

TOM MERRY'S CONQUEST!

The

GEM 1¹/₂

No. 722
Vol. XX

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20 pages.

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December 10th, 1921.



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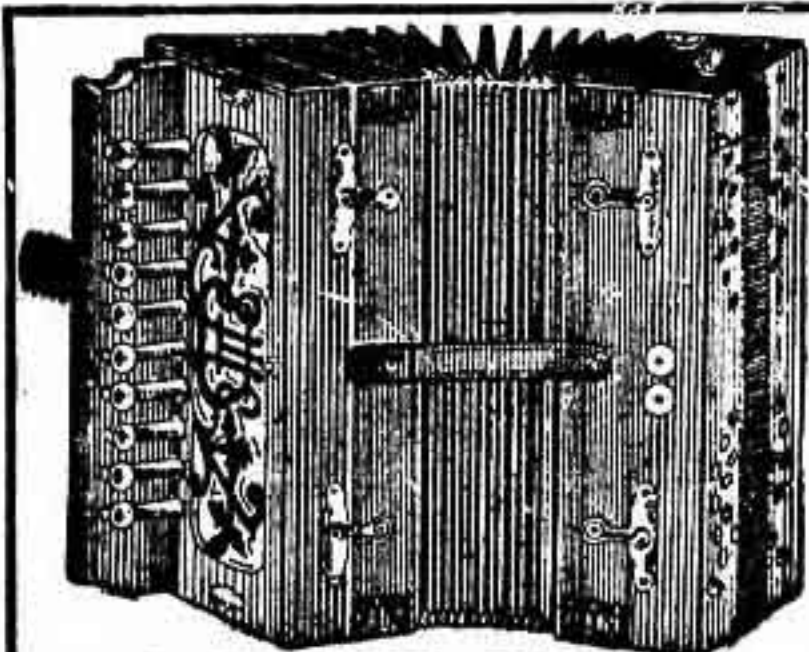
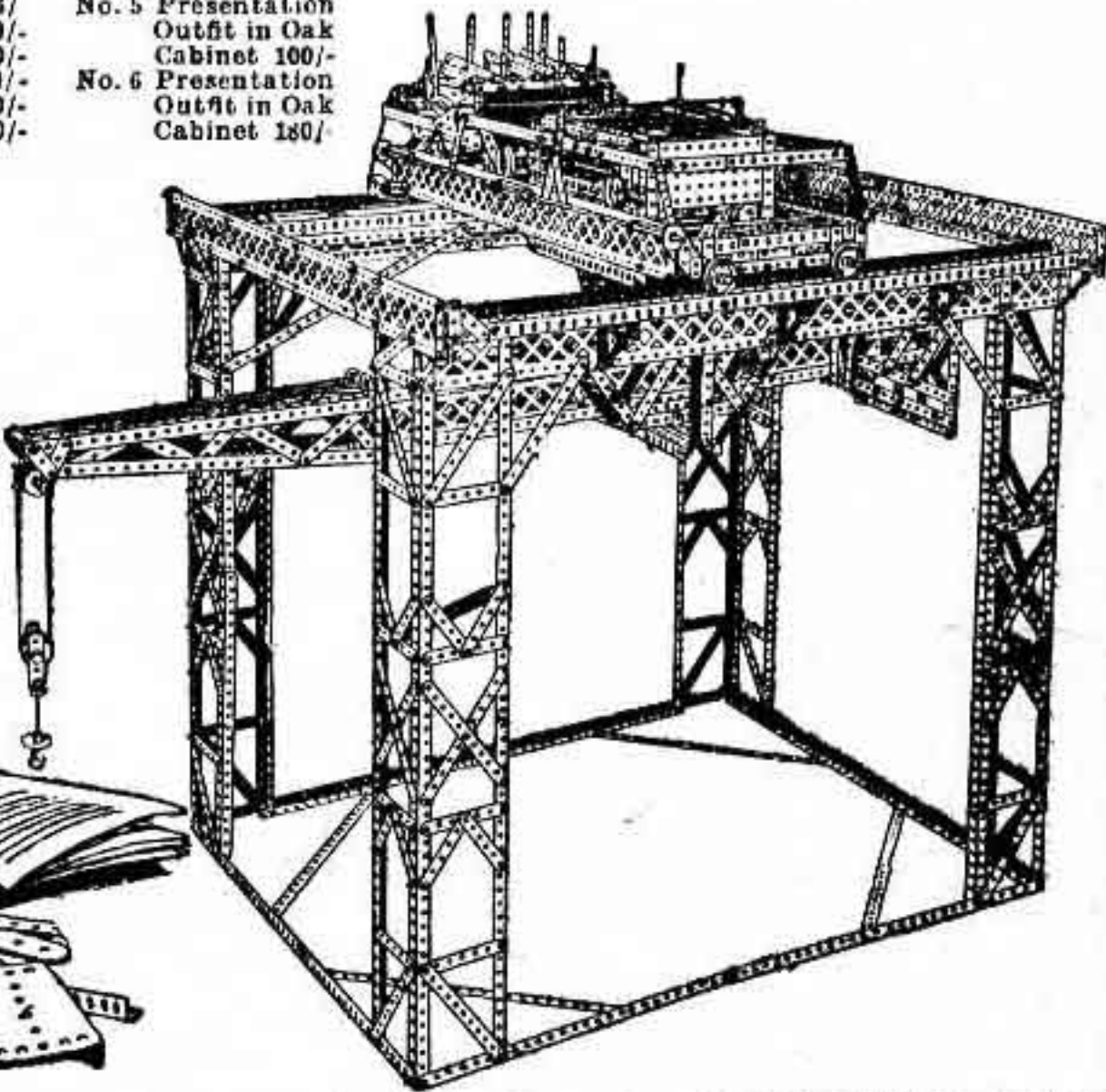
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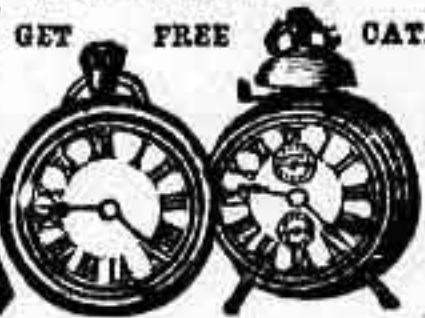
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Tom Merry's Conquest

A Grand Long, Complete Story of the Great Barring-Out at St. Jim's.
By Martin Clifford.

CHAPTER I.

The Rebels of St. Jim's!

NO SURRENDER!"

That rather surprising notice was chalked in huge letters on the door of the New House at St. Jim's.

The great door was locked and bolted.

Any stranger strolling that morning in the quadrangle of St. Jim's would certainly have been surprised by what he saw.

A dozen windows in the New House were broken, and the gaps in the glass had been stuffed with rugs and boards.

The Hall window, close by the door, was not only broken, but it was barricaded with desks, forms, and chairs.

Evidently something of a very unusual nature was going on at St. Jim's—on one side of the old quad, at least.

Over in the School House, where the Form-rooms were, lessons were going on. In that House existence pursued, more or less, the accustomed even tenor of its way.

During lessons the New House should have been almost deserted. On this particular morning, however, it was very far from being deserted.

More than thirty juniors of the Fourth and the Shell were in the New House, and evidently "cutting" lessons.

Figgins of the Fourth, ringleader of the House revolt, was standing at a window staring out into the quad.

His chums, Kerr and Wynn, were sitting in the window-seat, also looking out.

Figgins yawned a little.

"Nothing doing, you chaps," he remarked.

"All the better," said Kerr. "We had lots of excitement yesterday."

"That's all very well," said Figgins. "But I'd like to know what the giddy enemy are up to."

"We're missing lessons, anyhow," remarked Fatty Wynn. "That's something."

"It's something," agreed Figgys.

"The only real trouble," said Fatty Wynn thoughtfully, "is that we're short of grub."

"We've got rations for a week, at least."

"What you call rations!" said Fatty Wynn. "But when a chap doesn't get enough to eat, Figgys—"

"Bow-wow!" said Figgins.

"Anyhow, it's a lark!" said Kerr. "I wonder how it is going to end?"

"We're going to get our rights!" said Figgins emphatically. "Until we get our own terms the New House is going to hold out! That's final! And Mr. Ratcliff can put it into his pipe and smoke it!"

"Ratty doesn't smoke," remarked Fatty Wynn.

"Fathead! Can't a chap speak figuratively?" demanded Figgins.

"Well, about the grub—"

"Bother the grub!"

"Now Ratty's caught a cold, owing to our drenching him last night, I suppose Railton will take control," said Fatty Wynn thoughtfully. "Old Railton isn't a bad sort. I don't really believe in keeping up a row, Figgys, if it can be helped, when the grub—"

George Figgins turned a ferocious look upon his fat chum.

"If you say 'grub' again, Fatty, I'll biff your head on the wall!" he said. "Take that as a tip!"

"But, I say—"

"Dry up!"

Fatty Wynn grunted, but he dried up. The fat Fourth-Former was feeling rather anxious. Hitherto the rebels of the New House had held out against all attacks. Mr. Ratcliff, their Housemaster, had been defeated all along the line; the New House prefects had been driven off; even Mr. Crump, the village policeman, had tackled the rebels in vain. Figgins was, naturally, rather pluming himself upon his victories. But Fatty Wynn was thinking of the larder.

"Grub" in the New House might last a week, with strict rationing; but strict rations were not beloved of Fatty Wynn.

It was asked of old: "What should it profit a man if he should gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" And Fatty Wynn could not help asking himself: What should it profit the rebels if they should gain tremendous victories, and still run short of grub? That was a serious aspect of the case which nobody excepting Wynn seemed quite to realise.

Access to the school tuckshop was cut off. The rebels could not venture out of their barricaded House without danger of falling into the hands of the enemy. And even Fatty Wynn, though he sighed as he thought of the tarts and cakes in Mrs. Taggles' shop, did not care to run that risk.

Most of the rebels were playing leap-frog or punting a footer about in the passages of the New House. Figgins watched the quad for an attack. As a matter of fact, Figgys would have been glad to see the enemy. The rebels were resting on their laurels, as it were, and they were in danger of getting bored with the rebellion.

But the chalked notice on the door of the New House was descriptive of the feelings and intentions of Figgins & Co.

"No surrender!" was their motto.

In the absence of the Head, on sick leave, Mr. Ratcliff, the New House master, had governed with too high and heavy a hand. The revolt in his House had been the result. And there was to be no surrender until Figgins & Co. had their rights—whatever they were!

"Hallo! Here comes Railton!" exclaimed Figgins suddenly.

Fatty Wynn and Kerr jumped up, and looked from the window. Redfern and Owen, and half a dozen more juniors, joined them.

In the winter sunshine the athletic figure of Mr. Victor Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, was seen advancing.

The rebels watched him advance.

"I've got a jolly ripe apple here!" murmured Pratt of the Fourth. "What about catching him on the boko, Figgys?"

Figgys gave Pratt a glare.

"Let me catch you catching him on the boko!" he exclaimed witheringly. "We're not up against Railton! He's a good sort, and so long as he doesn't chip in—"

"Looks as if he's coming here to chip in!" said Redfern.

"Well, wait till he does!"

"According to what Tom Merry told us this morning, Ratty is laid up for repairs," remarked Owen. "If that's the case, Railton will be Head until he gets well, or Dr. Holmes comes home."

"He won't run this House!" said Figgins determinedly.

"Hear, hear!"

Mr. Railton came up to the House, and stopped as he saw the crowd of New House faces at the upper window. He looked up, and Figgins politely threw up the window and leaned out.

"Good-morning, sir!" he said cheerily.
Mr. Railton coughed.
"Good-morning, Figgins!"
"Nice morning for the time of year, sir!" said Figgins affably.
"Ahem! Quite so! I have come over to request you, Figgins, to cease these absurd proceedings and return to your duty," said Mr. Railton quietly. "This state of affairs cannot be allowed to continue."
And Mr. Railton, like Brutus of old, paused for a reply.

CHAPTER 2.

Nothing Doing!

GEORGE FIGGINS smiled genially. He liked Mr. Railton, and had a great respect for him. But he had no intention whatever of allowing the School House master to give him orders. Mr. Ratcliff was his Housemaster, and he was in rebellion against Mr. Ratcliff.

Still, Figgins was prepared to parley. He had nothing against Mr. Railton personally, and was ready to treat that gentleman with great politeness, though certainly not to the extent of surrender.

"Well, Figgins?" said the School House master, after a brief pause. "I am waiting for your reply, my boy."

Figgins gave a little cough.
"The fact is, sir, that you're dead in this act!" he explained.

"What?"
"We're prepared to make terms with our own Housemaster, sir," said Figgins. "Ratty knows that."

"You must not speak disrespectfully of Mr. Ratcliff, Figgins," said the School House master sternly.

"I beg to remind you, sir, that I did not ask for this interview," said Figgins, with polished politeness.

"Go it, Figgy!" murmured the juniors behind the great chief of the New House.

"Are we to understand, sir," continued Figgins astutely, "that you have come over in Mr. Ratcliff's name to make terms with us?"

"No."
"Then there's really nothing to be said, sir."

"Nothing at all, sir," said Kerr.
Mr. Railton compressed his lips.

"You boys are aware that the Head is away ill, and that he cannot be troubled with what is now going on here," he said. "Mr. Ratcliff is now laid up. He was drenched with water last night—"

There was a chortle in the window.

"He tried to sneak in, in the dark, and we ducked him, sir," said Figgins cheerfully.

"He has a severe cold," continued Mr. Railton, unheeding, "and is quite unable to attend to his duties. While he is confined to his room, and while Dr. Holmes remains absent, I take the place of the headmaster. You are aware of that. You boys are, therefore, now under my orders."

"I suppose that's so, in a way," admitted Figgins cautiously.

"It certainly is so," said Mr. Railton; "and I expect you to return to your obedience at once."

"On what terms, sir?"
"I cannot bandy arguments with you, Figgins."

Figgins's eyes glinted.

"Very well, sir; that's as you choose. Mr. Ratcliff has sentenced Kerr and Wynn and myself to a flogging, and says we're to be sent home. He raked up an old offence that the Head dealt with before he left, and pardoned. Do you call that playing the game?"

"I cannot comment on Mr. Ratcliff's administration of his own House, Figgins."

"Just as you like, sir! Well, we're up against Ratty, all the time and all along the line. He has got to rescind his sentence, and he has got to agree to make it pax all round—"

"Figgins!"

"Nobody is to be punished for what's happened in the New House," went on Figgins. "Everything is to be forgiven and forgotten, and Ratty has got to keep his temper a bit better under control. On those terms we will agree to stop the barring-out, and turn up to lessons."

"Hear, hear!"

"If Ratty puts that in black and white, we shall be satisfied. I'm sorry to say we can't trust his bare word. We've known Mr. Ratcliff break his word."

Mr. Railton frowned in a rather troubled way. His own opinion of his colleague was not unlike Figgy's; but he could not say so.

"That's all we ask, sir," said George Figgins. "Put that to Ratty, if you please, and see what he says."

"I may say, Figgins, that I have already endeavoured

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to persuade Mr. Ratcliff to take a more lenient view of the matter, and he declines to hear a word on the subject."

"That does it, then!" said Kerr.

"Yes, rather!"

"Well, we hold out till Ratty comes round to our terms, sir," said Figgins. "Nothing against you, Mr. Railton; but we're holding the fort."

"Hear, hear!"

"Figgins, I require you to throw open the doors of the New House at once, and to attend lessons this afternoon in the School House," said Mr. Railton.

"And chance it with Ratty afterwards, when he gets well?" asked Figgins.

"Mr. Ratcliff is not likely to leave his bed before Dr. Holmes returns. On his return the Head will deal with the matter."

"But suppose Ratty should recover first?" said Kerr.

"Are we to take our chance of that?"

"I fear that there is nothing else to be done, Kerr."

"We'll find something else, sir," said the Scottish junior.

"What-ho!" said Redfern emphatically.

"Nothing doing, sir," said Figgins. "There's our answer, chalked on the door."

Mr. Railton glanced at the door. "NO SURRENDER!"

in large letters stared him in the face.

"Have you nothing more to say, Figgins?"

"Nothing, sir."

"Then," said Mr. Railton, raising his voice a little, "I must tell you that this state of affairs cannot and will not be allowed to continue. I give you one hour in which to make up your mind. If you do not return to your duty by that time, strong measures will be taken."

"Rats!" roared Pratt.

"Shut up, Pratt!"

"Rot! I'm going to catch him with this apple!"

Figgins knocked the apple out of Pratt's hand just in time.

"Nothing doing, sir," he said. "You'd better go! We're not going to surrender, and you can tell Ratty so. Good-morning, sir!"

Mr. Railton turned and walked back to the School House.

Morning lessons had just ended, and Tom Merry & Co. were coming out into the quadrangle. As Mr. Railton retreated, Pratt regained possession of his ripe apple—which was too ripe for internal consumption. He leaned from the window and hurled it with unerring aim.

Smash!

There was a sharp exclamation from Mr. Railton, as his cap was knocked off his head by the whizzing apple.

"Got him!" grinned Pratt.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed D'Arcy of the School House Fourth. "They've knocked Wailton's tile off—"

Tom Merry ran forward, picked up the cap, and presented it to the Housemaster.

"Thank you, Merry!" said Mr. Railton quietly.

He walked on to the School House, with a heightened colour.

CHAPTER 3.

War!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY looked after Mr. Railton, and then glanced towards the New House.

There was a frown of wrathful indignation on the noble countenance of Arthur Augustus.

"Bai Jove, you fellows!" he breathed. "Knockin' old Wailton's headgear off, you know! It is weally too thick."

"Cheeky cads!" said Blake.

"They want a jolly good hiding!" said Herries wrathfully.

"All very well being up against their own dashed Housemaster—"

"But cheeking our Housemaster is too jolly thick!" said Digby.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Study No. 6 were evidently indignant. Hitherto, the sympathy of the School House fellows had been largely with the rebels. Mr. Ratcliff was not popular in either House.

But now that circumstances had changed, feelings in the School House were changing along with them.

The Head being still away, and Mr. Ratcliff confined to a room in the School House with a severe cold, Mr. Railton came to the head of affairs, and rebellion against Mr. Railton was quite a different matter, in the eyes of the whole School House.

The Terrible Three—Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther of the Shell—came over to Blake & Co. They were looking serious.

"This won't do!" said Tom Merry.

Blake nodded.

"Just what we were saying," he remarked. "There's a limit. I don't say Figgy wasn't right to back up against old Ratty. But he's jolly well not going to cheek our Housemaster!"

"Wathah not!" said Arthur Augustus emphatically. "The fact is, it's time they chucked their stunt," said Manners. "Now Railton's taken control, it's time they toed the line."

"They don't see it," remarked Monty Lowther. "But perhaps we can help them to see it. Let's go and talk to them."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry & Co. walked over to the New House. Figgins and his comrades were still at the window, and they hailed the School House crowd with remarks that were more personal than polite. The warfare between the two Houses of St. Jim's seldom slept for long.

"Hallo, what do you bouncers want on this respectable side of the quad?" inquired Figgins.

"Weally, Figgins—"

"What on earth are you wearing that Guy Fawkes mask for, D'Arcy?" exclaimed Redfern.

"Eh? I am not weahin' a Guy Fawkes mask!"

"My mistake! I thought you were!" said Redfern blandly. "Now I look again, I see it's only your features."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You attah ass!" roared Arthur Augustus.

"Figgins, old man," said Tom Merry, "we've come over to talk sense to you."

"You're going to talk sense?" asked Kerr.

"That's it."

"Has the doctor ordered you to take a thorough change, then?" inquired the Scottish junior.

Tom Merry breathed hard.

"Look here, you ass—"

"Yaas, wathah! Look heah—"

"We don't want any of your New House swank!" roared Blake. "For two pins we'd wade in and mop up the lot of you!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

George Figgins felt along the lapel of his jacket. He extracted therefrom two pins.

"Catch!" he said.

"Eh? What?" ejaculated Blake, as the pins dropped.

"There they are."

"What?"

"The two pins," explained Figgins. "Now wade in and mop up the lot of us."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the New House garrison.

"You cheeky idiot!" howled Blake. "I've a good mind—"

"Gammon!" said Figgins. "You haven't! I doubt a lot whether you've got a mind at all, old infant, let alone a good one."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here!" shouted Tom Merry. "We don't want New House cheek. You New House bouncers have got to stop playing the giddy ox. Got that? Now Ratty's laid up Railton's at the top, and you're not going to be allowed to cheek Railton! Is that clear?"

"Bow-wow!"

"Who the thump's Railton?" asked Fatty Wynn disrespectfully.

"Bai Jove! If you do not speak with respect of our Housemaster, Wynn—"

"Bless your Housemaster!"

"Blow your Housemaster!"

"Bother your Housemaster!"

It was a chorus of defiance from the New House. As a matter of fact, most of the New House fellows respected Mr. Railton as much as his own boys did. But they were not likely to own up to that to the School House fellows.

"Bai Jove! If you speak like that of our Housemastah—"

"Your Housemaster can go and eat coke!" said Figgins. "We're fed up on Housemasters, anyhow!"

"Mr. Railton's Head of St. Jim's now till Dr. Holmes comes back," said Manners.

"The New House doesn't recognise him!" said Figgins loftily. "You School House kids can toe the line, and say 'Yes, sir,' and 'No, sir,' and 'Please, sir,' and 'Oh, sir.' We're not going to!"

"No jolly fear!"

"Railton's told us to toe the line already," grinned Owen. "We've told him to go home and think again."

"If he's got any apparatus to think with," said Pratt. "Don't you bung your merry Housemaster at us, Tom Merry! We can't stand our own Housemaster, and we don't give twopence for yours!"

"Not a brass farthing!" said Jimson. "You cheeky New House rotters—"

"Yah! Go home!"

"I'll tell you what!" exclaimed Tom Merry wrathfully. "You New House kids want a jolly good lesson, and we're the chaps to give you one! If you don't chuck this rot, we'll take a hand and mop you up, and hand you over to the beaks!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Come and do it!" cooed Figgins invitingly. "We're waiting to be mopped up. Yearning for it, in fact. Pining for it."

The School House juniors stared up at the open window in great wrath. The taunting enemy were beyond their reach. It was easy enough to say that the New House should be mopped up without mercy, but getting at the rebels and doing the mopping was a much more difficult matter. On the spur of the moment it was not easy to say what could be done.

Figgins & Co. hurled defiance at the enemy outside, feeling perfectly secure. And from words they proceeded to missiles.

Two or three apples whizzed among the School House crowd below the window, and there was a howl from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy as his topper flew through the air.

Then Figgins got going with his garden squirt. That squirt had already done yeoman service in the alarms and excursions in and around the New House. Now it saw service again. Figgly suddenly leaned out of the window, squirt in hand, dripping with water.

"Look out!" gasped Manners.

The School House crowd surged back, but not in time.

Squooooosh!

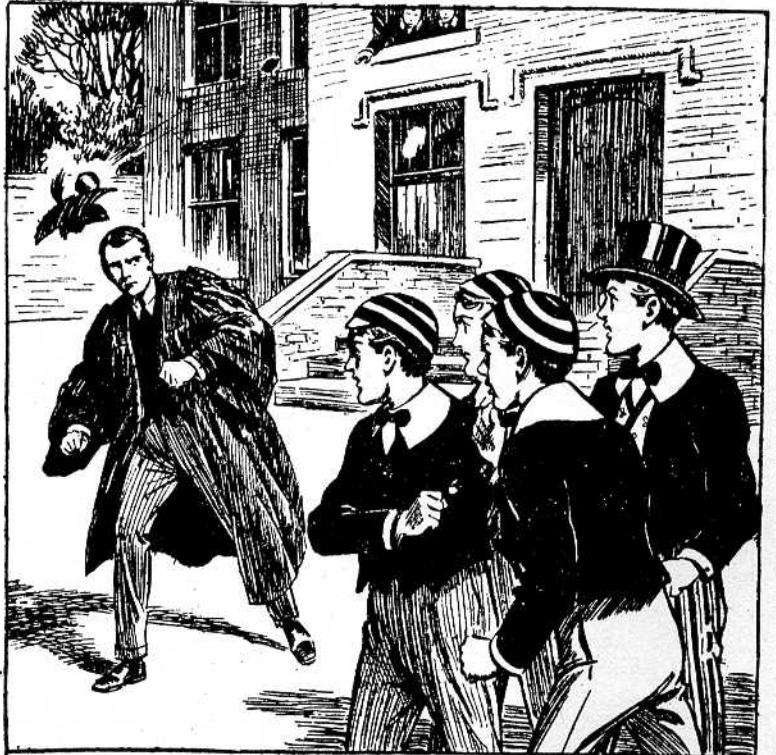
"Oh, my hat!"

"You New House rotter—"

"Groooogh!"

A shower of water fell on Tom Merry & Co., and they scattered. Loud yells of laughter followed them from the New House.

"Come back and have some more!" roared Figgins.



Pratt leaned from the window and hurled the apple with unerring aim. Smash! There was a sharp exclamation from Mr. Railton as his hat was knocked off his head by the whizzing apple. "Bai Jove!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "Those New House wottahs have knocked Railton's tite off!"

"You School House rotters want a wash! Come and have some more!"

But Tom Merry & Co. did not return. They retired out of range, heedless of the taunts and catcalls from the New House. But they had made up their minds now. It was war!

CHAPTER 4.

An Advance in Force.

"THERE'S somethin' on!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy made that remark as the School House crowd were going in to lessons that afternoon.

The New House was still defiant. "NO SURRENDER!" still stared in big chalk letters from the door, and the rebels were living up to their motto.

Of the New House members of the Fourth Form and the Shell, only half a dozen came in to lessons, and they were the fellows who had avoided taking part in the rebellion from the first—Clampe, Chowle & Co.

The New House seniors and the New House fags were also at lessons, but so far not a single member of Figgins' rebel brigade had weakened. Every fellow who had rebelled against Mr. Ratcliff was still in a state of rebellion. And it was pretty clear that there would be no deserters. Indeed, a deserter would have had to argue the matter out first with George Figgins, and George Figgins was a hard hitter, and in such circumstances he certainly would have hit his hardest.

What Mr. Railton would do, now that he had taken control, was an interesting question to the rebels, and to the School House fellows also. Tom Merry & Co. were prepared to back up their Housemaster all along the line in reducing the New House to obedience, but somehow it had not occurred to Victor Railton to ask their assistance.

But there was, as Gussy remarked, something on. "Wailton's been awound talkin' to the pweffects," said Arthur Augustus. "I wathah fancy there's going to be a wumpus while we're in class this aftahnoon, deah boys."

"The pweffects won't be much good," said Jack Blake disparagingly. "Better let the Fourth take a hand."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Better still, the Shell!" remarked Tom Merry. "I fancy we could handle Figgins & Co. fairly easily."

"I don't think the Shell would be much good," said Blake, shaking his head.

"Ass!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

The argument was interrupted, as the Shell and Fourth had to go into their respective Form-rooms.

It was not till all the juniors were in class that Mr. Railton proceeded with the strong measures he had planned. In point of fact, Mr. Railton sympathised a good deal with the New House rebels in their revolt against their tyrannical Housemaster. So long as Mr. Ratcliff had remained at the head of affairs the School House master had carefully kept clear of the dispute. But matters were altered now that he was himself at the head of the school. A state of revolt could not be allowed to continue; that was impossible. If it was prolonged it might get into the papers. It would get to the ears of the governors. It might even reach the Head, who was in no state to be worried. And as Mr. Railton was now in control the responsibility was his.

Mr. Ratcliff—now laid up, and sneezing and coughing in bed—had left him a legacy of trouble, as it were; but it was up to the School House master to see that order was restored, and he intended to do it.

While the Third, the Fourth, the Shell, and the Fifth were in class, Mr. Railton led the Sixth into the quadrangle.

It was with the help of the top Form that he intended to quell the insurrection.

Monteith and Baker and Gray, the New House prefects, were quite keen to deal with the cheeky juniors who had defied them, and the School House prefects would have followed Mr. Railton anywhere. Kildare and Darrel, and Langton and Rushden, and Mulvaney major and Knox, and the rest, turned out quite cheerfully, asplant in hand.

It was really hard lines upon the juniors to be left out of the battle, and so Tom Merry & Co. felt. But Housemasters had to be given their head, as Monty Lowther observed. For reasons best known to himself—quite inexplicable to the juniors—Mr. Railton preferred to rely upon the Sixth Form.

Figgins & Co. were on the watch, and they looked a little serious as Mr. Railton strode across the quadrangle, with more than a dozen big Sixth-Formers in his wake.

"Hallo! This looks like real business!" remarked Kerr. Figgins nodded.

"We're up against it!" he confessed.

"If only the grub holds out!" murmured Fatty Wynn. "Cheese it, Fatty! We've got to put up a fight now, and no mistake! No surrender!" said Figgins grimly.

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"No fear!"

"I—I say—" stammered Pratt. Figgins fixed a stern look on Pratt.

"Well?" he snapped.

"I—I—I say—"

"You were fast enough to knock Railton's cap off with an apple, you cheeky chump!" said Figgins. "Now, are you thinking of surrender?"

"N-n-no. But—"

"That's a good thing for you, Pratty. If you were thinking of surrender, old top, I should feel bound to knock you into a cocked hat!" said Figgins pleasantly. "Any chap who suggests surrendering will be put through it in a way he will find rather painful!"

Pratt was silent. After that plain hint, Percival Pratt deemed it wiser to keep his misgivings to himself.

Figgins looked from the window as the School House master came up with his formidable force. Mr. Railton signed to him.

"Figgins!"

"Yes, sir?" said Figgy.

"Open the door of the New House at once!"

"Sorry, sir—"

"Will you obey me, Figgins?"

"Can't be done, sir."

"I have every desire to deal leniently with you, Figgins," said Mr. Railton patiently. "I recognise that you no doubt believe that you have some justification for your revolt against Mr. Ratcliff's authority. But you are not dealing with Mr. Ratcliff now. The school is in my charge, and I cannot allow this state of affairs to continue. If it ends at once, I will see that the whole affair is left over until the Head's return, when he can deal with it personally. No punishment shall be inflicted before Dr. Holmes comes home."

Figgins paused.

"I—I say, that's not a bad offer, Figgy," whispered Fatty Wynn. "And—and we haven't much grub left—Ow!"

Fatty Wynn's remarks stopped suddenly as Figgy's rather bony elbow caught him in the ribs.

"Well, Figgins?" said Mr. Railton.

"We know you mean fair play, sir," said Figgins. "We respect you, and we don't respect our own Housemaster, or trust him, either. But if Mr. Ratcliff recovers, he takes control as senior Housemaster. It was because he was senior Housemaster that the Head left him in charge. He wouldn't care for any promises you made us, sir."

"Not a rap!" said Kerr

"So, with all respect to you, sir," said Figgins politely, "we're holding out till Ratty comes to our terms in black and white, or until the Head comes home."

"That is enough, Figgins. I desired to end this matter as peaceably as possible," said the School House master, frowning. "I will wait five minutes, while you think it over. If the doors are not opened by then, I shall use whatever measures are necessary to quell this disturbance."

"We shall resist, sir."

Mr. Railton made no rejoinder to that. George Figgins closed the window and fastened it, and looked round on the rather grave faces of his comrades.

"We're in for it," he said. "But we're going to pull through. I don't say they're not a hefty crowd—"

"They jolly well are!" murmured Digges.

"But we're in a strong position, and we're going to put up a good fight," said Figgins. "We've got pails of water ready, and cricket-bats and stumps, and mops and brooms. They won't find it so jolly easy to get in. We're not standing on ceremony with them. Hit hard and hit often, that's the idea. If any fellow here is thinking of surrender, I'm willing to fight him before they start."

Apparently nobody was thinking of surrender—at least, nobody accepted Figgy's offer of a scrap. The defenders prepared their weapons for defence with beating hearts.

There was a sudden yell from Redfern:

"They're coming!"

And the attack started.

CHAPTER 5.

"Buck Up, New House!"

CRASH!

"Phew!"

"Look out!"

In the hall of the New House Figgins & Co. gathered, prepared for the fray. Outside, crashing blow after blow was falling on the lock of the great door. The enemy were not seeking to enter by any of the windows, as Figgins had expected. The attack was falling on the door itself. And a sledge-hammer, wielded by the athletic Housemaster himself, made the big door ring and crack as its blows landed.

The lock was a big one and a strong one; but it was quite certain that it would not stand long against usage like this.

"My hat! They'll get through!" muttered Owen.

"Let 'em!" said Figgins recklessly. Owen shrugged his shoulders. Once the big door was open the assailants would enter in a body, and any number of juniors would scarcely be able to stand up to fifteen or sixteen athletic Sixth-Formers. George Figgins realised that himself.

Crash, crash!
"Phew!" murmured Kerr. "Railton's a bit different from Ratty as a chap to tackle, Figgy. Hotter stuff, and no mistake!"

Figgins nodded.
Crash, crash, crash!
Figgins set his lips. There was no getting at the assailants from the upper windows, as the porch of the New House sheltered them. Now that Mr Railton had decided upon really strong measures, there seemed no way of preventing the enemy from entering the House. And once they were inside, at close quarters, the affair was as good as ended, as every fellow there knew.

Crash, crash!
The lock flew into pieces.
But the door still held; it was bolted top and bottom. Crash, crash! went the sledge-hammer again. The bolts were strong, but again it was only a matter of time before they should give.

"Better chuck it, and make the best of it!" muttered Pratt.

Smack!
Percival Pratt gave a howl as Figgins smote him.
"Ow! Warrer you up to?"
"Shut up!" said Figgins savagely. "Trouble enough without funking. We've got to barricade the door, you fellows. Drag the dashed furniture along—anything—anyhow! We can pile it up before the door goes."

"My hat! There'll be some damage done!" said Redfern.
"Hang the damage!" said Figgins irritably.
"Oh, all right! Keep your wool on!"
"We're backing you up to the finish, Figgy, old man," said Kerr loyally. "Pile in, you fellows! No time to lose."

Figgins set the example, and his followers backed him up strenuously. Forms were dragged out of the dining-room, and stacked against the door. Then chairs and tables from the Housemaster's and prefects' studies were dragged along, and stacked up. Kerr, in his thoughtful Scottish way, brought his tool-chest on the scene, and started in with hammer and nails, while Wynn laboured with screws and screwdriver.

Upright tables were screwed and nailed to the floor, just inside the door, with a reckless disregard for damage. Chairs were nailed to them, and the dining-room forms screwed and nailed on to the door itself, as well as on to the surrounding stacks of furniture. Meanwhile, the top bolt had given under the crashing blows from without.

"Now the dining-room table!" gasped Figgins.
"Oh, my hat!"
"Buck up!"

The dining-room table was a terrific affair to be carried about, but the desperate rebels managed it. It was borne out into the hall, with every rebel lending a hand, and jammed against the stack of furniture. By that time the barricade stretched across the hall from side to side, and completely blocked the doorway. As the door opened inwards, it was not likely to open easily against such a defence.

Figgins & Co., perspiring from their hurried labours, hot and breathless, waited. The crashing outside ceased at last; the second bolt had gone, and the great door hung only by its hinges.

It came open a few inches, and then stopped.
"Push harder!" came Mr. Railton's voice.

"Something's blocking it," said Kildare.

"All together, my boys!"

Six inches the door came, and then it stopped dead. A face was seen peering into the opening, and Figgins let fly with his garden squirt through the barricade. The face belonged to Knox of the Sixth, and Gerald Knox gave a gurgling howl as he drew it away.

Then began a steady pressure on the door, the Sixth-Formers exerting all their strength.

Figgins & Co. watched breathlessly. But the attack exhausted itself in vain; the barricade would have resisted the pressure of an elephant on the door.

"They're done!" muttered Figgins triumphantly. There was a breathless chuckle from the garrison. The attack had been defeated by Figgy's desperate measures.

Mr. Railton's voice was heard outside.
"The door appears to be barricaded—"

"It jolly well is barricaded, sir!" sang out Pratt, full of courage again now. "You jolly well won't shove in here!"

"Come!" said Mr. Railton. Retreating footsteps were heard.

"Hurrah!" yelled Figgins.

"They're going—"
"Bravo!"

The rebels cheered—with relief as much as with triumph. But their cheers were suddenly interrupted.

Crash! Crash!
The sledgehammer was crashing on the kitchen door, at the back of the house.

Figgins gave a jump.
"My hat! They've gone round—"

"We shall have to barricade that—"
"There's nothing left—"

"Oh, crumbs!"
Crash! Crash! Crash!

George Figgins scudded away to the kitchen. Five or six of the rebels followed him. The door was already giving under the hefty attack from without. Nearly all the furniture in the New House was stacked against the front door, backed by the heavy dining-table. Another barricade of the same kind was not feasible. Figgins & Co. seized the long kitchen-table, and backed it up to the door. Then they retreated from the kitchen, Figgins closing and locking the inner door after him.

"They'll get into the kitchen!" said Redfern, with a grave face.

"Looks like it!"
"And this inside door won't stop them long—"

"I know!"
"Oh dear!" said Pratt dismally. The ups and downs of Pratt's spirits on that eventful afternoon were really



The New House rebels worked with a will. Forms were dragged out of the dining-room and stacked against the door, together with chairs and tables. Kerr brought his tool-chest on the scene and started in with hammer and nails, while Fatty Wynn laboured with screws and screw-driver.

remarkable. "We're done. You ought to have taken Railton's offer when he made it, Figgy. We— Yaroooooh!"

Pratt sat down with a bump.

"Now we're getting upstairs," said Figgins, unheeding Pratt after he had bowled him over. "We've lost the ground floor, and there's no good denying it. We're going to hold the second floor."

"Good old Figgy!"

"A fight to a finish!" said Redfern resolutely. "Come on!"

"Hold on!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn excitedly. "Figgy—"

"What's the row now?"

"The grub—"

"What?"

"The grub's in the pantry—"

"Hang the grub!" roared Figgins furiously. "If you say grub again I'll scalp you! Come on!"

Figgins rushed for the staircase. As a matter of fact, Fatty Wynn's reference to the "grub" was not so much out of place; standing a siege without provisions was not good generalship. And so Figgins realised the next moment He turned back, and unlocked the kitchen door from the passage.

"Bag all the grub you can carry!" he hissed. "Buck up, all of you; we can't come back for a second lot!"

Not an instant was wasted.

The outer kitchen door was already trembling and cracking under the hefty blows from without.

The rebels grabbed whatever came to their hands, from kitchen and pantry, and trooped out with it. Much had to be left, but that could not be helped. Fatty Wynn had his pockets full, and his arms full, and his mouth full. He fairly staggered under his load as he retreated, and dropped several articles en route. But there was no time to stop for them. Figgins closed the kitchen door again, and locked it, as the outer door fell in. There was a rush of feet in the kitchen. The assailants were inside the New House at last. But the door between the kitchen and the passage stopped them. It was not likely to stop them for long, but it gave the rebels breathing-space.

Crash! Crash!

"That lock won't last long!" babbled Pratt.

"Come on!" yelled Figgins.

The rebels scudded up the staircase. At the first landing there was a turn in the staircase, and it was this spot that Figgins had chosen, with a good general's eye, for defence.

Bedstead and beds were dragged out of the dormitories, and stacked on the landing, crammed from side to side.

Some of the bedsteads stood on their legs, some on their ends, some upside-down, some interlaced with the others, legs sticking through wire mattresses. Bedstead after bedstead was added to the weird pile, till the stack was high, and encroached upon the upper stairs.

Crash!

The inner door from the kitchen gave, and the Sixth-Formers rushed through. There was a trampling of feet in the passages and the hall below.

"All serene now, sir!" said Kildare.

"Figgins!" shouted Mr. Railton.

"Adsum!" Figgins chuckled breathlessly from above.

"They're upstairs, sir," said Darrel.

"Follow them!"

Mr. Railton came on the lower stairs, with the crowd of big seniors behind him. He stopped and stared at the sight of the stack of bedsteads that barred all further progress.

"Bless my soul!" he ejaculated.

"My hat! We can't get past that!" muttered Knox.

"Figgins!" shouted Mr. Railton. "You foolish, reckless boy! I command you to cease this instantly, before more damage is done!"

"Can't be did, sir!"

"Follow me!" exclaimed Mr. Railton.

He came up the staircase, with the Sixth-Formers at his heels.

"Yah! Go home!" roared Pratt. Once more Percival Pratt was all defiance and reckless daring. "Get out!" And Pratt hurled a bolster from above.

It caught Mr. Railton, and curled round his neck, and swept him backwards. He just saved himself by catching at the banisters.

Then from above came a thundering shower of missiles. The assailants were open to fire at last, and the fire was hot. Pillows and bolsters, blankets and rugs, even chairs, came hurtling down the staircase, and there were wild yells from the attacking party.

Along with the missiles came streams of water from Figgins' squirt, and water by the pailful hurled by Kerr and Wynn.

The fusillade was too tremendous.

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The assailants scuttled down the staircase under it, even Mr. Railton retreating with the rest.

The attack was baffled.

And from the New House juniors, safe behind the barricaded landing, came a breathless yell of triumph.

CHAPTER 6.

Up to Tom Merry & Co.

TOM MERRY & CO., over in the School House, had given little attention to their lessons that eventful afternoon.

In the Shell-room, Mr. Linton had hard work to keep his pupils up to the mark, and he did not succeed; and in the Fourth Form-room, Mr. Lathom was equally hard pressed. Even in the Third Form-room, the frowning brow and ready cane of Mr. Selby lacked their usual efficacy. For, from the direction of the New House, loud sounds of conflict wafted over, and the School House juniors were agog with thrilling excitement.

Never had lessons been so troublesome to the masters, and never had they seemed so long to the pupils.

It really seemed to Tom Merry & Co. as if that long, long afternoon would never end.

But everything comes to an end at last, and lessons did finish, and the juniors were able to scuttle out into the quadrangle to ascertain what had happened.

Baggy Trimble reported that Mr. Railton was in his study—and the Sixth could be seen about their quarters. If the attack on the New House had succeeded, the assailants were evidently not in occupation of the conquered territory. But had it succeeded?

That was what the School House fellows wanted to know; and they trooped across the quadrangle to inquire.

They stared at the sight of the damage done to the New House.

"My only hat! They've been goin' it!" said Cardew of the Fourth.

"Hallo, here's Kildare!"

"What's been goin' on, Kildare, deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

The St. Jim's captain looked out of the New House with a frown. Since the attack on the staircase had failed, the assailants had remained in possession of the ground-floor. The Sixth-Formers had worked at unstacking the barricade, and had shifted the piled furniture, and the big door was wide open now, and fastened open. Kildare and Darrel remained on the scene, to see that the rebels did not descend and close it.

For the present, the attacks had ceased but the rebels were not to be allowed to regain the territory they had lost.

"You kids cut off!" said Kildare.

"But what's happened?" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Where are Figgins & Co.?"

"Upstairs!" said Kildare briefly.

"Holding out?" exclaimed Levison of the Fourth.

"Yes."

"Let's have a look at them, Kildare," pleaded Tom Merry.

Kildare hesitated, and then nodded.

"Well, don't start any ragging," he said; and he allowed the School House juniors to swarm into the house.

"Breaking up the giddy, happy home, and no mistake!" grinned Monty Lowther. "I wonder what Ratty will say when he sees this?"

"What will the Head say?" said Clive.

"Something emphatic, I should imagine!" chuckled Jack Blake. "After all, it's Ratty's fault."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Ratty's fault to start with," said Tom Merry judiciously. "But these cheeky New House bounders oughtn't to be backing up against our Housemaster."

"Quite wight, deah boy! I have weally nevah heard of such feahful cheek!"

"Rats to you!" came a howl down the staircase. "Take that image back to the Chamber of Horrors, somebody."

"Bai Jove!"

Tom Merry & Co. stared up the barricaded staircase. The stacked bedsteads, jammed into one another and into the banisters, showed why the attack had stopped. The stairs were still strewn with the missiles that had dropped there. Over the ragged, tangled barricade Figgins & Co. grinned at the School House juniors.

"You fags taking a hand?" called out Figgins. "You're welcome to if you like! We've knocked the Sixth into a cocked hat, and we sha'n't make much of a mouthful of you kids."

"Weally, Figgins—"

"Cheeky ass!" growled Blake.

"Come up, you School House bounders!" roared Pratt. "We're ready for you! Yah! Funks!"

"Bai Jove If you chawctewise me as a funk, Pwatt,

I shall certainly come up and give you a feahful thwashin'!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus hotly.

There was a howl of defiance from Pratt.

"Come on, then! Funk!"

"Weally, Pwatt—"

"Funk!" roared Pratt.

"That does it, bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus rushed up the staircase.

"Come back, you ass!" roared Blake. "You can't get through."

"Wats!"

Arthur Augustus' noble blood was boiling with wrath. He charged gallantly up the staircase, greeted with loud laughter by the New House juniors above. Pratt reached over the barricade and swiped at him with a mop dipped in water. Arthur Augustus dodged the mop, but he could not dodge a broom that reached out at the same time, handled by Owen. The broom caught Gussy under his aristocratic chin.

"Gwooooh!"

Kildare came striding towards the staircase below.

"I told you there was to be no ragging," he snapped. "Clear out of this at once, the lot of you. Come down the stairs, D'Arcy."

Arthur Augustus came down—rolling! A cushion, hurled over the barricade, caught him full upon his Greek nose. It was not in obedience to Kildare's command, but because he lost his footing, that Gussy came down—and he came with a roll and a rush.

"Oh, deah! Gwoogh! My hat! Oh, cwumbs!" gasped Arthur Augustus, as he landed.

"You young ass—"

"Weally, Kildare! Oh, cwumbs!"

"Clear off."

Arthur Augustus scrambled up.

"I am goin' to give Pwatt a feahful thwashin'—"

Kildare took Gussy's noble ear between finger and thumb, and led him away, the swell of St. Jim's loudly protesting. There was a yell of laughter from the New House garrison.

"Any more coming on?" sang out Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Outside, you fags!" said Darrel of the Sixth tersely.

Tom Merry & Co. retired from the scene, followed by yells of derision from the rebels of the New House. The School House crowd looked rather red and excited when they emerged into the quadrangle.

"It's up to us, now!" said Tom Merry. "We're not standing that from New House bounders! It's up to us!"

"Yaas, wathah!" gasped Arthur Augustus, rubbing his ear.

"They've challenged us now," said Kangaroo of the Shell. "We're bound to give the cheeky rotters the kybosh!"

"Hear, hear!"

"The seniors can't manage it," said Monty Lowther. "Even old Railton seems to have slipped up on the job. It's up to us."

Manners looked thoughtful.

"I fancy Railton's got his reasons for giving them a rest," he said. "They can't hold out long upstairs in the New House. For one thing, their grub will give out. And they'll have to sleep on the bare boards, I imagine, considering how they've built up their barricade. I fancy Railton's giving them time to come round, to save doing further damage."

"Anyhow, they're still holding out, and it's up to us to put 'em in their place," said Jack Blake. "They've asked for it."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We're taking the matter in hand," said Tom Merry decidedly. "They're not going to check our Housemaster, and they're not going to challenge us and call us funks. We're going to handle them, and bring them up in the way they should go."

"Hear, hear!" roared Grundy of the Shell.

There were no dissentient voices. Whether it was "up" to the School House juniors or not, they unanimously decided that it was up to them; and their resolve was made. And an excited crowd adjourned to the Hobby Club room in the School House to hold a council of war.

CHAPTER 7.

The Plan of Campaign.

IT was rather an excited council of war in the School House. There were many opinions on the subject in hand, and many of them were expressed simultaneously, which led to confusion. Grundy of the Shell was the most emphatic. George Alfred Grundy was ready to take the lead—he always was. Grundy was in favour of a frontal attack on the rebels, and fairly overwhelming them by it. The fact that the Sixth-Formers had been stopped by the barricade on the stairs did not matter to Grundy. He was

prepared to lead the juniors to success where Mr. Railton and the Sixth had failed.

"You back me up, that's all," said Grundy confidently. "I'll see you through. Just leave it in my hands."

"Weally, Gwunday—"

"You howling ass, Grundy," said Jack Blake, in measured tones. "We shall be stopped if we start on the New House openly. Mr. Railton wouldn't allow it."

"I shouldn't allow anybody to stop me."

"Fathead!"

"If you're funky, Blake—"

"You cheeky owl—"

"Order!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "It's settled that we're not going to tackle the New House yet—Railton would be down on it. We don't want a scrap with the Sixth ourselves. That isn't in the programme. It's no good asking Railton for leave to handle the cads—he wouldn't give us leave. We've got to manage it without Railton or the prefects chipping in at all."

"Yaas, wathah—we've got to keep it dark."

"Not that a frontal attack would be any good," added Tom. "Nobody could get past that barricade on the staircase."

Grundy snorted contemptuously.

"I could!" he snapped.

"You can go and do it on your lonely own, then," said Tom. "This isn't a matter for bull-at-a-gate tactics, Grundy."

"If you fellows will back me up—"

"But we won't," said Blake. "We're not looking for a new leader, Grundy; and if we were, we shouldn't pick out the biggest idiot at St. Jim's!"

"Wathah not!"

"We've got to use strategy in this," said Tom Merry sagely. "It's got to be kept dark, to begin with, as Railton would stop us if he knew. We're going to hand over the New House when we've captured it—as a sort of present to Railton—"

"Hear, hear!"

"Then it will be an accomplished fact—"

"Un fait accompli!" said Dig, who was strong on French. "Exactly! Railton can't quarrel with a fait accompli," said Tom. "Now, that means a night attack."

"I suppose it does!" agreed Gore.

"Of course it does! And rushing up the staircase and biffing our nappers on a stack of bedsteads won't wash. That may be good enough for the Sixth, but it won't do for us."

"Hear, hear!" grinned Monty Lowther.

"A ladder to a window?" asked Herries thoughtfully. "We can't bag Taggles' ladder—"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"I've got a better idea than that. There's going to be two attacks—one a false attack to draw their attention, the other the genuine article, to give them the kybosh."

"That's not a bad idea," agreed Blake.

"My dear chap, it's a jolly good one. At the witching hour of midnight, as Shakespeare puts it—"

"Bother Shakespeare!"

"At the witching hour of midnight," repeated Tom Merry calmly, "we shall be on the scene. One party will rush into the house and make a sham attack on the staircase, to draw their attention downward—"

"And then?"

"The other party will be on the roof—"

"On the roof!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus.

"Exactly!"

"On the giddy roof at midnight, like merry old Asmodeus!" said Monty Lowther. "Better sign the 'Daily Mail' insurance coupon first!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It may be a bit risky," said Tom Merry. "But as the Johnny says in the play, it's the only way. There's the trap in the roof that's to be used in case of fire—we shall use it from outside, to get in."

"It will be fastened inside," said Gunn.

"We shall take a crowbar."

"Good!" said Blake, rather slowly however.

"And how are we going to get on the roof?" queried Cardew. "Are we going to borrow an aeroplane from somewhere?"

"It will be a full moon to-night—"

"Oh, good!" said Grundy of the Shell, with crushing sarcasm. "We'll get the man in the moon to let down a rope to us."

"Grundy, old man, don't be funny—funnier than nature made you, I mean," said Tom Merry. "It will be a full moon, so we shall have lots of light."

"Good!" said Monty Lowther, who could never slip the opportunity for a pun—good or bad. "A light on the roof—that's all we need! We've only got to alight on the roof!"

"Keep that for the Comic Column, old infant!" implored Tom Merry. "There's ways and means of getting on the roof. You've heard of rope-ladders?"

"Oh!" said Blake.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Wildwake is awfully good with a lasso—he can lasso a chimney-pot, you know, and we can climb up the rope. It will be all right if we put on some vewy old clothes."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ass!" said Tom Merry politely. "I shall climb up first and carry the rope. The kitchen and things are built out from the back of the New House, and above them there's thick ivy right to the roof. I can climb the ivy, fasten the rope-ladder, and the rest is easy."

"Too jolly risky!" said Manners.

"Bow-wow!"

"You won't have the nerve," said Trimble.

"Kick Trimble out, somebody," said Tom Merry. "Now that's settled, we'd better get to work on the rope-ladder. It will take some time to make."

"Who's going to lead the attack downstairs?" asked Grundy.

"You can, if you like, old top," answered Tom. "You'll only have to yell and kick up a row to draw their attention. Even you have brains enough for that!"

"I'll do it," said Grundy, with a snort, "and your dashed attack on the roof won't be needed. I shall carry all before me, if I'm properly backed up."

"All the better!" said Tom, laughing. "Now that's settled, let's get to work!"

And after some little further discussion, the council of war broke up.

Tom Merry & Co. had a hurried tea, and after that they were busy.

Tom cycled down to Rylcombe to purchase the necessary rope, a dozen fellows contributing the cash required.

In Study No. 10 in the Shell, a crowd of juniors were at work that evening—much to the detriment of their prep. But prep could not be considered at such an exciting stage in the history of St. Jim's.

The rope-ladder was duly manufactured, and strengthened with an immense number of knots.

When it was completed, it was concealed in the box-room, to be called for when wanted.

The School House juniors went to bed that night in a state of suppressed excitement. Long after lights were out in the School House, electric lights were blazing from all the upstairs windows of the New House. In the besieged House, Figgins & Co. kept watch and ward, prepared for defence in case of a night attack. And when midnight tolled out from the clock-tower of St. Jim's, Tom Merry and his comrades were astir.

CHAPTER 8.

By the Light of the Moon,

"QUIET!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Shut up, Gussy!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Quiet, ass!"

The box-room in the School House was crowded. Outside, the moonlight fell in a silver flood on the leads of the out-house. The window was open, and one by one the School House juniors crept through, dropped lightly on the leads, and clambered to the ground below.

Nearly all the Fourth and the Shell had turned out of their dormitories for the raid.

Baggy Trimble preferred to remain in his warm bed, and so did Mellish and Crooke and Racke and a few others. But the slackers were not wanted. There were plenty of fellows made of sterner stuff, to back up Tom Merry in dealing with the New House rebels.

The School House below was wrapped in slumber. Mr. Raifton, fast asleep, certainly was not dreaming that the juniors of his House were taking the matter into their own hands. Mr. Ratcliff in fitful slumber in his room, was dreaming of administering floggings all round to Figgins & Co. without a suspicion that the doom of the rebels was at hand. Over in the New House most of the garrison were asleep, but a careful and wary watch was being kept by Figgy's sentries. Grundy's frontal attack, when it came, was quite certain of defeat. It remained to be seen whether Tom Merry's strategy would have better fortune.

The School House array were all out in the quadrangle at last.

"Quiet!" commanded Tom Merry.

"Weally, you know——"

"Order!"

"Old chap, you talk too much!" murmured Blake, "Set us a giddy example!"

There was a faint chuckle among the raiders.

"Follow on!" said Tom Merry, suppressing his feelings.

"Yaas, wathah!"

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Quietly enough, the raiders marched across towards the New House. In the shadow of a group of trees Tom Merry divided his forces.

He had already picked out the fellows who were to back him up in the rather desperate attempt. The Terrible Three, and Study No. 6, and Levison, Cardew, and Clive, and Kangaroo, Talbot, Dane, Glyn, Julian, Hammond, Reilly, and two or three others, were the storming-party. The rest were assigned to back up Grundy in the sham attack—which George Alfred intended to turn into a real attack, carrying all before it.

"You understand, Grundy——"

"Better than you can tell me!" interrupted Grundy.

Tom Merry breathed hard.

"Listen to me, you ass! You're not to attack till I give the signal. I'll whistle when we're safe on the roof."

"I don't suppose you'll ever get on the roof," answered Grundy coolly. "It's rather too hefty a job for you. Look here, I'll wait till the clock strikes the half-hour, and then I'll pile in."

"That will do. The chime will be the signal."

"Right-ho!" said Grundy.

"Keep in cover till then——"

"Leave it to me, old chap. I know better than you can tell me!" said George Alfred confidently.

Again Tom Merry had to suppress his feelings. It was no time for punching the nose of the great George Alfred.

Leaving Grundy and his numerous party in the shadow of the trees, Tom Merry led his own followers round the New House to the back of the building.

It was easy enough to climb to the leads over the kitchen buildings, and a few minutes were enough.

The hardest part of the task remained to be done.

Thick tendrils of ivy covered the wall above, offering good and safe hand and foothold to a climber. But the height was great, and the juniors looked up at the wall with many misgivings. The ivy glimmered and rustled in the moonlight.

"I—I say, Tom——" murmured Manners.

"All serene, old chap. I'm taking up a cord. I'll let it down for the rope-ladder."

"Right. But——"

"Give me a bunk to begin with."

If Tom Merry felt any misgivings, he did not betray it by tone or look. Certainly, if the danger had been ten times as great he would not have turned back at that point, after leading his followers to the scene of the assault—like that famous general, who, with ten thousand men, "marched them up the hill, and then marched them down again."

Manners and Lowther bunked up their leader, and Tom got a good hold on to the thick ivy.

Then he began to climb.

His chums watched him anxiously from below.

It was true that the feat required only a steady head and an iron nerve. But a momentary loss of nerve meant a fall that could only have ended in a sudden, fearful death.

But Tom Merry was not likely to lose his nerve.

He climbed on steadily—not hastily; taking his time, and selecting his hold with care before he trusted his weight.

Foot by foot, yard by yard, he mounted, the ivy swaying and rustling round him.

"Bai Jove, he's done it!" muttered Arthur Augustus at last, with a deep breath.

Tom Merry had reached the stone coping at the edge of the roof.

He clambered over it, and disappeared from the sight of the juniors standing on the leads.

"Good old Tommy!" murmured Lowther.

A cord came slithering down from above. Lowther tied the end firmly to the rope-ladder, and jerked the cord as a signal. It was drawn up, and the long rope-ladder lengthened along the ivy.

The end of it was drawn over the coping, and Tom Merry secured it, with many knots and windings, to a chimney-stack.

Then there was a signal-whistle.

Talbot of the Shell was the first to mount the ladder. It was an easy enough task to climb now.

Talbot disappeared on the roof, and Lowther followed, then Manners, then Jack Blake, and then, one by one, the rest of the storming-party.

The last of the party had landed safely on the roof of the New House, when the half-hour chimed from the clock-tower.

"Time!" murmured Lowther.

The juniors found themselves in the midst of a rather confusing agglomeration of flat and sloping roofs. The New House was built rather irregularly, many additions having been made to the building at different periods. But Tom Merry was not long in finding the trap. It was, as he expected, fastened within.

"Who's got the crowbar?" asked Tom.

“Here you are!” said Kangaroo. There was a sudden roar from within the New House. In the silence of the night the sudden din was startling. “Bai Jove! Gwunday's goin' it!” The sham attack was beginning. Tom Merry drove the crowbar under the edge of the trap, and forced it. There was a creak, and a crack, as the trap gave. It was drawn up, and the opening in the roof appeared in view. Below was a square landing at the top of the stairs, two floors above the landing where Figgins & Co. were guarding their barricade, and quite out of sight of the New House garrison. It was lighted—for every light in the New House was turned full on.

“Follow your leader!” said Tom Merry. There was a ladder below, fixed for use in case of fire. Tom Merry lowered himself through the opening, and got his feet on the ladder inside. From below a deafening din ascended.

“Come on, deah boys!” ejaculated Arthur Augustus. He dropped in after Tom Merry, and then, in hot haste, the rest of the party followed; and when all were inside, Tom Merry led the rush down the stairs, to take Figgins & Co. in the rear.

CHAPTER 9.

A Fight to a Finish.

GRUNDY of the Shell was going strong. He had waited with great impatience—inwardly convinced that, if anything was done that night it was going to be done by his able self, George Alfred Grundy. Waiting for Tom Merry seemed so much waste of time to George Alfred. Indeed, probably he would not have waited till the half-hour if his followers had been willing to follow him to an immediate attack. But they weren't.

Grundy intended that attack to turn into the genuine article, and lead on to glorious victory; but his companions were not figuring on anything of the kind. They were there to carry out Tom Merry's instructions—which was rather a handicap to Grundy as a great chief.

The half-hour chimed at last, to Grundy's great relief.

“Come on!” he exclaimed, at the first stroke.

“Wait till it's finished,” said Wilkins.

“Rats! Come on, I tell you!”

“Tom Merry said—” began Kerruish.

“Blow Tom Merry!” said Grundy

forcibly.

“Blow him as much as you like, but we're doing as he said,” remarked the Manx junior coolly.

“Look here, Kerruish—”

“There's the last stroke,” said Dur-

rance. “We're ready now.”

“Come on, confound you!”

Grundy started at a rush for the New House. He had a cricket-stump in his hand—a stump that was to do great execution among the New House rebels if they ventured to resist the great George Alfred.

Grundy came into the New House with a rush and plenty of noise, and started off for the staircase. Then he made the discovery that his followers were not yet in the house.

They did not seem to be in such a hurry as Grundy. George Alfred glared round for them.

“Come on, you slackers!” he bawled.

“Hallo! Ware School House cads!”

roared the voice of George Figgins above.

“Look out!”

The New House garrison were half asleep, but they were wakeful enough in a twinkling.

There was a rush of the defenders to the barricade on the stairs.

“Here they come!” shouted Kerr.

“Give 'em socks!”

“It's Grundy!” chuckled Fatty Wynn.

“The fags have taken it on. We'll give 'em a lesson!”

“Give 'em jip!” roared Figgins.

“Will you come on, you slackers!” yelled Grundy.

The School House party swarmed into the New House now. Grundy waved his stump, which, like the white plumes of Navarre of old, was to lead on to glorious victory.

“Follow me!” he bawled.

And he rushed up the stairs.

“Come on!” grinned Kerruish. “Not too near—but come on!”

Everybody but Grundy intended the sham attack to be a sham attack. They had no fancy for charging an impassable barricade with cricket-bats and brooms wielded behind it. They charged up a few stairs, yelling and stamping, to make as much noise as possible, and to make Figgins & Co. believe that the assault was genuine.

It was genuine enough as far as Grundy was concerned. Fearless as a bull charging a gate, Grundy rushed to the attack, and reached the barricaded landing.

“Back up!” he roared.

“Hurrah! Down with the New House!” came in a yell from behind him; and there was a terrific tramping and stamping and yelling.

Grundy was under the impression that his splendid lead had bucked up the School House juniors to the fighting pitch. He grasped at the barricaded bedsteads to drag a way through.

Splash! Slooosh!

A paifful of water came swooping over the barricade, and it landed right on Grundy's features.

“Gug-gug-gug!” spluttered George Alfred.

A broom reached out and smote Grundy, and the great leader staggered, and sat down on the stairs.

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Come on, Grundy!” yelled Redfern.

“Grooooooogh!”

Grundy staggered up. From behind him his followers were hurling missiles—anything that came to hand—at the defenders. Figgins & Co. replied with interest, and the staircase was thick with flying pillows and bolsters and cushions, and other articles. Grundy, being between the two fires, came in for the chief benefit from both.

A pillow from above swept him back, but a cushion from below righted him again. Grundy roared.

“Back up, you silly idiots! Yaroooooh! Follow your leader! Oh crumbs! Come on! Yooop!”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

Grundy clutched desperately at the barricade, and strove to drag himself over it, as he could not displace the jammed bedsteads. Under a shower of lunges from above, drenched with water, dizzy but determined, George Alfred clambered on, till he was fairly on top of the barricade. There his legs



The New House rebels grabbed whatever came to their hands, from kitchen and pantry, and trooped out with it. Fatty Wynn had his pockets full, and his arms full, and he fairly staggered under his load as he retreated, dropping several articles en route. There was no time to stop for them.

slipped through a broken wire mattress, and he disappeared among the jammed bedsteads up to the waist.

He struggled furiously to release himself, but it was beyond his power. The more furiously he struggled the deeper he jammed himself among tangled wires and the legs of beds.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Grundy. "Come on, you rotters! I'm stuck!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Nobody in the attacking party had any desire to share Grundy's hapless fate, evidently. They hurled missiles, and they yelled and stamped, but they wisely did not charge the barricade. Grundy, struggling and yelling, was within reach of the defenders, and he could neither advance nor retreat. Pailfuls of water drenched over him, cricket-stumps poked at him, brooms lunged at him, and for some minutes Grundy's life was a most exciting one. It would certainly have fared hard with Grundy had not help arrived—from a quarter utterly unexpected by the New House garrison.

There was a sudden tramping on the upper staircase behind Grundy and Co.

The New House juniors were all facing the barricade, to defend it, and they spun round in astonishment at the sounds from above.

There was a yell:

"Down with the New House!" It was Tom Merry's voice. "Back up, School House! Give 'em beans!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

For a moment Figgins stood transfixed, wondering whether he was dreaming, as Tom Merry & Co. charged down on him.

But it was no dream; it was horrid reality!

Tom Merry & Co. were inside the house—behind the defences—and Figgins & Co. were taken in the rear. They rushed down valorously on the surprised and dismayed garrison.

"Back up, New House!" yelled Figgins desperately.

With their backs to the barricade now, Figgins & Co. put up a desperate fight. The landing swarmed with combatants, School House and New House indiscriminately mixed. The uproar was terrific.

"They're in!" yelled Kerruish below. "Come on!"

The sham attack became a genuine one now, in earnest. There were no longer any defenders of the barricade. Figgins & Co. had their hands full with Tom Merry's party.

The juniors below swarmed up the stairs, and clambered over the undefended barricade.

They picked their way very carefully over the jammed bedsteads, and avoided Grundy's hapless fate, and one by one they dropped on the landing beyond, and joined in the fray.

Grundy yelled for help and release; but nobody heeded Grundy. There was no time to waste on George Alfred.

More and more School House juniors clambered over, till the odds against Figgins & Co. were simply overwhelming.

Still the New House garrison resisted, till one by one they were floored and sat upon and secured.

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn were the last, fighting gamely, with their backs to the wall; but a rush of the victors overpowered them, and the famous Co. went down.

Then there was a roar that rang afar across the quadrangle:

"School House wins! Hurray!"

CHAPTER 10.

Peace with Honour.

"RAILTON!"

"Bai Jove! Heah comes old Wailton!" Arthur Augustus dabbed a stream of crimson from his noble nose, and grinned. "Old Wailton can't stop us now."

Mr. Railton strode into the New House with a grim brow. An astonishing sight met his gaze.

Tom Merry & Co., victorious, not to say happy and glorious, were dragging away the stacked bedsteads from the landing, opening a passage on the stairs.

On the landing were the prisoners, each of them extended on his back, with a School House victor sitting on him.

Grundy had been released at last, and he was rubbing himself all over, with wrathful ejaculations. Grundy had collected up more bruises and bumps than he could possibly count, if he had had a fancy for counting them.

The School House juniors were in a hilarious mood. But they calmed down a little at the sight of their Housemaster. They were well aware that the terrific din of the conflict must have reached the School House and awakened everyone there. So Mr. Railton's arrival was not unexpected.

The School House master mounted the stairs. There was a way through the barricade now, and he reached the landing. There he stared blankly at the astonishing scene.

The New House rebellion was over. There was no doubt about that. Tom Merry & Co. wondered how their Housemaster would take it. Certainly they had broken dormitory bounds. But they had won a glorious victory, and they quite expected their Housemaster to be pleased and gratified.

But he was frowning darkly.

"What does this mean, Merry?" he exclaimed. "What are you doing out of your dormitory at this hour of the night?"

"We—we thought we'd better take the matter in hand, sir," said Tom.

"What?"

"We couldn't allow the New House to crow, sir," said Arthur Augustus. "So we decided to give them the kybosh, sir."

"Bless my soul!"

"We've taken the place by assault, sir," said Blake. "We—we—we beg to hand it over to you now, sir."

Mr. Railton was silent for some moments. Probably he was pleased to see the rebellion at an end, and the rebels at his orders. But certainly he was not pleased at having matters taken out of his hands by the Fourth and the Shell. "Really you have acted in a very extraordinary manner!" he said. "Your assistance was neither asked nor required."

"Ahem!"

"You should be in bed. I shall speak to you to-morrow on this subject. Now, go back to bed at once."

"Ahem! Shall we let them go, sir?" asked Tom Merry demurely. Some of the School House juniors grinned.

If Figgins & Co. had been released at that moment and the victors had departed, certainly Mr. Railton would have been promptly dealt with by the rebels, and the rebellion would have been in full swing again. The Housemaster realised that, and there was a pause.

"One moment!" said Mr. Railton. "Figgins!"

"Yes, sir?" groaned Figgins, from under the weight of Kangaroo of the Shell.

"I require you all to give me your word that there shall be no further disorder," said Mr. Railton. "Otherwise, every New House boy here will be locked up for the night!"

Figgins gave a hopeless blink round. He was fairly in the hands of the Philistines, and so were all his comrades. The game was up, and Figgy realised it clearly.

"Very well, sir!" he gasped. "We—we—we chuck it, sir! We—we—we'll do as you tell us."

"I can trust your word Figgins. You may now release them."

The New House garrison were released, and they rose sheepishly to their feet. Mr. Railton surveyed them sternly.

"You have given great trouble, and caused very considerable damage," he said. "I shall, however, keep my word to you, and see that your conduct is reserved for judgment until the Head returns."

The New House juniors brightened up wonderfully. So

(Continued on page 15.)

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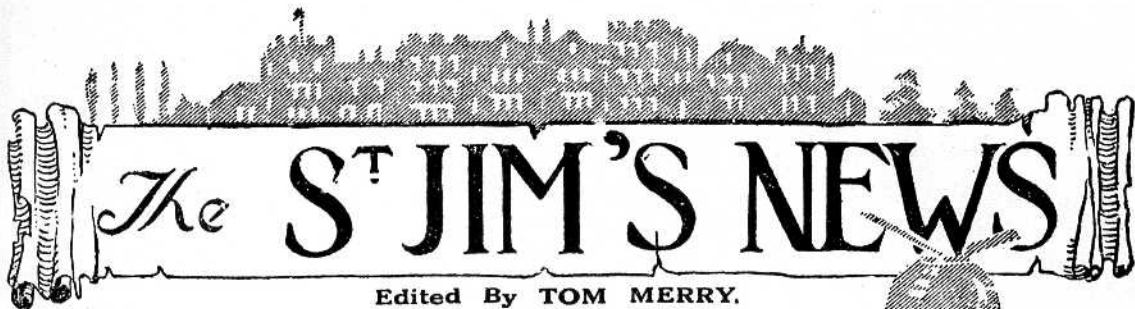
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The ST JIM'S NEWS

Edited By TOM MERRY.

D'Arcy's Terrible Cousin.

A SEVERE LESSON FOR GUSSY.

By ETHEL CLEVELAND.

THE chums of the Fourth decided that Gussy had completely learned his lesson when he accepted a licking for keeping dark the name of Percy Mellish, the mischievous young gentleman who had recently worked off a successful jape against him, Arthur Augustus' next little lapse I will describe.

Figgins, Kerr, and Fatty Wynn got to hear of the way in which Gussy had refused to give away the name of the boy who led him across to Monteith's bed, and accepted a stiff caning in consequence. They were a bit doubtful about such behaviour lasting, and after some thought decided to put it to the test. Their test consisted of an extremely rough ragging—and one can be sure Figgy had "no respect for a fellah's eloblah."

Mr. Rateliff, the Housemaster on Figgy's side, happened on the scene just when my cousin looked most like the approved edition of a 1921 Guy Fawkes. Fatty demanded an explanation, and before anyone could answer, stated his opinion, that Figgins was to blame, as usual. My cousin—being blessed with such a liberal portion of tact and judgment—in trying to correct him, gave away the fact that it was Kerr.

Our canny Scotch chum then suffered a severe walloping at the unmerciful hand of Mr. Rateliff. Small wonder was it that he afterwards vowed stern vengeance on the noble head of Arthur Augustus. However, a couple of days passed, and Gussy was still alive, in one piece, and, in fact, without as much as one hair on his brainy dome out of place.

A Shock for Gussy.

The next day was a half-holiday, and Mr. Latham had decided to take his class out for an afternoon walk. The news naturally brought joy to the breast of Arthur Augustus, but the other boys did not experience that feeling. D'Arcy's delight was simply because it gave him a chance again of appearing in all the glory of a silk topper. Up till now he had hardly been able to wear it once since he had arrived at St. Jim's. In fact, whenever he attempted to sport his

famous tile on a week day a senior always sent it flying from his head.

When everything was ready the boys lined up in the quadrangle.

"Don't we look a set of blithering asses!" growled Jack Blake.

"Just like a crowd of mouldy convicts!" agreed George Figgins.

Mr. Latham then appeared, and led the boys away in the direction of Rylcombe. After they had passed through the gate, two School House boys noticed that Kerr was not among them.

Upon inquiry, Figgins said Kerr had cheeked Monteith, and got an impot to detain him. Quite a lot of remarks were passed on Kerr's intelligence at having thought of such a cute trick.

Every other minute Mr. Latham would halt his procession, and learnedly expound upon some object of doubtful interest on the landscape. Together with the increasing chaff of the village boys, the walk grew very wearisome.

At length one ragged youth by the side of the road started forward, and, to the great surprise of the party, flung his arms around the neck of my cousin.

"Archie! Archie!" sobbed the youth. "Ow bloomin' glad I am to see yer again—yer own flesh an' blood! You can't refuse to speak to me, now as yer along of these swells! Oh, Archie—Archiebald!"

The swell of St. Jim's, who had never even seen the ragged youth before in his life, was flabbergasted. The procession stopped immediately; Mr. Latham gave up talking about beech bark and caterpillars, and hurried forward. The urchin wept copiously and Gussy tried his hardest to push him away.

"I'm 'is own flesh an' blood, sir!" howled the ragged one. "I can prove it to you if you likes me to, sir. 'E's gotter mole on the left side of 'is neck, sir. You 'ave a look, sir. It's jest below 'is collar, sir."

Every boy present decided that if Gussy had really got such a mark, the ragged youth's story must be a true one. The majority of boys grinned at the very idea with delight, because Arthur Augustus had put on such a terrible amount of side and swank since his arrival at the Sussex college, that this terrible fall to his pride would be a pleasing sight.

As the urchin made the statement, D'Arcy's hand immediately flew to his collar, and remained there. Nobody tried to prove the ragged youth's words after that, Gussy had proved them himself.

The Fourth Form boys looked grimly at Arthur Augustus, and even Mr. Latham firmly believed the urchin to be related to the swell of St. Jim's.

"Oh, you can go and ask my papa! You can go and ask all my aunties!" wailed the unhappy swell, in great dismay. "Oh, that I should eveal be insulted like this! It is too, too woadful! I shall nevah wecovah fwom it. An' this wretched fellah has quite wuined my beautiful waistcoat, Oh, deah!"

The master of the Fourth Form then came to the brilliant conclusion that the most sensible thing to do would be to offer the ragged youth a shilling.

"I don't want yer money, sir!" sobbed the outcast. "What's the use of money to a broken heart?"

"Sticking-plaster would be far more useful!" murmured Percy Mellish.

The ragged youth then decided that it was time to depart. This time he gripped the swell of St. Jim's in an embrace from which he could not escape. The youngster told the swell he was quite forgiven, and that he would never trouble to call upon him like this again. Just before he finally released him, however, the youngster's lips approached Gussy's ear. Every boy saw the strange action, and wondered what it implied.

Then the urchin moved swiftly away, jumped through a gap in the hedge, and disappeared. The effect of that whisper upon Arthur Augustus was simply astounding. He staggered back, his jaw dropping, his eyes wide open in amazement, and a look of mingled wonder and relief upon his noble features.

These were the whispered words. "Now I'm even with you, you beast!"

The ragged youth, of course, had been none other than George Francis Kerr, of the New House. It took the other Fourth-Formers in the procession a very short time to discover that fact. But Mr. Latham doesn't know who it was that held up the walk in such a startling manner to this very day.

On the whole, Arthur Augustus was quite relieved to find his claimant to kinship was only a joker in disguise. Kerr's vengeance did quite a lot of good, for Gussy was never known to sneak about trifling little matters after that incident—and, naturally enough, no more ragged youths ever stopped him on an afternoon walk, and claimed to be his long-lost cousin.

ETHEL CLEVELAND.

(Another article about early St. Jim's will appear shortly in the "St. Jim's News.")

EDITORIAL.

My Dear Chums,

If it turns out that I have missed anything which ought to have gone into our bumper Christmas Number of the "Gem," I am bound to hear about it. But I do not think any important feature has been overlooked. I feel certain you will all consider this number a great success.

The bumper number will be a triumph. I am convinced. I have been busy on it for long past. The publication of a real old-fashioned Christmas Number is like breaking new ground, or, rather, reclaiming old ground long neglected owing to the war. The "Gem" Special

will be right up to date. The story of St. Jim's is one of the very best. Mr. Martin Clifford has scored many triumphs, but he has never done better in this fine Christmas yarn.

Meantime, our splendid "barring-out" stories are going splendidly, and also the learned Hobby, and Tony, to say nothing of Billy, are passing through tremendous adventures in the mysterious "Valley of Surprise" which they are exploring. The medicine man, Maxia, is a quaint person with some particularly unpleasant and treacherous notions in his woolly head. All my correspondents seem to be keen on this great serial, which gets better with each instalment.

My New Zealand mail brings me a heap of congratulatory letters. I am sure there will be plenty more of these compliments after Christmas. An Auckland reader tells me that both Racke and

Baggy Trimble are undesirable boys! Well, perhaps they are. Racke certainly is worse than Baggy. His wrongdoings have more calculation about them. Master Bagley tells untruths, raids cupboards, and listens at keyholes, but he is not as dangerous as Aubrey Racke. Still, it is close on Christmas, and I am not going to speak harshly of Baggy. Who knows—he might reform this Christmas? Just imagine what would be said if, with the start of 1922, we found Baggy a perfect pattern of a fellow,

You might bear in mind that the "Boys' Herald" is still offering splendid prizes to readers. The "B. H." is also the paper in which Frank Sturdy and Reggie Peddar disport themselves, and where you find a stirring detective yarn each week about Ferrers Locke and Drake.

YOUR EDITOR.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 722.

The Queer Case of Dr. Brutell

Written by Professor Hector Gordon, Science Master of St. Jim's.



An extraordinary story, dealing with incidents in the life of Dr. Brutell, the well-known scientist. Brutell, in his normal moods, is a highly respected man, but he is afflicted with a strange malady which alters his whole character.

(Continued from last week.)

AFTER their raid on the Stanton ranch-house, Hammer and Pinchers and the rest of the villains belonging to the Black Circle gang made off in the direction of their secret lair in the mountains. Madeleine was completely in their power, and resistance on her part was worse than useless.

Dr. Brutell waited for a few minutes until the last of the bandits was out of sight; then he despatched one of the cowboys to inform the sheriff of what had taken place. The man chose one of the swiftest horses in the outfit, and then set off at top-speed in the direction of the sheriff's office.

There was no time to be lost if Madeleine was to be rescued. If the gang succeeded in reaching their secret headquarters there was very little hope that the representatives of law and order would be able to track them down.

Although it was pretty generally known that the hiding-place was hidden away somewhere in the mountains, nobody had so far been fortunate enough to discover the whereabouts, and this in spite of the fact that a large sum was offered as a reward.

Jack Regan, the popular foreman of the Stanton ranch, and, indeed, many other cowboys also, had spent hours in searching for the headquarters of the Black Circle, but so far without the slightest success.

Dr. Brutell decided that he would not wait until the arrival of the sheriff and his men. He gave instructions that all those left behind should render every assistance possible, so that the unfortunate Madeleine would stand some chance of being rescued from her unhappy plight. Every man signified his willingness to join wholeheartedly in the chase.

The capture of Mr. Stanton himself was a great tragedy to the loyal men of his ranch, and now this second blow had fallen upon them with such swiftness that they could scarcely realise it. What a tragic ending it all was to their evening of entertainment.

There was not a man there whose heart did not burn with hatred against the Black Circle, and who did not desire to do all in his power to obtain revenge. Had it not been for Dr. Brutell they would have set out at once. They realised, however, that his plan would be the better one.

When the sheriff arrived an organised movement could be made against the outlaws, and this was far more likely to prove successful than a series of raids. Brutell's idea to go out alone while the tracks of the fleeing villains were still fresh was an excellent one, and the men had not the slightest doubt that this amazingly clever scientist would succeed in picking up some valuable clues, even if he did not manage to follow them to their destination.

The raiders would no doubt have watchmen posted at various distances near the approach to their skillfully hidden rendezvous, and it would be impossible for anyone, no matter how clever he was, to get through these guards without arousing suspicion.

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Brutell was determined upon one thing, and that was that the unfortunate Madeleine must be rescued without the slightest delay. The poor girl had already suffered sufficient at the hands of these inhuman men, and the doctor guessed that they would not treat her with much consideration.

Pinchers, the second in command, would not soon forget the fact that she had torn his mask from his face, and thus revealed his features. This was an unpardonable crime in his eyes, for, like the rest of the members of the Black Circle, he realised that secrecy was the greatest safeguard.

As soon as the gang got to their destination, they took the precaution to tie their prisoner securely to a post in the cave. And there was a good deal more method in this than was at first apparent to Madeleine. This particular post supported the beams that were braced against the top of the cave, but Pinchers did not hasten to explain this important fact to the bewildered girl. Instead, the heartless leader of the gang contented himself by smiling at her in a most curious fashion.

Madeleine took not the slightest notice of Pinchers nor any other of her captors, and presently he broke the silence himself.

"We have some important business to attend to," remarked Pinchers, with a studied air of politeness, "and it is necessary for us to leave here for the city almost immediately. Before we go I must request you to sign those bonds for us; you must realise that it will be better in the end if you obey orders."

Pinchers and his followers, as a matter of fact, were very desirous of moving on as quickly as possible. It was a golden rule of theirs never to stay in the same place for very long. This was one of the secrets of their success, and was the reason why they were able to elude capture so successfully.

They realised that by now the cowboys of the Stanton ranch would have given the alarm, and possibly pursuers were already upon their track. This fact made them more than ever desirous of moving away from their mountain lair.

It was true that so far this hiding-place had remained secure, but their enemies were becoming more and more determined. The net of justice was being drawn tighter and tighter around them. As the crimes of the Black Circle increased so the hatred of their victims grew with greater intensity.

They knew full well that little sympathy would be shown them by their captors, and they certainly deserved none.

Pinchers grew a little impatient when Madeleine still ignored him.

"Are you going to sign those bonds for us?" he demanded once more.

"Never!" replied the girl, in an em-

phatic voice, and Pinchers knew by the determined look upon her face that she was not the sort to yield to threats of violence.

Silence reigned again for a moment, but there were sounds of restlessness amongst the followers. The men were anxious to get away. It was as though they could already hear the pattering of the hoofs of the horses of their pursuers.

These men were great cowards at heart. They did not mind when they were the superior force and things went their way, but anything in the nature of a fair and square fight, when victory was the reward of the valiant, then there was a different story to tell.

Darkness and secrecy were their allies, and they employed these forces very successfully during their recent raid upon the Stanton ranch.

"It's time to be moving!"

This brief sentence came from the mouth of a big, hefty fellow standing next to Pinchers. Immediately the second in command issued instructions, and the outlaws piled into a large motor-car which they had in readiness.

Pinchers turned once more towards the helpless and bound girl.

"While we are away," he said, and there was a cruel smile playing around his face, "don't lean against that post too hard—and don't struggle—or the roof will drop in!"

At the sound of the word "roof," Madeleine glanced upwards, and it was then that the horror of her position dawned upon her for the first time.

The post to which she was tied was the chief means of support to the roof of this dungeon. If she struggled it would give way, and the whole of the mass above her would come crashing down. It was a predicament that would try the courage of anyone. But Madeleine would not plead for help.

Pinchers waited a moment or two to see if her courage would fail, but she would not give way. Already one of his men had started the engine of the car.

With a last cruel taunt upon his lips the second in command climbed into the car, and they set off on their long journey.

Owing to the excellent scouting work of Dr. Brutell the sheriff's posse made excellent progress. The doctor had now joined the main party, and he was convinced that they were hot upon the trail. The fact that they had now come upon a double track, made by the wheels of the car, showed that the Black Circle party had already left their hiding-place, and had set out for another destination.

They decided to follow the new trail, and abandon their original idea of going to the headquarters, for they considered that no useful purpose could be served by going to the deserted hiding-place. It was the bandits themselves they were anxious to capture.

Alas! had they but known that there was still one lonely person left behind, who was hoping and hoping that help would come to her before it was too late. But the poor girl realised that there was little chance that anyone would discover her desolate prison!

Meanwhile the outlaws were driving their car at breakneck speed in their mad desire to get to the city headquarters. Here they were perfectly safe from discovery.

All was going well with them until the driver suddenly jammed on the brakes and stopped the car. Just in the nick of time he had discovered that there was a great gap in front of them.

"The bridge across Wild Cat Canyon has been burned!" yelled the bandit excitedly. And this was true enough. The remains of the wooden structure were still smouldering, and this proved that the bridge had been destroyed fairly recently.

The gang were caught in a most unpleasant trap. They dare not go back, and certainly could not go forward.



DON'T FORGET YOUR COPY!

(To be continued next Wednesday.)

TOM MERRY'S CONQUEST.

(Continued from page 12.)

long as they were not handed over to Mr. Ratcliff they were satisfied.

"Thank you, sir!" said Figgins. "That's all we want. If we could have been sure about Ratty——"

"That will do, Figgins. I trust you to keep order now."

"Rely on us, sir," said Redfern.

"Very good! All the School House boys will return to their Houses at once."

And Mr. Railton shepherded Tom Merry & Co. out of the New House. With quite satisfied feelings, the victors returned to their own quarters.

"You see, deah boys," murmured Arthur Augustus sagely, "old Wailton can't vewy well own up that we've managed the affair for him bettah than he could have done it himself. But I wathah think that we shall not heah anythin' more about it! He's bound to be wathah gwateful, you know, for havin' the mattah wound up in this splendid style."

And Tom Merry & Co. turned in cheerily.

Arthur Augustus was right.

On the following day Mr. Railton apparently forgot to remind the School House juniors for leaving their dormitories without permission, and for taking the battle into their own hands.

Whether he was grateful, or how deep his gratitude was, the juniors did not know, but certainly he allowed the whole affair to drop.

That day Figgins & Co. turned up in the Form-room as usual.

On all sides in the junior Form-rooms there were signs of damage—the number of swollen noses, discoloured eyes, and bumps and bruises made quite a record. But Mr. Lathom and Mr. Linton made no remark upon them.

That day, too, workmen were busy in the New House. Mr. Railton was very anxious for all signs of the wreckage to disappear before the Head should return.

In a few days matters resumed very much their normal course at St. Jim's, while Mr. Ratcliff was still laid up with his cold. But there was much speculation as to what would happen when Ratty came down, if he came down before the Head returned. And he did.

There was much excitement when Mr. Ratcliff's lean face was seen about the school again. Figgins & Co. waited with some apprehension for the storm to break. They trusted Mr. Railton; but they did not trust Ratty, and they expected trouble. And if Mr. Ratcliff failed to honour Mr. Railton's engagement Figgins & Co. were determined on another revolt. And Horace Ratcliff, who never seemed able to learn, was bent on trouble. The very morning he came down he breakfasted in the School House, and after breakfast addressed Mr. Railton in strident tones that were eagerly heard by all present.

"Mr. Railton, you will kindly assemble the school in Hall!" said Mr. Ratcliff. "I desire the whole school to witness a flogging!"

The School House master looked at him.

"The flogging of whom, may I ask?" he said quietly.

"Of every boy who took part in the rebellion in my House!" said Mr. Ratcliff venomously. "My intention is to make an example!"

"I have already told the boys concerned that the matter will stand over till the Head's return, Mr. Ratcliff."

The New House master sneered.

"You have no authority to do anything of the kind, sir! You seem to forget that I am senior Housemaster!"

"I forget nothing, sir," said Mr. Railton quietly. "You left your House in a state of uproar and rebellion, which I had to deal with. In such circumstances, I regard myself as having authority to make any pledge I think fit to the boys concerned. And that pledge will be kept, Mr. Ratcliff. The affair will be left till Dr. Holmes returns."

"The affair will be dealt with this morning, Mr. Railton."

"I shall not allow it, sir!"

"Sir!"

"I speak plainly—it is necessary! I will not allow the school to be plunged into disorder again. I am ready to answer for my conduct before Dr. Holmes when he returns."

Mr. Ratcliff spluttered, but he did not reply. He whisked out of the School House and whisked away to his own House. Perhaps what he saw in the faces there warned him that it would be wiser to comply with Mr. Railton's injunctions. At all events, there was no flogging, and no further mention of it. Tacitly Mr. Ratcliff accepted the situation as it was.

"After all," Figgins confided to Tom Merry, "I'm glad it's over! It would have been rather rotten for the Head to find a terrific shindy on when he came back. Of course, it was like the thumping cheek of you School House fags to chip in. Still, I'm glad, as it's turned out."

All was in the best of order when Dr. Holmes' car drove in at the gates of St. Jim's the following week.

Nobody could have been more respectful than Figgins & Co. as they capped their headmaster in the quad.

But they waited with keen anxiety to know what was to follow.

Greatly to their surprise, nothing followed.

The Head heard the statements of his Housemasters, and made some inquiry among the prefects. The result was what the juniors would have called a "jaw"—and Mr. Ratcliff, to his surprise and extreme annoyance, had the benefit of the "jaw."

Certainly the Head could not uphold anything like rebellion. But a week of perfect order had elapsed since the outbreak. With great tact, the Head decided to ignore the whole affair. Instead of the wholesale floggings and expulsions that Mr. Ratcliff anticipated, the Head gave him a plain talk on the subject of tactfulness and want of sympathy in dealing with his boys—which, in the Head's opinion, had caused the whole trouble. Certainly there should have been no rebellion; but equally certainly it should not have been provoked. And it was wisest to allow the whole affair to sink into oblivion.

Which was done—much to the satisfaction of the New House and of the School House, too. Only Mr. Ratcliff was not satisfied, and he was deprived even of the satisfaction of "taking it out" of Figgins & Co. For he felt that the Head had an eye upon him now, and that it behoved him to walk warily.

And so—excepting for Ratty—everything at St. Jim's was calm and bright, so to speak; and Figgins & Co., relieved of their apprehensions, were able to devote their attention to the very important task of making the School House "sit up" in retaliation for Tom Merry's Conquest!

THE END.

(Next week's issue of the "Gem Library" will contain a real rollicking fine story in "TRIMBLE'S PAL—THE PRINCE!" by Martin Clifford. On no account must you miss reading this grand yarn. You will roar with laughter from beginning to end.—Editor.)

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THE OPENING CHAPTERS.

Hobby Tarrant and Tony Matthers, with Billy Kettle, a trusted negro servant, are on an expedition in the Andes. A volcanic eruption, causing a tremendous tidal wave, carries their canoe into the Valley of Surprise. The party explore the valley, and meet many weird and wonderful animals, and experience many adventurous times. Reaching a village, they are confronted by a race of strange primitive men, who show great hospitality, and make friends. But Maxla, the medicine-man, hates the newcomers, and through a dastardly scheme which he hatches, they very nearly lose their lives. For this action the Ariki lose faith in him. Maxla then succeeds in making friends with the Mungas, a party of red-haired, semi-human brutes, and persuades them to march on the Ariki camp.

With Maxla at their head, the Mungas approach the camp, and, bellowing like so many bulls, they charge.

Hobby The Wonder-Worker.

EACH of them carried a big flint, shaped like a sole, in either hand—terrible weapons at close quarters. But the Ariki were not dismayed. Long years of continual bickering with the near-humans had taught them how to deal with them.

They could not stand up to them in hand-to-hand fighting, therefore they kept their distance. Even as the Mungas appeared Lalo shouted an order. The bows twanged, and the two foremost of the foe toppled over, squirming, with the deadly, flint-tipped shafts plunged deep in their hairy chests.

At the same moment Hobby let drive both barrels of his shotgun amongst the others. The shot, having room to spread a little, peppered the lot impartially. With wild howls of pain and terror, they halted, turned, and bolted madly, all the fury of slaughter gone out of them.

The Ariki would have pursued them, had not a sharp order from Lalo bade them stand fast. The chief had experience of this sort of warfare. Man to man, the Indians stood no chance at close quarters against their terribly powerful foes. Once separated, they lost the superiority of their rough discipline, and would fall an easy prey to the cunning Mungas who ambushed beside the trail.

However, they consoled themselves by despatching the two fallen and sawing off their heads for use as warnings. Then the party moved on. During the fight nothing had been seen or heard of Maxla, but presently they came upon proof that he had been among the enemy. Glittering beside a rough basket of rushes packed with raw fish was the fountain-pen which Hobby had given to the traitor.

Tony picked it up and presented it to Lalo.

"In the beginning we made a mistake," he said, through Billy. "But now we know our true friends. Wear this, and we will make you medicine-man as well as chief."

Lalo capered with delight. He had secretly envied Maxla the superb decoration. Now that it was his, the world held little more to desire. He thrust the pen through the hole in his nose, and, to make sure that he should not lose it, as Maxla had, wound a strand of cord about either end, and made them fast to his earrings, which gave him an odd appearance of wearing a snaffle and cheek-straps.

Meanwhile, they had come to the gap opposite the camp. Tony had been right in his surmises. Evidently Maxla had been preparing to swing across to the little platform when surprised. But a few minutes later and they would have arrived to find their pots and spare blankets, perhaps their store of ammunition, gone.

"I think we had better leave the place for a few days, at all events," said Tony, when they had found that all was in order. "So long as Maxla is alive we shall have no peace. He will persuade the Mungas to come at night. If they surprised us, we should have no chance. I vote that we go to stay with the Ariki for a little while. If we camp on the farther side of the village we shan't get the benefit of the smell."

"And I shall have a chance to study the creatures in the lake," agreed Hobby. "Besides, we can make Lalo a medicine-man in style. Let's!"

So their baggage was quickly transferred to the backs of several of the Indians, and in a short while they had returned to the village. Great was the noise and rejoicing. The two fresh heads were hung aloft, as the others had been, and, with most of the men on the job, a comfortable hut of branches and leaves was quickly erected for the honoured guests.

This done, the men dispersed to fish, while a party set off to visit the snares and traps they had set overnight. Billy took the lines, and, descending to a safe distance from the water, began to fish also. Hobby and Tony sat down to discuss the matter of making Lalo a medicine-man.

"If I had some chemicals here I could rig up a little show that would send 'em all into fits," said Hobby mournfully. "We must do the best we can with what we have. Where is that little case of medicines?"

Tony produced it from his pocket. It had been presented to him when he left home. So far there had been no need for it. It contained various useful medicines in tabloid form. Hobby examined them.

"Seidlitz-powders—in tabloids!" he exclaimed. "I guess I can use a couple of these. And here are some unused penny stamps. And I've got a half-crown tucked away for luck. Old man, if I can only brush up my conjuring enough to deceive these simple savages, we'll make a medicine-man of friend Lalo in a fashion to make 'em all sit up. Now, lemme alone."

For some hours he sat alone in a corner

of the hut assiduously practising his few elementary conjuring tricks. When Billy returned with a great string of fish, he talked with him for a while, then sent him to announce to Lalo and the people generally that, an hour before sunset, the great white chiefs and their black brother would solemnly confer upon the chief all the powers and privileges of a high-class medicine-man.

When the time came there were no absentees from the crowd that assembled at every point of vantage around the bit of staging before the new hut. The elders squatted in front, the warriors made the next row, while the women and children tucked themselves away wherever they could find room.

When all were assembled, Hobby, draped in his blanket that he might look more impressive, and wearing a spare pair of glasses on the end of his nose, in addition to his round spectacles, stalked out of the hut accompanied by Tony and Billy.

He called for Lalo, Lalo, in a blue funk, for he had no notion what might happen to him, but feared something with knives and boiling oil, was pushed forward by his eager followers. Then, with Billy translating as best he could, Hobby laid upon him a number of commands.

He must rule the people justly and kindly. He must not take what belounged by right to another. He must not put anyone to death except the old men approved. He must divide the spoils of hunting without favour. These, and many other things, Lalo promised to do or leave undone.

Then Hobby advanced, and bade him kneel. He waved his hands in the air to show that they were empty. Then he snapped his fingers, and there, drawn out of the empty air, as everybody saw, was a beautiful necklace composed of a dozen copper coins with a fine half-crown for pendant, all threaded upon a stout string by holes bored in them.

"This is the necklace of a medicine-man!" boomed Hobby, in his deepest voice, and hung the thing upon Lalo's neck.

Then he solemnly retrieved a red penny stamp from the treasury of the air, licked it, and stuck it on Lalo's forehead.

"This is the seal of a medicine-man!" he went on.

And, holding out a small earthen cup in which was water with half the Seidlitz-powder dissolved in it, so that all could see, he continued:

"You all see that this is cold water. By the power of my medicine I will cause it to boil by passing my hand over it. And, by the power which I give him, Lalo the chief shall drink it while it still boils, and he shall not be scalded. Tell 'em all that, Billy."

Billy did. Everyone within reached forward eagerly, and saw that what the wonder-worker said was true. There was only cold water in the cup. Then, with a wave of his hand, Hobby dropped to the half of the tabloid Seidlitz-powder into the water, and the usual bubbling began.

A low groan of wonder burst from the spectators. This was truly high-class magic, far transcending anything that Maxla had ever dreamed of. Lalo groaned also. He had to drink the boiling water, and his faith was weak.

Nevertheless, he had to go through with it. The dreadful, compelling gaze of Hobby's eyes, doubly magnified by the two pairs of glasses, was upon him. He took the cup thrust at him, shut his eyes, drained it at a gulp, and opened wide his optics.

"It is true, oh, people!" he gasped. "It boiled, as you saw, yet I was not scalded!" Then, all his distrust vanished, he took the piece of bark upon which Hobby had heaped the powder from a shot cartridge, and covered it with a thin layer of dust.

"Lastly," went on the magician, "having sealed him with the sign, and given him to drink of the sacred cup, I will burn dust in his hand for a sign that his enemies shall perish so also. Behold!"

The dust-pile was plain in the view of everyone. Everyone saw Hobby's hand extended towards it. What everyone did not see was that the hand held a fragment of burning tinder. There was a flash, a great cloud of smoke flew up, and the ceremony

(Continued on page 18.)

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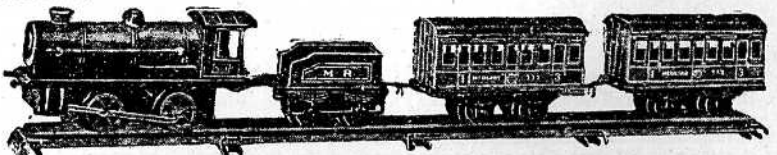
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THE VALLEY OF SURPRISE.

(Continued from page 16.)

ended by all falling on their faces and raising the chant of praise. That it happened to be in praise of the fish god mattered nothing. The wonder-worker accepted it. That was enough.

The Ariki sat long before their huts that night. They had enough to keep them in talk for years, so it was no wonder they wanted to get a good start. But if anyone had dared to tell them that their visitors were neither more nor less human—well, that imprudent man would have paid dearly for the folly.

"You did it very well, Hobby," said Tony, when they had retired from the devout stares of the people to the back of their hut. "The only trouble is that you may have done it a trifle too well. If any sort of accident happens you'll be called on to set matters right. If anyone falls sick, you'll be lugged in to doctor him."

"Oh, these people are never ill, and they know how to set broken legs and arms," said Hobby easily, and dropped off to sleep with a troubled mind.

There was an alarm in the night. One of the sentries thought he saw a stealthy figure crawling among the boughs of the nearest tree, and roused the village. But nothing happened, and the men went growling back to their interrupted rest.

But shortly after dawn came another disturbance. A man began to howl dismally. The cry was taken up by several women. And in a minute or two Lalo appeared at the hut door, begging the great white wonder-worker to help him. A man had been mysteriously smitten in the night. He was dying. And because he was a good warrior and hunter, Lalo besought Hobby to restore him to health.

The New Medicine Man.

It looked as though Hobby was going to be hoist with his own petard. Having pretended to strange, superhuman powers, he was taken at his word. He was called upon to cure a dying man.

Nearly any other lad of his years would

have declined the job, thus losing most of the respect which the overnight performance had given him. But Hobby had that dogged determination which so often wins in spite of odds.

"I don't know what's the matter with him, but anyhow, I'll have a try," said Hobby. "At the worst I can only kill him, and since they think he's booked anyhow it won't matter so much. Gimme the medicines and come along!"

Draped in his blanket to add dignity, he stalked out followed by Tony and Billy. They found the patient lying in the door of his hut, which was one of the outermost on the side where the trees of the forest most nearly approached those in which the village was built.

The first glance showed that the poor fellow was indeed in a bad way. His copper-coloured skin looked almost grey, his eyes were dull, he moaned continually. Billy started at sight of him.

"Marse Tony, him been p'isoned!" he said, in a low voice. "You gotter make him sick mighty quick, or he a gone coon!"

Hobby began to pace to and fro, singing gibberish softly, and making movements of the hands beneath his blanket, which he had flung over his head. It looked as though he were making a very big magic. In reality he was selecting a powerful emetic from amongst the tabloids.

Then throwing off the blanket, he called for water. Someone made for the big earthen pot of drinking water which stood beside the hut door. A sudden idea flashed across Hobby's mind.

"Not that one!" he told Billy. "Tell them no one must drink water till I give leave. And scoot across to the pot inside our hut and bring me some from it. Quick!"

Billy yelled the order, and fled with the cup. In a jiffy he was back again. Hobby dissolved a double dose of the emetic and held the cup to the sick man's lips. He drank greedily. Hobby waved his hands above him in a mystical fashion, while all waited breathless. And then the emetic did its work.

"Dat's saved him, I reckons!" muttered Billy. "Hallo, dere's another one!"

This time it was a woman, who lay groaning in pain, and presently another began to moan. With each Hobby dealt as he had done with the man. Not till the third dose

had accomplished its work had he leisure to look into the cause of the epidemic.

He had to look no farther than the pots of drinking water which stood outside the huts. In every one he found a small package of pounded roots wrapped in a leaf, and weighted with a stone. In each instance the pots stood within throwing range of the trees beyond the gap.

The mystery was explained. The prowler of the night had been the traitorous medicine-man, Maxla. He had prepared the bundles of poison roots and thrown them across the wide-mouthed pots, not a very difficult feat for a man who had always been skilful at stone-throwing.

Thanks to the strength of the doses which Hobby had given them, the three who had drunk water in the early hours soon began to show signs of recovery. He ordered them to be wrapped up warmly and allowed to sleep. Then he joined Tony and Billy.

"How's that, old top?" he inquired proudly. "I've brought 'em round in fine style, eh?"

"First-class!" agreed Tony. "But you had luck. But Billy and I have been talking. All these huts are dry as tinder. If Maxla were to chuck a torch or two, or shoot a few arrows with flares fastened to them, we'd have to fly or be burned!"

"I don't think he'd do that!" said Hobby. "He doesn't want to spend all his days among the Mangas. He wants to do us in and come back to his old position. If he burned the place he could expect no mercy. There's no fear of that, but I think we will have to look out for ourselves."

"If some of dem trees was cut down—" began Billy, and stopped as he realised the futility of the suggestion. The flint choppers of the Ariki, even if they were assisted by his steel one, would have to be busy for months, if not years, to make any impression on the enormous trunks.

"It comes to this. We'll have to organise a hunt for Maxla. There'll be no peace until he is settled," said Tony gravely. "Let's have breakfast and then talk it over with Lalo."

They returned to their hut, the people bowing to them even more reverently than before. Henceforth they were bosses of the Ariki.

(Another fine long instalment next Wednesday.)

Camphor dissolved in alcohol added to the blacking makes the leather more pliable, and keeps it from cracking.—Mark M. Laughlin, 40, Greenhill Lane, Bradford, Yorks. —

A HERO.

Small boy: "What is a hero?" Big man: "A hero is a fellow that does something." Small boy: "Well, my father got six months for doing something, so he's a hero."—William Jones, 42, Testerton Street, Notting Hill, W.11.

A REASONABLE SUPPOSITION.

A boy of four years of age had been naughty, and his mother had chased him to punish him, but the little fellow dived under a bed, and refused to come out and be chastised. His mother left him there and when his father came home she told her husband what had happened, and asked him to go up and bring the prisoner out. No sooner did father's head appear under the bed than the boy exclaimed: "Hallo, dad, is she after you, too?"—H. Hill, 11, Gas Street, Coventry.

VERY POLITE.

Dodger: "Pardon me, sir, but have you seen a policeman round here?" Polite pedestrian: "No, I haven't." Dodger: "Thank you. Now, will you kindly hand over your watch and purse?"—W. D. Rees, 92, Tonna Road, Caerua, nr. Bridgend, Glam., South Wales.

MY READERS' OWN CORNER.

2/6 is paid for each contribution printed on this page.

MAKING IT SIMPLE.

Scene, a Form-room at St. Jim's. The Head (during an exam.): "My boys, write down the meaning of the phrase 'A wink is as good as a nod to a blind horse.'" When the papers were collected Skimpole's read this way: "A spasmodic movement of the optic constitutes as adequate a groelling as a slight inclination of the cranium to an equine quadruped devoid of its visionary faculty."—A. G. Eaton, 1, College Street, Islington, N.1.

THE GREATER FOOL.

At an old time Court the king had a jester who delighted his master with his shrewd witticisms. On one occasion the monarch was so pleased that he drew a costly ring from his finger and gave it to the jester, telling him to wear it until he found a greater fool than himself. When the king was lying on his deathbed, amongst those admitted to see him was the jester. The king said he was

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going on a long journey. "Where?" asked the jester. "I do not know," replied the king. "Have you made any preparations for this journey?" inquired the jester. "None," answered the king. "And you never asked where it would lead?" "No." "Then," said the jester, "at last I have found someone more deserving to wear this ring." And he gave it back.—N. Evans, 21, High Street, Blaenavon, Mon., South Wales.

THE BITTER END.

In a small village school a teacher asked the scholars in her class to write a sentence finishing with the words "bitter end." One boy wrote, "The enemy fought to the bitter end." Another that "the afternoon's holiday came too soon to a bitter end." But the most striking sentence was the work of a bright boy whose sentence ran thus: "Our bull pup ran after Murphy's cat yesterday, and as she was running through a wooden fence he bitter end."—James E. Harwood, 46, Kilm Lane, Hillfield, nr. Manchester.

A HINT ABOUT BLACKING.

Just a word to show GEM readers how to make waterproof blacking. Dissolve an ounce of borax in water, and in this dissolve gum shellac until it is the consistency of paste; add lampblack to colour. This makes a cheap and excellent blacking for boots, giving them the polish of new leather. The shellac makes the boots and shoes almost water-tight.

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