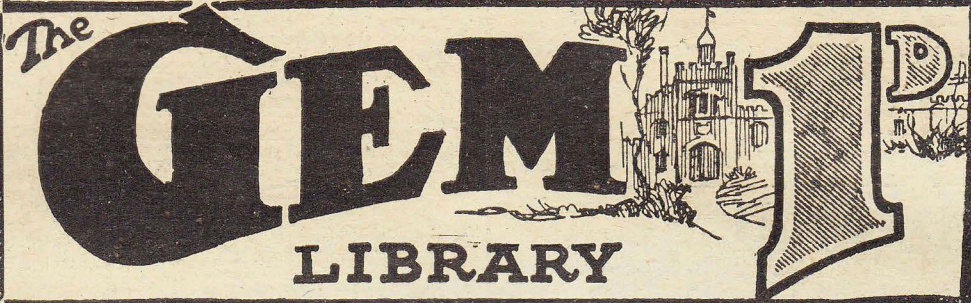


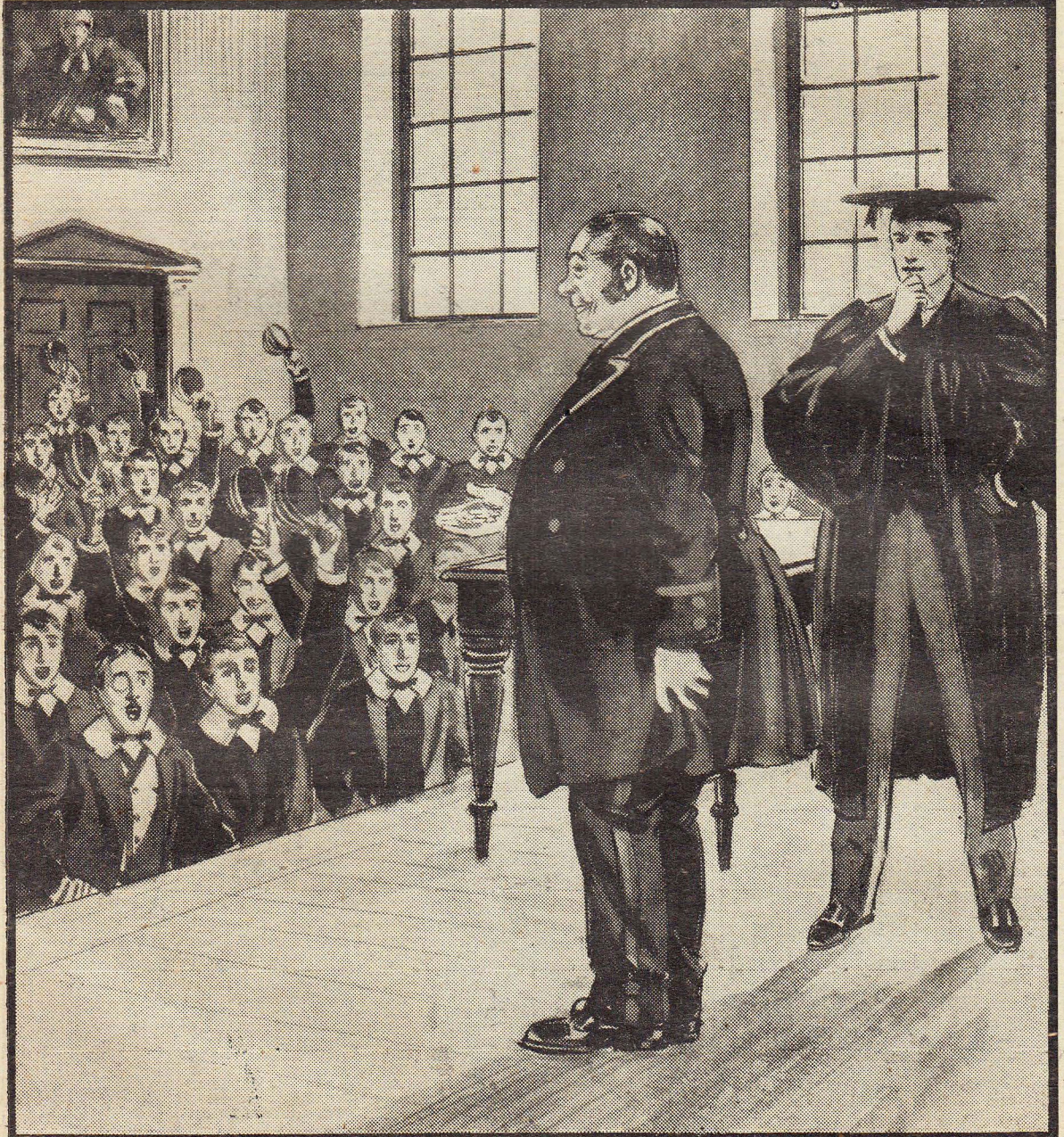
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"Which I'm werry much obliged to yer," said Taggles, with an effort. "Speechfying ain't in my line, but I'm werry thankful that you young gentlemen 'old me in such high esteem. From your goings-on I should never 'ave believed it—never!" "Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry & Co. (For this amusing incident read the grand long, complete tale of Tom Merry and his Chums at St. Jim's contained in this issue.)



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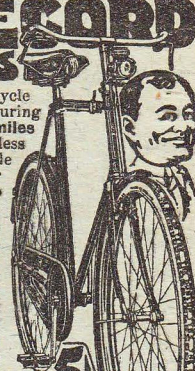
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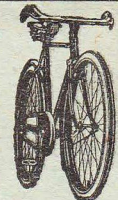
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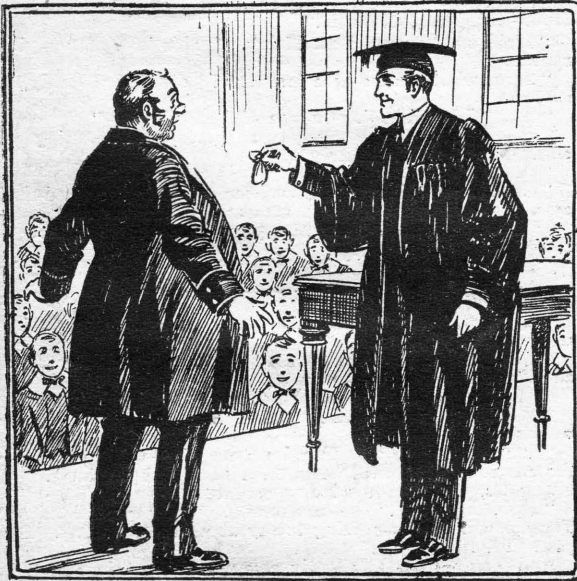
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CHAPTER 1.

Under Suspicious Circumstances.

"YOUNG raskils!" said Taggles.

That was Taggles' fixed opinion.

As Taggles was school porter at St. Jim's, and had seen generations of schoolboys come and go at the old college, Taggles certainly ought to have known.

"Hup to some mischief, as usual!" growled Taggles, glowering in the direction of the wood-shed. "I wonder wot is is now?"

"Hallo, Taggy, old son!" said a cheery voice, as Tom Merry, of the Shell, came by. "Lovely afternoon, isn't it? That why you're looking so good-tempered?"

Taggles rested upon his stable-broom, and regarded Tom Merry with much disfavour.

"Wot is it now, Master Merry?" he demanded.

"That depends," said Tom Merry cheerfully. "What is what?"

"Wot's the little game?"

"Game?" said Tom Merry innocently.

"Yes!" said Taggles emphatically. "Fust I seed Master Blake slip across to the wood-shed. Then I seed Master Herries foller him there. Then I seed Master D'Arcy. Then I seed Master Manners. And I says, says I, wot's the little game, I says?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"It's a meeting," he explained.

"Hoh!" said Taggles.

"A very important meeting, about a very important person," said Tom Merry mysteriously. "We're meeting in the wood-shed to discuss a very important subject."

"Hoh!"

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By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"By the way, it's your birthday to-morrow, isn't it, Taggles?"

"Yes, Master Merry," said Taggles, thawing a little; "it are!"

"By Jove," said Tom, "you keep awfully youthful, Taggy! Nobody would take you for ninety to look at you!"

Taggles turned purple.

"I ain't ninety!" he roared. "I'm sixty-five to-morrer!"

"My mistake," said Tom Merry blandly. "I didn't know you were such a kid!"

Taggles jabbed away savagely with the stable-broom, and declined to answer. Tom Merry whistled cheerily, and walked on, and disappeared into the wood-shed. Five minutes later Monty Lowther, of the Shell, came along, and Taggles bestowed a glare upon him. Monty Lowther replied to it with a benevolent smile.

"Hallo, Taggy! How does it feel to be a hundred?" he inquired.

"I ain't a 'undred!"

"Well, well, the difference isn't worth mentioning! You will be to-morrow!" said Monty Lowther soothingly.

"I won't be!"

"Why— isn't your birthday to-morrow?" asked Lowther, in surprise.

"Yes, it is, Master Lowther; but I sha'n't be a 'undred," said Taggles. "I shall be sixty-five, if you want to know!"

"Well, I don't know that I want to know specially," said Lowther. "Still, I'm obliged to you for the information, Taggles. You're sure it isn't a hundred?"

Taggles snorted.

Monty Lowther sighed, and walked on to the wood-shed.

"Young raskils!" repeated Taggles, glowering at the

Next Wednesday

"SCHOOLBOY AND GENTLEMAN BOXER!" AND "THE CHEER-OH CHUMS!"

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wood-shed. "Gettin' up to some mischief, of course! I've a good mind to report 'em!"

Taggles thought it over. But he concluded that there was very little to report in the juniors simply entering the wood-shed. The wood-shed, of course, was not out of bounds. Taggles resolved to wait until the suspected mischief reached a further stage.

Three juniors came by arm-in-arm a few minutes later, evidently bound for that important meeting in the wood-shed. They were Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, the famous Co. of the New House at St. Jim's, and the deadly rivals of Tom Merry & Co.

"Hoh!" said Taggles. "I know wot it is now—another of their blessed 'Ouse rows, and my wood-shed is goin' to be turned upside-down! Hoh! Master Figgins!"

Figgins & Co. halted, and bestowed pleasant smiles upon Taggles.

"Feeling fit this afternoon?" asked Figgins genially.

"I'm fit enough!" growled Taggles.

"You're wearing jolly well, Taggles," said Kerr encouragingly. "It isn't every school porter who makes a century, not out!"

"I ain't made a century!" howled the exasperated Taggles. "I'm sixty-five to-morrer, Master Kerr, and well you know it!"

"Well, sixty-five isn't a bad innings," said Fatty Wynn, "and no sign of the wicket going down yet, either!"

"Look 'ere," said Taggles, "I ain't 'aving it! You mark my words, I ain't!"

"Ain't 'aving what?" asked Figgins.

"No bloomin' 'Ouse rows in my wood-shed!" said Taggles, shaking a warning forefinger at the New House trio. "I warns yer fair and square. Only the hother day my wood-shed was mucked up, and I 'ad to stack up all the faggots again, and I'm fed up! I ain't 'aving any more of it! I'll report yer!"

Figgins grinned.

"Tisn't a House row this time, Taggy," he said. "We're going to a very important meeting."

Taggles grunted.

"Now, don't lose your temper the day before your birthday, Taggy!" said Kerr. "Try to keep pleasant till you've fairly turned ninety-four—"

"I ain't ninety-four, you—you—"

Figgins & Co. walked on before Taggles could finish. They disappeared into the wood-shed.

Taggles jammed his broom into a corner, and snorted again. Truly enough, the last time New House had met School House in the wood-shed there had been a "scrap," and the order and tidiness of the wood-shed had suffered in consequence. Tom Merry had explained that in time of war non-combatants often got it "in the neck" as well as combatants; but Taggles wasn't satisfied.

"I'll keep a heye on them," said Taggles, "and at the first sign of a row I'll report 'em! I'll bring Master Knox down on 'em! Master Knox is always glad to catch 'em out! I'm not goin' to be worried to death by a parcel of young raskils!"

And Taggles approached the wood-shed.

Taggles was a tactician in his way. He did not approach the door of the shed, but walked very quietly towards the window. At the window he could hear all that was going on, and a corner of the shed screened him from the sight of any fresh arrivals.

Inside the shed there was a buzz of voices.

Nearly a dozen juniors of both Houses had met there, and Tom Merry was addressing the meeting:

"Gentlemen, chaps, and fellows—"

"Hear, hear!" said the meeting heartily.

"This meeting has been called—"

"Names!" said Monty Lowther. "By Taggles, too!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form, rose from his seat upon a garden-roller, and jammed his eyeglass into his eye, and turned it upon Monty Lowther severely.

"I object to Lowthah bein' funnay at a sewious meetin'," said D'Arcy. "If Lowthah is goin' to be funnay, I move that this meetin' adjourns!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Order!" said Jack Blake. "It's understood that D'Arcy is to be the only funny person present. As he was born so, no one can reasonably object—"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Passed unanimously!" said Tom Merry. "Gentlemen, this meeting has been called for a most important object—"

"I don't think Taggles would like to be alluded to as an object," said Monty Lowther, with a solemn shake of the head.

"Order!"

"Shurrup!"

"Cheese it!"

"Young raskils!" murmured Taggles, outside the window. "Young raskils! Some more of their tricks on me—drat 'em! I'll report 'em!"

"Important object," said Tom Merry. "Gentlemen—"

The door opened, and Kangaroo, of the Shell, came in, followed by Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence—three New House fellows. Reilly and Kerruish and Ray, of the School House, followed them in. Reilly pushed back his cuffs as he entered.

"Sure, and I'm ready!" he exclaimed. "Here's the New House bounders! Pile in!"

"Hold on!" roared Tom Merry. "This isn't a scrapping match!"

"Sure, what are we here for, then?" demanded Reilly, in surprise.

"Ass! It's a meeting—a peaceful meeting—"

"Oh!" said Reilly, with a perceptible waning of enthusiasm. "Is it intirely?"

"Order!"

"Gentlemen, this meeting has been called in the wood-shed as a common ground upon which both Houses may meet without rows," said Tom Merry, with a severe glance at Reilly.

"Oh, all right," said Reilly; "I'll be as ppaceable as a little lamb! But phwat is it about intirely?"

"Taggles!"

"Taggles!" repeated Reilly; and several other voices chimed in: "TAGGLES!"

"Yes. Mind, Taggles mustn't know a word about it," added Tom Merry, in a warning voice.

And Taggles, outside the window, chuckled grimly.

"Well, what's the game?" asked Kerruish. "Get to the washing!"

"We're going to give Taggles a surprise—a big surprise—the surprise of his life!" said Tom Merry impressively.

Taggles, outside the window, grunted.

"Hoh, har you!" he murmured. "Har you, hindeed? Taggles will 'ave something to say about that, I think. Har you? I'll report yer!"

And Taggles glided silently away, and went in search of Knox of the Sixth—the most unpleasant prefect of St. Jim's, who was the special enemy of Tom Merry & Co. And the meeting remained in blissful unconsciousness of the fact that Taggles had overheard them, and had gone to report them to the prefect.

CHAPTER 2.

An Interrupted Meeting.

TOM MERRY glanced round upon the meeting, pleased with the impression he had made. The juniors were all listening with great attention.

Taggles was an exceedingly crusty old gentleman, and he had had many and many a rub with the junior boys of both Houses. A surprise for Taggles, of course, seemed to the juniors to mean, naturally, a jape of some sort on the school porter, and they were all prepared to rally round Tom Merry for that purpose. As Redfern nobly said, this was no time for House rows.

"Go ahead!" said Blake.

"Pile in!" said Herries. "I'm with you all the way, kid. Taggles threw a stick at my bulldog the other day—actually chucked it at him, you know. You know what an inoffensive animal Towser is, too. Poor old Towser had just nipped hold of his trousers—that was all. He's so playful!"

"Weally, Hewwies, I have often remarked that that wotten bulldog of yours has no wespect for a fellow's twousahs!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy severely.

"I've remarked just as often that you are an ass—"

"I wefuse to be called an ass—"

"Gentlemen," said Monty Lowther, "I rise to a point of order! Is this meeting about Taggles, or about Towser? I'm asking the honourable chairman for information."

"Order!"

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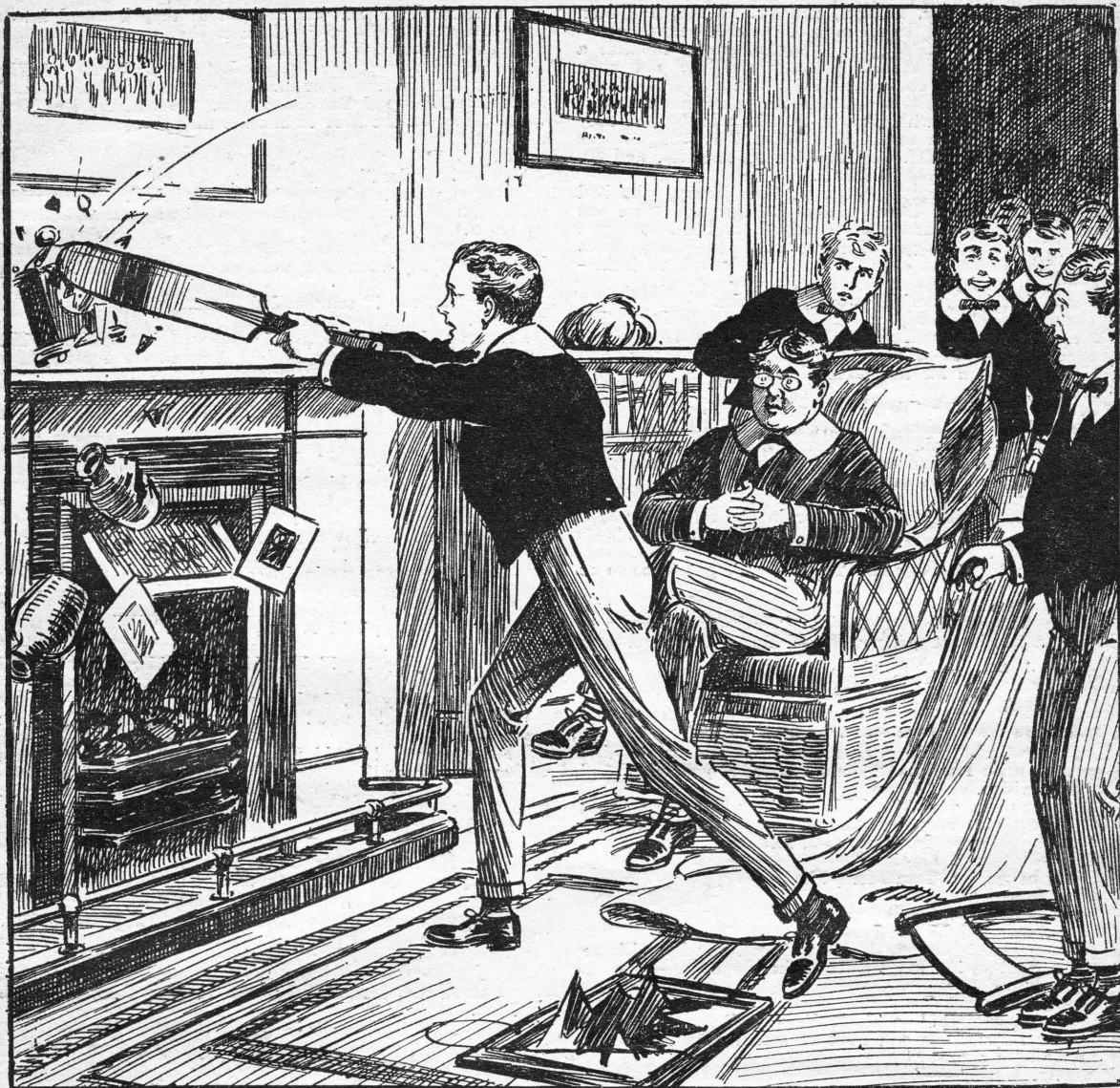
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(See column 2, page 26 of this issue.)

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"I'll have him yet!" said Figgins, breathlessly pursuing that incessant buzzing round the study. "I can't even see the beggar, but I can hear him all the time. Ha! Now he's on the clock. I've got him—!" Crash! Figgins caught the clock a terrific swipe with his cricket-bat, and the ruins of the clock rattled down into the grate, but the buzzing still went on. (See Chapter 15.)

"It's about Taggles," said Tom Merry. "Shut up, Gussy! Shut up, Herries! Blessed if you Fourth-Form kids know how to behave at a meeting!"

"What's that?" demanded Blake warmly. "Whom are you calling kids?"

"Gentlemen—"

"Order!"

"Gentlemen," said Tom Merry, "some of you appear to be labouring under a misapprehension—"

There was a gasp of surprise from the juniors.

"Jolly good word, that!" said Kangaroo cordially. "I'll back that both ways."

"Misapprehension," said Tom Merry firmly. "This meeting is not called for the purpose of ragging Taggles."

"Oh!"

"Taggles has a birthday to-morrow."

"Oh!"

"And we're going to surprise him on his birthday."

"Not half a bad wheeze!" said Redfern. "What do you suggest—a band outside his window playing 'Home, Sweet Home,' or 'Come Where the Booze is Cheaper'?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Order! We're going to give Taggles a pleasant surprise, you ass! That's my idea. Taggles has deserved well of St. Jim's."

"Of course he has. He's been school porter for dog's ages. 'Has he?' said several voices, in surprised tones. and he's a regular institution here. He's getting old, and my idea is to give him a benefit."

"A—a—a—a what?"

"A benefit. We're going to raise funds, and give him a testimonial, and a purse containing something in cash, you know—as a sign of appreciation on the part of the juniors of St. Jim's."

Monty Lowther and Manners and Figgins, who were in the secret already, nodded approval. The other fellows looked astounded.

"I'm not denying that we've had our rubs with Taggles," said Tom Merry. "But he's going to have a birthday. And he's an institution at St. Jim's—not exactly a wholly agreeable institution; but he's part of the old place—like the doctor's cane, for instance."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry's suggestion had come as a surprise to most of the fellows; but, on second thoughts, they were inclined to approve of it.

After all, Taggles the porter was, as Tom Merry said, a part of the old place—a regular institution at St. Jim's.

He had been there so many years that he had forgotten himself how many it was. He remembered headmasters there

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NEXT WEDNESDAY: "SCHOOLBOY AND GENTLEMAN BOXER!" A Magnificent, Long Complete Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

before the time of Dr. Holmes, and Dr. Holmes had been headmaster far beyond the memory of the oldest inhabitant—with the exception of Taggles. Taggles was as familiar a sight at St. Jim's as the old gateway and the old grey buildings and the old elms themselves. Indeed, some of the youngest boys in the lowest Forms had a belief that Taggles' existence was coeval with that of St. Jim's itself, and they would not have been surprised to hear that Taggles was there when Henry VIII. dissolved the monasteries, and St. Jim's first became a public school.

"In honouring Taggles," went on Tom Merry, who had evidently prepared a little speech in advance, "we are honouring ourselves, and the old school, and old age, you know. Of course, Taggles isn't so very old—sixty-five is quite youthful in these days. But he has been here from—"

"From time immemorial," suggested Blake.

"Good!" said Tom Merry. "I like that. We'll put that in the testimonial. Taggles has been here from time immemorial, and we're going to recognise his long and faithful services on his sixty-fifth birthday."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's a half-holiday this afternoon, and we've got lots of time, especially as Abbotsford have scratched their match at the last moment," said Tom Merry. "My idea is to put our heads together and raise funds for giving Taggles a really stunning surprise on his birthday."

"Hear, hear!"

"Both Houses will stand together in the matter," added Tom Merry. "All House rows are off now. It's pax."

"Hear, hear!"

"And, mind, not a word to Taggles. It's got to come as a great surprise."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Agreed!" said Figgins heartily. "We're quite ready to take the matter in hand, if you School House chaps will back us up."

"Oh, quite!" said Kerr.

"That isn't exactly what's wanted," said Tom Merry grimly. "You see, we're managing the affair ourselves, and we want you New House chaps to back us up."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, turning his eyeglass upon Figgins. "I'm surprised at you, Figgins!" Figgins sniffed.

"Well, you see, you School House kids will make a muck of it," he explained. "You'd better leave it in our hands."

"Sensible thing to do," remarked Redfern.

"Don't be funny, Figgins!"

"Don't be an ass. Tom Merry!"

"Look here—"

"Look here—"

"Order!" roared Monty Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah! Orдах, deah boys! All you New House boundahs, shut up! I'm goin' to make a speech—"

"Mercy!"

"You uttah ass—"

"Order yourselves!" said Redfern indignantly. "Of course, the New House will have to manage it. Don't you want it to be a success?"

"Weally, Weddy—"

"Funds will have to be raised," said Figgy. "A subscription among ourselves won't amount to much. We've got to raise funds, and that will require ideas; and where will you School House chaps be then?"

"Echo answers where!" said Fatty Wynn.

"Rats!"

"We jolly well sha'n't come to the New House for ideas!" said Tom Merry warmly. "What you fellows have got to do is to back us up—"

"Rats!"

"Bosh!"

"Piffle!"

"Look here, you New House fatheads—"

"Yah! School House duffers! Rats!"

"Oh, chuck them out intirely!" exclaimed Reilly. "Sure, and I knew there would be throuble with them. Chuck them out on their necks!"

"Like to see you do it!" said Figgins belligerently.

"Faith, and I'll—"

"Yah! Go home!"

"Ye New House spalpeen!"

"You bog-trotter!"

That was enough for Reilly. He rushed at Figgins, and clasped him in a loving embrace, and they waltzed around

the wood-shed. There was a crash as they bumped into a pile of faggots and brought them to the ground.

"Order!" roared Tom Merry.

He rushed to separate the combatants, and grasped Figgins by the ears. Kerr promptly rushed to his chum's rescue, and dragged Tom Merry off. Tom Merry and Kerr were rolling on the floor in another moment.

"Order!"

"Stop it!"

"Order! Order!"

There was a roar of voices in the wood-shed. In the midst of the din the door opened, and Taggles appeared, followed by Knox, the prefect.

"'Ere they are!" roared Taggles. "I knew wot it would be—wreckin' my wood-shed, same as they did before! Young raskils!"

"Stop that row!" commanded Knox.

Crash!

Figgins and Reilly bumped into the prefect, and sent him flying. Knox gave a yell and sat down in the doorway.

"Ow! You young villains! Ow!"

"I'll fetch Mr. Railton!" gasped Taggles.

"Well, you biessed ungrateful old sinner!" exclaimed Monty Lowther indignantly.

"I told yer I'd report yer!" said Taggles.

"You—you—you—"

Knox scrambled to his feet.

"Clear out of here at once!" he shouted. "Every boy present will take fifty lines! You, Reilly, and you, Figgins, will report yourself to the Head for assaulting a prefect! Now clear off at once!"

The meeting broke up in dismay.

Taggles chuckled as the juniors retired from the wood-shed. Tom Merry gave him a reproachful look.

"That's too jolly bad of you, Taggles!"

Taggles snorted.

"I ain't 'aying any!" he said. "I told you as 'ow I'd report yer."

"Bai Jove, Taggles, deah boy—"

"We'll jolly well chuck the idea now!" exclaimed Manners wrathfully.

"No, we won't!" said Tom Merry. "We'll heap coals of fire on his head!"

"Wot!" roared Taggles. "Let me catch you a-trying to put coals on my 'ead, that's all! I'll report yer!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the juniors departed, leaving Taggles with a brow like thunder. He was looking a little alarmed, too. The juniors were very exasperated, and there was no telling what wild young rascals like Tom Merry & Co. might do.

"I'll report 'em to the 'Ead!" gasped Taggles at last.

"So that's the idea, is it—the surprise they was goin' to give me—'eaping coals of fire on my 'ead! My word!"

And Taggles stumped away to the School House, to report to the Head that horrible scheme of heaping coals of fire on his head.

CHAPTER 3.

Before the Head.

DR. HOLMES, the Head of St. Jim's, laid down his pen as patiently as he could.

Reilly and Figgins had come into the study, followed by Knox.

"Well, what is it?" asked the Head.

"Nothing, sir," said Figgins promptly.

"Nothin' at all, sir," said Reilly.

"There has been a very serious disturbance, sir," said Knox. "Taggles reported to me that the juniors were wrecking the wood-shed, and I went to stop them."

"Quite right, Knox."

"And these two boys, sir, rushed at me and bumped me over," said the prefect.

Dr. Holmes frowned at the two juniors.

"That was very, very wrong of you," he said.

"Sure, it was an accident, sir!" said Reilly. "Knox is makin' a mountain out of a molehill, sir. We bumped into him by accident."

"Didn't even see him, sir," said Figgins.

The Head pursed his lips.

"I really think you might settle these trivial matters, Knox, without taking up my time, which you know is valuable," said Dr. Holmes. "Dear me, what is this?"

Taggles burst into the study.

"Sir! Dr. Holmes—"

"Well, Taggles?"

"I ain't 'aving it, sir! My life ain't safe!" howled Taggles.

"What!"

"Them young rips, sir—"

ANSWERS

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 283.

"THE MAGNET" LIBRARY,
Every Monday.

Our Companion Papers.

"THE PENNY POPULAR"
Every Friday.

"Taggles!"

"Them juniors, I mean, sir. I ain't saying anything about them busting up my wood-shed; but when it comes to puttin' burning coals on a man's 'ead—"

The doctor started.

"What—what! Nonsense, Taggles!"

"Burnin' coals, sir, on my 'ead!" said Taggles. "My life ain't safe, with them young rips—Master Merry and the rest—"

"What do you mean, Taggles? Do you tell me that Master Merry has put coals on your head?" exclaimed Dr. Holmes, in bewilderment.

"Which he ain't done it yet, sir, but that was what they was a-plottin' of," said Taggles.

"Nonsense!"

"Master Merry himself said so, sir."

"Dear me!" said the Head. "There must be some mistake! Master Merry could not possibly think of such a cruel and wicked action."

"Which he said so himself, sir—burnin', flamin' coals to be put on my 'ead, sir! Which my life ain't safe!"

"Knox, kindly fetch Master Merry here, at once."

"Certainly, sir!" said the prefect.

He left the study. He returned in a few minutes with Tom Merry, of the Shell.

Dr. Holmes regarded Tom sternly.

"What is this Taggles is telling me, Merry?" he exclaimed.

"I don't know, sir," said Tom Merry meekly.

"He says that you have threatened to place burning coals on his head."

Tom Merry jumped.

"I, sir!"

"I knew it must be a mistake—a most absurd mistake," said the Head, relieved. "I am sure you would not think of anything of the sort, Merry."

"Certainly not, sir!"

"Which he said so!" howled Taggles. "He said so with his own mouth, sir!"

"I couldn't say it with anybody else's mouth, certainly," said Tom Merry. "But you're dreaming, Taggles."

"I ain't! You said yourself that you was goin' to put burnin', flamin' coals on my 'ead, because I fetched Master Knox to stop your goings-hon in the wood-shed."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry suddenly, understanding at last.

"Merry!" said the Head severely. "This is not a laughing matter."

"Excuse me, sir! Ha, ha, ha! Tagles has made a little mistake," gasped Tom Merry. "I was speaking figuratively, sir."

"What did you actually say?"

"Some of the fellows were ratty, sir, at Taggles sneaking about us to Knox, but I suggested heaping coals of fire on his head."

"That's it!" said Taggles. "Burnin', flamin' coals! That's it!"

"Coals of fire!" said the doctor.

"Yes, sir."

"Reg'ler murderous, I call it!" said Taggles. "Crool—that's the word! Why, it might kill me at my age—sixty-five to-morrer!"

The Head smiled.

"You are under a misapprehension, Taggles. Master Merry was speaking in a figurative sense. Heaping coals of fire upon one's head does not mean actual burning coals, Taggles. It means that he would treat you with kindness instead of retaliating for the supposed injury you had done him."

Taggles jumped.

"Hoh!" he said.

"That's it, Taggy," grinned Tom Merry.

"Hoh!" said Taggles, only half convinced. "Well, that's all right. But if anybody begins puttin' coals of fire on my 'ead—"

"You may go, Taggles."

"Which my wood-shed is messed up, sir, and in awful disorder—"

"The delinquents will be properly punished. You may return to your duties, Taggles."

And Taggles, grunting, retired to his duties.

"I will deal with the juniors, Knox," said the Head.

And the prefect, understanding that that was his dismissal, retired from the study.

"Now, my boys," said the Head, "I cannot allow these disturbances, and I cannot have Taggles troubled, especially as it is his birthday to-morrow. I suppose this was one of your House quarrels?"

"Well, it ended something like that, sir," said Tom Merry ruefully. "But it was a peaceful meeting to begin with."

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NEXT WEDNESDAY: "SCHOOLBOY AND GENTLEMAN BOXER!"

The fact is, sir, we're going to surprise Taggles on his birthday. We're getting up a testimonial and a birthday-present for him, and the meeting was called to discuss ways and means.

Dr. Holmes smiled genially.

"That is a very good idea, my boys, and I approve of it highly. I suppose Taggles was not aware of it?"

"Oh, no, sir! We're keeping it dark till we're sure it's going to be a success, sir."

The Head coughed.

"Ahem! If Taggles had been aware of that laudable object of the meeting, he would probably not have reported you to Knox," he remarked. "Under the circumstances, you need not do the lines."

"Thank you, sir."

"But please try to carry out this laudable scheme without any more disturbances," said the Head. "I am sure you will find it better to work in harmony."

"Oh, yes, sir," said Tom Merry immediately. "We know it, sir; but the New House chaps are rather obstinate—"

"The School House fellows are a bit pig-headed, sir," said Figgins; "but—"

"You may go," said the Head, with a smile and a wave of the hand.

And the juniors left the study.

"Sure, the Head's a brick," said Reilly enthusiastically. "Sure, if we'd known it was going to turn out loike this we might have given Knox another bump."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And Taggles is a blessed old worm, and doesn't deserve a testimonial at all," growled Figgins.

"Never mind," said Tom Merry. "We'll heap coals of fire on his head—"

"Ha, ha, ha! Poor old Taggles!"

"Like good little boys!" said Tom. "Eric out-Ericked, you know! All you New House chaps have got to do is to back us up—"

"Knock you down, more likely!" said Figgins.

"Look here, Figgins—"

"Look here, Tom Merry—"

Tom Merry burst into a laugh.

"Well, if you won't back us up, and we won't back you up, the only thing to do is to run the thing separately," he said. "You chaps see what funds you can raise, and we'll do the same in the School House, and then we'll hold a committee meeting about the way to expend 'em to the best advantage. The first thing to be done is to raise the funds."

"Done!" said Figgins. "And I'll guarantee that we'll beat the School House in raising a fund, same as we do in footer and cricket—"

"And in gas!" grinned Tom Merry.

And so it was agreed. And the rival juniors of St. Jim's put their heads together in their two Houses to discuss ways and means, while the unconscious and ungrateful Taggles confided to Mrs. Taggles his fixed opinion that all boys ought to be "drownded" at birth—and especially Tom Merry & Co.

CHAPTER 4.

Figgins' Great Wheeze.

"HALLO!"
"Look here!"
"What on earth—"

The Terrible Three of the Shell had just come downstairs after a consultation in their study. Monty Lowther caught sight of a notice on the school board, and drew the attention of his chums to it.

The notice was written out in Figgins' sprawling handwriting, and the wording of it made the juniors exclaim in wonder. For this is how it ran:

"NOTICE!"

"At 4 p.m. precisely, on the junior cricket-ground, will take place a performance of Figgins & Co.'s Circus.

"Pavilion seats, One Shilling. Standing room round the ground, Sixpence.

"Only paying chaps admitted to the ground. Free list entirely suspended. Any chap found looking on without paying will be walloped.

"All proceeds for the Benefit Fund.

(Signed) G. FIGGINS."

The Terrible Three whistled.

"Figgins' Circus!" said Manners, in amazement. "What is it, I wonder? Figgins & Co. as a troop of performing donkeys, perhaps!"

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

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Seen this?" called out Tom Merry, as Blake and Herries and Digby and D'Arcy, the chums of Study No. 6, came along.

"No," said Blake. "What is it?"

"Read it!"

"My hat! Figgy's Circus! Must be a hoax!"

"Bai Jove!"

"A New House dodge for raising funds for the benefit," grinned Tom Merry. "But I don't quite see where Figgy has got his circus from. It's a stunning idea, if there's anything in it."

"If!" said Herries.

"Yaas, wathah; I wegard that as a vewy big 'it.' By the way, you fellows, I had a wiah—"

"Why a wiah?" asked Monty Lowther solemnly.

"Pway don't be a punnin' idiot, Lowthah. I've had a wiah from a chap—"

"Let's go and see Figgins," said Tom Merry. "If there's anything in this, we'll help him out, you know."

"I was just tellin' you that I'd had a wiah—"

"Come on!" said Blake.

"I've had a wiah from a fellow at Gweyfwiahs," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy wrathfully, as he followed the juniors out of the School House. "Do you wemembah a fat chap who came ovah with their cwicketin' team—chap as fat as Fatty Wynn, named Punter or something—"

"Bunter!" said Tom Merry. "Chap in goggles."

"That's it! I've had a wiah from him. He says he's accepted my kind invitation for this aftahnoon, and will be here at half-past four by the twain."

"Then you'll have to look after him," said Digby. "We've got plenty to do raising funds for the giddy benefit."

"Yes, really, Gussy, you shouldn't issue invitations in this reckless way without consulting your uncles," said Blake severely.

"But I didn't!" said D'Arcy. "He says he's accepted my kind invitation, but I haven't the least wemembance of givin' him a kind invitation."

"You don't mean to say that you gave him an unkind one," said Monty Lowther.

"I do not wemembah givin' him one at all," said D'Arcy.

"Well, he remembers it, if he's coming," grinned Tom Merry. "Wasn't Bunter the fat chap who was played as a substitute in the field till somebody turned up? He made a catch—"

"Yes, a giddy fluke," said Blake. "He caught Reddy out, and we all thought it was clever; but the other Grey-friars chaps said it was a fluke!"

"That's the chap," said D'Arcy. "He's a ventwiloquist, and he played a wotten twick on me while he was here, I wemembah. I certainly don't wemembah invitin' him. As a mattah of fact, he isn't the kind of fellow I like."

"Wire back that it's a mistake, then," said Lowther. "Wire that you're dangerously ill, and can't receive visitors. Or, better, say you're dead."

"Ass! He must have started from Gweyfwiahs long ago, if he's goin' to get here at half-past four."

"Awful nerve, I call it," said Herries. "The chap is a regular boulder. Still, you can look after him, Gussy; you won't have anything to do."

"I'm afraid I shall be wequired to superintend the waisin' of the fund—"

"Quite a mistake; you won't!" said Tom Merry.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Hallo, here's Figgins!"

The chums of the School House had reached the cricket-ground. On the senior ground, close at hand, the Sixth Form were playing the Fifth. It was a senior Form-match, and the seniors were very busy, and most of the members of the Sixth and Fifth who were not playing were gathered round the ground. Kildare was batting just now, to the bowling of Cutts of the Fifth, and it was well worth watching. But the juniors were too busy to think about such things as Upper-Form cricket matches.

Round the junior ground New House juniors were posted, at distances of a few feet from one another, evidently to guard the pitch from invasion.

Outside the junior pavilion was the great Figgins himself, with the Co.

Figgins bestowed an affable and condescending nod upon the School House fellows.

"Coming to the circus?" he asked. "A shilling for a seat, or sixpence standing room."

"What circus?"

"My circus," said Figgins.

"Performing porpoise?" asked Monty Lowther, with an

interested glance at Fatty Wynn; and the School House juniors grinned.

"Oh, don't be funny," said Fatty Wynn crossly. "This show is jolly well going to knock spots off the School House, anyway. If all the pavilion seats are sold, it will come to four quid at least, and we ought to raise another three or four from the standing room. That will beat anything you can do!"

"Yes, rather!" said Kerr emphatically.

"But what circus?" demanded Tom Merry. "Where is it? What is it?"

"Yaas, wathah. Explain that, deah boys."

"Certainly," said Figgins airily. "Jaggers' Circus is at Wayland, and we've borrowed some of their animals to give a show. You remember Jaggers' Circus, where Tom Merry wrestled with a Japanese chap. Well, they're at Wayland now, and it occurred to me that a circus performance here at St. Jim's would be the right thing at the right moment. Chaps will pay to see a circus, where you might offer 'em Shakespeare for dogs' ages and they'd only pay you to leave off, if they paid you at all. So I buzzed over on my bike, and struck a bargain with Jaggers."

"My hat!"

"He's sending the animals over in charge of his men, you know—a performing elephant and a buck-jumping horse. He's doing it cheap for the advertisement—expects to get a crowd of St. Jim's chaps over to see the real show afterwards, you know. They don't want the animals till to-night for their regular show, and it doesn't hurt Jaggers to turn an honest quid by hiring them out. Don't you think a buck-jumping horse and a performing elephant are worth paying a tanner to see?"

"Bai Jove!"

"What about the cricket pitch?" demanded Blake.

"Oh, that can be rolled afterwards," said Figgins cheerfully. "We had to give the performance somewhere, you know, and we couldn't give it in the Quad, or the Form-room, could we?"

"Ha, ha! No. But—"

"But it will wuin the pitch!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, blow the pitch!" said Figgins. "This isn't a time to think of the pitch. Besides, it can be rolled—we'll roll it. I'll make all you fellows stewards, if you like, to see that everybody who comes to the show pays up. Lots of fellows may come strolling round and looking on, without shelling out."

"School House chaps!" remarked Kerr.

"Oh, rats!" said Tom Merry. "I hope you've got your performing elephant under proper control. It would cause trouble if he broke loose and wandered away."

"Oh, that's all right! The elephant-tamer comes with him," said Figgins. "But a New House chap is going to ride him, you see, to make it more interesting. Now then, we ought to have a drum or something to attract the crowd—"

"I'll get my cornet, if you like!" said Herries.

"H'm! That might drive 'em away instead of attractin' 'em—"

Herries snorted.

"Never mind, get it!" said Figgins. "Fellows will come along to see what's the matter, so it will be all right. Fatty is going to work the cymbals. He's made them himself out of two saucepan-lids. Get your cornet, Herries, old man. Start on the cymbals, Fatty! It's time we began taking the money!"

"Well, of all the wheezes—" said Tom Merry, in amazement.

"Don't you think it's a jolly good one?" demanded Figgins.

"Ha, ha! Yes—if it works all right."

"Oh, this wheeze will work all right! It isn't under School House management."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Have you got the Head's permission to bring elephants and wild horses into the school?" gasped Tom Merry.

"We've got his permission to give a performance to raise funds for the Benefit. We didn't mention the elephants or the horses."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't cackle! Lend us a hand in taking the money."

"Right-ho! If there's any to take."

The crowd were already arriving.

CHAPTER 5.

Levison Takes a Hand.

RASH, crash, crash!
Toot-toot—root-toot!

Fatty Wynn, with the home-made cymbals, and Herries, with the cornet, outside the pavilion, made noise enough to attract all St. Jim's to the spot.

The cymbals and the cornet were certain to draw attention

to Figgins' Circus. Indeed, they might have been heard for a considerable distance from St. Jim's.

The New House juniors had made their preparations. A canvas tent had been hastily run up next to the pavilion to shelter the animals till the performance began. The performing animals were there, with their attendants.

The news of Figgins' Circus spread over St. Jim's like wildfire. Fellows came from near and far.

A dozen New House fellows, and an equal number of School House juniors, had been appointed stewards, to collect the entrance fees from all comers.

They had some difficulty in collecting it.

The fellows seemed to have an idea that they were entitled to walk on their own cricket-ground without paying, if they liked.

Tom Merry & Co. undeceived them on that point.

Tom Merry and Lowther and Manners, Kangaroo and Bernard Glyn of the Shell, and Vavasour, and the chums of Study No. 6, and Reilly, did yeoman's service as collectors of cash.

Fellows who didn't want to pay for admission were invited to clear off, on pain of being summarily ejected "on their necks."

Gore and Crooke and Levison and Mellish came down in a party by themselves, and stationed themselves outside the pavilion. Clifton Dane came up to them with a plate in his hand.

"What's that for?" asked Levison.

"Are you sitting or standing?" asked Dane.

"Standing at present."

"Then you pay sixpence."

"Rats!"

"Are you going to pay or clear off?" demanded the Canadian junior.

Levison shrugged his shoulders.

"Neither," he said calmly. "I suppose a chap can stand on his own cricket-ground if he wants to."

"I should jolly well think so!" said Mellish.

"You've come here to see the circus," said Dane.

"Well, we shall see what's going, I suppose," said Crooke.

"But I'm jolly well not going to pay anything, for one."

"Same here!" said Levison.

"Pay up!" said Clifton Dane, frowning.

"Rats!"

"Then clear off!"

"More rats!"

"Oh, I'll pay!" said Gore, throwing a sixpence into the plate. "There's your tanner!"

"You others going to pay?"

"No fear!"

"Kick them out, chaps!" said Dane.

And half a dozen stewards seized upon Crooke and Levison and Mellish, and they were hurled forth, with loud and angry expostulations.

"You rotters!" howled Levison, picking himself up. "I'm not going!"

"Kick him out!"

Several boots were at once forthcoming for the service. Levison raced off the cricket-ground with a powerful propulsion behind.

He retreated to the School House, gritting his teeth. Mellish and Crooke, on second thoughts, paid up, and stayed on the ground. The cash-collectors had plenty to do. Fellows were coming up in crowds, some of them with dire threats of what they would do to Herries if he didn't leave off. Herries did not heed. He blew away at the cornet, with puffed cheeks and bulging eyes, as if he were blowing for a wager.

Four o'clock chimed out from the old tower of St. Jim's.

"Time for the performance," said Tom Merry.

"Must finish taking the money first!" said Figgins.

Fresh crowds of fellows were arriving. From a distance, Levison of the Fourth was watching the scene, with a dark look on his face. The cad of the Fourth had been handled rather roughly, though not more roughly than he deserved. Partly on that account, and partly from the impish desire to cause mischief which was his ruling passion, Levison was turning a peculiar scheme over in his mind.

He strolled away from the School House, and made his way to the back of the cricket pavilion. The canvas shelter for the animals had been fixed at the side of the building, simply a slope of canvas from the top of the pavilion to the ground, with flaps covering in the ends. From behind the building Levison raised the flap of the canvas and looked into the enclosure.

Inside, the buck-jumping steed—not looking very fiery just now—was tethered to a peg in the ground. The elephant was not even tethered. The two men in charge of the animals had gone out of the tent, watching the scene on the cricket-pitch.

It was Levison's opportunity.

His eyes gleamed as he crawled in under the canvas flap and approached the horse. The steed was saddled ready for the performance, and Levison approached him with outstretched hand and soothing words.

The horse blinked at him, and went on munching from a bundle of hay.

Levison stroked him with treacherous kindness, and with a deft hand inserted a small stone under the girth.

The horse moved a little, and Levison backed away from him. As soon as the buck-jumping began that jagged stone under the girth would irritate the animal, and the buck-jumping was likely to be a little more in earnest than usual.

It was a cruel trick, and very like Levison.

Then the cad of the Fourth turned his attention to the elephant. The huge animal, evidently the tamest of the tame, took no notice of him. There was a gaily-decorated howdah upon his back, fastened by girths passing under the great body. Levison approached the great animal with some trepidation. If the elephant were alarmed or angered, one movement of the huge foot would have been enough to crush the cad of the Fourth.

But the elephant was as tame as a household cat. Levison stroked him, and he took no notice. The junior inserted his finger under the tight girth, still without alarming the elephant. Then he rammed in a stone—a larger one, with jagged edges. The elephant made a movement and turned his great head, and in a second his trunk was winding round the cad of the Fourth.

But the elephant was as tame as a household cat. Levison stroked him, and he took no notice. The junior inserted his finger under the tight girth, still without alarming the elephant. Then he rammed in a stone—a larger one, with jagged edges. The elephant made a movement and turned his great head, and in a second his trunk was winding round the cad of the Fourth.

Levison tried to spring away—too late! He was in the grip of the elephant's trunk, and was swept off his feet, and the earth and the tent swam round him.

A yell of terror broke from the frightened junior.

"Oh, help, help, help!"

He struggled wildly in the grip of the elephant's trunk.

A man ran into the tent. It was Captain Cambon, the elephant-tamer, a Frenchman. He uttered an angry exclamation.

"Mon Dieu! You could not meddle viz ze animals, garcon! But he vill not hurt you. It is ze trick zat hé perform! Arretez, Abdullah!"

At his master's word, the elephant set the junior upon his feet unharmed, and blinked his sleepy eyes at Cambon.

"You could not come in here!" said the performer. "It is not safe to meddle viz ze animals, mon garcon. Go you out!"

Levison panted for breath. His head was swimming, and he could hardly realise yet that he was out of danger. In the dreadful moment when he had been elevated in the elephant's trunk he had seen himself, in his terrified imagination, dashed upon the hard ground, and crushed to death.

Figgins looked into the tent.

"Ready?" he said. "Why, what are you doing here, Levison—sneaking in without paying, you cad? Clear out!"

"I—I—"

"Clear out!" roared Figgins.

And Levison was glad enough to crawl under the flap of the canvas and disappear.

He was still trembling as he hurried away, and his face was very white. But there was a gleam of spiteful satisfaction in his eyes.

"I fancy that performance won't go just as they want it!" he muttered, between his teeth. "There will be a surprise for them when it starts—hang them! But—but Figgins saw me there! I—I wonder if they will suspect me now?"

And that thought was quite enough to dash the satisfaction of the cad of the Fourth.

CHAPTER 6.

Buck-Jumping Extraordinary.

"GENTLEMEN—"

Bang, bang! Clang! Crash!

"Gentlemen—"

Toot-toot-rootey-toot-toot!

"Gentlemen, the circus is now open! The performance is about to begin! Gentlemen, this performance is the catch of the season! Allow me to present to you Cowboy Kit, the famous, celebrated, and well-known buck-jumping rider of the Far, Far West!"

Thus Figgins.

And the crowd cheered.

Figgins' idea of a circus performance at St. Jim's had caught on like wildfire. As there was no match on that afternoon it filled up a long-felt want, as Blake remarked. And as it was held for the Benefit Fund, all the fellows who sympathised with that worthy object were quite willing to shell out sixpences and shillings. They would get something for their money, at all events; so it was that much better than an ordinary subscription.

There was a cheer as Cowboy Kit led the buck-jumping

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steed out of the tent upon the pitch. The horse seemed a little restless.

"Hurray!"

Crash, crash, crash! went Fatty Wynn's improvised cymbals.

Toot-toot-toot-toot! went Herries' cornet.

"Chuck that row!" called out Gore. "You're frightening the horse, to say nothing of splitting our ear-drums!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Cease fire!" grinned Figgins.

And the musicians ceased their arduous labours.

Cowboy Kit, who was clad in his circus costume of a cowboy of the Wild West, mounted the fiery mustang.

He rode round the pitch at a great speed, cracking his whip in the air with a succession of reports like pistol-shots.

Then he put the steed through an exhibition of buck-jumping.

It was very realistic.

All the onlookers realised that the horse was in an excited state, and the earnest look on the cowboy's face was very convincing.

The rattle of hoofs in the turf, the snorting of the horse, and the deep breathing of the rider, were very realistic indeed.

"My hat!" murmured Jack Blake. "Blessed if that looks like a show performance at all! I come from Yorkshire, and I know something about horses. I'll bet you that that geegee is jolly near out of hand!"

"Looks like it, bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, turning his famous monocle upon the buck-jumper and his rider.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"They do this every evening in the circus," he said. "It's the usual performance, you know. I must say it's jolly realistic!"

"Yaas, wathah! A little bit too much, deah boy. There's somethin' w'ong with the horse."

"My hat!" roared Clifton Dane. "Look there!"

The mustang was rearing savagely, and as the rider forced him down he swept round his head, and made a savage catch at Cowboy Kit's leg with his teeth.

The cowboy's whip descended upon the head with a crashing blow.

Cowboy Kit's face was paler now, and hard set.

A murmur ran through the juniors.

They realised now that it was not merely a circus performance they were seeing. The horse was out of hand!

Some unknown cause had rendered it savage, and it was trying with desperate strength to unseat its rider and break away.

And the circus rider knew it.

He was struggling with the horse, striving to quell its savage spirit, and he was striving in vain.

The mustang was getting more and more out of control.

Figgins looked startled.

"My word! This is more than we bargained for!" he said. "The chap can't manage his own horse!"

"Somethin's gone w'ong with it, deah boy."

"What on earth could go wrong with it? It was all right when they brought it here," said Kerr.

"Nobody's been meddling with it, I suppose?" said Tom Merry anxiously.

Figgins jumped.

"My hat! I found Levison in there——"

"Levison!"

"Yes. But he couldn't have——"

"He jolly well could have, and would have!" growled Herries. "He's a beast to animals! You remember the trouble there was over his tormenting my bulldog?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Good heavens!" muttered Figgins. "If he's done anything to the horse, he ought to be boiled in oil! Pass the word to the fellows to clear back, in case he breaks away! It wouldn't be a joke to be run over!"

"Bai Jove, it wouldn't!"

The fellows round the field were already crowding back, in case the horse should bolt.

The struggle between the mustang and its rider was growing harder and fiercer.

Cowboy Kit's white, set face showed how earnest it was with him. He was using the whip now, but the heavy blows did not seem to quell the savage spirit of his steed.

"Clear away!" shouted the circus rider suddenly. "Somethin's wrong with him! I can't hold him! Stand back!"

The crowd cleared back in hot haste.

The circus rider had an iron grip on the reins, and he was trying to keep the mustang to circling round the pitch. But the animal broke away at last, and bolted from the cricket-pitch, and careered away across the quadrangle.

Crash, crash, crash! went the thundering hoofs.

"Good heavens!"

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"THE MAGNET" LIBRARY,
Every Monday.

"Look!"

"My hat!"

"Gweat Scott!"

Figgins & Co. stared after the flying horse in dismay. His rider was holding him well, but he could not stop him. He could only guide him, and he was guiding him towards the school gates. Outside, in the open country, the infuriated animal would be able to do less harm.

With foaming mouth and lashing hoofs, the mustang careered through the gateway, and disappeared.

There was a buzz on the cricket-field.

"Bai Jove! Jollay glad he's gone!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I suppose the chap will wide him back to the circus at Wayland—he'll be tired out by then."

"Rotten thing to happen!" growled Figgins. "Mucked up the first half of the show!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"This what you call an entertainment?" sneered Crooke. "Got the cheek to charge us a tanner for seeing a silly horse run away with a silly ass?"

"Oh, shut up!" said Figgins, with a worried look.

"Well, I think it's rotten!"

"Nobody wants to know what you think!" said Herries. "I dare say you had a hand in it—whatever it was Levison did to the horse!"

"Oh, rats!"

"Is Levison here?" asked Tom Merry, looking round.

But there was no sign of the cad of the Fourth. He was keeping at a safe distance.

"Better have the other turn on now," said Kerr. "The first one has ended rather suddenly, but the performing elephant will be all right."

"Yes; bring the elephant on, Captain Cambon!"

"Oui, oui!" said Cambon.

"Yaas; come wound, you fellows, and don't gwumble at what can't be helped, you know!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"I say, D'Arcy——"

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus looked round as he heard the fat voice. A very fat junior, with a very large pair of spectacles, was blinking at him with an agreeable smile. D'Arcy recognised Billy Bunter, of the Remove Form at Greyfriars, who had come over with the Greyfriars team for their cricket match at St. Jim's.

"Good-afternoon!" said D'Arcy, shaking hands with the fat junior.

"Had my wire?" asked Bunter.

"Yaas!"

"Good! Got some sort of a performance on here?" asked Billy Bunter, blinking round the pitch in surprise.

"Yaas; a circus performance for a benefit fund!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Are you goin' to stand or sit, Buntah?"

"Well, I'd rather sit down."

"That will be a shillin'."

"What!"

"Standin' woom, sixpence."

"Oh!"

Clifton Dane presented a plate to the Greyfriars junior. Billy Bunter coughed.

"Ahem! I'm frightfully sorry, but I left my purse with all my sovereigns in it at Greyfriars, otherwise——"

"No sovereigns wanted," said Dane, "only tanners."

"Unfortunately, Bob Cherry borrowed my last tanner as I was coming away," said Billy Bunter.

"It's all wight," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I'll pay for my guest, deah boy."

"Good. I'll send it to you later out of a postal-order I'm expecting," said Billy Bunter.

"All sewene."

And Arthur Augustus dropped a sixpence into the plate. Crash, crash, crash! went the cymbals; toot-root-toot! the cornet!

The elephant was on the scene!

CHAPTER 7.

Mr. Ratcliff Gets Wet!

"MURRAY!"

The juniors cheered the elephant and his skilful rider.

Captain Cambon—regiment unknown—was a good performer, and he could do all sorts of tricks on the elephant's back.

The great animal trotted solemnly round the pitch, with the Frenchman performing acrobatic feats on his back, turning somersaults, or holding on to the howdah with one foot, or allowing himself to be lifted in the great trunk.

"Bai Jove," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, "that's wippin'!"

And the juniors cheered. After the unfortunate experience

with the buck-jumper, it was a great relief to Figgins & Co. to see the elephant turn going well.

But Abdullah, the elephant, soon began to show signs of irritation.

After lumbering round the pitch several times he stood quite still, and refused to budge.

His surprised master urged him and coaxed him, but it was of no use.

The elephant seemed to have made up his mind, and he would not move.

"Bai Jove, is there somethin' w'ong with the elephant as well as with the horse?" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in surprise.

It certainly looked like it.

Captain Cambon was growing annoyed. He struck the elephant at last, and the great animal took him up in his trunk.

"He's starting again," said Figgins.

"Bwavo!"

The elephant carried the captain along for a short distance, and set him down upon his feet, and then lumbered away.

"Look out!" shouted Gore, as the great quadruped bore down upon the ropes.

The juniors scattered.

Abdullah trampled on, and left the pitch, proceeding in the direction of the senior cricket ground.

Figgins & Co. gazed after him in utter dismay.

What Kildare and the rest of the seniors would say if the elephant invaded their pitch in the middle of a Form match, the juniors could hardly guess.

Figgins ran up to Captain Cambon and caught him by the arm.

"Stop him!" he shouted. "Bring him back!"

Cambon shook his head.

"I'll try," he said. "But somethin's irritated him, and he's out of sorts. I don't know what it is, unless somebody has been meddling with him."

"Levison!" groaned Figgins. "Do your best; there will be a row about this."

"Ciel, I do my best!" said Cambon. "I do not understand it at all, mon garcon. It is zat somebody have irritated him while he is in zat tent, n'est-ce-pas?"

"Collar the beast; he'll be among the cricketers in a minute."

"Je vais—I run—I fly!" said Cambon.

He dashed after the elephant, calling to Abdullah. But Abdullah was evidently in an obstinate humour. He trampled on, and there was a yell of alarm from the Upper Form fellows gathered round the senior cricket-ground.

"Look out!"

"Look at that beast!"

"Where has he come from?"

Darrel, of the Sixth, was batting now, and Lefevre, of the Fifth, was bowling to him. Darrel swiped the ball away, and it crashed upon the elephant's thick hide as he lumbered into the field.

The concussion could not have hurt Abdullah, but it irritated him.

He gave an angry snort, and trampled on the pitch, and the cricketers scattered promptly enough before him.

Abdullah caught up the stumps in his trunk, and smashed them on the ground, and then lumbered on to the pavilion.

He wrenched up several seats there, and smashed them on the earth. Then, as Cambon dashed up to capture him, he lumbered away at a great rate.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Figgins. "There will be the Dickens to pay for this!"

Cambon was still vainly pursuing the elephant. When he came up with him, Abdullah calmly took him in his trunk, and carried him away a dozen yards or so, and set him down, and then lumbered off. The elephant was not showing any signs of ferocity, which was fortunate; but he was evidently in a state of irritation that placed him beyond control.

The juniors could only watch him in dismay, and wonder what he would do next.

The doctor's garden seemed to offer some attraction to Abdullah. He tramped on to the little gate, and tore it off its hinges with one wrench of his trunk.

Then he thundered into the garden.

Taggles was there, at work with a lawn-mower, or, rather, he had been at work with a lawn-mower. Just at the present moment he was sitting on the lawn-mower, under the shade of a tree, taking a well-earned rest, and mopping his brow with a handkerchief. He had his back to Abdullah, and did not trouble to turn his head at the sound of the elephant's footsteps, which were soft enough on the lawn.

Abdullah paused, and looked down at the back of Taggles, as if wondering what it was.

Then he curled his trunk round Taggles' hat, and jerked it off.

Taggles gave a yell.

"None of your tricks!" he yelled. "Don't you come into this 'ere garden! It ain't allowed! I'll report yer! 1—oh, crikey!"

The words died on Taggles' tongue as he looked up and saw the elephant.

He stared blankly at the huge beast, frozen with terror.

The elephant snuffed round him, and wound his trunk about the gasping and helpless school-porter, and lifted him from his feet. Then the unfortunate Taggles found his voice.

"Ow! 'Elp! 'Elp!"

"Don't struggle!" shrieked Cambon, dashing up. "He will not hurt you if it is zat you do not struggle viz him."

"'Elp!" moaned Taggles. "This is a 'orrid dream! 'Elp!"

Abdullah trotted on, carrying Taggles across the garden.

Splash!

Taggles was dropped bodily into the artificial lake in the garden, and the elephant turned away, leaving him spluttering and floundering there.

"'Elp!" shrieked Taggles.

Tom Merry and Figgins hastened to drag him out. Taggles lay gasping on the grass, in the middle of a pool of water that ran from his clothes.

"Ow!" moaned Taggles. "It's a 'orrid dream! Ow!"

The elephant lumbered on, followed at a respectful distance by the amazed and dismayed juniors.

"It's too awful for words!" groaned Figgins. "There will be a frightful row about this! Oh, my only hat, I wish we'd never thought of the rotten circus!"

"Well, we've got all the collection," said Kerr.

"Chaps will be asking for their money back now!" growled Gore.

"Let 'em ask!"

"He's making for the New House!" yelled Redfern, as Abdullah lumbered across the quad.

"Head him off, somebody!"

Nobody seemed inclined to take the risk of heading off the elephant, however. Abdullah reached the New House, and began rubbing his side against the stone porch.

"There's something irritating him in the girth," said Tom Merry.

"Might get it off him," said Blake.

"I sink zat is it," said Captain Cambon. "I zink I try him."

He rushed up to the elephant. Abdullah did not wait for him. He trampled into the New House, through the wide-open doorway, and the strong oaken floor sounded and creaked under his heavy tread.

"And Ratty's at home!" groaned Figgins.

"Oh, what rotten luck!"

Mr. Ratcliff, the master of the New House, was indeed in his study. The New House master was busy upon examination papers, and at such times he liked to be very quiet.

The noise he had already heard from the cricket-pitch had annoyed him very much. The sound of a giant's footsteps in the house filled the cup of his wrath to overflowing.

The sound of Abdullah walking in the passage was like unto somebody rolling heavy weights about, and the House-master was naturally indignant.

He jumped up, and opened the door of his study.

"What is this?" he shouted. "How dare you make such a disturbance! How dare you—why—what—what—what—"

Mr. Ratcliff recoiled into his study in terror.

Abdullah was just outside his door.

"Good heavens!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff. "Help! Help!"

Abdullah strode in.

Mr. Ratcliff, almost fainting with terror, backed away towards the window.

Crash!

The elephant had brushed against the table, and the table went flying, and its contents shot off to the floor.

He was still coming on, and Mr. Ratcliff executed a strategic retreat through the open window.

Mr. Ratcliff was not an athlete, but he performed that jump through the window in a very creditable manner.

He rolled over as he landed on the ground outside, and sat up dazedly, and looked up. The head and trunk and tusks of Abdullah looked down at him from the study window.

"Good heavens!" spluttered the New House master.

"Help, help!"

He picked himself up and ran.

Captain Cambon dashed into the house. He ran into the House-master's study, and found Abdullah rubbing himself on the doorpost, evidently to remove something under his girth that irritated him. Cambon hurriedly searched for it, and found the jagged stone. The cause of the elephant's peculiar outbreak of temper was now explained. Cambon succeeded

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in persuading him out of the house, and he lumbered out into the quadrangle again. He stopped at the fountain in the quad, and began to drink, drawing up the water with his trunk.

"It is all right now, mes garçons!" gasped Cambon. "Look at zis zat I have found; some vicked boy he have place zat zere undair ze girth!"

"Levison!" said Figgins, between his teeth. "For goodness' sake get the beast away before he does any more damage!" said Tom Merry. "There will be the dickens to pay as it is!"

"Yaas, wathah!" Mr. Ratcliff came up, trembling with rage. The sight of the elephant peaceably drinking at the fountain reassured the Housemaster; he understood that he had not to deal with some ferocious wild beast as, in his terror, he had fancied at first.

"Was this animal purposely brought into the precincts of the school?" he thundered.

"Yes, sir," said Figgins meekly. "We've been giving a show!"

"How dare you! You shall be flogged for this! Take the brute off the premises at once. Do you hear?"

"Yes, sir. I——" "Take him away!" shouted Mr. Ratcliff. "Take the brute away!"

Abdullah looked round. He was not in an equable temper yet, and perhaps the Housemaster's loud, rasping voice irritated him. He lumbered towards Mr. Ratcliff, and the Housemaster backed away in terror.

"Take him away! Take him away—ow—ooch!" Splash!

A spout of water flew from the elephant's trunk, and swamped all over Mr. Ratcliff.

The Housemaster staggered back drenched. There was a yell.

"Ha, ha, ha!" Mr. Ratcliff yelled, too—but not with laughter. He gathered his gown about him and fled madly into the New House, and disappeared.

"Oh, crumbs!" said Jack Blake, wiping his eyes. "There will be trouble over this! But Ratty got it in the neck that time! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Take him away!" moaned Tom Merry. "Take him away. Ha, ha, ha!"

And Captain Cambon succeeded in leading the recalcitrant elephant out of the gates at last, much to the relief of the St. Jim's juniors.

CHAPTER 8.
Levison Catches It.

DR. HOLMES had heard the uproar in the quadrangle, and it had drawn him to his window. He had seen Mr. Ratcliff's mishap, and so he was not surprised when the New House master burst into the study with face aflame.

"Dr. Holmes, I—I—most outrageous—most unparalleled—most——"

Dr. Holmes made a soothing gesture. "Calm yourself, Mr. Ratcliff——"

"I have been assaulted—I have been——"

"I saw it all from my window!" said the Head. "It is a very serious thing. How did that animal come here at all?"

"I understand that some of the juniors brought him here for a performance, or something of the sort!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff. "The severest punishment—the severest possible punishment——"

"I will send for the boys who seem to have been concerned."

And Toby the page was despatched in search of Tom Merry and Blake and Figgins.

The three juniors came into the Head's study looking dismayed, as they felt. Dr. Holmes fixed a very stern glance upon them.

"Am I to understand that you were responsible for introducing that dangerous animal into the school grounds?" he exclaimed severely.

"I did it," said Figgins. "These chaps didn't have anything to do with it, sir. It was my idea."

"We were backing you up, Figgy," said Tom Merry. "We're all in it, sir. But we didn't mean any harm. The elephant was going to be used in giving a show——"

"You gave me permission to give a show for the Benefit Fund," said Figgins.

The Head coughed.

"True. But you did not mention that you intended to introduce a dangerous animal into the show, Figgins."

"He isn't dangerous, sir."

"The brute has invaded and wrecked my study!" shrieked Mr. Ratcliff. "I was compelled to throw myself from the window. Then he drenched me with water from the fountain—squirting it upon me with his trunk, sir——"

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"I saw it," said the Head. "But—but it was the fault of the rotter who irritated him, sir," said Tom Merry. "Some cad put a sharp stone under his girth, to irritate the skin, and make him wild."

"Is it possible that any St. Jim's boy would be so cruel and so wicked?" exclaimed the Head, shocked and angry.

"The stone was found there, sir."

"Do you know who did it?"

The juniors looked uncomfortable. They knew that it was Levison, and they intended to make Levison smart for it; but they did not want to sneak even about the cad of the Fourth.

"We didn't see it done, sir," said Tom Merry at last. "I do not believe a word of it!" rapped out Mr. Ratcliff.

The Head gave him a glance that he understood at once.

"Merry says the stone was found, Mr. Ratcliff," Dr. Holmes said quietly. "I decline to doubt Merry's word for a moment. The boy who was guilty of that cruel action was the cause of all the trouble. I must know who that boy was."

"Ahem!"

"If this was done, Merry, where and when was it done?"

"In the tent where the elephant was before the performance, sir," said Tom Merry.

"Then someone entered the tent and did this thing?"

"Yes, sir."

"Was anyone seen in the tent?"

"Yes, sir."

"His name?"

The juniors were silent. Before the Head could speak again there was a knock at the door, and it opened, and Captain Cambon came in. The Frenchman was looking very angry, and he had the jagged stone in his hand.

"Monsieur," he exclaimed, "it is zat you are headmastair of zis school. Is it zat you permit ze cruelty to ze inoffensive animals?"

"Certainly not," said the Head.

"Zen look at zat!" said Cambon, holding up the stone. "Look at zat, monsieur! It is zis pierre—zis stone—zat a vicked boy have stick undair ze girth to drive my elephant vild viz himself, n'est-ce-pas? Ze vicked garcon!"

"Can you give me the boy's name, monsieur?" asked the Head.

"I do not know ze boy, sair, but I heard ze ozzers call him Levison."

"Levison!" said the Head, frowning. "A boy who has been found guilty on a previous occasion of cruelty to animals." The Head rang for Toby again. "Kindly fetch Master Levison here at once!"

In a few minutes Levison entered the study. He was looking a little pale, but quite calm and collected.

"You sent for me, sir?"

"Yes, Levison," said the Head, regarding him sternly. "You are accused of having designedly played a trick to goad this gentleman's elephant—a cruel trick!"

"If Tom Merry says——"

"Merry has said nothing. This gentleman accuses you!"

"Captain Cambon found him in the tent with the animals, and I saw him there," said Figgins, with a glare of angry contempt at the cad of the Fourth.

"What have you to say, Levison?"

"I haven't done anything, sir."

"You were in the tent?"

"I just went in to see the animals, sir," said Levison meekly. "No harm in that, sir. I'm studying natural history specially, and I wanted to see the elephant at close quarters. I did nothing whatever to irritate him, sir."

"Ze vicked boy!" said Captain Cambon. "If it vas not you, zen who vas it that placed zat stone where it would irritate ze elephant?"

"I'm sure I don't know," said Levison. "Perhaps Figgins may have done it."

"What!" roared Figgins.

"Or Tom Merry——"

"Why, you—you——" gasped Tom Merry.

"Silence!" said the Head. "I believe you are guilty, Levison."

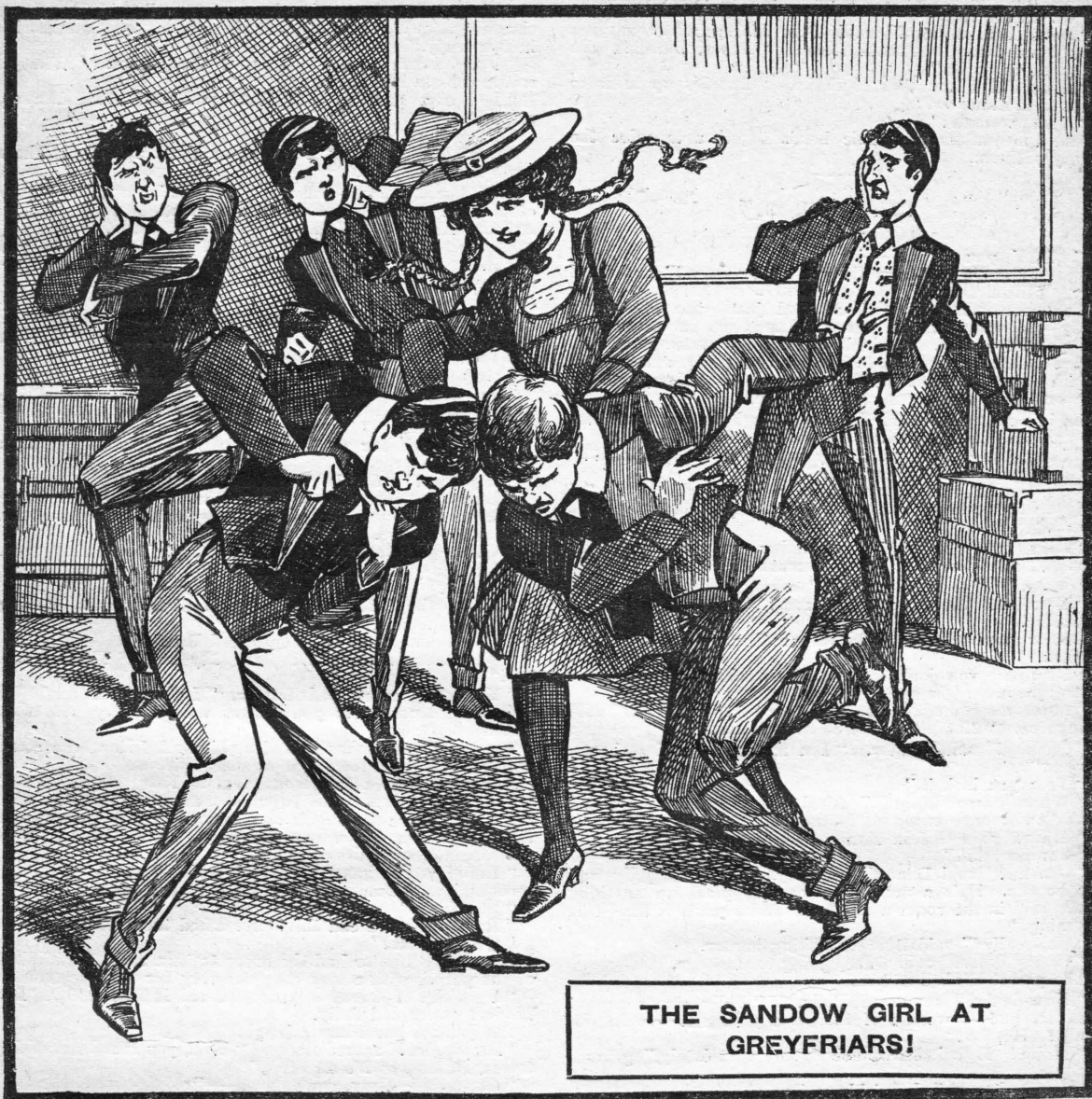
Levison bit his lip.

"There is no evidence, sir!" he stammered. "I was there—but anybody else might have got into the tent just as easily as I did——"

"It is true that the evidence is circumstantial," said the Head; "but the chief evidence against you, Levison, is furnished by your own character. You have been convicted before of cruelty to animals, which shows that there is a cowardly and cruel strain in your nature. I shall do my best to eradicate it. I am going to cane you severely, Levison."

"Oh, sir! I——"

"Silence! You may leave this matter to me, Mr. Rat-



THE SANDOW GIRL AT GREYFRIARS!

Miss Fluffy grasped Snoop and Skinner by their collars, and, exerting a force they never would have deemed her capable of, brought their heads together with a sounding concussion. Crack! "Oh!" "Yah!" Crack! Crack! (For this remarkable incident, you should get a copy of this week's number of "THE MAGNET" LIBRARY, and read the long complete tale of Harry Wharton & Co. entitled, "I'H U SANDOW GIRL AT GREYFRIARS!" by Frank Richards. Now on sale. Price One Penny.)

cliff. Levison is undoubtedly the only person to blame, and he will be severely punished. But understand, Figgins, that I forbid you to introduce elephants or any such animals into the precincts of the school again."

"Yes, sir," said Figgins meekly.

And the juniors departed, and Captain Cambon followed them. The New House master came out, only half satisfied. He had suffered very much, and he would have been better pleased to see half a dozen fellows, at least, caned. Still, there was something consoling in hearing the wild howls that proceeded from the Head's study after he left. Levison was "going through it," experiencing the only form of appeal to his feelings that he really understood—a severe caning.

"Jolly well out of that!" said Figgins, as the juniors emerged, relieved, into the quad. "And although I wouldn't have given Levison away, I'm jolly glad he's got it in the neck."

"Yes, rather; the cad!"

"All wight?" asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, joining them.

"Right as rain!" said Figgins.

"The show's been wathah a fwoast," said Arthur Augustus, with a grin.

"But we've got the takings, that's the chief point, and it will be a jolly good leg-up for the fund!" said Figgins.

"Yaas, wathah; that's twue enough."

"How much?" asked Tom Merry.

"We've got to pile in and count it up, but it must be three pounds at least!"

And when the stewards piled together their takings, and added them up, they found that the total amount was three pounds five shillings—a very substantial sum, as Figgins proudly declared, towards the fund for Taggles' Benefit.

"Bet you the School House chaps won't beat that!" grinned Figgins. "Things went wrong, but we've got the cash, and that's the principal point. It's up to you to go and do likewise."

"My dear chap, we'll beat you hollow!" said Jack Blake.

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"Go ahead, then!"

"Beat them hollow!" said Tom Merry reflectively, as they came into the School House. "M'yes, but how are we going to do it?"

"Blessed if I know," said Blake. "But it's up to us to manage it somehow."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And the juniors put their heads together to solve the knotty problem.

CHAPTER 9. Rather Awkward.

"SAY, you fellows—"

"Hallo! Where did you spring from?" exclaimed Clifton Dane.

Kangaroo and Clifton Dane had just come into their study—the end study in the Shell passage in the School House. They were surprised to see a fat junior ensconced in the armchair, with his feet on another chair, and a plate on his knees. It was Billy Bunter of Greyfriars, and he was evidently making himself at home.

He blinked at the Shell fellows through his big spectacles without stopping operations on the tarts he was eating.

"I say, you fellows, have they got rid of that elephant?"

"He's gone," said Kangaroo.

"Oh, good," said Bunter, with a breath of relief. "I dodged in here to get out of his way. I don't like elephants myself."

"They say a fellow-feeling makes us wondrous kind, though," the Cornstalk junior remarked.

"Ahem! Is this your study?" asked Bunter.

"Yes, and those are our tarts!" said Clifton Dane pointedly.

Bunter proceeded to demolish another, in spite of that remark.

"I suppose you don't mind a fellow taking a snack after a long journey?" he said.

"Much the same whether we do or not, it appears," said Kangaroo. "But pile in. You're welcome."

"Thanks!" said Bunter. "I'm making myself at home, you know."

"Yes; you look it."

"Whose parrot is that?" asked Billy Bunter, with a nod towards the cage swinging in the window.

"Mine!" said Clifton Dane.

"Can he talk?"

"Can he?" said Dane disdainfully. "I should jolly well say he can. He's a marvellous parrot; picks up anything that's said in the room where he is and repeats it like—like anything."

"Oh, really!" said Bunter, looking uneasy.

"Pretty Polly!" said Dane, going to the cage.

The parrot blinked at him.

"How-de-do?" screamed Polly. "Polly wants sugar! Ha, ha, ha! I wonder if there's anything to eat in this study? Ho, ho!"

"Hallo! He's heard somebody say that lately," grinned Kangaroo.

Billy Bunter smiled a sickly smile.

"I—I may have made a remark when I came in," he stammered. "You—you see, I was jolly peckish after my journey," said Billy Bunter confidentially. "I've got a good healthy appetite."

"Polly wants sugar! I wonder if there's anything to eat in this study? Blessed if this is the way to look after a guest! Rotten!" said Polly.

"Ahem!" said Bunter.

"That ass D'Arcy doesn't seem to know that a fellow gets hungry. Ha, ha, ha!" screamed Polly. "Rotten show, I call this place."

"Oh, do you?" said Kangaroo wrathfully.

"I—I didn't say that," said Bunter, in alarm. "The parrot's got it wrong. What I said was, it's a jolly ripping place."

"Lot of silly idiots watching an elephant," went on Polly. "Biggest idiot of all is D'Arcy! What a rotten show! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ahem!" said Bunter.

"Call Gussy in," grinned Clifton Dane. "He would like to hear Polly saying these pretty things."

"I—I say, you fellows, that blessed parrot's got it all wrong," said Bunter. "Of course, I shouldn't make remarks like that about my host. But perhaps it would be better not to let D'Arcy hear him. He mightn't understand."

"Or he might!" grinned Dane.

"Ahem! You see—"

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"The fellows are coming here, anyway," said Kangaroo, chuckling. "We're holding a committee of ways and means in this study."

"Polly wants sugar!" shrieked the parrot. "What a rotten show! Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I say, shut up that beast somehow," said Bunter, alarmed.

Clifton Dane shook his head.

"Can't!" he said. "Polly never shuts up. Hallo, here come the fellows."

The Terrible Three came into the study, and the chums of No. 6 followed them in. They stared at Billy Bunter. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy coloured a little. He had completely forgotten the existence of his guest. As he had not really asked Bunter to visit him at St. Jim's, however, there was some excuse for him. Billy Bunter had invited himself to the school, having long ago made up his mind to pay another visit to the hospitable juniors of St. Jim's.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I hope you are gettin' on all wight, Buntah."

"He seems to be," grinned Monty Lowther.

"Yes, thanks!" said Bunter. "I was hungry, you know, so I'm taking a little snack. All the same, I'm ready for tea when you are!"

"Pway offah our guest some weweshments, Kangy deah boy," said D'Arcy.

"Right-ho!" said the Cornstalk.

Kangaroo opened the cupboard door. As it happened, the cupboard of the end study had lately been replenished, and was well supplied.

"We've got a cold fowl and a steak pie," said Kangaroo. "Which do you prefer, Bunter?"

"Ahem!"

"Hallo, the fowl's gone!" exclaimed Kangaroo, staring into the cupboard.

"I—I was hungry—" stammered Bunter.

"Well, there's the steak pie. My hat! That's gone, too!"

"You see," murmured Bunter, "I thought I might as well have a snack, as you fellows were so busy with that blessed elephant."

The St. Jim's juniors looked at him. A fellow who could polish off a cold fowl and a steak pie, and then go on eating tarts, was a dangerous rival to Fatty Wynn. Fatty Wynn had always been supposed, at St. Jim's, to hold the record for achievements of that sort. But it was evident that he would be a bad second to Billy Bunter in a gastronomic competition.

"But if you're going to have tea, don't put it off on my account," said Bunter. "I'm quite ready."

"Bai Jove!"

"Rotten show, I call this!" screamed the parrot.

"Gweat Scott!"

Even Billy Bunter had the grace to turn red. He blinked at the parrot with a look that was very far from amiable.

"I wonder if here's anything to eat in this study! He, he, he!" screamed Polly.

The juniors burst into a laugh.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake. "Well, you found something to eat, Bunter, so it's all right."

"Oh, really—I say, you fellows—"

"That fellow D'Arcy is an ass! Polly wants sugar!"

Arthur Augustus turned crimson.

"Weally Buntah—"

"I trust you don't think I made that remark," said Bunter hastily. "Of course, I'm far too—too well-bred to say what I think when I'm a visitor—"

"What!"

"I—I mean I never said anything of the sort," stammered Bunter. "That parrot is a beastly idiot."

"Polly wants sugar! I wonder if there's anything to eat in this study! That fellow D'Arcy is an ass! Ha, ha, ha!"

"If that is your opinion of me, Buntah—" began Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, drawing himself up in a very stately way.

"B-b-but it isn't!" stammered Bunter. "I—I—"

"The pawtot must have heard you speakin'."

"Perhaps he heard somebody else speaking," suggested Tom Merry, pouring oil on the troubled waters, as it were. "You know Levison taught him a lot of things to cause trouble, once, and he might have been at his tricks again."

"Yaas, wathah! It's quite poss.," said D'Arcy, mollified.

"Levison!" said Bunter. "That's the chap who used to be at Greyfriars, and was sacked from our school? He's simply full of rotten tricks, I can assure you."

"Then I withdraw my remark, if you assuam me that you did not make those insultin' remarks," said D'Arcy.

"Oh, really—"

"That's all right," said Tom Merry hastily. "Now to business. The question is, what are we going to do to raise

the funds for the Benefit? Figgins & Co. have raised three pounds ten—"

"And raised Cain in the process," grinned Monty Lowther. "Yes. But they've got the tin, and that's the chief thing. If Figgins & Co. raise three quid and a half, it's up to us to raise at least four quids, for the honour of the School House."

"Hear, hear!"
"Soveweigns, dear boy," remonstrated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Quids!" said Tom Merry firmly.

"Soveweigns—"

"Quids—"

"Raising money for a fund—eh?" said Billy Bunter. "Perhaps I may be able to help you, you fellows."

"Any good ideas will be welcomed," said Tom Merry politely.

"They generally fall on me if there's anything of the kind going on at Greyfriars," explained Bunter. "I've got a head for business, you know. The fellows all rely on me. I get up concerts, and amateur dramatic performances, and that kind of thing. I had the leading part in arranging a performance of a Shakespeare play the other week for the benefit of some destitute sailors. You can't do better than come to me for advice. I'm the very chap you want!"

"Ahem!"
"I'll tell you what I'll do," said Billy Bunter generously. "I'll take the whole matter in hand and run it for you from start to finish if you like. All you fellows will have to do will be to obey my directions. What do you think?"

CHAPTER 10.

Polly Causes Surprise.

TOM MERRY & CO. looked fixedly at Billy Bunter. He had asked them what they thought, but they did not tell him what they thought. It would not have been polite to a guest.

But their looks spoke volumes.
Billy Bunter, however, was too short-sighted to notice it, and he was too busy with the last remaining tart to think of looking at the faces of the St. Jim's juniors. He went on munching a tart in a state of complete and perfect self-satisfaction.

If Billy Bunter had been a St. Jim's fellow, he would have been bumped on the spot for his astounding cheek.

But he wasn't, so the juniors let it pass.
"Thank you very much!" gasped Tom Merry, as soon as he recovered his breath. "You're very kind, Bunter!"

Bunter did not disclaim it.
"The fact is, it's my intention to be kind," he said.

"Oh!"
"Bai Jove!"

"Anything I can do I shall be glad to do, in return for the feed you're going to stand me, if for nothing else," said Bunter.

"Oh!"
"And really, though I say it myself, you can't do better than place the whole matter unreservedly in my hands," said Bunter cheerfully. "What do you say?"

"Ahem! I really don't know what to say," murmured Tom Merry. "Only—only we won't take advantage of your kindness, Bunter."

"Couldn't think of troublin' you, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus.

"No trouble at all," said Bunter, finishing the last tart and sighing slightly over the empty plate. "Look here, I've got a suggestion to make. Suppose you gave a ventriloquial entertainment?"

"A which?"

"Where are we to dig up the giddy ventriloquist?" asked Kangaroo.

Billy Bunter patted himself on the chest.
"I'm your man!" he said.

"You!"

"Bai Jove, Buntah is a wotten ventriloquist—I—I mean a wippin' ventriloquist!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"I wemembah his playin' a wotten twick on me—I mean, a wavy clevah twick—"

"I'm quite at your service," said Bunter. "I shouldn't charge you any fees. And I will undertake to bring the house down. The fellows at Greyfriars are simply enthusiastic about my ventriloquism. Wharton and Nugent sometimes beg me, with tears in their eyes, to come into their study and give them a show."

"Do they really?" murmured Tom Merry.

"Yes, rather!" said Bunter emphatically. "Is that ginger-beer in that bottle, Noble?"

"Yes," said Kangaroo.

"Good! I'm thirsty."

Kangaroo poured out the ginger-beer. There was

nothing left to eat in the study, so Bunter naturally considered that it was time to begin to drink.

"Give us a specimen of what you can do in the ventriloquial line," said Tom Merry, in a state of doubt as to how much of Bunter's assertion was fact, and how much was gas.

"Certainly," said Bunter, blinking round through his big glasses.

There was a sudden yell from the parrot's cage. Clifton Dane had covered it with a cloth, as the only way to stop Polly talking. From under the cloth came, or seemed to come, the voice of the parrot.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Polly wants sugar! Get your hair cut! Ha, ha, ha! Screech!"

Clifton Dane jumped up.
"That blessed parrot again!" he exclaimed. "He generally shuts up when I put him in the dark. Polly, you beast, cheese it!"

"Yah, yah! Cheese it yourself, cocky!"

The juniors simply jumped. The parrot had a wonderful way of repeating anything he overheard, but he had never been known to originate replies before. His retort to Clif on Dane astounded the Canadian junior.

"My hat!" gasped Clifton Dane. "Polly, you cheeky beast—"

"Go and eat coke yourself! I'm not going to shut up for you! Clear out! Get your hair cut and boil your face in oil!"

"Oh, my aunt!"
"Gweat Scott!"

Clifton Dane tore the cloth off the cage. Polly, the parrot, blinked at him out of one eye. Clifton Dane stared blankly at his pet. Polly was full of surprise, but this was certainly the biggest surprise of all.

"Look here, Polly—" gasped Dane.

"Can't do it! Put on a mask!"

"Wha-at!"

"Or a fire-screen, or something, if you want me to look. Your face worries me! Ha, ha, ha! Take it away and bury it!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

The juniors were all gathered round the parrot's cage now in unbounded amazement.

Billy Bunter was forgotten. The Greyfriars ventriloquist grinned and finished the ginger-beer.

"The—the blessed bird is a giddy wizard!" gasped Blake. "He can't have been taught those things!"

"Wathah not!"

"Yah! Go and eat coke! Where did you dig up those features, Gussy?"

"Bai Jove!"

Clifton Dane covered up the cage again. He was astounded.

"Yah, yah, yah! Lemme out! I couldn't go home in the dark, you ass!"

"Oh, great Scott! The beastly bird's a beastly magician, that's what he is!" exclaimed the Canadian junior.

"Chuck him out of the study!" said Blake.

"I'll stick the cage in the passage while we're having our jaw," said Dane. "I've never known Polly taken like this before."

He carried the cage out of the study, and placed it in the passage, and came in again and closed the door. The juniors had no sooner sat down than there was a sound of scratching at the door.

"Lemme in!" came the voice of the parrot through the keyhole. "I'm not going to stay out here, you silly ass! Open this rotten door!"

"Great Christopher Columbus!"

"I'll Christopher Columbus you, if you don't open this door! Do you think I'm going to stay out here, you ass?"

"He must have got out of the cage," said Blake.

"But he couldn't," said Dane, in bewilderment. "It's fastened."

"Well, he has; he's scratching at the door."

Scratch, scratch, scratch!

"Do open this door, fathead, or I shall have to fly round and get in at the window!" said the parrot's voice.

The juniors looked almost scared. There was something utterly amazing and uncanny in the parrot making those remarks.

Clifton Dane ran to the door and opened it. He staggered as he looked out into the passage. The cage was still at a distance from the door. It was closed, and the parrot was in it!

"He's not here!" yelled Dane.

"What!"

"He's still in the cage!"

"Rot!"

"Look for yourselves!" yelled Dane.

There was no doubt about. The parrot was still in the

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cage, a dozen feet from the door, and the cage was securely fastened. Who, or what, had scratched at the door, and screeched through the keyhole?

"Well, this takes the bun!" said Herries.
 "The giddy place must be haunted!" said Blake.
 "He, he, he!"

They all turned towards Billy Bunter as he chuckled. A sudden suspicion shot into all their minds at once.

"Bunter! Was that you?" roared Tom Merry.
 "He, he, he! You asked me to give you a specimen of ventriloquism," grinned Bunter. "What do you think of it? He, he, he!"

CHAPTER 11.

A Knock for Knox.

TOM MERRY & CO. stared blankly at Billy Bunter. They understood now, but they were still amazed.

Those wonderful remarks from the parrot had been the work of the Greyfriars ventriloquist.

"So it was you?" gasped Blake.
 "Yes, rather! He, he, he!"

"Well, my hat!"
 "Bai Jove! It's weally wemarkable!" said Arthur Augustus. "You are weally a vevy clevah ventwiloquist, Buntah! I couldn't have done that!"

"Go hon!" murmured Monty Lowther.
 The fat junior smiled a smile of fat self-satisfaction.

"I'm a jolly clever chap in a good many ways!" he said modestly. "But I'm best at ventriloquism. What do you think of my giving a show—hey?"

"Not a bad idea," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "I say, you got the parrot's blessed croak to a 'T.' Can you always imitate voices like that?"

"Yes, rather—any old voice I've heard once!" said Bunter. "It's a gift, you know."

"Doesn't require brains," murmured Monty Lowther. "That accounts."

But Billy Bunter did not hear that remark of the humorist of the Shell.

"Come along, and let's go over and see Figgins!" said Blake. "It will be funny to spring a giddy ventriloquist on him!"

"Good egg! Come on, Bunter!"

Billy Bunter was quite willing to get into the limelight. He rose from his chair, and accompanied the juniors from the study.

Knox, of the Sixth, met them in the lower passage, as they were about to leave the School House.

The prefect frowned at them. Knox was very much annoyed that the row in the wood-shed had not been followed by canings all round. He was looking out for further trouble with the Terrible Three, and he found it.

"Hallo! Who's this?" he demanded, as he glanced at William George Bunter.

"A visitah of mine, Knox," said D'Arcy, with dignity.

"Indeed! Have you got permission to receive a visitor here?"

"Buntah awwived watah suddenly——"

Gr-r-r-r!
 The growl of a dog close by Knox's heels made the prefect jump. He spun away in a great hurry, his face flushing with anger.

"Herries!" he roared. "You've been warned about having that bulldog of yours in the House! You——"

"My bulldog isn't here!" growled Herries.
 "I heard——"

Knox broke off as he glanced round in search of the bulldog. There was no dog to be seen.

Gr-r-r-r-r-rh!
 The door of Mr. Railton's study was half-open, and the growl proceeded from the Housemaster's room. Knox looked in.

"Mr. Railton——"
 But the study was empty. From under the table came the sound of a deep and ferocious growl.

"You dare to say that your dog is not in the House, Herries!" shouted Knox. "Can't you hear him growling under the table in your Housemaster's study?"

"Oh, rot!" said Herries.
 Herries had been startled for a moment, but a wink from Billy Bunter reassured him. He understood that the Greyfriars ventriloquist was responsible for that very lifelike growl.

"Take your dog out at once, Herries!" rapped out Knox.

"My dog's in his kennel!" said Herries.
 "You can hear him growling—under the table!" said the prefect, as another deep and savage growl came from under the tablecover, which reached nearly to the floor, and hid from sight the space under the Housemaster's table.

"You can hear him distinctly. There is no other dog about the place but yours with a growl like that. Get him out at once, and take him away!"

"My dog isn't there!" said Herries.

"Why don't you take him away, Knox?" asked Cutts, of the Fifth, coming along and looking into the study. "You're not afraid of a bulldog, I suppose?"

"He's a savage beast!" growled Knox. "You take him out, Cutts, and I'll report this young rotter for letting him into the House!"

"No, thanks!" said Cutts promptly.
 Knox hesitated a few moments, and then went into the study, and stooped to raise the edge of the tablecover.

Gr-r-r-rh!
 The growl was so ferocious that Knox jumped back, knocking over a chair in his hurry.


There were several books piled on the chair, and they were scattered on the floor.

Mr. Railton came back to his study at that moment. He stared at the prefect in amazement.


"What on earth are you doing, Knox?" he exclaimed. "What could possibly have induced you to enter my study, and knock that chair over? What is the matter with you?"


There was a chuckle from the juniors in the passage.

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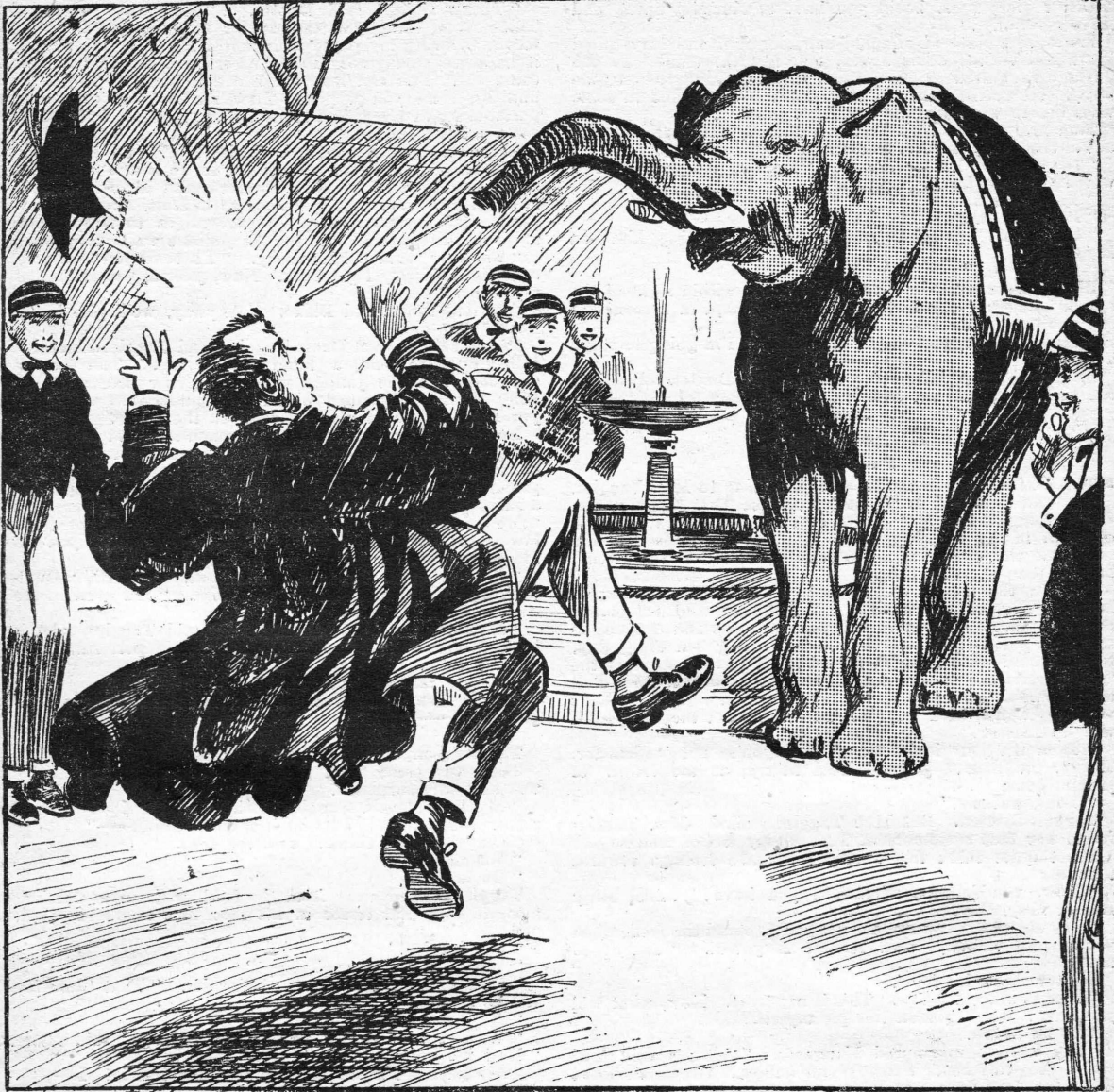


No. 11. NEXT WEDNESDAY
Grimes, Bernard Glyn,
Clifton Dane.





1. LEVISON.
2. MELLISH.
3. CROOKE.



"Take the brute away!" shouted Mr. Rateliff, backing away in terror. "Take him away—take him away! Ow—ooch!" A sput of water flew from Abdullah's trunk, and swamped all over the Housemaster, while the juniors looking on roared with laughter. (See Chapter 7.)

Knox was their special enemy, and they could have hugged Billy Bunter at that moment. Knox panted.

"Herries' bulldog is under your table, sir!" he exclaimed. "I was going to drive him out."

"Oh," said Mr. Railton, "that alters the case! Herries, you know very well that you have been forbidden to bring your dog into the House! You will take—"

"My dog isn't there, sir," said Herries.

"Indeed! Have you not seen him, Knox?"

"I heard him, sir. He was snapping round my feet, and then he bolted into this room," said the prefect.

"Herries' bulldog is under your table, sir!" he exclaimed.

"My dog isn't there, sir!"

"Well, well, whatever dog it is, take him away!" said the Housemaster.

"Very well, sir!"

Herries came into the study, and lifted the edge of the tablecover, and looked under. Then he rose again, and shook his head.

"There isn't any dog there, sir!" he said.

"What!"

"He is lying, sir!" said Knox furiously.

Mr. Railton frowned, and stooped down himself, and

glanced under the table. There was certainly no dog there—nothing at all but a wastepaper-basket.

The Housemaster rose and looked sternly at the angry prefect.

"There is no dog there, Knox!" he said coldly.

"Wha-at!"

"You may look for yourself, if you choose."

Knox did look. He almost fell upon the floor when he satisfied himself that there was no dog in the study. He gazed round him in bewilderment.

"But—but I distinctly heard a dog growl, sir!" he gasped.

"These juniors heard him, too. They must have seen him."

"Did you boys see a dog here?" asked Mr. Railton.

"No, sir!" chorussed the grinning juniors.

"Did you hear a dog growl?"

"A dog, sir? Certainly not!"

Knox clenched his hands.

"They're not speaking the truth, sir! They—"

"On the contrary, they are evidently speaking the truth, as there is no dog here!" said the Housemaster icily. "You are mistaken, Knox. I cannot understand how you could have imagined such a thing, but you have evidently done so.

Please replace those books you have so clumsily upset, and leave my study!"

Knox, in a state of mingled bewilderment and fury, piled the books on the chair again, and left the study. In the passage he glared at the juniors furiously, and then strode away. He realised that he must have been tricked in some way, but in what way he could not guess.

Tom Merry linked his arm in Bunter's, and marched him out of the School House, chuckling.

"It's great!" he murmured. "Bunter, old man, you're worth your weight in jam-tarts!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Poor old Knox! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come on!" grinned Blake. "Let's spring him on Figgins!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter paused as the party passed within sight of the school tuck-shop—the little establishment kept in a corner of the quadrangle by Dame Taggles.

"Come in here, you chaps!" he said. "I'm going to stand a feed!"

And, without waiting for a reply, Billy Bunter rolled into the tuck-shop, and the School House juniors followed him.

CHAPTER 12.

Fowl Play.

TAGGLES was in the tuck-shop, talking to Mrs. Taggles, and confiding to her his opinion of Tom Merry & Co. Taggles had not yet got over his experience with the elephant in the Head's garden. He had dried himself, and was none the worse for his adventure, so far as that went; but his temper had suffered.

"Wot's the school coming to? That's what I want to know?" Taggles was saying. "Bringing wild helephants into the place! They'll be bringing unicorns and dragons in next, I s'pose! If I was the 'ead, I'd flog 'em every day, that I would—fust thing in the mornin', to take some of the 'igh sperrits out of 'em, and then ag'in at dinner-time, and then ag'in at bedtime, jest to keep 'em in horder! That's wot they wants, Mrs. Taggles—and that's wot they'd get if I was 'eadmaster!"

"Then it's jolly lucky for us that you're not 'eadmaster, Taggy, old man!" grinned Tom Merry, as the crowd of juniors came in.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Taggles snorted. But Mrs. Taggles smiled. Mrs. Taggles found her best customers in Tom Merry & Co., and so she did not quite share her worthy husband's feelings towards them.

"Now, you fellows, what will you have?" asked Billy Bunter hospitably.

"My deah chap, we can't allow you to stand the feed, when you're our visitah," said Arthur Augustus. "It's up to us!"

Bunter shook his head.

"Not at all, old fellow. This is my treat. Now, what will you have? I'll begin on this pie myself."

And he began.

"My word!" murmured Kangaroo. "After a cold fowl and a pie—this beats Fatty Wynn hollow! Greyfriars can't make much profit out of Bunter if he has a free run of the larder!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Got over your ducking, Taggy, old man?" asked Blake sympathetically.

Taggles sniffed.

"Which I ain't," he said. "And as for young raskils that bring wild helephants into the school, I'd larrup 'em, I would! Huh!"

"It was for your sake, Taggy," remonstrated Lowther.

"Huh!"

"This is Taggles, our honourable and esteemed porter," Lowther explained to Bunter. "It's his birthday to-morrow, and he's just a hundred—"

"I ain't!" roared Taggles. "I'm sixty-five."

"And we're all so fond of him because he's so good-tempered," added Lowther. "He loves us dearly; we're the giddy apple of his eye—only he won't let on about it. He goes to the Head and tells him pretty stories about us because he's so fond of us. Don't you, Taggles?"

"Huh!" grunted Taggles.

"Walk up, you fellows!" said Bunter. "Don't be backward in coming forward, you know. Pile in—it's my treat!"

"Weally, Buntah, I cannot allow it. It's my treat," said D'Arcy firmly.

"Not at all, D'Arcy, old fellow—it's my treat."

"Well, if you insist—" said D'Arcy.

"As a matter of fact, I do!" said Bunter firmly.

"Very well, then; you shall have your way, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus gracefully.

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"That's right," said Bunter. "Roll up, you chaps! There's one thing you can do for me, though, D'Arcy. I forgot to bring my purse with me—I left it in my study, as it happens; and young Penfold borrowed my last bob as I came out. You can lend me a couple of quid, if you like, and I'll send you a postal-order for it. I'm expecting a postal-order at Greyfriars from a titled relation, but it hadn't come when I started."

Arthur Augustus coughed. If he had stood the feed, it might have come to ten shillings or so, so it was considerably more expensive to let Billy Bunter stand it. However, the swell of St. Jim's was generous to a fault, and he was in funds. He passed a couple of sovereigns to Billy Bunter, and they disappeared into the fat junior's waistcoat-pocket.

"Thanks!" said Bunter airily. "I'll send you that postal-order immediately I get back. Now, pile in, you chaps! It's my treat."

"Is it?" murmured Blake. "Anyway, we'll pile in."

And they did.

Orders rained upon Dame Taggles, and Taggles himself was called upon to lend a hand in serving. The shop was crowded, and the juniors were all giving orders at once. Billy Bunter performed wonders—wonders that would have put Fatty Wynn at his best quite in the shade.

But even Billy Bunter had to slacken speed at last. Dame Taggles had been called out of the shop to attend to some household duty, and Taggles was supplying the wants of the juniors, and jotting down the items with a stub of pencil on a sheet of sugar-paper. The school porter's face was a little more amiable. Goods at the school shop were not sold at low prices, and the business was doing very well just now. Hence the clearing of Taggles's manly brow.

"I don't think I'll tackle that fowl," said Billy Bunter, pushing back a cold chicken on a dish. "It's been in stock a bit too long, I think."

"Puffically fresh, Master Bunter," said Taggles, who had been eyeing Master Bunter's gastronomic performances in great wonder.

"Nearly talking, you mean," said Bunter.

"Look 'ere," said Taggles, nettled, "that there's a jolly good fowl—"

"Rot!"

Taggles jumped clear of the floor.

The reply came from the fowl in question, and Taggles was naturally surprised.

"My heye!" said Taggles, looking at the fowl in amazement. "My heye! Blessed if I didn't think—"

"Oh, you can't think!" said the fowl.

"Wh-a-at!"

"Go home!"

Taggles backed away from the fowl, with an expression of astonishment and terror in his face that made the juniors yell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What's the matter, Taggy?"

"Didn't you 'ear it?" gasped Taggles. "That there fowl! It was a-talkin'!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, I told you it was nearly talking," said Bunter.

"Now it's quite talking!"

"My heye! I never knowed anything like it! I——"

"Oh, you're squiffy!" said the fowl.

Taggles staggered back, and came into violent contact with a pile of grocery goods, and brought them to the floor with a run.

Mrs. Taggles came quickly out of her little parlour, as the tins of lobster and condensed-milk came to the floor with a crash.

"What are you doing, Henry?" she exclaimed sharply.

"My heye!" gasped Taggles.

"Upsetting the shop!" said Dame Taggles, with acerbity. "You had better let the gin alone before you come in here!"

"I ain't touched a drop—not for a hower or more!" spluttered Taggles. "Maria, that there fowl—that dead fowl—is a-torkin'!"

"Nonsense! It is quite fresh!"

"Torkin' in words, I mean—torkin' to me!"

Mrs. Taggles gave him a withering look.

"You'd better go and lie down and sleep it off!" she said sharply. "You're no use here!"

"I tell you I ain't touched a drop for a hower or more!" shouted Taggles. "And that there fowl was a-torkin'!"

"Don't be silly, Taggles!"

"He can't help it, ma'am" came from that surprising fowl. "He was born silly!"

"My goodness!" exclaimed Mrs. Taggles.

"There you har!" yelled Taggles. "You can 'ear it now yourself, Maria! Oh, my heye! The 'orrible thing's 'aunted!"

"I think we're about finished here," said Billy Bunter

cheerfully. "I'll put a few doughnuts in my pockets, in case I get peckish. How much does the bill come to, please?"

"Oh, my hey!"

Mrs. Taggles was gazing at the fowl with wide eyes, apparently incapable of speech.

Bunter rapped on the counter.

"How much?" he asked.

"Oh, my hey! Two pun fifteen shillin's and threepence!" gasped Taggles.

"Dear me!" said Bunter thoughtfully. "The two quid won't cover it, after all. I'll tell you what, D'Arcy—you can settle this bill, and I'll put it all on the postal-order I'm going to send you from Greyfriars. That all right?"

Without waiting for the astonished D'Arcy to reply, Billy Bunter rolled out of the tuckshop. D'Arcy fixed his monocle in his eye and gazed after him blankly.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus.

Blake chuckled.

"Jolly expensive guest, yours, Gussy!" he remarked. "You couldn't afford to have many of 'em, unless your pater sends you a regular shower of fivers. Pay up and look pleasant."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus paid up, and did his best to look pleasant. He had had a fiver from his "governor" that afternoon, and he now had exactly four shillings and ninepence left out of it. Billy Bunter was undoubtedly a most expensive guest.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus again, as he put the small remains of his fiver into his pocket. "Bai Jove!"

And the juniors followed William George Bunter from the tuckshop, and they bore down on the New House. For the moment the necessary arrangements in connection with Taggles' Benefit were forgotten, and the juniors gave all their attention to the "springing" of the Greyfriars ventriloquist upon Figgins & Co.

CHAPTER 13.

Kill That Wasp!

FIGGINS & CO. were in their study, in the New House, in a state of great satisfaction with themselves and with things in general.

As Figgins remarked, there was no doubt that the New House was taking the biscuit this time.

Three pounds ten shillings had been raised for the Benefit Fund by the scheme of the New House chums, and Figgins & Co. took the liberty of doubting whether the School House fellows would succeed in raising anything like it.

"As a matter of fact, it will be a New House Benefit," said Figgins. "The School House kids will have to fall back on a subscription, and you know how that kind of thing works out. Fellows won't give something for nothing."

"No fear!" agreed Kerr.

"Of course I hope they'll raise something, as we want to give Taggles a really good testimonial," said Figgins. "But they can't do it."

"They can't," agreed Fatty Wynn. "I say, Figgins, it hasn't been decided yet how the cash is going to be spent, has it?"

"Not yet."

"Well, I've got a suggestion to make," said Wynn. "I've been thinking it over, and I think I've hit on a really good idea to please all parties."

"Pile in," said Figgins cordially. "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings—"

"Why not stand Taggles a feed?" said Fatty Wynn. "Of course I know it's a bit out of the usual to have a school porter to a feed, but, after all, it's his birthday, and I suppose we're not snobbish. The best of that idea is that we can all be at the feed, and—"

"But this is Taggles' benefit, not Fatty Wynn's benefit," grinned Kerr.

"Well, you see—" argued Fatty.

There was a knock at the door, and it opened, and Tom Merry & Co. presented themselves. Billy Bunter came in with them. Figgins & Co. looked inquiringly at their visitors.

"Raised the fund yet?" asked Kerr, with a grin.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"We've got an idea for that," he said. "But we've brought over a friend to show you. You remember Bunter, who came over with the Greyfriars cricketers?"

"Oh, yes!" said Figgins. And the Co. shook hands with Billy Bunter.

The Greyfriars junior blinked at them.

"Jolly glad to see you fellows again!" he said. "Hope I shall see you all at Greyfriars some day. My old pals there will welcome you like anything. I've just been standing a feed in the tuckshop. I wish you'd been there!"

"My hat!" said Fatty Wynn. "I wish we had!"

"Always feel thirsty after a feed," said Bunter casually, with a glance at a bottle of ginger-beer on the table.

Fatty Wynn had brought in that bottle of ginger-beer for his own special delectation on that warm afternoon, but the Welsh junior was nothing if not hospitable. He went to the cupboard for a glass, poured out the ginger-beer, and Bunter accepted it gracefully.

There was a sound of a buzz in the study as Fatty closed the cupboard door.

"Hallo! You've let that wasp out!" said Bunter.

"Wasp!" said Figgins. "There's no wasp here!"

Buzzzzzz!

"Bee, then," said Bunter carelessly. "I'm rather short-sighted, and I can't see him. I suppose he won't sting—eh?"

Buzzzzzz!

"Brrrr!" said Figgins, as the buzzing came close to his ear, or appeared to do so, and he whirled a book in the air. "Clear off, you beast! I don't like wasps!"

"Can't see him," said Kerr, looking round.

Buzzzzzz!

"Jolly well hear him!" said Kerr.

Buzzzzzzzzzzzz!

The buzzing was close to Fatty Wynn's head, and the fat Fourth-Former gave a jump, and spun round, waving his hands wildly.

"Gerrooh! Gerroff, you beast! Ow! I almost felt him on my neck!" exclaimed Fatty. "I hate wasps! Drive him out of the window with that book, Figgins!"

"I would if I could see him," said Figgins.

The School House fellows grinned. The Greyfriars ventriloquist had not been long in getting to work in Figgins's study.

Buzzzzzz!

Figgins jumped round, looking very excited. The buzzing always seemed to come from behind his head, and he could not see the obnoxious wasp, or bee, whichever it was—if it was either.

"Blow the thing!" exclaimed Figgins. "It will sting one of us in a minute! Can any of you fellows see it?"

"I can't," grinned Tom Merry.

"Wathah not!"

Buzzzzzzzzzzzz!

Figgins caught up a cap, and twisted it in his hand to use as a weapon, and looked for that irritating insect with deadly intent.

The buzzing was up by the ceiling now, and Figgins scanned the ceiling in search of the wasp.

"It's behind the picture," said Fatty Wynn.

"I'll have him in a minute," said Figgins. "You stand on a chair and pull the picture aside, Kerr, and I'll stand on another and give him an awful whack the moment I see him."

The School House juniors crowded in the doorway, watching the proceedings with great interest. Figgins and Kerr mounted upon the chairs on either side of the picture. The buzzing was still continuing. Kerr suddenly dragged the picture aside, and Figgins smote the wall with a mighty smite.

Bang!

"Got him! I bet you—Hallo—"

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Crash!

Kerr had pulled rather too energetically at the picture. The nail that supported the cord had come out, and Kerr fell back off the chair and sat on the carpet with the picture on his head. Fortunately there was no glass in the frame; it was a framed oleograph. The oleograph bonneted Kerr, and the frame came down about his neck.

"Ow!" roared Kerr.

The School House juniors burst into a roar. The sight of Kerr sitting on the floor with the picture-frame round his neck struck them as funny.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Grooh!" gasped Kerr. "Oh!"

Figgins stepped down from his chair, and gazed at his chum in astonishment.

"Well, you are clumsy!" he ejaculated.

"Ow!" roared Kerr. "Do you think I did it on purpose, you fathead? Ow! The rotten nail came out, you chump! It was you drove the nail in, you burbler!"

"Sorry!" grinned Figgins. "Jolly lucky that picture wasn't a two-thousand-guinea Rembrandt, like the one in the Head's study!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Have you killed that beastly wasp?" growled Kerr, as he scrambled up and detached the picture-frame and the fragments of the oleograph from his person.

"Yes, rather! I'm not a clumsy ass!" said Figgins.

"Look here—"

Buzzzzzzzz!

Figgins started. He had evidently not killed the wasp.

Kerr chuckled.

"You haven't killed him!" he said. "Who's a clumsy ass now? Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't cackle!" said Figgins. "He's got a charmed life—the beast! I'll swear I hit him fair and square!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the School House juniors.

Figgins glared at them. His temper was rising. "What are you School House fatheads cackling about?" he demanded.

"Go on!" said Monty Lowther encouragingly. "We're waiting to see you slay the Jabberwock."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Buzz! Buzz! Buzzzzzzzz!

"The—the beast!" gasped Figgins. "I'll smash him, if it takes me all the afternoon! I'll squash him! I'll spifficate him! I'll—"

Figgins jumped as the buzz sounded close to his ears, and swept the cap round furiously.

"Yaroo!" yelled Fatty Wynn, as the weapon caught him on the side of the head. "Yah! Oh, you frabjous ass! What are you hitting at me for?"

"Sorry!" panted Figgins. "I'm trying to get at that wasp!"

"Ow! You've nearly busted my napper— You ass! Ow!"

"Oh, blow your napper!" howled Figgins, as the buzzing started again. "Hang your napper! Go and boil your silly napper in oil! I'm going to smash that wasp!"

Buzzzzzzzz!

Figgins made a wild drive in the direction of the buzz, and swept a vase from the mantelpiece. There was a crash in the fender.

"Looks more like smashing up the happy home, doesn't he?" grinned Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, stop cackling!" howled Figgins. "You're worse with your cackling than that rotten wasp with his rotten buzzing! Shurrup!"

Buz-buz-buzzzzzzzz!

"I—I—I'll smash that wasp, if I wreck the whole blessed study," gasped Figgins, whose blood was up now. "You watch me. Can you see him, Fatty?"

"Ow! I can't see anything. You've nearly stunned me."

"Oh, rats!" Figgins flung down the cap and caught up a cricket-bat as a more effective weapon. "If I get a swipe at the beast with this he won't buzz any more."

Buzzzzzz!

"Stand still, Kerr," shouted Figgins excitedly. "He's buzzing round the back of your head. He's settling down on your shoulder, I think. Stand still while I fetch him a swipe!"

"You dangerous lunatic!" roared Kerr, dodging away.

"Keep that bat away from me."

"Ass! I should have had him then—"

"Fathead! Chump!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "Go it, Figgy! Wait till he settles on Fatty Wynn's nose, and then go for him with the bat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll have him yet," said Figgins breathlessly, pursuing that incessant buzzing round the study. "I can't even see

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the beggar, but I can hear him all the time. Ha! Now he's behind the clock! I've got him—"

Crash!

It was only a cheap American clock, not made to be roughly used, or, indeed, to be used at all. But if it had been the best kind of clock of the best English manufacture it would not have withstood that terrific swipe from Figgins' cricket-bat.

"Oh, you ass!" yelled Kerr, as the ruins of the clock rattled down into the grate. "You have done it now!"

"Never mind the clock—I've settled that wasp!" said Figgins, perspiring, and gasping for breath.

Buzzzzzzzzzzzzzz!

Figgins jumped.

"Blessed if he hasn't got away again!" he muttered. "The blessed thing must have nine lives. I've killed him twice, at least."

The buzzing went towards the window. Figgins made a swipe after the sound, and there was another sound that drowned the buzzing—the sound of smashing glass. The bat was through a pane.

Crash! Crash!

"Oh, crumbs!"

Kerr and Fatty Wynn hurled themselves upon their excited chum, and dragged the cricket-bat away from him by main force. There was a sound of buzzing dying away in the distance outside the window.

"Lemme alone!" yelled Figgins. "I'm going to kill that wasp—"

"He's gone!" yelled Kerr. "And you've broken the window, you fathead! You'll have to pay three bob for that pain. Stoppit!"

"Well, he's gone," panted Figgins. "I've driven him out, anyway. He must have been hurt, too; I'm sure I hit him once at least."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the School House fellows.

Figgins glared at them.

"Look here, if you chaps can't do anything but cackle like a set of silly jays, you can buzz off!" he roared.

"Haven't you had enough buzzing?" asked Monty Lowther innocently.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins caught up the cricket-bat again, and made a rush towards them. Tom Merry & Co. crowded down the passage with Bunter, laughing loudly. As they emerged into the quadrangle Blake clapped Billy Bunter on the back.

"Spiffing!" he exclaimed. "You're the man for our money! Gentlemen, chaps, and fellows, we're going to give a ventriloquial entertainment to raise the fund for Taggles' Benefit, and William George Bunter is going to be principal performer."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Good egg!" said Billy Bunter. "I say, you fellows, when are you going to have tea?"

They looked at him. After that tremendous feed in the tuckshop the juniors had not proposed to have tea at all; and how Billy Bunter could possibly stow anything more away until at least some hours had elapsed was a mystery.

"Tea!" said Tom Merry faintly.

Bunter nodded.

"I'm getting rather peckish," he remarked.

"Oh, my hat! I—I mean we're just going to have tea," amended Tom Merry. "Gussy, old man, take your guest away to No. 6 and feed him. He must be simply perishing with hunger—ahem!—and we'll get ready for the show."

"Ya-a-a-a-as, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "This way, Buntah, deah boy."

And the remains of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's fiver were expended in providing yet further refreshment for William George Bunter of the Greyfriars Remove.

CHAPTER 14.

Bunter in the Limelight!

REDFERN came into Figgins' study about an hour later. The shades of night were falling fast, as the poet observes, and the lights were on in the New House. Figgins & Co. were beginning their preparation. Redfern was grinning. He had a sheet of paper in his hand, which appeared to be the cause of his merriment.

"Well, what's the joke?" demanded Figgins.

"You are, I fancy!" said Redfern. "Didn't you have a hunt for a wasp in this study this afternoon and smash things?"

"Yes," growled Figgins.

"Weren't those School House bounders here, with that fat chap Bunter from Greyfriars?" pursued Redfern.

"Yes. What about it?" asked Kerr, puzzled.

"Did you kill the wasp?" asked Redfern, still grinning.

"No," growled Figgins. "The brute got away. I think I damaged it, though."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling about?" demanded Figgins, whose temper was still a little edgewise. "If you've come here to cackle like frying bacon, you can clear."

"Ha, ha, ha! Sure you damaged the wasp?"

"Well, I think I did. If Kerr had kept still when it settled on his shoulder, I should have made a sure job of it," said Figgins, with a snort.

"Ahem!" grinned Redfern. "I'm not surprised that the wasp wasn't killed! You see, this paper lets in some light on it."

"Eh! What are you jabbering about?" asked Figgins crossly.

"Look!"

Redfern held up the paper. The chums of the New House read it with amazement. It was an announcement of an entertainment to be given that evening in the School House at St. Jim's for the benefit of the Benefit.

"GRAND ENTERTAINMENT!"

At 8 p.m. precisely, in the Fourth Form-room, Tom Merry & Co. have the honour to present

WILLIAM GEORGE BUNTER,
(Of Greyfriars),

The famous ventriloquist. Imitations of voices, cries of birds and fishes, growls of lions, tigers, zebras, New House kids, and other wild animals.

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(Of Greyfriars),

THE WORLD-FAMOUS VENTRILOQUIST!

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ROLL UP!

In your hundreds, thousands, and millions!

P.S.—Roll up!!!

Figgins & Co. read that striking announcement, and read it again, and read it yet again. Then they looked at Redfern and at one another. They turned very pink. Figgins dimly understood now why it was that he had not succeeded in killing that troublesome wasp in his study. One line in this precious announcement had evidently been specially inserted to enlighten Figgins on that subject.

"Well, my hat!" said Figgins, at last. "So that fat bouncer is a ventriloquist, is he? Now I come to think of it, I believe I've heard something of the sort before."

Redfern chuckled.

"So had I, but I'd forgotten," he said. "Seems to be a pretty good ventriloquist, too, by the way he's taken you fellows in."

"He'd have taken you in, too," growled Figgins. "Of course, I wasn't thinking anything of the sort. If I'd known it, I should have guessed."

"Go hon! And if you'd guessed it you'd have known, I suppose," suggested Redfern.

"Oh, rats!" said Figgins, as the Co. chuckled. "I wish I'd known. I'd have booted those School House bouncers out, and their precious Falstaff along with them. Like his cheek to come ventriloquising in my study! I suppose it's up to us to go to this rotten entertainment, as it's for the benefit of the Benefit. Of course, it will be tosh."

"Better go, though," said Redfern. "Every tanner helps; though it seems an awful waste to waste the fund on Taggles."

"Just what I was thinking," said Fatty Wynn eagerly. "My suggestion was to stand a big feed with the fund and let Taggles come. What do you think of that, Reddy?"

"Rotten!" said Redfern politely. "It's getting near eight now, and we'd better rout out the fellows. Better promise thick ears to all the chaps who don't go; we must rally round to back up the Fund. The School House chaps lined up to help us with that giddy circus, you know."

"Right-ho!" said Figgins. "One good turn deserves another. We'll all go."

And Figgins & Co. left their preparation where it was, and set energetically to work to marshal the New House juniors and shepherd them over to the School House.

Before eight o'clock sounded from the old tower of St. Jim's, Figgins & Co. and most of the New House juniors were in the Form-room. Figgins had promised dire punishment to all fellows who failed to rally round at that critical moment, and New House fags had been seen dashing to and fro in a state of great excitement trying to borrow sixpences of one another.

The Fourth Form room had been prepared for the entertainment.

Two rows of seats were numbered and reserved for the superb individuals who wanted to pay a shilling instead of sixpence, but there did not appear to be a run on them.

Several members of the School House Co. were in the Form-room keeping order, and showing fellows to their places. Billy Bunter was not yet to be seen. Billy Bunter had started a difficulty almost at the last moment. He could not possibly appear on the stage in public without evening clothes; and as he had not foreseen anything of this kind, of course he had not brought dress-clothes with him.

"Oh, you can go on as you are," said Tom Merry. "After all, you're going to appear as a ventriloquist, you know, not as a tailor's dummy."

Bunter shook his head.

"Must have evening-dress on an occasion like this," he said. "I suppose one of you fellows can lend me a dress-suit?"

Tom Merry looked perplexed.

"We could lend you one easily enough," he agreed. "But the trouble is, how on earth would you get into it? You're rather—ahem!—rather plump, you know."

"Gussy's got piles and piles of dress-clothes," said Blake. "You can do as you like with them," he added generously.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Come up to the dorm., and I'll show you all Gussy's clothes, and you can see what you can do," said Blake.

"Blake, deah boy—"

Blake led Billy Bunter up to the Fourth Form dormitory, apparently not hearing the murmured expostulations of the dismayed swell of St. Jim's.

Arthur Augustus followed him in a state of great trepidation. The elegant junior's dress-clothes were the pride of his heart; their cut and their fit were famous. To think of Billy Bunter's huge limbs being thrust into his elegant "clobber" was simply appalling. Arthur Augustus was well-known to be the politest person that, as Monty Lowther expressed it, ever polited. But his politeness was strained almost to breaking point by this fearful emergency.

Blake, with a generous hand, laid out D'Arcy's dress-clothes on a bed. Billy Bunter looked them over, and blinked at them through his big glasses.

"You'll nevah get them on, deah boy," murmured Arthur Augustus.

"I'm afraid not," agreed Bunter, and D'Arcy's face brightened up. It fell again, as Billy Bunter went on. "But I'll try. I don't mind how much trouble I take to please you fellows, especially as you're going to stand me another feed before I go."

"Oh!"

Bunter stripped off his own clothes, which fitted tightly to his rotund figure, though they were half a dozen sizes larger than D'Arcy's. Then he essayed to thrust a very fat leg into D'Arcy's elegant evening trousers.

Arthur Augustus trembled.

Crac-c-c-c-ck!

There was a long, rending sound.

D'Arcy opened his eyes, which he had closed in horror. The inevitable had happened. Billy Bunter had exerted all his strength to get those bags on, and they had burst!

"Oh, bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus, almost in tears.

"The bags are no good for me," said Billy Bunter, with undiminished cheerfulness. "I might make my own bags do, though, if the coat will go on. I'll try."

"It's puttin' you to a feahful lot of twouble, Buntah, deah boy!"

"Not at all!" said Bunter.

He essayed with the coat. There was an ominous sound, and the elegant evening-coat split up the back.

Bunter shook his head.

"No go!" he said. "Still, I'll do my best! I'll try all the rest!"

Arthur Augustus shrieked.

"No, you jolly well won't, you wottah!"

"Eh!" said Bunter, blinking at him.

"I—I mean, it wouldn't be any good, you know," stammered D'Arcy, crimsoning. "I say, I've got an ideah, you chaps. Fatty Wynn has evenin' clothes, and they'll be nearah to Buntah's size. We can bowwow them."

"They're nearer," said Tom Merry, "but they're not quite up to Bunter's measure, I fancy. Fatty might have something to say about it."

"That's all wight. The New House chaps are all in the Form-room, and you could bowwow the things without mentionin' it to Fatty. You can explain aftahwards that it was the only thing to be done, undah the circs., you know."

"Good egg!" said Blake heartily. "Why didn't you think of that before, Gussy? I'll cut over to the New House at once."

And Blake departed on his errand.

He returned in five minutes with a bundle of clothes. They were not quite so elegant as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's; but they were very much nearer Bunter's size, which was a more important point. With a squeeze, Bunter got into them. He had selected the best of D'Arcy's evening shirts, and borrowed D'Arcy's best diamond stud for the occasion. Arthur Augustus helped him to dress, and he was finished soon after eight o'clock.

There was a sound of stamping feet from the Form-room. The room was crowded with the audience now, and the audience were eager for the performance to begin.

"All ready?" asked Tom Merry.

"Oh, quite!" said Bunter.

"Come on, then!"

And the chums of the School House led the unusually elegant Bunter downstairs.

CHAPTER 15.

The Great Entertainment!

THE Form-room was crowded.

School House and New House had "rolled" up loyally to support the Benefit Fund; and a good many seniors had come in, curious to see the Greyfriars ventriloquist. Kildare and Darrel and Rushden and Langton, of the Sixth, had kindly taken reserved seats, shelling out whole shillings with great liberality. And a whisper ran through the room that the Head himself had promised to look in to show his approval of the object for which the junior fund was being raised.

Billy Bunter met a sea of faces as he entered by the upper door, but he was not in the least disconcerted. Billy Bunter was not afflicted with nerves, and he had too good an

opinion of himself to be easily put out. Stage fright might afflict fellows who were doubtful of their powers; but William George Bunter was not in the least doubtful of his powers. Quite the reverse, in fact.

"Gentlemen—" began Tom Merry.

"Hear, hear!"

"I have the honour of presenting William George Bunter, the famous ventriloquist—"

"Bwavo!"

"Mr. Bunter has already given some samples of his gifts, especially in the imitation of the buzzing of a wasp—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He will now proceed to give an entertainment."

"Hear, hear!"

Tom Merry sat down.

"Rats!" came a voice from the back of the room.

Tom Merry & Co. looked round wrathfully. It was Levison who spoke. Levison had paid his sixpence to come in in the hope of being able to "rag" the entertainment.

"Order!" shouted Blake. "Any cad interrupting will be chucked out on his neck!"

"Yaas, wathah! Levison, you wottah!"

"Rot!" said Mellish. "Audiences are allowed to express an opinion about the show, I suppose."

"Order!"


Billy Bunter's eyes gleamed behind his spectacles. It was evidently Levison's object to rag the entertainment, and spoil it if he could. Billy Bunter knew Levison well enough, as he had been an old Greyfriars boy, and had been "sacked" from that school. But Billy Bunter fancied that he was quite equal to Levison. So long as the cad of the Fourth remained in the room the entertainment was exposed to risk, and Billy Bunter promptly made up his mind that Levison should not remain.

Kildare, of the Sixth, had risen to his feet, and he frowned severely at Levison.

"Be quiet!" he exclaimed sternly. "You should know better than to interrupt like this, Levison."

"Oh, rats!"

Kildare jumped.



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NOW ON SALE!

It was Levison's voice, if it was not Levison that had used it, and the captain of St. Jim's turned crimson with anger.

"Go and eat coke, Kildare!"

"What! You cheeky young rascal!" shouted the captain of St. Jim's. And he made his way through the crowd towards Levison.

"Hallo, what's the matter?" demanded Levison. "I—I didn't say anything."

"You won't say anything more, that's a cert!" said Kildare grimly. "Come out!"

And he gripped the cad of the Fourth by the collar in an iron grip. Levison roared, and clung to a form.

"Leggo!" he roared. "I—I didn't—"

"Come out of that!"

Kildare dragged Levison from his hold, and picked him up, and carried him bodily to the door of the Form-room. The audience shouted approval.

"That's right, Kildare!"

"Chuck him out!"

There was a bump in the passage. Levison rolled on the floor and yelled.

"Ow! Ow! I—I didn't—"

Kildare shook a warning finger at him.

"If you come in here again you'll be licked," he said.

"I've paid for admission!" yelled Levison. "I'm not going to pay a tanner for nothing."

"You should behave yourself, then," said Kildare, and he closed the door of the Form-room, leaving the infuriated Levison growling in the passage.

Billy Bunter grinned with satisfaction. The intended ragger had been got rid of, and only a few fellows suspected that the ventriloquist had had a hand in it.

Dr. Holmes came in a few minutes later and took his seat, and then the performance commenced.

There was no doubt that Billy Bunter of Greyfriars was a clever ventriloquist. He did imitations of bird calls, and made them proceed from different parts of the room, and he imitated the cries of animals to perfection.

He held a conversation with a person supposed to be shut up in the Form-master's desk, so well that many of the fellows believed there was somebody squeezed into the desk, and weren't satisfied till they had looked.

"Bai Jove! It's jolly clevah, deah boys!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy confided to his chums. "I couldn't do all that, you know."

Than which there was no higher praise.

"Gentlemen," said Billy Bunter, "I will now hold a conversation with someone outside the window!"

"Hear, hear!"

The Form-room windows were open, on account of the heat of the summer evening. Billy Bunter, at the upper end of the room, was at a considerable distance from the windows. He called out to a supposed person outside:

"Are you there?"

The juniors listened for the reply.

"Yes, here I am!" came back a voice.

"My hat!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Blessed if I couldn't have sworn that that voice came through the window."

"Buntah didn't even move his lips, bai Jove!"

"It's wonderful!"

Bunter was staring blankly at the open window through his big glasses. There was an expression of surprise on his fat face.

"Are—are you there?" he repeated.

"I've told you so once, fathead!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the audience.

"Wh-what are you doing?" called out Bunter.

"Looking in at a set of silly asses!"

"Ahem!" said Tom Merry, with a warning glance at Bunter. That kind of badinage was not exactly in taste when the Head and the prefects were present. Dr. Holmes's brow was seen to wrinkle slightly.

"I—I say!" gasped Bunter.

"Oh, don't you say anything!" came the squeaky voice from the window. "You're the biggest idiot of the lot! Go and eat coke!"

"I—I—"

"Oh, go home! Tell all the duffers to go to bed and shut up!" came the voice from the window. "Tell Kildare he's an ass!"

"Dash it all, that's rather too thick!" exclaimed Kildare, turning red.

"Go easy, Bunter, old man," whispered Tom Merry. "You can't say things like that, you know. Kildare's head prefect. Be more careful!"

"I—I—" stuttered Bunter.

"Kildare's an ass, and they're all asses!" came the voice from the window.

Dr. Holmes rose to his feet.

"I do not approve of this kind of thing!" he said icily. "I regard it as disrespectful!"

And he moved towards the door.

"I—I say, you fellows," gasped Bunter, "I—I didn't say all that. I hadn't started!"

"What!"

"Oh, really, you know—there's some villain outside the window playing a rotten trick!" Bunter stuttered. "I swear I never said a word of it!"

"My hat!"

There was a rush to the window. But whoever it was who had been there, he had disappeared.

"It must have been that rotter Levison," said Bunter. "He was turned out, you know, for not behaving himself."

"Oh!" said the Head.

"Please sit down, sir!" said Tom Merry, in distress. "It was a rotten joke of somebody out in the quad, sir, that's all."

The Head nodded, and sat down again. Jack Blake made a sign to his chums, and left the Form-room quietly. He was going scouting, and if there was an unexpected voice at the window again, Blake would know to whom it belonged—with painful results to the owner.

Billy Bunter recovered himself.

He began to hold that conversation with an imaginary person outside the window, and it proceeded quite successfully for several minutes, till he asked the question:

"Who are you, my friend outside?"

The answer the ventriloquist intended to give was: "I'm Bill Bailey, coming 'ome!" But quite an unexpected answer came:

"I'm the only fellow present who isn't a silly chump!"

"That wasn't me!" roared Bunter, as the Head frowned again. "It was that rotten joker!"

"It's too bad!" exclaimed Tom Merry, jumping up. "It's some rotter trying to muck up the entertainment!"

Then there was a sudden uproar outside the window.

Biff, biff! Thump, bump—crash!

"Yaroo! Oh, ow! Yah, ha! Grooogh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lowther. "Blake's got him!"

The uproar outside the window was simply terrific for some moments. Blake had evidently captured the practical joker, caught him in the act, and was convincing him that it was no time for practical jokes.

A voice was heard raised in anguish.

"Ow, ow, ow! Leggo! Leggo my ears! Yah! Oh, you beast! Yow!"

"Levison!" roared Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Thump, thump, thump!

A couple of minutes later Jack Blake came back into the Form-room with a smiling if somewhat flushed countenance.

"It's all right!" he said. "There won't be any more practical jokes!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake was right; there were no more interruptions. The entertainment went on without a hitch after that, and concluded with great success. Quite an ovation greeted Billy Bunter when he made his final bow.

"Hurrah! Bravo, Bunter!"

"Jolly good show!" said Figgins heartily.

"Yaas, wathah—simply wippin'!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Very good indeed!" said the Head, giving Billy Bunter a benevolent smile. "I must say you are a very clever ventriloquist, Bunter. Very clever indeed!"

"Yes, sir," said Bunter. "Quite so, sir!"

"Ahem!" murmured the Head.

"Perhaps under the circumstances, sir," went on Bunter cheerfully, "you wouldn't mind giving me a note to my headmaster, explaining to him that I've stayed on here to help in a charity performance. You see, sir, I ought to have got in before calling-over, but, as a matter of fact, I sha'n't be in before eleven now."

The Head looked at him fixedly for a moment.

"I couldn't refuse to help these chaps out, you know, sir, especially as they're going to stand me a feed before I go," said Bunter.

"I will give you the note," said Dr. Holmes at last.

"Thank you very much, sir!"

And when Billy Bunter—after another tremendous feed—left St. Jim's, he carried that note in his pocket, to save him from the justifiable wrath of the headmaster of Greyfriars.

The juniors walked down to the station with him in a crowd. Billy Bunter had his peculiar little ways, but he had certainly been of great use to the School House fellows. The takings at the ventriloquial entertainment had amounted to three pounds ten shillings, the same as the amount raised by Figgins & Co. And as one of Figgins' sixpences had turned out to be a bad one, the score was really on the side of the School House.

Billy Bunter had been well worth feeding, as Monty Lowther remarked.

The juniors saw him into his train, and shook hands with him all round, and Billy Bunter promised that he would pay them another visit soon. And they gave the Greyfriars ventriloquist a cheer as the train rolled away.

"Jolly clever chap!" remarked Fatty Wynn, as the juniors walked back to St. Jim's. "Got a really good taste in grub, too; I like a chap who hasn't a rotten fairy appetite. Rather a tight squeeze in those clothes, though—what?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Tain't a laughing matter for the owner of the clothes," said Fatty Wynn, with a grin. "I noticed that the coat had burst under both arms. I suppose one of you chaps lent them to him."

"I lent them to him," said Blake blandly.

"Then you'll have to get 'em sewn up before you wear 'em again!" chuckled Fatty Wynn.

"Ha, ha, ha! It wasn't safe to let that porpoise get into them!"

"Oh, I sha'n't want to wear them!" said Blake calmly. "You see, they weren't mine—I borrowed them to lend to him."

Fatty Wynn roared.

"Ha, ha, ha! I should like to see the owner's face when he knows that!"

"Got your pocket-mirror with you, Gussy?" asked Blake.

"Yaas, deah boy!"

"Lend it to Wynn!"

"Eh?" said Fatty Wynn. "What are you getting at? What is Gussy to lend me his silly pocket-mirror for?"

"So that you can see the face of the owner of those clothes," said Blake calmly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fatty Wynn's face was a study.

"Why, you—you—you—" he sputtered out at last. "Do you mean to say that you had the awful nerve to borrow my clothes—my evening clobber—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He wanted 'em big enough for a porpoise," explained Blake gently. "As you were the only porpoise at St. Jim's—"

"We did it for the porpus!" said Lowther.

But Fatty Wynn did not listen to Monty Lowther's pun. He made a wild rush at Blake, and Blake fled, and half-way back to the school the fat Fourth-Former gave up the chase. He had done almost as well as Billy Bunter at that last feed, and he was not in a condition for a running match.

CHAPTER 16.

A Surprise for Taggles.

"YOUNG raskils!" said Taggles. That remark was made by the crusty old gentleman as the Terrible Three came towards his lodge on the following morning, before lessons. The chums of the Shell looked very bright and cheerful in the morning sunshine, and they had their best smiles on. They raised their hats to Taggles and bowed, all in a row.

"Good-morning, Taggles!"

"Huh!" grunted Taggles.

"Many happy returns of the day, Taggles!"

"Huh!"

"How does it feel to be a hundred and one?" asked Monty Lowther affably.

"I ain't a 'undred and one!" yelled the exasperated Taggles. "I'm sixty-five to-day, and well you know it!"

"Shush, Lowther!" said Tom Merry chidingly. "You're wanted, Taggles!"

"Huh!"

"Will you step into the House with us?" said Tom Merry sweetly. "We've got a little surprise for you, Taggles—a little surprise on your birthday."

"I'll report yer!" said Taggles.

"We're going to heap coals of fire on your head," explained Manners.

"Shush, Manners! Come on, Taggles! It isn't a joke this time; it's real business! Honour bright!"

"I ain't coming!" said Taggles.

"Must!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "Now, Taggles, old man, are you going to walk, or shall we have to carry you?"

"I'll report yer!"

"Must carry him, then!" said Tom Merry. "Lend a hand—all together!"

"Ow! 'Ands huff!" roared Taggles. "You young rip! I'll report yer!"

But Taggles was not heeded. The chums of study No. 6 and Figgins & Co. came to the help of the Terrible Three, and Taggles was lifted fairly off his feet, and carried into the lecture-hall.

The hall was crowded.

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"THE PENNY POPULAR"
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There was a shout from the swarm of juniors as Taggles, breathless and furious, was set upon his feet.

"Hurray! Many happy returns, Taggles!"

Taggles blinked at them. He did not understand yet, but he was beginning to see that it was not, after all, a rag.

Mr. Railton, the School House master, was present, and that sedate gentleman could not, of course, have been suspected of taking part in anything so disorderly as a rag.

"Many happy returns, Taggles!" said Mr. Railton, with a benevolent smile.

"Same to you, sir, I'm sure!" mumbled the confused Taggles.

Mr. Railton smiled more widely.

"Taggles, I am sure you will be pleased to know of the estimation in which the junior boys of this college hold you!"

Taggles looked doubtful.

"I have been doubted by Tom Merry, as head of the Junior Committee, to make the presentation," continued Mr. Railton.

"I—I—I—" stammered Taggles.

"The juniors have raised a fund for your benefit, Taggles," said Mr. Railton.

"My heye!"

"The sum of seven pounds has been raised by the united efforts of the juniors of both Houses," said Mr. Railton benevolently. "There has been no time for the purchase of a birthday present, but the juniors consider that the cash would be equally acceptable to you, Taggles, to be expended as you think fit."

"Seven quid!" gasped Taggles. "My heye!"

"I have therefore much pleasure in presenting you with this purse, containing seven sovereigns, as a mark of appreciation on the part of the junior boys of this college," said Mr. Railton.

Taggles took the purse like a man in a dream.

He opened it, and there were the seven golden sovereigns glittering inside. The many and varied coins collected by the juniors had been changed into sovereigns for the purpose of the presentation.

"My heye!"

That was all Taggles could say, in his astonishment and gratification.

Mr. Railton shook hands with the astounded porter.

"I wish you many happy returns of the day, Taggles," he said, "and may you stay many, many years with us to enjoy the esteem and kind regard of the boys of St. Jim's!"

"Hear, hear!" roared the juniors. "Bravo!"

"Speech, Taggy!" yelled Figgins.

"Yaas, wathah! Speech, Taggy, deah boy!"

Taggles gasped. He blinked at the golden sovereigns and blinked at the juniors.

"My heye!" he said.

For once in his long and chequered career as school porter at St. Jim's, Taggles was in a thoroughly good temper. He was pleased, and very surprised indeed at finding himself pleased.

"Go it, Taggy!" shouted the juniors.

"Which I'm werry much obliged to yer!" said Taggles, with an effort. "Speechifyin' ain't in my line, but I'm werry thankful that you young gentlemen 'olds me in such 'igh esteem. From your goings-hon, I should never have thought it—never!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Which I 'ave only to say that this 'ere proves that even you young gentlemen has your good points—ahem!—I—I mean, I'm werry grateful!" stammered Taggles. "And, as I was goin' to say, I'll report yer! No; I don't mean that—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm werry much obliged!" said Taggles. "May you all live as long as I 'ave, and be as dutiful, sober, and honest as I am! That's all I can say, young gentlemen!"

"Bravo!"

And the juniors cheered Taggles to the echo. They went into the Form-rooms that morning feeling very pleased with themselves, and for once Taggles was feeling very pleased with them. And for several days after that Taggles forgot to report Tom Merry & Co.—a very happy result of Taggles' Benefit!

THE END.

NEXT WEDNESDAY!
SCHOOLBOY & GENTLEMAN BOXER!

Another Grand, Long, Complete School Tale of TOM MERRY & Co.
at St. Jim's. By Martin Clifford; and

THE CHEER-ON CHUMS,
Our Splendid New School Serial.

Order In Advance.

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Our Weekly Prize Page.

LOOK OUT FOR YOUR WINNING STORYETTE!

DOOR-KNOCKING UP TO DATE.

Benevolent Old Gentleman (to small boy crying by door of house): "What is the matter, my little man?"

Small Boy: "P-p-please, sir, I can't reach the knocker!"

Benevolent Old Gent: "Never mind, I'll do it for you." And, suiting the action to the word, he gave three hearty raps. Then, as he heard a movement in the house, he turned round and asked the now grinning boy if there was anything else he could do for him.

"No. But if you don't run like the wind down the road you'll get copped!"—Sent in by L. Rogers, Islington, N.

TRY THESE.

Q.: Where are the lightest men in Britain?
A.: In Ayr or Cork.

Q.: When is a fowl's neck like a bell?
A.: When it is rung for dinner.

Q.: Who dares to sit before the Queen with his hat on?
A.: Her Majesty's footman.

Q.: What is it that is bought by the yard and worn by the foot?
A.: A carpet.

Q.: Who killed a fourth part of the whole world?
A.: Cain, when he killed Abel.
—Sent in by Mr. Riddle, Belfast.

HIS DREAM.

"Yes," said the footballer to a friend, "I'll tell you about my greatest goal. I received the ball in the middle of the field. I rushed down, cut through the defence like a knife through butter, and then I was near the goal. The crowd roared, 'Shoot!' and I shot."

"Was it a goal?" queried the friend breathlessly.

"I don't know about that," said the footballer slowly, "but it took my wife five minutes to get my toes off the bed-rail!"—Sent in by M. Miller, Nottingham.

OW!

"I wouldn't drink out of that cup, if I were you," said little Willie to the well-dressed visitor. "That's Lizzie's cup, and she's very particular who drinks out of her cup."

"Ah," responded the young man, as he drained the cup dry, "I feel honoured to drink out of the same cup as your youngest sister!"

"My sister! Why, Lizzie is my dog!"—Sent in by F. Perret, Aston.

DRY UP!

Farmer Grimes was ill, so the doctor was called in to see him. He informed Mrs. Grimes that her husband was in a serious condition, and that she must take his temperature every morning.

Mrs. Grimes, not knowing the difference between a thermometer and a barometer, used the barometer to take her husband's temperature.

When the doctor called next morning the first thing he asked was if she had taken the invalid's temperature.

"Yes," she replied; "and the indicator pointed to 'dry,' so I gave him a drink!"—Sent in by T. H. Sabine, Burton-on-Trent.

A FUNNY "TALE."

It was the first time little May had ever seen a snake, and, fascinated, she watched it wriggling its way along the ground. Then she ran excitedly to where her mother was sitting, and cried:

"Mother! Mother! Come and look at this tail wagging with no dog!"—Sent in by Miss G. Whipp, Barnoldwick, Yorks.

IT DIDN'T ACT.

"Hallo, George! You remember I told you my radish-beds were attacked by slugs?"

George: "Yes. And did you put some salt between the beds, as I said?"

"Why, yes, I should think I did! But when I got up next morning, what do you think I saw? There were the slugs, as large as life, pulling up the radishes, dipping them in the salt, and eating them quite contentedly!"—Sent in by A. Trimmitt, Battersea.

THE FICKLENESS OF MAN.

It was at a dance, and they were discussing the fickleness of man.

"Look at that man kissing that pretty young lady," said he, pointing to a couple engaged in the said pleasure. "He will have forgotten all about her by to-morrow."

"Oh, no, he won't," replied his companion grimly, "for he happens to be my husband!"—Sent in by A. Roylance, Fulham.

ECONOMY!

Solomon (to the tramway-car conductor): "How mooch will it cost to take mine leetle Joseph to Mile End Road? He is only vun year old."

Conductor: "Oh, he will go for nothing!"

Solly: "And Rebecca? She is two-and-a-half."

Conductor: "She can go free, too."

Solly: "Right! Will you oblige me by putting them down at Mile End Road, and I will walk!"—Sent in by C. F. Morgan, Brixton.

CERTAINLY NOT ASLEEP.

A country schoolmaster had two pupils, to one of whom he was partial and to the other severe. One morning it happened that they were both late, and were called to account for it.

"Please, sir," said the favourite, "I was dreaming that I was going to Margate, and I thought the school-bell was the steamer's bell ringing."

"Very well," said the master. And, turning to the other culprit, he inquired: "And now, sir, what do you mean by coming in late?"

"Please, sir," stammered the boy, "I—I—I was waiting to see Tom off!"—Sent in by E. Yorker, Hull.

GAVE THE GAME AWAY.

Mrs. De Swank was entertaining a visitor, when her young son came in, and omitted to remove his hat. His mother, noticing the omission, and hoping to teach him a lesson by admonishing him in front of her visitor, said:

"What did I buy the hat-stand for, Sammy?"

Without hesitation, the young hopeful blurted out:

"For half-a-crown from a man at the door. But you told me not to tell anyone!"

And he wondered what made his mother blush, and the visitor smile!—Sent in by F. R. Mason, Brighton.

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MONEY PRIZES OFFERED!

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NEXT WEDNESDAY: "SCHOOLBOY AND GENTLEMAN BOXER!" A Magnificent, Long Complete Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

THE CHEER-OH CHUMS!



"Come rain or fine or dull or
 shine, come fair or stormy
 weather;
 Whatever comes the Cheer-oh
 Chums will always stick
 together—
 Will always stick
 together!"
 —The Cheer-Oh Chums Anthem.

A Grand, New, Short Serial Story.

THE FIRST INSTALMENTS BRIEFLY EXPLAINED.

The Cheer-Oh Chums are the greatest of friends. Three of them are girls, whose names are Pat Wentworth, Polly Lake, and Madge Jackson, and all three are under the severe charge of Miss Primmer, headmistress of the Shoresmouth High School for Girls. The other half of the Cheer-Oh Chums are three juniors belonging to a college within easy walking distance of Shoresmouth. Their names are Jimmy Dunn, Billy Denton, and Dick Brewster. The Cheer-Oh Chums form a sort of secret society with one rule, and that is, all members must be always merry and bright. They meet in a secret hut quite close to the two schools. One day

the boys have to get an urgent message to their girl-chums, and Dick thinks of an ingenious scheme. Madge Jackson is expecting her brother, who is a new boy to the college, to visit her that afternoon, and Dick succeeds in passing himself off as young Jackson before Miss Primmer, and thus gains an interview with Madge. The two are no sooner together, however, before Miss Primmer bursts into the room again. "Children," she exclaims excitedly, "here's your father come to see you!"

"That's done it!" gasped Dick under his breath.
(Now go on with the story.)

Dick's Ordeal.

"Your father is very pleased to learn that you're here, Master Hubert," Miss Primmer continued, "because it will save him from calling at the college; and he hasn't much time. Come along—make the most of a pleasant surprise!"

"Er—look here," said Dick, "I shall have to be going, you know, Miss Primmer."

Miss Primmer gasped.
 "What nonsense!" she cried. "Don't you want to see your father?"

"I—I'm so awfully untidy!" Dick muttered.
 "Nonsense!" said Miss Primmer again. "Why, I was just thinking how smart you looked!"

Dick cast wildly about him for a way of escape, or, failing that, some plan of taking all the blame himself. He feared that Madge would be expelled for his folly, if Miss Primmer once suspected that he was not Hubert Jackson. Then, just as he was despairing, an idea came to him.

"Do you mind if I go in and see him first?" he gasped.
 "I—I want to see him about something before Madge sees him."

"What a strange idea!" Miss Primmer ejaculated.

"But may I?"

"Oh, certainly, if Madge doesn't mind."

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"THE PENNY POPULAR"
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Dick and Mr. Jackson struggled for a while in each other's arms, and when they disengaged, Dick felt faint and weak at the knees. Madge's father jumped about the room, speechless for the time being, and the young Cheer-oh watched his gold chain jumping up and down on his ample waistcoat.

"Er—I beg your pardon, sir," Dick murmured at length, in a weak voice.

"You beg my pardon!" snorted Mr. Jackson. "You pretend to be my son, you nearly strangle me, you nearly poison me with your nasty, sloppy kisses, and—and then you beg my pardon!"

"I had to do it," Dick faltered. "If I hadn't, you'd have let Miss Primmer see that I'm not your son, and she—Madge—would have been expelled!"

"But—"

"It's all my fault, sir. I was a silly ass. Madge didn't know I was coming. Don't punish her, or let Miss Primmer know, and I'll take any punishment you like to give me."

"I ought to hand you over to the police!" Mr. Jackson snorted, beginning to calm down. "But, there—tell me all about it."

Dick, feeling a little more at ease, proceeded to tell him. He did not mention the Cheer-ohs, out of regard for the other members, but he narrated all the rest of the story, taking all the blame upon his own shoulders whenever he found it possible to do so. He was not watching Mr. Jackson's face, and when the latter started to laugh he was just as startled as if he had received a blow across the face.

Mr. Jackson went on laughing, and the longer he laughed the more heartily he laughed. Dick, who saw nothing funny at the time, sighed with relief, for experience had taught him that a man is seldom severe when his sides are aching with merriment.

"You young scoundrel!" Mr. Jackson groaned. "You've given me the best laugh I've had for many a long day! You deserve a jolly sound thrashing. But, there! You've acted like a sportsman and—a gentleman in trying to take all the blame, and risking a worse row for yourself by tackling me, and trying to prevent Miss Primmer from knowing."

"You won't let her know, sir?" Dick exclaimed.

"I shall have to. But don't you worry. She won't expel Madge—when I've done talking to her. Oh, how my sides ache, you young vagabond! There, there! You'd better go. Send that girl of mine in to me on your way out. Oh, wait a minute, though!"

"Yes?" said Dick, hesitating.

Mr. Jackson fumbled in his waistcoat-pocket.

"I'm a business man," he said, "and I like to pay for what I've had. I've had a good laugh from you. Be careful how you spend it."

Their palms met, and Dick found himself the richer by a sovereign.

"I went to the girls' school this afternoon and saw Madge," Dick announced to his two boy chums at tea-time.

"Rats!"

"I did—honestly!"

"How on earth did you manage it?" Jimmy gasped.

"Tell you presently."

"Did you tell her that Tuesday's all off?" Billy demanded.

"No, old chap. We were just a quid short for Tuesday, and I've managed to raise it. Look here!"

They looked, and Jimmy whistled.

"Played!" he gasped. "Good man! Where on earth did you raise that?"

"Madge's pater," said Dick tersely. And he proceeded to tell the story.

The Wrong Train!

"Cave, Bennet!"

Jimmy crept back into the tea-room with his finger on his lips, and hissed the words to his boy and girl chums assembled there.

"Rats!" Billy exclaimed incredulously.

"Go and see for yourself then. He's in the shop waiting for us to come out. It's a fair cop, my hearties."

Consternation spread over the faces of the six Cheer-oh Chums. Pat, Polly, and Madge turned a little pale, Dick puffed out his cheeks and whistled softly and thoughtfully, and Billy began to walk up and down like a caged lion. The boys were thinking of the girls rather than of themselves, for it seemed more than likely that Mr. Bennet would report them to Miss Primmer, their headmistress.

The Cheer-oh Chums had been spending a whole day's holiday at Cliffbury, which was out of bounds for both boys and girls. They had known that Mr. Bennet, the boys' housemaster, was in the town, and fervently hoped that they

had escaped being seen by him. But he had evidently tracked them to the place where they went to have tea. He was now waiting in the shop until they should come downstairs from the tea-room.

"Did he see you?" Dick demanded.

"No jolly fear. Not that it makes much difference. I went down to get some more of those cream buns, and as I was going to walk through into the shop I looked through the glass door, and saw old Bennet's reflection in the mirror. I didn't worry about any cream buns then, you bet!"

"What was he doing?" Madge asked, staring hard at a tea-stain on the table-cloth.

"Swiggling tea and polishing off muffins. He was sitting at a little table near the counter."

Billy moved a chair to the door and sat on it, so that no one could enter unexpectedly.

"Council of war," he said. "It seems to me there's a jolly good chance that he doesn't know we're here. He may have come here for tea just like ourselves. Jolly good job he didn't march up here!"

Jimmy took a more gloomy view of the situation.

"I tell you he knows all right!" he growled. "He's waiting for us to come down—playing cat and mouse. He saw us in the town this afternoon."

"He may have seen our caps," said Billy; "but I doubt if he saw our faces. He's as blind as a bat, you know; but a Johnny who was stone-blind could see our house-caps in the dark a mile off. No, if he thinks we're here, he doesn't know who we are, or he wouldn't bother about catching us. He'd simply save it up until we get back to the college."

Polly uttered a little sigh of relief.

"That sounds right enough," she said.

"First sensible remark he's made to-day," Jimmy remarked.

"Good man, Billy, go on!"

"Well," continued Billy, enjoying his own importance, "it comes to this. Can we get out of here without his seeing us? If we can't, you two chaps and myself will just walk downstairs and give ourselves up. Then he won't know anything about the girls, and they won't get into a row."

"Hear, hear!" said Dick.

But all the girls demurred.

"No!" cried Polly. "None of that, Billy. The Cheer-oh's stand or fall together, you know."

"No reason why you should get into a row if we can help it," Jimmy urged. "If we can't escape by any possible means, and you can, why not take the opportunity?"

"No!" said Pat, shaking her head firmly. "It's against the rules. If there are any risks we share them."

"Don't be a—er—don't be silly!" pleaded Billy.

"Suffragettes!" taunted Dick.

"I don't care!" said Polly. "What Pat told you is quite right."

"Quite right!" agreed Madge.

"Instead of arguing," Pat put in drily, "it wouldn't be a bad idea if you boys got your mighty brains to work and thought out a way of escape for all of us. Don't forget that we all escape together, or all get caught together."

Their loyalty could not but appeal to their three boy chums, but it was no time for making speeches.

Jimmy looked out of the window.

"One thing, it's dark," he said. "Once we got outside, we could easily dodge old Bennet."

"And," said Dick, "there's a train in five minutes. If we could catch that back too, it'd be as good as an alibi."

"Suppose Bennet catches it, too?"

"No, he's waiting for us to come down, fathead. Awful sell for him. I wonder if the old girl would let us out of the side-door?"

"Just as likely to give us away, if we asked her," Madge remarked. "I didn't like the look of her, somehow."

"There's the window, of course," said Billy. "But it's a pretty long drop. I shouldn't care to tackle it myself, and it'd cripple the girls. Well, I'm stumped for ideas."

"I'm not, though!" Dick cried suddenly. "You girls can climb down a rope?"

"Rather!" Polly answered. "We do gym, just the same as you do."

"Then we're saved!" cried Dick, capering to the window.

"There's a nice hefty clothes-line in that garden down there!"

Jimmy shook his head.

"Poor chap's mad!" he explained to the others. "Ought to be detained during His Majesty's pleasure. What's the good of a clothes-line in the garden when we want it up here?"

"I'll show you!" said Dick.

He stripped the tablecloth away from under the tea-things, grabbed the cloths from two other tables, and proceeded to tie them together. The result was a rope quite strong enough

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to bear his weight, but a little too awkward for the girls to descend by.

"Played!" cried Jimmy. "I take it all back, Dick old man!"

The window overlooked a small garden at the back of the shop, and was perhaps twenty feet from the ground. Dick threw up the sash and climbed over, while the others lowered the tablecloths and clung frantically to them. Dick lowered himself until he was close enough to the ground to drop without hurting himself, and half a minute later he had cut down the clothes-line and tied it to the dangling tablecloths.

Billy and Jimmy left sufficient money on the table to pay for the tea, and five shillings extra to pay for the clothes-line and such damage as might have been done to the tablecloths; then, tying the rope to the leg of one of the tables, they slid down, and held it steady for the girls to make their descent.

There was a gate in the little garden, leading into a narrow lane, at the end of which the road led straight down into the station-yard. They dashed out into the lane, leaping, laughing and cheering, and as they ran, Billy consulted his watch.

"We've got just a minute to catch our train," he said. "Who feels like a sprint?"

They all did, and as the girls could run almost as fast as their boy chums, they reached the station in just under the minute.

"Come on!" Jimmy gasped. "I've got the return halves. What a frantic sell for Bennet when he gets back to the coll. and finds we're already there! Hi, Billy! This way! This is our platform!"

"No, you ass!" Billy shouted back. "It's that one over—"

"I tell you it is!" Jimmy yelled. "There's our train just starting. Come on!"

A train was just on the point of starting, and they made a dash for it. Jimmy threw open the door of a compartment just as it was on the move, and one after another they tumbled breathlessly inside, and dropped, gasping, on to the cushioned seats.

"Narrow squeak, that!" gasped Jimmy, who was the first to recover his breath. "Lucky I knew which platform the train went from, Billy, or we'd have been in the soup. Golly! Isn't the train getting up a speed!"

"Awfully jolly compartment," Madge said, looking round. "Corridor train, too," said Polly. "I wonder why. They don't generally run them on this branch of the line."

"I expect they ran short of the ordinary carriages," Jimmy observed, feeling in his pocket for a bag of chocolates. "Whew! She is mopping along!"

Dick, who was seated in a corner next to the door leading out into the corridor, got up and leaned out of the window. He withdrew his head immediately, with a piece of cinder in his eye, and his hair blown all over his face. The train certainly was moving at a considerable speed.

Further up the corridor a foppishly-dressed young man in a travelling overcoat that looked like a dressing-gown was frowning and fumbling in his pockets. An unlit cigar protruded from his mouth, and it occurred to Dick that he was in want of a match.

Dick had a box of vestas in his pocket, so he approached and offered it to the young man, who thanked him and struck a light.

"Much obliged," said the stranger, puffing. "Beastly nuisance comin' out without matches—what? Couldn't wait till I got to London before I had a smoke. Have a weed?"

"No thanks," said Dick. "I say," he added hastily, "did you say you were going to London, because this train goes—"

"Rippin' train, isn't it?" the young man interrupted, not seeming to hear what Dick had said. "The last time I came up—"

"But this train doesn't go to London," Dick cried. "You're going away from London. You're in the wrong train!"

The young man smiled.

"Well," said he, taking the cigar out of his mouth, "the guard told me that London was the first stop. Top-hole train. Does the eighty-five miles in an hour and a quarter. No use trying to kid me, my boy."

Dick's jaw dropped.

"Are you sure?" he gasped.

"Can't be sure of anything in this world," was the answer. "But if this train doesn't take me to London, the company'll hear about it. You say I'm in the wrong train, and the guard says differently. I back the guard."

He flicked the ash off his cigar, and smiled benevolently. "Then," gasped Dick. "I and my friends—we're in the wrong train!"

(Another splendid long instalment of this grand new serial next week.)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 283.

"THE MAGNET" LIBRARY,
Every Monday.

Our Companion Papers.

"THE PENNY POPULAR"
Every Friday.

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."

C. Blue, 23, Bell Street, Glenferrie, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in England, age 15.

A. Alam, Barraba, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in the United Kingdom, age 14-18, interested in photography.

W. Jones, Glencoe, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with girl Gem-ites, age 17-19.

W. Short, 153, Victoria Parade, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader interested in postcards, age 17.

C. Twiggs, 18, Davenport Avenue, Berea, Durban, South Africa, wishes to correspond with an Irish or a Scotch girl reader, age 16-17.

Miss N. Porter, Mocatta Place, off Hurtle Square, Adelaide, South Australia, wishes to correspond with a boy reader living in South Africa or America, age 15. Miss L. Porter, of the same address, wishes to correspond with a boy reader living in India or England, age 20.

H. F. Caines, care of Barton Street, P.O., Station B, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, wishes to correspond with an English or Irish girl reader, age 19-22.

W. A. Fitzpatrick, 80, Gloucester Street, City, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in England (Lincoln preferred), age 17-19.

C. E. Strutton, Muirden College, Adelaide, South Australia, wishes to correspond with an Irish girl reader and a Welsh girl reader, age 13-14.

W. J. Drysdale, Bon-accord Cottage, Hough Road, Walmer, Port Elizabeth, South Africa, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in British Isles, age 15-16.

J. Armstrong, 4, Gordon Terrace, Port Elizabeth, South Africa, wishes to correspond with readers all over the world, with a view to exchanging postcards.

James M. Way, 61, Trenery Crescent, Abbotsford, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader in the British Isles, age 16-18.

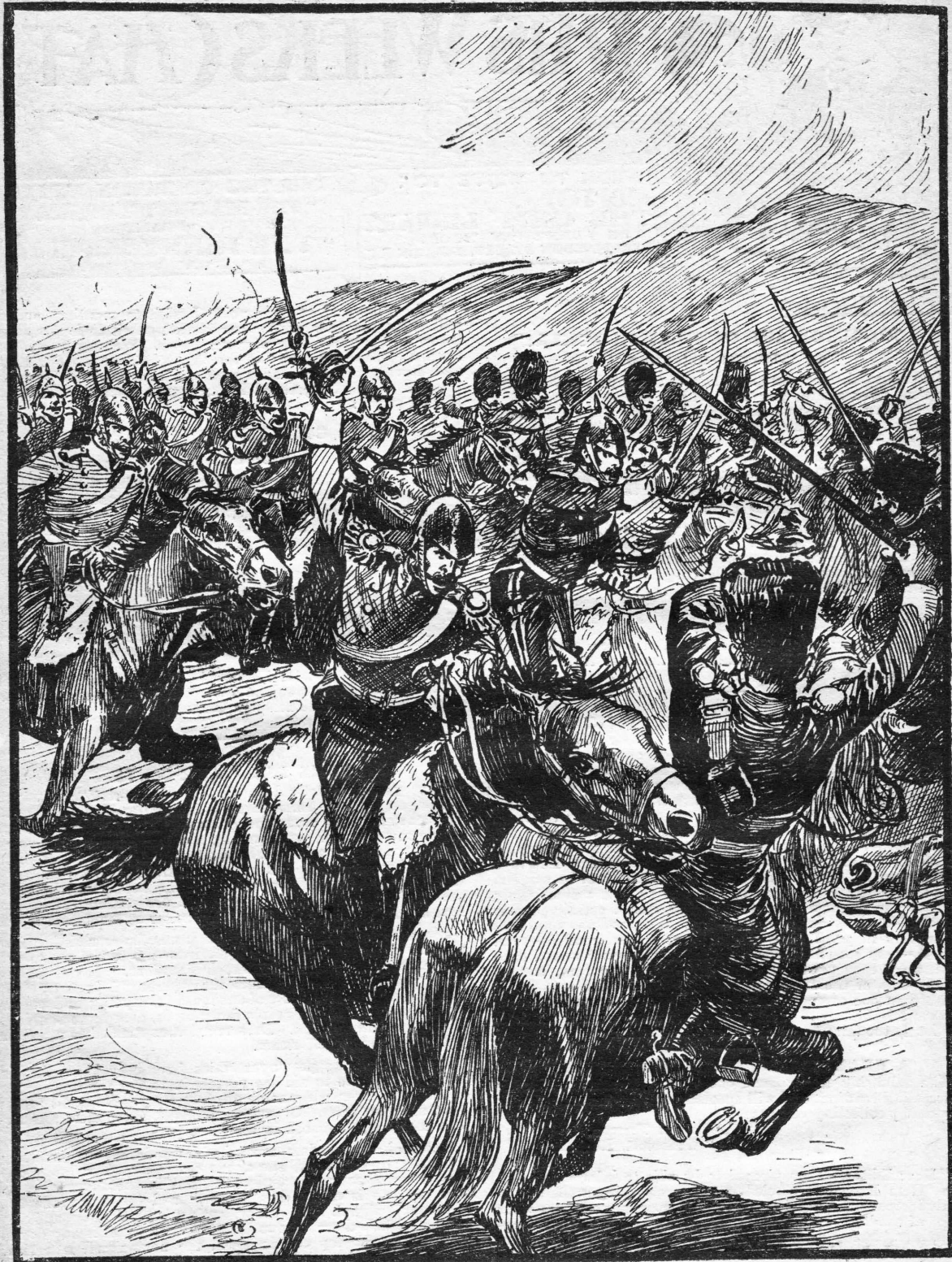
G. Kilroe, P.O., Germiston, Transvaal, South Africa, wishes to correspond with a girl reader, age 15-18.

Miss E. McNamara, 223, Flemington Road, North Melbourne, Australia, wishes to correspond with a boy reader living in Scotland, age 17.

C. Valentine, care of A. H. Burbank, Chinchillar, Queensland, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader, age 17-20.

The Editor specially requests Colonial Readers to kindly bring the Free Correspondence Exchange to the notice of their friends.

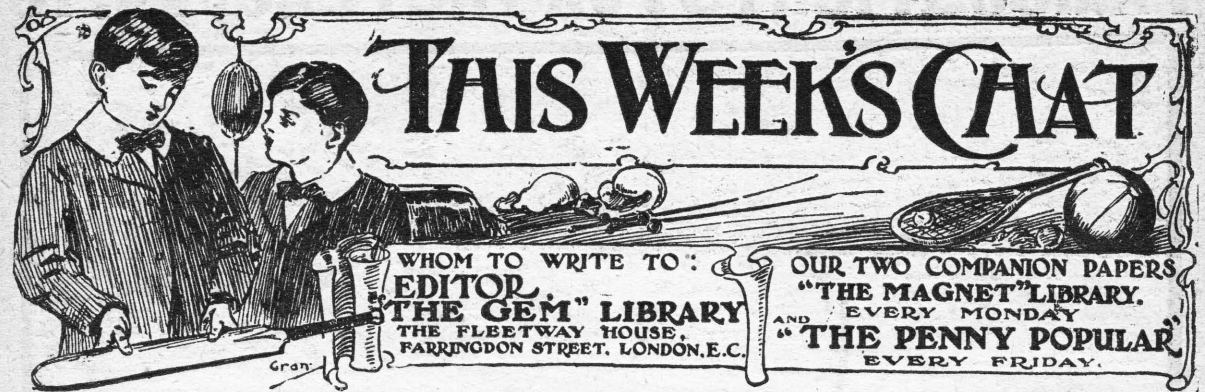
FAMOUS FIGHTS FOR THE FLAG. No. 10



Specially drawn for "THE GEM" Library by C. H. Blake.

This depicts one of the greatest charges ever recorded. It was during the Battle of Balaklava, on October 25th, 1854, that the Heavy Brigade, numbering about eight hundred men, was ordered to charge over 3,000 Russian cavalry. The Britishers dashed into the fray without a murmur and swept through and through the mass of Russians. This charge must not be confused with that famous charge of the Light Brigade—the gallant 600—which took place in the same battle!

OUR SPECIAL WEEKLY FEATURE



For Next Wednesday,

"SCHOOLBOY AND GENTLEMAN BOXER!"By **MARTIN CLIFFORD.**

Our splendid, long, complete tale of the chums of St. Jim's for next week relates how Tom Merry was able to pay back a good turn which was done him by Tiny Tim, a bantam-weight boxer performing at the Wayland Empire. Tiny Tim is injured by footpads, from whom he has rescued Tom Merry, and his "show" is in danger of being spoilt. But the plucky St. Jim's junior steps into the breach, and manages to render an excellent account of himself. In fact, the

"SCHOOLBOY AND GENTLEMAN BOXER!"

goes down splendidly with the Wayland audience, and the Slogger, his opponent in the ring, is truly glad when it is over. Knox, the unpopular prefect, tries to make trouble for the youthful boxer, but is badly chagrined by the view the Head takes of the matter.

NOTE.

Will T. Roberts, of St. Helen's, Lancashire, and C. M. Wright, of Hitchin, Herts, kindly let me hear from them as soon as possible?

OUR STORYETTE COMPETITION.

A little point in connection with "Our Weekly Prize Page" has been raised by a number of readers, so that perhaps a reference to it here will be the best way of explaining it, as I cannot enter into correspondence with entrants about the competition. It not infrequently happens that after I have picked out a certain postcard joke as being an extra good one, published it in due course, and sent the cash prize to the sender of it, I get a letter from another reader, saying in effect, "I sent that joke in, too—why shouldn't I have a prize as well?" Now, seeing that a joke need not be original to be eligible for our Weekly Prize Page, this sort of thing is bound to happen. Between the time that a certain joke is selected—entirely on its merits—for a prize, and the time that it appears in print some weeks later, several readers—even dozens—may send the same joke in, but I cannot award each of them a cash prize. The rule followed, therefore, is that in the case of the same prize-winning joke being sent in by more than one competitor, the prize goes to the reader whose postcard is first read, and picked out as a winner. This is obviously the fairest way of settling the matter.

A READER'S INTERESTING LETTER.

The following letter from one of my Kentish readers is interesting reading, and will specially attract the attention of my stamp-collecting chums:

"17, Dickens Terrace,
Wainscott, Rochester,
Kent.

"Dear Editor,—I am pleased to be able to inform you that the 'Gem Exchange Circle' is still progressing well, and is daily increasing in numbers. It would surprise you to see what a lot of readers you have to your papers who are also stamp-collectors. Being myself desirous of answering all the letters I receive, I should be glad if you would help me in the following. I have received a letter from a reader in Australia, who has omitted to place his name and address thereon. The only address he gives is 'Sydney,' and he signs himself 'Kangaroo.' I am desirous of answering his letter, as he has also sent me some stamps, therefore I should be pleased if you would help me by placing the above in your Chat Page.

"Then there is another point I wish to mention, and it will show you how widely our Exchange circle is growing, through the great help of your paper. Wishing myself to form a 'Branch Section' of the 'G. E. C.' in the Far East, and having found a reader who will look after its interests there, I should be grateful if you would place the following in your paper:

"THE GEM" EXCHANGE CIRCLE.**Branch Section.**

"All readers interested in stamp-collecting, living in any countries in the Far East, that is, China, Japan, India, etc., and being desirous of joining the above circle, can receive full particulars from W. Grenburg, 14, Minghong Road, Shanghai, China, who has consented to undertake the business of the exchange there."

"I should be extremely glad if you would further oblige me. Your reply is awaited in anticipation, when I will acquaint my Chinese friend as to the result. Again wishing your papers great success. I always look forward to them week by week.—I am, dear Editor, yours sincerely,

"HERBERT W. HENBEST."

Many thanks, Master Henbest! The publication of your letter will no doubt result in a great increase in the membership of your "Gem Exchange Circle."

SOME RAILWAY POINTS.

Have you ever noticed on electric railway-stations, just on the edge of the platform, large white figures, 2, 3, 4, 5, etc.? These are here for a very good reason. All platforms are not of the same length, consequently a driver cannot judge very well how far up he is to take his train. By the aid of these figures, however, if he has got three carriages to his train, he takes his train up as far as the figure 3, then he may be quite sure that the whole of his train is in the station. If he has four carriages, he takes his train up as far as the 4, and so on.

Along the side of the railway-track may be seen little white posts of about one foot in height, from the top of which are two arms jutting out in different directions. If one of the arms pointing upwards bears the figures "1 in 250," that means that there is a rise of one foot in every 250; and on the other hand, if the arm points downwards, then there is a drop of one foot in every 250. Drivers are thus enabled to ascertain just when to shut off steam.

Engines drawing passenger trains frequently have discs in front. These are to aid the porters in telling the destination of the train, even when some distance away. Different routes have different discs. Of course, at night, these discs are useless, so a lamp is placed in the same position.

Some of my readers must have wondered why railway signals have two arms, one above the other. The lower one has, on most railways, a piece cut out in the shape of a V. The top one is called the "home," and the lower one the "distant" signal. A driver, seeing both the top and the bottom signals down, knows that the next signal is also down, but if only the top one is down, the next signal is against him, therefore he must slow down. On a straight stretch of line, he can, on a clear day, see the next signal, but if the line curves he would be unable to tell whether the next signal is against him or not, were it not for these "distant" signals.

The Editor

THIS GRAND TALE WILL INTEREST ALL "GEM" READERS.

COUNT NEVANI'S COUP!

A Thrilling Long, Complete Story Dealing with
the Further Amazing Adventures of

SEXTON BLAKE, DETECTIVE.



He would be too late! That was the fear that possessed the detective, and it so spurred him on that he flung open the door of the carriage, and sprang from the moving train. (See this page.)

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The Night Express—What Sexton Blake Saw—The Dead Horse—Where is the Criminal?

SEXTON BLAKE moved lazily, and settled his feet more comfortably on the seat of his first-class compartment. He was travelling to the North of England alone, not even taking the faithful Tinker with him, for it was to settle a little matter that he was perfectly confident would not keep him there for more than a day. In fact, he had already wired instructions to the local police, and was quite prepared to discover that they had made an arrest—the right one—by the time he arrived.

Throwing the stub of his cigar out of the open window, Sexton Blake looked to see if he could discover how far the train had already got. The night was dark, however; with a suggestion of mist in the air, and with the moon behind a bank of clouds, it was only possible to see the faint line of the hedge bordering the rails, the darker shadows of trees beyond, and here and there the lights of some farmhouse where the inhabitants had not yet gone to bed.

The detective pulled out his watch, and saw that it was ten o'clock. Nearly another two hours before his journey could be completed. He began to be sorry that he had consented to take the journey, and—

There was a grating of brakes, the scream of a whistle, and the express began to lose speed. Sexton Blake at once put his head out of the window to discover the cause of the delay, and saw that the signal, still some hundreds of yards ahead, shone with a red, warning light.

Steaming slowly, its whistle shrieking a shrill protest

against the delay, the engine crawled on towards the signal at eight or nine miles an hour. This very much reduced speed enabled Sexton Blake to examine the country, and he stared out across the fields. The moon had slid from behind the clouds, making much visible that had been hidden only a few minutes before.

"Some day I think I will come and live in a place like this," Sexton Blake mused, feeling for a fresh cigar. "Here there would be no worry, no crime to detect, no—"

The detective stopped abruptly, and his whole attitude became tense and watchful. The train was beginning to move at a fast pace again, but it was still possible to see any objects in the fields bordering the line.

And the thing that Sexton Blake had seen, just for a brief second before the train whirled it out of his sight, had left a cold fear at his heart. Yet, to many, the thing that he had seen would have meant nothing.

Just a group of horses and cattle grazing peacefully, while a hundred yards away from them crouched the dark figure of a man. Under the strong light of the moon the detective had been able to see that plainly, and also that the man was moving towards the cattle. Well, what if he was? Was it not likely that the man had been sent to catch a particular horse, so that it might be stabled for the night, and so be ready for work the first thing in the morning? Ay, that was possible; but there was a more sinister explanation.

Three or four years ago Marley Dale, past which the express was now hurrying, had been the scene of terrible cattle maimings. Poor brutes had been found wounded or dead, and to this day no man had been found and proved guilty of the atrocities. Some had said that it was the work of a madman, others that—

Sexton Blake threw his hand up and snatched at the alarm bell. He heard it ringing away by the engine, for his compartment was forward in the train, and already he gripped the handle of the door, ready to swing out on to the line once the train had fairly slackened. His blood was racing, a fierce feeling of indignation filled him, and he meant to get back along the line to the field where he had seen the cattle grazing, the crouching man crawling towards them, without a moment's unnecessary delay.

He would be too late! That was the fear that possessed him; and it so spurred him on that he flung open the door of the carriage, without waiting for the train to slacken any more. It was still travelling at a clear twenty miles an hour, the driver having some difficulty in stopping it on the down grade, but Sexton Blake was lucky enough to land squarely on a patch of soft grass. He was flung to the ground, and started to roll back towards the line; but he snatched at the coarse grass, and so prevented himself from being carried down to the wheels.

Springing to his feet, and only feeling a trifle dazed through the violence of his fall, Sexton Blake leapt the hedge and dashed away across the fields. From behind him came the shouting of voices, calling him to come back and tell them what was wrong; but he took no heed of them. He was glad that the moon had gone behind the clouds again, for in the darkness any pursuit of him would be bound to fail.

Sexton Blake had forgotten all about the mission that was taking him North. He only thought of the cattle-maiming horrors that had startled the inhabitants of Great Britain three or four years back, and he meant to prevent anything like that happening again, if it lay in his power to do so.

At first, knowing that he might be pursued, Sexton Blake ran straight away from the line; but as soon as he reached a belt of trees, he swung round to the left, and dashed off in a straight line towards the field where he had seen the

(Continued on page iv. of cover.)

cattle and the crouching man. He reckoned that it lay nearly a mile away, but at the pace at which he was travelling he would cover that distance in five minutes.

Surely by then the maimer would not have been able to carry out his vile work and escape?

Spurred on by this hope, the detective crossed the fields almost at a sprint pace. Twice hedges barred his way, but he leapt them in his stride.

Once more the moon slid from behind the clouds, filling the fields with its white light, and Sexton Blake slackened his speed, seeing that he had reached his destination. He was in the field where he had seen the man and the cattle.

The detective looked round quickly, and a glance showed him that the cattle were not in the same position as when he had caught sight of them from the train. Did that mean that they had been frightened, or had they merely moved to obtain better pasture? Sexton Blake tried to assure himself that the latter was the case, but as he hurried on, to where he could dimly see the cattle standing, he knew that he himself was not convinced.

With a sharp cry breaking from him, Sexton Blake paused on the edge of a shallow ditch. Then he dropped to his knees, drew a small electric lantern from his pocket, and turned the light towards the ground. It played over a patch of wet clay, a thick growth of weeds, then on a brown mass, which in one place was stained with red.

The maimer had done his work. At the bottom of the ditch, where it had evidently rolled in its last struggles, lay a brown horse—quite dead. There was no need to ask the manner of its death; for a deep wound, clean cut and straight, stretched for eighteen inches across the abdomen. The man who had struck the blow had struck with force; he had meant to kill, and he had not failed to carry out his foul intention.

Sexton Blake turned the rays of the lamp from side to side, examining every part of the dead horse closely, but save for the clean cut, there was nothing to be seen. Crawling on his knees, he moved to the left, examining that clay of the bank; but there was not a clue there that could possibly help him to discover the identity of the fiend who had committed the outrage. The clay to the right only yielded the same result—no clue. The maimer, whoever he might be, had chosen his spot well. He had accomplished his design on the grass, where his boots would leave no mark that could possibly be followed.

Slowly Sexton Blake rose to his feet, switched off the light of his lamp, and stood looking down at the body of the dead horse as it lay in the ditch. His mouth was set hard, the lips drawn into two thin lines, and his eyes were cold and determined. There was the look on his face that was always there when he had set himself out to unravel a particularly knotty case.

Sexton Blake loved horses, and this killing of them without reason, this maiming and wounding at night, roused him as few other things could have done; and as he looked down upon the body of the dead horse he swore that he would accept no other case, however important it might be, until he had landed this horse-maimer in gaol.

From some distance away came the hoot of an engine whistle, followed by the noise of a train getting under way. The express to the North had gone on without him.

Sexton Blake, as if roused by the noise, straightened himself and looked sharply round. The moon was shining whitely, making the fields almost as light as day. But nothing, save the group of cattle, the animals huddled together as if in fear, could be seen.

Sexton Blake lifted the catch of the garden gate, and moved quickly up the path, bordered on both sides with dew-laden flowers, to the door of the farmhouse, from the front windows of which mellow lights were shining. He

had little doubt that this was the farm that the dead horse belonged to, and "he had come to break the news of its horrible death—and more.

Rapping sharply with his knuckles, Sexton Blake had not long to wait before the door was opened to him, and a tall man, perhaps fifty years of age, upright and hardy, and plainly of the farmer class, looked out at him. The man held an oil-lamp in his hand, so that the light fell upon the face of his visitor.

"What may you want at this hour o' the night?" he asked suspiciously.

Sexton Blake calmly put aside the hand that would have detained him, and stepped into the oak-panelled hall of the farmhouse.

"You own the horses and cattle grazing in that field?" he inquired, pointing back the way he had come.

"Ay; I'm Mark Strong," the farmer answered shortly. "Well?"

Sexton Blake drew a cigar from his pocket and lit it. "One of your horses is lying dead in a ditch in that field," he answered.

"But there be naught of 'em ailin'," the farmer said slowly, his voice full of amazement.

"The knife of a maimer kills quicker than any illness," Sexton Blake said slowly and meaningly.

A great cry of rage broke from the farmer, and his ruddy face turned white and drawn. His eyes blazed fiercely, and he flung his hands up, letting the oil-lamp fall to the ground. The glass shattered, but Sexton Blake dropped his foot on the blazing wick before the oil could catch light. Then he gripped Strong by the arms, as if to pull him together.

The farmer's arms dropped to his side, and even in the darkness Sexton Blake could see that the look of anger on his face had been replaced by one of utter helplessness.

"Four years ago these same things happened," he muttered, in a shaking voice, "an' all the police o' the county could discover naught."

In a few words as possible Sexton Blake related all that had happened—what he had seen from the train, the jump into the fields, the finding of the dead horse. At the end of the recital the farmer raised his hands and pressed them over his face. Sexton Blake lit a cigar.

"I had better be going now, Mr. Strong," he said, "for I want to start early on the case to-morrow."

The farmer looked up, a faint spark of interest in his listless eyes.

"What d'you mean?"

"I am going to track down the man who killed that horse to-night," Sexton Blake explained quietly.

Farmer Strong stared, his jaw dropped foolishly, then he recovered himself, and laughed bitterly.

"Ay, I reckon so!" he said sarcastically. "All the police o' the county have failed, and you—"

"I am Sexton Blake," the detective interrupted, a trifle sharply.

"The great detective?" Strong cried.

Sexton Blake nodded, and there was a smile on his lips.

"I have been called that," he answered. "Will you let me help you?"

(How Sexton Blake brought his amazing powers to bear in tracking down the dastardly cattle-maimers, and thereby revealed a far-reaching plot, forms the subject of the thrilling detective tale, entitled: "Count Nevani's Coup," contained in No. 39 of our splendid companion paper, THE PENNY POPULAR. This grand issue—which will be on sale everywhere next Friday—also contains a splendid long, complete tale of Tom Merry and Co. at St. Jim's, entitled: "On the War-path," by Martin Clifford, and a wonderful story of Jack, Sam, and Pete, by S. Clarke Hook, entitled: "Under False Colours." No "Gemite" can afford to miss this splendid feast of first-class reading-matter.)

MORE PRIZE WINNERS!

POPLETS NO. 4 RESULT.

FIRST PRIZE OF 20s.

A. R. MCKENDRICK, 21, DIXON STREET, HAMILTON, SCOTLAND.

Example: Emigration N.
Poplet: "Eye's" Disobedience Necessitated.

SECOND PRIZE OF 10s.

ERNEST H. ELLIOT, 31, UPPER VILLIERS STREET, WOLVERHAMPTON.

Example: King George E.
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GEO. PORTELL, 38, TRENTHAM STREET, SOUTHFIELDS, LONDON.

Example: London Town N.
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TWO 2s. 6d. PRIZES go to

J. BURGESS, 17, Portland Square, Workington, Cumberland; A. BROWN, 12, Bounces Road, Lower Edmonton, Middlesex.

FIVE 1s. PRIZES go to

H. FRASER, 190, Cambridge Road, Kilburn, N.W.; C. LAW-DAY, 10, Edgecumbe Park Road, Peverell, Plymouth; GEO. R. MACKENZIE, The Dreisk, Forres, N.B.; GEO. LEATHLEY, 21, Derringham Street, Spring Bank, Hull; JOSEPH FEATHERSTONE, 9, Beecher Street, Cowpen, Blyth, Northumberland.

Poplets No. 5 Result will be Published Next Friday.

Go in for Poplets To-day—See Page 32—No Entrance Fee—You may Send in as Many Coupons as You Like!