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BY RATTY'S COMMAND!



GRUNDY'S NEW STYLE OF CAKE-WALK!

(A Screamingly Funny Scene in the Splendid Long Complete School Tale in this Issue.)

17-6-19.

BY RATTY'S COMMAND!

A Magnificent, Long, Complete Story
of TOM MERRY & CO. at St. Jim's.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

Bartholomew the Cricketer!

"WAIT for me!" Rattiff of the Fourth called out, as Figgins & Co. were leaving the New House. George Figgins glanced round. Figgly had his bat under his arm, and he was going down to Little Side for cricket practice. He was not likely to wait for anybody just then; least of all for Bartholomew Rattiff of the Fourth.

"What do you want?" he asked curtly. Kerr and Wynn walked on. The less they had to say to Bartholomew Rattiff the better they liked it.

"I'm coming down to the cricket," explained Rattiff.

Figgins raised his eyebrows. "You—cricket?" he repeated. Cricket and Bartholomew Rattiff seemed quite incompatible to Figgins.

"Why not?" asked Bartholomew, with the sneering grin that made fellows long to punch his nose—grinning that would have been frequently granted if Bartholomew had not been the nephew of Mr. Rattiff, the Housemaster of the New House.

"You haven't bothered about cricket up to now," answered Figgins. "Still, come along if you like."

"Run up to the study and get my bat, will you?"

Figgins looked at the Housemaster's nephew.

"No!" he answered. "I won't!"

"Wait for me, then—"

"With!" that reply George Figgins followed his chums to Little Side; leaving Master Rattiff biting his lip.

Tom Merry & Co. were on the junior cricket-ground when Figgins arrived there. Lessons were over for the day, and a crowd of juniors had turned up for practice. On the morrow the first House match was coming off—that is to say, the first junior House match. Senior House matches were matters of lesser moment in the eyes of the Lower School—though to Kildere and Monteith and other great guns of the Sixth they were matters of the greatest importance.

"What's the trouble, Figgly?" asked Tom Merry, as he noticed a cloud on Figgly's rugged brow. "Thinking of the licking you're going to get to-morrow?"

"My dear chap, you won't lick us in ten years," Figgins answered. "I've just been speaking to Ratty's nephew. The wren is as cheeky as ever! He thinks he can get down in the Fourth, because Mr. Rattiff is his uncle. He told me to fetch his bat—"

"Cheeky aw!" said Tom.

"Ba' Jove!" remarked Arthur

Augustus D'Arcy. "What that boundah wants is a fearful thrashing!"

"There's a row with the Housemaster if a chap lays a little finger on him," said Figgins gloomily. "Half a dozen fellows have been caned for punching him—and he simply asks to be punched."

"Fairly sits up and begs for it," said Fatty Wynn.

"We've been thinking of sending him to Coventry, in the New House," said Kerr. "But it would mean no end of trouble with Ratty senior."

"I regard that as a very good idea," said Arthur Augustus. "It may bring the uthah boundah to his senses."

"Never mind Ratty junior now," said Jack Blake. "He never shows up here, that's one comfort."

"He's coming along now," answered Figgins. "He's taken a sudden fancy to cricket—just to make himself unpleasant, I suppose."

"Ba' Jove! Heah he comes!"

Rattiff of the Fourth was coming up, with a bat under his arm.

The group of cheery juniors regarded him with glances of strong disfavour.

Ratty junior was not an agreeable person in any way; and the fact that he was a sneak and tale-bearer made him intensely unpopular in both Houses. And the fact, too, that he was a Housemaster's nephew, and treated with marked favouritism by his uncle, made him very difficult to deal with.

Any fellow who quarrelled with Ratty junior was certain to find himself in Ratty senior's black books—which was uncomfortable for School House fellows, and much more so for fellows who belonged to the New House.

"Well, here I am," remarked Ratty junior, as he came up and bestowed a lofty nod upon Tom Merry & Co.

"Oh, there you are, are you?" granted Tom Merry.

"Yes; and quite ready to begin. I want to get into form for the House match, you know."

Tom Merry stared.

"The House match!" he repeated. "Are you playing Rattiff to-morrow, Figgly?"

Figgins gave a snort. "Playing Rattiff!" he repeated. "No jelly for! Our team is made up, and Rattiff certainly isn't in it."

"Ba' Jove! I should be vewy surprised to see a new kid in a House match!" remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Why, the chap hasn't even turned up to practice since he's been here."

"Oh, I'm a pretty good cricketer!" said Bartholomew airily. "I think you'd better put me down for the match to-morrow, Figgins."

"Don't be a silly ass!" was Figgins' reply.

"Do you mean that you won't?"

"Of course I do."

"Perhaps you'll change your mind presently," sneered Bartholomew. "I certainly don't intend to be left out!"

"Weally, young Watchiff—"

"Are you joking, Rattiff?" asked Tom Merry. "You know that Figgins is junior cricket captain in the New House, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Well, then, isn't it for Figgins to decide whether he plays a man or not?"

"A fellow might have special claims," answered Bartholomew, with a grin. "I think I have."

"If you mean because you're our Housemaster's nephew, you are talking out of your hat!" exclaimed Figgins, growing red. "That's got nothing to do with cricket."

"You may find that it has," retorted Bartholomew coolly.

Figgins clenched his hands. Master Bartholomew's airs and graces, so to speak, had been numerous and intolerable on account of his relationship to the New House master; but this was really the limit, even for Bartholomew. "George Watchiff means that he is a fewwiffie cricketchah, and it's ipoin to open our eyes with his remarkable form," suggested Arthur Augustus.

"I don't think!" murmured Blake.

"Let's see what he can do," said Tom Merry. "Get to the wickets, Rattiff, and D'Arcy will give you a ball or two."

"Aaa, wathah!" grinned Arthur Augustus. "I shall be vewy pleased."

"Oh, all right!" said Bartholomew. "I dare say I can knock your bowling sky-high, D'Arcy. You don't look, to me, much of a cricketer."

"Ba' Jove!"

"I don't think much of any of you in the cricket line, if you come to that," continued Bartholomew.

Tom Merry breathed hard.

"Well, let's see you do something better," he said. "We're waiting."

"Certainly!"

Master Bartholomew lounged to the wicket, and took up his stand there—in an awkward attitude, but that really did not promise great things. Redfern tossed the ball to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who went on to bowl.

There was a very determined expression upon Arthur Augustus' aristocratic countenance. He was not one of the chunky bowlers, by any means, but he was handy with the ball; and he was quite assured that he could down Master Bartholomew's wicket without a very great effort. But he meant to make the

greatest of efforts, all the same. He left nothing to chance. Master Bartholomew was to lose his wicket, first ball, as a reward for his disavowing remarks.

All the fellows looked on with interest as the swell of St. Jim's prepared to bowl.

Arthur Augustus turned himself into a sort of Catherine-wheel, and the ball came down like a bullet.

Crash!
There was a roar of laughter.

"Out!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"

CHAPTER 2.

Rough on Ratty!

"HOW'S that?" chuckled Jack Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
Arthur Augustus sniffed. His careful preparations, his expenditure of effort, had all been wasted. A fog of the Third Form could have bowled Bartholomew with ease. He simply did not know how to defend his sticks. "That's what he calls batting!" remarked George Figgins. "And that fellow is asking to be played in the House match to-morrow!"

"The silly ass!" growled Kerr. "Ducks' eggs will be cheap if he does!" remarked Lovison of the Fourth. Bartholomew Ratcliff looked round, with a sulky face. He heard a good many of the remarks made about him. Nobody was inclined to take any trouble to spare his feelings.

"Try again?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"Yea."
"Flaw that ball along, Weddy!"
Redfern returned the ball, and Arthur Augustus bowled again. This time Ratcliff was more careful, but it booted not, as a novice would say. His balls flew off.

"Well bowled!" chirruped Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Wats!" replied Arthur Augustus. "Any fog could bowl that ass! I would undertake to do the hat-trick without the slightest difficulty. The fellow doesn't even know how to hold a bat!"

"You cheeky fool!" roared Bartholomew.

"Bel Jove! If you are akin for a thwackin', young Watty—"

"Try again!" grinned Manners. "This is getting interesting. Here's the bat, Gussy."

"It's not much use that fatted twain to bat, but I will give him anyhow, if he likes."

The balls were set up, and Bartholomew stood on guard, watched by fifty grinning faces. After his swank there was something very funny in this disastrous variety of batting.

Whit! Crash!

Bartholomew's bat seemed nowhere. His middle stump went out, and there was a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"How's that?"

"The merry hat-trick!" chuckled Blake. "Oh, my word!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came off. He was fed up with bowling to that happy batsman.

"I recommend that chap to get some practice with the legs," he said. "It is not much use his comin' back."

"That's a good idea. Ratcliff!" said Figgins. "Kildare is giving the Third some coaching to-day, and you couldn't do better than run along there."

"Perhaps Ratty is a hidden genius at bowling!" suggested Monty Lowther humorously.

"Perhaps!" murmured Manners. "As

that lanky chap at Greyfriars would remark, the persapfulness is terrific!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go to try your hand with the ball, Ratcliff!" called out Tom Merry good-humouredly.

Bartholomew nodded, with a scowl. He had evidently not expected to make quite such an exhibition of himself as this. Redfern tossed him the ball.

"Catch," he said.

Bartholomew caught it—with his chest. It was the easiest of catches Reddy had given him, and that was how he dealt with it.

"You silly fool!" he shouted. "What are you at?"

"I don't think I'm the fool!" answered Redfern. "Why didn't you catch it?"

"Yass, wathah!"

Bartholomew picked up the ball, and his hand closed savagely on it, as if the thought crossed his mind of hurling it at Redfern. But he restrained his anger, and went on to bowl, Arthur Augustus taking the bat. The bowler of St. Jim's was rather amused by the idea of knocking Bartholomew's bowling all over the ground.

"Now, look out for the giddy fireworks!" grinned Herries.

"Fly up, Ratty!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bartholomew, with a scowling brow, delivered the ball. Arthur Augustus sent it spinning without an effort.

"Try again, dear boy!" he smiled.

Bartholomew tried again, and again, and again. He tried in vain. Arthur Augustus knocked the ball gently away, to be picked up easily and returned to the bowler. The juniors choriced as they looked on. It was pretty clear that a much worse batsman than Arthur Augustus D'Arcy could have defended his wicket for ever against Bartholomew's bowling, and taken any number of runs off it.

The swell of St. Jim's, in a playful mood, finally knocked the ball back to the bowler, giving him an easy catch—if he had known how to take advantage of it. But Gussy knew there was no danger of that. The ball dropped right under Bartholomew's nose.

There was a howl of merriment.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Can't you catch?"

"Oh, my hat!"

Arthur Augustus chortled.

"Really, Watty, this is very funny!" he exclaimed. "It is wathah good-natured of you to come along and give us entertainment like this. It is really feathally amusin'!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bartholomew stooped for the ball, his face full of fury. He rose again, his eyes glittering along the pitch. His sulky, sullen temper was at boiling-point.

The roars of laughter from the juniors were too much for him. With a sudden swing of the arm he hurled the ball, not at the wicket, but at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Bartholomew could not bowl, but he could throw. There was a loud yell from Arthur Augustus as the ball crashed on his shoulder.

"Ow-yow! Oooooop!"

Arthur Augustus dropped the bat, and clasped his shoulder, fairly hopping with an agony.

For a moment there was dead silence on the cricket-field, save for the painful howls of Arthur Augustus. The juniors looked on as if dazed.

Such an action, even on the part of Ratty junior, had never entered their thoughts.

But it was only for a moment that they were silent and still.

Then there was a yell of wrath, and twenty fellows rushed towards the young rascal.

"Collar him!" yelled Blake.

"Thrash him!"

"Mop him up!"

"Lynch him!"

Bartholomew's furious face paled suddenly as he saw the storm of wrath. He coolly action had evoked.

He sprang round and took to his heels, fleeing as if for his life, with the juniors after him in a yelling, enraged mob.

He was overtaken in a few moments, and he went down in the midst of the crowd, howling dimly.

"Help! Xoop! Yaroooh! Leggo! Help!"

Jack Blake fastened a grip on his collar.

"Bring a stump, somebody!" he roared.

"Here you are!"

"Toss him out!" said Tom Merry.

"The splendid worm! Give him a dozen of the best!"

"Xoop! Help! Oh! Oh-yow!" howled Bartholomew.

He struggled frantically as he was stretched in the grass. Blake, with a set and furious face, laid it on with the stump.

Thwack, thwack, thwack!

Wild yells rose from the hapless Bartholomew as the stump lashed on his person.

Blake laid on the full dozen, and by that time Bartholomew was roaring like a bull.

"New kick him out!" panted Blake.

"Crawl away, you cad!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

Bartholomew was released, and he staggered to his feet.

"You rotters!" he gasped. "I'll tell my uncle!"

"Kick him out!"

"Boot him!"

Five or six feet helped Bartholomew to start, and he fled again, and active feet behind him helped him in his career, till he escaped into the quad, and fled for the New House. Then Tom Merry & Co. returned to the cricket pitch.

"How's your shoulder, Gussy?" asked Tom.

Arthur Augustus was rubbing his shoulder ruefully.

"It feels wathah bad, dear boy," he answered. "I feel that there is a bruise, and I wathah think I will go in and wub it with embwoose."

"I'll come with you, kid," said Blake.

And Jack Blake led his noble chum away to the School House to attend to his injury. Cricket practice proceeded on Little Side, without the presence of Ratcliff of the Fourth. Bartholomew was bemoaning his injuries in his study in the New House—and for the present, at least, he did not care to face Tom Merry & Co. again.

CHAPTER 3.

A Very Serious Outlook!

"IT is wathah a scawious outlook for the School House."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy made that remark in Study No. 5 at tea-time. There was a very thoughtful expression upon his noble face.

Blake and Herries and Digby regarded him inquiringly. So far as they could see, the outlook in the House match was quite rosy for the School House.

"Oh, you shall beat them, my son!" said Blake.

"Look at the team we've got—Tom Merry and Talbot and Kangaroo and Lowther—all good men, though they're in the Shell. And Lev-

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son and Clive, and us four; and Wilkins isn't bad."

"Yess, but—"
 "A lot of reserves, if a man get crocked," said Herron. "Julian's a good man, and Reilly and Hammond, and Cardow could play if he liked."

"Yess, but—"
 "And look at Figg's lot," remarked Dig. "They've got some good men, like Figgins & Co. themselves, and Redfern, Owen, and Lawson. But their crowd isn't a patch on ours."

"That is very true. But—"
 "How's your shoulder, old chap?"
 "Wathah painful, dear boy. The fact is, I was thinkin' that the outlook is wathah serious for the School House, atfah all. I feab that I shall not be able to bat tomorrow."

"Too bad!" said Blake. "We'll jolly well scalp that young cad Ratcliff!"
 "I wathah think that wathah has had enough, Blake—he was wathah wudly handled on the cricket-field. But it is wathah if I have to stand out. I trust that it will not lead to the loss of Hon. Hebe's Boked in the first House match of the season."

"I trust not," murmured Blake, closing one eye at his chums.
 "Of course, I can be replaced," remarked Arthur Augustus.

"But, that's a comfort, isn't it?"
 "Yes, but the outlook is wathah serious, all the same. I think I will get along atfah tea and speak to Tom Mewwy, and prepare him."

"Do!" murmured Blake. "He will have time to get over the shock by tomorrow, perhaps, if you spring it on him at once."

Arthur Augustus gave his chum a rather sharp look; but Blake's face was grave and innocent.

The fact was that, although Arthur Augustus was a very useful bat, his loss to the team was not exactly in the nature of a disaster. There were plenty of reserves in the School House who could fill his place with credit. But the swell of the Jim's evidently took a very serious view of the matter, and his chums derisively took it as seriously as they could.

With chummy loyalty, they refrained from smiling until Arthur Augustus had left the study to break the gloomy news to the junior captain. Then they indulged in a smile.

Arthur Augustus' face was grave as he went along the passage. In the Shell quarters Grundy was holding forth to Wilkins and Gann on the subject of the House match. Grundy of the Shell was indignant because a fellow of his uncommon quality had been overlooked in the selection of the team. He asked Wilkins and Gann bitterly what they thought of a certain captain who went to the Fourth Form for men when there was a first-class player ready to hand in his own Form. Wilkins and Gann really did not know what to say, so they said nothing. Fortunately, that did not matter, as Grundy was quite prepared to stop the talking.

"Here's one of them!" said Grundy, as Arthur Augustus came along.
 "That's one of the fumbling facts that's playing to-morrow! And me left out! Me, you know! Think of that!"

"Hai Jove! If you characterise me as a fumbling fact, Gwunday—" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, in a rage.
 "You're not bad, in your rag way," said Grundy patronisingly. "But I suppose even you won't claim that your cricket is anything like mine."
 "I should be verry sorry if it was!" answered Arthur Augustus crushingly.

And he walked on before George Alford, who had just had work very

quickly, could think of anything adequate to reply to that.

The swell of St. Jim's tapped at Tom Mewwy's door, and Tom's cheery voice bade him trot in.

The Terrible Three were finishing tea when Arthur Augustus "trotted" in.
 "How's the shoulder?" asked Tom.
 "Wathah painful, dear boy."

"Too bad! It's a rotten shame!" said Monty Lowther. "That young blood and Radcliff ought to be kicked out of the school!"

"I think he will be if he keeps on as he's started," said Manners. "Why, even Trimble and McIlhain are sportsmen in comparison!"

"Anything up, Gussy?" asked Tom, noticing the somber expression on D'Arcy's face. "Anything beside the shoulder, I mean?"

"Yass."
 "Oh, wath's the trouble, then?"
 "I am awsay that I have some wathah bad news for you, old chap."

The Terrible Three became serious at once. Arthur Augustus might have been going to ask them to his own funeral, by his expression.

"What on earth's the matter?" asked Tom.
 "Somebody ill?" inquired Manners.

Arthur Augustus shook his head.
 "It's about the House match to-morrow, he said. 'I'm afraid the prospect is not so bright as we thought, dear boys.'"

"Oh, we're all right for a win!" answered Tom Merry cheerfully. "Of course, we want to begin the season with a win over the New House. I think we're pretty safe, Gussy."

"But if you lose your bet bat, dear boy—"

Tom jumped.
 "Nothing's happened to Talbot!" he exclaimed. "He was all right half an hour ago."

"I believe Talbot is all right, Tom Mewwy," answered Arthur Augustus rather silyly.

"Well—modesty apart—'m the next best bat to Talbot," said Tom Merry, with a smile; "and Kangaroo comes third. Anything wrong with Kangaroo?"

"Nothin' that I am awah of."

"Is it Wilkins? I believe Grundy's been trying to get Wilkins to resign in his favour," smiled Tom. "Not much chance of that!"

"Well—couldn't I play Grundy if a dozen Wilkinses resigned?"

"I was not alludin' to Wilkins."

"Blessed if I quite see what you are alludin' to, Gussy! Would you mind explainin'?" asked the captain of the Shell.

"A feahful bruise has developed on my shoulder, dear boy—"

"Sorry, old chap!"

"I feab—" Arthur Augustus paused, as if to break the dreadful news gently. "I feab, old fellow—" He paused again.

"Well!"

"I feab that I shall not be able to play for the School House to-morrow."

It was out at last. Arthur Augustus waited sadly to see consternation dawn in Tom Merry's face. He waited in vain.
 "Oh!" said Tom. "Is that it?"
 "Yass."
 "You're not to be standing out, kid; but if you're not at the top of your form, of course, it's the best thing. I'll speak to Julian—"

"Woolly, Tom Mewwy—"
 "Julian's a good man," said Tom.

"I believe Julian is wathah a good cricketer," said Arthur Augustus silyly. "If you think he is equal to fillin' my place, Tom Mewwy, I am verry glad."

I am very pleased indeed that the team will not suffer—in your opinion.

There was a note of deep sarcasm in Gussy's voice as he finished the sentence. Truth to tell, Gussy's opinion of Tom Merry's opinion at that moment approximated to Grundy's opinion of the same.

Tom Merry laughed—and then became very grave. He understood.

"My dear old chap," he said solemnly, "of course, this is a blow!"

"An awful blow!" said Lowther.

"A terrible blow!" said Manners.

"How we're to deal with the New House, under the circumstances, is rather a problem," continued Tom Merry.

"The century you were going to get—"

"I was in great hopes of scorin' a century, Tom Mewwy."

"In each innings," asked Manners.

"I was goin' to try, Mamma!"

"That's two hundred runs off a single bat!" said Monty Lowther regretfully.

"That would have seen us through."

"It would," said Tom.

"And saved time, too," said Manners.

"You could have put Gussy on first in each innings, Tom, and declared after his score. It wouldn't have been really necessary for anybody else to bat!"

"Sbeer waste of time!" said Lowther.

"In fact, we shouldn't have needed to bat a second time," remarked Manners.

"Gussy could have been given most of the bowling, too. The New House could scarcely have taken a dozen runs in all."

Arthur Augustus gazed at the Terrible Three very sharply—almost suspiciously. But the three cheery youths were as grave as a bench of judges. Lowther, indeed, looked on the point of bursting into tears, as he thought of the glorious chances the School House had lost.

"Too bad, Mamma!" said Arthur Augustus, very slowly. "I do not claim to be a champion bowler."

"Only a champion bats!" asked Manners blandly.

"Ahem! Not exactly a champion. I trust," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity, "that no fellow present suspects me of swankin'!"

"Ferial the thought!" exclaimed Lowther. "Impossible! You were merely mentionin' that prospects are dark now that you are crocked!"

"Ahem!"

"We shall have to bear up somehow!" said Tom Merry sadly. "We shall try to win. I don't say we shall do it. But we shall try."

"Nothin' like twyin', old chap!"

"That's so—we shall try. Give us a look—during the match, Gussy, and encourage us!"

"Yass, wathah!"

Arthur Augustus turned to the door. The Terrible Three continued to look like a bench of judges till he was in the passage. Then a broad grin was reflected from face to face.

"By the way, Tom Mewwy—"

Arthur Augustus looked in again. The grins vanished as if by magic. But it was too late.

"Bei Jove! May I inquit what you fellows are gwinna' at!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus warmly.

"Grinnin'" repeated Tom, to gain time.

"Yass, wathah!"

"Not grinnin'," said Lowther. "I—I was trying to control a feeling of despair, Gussy—"

"You uttah ass!"

"I," said Manners, "was on the point of weepin'—"

"I regard you as a howlin' duffab, Mamma!"

"My dear kid—" murmured Tom Merry.

"Wats!"

"You—you see——"

"I wepat, wats!"

And with that crushing rejoinder Arthur Augustus walked away. And considering what a serious outlook there was before the School House, Tom Merry & Co. finished their tea in remarkably good spirits.

CHAPTER 4.

By Order!

MONTEITH of the Sixth looked into the junior Common-room in the New House. His glance roved over the fellows present till it rested upon George Figgins. Then he beckoned to Figgins.

"You're wanted," he said. "Go to Mr. Ratcliff's study, Figgins!" And the head prefect of the New House stroled away.

Figgins of the Fourth made a grimace, and looked at his chums—and Kerr and Wynn made grimaces also.

"That cad has been complaining about the way we handled him, I suppose," said Figgins. "It's another row!" "Oh, rather!" grunted Fatty Wynn. "Just like Ratty junior—bless him!"

Kerr looked thoughtful. "I hardly thought he would speak about what happened on the cricket-ground," the Scottish junior remarked. "Chucking the ball at D'Arcy was rather thick—and even old Ratty couldn't excuse that, if he knew. I fancy it's something else this time, Figg; besides, it's only you that's wanted."

Figgins nodded. "Well, I'll go, and hope for the best," he remarked.

And Figgins of the Fourth left the Common-room—not very hopefully. Diggs met him in the passage.

"Going to Ratty?" asked Diggs.

"Yes." "I heard him tell Monteith. Look out for squalls!" said Diggs impressively. Young Ratty has been with old Ratty, so you can bet he's been sneaking, as usual.

Figgins grunted as he went on his way; his faint hope was dashed, by Diggs' warning.

When he presented himself in Mr. Ratcliff's study, however, he did not find Mr. Ratcliff looking "ratty," as he expected; neither was there a cane in view.

The New House master gave him almost a grimace look.

"Ah, it is you, Figgins!" he said. "I wished to speak to you, my boy. I understand that you are—ahem!—junior captain of cricket in this House?"

Figgins almost fell down.

It was the first time on record that Mr. Ratcliff had asked a fellow a question about games. It was well known that he detested cricket and football—indeed, some of the fellows averred that Ratty did not know which was the summer game of the two.

"Yes, sir!" gasped Figgins. "Quite so," said Mr. Ratcliff. "It appears that Merry, of the School House, is captain of the school junior club—is it not?"

"Yes, sir," said the astonished Figg. "Tom Merry's junior captain, and I'm junior captain of this House, sir."

"I believe the—captain has a considerable amount of—of influence in selecting members of—a team, Figgins?"

Figgins concealed a grin. "Oh, yes, sir!" he answered.

"Then it rests with Merry of the Shell to select boys to play in the junior school matches."

"That's so, sir; and in the School House matches, too," said Figgins.

"But you select the players for the New House in House matches. Is that it?"

"In the junior matches, sir, yes. Monteith looks after the senior House matches," added Figgins innocently.

"Yes, yes, I see! Well, you are playing in a House match to-morrow, I think!"

"Certainly, sir!" said Figgins, in great wonder. Mr. Ratcliff's interest in junior cricket all of a sudden astonished him completely. "If—if you'd care to walk down and see the match to-morrow, sir, we should be—be honoured, and—and delighted, sir!" ventured Figgins.

"I am afraid I have no time for such amusements, Figgins," answered Mr. Ratcliff. "However, I wish you every success in your match to-morrow."

"Thank you, sir!" stammered Figgins.

something in the nature of a game of marbles.

Indeed, Mr. Ratcliff's expression showed that he thought he was honouring the junior by taking this much interest in his little games.

"That is all, Figgins!" said Mr. Ratcliff, as the dismayed junior did not speak, and his manner indicated that the interview was over.

But it wasn't.

Figgins was dismayed; but this was a matter upon which there could be no surrender. Mr. Ratcliff did not understand what he was doing. So he had to be told—that was clear.

Figgins stood his ground.

"Excuse me, sir——" he began haltingly.

Mr. Ratcliff raised his eyebrows.

"What is it, Figgins?" he asked.



Figgins jerked his right hand from his pocket and struck Bartholomew Ratcliff full upon the nose. With a loud yell, Ratty junior sat down in the doorway. (See Chapter 5.)

"Is the eleven made up yet, my boy?" "Pretty well, sir. I'm not quite decided about Diggs or Pratt—but I think it will be Pratt."

"I should like you to play my nephew in this match, Figgins."

Figg jumped.

He understood now. That was why Master Bartholomew had been with his uncle! He had not been "sneaking," for once. He had been fishing for his uncle's support in the realisation of his ambition to shine as a cricketer in the House Eleven.

Figgins blinked at the Housemaster, not knowing what to say.

He was aware that Mr. Ratcliff did not comprehend the enormity of his request. To ask the junior cricket captain to play a hopeless "dad" in the first House match of the season was the limit—the very outside edge, so to speak.

But Mr. Ratcliff did not know it. No doubt he looked upon a House match as

"We—we can't very well play Ratcliff, sir."

"What?"

"You—you see, sir, the House Eleven is supposed to be picked from the best players—old hands, as it were," said Figgins, breaking it as gently as he could. "It's really quite unknown for a new chap to play in a House match."

"That seems to me absurd, Figgins. Why should not a new boy play cricket?"

"Yes, sir, of course. But a House match—it's a bit different. It counts in the House record."

"What difference does that make?"

"Well, sir, a win is to our credit, you see," murmured Figgins. "We—we want to beat the School House."

"Does not a win in cricket depend upon the number of runs taken?" asked Mr. Ratcliff, looking at him.

"Yes, sir!" gasped Figgins.

"Very well. My nephew is as likely

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to take runs as any other boy, I suppose!"

"Nunno. He's more likely to be bowled first ball for a duck's egg," said Figgins desperately.

"A duck's egg, sir."

"I am not very closely acquainted with the game of cricket," said Mr. Ratcliff—quite a superfluous statement, by the way—but I should certainly not have supposed that eggs were used in such a game—either ducks' eggs or any other kind. Are you jesting, Figgins?"

"Oh dear! I—I mean—we call it a duck's egg if the fellow scores a nought," said Figgins. "If he's out for nothing, sir."

"Oh!" said Mr. Ratcliff, as if a light had dawned upon him. "You consider it improbable that Bartholomew will take runs. Is that it?"

"Yes, sir. Very improbable."

"And why, Figgins?"

"He's a rotten player, sir—I mean, he's not practising. For the reason he can't bat for nothing. Why, if Talbot bowls to him he will knock his wicket to little bits first ball."

"I see no reason to suppose anything of the kind, Figgins. My nephew plays cricket; I've seen him do so."

"But—how there are degrees, sir. The best players are picked out for a House match."

Mr. Ratcliff shook his head.

"I am afraid, Figgins, that you have some ridiculous prejudice against Bartholomew. You have quarrelled with him in the street, and the reason you desire to leave him out of the cricket-matches. He has, in fact, told me so."

"Not at all, sir. If he could help us beat the School House I'd play him like a shot."

"No doubt you will find him better than you suppose, Figgins. Bartholomew has told me himself that he is a better cricketer than most of the boys of his age here."

Figgins could only gasp at that.

"We will take the matter as settled," said Mr. Ratcliff, frowning a little. "Kindly put my nephew in the middle of the roll, or list, or whatever it is, Figgins. You may go."

"But, sir—"

"That will do. The matter is closed."

"It isn't closed, sir!" stammered Figgins.

"I've got my duty to do as junior captain of the House—"

"What!"

"I can't play Ratcliff to-morrow, sir."

"What!" exclaimed the Housemaster.

"Is it possible, Figgins, that you are setting yourself up in opposition to my wishes? Are you out of your senses, boy?"

Figgins stared at him blankly. It was rather an invidious task for a junior to explain to a Housemaster that he was meddling in matters outside his province.

Mr. Ratcliff pointed to the door.

"You may leave my study, Figgins. Remember that my nephew is to play in the House match to-morrow at football—I mean, cricket. That is settled."

"B-b-but—"

"Leave my study!" thundered Mr. Ratcliff, reaching for his cane.

Figgins left.

CHAPTER 5.

Grundy Asks for It!

"TOM MERRY!"

"Hallo, Grundy! Don't come!"

"Why not?" demanded George Alfred Grundy.

Grundy's bulky form was framed in the doorway of Study No. 10, and he gave the Terrible Three of the Shell a rather early look.

"You are too numerous," explained the captain of the Shell. "Run away and play, old scout."

"I've come here to talk sense to you, Tom Merry!" roared Grundy.

"My dear man, you couldn't. You never have, at any rate. Buzz along!"

Instead of buzzing along, Grundy strode into the study. He was evidently there on business.

"I hear that D'Arcy may not be playing to-morrow," he remembered. "Is that right, Tom Merry?"

Tom nodded.

"Then this is a chance for you to do the right thing," said Grundy impatiently.

"I'm going to try to do the right thing," answered Tom mildly. "Will you excuse me if I mention that I'm not going around asking advice from silly men?"

"Play me," roared Grundy.

"Impossible!"

"And why?" roared Grundy.

"Because I'm going to do the right thing."

"The right thing is to play me. I don't bear of my form as a cricketer," warned Grundy.

"I shouldn't," murmured Lowther.

"I don't brag of it. But fellows know how I play."

"They do—they do."

"What I was at Redcliffe—" resumed Grundy.

The Terrible Three gave him beseeching looks.

"Don't!" they exclaimed with one imploring voice.

"Eh? Don't what?" demanded Grundy.

"Don't tell us about Redcliffe. We've heard it all before, a dozen times, you know, said Tom."

"A hundred times!" said Manners.

"A thousand!" said Monty Lowther tearfully.

"Mercy, Grundy! Draw it mild! Give Redcliffe a rest! Give your chin a rest! Give us a rest!"

"I suppose you think that's funny!" sneered Grundy. "A I'm saying when I was at Redcliffe—"

"How?"

"When I was at Redcliffe," roared Grundy, "the junior captain wanted to keep me out of the eleven. I whopped him till he agreed to play me. Even then the match was lost—"

"He, ha, ha!"

"Owing to the way the duffers failed to support me. I did my best. Now, look here, Tom Merry—"

"You tried the whopping game here once," said Tom, laughing. "I don't suppose they've found you since, Grundy. We're a bit tougher at St. Jim's than they were at Redcliffe."

"The question is, are you going to do the right thing now you've got a chance, by D'Arcy standing out? Are you going to play me in the House match?"

"You've got the check to tell me to my face that you won't give me a chance!" roared Grundy.

"You can't play cricket, you know," explained Tom impatiently. "You bowl like a Hun, and you bat like a rabbit. You can't catch, and you get in everybody's way in the field. If you keep wicket, you're as good as an extra man to the other side. If you ever, by a miraculous chance, hit a ball that's coming for your wicket, you knock it into the hands of the nextest fieldman. You're a first-rate cricketer for a comic once in a while, but not fit to play for a House match! Not at all!"

"Not a teeny-weeny bit!" said Lowther.

"Now, go away and play hop-scotch!" added Tom Merry.

Grundy did not reply to that. His

temper—always fiery—had reached boiling point. He made a rush across the study at Tom Merry, evidently with a view of trying once more the "whopping" method that he had found successful at Redcliffe.

But the Terrible Three were ready for Grundy. They rose as one man, and laid violent hands upon him.

George Alfred was swept off the floor and up-ended before he knew what was happening to him.

Tap!

There was a fendish yell from Grundy as the crown of his head tapped on a study carpet.

"Yaroooooh!"

"Come along, dear boy!" said Monty Lowther.

"Y-e-e-ow! Leggo!" roared Grundy.

"Walk him home!" said Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy's hands clattered wildly at the carpet as he was carried out of the study by his legs, wrong end uppermost.

His wild yells rang along the Shell passage.

Talbot and Goro and Skimpole looked out of the next study in amazement.

"That a blessed air-raid arrived late!" asked Goro.

"Only Grundy!" said Tom. "We're taking him home!"

"Yaroooooh!"

"He, ha, ha!"

"This way, Grundy!"

"Oh, my hat! I'll smash you! I'll—I'll—"

The Terrible Three marched on, with Grundy's legs in their possession; and Grundy progressed on his hands—and his head was an uncomfortable mode of progression. Shell fellows looked out of their studies, and roared with laughter as he went. Wilkins and Gunn blinked from their doorway and grinned as their study-mate came homo—thus.

"Those goods to be delivered here!" announced Tom Lowther. "Nothing to pay. Only give us room."

Wilkins and Gunn jumped back as Grundy's legs were thrown into the study, and the great George Alfred sprawled. The voice of George Alfred, as he sprawled, was like unto the voice of a lion of Bashan.

Tom Merry and his chums turned away awhorling, and found Figgins of the New House grinning in the passage.

"I've come over to speak to you," said Figny. "If you've finished—"

"I think we've finished!" said Tom, laughing. "Come to see the Terrible Three into No. 10. Grundy's wild howls were fainter in the distance."

"Squat down, old scout!" said Tom.

"Anything up?"

Figny's face had become serious.

"Yes, rather, he answered. "I've come over here to ask your advice, Tom—as a junior captain, you know."

"Go ahead! Good advice is kept on tap in this study, and there's no charge!"

"That sneaking cad—" began Figgins.

"Eh?"

"That nasty worm—"

"Who?"

"Young Ratty, of course!"

"Oh, of course!" said Tom, laughing.

"I ought to have recognized the description. What about the worm?"

"He wants to play in the House match to-morrow!"

"So does Grundy!" chuckled Manners.

"We've been arguing with Grundy. Give Ratty junior some of the same!"

"But, you see—"

Figgins was interrupted. There was a heavy tramp in the passage, and Grundy of the Shell came tearing in. Evidently he had come back for more trouble.

Unfortunately, Figgins was nearest the door, and it was upon Figgins that Grundy rushed in his blind wrath.

"Without even stopping to look, Grundy collared the junior and began to hammer him."

"There, you rotter! There, you cheeky cad! There—"

"Yoop!" roared Figgins.

"There, you worm! Take that—"

Figgins, taken by surprise, was hampered for a moment or two—his hand being closed on the Shell fellow, who had him, and sent him spinning.

"Oh, you hat!" gasped Figgins, rubbing his nose. "What the thunder is this silly ass going for me for?"

"Ha, ha, making a fool of me!"

"You-ow-woop!" came from Grundy.

"I—I thought it was Tom Merry. But I'll lick you—I'll—"

"You'll go home again, and you'll stay!" answered Tom Merry. "Wait a minute, Figg!"

The Terrible Three rushed into the passage and collared Grundy. The hapless George Alfred went home again—in a series of heavy bumps along the passage. He was bumped into his study, bumped on the table, and bumped on the door.

When the Terrible Three left him, George Alfred was not feeling inclined for any more scrapping. He collapsed into the armchair, and sat there gasping. Tom Merry & Co. returned to their study and their visitor. And Grundy did not follow again. Even the truculent George Alfred was fed up at last.

CHAPTER 6.

Kildare Takes a Hand!

FIGGINS was dabbing his nose rather ruefully as Tom and the Terrible Three came rather breathlessly back into No. 10. Grundy was a hard bitter, and Figg's unfortunate nose had had the benefit of it.

"Sorry!" gasped Tom. "I don't think Grundy will look in again. Is your nose hurt?"

"Ow! A little. Never mind!" said Figgins, with another dab. "It's been punched before many a time and oft. Now, about young Ratty. It's a beastly difficult position for me—"

"I don't quite see it," said Tom, in surprise.

"You've only got to say 'No.' You needn't mind 'Yes.' No!"

"To a cheeky cad like young Ratty?"

"But his blessed uncle—our Housemaster, you know—"

"He can't interfere in cricket matters!"

"Does, though?"

"What?"

"He doesn't understand, you see," said Figgins ruefully. "He's not like your Housemaster, old Railton. He thinks a House match is a sort of game like marbles or porton, and that his precious nose is being kept out of it. So—so he's ordered me to play young Ratty to-morrow!"

"My only hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "The cheeky ass! He's got no right to interfere in House games!"

"Blessed if I ever heard of such a nerve!" said Manners warmly. "Of course the old donkey doesn't know what he's doing!"

"But he means business, all the same!" said Figgins. "What would you do in my place, Tom?"

Tom Merry's blue eyes glistened.

"I'd refuse!" he answered decidedly. "Of course I'm going to refuse!"

"Figgins, I have refused, in fact, only Ratty wouldn't hear me! But—but—"

"Your House captain is the man to

go to," said Tom. "Try Monteith. He will put it to Ratty. If he won't, go to Kildare, as captain of the school. Kildare won't allow you to be put on in this!"

Figgins looked glum.

"I've spoken to Monteith," he answered. "He thinks the same as we do, of course; but—but—his head

prefers of the New House, and he doesn't care to have trouble with the Housemaster."

"He's been in hot water already for kicking young Ratty once. The fact is, I believe Rattiff would turn him out of his job if he got an excuse. He's so annoyed with him for kicking that young cad of a nephew of his. I—I know Monteith ought to back me up, but—but—"

"But he won't!" asked Tom.

"Well, it puts him in a hole!" said Figgins, colouring. "Ratty simply can't understand how he's putting his silly hoof in it, you see. I don't want to get Monteith landed into trouble!"

"Then go to Kildare!" said Tom.

"He'll go to Ratty, all right. Ratty can't hurt him as he's School House—and he wouldn't care, anyway!"

Monteith is in rather a difficult position, as Ratty is his Housemaster. Leave him out of it, and go to the captain of the school."

"I suppose that's the best thing to be done," said Figgins slowly.

"That's what I'd do!"

"Well, thanks for your advice!" said Figgins. "I'll try Kildare. He may be able to make Ratty see reason!"

And Figgins went his way, and tapped at the door of Kildare's study in the Sixth Form quarters in the school-house.

Kildare's cheery voice bade him enter.

The captain of St. Jim's was at work, but he suspended his occupation as the junior came in.

"What is it?" he asked. "Cut it short."

Figgins stammered out his story.

The St. Jim's captain listened in astonishment, and his handsome face grew serious and frowning.

"Ratty—I mean Mr. Rattiff—doesn't understand," wound up Figgins. "As captain of the school, Kildare, and head of the school, I thought you—"

"Quite right!" said Kildare. "Leave it to me, Figgins. I'll go over and speak to your Housemaster as soon as I've finished this."

"Thank you, Kildare!" said the junior gratefully.

And George Figgins returned to his own House feeling more hopeful. Kerr and Wynn met him in the doorway.

Redfern and Owen and Lawrence were there, too, all concerned and anxious.

Mr. Rattiff's unheard-of interference was known to all the New House juniors by this time, and great was their wrath and resentment.

"Kildare's coming over to speak to Ratty!" Figgins explained.

"Oh, good!" said Kerr.

"The New House juniors waited about the doorway for the captain of St. Jim's arrival. Kildare's athletic figure loomed up at last in the doorway of the quadrangle. He glanced at Figgins as he came in.

"Mr. Rattiff's in his study now, Kildare," said Figg.

"Right—ho!"

The big Sixth-Former walked on to Mr. Rattiff's study and knocked, addressing the juniors in low-voiced, breathless discussion.

Mr. Rattiff raised his eyebrows as Kildare entered his study. He had little to do with the captain of St. Jim's whom he disliked.

Big, open-breasted Eric Kildare looked litely and in common with the acid-tempered Housemaster of the New House.

"May I speak to you for a few minutes, sir?" asked Kildare respectfully.

"I am rather busy," answered Mr. Rattiff. "However, pray proceed."

"It is in regard to your junior House match to-morrow, sir," said Kildare, plunging into the subject at once.

"Figgins—"

"Is not the junior House match a matter for the juniors only?"

"In a way, yes; but the perfect exercise is a general supervision of junior games, of course, but you are aware of that, sir. You are probably aware also, sir," added Kildare, with a touch of sarcasm, "that as captain of the school I am also head of the games."

"No doubt," assented Mr. Rattiff.

"But I fail to see—"

"The junior captain of this House and it falls to him to decide which players shall appear in a House match, sir. It seems that your nephew's claims have been urged upon him—"

"Has Figgins complained to you?" asked Mr. Rattiff, with a steely glitter in his eyes.

"Figgins has acquainted me with the matter, as captain of the school—a proper step on his part," answered Kildare.

"You do not take much interest in the school games, sir, and no doubt you haven't taken the trouble to ascertain the rules and customs—"

"Really, Kildare—"

"But the fact is, sir, that it is quite—quite a new thing for a Housemaster to dictate in such matters. Advice and suggestions, of course, if you took an interest in the thing—"

"Nothing of the kind! I take not the slightest interest in questions which I regard as childish!" answered Mr. Rattiff, with deliberate offensiveness.

Kildare coloured.

"If you take no interest in such questions, sir, surely it is inconsiderate to enter Figgins—"

"Not at all. I find that my nephew has been excluded from these amusements, and I have told Figgins to see that this exclusion ceases."

"That is not exactly how the matter stands, sir," said Kildare quietly. "A House match is considered a matter of some importance. Success or failure means a great deal to the juniors. If Figgins is compelled to play a man who cannot keep his end up it will most likely cost him the match. That is not fair to him."

"Really, all this appears to me to be making a mountain out of a molehill!" said Mr. Rattiff impatiently, and I fail to see why you, who belong to the School House, should interfere at all!"

"I interfere because it is my duty as captain of the school. I hope, sir, that you will withdraw your order to Figgins."

"I shall certainly do nothing of the kind!"

Kildare's eyes gleamed.

"I protest against your interference, then!" he exclaimed.

"Are you aware, Kildare, that you are speaking to a Housemaster?"

"Perfectly, sir. In such a matter as this a Housemaster has no authority whatever!"

"Kildare!"

"The Head would take my view if the matter were placed before him," said Kildare. "In selecting my own team, for instance, I should be grateful to Mr. Railton for advice or assistance. But an order would be quite out of place, and he would not dream of giving one."

"That does not concern me, Kildare. Perhaps you may desire to take the

matter before the Head?" remarked Mr. Ratcliff satirically.

"Most certainly I shall do so, sir, if you do not consent to withdraw your order to Figgins!"

Mr. Ratcliff started. He looked at Kildare's frowning, determined face, it perhaps dawned upon him that he was venturing into unknown waters, as it were, and putting his clumsy foot into matters he did not understand.

There was a long pause, which Mr. Ratcliff broke at last with a harsh laugh. "Really, this childish game seems to be a matter of importance such as I have never dreamed of!" he said sarcastically. "If you assure me, Kildare, as head of the house—hem!—games, that it is outside a Housemaster's province to intervene in such concerns—"

"I do, sir!" said Kildare, quite respectfully. "You may rely upon my judgment in such things, I assure you."

"I was quite unaware of my offence," said Mr. Ratcliff in the same satirical vein. "I appear to have broken unnumbered laws of great importance. I must certainly retrieve this false step. You must inform me, Kildare, that my order to Figgins is an injustice—You assure me upon that point?"

"Certainly, sir!"

"Very well. Upon your assurance to that effect I withdraw my order, and you may tell Figgins so from me," said Mr. Ratcliff. "I am glad that I am very much obliged to you, Kildare, for having pointed this out to me, and saved me from committing—unintentionally—an injustice."

"You are very kind, sir," said Kildare, greatly relieved. "I was sure you would see it, sir, when I explained."

"Quite so. I am very much obliged to you, Kildare—very much indeed! Good-evening, my dear fellow!" said Mr. Ratcliff blandly.

"Good-evening, sir!"

And Kildare quitted the study, feeling that Mr. Ratcliff was not, after all, such a crusty old curmudgeon as he was generally supposed to be. And the news he imparted to Figgins & Co. made the hearts of these cheery youths rejoice.

CHAPTER 7.
Merry and Bright!

"**B**A! Jove! Figgys seems very cheery this morning!"

Arthur Augustus D'Acry made that remark as he came out into the quadrangle with his chums for a run before breakfast the next day.

Figgins & Co. were already in the quad, and Arthur Augustus's remark was justified. Figgins certainly looked very "chippie."

In fact, his face was beaming that sunny spring morning as brightly as the sun was shining down into the green old quad.

The chums of Study No. 6 bore down upon the Co.

"Hallo! Nice morning—what!" beamed Figgins. "Ripping weather—hey! Glorious day it's going to be!"

"Looks like it," assented Blake. "Are you looking so jolly on account of the licking you're going to get this afternoon?"

Figgins chuckled.

"My dear man, we're going to mop you off the face of the earth!" he answered. "There'll be hardly a greasy spot left to show where you were, when we've done with you!"

"Boy-wow!"

Blake and Herries said Digby made that rejoinder in chorus. But Arthur Augustus D'Acry gave a thoughtful nod.

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"It is wathah unfeelin' of you to we-joice like this, Figgins," he said, more in sorrow than in anger.

"I don't see it! I suppose you know that we want to win the first House match of the season, Gussy!" grinned Figgins. "That's only human nature, you know."

"And we're jolly well going to win, now!" said Patty Wynn. "It's a case of all clear, as it turns out."

"Yaas, I feah that that is the case," assented Arthur Augustus. "But it is weally wathah unfeelin' of you to we-joice like this, consid'ring the cause of your happy prospects, dear boys."

Figgins & Co. stared.

"I don't quite follow," said Kerr. "Is it because young Ratcliff—"

"Precisely! You owe your great prospects to young Watchif."

"Well, I suppose we do, in a way, but more to Kildare," said Figgins. "Young Ratcliff is going to help us win by standing out of the match."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's a poor heart that never rejoices," said Figgins. "I feel almost friendly even towards young Ratty, for once."

"I repeat, Figgins, that this is unfeelin'," and I am surprised at you!" said Arthur Augustus stiffly. "In your place, if you win the match, I should not regard it a genuine win, undah the circumstances."

"Oh, wouldn't you?" exclaimed Figgins warmly.

"Wathah not!"

"And why not, you ask?" exclaimed Kerr.

"Because it's ow'n' to a New House chap crockin' me!" answered the swell of St. James with dignity. "I admit that it makes your prospects very bright, but it is wathah unfeelin' to we-joice in it."

"What on earth is he burbling about?" asked Figgins, addressing Blake & Co., who were chortling. "Is he crocked!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake.

"I am crocked!" answered Arthur Augustus. "My shoulder is fresh bruised by the ball that howled waddy Watty threw at me yesterday, and am standin' out of the match in consequence."

"Awfully sorry!" said Figgins, sincerely enough. "It's hard cheese for you, Gussy. My shoulder is fresh bruised by the ball that howled waddy Watty threw at me yesterday, and am standin' out of the match in consequence."

"Weally, Figgins—"

"Tom Merry's got another man to play, surely, out of the School House crowd!" asked Figgins.

"Yes, he has," said Figgins, puzzled.

Arthur Augustus looked at him.

"Weally, Figgins, you are wathah dense. I repeat that it is unfeelin' of you to we-joice because you are goin' to win, undah the circumstances."

Then Figgins & Co. understood, and they yelled.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake & Co. joined in the roar, and Arthur Augustus turned his eyes from face to face in frigid dignity.

"I fail to understand the reason of this uproarious movement," he observed icily.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins.

"Weally, Figgins—"

George Figgins wiped his eyes.

"Excuse my sniffling," he murmured, "but, really, Gussy—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you ask—"

"You see, I didn't even know you were crocked, and hadn't the faintest idea you were standing out of the match," explained Figgins.

"Bai Jove!"

It was Arthur Augustus's turn to be puzzled.

"Then pway why were you we-joicin' in your prospects!" he asked.

"That innocent question elicited another roar from Figgins & Co."

"Bai Jove! If you fellows persist in yellin' whenever I make a remark—"

"How can chap help it!" gasped Kerr. "You're too funny to live, Gussy—you are, really, you know!"

"I regard that remark, Kerr, as simply asinine."

"You see," explained Figgins, as soon as he could control his merriment. "we were rejoicin' for different reasons. We didn't know you were standing out, Gussy. We shouldn't rejoice over that. It makes us less likely to win."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah ass!" roared Arthur Augustus. "Weally, Blake, if you see anything to chuckle at in the cheek of these New House boundahs—"

"But what's the merry mirth about, after all!" inquired Dig. "Has young Ratty fallen downstairs and busted his neck?"

"Not so good as that," grinned Figgins. "But Kildare has talked to old Ratty, and he's withdrawn his order. I'm not to play young Ratty in the match. I shouldn't have, anyhow, only I didn't see how I could get out of it. It's not easy to argue with a Housemaster, and old Ratty's a decent man, as you say, isn't it in his line?"

"Fathad!" remarked Kerr.

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"And Kildare's worked the cracker!",
asked Blake.

"Yes—he's talked Ratty round somehow, and the merry order's withdrawn. Hence three smiles!" grinned Figgins. "Congratulations, old chap!" said Blake heartily. "Of course, we should have flattened you out if you'd played that hopeless idiot. Still, we shall beat you, anyway; and we'd rather beat you fair and square!"

"Yes, wash! But undah the circus—the circus, we'd better go in for, as the bell's ringing," said "Hallo!—There's your prize rat. Give him a dot on the nose for me."

Figgins laughed as he glanced towards Bartholomew Ratcliff; but he did not follow Blake's injunction. Bartholomew's nose was not to be punched carelessly. There was his avuncular relative to be considered.

Figgins & Co. headed for their House for breakfast. Bartholomew joined them with a sour countenance.

"I don't see my name in the cricket list, Figgins," he said.

"And you're not likely to, my pippin," smiled Figgins.

"You're leaving no out?"

"Right on the cricket!"

"Leaving you out," snorted Fatty Wynn, contemptuously. "It's like your thundering cheek to ask to be put in. You play cricket like a potty Hun! Foot!"

"My uncle—?"

"Never mind you uncle now," said Kerr. "Mr. Ratcliff has decided not to chip in. You're dished this time, my ratty friend!"

Bartholomew gave the chums of the New House a sneering grin.

"I fancy I shall be playing this afternoon, all the same, if the House match comes off," he remarked.

"If!" repeated Figgins. "It's coming off all right, Ratcliff. And you won't be playing—not a little bit!"

"You'll see!"

With that remark Bartholomew went into the New House. Figgins' sunny face became grave.

"I—I suppose that scheming cad hasn't anything up his sleeve, has he?" he said uneasily. "He's so jolly cunning that—"

Fatty Wynn shook his head.

"Only talking out of his hat," he replied. "Let's get in, Figgy. I'm hungry!"

"Are you ever anything else?" grinned Figgins.

"Well, I like that!" exclaimed Fatty warmly. "I haven't tasted anything this morning yet, except a cold sausage and a bit of pie, and a few apples and some biscuits, and—"

"It will be dinner-time if we wait for the end of the list," remarked Kerr. "Come in to brekker, kids!"

Figgins & Co. went in to breakfast in cheery spirits. But, cheery as he was, George Figgins cast a glance or two at Bartholomew Ratcliff's sour, lowering face during the meal uneasily.

Kildare's intervention seemed to have settled matters quite satisfactorily; but—Figgins could not help having a lurking, uneasy suspicion that Bartholomew, after all, perhaps had "something up his sleeve."

CHAPTER 8.

Lying Low!

TOM MERRY & CO. came out after morning lessons in great spirits. Bright, sunny weather, and a cricket-match in prospect, more than sufficed to make the chums of the School House pleased with themselves and things generally.

Tom Merry was specially pleased, too, on Figgins' account.

Mr. Ratcliff's ill-timed intervention in matters which did not concern him had boded fair to "pruck up" the House match to which all the juniors had been looking forward eagerly. Figgins' eleven, weighed down with such a passenger as the conceited and clumsy Bartholomew, would not have had much chance. They would, in fact, practically have been playing a man short, which would have settled their chances in the match—not that the School House fellows considered them to have a very glorious chance, anyway.

Kildare's intervention had removed that difficulty, and all was plain sailing. It was going to be a stern tussle between the best junior teams the rival Houses could turn out—the kind of a match that

on the 'young shouldah six different times since that howvid cad Watty hwoiced it."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, what's the verdict!" he asked. "I don't want to leave you out, Gussy, if you think you can bat."

Arthur Augustus shook his head sorrowfully.

"It's fearfully hard cheese," he said. "I've been lookin' forward to the House match like anything. But I should not be able to do justice to the game. I can hardly swing a bat, dear boy. So I am standin' out. It's howvid hard cheese."

"That worm Ratty ought to be scragged!" growled Tom. "I wish we'd given it to him a bit harder now."

Arthur Augustus smiled.

"I think he had it washah hard when Blake was layin' on the stump," he said.



Kildare's eyes gleamed. "I protest against your interference, sir!" he exclaimed. "Are you aware, Kildare, that you are speaking to a Housemaster?" snapped Mr. Ratcliff. (See Chapter 6.)

appealed to Tom Merry as a keen cricketer.

And the juniors were very proud of their captain, who had chipped in with such effect. Even the dogged, obstinate Mr. Ratcliff had had to yield the point to Kildare, and the captain of St. Jim's was a greater man than ever in the eyes of his loyal admirers.

Tom Merry tapped Arthur Augustus on the shoulder as he met him in the Form-room passage.

"Wow!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, sorry, old son!" said Tom. "Is it still bad?"

"There is a fearful howise, dear boy," answered Arthur Augustus. "The 't is all right—I was the other shouldah you tapped me on."

"Then what did you yowl for?" demanded Tom.

"Weally, Tom Mewy, I strongly object to hearin' my remark chaw-tewised as you'llin'. I was, uttain' a warnin' remark. I have been clapped

"It's all wight, dear boy. I am comin' along to look on this afternoon, and I trust my presence will encourage the fellows to do their best."

"I trust so!" said Tom solemnly. "And he did not grin till his back was turned, and he went out into the quad with Manners and Lowther. George Alfred Grundy joined them there."

"Bump him!" said Monty Lowther at once.

But Grundy held up his hand. "I'm not going to whop you now," he said.

"Thank you for nothing."

"I don't want to spoil your form just before a cricket match," said Grundy generously.

"That's really kind of you, Grundy," said Tom, with a smile.

"My intention is to be kind and considerate," said Grundy loftily. "I'm not going to whop you. I'm tempted to, but I won't. I'm going to make an

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appeal to your common-sense, if you've got any—which I doubt."

"Not much good appealing to it, then, old man."

"D'Arcy's standing out," said Grundy. "Before you speak to another chap, Tom Merry, just think a minute. Give me a chance. You'll be thankful for it afterwards. As you are, you want to beat the New House, I suppose?"

"Quite so!" grunted Tom. "As you are!"

"Well, then—"

"But, as you are," continued Tom gravely, "I'm not quite as enough to play you in a House match, Grundy. There's limits, you know."

"Look here!" roared Grundy. "But the Terrible Threes declined to look there. They sauntered away to Little Side to have a look at the pitch. They found Figgins & Co. on the spot, with similar intent."

Figgins gave them a booming grin. "Lovely weather and a lovely pitch," he remarked. "What silly game was it called whether life was worth living?"

"No more trouble with the merry Bartholomew!" asked Tom.

"None at all. The best is taking it lying down, after all," answered Figgins. "I was afraid he had something up his sleeve—his so jolly deep. But it's all right. Batty looked rather black when he passed us this morning. I don't mind his looking black."

"He can look green and pink if he likes, so long as he doesn't meddle with the cricket," remarked Kerr.

"Well, I'm jolly glad it's turned out all right," said Tom Merry. "After all, Batty was bound to yield the point. Kildare would have gone to the Head, and I suppose Batty knew it."

"Kildare's a real brick!" said Figgins.

"Hear, hear!"

Figgins & Co. went in to dinner in great spirits. Master Bartholomew eyed them at the dinner-table, and his sneering grin made Figgys feel uneasy again. He had the uncomfortable impression of Bartholomew with "something up his sleeve."

After dinner the juniors were thinking chiefly of cricket, and Bartholomew was dismissed from their thoughts. Stumps were to be pitched early, and Figgins had plenty to think about without worrying about the Housemaster's unpleasant nephew.

The chums of the New House were on Little Side, chatting cheerily, when Chowie of the Fourth came along, with a grin on his ill-favoured countenance. He was a chum of Bartholomew's, and his grin portended trouble.

"What three chaps are wanted!" he called out to Figgins & Co.

"Go and eat coko!" was Figgins's answer.

"It's Mr. Ratcliff!"

Figgins felt a sudden sinking of the heart.

"What does Batty want?" he asked.

"Dressed if I know! But he was saying something to Monteith about a row with the Grammar School chaps when he called me," answered Chowie. "I think you're going to have a licking. Sorry!"

"A row with the Grammar School chaps?" repeated Figgins, as Chowie walked away. "Why, it's weeks since we've had a row with Gordon Gay's lot!"

"Better go!" said Kerr shortly.

The three chums made their way to the New House, their sunny looks clouded now. It was only too evident that Mr. Ratcliff had not, after all, taken Kildare's intercession in good part. Instead of taking it "lying down," he had

only been lying low. Tom Merry looked after Figgins & Co. as they went with a frowning brow, wondering what was going to happen.

CHAPTER 6.
The Blow Falls!

BARTHOLOMEW RATCLIFF was standing on the steps of the New House as Figgins & Co. came up, and he smiled at their downcast faces. The lurking slyness in his shifty eyes did not escape them, and Figgins gave, for a moment, undecided waver to "mop up" Bartholomew on the spot. But Kerr caught his arm and hurried him into the House.

"That rat is at the bottom of it, Kerr!" Figgins muttered.

"I know! But he will keep! We don't want trouble with Batty just before the match if we can help it."

Figgins nodded, yielding assent to his Scottish chum's capacity, as he generally did. The juniors arrived at Mr. Ratcliff's study, and found the Housemaster with a grim brow. But Kerr, whose eyes were very keen, thought he could see that Mr. Ratcliff was deliberately working himself into anger, and because there was cause, but because he wanted an excuse.

"I have received a very acerbic report, Figgins," said Mr. Ratcliff sternly. "In order that there may be no mistake about the matter I have consulted Monteith. It appears that you have assaulted a Grammar School boy—"

"I, sir!" ejaculated Figgins.

"Yes; one Gay, of the Fourth Form at Rylcoombe Grammar School."

"I haven't even seen him for the last fortnight, sir," answered Figgins.

"No doubt. The affair has only lately come to my knowledge, but it seems to have had some time back," said Mr. Ratcliff. "That makes it none the less serious. You struck this boy Gay violently upon the nose in Rylcoombe Lane."

"I had a bit of a scrap with him, sir," said Figgins. "But that's nothing. We often have rows with the Grammar School chaps."

"I think I have told you before, Figgins, that I disapprove of these continual bickerings with the Grammar School boys."

"We don't bicker, sir—it's really all in fun."

"You've contradicted me, Figgins!"

"Nonsense, sir!"

"If you dare to contradict me, boy—"

eliminated Mr. Ratcliff.

Figgins closed his lips hard as Kerr touched him gently on the elbow. "He could see now what Kerr had seen at first, and he was determined not to give him one. Mr. Ratcliff stared, in the palpable expectation of some unguarded reply from Figgins; but the junior did not speak.

"You struck this boy Gay," continued Mr. Ratcliff at last. "Do you deny that, Figgins?"

"He punched his nose, sir!" muttered Figgins. "He punched mine, too. It was only a scrap!"

"You say he struck you?"

Figgins fairly writhed.

"I didn't say so, sir. We had an argument about cricket, and we punched one another when we got excited. There was no harm done. I know that Gordon Gay hasn't complained."

"The matter has been reported to me," answered the Housemaster.

"Not by Gay, sir. I know that!" said Figgins firmly.

"You cannot possibly know by whom it was reported to me, Figgins! I know Gay isn't a sneak!"

Mr. Ratcliff's eyes glinted. The matter had evidently been reported to him by his hopeful nephew, as the Co. guessed easily enough. Bartholomew had been a witness of the little scene, which Figgins & Co. had forgotten, and it was now brought to their remembrance.

"If you have any explanation to offer Figgins—"

"I've explained, sir!"

"If you wish me to believe that you are blameless—"

"Nothing of the kind!" said hotly.

"If Gay was not to blame, you, to blame Figgins, and your company who were with you at the time."

"I don't think anybody was to blame, as there was no harm done, sir."

"Our opinions differ on that point," said Mr. Ratcliff. "I am determined that this incessant bickering shall cease. If you state that Gay commenced the quarrel, I will speak to his headmaster—"

"There was no quarrel, sir," answered Figgins firmly. "It was just an argument, and we got excited. We parted good friends, and we're good friends now."

"That is absurd, Figgins! As you cannot declare that Gay was the aggressor, I can only decide that you were the aggressor. I regard this as a very serious matter."

Figgins was silent. He felt a good deal like a mouse being played with by a cat.

"I shall not care you continued Mr. Ratcliff. "But, as you cannot be trusted to behave in a gentlemanly manner on a half-holiday, I shall detain you for this half-holiday, Figgins, as a warning to you. It may cause you to reflect on another occasion. Kerr and Wynn will also be detained. You will go to your study at once, and remain there until five o'clock. I shall set you a task, in order that your time may not be wasted."

The cat was out of the bag now.

Figgins looked fixedly at his Housemaster.

He would have been very dull indeed if he had not seen that this detention, on the day of the House match, was Mr. Ratcliff's rejoinder to Kildare's intervention.

In his order to the junior cricket captain of the House Mr. Ratcliff had gone too far, and he had been compelled to retreat by the intervention of the head of the game. But in this matter, of course, Kildare could not interfere; it was quite outside his province. A Housemaster could detain any junior of his House on a half-holiday as a punishment if he chose. The fact that a House match was fixed for the same date was an unfortunate coincidence.

Figgins did not speak.

He knew that it was useless. He had refused to play the Housemaster's nephew in his eleven, and Kildare had upheld him—and this was the outcome—he was detained so that he could not play in the match himself.

Figgins turned to the door without a word.

Fasty Wynn stared at the Housemaster, and opened his plump lips, and closed them again. Kerr ventured to speak.

"If you please, sir—"

Mr. Ratcliff raised his hand.

"I desire to hear nothing further," he said. "Your conduct has been inexcusable, as you are well aware. Your punishment is very light. You may go."

"It's the House match to-day, sir—"

"Enough!"

"Oh, come on, Kerr!" said Figgins, rookily and bitterly. "You know what we're detained for. It's no good talking!"

Mr. Ratcliff considered it judicious to be deaf to that remark. The three juniors left the study, and Figgins stamped away heavily down the passage. His hands were shoved deep into his pockets, and there was a line in his brow. His eyes were glinting.

In the doorway of the House Bartholomew grinned at them.

Figgins stopped. Bartholomew's grinning face looked at Bartholomew's grinning face. He jerked his right hand from his pocket and struck Master Bartholomew on the nose.

"A loud yell, Ratty junior sat down on the way."

Without another glance at him, Figgins stepped down the steps with his chums into the quad.

"Good!" muttered Fatty Wynn. He followed Figgins, but on second thoughts, he went up the steps again, and kicked the sprawling Bartholomew, eliciting another yell from that ill-reverent gentleman.

Then he followed Figgins and Kerr. The three dejected juniors returned to the cricket-ground. Mr. Ratcliff had told them to go to their study, where he was to set them a task; but it was necessary to tell the other fellows what had happened. But Mr. Ratcliff did not like it. He could lump it. Figgins did not care.

"Bai Jove! You fellows are lookin' wathin' down!" remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as they came along to the pavilion. Arthur Augustus was on the scene as a spectator.

"What's happened?" asked Tom Merry.

Figgins breathed hard. "We're detained," he said, "all three of us—detained for the afternoon because I won't play young Ratty in the eleven."

Tom Merry uttered an exclamation of anger and surprise.

"It's impossible! Even Ratty wouldn't dare—"

"Oh, he didn't put it like that," said Figgins bitterly. "We're detained because of a row with some Grammar School chap, two or three weeks ago. Ratty had to have an excuse, and his sneaking nephew thought of that for him, you see, and told him. If it hadn't been that it would have been something else—he would have detained us for the way we do our back hair, perhaps. Anyway, he's dished us for the House match, and that's what he meant!"

"Bai Jove!" "You see, Kildare can't interfere there," said Figgins. "I'd go to the Head, but the Head wouldn't believe that a Housemaster would be so mean as to refuse us to play such a trick on fellows."

Tom Merry set his teeth. He understood at once that the astute Ratty had taken up an impregnable position. Figgins & Co. were being punished for that old affair with the Grammarians—without any reference to Bartholomew or cricket—and that was quite good enough for the Head, if the aggrieved juniors thought of making any appeal to that awe-inspiring old gentleman.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a deep breath. "This is really past the limit, even for Watty. I regard the man as a wank outside!"

"Rotter!"

"Oad!"

"Worm!"

"Hum!"

Mr. Ratcliff's ears ought to have tingled in his study, as the junior cricketers expressed their emphatic opinions. Figgins turned to Redfern.

"You'll have to captain the team, Reddy," he said. "Fill 'er places the best you can. And—win if you can, old chap!"

Redfern nodded gloomily. He was very willing to captain the New House team; but he knew how little prospect there was of a win, with the three best men left out.

"We've got to go in now," said Figgins heavily. "I dare say there's going to be a row for coming here to tell you, and I've knocked down that young cad, too! I don't care!"

He was turning away, when Arthur Augustus spoke.

"Hold on a minute, Figgys!"

"Well!"

"I have an idea!"

CHAPTER 10.

Gussy's Brain-Wave!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS spoke with due impressiveness.

Probably he expected the clouds to roll by on the spot as he made his important statement.

But they didn't. Arthur Augustus had an idea, did not have the remotest effect of lifting the deep gloom from Figgins & Co.'s brows.

In fact, Figgins only grinned. "I have an idea!" repeated the swell of St. Jim's, with dignity.

"Well, get it off your chest, if you have," remarked Levison of the Fourth. "It will be worth hearing, as it's your first!"

"Weally, Levison—"

"Come on, you chaps!" said Figgins, apparently ready to go without having heard Gussy's idea at all.

"Figgys—"

"Hold on a minute, Figgys," said Tom Merry. "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings, you know—"

"Bai Jove! I refuse to be alluded to as a babe and suckling," Tom Merry said to Arthur Augustus indignantly.

"Well, what's the idea, old son?" asked Figgins impatiently.

"Play young Watty!"

"What?"

"Play young Watty!" repeated Arthur Augustus firmly. "Old Watty will let you off, probably, if you play young Watty."

Figgins stared.

"By Jove!" he ejaculated.

Simple as that idea was, it had not occurred to Figgins. His resolve not to play "young Ratty" had been too firmly fixed.

"It might work!" exclaimed Kerr. "Of course, it's the same as playing a man short, but—"

Figgins breathed hard.

"Play that cur," he said, "after the way he's dished us."

"No, and that," interposed Redfern. "This isn't a time to think of your personal feelings, Figgys; you've got to think of the House and play the game. If playing young Ratty will make old Ratty let you off, play him. Better play a man than lose three of the best. We can't win without Fatty to bowl, and you know it!"

Fatty Wynn nodded assent. That remark struck him as showing sound and solid common-sense on Reddy's part.

Figgins had an inward struggle. It was a bitter pill to swallow—the best of the unrepentable cad of the New House into the team as a reward for his sneaking and scheming.

"It's carrying a passenger, Reddy!" he said slowly. "The fool can't play!"

"I know it is. But better play one man than lose three men short—and that's really what it amounts to!"

"After what he's done—"

"It's rotten, I know, but it's the first House match of the season. Put your feelings in your pocket, old chap!"

Figgins had another inward struggle.

"A cad like that—and a hopeless cad—loading up the eleven with a fool like that! I be muttered."

"I have not finished yet!" remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with lofty dignity.

Figgins smiled faintly. "Got any more ideas?" he asked. "You're quite brilliant to-day, Gussy! Let's hear the next one!"

"My next suggestion," said Arthur Augustus, "is addressed to you, Tom Mowsey!"

"To me?" repeated Tom.

"Yaas, wathin'! You can help!"

"Go ahead, then!"

"Play Gwunday!"

"What?"

"Play Gwunday!"

"Off your dot!" asked the captain of the Shell. "Why the merry thump should I play Grundy!"

Arthur Augustus smiled superior. "To make things fail all woud," he explained, while the cricketers stared at him. "I want to win this match on our merits, not because Figgins's team is loaded up with a born idiot."

"Yes, but—"

"If Figgins plays one fool, you play another, and it will make the thing quite fair and square."

"My lord, hat!"

Figgins laughed.

"That's asking rather too much," he said. "Even young Ratty isn't such a born idiot as Grundy!"

"I regard it as fair play," said Arthur Augustus. "Figgys cannot play unless he plays Watty junior, and the match is a walk-over if Figgins and Wynn are left out, not to mention Kerr. But if the New House team carries a silly passenger, let the School House team carry another, and all is fair and square. Fair play on both sides."

There was a chuckle among the cricketers.

Arthur Augustus's idea was certainly extraordinary; but it had to be admitted that it put the House match on "fair and square" terms, after all.

Tom Merry's expression was quite peculiar for a minute or two. But he nodded his head as last.

"It's a go!" he said. "You're getting quite bright, Gussy!"

"A Daniel come to judgment!" said Monty Lowther solemnly.

Figgins brightened.

"I'll try Ratty," he said. "I—I think it will be all right, if I agree to play his cad of a nephew—with some soft swindler thrown in. Of course, he will only be a passenger—and every fellow is at liberty to kick him if he gets in the way!"

"It's all right," said Figgins.

"It's a good wheeze!" said Kerr.

"Let's try—and hurry up, and catch old Ratty before young Ratty has told him about his nose being punched!"

"Right-ho!"

The rivals of St. Jim's were in agreement, and Figgins hurried away to the New House to inform the captain, while Tom Merry proceeded to look for Grundy of the Shell. That bright youth was likely to be wanted, after all.

Figgins, a little regretting that he had allowed himself the satisfaction of knocking Bartholomew down on the New House steps, hurried to the House. He arrived rather breathlessly at his Housemaster's door. The study door was open, and the dulcet tones of Bartholomew could be heard within. The hopeful Bartholomew was losing no time in reporting to him under the latest outrage on the part of Figgins & Co.

Figgins stepped in quickly.

Bartholomew, who was just beginning his tale of woe, looked round at him with a savage expression.

"Here he is, uncle—"
 "Figgin's—"
 "Excuse me, sir," gasped Figgin's, "I wanted to ask you—"
 "You need ask me nothing, Figgin's,

"If you'd left us off detention this afternoon, sir—"
 "Certainly not!"

"So that we could play Ratchiff, sir—"
 "What?"

"In the House match—"
 Bartholomew grinned.
 "We've got a place in the team, sir, for Ratchiff," said Figgin's, manfully controlling his feelings. "If I captain the eleven, sir, I shall put him in. If you'd let us off, sir, it—it would be rather a chance for—for your nephew, sir—"
 "I should like to play in the House match, uncle," murmured Bartholomew.

Whether the young rascal had hoped for this outcome of his scheming Figgin's could not guess; but he was certainly looking very pleased.

Mr. Ratchiff looked sour and thoughtful.
 Egan Ratty senior had to keep up some appearance, at least, of just dealing. He appeared undecided.

Figgin's high hopes sank once more.
 "Ratchiff would like to play, sir, and—and it's really a chance for him—"
 he blurted.

"You surely do not think, Figgin's, that regard for my nephew would cause me to swerve from the strict path of justice?"

"Oh!" gasped Figgin's.
 He really did not know what to say in reply to that.

"However," resumed Mr. Ratchiff, more mildly, "I have no desire to—interfere unduly with the pursuits of the boys of my House. If this—this House match is really a matter of importance in your eyes—"
 "Oh, yes, sir—very!"

"And—and if you assure me, Figgin's, that you will be careful to avoid unseasonably brawls with the Grammar School boys—"
 "Certainly, sir!"

"Well—well, in that case perhaps I can overlook the occurrence," said Mr. Ratchiff, doubtless feeling that he had done enough for appearance. "You and your friends are excused detention this afternoon, Figgin's. Bartholomew, you are to play in this cricket-match."
 "Yes, uncle."

The two juniors left the study together. In the passage Bartholomew gave Figgin's a leering grin.

"I told you I should play, if the match came off," he remarked.
 "You did!" said Figgin's, suppressing his anger.

"I was right—wasn't I?" sneered Bartholomew.

"You were right!" agreed Figgin's.
 "You won't find me a nice chap to quarrel with, I assure you," said Bartholomew. "I generally make a fellow sit up in the long run, if he gets on the wrong side of me. You've found that out!"

"I have," said Figgin's, with unreluctant mildness.

"Better bear it in mind!"
 "I will!"

"You need head my nose a little while ago!" said Bartholomew morosely.
 "D-d-did I?"

"You know you did!"
 "Haden't you better get changed?" suggested Figgin's, no doubt feeling that it was time for conversation got changed. He was experiencing great difficulty in keeping his hands off Master Bartholomew. "The fellows are ready to begin."

"Let 'em wait!"

"Oh!"
 "I'll get changed," said Master Bartholomew. "I'm going to take my time. Don't begin without me, that's all!"
 "Book up, then!" murmured Figgin's, and he hurried out—just in time to save himself from spoiling everything by bumping Master Bartholomew right and left.

Tom Merry met him in the quad.
 "Well?" he asked.

"All serene—we're playing!" said Figgin's joyfully.

"Good egg! I'll look for Grundy."
 "You—you're really going to play that idiot?"

"Yes; one idiot on each side is fair play," said Tom, laughing.
 And he hurried away to look for the great George Alfred.

CHAPTER 11.

The House Match.

GRUNDY of the Shell was discovered in his study. Wilkins was with the cricketers, but

Gunn was in the study, trying to work. It was not much use for Gunn to try to work, however. George Alfred was pouring his grievances into his chum's ear, and Gunn, was inwardly wondering how long he could stand it. The flow of Grundy's eloquence was interrupted by the appearance of Tom Merry, in flannels, in the doorway.

Grundy gave him a morose look.
 "Playing now?" he asked.

"Just going to begin," answered Tom cheerily. "That's why I've come for you, Grundy. Get into your clobber."

Grundy jumped.
 "You want me?" he ejaculated.

"You've hit it," answered Tom.
 "Oh!"

William Gunn blinked at Tom.
 "You're playing cricket, ain't you?" he asked.

"Yes."
 "Then what do you want Grundy for?" asked Gunn, naturally perplexed.

"Tom's asked me."
 "We want Grundy in the team," he answered.

Gunn raised his eyes to the ceiling with a hopeless expression. Evidently he found the mystery too deep for him, and gave it up.

"Come on, Grundy!"
 "I'm not so jolly sure that I shall come!" answered George Alfred loftily.

"All very well calling on a fellow at the last minute. It's not the way to treat a fellow of my standing!"

"Oh, my hat!" said Tom. "Don't you like to play, then? I can find some other fellow you like."

"What!"
 "I—I mean, some other fellow. Trimble of the Fourth would do."

"Trimble!" roared Grundy. "You'd play Trimble in the House match?"

"I shall certainly play him if you don't join up," answered Tom. "He would do equally well."

"To save you from making such a crazy fool of yourself, Merry, and throwing away a House match, I'll come."

"Good man! Come on, then,"
 And Grundy came.

There was a general grin when he appeared on the cricket-ground with the School House junior captain. Most of the fellows were aware why the great George Alfred was being played—only George Alfred himself being happily unconscious of the reasons.

"It was a case of peerage being bliss, wasn't it, Grundy?" said Tom Merry cheerily.
 "Our prize cad hasn't come yet," said Figgin's. "Never mind him. It's all the same whether he turns up or not."

Next innings fell to the New House,

and Bartholomew arrived as Figgin's and Redfern were going on. He called out to Figgin's:

"I think I'd better open the innings, Figgin's."

"Do you really, old bean!" asked Figgin's.

"Yes, I do."
 "Think again, then!" suggested Figgin's.

And he went cheerily to the—leaving Bartholomew staring.

"Cheeky cad!" remarked Redfern to the fellow nearest him, who pined to be Redfern.

Redfern turned his back.
 Tom Merry & Co. were in the lead, and Bartholomew found himself rather uncomfortable among the waiting New House batsmen. He was not wanted for some time. He discovered that he was last on the list. And Kerr kindly explained to him that the reason was that Figgy thought it better to finish with a duck's egg than to begin with one. The cricketer did not seem to please Bartholomew.

New House were nine down for forty when Bartholomew's turn came. They were ten down for the same figure when Bartholomew had received one ball from Talbot of the Shell.

"They call that cricket in the New House," remarked George Alfred Grundy disparagingly.

"You'll show them some 'twin' bettah, Gwunday—that!" smiled Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Grundy sniffed.
 "I certainly hope so," he answered.

"It's awfully stern in the human breast!" remarked Arthur Augustus. And there was a chortle.

Grundy's hope proved to be ill-founded. Like Bartholomew, he was last on the list, and, also like Bartholomew, he went down to the first ball, Fatty Wynn grinning a fat grin as he despatched him.

Grundy looked perplexed as he came off.

"That's jolly queer!" he remarked.
 "The way you hit!" asked Monty Lowther.

"No!" roared Grundy. "Nothing of the kind. But such things happen in cricket—a first-class hit going down before a rather poor bowler."

"Oh, my hat!"
 "Cricket is a very uncertain game," remarked Arthur Augustus solemnly.

"It is," assented Grundy. "Never mind. Better luck next time. Jolly good thing for the House that I've got your place in the team, isn't it, D'Arcy?"

"Yess; it looks like it, dear boy!" answered the swell of St. Jim's, with a crushing sarcasm that was quite lost on Grundy of the Shell.

Bartholomew was looking rather tired and sulky after that innings. He had not distinguished himself in the field. But the other fieldsmen had taken full advantage of Figgy's permission to kick Bartholomew out of the way if he got into it. Bartholomew had often got in the way; and so he had received more kicks than halfpence, so to speak, in his first House match.

"Enjoy yourself, Wat-iff!" asked Arthur Augustus kindly, as he found the Housemaster's nephew rubbing various parts of his bonny person.

"No!" snarled Bartholomew.

"Great game, isn't it, cricket?" said the swell of St. Jim's blandly.

"Oh!"

School House were one to the good on the innings. Grundy had been of exactly as much use to them as Bartholomew was to their rivals, Figgin's & Co.

batted a second time. There was only one duck's egg scored in the innings, and Bartholomew was the distinguished proprietor of it. He wound up the innings with that distinction.

"Forty-five—total, eighty-five," said Figgins. "We'll beat them all right. I beat up their idiot is rather a bigger idiot than our idiot."

"My dear chap," said Tom Merry, "our idiot isn't a patch on your idiot."

"He is," snapped Tom Merry on the spot.

"Let me open the innings this time," said impressively. "It will be the chaps."

"The New House chaps!" asked Tom. "No, you cross me—our chaps!"

"They'll have to get on without it, Grundy. You're at the tail-end, if you don't mind."

"But I do mind!" snorted Grundy. "Same thing, old scout."

"Look here—"

"Man in, Talbot!"

And Tom Merry and Talbot went in to open the last innings, leaving Grundy snorting.

The last innings was a hard tussle. The New House cheered when Fatty Wynn performed the hat trick, taking the wickets from Lowther, Blake, and Clive in succession. But Tom Merry had done well; and Talbot kept the game open, with Levison at the other end, while the runs piled up. Figgins' face grew grave when the School House totalled forty, with three wickets in hand. Another man went down at forty-four.

"Eighty-five all," said Figgins. "It's a tie!"

"But it wasn't a tie. Levison, who was still batting, added another run, and there was a run."

"School House wins!"

"Hurrah!"

"Look here, where do I come in?" exclaimed George Alfred Grundy, greatly aggrieved.

"'Baj Jove! You don't come in at all, Grundy!" cried Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Your wicket isn't wanted, dear boy."

"And that chap," said Grundy, indicating Tom Merry, "is considered a cricketer—a cricketer captain! Here he's played on till nearly dark, when the game might have been finished an hour ago—"

"Why, with my fifty runs or so I should have wiped them out off my own bat, if Tom Merry had had the sense—the common horse-sense—"

"With your fifty runs!" asked Monty Lowther.

"Yes, certainly."

"About your duck's egg!"

Grundy did not reply to that impertinent question.

"Better luck next time, Figgy," said Tom Merry, clapping the New House skipper on the back. "It was a near thing, after all, Hallo!"

What's that unsparingly row proceeded from Bartholomew. He was hopping away, and groaning as he limped. He had got in the way, and the New House fieldmen had kicked him out of it—not wisely, but too well. Bartholomew did

not look as if he had been enjoying his House match.

"Had a good time?" asked Tom Merry, laughing.

"Yes—well. Hang you!"

"Thanks!"

"Hang you, Figgins!"

"And any more of us!" asked Monty Lowther blandly.

"I'll tell my uncle that Redfern kicked me."

"Did I give you a kick!" asked Roddy.

"Yes, you best, you know you did!"

"How many?"

"Two, you rotter!"

"That makes three, then."

"Yaroooh!"

Bartholomew departed. He was afraid that Roddy might make it four.

The House match was over, with very satisfactory results to the School House. Bartholomew, somehow, did not seem so keen afterwards on pushing himself into the New House junior team. But Grundy assured Tom Merry that he was ready to play again as soon as wanted. He wanted to know how long that was likely to be. And when Tom Merry, after due reflection, suggested that it would be in 1950 or 1961, Grundy was quite cross.

THE END.

(Don't miss next Wednesday's Great Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's, entitled "THE ORDER OF THE BOOT!" by Martin Clifford.)



THE MYSTERY OF D'ARCY'S "TOPPER."

By CLIFTON DANE.

"IT'S come, dear boys!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came into Study No. 6 with a beaming smile on his aristocratic countenance and a cardboard hatbox in his hand.

"It's come, dear boys!" he repeated in a slightly louder tone, and much more impressively.

"What's come, innogit?" snapped Jack Blake, leaning up from the cricket-foot he was facing.

"No, not your hat, Blake, dear boy," said D'Arcy swiftly. "My hat—my new topper, you know!"

"It's come, dear boys!" he repeated in a little as he met the steady stares from Blake, Herrick, and Digby.

"What on earth is the silly chump cackling at?" snorted Blake.

"What's the blessed joke, Gussy, you say?" roared Herrick.

"Why—Ha, ha, ha! Don't you fellows see?" cackled D'Arcy, almost bobbing over with mirth. "Awfully funny, you know. I came into this room with a hatbox in my hand, and I said, 'My hat, dear boys.' Then Blake says: 'What's come, innogit? My Hat!' Then like a flash, you know, I

say, 'No, my hat—my new topper, you know!' Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus paused expectantly for the remarks of Lowther. But, none came! Instead, glares of Bunlike intensity were shot at the would-be humorist.

"You—You—You—You on frabjous chumps!" breathed Blake at last. "Call that a blessed joke? You—You—"

Arthur Augustus frowned with annoyance, and this angry face flashed fearfully rather than pride himself on his brilliant repartee. But this lack of appreciation, not to say coldness, with which his witty reply had been received, was most disconcerting.

"'Baj Jove!" he ejaculated warmly. "You damn wotahs! I regard my reply as extremely witty and appropriate, you know that, if you fellows meet! I come into this room, an' I say, 'It's come, dear—'"

"Oh, for goodness' sake don't begin again!" growled Blake.

D'Arcy's eyes gleamed wrathfully through his eyelashes as he turned it upon Blake.

"Well, Blake, I consider your conduct as wondrous and disrespectful to the extreme!"

"I said, 'My hat, dear boys.' You say, 'What's come, innogit? My Hat!'"

"An' I'll regard you with this cricket-

stump if you don't drop that blessed box an' go and change, you—You polly tailor's dummy!" roared Blake. "You utter said I said 'My hat!' to express my astonishment and anger when I spotted you weren't changed, fathead! It's after two now, an' here you are dodging about with a blessed hatbox when you ought to be on the cricket-foot! What about the blessed match, you innogit?"

Arthur Augustus glared frigidly at Blake.

"I trust, Blake—I really trust," he remarked with severity, "you don't mean to suggest that I should place a cricket-match betwixt important matters of dress?"

"You apparently don't realize that this is a new topper I have purchased. I would certainly never dream of cricket until I had tried on my new topper!"

Jack Blake drew a deep breath.

"Look here, Gussy," he demanded with an air of finality, "are you coming down to cricket now, or are you arn't?"

"Impossible!" replied D'Arcy firmly. "But I have already answered that question once, an' I utterly refuse to discuss the match further!"

And Arthur Augustus focused his famous THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 588.

Then from a drawer in the table he took out the cracked glass of a tumbler. Holding this to his eyes, he began to examine the handkerchief closely. The lamp-glass possessed about as much magnifying power as a spy-glass, and he was not long before he appeared to find it effective, nevertheless. A moment later, followed by the astonished glances of his study-mates, he started to go, & to find an opportunity of returning him, looking as solemn as old owls.

"Well!" quivered together anxiously. "Any more?"

"No," said Grundy, trying hard to appear steady. "It is as I suspected."

"Grundy!"—

"Trumble!"—

"Blake!"—

"Monty Lenthew!"—

passed dramatically.

"It was Kildare!"

"Kildare, who-what?"

"Kildare," repeated Grundy faintly.

There was a moment's astonished silence, and Grundy smiled. Then the gravity of the juniors broke down under the strain.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Kildare!" sobbed Lenthew. "Oh, my hat!"

III.

GEORGE ALFRED GRUNDY frowned. The great G. A. never could see what his juniors were getting at, but he pulled; consequently, he was more than angry to find his dramatic nose received with yells of laughter.

"Oh, how he yelled angrily. "If you fellows mean to be funny—"

"Weally, Grundy," began D'Arcy warmly, "you surely do not expect us to believe that word!"

"Then what does that mean?" roared Grundy, throwing the handkerchief on the table with a dramatic sweep of his arm.

"That incriminating clue I found in the corner of your coat, Grundy, the initials are E. K. S.," said if those letters don't stand for Eric Kildare, then—"

Grundy stopped and gave a jump as the door opened and the strapping figure of Eric Kildare himself appeared. It was obvious that he had heard his name mentioned, for he stared curiously at the juniors. But evidently he had heard something further, for he passed no remark upon it.

"Ah, D'Arcy!" he said, "Have you seen anything of a handkerchief marked E. K. S. lying about?"

"Yes, your honour," said Grundy, "I saw it when—"

"Hullo! That looks like it!"

Stepping forward, Kildare was about to pick up the handkerchief from the table, but Grundy was too quick for him.

"No, you don't, Kildare, old top!" he snapped, snatching the handkerchief.

Kildare fairly blinked at the speaker.

"No, you don't," repeated Grundy triumphantly. "You're bowled out, Kildare! I expected something like this, though I must say I don't believe you're worth a red!"

But that game doesn't cut ice with George Grundy! You're not dealing with tags now, Kildare. You're dealing with me—and I've got you proved you can't handle D'Arcy's topper, and as these tags have placed the case in my hands I intend to see the thing through. I advise you, Kildare, for your own sake, to get out of the room, your skull, or I won't be responsible. Here, hands off! Wow!"

Grundy yelled in alarm as Kildare whirled him spinning across the room. Grundy yelled again as he sat down with a crash and a clatter in the fender.

"Taro!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That," said Kildare quietly, "will perhaps teach you how the diabolical you can do about like that at me. You can't help being a born fool, Grundy, or I'd give you a thundering good hiding for your astounding cheek!"

And the wrathful captain of St. Jim's pushed his way through the grinning juniors and left the study. It was plain even to Grundy that he had no intention of confessing his guilt.

(Continued on page 18.)

The Editor's Chat.

The Companion Papers are:

THE MAGNET. THE BOY'S FRIEND. THE GEM. THE VERY POPULAR. CHUCKLES. Every Monday. Every Monday. Every Wed. Every Friday. Every Friday.

YOUR EDITOR IS ALWAYS GLAD TO HEAR FROM HIS READERS.

For Next Wednesday:

"THE ORDER OF THE BOOT!"

By Martin Clifford.

My readers will have no difficulty in guessing to whom the Order of the Boot is applied. It is to Bartholomew Bickford, the New House master's, cadlike and unprincipled nephew.

Following in the footsteps of other bold, bad blades, Bartholomew is lashed heavily in dose, and the methods which he employs in order to steer clear of his liabilities do not find favour with the St. Jim's fellows, or with his uncle. Eric Katty draws the line at harbouring a thief at the school, and when the news spreads through St. Jim's that Katty Junior has received—

"THE ORDER OF THE BOOT!"

there are no tears or lamentations. Bartholomew's departure is a good thing for St. Jim's in general, and for Piggins & Co. in particular.

A RED-LETTER DAY!

Friday, May 23rd!

The date quoted above will prove to be one of the landmarks in boys' literature. On the day in question, the NEW "PENNY POPULAR" will make its appearance. The old reprint stories of St. Jim's, Greysians, and Hookwood will make way for—

THREE ENTIRELY NEW SCHOOL STORIES

by Martin Clifford, Frank Richards, and Owen Conquest. And every story's a gem!

A TREAT FOR LANCASHIRE!

My Lancashire chums will find next week's issue of the "Penny Popular" particularly attractive, for the Greysians story describes how Henry Warton & Co. journey to Blackpool, to do battle with a team of Lancashire boys in a series of sporting contests.

"THE LADS OF LANCASHIRE!"

By Frank Richards.

is a story which should find a place in every Lancashire home.

The new, long, complete story of Tom Jerry & Co. at St. Jim will be—

by Martin Clifford;

and there will also be a magnificent new, complete story of Jimmy Silver & Co. at Hookwood—

by Owen Conquest.

A WORD OF WARNING!

As there is certain to be an unprecedented run for this bumper issue, and as it will be impossible to publish an extra supply of copies, all my chums should place an order at once with their newspapers for—

THE "PENNY POPULAR" No. 18.

On Sale Friday, May 23rd.

ANOTHER SUPERB ATTRACTION!

There is a shower of good things to announce just now.

On the same date as the "Penny Popular" comes out in its new form, but are publishing—

AN EDITION DE LUXE

of "Chuckles," the finest and best coloured paper in the world.

The issue in question—on sale Friday, May 23rd—will contain—

A MAGNIFICENT COLOURED PLATE,

a Grand New Serial, and two splendid complete School Stories.

These readers of the Companion Papers who have been clamouring for a Competition will note with approval that next week's issue of "Chuckles" contains one, and that—

SPLENDID CASH PRIZES ARE OFFERED!

Miss next week's "Chuckles" and best work's "Penny Popular," and your Editor may forgive you, but you will never forgive yourself!

CONCERNING THE "GEM" ARTIST.

R. F. J. has written to ask if Mr. R. J. Macdonald, who used to draw for the Gem, will ever return to his old love.

I think I may safely say that he will. Mr. Macdonald is a Naval officer, and a good many thousand miles intervene at present between him and the office of the Gem Library. But I have no doubt that he will soon be with us again, and that his drawings will continue to give delight to my chums.

All praise, however, to Mr. Warwick Reynolds—one of the finest Macdonald-style artists of our day—who has so ably carried on the good-work in Mr. Macdonald's absence.

FROM AN AEROPLANE GIRL.

"A Member of the W.I.L.A.F.," writing from "Somewhere on Salisbury Plain," expresses the hope that a letter from an aeroplane girl will not offend me.

So far from doing that, my girl chum's letter has afforded me the keenest gratification; and I shall always be glad to hear from any "Wrafs," "Reims," or other fair "birds"—so entitled—who care to write to me.

NOTICES.

Correspondence, etc., Wanted.

R. Strike, 2, Abingdon, Whitton, near Ipswich, Suffolk—wishes readers who collect birds, etc., in E.I.C. Colonies and the United States, with view to exchange.

S. Phillips, c/o Box 62, Cape Town, South Africa—wishes readers anywhere, 14.12.

L. Range, 25, Chiswell Road, Grandpont, Oxford, wants more members for the United Correspondence Federation. Magazine published every month. Stamped envelope, please.

Back Numbers.

A. Darby, 237, Wick Road, South Hackney, E. 9.—"Bob Cherry's Barring-Out," "Tom Jerry's Peril," "Lionel the Elf," "The St. Jim's Inventors," "Piggins' Pig-Peddling," "Ed. for 'Barring-Out'"; 3d. others.

W. G. E. Dyer, Gloucester, Appendix Street, London, E. 8.—"The Mystery of the Magician's" before 400. Write first, stating price.

S. Samuel W. Callaghan, 26, Main Street, Bridgeton, Glasgow.—"Magnets" and "Gem." 1-100; 1d. for numbers, 1/6. for penny ones. Write first.

Miss C. E. Harding, 104, Argyle Road, West Kelling, Yorks.—"13—New Offered," new series, vol. 1, 2d. others. Write first.

Edward Vaudin, 5, Salford, St. Peter's Port, Guernsey, Channel Islands.—"Bob Cherry's Barring-Out," "The Mystery of the Gabbos," "Band of the Blade," "Hunter the Postman," "Billy Butler's Postal-Order," 2d. each offered. Write first.

John Sims, 47, Bernard Street, Upland, Swansea, South Wales.—First, fifteen numbers of St. Jim's Library. Write, stating price.

H. A. H. (YOUR EDITOR).

Directly—the door closed however, Grady, intending to his feet and made a dash to follow him. But Merry and Blake gripped him.

"Stop, you silly chump!" laughed Tom Merry. "You'll never get away from here!"

"Leave! Don't let me get away!" choked Grady excitedly. "It's not the only clue to solve his case! Let me—"

With a mighty effort Grady wrenched himself free, and starting over the door dashed out. In a laughing crowd the jokers followed. They had an idea that the sight of the great George Alfred being out of the Captain's study on his perch would be worth seeing.

"You'll get too near the door, or you'll get killed when he comes flying out," warned Blake. "Give him plenty of air space. Ha, ha, ha!"

From beyond the closed door came the booming tones of Grady's voice, followed almost immediately by sounds of a furious scuffle. Then the door flew open, and the hearty figure of George Alfred triumphantly started out and dropped in the passage like a sack of coke. "There the door slammed."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Mopsy Lawler. "No it again, Grady!"

Grady staggered to his feet dazed. Then, with a yell of defiance, he flung himself at the door. It was locked. Grady turned away with a snarl.

"Did you catch me that?" he gasped in a hoarse, excited way. "I've been chased out—no, you know! If that doesn't prove Kildare's guilt—What do you say, roving D'Arcy?"

"I say that you're an idiot, an. Gwendolyn, old boy and Arthur Augustus confoundedly!"

"Ah, what's that?"

"An idiot act!" repeated D'Arcy warmly. "I would just like, Grady, dear boy, to see you, coming in now. You'd better drop his hanky in our study. I caught that wretched Twinkle running out early, and I was giving him a fearful thrashing, and Kildare waded in with his assistant, and before us lay that beautiful picture canvas. He must have dropped it from his sleeve then."

"So!" Grady's crystalline face was a sight to see. But he quickly recovered.

"So it was Twinkle, an' not Kildare, after all," he said, frowning thoughtfully.

"Twinkle," gasped D'Arcy. "But why should—"

"Why, it's as plain as daylight!" roared Grady triumphantly. "An act of vengeance—don't you suspect? Why on earth did you tell me the story about Twinkle before, D'Arcy?"

"You—you waving hands!"

"Bah!" snorted Grady. In disgust, "I've a jolly good mind to chuck up the case altogether, young D'Arcy! As it is—"

Grady, however, the moment Arthur Augustus to one side and marched away. Digging his teeth, he reappeared a moment later armed with a cricket-stump, and proceeded to trimble's study to parse his investigations there. Grady's methods of investigation were, with certainty original, and looked like things out of a poet's notebook.

In a cheering crowd they followed the student. From the direction of Trimble's study came a sudden procession of flashy fellows in the unmistakable livery of Mopsy Lawler.

"Ha, ha, ha!" He's searching Mopsy Lawler's bags for clues with his cricket-stump; yelled Lawler. "Come—Look out!"

"From the passage above rattled the wheel of a gram, and Mr. Easton took up gratefully. He trotted directly at the open study door and looked in.

"Grady—let this poor boy go at once, sir!" he commanded sternly. "How dare you send a prisoner to that brutal man?" This is not the first time I have had to speak to you about talking jokers! Grady!"

Grady snarled in sheer astonishment. "It's not—boasting!" he stammered. "No no no no no!"

"Yes—believe me," sneered Mr. Easton. "You will take five hundred lines, Grady! And stop here this room at once!"

"But—but—" began Grady.

"And Grady," thundered Mr. Easton. "And Grady," with a hideous look of astonishment and indignation on his ragged face. To think that he—Grady, who had always looked upon himself as the champion of the oppressed—should be charged with lying!"

Grady looked quite dazed as he turned back the grating cover to his study. And as he did so, he happened again for some moments the crowd dispersed, having come to the conclusion that George Alfred had finished his investigations for the afternoon, and that the entertainment was therefore ended.

But they did not know their Grady, for barely had the others of Study No. 2 set down to tea when the door again flew back with a crash, and a crowd marched in, looking if anything lower and more determined than ever.

"Ah, D'Arcy!" he began briskly. "I've been thinking this business over—deeply, in fact. Now, where is that picture? I intend to examine it thoroughly—my old-fashioned methods about me, you know?"

"Waddy, Waddy," explained Grady, "though I've proved that it's Trimble's, but—"

"Oh, you've proved Trimble did the deed, have you?" grinned Blake.

"Of course I have," ejaculated Blake, in surprise.

The crime investigator swooped down on his knees by the bath-tub. Then suddenly he gave a roar. Diving his head into the box, he lifted out a heavy iron duster from the time-pur on the bottom.

"There you are, you jagged, roared, leading about the dumber! That's a clue, if you like! Splendid! Without a doubt the owner of that did the deed. Now, all we've got to do is to look for its owner, and the chain of evidence is complete!"

"Then you needn't look far, did you?" chuckled Dicky. "For that blessed dumber belongs to me, old top!"

Dicky nodded cheerfully.

"Ah!" said Grady, slowly and grimly. "Now we're getting at the truth! Then in that case, I've afraid I shall have to ask you to accompany me to the police, Dicky, an' I warn you to be careful how you answer them. Mind you, went on Grady cheerfully, "though the evidence looks black against you, Dicky, we've got to treat you as innocent until you're proved guilty. Now, tell me this! When did you last see your father's own dumber?"

"You—you jolly chump!" roared Dicky angrily. "I haven't seen or touched the thing since I cleaned it up on the top of the bookcase three some days ago. Why, I'll bet you—"

"But Jove!" yelled D'Arcy, leaping up from the table suddenly. "Dicky, dear boy, is that true? Was that wretched dumber really on the bookcase?"

"Of course it was, father!" cried Dicky heatedly. "That silly chump—"

"Then I do believe I've solved the mystery!" gasped D'Arcy, excitedly. "I'm glad to say that such a Twinkle see anyone else is guilty, an'—"

"But!" roared Grady.

Arthur Augustus looked Grady in an icy stare through his goggles.

"It's not you, Grady!" he said softly. "The whole thing is quite plain to me now. The mystery is a mystery no longer! The heavily dumber must have rolled off the bookcase and dropped on the bath-tub. I remember distinctly when Twinkle and myself were struggling in both this afternoon, we banged into the bookcase; an' I distinctly remember hearing a tremendous thud. But Jove! What a remarkable thing!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" he burst before you're back, Grady roared Jack Blake. "On my hat, ha, ha, ha! What poor Grady!"

Grady's face was a study.

"Then—then it wasn't Dicky after all!" he stammered at last.

"Ha, ha, ha! Not Trimble!" roared Blake.

"Nor Kildare!" yelled Mopsy.

Grady flushed crimson.

"Look here," he began frantically. "If you think you're being funny, you're not!"

"Not at all!" chuckled Blake. "It's you who're funny—especially as a detective, old man!"

Grady snarled, and took a step forward; but, suddenly thinking better of it, he turned back to his study with his nose in the air. It was very plain, even to the two rascals, that of George Alfred Grady, that Grady's theory was correct; at any rate, whether so brought me or not, he apparently felt by the conclusion that his services as detective were no longer required, for he did not return to make any further investigations into the Mystery of D'Arcy's New Topper.

Greyfriars Epitaphs.

No. 2. By BOB CHERRY.

BENEATH THIS SPOT REPOSES

(as he was accustomed to do in his lifetime)

HERBERT MAULVERER,

Otherwise known as "Maisy,"

WHO EXPIRED PEACEFULLY IN HIS

SLEEP,

having found it

TOO MUCH FOG

to go on living.

Although

HIGH BEYOND THE DEKANS OF

AVARICE,

he lost his banknote (and his security), and

finally his life.

HE TOILED NOT, NEITHER DID HE SPIN,

Throughout his career he always made a point of being up and doing—nothing, though he himself was done on numerous occasions.

Lessons bored him; games bored him; and he even found it too great a tax upon his energies to consume his dinner, whereupon Dicky Champ—always a very obliging sort of chap—consumed it for him.

His spats were a dream; his best Sunday topper was a nightmare.

He made a will, but mistaid it, and thought longly expired before it could be recovered.

"Bob Cherry's cricket-stump no more—

For Mopsy's reached the farther shore—

The only point to WHICH—"

No. 1 OF A GRAND SCHOOL STORY PAPER!

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