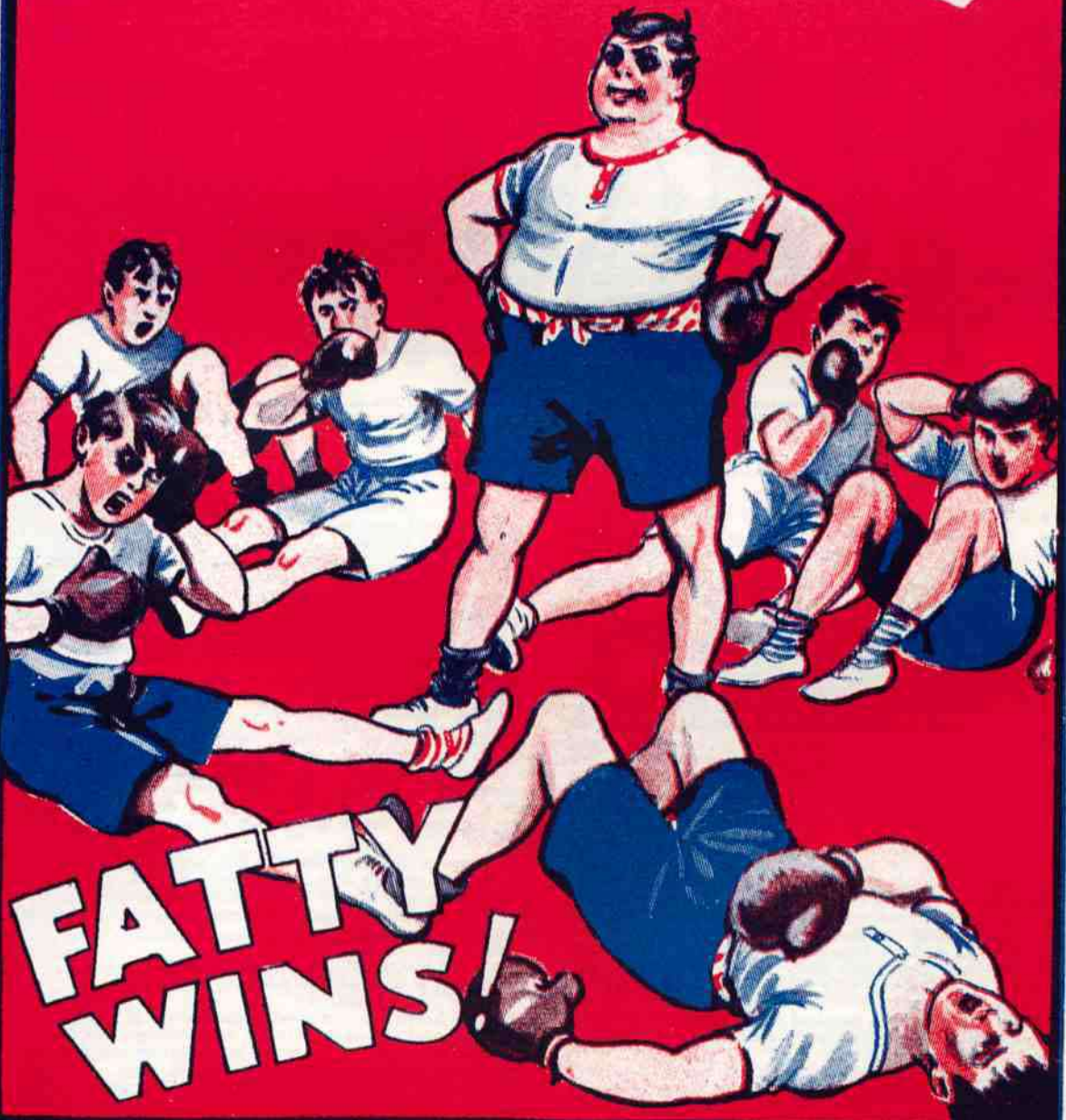


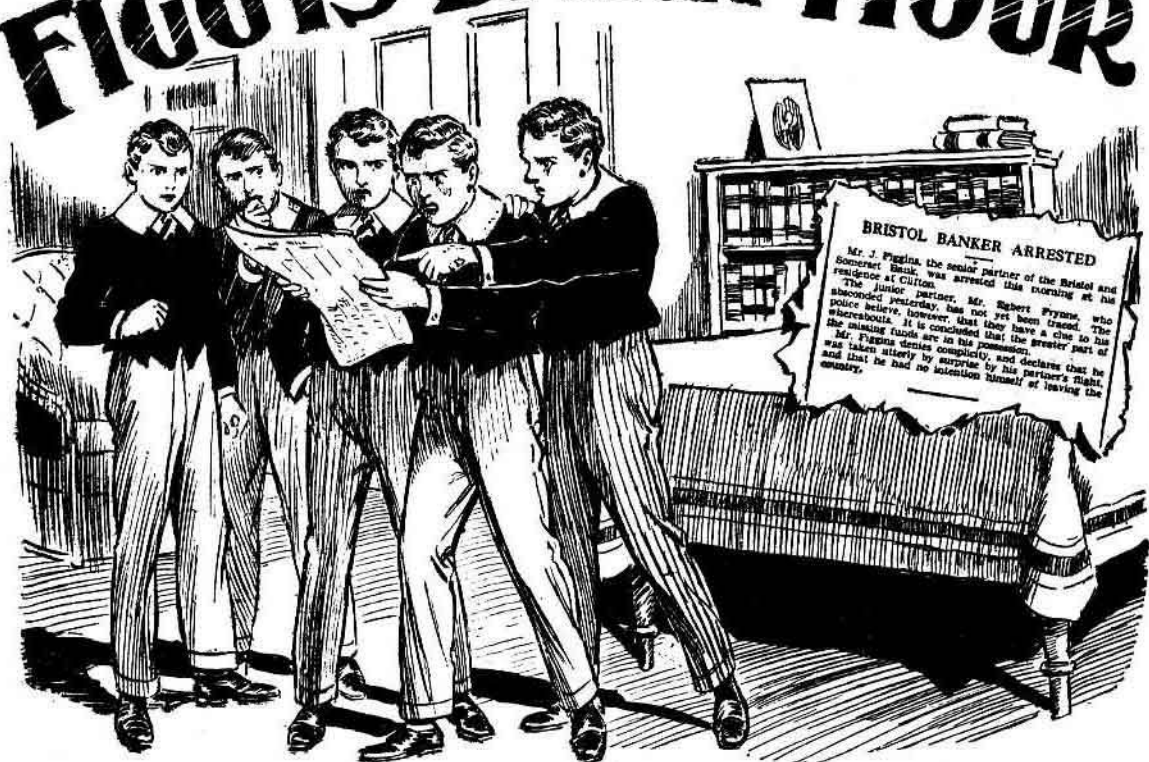
"FIGGY'S DARK HOUR!" and "HANDFORTH THE GHOST HUNTER!" **Stirring Stories**
INSIDE.

The **GEM**

2d



FIGGY'S DARK HOUR



As Figgins looked at the newspaper, his brain seemed to whirl round, and the clear print to dance before his eyes. There was the report in cruel type. It was true—his father had been arrested!

CHAPTER 1. Something Wrong!

GEORGE FIGGINS, the leader of the New House at St. Jim's, had been feeling rather downhearted that afternoon—feeling "rotten," as he would have described it himself.

There was no special reason why he should feel "rotten" that afternoon—but he did. The news from home had not been very pleasant in the last letter he had received, but for some days now he had had no letter. No news is generally considered to be good news, but Figgins was not cheered thereby.

It was a bright, sunny day in winter, with a keen breeze blowing which should have enlivened and invigorated anybody; it whistled in the branches of the old elms in the quadrangle at St. Jim's.

School was over for the morning, and some of the New House fellows were punting a ball about in the quad. But Figgins did not join in as usual. He preferred to walk off by himself, with his hands in his pockets and a moody frown upon his brow.

Perhaps it was because Kerr was away. Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn—known in the New House as Figgins & Co.—were generally inseparable. But Kerr had gone up to Scotland on leave to see a sick relation, and Figgins missed him very much. That was partly the cause of the New House junior being downhearted.

Fatty Wynn sighted Figgins as he walked in the old quad, and bore down upon him. Fatty Wynn's face was glowing with health and with the anticipation of a feed at Mrs. Taggles' tuckshop.

"Coming, Figgy?" he inquired breathlessly. Figgins started out of a moody reverie. "Where?" he asked. "Dame Taggles'; she's got in a fresh lot of steak-and-kidney pies," said Fatty Wynn. "I can tell you they're ripping!"

THE GEN LIBRARY.—No. 1,403.

Figgins shook his head. "But they are," said Fatty Wynn. "I've had some, and I'm going to have some more. Come along, Figgy."

"You'll spoil your dinner." Fatty Wynn snorted. "Oh, I've not got a delicate appetite!" he said. "Besides, dinner's more than half an hour yet, and I always get a bit hungrier than usual about this time of the year. Come on, Figgy!"

"No, thanks!" "Steak-and-kidney pies," said Fatty Wynn persuasively. "Better come!" "No, Fatty. Buzz off and have some yourself." "I'm jolly well going to!" said Fatty Wynn. And he "buzzed" off.

Figgins walked off, his hands thrust deep into his pockets and his brow wrinkled. As a rule Figgins was too popular to be left much alone; but just now nobody seemed to be anxious for his society. He was relieved, but it surprised him a little. When a fellow is feeling downhearted it is easy for him to detect a slight in every careless action or word.

A group of fellows were standing near the door of the New House, craning over one another's shoulders to read a newspaper which French of the Shell was holding up, but they did not call to Figgins to come and give his opinion on what they were reading.

"My hat!" "It can't be true!" "There it is in black and white." "Who'd have thought it?" Figgins heard the muttered exclamations of the juniors crowded round the paper French was holding. He paused and looked at them, and Jimson in the crowd met his eye. Jimson coloured and dropped his eye at once. He muttered something to French, and French folded up the newspaper, put it under his arm, and the whole crowd walked away.

POWERFUL LONG COMPLETE YARN, Starring GEORGE FIGGINS.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD

CHAPTER 2.
The Mystery!

Figgins viewed that proceeding in dumb astonishment. He stood just where he was, rooted to the ground for a minute or two. Never had he been slighted like that before—by fellows of his own House, too!

Figgins was inclined to follow the juniors and demand an explanation. His pride stood in the way, and he did not. He turned away with a deeper cloud upon his brow, and tramped off in the direction of the School House. It occurred to him that he was tired of his own company and would like to speak to somebody.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther—the Terrible Three of the Shell—were standing in a group on the steps of the School House. Monty Lowther held an open newspaper in his hands, and all three were reading it.

As Figgins came in sight Tom Merry made a gesture, and the Terrible Three went quickly into the House.

He was cut direct.

What did it mean?

True, the New House was generally at "war" with the School House, and as a rule each set of juniors never missed an opportunity of scoring over their rivals. But for the Terrible Three to turn their backs upon him in this manner!

Figgins' face flushed crimson and then turned pale.

He walked slowly away. He looked round for Blake of the Fourth and caught sight of him presently standing by the gym with D'Arcy, Herries, and Digby, his chums. Reilly and Brooke of the Fourth were with them. The six juniors were reading a paper together—just as Tom Merry & Co. had been, and the New House juniors, too.

"Bai Jove!" Figgins heard D'Arcy's voice as he came up. "It's imposs!"

"But it's printed here!" said Blake.

"Yaas, but it's imposs!"

"It must be true," said

Digby. "It's rotten enough; but they wouldn't put it in the paper if it wasn't true."

"That's so!" said Herries.

"Faith, and ye're right!" said Reilly. "It's true enough."

"Weally, deah boys, it's too howwid, you know!"

"Mind! Here's Figgins!" whispered Brooke.

Blake crushed the paper together. He turned a flushed face towards Figgins as he came up. Figgins had caught sight of the paper. It was an evening paper of the previous day.

"What's the news?" asked Figgins.

"News?" repeated Blake vaguely.

"Yes."

Brooke and Reilly went into the gym. Herries walked away quietly in the direction of the kennels; Digby and D'Arcy exchanged a glance and strolled off together. Blake's look showed that he would gladly have accompanied them; but he could not very well, for Figgins was facing him, waiting for a reply.

"Oh, the news!" said Blake.

"Yes. Can I see the paper?"

"This paper?"

"Yes."

"Oh, this is—yesterday's paper!" said Blake feebly.

"You—you don't want to see this paper, Figgy?"

Figgins' eyes glinted.

"Won't you let me see it?" he asked.

"You—you see—"

"What's in it?"

"Oh, there's—there's footer news, you know!" said Blake haltingly.

"You weren't looking at the footer news—"

"Well, no; but—but it's very interesting, you know, and—"

"Will you give me that paper?"

"Well, you see—"

"That's enough, Jack Blake!"

Figgins turned on his heel and walked away. Blake opened his lips as if to speak, and closed them again. There was deep sympathy in Blake's look as his eyes rested on the departing form of Figgins, and he murmured:

"Poor old Figgy!"

WHAT did it all mean?

Figgins could not make it out.

If Kerr had been there—Kerr with his clear, incisive insight—the mystery would have been thrashed out in a minute; Figgins felt sure of that.

But Kerr was far away. Consulting Fatty Wynn was not likely to be of much use. Fatty Wynn could keep goal with anybody, and could give a masterly opinion upon the merits of a steak-and-kidney pie. Fatty Wynn could make toffee, and he could cook bacon and eggs in a way that would have tempted an epicure, but he would have been hopelessly puzzled by the strange turn events had taken.

What did it mean?

What did fellows mean by turning their backs on Figgins and by refusing him so simple a request as that he had made to Blake.

Figgins was a simple, straightforward fellow. He was never good at fathoming things out, and this was a puzzle that had got him guessing.

He went into the School House, and found Thompson of the Shell lounging just inside. Thompson glanced at him, and went down the passage with a hurried stride. Figgins was usually on friendly terms with Thompson of the Shell.

"Thompson!" he shouted.

The Shell fellow did not seem to hear.

"Thompson!"

Thompson was still deaf.

Figgins was growing exasperated. He dashed after Thompson, caught him by the shoulder, and swung him round.

"Hallo!" said Thompson.

"What's the matter with you?" asked Figgins.

"Matter!" repeated Thompson.

"Yes. Why didn't you answer me?"

"Answer you?"

"Don't chatter my words over like a giddy parrot! Are you mad?"

"No!"

"Are all the chaps dotty? They're all playing the same giddy game!"

"Are they?"

"What have you got up against me?"

"N-nothing."

"Then why didn't you speak?"

"I—I'm sorry—"

"What are you sorry about?"

"Nothing."

"You utter ass!"

"I—I think I heard French calling me," muttered Thompson, looking round hastily.

"French is out in the quad, and you didn't think anything of the sort," said Figgins grimly. "You are going to explain yourself, Thompson, or you are going to take a licking. Which are you going to do?"

"I—I—"

"Then put up your hands!" shouted Figgins, now thoroughly exasperated. "Put them up, I say! I'm going to lick you!"

Thompson backed away. Thompson of the Shell was generally supposed to have plenty of pluck; but he backed away, and it was very evident that he was anxious to avoid a fight. Figgins followed him up, hitting out. Figgins' right came home upon Thompson's nose, and there was a spurt of red.

"Ow!" gasped Thompson.

"Put up your hands!"

"I—I won't!"

Figgins dropped his own hands in sheer amazement.

Angry as he was, he could not hit the fellow again. He could not make Thompson out at all. If anybody had punched Figgins' nose there would have been trouble. But Thompson didn't seem to mind, and he was dabbing the blood away on his handkerchief, without the least sign of resentment or of a wish to revenge the affront.

Had the whole school gone suddenly mad?

It seemed so to Figgins.

Thompson walked away, still dabbing his nose with the handkerchief. Figgins made no further effort to stop him.

Figgins, with his brain almost in a whirl, went out of the House and crossed over to the tuckshop. He wanted to see Fatty Wynn. His chum, at all events, would speak to him, even if it was only on the subject of steak-and-kidney pies and jam tarts.

Figgins passed two or three fellows he was very friendly with on his way to the tuckshop, and they acted in the same strange way that he was growing accustomed to now—they walked away as he came near.

He found Fatty Wynn in the tuckshop. The fat Fourth Former had evidently forgotten that dinner-time was drawing nigh. He was busily engaged upon his second steak-and-kidney pie, and he was enjoying it. It was disappearing very fast.

"Hallo, Fatty!" said Figgins a little gruffly.

Fatty Wynn looked up with a beaming smile.

"Hallo, Figgy! Changed your mind, eh?"

"No."

"They are really ripping," said Wynn. "More ripping than I thought, Figgy. Try some of this, and if you like it have one for yourself! Do!"

"Oh, rats!"

Fatty Wynn started a little and blinked at Figgins.

"I say, Figgy, there's nothing wrong, is there?"

Figgins was silent. Whatever had affected the rest of St. Jim's evidently had not affected Fatty Wynn; he was the same as usual.

"Bad news from home?" asked Fatty.

"No."

"You haven't heard from your governor?"

"No."

"Bank going on all right?"

"I suppose so."

"Hungry?"

"No, you ass!"

"Stony?" asked Fatty Wynn.

"No."

"Then what on earth's the matter?"

"I don't know."

Fatty Wynn stopped eating, and stared at Figgins.

"Look here, you're ill, Figgy!" he said. "Better have some of this steak-and-kidney pie, and you'll feel better."

"Oh, rats!"

Figgins walked out of the tuckshop.

"Hold on, Figgins!" called out Fatty Wynn anxiously.

"I'll come with you! Just wait a tick till I've finished this pie!"

But Figgins was gone.

CHAPTER 3.

Levison Does Not Like!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY, the swell of St. Jim's, was looking deeply distressed.

It was near dinner-time, and little groups of fellows had collected in the Hall, talking. And, to judge by their excited looks, there was a topic of unusual interest under discussion.

Arthur Augustus paused in the Hall, polished his eyeglass, and jammed it into his eye, and then took it out and polished it again. When D'Arcy of the Fourth was agitated, he never could get his eyeglass to fit comfortably. And at the present moment the aristocratic features of D'Arcy of the Fourth showed signs of mental distress.

Blake, Herties, and Digby were looking cloudy enough, too. They gathered in the passage gloomily.

"Bai Jove, deah boys! This is wotten!" said D'Arcy.

Jack Blake nodded without speaking.

"Beastly!" said Arthur Augustus.

"I'm sorry for Figgins," Digby remarked.

"I suppose we are all sorry for Figgins," said Blake.

Levison of the Fourth came up to the group with Mellish. The two cads of the School House were grinning.

"You've seen the paper, of course, you chaps?" asked Levison.

"Yes," said Blake shortly.

"Seen the news?"

"Yes."

"It's startling, isn't it?" said Mellish. "I should never have thought it of Figgins."

Blake turned on him angrily.

"Figgins! What has Figgins done?"

"Oh, nothing! But his father—"

"Figgy can't help what his father does."

"Wathah not!"

Levison laughed sneeringly.

"Oh, members of the same family are sure to be birds of a feather!" he said. "And I, for one, don't care about associating with the son of a thief!"

"You've never associated with Figgins!" said Blake disdainfully. "He wouldn't associate with you! You're not decent enough!"

"My father's not a thief, anyway!" sneered Levison.

"And I don't believe Figgy's is, either!" said Blake. "I can't help thinking there's some mistake about the matter!"

"The police think so."

Blake was silent.

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"Oh, it's pretty clear!" said Mellish. "And I think Figgins ought to leave the school! He must have the decency to get out after this!"

"And I shall be glad enough to see the last of the cad!" said Levison.

Smack!

The hand of Arthur Augustus came across Levison's face with a ringing report, like a pistol-shot. Levison staggered back against the wall with a gasp.

Arthur Augustus' eyeglass dropped to the end of its cord, and the swell of St. Jim's pushed back his cuffs and squared up to Levison in a most warlike way.

"Put up your hands, deah boy—I mean, you cad!" exclaimed D'Arcy.

"Ow!"

"I'm goin' to give you a feahful thwashin', you unspeakable wottah!"

"You dummy!"

"I have had many vows with Figgins," said D'Arcy, looking round, "but I wefuse to allow anybody to speak diswepctfully of a chap I wespct vevy highly! Put up your hands, you uttah wottah!"

"Hear, hear!" said Kangaroo of the Shell.

"Go it, Gussy!"

"Now then, Levison—"

Levison backed away. D'Arcy of the Fourth had many dandified ways, but he was a great fighting-man when his blood was up, and Levison did not care for the encounter.

"Come on, you wottah!"

"Look here—"

"Come on!" shouted D'Arcy, advancing upon Levison and tapping him on the nose. "I insist upon your puttin' up your wotten hands!"

"Cave!" muttered Blake.

Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, came out of his study just then, in time to save Levison.

D'Arcy dropped his hands. He jammed his monocle into his eye and gave the cad of the Fourth a most disdainful look through it, and walked away with his chums.

"Come into the study, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus. "We want to think this beastly mattah ovah."

The chums of the Fourth went into Study No. 6. Tom Merry & Co. were coming down the passage, and D'Arcy signed to them.

"Tom Mewwy, deah boy—"

"Hallo!" said Tom Merry glumly. "This is rotten news for poor old Figgy, isn't it?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The Terrible Three came into the study. The Fourth Formers and the Shell fellows looked equally gloomy.

"It's rotten!" said Monty Lowther. "Does Figgins know yet?"

"I think not," said Blake. "He wanted to see my paper."

"You didn't let him?"

"No."

"There aren't many papers in the House," Tom Merry remarked thoughtfully, "and, of course, Figgins doesn't know what there is to see in it. But—but he will have to know about it before long, you chaps."

"Yaas, wathah! That's what I was thinkin', deah boys, and I wanted to ask your opinion. We ought to bweak it gently to Figgins before he sees it in the papah. It will be a feahful shock to him!"

"Yes, rather."

"Besides, if some cad like Mellish, or Levison, or Crooke breaks the news, Figgy will get it worse than from us," Tom Merry remarked thoughtfully. "Suppose we break it to him?"

He looked round at the juniors. They all nodded.

"It's the best thing to be done," said Manners.

"I suppose so," Blake remarked slowly.

"Then the question is—who's going to tell him?" asked Tom Merry.

There was silence.

It was easy enough to agree that it was the best thing to be done, but it was not so easy to decide who should have the unpleasant task. Nobody was anxious to take it on.

"I suppose I had bettah tell him," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy at last, slowly. "As a fellow of tact and judgment, I suppose I shall be able to do it bettah than you chaps."

"Rats!" said Blake.

"If you want to bweak it to him, Blake—"

"I don't!" said Blake hastily.

"Or you, Tom Mewwy?"

"No fear!"

"Then I will do it. It appears to be necessary for somebody to thwow himself into the bweach," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity; "and it is the pwopah place for a D'Arcy to lead! I will bweak it gently to Figgins."

"Hush!"

There was a tap at the door, and it opened quickly, and



"What is my father arrested for?" shouted Figgins. "For wobbin' the bank——" began D'Arcy. But before he could finish his remark, Figgins' fist came crashing full in his face, and Arthur Augustus, with a yell of pain, was sent reeling backwards.

a flushed face looked into the study. It was the face of Figgins.

Silence fell upon the chums of the School House. D'Arcy cleared his throat with a little cough. Figgins came in and closed the door behind him, and then faced the School House fellows, with his eyes glinting and his teeth clenched.

CHAPTER 4.

Breaking It Gently!

F IGGINS did not speak for a moment. He looked at the chums of the School House, and they looked at him, and there was dead silence in Study No. 6.

It was Figgins who broke it.

"I've come here to speak to you chaps," he said.

"Yaas, deah boy!"

"I want to know what the matter is?" said Figgins savagely. "I'm getting fed up with it all, and the sooner you understand it the better!"

"Are you weally, deah boy?"

"There's something up," said Figgins. "The fellows all seem to have something up against me, and I can't get at what it is. They close up like oysters when I ask. I'm not going to stand it!"

The School House fellows were silent.

"You turned your back on me, Tom Merry——"

"I didn't, Figgy."

"What did you mean, then?"

"I—I didn't want to speak to you just then."

"Why not?"

The Shell fellow was silent.

"You refused to show me your paper, Blake."

"Ye-es."

"Why?"

"Well, you see——"

Figgins gritted his teeth.

"Yes, I see," he said. "I see that there's a plot of some kind on, and the only fellow not in it seems to be Fatty Wynn. I'm fed up!"

"Weally, Figgins——"

"And you've got to explain yourselves, or——"

"Or what?" demanded Blake, a little nettled.

"Or I shall fight everybody in this study in turn," said Figgins, pushing back his cuffs. "And I'll begin with you, Blake!"

"Look here, Figgins——"

"Are you going to explain?"

"You see——"

"Then put your fists up!" said Figgins, advancing upon Blake.

Jack Blake put his hands behind him.

"I'm not going to fight you, Figgy, old man," he said. "Goodness knows I feel too sorry for you to do that, whatever you may say."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Figgins glared.

"How dare you feel sorry for me?" he exclaimed passionately. "What do you mean? Are you all dotty? What has happened to make you all sorry for me, I'd like to know?"

Blake did not speak.

"Will you tell me?" shouted Figgins.

"I—I can't!" said Blake. "It's too rotten, Figgy, old man——"

"Don't call me 'Figgy, old man!' " exclaimed Figgins. "I tell you I'm fed up with all this. Some of you tell me what the matter is."

Every eye was turned upon Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. He had undertaken to explain the matter to Figgins, and to break it gently to the New House junior. But the words seemed to stick in D'Arcy's throat. He polished his eye-glass several times, and jammed it into his eye, and looked distressfully at Figgins.

"I—I—I'm goin' to explain, Figgy, deah boy!" he said.

Figgins turned upon him.

"Explain, then, quick!"

"You see, Figgy——"

"Well?"

"We're all sowwy——"

"Sorry for what?" yelled Figgins.

"For—for it, you know."

"For what?"

"What's happened."

"What has happened?"

"That's what I'm comin' to, deah boy! I'm bwreakin' it gently," D'Arcy explained. "I'm going to bwreak it gently to you, deah boy!"

"Buck up, Gussy!" muttered Tom Merry.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Tell him, for goodness sake, if you're going to!"

"Pway leave it to me, Tom Mewwy! You can twust a

fellow of tact and judgment to do this thing in a pwopah way," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a great deal of dignity. "Pway do not intewwupt me!"

"But—" "You bweak the thwead of my thoughts when you intewwupt me, Tom Mewwy. Figgay, deah boy, I'm sowwy to tell you—"

"Will you come to the point?" said Figgins huskily.

"Yaas, wathah! I'm comin' to it."

"It's about your father, Figgy," said Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

Figgins staggered a little.

"My father?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"What's the matter with him—is he ill?"

"No."

"What is it, then?" Figgins muttered. "What do you mean? What are you all looking at me like that for? Tell me, what is it?"

"Figgy, deah boy, I'll tell you—"

"Quick!"

"Your—your fathah—"

"Well?"

"He—he's been awwested—"

Figgins gave a hoarse cry.

"My father arrested?"

"Yaas!"

"Impossible!"

"It's twue," said D'Arcy sadly. "That's what was in the papah, deah boy. That's why we couldn't let you see it, you see."

Figgins caught at the edge of the table for support. His knees seemed to have become suddenly weak.

"It's impossible!" he said, and his voice was a husky whisper. "I think it's impossible! There is some hoax!"

"Figgy, deah boy—"

"What is he arrested for, then?" shouted Figgins.

"For wobbin' the bank—"

Crash!

Full in D'Arcy's face came Figgins' crashing fist, and the swell of St. Jim's reeled backwards and fell heavily to the floor.

CHAPTER 5.

The Newspaper Report!

TOM MERRY rushed forward.

He caught Figgins and dragged him back, and Blake and Lowther lent a hand.

D'Arcy lay dazed on the floor, and there was blood on his face. Figgins struggled furiously in the grasp of the juniors.

"Let me get at him!" he shrieked. "I'll teach him to call my father a thief! Let me get at the cad!"

"Figgins—"

"Hang you! Let me go!"

"Figgy—"

D'Arcy sat up, rubbing his nose dazedly. He wiped the flowing stream of red with a cambric handkerchief.

"Pway don't be wuff on him, deah boys," he said. "He's natuwally excited, undah the circs. I don't mind his biffin' me on the nose."

The words came straight from D'Arcy's heart. They had more effect upon Figgins than any amount of explanation could have had. He ceased struggling.

"Let me go!" he muttered. "I—I won't hit out again. I was a fool to lose my temper. But—but it's lies! You've been taken in."

"It's in the paper!" said Blake miserably.

"What paper?"

"The evening paper last night, and this morning's paper."

"It's not true!"

"You'd better read it for yourself, Figgy."

Figgins was leaning more heavily upon the table. The sudden fury was past. He was white and sick and miserable. A dreadful conviction was forcing itself into his mind that there was something in it. Other fellows knew it, as well as Tom Merry & Co. He remembered French and the other fellows with the newspaper. He remembered the peculiar conduct of Thompson of the Shell. He remembered seeing a derisive grin on Levison's face as he came into the School House. True or not, it was evidently in the paper; and how could it be stated in the paper if it was not true?

"Give me the paper," muttered Figgins.

Blake handed it to him without a word.

Figgins opened it with fingers that were trembling now. Blake pointed to the column containing the late news.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,403.

Figgins looked at it, and his brain seemed to whirl round, and the clear print to dance before his eyes.

Tom Merry's arm was flung round his shoulders to hold him. For a moment Figgins did not know where he was. Then he collected himself.

His starting eyes ran down the column again. There it was, in bitter, cruel type!

"BRISTOL BANKER ARRESTED!"

"Mr. J. Figgins, the senior partner of the Bristol and Somerset Bank, was arrested this morning at his residence at Clifton. The junior partner, Mr. Egbert Frynne, who absconded yesterday, has not yet been traced. The police believe, however, that they have a clue to his whereabouts. It is concluded that the greater part of the missing funds are in his possession. Mr. Figgins denies complicity, and declares that he was taken utterly by surprise by his partner's flight, and that he had no intention himself of attempting to leave the country."

The paper fluttered to the floor.

"Is that all?" asked Figgins.

"There was something in this morning's 'Daily Sketch,' " said Tom Merry. "I was looking for footer news when I saw it. Your father is accused directly of having appropriated the bank's funds, and of knowing where the missing money is hidden. He is going to be sent for trial."

"Oh heavens!"

D'Arcy had risen to his feet. He stood dabbing his nose, and saying nothing. Figgins looked at him with glassy eyes.

"I—I'm sorry, D'Arcy," he muttered. "I—I shouldn't have hit out like that. I—I hope I haven't hurt you much."

"That's all wight, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus. "It's nothin'—nothin' at all."

"I—I— Of course, this isn't true!" said Figgins, pointing to the paper on the floor. "I suppose Frynne is a thief as he's bolted; but—but my father is innocent!"

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy," said D'Arcy feebly.

Figgins compressed his lips.

"You don't think so?" he said.

The juniors were silent.

"After all, why should you think so?" said Figgins. "You don't know him—you don't know how good and kind he is—how thoroughly decent he is. But I know, and I know that he never did this."

"I hope you're wight, Figgy, old man."

"I know I'm right," said Figgins. "I suppose it's all up with me at St. Jim's, if the pater's money's gone. But my father is innocent."

He turned towards the door.

Tom Merry made a movement.

"Figgins, old man, is there anything we can do?"

"Thanks, no."

"You—you don't imagine now that we were down upon you because of this?" said Tom Merry. "I—I didn't want to tell you what I'd seen in the paper, you know."

"Same here," said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Figgins nodded.

"I understand!" he said.

"I wish there was something we could do to help you, Figgins, old chap," said Monty Lowther.

"I wish there were," said Figgins, with a miserable grin. "But—but there isn't! Thank you all the same."

He quitted the study.

Tom Merry & Co. looked at one another with glum faces.

All of them felt keenly the terrible blow that had fallen upon Figgins.

"How utterly rotten it is!" said Blake, at last.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It's possible that Figgy's pater is innocent," said Manners.

"I wish I could think so, for Figgy's sake," said Tom Merry slowly. "But it seems that a heap of money is gone, and that it was almost impossible for one partner to make away with it without the knowledge of the other. If Figgy's father is innocent, then he has been frightfully careless, I should think."

"Yaas, that is vewy pwobably the case, deah boys. Still, there's a vewy great difference between bein' careless and bein' a thief. I wish—"

"Well, what do you wish?" asked Digby, as the swell of St. Jim's took his eyeglass and polished it, with a very thoughtful air.

"I wish I were not bound by the twammels of bein' at school just at pwesent," said the elegant junior, slowly and meditatively. "You know that I have shown a wemarkable aptitude as an amatuah detective, deah boys."

"Oh, rats!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Don't talk out of the back of your neck, Gussy, at a time like this," said Blake peevishly.

"I regard that as a ridiculous expression, Blake. I wathah think that if I were free to act, I could twack down that wascal Fwynne and make him hand ovah the cash he had taken, and pewwaps it would pprove to be all that was missin'." Then Figgy's patah would be cleared. It's wathah a wippin' ideah, isn't it?"

"Yes; I can see you hunting down a chap when all the police in the country can't find him," Blake asserted sarcastically.

"It's a mattah of tact and aptitude——"

"Oh, rats!"

"I wefuse to allow——"

"I wish we could help Figgy's," said Tom Merry. "But I suppose we can't. Let's get out!"

The juniors left the study and went downstairs. On the steps of the School House, Mellish and Levison were standing, looking after the tall figure of the New House junior, and grinning maliciously. There had never been any love lost between Figgy's and the cads of the Fourth, and Mellish and Levison thought that the time had come to score over the fellow they feared and disliked. Any thought of dealing generously with a fellow who was "down" never entered their minds.

"Look out for your pockets!" yelled Levison, as some School House fellows passed Figgy's.

And Mellish burst into a cackle.

Figgy's stopped for a moment as if thunderstruck.

Tom Merry's eyes blazed.

With two bounds he reached Levison, and the cad of the Fourth was whirled round in the Shell fellow's grasp.

"Here, let go!" yelled Levison.

"You utter cad! You worm!"

"I say——"

picture of his father's kind face, darkened with care and shame, lined with suffering, in a prison cell.

His father arrested—in prison!

It seemed impossible.

But it was true. That much was true, at all events. The charge was not true; but his father had been arrested upon that charge, and was in prison, waiting to take his trial on the charge of stealing the money entrusted to his care.

It seemed too horrible.

And why didn't his father communicate with him? He could not understand the old gentleman's hesitation to send him news. And Figgy's had no mother.

Fatty Wynn came into the study. Fatty Wynn's plump face was very serious, and Figgy's could see that he, too, had heard the news.

"Dinner's ready, Figgy, old man," he said.

"I don't want any dinner."

"Ratty sent me to look for you."

"Ask him to excuse me, Fatty."

Fatty Wynn hesitated.

"You know what he is, Figgy—the old bounder! He will be down on you. Look here! You ought to eat something, you know. It's no good missing meals—no good ever came of that, Figgy. Come and have your dinner."

"I—I can't; it would choke me."

"But you must keep up your strength."

"I'm all right."

"Look here, Figgy, you'd better show up at dinner! The fellows may think that your pater's guilty if you seem too much knocked over."

Figgy's jumped up.

"I'll come, Fatty."

Many fellows in the New House dining-hall glanced at Figgy's as he came in with Fatty Wynn. Others, a little more tactful and delicate, were careful not to look at him.

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Tom Merry hurled the cad of the Fourth away from him. Levison rolled down the steps, and landed with a heavy bump at the bottom. There was a wild yell from Levison.

"Yaroo!"

Mellish went whirling down the next moment. He crashed into Levison and rolled over him, and his nose smote the hard ground.

Tom Merry looked down on them with angry face.

"Now come up again, you cads, if you like!" he shouted.

But they did not come up.

Figgy's glanced round, and then walked on towards the New House. Levison did not call after him again.

CHAPTER 6.

Under a Cloud!

FIGGINS entered his own House.

He was walking like a fellow in a dream.

The juniors who saw him could see that he had now heard the news.

Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, stopped him in the passage, laying a kindly hand upon his shoulder. Monteith of the Sixth, as a rule, was not specially kind-hearted, but he felt sorry for Figgy's now.

"I'm sorry for the news about your father, Figgy's," he said. "I can see that you've heard it now. I hope it will turn out all right."

"Thank you, Monteith!" said Figgy's dully.

He went up the stairs.

The bell was ringing now for dinner, but Figgy's hardly heard it, and did not heed it. He wanted to be alone, to think, or try to think. He went into his study and threw himself into a chair.

He could not think. Try as he would his thoughts would not run in order. A picture was before his eyes—the

Figgy's did not see any of them. He went straight to his place and sat down.

Mr. Ratcliff glanced at him. The New House master was not a kind man.

"You are late, Figgy's," he said.

"I am sorry, sir."

"Take fifty lines."

"Yes, sir."

Figgy's almost laughed. Lines were as nothing to him now in his present trouble.

Fatty Wynn sat beside Figgy's, and he saw to it that Figgy's plate was not left un replenished. But Figgy's ate very little. As he had said he felt as if every morsel he swallowed would choke him.

Fatty Wynn could not understand that state of mind at all.

He thought that if he were in trouble, he would think first of all of fortifying himself with a square meal. But fellows took things in different ways, Fatty Wynn sadly reflected. It troubled him very much to see Figgy's eat so little.

Mr. Ratcliff spoke to Figgy's again after dinner. He signed to the junior to stop when the others were going out. Figgy's paused.

The Head wishes to see you in his study, Figgy's, at half-past one," he said.

"Yes, sir."

"It is in reference to the news in the paper this morning," said the Housemaster. "I presume that you have seen it?"

"Yes, sir."

Figgy's was very glad that he had seen it. If it had remained to Mr. Ratcliff to break the news, it would not have been broken gently or tactfully.

Mr. Ratcliff had never liked the sturdy, independent hero of the Fourth.

"Very well," said Mr. Ratcliff. "It is shocking news, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,403.

of course. And I suppose it will lead to your leaving St. Jim's."

"If my father is ruined, sir, I suppose so," said Figgins quietly.

Mr. Ratcliff coughed.

"I did not refer to that. You can hardly remain at the school with the shadow of such a disgrace hanging over you. It would not be—er—well for the school."

Figgins flushed.

"I hope that my father's innocence will be proved, sir."

"Ahem! I have nothing to say as to that," said Mr. Ratcliff. "If Mr. Figgins is—er—innocent, I certainly hope that his innocence will be proved. Otherwise, I trust that you and he will see the propriety of your leaving the college very shortly."

"That's for the Head to decide, sir."

Mr. Ratcliff bit his lip.

"Very well, Figgins, you may go."

And Figgins went. It had been hard for Figgins to speak respectfully to Mr. Ratcliff. But he had succeeded. He had thought that even the sour, bad-tempered master of the New House might have been kind for once when a fellow was down on his luck. But Mr. Ratcliff evidently did not think so.

Figgins went out with his lips set. Fatty Wynn was waiting in the passage.

"What did Ratty want?" he asked.

"I'm to see the Head."

"Oh!"

"He had to have a dig at me, too," said Figgins bitterly. "I suppose I shall have to get used to that."

Fatty Wynn nodded, but did not speak. He would have suggested a visit to the tuckshop by way of comforting Figgins, and would have stood jam tarts galore, but he felt that it would be of no use.

Figgins went to the Head's study at half-past one and tapped on the door.

Dr. Holmes' deep voice bade him enter.

"Of course, you know why I have sent for you, Figgins?" he said. "You know that your father is in trouble?"

"Yes, sir."

"I am very, very sorry to hear it, Figgins."

"Thank you, sir."

"I hope that matters will turn out less serious than they—er—look at present," said the Head. "Meanwhile, pray remember that I—and I think all others here—feel only sympathy towards you, and do not dream of visiting your father's fault upon you."

"My father is innocent, sir!"

Dr. Holmes coughed.

"Ahem! I'm glad to see that you have faith in your parent, Figgins," he said. "It is quite an admirable trait in your character. I sincerely hope that your faith may prove to be well-founded. Meanwhile—ahem!—I have heard from your father. He tells me that if I wish, under the circumstances, I may send you away from the school at once, and that your uncle, Major Figgins, will take charge of you. But your uncle is at present abroad, having gone to Nice for the winter. He would take it as a favour, however, if I allowed you to remain at the school for the present. Now, of course, I shall be very glad to allow you to remain, and as far as you are concerned, Figgins, everything will go on as before. That is why I have sent for you to tell you."

"Thank you, sir."

Figgins hesitated.

"You wish to say something to me, my boy?" said Dr. Holmes kindly.

"Yes, sir. Would it be possible for me to see my father?"

The doctor shook his head.

"I fear that would be impossible, Figgins."

"Very well, sir."

"Pray try your hardest to bear this with fortitude," said the Head. "It is a terrible trial for you; but it is at such times that strength of character and firm faith should be shown."

And Figgins quitted the Head's study.

The kindness of the headmaster had made a deep impression upon Figgins. It was very refreshing after his interview with his own Housemaster. And Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, stopped him on his way out to speak a kind word; and so did Kildare of the Sixth, captain of St. Jim's.

But there were others. Mellish, Levison, and Crooke, and two or three others of the same kidney, met Figgins outside the Head's house, and gave him sneering looks. They did not speak, but their looks were enough.

Figgins paused, clenching his hands, but it was futile to enter into a row with the eads of the School House. He tramped on in silence, and a mocking chuckle followed him. He did not turn his head.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,403.

CHAPTER 7.

D'Arcy's Deduction!

"F'WYNNE!"

"Eh?"

"Fwynne!"

"What are you babbling about, Gussy?" asked Jack Blake crossly.

Blake was feeling cross that afternoon. Afternoon school was over, and the early winter evening had set in. The chums of Study No. 6 were in the Junior Common-room in the School House, and Blake was tenderly nursing a black eye.

Perhaps a black eye helped to make Blake cross. He had been in three fights that day. It was all on account of Figgins.

Blake had determined that nobody in the School House, at all events, should say a word against Figgins. Hence the trio of encounters. Crooke of the Shell had been the first victim. Crooke had made a sneering remark about Figgins, and Blake had licked him for it. It had been quite a terrific encounter, for Crooke was a big fellow. Blake was hard hit, but Crooke was hopelessly licked. Mellish had come next. He had said something about swindlers having their sons at decent schools, and that was quite enough. Mellish had been an easier victim than Crooke. Blake had simply wiped up the passage with him, and Mellish was now in his study nursing his injuries.

The third victim was Levison. Levison had emerged from the conflict a wreck. But Blake was showing signs of wear and tear by this time.

"Fwynne!" repeated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, for the third time.

"Look here, you ass—"

"I wefuse to be called an ass, Blake."

"Well, fathead, then."

"I wegard that expression as equally oppwobwious! Weally, Blake—"

"Oh, my eye!" muttered Blake.

Arthur Augustus' expression softened at once.

"I am sowwy you are cwooked in that way. Pway leave the next wottah to me! I should have been vewy pleased to give Levison a feafhul thwashin'."

"And I could have handled Crooke," said Herries.

"Fwynne!"

"Gussy's got that name on the brain," Digby remarked. "Is that a vocal exercise you are going through?"

"No, it is not, Dig. I am thinkin'! You know the name of Mr. Figgins' absconding partner is Fwynne."

"Frynne," said Blake. "I know it is. I've heard the name before."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"So have I when I come to think of it," said Digby thoughtfully.

"That is what I am coming to," said Arthur Augustus quietly. "If that man Fwynne could be found and the money was found on him—"

"It!"

"It's the only possible chance of cleawin' Figgins' patah."

"I dare say it is."

"I'm wathah inclined to think, on weflection, that Figgy seniah is innocent, deah boys."

"I wish I could think so," growled Blake.

"You see, Figgy himself is so awfully decent!" D'Arcy exclaimed. "Therefore, as Figgy is so jolly decent, the pwobability is that his patah is decent, too."

"It doesn't follow," said Blake, "but it's very likely. I'm sure I hope that it will turn out that he is all right."

"If Fwynne could be found—"

"The police are looking for him," said Digby. "Every port in the kingdom is being watched, and he can't possibly get out of England without being caught, I should say."

"Pewwaps he is not twyin' to."

"Oh, it's certain!" said Blake. "The police know he's trying to get out of the country. He's got a lot of money with him, too, and he knows he'd never be safe in England."

D'Arcy nodded.

"Yaas, the police think so," he assented.

"But you know better, perhaps?" Herries suggested sarcastically.

"I wegard that as vewy pwob, Hewwies. The police haven't vewy much bwains, you know, while I have weally a gif as an amatauh detective."

"Rats!"

"I will thank you not to make those oppwobwious we-marks," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity, "I have been thinking. That fellow Fwynne must be a deep beggah, don't you think?"

"I suppose so."

"And he can wead the papahs."

"Well?"

"Then he knows as well as we do that the police believe

he is twyin' to leave the countwy, and that the ports are bein' watched for him."

"Yes?"
 "Then if he is a deep beggah, you know, he won't twy to leave. He'll bide his time for a bit, and wait till the coast is clear!" said Arthur Augustus triumphantly.

"I shouldn't wonder," said Blake, without enthusiasm. "Are you thinkin' of making a walking tour through Great Britain, looking for him?"

"Weally, Blake—"
 "Or advertising for him in the newspapers?" asked Digby. "Don't be an ass, Digby! My ideah is that if he's deep, he will go inland instead of towards the ports, and will lie low in some quiet place till the police are tired of looking for him."

"Quite likely!"
 "Now I'm comin' to the point."
 "Time you did!" growled Blake.
 "Weally, Blake, do be patient, deah boy. I have been thinkin' this out vevy carefully, and I had a hundwed lines in class this aftahnoon for thinkin' of this instead of Woman history. The name of Fwynne is quite familiar to me."

"So it is to me," said Blake, "though I can't remember where I've heard it, unless Figgins may have mentioned it as the name of his father's partner in the bank."

"I have heard it in Wylcombe."
 "In Rylcombe?" repeated Blake, astonished.

"Yaas, wathah!"
 "What do you mean?"
 "There is a shop in Wylcombe kept by Jonas Fwynne," said D'Arcy, "and I wemembah that he is not a Wylcombe man, but a West Countyyman. He keeps a shop for fishin' materials and things."

"Yes, I remember now."
 "It has stwuck me—"
 "His shop has?" asked Digby.
 "It has stwuck me," said D'Arcy, ignoring the interruption, "that this Fwynne man may be a relation of the othah Fwynne, especially as he comes fwom the same part of the countwy."

"It's possible. It's not a common name."
 "Well, then, it's possible, too, that Fwynne may come to hide here. Wylcombe is a quiet place, and nobody would evah think of lookin' for a cwiminal there. Suppose Egbert Fwynne was turnin' ovah in his mind wherh he could hide while he was waitin' for the hue and cwy to blow ovah, and he had a relation in a quiet little corner like Wylcombe—"

"By Jove, it's possible!"
 "But a chap wouldn't be likely to shelter a relation who was hiding from the law," said Herries dubiously.
 "I don't know. Pewwaps a vevy honest man wouldn't, but this man Fwynne is not honest. He sold me a wotten fishin'-wod last summah, and swindled me."

Blake grinned.
 "Still, that's different."
 "I don't see it. A man who would swindle me would do anything else dishonest. I am bwingin' this theowty to your notice, deah boys, because I want you to help me."

"Help you?"
 "Yes, I am goin' to look into the mattah."
 "You're thinking of calling on Frynne in the village and asking him whether he's a relation of Egbert Frynne, and whether he's hiding him from the police—eh?"
 Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gave Blake a withering look through his monocle.

"No, you uttah ass! I don't think of doin' anythin' of the sort."
 "It would be like you," said Blake sweetly. "What is the little game, then?"
 "I'm goin' to investigate."
 "How?"

"I'm goin' to pay a visit to the place, and look wound. If you fellows like to come with me, you can; but you must be vevy cautious, and, of course, you mustn't say a word about Figgins."

Crash!
 The chums swung round at the sudden disturbance. It was caused by Hancock going headlong out of the



Several juniors were standing by the gates as Figgins came along. Then, as if by a concerted signal, they all turned up their noses and gave him extremely scornful looks. Figgins crushed down his angry feelings and walked on. He was shunned because his father had been arrested!

room into the passage, hurled there by the combined efforts of the Terrible Three.

"You can come in again, if you like, Hancock, and repeat that remark of yours about Figgins," said Monty Lowther sweetly.

Hancock did not accept the invitation.

"Good for you!" said Blake. "Come here, Tom Merry, and listen to Gussy's latest wheeze!"

"Yaas, wathah, deah boys!"

The Terrible Three crossed over. Blake explained, and the chums of the Shell grinned.

"Well, what do you think of it?" Blake demanded.

"Rotten!" said Manners.

"No good!" said Monty Lowther.

"Rather hazy, anyway!" said Tom Merry.

D'Arcy sniffed.

"You fellows can help or not, as you like," he said. "I'm goin' to investigate, and I'm goin' to begin now."

"Oh, we'll come!" said Tom Merry.

"Oh, you can please yourselves about that, deah boys!" said D'Arcy, with dignity.

"Oh, we'll come—we can't let you get into mischief alone."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"If we can get passes out, that is," said Tom Merry, with a laugh. "And I think it's very likely that we can't."

And Tom Merry's prediction proved to be quite correct—they couldn't. There were no passes out to be had by juniors, and Arthur Augustus' brilliant scheme of investigation had to be postponed till the morrow.

"Nevah mind, deah boys," said the swell of St. Jim's. "It's a half-holiday to-morrow, you know, and we shall have heaps of time. And I have a feelin' that we are on the twack."

Whereat Tom Merry & Co. grinned. They were quite willing to help Arthur Augustus in his investigations, but they were very far from feeling that he was on the track.

CHAPTER 8.

Figgy in a Fury!

FIGGINS was looking decidedly clouded that evening. It was not only the misfortune that had happened to his father, and his anxiety as to the fate of the unfortunate banker.

Figgins had a firm belief in his father's innocence, and he could not believe that an innocent man would be condemned. Surely something must conspire to make his father's innocence as clear to all the world as it was to Figgins. It was a touching faith, and it was very like Figgins.

But there were other troubles for Figgins just now.

There were some fellows at St. Jim's who would never turn upon him, whatever might happen. Fatty Wynn was one of them, and Kerr was another—if he had been there. Over in the School House Figgins had many firm friends, whose friendship was not seriously interfered with by the incessant House rows and disputes.

But in his own House the news about Figgins' father had made a great difference to the feeling with which Figgins was regarded.

As Dibbs of the Fourth said, it was pretty rotten having the son of a criminal in the House at all, and it was one up against the House, of which the School House fellows would not fail to remind them.

It was rotten enough having a swindling banker's son there, but that that swindling banker's son was junior captain of the House was intolerable to Dibbs.

Dibbs for a long time had had a secret persuasion that he would make a better junior captain than Figgins, and it seemed to Dibbs that the time had come for him to air his views on that subject in public, which he accordingly did.

He found a good following.

Many of the fellows, while feeling sorry for Figgins, felt that the time had come for him to retire from the public eye, so to speak, even if he did not leave St. Jim's.

And Dibbs suggested to a crowd of fellows in the Junior Common-room in the New House that Figgins should be asked to take a "back seat."

After all, there were other fellows in the House quite as good leaders as he was, Dibbs declared.

"Where will you find them?" asked Pratt.

"Well, I'm one."

"Rats!"

"Many rats!" said Thompson of the Shell.

Dibbs turned red.

"Well, I think so," he said, "and I think a good many fellows here agree with me. Anyway, I think all must agree that we don't want the son of a criminal for a skipper."

"Hush!" muttered French.

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Figgins had just entered the room.

But it was too late to "hush!"—Figgins had heard. His face went very red and then very pale. Dibbs went rather pale, too—he had no desire for a personal encounter with Figgins, but it looked now as if he would have no choice in the matter.

Figgins strode towards him.

"What's that you said, Dibbs?" he asked, in a very clear voice.

"You heard me!" muttered Dibbs.

"You were speaking of me?"

"Yes."

"As the son of a criminal?" said Figgins, his voice trembling with rage.

"Yes," said Dibbs sullenly.

"Take that, then!"

Smack!

Dibbs of the Fourth went heavily to the ground. He was upon his feet in a moment. Dibbs had plenty of pluck.

He rushed at Figgins, but the juniors surged between.

"Hold on!" exclaimed French. "No fighting!"

"Hold on! Hands down!"

"Stand back, Dibbs—"

"You'd better think a bit before you land out, too, Figgy," said Thompson of the Shell.

Figgins' eyes blazed.

"I'll land out at anybody who speaks of my father as Dibbs did, even if it's a Sixth Former who does it!" he exclaimed fiercely.

"Oh, cheese it!"

"Let me get at him!" roared Dibbs.

"Hold on—"

"Oh, let him come on!" said Figgins disdainfully. "I'll wipe up the floor with him, and with anybody else who cares to repeat what he says, too!"

"Look here, Figgy—"

Dibbs broke away from the juniors who were holding him and rushed at Figgins. Figgins was by no means disinclined for the encounter.

In a moment they were fighting hammer and tongs.

It seemed to Figgins that every blow he struck was in defence of his father, and that was very unfortunate, for Dibbs, being regarded in the light of a persecutor of Figgins senior, received a most drastic punishment.

Figgins knocked him right and left.

Dibbs came up to time again and again, but he was knocked out at last, and lay gasping on the floor of the Common-room.

Figgins stood with clenched fists and glaring eyes, gazing down at him.

"Do you want any more?" he shouted.

"Ow!" groaned Dibbs.

"Are you done, you cad?"

"Groogh! Yes."

"You'll get the same again if you speak of my father as you did," said Figgins, breathing hard.

Dibbs sat up and blinked at him out of his half-closed eyes. Dibbs was beaten, but he was not conquered, and he was a very obstinate youth.

"It's true!" he gasped. "It's true, all I said! You're the son of a criminal, and you can put that in your pipe and smoke it, Figgins!"

"You cad!"

Figgins sprang towards him. But the other fellows grasped him and dragged him back by sheer force. Figgins struggled furiously.

"Let me go!" he shouted.

"Rats!"

"Stand back!"

"I'll smash him!" roared Figgins.

"You've pretty well smashed him already," said Thompson of the Shell. "You can't hit him again, Figgins."

"Let him hold his tongue, then!"

"I won't!" howled Dibbs. "Your father's a bank robber—a rotten swindler, and you know it, and if you had any decency you'd leave the school!"

Figgins gave a roar of rage, and, by a tremendous effort, broke away from those who were holding him. He leaped upon Dibbs, and dragged him to his feet. Then he began to hit again, and Dibbs fell like a bundle of old clothes to the floor.

"Stop it!" roared French.

Figgins was dragged off. Dibbs was gasping and panting, and had no breath left to repeat his remarks. Figgins glared round on the juniors who were holding him. His eyes were burning with rage.

"So you fellows stand by that cad and what he says!" he exclaimed. "Very well! You can have him for your captain, if you like! I resign!"

"Look here, Figgins—"

"Jolly good thing, too!" growled Pratt. "I think we've

had enough of your temper. You ought to lie low at a time like this."

"I'll lie low enough," said Figgins. "I won't speak to you again—any of you! You can have Dibbs for your captain—a pretty captain he looks, too! Go and be hanged, all of you!"

And Figgins tramped furiously out of the Common-room. He left the New House juniors in a buzz.

Dibbs staggered to his feet. "We'll take him at his word!" he gasped. "Figgins resigned!"

"Yes, rather!" "About the best thing he could do," Pratt remarked. "But about having you for skipper, Dibby, that's quite another matter. You can go and eat coke!"

"Look here, Pratt—" "Kerr would make a better skipper," said Thompson. "As a matter of fact, he would have made a better skipper than Figgins, only he never would hear of it."

"But Kerr's away," said French. "Well, there's Fatty Wynn."

"Captain of the tuckshop, if you like!" said Dibbs, with a contemptuous snort.

"I don't know. He's true blue, anyway, and a jolly good goalkeeper," said Pratt. "I vote that we offer the job to Fatty."

"Hear, hear!" "Look here—" began the angry Dibbs.

"Oh, you shut up!" "I tell you—" "Rats!"

"Here's Wynn!" exclaimed Jimson. "Let's ask him!" Fatty Wynn looked into the room. He looked round, as if in search of someone.

"Figgy here?" he asked. "Well, no," said French uncomfortably. "He isn't."

"Know where he is?" "Gone up to his study, I think."

"Oh, all serene!" "Hold on, Fatty! We've got something to say to you."

Fatty Wynn turned round again. "Feed on?" he asked.

"Ha, ha, ha!" "We want you to be junior captain of the New House," said Thompson.

Fatty Wynn stared. "I can't," he said. "Figgy is junior captain."

"He's resigned." "My hat! What for?"

"Well, he really had to," explained French. "After the news about his father, of course, it wouldn't have done for Figgins to keep the position."

Fatty Wynn began to glare. "You utter ass!" he said.

"Eh?" "You unspeakable chump! Do you mean to say that you've given Figgins the order of the boot?" roared Fatty Wynn.

"Well, yes, it amounts to that."

"You frajvous chumps!" said Fatty Wynn. "And you have the cheek to ask me to be captain after that! I'd rather be captain of a bunch of bunny rabbits! Yah!"

And Fatty Wynn, with a snort, turned round and tramped out of the room. He left the New House juniors looking considerably sheepish.

"Ahem! Wynn doesn't seem to take to the idea!" French remarked, after a pause.

"Well, we don't want him," said Dibbs. "I'm willing—"

"Of course you are," said Thompson sarcastically. "But we're not, you see."

"Look here, Thompson—" "Oh, shut up!"

And the crowd broke up, leaving the unhappy Dibbs to nurse a swollen nose and two black eyes, with his chances of becoming junior captain of the New House as remote as ever.

CHAPTER 9.

On the Trail!

"YOU fellows weady?" "I'm ready," said Blake.

"And so am I," said Tom Merry. "Where are the othah boundahs?"

Blake grinned. "Herries has gone to look after his bulldog, and Dig has gone out with Manners and his camera," he remarked.

"Monty Lowther is playing footer," said Tom Merry.

(Continued on the next page.)



Do you know a good joke? If so, send it to "THE GEM JESTER," 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4 (Comp.). Half-a-crown is awarded to the sender of every joke that appears in this column.

FATTY'S FREE FEED.

George Figgins: "Run down to the tuckshop, Fatty, and get me two steak-and-kidney pies. One for yourself and one for me."

Fatty Wynn (returning later with the change): "Sorry, Figgy, but there was only one pie left, so I had it myself!" Half-a-crown has been awarded to J. Stewart, Tofts, Newton Mearns, Renfrewshire.

THE CULPRIT.

Father: "I can't think what is the matter with my razor this morning. It's quite blunt."

Son: "It was all right yesterday, dad; I sharpened my pencils with it!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to A. Williams, 82, Pasture Avenue, Moreton, Wirral, Cheshire.

THIS WEEK'S HOWLER.

Teacher: "What are the exports of India?" Tommy: "India rice, india-rubber, and indigestion!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to R. Whitehead, South Down House, Leigh, near Tonbridge, Kent.

DOING "TIME."

Creditor: "Is the manager in?" Office-boy: "Yes."

Creditor: "May I speak to him?" Office-boy: "When he comes out."

Creditor: "When will he come out?" Office-boy: "In four years!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to F. Shoebridge, 78, Dalwood Street, Camberwell, London, S.E.5.

PITY THE POOR HORSE!

Farmer: "That horse looks a bit thin. Have ye been feeding him properly while Oi've been gone?"

New Hand: "Oh, no, sir! You told me not to put a bit in his mouth while you were away!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to R. Lee, 27, Meyrick Road, Battersea, London, S.W.11.

LOOKING AHEAD.

Struggling Artist (being dunned for rent and trying to put a bold front on things): "Let me tell you this—in a few years' time people will look up at this miserable studio and say: 'Cobralt, the artist, used to work there.'"

Landlord: "If yer don't pay yer rent by ter-night they'll be able ter say it ter-morrow!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to R. Curlewis, 84, Havelock Street, West Perth, Australia.

A FINE SIGHT!

Musketry Instructor: "Now I've explained the principles of sighting a rifle, what would you describe as a fine sight?"

Recruit: "Two dinners on one plate, sir!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to R. Bass, Gordon Cottage, Bishop Sutton, near Bristol, Somerset.

"We three will be enough to track down the desperado, I think."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"There are enough of us to put salt on his tail if we catch him," said Jack Blake. "Come on, Gussy, and let the others go and eat coke!"

"Vevy well, deah boy. Aftah all, a crowd would be more likely to attract attention than to make discoveries."

"That only just occurred to you?" said Blake. "Not that I suppose there are any discoveries to be made, so far as that goes."

"That remains to be seen," said D'Arcy, with dignity.

"Of course it does," said Tom Merry. "I have a feeling that Gussy will discover the absconding banker hiding there disguised as a fishing-rod—"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy!" said Arthur Augustus. "Pway come on, and don't wot!"

And, having given his silk hat a final touch and adjusted his eyeglass, the swell of St. Jim's started with his comrades.

That there was a chance that D'Arcy's scheme might lead to the discovery of something helpful to Figgins, Tom Merry and Blake both admitted. But the chance was so exceedingly slim that they were inclined to treat the whole matter humorously.

They walked down to Rylcombe and entered the High Street. Arthur Augustus paused before a shop that lay back from the street with an old elm growing before it. From the shop a garden ran back to the river, and a punt was moored there.

In the shop were various accessories for boyish sports, and a little man with a brown complexion and quick, keen eyes was seated there mending a boot.

The three juniors paused and looked in at the shop window, taking a survey of the place before entering. The name over the shop had been painted out, apparently with a view to the sign being repainted. But the juniors remembered the old sign, with "J. Frynne" in sprawling letters, which had been above the shop for many a year.

Mr. Jonas Frynne was not a prominent inhabitant of Rylcombe, but he had been there a good many years, and he did so small a trade in his little shop, especially in the winter, that the villagers supposed that he must have some other source of income.

Mr. Frynne had confided to his neighbours that he had rich relations, and they had surmised that his rich relations made him an allowance.

Mr. Frynne did not bear a very good character in the village. Not that he had ever been known to do anything wrong, but in a sleepy, quiet little place like Rylcombe the smallest faults of character and temper are known and noted.

"There he is, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus.

"Can't see anybody else," said Jack Blake.

"Wats! Do you think he would keep him in the shop?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"I suppose not," he said. "But—"

"Excuse me, young gentlemen."

The juniors turned round as they were spoken to. A man with pointed beard, dressed in worn but respectable clothes, and having as commonplace a look as a man could possibly have, had stopped outside the shop.

Arthur Augustus raised his hat to the stranger.

"Did you address me, sir?"

"Yes. I am looking for a shop kept by Mr. Frynne. Can you tell me if this is it?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Ah, there is no name!"

"They are having the sign repainted, I think," said Tom Merry. "This is the shop, and that is Mr. Frynne in the shop there."

"Thank you very much. You said 'they,' I think. Mr. Frynne has relations living with him, I suppose?"

"Not that I know of."

"As a rule, does he?"

"No, I think not."

"Ah! I expected to see someone I knew here," the stranger remarked. "But if there is no one staying with Mr. Frynne—"

"We really don't know, sir," said Blake. "The best thing would be to go in and ask Mr. Frynne, wouldn't it?"

"Thank you! You are right!"

The man went into the shop.

"This way, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, in a suppressed voice.

He signed to the juniors to follow him. Tom Merry and Blake, considerably surprised, did so, and the swell of St. Jim's led them as far as a turning off the street before he condescended to explain. He might not have stopped

there, but Tom Merry caught him by the arm and held him forcibly.

"Where are you leading us?" he demanded.

"Only to a safe place to talk, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus mysteriously.

"Ass! You could talk here—"

"I wufuse to be called an ass—"

"What on earth has he got into his head?" said Blake wonderingly. "I can see that there's some blessed bee or other in his bonnet."

"Weally, Blake—"

"What is it, duffer?"

"I've found him."

"What!"

"I've got him!" said D'Arcy, in a thrilling whisper.

"Got who?"

"The bankah—the abscondah!"

"You—you've got him?" exclaimed Blake, staring at the swell of St. Jim's as if he half-expected to see the absconder peeping out of D'Arcy's waistcoat pocket.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Produce him, then, and we'll take him to the police station," grinned Tom Merry. "Where have you got him, Gussy? In your watch-case?"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"In your silk hat?" asked Blake.

"Pway don't wot! I've got him! Didn't you notice anythin' about that stwangah who asked us questions?" demanded Arthur Augustus triumphantly.

Tom Merry and Blake looked astonished.

"I noticed that he had a beard," said Tom Merry.

"So did I," assented Blake.

"Yaas, but you haven't twained your eyes as I have," said Arthur Augustus patronisingly. "I noticed that the beard was false."

"What!"

"False!"

Arthur Augustus nodded with great satisfaction.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"My hat!" said Tom Merry, with a deep breath. "Are you sure?"

"Quite sure, deah boy! I am perfectly convinced that it is not natuwal hair on his face."

"Phev!"

"He is the man!" said D'Arcy, with conviction. "Besides, he's a stwangah, come here to see Fwynne. How many stwangahs come here to see Fwynne, do you think?"

"Not many, I suppose."

"And he was vevy anxicus to know if there was anybody with Fwynne—"

"I didn't notice that he was anxious."

"Well, I did," said D'Arcy, with some asperity. "I notice these things, Tom Mewwy. I have twained my eyes—"

"You might have been training your imagination, too, you know," Tom Merry remarked.

"Weally, deah boy—"

"But if you are sure that the beard is false—"

"I am sure of it, deah boy."

"It's worth looking into, anyway," said Blake, for the first time showing some seriousness in the matter. "What do you propose to do, Gussy?"

"Lie in wait for him at the corner of the shop and grab him by the beard as he comes out!" said D'Arcy promptly.

"But suppose the beard isn't false, after all?" said Blake dubiously.

"But it is, deah boy. My twained eyes—"

"And suppose he isn't the man, anyway?"

"But he is the man."

"Suppose—"

"If you are goin' to waise difficulties all the time, Blake, I weally think that I should manage this affair bettah alone," said Arthur Augustus.

Blake chuckled.

"We'll stand by you, Gussy. After all, you will want us to bail you out when you're run in for assaulting innocent strangers and pulling their beards."

"Weally, Blake—"

"It's a jolly risky bisney," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "If we get the wrong pig by the ear—I mean, the wrong man by the beard—he's bound to cut up rough. Any man would."

"Phev! I should say so!"

"We must wisk it!"

"You see—Gussy—"

"If you fellows don't help me I shall do it alone," said Arthur Augustus resolutely. "But I should like you on hand to help me awrest the wascal and get him to the station when I have shown him up."

"We're in for it," said Blake. "Lead on, Gussy!"

And Gussy led on!

(Continued on page 14.)

WELCOME, CHUMS, FOR ANOTHER CHAT!



Let the Editor be your pal. Write to him to-day, addressing your letters :
The Editor, The GEM, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Fleetway House,
Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

HALLO, chums! A New Year is here again, and most of us have, no doubt, made good resolutions, as is the usual custom. The resolution that counts most with me is to give readers the best entertainment value in the contents of the GEM. That I have been successful in past years is reflected in the large following of readers the GEM has gained. But this year I am aiming to double that following, and all of you can help me to do it. First of all, however, I will tell you more of what I am doing to achieve my object. I gave you hint of it last week.

OUR GREAT NEW PROGRAMME.

Firstly, there will be a newcomer to the pages of the GEM in that popular author, Frank Richards. He has written for us a wonderful series of stories of school life and thrilling adventure in the Wild West. It features a Texas school where the pupils are tough guys, and where the headmaster "picks" a six-gun, and uses a quirt instead of a cane. It is an unusual series of stories, and as they are written in the inimitable style of Frank Richards, you can be sure they are hundred per cent entertaining.

Next we have the best story of the adventures of the St. Frank's boys Edwy Searles Brooks has ever written. In this super series Mr. Brooks takes his schoolboy characters into amazing adventures in the Arctic, where an unknown world is discovered, peopled with medieval folk. Sounds exciting, doesn't it? And you can rely on E. S. B. to show you how very thrilling it is.

Last, but by no means least, on our grand fiction programme are some extra good St. Jim's stories by our old favourite Martin Clifford. These are special stories for the opening of our new programme, and you will vote them the best you have ever read.

All these great stories will be starting in a fortnight's time, and I feel confident that they will go very near to creating a record sensation. But you, chums, can help me, also, by recommending the GEM to all non-readers. Make that your New Year resolution, is what I ask. The GEM will do the rest.

"HE DIDN'T PLAY THE GAME!"

In the meantime, for next Wednesday, there is another powerful long story of St. Jim's, which features Eric

A happy and
Prosperous New Year
to You All, Chums!

Kildare, the captain of the school, and Gerald Knox, the bullying prefect. Knox has shown before that what he cannot do by fair means, he will do by foul. But even Kildare, familiar as he is with Knox's little ways, doesn't reckon on his enemy going to the lengths he does to obtain a place in the St. Jim's football team.

Then there are the concluding chapters of our popular Christmas serial, and they are the most thrilling of them all. The ghost of the old Handforth Towers is laid at last, but not before Handforth & Co. nearly meet with a tragic end.

As usual, many other interesting features will complete this grand number in which, too, you will learn

PEN PALS COUPON

5-1-35



A free feature which brings together readers all over the world for the purpose of exchanging topics of interest to each other. If you want a pen pal, post your notice, together with the coupon on this page, to the address given above.

Miss Jemima Cunningham Dunearn, 3, Park Place, Dunfermline, Fife, Scotland, wants girl correspondents; age 18 upwards; sports, nursing; anywhere; especially New York.

Lawrence Brownlee, 5, Sunnybank, Benhar Road, Shotts, Lanarkshire, Scotland, wants correspondents; age 13-15; sports, scouting; Canada, U.S.A., France.

more about our super new programme starting in two weeks' time. Watch out for the GEM next Wednesday, chums.

THE PLUCKY SCHOOLMASTER.

The boys who attend the school at Shrivensham of which Mr. F. D. Dance is a master, must be feeling very proud to be under the tuition of such a brave man. His recent example of heroism is well worthy of the silver medal the R.S.P.C.A. have awarded him.

Mr. Dance, who is fifty-one, was out rabbit hunting when his dog, Don, disappeared. Suddenly the schoolmaster heard a yelp, and was horrified to find that his dog had fallen down a well. It was fifty feet deep, and the bravest man might have been excused for not risking his life by entering it. But Mr. Dance didn't hesitate. Slowly he worked his way down to the foul water in which his dog was struggling, and succeeded in lifting him out. But the ascent of the well, cumbered with the dog and nearly overcome by noisome fumes, was too much for the plucky schoolmaster to attempt. But help was forthcoming, and a rope was lowered by which Mr. Dance and his dog were hauled to safety.

AUTOMATIC SERVICE.

The salesman who is always at your service day and night. Such is the slot machine, and it has been a great boom to trade and people alike in recent years. There seems to be nothing that one cannot get by placing a coin in a machine. From sweets and tobacco to a bed-room in an hotel. It is in America where one can get a room late at night in an hotel, which would otherwise be closed to travellers. You just place a coin in a machine which lets you into a cosy bed-room.

But the latest thing in automatic machines is one that gives a forty minutes' wireless programme for two or three coppers. They are being used in France. The set is installed free of charge, and when you want to listen to it you put a coin in a slot, and the set starts to operate. It is assumed, of course, that the set is maintained free of charge, but, even so, over a year it would be rather more expensive than having your own set, and paying the ten shillings. Hence as we do in this country.

TAILPIECE.

Timkins: "There are two awful bores at our club!"

Tomkins: "Indeed! Who is the other one?"

THE EDITOR.

W. Young, 43, Cottage Grove, Surbiton, Surrey, wants correspondents; age 14-18; maps, map drawing, books, exploration.

Ronald Woodcock, 28, Wake Street, Lincoln, wants correspondents; match brands; has collection of 1,000.

Hugh Poyser, Bronzville, Malay Street, Moulmein, Burma, wants correspondents; Great Britain and New Zealand especially; age 15-16.

Douglas Bradford, 56, Pine Street, Brockville, Ontario, Canada, wants correspondents; age 14-15; exchange picture postcards.

Miss Olive Horton, Maison-Enfin, Stone Road, Lightwood, Longton, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffs, wants girl correspondents interested in films, dances, books and sports; age 13-16.

Russell Grogan, 14, John Street, Lidcombe, N.S.W., Australia, wants pen pals in America, South Africa, India and New Zealand; age 11-14; stamps.

(Continued on page 22.)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,403.

Figgy's Dark Hour!

(Continued from page 12.)

CHAPTER 10. Keeping Watch!

FIGGINS came out of his study in the New House with his chin down and his hands thrust deeply into his trousers pockets. Figgins affected not to notice that Dibbs drew ostentatiously away from him, that Pratt looked the other way, and that French turned his back. But Fatty Wynn, who was following his chum, noticed them all, and the Welsh blood boiled up in the veins of Fatty Wynn at once. As he passed French, Fatty Wynn's fat hand came out with a sounding smack, and French sat down on the floor. He sat there, staring. "You fat chump!" he roared. "What did you do that for?" "Your cheek!" said Fatty Wynn. "You—you—you—" "Look here—" began Dibbs. Smack! Dibbs staggered away, collided with the wall, and slid to the floor. "That's for you," said the fat Fourth Former. They stared at Fatty Wynn. This plump youth, who was popularly supposed to live in the contemplation of meal-times, and to dream exclusively of steak-and-kidney pies, had suddenly developed into a fighting man of the most truculent description. It was indignation on his chum's behalf that moved Fatty Wynn, and it seemed to have made quite a new fellow of him. Apparently, he was ready to fight the whole House, either singly or all at once, as they pleased. It certainly did not seem to have occurred to him to count odds. He stood glaring at French and Dibbs, waiting for them to get up, in order to hit out again, when Figgins seized him by the arm and dragged him away. "Come on, Fatty—" "Let me lick those cads first!" said the fat Fourth Former, resisting. "No—come on!" Fatty Wynn reluctantly allowed himself to be dragged away. "It's no good, Fatty," said Figgins, with a faint smile. "You can't fight the whole House, and if you did it wouldn't do any good. They would only get their backs up worse than ever, you know." "I'd like to give 'em a lesson, though!" growled Fatty Wynn. "Blessed if I ever knew you were such a terror, though!" said Figgins, laughing in spite of himself. "You've had three fights to-day, as well as two yesterday." "I expect I shall have a dozen more," said Fatty Wynn. "Look here, Kangaroo of the Shell wants you to keep goal," said Figgins. "They're playing a scratch match, and you might keep goal for him." "Certainly!" said Fatty Wynn. "Are you playing?" Figgins shook his head. "No; I don't feel up to footer just now, Fatty. I think I'll go for a stroll." "I'll come with you." "No—you go and keep goal for Kangy, and I'll come back at tea-time," said Figgins. "As a matter of fact, I'd like to get out of sight of the fellows for a bit." Fatty Wynn hesitated; but at that moment Kangaroo of the School House bore down upon him and marched him THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,403.



No. 47. Vol. 2. (New Series.)

Tom Merry's Weekly

EDITOR

Week Ending January 5th, 1935.

ROOKWOOD ROUTED FATTY WYNN INJURED GUSSY GOES IN GOAL

By Tom Merry

For our home match with Jimmy Silver & Co. of Rookwood, St. Jim's were at full strength, and I felt confident that we should snaffle the points. At the start, our pitch—a little larger than the Rookwood ground—seemed very much to the visitors' liking. They exploited the open game, swinging the ball from one wing to the other with speed and accuracy. Silver at centre-half initiated an attack which would have succeeded but for a brilliant on-the-goal-line save by Fatty Wynn. A few moments later Tommy Dodd went very close with a shot which hit the angle of the crossbar. Recovering, St. Jim's ran into their real form, and Blake notched an unexpected goal with a "backheel" at close range. This rather upset Rookwood, and for a brief period we did pretty much as we liked. It's funny how a "snap" goal will "rattle" a normally sound defence. Rookwood were miskicking badly, and D'Arcy added number two for us with a well-placed drive. A beautiful centre from Monty Lowther gave me an easy opening later—and I slammed home our third, having Conroy helpless. It was now, however, that Rookwood began to fight back. They pressed our defence hard, and three times Fatty Wynn fisted out. Dodd took the leather on the rebound the third time and smashed it in again. Fatty Wynn dived, diverted the ball, but crashed his head against the foot of the upright. Kildare came loping on to the field with sponge and smelling salts, and Fatty quickly revived. He had sustained a nasty bruise, however, and was still dazed. Though he pleaded to be allowed to carry on, I insisted on his going off for a rest. Kildare agreed, and Fatty went. Gussy gallantly offered to keep goal, and as nobody else wanted the job, I assented. Gussy donned the sweater and stood prepared to face all comers—but goalkeeping is not learned in a second. Rookwood's dashing forward-line drew Gussy out, and Dodd netted. Lovell added a second, and Jimmy Silver levelled the scores with a really fine long-distance effort. By half-time, Dodd had scored Rookwood's fourth—though no blame attached to Gussy, who had done his level best. After the interval, Fatty Wynn resolutely took the field with us, though his head was still aching. With Gussy restored to our forward-line, we were able to get going again, and Gussy wiped out his goalkeeping lapses with a brace of crisp goals, neither of which Conroy saw. We had the upper hand again now, with the score 5-4 in our favour. Rookwood were held in check by Kangaroo at centre-half and Figgins and Kerr at back, and Fatty Wynn was troubled scarcely at all. I think Fatty's example of "sticking to it" inspired us all. At any rate, I bagged a "hat trick." Rather funny—I got one with either foot, and headed the third. We had the legs of the Rookwooders at the finish, and just on time Kangaroo scored our ninth and last,

JUST MY FUN

Monty Lowther Calling



Hallo, everybody! Please note we don't handle goldfish; it's not good for them. Did you hear about the fellow who was such an expense at college that his father called him Bill? I know a man in Wayland who owns a big steamer. No, not a Cunarder—just the Wayland Turkish Baths! The "Wayland Courier" says: "£100,000 Will Suit." Yes, it will, splendidly—just in time for tea! D'you like "snappy" come-backs? How's this: "Can you give a poor fellow a bite?" asked the tramp. "I don't bite myself," snapped the lady of the house, "but I'll call the dog!" "How can I live on the fat of the land?" inquires Reilly. Become a masseur, old chap. "A fellow works best with his back to the wall," says the Head. What about a brick-layer? I saw a card in a Wayland outfitter's. "Arresting shirts." For policemen, I imagine. In Blankley's, the big Wayland store, they have a cross-eyed detective. The idea is you can't tell who he is watching. "What's on to-day?" asked the medical student. "Oh, just another organ recital," answered his friend—"a lecture about the heart, kidneys, liver and lungs!" I hear a squad of constables met a dangerous criminal at Wayland station. "Policed" to meet him! "Where can I get a good game of hopsotch?" asks Wally D'Arcy. Try the new pedestrian crossings in London! How's this: "I'm a self-made man!" said old Isaacs, the pawnbroker, proudly. "Is that a boast or an apology?" asked Lumley-Lumley cynically. D'Arcy tells me an expedition is excavating houses of the time of Abraham in the City of Ur. Well, that's one way of dealing with the housing shortage! Headline from the "Wayland Courier": "Blazing Hotel Escapes." It ought, however, to be quite easily recognised! My Foreign Correspondent cables me that Spanish bullfighters now ride on motor-cycles. Motoreadors! Special Prize Award to Skimpole, who, when a sea captain told him his boat made twenty-five knots an hour, asked solemnly: "But who unties them?" "What are the sins of omission?" demanded Mr. Selby in class. Wally D'Arcy wrote: "The sins of omission are those we should have done, but didn't." Wally has just looked in to say if you want to enjoy a herring cook it yourself over the fire and eat it straight from the pan. Out of the frying-pan into the fryer! Giving "picnic" hints for next spring, a local paper says a tin of fruit and a "ton" of sardines is ample for a small party. Yes, we should imagine a ton of sardines would be enough even for Fatty Wynn! "What is the first difficulty about being a life-saver?" inquires Skimpole. Learning to swim, old chap. As the captain of the rural fire brigade remarked, when they at last reached the smoking ruin: "Well, lads—better late than never!" Chin, chin, cheerio!

ST. FRANK'S FINE FINISH BUT HARD GAME AGAINST THE "RABBITS"

By Clarence Fellowe (the Rhyming Reporter)

Against St. Jude's, as "rabbits" known, St. Frank's set up a mighty groan when ere the game was ten mins old, heroic Handforth bit the moult. The ball glanced off his outstretched fist—old "Handy" at full length had missed! One up, St. Jude's pressed fierce and strong, but in defence a "spiky prong" was Edward Oswald—punching out shot after shot to stay the rout. At last St. Frank's got on the go—Pitt let drive—'twas a goal—what ho! Lunn of St. Jude's with bobbing head netted their second—St. Jude's led! But Nipper then did weave his way through massed defenders, "making hay," till feinting as the goalie rushed, the ball across the line he pushed! St. Jude's now failed to stand the strain—St. Frank's beset them might and main. Tregellis-West, with corner kick, scored a neat goal—'twas really slick. Now St. Jude's defence broke down—their kicking wild, completely "blown." There's just three minutes left to play—see Nipper shoot—hip, hip, hurray! A goal—St. Frank's have won, 4-2. We fear St. Jude's are feeling blue!

FULL RESULTS

Table with 2 columns: Team and Score. Rows include St. Jim's vs Rookwood, St. Jude's vs St. Frank's, Redclyffe vs River House, Greyfriars vs Highcliffe, Bagshot vs Rylcombe, and Claremont vs Abbotsford.

LEAGUE TABLE

Table with 6 columns: Team, P, W, D, L, F, A, Pts. Lists teams like Greyfriars, St. Jim's, St. Frank's, Rylcombe Gram., Highcliffe, Rookwood, River House, Abbotsford, Bagshot, Redclyffe, Claremont, and St. Jude's.

REPLIES TO READERS

"How do burglars work?" asks "Hopeful."—Never, except when "ordered away" for a rest. They usually take up stone-breaking then! "Prospective Motorist" writes to ask what is the rule of the road.—Keep left—or keep off! "Would we like to buy a snake?" writes "A.F."—No, sir! No snake could "adder" thrill to our existence!

ST. JIM'S SPOTLIGHT SHINING FROM TOP TO TOE

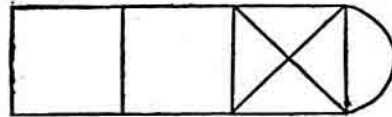
George Herries made his chums, D'Arcy, Blake and Digby, blink and blink again. Usually the untidiest of the four, Herries had evidently turned over a new leaf! His "topper" outshone even D'Arcy's; his spotless "Etons" looked fresh from the tailor's; while his carefully-polished shoes reflected the winter sunlight almost enough to dazzle his beholders! Even Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, elegantly attired as ever, was quite overshadowed by Herries' magnificence. To add to the effect, Herries led his bulldog, Towser, by a new leather lead attached to a new collar with bright brass studs. What could be the explanation? Was Herries attempting to rival his chum D'Arcy in sartorial elegance? Calmly, Herries admitted that that was just what he was trying to do. Too often had he been told of his slovenly appearance. He had made a New Year resolution—to become a glass of fashion and a mould of form, greater even than Gussy himself! It really seemed as if the old, rough-and-ready Herries had gone for good! But New Year resolutions are made to be broken, and when next morning Herries appeared in his old ink-spotted suit his chums forbore to "chip" him. Truth to tell, they prefer him that way!

TOM MERRY'S "DUD" TEAM

raised much laughter on Little-Side. His goalkeeper was Skimpole, while Slackers like Crooke and Mellish figured at centre-forward and centre-half. Merry himself played at outside-right. The dud eleven were opposed to the regular junior team, with the exception of Tom Merry himself. Merry said he was giving the slackers a chance to fulfil their frequent boasts that they could lick the junior eleven hollow. From the first kick the slackers were outplayed, however, and very soon all of them had "bellows to mend"! Merry kept them hard at it, though, till the very end—by which time the junior eleven had notched 34 goals! Tom Merry scored three goals for his "dud" eleven against Fatty Wynn—no mean achievement, considering his "support"!

CALIBAN'S PUZZLE CORNER

Here is a hopsotch court such as you sometimes see chalked on the pavement. Can you mark it out in a single line without taking your pencil off the paper and without going over any line twice? Solution next week.



Solution of Last Week's Puzzle

Loco backs to C, then forward into loop line at right, and unhitches truck. Loco alone now goes to B, round loop A to C, and hitches on to back of truck which it pushes to B, afterwards returning alone to A.

off to keep goal. Figgins strolled down towards the gates. It was likely to be a glum half-holiday for Figgins. He had no heart for footer—no heart for anything, as a matter of fact. But he did not want to make his staunch chum as miserable as he himself was. Most of the New House juniors were in the quad, and most of them gave Figgins grim looks. Fatty Wynn's great fighting powers were a source of solace to himself, but they had not helped to conciliate the juniors. Dibbs & Co. were very much down on Figgins and Fatty now—they seemed to have hardly a friend left in their own House. Dibbs, French, Pratt, Maine, Craggs, and several more fellows, stood looking at Figgins as he came along to the gates. As he drew near they all turned up their noses, as if by a concerted signal. Then, in turn, they walked away with extremely scornful looks. Figgins crushed down his angry feelings and went out at the gate. Even Taggles, the porter, forgot to touch his hat as Figgins gave him a nod in passing, and Figgins heard him sniff. The New House junior went out into the road, feeling miserable enough. It was all strange and unreal to Figgins. If a fellow he knew had been down on his luck, Figgins would not have been able to do enough for him. He would never have dreamed that fellows he had been friendly with could turn on him like this. Even if his father were guilty, as they all evidently believed, there was no excuse. It would not be the fault of the son, whatever the father did. They expected him to be humble—to conciliate them. Figgins' eyes flashed at the thought. Figgins had never been arrogant, but the idea of being humble for the sake of getting into anybody's good graces made his back stiffen at once. He went down the road towards the village in deep and gloomy thought. There was one ray of cheerfulness in the gloom—he had had a letter from Kerr that morning, full of loyal friendship and sympathy. Kerr had seen the news in the papers, and had written at once to Figgins. Whatever happened, the Scots junior was as true as steel—Figgins knew that, and the knowledge comforted him. Nothing would ever break the tie that united the three members of the famous "Co." Figgins walked into the old village street. Most of the St. Jim's juniors were busy on the footer ground, and Figgins had not expected to see any of them in the village. But almost the first person he saw was a youth with an eye somewhat discoloured, and he recognised Jack Blake of the Fourth. Blake did not look towards Figgins. He seemed to be very much occupied. He was standing by the corner of a shop, of which the sign was in process of being repainted. He was watching the door of the shop, somewhat like a terrier watching a hole. Figgins glanced at him in surprise. If Blake were waiting for a friend to come out of the shop, his looks were certainly singular. He was more like a dog waiting for a rat to show itself. Figgins paused, and looked on. "My hat!" he muttered. "There's Tom Merry—and Gussy! What the dickens—" D'Arcy was half-hidden by the elm-tree in front of the little shop. He had his monocle screwed firmly into his eye, and his eye glued upon the shop doorway. THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,403.

Tom Merry was a little farther on, sitting upon an old wooden trough, and he, too, was regarding the shop door with a fixed gaze.

Figgins could not help wondering. He came up, and tapped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy on the shoulder from behind. The swell of St. Jim's uttered a sharp cry, and his eyeglass fluttered down to the end of its cord.

"Bai Jove! You scoundwel——"
"What!"
"Oh! Is that you, Figgy! I beg your pardon. I—I thought it was that villain getting behind me!" gasped D'Arcy. "You thwey me into quite a fluttah!"

Figgins stared at him.
"What villain?" he asked.
"The scoundwel we're watchin' for."
"Off your rocker?" asked Figgins.
"Weally, Figgy——"

"You're watching for somebody?" asked Figgins. "All three of you?"
"Yaas, wathah! We're doin' this for you," whispered D'Arcy mysteriously.

"Eh?"
"Keep behind this twee, deah boy, so that you can't be seen from the shop, and I'll explain," murmured D'Arcy. Figgins complied, not without a suspicion that the swell of the School House was wandering a little in his mind.

D'Arcy gave a cautious look towards the shop—which would certainly have betrayed his purpose if anybody there could possibly have suspected an elegant junior in Etons of playing the detective—and then retreated into the cover of the tree.

"I think it's all wight, Figgy!" he whispered thrillingly.
"What's all right?" demanded Figgins, regarding him with astonishment.

"We've got him!"
"Him! Who?"
"The abscondah. You wemembah the name that was ovah that shop before it was painted out?" said Arthur Augustus. Figgins stared.

"By Jove! Yes! Frynne—the same as——"
"Yaas, wathah!"
"I didn't think of it before," said Figgins, "but it's the same surname as my father's partner, who has bunked with the bank's money and got my poor old dad into this scrape."
"Exactly!"

"But what——"
"And I suspect that they're welations," said D'Arcy in a tense whisper. "A chap disguised with a beard has gone into that shop, and he's goin' into hidin' there. I'm certain of that."

"What makes you certain?"
"Ahem! Some chaps are born with a detective instinct and some aren't," said the swell of St. Jim's, after a pause. "I'm quite assured on that point, Figgy. Now we're watching for that chap with the beard. When he comes out we're goin' to pile on him, seize his beastly beard, and dwag it off and show him up!"

"But——"
"Now you are here you can lend a hand gettin' him to the station——"

"But——"
"It is vewy fortunate your bein' on the spot like this, as I suppose you know your father's partner by sight——"

"No; I've never seen him."
"Bai Jove!"
"I hardly knew his name," said Figgins. "I've never been in the bank even. The pater never took me into his business in any way. But—but if you've really discovered something here, Gussy——"

"I'm quite sure of it, deah boy——"
"It's just barely possible——"
"It's quite certain! Bai Jove!"
"What's the matter?"
"He's comin' out!"

D'Arcy quivered with excitement. The commonplace-looking gentleman with the beard had appeared once more in the doorway of the little shop.

Evidently quite ignorant of the fact that three amateur detectives were waiting for him, he stepped out of the doorway.

CHAPTER 11.

Just Like Gussy!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS tried to whistle. He had arranged a signal whistle when the three juniors were to rush upon the disguised absconder together. But in the excitement the swell of St. Jim's could not whistle. He tried three times, but only a dry gasp came forth.

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Giving up the attempt, he dashed after the stranger, who was already walking briskly down the street.

Tom Merry and Blake followed him quickly, and Figgins, a little more slowly, joined in. It seemed to Figgins that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was making a big mistake, but he wanted to see the matter through.

D'Arcy was the first to overtake the stranger. The latter had paused to light his pipe at a spot where a paling ran along one side of the path. It was quite a quiet spot, and very suitable for the purpose of the amateur detectives. In their excitement the chums of the School House had forgotten everything but their prey.

Arthur Augustus caught the man by the sleeve, and he turned in astonishment.

"What——" he began.
"Wascal!" ejaculated D'Arcy.
The man backed away a pace in blank amazement. D'Arcy made a spring at him and caught hold of the beard with both hands and tugged with all his strength.

"Collah him, deah boys!" he howled.
A roar of pain broke from the stranger.
"Ow! Leggo!"

Crash!
Tom Merry and Blake were upon him in a moment. The bearded man went to the pavement with a crash, and Arthur Augustus rolled over with him, still tugging at the beard.

D'Arcy's silk topper had fallen off and his eyeglass was fluttering, but the swell of St. Jim's heeded them not. His grasp did not relax for a second.

In his wild excitement it never occurred to him that if the beard was really false it would have come off at the first tug and that the stranger's yells of pain were too genuine to be mistaken.

He tugged away at the beard with both hands as if for a wager.

"Yah! Yow! Ow! Help!"
The unhappy stranger yelled frantically.
"Bai Jove! He's got it fixed on awfully tight!" gasped D'Arcy. "The beastly thing won't come off! Lend a hand, Figgy!"

Figgins gasped.
"It's not false, you ass!" he shouted. "It's real!"
"Wats!"
"Let go!" yelled the victim, struggling under the weight of the juniors. "Yow! Let go! Yah! Ow!"

"Weally——"
Tom Merry dragged D'Arcy back.
"Stop it, Gussy! You've made a mistake!"
"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"
"The beard is growing there!" exclaimed Blake. "You'll pull the poor chap's face off in a minute! Let go!"
"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus desisted at last. Even he could not doubt any longer that the beard was attached to the stranger's face by the natural process of growing there.

D'Arcy released his victim and rose to his feet.

"Bai Jove!" he murmured, in dismay.
The stranger staggered up. The juniors had released him now. Tom Merry and Blake felt inclined to yell with laughter at the sight of D'Arcy's face. But the expression upon the bearded man's face stopped their desire to laugh. The stranger was crimson with fury.

"You—you scoundrels!" he gasped. "How dare you! I will have you locked up for this! Were you trying to rob me? Ow!"

Tom Merry turned very red.
"It was a mistake, sir," he said lamely.
"You—you—you——"

The stranger caressed his beard affectionately. The swell of St. Jim's had hurt him. A beard cannot be tugged by an athletic junior without painful results to the owner.

"Oh!" he groaned. "You young scoundrels!"
"I am sowwy——"
"You've made a frightful bloomer, Gussy, you ass!" said Blake witheringly.

Arthur Augustus looked obstinate.
"I wufuse to admit anythin' of the sort!" he exclaimed. "Figgins, deah boy, it's vewy unfortunate that you have nevah seen your patal's partnah, but do you wemembah whethah Egbert Fwynne wore a beard?"

Figgins grinned.
"I don't know anything about him," he said; "but I have an impression that he is a young man without any beard at all."

"Bai Jove! But he may have gwown that beard for disguise!"

"In two days, you ass?" roared Blake.
"Pewwaps he used somethin' to make them gwow."
"Ha, ha, ha!"

The fury had faded out of the stranger's face. He gave a

start at the mention of the name Frynne, and stared at Arthur Augustus. He seemed now to have forgotten even the pain in the roots of his beard.

"What are you talking about?" he asked sharply. "Whom did you mistake me for?"

"Fwynne, the abscondin' bankah," said D'Arcy. "If you are the wong man I am vewy sowwy. But I was quite sure you were the wight man."

"Is this lad's name Figgins?" asked the stranger, with a glance at the New House junior.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Oh! And what reason had you to suppose that the absconding Banker, Frynne, was hiding here?" the stranger demanded.

"I do not see why I should explain to a stwangah," said Arthur Augustus stiffly. "And I am not yet satisfied that you are not Fwynne."

The man laughed.

"If you know anything about the matter it is your duty to tell me," he said.

"Why?" asked Tom Merry.

The stranger drew a card from his pocket and held it out for the juniors to see. They looked at it and uttered a simultaneous exclamation of amazement. For this is what they read:

"Mr. W. Pix, C.I.D., Scotland Yard."

"Bai Jove!"

"My only hat!"

"Great Scott!"

"A—a—a—a detective!" gasped Tom Merry.

didn't see them. He went up to the Fourth Form dorm and began to take off his things.

His thoughts were evidently warlike, for the pucker in his forehead refused to quit.

"They ought to be boiled, the rotters!" he murmured.

Exactly who the "rotters" were was not apparent. Fatty hurriedly dragged on his trousers, muttering indistinctly the while.

"And Figgy—well, he's right off his rocker, that's a cert!"

Fatty got as far as fixing his collar before any further observations escaped him.

"Who shall I begin on?" he murmured, looking abstractedly through the window.

The window not being communicative, Fatty gave it up for a moment and completed his toilet. He paced up and down the dorm for a few moments in the manner known as trying to piece things up a bit. But things refused to be pieced up. It was clear that Fatty was in a quandary. He ended it for the time being by deciding to go down into the quad.

Arrived there, he thought he might wait for Figgins there. One good thought suggested another. He took a piece of paper from his pocket.

"By Jove! I'll make out a list!" he said.

And he busied himself writing out a list of New House fellows he intended to punch for Figgins' benefit. It wasn't a long list; Fatty could not think of more than three offenders.

They read in the order he had placed them—French, Pratt, and Dibbs.

"Now, shall I start on French? That's the question,"

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CHAPTER 12.

Fatty Wynn on the Warpath!

"GOAL!"

Fatty Wynn was off colour to-day. It was the third time that a goal had been scored against him. Sticking his hands into the pockets of his footer shorts, he walked out of goal.

The juniors stared. This was extremely unlike Fatty. It was only a friendly game, but such an act by the St. Jim's junior goalkeeper astonished them.

"What's the matter, old chap?" asked Kangaroo.

"Fed-up!" said Fatty laconically.

"Nothing strange in that—surely!" grinned the humorous Lowther.

"Get in again, Fatty, and don't rot!" called out several of the juniors.

"I'm not rotting!" said Fatty Wynn tartly. "I simply can't do it. I tell you I'm fed-up with goalkeeping. I'm right off-side for footer to-day."

And he continued to walk away from the goal.

"You are mucking things up, you know!" said Herries.

"He'll be back in a minute or two, after a little interview with Dame Taggles. Won't you, Fatty?" went on Monty Lowther.

Fatty Wynn almost turned round. But the chums had a further surprise when he refrained from taking any notice whatever of Lowther's remark. He looked as if he had the whole world on his shoulders and all its troubles on his mind as he walked away.

"I'll have a mince pie!" shouted Kangaroo.

"A stone ginger for me!"

"Sandwiches for me, Fatty!" yelled Lowther. "Just a little snack, you know; I'm famished!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But Fatty took no notice, and the chums gave it up as he disappeared in the direction of the New House. After a short confab they selected another goalkeeper, and the game went on with better results for the side Fatty Wynn had been representing.

Fatty Wynn strode into the New House with a gloomy brow. Several Fourth Form juniors saluted him, but he

murmured Fatty. "Slogging him first would very likely make it a sweet thing with the other rotters."

Fatty Wynn paused. French was not so little a foe when he came to think it over.

"Well, I can manage Pratt easily," he muttered, rubbing French out and putting him last on the list.

He looked at the paper, evidently more pleased with the new order.

"But, on the whole," he said a moment later, "I might as well make an example of Dibbs first."

And the paper was altered again accordingly. Fatty surveyed it complacently. He thought of the glory that would fall to his share when he told Figgins.

"I'll show the beggars!" he murmured. "And they're all New House fellows, too. I can see Dibbs going through it now."

And Fatty Wynn made a wild swipe at the air, demolishing untold foes of Figgins at one fell sweep.

The action suggested to him that he was really not in much form for fighting as well as footer this afternoon.

"On the whole," he muttered thoughtfully, "I'd better be guided by cires."

"Cires" guided Fatty Wynn upon French, after all, as his first victim. French was standing in the quad, and he allowed himself to sneer as Fatty strolled by.

Fatty Wynn swung round on him at once.

"What's the trouble with you?" he demanded.

"Pain in the eyes," said French humorously, staring at Fatty Wynn.

The fat Fourth Former paused; he had no retort ready. He unfolded the paper again and wrote French's name first on the list.

"Will you be in the gym in half an hour?" he asked politely.

"Eh? What for?"

"To be licked."

The Shell fellow laughed.

"Right-ho! If you want a set of thick ears—"

"I'll see you in half an hour in the gym if you've got the pluck to turn up," said Fatty Wynn, with a disdainful sniff.

"Oh, you'll find me there!"

Fatty Wynn strolled away in the direction of the footer field. He looked on at the junior game till it ended—it had not been far from the finish. Then he poked Kangaroo in the ribs as the players came off.

The Cornstalk grinned at him.

"Feeling any better?" he asked.

"Oh, that's all right! I want some of you fellows to back me up."

"What's on?"

"Scrap," said Fatty Wynn briefly.

Kangaroo whistled.

"What about the fellows in your own House?" he asked.

The fat Fourth Former snorted.

"They're the chaps I'm going to fight," he said.

"Eh? Not all of them?"

"A good many."

"We'll back you up with pleasure," said Kangaroo.

"But—"

"Yes, rather!" said Herries. "I suppose they're down on Figgy?"

Fatty Wynn nodded.

"We'll back you up," said Kangaroo, "any time you like."

"Come into the gym, then, when you've changed," said Fatty Wynn. "I'm making up a list, and I want Kangy to take it round to the chaps and make them come."

"Right-ho!" said Kangaroo.

Fatty Wynn sat down upon a bench and scanned the list. So far he had the names of French, Pratt, and Dibbs—and French's name was in the place of honour at the head of the list. But Fatty Wynn was growing more warlike. On the footer field several New House juniors had favoured him with grimaces, and Fatty Wynn had made a mental note of each of them. Every fellow who ventured to make a grimace was to be licked if the fiery Welsh junior was able to do the licking. And, inspired by indignation on his chun's behalf, Fatty Wynn felt just then as if he could conquer continents.

Kangaroo came out, looking very ruddy and cheerful.

"List ready?" he asked.

"Look here!"

Kangaroo read the list over Fatty's shoulders.

It ran as follows:

"French, Pratt, Dibbs, Craggs, Hoe, Tucker, Maine, Stacey."

Kangaroo stared.

"You're not going to fight the whole family?" he asked.

"I am!"

"One at a time, or all at once?" asked the Cornstalk humorously.

Fatty Wynn frowned.

"One at a time," he said. "I could manage Dibbs and Tucker with one hand. French will be rather tough to beat, but I shall lick him first, while I'm fresh. Will you go and round them up in the gym?"

"Yes, rather!"

And Kangaroo marched off with the paper.

Fatty Wynn sprinted across to the tuckshop and refreshed himself with steak-and-kidney pie—his favourite dish. Then he went to change into shorts and singlet and marched into the gymnasium.

The news spread. The fact that the Falstaff of the New House had challenged eight fellows, all of his own House, to fight him in succession, caused considerable excitement in the junior portion of St. Jim's. The juniors gathered from far and near to watch the encounter. The corner of the gym selected for the fight was crowded.

"Go it, Wynn!" said Gore encouragingly. "And if you want any help, sing out!"

"I shan't want any help!" said Fatty Wynn.

"My only Aunt Jane!" said Wally D'Arcy of the Third. "Fatty is on the warpath and no mistake! He's seeing red!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But Fatty Wynn did not laugh. His plump face remained very serious. It was not a laughing matter for Fatty Wynn, and it was not likely to be a laughing matter for his adversaries, either—at all events, for the first two or three.

There was a buzz as French, Dibbs & Co., dressed ready for the fray, came marching into the gym in a body. They were mostly grinning. Some of them, certainly, did not care for personal encounters with the redoubtable Welsh junior; but they had learned that they were low down on the list, and by the time Fatty got to them he was not likely to be in very good fighting trim.

French was the first, and French, certainly, was likely to have a lively time.

"Ready?" demanded Fatty Wynn aggressively.

"Ready, and waiting to be slaughtered!" said French, with a grin.

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"Hand out the gloves, Kangy!"

And Kangaroo handed out the gloves. Fatty Wynn put on the gloves with a very businesslike air.

CHAPTER 13.

Gussy, the Tec, Retires!

TOM MERRY & CO. stared at the gentleman with the beard.

The pain in the roots of the beard was probably abating, for Mr. Pix seemed to have quite forgotten the extremely rough way in which Arthur Augustus had handled it. He smiled genially, apparently amused by the astonishment in the faces of the juniors.

"A detective!" repeated Figgins.

"Exactly!" said Mr. Pix, replacing his card. "Now you understand that it is your duty to tell me anything you can."

"Oh, certainly!" said Tom Merry. "But—but have you come down here, sir, to look for that man Frynne?"

The detective smiled again, but did not reply.

"I hope you will find him, sir," said Figgins earnestly. "If he is found, I know that the bank's money will be found upon him, and my father's innocence will be proved!"

Mr. Pix looked curiously at Figgins.

"Very good!" he said. "I—I certainly hope that that will be the case, Master Figgins. Now, I find that you young gentlemen have suspected that the missing man Frynne may be here, and, therefore, it is possible you have some information to give me. Please tell me all you can."

"Go it, Gussy!"

D'Arcy hesitated a little.

He was wondering how Mr. Pix would receive the flimsy evidence that had satisfied him and caused him to make an unprovoked assault upon a simple stranger.

"Please go on," said Mr. Pix.

"Vewy well, sir. You—you see, the name stwuck me at first—Fwynne is not a common name. Then the man does not bear a good reputation, and I have heard people remark that he must have wick wrelations, because he does vewy little work. I wathah weckoned that he was the kind of man to give sheltah to that abscondin' wascal if he could get a share of the loot, sir. And then—"

"Very good," said Mr. Pix; "and then—"

"Then there is the fact that the sign has been painted out, sir," said Arthur Augustus. "I wogard that as a vewy important fact."

"It jolly well wanted repainting!" said Blake.

"Yaas; but at this particular moment it is suspicious," said the swell of St. Jim's, with a wise shake of the head. "It looks as if the man does not want to attract attention to the fact that his name is Fwynne—the same name that is in all the papahs."

"But everybody in the village knows it," said Figgins.

Arthur Augustus gave Figgins a patronising look.

"He isn't afraid of people in the village," he said. "But a stwanganh here, seein' the name of Fwynne, might wemark upon it, as it's the same name as that of the abscondah, and so it might bwing cwicious people nosin' about. And if the police in London should hear that there was a Fwynne livin' here, they would be sure to send a man down to see if he had heard anythin' of the missin' Fwynne, of Bwistol."

Mr. Pix nodded approvingly.

"Extremely good!" he said. "As a matter of fact, it transpired that Egbert Frynne had a relation living in this part of the country, and I was sent down to look into the circumstances. I am very glad to hear these particulars of the man's character, and, above all, to see that he has made an effort to keep his name from public attention. You are a very keen lad!"

The swell of St. Jim's glowed with pride.

"I have had a feelin' for a long time that I should make a good amateur detective, sir," he remarked modestly.

Mr. Pix smiled.

"You must be careful when you seize a man by the beard next time, that is all," he remarked.

The juniors chuckled, and D'Arcy turned red.

"That was a natuwal mistake, sir."

Mr. Pix rubbed his beard.

"Yes, yes—quite," he assented. "But—but don't do it any more! Now, can you tell me whether, until lately, this Mr. Jonas Frynne had an assistant in his business?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"He never had enough business to keep him going, sir," he said. "He certainly never wanted an assistant."

"He has one now," Mr. Pix remarked.

"Bai Jove!"

"You do not happen to know when the new young man came to Rylcombe?" asked Mr. Pix, looking at the juniors.

"Never heard of him before," said Figgins.

"He certainly wasn't there on Saturday," said Blake. "I went in there to buy some cord, and there wasn't anybody about the place excepting old Frynne."

Mr. Pix nodded.

"I suppose you young gentlemen belong to a school near here?" he asked.

"Yes; St. Jim's."

"And you are going back there now?"

"I—I don't know."

"I think you had better," said Mr. Pix blandly. "You see, you can safely leave this matter in professional hands, and—upon the whole, if you are off the scene, there is less danger of an alarm being given."

"You may wely—"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Come on, Gussy! We musn't stick here if we're in the way. If the missing man's there, Mr. Pix will have him."

"But weally—"

"Good-afternoon, young gentlemen," said Mr. Pix

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Let's get back to the school," said Tom Merry. "Mr. Pix thinks we shall talk about this, and put the man on his guard, and he thinks it won't matter so much if we talk in the school instead of in the village. Come on!"

"But weally, Tom Mewwy—"

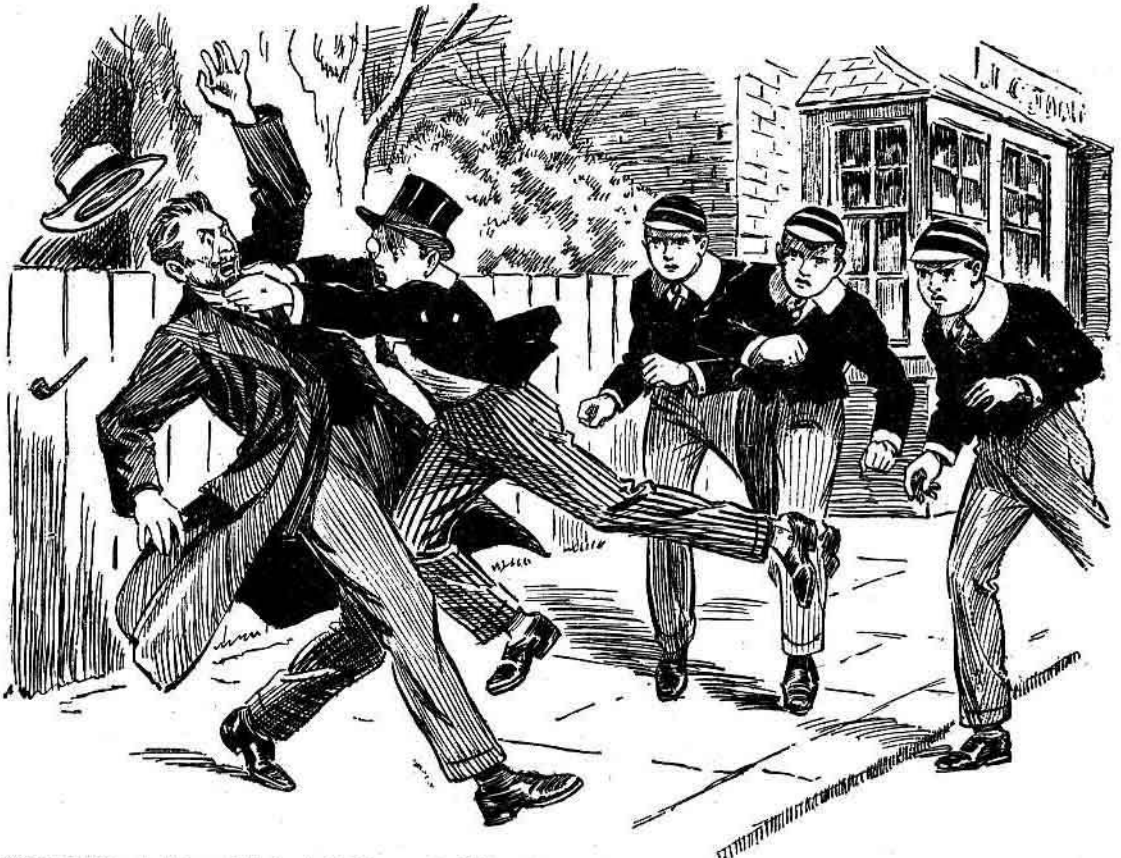
"Come on! I'm ready for tea, anyway," said Blake.

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy allowed himself to be led away.

Figgins hardly spoke as they walked back to the school. He was deep in thought.

From the detective's manner he felt that Mr. Pix considered it very likely that Egbert Frynne had gone into hiding in the little village, and that he would be arrested. Figgins' heart beat with hope at the thought.

If the absconder was taken, and the missing funds found upon him, no one would be able to say that Mr. Figgins had stolen any of the money. And if the man was at all



"Collah him, deah boys!" shouted D'Arcy. And he made a sudden spring at the stranger, caught hold of his beard, and tugged hard. But the beard, which D'Arcy thought was false, did not come away in his hands! "Ow—ow!" roared the unfortunate man. "Leggo!"

blandly. "I am very pleased to have met you. Of course, you will not say a word about this?"

"Not a word, sir."

"Until to-morrow, at all events," said Mr. Pix. "Good-bye!"

"Good-bye, sir."

The juniors accepted the dismissal. D'Arcy went very reluctantly, but as Blake had taken one of his arms, and Tom Merry the other, he had little choice about going. He expostulated as they went down the street.

"I wegard this as wotten," he said. "I was gettin' on vewy well with the case, and now this blessed professional has chipped in and taken it out of my hands."

Blake chuckled.

"Well, he's had more practice, Gussy," he said.

"Yaas, but I was managin' it vewy well."

"Yes, it's a bit of a triumph—"

"Yaas, watah!"

"To attempt to arrest a Scotland Yard detective," said Blake calmly. "I don't suppose any amateur detective has got that far before."

decent, when he found that he could not evade punishment himself, surely he would confess that his partner, whom he had deceived and ruined, was innocent. He could have no motive for wishing to injure Mr. Figgins more than he had done already.

Figgins felt his spirits rise a little.

The loss of money was nothing. It was the question of his father's honour and liberty that weighed upon Figgins' mind.

The juniors reached St. Jim's and went in. Figgins looked round. There was not a junior in sight. Even the footer field was deserted, excepting by a crowd of seniors, who were watching a Sixth Form match.

"Where are the fellows?" asked Tom Merry, in surprise.

"Bai Jove! They've all disappeared!"

"Listen!"

From the direction of the gym came a loud, echoing shout.

"Well done, Fatty!"

Figgins gave a start.

"Hallo! That sounds like Fatty Wynn in trouble!" he exclaimed anxiously.

Blake laughed.

"It sounds more like somebody else in trouble, you mean," he remarked.

"Yaas, wathah!"

But Figgins did not reply. He was racing towards the gym.

CHAPTER 14.

Fatty Wynn's Win!

"Go it, Fatty!"

"Pile in, French!"

Fatty Wynn and French, in singlets and shorts, faced one another with the gloves on. In spite of the gloves, there was likely to be some damage done to the features of his adversaries, to judge by their determined looks.

The juniors crowded round the ring in great excitement. The fight was a peculiar one—Fatty Wynn was fighting fellows of his own House, and all his sympathisers, with very few exceptions, belonged to the School House, the rival House of St. Jim's.

It was quite a new state of things.

Fatty Wynn was in deadly earnest.

French was taller than Wynn, and a little longer in reach, and he knew something about boxing. But he had simply no chance against Fatty.

Wherever his blows fell they seemed to leave hardly any impression. Even after being downed by a powerful right-hander Fatty Wynn came up unruffled.

And all the time his blows were hammering upon his foe. French stood it out gallantly for three rounds. In the fourth round a terrific uppercut sent him flying out of the ring, and he rolled over among the legs of the spectators.

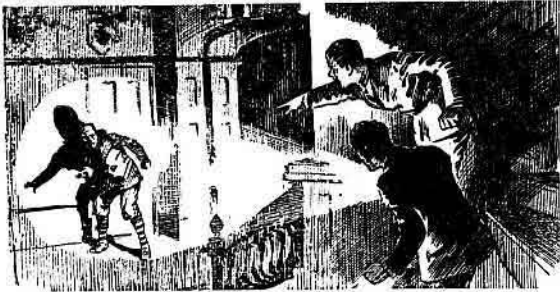
Fatty Wynn snorted.

"Chuck him back!" he exclaimed.

But French declined to be chucked back. He had had enough.

"I'm done!" he groaned.

"First man done," said Kangaroo, who was refereeing and keeping time. "Rest for five minutes, and then the next man in."



"THE FUGITIVE OF THE MOOR!"

Somewhere within the neighbourhood of Hilton Hall, where Harry Wharton & Co. are staying, lurks a convict awaiting a chance to flee the country. But difficulties have to be overcome first. With amazing cunning the hunted man proceeds to overcome them. What luck attends his efforts you will learn when you read this week's thrill-packed story of the Chums of Greyfriars, by famous FRANK RICHARDS. It appears in to-day's issue of

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"I don't want a rest!" said Fatty Wynn. "Come on, Pratt!"

"Put the gloves on, Pratt!"

"Pile in!"

Pratt stepped up rather unwillingly. He was not afraid, but he did not want to share French's fate. He had always been very friendly with Fatty Wynn, too, and he was repenting a little for having sided against him; but he did not care to say so now.

He put on the gloves and faced the fat Fourth Former. If French of the Shell had not been able to stand against Fatty Wynn, it was not likely that Pratt would be able to do so.

Fatty Wynn simply played with him.

Pratt was knocked right and left. The end of the second round found him lying gasping and exhausted on the floor of the gym.

"Time!" said Kangaroo.

Pratt grunted.

"Groogh!"

"Are you done?"

"Owl! Yes!"

"Next man in!" grinned Herries.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Dibbs came very unwillingly up to the scratch. But he had no choice about fighting. He had allowed himself to sneer at the fat Fourth Former, and that sneer had to be paid for.

Dibbs proceeded to pay for it. He stood up to Fatty Wynn for exactly one round, and in that one round he was punished for all his sins.

He looked a bundle of bruises by the time the round ended, and he was fairly knocked out.

Fatty Wynn was warming to his work. He sat down on the knees of his seconds to rest a few minutes, but he jumped up with alacrity as Craggs, the fourth on the list, toed the line.

"Time!" sang out Kangaroo.

"Go it, Wynn!" roared Digby.

The fourth combat commenced. Craggs was a tough antagonist, and he gave Fatty Wynn some punishment before he was disposed of.

But disposed of he was at last. After three rounds, Craggs was hopelessly knocked out, and by that time, too, Fatty Wynn was showing decided signs of wear and tear.

Craggs retired defeated, and Fatty Wynn sat down on Herries' knees to rest, gasping and panting. His wind was not what it had been, and both his eyes were beginning to darken. But he was unconquered.

"Better chuck it now, Fatty," said Kangaroo kindly. "Fight the other four to-morrow."

Fatty Wynn shook his head.

"I'll fight them now," he said. "I dare say I shall have another half-dozen to fight to-morrow, Kangy."

"My hat! I never knew you were such a blessed fire-eater. Wire in, then! Hoe, my son, it's your turn."

Hoe of the Fourth stepped up. Under ordinary circumstances, Hoe was no match for Fatty Wynn, and would not have lasted one round against him. But in Wynn's present condition, Hoe had a chance.

He did his best. Fatty Wynn had to fight hard now, but he had Hoe groggy in the third round. By the time Hoe was finished, Fatty was gasping and fagged.

"Chuck it now," said Herries.

"I won't!"

"Next man will lick you!"

"Rats!"

"Well, if you will have it, you will," said Kangaroo.

"Your turn, Tucker!"

Tucker sniffed.

"I'm jolly well not going to fight him!" he said. "Why, the fat duffer can hardly stand now. Rats!"

Fatty Wynn staggered into the ring.

"You'll fight me now, Tucker," he said. "You said that Figgy was the son of a swindler—"

"So he is!" said Tucker.

"Then you'll fight me, you cad!"

"I won't!"

"Yes, you will, if Fatty insists!" said Clifton Dane of the Shell. "That's what you've come here for. Walk up!"

"Look here—"

Tucker was pushed into the ring.

"Well, it's not my fault if I smash him," he said, putting on his gloves.

But the smashing, much to Tucker's surprise, was not so easy. Fatty Wynn had a great deal of life left in him yet. He stood up gallantly to his foe.

Three rounds were fought out, and both of them looked well punished. Fatty Wynn could hardly keep his feet in the fourth round, and Tucker rushed in to finish him. But he rushed in too soon.

A terrific upper-cut caught him fairly on the chin, and he reeled backwards and crashed to the floor.

Kangaroo counted. "One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine—licked!"

Tucker was knocked out! Fatty Wynn gasped for breath. "Now your turn, Maine!" he gasped painfully. "Look here, Wynn—" began Kangaroo.

There was a shout. Four juniors came racing across the gym towards the spot. They were Figgins, D'Arcy, Blake, and Tom Merry. They had just arrived.

Figgins burst through the crowd, elbowing and shoving the juniors right and left, in spite of angry expostulations.

"Hang you, Figgins!" "Stop it!" "Look here!"

"Oh, get out of the way!" exclaimed Figgins roughly. He burst into the ring.

"What are you doing to Fatty?" he shouted. Fatty Wynn blinked at him out of half-closed eyes.

"It's all right, Figgy!" he said thickly. "I—I'm fighting the cads in turn. I—I've licked six of them; there are only two more."

"Two more!" howled Figgins. "It's all right, Figgy!"

"I'll take the other two," said Figgins grimly. "Get aside, Fatty! Leave the cads to me! Where are they?"

"Oh, all serene!" said Fatty Wynn. "I feel rather done in, I must say. They're Maine and Stacey. You can lam them!"

And Figgins did. Maine and Stacey would almost as soon have tackled a lion in his wrath as Figgins, but they had no choice about the matter.

They faced the mighty Figgins in turn, and he made mincemeat of them.

Hardly showing a sign of the conflict, Figgins glared round at the rest of the New House juniors.

"Anybody else want a turn?" he asked. There was no reply.

Figgins sniffed and put on his jacket. The crowd broke up.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, patting Fatty Wynn on the back. "You are a wegulah hewo, you know! You ought to have a medal, or somethin'. I suppose you don't feel up to a feed aftah all that fightin'?"

Fatty Wynn grunted. "Don't I?" he said. "Fighting gives a chap a good appetite."

"Then come along with us, and have a feed in the study," said Jack Blake. "Come on, Figgy, my son! Never mind those wastofs."

And Figgins and Fatty Wynn walked away with the School House juniors; and Fatty Wynn, after he had changed his clothes and bathed his face, enjoyed himself in Blake's study, in spite of his injuries.

CHAPTER 15.
Good News!

THE next day Figgins was waiting anxiously for news. The happening in the village the day before had raised his hopes, and all his hopes were built upon the capture of the absconder Frynne.

If that rascal succeeded in making good his escape, with the stolen funds still in his possession, the fate of Mr. Figgins was sealed.

That he had been careless, that he had reposed an unjustified faith in his partner, was clear in any case, and to the outside world it looked as if he were more rascal than simpleton.

Only one thing could clear him—the capture of Frynne. Would the man be captured?

Figgins had confided the matter to Fatty Wynn, but to no one else. Both of them waited anxiously for news. Had the man been captured? Was Mr. Pix, of Scotland Yard, on the right track, or had he gone back to London disappointed?

"It's all wight, Figgy!" Arthur Augustus declared. "You will find that it is all wight. You can trust my detective instinct, deah boy."

Figgins grinned faintly. "Yes," he said, "but I'd rather have some news."

"Mr. Pix is sure to let you know."

"Yes, I suppose so. I wish he'd buck up," said Figgins, with a sigh.

The morning dragged slowly by. Figgins, in the Fourth Form Room, sat by himself. The New House fellows had nothing to say to him. Blake and

his friends were very friendly, but that did not help Figgins with the fellows of his own House.

Figgins was despondent. If the hope he had now should prove false, if the absconder was not arrested, and the truth did not come to light, he confided to Fatty Wynn that he thought he would leave St. Jim's, after all.

Fatty Wynn stared at him in dismay. "Figgy, you can't! You shan't!"

"No good staying here," said Figgins wearily. "The fellows are all down on me, and they'll all be down on you, so long as you stick to me, and the same with Kerr when he comes back. I'd better get out. They want me to go."

"You shan't go!" said Fatty Wynn. Figgins only smiled faintly.

The Fourth Form were dismissed, and French, Dibbs & Co. marched off very ostentatiously, leaving Figgins and Fatty Wynn alone.

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther came out of the Shell Room, and joined Figgins in the passage, and Blako & Co. came up. Figgins had plenty of friends, if not in his own House.

"Heard any news yet?" asked Blake. Figgins shook his head.

"Mr. Pix is sure to tell us!" "He hasn't yet."

The juniors moved out into the quadrangle. They were all looking very serious. For Figgins' sake, they hoped fervently that news would come of the capture of Frynne.

Arthur Augustus glanced towards the school gate, and uttered a sudden exclamation.

"Bai Jove, here he is!" "Eh! Here who is?" "The detective."

"My hat!" The juniors dashed towards the gates. The man with the beard had just entered, and was walking briskly towards the House.

The juniors surrounded him in a moment. "Any news, sir?" "Bai Jove, pway tell us!"

"Have you got him?" Mr. Pix smiled. "Yes," he said.

Figgins gasped. For the moment he was almost overcome, and Fatty Wynn put an arm gently behind him and held him.

"Buck up, Figgy!" he whispered. And Mr. Pix looked kindly at the pale face of the New House junior.

"I have good news for you, Master Figgins," he said quietly. "I have walked over, before taking the train to London, on purpose to tell you."

"Oh, thank you, sir! And what is the news?" "Frynne is arrested. He was hiding in his uncle's shop, and acting as an assistant. He was arrested this morning, and has confessed to everything."

"Confessed!" breathed Figgins. Mr. Pix nodded.

"Yes. The money and bonds have been found, concealed in various parts of the house, and the whole sum is correct. As for the earlier defalcations at the bank, Frynne has confessed they were all his work, and that he deceived your father as well as everybody else. To do him justice, he appears sorry that he has dragged your father into so much trouble, and he declares that, had he reached a place of safety, he would have sent a signed confession to England to clear Mr. Figgins."

Figgins drew a deep breath. "Will my father be cleared now?" he asked.

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"There will not be the slightest stain upon his name," said Mr. Pix. "His losses, I am afraid, will be great, but so much money has been recovered that you need not fear that he will be ruined."

"Oh, sir!"

The detective glanced at his watch.

"I came to give you the news," he said. "I have no further business here. Good-bye!"

Mr. Pix shook hands with the juniors, and they marched down to the gates with him, and wished him a hearty good-bye as he departed.

Mr. Pix smiled as he walked up the road.

Then the juniors gathered round Figgins.

Figgins was still looking pale and almost sick. The reaction had been too much for him. He could hardly realise that the black cloud had passed, that the horrible trouble that had threatened to ruin and stain his whole life had gone.

"Congwatuations, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, seizing a hand, and shaking it. "It was Jack Blake's hand, but in his excitement D'Arcy did not notice that unimportant fact. 'Congwatuations, old son!'"

"Thanks!" said Blake.

"Weally, Blake."

"Oh!" said Figgins. "I—I can't get used to it yet! I—I feel as if it were all a dream. That chap Frynne isn't such an awful rotter, after all. A man may be a thief without being everything that's bad."

"Yaas, wathah! It is wemarkable, but vewy true, Figgy, deah boy."

"We must celebrate this, somehow," said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I've a jolly good mind to change over into the School House, and give the New House the go-by," said Figgins. "That's my idea of celebrating it."

"Hurrah!" shouted Blake.

"You'd be jolly welcome," said Tom Merry heartily. "And wouldn't we jolly well give the New House the kybosh then."

"Yaas, wathah! I shall insist upon Figgins comin' into Study No. 6, deah boys."

The chums of the School House marched Figgins to their House in triumph. An inquiring crowd gathered round them.

The news they had to give was a complete surprise to St. Jim's.

The New House fellows who had been up against Figgins in his dark hour, looked very sheepish.

Figgins' father was innocent. He had been deeply, cruelly wronged, and that was all. And instead of standing by old Figgins in his trouble, they had turned on him when he was down, and made matters worse for him.

It was too rotten! Even Dibbs was sorry. French and Pratt and Tucker and the rest were repentant, but they

hesitated to tell Figgins so. They did not know what kind of reception they would meet with. They expended some of their feelings, first, by bumping Dibbs. It was in vain that Dibbs explained that he had been no worse than the others. The more he expostulated, the more they bumped him, and they left him sore and sorry.

"Fancy that chap thinking that he could be captain!" said Thompson of the Shell scornfully.

"The fathead!" said French. "Picture him, in comparison with Figgins!"

"Good old Figgins!"

"Let's go and ask him to be captain again!" said Pratt. "Too late!" said Stacey, with a glum shake of the head.

"I've got news from the School House Figgy is going to join them!"

"What?"

"He's going to desert the House?"

"Join the School House!"

"My hat!"

"This has got to be stopped," said French hurriedly. "My hat! How should we keep our end up against the School House rotters if Figgins turned against us? Come on! Where is he?"

"In Blake's study," said Stacey.

"Follow me!" exclaimed French.

The whole crowd of New House juniors dashed after French. They invaded the School House. They rushed up the stairs to Study No. 6. They kicked open the door, and rushed into the study.

"Figgy!"

"I say, old man, you don't mean it?"

"Figgins, old man—"

"What do you want?" Figgins demanded.

"We want to say we've been silly asses, and we're sorry," said French. "There, that's good enough for you, Figgy, isn't it? And—and we want you to stick to us, old man, and stick to the House."

"Stick to the House, Figgy!" came a chorus.

Figgins' expression softened.

"We're sorry!" said Pratt.

"Awfully sorry!" said French.

"Say it's all right, Figgins."

Figgins hesitated one moment. Then his kind and generous heart prompted his answer.

"It's all right!" he said.

And Figgins did not desert the New House, even though most of the New House juniors had deserted him in his dark hour.

THE END.

(Next Wednesday: "HE DIDN'T PLAY THE GAME!"—a powerful St. Jim's yarn of sport and adventure, starring Eric Kildare and Knox of the Sixth Form.)

Pen Pals

(Continued from page 13.)

Clifford Allsopp, 15, Coombe Dale, Sea Mills, Bristol, wants a correspondent in England interested in model aeroplanes.

John D. Smith, Riding Fields House, Beverley, E. Yorks., wants a correspondent; age, 12-15; Europe, Egypt, Asia Minor, South America, or Straits Settlements.

Arthur Pickett, 4, Mill Place, Kingston-on-Thames, wants pen pals; age, 12-15; sport, cricket, football, swimming; Dominions and U.S.A.

Miss Miriam Heywood, Riversvale, Burbage, Buxton, Derbyshire, wants girl correspondents interested in hockey, tennis, swimming, Girl Guides and camping; age, 14-17.

Robert B. Gear, 387, Zebina Street, Broken Hill, New South Wales, Australia, wants correspondents.

Clive Boswell, 87, Abbey Road, Warley, Birmingham, wants pen pals interested in stamps, electrical engineering and woodwork; age, 10-16.

Thomas Watson, 22, Leaside, Nottingham, wants to exchange with anyone outside England Nottingham newspapers for local papers—new or old.

U. Hutchinson, 6, St. Michael's Road, Headingley, Leeds, 6, Yorks., wants a pen pal who is interested in stamp collecting; age, 9-13.

Miss Irene Hyde, 12, Raleigh Street, Islington, London, N.1., wants girl correspondents; age, 17-18; sports, stamps.

D. Buttigieg, 171, Strada S. Domenico, Valletta, Malta, wants correspondents.

Joseph Jacques, 106, Ariel Street, Ashington, Northumberland, wants correspondents in the Empire; age, 16-19; photos, stamps, curios, magazines.

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Lawrence Poh, 290, McAlister Road, Penang, Straits Settlements, would like to get in touch with readers in the British Empire, France and Spain; stamps, snaps, magazines, wireless.

Billie Lloyd, Albemarle Hotel, Marine Parade, Brighton, wants pen pals in London, Manchester, Cornwall, Kent, and overseas; age, 13-15; stamps.

Miss Esmé Cuthbush, Kaylene Cottage, Waterloo Road, London, N.W.2, wants girl correspondents; age, 14-15; all sports, preferably swimming; overseas especially.

Alec McCabe, Margaret, 119, Alfreton Road, Nottingham, wants correspondents overseas; Chemnitz, Germany, especially; Spain, France, New York; swimming, riding, books, films.

Miss Gertie Dixon, 37, Smith Street, West Bank, East London, South Africa, wants girl correspondents; age, 19-25.

A. H. Ritchie, 22, Railway Cottage, Booth Junction, Durban, Natal, South Africa, wants pen pals in Great Britain or Belgium; interested in chemistry and electricity; age, 14-16.

Miss Jeanne D. Young, 22, Boardman Road, Higher Crump-sall, Manchester, wants a girl correspondent in Tibet, Pacific Islands, or Jugo-Slavia.

Jack Bakes, 55, Norman Drive, Eccleshill, Bradford, Yorks., wants a pen pal in Africa, Australia, or New Zealand; interested in dance bands or designing; age, 15-17.

G. Butler, 21, Quinn Buildings, London, N., wants correspondents.

Stanley Bellamy, 51, Ladysmith Row, Sprowston Road, Norwich, wants correspondents.

Miss Dorothy King, 234, Lichfield Street, Christchurch, New Zealand, would like girl pen friends in the British Islands; reading, films, music, pets; age, 16-18.

Lawrence H. Readden, 52, Collingwood Street, Ponsoby, Auckland, C.2, New Zealand, wants pen pals; photography, sports, and newspaper collecting.

Peter Bryceon, School Fellowship League, 40, Earls Court Square, London, S.W.5, wants more members for the League.

W. C. Leitch, 87, Mansfield Place, Torry, Aberdeen, would like to hear from readers who are interested in old "Boys' Realms."

MORE FUN AND THRILLS AT HANDFORTH TOWERS WITH THE ST. FRANK'S

CHUMS I



BY EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

THE OPENING CHAPTERS.

Edward Oswald Handforth, at the invitation of his uncle, takes a party of St. Frank's juniors and Moor View School girls to Handforth Towers, in Norfolk, for the Christmas holidays. They arrive at the Towers, a deserted and creepy old mansion, and in the night the juniors have many eerie and ghostly adventures. But it turns out to be a big jape devised by General Handforth and Willy, Handy's young brother. The Moor View girls had been taken secretly to the new Handforth Towers, for which the juniors then depart. But during their adventures in the old Towers Handy and Willy had discovered a secret crypt, in which were a big chest and a skeleton, and they also see a ghost. They propose to investigate these mysteries later. Meantime, Boxing Night comes, and a masked fancy dress ball is held. Handforth has boasted that he will soon pick out Irene; so he is japed. Willy dresses up in Irene's costume, and Irene dons Willy's—a Pirate Chief. Handforth gets annoyed with the Pirate Chief and throws "him" over a balustrade into a snowdrift. Then he is amazed to discover that it's Irene!

Trying to Put Things Right!

FOR a moment Handforth thought that he was out of his mind.

Irene!

It was unbelievable, incredible. He had known from the very start that Willy was to appear as a Pirate Chief. Irene was the Colleen—that was a certainty, too. And here, in the snowdrift, was the girl he had vowed to kiss under the mistletoe—and he had just flung her over the terrace balustrade!

"Oh!" exclaimed Irene tragically.

The look she gave Handforth was not angry, but purely startled. She knew that she had precipitated this affair herself, but she had never dreamed of an ending like this.

"Renie!" gasped Handforth. "I—I didn't know!"

"Oh, Ted!" she cried. "How—how could you?"

That was all she said, and then she scrambled out of the snow, clutched her displaced hat, wig, and mask, and fled. Handforth tried to stop her, but Church and McClure rushed up and seized him.

"Lemme go!" he panted desperately.

"Steady, Handy!" said Church. "Don't you know? We—we just saw her. The Pirate Chief was Irene all the time!"

"I—I chucked her into the snow!" said Handforth dully.

"Oh, so that's how she got smothered like that?" asked McClure.

"Yes!" said Handforth dimly.

"You might have hurt her," said Church. "She's not a chap—she's not your minor! Why the dickens didn't you make sure? Just like your impulsive recklessness!"

"Where is she?" asked Edward Oswald hopelessly.

"I don't know. She ran indoors," said Church, glancing round. "I expect she's gone upstairs. If she appears in the ball-room again to-night I shall be surprised. You've done it, Handy!"

"I know—I know!" moaned the unfortunate leader of Study D. "But there's been trickery!" he went on fiercely.

"And Willy was in it! That impish minor of mine must have worked it, by George! Don't you see? I knew all about that pirate dress—I saw it yesterday. Of course, he lent it to Irene, and—"

"And Willy must have dressed as the Irish Colleen!" gasped Church, sudden light dawning on him. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" howled McClure wildly.

Handforth looked at them with growing amazement.

"Such graceful ankles!" said Church, holding his sides.

"What?"

"Such poise—such a lovely walk!"

"You—you—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Great jumping corks!" shouted Handforth hoarsely.

A thought had suddenly struck him, a thought which brought a flush to his cheeks.

He clutched at his two chums.

"It—it was Willy!" he breathed, as though in a trance.

"The Irish Colleen was Willy!"

"Yes, we know," said Church. "What do you think we were laughing at? What an as you were, Handy—"

"But wait!" interrupted Handforth, his voice dropping to a trembling undertone. "That Irish Colleen! I—I kissed her under the mistletoe!"

His chums gave another united yell.

"Then you kissed Willy!" howled McClure.

"Oh, poor old Handy!" moaned Church.

"I—kissed—Willy!" said Handforth, like a fellow in a dream, his voice sounding hollow and unreal. "Willy! Think of it! Willy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You wait until I get hold of him again!" said Handforth, a tone of menace in his voice. "When I've finished with Willy there'll be no more Christmas party for him! One of you chaps had better ring up the nearest hospital and tell them to send the ambulance!"

And Handforth went off, only to be paged unmercifully

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by Reggie Pitt and Fullwood, and a few of the other juniors, who had seen Irene come in, and had guessed the truth.

But the joke was over at last, and Handforth found himself in peace. And the ball was now in full swing, too, with an orchestra playing fascinating foxtrots and haunting tangos.

What he was missing!

And he had planned to have every dance with Irene! He had meant to kiss her straight off, and— But his thoughts wouldn't formulate, and he wandered into the ball-room. As the music got hold of him, so his courage returned.

"Why should I give in?" he asked himself fiercely. "Irene must have wangled that trick with Willy, and she'll know that I was spoofed. By George, I'll ask her to forgive me. And then, if I get that kiss, I can claim all the rest of the dances."

He looked round, momentarily forgetting Willy. At that moment he wouldn't have taken much notice of the Irish Colleen if he had seen her, for he spotted Irene herself. The Pirate Chief was sitting over on one of the lounges, between two of the other girls. Handforth had jumped. It was something, at least, to know that she had come back into the ball-room.

He ran across to her, but as he did so, she leapt up and ran into the conservatory, which adjoined the ball-room. It was warm in there, and the electric lights were soft and shaded.

And, better still, it was deserted, save for Irene, sitting on one of the seats, with palm-trees on either side.

"Oh, I say, Irene!" murmured Handforth, approaching her and sitting down. "I—I'm terribly sorry about that—"

"Ted!" she whispered. "How could you?"

"But I didn't know!" he exclaimed. "I thought you were Willy. I was so sure of it that I didn't even stop to think, or—anything. I say, Renie, forgive me, you know!"

She placed one of her hands over his.

"Silly!" she whispered. "There's nothing to forgive! You weren't to blame, Ted!"

Handforth's heart jumped. Her voice was so soft—the whisper was such a nearly inaudible one that he could hardly hear it. But he had heard. And she had said that there was nothing to forgive, that he wasn't to blame!

"Oh, that's ripping of you, Renie!" he said happily. "I—I thought, perhaps, that you were going to cut up rusty."

"No, Ted," she breathed. "It was too bad to trick you like that. And—and you deserve your reward."

The girl produced a little sprig of mistletoe, and she reached up and tucked it into one of the palm-fronds. It was immediately above them.

Handforth went dizzy. She was asking him to kiss her. And that meant that she wanted all his dances!

"Oh, you're a brick!" he said happily.

He grabbed her clumsily and kissed her on the lips.

"Help!" said the Pirate Chief dazedly. "Water!"

The mask was torn off, and Handforth nearly expired on the spot. For he found himself looking into the mischievous eyes of—Willy!

Under the Mistletoe!

FOR the second time within that hectic half-hour Handforth thought that he was going crazy. He stared at Willy through a mist. The other shock had been bad enough, but this was ten times more acute.

"That's twice!" said Willy, making an awful grimace. "I don't suppose I shall be laid up for more than six months."

Handforth drew the back of his hand across his mouth.

"You—you little demon!" he burst out. "How—how did you do it? You—you were Irene not ten minutes ago—I mean, Irene was you—I'm blessed if I know which is which, and which is the other! Where's Irene? I'm going to take you outside and smash you up, limb by limb—"

"Go easy!" grinned Willy. "Here come the girls."

Handforth looked round, and he wanted to sink through the floor. But as it was of solid stone, this was somewhat difficult. He could do nothing but hold his ground. The girls came in, and the air rang with laughter.

"Oh, Willy, how brave you are!" said one of them.

"We saw it all from the doorway—"

"You—you saw it!" interrupted Handforth miserably. "Oh, I say—"

"It's time for unmasking now, so we'll let you know who we are," broke in the Spanish Dancer, as she removed

her mask, revealing herself as Doris. "Come on, girls, let him see who we are!"

But Handforth had eyes for none but the Colleen. And when her mask was removed, she turned out to be Irene herself—without any shadow of doubt.

"Thank goodness!" said Handforth. "I can't make any more mistakes now. Oh, Renie, I'm terribly sorry for chucking you in the snow!"

"All right, Ted; it was my own fault, and I suppose I deserved it," she laughed. "But we couldn't resist playing this last joke on you, just to make it complete."

"It serves him right," said Doris firmly. "It serves him absolutely right! He boasted that he could do this, that, and the other, so we decided to take him down a peg or two. But now it's all over, Ted, and we're the best of friends," she added, dropping her mock severity.

"Of course we are," agreed Irene, with merry eyes. "Don't look so cross, Ted; it's all in the Christmas fun."

Handforth responded instantly.

"Oh, rather!" he agreed, with a wry smile. "But—but I can't get the hang of it, you know. That quick-change business—how did you manage it?"

"Easy," smiled Doris. "It was another of my little ideas. I hope you won't hate me after this, Ted. But while Church and McClure were talking to you, and while you were being ragged by the other fellows, we rushed Irene upstairs and stripped off her pirate costume."

"And Willy?" asked Handforth, staring.

"Willy let his two chums into the know, and they rushed him off to their own bed-room, and he took off the Colleen dress," went on Doris. "Perfectly simple, you see. Chubby rushed round to our bed-room with the girl's costume, and we handed him the pirate outfit. And in five minutes' time they were downstairs again, and you hadn't guessed anything. Phew! But it was a close thing."

"Yes; and I'm glad it's over," said Irene, sitting down. "It was rather too bad, Ted, but—"

"My hat!" said Handforth abruptly.

Irene had seated herself on that bench—right under that sprig of mistletoe that Willy fixed there. And Handforth was determined to be successful this time. He dashed at her, took her in his arms, and gave her not one kiss, but two.

"Ted!" she cried, struggling free.

"Mistletoe!" grinned Handforth, pointing upwards.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, I was caught that time," smiled Irene, rather flushed. "But you've won, Ted—at least, you've kissed me. And I suppose I shall have to have the next fox-trot with you."

Handforth grinned happily.

"Yes, and all the other dances, too," he said. "By George! The effect of kissing Willy is wiped out now. I think we can call it square."

"Yes; but where do I come in?" asked Willy. "It won't wipe out those kisses of yours, Ted, if one of these girls kisses me. I'm not so keen on them as you are. I think I'd better go and get some Lysol—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you young monkey!" gasped Handforth. "I'm going to pay you out—"

"No, Ted!" interrupted Irene. "Willy only did it to please us. If you touch him for this, we shall be very angry with you."

"So that's that!" smiled Willy. "Well, thank goodness I can feel safe! I was trembling in my shoes. Ted's eagle eye had hypnotised me, and I was just about to go down on my knees to beg for mercy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Willy went off with his chums, who had been hovering in the background all the time.

"Well, it was a pretty good jape," he said cheerfully. "Now we'll go and find some tuck of some sort. I must have something to wipe out the flavour."

The others went into the ball-room to enjoy themselves. And, true to her word, Irene danced with Handforth every time, and it was generally noticed that the other fellows and girls paired off, too. But occasionally some of the other fellows had a look in, as it were. And there was general merriment and laughter.

And so Boxing Night passed with complete success.

But by the time everybody went up to bed it was practically two o'clock, and those hours of dancing had had due effect. Church and McClure were feeling just contentedly tired, and they yawned happily as they undressed.

"Ho-hum!" said McClure. "I can do with a good sleep now."

"Same here!" murmured Church.

But Handforth gave one of his scornful laughs.

"You're not going to bed yet, you ass!" he said. "What about that ghost hunt?"

"You're dotty!" said Church irritably. "You don't

mean to say you're still keen on that hare-brained game, Handy?"

"We're going," said Edward Oswald firmly. "I planned all this for to-night, and I'm not going to make any alterations. So that's that! I'll go and rake out the other chaps now, and you had better be ready by the time I get back."

He went out, attired in his dressing-gown and slippers. The first bed-room he went to was Willy's. His minor was half-dressed in his ordinary clothing.

"Shan't be long, Ted," said Willy briskly. "These fat-heads wanted to come, but I think we shall be better without them."

"We wouldn't go with you if you asked us to now," said Chubby Heath disdainfully. "Bother your old ghost-hunt! It's after two!"

"When you're ready, come to my bed-room," said Handforth crisply.

He went to the other bed-rooms, with the intention of getting the rest of the party together. Nipper and Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West were quite blunt.

So they reluctantly dressed, and prepared for the adventure.

The Ghost Hunters!

TEN minutes later they set off. When they got downstairs everything was dark and still. The household had retired, with the exception of General Handforth, Lord Dorrimore, and one or two of the other gentlemen—who were indulging in a final cigar in the library, over a yarn or two. But the four juniors easily avoided the library, and made their way outside by means of a side door. They had secured their overcoats, caps, and mufflers without any trouble.

"By jingo, it's a lovely night!" said Willy enthusiastically. They were out on the terrace, and his words were true. There was hardly a breath of wind; the moon was shining with a clear, crystal brilliance which transformed the grounds into a fairyland. And the keen Norfolk air was bracing and refreshing. There was a hard frost over the entire countryside.



"There's—there's something moving!" said Handforth. All four juniors caught a glimpse of a dark figure at the end of the passage, just as it disappeared round a corner. "Come on!" exclaimed Edward Oswald. "After him!"

"Nothing doing, Handy," said Nipper. "It's too late to-night. Leave it till to-morrow."

"Buzz off!" said Watson. "Begad, yes!" yawned Sir Montie. "We're all frightfully tired."

Reggie Pitt and the others were equally as firm. Handforth argued, but it was in vain. He was compelled to go back empty-handed, so to speak. Willy and his two chums would be his only companions.

"I've decided not to bother the rest," he said airily, as he went back into his bed-room. "So we're going alone."

"Oh, let's chuck it up, then—" began Clurch.

"We're going alone—but with Willy, of course," added Edward Oswald. "Willy was with me when I found that sea-chest, so I can't very well leave him out in the cold. Why, blow you, you haven't started dressing yet!"

"We—we thought perhaps—" "You shouldn't think, Arnold McClure!" broke in Handforth coldly. "I'm the only chap who's supposed to think in Study D."

"I'm glad you said 'supposed,'" retorted McClure, with bitterness. "Oh, all right! If we go, we may be back in an hour, and then we can get some sleep. If we don't agree, we shall be arguing all night."

The four juniors set off down the terrace, reached the drive, and marched down towards the road. There was plenty of compensation for their jaunt in the small hours. On a night like this it seemed a pity to go to bed.

"Do these chaps know?" asked Willy.

"About the treasure?" said Handforth. "Yes, I told them. In fact, I couldn't do anything else—because I overheard Uncle Gregory talking about one of our ancestors. A great old scadog, I believe, who came back from Spain, or somewhere, with loads of treasure, and buried it beneath the moat, or somewhere. Anyhow, he buried it in the towers, or the grounds."

"That sounds very concise, anyhow," grinned Willy. "But don't you see—we've located the treasure already!" exclaimed Handforth, his interest waxing stronger. "That chest we found in the crypt must be it. And that skeleton over it must have been the old ancestor."

It sounded very romantic, but Handforth was the only one who allowed his imagination to run loose. The others did not forget that they had come on a ghost hunt—and not on a search for treasure.

Having trudged along the road for some little distance, they came to another drive, and this was very different

from the one they had recently left. Bleak-looking yew-trees stood up against the sky, and everything was ill-kept and in a state of neglect. Going down this drive, they soon came in sight of the old, ruined towers.

"Looks a bit ghostly!" said Church.

"It's only the atmosphere of the place," said Handforth. "Before we know where we are, we shall be inside, and we shall be so interested in our investigations that we shall forget all about the eerie effect."

But this was not very comforting—for his chums could not see how they could forget the eerie effect, considering that they were on a ghost hunt. However, they advanced towards the house, and prepared to go ahead with the scheme.

"I suppose you brought the key, Ted?" asked Willy.

"Great Scott, no!"

"Just like your thoughtfulness!" said Willy severely.

"How do you suppose we can get in—"

"Oh, well, we'd better go back!" said Church carelessly.

"Sorry, old man," grinned Willy. "I knew Ted would forget the key, so I brought it myself."

They had arrived at the side of the house, for the front door was bolted and chained inside. But a door here was only locked, and Willy inserted his key and opened the door. They all went in. And a moment later they were in the big, gloomy hall.

Both Willy and Handforth were armed with electric torches, and they flashed them on. A wide staircase led up, and they did not waste much time in getting to the scene of the recent "haunting."

"It's down this wing," said Willy softly.

They were on the landing now, and every yard of the place was known to them, for it was only a night or two since they had had their adventures here. These adventures had seemed thrilling enough at the time, but everything had turned out to be a practical joke.

Now, there was no possibility of a joke.

Although Handforth pretended to lead the way, it was Willy who actually did so, for the shrewd Third Former had a very keen sense of direction, and he was not once at fault. At last he came to a standstill, and switched off the torch.

"Put yours out, too, Ted," he murmured. "Now, this is the place."

"Eh? The place?" breathed Church. "Which place?"

"This is where we first saw that rummy thing," replied Willy. "We chased it, and it rushed straight back along the passage. Let's stand here for a minutes, listening."

They did so, and held themselves tense.

And was it imagination, or could they hear some curious whisperings—uncanny, mysterious croonings from somewhere in the very air?

At all events, they all stiffened, and looked at one another with startled eyes.

The Ghost of the Towers!

CHURCH gave a little gulp.

"I—I say," he muttered. "Can you hear anything?"

"Hush!" said Willy, putting up a finger warningly.

But when they listened again the sounds had died away. They all felt relieved.

"Look here, Willy! Do you know anything about this?" asked Handforth suspiciously. "It was jolly rummy that you should tell us to stand here and listen—"

"No, old man, I don't know a thing," interrupted Willy quietly. "I can't explain why I suggested stopping at that minute, but there's nothing in it. And that peculiar sound we heard may have been caused by the wind—H'm! That can't be, though," he added. "There isn't any wind to-night."

"Just what I was thinking," said McClure. "Well, what are we going to do now? We can't stand here. What about that sea-chest? Wouldn't it be a good idea to go along and have a look at it?"

"Yes, that's what we'll do," agreed Handforth firmly. "I've got a cold chisel in my pocket, and this time we'll smash open those locks and see what's inside the thing. But what the dickens was that noise?"

He frowned, and looked about him uneasily.

"Intruders!"

The word came suddenly as Handforth paused. It seemed to emanate from the very spot where they were standing, and Willy looked at the chums of Study D sharply.

"Who said that?" he demanded.

"I—I didn't speak!" gasped Handforth. "Church, you

BS—

"Neither did I!" said Church hastily.

"It wasn't me!" vowed McClure.

They looked at one another very startled. For there had

been no mistake about that word. It had been spoken by somebody—

"Leave this house, or death will follow!"

It was the voice again, and Willy snapped his electric torch on, and whisked it round. Not that it was of much service. For the moonlight was streaming brilliantly through the windows, and in this particular corridor the torches were hardly necessary. The juniors could see one another perfectly—and they could see also that they were alone. The passage was visible for many yards in either direction. And there were no doorways near them.

"I—I say, this is uncanny!" said Handforth, pulling himself together with an effort. "Somebody spoke just now, but there's nobody here!"

"Listen again!" murmured Willy. "I'm not denying that there may be such things as supernatural visions, but you'll never make me believe that a ghost can talk! A thing without substance can't have vocal chords! And if there's a voice here it means a man! So be on your guard!"

"Go, intruders!" came that strange whisper again, just after Willy had finished speaking. "You are safe now—you will be safe if you go. Heed this warning!"

Handforth ran forward and burst open a door which stood eight or nine feet up the corridor. But when he flashed his torch he saw that the room was bare and empty. One or two of the windows were smashed, and there was an air of desolation.

"If beats me!" said Edward Oswald, scratching his head. "There was a voice, you chaps! It was speaking to us as plainly as I am speaking to you. What can it mean?"

They went down the corridor the other way, but there was no explanation of the mystery. Willy directed his torch over the walls, and upwards towards the ceiling. Overhead, there were dark, oak beams, even in this corridor.

"Hallo!" he said softly. "What's this we see?"

They all stared up.

"There's nothing there!" said Handforth. "Only beams—"

"Isn't there a little hole in the plaster?" asked Church.

"I may be wrong, but if there's somebody up on the next floor he could easily speak through that hole, and the voice would sound as though it had come out of the air," replied Willy keenly. "Anyhow, that's the only possible clue that I can think of. Let's go up and have a look round."

"Is there a staircase?" asked Church.

"Yes—farther along—a narrow flight which we didn't explore when we were here the other night," replied Willy. "This isn't a high house, but I think there must be a row of attics over us."

They all continued down the corridor, turned into a small landing, and, sure enough, a flight of narrow stairs led upwards. Willy was about to lead the way, but Handforth pushed him aside.

"I'm leader here!" he said gruffly.

"There might be danger—" began Church.

"That's why I'm going first!" retorted Handforth. "Willy, my lad, you'd better get at the back. You're only a fag, and—"

"That's enough of your 'only a fag' business," interrupted Willy coldly. "I may be younger in years, Ted, but I'm an old man, compared to you, when it comes to brains!"

"Look here, you young ass—"

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Willy. "Are we going to have a slanging match in the middle of a ghost hunt?"

Handforth grunted, and said no more. The stairs creaked ominously as he mounted, and they felt none too secure. But, at length, the juniors reached another passage—and this one was very dark. It was narrow, the walls were damp, and the ceiling was sloping. Handforth flashed his torch along the length of the passage, and then cautiously proceeded.

"Nothing here!" he said in a low voice.

"This is about the spot," murmured Willy, as he bent down, with the torch focused upon the floor. "And here's that hole. Look! It goes right through, and looks down on the other corridor. That wasn't a ghostly voice you heard, my sons—it was somebody speaking through here."

"Yes, but—who could it have been?"

"This isn't a time to ask riddles," replied Handforth minor. "We're here to conduct investigations, and instead of being a ghost hunt, it's a man hunt! If there isn't some rotter trying to scare us off, I'm a sardine!"

A sudden intake of breath came from McClure.

"Look!" he breathed. "What's that up the end of the passage? I—I thought I saw something move. Fancy, I suppose, but—"

Handforth and his minor both directed the light of their torches up the passage, but although they were powerful beams, they could not penetrate that far, for the passage was a long one.

"Yes!" said Handforth. "There's—there's something moving!"

They all caught a glimpse of a dark figure. But even as they stared, it passed round an angle of the passage. The juniors looked at one another excitedly.

"Come on!" roared Handforth. "After him!"

He led the way, running for all he was worth. But he had hardly gone ten feet before the toe of his shoe caught against a loose board. He went head over heels, and ended up on his back. His torch had flown out of his hand, and dropped with a thud, about ten yards farther down.

"You ass!" said Willy severely. "You've smashed it!"

"I've smashed both of 'em!" groaned Handforth painfully, hugging his left ankle.

"I'm talking about the torch, not your silly legs!" replied Willy, without the least sympathy. "That lamp is busted, and now we've only got one torch between us. Get up, Ted—don't lie there!"

"You—you callous young bouncer!" panted Handforth. "I'm hurt!"

"You deserve to be," replied Willy, as he helped to hoist Edward Oswald to his feet. "If you had let me take the lead, we should have collared that ghost, instead of letting him get away. You're such a clumsy barge!"

Handforth felt himself all over and found that he wasn't hurt much. He picked up his torch, switched it on, and grunted. The lamp had smashed. He handed the torch to Willy.

"I don't want it," said Willy, staring.

"Perhaps you don't, but I want yours!"

"Do you know any more jokes?" asked Willy tartly.

"Look here—"

"You smashed one torch, and I'm blown if you're going to smash mine!" said the Third Former. "Where should we be if we hadn't any torch at all? I'll do the leading after this!"

And Willy hurried ahead, with Handforth fuming and fretting in the rear. But, of course, when they got to the end of the passage and turned an angle, there was no sign of that strange figure.

They continued their search, and came to another staircase, which eventually brought them back to the first floor.

"We're back at the spot we started from," said Church.

"Yes, and we're going round again," replied Willy. "That ghost, or whatever it is, doesn't inhabit this part of the building. I expect it dodged—"

"It's there!" shouted McClure, pointing.

They looked and saw a form down one of the corridors which led out from the landing. But the mysterious presence scuttled off at once. And Willy raced after it in full cry. Handforth & Co. were close at his heels.

They could see the figure ahead of them, but after a few moments it turned off into a passage at right angles, and Willy just caught a vision of it as the thing went into a black patch. Then, with a sudden note of alarm in his voice, Willy pulled up.

"Back!" he gasped.

"But we've nearly got it—"

"Back, Ted, you idiot!" yelled Willy.

His voice was so full of warning that the other three juniors backed hastily into the main corridor. Willy joined them, and in the moonlight they could see that his face was pale.

"Rummy!" he muttered, puzzled.

"What's—what's the idea of stopping like this?" demanded his major grimly.

"I nearly went through that floor just now," replied Willy steadily. "I could feel the beams shaking, and the boards were cracking under me. I only just got back in time."

"But the ghost went that way," muttered Church.

Willy nodded.

"That's what I can't understand," he said quietly.

The Chest and the Skeleton!

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH granted.

"Sorry, Willy, but I don't believe you," he said.

"If that figure could go safely over the flooring of this passage, so could we. Stand aside, I'm going to have a look for myself!"

"Church! Mac!" snapped Willy. "Grab him!"

They grabbed.

"You—you traitors!" panted Handforth, as he was held. "Is this the way you follow my lead and disobey my orders? Mutiny, by George!"

"You're a fine chap to fight, Ted, but you're no good as a ghost hunter," said Willy, shaking his head. "I had to give up that chase just when I was overtaking the thing. I should have gone right through that flooring, I tell you. Just look here!"

He went forward very gingerly, and then he jumped up and down. The others could feel the floor shake and quiver. Willy went farther forward, foot by foot. There was an ominous sound of rotten, crumbling wood. His foot had gone clean through one of the ancient floorboards. He backed hastily, and flashed his torch farther along the passage.

"I knew it," he said, with compressed lips. "I couldn't have gone a step farther without risking my life, for there's no telling what's underneath. And just ahead there the floor's all a mass of gaping holes. How the dickens did that thing get over?"

Handforth was convinced at last.

"I don't know," he said huskily. "It seems to me that that ghost tried to make us run into that passage, so that we would crash through this floor."

Willy nodded.

"It looks like it," he admitted. "But, of course, it may just be that he didn't want us to follow him. Well, what's going to be done? We can't go any farther this way, anyhow."

"I say, let's have a look at that treasure chest, and then get back," put in Church earnestly. "It must be three o'clock, you know, and we can't stay here all night."

"Yes, I think we'll go and have a look at that crypt," agreed Willy, his voice unusually subdued. "What do you say Ted?"

"All right," said Edward Oswald. They abandoned the ghost hunt for the time being, and made their way towards the tower. And as they progressed, they all felt silent.

They had an uneasy feeling that this whole affair was really supernatural, although they told themselves, at the same time, that such a thing was impossible. What if this was a real ghost? The ghost of that man whose skeleton was lying over the chest in the crypt?

So far as Handforth knew, this old house had never had the reputation of being haunted. Why, then, had this apparition suddenly manifested itself? Nothing had been seen of it until Handforth had disturbed the crypt.

Could it be that the ghost had remained peaceful for all those centuries—and that the opening of the crypt had released it, to haunt the whole building?

The juniors all had a desire to go back—to return to bed without making any further investigations. The thought of going to the crypt—right to the place where that skeleton lay—scared them. But not one of them wished to show any sign of weakening. And so they all went on.

"Here we are!" said Willy, at last. "Don't forget the hole in the floor, Ted. No. Wait a minute. Let's examine this door."

They had come down a passage, and at the end of it there was a solitary door. As they knew, from their previous exploration, this door led into the tower staircase. And immediately beneath was the mysterious crypt. But Willy stayed his major's hand.

"I want to have a look at this door first," he said quickly. "Don't you remember that we pushed a wedge under it when we closed it?"

"By George! So we did!"

"I want to make sure that it's still in the same place," said the Third Former shrewdly. "If so, it'll be proof that the door hasn't been disturbed since we shut it."

He went down on his knees, and invited Handforth to open the door slowly. In the meantime, Willy gazed underneath it as it opened. He uttered a little exclamation of surprise.

"That wedge has gone!" he exclaimed. "The door opened easily, didn't it? And there's no loose piece of wood here! Somebody's been here since we shut this place up, Ted!"

Handforth was so alarmed that he forgot his fears.

"They've pinched the treasure!" he gasped.

"We don't know that there is a treasure, or that there was one," said Willy. "Still, it won't take us long to find out now. I'll go first, and you chaps can drop down after me."

Just inside the doorway there was a jagged, uneven gash in the rotten floor, where Handforth had fallen through during the previous adventure. Willy quickly lowered himself into the stone apartment underneath. And Handforth & Co. followed. A glance round showed that everything was as they had left it.

"There's no chest here!" exclaimed Church. "Somebody must have come along and carried it out—"

"Wait a minute," interrupted Handforth. "The treasure is underneath this—in the crypt."

Willy was directing the beam of light upon a flagstone in the centre of the floor. There was a rusty iron ring in it, but there was no indication that the flagstone had been recently shifted.

"Come on—heave!" said Willy briskly.

They all took hold, and one strong heave was enough. The flagstone came up, and they laid it aside. Church backed away.

"My stars!" he muttered. "It—it smells like a grave!"

"Hi, cheese it!" muttered McClure, shivering. "There's no need to make things worse by talking about graves!"

Willy flashed his torch down into the depths.

"Nothing has been disturbed here," he said at once. "Look, Ted!"

Handforth looked. Immediately beneath the hole there was the heavy sea-chest, with a skeleton of a man stretched over it. A few tatters of rotted clothing were still clinging to the remains. Handforth had seen all this before, but it nevertheless gave him an eerie thrill.

"Yes, it's still intact," he said, with tremulous satisfaction. "Willy, my lad, it's the treasure! It's the old sea treasure that Uncle Gregory has been digging for. I say, what a yarn to tell him!"

Willy nodded.

"Rather!" he agreed enthusiastically. "But let's find the treasure first!"

In the Secret Crypt!

"ARE—are we going down there?" asked McClure dubiously.

"When you've finished with brainless questions, I shall be obliged!" replied Handforth, with sarcasm. "Of course we're going down! What do you think we came for? Here's the treasure, right at our feet, and we should be fine fatheads if we didn't take advantage of—"

"Not so much about the treasure, Ted," growled Willy. "We'll just force the chest open, see what it contains, and then buzz off. And the sooner we do it, the better."

They all dropped down into the crypt—an easy move, for that stone dungeon was not more than eight feet in depth. By dropping carefully, they avoided the chest, and its gruesome guardian. For it seemed as though the skeleton was there to protect the old relic and its contents.

"Oh crickey!" said Church, in a scared voice.

If they had felt eerie before, there was more reason than ever for them to have that sensation now. For here they were in the crypt itself, in the presence of the skeleton. What if that ghost was really the spirit of this poor remnant of humanity? None of the boys doubted that the unfortunate man had died here hundreds of years earlier.

"It's no good being nervous," said Handforth firmly. "You hold the torch, Willy, and I'll shift these bones over to the wall."

He touched the skeleton, and it practically fell to pieces as he attempted to move it intact. The four schoolboys held their breath. They wondered if anything would happen. Church thought he heard something overhead, and looked up with a sudden gasp. But it must have been his imagination.

"I—I don't like this!" he said shakily. "Let's get out!"

"Not until we've opened this chest," replied Handforth. "Now, you hang on to this end, Willy, and I'll use the chisel."

"Right you are," agreed Willy. "But let's try to lift it first."

They tried, and it was as much as they could do to shift it from the stone floor.

"By George, it's heavy!" breathed Handforth.

"Yes, but that doesn't prove anything—"

"I'll bet it's full of gold!"

"Rats!" said Willy. "These old chests are a terrific weight, even when they're empty. Where's that chisel! Don't waste any time on the locks, Ted. Just break them as quickly as you can."

Handforth nodded, and produced a heavy steel chisel. And the locks were attacked. But it was not such an easy job to smash them off. Handforth struggled and wrenched.

"I say, wait a minute!" exclaimed Willy, after a time. "By jingo, what a lot of idiots!"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, look at these catches," said Willy. "They seem to be pretty ingenious—there was no need to force them at all. If you push this heavy bar down, the whole thing comes open of its own accord."

He tried, but nothing budged.

"Of course not!" he growled. "It's too late now—you've twisted the bar up and jammed it. So you'd better go ahead. But if we had looked carefully at first, we shouldn't have had this trouble."

"I'm not so sure," said Handforth. "You told me to use the chisel—"

"That's all right—you would have used it just the same, without any telling," retorted Willy. "I don't suppose it matters. Go ahead!"

So Handforth went ahead, and at last the heavy metal catches were smashed away.

All the juniors were now thrilled by the prospect of what they might find. They had forgotten their nervousness completely. This adventure had resolved itself into a genuine treasure-hunt.

"Come on—heave!" said Handforth excitedly.

"Right you are! All together!"

They tugged and pushed, and the heavy lid of the trunk creaked as they exerted their strength. Handforth was perspiring with his exertions, and his eyes were gleaming.

"One more go, and we'll do it," he panted. "Treasure! I expect it will be packed to the brim—"

"With air, very likely," said Willy. "I don't like to encourage these ideas of yours, Ted. They only lead to disappointments—"

(What is in the chest? Does it contain the missing treasure? Don't miss the thrilling, concluding chapters of this great serial.)



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