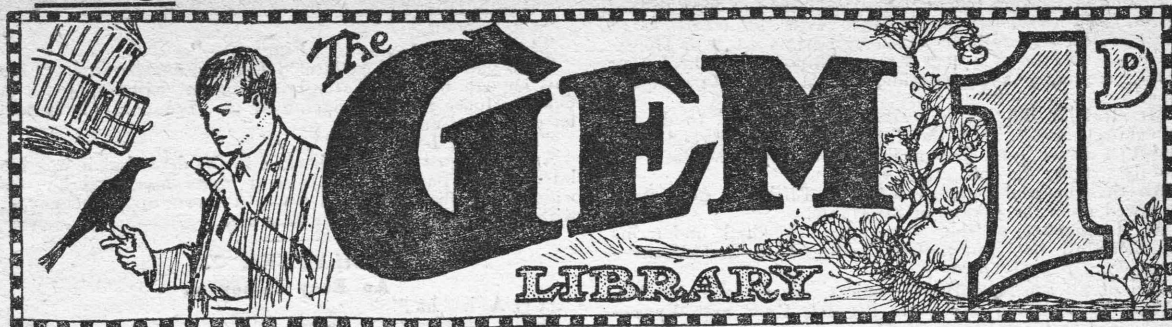


Every

Thursday.



Complete Stories for All and Every Story a Gem.



THE GREAT BARRING-OUT AT ST. JIM'S!

A Splendid, New, Long, Complete School Tale
of Tom Merry & Co. and Figgins & Co.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.



CHAPTER 1. Too Thick!

"I 'm not going to stand—"
"Sit down, then, Figgy!" said Fatty Wynn, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, pushing a chair towards the great Figgins, in perfect simplicity and sincerity. Kerr chuckled softly. Figgins bestowed a glare upon Fatty Wynn, much to the astonishment of that plump youth. He had only meant to be kind.

"You ass!" said Figgins. "I tell you I'm not going to stand—"

"Well, there's a chair."

"I'm not going to stand this any longer," said Figgins.

"Oh!" said Fatty Wynn.

Figgins had just come into his study in the Fourth-Form passage, in the New House at St. Jim's. Figgins was looking very red and excited. He had his right hand tucked away under his left arm, and was squeezing it there, as if he were trying to alleviate some pain in it—as, indeed, he was. It was easy to see that Figgins had suffered under a very recent application of the cane.

Kerr had been doing algebra when Figgins came into the study. Fatty Wynn was thoughtfully busy upon cleaning out the last traces of a rabbit-pie from a large dish. Both suspended their occupations as Figgins strode in. Figgins & Co. were inseparable, and when one of them suffered, the other two felt it almost as much as the sufferer himself.

"I'm not going to stand it," went on Figgins. "It's getting too thick."

Kerr nodded.

"Altogether too thick!" he agreed.

"I saw Blake a few minutes ago," said Figgins. "He said that if he had a Housemaster like ours in the School House he'd pulverise him!"

"Gas!" said Kerr.

"But it's too thick!" exclaimed Figgins excitedly. "He's just caned me."

"How many?" asked Fatty Wynn sympathetically.

"Two!"

"What for?"

"For whistling in the passage!" said Figgins, with biting emphasis. "Two scorchers—for whistling in the passage!"

"Rotten!" said Kerr.

"Beastly!" said Fatty Wynn.

Figgins extracted his damaged hand from under his arm, and clenched it.

"I came jolly near giving him an upper-cut," he said.

Kerr looked alarmed.

"Steady on, Figgy! You can't punch a Form-master, you know."

"I know I can't!" growled Figgins. "That's the worst of it. If it was a prefect—if it was Monteith, for instance—we could give him something back. But a giddy House-master is out of our reach."

"Better grin and bear it," said Fatty Wynn. "Look here, Figgy, have some of these ham-sandwiches, and forget all about it."

"Blow the ham-sandwiches!"

"Some of the jam-tarts, then," urged Fatty Wynn.

There was a fixed conviction in the Fourth-Former's mind that jam-tarts and ham-sandwiches would cure any ills that flesh was heir to.

Figgins snorted.

"Blow the jam-tarts!"

Fatty Wynn sighed. He had got to the end of all the consolations he could think of.

Figgins brandished a clenched fist as he went on:

"It's too thick! It's utterly rotten that we should have to stand it! Ratty is going too far, and he'll jolly soon get to the limit."

Kerr nodded.

Kerr fully agreed with Figgins, and sympathised with him. He was willing to agree that it was too "thick," and that Mr. Ratcliff, the Housemaster of the New House, was getting dangerously near the limit.

But he did not see what was to be done. That was the difficulty in the situation.

Mr. Ratcliff was Form-master of the Fifth; and if ever

Next Thursday:

"FIGGINS & CO.'S NEW MASTER!" AND "WINGS OF GOLD!"

a Form-master was detected, Mr. Ratcliff was by the Fifth Form at St. Jim's. But the Fifth were seniors, and Mr. Ratcliff's unpleasant temper could not have full play in that Form. It was not in accordance with the traditions of St. Jim's for seniors to be caned by Form-masters or House-masters. In case of a very serious delinquent in the Upper School requiring that correction, he had to be sent in to the Head.

Mr. Ratcliff did not like that. He preferred to do the punishing himself. Mr. Ratcliff was a sour-tempered man, and had never been known to risk spoiling the child by unduly sparing the rod.

All that he could not give to the Fifth, he generously bestowed upon the juniors of his House.

As Housemaster of the New House, he had under his authority all the juniors who belonged to that House—Shell, Fourth, and Third.

And of all the New House juniors, the three whom Mr. Ratcliff disliked the most were Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn—otherwise known as Figgins & Co.

Whether it was the independence of their spirit, or the fact that they were responsible for more mischief than any dozen fellows in the House, or that they were specially distinguished in keeping up the warfare with the School House—whatever the reason, Mr. Ratcliff was always "down" upon Figgins & Co.

They were used to that. But lately matters had gone from bad to worse. Mr. Ratcliff's sour temper had caused trouble in the Fifth Form. He had taken it upon himself to cane Lefevre, the captain of the Fifth. And Lefevre, bursting with indignation at such an insult to his great dignity as a senior, had appealed to the Head. And the Head had spoken very plainly to Mr. Ratcliff on the subject—so plainly that fellows who saw him come out of Dr. Holmes's study afterwards declared that he was quite green.

After that unpleasant experience, Mr. Ratcliff could not venture to use the cane again in the Fifth-Form room.

And with great injustice—though he never wanted for a plausible excuse—Mr. Ratcliff had visited his wrath upon the juniors. Figgins & Co., as usual, bore the brunt of it; but there was hardly a junior in the New House who had not suffered during the last few days.

Mr. Ratcliff had, as a matter of fact, suffered what amounted to a defeat in the Fifth-Form room. The whole school knew it, and the whole school grinned over it. Ratty's autocratic methods were not popular. And the juniors of the New House rejoiced at the setting-down of their House-master as much as the Fifth themselves. And Mr. Ratcliff knew it, and he had taken measures to nip their rejoicing in the bud.

He had succeeded in that.

Lines and canings, canings and lines were the order of the day, and the fellows had grown to dread the sight of Mr. Ratcliff's bilious face and greenish eyes.

A feeling of revolt was rising in the breasts of the New House juniors, and yet the impossibility of "backing up" against a Housemaster held them in check.

Once, on a great occasion, Figgins & Co. had tied up an unpopular prefect, and left him in a room for a night to consider himself. The juniors still talked of that punishment inflicted upon Monteith with considerable glee.

But it was hardly feasible to think of punishing a House-master in that drastic fashion. To grin and bear it seemed to be the only resource—but it was growing impossible to grin, and very difficult to bear it.

"Something's got to be done."

Figgins emphasised that remark by bringing his fist down upon the table with a terrific thump. The ink spouted out of the inkpot, and splashed over Kerr's exercise-paper, and over Fatty Wynn's jam-tarts. Figgins did not even notice it. And the two juniors said nothing. Fatty Wynn gave his inky tarts a very mournful look, but he bore it manfully.

"Do you hear?" exclaimed Figgins. "Something's got to be done."

"All serene!" said Kerr. "But what?"

"I don't care what. I'm getting fed up."

"I think the whole House is fed up," Kerr remarked thoughtfully. "The seniors can stand it, because he has to let them alone. But the Shell and the Fourth are ready for anything, I think. But what can be done?"

"Pway excuse me, deah boys—"

It was a soft voice at the door. An eyeglass gleamed into Figgins's study, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the Fourth Form, followed it into the room. Figgins glared at the School House junior. At the present moment he was, not feeling in an amiable mood.

"I disappove vewy stongly of your wotten House-mastah," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy explained. "I have come ovah to tell you fellows—"

"You let our Housemaster alone," said Figgins, rather

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unreasonably, considering how he had just been speaking of Mr. Horace Ratcliff. "What the dickens do you mean?"

"Weally, Figgins—"

"Oh, buzz off!"

"I wegard you as an ass, Figgay—"

"Oh, bump him!" exclaimed Figgins, exasperated. "It's bad enough to have Ratty bothering us, without having a School House bouncer jawing at us. Bump him! It will let off steam, anyway."

"Bai Jove, I—"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy backed to the door, but it was too late. Three pairs of hands were upon him, and he was whirled off the floor, and bumped down upon the carpet with a bump that made the dust rise.

CHAPTER 2.

An Easy Conquest.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins & Co. roared.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sat upon the study carpet in a little cloud of dust, blinking at the New House juniors.

"Bai Jove!" he gasped. "Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins pointed a long, lean forefinger at the swell of the School House.

"Now, you buzz off!" he exclaimed. "And don't come here jawing at fellows who are down on their luck. Scat!"

"Ow! Weally, Figgins—"

"There are two ways of getting out of this study," Kerr remarked—"the door and the window. Which do you prefer, Gussy?"

"Ow!"

Arthur Augustus rose to his feet, glaring with wrath. He groped for his eyeglass, and jammed it into his eye, and stared at the three chums of the New House with immeasurable scorn.

"I wegard you as wank wottahs!" he exclaimed. "I came here to—"

"Jaw!" said Figgins.

"I came here to—"

"Talk!" said Kerr.

"I came here—"

"To chin-wag!" said Fatty Wynn.

"I was goin' to—"

"Do a gramophone turn," said Figgins. "Yes, I know what you were going to do, but we're fed up. Scat!"

"I wufuse to entah into any discuss. with you. I shall shake the dust of this study from my feet," said Arthur Augustus, with a great deal of dignity.

"You'll have to shake some of it from your trousers, too," said Figgins, with a chuckle.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy did not deign to reply to that remark. He retreated to the door and into the passage, and slammed the door behind him with a slam which showed that he had for the moment quite forgotten the repose which is supposed to stamp the caste of Vere de Vere.

The New House juniors chuckled.

"Well, that's some relief," said Figgins. "When a chap's fed up, it's wonderful how it lets off steam to bump somebody else. It was really very kind of Gussy to come along just then. He's the right man in the right place."

And Kerr and Wynn grinned. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, in the passage, dusted down his elegant trousers, and snorted with wrath. Three youths came down the passage from the end study, and stopped to regard the swell of St. Jim's, as he was thus engaged. They were Redfern, Lawrence, and Owen, the three new boys in the House—sometimes called the New Firm, because they had to some extent set up in opposition to Figgins & Co., and divided with them the leadership of the New House juniors.

Redfern, Lawrence, and Owen had come to St. Jim's on County Council scholarships, but they were not, on that account, inclined to take a back seat in the life at the old school. Quite the reverse, in fact. They had made themselves very prominent.

"Hallo, my son!" said Redfern. "Have you been in the wars? Wherefore this thushness?"

"Weally, Wedfern—"

"Trouble with Figgins?" asked Lawrence sympathetically. "Figgay has just been through it in Ratty's study, you know. Ratty has been on the warpath lately. If Ratty hadn't such keen ears, we'd give you a bumping for your cheek in coming into this House."

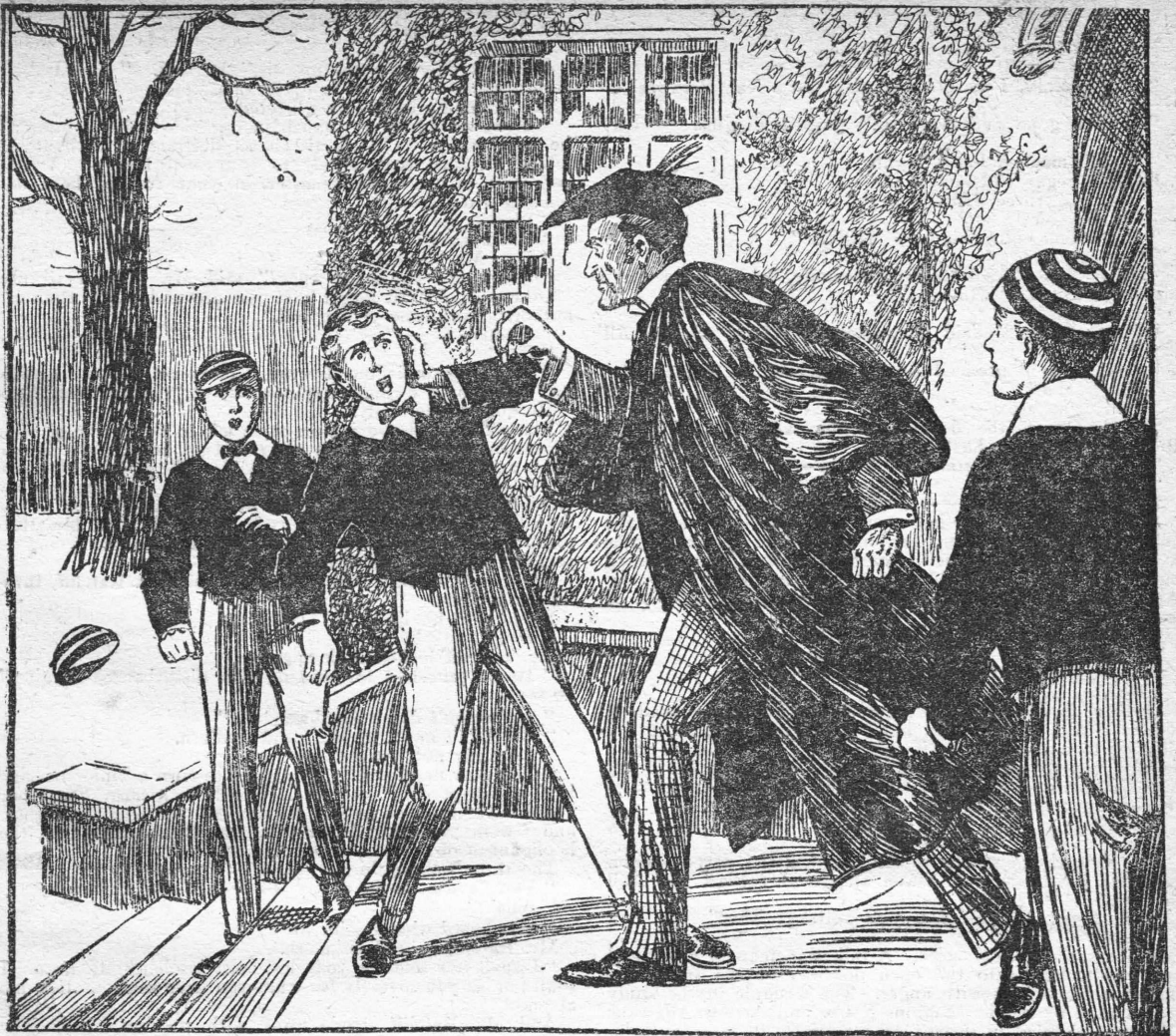
"Weally, Lawrence—"

"Just so!" said Owen. "Perhaps we'd better give him a bumping anyway. I believe that Ratty has gone out."

"Good egg!" said Redfern.

"I should uttably wufuse to be bumped," said Arthur Augustus. "I came ovah here to do Figgins a good turn, and I have been treated with gwoss diswewpect. I was

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As the New Housemaster passed the chums of the Shell he swung round, and boxed Tom Merry's ear. The hero of the Shell staggered back in amazement, his ear burning and singing, and his eyes blazing. "You cad!" he shouted. (See Chapter 4.)

considerin' whethah I ought to go back into the studay and thwash all three of them."

The New Firm chuckled jously.

"That's exactly what you ought to do," said Redfern.

"Just the thing!" said Owen.

"We'll hold your coat," chimed in Lawrence.

D'Arcy reflected.

"Upon the whole, pewwaps I owe it to my personal dig. to inflict some chastisement upon the wottahs," he said.

"Of course you do. Go in and win."

"Yaas, wathah! Upon welflection, I think I had bettah!"

Redfern opened the door of Figgins's study. Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn looked round. Lawrence gently pushed D'Arcy into the study.

"You chaps made your wills?" asked Redfern.

"Eh?"

"If not, you'd better buck up. D'Arcy will hold off for a few minutes while you make your last wills and testaments," Redfern said.

"Weally, Wedfern—"

"Oh, buzz off!" said Figgins.

"I am goin' to give you a feahful thwashin' Figgay!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, taking off his elegant Eton jacket and handing it to Redfern to hold. "I am also goin' to give Kerr and Wynn a feahful thwashin'."

"One each?" asked Figgins humorously.

"Pway don't wot. Put up your hands."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy turned back his cuffs, and advanced upon Figgins & Co. The three New House juniors

regarded him with grinning faces. D'Arcy, in spite of his elegant ways, was an athletic junior, and he would have been a good match for any one of them. But it was hardly within his powers to tackle all three. But the swell of St. Jim's never stopped to count odds.

"Put up your hands, you wottahs!"

Redfern took out his watch.

"I'll time you," he remarked. "I'll ref., too. One minute rounds, and ten minute rests. Gussy will need 'em."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Wedfern—"

"Time!" shouted Redfern.

Arthur Augustus rushed to the attack. Figgins & Co. exchanged a wink, entering into the spirit of the thing. Arthur Augustus smote Figgins on the chest, and Figgins fell heavily upon the carpet.

"Get up, you wottah!" shouted D'Arcy, warming to the work.

Figgins groaned.

"I—I o-c-can't!"

Bump!

Kerr guarded D'Arcy's heavy drive, but he fell all the same, and lay groaning beside Figgins. Fatty Wynn rolled over before D'Arcy's knuckles reached him, and groaned more terrifically than the other two.

Arthur Augustus regarded the three fallen juniors in astonishment.

He had great faith in his own powers as a pugilist, but he was amazed at this sudden and complete collapse of three of the greatest fighting men in the New House of St. Jim's.

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NEXT THURSDAY: "FIGGINS & CO.'S NEW MASTER!"

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

He brandished his fists and danced round the fallen juniors, calling upon them to get up and have it out.

Figgins & Co. lay still and groaned.

"Ow, ow, ow!"

"You wottahs, I am goin' to give you a feahful thwashin'—"

"You've gone and done it!" gasped Figgins. "Oh! Ow!"

"Yow!" moaned Fatty Wynn.

Redfern began to count.

"One, two, three, four, five—"

"Ow, ow, ow!"

"Six, seven, eight, nine— DONE!"

"Ow, ow, ow!"

"Gussy wins!" said Redfern solemnly, taking away the big silver watch. "Hurrah!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Counted out!" said Lawrence. "Gussy wins! All hail!"

"Ave Cæsar!" groaned Kerr. "Morituri te salutant!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah asses—"

"Hail, Cæsar, the doomed to die salute thee!" yelled Redfern. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"I believe those wottahs are wottin'—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you know— Ow—oh—yaroop!"

A hand from the floor had caught Arthur Augustus by the ankle, and in a twinkling he bumped down beside Figgins & Co. Then the three fallen heroes who had been counted out rolled over upon him, and sat upon the elegant form of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. The study rang with a yell of laughter.

"Ow, ow! You uttah wottahs—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I will give you a feahful thwashin'—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Redfern & Co. yelled. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy made a terrific effort, and dragged himself up, with Figgins & Co. clinging to him, gasping with merriment. The four of them crashed heavily against the table, and it was hurled flying into the grate. Papers and inkpot and pens and jam-tarts crashed upon the bars.

Crash!

Bump!

The struggling juniors rolled over on the carpet again. Redfern, Lawrence, and Owen staggered against the wall shrieking.

"Bai Jove! Welease me, you wottahs! Ow!"

"Boys!"

It was a sharp, acid voice. A tall, thin man in gown and cap was looking into the open doorway of the study, his thin, sour face dark with anger. The struggle in the study ceased as if by magic. Figgins & Co. and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy scrambled in dismay to their feet, to face the cold, angry eyes of Mr. Horace Ratcliff, the Housemaster of the New House.

CHAPTER 3.

Hard Cheese.

MR. RATCLIFF looked at the juniors, and the juniors at Mr. Ratcliff. Dismay had fallen upon the study. Any master but Mr. Ratcliff would have taken no notice of a little horseplay in a junior study, unless it became really serious; but Mr. Ratcliff was not like the other masters at St. Jim's.

He was much given to finding fault, and he had a prim and exact mind; he hated any kind of noise or irregularity.

He did not like boys at all, but his ideal of a boy was the kind that approximated most to a machine. A boy's business in life, according to Mr. Ratcliff, was to learn his lessons meekly, and sit down and be good. Mr. Ratcliff's influence was of the kind which turns boys into hypocrites; but fortunately his influence did not go very far with Figgins & Co.

But the culprits knew that they were "in" for it, as they caught the cold glare of Mr. Ratcliff's stony eyes.

"What does this mean?" said Mr. Ratcliff sharply.

Mr. Ratcliff had a way of propounding riddles of that sort. He would seize upon the most harmless outbreak of youthful exuberance, and demand what it meant. It did not mean anything at all, excepting that the juniors were human beings, and not made to go by clockwork. But it was useless to explain that to Mr. Ratcliff. He had long ago forgotten what it was like to be a boy—if, indeed, he had ever been a boy at all, which some of the juniors were inclined to doubt.

"Ahem!" said Figgins.

"Bai Jove!"

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"THE RIVAL'S TEST!"

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"What is the meaning of this disgraceful scene?" asked Mr. Ratcliff sternly.

Figgins's eyes flashed.

"It was only a little fun, sir," he said. "And I don't see anything disgraceful in it, for one."

Mr. Ratcliff's hard eyes glittered.

"Then we differ very much in our views of the matter," he said acidly. "I regard it as disgraceful hooliganism. D'Arcy, return immediately to your own House. I shall complain to your Housemaster of your coming here and making a disturbance."

"Weally, sir—"

"Not a word!"

"But, Mr. Ratcliff—"

"Leave the House at once!" said Mr. Ratcliff sternly. "Otherwise, I shall forget that you are under Mr. Raitlon's authority, and cane you myself."

"Weally, sir—"

"Go!"

"Oh, vewy well; but I wegard it as vewy unweasonable not to listen to a chap's explanation, sir," said D'Arcy.

He quitted the study.

The six New House juniors were left to the mercy of their Housemaster. They were all proud of being New House boys, and all agreed to regard the New House as cock-house at St. Jim's. But just then they would have been very pleased to be under Mr. Raitlon of the School House rather than their own Housemaster. It was evident in Mr. Ratcliff's set face and spiteful little eyes that he was going to punish them, and punish them severely.

"You will follow me to my study," said Mr. Ratcliff, turning on his heel.

Figgins bit his lip.

"What for?" he asked.

Mr. Ratcliff looked back angrily.

"To be punished for making this disturbance, Figgins," he said.

"We weren't doing any harm, sir."

"We didn't mean to, sir," said Redfern.

"Certainly not," said Kerr.

"You may not consider it harmful to turn a junior passage into a bear-garden," said Mr. Ratcliff satirically, "but our views differ on that point. As for you, Redfern, Lawrence, and Owen, you must learn that you cannot introduce the hooliganism of a Board-school into this college!"

The three fellows flushed scarlet.

"You have no right to say that, sir!" said Redfern.

"What!"

"You heard what I said, sir."

Mr. Ratcliff gritted his teeth.

"I shall not tolerate your low-born insolence, Redfern. I shall punish you severely for what you have said. Follow me at once."

And Mr. Ratcliff strode away with rustling gown. The half dozen juniors in Figgins's study looked at one another irresolutely.

"He was a rotten cad to say that to you, Reddy!" said Figgins. "But it's just like Ratty to hit below the belt."

Redfern's brows knitted in a frown.

"I've a jolly good mind not to go," he said.

"I suppose we must!"

"He's a rotten cad, and an outsider!"

"But he's got the whip hand," said Lawrence; "we've got to knuckle under."

The juniors looked gloomily at one another. It was, as Figgins had declared many times, getting altogether too thick. But what were they to do? While Mr. Ratcliff's present humour lasted, punishments were likely to be as thick as leaves in Vallombrosa. How long would the fellows be able to stand it?

There was a step in the passage, and Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, looked frowning into the room.

"You kids are wanted in Mr. Ratcliff's study!" he exclaimed. "He's waiting for you. What do you mean by not going?"

The juniors were silent.

"Come on," said Monteith, not unkindly. "You'll only get it worse for making him wait, you know. Come on!"

"I—I suppose we've got to," muttered Figgins between his teeth.

Monteith stared.

"Of course you've got to!" he said. "I've been sent to fetch you. Now then, get a move on!"

And the prefect herded the juniors out of the study and downstairs to Mr. Ratcliff's room.

Mr. Ratcliff was standing before his fire, with a cane in his hand, and an extremely unamiable expression upon his never-amiable face.

"Why did you not come immediately?" he demanded.

"We were thinking it over, sir," said Figgins.

"Thinking what over?"

Figgins made a desperate plunge.

"We think there's a lot too much caning lately, sir, and too many lines!" he exclaimed, taking his courage in both hands, so to speak. "We think that it's time to draw a line, sir."

Mr. Ratcliff seemed petrified.

"What?" he ejaculated. "What are you saying, Figgins?"

"We think it's rotten, sir—"

"Hold your tongue, you young fool!" muttered Monteith.

Monteith was something of a martinet himself, and not very popular among the juniors; but he fell very far short of Mr. Ratcliff's standard of severity.

"Hold out your hand, Figgins!" shouted Mr. Ratcliff.

Figgins hesitated a moment, and then held out his hand. He could not defy his Housemaster. All custom, all tradition, all experience was against such a thing.

Mr. Ratcliff brought the cane down with a spiteful swish; and Figgins gave a sharp cry, though he had not meant to make a sound.

"The other hand!"

Figgins did not make a sound again. He set his teeth hard to keep it back, as he received six cuts upon his hands alternately. He was very pale when the infliction ceased, and he stood gasping for breath.

Then the others went through it.

Mr. Ratcliff's arm was quite tired when he had finished. Six juniors stood in the study, pale and red by turns, gasping with pain.

Mr. Ratcliff laid down the cane and pointed majestically to the door.

"Go!" he said. "And remember, unless order is kept in this House, you will be visited with more severe punishment. Go!"

The juniors went, without a word.

And a few minutes later Mr. Ratcliff, having disposed of his own victims, crossed the quadrangle to the School House to call upon Mr. Railton and complain of the heinous conduct of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form.

CHAPTER 4.

The Cut Direct.

TOM MERRY was standing on the steps of the School House as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came in. The Shell fellow stared at the swell of St. Jim's in amazement.

"What's the matter, Gussy?"

"Ow!"

"Have you appointed yourself dust-collector-in-chief to St. Jim's?"

"Ow!"

"Been arguing with Figgins & Co.?" grinned Monty Lowther.

"Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's nothin' to laugh at, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus, jamming his eyeglass into his eye and turning it reprovingly upon the Terrible Three of the Shell. "I have been tweated with gwoss diswespect."

"You look it!" grinned Manners.

"I went ovah to the New House to suggest to Figgins a way of puttin' his wotten Housemastah into his place, and we had a wow instead," D'Arcy explained. "It's wotten! The silly asses didn't listen!"

"Wisdom cries out in the streets, and no man regards it," said Manners sympathetically.

"Yaas, wathah! The worst of it is that old Watty caught us wovin', and he's comin' ovah to the School House to complain to Mr. Wailton."

"That's bad!"

"Yaas, wathah! It's wotten to be wagged for twyin' to help fellows, and then to be complained of to a chap's Housemastah," said D'Arcy. "Of course, I don't care for Watty's opinion; he's a wank outsidah. But I wespert Mr. Wailton vevy much, and I don't want to have him down on me."

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy entered the School House and went up to his study in the Fourth Form passage, to look for a clothes-brush, which he greatly needed. Blake, Herries, and Digby, his chums in Study No. 6, were there.

They stared at him.

"Been over to the New House?" chuckled Blake.

"Yaas."

"Had a row?"

"Yaas."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I see no cause whatever for wibald laughtah," said D'Arcy stiffly. "This is what comes of twyin' to help fellows. Where's my clothes-brush?"

"Shall I give you a brush-down, Gussy?" asked Blake sympathetically.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Blake brushed down the unfortunate hero of the Fourth. Clouds of dust spread from D'Arcy's attire. He gasped and coughed.

"Bai Jove, it's wotten! Pway buck up, deah boy; you're suffocatin' me; and I expect to be called into Mr. Wailton's studay evewy minute."

"Why, what's the row?" asked Digby.

"Watty's comin' over to complain."

"Beast!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Kangaroo of the Shell put his head into the study as the brushing-down was finished.

"Mr. Railton wants to see Gussy," he said.

"Vevy well," said D'Arcy resignedly.

"Look out for squalls," said the Shell fellow. "Ratty's with him, and he looks as if he's been drinking vinegar."

"The wottah!"

"Better not tell him that!" grinned Kangaroo.

"Well, you're not so dusty now," said Blake, ceasing to brush. "Mind you don't let out to Ratty what you went over to the New House for."

"Yaas, I'll be vevy careful. Thank you, deah boy!"

Arthur Augustus, restored to something like tidiness, went down to his Housemaster's study. Mr. Ratcliff was standing there, and Mr. Railton, the master of the School House, was at his table, looking considerably worried. For the sake of keeping up appearances, if for nothing else, Mr. Railton was bound to treat Mr. Ratcliff with courtesy, and listen to his complaints with patience. But his patience was very much exercised by the petty and unending complaints of the New Housemaster.

Arthur Augustus did not look at Mr. Ratcliff as he entered. He cut the New Housemaster dead, so to speak, and fixed his eyes upon his own master.

"You sent for me, sir," he said.

"Yes, D'Arcy," said Mr. Railton. "Mr. Ratcliff complains that you went over to the New House and caused a disturbance in Figgins's study."

"It is quite a mistake on Mr. Watcliff's part, sir."

Mr. Ratcliff frowned.

"Do you deny that you went to the New House, D'Arcy?" he exclaimed.

D'Arcy did not reply.

"Do you hear me, D'Arcy?" thundered the New Housemaster.

D'Arcy certainly did not appear to hear.

He kept his eyes straight before him, and did not turn his head or answer. He might have been quite deaf.

Mr. Ratcliff's bilious face assumed a kind of peculiar purple hue.

"D'Arcy!" he shouted.

No reply.

"Will you answer me, boy?"

Silence.

Mr. Ratcliff turned to Mr. Railton, his face distorted with anger.

"This is the kind of impertinence I am expected to tolerate from the boys of your House, Mr. Railton!" he said, his voice almost choked with passion.

Mr. Railton was frowning now.

"D'Arcy, why do you not answer Mr. Ratcliff?" he exclaimed severely.

"I am here to ansawah you, sir," said D'Arcy firmly.

"You must not be impertinent to Mr. Ratcliff."

"No, sir."

"You went over to the New House?"

"Yes, sir."

"For what purpose?"

"To speak to Figgins and his fwriends, sir."

"Ah! You did not intend to make any disturbance?"

"Certainly not, sir."

"But there was a disturbance?"

"Yaas, sir. Figgins misunderstood."

"You see, Mr. Ratcliff, D'Arcy did not intend any harm," said Mr. Railton, with a propitiatory glance towards the master of the New House.

The latter frowned darkly.

"I have already severely punished Figgins and the rest for the disturbance," he said. "It was provoked by the presence of a School House boy, and I must, in justice, ask for the punishment of D'Arcy, who was struggling with the boys there when I saw him."

Mr. Railton caressed his chin thoughtfully. His own opinion was that Mr. Ratcliff was giving altogether undue prominence to a youthful lark, but he did not like to say so. He was in a very difficult position, for he had a very strong objection to punishing a boy for little or nothing, and at the same time he did not see how he could refuse Mr. Ratcliff's demand.

"Does D'Arcy declare that the fault was wholly with

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Figgins?" demanded Mr. Ratcliff, "Do you say that, D'Arcy?"

Silence.

"Answer me, boy!"

Silence.

Mr. Ratcliff took a step towards the junior, his hands working. D'Arcy was giving him the cut direct and ignoring his existence, in blissful carelessness of the fact that he was the senior Housemaster of St. Jim's.

"D'Arcy, answer me!" said Mr. Railton hastily. "Do you lay the blame of the disturbance upon Figgins?"

"Certainly not, sir!"

"Very well! You will take a hundred lines, D'Arcy, very concerned in a disturbance in the New House," said Mr. Railton. "I think that will meet the case, Mr. Ratcliff."

Mr. Ratcliff almost choked.

"What—what? A hundred lines? I have severely caned the boys of my House who were concerned in the disgraceful scene!"

"I have no comment to pass upon the way you govern the boys of your House, sir."

"I request that D'Arcy be severely caned."

Mr. Railton shook his head.

"I hardly think that the matter is so serious," he said.

"I have punished D'Arcy, and there the matter may drop. You may go, D'Arcy."

"Yaas, sir. Thank you, sir."

And, still ignoring the existence of Mr. Ratcliff, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy walked out of the study.

Mr. Ratcliff clenched his hands hard. It really looked for a moment as if he would have liked to strike the master of the School House.

"So—so the matter is to end here?" Mr. Ratcliff gasped.

Mr. Railton nodded.

"The matter is now ended," he said.

"Mr. Railton, I—I cannot agree to this! I must insist upon that boy being severely punished."

"You have no right to insist upon anything of the sort, sir. I must be allowed to manage my own House in my own way," said Mr. Railton coldly. "I do not interfere with the management of your House, whatever my opinion of it may be."

And the Housemaster's tone indicated pretty plainly that his opinion of the management of the New House was not a high one.

Mr. Ratcliff gritted his teeth.

"I have caned the boys in my House who were concerned in this scene of disgraceful hooliganism that I have described to you," he said.

"Yes, you have already informed me of that fact."

"I demand that D'Arcy be caned in the same manner."

"I do not consider it necessary."

"You mean you refuse?"

"If you force me to put it so plainly, Mr. Ratcliff, yes—I refuse."

Mr. Ratcliff clenched his hands.

"It is this leniency," he said, in almost a hissing voice, "it is this easiness with the boys, that causes the riotous behaviour of the juniors of your House, and creates insubordination and insolence."

The School House master flushed.

"I have never noticed those faults in the boys of my House, neither will I listen to such comments upon their conduct," he exclaimed. "Mr. Ratcliff, I think that this interview had better cease."

"You refuse to punish D'Arcy?"

"I have punished him."

"More severely, I mean."

"I certainly refuse to do that."

"Very well! I regard your conduct as calculated to cause disorder in the school, Mr. Railton. I regard you as aiding and abetting insubordination and insolence towards another Housemaster," said Mr. Ratcliff, his voice trembling with rage.

"I am sorry you should think so. I hope you will change your views when you are calmer."

"I am quite calm now," said Mr. Ratcliff, though he did not look calm by any means. "Before I go, I shall tell you what I have long thought—that this House is a disgrace to St. Jim's owing to the scandalous leniency of its master."

Mr. Railton rose to his feet.

"Will you kindly leave my study, sir?" he asked politely.

Mr. Ratcliff looked at him. The big, handsome Housemaster towered over him, and Mr. Ratcliff somehow felt unequal to carrying the argument further. He left the study, and slammed the door behind him. Mr. Railton sat down at his table again with a sigh.

"If Mr. Ratcliff does not change his tactics there will be a revolt in the New House after the Head has gone on his holidays," the School House master said to himself. "Boys

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cannot be driven like animals. The man is a fool. I should very much like to tell him so."

Etiquette forbade any such plain speaking on the part of the School House master. He was glad that Mr. Ratcliff had gone; the scene had come perilously near a violent altercation, which both masters would have been very sorry for afterwards.

Mr. Ratcliff walked down the passage to the door of the School House. The Terrible Three were still standing on the steps, and they glanced at Mr. Ratcliff as he came out, and raised their caps. They did not respect Mr. Ratcliff—few fellows at St. Jim's did—but they knew what was due to a Housemaster's position, and their manner was respectful enough. There was nothing in it to find fault with, but Mr. Ratcliff was not in a mood to be reasonable. He fancied that he detected a grin on Tom Merry's face—a grin of derision—and as he passed the chums of the Shell he halted for a moment, and boxed Tom Merry's ear.

The hero of the Shell staggered back in amazement.

He reeled against the stone wall of the porch, his ear burning and singing, and Mr. Ratcliff walked on, perhaps a little sorry for what he had done, for he had broken every law at St. Jim's, written and unwritten, by that hasty act. For although masters were allowed to cane juniors, such brutal and dangerous acts as boxing their ears were not permitted, and, in any case, Mr. Ratcliff had no right to touch a School House boy.

The thing was so utterly outrageous that Tom Merry could hardly believe that it had happened for a moment.

He stood rubbing his ear, and gazing blankly after the receding form of the New House master.

"My hat!" muttered Manners, while Monty Lowther whistled softly.

Tom Merry's eyes blazed.

"You cad!" he shouted after Mr. Ratcliff.

"Hold on, Tommy!" muttered Lowther hurriedly.

"Cad!" yelled Tom Merry recklessly.

Mr. Ratcliff half turned, his face crimson. But what he had done could not be justified under any circumstances—he dared not even let the Head know that he had done it. He had placed it in the junior's power to say what he liked, and Tom Merry was saying it.

"Cad!"

Mr. Ratcliff affected to be deaf, and walked away towards his own House at a quickened pace. He entered the New House in a mood that made it extremely unsafe for any junior to come into his path, as Pratt of the Fourth and Thompson of the Shell discovered to their cost, having the misfortune to meet their Housemaster on his way to his study.

CHAPTER 5.

D'Arcy's Great Idea.

"WELL!"

Blake, Herries, and Digby jerked out that monosyllabic query simultaneously as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy returned to Study No. 6.

The swell of St. Jim's smiled serenely.

"It's all sewene, deah boys."

"Not licked?"

"Wailton is a bwick!" said D'Arcy. "I've got a hundred lines, but it was worth that to pull old Watty's leg. I wufused to speak to him in Mr. Wailton's studay. I tweated him with contempt."

Blake roared.

"Ha, ha, ha! I wonder he didn't treat you with a thick ear."

"I should have wufused to be tweated with a thick ear," said D'Arcy loftily. "Watty was in a feahful wage. But it's all wight. I'm only sowwy that owin' to Figgins bein' such a silly ass I sha'n't be able to help him."

And Arthur Augustus settled down to do his preparation.

It was about ten minutes later that there was a tap at the door of the study, and Figgins came in. Arthur Augustus put up his monocle and surveyed Figgins with a decidedly disapproving air.

"Weally, Figgins—" he began.

Figgins nodded genially.

"Just looked in to say we're sorry we got you into a row," he said. "That's all. I hope Ratty didn't chivy your Housemaster into caning you?"

"Not at all, deah boy."

"I'm glad!" said Figgins.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's aristocratic countenance assumed a more friendly expression.

"Pway sit down, Figgay, deah boy," he said. "As you're here, I may as well explain to you what I came over to your studay for."

Figgins grinned.



Above, from a rocky ledge where even a gull could hardly have found a footing, an evil, bearded face looked down at Harry Wharton. It was Barengro, the gipsy, peering down to watch the effect of his missile, and the schoolboy knew that his enemy had trapped him at last!

(An exciting incident from "The Rivals Test," the splendid, long, complete school tale of Harry Wharton & Co. at Greyfriars, contained in this week's issue of The "MAGNET" Library. Now on Sale. Price One Penny.

"I know what you came for, Gussy. You came to jaw, and we bumped you for it."
 "Weally, Figgins—"
 "Gussy's got a first-chop, ripping, double-back-action idea to lend you fellows for nothing," said Jack Blake. "He makes no charge for it."
 "Weally, Blake—"
 "Free, gratis, and for nothing," said Digby. "Of course, it isn't any good, but you must take the will for the deed."
 "Weally, Dig—"
 "I hear your giddy Housemaster is giving you beans," said Blake sympathetically. "If we had a Housemaster like old Ratty—"
 "You'd stand him, the same as we do," said Figgins gloomily. "Don't talk out of your hat."

Blake laughed.
 "Well, I dare say we should, unless we adopted Gussy's brilliant idea," he remarked.
 "I wathah considah that my ideah would help Figgay out of his pwsent difficult posish," said D'Arcy.
 "What's the scheme?" asked Figgins curiously. "If you can suggest any dodge for cutting old Ratty's claws I'll be jolly well obliged. The Head's going away this evening to stay for a week, and we all know that Ratty will be worse than ever when he's gone. I believe he'll come down on seniors as well as juniors as soon as the Head's out of the way, and if he keeps on as he's started there'll be a giddy revolt in the New House. What's your wheeze, Gussy?"
 "A wound wobin, deah boy."
 Figgins stared.

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"A w-w-what?" he ejaculated.
"A wound wobin."
"What on earth's a 'wound wobin'?" demanded Figgins, in astonishment. "Is it something to eat?"
"Weally, Figgins—"
"Or a kind of torture?" asked Figgins.
"Pway don't wot!"
"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake. "Gussy means a round robin."

"Oh!" said Figgins. "A round robin."
"Yaas, wathah, deah boy! A wound wobin."
"But what's the good of a round robin?" asked Figgins, puzzled.

Arthur Augustus condescended to explain.
"You see, if you chaps wemonstwater with Watty he'll only get worse, and the wingleaders will get feahful thwashin's—"

"What-ho!" said Figgins.
"But if you all sign a wound wobin you can all sign your names in a wing, and no one will be more conspicuous than the othahs, you know. Watty won't be able to jump on ewevy giddy boundah in the House, and you can give him a genewal expression of feelin' on the subject without so much wisk. And when he's had a manifesto showin' him that ewevy juniah in the New House wegardis him as a tywant, I should wathah think that he would pause and welflect."

"By Jove!" said Figgins.
"It's not half a bad idea," said Blake. "You chaps might try it."

"It's a jolly good idea," exclaimed Figgins. "We shall have to stop Ratty somehow, and a round robin from the whole House is just the thing. It may make Ratty understand that he's getting near the limit."

"Yaas, wathah!"
"I'm much obliged to you, Gussy, and I'm jolly sorry we bumped you when you came over, if that was what you came over for. But, of course, we couldn't be expected to know that you had a good idea."

"Of course not!" agreed Blake, with a chuckle. "Gussy has never been suspected of anything of the sort."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Weally, Blake—"
"I'll jolly well buzz off and get the thing going," said Figgins, with growing enthusiasm. "We'll get it done to-night, and I shouldn't wonder if it stops Ratty making an ass of himself. Anyway, if there's trouble, he can't say that he wasn't warned."

"Yaas, wathah!"
And Figgins, looking a little excited, hurried out of the study. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jammed his monocle into his eye and surveyed his grinning chums in a very lofty way.

"Figgins is a wathah sensible chap, aftah all," he remarked. "He knows a good thing when he sees it."
"And he can seize a good thing when he knows it," Blake remarked.

"Oh, pway don't be an ass!"
Figgins hurried downstairs, and out of the door of the School House. The Terrible Three were still there, and Tom Merry was rubbing his ear, which was not yet reduced to its natural hue.

"Here's Figgins," said Monty Lowther. "Let's bump him for having such a rotten Housemaster."

"Hear, hear!" said Manners.
Figgins held up his hand in sign of peace.

"Pax!" he exclaimed.
"Oh, rats! Look here—"
"Oh, cheese it!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "Let Figgy alone. He has more to stand from the cad than we have."

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"Ratty been going for you?" asked Figgins.
"He's given me a thump on the napper," said Tom Merry, flushing. "I can't go to the Head about it, but I'll make the boulder sit up, somehow."

"He is a worm," said Figgins frankly; "and he's going to be worse when the Head's gone, I'm afraid."

"The Head's gone already," said Manners. "He drove away to catch the seven train."

Figgins whistled.
"Then Ratty will begin to let things rip, you bet. He's senior Housemaster, and he may even chip in over here, in School House matters."

The Terrible Three looked very grim.
"He'd better not," said Monty Lowther. "Railton wouldn't stand it for a minute."

"And if Railton would, we wouldn't," said Tom Merry. "Ratty will get let down jolly sharp, if he meddles in the School House. I wonder you chaps over there can put up with his rotten temper."

"We can't," said Figgins.
"There have been barrings-out in schools for less than Ratty does," said Tom Merry, with a frown. "He ought to be brought to his senses somehow."

"A barring-out is a big order," said Figgins. "But it may come to that yet. It will, I think, unless Ratty takes some notice of the round robin."

"The what?" demanded the Terrible Three with one voice.
"It's Gussy's idea," said Figgins. "We're going to get up a round robin in the New House, and all the fellows will sign it, and it will show Ratty which way the wind blows. If he's got any sense he'll stop his rotten tricks."

Tom Merry shook his head.
"More likely to hand out lickings," he said.

Figgins's jaw became very square.
"Then there will be trouble," he said.

"Well, I wish you luck, old fellow!"
Figgins nodded, and walked away in the dark towards the New House.

"A round robin," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "I'm afraid Figgins won't find it work. It would be quite in Ratty's line to cane every chap who signs it."

"Then there will be trouble," said Lowther.
"Yes, rather! And goodness knows how it will end. One thing's certain," said Tom Merry; "if there's trouble, we're going to back up Figgins & Co. all along the line."

And Manners and Lowther said "Hear, hear!" very heartily.

CHAPTER 6.

The Round Robin.

FIGGINS burst into the study in the New House, with great excitement. Kerr and Wynn were at work, and they scattered a variety of blots over their papers as the junior came rushing in like a whirlwind.

"Got it!" shouted Figgins.
"Eh?"

"What?"
"I've got it!"
"Got what, you ass?" growled Kerr. "I know you've spoiled my paper!"

"And mine!" grunted Fatty Wynn.
"Blow the papers! I've got it—the idea! We're going to put an end to old Ratty's knavish tricks!" trilled Figgins.

"It was Gussy suggested it—Gussy! That's what he came over here for when we bumped him. Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings, you know."

"What's the idea?" asked Kerr, not very enthusiastically.
"A round robin, signed by every junior in the house, telling Ratty that we're fed up," said Figgins. "It will stop him, if anything will."

Kerr whistled.
"It will mean trouble, I think," he said.

"There will be trouble, anyway, if Ratty doesn't draw a line."

"Yes, that's true enough."
"I think a round robin ought to stop him," said Figgins confidently. "It will have to be signed by every junior in the House—all the Fourth and the Shell, at any rate. No good having the fags in it; they can't stand up to the rack and take their fodder as we can, if there's trouble."

"It's not a bad idea," said Fatty Wynn thoughtfully. "I suppose even Ratty can't cane the whole House."

"I shouldn't wonder if he did," said Kerr.
"The House wouldn't stand it," said Figgins. "I know he wouldn't dare to try it if the Head were here, anyway."

"But the Head isn't here," said Kerr. "Every chap in the House is saying that old Ratty will get thicker and thicker as soon as the Head's gone."

"That's just what I want to try the round robin dodge for, to warn him off in time," said Figgins.

"Well, it might work," Kerr admitted.

"We'll try, at any rate. You begin to draw up the paper, and I'll rope in the fellows," said Figgins. "Redfern and his lot will sign like a shot, I know; and the rest will follow suit. I'm off!"

And Figgins whirled out of the study. He rushed into the end study, occupied by Redfern & Co., in the same style of a whirlwind. When Figgins had anything to do, he did not allow the grass to grow under his feet.

Redfern & Co. jumped up as Figgins rushed in. Relations were sometimes strained between the two studies, and for a moment the New Firm thought that it was a raid. But Figgins soon reassured them.

"All serene!" he exclaimed. "We're getting up a round robin to warn Ratty off the grass, and we want you fellows to sign it."

Redfern chuckled.

"I don't suppose it will be much good," he said. "But we'll sign it with pleasure. We'd lend a hand scalping him, if it could be done."

"What-ho!" said Lawrence and Owen, with great feeling.

"Get into my study, then."

And Figgins, like the bearer of the fiery cross in the Highlands of old, rushed off to rouse up the New House juniors to the fray. By the time he returned to his study, Redfern & Co. were there, and other fellows in a crowd, and more and more were coming along the Fourth Form passage. Thompson of the Shell, and Pratt of the Fourth, came in with Figgins, and they seemed equally enthusiastic. French and Jimson and Dibbs and Craggs were already there; the crowd was growing thicker and thicker, and the accommodation afforded by Figgins's study was taxed to its utmost limit.

The idea of the round robin had evidently caught on with the New House juniors. All of them were smarting under a sense of injustice, all of them were ripe for revolt, if revolt had only been practicable. And a round robin to the Housemaster was the first step on the road to resistance. It might be the last step, too, if Mr. Ratcliff took a sensible view of the matter. If he did not— But it was useless to think about that yet. Sufficient for the hour was the wheeze thereof.

Kerr had a sheet of paper before him, and a pen in his hand. Fatty Wynn was leaning over one shoulder, and Redfern over the other, giving advice. Round the table the other fellows were crowded, looking on, and also giving advice, and Figgins's study at that moment bore a strong likeness to the celebrated Tower of Babel, where confusion of tongues first fell upon mankind.

"Pitch it to him straight, Kerr."

"Give him the facts."

"Tell him we're fed up."

"Point out that we all think he's a cad and a rotter!"

"Tell him to play the game."

"Say we won't stand any more of his old buck."

"Pile in with the 'won't' and 'sha'n't's.'"

Figgins pushed his way through the crowd, and joined Kerr. He looked at what had been already written, and called for silence, and read it out.

"Whereas the undersigned juniors of the New House object—"

"Good!" interjected Pratt. "'Whereas' sounds legal."

"Order!"

"Sorry! Go on."

"Whereas the undersigned juniors of the New House object to the excessive punishments which Mr. Ratcliff has seen fit to hand out lately—"

"Hear, hear!"

"They venture to call upon Mr. Ratcliff with all respect—"

"Phew!" said French. "We're not going to call upon him, are we? Blessed if I quite care about going into his study!"

"Ass!"

"Look here, Kerr—"

"We call upon him in a figurative sense, you fathead!" said Kerr witheringly.

"I see. I don't mind calling upon him in a figurative sense," agreed French. "I don't want to go into the lion's den, that's all."

"Same here," said Dibbs, with much feeling. "I've been in Ratty's study once to-day, and my hands won't feel the same again till to-morrow."

"Order! Get on with the washing!"

"Silence for the chair!"

"With all respect—" resumed Kerr.

"But we don't respect him," objected Lawrence.

"No good telling whoppers, especially such awful whoppers as that," Owen remarked.

"Hear, hear!"

"Cut out the respect, Kerr."

Kerr sniffed.

"Asses! It's the position we respect, not the man who fills it. Fellow is bound to respect a Housemaster."

"H'm! Well, go on, then."

"They venture to call upon Mr. Ratcliff, with all respect, to stop it."

"Good!"

"That's plain enough."

"Ought to put in something about being fed up," said Thompson.

"Can't use slang in a round robin to a Housemaster," said Kerr, with a shake of the head.

"Say we've had enough of it, then."

"Tell him we won't stick it."

"Order!" said Figgins. "Mustn't make the thing cheeky. We don't want to give Ratty the slightest excuse for getting his back up about this."

Redfern grinned.

"I fancy he will get his back up, all the same," he remarked.

"Well, if he gets his back up over a perfectly reasonable and respectful round robin, he must get his silly back up, that's all," said Figgins.

"Hear, hear!"

"Going to shove in any more?" asked French.

"No; I think that will do," said Kerr. "Sign your names all round the paper, in a circle, so that he can't possibly detect which signed first. He would be only too glad to have somebody to pick on."

"Yes, rather!"

"I'll sign first, all the same, as I started this wheeze," said Figgins, and he picked up the pen and dipped it in the ink.

"G. Figgins," in a sprawling hand, adorned the paper the next moment. Then Kerr and Wynn signed, and then, in order, came Redfern, Lawrence, and Owen, and then Thompson, Pratt, Dibbs, Craggs and the rest. Fellows as they signed their names retreated from the study to make room for new-comers, and there was a constant procession in and out of Figgins's study.

The news of what was going on soon spread through the house. Fags of the Third and Second Forms came to sign, but they were turned away. It was more than possible that the round robin would lead to a big row and severe punishments, and Figgins did not want the "infants" to come under the ban of Mr. Ratcliff.

In an hour's time every junior of the New House who belonged to the Fourth or the Shell had written his name upon the paper.

"Now it's only got to be taken to old Ratty!" said Figgins.

And he surveyed with great pride the paper, which looked somewhat like a rough representation of a spider's web.

"Who's going to take it?" asked Redfern.

There was a pause.

That was not an easy question to answer. The junior who presented such a paper to the Housemaster was certain of a caning, whatever happened to the rest of the signatories.

"Ahem!" said Lawrence.

"Might leave it on his table, when he's out of his study," Owen suggested.

Figgins brightened up.

"Jolly good idea!" he exclaimed.

"I'll do it!" said Redfern.

Figgins shook his head, and picked up the paper.

"It's my bisney," he said tersely.

"Well, go it, then!"

"Make sure that Ratty isn't in his study, that's all," Kerr remarked.

"You bet!"

Figgins went downstairs with the paper in his hand. He caught sight of Mr. Ratcliff at the door of Monteith's study, evidently talking with the prefect within. The coast was clear. Figgins hurried to Mr. Ratcliff's study and entered, and laid the paper upon the Housemaster's table. He laid a paper-weight upon one corner of it, in case it should be whisked away, and glanced over it with a grin.

Then he turned to the door.

Just as he stepped towards it, a thin form in rustling gown blocked up the doorway.

Figgins stopped dead. Mr. Ratcliff gazed at him with cold, searching eyes.

"Figgins, what are you doing here?"

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CHAPTER 7.

The Result of the Round Robin.

FIGGINS did not reply. He stood staring in dismay at Mr. Ratcliff. He knew that the Housemaster, whose eyes were everywhere, must have seen him come to the study, and had followed him there. Probably Mr. Ratcliff suspected some jape; but he certainly did not suspect what was really the case. Figgins wondered dimly what he would say when he saw the round robin on the table.

Mr. Ratcliff's little stony eyes glittered as he fixed them on Figgins. He was wondering what the junior was doing in the study, and he meant to know before Figgins departed.

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

"I—I came—" stammered Figgins.

Mr. Ratcliff's eyes fell upon the paper on the table, held down at the corner by the paper-weight. He made a stride towards the table, and Figgins made a strategic movement towards the door.

"Stop!"

The Housemaster rapped out the word.

Figgins stopped.

There was no help for it; he had to go through with it now. Mr. Ratcliff removed the paper-weight, and picked up the peculiar manifesto that had been signed with so much enthusiasm in Figgins's study. He started as he looked at it, and his lips set in a thin line, and his eyes gleamed as they ran over the paper. He read through the declaration, and glanced over the crowd of signatures. Then he looked at Figgins again. Figgins was standing silent, waiting for the storm to burst.

It burst.

"Figgins! What is this?"

"If you please, sir—" began Figgins.

"What is it? What does it mean?"

"If you please, sir, it's a round robin."

"What? It is what?"

"A round robin, sir."

"Who wrote this paper out?"

"It was signed by all of us, sir."

"Who wrote it?"

"One of the chaps, sir."

"His name?"

Figgins was silent.

"Was it you who wrote this insolent message, Figgins?"

"We didn't mean to be insolent, sir. We just wanted to point out things," Figgins explained awkwardly.

"Did you write it?"

"No, sir."

"Who did?"

No answer.

Mr. Ratcliff scanned the paper, his eyes quite green now. He knew the handwriting of every boy in the House, and it did not take him long to ascertain that it was Kerr, of the Fourth, who had written the paper, though the signatures were in various hands.

"Kerr wrote this?" he said, looking at Figgins again.

Figgins did not reply.

"And it was signed by all the boys whose names are here?" asked Mr. Ratcliff.

"Yes, sir."

"Indeed!" Mr. Ratcliff's sharp voice seemed to cut like a knife. "It appears that all the members of the Fourth Form and the Shell who belong to this House have signed this paper?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well!" said Mr. Ratcliff. "You would like an answer, no doubt, to this piece of unheard-of insolence?"

"Yes, sir; we should like an answer."

"You shall have it, Figgins!" Mr. Ratcliff took the paper in his thin fingers, and tore it across, and then across again. "Every boy who has signed this paper will be caned." He threw the fragments of the paper into the fire. "That is my answer, Figgins. Every boy in this House who belongs to the Fourth or the Shell will be caned to-morrow morning after prayers. You can take the message to them from me. Every signatory to this paper will receive a dozen strokes with the cane, a thousand lines, and will have his half-holidays stopped for two weeks."

"Oh, sir!"

"Now you may go, Figgins."

"If you please, Mr. Ratcliff—"

"Not another word! Leave my study!"

Figgins left the study. He closed the door quietly behind him, and walked away. On the stairs were a crowd of juniors waiting for him. They hurled eager questions at Figgins as he appeared.

"Did he catch you, Figgy?"

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"What did he say?"

"Licked?"

Figgins did not reply till he had reached his study. He was pale, and very grim. The crowd of juniors followed him to the study, and thronged it.

"What's happened?" demanded Redfern.

"Tell us, Figgy!"

"Was there a row?"

"Are you licked?"

Figgins shook his head.

"Has he read the paper?" asked Kerr.

"Yes."

"What did he say?" shouted a dozen voices.

Figgins's jaw set squarely.

"He says that every fellow who has signed the paper will be caned to-morrow morning after prayers—a dozen licks each!"

"Oh!"

"Anything else?" asked Fatty Wynn.

"A thousand lines each."

"Oh!"

"And gated for a fortnight?"

"My hat!"

"Gated for a fortnight, a thousand lines each, and a dozen licks!" said Redfern, in a thoughtful way. "That's coming it rather strong, even for Ratty!"

"Jolly strong!" said Thomson, of the Shell.

"The round robin is a bit of a fiasco," grinned Dibbs, rubbing his hands, as if in anticipation of what was to come.

Figgins's eyes flashed.

"It will be rotten, certainly, if we stand it!" he said.

"I suppose we've got to stand it," remarked French.

"I sha'n't, for one!"

"What will you do?"

Figgins's eye ran over the crowd. Figgins was in deadly earnest, and the anxious juniors waited breathlessly for him to speak.

"There's only one alternative," said Figgins slowly. "We've got to knuckle under to Ratty all along the line or else—"

"Or else what?"

"Go it, Figgy!"

"Or else kick."

"How can we kick?"

"There's only one thing."

"And that—"

"A barring-out!"

"Phew!"

"I say, Figgy—"

"A barring-out! My hat!"

Figgins looked very grim.

"If we were going to get scared, and turn back, and knuckle under, we shouldn't have sent in the round robin," he said quietly. "After that, we've got to go on. We've got to show Ratty that we're not slaves. Now the Head's away, he will get worse and worse, and we've had enough of the mailed fist bizney. I vote that we don't stand it. Will you fellows back me up?"

"Yes, rather!" said Redfern promptly.

"Hear, hear!"

"We'll back you up, Figgy."

"Then, if you'll all follow my lead, we'll stand out against this," said Figgins. "We'll all refuse to be punished, in the first place. If we stand together, shoulder to shoulder, you know, he can't touch us. And if he starts the prefects on us, we'll bar him out, and hold out, too, till the Head come back."

"Phew!"

"Who's game?"

"All of us, I think," said Lawrence. "Hands up for the barring-out if Ratty doesn't come to his senses!"

Every right hand went up.

"That settles it," said Figgins. "We all refuse to be caned or gated for signing the round robin, and if Ratty carries the matter any further, we bar him out. And as it's pretty certain it will come to that, we'd better get ready to-night."

"Hear, hear!"

And that evening no preparation was done by the juniors of the New House. They were preparing for other things.

ANSWERS

"THE RIVAL'S TEST!" is the Title of the Splendid, Long, Complete School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co. appearing in this week's "MAGNET" Library. Now on Sale. Price One Penny.

CHAPTER 8. Backing Up Figgins.

TOM MERRY & CO., over in the School House, were soon informed of what was going on in the rival house of St. Jim's. But they did not look upon the New House as a rival house just now. They were only too willing to stand by Figgins & Co. in their hour of need. Figgins came over to tell them about it, and the chums of the School House met in Study No. 6 to consult on the subject. Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn were there, very serious and determined, and of course very glad to get what help they could from their old rivals. It was a time for the juniors of St. Jim's to stand together, and sink all differences among themselves.

"Ratty's passed the limit!" said Figgins grimly. "Even if we gave him his head this time, it wouldn't be the end of it—it would only be the beginning. He would go from bad to worse, and we should have to kick some time. Some old johnny said once: 'Resist the beginnings.' That was a good maxim."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Good for you!" said Tom Merry. "But what are you going to do?"

"Bar him out."

"Where?"

"In the New House," said Figgins. "If it was a matter that concerned the whole school, and you fellows were in it, we'd choose the School House, and fortify the Form-rooms. But it doesn't affect the School House, and we don't want to do anything to get Railton down on us, either. And we don't want to bring Kildare and the School House prefects into it. It's a New House matter, and it's got to be fought out over there. We shall take possession of the New House, and hold it against all comers."

"Bai Jove!"

"There are enough of us to do it," said Figgins. "We're going to bar Ratty out, and every senior who doesn't side with us, too. We shall all stand together, and we've agreed among ourselves not to surrender unless the Head gives his word that nobody shall be expelled for the barring-out. Of course, they can't expel fifty chaps, and we're not going to have the leaders picked on for punishment. Every chap who doesn't want to hold out will be given the choice of getting out before we bar up the doors. But I think the whole gang will stick to their colours."

"Bai Jove! I've a jollay good mind to join you, deah boy!"

Figgins shook his head.

"No School House chaps had better get mixed up in it," he said. "You've nothing to complain of—you're not under Ratty."

"Yaas, but you chaps need a fellow of tact and judgment to see you through this," said Arthur Augustus anxiously. "You require a weally good leadah—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

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

"I fail to see any cause for wibald laughtah—"

Figgins chuckled.

"We'll manage to rub along without you as leader, Gussy," he said. "I'm leader, and I'm quite satisfied with myself, as a matter of fact. Kerr has agreed that Redfern shall be first lieutenant, for the sake of peace. Reddy is a keen chap, too, and he will be useful. We mean business this time."

"What about grub?" asked Manners. "You'll want to provision the house, if you're going to stand a siege."

Fatty Wynn nodded emphatically. He had been impressing upon Figgins all the time the great necessity of laying in a sufficient quantity of provisions.

"That's the important point," said Fatty Wynn. "It would be awful to be starved out, and, of course, that will be Ratty's game when he finds that he can't get at us."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We've pooled all our cash," said Figgins. "We're going to buy up grub at the tuck-shop as far as the tin goes, and lay it in ready. We can't do more than that."

"Bai Jove, you know, we'd bettah have a subscription ovah here," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I have vewy fortunately had a fivah frowm my governah, and it will come in vewy useful. It is quite at your disposal, Figgay."

Figgins hesitated.

"Good!" exclaimed Tom Merry heartily. "You'd do as much for us, Figgay, if we were in the same fix."

"Yes, that's so," agreed Figgins; "but—"

"No buts about it. We're going to raise a fund, and buy up grub for you," said Tom Merry decidedly. "We'll set about it at once, and clear Mrs. Taggles's shop out of provisions. Strike the iron while it's hot."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, you're awfully good," said Figgins gratefully. "Of course, every little helps. It would be rotten to have to go

without grub, and, of course, we would starve rather than surrender."

"That's settled," said Kerr.

Fatty Wynn opened his mouth to speak, and closed it again. Fatty Wynn had as much pluck as anybody, but the prospect of starving filled him with dismay. Monty Lowther grinned as he noted the expression upon the fat Fourth-Former's face.

"In case of dire necessity you could fall back on Fatty Wynn," remarked the humorist of the Shell,

Fatty Wynn started.

"Eh? What's that?" he ejaculated.

Lowther chuckled.

"Wynn would last you for weeks, if you should come as far as cannibalism."

"Look here, Lowther—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Think what lovely pork chops he would make!" said Lowther.

"Look here, you silly ass—"

"Fellows have come to it, in open boats at sea," said Monty Lowther solemnly. "Of course, Fatty Wynn would be only too glad to sacrifice himself in the good of the cause."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fatty Wynn glared wrathfully at Lowther.

"Of all the silly asses—" he began.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We shan't come to that," said Figgins, laughing. "There's always enough grub in the House to last a day or so, and we shall clear out Mrs. Taggles's stock. Redfern and the rest are at it now."

"And we'll get at it, too," said Blake. "We'd better buy up the stuff as if it were for ourselves, and sneak it into the New House in small parcels, so as not to attract attention."

"Yes; that's a good wheeze."

"And if grub runs short, and there's a long siege, we'll manage to smuggle grub in to you," exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Running the blockade, you know, as they do when a seaport is blockaded in war time."

"Oh, ripping!"

"Yaas, wathah! That will be fun, you know."

"It's jolly good of you fellows to rally round us like this," said Figgins.

"Not at all, deah boy. Now's the time for all twue men to wally wound the old flag," said D'Arcy. "The only thing I'm wovvied about is that you want a weally good leadah."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the meeting broke up. D'Arcy was still feeling rather worried about that lack of a really good leader for the barrers-out, but Figgins did not seem at all anxious upon that point.

It was a busy evening for the juniors. Dame Taggles was amazed at the sudden run upon her little shop. New House fellows had cleared off a considerable part of her stock, as far as their supply of cash went. Then came a raid by the School House juniors. The Terrible Three came in and made reckless purchases of all sorts and conditions of things, and carried them off in parcels. Then came in Blake and Digby with more demands, and after them came D'Arcy and Herries, spending money still more recklessly. And then Kangaroo, and Lumley-Lumley, and Clifton Dane and Glyn, and more fellows—all apparently with plenty of money to spend, and a determination to make a complete clearance of all the eatables in Dame Taggles's establishment.

Mrs. Taggles was amazed. She had never done so great a stroke of business in all the time she had kept the little tuckshop in the corner of the quad, behind the elms.

By the time the epidemic of purchasing was over, there was a very considerable quantity of cash in Dame Taggles's till, and there was hardly anything eatable left in the shop.

Parcel by parcel, the purchased provisions were sily conveyed into the New House, and concealed in the Shell and Fourth Form studies.

Mr. Ratcliff was thinking a great deal that evening about the punishment he was to inflict upon the signatories of the round robin, the next morning.

But he was not thinking of the preparations that Figgins & Co. were making. He never even dreamed of the possibility of an organised and combined resistance to his tyranny. He was to discover that on the morrow!

CHAPTER 9.

Passing the Rubicon.

MORNING dawned upon St. Jim's.

To all appearances, it dawned as many other mornings had dawned. In the old quadrangle the trees showing their first spring green, glistened in the sunlight. The rising-bell clanged as usual to wake the St. Jim's fellows, and in the School House and the New House they came down to breakfast as usual.

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

NEXT
THURSDAY:

"FIGGINS & CO.'S NEW MASTER!"

But there was suppressed excitement in all the lower Forms, especially in the New House.

After prayers, Figgins & Co. had received orders to present themselves in the Big Hall for a public caning.

As a rule, only punishments inflicted by the Head were carried out in the Big Hall, but now that Dr. Holmes was away Mr. Ratcliff had appointed it so.

The whole school was to be assembled to witness the punishment.

At the appointed time, the School House prefects saw that all the juniors belonging to the School House were in their places in Big Hall.

Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, and Darrel, and Rushden, and the other prefects of the School House, were looking very serious, but they did as Mr. Ratcliff bade them. As senior Housemaster, Mr. Ratcliff had the right to order an assembly of the school, and Mr. Railton did not oppose the step.

The seniors of the New House—Fifth and Sixth—came in their places. So did the fags of the Second and the Third. But in the ranks of the Fourth and the Shell there were gaps.

The New House fellows belonging to those two Forms were conspicuous by their absence.

Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, noted it with a frown.

It was the first hint he had received of the intention of the New House juniors to resist.

Mr. Ratcliff came into the Hall by a door at the upper end, which was used by the Head on such occasions.

The master rustled in, and glanced over the assembly, not, for the moment, noting the absence of fifty boys among so many.

There was a breathless hush in the Hall.

"My hat!" Tom Merry whispered to Manners and Lowther "Nothing could have happened better than this to suit Figgins. They've got the whole House to themselves now!"

Monty Lowther grinned.

"Figgins won't let a chance like this slip by," he murmured.

"No fear!"

"Hark! There goes Ratty!"

"Silence!" called out Kildare.

There was breathless silence. Everybody in the Hall, with the exception of Mr. Ratcliff, was perfectly aware that the "round robin" brigade had not come in, and they wondered what "Ratty" would say when he made the discovery.

Mr. Ratcliff came, frowning, to the edge of the dais.

"Monteith!"

"Yes, sir?"

"Send forward all the boys whose names I have given you."

Monteith hesitated.

"Do you hear me?" exclaimed Mr. Ratcliff sharply.

"Ye-es, sir."

"Then do as I tell you."

"They—they're not here, sir."

Mr. Ratcliff jumped.

"What? Not here?"

"No, sir," said Monteith.

"What do you mean, Monteith?" exclaimed Mr. Ratcliff, in surprise, not in the least understanding yet what it meant.

"How is it that they're not here?"

"They haven't turned up, sir."

There was a faint chuckle among the crowd of boys. Monteith's explanation was certainly simple enough.

"Monteith, I warned you that the whole school was to be present," said Mr. Ratcliff, frowning. "Did you not make it known?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then Figgins and the rest have deliberately refused to obey my order?"

"Apparently so, sir."

Mr. Ratcliff's brows came together in a thick, black line.

"Where are they, Monteith?"

"In the New House, I believe, sir."

"This is—is incredible!" ejaculated Mr. Ratcliff. "You are sure that they had orders to come here, Monteith?"

"Quite sure, sir."

"There was no misunderstanding?"

"Certainly not."

"I cannot understand it. It is incredible that they should deliberately disobey the orders of their Housemaster!" exclaimed Mr. Ratcliff.

Monteith was silent.

"Go to the House at once, Monteith, and bring them here—immediately!" said Mr. Ratcliff commandingly.

"But, sir—"

"Go at once."

"Very well!"

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Monteith walked down the hall and disappeared out of the great doorway. Mr. Ratcliff stood waiting upon the platform, frowning darkly, his thin hand clutched tightly upon his cane. There was a breathless pause. That Figgins & Co. would not come was pretty certain; they had passed the Rubicon now. What would happen after that was still upon the knees of the gods.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy to Blake.

"Old Watty looks awf'ly watty now, you know!"

Blake chuckled silently.

"He'll look more ratty still when Monteith comes back," he said.

"What-ho!" murmured Lumley-Lumley. "I guess Figgy will hold out."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Silence!" said Kildare.

And the muttering of voices died away.

But there was a buzz again as Monteith came into the hall, his face very grave. He came alone. Every eye was upon him as he walked up the hall.

"Monteith, where are the juniors?"

"They refuse to come, sir!"

Mr. Ratcliff seemed petrified for a moment.

"What, what!" he ejaculated. "What did you say, Monteith?"

"They refuse to come, sir!"

Mr. Ratcliff stared at him blankly for a moment. Then he descended from the dais, and, with his gown rustling behind him, and his cane clutched hard in his hand, he strode from the hall. There was a clamour of voices behind him as he strode out. He had gone to fetch Figgins & Co.

"To the Form-rooms!" called out Kildare.

But no one appeared to hear him. The whole school crowded out of the doors into the sunny quadrangle—to see the fun!

CHAPTER 10.

The Barring-Out.

FIGGINS stood at the door of the New House, looking into the quad.

Figgins's face was a little pale, but it was very determined, and his eyes were gleaming with a resolute light.

"Jacta est alea," Kerr had said; and the New House fellows realised that indeed the die was cast.

They had returned an emphatic "No!" to Monteith's order to them to go to Hall at once and take their punishment.

The fight had begun.

And Figgins and his loyal henchmen were ready for it. The assembling of the school in Big Hall had given them the chance they wanted. The School House—the original building of St. Jim's—contained the Form-rooms and the school hall—the New House was simply a boarding-house. When the school was assembled the New House was deserted save for the maids below stairs. And so the assembling of the school, which Mr. Ratcliff had intended as a vindication of his authority before all St. Jim's, had given Figgins his chance. No one remained in the New House excepting the rebels and the servants. And the latter had been gently but firmly marched out into the quad. The cook and the maids, much to their astonishment, had been told that a barring-out was intended, and that their room would be more highly prized than their company by the garrison of the New House, and in spite of objections they had been marched out of the House.

Only Figgins and the numerous Co. remained.

Every window had been closed and fastened, and every door had been locked and bolted, with the exception of the big door on the quadrangle.

There the rebels were massed, looking out, ready to shut the door and bolt it, and hold parley from the window if required.

There was a buzz as the lean figure of Mr. Ratcliff was seen striding across the quadrangle.

"Here he comes!"

"Better fasten the door," said Kerr. "He will try to get in, and we don't want to be driven into actually laying hands on a master if we can help it."

The advice was too good not to be followed.

The big door was jammed shut and the bolts were shot, and the chain rattled into its place before Mr. Ratcliff was within a dozen yards of the steps.

The clang of the door warned the Housemaster that he was being shut out, and he quickened his pace.

There was a window in the hall beside the door, and Figgins stood at the window, looking out, ready to parley with the Housemaster, if Mr. Ratcliff was in a mood for parley.

Mr. Ratcliff strode up the steps, and smote the shut door with a sounding blow from his cane.

"Open this door at once!" he shouted. There was no answer from within. Crash, crash!

The cane rang upon the door, and split with the force of Mr. Ratcliff's furious blows, and he was left with only a fragment in his hand.

But the door did not budge, and there came no reply. Mr. Ratcliff, almost choking with rage, glared round him, and caught sight of three or four faces at the window. He turned towards the window.

"Figgins!"

He was in so great a rage that he could hardly articulate the name.

"Yes, sir," said Figgins, from the open window as respectfully as he could.

"Open this door at once, Figgins!"

"I am sorry, sir, but I cannot."

"What, what!"

"We delivered you an ultimatum last night, sir——"

"What, what!"

"There has been too much caning, and too many punishments of all kinds, sir, in this House lately," said Figgins firmly. "We can't stand it, sir."

"We're fed up," explained Redfern.

"Past the limit!" said Kerr.

"What, what!"

It seemed as if the enraged and astounded man had lost the power of speech, excepting for the ejaculation of that monosyllable.

"It's a barring-out, sir!" Figgins explained.

"What, what!"

There was a pause. Mr. Ratcliff tried to calm himself, and the juniors, crowded at the window, watched him in silence. Their hearts were beating hard; resistance to constituted authority was new to them, and strangely thrilling and exciting. And no one knew how it would end.

"Figgins," said Mr. Ratcliff at last, "I order you to open that door!"

"I cannot, sir!"

"Do you refuse to obey me?"

"If you put it like that, sir—yes."

"You—you refuse to obey me—me, your Housemaster?"

"Yes, sir."

"You will be flogged and expelled for this, Figgins."

"I don't stand here alone, sir!"

"You are the ringleader——"

"We're all in this together, sir," said Kerr; "we all stand by Figgins, and whatever punishment he gets we shall get, too."

"Yes, rather, sir!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Sink or swim together!" shouted Redfern.

"Hurrah!"

Mr. Ratcliff gritted his teeth.

"Open that door at once!"

"We cannot, sir."

"You refuse?"

"We've said so, sir. We don't open that door until our demands are granted, sir."

"Your—your demands!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff, not yet quite able to trust his ears. "Your demands! You dare to make demands of your Housemaster?"

"Everybody has a right to ask for justice, sir."

"Hear, hear!"

"Justice!" yelled Mr. Ratcliff. "I will give you justice! If you do not immediately return to your duty I will cane every boy in the House, and stop all holidays for the whole term, and all the ringleaders shall be expelled from the school!"

"Then you can go ahead, sir. We are holding out!"

"No surrender!" yelled Redfern.

The cry was taken up.

"Hurrah! No surrender Hurrah!"

"Figgins, Redfern, Kerr! You are the ringleaders! I know that well! You shall be expelled from the college. I will cane all the others. Now, open the door at once!"

"Good offers—any takers?" murmured Redfern.

And there was a chuckle.

Mr. Ratcliff came towards the window. It was not much above the level of his head, and he was speaking to Figgins face to face now. The Housemaster's face was white with rage; Figgins's a little pale, but calm and deadly determined.

"I order you, Figgins, to admit me to the House."

"Do you grant our demands, sir?"

"Figgins!"

"We demand an amnesty, sir," said Figgins, rather proud of that word. "That's a general pardon for all concerned in the bizney." It was probable that Mr. Ratcliff knew what an amnesty was quite as well as Figgins did, but Figgy was anxious to make it quite clear. "Nobody is to be

punished, and all punishments already ordered are to be rescinded. And there are to be fewer lickings in the future."

"Hear, hear!"

"Those are our terms, sir. Do you accept them?"

"Certainly not!" shouted Mr. Ratcliff. "No!"

"Then we cannot admit you to the House, sir."

"If you do not immediately open the doors, Figgins, I shall call upon the prefects to effect an entrance by force."

"We shall resist, sir."

"You will not dare to resist the prefects, you impudent young scoundrel!"

"You will see, sir."

"I order you——"

"We cannot obey your orders, sir, unless you play the game," said Figgins.

"Hear, hear!"

That was too much for Mr. Horace Ratcliff. He made a spring at the window, and drew himself up on the sill, with the evident intention of forcing his way into the House. The juniors receded for a moment; the habit of discipline is strong, and if Mr. Ratcliff had been wise he would never have done anything to weaken it. But Mr. Ratcliff was not wise. If he had been wise in time there would have been no trouble in the New House at St. Jim's; but the trouble had come now, with a vengeance.

Mr. Ratcliff's head and shoulders were through the open windows when Figgins rallied. He rushed to repel the attack, with the rest of the juniors backing him up. Many hands—whose hands could hardly be ascertained in the confusion—grasped Mr. Ratcliff, and he was pitched bodily back into the quadrangle.

"Oh!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff.

Bump!

"Oh!"

The window was slammed and fastened.

CHAPTER 11.

The Attack.

MR. RATCLIFF scrambled up. He had not been much hurt by his fall, but he had been very much shaken up, and he was sputtering with rage.

Figgins, inside the house, breathed hard.

The rebellion had started now with a vengeance!

Some of the rebels were looking a little scared, but not so Figgins & Co. They were grim and determined.

"We've shown Ratty that we mean business," said Kerr.

"Hear, hear!" yelled Redfern.

"I wonder what he will do now——"

"The prefects!" said Lawrence.

Figgins laughed.

"We're not afraid of the prefects!" he said.

From the windows of the New House the rebels watched anxiously.

Mr. Ratcliff made no second attempt to enter the window. He had already sufficiently compromised his personal dignity, and on rising after his fall he had found the whole school looking on. Across the quadrangle, within easy view, the whole School House crowd was gathered to watch. Even the masters seemed to have forgotten that it was more than time for the fellows to be in the Form-rooms.

Mr. Ratcliff limped away.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Figgins & Co. are goin' it now, and no mistake, dear boys!"

"Good luck to them!" said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Bravo, Figgins!" roared Blake.

And the cheer was taken up.

Mr. Railton came out of the School House.

"Silence!" he exclaimed.

The cheering died away. Mr. Railton was too popular a master for anyone to wish to show him the slightest disrespect.

"The boys will now go into their Form-rooms," said Mr. Railton. "All School House boys go in at once."

"Very well, sir."

The juniors went in reluctantly. They would greatly have preferred to see the siege of the New House, but it was hardly likely to be over before morning lessons finished. There would yet be plenty to see.

"Railton can't be going to back up Ratty?" muttered Tom Merry.

"No fear!" said Blake.

"Wathah not! If Railton did anythin' of the sort I should certainly not regard him with respect."

"Then he couldn't, of course!" remarked Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"Get into your Form-rooms, you kids!" exclaimed Kildare. The Fourth and the Shell, the Third and the Second crowded in. But there were many vacant places in the

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NEXT THURSDAY:

"FIGGINS & CO.'S NEW MASTER!"

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

Fourth and Shell rooms. Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, noted down the absentees with a frowning brow. Mr. Linton did not quite approve of Mr. Ratcliff, but he approved still less of Shell fellows staying away from classes. A third part of the Shell boarded in the New House, and every one of them was with Figgins.

In Mr. Lathom's Form—the Fourth—the gaps were even more numerous. Every Fourth-Former who belonged to the New House was with Figgins & Co. Little Mr. Lathom shook his head solemnly, and began the instruction of his diminished class. But his words fell upon inattentive ears. The juniors did not care twopence for the fortunes of Cæsar in the war with the Helvetians, but they cared very much for what happened in the war between Mr. Ratcliff and his rebellious House. They were listening with all their ears for sounds from the quadrangle.

In the quadrangle Mr. Ratcliff was not idle. He called upon the prefects of St. Jim's to help him, but he found, to his surprise, that the prefects were by no means enthusiastic in backing him up.

Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, was the least enthusiastic of all.

"The Fifth and Sixth will go into their Form-rooms," said Mr. Ratcliff. "All the prefects, however, will remain here—I shall want them. Mr. Railton, you will perhaps be so good as to take charge of the Fifth as well as the Sixth this morning, as I am likely to be busy for some time."

"Certainly," said Mr. Railton.

"You, Kildare—"

"Excuse me, sir," said Kildare quietly. "I am not a New House prefect, and I do not consider that I am called upon to interfere in a purely New House matter."

Mr. Ratcliff glared.

"You will obey my orders, Kildare."

"I do not wish to interfere here, sir."

"It is not what you wish, but what I wish, that matters," said Mr. Ratcliff acidly.

"I appeal to you, sir," said Kildare, turning to Mr. Railton.

Mr. Railton was frowning.

"I shall not order the prefects of my House to assist you, Mr. Ratcliff," he said. "I do not think it is required of them to do so."

"What?"

"You heard what I said, sir."

Mr. Ratcliff gritted his teeth.

"You are aiding and abetting this extraordinary rebellion, then?" he exclaimed.

"Nothing of the sort. But I shall certainly not interfere in it, or allow any boy under my orders to interfere," said Mr. Railton calmly.

"That is the same as aiding them."

"I do not think so; and since you force me to speak, I must remark that I do not think things would have come to this pass, Mr. Ratcliff, if you had exercised a little more tact and a little more humanity."

"Sir!"

"School House prefects will go in at once," said Mr. Railton.

And the School House prefects went in, and the School House master followed them.

Mr. Ratcliff opened his mouth as if to say some very bitter things, but he closed it again with the unpleasant words unuttered. It was useless for him to infringe upon Mr. Railton's borders.

The New House prefects remained at the orders of their Housemaster. There were four of them, and they did not look very pleased with their prospects.

Mr. Ratcliff turned to them. By this time only Mr. Ratcliff and his four prefects remained in the quadrangle. The rest of the school, with the exception of the rebels of the New House, had gone in to classes.

"What do you want us to do, sir?" asked Monteith.

Mr. Ratcliff pointed to the New House.

"You must make an entrance there," he said.

"If they try to keep us out I don't see how we're to get in, sir," said Baker.

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Mr. Ratcliff frowned darkly.

"It is not for you to argue, Baker, but to obey my orders," he said. "Go and do as I tell you at once."

"Come on!" muttered Monteith.

And the four Sixth-Formers made their way unwillingly enough to the New House. They were very angry, though more with Mr. Ratcliff than with the junior rebels.

"They're coming!" said Redfern from the window.

"How many?"

"Four—Monteith, Baker, Wood, and Sefton, the prefects."

"Four!" grinned Figgins. "And we're nearly fifty."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"They look as if they mean business," Kerr remarked.

"Well, we mean business, too!"

"What-ho!"

Defiant faces crammed the windows as the prefects came up. Monteith & Co. were looking and feeling somewhat irresolute. They hardly knew what to do. Unless the juniors would open the doors when ordered to do so, the prefects did not seem to have much chance. And they were not likely to obey prefects when they had disobeyed a Housemaster. The New House could not, like Jericho of old, be taken by sound alone.

Monteith rapped on the window.

"Open the door at once, Figgins!" he exclaimed. "There's been enough of this foolery; you'd better chuck it."

"Sorry, Monteith; it can't be done."

"You'd better do as I tell you, Figgins."

"Has Ratty accepted our terms?"

"No, you young ass!"

"Then we're holding the fort."

"Look here, if you don't let us in, you'll soon have to open the doors and come out for your meals," said Baker.

"You can't live without eating, especially Fatty Wynn."

There was a laugh.

"Look here—" began Fatty Wynn wrathfully.

"We're fixed all right for grub, Baker," said Figgins cheerfully; "and we'll starve sooner than surrender. That's flat!"

"Hear, hear!"

"No surrender!"

"Some of you will be expelled for this," growled Wood.

"We're sticking together, old man, and we're not going to surrender till it's promised that no one shall be punished at all."

"Look here—" began Sefton.

"Nuff said!" replied Figgins briskly. "Go and tell Ratty that if he doesn't accept our terms he can go and eat coke! That's our last word."

"Will you let us in?"

"No!"

Monteith and his three companions backed away. Mr. Ratcliff came striding up, his face purple with rage.

"They won't let us in, sir," said Monteith.

"Break in, then!"

"I don't see—"

"You will not be responsible for any damage done," said said Mr. Ratcliff. "I order you to break in the windows, and effect an entrance."

"Very well, sir."

The hall window was the most accessible in the New House. The assailants gathered there. Figgins & Co. were ready for the attack. Figgins had posted a sentry at every window on the ground floor, ready to give the alarm if there were a surprise attack, and that left him ample forces for the defence. Fellows had gathered up cricket-stumps and pokers and stuffed socks as weapons, and they meant to use them if necessary. It was soon evident that it would be necessary.

Crash!

Fragments of glass fell into the House. The window had been shattered by a heavy blow from without.

"They're coming!" yelled Lawrence.

"Line up!"

Through the smashed window came a hand to unfasten it. Figgins raised a cricket-stump, but he did not like to hit the defenceless hand. Instead, he grasped it round the

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Arthur Augustus D'Arcy brandished his fists, and danced round the fallen juniors, calling upon them to get up and have it out. But Figgins & Co. lay still and groaned. "Gussy wins!" chuckled Redfern. "Hurrah!" (See Chapter 2.)

wrist, and held it fast. It was Monteith's hand, and Monteith's other fist lashed in and caught Figgins upon the nose.

Biff!
Figgins gave a fearful yell, and staggered back, and sat upon the floor, with a red stream bursting from his damaged nose.

Monteith, with a herculean effort, dragged himself through the broken window, and rolled heavily into the house. Baker came clambering in after him.

CHAPTER 12. The Defeat of the Prefects!

REDFERN gave a shout. Figgins was sitting on the floor, dazed, his hand to his nose.
"Collar him!"

There had been a momentary pause among the rebels; but it was only momentary. They followed Redfern fast. Seven or eight juniors threw themselves upon Monteith as he rose, and bore him to the floor again with a crash.

Five or six more fastened upon Baker as he came clambering through the window.

Sefton and Wood, outside, ran along to the next window, and there was a crash—crash of breaking glass.

Two heads came in at the broken windows.

"Collar them!"

"Sock in to them!"

"Sit on that cad!"

Monteith was struggling desperately, hitting out with all his strength. Redfern had fallen, his eye closed by a heavy blow—Kerr had dropped across him—Owen was reeling away half-stunned. But the juniors did not falter. Five or six were grasping Monteith, and he was rolling over again, and they held his arms and his legs, and Fatty Wynn sat on his chest, and the head prefect of the New House gasped helplessly.

Baker, in the window, was held by every pair of hands that could get at him. Baker was a popular prefect, and the juniors would have been sorry to hurt him, but they did not intend to let him get in to the aid of Monteith.

At the other window, Wood had rolled in. But he was instantly pinioned by half a dozen fellows, and dragged down, and the captors sat upon him promptly, and held him pinned down in spite of his furious struggles.

Sefton was less lucky. Sefton, of the Sixth, was a bully, and the juniors were not sorry for a chance of paying off old scores. Pratt, of the Fourth, rushed to repel him with a cricket-stump, and it rang across Sefton's head, and he dropped back into the quadrangle with a terrific yell.

He did not return to the attack. He sat in the quad, rubbing his head, and Pratt, inside, looked at a dent on his cricket-stump with much pride.

"Let me gerrup!" yelled Monteith.

"Will you go out quietly, if we do?" asked Figgins.

"No!" roared the prefect.

"Then you'll stay as you are."

"Yes, rather."

"Prisoners of war, my son," said Redfern, rubbing his eye, but grinning good-humouredly. "Take it calmly."

"You young scoundrels—"

"Oh, draw it mild! It's the fortune of war, you know."

"Get a rope, somebody, and tie him up!" said Figgins grimly. "Now, then, Baker, are you coming in or going out?"

"I'm coming in, you young sweep!" gasped Baker.

"You'll come in on your head, then."

"And go out on your neck!" grinned Lawrence.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Baker was dragged in by so many hands that he had no chance of fighting. He was bumped on the floor, and as many juniors as could find room sat upon him. He could do nothing more than gasp for breath, and he found some difficulty in doing even that, with the weight of the juniors upon him.

"Tie the bounders up!" gasped Figgins.

There was cord in plenty. Monteith and Baker were tied up with as much cord as if they had had as many legs as centipedes, all requiring tying.

Wood was struggling in the grasp of the juniors, but the numbers were too great, and he was quickly tied up like the others.

"Got 'em!" gasped Redfern.

"Hurray for us!" yelled Kerr.

And the victorious rebels cheered.

Three of the prefects were bound prisoners, gasping on the floor, and the fourth could be heard outside, groaning and threatening vengeance.

Figgins ran to the window.

Mr. Ratcliff had advanced to it, but at the sight of Figgins's cricket-stump, and his crimson, excited face, the Housemaster hastily backed away.

"You shall pay dearly for this, Figgins!" he said, between his teeth.

"Rats!" said Figgins.

Mr. Ratcliff jumped. Even after what had happened, every fresh word or act of disrespect seemed a surprise to the Housemaster. Mr. Ratcliff was a gentleman who understood things very slowly.

"What—what!" he ejaculated.

"Rats!"

"Figgins! I—I—I—"

"And many of 'em, sir!" said Figgins cheerily. "You've driven us into this, and it's all your own fault. Rats!"

"Rats!" yelled the rebels from the windows.

Mr. Ratcliff almost staggered.

"Chuck those giddy prefects out!" said Figgins, turning back from the window. "We don't want 'em here. We can't afford to keep prisoners of war. Chuck 'em out!"

"Look here—" began Monteith.

"Sorry—no time."

"I say—"

"It's not the time for you to say anything. I can do all the saying that's required just now. You've chosen to back up Ratty, and you can take the consequences."

"You young rascal—"

"Chuck him out!"

Monteith, bound as he was, was lifted bodily through the broken window. The fragments of glass cut and tore his clothes, and he did not venture to struggle, lest his skin should suffer in the same way.

He was dropped into the quad, on his feet, and lay there panting and gasping. Baker was dropped out in the same way, and then Wood. Sefton had taken good care not to attempt to enter a second time.

"Beaten them!" yelled Fatty Wynn.

"Hurray for us! Hear us smile!" shrieked Redfern.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Outside, Mr. Ratcliff gazed in speechless rage at the helpless prefects. He motioned to Sefton to untie them, and Sefton obeyed. The dishevelled, bruised, and breathless seniors staggered to their feet.

"Get in again, at once!" said Mr. Ratcliff, finding his voice. The prefects exchanged glances.

"It's no use," said Monteith.

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"It can't be done, sir."

"There's too many of them," said Wood.

"I order you—," began the New Housemaster.

Monteith's face set obstinately.

"It's no good ordering four chaps to fight fifty juniors, sir," he said bluntly. "We can't do it, and it's no good trying. I've had enough of it, for one."

"And I, for another," said Baker.

And the prefects walked away with savage, sullen faces, leaving their Housemaster speechless with rage.

CHAPTER 13.

The Siege of the New House.

"**H**EAR us smile!" roared Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the smile of the victorious New House juniors could be heard as far as the School House. It reached the open windows of the Form-rooms, and caused some interruptions in the lessons that were going on there.

Mr. Ratcliff heard it as he paced under the elms in the quad, debating within his own mind what his next move should be. Like many men who are accustomed to be hard-handed, and to show no mercy, he was quite astonished when he had provoked resistance, and found that he could not drive and harry beyond a certain limit. But he was far from being willing to admit that he was in the wrong. According to Mr. Ratcliff, everybody else might be in the wrong, but he was always the representative of high righteousness.

Figgins & Co., for their part, had no doubts about what they were going to do. They were going on as they had started. The defeat of the prefects had encouraged them immensely.

"We've beaten them!" said Figgins for about the twentieth time. "We've licked the giddy prefects! Hurray!"

"Hurray!" shouted his followers.

"What next?" asked Redfern.

"We ought to celebrate a giddy victory," said Fatty Wynn thoughtfully. "We've got plenty of grub in the house, and—"

"Ring off!" said Figgins tersely. "You're not going to grub just yet. There's plenty to be done."

"But I'm hungry."

"You can keep hungry till dinner-time, then," said Figgins. "This is a barring-out, not a tea-fight. We've got to get all the lower windows safe."

"They're safe enough with us behind them," said Pratt, shaking his cricket-stump—the stump which had done such execution upon Sefton.

"We've got to make them safer than that. Ratty won't take this lying down," said Figgins sagely. "Some of the windows have been broken, and if he can get the School House prefects to help him, they'll soon break the others, and we may have a dozen Sixth-Formers piling in on us at once."

"We'll keep 'em out," said Owen.

"We're going to board-up the windows," said Figgins. "We've got heaps of nails and screws, and we can take up floor-boards."

"Phew!"

"No good doing things by halves," said Figgins decisively. "In for a penny, in for a pound, you know. May as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's a jolly good idea," said Redfern, "and it will show the giddy enemy that we're in dead earnest, too."

"I suppose you don't mind if I have a snack first, Figgy?" suggested Fatty Wynn. "I've always noticed that I do carpentry work better after a good meal."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No meals yet," said Figgins. "We've laid in grub to stand a siege, not to stand you a feed. It wouldn't last over to-day if we let you fairly start on it. Get the tools, and let's get to work, you fellows."

The fellows were willing enough to get to work. The work was hard, but then it was noisy and destructive, and so naturally recommended itself to boyish tastes.

Floor-boards were dragged up with the help of chisels and pokers, and hammers and nails were soon busily at work.

Planks were nailed across all the windows, and the juniors did not spare the nails. The sound of hammering echoed across the quadrangle.

It reached the ears of Mr. Ratcliff, and he came towards the New House to see what it meant. He clenched his hands as he saw the boards being nailed up inside all the windows. The position was being fortified, and he could do nothing to prevent it.

For an hour or more two score of juniors laboured at the fortifying of the New House, and the damage they did in that space of time was marvellous.

But they succeeded in their object. It was made exceed-

ingly difficult for any enemy to effect an entrance at the lower windows of the New House unless he brought a battering-ram with him.

Then, and not till then, Figgins allowed dinner to be prepared. Much of the food that had been laid in was ready cooked, and as for the rest, Fatty Wynn attended to it. Fatty was a born chef. With an apron on, and his shirt-sleeves tucked up, Fatty Wynn took the place of the New House cook, and his plump face shone in the glow of the kitchen stove. It is probable that Fatty Wynn enjoyed more "snacks" in the course of the cooking than he had ever enjoyed in any whole week before. His fat features glowed with contentment.

"I don't care how long this siege lasts," he confided to Redfern, "I like it."

Redfern grinned.

"What about when the grub begins to peg out, Fatty?" he asked.

"Fatty will peg out, too," said Thompson, of the Shell.

"We can go on short commons, if necessary," said Fatty Wynn. "A cook can always find a snack or two to keep him going; and you fellows can be allowed. Besides, the School House chaps will run the blockade."

Dinner was eaten in the kitchen below stairs, and the juniors made a much better dinner than they were accustomed to. Some of the provisions were of a perishable nature, and it was considered advisable to get them eaten; and every fellow was willing to help as far as that went.

Sentries were posted to keep watch while the juniors ate their midday meal. On one side, where it was joined by a mass of other buildings, and there were no windows, the New House could not be attacked. But at one side, and at the front and the back, it was vulnerable to the enemy, and Figgins kept his sentries posted at a dozen windows, to give the alarm the moment an enemy appeared.

But the enemy did not seem in a hurry to appear.

Dinner was not interrupted, and after it was over, the juniors ascended to the upper regions again, and posted themselves at the windows.

Morning school was over, and the quadrangle was full of boys.

The New House boys who had attended lessons—Fifth, and Third, and Second-Form boys—were given their dinner in the School House, arrangements being hastily made there for that purpose. Their usual dining-room was closed to them. Mr. Ratcliff was constrained to dine with Mr. Railton, who was painfully polite to him. The School House-master felt sorry enough for the impossible position Mr. Ratcliff had got himself into through his obstinacy and hard-heartedness, though he had no intention of being drawn into the trouble with the insurgent juniors.

If Mr. Ratcliff had asked his advice, Mr. Railton would hardly have known what to advise. The rebels would not surrender unless their demands were granted; and Mr. Ratcliff could not very well grant them without the risk of losing every shred of authority and respect in his own House. Yet the present state of affairs could not continue. Unless the Head returned and took the matter in hand, Mr. Railton did not see what was to happen. But he was not troubled to give Mr. Horace Ratcliff any advice. Mr. Ratcliff never even thought of asking for any. He was determined to keep on as he had begun—his only idea still was to meet resistance with force and anger, and to punish—and punish—and punish! Mr. Ratcliff was a great believer in the efficacy of punishment, under all circumstances. But it did not seem likely that he would have anybody to punish, so long as the barring-out continued.

Tom Merry & Co. took advantage of the fact that Mr. Ratcliff was dining in the School House, to have a word or two with the rebels. Figgins nodded to them between the nailed boards of the hall window, when they came over.

"My hat! You're going it!" Tom Merry remarked admiringly.

"We mean to go it," said Figgins. "Where's Ratty?"

"Dining with Mr. Railton."

"How does he look?"

"As if he'd like to bite somebody."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, he won't bite us, just yet," said Figgins, with a grin. "He won't set his hoof in the New House till he's given in."

"That's wight, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy encouragingly. "Hold out to the bittah end, you know."

"We're going to," said Redfern.

"Cave!" muttered Blake. "Here comes Ratty!"

Mr. Ratcliff was striding towards the New House. His brow was as black as thunder as he saw the School House juniors in converse with the rebels.

"Go away at once!" he shouted angrily. "I forbid you to come near the New House! Do you hear?"

"Certainly, sir," said Blake politely. "We are not deaf, sir."

"Take a hundred lines for impertinence, Blake."

Blake sniffed audibly.

The School House juniors strolled away, and Mr. Ratcliff, after glaring at them, came up to the window, and peered between the boards at Figgins.

"Figgins!" he said hoarsely.

"Yes, sir."

"It is time for this foolery to cease."

"What foolery, sir?" asked Figgins.

"This—this barring-out, as you call it," hissed the House-master.

"That isn't foolery, sir?" said Figgins, in a tone of great astonishment. "You're quite mistaken, sir. That's business—sheer business."

"What-ho!" chimed in Redfern.

"I am not speaking to you, you Board-school boy," said Mr. Ratcliff, recognising the voice of the scholarship junior. Redfern grinned.

"We could teach you manners in the Board-school, sir," he remarked.

"Yes, rather," said Lawrence and Owen. "We never had a chap like you at the Board-school, sir. We would have suffocated him, if we had, sir."

Mr. Ratcliff, as a matter of fact, seemed on the point of suffocation now. He was gasping for breath, and his face was almost purple.

"Silence!" he panted. "Oh! You shall suffer for this—all of you! Figgins, Kerr, Wynn, and the three Board-school boys, shall all be expelled from the school, and the rest shall be publicly flogged. Now, open the door at once!"

Figgins chuckled.

"Not good enough, sir," he replied. "If I'm going to be sacked, I may as well hold out, you see. You can go and eat coke."

"What!"

"Go and chop chips."

"I—I—I—"

"Sheer off—we're fed up with you!"

Mr. Ratcliff staggered with astonishment. As a matter of fact, by making it clear that he would do his worst in any case, he had taken away any motive the rebels might have had for surrendering. He found his voice at last.

"Figgins, I am loath to do damage to the House—but if you do not open the door immediately, I shall send for Taggles to break it in with an axe."

"Go it, old cock!" said Figgins.

"Oh!"

Mr. Ratcliff retired speechless.

CHAPTER 14.

Wet!

TAGGLES, the school porter of St. Jim's, came towards the New House, with a dubious expression upon his weather-beaten face, and a heavy axe under his arm. Mr. Ratcliff was following him, his face white and set. The House-master had evidently resolved upon desperate measures.

The bell had rung for afternoon lessons, and the School House fellows were all in the Form-rooms—all the school, in fact, excepting the rebels of the New House.

Mr. Ratcliff and Taggles had the quadrangle to themselves. The New House prefects had gone in with the rest of the Sixth; they had had enough of the contest.

"Here comes Taggy!" muttered Redfern from the window. "He's got the axe."

"Ratty means business," said Figgins, with a chuckle.

"Have you got that syringe ready, Kerr?"

"Here you are!"

"Good!"

Figgins took the garden syringe in his hands, and stationed himself at the window beside the doorway. A pail stood beside him, with a mixture of soot and water in it. That syringe had been used by Redfern in a "jape" on Figgins & Co. that was still fresh in the memory of the New House juniors—and its usefulness was not over yet. From the window, which was now innocent of glass, Figgins had a good aim at the doorway, and Taggles was not likely to break in the door unscathed.

Figgins filled the syringe and waited. It was a big syringe, a couple of feet long, and usually used for garden work. A jet of sooty water from it would come as a far from pleasant surprise to the assailant.

"You fellows be ready," said Figgins. "If they get the door open, mind, you're to fight like thunder. If Ratty gets in, he's to be chucked out again. At a sign of the door giving way drag the furniture out of the studies and barricade it. Ratty's study first, and then the seniors' things,

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and then the dining-room furniture—leave our own studies to the last, of course."

"Ha, ha, ha! Right-ho!"

There was an audible grunt from outside, as Taggles stopped upon the steps of the House. Mr. Ratcliff's thin, spiteful voice was heard.

"Break in the lock immediately, Taggles."

"Yes, sir."

"Waste no time, please; I'm waiting for you."

"It's a big job, sir—"

"Then set to work at once."

"Oh, werry well, sir!"

Crash!

Taggles' heavy axe descended upon the lock, and the door shook from top to bottom. Figgins looked between the boards that were nailed across the broken window, and took aim with the garden squirt.

Whiss-s-s-sh!

The jet of water flew with a deadly aim.

It caught Taggles in the left ear, as he was raising the axe for a second blow.

"Yaroo!" roared Taggles.

The school porter fairly jumped in the air in his surprise. Sooty water was streaming over his face, and his hair, and his collar. Taggles clapped his hand to his ear, and danced. The axe fell with a crash

"Yow! Ow! Wharrat Yaroo!" roared Taggles. "I'm wet! Yowoo!"

Mr. Ratcliff gritted his teeth.

"Break in the lock, Taggles!"

"Groo! I'm wet! I'm sooty! Ow!"

"Do you hear me?" shouted Mr. Ratcliff furiously.

"Groo! Hoo! Ow!"

"Obey me at once, or I shall discharge you!" shrieked Mr. Ratcliff.

Taggles grunted and groaned, but he picked up the fallen axe, and returned to the charge.

Crash! Crash!

The door shook and rang again. Figgins had refilled his squirt—and there was no cover for Taggles! Whiss-s-s-sh!

"Yaroooop!"

"Taggles! I order you—"

"Orders be blowed!" roared Taggles. "I ain't standing there to be drenched, not if I knows it! Yow! I'm soaking! I'm hoff!"

"Taggles—"

"I'm hoff!" roared Taggles.

And Taggles was off. With sooty water running down all over him, the school porter strode away to his lodge. Mr. Ratcliff called after him, but Taggles did not even turn his head.

Mr. Ratcliff breathed hard.

He stooped and picked up the axe Taggles had dropped, and advanced to the attack himself.

"My hat! Ratty's going to chop!" muttered Figgins.

Crash! Crash!

Figgins hesitated. Rebels as the New House juniors were, it seemed a little too "thick," even to Figgins, to drench a Housemaster with sooty water. But the door would soon give way under Mr. Ratcliff's terrific blows if he were allowed to go on.

"Mr. Ratcliff!" shouted Figgins, at last.

Crash! Crash!

"Will you go away and let that door alone, sir?"

Crash! Crash!

"If you don't, I shall serve you the same as Taggles, sir!"

Crash! Crash!

The blows descended in a savage shower. Mr. Ratcliff was putting an unexpected amount of muscular force into the attack. He did not believe for a moment that Figgins would dare to serve him as he had served the school porter. Mr. Ratcliff never could believe a thing till it happened.

"Buck up, Figgy!" shouted Redfern. "The lock's giving!"

Crash! Crash! Crash!

The lock on the door, strong and heavy as it was, flew into pieces. The bolts still held the door in its place, but they would not last long if the attack continued. Figgins made up his mind.

"Will you buzz off?" he shouted.

Crash! Crash!

"Well, you will have it, then!"

Whiss-s-s-sh!

The sooty stream from the garden syringe smote Mr. Ratcliff just under the nose.

He started back, gasping, and fell, and rolled off the steps into the quad.

"Ow, ow, ow! Oh! Yah! Oh! Oh!"

Thus Mr. Ratcliff.

Within the house the juniors chuckled rather breathlessly.

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This was "going it" with a vengeance. But Mr. Ratcliff had brought it upon himself. They could not feel that they were to blame.

"Ow, ow! You young scoundrels! Oh!"

Mr. Ratcliff jumped up. His thin, angry face was almost hidden under sooty water. His eyes were gleaming with rage. Forgetful of everything but vengeance upon the rebels, he rushed up the steps again. But Figgins was ready. There was no hesitation now.

Whiss-s-s-sh! went the garden syringe, and a fresh jet of sooty and inky fluid smote Mr. Ratcliff under the chin.

"Oh! Oh! Groooh!"

He staggered, and as he staggered Figgins refilled the squirt, and drove a fresh stream upon him, and Mr. Ratcliff fairly jumped off the steps and fled.

Figgins threw down his weapon with a yell of laughter.

"He's hopped it! Ha, ha, ha! Hurray for us!"

"Hurray!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors watched from the windows. Mr. Ratcliff was gone, and he did not return. They did not see him again till school hours were over at St. Jim's, and the various Forms came streaming out into the quadrangle. Crowds of fellows—seniors and juniors—stood staring towards the New House, grinning and laughing and talking. Evidently the barring-out was the one great topic of conversation at St. Jim's.

There was no fresh attack. But Figgins noted that Sefton and Monteith were stationed in the quad, to keep School House fellows from coming near the house. Mr. Ratcliff did not mean the rebels to hold any communication with the rest of St. Jim's.

"It's going to be a siege now," said Figgins, as he sat down to tea, with one eye on the window. "I suppose Ratty thinks he can starve us out. He doesn't know how much grub we've got here. It will last us for days."

"Unless Fatty gets at it," remarked Redfern.

"Look here, Reddy—" began Fatty Wynn.

"Still, there's always Tom Merry & Co. to help us from outside," grinned Figgins. "They would smuggle in grub to us after dark if we needed it. Either Ratty is going to try to starve us out—which he can't do—or else make a night attack, after dark, and we shall be on the watch for that, you bet. We've done him!"

"But how's it going to end?" said Pratt.

"Blessed if I know! But we've done Ratty, and we won't surrender, excepting for a general pardon and all our terms granted. That's settled."

"Hear, hear!"

"Hurray!"

"Down with Ratty!"

And the rebels of the New House had their tea—a very plentiful tea—in the highest of spirits. They had won all along the line so far, and they meant to hold out, as Figgins put it, "to the last shot in the locker."

CHAPTER 15.

Hot Stuff!

TOM MERRY looked out of the door of the School House. Night was black in the old quad, of St. Jim's, but from the direction of the New House came a flare of lighted windows. Every electric light in the New House was burning. The house was lighted from end to end. It was near bedtime for the juniors of St. Jim's, but it was very clear that the rebels of the New House were not thinking of bed.

"Bai Jove! They're goin' it, you know," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked.

Tom Merry nodded.

"Figgy doesn't mean to be taken by surprise," he remarked. "Ratty has been talking with the New House prefects this evening, and I think he means to make a raid to-night."

"Yaas, wathah! It wouldn't be a bad ideah to give old Figgy a word of warnin'."

"Good egg! I'll cut across the quad, and tell him."

Tom Merry slipped down the steps of the School House, and disappeared into the shadows. A couple of minutes later he was tapping at the boards nailed across the broken window in the porch of the New House.

"Hallo!" came Figgins's cheerful tones from within.

"It's all right, Figgy!"

"That you, Tom Merry?" asked Figgins, peering out.

"Yes."

"How's Ratty?" grinned Figgins.

Tom Merry laughed.

"He's raging!" he said. "He's had some words with Mr. Railton about not backing him up in this row, and he's asked for the School House prefects to help him, and Railton won't have it."

"Good old Railton!"
"Mr. Railton sent off a telegram to-day, and I think it's to the Head," said Tom Merry.
Figgins looked grim.
"There will be more trouble if the Head comes back on account of this," he said. "We're jolly well not going to surrender unless we get our terms."
"Rather not!" chimed in Redfern.
"Ratty and Monteith and the New House prefects are whispering over something," said Tom Merry. "We all think it means a raid in the middle of the night. You chaps had better keep some of your eyes open."
"That's right!" said Figgins confidently. "We've arranged to have sentinels in turn all night, and if Ratty comes we shall be ready for him. We've got every blessed door and window nailed up, and I don't think he'll get in."
"Well, keep a good look-out, that's all. I thought I'd tell you."

"Thanks awfully!"
Tom Merry disappeared.
Figgins & Co. were having supper in the New House, and they were very liberal with themselves. The enthusiasm of the rebels was still keen, but some of them were beginning to feel very sleepy.
Figgins had told off the sentinels for the first watch, but it was not till after ten o'clock that any of the juniors went to bed. Then they did not undress, but lay down in their clothes, to be ready in case of a surprise.

The lights were extinguished one by one in the School House and the other buildings round the old quad. But in the New House the electric light blazed away all through the dark hours.
To stay up after the usual bedtime was a treat to most of the juniors, chiefly because it seldom fell to their lot. But now that they experienced it the treat was not so enjoyable as they had supposed.

The fellows who were keeping watch felt very sleepy long before midnight sounded, and they would have been very glad to go to their dormitory.
The sentinels yawned and tramped about to keep themselves awake, and most of them began to nod after a time.

Figgins was in the second watch, realising that in the middle of the night the most keenness would be required.
Pratt woke him up, and he came down with Kerr and Redfern and Owen to keep watch, the earlier sentinels going off to bed gladly enough.
Figgins rubbed his heavy eyes, and looked out into the quadrangle.

Half-past twelve had rung out from the clock-tower, and the old school was very silent and still.
Not a light was to be seen in the great black mass of the School House. The quadrangle, silent, dark, save where the light from the New House streamed into it, looked ghastly and weird.

"Groo!" said Figgins. "I wish they'd come if they're coming!"
"Yaw-aw-aw!" said Redfern. "I wish they would!"
Owen nodded off in a chair, and Redfern sat down and yawned, and soon began to nod, too.

Figgins leaned up against a wall, and his head drooped. Kerr was as wakeful as ever.
The Scottish junior moved about from one window to another, looking out into the quad. every few minutes. In the hall firegrate a large fire was burning, for the night was cold, and the juniors had no reason to be economical with the coal. Kerr replenished the fire from time to time, and thoughtfully left the poker between the bars to get red-hot. It might be useful if the attack came, as Tom Merry had warned them.

One!
The stroke boomed out from the clock-tower. Figgins half-opened his eyes, and yawned.
"Keeper goo! look-ou—" he murmured.
Kerr grinned.
"All right, Figgy!"
Another hour passed slowly.
The sentinels were all fast asleep by this time, with the exception of Kerr, whose keen, unresting eyes never closed.

The Scottish junior gave a sudden start at last. There was a faint sound in the quadrangle. It was followed by the creak of a board. Kerr's eyes gleamed.

Someone was trying one of the boards at one of the nailed-up windows.
It was one of the broken windows, of course. The others could not be got at without smashing the glass outside, and the midnight assailants did not want to awaken the whole house with a terrific crash.
Kerr stepped towards Figgins, and shook his leader by the shoulder. Figgins started out of a dream.
"Grooh-oh!" he murmured. "Wharrer marrer? 'Tain't rising bell."

Kerr chuckled.
"No, it isn't rising-bell, you ass, and it isn't morning! It's the enemy!"
"Oh, all serene!"
Figgins was wide awake in a moment.
"Doggo!" muttered Kerr. "If they think we're asleep, they'll show just where they are, and we can get at them."

"Right-ho!"
Figgins awakened Redfern and Owen. The four juniors, silent and keen, waited for the attack. Kerr twisted his handkerchief round the handle of the poker, and held it ready, the glowing point still between the bars.
Creak! Creak!
The attack was coming. It was at the hall window—the easiest to reach, as it was nearest the ground, and the glass was gone. There was a sound as some tool from the outside prised at the nailed boards. Then a whispering voice:

"Careful, Monteith!"
"Yes, sir."
Figgins chuckled audibly, and strode towards the window, and tapped on the inner side of the boards. There was a sharp exclamation from without.
"Hallo!" roared Figgins.
"Oh! They're awake, sir!" It was Monteith's voice.
"Yes, we're awake," grinned Figgins, "and quite ready. You'd better go back to your little bunks, my sons, unless you're looking for trouble."

Crash! Crash!
Heavy blows descended upon the nailed boards. The attacking party had given up all caution now, and they were using hammers. The boards tore away from the nails under the crashing blows, and Monteith's face was seen in the aperture.

"Now, Figgins," said the prefect, between his teeth, "we're coming in."
"You're not, my son!"
"If you lay a finger on me you'll get hurt, and it will be your own look out!" said the prefect, and he put his head and hand through the window. There was a cricket-stump in his hand, and his look showed that he meant to use it.

"Mind, if I brain any of you, you will only have yourselves to blame," he said.
"Look here, Monteith!"
"I'm coming in! Stand back!"
Figgins rushed forward, and the prefect made a savage slash at him with the stump. Figgins jumped back only just in time.

Monteith grinned savagely, and clambered through the window.
"Hold on!" said Kerr coolly.
He had jerked the red-hot poker from the fire, and swung it round to the window, and the glowing point of it was within an inch of the prefect's nose.

Monteith started back so violently that he knocked his head on the window-frame, and uttered a yell of anguish. He fell back into the quadrangle, and the window was clear.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins. "Hear us smile!"
Kerr chuckled, and stuck the poker in the fire again. Outside, Mr. Ratcliff's acid voice could be heard urging the prefects to attack. But they evidently did not like the task.

"He's got a red-hot poker, sir," said Monteith.
"Bah! Are you a coward?"
"I don't like getting my chivvy burnt, sir," said Monteith sullenly.
"Nonsense! He would not dare to touch you with it!"
"Well, try yourself, sir."
"Don't be insolent, Monteith!"
"Well, I've had enough of it. If you think he wouldn't touch you with the poker, get in at the window, sir, and we'll follow you."
"Get ready, Kerr!" muttered Redfern.
"What-ho!"

Mr. Ratcliff's face appeared at the window, pale with rage. He put his hands in, and clambered up, his teeth set, and his eyes gleaming. Kerr swung the red-hot poker round, and Mr. Ratcliff paused, half in the window. He made a savage cut at Kerr with a cane he had in his hand, but Kerr parried it with the poker, and there was a scent of scorched cane.

"Better keep out, sir," said Kerr, politely. "You might get burnt, sir."
"Kerr, stand back at once!"
"Sorry sir! Can't be done!"
"If you dare to touch me with that poker, Kerr—"
"I won't if you don't come in, sir. If you try to get in, I shall give you just a little dab on the nose, sir—only a little one, sir."
"Kerr! You insolent young villain! Stand back!"
"Rats, sir!"

Mr. Ratcliff, mad with rage, scrambled on. There was to help for it. Kerr poked forward with the poker, and the extreme tip of it touched for a second the extreme tip of Mr. Ratcliff's prominent nose.

One second was enough. Mr. Ratcliff gave a terrific yell, and rolled back into the quadrangle.

"Oh—oh—oh! Yow! I'm burnt! Oh—oh—oh!"
 "I told you so, sir," said Monteith, rather tactlessly.
 "Ow—ow! Oh! Yaro-o-oh! Ow! Oh!"

There was a sound of retreating footsteps.
 "What's the row?" came the voice of Lawrence from the stairs. "Is it an attack, Figgy?"

Figgins roared.
 "Ha, ha, ha! It was; but it's over!"
 And it did not come again. The remainder of the night passed undisturbed for the rebels of the New House.

CHAPTER 16.
Peace with Honour.

MORNING dawned upon St. Jim's. Almost before the rising-bell had ceased to clang, the quadrangle was crowded with juniors staring towards the redoubtable New House.

Seniors and fags belonging to that House had been accommodated in the School House for the night, not without a great deal of over-crowding and inconvenience, which did not make the general feeling towards Mr. Ratcliff any the more amiable.

The feeling of the whole school was against him; and though the masters and prefects could not uphold the revolt of the New House juniors, and were bound to condemn anything in the nature of a barring-out, they knew perfectly well that Mr. Ratcliff was to blame, and they let him see pretty plainly that they thought so.

Mr. Ratcliff was in an unenviable state of mind that morning.

It was dawning upon even his obstinate mind at last that he had gone too far, and that the mailed fist was not really what was most needed in dealing with the juniors of his House. That he would ever reduce the New House to subordination again seemed impossible. He knew that Mr. Railton had wired to the Head the previous day, and he was relieved rather than otherwise at the thought of Dr. Holmes returning to take the responsibility off his hands. It was certain, of course, that the Head would return the instant he heard of the barring-out in the school.

When Mr. Ratcliff appeared in the morning, he was greeted with smiles. There was a huge blister on the end of his nose, and as the nose was already a very large-sized one, the big blister was given great prominence.

It hurt considerably, and Mr. Ratcliff caressed it tenderly from time to time. It caused broad grins wherever he appeared, and even after having their ears boxed for grinning, the fags would grin again.

It was about an hour after breakfast when a cab drove into the gateway, and the New House juniors recognised the station hack from Rylcombe. They saw it cross the quadrangle, and saw Dr. Holmes step out at the door of the School House.

The Head of St. Jim's had returned.
 Dr. Holmes went directly to his study. His face was very grave and stern. Mr. Ratcliff followed him there at once, and there was a grim silence for a moment as the two masters looked at one another.

Mr. Ratcliff caressed his nose. Serious as the state of affairs was, the Head could hardly help smiling as he looked at it.

"Will you kindly explain what has happened during my absence, Mr. Ratcliff?" asked the Head coldly.

Mr. Ratcliff explained, with emphasis. He pointed out the rascality of the New House juniors, their wicked insubordination and insensibility to kindness, the backwardness of Mr. Railton and the School House prefects in lending him support, and his own uncommon patience, moderation, and general virtue as a Housemaster. The Head listened in silence till he had finished. Mr. Ratcliff did not finish till he was nearly out of breath.

"I have more than once pointed out to you, Mr. Ratcliff," said the Head, at last, "that I consider your measures too severe with the boys of your House. I cannot blame Mr. Railton for refusing to be drawn into a dispute which did not concern him, and which he entirely disapproved of. What do you propose to do now?"

"I should expel half a dozen of the ringleaders, sir, and cane the rest without mercy!" said Mr. Ratcliff through his tight, thin lips, and caressing his blistered nose again.

The doctor frowned.
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"That is hardly likely to sow content and order in the House," he said, "and I think I know these boys well. I do not think they will desert one another, and surrender, to allow their leaders to be punished so severely. Once a barring-out has started, Mr. Ratcliff, it is not easy to see where it will end. It is very fortunate that the movement has not spread over the whole school, and I owe that to Mr. Railton. You appear to have suffered some personal injury—"

"I was assaulted with a red-hot poker."
 "I must say, Mr. Ratcliff, that I think it was injudicious of you to come into personal conflict with juniors."

"Sir!"
 "You must allow me to speak plainly. This is a most serious matter, and will do St. Jim's incalculable harm if it continues and becomes known to the public," said the Head severely. "It must cease at once! As you have received an injury which is, to say the least, unsightly, I think you had better take a holiday—"

"What!"
 "And stay away from St. Jim's for a few weeks till this has blown over."
 "Oh!"

"Meanwhile, the boys will settle down again. I really think this is the best thing to be done, Mr. Ratcliff. I have thought the matter out carefully, and I hope you have no objections to make."

The Head's tone was final. Mr. Ratcliff had plenty of objections to make; but he did not make them. He felt that if he spoke at all, he would say things which would make it impossible for him to retain a position at all under the Head of St. Jim's. And he choked back his feelings and said not a word.

Kildare walked across the quadrangle and stopped under the window of the New House, where a dozen faces were crammed together to watch him. Kildare's face was very stern, but there was a glimmer in his eyes.

"Any news, old man?" asked Figgins.
 "Yes; the Head's come back."
 "I know that."
 "I've a message for you."
 Figgins's lips set.

"It's no good asking us to surrender," he said. "We're not going to surrender without a free pardon for everybody. Oh, I know it's rotten bad form backing up against the Head; but we're not going to be flogged, and some of us sacked, and then be put under Ratty again, rattier than ever. It's not good enough!"

"Not by long chalks!" said Redfern.
 Kildare smiled slightly.
 "Mr. Ratcliff has left St. Jim's," he said.
 "What!"

It was a general exclamation of surprise.
 "He has suffered in his health from these rows, and he's going away for a rest," said Kildare. "He won't be back the rest of this term, I hear."
 "By George!"
 "Hurray!"
 "Oh, ripping!"

The satisfaction of the New House juniors was not complimentary to their Housemaster, but it was evidently very genuine.

"You young rascals!" said Kildare laughing. "Well, he's gone now, and it's all over. You kids had better go into your Form-rooms now, as if nothing had happened, and the Head won't inquire into the barring-out."

"Is that understood?"
 "Yes. Of course, the Head couldn't approve of anything like this."

"Of course not!" said Figgins. "We know that—we're not asses! At the same time, he knows jolly well that it was Ratty's fault; but he can't say so officially. We savvy!"

"Never mind that," said Kildare. "I've just come over here to advise you to go into your places in the Form-rooms, and hold your tongues; and if you're wise, you'll do it."

"You bet!" said Redfern.
 Kildare walked away.

There was no hesitation among the rebels. The boldest of them had his doubts about continuing the struggle now that the Head had returned, and all they wanted was an honourable peace—and they had it now.

In ten minutes the barring-out was a thing of the past, and Figgins & Co. were in their places in the Form-rooms.

THE END.

(Another Splendid, Long, Complete Tale of the chums of St. Jim's next Thursday, entitled: "Figgins & Co.'s New Master," by Martin Clifford. Order your copy of next week's "GEM" LIBRARY in advance. Price, One Penny.)

"THE RIVAL'S TEST!" Is the Title of the Splendid, Long, Complete School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co. appearing in this week's "MAGNET" Library. Now on Sale. Price One Penny.

WINGS OF GOLD!

The Story of the Most Terrible and Amazing Journey Ever Made By Man.

Edited from the Notes of Maurice Fordham, Esq.

By **SIDNEY DREW.**

CHARACTERS IN THIS GRAND STORY.

MAURICE FORDHAM and **LANCE MORTON**—Two healthy and wealthy young Britons, owners of the yacht Foamwitch, and the wonderful aeroplane, Wings of Gold.
PROFESSOR LUDWIG VON HAAGEL—The famous German scientist, also noted for his clumsiness.
MATTHEW REDLAND—The talented inventor of a wonderful airship. He is drowned at the entrance of the ice barrier.
JOSEPH JACKSON or **SHOREDITCH JOSE**—A Cockney member of the crew, whose constant companion is a game bantam named the Smacker.
TEDDY MORGAN—Ship's engineer.
WILLIAM TOOTER—The hairy first mate.

aeroplane, Wings of Gold—which has been carried in pieces on the Foamwitch—is proceeded with, and in it begins a wonderful voyage into the heart of the Antarctic.

Fearful creatures, thought to be extinct since prehistoric times, are encountered when the adventurers reach a mysterious mountain country never before trodden by the foot of man.

One night while hovering some sixty feet above the ground, the aeroplane is attacked by that terrible bird-lizard, the pterodactyl, which fouls the screws and dashes the aeroplane to the ground. The impact causes fearful havoc on board the craft.

"What of the engines?" is the question that is on everyone's lips. Morgan, the engineer, looks grave.

"We can't tell yet how bad this business is going to be, but we must not be afraid of looking at it squarely. The real truth always pays best in the end."

(Read on from here).

The Foamwitch is on an expedition with the object of exploring the strange land which is believed to lie beyond the barrier of eternal ice near the South Pole.

As soon as the first land is reached the construction of the



New Hope—Crooks Cuts a Little Asparagus—Righting the Vessel.

"If Wings of Gold as smashed past Teddy's skill," said Maurice Fordham quietly, "our chances aren't big enough to fill a thimble."

There was a brief silence. Tooter stroked his beard, and took great interest in the bottom of his teacup. Little Jackson began to cut up tobacco nervously, and the eye of Crooks looked larger and brighter and more penetrating.

"And why not, sir?" he growled.

"Speak out, sir!" said Fordham, as Morgan hesitated.

"Because only a flying machine can cross the ice, Crooks, and there are no flying machines in the world except our own. I do not call the flimsy gas-bags with a rudder and a little toy petroleum engine flying machines. I call them dangerous toys."

"It's lively and not 'arf," said Jackson shakily. "I take as yer mean as how nobody knows how to build a ship like this?"

"No one?"

"Tell 'em. Why not?" grunted the cook. "There was guns 'ere, there was grub, and there was balloons. We was able to wait. Why not? Write how she was made and send off balloons."

"We can do that," said Lance; but his voice was not hopeful. "It would mean a long time."

Teddy Morgan shook his head.

"It would take ages," he put in, "and there are long odds against any of the balloons being found. Thunder! If we waited for a rescue in that style, they'd only find our skeletons. We've got to strike out for ourselves. From here all roads lead to the North. We came over ice, and a bit ago I'd have wagered it was all ice. How do we know there ain't a better road back to the sea?"

Lance spread out a chart of the Antarctic regions. It was almost a blank. Fordham sprang up angrily as the pterodactyl uttered its hateful shriek.

"I'll finish the brute! I can't stand that noise!" he said.

"That ain't wisdom, sir, with all respect," said the thoughtful engineer. "It'll mean two of them for us to bury, and if you let 'em be it will save digging, for there'll be nothing to bury. There'll be more at the dead one soon."

"Morgan, you have on you ein clear head," said Von Haagel, glancing over the book. "It is better to let them alone, Maurice."

It was the dreariest night they had ever spent. Crooks

and the engineer managed to obtain a little sleep. The dawn came struggling in, pale and grey, and Lance opened the portholes. The loathsome monster had taken wing.

"How goes it, old chap?" asked Maurice. "Are you done up?"

"I'm pretty well dead-beat, Maurice. Some tea might buck me up. It won't be light enough to see for a bit."

Crooks went down to the galley. They soon heard him sawing and hammering, and he quickly had his stove to-rights and a fire going. He brought in a great dish of fried ham, two loaves, and a tin jug of tea.

"Good for you, Crooks!" said Maurice. "You're a Briton! Now, boys, eat something, and then have a good wash. Pull yourselves together! We're not buried yet, and nothing like it."

"Cock-a-oo-oo-doo!" crowed the bantam, as it hopped in.

They waited until the heatless sun had arisen before they opened the slide. Lance cocked his rifle, and was the first on deck. They clambered up after him, and dropped to the ground.

Morgan walked round the vessel with his hands in his pockets.

"Well, Teddy?"

With bated breath they waited for the engineer's verdict.

"I don't know," said Teddy Morgan. "I can't tell; but it's better than I thought. Thunder! I reckon that brute made a bad mistake," he added, with a chuckle, "when he took this boat for something to eat, and got mixed up with it. We're badly strained and twisted aft, and got mixed up with it. We're badly strained and twisted aft, and any man would be forgiven for sitting down and crying like a kid at one peep at the engine-room. I'll tell you in an hour or so. Please don't worry me."

Their spirits rose. Morgan was not the kind of man to raise false hope. It was plain that the vessel had fallen lightly. When the aft screws had been fouled by the pterodactyl, the fore screws had continued to work, and broken the speed of the descent. The shock had played havoc with the liquid air cylinders, and loosened them from their fittings. One of them had almost come through the plates, which had bulged and split.

"She's a mighty tough boat," said Morgan proudly, "and I don't say that because I had a lot to do with her. She beats a sea-boat to fits. Look at that hole. A steamer with a gash like that in it would have foundered in ten minutes. The first thing to be done is to get her on an even keel. We want derricks for that. If we had derricks I guess I

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

Besieged by Great Crustaceans,

Morgan's face seldom reflected his feelings. It was what Tooter described as one of those wooden faces that had been left out in the rain and got warped. But there was a smile on it when he came into the lamplight and sank into an easy-chair. The saloon looked as comfortable and as cheery as ever. A little tinkering and elbow-grease had repaired and repolished the furniture, and there was a burst of applause when Teddy pressed his forefinger against the wall, and the electric lamps blazed out.

"Has somebody struck a vesta? Why not?" inquired the rumbling voice of Mr. Crooks. "I am joyful, and I was thankful! Why was I joyful and thankful? Ax me? It was becous with the lighted light I can see the lovely whiskers of William by the naked eye. A naked eye wears no clothes, which is bad for tailors. Why not? I only states the bare fact."

"Crooks," laughed Fordham, "if you don't keep that huge, ugly mouth of yours closed, you'll get into trouble. That's another bare fact. You can see it with the naked eye. Teddy, my boy, you'll get into trouble as well if you do another stroke of work. You've performed miracles!"

"He's a champion!" said Lance.
"Ach, he is ein grand yellow! You are all grand yellows!" puffed the professor. "I am proud of you all—most proud! Wings of Gold, you shall beat the air again, is it not? You shall vly again aldogeder, is dot so? Vonderful—glorious—suplime!"

"And you shall get thrown out, dad—is dot so altogeder yet?" said Lance. "You'll get pitched out on your head altogether yet very soon, if you speak such wicked English!"

"So you mock me, dear lad. You laugh at me. Well, I do not gare. You shall sing to us for ein punishment. Sit down and sing!"

Morgan had not pledged himself to do anything, but he had promised to do his utmost. It was not in his nature to attempt an impossible task. He had gone over every inch of the vessel with Fordham. The damage was great, the labour was great; but dogged perseverance, patience and unyielding pluck are three qualities that seldom, when united, meet with defeat.

Lance went to the piano. It had been shipped from the yacht at the last moment at Von Haegel's wish. Several of the wires had been sprained by the accident, but the hideous noise they made when they struck the damaged notes only added to the fun of it, for Mr. Crooks jumped as if stabbed, and his eye rolled horribly at each repetition of the discord.

Jackson fetched his mouth-organ. The music the little Cockney got out of the wretched, gimcrack toy was astonishing. When it was almost midnight he played "Home, Sweet Home." They sang it, hand clasping hand—the grand old melody that turns every British exile's heart towards the two little islands whose sons have done more to make the world a better place in a few brief centuries than all the empires of all ages.

Their lusty voices drifted away through the starlit silence of that empty land.

"Vell done—vell done!" said the professor, wiping his eyes. "It is sweet to hear dot. Ach! Never in der vide world shall we quarrel or be angry mit one anoder. Never—never! Und now I shall shake hands mit you all, for I am tired."

Crooks, Tooter, and Jackson turned into the galley for a last smoke.

Lance went to Maurice's cabin to bandage his friend's wound. Owing to Fordham's magnificent health, the wound was already scarred over. Lance lingered.

"Not sleepy, old chap?"
"Not a bit," said Lance. "It's too beastly hot and muggy. All the same, I don't want to keep you awake."

"I'm not sleepy either," said Fordham, looking at the thermometer. "Phew! It's eighty-two degrees in here, and all the ventilators open. I daren't open the light, to let in what air there is, for I might get a pterodactyl sticking his ugly head to graze off my features. Oh, it's sickly! Sling me that dressing-gown, sonny, and we'll stroll."

"On deck?"
"Where else?" said Fordham. "Go and get your little gun."

Lance took a candle. He was fully dressed. He went to

the gun-case, and took out a rifle. When he pulled out the drawer he found that there were no Lee-Metford cartridges, but plenty for the elephant guns. Not caring to have to break his shins in the store-room, he replaced the rifle, and shouldered the sturdy, thick-barrelled elephant gun of the latest pattern.

"Ready?" called out Maurice.
"As soon as I have filled my pipe."
"Bring a cigar for me, old boy."
"Right!"

Lance left the candle on the floor, and drew back the slide. The moon was sailing above him, still encircled with rings of faint yellow, as it had been on the previous night.

"Ugh! Doesn't it smell musty?" said Fordham.
"Brutal, like a vault! I—"
"What's the matter?" cried Fordham, as Lance's voice died into a gasp.

"Something—something. Look out! Oh, look out!"
The gun was wrenched from Lance's hand with terrific force. A shadow cut off the moonlight. Lance almost fell. He seized the bars of the slide, closed it as far as it would go, and held on for life. He had imprisoned something—something terrible and unknown. It snapped and clacked and clattered close to his head, almost touching his hair, and striving to force open the slide.

"A light—a light!" he screamed.
Maurice raised the candle. A monstrous, crab-like claw, pinned on the slide, was snapping close to Lance's head.

"Help! Maurice—Tooter! Help! An axe—an axe!"
Teddy Morgan rolled out of his bunk as the urgent cries rang through the ship. Lance still kept his hold, and Fordham balanced himself on the step.

"Bend your head!" he said hoarsely.

He began to beat frantically at the snapping claw with the barrel of his rifle. He had little room, and was compelled to strike sideways. Metallic blows sounded on the deck above.

"I can't hold on much longer," said Lance through his teeth. "He's too strong."

"Teddy—Teddy, an axe!" yelled Fordham.

"Ay, ay!" answered the deep voice of Teddy Morgan.

Morgan, in shirt and trousers, rushed down the corridor. He whistled as he looked up.

"Right, sir!" he said grimly. "Out of the way, by thunder!"

The axe swept over Lance's head. A shriek answered the blow. The claw fell with a crash, and Lance, half-fainting, shot the bolt into its socket. Above them they could hear a rustling and clattering. Lance

leaned, panting, against the wall. A sickly stench tainted the air.

"Things are beginning to hum," said Maurice, with a weak laugh. "How those other fellows sleep! I thought I howled loud enough to wake a graveyard. You look scared, Lance, old boy."

"What are they?"
There was a rattle of falling glass, and then a shriek.

"Help, dear lads! Ach, I am murdered! Lance—Maurice! Oh, der teufel haf got me! Murder! It is der teufel—it is der teufel!"

Von Haegel's voice was full of dread. They bounded madly towards his cabin.

"Open the door! Open the door!"
"Ach, I gannod! I am held, I am pinned, I gannod move! For mercy's sake, dear lads, to der—"

The rest was swallowed by the noise of an axe against wood. Morgan burst open the door.

The lamp showed the professor in a strange attitude. His right hand was extended, and his left hand clutched the rail of his bed. His eyes were big with staring terror. Something that shone like a tightly-stretched copper wire ran from his wrist, and passed through the broken window.

Teddy's axe flashed down and severed the thing, and Von Haegel fell back in a heap.

Then Lance fired into the enclosed space. The roar of the elephant gun deafened them. Morgan closed the metal shutters. Again there was a crash of glass.

"The saloon this time," said Morgan. "Look after the professor. By thunder, we were mad to leave the shutters open!"

Lance was reloading the gun with trembling fingers.



NEXT THURSDAY:

"FIGGINS & CO.'S NEW MASTER!"

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

Fordham raised the professor. The other men were awake at last, and shouting lustily. Morgan gently opened the door of the saloon. A dark object shut out the moonlight. The engineer kept well back. He felt a peculiar sensation in his skin and hair, and his heart was beating at a rapid rate.

He heard a scraping and a shuffling outside. Then, with a soft rustling and tapping, something seemed to enter. What was it, or what were they? There appeared to be more than one. Morgan's hair began to bristle.

Tap, tap, tap! Rustle, rustle, rustle! The sounds wandered from point to point, from corner to corner, from ceiling to floor, and the scraping noise went on outside.

And then Morgan felt his ankle gripped, and uttered a loud shout.

"Bring a light!"

Fordham was beside him at once, but Teddy had found the switch. A whiplike object was writhing in the air—a long, wiry tentacle. No one stirred. The tentacle hovered over the floor; and then, as if it had found what it was seeking, it shot forward and hooked itself round the engineer's second ankle. Morgan cut himself free. The tentacles lashed wildly, and were withdrawn. Morgan coolly walked forward, and closed the shutter.

"We're safe now," he said; "and I want to have a look at the brutes."

"You've got a good nerve, Teddy," said Lance.

"People need good nerves in these parts, sir," said the engineer, shrugging his shoulders. "You fellows had better go back to bed. There's no more danger."

They looked pale and uneasy, with the exception, of course, of the dauntless Crooks.

"Why not?" he growled. "Never wake a man if it ain't to tell him good news. That 'ere is a proverb. The news was bad. Why not? I'm going back to sleep."

Von Haegel had received an unpleasant shock, but his love for science mastered everything. When Lance hurried in with a glass of brandy, he found Von Haegel examining the severed tentacle by the light of a candle.

"Ach!" he puffed. "Another discovery, dear lad. Dot vos ein great lobster, or ein great crab. But it is most different. It is like der at—at—what do you call it?—der feelers of ein big butterfly."

"Drink this," said Lance. "I'm wanted."

Morgan had brought a step-ladder, and had opened one of the ventilators. He looked out. The moon was clear and strong. Then something moved beyond the row of poles. A crablike monster raised itself upon its horny claws. It began to crawl over the ropes. Then came a second and a third.

The engineer's view was limited, but the rustling and scuffling on deck was sufficient. They were besieged by mighty crustaceans.

He came down the ladder, and Fordham took his place. Maurice descended without a word. Lance began to laugh.

"This is a caution," he said. "Just imagine being bottled up by a silly lot of lobsters. There's one beggar here about nine feet long. He'd make a first-class salad. Shall I try a shot?"

"Have you got room?" asked Fordham.

"Plenty, if you're quick. There's a brute just in the right place. Give me the gun, old chap. Careful—it's loaded. Hold the ladder, Teddy, for this gun kicks like a mule. I may jump for it, so look out."

The crustacean Lance had selected seemed almost blind. It kept turning round and round, its claws snapping blindly. Then it seized one of the posts, and shook it. Lance fired full at its armoured back with an explosive bullet.

"Mind!" he yelled. "I'm down!"

He fell on his feet, luckily. A little smoke drifted in.

"You've killed it!" cried Maurice.

The scuffling grew louder, and there was a chorus of hissing. The crustaceans had scented the dead. They gathered round, and fought over it, and the stench was intolerable.

"Let me have the gun!" cried Maurice. "I'll gorge them!"

He fired shot after shot. Like starving wolves, the weird brutes fell upon the dead and wounded.

"That's enough," said Lance. "I'm pretty sick. Stop it, Maurice. They'll be gone at daylight, I feel sure. All these things seem to be night prowlers!"

The pterodactyls were hovering about the crustaceans, and wheeling round them with dreadful screams. One came too close, and a claw clutched its neck. In a second it was dragged down and torn to atoms.

"By thunder!" said the engineer. "If this sort of thing lasts we shall soon be dead! A man can't live long without sleep. I'm going to bed again, and I sha'n't wake up for forty earthquakes. Good-night again, gentlemen!"

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"THE RIVAL'S TEST!"

is the Title of the Splendid, Long, Complete School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co. appearing in this week's "MAGNET" Library. Now on Sale. Price One Penny.

Lance took a last look at the professor. He had dropped asleep over his Shakespeare.

In the morning their faces showed traces of the excitement of the night. Jackson was quite feverish. Crustaceans and pterodactyls, like evil visions of the darkness, had fled with the break of dawn. They had left some ghastly relics behind them in the shape of broken shells and fragments of hairy legs. Von Haegel, disdaining the hideous smell, searched among the relics.

"We'll stick to the ship to-day," said Maurice, "and nobody must go a yard from it."

"I don't think anyone will want to, old chap," said Lance. "If we get Wings of Gold afloat again, back we go."

"Ach!" sighed Von Haegel. "It must be so, dear lads. It grieves me, but it must be. Yes, yes!"

He sighed again mournfully. It was hard to abandon everything, hard to stand on the threshold of the unknown without daring to enter. They had had enough of horrors. The strain was telling on them. It was time they turned back.

The moment breakfast was over, Teddy Morgan took off his coat. They worked that day like demons to get the cylinders back into their place. Jackson was too ill to do much except prepare the meals. There was no chatter or music that evening. They slept like logs. If any monster visited them, and tried to break into their steel refuge, they did not hear. Morgan was up at daybreak, but he let the others rest until nine o'clock.

Jackson was worse. Crooks found him lying outside the galley, and carried him to bed.

"I am avraid we are going to lose dot vine lad," said Von Haegel sadly. "Ach, I am sorrowful! He is most weak, and his pulse is so violent. It is der fever."

"Malaria?" asked Lance.

"Ach, yes, dear lad!" answered the professor gloomily.

"He laughs, und is so plucky, und dot teufel of ein bird crow at him, und he laugh more. Und when he laugh, und I ask him why he laugh, he say der bird haf nine beaks, und dot he crow backwards."

Von Haegel wiped his eyes. Poor Jackson was delirious. Crooks made him some beef-tea. When Crooks returned, his only eye looked damp.

"Why not?" he growled. "He was balmy. He telled me I was a terrydacktelly, wi' a long neck, and that I wore whiskers round me socks. It was balminess. Why not? Poor Josh!"

"Work, work, work!" said Teddy Morgan.

Progress was slow—pitifully slow. Their limbs ached, and their hands were sore, and so little had been done. To the joy of all, the sick man had rallied. He was quite rational again. Crooks had been in and out of the room all day long.

"I'll look arter him," he said. "Why not? I'll sleep on the floor. Floors is not bad for sleepin' on. Don't worry. Bill's face would bring on the dottiness again, for it is 'airy. He knows me. Why not?"

Again they slept like tired dogs; again the engineer called them to their toil. Jackson was wonderfully better. Von Haegel, who was almost fanatical in his belief in the virtues of quinine, dosed him heavily with that drug, and with whisky.

No plantation slave, writhing under the overseer's cruel whip, laboured as they laboured for ten terrible days. They were fighting for their lives. Von Haegel, Lance, and Maurice felt it most. Unlike the others, they were quite unaccustomed to manual labour. Their hands became enlarged, scarred, and blistered, but they were cheerful and merry.

"We shall know to-morrow," said Teddy Morgan.

"Why not?" growled Crooks.

Crooks was the only one awake. All the others had fallen asleep over their supper of bread and cheese. The cook went on eating stolidly. He was a man of iron. He smiled grimly when he saw Morgan's head fall forward.

"Crooks was the toughest yet," he muttered. "Why not? Somebody must keep awake. They was not tough, but toughish. So is some beef. Why not? Which reminds me of beef-tea for Josh."

The cook, though his eyelids felt like lead, managed, in a half-slumbering condition, to prepare a mixture of beef-tea and brandy for his patient.

Jackson drank it.

"You're a good 'un, not 'alf!" he said gratefully. "Ere, stand up! What's wrong wit yer?"

"Why not?" said the cook. "Why n——"

His glaring eye closed with a snap, and he fell off the chair—sound asleep. A pterodactyl swept over the ship with a blood-curdling shriek. The sick man heard it, and shuddered.

Well Done, Teddy Morgan—Hopes of Home—The Snowstorm.

Teddy Morgan stepped out into the pale sunshine, axe on shoulders. They crowded after him, ragged and unshaven and unwashed. Water was becoming a luxury. The tanks were almost dry. Lance Morton grinned as he surveyed his companions. They reminded him of candidates for a casual ward. Mr. Tooter's eyebrows and hair had grown amazingly. He resembled a gorilla in a tattered shirt and trousers, and his hair was so long that it curled over his shoulders.

"Cast off!" said Morgan.

They dashed off the ropes. Cable after cable fell clear. Morgan entered the wheelhouse. Every lever shone like gold.

"Stand clear!"

Fr-r-r-r-r-r! The suspensory screws began to spin. Their shrill note was the richest music to the ears of the crew.

The vessel quivered and struggled to rise, but the force was not great enough. Morgan was not worried about that. Every screw was spinning slowly and smoothly.

"Will she do it, Teddy?"

"Yes, with a bit more feed," shouted the engineer.

"Ach! Suplume, grand, peautiful, vunderful!" roared Von Haagel, beginning to dance. "Oh, mine dear lads, is it not suplime? Is it not— Oh, o-oh! Gonfourt it! I haf—haf tumbled!"

The professor inadvertently trod upon the point of a pick lying close by. The pick immediately stood up, and gave the professor a blow in the ribs.

Then, with his usual clumsiness, Von Haagel tripped over a guy-rope backwards, amid cheers, congratulations, and shouts of laughter. Lance raised him and dusted him down. Then they swarmed round Morgan to pat him on the back, and shake his hands.

"Well done, Teddy! Bravo, Teddy!"

"Easy, easy!" cried the engineer. "It's like being mobbed by a crowd of hooligans! Give me a chance to breathe, you rebels! We're all right, by thunder! Shut up, and listen to the prettiest music you ever heard!"

Fr-r-r-r-r-r-r! sung the screw.

"Dot was sweeter dan der opera!" puffed Von Haagel, beating time with one fat finger. "Ach! Peautiful—peautiful! I am so joyful dot I can warble to it! Tra-la-la-la-la-la! Ach, tra-la-la-la-la-la! Ach, tra-la-la-la-la-la!"

"Was that a canary bird," asked Mr. Crooks, gazing at the sky in search of the songster, "or was it two cats fightin'?"

"Blackbirds! He'll make it rain!" growled Mr. Tooter. "Ach, tra-la-la-la! Ach, tra-la-la-la! It do remind me of the chirrup of a London nightingale, which is only a perlite name for a tom-pussycat."

"Not 'arf!" agreed Jackson, with a grin.

There was a shout as one of the cylinders swung into the air and went over the side to be re-charged. Lance fired the explosive, and the cylinder, vastly heavier than before, went back and dropped into its place in the engine-room, and was bolted down.

But Morgan was not ready to make the ascent.

He had yet to test every screw singly at full speed. The dusk was upon them before they knew it.

"Whistle 'em up, William," said Fordham.

Tooter's bo's'un's whistle uttered its silvery call.

"Gentlemen in rags, attention!" laughed Fordham. "You are a disgrace to anything except the workhouse. As we needn't hoard up the water now, I order you to wash, shave, and make yourselves less like a pack of beggars."

"What about yourself, mossgrown fossil?" inquired Lance. "Why not?" growled Crooks. "That was a mistake. There was no moss on Mr. Maurice. Why not? Because there was none left. It was all on Tooter. There's 'air—square miles of it!"

They were filled with hopes of home. When they gathered round the dinner-table they were like different men. Jackson, pale and thin, was given the post of honour between Lance and Von Haagel. Crooks, by special demand, had prepared a dinner fit for kings.

There was a twinkle in the cook's eye as he bore in the first dish.

"A roast turkey, by Jove!" said Maurice, sharpening his knife. "That's good enough for me. Push those plates along, cookey."

"Why not?" growled Crooks. "I shall want someone to help with the duff. Will you come, Josh?"

"Not 'arf!" answered the little Cockney gratefully. "You chased yerself for me like a good 'un!"

"And I'll have William of the long 'air also. Why not?" grinned Crooks.

Lance and the others guessed that the chef had some

surprise in store for them. The remains of the turkey were removed. Suddenly they heard the strains of Jackson's mouth-organ, and the lusty voices of Crooks and Tooter rang through the ship.

"Christians awake! Salute the happy morn!"

They were singing the old carol. The door opened. There stood Father Christmas himself, holding the blazing pudding, his one eye blazing more merrily than the burning brandy itself.

"A merry Christmas! A merry Christmas!"

They had forgotten—it was Christmas Day. The next moment they were all laughing and shaking hands, and wishing each other the compliments of the season.

"Shaf!" cried the professor. "Where were our heads dot we forgot der dates? Ach, yes, it is der twenty-fifth of December. Dear gomrades of mein, bless you all! A merry Christmas and a most happy, happy new year! Ach! What haf we here?"

"Crackers, dad!" said Fordham. "Crooks, you're a one-eyed wonder! I'll pull a cracker with you, dad. Catch hold! Bang! What's the motto inside?"

They roared when Von Haagel was decorated with a child's paper bonnet and pinafore, and Maurice read:

Your soft blue eyes have pierced my heart,
You're sweeter than a penny tart.
Oh, let us buy a motor-car,
And ride away to regions far!"

"Teuf, teuf! Pip-pip!" said Lance.

Lance inaugurated snapdragon, and it was the sight of a lifetime to see the professor burning his fingers and sucking them afterwards. Then they sang carols.

The old tunes brought back thoughts of home. When they separated at midnight a glance through the porthole showed a clear, starry sky.

Morgan tapped the barometer, and took another look at the sky. The mercury was uneasy. It was falling a little, but the aspect of the sky was reassuring.

Maurice Fordham seemed barely to have closed his eyes when the deep growl of Mr. Crooks made him jerk them open.

"What, is it morning already, cookey?" he asked.

"That was some 'ot tea," said the cook. "It was mornin', too, or else the galley clock was busted. Clocks will bust at times. But it was pretty dark. We was buried."

"Buried? What do you mean?"

Crooks pulled back the shutter. The porthole had been repaired. No light came in, but something white slid down in a little stream and formed a heap on the floor.

"That was snow," growled the cook, trying to thaw the heap with his shining eye. "Why not? Snow is seasonable at Christmastide, when pipes do bust and bills come due, and naughty boys make slides. Why not? There is water where there is snow, and the tanks is dry."

Crooks picked up the tray, and went off to deliver his welcome cups of tea. The aeronef was buried in snow up to the heights of her ports at least, but such a trifling matter could not disturb the cook's equanimity. As he rammed the snow into his kettle he was rather pleased than otherwise.

Maurice dressed hurriedly. He met Morgan coming out of his cabin.

"This is encouraging, isn't it, Teddy?" he said.

"By thunder, it's the biggest fall I ever heard of, sir," answered the engineer. "It must be at least nineteen feet deep. Big, wet flakes, I expect, for it ain't cold."

"Cheer-ho, my merry men!" shouted Lance. "This is a bit of real Christmas! How goes it? Come outside, and I'll snowball you for sixpence. Hallo, dad! Can you keep warm?"

Von Haagel puffed along in a state of great excitement. "Ach, dear lads, dot was most extraordinary!" he panted. "It is not to be believed unless mit seeing it dot so much snow come down in a few hours. But Morgan shall melt it away. Is not dot so, Morgan? Ja!"

"We'll get out of it, sir," said the engineer; "but I have no steam, so I can't melt it. I expect it's just deep enough to cover our lights. Stand clear of the avalanche."

He mounted a ladder and tied a rope to the sliding hatch. Von Haagel's bare feet were thrust into felt slippers. Lance stepped back, and accidentally trod on the unlucky professor's toe.

"Ach! Ow! You haf killed me, Lance!" shrieked Von Haagel.

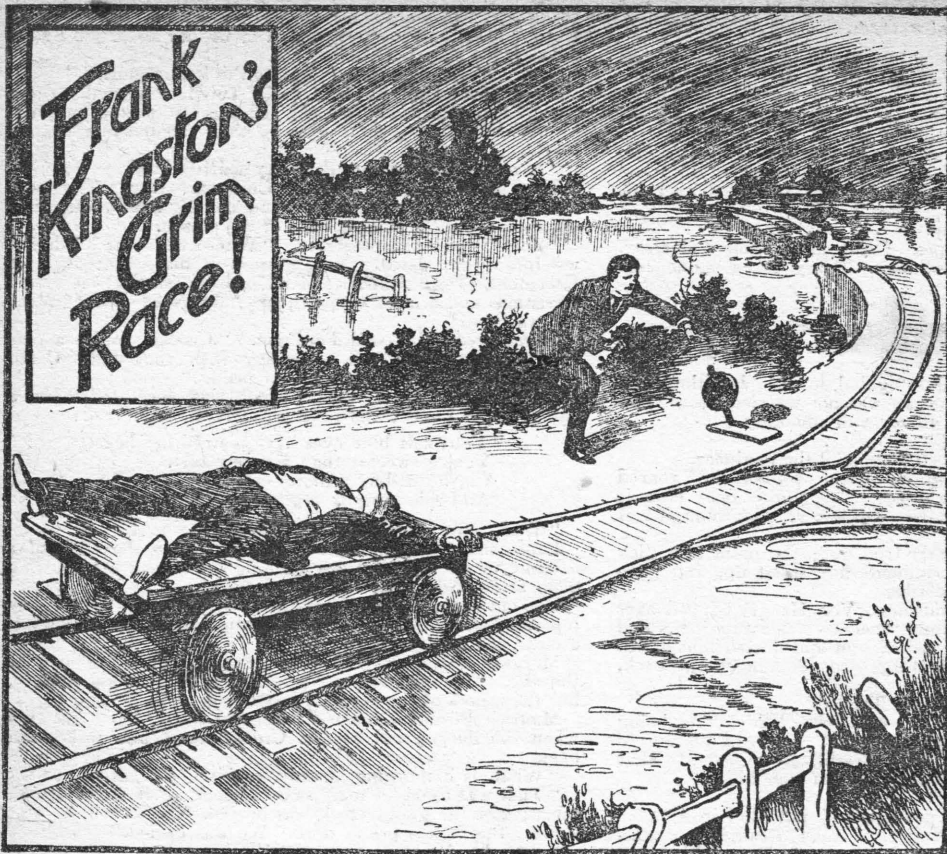
As he shrieked, he hopped on one leg, and got under the slide. Maurice made a valiant clutch to drag him back. The slide stuck a little, and then opened with a jerk. Down came quite a ton of snow, burying the professor from sight, and filling the corridor from floor to deck beams.

(This grand serial story will be continued in next week's issue of "The Gem" Library. Order now. Price 1d.)

NEXT
THURSDAY:

"FIGGINS & CO.'S NEW MASTER!"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 212.
A Splendid, New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom
Merry & Co. at St. Jim's. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.



A Grand, New Series of Short, Complete Stories, introducing **FRANK KINGSTON,** DETECTIVE, and **TIM**—His Smart Boy Assistant.

Next Thursday: **"CHEATING THE FLAMES!"**

CHAPTER 1.

The Impassable Road—A Surprising incident.

"DON'T think I've ever seen worse weather, sir, in all my stretch!" growled Tim Curtis disconsolately, gazing through the rain-specked window of the large Rolls-Royce landaulette as it ploughed steadily through the watery mud of the narrow country road.

Frank Kingston looked up from his paper.

"Come, Tim, you've got nothing to grumble at!" he smiled. "In here you're warm and cosy. Think of Fraser outside there exposed to the wind and rain—he's much worse off than you are."

"That don't alter the weather, sir," persisted the youngster. "We've had nothin' but rain for days on end, an' the whole time we were up in Yorkshire we didn't see the sun once. It's rotten! There don't seem no end to the wetness; an' now we're goin' back to London—"

Tim paused in his rather lengthy but perfectly justifiable grumble against the weather, for the large car suddenly came to an abrupt standstill; and the next moment Fraser was out of the driver's seat and had opened the door of the tonneau.

"Anything wrong, Fraser?" inquired the great detective.

"Not with the car, sir," replied Fraser, looking just a little uncertain. "Still, we can't go on."

"How's that?"

"The road's absolutely covered with water, sir," explained the chauffeur. "We've just come down a hill, and there's nothing ahead but water. I remember this gradient coming from London; and if I'm not mistaken the water's about five foot deep at the worst part."

Frank Kingston whistled.

"By Jove, that's awkward!" he exclaimed, stepping out into the rain. "It's quite certain we can't continue the journey—at least, by this road."

No sign of the road was visible for at least a hundred yards in front of the motor-car. The hill was fairly steep, and the flood covered the entire bottom of the valley, for the road could be seen emerging again on the further side of the water. The only way to reach it would be by boat or by wading.

"Well, it's useless standing here looking at it," said Kingston cheerfully. "We'd better make our way back to the village along the road, and see if we can get to London

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by train. It's a nuisance, the river overflowing its banks and making the roads impassable."

"There was somethin' to grumble at, after all!" murmured Tim, with a grin.

A few minutes later the car was proceeding along the road on its own tracks, and very soon came to a rather small village, which stood well clear of the floods.

The main street was practically deserted, so the car pulled up outside the largest inn visible. An old countryman was at that moment leaving the premises; and Kingston, leaning out of the window, asked him in which direction the nearest station lay.

The old fellow removed the stump of a clay pipe from his lips.

"Station, sur? Why, there be Little Beedin' Station," replied the countryman, jerking a gnarled thumb over one shoulder. "That's six mile—though, mind ye, the railway line runs right close hereabouts. But it ain't no use you a-goin' to Little Beedin' neither!"

"How's that? The road's not flooded in that direction."

"True 'nough, master. But just near here there's a bridge across the river, an' that 'ere bridge 'as bin sweep' away. Sakes! I ain't never seed such floods since I bin in these parts. Man an' boy, I've worked—"

"Quite so!" interrupted Kingston, slipping a sixpence into the rustic's hand—much to the latter's surprise. "So we can neither go by road or train?"

"That do fare loike it, sur," agreed the old chap readily.

Frank Kingston came to a quick decision. The afternoon was late, and already the light was beginning to fail. He told Fraser to drive the car into the stable-yard of the inn, while he and Tim made their way into the little parlour.

"We may as well have some tea while we're deciding what to do," explained Kingston, as he stood before the cheerful little fire. "What do you think of the idea, Tim?"

"Ripping, sir! I was just wonderin' how long tea would be."

From the landlord Kingston learnt that the flood in the neighbouring valley had broken its record. It appeared that the railway-line passed quite near the village, and about a mile further on spanned the river. This bridge had, during the day, collapsed. Therefore, the only way to reach London was by making a detour of about twenty miles.

"It's a sight, sir—that's what it is!" declared the landlord.

"THE RIVAL'S TEST!" is the Title of the Splendid, Long, Complete School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co. appearing in this week's "MAGNET" Library. Now on Sale. Price One Penny.

"You never saw such a flood afore! It's rushin' down the valley like the Niagara Rapids themselves! No wonder that old bridge gave way!"

"You make me curious," replied Kingston, reclining in his customary languid fashion in one of the easy-chairs. "Do you think it's too dark, landlord, to see them now?"

The worthy host was doubtful.

"I don't know as you wouldn't see some of it if you hurried up," he replied. "There's another gent stayin' with me gone out in that direction. Maybe if you go you'll see 'im."

Five minutes later Kingston and Tim were trudging along the muddy country lane which the landlord had instructed them to follow. Kingston had decided to remain at the inn for the night. For, by all appearances, the weather had made up its mind to be rougher than ever. The wind was whistling mournfully, and the rain drove into the faces of Kingston and Tim Curtis with stinging force.

The detective was not in the least perturbed, while Tim was too eager to see the flood to raise objections. Soon the pair found themselves walking along a stretch of roadway bordered by low hedges. Away to the right could be seen a fairly large house, standing quite alone. A small plantation lay between, but Kingston could plainly see the form of a man moving stealthily around one of the walls.

"Now, that fellow looks as though he had no right there!" he exclaimed interestedly, coming to a halt. "Just look at the way he's striving to remain unseen from the house windows! I wonder— By Jove!"

"Look, sir, look!" cried Tim at the same moment.

As Kingston had come to a halt so two other forms had crept round the corner of the house in the first man's rear. Before he could turn, one of the other men raised a thick stick and brought it down with stunning force on the unfortunate man's head.

The little drama had not taken more than fifteen seconds to enact. Almost before Kingston could utter another word the unconscious man was lifted from where he had fallen and was swiftly conveyed through a small side door into the house.

CHAPTER 2. A Dastardly Scheme.

"BY Jimmy!" Tim uttered the exclamation in a tone of surprise and excitement. He was staring through the dusk at the doorway through which the three men had just disappeared, and his mind was filled with thoughts as to what the cowardly stuning of the first man meant.

Frank Kingston, however, was quite calm. He felt sure that there was something sinister occurring in that bleak-looking house, but already he had made up his mind what to do.

"Ain't you goin' to see what's up, sir?" inquired Tim eagerly.

"I am, my lad!" replied his master, with a certain grim determination in his voice. "But I certainly think it would be unwise to approach the house now, just after what has happened."

"But why, sir? That poor chap—"

"That poor chap will be safe enough, I should think, until darkness has fallen," replied Kingston. "Then we can approach the house safely and without fear of being seen. Were we to go up now it would probably spoil our chances of finding out what is in the wind."

"Then what are you goin' to do until it's dark, sir?" inquired Tim anxiously. "Wait here until—"

"I have not the slightest intention of waiting here, Tim; that would be futile. We came out to view the floods, so I propose we do so, then stroll back and call upon the occupants of this house. It is highly improbable that they will have harmed the man during the interval."

So the detective and his young friend once more faced the storm and trudded along the slushy lane.

Meanwhile, events were happening quite contrary to Kingston's surmise. The unfortunate man who had been stunned was swiftly borne into the house and placed upon the table of a bare and cold kitchen. The two men stood looking at him with considerable satisfaction.

"Taken a leaf out of his book—eh?" remarked one, with a chuckle—a large man with clean-shaven face and apparently gentlemanly. "I don't think he expected that attack, do you, Hughes?"

The other man, also of good appearance, and well dressed, was much smaller in stature. He was wiry, however, and was, if anything, stronger than his companion.

"No, I don't think the fool was prepared!" he exclaimed, but with no sign of humour in his hard voice. He picked up a lighted candle, and held it close to the senseless man's face. "Yes, it's him, right enough!" declared Hughes, after a

second. "I'd know his face in a hundred, even though he is disguised. We must get rid of him, Wells—at once!"

"Get rid of him?" echoed the other man. "My dear chap—"

"Yes, get rid of him!" said the small man fiercely. "If we allow him to go free it will be as good as signing our own death-warrants! And whose neck do you value most—his or your own?"

"That's ridiculous! You know positively well, Hughes, that I'm just as much against him as you are. But we mustn't take any risks."

"Risks be hanged!" snapped Hughes impatiently. "Why, man, there could never be a more favourable opportunity than this moment. We're in this house alone; and on a night like this it's the unluckiest thing in the world that anybody will be out in this bare spot. In my opinion, there couldn't be a better way of doing the business than by quietly drowning him!"

Wells nodded in agreement. His companion was a much stronger-minded man than he, and usually had his way in everything.

"Drowning seems all right. With all this water about it'll be dead easy."

"Easy's not the word for it. But, I say," added Hughes, with a slight chuckle, "an idea has just entered into my head. This interfering brute here has been a thorn in our side for years. So why shouldn't we have a bit of sport out of him?"

And the little man forthwith outlined a plan whereby their prisoner would meet with a terrible fate—but a plan which was absolutely safe—or nearly so.

"I vote we start right away!" exclaimed Wells enthusiastically. He was a hard-hearted ruffian, and the plan appealed to his coarse nature immensely. "But I forgot," he added, with a glance at the window. "It's not quite dark yet."

"All the better! We shall be able to see what we're doing."

"Yes, but that applies two ways; other people may see what we ourselves are up to."

"Out of the question!" declared Hughes, walking across the room and procuring a coil of rope from a cupboard. "The railway-line is quite away from all roads and houses, so we shall stand no chance of being overlooked. And, in any case, who's going to be out on a night like this, watching the railway-line?"

And he laughed at the bare thought of it.

Five minutes later the pair of scoundrels were moving laboriously across the fields, keeping close to the hedges, bearing between them the securely-bound form of their prisoner. It was not yet quite dark; but it was quite impossible to see the trio at a greater distance than a hundred yards.

The wind was blowing stronger than ever, and with it came the rain in whistling volleys. Overhead the clouds raced across the sky.

The railway-line was quite close, and the pair soon threw their burden down on the soaking grass of the embankment. The line at this point ran down at a sharp gradient to the river, the bridge over which had been destroyed.

From the spot where the men stood they could faintly distinguish the river half a mile distant, while the sound of its roar came up uncertainly between the gusts of wind.

Not a soul could be seen in any direction—not a single light.

"We're to ourselves, right enough!" exclaimed Hughes briskly. "Jove, Wells, but our friend couldn't have paid us a visit at a more opportune time! Last week, for instance, we should have had considerable difficulty in disposing of him—"

"While to-night it's child's play!" chuckled the bigger man. "And a first-class scheme into the bargain! Why, it's absolutely impossible for us to be found out! What do you—Hallo! He's coming round!" he added, glancing suddenly at the bound form.

"Good! All the more fun!" said Hughes callously.

The prisoner, feeling the effect of the cold wind and rain on his bare head, was indeed returning to consciousness. He opened his eyes. But in his dazed condition he did not realise where he was or what had happened to him.

The next minute, however, he turned his head as he heard sounds of movement and voices close to him. Instantly full remembrance came back, but he could not understand what his captors were intent upon.

Both of them were close to him, and they were struggling with a heavy railway-trolley, endeavouring to place it on the metals. It was one of those four-wheeled articles which platelayers use to go to and from their work.

The two scoundrels soon had it in position, then they descended the embankment again, and laid rough hands on the prisoner.

"What are you going to do?" exclaimed the latter

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"Well, as I don't believe in prolonging agony," replied Hughes, with a grin, "we're going to bind you to this trolley, and set it going down the hill. I believe you understand what that means!"

"But the bridge!" gasped the other, horror-struck. "It's been washed away!"

"Quite so," nodded Hughes. "I thought you understood!"

The prisoner stared at the two men for a moment in silence. "You brutes!" he cried fearfully. "You mean to murder me. By heavens, if that is your intention the least you could do would be to finish it straight off! Not that I care twopence for you," he added quickly. "I'd rather die by torture than ask a favour of either of you cowardly hounds!"

"That's as well, for you won't get any favours," returned the smaller of the two men. "We've made up our minds to give you a last ride before being snuffed out. We thought you'd like the little bit of excitement."

The captive did not deign to answer. He simply looked at his persecutors with the utmost contempt. He did not seem to be afraid in the least, having evidently made up his mind that escape was out of the question.

With little ceremony he was bound with outstretched arms and legs to the trolley, one limb being secured to either corner. Not a sound of complaint now left his lips, and this hastened the end rather than delayed it, for had he commenced making appeals for mercy, his captors would, very probably, have wasted time in useless taunts.

"Now!" muttered Hughes tensely. "Let him go!" With a heave, the two men pushed at the trolley with all their force, and it moved slowly forward down the gradient. Then it gathered way rapidly, and within fifteen seconds was dashing headlong down towards the river, carrying its helpless human freight to what seemed certain destruction.

CHAPTER 3.

Frank Kingston Receives a Surprise.

"CRIKEY, sir, you might think you was lookin' for the blessed sea!" exclaimed Tim Curtis, in a tone of awe, as he and his master stood on the brow of a long hill. Before them, in the ever-darkening dusk, stretched the great valley, with the swollen river roaring on its way.

Meadows, fields, roads, were all covered by the flood, and here and there the upper part of a cottage could be seen, dimly in the gathering darkness. Away to the left, fairly close, the remains of the bridge stood out stark and staring in its incompleteness. The railway track could be seen distinctly for perhaps a mile, where it turned an abrupt curve.

"By Jove," said Kingston, "I scarcely imagined the flood was as bad as this! Think, Tim, of the tremendous amount of damage that must have been caused!"

"I know, sir. But what about that poor chap we saw knocked on the head?"

"I notice you can't get that matter off your mind, Tim," smiled the detective. "Let me see, how long ago did it happen?"

"About twenty minutes, sir."

"More than that, Tim, I think," said Kingston, consulting his watch. "We took the wrong turning, you know, and had to retrace our steps. Perhaps we had better be getting back now. But I shall certainly come again to-morrow morning, and—"

Kingston paused, and stepped forward a pace. He was looking intently at a spot on the railway track, just over a quarter of a mile distant. It so happened that there were no trees intervening, and he had an uninterrupted view.

"What's up, sir?" asked Tim.

"I imagine I can see somebody on the railway-line yonder," replied Kingston, without moving. "Do you see anything, my lad?"

"No, sir!"

"If you look carefully you will notice that two men are placing a trolley on the down metals," went on Kingston.

Apparently he was looking into the blackness, and it is quite certain that had anybody else besides Tim been there, they would have been every bit as surprised. Kingston's eyesight was abnormally keen, and he could see quite distinctly with the very smallest minimum of light.

"What's that, sir? Somebody monkeyin' with a trolley?"

"Yes. What on earth they're putting the thing on the rails for, is more than I can gather," said Kingston. "I shouldn't think— By jingo!"

Tim looked at his master inquiringly.

"What, have you seen something else, sir?"

"In this twilight it's a job, Tim, but I can distinguish that those two men are tying a third one to the trolley! Can you not guess what their object is?"

"They—they mean to send the trolley down the hill, so's it'll flop into the river!" gasped Tim. "Crikey, what a rotten thing to do! But I say, sir," he added excitedly,

"don't it seem rather funny? I'll bet fourpence-halfpenny that those three chaps are the same ones that we saw at that house!"

"It's not only a possibility, Tim, but a certainty," replied Kingston grimly.

"Then the poor chap's done for!" cried Tim miserably. "Oh, Mr. Kingston, why didn't we go and rescue him at first?"

"Quiet, my lad! I think there is a way out," said the detective resolutely.

"What is it, sir? I'm blest if I can think of anything!"

"Before it got quite so dark I noticed that a single line branches out from the main track, and runs for at least a mile before it is submerged by the flood. The only hope of saving that unfortunate man is to reach the points and alter them so that the trolley will be diverted from its course."

"But it can't be done, sir; there ain't time! An' even if there was, the trolley would jump the metals at the points."

"Possibly," said Kingston quickly, "and probably not. That, in any case, will have to be left to chance. Hold these, young 'un!"

He thrust his coat, hat, and stick into Tim's arms, for he had been divesting himself of these while talking.

"But you ain't goin', sir?" cried Tim. "It's no good!"

But Kingston had gone, leaving Tim standing there gazing helplessly into the rain and wind-swept darkness. At least, it was darkness to Tim. To his master it was dim twilight, and the thing that made him dash off so abruptly was the sight of the trolley being pushed off by Hughes and his companion.

It would be a race indeed!

Frank Kingston was absolutely unacquainted with the district, but his sense of direction was keen, and very soon he found himself at the exact spot he had made for—the portion of the railway track where the points were situated. He did not stop to look up the main line, but knew, instinctively, that the trolley was practically upon him; he could hear the rattle of its wheels in his ears as he grasped the heavily-weighted lever which manipulated the points.

Clang!

With a sharp ring of metal the points flew into position, and at the same second Kingston felt, rather than saw, the trolley dash past and take the points with a rattle.

For a second Kingston held his breath.

Would the trolley become derailed?

No, it held to the metals magnificently, and went careering on its way down the branch line, with Kingston running after it with all speed. The impact with the water acted as a brake immediately. Happily the flood here was little more than eighteen inches deep, so the trolley stuck to the lines.

Kingston came splashing through the water to its side, more thankful than he could say that his object had been achieved. In a moment his electric torch was out, and he flashed it upon the outstretched form upon the trolley. Then he uttered a cry of amazement; for a second even he was surprised out of his customary imperturbability.

"By Jove!" he cried. "Carson Gray!"

"Kingston!" exclaimed the rescued man, in faint tones.

"Great Scotland Yard!"

Incredible as it seemed, Frank Kingston had rescued from certain death the best friend he had—Carson Gray, detective.

Three hours later the two detectives were seated in the cosy parlour of the inn, and Carson Gray was looking quite presentable.

"Just fancy you being in this little tin-pot place at the same time as I!" he said.

Frank Kingston smiled.

"It's not so improbable," he said languidly. "After all, England is not very large!"

"It's a lot smaller than I thought," declared Gray. "But it was really good how those two scoundrels were caught," he went on. "Of course, they thought I was dead."

"Quite so. Instead of that, my dear Gray, you are very much alive, and all we had to do was to raid the place with the help of a few yokels and take Mr. Wells and Mr. Hughes prisoners. You say you have been after them for a long time?"

"For a month at least," replied the other detective. "They're two of the smartest crooks in England, and they took this house down here to come to when London got a little too hot for them. I got on the scent after a lot of trouble, and sniffed them out."

"With dire results to yourself," put in Kingston.

"I agree!" cried Carson Gray. "I don't excuse myself a scrap. I bungled hopelessly! And if it hadn't been for you," he added, grasping Kingston's hand warmly, "I should have by this time been gently reposing in the mud at the bottom of the river; and I don't mind admitting, I'd rather repose at the bottom of a feather bed. I feel tired!"

THE END.