RALLYING ROUND FIGGINS!

A Grand Complete Tale of School Life in this Issue.

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No. 313.

Vol. 8.

"FIGGINS! WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE—IN THE OLD TOWER—AT THIS TIME OF NIGHT?" EXCLAIMED TOM MERRY IN AMAZEMENT. FIGGINS WAVED HIS HANDS TOWARDS THE BOOKS ON THE OLD OAKEN BENCH, AND THE JUNIORS SUDDENLY UNDERSTOOD. "MY HAT! SWOTTING!" YELLED BLAKE. *(An incident in this week's Grand School Tale.)*

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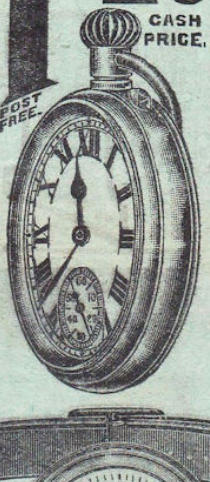

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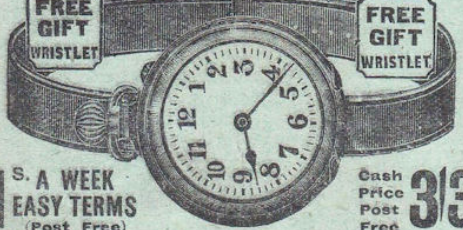

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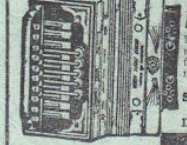

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RALLYING ROUND FIGGINS!

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

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Up the stairs went the juniors, with Figgins shoulder high in their midst. As soon as they were spotted in the Shell passage, there was a throng round them, all cheering the hero of the Abbotsford match. (See Chapter 13.)

CHAPTER 1.
Simply Astounding.

"NOT Figgins!"

"Yes, Figgins!" said Tom Merry solemnly.

"Oh, rats!"

"Yaas, wats!"

"Impossible!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry's news was received with utter incredulity. The crowd of School House fellows to whom he had imparted it chuckled in chorus. Tom Merry was grinning himself. The news was indeed surprising, and Tom Merry had been incredulous at first.

"Who told you?" demanded Blake, of the Fourth.

"I had it from Kerr!"

Blake shook his head.

"It's one of Kerr's little jokes, then—one of his blessed Scotch jokes. Of course, it's impossible. Figgins is an ass—but he's not such an ass!"

"Yaas, wathah!" chimed in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I have always wegarded Figgay as an ass—in fact, as sevewal sorts of an ass—but I weally do not considah that he is such an ass as that!"

"Must be off his giddy rocker, if it's true!" chuckled Levison, of the Fourth. "Not that I believe it. Kerr was pulling your leg!"

"It's the giddy limit!" said Monty Lowther. "Anybody but Figgins!"

"Not Figgins! Ha, ha, ha!"

"I know it's funny," agreed Tom Merry. "But it's true. He's going to take in his name to Mr. Ratcliff this afternoon. To-day's the last day."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ratty will think he is joking."

"Blessed if I can swallow it," said Blake. "Figgy oughtn't to be allowed to make such a giddy ass of himself. What are Kerr and Wynn thinking about? Why don't they stop him?"

"Yaas, wathah! It's a chap's dutay to see that a pal doesn't play the gidday goat!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a shake of the head.

"Yes; we do that for Gussy," remarked Blake. "Lots of times we've chipped in to stop him playing the giddy ox——"

"Weally, Blake——"

"And Kerr and Wynn ought to do as much for Figgy.

Next Wednesday:

"D'ARCY'S MYSTERIOUS PRESENT!" AND "SECRET SERVICE!"

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Why, it'll be the joke of the term. What chance will he have?"

"Nix!"

"Less than nix!"

"Hundred per cent. less than nothing," said Monty Lowther. "Why, what does Figgy know about Horace, for instance?"

"You should hear him construe Cæsar," grinned Blake. "He just scrapes through. And Cæsar to Horace is like moonlight unto sunlight, and water unto wine, as Shakespeare says——"

"Wasn't that Browning?" grinned Herries.

"No, it jolly well wasn't," said Blake warmly. "It was Shakespeare."

"Browning——"

"Shakespeare——"

"Tennyson, you asses!" said Monty Lowther, laughing. "But blow Shakespeare and Browning and Tennyson! What about Figgins? I think a deputation ought to wait on Figgins from all the Lower School, and politely request him not to play the giddy ox."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas, wathah! I should be quite willin' to be chairman of the deputation——"

"I can't quite swallow it yet," said Blake, shaking his head. "Let's go and see Figgins. We'll reason with him. Of course, he's only a New House bounder—but I don't like to see Figgins looking for trouble in this way. Figgy is a good sort, though he's an ass."

"It will be a standing joke for the rest of the term, if he really enters," Manners remarked.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Kerr and Wynn ought to be ragged for letting him do it," said Tom Merry, with a nod. "He won't listen to us! But we'll see him, and try our eloquence on him."

"Good wheeze!"

And Tom Merry & Co. walked across the old quadrangle of St. Jim's, bent upon doing their best with Figgins.

They were really concerned about Figgins.

If Figgins was not pulling the leg of the school generally, he must certainly be off his rocker, or so the juniors regarded it.

Figgins had his qualities. He was chief of the New House juniors, their leader in all their alarums and excursions against the School House; and Tom Merry & Co., of the School House at St. Jim's, admitted that he was a foeman worthy of their steel.

Figgins was as brave as a lion, and generous to both friend and foe. He could swim and run and box and row—and he was a splendid forward, and almost equally good as a half-back. He was a jolly good fellow all round. But in the scholastic line Figgins was not distinguished.

His best friend would never have said that old Figgins was the fellow to enter for a difficult examination with any chance of success.

It was the last thing that anybody would have expected of Figgins. He hadn't a taste for that kind of thing. He was the kind of chap who cannot breathe quite freely indoors. On the footer-field or the river or the running-track he was in his element. But in the class-room he did not shine. Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, to which Form Figgins belonged, did not regard him as a promising pupil. He was industrious and painstaking, and that was all. He had often expressed an opinion that things would go on much better at all schools, if all Latin and German masters were put into a sack and dropped into the North Sea.

And now——

It was enough to take one's breath away. The Bishop's Medal was a much-sought-after distinction. The examination was confined to juniors—and many were the ambitious "swots" who sweated over their books for the purpose of "having a shy" at the Bishop's Medal. The examination was yearly, and there were generally nine or ten entrants. The subjects were "stiff," decidedly so. Fellows like Levison of the Fourth, or Brooke, or Manners of the Shell, had a good chance. But Figgins——

What could have induced Figgins to do it—if he was really going to do it—was a mystery.

He was not as a rule ambitious of distinctions of that kind.

To win a race or a footer match—Figgins had ambitions of that kind. But to win an exam.—that wasn't in his line at all.

Of course, there was no telling what a fellow could do until he really tried. Figgins might turn out a "dark horse." But it wasn't likely.

"Bai Jove! I wondah whethah old Figgay is hard up!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked suddenly, as if he had found the explanation. "They give ten guineas in cash along with the Bishop's Medal, you know."

"My hat!" said Blake. "I'd rather raise a subscription for Figgy than let him swot for that exam., if it's the giddy guineas he wants. He will burst something if he swots over Horace."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It will be in the papers," said Monty Lowther solemnly. "'Shocking fatality at a Public School! Unhappy Junior found Lying Dead upon a Volume of 'Horace.' Death Due to Fatty Degeneration of the Brain!'"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Kerr and Wynn, of the Fourth, were standing in the doorway of the New House when the School House juniors arrived there. Kerr and Wynn—the famous "Co." of the New House—were looking a little less cheerful than usual. Perhaps they were worried about that sudden, new, and unexpected departure of their great chum Figgins.

"Hallo! What do you School House bounders want?" demanded Kerr, a little gruffly.

"Is it true, Kerr?" sang out all the visitors at once.

"Is what true?"

"About Figgins."

"Yes," growled Kerr. "Didn't I tell you, Tom Merry? Figgy's going to put his name down this afternoon, when Ratty comes in."

"But what's the matter with him?" asked Monty Lowther. "Is it insanity, or a weird sense of humour?"

"Oh, rats!" said Kerr crossly. "Don't bother!"

"I suppose we can see Figgins?" asked Blake. "You haven't got him in a strait-jacket yet, have you?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He's in the study," said Kerr. "Writing a letter, I believe. You can go up if you like. No larks, you know, or we'll come and chuck you out on your necks."

"Weally, Kerr——"

"No larks!" said Tom Merry solemnly. "Come in, you fellows!"

And the School House juniors walked in, and ascended the stairs to the Fourth Form passage, and thumped on the door of George Figgins's study.

CHAPTER 2.

Figgins Doesn't Like It.

FIGGINS of the Fourth was seated at his study table. He had a sheet of paper before him on a blotting-pad, and a pen in his hand. Kerr had said that Figgins was writing a letter, and that certainly had been Figgy's intention when he sat down at the table. But, as a matter of absolute fact, Figgins was chewing the handle of the pen, apparently as an aid to composition.

Three words had been written on the sheet, and they were "Dear Cousin Ethel." And there Figgins had stopped, at a dead loss for words.

Then came the thump on his study door. Figgins jumped, and almost swallowed the penholder, and hastily put his hand over the sheet of paper.

"Come in!" he muttered.

The door opened, and Tom Merry & Co. marched in. Figgins had expected some New House fellow or other, and he jumped up in surprise at the sight of the School House crowd. His first thought was that it was a raid, one of the little "alarums and excursions" that enlivened the existence of the rival Houses of St. Jim's. And he picked up a big ebony ruler in a very significant sort of way—thus leaving the letter, with the three written words unconcealed.

Tom Merry waved his hand amicably.

"It's all right, Figgy!" he exclaimed. "We're here as friends—no need for that ruler."

"Wathah not, deah boy!"

Figgins grinned rather awkwardly, and laid down the ruler.

"All serene!" he said. "What's wanted? You fellows will excuse me, I—I'm rather busy now!"

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See column 2, page 27 of this issue.)

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Figgins staggered back, dazed—and like a fellow in a dream he saw the figure of his Form-master standing before him. "So you have returned, Figgins?" said Mr. Ratcliff sternly. (*See Chapter* 14.)

"Workin' up for the exam. alweady, deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sympathetically.

Figgins coloured.

"Not yet," he said

"That's what we've come to see you about," said Jack Blake. "Is it really true, Figgy?"

"Quite twue, deah boy?"

"The truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the giddy truth?" asked Monty Lowther, with great solemnity.

"Is what true?" asked Figgins irritably "Look here——"

"About your entering for the Bishop's Medal," said Tom Merry.

"Yes, it is."

"You're not pulling our leg—eh?"

"No, fathead!"

"It isn't a weird, wild, and wonderful joke?"

"You silly ass——"

"Then what does it mean?" asked Blake. "You've got about as much chance of getting the medal and the ten quidlets——"

"Guineas, deah boy!"

"Shut up! Quidlets, as the man in the moon—rather a smaller chance if anything," said Blake. "Do you know that Brooke of the Fourth has entered?"

"Never mind Brooke!"

"And Levison——"

"Blow Levison!"

"And Kerruish——"

"Hang Kerruish!"

"And some more chaps——"

"Confound the chaps!"

"Ahem!" said Tom Merry. "Figgins, old man, we don't understand. We only want to know, you know. This isn't an exam. in shooting for goal, or in late cuts, or anything of that sort. They spring Horace on you—giddy Horatius Flaccus, wild and untamed——"

"I know they do!" said Figgins crossly. "Why shouldn't I mug up Horace as well as any other chap?"

"Ahem! No reason why you shouldn't, excepting that you couldn't. Figgy, old boy, we are quite alarmed about you!"

"That way madness lies!" murmured Lowther.

"If you start swotting for this medal you'll have brain fever, or burst a boiler, or something of the sort!" said Tom Merry seriously. "Then what shall we do without you, Figgins? The New House will go to pot, and we sha'n't have anybody left to rag. Think of us, Figgy, before you do this dreadful thing."

"Yaas, weflect a little, Figgay, deah boy!"

"Don't bring down our grey whiskers with sorrow to the crematorium!" murmured Monty Lowther. "Rash youth, beware!"

Figgins turned very red. He had heard remarks like that

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from fellows in his own House, when he had first announced his intention of entering for the Bishop's Medal. But it was too exasperating to have the School House going for him too—Pelion piled on Ossa, so to speak.

"I'm much obliged to you for your good advice," said Figgins, as calmly as he could. "I know you think me an ass——"

"He's a giddy thought-reader!" whispered Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I know you think I can't do anything but row a boat, or kick a football, or whack a cricket-ball with a bat," said Figgins bitterly. "Yes, I know that. But there may be other people—people with more sense than you—who think that I can do something with some sense in it?"

The juniors stared at him.

"Isn't there any sense in kicking for goal, then?" demanded Blake warmly.

"I mean, something that requires brains as well as muscle," said Figgins. "I think I've got a chance of bringing it off."

"Oh, my hat!"

"And I don't see that it matters to you chaps, anyway," said Figgins bluntly.

"We've come over as your friends—as your sorrowing friends," said Monty Lowther. "We're sorry to see you on the road to Colney Hatch in this way. And we didn't really believe it; we wanted it to be confirmed, straight from the horse's mouth—ahem!—I should say, from the donkey's mouth!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins pointed to the door.

"I dare say you're very funny!" he said. "But I'm rather busy now, and I've no time for your funniness. Would you mind getting out?"

The visitors exchanged glances.

"Ahem—certainly!" said Tom Merry. "Don't mind our little jokes, Figgy. If you're really going in for the medal, we wish you luck!"

"Yaas, wathah! I'm only sowwy that impossibilities cannot happen, for your sake, Figgay!"

"Better have a medical man to feel your pulse every now and then, while you're studying," said Lowther anxiously. "We don't want to lose our Figgins."

"Oh, clear out!" said Figgins crossly.

The good-tempered, good-natured Figgins, who was always cheery and genial, was cutting up rusty! There was no doubt about that.

"I suppose you've got a reason for this, Figgy?" Blake asked.

"Yes, I have!"

"May an old pal ask the giddy reason?"

"No!"

"Oh!" said Blake.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "You will excuse me, Figgins, I have just caught sight of that lettah. If you don't want people to see your lettahs, you should not leave them lyin' open on the table, you know. It's wathah too late to covah it up with your fist," added Arthur Augustus, as Figgins, flushing crimson, placed his hand again over the letter. "I am sowwy that I saw it, as it was not intended for my eyes; but now that I have seen it, I must beg to be allowed to ask you a question."

"Oh, rats!" said Figgins.

"I was not aware," said D'Arcy, with great dignity, "that you had a cousin named Ethel."

"I haven't," said Figgins.

"Then I pwesume that it is to my Cousin Ethel that you are w'itin' that lattah?" said Arthur Augustus, in his most stately manner.

"You can presume what you like!" growled Figgins.

"Weally, Figgins, I have wemarked befoah that you seem to considah Miss Cleveland wathah as your cousin than as my cousin——"

"Oh, bosh!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's eye gleamed behind his eyeglass.

"I came here as a fwiend, Figgins," he said, in measured tones. "But if you chawactewise my wemarks as bosh, I shall have no wesource but to give you a feahful thwashin'."

"Oh, get out!"

"I wefuse to get out. I have a wight to an explanation——"

"Will you take that lunatic away, or must I chuck him out on his neck?" asked Figgins, looking round.

"We'll take him away," said Tom Merry, laughing. "Come on, Gussy——"

"Undah the circs., unless Figgins apologises——"

"Kim on!" said Blake, taking his noble chum by the arm. "This way to the door. Good-bye, Figgins, and don't forget to tie a wet towel round your head when you begin swotting! And when brain-fever sets in——"

"Cheese it!" growled Figgins.

"I wefuse to go until——"

Arthur Augustus had no time to finish. Tom Merry took his other arm, and Blake and Tom between them walked the swell of St. Jim's out of the study. The other fellows followed; Figgins watching them go with a frowning brow. When they were gone, he slammed the door after them, grunted, and sat down to his letter again. He chewed the handle of the pen for some time, and then succeeded in starting:

"Dear Cousin Ethel,—I have taken your advice, and I'm putting my name down to-day for the Bishop's Medal. I'm going to work hard for it, and I hope——" Then the chewing of the pen-handle started again, and lasted quite a considerable time.

Meanwhile, Tom Merry & Co. had descended the stairs, Arthur Augustus still expostulating. But his comrades did not listen to his expostulations, and he was marched out of the New House by main force, and across the quadrangle.

Then the news spread.

And all St. Jim's, when they heard that Figgins was entering for the Bishop's Medal, expressed their surprise on the subject with prolonged chuckles.

Some fellows refused to believe it, and went over to see Figgins about it; but Figgins was "sporting his oak" now, and there was no admittance of curious investigators.

The news was true. Figgins, who was generally supposed not to be able to scrape through Cæsar without a crib, was going the whole hog with a vengeance, or, as Monty Lowther expressed it, Figgins, the champion duffer of the Fourth, was going the whole giddy unicorn. And the St. Jim's fellows agreed that wonders would never cease.

CHAPTER 3.
The Scoffers!

"COME in!" said Mr. Ratcliff.

Mr. Ratcliff, the Housemaster of the New House at St. Jim's, laid down his pen somewhat impatiently. Mr. Ratcliff was not a good-tempered master—indeed, he was decidedly the reverse. He was a thin, sour man, with an almost perpetual frown, a troublesome liver, and a consequently troublesome temper.

Figgins entered the study.

Mr. Ratcliff's expression did not relax at the sight of Figgins. He did not like Figgins of the Fourth. The free and easy Figgins was really not likely to please the sour and suspicious Housemaster.

"Well," rapped out Mr. Ratcliff, "what is it Figgins? I am busy."

Figgins stood hesitating, his cheeks very red.

"If you please, sir——"

"Kindly come to the point."

"I want you to put my name down, sir."

"What do you mean? For what?"

"For the Bishop's Medal exam., sir!" blurted out Figgins. Then he stood with scarlet cheeks, wondering what the Housemaster would think, and what he would say.

Mr. Ratcliff was evidently astonished. He swung round a little on his chair, and looked fixedly at Figgins. Figgy felt his face growing redder and redder under the penetrating gaze of the Housemaster.

"The Bishop's Medal!" Mr. Ratcliff exclaimed at last.

"Yes, sir. This is the last day for entering."

"I am aware of that. I am only surprised that you should think of entering at all!" said Mr. Ratcliff snappishly. "What are your qualifications for such an examination?"

"I—I'm afraid, sir—but I'm going to work hard!"

"That will be quite a new line for you to take, I think, Figgins. You are not, I believe, a credit to your Form in classics."

"I'm afraid not, sir."

"I think it is absurd for you to enter for this examination. You will have no chance whatever from your record in the school!" said the Housemaster harshly. "You will simply bring ridicule upon your House by an absurd attempt, which can only end in ridiculous failure."

Poor Figgins was the colour of a beetroot now. He had expected his Housemaster to be surprised, but he had not expected an outbreak like this. He suspected, however, that Ratty's personal dislike of himself had something to do with it, and Figgins, modest and unassuming fellow as he was, had plenty of determination. He had come there to have his name put down for the Bishop's Medal exam., and he meant to have it put down. Mr. Ratcliff's remarks made him uncomfortable, but none the less determined.

"I am sorry you don't think I have a chance, sir," said Figgins at last.

FERRERS LOCKE, DETECTIVE is the principal character in one of the complete stories contained in CHUCKLES, ½d.

"Do you think you have any yourself?"

"I hope so, sir."

"Then you are very sanguine!" said Mr. Ratcliff, with bitter sarcasm. "I think you should not enter. I do not like the boys of my House to record failures, especially egregious and ridiculous failures, such as yours will be. It is bad for the House, and not at all to the credit of the Housemaster. I therefore advise you to think no more of this."

And Mr. Ratcliff picked up his pen, and turned back to his writing, as if the affair was wholly disposed of.

But it wasn't! Figgins was silent for a moment or two, but his purpose had not wavered.

"You may go!" said Mr. Ratcliff, half-turning his head.

"If you please, sir, I'd rather you put my name down."

"What!"

"I prefer to take my chance with the exam., sir."

Mr. Ratcliff gave the junior a terrific look. That Figgins would have the nerve to persist in the face of his displeasure had not even occurred to him. Figgy was standing upon his rights, and he meant business, though his manner was very respectful.

"You mean that you wish to enter this examination against my advice?" exclaimed the Housemaster angrily.

"I wish to enter it, sir."

Mr. Ratcliff gnawed his lip.

"I cannot forbid you to do so, Figgins, as the examination is open to all boys in the Fourth and the Shell. But I disapprove entirely."

"I am sorry for that, sir."

"But it makes no difference to your decision?" exclaimed the Housemaster sharply.

"I think I'd like to try, sir."

"Very well," said Mr. Ratcliff, compressing his lips. "You may enter, if you choose to do so against my wish; but I shall not forget this, Figgins. I will put your name down. You may go!"

"Thank you, sir."

Figgins quitted the study, and closed the door after him. His face was very glum and gloomy as he went down the passage. Kerr and Wynn met him at the end of the passage with inquiring looks.

"Name down?" Kerr asked.

"Yes."

"Ratty nice about it?"

"About as nasty as he could be," said Figgins. "He as good as ordered me not to enter, but I stuck to it. I've left him awfully ratty. He thinks I shall make a fool of myself, and count another failure in the House record."

"Well, it's no business of Ratty's, anyway," said Fatty Wynn. "Go in and—and win, Figgy."

Figgins smiled bitterly.

"You chaps think just the same about it as Ratty does," he said. "You don't think I can do anything but slog a cricket-ball or kick a footer about."

"Well, exams. ain't exactly in your line, Figgy, old man," said Kerr awkwardly. "I'm sure I wish you luck."

"Heaps of it," said Fatty Wynn. "Besides, you never know what may happen. The other chaps in the exam. may turn out rank duffers."

Figgins smiled grimly. Fatty Wynn meant to be comforting; but there really was not much comfort in the way he put it.

"Well, I think I have a chance," said Figgins, "and I'm going to slog my hardest, anyway, and win if I can. I don't see why I shouldn't be good for something more than a footer-match. My people would be awfully pleased if I pulled it off. Why shouldn't I?"

"Of course, why shouldn't you?" agreed Kerr, as heartily as he could.

Figgins grunted, and they sauntered out into the quadrangle together. Fatty Wynn led their steps in the direction of the tuckshop.

The dusk of evening was falling on St. Jim's, and the tuckshop was lighted, and the cheery illumination gleamed out on the old elms. There were School House fellows in the tuckshop, and a loud laugh was heard when they spotted Figgins & Co. approaching. It was Levison of the Fourth, himself an entrant for the Bishop's Medal, who spotted them, and sang out.

"Here comes the medal-pincher!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Listen to 'em!" growled Figgins. "I must say this is encouraging. The whole blessed School House making fun of me, and my own chums thinking that I'm playing the giddy ox."

"Well, you are, you know," said Fatty Wynn. "I—I—I mean, of—of course we're going to—to believe in you, and—and back you up—ahem!—we——"

"Oh, rats!" growled Figgins.

There was a sudden burst of melody from the tuckshop. Four or five fellows had burst into a tune—the tune of "Bill Bailey"—to which someone, probably Lowther of the Shell, had fitted new words for the occasion.

"Don't play the goat, George Figgins—don't play the goat!
Don't play the giddy o-ox!
You'll only get a licking, you will be licked,
Licked right out of your so-ocks!"

Kerr and Wynn chuckled—they could not help it; but George Figgins's face was crimson. Figgins evidently did not appreciate Monty Lowthers humorous efforts.

"The silly rotters!" growled Figgins. "I'm not going to stand this cheek from the School House. It's bad enough to have my own pals doing the Job's comforter bizney. Back me up, and we'll soon stop their squalling!"

And Figgins rushed into the tuckshop. Kerr and Wynn followed him loyally.

Monty Lowther was seated upon a high stool at the counter, and Herries and Digby of the Fourth were standing near him. Levison and Gore were also there. The odds were against the New House trio; but Figgins was too exasperated to think of odds.

He rushed right at Monty Lowther, caught hold of him, and yanked him off the high stool. As Monty Lowther was just refreshing himself with a glass of ginger-beer after his tuneful efforts, the result was disastrous.

Swoosh! came the ginger-beer over Lowther's face and neck, and the glass dropped to the floor and smashed into fifty pieces.

Monty Lowther was on the floor the next moment, roaring.

"Ow! Fathead! Yow! Grooh! Rescue!"

Digby and Herries and Gore rushed to his aid at once, and Kerr and Wynn piled in instantly, and there was a wild struggle. Levison quietly slipped out of the tuckshop. Rough-and-tumble tussles were not in his line when he could avoid them. But four School House fellows remained to deal with Figgins & Co., and numbers told.

Lowther had clutched hold of Figgins, and was rolling on the floor with him, to the great damage of the clothes of both the juniors.

Gore had closed with Fatty Wynn, and they were wrestling furiously; and Digby and Herries had collared Kerr.

In two minutes the three New House juniors were on their backs in the sawdust on the floor, and four School House fellows were sprawling over them, pinning them down, and chortling victoriously between their gasps.

CHAPTER 4.

School House Against New House!

MONTY LOWTHER grinned cheerfully down at Figgins, as the chief of the New House writhed under him. Figgins was furious; but Lowther was quite good-tempered. Herries had lent him a hand in getting Figgins under, and now Lowther was seated on his chest, and the long-limbed junior was helpless.

"Lemme gerrup!" Figgins murmured sulphurously.

Lowther shook his head.

"Not this evening," he said genially. "Some other evening."

"You—you School House rotter——"

"Shush!" said Lowther. "Look at my face! See the ginger-beer you've wasted? What do you mean by rushing at me like a wild bull, simply because I was exercising my vocal gifts?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I—I'll pulverise you!" panted Figgins.

"Shush!" said Lowther chidingly. "Now, don't be ratty—I'm not going to hurt you. I'm going to sing you a song instead."

"Look here——"

"Don't play the goat, George Figgins—don't play the goat!" sang Lowther, while his companions roared with laughter.

Figgins struggled desperately to release himself. Lowther had to exert his strength to keep him down, and so the next line came out in spasmodic jerks.

"D-d-do-o-n't p-p-play th-the g-g-g-g-gid-d-d-dy o-o-ox!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Let me up!" howled Figgins.

"Shush!"

"I'll smash you! I'll—— Rescue, New House!" yelled Figgins, in the hope that some fellows of his own House might be within hearing.

"Give me a glass of ginger-beer, Mrs. Taggles, please!" said Monty Lowther. Mrs. Taggles was regarding the scene from behind her little counter with uplifted hands.

"What for, Master Lowther?" faltered the good lady.

"I'm going to give it to Figgins!"

"Don't give it to him, Mrs. Taggles!" roared Figgins. "The beast wants to swamp it over me!"

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"Shurrup!" said Lowther. "I suppose one good turn deserves another, doesn't it? Buck up with that ginger-beer, Mrs. Taggles, please!"

Mrs. Taggles shook her head.

"Rescue, New House!" shouted Figgins again.

An eyeglass gleamed in at the door, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy glanced over the scene in surprise and amusement.

"Bai Jove! Is that a game?" he asked.

Lowther nodded.

"Yes; we're playing at ragging the New House bounders," he said. "Figgins rushed in where angels fear to tread, and now he's getting it in the neck. Will you hand me a soda syphon, Gussy? Mrs. Taggles is neglecting me!"

"Oh, Master Lowther——" murmured Dame Taggles.

"With pleasuah, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus, crossing towards the counter. "Do you like sodah, Figgay, deah boy?"

"You—you rotters! Rescue!" howled Figgins.

Redfern, Lawrence, and Owen of the New House, looked in. They had heard Figgins's cry for rescue, and rushed across at once. There was rivalry in the New House between the two Co.'s; but against the School House they were as brothers.

"Keep 'em out, Gussy!" shouted Lowther.

Arthur Augustus ran back to the door, with the soda-syphon in his hands.

"Keep out, you wottahs!" he exclaimed, raising the syphon menacingly. "I shall swamp you if you—— Bai Jove!"

Swoosh! went the soda-water, and Redfern & Co. rushed in, Redfern caught it full in the face, and staggered back; but Lawrence and Owen were upon Arthur Augustus in a moment, and the soda-syphon was whirled away by Owen, while Lawrence bumped the swell of St. Jim's over upon the floor.

"Yawooh!" roared D'Arcy, as he went down. "Bai Jove! Help!"

Swoosh! Swhissh! Owen turned the syphon upon the swell of St. Jim's, and Arthur Augustus rolled over madly in the midst of a swamping shower of soda-water.

"Gewwooh! Stoppit! Chuckit! You'll wuin my clothes! Gweat Scott! Ow!"

"Yow!" roared Lowther, as the grinning Owen turned the syphon upon him, and a stream caught him under the ear. "Yow-ow!"

The syphon gurgled in an expiring manner; it was exhausted. The New House juniors were already piling in to the rescue of Figgins & Co., and Owen dropped the syphon and joined them.

Lowther and Herries and Digby and Gore fought desperately; but the odds were now heavily against them.

One after another they were thrown out of the tuckshop, and rolled on the ground outside.

Arthur Augustus was the first to go; and as he sprawled helplessly on the ground, his comrades came tossing out, one after another, sprawling over him and over one another.

There was a chorus of gasps, and yells, and roars.

"Yawooh! Help! Gewwoff!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Gerroff my chest!"

"Keep your blessed elbow out of my eye!"

"Ow! Wescue!"

The New House juniors crowded the doorway of the tuckshop, yelling with laughter. The School House fellows scrambled up, untidy and breathless, and crimson with exertion and fury. Figgins waved his hand to them.

"Come back!" he said. "Come on—we're waiting for you!"

"You uttah wottahs! I shall give you a feahful thwashin'! Back me up, deah boys!" shouted Arthur Augustus.

And the swell of St. Jim's rushed fiercely to the attack.

He was promptly collared, and hurled forth, and he gave a loud yell as he went spinning along the ground.

But by this time the alarm had spread, and School House juniors were running up on all sides. New House fellows were also arriving, and there was every prospect of a general battle, in which the tuckshop would be reduced to wreck and ruin.

"Have the bounders out of there!" shouted Jack Blake.

"Come on!" roared Tom Merry.

"Back up, New House!" shouted Figgins.

Kildare of the Sixth, the captain of St. Jim's, came striding from the direction of the School House, as the rival juniors closed in combat. The uproar had reached him, and he had thoughtfully brought a cane with him. At the same time Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, arrived upon the scene from another direction.

The two prefects exchanged a glance, and, without wasting time in words, they started restoring order.

Slash, slash, slash!

Whack, whack, whack!

With great impartiality they lashed and whacked at every junior within reach, and there were loud yells of anguish from the recipients.

The combat ceased as if by magic, and the juniors ran and dodged hither and thither to avoid the lashing canes.

In one minute or less the ground was clear, excepting for a few scattered caps.

Kildare and Monteith exchanged a grin, and went back to their Houses

"Ow!" groaned Monty Lowther, as he came into the study of the School House. "Ow! I've got a cut across my arm, and another across my back, and another——"

"Never mind," said Tom Merry cheerfully, "we should have licked the New House. But what was the row about?"

"Figgins got his rag out," said Lowther, chuckling. "He's touchy about that blessed exam., you know. Came for me like a giddy wild elephant."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Poor old Figgins! I say, you chaps, if he cuts up rusty about it, better not chip him."

"Oh, rats!" said Lowther warmly. "Must have our little joke. I'm thinking of doing some comic paragraphs on the subject for the next number of the 'Weekly.'"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Oh, ring off, Monty! Poor old Figgy will have enough to worry about if he's really going to swot for that exam. You've been over last year's papers, Manners—it's jolly hard, isn't it?"

"Jolly hard," said Manners, with a nod. "I don't know that I shall pull it off this year—but as for Figgins, he hasn't an earthly."

"Not a ghostly!" agreed Tom Merry. "But we'll give him a quiet time while he's trying, you know. That's only playing the game. Now, Monty, don't chip him any more."

"Oh, br-r-r-r-r!" said Monty Lowther discontentedly. To the mind of the humorist of the Shell, a joke came before anything else, and he had foreseen immense possibilities of fun in Figgy's strange and unaccountable outbreak.

"Come, Monty, what do you say?"

"Rats!" said Lowther, laughing.

"Now, look here——"

"My hat—I'd better go and wash this blessed ginger-beer out of my neck," said Monty Lowther.

And he quitted the study.

CHAPTER 5.
Helping Figgins!

FIGGINS started.

It was the day after the row in the tuckshop.

Figgins was at work in his study.

Kerr and Wynn had kindly left him the study to himself, as he wanted to swot—and Figgins was swotting.

The light that burned in the study gleamed out over the dusk of the quadrangle, and showed all who cared to know that Figgy was swotting for the Bishop's Medal exam.

Swotting was new to Figgins.

In spite of himself, his thoughts would wander. His mind left the almost impenetrable pages of Horace, and wandered to football-fields, and the river, and the fives-court, or to the rehearsal of the Amateur Dramatic Society that he was missing.

But every time he found his attention wandering, Figgins pulled himself up with a jerk, and slogged away again.

Horace was hard for him, there was no doubt about that. When Cæsar observed that all Gaul was divided into three parts, Figgins could understand him quite easily; but when Horatius Flaccus declared that if Mæcenas ranked him among the poets, he would strike the stars with his sublime head, Figgins found it difficult to disentangle his meaning.

But he meant to do it, and he slogged away.

He could not help reflecting bitterly that if he had been a School House chap, he would have received encouragement and assistance from Mr. Railton, the School House master; while from Mr. Ratcliff he had received nothing but contemptuous disdain.

But that had the effect of spurring Figgins on. Besides his other reasons for wanting to succeed, he wanted to show the New House master that he wasn't such a dunce after all.

"Hunc, si mobilium turba Quiritium," said Figgins dole-

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fully. "Queer how easy all this is to Kerr, and how jolly hard to me! I s'pose we ain't built the same way—— Hallo! What's that?"

Then he started.

There was a clink of a pebble on his window, and Figgins frowned. He guessed that it was some chipping from the School House fellows. Chipping he did not mind in itself, but he did not want his studies interrupted and his time wasted. He crossed to the window and through up the sash, and peered down into the dusky quadrangle.

"Who's there?" he called out.

"Us!" came back the cheery voice of Monty Lowther.

Figgins frowned as he blinked down in the dusk. He could make out the forms of four juniors, and he saw that they all had musical instruments. Jack Blake had a flute, Manners a violin, Monty Lowther a kettle-drum, and Digby a tin whistle.

"Look here," called out Figgins; "clear off, like good chaps! I'm hard at work."

"We're going to back you up," explained Lowther. "This is my ragtime band. You will work ever so much better to music."

"I tell you——"

"It will cheer you up, you know, and make you feel no end better," remarked Jack Blake. "We shall also sing appropriate words."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If I come down to you, you'll get hurt!" roared Figgins, his temper beginning to rise.

"'Music hath charms to soothe the savage beast,'" replied Lowther. "We'll give it a chance, anyway. Strike up!"

The ragtime band struck up.

They played one of the latest importations from New York, the "Crabs' Glide"; but as the instruments did not all agree with one another in time or in tune, it might just as easily have been the "Lobsters' Crawl" or the "Bunny's Roll."

Figgins put his fingers in his ears and yelled.

"Stop it! Clear off!"

Blare! went the band.

"Will you go away?" shrieked Figgins, as there came a momentary pause in the music.

"We're helping you," said Lowther. "We're doing this out of kindness. It isn't often the biggest duffer in the school goes in for an exam. Naturally, we want to celebrate the occasion."

"We'll play slow time if you like," chuckled Blake. "It will keep pace with your construing."

"It would have to be slower than a funeral march for that," said Monty Lowther, with a shake of the head. "Better give Figgy something jolly, and buck him up."

"Start again," said Digby.

Blare!

Figgins stepped away from the window. It was really too bad, and he was utterly exasperated. The juniors did not take his candidature for the Bishop's Medal with the slightest degree of seriousness, and so they had no thought of doing any harm by ragging him. But to Figgins, whose "swotting" was a very serious matter indeed, the blare of the ragtime band was quite a different matter. He felt that every hour's study he lost decreased his chances—probably not very good in any case.

Blare, blare!

Figgins hurried out of the study, and sped into the nearest bath-room, and returned in a couple of minutes with a large can of water.

Then he stepped to the window, keeping the can out of sight.

The ragtime band was playing away merrily.

Figgins raised the big, heavy can to the window-sill, and before the ragtimers could guess what was coming he tilted it forward.

The water shot out in a swooping stream, and descended in a flood upon the unhappy bandsmen.

Swoooooosh!

"Gr-r-r-r-r-r-r-rh!"

"Oh! Ow! I'm drenched! Ow! Ah!"

"Yarooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins from the window. "How do you like that? Do you want any more?"

The drenched bandsmen glared up at him furiously.

"You ungrateful beast!" shouted Lowther. "This is the last time I'll try to help you with your studies!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins. "You look wet!"

The raggers did look wet—and they felt wet too. They shook their fists up at Figgins's window, but they could do no more; there was no way of getting at Figgins. And they were drenched from their heads almost to their feet, and the cold evening wind was making itself felt.

With sulphurous remarks concerning Figgins, the ragtimers beat a retreat across the quad., followed by a yell of laughter from Figgins's window.

Figgins returned to his table in a much better humour. The laugh had done him good, and cleared away some of his depression.

He wired into Horace with increased keenness.

And for the rest of that evening he was not worried by any further raggings from the School House.

CHAPTER 6.

Cousin Ethel's Opinion.

"EVEWYTHIN' weady—what?"

Thus Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Study No. 6, in the Fourth-Form passage in the School House, was presenting an unusual aspect of tidiness, cleanliness, and festivity

The grate had been swept clear of ashes, fragments of paper, and slippers and things. The mantelpiece had been dusted. A bright, clean tablecloth, especially borrowed from Mrs. Mimms, the house-dame, gleamed upon the table. Bright, clean crockeryware gleamed upon the tablecloth. There were cups and saucers of all varieties of pattern, borrowed from studies in the Fourth and the Shell. Cups in bright crimson stood in saucers of dark-green, along with a blue milk-jug and a pink sugar-basin. But, as Jack Blake remarked, the effect was very bright, and really good—quite in the style of an impressionist picture.

The unusual preparations in Study No. 6 were, of course, an indication that an unusual visitor was expected.

The visitor was already in the Head's house, staying with Mrs. Holmes, but she had consented to come to tea in Study No. 6.

Needless to say, the expected visitor, on whose account the juniors had made such almost unheard-of efforts of tidiness and preparation, was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's charming cousin, Ethel Cleveland.

Ethel was expected every moment, and the Co. were ready.

Blake, and Herries, and Digby, and D'Arcy, the owners of the study, were looking very neat and clean and tidy, Arthur Augustus especially being a perfect picture of elegance.

The Terrible Three of the Shell—Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther—had a nice, newly-brushed look, and their hair was very tidy and neat.

"All here—eh?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yaas, exceptin' Ethel."

"No more chaps coming?" asked Tom.

"I did not want too big a crowd, deah boy. I asked Kangawooh, but he has gone out on his bike with Dane and Glyn."

"Any New House chaps?"

Arthur Augustus frowned.

"I weally did not think it necessary to ask any New House chaps, Tom Mewwy."

"I was thinking that Figgins——"

"I weally do not know why Figgins should be supposed to have come here whenevah my cousin comes. You seem to wegard Ethel as Figgins's cousin, and not as mine at all."

"It's all right," Blake remarked. "I've asked him."

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass upon his chum with a frigid stare.

"You have had the awful cheek, Blake, to ask Figgins to come ovah heah and meet my cousin?" he exclaimed.

Blake shook his head.

"Certainly not!"

Arthur Augustus looked relieved.

"Oh, that's all wight, then!" he said. "But you remarked that you had asked him, Blake."

"I haven't asked him here to meet your cousin," Blake explained. "I've asked him here to tea."

There was a chuckle in Study No. 6. All the juniors knew of Figgins's desire to seek the company of Miss Cleveland, for some reason best known to himself, and they all sympathised with Figgy. Arthur Augustus, however, seemed to be a little obtuse or else obstinate upon the point.

"You have asked that New House boundah to tea, Blake?"

"Yes. I suppose I can ask a chap to tea in my own study if I like can't I?" exclaimed Blake, in astonishment. "Of course I shouldn't ask a fellow to meet your cousin without consulting you. It would be a cheek. But I suppose I can have a friend in to tea?"

"You know perfectly well, you ass, that Figgins cannot come to tea without meetin' Cousin Ethel, as Cousin Ethel is comin' to tea."

"Yes. That's what you'd call a coincidence, isn't it?" said Blake, with a nod. "These coincidences will happen, you know; they can't be helped."

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"Two separate objects, moving towards the same spot, are bound to meet in the long run," said Monty Lowther solemnly. "I don't know whether that's in Euclid; but it's a fact."

"Undah the circs., Blake, I must wequest you to wequest your fwiend Figgins to postpone his visit——"

"Rats!" said Blake cheerfully.

"If you say wats to me——"

"And many of 'em!" added Blake.

"I shall be sowwy, Blake, to thwash you just when we are expectin' a laday visitah, but, under the circs., I considah——"

"You'll be doing your considering under the table, if you don't ring off!" said Blake. "Now, shut up, and butter the toast!"

"I wefuse to buttah the toast! I wefuse——"

"Cheese it!"

"I decline to cheese it! I wepeat that I do not wegard Figgins——"

"Ring off, for goodness' sake!" said Herries. "Bump him over, and sit on him!"

"You uttah wottah!" shouted Arthur Augustus indignantly, shaking a wrathful fist at Herries across the table. "I——"

"Good-afternoon!"

It was a sweet and gentle voice at the doorway.

Cousin Ethel looked into the study.

Arthur Augustus, taken by surprise, remained as if petrified for a moment, his clenched fist extended across the table towards Herries's grinning face.

Then he suddenly dropped it to his side and swung round, his countenance turning a bright crimson as he met Cousin Ethel's glance.

"G-g-good-aftahnoon, deah gal!" he stammered. "I—I—I——"

"So good of you to come," said Blake. "Chuck it, Gussy; you can finish your gymnastics afterwards!"

Arthur Augustus almost choked.

"Weally, Blake, I—I—— Ethel, deah gal, I feah that you saw me in a wathah suspicious attitude. I—I was showing Hewwies how to—to—to——"

"How to play the giddy ox!" said Herries.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Hewwies—weally—— Ethel, I—ah—— Hallo, Figgins, deah boy! How do you do?"

Arthur Augustus was quite grateful to Figgins for entering at that moment.

Figgins seemed a little surprised by the warmth of his greeting, but he was pleased by it.

"Pway sit down, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus, dragging up a chair to the table. "Heah you are!"

And, in his confusion and agitation, Arthur Augustus placed Figgins's chair next to Cousin Ethel's—a thing he had certainly never intended to do. He saw his mistake as Figgy sat down—as Figgy very promptly did.

"Figgay, deah boy, pewwaps you'd wathah be nearah the fiah——"

"Not at all!" said Figgins affably. "This is quite comfy!"

"Sure you are not in a dwaught there?" asked D'Arcy anxiously.

"Quite sure, thanks!"

And Arthur Augustus gave it up. Tea proceeded very merrily, the juniors vying with one another in attending to Cousin Ethel, and looking after her requirements. If Miss Cleveland had eaten one quarter of the good things her hosts wanted to help her to, she would have put Fatty Wynn, of the New House, quite in the shade.

"By the way," Blake remarked presently, "Figgy's got some news for you!"

Figgins flushed, as Cousin Ethel's eyes turned upon him.

"Blake means that I've entered for the Bishop's Medal," said Figgins.

"Yes; I'm so glad!" said Ethel. "I knew that already," she added, in her frank way. "Figgins wrote and told me—didn't you?"

"Yes," said Figgins. "I only wish I could have told you that I thought I had a look-in."

"But you have a good chance," said Ethel, "and you will work hard. And all your friends will back you up, and help you to work hard for the exam."

The juniors looked at one another rather curiously, and Monty Lowther turned a little pink. Certainly, so far, their efforts in connection with the matter had not been exactly directed towards backing up Figgins.

"Ahem!" murmured Blake. "We—we—we're going to, of course!"

"Yes, rather!" said Tom Merry.

"Of course, we all wish Figgy luck!"

"Yaas; we all wish he could perform impossibilities and things, bai Jove!"

"Excepting me!" grinned Manners. "I'm in the exam. myself, you know, so I can't quite hope that Figgy will pull it off. I hope he'll be second!"

"Thanks!" said Figgins. "The same to you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Cousin Ethel's opinion that Figgy had a chance for the exam. made a curious difference in the point of view of the juniors. They had not thought of taking Figgy seriously before. But if Cousin Ethel took him seriously, there was certainly no reason why they should not. They all had a very deep respect for Ethel's judgment.

When tea was over, Arthur Augustus rose to walk with his cousin to the Head's house. Figgins rose with the same object.

Arthur Augustus's eyeglass gleamed at the New House junior.

"Comin' as fah as the door, Figgay?" he asked politely but significantly.

"Ye-es," murmured Figgins.

And the juniors stood up and said "Au revoir!" to Cousin Ethel, and she walked away with Arthur Augustus and Figgins. And at the door of the School House Figgins had to say good-bye, comforted, however, by the knowledge that Ethel was staying the night with Mrs. Holmes, and that he might see her on the morrow.

Figgins went off disconsolately towards the New House, and Arthur Augustus escorted his cousin through the dusky quad. towards the Head's private entrance.

"I want to speak to you, Arthur," Cousin Ethel said, slackening her pace.

"Yaas, deah gal?"

"It's about that examination."

"Oh, Figgins!" said D'Arcy carelessly.

"Yes. You don't think he has much chance?"

"Well, he's wathah a duffah, you know! And it's a vewy hard exam. I don't weally feel suah that I should pull it off myself if I entahed."

Cousin Ethel smiled.

"But Figgins may succeed, if he works hard——"

"Swottin' ain't much in his line, deah gal."

"His father would be very pleased, and it would be a good thing for Figgins in the school, too. I suppose you all help him as much as you can when he studies, and see that he is not interrupted by pranks, or anything of that kind?"

Arthur Augustus stammered a little.

"Well, as a mattah of fact, deah gal, he's been wathah wagged about it," he admitted.

Cousin Ethel's sweet face became very serious. Probably she had guessed that already.

"Arthur dear, don't you think that is a shame, when Figgins is trying to do serious work for the first time?"

"But it's all wot, you know. He can't do it."

"But he is trying."

"Yaas; he's twyin'," admitted D'Arcy.

"Then isn't it a shame that he isn't given a chance?"

"Yaas; I suppose it is," agreed Arthur Augustus. "If we considahed the thing sewiously, of course, we should back him up."

"Then consider it seriously. You like Figgins, don't you?"

"Ah—er—ahem—yaas, I suppose so!" said Arthur Augustus, rather taken aback by the question. "He is wathah a cheekay ass in some things, but he is a jolly good fellow. A chap can't weally help likin' Figgins, somehow!"

Cousin Ethel gave him the sweetest smile she had ever bestowed upon him.

"Then why not take it very seriously, and back him up, and see that all your friends do, Arthur? It would be generous, and like you!"

"Any old thing," said Arthur Augustus, "if you weally think I ought——"

"I think it would be kind and generous of you!"

"Done!" said Arthur Augustus. "Aftah all, miwacles have happened befoah, so why shouldn't Figgay bwing off the exam., pewwaps? Anyway, I'm goin' to wally wound him, and I'll see that the othah chaps back up, too, and wally wound old Figgins!"

And Cousin Ethel's face was very bright as she bade her cousin good-night, and went into the Head's house.

Arthur Augustus was looking unusually serious as he made his way back to Study No. 6. It was impossible for Arthur Augustus to refuse anything asked by a feminine tongue, and Ethel had made him see quite clearly that it would only be the decent thing to help old Figgins now that he was struggling with a heavy task; but Arthur Augustus was a little doubtful about how the other fellows would look at it.

However, he had made up his noble mind on one point—whatever the other fellows did or didn't do, he was going to keep his word to Cousin Ethel, and rally round old Figgins.

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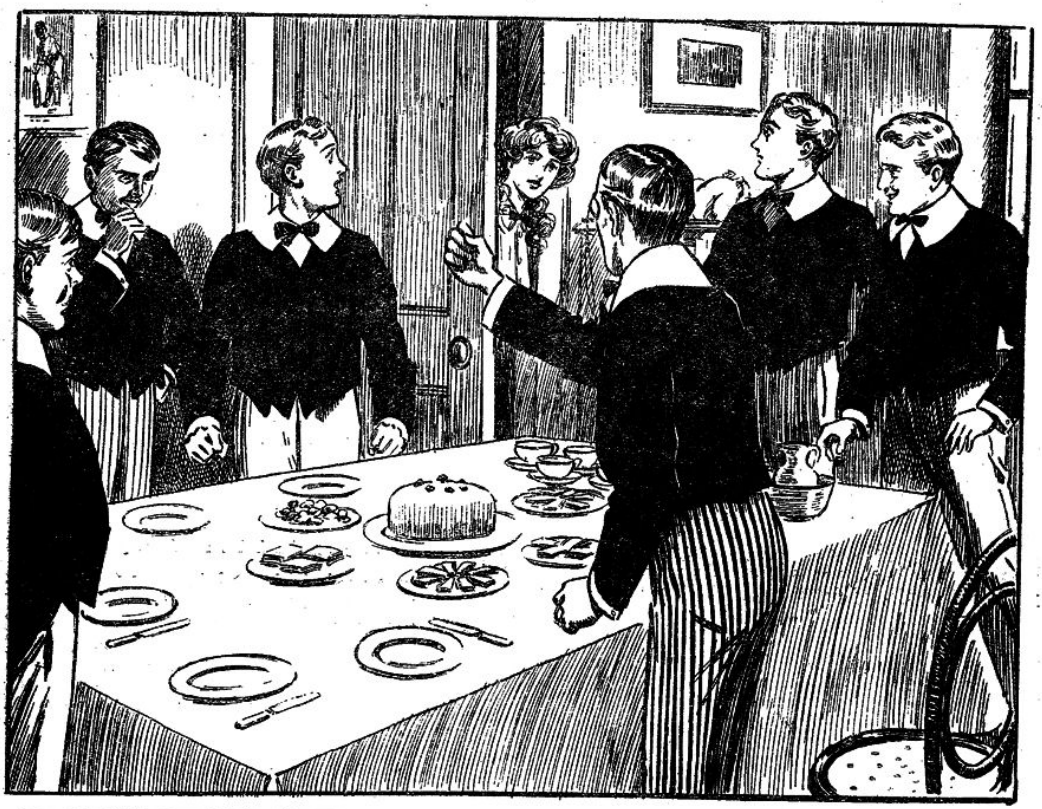

Arthur Augustus stood as if petrified, with his clenched fist extended towards Herries' grinning face. For at that moment Cousin Ethel's face appeared in the doorway. "Good afternoon!" she said. "G—g—good aftahnoon, deah gal!" stammered D'Arcy. (See Chapter 6.)

CHAPTER 7.
"Rally Round!"

TOM MERRY & CO. were finishing the ginger-beer and nuts in Study No. 6 when Arthur Augustus returned. The serious look upon his aristocratic face attracted their attention at once as he came into the study.

"Wherefore that pensive brow?" asked Blake.

Arthur Augustus did not reply for the moment. He assumed his favourite attitude when about to lay down the law—standing with his back to the fire, with his eyeglass between finger and thumb of his right hand.

The juniors all looked at him curiously. It was evident that something of unusual importance was coming.

"Get it off your chest!" said Blake. "Can't you see we're on giddy tenter-hooks?"

"I have somethin' to say to you chaps."

"Pile in! Life's short!" reminded Lowther.

"Pway don't intewwupt me with your funnay wemarks, Lowthah! I entweat you to keep all that for the comic column in the 'Weekly.' As we are not bound to wead that column, it does no damage there! On the othah hand——"

"Is this a lecture or a sermon?" inquired Manners politely.

"Neithah, deah boy. But I do not want to be intewwupted. I have been thinkin'——"

"Not really!" exclaimed Monty Lowther, in great astonishment.

"Weally, you ass——"

"Order!" exclaimed Blake. "For goodness' sake, don't interrupt, or this will last all the evening, and to be continued in our next! Gussy, old man, cut the cackle, and come to the hosses!"

"It's about Figgins. I wegard Figgins as a vewy decent chap, and a wathah deservin' chap."

"Figgy is all right," said Tom Merry, in wonder. "What next?"

"Figgins is entahin' for a vewy difficult exam. I considah that Figgins has a wight to be wegarded sewiously."

"Oh!"

"My hat!"

"Great pip!"

"Rot!"

"Rubbish!"

Arthur Augustus jammed his eyeglass into his eye, and looked round upon the juniors with a very severe glance.

"Yaas," he said emphatically; "that is my point of view. I admit that it did not stwike me until Ethel mentioned it."

"Oh! Did Ethel say so?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, that alters the case!" agreed Blake. "Of course, Figgy is only playing the giddy ox, and we can't possibly take him seriously, though."

"I wegard it as bein' up to us to take him sewiously and help him!" said Arthur Augustus firmly. "Of course, he is an ass—I'll admit that. But he is a wathah decent chap, and though he's only a New House boundah, he is weally one of our pals, isn't he?"

"Oh, yes; that's all right!"

"Well, when a pal of ours is up against somethin' specially hard, I wegard it as our duty to wally wound him."

"To—to which?"

"Wally wound him!"

"Oh, rally round him!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "Good egg! So we're to rally round old Figgins?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Not a bad idea," said Tom heartily. "I've said so before to you, Monty. Let's rally round Figgins and back him up."

"But there's such a blessed lot of fun in Figgy entering for an exam.!" said Lowther. "It's worth whole comic papers to us."

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"Lowthah, I say it is up to us to wally wound Figgins," said Arthur Augustus, with great firmness. "I twust you are goin' to wally wound with the west."

"Weally and twuly wally wound with the west!" chuckled Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lowther grunted.

"Oh, I'm on," he said, "if you all think so! You can count me in. But it's rotten! I was planning all sorts of rags for Figgins."

"Well, so was I, as a matter of fact," said Blake, rather ruefully. "Still, we'll rally round. After all, there may be a millionth part of a baby chance that Figgy may pull off the exam. if he swots himself black and blue."

"Oh, piffle!"

"Bosh!"

"I think he might have a ghost of a chance," said Tom Merry. "Of course, Manners will beat him; but he may get in second if—if he moves mountains."

Manners was looking very thoughtful.

"I don't know that I care much about the Bishop's Medal," he said. "I've bagged lots of their blessed pots and things. It seemed a pity to let it go to such a rotter as Levison—that was one reason why I put my name down. But if Figgy's really seriously going to hunt for it, I'm blessed if I don't stand out!"

"Bai Jove!"

"I say, that's rather a lot to do, Manners, old man," Tom Merry remarked. "In my opinion, the medal was a dead cert. for you!"

"Levison and Brooke both have a good chance," said Manners. "I think very likely I should have beaten them. But, hang it all, I've collared plenty of things, and Figgins has never bagged even a book prize. I'm not going to be a hog. Figgins has never taken anything yet, and I'm not going to stand in his way. I'm not keen on it, anyway."

"Well, that's one way of rallying round Figgins!" said Blake, laughing. "Are you going to take your name off the list, then?"

"Yes," said Manners, with a nod.

"Good egg!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Now, I heah that some of you boundahs were waggin' Figgins last night with a wagtime band——"

"And the rotter drenched us with water!" growled Blake.

"Serve you wight, undah the circs! I think I'll twot ovah to the New House, and tell Figgins that we're goin' to wally wound him."

And Arthur Augustus lost no time. Whatever Arthur Augustus did, he did with all his heart, and he was already enthusiastic over the scheme of rallying round Figgins, and helping him through his examination.

Brimming over with good resolutions and the milk of human kindness, Arthur Augustus came up to the New House with his graceful saunter.

But, as luck would have it, he was spotted just in front of the House by Redfern and Owen and Thompson, of the Shell, and Pratt, of the Fourth, and several other New House juniors; and, mindful of the rows in the tuckshop, those cheerful juniors rushed upon him without a word of warning, and seized him and swept him off his noble feet.

Arthur Augustus gave a wild yell as he was whirled into the air. Earth and sky, trees and stars seemed to swim about him in wild confusion.

"Yawoooh! Welease me! Let me down at once, you wottahs!"

Bump!

The New House juniors obeyed, and they let him down—hard.

"Oh, cwumbs! You are—ow!—wuinin' my twousahs! Lemme gewwup, you wottahs! Oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No School House tramps allowed on the decent side of the quadrangle!" grinned Redfern. "Run him back to his own House!"

"Ha, ha! Come on!"

"Ow! You wottahs! I have come ovah——"

"Ha, ha! And now you're going back!"

"I came here to look for——"

"Trouble!" chuckled Owen. "And you've found it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And in the midst of the yelling New House juniors the struggling swell of the School House was rushed back at top speed across the quadrangle, up the steps of the School House, and dumped down within doors.

With a final yell the New House fellows fled, before a hand could be raised against them, and vanished across the dusky quadrangle again.

Arthur Augustus sat and gasped.

"My hat!" exclaimed Tom Merry, running down the stairs. "Is that you, Gussy?"

"Gwoo-wooh! Yaas! Goowh!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Have you seen Figgins?"

"I have not seen Figgins! Ow! I was collahed by a gang of young wuffians—ow!—and tweated with gwoss—ow!—diswespect! Gwooh!"

"Then you haven't told Figgins we're going to rally round him?" chuckled Tom.

"Ow! Blow Figgins! Wow!"

And Arthur Augustus departed in search of a clothes-brush and a clean collah, and Figgins, who was grinding away at Horatius Flaccus, remained in blissful ignorance of the fact that the School House juniors had resolved to rally round him.

CHAPTER 8.

The Limit.

A FEW days later Tom Merry, of the Shell, might have been seen, as they say in the novels—and, as a matter of fact, was seen—to wear a worried look.

It was a Saturday, and in the afternoon the St. Jim's junior eleven were going over to Abbotsford to play the team there.

The junior team at St. Jim's was selected from the best players in the two junior House teams, and Tom Merry was the captain thereof.

Now, although when heated with argument with the New House fellows, Tom Merry would maintain that any fellow in the School House could give any fellow in the New House the "kybosh" at footer, yet on the occasions when the junior team played outsiders, Tom was very particular to secure the services of Figgins & Co.

On such occasions Figgins & Co. could not possibly be left out.

Figgins was a wonderful forward, Kerr was a most reliable half, and Fatty Wynn was simply a marvel in the "chicken-run."

Figgins & Co. had their places in the junior eleven, as a matter of course, when the match was of any importance, and, as a rule, they were very keen to play.

But a change had come over Figgins of the Fourth.

Figgins was swotting!

For days now Figgins had been at it, and, owing to the noble resolution of Tom Merry & Co. to rally round him, he had been allowed to prosecute his unusual studies without interruptions or rags.

Indeed, Arthur Augustus had kindly offered to coach him, an offer which Figgins had, for reasons unknown to Arthur Augustus, declined with thanks.

Figgins had shown an astonishing keenness for study. He stuck to it all the harder because it was against the grain. But the general opinion was that he was overdoing it. For he was cutting footer practice for the sake of the grind.

And now the day of the Abbotsford match had come, Tom Merry had a suspicion that Figgins meant to cut the match, and stay at home mugging up Latin, instead of kicking goals for St. Jim's on the footer field.

And the prospect of leaving behind one of his best forwards brought a worried look to the youthful brow of the junior captain.

There were plenty of fellows to take Figgins's place, so far as that went — indeed, many fellows regarded themselves as possible improvements on Figgins—but Tom Merry knew that he would not be able to find an inside-right to equal old Figgins. And the Abbotsford match was a stiff one. There were rumours that Abbotsford were in specially good form, and were going to make terrific efforts to wipe out two successive defeats. And the unanimous opinion of the junior football committee at St. Jim's was that Figgins couldn't be left out.

When the Fourth Form came out of the Form-room on Saturday morning, therefore, Tom Merry was waiting for Figgins in the passage. The Shell had come out a couple of minutes earlier. Figgins, as he came down the passage, with a book under his arm and a thoughtful expression on his face, found himself stopped by the Terrible Three.

"Halt!" said Monty Lowther. "Stand and deliver!"

Figgins grinned feebly.

"Don't be funny now," he said. "I'm in a hurry. I've got time for another grind before dinner."

"Your mistake," said Tom Merry. "You haven't."

"Yes, I have," said Figgins, in surprise, looking at his watch.

"Not at all—you've got an engagement."

"An engagement," said Figgins, staring at him.

"Yes, you're coming down to the footer-field, to show us what kind of form you're in for this afternoon."

"This afternoon!" said Figgins vaguely.

"You may have forgotten that there's a match on with Abbotsford," Manners remarked sarcastically.

"Match!" said Figgins. "Abbotsford! Oh, yes! I'm

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sorry, Tom Merry—I sha'n't be able to play this afternoon."

Tom Merry looked very grim.

"I thought that was coming," he observed. "Well, you're going to play. We can't spare you. Do you want Abbotsford to lick St. Jim's?"

Figgins looked distressed.

"Oh, no, no! Put Reddy in instead. He's all right."

"I know he is—right as rain," agreed Tom Merry. "But if your silly wits hadn't gone wool-gathering after Latin conjugations and declensions and deponent verbs and things, you'd remember that Redfern is right-half already. As he can't be in two places at once, I can't very well play him as inside-right, too. I would if I could—but I don't see how it's to be done."

Figgins smiled.

"I—I was thinking of something else," he said. "You see, I find that blessed grind for the Bishop's Medal is harder than I thought."

"Go hon!" murmured Manners.

"But I'm determined to bring it off, or at least got honourable mention, or bust a boiler," said Figgins. "I'll run you pretty close, Manners."

"You won't run me very close," said Manners. "I'm not in it."

"Your name's down," said Figgins.

"I've withdrawn it."

Figgins whistled.

"I hadn't heard. What did you withdraw for?"

"Sort of decided to, somehow," said Manners. "I'm going in for the Percy Prize instead. Levison and Brooke are your toughest rivals now—and Brooke doesn't have much time for grinding at exams., now he's got coaching work to do. You've got Levison to beat. The others won't touch Levison."

"Well, I'll try," said Figgins. "Levison will be a hard nut to crack—but he's not your form, and I think I shall beat him if I work hard at it. So you see I've got to chuck footer for a bit."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"That's just where you make a mistake," he replied. "You can't really grind for an exam. unless you keep fit. If you shut yourself up all the time, and get off colour, you can't put your beef into your work. A good game of footer every now and then will make you fit for the swotting."

"I'm sorry— "

"Nothing to be sorry about. You'll grind all the better afterwards, when you've played Abbotsford and kicked goals for St. Jim's."

Figgins looked worried.

"I'm sorry," he repeated. "But I really can't, you know. I know you mean well, but I simply can't give up an afternoon."

"We can't leave you out."

"But—but there are others, you know. Look here, I'm going to have a jolly hard grind this afternoon. I simply can't come. You can easily fill my place."

"Look here, Figgy, I know what I'm talking about. You'll be making yourself ill, sticking indoors and grinding away, after what you've been used to. Suppose you fall ill and get crocked for the exam.—how would you like that?"

"Oh, I shall be all right!"

"You'll be all righter if you help us play Abbotsford. The fact is, Figgy, they're very hot stuff—they've got two or three new men who are reported to be regular corkers—all ready to spring on us to-day. We can't run risks. I don't mind saying that you are the best inside-right we've ever played. If we leave you out, it may make all the difference."

"Thanks! But——"

"We leave here at two," said Tom Merry; "the brake will be at the gate then. You'll be ready?"

"I can't come."

"What! Haven't I explained——"

"It's no good," said Figgins. "I can't come. My heart wouldn't be in it, anyway. You must let me off this time."

"Rats!"

"Rubbish!"

"I'm really sorry—but try Lawrence or Owen or Thompson—but I shall really have to stand out for once. I'm sorry—but there you are. I've got special reasons for wanting to pass this exam. I can't afford to throw away chances."

"You won't pass it unless you look after your health—and you can't look after your health without taking a proper amount of exercise."

"Oh, my health's all right!"

"Look here, you must come."

"I can't—I really can't!"

And Figgins, to save futher argument, dodged the Terrible Three, and darted out of the house. The Shell fellows rushed after him.

"Figgins! Stop a minute!"

"Can't!"

"Collar him!" shouted Tom Merry.

Figgins broke into a run, and the Terrible Three dashed in pursuit. But Figgy's pace, as he crossed the quadrangle, showed that swotting had not impaired his speed, at all events.

He dashed away like a deer, and disappeared into the doorway of the New House, leaving the Terrible Three baffled and exasperated in the quad.

"Hang it all!" Tom Merry, as they turned back. "This is rotten! We can't leave him out."

"What's to be done, then?"

"Blessed if I know! But he's jolly well not going to be left behind, if we have to take my by the oars, and bundle him neck and crop into the brake!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

And the Terrible Three, instead of proceeding to the footer-ground, proceeded to call together Blake & Co., and other members of the team, to consult what was to be done in the case of the recalcitrant Figgins.

CHAPTER 9.

Not to be Left Out.

TOM MERRY'S team for the Abbotsford match consisted of seven School House fellows and four of the New House. Figgins & Co. and Redfern represented the New House. The School House members were Tom Merry, Lowther, Kangaroo, Blake, D'Arcy, Reilly, and Herries. The seven, when the matter was discussed, were unanimously of opinion that Figgins couldn't be left out. Tom had not called the New House members to the meeting, as he guessed that the measures he had in contemplation might not be approved of by Kerr and Wynn, at least.

"Like his blessed cheek to ask to be left out, I think," growled Herries. "Why, the New House fellows were grumbling at having only four members in the team, against our seven. Now one of them wants to stand out."

"Sure, and he can't be allowed," said Reilly. "If it was any other match, it wouldn't matter entirely. Young Mulvaney could be put in—he's jolly good form. But we've got to put in the toppest team we can get to beat Abbotsford this time."

"We could fill Figgy's place easily enough," assented Tom Merry, "if it were a match a bit less stiff than this. But as it is——"

"Figgy's got to play."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"He's as obstinate as a giddy mule," Monty Lowther remarked. "I don't believe he can be talked over."

"Then he'll have to be walked over," said Blake.

"Hear, hear!"

"Yaas, wathah! If Abbotsford beat us by a nawwow margin Figgay would feel awf'ly wotten about it," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "It would pwobably wowwy him and upset him for his beastly swottin', and so in the long wun it would do him more harm than good. Besides, if he isn't made to take some exahcise, he'll swot himself ill!"

"He's got to play!" said all the fellows together.

"Yaas. You wemembah, deah boys, that we have agweed to wally wound Figgins. I wegard this as an important point. Figgay is ovahdoin' it. As his pals, who have sworn to wally wound him, we are bound to pwevent him fwom ovah-doin' it. It is our dutay as—as——"

"As ralliers round, or as rally-rounders!" said Monty Lowther.

"Yaas, it is our dutay as wally-woundahs to see that Figgay doesn't ovahdo that beastly swottin'. I wecommend stern measuahs!"

"Good!" said Tom Merry. "My idea is this—we'll wait till the brake's at the gate, and get Kerr and Wynn and Reddy in it first, in case they feel inclined to interfere—as they're New House kids they might cut up rusty—then we'll collar Figgins by main force and drag him in."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If he won't go quietly we'll sit on him, and when we get to Abbotsford—why, as he's there, of course, he'll play."

"Good egg!" said Blake heartily.

"Yaas, wathah! It is wathah dwastic, but I don't see any othah way. We'll all back you up, deah boy!"

"Only the other New House chaps may chip in, and make a House row of it!" said Herries rather doubtfully. "We don't want a House rag just before a footer match."

"No; we shall have to be careful," agreed Tom Merry. "Most of the New House chaps will be against Figgins standing out of the match, you know. Still, we'll be careful. I don't see anything else that can be done."

"Wathah not, considewin' that we have pwomised to wally wound old Figgins!"

And so it was decided. The juniors went down to the footer-ground for a punt about before dinner, joining the New House members of the team there. When they came

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off the field Kerr joined Tom Merry, looking rather anxious and worried.

"I suppose you've heard from Figgy about his standing out?" he asked.

"Yes," said Tom.

"I've been keeping him from telling you all the week," said Kerr. "I hoped I should be able to dissuade him. But he's as firm as a rock."

"It's all right!" said Tom Merry. "I think we shall see him at Abbotsford this afternoon after all, Kerr."

Kerr shook his head.

"You don't know how set he is on that blessed exam.," he said. "He's putting it before everything else, and he'll be making himself ill with overwork soon. The queer thing is that I'm beginning to believe that he has a chance. I've been through last year's papers with him, and the amount that he has picked up already is astonishing. I never thought he had it in him. Now that Manners has withdrawn, I think Figgy will very likely pull it off, unless he breaks down before the exam."

There was a chuckle from Levison of the Fourth, who overheard Kerr's remark.

"Will you take a bet on it?" asked Levison. "I'll give you five to one that I get in ahead of Figgins in the exam."

"No, I won't," said Kerr disdainfully. "Make your rotten bets with Mellish, or Cutts of the Fifth—they're not in my line."

Levison grinned spitefully.

"Well, I'll take jolly good care that your precious Figgins doesn't have much chance for the exam.," he said. "I've been slacking a bit myself, but I could beat Figgins blindfolded, and you know it."

"We shall see," said Kerr, and he walked away with Tom Merry, leaving Levison scowling.

"You don't think you can persuade Figgins to come, Kerr?" the captain of the junior eleven asked.

"I'm afraid not."

"Well, we shall see. The brake's here at two—you'll be ready!"

"Right-ho!"

And the juniors went in to dinner.

Promptly at two o'clock the brake drew up outside the gates of St. Jim's. Kerr and Wynn and Redfern came down with their bags, and Reilly and Blake and D'Arcy and Herries joined them. Manners and Mulvaney, who were going as reserves, also got into the brake. Kerr looked round, but there was no sign of Tom Merry or Lowther or Kangaroo.

"Where are the other chaps?" he asked.

"Oh, they're coming!" said Jack Blake, with a grin.

"Who's playing instead of Figgins?" Kerr asked.

"Ahem! Perhaps Figgy will be playing after all."

"Oh, no—he's not coming!"

"Pewwaps he may come," smiled Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "In fact, I wathah fancy that Tom Mewwy has gone to twy and persuade him to come."

"It won't be much good," said Redfern. "I've jawed to him for a steady ten minutes on the subject, but he's as obstinate as a mule."

"Not a bit of good," said Fatty Wynn sorrowfully. "I should never have believed it of Figgy, but he's putting that rotten exam. before a football match. Queer, ain't it?"

"Yaas, it's wathah wotten—but Figgay has fwiends to look aftah him, you know. It's a case of savin' a chap fwom himself."

"Shurrup!" said Blake.

Kerr looked at them quickly and suspiciously.

"I say, is there some game on?" he exclaimed. "We can't have any larks with old Figgins, you know. If he chooses to stand out, he stands out, and that's all there is about it."

"Not quite all!" grinned Blake.

"Wathah not!"

Kerr jumped up.

"I think I'll just run back to the New House——"

Jack Blake grabbed Kerr and dragged him back into his seat.

"No, you won't, my son!" he chuckled. "Steady on! You New House kids are staying here. Look out, you fellows!"

"Look here——" shouted Kerr.

"It's no go, Kerr!" said Herries. "Don't let any of 'em get out of the brake, you chaps!"

"What-ho!"

Redfern laughed, and remained motionless in his seat.

"If you've got any dodge for making Figgins come, you're welcome," he said. "School matches come before House rows. Figgins ought to come. I jolly well sha'n't interfere."

"Quite wight," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I quite appwove of your attitude in the mattah, Weddy!"

"Good! Now I can feel quite comfy," yawned Redfern. "If you hadn't approved, Gussy, I should have felt frightfully worried."

"Weally, Weddy——"

"Look here, we're getting out!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn. "Let go my arm, Mulvaney, you beast! Leggo, my collar, Herries! Get off my feet, Manners!"

"Rats!"

"Yaas, wats!"

Kerr and Wynn began to struggle, but the School House fellows held them firmly in their seats. Redfern whistled cheerily. Kerr and Wynn, as a matter of fact, were in sympathy with Tom Merry's device, which they now suspected, but they felt bound to stand by their chum. But they had no chance. The School House fellows in the brake outnumbered them, and they were pinned down.

There was a sudden shout from Mulvaney.

"Arrah! Here they come!"

"Hurrah!"

CHAPTER 10.
By Main Force.

FIGGINS was in his study, when Tom Merry and Lowther and Harry Noble entered the New House. Figgins was looking a little glum as he bent over his books. He had felt that he was bound to devote half-holidays to study instead of to sport, until the Bishop's Medal exam. was over. But it was hard. His whole soul was with the team who were going over to Abbotsford to do battle for the St. Jim's colours. He was worried, too, at the thought that the reserve who would be played in his place might not be up to his form—probably would not be. Figgins was not conceited; but he knew his own value in a football team—if he had not been one of the best players in the New House, he would not have been skipper of the junior House eleven. But he felt that he had a duty to do, however worrying it was, and he stood by it manfully. The thought had crossed his mind that he might be overdoing it—Kerr had hinted as much to him.

But Figgy felt that that was a temptation to leave his books, and he would not yield to it. He was seated at the study table, with a Latin dictionary open before him, a Horace on his left hand, and "Latin Verse" on his right, when the three School House fellows walked cheerfully in.

Figgins turned his head and looked at them dolefully. He could not help looking glum. He thought they had come to say good-bye, and he would have given anything to shy his books into the fire and go with them.

"Just off?" he asked.

"Yes—come on!"

Figgins made a weary gesture.

"Don't begin that again, for goodness' sake!" he said. "It's bad enough as it is—you don't know how much I want to come. But I can't, and there's an end of it."

"That's where you make your little mistake," said Monty Lowther. "That isn't the end of it!"

"Just the beginning of it, in fact!" remarked Kangaroo.

"The fact is, you're overdoing it, Figgy!" Tom Merry explained. "As your friends, we can't stand by and let you overdo it, and knock yourself up, and then fail in the exam. because you're not fit. That isn't good business. We're going to look after you—especially as we can't possibly spare you from the Abbotsford match."

"Good-bye!" said Figgins grimly.

"Now, as a sensible chap——"

"You're keeping the other fellows waiting," said Figgins, "and as a matter of fact, you're wasting my time. Good-bye, and good luck at Abbotsford!"

The School House fellows exchanged glances. They were quite willing to persuade Figgins, if Figgins was open to persuasion. But if he wasn't, they were equally ready to use other measures.

"We're not going without you," said Tom Merry bluntly.

"Then you won't go at all," said Figgins.

"In other words, you've got to come, and you can walk or be carried," said the Australian junior. "That's the whole extent of your choice, Figgy."

"Don't play the giddy ox," said Figgins impatiently. "Buzz off, and let me get to work. It's hard enough, anyway."

The three School House juniors did not buzz off. They advanced upon Figgins; and Figgins jumped to his feet.

"Get out!" he exclaimed angrily. "You silly asses, do you think you're going to take me to Abbotsford against my will? Are you dotty?"

FERRERS LOCKE, DETECTIVE is the principal character in one of the complete stories contained in CHUCKLES, ½d.

"No; but you are," said Tom Merry. "Now, are you coming?"

"No!" roared Figgins.

"Collar him!"

Figgins dodged round the table.

"You silly chumps!" he panted. "Do you want a scrimmage just before a footer-match? I'll call the other fellows in if you don't clear off!"

"The other fellows are all out," said Tom Merry coolly. "Most of them have started for Abbotsford already to see the match. There's hardly a fellow left in the House, and there are plenty of our chaps hanging round the House to come in if we want them. You are coming with us, Figgy."

"I'm not!" yelled Figgy.

"'Nuff said!" exclaimed Kangaroo. "Have him out!"

Figgins dodged round the table again, with Kangaroo after him. He made a break for the door, but Monty Lowther intercepted him.

"Now, Figgy—yaroooh!" roared Lowther.

Figgins's blood was up. He hit out, and Lowther rolled over on the study carpet. But Tom Merry's grasp was upon Figgy the next moment, and he was dragged back from the door. Kangaroo's arm was thrown round his neck from behind; and Lowther, jumping up, collared him also with great energy. Figgins, struggling wildly, was borne to the floor in the midst of the three.

On the floor he rolled and wrestled, but three sturdy juniors pinned him down, and Figgins had no chance. He put up a good fight, however, and the trio were panting breathlessly by the time they had secured him.

"Got him!" gasped Tom Merry at last. "Now, Figgy, are you coming quietly?"

"No!" gurgled Figgins.

"Then we shall carry you."

"Rescue!" yelled Figgins. "Rescue, New House! Res—groohoooogrrrr!"

Tom Merry stuffed a handkerchief into Figgy's open mouth, and Figgy's yells died away suddenly in a gurgle. Monty Lowther drew a length of whipcord from his pocket, and coolly fastened Figgy's wrists together. Figgins was making wild efforts to eject the gag, but Kangaroo tied a string round his head, effectually keeping the handkerchief in place.

The New House junior lay and glared up at his captors in powerless fury.

"Now, walk him out!" panted Tom Merry.

Figgins was lifted to his feet.

Tom Merry took one arm, and Kangaroo the other, and Monty Lowther went ahead, and the juniors quitted the study.

Figgins had to walk. When he declined to move his legs, Tom Merry and Kangaroo swung him clear of the floor and carried him out. It was more comfortable to walk.

In this guise they descended the stairs, Figgins looking round in vain for succour. In the lower passage there were some fags, and they came running up; but Figgins was rushed out of the House in a twinkle, and outside the New House there were a dozen School House fellows ready to surround him. Figgins could have drawn the Housemaster from his study by making a row, and certainly Mr. Ratcliff would have put a summary stop to the proceedings—and he would also have reported the three invaders to their Housemaster for punishment—but Figgins had no intention of doing that; it was not playing the game. Outside the New House the crowd of fellows surrounded him, and he was rushed away towards the gates without any casual observers in the quadrangle even seeing Figgins in the throng, so the fact that his hands were tied escaped notice. At the gates Tom Merry jerked the handkerchief from his mouth.

"Come on, Figgy; it's all up now, you know."

"Groo! Lemme go!"

"Lift him in!"

"Rescue!" spluttered Figgins.

The juniors heaved him into the brake. Kerr and Wynn, loyal to their chief, were struggling in the brake; but they were held fast by the fellows there. Figgins went whirling into the brake, and tumbled over there among the many feet, and Tom Merry & Co. scrambled in after him.

"Drive on!" shouted Tom Merry.

The brake started.

Figgins, with three or four School House fellows sitting upon him, writhed and struggled helplessly in the bottom of the brake.

The juniors at the gates laughed and cheered as the brake rolled away. The driver cracked his whip, and the horse broke into a trot.

The team for Abbotsford were fairly started now, and Figgins was with them!

CHAPTER 11.
Figgins Says "No!"

"LEMME gerrup!"

Thus George Figgins.

Figgins was wriggling under quite a heap of juniors. The brake was as full as it could hold of fellows who were going to play Abbotsford, and fellows who were going to see them do it. Lawrence and Owen and several other New House juniors had jumped in, but they followed Redfern's example, and did not "chip in." Only Kerr and Wynn strove to come to their leader's assistance, and they were firmly held.

"Are you going to be quiet?" asked Tom Merry.

"No!" roared Figgins. "I'm going to get out."

"Then you'll stay where you are."

"Lemme gerrup! I'll pulverise you! I'll—I'll——"

"Go easy!" said Kangaroo. "No good trying to shift me off, Figgins. I'm planted on your manly chest. All the way to Abbotsford, if necessary."

"Gerroff! Gerrooh! Ow!"

"Sit on his head, Hammond. It's soft enough to be comfortable."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Keep off, Hammond, you beast! Look here, you rotters! Help me, Kerr! Back up, Fatty! Reddy, lend a hand!"

Redfern shook his head.

"Can't be did, Figgy. I think you ought to come to Abbotsford."

"Won't you back up your own House?" roared Figgins.

"Not in playing the giddy ox," said Redfern calmly. "It's all right. You'll be glad of it afterwards. It's like taking medicine, you know."

"I won't go to Abbotsford."

"You're going!" said Tom Merry, with a chuckle.

"I won't play when I get there."

"Yes, you will, Figgy. You won't sulk. You'll play up like a sportsman," said the St. Jim's junior captain cheerfully.

Figgins relapsed into grim silence. He was in for it now, and there was no escape from the hands of his captors. And the brake was bowling along at a good speed, covering the ground in fine style.

"Get off me, you beasts!" growled Figgins at last. "I'll stay in the brake."

"Honest Injun?"

"Yes!" snapped Figgings.

"Let him get up."

The juniors rose from their seats on various parts of Figgins's person, and Figgy scrambled up, gasping. He gave the juniors grim looks, to which they replied with pleasant grins, and glumly sat down in the brake. He was silent for a long time, while the fellows round him chatted over the coming match and the school's prospects in it. Manners took a pocket Horace from his jacket, and passed it to Figgins.

"Improve the shining hour, like the giddy busy bee, Figgy, old man," he said.

"Oh, thanks!" said Figgins.

And his face cleared a little as he opened the volume, and was soon deep in the "Carmina," turning the pages continually to refer to the notes at the end, and then blinking back at the text. The other fellows grinned as they watched him. They did not mind Figgins "swotting" on the way to Abbotsford so long as he played up when he reached the place.

The brake bowled on through the country lanes, and ran into Abbotsford at last. The school appeared in sight. Tom Merry tapped Figgins on the shoulder, and Figgins came out of Horatius Flaccus with a start.

"We're there, Figgy," said Tom.

Figgins grunted.

"I'm not going to play."

"Stuff!"

"I haven't got my things with me, for one thing!" growled Figgins. "You didn't think of that when you yanked me out of my study."

"Yes, we did!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "We've brought you some of Kangy's things. They fit you, you know."

"Look here, I'm not going to be ragged into playing if I don't choose to," said Figgins morosely. "You had no right to bring me here."

The brake halted before Tom Merry could reply. The St. Jim's fellows swarmed out, and were greeted by the Abbots-

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fordians. Figgins was the last to leave the brake. He glanced round him as if meditating bolting; but the other fellows were all round him; and Figgy, too, did not want to make a scene before the Abbotsford players.

But his look was still very grim, as he was walked into the dressing-room in the midst of the St. Jim's party.

"You're not changing, Figgy," said Tom Merry, after a minute or two.

The St. Jim's players were rapidly turning into their football things, with the exception of Figgins. He was standing with a moody brow.

"I'm not going to change!" said Figgins doggedly.

"Buck up!" urged Tom Merry.

"I won't, I tell you!"

Tom Merry looked a little nonplussed. It was so utterly unlike Figgins to be sulky that Tom had not counted upon that. He had not doubted for a moment that, once upon the Abbotsford ground, Figgins would fall into line and play up cheerfully.

"Abbotsford will be waiting for us soon," said Kerr quietly.

"Let 'em wait!" said Figgins.

"Look here, old man——" began Fatty Wynn persuasively.

"Bosh!"

Two or three of the team broke out wrathfully.

"Look here, Figgy, none of your rotten sulks."

"You've got to play."

"We'll jolly well hammer you if you don't!"

"Faith, lave him out, and put Mulvaney in!"

"Let the sulky brute go and eat coke!"

"Bump him!"

Figgins was grimly silent. He was evidently very "rusty." Some of the fellows were looking very angry now, and closing round Figgins as if to collar him. Kerr and Wynn had not a word to say.

Tom Merry raised his hand.

"Hold on!" he said. "You say you won't play, Figgins?"

"No, I won't!"

"Very well. We'll play a man short, and if we get licked——"

Figgins jumped.

"Man short!" he exclaimed. "Against Abbotsford? Are you dotty?"

"If we get licked——" went on Tom Merry evenly.

"If!" howled Blake. "We shall be licked to the wide!"

"Licked out of our boots!" said Kangaroo.

"Dished and done!" growled Herries.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"If we get licked," pursued Tom Merry, as soon as he could make his voice heard, "then Figgins can answer for it to all the fellows! I'm going to take ten men into the field, and leave Figgy's place open. If he likes to see St. Jim's play Abbotsford without an inside-right, he can. I shouldn't care to be in his shoes afterwards, that's all."

Figgins frowned.

"That's rotten unfair to me!" he said irritably. "You'll get licked, as sure as a die, and the School will say it's my doing!"

"So it will be your doing!" said Redfern hotly. "By George! We'll make the New House too hot to hold you, if you leave us in the lurch like that, I can tell you!"

"Figgins won't leave us in the lurch," said Tom Merry. "I think I know him better than that. Figgins will take his place."

"I won't!" said Figgins.

"Very well. I mean what I say. You fellows ready?"

"Yes, we're ready."

Tom Merry, without another look at Figgy, walked out of the dressing-room, and the team followed him. Kerr and Wynn lingered behind to reason with their chum.

"Figgy, you can't do it, for the sake of the House!" Kerr expostulated. "The New House will never be able to look anybody in the face again!"

"You must come, Figgy!" urged Fatty Wynn. "Now, get into your things. Here they are, all ready. I'll help you."

"I've said I'm not going to play, and I won't!" said Figgins, with a doggedness his chums had never observed in him before.

Kerr looked at him very straight.

"You don't mean that, Figgy?"

"I do mean it!"

"Then I've got no more to say—excepting that I'm ashamed of you!" said Kerr. And, with a very red face, Kerr walked out.

"Figgy, old man——" Fatty Wynn urged helplessly.

"You coming, Wynn?" called out Tom Merry.

"Just coming. I say, Figgy——"

"Wynn, you're wanted! They've won the toss."

Fatty Wynn gave Figgins a reproachful look, and hurried out. The teams were in the field, and already lining up. Raikes, the junior captain of Abbotsford, had won the toss, and given St. Jim's a stiff wind to kick off against. Blake touched Tom Merry on the arm.

"You don't mean it—about playing a man short?" he whispered.

"Figgins will come."

"But supposing he doesn't?"

"I think he will. If he doesn't, we must chance it," said Tom steadily. "But Figgins won't find things very pleasant at St. Jim's afterwards if we're beaten."

"You're a man short, Merry," said the referee.

"That's all right," said Tom Merry. "We're ready to start."

"Not crocked—eh?" asked Raikes.

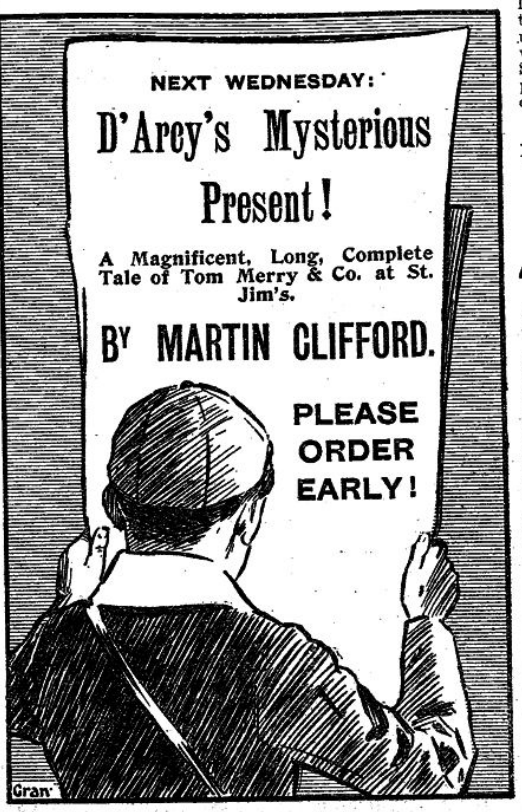
"Oh, no!"

The Abbotsford captain gave him an odd look. If a member of the team had been crocked, or turned seedy, Tom Merry had plenty of fellows with him to play instead. And why a member of the team should stay out of the fighting-line at the kick-off was more than Raikes could understand, unless he was seedy. But it was no business of his, if the St. Jim's captain chose to play ten men instead of eleven.

Pheep! went the whistle.

The ball ran from Tom Merry's foot.

Figgins had not appeared.



CHAPTER 12.
Play Up!

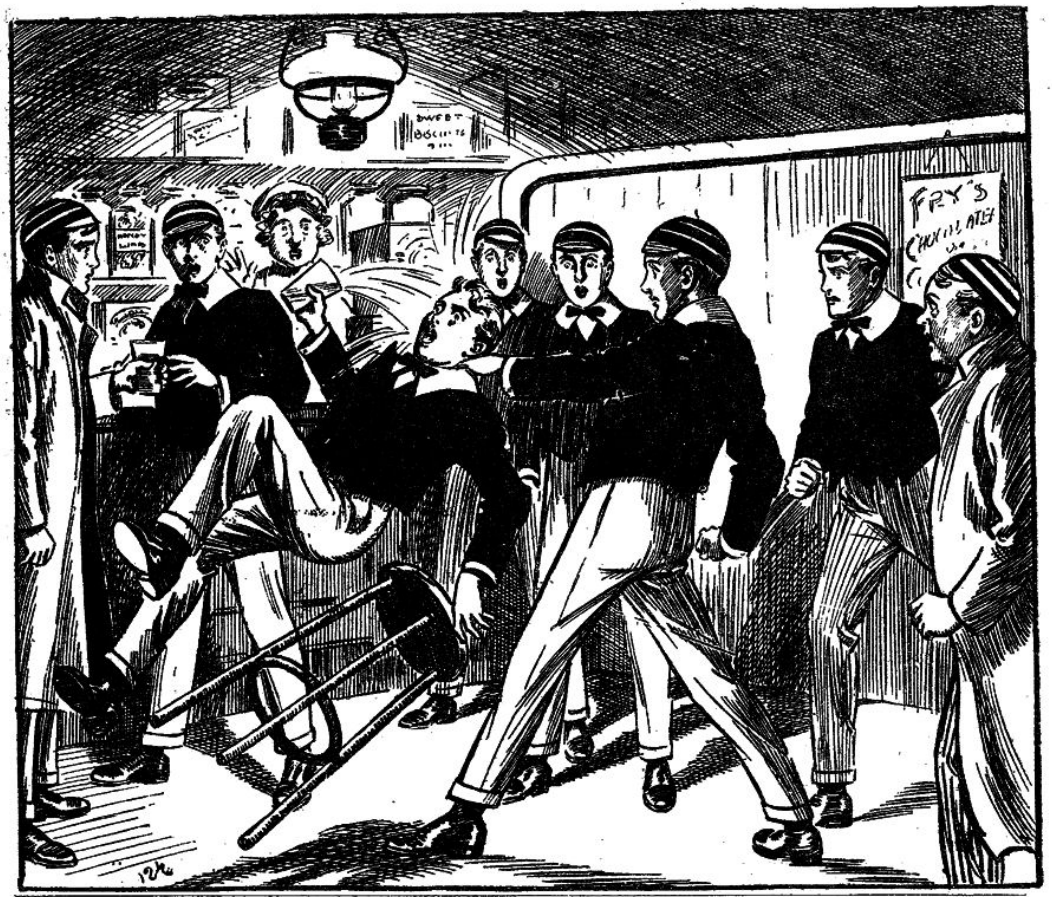
TOM MERRY had no time to think about Figgins for the next few minutes.

The Abbotsford fellows came on with a rush, and soon showed their quality. There was a tussle for the ball in the visitors' half, and it went into touch. As the fellows stood round for the throw-in, Tom Merry spotted a long-legged figure and an awkward grin, and smiled.

Figgins must have changed like lightning, for he was on the field now. Tom Merry had judged him well. If the St. Jim's skipper had played a man in his place, Figgins would have gone. But he could not possibly leave the Saints to fight ten against eleven. Not for the sake of a dozen Bishop's Medals would Figgins have left his comrades in the lurch in that manner.

"Good old Figgy!" said Kerr, greatly relieved.

And Fatty Wynn, in goal, grinned a fat smile of satisfaction.



Figgins rushed right at Monty Lowther, and yanked him off the stool. Lowther was refreshing himself with ginger-beer at the time, and as he was pulled back, swoosh! came the liquid over his face and neck. "Ow!" he roared, "You fathead!" *(See Chapter 3.)*

Never had the aid of Figgins been more required.

The Abbotsford fellows were keen and determined. Their attack was hot and hard pressed, and almost incessant. The Saints were used to attacking, but they found that they had a good deal of defending to do now. When the ball went across the halfway line, it was incessantly sent back, and for a long time none of the St. Jim's forwards got anywhere near the enemy's goal.

Fatty Wynn, between the sticks, was all eyes and hands and feet. It was not easy to send the "pill" past him—never was a chicken-run better guarded.

But for his sturdy defence, Abbotsford would have scored and scored again in the first ten minutes of the play.

But Fatty Wynn was "all there."

The struggle swayed away into midfield, and the ball went continually into touch, but the St. Jim's fellows were gaining ground.

Tom Merry's eyes sought Figgins somewhat anxiously.

Now that he was playing, Tom Merry knew that he would play his best, and work his hardest; he had not the slightest doubt of that.

But he had neglected all practice for a week, and it was likely enough that he would be a little off colour, and every little helped the enemy in so close a match.

Figgins's speed, his accurate passing, and his steady kick at goal were very much wanted now on the St Jim's side.

And certainly Figgins did not seem to be quite up to his usual form just at first. Perhaps the thought of the exam. and the "swotting" he had had to give up haunted him in spite of himself, and took his heart out of the game. Or perhaps it was only that he had been neglecting practice.

Certainly he did not seem so useful as usual.

The Abbotsford fellows were scoring now. Raikes had passed the ball to his centre, and the centre had put it in, in spite of Fatty Wynn.

It was first blood to Abbotsford.

There were ten minutes of the first half still to go, and the Saints made a desperate effort to equalise, but they exerted themselves in vain.

The whistle went, leaving Abbotsford one to nothing.

It had been a hard half, and the fellows were breathing very quickly as they rested in the interval. Figgins's face was very gloomy.

"I haven't been much good to you, after all, Tom Merry," he said ruefully, as he rubbed his crimson and perspiring face.

"Better luck in the next half," said Tom Merry. "After all, they've only broken their duck."

"Better have put me in," growled Gore of the Shell, who had come over to look on. "I fancy I couldn't have done worse. Figgins is sulking, and he doesn't want to win."

Figgins heard the words, and his eyes glittered.

But he made no reply. He knew that Tom Merry & Co. would not suspect him of slacking because he had been forced to play; but Gore, and fellows of Gore's kidney, would turn naturally to such a suspicion. And if the match were lost, a good deal of blame would fall to Tom Merry for playing an unwilling man. Figgins inwardly resolved that he would play up like an International in the second half.

The teams lined up, and the second half commenced.

By this time Figgins was feeling all his old form coming back to him, and he was as fresh as paint, and very keen. Horatius Flaccus had vanished from his mind, all thoughts of swotting and mugging were gone, and he was a footballer from the crown of his head to the tips of his toes.

The wind was behind St. Jim's now, and it helped them

as much as it had hindered them in the first half. Tom Merry & Co. attacked, and Figgins came out very strong.

With a fine forward rush, they brought the ball up the field, the whole forward line passing like clockwork. The leather went out to D'Arcy on the wing, and he ran it along the touchline, and sent it in to Blake as he was stopped, and Blake centred to Tom Merry as a half ran him off the ball. Tom Merry captured the ball, and rushed on, and as there was no opening he sent it out on the right, and Figgins had it, and sent it further out to Kerr as he was tackled. Kerr sent it back to Figgins, and Figgins to Tom Merry, and Tom to Figgins again, beating the Abbotsford defence by short and fast passing, and it was from Figgins's foot that it whizzed into goal.

Then the St. Jim's spectators shouted.

"Bravo, Figgy!"

"Goal! Goal!"

"Hurrah!"

Kerr clapped Figgins enthusiastically on the back.

"Good man!" he exclaimed. "Oh, good man!"

"A bit of luck," said Figgins. "It was the whole line took that goal!"

And the St. Jim's fellows lined up for the restart with very cheerful faces.

There were twenty minutes yet to play—plenty of time for the match to be won and lost over and over again. Raikes and his men fought hard for a fresh start on the score, and they succeeded at last, Fatty Wynn being beaten by a shot that few goalkeepers could have saved.

Two to one!

But St. Jim's were in splendid fighting trim now, and ten minutes later Tom Merry whizzed the ball right in, beating the Abbotsford goalie hollow.

Two to two!

"Looks like a draw!" yawned Gore of the Shell.

"You can't say Figgins isn't playing up now, hang you!" said Lawrence.

Gore snorted. There was no doubt that Figgins was playing up like a Trojan. He was as good a man as anyone on the field, and better than most.

"Getting close on time!" Mulvaney remarked, looking at his watch. "Not more than four or five minutes now."

"Play up, St. Jim's!"

"On the ball!"

"One goal more, Tom Merry!"

"Play up! Play up!"

Both sides were playing up hard. But the struggle was in the home half, and Abbotsford had plenty to do to defend their goal. Again and again the St. Jim's forwards broke through, but always the defence was sound, and once or twice the home players succeeded in rushing the game away into the visitors' territory. But it was whirling back again, and the Abbotsford goal was hotly attacked. All the players knew that it was close on time, and they strained every nerve for that last goal. The play was fast and furious. The referee was handling his whistle when Tom Merry buzzed the leather in, and the goalkeeper just caught it and staggered forward to fling it far. But in his excitement he came a little too far—and Figgins's eagle eye was upon him.

Like an arrow from a bow Figgins sprang forward and crashed upon the goalkeeper.

Back he went into his own territory, reeling and collapsed, with the ball in his hands—charged fairly into the net.

Pheep!

The whistle rang out, while the goalkeeper lay and gasped. There was a frenzied yell from all the St. Jim's fellows on the ground:

"Goal! Goal!"

"Figgins! Figgins! Figgins! Hurrah!"

Right on the stroke of time George Figgins had won the match for St. Jim's, and his fellow-players thumped him on the back, and dug him in the ribs, as they came off the ground. Tom Merry's wisdom in playing Figgins was justified now, to the satisfaction of everybody—excepting, perhaps, Abbotsford. And Figgins was grinning joyfully as he came off the field.

"Better than mugging up Latin—what?" Blake bawled in his ear.

Figgins became serious at once.

"My hat! I'd forgotten the mugging!" he said. "Never mind, I'll have a grind at Horace in the brake going back——"

And he did.

As the brake rolled homeward in the winter dusk, Figgins was poring over Manners' Pocket Horace; but as the other fellows were roaring out choruses and playing tin whistles and mouth-organs, it is probable that he did not put in very much real and serious study during that drive home.

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CHAPTER 13.

The Hero of the House.

TOM MERRY'S study was crammed.

The passage outside was swarmed. The St. Jim's juniors were rejoicing. The victory over Abbotsford was being celebrated—and it was being celebrated in tremendous style.

Tom Merry & Co. had pooled funds for the occasion, and quite a raid had been made on Dame Taggles's tuckshop, and everybody had been asked to the feed.

Guests of honour had chairs, stools, or stood up, in the study—the rest swarmed in the passage, where chairs and benches and forms had been dragged for their accommodation.

As Monty Lowther put it poetically, the "red wine flowed freely"—the red wine, however, being represented by mere harmless beverages, such as ginger-beer and lemonade.

The excitement and enthusiasm were great, and the noise also was considerable. But at a hint from Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, the prefects turned a deaf ear to the noise. The juniors had won one of their toughest footer matches of the season, and it was only natural that they should want to celebrate it with song and dance, so to speak.

Figgins was the hero of the hour.

Figgins, though he had been fairly kidnapped to play in the match, had won the match for St. Jim's. There was no doubt about that. It had been practically a draw, when Figgy, with lightning promptness, had charged the goalie into the net with the ball in his hands. By that prompt action he had pulled off the match.

But while all St. Jim's—all the juniors at all events—were prepared to do great honour to Figgins, at any cost to their lungs and their digestion, the modest and unassuming Figgy was avoiding the public eye.

He was expected to come over with Kerr and Wynn, and Redfern and Owen and Lawrence, and the rest of the New House fellows who marched over in a body to join in the jubilee. But he didn't come with them.

"Where's Figgins?" was the general inquiry.

"He's going to look in later," said Kerr, a little awkwardly.

"Bai Jove! But he's the hewo of the hour, you know!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy exclaimed.

"I've told him so," grinned Kerr.

"And what did he say, deah boy?"

"He said rats!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Swotting again?" asked Tom Merry.

"Well, I left him with his nose in a delectus!"

"Grooh!"

"Silly ass!"

"Sure he's coming over, though?" asked Tom Merry. "He must come."

"Well," said Kerr cautiously, "he said he would if he could. If he couldn't, he wants you chaps to excuse him."

"Yes, we'll excuse him—I don't think!" said Tom Merry warmly. "The chap who got the winning goal against Abbotsford isn't going to shut himself up and swot while we're celebrating."

"No fear!"

"Wathah not!"

"Give him a chance," said Blake, "and if he doesn't come, we'll fetch him."

"Yes, rather!" said Fatty Wynn. "I sympathise with Figgy—but I think this is going too far. Missing a feed like this would be a sin and a shame!"

And Fatty Wynn started upon the feed with an energy which proved that he, at all events, had no intention of missing it.

"We'll fetch him presently," said Tom Merry. "Give him half an hour. Pile in, gentlemen!"

The gentlemen were already piling in, as a matter of fact.

Figgins did not appear, and ere long Tom Merry announced his intention of going for him. Blake and Lowther and D'Arcy and Redfern decided to go with him. There might be occasion to use force, as Redfern thoughtfully remarked. Figgins had to come.

"The bounder may sport his oak!" said Digby.

"He can't!" said Fatty Wynn, with a chuckle. "I've got the key of the study in my pocket."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Tom Merry and his comrades crossed over the dusky quadrangle to the New House, and hurried up to Figgins's study.

Figgins was sitting at the study table, his books before him, poring over them with a thoughtful and worried brow.

He did not look happy. He would have been very glad to be sharing in the jollification over at the School House, and the silence and gloom of his study formed a very

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unpleasing contrast to the brightness and gaiety he knew would be going on in Tom Merry's study.

But he stuck grimly to his grind.

He could not help sighing a little, however, as his thoughts wandered to the merry scene over in the School House, and Tom Merry & Co. heard that sigh as they came along to his door.

Tom Merry pushed open the door, which was ajar. The juniors looked in, on tiptoe—Figgins had not heard them.

The hero of the Abbotsford match had rested his chin on his hand, and was staring at the book before him with unseeing eyes.

He was plunged in a far from happy reverie, but he started out of it as the door was flung violently back against the wall, and the juniors swarmed in.

Figgins jumped to his feet.

"Come on," said Tom Merry; "the feed's going strong! The festive scene is toward in the ancestral halls of the Shell——"

"And goodly viands load the groaning board!" said Jack Blake.

"And the red wine flows like water!" said Monty Lowther.

Figgins grinned.

"Excuse me, you fellows; I'd like to come, but after the time I've lost to-day, I think I'd better not. Leave me here; I must work—I must, really!"

"Come on!" said Redfern. "Never do to-day what you can put off till to-morrow! If pleasure interferes with work, give up work! Come on!"

"But I——"

"This way!" said Blake, taking his arm. "Help him along, Tom Merry!"

Tom Merry took Figgy's other arm.

"March!" he said

"But I—I—I——"

"This way to the feed!"

And Figgins was extracted from his study, and walked down the stairs, hardly knowing whether to laugh or be angry.

"I say, you chaps, I ought to work, you know!" he expostulated.

"Lots of time for that!" said Monty Lowther. "A feed comes only every now and then, but a chap can always find time for work"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I've got to grind at Horace! There's a viva voce exam. on Horace, you know. They make you construe the beast at sight!"

"Yaas; that's wathah wuff. But I have alweady offahed to coach you on Howace, if you like, Figgay. I don't know vewy much about him, nevah havin' opened Howace in my life; but I should be vewy willin' to help you!"

Figgins did not appear very grateful for that generous offer.

"Oh, rats!" he said.

"Weally, Figgins——"

"Horace or no Horaces," said Tom Merry, "you're coming to the feed! Shoulder-high, you chaps! Up with him!"

"But I—I say—my work——"

"Blow your work!"

"The exam.——"

"Blow the exam.!"

"The medal——"

"Blow the medal!"

Figgins gave it up in despair. He was hoisted upon the shoulders of Tom Merry and Monty Lowther, and marched across the dusky quad. Right into the School House he was marched in that guise.

Kildare, of the Sixth, met them in the passage, and grinned.

"Behold the conquering hero!" said Monty Lowther. "A fellow whom the Shell delights to honour!"

"Don't break his neck" said Kildare, laughing.

"Not if we can possibly help it," said Lowther. "But we're bound to honour him, anyway, at the risk of his giddy old neck!"

"Yaas, wathah; we've got to wally wound Figgins, deah boys!"

"Up the stairs!" said Tom Merry.

Mr. Railton, the master of the School House, looked out of his study for a moment; but he smiled, and closed the door again. He was quite willing to give the juniors a little rope on such an occasion for celebrating.

Up the stairs went the juniors, with Figgins shoulder-high in their midst. As soon as they were spotted in the Shell passage there was a throng round them, all cheering the hero of the Abbotsford match.

"Here he comes!"

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Figgins!"

"Way! Way! Place! Place!" shouted Monty Lowther, as they swayed into the study with their honoured burden.

In the crammed study it was not really easy to make way for the procession. Figgins ducked his head just in time to avoid a crack as he came through the doorway, and the movement made him sway so heavily on the shoulders of his bearers that they stumbled.

There was a yell of warning:

"Look-out!"

"Hold on!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

Figgins plunged forward. His bearers and half a dozen other fellows grabbed at him—too late! Crash he came down upon the festive board!

"Yaroooh!

"Oh, my hat!"

"Gweat Scott!"

There was a terrific crash of crockery-ware as Figgins rolled on the table. He sat up, dazedly, in the butter, with jam smeared over his face and jellies clinging to his neck.

"Oh, my hat!" he gasped.

There was a yell of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Sorry, Figgy! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why didn't you hold on? Ha, ha, ha!"

"Groooh!" growled Figgins, rolling off the table, and gaining his feet. "You silly ass! I'm jammy! I'm sticky! I'm buttery and greasy! Groooh!"

"Never mind! It's all in the day's work!" grinned Blake. "You're the giddy guest of honour! Sit down! Here's your chair!"

"I must go and clean——"

"No, you jolly well won't; you'd bolt!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But I'm sticky—I'm jammy!"

"Here's a handkerchief," said Blake, jerking a beautiful cambric from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's pocket. "Rub the jam off with that!"

"Blake! You—you feahful wottah——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But—but I'm greasy—I'm buttery——"

"Here's Tom Merry's hanky!" said Blake generously. "If they're not enough, you can have Lowther's——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was no escape for the hero of the hour, so Figgins cleaned himself of the butter and jam and jelly as well as he could with the handkerchiefs so liberally supplied by Blake, and sat down to the feed. And in the conviviality that followed he forgot once more all about Horace and all his works.

CHAPTER 14.

Figgy Requires Looking After.

"FIGGY'S looking pretty seedy!"

Tom Merry made the remark, one morning a week after the Abbotsford match, as the Fourth-Formers were coming out after lessons.

Figgins had passed them, without looking towards the Terrible Three and gone out into the quad., and as he walked away he was reading!

Reading Latin, walking in the quad.—the very last and most hopeless sign of a swot!

All the fellows who saw him exchanged glances. Well-known swots were sometimes seen to read in the quad., mumbling over Latin as they trotted to and fro under the old elms. But Figgins!

Figgins's friends gloomily prognosticated that he was going wholly to the bad. And undoubtedly, as Tom Merry remarked to his chums, old Figgy did look seedy.

"Seedy isn't the word!" said Monty Lowther. "He looks sick and solemn as a boiled owl! He hasn't touched a footer since the match at Abbotsford."

"Hardly even a sprint round the quad., I believe," said Manners.

Jack Blake joined them.

"Looks pretty stuffy, old Figgy, doesn't he?" he remarked.

"Just saying so," said Tom Merry. "Lucky the exam. isn't very far off now, or he'd be ill, I think. He's taking it jolly seriously. I never thought he had it in him. By Jove, if he should pull off the exam., we'll give him a stunning ovation!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "We'll wally wound him and celebwate like anythin'! And, weally, he may have a chance—Mannahs has withdwawn, and I have not entahed——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I weally do not see anythin' to cackle at in that wemark," said Arthur Augustus. "I'm wathah a demon at things like

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that when I exert myself, you know! I took up Gweek once, and I learned an awful lot in one aftahnoon—sevewal lettahs of the alphabet, and something else—I forget what now. I was weally thinkin' of goin' in for this medal, but I'm glad I didn't now. I want to give Figgy a look-in. But he will find Levison wathah hard to beat!"

"I suppose Levison has the brains to beat him," Tom Merry admitted. "There's no denying that Levison is clever. But he slacks too much; he hasn't been working for the exam."

"He thinks he can do it without working hard, against the other chaps who have entered," Blake remarked; "and he's awfully clever—learns up Latin and Greek just as we might learn English. But he may be oversure; it may be a case of the hare and the tortoise over again."

"I hope it will," said Tom Merry. "I'd rather see Figgins win, though Levison is a School House chap."

"Thank you!" said Levison's sarcastic voice behind him. "I'll remember your good wishes, Tom Merry! It's kind of you!"

Tom Merry turned round, and looked the cad of the Fourth straight in the face.

"I mean it!" he said. "You've taken enough things; and, besides, Figgy's a better chap than you are, and I wish him luck!"

Levison sneered.

"Well, I've got some time left to swot in, and perhaps I may have a chance," he said sarcastically. "I'll ask the Head to shove me into the First Form among the Babes if I let a duffer like Figgins beat me in an exam."

And Levison shrugged his shoulders and walked away.

Tom Merry looked for Figgins after dinner, and found him in his study. Figgins was working.

"Got one minute to spare?" asked Tom, with a smile.

"Just one!" said Figgins, in a tired voice. "What is it?"

"Do you want to play in the match next Saturday against Wayland Ramblers' second team?"

Figgins shook his head.

"No; I asked you to put somebody in my place after the Abbotsford match, you remember."

"Yes—I've done it," said Tom Merry. "I'm giving Owen a chance. But your place is always open to you if you choose to take it."

"Thanks! But not till after the exam."

"We play the return match with Greyfriars later," said Tom. "You've simply got to play for that—but that's later than the exam., luckily. So we needn't worry about that. Are you cutting the junior House-match, too?"

"Yes; I've arranged with Redfern to skipper the team."

"Look here, Figgy, you're overdoing it, you know," said Tom earnestly. "You're losing all your colour, and Fatty Wynn says you're going off your feed."

Figgins smiled faintly.

"Fatty thinks any chap is off his feed if he doesn't eat enough for an army," he remarked.

"I fancy Kerr and Wynn are both anxious about you, Figgy."

"I'm all right."

Figgins turned back to his books. Tom Merry laughed. It was a plain hint that Figgins wanted to be alone.

"There's another matter," said Tom. "While you've been sticking your nose into your blessed books, you've been overlooking other things besides football. There's something going on in your House that you ought to keep an eye on."

Figgins looked startled.

"What's that?" he asked. "I've been rather out of things lately."

"I don't know how much there is in it," said Tom. "I heard it from Levison, and one never knows whether he's telling the truth. But he says he heard Monteith, your prefect, telling Kildare about some junior in your House breaking bounds at night. It seems that Monteith was coming in late the other night, and he spotted a junior getting in at the passage window at the back."

Figgins turned red.

"My hat! Did he?"

"Yes—and he didn't recognise him, and he made a round of the dorms. afterwards and found everybody in bed. Now, if there's an idiot on your side playing the giddy ox like that, he's running the risk of being sacked, Figgy—and as junior captain it's up to you to keep an eye open. You don't want a fellow expelled."

"I don't think there's any danger of that," said Figgins uncomfortably. "We haven't any smart fellows, no giddy blades, in the New House, like——". He paused.

Tom Merry laughed good-humouredly.

"Like we have in the School House—Levison and Gore and Cutts, for example," he said. "Well, I thought I'd mention it to you, Figgy. If you've got a chap here asking for trouble, he'll find it sooner or later, and however big a rotter he may be, it comes rough on a chap to be sacked."

"How do you know he's a rotter?" said Figgins irritably.

Tom Merry looked surprised.

"Well, a chap must be a rotter who breaks bounds at night, I suppose," he said. "He couldn't go out of bounds for any good, I suppose."

"How do you know he goes out of bounds?"

"I don't know, of course," said Tom, still more surprised. "But I don't suppose a fellow gets out of his house nearly at midnight simply to walk round the quad."

"I—I suppose not!" muttered Figgins.

Tom Merry was looking at him very curiously, and Figgins, for some reason, turned very red. A suspicion, natural under the circumstances, came into Tom Merry's mind, but he dismissed it instantly. Old Figgins was not the kind of fellow to play the giddy ox—not at all the kind of chap to be guilty of "pub. haunting," or anything of that kind. But Tom Merry's suspicion, momentary as it was, showed in his eyes, and Figgins saw it, and his face, already quite red, grew perfectly scarlet.

"Well, don't be offended, Figgy," said Tom, getting off the table. "I mentioned it, because you're junior House captain, and you ought to know. Of course, it's no business of mine, as a School House chap."

"I—I'm much obliged to you, of course," said Figgins haltingly. "But—but I don't think there's anything wrong."

"Right-ho! I'm off. Give my love to Horace," said Tom Merry; and, with a cheery nod and a smile, he walked out of the study.

Figgins was grinding Latin again before he had passed the doorway.

But Tom Merry's face was very serious as he crossed the quadrangle. He was so serious and thoughtful, that he almost walked into the chums of Study No. 6 as he came into the School House, without seeing them.

"Hallo! Gone to sleep?" asked Blake genially, as he grabbed hold of Tom Merry's arm and brought him to a halt. "Wherefore this worried brow, oh, my son?"

"I was thinking," said Tom.

"More miracles!" sighed Blake. "When Figgy starts swotting, and you start thinking, I really think the age of miracles has come again! We only want to hear Gussy start talking sense, and then I shall really believe that the end of the world is coming."

"Weally, Blake——"

"I've just seen Figgy, and I've told him that yarn of Levison's, about Monteith having seen a junior scuttling in at a window nearly midnight last night—and if I didn't know Figgins so well——" Tom Merry paused.

"Well?" said Blake curiously.

"He coloured up so much, I should think he was the chap—only it's impossible," said Tom. "He isn't that kind of ass. But he knows who it is—I'm sure of that. Some pal of his playing the giddy ox, and worrying him at a time when he oughtn't to be bothered. It's too bad if that's the case."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy indignantly. "This is a time for wallyin' wound old Figgins, and not for bothahin' him. The chap ought to be ashamed of himself, whoever he is."

"He ought to be stopped," said Blake, frowning. "Figgy's got a hard, uphill fight before him, and if we're going to let him off footer, and his chums are letting him off the House-matches, too, it's silly rot for a giddy ox to bother him with tricks like that. Perhaps that's what's making him look so badly off colour, as well as the work. The chap ought to be mobbed, whoever he is."

"I was thinking——" began Tom Merry.

Blake nodded quickly.

"I savvy! But it would be a rather serious bizney for us to get out of our House at that time of night to collar him—if we were spotted out——"

"Bai Jove! It would mean twouble——"

"We could risk that, for Figgy's sake," said Tom. "I think there's no doubt that it's weighing on his mind. I remember now that Fatty Wynn mentioned that he woke up one night and found Figgy's bed empty. Figgy came in a few minutes later, and didn't tell Fatty what he'd got up for—but since we know this, I think it's pretty clear. Figgins knew there was a chap breaking bounds, and had been to look for him or stop him——"

"I can't believe he's the chap himself," said Blake. "It's not in his line at all. Besides, if he was going to play the roving blade like Cutts of the Fifth, he wouldn't do it at a time when he's working up for a hard exam."

"Of course he wouldn't. It's not Figgins. But he knows who it is, and he's worrying about it, and losing his sleep looking after the silly chump, whoever he is. And for a fellow who works as Figgy's doing now to lose his sleep is a serious thing. No wonder the poor chap is looking like putty."

"Bai Jove! It's wotten!"

"It's got to be stopped," said Blake resolutely. "I'll tell

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you what—we'll take it in turns to watch for the idiot, and collar him the first time he comes out of bounds, and make-believe he's fallen into the paws of a prefect. We'll scare him out of his wits by threatening to take him to the Head, and then let him get away. If that doesn't cure him of breaking bounds at night, nothing will. But I wonder who it is?"

"We shall know if we catch him," said Tom. "It's a go. Suppose you start with me to-night. And if we draw it blank, Lowther and Manners can watch to-morrow night—and Kangy and Herries the night after—till we catch the rotter!"

"Good egg!"

"Pewwaps I had bettah keep watch, deah boys. It was weally my ideah at the start to wally wound old Figgins, you know."

"You can come if you like," said Tom Merry. "I expect you'll be fast asleep——"

"Wats! I shall make it a special point to keep awake."

"I'll make it a special point to haul you out of bed by your leg," chuckled Blake. "That's all right—we'll be in the box-room to-night—say at ten, Merry."

"I'll join you there," said Tom.

And so it was arranged. The chums of the School House felt that it was the only thing to be done. They knew Figgins's sense of duty, and they knew his regard for anybody who had any claim on his friendship. It was just like Figgins to lose his night's rest, at a time when he needed it badly, in looking after some foolish fellow who was hunting for trouble. Certainly the Co. could not "rally round" old Figgins more effectively than by relieving his mind of such a worry.

And when ten o'clock rang out from the old tower that night, Tom Merry was waiting in the box-room for the two Fourth-Formers—and they joined him there in the darkness; and ten minutes later the three of them were scudding towards the New House in the gloom—to keep watch upon the passage window by which the unknown delinquent had left the New House on one occasion at least—probably on many. If anyone came out of that window, or tried to enter by it, during the next two hours, they were ready to collar him; and he would not escape from their clutches without answering most severely for his sins.

CHAPTER 15.
Something Like a Surprise.

THE night was dark and gloomy.

Fitfully through ridges of dark clouds the moon peeped down upon the old quadrangle of St. Jim's, one minute shedding a silvery glimmer, and then being again lost to sight.

Tom Merry and Blake and D'Arcy waited patiently.

They were pretty certain that the culprit, if he was coming out that night at all, had not yet come out. The bedtime of the juniors was at half-past nine, and the young rascal would surely allow half an hour to elapse before he ventured to leave the dormitory for the coast to be clear. It was much more likely that he would be later than that he would be earlier than ten o'clock. Indeed, it was quite possible that if he was bound for forbidden haunts outside the walls of St. Jim's, he would not come out until eleven o'clock.

The three juniors swung their arms, and tramped to keep themselves warm—in the old quadrangle it was cold enough, and there was a keen wind. They sheltered themselves as well as they could behind an angle of the outbuildings, in sight of the window they were there to watch. When the moon shone, the window glimmered with the light, and then was plunged into blackness again.

Half-past ten had chimed out, when Tom Merry uttered a sudden exclamation. The window had moved in the glimmer of moonlight, and the lower sash was raised. Then the clouds hid the moon again, and all was invisible.

"Did you see anythin', deah boy?" whispered Arthur Augustus, who had been polishing his eyeglass at that moment.

"Yes, the window opened."

"Then the wottah's comin'."

"Yes. Quiet. If he hears us he'll get back, and we shall have all our trouble for nothing. We've got to collar him! Don't move or make a sound until he's on the ground."

"Wight-ho!"

"Shush!" murmured Blake.

"Weally, Blake——"

"Shush, you ass!"

There was a sound of rustling ivy, faint in the stillness of the quadrangle. The three juniors held their breath, even Arthur Augustus forbearing from making any further remarks. They listened intently.

The moon glimmered again, and for a moment they caught a glimpse of a dark form clinging to the ivy. Then all was darkness again.

The glimpse had been too brief for recognition to be possible, and the face of the junior, too, was turned to the ivy he clung to. But that it was a junior they had seen—a fellow in the Fourth or the Shell without a doubt.

They heard the light pit-a-pat of feet as he dropped to the ground.

They waited for a moment for the moon to emerge again, confident that when it gleamed they would see the unknown making round the house to get into the open quadrangle, to head for the school wall.

But when the gleam came, Tom Merry rubbed his eyes in wonder. They were between the unknown junior and the open quad—and he could not have passed without their knowing it. But the place was deserted—he was not in sight. The moon was clear for a full minute—the light searched out every interstice of the wall—the ivy glimmered before them, but the junior who had descended had vanished.

"M-my hat!" murmured Blake. "Where is he?"

Tom Merry snapped his teeth,

"He's cut off round the back of the house."

"Then he can't be making for the road," muttered Blake. "He didn't know we were here waiting for him—and he wouldn't go right round the house and by the stables for nothing. He can't be going out of the gates."

"I don't understand it; but he must have gone round the back of the house. I thought he would pass this way, of course. Blessed if I know what's on! Anyway, after him, and be careful, or he'll dodge us in the dark."

"It's vewy odd!" said D'Arcy.

Greatly puzzled, the three juniors moved on, and passed round to the back of the New House. All was darkness there, and they listened and strained their eyes in vain. There was nothing for it but to wait for the moon to gleam out again, and it was a couple of minutes before the clouds rolled on and left the moon clear. Then the light was strong enough, and they looked round them. For a time they saw nothing; but just as the moon was disappearing again Tom Merry spotted a dark figure moving cautiously in the distance, in the direction of the ruined tower.

"There he is!"

Darkness again.

"Where?" muttered Blake. "I saw nothing. Did you see who it was?"

"No; but I spotted him! He's making for the old tower."

"Great pip! What can he possibly want there?"

"Blessed if I know; but we're going to find out. Come on!"

Still more puzzled, the juniors made their way towards the old ruined tower. They did not need the moon to guide them now—they knew every inch of the way by day or night. They reached the ruins, treading very cautiously so as not to alarm their quarry. It began to look as if the night-walker was not going to break school-bounds after all; but the juniors meant to know what he was going to do, and who he was, anyway. It was very mysterious, and utterly inexplicable. What a fellow could want in the old ruins at that hour of the night was utterly beyond their powers of guessing.

Tom Merry led the way into the ruined tower. A gleam of light struck upon his eyes, and he halted. There was a faint odour of burning oil.

"He's got a bike lantern!" whispered Blake.

"Yes; we shall spot him now."

They pressed on. The light glimmered down the old stone steps; they mounted, and reached the stone doorway of the first room in the tower. The old oaken door had been shut—they had heard it close softly. A gleam of light came under it.

"Well, we've got him now!" said Blake. "There's no way out of that room excepting by the loophole—and only a cat could get through that."

"Yaas, wathah! Open the door!"

"I—I don't know," said Tom Merry, hesitatingly, with his hand on the door. "The chap isn't going to break bounds after all. I don't know that we've got any right to interfere with him, as it turns out."

"Well, he's a New House bounder, anyway, and we'll bump him for giving us all that trouble," said Blake.

"Yaas! Besides, we've got to know what's goin' on, so that we can tell old Figgins, and welieve his mind," said Arthur Augustus.

Tom Merry nodded.

"Right-ho, we'll go in!"

Tom Merry threw open the door, and the three juniors rushed in.

There was a startled exclamation within.

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A boy who was sitting at an old oaken bench jumped up, and swung round towards the three invaders. The bicycle lantern burning on the bench gleamed upon his face, and the astounded juniors recognised him, and almost shouted:

"FIGGINS!"

CHAPTER 16.

Mr. Ratcliff Makes a Capture.

"FIGGINS!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Figgy! You!"

Figgins it was!

He seemed as astounded as the three School House juniors. He gazed at them like a fellow in a dream.

"You!" he exclaimed. "Tom Merry—Blake—Gussy! What on earth are you doing here at this time of night?"

"What are you doing here—that's the question!" retorted Tom Merry.

"I? Oh, I——"

"So you're the chap Monteith spotted last night getting into a window in the New House?" said Blake.

Figgins flushed.

"Well, I suppose it's no use denying it now," he said. "I'm the chap!"

"But what are you up to?" Tom Merry demanded, in wonder. "What do you mean by getting out of your House at this time of night, and coming here? What's the little game?"

Figgins waved his hand towards the oak bench.

The juniors looked. Then they understood.

There were books and impot. paper and pen and ink there. Figgins had a pen in his hand. A Latin dictionary—a delectus—Horace and Virgil!

"Swotting!" yelled Blake.

"Bai Jove! Swottin'!"

"Well, you—you ass!" gasped Tom Merry.

Figgins's flush deepened.

"There was no other way," he said apologetically. "This exam. is a regular twister, and I couldn't—I simply couldn't find enough time for studying in the daytime. There's such a lot of things to interrupt a fellow, and the time's so short to the exam."

"So you've been coming here of a night to study when you ought to be in bed asleep?" Tom Merry exclaimed.

Figgins nodded.

"You ass! Do you think that's the way to get ready for an exam.?" exclaimed Tom hotly. "No wonder you've been looking seedy and going off your head. You'll be knocked up before the exam. comes round—you'll be in the school hospital instead of in the examination-room, when the time comes."

"I shall be all right."

"Wubbish! It's burnin' the midnight oil at both ends, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a sage shake of the head. "It won't do—it weally won't."

"I've been putting in a couple of hours every night," said Figgins. "Sometimes only one hour, when I was too fagged to keep it up. It's nice and quiet here for study—no beastly interruptions—no silly asses coming in to jaw—until now—excuse me——"

Tom Merry laughed.

"We'll excuse you," he said; "but you must chuck it, Figgy. It's—it's madness. You'll get knocked up. Do the other fellows know?"

"Not a bit. I've kept it dark. Blessed if I know how you spotted me," said Figgins.

"We were watching for a rotter breaking bounds. We were going to nab him and stop him. We thought you were worrying about it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, Fatty Wynn found you up one night, and——"

"Yes, it nearly came out that time," said Figgins, with a grin. "Now, you kids go back to bed, and leave me alone. I can't waste time."

"Then you're going to keep this up?" asked Blake.

"I must."

"It's rotten, Figgy. You'll get knocked up."

"I can stand it—till the exam.," said Figgins wearily. "I'm going to pull off that exam. or burst something. And the harder I work, the better chance I shall have. I'm getting on splendidly. I know I've got a chance."

"You won't have a chance if you get crocked, and have to miss the examination altogether," said Tom Merry.

"That's all right. I'm pretty tough. When it's all over I'm going in for outdoor games again, like a bird, and it will soon pull me round."

"I wish you'd go back to bed," said Tom Merry uneasily. "This is over-doing it. Really playing the giddy ox, Figgy. Suppose you're spotted out of the House?"

"Well, I should have to chuck it then. I suppose."

"But you'd get into a row. Ratty would take it out of you."

"I can stand a licking."

"Yes; but he mightn't believe that you'd been out of the House to swot. He might think you'd been up to games like Levison."

"I should explain it all if I were spotted, of course. Now buzz off, like good fellows, and let me wire in," said Figgins.

The School House fellows exchanged glances. They did not approve of Figgins's methods at all; but he was his own master. If he was determined to burn the midnight oil, it was his own business.

"Well, I think you're an ass!" said Tom Merry at last.

"Yaas, wathah; sevewal sorts of an ass!"

"Though you larrup a duffer with a cricket-stump, yet will not his folly depart from him," said Blake resignedly. "All serene, Figgy. We won't waste your time. Good-night!"

"Good-night!" said Figgins.

He turned back to his books. He was deep in Horace before Tom Merry had closed the door. The three juniors made their way back to their own house, considerably worried about Figgins, but glad that matters were no worse. The night-walker had turned out to be old Figgins; but though Figgins might play the "giddy ox," he would never be found out doing anything worse than that.

In the lonely room in the old tower Figgins worked away grimly till midnight tolled out from the clock-tower close by. Figgins paused a few moments then; but he bent resolutely to his task again, and worked on till the half-hour chimed. Then he rose and sighed.

He put his books into his pockets, concealed the ink and the lantern in a recess of the old wall, and left the lonely room, making his way down the old stone stairs in the dark.

He was tired out, and his head was throbbing.

The unaccustomed work of swotting was telling very much upon the sturdy junior, and he felt a weary desire for the whole thing to be over. Well, it would be over soon, and he would know whether he could do things or not; and perhaps the medal would fall to him, and at that thought, and the thought of showing Cousin Ethel that her faith in him was not misplaced, Figgins felt a warm glow, and his weariness dropped from him like a cloak.

He climbed the ivy behind the New House, and clambered in at the window, carefully shutting it after him without a sound. The House was very dark and silent. At that hour masters and boys were long in bed.

Figgins tiptoed his way back to the Fourth Form dormitory, and opened the door. In the passages all was dark and silent.

He entered the dormitory and closed the door behind him.

The next moment he uttered a sharp, startled exclamation, as there was a blinding flash of light.

The electric light had been suddenly turned on in the dormitory.

Figgins staggered back, dazed, and, like a fellow in a dream, he saw the figure of Mr. Ratcliff, his Housemaster, standing before him, and his wandering gaze detected the Fourth-Formers sitting up in bed with scared faces.

"So you have returned, Figgins."

Figgins could only stare.

Dimly he realised that his Housemaster must have made a round of the dormitories at a late hour, and missed him from his bed, doubtless owing to Monteith's report of what he had seen the previous night.

The Housemaster had discovered that Figgins was missing from the Fourth Form dormitory; and, with cat-like patience, he had waited there in the dark for the errant junior to come back.

When he heard Figgins enter the room, he had turned on the light; and Figgins was revealed—fairly caught!

Figgins gazed dazedly at the Housemaster. He saw the cold, cruel smile upon Mr. Ratcliff's thin lips, and realised how pleased the hard-hearted master was at this discovery. All Ratty's old dislike of the free and independent Figgins was in his hard, sour face at that moment, and gleaming in his greenish eyes. Of all the New House fellows Figgins was the one whom Mr. Ratcliff would have chosen to have completely at his mercy, and his time had come now.

All the fellows were awake! They had been awake ever since Mr. Ratcliff came into the dormitory. Kerr and Wynn were looking almost haggard with dismay. For unless Figgins had some very good explanation to give, he was ruined. There was only one punishment for breaking bounds at night, and staying out to nearly one o'clock in the morning, and that was expulsion. Farewell to the examination for which he had worked so hard—farewell to the old school and the playing-fields—that was Figgins's punishment! Kerr and Wynn, who would have faced death for their chum, could not help him now. He was like a mouse in the cat's claws,

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and Mr. Ratcliff's hard, cold, sour face showed that he would give no more mercy than the cat would give to the captured mouse.

"Where have you been, Figgins?"

Mr. Ratcliff's voice was hard and metallic. Figgins gasped.

"I—I've been out, sir."

Mr. Ratcliff smiled, a cold, sarcastic smile.

"I am aware of that, Figgins, since I have been waiting for an hour and a half for you to come in. Where have you been? But I need not ask. What disgraceful place have you visited at this hour of the night?"

Figgins's eyes flashed. He began to recover himself a little.

"None, sir," he said firmly. "I haven't been outside the school walls."

Mr. Ratcliff sneered.

"Do you expect me to believe that, Figgins?"

"Yes, sir," said Figgins.

"You expect me to believe that you have spent two hours in the middle of the night outside your House, but within the school walls? And what were you doing, pray?"

"I—I was studying, sir."

Mr. Ratcliff almost jumped.

"You were—what?"

"Studying, sir," said Figgins, with an effort. He realised that his midnight swotting was all over now, at all events. "I'm working for the exam.—the Bishop's Medal, as you know, sir. I got up to study, and I've been in the tower, working, sir, since I left the dorm."

"I do not believe one word of it," said Mr. Ratcliff, in a sneering tone. "If you cannot think of a better explanation than that, Figgins, you had better hold your tongue!"

"But, sir, I——"

"You have been to some public-house, I presume—like Sleath, who was expelled for such practices," said Mr. Ratcliff. "You, like he, are a disgrace to your House. I demand to know, Figgins, what disgraceful resort you have been?"

Figgins turned crimson.

"I can only tell you the truth, sir. I've been studying in the room in the old tower, and I've been doing the same every night this week," he said steadily. "I couldn't work in the House. I should have been spotted burning a light."

"You refuse to tell me, then?"

"I've told you."

"Enough! Go to bed, and in the morning I shall take you to Dr. Holmes, and then, Figgins, you will receive your sentence. You need not have the slightest doubt that you will be expelled from the school you have disgraced."

"I—I——"

"Silence! Go to bed."

Figgins, with burning eyes, went to bed. Mr. Ratcliff turned out the light, and quitted the dormitory.

"Oh, Figgy," gasped Kerr, "I—I knew it wasn't anything rotten, though I was staggered when Ratty came in, and you weren't here! But, Figgy, you ass, Ratty won't believe you; the Head mayn't believe you!"

Figgins groaned.

"It can't be helped now. Don't worry about me."

But his chums could not help worrying, and there was little more sleep for Figgins & Co. of the New House that night.

CHAPTER 17.

Rally!

TOM MERRY came down in the morning, a little heavy-eyed and sleepy from loss of rest on the previous night. But all his sleepiness vanished as Kerr came running into the School House, white-faced and panting.

Tom ran towards him.

"Kerr, what's the matter? What's happened, old chap?"

Kerr caught his arm, clutching it tight in his agitation.

"You saw Figgy last night?" he muttered. "You and Blake and Gussy—Figgins told me—in the old tower swotting!"

"Yes," said Tom Merry, in wonder. "But what——"

Kerr drew a deep breath.

"You'll speak up for him—you and the others?"

"I don't understand——"

"He's caught!" groaned Kerr. "Ratty made a round of the House last night, missed Figgy, and waited for him to come in. He explained where he'd been, and Ratty wouldn't believe a word of it. You know he's down on Figgy always, and he's specially down on him now because Figgy went in for the Bishop's Medal against his wish. Oh, he's jolly glad he's caught him out—the beast—the beast! He's taking Figgy to the Head now! He's going to have him"—Kerr choked—"sacked—sacked, do you understand, for breaking bounds at night. He thinks Figgy has been pub.-hunting. Figgy can't prove where he was. The Head will believe Ratty, and—and——" Kerr choked again.

"Great Scott! What a ripping stroke of luck that we found Figgy out!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"You'll speak up for him?"

"Well, rather!"

"Oh, good! Good——"

"Hasn't Figgins mentioned——"

"He hasn't said a word about you. You'll get into a row, you know, for being out of your House at that time of night. Figgy's not going to say anything about it. But I knew if I told you——"

"Oh, the ass!" said Tom Merry. "As if we should mind his giving us away at such a time as this! Just like Figgy, though! But you bet we'll speak up, if we get the flogging of our lives for breaking House bounds! I'll find Blake and Gussy at once!"

"Heaven bless you!" said Kerr. There were tears in the Scottish junior's eyes, and Tom Merry, who had seldom seen traces of emotion in the cool, steady junior's face, realised how deeply he was moved by his chum's peril. "I—I speak up for Figgy, that's all. The Head will believe you, if Ratty won't. I'm sure the Head will take your word. Get Blake and D'Arcy to go with you——"

"You bet!"

Tom Merry rushed off in search of Blake and D'Arcy. They were not down yet, but he met them on the stairs. In a dozen panted words he told them what had happened and what was wanted. Blake chortled.

"Oh, what ripping luck we were out last night! Three giddy witnesses for Figgy!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with great satisfaction. "They can lick me if they like; I don't care a wap! This is the time for us to wally wound Figgins, and no ewwah."

And, whatever might be the results to themselves, the three juniors were determined at once on that point. They were going to speak up for Figgins, and bear witness in his favour.

A little later Mr. Ratcliff was observed crossing the quadrangle, with Figgins walking by his side. Figgins was looking very downcast. Mr. Ratcliff had sent a message over to the Head that he wished to see him early upon a very important matter, and Dr Holmes was in his study waiting for him. Mr. Ratcliff and Figgins walked through a crowd of curious fellows to the Head's study, and the door closed upon them

Dr. Holmes looked inquiringly at the Housemaster. His kind old face grew very grave as he listened to what the New House master had to say. Then he turned to Figgins.

"You do not deny this, Figgins?"

Figgins faced the Head's calm, searching glance bravely.

"I don't deny that I was out of the house last night, sir," he said. "But Mr. Ratcliff has not told you my explanation."

"A most palpable falsehood!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff.

"However, I will hear it," said the Head.

"I'm working for the Bishop's Medal examination, sir. Every night this week I've been swotting—I mean, studying—in the room in the old tower, sir. That's where I was last night, mugging up Horace."

Dr. Holmes looked at him very hard.

"I hope that is true, Figgins. But what is your opinion, Mr. Ratcliff, as this boy's Housemaster?"

"My opinion, sir, is that the explanation is false."

"You have no proof, Figgins, of any kind. Did your companions know where you had gone?"

"No, sir," faltered Figgins.

"You did not tell your own personal friends?"

"I—I didn't want to get them mixed up in a breach of rules, sir, in case it should come out at any time."

"You must be aware, Figgins, that this is—well, a most extraordinary explanation," said the Head coldly.

"It's true, sir," said Figgins miserably. "Mr. Ratcliff doesn't believe me, and I suppose you won't. But it's true."

Knock!

The door opened, and Tom Merry stepped into the study, followed by Jack Blake and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Dr. Holmes looked at them with a frown.

"How dare you——" he began.

"Excuse us, sir," said Tom Merry hurriedly. "We know what Figgins is here for, and we can bear witness, sir."

"Do you mean that you know something about this matter, Merry?"

"We know all about it, sir."

"Yaas, wathah, sir!"

"It is impossible that these School House boys can know anything whatever about it!" said Mr. Ratcliff angrily.

The Head made a gesture.

"I will hear them. Go on, Tom Merry!"

"We know that Figgins was swotting in the old tower last night, sir."

(Continued on page 27.)

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NASTY!

"I am very sorry, Mr. Spooner," she said, "to learn that when you called the other day my dog bit you!"

"Oh, that's all right!" he said, with a forced effort to be cheerful. "There—there's no reason to cry!"

"It isn't all right!" she sobbed. "The poor dog has been ill ever since."—Sent in by J. Adams, Glastonbury.

ONCE ENOUGH.

A young man once had the misfortune to be run over. As usual, the driver omitted to shout out his warning until too late.

"Look out!" he yelled, when the cart had gone a few yards past the fallen man.

The unfortunate young man struggled to a sitting position, and asked:

"What! You aren't coming back, are you?"—Sent in by H. E. Lester, Chelsea.

"HUSH!"

Ginson, returning from his club, after imbibing not wisely, but too well, saw an imitation fish suspended from a fishing-rod outside a local sports dealer's shop. After ringing the bell for some time a head was poked out of a window above, inquiring what was the matter.

"Come down at once!" whispered Ginson.

The dealer came down in haste and alarm.

"What's happened?" he gasped.

"Shush!" whispered the cheerful one. "Don't make a row; you've got a bite, guv'nor!"—Sent in by H. Bodecott, Jersey.

QUITE TRUE.

Newsagent (to "Gemite," who has accidentally dropped his copy of THE GEM into a puddle): "Well, my boy, it's all up with your GEM now."

"Gemite" (with a confident smile): "It's all right. THE GEM is always like that."

Newsagent: "Always like that! What do you mean?"

"Gemite": "There's never a dry page in THE GEM."—Sent in by E. Frost, Islington, N.

POOR YOUTH!

In a small village there lived a gentleman whose name was Peacock, his great hobby being the breeding of turkeys. The birds were kept in a large paddock in front of his house.

One day a stranger came past, and mixed with the crowd that was always to be found there admiring the magnificent turkeys.

"Whose turkeys are these?" the stranger demanded of a youth.

"They're Peacock's," replied the youth.

"I asked whose turkeys they were!" snapped the stranger angrily.

"Didn't I tell you they were Peacock's?" retorted the youth.

The stranger got very excited, and vigorously boxed the lad's ears.

"You young fool, don't you think I know the difference between peacocks and turkeys?"—Sent in by E. Stanley, Cambridge Heath.

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OF COURSE!

Salesman: "This is our new patent buttonless tan boot, sir; 'banana skin' brand."

Customer: "What ever makes you call it by that peculiar name?"

Salesman: "Because, sir, it is yellow, and so easy to slip on."—Sent in by D. Whaley, Horley.

HE DID NOT MAKE HER.

First Husband: "My wife's gone to the West Indies."

Second Husband: "Jamaica?"

First Husband: "No, she wanted to go!"—Sent in by Miss H. Corder, London, N.

ALL FOR A PENNY.

"A gill of fourpenny beer, please!" piped the small boy. "And will you please lend mother a jug, and please put it in a warmer for a minute as our fire has gone out; and please give me a piece of sugar, and the ground ginger in a piece of paper, in case you put too much in; and send my father a pipe and a few matches. Please will you lend our Bill some writing-paper and a pen and ink, and to-day's 'Daily Mail,' and tell our Susie the time, and mother will send you the penny on Saturday."—Sent in by G. Walsh, Bolton, Lancs.

ONE FOR HER.

"As my wife at the window one day,
Stood watching a man with a monkey,
A cart came by with a broth of a boy,
Who was driving a stout little donkey.
To my wife I then spoke, by way of a joke,
'There's a relation of yours in that carriage.'
To which she replied, as the donkey she espied,
"Ah, yes, a relation—by marriage!'"

Sent in by A. Ward, Edmonton, N.

ONE HORSE-POWER.

A motorist was having trouble with his car, and a by-stander addressed him.

"What's her power?" he asked.

"Forty horse-power," was the laconic reply.

"What's the matter with her?" demanded another.

"Dunno, quite," replied the motorist, "but from the way she is behaving, I should say the other thirty-nine horses were dead!"—Sent in by A. Riddick, London, S.E.

THE PROFESSOR'S PROOF.

"No," complained Professor McCanny to his students, "ye dinna use your faculties of observation. Ye dinna use 'them. For instance——"

He picked up a jar of chemicals from which came a hideous odour, and stuck his finger into it, and then into his mouth; then he passed the vessel from student to student.

After each man had dipped a finger in, and tasted the chemical, and was feeling decidedly queer in the regions of the stomach, the old professor rubbed his hands gleefully together.

"I told you so!" he exclaimed triumphantly. "Ye dinna use your faculties. If ye had observed, ye would have seen that the finger I stuck into ma mouth was not the finger I stuck into the chemical!"

Sent in by W. Twycross, Shorncliffe.

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SECRET SERVICE!

The Opening Chapters of a Grand New Serial Story. By AGENT "No. 55."

NOTE!

The author has, for obvious reasons, to conceal his real identity under the pen-name of Agent "No. 55." Concerning his position, I am allowed to say no more than this: that if his real name were revealed it would cause something like consternation in Diplomatic and Secret Service circles.

THE EDITOR.

THE FIRST INSTALMENTS.

Jerry Osborne, a young Britisher who is employed as a clerk in London by a German named Muller, goes to Berlin on a holiday, and there meets with an adventure which alters the course of his whole life. Chance throws him into the company of Max Elton, a famous British airman and inventor, who has established himself on the German coast in order to keep an eye on the secret preparations for war with Britain, which Germany is carrying on on a huge scale. Osborne joins Elton in his work, and learns that the airman is in danger of his life from German Secret Service agents, of whom Jerry's own employer, Muller, is the chief.

The two become fast friends, and go through many adventures together, finally coming back to England, where Elton becomes one of the advisers of the Cabinet. Various disasters happen to English arsenals and dockyards, but still no suspicion is breathed against Germany.

"If they'd only give me a free hand, Jerry," said Elton one day, "we'd soon upset this German invasion business!"

(Now go on with the story.)

A Surprising Visitor!

"Why, what's your latest idea?" asked Jerry.

"To give 'em socks right at the beginning of trouble; never allow them the chance of getting their invasion business under way. I'd have a permanent North Sea fleet of warships stationed near at hand, so that as soon as the transports get outside the Zee they can be sunk out of hand."

"But surely Germany will send her own fleet to see the transports safely across?" Jerry objected.

"No doubt; but a few aeroplanes carrying bombs would keep them quiet. They could be kept on the warships. There's a new model I'm bringing out that will be able to rise into the air almost direct from the ground. Went's at work on the idea now."

"But the Germans have aircraft as well as us. They'll be able to destroy our ships as easily as ours will theirs," Jerry persisted.

"Right again—if they're given the chance; and it's up to us to see that they don't get it, Jerry. Germany has spies; England must have ditto. And at the first sign of the invasion materialising, a few bombs dropped on to those sheds and hangars we've seen would do the trick."

"If we were first."

"That's just the point. We've got to be first. I'm not a bloodthirsty chap, but war is war. It isn't a game of cricket, nor yet a friendly spar with the gloves. In war, you're out to do your adversary in just as quick and thoroughly as you know how. You don't say to him, 'Now, you make your move, and then I'll make mine'—game of chess business. It's least expensive and most humane, in the long run, to handle him so that he can't make a move at all. We in England have no business to wait until the German actually has his foot firmly on British soil before we begin to try to shift him. May be chivalrous, and all that, but it isn't common-sense. War with kid gloves isn't any use. You've just got to hit first—hit just as hard as you can, and keep on hitting until the other fellow is sure he's had enough. If he gets hurt while he's finding this out, that's his look out."

"Yes," Jerry agreed, "playing the game's all right, but not of a lot of use if your opponent doesn't play according to the rules."

"Your rules, you mean. He plays according to his, and I think Germany has shown us pretty conclusively just what her ideas of war rules are."

"But how would you get the news of Germany's start early enough to get in your smashing first blow?"

"Why, this way, Jerry; and it's just what I want our Government to realise, but they don't seem—— Hallo! What is it?"

The door had opened to admit the keeper of the little alehouse where the two comrades had been for three days past.

"Gen'leman for you, sirs! Come in a great motor, he 'as," he announced, with some wonder. He believed Elton and Jerry to be holiday-making artists.

"Didn't he give his name, Venner?"

"Yes, sir. Sir Edmund Black, I think 'e said, sir."

The next moment both were on their legs to meet the Foreign Secretary, and the landlord backed out of the room.

NEXT WEDNESDAY: "D'ARCY'S MYSTERIOUS PRESENT!" Another Splendid, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's. Order Early.

"No bad news, Sir Edmund?" cried Max Elton hastily. "This isn't a place to expect to see you."

"No." And Sir Edmund shook hands with both. "But I thought it necessary to come down."

"But how did you know where to find us?" cried Elton, surprised.

The Minister looked slightly puzzled.

"From your message."

"I haven't written you telling you we were here!" Elton declared.

He looked the question at Jerry, who shook his head.

"It was signed by you, Elton, at least; and I was asked to see you at once. An important matter. So I came."

Sir Edmund spoke a trifle impatiently, his keen, frowning eyes travelling from one to the other, evidently beginning to think he had been made a fool of.

"I got your message—a telegram—this evening, at five o'clock, to be precise," he continued. "It stated the matter was urgent, so I motored down as quickly as I could. I won't deny I found it inconvenient. I'm a busy man, with most of my time mapped out. But as you were the sender——"

"Apparently the sender," broke in Elton. "When, and from where was the wire sent?"

"Four this afternoon; place of despatch, Southend."

"Did you bring it with you?"

"No; why should I? What, Elton, are you driving at?"

"Why, that someone, obviously, had an interest in getting you out of London to-night."

"Sir," Jerry's voice interrupted sharply, "did you meet with any accident coming down?"

"Accident? Why, no!"

An expression of intelligence flashed into Elton's face. He understood the drift of the question at once.

"Nothing that looked like an accident?" he asked quickly.

"No, no. Why do you ask?" the Minister answered.

"Because, as it hasn't happened yet I reckon it'll soon be due," Elton said quietly. "A forged telegram, a British Minister—and the strongest man of the Cabinet—brought to this forsaken place at night, where Mr. Osborne and myself happen to be! By George, sir, isn't it plain enough? There'll be more excitement for us than we'll appreciate, I'm thinking."

"Muller's work?" said Jerry.

"Likely, my boy."

With the remark that he had not dined, Sir Edmund left the room to order the landlord to bring him some kind of a meal. He returned, carrying a glass of ale, from which he drank with relish.

"What is troubling you, Elton?" he asked, going across to where Elton had seated himself, head on doubled fists.

The inventor looked up.

"I'm considering, sir," he said slowly, "that it happens there are gathered here the only men in this country who are fully acquainted with the plan of Germany's secret scheme of invasion. It may be simply a coincidence; it may not; but if anything should happen to us here this evening——"

"It will be greatly to the advantage of our enemy," interrupted the Foreign Secretary in an even voice.

He sipped at his ale without sign of disturbance in his pale, lined face.

Jerry's Vigil!

Sir Edmund Black was essentially a strong man, a man of no uncertain courage, and with wonderful self-control. The suggestion of danger neither excited nor depressed him, nor did he attempt to make light of his companions' apprehensions. A man can know his own value without being vain, and Sir Edmund was well aware that his loss to the English Government would be an advantage to Germany of extreme value.

He it was who had brought about England's tardy efforts of aerial defence. Once he had threatened to resign if the Navy were the victim of those who proclaimed against war expenditure. He was insistent that the most recent efforts being made against German aggression should be pushed forward. While eating his meal, he listened quietly to the talk between Max Elton and Jerry.

"Must you get back to London to-night, sir?" the latter asked.

And he replied:

"I should be glad to do so. And on the other hand, I have no desire to meet with General Ranger's fate."

"Eh?" cried Elton and Jerry together.

"You have not heard? The report was in this morning's papers. A woman—at least, so it is supposed; the miscreant has not been apprehended—shot at him last evening as he was driving to the barracks at Chelmsford."

"And is he dead?"

"No; but the surgeons are uncertain if he will lose the sight of one eye. The bullet struck the wind-screen, and a bit of glass struck him."

Elton banged his fist violently upon the table.

"This sort of thing goes on, and yet I'm not allowed to go across one night and drop a few bombs down among the German war material in the Zuyder Zee!" he cried bitterly.

"That wouldn't get us out of our present fix, Elton," the Minister reminded him.

"By George, that's true!" And Elton brightened up. "Look here, sir! Osborne has made a good suggestion. It's this: We're here for a certain purpose."

"Then by all means carry it out, Mr. Elton, without considering me," observed Sir Edmund.

"That's Osborne's suggestion. He'll stay here to see our business through, and I'll go back to London with you."

"So that if anything has been arranged for my exit from the world, you will have the opportunity of accompanying me?" And Black smiled. "I think you'd better let me run my own risks."

"Three persons—I suppose your chauffeur is to be depended upon?—might be more useful than two," returned Elton. "No, sir; with your permission, I consider it part of any Englishman's duty to do his best to protect the life of a man of your importance to England, and I mean going with you."

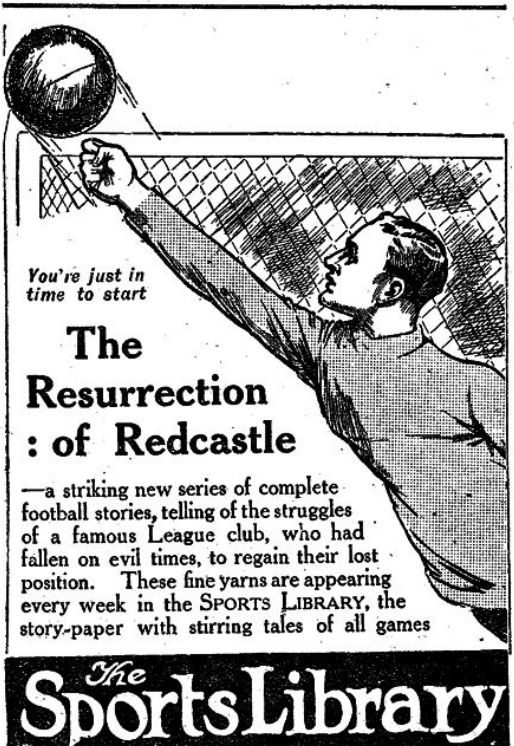
"Then in that case there's nothing for me to say," laughed the Minister. "Mr. Osborne, don't you find your friend a little tyrannical at times?"

"Oh, he can be obstinate, too," laughed Elton. "I wanted him to go with you, but he thinks he can do the work here better than I can. If I had my 'plane here I'd take you to London in that. As I haven't, we'll go in your car, and by a roundabout route. And as I know these roads better than your man does, I'll take the wheel."

"Very good, Mr. Elton. I suppose I must submit. When do we make a start?"

"At ten o'clock, if that's agreeable. It is now eight."

Soon afterwards Jerry said good-night to the Minister, and left the inn. Elton walked with him, and the two engaged in close conversation as they tramped across sodden marshland by a footpath that crossed a road leading from Col-



OUR COMPANION PAPERS: "THE MAGNET" LIBRARY, Every Monday. "THE PENNY POPULAR," Every Friday. "CHUCKLES," 1D. Every Saturday, 2

chester to Brightlingsea, and ultimately gave upon the open estuary of the river Colne.

"But what gets over me is how Muller has learned we are here?" said Jerry. "He or one of his agents must know. They couldn't have hit upon this inn where we're staying by chance, or, if they had, wouldn't have mentioned your name."

"I fear it is so, Jerry, wide-awake as we've been to keep our movements covered. Of course, it may be only a chance shot, but I can't believe it," said Elton.

"Which way do you drive?"

"Walton first, then to Manningtree, and across to Stortford, home by Enfield. Thus I'll miss the likely places between here and Colchester, the natural road back to London. You're all right, old man?"

"Right as rain."

"Just my blessed luck if the fellow should take it into his head to come across to-night! But you're right, Jerry; keeping Sir Edmund safe is the more important matter of the two. Got the gun all right?"

"Yes."

"Well, don't be afraid of using it. It takes ten shots, and you ought to be able to disable the engine in that number. So-long, old chap! Take care of yourself."

"You, too. So-long!"

Left to himself, Jerry began to pace up and down the spit of oozy turf. Behind him lay the black marshland, and within a stone's throw in front he could hear the soft, gurgling murmur of the gently-breaking sea. Beyond that no sound broke the black, dreary silence of the desolate spit. And here alone he was going to keep vigil through the night, or for so much of it until the expected person made his appearance.

The outcome of his and Elton's tracking of Muller had been their agreement that the spy was no longer in England. By some means or other he must have contrived to evade detection and get away to—Holland seemed the most likely spot. A stray report from a Coastguard that he had twice seen an aeroplane come from seaward and continue its flight inland had been seen by Elton. To most persons, it would have suggested nothing. Aeroplanes from abroad flying across England were nothing rare. To Elton it suggested Muller. It had brought him and Jerry to this forsaken strip of the Essex coast, and for three nights they had kept watch. And nothing had happened.

Perhaps they were right. Events might prove them wrong. But the scent was worth following up. That Muller's agents had not all been discovered, and that the man still contrived to send them orders, the outrage of which Sir Edmund Black had just acquainted them conclusively proved. He might be Muller or only a messenger sent by the spy who was making these nightly trips. If he could be captured good would result.

To and fro went Jerry, his eyes searching the sky seaward. He and Elton had searched the ground inland thoroughly, and had found indubitable traces suggesting the landing of a 'plane. If that occurred to-night it would be for Jerry to get as close as possible, and with his weapon, a silent shooting rifle through a large calibre bullet up to eighty yards—one of Elton's inventions, gas the exploding force—destroy the engine or otherwise render the machine helpless.

Nine o'clock by his watch, and a thin rain began to fall. Turning up his collar, Jerry doggedly tramped the wet grass. The moon was hidden, and a brisk wind was blowing from westward. Presently the rain began to fall so heavily that he went and crouched under a straggling hedge thirty yards inland. He was cold, wet, and a sleep fit was stealing over him. To counteract it he rose and paced this way and that, using his night glasses at intervals.

Suddenly a tiny moving light came within the range of his vision, and his sleepiness departed forthwith. Crouching, he kept the lenses fixed upon the advancing pin-prick, a warm thrill of excitement stealing through him. Perhaps Max Elton's joking grumble was to come true.

Within five minutes he had no doubt of it. The aeroplane, just a nebulous shadow upon the night, was rapidly nearing the coast. Once more back to the ditch went Jerry, for he must offer no chance of being seen by the pilot of the 'plane, supposing the machine was going to land.

And land it did, passing over where Jerry was crouched so that he could see the huddled figure set amid the spidery stays. Rising, he looked back over the hedge. The 'plane was very near the ground.

Bent double, Jerry ran silently forward, not willing to risk a shot until profitably near. And as he ran the wind brought the hum and running sound of a powerful motor-car along the road not far away. The confederate come to receive the message brought from oversea.

Ten seconds flew by. Jerry's blood was racing. Was it Muller himself he was about to capture? Should he wait to shoot until after the car had started on its backward journey, to wherever that might be? And then upon the night sounded with awful clearness that menace the report of a weapon, the short, barking note of a pistol or revolver, and his heart leaped.

It was the car Elton was driving, and it was being attacked!

Further shots rang out, abrupt, confused, a regular fusillade. The attackers—those who had laid the trap and evidently foreseen Elton's precautions—must be numerous. A fierce fight was in progress. Should he run to assist? He had forgotten the aeroplane.

Suddenly memory jogged, and he turned his eyes to the machine. It had come to earth, and beside it he could make out the figure of a man standing. Mechanically Jerry put up his glasses. The man stood motionless, listening like himself to the cracking shots that marked the night-hidden fray in the road beyond.

Fifty yards—less—separated Jerry from the still figure and its machine, yet he was undecided. Elton was fighting for his own and another life hardly less valuable, and Jerry's instinct was to help.

In the Dark.

Muller—for he it was who had stepped from the seat of the aeroplane—was quite as badly surprised as Jerry Osborne by the sounds of the fierce encounter in the road; and if Jerry were uncertain what was best for him to do, the spy was no less so.

True, it was his fertile brain had hatched the plot whereby Sir Edmund Black was to be kidnapped and carried out of the country. All being well, he had anticipated the pleasure of conveying the Minister back to Holland with him that night. But anything like a fight he had not expected, well aware that Sir Edmund carried his lofty contempt of personal danger to the extent of refusing to carry weapons.

And, anyway, the fight shouldn't be taking place where it was. The Minister's car had no business to be where evidently it was.

Muller had learned that Max Elton was still alive, though he had not confessed the fact to General Zophel; he was aware that Elton and Jerry Osborne were staying at the marshland inn. What he did not know was that the fellow whom the landlord had recently engaged as stableman, and who was in Muller's pay, had learned from the chauffeur of the change of route Elton intended making, and had conveyed the information to the three men who had been set the task of abducting the English Minister.

Ignorant of the observation kept upon him, Muller stood hesitating. Finally, he concluded that something must have gone wrong, and that it was not safe for himself to run any risk.

It was just as he was turning to the 'plane when Jerry also came to a decision. He would do what Elton had told him to do.

Muller turned in time to see a small disc of bright light playing upon the 'plane, travelling across its parts. The next instant it came to a standstill, and almost simultaneously some part of the machinery clanged dully under the impact of a forceful blow.

It was the first of Jerry's bullets, and it had gone clean through one of the cylinders of the engine, which a small electric torch—fixed to the rifle, and acting as a miniature searchlight—had enabled the marksman to locate.

Before Muller could realise the phenomenon came a second clang, followed immediately by a third and fourth, and a cry of consternation broke from the German. All four of the engine cylinders were ruined. Wildly he looked about him, but could see nothing. Jerry's weapon was soundless, and no flash accompanied the silent explosions. And then the tiny disc of light settled upon Muller himself. With an exclamation of horror, the man leaped six feet away, threw himself on hands and knees, and crawled as rapidly as he was able to hide himself from this mysterious engine of destruction.

Then Jerry, having done his duty, started running across the wet grass towards the road, fearful of what he might find.

"Come out of it pretty well—eh?"

The voice was Elton's, and Jerry's heart jumped with relief. Gaining the road, he came within the glare made by the headlights of the stationary car.

"Throw up your hands there; you're covered!" Elton's voice rang out.

"All right; it's I!" Jerry shouted back. "Any harm done?"

"That you, Jerry? Good, man! No, nothing much," his friend replied. "Car suffered a bit, that's all. But we've beaten the beggars off. Stole a march on us somehow—deuce knows how!"

NEXT WEDNESDAY: "D'ARCY'S MYSTERIOUS PRESENT!" Another Splendid, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's. Order Early.

Within the tonneau was standing the Foreign Secretary, as composed as though he had recently been peppered with dried peas instead of bullets.

"A busy few minutes, Mr. Osborne," he said. "I am afraid Mr. Elton has suffered, though."

"Just a scratch or so. How's the car, chauffeur?"

"Not hurt so's she won't run, sir," the man said.

"More than one chap who attacked us can say, I fancy."

Elton spoke lightly; but, as a matter of fact, the one or two scratches were in reality nasty cuts, inflicted by the flying glass of the wind screen, shattered by the first volley of shots fired by the assailants, who had been in hiding beside the road.

Going to Elton, Jerry spoke to him rapidly.

"Eh—what? Muller himself! You're sure, Jerry?" cried Elton.

"Certain; recognised him when I turned your 'finder' on his face."

"Then, by George, we ought to be after him!"

Beaten off, the attackers had scattered into the darkness, where it was impossible to follow them, and directly Sir Edmund heard Jerry's news he insisted upon Elton leaving him.

"It's not likely any further traps have been laid," he said. "By all means, Elton, go and help Mr. Osborne retrieve the important bird that he's winged. Good luck to you both! Good-night!"

"Fine chap, that," observed Elton, as at a swift pace they moved across the marsh to where Muller's aeroplane had landed. "The man of all others that England won't be able to spare when Germany begins her little games. Cool as a cucumber, and certain as quarter-day. No wavering or funk about him. Wish the others were the same. I yelled to him to take cover when those beggars just now hopped out and started pitching bullets at us; but not a bit of it. He sat in his place, just as though the whole entertainment had been got up for his amusement. Fairly scared me!"

Jerry laughed heartily. The idea of Max Elton being scared was too funny.

"And what did you do?" he asked.

"Left the wheel, and hopped over the side like lightning, so as to get the car between me and the bullets. Didn't fancy at all stopping one of them!"

"And what was it kept the fellows from getting at Sir Edmund?"

"Oh, I happened to have my 'gun' in my pocket! Neither Black nor his man had a weapon, except what Nature gave 'em," Elton replied carelessly. "Don't hold with that sort of thing myself!"

"But why couldn't you drive straight on?" Jerry wanted to know. "In ten seconds you'd have been lost to them!"

"Yes; but the brutes had blocked the road with a healthy young tree-trunk. I just managed to catch sight of it in time. How did you get on with the aeroplane, old chap?"

"Crocked the engine. That 'finder' of yours worked O K. And the rifle is a gem. There's the 'plane!"

They wasted little time over that. A brief inspection with the pocket electric torches they carried showed that the machine was completely put out of action, and the pressing business was to try to find out where Muller had gone. This was very like looking for a needle in a haystack.

"Worse than playing blind man's buff!" Elton grumbled. "In daylight we could do something, but now tracking is a sheer impossibility. Ever do anything, Jerry, in the Boy Scout line?"

He had, Jerry admitted. He was an assistant scoutmaster, but he hadn't seen his patrol for some weeks.

"H'm! Well, perhaps you can tell me what's the proper thing to do under these conditions," said Elton. "I never learned."

"Well, why not let us wait here until something happens?" Jerry suggested. "Muller must have expected someone to meet him, or else there's a house in the immediate locality where he meets his friends. I scared him away, but some time or other he'll come back—or someone will—to see about his 'plane. If we hide, we ought to be on hand then!"

"Fight the fight of sit down, as the Zulus say—that's your suggestion," rejoined Elton. "Safe, but a bit slow. What's the matter with getting that dog belonging to our landlord friend? The brute has a good nose, and the seat in the 'plane ought to retain enough to put him on the scent."

"It's worth trying," Jerry admitted.

"Better than doing nothing. I'll cut back to the inn."

"Right you are!"

Another period of dreary waiting for Jerry Osborne, and he was not sorry when out of the darkness appeared Max Elton, holding on to the end of a cord, with a tugging dog at the other end as big as an Airedale.

A first-class mongrel the brute was; but his nose was good, as had been proved before, and, after nosing about the 'plane for a bit, he set off on a hot scent. A couple of hundred yards he went, and then pulled up dead, clawing and tearing at a heap of material which, on inspection, Jerry discovered to be an airman's complete flying kit. Beyond, in spite of all encouragement, the dog refused to go.

"This finishes us," observed Elton. "Muller's discarded his outfit, that's plain, and it evidently means he's so scared that he doesn't intend going back to his 'plane!"

"It also means he's escaped us once more," Jerry added.

"Hallo! What's that?"

"That" sounded uncommonly like a whistle, and for several seconds the Englishmen stood listening intently for a repetition. It came several times, and Jerry suggested the whistler to be the friend whom Muller had expected to meet.

"I believe you're right, old man; if so, the chance is too good to be missed," answered Elton.

And, as quickly as the darkness would permit, he began to array himself in the garments Muller had left behind him.

"Keep the dog quiet, old man, if you can, or he'll give the show away," he said to Jerry. "I'm going to play at being Muller. We may learn something useful. But don't go too far away!"

Flat on his stomach lay Jerry in the wet grass, one arm fast about the body of the dog, around whose jaws he had succeeded in tying his handkerchief as a muzzle to prevent barking. And fifteen feet away, in Muller's combination flying-suit—which was an awful fit—the hood pulled well over his forehead, Elton waited the approach of the unknown person who had whistled.

The Message.

Osborne, glued to the ground, heard the approach of solid footsteps, but could see nothing. Elton could not hear the deadened steps, but a sudden, monstrous, black shadow upon the darkness of the night grew all at once apparent, and a voice cried:

"Why did you not show a signal? Thunderweather! How did you think I was to find you in this pit?"

The words were in German, and uttered in a tone that plainly indicated the speaker was annoyed. Promptly came the answer, also in German, which tongue Elton spoke like a native.

"To whistle was useless—the wind is against me; and I was afraid to show a light!"

"Afraid! Who is there to see in this forsaken hole?" was growled back. "If we had missed each other it had gone ill with you, my friend!"

"Is the matter important, sir?"

Only by a big effort was Max Elton able to control his voice so as to speak naturally, and his heart was beating quicker. He had been in more than one tight corner, had become almost hardened against exciting happenings, but now he felt that he was standing on the threshold of a discovery the importance of which might have effects almost beyond imagination.

The first words of the unrecognisable man before him had sounded familiar; the third sentence had convinced him of the individual's identity; and he needed not to be told that only a matter of the most vital importance could have brought to such a place, at such a time, and in such a manner, so notable a personage as the official representative in England of the German Empire.

He had expected to meet Muller, clear proof that the spy was engaged in some other and more confidential work than the direction of his agents in England. But what was that work? What was the purpose that had brought the German Ambassador into personal communication with Muller?

"Important?" The word was snapped out contemptuously. "Is it for an unimportant matter I should be here to-night? Thunder, the matter is of such importance that, except you perform your part safely, my friend, for the best of reasons Herr Krug will disappear from our Secret Service. How long have you been here?"

"The aeroplane landed a little more than half an hour ago, sir," replied Elton.

"You have not been seen?"

"No, sir; I believe all to be well for me."

"Ah, well! I am a little late; these roads are not the best for travelling. By what time can you return to Berlin?"

"A ten-hour flight; no more, sir."

"Where is your 'plane?"

"It lies yonder." And Elton pointed in the direction where lay Muller's 'plane, with its perforated and useless cylinders.

"So; we will go to it." The speaker brought his hands from the voluminous overcoat under which they had been concealed, and held a packet towards Elton. "Take this. And now let me see your 'plane. Come."

(This grand serial will be continued next Wednesday. Order your copy in advance, or you may miss the most exciting instalment.)

FERRERS LOCKE, DETECTIVE is the principal character in one of the complete stories contained in CHUCKLES, ½d.

RALLYING ROUND FIGGINS!

(*Continued from Page 21.*)

"Indeed! How do you know?"

"Because we saw him, sir."

"Then you must have been out of your dormitory and your House in the middle of the night."

"Yes, sir."

"It is untrue," said Mr. Ratcliff—"a plot among these young rascals to save Figgins from the punishment of his iniquity——"

"Weally, Mr. Watcliff——"

"Silence! Kindly explain to me, Merry, how you came to be out of your House at such a time of the night," said the Head very quietly.

Tom Merry explained breathlessly.

Figgins gave the School House juniors a look of heartfelt gratitude. He wondered if they had saved him. But it was Mr. Ratcliff's sour voice that broke the silence.

"Of course, Dr. Holmes, you do not credit this? These boys are well known to be personal friends of Figgins, and this is evidently a scheme——"

"I do not think anything of the kind, Mr. Ratcliff," said the Head icily. "On the contrary, I know these three boys to be thoroughly honourable lads, and I firmly believe every word they have uttered."

Tom Merry's face lighted up, and it was with difficulty that Jack Blake restrained himself from shouting "Hurrah!"

Mr. Ratcliff's face was a study.

"The evidence of three honourable and straightforward witnesses is enough, and more than enough," continued the Head. "It is clearly established that Figgins left his dormitory for the purpose he has stated. I am very, very glad that three boys have had the courage to come forward in this way at the risk of severe punishment to themselves to speak up for a schoolfellow. Under the circumstances, Merry and Blake and D'Arcy will not be punished for having broken House bounds," said the Head. "I thank them for having come forward and saved me from the possibility of committing an injustice. Figgins, you have acted very unwisely, and it must be understood that nothing of the kind occurs again."

"Certainly, sir," said Figgins.

"I am very glad that you are cleared from disgraceful suspicions. Mr. Ratcliff, as Figgins's motives were good, though his conduct was unwise, I should prefer this matter to be passed over without punishment."

And Mr. Ratcliff could only bow; he could not trust himself to speak. He hurried from the study without another word.

"You may go, my boys," said the Head. "I wish you good fortune in the examination, Figgins, but no more midnight study. Everything should be in reason, and you may work too hard."

"Thank you, sir!"

And the juniors left the study looking as if they were walking on air.

* * * * * * * * * *

And Figgins did win the Bishop's Medal.

The exam., as he said afterwards, was a regular twister, and nobody was really so much surprised as Figgins when his name came out at the head of the list. But there it did come out; and when the Medal and the purse of ten guineas were handed to George Figgins by the Head himself before the assembled school the old hall rang with the cheering.

And afterwards there was a gigantic celebration, to which came Cousin Ethel, all smiles and delight, thus filling the cup of joy to overflowing for Figgins.

And when Figgins was shouted at for a speech, and he rose to say a few words, his few words were:

"Gentlemen, chaps, and fellows! I propose the health of Miss Ethel, who first made me think I could possibly score at anything besides cricket and football, and backed me up like the good and true chum she is. Gentlemen, Cousin Ethel!"

And the toast was drunk with exuberant enthusiasm. And it was agreed on all hands that Tom Merry & Co. had deserved well of their country in rallying round Figgins.

THE END.

(Another splendid, long, complete tale of the Chums of St. Jim's next Wednesday, entitled "D'ARCY'S MYSTERIOUS PRESENT!" by Martin Clifford. Order your GEM in advance. Price One Penny.)

A NEW FREE CORRESPONDENCE EXCHANGE.

The only names and addresses which can be printed in these columns are those of readers living in any of our Colonies who desire Correspondents in Great Britain and Ireland.

Colonists sending in their names and addresses for insertion in the columns of this popular story-book must state what kind of correspondent is required—boy or girl; English, Scotch, Welsh, or Irish.

Would-be correspondents must send with each notice two coupons, one taken from "The Gem," and one from the same week's issue of its companion paper, "The Magnet" Library. *Coupons will always be found on page 2 of both papers, and requests for correspondents not containing these two coupons will be absolutely disregarded.*

Readers wishing to *reply* to advertisements appearing in this column *must write to the advertisers direct.* No correspondence with advertisers can be undertaken through the medium of this office.

All advertisements for insertion in this Free Exchange should be addressed: "The Editor, 'The Gem' Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C."

W. Browne, care of Car Barn, High Street, Fremantle, West Australia, wishes to correspond with readers.

F. Kerr, 52, Albert Street, Brunswick, Melbourne, Victoria, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in England, age 14-15.

C. Markby, Orlando Street, Hampton, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with English girl readers living in Birmingham, age 15-16.

B. McCallum, 259, York Street, Subiaco, Western Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader, age 20, living in England.

J. Mackenzie, care of Post Office, Perth, Western Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader in Scotland, age 20-21.

Miss A. Marshall, 141, Victoria Avenue, Albert Park, Melbourne, Victoria, wishes to correspond with a boy reader, age 20-21, living in Shanghai or Hong Kong, China.

Miss Akers, care of the Southern Life Association, P.O. Box, 143, Bloemfontein, South Africa, wishes to correspond with a boy reader, age 25-28.

H. Hill, Gawler P.O., South Australia, wishes to correspond with readers, age 16-19.

Miss E. Hill, 134, Princes Street, Port Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with boy readers living in Canada, South Africa, and British Isles, age 18.

J. L. McLennon, care of 15, Temple Court, 447, Chancery Lane, Melbourne, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in the British Isles, age 16-18.

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J. Gardner, 16, Walton Road, Victoria Park, Perth, Western Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader in England or Ireland.

L. B. Wilson, Kyle Street, Knoxville, Adelaide, South Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in England, age 18-20.

W. J. Cunningham, 27, Laura Street, Stepney, Adelaide, South Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in England, age 18-20.

J. Hunter, 1, Charles Street, Abermain, via West Maitland, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in Devonshire, England.

Miss D. Watt, Domain Road, Glebe, Hobart, Tasmania, Australia, wishes to correspond with readers, age 19-20.

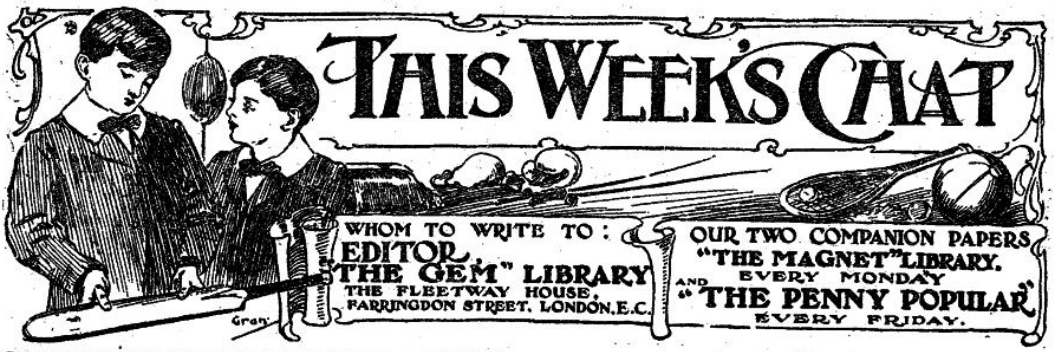
K. Thompson, Napier Street, Exeter, South Australia, wishes to correspond with a boy reader living in Canada, age 13-14.

H. Jones, Post Office, Murray Street, Gawler, South Australia, wishes to correspond with readers, age 17-20.

The Editor specially requests Colonial Readers to kindly bring the Free Correspondence Exchange to the notice of their friends.

FERRERS LOCKE, DETECTIVE is the principal character in one of the complete stories contained in **CHUCKLES, ½d.**

OUR SPECIAL WEEKLY FEATURE—



For Next Wednesday.

"D'ARCY'S MYSTERIOUS PRESENT!"
By Martin Clifford.

In this magnificent long complete tale of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy receives a present from his noble "governor," which is destined to become the centre of a number of exciting incidents. The mysterious attraction it appears to possess for total strangers puzzles the juniors exceedingly, and it is not until Kerr, the canny Scots junior, of the New House, brings his keen detective powers to bear on the matter that they get on the right track.

A visit from Lord Eastwood furnishes an amazing explanation at the end, and Kerr finds that he has been doing far more important work than he realised at the time in devoting his attention to the matter of

"D'ARCY'S MYSTERIOUS PRESENT!"

A PERSONAL MESSAGE TO EVERY CHUM.

"Chuckles!" our latest companion paper, is still booming—"hot cakes isn't in it!" as one newsagent remarked—and I am sure all my GEM chums must be proud of the success achieved by the bright little paper which is literally the outcome of their own suggestions and ideas. Certainly I am proud of it, and very grateful to my thousands of reader-chums, too, for such a success as this latest one of ours could only have been achieved by the loyal efforts of a huge band of willing helpers. Such widespread interest has been aroused by our latest venture, that I venture to say that there is hardly a boy or girl in the country who has not at least heard of "Chuckles!", while it will not be long before the same cheery word—with all that it stands for in the way of funny pictures, splendid stories, and bright colours—will be familiar to almost every young Colonial throughout our vast overseas possessions.

The day of the comic paper which supplies its readers with unwholesomely sensational and trashy type of reading-matter is past. The new style—"Chuckles!" style—has put this type of paper on a higher plane altogether In "Chuckles" I provide my chums—in addition to the amusing pictures—with wholesome literature of the same high order and distinctive interest as that which has made the famous companion papers "The Magnet" and "Gem" Libraries, and "The Penny Popular" so deservedly popular. It is my firm conviction—and always has been—that the average British boy and girl prefers this wholesome type of literature, which is all too seldom offered them; hence my efforts to give them such fare. And from the way in which these efforts have been supported I do not feel that I can be far wrong.

Next Saturday's "Chuckles!" is yet another splendid example of the value that can be given—both in quantity and quality—for one halfpenny, and I am going to ask every one of my readers to do me the favour of getting at least two copies—one for himself and one for his friend. Will all my loyal reader-chums, boys and girls alike, just do me this one good turn—thank you, I know you will!

Remember when buying next Saturday's issue of "Chuckles!", the great new halfpenny coloured comic paper, say:

"I'LL TAKE TWO COPIES, PLEASE!"

RABBIT KEEPING.—No. 2,
By Meredith Fradd.

The Belgian Hare.

Readers with but the slightest knowledge of matters appertaining to the rabbit fancy will have heard of the Belgian Hare, and no doubt many will think that it is a species of hare. This is not so, it is a rabbit; and here it may be well to mention a little-known difference with regard to the young of the hare and the rabbit tribe. Leverets are born with their eyes open and their fur on, but rabbits are born with no hair on their bodies, and their eyes do not open until the tenth day. The Belgian Hare rabbit, then, is so called because of its likeness, both in colour and "form," to our wild hare. Its chest, forefeet and belly should be afire with that lovely rufus-red so well known to admirers of the wild hare, the ears are erect and their edges lined with black, while the body colour of brown is ticked with black hairs; a truly lovely sight is one of our best exhibition Belgian Hares. Five pounds is quite an ordinary price to pay, and anything up to twenty pounds is not at all out of the way, but it was left to our American cousins, in the year 1900, to boom this variety, and the tale is worth telling. In the year mentioned the American medical profession propounded the idea that the flesh of these little animals was the most delicate, the most digestible, of any animal food; forthwith Belgian Hare rabbitries sprung up all over their country, and Americans came over here and bought the best that English fanciers could produce; any sum between £15 and £30 was easily got. Very many Belgian hares were sold for £50, one was actually sold for £120; but the boom quickly died out. A few financiers made large sums of money, others were badly bitten through laying in a stock for the American visitors that did not come their way, and now we are all waiting for the next boom!

The Dutch Rabbit.

Undoubtedly the most popular breed of fancy rabbit in England to-day is the Dutch, a popularity gained, no doubt, by their hardihood, unique style of markings, and their devotion to their young, the latter characteristic causing them to be in great demand as foster-mothers for the larger and more careless breeds. A lady once said to me, when watching one of mine that was standing upon its hind legs, "Oh, he looks just like a man when he is in his shirt and trousers!" And that is really a most happy description. The hinder half, or the trousers, is coloured blue, black, tortoise-shell, or dark or light grey, with the exception of about an inch and a half from the tip of the toes, which is of the same colour as the hind part, the cheek markings being beautifully rounded, leaving a white nose from which a white mark goes right up through the ears, tapering off as it reaches them. One sees fox terriers with face markings very similar to those of the Dutch rabbit. It is the symmetrical rounding of the cheek markings, the shortness of the ears, the exactness of the line of demarcation that encircles the body, the absolute definition of the lines on the hind feet which constitute the "stops," and the depth and richness of the colour that decides whether the little animal is worth £5—quite an ordinary figure—or £20, a price lately given for one of the best does.

(Another splendid "Rabbit-Keeping" article next Wednesday.)

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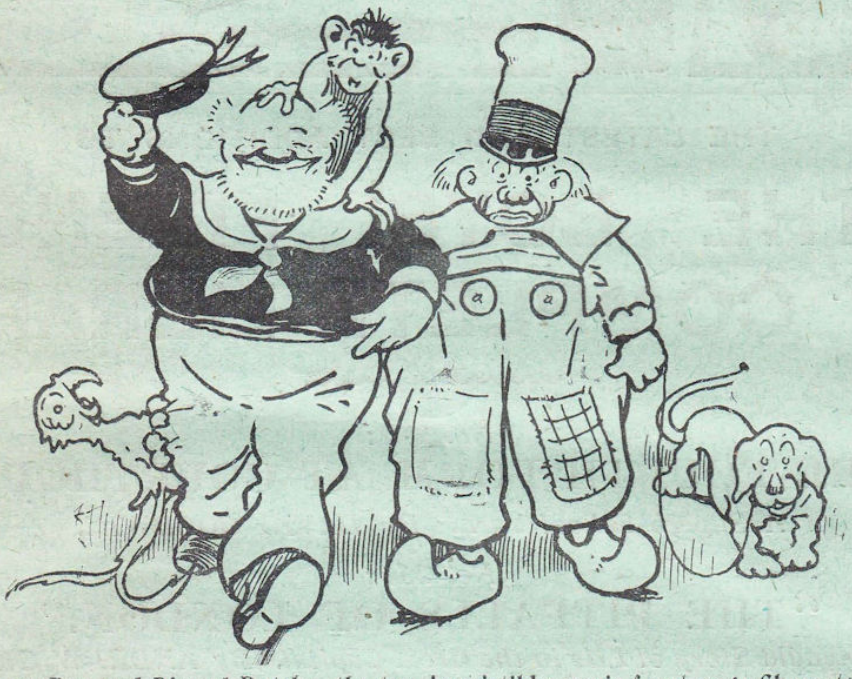

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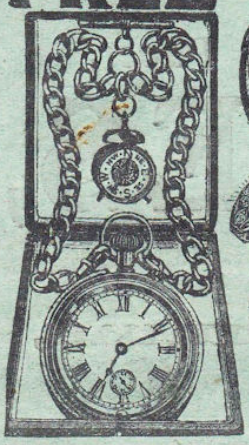

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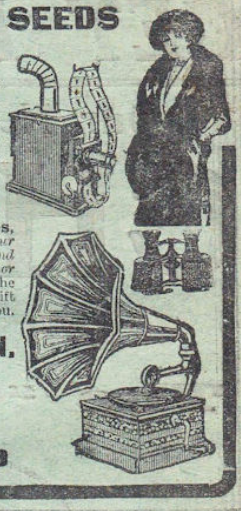

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