

Grand, Original School Tale.

THE GEM LIBRARY

1^D
PRICE
2

TOM MERRY'S MISTAKE.

LONG, COMPLETE
SCHOOL
TALE.

By
MARTIN CLIFFORD



THE
PRISONER!

(See page 7.)

NO 13.

VOL. 1.

"NOW, MY FINE FELLOW," SAID TOM MERRY, "ANY PART OF YOU THAT COMES OUT WILL GET STAMPED ON!"

£3 10s. GIGANTIC FACTORY SALE

Offered: 5,000 new "Climber-Tyred" F.W. Cycles for £3 15s. by instalments; or, cash with order, £3 10s. Worth double. Free on rails Norwich; approval. Send no money. Send Postcard for full particulars.

Derehamroad Cycle Co., Norwich.

**MOUSTACHES.**

A nice manly moustache positively grows in a few days at any age by using "MOUSTA," the wonderful Brazilian discovery. Boys become men. Acts like magic on the smoothest faces. Don't waste your money on inferior and worthless pomades. Dixon's "MOUSTA" is the only moustache former that is guaranteed always effective. Money returned should it fail. Box sent (in plain cover) for 6d. stamps. Mr. G. DIXON, 42, Junction Road, London, N.

Read the Thrilling Adventures of
JACK, SAM & PETE,

By **S. Clarke Hook,**

IN

'The Marvel,'

NOW ON SALE.

PRICE ONE PENNY.

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO TAKE GOOD PHOTOGRAPHS.

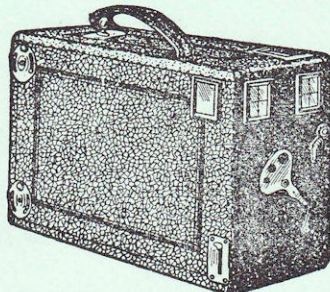
The "Reliance"

CAMERA & COMPLETE OUTFIT.

The Editor offers this very special bargain, comprising Camera, Developing, and Printing Outfit complete, to all his readers at the remarkably low price as below.

CAMERA.

A really useful Instrument, Constructed on the Latest Ideas, neatly covered with Black Leatherette Cloth, will carry Six Plates (3½ in. by 2½ in.) in Metal Sheaths, View Lens with Three Stops, Time and Instantaneous Shutter, Automatic Changing, Two View Finders, and Leather Carrying Handle.



OUTFIT.

Six Dry Plates, Packet of Printing Paper, Six Mounts, Ruby Dark Room Lamp, Packet of Developer, Packet of Fixing Salts, Two Celluloid Developing Dishes, Glass Measure, Printing Frame, Draining Rack, Glass Stirring Rod, One Packet Concentrated Toning and Fixing Bath, and Book of Instructions.

WORTH MORE THAN DOUBLE.

HOW TO GET THEM.—Send a postal order for **8s.**, addressed to The Novelty Dept., 12 and 13, Broadway, Ludgate Hill, London, E.C., with your name and address clearly written. Foreign and Colonial orders postage extra. Total weight of Camera, Outfit, and packing, 5lb.

Orders are executed in rotation, so do not delay, but make sure of this exceptional bargain by sending at once.

DRY PLATES IN PACKETS OF EIGHTEEN, PRICE 1s. 3d., POST FREE.

NOTE.—The above can be supplied separately at the following prices: Camera, **3s. 9d.**, postage 3d. extra; and the Developing Outfit, **5s.**, postage 3d. extra.

716

Postage 6d. extra.

Next
Thursday.

"THE MASTER'S SECRET," by Martin Clifford.

No. 13.

Vol. 1:



A COMPLETE STORY FOR EVERYONE, AND EVERY STORY A GEM!

TOM MERRY'S MISTAKE



A Grand Long,
Complete
School Tale.
By
**MARTIN
CLIFFORD.**

CHAPTER I. A Capture from the Enemy.

FIGGINS & CO. came out of the New House at St. Jim's, looking very well satisfied with themselves, and things generally. They were nicely arrayed in Norfolk jackets and knickers, and looked very fit and well.

It was Wednesday afternoon, a half-holiday at St. Jim's, and Figgins & Co. were evidently about to start on a little outing. Figgins, the long-limbed chief of the New House juniors, cast his eye upwards to the sky, which was blue and serene. There had been a threatening of rain earlier in the day, but it seemed to have passed off entirely. "Good luck," said Figgins, "it's going to be a jolly fun

DON'T MISS the New Long, Complete Tale, **TOM MERRY,** next Thursday, of **MARTIN CLIFFORD,**

afternoon, and we shall have a ripping ride! Now to get out the bikes."

"Hallo," said Kerr, "there's that bounder, Blake! What does he want?"

Figgins & Co. looked suspiciously at the junior, who came straggling over from the direction of the School House.

Blake had his hands in his pockets, and a straw hat on the side of his head, and looked the picture of lazy carelessness. He stopped and surveyed the New House juniors, as they came down the steps, with a grin.

"Hallo, Figgy!" he exclaimed. "Whither bound? How nicely we're got up!"

"Oh, go and eat pancakes!" said Figgins.

"By the way, Figgy, where are you taking those pipe-stems?" asked Blake, fixing an interested and curious glance upon Figgins's calves.

Figgins turned red with wrath. The chief of the New House juniors was decidedly long and lean, and his calves were certainly not plump, and the tight stockings showed up their lean proportions very plainly.

"But, perhaps, I'm mistaken," continued Blake, "perhaps they're not pipe-stems, but walking-sticks. I'm open to correction."

"You'll be open to getting a thick ear if you don't buzz off!" said Figgins wrathfully. "We're going for a spin, you School House bounder, and I've got no time to waste on you. Come on, chaps!"

And Figgins & Co., with their noses in the air, marched off towards the bicycle shed, and Blake stood looking after them, with a peculiar expression upon his face.

Blake had nothing special on that afternoon, and he had been trying to think out some plan for taking a rise out of his ancient enemies, the juniors of the rival house at St. Jim's. Since the coming of Tom Merry to St. Jim's, Blake had been put upon his mettle to see that his laurels as leader of the School House juniors were not won from him. Now, as he watched Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, making their way to the bicycle-shed, an idea flashed into his brain, and he burst into a chuckle. The next moment he was speeding off to the School House.

His chums, the comrades of Study No. 6, were lounging in the doorway, discussing plans for the afternoon, when Blake burst upon them.

"Hallo, what's up?" exclaimed Herries, looking at Blake in surprise. "Have you lost twopence, and found a three-penny-bit?"

"No, something better than that," said Blake, grinning.

"Well, get it off your chest!" said Digby. "If it's any fun for the afternoon, I'm on!"

"I must beg you to excuse me, dear boy," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, languidly. "The weathah is weally too, too awfully welaxing for any wuff play, and—"

"Oh, dry up!" said Blake. "Listen to your uncle. Did you see Figgins & Co. come out of the New House just now?"

"Yes," said Herries, "what about it?"

"They're togged up for a ride, and they've gone to get their bikes out. They're going for a long spin for the afternoon. Now, doesn't that strike you as a jolly way of spending a half-holiday?"

"Well, yes; rather. But we can't do the same, Blake."

"Why can't we?"

"Jolly good reasons. My bike is busted; yours has a variety of punctures it would take a dog's age to mend; and Dig has sold his to Percy Mellish. If they're not good reasons for not taking a spin, I've never heard of any!"

"My dear chap, I wasn't thinking of going on our own jiggers."

"What the dickens were you thinking of, then?"

"Figgins & Co.'s jiggers," said Blake coolly. "It seems to me to be silly rot that those New House wasters should go for a spin, while we young gentlemen of the School House hang around the quad with our hands in our pockets. Don't you think so?"

"Rather!" said Herries and Digby, together. "Jolly good wheeze if we can raid the jiggers. What's the game?"

"Figgins & Co. have gone to get them out of the shed. We're going to make them leave them in the quad and go up to their study. While they're gone—"

"I don't see how you can fix it."

"My dear kid, do you ever see anything till I have explained it to you?" demanded Blake. "Don't interrupt, but listen to your uncle."

"Oh, go on; cut the cackle and come to the hesses!"

"That's what I'm trying to do, but you will interrupt. Now, when Figgins & Co. come back, if they find that the enemy are in their fortress—that is to say, that we have raided their study—you'll bet they'll come up to turn us out before they leave the school. What?"

"That's true enough," said Herries. "But if we're in

their study, and they come and start fighting us there, how the dickens are we going to collar the jiggers?"

Blake gave him a pitying glance.

"Herries, old man, why don't you wait patiently till I've finished, instead of trying to think things out? You'll get a pain in your brain-box soon! We're not all going to be in the study. Adolphus is going to be there."

"Oh, dear boy, weally!" protested Arthur Augustus.

"Didn't you say that you didn't feel inclined for any rough play, Gussy?"

"Yes, but—"

"Well, then, that's how considerate I am to you. Herries, Dig, and myself are going to collar the jiggers, and take all the risks, and all you've got to do is to stick in the study and draw the attack."

"That's all very well, Blake, but when they see you take the bikes away they'll have me all to themselves, and—"

"Oh, some people are never satisfied!" said Blake, impatiently. "Do you want me to wrap you up in cotton-wool, and keep you in a giddy band-box?"

"No, dear boy, weally, but—"

"Then don't say any more. I'm giving you the easy part of the job. You can go to bed, afterwards, if you like, or, if Figgins & Co. hurt you, you can go into the infirmary. It's been made very comfortable lately, with electric light, and some ripping books for the patients!"

"I weally don't want to go into—"

"We can't have all we want in this world. There are only three bikes, so three of us are enough to do the collaring business. We're going to save you the fog of pedalling a bike around all the afternoon," said Blake.

"Yes, by Jove!" said Digby. "You seem to me to be very unreasonable, Gussy!"

"Unreasonable isn't the word!" exclaimed Herries. "Here's a chance of taking a glorious rise out of the New House, and getting a fine afternoon's spin into the bargain, and D'Arcy doesn't want to do even the easiest part of it! I call it unpatriotic!"

"You see, the majority's against you, Aubrey," urged Blake. "Don't be selfish! If there's anything I hate in a chap, it's selfishness, and a want of regard for the comfort of others. I do really."

Thus assailed on all sides D'Arcy gave in.

"I am quite weady to do my best," he said, "so long as you give me time to change my waistcoat first, I don't mind. This is a special new waistcoat, and I can't win the wisk of having it spoiled."

Blake seized him by the collar, as he was turning into the house.

"Blow your confounded waistcoat!" he shouted. "There's no time to attend to your beastly waistcoat! Figgins & Co. will be back in a jiffy. There's no time to lose. What do you want to wear a rainbow waistcoat for? If Figgy puts some ink on it, it will make it a little less startling. Come on!"

D'Arcy was not quite persuaded, but Herries took him by one arm, Digby by another, and Blake helped him from behind with his boot, and thus he was propelled at a breathless pace towards the New House.

The House was deserted, all the boys being out in the fine sunny weather, and the coast was clear for the carrying out of Blake's plan.

"Mind, you're to let Figgy see that you're there, Gussy!" he exclaimed. "Make him think we're all with you. Knock things about, and smash 'em up generally. I can leave all that to your judgment. You're an awfully clever chap!"

"Yes; I believe I am wathah clevah, Blake, but—"

"When they see we've got the bikes, they'll come after us, and you'll have a chance to slither away," went on Blake. "But don't forget, you must get them to come up to the study if it costs you a leg!"

"Yes, I quite understand, dear boy, but—"

"In you go, then!"

And D'Arcy was propelled into the porch of the New House, and he stumbled into the hall, and then, being fairly committed to the adventure, he hurried up the stairs to the study belonging to Figgins & Co.

"That's settled!" exclaimed Blake, gleefully. "Now to take cover, kidlets!"

"Buck up, or those bounders will be back and spot us! Where shall we hide?" said Digby, breathlessly.

"Just round this corner."

The juniors dashed round the nearest corner, and remained there, close against the wall, waiting for the return of Figgins & Co.

Blake ventured to take a peep out, hardly showing more than an eyebrow, in case it should meet the suspicious eyes of Figgins.

"Hallo, here they are! Quiet, now!"

And the chums of the School House almost held their



breath in their anxiety. Figgins & Co. were coming back, wheeling their bicycles from behind the New House. It was usual to wheel the machines out of the gates of St. Jim's before mounting. Figgins cast a glance round, expecting to see Blake in sight, and to get a volley of chipping from him. But there was no Blake to be seen.

"Come on, chaps," said Figgins, "it's going to be a jolly afternoon! I— Scott! what on earth's that?"

Crash!

A milk-jug descended from a study window, and smashed to fragments only a few feet from the astounded cyclists. Figgins stared at the fragments, and then looked up at the window of his study. It was open, and he caught a glimpse of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy inside, with his eyeglass screwed into his eye, and a serious expression upon his face. There was a loud crash from the study. It sounded like a table laden with books, and fishing tackle, and cricket paraphernalia, going right over on the floor. And as a matter of fact, that was just what it was.

Figgins & Co. were petrified for a moment. Then Figgins gave a yell of fury.

"The— the bounders! They're wrecking our study! They thought we were gone, I suppose, and— come on!"

He stood his bicycle up against an elm, and went up the steps of the New House three at a time. Kerr and Wynn promptly followed his example.

On a famous occasion, Figgins & Co. had raided Blake's study in the School House, and wrecked it in the owner's absence, and it immediately occurred to him that the School House chums were at this precise moment returning the compliment.

Figgins's long legs made rapid work up the stairs. Kerr bounded behind him like a shot, and Fatty Wynn laboured last of the three. The moment they were in the New House, the ambushed juniors round the corner, came running out.

"The coast's clear," giggled Blake. "Here we are, three jolly good jiggers to be had for nothing! Any takers?"

"Rather!" chuckled Herries. "Buck up!"

"Here we are! Once aboard the lugger, and the girl is ours—I mean, Figgy won't be able to catch us in a month of Sundays, when we've started!"

And the clutch of the raiders was quickly on the bicycles. Meanwhile Figgins & Co. had reached their study, and burst into it like a hurricane. They expected to find four foes there, and they were only three; for Marmaduke was away from St. Jim's just then. But they did not care. They would as soon have faced forty as four at that moment.

Figgins kicked the door open, and dashed in.

"Caught you, you rotters!" he roared. "Sock it to 'em, kids! Why— what— there's only one! Never mind, oollar him!"

D'Arcy had certainly made a wreck of the study. The floor was strewn with all kinds of things, and Figgins & Co. had a great deal of sorting out to do before they got their quarters to rights again. In the midst of the wreckage was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, engaged in casting the books out of the bookcase, in various directions.

Blake had hardly meant his faithful follower to make such an exceedingly clean sweep, but D'Arcy was anxious to please, and so he had done things thoroughly.

Figgins & Co. rushed upon D'Arcy as one man. In a twinkling they had him down on the floor in the midst of the havoc he had wrought, and D'Arcy squirmed helplessly in so many hands.

"Don't be so wuff and wude!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Pway don't be so beastly wuff, deah boys, you are spoiling the cwease in my twousers."

"I'll—I'll squash your face!" howled Figgins. "I'll squash you! I'll—"

He suddenly broke off.

The New House trio released Arthur Augustus as though he had suddenly become red-hot. A shout from the quadrangle rang in at the open window.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hear us smile!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Whom do the bikes belong to?"

"Figgins & Co."

"Who's going to ride them?"

"We are!"

Figgins & Co. staggered weakly to the window.

Blake and Herries and Digby were in the saddle, holding to each other's shoulders, to keep the machines upright, but had not started riding yet.

Figgins gazed out speechlessly at the raiders.

"Get off our bikes!" yelled Kerr. "We'll come down and—"

Blake let go with one hand, and kissed his fingers to the infuriated juniors at the study window.

"Good-bye, Bluebell!" he trilled. "Sorry and sad we go from thee! I say, Figgy, who's cock house at St. Jim's?"

"School House!" yelled Herries and Digby.

"Who's top of the School House?"

"We are! We are!"

"Who's licked Figgins & Co. hollow?"

"We have!"

"Come on!" muttered Figgins desperately. "There's a chance yet! Buck up!"

He turned from the study window, and rushed out. Down the stairs he went like a roebuck, and Kerr and Wynn came leaping and tumbling after him. In their anxiety to recapture the bicycles, Arthur Augustus was completely forgotten.

Figgins & Co. burst from the New House. Blake and his chums were pedalling away down the path to the gate, careless of rules at that critical moment. The gates of St. Jim's were wide open ahead.

"Stop!" howled Figgins, darting after the riders. "You beasts, stop! I'll—"

The cyclists put on a spurt, still holding each other's shoulders, and keeping abreast. They went down to the gate with a whizz, and Figgins & Co. on foot laboured behind in vain!

As they dashed through the ancient gateway into the road, and turned to the left towards Rylcombe, Blake glanced back and kissed his hand again to the furious three.

Figgins & Co. stopped, panting and breathless, in the gate. The three cyclists were disappearing in a cloud of dust far down the road.

The New House juniors did not say anything. Their feelings at that moment were too deep for words. They turned and hurried back to the New House, with a faint hope that Arthur Augustus might be still there. But when they reached the study, it was empty. D'Arcy had made good the chance of escape.

"Well, my only hat!" said Figgins, forcing a laugh. "We're done—foiled, diddled, dished, and done, and there's no getting out of that!"

And the Co. had to admit it.

CHAPTER 2.

A Hot Chase and a Wet Ride.

BLAKE, Herries, and Digby went whizzing down Rylcombe Lane, leaving a cloud of dust behind them, still close abreast, and gasping with laughter as they rode. It was not till they were a mile from St. Jim's that they slackened down, and dropped into a gentler pace.

"Well, my word," said Blake, "this is a clean licking for Figgy, and ro mistake! They can go for a little walk this afternoon, while we take their bikes out for a run!"

"Ha, ha! Figgy will be wild! I hope Arthur Augustus got out of the study before Figgins & Co. got back, that's all!" said Herries.

"Trust him for that! Now, which way are we going?"

"What do you say to a run round by Wayland, and back by the North Road? It's good going, and we shall get in nicely for tea."

"Good enough. Come on."

"Wait a bit," said Blake. "This bike of Figgy's is a jolly good one, but it's a bit too high for me. Stop a bit while I put the saddle down a trifle."

Figgins's tool-bag was on the machine, so it did not take Blake long to lower the saddle a little. Kerr's and Wynn's bikes suited Herries and Dig to a hair. They were really good machines. The triumphant juniors of the School House were in for an enjoyable spin.

Blake remounted, and the chums rode on through Rylcombe. Suddenly Blake uttered an exclamation.

Outside the tuck-shop three bicycles were standing against the kerb, and Blake knew those machines at a glance. They belonged to three School House boys, no others than Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther, known at St. Jim's as the Terrible Three, and the deadly rivals of Blake for the supremacy among the School House juniors.

The Terrible Three were evidently in the tuck-shop, having ridden down to Rylcombe from the school, and they had left their machines outside while they sampled the good things within.

"Slow down!" commanded Blake. "Do you see those jiggers?"

"What about them?" asked Herries.

"You know whom they belong to—Tom Merry and his lot. Just keep your eyes on me, kids, and do as I do."

Blake pedalled ahead, and as he passed Tom Merry's machine, skilfully caught it in the centre of the handle-bars, whisked it away from the kerb, and rode on, wheeling the bike beside his own.

His chums chuckled, and lost no time in following his example.

Herries caught hold of Lowther's machine, and Digby captured Manners's, and they followed Blake, pedalling on, and wheeling the captured bikes.

There was a shout from the tuck-shop door. Manners had caught sight of the raid from the window, happening to glance out into the street, and he had immediately given the alarm.

"Hallo, there!"

"What are you doing with our bikes?"

"Stop, you horrid bouncers! Stop!"

Blake glanced back. The door of the shop was filled by three juniors, stricken with rage and consternation at the sight of this raid under their very eyes.

Tom Merry had a half-finished glass of lemonade in his hand, Manners half a jam-tart, and Monty Lowther a packet of toffee.

The sight of Study No. 6 and their daring raid had interrupted the Terrible Three in the midst of an enjoyable feast in the tuck-shop.

Blake grinned as the three came tumbling over each other from the tuck-shop out into the street. Tom Merry broke into a run.

"After them, chaps!" he exclaimed. "They've got our jiggers! We'll have to walk home if we don't get them back! Sprint for all you're worth!"

The three dashed into the road, and ran their hardest after the three cyclists. But Blake and his comrades, though encumbered with the captured bikes, made good speed, and the Terrible Three never looked like catching them. The village was left behind.

"Follow on! Follow on!" exclaimed Blake. "This will do you good, my infants. Nothing like a little exercise on a warm afternoon! We'll leave the bikes for you in the ditch at Wayland. Trot, now!"

Tom Merry knew that his chums would not damage the machines, but he made desperate efforts to overtake the raiders. The cyclists turned into a country lane and scorching on.

"The horrid bouncers!" Tom gasped. "They're riding Figgins & Co.'s machines, I can see that, and now they've collared curs. This is Blake's day out, and no mistake."

"We've got to stop them somehow!" panted Manners. "If somebody would only get in their way, and make 'em take a tumble! Good! Look there!"

The Terrible Three gave a gasp of relief.

A huge market-cart was lumbering towards the village, and there certainly wasn't room for Study No. 6 to pass it with the wheeling machines. The cart filled the lane almost from side to side, leaving less than a foot on either side between the wheels and the hedges.

Blake saw the danger at once, and slackened down.

"Oh, rotten!" he exclaimed. "Look out there, kids, we can't get past without letting the bikes go! The game's up!"

It was certainly true. If they stopped, the Terrible Three would be up with them before they could get past the cart, and the promised afternoon's spin would end in a free fight. And they could not ride on without abandoning the captured machines.

"Never mind," panted Herries, "we've given the bouncers a little run for their jiggers, anyway. Stick 'em against the hedge!"

"Right-ho!"

Blake rode closer to the side of the lane, and allowed Tom Merry's bike to fall gently against the hawthorns, where it rested without damage. Herries and Digby did the same with the other machines, and then followed Blake.

It was rather a close fit, riding between the lumbering cart and the high, stiff hedge, but the juniors were good cyclists, and they were soon past the obstruction. Then, in the clear road, they went pedalling on.

A couple of minutes later Blake looked back, and uttered an exclamation. Three cyclists were coming up the lane, leaning over their handle-bars and scorching in determined style.

"The Terrible Three!"

"Hallo!" exclaimed Blake. "Look out for squalls! They're on the track, by Jove! Ride for your lives, old dears!"

The Terrible Three evidently meant business. They were scorching furiously to overtake the juniors. Blake and his companions put on a spurt, and went flying ahead. Away they went at full speed, with the avengers close behind.

"Good!" grinned Blake. "This is just what I want—a nice little race, and we'll show the Terrible Three—three terrible duffers, I call 'em—that they can't touch one side of us when it comes to cycling! Put the steam on!"

The juniors pedalled away merrily. Close on their track Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther rode their hardest.

Under ordinary circumstances, the two parties would have been about equally matched, being much of a size and age;

but now the Terrible Three had been eating pastries and drinking ginger-pop in the tuck-shop, and so they were far from being as fit as they might have been. And so they were hard put to it to keep up with the juniors.

Blake looked back and grinned gleefully.

"We're gaining ground!" he exclaimed. "Tom Merry is puffing like a grampus, and Manners is wheezing like an old trombone with a hole in it. Monty Lowther looks as if he wants to go to sleep on his handle-bars. Put your beef into it, my sons, and make the fur fly. We'll soon drop those bouncers behind. It's not so hot as it was, is it?"

The afternoon had certainly become suddenly cooler.

Blake uttered a sudden exclamation as he felt a drop of wet upon his flushed and heated face.

"Hallo, rain, by Jingo!"

He looked up at the sky. Rain had threatened in the morning, but the clouds had cleared off. Now they were driving darkly over the woods from the west, and bringing rain with them. There was a spattering of drops in the dusty road.

"My hat!" said Herries. "This will be pretty muddy when the water comes down!"

"Rather! How lucky we're not riding our own bikes."

"Ha, ha! Yes. But I say, it's no fun riding in the rain if it comes on thick, and we haven't our ponchos with us. Shall we stop in Woodford?"

They had dashed into a narrow village street, and past a little country railway-station. Blake did not slacken.

"Oh, rats!" he said. "We're not going to let those fellows catch us because we're afraid of a few drops of rain!"

"It won't be a few drops," said Herries seriously; "there's going to be a regular downpour, if I'm any judge of the weather."

"Well, perhaps you're not," said Blake. "I dare say you're not, when you come to think of it. Anyway, buzz on, and don't waste your breath!"

They went through the village street at full-tilt, scattering screaming chickens and quacking ducks on all sides. Then out into a country road again, and hot onward to Wayland. High hedges were on both sides now, and above the hedges the hills glowed purple, soon changing, however, to a dim greyness as the rain came down thicker and the landscape swam in mist.

Down came the rain, and the juniors turned up their collars and pulled their caps over their ears. The glorious sunny afternoon had turned out shockingly. They dashed on through the rain, with their heads bent over their handle bars. Blake looked back over his shoulder. The road was clear as far as he could see; the rain was dashing down, but it dashed only on the bare road; there were no cyclists in sight. And the chief of the School House juniors gave a chuckle of triumph.

"We've done 'em! They're hung up in Woodford, chaps!"

Herries and Dig looked back. It was the truth. The Terrible Three had undoubtedly stopped in the village the juniors had just passed through to escape the rain.

"They've stopped!" giggled Blake. "I admit it's wet, but—"

"We ought to have stopped, too!" grumbled Herries. "Hang it, we shall be wet through to the skin! Blow this rain, I say!"

"Blow it as much as you like, my son. I wish you could blow it away. It's only a couple of miles now to Wayland, and we can hold up there till the rain blows over."

"I don't believe it will blow over this side of midnight."

"Oh, you're a croaker! Get a move on you, or we shall be drowned!"

The rain was coming down more heavily every moment. The three juniors scorching on through the thickening mud of the country road, splashed over with it, while the rain soaked through their thin jackets and ran down their necks.

If Figgins & Co. could have seen them then, they would have felt themselves avenged.

"Wayland!" exclaimed Blake suddenly.

The outlying houses of the country town had come in sight. The chums rode into the street looking and feeling like drowned puppy dogs, and made for the railway-station. They had to slacken down now, in spite of the pouring rain, for Wayland had lately indulged itself in electric trams, and the tram-lines made the street dangerous on a wet day. Even Blake's cheerfulness was damped when he skidded on a tram-line and sat down with Figgins's bicycle in a puddle of liquid mud six inches deep.

"Ow!" ejaculated Blake. "Don't stop!"

Herries and Dig rode on. Blake remounted, and riding more cautiously now, he followed his chums. The welcome shelter of the railway-station was reached at last. As they wheeled their machines, dripping with rain and mud, into

the station, a good many curious glances were cast at them. They did not look as if they had enjoyed the spin. Blake went to the booking-office.

"When's the next train for Rylcombe, please?" he asked. The man in the office stared at him.

"Hallo! Have you been out collecting mud, young shaver?"

"You mind your own business, John," said Blake severely. "I shall have you discharged if you are familiar with me."

The man stared. He had never been answered quite like that before, but he recognised that he would not get much change out of Jack Blake.

"Next train Rylcombe?" he said. "It's coming in now."

"Then we're just in time. What a bit of luck!"

"Oh, there's lots of time!" said the man, with a grin. "It doesn't start till the London train gets in, which won't be for twenty minutes yet."

"Oh, blow your old railway!" said Blake crossly. "What's the good of a railway if you never have any giddy trains? Think I'd better walk it. I should get in first!"

"Much better," agreed the man in the booking-office.

"If you go by train we shall have to charge you extra for all that mud you're carrying about."

Blake gave him a withering look.

"Give me three seconds, Johnny, and tickets for the bikes," he said, "and don't you try to be funny. Nature made you funny enough to look at, and there's no need for you to do anything more!"

He got the tickets and left the office.

"Twenty minutes to wait for a beastly train!" he announced. "Nice, sticking about in a draughty old station in wet togs, isn't it? Still, there's one comfort!"

"What's that?" growled Herries, who was squeezing the water out of the legs of his trousers and could not see much comfort in anything just then.

"Why, these trains run only once in a blue moon—once an hour, to be exact—and so it's this train that Tom Merry will have to catch. He'll have to wait longer at Woodford than we have to wait here. Ain't that a comfort?" demanded Blake.

"Ye-es," said Herries. "Let's get the bikes down on the platform and stuck into the train, and then look for something to eat."

"That's a good idea."

The local train was already waiting for the London train to arrive. The three bicycles were delivered to a porter to be placed in the luggage-van, labelled for Rylcombe. Going home by train was a sorry ending to an afternoon's spin, but there was no help for it.

Having disposed of the machines, the chums started looking for refreshments, and found a room where they could stand before a fire and warm themselves and drink hot lemonade, which was a comfort. A perfect cloud of steam rose from them as they stood there, and enveloped them like a blanket.

"This is a little better," said Blake. "I hope you don't mind us standing here and making all this giddy steam, miss."

The young lady in charge of the refreshment-counter smiled.

"Not at all," she replied; "I hope you won't catch cold."

"Thank you so much! This is jolly! Hallo, kids, there's the London train coming in!"

The clanking of the train from the city sounded through the station.

"Still five minutes before the local starts," said Blake lazily. "No hurry; may as well finish steaming ourselves."

A minute later a stranger entered the room. He had evidently just arrived in the train from London, for he was quite dry. He wore a travelling coat and cap, and carried a leather-strapped bag, upon which were the initials "A. K." He was looking the reverse of amiable as he came in.

"This is a shocking line!" he exclaimed. "The London train has come in five minutes late, and now I am informed that the train will not start for Rylcombe for seven minutes. A hot whisky-and-water, please, miss, an—er—not too much water."

He turned a frowning countenance upon the three boys, who were steaming away merrily.

"Stand aside from the fire!" he commanded. "I wish to see it! You have no right to come into a public-room in such a state. I insist upon your leaving it!"

Blake stared hard at him. He didn't like the stranger's look from the first. He had a hard face and little keen grey eyes, that looked like flints, and very tight lips.

"Excuse me, sir," said Blake politely, "but we've got wet, and we're trying to dry ourselves. We really can't clear out, you see."

"Do you want me to box your ears, boy?"

"Not particularly."

"Then do not be impertinent. You should not be so careless as to become wet. If you were in my charge, I should cane you severely. Stand aside!"

And as Blake did not budge very quickly, the stranger pushed him out of the way, drew a chair to the middle before the fire, and sat himself down there with his whisky-and-water. He put both feet on the fender, one on either side. The juniors surveyed him with deep disgust.

"I didn't know boys were admitted here, miss," said Blake, to the girl behind the counter, loud enough for the stranger to hear.

The man's eyes gleamed, and he gave Blake an expressive glance, but he did not speak. Blake laid half-a-crown on the counter.

"Let me see, I think I'll have a syphon of soda-water, miss," he remarked, in a thoughtful way.

Herries and Digby stared at him.

"What the dickens—" began Herries.

"My dear chap, don't you start asking questions; you'd never get finished. Thank you, miss, don't give me any change, please. Now, I wonder how you work these things?"

"Why, you know as well as—" began Herries, again mystified.

"Let me see," murmured Blake thoughtfully. "If you hold the thing like this and press it so, and—my hat! Look there, now!"

The nozzle of the syphon was pointing directly towards the back of the stranger's neck as he sat before the fire, and as Blake pressed, a stream of soda-water shot out and caught the unfortunate man just above his collar.

He gave a sudden, startled yell, and sprang to his feet. His hot whisky-and-water went with a splash over his knees, and the glass smashed into a thousand pieces on the floor. He gave a yell of rage.

"You young demon!" He whirled round on Blake like a cat. "I'll—oh! Oooh!"

As he started saying what he would do, a fresh stream from the syphon caught him in the face, and he broke off, gasping and gurgling.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Blake. "I seem to have nothing but accidents!"

The girl behind the counter was laughing hysterically. Herries and Digby were doubled up, as much at Blake's expression of innocent surprise as at the disaster which had befallen the ill-mannered stranger.

The man, gasping for breath, drenched with soda-water, made a mad rush at Blake. The junior promptly dodged him round one of the little refreshment tables, and at the same time caught him under the chin with a fresh spurt of soda-water. The man staggered into the table, and sent it over with a crash, and as there were cups and saucers standing on it, there was a smash of china.

"You—you young demon—I'll—I'll—"

Swish! The last drop from the syphon came over his chest, and then Blake dropped it and bolted. Herries and Digby hurried after him, yelling with laughter, leaving the ill-tempered passenger more ill-tempered than ever, and stamping about the room like a maniac.

"Ha, ha, ha!" howled Blake. "I think we gave that chap as good as we got—eh? But we'd better give him a wide berth till the train starts."

"Ha, ha, yes! He won't be safe at close quarters for some time, I fancy!" gasped Herries.

The chums lay low till the train was on the point of starting, keeping out of sight on the stairs leading from the platform, and not till they heard the guard's whistle sound did they dash across the platform to board the train.

Blake tore open the door of the first carriage he came to and scrambled headlong in, and his chums piled in after him anyhow. The carriage door slammed and the train started. Blake picked himself up gasping.

"That was a close thing!" he exclaimed. "But we're all right now, anyway. We—why—Oh, my Aunt Lavinia Sempronial! There's the chap himself!"

It was too true!

Glaring at the unlucky juniors from the other end of the carriage was the man Blake had treated so unceremoniously in the refreshment-room. Instead of escaping him, the juniors had bundled into the same carriage with him!

DAILY MAIL

ORDER NOW.

"THE MASTER'S SECRET,"

NEXT THURSDAY.

CHAPTER 3.
At Close Quarters.

BLAKE quickly recovered his coolness. He raised his cap politely to the man who was glaring at him from the further end of the carriage.

"How do you do, sir? I hope you weren't made very wet by that—that little accident to the soda-water?"

"You young rascal!"

The man jumped up, and picked up his walking-stick. He looked as if he meant business, but the three sturdy juniors were not afraid of him.

Blake eyed him warily.

"I know what you're thinking of doing with that stick, sir," he remarked calmly. "But if it comes anywhere near me, there will be ructions!"

"I will thrash you within an inch of your life!"

"If you start, my dear chap, I think somebody will get hurt," said Blake, wagging his forefinger at the irate passenger in an extremely aggravating way. "I wouldn't be disrespectful for worlds—I'm such a quiet, respectful chap. Do stop that cackling. Herries—but one must draw a line somewhere. I draw it at being whacked with a walking-stick. Now, don't be a giddy goat!"

The three juniors were ready for war, and, after looking at them doubtfully for some moments, the passenger seemed to think that it was not good enough. He sat down in his seat again, with a black scowl upon his face. The train thundered on through the rain, and the passenger scowled out of the window into the driving wet.

Blake sat down, next to the window on his side.

"Keep your little peepers open, my children," he said. "It's only a few minutes to Woodford, and we shall find Tom Merry and his little lot there, as large as life. If they see us, they are pretty certain to try and get into this carriage."

The passenger gave a sudden start, and looked across at Blake. Blake noticed it, and wondered what interest the name of Merry could have for him. He thought the man was going to speak for a moment, but he did not, but turned his gaze again out of the window to the driving rain.

"No good their trying to get in," said Herries, who had noticed nothing. "We're on the safe side of the door, and we'll keep them out easily enough."

"Rather!" said Dig.

The rain was still coming down hard. It was certain that the Terrible Three, who had faken refuge from the wet in Woodford, would return to Rylcombe by train, and Blake knew that they would have to wait for this especial train. So the juniors were on their guard as the Woodford signal-box appeared in view, and the train ran into the station.

Blake uttered an exclamation:

"There they are!"

Three boyish forms could be seen upon the platform, waiting for the train. Three cycles, labelled for Rylcombe, were in charge of a porter. The Terrible Three were evidently waiting for the train, and by the way they ran along it, peering into the carriages, it was equally evident that they were waiting for Blake, Herries, and Dig.

"They're on the war-path!" exclaimed Blake. "Look out!"

By the time the train had clanked to a halt, the Terrible Three had discovered which carriage held their foes. Tom Merry caught hold of the handle of the door. Blake held it tight from inside, and smiled sweetly at him through the glass.

"No entrance!" he said. "Puppies and bounders not admitted!"

"Open this beastly door, Blake!"

"Rats!"

Tom Merry made a desperate effort to turn the handle; but Blake held it fast, and it hardly budged, and the three juniors within grinned triumphantly at their enemies without.

"No go!" said Blake. "Go into the guard's van, that's where dogs have to be carried, and it will suit you three bounders. You can't come in here!"

"We're coming in!"

"You may be right, Merry, old son; but I fancy you're not. How are you going to get in?"

"I'll give you a thundering licking for this, Blake!"

"All right; I hope I shall be there when you do it."

"Hurry up, there!"

It was a porter's voice.

"Hurry up, can't you?"

"Better hook it," advised Blake. "You can't come in. I'm sorry; but we're rather particular what company we keep."

Tom Merry's eyes gleamed. He hated to be beaten, and he was determined to get into that carriage by hook or by crook. He glanced quickly round.

A young man was standing by, sucking the end of his walking-stick, in the way some young men do, and looking on with a grin at Tom's vain efforts to turn the handle. An idea flashed into Tom's brain.

"Excuse me," he said. And, with a jerk, he took the walking-stick away from the amused spectator.

"Here, I say, what the dickens—"

Tom Merry paid no heed. He passed the walking-stick through the loop of the carriage door handle, and seized one end, while Manners gripped the other.

Blake saw the little game, and hung on inside for all he was worth; but it was in vain, for the stick gave Merry and Manners such a purchase that the door-handle went round in a flash, in spite of Blake's efforts. The door came open in a twinkling.

"Well, my hat!" ejaculated Blake.

"Here, I say, give me my stick, you young—"

The astonished owner of the stick was rushing at Tom Merry. Tom tossed the stick back to him, and, unfortunately, the young man stumbled over it as it caught him on the legs, and went down on the platform in a heap.

"Thanks very much!" said Tom. "I'm much obliged!"

"You rascal!" howled the infuriated stranger, staggering to his feet. "I'll—"

But it was too late for reprisals. Tom Merry had bundled headlong into the carriage. Blake, Herries, and Dig closed up to stop him, but Tom charged through them like a Rugger three-quarter, and all four went sprawling in the carriage.

Manners and Monty Lowther came bundling in, just as the guard ran along to hold them back, for the train was in motion.

The door slammed shut. Away went the train, and in that carriage the Terrible Three and Study No. 6 were mixed up in an almost inextricable heap.

"Gerrof me neck!" came Blake's gurgle from the bottom of the heap.

"Lemme gerrup!" gasped Tom Merry.

The half-dozen of them struggled and scrambled and sorted themselves out. In the process Tom Merry came in contact with the ill-tempered passenger, who was surveying the scene with a scowl on his face. Tom plunged against his knees, and was rewarded with a savage kick.

Tom caught that kick with his ribs, and it surprised him. It hurt him, too. He was not the kind of boy to take a kick in the ribs from anybody, and he promptly hit out in return and upward, and the passenger, who was glaring down at him, received a fist like a lump of iron fairly upon the nose. His head went up with a jerk, and he gave a yell.

"Sorry," said Tom; "tit for tat, you know! Hallo! Hellup! He's dangerous!"

The passenger had seized him, and was boxing his ears furiously. Tom struggled, but, of course, he was no match for a grown man, and he would have fared badly, if the other juniors had not quickly come to the rescue.

Blake was the first to grasp the situation. The next moment he grasped the passenger. With both hands on the irate man's collar, he dragged him away from Tom Merry, and jammed him forcibly back into his seat.

The next moment Blake recoiled away from a spiteful blow, for the passenger was in a fury now, and he hit out with all his force. But the odds were against him. Manners and Lowther piled on him at once, and flattened him down on the seat, and before he could wrench himself loose, Herries and Digby were upon him.

The passenger gasped and yelled, with four sturdy juniors sitting upon him, and struggled furiously, but Blake, quickly recovering himself, grasped his wrists, and held them fast, in spite of his efforts to free them.

"My word," ejaculated Tom Merry, "what a savage beast! Let me get hold of him!"

And he gripped the passenger by the hair, which was really about the only part left of him for anybody to get hold of. He had almost disappeared under the half-dozen juniors. The man, although a strong, powerful fellow, and in a raging temper, was helpless with so many against him, and, as he found that he could not rise, he began to break into a torrent of bad language.

The boys, though they had been considerably hurt in the struggle, had taken it humorously till now; but as the passenger began to swear, Blake's brow darkened.

"Here, shut up that, you blackguard!" he said roughly.

The irate passenger took no notice, and continued, growing worse, if anything, and Blake jammed a handkerchief into his mouth, and stuffed it well in. The fellow gurgled now and gasped, but his flow of eloquence was cut off, and he glared in speechless rage at the juniors.

"Well, this is a nice giddy specimen of a blackguard!" exclaimed Blake, panting. "He's dressed like a decent man, but he could give any hoodlum points in language! No; I'm not going to take that out, you rotter! I've had enough of your talk!"

The man made a terrific effort to hurl the juniors off; but it was in vain. He was pinned down by the weight of numbers, and helpless.

"What are we going to do with him?" said Tom Merry. "If he can't act like a civilised human being, we can't let him loose."

"Gr-r-r-r-r!"
"Oh, stop making that noise!" said Blake. "You make me tired."

"Gr-r-r-r-r!"
"Isn't it like a giddy bulldog? I know; the proper place for him is under the seat, and that's where he's going!"

"Ha, ha, that's a good idea!"
"Gr-r-r-r-r!"

"It's no use your gr-r-r-r-ing," said Blake. "You're going under the seat, my beauty, and you're going to stay there until we get to Rylcombe!"

"Gr-r-r-r-r!"
"Now, all together, chaps, down with him. It doesn't matter if you hurt him a bit."

The juniors gripped the unfortunate passenger, and dragged him off the seat. He went down on the floor of the carriage with a thump. There he made a desperate effort to wrench himself loose, but he was more at a disadvantage than ever, and he could not do it. Blake gave him a shove to get him under the seat.

"Now, under you go, my man," said Tom Merry. "It's no good being obstinate. Get under!"

But the passenger was obstinate. He refused to move.
"Oh, very well!" exclaimed Blake, with a wink to the others. "If he won't go under the seat, we'll jump on him! I'll take his face, and you his neck, Merry. Herries can jump on his chest, and you others on his legs. Now, all together!"

The passenger squirmed under the seat like an eel.
"Ha, ha, ha! I thought that would move him! Now, my fine fellow, you're to stay under there, do you hear, till we get to Rylcombe? Any part of you that comes out will get stamped on!"

The man had got the gag out of his mouth by this time, and he was starting again with the flow of language Blake objected to so much.

"Are you going to shut up," demanded Blake, "or shall I back-heel you?"

The swearing continued, and Blake, who was in deadly earnest, back-heeled, and the passenger received a clump on the chest, which stopped him.

"I'll thrash all of you within an inch of your lives!" he yelled.

"That's all right," said Blake serenely. "You can say what you like, so long as you don't say naughty things."

"You young rascal!"
"Go ahead!"
"I'll smash you when we get out of the train!"

"Keep it up!"
"I'll skin you! I'll flay you!"
"Any more coming on?"
"I'll—I'll—I'll— Oh!"

Words failed the infuriated man, and his flow of threats ceased. They made no impression at all upon the grinning juniors.

"Now he's safely housed," said Blake, "we can have a little peace. What a bad-tempered person! I'm not sure that I sha'n't have him given into charge at Rylcombe for causing us annoyance in the train. He ought not to be allowed out alone."

"Rather not!" said Tom Merry. "The beast has made my ribs ache with that kick he gave me. He's in his proper place now. I say, we came into this carriage to scrag you, you bouncers! It had slipped my mind."

Blake laughed.
"We'd better make it pax, I think, till we get to St. Jim's."

"Right-ho! It's a bargain!"
There was a gasping voice from under the seat.

"Do you boys belong to St. James's College—all of you, I mean, besides Merry?"

"Yes, we do, old son. And what the dickens do you know about Merry?" asked Tom, surprised to find a perfect stranger familiar with his name.

The man did not answer that question.
"You are all boys of St. Jim's? Then I command you to instantly release me from this ridiculous position!"

"Really, I don't see what our being Saints has got to do with it," said Blake. "Anyway, you're booked till we get to Rylcombe."

"You will be severely punished for this outrage."
"Who started the outrage, old hoss? Anyhow, rats!"
"I am going to St. James's College."
"Are you? Then you can save your time; we don't

employ a chucker-out there, my p'ppin, and there's nothing you young fool! I am the new master!"

Blake laughed.
"Why don't you say you're the Prince of Wales, old hoss?"

"I tell you I am the new master!" howled the passenger.
"My name is Keene—Mr. Amos Keene, and I am the new master of the Shell!"

"Bats, and more rats!" said Blake cheerfully.
"Don't you believe me, you young fool!"

"No, I don't—not one side of you!"
"I am the new master of the Shell at St. Jim's!"

"Oh, come off!" said Blake. "What do you take us for?"
"Innocents, and no mistake," said Herries. "Fancy expecting us to believe that a chap who used such language would be a master at St. Jim's!"

"He's off his rocker," agreed Tom Merry. "He might tell us something a little less steep. If he said he was the new school porter, we might swallow it."

"I am the new—"
"Oh, don't keep it up!"
"Master of the—"
"Ring off! Back-pedal!"

"Shell—"
"My dear chap, we know you're romancing, so why don't you shut up?" exclaimed Blake, getting exasperated. "You can't scare us with a tale like that. Now, do be quiet, like a good little boy. I don't want to have to back-heel you again! We shall soon be in Rylcombe, and I'm sure you might be very comfy where you are if you made up your little mind to it."

Rylcombe, indeed, was already in sight.
Through the falling rain the train rushed on, the passenger still under the seat. The boys had not attached the slightest credence to his statement. The train slackened down in the station, and Blake opened the door of the carriage.

"Now you can get out, Mr. Amos Keene, master of the Shell," he chuckled. "Come on, kids! Hallo, there's Mr. Kidd!"

The housemaster of the School House at St. Jim's was walking slowly along the train. He seemed to be looking for somebody, as if he expected to meet someone there. He glanced at the boys as they crowded from the carriage. The juniors raised their caps.

"Hallo!" said the housemaster genially. "Caught in the rain, my lads?"

"Yes," said Blake ruefully. "We trained it home, sir. Got wet."

"You look it. As soon as you get to St. Jim's, undress immediately and go to bed," said Mr. Kidd. "The consequences may be serious if you neglect such a wetting. Leave your bicycles here, and take the hack to the school."

"Yes, sir; but about going to bed—"
"You will do as I tell you," said Mr. Kidd. "I know best, Blake."

"Yes, sir, of course," said Blake submissively.
Mr. Kidd's glance turned to the train again.

"I was expecting to meet a gentleman who was to arrive by this train!" he exclaimed. "Have you seen a—"

He broke off abruptly.
His words had struck a chill of horror to the juniors.

But Mr. Kidd did not observe them. His gaze was fixed upon a figure that emerged from the carriage.

A man with his collar torn out, his necktie dangling, his shirt crumpled, his clothes in disorder, and smothered with dust, his nose smeared with red, his face horribly dirty, and black with fury.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Mr. Kidd. "Who can this be? It is not possible that—"

"It is possible!" howled the terrible-looking object. "I am the new master, sir, whom you have come to meet! I have been the victim, sir, of an outrage."

Blake staggered back weakly against Herries.
"My hat!" he murmured. "Carry me home to die! We've put both feet into it this time, and no mistake!"

CHAPTER 4.

The New Master of the Shell.

MR. KIDD stared at the strange apparition with his eyes nearly starting from his head.

"Goodness gracious!" he gasped. "Is it possible that you are Mr. Keene?"

"I am Mr. Keene!"
The new master of the Shell?" said the housemaster faintly.

"Yes, the new master of the Shell!"
"But—but how—goodness gracious!—how did you come into that dreadful state?"

"I have been the victim of a brutal assault, sir!" exclaimed Mr. Keene furiously. "These boys, sir, attacked me in the railway-carriage like a set of hooligans, and——"

"These boys—Blake—Merry! Impossible!"

"Do you doubt my word, sir?"

"I—I——" The housemaster passed a hand over his brow. Curious passengers were already collecting to gaze with smiling wonder at the figure of the unfortunate Mr. Keene cut.

"This is no place to investigate into this matter," Mr. Kidd broke off abruptly. "Come into the waiting-room, sir, for goodness' sake, and try to get yourself a little more presentable!"

"I insist——"

"Come, come, lose no time! Boys, I shall see you at the school."

Mr. Kidd hurried the new master into the comparative privacy of the waiting-room, there to make some attempt at improving his appearance before taking him to St. Jim's.

The juniors looked at each other in dismay.

"He was telling the truth, after all!" groaned Blake.

"He's really a new master at St. Jim's."

"How were we to know?" exclaimed Tom Merry. "He certainly didn't talk like one."

"My hat, no! What are we going to do?"

"Well, my opinion is, that we're going to get a licking."

"A nice ending to an afternoon out."

"Can't be helped," said Tom, his usual saying when matters looked bad. "Can't be helped, old son. Let's get to the school. Mr. Kidd told us to go to bed like good little boys, and we'll obey orders, rather! If the row is postponed till to-morrow morning, the new master may have got over it a bit."

The boys left the station. The bicycles were left there to be sent on, Blake giving directions for the property of Figgins & Co. to be delivered at the New House at St. Jim's. Then the six juniors crammed themselves into the station hack and rolled off to the school. They saw the Head's carriage waiting outside the station. Mr. Kidd had evidently come in it to meet the new master.

"This is rotten!" said Blake. "We've made an enemy, my pippins, and that chap looks a spiteful beast, too. He'll make us feel it." Then his face broke into a smile. "But it was funny, too, wasn't it?"

And all the juniors laughed. Nothing ever depressed their spirits for long, and, as Blake said, the happening had certainly been comical from one point of view.

The hack rolled in at the gates of St. Jim's, and stopped before the School House. Three youthful figures were ambushed in the porch—the figures of Figgins & Co.

"That's them!" said Figgins, in a vengeful whisper. "I knew they would get hung up by the rain, and would have to get home without the jiggers."

"Keep out of sight," muttered Kerr. "We've got to take them by surprise."

"Right-ho!"

The juniors alighted, and Blake paid the cabby. The six came together into the porch, and then there was a sudden commotion.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Blake. "The enemy! Look out! Sock it to them!"

The luck of Figgins & Co. was out that day. They had expected to have an equal number of foes to deal with, and they suddenly found that the enemy were six to three.

They attacked gallantly, but the School House boys were all over them in a minute.

Study No. 6 and the Terrible Three made common cause, of course, against the New House. They had their little disputes at home, but against the common foe they were as one. Figgins & Co. were hurled forth into the cold, cold rain, and they sat down in the wet, looking the reverse of happy.

Blake kissed his hand to them from the top of the steps.

"Don't you find it wet out there, Figgy?" he asked.

The New House juniors jumped up. For a moment Figgins was inclined to charge up the steps to attack, reckless of odds; but six juniors were waiting for him to do it, and prudence prevailed. He made the signal of retreat, and the three heroes of the New House turned away across the quad towards their own quarters.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake. "Figgy, hear me smile!"

Figgy heard him smile, but would not turn his head, and the three New House juniors disappeared into the rain.

"That was rough on old Figgy," grinned Blake. "It's hard cheese, laying a giddy ambush and falling into it yourself."

The door opened and the juniors went in. They lost no time in obeying the housemaster's instructions, thinking it safer to be in bed when the new master arrived.

"This afternoon hasn't been exactly what you'd call a success," said Blake, as he tucked himself in in the dormitory. "We've saved Figgins & Co. from getting a drenching on their bikes. Still, they must have got pretty wet just now in the quad, and that's some comfort. Hallo, that's the bell downstairs!"

"It's the new master!" growled Herries. "I'm going to sleep. I shouldn't wonder if they come up here to talk to us."

"Ha, ha! That's a good wheeze. I wonder if Tom Merry will have sense enough to do it? We have, anyway. Mind, all three of us are fast asleep if anyone comes in."

"Sound as a bell!" agreed Digby.

The three Fourth-Formers listened intently. They were alone in the big Fourth Form dormitory—dusky now, with the shades of cloudy evening. Some time passed quietly, and then the sound of footsteps was heard.

"Cave!" whispered Blake.

The door opened. Two men came in—Mr. Kidd, the housemaster, and the new master of the Shell, Mr. Amos Keene.

They came straight towards the three occupied beds. Mr. Kidd was looking worried, and the new master spiteful.

"Blake!" said Mr. Kidd.

Blake snored.

"Blake, I want you to explain——"

Snore!

"He is not asleep!" said Mr. Keene savagely. "It is absurd to suppose that he is asleep so early. He is pretending, Mr. Kidd."

The housemaster did not reply. He came closer to Blake's bed.

"Blake, are you asleep?"

Snore!

Mr. Kidd turned to Herries's bedside. Herries appeared to be sleeping the sleep of the just. His face was half buried in the pillow; one eye was visible, and that was closed tightly—so tightly that Mr. Kidd was suspicious.

"Herries, are you asleep?"

Snore!

"Herries, I say——"

Snore!

Mr. Kidd, with a faint smile, turned to Digby's bed; but Dig, anticipating questioning, gave a tremendous snore to start with. It was a good deal too loud to be natural, and Blake smiled involuntarily.

"There, you see," exclaimed Mr. Keene spitefully, "the boy is grinning at us! He is only shamming!"

"What rot!" exclaimed Blake, forgetting himself for a moment. "I was only smiling in my sleep! Oh, Columbus!"

He had given himself away. The two masters turned towards him, but Blake was not beaten yet. His eyes were closed tightly.

"Blake, as you are awake, I wish you to explain——"

Snore!

"Blake, you must tell me——"

Snore!

Mr. Keene's hand was outstretched to shake the boy, but the housemaster put it aside.

"After all, Mr. Keene, to-morrow morning will do as well," he said. "I really do not see where the great hurry is, and you must be in need of refreshment yourself."

Mr. Keene set his teeth hard.

"These boys," he said, "were not the worst. The worst of the boys was the one called Merry—Tom Merry."

"Very well," said Mr. Kidd resignedly; "we will go to the Shell dormitory."

And the two masters left the room. Blake sat up in bed, and grinned genially.

"Kidd's a genial old sort," he exclaimed; "but that new master is a bundle of rubbish, and I can foresee ructions in the School House, my infants. I wonder how he will get on with the Shell? Queer, isn't it, how down he seems to be on Tom Merry? He knew his name in the train; and, as a matter of fact, old Tom wasn't so rough on him as I was. I wonder if he knew anything of Merry before he came to St. Jim's?"

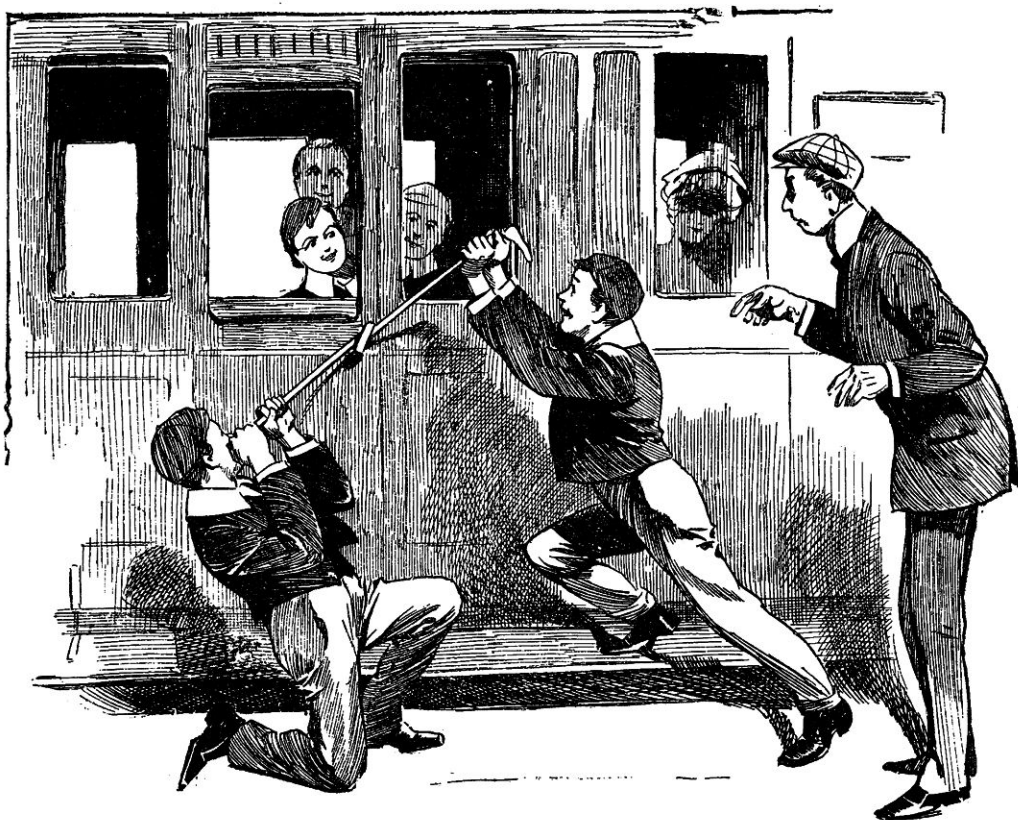
Perhaps there was something in Blake's surmise. The face of the new master was very dark and spiteful when he entered the Shell dormitory, and stopped beside Tom Merry's bed. The Terrible Three had gone promptly to bed; but they were sitting up, talking cricket, as it unfortunately happened, when the masters came in.

"Merry," said Mr. Kidd, "this gentleman is the new master of your Form—Mr. Keene."

Tom bowed as well as he could.

"I am happy to make your acquaintance, sir," he said politely.

Mr. Kidd went on hastily:



"No entrance!" said Blake. "Puppies and bounders not admitted!" (See page 6.)

"Merry, Mr. Keene lays a very serious complaint against you and Manners and Lowther, and also against Blake, Herries, and Digby. Unless you can explain the matter, I shall have no alternative but to send you before the Head."

"I hope not, sir."

"Do you deny," exclaimed Mr. Keene, "that you assaulted me in the most outrageous way in the train coming to Rylcombe, Merry—you and the others?"

"We didn't know you were coming to St. Jim's, sir."

"I told you distinctly that I was a new master coming to this school."

"Yes; but—but—"

"But what, Merry?" said the housemaster. "You had better speak out frankly."

"We didn't believe him, sir," said Tom Merry.

"Merry, what right had you to doubt a gentleman's word?"

"He wasn't talking like a St. Jim's master," said Tom Merry demurely. "We—we thought we were dealing with a hooligan, sir!"

Mr. Keene turned scarlet with rage, and the housemaster coughed.

"I don't understand you, Merry. Do you mean to say that you assaulted Mr. Keene because you did not like the way he talked? Anything more absurd—"

"Oh, no, sir! We shoved him under the seat because he assaulted us. He won't deny that he started the row; though, of course, we're very sorry. And we were a bit rough with him, sir, because of what he said."

"I don't understand you. What did he say?"

"What did he say, Manners?"

"I couldn't repeat it," said Manners. "Lowther will tell you."

"No, I won't!" said Lowther. "I've been properly brought up. Besides, I don't know half the words Mr. Keene used."

The new master changed colour. For the first time it occurred to him that the juniors also had something to complain of. In his rage he had forgotten that.

Mr. Kidd looked from the new master to the boys, and from the boys back again to the new master. Perhaps he guessed a great deal, for his brow grew very stern.

"Merry, you are making a serious allegation. Do you mean to say that Mr. Keene used language unfit for boys to hear?"

"Mr. Keene can tell you best what language he used, sir."

The new master broke in hastily:

"I may have used some angry expressions. It all seems to be a mistake. If Merry assures me that he did not think I was a master at the school—"

"Honour bright, sir! I mean it, I do assure you!"

"Then I am willing to overlook the matter," said Mr. Keene, speaking as if the words were wrenched from him. "I do not wish, if it can be helped, to signalise my coming to this school by the infliction of a punishment. Mr. Kidd, if you are agreeable, I am willing that the matter should be passed over."

The housemaster gave a stiff nod. He had his own thoughts about the matter, and it was pretty plain that his opinion of the new master was not a high one.

"Certainly, Mr. Keene! Boys, the matter ends here. I hope you will try and get on better with your new master in future."

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Kidd walked to the door. The new master of the Shell followed him. He gave Tom Merry a dark look as he followed the housemaster out of the dormitory.

"We're well out of that!" chuckled Tom Merry. "It will be good news for Blake in the morning. I say, chaps, I don't like that chap a little bit; and if we've got to put up with him in the Shell, there will be ructions."

And Tom Merry's predictions proved to be correct.

CHAPTER 5.
Pets—and a Parrot.

THE new master at St. Jim's did not become popular. Boys are sometimes very keen, and the boys of St. Jim's did not take to Mr. Amos Keene, without knowing exactly why they did not like him, but, at the same time, quite, quite sure that they did not like him a little bit.

To the other masters he was very pleasant and suave, and he got along with them pretty well, except perhaps Mr. Kidd, the master of the School House. The housemaster was always polite to Mr. Keene, but he did not like him.

The boys of the Shell disliked him from the top boy to the lowest. And the Fourth Form, whom he took in the English history class, disliked him equally.

Mr. Keene boarded in Mr. Kidd's house, and so the Terrible Three and Study No. 6 saw more of him than their fellow-formers in the New House. And the more they saw of him the less they liked him.

Mr. Keene did not go in for sports of any kind, for one thing. That was the head and the front of his offending in the first place. Then he was spiteful, and would sometimes rap knuckles with a ruler in a way that was exceedingly unpleasant to the recipients of those little favours. Whenever he imposed lines, he never forgot them afterwards, as some of the other masters did; and he imposed more than any other two masters in the school.

His nature was hard and cold, and such a nature was not likely to pull well with boys. It was noted from the first that he had a peculiar dislike for Tom Merry. It could not have been wholly due to the adventure in the train, for on that famous occasion Jack Blake had certainly been more to the fore than Tom Merry.

It seemed almost as if he had known Tom in the past, and had saved up a dislike for him, as it were. Yet, as far as Tom knew, he had never seen the man before he met him in the train to Rylcombe.

There was, in fact, some slight smack of mystery about the new master, which oddly added to his unpopularity. But a couple of days after the arrival of Mr. Amos Keene the boys had other things to think about, more important than the new master.

Tom Merry brought the news to his chums of the Shell, bursting into the study with an excited look. Manners and Lowther were entertaining Study No. 6 to tea, peace having been made between the rivals of the School House for a time.

"Hallo! What's the row?" asked Blake, looking up from his teacup. "Any news?"

"Rather!" said Tom Merry. "You can give me a cup of tea, Manners. 'I say, what do you think? You know the new building they've been rigging up in the rear of the principal's house?"

"Rather!" said six voices together.

And there was a general grin. On a well-known occasion, not long ago, Herr Schneider had been shut up in the cellar under that building, and the juniors were not likely to forget it.

"Well, we wondered what it was for," continued Merry. "I've just found out. The Head himself said so."

"Said what?"

"We are going to be allowed to keep pets in the school now, and that's where they're to be kept. You remember that pets were barred when—"

Blake giggled.

"When Mellish's badger got into Mr. Lathom's bed-room, and nearly scared him out of his wits? Rather! They cleared us all out of them then, and I had to part with my white rabbits. They pretended it wasn't hygienic to keep 'em in the study. Rot!"

"What you don't know, Dig, would fill an encyclopedia," replied Jack Blake. "Let's hear Merry's news. Go ahead, Thomas, old dear!"

"Well, the Head says we shall be allowed to keep pets in the new building. It's been put up for the special purpose. I'm going down to Rylcombe to-morrow to old Salmon's to get some white rats."

"And I'll get my rabbits again," said Blake, with a look of satisfaction. "And—my hat—that parrot that Salmon showed us last week?"

"A parrot!" said Tom Merry. "Good wheeze; you can teach it to talk."

"It knows as much already about talking as I do," replied Blake. "It's a wonderful bird, and it will repeat things you say after you've said 'em. The worst of it is that Salmon wants such a thundering big price for him. We shall have to club together, kids."

"Well, we'll all go down to-morrow afternoon and see the giddy parrot," said Tom Merry. "If it's as good as you say we ought to be able to get some fun out of it."

And on the morrow afternoon, which was Saturday and

a half-holiday, the juniors set off for Rylcombe in high spirits. They reached Salmon's, the naturalist's shop in the village, where the wants of the saints who had a predilection for natural history were usually supplied. It was a little old-fashioned shop crammed with stuffed birds, fishing-tackle and rods, bats and nets, and all kinds of paraphernalia dear to boyish hearts.

Mr. Salmon, a little old-fashioned man, greeted the boys politely. He could see that they had come bent on making purchases.

"What can I do for you to-day, young gentlemen?" he asked, peering at them over his glasses.

"You can show us that giddy parrot," said Blake promptly. "I've brought these chaps to hear him talk."

Mr. Salmon lifted down a round cage and set it on the counter. A sleepy-looking green parrot inside opened his round, red eyes and blinked at the juniors.

"Polly like sugar," said Blake, producing a lump. "Poor old Polly. Like sugar!"

"Blow me tight!" said Polly. "Shiver my topmasts!" So natural was the voice, that for a moment the juniors could hardly believe that the parrot had spoken.

"I say, that bird has belonged to a sailor!" said Tom Merry laughing. "I hope he doesn't use any of the words they use sometimes in the fore-castle?"

"No, he's quite a respectable bird," said Mr. Salmon. "He'll talk to you sometimes like a Dutch uncle, and sometimes for hours he won't talk at all. Then he'll come out with something you've been saying, that you'd never ha' thought he'd noticed. Oh, he's a queer bird, he is! And I'm offering him cheap at the figure I've named, Master Blake."

Blake made a grimace. "Cheap, he may be, Mr. Salmon, but I'm not a giddy millionaire. What do you say, chaps, shall we club up and buy him? He's a funny-looking freak, anyhow."

"He's a funny-looking freak, anyhow."

"Here, Polly, old dear, you're getting personal!" exclaimed Blake. "Where are your manners, you bouncer? But, I say, chaps, he picked that up awfully quick. I think we must have him!"

The juniors, after some discussion, agreed that they must. None of them were very flush at that particular moment, but there were seven of them, and between them they raised the required amount. As the parrot could not be kept in their own quarters, there was no difficulty likely to arise owing to the common ownership of the bird.

Having completed the purchase, the cage was wrapped up, and Blake took possession of it.

"I'll carry him to the school myself," he declared. "You chaps ready?"

They were not ready. They had other purchases to make. It was an hour before they left the old naturalist's shop, and when they went they were laden with all kinds of queer cargo; white mice, and rabbits, canaries, and tortoises, and D'Arcy carried a globe of gold-fish.

Figgins & Co. met them as they came into the quadrangle. "Hallo, here's funny old Figgins!" said Blake. "Hallo, Figgys, how d'ye do? Have you got all that mud cleaned off your bike yet?"

Figgins pretended not to hear the question.

"What have you got there?" he asked.

"Pets, my kid, pets, to be kept in the new little wooden hut," said Blake. "Tom Merry started by keeping a fat German in the cellar, you know, and now we're going to keep a parrot and other things. Like to see Polly?"

"Rather!" said Figgins, interested.

Blake uncovered the cage. Polly blinked in the light and stared at Figgins.

"Measly-looking wreck!" said Figgins disdainfully. "Do you call that a parrot?"

"Yes, and a jolly good one," said Blake wrathfully. "What do you know about parrots? You should hear him talk!"

"Talk!" sniffed Figgins. "I don't believe he can talk."

"He can say all sorts of things!" exclaimed Blake indignantly. "Can't you, Polly? Pretty Polly! Say something to the bouncer!"

Polly remained solemnly silent.

"Talk, Polly," said Blake coaxingly. "Talk, old Polly! Pretty Polly! Polly like sugar!"

The parrot gave a cackle.

"Yah!" said Figgins. "He can't talk for toffee. Rats!"

"Hallo, here's funny old Figgins!"

Blake gasped, and Figgins turned crimson.

"My very words," said Blake. "Can't he talk now?"

"Why, the horrid brute—" began Figgins.

"Ha, ha! Can't he talk! Go on, Polly!"

"Here's funny old Figgins! Here's funny old Figgins! Here's funny old Figgins!"

The parrot, having once started, went on at a great rate,



and the juniors howled with laughter at the expression upon the face of the New House chief.

"Here's funny old Figgins! Here's funny old Figgins! Here's funny old Figgins!"

Blake chuckled as he dropped the cover on the cage again. "That's enough, Polly. Think he can talk now, Figgy?"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Figgins.

A muffled voice came from under the cover.

"Here's funny old Figgins! Here's funny old Figgins! Here's funny old Figgins!"

The School House juniors laughed as they marched on. They entered the little building and began to unload themselves. The parrot was soon the centre of attraction for a crowd of interested juniors.

"We'll teach him all sorts of things," said Blake, with a grin. "Now, Polly, you've got to learn to say, 'Schneider, how you vas?' Do you hear?" "Schneider, how you vas?"

But Polly had become silent, and not a sound would she utter, and at last Blake had to give it up.

"Obstinate bouncer," said Blake. "Never mind, he'll pick it up. We want to fill him up with nice things like that to say, and get Herr Schneider to come and look at him. Chaps, I think that bird will help us to dig up a lot of fun!"

"Yes," said Tom Merry thoughtfully, "and we might teach him some compliments to pay Mr. Keene when— Oh, crumbs!"

He broke off as Mr. Keene entered the room.

"Merry!"

The master of the Shell spoke in the hard, harsh tone he usually used in speaking to Tom Merry. Tom touched his cap.

"Yes, sir."

"I gave you an imposition this morning, I believe," said the master of the Shell.

"Yes, sir. A hundred lines from Virgil, sir," said Tom Merry cheerfully.

"Have you written them out?"

"Not yet, sir."

"Did I not tell you to do so before you left the school?"

"I—I believe you did, sir. I quite forgot."

Mr. Keene smiled sarcastically.

"Then you must learn not to forget, Merry. You will write them out and bring them to me before tea, and another hundred lines as well."

Tom looked dismayed, as well he might. The imposition would fill up every minute that was left of his half-holiday.

"Oh, I say, sir, wouldn't it do if I did them this evening?"

Mr. Keene glared at him.

"It would not do, Merry. When I say a thing I mean it. It would not do. You will bring me the two hundred lines before tea, or I shall double the imposition and report you to the Head."

"I will do them, sir," said Tom quietly, but with a glint in his eyes.

"You had better, Merry. If you forget again the consequences may be serious for you," said Mr. Keene, clicking his teeth.

And he walked out.

"The beast!" said Blake, looking at Tom sympathetically. "What has he got such a down on you, for Tommy?"

"Blessed if I know," said Tom. "He seemed to dislike me from the first. He gave me the impot. this morning for next to nothing. I just whispered to old Manners. Fancy a hundred lines for that! Any other master wouldn't have given twenty."

"Keene is a beast," said Blake.

"Keene's a cad," said Manners.

"Keene's a rotten outsider!" exclaimed Monty Lowther.

"I wish we could get the brute kicked out of St. Jim's."

"I wish we could," said Tom with a sigh. "Well, I suppose I had better cut off and do that impot. I don't want to be reported to the Head."

"I'll come and help you," said Blake generously.

Tom shook his head.

"Thanks, Blake, that's good of you, but it's no go. Old Keene is as sharp as a needle. Monty did some of my lines for me yesterday, and he detected the difference in the handwriting at once, and he made me write out the whole imposition again, what I had done myself as well as what Monty had done."

"The horrid bouncer! What a howling cad!"

"So I'd better cut off. Ta-ta!"

And Tom Merry went away to his study to work through the imposition. It was a long and hard one, and though Tom set to work with a will, the lines seemed endless before him. He commenced with the familiar "Arma virumque cano," and went on slowly through the first book of Virgil, weary of his task before it was half-over. Manners and Lowther came into the study while he was still hard at work.

"Nearly done, Tom?" asked Manners, looking over his shoulder.

Tom grunted.

"Another sixty to do," he replied.

"Then you'll never do it, old kid. The tea-bell goes in ten minutes."

"I shall have to take them in unfinished, then," said Tom.

He finished the line he was doing and rose from his chair.

"There will be a row, I expect."

"Try and soap him over," said Manners. "You mustn't have any more this evening. Blake is going to smuggle the parrot into his study, and he wants us to go there and help to teach him to talk."

"Not much good trying to soap over old Keene," said Tom, and he took up the lines he had written and went to the study of the master of the Shell with them.

Mr. Keene was there, and he looked up sharply as Tom came in, with his black, ferrety-looking eyes, that always had an unpleasant glint in them. He had been reading a letter, and he laid it on the table as Tom entered.

"Well, Merry, have you done your lines?" he asked pleasantly.

"I've done all I could, sir," said Tom respectfully. "I haven't had time to do the whole two hundred. I have been doing them ever since you spoke to me, sir."

"Indeed! It would have been better if you had not forgotten them in the first place, Merry, would it not?"

"Yes, sir."

"You have not finished them, then. Very good! Hold out your hand."

A deep flush came into Tom's face as the master of the Shell picked up a cane from the table. He had had it there all ready, evidently anticipating that the junior could not get the imposition finished in time.

"Hold out your hand, Merry."

"You are going to cane me, sir?"

"Yes, I am going to cane you," snapped Mr. Keene, savagely. "Hold out your hand."

Tom slowly held out his right hand. The cane came down upon it with a slash that made him wince.

"Now, the other."

A second slash made the left palm feel as if it had been burned.

"Now, the right hand again."

Tom put his hands behind him, his eyes sparkling.

"You have no right to cane me like this!" he broke out, passionately. "If you touch me again I will complain to Mr. Kidd."

The master of the Shell stared at him for a moment, as if he could scarcely believe his ears.

"Merry!"

Tom did not speak, but his hands remained behind him, and his clear blue eyes met the master's steadily.

Mr. Keene seemed to be at a loss for a moment. He was inclined to take Tom by the collar and thrash him without mercy, but he felt that it would not do. Punishment was rarely inflicted by the under-masters at St. Jim's; serious cases being dealt with by the Head himself. Mr. Keene had never looked for resistance, but he knew that if his conduct was made known to the house-master, he would find himself in trouble. And the new master was already not on the best of terms with Mr. Kidd.

There was an awkward pause. It was broken by an unlooked-for incident. The study window was open, and the wind at that moment blew the letter Mr. Keene had been reading off the table, and it fluttered to Tom Merry's feet.

Tom stooped to pick it up as a matter of course. The new master muttered something, and sprang forward to snatch it from him. To Tom's amazement, Mr. Keene's face had gone quite pale, and his eyes were startled, almost scared.

His hand knocked against Tom's, and the letter fell to the floor again. It was impossible for Tom to avoid seeing the writing then. It was a thick, black writing, which showed up heavily on the thin, foreign notepaper. It was a hand he knew!

He did not touch the letter again, but allowed Mr. Keene to pick it up. The new master thrust it hastily into his pocket. Then his ferrety eyes searched Tom's face.

Tom's look was startled, amazed.

Mr. Keene saw that he had seen the handwriting of the letter, and that he had recognised it. He bit his lip hard. Then, with a wave of his hand, he dismissed the boy.

Tom, glad enough to escape, hurried from the room, and hastened back to his study, where Lowther and Manners were waiting for him.

"Got off all right?" asked Manners. "Hallo, what's happened?"

Tom's startled look caught his attention at once.

"A giddy mystery," said Tom. "I don't know what to think. Keene was reading a letter when I went in. The wind blew it off the table, and I picked it up—"

"Nothing particular startling about that, that I can see."

"I saw the writing by accident, and I recognised it. It's the writing of my cousin, Philip Phipps, in India."

Manners and Lowther stared at him.
"You're dreaming!" exclaimed Manners. "What could your cousin want to write from India to a master at this school for?"

"I don't know; but I'm certain of what I say."
"Then it looks fishy," said Manners, shaking his head.

"How do you get on with that cousin of yours—chummy?"
"I haven't seen him for years, but we never pulled very well together. He's ten years older than I am, you see, and not a bit like me."

"We said that Keene acted as if he knew something about you before he came to the school," said Manners, thoughtfully. "If he knows your cousin that would account for it. But why he should be down upon you, Tom, is a funny mystery. Hallo, there goes the tea-bell!"

The three hurried down to tea. The matter was certainly mysterious, but for the time they dismissed it. Amazed as they were, they did not dream of the strange developments that were to follow the coming of the new master to St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 6.

A Row in No. 6.

BLAKE came hurriedly into Study No. 6 in the School House. The parrot-cage was in his hand, with a cloth wrapped round it. He set it down upon the table with a gasp of relief.

Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy were awaiting him eagerly. The excitement of their new possession had not passed off yet. In spite of the rule that all the schoolboys' pets were to be kept in the building devoted for that purpose, Blake and his chums saw no reason why they shouldn't have the parrot in the study if they liked.

They only wanted to teach it to talk, and certainly there was no harm in that. Other pets kept by the juniors were not so harmless, and so the general rule was made that no pets should be kept in the studies. But, as Blake said, what was the good of a rule without an exception to it? Study No. 6 were prepared to supply the exception.

"Got it?" said Herries, D'Arcy, and Dig, in one voice.
"Yes," gasped Blake; "but I had a dinkens of a job getting it here. Taggle was nosing around the place, and I had to square him with a bob to let me get away. Horrid, greedy, old blackmailing bounder, that Taggles. Then I met Kildare in the quad, and I was only just able to dodge him, and he called after me. He wondered what I was carrying, but I don't think he tumbled. Then as I came into the School House, there was the Keene beast coming downstairs."

"Oh crumbs! Did he spot you?"
"I don't think so, as I dodged into a study pretty quick. He passed the door, anyway. I was in a mortal dread that Polly would begin to cackle and give me away. But she didn't, bless her little heart!"

"All's well that ends well," said Dig. "Let's see her."
Blake removed the cover from the cage. The green parrot blinked solemnly in the light.

"Now, old lady, begin," said Blake, persuasively, as if the parrot could understand him. "Go hon! Talkez-vous!"
"Hallo, here's the guests!" exclaimed Herries, as the Terrible Three came in.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther entered the study, and Tom closed the door.

"Here's the parrot!" said Blake, cheerfully. "Hallo, what are you listening for, Merry?"

Tom's head was bent towards the door.

"I saw old Keene standing in his doorway," he said. "He was sniffing up and down the corridor like a terrier. Do you think he spotted you bringing the cage in?"

"Oh dear, I hope not! Hang him! Why can't he let good boys like us rest in peace, and not keep on chivving us!" exclaimed Blake. "Lock the door, and if he comes along we'll pretend not to hear him. I've got some food for Polly, and it's about time she was fed."

Tom Merry turned the key, and the juniors surrounded the table upon which the parrot's cage was standing. Blake opened the door of the cage.

"Now, Polly, don't flutter about; you're not going to get out. Talk, you bounder! What do you think I paid through the nose for you for, if you're going to keep as silent as an Egyptian mummy?" exclaimed Blake, rather indignantly.

"Keene's a beast! Keene's a cad! Keene's a rank outsider!"

Blake staggered back in surprise. The parrot winked and

blinked, and whistled and cackled, and the sentences it had picked up in the afternoon, and had doubtlessly repeated many times since, came out in a vigorous stream, in the midst of cackling and whistling.

"Keene's a cad! Keene's a beast! Keene's a rank outsider! Here comes funny old Figgins! Ha, ha, ha! Schneider, how you vas! Keene's a cad! Blow me tight! Shiver my topgallants! Ha, ha! Keene's a cad, Keene's a cad, Keene's a cad!"

Blake stared at the eerie bird in amazement.
"Well, my only tribby hat!" he exclaimed at last. "Did you ever see such a bird! If Keene should come along and hear her talking—"

"Keene's a cad, Keene's a cad, Keene's a cad!"
The word Keene on Blake's lips had started the parrot off again.

"My word!" said D'Arcy, "what a strange bird! Weally, if Mr. Keene should hear that, I am afraid there would be wucksons."

"Ructions!" said Blake, "I should say so. I say, Polly—"

Knock!
The juniors stared at each other in dismay. It was a sharp knock on the locked door, and the handle was tried the next moment.

"Keene!" whispered Blake. "He's spotted us! There's no way to get rid of Polly! My hat!"

"Open this door!"
It was the voice of the master of the Shell.
"The cupboard!" said Dig, hastily. "Shove her in there!"

"If she talks—"
"Pr'aps she won't talk in the dark. Anyway, it's a chance."

Blake shoved the cage into the cupboard in a twinkling. He closed the door, and stood with his back against it.

Knock!
"Open the door, Merry!"
Tom Merry unlocked the door and threw it open. The master of the Shell strode into the study, his brow dark, and his face flushed.

He cast a quick glance round the room, evidently in search of something. The juniors tried to assume expressions of innocence, but the attempt was not very successful.

"How dare you lock the door of this study?" demanded Mr. Keene, in a loud voice. "What mischief was brewing here, that you were so afraid of interruption?"

"We weren't brewing anything, sir," said Blake innocently. "We were going to have a study brew to-night, but the funds ran out."

"Blake, tell me instantly why the door was locked."
"Certainly, sir. We locked the door because—because—"
"Instantly!"

"Because we thought some meddling bounder might come along and shove his long nose into the study, sir," said Blake, meekly.

Mr. Keene turned purple.
"Blake; you dare to apply such expressions to me—to me—"

"Certainly not, sir," said Blake, in surprise. "I said we were afraid some meddling bounder might come along, and shove his long nose into the study. So we were, sir. I wouldn't dream of calling you a meddling bounder, sir. I respect you too much, sir."

Mr. Keene was speechless. His experience of Jack Blake, of St. Jim's, had, as yet, been a short one, and he did not know the chief of Study No. 6 very well yet. He was not prepared for Blake's fathomless coolness and nerve.

"Blake!" he gasped at last. "This impudence—this insolence—"

"Oh, sir!" exclaimed Blake, looking shocked. "I couldn't be impudent to you, sir. We all respect you so much. Don't we, chaps?"

"Rather!" said Herries. "We respect you sir, as much as if—as if you were our grandfather, sir. We do, really."

"We wouldn't call you such a thing as a meddling bounder for worlds!" said Dig. "We are always glad to see you in the study, sir. You make it look quite home-like."

"Wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Weally, deah sir, we respect you so much—geroooh!"

A sudden box on the ears had cut short D'Arcy's expression of respect.

"This impertinence," said Mr. Keene, breathing hard, "will not serve you. I have reason to believe that you have some pet in this study, against the rules."

"A pet, sir," said Blake. "What kind of a pet do you mean, sir? A monkey?"
"I don't think there's a monkey here, sir," said Tom Merry, looking round. "There wasn't before you came in, sir."

Blake could not help giggling.

Mr. Keene's countenance assumed a beautiful purple tint. "I believe there is a parrot in this study," he shouted, slapping the table with his hand. "If there is such a bird here, produce it at once!"

"Is there such a bird here, Dig?" asked Blake.
"I can't see it," replied Digby, looking into the fire-grate.
"Is there a parrot here?" demanded the master of the Shell.

"I can't see one, sir."
Mr. Keene said no more, but began to look round the study. Blake was standing with his back to the cupboard door, and Lowther was beside him. Between them they hid the cupboard, and Mr. Keene did not notice it.

A baffled look came over the master's face. He had been so certain of catching the juniors in an infraction of the rules, and he had failed.

"Very well," he said, clicking his teeth in the unpleasant way he had—"very well—"

He broke off suddenly as a screech came from the cupboard behind Blake and Lowther. It was followed by words, awfully distinct:

"Keene's a cad! Keene's a cad! Keene's a cad!"
The master's face was a study.

"Keene's a beast! Keene's a cad! Keene's a rank outsider! Ha, ha! Keene's a cad!"
Blake gave an inward groan.

"My aunt Lavinia! The fat's in the fire now, with a vengeance!"

He was right. Mr. Keene stood for a few moments speechless, and then he rushed forward and hurled Blake and Lowther away from the cupboard, and wrenched the door open. A green parrot fluttered out into his face and made him stagger backwards.

Blake had forgotten to close the door of the cage in his haste when he thrust it into the cupboard. Polly was out of the cage now, and the opening of the cupboard set her at liberty.

"Ha, ha, ha! Keene's a cad! Keene's a cad! Keene's a cad!"

The words seemed to have some kind of relish for that dreadful parrot, for Polly kept on repeating them almost without a break.

The juniors, dismayed as they were, could not resist the humour of the situation. They were simply doubled up with laughter. The expression upon Amos Keene's face was, as Blake said afterwards, by itself enough to make a mummy chuckle.

"Keene's a cad! Keene's a cad! Keene's a cad!"
"You young rascals," shouted the master of the Shell, too infuriated at that moment to care what he said or did—"you young rascals, I'll break every bone in your bodies! You confounded whelps, I'll half kill you!"

"Nice, pleasant language from a master," murmured Blake. "I wish Mr. Kidd or the Head were here to hear that little lot."

The new master rushed at Blake. The junior dodged round the table. The new master looked dangerous to get at close quarters with just then. Mr. Keene was after him like a shot.

Blake would certainly have been caught had not Tom Merry thoughtfully put out his foot, and caused Mr. Keene to fall and bury his features in the hearthrug. Then, with great promptness, Digby tilted up the table, shooting a heap of books and papers on top of him; and before he could get up, the juniors had crowded out of the study.

"Come on!" gasped Blake. "There'll be a fearful row over this, I expect; but it can't be helped. Buzz along!"
They heard Mr. Keene growling in the study, but did not wait to hear what he said.

"Hallo, there's the parrot!" exclaimed Tom Merry.
The green parrot, the cause of all the trouble, was fluttering along the passage, and it went flapping down the stairs as Tom spoke. Blake made a dash after it.
"I say, we must catch it!" he exclaimed. "Quick, lend us a hand!"

The juniors dashed after the parrot, but Polly seemed to rejoice in her newly-found freedom, and did not intend to relinquish it in a hurry. The juniors chased it down the stairs, the parrot fluttering and dodging as if possessed by the spirit of mischief. An open door in the hall below, from which the light was streaming, attracted Polly, and she went hopping into it, and vanished. Blake gave a gasp of dismay.

"My hat, the horrid thing's gone into Mr. Kidd's study!"
"Scissors!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "I wonder if he's there? He can't be, or we should hear something!"

The juniors leaned over the banisters, listening. It was certain that the housemaster was not in his study. They

could hear the parrot fluttering about and whistling, but there was no sound of anyone moving.

"Kidd's gone out for a bit," muttered Blake. "Come on, we may be able to nab the beastly bird before he comes back."

Rather dubiously the juniors followed Blake's lead. Mr. Kidd was not in his study, but he had probably only stepped out for a few minutes to speak to someone, as his door was left open and the light burning.

But it would never do for the housemaster to find the parrot in his quarters, and so the juniors made the venture. Blake looked into the study. Polly was seated upon the table, gravely squinting at the papers Mr. Kidd had been writing, as if she could understand them.

The parrot looked up and saw Blake. She watched him as he advanced towards the table.

"Pretty Polly!" said Blake, in soothing tones. "Pretty Polly! Nice bird! Polly like sugar?"

His hand was gently outstretched. Once he got within reach a grip would be enough, and he did not care for a peck or two from the beak. But the bird was wary, Blake's hand was within six inches, and he was already congratulating himself upon his success, when the exasperating bird fluttered off the table, and perched on Mr. Kidd's desk. Blake felt inclined to say things, but he possessed his soul in patience.

"Pretty Polly! Nice old Polly! Come on, then. Polly like sugar? Pretty Polly!"

Pretty Polly eyed him gravely as he persuasively approached again. Again he was close at hand, when the parrot suddenly scuttled away, and this time perched on the top of a high bookcase, far out of the junior's reach.

"Oh, you funny beast!" muttered Blake, annoyed. He was on tenterhooks lest the housemaster should return at any moment, and find him in his study.

Polly, as if knowing that she was quite safe now, solemnly blinked at him from the top of the bookcase. Blake tried to frighten her down by "shooing," but the "shoo" had only the effect of making her retreat to the back of the bookcase top, where she was invisible from below.

"Cave!"
It was a sudden, alarmed whisper from the door, and there was a scuttling of feet down the passage. It meant that the housemaster was coming, and Blake nipped out of the study like lightning.

Mr. Kidd came from the hall. He had just been told to speak to Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's. He caught sight of two or three youthful forms vanishing in the distance. He looked after them in some slight surprise, and then walked into his study. He knew that some juniors had been there, and he glanced round the room. Nothing seemed to be out of order. Polly, doubtless scared by Blake's efforts at recapture, was still at the back of the high bookcase, and quite silent and still.

Mr. Kidd sat down at his table again, and took up his pen; but barely had pen touched paper when there came a sharp knock at his door.

"Come in!" said Mr. Kidd resignedly. And he laid down his pen upon the inkstand again. The door was thrown open, and the master of the Shell, red with rage, strode into the room.

CHAPTER 7.

Mr. Keene is Bowled Out.

MR. KIDD started to his feet at the sight of the new master.

"Mr. Keene! What is the matter?"
He stared at the master of the Shell in amazement. Mr. Keene had received a full inkpot in his face when Dig tilted the table upon him, and it had transformed him into something like a Christy minstrel in appearance. He had stopped to clean off some of the ink, but there was still enough left to give him a decidedly mottled and unique appearance.

"Whatever has happened, Mr. Keene?"
"I have a complaint to make, Mr. Kidd!" exclaimed Mr. Keene, in a voice much louder than the housemaster was accustomed to listen to.

Mr. Kidd knitted his brows.
"Very well; but kindly moderate your tones, please."
Mr. Keene clicked his teeth.

"I have to complain of an outrage, and I don't think I need tell you the names of the culprits. They are the worst boys in the school!"

"Indeed! Perhaps you had better tell me their names," said Mr. Kidd quietly. "I do not recognise the boys in question by that description."

"I am speaking of Merry and Blake, and their friends."
"Do you call them the worst boys in the school?"

"Yes; I do, Mr. Kidd."

"Then I must say that I do not agree with you. So far from being the worst boys at St. Jim's, they are boys of a fine and manly character. A propensity to fun—perhaps carried too far—is their only fault, that I am aware of."

Mr. Kidd spoke warmly. He had reason to know and like the character of the juniors of Study No. 6, and Mr. Keene's aspersion got the housemaster's "back up" at once.

"Am I to understand, then, that you decline to listen to my complaint?" exclaimed the master of the Shell. "I warn you, sir, that, in that case, I shall carry it direct to Dr. Holmes, and ask him to deal with the matter as Head of the College."

Mr. Kidd's eyes flashed.

"There is no need of that," he said quietly. "I am perfectly able and willing to deal with questions of discipline connected with my own house. If you have a complaint to make, I am the proper person to hear it, Mr. Keene, and I was ready to do so."

"Then I will speak. To-day I had occasion to cane Merry for failing to do some lines I gave him, and he had the audacity to threaten to complain to you, as if you would back him up in his insubordination."

"I certainly do not understand that."

"I can only tell you what happened," snarled Mr. Keene. "Now, I have been to Study No. 6, because I had reason to believe that the juniors there had brought a pet into the house against the rules laid down by the Head on the subject."

"That was certainly wrong of them, but simply a piece of careless, boyish thoughtlessness," said the housemaster. "Surely that is not all—"

"It is not all. They had taught the parrot to say things about me—to speak my name connected with opprobrious expressions."

Mr. Keene's face grew very grave.

"If that is the case, Mr. Keene, I admit that it is serious."

"Do you doubt my word, sir?"

"No; but I refuse to condemn anybody unheard. Whom do you accuse of teaching the parrot these expressions?"

"I do not know which one it was. I believe they are all concerned in it. Merry and Blake have set themselves against my authority ever since I have been at the school."

"I cannot think so, Mr. Keene."

"But I am certain of it, sir, and I only say what I know. When I heard these offensive expressions from the parrot, I was about to chastise Blake, when Merry tripped me up, and another of them overturned a table and an inkpot upon me."

"You were about to chastise Blake?"

"Yes."

"Why, if you do not know which of the juniors taught the bird these expressions?"

Mr. Keene was nonplussed for a moment.

"I am sure it was Blake and Merry."

The housemaster gave a dry smile.

"I do not see how you can be sure. However, I will send for the juniors in question, and see what they have to say."

Mr. Kidd stopped to the door, called a fag, and sent him 'n quest of Blake and Merry, and then returned to his chair again. In a few minutes Blake and Tom arrived.

Blake glanced up at the bookcase out of the corner of his eye as he entered the study. To his dismay he saw that the parrot had come forward again, and was perched in full view on the ornamental top of the bookcase front.

If either of the masters glanced up in that direction, the parrot could not fail to be seen at once. And from the bird's look, Blake imagined that it was about to begin to talk again. He fervently prayed that it would not.

Mr. Kidd fixed his eyes upon the juniors.

"Blake, Merry, Mr. Keene makes a serious charge against you."

"I am sorry for that, sir," said Blake meekly.

"I am sorry for that, sir," said Tom Merry, in exactly the same tones.

The housemaster frowned slightly.

"Blake did you bring a parrot into Study No. 6, against the rules of the school?"

"Yes, sir."

"You knew you were breaking a rule?"

"Ye-es, sir; but I—I wasn't thinking about the rule at the moment. I was thinking about the parrot, sir."

"You did wrong, Blake, and you will take fifty lines for bringing a pet into the School House without the permission of a master."

"Yes, sir," said Blake, wondering whether he was to escape as cheaply as that.

"But that is not all," said Mr. Kidd sternly. "Is it true that you have taught the bird to use offensive expressions connected with Mr. Keene's name?"

"No, sir," said Blake promptly.

"You deny having done so?"

"Certainly. I was thinking of doing it, but I haven't had time yet, sir. You wanted me to tell you the whole truth, didn't you, sir?" said Blake innocently.

Mr. Kidd coughed.

"Mr. Keene, what expressions do you complain of?"

"Keene's a cad! Keene's a cad! Keene's a cad!"

Blake and Tom Merry exchanged glances of mutual dismay.

The parrot was at it again.

Mr. Kidd started up in amazement, and looked round the study.

"Who spoke? Who said that?"

"It is the parrot," said Mr. Keene viciously. "It is in this room. Now you can judge for yourself how much truth there is in this boy."

"Keene's a cad! Keene's a cad! Keene's a cad!"

Mr. Kidd looked up at the bookcase and caught sight of the parrot. His brow became very stern.

"Blake, is it possible that you have spoken falsely? How did the bird learn that extremely disrespectful sentence if it was not taught?"

"It's an awfully quick bird to learn, sir," said Blake ruefully. "That's why we bought it. It repeats anything it has heard said only once or twice, sir."

"Keene's a boast! Keene's a cad! Keene's a rank outsider! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blake! Then you admit having used those expressions, even if you did not teach them to the parrot?" exclaimed the housemaster.

"I suppose I must, sir. I spoke hastily. Mr. Keene was very rough on Tom Merry, and we all said the same. Of course, we didn't know that the beastly bird would go and say it all over again to Mr. Keene."

"I dare say you did not," said the housemaster drily. "You have spoken of your master in the most disrespectful and reprehensible way. I expect you to apologise to him immediately, before we go any further into this matter."

"I am very sorry, sir," said Blake. "I wouldn't have said you were a cad, sir, if I had known Polly was picking it up to repeat to you."

Mr. Kidd tried not to smile.

"That is not an apology, Blake. You must say that you are sorry you used such expressions."

"I am sorry I used such expressions," said Blake resignedly.

"I expect you to say the same to Mr. Keene, Merry."

"Certainly, sir. I am sorry Blake used such expressions, sir," said Tom Merry innocently.

Blake grinned.

"You must speak for yourself, Merry," said Mr. Kidd severely. "I did not call you here to trifle with me."

"Yes, sir. I beg to apologise, Mr. Keene, from my heart, that expressions were used, by Blake or myself, or anybody else in the United Kingdom, which have caused you any kind or variety of pain, sir," said Tom Merry demurely.

Mr. Keene seemed about to choke as he received this peculiar apology. Mr. Kidd went on hurriedly.

"That will do, Merry. You will take two hundred lines of Virgil apiece for having used these expressions. Now to come to a still more serious matter. One of you tripped Mr. Keene up in Study No. 6, and some ink was spilled upon him. That amounts to an assault upon a master—a very serious thing, which can only be dealt with by the Head himself. What have you to say, before I report you for a flogging?"

"Keene's a cad! Keene's a cad! Keene's a cad!"

Mr. Kidd took no notice of the parrot, though it made Mr. Keene grind his teeth.

"It was I who tripped Mr. Keene up, sir," said Tom Merry diffidently. "I thought he was going to half-kill Blake, sir."

"To—what? What an expression! How could you possibly have thought such an utterly ridiculous thing?"

"He said so, sir."

"Mr. Keene said so! Be careful what you say, Merry. I cannot believe that Mr. Keene said that he would half-kill Blake."

"It is an absolute lie!" exclaimed the master of the Shell—"not a mistake, mind you, nor an equivocation, but an absolute lie!"

"You did not say what Merry alleges?"

"I said nothing of the kind."

"Now, Merry," began Mr. Kidd, with a harassed look.

"It is true, sir. He said he would half-kill us, so when I saw him going for Blake like a maniac, of course I had to stop him."

"Keene's a cad! Keene's a cad! You confounded whelps, I'll half-kill you! Ha, ha, Schneider, how you vas! You confounded whelps, I'll half-kill you!"



The words came in a torrent from the parrot, amid chuckles and screams and whistling.

"I'll half-kill you! Ha, ha! Keene's a cad!" Mr. Kidd's brow grew as black as night, while the master of the Shell turned quite pale.

"You hear that, Mr. Keene?" cried the housemaster. "They taught the bird to say that, to back up their tale!" exclaimed Mr. Keene. "Surely you do not believe—"

"You confounded whelps! Keene's a cad! Keene's a cad!" "Did they teach it to imitate your voice also, Mr. Keene?" cried the housemaster contemptuously. "I cannot have the slightest doubt that those coarse, brutal expressions were uttered by you."

"I assure you—"

"It is of no use assuring me that black is white, and white black. The parrot is repeating your words, as it repeated those of Blake."

"I did not—"

"You allowed yourself to lose your temper, and to get into a state of fury only fit for a drunken hooligan!" exclaimed Mr. Kidd, forgetting the presence of the boys, in his righteous anger and indignation. "You complain that the juniors spoke of you disrespectfully. How can you expect to retain their respect when you act in a way that can only excite their contempt?"

"Mr. Kidd, you are insulting! Remember, we are not alone!"

The housemaster bit his lip. He had, indeed, let himself go more than was judicious in the presence of Lower Form boys. But the expression upon the faces of Blake and Tom was wooden. They appeared to have heard nothing, though, of course, they had heard everything.

The housemaster breathed hard for a moment. "Mr. Keene," he said quietly, "I refuse to punish these

boys. If you choose for the matter to go further, it may go before the Head, but in that case I warn you that those brutal expressions you made use of will be repeated to Dr. Holmes. You can take your choice. Boys, I excuse you from the lines already imposed. The matter ends here. You may go."

"Thank you, sir," said Blake and Tom together, joyfully enough.

Blake looked up at the parrot on the bookcase.

"May I take Polly, sir?"

"No," said Mr. Kidd. "That bird is hardly a fit pet for you, considering everything, and I think the dealer had better be induced to take it back. Whatever you lose on the transaction, I will make up to you. Now you may go."

The juniors quitted the study. Mr. Keene made as if to follow them, but the housemaster's voice broke in sharply.

"Remain a few minutes, please, Mr. Keene. I have something to say to you."

Blake closed the door.

"Something pleasant, I expect," he chuckled. "Didn't Kidd slang him a treat, Tommy? And didn't he deserve it? My hat! I'm sorry to part with Polly, but a giddy bird like that really isn't quite safe about the house. We've got out of this nicely; we owe Polly something, and no mistake!"

"Good old Polly!" grinned Tom. "She got us out of a scrape! Ha, ha! Keene won't let this affair go before the Head. Depend upon it, we shan't hear of the matter again."

And Tom was right. They did not hear of it again. But the School House juniors had not yet seen the end of their troubles with the New Master!

THE END.

(Another Tale dealing with Tom Merry next Thursday.)

NEXT THURSDAY'S COVER is reproduced on the Third Page of this Cover.



READ
THIS
FIRST

Stormpoint

A School Tale. By MAURICE MERRIMAN.

Rex Allingham, Jim Fisher, and Bob Bouncer are three well-known chums at Stormpoint College. Hal Trehearn, the captain of the school, favours them; but they are bullied by Jardon and Symes, two Fifth-Formers. One day the three chums borrow cooking utensils from Jardon's study, and have a good "feed" in the school stove-hole. They are surprised by the two Fifth-Formers and Parker the school porter, and a general fight ensues. Dr. Andale, the Head, stops it, and has Rex put into the school hospital because of a very bad cut on the head. However, he soon recovers, and in return for his injury and other spiteful tricks that Jardon and Symes played on the three chums, Bob one night pours a strange lotion into the bullies' water-jug. As Bob does not want to be found out, the next morning he pours the water that Jardon and Symes have used out of the dormitory window. Unfortunately, Parker is underneath, and he gives vent to an awful yell. (Now go on with the story.)

A Change of Complexion.

"I say, you chaps!" exclaimed Bob, rushing back to the dormitory, where Rex and Jim were just finishing dressing. "I've made a bad mistake! In pouring away the circumstantial evidence, I have been and slopped it all over Porker's head."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jim. "Let's come and see him turn black. How long does it take?"

"Well, I should say the strength I've got it, it wouldn't take many minutes. It all depends on the light, you know; but if you want to see him change colour, I think we ought to hurry up. Come on!"

Porker was raving as they passed his lodge, "Dear me, Porker, what is the matter?" inquired Rex, looking very meek and innocent.

"Matter be hung!" roared Porker. "That villain Jardon has ordered his jug on the top of my head! Bust him! I'll

report him! I'll teach him to play his tricks on me! Where the thunder is my towel? I'm drenched!"

"Perhaps it was an accident," suggested Rex.

"Yus. I know them sort of accidents, done on purpose! They are the sort of accidents you has occasionally. But I'll be level with him!"

"He's a beast of a fellow, isn't he?"

"A perfect varmint! All the same, he ain't noar so bad as you. Now clear hout!"

"Are you sure you have rubbed your noddle dry? It would be a sad thing for you to catch cold!"

"You'll catch it hot if you don't go, so I tell you!"

Here a change came over the chums' countenances. It was caused by the gradual change that was coming over Porker's gown. He was turning a dark grey, which gradually grew darker.

"Why, what's all this on the towel?" he growled.

ORDER NOW. "THE MASTER'S SECRET." NEXT THURSDAY.

* **STORMPOINT** (continued). *

"Perhaps your face wasn't quite clean," suggested Rex. "I have often noticed it look rather smudgy."

"It can't be that," said Bob; "'cos I know Porker washes his face once a week, whether it requires it or not."

"Bust you! I wash my face quite as often as you do yourn! Why, it's hink!"

"Perhaps you have sent some over on the table," suggested Rex. "You see, the damp towel would be sure to sop it up. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jim.

The unfortunate man was gradually becoming as black as the towel, at which he was gazing in wonder, for its colour was deepening before his eyes.

"That's hink right enough, Porker," said Rex. "Ha, ha, ha! Oh, my eyes!"

"A change came o'er the spirit of my dream," quoted Bob. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, my eye!" roared Jim. "Look here, Porker, I don't see what you want to look as black at me as that. I haven't done anything!"

"Who's looking black at you, you varmint? What can be the matter with the towel?"

"It is evidently seriously ill, and is dyeing," said Rex. "You can see the deepening dye if you watch it closely. Ha, ha, ha! You appear to be dyeing, too, Porker. You are not well!"

"Porker," growled Bob, "I think you've got the swine fever. You will have to be isolated."

"What are you guffawing at, you silly little brutes?" roared Porker.

"We were smiling at you, Porker. You look as though you were being hanged," said Rex. "Whatever have you done to yourself?"

"Why, my hands is growing black!" hooted Porker.

"So is your face, dear boy," said Rex. "You've got Asiatic cholera; that's what's the matter with you. Don't go near him, Bob. You will catch it, and it hurts."

"I think it is foot-and-mouth disease," said Jim.

"It makes him look blue, whatever it is," observed Rex. "Oh, thump! Ha, ha, ha! He's changing into a well-bred nigger, only more so."

Porker rushed to the glass; then he uttered a howl that caused the chums to bolt, because they felt certain it would bring a master on the scene. As a matter of fact, it brought Mr. Salmon; but the convulsed comrades were watching from the opposite door now, and they were comfortably concealed behind it. They could not hear what Mr. Salmon was saying, because of Porker's howls. He was raving at the top of his voice, nor would he be comforted. He appeared to think that he was seriously ill, and he would not let Mr. Salmon get near him to make an examination, while he was in such a fearfully excited state that he could give no coherent account of what had happened.

"Let's scoot!" murmured Bob. "This is no place for us!"

Rex had an idea that the hall would be no place for them, either, but they went there, and they had scarcely entered it when Jardon and Symes came rushing in.

They were both jet black, and their appearance created roars of laughter, which even the doctor, who was present, could not stop. The boys were simply convulsed.

"Silence! Silence!" shouted Dr. Andale; but his voice was drowned by another terrific roar. Jardon and Symes were leaping about in their impotent fury, and they were raving at the top of their voices; but it was utterly impossible to hear what they were saying, and several minutes elapsed

before there was anything like silence prevailing in the great Hall.

"Be calm, Jardon!" cried the doctor. "This insensate fury is childish. Who has played you this trick?"

"Rex Allingham, of course! Look at my face! Look at my hands! Oh, fury!"

"Silence! How dare you rave at me like that?"

"I'll—! I won't be answerable for what I do to the little fiend!"

"Absurd! You will be made to answer for your actions! How did the boy do it?"

"How should I know?"

"Don't you dare to answer me like that, boy! You must know how he did it!"

"I tell you I don't!"

"Then how do you know it was Rex Allingham?"

"I saw him in my room."

"Did you do it, Allingham?"

"No, sir."

"Did he see you in his room?"

"No, sir."

"How do you know that?"

"Because I haven't been in his room, sir."

"You pledge me your word of honour that you are speaking the truth?"

"Yes, sir. I haven't been into his study or his bed-room for upwards of a week; and then, as the Irishman would say, I didn't go into his bed-room. I only went into his study to shove some cinders into his jam-pot by way of a little retaliation."

"It's a lie! You were in my bed-room last night; and you have put something into my water-jug!"

"You are mistaken. I did nothing of the sort!"

"Then you know who did it!"

"You see, sir," exclaimed Rex, "he asserts that he saw me! Now, I assert that that is a deliberate falsehood. He never saw me for the simplest of all reasons—I was not there. Next, he asserts that I know who played him some trick. Now, no one is compelled to convict himself; and, even if I do know who played him some trick, I do not think you would compel me to reveal the boy's name. But he is only guessing, because he does not know that I am aware of the boy's name, nor does he know that I am ever aware a trick has been played on him. You will recollect that a similar trick was played on me last night. Now, is it not more likely that the boy who played that trick played this one?"

"I think not, most decidedly," answered the doctor. "The faces of both Jardon and Symes are blackened. Do you know what has turned your faces black, boys?"

"Of course not! What does it matter? Just look at the shameful state we are in! I'll have a terrible vengeance for this. I must say, sir, that I believe you know the young villains did it as well as I do!"

"You are almost convicting yourself of the trick that was played on Rex Allingham last night," said Dr. Andale.

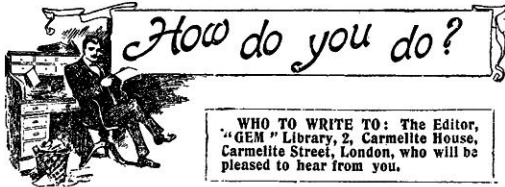
"Yet you asserted that you knew nothing about it. If you will play tricks on boys, you must expect retaliation. Go and wash your faces."

"Wash our faces!" howled Jardon. "We have been washing them for the last half-hour!"

"Do you know what it is, Allingham?"

"If you please, sir, I would prefer giving no information concerning the matter. You see, if I answer one question it is natural that he would ask me others, and as he has wrongfully accused me of having played the little trick—why, I don't see that I ought to be compelled to say anything that might incriminate another boy. No boy was forced to answer questions when my face was blackened last night, so I hope I shall be treated in the same way. At the same time, if you order me to answer your questions, I will, of course, do so, sir."

(To be continued in next Thursday's "Gem," Order it in advance.)



WHO TO WRITE TO: The Editor, "GEM" Library, 2, Carmelite House, Carmelite Street, London, who will be pleased to hear from you.

"THE MASTER'S SECRET."

The tales of Tom Merry and his Chums have proved so wonderfully popular that

NEXT THURSDAY'S ISSUE

will contain another of these stories by Martin Clifford, under the title of

"THE MASTER'S SECRET."

I shall be glad if you will drop me a postcard criticism of our stories, and also comply with my request on the next page

THE EDITOR.

Note from the Editor to the Purchaser of this Issue.

PLEASE HAND THIS PAGE TO A FRIEND.

NEXT THURSDAY!

TOM MERRY!



A BIFF FOR AUGUSTUS!

OUR NEXT COVER!

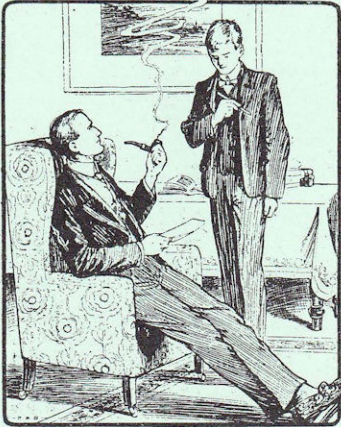
Note from the Editor to Present and Future Readers.

**DO ME THE FAVOUR
OF ORDERING YOUR
IN ADVANCE "GEM" IN ADVANCE
LIBRARY**

No. 19. "The Boys' Friend" 3d. Library.

NELSON LEE'S PUPIL.

*A
Complete
Detective
Story.*



3^D

ORDER NOW!

THE TWO NEW VOLUMES

of the

'BOYS' FRIEND' LIBRARY.



A Detective
Story.



A School
Tale.

PRICE

3^D

EACH.

*(Handsome Coloured
Covers.)*

No. 20. "The Boys' Friend" 3d. Library.

Three British Boys

By MAURICE
MERRIMAN.

