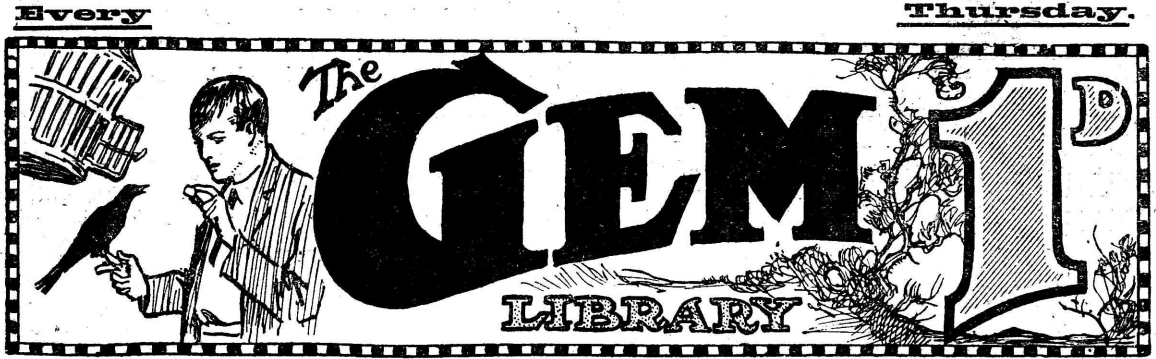
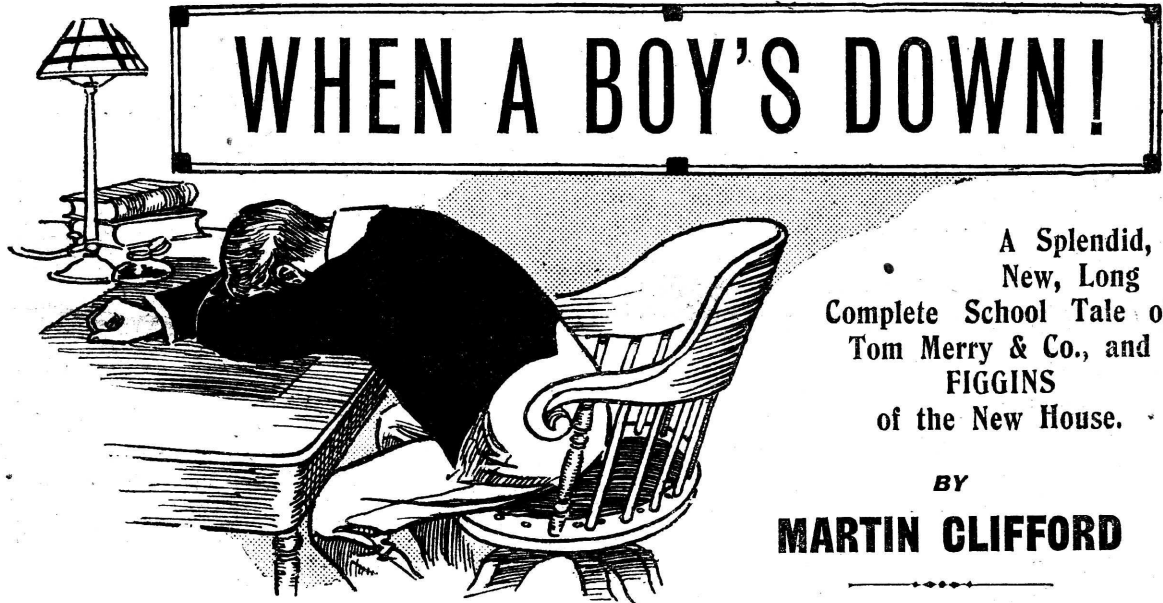


NEXT THURSDAY'S GRAND CHRISTMAS DOUBLE NUMBER WILL CONTAIN:
"THE GHOST OF ST. JIM'S." | "CAUGHT RED-HANDED." | "BILL HIGGINS' FOREIGN SPIES."
 A Double-Length Tale of Tom Merry & Co. | A New, Complete Tale of Frank Kingston, Detective. | **"DEEP SEA GOLD." JOKES, TRICKS, ETC., ETC.**



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WHEN A BOY'S DOWN!

A Splendid,
 New, Long
 Complete School Tale of
 Tom Merry & Co., and
FIGGINS
 of the New House.

BY
MARTIN CLIFFORD

CHAPTER 1.
Something Wrong.

FIGGINS had been feeling downhearted that afternoon—feeling “rotten,” as he would have described it himself. There was no special reason why he should feel “rotten” that afternoon; but he did. The news from home had not been very pleasant in the last letters he had received, but for some days now he had had no letter, and no news is generally considered to be good news.

But Figgins certainly did feel rotten.

It was a bright, sunny day in early winter, with a keen breeze blowing which should have enlivened and invigorated anybody. It whistled in the branches of the old elms in the quadrangle of St. Jim's, and rang round the old red chimney-pots of the School House.

School was over for the morning, and the fellows were punting a ball about in the quad., and over by the gym. a crowd of School House and New House juniors were slanging one another excitedly. But Figgins did not join in as usual. He was feeling so decidedly rotten that he preferred to walk off by himself with his hands in his pockets and a moody frown upon his brow.

Perhaps it was because Kerr was away. Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn—known in the New House as Figgins & Co.—were generally inseparable. But Kerr had gone up to Scotland on leave to see a sick relation, and Figgins missed him very much. That was partly the cause of the rottenness that Figgy's spirits suffered from; but he felt that there was something in the air, as it were; it was so very unusual for him to be downcast.

Fatty Wynn sighted Figgins as he walked lonely in the old

quad., and bore down upon him. Fatty Wynn's face was glowing with health and with the anticipation of a feed at Mrs. Taggles's tuckshop.

“Coming, Figgy?” he inquired breathlessly.

Figgins started out of a moody reverie.

“Where?” he asked.

“Dame Taggles's. She's got in a fresh lot of steak-and-kidney pies,” said Fatty Wynn. “I can tell you they're ripping!”

Figgins shook his head.

“But they are,” said Fatty Wynn. “I've had some, and I'm going to have some more. Come along, Figgy.”

“You'll spoil your dinner.”

Fatty Wynn snorted.

“Oh, I've not got a delicate appetite!” he said. “Besides, dinner's more than half an hour yet, and I always get a bit hungrier than usual about this time of the year. Come on, Figgy!”

“No, thanks!”

“Steak-and-kidney pies,” said Fatty Wynn persuasively. “Better come.”

“No!”

“Ill?” asked Fatty Wynn sympathetically. To the fat Fourth-Former of the New House it seemed as if illness could be the only valid excuse for declining to partake of Mrs. Taggles's steak-and-kidney pies.

Figgins laughed.

“No, Fatty. Buzz off and have some yourself.”

“I'm jolly well going to,” said Fatty Wynn.

And he “buzzed” off.

Figgins walked on, his hands thrust deep into his pockets

Next Thursday:

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and his brows wrinkled. As a rule, Figgins was too popular to be left much alone. But just now nobody seemed to be anxious for his society. He was relieved, but it surprised him a little. When a fellow is feeling downhearted it is easy for him to detect a slight in every careless action or careless word.

A group of fellows were standing near the door of the New House, craning over one another's shoulders to read a newspaper which French, of the Shell, was holding up; but they did not call to Figgins to come and give his opinion on what they were reading.

He had no doubt that they were scanning the League results, and Figgins was a great authority upon League football. He was one of the finest junior players at St Jim's, and he took an intense interest in the game outside the school, and followed the fortunes of the big clubs with unflinching assiduity. There was not likely to be anything else in the paper to interest the juniors, and they could all see Figgins strolling not far from them, yet they did not call to him or make a sign. Figgins wondered,

"My hat!"

"It can't be true!"

"There it is in black and white."

"Great Scott!"

"Who'd have thought it?"

Figgins heard the muttered exclamations of the juniors crowded round the paper French was holding. He paused and looked at them, and Jimson, in the crowd, met his eye. Jimson coloured and dropped his eyes at once. He muttered something to French, and French folded up the newspaper, put it under his arm, and the whole crowd walked away.

Figgins viewed that proceeding in dumb astonishment.

He stood just where he was, rooted to the ground for a minute or two. Never had he been slighted like that before, by fellows of his own House, too! What did it mean? What could it mean?

Figgins was inclined to follow the juniors and demand an explanation. But pride stood in the way, and he did not. He turned away with a deeper cloud upon his brow, and tramped off in the direction of the School House. It occurred to him that he was tired of his own company, and would like to speak to somebody.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther—the Terrible Three of the Shell—were standing in a group on the steps of the School House. Monty Lowther held an open newspaper in his hand, and all three were reading it.

As Figgins came in sight Tom Merry made a gesture, and the Terrible Three went quickly into the House.

Figgins halted.

It was the cut direct!

What did it mean?

True, the New House juniors were generally at war with the School House juniors, and, as a rule, when they met, there were slangings, if not punchings of noses. Figgins would not have been surprised if the Terrible Three had rushed upon him and bumped him in the quad. But to turn their backs upon him in this manner! What could it mean?

His face flushed crimson, and then turned pale.

He walked slowly away. He looked round for Blake, of the Fourth, and caught sight of him presently, standing by the gym., with D'Arcy and Herries and Digby, his chums. Reilly and Brooke, of the Fourth, were with them. The six juniors were reading a paper together—just as Tom Merry & Co. had been, and the New House juniors too.

"Bai Jove!" Figgins heard D'Arcy's voice as he came up. "Bai Jove! It's imposs.!"

"But it's printed here," said Blake.

"Yaas, but it's imposs.!"

"It must be true," said Digby. "It's rotten enough, but they couldn't put it in the paper if it wasn't true."

"That's so," said Herries.

"Faith, and ye're right," said Reilly. "It's thrue enough."

And Brooke nodded.

"Weally, deah boys, it's too howwid, you know."

"Mind! Here's Figgins!" whispered Brooke.

Blake crushed the paper together, and thrust it under his Eton jacket. He turned a flushed face towards Figgins as he came up. Figgins had caught sight of the paper. It was the "Evening News" of the previous evening.

"What's the news?" asked Figgins.

"News!" repeated Blake vaguely.

"Yes."

Brooke and Reilly went into the gym., Herries walked away quietly in the direction of the kennels, Digby and D'Arcy exchanged a glance and strolled off together. Blake's look showed that he would gladly have accompanied them; but he could not very well, for Figgins was facing him, waiting for a reply.

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"Oh, the news!" said Blake.

"Yes. Can I see the paper?"

"This paper?"

"Yes."

"Oh, this is—is yesterday's paper!" said Blake feebly.

"You—you don't want to see this paper, Figgys."

Figgins's eyes glinted.

"Won't you let me see it?" he asked.

"You—you see—"

"What's in it?"

"Oh, there's—there's footer news, you know!" said Blake haltingly. "Manchester United look like having a good chance for the Cup-tie, and—and—"

"You weren't looking at the footer news—"

"Well, no; but—but it's very interesting, you know, and—"

"Will you give me that paper?"

"Well, you see—"

"That's enough, Jack Blake."

Figgins turned on his heel and walked away. Blake opened his lips as if to speak, and closed them again. There was deep, deep sympathy in Blake's look as his eyes rested on the departing form of Figgins, and he murmured: "Poor old Figgys."

CHAPTER 2.

The Mystery.

WHAT did it all mean?

Figgins could not make it out.

If Kerr had been there—Kerr with his clear, incisive insight—the mystery would have been thrashed out in a minute—Figgins felt sure of that. But Kerr was far away, and Figgins felt as if his right hand were gone. Consulting Fatty Wynn was not likely to be of much use. Fatty Wynn could keep goal with anybody, and could give a masterly opinion upon the merits of a steak-and-kidney pie or a meringue. Fatty Wynn could make toffee, and he could cook bacon and eggs in a way that would have tempted an epicure, but he would have been hopelessly puzzled by the strange turn events had taken.

What did it mean?

What did fellows mean by turning their backs on Figgins, and by refusing him so simple a request as that he had made to Blake.

Figgins was a simple, straightforward fellow. He never could guess a puzzle in his life, and this was a greater puzzle than any conundrum.

He went into the New House, and found Thompson, of the Shell, lounging just inside, jamming his feet occasionally upon the stove to keep them warm. Thompson glanced at him, and went down the passage with a hurried stride. Figgins was usually on very friendly terms with Thompson, of the Shell.

"Thompson!" he shouted.

The Shell fellow did not seem to hear.

"Thompson!"

Thompson was still deaf.

Figgins was growing exasperated. He dashed after Thompson, caught him by the shoulder, and swung him round.

"Hallo!" said Thompson.

"What's the matter with you?" roared Figgins.

"Matter!" repeated Thompson.

"Yes."

"Nothing."

"Why didn't you answer me?"

"Answer you!"

"Don't chatter my words over like a giddy parrot! Are you mad?"

"No."

"Are all the chaps dotty? They're all playing the same silly game!"

"Are they?"

"What have you got up against me?"

"N-nothing."

"Then why didn't you speak?"

"I—I'm sorry—"

"What are you sorry about?"

"Nothing."

"You utter ass!"

"I—I think I heard French calling me," muttered Thompson, looking round hastily.

"French is out in the quad, and you didn't think anything of the sort," said Figgins grimly. "You are going to explain yourself, Thompson, or you are going to take a licking. Which are you going to do?"

"I—I—"

"Will you explain?"

"I—I—"



"Collah him, deah boys!" howled Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, laying hold of the stranger's whiskers with both hands and tugging with all his strength. A roar of pain broke from the stranger, and Tom Merry and Blake were upon him in a moment. (See chapter 13.)

"Then put up your hands!" shouted Figgins, now thoroughly exasperated. "Put them up, I say! I'm going to lick you!"

Thompson backed away. Thompson, of the Shell, was generally supposed to have plenty of pluck; but he backed away, and it was very evident that he was anxious to avoid a fight. Figgins followed him up, hitting out. Figgins's right came home on Thompson's nose, and there was a spurt of red.

"Ow!" gasped Thompson.

"Put up your hands, you cad!"

"I—I won't!"

Figgins dropped his own hands in sheer amazement. Angry as he was, he could not hit a fellow who would not defend himself. He could not make Thompson out at all. If anybody had punched Figgins's nose, there would have been trouble. But Thompson did not seem to mind, and he was

dabbing the blood away on his handkerchief, without the least sign of resentment, or of a wish to revenge the affront.

Had the whole school gone suddenly mad?

It seemed so to Figgins.

Thompson walked away, still dabbing his nose with the handkerchief. Figgins made no further effort to stop him. He could only stare.

Figgins, with his brain almost in a whirl, went out of the House, and crossed over to the tuck-shop. He wanted to see Fatty Wynn. His fat chum, at all events, would speak to him, even if it was only on the subject of steak-and-kidney pies and jam tarts.

Figgins passed two or three fellows he was very friendly with on his way to the tuck-shop, and they acted in the same strange way that he was growing accustomed to now—they walked away as he came near.

He found Fatty Wynn in the tuck-shop. The fat Fourth-

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Former had evidently forgotten that dinner-time was drawing nigh. He was busily engaged upon his second steak-and-kidney pie, and he was enjoying it. It was disappearing very fast.

"Hallo, Fatty!" said Figgins, a little gruffly.

Fatty Wynn looked up with a beaming face.

"Hallo, Figgy! Changed your mind, eh?"

"No."

"They are really ripping," said Wynn. "More ripping than I thought, Figgy. Try some of this, and if you like it, have one for yourself! Do!"

"Oh, rats!"

Fatty Wynn started a little, and blinked at Figgins.

"I say, Figgy! Nothing wrong, is there?"

Figgins was silent. Whatever had affected the rest of St. Jim's, evidently had not affected Fatty Wynn; he was the same as usual.

"Bad news from home?" asked Fatty.

"No."

"You haven't heard from your governor?"

"No."

"Bank going on all right?"

"I suppose so."

"Oh, I thought it might be that!" said Fatty Wynn, with relief. "You told me your father wrote that affairs were in a shaky state, and that you must prepare yourself in case anything went wrong."

"Oh, yes!" said Figgins. "He wanted me to prepare for it in case I had to leave St. Jim's. I suppose I should have to if the bank failed, and that's what the pater was afraid of. It's been hard hit over the war with Italy and Turkey. It had big engagements in Turkey, and they're mucked up or something. I don't rightly catch on to it, but I suppose the poor old governor must be anxious; he wouldn't have written to me like that if he hadn't been. But I haven't heard from him since, so I suppose things are going on all right at the bank."

"Jolly glad to hear it!" said Fatty. "If you got done in like that, Figgy, we should raise a subscription to pay your fees here. We couldn't let you go."

Figgins's face softened a little.

"I know you'd always stick to a chum, Fatty," he said.

"Of course, I would," said Fatty Wynn. "You never find a Welshman go back on a chum. Why, it wouldn't be St. Jim's without you, Figgy! But if it isn't that, what's the matter? You are looking like a bear with a sore head!"

"Something's up."

"Hungry?"

"No, you ass!"

"Stony?" asked Fatty Wynn.

"No."

"Then what on earth's the matter?"

"I don't know"

Fatty Wynn stopped eating, and stared at Figgins.

"Look here, you're ill, Figgy!" he said. "Better have some of this steak-and-kidney pie, and you'll feel better."

"Oh, rats!"

"I'll pick out some lovely bits of kidney for you, and—" Fatty Wynn broke off. Figgins had walked out of the tuck-shop. "Hold on, Figgins," called out Fatty Wynn anxiously; "I'm coming with you! Just wait a tick till I've finished this pie!"

But Figgins was gone.

CHAPTER 3.

Friends in Council.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY, the ornament of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, was looking deeply distressed.

The School House fellows had had their dinner, and turned out of the dining-hall, and most of them were collected in little groups, talking. And to judge by their excited looks, there was a topic of unusual interest on the tapis.

Arthur Augustus paused in the hall, polished his eyeglass, and jammed it into his eye; and then took it out and polished it again. When D'Arcy of the Fourth was agitated, he never could get his eyeglass to fit comfortably. And at the present moment the aristocratic features of D'Arcy of the Fourth showed signs of the greatest mental distress.

Blake and Herries and Digby were looking cloudy enough, too. They gathered in the passage gloomily.

"Bai Jove, deah boys! This is wotten!" said D'Arcy.

Jack Blake nodded without speaking.

"Beastly!" said D'Arcy.

"I'm sorry for Figgins," Digby remarked.

"I suppose we are all sorry for Figgins," said Blake.

Levison of the Fourth came up to the group with Mellish. The two cads of the School House were grinning.

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"You've seen the paper, of course, you chaps?" asked Levison.

"Yes," said Blake shortly.

"Seen the news?"

"Yes."

"Bit startling, isn't it?" said Mellish. "I should never have thought it of Figgins."

Blake turned on him angrily.

"Figgins! What has Figgins done?"

"Oh, nothing! But his father—"

"Figgy can't help what his father does."

"Wathah not."

Levison laughed sneeringly.

"Oh, members of the same family are sure to be birds of a feather," he said. "And I, for one, don't care about associating with the son of a thief."

"You've never associated with Figgins," said Blake disdainfully. "He wouldn't associate with you. You're not decent enough."

"My father's not a thief, anyway," sneered Levison.

"And I don't believe Figgy's is, either," said Blake. "I can't help thinking there's some mistake about the matter."

"The police don't think so."

Blake was silent.

"Oh, it's pretty clear," said Mellish, "and I think Figgins ought to leave the school! He must have the decency to get out, after this."

"And I shall be glad enough to see the last of the cocky cad," said Levison.

Smack!

The hand of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came across Levison's face with a ringing report like a pistol-shot. Levison staggered back against the wall, with a gasp. Arthur Augustus's eyeglass dropped to the end of its cord, and the swell of St. Jim's pushed back his cuffs, and squared up to Levison in a most warlike way.

"Put up your hands, deah boy—I mean, you cad!" exclaimed D'Arcy.

"Ow!"

"I am goin' to give you a feahful thwashin', you unspeakable wottah!"

"You dummy—"

"I have had many wows with Figgins," said D'Arcy, looking round; "but I wufeso to allow anybody to speak diswepctfully of a chap I wufpect vevy highly! Put up your hands, you uttah wottah!"

"Hear, hear!" said Kangaroo, of the Shell.

"Go it, Gussy!"

"Now then, Levison—"

Levison backed away. D'Arcy, of the Fourth, had many dandified ways, but he was a great fighting-man when his blood was up, and Levison did not care for the encounter.

"Come on, you wottah!"

"Look here —"

"Come on!" shouted D'Arcy, prancing up to his enemy, and tapping him on the nose. "I insist upon your puttin' up your wotten hands!"

"Cave!" muttered Blake.

Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, came out of his study just then—in time to save Levison. D'Arcy dropped his hands. He jammed his monocle into his eyes, and gave the cad of the Fourth a most disdainful look through it, and walked away with his chums.

"Come into the studay, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus. "We want to think this beastly mattah ovah."

The chums of the Fourth went into Study No. 6. Tom Merry & Co. were coming down the passage, and D'Arcy signed to them.

"Tom Mewwy, deah boy—"

"Hallo!" said Tom Merry glumly. "This is rotten news for poor old Figgy, isn't it?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The Terrible Three came into the study. The Fourth-Formers and the Shell fellows looked equally gloomy.

"It's rotten," said Monty Lowther. "Does Figgins know yet?"

"I think not," said Blake. "He wanted to see my paper."

"You didn't let him?"

"No."

"There aren't many papers in the house," Tom Merry remarked thoughtfully, "and, of course, Figgins doesn't know what there is to see in it. But—but he will have to know about it before long, you chaps."

"Yaas, wathah! That's what I was thinkin', deah boys, and I wanted to ask your opinion. We ought to bweak it gently to Figgins, before he sees it in the papah. It will be a feahful shock to him."

"Yes, rather."

"Besides, if some cad like Levison, or Mellish, or Crooke breaks the news, Figgy will get it worse than from us," Tom

Merry remarked thoughtfully. "Suppose we break it to him?"

He looked round at the juniors. They all nodded.

"It's the best thing to be done," said Manners.

"I suppose so," Blake remarked slowly.

"Then the question is, who's going to tell him?" asked Tom Merry.

There was silence.

It was easy enough to agree that it was the best thing to be done, but it was not so easy to decide who should have the unpleasant task. Nobody was anxious to take it on.

"I suppose I had better tell him," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy at last, slowly. "As a fellow of tact and judgment, I suppose I shall be able to do it better than you chaps."

"Rats!" said Blake.

"If you want to bweak it to him, Blake——"

"I don't!" said Blake hastily.

"Or you, Tom Mewwy?"

"No fear!"

"Then I will do it. It appears to be necessary for somebody to throw himself into the bweach," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity; "and it is the pwopah place for a D'Arcy to lead. I will bweak it gently to Figgins."

"Hush!"

There was a tap at the door, and it opened quickly, and a flushed face looked into the study. It was the face of Figgins, of the New House.

Silence fell upon the chums of the School House. D'Arcy cleared his throat with a little cough. Figgins came in, and closed the door behind him, and then faced the School House fellows, with his eyes glinting and his teeth clenched.

CHAPTER 4.

Breaking It Gently.

FIGGINS did not speak for a moment.

He looked at the chums of the School House, and they looked at him, and there was a dead silence in Study No. 6.

It was Figgins who broke it.

"I've come here to speak to you chaps," he said.

"Yaas, deah boy!"

"I want to know what the matter is!" said Figgins savagely. "I'm getting fed up with it all, and the sooner you understand it the better!"

"A-a-are you weally, deah boy?"

"There's something up," said Figgins. "The fellows all seem to have something up against me, and I can't get at what it is. They close up like oysters when I ask. I'm not going to stand it!"

The School House fellows were silent.

"You turned your back on me, Tom Merry——"

"I didn't, Figgy."

"What did you mean, then?"

"I—I didn't want to speak to you just then."

"Why not?"

The Shell fellow was silent.

"You refused to show me your paper, Blake."

"Ye-es."

"Why?"

"Well, you see——"

Figgins gritted his teeth.

"Yes, I see," he said—"I see that there's a plot of some kind on, and the only fellow not in it seems to be Fatty Wynn. I'm fed up!"

"Weally, Figgins——"

"And you've got to explain yourselves, or——"

"Or what?" demanded Blake, a little nettled.

"Or I shall fight everybody in this study in turn!" said Figgins, pushing back his cuffs. "And I'll begin with you, Blake!"

"Look here, Figgins——"

"Are you going to explain?"

"You see——"

"Then put your fists up!" said Figgins, advancing upon Blake.

Jack Blake put his hands behind him.

"I'm not going to fight you, Figgy, old man," he said. "Goodness knows I feel too sorry for you to do that, whatever you may say."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Figgins glared.

"How dare you feel sorry for me?" he exclaimed passionately. "What do you mean? Are you all dotty? What has happened, to make you all sorry for me, I'd like to know."

Blake did not speak.

"Will you tell me?" shouted Figgins.

Blake groaned.

"I—I can't!" he said. "It's too rotten! Figgy, old man——"

"Don't call me Figgy, old man!" exclaimed Figgins. "I tell you, I'm fed up with all this. Some of you tell me what the matter is."

Every eye was turned on Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. He had undertaken to explain the matter to Figgins, and to break it gently to the New House junior. But the words seemed to stick in D'Arcy's throat. He polished his eye-glasses several times, and jammed it into his eye, and looked distressfully at Figgins.

"I—I—I'm goin' to explain, Figgay, deah boy!" he said.

Figgins turned upon him.

"Explain, then, quick!"

"You see, Figgins——"

"Well?"

"We're all sowwy——"

"Yes?"

"Feahfully sowwy——"

"Sorry for what?" yelled Figgins.

"For—for it, you know."

"For what?"

"What's happened?"

"What has happened?"

"That's what I'm comin' to, deah boy! I'm bweakin' it gently," D'Arcy explained. "I'm goin' to bweak it gently to you, deah boy!"

"Buck up, Gussy!" muttered Tom Merry.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Tell him, for goodness' sake, if you're going to!"

"Pway leave it to me, Tom Mewwy! You can twust a fellow of tact and judgment to do this thing in a pwopah way," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a great deal of dignity. "Pway do not intewwupt me!"

"But——"

"You bweak the thwead of my thoughts when you intewwupt me, Tom Mewwy: Figgay, deah boy, I'm sowwy to tell you——"

"Will you come to the point?" said Figgins huskily.

"Yaas, wathah! I'm just comin' to it."

"It's about your father, Figgy," said Blake.

"Weally, Blake——"

Figgins staggered a little.

"My father?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Is he—is he ill?"

"No."

Figgins breathed again.

"What is it, then?" he muttered. "What do you mean? What are you all looking at me like that for?" Figgins's voice rose almost to a shriek. "Tell me—what is it?"

"Figgay, deah boy, I'll tell you——"

"Quick!"

"Your—your fathah——"

"Well?"

"He—he's been—been——"

"Yes, yes?"

"Awwested——"

Figgins gave a hoarse cry.

"My father arrested?"

"Yaas."

"Impossible!"

"It's twue," said D'Arcy sadly. "That's what was in the papah, deah boy. That's why we couldn't let you see it, you see."

Figgins caught at the edge of the table for support. His knees seemed to have become suddenly weak.

"It's impossible!" he said, and his voice was a husky

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whisper. "I know it's impossible! This is some hoax—some horrible jape! Hang you—"

"Figgay, deah boy—"

"What is he arrested for, then?" shouted Figgins.

"For wobbin' the bank—"

Crash!

Full in D'Arcy's face came Figgins's crashing fist, and the swell of St. Jim's reeled backwards, and fell heavily to the floor.

CHAPTER 5.

Figgins Knows:

TOM MERRY rushed forward.

He caught Figgins and dragged him back, and Blake and Lowther lent a hand. D'Arcy lay dazed on the floor, and there was blood on his face. Figgins struggled furiously in the grasp of the juniors.

"Let me get at him!" he shrieked. "I'll teach him to call my father a thief! Let me get at the cad!"

"Figgins—"

"Hang you! Let me go!"

"Figgay—"

D'Arcy sat up, rubbing his nose dazedly. He mopped the flowing stream of red with a cambric handkerchief.

"Pway don't be wuff with him, deah boys," he said. "He's natuwallly excited, undah the circs. I don't mind his biffin' me on the nose. He can do it again, if it will welieve his feelin's, poor chap!"

The words came straight from D'Arcy's heart. They had more effect upon Figgins than any amount of explanation could have had. He ceased struggling.

"Let me go!" he muttered. "I—I won't hit out again. I was a fool to lose my temper! But—but it's lies—lies—lies! You've been taken in."

"It's in the paper!" said Blake miserably.

"What paper?"

"The evening paper last night. We had it this morning."

"It's not true!"

"You'd better read it for yourself, Figgay."

Figgins was leaning more heavily upon the table. The sudden fury was passed; he was white and sick and miserable. A dreadful conviction was forcing itself into his mind that there was something in this. Other fellows knew it, as well as Tom Merry & Co. He remembered French and the other fellows with the newspaper; he remembered the peculiar conduct of Thompson of the Shell. He remembered seeing a derisive grin on Levison's face as he came into the School House. True or not, it was evidently in the paper; and how could it be stated in the paper if it was not true?

"Give me the paper," muttered Figgins.

Blake handed it to him without a word.

Figgins opened it with fingers that were trembling now.

Blake pointed to the column containing the late news.

Figgins looked at it, and his brain seemed to turn round, and the clear print to dance and whirl before his eyes.

Tom Merry's strong arm was flung round his shoulders to hold him. For a moment Figgins did not know where he was. Then he collected himself.

His starting eyes ran down the column again.

There it was, in bitter, cruel type!

"The senior partner in the Bristol and Somerset Bank was arrested this morning at his residence at Clifton. The junior partner, Mr. Egbert Frynne, who absconded yesterday, has not yet been traced. The police believe, however, that they have a clue to his whereabouts, and vigorous search is being made for him. It is concluded that the greater part of the missing funds are in his possession. Mr. Figgins declares that he was taken utterly by surprise by his partner's flight, and that he had himself no intention of attempting to leave the country."

The paper fluttered to the floor.

"Is that all?" asked Figgins.

"There was something in this morning's paper," said Tom Merry. "I was looking for footer news when I saw it, in the Head's 'Daily Mail.' Your father is accused directly of having appropriated the bank's funds, and of knowing where the missing money is hidden. He is going to be sent for trial."

"Oh, heavens!"

D'Arcy had risen to his feet. He stood dabbing his nose, and saying nothing. Figgins looked at him with glassy eyes.

"I—I'm sorry, D'Arcy," he muttered. "I—I shouldn't have hit out like that. I—I hope I haven't hurt you much."

"That's all wight, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus.

"It's nothin'—nothin' at all."

"I—I— Of course, this isn't true!" said Figgins, pointing.

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ing to the paper on the floor. "I suppose Frynne is a thief, as he's bolted; but—but my father is innocent!"

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy," said D'Arcy feebly.

Figgins compressed his lips.

"You don't think so?" he said.

The juniors were silent.

"After all, why should you think so?" said Figgins.

"You don't know him—you don't know how good and kind he is—how thoroughly decent he is. But I know, and I know that he never did this."

"I hope you're wight, Figgay, old man."

"I know I'm right," said Figgins. "I suppose it's all up with me at St. Jim's, if the pater's money's gone. But my father is innocent."

He turned towards the door.

Tom Merry made a movement.

"Figgins, old man, is there anything we can do?"

"Thanks, no."

"You—you don't imagine now that we were down upon you because of this?" said Tom Merry. "I—I didn't want to tell you what I'd seen in the paper, you know."

"Same here," said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah."

Figgins nodded.

"I understand!" he said.

"I wish there were something we could do to help you somehow, Figgins, old chap," said Monty Lowther.

"I wish there were," said Figgins, with a miserable grin.

"But—but there isn't! Thank you all the same."

He quitted the study.

Tom Merry & Co. looked at one another with glum faces.

All of them felt keenly the terrible blow that had fallen upon Figgins.

"How utterly rotten it is!" said Blake at last.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It's possible that Figgay's pater is innocent," said Manners.

"I wish I could think so, for Figgay's sake," said Tom Merry slowly. "But it seems that a heap of money is gone, and that it was almost impossible for one partner to make away with it without the knowledge of the other. If Figgay's father is innocent, then he has been frightfully careless; I should think."

"Yaas, that is vewy pwobably the case, deah boys. Still, there's a vewy gweat diffewence between bein' careless and bein' a thief. I wish—"

"Well, what do you wish?" asked Digby, as the swell of St. Jim's took off his eyeglass and polished it with a very thoughtful air.

"I wish I were not bound by the twammels of bein' at school just at pwesent," said the elegant junior, slowly and meditatively. "You know that I have shown a remarkable aptitude as an amateur detective, deah boys."

"Oh, rats!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Don't talk out of the back of your neck, Gussy, at a time like this," said Blake peevishly.

"I wogard that as a wudiculous expwession, Blake. I wathah think that if I were free to act, I could twack down that wascal Fwynne, and make him hand ovah the cash he has taken, and pewwaps it would pwove to be all that was missin'. Then Figgay's patah would be cleared. It's wathah a wippin' ideah, isn't it?"

"Yes; I can see you hunting down a chap when all the police in the country can't find him," Blake asserted sarcastically.

"It's a mattah of tact and aptitude—"

"Oh, rats!"

"I wefuse to allow—"

"I wish we could help Figgins," said Tom Merry. "But I suppose we can't! Let's get out."

The juniors left the study, and went downstairs. On the steps of the School House, Mellish and Levison were standing, looking after the tall figure of the New House junior, and grinning maliciously. There had never been any love lost between Figgins and the cads of the Fourth, and Mellish and Levison thought that the time had come to score over the fellow they feared and disliked. Any thought of dealing generously with a fellow who was "down," never even entered their minds.

"Look out for your pockets!" yelled Mellish, as some School House fellows passed Figgins.

And Mellish burst into a cackle.

Figgins stopped for a moment, as if thunderstruck.

Tom Merry's eyes blazed.

With two bounds he reached Levison, and the cad of the Fourth was whirled round in the Shell fellow's grasp.

"Here, let go!" yelled Levison.

"You utter cad! You worm!"

"I say—"

Tom Merry hurled the cad of the Fourth away from him. Levison rolled down the steps, and landed in a puddle left by recent rain. There was a splash, and a wild yell from Levison.

"Yaroo!"

Mellish went whirling down the next moment. He crashed into Levison, and rolled over him, and plunged his face in the muddy puddle.

Tom Merry looked down at them with flaming face.

"Now come up again, you cads, if you like!" he shouted. But they did not come up.

Figgins glanced round, and then walked on towards the New House. Levison did not call after him again.

CHAPTER 6. Under a Cloud.

F IGGINS entered his own House.

He was walking like a fellow in a dream.

The juniors who saw him could see that he had, now, heard the news.

Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, stopped him in the passage, laying a kindly hand on his shoulder. Monteith, of the Sixth, as a rule, was not specially kind-hearted, but he felt sorry for Figgins now.

"I'm sorry for the news about your father, Figgins," he said. "I can see that you've heard it now. I hope it will turn out all right."

"Thank you, Monteith," said Figgins dully.

He went up the stairs.

The bell was ringing now for dinner, but Figgins hardly heard it, and did not notice it. He wanted to be alone—to think—or try to think. He went into his study, and threw himself into a chair.

He could not think. Try as he would, his thoughts would not run in order. A picture was before his eyes—the picture of his father's kind face, darkened with care and shame—lined with suffering—in a prison cell!

His father arrested—in prison!

It seemed impossible!

But it was true! That much was true, at all events. The charge was not true; but his father had been arrested upon that charge, and was in prison, waiting to take his trial on the charge of purloining the money entrusted to his care. It seemed too horrible.

To go at once to his father—that was Figgins's thought. But that was impossible. He would not be allowed to see him. And surely his father must communicate with him soon!

He could understand the old gentleman's hesitation to send him such news. And Figgins had no mother.

Fatty Wynn came into the study. Fatty Wynn's plump face was very serious, and Figgins could see that he, too, had heard the news.

"Dinner's ready, Figgy, old man," he said.

"I don't want any dinner."

"Ratty sent me to look for you."

"Ask him to excuse me, Fatty."

Fatty Wynn hesitated.

"You know what he is, Figgy—the old bouncer! He will be down on you. Look here, you ought to eat something, you know. It's no good missing meals—no good ever come of that, Figgy. Come and have your dinner."

"I can't—it would choke me."

"But you must keep up your strength."

"I'm all right."

"Look here, Figgy, you'd better show up at dinner. The fellows may think that your pater's guilty if you seem too much knocked over."

Figgins jumped up.

"I'll come, Fatty!"

Many fellows in the New House dining-hall glanced at Figgins as he came in with Fatty Wynn. Others, a little more tactful and delicate, were careful not to look at him. Figgins did not see any of them. He went straight to his place, and sat down.

Mr. Ratcliff glanced at him. The New Housemaster was not a kind man.

"You are late, Figgins," he said.

"I am sorry, sir."

"Take fifty lines."

"Yes, sir."

Figgins almost laughed. Lines were not much to him now.

Fatty Wynn sat beside Figgins, and he saw to it that Figgins's plate was not left un replenished. But Figgins ate very little. As he had said, he felt as if every morsel he swallowed would choke him.

Fatty Wynn could not understand that state of mind at all. He thought that if he were in trouble, he would think first of all of fortifying himself with a square meal. But fellows took things in different ways, Fatty Wynn sadly reflected. It troubled him very much to see Figgins eat so little.

Mr. Ratcliff spoke to Figgins again after dinner. He signed to the junior to stop when the others were going out, and Figgins paused.

"The Head wishes to see you in his study, Figgins, at half-past one," he said.

"Yes, sir."

"It is in reference to the news in the paper this morning," said the Housemaster. "I presume that you have seen it?"

"Yes, sir."

Figgins was very glad that he had seen it. If it had remained to Mr. Ratcliff to break the news, it would not have been broken gently or tactfully. Mr. Ratcliff had never liked the sturdy, independent hero of the Fourth.

"Very well," said Mr. Ratcliff. "It is shocking news, of course. I suppose that it will lead to your leaving St. Jim's."

"If my father is ruined, sir, I suppose I shall have to leave," said Figgins quietly.

Mr. Ratcliff coughed.

"I did not refer to that. You can hardly remain at the school with the shadow of such a disgrace hanging over you. It would not be—er—well for the school."

Figgins flushed.

"I hope that my father's innocence will be proved, sir."

"Ahem! I have nothing to say as to that," said Mr. Ratcliff. "If Mr. Figgins is—er—innocent, I certainly hope that his innocence will be proved. Otherwise, I trust that you and he will see the propriety of your leaving the college very shortly."

"That's for the Head to decide, sir."

Mr. Ratcliff bit his lip.

"Very well, Figgins, you may go."

And Figgins went.

It had been hard for Figgins to speak respectfully to Mr. Ratcliff, but he had succeeded. He had thought that even the sour, bad-tempered master of the New House might have been kind for once, when a fellow was down on his luck. But Mr. Ratcliff evidently did not think so.

Figgins went out with his lips set. Fatty Wynn was waiting in the passage.

"What did Ratty want?" he asked.

"I'm to see the Head."

"Oh!"

"He had to have a dig at me, too," said Figgins bitterly.

"I suppose I shall have to get used to that."

Fatty Wynn nodded, but did not speak. He would have suggested a visit to the tuckshop by way of comforting Figgins, and would have stood jam-tarts galore, but he felt that it would be of no use.

Figgins tapped at the door of the Head's study at half-past one. Dr. Holmes's deep voice bade him enter.

"Of course, you know why I have sent for you, Figgins?" he said. "You know that your father is in trouble?"

"Yes, sir."

"I was very, very sorry to hear it, Figgins."

"Thank you, sir!"

"I—I hope that—that matters will turn out less serious than they—er—look at present," said the Head. "Meanwhile, pray remember that I—and I think all others here—feel only sympathy towards you, and do not dream of visiting your father's fault upon you."

"My father is innocent, sir!"

Dr. Holmes coughed.

"Ahem! I am glad to see that you have faith in your parent, Figgins," he said. "It is quite an—admirable trait in your character. I sincerely hope that your faith may prove to be well-founded. Meanwhile—ahem—I have heard from your father. He tells me that if I wish, under

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the circumstances, I may send you away from the school at once, and that your uncle, Major Figgins, will take charge of you. But your uncle is at present abroad, having gone to Nice for the winter. He would take it as a favour, however, if I allowed you to remain at the school for the present. Now, of course, I shall be very glad to allow you to remain; and as far as you are concerned, Figgins, everything will go on as before. That is what I have sent for you to tell you."

"Thank you, sir!"
Figgins hesitated.
"You wish to say something to me, my lad?" said Dr. Holmes kindly.
"Yes, sir. Would it be possible for me to see my father?"
The doctor shook his head.
"I fear that would be impossible, Figgins."

"Very well, sir."
"Pray try your hardest to bear this with fortitude, my dear lad," said the Head. "It is a terrible trial for you; but it is at such times that strength of character and a firm faith in a Higher Power should be shown."

And Figgins quitted the Head's study.
The kindness of the old doctor had made a deep impression upon Figgins. It was very refreshing after his interview with his own Housemaster. And Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, stopped him on his way out to speak a kind word; and so did Kildare, of the Sixth, the captain of St. Jim's.

But there were others. Mellish and Levison and Crooke, and two or three others of the same kidney, met Figgins outside the Head's house, and gave him sneering looks. They did not speak, but their looks were enough.

Figgins paused, clenching his hands, but it was futile to enter into a row with the cads of the School House. He tramped on in silence, and a mocking chuckle followed him. He did not turn his head.

CHAPTER 7.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy has a Brilliant Idea.

"F WYNNNE!"
"Eh?"
"Fwynne!"
"What are you babbling about, Gussy?" asked Jack Blake crossly.

Blake was feeling cross that afternoon. Afternoon school was over, and the early winter evening had set in. The chums of Study No. 6 were in the junior common-room in the School House, and Blake was tenderly nursing a black eye.

Perhaps a black eye helped to make Blake cross. He had been in three fights that day. It was all on account of Figgins.

Blake had determined that nobody in the School House, at all events, should say a word against Figgins. Hence the trio of encounters. Crooke, of the Shell, had been the first victim. Crooke was rather a big fellow for Blake to tackle, but he had refused Tom Merry's offer to take Crooke on instead of him. Crooke had made a sneering remark about Figgins, and Blake had licked him for it. It had been quite a terrific encounter, and Blake was hard hit; but Crooke was hopelessly licked. Mellish had come next. He had said something about swindlers having their sons at decent schools, and that was quite enough. Mellish had been an easier victim than Crooke. Blake had simply wiped up the passage with him, and Mellish was now in his study nursing his injuries. The third victim was Levison. Levison had emerged from the conflict a wreck. But Blake was showing signs of wear and tear by this time.

"Fwynne!" repeated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, for the third time.

"Look here, you ass——"
"I wefuse to be called an ass, Blake."
"Well, fathead, then."
"I wegard that expression as equally oppwobwious! Weally, Blake——"
"Oh, my eye!" muttered Blake.

Arthur Augustus's expression softened at once.
"I am sowsy you are ewoked in that way, Blake. Pway leave the next wotah to me! I should have been vewy pleased to give Levison a feahful thwashin'."
"And I could have handled Crooke," said Herries.
"Fwynne!"

"Gussy's got that name on the brain," Digby remarked. "Is that a vocal exercise you are going through, Gussy, like peaches-prunes-prisms?"

"No, it is not, Dig. I am thinkin'. You know the name of Mr. Figgins's abscondin' partner is Fwynne."
"Frynne," said Blake. "I know it is. I've heard the name before somewhere."

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"Yaas, wathah!"
"So have I, when I come to think of it," said Digby thoughtfully.

"That is what I am comin' to," said Arthur Augustus quietly. "If that man Fwynne could be found, and the money was found on him——"

"If!"
"It's the only possible chance of clearin' Figgy's patah."
"I dare say it is."
"I am wathah inclined to think, on weflection, that Figgy seniah is innocent, deah boys."

"I wish I could think so," growled Blake.
"You see, Figgyay himself is so awf'ly decent," D'Arcy explained. "The Good Book tells us that you do not gather gwapes fwom thorns, or figs fwom thistles. Therefore, as Figgy is so jolly decent, the pwobability is that his patah is decent, too."

"It doesn't follow," said Blake, "but it's very likely. I'm sure I hope that it will turn out that he's all right."

"If Fwynne could be found——"
"The police are looking for him," said Digby. "Every port in the kingdom is being watched, and he can't possibly get out of England without being caught, I should say."

"Pewwaps he is not twyin' to."
"Oh, it's certain!" said Blake. "The police know he's trying to get out of the country. He's got a lot of money with him, too, and he knows he would never be safe in England."

D'Arcy nodded.
"Yaas, the police think so," he assented.
"But you know better, pchaps?" Herries suggested sarcastically.

"I wegard that as vewy pwob., Hewwies. The police haven't vewy much bwains, you know, while I have weally a gift as an amateur detective."

"Rats!"
"I have no time to thwash you now, Hewwies," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity, "but I will thank you not to make those oppwobwious wemarks. I have been thinkin'. That fellow Fwynne must be a deep beggah, don't you think?"

"I suppose so."
"And he can wead the papahs."
"Well?"
"Then he knows as well as we do that the police believe he is twyin' to leave the country, and that the ports are bein' watched for him."
"Yes?"

"Then if he is a deep beggah, you know, he won't twy to leave. He'll bide his time for a bit, and wait till the coast is cleah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus triumphantly.

"I shouldn't wonder," said Blake, without enthusiasm. "Are you thinking of making a walking tour through Great Britain, looking for him?"

"Weally, Blake——"
"Or advertisin' for him in the 'Daily Mail'?" asked Digby.

"Pway don't be an ass, Digby! My ideah is that if he is deep, he will go inland instead of towards the ports, and will lie low in some quiet place till the police are tired of lookin' for him."

"Quite likely!"
"Now I'm comin' to the point."
"Time you did!" growled Blake.
"Weally, Blake, do be patient, deah boy. I have been thinkin' this out vewy carefully, and I had a hundwed lines in class this aftahnoon for thinkin' of this instead of Woman history. The name of Fwynne is quite familiar to me."

"So it is to me," said Blake, "though I can't remember where I've heard it, unless Figgins may have mentioned it as the name of his father's partner in the bank."

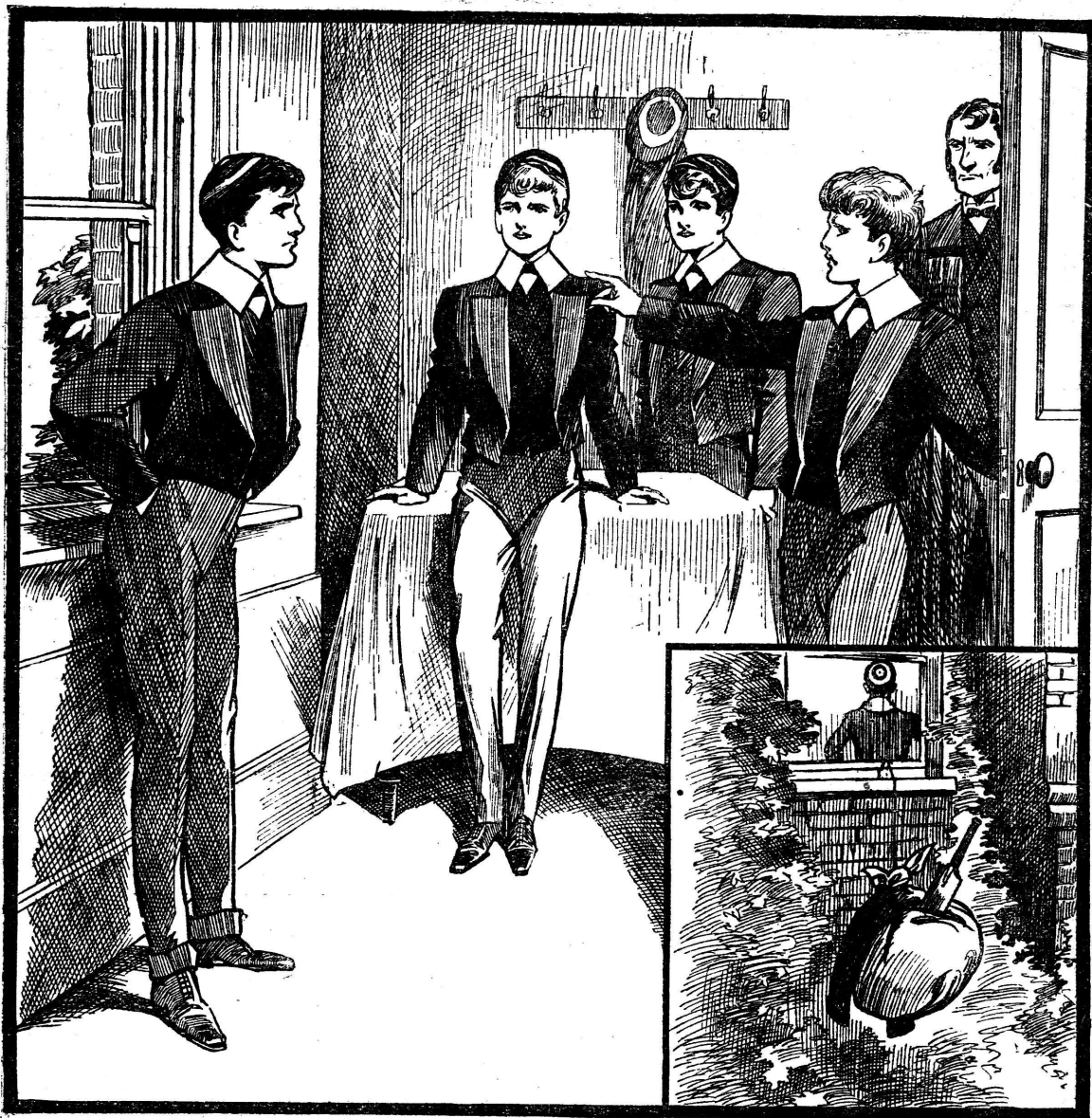
"I have heard it in Wylcombe."
"In Rylcombe?" exclaimed Blake, astonished.
"Yaas, wathah!"

"What do you mean?"
"There is a shop in Wylcombe kept by Jonas Fwynne," said D'Arcy, "and I wemembah that he is not a Wylcombe man, but a West Country man. He keeps a shop for fishin' matewials and things."

"Yes, I remember now."
"He sells bats, and wods, and lines, and flies and things. It has stwuck me——"

"His shop has?" asked Digby.
"It has stwuck me," said D'Arcy, ignoring the interruption, "that this Fwynne may be a vewation of the othah Fwynne, especially as he comes fwom the same part of the country."

"It's possible. It's not a common name."
"Well, then, it's possible, too, that Fwynne the wascal may come to hide here. Wylcombe is a quiet place, and nobody would evah think of lookin' for a cwiminal there."



Frank Nugent, in defence of his chum's honour, passionately accuses the cad of the Remove, and demands that his study be searched for incriminating evidence.

How the culprit conceals the evidence of his guilt.

(This picture appears on the cover of our companion paper, "THE MAGNET" Library, and depicts a most exciting incident in the splendid, new, long, complete school tale, entitled "FOR THE HONOUR OF HIS CHUM," by Frank Richards. Ask your newsagent for a copy of "THE MAGNET" Library to-day.)

Suppose Egbert Fwynne was turnin' ovah in his mind where he could hide while he was waitin' for the hue-and-cry to blow ovah, and he had a welioun in a quiet little corner like Wylcombe—"

"By Jove, it's possible!"

"But a chap wouldn't be likely to shelter a relation who was hiding from the law," said Herries dubiously.

"I don't know. Pewwaps a vevy honest man wouldn't, but this man Fwynne is not honest. He sold me a wotten fishin'-wod last summah, and swindled me."

Blake grinned.

"Still, that's different."

"I don't see it. A man who would swindle me would do anythin' else dishonest. I am bwingin' this theovy to your notice, deah boys, because I want you to help me."

"Help you?"

"Yes. I am goin' to look into the mattah."

"You're thinking of calling on Frynne in the village, and asking him whether he's a relation of Egbert Frynne, and whether he's hiding him from the police—eh?"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gave Blake a withering look through his monocle.

"No, you uttah ass! I don't think of doin' anythin' of the sort."

"Oh, it would be like you!" said Blake sweetly. "What is the little game, then?"

"I'm goin' to investigate."

"How?"

"I'm goin' to pay a visit to the place, and look wound. If you fellows like to come with me, you can; but you must be vevy cautious, and, of course, you mustn't say a word about Figgins."

Crash!

The chums swung round at the sudden disturbance.

It was caused by Barker, of the Fifth, going headlong out of the room into the passage, hurled there by the combined efforts of the Terrible Three.

"You can come in again, if you like, Barker, and repeat that remark of yours about Figgins," said Monty Lowther sweetly.

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The Fifth-Former did not accept the invitation. "Good for you!" said Blake. "Come here, Tom Merry, and listen to Gussy's latest wheeze!"

"Yaas, wathah, deah boys!" The Terrible Three crossed over. Blake explained, and the chums of the Shell grinned.

"Well, what do you think of it?" Blake demanded. "Rotten!" said Manners.

"No good!" said Monty Lowther.

"Rather hazy, anyway!" said Tom Merry.

D'Arcy sniffed.

"You fellows can help or not, as you like," he said.

"I'm goin' to investigate, and I'm goin' to begin now."

"Oh, we'll come," said Tom Merry.

"You can please yourselves about that, deah boys," said D'Arcy, with dignity.

"Oh, we'll come—we can't let you get into mischief alone."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"If we can get passes out, that is," said Tom Merry, with a laugh. "And I think it's very likely that we can't."

And Tom Merry's prediction proved to be quite correct—they couldn't. There were no passes out to be had by juniors, and Arthur Augustus's brilliant scheme of investigation had to be postponed till the morrow.

"Nevah mind, deah boys," said the swell of St. Jim's.

"It's a half-holiday to-morrow, you know, and we shall have heaps of time. And I have a feelin' that we are on the track."

Whereat Tom Merry & Co. grinned. They were quite willing to help Arthur Augustus in his investigations, but they were very far from feeling that he was on the track.

CHAPTER 8.

The Fall of Figgins.

FIGGINS was looking decidedly clouded that evening. It was not only the misfortune that had happened to his father, and his anxiety as to the fate of the unfortunate banker.

Figgins had a firm belief in his father's innocence, and he could not believe that an innocent man would be condemned. Surely something must transpire to make his father's innocence as clear to all the world as it was to Figgins. It was a touching faith, and it was very like Figgins.

But there were other troubles for Figgins just now.

There were some fellows at St. Jim's who would never turn upon him, whatever might happen. Fatty Wynn was one of them, and Kerr was another—if he had been there. Over in the School House Figgins had many firm friends, whose friendship was not seriously interfered with by the incessant House rows and disputes.

But in his own House the news about Figgins's father had made a great difference to the feeling with which Figgins was regarded.

As Dibbs of the Fourth said, it was pretty rotten having the son of a criminal in the House at all, and it was one up against the House, of which the School House fellows would not fail to remind them.

It was rotten enough having a swindling banker's son there, but that that swindling banker's son should be junior captain of the House was intolerable to Dibbs.

Dibbs for a long time had had a secret persuasion that he would make a better junior captain than Figgins, and it seemed to Dibbs that the time had come for him to air his views on that subject in public, which he accordingly did.

He found a good following.

Many of the fellows, while feeling sorry for Figgins, felt that the time had come for him to retire from the public eye, so to speak, even if he did not leave St. Jim's.

As for his declaration that his father was innocent, and that that would be cleared up in time, of course, he would say all that, anyway.

So Dibbs declared.

And Dibbs suggested to a crowd of fellows in the junior common-room in the New House that Figgins should be asked to take a back seat.

"After all, there are other fellows in the House quite as good leaders as he is," Dibbs declared.

"Where will you find them?" asked Pratt.

"Well, I'm one."

"Rats!"

"Many rats!" said Thompson of the Shell.

Dibbs turned red.

"Well, I think so," he exclaimed, "and I think a good many fellows here agree with me. Anyway, I think all must agree that we don't want the son of a criminal for skipper."

"Hush!" muttered French.

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Figgins had just entered the room.

But it was too late to "hush!"—Figgins had heard. His face went very red and then very pale. Dibbs went rather pale, too—he had no desire for a personal encounter with Figgins, but it looked now as if he would have no choice in the matter.

Figgins strode towards him.

"What's that you said, Dibbs?" he asked, in a very clear voice.

"You heard me," muttered Dibbs.

"You were speaking of me?"

"Yes."

"As the son of a criminal?" said Figgins, his voice trembling with rage.

"Yes," said Dibbs, sullenly.

"Take that, then!"

Smack!

Dibbs of the Fourth went heavily to the floor. He was upon his feet in a moment. Dibbs had plenty of pluck.

He rushed at Figgins, but the juniors surged between.

"Hold on!" exclaimed French. "No fighting!"

"Hold on! Hands down!"

"Stand back, Dibbs—"

"You'd better think a bit before you land out, too, Figgys," said Thompson of the Shell.

Figgins's eyes blazed.

"I'll land out at anybody who speaks of my father as Dibbs did, if it's the head of the Sixth who does it!" he exclaimed fiercely.

"Oh, cheese it!"

"Let me get at him!" roared Dibbs.

"Hold on—"

"Oh, let him come on!" said Figgins disdainfully. "I'll wipe up the floor with him, and with anybody else who cares to repeat what he said, too!"

"Look here, Figgys—"

Dibbs broke away from the juniors who were holding him and rushed at Figgins. Figgins was by no means disinclined for the encounter.

In a moment more they were fighting hammer and tongs.

It seemed to Figgins that every blow he struck was struck in defence of his father, and that was very unfortunate for Dibbs, for Dibbs, being regarded in the light of a persecutor of Figgins senior, received a most drastic punishment.

Figgins knocked him right and left.

Dibbs came up to time again and again, but he was knocked out at last, and laid gasping on the floor of the common-room.

Figgins stood with clenched fists and glaring eyes, glaring down at him.

"Do you want any more?" he shouted.

"Ow!" groaned Dibbs.

"Are you done, you cad?"

"Groo! Yes."

"You'll get the same again if you speak of my father as you did," said Figgins, breathing hard.

Dibbs sat up, and blinked at him out of his half-closed eyes. Dibbs was beaten, but he was not conquered, and he was a very obstinate youth.

"It's true!" he gasped. "It's true all I said! You're the son of a criminal, and you can put that in your pipe and smoke it, Figgins!"

"You cad!"

Figgins sprang towards him. But the other fellows grasped him and dragged him back by sheer force. Figgins struggled furiously.

"Let me go!" he shrieked.

"Rats!"

"Stand back!"

"I'll smash him!" roared Figgins.

"You've pretty well smashed him already," said Thompson of the Shell. "You can't hit him again, Figgins."

"Let him hold his tongue, then."

"I won't!" howled Dibbs. "Your father's a bank robber—a rotten swindler, and you know it, and if you had any decency you'd leave the school!"

Figgins gave a roar of rage, and broke away from those who were holding him by a tremendous effort. He leaped upon Dibbs, and dragged him to his feet. Then he began to hit again, and Dibbs fell like a bundle of old clothes to the floor.

"Stop it!" roared French.

Figgins was dragged off. Dibbs was gasping and panting, and had no breath left to repeat his remarks. Figgins glared round on the juniors who were holding him. His eyes were burning with rage.

"So you fellows stand by that cad and what he said!" he exclaimed. "Very well! You can have him for your captain if you like! I resign!"

"Look here, Figgins—"

CHAPTER 9.

Solid Comfort.

"Jolly good thing, too!" growled Pratt. "I think we've had enough of your temper. You ought to lie low at a time like this."

"I'll lie low enough," said Figgins. "I won't speak to you again—any of you! You can have Dibbs for your captain—a pretty captain he looks, too! Go and be hanged, all of you!"

And Figgins tramped furiously out of the common-room.

He left the New House juniors in a buzz.

Dibbs staggered to his feet.

"We'll take him at his word," he gasped. "Figgins's resigned."

"Yes, rather!"

"About the best thing he could do," Pratt remarked. "But about having you for skipper, Dibby, that's quite another matter. You can go and eat coke!"

"Look here, Pratt——"

"Kerr would make a better skipper," said Thompson. "As a matter of fact, he would have made a better skipper than Figgins, only he never would hear of it."

"But Kerr's away," said French.

"Well, there's Fatty Wynn."

"Captain of the tuckshop, if you like!" said Dibbs, with a contemptuous snort.

"I don't know. He's true blue, anyway, and a jolly good goal-keeper," said Pratt. "I vote that we offer the job to Fatty."

"Hear, hear!"

"Look here——" began the angry Dibbs.

"Oh, you shut up!"

"I tell you——"

"Rats!"

"Here's Wynn!" exclaimed Jimson. "Let's ask him." Fatty Wynn looked into the room. He looked round, as if in search of someone.

"Figg here?" he asked.

"Well, no," said French uncomfortably. "He isn't."

"Know where he is?"

"Gone up to his study, I think."

"Oh, all serene!"

"Hold on, Fatty! We've got something to—to say to you."

Fatty Wynn turned round again.

"Feed on?" he asked.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We want you to be junior captain of the New House," said Thompson.

Fatty Wynn stared.

"I can't," he said. "Figg is junior captain."

"He's resigned."

"My hat! What for?"

"Well, he really had to," explained French. "After the news about his father, of course, it wouldn't have done for Figgins to keep the position."

Fatty Wynn began to glare.

"You utter ass!" he said.

"Eh?"

"You unspeakable chump! Do you mean to say that you've given Figgins the order of the boot?" roared Fatty Wynn.

"Well, yes, it amounts to that."

"You—you—you frabjous chumps!" said Fatty Wynn. "And you have the cheek to ask me to be captain, after that! I'd rather be captain of a hutch of bunny rabbits! I'd rather be captain of an army of skunks! Yah!"

And Fatty Wynn, with a snort, turned round and tramped out of the room. He left the New House juniors looking considerably sheepish.

"Ahem! Wynn doesn't seem to take to the idea!" French remarked, after a pause.

"Well, we don't want him!" said Dibbs. "I'm willing——"

"Of course you are," said Thompson sarcastically. "But we're not, you see."

"Look here, Thompson——"

"Oh, shut up!"

And the crowd broke up, leaving the unhappy Dibbs to nurse a swollen nose, and two black eyes, and a thickened ear, and a twisted mouth—with his chances of becoming junior captain of the New House as remote as ever.

FIGGINS had gone up to his study.

The excitement of the combat was over, the reaction had set in. He had thoroughly punished Dibbs, but it was no satisfaction to him now. After all, what did it matter what Dibbs said? Dibbs represented a crowd of fellows at St. Jim's who thought the same thing, whether they said it or not.

Figgins had flung his defiance in the faces of the juniors—those who were friendly to him, as well as those who were not. He realised now that he had been hasty. But Figgins was not quite himself just now.

He groaned under his breath as he flung himself into a chair. What was he to do? The whole school seemed to be turning against him, and at a time, too, when he needed help and sympathy more than he had ever needed them before. Help and sympathy he had found in the rival House—in his own House, where he might more reasonably have expected to find it, it was wanting.

"It's always the same!" Figgins muttered bitterly. "When a boy's down, the chaps turn on him—it's always the same!"

But there was at least one true chum left to Figgins in the New House. There was a heavy footstep on the stairs, and in the passage outside the study, and Figgins's downcast face brightened up a little as he recognised the footstep of Fatty Wynn. Fatty Wynn, at least, sympathised; even if his sympathy was wont to take the practical shape of steak-and-kidney pies or jam-tarts.

"Oh, I say, Figg!"

Figgins looked up as Fatty Wynn entered the study. He was sitting with his legs thrust out, in front of the fireplace. With his hands stuffed hard into his trousers' pockets he looked a picture of melancholy.

Fatty Wynn held up a steak-and-kidney pie triumphantly. To his intense disgust Figgins turned his gaze away without betraying the least interest.

"Oh, I say!" he repeated, advancing a little nearer. "I think you might chuck some of it off your chest, Figg, when I come in sight with a thing like this!"

Figgins turned a wintry look on the pie.

"What is it?" he asked.

"What is it?"

Fatty Wynn's voice sounded like a screech. That anyone should fail to recognise a steak-and-kidney pie was past his comprehension. Words failed him for a moment.

"It's a steak-and-kidney pie, Figg!" he said indignantly.

Figgins watched his chum mechanically, as he laid the pie on the table and began busying about for plates and knives and forks.

"It's very good of you really, Fatty," he said. "But I can't eat, really!"

Fatty Wynn dropped two plates he was carrying and a bunch of knives and forks in astonishment. Luckily they fell on the table.

"Look—look here, Figg!" he began.

"Oh, don't, Fatty, I want to be alone and think!" said Figgins wearily.

"But a steak-and-kidney pie!" protested Fatty.

"Yes, I know. But if you felt like I do, you wouldn't care, Fatty."

"Wouldn't I? Have a bit, old kid. It'll buck you up like anything!" said Fatty encouragingly.

Figgins shook his head.

"I couldn't really, Fatty!" he said.

"Rats!"

And without more ado Fatty Wynn cut a piece of the pie and laid it on a plate. With an encouraging rattle of the knife and fork he held it out to Figgins.

"You must be made of iron, Figg. Go on. Have a go at this. I could eat four times that!"

"Yes, you eat some!" said Figgins quickly.

"Well, I was thinking of having a little snack," admitted Fatty.

Figgins could not but smile. Fatty was always thinking of that "little snack."

"You are down on your luck, Figg," went on the Falstaff of St. Jim's. "But where there's a will there's a way, and you'll shift that dose of the blues quite easily if you do as I tell you. Go on!"

Figgins took another look at the pie.

"It certainly does look all right, Fatty," he said.

"It is all right!" said Fatty Wynn. "I like that, I must say, after I've been to the trouble to get this specially to cheer you up. Of all the cheek——"

"Oh, I'm sorry, Fatty!" began Figgins.

Fatty grunted.

"You've made me feel quite faint, Figg," he said,

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cutting vigorously at the pie. "I think I had better—but suppose you eat that first, Figgy!"

Figgins smiled something like his old smile. This was sacrifice indeed from Fatty Wynn.

But he did not feel like feeding all the same. Despite his ill luck, he felt inclined to grin at the sight of the fat junior divided between love and duty, so to put it. Fatty was alternately casting looks of sympathy at him and devouring the rest of the pie with his eyes. Another look from Fatty decided Figgins.

"I might try a little, Fatty," he said. "But I must tell you again, I don't feel the least bit like it."

"I know you don't, Figgy, old kid!" said Fatty. "I've often felt like that myself. But it soon goes away when once you start. Here you are!"

But to Fatty Wynn's intense disgust Figgins had relapsed into his brown study again.

Apparently he did not hear Fatty.

"Oh, I say!" said Fatty, putting the plate down again. "It's too much, you know, Figgy!"

Figgins sighed.

"Yes, I know. I suppose it is, Fatty. But what would you feel like with those rotten cads like Mellish and Levison turning up their noses at you—"

"If I had a pie like that all to myself," broke in Fatty earnestly, "Levison and Mellish could go and eat coke. Buck up, you ass, or I'll eat the blessed thing myself!"

Fatty intended the latter part of his sentence for a "tragic" threat. Figgins smiled faintly. Fatty Wynn growled like a grizzly bear and proceeded to serve himself with a huge piece of pie.

"Just a little snack to help me on, you know!" he explained to no one in particular. "Wade in, Figgy. You'll be ill if you don't eat something. I'm only doing this to encourage you, though. Come on, don't be an ass!"

Figgins drew a chair up. The pie smelt delicious. It was not in human nature to resist it any longer. Fatty Wynn smiled hugely. He sincerely wanted to cheer Figgins up.

But now he had tasted blood, so to speak, he began to hope that Figgins's appetite would not be large.

"It is jolly good, though," said Figgins, wading in in real earnest.

"I'll race you, Figgy!" cried Fatty brightly, as he filled his mouth with a huge piece.

Figgins laughed. It was the first time he had laughed since the morning. Fatty Wynn grinned with pleasure; he had succeeded in breaking through his chum's deep despondency for the moment, at all events.

And Figgins, now that he was eating, discovered that he was really hungry after all. He had eaten hardly any dinner—and he was empty. And, to his own surprise, Figgins found that the black despondency left him a little as he ate. There was something, after all, in Fatty Wynn's maxim of laying a solid foundation. Fatty Wynn had most of that steak-and-kidney pie, but by the time it was finished, Figgins had to admit that he felt better.

CHAPTER 10.

The Cold Shoulder.

It was inevitable, perhaps, that the news of Figgins's family misfortune should make a difference to the way in which he was regarded in the New House at St. Jim's.

Some fellows would have been a little more careful, and a little more tactful, than Figgins and perhaps would have weathered the storm.

But Figgins was not always tactful, and he was seldom prudent. He was just a plain, straightforward fellow, with plenty of the innocence of the dove, but nothing whatever of the wisdom of the serpent.

He had gone the wrong way to work to conciliate fellows who were inclined to desert him. For Figgins did not care twopence whether they deserted him or not—at all events, not to the extent of trying to propitiate and conciliate them.

If a fellow chose to give him the cold shoulder, let him—that was Figgins's view—and plenty of them did—and he let them.

Some of the New House fellows thought that Figgins knew perfectly well that his father was guilty, and was trying to carry off matters with a high hand. They did not know Figgins. Had he believed that his father was a thief, he would have crept away from St. Jim's in utter shame, and never have looked upon a St. Jim's fellow's face again, if he could have helped it.

It was his firm faith in his father's honour that enabled him to hold his head as high as he did now.

Other fellows thought that with such a shadow hanging over him, he ought to have been humble and meek; but

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Figgins never was meek or humble, and he did not mean to begin now.

Upon the whole, the New House fellows felt that Figgins was hopelessly in the wrong, and many of them determined to have nothing more to say to him.

Figgins did not care.

He let them go their way, as they chose. He would not utter a word to conciliate them. Yet it was a blow to him to feel upon what an unstable foundation his popularity had rested.

Fatty Wynn was true. But there were very few other fellows in the New House who were inclined to stick to Figgins through thick and thin.

He was more likely, in fact, to receive persecution from his own House than from the School House.

For in the junior section of the School House Tom Merry & Co. reigned supreme, and they had declared that Figgins was not to be annoyed.

The fellows who had disregarded that warning had suffered for their disregard. Blake had had, as we have said, three fights on his hands—and each of the Terrible Three of the Shell had vanquished a foe.

After that, the School House fellows who were inclined to make capital out of Figgins's misfortune had controlled their inclination.

But in the New House, of course, Tom Merry & Co. could not interfere.

There Figgins had to face cold looks and averted glances, and though he told himself that he did not care, he suffered all the same. If only he could have done something to help his father, to establish the truth, it would not have been so bad. But he felt that his hands were tied. He could not even go to see his father—he was quite helpless—he could only wait and suffer.

But for the steady friendship of Fatty Wynn, Figgins would have found the New House intolerable. As it was, he met with slights and rebuffs at every turn; and he encased himself harder and harder in an armour of pride and reserve, very foreign, naturally, to his frank nature.

Very peculiar looks were cast upon Figgins when he entered the Fourth-Form dormitory in the New House that night. A third part of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's boarded in the New House. Up till now, Figgins had counted hardly one enemy among them.

Now they all seemed enemies, or at least indifferent. They did not speak to him. Dibbs was looking a perfect wreck, and no one felt inclined to emulate Dibbs, and bring down the wrath of Figgins upon himself specially.

But their silence was enough.

Figgins turned in without speaking a word. Fatty Wynn, angry on his chum's account, glared angrily at the Fourth-Formers of the New House. Fatty Wynn was inclined to fight the whole Form at once.

"Good-night, Wynn!" said Pratt.

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Fatty Wynn.

And Pratt sniffed and went to bed.

Fatty Wynn glared round at the juniors.

"Nice set of blithering asses you are, aren't you?" he demanded.

No one felt called upon to reply. Some of them looked in surprise at Fatty Wynn. For once the fat Fourth-Former seemed to be looking for trouble. As a rule, Fatty was one of the most peace-loving of youths. Unless someone attempted to raid his supplies of comestibles, Fatty was incapable of quarrelling. But he seemed to have changed his nature now. He was seeking trouble.

"Set of silly, jabbering, unreasonable fatheads!" said Fatty Wynn aggressively. "I've had mutton-chops that had more sense than you have."

"Oh, shut up, Wynn!" said Pratt.

Fatty Wynn turned upon him at once. It seemed as if he was only waiting for somebody to take up his challenge.

"Did you speak to me, Pratt?"

"Yes, I did."

"And what did you say?"

"I said 'shut up!'" said Pratt defiantly.

"Get out of bed and say it again!" said Fatty Wynn.

"Rats!"

"I'll jolly soon have you out, then!"

"Bosh!"

Fatty Wynn rolled towards Pratt's bed. Figgins sat up.

"Hold on, Fatty! Let him alone!"

"Really, Figgy—"

"It's no good having rows with the asses, Fatty. I'd rather you didn't."

"Well, I'm going to lick Pratt for his cheek, anyway!" he said.

"You couldn't!" said Pratt.

That was enough for Fatty Wynn. His fiery Welsh blood

was at boiling-point. He rushed at Pratt's bed and dragged the bedclothes off.

"Yow!" yelled Pratt.

Spank, spank!

"Yaroo!"

"Now get up and put up your fists!" said Fatty Wynn.

"I'll jolly soon do that!" roared Pratt. "I'll wipe up the blessed dormitory with you, you blessed fat porpoise!"

"Come on, then!"

Pratt rushed at his enemy. He might as well have rushed at the wall. Fatty Wynn was too heavy for him to shift, and he was too good a boxer to let any of Pratt's drives come home.

Pratt exhausted himself in hammering and plunging at the fat Fourth-Former, and as he paused, gasping, Fatty Wynn "sailed in" in his turn.

Right and left, left and right, and right and left again came the fat, heavy fists of the Falstaff of St. Jim's.

Pratt staggered back, and back, and back, till he reached his own bed again, and a final heavy drive sent him sprawling across it.

"Yow!" yelled Pratt. "Yow! Ow! Yoop!"

Fatty Wynn paused, panting for breath. The steak-and-kidney pie was telling upon him a little under the stress of that sudden exertion.

"There, you worm!" he gasped. "That will teach you not to run my chum down."

"I didn't run him down!" roared Pratt.

"Well, you were thinking of it, anyway!"

"I'll think what I like, hang you!"

"No, you won't!" said Fatty Wynn autocratically. "I'll jolly well smash you if you do! I'll smash every silly chump in this dormitory for two pins. I'll—"

The dormitory door opened. It was Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, coming to see lights out. He stared at the warlike Fatty.

"Hallo! What's the matter here?" he exclaimed.

"Oh, nothing, Monteith!"

Monteith looked at the juniors, and thought that he understood. He frowned a little.

"Well, go to bed, and let's have no more of it," he said.

"Look here, you youngsters, if you are down on Figgins because his father's had a lot of trouble, it's rotten of you. His father may be innocent—anyway, no man's guilty till he's proved so; and, in any case, it's not Figgins's fault. Don't be cads!"

"Oh, they can't help it!" said Figgins. "I don't mind them—a set of yapping mongrels. I'm ashamed that I ever was junior captain."

"And the less you talk like that, the better, Figgins," said the prefect.

He extinguished the lights and left the juniors alone.

There was a buzz of talk after he was gone, and although no one made any direct remark to Figgins, the talk was evidently "at" him, if not "to" him. Dibbs started a discussion on the subject of defaulting bank-directors, and the juniors kept it up, tossing the ball, as it were, from one to another with assiduity, much solaced by the thought that they were tormenting Figgins.

Fatty Wynn paid little heed at first, as his thoughts were, in point of fact, busy upon the subject of steak-and-kidney pies; but when the drift of the talk dawned upon Fatty Wynn he sat up in bed, frowning in the darkness.

"I want to go to sleep," he announced. "You fellows can shut up!"

There came a chorus of derision from all quarters of the dormitory:

"Rats!"

"Bosh!"

"Go and eat coke!"

"I'll begin on the next chatterer with a jug of water," said Fatty Wynn.

"Rats!" said Dibbs.

Swish! Sloosh!

There was a wild roar from Dibbs. Water was drenching him and his bed. He leaped out of the soaking bedclothes.

"You—you fathead!" he roared. "I'm soaked!"

"You'll be hammered, too, if you make a row!" said Fatty belligerently.

Pratt burst into a laugh.

"Oh, let's go to sleep!" he said. "Fatty is on the war-path to-night, and he's a good little fat duffer. Let him alone."

"I'm wet!" yelled Dibbs.

"Well, dry yourself!"

"My bed's too wet to sleep in."

"Sleep on the floor, then."

But Dibbs remembered Kerr's empty bed, and slept there, and growled himself into slumber. And there was silence at last in the Fourth Form dormitory in the New House.

CHAPTER 11.

Got Him!

"YOU fellahs weady?"

"I'm ready," said Blake.

"And so am I," said Tom Merry.

"Where are the othah boundahs?"

Blake grinned.

"Herries has gone to look after his bulldog, and Dig has gone out with Manners and his camera," he remarked. "They've deputed their powers to me."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Monty Lowther is playing footer," said Tom Merry. "We three will be enough to track down the desperado, I think."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"There are enough of us to put salt on his tail if we catch him," said Jack Blake. "Come on, Gussy, and let the others go and eat coke."

"Vewy well, deah boy. Aftah all, a cwovd would be more likely to attract attention than to make discoveries."

"That only just occurred to you?" said Blake. "Not that I suppose there are any discoveries to be made, so far as that goes."

"That remains to be seen," said D'Arcy, with dignity.

"Of course it does," said Tom Merry. "I have a feeling that Gussy will discover the absconding banker hiding there disguised as a trout-fly—"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Or a fishing-rod," said Blake.

"Pway come on, and don't wot, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus loftily.

And, having given his silk hat a final touch and adjusted his eyeglass, the swell of St. Jim's started with his comrades.

That there was a chance that D'Arcy's scheme might lead to the discovery of something helpful to Figgins, Tom Merry and Blake both admitted. But the chance was so exceedingly slim that they were inclined to treat the whole matter humorously.

They entered the old High Street of Rylcombe, and Arthur Augustus paused before a shop that lay back from the street with an old elm growing before it. From the shop a garden ran back to the river, and a punt was moored there. In the shop were various accessories for boyish sports, and a little man with a brown complexion and quick, keen eyes was seated there mending a boot.

The three juniors paused and looked in at the shop window, taking a survey of the place before entering. The name over the shop had been painted out, apparently with a view to the sign being repainted. But the juniors remembered the old sign, with "J. Frynne" in sprawling letters, which had been above the shop for many a year.

Mr. Jonas Frynne was not a prominent inhabitant of Rylcombe, but he had been there a good many years, and he did so small a trade in his little shop, especially in the winter, that the villagers supposed that he must have some other source of income. And sometimes, over an evening glass at the Red Cow or the Rylcombe Arms, Mr. Frynne had confided to his neighbours the fact that he had rich relations, but he never mentioned anything more than that, and some sapient villagers, who had seen Mr. Jonas Frynne staggering home intoxicated in the small hours of the morning, surmised that Jonas's rich relations made him an allowance, probably on condition that he never went near them, and that they were glad to be rid of him.

Mr. Frynne did not bear a very good character in the village. Not that he had ever been known to do anything exactly wrong, but in a sleepy, quiet little place like Rylcombe the smallest faults of character and temper are known and noted.

"There he is, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus.

"Can't see anybody else," said Jack Blake.

"Wats! Do you think he would keep him in the shop?" Tom Merry laughed.

"I suppose not," he said. "But—"

"Excuse me, young gentlemen."

The juniors turned round as they were spoken to. A man with grey whiskers, dressed in worn but respectable clothes, and having as commonplace a look as a man could possibly have, had stopped outside the shop.

Arthur Augustus raised his hat to the stranger.

"Did you address me, sir?"

"Yes. I am looking for a shop kept by Mr. Frynne. Can you tell me if this is it?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Ah, there is no name!"

"They are having the sign repainted, I think," said Tom Merry. "This is the shop, and that is Mr. Frynne in the shop there."

"Thank you very much. You said 'they,' I think. Mr. Frynne has relations living with him, I suppose?"

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"Not that I know of."

"As a rule, does he?"

"No, I think not."

"Ah! I expected to see someone I knew here," the stranger remarked. "But if there is no one staying with Mr. Frynne—"

"We really don't know, sir," said Blake. "The best thing would be to go in and ask Mr. Frynne, wouldn't it?"

"Thank you! You are right."

And, raising his cap politely, the man went into the shop. "This way, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, in a suppressed voice.

He signed to the juniors to follow him. Tom Merry and Blake, considerably surprised, did so, and the swell of St. Jim's led them as far as the turning of the street before he condescended to explain. He might not have stopped there, but Tom Merry caught him by the arm and held him forcibly.

"Where are you leading us?" he demanded.

"Only to a safe place to talk, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus mysteriously.

"Ass! You can talk here—"

"I wefuse to be called an ass—"

"What on earth has he got into his head?" said Blake wonderingly. "I can see that there's some blessed bee or other in his bonnet."

"Weally, Blake—"

"What is it, duffer?"

"I've found him."

"What!"

"I've got him!" said D'Arcy, in a thrilling whisper.

"Got who?"

"The bankah—the abscondah!"

"You—you've got him?" exclaimed Blake, staring at the swell of St. Jim's, as if he half expected to see the absconder peeping out of D'Arcy's waistcoat-pocket.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Produce him, then, and we'll take him to the police-station," grinned Tom Merry. "Where have you got him, Gussy? In your watch-case?"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"In your silk topper?" asked Blake.

"Pway don't wot! I've got him! Didn't you notice anythin' about that stwanga who asked us questions?" demanded Arthur Augustus triumphantly.

Tom Merry and Blake looked astonished.

"I noticed that he had grey whiskers," said Tom Merry.

"So did I," assented Blake.

"Yaas, but you haven't twained your eyes as I have," said Arthur Augustus patronisingly. "I noticed that the gwey whiskahs were false."

"What!"

"False!"

Arthur Augustus nodded with great satisfaction.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"My hat!" said Tom Merry, with a deep breath. "Are you sure?"

"Quite sure, deah boy. I am perfectly convinced that I saw the ends of the tags that fastened them behind his ears."

"Phew!"

"He is the man!" said D'Arcy, with conviction. "Besides, he's a stwanga, come here to see Fwynne. How many stwanga come here to see Fwynne, do you think?"

"Not many, I suppose."

"Then he was vewy anxious to know if there was anybody with Fwynne—"

"I didn't notice that he was anxious."

"Well, I did," said D'Arcy, with some asperity. "I notice these things, Tom Mewwy. I have twained my eyes—"

"You might have been training your imagination, too, you know," Tom Merry remarked.

"Weally, deah boy—"

"But if you are sure that the grey whiskers are false—"

"I am sure of it, deah boy. I have twained my—"

"In that case—"

"He's a wottah!"

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"It's worth looking into, anyway," said Blake, for the first time showing some seriousness in the matter. "What do you propose to do, Gussy?"

"Lay in wait for him, at the corner of the shop, and gwab him by the whiskahs as he comes out!" said D'Arcy promptly.

"But suppose the whiskers aren't false after all," said Blake dubiously.

"But they are, deah boy. My twained eyes—"

"And suppose he isn't the man, anyway."

"But he is the man."

"Suppose—"

"If you are goin' to waise difficulties all the time, Blake, I weally think that I should manage this affaih bettah alone," said Arthur Augustus.

Blake chuckled.

"We'll stand by you, Gussy. After all, you will want us to braid you out, when you're run in for assaulting innocent strangers and pulling their whiskers."

"Weally, Blake—"

"It's a jolly risky bizney," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "If we get the wrong pig by the ear—I mean, the wrong man by the whiskers—he's bound to cut up rough. Any man would."

"Phew! I should say so."

"We must wisk it."

"You see, Gussy—"

"If you fellows don't help me, I shall do it alone," said Arthur Augustus resolutely. "But I should like you on hand to help me awrest the wascal, and get him to the station when I have shown him up."

"We're in for it," said Blake. "Lead on, Gussy!"

And Gussy led on!

CHAPTER 12.

On the Watch.

FIGGINS came out of his study in the New House, with his chin down, and his hands thrust deeply into his trousers-pockets.

Figgins affected not to notice that Dibbs drew ostentatiously away from him, and that Pratt locked the other way, and French turned his head.

But Fatty Wynn, who was following his chum, noticed them all, and the warlike Welsh blood boiled up in the veins of Fatty Wynn once more.

As he passed French, Fatty Wynn's fat hand came out with a sounding smack, and French sat down on the floor. He sat there staring.

"You fat chump!" he roared. "What did you do that for?"

"Your cheek!" said Fatty Wynn.

"You—you—you—"

"Look here—" began Dibbs.

Smack!

Dibbs staggered away, collided with the wall, and slid to the floor.

"That's for you," said the fat Fourth-Former.

They stared at Fatty Wynn. This plump youth, who was popularly supposed to live in the contemplation of meal-times, and to dream exclusively of steak-and-kidney pies, had suddenly developed into a fighting-man of the most truculent description. It was indignation on his chum's behalf that moved Fatty Wynn, and it seemed to have made quite a new fellow of him. Apparently he was ready to fight the whole House, either singly or all at once, as they pleased. It certainly did not seem to have occurred to him to court odds.

He stood glaring at French and Dibbs, waiting for them to get up, in order to hit out again, when Figgins seized him by the arm and dragged him away.

"Come on, Fatty—"

"Let me lick those cads first!" said the fat Fourth-Former, resisting.

"No—come on!"

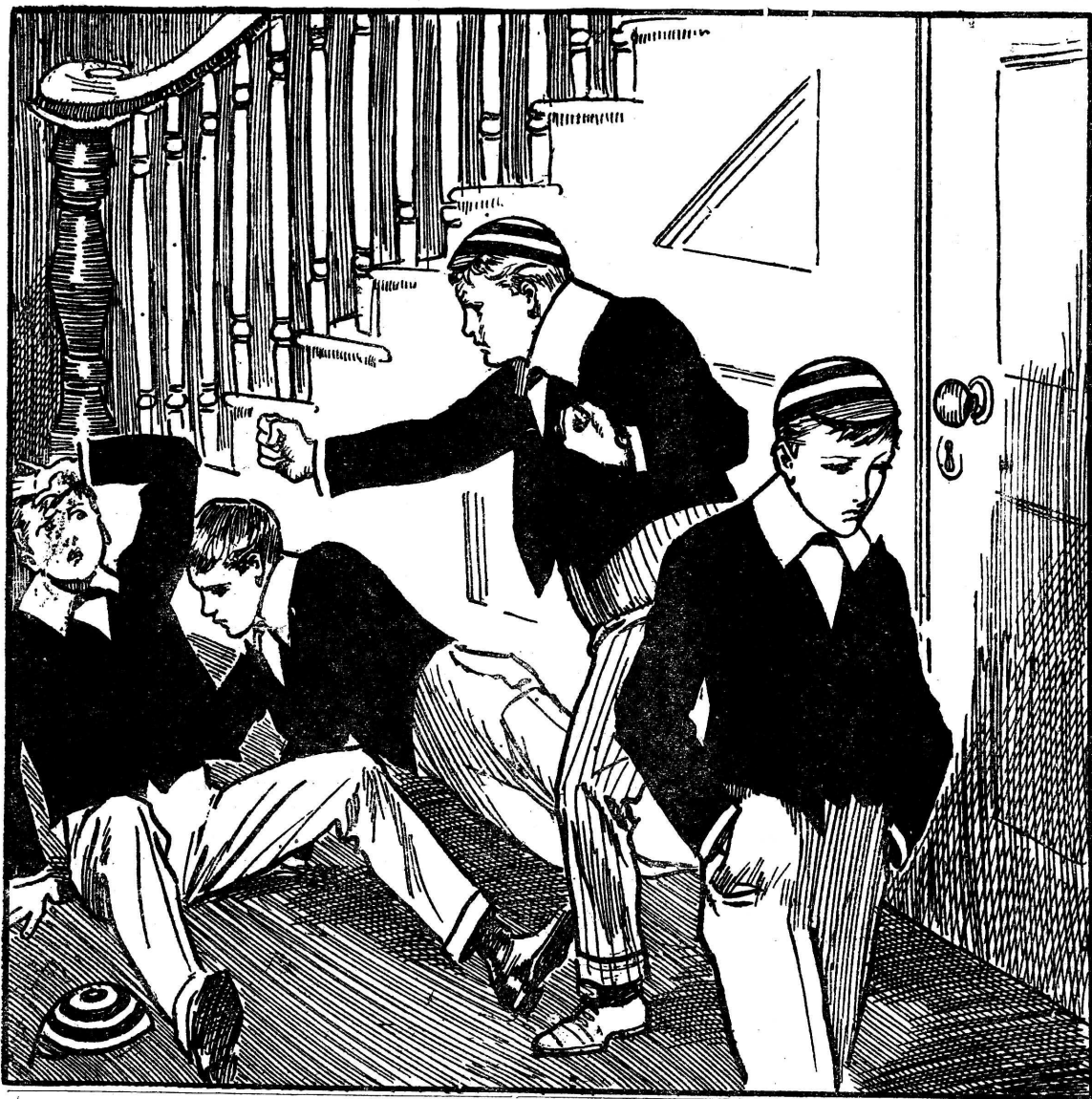
Fatty Wynn reluctantly allowed himself to be dragged away.

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"That's for your cheek!" said Fatty Wynn, glaring at the two fallen heroes. Indignation on his chum Figgins' behalf seemed to have made a new fellow of the fat Fourth-Former, and he had suddenly developed into a fighting-man of the most truculent description. (See chapter 12.)

"It's no good, Fatty," said Figgins, with a faint smile. "You can't fight the whole House, sonny, and if you did, it wouldn't do any good. They would only get their backs up worse than ever, you know."

"I'd like to give 'em a lesson, though," growled Fatty Wynn.

"Blessed if I ever knew you were such a terror, though!" said Figgins, laughing in spite of himself. "You've had three fights to-day, as well as two yesterday."

"I expect I shall have a dozen more," said Fatty Wynn.

"Look here, Kangaroo of the Shell wants you to keep goal," said Figgins. "They're playing a scratch match, and you might keep goal for him."

"Certainly," said Fatty Wynn. "Are you playing?"

Figgins shook his head.

"No. I don't feel up to footer just now, Fatty. I think I'll go for a stroll."

"I'll come with you."

"No—you go and keep goal for Kangy, and I'll come back at tea-time," said Figgins. "As a matter of fact, I'd like to get out of sight of the fellows for a bit."

Fatty Wynn hesitated; but at that moment Kangaroo of the School House bore down upon him, and marched him

off to keep goal. Figgins strolled down towards the gates. It was likely to be a glum half-holiday for Figgins. He had no heart for footer—no heart for anything, as a matter of fact. But he did not want to make his only true and staunch chum as miserable as he himself was.

Most of the New House juniors were in the quad., and most of them gave Figgins grim looks. Fatty Wynn's great fighting powers were a source of solace to himself, but they had not helped to conciliate the juniors. Dibbs & Co. were very much down on Figgins and Fatty now—they seemed to have hardly a friend left in their own House.

Dibbs and French and Pratt and Maine and Craggs, and several more fellows stood looking at Figgins as he came along to the gates.

As he drew near, they all turned up their noses, as if by concerted signal, and walked away with extremely scornful looks.

They marched off in line, with their noses in the air, and Figgins looked after them, clenching his hands hard.

But he crushed down his feelings, and went out at the gates. Even Taggles, the porter, forgot to touch his hat, as Figgins gave him a nod in passing, and Figgins heard him sniff.



The boy went out into the road feeling miserable enough. It was all strange and unreal to Figgins. If a fellow he knew had been down on his luck, Figgins would not have been able to do enough to help him. He would never have dreamed that fellows he had been friendly with could turn on him like this. Even if his father were guilty, as they all evidently believed, that was no excuse. It would not be the fault of the son, whatever the father did.

They expected him to be humble—to conciliate them. Figgins's eyes flashed at the thought.

Figgins had never been arrogant—but the idea of being humble for the sake of getting into anybody's good graces made his back stiffen at once.

He went down the road towards the village, in deep and gloomy thought.

There was one ray of cheerfulness in the gloom—he had had a letter from Kerr that morning, full of loyal friendship and sympathy. Kerr had seen the news in the papers, and had written at once to Figgins. Whatever happened, the Scottish junior was as true as steel, Figgins knew that, and the knowledge comforted him. Nothing would ever break the tie that united the three members of the famous "Co."

Figgins walked into the old village street. Most of the St. Jim's juniors were busy on the footer ground, and Figgins had not expected to see any of them in the village. But almost the first person he saw was a youth with an eye somewhat discoloured, and he recognised Jack Blake, of the Fourth.

Blake did not look towards Figgins. He seemed to be very much occupied. He was standing by the corner of a shop, of which the sign was in process of repainting. He was watching the door of the shop, somewhat like a terrier watching a hole.

Figgins glanced at him in surprise. If Blake was waiting for a friend to come out of the shop, his look was certainly singular. He was more like a dog waiting for a rat to show himself. Figgins paused, and looked on.

"My hat!" he muttered. "There's Tom Merry—and Gussy! What the dickens—"

D'Arcy was half hidden by the elm-tree in front of the little old shop; he had his monocle screwed firmly into his eye, and his eye glued upon the shop doorway.

Tom Merry was a little further on, sitting upon an old wooden trough, and he too was regarding the shop door with a fixed gaze.

Figgins could not help wondering. He came up, and tapped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy on the shoulder from behind. The swell of St. Jim's uttered a sharp cry, and his eyeglass fluttered down to the end of its cord.

"Bai Jove! You scoundwel—"

"What!"

"Oh! Is that you, Figgay! I beg your pardon—I-I thought it was that villain gettin' behind me!" gasped D'Arcy. "You thwem me into quite a fluttah."

Figgins stared at him.

"What villain?" he asked.

"The scoundwel we're watching for."

"Off your rocker?" asked Figgins.

"Weally, Figgay—"

"You're watching for somebody?" asked Figgins. "All three of you?"

"Yaas, wathah! We're doin' this for you," whispered D'Arcy mysteriously.

"Eh?"

"Keep behind this twee, deah boy, so that you can't be seen ffrom the shop, and I'll explain," murmured D'Arcy.

Figgins complied, not without a suspicion that the swell of the School House was wandering a little in his mind.

D'Arcy gave a cautious look towards the shop—which would certainly have betrayed his purpose, if anybody there could possibly have suspected an elegant youth in Etons of playing the detective—and then retreated into the cover of the tree.

"I think it's all wight, Figgay!" he whispered thrillingly.

"What's all right?" demanded Figgins, regarding him with astonishment.

"We've got him."

"Him! Who?"

"The abscondah. You wemembah the name that was ovah that shop befoah it was painted out?" said Arthur Augustus.

Figgins started.

"By Jove! Yes, Frynne—the same as—"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I didn't think of it before," said Figgins. "But it's the same surname as my father's partner, who has bunked with the bank's money, and got my poor old dad into this scrape."

"Exactly."

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"But what—"

"And I suspect that they're welations," said D'Arcy, in a tense whisper. "A chap disguised as a person in gwey whiskahs has gone into that shop, and he's goin' into hidin' there. I'm certain of that."

"What makes you certain?"

"Ahem! Some chaps are born with a detective instinct, and some ain't," said the swell of St. Jim's, after a pause. "I'm quite assured on the point, Figgay. Now, we're watchin' for that chap in gwey whiskahs. When he comes out, we're goin' to pile on him, and seize his beastly whiskahs, and dwag them off and show him up!"

"But—"

"Now you are here, you can lend a hand gettin' him to the station—"

"But—"

"It is vewy fortunate, your bein' on the spot like this, as I suppose you know your fathah's partner by sight—"

"No; I've never seen him."

"Bai Jove!"

"I hardly knew his name," said Figgins. "I've never been in the bank, even. The pater never took me into his business in any way. But—but if you've really discovered something here, Gussy—"

"I'm quite sure of it, deah boy!"

"It's just barely possible—"

"It's quite certain! Bai Jove!"

"What's the matter?"

"He's coming out!"

D'Arcy quivered with excitement. The commonplace-looking gentleman in the grey whiskers had appeared once more in the doorway of the little shop.

Evidently quite ignorant of the fact that three amateur detectives were waiting for him, he stepped out of the doorway.

CHAPTER 13.

Real Whiskers.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY tried to whistle. He had arranged a signal whistle, when the three juniors were to rush upon the disguised absconder together. But in the excitement the swell of St. Jim's could not whistle. He tried, but only a dry gasp came forth.

He gasped thrice, and then, giving up the attempt, he dashed after the stranger, who was already walking briskly down the street.

Tom Merry and Blake followed him quickly, and Figgins, a little more slowly, joined in. It seemed to Figgins that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was entering upon one of the biggest "bloomers" of his career, but he wanted to see the matter through.

D'Arcy was the first to overtake the stranger. The latter had paused to light his pipe, at a spot where a paling ran along one side of the path, and there was a big tree on the other. It was quite a quiet spot, and very suitable for the purpose of the amateur detectives. In their excitement, the chums of the School House had forgotten everything but their prey.

Arthur Augustus caught the man by the sleeve, and he turned in astonishment.

"What—" he began.

"Wascal!" ejaculated D'Arcy.

The man backed away a pace in blank amazement.

D'Arcy made a spring at him, and caught hold of the grey whiskers with both hands, and tugged with all his strength.

"Collah him, deah boys!" he howled.

A roar of pain broke from the stranger.

"Ow! Leggo!"

Crash!

Tom Merry and Blake were upon him in a moment.

The grey-whiskered gentleman went to the pavement with a crash, and Arthur Augustus rolled over with him, still tugging at the grey whiskers.

D'Arcy's silk topper had fallen off, and his eyeglass was fluttering, but the swell of St. Jim's heeded them not.

His grasp did not relax for a second.

In his wild excitement, it never occurred to him that if the grey whiskers were really false they would have come off at the first tug, and that the stranger's yells of pain were too genuine to be mistaken.

He tugged away at the whiskers with both hands, as if for a wager.

"Yah! Yow! Ow! Help! Police! Murder!"

The unhappy stranger yelled frantically.

"Bai Jove! He's got them fixed on awf'ly tight!" gasped D'Arcy. "The beastly things won't come off! Lend a hand, Figgay."

CHAPTER 14.

On the List.

Figgins gasped.
"They're not false, you ass!" he shrieked. "They're real!"

"Wats!"
"Let go!" yelled the victim, struggling under the weight of the juniors. "Yow! Murder! Let go! Yah! Ow!"
"Weally——"

Tom Merry dragged D'Arcy back.
"Stop it, Gussy! You've made a mistake!"
"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"
"The whiskers are growing there!" shrieked Blake.
"You'll pull the poor chap's face off in a minute! Let go!"

"Bai Jove!"
Arthur Augustus desisted at last.
Even he could not doubt any longer that the grey whiskers were attached to the stranger's face by the natural process of growing there.

D'Arcy released his victim, retaining several little tufts of grey whisker in his hands.
He rose to his feet.

"Bai Jove!" he murmured, in dismay.
The stranger staggered up. The juniors had released him now. Tom Merry and Blake felt inclined to yell with laughter at the sight of D'Arcy's face. But the expression upon the grey whiskered gentleman's face stopped their desire to laugh. The stranger was crimson with fury.

"You—you young scoundrels!" he gasped. "How dare you! I will have you locked up for this! Were you trying to rob me? Ow!"

Tom Merry turned very red.
"It was a mistake, sir," he said lamely.
"You—you——"

The stranger caressed his whiskers affectionately. The swell of St. Jim's had hurt him. Whiskers cannot be tugged by an athletic junior without painful results to the owner.

"Oh!" he groaned. "Ow! Yow! Groo! Oh! You young scoundrels!"

"I am sowwy——"
"Oh! Ow! Groo!"
"You've made a frightful bloomer, Gussy, you ass!" said Blake witheringly.

Arthur Augustus looked obstinate.
"I refuse to admit anythin' of the sort!" he exclaimed.
"Figgins, dear boy, it's vewy unfortunate that you have nevah seen your patah's partnah, but do you wemembah whether Egbert Fwynne wore gwey whiskahs?"

Figgins grinned.
"I don't know anything about him," he said; "but I have an impression that he is a young man without any whiskers at all."

"Bai Jove! But he may have gwon that beard and whiskahs for disguise."

"In two days, you ass?" roared Blake.
"Pewwaws he's used Scwatcho, or somethin', to make them gwow."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
The fury had faded out of the stranger's face. He gave a start at the mention of the name Fwynne, and stared at Arthur Augustus. He seemed now to have forgotten even the pain in the roots of his whiskers.

"What are you talking about?" he exclaimed sharply.
"Whom did you mistake me for?"

"Fwynne, the abscondin' bankah," said D'Arcy. "If you are the w'ong man, I am vewy sowwy. But I was quite sure you were the wight man."

"Is this lad's name Figgins?" asked the stranger, with a glance at the New House junior.
"Yaas, wathah!"

"Oh! And what reason had you to suppose that the absconding banker, Fwynne, was hiding here?" the stranger demanded.

"I do not see why I should explain to a stwanger," said Arthur Augustus stiffly. "And I am not yet satisfied that you are not Fwynne."

The man laughed.
"If you know anything about the matter, it is your duty to tell me," he said.

"Why?" asked Tom Merry.
The much-ill-used stranger drew a card from his pocket, and held it out for the juniors to see. They looked at it, and uttered a simultaneous exclamation of amazement. For this is what they read:

"Mr. W. Pix, C.I.D., Scotland Yard."
"Bai Jove!"
"My only hat!"
"Great Scott!"
"A—a—a detective!" gasped Tom Merry.

"GOAL!"
Fatty Wynn was off colour to-day. It was the third time in ten minutes that the chums had scored against him. Sticking his hands into the pockets of his footer shorts, he walked out of goal. The juniors stared. This was extremely unlike Fatty.

"What's the matter, old kid?" asked Kangaroo.
"Fed up!" said Fatty laconically.
"Nothing strange in that, surely," grinned Monty Lowther.

"Oh, I say, Lowther——"
"Get in again, Fatty, and don't rot!" called out several of the juniors.

"I'm not rotting!" said Fatty Wynn tartly. "I simply can't do it. I tell you, I'm fed up with goalkeeping. I'm right off-side for footer to-day."

And he continued to walk away from the goal.
"You are mucking things up, you know," said Herrics.
"You're a giddy lunatic, Fatty!" said Digby.

"He'll be back in a minute or two, after a little interview with Dame Taggles—won't you, Fatty?" went on Monty Lowther.

Fatty Wynn almost turned round. But the chums had a further surprise when he refrained from any notice whatever of Lowther's remark. He looked as if he had the whole world on his shoulders, and all its trouble in his mind, as he walked away.

"I'll have a mince-pie," shouted Kangaroo.
"A stone ginger for me."

"Right-ho, Dane!" cried Monty Lowther. "Sandwiches for me, Fatty. Just a little snack, you know. I'm famished!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
But Fatty took no notice, and the chums gave it up as he disappeared in the direction of the New House. After a short confab, they selected another goalkeeper, and the game went on, with better results for the side Fatty Wynn had been representing.

"Perhaps it's as well he's gone," commented Digby.
"Though they might have had some doubt about it, Fatty Wynn had none. He strode into the New House with a gloomy brow. Several Fourth-Form juniors saluted him, but he didn't see them. He went up to the Fourth-Form dormer, and began to take off his things.

His thoughts were evidently warlike for the pucker in his forehead refused to quit.

"They ought to be boiled, the rotters!" he murmured.
Exactly who the rotters were was not apparent. Fatty hurriedly dragged on his trucks, muttering indistinctly the while.

"And Figgy—well, he's right off his rocker, that's a cert."

Fatty got as far as fixing his collar before any further observations escaped him.

"Who shall I begin on?" he murmured, looking abstractedly through the window.

The window not being communicative, Fatty gave it up for the moment, and completed his toilet. He paced up and down the dormer for a few moments, in the manner known as trying to piece things up a bit. But things refused to be pieced up. It was clear that Fatty was in a quandary. He ended it for the time being by deciding to go down into the quad.

Arrived there, he bethought him that he might wait for Figgins there. One good thought suggested another. He took a piece of paper from his pocket.

"By Jove! I'll make out a list!" he said.
And he busied himself writing out a list of New House fellows he intended to punch for Figgins's benefit. It wasn't a long list. Fatty could not think of more than three offenders.

They read in the order he had placed them—French, Pratt, and Dibbs.

"Now shall I start on French? That's the question," murmured Fatty. "Slogging him first would very likely make it a sweet thing with the other rotters."

Fatty Wynn paused. French was not so little a foe when he came to think it over.

"Well, I could manage Pratt easily," he muttered, rubbing French out, and putting him last on the list.

He looked at the paper, evidently more pleased with the new order.

"But on the whole," he said a moment later, "I might as well make an example of Dibbs first. Slogging a fellow with one hand makes a better impression than anything."

And the paper was altered again, accordingly. Fatty surveyed it complacently. He thought of the glory that would fall to his share when he told Figgins.

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"I'll show the beggars!" he murmured. "And they're all New House rott-fellows, too I can see Dibbs going through it now."

And Fatty Wynn made a wild swipe at the air, demolishing untold foes of Figgins at one fell swoop. The action suggested to him that he was really not in much form for pugilism as well as footer, this afternoon.

"On the whole," he muttered thoughtfully. "I'd better be guided by circs."

"Circs," guided Fatty Wynn upon French, after all, as the first victim. French was standing in the quad., and he allowed himself to sneer as Fatty strolled by.

Fatty Wynn swung round on him at once.

"What's the trouble with you?" he demanded.

"Pain in the eyes," said French humorously, staring at Fatty Wynn.

The fat Fourth-Former paused; he had no retort ready. He unfolded the paper again, and wrote French's name first on the list.

"Will you be in the gym. in half an hour?" he asked politely.

"Eh! What for?"

"To be licked."

The Shell fellow laughed.

"Right-ho! If you want a set of thick ears—"

"I'll see you in half an hour in the gym., if you've got the pluck to turn up," said Fatty Wynn, with a disdainful sniff.

"Oh, you'll find me there!"

Fatty Wynn strolled away in the direction of the footer-field. He looked on at the junior game till it ended—it had not been far from the finish. Then he poked Kangaroo in the ribs as the players came off.

The Cornstalk grinned at him.

"Feeling any better?" he asked.

"Oh, that's all right! I want some of you fellows to back me up."

"What's on?"

"Scrap!" said Fatty Wynn briefly.

Kangaroo whistled.

"What about the fellows in your own House?" he asked.

The fat Fourth-Former snorted.

"They're the chaps I'm going to fight," he said.

"Eh! Not all of them?"

"A good many."

"We'll back you up with pleasure," said Kangaroo.

"But—"

"Yes, rather!" said Herries. "I suppose they're down on Figgy?"

Fatty Wynn nodded.

"We'll back you up," said Digby. "Any time you like."

"Come into the gym., then, when you've changed," said Fatty Wynn. "I'm making up a list, and I want Kangy to take it round to the chaps, and make them come."

"Right-ho!" said Kangaroo.

Fatty Wynn sat down upon a bench, and scanned the list. So far, he had the names of French, Pratt, and Dibbs—and French's name was in the place of honour, at the head of the list. But Fatty Wynn was growing more warlike. On the footer-field several New House juniors had favoured him with grimaces, and Fatty Wynn had made a mental note of each of them. Every fellow who ventured to make a grimace was to be licked, if the fiery Welsh junior was able to do the licking. And, inspired by indignation on his chum's behalf, Fatty Wynn felt just then as if he could conquer continents.

Kangaroo came out, looking very ruddy and cheerful.

"List ready?" he asked.

"Look here!"

Kangaroo read the list over Fatty Wynn's shoulder.

It ran as follows:

"French, Pratt, Dibbs, Craggs, Hoe, Tucker, Maine, Stacey."

Kangaroo stared.

"You're not going to fight the whole family?" he asked.

"I am!"

"One at a time, or all at once?" asked the Cornstalk humorously.

Fatty Wynn frowned.

"One at a time," he said. "I could manage Dibbs and Tucker with one hand. French will be rather a coughdrop, but I shall lick him first, while I'm fresh. Will you go and round them up into the gym.?"

"Yes, rather!"

And Kangaroo marched off with the paper. Fatty Wynn sprinted across to the tuckshop, and refreshed himself with steak-and-kidney-pie—his favourite dish. Then he marched into the gymnasium.

The news had spread. The fact that the Falstaff of the New House had challenged eight fellows, all of his own

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House, to fight him in succession, caused considerable excitement in the junior portion of St. Jim's. The juniors gathered from far and near to watch the encounter. The corner of the gym. selected for the fight was crowded.

"Go it, Wynn!" said Gore encouragingly. "And if you want any help, sing out!"

"I sha'n't want any help!" said Fatty Wynn.

"My only Aunt Jane!" said Wally D'Arcy, of the Third. "Fatty is on the warpath, and no mistake! He's seeing red."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But Fatty Wynn did not laugh. His plump face remained very serious. It was no laughing matter for Fatty Wynn, and it was not likely to be a laughing matter for his adversaries, either—at all events, for the first two or three of them.

There was a buzz as French, Dibbs & Co. came marching into the gym. in a body. They were mostly grinning. Some of them, certainly, did not care for personal encounters with the redoubtable Welsh junior; but they had learned that they were low down on the list, and by the time Fatty got to them, he was not likely to be in very good fighting trim. French was the first, and French, certainly, was likely to have a lively time.

"Ready?" demanded Fatty Wynn aggressively.

"Ready, and waiting to be slaughtered," said French, with a grin.

"Hand out the gloves, Kangy!"

And Kangaroo handed out the gloves. Fatty Wynn put on the gloves with a very businesslike air.

CHAPTER 15.

The Gentleman from Scotland Yard.

TOM MERRY & CO. stared at the gentleman in the grey whiskers. The pain in the roots of the whiskers was probably abating, for Mr. Pix seemed to have quite forgotten the extremely rough way in which Arthur Augustus had handled them. He smiled genially, apparently amused and perhaps gratified by the wonder and awe in the faces of the juniors.

"A detective!" repeated Figgins.

"Exactly," said Mr. Pix, replacing the card "Now, you understand that it is your duty to tell me anything you can."

"Oh, certainly!" said Tom Merry. "But—but have you come down here, sir, to look for that man, Fwynne?"

The detective smiled again, but did not reply.

"I hope you will find him, sir," said Figgins earnestly.

"If he is found, I know that the bank's money will be found upon him, and my father's innocence will be proved."

Mr. Pix looked curiously at Figgins.

"Very good," he said. "I—I certainly hope that that will be the case, Master Figgins. Now, I find that you young gentlemen have suspected that the missing man, Fwynne, may be here, and therefore it is possible you have some information to give me. Please tell me all you can."

"Go it, Gussy!"

D'Arcy hesitated a little.

He was wondering how Mr. Pix would receive the flimsy evidence that had satisfied him, and caused him to make an unprovoked assault upon a simple stranger.

"Please go on," said Mr. Pix.

"Vewy well, sir. You—you see, the name stwuk me at first—Fwynne is not a common name. Then the man does not bear a good reputation, and I have hear! people wemark that he must have wich wrelations, because he does vewy little work, and has enough money to spend in gettin' dwunk. I wathah weckoned that he was the kind of man to give sheltah to that abscondin' wascal if he could get a share of the loot, sir. And then—"

"Very good," said Mr. Pix; "and then—"

"Then there is the fact that the sign has been painted out, sir," said Arthur Augustus. "I wemark that as a most important fact."

"It jolly well wanted repainting," said Blake

"Yaas; but at this particulah moment, it is suspicious!" said the swell of St. Jim's, with a wise shake of the head. "It looks as if the man does not want to attract attention to the fact that his name is, Fwynne—the same name that is in all the papahs."

"But everybody in the village knows it," said Figgins.

Arthur Augustus gave Figgins a patronising look.

"He isn't afraid of people in the village," he said.

"But a stwangan here, seein' the name of Fwynne, might wemark upon it, as it's the same name as that of the abscondah, and so it might bring cwicious people nosin' about—and if the police in London should hear that there

was a Fwynne livin' here, they would be sure to send a man down to see if he had heard anythin' of the missin' Fwynne of Bwistol."

Mr. Pix nodded approvingly. "Extremely good!" he said. "As a matter of fact, it transpired that Egbert Frynne had a relation living in this part of the country, and I was sent down to look into the circumstances. I am very glad to hear these particulars of the man's character, and, above all, to see that he has made an effort to keep his name from public attention. You are a very keen lad."

The swell of St. Jim's glowed with pride. "I have had a feelin' for a long time that I should make a good amateur detective, sir," he remarked modestly.

Mr. Pix smiled. "You must be careful whom you seize by the beard next time, that is all," he remarked.

The juniors chuckled, and D'Arcy turned red.

"That was a natuwal mistake, sir."

Mr. Pix rubbed his whiskers. "Yes, yes, quite," he assented. "But—but don't do it any more! Now, can you tell me whether, until lately, this Mr. Jonas Frynne had an assistant in his business?"

Tom Merry laughed. "He's never had enough business to keep him going, sir," he said. "He certainly never wanted an assistant."

"He has one now," Mr. Pix remarked.

"Bai Jove!"

"You do not happen to know when the new young man came to Rylcombe?" asked Mr. Pix, looking at the juniors.

"Never heard of him before," said Figgins.

"He certainly wasn't there on Saturday," said Blake.

"I went in there to buy some cord, and there wasn't anybody about the place excepting old Frynne."

Mr. Pix nodded. "I suppose you young gentlemen belong to a school near here?" he asked.

"Yes; St. Jim's."

"And you are going back there now?"

"I—I don't know."

"I think you had better," said Mr. Pix blandly. "You see, you can safely leave this matter in professional hands, and—and upon the whole, if you are off the scene, there is less danger of an alarm being given, in case the rascal should really be there."

D'Arcy turned pink. "But we can assist, my deah sir!" he exclaimed.

Mr. Pix coughed.

"If there is an arrest to be made, the police here will assist," he said. "I am very much afraid that you may give the alarm."

"You may wely—"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Come on Gussy! We mustn't stick here if we're in the way. If the man's there, Mr. Pix will have him."

"But weally—"

"Good-afternoon, young gentlemen!" said Mr. Pix blandly. "I am very pleased to have met you. Of course, you will not say a word about this."

"Not a word, sir."

"Until to-morrow, at all events," said Mr. Pix.

"Good-bye!"

"Good-bye, sir!"

The juniors accepted their dismissal. D'Arcy went very reluctantly, but as Blake had taken one of his arms, and Tom Merry the other, he had little choice about going. He expostulated as they went down the street.

"I wegard this as wotten!" he exclaimed. "I was gettin' on vewy well with the case, and now this blessed professional has chipped in, and taken it out of my hands."

Blake chuckled.

"Well, he's had more practice, Gussy," he said.

"Yaas; but I was managin' it vewy well."

"Yes, it's a bit of a triumph."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"To attempt to arrest a Scotland Yard detective," said Blake calmly. "I don't suppose any amateur detective has got that far before."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Let's get back to the school," said Tom Merry. "Mr. Pix thinks we shall talk about this, and put the man on his guard, and he thinks it won't matter so much if we talk in the school, instead of in the village. Come on!"

"But weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Come on! I'm getting ready for tea, anyway," said Blake.

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy allowed himself to be led away. Figgins hardly spoke as they walked back to the school. He was deep in thought.

From the detective's manner he felt that Mr. Pix con-

sidered it very likely that Egbert Frynne had gone into hiding in the little village, and that he would be arrested. Figgins's heart beat with hope at the thought.

If the absconder was taken, and the missing funds found upon him, no one would be able to say that Mr. Figgins had stolen any of the money. And if the man was at all decent, when he found that he could not evade punishment himself, surely he would confess that his partner, whom he had deceived and ruined, was innocent. He could have no motive for wishing to injure Mr. Figgins more than he had done already.

Figgins felt his spirits rise a little.

The loss of money was nothing. That his father's financial losses would be great, that the bank was ruined, mattered very little. It was the question of his father's honour and liberty that weighed upon Figgins's mind.

The juniors reached St. Jim's, and went in. Figgins looked round. There was not a junior in sight. Even the footer field was deserted, excepting by a crowd of seniors, who were watching a Sixth-Form match.

"Where are the fellows?" explained Tom Merry in surprise.

"Bai Jove! They've all disappeared!"

"Listen!"

From the direction of the gym. came a loud echoing shout.

"Well done, Fatty!"

Figgins gave a start.

"Hallo! That sounds like Fatty Wynn in trouble!" he exclaimed anxiously.

Blake laughed.

"It sounds more like somebody else in trouble, you mean," he remarked.

"Yaas, wathah!"

But Figgins did not reply. He was racing towards the gym.

CHAPTER 16.

Fatty Wynn on the Warpath.

"GO it, Fatty!"

"Pile in, French!"

Fatty Wynn and French faced one another with the gloves on. In spite of the gloves, there was likely to be some damage done to the features of the adversaries, to judge by their determined looks. The juniors crowded round the ring in great excitement. The fight was a peculiar one—Fatty Wynn was fighting fellows of his own House, and all his sympathisers, with very few exceptions, belonged to the School House, the rival House of St. Jim's. It was quite a new state of things.

Fatty Wynn was in deadly earnest.

French was taller than Wynn, and a little longer in the reach, and he knew something about boxing. But he had simply no chance against Fatty.

Wherever his blows fell they seemed to leave hardly any impression. Even after being downed by a powerful right-hander, Fatty Wynn came up unrudded.

And all the time his blows were hammering upon his foe.

French stood it out gallantly for three rounds. In the fourth round a terrific upper-cut sent him flying out of the ring, and he rolled over among the legs of the spectators.

Fatty Wynn snorted.

"Chuck him back!" he exclaimed.

But French declined to be chucked back. He had had enough.

"I'm done!" he groaned.

"First man done," said Kangaroo, who was refereeing and keeping time. "Rest for five minutes, and then the next man in."

"I don't want to rest," said Fatty Wynn. "Come out, Pratt!"

"Put the gloves on, Pratt!"

"Pile in!"

Pratt stepped up rather unwillingly. He was not afraid, but he did not want to share French's fate. He had always been very friendly with Fatty Wynn, too, and he was repenting a little for having sided against him; but he did not care to say so now.

He put on the gloves, and faced the fat Fourth-Former.

If French, of the Shell, had not been able to stand against Fatty Wynn, it was not likely that Pratt, of the Fourth, would be able to do so. Fatty Wynn simply played with him.

Pratt was knocked right and left. The end of the second round found him lying gasping and exhausted on the floor of the gym.

"Time!" said Kangaroo.

Pratt grunted.

"Groo!"

"Are you done?"

"Ow! Yes."

"Next man in!" grinned Herries.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Dibbs came very unwillingly up to the scratch. Dibbs was still looking very much of a wreck from his encounter with Figgins the previous day. He was feeling very sore and seedy, not having by any means got over that encounter yet. But he had no choice about fighting. He had allowed himself to sneer at the fat Fourth-Former, and that sneer had to be paid for.

Dibbs proceeded to pay for it. He stood up to Fatty Wynn for exactly one round, and in that one round he was punished for all his sins. He looked a bundle of bruises by the time the round ended, and he was knocked fairly down.

Fatty Wynn was warning to his work. He sat down on the knee of his second to rest a few minutes, but he jumped up with alacrity as Craggs, the fourth on the list, toed the line.

"Time!" sang out Kangaroo.

"Go it, Wynn!" roared Digby.

The fourth combat commenced. Craggs was a tough antagonist, and he gave Fatty Wynn some punishment before he was disposed of.

But disposed of he was at last. After three rounds, Craggs was hopelessly knocked out, and by that time, too, Fatty Wynn was showing decided signs of wear and tear.

Craggs retired defeated, and Fatty Wynn sat down on Herries's knee to rest, gasping and panting. His wind was not what it had been, and his fat face was blue with bruises. But he was unconquered.

"Better chuck it now, Fatty," said Kangaroo kindly.

"Fight the other four to-morrow."

Fatty Wynn shook his head.

"I'll fight them now," he said. "I dare say I shall have another half a dozen to fight to-morrow, Kangy."

"My hat! I never knew you were such a blessed fire-eater. Wire in, then! Hoe, my son, it's your turn."

Hoe, of the Fourth stepped up. Under ordinary circumstances, Hoe was no match for Fatty Wynn, and would not have lasted one round against him. But in Wynn's present state, Hoe had a chance.

He did his best. Fatty Wynn had to fight hard now, and he licked Hoe hollow, but by the time Hoe was finished with Fatty was gasping and fagged.

"Chuck it now," said Herries.

"I won't!"

"Next man will lick you."

"Rats!"

"Well, if you will have it, you will," said Kangaroo.

"Your turn, Tucker."

Tucker sniffed.

"I'm jolly well not going to fight him!" he said. "Why, the fat duffer can hardly stand now. Rats!"

Fatty Wynn staggered into the ring.

"You'll fight me now, Tucker," he said. "You said that Figgys was the son of a swindler—"

"So he is," said Tucker.

"Then you'll fight me, you cad!"

"I won't!"

"Yes, you will, if Fatty insists," said Clifton Dane, of the Shell. "That's what you've come here for. Walk up!"

"Look here—"

Tucker was pushed into the ring.

"Well, it's not my fault if I smash him," he said, putting on the gloves.

But the smashing, much to Tucker's surprise, was not so easy. Fatty Wynn had a great deal of life left in him yet.

He stood up gallantly to his foe.

Three rounds were fought out, and both of them looked well punished. Fatty Wynn could hardly keep his feet in the fourth round, and Tucker rushed in to finish him. But he rushed in too soon. A terrific upper-cut caught him fairly on the chin, and he reeled backwards, and crashed to the floor.

Kangaroo counted.

"One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine—Licked!"

Tucker was licked.

Fatty Wynn gasped for breath.

"Now your turn, Maine!" he gasped painfully.

"Look here, Wynn—" began Kangaroo.

There was a shout. Four juniors came racing across the gym, towards the spot. They were Figgins, D'Arcy, Blake, and Tom Merry. They had just arrived.

Figgins burst through the crowd, elbowing and shoving the juniors right and left, in spite of angry expostulations.

"Hang you, Figgins!"

"Stop it!"

"Look here!"

"Oh, get out of the way!" exclaimed Figgins roughly.

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He burst into the ring.

"What are you doing to Fatty?" he shouted.

Fatty Wynn blinked at him out of half-closed eyes.

"It's all right, Figgys!" he said thickly. "I—I'm fighting the cads in turn. I—I've licked six of them; there are only two more."

"Two more!" howled Figgys. "Oh, Fatty!"

"It's all right, Figgys!"

"I'll take the other two," said Figgins grimly. "Get aside, Fatty! Leave the cads to me! Where are they?"

"Oh, all serene!" said Fatty Wynn. "I feel rather done in, I must say. They're Maine and Stacey. You can lam them."

And Figgins did.

Maine and Stacey would almost as soon have tackled a lion in his wrath as Figgins, but they had no choice about the matter. They faced the mighty Figgins in turn, and he made mincemeat of them.

Hardly showing a sign of the conflict, Figgins glared round at the rest of the New House juniors.

"Anybody else want a turn?" he asked.

There was no reply.

Figgins sniffed, and put on his jacket.

The crowd broke up.

"Bai Jove," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, patting Fatty Wynn on the back, "you are a wegulah hewo, you know! You ought to have a medal, or somethin'. I suppose you don't feel up to a feed aftah all that fightin'?"

Fatty Wynn granted.

"Don't I?" he said. "Fighting gives a chap a good appetite."

"Then come along with us, and have a feed in the study," said Jack Blake. "Come on, Figgys, my son! Never mind those wasters."

And Figgins and Fatty Wynn walked away with the School House juniors, and Fatty Wynn, in spite of his injuries, enjoyed himself exceedingly in Blake's study.

CHAPTER 17.

All Right.

THE next day Figgins was waiting anxiously for news. The happening in the village the day before had raised his hopes, and all his hopes were built upon the capture of the absconder, Fryne.

If that rascal succeeded in making good his escape, with the stolen funds still in his possession, the fate of Mr. Figgins was sealed.

That he had been careless, that he had reposed an unjustified faith in his partner, was clear in any case, and to the outside world it looked as if he were more rascal than simpleton.

Only one thing could clear him—the capture of Fryne.

Would the man be captured?

Figgins had confided the matter to Fatty Wynn, but to no one else. Both of them waited anxiously for news. Had the man been captured? Was Mr. Pix, of Scotland Yard, on the right track, or had he gone back to London disappointed?

"It's all wight, Figgys!" Arthur Augustus declared. "You will find that it is all wight. You can twust my detective instinct, deah boy."

Figgins grinned faintly.

"Yes," he said, "but I'd rather have some news."

"Mr. Pix is sure to let you know."

"Yes, I suppose so. I wish he'd buck up," said Figgins, with a sigh.

The morning dragged slowly by.

Figgins, in the Fourth-Form room, sat by himself. The New House fellows had nothing to say to him. Blake and his friends were very friendly, but that did not help Figgins with the fellows of his own House.

Figgins was despondent.

If the hope he had now should prove false, if the absconder was not arrested, and the truth did not come to light, he confided to Fatty Wynn that he thought he would leave St. Jim's after all.

Fatty Wynn stared at him in dismay.

"Figgys, you can't! You sha'n't!"

"No good staying here," said Figgins wearily. "The fellows are all down on me, and they'll all be down on you so long as you stick to me, and the same with Kerr when he comes back. I'd better get out. They want me to go."

"You sha'n't go!" said Fatty Wynn.

Figgins only smiled faintly.

The Fourth Form were dismissed, and French, Dibbs, & Co. marched off very ostentatiously, leaving Figgins and Fatty Wynn alone. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther came out of the Shell room, and joined Figgins in the

passage, and Blake & Co. came up. Figgins had plenty of friends, if not in his own House.

"Heard any news yet?" asked Blake.

Figgins shook his head.

"Mr. Pix is sure to tell us."

"He hasn't yet."

The juniors moved out into the quadrangle. They were all looking very serious. For Figgins's sake, they hoped fervently that news would come of the capture of Frynne.

Arthur Augustus glanced towards the school gates, and uttered a sudden exclamation.

"Bai Jove, here he is!"

"Eh? Here who is?"

"The detective."

"My hat!"

The juniors dashed towards the gates. The gentleman with the grey whiskers had just entered, and was walking briskly up towards the house. The juniors surrounded him in a moment.

"Any news, sir?"

"Bai Jove, pway tell us!"

"Have you got him?"

"Have you got—"

Mr. Pix smiled.

"Yes," he said.

Figgins gasped. For a moment he was almost overcome, and Fatty Wynn put an arm gently behind him and held him.

"Buck up, Figgy!" he whispered.

Mr. Pix looked kindly at the pale, working face of the New House junior.

"I have good news for you, Master Figgins," he said quietly. "I have walked over, before taking the train to London, on purpose to tell you."

"Oh, thank you, sir! And what is the news?"

"Frynne is arrested. He was hiding in his uncle's shop, was acting as an assistant. He was arrested this morning, and has confessed everything."

"Confessed!" breathed Figgins.

Mr. Pix nodded.

"Yes. The money and bonds have been found, concealed in various parts of the house, and the whole sum is correct. As for the earlier defalcations at the bank, Frynne has confessed they were all his work, and that he deceived your father as well as everybody else. To do him justice, he appears sorry that he has dragged your father into so much trouble, and he declares that, had he reached a place of safety, he would have sent a signed confession to England to clear Mr. Figgins."

Figgins drew a quick breath.

"Will my father be cleared now?" he asked.

"Certainly!"

"Quite cleared?"

"There will not be the slightest stain upon his name," said Mr. Pix. "His losses, I am afraid, will be great; but so much money has been recovered, that you need not fear that he will be ruined."

"Oh, sir!"

The detective glanced at his watch.

"I came to give you the news," he said. "I have no further business here. Good-bye!"

Mr. Pix shook hands with the juniors, and they marched down to the gates with him, and gave him a cheer as he departed. Mr. Pix smiled as he walked up the road.

Then the juniors gathered round Figgins. Figgins was still looking pale, and almost sick. The reaction had been too much for him. He could hardly realise yet that the black cloud had passed, that the horrible trouble which had threatened to ruin and stain his whole life had gone.

"Congratulations, old boy!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, seizing a hand and shaking it. It was Jack Blake's hand, but in his excitement D'Arcy did not notice that unimportant fact. "Congratulations, old son!"

"Thanks!" said Blake.

"Weally, Blake!"

"Oh," said Figgins, "I—I can't get used to, it yet! I—I feel as if it were all a dream. That chap Frynne isn't such an awful rotter after all. A man may be a thief without being everything that's bad."

"Yaas, wathah! It is wemarkable, but vewy twue, Figgy, deah boy."

"We must celebrate this, somehow," said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I've a jolly good mind to change over into the School House, and give the New House the go-by," said Figgins.

"That's my idea of celebrating it."

"Hurray!" shouted Blake.

"You'd be jolly welcome," said Tom Merry heartily. "And wouldn't we jolly well give the New House kybosh then?"

"Yaas, wathah! I shall insist upon Figgins comin' into Studay No. 6, deah boys."

The chums of the School House marched Figgins to their House in triumph. They cheered as they went, and their cheering soon brought an inquiring crowd round them. The news they had to give was a complete surprise to St. Jim's.

The New House fellows looked, as Jack Blake described it, perfectly, completely, and utterly sick.

Figgins's father was innocent! He had been deeply, cruelly wronged, and that was all. And instead of standing by old Figgins in his trouble, they had turned on him when he was down, and made matters worse for him.

It was too rotten! Even Dibbs was sorry. French and Pratt and Tucker and the rest were repentant, but they hesitated to tell Figgins so. They did not know what kind of reception they would meet with. They expended some of their feelings, first, by bumping Dibbs. It was in vain that Dibbs explained that he had been no worse than the others. The more he expostulated, the more they bumped him, and they left him sore and sorry.

"Fancy that chump thinking that he could be captain!" said Thompson, of the Shell, scornfully.

"The fathead!" said French. "Picture him, in comparison with old Figgins!"

"Good old Figgins!"

"Let's go and ask him to be captain again!" said Pratt.

"Too late!" said Stacey, with a glum shake of the head.

"I've got news from the School House. Figgy is going to join them."

"What?"

"He's going to desert the House!"

"Join the School House!"

"My hat!"

"This has got to be stopped," said French hurriedly.

"My hat! How should we keep up our end against the School House rotters if Figgins turned against us? Come on! Where is he?"

"In Blake's study," said Stacey.

"Follow me!" exclaimed French.

The whole crowd of New House juniors dashed after French. They invaded the School House. They rushed up the stairs to Study No. 6. They kicked open the door, and rushed into the study.

"Figgins!"

"Figgy!"

"I say, old man, you don't mean it?"

"Figgins, old man—"

Figgins glared at them.

"What do you want?" he demanded.

"We want to say we've been silly asses, and we're sorry," said French. "There, that's good enough for you, Figgy, ain't it? And—we want you to stick to us, old man, and stick to the House."

"Stick to the House, Figgy!" came a chorus.

Figgins's expression softened.

"We're sorry!" said Pratt.

"Awfully sorry!" said French.

"Say it's all right, Figgins."

Figgins hesitated one moment. Then his kind and generous heart prompted his answer.

"It's all right!" he said.

And Figgins did not desert the New House.

THE END.

.....
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A Perilous Expedition.

Barely had Dick Dauntless jerked the rope to inform those above that he had reached the ground in safety ere his perils began.

Under the shelter of the inky darkness that obtained over the island some of the rebels had crept so close to the walls, looking in vain for some weak spot that offered foot and hand hold, that they had heard the colonel's farewell words.

Uttering wild cries, they rushed towards the brave lad. But those on the wall were prepared for them. In a moment a blue light hurtled through the air, and, exploding as it touched the ground, revealed the position of the enemy.

In a moment rifle-fire, the rattle of machine-guns, and the deeper roar of quickfirers rent the silence of the night.

Filling the air with shrieks of terror, the rebels turned and fled, leaving Dick to make the best of his way across the island in peace.

All went well until, moving noiselessly over the rich grass which carpeted every treeless spot of the Island of Rest, he had reached the neighbourhood of a small house from which the toboggan railway to the sea cave commenced. Close at hand was a small palm-leaf thatched cottage.

Although the late occupier was in the castle, his cottage had so far escaped the ravages of the invaders.

As Dick glided noiselessly alongside a fence that hemmed in the neatly-kept little garden attached to the house, he dropped flat to the ground.

A sudden outburst of excited voices, accompanied by the uneven tramp of running men, fell on his ears.

At first he thought he was being pursued, but a moment's reflection showed him that the enemy were approaching from the opposite side of the island to that on which the castle stood.

How he blessed their raving tongues, their lack of discipline!

Had they moved more silently he might have ran into their midst before he was aware of their presence.

As it was he had nothing to do but to lie perfectly still where he was, and they would pass him unseen.

And that is exactly what they did do.

But one, keener-sighted than his companions, detected the thatch of the cottage through the trees by which it was surrounded.

In a spirit of wanton mischief he hurled a torch of pine-wood he carried on to the thatch.

In a second the dry leaves caught fire.

A wild shout of delicious delight hailed the sudden mass of flame which shot heavenwards from the doomed cottage.

The next moment a louder, fiercer, more bloodthirsty yell burst from the rebels' lips.

Springing to his feet, Dick fled for dear life. The glare from the burning building had disclosed his crouching form to his foes.

Filling the air with fearful cries, like the baying of hungry wolves, the mob started in pursuit.

Dick was fleet of foot, and had no fear but that he would easily outdistance his pursuers. But he counted without the savage shouts with which the rebels took up the chase.

Soon cries from every side proclaimed that the whole countryside was aroused. He was surrounded; hemmed in by remorseless foes from whom there was no escape.

Yet Dick's bulldog determination did not for a moment desert him. He had set off to rejoin Jack Orde, and rejoin Jack Orde he would, or die striving to the last.

Without slackening his speed, he listened intently to the distant voices. They were louder, fiercer, more sustained in his rear, front, and on his right. Those on his left were fewer and weaker.

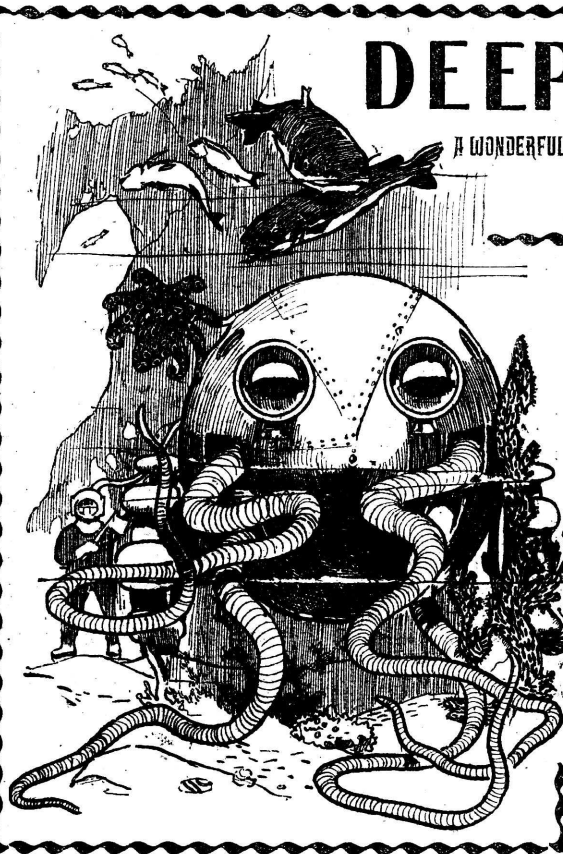
Doubling swiftly just as the mob hastening to cut him off appeared immediately ahead, he put on a despairing spurt, and ran swiftly to his left.

Suddenly he stumbled over the protruding roof of a tree, and rolled into a thick bush of sharp thorns.

Dick Dauntless gave himself up for lost.

But the accident proved his salvation.

As, panting and bruised, bleeding from a dozen scratches,



The Opening Chapters of "DEEP SEA GOLD," specially re-written for this number of "THE GEM" LIBRARY.

Dick Dauntless and Jack Orde, chums of Weltsea College, are bathing in the sea early one morning, when they are suddenly seized by enormous octopus-like tentacles and dragged swiftly down beneath the surface of the water. The chums are almost at their last gasp, when a dark trap-door appears before them, and they are pulled aboard a strange submarine craft, the like of which they have never seen before. It is, in fact, a submarine motor-car, and the boys are soon introduced to Captain Flame, the captain of the Octopus, as the strange craft is named.

The crew consists entirely of boys, with whom Dick Dauntless and Jack Orde are soon on good terms.

The chums learn that Captain Flame is bound for the Pacific with the express intention of searching for Dick Dauntless's millionaire father, who was a friend of his, and whose yacht the Morning Star, has long been reported missing.

A chance paragraph in a newspaper gives the adventurers a clue, and they make for that dreaded mass of floating weeds known as the Sargasso Sea. There, stuck fast in the midst of the weeds, they find both the Morning Star and a tug which had been sent to aid her.

Captain Flame, with a small party of his boys, set out in a launch to investigate. When the party return to the Octopus they find that it is being attacked by the fearful monsters of the deep.

These are eventually driven off, and the Octopus is repaired. Just as the repairs are finished, however, a body of Tankas, huge men who dwell in the crater of an extinct volcano, are seen advancing to attack the ship. The leader is captured, and the Octopus makes for an island, where the repairs can be properly attended to. Dick Dauntless and Jack Orde are sent, in the launch, to the Island of Rest for chemicals, but on arriving at their destination they find that the prisoners of the Island of Lost Hopes have rebelled, and invaded the Island of Rest. Dick thereupon leaves his chum Jack in charge of the launch, while he himself, with a party of warders, escorts a number of fugitives to the refuge of a strong castle. After nightfall, Dick sets out to rejoin Jack Orde. "Good-bye, my lad! You're Dauntless by name, and dauntless by nature. Take care of yourself!" are the farewell words of the colonel commanding the castle, as the boy lowers himself by a rope from the battlements.

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DON'T MISS "FOR THE HONOUR OF HIS CHUM." The Splendid, Long, Complete School Story appearing in this week's number of the "MAGNET" LIBRARY, 1^d.

he lay amongst the spreading branches of the bush a wide, extended line of yelling rioters swept by.

Dick Dauntless marked their wild, ragged forms, their fierce, bloodshot eyes, and shuddered.

Better to fall into the hands of the monsters of the under-seas than in their hands.

For some minutes he lay motionless, scarce daring to breathe.

Presently, from some distance away, the shouts arose afresh, and Dick knew that the rebels had discovered that he had once more escaped.

He heard their voices raised in anger, and knew that they were quarrelling amongst themselves, each party blaming the other for having allowed him to slip through their fingers.

He dare not remain there longer.

At any moment the rebels might return and discover him. With difficulty restraining the cries of pain which rose to his lips, he burst free from the detaining thorns, and was soon leaving the excited voices of his would-be murderers far behind.

But he was still in fearful peril.

During his headlong flight through the night he had lost all sense of direction, and knew not which way to turn.

Throwing himself down upon the soft slope of turf, he listened intently.

The sound of breaking billows reached his ears.

Hope lending his tired frame renewed vigour, he breasted the steep slope once more.

Five minutes later he stood on the summit of the rocky wall which hemmed in the Island of Rest.

The next moment he bitterly regretted his indiscretion.

He had forgotten that his form would stand up in plain relief against the stars.

A distant roar of many voices told that he had been seen.

Wildly he looked around him for some way of escape. There was none!

Immediately beneath him there was a sheer precipice, five hundred feet in depth, the foot of which was lapped by the restless ocean billows.

Behind him a fierce, wild mob of foemen, eager to carry him off to a lingering death by torture.

A distant hail caused Dick Dauntless to glance over the edge of the giddy cliff.

Floating on the starlit waters beneath him was the launch.

A glance to his rear revealed a long, uneven line of nimble figures, as the rebels scaled the slope up which he had just climbed.

A wild yell of triumph arose from his swarming foes.

They felt sure of him now.

In a moment Dick's mind was made up.

Without daring to look again upon the dizzy path he had determined to tread, he turned his back to the depths, then dropping face downwards on the edge of the cliff, commenced his perilous, almost hopeless descent.

It was indeed a fearful climb.

Now hanging by his fingers to a protruding rock whilst his groping feet sought some narrow ledge on which to rest; now creeping along a ledge upon which a seabird could scarce have found foothold, he slowly and painfully worked his way down the precipice, thanking the kindly darkness which hid the full peril of his path from view.

About half-way down he looked up, to see the edge of the cliff lined with a hundred angry, baffled faces.

A minute later a shower of stones and rocks, hurled by the raging rebels, hurtled past him.

He dared not pause, though his fingers were skinned and bleeding, his arms ached as though they were being torn from off his body, his whole frame was racked with cramp.

Another agony-filled five minutes, which seemed like so many hours.

Suddenly a bitter cry rose from Dick's lips.

A gnarled root, to which he was clinging, gave beneath his weight, and he felt himself falling.

Down he went, down and down, turning head over heels in his descent, until at last he struck the water with a force which dispersed the few remaining sparks of consciousness that were left in him, and all was blank.

Lost in the Boundless Ocean.

When Dick Dauntless again awoke to consciousness it was to find himself in the gallant little launch as she ploughed her way over a sun-kissed sea.

He opened his eyes and looked around him.

He was lying on a cosy bed of rugs at the bottom of the boat.

Then he raised his head and saw Jack Orde sitting at the tiller regarding him anxiously.

"Hallo, old chap! Awake at last—eh?" cried Jack cheerfully.

Then, as Dick replied with a faint smile, he continued:

"It grieves me to say it, Dick Dauntless, but if ever a man was born to be hung it is you. No other living being could have climbed as far down the face of that awful cliff; and certainly no one else not—as I have before intimated—born to be hung could by any stretch of imagination have fallen a good hundred feet into water and live to tell the tale. And that reminds me. You must have a fairly exciting tale to tell, considering the amount of shooting that has been going on on the island. I was nearly going ashore to find out what the row was all about."

"Thank Heaven you didn't!" ejaculated Dick earnestly.

Without further pressing on his chum's part, he plunged into a graphic account of his adventure down to the time when he lost his footing on the cliff and fell headlong into the sea.

"And now, old chap, finish the yarn," he concluded.

"Tell me how you fished me out of the sea, and what happy inspiration induced you to set sail at once for the Desert Island—for that is, I suppose, whither you are bound."

"Guessed it in once, Dick," admitted Orde. "When you fell, I was, fortunately, already under weigh for the foot of the cliff, and reached the spot where you dived a few seconds after you had disappeared beneath the surface."

"You were such a long time coming up again that I began to fear you had stopped there for good. But just as I was thinking of diving in after you you rose to the surface. I grabbed you by the hair, pulled you into the launch, and here you are."

"As to why I left the island, I received quite a number of broad hints that I was not wanted there. The hints took the shape of a hail of rocks, stones, and sundry other throwable articles; so I sheered off. Guessing that you would wish to return to Captain Flame and let him know how his naughty children are behaving, I picked up the course, as near as I could guess it—and here we are."

Dick nodded, and, feeling still a trifle the worse for wear, sank on the rugs, and was soon fast asleep once more.

It was night when Dick Dauntless again awoke.

Directly he opened his eyes he knew that something was wrong. The launch was behaving in a most extraordinary way.

At one minute she would be moving along on a fairly level keel, the next swerving off to right or left.

Then she would whirl round in a circle, as though enjoying a solitary waltz, and a second later would be running forward on a straight course once more.

Struggling to his feet, Dick Dauntless glanced towards the stern.

A single glance sufficed to explain the mystery.

Jack Orde had slipped to the bottom of the boat and was sleeping peacefully, all unconscious that the boat, which he had left to its own devices, was performing the many strange evolutions which had so alarmed Dick Dauntless.

Angry at his chum for sleeping on his post, Dick made his way aft. In the very act of raising his foot to give Jack a rude awakening, he changed his mind.

Orde had been awake the whole of the previous night; had, doubtless, steered the boat whilst he was unconscious, far into the day, and had stuck gamely to the steering-wheel whilst he slept.

"No wonder the poor old chap dropped off!" muttered Dick. "I was a beast not to remember what a long spell on duty he has had!"

Very gently he stooped down, and, making a pillow of the rugs from which he had just risen, took his place at the tiller.

As he did so he glanced at the compass.

An ejaculation of dismay escaped his lips.

The launch was heading due north, and the Desert Island lay on a south-easterly course from the islands.

Instinctively he steered the boat round until her bows pointed in the right direction.

For nearly an hour he sat perfectly still, gazing blankly over the starlit sea.

The more he thought about it the more hopeless appeared their position. There was no telling how long the launch had been careering at her own sweet will over the waves. It may only have been minutes, it may have been hours.

Which ever it was he was equally fogged as to his true position. He still had the compass to guide him, it is true; but it was of comparatively little value, as he did not know his present position.

Even though he held to what he hoped would turn out the right course, it might lead him a hundred miles away from that tiny speck in the mighty Pacific that represented the Desert Island, where the Octopus was awaiting them.

Even when morning dawned they would be in no better position. Without sextant or chronometer, it was impossible to take an observation.

They were out of the track of ships; the hardy little

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trading schooners of the Pacific Islands never came within a hundred miles of the dread Sargasso Sea if they could help it.

However, it is useless crying over spilt milk. Taking out the chart Captain Flame had given him, Dick determined to steer as true a course as he could and chance to luck.

But when three days had passed, and still the unbroken billows of the Pacific appeared around them, and above a cloudless sky from which the sun shone like a ball of fire, even Dick Dauntless's sanguine temper failed him.

Not that he felt any fear of their eventual safety, for, besides their own provisions, the launch had been laden with stores for the Octopus; and their power would carry them half across the world if the need arose.

But he knew how anxiously Captain Flame would be looking for them. Above all, he was weighed down by a sense of the important news he carried to the great inventor, who, despite his occasional "dark hours," he had grown to love and respect as a second father.

An Eruption Beneath the Sea.

On the fifth day after leaving the islands, and the eighth since they had started from the Octopus, the boys had stopped the engines, and were enjoying a hearty meal, cooked over a little Primus stove, when they were startled by a deep, rumbling sound which seemed to come from the sea beneath them.

Springing to their feet, they scanned the horizon in every direction. Not even a bird was in sight.

It was fearfully hot. The sea was like a millpond. Not a breath of wind arose to fan their heated faces.

Wondering what the sound might portend, the boys settled down once more to their meal.

Once more that mysterious roar assailed their ears, but louder, nearer, more terrible than before.

It was like a prolonged clap of tropical thunder, but, as before, seemed to come from the sea.

Suddenly the launch commenced to roll and pitch, although the sea was still perfectly calm.

Alarmed by the boat's mysterious behaviour, Dick Dauntless looked from under the rough awning of rugs they had rigged to protect themselves from the scorching rays of the sun.

The next moment he sprang forward, with a cry of alarm, and, flinging himself into the steering-seat, started the engines.

Alarmed by his friend's hurried actions, Jack Orde followed.

His face as pale as death itself, Dick pointed over the stern. Jack's eyes followed the direction of his friend's outstretched arm.

A moan of terror burst from his lips. A mile astern a mighty mound of water was reared some fifty feet above the level of the sleeping sea.

Its sides and summit were as smooth as glass. A broad band of white foam circled its base.

Even as the boys gazed upon the strange phenomenon, the mound burst asunder, sending a mass of mud, steam, and burning rocks hurtling heavenwards.

Then came a huge column of blood-red flame, which seemed to touch the arched dome of heaven, and, in turn, disappeared, buried beneath a canopy of thick, black smoke, risen in a thousand places by jagged flashes of forked lightning.

Crash!
A glowing boulder of molten rock splashed into the sea alongside, causing the launch to bob up and down like a cork on a millstream.

Crash!
A second boulder dropped, hissing, into the sea within twenty paces of their stern.

In a moment the disturbed waters to right, to left, before, behind were dotted with floating streamers of steam, where smaller blocks of steaming lava—any one of which would have sufficed to crush their frail craft to pieces—had plunged into the sea.

Moaning with terror, the boys crouched in the bottom of the boat.

As suddenly as it had commenced, the disturbance ceased. Save for a whirling mass of water where the mound had been, and thick shoals of pumice-stone cast forth from the centre of the earth, that floated around them, naught remained to remind the boys of the fearful sight they had just witnessed.

Shortly afterwards the sun dropped below the horizon with tropical suddenness, plunging the sea in darkness.

Dick Dauntless cast an uneasy glance behind him. As he did so he uttered a loud cry of delight, and, to

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Jack Orde's amazement, jammed the rudder hard to starboard. The launch swept round in a graceful circle.

As she did so, Orde glanced ahead, and an excited shout burst from his lips.

The horizon over the port bow was lighted by a lurid glare, and he knew that they had at last found the Desert Island, for those flame-tinted clouds could only hang over an active volcano.

Immediately their trials and troubles were forgotten, even the terrors of the submarine eruption paled before the thoughts of once more seeing their friends.

Yet though they coaxed the last knot out of the launch's engines, the day was well advanced ere they came in sight of the island.

As they approached, their hopes sank to zero.

A vague presentiment of coming misfortune checked the excited conversation in which they had indulged throughout the night.

A glowing pillar of flame arose from the volcano. An impenetrable veil of smoke hid the island from view.

Still they pressed on, though greatly they feared they had come too late and those they sought had left the fire-haunted island.

When within half a mile of the island, a sudden gust of wind blew the smoke aside.

The boys glanced at each other in dismay.

Could that bare, desolate spot, those lava-covered plains be the pleasant isle they had left little over a week ago.

Too agitated to speak, they gazed blankly at the island.

Yes, it was undoubtedly the same, for before them lay the shelving beach up which they had run the Octopus; but instead of graceful palms and open spaces rich with variegated tropical flowers, naught met their gaze but scorched rock, black, gaunt, hideous.

In awed silence Dick Dauntless ran the launch ashore. Leaping on to the scoria-strewn beach, the boys made their way to what had once been a green, pleasant hill, now a desolate mound in the midst of a blackened and still smoking land.

From the summit of this hill they looked vainly around for the Octopus.

It needed but a single glance at the still glowing blocks of rock, the erstwhile pleasant valleys filled with rapidly cooling lava, to assure them that nothing having life could have existed long on that doomed land.

It was indeed an appalling sight.

A dry, tearless sob burst from Jack Orde's lips. He pointed with trembling hand across the steaming waste.

"Perhaps the Octopus, Captain Flame, and our brave, merry-hearted companions, are buried somewhere yonder," he moaned.

Dick made a brave attempt at a laugh.

"Not likely!" he retorted, with a vehemence that showed he was trying to persuade himself, as well as Orde, of the truth of his words. "Captain Flame is not the man to have been caught napping. Depend upon it, he made for the sea directly the eruption commenced. And we'd better do the same. I do not like the look of that smoking horror at all. It seems as though she might burst out again at any moment," he added, pointing to the volcano, over which dense clouds of evil-looking smoke were gathering.

Without another word the boys turned and retraced their steps to the shore.

When still some fifty yards from the launch, Dick, who was leading, uttered a low cry of despair, and rushed towards a strangely shaped mass of lava.

It lay on the edge of the water, and was piled up to a height of nearly twenty feet.

Light wreaths of steam still floated over it.

Dark and forbidding though it looked, it was not that alone which had attracted Dick's attention.

From the sand clinkers at its base protruded lengths of broken and twisted wire rope, and the torn and rent ends of iron plates. They must once have formed part of the submarine car's body and steel wire tentacles.

In speechless agony the boys gazed at these relics of their lost submarine home.

They were aroused from the despairing thoughts that filled their hearts by a deafening crash which seemed to strike them with temporary deafness, so loud, deep, and fearful was it.

The ground beneath their feet swayed like the deck of a storm-driven ship.

Appalled by the impending catastrophe, the boys looked towards the burning mountain, then gazed in spellbound awe and wonder at the magnificent sight the volcano presented.

Its sugar-loaf-shaped cone was rent in a hundred places. A veritable pillar of vari-coloured flame shot heavenwards from its yawning crater.

Huge rocks—miniature mountains in themselves—were

being hurled heavenwards, to disappear through a canopy of inky clouds.

Swiftly the clouds spread over the island, blotting out the light of the sun and plunging the two boys into an unnatural night, so dark that they could not see a dozen yards ahead.

With one accord they rushed to the launch. But ere they reached it an enormous boulder ploughed through the darkness, and, striking the launch in the stem, buried her bows deep in the yielding sand, while her stern stood upright in the air.

Something soft, flaky, and warm to the touch fell on Dick's face. With a cry of horror, he brushed it off.

He glanced up, to find the air filled with similar flakes. Ashes from the volcano were falling in suffocating clouds.

Seizing Jack Orde, who seemed paralysed by the fearful terrors that surrounded them, by the arm, he drew him to where the stream of lava had been turned into numberless fantastic caves and crevices as its onward progress was arrested by the sudden cooling of its advancing stream in the sea.

And there in a darkness that could almost be felt, with the suffocating ashes mounting higher and higher above them, they crouched on a ledge of rock beneath a curling mass of cooled lava, listening to the constantly recurring thuds and splashes of falling rock.

It seemed as though the navies of the world were boarding their hiding-place.

Ere long unconsciousness gave them relief from a terror that seemed to be sapping the very souls out of their bodies.

Alone on the Buried Island.

How long Dick Dauntless and his chum remained unconscious they could never tell.

Dick was the first to awake from the long swoon into which he had fallen.

At first he lay motionless, scarce daring to breathe lest he should hear once more the fearful sounds which had almost deafened them ere their senses fled.

Save for the soft murmur of billows breaking gently on a stony beach, all was still.

He started violently. Something of the terror he had recently experienced swept through his heart as a loud report reverberated in his ears.

Raising himself on his elbow he listened intently. Again that crashing noise fell on his ears.

What was it?

He had heard something like it before, but where? In vain he tried to think.

Again the mysterious explosion rang out.

Struggling to a sitting position, he clasped his throbbing head between his hands, and racked his dazed brain for an explanation of the mystery.

His wandering thoughts flew to far-away Old England. He was back at Weltsa College, and had gone with Jack Orde and two others to see a military funeral.

He seemed to hear once more the solemn notes of the funeral march, the slow, steady tramp of the marching men, and the rumble of the gun-carriage wheels which bore the Union Jack draped coffin.

In fancy he followed the sad procession to the cemetery, and once more felt his heart thrilled by the sullen roar of the rifles as the soldiers fired three volleys over their dead comrade's last resting-place.

With a wild cry, Dick Dauntless sprang to his feet.

He had it now.

The three reports which had so puzzled him were volleys fired over a dead hero's grave.

It was absurd! There was not a soldier within a thousand miles of that desolated island.

He was about to drop once more by Orde's side, when he heard sharp, quick orders given in a familiar voice.

"Jack—Jack, get up! We are saved!" he cried, dropping on his knees by his chum's side, and shaking him vigorously.

Slowly Jack Orde opened his eyes.

"What is it? Where are we?" he demanded.

"Come—quickly! Captain Flame is near. I heard his voice," declared Dick excitedly.

"Captain Flame is dead," returned Jack despondently.

"Don't you remember the wreckage of the Octopus we found beneath the lava?"

"He is alive, I tell you! I said he would never be caught napping," insisted Dick, drawing his comrade to his feet. Half-leading, half-carrying the half-unconscious boy, he forced him along the ledge.

A few steps, and he allowed his chum to fall to the ground with a moan of dismay.

All exit from the cave was forbidden by a wall of ashes.

A muffled sound reached Dick Dauntless's ears which drove the new-found hope from his heart.

It was the gentle hum of the Octopus's engines, the scrunching of her huge wheels on the sand.

Rushing forward, he hurled himself at the obstructing mass of ashes. For a moment he was covered with the light, fleecy stuff. The next he had burst through the ashes and found himself in the bright light of day.

A bitter cry that was almost a shriek of despair burst from his lips.

The rounded hull of the submarine car was just disappearing beneath the waves.

Bitter disappointment, courage-wrecking despair robbed Dick of power to move or speak as he watched the ripples fading away from the surface of the sea, which showed where the Octopus had been a minute before.

Near the upturned hull of the launch lay a pile of empty cartridge-cases. Dick realised that he had had the unique experience of listening to the last honours paid by his sorrowing friends over what they believed to be his tomb.

Then even Dick Dauntless's brave heart failed him, and, throwing himself on to the ash-strewn strand, he burst into tears.

Night fell and morning dawned ere the two castaways recovered from the bitter disappointment which had been theirs.

Then their unconquerable British spirit exerted itself, and they looked about them for means by which to prolong their lives as long as possible.

An examination of the launch's hull showed that the food-stuffs and their arms had not been removed.

They had enough provisions to last them for some time, but, alas, the beaker containing water was buried beneath many tons of cold lava.

But Dick Dauntless was not one to sit down and bemoan his ill-luck.

Securing their rifles, cartridge and sword-belts, and each carrying a bag of provisions, they set out to explore the now black and desolate island on which they seemed to be the only living creatures.

But the few springs in the island had been dried up or buried beneath the lava. All that day they wandered backwards and forward in vain quest of the life-giving fluid.

That night they slept on the yielding ashes at the foot of the volcano, which seemed to have expended its fury, for only faint wreaths of smoke arose from its shattered cone.

The boys awoke with the sun, parched and unrested. Wearily Dick rose and gazed around him.

A hoarse cry of joy burst from his lips. He pointed to where the sun shone brightly on a thin, silvery streak issuing from a crevice half-way up the volcano.

Without a word the castaways raced up the lava and ashes-strewn slope, and, some half-hour later, were drinking their fill from the warm, tepid water which issued from the volcano's mouth.

As, their thirst quenched, the boys rose to their feet, they were startled by a low moan that came from a dark opening some ten yards from the spring.

Into the Bowels of the Earth.

"What's that?" cried Jack Orde, turning in the direction from whence the groan had come.

"Sounded like someone in deadly pain," replied Dick.

Again the low cry fell on their ears.

"It must be one of the fellows from the Octopus," declared Dick, remembering that the island was supposed to be uninhabited. "Whoever it is, he wants assistance, so here goes!" he added, running towards the cave. "Who's there?" he cried, peering inside the dark opening.

There was no response, but his quick ear detected a short, quick, laboured breathing.

His rifle advanced, Dick Dauntless entered the cavern. Barely had he taken a couple of steps ere a dull glitter before his eyes caused him to throw himself on one side.

It was well he did so.

The next moment a broad-bladed spear grazed his shoulder, and clattered on the stony path behind him.

Dick's rifle sprang to his shoulder; but ere he could pull the trigger he heard a low thud, as though some half-raised body had fallen on the ground.

Ready to fire at the first sign of danger, he stood perfectly motionless for nearly a minute, as he peered into the cave.

Jack Orde, ready to back up his friend, was immediately behind him.

As his eyes grew accustomed to the uncertain light, he saw a huge frame stretched from side to side of the tunnel-like opening.

Again he challenged. There was no response.

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Moving cautiously forward, he found a Tanka warrior, his arms extended as though still in the act of throwing, stretched dead upon the floor.

The man's right leg was terribly crushed, evidently by some falling boulders, his body burnt in a dozen places.

He had evidently been injured during the eruption, and had crawled into the cave to die.

With wondering admiration they marked the dead warrior's mighty limbs, and his curious helmet and breast-plate of interwoven shells.

They were about to turn away, when Jack Orde struck his foot against some object on the floor.

Wonderingly he picked it up, and carried it to where Dick Dauntless was waiting for his return at the entrance to the cave.

An ejaculation of astonishment burst from the latter's lips. A cartridge similar to those they carried in their bandoliers lay in Jack Orde's hand.

For some minutes neither spoke. Then, in agitated tones, Dick Dauntless said:

"This proves that one at least of our comrades was left on the island."

"But how did the Tanka reach this spot? Good heavens, Dick! What if this leads into their country? It is unlikely that they came by sea. They must have reached the island by some subterranean passage from the Sargasso Sea."

"A passage a hundred miles in length?" ejaculated Dick.

"Why not? After the wonders we have seen, that does not appear incredible."

Again came silence. Then Dick moved impulsively towards the cave.

"You may be right, after all, Jack," he cried. "At any rate, it will not do any harm to explore farther. What a pity our helmets and lamps were in the fore part of the launch. But the Tankas could not move about in the dark any more than we can; and if this is, as I begin to think, the entrance to a subterranean passage leading to some hitherto undiscovered land in the centre of the earth, we will soon find light to guide us."

Whilst speaking, Dick Dauntless had moved swiftly from the entrance.

A dozen yards, and his path turned to the right, then dipped at a considerable angle to the earth.

Presently they halted. Striking a match, Dick held it above his head.

The flickering flame showed that they were in a narrow tunnel, the rough sides and roof of which seemed the work of Nature rather than that of man.

On they pressed. Warmer and warmer grew the air.

A dull, heavy rumble, broken now and again by reports like the firing of distant cannon, sounded constantly in their ears.

Gradually the darkness through which they had travelled was lightened. Soon a strange, weird, yellow light, which increased in intensity the deeper they plunged into the bowels of the earth, surrounded them.

Now and again sulphur fumes caused them to pause and gasp for breath. The rumbling became deeper, the explosions louder and more frequent.

The all-pervading yellow light was now a fearful lurid glare. Blood-red tongues of flame flashed before their eyes.

The heat was intense. Breathing became more difficult each moment.

Suddenly Dick Dauntless, who was leading, came to an abrupt halt, and gazed with awed eyes into what looked like nothing so much as the interior of a furnace in full blast.

A hundred yards from where they stood a mighty column of fire, interspersed with glowing rocks and burning stone, occupied an enormous opening in the tunnel on their right.

Tremblingly Dick Dauntless approached the verge of the ledge on which they stood, and looked down.

One glance was enough.

Beneath him raged and roared a sea of molten lava, from which arose bubbles that, bursting, sent spears of burning gases to join the main column of flame.

Grasping Jack Orde by the arm, Dick drew him onward, until at length the ledge was passed, and they gained a spot where the tunnel branched off at right angles from the fiery crater.

With intense relief they felt the heat growing less, the air purer and more free from sulphurous taint.

On, on they pressed, through a darkness that was little less terrible than the silence which, now the volcano had been left behind, surrounded them on every side.

How the hours passed they could not tell, for both Jack Orde's and Dick Dauntless's watches had stopped.

After a time they dropped wearily on to the stone floor of the tunnel, and, forcing a few mouthfuls down their parched throats, slept the sleep of utter exhaustion.

For two days they stumbled through the darkness that

hung around them like a black pall, penetrating deeper and deeper into the bowels of the earth at every step.

At times the heat was intense, but at others a cool breeze, laden with odours such as no earthly flowers had ever given forth, fanned their cheeks, seeming to speak of a strange land which would greet them when their journey along that apparently endless tunnel was completed.

The Under-World.

"Good gracious, Dick, where are we?"

Dick Dauntless made no reply. He was gazing, with wide-staring, incredulous eyes, upon surely as strange a scene as human eye had ever beheld.

They were standing at the top of an enormous flight of steps, broadening as they descended to a wide, sluggish river, beyond which could be seen a reed-covered swamp.

A strange light, equivalent to that of twilight on a bright summer's evening, obtained around.

With wondering eyes they marked the elaborately-carved archway beneath which they stood.

Dick Dauntless was the first to break the silence.

A grating laugh burst from his lips, a laugh in which there was no mirth, only despair.

"It's no good standing here like stuck pigs," he growled irritably. "There is no sign of an excursion steamer to take us off, so our only plan is to swim the river."

Jack Orde nodded.

Slinging his rifle behind his back, he followed Dick down the broad steps.

As they did so, they noticed that the stairway was lined with stone figures representing monsters similar to those they had seen in the Sargasso Sea.

From the lowest step Dick looked with a shudder upon the dark, forbidding river.

Suddenly he unslung his rifle and sprang up two steps with a cry of dismay.

The waters at his feet had been suddenly disturbed, and a hideous head was thrust above the surface.

The next moment the long, scaly body of an enormous crocodile followed the head into view.

The boys looked blankly at each other.

All idea of swimming that crocodile-infested stream must be abandoned.

"Yet we have got to get across," asserted Jack. "I'd rather face the crocodiles than go back through that dark, endless tunnel."

Dick Dauntless did not answer. He was leaning eagerly forward, listening intently.

Then he touched Orde on the shoulder, and running along the wide steps, dived beneath a huge, tusk-armed monster carved out of the living rock.

So enormous was the statue that there was ample room in the stone folds of its skin for the boys to hide.

"What was it, Dick?" asked Jack Orde.

"Paddles!" was the laconic reply.

Presently a canoe, worked by two shell-armoured Tankas, shot out from the rushes some half-mile on their left, and rapidly approached the steps.

Jack Orde leaned against his comrade.

"We must have that canoe, Dick! There's only two of them, and"—he hesitated a moment—"we can shoot them down when they step on shore."

Nodding his assent, Dick stretched himself by his comrade's side, saying:

"I'll take the taller: one of the two, you make sure of the other."

As the canoe glided alongside the lower steps the boys covered the unconscious warriors.

Little dreaming of the sudden death which menaced them, the Tankas secured the canoe to a ring bolt, then began the ascent of the steps.

As they did so the two rifle-barrels followed them, each foresight aligned on to a warrior's shell-helmeted forehead.

With an impatient sigh Dick Dauntless lowered his weapon.

"I can't do it, Jack! I cannot shoot men down like this!"

"Neither can I, Dick," confessed his chum. "Let's lie low, and see what they are about. There'll be time to hold them up if they discover us."

A few minutes later the Tankas had disappeared through the archway from which the boys had recently emerged.

"Quick, Jack!" Dick cried. "Now's our time! We can take the canoe and be off."

As soon done as said, and the boys, rejoicing at the lucky chance which had put the craft at their disposal, paddled swiftly across the river.

Presently they struck a narrow opening in the reeds.

It was evidently the path by which the warriors had come. Listening intently, for they could see nothing to right or left but the tall banks of reeds which hemmed them in on either side, they continued to paddle.



Dick Dauntless, seeing one of the gorillas in the act of hurling itself upon Jack Orde, took a snap shot at the shaggy body. The bullet sped true to its mark, and a hairy form dropped dead at his feet. (See below.)

Suddenly Dick Dauntless held up his hand. "Back water!" he commanded, in low tones.

As the canoe ceased to move he glanced through the dripping stalks to where a Tanka sentry paced, with slow, regular strides, the summit of a large stone fort protecting a landing-stage, beyond which could be seen a wide, well-made road that disappeared in the heart of the jungle.

On either side of the landing-stage arose a number of warehouses, in and out of which passed naked men carrying heavy bales and packages of merchandise to and from a galley moored to a wharf at the foot of the fort.

For some time the boys watched the busy scene, then backed the canoe until they were to the right of the steps.

Resuming their paddles, they drove her ashore on a shelving beach beneath the shadow of enormous trees, the leaves of which were of various shades of brown and black.

Abandoning the canoe which had served them so well, the boys plunged inland until they could no longer hear the hum of voices from the fort.

Presently they struck the road they had seen from the lagoon, and, ready to dash into the undergrowth at any moment, trudged bravely onward, whither they knew not.

For so far as they could judge, in a land where there was neither night or day, the boys proceeded for three days along this long, well-kept track.

The adventures through which they passed would of themselves fill a volume.

They were constantly meeting, or being overtaken by, parties of Tankas, but they were always in such large parties that the noise they made gave the boys sufficient time to hide in the thick foliage that hedged the road until the danger was passed.

Solitary wayfarers there were none. They were soon to discover the reason.

They had rested on a pleasant, lawn-like expanse, shielded from the road by flowering shrubs, and were enjoying a hearty meal from their slender stock of provisions, when a huge stone struck the yielding sod by Dick's head.

Looking up, he found that the branches of the trees were filled with huge gorillas—creatures which, uttering loud, hate-laden cries, sprang towards them.

Seeing one of their enemies in the act of hurling itself upon Jack Orde, Dick took a snap shot at the creature's shaggy body.

The bullet sped true to its mark, and a hairy form dropped dead at Dick's feet.

(A long instalment of this thrilling adventure serial in next week's Double Number of "The Gem," Library. Order your copy well in advance, price 2d.)

OUR NEW WEEKLY FEATURE



Next Thursday's Grand Double Number.

I think I may say, without boasting, that I have succeeded in providing a real treat for my readers next week in the Grand Christmas Double Number of THE GEM LIBRARY. First and foremost among the contents comes the splendid,

DOUBLE-LENGTH SCHOOL TALE

of Tom Merry & Co., entitled,

"THE GHOST OF ST. JIM'S"

—a really fine story, in which the ever popular Martin Clifford gives of his very best. Next, I have secured a splendid long, complete story of Frank Kingston, in his new role of private detective, entitled,

"CAUGHT RED-HANDED,"

from the pen of Robert W. Comrade, whose previous stories, "The Iron Island," and "The Brotherhood of Iron," gained such a wide measure of popularity. It will, I know, be good news to my readers to hear that his latest story, "Caught Red-Handed," is far and away the most powerful and thrilling story Robert W. Comrade has ever written. In addition to the foregoing, the Grand Double Number will contain a special and amusing complete tale of the Great Spy Scare in England, entitled,

"BILL HIGGINS' FOREIGN SPIES,"

by a new author.

A long, thrilling instalment of Reginald Wray's amazing adventure serial,

"DEEP SEA GOLD,"

and the usual page devoted to

"THIS WEEK'S CHAT,"

together with sundry

Storyettes, Tricks, Conundrums, Etc.,

complete the tally of the good things you will find in next Thursday's Grand Christmas Double Number. Surely a veritable feast of your favourite literature!

Just one thing more. It will be a source of great disappointment to me, after the great efforts I have put forth to make next week's grand issue a real bumper Double Number, if I find that some of my chums have been unable to participate in this treat on account of their newsagents being sold out. There is bound to be an unprecedented rush for this grand issue, so let me here and now impress upon you, my thousands upon thousands of reader-friends, the fact that it is more than ever necessary to

ORDER the Grand Christmas Double Number IN ADVANCE.

Health Hints.**The Value of Fresh Air and Sunlight.**

Keep your vitality above the negative condition, and you will never know disease of any kind. No disease can exist where there is an abundance of pure blood. To get the necessary amount eat plenty of nutritious food, to circulate it perfectly take plenty of exercise, to purify it get fresh air and sunlight.

If a perfectly healthy condition of the skin exists, and an even temperature of the body maintained, it is impossible to take cold. Cold-water baths taken every day—by those who can stand them—will do much towards producing the former; proper food and exercise the latter.

Things to Remember About Eating.

More carbonaceous food should be eaten in winter than in summer. One who labours all the week and rests one day out of the seven needs less that one day, but usually eats more.

Avoid eating heartily before or after any great mental or physical exertion. If the blood is drawn to either the brain or muscle when needed in the stomach, digestion must necessarily be retarded.

Replies in Brief.

M. L. L., London.

Am very glad to hear you like "Deep Sea Gold" and "Beyond the Eternal Ice" so well, but I am afraid I cannot undertake to have these stories bound for you when completed. Your best plan would be to keep all your copies of THE GEM and "The Magnet" carefully, and have them bound in volumes.

Dorothy D. H., Kinsale, Co. Cork, Ireland.

Thanks for your letter and words of appreciation. Yes, if your dog's nose is hot and dry, it is a sure sign that he is ailing, but it is impossible for me to tell you offhand what is the matter with him. He may only have a cold, or some such slight indisposition, or he may be sickening for distemper. In any case, I should advise you to take extra good care of him, and to look particularly after his diet, until his nose is damp and cold again. While he is still unwell, your dog should be given very little meat.

G. L., Bristol.

In answer to your query I must tell you that the latest advices from Canada prove that the supply of clerical labour in that country exceeds the demand at present. I am afraid this is not very encouraging to you, but, of course, a first-class, capable young fellow, with lots of "go," can generally win a place for himself anywhere.

"Gemite," Bristol.

I am sorry I cannot give you a definite date for the publication of "The Iron Island" in book form. Much obliged to you for helping me by passing on your copies of THE GEM.

R. M., Holloway.

Glad you are so pleased with the Chat page. I will make a note of your suggestion which I consider quite a good one. Ernest W., Leytonstone.

To obtain expert advice upon the care of your canary from China, I should advise you to write to the Editor of "Cage Birds," at 154, Fleet Street, E.C. As you, quite naturally, value your pet so much, you will, no doubt, not be satisfied with the advice of any but specialists on the subject of cage birds.

Of Interest to All Readers.

Miss N. Barbara Edwards, of 73, Victoria Mansions, South Lambeth Road, S.W., would like to correspond with some boy or girl Colonial chum, age about 16.

Master W. S. Thorold, 8, Bamwell Terrace, Harlaxton Road, Grantham, would like to correspond with some "Gemite" in Canada.

Miss A. Hayward, 40, Lilymead Avenue, Knowle, Bristol, would like a girl chum to correspond with her.

Miss K. Miller, of the Estivals, Carlton Colville, Lowestoft, would like to correspond with some reader living in Dublin, or some other part of Ireland.

Master Harold Downs, of Rossie House, 16, Queen's Square, Bloomsbury, W.C., who is 16 years of age, would like to correspond with a girl reader of THE GEM.

Master H. E. Smith, of 109, Sixth Avenue, Queen's Park, London, W., would very much like to correspond with some girl reader.

Charles T. Grout, of 89, Southwark Park Road, Bermondsey, S.E. (age 20), would like a girl reader of about 19 years old to correspond with him.

Master Horace L. B., of 31, Effingham Street, Ramsgate, wishes to get into communication with some boy or girl reader, age between 14 and 15.

E. H. Laws, of 27A, Glenelg Road, Acre Lane, Brixton, S.W., is desirous of joining a football club in the neighbourhood of Brixton, Kennington, Clapham, Balham, Streatham, or Tooting. Also will any small football club wanting two matches, one away and one home, apply at the above address. Master Laws would also like to communicate with a girl reader of THE GEM, aged 14 or 15.

THE EDITOR.