. Ratcliff.

Monteith made a careful examination of the door. He felt over it, and felt the head of one of the screws driven in so deftly by Monty Lowther. Then he understood.

"It is screwed up, sir!" he said.

"My hat! Screwed?" said Figgins, in wonder. Then he burst into a chuckle involuntarily. He understood now what the School House fellows had done. They had screwed up the Housemaster in mistake for himself!

Monteith looked at him sternly.

"This is no laughing matter, Figgins. You will get into trouble over this."

"I!" exclaimed Figgins indignantly. "I didn't do it! I hadn't the faintest idea the door was screwed up!"

"Then who did?"

Figgins did not reply. He knew very well who had done it, but he did not intend to say so. It was not his business to "sneak."

"Screwed up!" said Mr. Ratcliff, seeming to speak with difficulty. "The authors of this—this outrage shall suffer for it! Pray get a screwdriver, Monteith, and release me!"

"Very well, sir."

The prefect hurried away, and returned with a screwdriver. He unscrewed first one and then the other of the screws. Then the door swung open, and Mr. Ratcliff strode forth, with rustling gown and flaming face.

"Now," he thundered, "which of you screwed up that door, knowing that I was in the study?"

There was no reply.

"Was it you, Figgins?"

"No, sir."

"I do not believe you. The assumption is that it was you, as I was in your study. And if no one else here admits having done this——" Mr. Ratcliff paused, and swept his little steely eyes over the crowd of juniors; but no one spoke.

"Very well, Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, you will follow me to my study! I shall cane you most severely!"

"We didn't do it, sir," said Kerr.

"Silence!"

Mr. Ratcliff stalked away. The three dismayed juniors followed him. They were adjudged guilty, and there was no way of saving themselves—unless by giving away the Terrible Three. And that did not even enter their minds. There was always warfare between the juniors of the two Houses; but it was always fair and loyal, and not a fellow on either side would have dreamed of "sneaking."

But just as the Co. were following Mr. Ratcliff into his study, Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther arrived on the scene. They followed Figgins & Co. in. Mr. Ratcliff picked up a cane, and turned round, and then stared in surprise at the School House fellows.

"What are you doing here?" he exclaimed harshly.

"If you please, sir——" began Tom Merry.

"Have you anything to say to me?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then you may wait till I have punished these juniors. Not a word! I decline to listen to you till I have punished these juniors!"

"But, sir——"

"Silence, Merry!"

"But it's about what you're going to punish them for, sir!" persisted Tom Merry desperately. "You see, sir, we——"

"Silence, I say!"

It really looked as if Mr. Ratcliff guessed what was coming, and did not want to lose his excuse for caning Figgins & Co. But Tom Merry was not to be denied.

"It was we who screwed up the study door, sir!" he said.

"What!"

"Figgins hadn't anything to do with it, sir," said Tom Merry. "We were japing Figgins. We heard somebody in the study, and thought it was Figgy, and screwed up the door."

Mr. Ratcliff breathed hard. He understood that the School House juniors had chivalrously come over from their House to own up as soon as they knew that their little joke was likely to get somebody else into trouble. But Mr. Ratcliff

did not feel any admiration for such chivalry. He was only exasperated.

"You dare to admit this, Merry?"

"Yes, sir. We had no idea you were in the study."

"I do not believe you, Merry!" said the Housemaster, between his teeth. "I believe this is a trick to save Figgins and Kerr and Wynn from their just punishment. Doubtless, you hope that I shall let them off, and then hand you over to your own Housemaster, knowing that I do not approve of Mr. Raiton's leniency. Well, Merry, you will be disappointed. I shall certainly not leave you to your Housemaster. Your offence has been committed in my House. I shall take your punishment into my own hands."

Tom Merry flushed.

"We don't mind that, sir. We don't want you to report us to Mr. Raiton. But we didn't mean any harm, sir! We thought we were screwing Figgy up in the study——"

"Do not repeat that ridiculous story, Merry. I know perfectly well that this was a concerted trick among all of you."

"It was nothing of the sort, sir."

"Certainly not, sir," said Figgins.

"Silence!" said Mr. Ratcliff, his thin lips closing tight. "I shall cane all of you in turn. You are all equally culpable, to my mind. You first, Merry. Hold out your hand!"

There was nothing for it but to obey. The juniors went through the caning with feelings too deep for words. The injustice of it cut deeper than the cane. Any other master at St. Jim's would have accepted Tom Merry's explanation, and dismissed Figgins & Co. unpunished. Not so, Mr. Ratcliff. A victim once gathered into his net had little chance of escaping unscathed.

The six juniors were caned in turn. Then Mr. Ratcliff threw the cane upon the table, and waved his hand towards the door.

"You may go," he said, "and I trust this will be a lesson to you."

The juniors went without a word.

But outside in the passage they looked at one another, and they found words enough.

"The rotter!" murmured Tom Merry.

"The beast!"

"The cad!"

"He's all that, and more," said Figgins miserably. "It was jolly decent of you fellows to come over and own up. But it's no good with Ratty. He was wild with us, you see, because we found him spying in our study through you fellows screwing him in. He was bound to put us through it, the cad. Still, it was jolly decent of you to come over."

"Jolly decent," said Kerr.

"Yes, rather," said Fatty Wynn, rubbing his plump hands, "and—and you can come up and have some of my pie, if you like."

Tom Merry groaned.

"I don't feel much like pie now," he said. "I feel like slaughtering Ratty. If you ever find a dead pig lying about the quad, you'll know what's happened to Ratty. So-long!"

And the Terrible Three returned lugubriously to their own House.

CHAPTER 4. A Big Order!

"AUGHT it bad?" asked Blake sympathetically, as the chums of the Shell came back into the School House.

The Terrible Three groaned in chorus.

"Yes, rather."

"Nevah mind, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus comfortingly. "You did the wight and pwopah thing in ownin' up, you know, and gettin' Figgins & Co. off."

"But we didn't get them off," said Manners. "Ratty pretended to think that we were all in the game together, and he licked them, too."

"Bai Jove!"

"Awful cad!" said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard Mr. Ratcliff as a wank outsidersah, deah boys. Of course, it would have been beneath your dignity to wemonstwate with him!"

Tom Merry grinned painfully.

"It wouldn't have been any good, or we'd have chanced the dignity," he said. "But we'll make him sit up for it. How were we to know that he was spying in Figgy's study? He's licked us as much as if we'd screwed him up in his own study. He's a beast! But we'll make him sorry for himself, somehow."

"We jolly well will," said Monty Lowther, with a grimace. "Anybody in the prefects' room, do you know?"

"Most of the Sixth are on the river," said Blake. "What do you want in the prefects' room?"

"I want to use the telephone."

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY!

"COWARD OR HERO?" A Magnificent, Long Complete Tale of Tom Merry & Co.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"Well, you can use it if the prefects are there, if you ask permission."

Monty Lowther grinned.

"But I don't want to ask permission," he explained. "It's a giddy little secret. I think I'll go and see if the room's empty."

Monty Lowther walked away towards the prefects' room, and the other fellows, curious to know what idea the humorist of the Shell had in his mind, followed him. Monty Lowther tapped at the door and entered. The room was sacred to the use of the members of the Sixth Form who had attained the rank and dignity of prefects, though other members of the Sixth sometimes used it. But juniors were quite barred, and the Fifth never ventured in.

There was a telephone in the room, which fellows were allowed to use after asking a prefect's or a master's permission. If there had been anyone in the room, Lowther had an excuse ready; but, fortunately, the Sixth were all out of doors. The ground was unfit for cricket, but the seniors were at rowing practice, and those who were not in the boats were on the raft or along the towing-path. There was brilliant sunshine after the rain, and it had tempted all the fellows out of doors. Monty Lowther looked cautiously round the room, and ascertained that the armchairs were all unoccupied.

"All serene!" he remarked, as he approached the telephone and took up the receiver.

"What's the little game?" demanded Blake.

"Listen, and you'll find out!"

On the shelf under the telephone was the telephone directory, and Monty Lowther glanced into it quickly. A voice came from the Exchange asking to know what number he wanted.

"1001 Wayland!"

Lowther waited patiently, with the receiver in his hand. The other juniors regarded him in surprise; 1001 Wayland was the telephone number of Mr. Rutter, the outfitter and general provider in Wayland, from whom the juniors obtained most of their sporting requisites. A voice came through.

"Is that Rutter's?" asked Lowther.

"Yes."

"This is St. Jim's. Kindly book an order for Mr. Ratcliff, New House, St. Jim's!"

"Yes, sir."

"Three dozen cricket-bats, at fifteen-and-six, and one dozen of your special match cricket-balls as advertised," said Lowther.

"With pleasure, sir."

"Kindly deliver them to-morrow morning at half-past nine, as nearly as possible."

"Our van shall call at that time, sir. Can we supply you with anything else? We specially recommend our tennis racquets."

"No, thank you, that will do."

"If you would like me to send a specimen racquet—"

"No; the New House juniors make racket enough as it is."

"Eh?"

"I mean I'm not requiring any racquets at present. Kindly deliver without fail at half-past nine in the morning. Remember, Mr. Ratcliff—Horace Ratcliff, New House, St. Jim's."

"Certainly, sir."

Lowther rang off. Tom Merry & Co. stared at him blankly. The nerve of Lowther's proceeding simply took their breath away.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "You awful ass, Lowther! What will Watty say when they delivah those dozen cwicket-bats and a dozen cwicket-balls to-morrow mornin'?"

"I really don't know," said Lowther blandly. "But whatever he says, it will be interesting, I think." And he rang up again.

"108, Wayland!" he said to the Exchange. "Hallo, hallo! Is that one-nought-eight Wayland—Mr. Robinson's?"

"Yes, this is Robinson's."

"Have you a very comfortable armchair—real leather, well padded, at a moderate price? This is St. Jim's."

"Certainly, sir. Our special Library Easy-Chair is exactly the thing you want, sir. The price is absurd. Merely six guineas."

"H'm! Six guineas! You can recommend that chair?"

"Absolutely, sir."

"Could you deliver it here at a quarter to ten to-morrow morning without fail?"

"Certainly, sir."

"Very well. Deliver to Mr. Ratcliff, New House, St. Jim's, and kindly send the bill with it, and instruct bearer to ask for payment."

"With pleasure, sir."

And Lowther serenely rang off. Tom Merry sank into a

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chair and gasped. The other juniors grinned and stared at the humorist of the Shell. Monty Lowther prided himself upon his sense of humour. But certainly his sense of humour had never been known to proceed to this length before. And he was not finished yet. After a minute had elapsed, he rang up the Exchange once more, and asked to be put on to 606, Rylcombe.

"That's Bunn!" exclaimed Blake. "What do you want with Bunn's?"

"You'll see. Hallo, hallo! Is that Mr. Bunn's, the confectioner's?"

"Yes, sir."

"This is St. Jim's. Can you fulfil a large order at a very short notice—two hundred jam-tarts and one hundred pound-cakes—currant cakes—by ten o'clock to-morrow morning?"

"Certainly, sir. My establishment could easily fulfil a larger order than that."

"Very well. Kindly deliver to Mr. Ratcliff, New House, St. Jim's, without fail, at ten o'clock to-morrow morning."

"Very well, sir. Thank you, sir."

Lowther rang off. He gave the Exchange one minute's rest between the rounds, as he expressed it, and then rang up again. This time it was for Mr. Wiggs, the costumier and tailor and dealer in ready-made clothes in Rylcombe.

"Hallo! Is that Mr. Wiggs'?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is it Mr. Wiggs speaking?"

"Yes. What's wanted?"

"This is St. Jim's," said Lowther, disguising his voice as well as he could, for he had a personal acquaintance with Mr. Wiggs. "This last time I—er—passed your establishment, Mr. Wiggs, I noticed that you were—er—advertising a new line in reach-me-downs—I mean in ready-made attire for boys."

"Certainly, sir. My guinea suits are a marvel—for style, fit, wear, comfort, and elegance. They are fully equal to the thirty-shilling suits sold by rivals in Wayland."

"Quite so. Can you send me fifty of your guinea suits immediately, Mr. Wiggs? Can they be delivered by ten o'clock—ahem!—I mean a quarter-past ten, to-morrow morning, without fail—Mr. Ratcliff, New House, St. Jim's."

"Certainly, sir. The sizes—"

"All of a size, please—the same size as the sample Guinea Suit outside your shop, Mr. Wiggs! I may rely upon you!"

"Absolutely, Mr. Ratcliff."

"Thank you! Good-bye!"

"You—you awful ass!" roared Manners, as Lowther blandly rang off. "Chuck it! What will Ratty say when they deliver fifty guinea suits to-morrow morning? My hat! Whom are you ringing up now, you frabjous ass?"

"Pillbury, the chemist. Hallo, hallo! Is that Mr. Pillbury?"

"Yes. Who is there?" came back on the telephone.

"This is St. Jim's. Kindly deliver twenty large-size bottles of cod-liver oil to-morrow morning, at half-past ten, to Mr. Ratcliff, New House, St. Jim's."

"Very well, sir."

"Drag him away!" gurgled Blake. "There will be an earthquake to-morrow, if this goes on. Shut up, Lowther! Ring off, you ass!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm ringing on," grinned Lowther, busy with the telephone again. "Thank you, miss! Will you give me 801? Thank you! Hallo, hallo! Is that Mr. Snorks?"

"This is Snorks."

"Kindly deliver ten legs of mutton, and twenty pork chops, at a quarter to eleven to-morrow morning, personally to Mr. Ratcliff, New House, at this school—St. Jim's."

"Very well, sir. A quarter to eleven?"

"Yes; as near as possible."

"Most certainly, sir."

"Yank him away from that telephone," said Tom Merry faintly. "The—the awful ass! Monty, old man, chuck it! You've done enough already to be flogged about ten times for."

"One more order!" said Monty Lowther. "Ratty ought to be laying in coals. It's good economy to buy your coals in the summer, you know, and save them up for the winter. You save a lot of money that way. 210 Wayland, miss, please. Thank you. Hallo, hallo! Is that 210 Wayland—Welsher Co., Coal Merchants?"

"Yes."

"This is St. Jim's. Kindly tell me your lowest price for twenty tons of good house coal."

"We can do good house coal at nineteen shillings a ton at present, sir, taking twenty tons. We could make a reduction for a larger quantity."

"Indeed! A substantial reduction?"

"Fifty tons could be supplied for eighteen shillings a ton, sir—best quality house coal. These are our lowest summer prices. I may add that we defy competition."

"Very well. Make it fifty tons—only I require them to be delivered at a time when I can personally superintend the matter. Do, please, let your vans arrive here at eleven o'clock to-morrow morning."

"Certainly, sir; that can be arranged."

"Kindly deliver to Mr. Ratcliff, New House, St. Jim's, and send the invoice at the same time. I do not want any account to run."

"It shall be as you wish, sir."

"Thank you!"

Lowther rang off. He was turning over the leaves of the telephone-book, when his chums made a sudden swoop on him, and bore him off by force. He was rushed out of the prefects' room by main force.

"That's enough," said Tom Merry, laughing till the tears came into his eyes. "Anything after the fifty tons of coal would be an anti-climax. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fancy Ratty will be rather worried to-morrow morning, with so many tradesmen delivering their goods," said Lowther thoughtfully. "Still, it will be very nice for the Fifth to get rid of him for a bit."

Cutts, of the Fifth came by as the Shell fellow was speaking. Cutts looked suspiciously at the grinning juniors.

"What have you young rascals been up to?" he demanded.

"Snuff!" said Lowther blandly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We've been doing you a favour, Cutts," said Lowther. "I say, Cutts, I've been thinking of a conundrum? Why are you and I like two famous comic papers? Because one's comic Cutts, and the other chips!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Cutts, of the Fifth, did not laugh; he frowned and walked away. It was beneath the dignity of a lordly member of the Fifth to be "chipped" by juniors. The Terrible Three chuckled gleefully; consoled for their licking by the anticipation of the surprise and rage of Mr. Ratcliff, when all those articles, so recklessly ordered by Monty Lowther, were delivered to him in succession on the following morning.

CHAPTER 5.

Hare and Hounds.

THE question isn't settled," Jack Blake remarked, after a time. "What question?"

"What are we going to do with the giddy afternoon?"

"If you chaps would care for a concert in the studay, I should be vevy pleased to contribute some tenah solos

"My idea is that we want to prove a strong alibi for this afternoon," said Blake. "There may be inquiries to-morrow as to whether anybody was seen near the telephone. Let's make it a paper-chase."

"Who says paper-chase?" asked Tom Merry. "Hands up for hare and hounds!"

Many hands went up. It was obviously the best way of filling up an otherwise empty afternoon.

"Right-ho!" said Tom Merry. "Look out for the scent—Gussy's contributions to the next number of the 'Weekly' will do. Tear 'em up small—"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"And Skimpole's scientific books," said Lowther. "It will save him from the awful labour of reading them. Who's going to be hare?"

"Three hares this time," said Tom Merry. "We three, as we're the best runners in the Lower School."

"Good egg!" said Manners and Lowther heartily. The Fourth-Formers did not say "Good egg!" They glared.

"Well, of all the silly asses!" began Jack Blake emphatically.

"Yaas, wathah! Of all the cheekay duffahs—"

"Of all the impatient chums—"

"You chaps leave off talking about yourselves for a bit," suggested Lowther, "and let's get to bizney. I think we had better take some Thatcho with us, in case we get tired."

"What on earth for?" demanded Manners.

"It's a hare-restorer," explained Lowther.

They fell upon Lowther, and smote him hip and thigh. Then the scent was made, all sorts and conditions of papers being torn up for the purpose. Old exercises, and fly-leaves of volumes, and old magazines and numbers of Tom Merry's "Weekly," and scientific books belonging to Skimpole, and volumes of poetry belonging to D'Arcy, were added to the

pile, and three bags were soon filled. The word went round that hare and hounds were starting, and a large pack gathered. Figgins & Co., and a crowd of New House fellows joined the pack, and more than a hundred fellows lined up in the quadrangle to start.

Mr. Railton, the master of the School House, was in the quad., and he smilingly agreed to start the hunt. The Terrible Three, looking very fit in their running clothes, with their bags of scent slung on, stood ready for the house-master to give the word. The ground was wet, but there was a bright sunshine, and the countryside was drying up under the sun blaze, and it was likely to turn out a very pleasant afternoon.

"The run goes round by the wood, over the moor, and back to Rylcombe over the bridge, and the level crossing," said Tom Merry. "When you fellows get in, you'll find us at tea."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Go!" said the Housemaster.

The Shell fellows trotted off, and disappeared out of the gates of St. Jim's.

They had five minutes start before the pack was let loose on them, and they made the most of it. The three hares were in splendid form, and they ran fleetly down the road, and took the path over the fields towards Wayland. There the scent was dropped as they ran. They were in the midst of wide green fields when the sound of a bugle on the clear air was wafted to their ears.

"That's Blake's toot!" said Monty Lowther. "They're after us!"

"Come on!"

The hares ran on fleetly.

They turned into the wood, leaving the scent among the underbrush, and crossed the woodland stream wading. All the hounds who did not like water would have a long way to go round there, and the pack would be diminished. On the opposite bank the scent was laid again, and the juniors came out at last on the high road to Wayland. They turned off before they reached the town, however, and ran upon the wide, lonely moor, leaving the scent among the gorse and ferns. Another ta-ra-ra on the bugle warned them that they were seen, and they looked back and saw the figures of the pursuers dotting the moor in the distance.

"They're sticking to us!" said Monty Lowther. "Let's give 'em a run across Mr. Oates's farm—Oates will make things pleasant for 'em!"

Tom Merry looked serious.

"Oates is a bad-tempered old chap!"

he said. "He may cut up rusty. You know, he's sworn a solemn swear that he won't allow school-boys across his land, ever since the time he caught Levison and Mellish chasing his ducks."

"But we're nice good boys, quite Erics, in fact, and he ought to be pleased to see us."

"He ought to be—but he won't be!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"And we shall get through all right, and we can leave the pack to argue it out with Oates, or go round!" added Lowther.

"Oh, all right!"

The juniors dipped into a deep hollow of the moor, that hid them from the sight of the pack. Keeping under cover of the depression in the ground, they left the scent along the hollow, and then through deep thickets, till they came to the first field belonging to the extensive farm of Mr. Oates. It was very likely that they would get through Mr. Oates's land uncaught, but the pack would probably find trouble there. But that, as Monty Lowther observed, was their business.

Unfortunately for their calculations, it was the hares that found the trouble.

As they came dashing across the field, leaving the scent in their wake, a good distance now ahead of the pack, a portly gentleman in gaiters, with a very ruddy face stepped from the farmhouse in the distance and sighted them.

His ruddy face became ruddier at the sight of the three schoolboys tearing across his fields, and leaving the trail of torn paper. He waved a riding-whip in the air, and shouted to them.

"Hi, there! Get off my land! Go back! D'ye hear?"

The juniors apparently did not hear. They kept on. The stout farmer began running to intercept them.

"It's all right!" panted Tom Merry. "We shall get past before he can stop us. The pack can talk to him!"

The three juniors dashed on. The farmer failed to intercept.

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cept them, but he came thundering in their wake, gasping for breath as he ran.

"Hi, Garge! Hi, Garge! Hi, Joe!" he roared.

Two stout countrymen appeared from a haystack, with pitchforks in their hands. They looked at the farmer, and they looked at the running juniors.

"Stop 'em!" roared Mr. Oates. "Stop them! D'ye hear?"

The two yokels stood in the path of the Terrible Three, with the evident intention of stopping them.

"Bump 'em over!" said Tom Merry. "We can't stop now! I don't want to go back and talk to Oates!"

"Ha, ha! No!"

But it was not so easy to bump over the yokels. As the schoolboys bore down upon them, they put up their pitchforks in a defensive attitude, and the Terrible Three had to halt. They could not run on the prongs of the pitchforks. Garge and Joe grinned.

"Happen you'd better stop, young measters," said Garge.

"Let's get by, like good chaps!" said Tom Merry.

But Garge shook his head. Evidently he was not a good chap.

The Terrible Three looked back. Farmer Oates was lumbering on, and he had a big mastiff with him. The juniors did not like the look of the farmer, and they liked still less the look of the mastiff.

Tom Merry whistled softly.

"Looks to me as if we're in a fix!" he murmured.

"Dodge them across the field!" said Manners.

But the farmer shouted again.

"Stop, you young raskils! Fetch 'em, Cæsar! Fetch 'em!"

He came panting up.

"You try to run, and Cæsar'll stop you, fast enough!" he grunted. "Mark 'em, Cæsar!"

The mastiff showed his teeth and growled. Between the farmer and his men and the mastiff, the unfortunate hares had no chance. They had to stop.

"Look here," said Tom Merry; "we're doing no harm trotting over the field, Mr. Oates."

The farmer grunted.

"Some of you was chasing my ducks the other day——"

"That wasn't us! We wouldn't do it!"

"You're all the same," said Mr. Oates, "and ain't you seen the board—Trespassers will be prosecuted.—By horder?"

"Yes; we thought that was your little joke, you know," explained Monty Lowther.

Mr. Oates grunted.

"You'll find it ain't a joke!" he said. "You belong to St. Jim's, I suppose?"

"Ahem!"

"I'll soon find out. I'm going to Rylcombe presently, and I'll take you in the trap, and drive you up to the school," said Mr. Oates. "I dare say your 'ead-master will recognise you."

The juniors regarded one another in dismay. To be taken back to St. Jim's in Mr. Oates' trap, and delivered up to the Head—it was not to be thought of. But there was no escape. Three men and a mastiff were more than a match for the three heroes of the Shell.

"I say, Mr. Oates——" began Tom Merry.

The farmer interrupted him.

"Don't you say nothing," he said. "'Tain't for you to talk. Bring 'em along, Garge and Joe, and I'll lock 'em up in the stable till we're ready to take out the trap! Pass the word round to the other 'ands that there are a mob of schoolboys yonder to be kept off the land."

And the Terrible Three, five minutes later, were disposed of in Mr. Oates' stable, and the key was turned upon them.

CHAPTER 6.

A Dash for Liberty.

"MY only sainted aunt!" groaned Monty Lowther.

"Oh, dear!"

"Great pip!"

The Terrible Three bemoaned their fate.

The run that had started so cheerfully seemed likely to end in disaster.

They were locked up in Mr. Oates' stable, and they had to remain there till Mr. Oates was ready for his afternoon drive to Rylcombe. And then he would call at St. Jim's with the three juniors in his trap, to ascertain whether they belonged to that school—as he was pretty certain they did. The juniors knew what the result would be. Dr. Holmes would have no choice but to punish them for trespassing on the farmer's land.

"Come to think of it, it's wrong to trespass!" said Manners thoughtfully.

Monty Lowther grunted.

"Only just thought of that?" he inquired.

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"THE MAGNET" LIBRARY,
Every Monday.

Our Companion Papers.

"THE PENNY POPULAR"
Every Friday.

"But Oates is a beast, all the same!"

"Must be a direct descendant of Titus Oates, I should think," growled Tom Merry. "Almost wish now that we'd fought for it. But you can't punch pitchforks and mastiffs!"

"We hadn't a chance! What a rotten end of a run!"

"Disgusting!"

"Rotten!"

"The farmer's men will be keeping the pack off, though," said Tom Merry thoughtfully, after a pause. "They'll have to go round—and it's a good way. If we could get out of this, we might get ahead of them still!"

"But we can't get out!"

"We'll try!"

Tom Merry tried the door of the stable. It was securely locked on the outside. There was a ladder into the loft over the stable, and he mounted into the loft. The loft doors were closed, but there was a little window, not made to open. Tom Merry looked through the window; it commanded an extensive view of the surrounding country. For in the distance he could see back the way they had come, and he caught sight of the pack. More than fifty fellows in St. Jim's colours had been stopped on the border of Mr. Oates' ground by a group of farm-labourers, armed with pitchforks. The pack were arguing hotly with the farmer's men, who evidently refused to let them pass, and declined to listen to their reasonings. Tom Merry could see Arthur Augustus D'Arcy laying down the law to Garge, who was grinning stolidly.

"Well, Sister Anne, do you see anything?" demanded Lowther. The chums of the Shell had followed Tom into the loft.

"They've stopped the pack!" said Tom Merry.

"That's good!"

"And I fancy about all the farm hands are over there—nearly a quarter of a mile away—blocking the way!" Tom Merry remarked. "If we could get out of this, there wouldn't be anybody to stop us. The mastiff's over there, too—it's a case of all hands to repel boarders!"

Monty Lowther looked from the little window.

"I can't see old Oates among them, though," he remarked. "Well, we could handle Oates, by himself, without his blessed mastiff and his Garges and Joes with their pitchforks."

"This window isn't made to open."

"We can change all that, though. A window can be made to open—by shoving something through it. It's quite simple."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was the only way, and the Terrible Three realised it. They did not want to do any damage to Mr. Oates' property, and if they could have smashed the window without damaging it, they would willingly have done so. But it was evidently necessary to smash it, and the damage had to be risked. Tom Merry looked round for a weapon. There was nothing but hay in the loft.

"Shove an elbow through it," said Lowther. "Those rotten sashes won't stand a shove!"

"Good! Go it, Monty!"

"Eh?"

"I said go it!" said Tom Merry.

"I'm waiting for you to go it!" said Lowther pleasantly.

"Might get out!"

"Just what I was thinking," said Tom Merry.

"Well, go ahead! The farmer may come any minute to take us to the school."

"Ahem!"

"A leader's place is to lead!" Manners remarked, in a reflective sort of way. "I may be mistaken, of course, but that's what I've always thought."

"Go it, Tom!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Look here, you two fellows hold me up, and I'll try my boots on it," he said.

"Well, that's not a bad idea."

Tom Merry mounted on the shoulders of his chums, and crashed his boots upon the little window. The frail sashes and the glass flew out together.

Crash—crash—crash!

There was a shivering of broken fragments of glass on the ground outside. Tom Merry jumped down from his chum's shoulders.

"Buck up!" he said. "The farmer will have heard that. We've got to clear before he can call his men back."

"Quick's the word, then."

Tom Merry, carefully avoiding the remaining fragments of glass, climbed through the little window, and hung on outside with his hands. There was then a drop of eight feet to the ground, but that did not trouble him much. But just as he was ready to drop, the stout farmer came tearing round the stable. He had heard the smashing of the glass.

Mr. Oates stood petrified for a moment as he saw the

shivered glass on the ground, the broken window, and the junior hanging to the ledge.

Then he uttered an oath, and strode towards Tom Merry, grasping his riding-whip.

Tom was hanging in a specially favourable position to be lashed with the whip, and Mr. Oates had no doubt that after a lash or two the junior would be glad to scramble in at the broken window again.

But he did not know Tom Merry.

As the portly farmer arrived beneath him Tom Merry let go, and he fell, and landed fairly upon Mr. Oates' broad shoulders.

His fall was broken, and, by the terrific roar the farmer gave, it might have been supposed that he was broken, too.

Mr. Oates rolled over on the ground, and Tom Merry rolled over him.

"Quick!" gasped Lowther.

He was out of the window in a twinkling, and he dropped, and rolled on the farmer's gaitered legs. Manners came bundling down the next moment, and bumped into Mr. Oates's chest. The farmer gasped and roared.

"Ow, ow! Oh, Garge! Joe! Cæsar! Yow! Yah!"

The gasping juniors scrambled up. Tom Merry, with great presence of mind, picked up the farmer's whip, and tossed it upon the roof of the stable. Then the juniors ran.

The farmer staggered up.

"Ow!" he gasped. "Ow, Cæsar! Garge! Joe! Groogh!"

He cast a vain glance round for his whip, and then dashed after the juniors.

The farmer's wife came running out of the house as they dashed away, but they avoided a collision, and ran round her, leaving the stout dame staring blankly after them as they sped across the fields.

"Make for the level crossing!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Right-ho!"

They ran fleetly on. After them came Mr. Oates, lumbering along like a runaway rhinoceros, and shouting to them to stop—a thing they were very unlikely to do under the circumstances.

Field after field was crossed at a terrific speed, and that speed told sooner upon the stout farmer than upon the lithe juniors. Mr. Oates dropped behind. At the end of the third field the juniors looked back, and saw the farmer at a standstill. Mr. Oates had halted at the last fence, and was shaking both fists after them in helpless rage.

The juniors halted, too. The terrific burst had almost winded them.

"My hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "That was a run! We're well out of that!"

"He'll go up to the school and complain for a cert." said Manners. "He can't have liked our dropping on him!"

"Ha, ha! No, come on! After all, he mayn't be able to identify us, if he goes to the Head! Sufficient for the run is the trouble thereof, anyway. Good-bye, Mr. Oates!"

Monty Lowther kissed his hand to the enraged farmer.

"Good-bye, Bluebell!" he called out. "We'll meet you round the bandstand another time, ducky!"

Whereat Mr. Oates seemed more furious than ever. He began scrambling over the fence, as if to take up the pursuit again, and the juniors started to run once more, dropping the scent as they ran.

In a few minutes more they were past the border of Mr. Oates's land, and the farmer had disappeared from view. They ran on at a more moderate pace down towards the railway-line and the level crossing.

CHAPTER 7. A Gallant Deed.

THE Terrible Three chuckled as they ran.

They had escaped from durance vile, and if there was to be trouble afterwards, they could meet that when it came. It was no use meeting troubles half-way. They were still well ahead of the pack. The pack would have to go round Mr. Oates's farm, and pick up the trail again on the other side, and they were evidently not round yet, for the hares could see no sign of them.

The Terrible Three felt that they were entitled to take it a little easy.

Ahead of them was the railway track, with the level crossing. Beyond that was the lane to Rylcombe and the run home. It looked as if the hares would get home easily ahead of the hounds. The level crossing was approached by a stile on either side, and the railway line was marked off by a low fence. There was a signal-box in the distance. As the juniors came running easily down the green slope towards the railway they caught sight of the signal and a train in the distance.

"That's the London express," said Manners. "Better wait for it to go by! It passes this level crossing jolly quick!"

"Right-ho!"

And the juniors slackened down to a walk.

There was no hurry, and they did not want to be fool-hardy. But suddenly, as they sauntered on towards the stile, Tom Merry gave a jump.

"Good heavens!" he ejaculated.

"What's the matter?"

Tom Merry did not reply. His face had gone suddenly white. Without a word, he broke into a desperate run for the level crossing.

"Stop!" roared Manners. "Tom, stop, you ass! The express!"

"You can't get across in time!" shrieked Lowther. "Are you mad? Stop!"

Tom Merry did not heed, did not even hear.

He was running for the railway line as if his life depended on it.

There was a screech from the engine as the train came thundering along the line. For a moment Manners and Lowther believed that Tom Merry had taken leave of his senses. Then they saw what he had seen.

In the very centre of the railway track was a little girl of five or six, with her hands full of wild flowers. She was sitting there, making daisy-chains, and the high hedge hid her from the view of the man in the signal-box, and until he rounded the bend the engine-driver could not see her; and then, of course, it would be too late!

The unconscious child was in the path of the express, her lap full of flowers, her innocent face bent over them in earnest interest, while a horrible death was rushing down upon her at lightning speed.

The juniors turned white as chalk.

They halted, petrified. The train would be by in a few seconds, before they could reach their chum to drag him back from death. For they knew what Tom Merry meant to do—to dash upon the railway track, and drag the child to safety, or—

They felt sick.

"There's no time!" panted Lowther. "He'll be— Oh!" He could not finish. They watched, their brains in a whirl of horror.

A shriek again from the engine!

The child, startled, looked round. Tom Merry did not climb the stile; he cleared it at a single bound.

Then he was upon the track.

The train was rushing down upon him. The engine-driver had seen all now, and his face was white, for it was too late. Tom Merry grasped the child.

He could almost feel the rushing engine upon him. He made one desperate bound for safety, with the child in his arms.

He was rolling on the ground the next moment, and the train was roaring by, with a thunder of wheels.

Thunder, thunder!

The express roared on.

Tom Merry staggered up dazedly.

The child was in his arms, unhurt. The junior gazed almost stupidly after the vanishing train. He had succeeded, but he had been so near to death that his brain was swimming with it.

Not till the train had passed could Manners and Lowther see him again, and for those horrible seconds they did not know whether their chum was under the grinding wheels. But when the express had flashed by, they saw him standing on the further side of the track, holding the little girl, who was crying with alarm.

"Tom!" yelled Lowther.

"Tom!" shrieked Manners.

"It—it's all right!" gasped Tom Merry.

A freckled, fresh-faced young woman came running from the adjoining field, shrieking hysterically. She clasped the little girl from Tom Merry's arm, weeping over her.

"It's all right now, miss," said Tom Merry. "She's not hurt!"

The girl could not reply. She could only sob. The juniors understood that the child was her little sister, and had wandered away gathering flowers, and the young woman had seen her on the railway track only when Tom Merry seized her to spring for safety. She could not speak, but the child was speaking, chiefly worried by the loss of her daisy-chains, and far from realising the fearful danger she had escaped.

"It's all right now," said Tom Merry comfortingly.

"Nothing to cry about now, you know."

"Oh, thank you, sir—thank you, sir! What would mother have said if—if—" She could say no more.

"Jolly glad we came by in time!" said Tom Merry.

And the juniors raised their caps and walked on.

Manners and Lowther regarded their chum with somewhat peculiar looks. Tom Merry was silent. He had passed through the valley of the shadow of death, and for the moment his sunny face was clouded.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 280.

A Magnificent, Long Complete Tale of Tom Merry & Co.
By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"COWARD OR HERO?"

"Well, Tom?" said Manners at last.
 "Well?" said Tom Merry, coming out of his reverie with a start.
 "You awful ass!"
 "Eh?"
 "You frabjous fathead!" said Manners, in measured tones.
 "Do you know that when you started to run for that kid there simply wasn't a dog's chance for you?"
 Tom Merry smiled faintly.
 "I'm afraid I didn't stop to think," he replied.
 "Just like you, wasn't it?" said Lowther.
 "I suppose so," said Tom.
 "And we both think you're a silly, fat-headed, frabjous ass, and the rippingest silly idiot in the world!" exclaimed Manners, and then he fell upon Tom Merry and simply hugged him. "Oh, Tom, old man—"
 "Here, cheese it!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Have you gone off your rocker?"
 "You—you don't know what we felt like when we had to wait for the train to go by before we could see you," said Manners, with a break in his voice. "Oh, Tom, you fat-head! Do you know I feel like blubbing?"
 "My hat, don't do that! Let's stop in the village and have some ginger-pop at Mrs. Murphy's. It'll set you up."
 And the juniors laughed.
 "Not a word about this at the school," said Tom Merry, after the visit to Mrs. Murphy's, where the ginger-pop had been duly discussed.
 "Why not?" demanded Lowther.
 "He's afraid of being made a giddy hero of!" grinned Manners. "Why, I was thinking out a splendid descriptive article for the 'Weekly'—"
 "Look here—"
 "And I'm going to do a poem on the subject for the 'Weekly,'" said Lowther. "Something in the form of a limerick—like this:

"There's a champion duffer named Merry,
 Who's a very soft idiot—very—"

"That's all right for the beginning, isn't it? Very descriptive, and—"
 "Oh, dry up, Monty! Look here, don't jaw about this at the school, or it will come out that we're the three chaps who were on Mr. Oates's land, and jumped on him from his own window. We don't want to give ourselves away."
 "Something in that," said Lowther, with a nod. "But you are entitled to march home with musical honours—"See the Conquering Hero Comes,' you know—"
 "Shut up!" roared Tom Merry.
 But it was agreed that the adventure should not be mentioned. The story would infallibly lead to the identification of the Terrible Three as the three juniors who had handled Mr. Oates so roughly. The hares arrived at the school, and they changed out of their running-clothes, and they were cheerfully sitting down to tea in the study when the pack, tired and exasperated, came straggling in.

CHAPTER 8. A Really Good Idea.

"BAI Jove! Here the boundahs are!"
 Arthur Augustus D'Arcy made that remark as he looked into Tom Merry's study. The passage was crowded with tired and muddy hounds.
 The Terrible Three grinned at them serenely.
 "Got home?" asked Lowther, in surprise. "Didn't expect you yet!"
 "Look rather a muddy crowd, don't they?" remarked Manners. "You want a wash, Gussy."
 "Yaas, watah! I think I do," said D'Arcy. "I have had a tussle with a wuff farmah man. He wanted to pwevent me fwom followin' the twack, you know, and of course I insisted upon passin'. And the wuff beast dwopped me into a ditch, you know."
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "There is nothin' to laugh at, deah boys. It was wotten."
 "We had to go round Oates's land, and picked up the trail at the level crossing," said Blake. "Of course, we should have caught you if it hadn't been for old Oates."
 "Rats!"
 "We understood from the farmer's men that they had locked you up in a stable," said Herries. "How did you get away?"
 "Stone walls do not a prison make, nor iron bars a cage," said Monty Lowther. "We hopped it. Go and wash yourself. I told you we should be having tea when you came back—so we are. Seat!"
 And the muddy pack scattered.
 "Beaten those kids!" said Monty Lowther, cracking a

fourth egg with great satisfaction. "Of course, they didn't have a look-in!"
 "Of course not!" said his chums, in hearty agreement.
 "But I jolly well hope old Oates won't be along here to-morrow morning with a giddy complaint," said Lowther.
 "He looked very waxy when we left him."
 "I don't suppose he'll be able to pick us out," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "If he complains that three fellows here trespassed on his land, he'll have to identify them. We shall look a bit different in Etons, you know. He saw us in running-things. And we might make ourselves look a bit different, too."
 "Good egg! We'll disguise ourselves if he comes to identify us!" said Lowther, with a chuckle. "I can squint when I like. You can pull your faces a different way, you know, and look different. Let's do some practice after tea."
 "Good egg! We'll disguise ourselves if he comes to And when tea was over, the Terrible Three did some practice before the glass, and pulled the most horrible faces.
 Blake looked into the study later, and he gave quite a jump as he saw Monty Lowther squinting horribly, and Manners with his mouth twisted up one side, and Tom Merry wrinkling his brows in a dreadful frown.
 Blake stared at them blankly.
 "Gone dotty?" he exclaimed.
 Lowther squinted at him, and Blake backed out in alarm.
 The Terrible Three burst into a roar.
 "Ha, ha, ha! It's all right, Blake."
 "What on earth—"
 "We're practising disguising our chivvies, in case Oates comes along to-morrow," Monty Lowther explained. "Do you think he'll know me with that squint?"
 "Ha, ha! I fancy not! It makes you look horribly ugly," said Blake. "But it's a different kind from your natural looks—"
 "What!"
 "Why not try to make-up as a good-looking chap?" suggested Blake. "Then there wouldn't be the slightest risk of identification—"
 A volume of Virgil hurtled through the air, and Blake retreated, chuckling, into the passage, and slammed the door just in time.
 That the incensed Mr. Oates would come up to the school to complain was certain. As had happened once before on a somewhat similar occasion, the Head would order the boys to be assembled, and the farmer would have to identify the culprits. And if he succeeded in identifying them, there would be a painful interview with the Head afterwards. The scheme of altering their faces so as to escape identification seemed an excellent one to the juniors, and they did a considerable amount of practice.
 When they came down to the common-room, after finishing their preparation that evening, they had on what Lowther called their new faces.
 "Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, turning his eyes glass upon them as they came in. "Gweat Scott! What's the matah with your eye, Lowthah?"
 "Ass!" said Lowther.
 "Weally, deah boy—"
 Lowther squinted at him.
 "Do you recognise me?" he demanded.
 "Yaas, you ass."
 "Well, Oates doesn't know me so well as you do. The squint will do for him. He'll remember seeing a nice-looking chap, and he won't know me if I squint."
 "Bai Jove! That's watah a good ideah!" said the swell of St. Jim's thoughtfully. "The old boundah is sure to come and complain. But why not disguise yourselves pwo-pahly, deah boys? You could put on false moustaches—"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "I fail to see any cause for laughter in that remark. There is nothing like a false moustache for a weally good disguise."
 "Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake. "I think I can see Railton's face when he finds three kids in Hall with moustaches on!"
 "Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that, you know!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 Figgins, of the New House, looked in. Lowther squinted at him, and Figgins stared.
 "Got a pain anywhere, Lowther?" he asked.
 "Oh, you ass!" said Lowther crossly. "Do you recognise me, too?"
 "Know that face anywhere!" said Figgins cheerfully. "You don't often see a face like yours, Lowther, excepting on some old-fashioned gargoyles—"
 "Look here, you New House bouncer—"
 "What's the news, Figgy?" asked Tom Merry. "Have you come over to tell us something? Is Ratty on the war-path again?"
 Figgins grinned.

"Yes. He's as mad as a hatter. He says somebody has been larking with the telephone. We were able to prove an alibi, so it's all right for us."

"Telephone!" said Monty Lowther, innocently. "Anything gone wrong with Mr. Ratcliff's telephone?"

"No. It seems that Snorks, the butcher, has rung him up, to ask him whether he must have the legs of mutton and pork-chops at a quarter to eleven, as his man usually goes on his rounds a little earlier. Ratty was astounded. It seems that somebody has telephoned to Snorks to deliver legs of mutton and pork-chops to Ratty to-morrow morning at a quarter to eleven, and Snorks says he was 'phoned from here. Ratty had us all up and questioned us, but the only 'phone in the New House is in his own study, so he couldn't make out that any of us had done it. Queer, isn't it?"

"Awfully queer," said Manners.

"Has he countermanded the order for the pork chops and legs of mutton?" asked Lowther.

"Of course, they won't be delivered now," said Figgins. "I wondered if you fellows knew anything about it?"

"Us!" said Tom Merry. "Why, what should we know about it?"

Figgins chuckled.

"Well, I thought you might," he said.

"I shouldn't be surprised if some other tradesmen have had orders on the telephone," Monty Lowther remarked dreamily. "These things do happen, you know."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then it was you, you bounder?" said Figgins. "Well, I don't mind—he's our Housemaster, but we don't own him. He's a rank outsider!"

"Figgy, old man, you're talking sense. Come and have some of these chestnuts," said Blake affectionately.

And Figgins did; and the rivals of St. Jim's parted on the best of terms, Figgins by that time being in possession of the wheeze, and anticipating the morrow morning with very great satisfaction.

CHAPTER 9.

Prompt Delivery.

MR. RATCLIFF was looking a little sourer than usual as he went into the Fifth Form room the next morning. Mr. Ratcliff was Form-master of the Fifth, and the Fifth were not proud of him. Being a senior Form, they were exempt from caning, otherwise there would have been some smarting palms in the Fifth Form room that morning.

"Looks ratty, doesn't he?" murmured Lefevre, of the Fifth, as Mr. Ratcliff came in. "What's been upsetting his nibs, Cutts?"

Cutts shook his head.

"Blessed if I know. I know we're going to have a rotten morning."

"Somebody's been rotting him on the telephone yesterday," said Bray. "I heard in the New House somebody had 'phoned for legs of mutton and things to be delivered to Ratty this morning, and Ratty can't get on to who did it. It wasn't anybody in the New House, I know that. He can't prove it was a St. Jim's chap at all. Anybody might have used the telephone anywhere."

Cutts chuckled.

"I fancy it was somebody in my House, and I dare say I could name him," he remarked. "I'm sorry the thing didn't come off."

"Silence here, please," said Mr. Ratcliff, looking round sourly. "Kindly remember that you are in the Form-room. This is not a junior Form, kindly remember, and I decline to allow chattering and whispering."

The Fifth-Formers looked daggers at their Form-master. It was evident that Ratty was more ratty than ever that morning.

Lessons had hardly started in the Fifth Form room, however, before they were interrupted.

There was a tap at the door, and Taggles, the school porter, put his head in. Mr. Ratcliff looked round angrily.

"You should not come here when lessons are on, Taggles!" he said sharply. "You should know better, my man. Go away at once!"

"Werry well, sir," said Taggles sulkily, "but wot—"

"Kindly go!"

"Yes, sir; but wot am I to do with the cricket-bats?"

Mr. Ratcliff stared at him.

"Are you intoxicated, Taggles?" he rasped out.

"No, I ain't, sir," said Taggles very gruffly, "and I don't take it kindly, sir, that you should insinuate that I am, sir. The 'Ead, sir, is puffykly satisfied with my conduct; and if you ain't satisfied, sir—"

"If you are not intoxicated, what do you mean by coming here with a ridiculous question? I know nothing about

cricket-bats. You know I take no interest in such frivolous things, or you should know."

"Mr. Rutter's man says as how he was instructed to wait for the money, sir."

"What! The money for what?"

"The cricket-bats, sir, and cricket-balls, wot you ordered." Mr. Ratcliff seemed rooted to the floor.

"Cricket-bats! Cricket-balls! Ordered by me!" he stammered.

"Yes, sir, they've come."

"I did not order them!"

"Which Mr. Rutter's man says as how he was specially instructed to deliver them at 'arf-past nine this morning to you personally, sir."

"It is some idiotic mistake. Tell the man I have not ordered anything of the kind, and have had no communication with Mr. Rutter. They may be for Mr. Railton, I have no use for such nonsense. Tell the man to go away."

"Werry well, sir."

Taggles retired, shutting the door with more force than was really necessary, and Mr. Ratcliff, very much ruffled, went on with the Fifth. The Fifth were grinning. They suspected a "jape," and they were not sorry.

Five minutes later, Taggles was back again. He knocked at the Form-room door, and opened it, and looked in with a decidedly surly expression. The Fifth Form-master glared at him as if he would eat him.

"Well, what is it?" he snapped.

"The man says as how there's no mistake, sir. The cricket-bats and things was ordered by you over the telephone yesterday afternoon."

Mr. Ratcliff breathed hard. He began to understand. He remembered the misunderstanding with Mr. Snorks, the butcher.

"Tell the man I did not order them," he said. "It was a joke of somebody—somebody I do not as yet know. And don't come back here again. I refuse to hear anything further on the subject. Go away at once."

Taggles grunted and went. Mr. Ratcliff swept his Form with a furious glance.

"There is no occasion for merriment in this ridiculous occurrence," he said. "The next boy who laughs will be reported to the Head for deliberate impertinence."

And the Fifth-Formers tried not to laugh. The lessons went on, Mr. Ratcliff ragging the seniors with all his great powers in that line. He was just making Lefevre feel that life was not worth living in a world where there were such poets as Horace, and such Form-masters as Mr. Ratcliff, when Taggles looked in again. Lefevre, who would have welcomed an earthquake at that moment, was glad to see him. But Mr. Ratcliff was not. He had succeeded in confusing and tangling Lefevre to such a point that the Fifth-Former was in a state of utter misery, and naturally he did not like to be interrupted. He gave Taggles a savage glare.

"I told you not to return to me about those cricket-bats, Taggles. How dare you disobey my orders! I refuse to hear anything more about the matter. Mr. Rutter may take what measures he pleases. I will not hear a word about the matter. I—"

"Tain't that matter, sir," said Taggles surlily. "It's the armchair."

"What!"

"The armchair's come."

"Are you mad?" shrieked Mr. Ratcliff. "What armchair?"

"From Robinson's, sir."

"Robinson's. Who is Robinson?"

"Furniture dealer in Wayland, sir. They've sent a man over with it special, as you wanted it at a quarter to ten this morning without fail. The man says he's brought the bill by your special instructions, sir, and he's waiting to be paid."

"I know nothing about an armchair!" shouted Mr. Ratcliff. "I have never heard of Robinson's, and I have not ordered an armchair. Tell the man so. Don't come back and tell me what he says. I refuse to know what he says. Tell him to take the chair away, and don't come back here."

Taggles breathed hard and retired. Taggles was getting into a bad temper himself by this time. He met Toby the page in the passage, and confided to him that Mr. Ratcliff was either mad or drunk, he didn't know which; but the odds were on the madness.

In the Fifth Form-room, only Mr. Ratcliff's fierce eye kept the fellows from bursting into a roar of laughter. It was evidently a "rag," and a rag of unusual richness. The Fifth Form-master was so agitated that he began to make mistakes himself, instead of catching his pupils in mistakes, and, unfortunately, at that moment he was tackling Cutts, of the Fifth. Cutts was as cool as an iceberg, and he avenged the sufferings of his Form-fellows upon Mr. Ratcliff by catching the master, and showing him up, and making him admit that

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he was wrong. Mr. Ratcliff was by this time in a state of mind bordering on homicidal mania. Then came another tap at the door, and Taggles presented himself. There was a suspicion of a grin on Taggles's rugged face.

"Please, sir, the stuff's come from Mr. Bunn's."

"What!"

"The jam-tarts and cakes, sir."

"This—this is a plot!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff, as the Fifth burst into an irrepressible chuckle. "It is a vile plot. Do you mean to say, Taggles, that Mr. Bunn has delivered goods here in the belief that they were ordered by me?"

"Yes, sir. Two 'undred jam-tarts, sir, and one 'undred pound-cakes, sir."

"I refuse to accept the goods! Jam-tarts! Good heavens! Mr. Bunn must be mad! What can he suppose I want with a hundred jam-tarts!" shrieked Mr. Ratcliff. "Tell the man to take them back." Tell him to tell his master that he is a fool. Go away at once."

"Yes, sir."

"Lefevre, you were laughing. Take a hundred lines! Cutts, how dare you laugh! Take five hundred lines! Take five hundred lines, Prye."

And the Fifth did not laugh any more.

Mr. Ratcliff was raging. He could hardly control himself sufficiently to go on with the lesson. But by the time he had settled down, another interruption was due. The school porter put his head into the Form-room.

"If you please, sir—"

Mr. Ratcliff turned round with almost a yell. "How dare you come here again, Taggles? Go away instantly."

"But the clothes have come, sir."

"The—the what?"

"The ready-made clothes from Mr. Wiggs, sir. Fifty of 'em, sir. The man has the bill, sir; fifty-two pun ten, sir."

"It is a wicked plot! I did not order them! Taggles, if anything more is delivered at the school for me, refuse to take it in. I have ordered nothing. Now go away, and do not come back. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir," said Taggles.

Mr. Ratcliff mopped his perspiring brow.

"I—I shall leave you for a short time," he rapped out. "I feel too disturbed to continue the lesson. Lefevre, I leave you in charge here. If there is any neglect of your work, you will answer for it to me."

And Mr. Ratcliff strode out of the Form-room and slammed the door after him. The Fifth-Formers burst into a yell of laughter as soon as he was gone. In the passage Mr. Ratcliff came suddenly upon Taggles talking to Toby.

"He's mad," said Taggles—"mad as a 'atter! Hordered things right and left by telephone, and now he won't take 'em! Shouldn't wonder if they summonses him—"

"Taggles!"

"Ho! I—I didn't see you, sir! You moves so quiet!" said Taggles.

"You were speaking of me, Taggles."

"Ho, no, sir! I was a-talking about the weather, sir," said Taggles. "Looks to me like more rain to-day, sir—don't you think so?"

Mr. Ratcliff did not state what he thought on that subject. Taggles retired, to send away Mr. Wiggs's man with the fifty guinea suits. Mr. Ratcliff took a turn in the quadrangle to calm himself. He realised that he was the victim of a joke, and he had an uneasy suspicion that there was more to come. His suspicion was well founded. A few minutes later he caught sight of the chemist's boy, from Mr. Pillsbury's in the village, with a parcel outside Taggles's lodge, arguing hotly with Taggles. Mr. Ratcliff swept down upon them.

"What is it—what is it?" he demanded.

"Please, sir, I've brought the cod-liver oil, sir, and Mr. Taggles says it ain't hordered, sir," said Mr. Pillsbury's boy.

"Cod-liver oil!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff.

"Yes, sir. Twenty large-sized bottles. Ordered by telephone yesterday."

"Take it away!" shrieked Mr. Ratcliff. "I did not order it!"

"But I took down the order myself, sir, when you was talking to Mr. Pillsbury over the telephone, sir."

"I did not order it, I tell you! It is an infamous plot! Take it away!"

The chemist's boy picked up his big parcel.

"Very well, sir. 'Ere's the bill."

"Take it away!"

"Will you pay now, sir?"

"Go!"

The chemist's boy cast an alarmed look at Taggles, and Taggles, taking advantage of the fact that Mr. Ratcliff's back was turned to him, tapped his forehead significantly. The chemist's boy whistled softly, understanding what that meant.

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"THE MAGNET" LIBRARY,
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Unfortunately, Mr. Ratcliff turned round just in time to catch Taggles in the act. He gave the school porter a thunderous look.

"Taggles, what do you mean? What are you doing?"

"Scratchin' my 'ead, sir," said Taggles innocently. "No 'arm in that, sir, I 'ope?"

Mr. Ratcliff strode away, without replying. He was almost at boiling-point. The chemist's boy shouldered his parcel and retreated, with the firm conviction that Mr. Ratcliff was mad, and he left Taggles with the same conviction.

CHAPTER 10.

Cheap Coal.

"HERE we are again!" said Monty Lowther genially. At eleven o'clock the juniors were allowed out of the class-room for a quarter of an hour. They came trooping out into the sunny morning in great spirits. The Fifth were out, too, and the talk of the Fifth was very interesting to the juniors. It showed them that the jape upon the Fifth-Form master had worked quite satisfactorily.

"The coal hasn't been delivered yet," Tom Merry remarked, with a glance at the clock-tower. "It's just eleven."

"I wanted that to be delivered under my personal supervision," remarked Lowther. "I told them that on the telephone."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, Ratty's in a state of lunacy," said Figgins, joining the chums of the School House. "He's just gone into the New House, looking as if he wanted to commit nine or ten murders all at once."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Any of you young rascals been telephoning to tradesmen?" asked Cutts, of the Fifth, stopping to inquire of the juniors.

"Us!" said Tom Merry. "My dear Cutts! How can you ask such a thing?"

"Yaas, wathah, Cutts! I wegard you as a suspicious beast, you know!"

Cutts laughed and walked away. He was pretty sure of the matter, but it was no business of his. He enjoyed the ragging of Mr. Ratcliff as much as anyone.

Tom Merry & Co. waited for the arrival of the coal. They gathered round the side entrance, where the vans would arrive, and it was Blake who first caught sight of them, and shouted to his comrades.

"Here they come!"

"Hurray!"

The juniors crowded out into the road.

A line of coal-vans were coming along, with grimy men upon them, and big dray-horses pulling along that huge consignment of coal for Mr. Ratcliff.

The juniors simply yelled at the sight.

The joke had spread among the juniors now, and nearly all the fellows who saw the coal-vans knew that their arrival was due to Monty Lowther's humorous activity with the telephone.

The vans drew up at the tradesmen's gate.

A huge, broad-shouldered, dusty giant descended from the foremost van, and rang the bell. He looked in surprise at the yelling juniors. To the coalman there was nothing surprising or comic in the delivery of fifty tons of good house-coal at eighteen shillings a ton. But to the St. Jim's juniors it seemed very funny indeed.

It was Toby, the page, who came down to the gate. Toby looked at the coalman, and at the coal-vans, and seemed surprised.

"I didn't know there was any coal hordered," said Toby.

"It ain't for the School House, I'm sure of that."

The coalman consulted his bill.

"Mr. Ratcliff, New 'Ouse," he said.

Toby jumped. He had heard of the various articles that had arrived for the New Housemaster that morning, and he thought he could guess what the arrival of the coal meant.

"'Ow much is there?" asked Toby faintly.

"Fifty tons 'ouse-coal," said the coalman.

"Fifty tons! My word!"

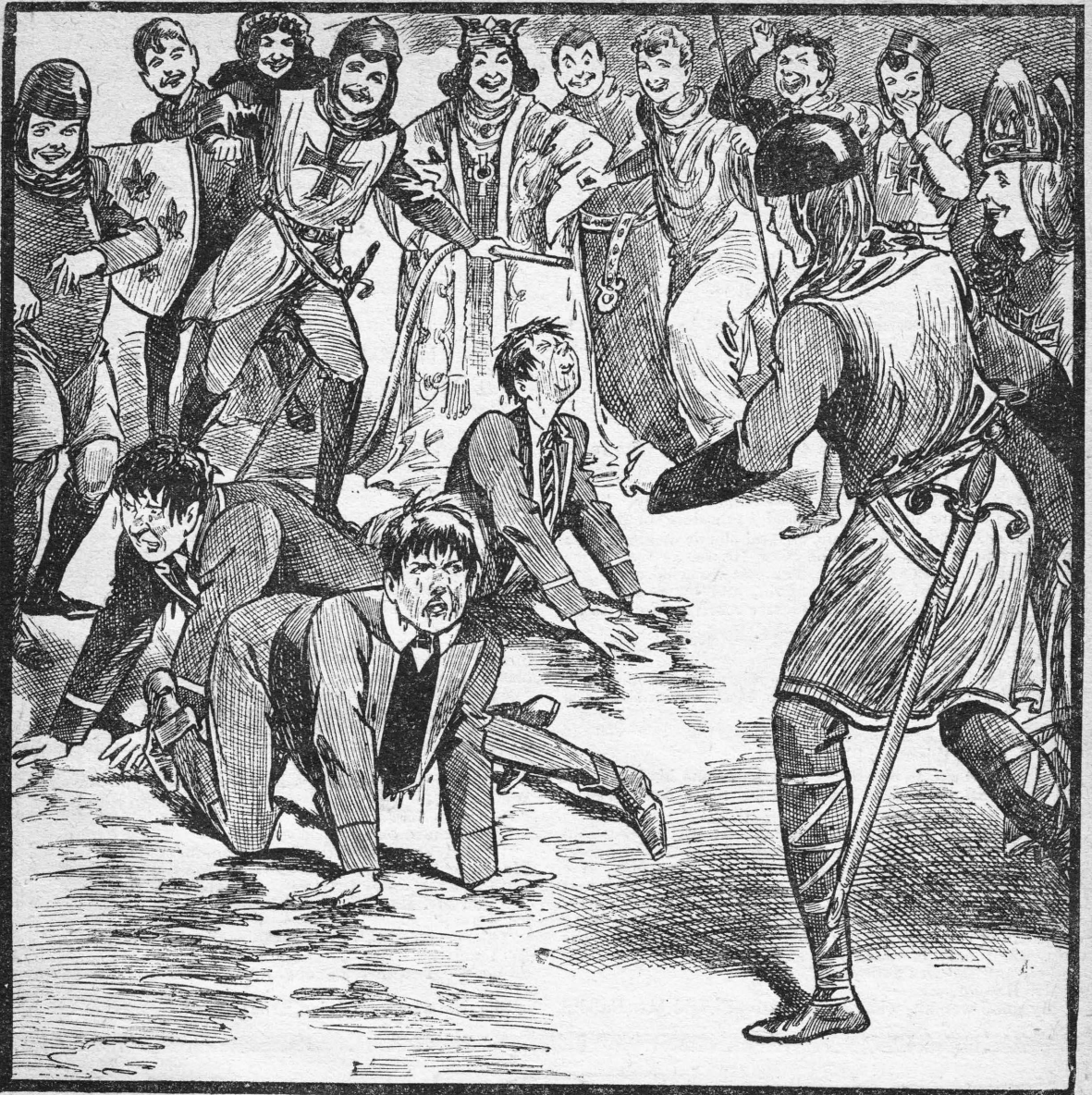
"Where am I to deliver it?" asked the man, rather surprised. "Didn't you know it was ordered?"

"That I didn't," said Toby, with a chuckle, "and I dare say Mr. Ratcliff didn't, either. My word! I'd better tell 'im afore you take it in, I think. Wait 'ere."

"Wot am I to wait for?" demanded the coalman. "We was told to get it 'ere at eleven o'clock without fail, and we've got to get 'ome to Wayland to dinner."

"I think there's a mistake."

"There ain't any mistake fur as I'm concerned," said the coalman. "Fifty tons of 'ouse-coal at heighteen shillings a ton—and 'ere's the invoice."



Three drenched and dirty bedraggled Fifth-Formers crawled out of the ventilator, one after another. The juniors greeted them with roars of laughter, and Coker & Co. crawled away, too utterly "done in" even to speak. (For this amusing incident see the grand, long, complete tale of Harry Wharton & Co. in "The Magnet" Library, entitled, "The Schoolboy Dramatists," by Frank Richards. Now on Sale. Price One Penny.)

"You wait 'ere," said Toby.

And Toby scuttled off. The coalman grunted. His mates, who had descended from their vans, grunted, too. They didn't see why they should have to wait. The juniors didn't see it, either, and they were willing to give advice.

"Better get the coal in," said Monty Lowther. "I'll show you the way, if you like. You come this way to the back of the New House, and shoot it into the cellar. Quite simple."

"Thank you, sir!" said the coalman. "It'll take us a tidy time to empty that lot, and we've got other jobs for this afternoon, young gentleman."

"Draw it mild, Monty!" murmured Tom Merry.

Lowther looked at him in surprise.

"My dear Tom, surely you don't want this good man to waste his time. He's got plenty to do to deliver fifty tons of coal at a sack a time and get back to his dinner. It would be a shame if he were kept waiting for his dinner."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"This way," said Monty Lowther. "I'll show you where the New House coal-shoot is, and you can do the rest."

"Thank you kindly, sir!"

"Not at all. This way."

And Monty Lowther started off to show the way, followed by a long line of coalmen, each bending under the weight of a sack of cheap house-coal at eighteen shillings.

The juniors looked on with great enjoyment.

"The New House ain't got accommodation for fifty tons of coal at once," murmured Kerr. "Forty tons is the limit, and Ratty's had the summer coal in, too."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I dare say they'll find room somewhere," grinned Blake. "If the cellars won't hold it, they can pile it in the garden."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Meanwhile, Toby was looking for Mr. Ratcliff. He found the New Housemaster in his study in the New House, where he had retired for a nerve rest. He glared at Toby as that cheerful youth in buttons presented himself. Mr. Ratcliff would have glared at any visitor he had received at that moment.

"Well, what is it?" he snapped.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 230.
NEXT WEDNESDAY: "COWARD OR HERO?" A Magnificent, Long Complete Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"If you please sir, the coal's come!"
 "The coal!" yelled Mr. Ratcliff.
 "Yes, sir."
 "What coal?"
 "Fifty tons of 'ouse-coal, sir, for the New 'Ouse."
 "I did not order it! Tell the man to take it back! I refuse to take it! I refuse to bandy words on the subject! Tell the man to take it back! Do you hear?"
 "Yes, sir," said Toby.
 "Go at once! Not a word more! Go!"
 Toby went. He hurried back to the gate, and, to his dismay, found that consignment of good house coal in the full process of delivery. A long line of coalmen followed one another to the New House, delivering coals. An obliging junior had slipped into the house, and opened the coal shoot, and the sackfuls were descending into it one after another. Toby gasped at the sight.

"Look 'ere!" he exclaimed. "You're not to deliver that coal! Mr. Ratcliffe says as 'ow it wasn't hordered, and you're to take it back."
 The coal foreman grunted.
 "It was hordered, and my horders was to deliver it," he said. "And we've put in three tons already."
 "Oh, my word!"
 "Git on with it, mates—it's a tidy lot, and it'll take some time."
 "You'd better keep the rest back—"
 "Keep back nothin'," said the coalman rudely. "I'm hordered to deliver this 'ere coal, and I'm a-doin' of it."
 And the coaly procession went on, and clouds of black dust rose from the recesses under the New House, as sack after sack was shot into the opening. Toby, at his wits' end what to do, rushed round the house again, and hurried to Mr. Ratcliff's study. The New Housemaster received him with an angry frown.
 "Well, what is it now?" he snapped.
 "The coalman, sir—"
 "Don't say another word to me about the coalmen!" shouted Mr. Ratcliff. "I refuse to hear a word on the subject! Go!"
 "But, sir—"
 "Go! Leave this room!"

Toby had no choice but to go. He had done his best, and if Mr. Ratcliff refused to hear him he could do no more. He went.
 Mr. Ratcliff sat down again, fuming. He was getting into a homicidal temper. But his repose was soon disturbed again. This time it was the New House housekeeper who came. She knocked at the door, and opened it without waiting to be told to do so, and flounced in. Mrs. Kenwigg was a portly dame, and, as a rule, extremely dignified. But there is no denying or concealing the fact that her movements, as she entered the study, could only be described as flouncing. She was indignant, and she was annoyed.
 "Mr. Ratcliff, sir—"
 "My good woman, what is the matter?" said Mr. Ratcliff

peevishly. "I trust you have not come to trouble me with household matters now? I am in no humour for it."
 "That coal, sir—"
 "Oh, dear! I have ordered them to take it back!"
 "But they are delivering it!" shrieked Mrs. Kenwigg.
 "What!" Mr. Ratcliff jumped up. "Delivering it?"
 "Yes, sir! And we've had the coal in for the winter, and the cellars are nearly full. You order this coal without consulting me, your housekeeper, sir, and never give me a word of warning that it is coming to-day—"
 "I did not order it!" shrieked Mr. Ratcliff. "It is a wicked, infamous plot, and—"
 "It is being delivered. They are shooting it into the cellar, and the cellar is overflowing."
 "Good heavens, I will soon put a stop to that!"
 And Mr. Ratcliff rushed out of the study.


CHAPTER 11.

Mr. Ratcliff is Very Ratty Indeed.


"CAVE!"
 "Ware rats!"
 "Here he comes!"
 The words passed among the juniors in a whisper as Mr. Ratcliff heaved in sight. The New Housemaster looked excited. His scholarly cap was on a little aslant, and his gown was flying in the wind. His face was red, and his eyes were gleaming.
 "Man! Stop! Don't you dare to deliver that coal!" he exclaimed, as a burly coalman was shooting in a fresh sack.
 Crash! went the coal, and a cloud of dust arose. The Housemaster coughed and jumped back. The coalman looked at him stolidly.
 "Tain't my business, sir," he said. "You'd better speak to my boss."
 "Your—your what? Oh, your foreman, I presume you mean! Where is the man? Stop delivering that coal at once! Cannot you see that the cellar is full?"
 "That ain't my business, sir."
 "Are you a fool?" roared Mr. Ratcliff.
 "No, I ain't," said the grimy man surlily, "and I don't allow nobody to call me one, sir; so don't you do it, that's all."
 "What man is in charge here? I insist upon seeing him! Where is he?"
 "'Allo! Wot's wanted?"
 "Are you in charge of these men?"
 "Yes, I ham," said the coal foreman, not at all pleased by Mr. Ratcliff's bullying manner. "Wot's the trouble?"
 "I did not order that coal. I forbid you to deliver it."
 "You Mr. Ratcliff, New 'Ouse?"
 "I am!"
 "Then you're the gent as the coal's consigned to."
 "I tell you I did not order it! If you do not immediately go away, I will telephone for the police, and have you arrested."
 The coalman looked dangerous.

NUMBER 7.
"THE GEM" LIBRARY
PORTRAIT GALLERY.


No. 8. NEXT WEDNESDAY.
Wally D'Arcy,
Curly Gibson, Jameson.



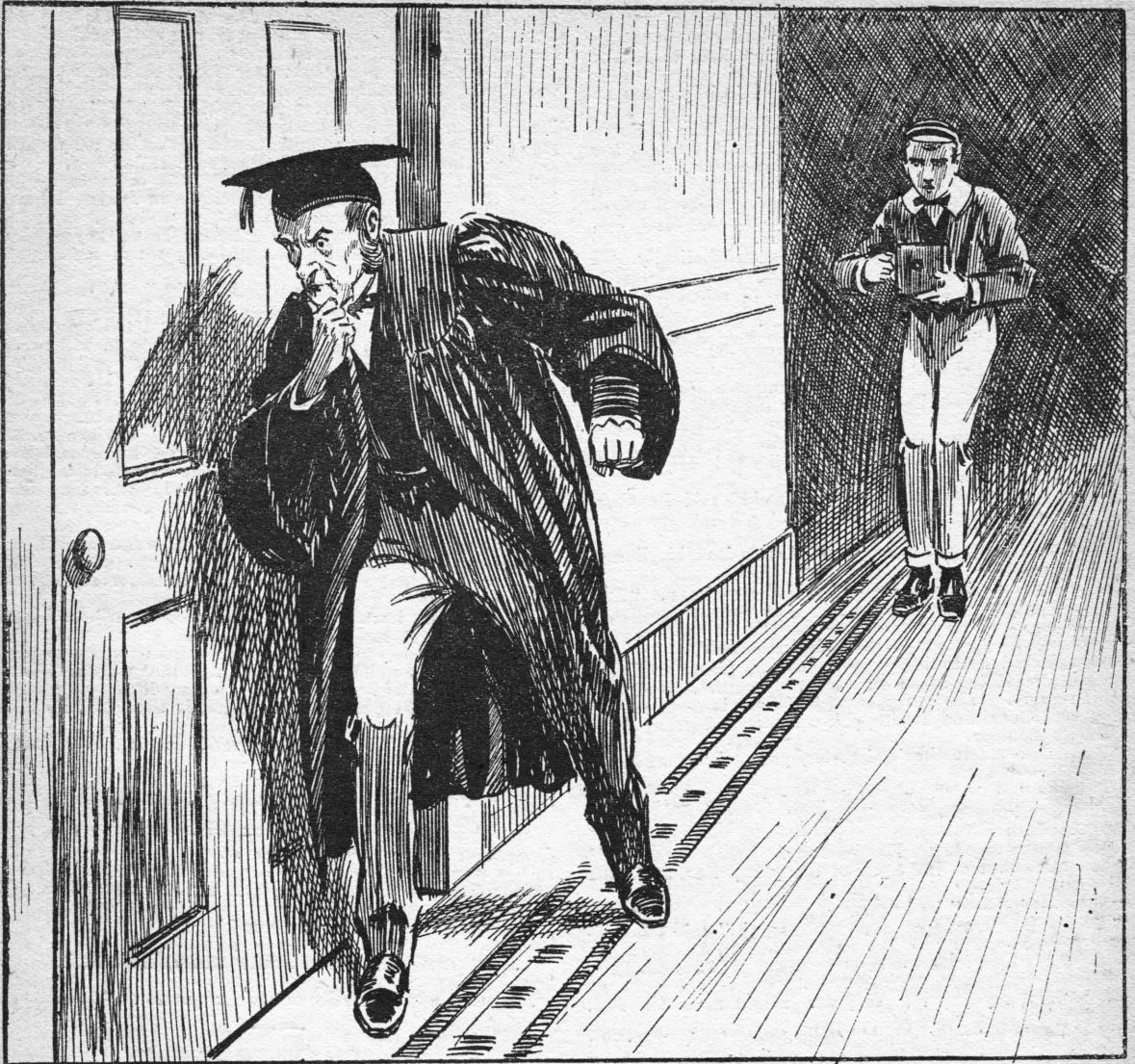
1. MR. RATCLIFF.



2. REILLY.



3. TAGGLES.



The Housemaster paused outside the door and bent his head to listen to what the juniors inside the study were saying. "He hasn't got on to the telephone jape yet!" "We'll make the old bouncer sit up!" came the voices from the interior, and Mr. Ratcliff in his excitement at his discovery, failed to hear three sharp clicks along the passage.

"Look 'ere," he said, "I was hordered to deliver that there coal 'ere. If you want me to take it back, you say so, and I takes it back. That's all. You orter 'ave said so afore any of it was delivered. Wot's been delivered you'll 'ave to pay for."

"I refuse to pay a penny. It is an infamous joke. I did not order the coal! I order you to take it back at once."

"Don't deliver any more, mates," said the coal foreman. "The gentleman 'as altered his mind. Get back to the vans."

The procession turned round, and the sacks were taken back.

"Now remove the coal you have already placed in my cellars!" commanded Mr. Ratcliff.

"Don't you talk silly!" said the coalman.

"What! What!"

"'Ow can we git coal up outer the cellars?" demanded the coalman. "Wot's there will 'ave to stay there, and you'll be charged for it."

"Take it back at once!"

"Can't be done, sir!"

"I order you—"

The coalman, who was quite "fed-up" with Mr. Ratcliff by this time, turned his back on the Housemaster. It was

quite evident that there would be no tip for the thirsty coalmen, and they were growing exasperated. Mr. Ratcliff rushed after the coalman and caught him by the shoulder.

"Will you take that coal back?" he shrieked.

"'Ow can I?" roared the coalman, losing his temper. "Do you think I can go down on my 'ands and knees in your blooming cellar pickin' up bits of coal?"

"I do not care how you do it, so long as you leave none of your coal here. I did not order it, and I refuse to take it. I shall not pay a penny."

"You can settle that with my bosses," said the coalman. "'Ands off, please!"

"Will you take that coal away?"

"Don't be a hass!" said the coalman.

"You—you ruffian! You—you dare to address me—me—in that manner? I—I will have you arrested! I will—"

The coalman shook off Mr. Ratcliff's detaining hand, and strode away.

Outside the gate the men were loading up the vans again with the sacks of coal that had been taken down, and with the empty sacks that had been delivered. The foreman checked them off.

"You sign this 'ere paper?" he said to Mr. Ratcliff.

"What?"

"You sign for receiving three ton of coal—'ouse coal—"
 "I will not sign it! I will not receive the coal!"
 "It's delivered," said the coalman, "and you've got to sign for it, sir. I shall get into a row if I go back without it being signed for."

"I refuse to sign the paper! You are a fool—you are an idiot! I did not order the coal! Go!"

And Mr. Ratcliff stamped furiously away. The coalman stared after him in a slow, stolid way, evidently under the impression that he had to do with a lunatic. The man was in a great difficulty. To extract the coal from the cellar was a big task, and to go away with the paper unsigned meant trouble for him with his employers, especially after Mr. Ratcliff's declaration that he would not pay.

"It's a shame!" said Monty Lowther sympathetically. "I should appeal to the headmaster, if I were you."
 "Ain't that dotty gent the 'Eadmaster?" asked the coalman.

"Certainly not!" said Blake. "He's only a House-master. The best thing you can do is to see the Head."
 "I'll show you the way!" said the obliging Lowther.

"Thank you kindly! You're a young gentleman," said the coalman. "I should get 'auled over the coals, I tell you, if I went back without that paper signed. But I s'pose it will be all right if the 'eadmaster signs it."

"Right as rain!" said Lowther. "This way! Hi, Toby!"
 "Yes, Master Lowther," said Toby.

"Show this gentleman in to the Head!" said Lowther.
 "Dr. Holmes has got to sign his paper."
 "Oh, Master Lowther—"

"Buck up, Toby; you're keeping the chap from his dinner, and it's a shame."

"I ain't got no time to waste," said the coalman. "I've wasted enough already; though I'm sorry for the gentleman if he's mad. I s'pose he can't 'elp it. But I've got to 'ave this 'ere paper signed for three ton of 'ouse coal."

Toby glanced hesitatingly at the dusty, grimy coalman, wondering what the Head would say when he showed him into the study. The coalman appeared to understand the page's reflections, and he dropped a heavy and grimy hand on Toby's shoulder.

"You show me to the 'eadmaster, young feller-me-lad!" he said.

"Orlright," said Toby. "Don't you 'old me—you're a-makin' my tunic black. Foller me!"
 The coalman followed.

Toby led the way to the Head's study. Dr. Holmes started up in amazement at the sight of the grimy man from the coalyards.

"What—what—" he began.
 "I want this 'ere paper signed, please, sir," said the coalman. "Coals ordered by Mr. Ratcliff, and he's changed his mind. Can't take back the three tons wot is delivered. The gentleman won't sign for the three tons, sir. I can't go back without my paper signed, sir. Might mean the sack for me!"

"I—I—I do not understand!" gasped the Head. "Do you mean to say that Mr. Ratcliff has ordered coals, and now refuses to take them—"

"That's it, sir! Three tons was delivered by the time he changed his mind. Somebody have got to sign this 'ere paper."

"This is—this is extraordinary. I fail to understand it. My good man, surely there is some mistake," said the Head helplessly. "Toby, request Mr. Ratcliff to step over here!"

"Yes, sir!"
 "Wait a few moments, my good man. I have no doubt Mr. Ratcliff will be able to explain."

The New House master entered the study a few minutes later. He was still flaming with wrath, and he stared in surprise at the sight of the coalman in the Head's study. There was a little powdering of coal-dust on the carpet round the spot where the coalman stood.

"What does this mean?" gasped Mr. Ratcliff. "Man, have you dared to come here—"

"I want this 'ere paper signed!" said the coalman stolidly.
 "What is the meaning of this, Mr. Ratcliff?" the Head asked, with asperity. "It is a most extraordinary occurrence—most extraordinary and unpleasant!"

"It is a plot, sir—an infamous plot! Someone has been impersonating me on the telephone—ordering all kinds of things to be delivered to me by the tradesmen in Rylcombe and Wayland. I did not order this coal! It is infamous!"

"Three ton of 'ouse coal is delivered, sir," said the coalman. "The gentleman didn't tell me not to deliver it till arter I'd delivered three ton!"

"I—I—I did not know the man was delivering it. I—"
 "The man is not to blame, evidently," said Dr. Holmes.

"You had better sign the paper for the amount delivered, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 280.

Mr. Ratcliff. After all, it will do no harm to purchase three extra tons of coal at this time. Please do as the man wishes."

There was evidently no other way of getting rid of the coalman, and Mr. Ratcliff realised it. He signed the paper with an exceedingly bad grace. Satisfied as soon as the paper was signed, the coalman departed.

"This is an extraordinary thing, Mr. Ratcliff," said the Head, when the grimy gentleman from the coal-yards was gone. "Who could have impersonated you on the telephone? Do you think it was someone at this school?"

"I think it must have been, sir. It is outrageous—unheard of! But it was not a boy in my own House—I have inquired strictly, and none of them had access to my telephone. I am sure that it was a School House boy—and I think I could name half a dozen among whom the culprit could be found."

"It was evidently a foolish practical joke," said the Head. "But we cannot proceed on suspicion, Mr. Ratcliff. Unless you have a definite idea who is the culprit, I think it would be better to mention no names. Of course, you will make inquiries, and I will ask Mr. Raiton to do so."

And Mr. Ratcliff had to be satisfied with that. He returned to his own House in a whirlwind of rage, and boxed the ears of several juniors whom he met on the way. There were a good many inquiries made on the subject of that mysterious ordering of goods for Mr. Ratcliff without his knowledge. But no discovery was made. Mr. Ratcliff suspected that Tom Merry or Blake could have told something if they had chosen—but he could not be sure—and, of course, the telephone might have been used by anyone anywhere. Mr. Ratcliff, with rage and hatred and all uncharitableness in his bosom, was compelled to let the matter drop. But he still nursed a hope that the culprit might be discovered, and he gave the matter a great deal of thought.

He would not have been left in any doubt on the subject, if he could have looked into Tom Merry's study after the coalman had gone. The study was crowded with fellows who had retired there to laugh in safety. And they were laughing.

"Poor old Ratty!" said Figgins, wiping his eyes. "Poor old Ratty! He's got it in the neck this time, and no mistake!"

"Nice for the Fifth this afternoon!" grinned Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Well, if he loses his little temper, and licks Cutts, all the better—Cutts wants it!" said Blake. "Poor old Ratty!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 And the juniors were still grinning gleefully when the dinner-bell rang, and they went down. Kildare met them in the passage. The captain of the school ceased to grin, and looked properly innocent and serious as they caught Kildare's eye.

"I suppose you don't know anything about that telephone business, you three?" said the St. Jim's captain.

"Us!" exclaimed the Terrible Three, in astonishment.

"Oh, Kildare!"
 Kildare laughed, and did not ask any more questions.

CHAPTER 12.

Not a Success.

"SISTER ANNE, Sister Anne, spottest thou anybody coming?"

It was Monty Lowther who asked the question. Figgins of the New House had kindly consented to keep watch for Mr. Oates, if he should appear in sight. For if Mr. Oates came, the Terrible Three had to carry out their new and first-class idea of disguising themselves from recognition by contorting their features. It was Figgins whom Monty Lowther playfully addressed as Sister Anne. Afternoon lessons were over, and the farmer had not come—though the Terrible Three had sat through lessons in the momentary anticipation of hearing his voice. That Mr. Oates would forgive them for the damage they had done—though quite against their will—was not to be hoped for; and it was only a question what time he would arrive, to draw down the wrath of the Head upon them.

"Sister Anne—Sister Anne—"
 Figgins grinned.

"Look out, you chaps!" he said.

"Can you see him?" asked the Terrible Three in chorus.

"Yes; I've just spotted Bluebeard in his trap. He's coming here."

"Oh, crumbs!"
 Monty Lowther peered cautiously round a corner of the gateway. There was Farmer Oates, driving in his trap toward the school, red and ruddy as ever. He did not look bad-tempered, certainly, but there could not be any doubt about what he was coming to St. Jim's for. The Terrible Three groaned.

"All because three innocent children trotted over his

beastly land!" said Monty Lowther. "What on earth was land made for?"

"Direct descendant of Titus Oates, I know that!" grunted Manners. "I've a good mind to ask him after his ancestor!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Get out of sight," said Figgins. "He'll spot you as soon as he gets in here. Go and bury yourselves, and don't show up unless the school is called together."

"What-ho!"

And the Terrible Three promptly disappeared. Figgins took off his cap very respectfully to Farmer Oates as he drove in in the trap. The stout farmer drew up. He recognised Figgins as one of the pack that had been kept off his land, and prevented from following the hares, the day before.

"Hallo! You were one of the young rascals!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, sir, please," said Figgins. "I suppose you haven't come here to complain about yourself for keeping me off your land, have you?"

The farmer laughed.

"Haw, haw! No, young gentleman!"

Then he dove on, leaving Figgins in a state of great astonishment. The New House junior could not understand the farmer's good temper. Figgins had heard of the famous gentleman who was the kindest-hearted man that ever cut a throat. Certainly Farmer Oates looked the best-tempered man that ever came to get a junior caned.

Mr. Ratcliff encountered Farmer Oates as the latter descended from his trap. The New Housemaster was looking very sour. All inquiry on the subject of the telephone jape had been fruitless, so far. Mr. Ratcliff was just coming away after speaking to the Head on the subject; and the Head had shown some slight signs of being bored with it. Mr. Ratcliff knew the farmer by sight, and as the portly gentleman naturally had no business at the school, the Housemaster guessed at once that he had come to lodge some complaint. That was a matter after Mr. Ratcliff's own heart, and he saluted the farmer very politely.

"Good-afternoon, Mr. Oates."

"Afternoon, sir!" said Mr. Oates. "I've dropped in to see Dr. Holmes!"

"I trust none of the boys have been trespassing on your land again," said Mr. Ratcliff, not quite stating the facts. As a matter of fact, he trusted that they had.

"That's it, sir!" said Mr. Oates. "Three young rascals, sir!"

"You know their names?"

"That's jest what I've come to find out!"

"Ah! Doubtless you could identify them?"

"Quite sure of that, sir!"

"Pray come in. I will take you to the Head at once. Dr. Holmes will do everything he can, I am sure, to see justice done."

"I hope so," said Mr. Oates, with a peculiar twinkle in his eyes.

Mr. Ratcliff graciously showed him the way to the Head's study. Dr. Holmes concealed a yawn at the sight of the New House master; but Mr. Ratcliff had not come back to talk about the telephone outrage again. He presented Mr. Oates.

"Mr. Oates has called to complain of some of the juniors trespassing on his land yesterday, sir," said Mr. Ratcliff. "I have taken the liberty of bringing him to you at once."

And Mr. Ratcliffe retired, in the comfortable conviction that there was trouble brewing for somebody, and probably for the boys he specially disliked.

Ten minutes later the word went forth for the junior Forms to assemble in hall.

Jack Blake brought the news to Tom Merry's study, where the Terrible Three were lying low. Monty Lowther met him with a horrible squint, and he recoiled.

"My hat! Don't spring that too suddenly on old Oates, or he'll have apoplexy!" he said. "You're wanted. All junior Forms to assemble in hall."

"No chance for three kids to keep out, I suppose?" said Tom Merry, with a sigh.

Blake shook his head.

"No; the prefects have been instructed to see that all the juniors are there."

"Oh, rats!"

And the Terrible Three came disconsolately downstairs. After the feast comes the reckoning, and the hour of retribution had evidently arrived.

The Junior Forms—the Shell, the Fourth, the Third, and the Second—assembled in hall. The First—the Babes, as they were called—were not wanted. Shell and Fourth and Third and Second lined up, the Terrible Three keeping as far back as possible in the ranks of the Shell. The prefects called over the names to ascertain that all were there. Then the Head entered the hall by the upper door, accompanied by

the stout and ruddy farmer. Dr. Holmes glanced over the assembly.

"My boys," he said, "I understand that there was a junior paper-chase yesterday, in which most of the junior boys took part. There were three hares, and they crossed the land belonging to Mr. Oates, in spite of the prohibition. These three boys are wanted. Let them come forward."

There was no movement.

The Terrible Three looked as unconscious as they could. Kildare glanced at them, and Monty Lowther had the audacity to half-close one eye and wink at the captain of St. Jim's. Kildare almost burst into a laugh, but he turned it into a cough just in time.

"If the three boys do not come forward, Mr. Oates will identify them," said the Head.

Silence.

"Pray pick out the boys, Mr. Oates."

"Certainly, sir!" said Mr. Oates.

And the stout farmer descended from the dais and came along the assembled Forms. He scanned all the boys carefully as he passed.

He recognised many members of the pack, but he had nothing to do with them; they had not entered his land.

He paused as he came opposite the Terrible Three.

Monty Lowther was squinting atrociously, Manners had a big chunk of toffee in his cheek, giving him an appearance of bad toothache, and Tom Merry had twisted his mouth sideways in a really alarming manner.

Thus they faced the inspection of the farmer.

In Etons and broad collars they looked, of course, very different from their appearance in running clothes, and, added to the contortion of their features, that should have saved them from recognition.

The farmer, in fact, did not recognise them, but he was struck by Lowther's squint, and he stopped and stared at him as if fascinated.

"Good 'eavens!" he murmured.

He was about to pass on when Mr. Ratcliff's rasping voice rapped out. Mr. Ratcliff really had no business there at all; but Mr. Ratcliff was a gentleman who had a finger in as many pies as he could. Mr. Ratcliff was on the spot to lend any assistance possible in identifying the culprits. And Mr. Ratcliff spotted at once the facial contortions of the Terrible Three.

"Tom Merry!" he rapped out.

"Yes, sir?" said Tom, speaking with some difficulty, as he did not want to untwist his mouth while the farmer's eyes were upon him.

"Why are you twisting your face in that ridiculous manner?" demanded Mr. Ratcliff.

"Eh, sir?"

"Is it to prevent recognition, Merry?"

"Oh, sir!"

"Lowther, this is the first time I have seen you afflicted with a squint! Is it natural, Lowther, or is it assumed?"

"Oh!" murmured Lowther.

"Manners, take that out of your mouth, whatever it is!"

"Oh!"

"And kindly resume your normal appearance," said Mr. Ratcliff acidly. "I fear that you are attempting to deceive Mr. Oates."

The Terrible Three looked at Mr. Ratcliff as if they could eat him. The game was up now; and Lowther's squint and Manners' swelling in the face and Tom Merry's twisted mouth disappeared all together.

Mr. Oates uttered an exclamation.

"They are the three!"

"I thought so," said Mr. Ratcliff grimly. "Kindly step out here, Merry and Manners and Lowther!"

The chums of the Shell, with feelings too deep for words, stepped out.

"Ere they are, sir!" said Mr. Oates.

The Terrible Three, followed him to the Head. Dr. Holmes looked at them over his gold-rimmed pince-nez.

"Merry! Manners! Lowther! You were the hares in the paper-chase yesterday afternoon?" asked Dr. Holmes.

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry resignedly.

"Why did you not come forward?"

"We—we didn't want to be licked, sir."

The Head coughed.

"They were attempting to avoid recognition, Dr. Holmes, by contorting their features," said Mr. Ratcliff spitefully.

Dr. Holmes smiled.

"As these boys admit the fact, the matter is now settled," he said.

"Not quite, sir," said Mr. Oates. "I've got a question to put to these young gentlemen, with your permission, sir."

"Certainly, Mr. Oates."

"If—if you please, Mr. Oates," said Lowther meekly, "we're awfully sorry! It was really your fault the window was broken—"

"What!"

"If you had had your window made to open we shouldn't have had to break it, sir. We tried to break it without damaging it, but it was impossible."

The doctor turned his head away, and Mr. Oates burst into a guffaw.

"This ill-timed levity will not serve you, Lowther," said Mr. Ratcliff.

"I'm only trying to explain to Mr. Oates, sir," said Lowther. "I am sure, Mr. Oates, as a reasonable man, won't want us to be punished for what we couldn't help. And we are willing to pay for the window, or I will mend it if he chooses. I'm a good carpenter."

"I want to ask you young gentlemen a question," said Mr. Oates. "You dropped on my 'ead from my window, and you run off. You got off my land afore I could catch you, and you went over the level-crossing?"

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry, in surprise, wondering what was coming.

"Now," said Mr. Oates impressively, "which of you was it that took my little girl off the railway line jest as the express was comin' by?"

The Terrible Three jumped. A bombshell dropping into the old hall would hardly have astonished them more than that unexpected question from Mr. Oates.

CHAPTER 13.

Tom Merry—Hero!

THE RE was a buzz among the juniors crowding the hall. The Head was smiling.

Mr. Ratcliff bit his lip. He began to see that the farmer's visit had not exactly the object he had supposed and wished.

"My hat!" murmured Jack Blake. "This is the first time I've heard of this. What is the old boy getting at?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The Terrible Three were silent. Mr. Oates was regarding them seriously. He turned to the crowded, eager fellows looking on.

"Young gentlemen," he said, "I dessay you thought I've come 'ere to have a lad punished for trespassing on my land. Well, I was coming here for that—specially after they broke my winder and dropp'd on my 'ead! But after that I heard something, which I have told your headmaster. My eldest girl was out with my little Alice, and the kid had wandered away and got on the railway line. She was right under the express, when one of these boys pulled her out, and nearly got hisself killed in doing it.

"When my girl came in, crying and in hysterics, I knew that it must have been one of them, 'cause it happened at the level-crossing only five minutes arter they'd got out of my stables. If they hadn't got out my little girl would have been cut to pieces by the train." The stout farmer's voice shook. "The boy that did that was a hero. He was one of the best! I've come 'ere to give him a father's thanks, and to tell his schoolmates to be proud of him. It was the bravest thing I've ever come across. And now I want to know which of you young gentlemen it was," added the farmer, turning to the Terrible Three again.

Tom Merry's face was scarlet. Manners and Lowther, delighted at the turn the affair had taken, pushed him forward.

"Here's the giddy hero, sir!" said Lowther.

"That's the chap!" said Manners. "He wanted to hide his light under a bushel, but murder will out. Here he is."

"Shurrup!" murmured Tom Merry.

There was a yell from the juniors in the hall.

"Good old Tom Merry! Bravo!"

"So it was you, young gentleman?" said Mr. Oates.

"I—I didn't know it was your little girl, of course!" stammered Tom Merry.

The farmer grinned.

"You wouldn't have left her there if you'd knowed that, I suppose?" he said.

"No, I didn't mean that! But—but it was nothing, you know. I couldn't have let the kid be run over, could I?"

"Yes, you could," said the farmer. "You could have thought of your own danger."

"I didn't stop to think," confessed Tom Merry.

"That's just it!" said the farmer. "If you'd stop to think whether you'd risk it, my little girl would have been killed. I'd like to shake hands with you, young gentleman," said Mr. Oates, holding out a big red hand. "I had been rough on you and 'ard on you, and you saved my little girl from death, and you might have been killed yourself.

"I'm glad you came to no harm, sir, and I'm sorry I stopped you coming on my land; and I'm glad you broke the window and dropp'd on my 'ead, and it would have

served me right if you'd dropp'd 'arder. And if you ever want to come on my land again, you're to do jest as you like; it's free to you and all your friends; and when you feel inclined to drop into the farmhouse to tea, my missus will be more than glad to see you."

Tom Merry shook hands with Mr. Oates gladly enough. He was only too pleased to see the matter end that way.

"I am very glad that Mr. Oates has brought this matter to my notice," said Dr. Holmes. "Merry, I am proud of you. It was a very gallant action. You did wrong in trespassing upon Mr. Oates's property, but the result has been so happy that I am sure Mr. Oates is glad that you came there."

"And will be glad every time Master Merry comes again, sir," said Mr. Oates. "He and all his friends will always be welcome to do what they like. God bless him!"

And the stout farmer shook hands with Tom Merry again, and ducked his head to the doctor, and retired.

"Three cheers for Tom Merry!" shouted Figgins.

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

"And three more for Mistah Oates!" chirruped Arthur

Augustus D'Arcy.

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

The old hall rang with it. And the Head smiled approval. As the Head retired, there was a rush of the fellows towards Tom Merry, and he was seized and hoisted on the shoulders of three or four juniors, and carried out of the hall in triumph.

"Round the quad.!" shouted Blake.

Tom Merry struggled.

"Put me down, you asses! Leggo!"

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus. "We're proud of you, deah boy. You have done exactly what I should have done undah the same circes—"

"Than which there can be no higher praise!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"March him round the quad., deah boys!"

"Hurrah!"

"Let me go!" yelled Tom Merry. "You silly asses! You frabjous chumps! Stop it! Don't play the giddy goat!"

"True heroes are ever modest," grinned Blake; "but we're going to give you your proper allowance of glory!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

And Tom Merry was rushed out into the quadrangle, high on the shoulders of his schoolfellows, amid a cheering throng.

Blake produced a mouth-organ, and placed himself at the head of the procession, buzzing out: "See the Conquering Hero Comes!" But Digby tapped him on the shoulder.

"Play something more appropriate, you ass!" said Dig.

Blake stopped his musical efforts for a moment to glare at Digby.

"Ass!" he said. "There isn't anything more appropriate than that!"

"Blessed if I see it! Why not play 'See the Conquering Hero Comes'?" said Digby.

Blake glared.

"You fathead! That's what I was playing!"

"Oh!" said Dig, in astonishment. "Were you?"

Blake disdained to reply. He buzzed on again, and the procession marched. Right round the quadrangle they bore the crimson-faced and exasperated hero, amid thunderous cheers. There was only one glum face looking on—Mr. Ratcliff's. Mr. Ratcliff would have stopped the demonstration if he had dared, but he knew that the Head was looking on from his study window, with a smile of approval. The good old doctor was very pleased to see the St. Jim's fellows recognise so spontaneously the heroism of their schoolfellow.

"Hurrah! Hurrah!"

"Bwavo, Tom Mewwy!"

Right round the quadrangle and back to the School House, where the flustered hero was set down at last on the steps.

"Speech!" shouted Figgins.

"Yaas, wathah! A few gwaceful words suitable to the occasion, deah boy."

Tom Merry snorted.

"All right!" he said. "I think you're a lot of asses! If you collar me again, I shall hit out. That's all."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a rush, and Tom Merry vanished into the School House. Manners and Lowther found him in the study, smoothing out his crumpled attire, and putting on a new collar.

"Tommy, we're proud of you," said Manners.

"Bravo!" chortled Lowther.

Tom Merry did not reply. He picked up a big cushion, and rushed upon his faithful chums, and smote them hip and thigh, and drove them out of the study.

And after that there was peace for the hero of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 14. Lowther Looks In.

"MERRY!"
"Yes, sir!" said Tom Merry, stopping.
"I wish to speak to you, Merry," said Mr. Ratcliff, with his thin lips looking very tight and spiteful.
"Very well, sir."

Mr. Ratcliff had stopped Tom Merry in the quad, the day after Mr. Oates's visit to the school. The Terrible Three had almost forgotten the telephone jape by that time; but Mr. Ratcliff had not forgotten it, as his next words showed.

"I have been making inquiries," said Mr. Ratcliff. "It appears that you were in the House at the time those orders were given by telephone to the tradesmen on Wednesday."

Tom Merry groaned inwardly. Why on earth couldn't Ratty let the matter drop? he wondered. It was so like Ratty to be always raking up ancient history in this way.

"Was I, sir?" said Tom.

"Yes."

"We had a paper-chase that afternoon, sir," said Tom Merry innocently.

"But I have ascertained the times, and I find that you did not start on the paper-chase until after the tradesmen had received those orders."

"Indeed, sir!"

"I suspected all along," said Mr. Ratcliff, "that you were the author of that exceedingly foolish practical joke."

"Did you really, sir?"

"I did. Do you deny it?"

Tom Merry was silent.

"I have asked you a question, Merry," said Mr. Ratcliff, with a glitter in his eyes.

"I can't answer it, sir," said Tom Merry.

"What!"

"It isn't fair to ask me," said Tom Merry, respectfully but firmly. "It's making use of me to find out who did it. It's not my business to give a fellow away, or to betray myself if I did it. The Head wouldn't think so."

"Are you aware, Merry, that you are speaking to a House-master, to whom you owe respect and obedience?" thundered Mr. Ratcliff.

"You are not my House-master, sir," said Tom Merry. "If Mr. Railton questions me, I am bound to answer."

"Don't bandy words with me, Merry. I ask you if it was you that gave those orders to the tradesmen on the telephone."

"I have nothing to say, sir."

"I shall take your silence as a confession."

"You may please yourself about that, of course, sir."

"Then I shall place the matter before the Head."

"Very well, sir."

Mr. Ratcliff paused. He knew that the Head would not approve of catechising the boys one after another, in the hope of catching one of them tripping. Mr. Ratcliff was proceeding on the blindest suspicion, for he had no evidence that those telephone calls had been made from the school at all. The Head had shown very plainly that he was tired of the whole matter, and that he would not call up a boy to be examined

about it unless there was some real evidence against him. It was simply tempting a boy to tell falsehoods, the Head had told Mr. Ratcliff. And so Mr. Ratcliff's statement that he would place the matter before the Head was, in fact, mere "gas," as Tom Merry suspected.

"You are insolent, Merry!" said the New Housemaster, at last.

"I don't mean to be, sir. But I don't think it's right to ask me to give information about myself or other fellows."

"Do you dare to criticise my methods?"

Tom Merry did not answer. He was determined that Mr. Ratcliff should not catch him tripping.

"I repeat, Merry, that I feel certain that it was you. If you choose to confess, you may be dealt with more leniently than otherwise."

Tom Merry almost smiled. He was not likely to take a bait like that, even if he had been the practical joker in question—which he was not.

"Have you anything to say, Merry?"

"No, sir."

"You are an impertinent boy!" said Mr. Ratcliff, and he suddenly reached over, and boxed Tom Merry's ears.

Then he walked away.

Tom Merry staggered. He was more astonished and indignant than hurt. Boxing ears was not a practice in favour at St. Jim's, and the Head would certainly have been angry if he had seen Mr. Ratcliff's action. Tom Merry rubbed his ear, and stood simply simmering with fury.

"Hallo! What's the trouble?" asked Manners, coming out of the House with his camera under his arm.

Tom Merry glared.

"Ratty! He's smacked my napper."

"My hat! What for?"

"Because he thinks I telephoned for those things the other day," said Tom Merry sulphurously. "The cowardly beast! To dare to lay his paws on me—a School House chap, too!"

"He's an awful beast!" said Manners sympathetically.

"The rotter ought to be brought to his senses somehow."

"I should jolly well think so!" chimed in Monty Lowther.

"He's going round asking fellows questions all the time, trying to get them to give themselves away. Something has got to be done. I've got an idea—"

Tom Merry grunted.

"You go and bury your ideas, Monty! We shall never hear the end of your telephone wheeze as it is!"

"My dear chap, Ratty can't box School House ears and then go on as if nothing had happened," said Monty Lowther severely. "I'm surprised at you! It's an insult to our study, and to the whole House, and to the public school system generally. Ratty has got to be made to realise that the way of the transgressor is hard, and I've got an idea. I had it before he pawed your napper, as a matter of fact, and that's an additional reason for making him sit up. It's a brilliant idea, and only requires a length of insulated wire, and I can borrow some from Glyn's study. He's gone out!"

Tom laughed.

"Well, I'm on," he said. "He's not going to box my ears for nothing. It's an insult, and it hurts, too. He's made my head sing, the beast!"

"I've been helping Bernard Glyn with some of his experiments," Lowther explained. "He's got all the things we want in his study. I suppose you know how an electric-bell is worked? When you press the button, it—"

"Rings!" said Manners.

"Yes, fathead! But when you press the button, it brings the two terminals into contact, and that sets up a current, which causes the bell to ring."

"Yes; I believe I know that," yawned Manners. "Do you make any charge for these lessons in the elements of electricity?"

"Ass! My idea is this: Old Ratty is busy on exam. papers now. He spends a lot of time on them, trying to make up regular twisters that the fellows can't get through. He gets frightfully ratty at being interrupted when he's doing them. I've planned a regular series of interruptions for him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"All that's wanted is for his study-bell to keep on ringing, so that the housemaids will keep on going to see what he wants."

"I suppose he won't ring his study-bell unless he wants to, will he?" demanded Tom Merry.

Monty Lowther nodded calmly.

"Yes, he will. That's where the joke comes in. He's going to ring his study-bell whenever he sits down in his chair to work."

"But he won't!" roared Tom.

"Yes, he will, because I'm going to attach an extra wire to it, and put a button under the cushion on his chair," Lowther explained serenely. "He can't sit down then without pressing the button."

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"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But you'll have to get into his study——"

"Easy enough. He's in the School House now, asking the prefects questions. He's guessed, somehow, that it was the telephone in the prefects' room that was used the other day, and he thinks some of the seniors may have seen a chap hanging about there. He'll be some time, and I sha'n't be long. You fellows can hang round under his window, and whistle as he's coming, and I'll slip out and hide in Figg's study."

"Good egg! Got the wire?"

"Yes; in my pocket."

"Come on, then."

The Terrible Three strolled over to the New House. Figgins & Co. met them there, and were somewhat inclined to give them a hostile reception. But a few whispered words put Figgins & Co. on the best of terms with the School House fellows. Monty Lowther sauntered into the House, leaving his chums on the watch outside. Two minutes later he was in Mr. Ratcliff's study, with the door closed.

Lowther set to work quickly.

Electricity had not been thought of in the days when the New House was built, and when it was installed there the wires had been placed outside the walls, not under the surface as in modern houses. Mr. Ratcliff's bell was beside the fireplace, and the wire ran from it down the wall, very carefully and neatly disposed of in the angle beside the square stone pillar at the side of the grate. There it disappeared under the floor. Monty Lowther turned back the edge of the carpet, and scraped the wire on a level with the floor until the covering was scraped away and the two wires inside were revealed to view.

Carefully keeping the two wires separate, he attached the two ends of his insulated wire to them, and then replaced the binding as well as he could. He pulled his own wire along under the carpet, and jabbed a hole in the carpet under Mr. Ratcliff's swivel-chair, for the wire to emerge. He wound his wire round the centre leg of the swivel-chair, and brought it up the back of the chair and through an interstice in the ornamental back. To the end of the wire he attached a flat bell-push. He raised the cushion from the seat of the

chair, placed the bell-push there, and laid the cushion lightly down again.

The weight of the cushion was not sufficient to depress the push. But as soon as anyone sat in the chair, the cushion would be pressed down hard, of course, and then the push would be depressed, and a current would be set up by the contact of the terminals, and the bell would ring, just as if Mr. Ratcliff had pressed the button beside his fireplace.

Monty Lowther worked quickly, and in five minutes all was done.

He left the study in a mood of serene satisfaction.

His chums met him outside with a glance of inquiry.

"My infants!" said Lowther. "This is where we bunk! Upon the whole, I don't think Ratty had better see us here when he comes home. He might suspect that some naughty boy had been in his study."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the Terrible Three departed.

CHAPTER 15.

Rung Up.

MR. RATCLIFF retired to the New House in a decidedly bad temper.


The School House prefects had been unable to give him any information. They had been out of the House at the time when the Housemaster suspected that the telephone had been used, and Mr. Ratcliff more than suspected that they were very much tickled with the jape and not disposed to help him in his search for the practical joker.

Hence the dark frown upon Mr. Ratcliff's face as he came into his study. He had only one consolation—it was his task to prepare the examination papers for a forthcoming exam., and he could make them, as Lowther expressed it, regular twisters.

The New Housemaster closed his door, and growled to himself, and sat down in his comfortable chair at the table, and drew his papers and pen and ink towards him.

He settled down to work.

A minute later there was a tap at the door, and Sarah, the housemaid, appeared.



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Mr. Ratcliff stared at her.

"Yes, sir?" said Sarah.

"What do you want?" snapped Mr. Ratcliff. "If there is anything wrong below-stairs, go to Mrs. Kenwigg. Do not bother me."

"You rang, sir."

"I did not ring."

"I thought I heard your bell, sir."

"You were mistaken."

Sarah retired. Mr. Ratcliff grunted, and settled down to work again. But he was not left in peace. In a minute, or less, there was a tap at the door again, and Sarah put a surprised face into the room.

"Do you want anything, sir?"

"No, I do not. Please do not come here unless I ring."

"But you rang, sir."

"What!"

"You rang, sir," said Sarah firmly.

Mr. Ratcliff rose to his feet, and surveyed the maid with a stony glare.

"What nonsense is this, Sarah? I repeat to you that I did not ring! How dare you tell me I rang, when I tell you I did not ring! It was probably some other bell—perhaps Mr. Flatt's. Go and see."

"It was your bell, sir. The cook said so, too."

"The cook is as stupid as you are, Sarah. Kindly go away."

Sarah retired, or rather flounced away. Mr. Ratcliff, very much annoyed, sat down to his work again, quite unconsciously ringing the bell by doing so. In two minutes there was a sharp knock at his door, and Mrs. Kenwigg, the New House housekeeper, came in, with a very red face. Mr. Ratcliff jumped up irritably.

"Good heavens, Mrs. Kenwigg! Cannot I be left in peace for a few moments together?" he exclaimed. "How am I to work with these endless interruptions? What is it now?"

"You rang, sir."

"What!"

"Sarah has been up twice, sir, when you rang," said Mrs. Kenwigg. "Now I have come myself. I can't understand your playing a joke upon a housemaid in this way, Mr. Ratcliff, and it is my duty to tell you so."

Mr. Ratcliff almost choked.

"Joke," he roared—"joke!" Mrs. Kenwigg, am I in the habit of playing jokes on servants? Are you out of your senses?"

"I am not, sir," said Mrs. Kenwigg sharply; "but I think you must be, sir. First ordering fifty tons of coal just after the coal was laid in, and now ringing the bell and telling the maid you do not want her when she comes—"

"I did not ring the bell!" shrieked Mr. Ratcliff, almost in a frenzy. "I tell you, Mrs. Kenwigg, that I have not touched the bell since I have entered this room! I have not moved from my chair!"

"The bell rang, sir."

"It did not ring! How could it ring unless I rang it?" fumed Mr. Ratcliff.

"That's what I want to know, sir," said Mrs. Kenwigg.

"And I must say—"

"Leave my room, Mrs. Kenwigg! I refuse to be troubled with such nonsense. If the bell rings it must be out of order. Send for a man to see to it, if you like. Do not trouble me."

"The bell is not out of order, sir," said Mrs. Kenwigg, with asperity, "and it can only be rung from this room. You must permit me to say, sir, that I think it ridiculous."

And Mrs. Kenwigg retired.

Mr. Ratcliff sat down again, and murmured something under his breath. Mrs. Kenwigg, as she reached the stairs, heard the sound of the bell ringing below, and called down to Sarah.

"What bell is that, Sarah?"

"Mr. Ratcliff's bell, ma'am."

Mrs. Kenwigg felt quite faint. The affair of the fifty tons of house coal had made her regard the Housemaster with suspicion. Now Mr. Ratcliff was ringing his bell the moment she had left his study, and it was ringing continuously, without cessation. Mrs. Kenwigg turned back towards the Housemaster's room, and then hesitated. If Mr. Ratcliff had really gone insane, it might not be safe to venture into close quarters with him. In her doubt and alarm, Mrs. Kenwigg knocked at the door of Mr. Flatt, the music-master of St. Jim's, who had his quarters in the New House.

"Mr. Flatt, please, would you mind going and seeing Mr. Ratcliff?" said Mrs. Kenwigg. "I'm afraid there is something very wrong with him."

The little, bald-headed gentleman jumped up from his piano at once.

"Certainly, Mrs. Kenwigg. What is the matter?"

"He keeps on ringing his bell, sir, and when a body goes to see what's wanted, he says he hasn't rung," said Mrs. Kenwigg, in bewilderment. "I can't make him out, unless he is—ill."

"Bless my soul," said Mr. Flatt.

The music-master hurried to Mr. Ratcliff's study, and knocked at the door, and entered.

Mr. Ratcliff glared at him.

"Really, Mr. Flatt—"

"Is anything wrong, my dear Ratcliff?"

"Wrong! What should be wrong?" snapped the Housemaster.

"Ahem! Mrs. Kenwigg says—"

"I think Mrs. Kenwigg has taken leave of her senses, as well as the rest of the household," snapped Mr. Ratcliff. "She persists that I have rung my bell."

"It's ringing now," came Mrs. Kenwigg's voice from the passage.

"What?" cried Mr. Ratcliff.

"It's ringing now, sir."

"Mr. Flatt, you can see that I am not touching the bell!" almost shouted the Housemaster. "The whole household has gone mad, I think."

Mr. Flatt looked astounded.

"This is most extraordinary!" he exclaimed. "Are you sure that it is Mr. Ratcliff's bell that is ringing, Mrs. Kenwigg?"

Mrs. Kenwigg called down the stairs.

"Whose bell is that ringing, Sarah?"

"Mr. Ratcliff's, ma'am."

"Extraordinary!" exclaimed Mr. Flatt. "Mr. Ratcliff is not touching his bell. This is some extraordinary case of acoustics, and well worthy of investigation. Mr. Ratcliff, this is most extraordinary!"

"The house must be haunted," cried Mrs. Kenwigg.

Mr. Ratcliff jumped up.

"Nonsense!" he exclaimed. "It must be a trick of some sort—"

"The bell's stopped ringing now," said Sarah's voice from the distance.

"That is very curious," said Mr. Flatt. "It certainly appears to be an impenetrable mystery. I am very interested in the subject of acoustics—"

"I am not!" snapped the Housemaster. "I should be glad to be left in peace, to get on with my work. If the bell has stopped ringing, Mrs. Kenwigg, the matter is ended."

And he sat down again.

"Please, ma'am, the bell's ringing again," came Sarah's voice.

"Ringing again?" exclaimed Mr. Ratcliff. "Impossible."

"Most extraordinary!" said Mr. Flatt. "Do you observe, my dear Ratcliff, that the bell ceased to ring when you rose, and recommenced when you sat down? It is a most extraordinary case of magnetism."

"Nonsense!"

"My dear Ratcliff—"

Mr. Ratcliff had jumped up again. Sarah's voice below reported that the bell had ceased to ring. Mr. Flatt was triumphant. As a musician, he was very keen on the subject of acoustics. It was a most extraordinary case, and Mr. Flatt wanted to investigate it. Mr. Ratcliff wanted to investigate it, too, and he was more practical in the matter than the musical Mr. Flatt. As soon as he found that the bell rang when he sat down, and ceased to ring when he rose, he suspected a trick.

He dragged the cushion from his seat.

He almost staggered at the sight of the bell-push there, with the wire curling down the back of the chair to the floor.

He grabbed up the bell-push, and dragged up the wire.

"It is a trick!" he yelled. "Someone has attached this wire and bell-push to my bell, so that it rang whenever I sat down. It is infamous!"

"Good Lord!" said Mr. Flatt.

"Goodness gracious!" murmured Mrs. Kenwigg.

"It is an infamous trick!" yelled Mr. Ratcliff. "I—I—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Ratcliff glared at the music-master.

"What are you laughing at, Mr. Flatt?"

The music-master coughed.

"Ahem! Hum! I—I—ahem!—"

"I do not see anything to laugh at. It is infamous. Some one shall be most severely punished for this!" shrieked Mr. Ratcliff.

And he caught up a cane, and rushed from the study.

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CHAPTER 16.

Mr. Ratcliff Climbs Down.

"A, ha, ha!"

"My hat! Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry and Monty Lowther roared.

It was an hour since that peculiar scene in Mr. Ratcliff's study, and the chums of the Shell had received an account of the disturbance in the New House from the grinning Figgins.

Tom Merry and Lowther were in the study. Manners was out somewhere with his camera, as usual, but the other two were quite adequately occupied in chuckling over the discomfiture of Ratty.

"If I could only have been there," sighed Lowther. "That's the worst of a little joke on Ratty—chap can't see his face."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Still, we saw him when the coal came," grinned Lowther.

"Poor old Ratty! He isn't up to our weight."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The chums of the Shell, as they roared with laughter, did not hear a faint creak in the passage. The door was half-open, as Manners had left it. They did not know that Mr. Ratcliff was coming along the passage, and that he had heard their laughter, and their careless words, and stopped to listen.

That was quite Mr. Ratcliff's way.

He had a custom of going about very quietly, and hearing things never intended for his ears, and using them against the speakers. That was one reason why Mr. Ratcliff was so unpopular in his own House, as well as in the School House, or perhaps more so there.

The New Housemaster was on the track. He had questioned all the New House boys about that wire in his study, and satisfied himself that the practical joker had come from the School House. And so he had come over to see the Terrible Three about it. And, as he heard the juniors talking carelessly in their study, he lightened his footsteps, and came cautiously towards the door, to listen. There was no other master at St. Jim's who would have deigned to play the eavesdropper; but Mr. Ratcliff had no scruples. To discover the culprit, and inflict upon him a most condign punishment, seemed to Mr. Ratcliff to be an end that would excuse the use of any means whatever.

The Housemaster paused outside the door, and bent his head to listen, his whole attitude that of a spy. There was no one else in the passage, and, if he had heard a footstep, Mr. Ratcliff would have been on his guard at once, and would have changed his attitude promptly. Quite unconscious of the eavesdropper just outside their door, Tom Merry and Lowther ran on.

"The old duffer will never let this rest," grinned Lowther. "But I fancy he won't bowl me out—what?"

"No fear!"

"He hasn't got on to the telephone japer yet. Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Ratcliff's eyes glinted; he had heard enough. In his excitement at making the conclusive discovery, he had not heard three short, sharp clicks along the passage. He burst into the study.

"So I have discovered you!" he thundered.

Tom Merry and Monty Lowther started up in dismay. They knew, at once, that the Housemaster had been listening.

Tom Merry faced him, his eyes gleaming with scorn.

"You have discovered what, sir?" he asked coldly.

"The author of the outrage with the telephone, and the more recent outrage in my study!" thundered Mr. Ratcliff. "You are condemned out of your own mouths! I have heard you discussing your wickedness. Follow me to the Head!"

Manners entered the study. He had his camera in his hand, and a genial smile upon his face.

"Follow me to the Head!" said Mr. Ratcliff harshly. "You had better come too, Manners. I am sure that you were in this plot as well."

"Would you mind waiting till I've developed my photographs, sir?" asked Manners, with deadly politeness. "I've got some that would interest the Head very much. I took three snapshots just now in the Shell passage, sir—three really good interiors. The light from the end window, sir, was very good, and I am sure that the negatives will come out really fine. I snapped the door of this study, sir, and I had the good luck to snap it just when you were there—"

Mr. Ratcliff turned white.

Tom Merry and Lowther gasped. They understood!

Manners had come upstairs to return to the study just as Mr. Ratcliff was playing the eavesdropper outside the door.

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of the study, and the amateur photographer of St. Jim's had had the great presence of mind to snapshot Mr. Ratcliff in the very act of playing the spy.

"You—you have photographed me, Manners?" gasped Mr. Ratcliff.

"Yes, sir—close to the door—very close, in fact, sir."

Mr. Ratcliff breathed painfully. He was quite satisfied for his own part with his own methods of getting information. But to be photographed in the act of playing the spy; to be shown up to all the school as an eavesdropper; to be branded in the public gaze—his head seemed to swim at the thought.

He was satisfied with his methods, but he knew that the Head would not be satisfied with them. And the negatives, developed, could be printed to any extent; there might be a flood of photographs distributed all over St. Jim's—Mr. Ratcliff in the character of spy! It would be enough—more than enough—to compel him to resign his post at the school. He would never be able to face and live down such a storm of derision and contempt as would follow.

"Give me that camera, please, Manners!" he stuttered at last, in a husky voice.

Manners looked surprised.

"My camera, sir!" he exclaimed.

"Yes; give it to me at once!"

Manners put his camera behind him.

"It's my camera, sir," he said.

Mr. Ratcliff made a forward movement, as if to take the camera by force. Tom Merry and Lowther lined up grimly beside Manners. They had the whip-hand of Mr. Ratcliff now, so long as they kept the negatives. They did not intend to allow the Housemaster to take the evidence out of their hands. He would never dare to report them to the Head when it was in their power to prove that he had played the spy at their study door.

"Do you dare to disobey me?" he thundered, in a last effort at bullying.

"It's my camera and my films, sir," said Manners.

There was a long pause.

"You—you are quite mistaken in thinking that—that I was listening at the door!" said Mr. Ratcliff at last, thickly. He was consumed with fury at the necessity of humbling himself thus to the juniors. But there was no help for it, and Mr. Ratcliff had to climb down lest worse should befall him.

"Then the photographs won't do any harm, sir," said Manners demurely.

"The—the photographs might lead to apprehensions," muttered Mr. Ratcliff. "I prefer to—to destroy them. I ask you, as a favour, to give me the negatives, Manners. Under the circumstances, I will overlook your conduct, and nothing more shall be said about the affair of the telephone or about what happened in my study this afternoon."

"You promise, sir?"

"Yes, I promise you that."

Manners exchanged a glance with his comrades. Mr. Ratcliff had been brought fairly to his knees, and the juniors could feel almost sorry for him.

Tom Merry and Lowther nodded assent to Manners' unspoken query, and the amateur photographer of St. Jim's opened the camera, took out the roll of films, and handed it to the Housemaster.

Mr. Ratcliff crushed it in his hand, and left the study without another word.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Monty Lowther. "Manners, old man, you've saved the situation! It was great!"

Mr. Ratcliff's footsteps died away. He was seen to go; and a few moments later the chums of Study No. 6 looked into Tom Merry's study to learn what Ratty had wanted.

They were surprised to see the Terrible Three executing a wild war-dance round the table.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, turning his eyeglass upon the Shell fellows in astonishment. "G'wreat Scott! What the—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "Hear us smile!"

"Hurrah!"

"We've caught Ratty!" sobbed Monty Lowther. "'This is the cat that killed the rat—'"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

They explained breathlessly. And then there was a yell of laughter from the chums of Study No. 6; and they joined in the war-dance of triumph.

Mr. Ratcliff kept his word. Probably his love for the Terrible Three was not increased by what had happened. But that was a trifle that did not trouble in the least the serenity of the Scamps of the School.

THE END.

(Another splendid long, complete tale of the chums of St. Jim's next Wednesday, entitled "Coward or Hero?" by Martin Clifford. Order Now.)



Our Weekly Prize Page.

LOOK OUT FOR YOUR WINNING STORYETTE!

A NARROW ESCAPE.

Donald had fallen into the harbour, and had been rescued by a bystander. After thanking his rescuer, he finished up with: "I'm glad ye got me oot. What a licking I should have got frae ma mither if I had been drowned!"

And with a shake of the head, he went home.—Sent in by A. Milne, Forres.

The prominent citizen stormed into the editor's room.

"See here, what in thunder do you mean by printing my name in your 'Obituary' columns? Can't you wait until a man's dead before you bury him? It's hurt my business seriously. I want a contradiction in to-morrow's paper without fail!"

"I'm sorry, Mr. Blank," said the editor, "but that's out of the question. We never apologise, and we never withdraw a statement. But we'll put you in the 'Births' column next issue, if you like!"—Sent in by F. Smith, Lymington.

NO DIFFERENCE.

"Wot's the meaning of 'ditto,' 'Arry?"

"Why, this 'ere's one brick, ain't it?"

"Yus."

"Well, that there one is 'ditto.' See?"

"Yus, but they look just the same to me!"—Sent in by T. Beedle, Burnham.

"PRIVATE!"

Some children were trespassing in a field, and were quite happy gathering flowers. Presently up came the keeper.

"Now then!" he cried angrily. "Didn't you see the notice at the gate?"

"Oh, yes!" answered one little girl shyly. "We saw a notice, sir, but it had got 'Private!' on top, so we didn't like to look."—Sent in by Miss M. Evans, Ruabon.

Traveller: "Yes, the heat was so great in Central Africa that it singed the hair on our heads!"

Pat: "That's nothing to what I remember in Dublin. Once it was so hot that we had to feed the chickens on ice-cream to keep them from laying fried eggs!"—Sent in by Miss Foggitt, Stockton-on-Tees.

THE TRAGEDY OF YOUTH.

The little fellow was crying bitterly by the roadside, and one good, kind lady stopped and gently patted him on the head.

"Why, my little man, what's the matter?"

"Matter?" sobbed the youth. "Why, here have I been playing truant all day, and I've just remembered the holidays began yesterday!"—Sent in by J. J. Jones, Liscard.

A USELESS QUESTION.

An old gentleman, on arriving back in London from his holidays, found that he had left his umbrella behind at the hotel where he had been staying. After a time he managed to get into communication with the hotel by telephone.

"Would you please see if I left my umbrella in the hall?" he asked the person at the other end of the wire.

After a short pause came the hall-boy's voice: "Is this it, sir?"—Sent in by Miss F. Davidson, Redland.

A SERI(AL)OUS MATTER.

Teacher: "Now then, Tommy, name one of the most important cereals that you know of."

Tommy (having in mind that THE GEM was out that day): "Why, sir, 'Sir Billy, of Greyhouse.'"

The teacher failed to see it, and Tommy got spanked.—Sent in by C. A. Titterell, Peckham.

PAT'S LITTLE WAY.

Pat was the new orderly, and he had received orders to call his major at 7.30 a.m. Precisely at 5.30 a.m. Pat rapped on the panels of the door, and an angry voice roared:

"Who's there?"

"Sure, and it's half-past five, sorr!" said Pat.

"You idiot!" yelled the major. "I told you to call me at 7.30, not 5.30!"

"Yes, sorr," responded Pat. "But I've woke yez to tell yez that you have another two hours to slape!"

There is a new orderly wanted in Pat's regiment.—Sent in by C. Hingston, Devonport.

SORRY HE SPOKE.

Mike Hennessy, a hefty young Irishman, secured his first foremanship after serving for some years as "one of the gang." Promptly at seven o'clock in the morning he began his duties by calling the gang to order.

"Ye all have to work for me!" he shouted. "Work, I say! And I want every man of yez to understand that I can lick any man in the gang!"

The gang took this insult without a murmur, with the exception of one man, who stepped forward and said:

"You can't lick me, Mike Hennessy!"

"Oh, I can't, can't I?" yelled Mike. "Well, thin, go to the office and draw your money. I'll have no man in my gang that I can't lick!"—Sent in by Patrick Farrington, Dublin.

FAIR PLAY!

Two Irishmen arranged to fight a duel with pistols. One of them was distinctly stout, and when he saw his lean opponent facing him he raised an objection.

"Bedad!" he said. "I'm twice as big a target as he is, so I ought to stand twice as far away from him as he is from me!"

"Be aisy, now!" said his second. "I'll soon put that right!" And, taking a piece of chalk from his pocket, he drew two lines down the stout man's coat, leaving a space of moderate width between them. "Now," he said triumphantly, turning to the other man, "fire away, ye spalpeen! And remember that any hits outside that mark don't count!"—Sent in by J. McColgan, Derry, Ireland.

A DIVISION OF LABOUR.

Two Irishmen were walking towards New York, when they met a man, and asked him how much further they had to travel. They were told that they were still twenty miles from the city.

"Faith, and it's ourselves won't reach the place to-night!" said one.

"Begorra, Pat, come on!" urged his companion. "Twenty moiles! Sure, that's not much—only tin moiles aiece!"—Sent in by A. W. Riddell, Edinburgh.

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SIR BILLY, OF GREYHOUSE!

A Splendid Serial Story dealing with Public-School Life.

By R. S. WARREN BELL.

READ THIS FIRST.

Sir William Percival Travers, 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 Form-fellows 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 Wardour, the captain of the school, while his principal chum is Carew, otherwise known as Parsnip.

(Read on from here.)

The Storming of Greyhouse.

It was on a July day—on a day when the topmost branches of the great oaks in the avenue were nodding and bowing to each other in most decorous fashion, when the drowsy hum of working bees came from among the flowers in the Head's garden, when the birds sang gaily, and all was peace and sweet summer-tide.

Upon this fair scene there broke a horde of savage men. Their curses drowned the peaceful buzzing among the roses. As if in dismay the birds decamped, and even the bees flew away to another garden. But slowly—the men are not yet come.

The tin-workers' strike at Belsert had lasted several days when the mob, setting at defiance the handful of police which had been told off to watch them, swooped down upon the residence of the biggest manufacturer, who lived near Greyhouse, five miles out of the town, along a flat road.

Not a few Greyhouse fellows, wandering about the countryside, had been molested by the strikers. The tales they brought home made the school feel very sore indeed.

These tales had come to the ears of the Head, who, knowing the temper of the strikers, felt some little concern about the safety of those fellows who chose to venture too near Belsert in the course of their rambles.

The striker, when heated by drink—or an empty stomach—and the inflammatory doctrines of his fiery-tongued leaders, will stick at little; when the demon of misrule gets a hold of him he will destroy property, and break heads with few qualms. Fancied wrongs, empty cupboards, and bad liquor will turn reasonable men for brief, mad periods, into creatures lower by many scales than the brute beasts of the field.

The Head promptly stopped all leave, and then, by way of finding out when it would be wise to renew it, walked round to the house of Mr. Winslow, the manufacturer referred to.

Mr. Winslow did not prove communicative.

"I don't know when it will be over," he said. "We have determined not to give in to their demands—they must be starved into submission."

"It is a pity," said the Head peacefully, "that the matter cannot be settled by arbitration."

"Resistance of their claims, absolute and unbending, is our one weapon of defence. Give in, and they will strike again within twelve months on the flimsiest excuse," the manufacturer replied.

"Meanwhile, there is anarchy at Belsert," put in the Head.

"A large force of mounted police is being sent down from London," returned the manufacturer. "Our local men are fat and sleepy, but the Metropolitan Police won't stand nonsense, as the tin-workers will soon discover."

"It is a sad business," said the Head. "I hear the strikers' wives and children are begging of the cottagers out THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 280.

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here. They have wandered all this way to look for bread. You are the leading man in the district—cannot you arrive at a compromise? I will act as a mediator if you like."

"I will not trouble you—" Mr. Winslow was beginning, when the butler entered without knocking.

"If you please, sir," he exclaimed hastily, "there's a boy brought news that a huge mob of strikers is marching along the high road. People are hiding in the fields. They've raided every public-house they've come to, and are mad with drink."

"Bring the lad in!" commanded Mr. Winslow. "Thank God," he added, as the servant left the room, "I've sent my women-folk away! I am prepared for the worst."

The lad—a little country fellow—corroborated the butler's statement. The strikers were advancing in a dense crowd, shouting and singing, waving sticks, and calling out the name of the chief manufacturer.

"They can come if they like!" exclaimed Mr. Winslow recklessly. "I'll shoot a dozen of the blackguards before they can break in. Barricade all the doors and windows," he concluded, thinking the butler was present.

"He's bolted!" observed the boy informer, with a snigger.

The Head had been thinking. He had made up his mind. "Mr. Winslow, come with me! They can smash up this modern place of yours, but Greyhouse is made of sterner stuff. Will you accept the shelter of my school, sir?"

The manufacturer hesitated, clasped his hands nervously, looked from the headmaster to the boy and back again, and at length inclined his head.

"I must," he said unwillingly.

"Just as well," returned the Head shortly. "Because if you stay here they'll kill you."

The manufacturer was not a coward, but the trying events of the past week had shaken his nerve. Without a word he followed Mr. Patterson out of the house.

Immediately on re-entering his own domain the Head had all the gates closed, and caused the bell to be tolled for attendance in Big School.

Rumours of the strikers' approach had already reached Greyhouse; as the fellows trooped into Big School their hearts beat fast at the thought of a possible conflict.

The Head briefly explained the situation. A large band of strikers was advancing on the village, and the chief object of their vengeance was now under the school's roof. It might be necessary for the school to oppose the mob, and he therefore thought it advisable that everyone should arm himself to the best of his ability in case the rioters actually attacked the place. In dismissing them to procure whatever weapons they might be able to lay their hands on, the Head urged them to carry out implicitly the directions of the masters and monitors, who would previously take instructions from himself.

Weapons having been obtained, the school was to assemble in the playground, where further orders would presently be issued.

As Mr. Patterson finished speaking, Cripps hurriedly entered the big school-room and approached the headmaster's desk.

"What is it?" said the Head, amid a deathlike hush.

"They're coming, sir. They've been told Mr. Winslow is here, and they've turned off in this direction."

"Dismiss!" thundered the Head, and the assembled Greys broke away from their places like hounds from the leash. Anything that would hit—and hurt—was a good enough weapon. The door of the armoury was rushed by the school cadets (a hundred in number), who strapped on belts and bayonets, and, with their rifles at the trail, hastened to join the other fellows, who were massing in the playground. Soon the whole school was assembled there awaiting the foe's arrival. The masters, with equal alacrity, swelled the defending host, and came equipped with heavy walking-sticks, golf-clubs, and suchlike implements. Even Mr. Kitt proved himself equal to the occasion, and came striding along by the side of Professor Pulmeyer, carrying a "brassy" over his shoulder. Saunders, Cripps, and the other men assembled

there, too, armed with thick sticks. The Head conferred rapidly with his colleagues. Mr. Forbes, Mr. Dodson, Mr. Phillips, and other masters were told off to direct detachments. The cricket "pro."—Sims—and the gym. instructor—Sergeant Halliday—proved useful acquisitions to a force that was now looking really formidable, in spite of the fact that its chief constituents were boys.

The front of the school was divided from the high-road by a stone wall almost six feet high. The entrance to the drive was guarded by two solid iron gates, full ten feet high, hung on two immense stone pillars. These gates had been closed and bolted. At the back the school playground was surrounded by a wall of gigantic dimensions and practically unscalable. Half a dozen boys were posted at various dormitory windows to give the alarm in case any attempt was made to climb this wall.

The strikers were advancing to the assault with a confidence born of contempt for "them boys"; they came on in the manner of dervishes, with hoarse, raucous shoutings, oaths, and cryings-out of the name of "Winslow!" The distant murmur swelled and grew into a near roar, and soon a dense cloud of dust told that they were close at hand.

Arrived at the gates, the foremost of the mob hammered on the tough iron bars and demanded admittance. The Head walked down to interview them.

"What do you want?" he asked.

"We want Winslow!" they roared. "Give 'im up, and we won't touch the laddies!"

"What do you want Mr. Winslow for?"

"Never mind wot!" returned the leader of the mob. "Mebbe to make a hangel of 'un!"

This sally was received with a hurricane of drunken cheers and laughter.

"You can't have him for that or any other purpose," replied the Head coolly. "So you had better go away."

So saying, he retired, wisely keeping his face towards them. The leader bent down, and, seizing a stone, flung it through the bars of the gates at the headmaster, whom it missed by a bare inch.

The disappointed mob leader seized the gates, and shook them as a wild beast claws its bars. The strikers had struck the first blow. Greyhouse streamed down the drive.

The strikers began to swarm up the wall and gates, "legged up" by their companions—but the Greys were ready for them.

Laying down their rifles for the nonce, the cadets—being the biggest fellows—seized stumps and bats, and, whenever a hand or head appeared, smacked at it with a hearty goodwill, which elicited shrieks and evil words from the host without. Up came a close-cropped head. Thwack! The head disappeared, its owner having sustained a broken scalp. Bang! A yell, and the imprecations following told that the beaten-off one had fallen amongst his comrades. It was the same all along the staunch fortress wall. Heads and hands appeared and disappeared with marvellous rapidity. The Greys and their masters were guarding the wall from one end to the other. Several strikers toppled right over; in a trice they were pounced upon and pinioned by the Greys in their neighbourhood—Cripps having thoughtfully procured about a mile of rope from the box-room. These topplings-over became more frequent, and soon a score of strikers had been taken prisoners.

The mob must have been a thousand strong, but so gallant was the defence of the Greys that it looked as if the tin-workers would never effect an entrance by the over-the-wall method. The Greys thwacked hard and accurately, and many broken heads and bruised hands must have gone back to Belsert that day.

The strikers, however, surged most thickly round the gates, guessing that this was the weakest point in the defences. Here half a dozen of the masters, helped by several of the Sixth, had posted themselves, and the fight may be said to have been hand-to-hand as far as a fight of that sort could be carried on through bars.

"It'll give way soon, lads!" yelled a man in front, who was banging at one of the hinges with a sledge-hammer. "And then we'll have 'em!"

"And make 'em pay for this!" was the savage addition of another, whose head was bound up in a red handkerchief.

"With a will, lads, with a will; we'll have 'em soon!" growled the mob outside.

"Greys! Greys! Greyhouse for ever! Keep 'em out, Greyhouse! Never say die, Greyhouse! Greys! Greys!"

Such were the cries that came from all along the wall while the fight raged.

The strikers' blood was up; they were sweating and gnashing their teeth; in their heat and gore they looked more like wild animals than men. No wonder the more timid of the schoolboys shuddered as they gazed on the scene—too frightened to fight, and not daring to run away. Truly an unenviable predicament!

Of a sudden, to the wonder and dismay of all who perceived it, Wardour and half a dozen of the biggest fellows started running at top speed towards the school buildings. The strikers saw them, too, and raised a hoarse chorus of triumph.

"They're frightened! Coom on, lads! Down wif th' gates, and we'll dance on they—sure!"

But the rest of the Greys, though they felt a bit damped by their leader's disappearance, didn't intend to let their assailants in. Still they guarded the walls, hammering intruding hands and legs with increased vigour, and sustaining many wounds from stones and sticks in their turn.

But the old gates were shaking; the strikers were plunging themselves against them in masses. The masonry was ancient and the hinges none too secure. It seemed certain that the mob would effect an entrance sooner or later, and then where would the Greys be?

But at this juncture the little fellows in the rear raised a loud cry. Oh, most happy inspiration! Wardour and his companions were tugging the school fire-engine down to the gates; and, by Jove, another fine idea! All the fellows who had run off had hastily donned fencing-jackets and helmets, which are made of wicker and padded with leather.

They had often practised out in the front here, where was situated a fire-plug in connection with Belsert reservoir. The hose was attached, a score of fellows started pumping, Wardour took command of the nozzle, and brought it to bear full upon the crowd at the gates.

Swish! Swelsh! The great stream of water was drenching them. But the bars of the gates lessened its force.

"A leg up, some of you!" cried Wardour, running to the wall and beginning to scramble up.

They helped him, and in a trice he was sitting astride the wall, bombarding the mob with the water, which poured in a torrent from the nozzle, thanks to the energy of the pumpers!

The strikers round the gate skedaddled pell-mell to escape this formidable onslaught, and no man in front of the mob could feel secure, for Wardour dodged the nozzle about most impartially, and let them all have a taste of it.

But alas! Gazing on the retreating figures, he forgot the space immediately beneath him. Even as his fellow Greys were enthusiastically cheering him on, they saw him drop the hose and clutch furiously at the coping of the wall. It was loose, and gave way beneath his desperate strength. He grabbed at it again, but those on the other side were too powerful and too quick, and before he could be rendered any assistance he had been pitched over the wall into the road—one boy alone amongst a thousand savages.

For a moment the Greys were tongue-tied and limb-tied; the catastrophe had unnerved them. Their captain was gone!

But another leader was at hand. Mr. Dodson—"fighting Doddie"—romped up to the spot where Wardour had been pulled over.

Doddie was blood-stained and battered, but his eyes shone with battle.

"To the rescue, Greyhouse!"

To get over that wall was the work of a moment with him. As many others surged after him, he dropped into the road, and dashed headlong into the crowd, rushing straight for that spot where the fencing-helmet was swaying and reeling amidst overwhelming odds. Had it not been for that helmet and jacket Wardour's life would not have been worth a minute's purchase.

Over they went, not stopping to count the cost. Over—over—over! Their blood was on fire; they meant to save Wardour.

"Come on, Greys! To the rescue, Greys! Greyhouse for ever! Follow up, Greys!" And the cry was echoed back and back. Greyhouse knew how to cheer.

Thus they made that wild and desperate charge which will for ever be the greatest feat in the glorious annals of old Greyhouse.

(This splendid story will be concluded in next Wednesday's issue of THE GEM LIBRARY, when the opening instalment of a grand, new, short serial story, entitled "THE CHEER-OH CHUMS!" will appear.)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 280.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.



Have You yet tried Your Hand at

POPLETS ?

Below are Reproduced Five of the Winning Coupons sent in for POPLETS No. 1.

**A NEW FREE
CORRESPONDENCE EXCHANGE.**

The only names and addresses which can be printed in these columns 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.

Would-be correspondents must send with each notice two coupons, 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."

S. Wood, 1842, Retallack Street, Regina, wishes to correspond with readers living in England or Australia with a view to exchanging stamps.

T. H. Large, "Old Marriedahl," Newlands, near Cape Town, South Africa, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in England, age 15.

S. F. Leshnick, 49, Princes Street, Troyeville, Johannesburg, South Africa, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in the British Isles, age 17-19.

W. Sachs, 261, Blood Street, Pretoria, Transvaal, South Africa, wishes to correspond with a boy reader living in England, age 16-17.

V. Scott, "Pymont House," Claremont, Cape Colony, South Africa, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in England or Ireland, age 16-18.

V. O. Reid, 15, Garland Street, Ophirton, Johannesburg, Transvaal, South Africa, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in the British Isles, age 14-16.

C. Merry, "Brontë," Claremont Avenue, Claremont, West Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in England or Ireland, age 15-16, and interested in stamps.

R. Newing, Neerim Road, Murrumbena, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in Canada, age 15.

W. Saunders, care of Morris, Fletcher & Jeneen, Queen Street, Brisbane, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in England, age 16-17.

If the "Terrible Three," of Sydney, will send their full names, they will be inserted in this column.

G. Hore, 198, High Street, Northcote, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with a reader living in the British Isles, age 12 to 16.

R. Cohen, 94, George Street, Fitzroy, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with readers interested in stamp-collecting.

H. Elliott, 29, Cayuga Street, Brantford, Ontario, Canada, wishes to correspond with readers interested in postcards, living in the British Isles, India, Africa, or Australia.

W. E. Ford, 74, Maria Avenue, Montreal, Canada, wishes to correspond with a girl reader, age 16.

W. Ison jun., Railway Works Office, Minion Street, Armadale, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in Scotland, age 16.

G. Stewart, 2, First Street, La Rochelle, Johannesburg, South Africa, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in the United Kingdom, age 14.

The Editor specially requests Colonial Readers to kindly bring the Free Correspondence Exchange to the notice of their friends.

Closing Date, First Post FRIDAY, MAY 16th. No. 1. I enter "The Penny Popular" No. 1 POPLETS Competition in accordance with the rules and conditions announced on this page, and agree to accept the published decision as final and legally binding.
SIGNED <u>James Ernest Jones</u> 20/
ADDRESS <u>37 Stanwell Rd., Penarth, N.E. Cardiff</u>
Example <u>A Boy scout</u> Poplet <u>Aviation Next Tied</u>
Closing Date, First Post FRIDAY, MAY 16th. No. 1. I enter "The Penny Popular" No. 1 POPLETS Competition in accordance with the rules and conditions announced on this page, and agree to accept the published decision as final and legally binding.
SIGNED <u>Hyman Winelbaum</u> 10/
ADDRESS <u>13 Sheplaka Bys Calvert Avenue Bethnal Green. N.E.</u>
Example <u>County match</u> Poplet <u>Cricketing Youngster's Hope</u>
Closing Date, First Post FRIDAY, MAY 16th. No. 1. I enter "The Penny Popular" No. 1 POPLETS Competition in accordance with the rules and conditions announced on this page, and agree to accept the published decision as final and legally binding.
SIGNED <u>Alexander Edward Bonington</u> 5/
ADDRESS <u>9 Harriston Crescent Edinburgh</u>
Example <u>The tuck-shop</u> Poplet <u>Tenner from Pater</u>
Closing Date, First Post FRIDAY, MAY 16th. No. 1. I enter "The Penny Popular" No. 1 POPLETS Competition in accordance with the rules and conditions announced on this page, and agree to accept the published decision as final and legally binding.
SIGNED <u>Randa S Skilton</u> 2/6
ADDRESS <u>Sea View Ferry Rd. Lower Connar, Pembroke Dock South Wales.</u>
Example <u>Coconut - shies</u> Poplet <u>create "back" shots</u>
Closing Date, First Post FRIDAY, MAY 16th. No. 1. I enter "The Penny Popular" No. 1 POPLETS Competition in accordance with the rules and conditions announced on this page, and agree to accept the published decision as final and legally binding.
SIGNED <u>Clifford Lockwood</u> 2/6
ADDRESS <u>14 Town End, Dasset, Yorks</u>
Example <u>Arthur Augustus</u> Poplet <u>Artfully displays socks</u>

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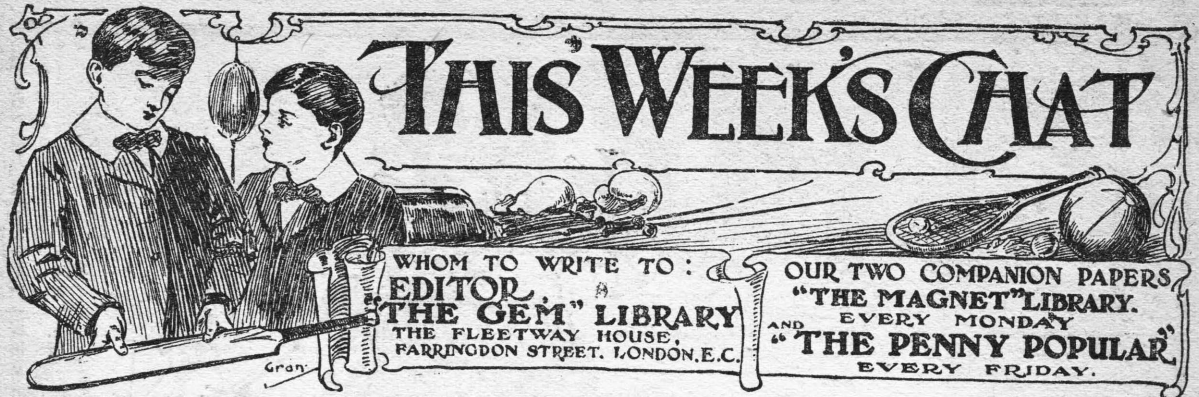
FAMOUS FIGHTS FOR THE FLAG. No. 7



Specially drawn for "THE GEM" Library, by C. H. Blake.

The above drawing depicts a stirring incident in one of the greatest of all British victories. During the battle of Waterloo, on June 18th, 1815, the Union Brigade charged and captured the French guns. Sergeant Burrage of the Royals had his horse shot under him, and was just on the point of being bayoneted by one of the enemy, when Trumpeter Macdonald of the Scots Greys urged his charger forward, leapt a gun, and knocked the French soldier clear of his victim.

OUR SPECIAL WEEKLY FEATURE



WHOM TO WRITE TO :
EDITOR,
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 THE FLEETWAY HOUSE,
 FARRINGTON STREET, LONDON, E.C.

OUR TWO COMPANION PAPERS
"THE MAGNET" LIBRARY.
 EVERY MONDAY
"THE PENNY POPULAR"
 EVERY FRIDAY.

For Next Wednesday,

"COWARD OR HERO?"

By **MARTIN CLIFFORD.**

In next week's splendid long, complete-tale of the chums of St. Jim's a new boy arrives whose reputation for pluck has preceded him. Some little time before, the newspapers had been full of the story of how Roland Ray—a mere schoolboy—had rescued his brother from a burning building under circumstances of the most desperate danger; and now that Roland Ray comes to St. Jim's as a new boy, Tom Merry & Co. give him the heartiest of welcomes. The new boy, however, soon shows himself utterly incapable of living up to his great reputation, and gradually the chums of the Shell and Fourth Forms fall away from him in disgust, as it becomes painfully obvious that Roland Ray is a hopeless coward. In a short time, in fact, he is known throughout the junior school as "The Funk." Only one junior continues to believe in him, and that is Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth. In this he is directly opposed to all his chums, who put down his friendship with the timorous new boy as only another instance of D'Arcy's well-known obstinacy. In the end, however, the question whether Roland Ray really is

"COWARD OR HERO?"

is answered in a very decisive way.

A WONDERFUL NEW SERIAL NEXT WEEK!

Next week a magnificent new, short serial story will commence in "The Gem" Library, entitled:

"THE CHEER-OH CHUMS."

I have purposely left the announcement of this a secret up to the last moment in order to give my chums a really splendid surprise; for this new serial, which I have had specially written for me by an exceptionally clever young author, is no ordinary school story. It deals with boy and girl life and friendship from an altogether new and original point of view, and is one of the most delightful and refreshing stories it has ever been my lot to read.

This wonderful new serial which I am putting before my chums next week will be quite a short one, but I am expecting it to create a big sensation. I shall be particularly interested to have my chums' opinions on this new story, for I have the brilliant young author's promise that he will let me have some more of

"THE CHEER-OH CHUMS"

adventures if my Gemite chums demand it.

REPLIES IN BRIEF.

"A Melbourne Reader."—Very many thanks for your letter. The history of your stamp is of great interest.

"A Glasgow Reader."—I am afraid that I cannot recommend a profession for you to follow, as you give me no idea whatever as to your tastes and qualifications.

I. F. (Exeter).—You could probably get a book on toy-making from Messrs. Gamage & Co., Ltd., High Holborn, London, E.C.

K. C. Toms (Somerset).—I am sorry I am unable to grant your request.

D. McIntosh (Argyllshire).—Very many thanks for your letter, and for obtaining new readers. Have you seen our new companion paper, "The Penny Popular"?

G. M. T. (Croydon).—I am afraid all the back numbers earlier than the last few months are out of print, and therefore unobtainable from the office.

C. C. (Oxford).—Val Bishop is still at the school. To transfer the photographic print on to ordinary paper, you must send it to a firm of block-makers to have an electro made. This electro can then be printed on to ordinary paper.

"Two Constant Readers," of Southport.—Very many thanks for your letter.

HOW TO WRITE A PICTURE-PLOT.—No. 6.

By a Successful Photo-Playwright.

For further illustration of the terms "Introduction, Climax, Denouement," referred to last week, let me quote you an excellent photo-play, entitled, "The Boy Scout Hero," which, although slightly different from the usual run of film plots, will serve my purpose excellently. The story is, briefly, a waif assists boy scouts attacked by tramps, and is admitted into the patrol. Camping out in a wood, the waif-scout discovers that the tramps have dropped the sluice-gates of a stream, thus flooding the cottage where the girl scouts are sleeping.

Arousing the camp, he is the central figure of a daring rescue, for which he is rewarded by the presentation of a splendid pony. Now, the introduction here is the attack upon the scouts by the tramp, the camping out leading up to the climax, which is reached when the tramps flood the cottage, and the result or issue of this is the daring rescue by the scouts—the denouement. A further development of the denouement is the reward for heroism, but strictly speaking, it would have been better for the photo-play to have concluded with the rescue scene, showing the girl scouts standing on the bank with their plucky rescuers beside them. I quote this story because it is essentially one for young people, and as young people know most about their own lives, and how they live them, they are best qualified to write stories about themselves.

Things to Avoid.

Write a simple plot, which explains itself without the use of abundant sub-plotting, and try to draw it to a happy ending. We have enough of sad endings in our private lives. Most of us bar them on the pictures, and unless they be very finely written, and carefully acted, they are apt to be melodramatic, and fail to convince you of their reality.

Avoid the following hackneyed and undesirable subjects: Death-bed scenes, which are uselessly morbid, and generally unrealistic; murders, burglaries, and all crimes of a highly sensational nature, which are productive of no good, and only incite to crime. Burglars may be used in comedies or comics, but it's best to leave them alone; they are worn out. Discharged employee who revenges himself on employer, to receive chastisement at the hands of handsome, moneyless Alec, who marries Dorothy, employer's daughter, for his valour; child who reconciles quarrelsome lovers, separated parents, or disowned daughter to hard-hearted father; the unfortunate suitor dismissed by papa for no earthly reason, except to make a bad story worse. Cheap trick films, including the almost obsolete chase.

What I said about the drama may also be applied to the comedy, although the form need not be strictly adhered to, comedy of setting and action being paramount.

Next Week's article will tell you how to send out your Picture-Plot when finished.

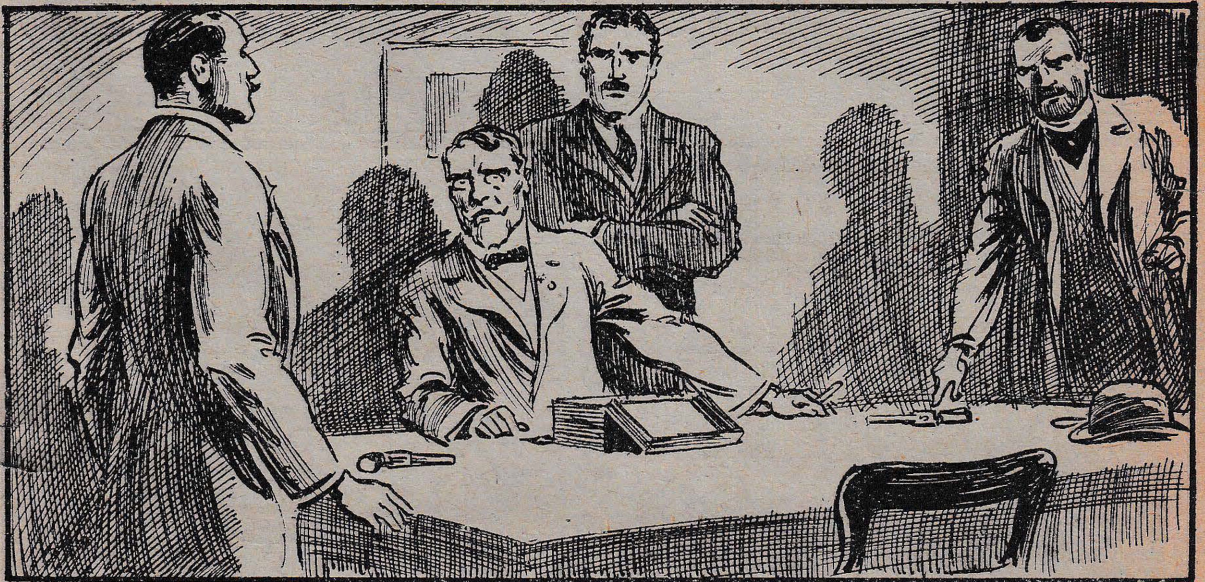
THE EDITOR.

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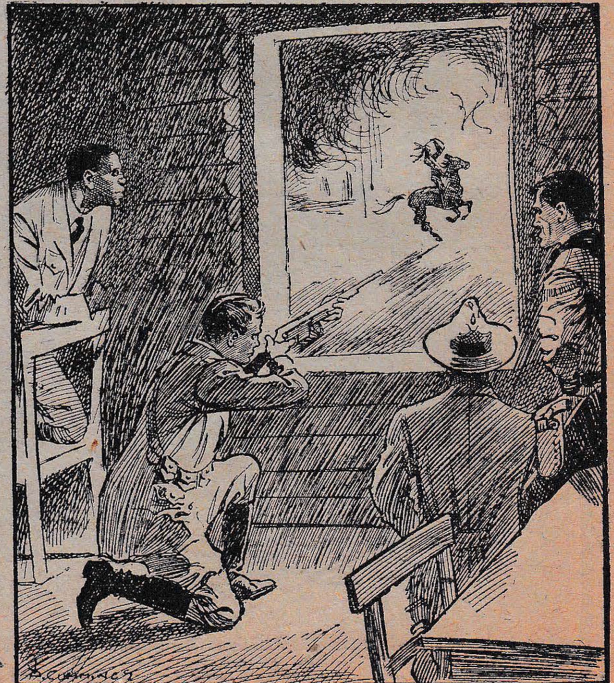
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