

Northern Section

LEVISON ON THE WAR-PATH!

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.

The **GEM** LIBRARY No. 498 Vol. 83



WILL MR. RATCLIFF BUY THE BULLDOG?

(Amusing Scene in the Magnificent Long, Complete School Tale in this issue.)

THIS WEEK'S CHAT

Whom to Write to
EDITOR, "THE GEM" LIBRARY.
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For Next Wednesday:

"LEVISON MINOR!"

By Martia Clifford.

With some of the many characters appearing in the long series of St. Jim's stories; though all are drawn well and to the life, has Mr. Clifford been more successful than with Ernest Levison. A strange mixture of good and evil, of cowardice and hardness, thick-skinned as any boy could be in some respects, extraordinarily thin-skinned in others, Levison has always interested even those who have not lived with him; and it is a singular thing that many readers cherish something very like affection for him, believing, against all likelihood, that he will turn up (traces in the end. Levison is one of those who, knowing the good, choose rather the evil. There are times when he lacerates himself for being what he is, and times when he hates better follow than himself because they despise him for the very faults that see we more clearly than he does. In the splendid yarn which appears next week, he is shown moved by a new set of circumstances to think seriously about his position. His younger brother ceases to be St. Jim's, and Frank Levison is a straightforward, plucky kid—out of the best, in short. He does not even suspect beforehand that his older brother is despised and disliked. He has never seen anything of the wrong side of Ernest. At first he fights fiercely against the belief that is forced upon him later. The start of how his eyes are gradually opened is told in Mr. Clifford's most graphic passages. Disillusionment does not destroy the younger's loyalty. He sticks hard to that, at least. Ernest may be the blackest of black sheep, but Ernest is still his brother. That great, unswerving loyalty saves the reader from otherwise certain exasperation, and St. Jim's generally recognizes that, whatever may be said against Levison senior, there is the right stuff in

"LEVISON MINOR!"

TWO MORE AMERICAN CORRESPONDENTS.

I am not very keen on argument. My experience of it is that the method of argument adopted by the average boy—and the average man also—runs too much in the direction of *outrage reasons*. You have not squashed your opponent when you tell him he is utterly wrong. To squash him, you must shove him so. Still less have you squashed him when you tell him he is an idiot. It is quite possible that he is right, and then, if there is an idiot in the case, it is hardly he; it may seem—whisper it low!—be you.

But when a matter which is likely to lead to discussion has been opened in the columns of a paper, one can hardly ignore letters received about it, and so I am dealing this week with letters received from two American correspondents.

"Stars and Stripes" ends his communication with this absurd paragraph:

"I thought Englishmen were sportsmen. Still, it seems that they can never forget the treacherous linking we gave them one hundred years ago."

Really, nothing could be much siller than that! I do not believe there is an Englishman living who cherishes the least rancour against the United States because in the War of Independence 160—not nearly 100—years ago the Colonists got the better of the Mother Country. Quite certainly, no such rancour is incited by our school historians. I wish as much could be said for American school histories as regards Britain. It is curious, but true, that the victors have been those unable to forgive and forget.

"Our film pictures are far and away better than the fifth-rate ones they manufacture in your pecked old island."

On the proficiency of the language here it is hardly necessary to comment.

"Stars and Stripes" objects to the word "Yankee" being used to denote an American from any state. He says that only the inhabitants of the New England States—Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and

Rhode Island—are Yankees. I was perfectly well aware of this, and I have no doubt the author of the stories in the "Magnet," our famous companion paper, who has given us "Fisher T. Fish to be" a thing of beauty, and a joy for ever," was also aware of it. But there is a fair possibility. Why might not the inhabitants of the U.S. take to themselves as their own the name of American? Are not Canadians, Brazilians, Mexicans, Costa Ricans, Argentines, Guatemalans, Peruvians, and the peoples of half a dozen or more other countries as much Americans as they? Of course, we over here use the word in the same loose way; but they do not object to that, so why not let Yankees pass?

My other correspondent (from the U.S., who writes from Chicago, is rather more civil—I might say much more civil, for he really sets arguments, and does not object to doing. He sends us statistics to prove that but for the U.S. the Allies would have had no earthly chance of winning the war. While the U.S. produces over 30,000,000 tons of steel ingots and castings per annum, the production of the United Kingdom is little more than a quarter of that amount, and that of France only about one-seventh. I don't know. I am unaware how much steel we need for war purposes, though I know that the States have supplied us with enormous quantities of war material at stupendous good profits!

There was a time when we seemed to be lagging behind our Allies, when some of our "war men" said to England: "We are searching the Alliance. We are seeking supplies. You cannot have everything. We will pay; you can hold the lines."

Some such thing they said, the men who did not understand the real temper of the British nation. And France's noble answer was to this effect:

"We are pouring out our blood like water. Bricks that sacrifice labour and money are small things."

So may we say to the United States. They hang back in the greatest of wars—a war on which the whole future of the world hangs. Have they cause for shame? Some of their own best men say with an uncertain voice: "Yes!" Certainly their trading in munitions gives them no cause for pride, however useful these munitions may be to the Entente Powers.

NOTICES.

Leagues, Correspondence, etc.

More members are required for the Boys' Social Club, 28, North End, East Grinstead. Magazine published monthly, to which members may contribute.

A. G. Fowkes, 508, Main Street, Ballarat, Australia, would like to correspond with one or two boy readers in the U. K.

C. Love, 34, City Road, Park, Sheffield, wants more members for his "Gem" and "Magnet" League. Correspondence and stamp exchange run.

Herbert Black, 26, Fox Street, Canning Town, E., wants to form a "Gem" and "Magnet" League among Essex readers, with a view to the publication of an amateur magazine. Stamped and addressed envelopes, please.

Lewis Jones, 25, Parkwood, Street, Worcester, would be glad to correspond with Australian readers.

H. Wade, 7, Batten Grove, Arundel, Leeds, has started an amateur journal, and would be glad to hear from other readers interested. Stamped and addressed envelopes, please.

W. C. Mason, 25, Stovel Road, Highfield, Sheffield, wants to form a local "Gem" and "Magnet" League, and will be glad to hear from readers interested.

Your Editor

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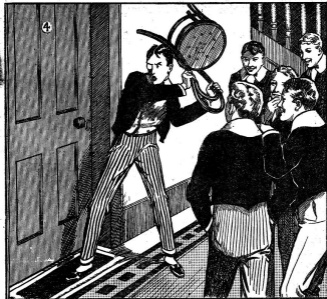
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LEVISON ON THE WAR-PATH!

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's.

By **MARTIN CLIFFORD.**



Crash! The chair smote the door with a terrific concussion. "My hat!" ejaculated Figgins. "You'll have Ratty up here at this rate." (See Chapter 2.)

CHAPTER I.

Declined with Thanks!

THREE editorial staff of "Tom Merry's Weekly" were very busy in the editorial office—otherwise, Tom Merry's study—when Arthur Augustus D'Arvy came in. D'Arvy of the Fourth had come to help in the editorial labours. But there was an excited and grateful expression on his usually serene countenance.

"Something will have to be done about Watty, you fellows," he said, as he came in.

There was no reply.

Tom Merry and Masses and Lawther were writing away at express speed. Jack Blake was chewing the handle of his pen and muttering deeply. Digby was searching through a dictionary for a rhyme for "dashed Hen"—Dig being engaged upon a war-poem.

D'Arvy of the Fourth surveyed the busy editors and sub-editors and frowned.

Next Wednesday.

"LEVISON MINOR!" AND "CORNSTALK BOB!"

"I made a remark!" he announced.

Still no reply.

"Well, you folks, a fellow expects an answer when he makes a remark!" said Arthur Augustus, in slightly-raised tones.

Tom Merry looked up at last.

He pointed with the handle of his pen to a sheet of card-board stuck on the mantelpiece, upon which was dabbed, in large letters:

SILENCE!

"Wah!" said Arthur Augustus emphatically.

"Shut up!" exclaimed Blake.

"I refuse to shut up, Blake! I repeat that something will have to be done about old Watty."

"Sit down and turn out your article!" said Tom Merry severely. "Nesse said old Ratty now. This copy has got to be got ready. The fellows have been calling our 'Weekly' 'Tom Merry's Annual' lately. We've got to get this number out, or burst a boiler. No hushling allowed in the editorial office! Pile in!"

"Yess, but old Watty——"

"And make your article half its usual length," said Tom. "The paper is cut down this week."

"Whuhuh!"

"Paper famine, you know," explained the chief editor. "We're making it four pages short. Paper's gone up enormously, owing to the wood-pulp regulations and the heavy demand from America for paper for Presidential Notes. Old Taper simply can't give us the usual amount. Everything in the paper is cut down except the leading article. I'm doing that now."

"Well, Tom Merry, it would be more judicious to cut down the least attractive features of the paper!"

"Yes, I've done that—your fashion article, Figger's serial, Dig's poetry, and Lowthorpe's jokes!"

"You silly ass!" began Lowther.

"I refuse to have my article cut down! I shall squish a little extra space, as a matter of fact. I see don't waste advice to wasters on how to maintain a wealthy elegant appearance, while at the same time practising war economy."

"War economy is going to be practised on your article, my son," said Tom Merry calmly. "You can make it the usual length, if you like——"

"Oh, good!"

"And I'll cut it down for you."

"You cheat me——"

"Silence!" roared Messers.

"However, I was making a remark about old Watty——"

"Well, don't!"

"Old Watty is on the war-path again. He has been pullin' Levson's ear."

"I dare say Levson asked for it."

"Wah! It is a shame on the honour of the School House for a School House chap to be pulled by the New House master. Besides, I do not approve of 'pullin' ears, as principle. It is derogatory to a chap's dig."

"Dry up!"

"And I think we ought to take the matter up, and make old Watty sorry he spoke," continued Arthur Augustus calmly, unheeding the editorial glare on all sides. "Levson is worth a woman, but he is a School House chap, and we're not got to have Watty pullin' School House ears."

"How Levson's ear?" howled Blake. "Dry up!"

"I refuse to dry up, Blake! I regard this as a question affecting the honour of the House. Why, Watty may start pullin' my ear next!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly.

"He's welcome to," said Monty Lowther; "and if he would grab you at the same time, we'd pass a vote of thanks!"

"Well, Lowthorpe——"

The door opened again, and Levson of the Fourth came in. The juniors looked at him. Levson was scowling, and his right ear was very red. Mr. Ratliff's finger and thumb had closed on it like a pair of pincers, and Levson had been hurt.

Tom Merry waved his hand.

"Don't tell us about it, Levson. Don't interrupt the work. Buzz off!"

"Look here——" began Levson angrily.

"Silence in court!"

"I've brought you a contribution."

"Oh! Well, you can lay it on the table," said the chief editor. "Outside contributions are rather out of date in this paper, owing to the shortage of paper. But I'll look at it."

"It's about Ratty," said Levson. "The beast has been pulling my ear—for nothing, of course."

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"Oh, of course!" grinned Blake.

"Well, I did nothing. I was simply talking to Mellish about rats, when Ratty happened to pass. He took it as a reference to himself——"

"And so it was."

"Well, suppose it was! He had no right to go for me, I suppose? He couldn't prove it; he's not the only rat at St. Jim's, I suppose!"

"His, ha! No."

"Well, I can't pull his ear," said Levson. "But I think we ought to state the cat in the 'Weekly.' We can get at him that way."

"Absent! That depends. We don't want the paper suppressed for stating the rumors," said Tom Merry, with a shake of the head. "Must draw a line somewhere, you know."

Levson sneered.

"If you're afraid of Ratty——" he began.

"I'm not afraid of Ratty, and you know it. But we can't state rumors in the school paper, or the Head will suppress it, and screw us right, too, for that matter. However, I'll look at it."

Tom Merry picked up Levson's contribution, and read it out. It was in the form of a letter, and it ran:

"There's a rotter whose temper is rattly,
Whose appearance is never quite rattly.
He's a face of a Hog,
And the manners of one,
And a rat couldn't be quite so rattly."

"You see, there's nothing he can take hold of in that," said Levson. "He's hoarse to see it, and know that it's meant for him, but he can't prove it, as there's no name mentioned."

"He will take it for granted, I imagine," said Tom. "We don't want to be called up before the Head for insulting a Housemaster. Can't be did, Levson."

"But he couldn't prove——"

"The Head would ask us out straight if it was meant for Ratty."

"Well, you could say it wasn't!"

Tom Merry's lip curled.

"Perhaps we could, if we were lying Prussian," he said. "But we're not. Publishing a thing and telling lies about it afterwards, isn't quite in the style of this 'Weekly.' Declined with thanks!"

"Yess, wath! I disapprove of Watty's actions, Levson, but I could not possibly approve of telling 'whoppas.'"

"You see, Gussy doesn't approve," remarked Lowther. "So there's nothing more to be said. Take it away and bury it, Levson!"

Levson picked up his contribution with a bitter smile. "So you're afraid!" he sneered.

"Too sure to be fast."

"Which way do you prefer to leave this office?" he asked. "On your feet or your back!"

"You're funky of having Ratty down on you! Well, I'm not! This letter is going in, all the same."

"I don't quite see how you'll manage that," said Tom. "If we catch you meddling with the copy, you will get into trouble."

"If you're not funky——"

"Oh, chuck him out!" exclaimed Lowther. Levson backed hastily out of the study as the captain of the Shell made a movement towards him.

"It's going in all the same," he said between his teeth. "You'll see!"

And he strode away down the passage. Tom Merry slammed the door and returned to the editorial table.

"Cheeky rotter!" growled Blake.

"It's enough to get us all licked and the paper suppressed, to get in rot like that about a reester," said Tom. "Levson wouldn't mind if 'Tom Merry's Weekly' got in the neck. But we should mind."

"Besides, it is wathal disreputable," remarked Arthur Augustus. "Watty is a very objectionable character, but there is such a thing as good form. I quite approve of your decision, Tom Merry."

"After which nothing remains to be said," remarked Lowther. "And thank goodness for that! Dry up, and let's get on."

"Well, Lowthorpe——"

"Silence!" ordered all the editors together.

And Arthur Augustus snifled and set down to his literary labours.



Arthur Augustus resisted manfully, but Crooke and Raake and Mellish rolled him over and over, and Quessy's elegant "chopper" collected huge quantities of dust. Meanwhile, Levison had 'arced the handlebars off the bike. (See Chapter 2.)

CHAPTER 2. A Little Mistake.

"WELL, what's the game?" asked Crooke.

There was a meeting in Levison's study. Crooke and Raake of the School, and Levison of the Fourth, and Piggott of the Third were there. The door was locked, and Levison had produced a packet of cigarettes. But it was not merely for a forbidden smoke that the black sheep of the School House had foregathered in Levison's study.

It was understood that there was something "on"—something that was up against Tom Merry & Co. All Levison's friends were quite ready to take a hand in anything against the Terrible Three so long as there was no great risk involved.

"I want you chaps to help me," explained Levison. "I suppose you know they're getting out a new number of the 'Weekly'?"

George Gerald Crooke yawned portentously.

"What does that yet matter to us?" he asked.

"I've got something to go into the paper, and Tom Merry won't get it in. It's about Ratty, and he's afraid of being called over the coal," said Levison. "My idea is to share it in all the same, and I want you fellows to help."

"Blamed if I see how! Besides, you'll get into a row," said Mellish. "I know Ratty always gets hold of a number of the 'Weekly' and looks at it. He always thinks somebody's getting at him. Of course, fellows do get at him."

"That's what I want," said Levison. "If my linerick comes out in the 'Weekly,' it will be supposed to be their work, not mine. I can prove that Tom Merry refused to put in anything of mine."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But you can't shove it in without their knowing," remarked Piggott.

"That's my idea, though. They're finishing the copy now, and one of them is going down to Rykoonah with it, to hand it to old Tiger, at the 'Rykoonah Garage' office, before he closes. My idea is to watch for the chap who goes, and take the copy away from him and put in my linerick."

"Well, if there's only one of them, I suppose we could do that easily enough," said Crooke. "But they'd know, and they'd aber it afterwards."

Levison shook his head.

"Not at all! We collar the ratter, whoever he is, and rag him. He will be too busy to think about his parcel. While you fellows are bringing him and dog's-mooseing him I can open the parcel, make the alteration, and shove it up again. After we've done with him he finds the parcel in the road, just as he dropped it. Ten to one he won't guess it's been opened and altered."

"Not a bad idea," asserted Crooke. "But if we rag one of them there'll be a ragging for us to follow."

"I suppose it's worth the risk, isn't it? Ratty will raise Cain about that linerick, and the whole gang of them may be chased and the paper suppressed."

"Of course, that's all right. But—"

"Where are you going, Piggott?" exclaimed Levison.

"Got an appointment with a chap in the Third," said

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"LEVISON MINOR!"

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

Figgett; and he unlocked the door and opened the study. Figgett evidently did not want a ragging.

Levison scowled.
"I suppose most fellows are not afraid!" he sneered. "It's a chance in a thousand of getting even with those cads."
Crooke and Mellich hesitated. But Backe nodded at once.
"I'm your man," he said. "Count me in!"
"Oh, all right!" said Crooke; and Mellich assented, too.
"Then we'd better be on the look-out for the chap who goes with the copy," said Levison. "We'll hang about the door till he goes out."

The cigarettes having been finished, Levison & Co. left the study and took up their stand outside the School House to watch for the "copy" and its bearers. About a quarter of an hour later Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came out.

The swell of St. Jim's had a little parcel under his arm, and Levison & Co. exchanged glances as they noted it.
"That's it," said Levison. He approached Arthur Augustus with a careless air. "Going out, D'Arcy?"

"Yess, deah yer."
"Down to Wycombe, I suppose?"
"Weally, Levison, I do not see how you know I am going to Wycombe, but, as a matter of fact, I am going there."

Arthur Augustus walked away to the bike shed and Levison, grinning, rejoined his comrades.

"It's all right," he said. "He's going down to Wycombe as his bike. We've lots of time to get ahead of him. Come on!"

The four juniors hurried out of the gates. They ran down the lane for a couple of hundred yards, out of sight of the gates, and halted there. There they waited for the cyclist.

A few minutes later Arthur Augustus came in sight, riding at a leisurely pace, with his bundle tied on the handlebars of his machine.

Levison held up his hand.
"Stop!"

"But Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus.
He slowed down. The four were standing directly in his way, so he had to stop. He jumped off the machine.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"We've come out specially to see you," grinned Levison. "We think you spend rather too much on clothes for war-time, D'Arcy. We have formed ourselves into a Committee of National Economy."

"Weally, Levison—"

"And we're going to give you a lesson. Collar him!"
"But Jove! Hands off, you wretches!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly.

He had to let go the bike to put up his hands in defence. The bicycle went clanging in the road, and Arthur Augustus stood up, manfully, against the rush of the four ruggers. Levison yelled as he went backwards from a drive on the chest, and Mellich sat down suddenly with a feeling as if his nose had been driven through the back of his head.

Arthur Augustus, with all his elegant ways, was quite a fighting-man when his noble blood was up. But Crooke and Backe were upon him, and they grasped him and dragged him down, and Levison and Mellich piled in again immediately. The odds were too great. Arthur Augustus sprawled in the dust, with the four ruggers sprawling over him.

"Gwook!" growled Arthur Augustus. "Fah play, you wretches! I shall fire you a fearful thwackin' for this!"
Gwook! Gwook! Gwook! Gwook! Gwook! Gwook!

"Roll him in the dust!" grizzled Levison. "Sorry, D'Arcy, but the committee can't allow dandies in war-time. We are dead on oats. Roll him over!"

"Gwook-wooh! Yewooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus roared manfully, but Crooke and Backe and Mellich rolled him over and over, and Gussy's elegant "clobber" collected huge quantities of dust.

Merriville Levison had jerked the bundle off the handlebars of the bike. Arthur Augustus, naturally, had no eyes for him; he was too busily engaged with the ruggers. Levison slipped behind the hedge with the bundle, and untied it hastily. He required only a few minutes to make the alteration in the "copy" of the "Weekly" and replace the bundle on the bicycle. Arthur Augustus, when he leaved it there as he had left it, was not likely to suspect what had been done.

Levison opened the parcel quickly.

Then he jumped.

It was not the manuscript of the "Weekly" that met his eyes.

A carefully folded waistcoat of gorgeous hue came to light as he opened the paper wrappings.

Levison stared at it blankly.

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"Sold!" he ejaculated.

He ran back into the road ferociously.

Arthur Augustus, dusty from head to foot, was still struggling with the ruggers.

"You uttah wretches!" he shouted. "You are wretches! my clobber! Gwook! Crooke, you wretches! Wack! Wack! Wack! Gwook!"

"Let the silly fool alone!" growled Levison. "This is the copy!"

"What!"

The ruggers released the swell of St. Jim's. Arthur Augustus sat up, gasping for breath.

"Oh, you awful wretches! Gwook!"

"Where's the copy of the 'Weekly,' bang you?" shouted Levison.

"Eh?"

Arthur Augustus blinked at Levison.

"What are you doing with my waistcoat, you wretches!"

Levison hurried the waistcoat at him. It was evident that there was no error in his calculations.

Arthur Augustus grinned as he comprehended.

"You uttah ash! The 'Weekly' isn't finished yet. So you were using the copy, you wretches!"

"You silly ass, Levison!" growled Crooke. "You've given the game away now! Ah! all for a fancy waistcoat! You see!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled Mellich.

"You uttah ass, Levison! I am takin' that waistcoat to the tailor to be pressed! I am not takin' the copy of the 'Weekly'! You uttah deffiah!"

Levison scowled savagely. Arthur Augustus scrambled to his feet.

The disappointed ruggers turned away. Arthur Augustus began to dust himself down.

"I shall see you wretches again when I come in!" he called after Levison & Co. "You can make up your mind to have a fearful thwacker all wretches!"

"Which was a very pleasant prospect for Levison & Co. As they came in at the school gates they met the Terrible Three. Tom Merry had a packet in his hand, and it was easy to guess that it contained the copy of the "Weekly."
The Shell fellows started down the road, and Levison looked quickly at his companions.

"Come on!" he muttered. "We shall be late to three—"

"Thank you for nothing!" said Crooke. "I've not talking time of them! Go and eat cake!"

And Levison scowled and gave it up. The "Weekly" arrived safely at the office of the "Bricolage Gazette," and was duly delivered into the hands of Mr. Tiger. But Levison was not beaten yet.

CHAPTER 3.

Arthur Augustus on the War-path!

"I HAVE been wagged!"
Arthur Augustus D'Arcy made that startling announcement in Study No. 6. Blake and Herriot and Digby were at tea when the swell of St. Jim's returned from Wycombe. Arthur Augustus was late for tea; but he was not thinking of that. Tea counted as nothing at this season.

Arthur Augustus had been wagged, and that was a matter that overshadowed everything else. Even the war failed into insignificance in comparison with that.

Blake & Co., however, did not seem to be greatly impressed. They went on with their tea untroubled.

"Do you fellows hear me?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"Yes. Your tea's wagged."

"I have been wagged!"

"I wish I'd been there!" said Digby. "I've never seen a chap wagged. I've seen a flag wagged, and a tail wagged. How did they wag you?"

"Ewaw! don't wag on a serious matter, Dig! I have been wagged! Four fearful wretches collared me in the lane, and wagged me. I am going to thrash them all wotted! I want you fellows to come and see fah play. They are wotter f'wessians, and pile on a fellow all together! Look at my clobber!"

"Urreely!" said Blake. "Really, D'Arcy, we can't have you going about in this darty state! It reflects on the study."

"We've got the reputation of this study to keep up," said Herriot, shaking his head. "You shouldn't be so slovenly. Gussy—you shouldn't, really!"

"I suspect that I have been wagged!" shrieked Arthur Augustus excitedly.

"That's no cause for showiness! Tomer's tail is wagged often enough, but it doesn't get darty!" said Herriot.

"I refuse to be misapprehended in this ridiculous way!"

I have been waggod, and I am goin' to smash the waggahs! If you wottahs will not back me up, I will go and ask Julius and Kerwah to see me through!"

"Oh, we'll see you through!" said Blake resignedly. "Who are the wicked rebels who have dared to lay a sacrilegious hand on the only Adolphus?"

"Levison and Mellish and Wacks and Crooks! They were afish the 'Weeky,' and they colahed me. I was afish, my waggahs, and the talkah's to be pressed, and the defahs thought it was the 'Weeky.' They waggod me!"

"It is not a laughin' matter! My clothes have been almost waind! I am goin' to thrash them all round! Come and back me up!"

"Oh, all right! Won't you have your tea first?"

"Eggs! This spash cannot be allowed to wait!"

Arthur Augustus led the way from Study No. 3, and Blake & Co. followed him, grinning. Arthur Augustus was on the waggah, and at each moment his chums found him very entertaining.

Levison's study was visited first. Linsley-Lansley and Terrible were present, but there was no sign of Levison or Mellish.

"Where are those wottahs, Linsley-Lansley!" asked Arthur Augustus, broasting wrath. "I am lookin' for Levison and Mellish to thrash them!"

"Come over to the New House, I think," said Linsley-Lansley. "Crooks and Racks came in for them after tea. They're visiting Clampe of the Shell. I think there's a waggah-party on in Clampe's study."

"The waggah wottahs! Come on, dash boys!"

Arthur Augustus marched off again, and headed for the stairs.

"Hold on!" said Digby. "We'd better not go over now in the New House. There may be trouble with Batty."

"Wasn't!"

"Wait till the giddy goats come home, Gussy!" advised Herries.

"I refuse to wait! I have been waggod!"

"Now, look here, Gussy—" urged Blake.

"I refuse to do anything of the sort! I am goin' on to the New House. These wottahs are keepin' out of the way on purpose! Wait!"

Arthur Augustus strode out into the quadrangle, and Blake & Co. followed. They could not refuse to back up their chum, even when he took the bit between his teeth in this manner. The Terrible Three of the Shell met them in the quad. They had just returned from Rytocoba.

"Hallo! What's the row?" asked Mooty Lowther.

"Where'den this lolly froon upon the bow of the great Gussy?"

"I mayn't wot, Lowther! I have been waggod! The wottahs are afish' in the New House, and I am goin' to wot them yet!"

"Come along and help, you fellows!" said Blake. "I suppose it will end in a House row, and the more the better!"

"Right ho!"

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther joined the procession to the New House. They arrived there, and found Figgins & Co. chatting in the doorway. Figgins and Kerr and Wynn looked suspiciously at the School House party.

"Pax!" said Tom Merry. "No House row this time."

"What do you want, then?"

"Gussy has been waggod," said Mooty Lowther gravely. "The wottahs waggahs have taken waggah in this beakler, and Gussy is goin' to wot them out!"

"Fig. 48, ha!"

"They are School House wottahs, and you New House beaklers need not interfere," added Lowther. "Gussy is goin' to nap them up and stow the bukkix' with their waggahs! It will be waggah interestin'!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins & Co. kindly stood aside, and allowed the School House party to march in.

Tom Merry & Co. ascended the stairs to the junior quarters. They arrived at Clampe's study. Clampe of the Shell was a festive, sportive youth, on very good terms with the black sheep of the School House. There was a buzz of voices in the study and a fragrance of cigarettes came from the keyhole.

Tom Merry rapped on the door.

"Hallo! Who's there?" called out Clampe's voice.

"Gustave de Great!" replied Mooty Lowther. "He is lookin' for some wottahs who have waggod him!"

"Weally, Lowther!"

"Yes, you set off!" called out Clampe.

Tom Merry turned the handle, but the door did not open. It was locked on the inside. There was a shriek from within.

"Open this door!" shouted Arthur Augustus.

"Bats!"

"If you refuse to open the door, Clampe, I shall have to waccare but to break the lock!"

"Baw-woop!"

"Paw got a hazzah or smother, you fellahs!"

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Blake. "You can't break open New House studies, you know. We shall have a prefect or have it you kick up a row."

"Blaw the prefect!"

"But you can't blow prefects, you know—prefects are not to be blown! Better leave it over."

"I refuse to leave it crash! Figger, dash boy, will you have the extreme kindness to lend me a hazzah!"

Figgins & Co. grinned.

"Not to smash New House lock," said Figgins. "Can't he do it?"

"Weally, Figgins—"

"Suppose you hit a solid piece of wood against it?" suggested Kerr.

"Yes, that would be all right! Where is there a solid piece of wood, Kerr, dash boy?"

"Use your head!"

"I did not come back to listen to waggah jokes, Kerr! I am goin' to thrash those wottahs! Will you open the door, Clampe?"

"Go and eat cake!"

Arthur Augustus looked up and down the passage with a glooming eye, in search of an implement for housebreakin'.

The passers watched him, grinning.

"If you refuse to lend me a hazzah, Figgins—"

"Not this evening," grinned Figgins.

"However, I shall find someone!"

Arthur Augustus stepped into the next study. He reappeared with a chair in his hands.

Crash!

The chair smote the door with a terrific concussion.

"My hat!" ejaculated Figgins. "You'll have Batty up here at this rate."

"Blow Watty!"

Crash, crash, crash!

CHAPTER 8.

The Conquering Hero.

CLAMPE of the Shell jumped up. He was alarmed. This crashing on the door was certain to attract attention, and Clampe did not want a prefect or a master to look in and find the study rocking with uproar.

"Stop that!" shouted Clampe. "I'll open the door, you idiot!"

"Bentak back up, then?"

"Hold on!" exclaimed Crooks. "Don't let those cake in."

"I can't have Batty brought up here?" growled Clampe. "Shove those cigarettes out of sight, anyhow, in case anybody comes."

He unlocked the door and opened it.

Arthur Augustus sat down the chair, and strode into the study, followed by the School House party. Levison & Co. drew together:

"Now, you wottahs, I have won you down!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Blake, will you hold my jacket! Peay mind my eyesahs, Dig! Now, which of you wottahs is goin' to be thrashed first?"

"Don't all speak at once!" grinned Mooty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Levison & Co. did not seem in a hurry to speak at all.

"Kick here, we're not going to kick up a row in my study!" growled Clampe.

"I am sorry, Clampe, to make a vow in your quarters, but if you associate with such wottahs you must take the consequences. Peay open the window, Tom Merry! This disgusting smoke makes me feel quite queash! Crooks, will you kindly put up your hands?"

"No, I won't!" growled Crooks. "It was only a joke."

"I have been waggod. Will you put up your hands, Mellish?"

"Oh, rats!"

"As you do not appear eager to begin, I will take you in alphabetical order," said Arthur Augustus. "You come first, Crooks!"

"Hands off, you fool!"

"I refuse to be called a fool, Crooks! Put up your paws!"

"Keep off! Yaw—woop!" roared Crooks, as Arthur Augustus opened the attack.

Crooks put his hands up.

His comrades did not interfere. Had Arthur Augustus come alone, he would certainly have received a ragging from the four together. But Tom Merry & Co. were there to see fair play.

Crooke was older and bigger than D'Arcy, but he did not make much of a show in the wild and whirling scrap that ensued. The indignant Gussy knocked him right and left, and Crooke went down at last, and lay gasping on his back.

"Fwuy got up, Cwooke!" said Arthur Augustus. "I have not finished yet."

"Woh-woh!" moaned Crooke. "I'm here!"
 "Oh, very well!" I regard you as a slacker, wotiah, Cwooke! You are not worthly half kicked yet. Howsevy you can wiggle your eye like, your turn next, Levson!"
 "Oh, don't be a silly idiot!" said Levson. "We shall have Ratty up here if this row goes on."

"I have been waggod, Levson, and I refuse to cessidiah Wotiah in the mattah at all! Fwuy come on!"

"Go it, Gussy!" sang out Redfern.

Quite a crowd of New House juniors had now gathered round the doorway, looking on in great delight.

Arthur Augustus "went it." Levson had to fight, and he did his best. He was a much tougher opponent than Crooke. He was a good boxer, and had been in proper condition he would probably have been the last on Gussy's list. But the end of the Fourth was hopelessly out of condition, and in a few minutes he had belown to mazed. He was driven round the table, and a right-hander knocked him into the corner of the study at last, and he stayed there.

Arthur Augustus was breathing very hard now.

"Is that wotiah, Levson?" he inquired politely.

"You hang you!" growled Levson.

"Very well. Your turn next, Mellish!"

"I—I say, it was only a joke, you know," said Mellish.

"I'm willing to apologise."

"I shall be very pleased to accept your apology, Mellish, atah I have thrashed you. I have been waggod. Fwuy pay up your hands! I do not wish to leavvy you, Mellish; but if you do not put up your hands, I shall strike you on the nose!"

"His, ha, ha!"

"Go, Gussy! Map 'em up!"

The unfortunate Mellish put up his hands reluctantly.

Mellish did not last long. The second punch felled him to the floor, and he declined to rise.

"You are not done yet, Mellish!"

"Oh!" growled Mellish. "I give you best!"

"I regard you as a funk, Mellish!"

"Yow-ow!"

"Fwuy crawl out of the way, you lankay wotiah! Wacka, it is your turn!"

"I'm ready for you!" growled Backe of the Shell.

"Fwuy come on, Wotiah!"

Backe came on more readily than the others. The two were soon going, it hammer and tonga, cheered on by the delighted crowd in the passage. Backe put up a good fight, and D'Arcy found his hands full. He was feeling the effects of his previous exertions, and they told on him.

Backe & Co. looked a little anxious. Arthur Augustus was giving ground now. It would be too humiliating for Gussy to be licked by a cud like Backe.

"Back up, Gussy?"

"Go for his nose, old man!"

"Put your best into it!"

"Leave Backe to me, Gussy!" said Herries.

"Wah! I am goin' to thrash him!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"Tump, tump, tump!" Punch, pommel, punch! The two combatants closed in stride, and Gussy's head went into Chissey. There were muffled oars from D'Arcy as Backe punched away savagely. But he wrenched himself loose, and delivered an upper-cut that fairly lifted Backe off his feet.

Backe of the Shell crashed down on the floor, with a gasping yell. Arthur Augustus leaned heavily on the table, and gasped for breath.

"Bravo, Gussy?"

"Oh, what a nose!"

"His, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus mopped his nose. It was streaming crimson.

"Wacka, you wotiah, go-wawp!"

Backe gasped.

"I'm done!" "Oh-ow-ow-ow!" Backe clasped his chin and moaned.

"Hang you! Yow-ow!" I do done! Yow!"

"Behold the conquering hero!" grinned Monty Lowther.

"Don't leave off now, Gussy, just when you're in the vein. Thrash some more while you're about it. How's Clampe waiting for his turn?"

"I'm not!" growled Clampe.

The GUY LEISURE—No. 402.

Arthur Augustus turned to Clampe, who lacked away in a hurry.

"Clampe, dear boy, if you take exception to my conduct in kickin' up a row in your study—"

"I don't!" gasped Clampe. "I don't mind a bit!"

"I am quite prepared to smother for my conduct, Clampe, if you have any objection to make."

"Very well, if you are quite sure you are satisfied. If you are not quite satisfied, Clampe, I am ready to give you satisfaction."

"There was a sudden call along the passage.

"Cave!"

The warring was followed by a swamping of feet. The crowd in the passage melted away as if by magic.

Tom Merry & Co., unfortunately, could not melt away.

The School House fellows had no escape.

Mr. Ratcliff, the Housemaster of the New House, came striding along the passage with a thunderous brow.

"Now, look out for yourself!" murmured Messons.

The New House master strode into the study.

He looked at the School House party, and he looked at the overturned chairs and the trampled carpet. He looked at D'Arcy's flushed and battered countenance, and at the four fellows who were greasing away their injuries. Fortunately for Clampe, the smoke had cleared off, and the cigarettes were out of sight.

"What does this mean?" thundered Mr. Ratcliff.

There was no reply. It was quite clear what it meant, for this matter, and the question was superfluous.

"Clampe, this is your study. Are you responsible for the uproar in the house—for the disgraceful uproar that was none appropriate to a bear-garden than to a study at a public school?"

"Nasso, sir!" gasped Clampe. "I—I couldn't prevent it, sir."

"Did you ask these boys from the other House to enter here, and to make this disturbance, Clampe?"

"Certainly not, sir! They forced their way in!"

Mr. Ratcliff's eyes glittered. He had a heavy down on Tom Merry & Co., and smiling pleased his nose than to make complaints to Mr. Ratcliff on the subject of the School House fellows.

"Now, it is supposed you were the leader in this—"

"Not at all, Mr. Wotiah," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"I was the leader, sir!"

"Then you are responsible for this disgraceful disturbance, D'Arcy!"

"I do not regard it as disgraceful, sir. I came back to thrash some wotiah for waggod me."

"Clampe, kindly tell me exactly what has happened."

Clampe was quite ready to do so.

"Levson and Mellish and Crooke and Backe came over to tea with me, sir," he said. "D'Arcy and his friends came after them. That's all I know, sir."

"Who began the disturbance?"

"D'Arcy, sir, and his friends backed him up. Otherwise, I should have turned him out of the study. My friends did not want to fight."

"Is that correct, D'Arcy?"

"Yess, sir!"

"Very good! You School House boys will return to your own House at once. I shall lay the matter before your House-masters. You may go!"

"Wotiah! Mr. Wotiah!"

"Go!" thundered Mr. Ratcliff.

And Tom Merry & Co. went.

CHAPTER 5. Called over the Coals.

"FATHEAD!"

"Ass!"

"Duffin!"

"Jabberwock!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy polished his eyelids, jizzed it into his eye, and surveyed his friends calmly, as they delivered their candid opinions of him.

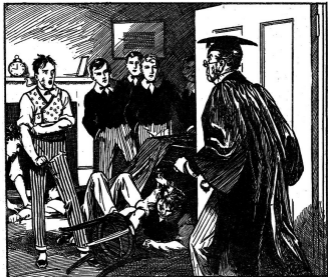
Tom Merry & Co. were waiting in Study No. 4 for the inevitable summons to Mr. Ratcliff's study.

Mr. Ratcliff had come over to the School House almost on their heels, and he was now in the Housemaster's study. The storm was blowing—

"Why didn't you tie the duffin up in the first place!" said Jack Blake, addressing Gussy. "We could have done that!"

"Wotiah, Blake!"

"Now Ratty's got as by the short hair," said Blake. "It's the chance of a lifetime for Ratty. A gang of us going over



Mr. Ratcliff, the Housemaster of the New House, strode into the study. He looked at the School House party, at the overturned chairs, and at the trampled carpet. "What does this mean?" he demanded. (See Chapter 4.)

to his House and making a shattering row there—that's how he'll put it to Hallton. And we can't deny it."

"Well, we're in for it!" said Tom Merry. "We've put ourselves in the wrong this time, and Baitty won't give us a chance. Hallo, here comes Kildare!"

Kildare of the Sixth looked into the study.

"You're wanted in Mr. Ratcliff's study—the lot of you!"

Tom Merry & Co. proceeded to the Housemaster's study, yet at all in cheerful spirits. Mr. Hallton was looking grim. Mr. Ratcliff was with him, still thunderous.

Lucien & Co. were not in the study. Evidently Mr. Ratcliff's complaint did not include them.

"Mr. Ratcliff has made a very serious complaint to me," said Mr. Ratcliff sternly. "It appears that you visited a study in the New House this evening, and deliberately made a disturbance there. Have you anything to say?"

"Yess, wathah, sir?"

"I am willing to listen to any excuse you may have to make."

Mr. Ratcliff broke in irritably.

"Heady, Mr. Ratcliff, I do not see what excuse those young rascals can have to make for their conduct. They have acted like brutal hoodlums, to my knowledge. I may say that I am not surprised at such conduct in them."

"I should be very much surprised if any of my boys acted like hoodlums, Mr. Ratcliff," said the School House master curtly. "And I am bound to give them a hearing before I inflict punishment. If you have anything to say, Merry, you may say it."

"Well, sir, we did go over to the New House," said Tom.

"There was a bit of a row."

"I may leave this matter in my hands, Tom Merry. The

fact is, Mr. Wallton, I went over to the New House to thrash some wottaks—"

"What?"

"To thrash some wottaks, sir!" said Archer Augustus firmly. "My friends went with me to see fair play, and they did not take part in the row."

"I understood you to say, Mr. Ratcliff, that the whole party were concerned in the disturbance."

"Certainly!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff. "I found the study almost a wreck. They had forced their way in to attack some School House boys who appear to have taken refuge there from their ruffians!"

"That isn't correct, sir," said Tom Merry, his eyes glinting.

"We went over to see fair play, as D'Arcy says."

"You did not join in the disturbance!"

"Not at all, sir! We should have joined in if D'Arcy hadn't got fair play, though. That's what we went for."

"Who was responsible for the forcing of the door?"

"I was, Mr. Wallton."

"Did your friends help you?"

"No, sir."

"You will see, Mr. Ratcliff, that D'Arcy alone was responsible."

"I am sure, Mr. Ratcliff, that that does not even that those werry ruffians are to be punished!" rapped out Mr. Ratcliff. "If such is your decision, I shall have no choice but to take the matter before the Head!"

Mr. Ratcliff's eyes gleamed for a moment, but his voice was quite calm as he replied:

"Not at all! As they aided and abetted D'Arcy in making a disturbance in the New House by their presence and support, I shall punish them. So far as they are concerned,

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However, the matter is not serious. D'Arcy, I shall cease you severely!"

"But Jove!"
"The rest will take two hundred lines each."
"Yes, sir?" said Tom Merry.
"I object to this!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff. "I consider that every member of the party should be cased most severely—most severely, sir."

"I am sorry I cannot meet your views, Mr. Ratcliff," said the School House master, assented. "All but D'Arcy will do!"

Tom Merry & Co. quitted the study. Mr. Ratcliff rose and took up his cane.

"Hold on, wear head, D'Arcy."
"Hast, sir?"
"Swish, swish, swish, swish!"
"Gooeough!" mumbled Arthur Augustus, as he sneezed his hands. "Oh, dear!"
"You may go, D'Arcy."
"Thank you, sir!"

"And that is all!" exclaimed Mr. Ratcliff furiously. "These young rascals have turned my House into a hodge-podge, and that is all. Go punishment you think proper to inflict, Mr. Ratcliff!"

"I have reflected the punishment that seems to me just," said Mr. Ratcliff coldly. "The matter is ended now."

"Then I shall refer it to Dr. Holmes!"
"You may please yourself about that, of course!"

Mr. Ratcliff whisked out of the study with rattling gown. Arthur Augustus was squeezing his hands in the passage. The New House master gave him a dark look as he passed. But he did not go to the Head's study. He was well aware that Dr. Holmes would uphold the School House master in his own House, and it was useless to complain. The threat was an idle one.

Mr. Ratcliff whisked back to his own House, and found some relief in boxing Figgins' ears as he went in. He whisked on, leaving George Figgins staring after him in astonishment and wrath.

Arthur Augustus was still wringing his hands when he returned to Study No. 6.

"Had it hot?" growled Blake.
"You-er! Yes. Wow-wow!"

"Serve you jolly well right!" said Blake crossly. "If Ratcliff hadn't kicked you, we'd jolly well keep you, you duffer!"

"Woolly, Blake—"
"You are?" said Herries. "You've given Betty a chance of roasting old Ratcliff, and he's always waiting for chances like that! You ought to be scragged!"

"Woolly, Herries—"
"And you can do the lines!" said Digby. "That'll be a load of trouble handed for you, and I hope you'll enjoy them!"

"Woolly, Dig—"
"Be-ee-ee-ee!"

And Study No. 6 settled down to prep, Arthur Augustus prating every now and then to rub his back.

CHAPTER 6.

Levison's Luck is Out!

"NOT good enough!" said Percy Mellich, with emphasis.

"There's no risk—"
"There's a jolly lot of risk, you foolhead! Ask next door!" said Mellich. "Nothing doing, no far as I'm concerned!"

Levison scowled angrily.

The black sheep of the Fourth had a new scheme in his fertile brain, but his canvas were fed up with Levison's schemes.

It was a couple of days after the row in the New House, "Tom Merry's Weekly" had not been delivered yet, but it was expected the following day. The matter being so exceedingly late, the editors had dispersed with profuse. Above the necessity of proof-correcting had worn off, they feared that labour rather a bore.

Levison was quite aware that proofs of the "Weekly" were not to be sent on this occasion, and that gave him a chance of showing the copy undisturbed, if he could get at it. His first attempt had led to the capture of D'Arcy's waistcoat, and a soaking afterwards. The copy being now safe in the "Ryker's Gazette" office, the second attempt required some thinking out. But Levison had thought it out.

Levison was quite determined that his linerick should go in. It was too easy to essay Mr. Ratcliff, however, than to drag the schoolboy editors into another row with the New House master.

He knew that Mr. Ratcliff would see it, that he would take it for himself, and that three would be troubled. But certainly the schoolboy editors would have to bear the least of it. They would know that the linerick was Levison's work, but they would not be able to prove it!

Levison's new scheme for getting the linerick into the "Weekly" seemed to him an excellent one, but his comrades did not view the matter in the same light. Crooke was alarmed at the mere suggestion, Backe told him to go and get out, and Piggott pointedly informed him that he would see him hanged first. He tried Mellich last, and he found Mellich as hard to convince as the others.

"It's as safe as houses," said Levison, biting his lip. "I'm going to take all the risk, if there is any. I've scouted round Tiper's place. It's perfectly easy to get into the printing rooms from the garden. It's quite detached from the part of the house where they live."

"How was it?" said Mellich.

"I spotted them this afternoon at work there," said Levison. "Old Tiper has only a boy to help him, and neither of them will be there to-night. We could get in at the window as easy as falling off a log, and alter the type in the formes as much as we like. It's certain to be set up to-day. Tiper's promise is for to-morrow, only his new stock of paper hasn't come in yet. I heard Blake say so!"

"You ran chance if it you like?" grinned Mellich. "Levisee, see out!"

"It's a jolly good idea! Some of the 'Weekly' will be set up, at least, and I know how to set type. I can get the linerick in, taking something else out, and old Tiper will never notice it when he turns the sheets off on the machine. They're not having any proofs set!"

"And suppose you get spotted, and arrested as a burglar?" said Mellich.

"That's all yet! If we were spotted, we should own up that it was a joke on Tom Merry, and old Tiper would be wroth!"

"Yes, he'd be satisfied when he'd searched us to the Head for a flogging. I'm not taking any!"

"Wook!"

"Shove to you, and many of them!" grinned Mellich; and he strode away, whistling.

Levison scowled, and walked away to the New House. He did not want to undertake the risk alone, and Clazpe of the New House was his last chance of getting help. He found Clazpe in his study, smoking a cigarette and reading a sporting paper.

Levison explained his mission, and Clazpe's response was short, if not sweet.

"Rate!"

"So you think it, too?" growled Levison.

"I'm not going to start as an enterprising burglar!" grinned Clazpe. "I advise you to let it alone, too. It's too thick. Have a cigarette, and don't talk rot!"

Levison accepted the cigarette, and lighted up.

"Better let the 'Weekly' alone, advised Clazpe.

"You've still got a fat nose when D'Arcy pumbed it. Those boasts cut up too rough over a joke—your sort of job!"

"I'm going, all the same. I— Oh!" ejaculated Levison, as the study door opened.

Clazpe started up in alarm.

Mr. Ratcliff strode in.

The cigarette was in full view. Levison and Clazpe singly blinked at the Housemaster.

It was possible that Mr. Ratcliff had scented smoke on the occasion of his previous visit to Clazpe's study. At all events, he was evidently suspicious and watchful. And the two young rascals had been caught fairly in the act now.

Mr. Ratcliff's eyes glittered greedily at them.

"So this is the cause of your visits to this House, Levison?" said Mr. Ratcliff. "Your object is to initiate the boys of my House into the vicious practices of the School House!"

"I—"

"Both of you will follow me to my study!"

"Oh, crooked!" murmured Clazpe, in dismay.

Mr. Ratcliff rushed away, with the two dismayed juniors following him. In his study he selected a cane.

Have You Had Your Copy of

ANSWERS

The Popular Penny Weekly

THE GLEN LIBRARY—No. 450

TUCK HAMPERS ARE GIVEN AWAY TO READERS OF THE "BOYS' FRIEND," 1st.

"Clamp, I shall punish you for smoking, but not as severely as Levinson. I have little doubt that you were led into it by this School House boy!"

"Clamp did not speak. He was only too glad to get off lightly. As he was older than Levinson, he might reasonably have been considered more to blame; but Mr. Ratcliff chose to take the view that Mr. Bailton's House exercised a corrupting influence on the New House, over which he himself held sway.

"You should be more careful in choosing your associates. Clamp! Hold out your hand!"

"Swish!" It was a severe cut, but it was all. Then Mr. Ratcliff turned to Levinson of the Fourth.

"Hold out your hand, Levinson!"

"Levinson looked sulky.

"If you please, sir, I'd rather be reported to my own Housemaster!"

"I do not choose to take that course, Levinson!" said Mr. Ratcliff, with a sneering smile. "Mr. Bailton's view of offences committed in my House are altogether too lenient: if you choose to bring your disgusting habits of smoking into the New House, you must take the consequences! I shall punish you myself, and you may report the matter to Mr. Bailton if you choose! Once more, hold out your hand!"

"You've no right to cane me!" said Levinson.

"Indeed!"

Mr. Ratcliff said no more. He grasped Levinson by the collar with his left hand, and lashed him with the cane in his right.

Levinson roared with pain, as the heavy lashes descended on his shoulders and back. When Mr. Ratcliff had finished with him, he was huddled, breathless and gasping, out of the study, and the door closed on him.

Clamp followed him down the passage.

"You suffer!" said Clamp. "Why did you check him?"

"It only makes him worse."

"I'm going to my Housemaster about this!" said Levinson, between his teeth. "The rascal has no right to cane me!"

"Well, you have no right to smoke in the New House, if you come to that!" grinned Clamp.

"Oh, rats!"

Levinson, white with pain and rage, hurried across the quadrangle to Mr. Bailton's study in the School House. He knocked at the door, and Mr. Bailton bade him enter.

The Housemaster regarded his white, furious face curiously.

"What is the matter, Levinson?"

"Mr. Ratcliff has caned me, sir—threatened me with a cane in his study!" burst out Levinson. "I appeal to you for protection, sir, as my Housemaster!"

"What cause did you give Mr. Ratcliff to punish you, Levinson?" he asked. "You must have been in the New House!"

"I was in Clamp's study, sir."

"Mr. Ratcliff did not punish you, I presume, simply because you were in Clamp's study?"

"No, sir. Clamp offered me a cigarette, and—and I was just trying it. I wasn't really smoking, only just trying it, to see how it tasted!"

"You were smoking in Clamp's study, Levinson!" said Mr. Bailton sternly. "I should have preferred Mr. Ratcliff to report the matter to me, as you belong to my House. Since it has come to my knowledge, however, I shall deal with the matter! Hold out your hand!"

"Wh-a-ah!" gasped Levinson.

"Hold out your hand!"

Mr. Bailton took up his cane.

"But—but—"

"Swish! Swish!"

"You may go, Levinson," said Mr. Bailton, laying down the cane. "On the next occasion, Levinson, your punishment will be more severe."

Levinson of the Fourth left the study with feelings too deep for words. He had received two licks instead of one, and he had not had even the satisfaction of causing trouble between the two Housemasters. Certainly Levinson's luck was out.

CHAPTER 7.

Levinson is Humorous.

PERRY MELLESH looked very curiously at Levinson when the Fourth Form went up to the dormitory that evening. Levinson did not catch his eye, however. Mellesh was wondering whether the black sheep of the Fourth intended carrying out his scheme that night on his own. Levinson had nerve enough for anything. The juniors turned in, and at eleven o'clock there was silence

and slumber in the dormitory. But as the last stroke of eleven drew away, Mellesh was awakened by a shake.

He blinked up at Levinson. He knew that the shadowy form beside his bed was Ernest Levison.

"Are you coming with me?" whispered Levinson.

"No fear!"

"Well, I'm going alone, then, you rotten hank!"

"Retire—shak it. There'll be a row."

"Rats!"

Levinson disappeared into the shadows, and Mellesh settled down to sleep again. A risky adventure of that kind was not at all to Mellesh's taste.

Ten minutes later Levinson of the Fourth dropped from the school wall into the road. He tramped away towards Rylands in the darkness.

The scheme he had outlined was not difficult. But it required a good deal of nerve to carry it out. If Levinson was discovered as Mr. Tiper's premises at that hour of the night, the result was likely to be serious. He could explain to Mr. Tiper that it was only a joke, but it was very doubtful indeed whether the printer would see the joke.

But Levinson did not hesitate. He let himself in through the garden gate at the back of Mr. Tiper's house, and cautiously approached the building.

The office of the "Rylands Gazette," and the printing works were both in the same building, in another part of which the Tiper family resided. Levinson had visited the place before, and he knew his way about. Mr. Tiper's business was not on an extensive scale. The "Rylands Gazette" was set up by hand, by Mr. Tiper and his boy—as well as the other printing that was done in the place.

Levinson flattered his nose against a dark window, and peered in.

He could dimly make out the shape of the printing machine, and the benches in the room. The occupied part of the house was in darkness—the Tiper family had gone to bed.

The window was fastened by a common catch, and the sashes were set loose. With hardly a sound, Levinson forced back the catch with his penknife, and pushed up the lower sash.

His heart beat as he clambered in at the window.

It was all very well to regard the matter as a joke, but it was a serious business to force his way into a house near midnight, and he knew it. If Police-constable Crump had spotted him there, Levinson would have passed the night in the lockup, with the prospect of being expelled from St. Jive's in the morning. For a moment or two he almost regretted his enterprise. But he did not draw back. He stooped inside, closed the window, and drew the blind carefully. He would not work without a light, and he did not want the light to show.

He listened for a few minutes with beating heart. But there was no sound in the building.

He stretched a match, at last, and lighted the gas. He turned it half on. Then he looked about him hastily.

He believed that the copy of the "Weekly" was already set up, and he soon found that he was not mistaken. There was a good deal of type set up, and Levinson glanced over it curiously.

The "Rylands Gazette" was set up, as well as the "Weekly." Levinson glanced over the columns—the stogy articles, and the columns after columns of advertisements. His face broke into a sudden grin.

"My lark! What a lark!"

The idea had come into his mischievous brain of making some alterations in the type of the "Gazette." Mr. Tiper having left it all ready for printing in the morning, would not be likely to notice any change. Levinson chuckled softly at the idea.

But he devoted his attention to the "Weekly" first.

He selected the forms in which Levison's comic columns was set up. He coolly extracted several lines of type, and then, helping himself from the case, he set up his limerick in the place of one of Monty Levison's little jokes.

The "pied" type he distributed in the case, not taking the trouble as "diss" it properly, however. He picked the types in carelessly. Mr. Tiper's boy was to have the pleasure of sorting them out when he found them mixed.

His work on the "Weekly" done, Levinson listened again at the door.

But there was no sound to alarm him.

Mr. Tiper was sleeping the sleep of the just at a distance from the printing-office, little dreaming that a practical joker was at work there.

Levinson ran his eye over the columns of type that were to fill the advertisement spaces of the local paper—about two-thirds of the paper.

His eye lingered on the column headed "Wanted to Purchase."

"Building wanted. Good price given for really good THE ONE LIBRARY.—No. 60.

A Magnificent New, Large, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

animal. Call any time after five o'clock.—A. J. Black Bell, Wayland.

Levison's eyes glimmered. He helped himself to some more type, and removed the name and address from the advertisement. In its place he set up "Call any time Saturday afternoon, Mr. Ratcliff, New House, St. James' School."

Further down the column was another advertisement which read:

"Second-hand bicycle wanted. Must be cheap and in fair condition.—J. Thatcher, Oak Tree Lane, Rykeombe."

That name and address Levison altered to those of Mr. Ratcliff, adding "Call Sunday afternoon."

Further down the column it was stated that "A gentleman desires to dispose of discarded clothes. Several suits almost new. Apply by letter to J. J. case of this paper."

Levison cheerfully replaced the last line with "Apply personally to Mr. Ratcliff, New House, St. James' School."

The young rascal rubbed his hands and chuckled. He was looking forward to Saturday afternoon, and the various callers who would arrive for Mr. Ratcliff. By the time the New House master had finished with them, he would have reason to regret that thrashing he had bestowed on Levison.

Levison had come to the printing-office to insert his limerick in "Tom Merry's Weekly," but he was not the fellow to lose an opportunity. The "Rykeombe Gazette" offered him still more scope for his peculiar humor.

And he was not done yet.

In the next column was a "displayed" advertisement.

"MONEY LENT!
Any Sum from Five Pounds to Five Thousand, on Note of Hand Alone.

A Gentleman makes loans on Favourable Terms with strictest secrecy. This Gentleman being in a respectable position, his clients can rely upon Fair Play and Absolute Discretion.

J. SCHREWER, Rose Dale, Wayland.

Levison suppressed a chuckle.

"What a joke on Ratty!" he murmured.

In a few minutes "J. Schrewer, Rose Dale, Wayland," was changed into "H. Ratcliff, New House, St. James' School."

Then Levison calmly lifted a whole paragraph, and set up a new one in its place, in the following effect:

"If William Sell, of Wayland, will apply to H. Ratcliff, New House, St. James' School, on Saturday afternoon, he will hear of something to his advantage.

Levison chuckled sardoniously over that previous paragraph. William, otherwise known as Billy Sell, was the worst character in Wayland. When he was sent to prison for being drunk and disorderly, he was generally qualifying himself for a new stretch. If he came upon that advertisement—and it was pretty certain to be pointed out to him—William would certainly call upon Mr. Ratcliff at St. Jim's—to hear of something to his advantage. He might anticipate that he had come into a fortune, or that an inheritance was waiting for him to claim. So certainly he would anticipate something. And he was certain to cut up exceedingly nasty when he found that Mr. Ratcliff, so far from having anything to his advantage to offer him, would not even know why he had called, and would undoubtedly order him out as the next.

"I rather fancy Ratty will be sorry for himself on Saturday!" grinned Levison. "But—My hat! I shall have to keep this jolly clock!"

He turned out the gas, and slipped from the window, closing it carefully behind him. With cautious step he made his way out of the garden, and took the lane to St. Jim's.

The Fourth-Farm dormitory was silent when Levison came into it with noiseless steps. Melish was fast asleep, and Levison did not awaken him. He did not mean to confide his latest exploit even to Melish—it was necessary to keep the identity of the author of those advertisements exceedingly dark.

Levison turned in quietly, and was soon asleep.

He was a little heavy-eyed as he turned out at the clang of the ringing-bell in the morning.

Melish eyed him curiously.

"Did you go to Rykeombe?" he asked, as they went downstairs.

The GUY LAMBERT.—No. 456.

Levison shook his head coolly.

"No, I thought it was rather too risky after all."

"How?" grinned Melish. "It's all serene, though! Mum's the word!"

Clumps of the Shell were down on Levison.

"Did you go after all?"

"Oh, no!"

"Then the limerick won't be in the 'Weekly'?"

"Eh! What limerick?" he said.

Clumps stared.

"Your limerick," he said.

"You're dreaming!" said Levison pleasantly. "I've never composed any limericks. Can't write in rhyme to save my life. I believe there is a limerick in the 'Weekly'—I think it's in Lawther's social column. Nothing to do with me, of course."

Clumps chuckled.

"All serene, you see! I'm not going to give you away! But I'll give you a tip: If those shops find it there, they'll take jolly good care that Ratty doesn't see the 'Weekly' at all."

"I've thought of that," said Levison coolly. "I think Ratty will see it before they do."

"How on earth—?"

"If there's a cheeky limerick about Ratty in the paper, I'm afraid those shops are looking for a spy," said Levison calmly. "Of course, it's no affair of mine."

CHAPTER 8.

Mr. Ratcliff on the Track.

MR. RATCLIFF passed his hours knitting. He was coming away from the School House after morning lessons. Mr. Ratcliff being master of the Fifth as well as Housemaster. He passed under the elm in the quadrangle on his way to the New House, and, as it happened, two jokers of the Fourth were in conversation there. They had their backs towards Mr. Ratcliff, and apparently did not see him coming. They were Levison and Melish, and Levison was saying:

"I hope, for their sakes, Mr. Ratcliff won't see it."

Then Mr. Ratcliff passed.

Any other master of St. Jim's, excepting perhaps Mr. Selby, would have passed on, without deigning to listen to words apparently not intended for his ears. But Mr. Ratcliff was not like that, as Levison very well knew. Mr. Ratcliff intended to hear some—

"But are you sure?" began Melish.

"Well, I can't be sure, of course," said Levison. "They don't let me see 'Tom Merry's Weekly' before it goes to press. But I've heard about it, and I'm sure Mr. Ratcliff would be very angry if he knew that he was being made fun of in the school paper. I shouldn't wonder if he complained to the Head about it. I don't approve of it myself. I consider it disrespectful."

Levison and Melish walked on, without tussling their heads.

Mr. Ratcliff gazed after them.

The New Housemaster was a suspicious man, but he did not suspect that the crafty Levison had got up that little scene for his special benefit, in order to put him on the track of the offensive limerick. Even Levison did not care actually to sneak, but those carefully-dropped words sounded the purpose equally well. Mr. Ratcliff was on the track now.

"Oh, indeed!" murmured Mr. Ratcliff. "Indeed! So the impudence of those young rascals has been pushed to that extent—actually to making fun of a master in the columns of the school paper! We shall see—indeed, we shall see!"

Mr. Ratcliff walked on to his own House, deep in thought.

If there was some impertinent reference to himself in the "Weekly," Mr. Ratcliff intended to know all about it. In fact, he generally looked over the "Weekly," his suspicious mind on the alert for something of the sort. But if he was actually installed in the forthcoming number, he considered it very likely that the schoolboy editors would seek to keep it from his knowledge. If he asked for a copy of the paper, he

TUCK HAMPERS

FOR READERS OF

THE

BOYS' FRIEND

OUT TO-DAY!

ONE PENNY.

Mr. Ratcliff walked on to his own House, deep in thought. If there was some impertinent reference to himself in the "Weekly," Mr. Ratcliff intended to know all about it. In fact, he generally looked over the "Weekly," his suspicious mind on the alert for something of the sort. But if he was actually installed in the forthcoming number, he considered it very likely that the schoolboy editors would seek to keep it from his knowledge. If he asked for a copy of the paper, he



Mr. Ratcliff laid his hands on the fat gentleman's shoulders, and swung him to the door. They two was as good as his word. He swung up his black bag, and it crashed on Mr. Ratcliff's chest. (See Chapter 12.)

would receive an excuse instead of a paper, and every justice he asked would find that he hadn't one. Mr. Ratcliff was not to be defused so easily as that, however, now that he was on the track.

He called Figgins of the Fourth into his study.

"I understand, Figgins, that you have something to do with a—er—a kind of publication belonging to the justices?" he said.

"Yes, sir," said Figgins, in some surprise. "The 'Weekly,' sir."

"A new number is forthcoming, I think?"

"We're expecting it to-day, sir. Mr. Tiper promised it for to-day. If you'd like a copy, sir, I'll bring you one at once," said Figgins, rather flattered by his Housemaster's interest in the paper. He wondered whether it was his ripping serial that interested the Housemaster. It was really very gratifying if Mr. Ratcliff was keen to get the next instalment.

Mr. Ratcliff gave him a searching glance. If there was any

experience in the paper, it was pretty clear that Figgins was not a party to it.

"You do not read all the contributions in the paper, Figgins?" he asked.

"Oh, I generally look them over, sir."

"But before they are printed?"

"Oh, no, sir. When we have proofs sent, every chap corrects his own proofs. This time we hadn't any."

"When do you expect the paper to arrive, Figgins?"

"After lessons, sir."

"Does Mr. Tiper deliver it personally?"

"He sends his boy with it, sir, and it's left with Taggles,"

said Figgins, in wonder.

"Very good!" said Mr. Ratcliff. "You may go, Figgins." Figgins went, very much surprised. He did not like the look in Ratcliff's eye, as he confided to Kew and Fatty Wykes. It was evidently not merely kindness to see Figgins's next instalment that was the cause of Mr. Ratcliff's interest in the new number.

The New House master left the house again, and walked down to the lodge, to see Taggie's porter.

"Taggie, you will receive a parcel this afternoon from the printer's in Rykonohe," he said. "It will be addressed to Master Merry, I think."

"Yesir," said Taggie. "Master Merry's expecting 'a paper, sir. He's giv' us threepence to give the lad."

"When you receive that parcel, Taggie, you will bring it to my study in the New House. If I am not there, leave it on my table. It is necessary for the paper to be examined before it is allowed to pass into circulation among the boys."

"Yesir," said Taggie.
 Mr. Ratcliff went in to lauch feeling satisfied. If there was any important reference to himself in that number of the "Weekly," it could not escape him now. His eyes would be the first to see the "Weekly."

Tom Merry & Co. were anticipating the delivery of the paper that afternoon, little dreaming of the arrangements Mr. Ratcliff had made. It was to be delivered during the afternoon, and also lessons. It had to be fetched from Taggie's lodge, as usual. But on this occasion there was a disappointment in store for the schoolboy editors.

After lessons Tom Merry & Co. strolled down to the lodge. They found Taggie there, but there was no sign of the bundle of papers from the "Rykonohe Gazette" office.

"Has it come, Taggie?" asked Tom.
 "Yes, Master Merry."

"Well, where is it, Taggie?"
 "Which it's been taken to Mr. Ratcliff's study."

"What on earth for?" demanded Tom, in astonishment.
 "Mr. Ratcliff's orders."

"But Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "That's walloch odd of Watty, even if he is keen to see the 'Weekly,' dear boys!"

"Blessed if I catch on!" said Tom, wrinkling his brows. "I don't see what Ratty wants with our paper. We'd better go and ask him for it."

"Yess, walloch!"
 "I suppose Lowther hasn't showed in any of his blessed jokes about Ratty?" said Blake suspiciously. "If he did, and Ratty got wind of it—"

Merry Lowther shook his head.
 "No fear! I let Ratty alone. He's too ratty for jokes."

"Well, come on!" said Tom. "I suppose we've a right to ask Ratty for our own paper?"

Tom Merry & Co. proceeded to the New House. Mr. Ratcliff had returned there after leaving the Fifth Form-room, and they expected to find him in his study. But as they came up to the porch, the Housemaster emerged.

The juniors started as they looked at him. Mr. Ratcliff's face was white with anger, his eyes were glowing, and he held a copy of the "Weekly" clutched in his busy hand.

He gave the juniors a dark glance, and strode away towards the School House.

"But Jove!" ejaculated D'Arcy. "What's the matter!"
 "Something's up!"

"He had the 'Weekly' in his paw," said Blake. "Look here, you fellows, he's going to Reddie, or the Head! You could see that! Some silly ass has been slating him in the paper, and he's got on to it."

"My hat!" said Tom suddenly. "Is it possible—?" He looked at the "Weekly" in his hand.

"What have you got in your hand?"

"Lowther's blunderick. He said he would show it in some-how. But—he couldn't. He couldn't get at the copy after Tipper had it."

"Impossible!"
 "How's Figgins! Figg!"

Figgins & Co. joined them, looking very grave.
 "Something's in the wind," said Figgins. "Ratty's gone out, looking like a Hun—"

"Yes, we've just seen him. He's got the 'Weekly' in his study, and he had one number in his hat. What's the row?"

"Scratching in the paper," said Figgins. "He was asking me questions about it this afternoon, I remember. Which of you School House dummies has been slating our Housemaster?"

"Weally, Figgins—"
 Julian of the Fourth came waddling over from the School House.

"What's the merry dickens have you fellows been doing?" he exclaimed. "Ratty—"
 "What's he up to now?" asked Marston.

"He's gone into the Head's study, with a face like a Fressian! He's got a copy of the 'Weekly.' There's no going to be trouble for anybody!"

The juniors exchanged anxious glances. Mr. Ratcliff came out of the School House, and beckoned to Tom Merry. Tom approached.

"Follow me, Merry," said the Housemaster severely.
 "Yes, sir."

Tom Merry followed him. And his chums gathered in the doorway of the School House, in an anxious mood.

CHAPTER 9.

Mr. Ratcliff is Very Ratty.

DR. HOLMES had retired to his study to enjoy a quiet hour with Eurypides, when there came a rap at the door, and Mr. Ratcliff strode in. The Head raised his eyes from his book, a look of surprise coming over his face as he noted the excitement in the New House master's manner.

"Dr. Holmes," Mr. Ratcliff gasped with wrath, "I must bring this to your notice! Such impudence—such unparalleled impudence—"

"My dear Ratcliff—"
 "I have here, sir, a copy of a junior publication—you have perhaps seen it—"

"Tom Merry's 'Weekly'!" The Head smiled. "Yes, I have seen it, Mr. Ratcliff. Surely there is nothing in it of an objectionable nature? I have glanced at several copies at different times, and found them quite harmless."

"Look at it, sir!"
 Mr. Ratcliff slammed the paper down on the Head's writing-table. It was open at Lowther's comic column. Mr. Ratcliff's bony finger indicated the offending paragraph. The Head read it with astonishment. His brows darkened as he read:

"There's a ratter whose temper is evil,
 Whose appearance is queer quite ratty,
 He's the face of a Hun,
 And the temper of one,
 And a rat couldn't be queer so ratty."

"The last word, sir," said Mr. Ratcliff, his voice trembling with rage, "is a pun on my name—a ridiculous, impudent

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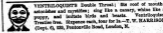
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you! It is intended in order that the writer may make plain the reference to myself, without actually mentioning my name!"

"You believe, Mr. Ratcliff, that this absurd jingle is intended to refer to you?"

"I am absolutely certain of it, sir!"

"If it is so," said the Head, "such impertinence shall certainly be very severely punished. But it seems incredible that any boy should dare to refer to a master in such terms."

"There is no doubt about it, sir! Owing to some talk among the juniors, my attention was specially directed to this number of the paper. I made it a point to secure a copy at once. I find then, the reference to myself is direct. It is unmistakable. It is the work of a School House boy. The paper is run, I understand, by Merry of the Shell. Will you question him?"

"I will certainly do so at once."

Dr. Holmes rang the bell, and sent Toby to ask Mr. Ralston to come to the study. The School House master arrived in a few minutes, and the Head handed him the paper. Mr. Ralston frowned as he read the libelous. He had no great concern personally for his colleague; but he had a very great regard for discipline and good manners.

"Mr. Ratcliff supposes that that absurd rhyme refers to himself, Mr. Ralston. What is your opinion?"

"I am afraid that such is the intention of it, sir," said the School House master. "It is execrable."

"Will you call Merry here?"

"Certainly."

Mr. Ralston left the study in quest of Tom Merry. When he returned, the captain of the Shell followed him in, looking far from cheerful. It was only too evident that serious trouble was brewing.

"Merry!" The Head's voice was unusually stern. "Look at this, and tell me whether you are responsible for it."

Tom Merry looked at Levison's precious libelous. He had already guessed that it was these, though how it had come there was a mystery. He coloured under the stern gaze of the three masters. "It is execrable."

"Well?" said Dr. Holmes.

"I am not responsible for it, sir," said Tom quietly. "It has got into the paper without my knowledge or permission."

"It is intended to refer to Mr. Ratcliff?"

"I suppose so, sir."

"You are editor of the paper, I think?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you not examine the contributions before you print them?"

"Not always, sir. Only outside contributions," said Tom. "The staff—them—can be relied on not to put in any rot like that."

"I see that the column is headed 'Confidential,'" said the Head. "Which of the contributors is responsible for that column?"

"Leather, sir. But Leather did not write that libelous. It has been put into the paper without our knowledge."

Mr. Ratcliff sneered. To him that remark seemed a palpable falsehood, a flimsy attempt to escape responsibility. But it did not seem so to the Head or Mr. Ralston, who knew boys better than Mr. Ratcliff did.

"How could this be inserted in the paper without your knowledge, Merry?" asked Mr. Ralston.

"It was not in the copy when I left our hands, sir," said Tom. "The chap who wrote it must have got at the copy somehow after it left us, and put the thing in."

"Had you seen it before?"

"Well, yes."

"Then you know who wrote it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Kindly give me the writer's name!" said the Head.

Tom was silent.

"I do not attach the slightest importance to Merry's denial," broke out Mr. Ratcliff. "This impertinence was evidently concocted by the whole party, of them!"

"Nothing of the sort!" exclaimed Tom indignantly. "Dr. Holmes! That rubbish was offered me for the paper, and I refused it. The fellow somehow got at the copy afterwards and put it in without my knowledge. That's all I know about it."

"I suppose that is possible," said the Head doubtfully. "After you had prepared the copy for the printer, Merry, what did you do with it? Was it left about your study?"

"No, sir. We took it down to the printer's."

"And delivered it to him?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then the person concerned must have tampered with the copy after it was in the printer's hands?"

"I suppose so, sir."

"That would, surely, be very difficult," said Mr. Ralston.

"Yes, sir," said Tom honestly. "I can't understand how he worked it. But he did, for here is the libelous."

"Utter nonsense!" snapped Ratcliff.

"Merry must be given a fair hearing, Mr. Ratcliff," said the Head quietly. "You know the author of these impertinences, Merry. It is a regular contribution to the paper!"

"No, sir. We never print anything of his, because he always has something hidden in what he writes—some mean trick or other going at somebody. He has taken as in like that once or twice, and we've made it a rule never to let him contribute."

"You say that he offered you this as a contribution?"

"Yes, and I refused it."

"Your friends, I suppose, could give evidence that this is the case?"

"Oh, yes, sir. Manservant and Lowther and Blake and D'Arny were present."

"Very good. I do not doubt your statement, Merry. But it is necessary for you to give the name of the writer of those lines. Otherwise, you cannot complain if you are held responsible for them."

Tom Merry did not speak.

"He cannot give the name!" snarled Mr. Ratcliff. "I have no doubt whatever that Merry himself is the author of those lines!"

"I am not, sir."

"Then who is the author?"

Tom Merry's face crimsoned, but he did not speak. If ever a trichster deserved to be given away, it was Levison of the Fourth. But Tom could not make up his mind to give him away. It was against the schoolboy code of honour.

The Head's brow grew sterner.

"Unless your statement is proved, Merry, you cannot expect it to be accepted," he said. "If you are held responsible for these rude and foolish lines, you will be flogged, and the paper will be permanently suppressed. Your statement that the copy was tampered with in the printer's hands seems to me extraordinary. It appears utterly credible. I am willing to give you every chance, however."

"If I give you the name, sir, every fellow in the school will call me a sneak," said Tom desperately. "I'd rather be flogged than that."

Dr. Holmes paused. Mr. Ratcliff snarled impatiently, but the Head was patient, and he could understand.

"I am willing to make every possible allowance," he said at last. "If, when I prosecute, a School House boy who wrote those lines is named—"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well! I shall leave the matter in Mr. Ralston's hands for investigation, for the present. Mr. Ratcliff, you may accept my assurance that the delinquent will be discovered and severely punished. For the present, the matter rests here. You may go, Merry. But understand this, unless it is clearly proved that the copy was tampered with after it left your hands, the paper will not be allowed to appear again."

"Yes, sir," said Tom.

He left the study. Mr. Ratcliff watched him go, with an expression like that of a tiger who sees his victim escaping. But the Head's word was law, and Mr. Ratcliff did not venture to gainay it.

CHAPTER 10.

Rough Justice!

THERE was dismay among the schoolboy editors. The fate of the famous "Weekly" was trembling in the balance.

Tom Merry & Co. held a council of war in Study No. 4. The whole edition of the "Weekly" had been suppressed, and duly burned by Tapples in his glory. But that was a small matter in comparison with the threatened total suppression of the paper. The drama, of course, knew that Levison had somehow contrived to get at the copy in Mr. Tiper's office. But how he had done it was a mystery. They were agreed that they could not betray Levison to the Head. But it had to be proved, somehow, that some person or persons unknown had got at the "Weekly" after it was in Mr. Tiper's hands.

How that was to be done was a problem that baffled the juniors, for, on the face of it, the thing was unlikely. Mr. Tiper would have allowed any known member of the staff to call and make corrections, but he would not have allowed Levison to do so. And that matter was seen set beyond doubt, for Mr. Ralston called on the Ripcombe printer, and, after his return, he sent for Tom Merry.

"I have seen Mr. Tiper," the Housemaster said quietly. "He assures me that after the copy of the paper was in his hands, it was not over seen by any boy belonging to this school."

"The Gem Library.—No. 450.

A Magnificent New, Large, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. by MARTIN CLIFFORD.

school. I supposed it possible that some boy might have called your attention of being sent to make corrections in the sheets. Mr. Tiger assures me that such was not the case, and that the copy was set up exactly as it reached his hands."

Tom Merry winked his eyes.
"I can't understand how it was done, then, sir. But there's the original manuscript of the 'Weekly'—that is still at the printer's."

"True; but a page is missing."

"A page missing, sir?"

"Yes, the page from which the column of 'Conundrums' was set up. Apparently it became detached, and has been lost. It is very unfortunate."

"It's not an accident, sir!" exclaimed Tom excitedly.

"The chap who altered the columns must have taken that page away when he did it, so that it couldn't be proved afterwards."

"You mean that someone must have entered the printing-office without Mr. Tiger's knowledge, and altered the type after it was set up in the forms?"

"I suppose so, sir."

"If anyone did so, he would justly destroy the original manuscript of the page he altered," said Mr. Railton.

"Doubtless it was left on the bench. But that is an extraordinary allegation to make, Merry! You suggest that some boy belonging to this school broke into the printing-office at night! He could not have entered unobserved in the day-time."

"I know it sounds rather thick, sir. But it's the only thing that can have happened. I know that the type was set up over night, and left for the printing-to-day, because Mr. Tiger's new lot of paper had to come in. He told me so."

"I suppose such a thing is possible," said Mr. Railton, after a long pause. "It will be a very difficult matter to prove, however."

"He looked hard at Tom. "In the circumstances, Merry, you would be more than justified in giving the name of the author of those lines. Unless it is clearly demonstrated that a forcible entrance was made into Mr. Tiger's office, and this alteration made in the type, the paper cannot be allowed to appear again!"

"I know, sir," said Tom despondently. "But—but—"

He broke off.

"Very well; you may go!"

Tom rejoined his chums in Study No. 6. He related what had passed with the Housemaster.

"Lorion, of course!" said Blake, with a deep breath.

"He must have broken bounds last night, and barged Tiger's office."

"You didn't see anything of it? He's in your dormitory?"

Blake shook his head.

"No! I was fast asleep. But there's no doubt about it. Not that it's much good knowing that, as we can't give Lorion away to the Head."

"But we can jolly well hammer him!" growled Herries.

"Yess, watah!"

"We can't give Lorion away," said Tom thoughtfully.

"But if it's proved that somebody barged Tiger's office, that will be enough to see us clear."

"But how's that going to be proved? He can't have left any traces behind, or Tiger would know."

"It was Lorion," said Tom. "He's as full of tricks as a monkey. He may have played some other rascal's tricks there, for all we know. It would be like him to damage the machine, or pry all the type, or upset the pointer's ink. If anything of that kind has been done, it will come out, and it will prove that the office was entered at night. That will see us clear. Even Ratty wouldn't think that we barged the printer's office to shove a paragraph into the paper, when we could have written it in the copy in the first place."

"Yess, watah! But suppose it doesn't come out?"

"Then the 'Weekly' is done for," grunted Tom.

"Lorion go and see Lorion," said Herries.

"That suggestion was adopted at once. The schoolboy editors proceeded in a body to Lorion's study. Four printers were there at work on their preparation. Both Lorion and Mellish looked a little uneasy as the Co. came in. Lansley-Lesley greeted them with a grin.

"You've put your foot in it this time, I guess!" he remarked. "You must have been ass to slate Ratty like that!"

"We didn't," growled Tom. "A mad barged the printer's office last night, and made alterations in the make-up of the paper."

"He, he, he!" chuckled Trimble.

"What are you chucking at?" demanded Tom angrily.

"He, he, he! That's rather too thick!" grinned Trimble.

"You can't expect the Head to realize that whopper!"

"But how?" held up his tongue, Blake, while I give Trimble a thwack!"

Trimble jumped up.

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"Hold on!" he roared. "I—I mean, I—I quite agree with what Merry says. Keep off, you beast! I—I really thought so all along."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Never mind Trimble," said Tom Merry. "Lorion, you cad, it's time for you to own up!"

Lorion stared.

"What are you babbling about?" he asked pleasantly.

"You told us you were going to shove that rotten limerick in, and you've done it. Now the 'Weekly' is going to be set up, so it's time for you to own up. If you've got a tag of decency, you'll do it!"

"What limerick?" asked Lorion.

"Yours; the one you brought to my study the other day."

"I don't remember bringing any limerick to your study," said Lorion calmly; "and if you spin any yarns like that about me, I shall certainly deny it."

"But Jove! You disfigure! Pshaw!"

"It wouldn't be much good your denying it," said Tom Merry quietly. "There are plenty of witnesses that it was your limerick. But we draw the line at giving you away to the Head. You ought to own up."

Lorion drew a breath of relief. He was prepared to lie like the rest of the crew of Freshies; but he had a lingering doubt whether his falsehood would find belief.

"I don't know anything about it," he said coolly. "Would you fellows mind leaving off now? I've got my prep to do."

"Collar him!" grunted Herries.

"You've got us into a scrape, Lorion, with your dirty tricks," said Tom. "If you choose to own up, like a decent chap, the matter ends. If you don't, you'll get the ragging of your life!"

"I'm owing up to nothing!" said Lorion wearily. "And I jolly well hope your rotten 'Weekly' will be suppressed! And if you touch me, I'll brain you!"

He caught up a ruler savagely from the table.

It went flying from his hand the next moment, however, and Tom Merry's grasp was upon him.

Lorion struggled and yelled.

But the staff of "Tom Merry's Weekly" had no mercy on him. The prospect of having the school magazine suppressed as a result of Lorion's tricks incensed them too deeply. Lorion had to have a lesson—and he had it! The next five minutes was like a very bad nightmare to Lorion of the Fourth.

Lansley-Lesley dragged the table out of the way, to give the ruggers room. Mellish dodged out of the study, fearful that his turn would come next. Lorion was banged, and rolled in the cinders, and anointed with jam and ink and polishes, and generally ragged, till he howled for mercy. The terrific din in the study drew a crowd along the passage, who looked on grinning. Lorion had asked for it often enough, and now he was getting it.

"Look out, bees comes Railton!" Tabot called from the passage.

Bump, bump, bump!

"You—or—no!" shrieked Lorion. "Help! Help!"

"Give him another, deak boys! Forwaps he will let the 'Weekly' shove after this!" yelled Arthur Augustus.

Bump!

Mr. Railton strode in at the doorway.

"Cease this instantly!" he thundered.

"Oh, my hat!"

"But Jove! Wait! Wait! Aham!"

The ruggers drew back, panting. Lorion rolled on the carpet, a pitiable object. Mr. Railton eyed Tom Merry & Co. sternly.

"Merry, what is the meaning of this?"

"—It's—a ragging, sir," gasped Tom.

"Why have you attacked Lorion in this manner?"

Silence.

"I can only conclude," said Mr. Railton, "that you expect Lorion of being the guilty party in connection with the incident of the school paper. Lorion, stand up!"

"Grough!"

Lorion struggled to his feet. He was almost unrecognizable under his coating of jam and ink and cinders and polishes. He panted with rage.

"Lorion, did you break bounds last night and enter Mr. Tiger's printing-office?" asked the Housemaster sternly.

"Grough! No, sir."

"Were you the author of the insolent lines relating to Mr. Hatfield in the school paper?"

"No, sir."

"But you are suspected of it, it appears."

"It's not true, sir," gasped Lorion, wishing he had not shared quite so readily for help.

"Very well, the matter remains to be proved," said Mr. Railton. "Merry, you and the rest will take two hundred

lines such, and you will remain within gates to-morrow afternoon! Let there be no more of this!"

Mr. Ratcliff strode away. He had little doubt how matters would now. Tom Merry & Co. quitted the study, leaving Levison grinding his teeth. Justice had been done, and it was worth two hundred lines and a gating. All the staff of the "Weekly" were agreed upon that point.

CHAPTER 11.

Bike for Sale.

MR. RATCLIFF was surprised. It was Saturday afternoon. For some reason, which Mr. Ratcliff could not understand in the least, he was an object of unusual interest to all the fellows at St. Jim's.

Every time he appeared in public the fellows stared at him and broke into suppressed giggles.

He was surprised, and he was angry.

It began with Figgins. Figgins had a copy of the "Rykoombe Gazette," which was published on Friday afternoon and generally came along to St. Jim's on Saturday. Some of the St. Jim's matches were reported in the local paper, and Figgins was looking for the cricket reports when he came upon something else that amused him highly. And he burst into a laugh at the sight of Mr. Ratcliff coming down the passage.

Mr. Ratcliff beamed his eyes on the spot. It was disrespectful of Figgins. Mr. Ratcliff did not connect his wondrous movement with the "Rykoombe Gazette," a journal which did not number the New House master among its readers. But Figgins was only the first. After that every fellow Mr. Ratcliff came across seemed to be seized with an unaccountable fit of merriment at the sight of Ratty. It was disrespectful, it was amusing, it was irrepressible, but there it was.

Tom Merry & Co. were within gates that afternoon—a penalty for punishing Levison. But they were not sorry after Figgins had shown them the "Rykoombe Gazette" and they had glanced over the advertisement columns. There was a roar of laughter as they read.

"Bai Jove," gasped Arthur Augustus, "old Watty must be off his woggle! Fancy old Watty advertising as a money-lender!"

"And advertising for a second-hand bike!" ejaculated Levison. "What sort of a mess with a second-hand bike! I should think he could afford to buy a new one, if he's going to take up biking in his giddy old age."

"And selling off his old clothes!" yelled Blake. "Trust Ratty to turn an honest penny! Wartime economy, I suppose."

"And what the thunder does he want to buy a building for?" exclaimed Horrie. "He doesn't like buildings. He never liked Tenner, I know that. And there's precious few buildings like Tenner."

"And Billy Ball!" gasped Tom Merry. "Billy Ball of Weyland! That's the awful hoodlum, you know—chap who's always getting and fighting the police when he isn't in chinks. What does Ratty want to see him for?"

"It's a giddy mystery."

"Bai Jove, Watty will have some wathak interestin' calkine this afternoon, demn boys! They will be worth seein'."

"He, he, he!"

"I'm blessed if I understand this!" said Figgins. "There would be a row if the Head knew that Ratty was advertising as a money-lender. And he's bound to know sooner or later."

"'Wathak degwadis', bai Jove!"

"There must have made some mistake," said Talbot of the Shell. "Ratty can't really have put in those advertisements. It's too thick. There must have got them mixed somehow."

"Perhaps he set them up after coming home from the Green Man," chuckled Levison. "It really looks like it."

"My hot!" exclaimed Tom Merry, a sudden light breaking on his mind. "Levison!"

"Yes. We knew he bought Tyler's printing-office to mock up the 'Weekly.' Ten to one he meddled with the type of the 'Gazette' while he was there."

"Bai Jove!"

"The cheeky one!" exclaimed Figgins. "After all, Ratty's our Housemaster!"

"He, ha! It's a good wheeze—for Levison, if he did it. Fancy Ratty's face when he gets the callers!" roared Monty Levison.

"He, he, ha!"

The juniors yelled at the thought. On reflection, they had little doubt that the advertisements were Levison's work.

It was simply inconceivable that Mr. Ratcliff could have inserted such advertisements, unless he was out of his senses. Certainly he could not have advertised "Money Lent" without being called upon to resign his position at St. Jim's immediately the Head knew of it.

That afternoon it might have been noticed that the School House fellows found the neighbourhood of the New House very attractive. House rows were old—quite old. Everybody was interested in Mr. Ratcliff's prospective callers. Tom Merry & Co. no longer regretted that they were gated. They wanted to see whether there would be any answers to the advertisements in the columns of the local paper. The story of these weird advertisements spread through the school. Mr. Ratcliff's rage and indignation increased minute by minute.

There was evidently some tremendous joke on, and equally evidently he was the object of it. He could see that. But for the life of him he could not divine what was in the wind. A glance at the Rykoombe paper would have enlightened him, but naturally he never thought of glancing at it.

He retired to his study fuming. He attributed the whole affair to some plot among the juniors, but he was quite mistaken. About three o'clock that afternoon a yell from Kermish at the gates drew a crowd to the spot. A lad of about sixteen, in corduroy, was wheeling in an ancient-looking bicycle. Taggie rushed out of his lodge like a hen from his den.

"Whatcher want 'ere?" he demanded.

"I come to see Mr. Ratcliff," said the youth, blinking at him. "I got this 'ere bicycle to sell."

Taggie stared at him. He had not seen the "Rykoombe Gazette."

"You cheeky young rascal!" he ejaculated. "Hoff with you!"

"I tell you I come 'ere to see Mr. Ratcliff."

"It's all right Taggy," said Blake. "Ratty's advertising for a second-hand bike."

"Don't you be a young hen, Masie Blake!"

"Look here, Taggy!"

Taggie simply gaped as Blake pointed out the advertisement in the local paper. He rubbed his nose and retired to his lodge. The Rykoombe youth victoriously wheeled in the bike, Figgins obligingly showing him the way to the New House. Then—Figgins was always an obliging fellow—he conducted the caller to Mr. Ratcliff's study, and left him knocking at the door. Figgins came out of the House grinning.

"Come in!" called out Mr. Ratcliff irritably.

The Rykoombe youth came into the study. He had left the bike outside.

"What do you want?" snapped Mr. Ratcliff, surprised and not at all pleased by the visit.

"I'm Joe 'iggins," explained the visitor. "I've brought the bike."

"What?"

"It's a good machine, sir," said Joe Higgins. "I want two pound for it."

Mr. Ratcliff blinked at him.

"Are you out of your senses, boy? Tell me what you want here, at once!"

"Ain't you Mr. Ratcliff?"

"Yes, yes."

"Then you're the gent what wants a second-hand bike," said Joe Higgins, in surprise. "If you'll step outside and look at it—"

"I suppose," said Mr. Ratcliff, glaring, "that this is some absurd practical joke? Leave my study at once!"

Joe Higgins looked sorry. He had travelled a couple of miles with his old bike to answer that advertisement in the hope of striking a bargain. Naturally he did not like being turned away like this, without the valuable machine even being looked at by the advertiser.

"Ain't you ever goin' to look at the bike?" he demanded.

"I refuse to do anything of the kind! Don't be absurd!"

"I brought it 'ere for you to see, sir. You advertised for a second-hand bike."

"Are you insane! I did nothing of the kind!" exclaimed Mr. Ratcliff, exasperated. "Leave my study, you insolent young rascal, and take your disrespectful joke somewhere else! Another word, and I will chastise you!"

"Well, I'm blawed!" ejaculated Joe Higgins, in astonishment and anger. "Nine guineas, I mean say! Look 'ere, you rummy old codger, if you don't want a second-hand bike, what do you advertise for a second-hand bike for, well!"

Mr. Ratcliff did not reply to the question. He jumped up and seized his cane. Joe Higgins made a backward jump to the door, just in time to evade a lash.

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NEXT WEDNESDAY: "LEVISON MINOR!"

"You silly old duffer!" roared Joe Higgins. "Wharrer you so to? Are you drunk?"

Mr. Ratcliff dashed at him with the cane. His temper was quite out of control. Joe Higgins gave him one black, and Ed, quite convinced that the St. Jim's master was dangerously intoxicated.

Down the passage went the astounded and alarmed Higgins, with Mr. Ratcliff on his track. There was a yell from Lovell's in the quad.

"Here they come!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Joe Higgins came bolting out of the house, his eyes wide open with alarm. He grabbed the bars from the porch, barred himself upon it, and peddled away to the gates at frantic speed, amid shrieks of laughter. Mr. Ratcliff lapsed on the steps, panting. He gave the crowd outside a glare, and strode back into the house. Tom Merry & Co. almost wept.

CHAPTER 12.

Nothing Doing!

"GOOD-AFTERNOON, young shufflemans!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Welcome as the flowers in May!" choraled Higgins. "Come right in!"

It was Ray Mo, the old-clothes dealer of Weyland. He was a genial old gentleman, with a hoarse nose, a broad smile, a shaggy complexion, and a black bag. The juniors had often seen him about Weyland, but they had never expected to see him visit the school. But here he was—evidently in answer to an advertisement in the "Ryckombe Gazette."

Ray Mo seemed somewhat surprised by the familiarity of the juniors. But he grinned at these good-humoredly.

"I call to see Mr. Ratcliff," he explained, and there was a fresh roll of laughter.

"This way, Mr. Mo," said Lovison. "Ratty's in the New House. I think he's waiting for you."

"Thank you, young shufflemans!"

Ray Mo followed Lovison. That kind youth showed him into the New House, but not as far as Mr. Ratcliff's study. He did not want to interrupt Mr. Ratcliff himself. He called the House page, and handed Mr. Mo over to him. Turbul, the page, stared at Ray Mo in astonishment. However, he showed him in.

Mr. Ratcliff had raised dogs a little when Mr. Mo was announced. The visit was a surprise to the Housemaster. Ray Mo bowed himself into the study with great respect.

"Good-afternoon, Mr. Ratcliff!" he said.

"Good-afternoon," said Mr. Ratcliff shortly. "May I ask what you want here?"

"There is my card, sir."

Mr. Ratcliff stared at the card.

"I fall to see any reason for this call," he said archly. "Kindly explain your business at once!"

"I have the left-off clothes," explained Mr. Mo. "I give 'em good price. Shufflemans' discarded clothes—"

"I have no desire whatever to dispose of my old clothes to a dealer. Good-afternoon!"

"I give you good price," persisted Ray Mo. "I take them away in a bag—everything very select. You have the old trousers and waistcoats to sell, don't it? You will find me the very honest dealer."

"I repeat that I have no old clothes to dispose of!" exclaimed Mr. Ratcliff irritably. "I regard it as an impertinence on your part to call on me. Kindly take yourself off at once!"

"You think that I do not give good price?" Ray Mo spread out his fat hands in eloquent gestures. "But everybody in Weyland will tell you that I am an honest man."

"Will you leave my study?" thundered Mr. Ratcliff.

"You've no wish to do no business with me?"

"Certainly not! Go!"

"See what for you advertise and make a man waste his time?" exclaimed Mr. Mo angrily. "My time is valuable. Mr. Ratcliff, I do not walk a long way for no pleasure of walking!"

"You must be intoxicated, I think," said Mr. Ratcliff. "I have not advertised anything of the kind."

"Yes, advertise in no 'Ryckombe Gazette' and you sell old clothes—"

"I did nothing of the sort!" roared the irascible Housemaster. "The suggestion is an insult! How dare you!"

"Yes, advertise—"

"I did not—"

"You did!" shouted Ray Mo, as angry as Mr. Ratcliff now. "Via my own eyes I see him, and I think I walk here to oblige a shufflemans. You are no shufflemans, sir!"

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"Leave my study, you low rascal, or I will eject you with my own hands!"

Ray Mo's black eyes glistened. He was a very genial and easy-going gentleman in the way of business, but there was a business to be done here. And when there was no business to be done, Ray Mo was not to be treated with ingratitude.

"Vell! I say that you are no shufflemans!" he roared. "You bring a man here to waste his time, and you insult him! You are van old rascal, sir!"

"Go!" roared Mr. Ratcliff, advancing upon him. The steady Housemaster crossed over the fat little clothes-dealer. But Ray Mo was not alarmed. He shook a fat and shaggy fist right under Mr. Ratcliff's nose.

"You low rascal!"

"Low rascalized yourself!" retorted Mr. Mo. "You've your finger on me, and I wipe up in room via you! I goes you I blames myself!"

Mr. Ratcliff laid his hands on the fat gentleman's shoulders, and swung him to the door. Ray Mo was as good as his word. He swung up his black bag, and it crashed on Mr. Ratcliff's chest.

The Housemaster staggered back, and sat down on the study carpet with a heavy concussion.

"Now sat you come on!" roared Ray Mo, passing round him. "You insults me, is it? You now me out, after not I walk to oblige you in so way of business. Sat you come on, see, you old rascal!"

"Good!"

"I think that you are drunk!" shouted Mr. Mo. "Come on via you!"

Monteith of the Sixth looked into the study in alarm.

"Is anything the matter, sir?"

"Monteith!" Mr. Ratcliff gasped on the floor. "Take that man—that ruffian—away! He has assaulted me! I—I— Take him away!"

"I come here to buy no old clothes!" roared Mr. Mo. "I am an honest man!"

"Better come away!" said Monteith.

"Get old rascalized advertise in so paper and he sell old clothes, and I come to buy men in so way of business—"

"Yes, you come on!"

Monteith pointed the indignant dealer out of the study. Mr. Mo voiced his complaints in loud tones as he was gently led to the door. He was indignant—which was not to be wondered at, in the circumstances. Monteith succeeded in getting him out of the house, but Mr. Mo insisted upon talking in the quadrangle, to explain his grievances to the hearing crowd there.

"Get Ratcliff advertise me he sell old clothes!" he roared. "I come here to buy men! I give good price for old clothes! Get Ratcliff in so shufflemans!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old boys!"

"I am an honest man. I give good price for left-off wardrobe of ladies and shufflemans."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This way, for goodness' sake!" urged Monteith. He did not want to handle the old man. Mr. Mo allowed himself to be persuaded to the gates, where he halted once more and delivered another speech, amid sympathetic cheers from the juniors. Somewhat mollified by the sympathy of the St. Jim's fellows, Mr. Mo took himself off at last, leaving them shrieking.

"Who brought that man here?" demanded Monteith.

"He come on his own," said Lovison meekly. "Ratty seems to have advertised about selling old clothes—"

"Nonsense!"

"Here it is in the paper."

Monteith's eyes almost bulged out as he looked at the advertisement.

"Mr. hat!" he ejaculated. "Then what on earth did Mr. Ratcliff get up ready with the old shop for!"

"Most likely he wanted to beat the price down, and Ray Mo wasn't having any," suggested Lovison.

Monteith walked away, looking very puzzled. The juniors howled.

"I wonder if there's any more coming!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Will you young gentlemen tell me which is the New House?"

The juniors swung round. A steady-looking gentleman had entered at the gates. It was evidently another caller for Mr. Ratcliff.

"Certainly, sir!" said Lovison. "You want to see Mr. Ratcliff?"

"Yes."

"This way, sir!"

The steady gentleman followed Lovison to the New House.

CHAPTER 13.

Very Pleasant for Ratty.

MR. RATCLIFF was still gawping in his study when there came a tap at the door.
"Gentleman to see you, sir!" announced Tackle.
The speedy gentleman was shown in. Mr. Ratcliff endeavoured to compose his manner a little. But he did not look agreeable.

"Mr. Ratcliff!" asked the visitor.
"That is my name. What—"
"My name is Baggs—Joseph Baggs! I have called in reference to your advertisement in the 'Rylocombe Gazette.'"
Mr. Ratcliff's eyes glared.

"I have not," he began, breathing hard—"I have not inserted any advertisement in the 'Rylocombe Gazette.' I presume that you have come here to sell me a second-hand ferret, Mr. Baggs?"
"Certainly not!" said Mr. Baggs, in surprise. "I am in need of temporary financial assistance—"

"What!"
"I understand that you make loans at moderate interest, at the same time preserving the strictest secrecy—"
"Are you mad?"

"I fail to understand you, sir," said Mr. Baggs, with superiority. "You are Mr. Ratcliff, and this is the New House, No. Ten, Jersey Street, I presume?"
"Certainly! But—"
"Then you are the advertiser I wish to see. You lend money on note of hand alone?"

"I do nothing of the kind!" thundered Mr. Ratcliff.
Mr. Baggs smiled bitterly.

"I have had some experience of moneylenders," he said. "I must remark that they are all the same. After advertising that you lend money on note of hand alone, you demand security for a loan. Well, I was prepared for that. What security do you require?"

"—I—I—"
"The loan I am in temporary need of is not large—a mere note of fifty pounds," said Mr. Baggs. "I am willing to pay five per cent. interest."
"—I—I—" gasped the cowering Housemaster. "How dare you—"

"Is it not enough? True, you can obtain five per cent. from an Exchequer Bond," assented Mr. Baggs. "I wish to be reasonable. Name the interest you exact."
"—I—I—I— exact interest! —I—I—I—" stammered Mr. Ratcliff.

"Be quite plain, Mr. Ratcliff, I am in need of the money, and I am prepared to meet your terms, if not too strict," said Mr. Baggs. "If you require ten per cent, I shall not refuse to do business with you. The question is, can you advance me fifty pounds immediately?"

"No, sir!" roared Mr. Ratcliff. "I cannot!"
"Then what, sir, do you mean by advertising that you are prepared to lend sums from five pounds to five thousand?"
"—I—I—I—"

"Let us come to business, sir! I am a busy man. I have come here to be accommodated with a loan. Upon what terms will you advance me fifty pounds?"

"I refuse to advance you a single penny, upon any terms whatever!" shrieked Mr. Ratcliff. "How dare you, a perfect stranger, come here and attempt to borrow money from me! I never lend money!"

"That is absurd, of course!" said Mr. Baggs coolly. "As you advertise your business as a professional moneylender—"
"—Are you mad? How dare you say so! This is a plot to humiliate me!" shouted Mr. Ratcliff. "You are not the first insolent knave who has visited me this afternoon!" The Housemaster rang the bell savagely. "Tackle, show this man out at once!"

Mr. Baggs stared angrily at him.
"So you refuse to make me a loan, without even inquiring into the security I can offer you?" he exclaimed.
"Most decidedly!"
"Then, sir, you are a trickster!" exclaimed Mr. Baggs. "You are an extortioner, sir! You advertise as a moneylender, and you have no money to lend! Your pretended business is a swindle! In what way, sir, do you hope to profit by this trickery?"

"Show that man out at once, Tackle!"
"—This way, sir," gasped Tackle.
"—I will go!" shouted Baggs wrathfully. "But I shall go directly to the police-station, sir, and report this wretched business; and you may expect a visit from the police, Mr. Ratcliff, to look into your awfully moneylending business!"
Mr. Baggs' indignant voice rang through the New House. He contemplated to stride away after Tackle, when he had

delivered his opinion of Mr. Ratcliff and his moneylending business.

Mr. Ratcliff sank back into his chair, gasping.
"Am I dreaming?" he murmured. "Unless I am dreaming, what does—that can this mean? It is amazing— incredible! It is a plot!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
It was a roar of laughter from the quadrangle. Mr. Ratcliff jumped to his window, and threw it open.
"—How dare you?" he shouted. "Disperse at once! Do you hear me?"

The grinning janitor cleared off, still grinning. A man in a white waistcoat and gaiters was coming towards the New House with a young bulldog under his arm. Mr. Ratcliff blinked at him. After what he had gone through, he would not have been surprised if this had proved another visitor for him. And such, indeed, was the case. He had scarcely seated himself when there came a tap at the door, and the grinning Tackle showed in the man in white.

Mr. Ratcliff blinked at him quite feebly.
"—What—what—what do you want?" he stammered.
The man in white was touched by his forelock.
"—Afternoon, sir!" he said cheerily. "I've brought 'im!"

"—Whom—whom?"
"—Toothy, sir!" said the visitor. "That three-bellied, six! A better bred critter than that 'ere, sir, you never did see in your natural! Look at 'im, sir!"

The gentleman in white was at the building down. Mr. Ratcliff hastily gathered up his long legs. The building looked a thoroughly vicious brute; and Mr. Ratcliff had a horror of dogs.

"Look at 'im, sir!" repeated the visitor, with pride.
"Ain't he a beauty!"
"—Take it away!" said Mr. Ratcliff faintly.
The visitor looked surprised.

"Ain't you the gent what wants to buy a bulldog?" he asked.
"Not! Certainly not!"
"—My boy! That three young rip said as you was Mr. Ratcliff!"

"I am Mr. Ratcliff. But—"
"—This 'ere the New House!"
"—Yes; but—"

"Then you're the gent I want to see. I'm Bill 'Orocko! You're the gent what advertised for a bulldog in the 'Rylocombe Gazette,'" said Mr. Horrocks decidedly. "I brought that three-bellied 'ere for you to see. If you ain't satisfied with 'im, there darg, you say so! You say what's the matter with that three-bellied 'ere?"

Mr. Ratcliff eyed the dog nervously.
"—I—I—I am sure the dog is a— a first-class animal!" he gasped. "But—but I really do not want to purchase a bulldog, my man!"

"You don't want to buy that three-bellied 'ere?"
"—No, no, no!"
"—You don't want to buy a dog at all!" demanded Mr. Horrocks, in angry astonishment.

"Certainly not! I detest dogs!"
"—Then why," demanded Mr. Horrocks—"why did you advertise in the local paper for a bulldog? I asks you that, as soon as man!"

"I did not! It is some—some mistake! I assure you that I did not do anything of the kind! Pray—pray take that dog away! I—I do not like the way he is looking at—at my legs!"

"If I give that three-bellied a word, sir, he'll do something more than look at your legs!" said Mr. Horrocks significantly. "I come 'ere from Weyland, as soon as your advertisement. I didn't ask you to advertise for a dog, did I? I offer you that dog for four guineas, and, mind, I'm strictly giv' 'im away! Take it or leave it!"

"I refuse to buy a dog at all! I hate dogs!" shrieked Mr. Ratcliff.
"—And what about giv' a man a juzz for nothing!" said Mr. Horrocks darkly. "Wat 'ere you brought me 'ere for with that three-bellied, if you don't want a dog? I asks you that, as man to man!"

"Good heavens! The man is mad!" roared Mr. Ratcliff. "Take that dog away! Unless you take that dog away I—I shall telephone for the police!"
Mr. Horrocks glared.

"A man of your age plays' tricks like that 'ere!" he ejaculated. "Well, I ain't the crew to be played with. I tell you that straight! I want five bob for my time comin' 'ere 'ere. That's straight!"

"I shall pay you nothing! I did not ask you to come! Take that dog away!"
"—Five bob!" roared Mr. Horrocks. "And little enough, too! 'And it over, or, by gess, I'll set the dog on you, you silly old 'ell!"

"I refuse! I—I—"

"Seize 'em, Toothy!"

Mr. Ratcliff uttered a yell of affright as the cheery Toothy promptly made a dash. He leaped on his chair.

"Call that dog off!" he shrieked.

"Aye 'em, Toothy!"

The building made a jump at Mr. Ratcliff's legs, and the Housemaster bounded on the table. Toothy pranced round the table, growling and showing his teeth. The mere sight of his teeth gave Mr. Ratcliff a cold chill.

"Call him off!" he shrieked. "I—I will pay you five shillings! I—I protest—but I will pay you five shillings—call him off!"

"Money talks!" said Mr. Harrocks.

Mr. Ratcliff fumbled in his pocket and produced the five shillings.

"Little enough, too, after the trouble you've given me for nothing!" snarled Mr. Harrocks, as he slid the money into his trousers pocket. "You take my five, old 'un, and make up your mind whether you want a dog or not above you advertising for a day! Come 'ere, Toothy!"

And Mr. Harrocks quitted the study with Toothy at his heels, much to Mr. Ratcliff's relief.

The Housemaster sank into his chair again, perspiring at every pore. He almost felt that he was in the grip of a nightmare, and would awaken presently. A chuckle reached his ears, and he glanced round and saw the steady window lined with faces. They disappeared at once, but the chuckling could still be heard. Mr. Ratcliff was providing a rare entertainment that afternoon for the St. Jim's juniors, and Tom Merry & Co. were enjoying it.

CHAPTER 19.

Something to His Advantage.

"H A, ha, ha!"

"Oh, my hat! What an afternoon!"

"How ripping for Ratty! Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry wiped his eyes.

But the laughter was hushed a little as Mr. Ratcliff came striding from the direction of the School House. Mr. Ratcliff had observed that something very unusual was going on, and he had come to look into it. The juniors looked as dejected as they could. Just as the School House master arrived on the scene a peevish figure dashed in at the gates, and there was a gasp from the juniors:

"Billy Ball!"

It was William Ball of Wayland, evidently visiting St. Jim's to "hear of something to his advantage." The market-place loafer was a little uncertain in his gait; probably his gait at the Black Ball had been standing him something on the strength of his supposed good luck, in reckless disregard of the no-treating law. Mr. Ball staggered a little and jerked a little. His hatband had was on the back of his head, and his pipe was bowled downwards in his brown teeth. In one dirty hand he held a copy of the "Rykosmbe Gazette."

Mr. Ratcliff, as he spotted that tattered and battered figure, transferred his attention from the juniors to Mr. William Ball. He strode towards that gentleman with a frowning brow.

"What do you want here?" he asked.

Billy Ball leered at him.

"You Mr. Ratcliff?" he asked.

"No. You have no business here, my man."

"I come 'ere to see Mr. Ratcliff."

"Nonsense!"

"To 'ear of something to my advantage," said Mr. Ball. "That's 'ere it is in the paper. I come into a fortune—wat! This 'ere Ratcliff is a solicitor, I s'pose—boy!"

"Mr. Ratcliff is a Housemaster here. What do you mean?"

"Look at this 'ere!" said William Ball, holding out the paper. "I come 'ere to 'ear of something to my advantage. Don't you give me any jaw, young man. I come 'ere to see Ratcliff."

Mr. Ratcliff simply blinked at the advertisement. Certainly, according to that perfectly plain notice, Mr. Ball had a right to visit Mr. Ratcliff and hear of something to his advantage.

"How my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Ratcliff. "This is very extraordinary!"

"Where's that 'ere Ratcliff?"

"Follow me!"

Greatly perplexed and puzzled, Mr. Ratcliff led the visitor to the New House. Billy Ball leered at the juniors, and followed him in.

"Oh, evens!" ejaculated Lovison. "There'll be a row 'TUE GEM LIBRARY—No. 436.

if that merry cudge doesn't bear of something to his advantage.

"And there'll be another row if they did not who showed that advertisement into the 'Gazette,'" grinned Lovison.

"Of course I don't know anything about that," said Lovison.

"Rats!"

"Yes, without! Waste!"

Lovison shrugged his shoulders. His little joke could not be brought home to him, he felt sure; and that was all he cared about.

Mr. Ratcliff tapped at the New House master's door. Mr. Ratcliff started up with a gasp. Evidently it was Lovison's visitor.

"This man has called to see you, Mr. Ratcliff," said the School House master, and he stepped back and Mr. Ball entered.

"I refuse to see him!" shouted Mr. Ratcliff. "I—I will not endure this proceeding! I will appeal to the police for protection!"

"Afternoon!" said Billy Ball affably. "You're Mr. Ratcliff—wat? Legal gent, I s'pose? Well, 'ere I am!"

"Who are you? What do you want?"

"William Ball—that's me! I come 'ere to 'ear of something to my advantage. I come into a fortune—wat!" said Mr. Ball, rubbing his grubby hands. "You got the money, old 'un—wat?"

"The man is mad or drunk!" exclaimed Mr. Ratcliff.

"Leave my study at once!"

"I come 'ere—"

"Go!"

"But wat about this 'ere advertisement?" roared Mr. Ball.

"Wat's this about something to my advantage?"

"Nonsense! You are interested! Leave my study! I will telephone to the police. Mr. Ratcliff, do not go—I beg you to remain! I will not be persecuted by this ruffian!" shrieked Mr. Ratcliff, almost beside himself. His nerves had suffered severely that afternoon.

"Look at this 'ere paragraph in this 'ere paper!" shouted Mr. Ball. "I come 'ere to answer that!"

"There is certainly an advertisement in the paper, Mr. Ratcliff," remarked Mr. Ratcliff. "This man has come to see you—"

"I inserted no advertisement! It is a Go—a trick!"

"But it is there—"

"Nonsense!" shouted Mr. Ratcliff.

"Kindly look at the paper yourself, sir," said Mr. Ball.

Mr. Ratcliff looked at the "Rykosmbe Gazette." Mr. Ball's grimy fat, and his eyes almost started from his head.

"I—I am not responsible for that! I—I begin to understand now. It is some malicious practical joke. My name has been used. It is atrocious!"

"A blessing (joke, is it?) roared Mr. Ball, exasperated.

"You bring me 'ere all the way from the Black Ball for a joke, you stupid old donkey! I'll teach you to play your old jokes on me, you old light!"

And Billy Ball made a rush at Mr. Ratcliff and whipped him out of his chair in a twinkling. He was justly exasperated.

"Help!" screamed Mr. Ratcliff. "Ratcliff, I beg you—help—help!"

"Punch! Punch! Punch! Billy Ball was angry, and he persecuted the wretched Housemaster without mercy. Fortunately Mr. Ratcliff was there. But for the presence of the School House master Mr. Ratcliff would have suffered severely. But Mr. Ratcliff dashed to the rescue, and dragged the angry Billy Ball off with his second arm.

"Lemme alone, but you!" roared Billy Ball. "I'm going to give 'em a 'hit! I'll squash his monkey face for 'em! Leggo!"

"Monst'ous! Baker!" shouted Mr. Ratcliff. Mr. Ratcliff had brought home a disabled arm from the Freet, and, with one arm, he was not quite up to Mr. Ball's form. The New House master had dodged round the table, yelling with terror; there was no help from him.

But Mastewich and Baker of the Sixth dashed into the study. Billy Ball was collapsed, and whirled out into the passage, still roaring.

"Lemme get at him! I'll squash his ugly mug! I'll spoil his blooming beauty for him! Yah! Lemme get at old Monkey-Face!"

But Billy Ball was not allowed to get at "old Monkey-Face." Two or three more Sixth-Formers lent a hand, and Billy Ball was rushed out of the New House and down to the gates and deposited in the road.

"Calas yourself, Ratcliff," said Mr. Ratcliff. "The man is gone!"

(Continued on page 111, of next, vol. 2.)

OUR GREAT NEW AUSTRALIAN SERIAL!

CORNSTALK BOB



The Previous Installments Told How

Old TOM HILDER, a cattle-farmer of Kestfrit, Australia, loaded with ruin for the want of £1,000. He goes to a friend in Sydney, HENRY NORMAN, from whom he obtains the money, but is afterwards robbed, and, in recovering the notes, becomes raised up, in the eyes of the police, with a gang of scoundrels.

His son BOB receives the money from his father, and takes it to SUMMERS, the bank manager, who is in league with BOARDMAN, a scoundrel who has plotted to ruin old Hilder. Bob is afterwards arrested, and charged with passing false notes at the bank, but is liberated from his prison-cell by CAPTAIN DASHWOOD, a notorious outlaw.

Bob leaves from him that his father was robbed by a man named SUTHERLAND, the leader of another gang of outlaws, and he sets out in pursuit of him. He traces the villain to an hotel, where he also sees his father. A fight ensues, and the place is burnt down. Bob narrowly escapes with his life, believing his father to be dead. He hears later that the old man is still alive.

Later the horse of a squatter, of which Bob is in charge, is robbed by Sutherland; but Dashwood again comes to the rescue, but is unfortunately badly wounded.

Old Hilder takes Dashwood into the scrub, while Bob goes off to fetch a doctor. Bob fails, as he falls into a trap and is nearly captured. However, he is saved by Rogson, Dashwood's native servant, who guides him back to his father and Dashwood, who are in hiding in Dashwood's secret den.

(Now read on.)

Dashwood's Resolve.

"And how is Dashwood now?"

"He's asleep. He'll pull through, I think. But he won't be able to stir for weeks to come."

Bob set down.

"It's a bad job, and I'm in it now up to my neck," he said. "You had better clear out, father, before you are identified with Dashwood, too. But I'll have some grub before I talk any more. That soup will back me up in two shakes!"

Old Tom filled a bowl, and gave him a big chunk of bread. The lad ate ravenously, and soon felt much better. He took a second helping, and then stretched himself by the fire. The old man was smoking, and gazing thoughtfully into the flames. His lined face looked very grave.

"There'll be a watch put round here," he remarked presently. "But they'll never get us. We're quite safe!"

"You could clear out to-night," Bob said. "There's hazaar Benz; you can have her. I left her here when we started for Coaker's, and she's rested now, and Begong could show you the way out of this!"

"I'm not going," old Tom said doggedly.

"But, father—"

"There's no use in trying to talk me round, my lad. My mind is made up. Your risks are mine from now on. We

sink or swim together. We've been parted from the start of this wretched business until a few hours back, and we're not going to be parted again. There may be danger in our staying together, for at a push I'm not as nimble as you, but my headpiece is all right, and I can still teach the youngsters a trick or two. Anyhow, whether I'm right or wrong, I'm not going to budge!"

His tone was so emphatic that Bob saw that to remonstrate with him would probably be useless. Yet he felt impelled to change his decision, if possible.

"But what is to be gained by your being mixed up with Dashwood?" he urged. "That only would make our difficulties greater!"

"I'm in a bad way as it is, and I don't know that it can be much worse, whatever I do," the old man replied, knocking the ashes out of his pipe. "The police are after me. They think I've been dabbling with false notes. If they get me I'm locked up, and it wouldn't much matter whether I get five years or twenty, would it? No! We must go on another track, and we must stick together in the work!"

"You've lived up some idea, father, I can see that," Bob said, aroused by the hot words.

"I've been puzzling things out, but I can't say as I've fixed up anything," old Tom replied. "It's like this, though, in my way of thinking. We've been rearing away, and are still trying to clear ourselves. No good has come out of it, and none will. We must take the bull by the horns, so to say, and, instead of avoiding trouble, we must go into the thick of it. Perhaps then our luck will turn!"

Bob set up and stared at him.

"I'm puzzled to know what you mean," he said.

"And I ain't a good hand at explaining, but I'll do my best," his father answered. "There's that scoundrel Sutherland. He's got my money, and, until I get it back and have him robbed, I can't prove that the false notes are his. So I must catch him at all risks. And there's that villain Boardman, who has robbed us of our horse and home. We know that he endeavoured to bring about our deaths. God could prove that if he would, and God is going off his head through sheer terror and remorse. We might be able to get him round to our side if we tackled him properly."

"Then you would try to get hold of God?" Bob gasped.

"It's a desperate venture, I admit," old Tom answered. "But I mean to have a try, for all that, and to get him well have to follow him up when he leaves that doctor's house. And we'll have to get on Sutherland's track, too, and hold on to it through thick and thin till we can hit him down. And it's not by slinking about the bush that we'll succeed. And there's more than that, too!"

His voice had risen.

"What else is there?" Bob replied.

"There's this!" Old Tom went on, squaring his shoulders, his eyes flashing. "We're not criminals, whatever folks may think at present, and we're not going to act as if we were. We've done nothing of which we need feel ashamed. We've a right to look every honest man in the face. We have pride, and we have pluck, for our consciences are clear; THE GEM LIBRARY, No. 490.

and to our nerve will stand to us, whatever we take on, when a gully man would flinch. That's what I mean; and mark my words, since will show we're right, to fight on those lines from this on."

Bob nodded in silence. His father's courageous words had sent a glow through his heart.

"And now I'm going to turn in," old Tom said, with a change of tone; "and it's more than time that you had a turn, too. Don't trouble to see Dashwood to-night; the black fellow will look after him. To-morrow we'll thrash this business out a bit more. We'll have plenty of time to fix up our plans before we clear out of here."

Bob took his father's advice, and went to sleep. In the morning Dashwood was better, but still very weak, and the lad did not talk much to him. Boggus during the day kept out of the man's room, and recovered safely late in the evening. The news he had to tell was gloomy, but not disastrous.

The police had gathered in a circle far miles around, and were searching the bush thoroughly; but all in the glade felt that they would not be discovered.

But this meant a long duration there, and it was clear that old Tom Hilder's prophesy was coming true. There would indeed be plenty of time for him and Bob to form their plans before the opportunity could come to adopt them. Fortunately, there was no danger of their provisions running out. The outfit, always relying on this place as a refuge, had taken care to stock hisarder well.

During these days Bob and his father had many talks, and as Dashwood picked up his strength he joined in their discussions. A change seemed to have come over him. Though still defiant, yet he had not good deal of his old audacity.

He had become very thoughtful, too, and Bob, watching him, often thought there was a look in his face that used not to be there before. He never spoke of himself, or of what he intended to do, until near the end, when Boggus reported that the police had been withdrawn, and that it would be safe for the party to emerge. Then one night he threw off his reserve.

"So you change start in the morning?" he remarked. "And, like to say, we will never meet again. Well, I'm glad to have dropped across you, and grateful for the way you pulled me out of this fix. I owed Bob some, and need deal before, but this caps it. Heigho! If you but let me rubbed somewhere in Queensland, you will know that I failed to get to the coast!"

"That is your idea, then?" Bob suggested.

"Yes, I'm going right through that half of the continent, and I'm taking Boggus along with me. He's going back to the South Sea Islands."

"And you?"

"I was before the mast for a spell over. If I can get a ship, I don't care where it takes me. Captain Dashwood's number is up in Australia, and I'm not sorry. A slip at the start sent me from bad to worse, for they kindred no else away they get me down. But I'm not grumbling. I have myself to thank!"

"And now?"

The outlaw laughed, but an earnest look was in his face.

"I'm going to run straight, if I have the luck to get away," he replied. "But, somehow, that's more than I dare to hope."

Trapped!

Early on the following morning Bob and his father parted with Dashwood and Boggus. The outlaw's words on the previous night had made a deep impression on them both. As they stood for a moment looking down into the glade—Bob on the right, and old Tom Hilder riding a horse on the left—Boggus—Dashwood waved his hand, and they retraced the exhibition. Then, guided by the black tracker, they passed through the maze and set upon their steeds.

It was pleasant to be once again in the open bush, amidst the sights they loved so much; but cheerful as the scene was, they rode for a long time in silence.

Old Tom was the first to speak.

"I'm sorry for that man," he said. "There's a deal of good in him I don't suspect. More than likely we'll never meet him again; leastways, I hope so, for if he doesn't clear right out of Australia sharp, he'll never get through. But I would be glad to know that he was safe. He deserves another chance."

"I've thought on for a long time, and if he's broken the law, he's often played fair, too, and done many a fellow a kind turn, as I know well," Bob agreed. "Perhaps, in years to come, we may meet him again. Anyhow, he has my very best wishes for his luck, and I feel quite lonely at parting with him."

"I can understand that," his father assented. "He's a really fellow, when all is said. But there's no use thinking

over old things at this moment, anyhow, my lad. We've enough, and more, to fill up our thoughts. And it's only by snapping out everything as striking quick that we'll pull ourselves out of the mess that the villainy of others trapped us into."

"That's so. And sometimes the job seems impossible," Bob replied. "But at other times I get quite hopeful. Have you decided on the first move?"

"I have," old Hilder said, his mouth growing firm. "I've given the whole business a deal of hard thinking which we've been cooped up down there. And there's no use in trying to make absolutely sure before we move. We must trust to a certain extent to luck, and take risks without hesitation. What I suggest is that we go to Glen Gully and find out about that ruffian Gell. From what you told me it's not likely that he's become well enough to clear out of that doctor's house yet."

"I shouldn't think he has. And I know you to well, father," Bob went on, "that I'm sure you've guessed out everything about Gell in advance. What's your programme?"

The old man chuckled.

"I'll allow that I've planned one," he admitted; "and here's the idea. We can't go riding about as if we were free men, entitled to do as we like, and show ourselves anywhere. We must lie low to a certain extent, and yet we must be able to keep an eye on Gell. Now, there's plenty of work to be had around Glen Gully, and we're both skilled farmers. We must get taken on."

"That's a good notion."

"We have these horses," old Tom continued, "and if I become suspicious, we can just mount and ride away. And here it where we'll be cautious. We'll pay company when we're out, and such will go off on his own track. You get me in one place, and I'll get it elsewhere. We won't let on that we know one another; we'll take different names and put different yarns. But we'll manage to meet on the quiet—twice, and work at our own game. And except for that we'll keep out of his eyes, and we'll stick such on our own farm. We'll be the most hardworking and the best talkative of any that ever came this way."

He chuckled again as he concluded.

"That's the best!" Bob agreed. "Of course, we'll still be running a risk, for someone who knew us may spy on us. But we must chance that."

"We must chance a lot, and there'll be plenty to spare in before we win through," old Tom said, with emphasis. "I expect that, and I'm ready to face it. Now we'll jog on together for half a dozen miles. Then you go to the left of the town, and I'll go to the right, and when we get into the country beyond, we'll each search for his job."

An hour later Bob was riding on alone. All his senses were on alert, and his keen eyes swept the bush in advance. Making a wide detour, he came on to one of the roads behind the town, and followed it for a couple of miles before he seized up before a homestead. Here he received the friendly welcome always accorded in the bush, but no hands were wanted. He went on to another homestead, and was told of a place that was likely to suit him. Before half the day was over he had got a job.

All went well. For three days he did not venture beyond the farm. Then at night-time he set out to ascertain how his father had fared. The old man was rustically searching for his luck, too, but was weak before they met. Both had good news reports to give, and they arranged to meet again. Before a fortnight was out, old Tom had made certain that Gell was still at the doctor's house, but that it was likely he would leave soon.

From then onwards one or the other kept a sharp watch on the doctor's house every night. Nothing occurred to make them apprehensive. Both had made friends of their employers; the seal with which they worked had given great satisfaction; their cheerfulness had won the good opinion of their mates; the only danger was that their might become too popular, and thus get talked about. But even this did not happen. Everything seemed to be going the way they wanted. And all the time these conditions were increasing, and it was becoming more and more difficult for them to maintain an appearance of unconcern.

But they succeeded, keeping a lynx eye on Gell, meanwhile, and picking up a lot of information about him. He had had a violent attack of brain fever; rascals had spread of the terrible tales he had told in his delirium, and men were slow to make friends with him. Even the doctor did not like him; he had said he would be glad when Gell was well enough to leave. And Gell, as he recovered, had become moody, and sometimes had a bad temper.

There was some great crime on his conscience, all felt sure, and none were willing to give him employment. But he was

(Continued on page 44 of cover.)

CORNSTALK BOB!

(Continued from page 29.)

a stranger, and had been at death's door. They would not, therefore, leave him altogether in the lurch. When he was strong enough to go, they would make up a small posse, and send him with it on his way.

Bob and his father talked over all this from time to time, and made ready. They found out when Gell would leave, and on the day arranged each asked for and got a holiday. They set out and waited on a hill from which they could see the town, and after prolonged and anxious watching they saw Gell, late in the afternoon, riding down the street. The horse he rode was an old one, given him out of charity, for he was not yet hardy strong enough to tramp in search of work.

"Now for it!" old Tom said. "By the road he's taking he must shape for Moon's Hill, twenty miles away, and we can make rings round his old nag. We'll cut into the country, and wait for him seven miles or so out. When we spot him we'll keep well ahead. We don't tackle him till midnight, for fear of being seen. Come along!"

They galloped away. Off far to the right of the town they went, and then swung round. They rejoined the road on a crest where they had a clear view back for a mile, and, as they expected, they identified Gell after some time looking slowly towards them. On again they went, and looked back. He was following, unconscious of the trap into which he was riding. And the sun was gradually sinking.

Now all looked well. In another hour darkness would fall, and they would be safe from him. He would be overwhelmed with terror; he would know that they never would give him his freedom until he had confessed all, and had passed Roundman's villidial. It really seemed as if tragedy had rapidly drawing near, after all they had gone through.

As darkness began to fall they had to maintain a sharper watch, and yet keep at a distance, so that Gell might not take alarm and double back. But there was no such strategy to which they were not equal. With splendid skill they lured him on.

And now night had gathered. It came swiftly after sunset, with the air still hot and the buzzing of the myriad insects not yet hushed. They had outwitted everything. Bob turned loose Bess into the scrub and waited; his father rode on.

The left hand thumped with excitement as Gell went past, just a mile away the road dipped deeply, and in this ambush old Tom would be ready. Bob was to follow and overtake Gell there. Attacked from front and rear, his escape would be impossible.

Giving him a good start, Bob shook up the reins and set Bess a gallop. Up the hill he galloped, flushed over the top, and dashed down towards the bottom, the gallant steed spurring the loose stones to either side. Rising in the straps, the lad looked eagerly ahead. He heard a shout, and rode even faster.

Another shout! But it was one of fear. And it was not Gell's voice he heard. Fumfled, he dashed on. Hoarse cries came to him, shouts and forewarnings were in many voices, and the clatter of weapons. What could it mean? Then a cry:

"Bob, Bob!"

His father! He had been set upon! Given towards the very Bob mood. He had no time for thought, no time for any strategy. With his whip tightly clasped, he sat firm, determined to ride in amongst the rascals, wherever they might be, and lay about him whilst his strength endured. He saw a small group in the middle of the road, he saw Gell's horse with empty saddle. Then that ruffian was in this, too!

As he dashed out of the darkness on to the gang, he nearly reeled, with amazement. For he recognized Sutherland! And worse than that even, a broad-shouldered villain was leaning over his poor father, stretched his length upon the ground. Other men were there, too, but he took no notice of them.

"Boardman, you cur!" he yelled. "Don't dare to strike again!"

Crash!

As he shouted, Bess jerked forward. Either she had stumbled or she had been tripped up. She shot sideways, and, bang out of the saddle, Bob spun through the air and came down with a sickening thud.

And Roundman's voice ever loud and fierce.

"Nab him, too, and get him along!" he roared. "It's our lives or theirs. But we yet have time."

(Another fine instalment of this great serial next week, when the outlaw Dashwood and Bopeng the black reapper.)

LEIVSON ON THE WAR-PATH!

(Continued from page 18.)

"Good heavens!" Mr. Ratcliff snatched his nose, which was streaming red. "The awful ruffian! His fist assailed me! I am injured! I am bleeding! He shall be arrested—sent to prison! I groan—waa—woe!"

Mr. Ratcliff collapsed into his chair, gasping for breath and mopping his nose wildly. Outside in the quadrangle there was a hysterical yell:

"Ha, ha, ha!"

All St. Jim's howled over Mr. Ratcliff's extraordinary adventures that eventful afternoon. But there were no more callers. Society orders were given to Taggins not to admit any visitors for Mr. Ratcliff, and many disappointed callers were turned away at the gates. The New Home master was left in peace at last.

When he had recovered a little he paid a visit to Mr. Tiper, in Rykooche, to demand an explanation. Mr. Tiper was astonished when he saw these advertisements.

It was only too clear that a mischievous hand had been at work. The printing-office had been entered and the type changed; that was obvious. But who had done the deed?

That was a mystery.

But the discovery was a piece of good luck for the school-boy editors. For, as it was clear that the printing-office had been entered on Thursday night and the setting type tampered with, it was clear also that "Tom Merry's Weekly" had been tampered with on the same occasion.

Even Mr. Ratcliff had to admit it, and the school-boy editors were therefore exonerated from blame on account of Leivson's blarney.

As for Leivson, he was not discovered. There was no proof, Mr. Ratcliff had a strong suspicion, but no evidence, and the matter was perforce allowed to drop.

Tom Merry & Co. quite forgave Leivson. They felt that they owed him a most enjoyable afternoon. It was long before the St. Jim's fellows ceased to chortle over Mr. Ratcliff's peculiar predicament.

THE END.

Don't miss the Great New Story published next week—"LEIVSON MINOR!" by MARTIN CLIFFORD.

BRIEF REPLIES & NOTICES To Readers of THE "GEM" LIBRARY.

Leagues, Correspondence, &c.

More members are wanted by the Athletic Boys' Club. Will any reader interested please write to or call upon the Hon. Sec., A.B.C., 83, Kelvin Road, Highgate Park, N. Main activities of the club—rowing, swimming, boxing, jumping, rowing.

E. D. Roberts, Cartrod, Ramsey Road, St. Albans, writes to form a local "Gem" and "Magnet" League, and will be glad to hear from anyone interested. Stamped and addressed envelope, please.

The "Magnet" Exchange and Correspondence Club will be glad to receive more colonial and foreign members, also a few more in the U. K. Particulars sent on receipt of 1d. stamp of any country.

J. Lee, 20, North End, East Grinstead, wants more members for the league of which he is secretary. Full particulars will be sent on receipt of a stamped and addressed envelope.

Wm. Purdy, 20, Bulwer Street, Rochdale, would be glad if some reader would correspond with him in Parnan's Street-lane, for practice.

Miss Constance M. Lyons, Stanley House, Ely Street, Stapleford, Nottingham, would like to correspond with girl readers aged 15-20.

Miss Doris M. Wiefel, 1, Springfield Avenue, Sandiacre, Nottingham, would like to correspond with girl readers aged 14-15, at home or abroad.

G. Hayden, No. 3 Mess, H.M.S. Ajax, c/o G.P.O., London, would be glad to correspond with some boy readers.

Miss Dorothy Maggister, Lindisfarne, Milway Road, Aulsebrook, would like to correspond with a girl reader aged 16-17, in either Australia or Canada.

A Cash Prize for Every Contributor to this Page.



DUTY FIRST.

A recruit was brought up for trial before the regimental court, charged with deserting his leave.

"The Colonel," Private Jones, you see charged with being absent from the camp after "Lights out" had been sounded. Have you anything to say in defence?"

"Private Jones," "Well, no, it was this way. I was ready to march the last week from London, when a band suddenly started playing "God Save the King," so I promptly stood at attention, and before my band had finished the tune went out of the station, and I raised it."—Sent in by C. Bennett, Leeds.

FIRST CLASS.

A dear old lady preparing for a journey to the country. She had never travelled in a train before, but she had much careful attention as to what she had to do when she reached the station. Arrived at the station from which she was to commence her journey, she went up to the booking-office, and asked the clerk for a ticket.

"First class?" asked the clerk.
"Yes, thank; and how are you?" replied the old lady.—Sent in by W. Hamilton, Manchester.

IRONY.

"Old Lady, the tramp, who has just called at his house: 'Here's a glass of deliciously cold water for you, my poor ma'."

Tramp: "I don't touch it, ma'am."
Old Lady: "Why ever not?"
Tramp: "Well, you see, it's like this, ma'am. I've got an iron constitution, and if I were to drink water it would take it away!"—Sent in by J. E. Dwyer, Thornhill, Co. Tyrone.

HOW POLISH!

A farmer one day went into a bicycle shop, with the intention of purchasing some wheels.

The shopman, a smart business man, did all he could to persuade his customer to invest in a cycle.

"Well," said the farmer hesitatingly, "I think I'd sooner put the money towards a cow."
But the answer towards the shopman, "you would look an awful fool riding round the farm on a cow."
"So I might," replied the farmer; "but I should look a bigger fool milking a bicycle!"—Sent in by E. Glover, Bedford.

A CIVIL REPLY.

A British officer, just in for a few hours at an Irish post, for the purpose of calling.

"Some of the ladies who were not wanted by the work or hard work given permission to go ashore." Although these lucky ones was a tall, bearded Irish tar, who, merrily walking down the main street of the town, was stopped by one of his old acquaintances.

"Hikey!" said his friend.
"When are you going to place your whiskers on the reserve list?"

"Sure, that will take place," replied the sailor, "when you place your tongue on the 'Chill list'!"—Sent in by Miss A. Foxwell, Lancashire.

BERRY CLEVER.

Smith's barber, Berry, had sent his bill in before it was due. Smith, in great wrath, dashed off to scold the barber, which he did in the following manner:

"Good-morning, Mr. Berry! You've made a pretty bill, Berry, sending in for debt, Berry, before it was due, Berry. If it had been your father, the old Berry, he would not have been such a goose, Berry. You need not look so stiff, Berry, for I don't care, Berry, and I shall not pay you till Christmas, Berry!"—Sent in by D. Hope, near Bolton.

AN APT HISTORY.

A recruiting-sergeant went up to a young fellow in a street in Glasgow, and asked him if he wished to enlist in a Scottish regiment. The young man, thinking to have some fun at the soldier's expense, replied:

"Not likely! I'd rather go into a hospital again than enlist in a Scottish regiment!"
"Ah, well," said the sergeant, "I've no doubt you'd be worse at home than!"—Sent in by C. Crossley, Weymouth.

SHE KNEW.

It was question-time at the village Sunday-school, and the teacher commenced by asking:

"Why did Joseph's brethren put him into the pit?"
This question was too long a question for the class to solve, so there was a prolonged silence for a few moments.
"Doesn't any little boy or girl know the answer?" pressed the teacher.
"Because he had a coat of many colours," answered a little girl of seven, who came from home.
"What had that to do with it?" the teacher asked.
"Why," laughed the girl, "I suppose if he had been wearing a down-stair, they would have put him in the stable!"—Sent in by D. Grant, Gosport.

HIS MISTAKE.

"Yes," said the young singer complacently. "I had a great reception after my song last night. The audience rose, and shouted at the top of their voices."

"Fine!" "Fine!"
"A jolly good thing that you did not sing again," said the critic.

"What do you mean?" asked the singer.
"Why, they would have yelled 'Imprisonment' the second time!"—Sent in by D. Kavanagh, Dublin.

A "GROWING" SALE.

A good-looking woman, into a barber's shop to have her hair cut. Having sat down in a chair, she glanced at the looking-glass in front, and saw reflected therein the attendant, who, to his surprise, was wearing rubber gloves. This fact caused the proposition to become serious, so he said to the barber:

"Why do you wear rubber gloves when cutting hair, my man?"

"For the purpose," replied the attendant, "of keeping our celebrated hair-restorer from coming into contact with my hands." He said it!—Sent in by E. Sisson, Brighton.

As the "GEM" Storyette Competition has proved so popular, it has been decided to run this novel feature in conjunction with our new Companion Paper.

THE BOYS' FRIEND, 1d.,

Published every Monday,

in order to give more of our readers a chance of winning one of our useful Money Prizes.

If you know a really funny joke, or a short, interesting paragraph, send it along (on a post-card) before you forget it, and address it to: The Editor, THE BOYS' FRIEND and GEM, Gough House, Gough Square, Fleet Street, E.C.

Look out for YOUR Prize Storyette in next week's GEM or BOYS' FRIEND.