

"THE NEW HOUSE RIVALS!" SPARKLING LONG ST. JIM'S STORY—INSIDE.

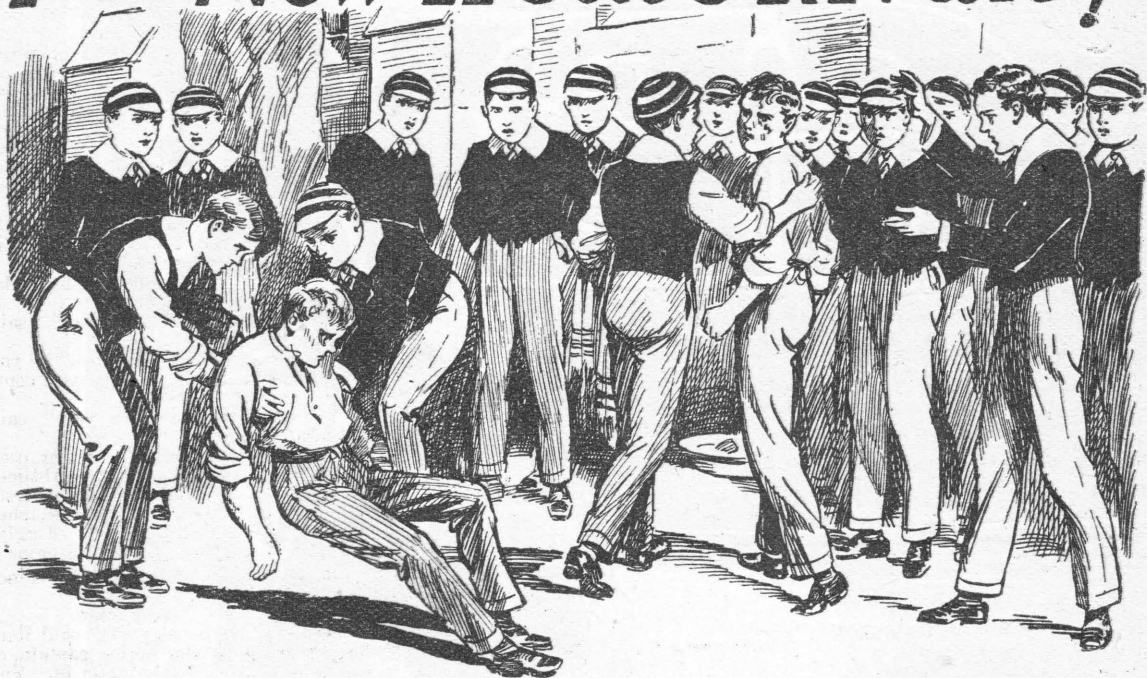
The GEM 2^d



*Mr. Ratcliff
makes a
Splash!*

GREAT YARN OF ROLLICKING RIVALRY AND LIVELY JAPING—

The New House Rivals!



Had the round gone on, Figgins, his senses swimming from Redfern's crashing upper-cut, would certainly have been counted out. But the call of time saved him, and Kerr and Wynn picked up their champion and bore him to his corner.

CHAPTER 1.

Not Good Enough!

BANG!
Figgins of the Fourth brought his fist down upon the table in his study in the New House at St. Jim's.

"It's not good enough!" he exclaimed. Figgins had been sitting at the study table for some time with a very thoughtful expression upon his face, and he had suddenly come out of his reverie in that emphatic manner.

He had chosen an unfortunate moment.

Kerr was writing on one corner of the table, and Fatty Wynn was breaking eggs into a dish on another corner. Kerr was driving through a German imposition at express speed, and evidently Fatty Wynn was thinking of the pudding he was going to make. Neither of the juniors had an eye upon Figgins.

The sudden crash of Figgins' heavy fist made the study table dance.

Kerr's pen jammed into his paper, and scattered a variety of big blots and little ones over the German characters he was scribbling out, and Kerr gave a yell. Fatty Wynn roared as the egg he was breaking shot a liquid stream up his sleeve.

"Oh!"

"Yow!"

"It won't do!" repeated Figgins emphatically.

"Yah! You ass!"

"You silly fathead!"

Figgins did not heed. Kerr's ruined imposition and Fatty Wynn's wasted egg did not appeal to him in the least. He thumped the table again.

"I tell you it's not good enough!"

"If you mean my impot, it was good enough till you splashed it, you frabjous!"

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ass!" roared Kerr. "I've got thirty-five lines of beastly German to do over again, you awful chump, and it's due in Herr Schneider's study in ten minutes, you burbling ass!"

"If you mean my pudding, it would have been all right if you hadn't wasted that egg!" yelled Fatty Wynn. "Groogh! I've got it up my sleeve!"

"I tell you—"

"Look at my impot!"

"Look at my eggy sleeve!"

"Oh, blow your impot!" said Figgins. "Blow your silly eggs! This isn't a time to be thinking about puddings and impots! The honour of the study is in danger!"

"Oh, what's the matter with the honour of the study?" asked Kerr, as he set the table to rights again. "It seems to me that the carpet is in a worse state than the honour of the study."

"I'm thinking of our prestige!" said Figgins loftily.

"And I'm thinking of our pudding!" said Fatty Wynn.

"Blow the pudding!" roared Figgins, exasperated.

"Well, blow the prestige, then!" retorted Fatty Wynn.

"I was going to say—"

"I've heard you say that before," Kerr remarked. "Two or three times, in fact. What isn't good enough, most noble, grave, and reverend signor?"

"The state of things in this House!" said Figgins.

Kerr looked puzzled.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean Redfern!"

"Oh!" said Kerr comprehensively. "Redfern!"

"Yes," said Figgins, smiting the table again with a mighty swipe. "It's Red-

fern, Owen, and Lawrence! The New Firm, in fact!"

"I say, have mercy on that table!" said Kerr anxiously. "One of the legs is rather gammy already!"

"Blow the table!"

"Very well," said Kerr resignedly. "But smashing the study furniture won't keep up our end against Redfern & Co. that I know of!"

Figgins snorted.

"It's not good enough!" he said. "How long have Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence been in the New House of St. Jim's?"

"Blessed if I know! I forget."

"Well, not long, anyhow," said Figgins. "Now, you fellows know that when Redfern came I explained to him like a Dutch uncle that I was the junior leader of the New House, just as Tom Merry was in the School House, and I offered him a thick ear if he didn't keep his place. I couldn't say fairer than that, could I?"

Kerr chuckled.

"Impossible!" he agreed.

"But has he kept his place?" demanded Figgins excitedly.

"He hasn't—he's kept yours!" said Fatty Wynn.

And Kerr chuckled.

"He's actually had the cheek to say that he's not looking for a leader, you know," said Figgins, in great wrath. "He doesn't admit that I'm junior captain of the House, though I told him so plainly. He's been planning raids on the School House and raids on the Grammarians, all on his own, without consulting us."

"And getting the best of it," said Kerr.

"Yes, that's the worst cheek of all. Some of the fellows are beginning to say that we're played out, you know."

—FEATURING FIGGINS, REDFERN, AND ALL THE FAVOURITES OF ST. JIM'S.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD

"What rot!"
"I know it's rot; but they're saying it. Look here, it's not good enough! We've got to put Reddy & Co. in their place once for all!"

"Hear, hear!" said Kerr heartily.
"I wonder what they've got for tea?" said Fatty Wynn thoughtfully. "We might raid them—"

"That's just what we're going to do!" said Figgins emphatically. "I happen to know what they are doing, and it's a first-class chance of putting them in their place. Reddy said it's such a fine afternoon that he's going to have his tea out of doors, and the three bounders have taken their grub in a basket to picnic under the trees behind the chapel."

Fatty Wynn's eyes gleamed with the light of battle.

"What have they got?" he asked.
"I heard Lawrence mention a cold chicken—"

The Falstaff of the New House made a movement towards the door.

"Come on!" he exclaimed.
"Hold on a minute!"

"What is there to hold on for?" exclaimed Fatty Wynn peevishly. "What about the prestige of the study? We've got to put those bounders in their place, haven't we?"

"And collar their cold chicken," murmured Kerr.

"Really, Kerr—"
"Listen to me," said Figgins. "We're going to deal with this matter in the right way. We shall go to Reddy and explain to him with perfect patience and calmness that we are cooks of the walk in the New House. As proof of it, and as a punishment for his cheek in setting up his study against ours, we shall eat their tea. If they object, it will be taken as rank mutiny, and we shall wallop them."

"Good egg!" said Fatty Wynn.
"What do you think, Kerr?"

"Oh, good!" said Kerr, laughing.
"I'm on!"

"Come on, then!" said Figgins.
"Never mind the impot, and never mind the pudding. I'll help you to do the impot this evening, and we shall get enough tea from Reddy. They had a basketful of stuff when they went out."
"Did they?" exclaimed Fatty Wynn eagerly.

"They did!" said Figgins. "Mind, we've got to talk to them like Dutch uncles first. We don't want to give an impression that we're after their grub."

And Figgins led the way from the study, and the two chums followed, Fatty Wynn, in deadly earnest, thinking of the cold chicken, and Kerr grinning.

Figgins frowned a warlike frown as he led the way across the quadrangle.

During the short time that Redfern, Lawrence, and Owen, the three County Council scholarship boys, had been at St. Jim's, they had certainly made their mark in the New House. Figgins & Co., who had always been considered leaders of the juniors of the New House, had been in danger of being eclipsed by the newcomers on more than one occasion. And Redfern had not seemed to understand in the least when Figgins explained that he was the great chief of the New House juniors, and that all rotten outsiders were expected to toe the line. Lately, some of the New House fellows had chipped Figgins on the subject, asking him if the Co. had gone out

of business, and questions of that sort. And Figgins had decided that it was high time he did something, and now he was doing it.

CHAPTER 2.

Figgins Puts His Foot Down!

TOM MERRY of the Shell looked out of the doorway of the School House and uttered an exclamation.

And Manners and Lowther, who were chatting in the Hall, lounged towards him lazily. The Terrible Three were killing time until Blake called them to tea in Study No. 6. Jack Blake of the Fourth was standing a tea in his study, and Herries and Digby were helping him to get it.

"Hallo! Here come Figgins & Co.," said Monty Lowther. "It's a long time since we've bumped those New House bounders, and they deserve to be bumped."

"Yes, rather!"
"Collar them, then!" said Manners.

"Come on!"

Five or six School House juniors bore down upon Figgins & Co. as they came across the quadrangle. Figgins held up his hand in sign of peace.

"Pax!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, rats!"

"Pax!" repeated Figgins. "We're on the warpath. We're putting down a rebellion in our own House, and we've

Who's going to be top dog of the New House? When George Figgins, the accepted leader, finds he has a strong rival in Redfern, he loses no time in trying to put him in his place. But Figgy soon discovers that he's up against a tough customer in the St. Jim's scholarship boy!

got no time for rows with you School House chaps. We're going to bring Redfern & Co. to their senses!"

"Redfern! What's Reddy been doing?"

"Getting his cars up," said Figgins darkly. "We're going to bring 'em down again for him! You School House chaps can come down and see the fun, if you like."

Tom Merry & Co. grinned at one another. They had tested the quality of Redfern & Co., and they had more than a suspicion that Figgins & Co. would not find it easy to put the New Firm in their place.

"We'll come, rather!" said Tom Merry. "What are you going to do to them?"

"Something lingering. I suppose, with boiling oil in it," suggested Monty Lowther blandly.

Figgins snorted.

"Oh, don't be an ass! Come on, you fellows!"

And the New House trio proceeded on their way. Tom Merry & Co. followed them, greatly interested to see what would happen, and several other School House fellows joined them en route. Lumley-Lumley, Levison, Gore, Bishop, and Herries, and two or three more fellows came along to see the promised entertainment, so it was quite a little party that arrived upon the scene where Redfern, Lawrence, and

Owen were enjoying their little al fresco spread.

Redfern & Co. certainly looked as if they were enjoying themselves. They were seated upon the grass under the big, shady trees near the old chapel, and they had a white cloth on the ground in their midst. Two or three bottles of lemonade, a cold chicken on a dish, buttered toast galore, and cakes and jam tarts made a most enticing array. Redfern had just filled the three glasses with lemonade, when the avengers of the prestige of Figgins' study arrived, and with them the School House crowd.

Redfern glanced up coolly.

"Hallo, you fellows!" he said cheerfully. "So kind of you to give us a look in! Will you sample the lemonade, Figgins?"

"I haven't come to tea," said Figgins.

"Well, there isn't any tea, if you had," said Redfern. "Have you come to lemonade?"

"I've come to talk to you," said Figgins abruptly.

"Good! My great-grandmother used to say that what was nice at meal-times was light and entertaining conversation," said Redfern. "Lawrence, shut up! Owen, don't say a word! Figgins is going to talk to us. Go on, Figgins."

"Mum's the word!" said Lawrence solemnly.

"Not a whisper!" said Owen.
"There you are, Figgins!" said Redfern, turning to the junior captain of the New House. "Now, pile in. You don't mind if I go on with my lemonade, do you?"

Figgins turned crimson. The New Firm were chipping him with great solemnity, with never a grin on their faces; but the School House fellows were grinning gleefully. Figgins strode a bit nearer to the tea-party.

"Look here, Redfern—"
"I'm looking."

"I'm going to talk to you plainly. I'm a plain chap—"

Redfern looked at him.
"You are," he agreed.

There was a roar of laughter from the juniors, and even Fatty Wynn and Kerr grinned. Figgy was a very pleasant and manly looking fellow, but his best friend had never called him handsome. But Redfern had put quite a different meaning to Figgins' words from that which Figgins intended.

"Look here!" roared Figgins. "I don't want any of your cheek, Redfern."

"Well, I don't want any of yours, if you come to that," said Redfern peaceably. "Suppose we make up our minds to give and take?"

"You—you—you—"
"Jam tarts, please, Lawrence!"

"Here you are!"
"Redfern!" roared Figgins.

"It's all right," said Redfern, with his mouth full. "If you're going to talk, I can listen all right while I eat. I've done it before. I always eat jam tarts when my grandfather is talking to me. Go ahead!"

Figgins almost exploded.

"Look here, we're going to put you in your place!" he roared. "Fellows have been asking who's junior captain of the New House, and it's time you new bounders were shown where you belong."

"More lemonade, Owen?"
"Please!"

"Do you hear me?" roared Figgins.

"Yes, I hear," said Redfern. "I think I should hear you if I were across the quad. No harm in my helping Owen to lemonade while you talk, is there? Don't think I mind you talking, of course. You can run on as long as you like, and we'll listen till we've finished tea."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins appeared about to choke, and Kerr laid a restraining hand upon his arm and pulled him back.

"Don't get excited, Figgy, old chap!" he whispered. "Let me talk to the cheeky bouncers."

Figgins nodded.

"Look here, Redfern," said Kerr, in his keen and incisive way, "we're the leaders of the New House. You fellows have got to toe the line. You savvy? Get up!"

"Eh?"

"We're going to eat your feed for you," said Kerr coolly. "Not because we want it—"

"Oh, don't we?" murmured Fatty Wynn.

"Shut up, Fatty! Not because we want it," said Kerr loftily, "but just to show you and everybody else that we are the leaders of the New House juniors, and that you, and all the rest, have to toe the line, Savvy?"

Redfern cocked his head thoughtfully on one side.

"Yes," he said. "I think I savvy."

"Then get up!"

Redfern made a sign to Owen and Lawrence, and they rose to their feet. Their quiet meekness astounded Tom Merry and his chums, and indeed, Figgins & Co. as well. Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence were not wont to take orders meekly from anyone. But they obeyed Kerr's command with the meekness of pet lambs.

"Anything else?" asked Redfern.

"Yes. You can wait on us while we eat your tarts."

"Certainly!"

"And buck up!" said Kerr.

"Your humble servant," said Redfern, with a bow.

And Tom Merry & Co. stared at the amazing spectacle of Figgins & Co. sitting down to Redfern's tea, and Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence waiting on them with meek attention and civility.

CHAPTER 3.

Figgins & Co. Take Their Medicine!

FIGGINS was so astounded that he could hardly eat the jam tarts.

The coolness and cheek of the New Firm had caused the great Figgins to rise in his wrath and declare that Redfern & Co. must be put in their places and kept there. But Figgins had not been prepared to find the task so easy as this. He had expected alarms and excursions, so to speak—something just a little short of battle and sudden death. To see the three coolest and calmest fellows in the New House knuckling under in this way astounded Figgins. Kerr was equally surprised, though he tried not to show it. Fatty Wynn would have been surprised, too, if he had had time. But he hadn't. He was far too busy negotiating the good things Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence had provided for their own delectation.

Figgins and Kerr were acting in the matter from the highest motives, as they had explained; but it is to be feared that Fatty Wynn's motives were a little nearer earth.

The School House fellows looked on at this lesson in House discipline, simply

gaping. They could not understand Redfern & Co. at all.

Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence were perfectly grave.

They waited upon Figgins & Co. with meekness and polite attention. They handed them things to eat and changed their plates as if they had been born to the work of waiters.

"More ham," said Fatty Wynn, breaking silence at last—a silence that had been deep and joyful.

Redfern looked politely regretful.

"I'm sorry," he said, "there isn't any more ham. But there are heaps of jam tarts."

"Jam tarts galore, sir," said Lawrence humbly.

Fatty Wynn grunted.

"I want to lay a solid foundation," he said. "Keep the jam tarts for a bit. I'll have some of those cold potatoes. Is there any more chicken?"

"No; you have finished it."

"You ought to have had two chickens," said Fatty Wynn. "Still, you didn't know I was coming to tea. Are they sausages in that bag?"

"Yes, they are."

"Hand them over, then!"

"Certainly."

"Look here, Reddy!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "What's the little game? What are you fellows playing the giddy ox like this for?"

Redfern looked surprised.

"We're waiting on Figgins," he said, as if that were quite sufficient explanation.

"Yes. But what are you doing it for?"

"Because he told us to."

"You jolly well don't obey orders as a rule!" said Blake suspiciously.

"The flesh is weak," said Redfern blandly, "but the spirit is willing, you know. We've got a lot of arrears of respectfulness to make up."

"Look here, you ass—"

"Here's pulling Figgins' leg!" said Monty Lowther.

"Well, they can always pull my leg, too, if they do it this way," Manners remarked.

"It's a good feed, and Fatty Wynn seems to be enjoying himself. If this is a joke, I don't see where the fun comes in—for Reddy."

Redfern looked shocked.

"You don't think I'm playing a joke on Figgins, surely?" he said. "You don't seem to understand what a great man Figgins is."

Figgins turned red.

"Don't be an ass!" he exclaimed.

"I'm only saying what I feel," said Redfern humbly. "It's an honour to wait on Figgins. It's jolly kind of him to live in our House. In fact, it's pretty condescending of him to inhabit this world at all. We feel that."

"It's our place to wait on Figgins," said Owen, with an owl-like gravity, "and we're doing it. What more could anybody want?"

"Look here," said Figgins warmly, "if you're trying to be funny—"

"But we're not," said Redfern in surprise. "We're toeing the line and waiting on you, just as you ordered us to."

"Obeying orders from superior officers, you know," said Lawrence.

Kerr looked suspicious. He could not understand the sudden and amazing humility of the New Firm, though he tried to look as if he took it all as a matter of course. Fatty Wynn finished the sausages and potatoes, and looked round for fresh worlds to conquer. Only the jam tarts remained, but, as Lawrence had said, there were jam tarts galore. Redfern had taken them out of the bags and arranged them in tempting array upon plates. He had replenished

the jam in them from a jar. Dame Taggles, who kept the school tuckshop, made excellent jam tarts, but the juniors considered her a little "close" with the jam. But Redfern had made up for that. There was plenty of jam on each tart now, and they really looked very nice.

"Try the tarts now, Fatty?" asked Redfern.

"Yes," said Fatty.

"You can eat three or four, I suppose?"

"Three or four dozens, you mean!" grunted the Falstaff of the New House.

"Don't be funny!"

"Here you are, great chief!"

Redfern dropped solemnly upon one knee and presented Fatty Wynn with a plate loaded up with luscious-looking jam tarts.

Lawrence did the same for Figgins, and Owen for Kerr.

By this time a very considerable crowd had collected upon the scene, and the fellows were standing in a ring round the picnickers, looking on in astonishment.

Inquiries were showered upon Redfern from all sides as to what he was up to, and Redfern replied solemnly to each inquiry that he was waiting on the great Figgins, and that he regarded it as an honour to be allowed to do so.

Figgins and Kerr did ample justice to the jam tarts. They disposed of at least seven or eight each, and then they called a halt. But Fatty Wynn was not finished yet. As Monty Lowther remarked, it was always a dead heat between Fatty Wynn and the grub.

"Finished, Fatty?" asked Figgins, at last.

"How many more tarts are there?" asked Fatty.

"Six."

"I'll be finished in three minutes, then."

"Two tarts a minute," grinned Monty Lowther. "Hurrah!"

"Leave three of them for the kids," said Figgins generously. "They've waited on us very well, and we might leave 'em a tart each for a tip."

"Good idea!" said Kerr.

Fatty Wynn looked doubtful. As he would have explained, he was not greedy, but he liked a lot. But Redfern came to the rescue.

"Don't leave any for us," he said. "This is a lesson in discipline, and it ought to be carried out to the bitter end."

"The bitter end," grinned Lawrence.

"Exactly."

"Pile in, Fatty!" said Owen encouragingly.

"Well, if you press me," said Fatty.

"We do—we do."

"Then I may as well finish the lot, as you're so pressing."

And Fatty Wynn finished the lot. He had some little difficulty in rising to his feet when he had finished. He had eaten not wisely, but too well.

"Enjoyed yourself?" asked Redfern respectfully.

"Yes, rather! Thanks!"

"Not at all. It's our duty, you know."

"All serene!" said Figgins. "You keep this up, and it will be all right. All I want is for you chaps to understand what's what, and to keep in your place."

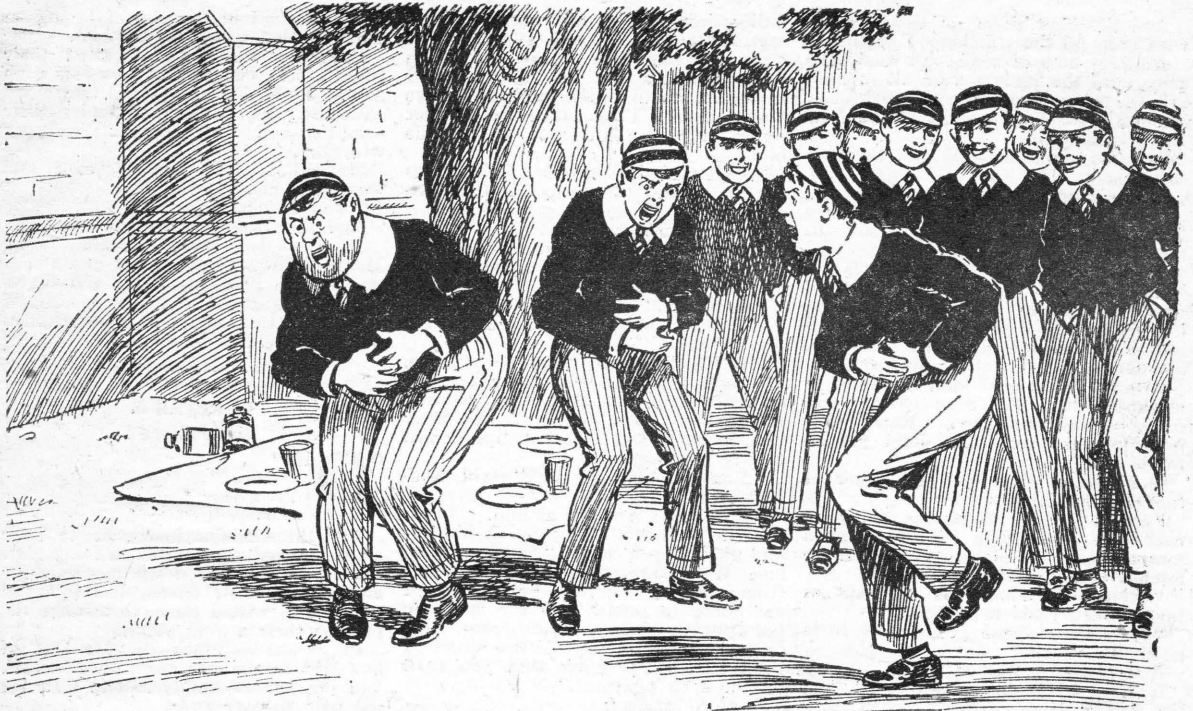
Redfern turned seriously to his chums. "Do you understand what's what, Lawrence?"

"Yes, Reddy."

"Do you understand what's what, Owen?"

"Yes, Reddy."

"Good! We all understand what's what, Figgy. What are you School



"Oh! Ow! Groogh!" gasped Figgins & Co., pressing their hands to their waistcoats. "I—I—I'll slay that beast Redfern!" muttered Figgins. "I—I—Ow!" The crowd of juniors roared with laughter. After the feast came the reckoning! And the three New House juniors heartily wished they had not bagged that doctored feed!

House chaps sniggering at?" demanded Redfern, looking round inquiringly. "It's very important for a chap to understand what's what, and Figgy is very particular about it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "I don't see anything to snigger at. We've done our duty looking after Figgins' health in this way."
 "Looking after my health!" repeated Figgins. "What do you mean?"

"Your health and Kerr and Wynn's," said Redfern blandly. "Wynn's most of all, as he's eaten the most." If Wynn has any pains in his little interior, he must remember that it is for his good."

Fatty Wynn looked alarmed.
 "Pains!" he repeated. "Look here, you bouders! What rotten game have you been playing?"

"Game!" said Redfern. "Nothing of the sort. It was for your good. We've only done our duty, haven't we, you chaps?"

"Certainly!" said Lawrence.
 "Done it brown," agreed Owen.
 Figgins & Co. had been about to depart. But they stopped now, and looked very queerly at Redfern, Lawrence, and Owen.

"Look here!" said Figgins, with an effort. "If you've been doctoring that grub in any way—"

Fatty Wynn turned quite pale.
 "Doctoring the grub!" he murmured.
 "Only the jam tarts and the lemonade," said Redfern cheerfully. "It's for your good, you know—for the sake of your health."

"I—I noticed the lemonade had a taste," murmured Kerr. "You villain! What did you put in the lemonade?"

"Only mixed up some Epsom salts," said Redfern innocently, "and some syrup of figs in the jam. You've taken enough for a whole hospital among you. But it will do you good. We've done our duty. Come on, you chaps!"

And Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence walked solemnly away arm-in-arm.

Figgins & Co. stood quite still, looking very pale. From the interested crowd round them came a wild roar. They understood now the extraordinary meekness of Redfern & Co. They yelled.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Oh!" murmured Figgins.
 "Ow!" muttered Kerr.
 "Groogh!" groaned Fatty Wynn.
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

The three New House juniors pressed their hands to their waistcoats.
 "Ow—ow! I've got a pain!"
 The juniors shrieked.

"I—I—I'll slay that beast Redfern!" gasped Figgins, turning very white.
 "I—I—I—Ow!"
 "Yow!"
 "Groogh!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins & Co. dashed away. A roar of laughter followed them from Tom Merry & Co. The leaders of the New House were not seen in public again for some time, but fellows who passed their door in the New House heard the most hair-raising groans proceeding from their study. After the feast had come the reckoning.

CHAPTER 4.

Mr. Ratcliff Comes Down Heavy!

TOM MERRY & CO. were almost weeping when they gathered in Blake's study for tea. The joke on the unfortunate Figgins had made them laugh themselves hoarse.

The absurd scene of Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence waiting meekly upon the leaders of the New House, and its climax, was too funny.

"Poor old Figgins!" murmured Tom Merry. "He's caught a tartar in Reddy. The new kid is hot stuff, and no mistake."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur

Augustus D'Arcy. "I am vevy much inclined to go and ask Weddy to tea."
 "Go ahead, then!" said a cheerful voice at the door.

Redfern tapped at the open door and came in, followed by Lawrence and Owen. The heroes of the New House were grinning serenely.

"Hallo!" said Blake.
 "Please we've come," said Redfern.
 "Well, of all the cheek—"

"We had a sort of feeling that Gussy wanted to ask us to tea," explained Redfern. "At any rate, we had a sort of feeling that we wanted to come. Didn't we, my children?"

"We did," said Lawrence and Owen.
 "Figgins & Co. have scoffed our tea," said Redfern. "We have nothing to eat, and we are thrown on the cold world."

"Pway sit down, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus. "We have got a weally good spweed, you know, and you are vevy welcome."

"Oh, make yourselves at home!" said Blake.

"Thanks; we will!"
 "Nothing in the jam, though, you know," said Owen. "No larks."
 "Ha ha, ha! No!"

"Poor old Figgins is groaning," said Lawrence. "We passed his study a few minutes ago, and looked in. We asked him if we could get him any medicine or anything, and he threw a cushion at us. I call that ungrateful."

"They're making a fearful row," added Redfern. "The Fourth Form passage is simply groaning. I think Fatty Wynn had too many tarts."

"This is what comes of trying to put fellows in their place when they won't be put," sighed Redfern. "I say, that ham looks prime!"

"So it is," said Tom Merry, laughing. "Here you are."
 "Thanks!"

And the New Firm sat down to tea with cheerful faces and good appetites.

A merry buzz of voices ran round the table, and the juniors were all in high spirits, when the door opened, and Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, looked in.

"Oh, so you're here!" said the prefect grimly.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy nodded.

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy. We're here!" he replied. "Have you come to tea?"

Monteith frowned.

"No, I haven't come to tea; and I wasn't addressing you!" he said. "I'm looking for three young rascals belonging to my House—Redfern, Lawrence, and Owen, Mr. Ratcliff wants you!"

"Ratty wants us?" said Redfern, in astonishment. "My dear chap, there must be some mistake! Ratty can't possibly want us. We don't get on together at all."

Monteith shook a warning finger at the cheerful Redfern.

"You'd better go to his study at once," he said. "He isn't in a good temper, and he might come over to fetch you himself."

"Oh dear! What does he want us for?" asked Lawrence.

"He knows about your latest little game, that's all."

And Monteith walked away.

Redfern & Co. looked dismayed, and the School House fellows looked sympathetic. Mr. Ratcliff, the master of the New House, did not have a sweet temper. When he was in a bad humour the New House fellows were always on the look-out for trouble; and he generally was in a bad temper.

"Bai Jove, that's wotten!" said Arthur Augustus. "Surely Figgins hasn't told him about your little trick?"

"I suppose the awful rotter has found out somehow!" groaned Redfern. "It's marvellous how Ratty finds things out. He's got a wonderful nose for poking into things that don't concern him. What does it matter to him if we physicked Figgins?"

"Nothin' at all, deah boy. You'd better explain that to him."

"No good explaining things to Ratty," grunted Redfern, as he rose. "Good-bye, you fellows; thanks for the feed!"

"Not at all, deah boy!"

And the New House juniors quitted the study. Their faces were glum as they crossed the quadrangle towards the New House. Mr. Ratcliff seemed to live only for the purpose of making himself obnoxious to easy-going juniors.

"Blessed—if I know how he knows anything about it!" said Owen. "I suppose he's been listening to the fellows talking. No other master at St. Jim's would take any notice of anything he overheard."

"Oh, it's no good trying to make Ratty play the game!" said Redfern despondently. "I'd change him for Railton of the School House with pleasure. What does it matter to him if we jape Figgins & Co.?"

"I believe he'd like us to be on bad terms with Figgy's study!" said Lawrence savagely. "He enjoys stirring up mischief!"

Thompson of the Shell met the three as they came in. He greeted them with a solemn wag of the head.

"You're in for it," he remarked.

"Ratty very bad?"

"Yes," said Thompson, "rotten! He's just given me fifty lines for whistling in the passage. He had

indigestion all the afternoon, Lefevre says, and the Fifth had a very rough time with him. He takes those rotten white powders for his indigestion—I mean, for his digestion—and they make him worse. They make his temper worse, anyway. Mind how you handle him."

"Nice, ain't it?" growled Redfern, as the trio made their way to Mr. Ratcliff's study.

Redfern knocked.

A voice that bore a great similarity to the grind of a rasp answered the knock.

"Come in!"

The chums of the Fourth entered the lion's den.

Mr. Ratcliff was sitting at his table. His long, thin nose was very red at the end, and that was always a sign that his digestion was at fault. His brow was knitted, and his thin lips drawn tightly together.

"You sent for us, sir?" said Redfern meekly.

Mr. Ratcliff frowned at him.

"Yes, Redfern." He rose to his feet and picked up a cane. "Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn are suffering very much from your mischievous prank, and I am going to punish you for it. I do not approve of these absurd jokes, Redfern, and I must see justice done. I have promised Figgins that you shall all three be punished."

Redfern gasped.

"Did—did Figgins tell you, sir?" he asked.

"Certainly he did!"

"My hat!"

"You should not utter those ridiculous ejaculations in my study, Redfern. Try to show a little better behaviour here, please."

"Sorry, sir. But—but I never dreamed that Figgins would sneak," said Redfern, in amazement.

"The awful rotter!" murmured Owen.

"Silence! It is not sneaking for Figgins to inform his Housemaster of an ill-natured trick that was played upon him to the detriment of his health," said Mr. Ratcliff. "You do not deny it, I suppose?"

"Oh, no, sir!"

"Then hold out your hand!"

Redfern held out his hand. His face was white with anger. He was not angry with Mr. Ratcliff. He expected the Housemaster to be "down" on him; there was no love lost between the hearty, breezy junior and the sour Housemaster of the New House. But Redfern was very angry with Figgins. Whatever might be the japes and raids among the juniors, it was always understood that no fellow would sneak to a master or a prefect.

True, Figgins & Co. had been very ratty lately about Redfern, Lawrence, and Owen declining to toe the line, as they called it. They had tried to assert their position as the born leaders of the New House juniors, and they had not succeeded. But that Figgins should come to so disgraceful a resort as sneaking to a master was almost incredible. But Mr. Ratcliff evidently knew all about it, and he stated that Figgins had told him.

Redfern's blue eyes glinted with anger as he held out his hand.

Swish!

Mr. Ratcliff brought the cane down with force. Redfern had to hold out the other hand, and the cane descended upon it with a terrific swish. Redfern had only two cuts. But they hurt as much as five or six by any other master.

Mr. Ratcliff had a way of laying on the cane that was quite his own.

Lawrence and Owen awaited their turn, which soon came. Two cuts each almost doubled them up, and they stood with their hands squeezed under their armpits, and their faces almost pale with anger.

Mr. Ratcliff laid down the cane and waved his hand to the door.

"You may go!" he said.

And they went, without a word.

As the door closed behind them Mr. Ratcliff sat down again, and a sour smile came over his face. His digestion was still bad, but the caning of Redfern & Co. seemed to have afforded him some relief.

CHAPTER 5. Bitter Blood!

"OH!"

"Ow!"

"Yowp!"

Thus Redfern & Co.

The three chums had gone to their study immediately after leaving Mr. Ratcliff. They sat down in the study and rubbed their hands, and squeezed them, and twisted them, to assuage the pain in their aching palms.

But it was not much use. Mr. Ratcliff had laid on the cuts quite scientifically, and the juniors simply had to wait for the pain to pass away.

"Ow!" repeated Redfern, for the twentieth time. "Can't the beast lay it on? Yow!"

"I think he must have been practising with Indian clubs on purpose," groaned Owen. "Ow! I should like to give him just one! Yow!"

"Groogh!" said Lawrence. "But it isn't Ratty who's the worst. It's Figgins. Fancy Figgins sneaking to a Housemaster!"

"The rotter!"

"I knew he was wild about our letting him down," said Redfern thoughtfully, "and I dare say we were rather liberal with the medicine—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But that's no excuse for his giving us away to Ratty. I can hardly believe it of him," said Redfern.

"Oh, you never know a chap till you find him out!" said Owen. "Ow! I shan't be able to use my hands for hours! Yow!"

"We've got to get even with Figgins & Co. for this!" said Lawrence savagely.

Redfern nodded.

"What-ho! If they're going to take up sneaking to the masters, the sooner they're downed for good, the better. But—but it's a queer business. I think we'll go and ask Figgins just what he said to Ratty."

"We got it plain enough from Ratty."

"Still, we'll ask Figgins."

"I don't want to speak to the cad!" growled Owen. "You can go if you like!"

"Same here!" said Lawrence.

Redfern rose.

"Then I'll go," he said. "I'll soon get at the facts."

And Redfern, still squeezing his aching hands, walked down the Fourth Form passage to Figgins' study. He knocked at the door and opened it. There was the sound of a mumbling grunt as he opened the door. Figgins & Co. were there, but Fatty Wynn was not to be seen.

Figgins & Co. glared at Redfern.

"What do you want?" growled Figgins.

Redfern grinned.

"Got over the pain in the little inside?" he asked.

"Oh, go and eat coke!"
 "Look here!" said Redfern, "I dare say that gave you a twist, but you deserved it for your cheek in ordering us to hand over our tea to you. And it was only a jape, too. You've been just as rough on us, at times, and we never thought of complaining to a master. That's always supposed to be barred."

"What?"
 "Sneaking is a bit too thick, you know!" said Redfern sharply. "Whatever you might have done to us we should never have said anything to Ratty. And I think you might have shut up. It's rotten!"

"What's rotten?" demanded Kerr.
 "Sneaking!"
 Figgins & Co. jumped up.
 "Get out of this study!" roared Figgins.

Redfern did not move.
 "I want to know whether you've got any explanation to make," he said. "I've come here to speak—"

"You've come here to get a licking!" said Figgins angrily.

"I'm open to take all the lickings you can give me," said Redfern disdainfully. "I'm not afraid of a sneak!"

"A what?" yelled Figgins.
 "You heard what I said—a sneak!" retorted Redfern. "It was sneaking to tell old Ratty about the jape—"

Redfern got no further. Figgins rushed right at him, and they closed and waltzed round the study. Redfern was dragged round to the door and sent whirling out into the passage. He crashed upon the floor with a loud bump.

"There!" gasped Figgins.
 "Yaroooh!"

"If you come into this study again—"
 "I'm jolly well coming, anyhow!" roared Redfern furiously.

He was up again in a moment, and rushing at Figgins.

"Pitch him out, Figgy!" yelled Kerr.
 "I'm going to!" gasped Figgins.

They struggled in the doorway. The heavy tramping of feet, the fierce gasping for breath, brought a crowd of juniors to the spot. The sight of Figgins and Redfern in deadly conflict caused loud exclamations of surprise. Although the rival leaders of the New House were generally on fighting terms, to a certain extent, they waged war good-temperedly, as a rule, and good feeling always reigned at bottom. But it was evident that matters had become serious now, and that bitterness had crept into the strife.

"What on earth's the trouble?" demanded Digby, of the Fourth.

"Separate them!" yelled Pratt.

Pratt, Thompson, and French, and several more fellows, rushed to separate the combatants, but it was not an easy task. The intended peacemakers yelled as they received several powerful blows that the adversaries intended for one another.

"Yow!" roared French. "Chuck it!"
 "Leggo!" growled Figgins.

"Drag that ass back, Pratt."
 "Now then, all together!"

In the grasp of half a dozen juniors the foes were dragged apart. They stood panting in the juniors' grasp, glaring fiercely at one another. Redfern's nose was streaming crimson, and Figgins' left eye was closed.

"Now, what's the matter with you two duffers?" asked Pratt.

"He called me a sneak!" roared Figgins. "Lemme get at him! I'll smash him!"

"So you are a sneak!" yelled back Redfern.

"Leggo!" shrieked Figgins.
 "Look here, Figgins— Oh!"

Figgins broke loose and rushed at Redfern. Redfern, nothing loath, met him half-way, and the fight raged again furiously.

"Oh, let the silly asses have it out!" growled Pratt, rubbing his nose, which had received a left-hander from Redfern. "Let them hammer one another, if they like."

"Go it, Figgy!"
 "Go it, Reddy!"

"Cave!" yelled Craggs, from the stairs.

The juniors scattered along the passage at the warning. But Redfern and Figgins were too furious to heed. They fought on, and did not stop, even when Mr. Ratcliff mounted the stairs and stood in the passage, looking at them grimly.

"Redfern!" rasped out Mr. Ratcliff. "Figgins!"

Then they ceased fighting.

"You will take a thousand lines each for fighting in the House," said Mr. Ratcliff acidly. "You will stay in on Wednesday afternoon to write them out. And if there is any renewal of this disturbance I shall cane you both severely."

Figgins stepped back into his study. Redfern blinked after him with the one eye he could still see with, and then went down the passage. Lawrence and Owen were still in the study at the end of the Fourth Form passage, rubbing their hands. They had not even come out to see the row. The ache in their hands occupied all their attention. But they looked inquiringly at Redfern as he came panting in.

"Been rowing?" asked Lawrence.
 Redfern snorted.

"Didn't you hear us?" he demanded.
 "We heard a row," said Owen.

"What did Figgins say?"
 Redfern ground his teeth.

"He didn't have anything to say. He never even troubled to deny that he had sneaked. He simply went for me, and we've been fighting. Ratty's given us a thousand lines each."

"Phew!"
 "I'm fed-up with Figgins!" said Redfern, between his teeth. "He's a sneak, and we'll make him sit up for it! I'll—"

"You'd better bathe your eye," said Lawrence. "And your nose looks as if it ought to be put in a sling. Better leave Figgins alone for a bit."

But Redfern's anger was by no means abated. He bathed his eye and his nose, but all the time his thoughts were running upon the one subject—to punish Figgins & Co. for having broken the universal law of schoolboy honour by sneaking to Mr. Ratcliff.

CHAPTER 6.

Gussy the Peacemaker!

MUTUAL glares were exchanged by Figgins & Co. and the New Firm the next day whenever they met.

Most of the New House portion of the Fourth Form knew already that the two Co.'s were on the worst of terms, though all of them did not know the reason. But to the School House fellows it came as a surprise. The general impression was that Figgins & Co. were resenting the jape of the previous afternoon, and it caused surprise that the famous Co. could not take a joke against themselves for once. But, whatever was the cause of the bitter

blood, it was certainly bitter enough. After mutual glares the two New House Co.'s carefully avoided looking at one another at all.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy drew his famous monocle from his waistcoat pocket and jammed it into his eye, the better to survey the rival juniors of the New House. It was a new sight to see the scowl of enmity upon Figgins' sunny brow.

"Bai Jove!" the swell of St. Jim's remarked to Blake after morning lessons. "There's somethin' vewy wong there."

Figgins and Redfern came in contact, at the door of the Form-room and they looked at one another like savage dogs and went different ways in the passage.

Arthur Augustus hurried out of the Form-room after them.

"Figgy, deah boy!" he called out.
 Figgins stopped.

"Hallo, Gussy! What is it?"
 "I want to speak to you," said D'Arcy. "It's about Weddy."

The genial expression vanished from Figgins' face, and he frowned.

"Blow Reddy!"
 "Yaas, wathah, deah boy; blow him as much as you like!" said D'Arcy.

"But what is the wov about? I can see that that there is somethin' up," he added, with a sage shake of the head.

Figgins grunted.

"A white mouse with half an eye could see that," he replied. "I'm not on good terms with that fellow, and I never shall be again. He's a rotter—and you can tell him I said so if you like. That's all!" And Figgins strode away with his hands thrust deep in his pockets and his brows still knitted.

Arthur Augustus walked away elegantly, thinking it out, and finally he went to look for Redfern. He found Redfern, Lawrence, and Owen in the gymnasium. Redfern was sitting on a parallel bar, and Lawrence and Owen were talking to him.

"I observe that you chaps have got into some silly wov with Figgins & Co.," said D'Arcy.

"Never mind that," said Redfern briefly.

"Pwaw don't be an ass, Wedfern. Now, you boundahs, I feel sure that the twouble is simply due to some mis-undahstandin', and it only wants the assistance of a fellow of tact and judgment to set it wight."

"My dear Gussy, keep off the grass," said Redfern.

"But what's wong between you and Figgy?"

"Oh, he's a rotter!"

"That is wubbish! He certainly isn't a wottah!" said D'Arcy warmly. "He has his faults, I know. Sometimes he has a feahful nerve, especially when my Cousin Ethel comes down here. He weally seems to think that she is his Cousin Ethel, and not mine at all. But in othah wespects Figgins is all wight. I wufuse to listen to you callin' him names, Weddy."

"Well, travel off, then," said Redfern carelessly.

"I wufuse to twavel off till I have set this mattah wight. It's no good callin' Figgins a wottah. That's what he said when I asked him about you—"

"He called me a rotter, did he?" roared Redfern.

"Yaas, and I wemarked—"

"Well, I'll tell you what I've got up against him, after all," said Redfern, red with anger. "He's a sneak! He sneaked about us to the Housemaster! Now drop the subject! I'm sick of it—and of Figgins, too!"

And Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence stalked away. Arthur Augustus' eye gleamed behind his monocle, and he pushed back his cuffs in a warlike way. He was about to rush after the New Firm and commit assault and battery, when he remembered his peace mission and restrained his riotous indignation.

And Arthur Augustus tried Figgins again. He found Figgins outside the New House with a frown on his brow. Several fellows had been asking Figgins questions about his trouble with Redfern, and most of them seemed to blame Figgins—which was not unnatural, as Figgins declined to give any details of the matter. Figgins was feeling unusually sharp and cross when D'Arcy sailed up.

"Figg, deah boy, I've seen Weddy, and—"

Figgins snorted. "I'm fed-up with Reddy!" he exclaimed. "Don't talk to me about that bounder!"

"Pway be reasonable, deah boy! I'm goin' to make peace, if I have to fight both of you ovah it!" said Arthur Augustus. "There is some feahful misapprehension. I cannot help suspectin' that somebody has been makin' mischief, or else Weddy would not call you a sneak."

Figgins jumped. "Call me what?" he roared. "He wegards you as a sneak, and I explained that it was impos—"

"He calls me a sneak, does he?" bellowed Figgins. "I'll show him! Where is he?"

"Weally, Figgins—"
"Where is he?" yelled Figgins.
"In the gym. But, weally—"

Figgins did not wait for D'Arcy to finish; he dashed away across the quadrangle in the direction of the gym. Arthur Augustus jammed his monocle into his eye, staring after Figgins in utter dismay.

"Bai Jove!" he ejaculated. "What ovah is the mattah with Figgins? It looks as if there is goin' to be twouble—afah all my efforts to make peace, too! Weally, there is not much use in intahfewin' with those silly asses, even for a fellow of tact and judgment."

It was barely possible that D'Arcy had not been quite so tactful as he fondly imagined. At all events, the outcome of his well-meant efforts was certainly not peace—it was war!

CHAPTER 7.

Face to Face!

REDFERN & CO. were still in the gym when Figgins burst in.

Figgins came in with red face and flashing eyes, and evidently in a towering rage.

The trio saw him at once, and guessed what was coming. They faced him coolly, Redfern stepping a little in advance of the other two.

Figgins rushed up furiously. "You cad!" he bellowed.

"Hallo!" said Redfern, with deadly coolness. "Are you going to blow off steam again?"

"You lying cad!"
"Is that all?"

"Put up your fists, you utter rotter!" roared Figgins.

"With pleasure!" said Redfern grimly.

He had only just time to put them up. Figgins was rushing at him like a whirlwind. There was a crash as they met, and they were hammering wildly in another minute.

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Kildare of the Sixth, the captain of St. Jim's, came into the gym at the same moment, with Darrell and Langton of the Sixth.

The St. Jim's captain uttered an angry exclamation at the sight of the fighting juniors.

"Stop that!" he roared.

Redfern and Figgins did not even hear. Kildare strode up to them, and each of them was seized by the collar in a grasp of iron, and Kildare, exerting his great strength, wrenched them forcibly apart.

"Ow!" gasped Figgins.
"Oh!" grunted Redfern.

"You young asses, what do you mean by this?" Kildare exclaimed angrily. "You will take two hundred lines each, and go and write them out at once. That will keep you busy till dinner. Cut off!"

"Look here, Kildare—"
"I say—"

"Cut off, and don't let's have any more of this!" said Kildare, frowning.

"Mind, I shall keep an eye on you!"

Figgins tramped away with a black brow. He paused in the doorway of the gym to speak to Redfern, who was frowning just as darkly.

"We'll settle this after school to-day!" he said savagely.

Redfern nodded.

"Just what I was thinking," he agreed.

"Half-past five, behind the chapel, then!"

"I'll be there!"
"Good!"

And then they separated.

Redfern and Figgins did not speak again during the afternoon. They avoided one another carefully. But neither forgot the appointment for half-past five behind the chapel, and when afternoon lessons were over, they prepared for the meeting.

Tom Merry & Co., who were making their way to cricket practice, passed Figgins & Co., who were going rather mysteriously round the School House. Kerr was carrying a bag, which he rather seemed to wish to keep out of sight under his arm.

Tom Merry hailed them.

"Coming down to cricket, you New House bounders?"

"No!" said Figgins shortly.

"We shall lick you in the next House match, if you don't keep up your practice, you know," said Blake.

"Bai Jove! We shall lick them anyway, deah boys!" remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Rats!" said Figgins.
"What's on, though?" inquired Monty Lowther.

"Got an engagement."

And the New House trio disappeared round the School House, in the direction of the chapel.

Tom Merry paused.

The open space behind the chapel, shaded by trees and well screened by buildings, was a favourite battle-ground for truculent juniors, and it was not difficult to guess what Figgins & Co. were making their way there for.

"There's a fight on," said Manners.
Tom Merry nodded.

"Let's go and see fair play," said Blake. "The cricket can stand over for a bit."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And the chums of the School House followed Figgins & Co. A good many juniors, who had discovered what was on, were making their way in the same direction in twos and threes. They did not go in a crowd, for fear of catching the watchful eye of a prefect. Quite

a crowd was gathering near the chapel railings when Tom Merry & Co. arrived upon the scene, mostly New House juniors.

Kerr had his bag open, and had taken out a basin, a sponge, and a towel.

He filled the basin with cool clear water from an adjacent tap. It did not need any more evidence that a fight was to come off.

"You chaps are not going to slog one another, surely?" demanded Tom Merry, regarding Figgins & Co. in amazement.

"No, ass!" said Figgins.

"Who's the happy victim, then?"
"I'm going to fight Redfern!" growled Figgins.

"Bai Jove! I wegard that as wathah wotten, afah my efforts to make peace between you," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy indignantly.

Figgins snorted, but made no other reply.

"I have twied by evvery means to make peace," said D'Arcy, looking round. "I wegard this as wotten and most ungwateful."

"Oh, rats!" said Figgins crossly.
"Weally, Figgins—"

"But what has Reddy done?" asked Kangaroo of the Shell.

"He called me a sneak!" said Figgins sulphureously. "He told D'Arcy so!"

"And you told Figgins, you ass?" asked Kangaroo, glaring at Gussy.

"Weally, Kangawoo, I was twyin' to make peace—"

"Fathhead! Nice way to make peace, I must say!" growled the Cornstalk.

"I was twyin' to get it cleared up—"

"Ass!"
"I wufuse to be called an ass! I considah—"

"Here comes Reddy!" said Digby.

Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence arrived upon the scene. Lawrence carried a little bundle under his arm, which when opened revealed a sponge and a towel and a tin basin. The New Firm had come prepared.

Tom Merry looked in a perplexed way at the New House rivals. He did not understand how matters had come to this pass, and it troubled him. He was convinced in his own mind that Redfern and Figgins were two of the best, and yet it was evident that they were very bitter against one another. And bitterness was really quite foreign to the natures of both the juniors.

"I don't want to chip in in a New House affair," said Tom Merry. "But this seems rotten to me. Can't this be arranged?"

"No," said Figgins; "it can't! Unless Redfern chooses to take back what he says, and apologises for it!"

Redfern's eyes gleamed.

"I'm not likely to take back the truth!" he said.

"That's enough!" said Figgins.

"Weally, if you would allow me to awwange the mattah—"

"Oh, shut up, Gussy!"

"I wufuse to shut up!"

"Why can't you explain what you've got up against one another?" demanded Tom Merry.

"I told you!" growled Figgins.

"Don't waste time!"
"What did you call Figgins a sneak for, Reddy?"

"Because he is one!"
"Look here—"

"Oh, don't jaw!" said Figgins savagely. "If you don't buck up with the arrangements, you fellows, I shall start on the rotter at once!"

"I'm ready!" snapped Redfern.
"Gloves on, I suppose?" said Tom Merry.



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THE HAUNTED HOUSE.

Pat was about to stop the night in a house reputed to be haunted. Suddenly, when he had removed one of his shoes, a voice moaned:
 "There's only me and you—there's only me and you!"
 Pat nervously fumbled for his shoe.
 "Wait till I get this shoe on again," he said, "then there'll only be you!"
 Half-a-crown has been awarded to G. Bate, 83, King William Street, Amblecote, Worcestershire.

WELL STATED.

Son: "I say, dad, where is the State of Matrimony?"
 Father: "Oh, that, my son, is one of the United States."
 Half-a-crown has been awarded to S. McCullough, the Sheriffs, Sheriffs Lane, Rotherfield, Sussex.

THE FOUR DEARS!

Monty Lowther: "Have you heard the story of the four dears, Gussy—a thought, a sigh, a motor-car, and a donkey?"
 Gussy: "No, dear boy."
 Monty Lowther: "A thought is an idea, a sigh is an 'Oh dear!' and a motor-car is too dear."
 Gussy: "But what about the donkey, dear boy?"
 Monty Lowther: "Oh, that's you, dear!"
 Half-a-crown has been awarded to M. Smith, Syndale, Chalotte Street, Chalkwell, Sittingbourne, Kent.

READY WIT!

Boy (to painter painting fence): "How many coats of paint do you put on that fence?"
 Painter: "Two, sonny. Why?"
 Boy: "Well, if you put on a third it would be an overcoat, wouldn't it?"
 Painter: "Yes, and a waste coat, too!"
 Half-a-crown has been awarded to G. Robinson, 8, Stormont Road, Hampstead Lane, London, N.6.

STRAP-HANGING.

The light in the car had failed.
 "Can I find you a strap?" a tall youth asked a little man standing at his side.
 "Thank you, I have one," the little man replied.
 "Good!" replied the youth. "Maybe you'll let go of my tie now!"
 Half-a-crown has been awarded to J. Williamson, 175, Newport Road, Cardiff.

"No!"
 "Well, you're a pair of silly asses, that's all I've got to say!" growled the captain of the Shell.

"Quite enough, too!" said Redfern.
 Redfern stripped off his jacket and waistcoat, and tied his braces round his waist. The two adversaries faced one another, and Kerr called to Tom Merry.
 "You can keep time, Tom Merry, as an outsider in this."

"All serene!"
 And Tom Merry took out his silver watch to keep time.
 "Two-minute rounds, and one-minute rests?" he asked.

"Yes."
 "Good! Get ready!" A pause.
 "Time!"

Figgins and Redfern did not shake hands. At the call of time the fight began, and in a moment it was raging furiously.

**CHAPTER 8.
 A Furious Fight!**

TOM MERRY stood, watch in hand, and the other fellows formed a ring round the combatants.

The crowd, which was increasing in numbers every moment, looked on with breathless interest at the first round of that historic fight.

Figgins and Redfern had had many little rubs since Reddy's first arrival at St. Jim's, but they had never stood up to one another in a set mill before. And as both of them were keen athletes and had boundless pluck, the combat was certain to be a severe and protracted one.

Redfern was not quite so tall as Figgins, and not quite so long in the reach. But he was more stoutly built, and he was known to possess very unusual strength. And both the juniors were famous boxers.

They seemed to be pretty evenly matched as they toed the line and faced one another in the first round.

The fight was hard from the beginning, and when Tom Merry called "Time!" at the end of the first round, both the juniors were looking pretty well punished.

Redfern staggered a little as he moved to his corner, and sank upon the knee Lawrence made for him, while Owen sponged his heated face:

Figgins gasped as Kerr performed the same office for him.
 "Stick to it!" murmured Kerr.
 "You're bound to lick him, Figgy, old man!"

Figgins gritted his teeth.
 "I'll lick him or bust!" he said.
 "That's the music!"
 "Time!" said Tom Merry.

Figgins jumped up. Redfern rose from his second's knee with equal alacrity, and they came into the ring again.

"Now look out for fireworks!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah! I disapprove of this, you know. Aftah my efforts to make peace—"

"They're making efforts to make pieces!" said Lowther.
 "Weally, Lowthah—"

"Go it, Figgy!"
 "Pile in, Reddy!"

Figgins and Redfern were "going it" and "piling in" with a vim, and they needed no encouragement.

They were at it hammer-and-tongs. Neither thought so much of defence as of attack, with the result that both were badly punished.

Figgins got in several body blows upon his adversary that made Redfern stagger, and the chief of the New Firm was driven round the ring; but just at the end of the round he deceived Figgins with a feint, and delivered a crashing upper-cut that swept the long-legged junior fairly off his feet.

Bump!
 Figgins came down heavily upon his back, his senses swimming, and the chapel and the trees seeming to swim around him.

Had the round gone on, Figgins would certainly have been counted out; but the call of time came to his rescue.
 "Time!"

Kerr and Wynn picked up their champion and bore him to his corner.

Figgins was looking dazed and a little sick as he sat on Fatty Wynn's knee. He put his hand to his jaw, which was aching terribly.

"Teeth all right?" muttered Kerr.
 "Yes, I think so."

"You must look out for that upper-cut. It's a trick of his."

"He shan't do it again!" said Figgins.

On the other side of the ring, Lawrence and Owen were jubilant. They knew that the heavy fall must tell upon Figgins, powerful as he was.

"Another like that, and he's out!" said Lawrence. "You are handling him splendidly, Reddy, old man! The blessed sneak won't last two more rounds!"

"He's putting up a good fight, though!" remarked Redfern. "The beggar's got plenty of pluck, sneak or not!"

"Pile in, and he's done!" said Owen confidently.

"Yes; I'm going to pile in, rather!"

Perhaps Redfern piled in a little recklessly in the next round. At all events, he laid himself open to a terrific right-hander from Figgins, which crashed upon his nose and sent him spinning. He grunted painfully as he struck the ground.

"Count! Count!" yelled Kerr.
 Tom Merry was counting.

"One—two—three—four—"
 Redfern did not move.

Lawrence and Owen watched him anxiously. If he was counted out now the fight was over, and their champion was licked.

"Five—six—seven—"
 "Oh, Reddy!" murmured Lawrence.

"Eight—"
 Figgins stepped back, and dropped his hands, and stood waiting quietly.

"Nine!"
 Redfern staggered to his feet.

"Come on!" he muttered thickly.
 And he groped half-blindly towards Figgins.

"Good old Figgy!" said Jack Blake.
 "That's just like him."

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard Figgy's conduct as vevy wight and pwopah!"

And as the round finished, they could see that Figgins was sparing his adversary. He defended himself, and did not hit out as he might have done. Redfern was in no condition to guard; in fact, it was only by an effort of will that he kept his feet at all.

"Time!"

Never was the call of time more welcome to a fighting man than it was to Redfern of the Fourth at that moment.

He sank heavily upon Lawrence's knee, gasping.

Owen sponged his flaming face. Redfern was breathing in short, quick gasps. Lawrence and Owen did not speak. They were feeling very anxious

(Continued on the next page.)

and despondent, but they tried to look cheerful. But their leader understood their feelings.

"That was bad!" he muttered. "But it isn't the finish!"

"Stall him off in the next round," murmured Lawrence. "You must give yourself time to recover a bit, Reddy."

"I know."

"If he gets in another drive like that you're done! Look out!"

"You bet!" said Redfern tersely.

"Time!"

Redfern was very cautious after that, and he sparred with Figgins, keeping him at armslength. It was not till the sixth round that the fighting became close and hard again. By this time half the junior portion of St. Jim's seemed to be upon the scene. The chapel green was crowded with juniors, and there was a ring five or six deep round the spot where Redfern and Figgins were slogging one another.

In the seventh round there was much less science and much more slogging. Both the combatants were warmed up to the work now, and both excited. Figgins had one eye closed, and Redfern could hardly see out of either eye. But both of them were standing up to the punishment with grim determination.

"Eighth round!" said Monty Lowther, as Tom Merry called time again. "My hat! They're sticking it out!"

"If it lasts much longer we shall have a blessed perfect on the scene," said Herries.

"Oh, it can't last long at this rate!"

"Too fast," said Manners.

Hammer-and-tongs they went at it again. Both of them seemed to have flung defence to the winds, and they were hammering away blindly and furiously.

Tom Merry glanced at his watch. He was about to call time when there was a shout from Pratt of the Fourth, who was perched on the chapel wall, and had a view over the heads of the crowd.

"Cave!"

"Some rotten perfect, of course!" growled Blake.

"It's Ratty!"

"Oh!"

"Time!" shouted Tom Merry.

Figgins and Redfern dropped their hands and stepped back, gasping and very unsteady upon their feet. At the same moment the ring of juniors opened, and Mr. Ratcliff, the master of the New House, strode upon the scene.

CHAPTER 9.

Taken Before the Head!

MR. RATCLIFF did not speak for a moment.

He stood looking at the two battered juniors, in the midst of a general silence. There was dismay in every face.

If a perfect had come upon the scene he would have stopped the fight, and would probably have given the two juniors lines. If a master had found them so engaged he would probably have reprimanded them very severely, and perhaps caned them, and then allowed the matter to drop—any master but Mr. Ratcliff. But with Mr. Horace Ratcliff it was different. Fighting was not wholly frowned upon by the authorities of St. Jim's, so long as it was kept within certain limits and gloves were used. But a fierce fight without gloves was certain to be punished if it was discovered.

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But Mr. Ratcliff had methods unlike those of other masters. He never allowed a matter to drop at the judicious moment. And all the fellows round the ring knew, as soon as they saw the New House master, that there was to be trouble.

Mr. Ratcliff had always been specially "down" upon Figgins and Redfern. They had been the leaders in a revolt in the New House when Mr. Ratcliff was barred out by the juniors; and the Head of St. Jim's, instead of punishing the rebels as Mr. Ratcliff considered necessary, had merely suggested to the New House master that he should take a holiday for a time till matters settled down again.

Mr. Ratcliff had taken the holiday because he had no choice in the matter; but he had not forgotten.

Immediately he returned to St. Jim's he had shown his dislike of Figgins and Redfern, and he made them feel it in many ways.

Neither was in his Form, as Mr. Ratcliff was master of the Fifth, and Figgins and Redfern were both Fourth Formers; but as Housemaster he had many opportunities of making himself disagreeable, and he had not neglected one of them.

Figgins and Redfern looked at Mr. Ratcliff as he stood scanning them—or, rather, they tried to look at him. Their eyes were blinking very painfully, and certainly their faces were in a state that Mr. Ratcliff was justified in considering disgraceful.

The silence grew quite painful.

"So you are fighting again," said Mr. Ratcliff at last.

"Ye-es, sir," mumbled Figgins.

"I think I forbade you to fight—yesterday?"

None replied.

"Which of you began it?"

There was a sniff from the crowd. That was just like Mr. Ratcliff—to try to make a fellow sneak if he could!

Neither Redfern nor Figgins answered.

"I asked which of you began this disgraceful combat?" said Mr. Ratcliff, raising his voice a little.

Still no answer.

"Very well," said the New House master, compressing his lips. "I must take it that you are equally to blame."

"Yes, sir" said Redfern.

"This is perfectly disgraceful," said Mr. Ratcliff. "Look at yourselves! Do you think you are fit to be seen in any respectable school?"

Silence.

"Are you not ashamed of yourselves?"

Silence.

"Yesterday," said Mr. Ratcliff, "I forbade you to fight. You have disobeyed me, Redfern and Figgins."

"I—I forgot about it," muttered Figgins.

"It is easy to forget when one does not choose to remember!" said Mr. Ratcliff sarcastically. "You are undoubtedly the two worst boys in my House. You are as bad as the worst boy in the School House—which is saying a great deal!"

And Mr. Ratcliff's eyes rested upon Tom Merry and Blake for a moment.

Tom Merry's cheeks reddened, but he did not reply to the taunt. Respect for Mr. Ratcliff's position, if not for Mr. Ratcliff, forbade it.

"I shall not deal with this matter myself," said Mr. Ratcliff. "I shall take you both to the Head. Follow me!"

"Oh, sir!"

"Follow me at once!"

The juniors did not move.

Mr. Ratcliff, if he had thought the

matter out for hours, could not have devised a way for hitting them harder.

Redfern and Figgins respected the kind old Head of St. Jim's, and valued his good opinion very much, and to be taken before him in their present battered state went more against the grain than the hardest caning from Mr. Ratcliff.

"If—if you please, sir," stammered Figgins, "I—I'd rather you caned me, sir!"

"So would I, sir," said Redfern. Mr. Ratcliff smiled sneeringly.

"You do not wish Dr. Holmes to see you in that disgusting condition, apparently," he said.

"No, sir, please," said both juniors at once.

"Well, you should have thought of that before. Follow me!"

And Mr. Ratcliff stalked away.

Redfern and Figgins followed him. There was no help for it; they had to obey the Housemaster's orders. But they went with heavy hearts and glinting eyes. They had never liked the harsh, sour Housemaster, but they came perilously near to hating him at that moment.

There was a murmur among the crowd of juniors as the New House master moved away, with the hapless fighting men in his wake.

"Rotten!" said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Just like Ratty!" said Pratt. "He knows they'd rather be licked than shown up to the Head in that state. That's why he's doing it."

"They oughtn't to have fought without gloves," said Kangaroo. "That was rotten. Blessed if I see what they're so ratty with one another about."

"Yes, I suppose they ought to be licked; but Ratty could lick them. It's rotten to take them to the Head."

"Trust Ratty to do anything that's rotten!" growled Blake.

The crowd followed at a distance, and saw the Housemaster and the two battered juniors disappear into the School House.

Mr. Ratcliff, with his long, thin nose very high in the air, stalked on ahead with rustling gown.

Figgins and Redfern followed him down the passage to the Head's study, and paused while the Housemaster knocked at the door and opened it.

"Nice go this is!" muttered Figgins, forgetting for the moment that he was on terms of enmity with Redfern.

"All your fault!" said Redfern.

"All yours, you mean, you rotter!"

"Sneak!"

"Cad!"

"I'll—"

"Silence!" exclaimed Mr. Ratcliff, turning round sharply. "Do you dare to recommence your quarrelling at Dr. Holmes' very door?"

The juniors dropped into abashed silence.

They followed Mr. Ratcliff into the Head's study. Dr. Holmes rose from his chair, and looked at them in amazement and horror.

Black eyes and swollen noses and cut lips and rumpled hair and torn collars certainly presented a shocking sight in the eyes of Dr. Holmes.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed. "What has happened, Mr. Ratcliff?"

The New House master smiled grimly. His chance had come at last. These two boys, who had been the leaders in the outbreak against his authority in the New House, were at his mercy, and he did not mean to spare them.

"I have deemed it my duty to bring this matter to your notice, sir," he said.

"I feel that it is too serious for me to deal with, even as a Housemaster. These two boys have been fighting like hooligans, or, rather, like wild cats. You see the state they are in."

"Bless my soul!"
 "If they had been fighting with gloves on I should have dealt with the matter myself, sir—severely, but, I hope, justly," said Mr. Ratcliff. "But this disgraceful exhibition of savagery is quite beyond me. As their Housemaster, I cannot give these two boys a good character. If you thought fit to expel them from the school, I could only approve, and I should not feel justified in asking for leniency towards them."

Dr. Holmes looked sternly at the two culprits.

"What have you to say?" he demanded.

The juniors looked at one another, and then at the carpet. Evidently they had nothing to say; at all events, they did not say anything.

"You have been fighting, Figgins and Redfern?"

"Yes, sir."

"With one another."

"Yes, sir."

"Why?"

"We—we had a row, sir," said Figgins hesitatingly.

"That's all, sir," said Redfern.

Dr. Holmes sat down again and scanned the two juniors closely. Their battered and bruised faces reddened under his searching glance. They were only too keenly conscious of their disreputable looks, which seemed more out of place than ever in the quiet, cool, reposeful study of the Head of St. Jim's.

"I do not understand this," said the Head slowly. "I think it will be

necessary to investigate a little further, Mr. Ratcliff."

The New House master looked as impatient as he dared.

"The matter appears to be quite clear," he said. "These two boys have been guilty of outrageous and disgraceful conduct. Their faces will be battered for days, if not weeks, after this hooligan combat. They are a disgrace to the school. I think they should be sent away, sir. That is my firm opinion."

Figgins gave a little gasp of dismay. Redfern's eyes gleamed. They had never realised before how thoroughly their Housemaster detested them, and how bitterly he remembered that old affair of the barring-out.

At the worst, what they had done would be well punished by a flogging; but it was evidently Mr. Ratcliff's desire to get them expelled, if possible.

Dr. Holmes did not reply to the Housemaster. He seemed to be thinking deeply.

"Well, sir?" said Mr. Ratcliff.

The Head looked at the juniors again.

"I think there is more in this than appears on the surface," he said quietly.

"Figgins and Redfern, I must have a full explanation of this."

The Head's tone was quiet, but very decided, and Mr. Ratcliff bit his lip and was silent.

CHAPTER 10.

A Reprimand for Ratty!

F IGGINS looked at Redfern, and Redfern looked at Figgins.

Neither spoke.

They had nothing to say.

They had fought because they were on bad terms. But they did not want to

explain all that to the Head. For one fellow to complain about another to a master came under the heading of "sneaking." And that was a thing Redfern and Figgins wanted to avoid.

They stood with their eyes upon the carpet and the flush deepening in their cheeks, and made no answer to Dr. Holmes.

"Come," said Dr. Holmes, quietly and kindly. "I will ask you first, Figgins. Both of you boys have impressed me favourably. Neither of you is of a spiteful or revengeful nature. You must surely have had some powerful motive for acting in this manner which Mr. Ratcliff justly describes as outrageous and disgraceful. You must admit that you are in a state which would be a disgrace to any school."

"I—I suppose so, sir," said Figgins.

"Why did you fight without gloves?"

"Because—because—"

"Well?"

"Because we were ratty, I suppose, sir."

"You mean you felt very bitter against one another?"

"Well, yes, sir."

"Why?"

Figgins was silent.

"Can you answer me, Redfern?"

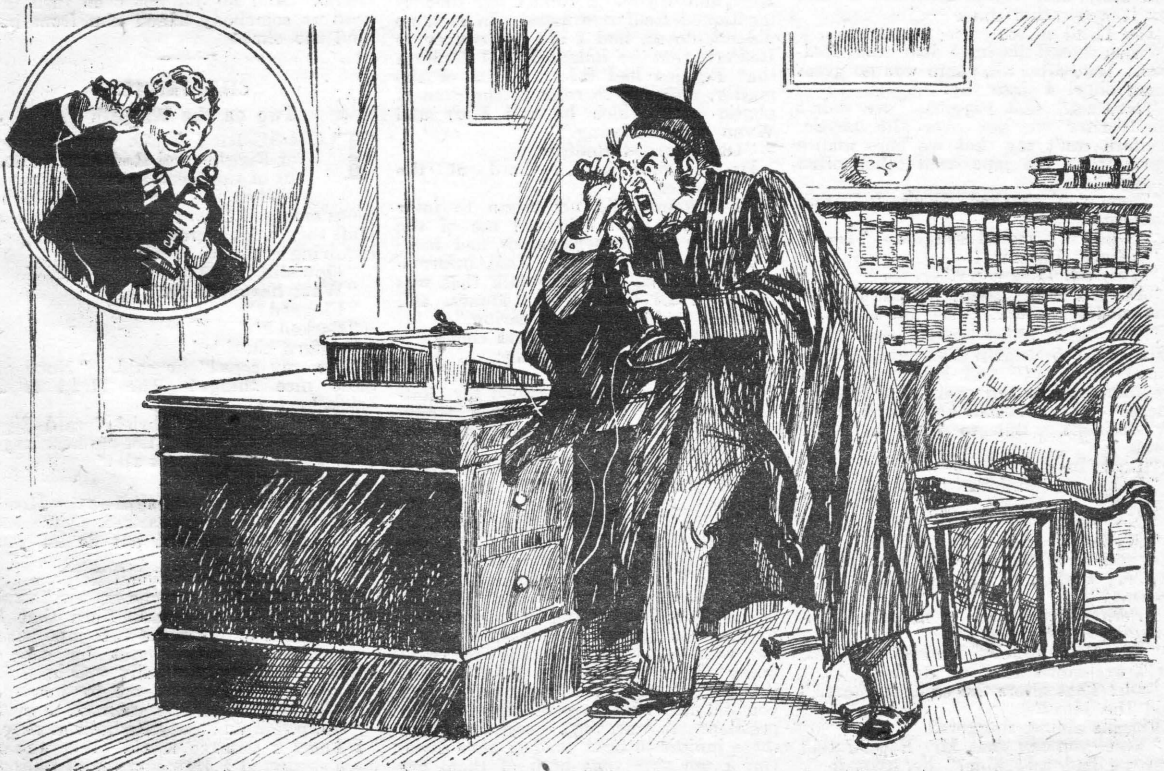
No reply.

"Come," said the Head, who could see far more deeply into the matter than the juniors themselves. "Come, this will not do. What cause can you possibly have had for this bitterness? What had Redfern done to you, Figgins? I insist upon an answer!"

Figgins looked at Redfern.

"Go ahead!" murmured Reddy. "I don't mind."

"He called me a sneak, sir," said Figgins, flushing at the remembrance of the insult.



"What—what have I taken?" gasped Mr. Ratcliff, horrified. "Is it arsenic? Is it strychnine? Have you made a mistake in my powders? OW! I will have you prosecuted!" "There's only one thing you can do," came the voice from the other end of the phone. "Go to the bath-room at once and let the water run down your back!" The Housemaster littis knew he was being japed by Figgins!

"That was very wrong, Redfern. Why did you do so?"

"Because he sneaked, sir," said Redfern promptly.

Figgins clenched his hands.

"If we weren't here——" he began hotly.

Dr. Holmes frowned.

"Silence, Figgins!"

Figgins turned crimson.

"I—I'm sorry, sir!"

"You deny what Redfern has stated?"

"Yes, sir. I've never sneaked in my life. It's a rotten thing to say about any chap," said Figgins. "I've never given him any cause to say it."

"You jolly well have, and you know it," said Redfern.

Mr. Ratcliff walked to the window, biting his lip. His impatience at this peculiar scene was so great that he could scarcely hide it, even in the presence of the Head. The Head of St. Jim's was acting like a good-natured prefect trying to make peace between two quarrelsome juniors. It seemed absurd to Mr. Ratcliff. He had certainly never tried to make peace in his life.

It did not seem absurd to the Head. If he could remove a misunderstanding, and set two fellows who were bitter against one another upon good terms, he would not regret the quarter of an hour it had cost him.

"We will go into this," said the Head good-naturedly. "I think perhaps there is a misunderstanding. Tell me the whole matter. You have no objection, Figgins, to Redfern telling me why he makes this charge against you?"

"Certainly not, sir."

"Then go on, Redfern."

"We japed Figgins yesterday, sir," said Redfern. "He raided our tea, and we physicked him—put physic in the jam and lemonade, sir, and gave him and Kerr and Wynn a twist. I dare say it was rather thick——"

The Head smiled.

"You should not have done that, Redfern. But, after all, there was no great harm done, I dare say."

"No, sir," said Figgins, "we didn't mind—after we got over the physic. Redfern can't say that we bore malice about it. We jape each other often enough."

"But you sneaked about it," said Redfern.

"I didn't!" roared Figgins. "I——"

"Silence, Figgins!"

"Yes, sir. I'm sorry."

"Do you mean, Redfern, that Figgins informed a master?" asked the Head.

"Yes, sir. Mr. Ratcliff sent Monkeith to fetch us into his study, and he caned us for it," said Redfern. "But we didn't mind the caning, if Ratty—ahem!—if Mr. Ratcliff had found it out by accident. But to have a fellow sneak——"

"Look here, Redfern——"

"Did you inform Mr. Ratcliff, Figgins?"

"No, sir."

"My hat!" exclaimed Redfern. "How can you have the nerve to stand there and say that, with Mr. Ratcliff himself present?"

"Perhaps you made a mistake, Redfern, in supposing——"

"But Mr. Ratcliff himself told us, sir!" exclaimed Redfern excitedly.

"Oh! That alters the case, of course," said the Head.

Figgins almost staggered.

"You—you say that Mr. Ratcliff told you we had told him?" he gasped.

"Yes, he did."

"Impossible!"

"He told all of us—Lawrence, Owen, and me."

"But—but he couldn't have!" panted Figgins. "I tell you we didn't tell him. I——"

"Please be silent, Figgins. Mr. Ratcliff, perhaps you can clear this up?" said the Head gently. "As I supposed, it is a case of misapprehension?"

Mr. Ratcliff turned from the window, his lips tightening a little. He was beginning to wish that he had not brought Figgins and Redfern to the Head's study, after all. He had certainly not anticipated anything of this sort. But he felt that he ought to have remembered that Dr. Holmes' methods were nothing like his own.

"Did I tell you about that jape of Redfern's, sir?" burst out Figgins.

"Ahem——"

"You will not mind clearing this up, I'm sure, Mr. Ratcliff," said the Head gently, but with a tone of firmness in his voice that was like iron. "You are aware that it would be very much against my wish to encourage tale-bearing among the boys, and I am sure that you have not intentionally done so."

"Redfern appears to—have placed a somewhat erroneous construction upon what I said to him," said Mr. Ratcliff haltingly. "I cannot say that Figgins actually informed me of the occurrence."

"Oh!" said Redfern. "But you said he had, sir!"

"I did not, Redfern. I said I had learned of it, and that Figgins had—er—told me what was the matter with him, or words to that effect. I do not remember the exact words I used, as I attached no importance whatever to the matter. You see, sir," the Housemaster explained, turning to the Head with a slightly flushed face, "after I had learned of the affair, which was the talk of the whole school, I saw Figgins and questioned him, and extracted from him what was the matter with him and with Kerr and Wynn. I cannot say that he mentioned Redfern's name. In fact, he did not do so, and I did not convey to Redfern that he did. I told Redfern that Figgins had informed me of the matter, meaning to refer to the dose of physic from which he and Kerr and Wynn were suffering."

"Oh!" gasped Redfern.

Dr. Holmes looked hard at the Housemaster.

"I certainly did not mean to infer that Figgins had informed me of the matter in the first place, or had mentioned Redfern's name. That information I received from the talk that was going on all through the House, and which I could not help hearing."

"Indeed," said Dr. Holmes coldly.

Redfern looked at Figgins.

"I—I say, I'm sorry, Figgy," he faltered. "I—I misunderstood Mr. Ratcliff, and—and I came to your study, and you didn't deny it—you just went for me——"

"What would you do if a chap asked you if you were a sneak?" demanded Figgins.

"Go for him!" said Redfern promptly.

"Well, then——"

"This is a very unfortunate matter," said the Head. "You appear to have used unfortunate words, Mr. Ratcliff, which gave Redfern the impression that Figgins had been telling tales. I do not see what other construction he could really have put upon your words, though, of course, I understand that you did not wish to give him that impression. It was very, very wrong for these juniors to fight as they have done. But I am sure that both of them are very sorry now."

"Oh, yes, sir!" said both the juniors. "I shall therefore excuse you," said the Head.

Mr. Ratcliff gasped.

"Excuse them, sir!" he ejaculated.

"Certainly!" said the Head. "As a matter of fact, they appear to have punished one another severely enough. And as the whole matter was due to a misunderstanding, I shall allow it to pass. I warn them never to allow such a thing to happen again, and I caution them to be more careful before they jump to conclusions. You may go, my boys."

"Thank you, sir!"

The two juniors quitted the study.

"One moment, Mr. Ratcliff," said the Head, as the New House master was about to follow. "I have a few words to say to you."

Mr. Ratcliff paused, almost blind with rage. He did not speak—words failed him at that moment.

"You have been the unconscious cause of this trouble, Mr. Ratcliff," said the Head gravely. "I regard it as a serious matter for a boyish friendship to be broken. You might even give a suspicious boy the impression that you had deliberately misled Redfern in order to break a friendship. I know you have a prejudice against these two boys, on account of the old trouble in your House. I must ask you, Mr. Ratcliff, to be more careful, and to try to overcome this prejudice against the two boys who may be a little unruly, but who have splendid qualities, and are a credit to the school. I hope you will think over what I have said."

Mr. Ratcliff left the study, breathless with fury. He had taken Redfern and Figgins there to be severely punished—to be flogged, if not expelled. And, instead of that, the Head had reconciled them—and reprimanded him. Truly, Mr. Ratcliff was a bad hand at Machiavellian plotting! Mr. Ratcliff's face was quite white as he walked across the quadrangle to the New House. And he did not even turn his head as somebody hissed him from behind the elms.

CHAPTER 11.

Two on the Warpath!

TOM MERRY & CO. were waiting for Figgins and Redfern to come out of the Head's study.

When the two battered champions emerged from the passage into the Hall they were surrounded by an eager, inquiring crowd at once.

"How did it go?"

"What have you got?"

"Flogged?"

"Sacked?"

Redfern chuckled.

"No, my sons!" he said. "None of those nice things! The Head is a brick."

"A real, gill-edged brick," said Figgins enthusiastically. "Let me hear anybody say he isn't, that's all!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Nobody's likely to say that the Head isn't a brick," he remarked. "We all know that he is. But has he let you off?"

"Yes, rather!" exclaimed Redfern.

"He went right into the matter," said Figgins. "Ratty told Redfern that I had sneaked to him about that jape with the physic. He pretends he didn't mean it, but we know jolly well he did. He wanted Reddy and me to quarrel. And Reddy, like a silly ass, took it in!"

"Oh, pile it on!" said Redfern meekly. "I know I deserve it all. But who'd have suspected a Housemaster of telling whoppers?"

"It would not have been respectful to suspect a Housemaster of doin' anythin' of the sort," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a shake of the head.

"But he did it, though," said Lawrence.

"Not exactly whoppers," said Figgins judiciously. "Mustn't put it like that, when I come to think of it. Must be just!"

"The just man just made perfect!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah, this is not a time to be funny—"

"Ratty is awfully deep!" said Figgins. "He's never got over that barring-out we had while the Head was away. He pretends he has—but he hasn't! He's been down on Reddy and me like a ton of bricks ever since. And I know it worried him to see us stand by one another. He deliberately worded what he said to Reddy to give him the impression that I sneaked—trying to make trouble like some rotten, miserable little fag."

"The rotter!"

"Nice dignified occupation for a giddy Housemaster!" said Tom Merry, with a curl of the lip.

"Yaas, wathah! I am quite shocked at Watty!"

"The Head doesn't believe he meant to deceive us; he couldn't suspect that of him—he's too simple," said Redfern. "But that was what Ratty meant—just to set us by the ears, and give him a chance at us. The awful beast!"

"And I think the Head's jawing him now!" grinned Figgins.

"Serve him right!"

"So you two silly asses have made it up?" Manners remarked.

"Well, yes," said Redfern, colouring. "I was taken in, and I was wrong about Figgins. I beg his pardon!"

"Same here!" said Lawrence.

"And here!" said Owen.

"Quite wight, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, beaming approval.

"Between gentlemen an apology is quite sufficient!"

"Quite!" grinned Figgins. "But look here, we've been done in the eye by Ratty. We never did anything to him, and he has jumped on us like this. In effect it was Ratty who's given Reddy and me these black eyes and thick ears!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And Ratty's got to sit up for it!" said Redfern.

"Just what I was thinking!" said Kerr.

And the rival Co.'s of the New House walked away, discussing very amicably how Ratty might be made to "sit up" for the trouble he had caused.

Figgins and Redfern spent the next hour or so in the Fourth Form dormitory in the New House, bathing their eyes and other injured places.

When they came down they presented shocking sights. It was likely to be several days before even the worst traces of that terrific combat passed away.

The Head's intervention had put an end to the bitterness that had grown up between the rivals of the New House, but they were rivals, all the same.

Later in the evening the New Firm looked into Figgins' study.

Figgins was sitting at the study table, doing his preparation with great difficulty. He could hardly see with his blackened eyes, and he was aching all over. Fatty Wynn and Kerr were helping him as much as they could. Redfern grinned at Figgins, blinking out of one eye. The other was quite closed.

"Well, you look a pretty object!" he remarked.

"So do you," said Figgins. "I think we're a pair!"

"Look here," said Redfern. "I've just had fifty lines from Ratty for whistling in the passage!"

"Shouldn't think you felt much like whistling," said Kerr.

"I wasn't whistling," said Redfern. "That was the excuse. Ratty seems to have been jawed by the Head, and he's down on me!"

"Nice man!" murmured Lawrence.

"It comes to this," said Redfern. "Ratty's called the tunc, and now he's got to pay the piper! You fellows have some queer ideas in your heads that this study is the top study in the New House—"

Figgins looked warlike.

"And isn't it?" he demanded.

"No fear!"

"Look here, Reddy, if you want your left eye to match the right one, you've only got to say!"

Redfern laughed.

"I've got an idea," he said.

"We've been up against one another, and we very nearly got it in the neck. We shall never agree that this is top study, and you won't agree that we are great chiefs—"

"Not much!" said Kerr emphatically.

"Then suppose we come to an arrangement," said Redfern. "We've agreed that Ratty has got to go through it for what he has done—"

"Yes, rather!"

"Then we'll go for his scalp, and the study that gets ahead of him is to be considered top study," suggested Redfern. "Is that fair?"

Figgins reflected.

"You've got a scheme?" he asked.

"Yes," grinned Redfern.

"Good! So have I. If you down Ratty, you're top study; if we down him, we're top," said Figgins. "That's square as a die."

"Done!" said Redfern.

"You'll have to be jolly careful!" said Kerr. "Ratty is jolly deep. And he will be on the look-out for trouble now!"

"I'm going to be careful," said Redfern. "Now which study goes on the warpath first? Shall we toss up for it?"

"Certainly."

Figgins tossed a penny in the air and caught it.

"Head!" said Redfern.

Figgins showed the figure of Britannia upward.

"I've won!" he remarked. "It's my innings!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Redfern & Co. departed, and Figgins struggled on through his preparation.

CHAPTER 12.

A Shock for Ratty!

MR. RATCLIFF was in a very bad temper the next day. His experience in the Head's study had been very exasperating, and with the exception of inflicting petty little punishments, he was unable to wreak his wrath upon Redfern and Figgins.

If the cheerful juniors had been in his Form he would have had many opportunities, but fortunately for them Mr. Ratcliff was Form-master to the Fifth. It was not fortunate for the Fifth, however. As the Fifth were seniors he could not care them, but he worried them into a most exasperated state in the Form-room that morning.

Lefevre of the Fifth confided to Dalton, after morning lessons, that he had come very near to shying Cicero at the Fifth Form master.

"He's an awful beast!" Lefevre said, with great feeling. "That's what I say—he's simply a beast. He's going for us because the fags have bothered him. I wish the old bouncer could take another holiday, and never come back."

And Lefevre's wish was heartily echoed by the rest of the Fifth.

But Mr. Ratcliff was not likely to take another holiday. He was sure to remain, as Dalton remarked, where he could make himself most unpleasant.

After morning lessons Mr. Ratcliff returned to the New House with a frown upon his brow.

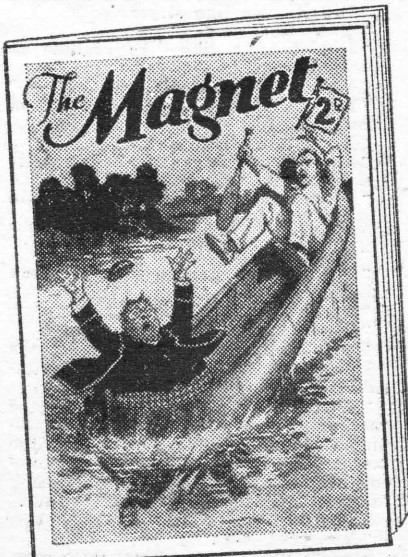
He looked round for Redfern and Figgins, but those two cautious juniors were keeping very carefully out of sight. They did not mean to give Mr. Ratcliff the slightest chance of punishing them.

Meet HARRY WHARTON & CO., and BILLY BUNTER

in this Lively

School Yarn

by Frank Richards



Having befriended and sent Ralph Stacey to Greyfriars, Colonel Wharton sincerely hopes that his nephew, Harry Wharton, of the Remove, and Ralph will be the greatest of chums. But the old Colonel is booked for a bitter disappointment, for, although resembling each other in looks, the two juniors are as different in character as chalk from cheese. If you fail to read

"RIVALS OF THE REMOVE!"

you'll be missing the finest treat of the week, for this grand yarn shows famous FRANK RICHARDS at the top of his form.

The MAGNET

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Mr. Ratcliff went into his study, still frowning. The Head's words rankled very much in his mind. His little scheme to make the obnoxious juniors feel the weight of his resentment had recoiled upon his own head, and he knew that it was useless to make further complaints about Figgins and Redfern to Dr. Holmes.

The Head had told him very plainly that he expected him to cease feeling his prejudice against those two juniors, and outwardly Mr. Ratcliff felt that it would be only judicious to affect to have forgotten his dislike for them. For Mr. Ratcliff, although appointed by the governors of the school, could be removed from his post at the Head's wish—and he was in too comfortable a position at St. Jim's to wish to leave. And if he gave the Head the impression that he was persistently unjust, there was no doubt that pressure would be brought upon him to make him resign.

Mr. Ratcliff thought that matter over, and decided that he had better be careful. When he went into the New House dining-room to lunch—the dinner of the school—he glanced at the Fourth Form table. Figgins and Redfern were sitting there, looking very black and blue, but behaving themselves in the most exemplary way.

There was not the shadow of an excuse for finding fault with them.

Mr. Ratcliff ate his dinner silently and sullenly. He retired from the dining-room with his usual attack of indigestion, caused chiefly by want of exercise. In his study he sorted out a paper from a cardboard box which he kept on his mantelpiece.

The folded paper contained a white powder which Mr. Ratcliff took for his indigestion—a remedy which, like many patent remedies, probably made the complaint worse instead of better.

Mr. Ratcliff was much given to taking patent medicines. If he had taken a little healthy exercise and more cheerful views of things generally, he would have been sound enough in health; but as it was he kept himself in a more or less unwholesome state, and made matters worse by doctoring himself with patent medicines.

In the medicine chest in his study there were all kinds of fearsome powders and liquids and tablets and pills, and he had his regular hours for taking them. One of the chief interests in Mr. Ratcliff's life was taking his varied assortments of medicines, and the whole House grinned over his peculiar little ways in this respect.

Mr. Ratcliff poured a white powder into a glass, and added water to it, and mixed it up carefully, and took out his watch to time himself. He took that powder every day at exactly 1.30, and he was always right to the second. He drank off the concoction, and made a wry face. As a rule, Dr. Hawkins' Patent Powder for Debilitated Digestions was perfectly tasteless. This one, however, had a salty flavour that lingered on Mr. Ratcliff's lips.

"Ugh!" said Mr. Ratcliff. "That powder must have been in the box too long. Ugh!"

Buzz!

It was the telephone bell in his study. Mr. Ratcliff turned from the table, and picked up the receiver.

"Hallo!"

"Hallo!" came a voice—a high-pitched voice which Mr. Ratcliff did not recognise. "Is that St. Jim's New House?"

"Yes."

"Mr. Ratcliff?"

"Yes."

"Have you taken the powder?"

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Mr. Ratcliff started.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"Have you taken the powder?"

"Are you Mr. Twist, the chemist?"

"Have you taken the powder?"

"Yes; I have taken it."

"Good heavens!"

Mr. Ratcliff felt alarmed.

"Are you the chemist?"

he demanded anxiously.

"I thought it had a particular flavour. Was there anything wrong with it?"

"You are sure you have taken it?"

"Yes."

"Good heavens!"

Mr. Ratcliff quaked. He had heard of careless chemists making mistakes with powders. He had never supposed that anything of the sort would happen to him. But he might really have foreseen it. A man in the habit of taking medicines, pills, tablets, and powders every day was bound to get a wrong one in the long run. He had sent to the chemists for that new box of powders only the previous day, and it dawned upon him that the chemist had sent him the wrong article now. The salty flavour on his tongue seemed to burn him. What had he taken?

"What do you mean?" he panted into the telephone. "Was there anything wrong with the powder?"

"Yes. Did it have a taste?"

"Yes. Oh dear—yes!"

"What did it taste like?" asked the voice. "Did it have a flavour like arsenic?"

"Ow! I don't know the flavour of arsenic. But—"

"Did it taste like strychnine?"

"Yow!"

"Did it taste like—like cyanide of ketchuminside?"

"Yow! Ow! I don't know! I—"

"Do you think it had a flavour of potassium of twistem?"

"Yow! Ow—ow!"

"Why don't you answer? It's jolly—ahem!—extremely serious!"

"I—I can't say. It seemed to me to taste of salt."

"Salt!"

"Yes."

"Common or garden salt—I mean table salt?"

"Yes."

"Good heavens!"

The voice, as it came through the telephone, was full of horror. Mr. Ratcliff felt his hair rising on end.

"What—what have I taken?" he gasped. "Is it arsenic? Is it strychnine? Have you made a mistake in the powders? Ow! I will have you prosecuted! Yow! I will have you hung for manslaughter and assault! Yow!"

"Do you feel any ill effects?"

"Yes, yes! Ow!"

Mr. Ratcliff's fears were at work now, and he was feeling creepy all over. The salty flavour on his tongue seemed to burn, and he was quite willing to believe that he had taken a whole cargo of deadly poisons, of all varieties.



There was a roar of laughter as the weird figure rushed across the juniors. "Mr. Ratcliff! Ha, ha, ha!" With burning figure in his amazing attire, sped

"Have you a chill down your spinal column?"

"Yow! I—I think so. Yes!"

"And a pain in the occiput?"

"Yoop! Yes."

"And a sort of liverish feeling in the feet?"

"Oh! Yes—ow!"

"Then there's only one thing for you to do. Can you hear me?"

"Yes, yes."

"You haven't fainted?"

"N-no."

"You must pour cold water down your back instantly. Go to a bathroom and let the tap run down your back. Don't wait to undress. Go at once. Do you understand?"

"Ow! Yes. Will that make it all right?"

"You will be all right afterwards. But buck up—I mean, be quick! It may be touch and go, you know. Do you understand?"

"Yes. Is there anything else?"

"No, that's all. Quick!"

Mr. Ratcliff hung up the receiver and dashed out of the study.

CHAPTER 13.

A False Alarm!

"WHAT the—"
 "Why the—"
 "My hat!"
 "What's the matter?"
 "He's mad!"
 "Right off his giddy rocker!"



quad towards the New House. "It's Ratty!" shrieked and flaming eyes the Housemaster, presenting a funny y too anxious to get out of sight!

Mr. Ratcliff heard the amazed exclamations. But he did not heed. He dashed at full speed to the nearest bath-room and flung himself, clothes and all, into the bath, without even troubling to shut the door, and turned on the tap.

Water swished down his back. Fellows who had seen him gathered round in amazement and alarm.

The passage was soon crammed with seniors and juniors. Monteith, the head prefect of the House, strode into the bath-room. Behind him faces and faces crowded like a sea. The impression of the whole House was that Mr. Ratcliff had suddenly taken leave of his senses.

Monteith's jaw dropped as he saw the Housemaster on his back in the bath, with the water running at full speed.

"Good heavens! Mr. Ratcliff!"

"Groo!"

"What is the matter?"

"Yow!"

"Mr. Ratcliff! Are you ill?"

Monteith did not like to ask the Housemaster if he was mad.

"Yow!"

"Can I—can I help you?"

"Ow! I am poisoned, and this is the only antidote!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff.

"I have taken the wrong powder—yow!"

"But—but—how—"

"The chemist has just rung me up on the telephone to tell me that this is the only cure for the wrong powder—yow!"

"Oh!"

"Oh!"

Swish, swish went the water over Mr. Ratcliff, and in a few minutes he was floating in it, soaked to the skin.

Monteith stared at him blankly.

"But—but—but it's impossible!" he stammered.

"If you've taken the wrong powders and things, that can't do it any good, sir."

"The chemist says so. Ow!"

"But he must be pulling your leg, sir. Are you sure—"

"Ow! Send those boys away! How dare they laugh when I'm in danger?" shrieked Mr. Ratcliff. "Send them away!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came in a roar from the passage.

Monteith, grinning himself, turned to the door and waved his hand to the yelling crowd, with a gesture of command.

"Go at once!" he exclaimed.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Clear out!"

The New House fellows, shrieking hysterically, cleared off. Yells of laughter came echoing from the distance.

Monteith turned to the wallowing Housemaster again. Mr. Ratcliff was puffing and panting, and snorting like a grampus.

"Did Mr. Twist say how long you were to do this?" he asked.

"N-no. Grooogh!"

Monteith grinned. He felt certain that the Housemaster was the victim of a practical joke. If Mr. Ratcliff had not been so

craven and nervous at heart he might have suspected it himself. But he was too full of horrid fears to think of anything but his supposed danger.

"You'll catch cold if you keep this up long, sir," said Monteith. "Shall I ring up Mr. Twist and ask him how long it's to continue?"

"Yes. Groo! Yoop! Yes."

Monteith hurried away to Mr. Ratcliff's study. He rang up Mr. Twist, the chemist of Rylcombe.

"Is that Mr. Twist?"

"Yes," came back a squeaky voice.

"This is St. Jim's New House."

"Yes."

"How long is Mr. Ratcliff to stay in the bath?"

"What?"

"Is the treatment to continue?"

"Don't be funny."

"I say—"

"You can't work off your jokes on me, young fellow," came back Mr. Twist's voice. "I've been rung up by you young rascals before. You can't pull my leg! Good-bye!"

"But, I say—listen—"

But the chemist had rung off.

Monteith returned to the bath-room. Mr. Ratcliff had dragged himself out of the bath now, and a pool of water collected round him on the floor.

"What does he say?" he demanded eagerly.

"He seems to think it's a jape, sir. You'd better ring him up yourself. He'll know your voice."

"Very well."

Mr. Ratcliff wrapped himself up in bath towels and hurried back to his study, squelching out water as he went. Sounds of laughter came from all quarters, but he did not heed. He hurried to the telephone and rang up Mr. Twist. It was some minutes before he could get into communication with him, and he was in a fever of excitement while he waited. At length the chemist's squeaky voice came along the phone.

"Hallo! What is it?"

"I am Mr. Ratcliff—New House."

"Oh! What can I do for you, sir?"

Mr. Twist's voice was very respectful now. The New House master was one of his best customers. Without Mr. Ratcliff Mr. Twist could not have sold half so many powders, pills, tablets, and liquids.

"I have been in the bath."

"Eh?"

"I have allowed the water to run down my neck."

"Great Scott!"

"You did not tell me how long the treatment was to continue."

"The—treatment?"

"Yes."

"What treatment?"

"For taking the wrong powder?"

"Have you taken a wrong powder?"

Mr. Ratcliff almost staggered.

Was the chemist insane? It really seemed so.

"You rang me up to ask me about the powders?" he shrieked into the receiver.

"I did?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Ten minutes ago."

"There is some mistake, sir! I have not rung you up to-day."

"Your assistant, then—"

"Assistant's gone, sir, some time. This is his half-day!"

"Do you mean to say that I have not been rung up from your shop at all?"

"Not to-day, sir. It must have been some joke of somebody, sir!"

"Oh!"

"I'm sorry, sir. If you've got wet you'd better dry yourself, sir, before you catch cold. If you like, I can send you along some special powders for chills—"

Mr. Ratcliff rang off.

"Is it all right, sir?" asked Monteith, looking into the study.

"Yes," said Mr. Ratcliff faintly. "I have been the victim of a practical joke by someone in the village. I will have him prosecuted—if I can discover him. It is infamous. By a peculiar coincidence I fancied that the powder had a salty flavour, which made me the easier victim to this wretched trick."

And Mr. Ratcliff hurried upstairs to his bed-room to change his wet clothes. Monteith grinned. As he left the study he found Redfern & Co. grinning outside in the passage.

The prefect stopped to speak to them.

"Do you know anything about this, Redfern?" he asked.

"No—only what I've seen. Is Ratty mad?"

"Someone rung him up on the telephone with a yarn about taking a wrong powder, and made him duck himself in a bath to remove the ill effects."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Where is Figgins?" asked Monteith suddenly.

"Dunno!" grinned Redfern.

Monteith went out into the quadrangle. Ten minutes later, Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn came strolling in at

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the school gates. They were grinning, and Monteith thought that he understood. He beckoned to the trio to come to him. They came up cheerfully. "Where have you been?" asked Monteith.

"Stroll in the village," said Figgins airily. "It's all right, Monteith, Baker gave us a pass out of gates."

"You are aware, I believe, that Mr. Ratcliff takes a powder after his lunch every day?" said the prefect, looking hard at Figgins.

"All the giddy House knows that," said Figgins.

"Did you put any salt in his powder?"

"Salt?"

"Yes."

"In his powder?"

"Yes."

"Nice afternoon, ain't it?" said Figgins.

"Have you been to the telephone call-office in the village?" asked Monteith.

"Telephone?"

"Yes."

"What jolly queer questions you're asking, Monteith," said Figgins, looking astonished. "Has anybody rung Ratty up on the telephone?"

"I think you know more about it than I can tell you, you young rascals!" said Monteith, bursting into a laugh. "However, it isn't my business."

And Monteith walked away, laughing. Figgins & Co. grinned at one another joyously, and went into the House. They looked into Redfern's study. The New Firm were almost weeping.

Redfern jumped up as Figgins & Co. came in.

"You awful bounder!" he shrieked.

"Was it you?"

Figgins chuckled.

"Has Ratty been ramping?" he asked.

"Ha, ha, ha! He's been wallowing in his clothes in the bath—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Redfern hugged Figgins as if he loved him, and waltzed round the study table with him.

"If you'd only seen him!" he gasped.

"If you could have seen him, dripping, wrapped up in bath towels—ha, ha, ha!"

And another attack of hysterics stopped his utterance.

CHAPTER 14.

In Weird Attire!

MR. RATCLIFF looked more savage than ever in the Fifth Form Room that afternoon. The story of the Fifth Form master's bath with his clothes on was all over the school; and St. Jim's had chuckled over it joyously.

Mr. Ratcliff was under the impression that the joke had been played upon him by someone in Rylcombe; but most of the fellows guessed that the practical joker might have been discovered a little nearer home. The Fifth grinned when Mr. Ratcliff came in, and there were suppressed grins in the Form-room all the afternoon. But Mr. Ratcliff took no notice. He knew that he had made himself ridiculous, and shown himself up as a poltroon. He was only anxious for the affair to be forgotten as quickly as possible.

When lessons were over, Mr. Ratcliff lingered in the passage a few minutes until the Fourth Form were also dismissed.

Blake, D'Arcy, and Redfern were the first out of the Fourth Form Room, and

they came out into the passage with a whoop.

Mr. Ratcliff raised his lean forefinger.

"Redfern!" he thundered.

Redfern became solemn at once.

"Yes, sir?" he said meekly.

"How dare you make such a noise in the Form-room passage?"

"If you please, sir—"

"Take a hundred lines."

"Thank you, sir!"

Mr. Ratcliff strode away, feeling a little comforted.

The hundred lines, bestowed upon the flimsiest pretext, would keep Redfern away from the cricket practice, and that was a solace to the genial Ratty.

"Nice man, I don't think!" said Redfern, looking after the retreating form of his Housemaster with gleaming eyes. "I wonder whether he's going down to bathe as usual this afternoon?"

"Pewwaps it will put him into a better tempah if he does," said Arthur Augustus. "I have thought sevowal times of wecommendin' Mr. Watcliff to take more exercise, but I don't know how he would take the advice from a juniah."

"I do," said Blake, laughing. "You would get a licking for your cheek."

"Weally, Blake—"

Redfern & Co. walked away to the New House. It was a blazing afternoon, and most of the fellows were going down to the cricket field. Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence went into their study in the New House, and discussed ginger-pop and cake, while Redfern kept his eye on the quadrangle from the window.

"Figgins' little jape on the telephone was good—distinctly good!" Redfern remarked. "But I think we shall beat it—next time Ratty goes to bathe."

And Lawrence and Owen chuckled.

"Hallo! There he goes!"

The three juniors looked from the window. Mr. Ratcliff, with a little bag in his hand, was crossing towards the school gates with his stilted steps. The juniors knew that little bag. It contained Mr. Ratcliff's towels. The only form of exercise Mr. Ratcliff ever took was a bathe in the Pool of the Rhyl River, and that only on specially warm days, when there was no danger whatever of taking a chill.

He was a very poor swimmer, but even his nerves were equal to a bathe in shallow water. Redfern, Lawrence, and Owen grinned at one another.

"Time!" said Redfern.

And he picked up a bundle from under the study table, and quitted the study.

Quite unconscious of the interest the New Firm took in his movements, Mr. Ratcliff walked down to the towing-path, and followed the river till he reached the Pool. In one place the Pool was deep and dangerous, and full of currents; but in another spot, sheltered by trees, a space had been marked off for bathing, and was protected by a net in the water. It was a beautiful spot, with the sun shining upon the water through the openings in the thick foliage of the trees.

Even Mr. Ratcliff's sour face cleared a little as he stripped for the plunge into the Pool. In his methodical way he folded up his clothes carefully, and placed them in a thicket to conceal them from the general view, in case some tramp should happen by and take a fancy to them. Then he plunged into the water to bathe.

As he waded out from the bank, there was a rustle in the thicket where he had placed his clothes and hat, but Mr. Ratcliff did not hear it.

And it was only for a few moments.

Then there was silence along the wooded shore, save for the twittering of the birds in the branches overhead.

Mr. Ratcliff disported himself in the Pool in great enjoyment.

He remained about ten minutes in the water, and then waded to shore, and stepped gingerly on the sloping grass with his bare, wet feet.

He extracted the towels from the bag, and rubbed himself down, and felt much better than if he had taken a patent powder, or a patent pill, or a marvellous mixture.

Then he groped in the thicket for his clothes.

His hand came in contact with a bundle, and he dragged it out.

His face changed its expression as the bundle came into view.

His clothes were gone!

Instead of his own clothes, the bundle contained a short, spotted skirt of red and blue, and a bodice of pink with black stripes. There was also a large bonnet of an early Victorian type, and a pair of very large shoes and stockings.

Mr. Ratcliff gazed at the strange garments in amazement.

"Dear me!" he gasped.

He groped in the thicket again. Then he searched round about for some distance. But there was no sign of his clothes. If he had looked in a certain hollow tree farther up the bank, he might have had more success. But Mr. Ratcliff knew nothing about the hollow tree. He ceased his search at last, and gazed at the weird clothes which were all that remained to him.

"Good heavens!" muttered Mr. Ratcliff. "What am I to do?"

It was only too clear that someone had taken away his clothes and substituted these in their place. Whether it was a joke or a robbery he did not know—that was really not the important point just now. At the present moment, the pressing question was, how was he to get back to the school?

Certainly he could not return to the school clad in the simple airy attire of only a bathing suit.

He coloured all over at the thought. It was nearly a quarter of a mile to St. Jim's, and he would be liable to arrest if he attempted to return in the extremely spare attire he was wearing at present.

But what was he to do?

To don women's clothes—and such clothes? His hair rose on end at the thought.

He ground his teeth with rage.

It was a "jape", there was little doubt about that, though there was not the slightest clue to the japer.

Mr. Ratcliff shivered.

If he remained there without clothes much longer he was likely to take a chill. He thought of shouting for help, but it was futile. There was no one in view along the river—and besides, he could hardly ask anybody to give him his clothes, and go without himself.

Mr. Ratcliff sat down to think it out.

The sun was sinking, and a cool breath blew along the river. He shivered, and started to his feet again. This certainly would not do. He resolved to don the ridiculous clothes, to keep himself warm while he was pondering what to do.

Very gingerly Mr. Ratcliff put his long legs into the skirt, and drew it up round his waist and fastened it there. Then he donned the bodice, which was a great deal too large for him, and hunched it up round his spare form and buttoned it. His long thin legs projected below the skirt from the knees. He drew on the stockings, which were

(Continued on page 18.)



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! I have had so many repeated requests for another yarn featuring Jerrold Lumley-Lumley, once the outsider of St. Jim's, that I have arranged for another ripping yarn about this popular character. This story, which bears the unusual and intriguing title of:

"FROM FOURTH FORMER TO GROCER'S BOY!"

will be appearing next week. Martin Clifford always excels himself when dealing with the adventures of the boy from the Bowery, New York, so you can expect an extra-special story for next Wednesday. It tells of Lumley-Lumley being disowned by his millionaire father and compelled to leave St. Jim's. But does Lumley worry? Not he! He's had to earn his own living before, and he's ready to do so again—as a grocer's boy in Rylcombe! It's a ripping yarn, chums, and you will thoroughly enjoy every word of it.

Then there is another smashing story of the Packsaddle pals, called "THE SIX-GUN SCHOOLMASTER!"—in which Bill Sampson, the cowboy master, is fired from his job at the cow town school. But, as you will read in this wonderful yarn, it's Bill who does the firing!

To complete this grand story programme, there are more thrills from Mr. Brooks' popular serial "The Secret World!" And readers' prize jokes, and Monty Lowther's fun will complete the number. Order early in my oft-repeated advice—and don't forget to put your pals on to this tiptop issue.

SHARE YOUR PLEASURES.

In this year of Jubilee every British boy and girl has a splendid two-fold

opportunity. By sending postal orders or unused stamps to King George's Jubilee Trust, St. James' Palace, London, S.W.1, they can join in the great National Tribute to our beloved King for his reign over us during the last twenty-five years, and at the same time help in providing opportunities for healthy recreation and pastime for the youth of Great Britain. His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, who inspired this two-fold opportunity, said on the wireless:

"I believe there are over 1,000,000 boys and girls between the ages of fourteen and eighteen with no opportunity of enjoying the games and chances of self-development to which they are entitled—with no outlet for their natural high spirits and ambitions."

True sportsmanship includes the privilege of sharing our pleasures with those who are denied them.

SNAKES ALIVE!

From two Colonial readers I have received interesting stories which I think worth while passing on. The first one, from an Australian chum, is about a man's fight with a snake near Grafton. The man was engaged on a job of work in the bush when he spotted the snake coming for him. He eluded it, and, flinging up the spade he had been using, brought it down on the reptile. The force of the blow severed it in two, but that snake was not finished with yet! The head-half attacked again, and the man ran for it. The snake pursued him rapidly, and in the end the man turned

PEN PALS COUPON

25-5-35



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.

John Pross, Sandy Bay Baths, Sandy Bay, Hobart, Tasmania, Australia, wants correspondents; England, Africa, France, U.S.A.; age 14-15; stamps, cigarette cards, postcards of ships.

Miss Margaret Muir, 26, Glasgow Road, Cambuslang, by Glasgow, wants girl correspondents; age 16-20.

Miss June Robertson, 55, Le Cren Street, Timaru, New Zealand, wants girl correspondents; age 18 upwards; sports, stamps, music.

Miss Rose A. Culverhouse, Flat 5, 240, Great College Street, Camden Town, London, N.W.1, wants girl correspondents; age 17 upwards; Hollywood especially; films, dancing.

and struck again with the spade at the creature. That was the finish—the snake's head was cut off.

The other interesting story was sent to me from a New Zealand reader, and it tells of a man's lucky find in his own toe, of all places. A twinge of pain in one of his digits kept worrying him as he walked along, so at a favourable opportunity he took off his shoe and sock to examine the toe. Imagine his surprise and delight when he saw a small diamond embedded in the flesh! Apparently it had stuck to his toe while he was paddling in the sea.

GETTING THEIR OWN BACK.

Revenge, it is said, is sweet, and it certainly was for some Chicago boys, but it was extra sweet for the birds they used to get their own back on a grocer. The latter, enraged at the way the boys, in fun, noisily entered his shop on roller skates and then scooted out again, set his wife to wait for them with a broom-handle to teach them a lesson. After two or three of them had felt the weight of the handle, they got together to seek revenge. The boys caught over a hundred sparrows and put them in a basket. Then they went to the shop and released the lot inside. In a moment the birds were enjoying themselves, pecking at everything eatable. Frantically the grocer tried to drive them away, but the sparrows wouldn't leave. They liked the taste of his sweets, sugar and prunes! Police were called in, but they couldn't shift them, either. Eventually a bird expert came to the rescue and succeeded in relieving the grocer of his winged invaders.

GRAND JUBILEE DANCE.

I have received another letter from Miss Kathleen Costello, a GEM reader, and Hon. Secretary of the Henry Edwards' Film Club, in which she tells me that the club is holding a grand Jubilee Dance at Bush House, Aldwych, London, W.C., on Saturday, May 25th. The previous dance held there was a great success, but this one promises to be even greater. Many film stars will be present, and, in addition, the whole of the South African Test team, and Ben Foord, the heavy-weight champion of South Africa, will be attending. All GEM readers are welcome. If you would like to go, write for tickets without delay to either the Hon. Secretary, 32, Amesbury Avenue, Streatham Hill, London, S.W.2, or J. Hudspith, Esq., 172, Plumstead Common Road, London, S.E.18. Tickets are 3s. 6d. each.

THE EDITOR.

Miss Elsie Shearl, Thurlston House, Fleet, Hants, wants a girl correspondent; age 14-15.

Miss Miriam Heywood, vice-secretary of the British and Dominions Film Club, Riversdale, Burbage, Buxton, Derbyshire, invites girl correspondents.

Members of the British and Dominions Film Club and all interested are invited to write to the Secretary, Lyle Talbot Film Club, 8, Cordelia Street, Mile End, London, E.3, or 24, Alleyn Park, Southall, Middx.

G. Wright, Moorside House, Honley, near Huddersfield, Yorks, wants to correspond with a French boy, age 14-15.

Miss Peggy Lyons, 4, Stonehall Avenue, Wanstead Lane, Ilford, Essex, wants girl correspondents; age 16-19; films, stamps, football, cricket, tennis.

Joseph Wright, No. 4343, H.M.S. Ganges, Ipswich, Suffolk, wants a correspondent; age 16-17.

Miss Peggy Brown, Vuelta, 47, Castleview Gardens, Ilford, Essex, wants girl correspondents; age 16-19; books, films, football, cricket, tennis, stamps.

(Continued on next page.)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,423.

The New House Rivals!

(Continued from page 16.)

of a bright yellow colour. Then the shoes, which squashed about on his feet. They were three or four sizes too large, and he had to draw the laces very tight to keep them on at all.

Then he sat down to rest and think it out.

The evening air was getting a little chilly now, and he shivered again. He cast a despairing glance up and down the river bank. There was no one in sight. What was he to do? It was being borne in upon his mind that he had no choice in the matter. He had to return to St. Jim's—and he had to go as he was.

"Oh!" murmured Mr. Ratcliff. "The—! the villains! I presume this is a joke! I—I—I—"

Words failed him.

He felt that he could wait no longer. A sudden thought struck him, and he put the large bonnet on and squashed it down over his face as much as possible to conceal his features. Then he moved from the spot.

He certainly made the most peculiar figure as he hurried through the wood towards the school.

A blue and red skirt, a pink bodice with black spots, yellow stockings, and a poke-bonnet could not really be considered suitable attire for a dignified Housemaster at a Public school!

But Mr. Ratcliff had to go, though with it. He hoped that he would find the quadrangle deserted, and would be able to rush across to the New House, and skip up to his room without being observed.

He arrived at the gates of St. Jim's red and breathless with hurry, fortunately without having encountered anyone en route.

The first person to observe him was Taggles, the school porter. Taggles stared in blank amazement at the queer figure entering the gateway. His first impression was that a female tramp of a particularly unpleasant variety was

seeking to obtain shelter within the classic walls of St. Jim's. Taggles' few remaining hairs bristled with indignation at the thought. He strode to intercept the newcomer.

"Ere, you get hout!" he shouted. "This ain't no place for you! You get hout! Do you 'ear?"

"Let me pass, you fool!"

Taggles staggered back.

"Mr. Ratcliff!" he gasped.

Mr. Ratcliff dashed past him with fluttering skirt, and the strings of his bonnet floating in the wind behind him.

Taggles staggered against his lodge and gasped.

"Mad as a 'atter!" he murmured. "Stark, starin', ravin' mad! My heve!"

Mr. Ratcliff rushed on. But alas for his hope of finding the quad deserted. The quad was simply alive with juniors. Outside the New House Redfern, Lawrence, and Owen were standing on the steps with Figgins & Co., Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther, and Blake, D'Arcy, and Digby, and Kangaroo, Reilly, and five or six more School House fellows were crowding on the New House steps with Redfern and Figgins—just as if they had been invited over to behold a special sight, as, indeed, they had!

There was a roar from every quarter of the quadrangle as the weird figure was seen rushing towards the New House.

"Hallo!"

"Who's that?"

"What is it?"

"It's Aunt Sally come to life!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The wild roar brought fellows and masters to their windows in both Houses to see what was the matter. All St. Jim's seemed to have become alive with eyes for Mr. Ratcliff's special benefit.

Dr. Holmes came to his study window and looked out and gasped. Yells of laughter rose on all sides.

"It's Ratty!" shrieked a score of voices.

"Mr. Ratcliff!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

With burning cheeks and flaming eyes Mr. Ratcliff sped on, his skirt fluttering wildly over his yellow stockings. One wild yell of laughter sounded

on all sides. On the steps of the New House the juniors seemed to be in hysterics. Monteith came out in wonder—and at the sight of Mr. Ratcliff he burst into a whoop and doubled up in a paroxysm of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He, he, he!"

"My hat! Ho, ho, ho!"

"Bai Jove! I wegard— Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Ratcliff swept up the steps between the rows of shrieking juniors and swept into the House. His bonnet was hanging down the back of his neck by this time, and one of the big shoes had come off. Yells of laughter followed him into the House, and yells of laughter met him from everyone whom he encountered. Foaming with rage and shame, Mr. Ratcliff tore upstairs and into his room, and the bang of his door echoed through the House.

Out in the quadrangle fellows were hugging one another, or leaning against the walls and elms, gasping and shrieking hysterically.

St. Jim's learned later that Mr. Ratcliff was ill and obliged to keep to his room for some days. Nobody believed in the illness; the school understood well enough that the New House master simply dared not face St. Jim's until some time had elapsed after the ridiculous exhibition.

St. Jim's, from the headmaster to the smallest fag, laughed over it, and Mr. Ratcliff writhed with rage. His enforced seclusion came as a boon and a blessing to the Fifth Form, and to all the New House.

There was no doubt that Mr. Ratcliff had been made thoroughly to "sit up" for his sins against Figgins and Redfern—but those two cheerful youths could not agree as to which had made him "sit up" the most, and so the question of "top study" in the New House remained unsettled—and it was likely to remain an open question for good.

(Next Wednesday: "FROM FOURTH FORMER TO GROCER'S BOY!"—a great school yarn that is different—starring Jerrold Lumley-Lumley.)

PEN PALS

(Continued from previous page.)

Low M. Wigfall, 21, White's Road, Cleethorpes, Lincs., wants a pen pal in U.S.A.; age 13-15; sport, cage birds, books.

Fred C. Marshall, Elm Cottage, Crookham Common, near Newbury, Berks., wants correspondents in U.S.A. and Canada.

Alex. G. Foley, 25, Eureka Street, Geelong West, Victoria, Australia, wants to exchange photographs.

Robert Smith, 30, Barnes Street, Barrhead, Renfrewshire, Scotland, wants pen pal; age 12-15; football, cricket, running.

John Rudderham, Whitechurch, Blandford, Dorset, wants correspondents, especially India; age 10-12; books, aeroplanes, photography.

Miss Joan Langrick, Crow Hill Lane Club, Mansfield Woodhouse, Notts., wants girl correspondents; age 15-18; sports, stamps.

Miss D. Barrow, 17, Punderson Gardens, Bethnal Green, London, E.2, wants girl correspondents; America, Australia, Canada; sports; age 17-18.

Bernhart Angimundson, 920, Windermere Avenue, Fort Garry, Manitoba, Canada, wants correspondents; age 13-14; stamp collecting, hockey, football.

W. Murphy, 36, Birmingham Street, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, wants correspondents; stamps.

Wm. Lyall Kilgour, 59, Tees Street, Oamaru, New Zealand, wants pen pals; Great Britain, U.S.A.; age 15-17; stamps, photography, coins.

Alan T. Smith, c/o G.P.O. Invercargill, New Zealand, wants to hear from readers interested in his correspondence and exchange club; quarterly mag; British Empire stamps.

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R. Hobbs, The Three Horseshoes, Garston, near Watford, Herts., wants correspondents; age 10-14; science, public school stories.

Peter Finding, 443, Beverley Road, Hull, wants correspondents; age 11-14; machinery.

Patrick Malone, 12, Canterbury Road, Wallasey, Ches., wants a pen pal; Canada, New Zealand; age 15-18.

John Hambridge, 108, Rathbone Road, Bearwood, Smethwick, near Birmingham, wants pen pals; age 11-13; South America, Canada, Australia; stamps, swimming, sports.

Miss Audrey M. Doel, Box 91, Hebdon Street, Lockhart, N.S.W., Australia, wants girl correspondents outside Australia; age 18-24.

Miss Wynne Smith, 117, Wakefield Street, East Ham, London, E.6, wants girl correspondents in Canada, France, New Zealand; age 15-19.

Miss Mavis Dear, 2, Pier Street, Sandy Bay, Hobart, Tasmania, Australia, wants girl correspondents; age 13-15; United States, India; stamps, coins, sports.

Miss Eileen Webster, 72, Montpelier Road, Hobart, Tasmania, Australia, wants girl correspondents; age 14 upwards; Italy, France, Germany, Canada; sports, films, books.

Andrew R. Cowans, 1523, McGregor Street, Montreal, Canada, wants correspondents; age 11-13.

Miss Ter Wadia, The View, Hornby Vellard, Worli, Bombay, India, wants girl correspondents; England, Australia, China, Japan; age 12-16.

Jack Laphen, 1330, King Street, W. Toronto, Ontario, Canada, wants pen pals; age 14-15; games, aviation, chemistry, newspapers, coins.

A. Ansell, Syrnaga, Ockley, near Dorking, Surrey, wants a pen pal interested in cacti in pots; would swap young ones.

Miss A. Wood, 95, Lyell Street, Ladysmith, Natal, South Africa, wants girl correspondents; age 17-22; stamps.

THE SCHOOLBOYS WHO HELD UP THEIR HEADMASTER WITH SIX-GUNS!



Powerful Yarn of the Pals of Packsaddle School

By FRANK RICHARDS.

Caught!

“YOUR deal, Steve!”

“Sure!”

Dick Carr stared into the chuckhouse at Packsaddle. Lessons were over for the day at the cow town school, but it was not yet time for supper, and, except at meal-times, the chuckhouse was generally deserted. Now there were three fellows there, sitting round the end of the long trestle table—Steve Carson, Poker Parker, and Slim Dixon.

Big Steve had a pack of well-worn cards in his hands, and was shuffling them. He glanced across at the doorway, as the shadow of the tenderfoot of Packsaddle fell in, with the bright sunlight behind him. He grimed derisively as he caught Dick's surprised stare.

“Say, what you want hornin' in?” he demanded. “Looking for a hand in a poker game?”

“I guess the tenderfoot don't play poker any, Steve!” grinned Slim.

“You said it!” chuckled Poker Parker.

Dick's lip curled.

“Right!” he answered. “And if Bill catches yo' playing poker here, you'll rather wish you hadn't, either.”

“Aw, can it!” snapped Steve. He dealt the cards with a practised hand. “We're wise to it that Bill's gone down to Packsaddle, and I guess he won't be back yet a piece! You goin' to put him wise when he hits the school agin’?” he added, with a sneer.

“Oh, shut up!” snapped Dick Carr angrily.

More than once Steve had had the quirt, hard and heavy, as a warning to leave the “devil's picture book” alone! And certainly he would not have been

playing poker in the chuckhouse now but for the fact that he had seen Bill ride out at the gate.

“Put him wise if you want!” went on Steve. “I guess that's the sort of pizen coyote you are!”

“That's a lie, and you know it!” answered Dick Carr coolly. “I'm not telling Bill anything. But I'll tell you this—Bill's not so far away as you think. He's come back—”

“Oh, great gophers!” ejaculated Slim Dixon, jumping up from the pinewood bench in alarm.

“Aw, squat down, you goob!” growled Carson, still dealing cards. “You figure

When Steve Carson & Co. received a well-deserved hiding from Bill Sampson, they resolved to give the headmaster of the cow town school a taste of his own medicine! But they reckoned without Dick Carr & Co.!

that that piecan would put us wise if Bill was around? He sure can't string me along that-a-way!”

“I tell you—” exclaimed Dick Carr.

“Pack it up!” jeered Carson.

“Yep, pack it up and beat it!” said Slim, sitting down again. “I guess you can't fool us, not so's you'd notice it!”

Dick Carr turned from the doorway. Big Steve was his enemy, and Slim and Poker backed up Big Steve. Friends or foes, Dick had felt bound to give them

the tip that Bill was around. But if they did not choose to believe that the tip was given in good faith that was their own funeral.

Steve and his comrades picked up their “hands.” Deep in the game of draw-poker, they dismissed the tenderfoot of Packsaddle from their minds.

A shadow fell across the doorway again.

It was a longer shadow this time; the shadow of a herculean figure, over a foot taller than Dick Carr's.

But Steve & Co., deep in the game, did not observe it. Steve tossed a silver dollar into the pool. He had dealt himself four of a kind—a hand that made him very keen and eager.

“Guess I'm raising you, Steve!” remarked Slim, and he threw a dollar and a quarter in.

Slim had a “full house.”

“I'll see you!” said Poker Parker, and his dollar and a quarter followed Slim's into the beef-can that served as a pool.

“Carry me home to die it!” roared a deep voice at the doorway; and the three started and spun round.

“Bill!” gasped Slim.

Steve Carson gritted his teeth. He realised—too late—that the tenderfoot's warning had been given in good faith. Bill was back from Packsaddle town—and here he was, staring into the chuckhouse, his bearded face grim.

Bill's quirt was under his arm. He slipped it down into his hand as he strode into the chuckhouse.

“Pokey, hey!” roared Bill. “I guess you ain't had enough quirt, young Carson, and you sure are honing for more!”

Steve did not speak. He was fairly caught, and there was nothing to say. But his look was black and bitter at the cow town schoolmaster.

"Only a leetle game, Bill," said Poker Parker nervously. "I guess—Whoop! Yoooop! Yow, owwoop!"

The quirt sang and rang round Poker. He bolted for the door, and Bill rushed after him, still lashing. Poker was yelling frantically as he bolted out of the doorway into the playground.

Bill strode back to the other two. "Now, you, Dixon!" roared Bill.

"I guess— Oh wake snakes! Let up!" yelled Slim, as Bill gave him his turn with the quirt.

Down the long chuckhouse went Slim, with the quirt raining lashes on his back as he went. He leaped through the doorway, yelling.

Then Bill came back for Steve Carson. Steve was the chief offender of the three, as Bill well knew. He was a bad influence in the cow town school—an influence to which Bill aimed to put "paid." Steve had backed away towards the window, while Bill was dealing with the other two. Now he had the window open; and as Bill came back for him he made a hurried scramble through it to escape.

But there was no escape for Big Steve. Bill's grasp was on him when he was half-way through.

Crack came the quirt on his back! Big Steve yelled and kicked out wildly. "Jumping painters!" roared Bill Sampson, as a heavy boot caught him under his bearded chin.

"Ha, ha, ha!" came a yell from the Packsaddle bunch outside. The uproar from the chuckhouse had drawn all the bunch across the playground to "rubber" at the scene.

"Beat it, Steve!" yelled Slick Poindexter.

"Out you come!" exclaimed Mick Kavanagh, and he grabbed hold of Steve's arm to help him from the window.

The next moment he let go, with a fearful yell. Bill, reaching over Steve from the window, landed a lick with the quirt, and Mick jumped back, wailing all the echoes of Packsaddle.

Bill's left hand was gripping Steve by the back of his belt.

Crack, crack, crack! The swipes of the quirt rang like pistol-shots. The Packsaddle bunch stared on. Bill had a heavy hand—and he needed one to ride herd over the rough-and-tough bunch at the cow town school. But they had seldom seen Bill ladle it out to this extent.

"Let up, you pesky old piecan!" shrieked Steve, wriggling frantically as the quirt rose and fell. "Let up, dog-gone you! I'll sure make you howl for this, you goldarned old geck!"

Crack, crack, crack, crack! rang the quirt.

"I guess that let's you out, young Carson!" panted Bill. "I'll say you hit this hyer school to larn, and I'll mention that I'm the galoot to larn you, just a few, and then some! Git!"

He dropped Carson from the chuckhouse window, and the bully of Packsaddle sprawled, roaring, on the ground.

Bill tucked his quirt under his arm, stamped out of the chuckhouse, and across to the schoolhouse, still frowning. He was not quite sure that he had given Big Steve enough.

Steve was sure, however. Steve lay and roared and howled. His friends, Poker and Slim, were putting in some yelling on their own account, and did

not give him any heed. Dick Carr came towards him to give him a hand up.

The gunman's son, with a savage scowl, struck his helping hand aside. Then he staggered to his feet and limped away to the bunkhouse.

Slick Poindexter whistled.

"I guess Bill sure had his mad up with that guy!" he remarked. "He sure did quirt him like he was an ornery steer! But I'll tell a man, Steve's the galoot to ask for it."

There was no doubt that Big Steve had had the quirting of his life. He was still mumbering and wriggling when the Packsaddle bunch went to bed in the bunkhouse. And when the rest of the bunch were asleep, Big Steve still lay awake, with many twinges, his gleaming eyes staring into the darkness, and fierce thoughts of vengeance running in his mind.

The Hold-Up in the Timber.

"HUNT cover!" grinned Slick. "You said it!" murmured Mick Kavanagh.

Dick Carr glanced round in surprise for the moment. Then the sight of a ten-gallon hat put him wise, and he hunted cover with his comrades.

School bounds at a school like Packsaddle were not very definitely drawn. Every guy in the bunch had a horse, and after class could ride where he liked on the rolling prairie, from the banks of the Rio Frio to the rugged slopes of Squaw Mountain. But every galoot who boarded at the cow town school had to be in before sundown.

It was a necessary rule. Steve Carson and some of his friends found bad company at some of the joints in the cow town. Dick, Slick and Mick were not the fellows to be found in bad company, but they had to toe the line, with the quirt in prospect if they failed so to do. So the sight of Bill's ten-gallon hat, five miles from school, when the sun was sinking in crimson and gold behind Squaw Mountain, caused them to hunt cover and hunt it quick.

They had ridden home after class with Pie Sanders, whose folk lived at Squaw Mountain. Certainly there was no harm in that, but they had rather lingered at the Sanders' shebang, and given themselves little time to get back ten miles to Packsaddle.

Their way homeward lay through a timber island, and it was luckily in the timber and not on the open prairie that they sighted Bill.

On the open plain, Bill would have spotted them at once, and there was no doubt that he would have weighed in with the quirt on the spot. But the trail through the timber was narrow, closed in on either side by big coibas, with great masses of Spaniards' beard pendant from the overarching branches. There was ample cover, and the three schoolboys hunted it promptly. On the thick grass of the trail the hoofs of their horses had made no sound. They jumped down and led the broncs by their reins into the trees within a second or two after sighting Bill.

Bill, still at a distance, had not seen them. He was coming up from the direction of the school at a leisurely pace. They knew that Bill was going over to Kicking Mule Ranch that evening, and so it was easy to guess that he was now on his way there. All they had to do was to wait in cover for Bill to ride by, and then resume their way home.

Keeping carefully in cover, they watched him as he came trotting up the trail.

"Gum!" breathed Poindexter suddenly.

Dick Carr caught his breath, and Mick's eyes opened wide.

Bill was still twice a lasso's length away when three figures on foot leaped suddenly from the trees beside the trail.

"Stick 'em up!"

Loud and sharp came the words.

The hidden schoolboys stared.

It was a hold-up!

The three figures that had suddenly appeared from the timber were clad in long Mexican serapes, belted round them, completely concealing them, and giving them a bulky look.

Mexican sombreros were on their heads, and their faces were hidden by black cloth masks covering them from forehead to chin.

The schoolboys would have taken them, from the sombreros and the serapes, for Mexicans—"greasers" from over the border.

But the voice that bade Bill "stick 'em up" had no Spanish sound, and they guessed that the Mexican outfit was merely adopted as a disguise by bulldozers who belonged much nearer than Mexico.

Three six-guns were levelled at Bill Sampson as he drew in his horse, and stared at the hold-up gang.

Bill's reins dropped over his horse's neck, and he lifted his hands over his stetson. Bill was quicker on the draw than any other man in Santanta County, but he was too wise to pull a gun with three Colts levelled at him.

His rugged, bearded face was dark with rage as he put his hands up.

"By the great horned toad!" said Bill. "You doggoned piccans, is this hyer a hold-up?"

"Can it!" interrupted the hold-up man. "Keep your paws elevated, Bill Sampson, or you get yours mighty sudden."

"I guess I ain't arguing with a six-gun, feller!" said Bill. "But I'll sure see you strung up on a cottonwood for this hyer game."

"Forget it!" snapped the hold-up man. "Say, you guys, you want to lift his hardware."

Two of the masked Mexicans—if they were Mexicans—stepped to Bill. One of them drew the big Colt from the holster in his belt, and pitched it away into the thickets.

Bill, tight-lipped, gritted his teeth. His eyes glittered under his knitted brows. His "mad" was up, but he made no movement. No man in the cow country thought of arguing with a six-gun that looked him in the face.

"You doggoned skunks!" breathed Bill. "You goldarned ornery gang of greasers! I'll sure make you hone for the other side of the Rio Grande afore you're much older."

"Pack it up!" snapped the leader of the gang. "Light down off'n that cayuse, and keep your bully-beef trap shut."

"You ain't no greaser, if your side-kickers are!" said Bill, with a fierce glare at him. "I'll say you're some bullwhacker from along to Packsaddle, or you'd never have knowed I was riding this trail. I'll sure root through Packsaddle till I git you."

"Quit chewing the rag and light down!"

Bill slowly clambered down from his bronc.

One of the gang gave the horse a smart cut, and it galloped on up the trail with swinging stirrups. It went galloping by the spot where Dick, Slick, and Mick stared breathlessly, and vanished up the trail towards Kicking Mule.

The schoolboys exchanged glances.

Had Bill Sampson tried gunning they would have rushed out to his aid, unarmed as they were. But Bill was taking it like a lamb, and to rush on three desperadoes with six-guns in their hands was not wise. The hold-up gang did not know they were there, that was clear, and it was wiser to leave them in ignorance. Dick Carr gripped his quirt, but Slick caught him by one arm, Mick by the other.

"Forget it, you gink!" breathed Slick. "You want them bulldozers to fill you up with lead?"

"We ain't got a dog's chance," whispered Mick. "They got the guns, you geck! Bill's taking it quiet. I guess we want to play possum."

Dick Carr nodded.

Packsaddle headmaster made a convulsive movement. This was no ordinary hold-up—the gang did not mean to go through his rags, and then let him proceed on his way. They were making him a prisoner. What their object could be was a mystery to Bill as well as to the breathless schoolboys watching from the thicket.

"You doggoned skunks!" Bill choked with rage. "What's this hyar game? I'll tell a man! What for you hog-tying a guy this-a-way? Spill it!"

"I guess you'll soon be put wise!" jeered the hold-up leader. "We got you dead to rights, now, you piefaced old geck! Beat it, you 'uns!"

With hands gripping his bound arms,

Three on the Track!

"LISTEN!" breathed Slick Poindexter.

He halted, bending his ear to listen more intently. His comrades halted with him.

Ahead of them they could still hear the rustling made in the thickets as the hold-up gang led their prisoner farther away from the trail into the depths of the timber.

But there was a sound from the timber closer at hand, and Poindexter's keen ear picked it up at once—the sound of tethered horses.

"That'll be their cayuses!" whispered Mick.

Dick nodded.

That the hold-up gang had horses at



"Carry me home to die!" roared Bill Sampson as he strode into the chuckhouse. The three card players started in alarm. Steve & Co. were fairly caught! "Poker, hey?" went on the cow town schoolmaster. "I guess you're sure honing for the quirt!"

"Mebbe we'll get a chance to horn in later!" muttered Slick Poindexter. "But I guess a front seat in a funeral won't help none."

Dick could only assent. But his eyes gleamed as he watched through the Spanish moss, hanging in thick clusters from the branches.

Bill Sampson stood in the trail, his hands still up. The leader of the gang, his eyes glittering through the eyeholes of his mask, stepped a little nearer to him, his six-gun at a level. The other two were now handling a lasso.

The loop was thrown over Bill's lifted arms and drawn taut. The headmaster of Packsaddle was a prisoner, his arms cinched in the rope.

"I guess you can put your fins down now, Bill Sampson!" jeered the voice from the mask. "Hog-tie him, you galoots."

Neither of the others had spoken a word. In silence they proceeded to knot the lasso round Bill, fastening his sinewy arms down to his sides. The

hand was certain; no man could travel on foot on the prairie. It went without saying that they had left their horses tethered in the timber while they ambushed Bill on the trail.

But they were not making for their horses now, that was clear.

By the way they went they were avoiding the spot where the animals were tethered.

Obviously it was not their purpose to make their getaway with Bill a prisoner in their hands, or they would have gone for their horses. Why they were walking the Packsaddle headmaster into the deepest depths of the timber, far from the trail, was a mystery.

But, whatever their purpose was, they would come back for their horses afterwards to make their escape. Slick's eyes gleamed.

"I guess it's got me beat what they want with Bill!" he whispered. "But they'll want their critters arter they're through, to burn the wind! I'll say

they ain't going to find them critters when they want them. Foller me!"

Leaving the track of the hold-up gang, Slick Poindexter plunged into the trees in the direction of the sound that had caught his ears.

Dick and Mick followed him, catching on at once to the plan in his mind. Deprived of their horses, the hold-up gang had no chance of escape in the cow country, where every man went on horseback. And the tethered horses were at the mercy of the gang's unsuspected pursuers.

In a few minutes the schoolboys pushed into an open space under the branches of a great ceiba, where three ponies, saddled and bridled, were hitched. Evidently they were the mounts of the hold-up gang, left there when they ambushed Bill on foot by the trail.

"Gum!" ejaculated Poindexter, as he stared at them.

"Cut them loose!" breathed Dick Carr. "No time to lose! We've got to get after Bill!"

"Hold on a piece! Don't you know them critters?" gasped Poindexter.

"Howly Mike!" breathed Mick. "They're Packsaddle cayuses."

"What?" exclaimed Dick Carr, in amazement.

"Look at that critter's white stockings!" said Slick, pointing to one of the tethered animals. "That's Big Steve's critter!"

"Oh, my hat!"

In amazement they stared at the horses. There was no doubt about it. The animals were familiar to their sight. One of them, with white stockings—patches of white on its forelegs—they would have recognised anywhere as Steve Carson's horse. The other two belonged to Poker Parker and Slim Dixon.

"Say, them guys have lifted Packsaddle critters!" said Mick. "They're sure met with Steve, Slim, and Poker, and cinched their cayuses."

"Horse thieves!" said Slick. "Yep! They're sure Packsaddle critters, and I'll tell a man that gang ain't seeing them any more."

It was an amazing discovery to the comrades of Packsaddle. They could only conclude that the hold-up gang had met Steve, Slim, and Poker on the prairie and robbed them of their horses. Yet Bill's horse, a more valuable animal, had been set galloping off when they cinched the schoolmaster on the trail. It was puzzling enough; but they had no time to work out puzzles.

Slick cast the three ponies loose and started them through the trees towards the trail. There was no doubt that they would trot home to Packsaddle School now that they were released.

"Hump it, you'uns!" said Slick, and as the horses disappeared towards the trail, the schoolboys turned back to take up the track of the hold-up gang again.

The rustling sound made by the gang as they threaded a way through the timber had died in the distance. But it was easy enough to pick up the track of the tramping feet—especially those of Bill Sampson's enormous cowman's boots.

Winding through ceibas and pecans and hanging moss, the schoolboys followed the track into the very deepest depths of the timber. Each of them carried his quilt—the only weapon he had.

"What on earth can their game be?" muttered Dick Carr. "What are they going to do with Bill?"

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"I guess we'll soon be wise to that. Anyhow, they won't get away arter," answered Slick. "They ain't got no hosses, 'cept what they lifted from Steve, Poker, and Slim—and I'll say them cayuses is half-way back to Packsaddle by this time. Watch out! They've halted! We've run them roughnecks down!"

On the edge of a little glade, shut in by overhanging trees, the schoolboys halted, and peered through the pendant masses of Spaniards' beard. And the sight they saw made them wonder whether their eyes deceived them.

The Face Behind the Mask!

"**C**ARRY me home to die!" breathed Bill Sampson.

The fury in his rugged, bearded face might have terrified any hold-up gang in Texas had Bill been loose with a gun in his hand.

But Bill's gun was gone, and his hands were helpless, his arms fastened down to his sides.

Utterly powerless, the headmaster of Packsaddle lay in the thick grass. Kneeling round him, the masked trio knotted the lasso again and again, till Bill could hardly stir a limb.

Then they left him lying. The leader of the gang—the only one who had spoken—gripped a quirt and swished it in the air.

Bill, lying face down, twisted his head to glare up at him.

"You doggoned polecat!" said Bill, his voice husky with rage. "You don't dare touch me with that quirt!"

"Forget it!" jeered the fellow with the quirt. "I guess you're going to be lambasted a few, Bill Sampson, and then some! I'll tell a man you'll jost be able to crawl home on your hands and knees when I'm through!"

Neither of the others spoke. They looked on through the eyeholes of their masks in silence.

Bill writhed with rage.

"I guess I'll get wise to you, you god-darned piccan!" he hissed. "You ain't no greasers from over the border—you're bulldozers of this here section. I guess I've heard your toot before, somewhar, though I don't rightly know where, and I reckon your 'side-kickers ain't talking none, because mebbe I'd be wise to them if they did! You belong to Packsaddle town, and I guess I've trod on your corns some time and put you on the prod!"

"You've sure spilled a bibful!"

"I'm telling you!" roared Bill. "I'll root through every joint in Packsaddle town till I get you!"

There came a mocking laugh from under the mask. Up went the quirt, coming down with a terrific lash across Bill Sampson's back.

It rang like a rifle-shot through the timber, and louder still rang the enraged roar of the headmaster of Packsaddle.

From their cover on the edge of the glade Dick, Slick, and Mick stared on, in utter wonder. They knew now what the gang wanted with Bill!

It was vengeance they were after.

"Gum!" breathed Poindexter. "That's the game! I guess Bill has trod on a good many corns down to Packsaddle town. Them bulldozers have cinched him to hand over a quirting!"

Dick set his lips.

There seemed no doubt now that Bill had fallen into the hands of some rough gang who had a grouch against him. Bound and helpless, he was going to be quirted like a steer.

"We're not standing for this!" muttered Dick. "They're not going to quirt our headmaster under our eyes!"

"You said it!" breathed Mick.

Slick Poindexter nodded slowly. The quirt came down again with another terrific lash, and another wild roar from Bill.

"We got a chance!" whispered Slick. "But if they pull guns on us, it's us for the other side of Jordan. But we got a chance if we get them sudden."

"I'm game!" breathed Dick.

The fellow with the quirt was thinking of nothing but handing out fierce lashes to Bill. The other two, looking on, had their backs to the schoolboys. Obviously none of them had the faintest suspicion that they were watched. It was easy,

with a sudden rush, to take them utterly by surprise, and knock them spinning with the butt-ends of the quirts. But if they had a chance to pull their guns—

Down came the cow-whip again, crashing on Bill. That settled it for the comrades of Packsaddle. They were not standing for that.

"Get them!" breathed Slick. "Pick your man, and get him! We got to take the chance!"

He led the rush.

Poindexter picked the fellow who was lashing Bill. The cow-whip was in the air again, about to descend as Slick rushed in. The butt of Slick's heavy quirt crashed on the crown of the sombrero before the fellow knew he was coming, and the hold-up man went staggering across Bill, falling heavily on the Packsaddle schoolmaster.

Slick was on him like a panther.

Bill, face down, gave a grunt as the weight crashed on his back. Slick's weight was added the next second, as his knee was driven into the ribs of the sprawling hold-up man, and his right arm flew up to deliver a stunning blow with the butt of his quirt.

But that blow did not fall!

Instead of smashing the heavy butt down, Poindexter arrested the blow just in time, staring dizzily, in amazement, at the hold-up man. For the first blow had knocked off the sombrero and the mask with it, and the face of the hold-up man was revealed.

And that face was the face of Steve Carson, the bully of the cow town school!

Return of—

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RANGER

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Bad Luck for Big Steve!

DICK CARR and Mick Kavanagh, rushing in at the same time as Slick, landed their blows at the same moment. Two masked figures rolled over, felled by the crashing of the heavy metal butts of the quirts. They yelled in surprise and pain and rage as they rolled.

Before the two had a chance of rising or pulling a gun, Dick and Mick were

on them, and had torn the six-guns from their belts.

Instantly they covered the sprawling hold-up men with their own guns.

"Hands up, you' uns!" roared Mick.

"Put 'em up!" panted Dick Carr.

"Aw, wako snakes!" gasped one, sitting up dazedly, with a hand to his aching head, where the sombrero had been crushed in.

"Great gophers!" gurgled the other.

The voices from under the masks sounded familiar to the ears of the schoolboys!

A moment more and the two masked figures had leaped up, and were bounding away, heedless of the order to "Stick 'em up!"

"Hold on, you'uns, or sure I'll shoot!" roared Mick.

They tore away into the trees. With the intention of firing over their heads Mick pulled trigger. But there was only a click from the six-gun!

"Howly Mike!" yelled Mick. "Sure it ain't loaded, and so it ain't!"

The running figures vanished into the timber.

"What the thump—" ejaculated Dick Carr.

The six-guns were not loaded! Hold-up men with unloaded guns were a new thing in the cow country!

But the next moment Dick and Mick understood, as they turned to Slick Poindexter and the man he was pinning down—or, rather, the boy! Two of the gang had fled, but Slick had his man safe.

"Great jumping Mike!" howled Mick, in astonishment, as he stared at the white furious face of Big Steve Carson.

"Great Scott!" gasped Dick Carr.

"Sure it bates Banagher!" stuttered Mick Kavanagh. "Sure, they're not hold-up rustlers at all!"

"Oh, my hat!"

Steve Carson did not struggle. He was down on his back, across Bill's broad back, as the Packsaddle schoolmaster sprawled, face down, in the grass.

Slick, amazed as he was, had him pinned. And the bully of the cow town school, now that his mask was off, had one overwhelming fear—that Bill would see his face!

"You!" panted Poindexter. "You!"

"Then, the others—" gasped Dick Carr.

He knew now who were the other two who had fled—Poker Parker and Slim Dixon.

"That's how we found their hosses there!" stuttered Mick. "We figured that they was hoss-thieves that had lifted Packsaddle critters, but—"

There was a roar from Bill! The weight of Steve and Slick fairly crushed him into the grass, and, bound as he was, he struggled in vain to shift the weight. He could see nothing of what was going on, only he knew that the masked men had been interrupted in their act of vengeance. His voice came in a muffled roar from a mouth buried in grass roots:

"Say, you gerroff my doggoned back, goldarn you! What the great horned toad—"

He heaved frantically.

Steve Carson did not speak; but the rage and fury in his face gave place to terror, and he fixed his eyes on Slick in dumb appeal for silence.

The comrades of Packsaddle understood.

For a moment or two they hesitated, exchanging quick glances.

They had believed that they were dealing with armed hold-up men—a rough gang of the cow town, who had cinched Bill to pay off some grouch

with a quirting. But they were no bulldozers of the cow town saloons; they were three of the Packsaddle bunch, disguised in sombreros and serapes and masks, and they had held up Bill with unloaded guns. Steve had planned this in revenge for the quirting Bill had given him in the chuckhouse. But for the intervention of Dick, Slick, and Mick, he would have got away with it; Bill would have been quirted like a steer, and the identity of his assailants would have remained a mystery.

But now—
Now Big Steve fairly cringed with terror. He had delivered only three swipes when he was stopped. But what Bill would give him in return when he knew who he was, made Steve dizzy to think about.

Bill, his face buried in grass roots, had not seen him unmasked. He stared at the schoolboys, pleading dumbly for mercy.

Only for a moment or two they hesitated.

Then Slick removed his knee. He did not speak, but he pointed to the timber. It was enough for Steve Carson.

With a bound he was on his feet and running.

In three seconds the running figure vanished into the trees in the direction Poker and Slim had taken—the direction of the spot where the horses had been tethered under the ceiba. They did not yet know that the horses were missing.

Slick closed one eye at his comrades. Mick grinned.

They were going to keep it dark; it was not for them to give Steve away. Neither, probably, would Bill have been pleased had he learned that he had been held up by schoolboys with unloaded guns.

Bill, as the weight was taken off his back, rolled over, panting. He had a glimpse of the running figure that disappeared into the timber, but all he saw was a back view of a belted serape, and Big Steve was gone the next second.

He blinked at Dick, Slick, and Mick. "You'uns!" he gasped.

"Jest us, Bill, old-timer!" grinned Slick. "Say, them guys have hog-tied you a few! Who was they, Bill?"

"How'd I know, with their front porches kivered up?" roared Bill. "Get me loose, you young geck, 'stead of chewing the rag!"

"You said it!" grinned Slick.

The three schoolboys started unfastening the knotted lasso.

"How come you're here?" demanded Bill.

"I guess we spotted them bulldozers taking you for a leetle pasear in the timber, Bill, coming back from Squaw Mountain," grinned Slick. "We sure followed on and handed them a few with our quirts."

"Jumping painters!" said Bill. "Three bullwhackers what packed guns—and they vamoosed from you young gecks! I guess that's got me beat! I don't get it."

He swung to his feet as the ropes fell from his limbs.

"Beat it for Packsaddle, you!" he snapped. "I guess I'm hitting Kicking Mule and rousing out the punchers to get offer them bulldozers!"

Without staying for more, the Packsaddle headmaster tramped away through the timber, taking the shortest cut in the direction of Kicking Mule Ranch.

Dick, Slick, and Mick looked at one another. They could not help grinning.

"Howly Mike!" murmured Kavanagh. "Bill's going to rouse out the Kicking Mule outfit to get after them bulldozers! What'd he say if he knowed they was Steve, Poker, and Slim?"

"I guess he wouldn't leave much skin on them!" grinned Slick. "But we sure ain't spilling the beans! Beat it!"

The comrades of Packsaddle tramped back to the trail for their ponies. They mounted and rode out of the timber in the sunset on the way to the school. A quarter of a mile out on the plain they came on three weary, tramping figures.

Steve, Poker, and Slim had got rid of their Mexican disguises—and missed their horses. With aching heads—for the butt-ends of the quirts had hit hard—they had started on a five-mile tramp across the rough and rugged prairie to the cow town school.

They stared round at the clattering hoofs on the trail and gave Dick, Slick, and Mick savage looks.

The three riders grinned at them.

"Doggone you!" snarled Steve. "Aw, pack it up!" said Slick. "I guess if we put Bill wise, that quirting he gave you yesterday wouldn't be a circumstance to what he'd give you next!"

"You ain't spilling the beans?" gasped Poker.

"Nunk!" snapped Slick. "But you try this game on again, you pesky skunks, and we'll sure put Bill wise—and you can chew on that!"

And the three riders dashed on, leaving Steve, Poker, and Slim to crawl wearily on their homeward way. By the time the wretched trio tottered into Packsaddle School the hour was late, and they were weary to the bone, and their only comfort was that Bill was not there to meet them.

Bill never discovered the identity of the three roughnecks who had held him up in the timber and started to quirt him.

Bill was very keen to spot them. He did his best, and gave a lot of time to it. But he never thought of looking within the fence of Packsaddle School—and so he was not likely to spot those roughnecks.

But for many days Steve, Poker, and Slim lived in terror of discovery. A careless word from Dick or his chums would have spilled the beans—and the thought of what Bill would do if he got wise to the fact made cold chills run down their backs. It was likely to be the schoolboy bandits' last—as well as their first—hold-up!

(Next week: "THE SIX-GUN SCHOOLMASTER!" Look out for this gripping yarn of the cow town schoolboys.)



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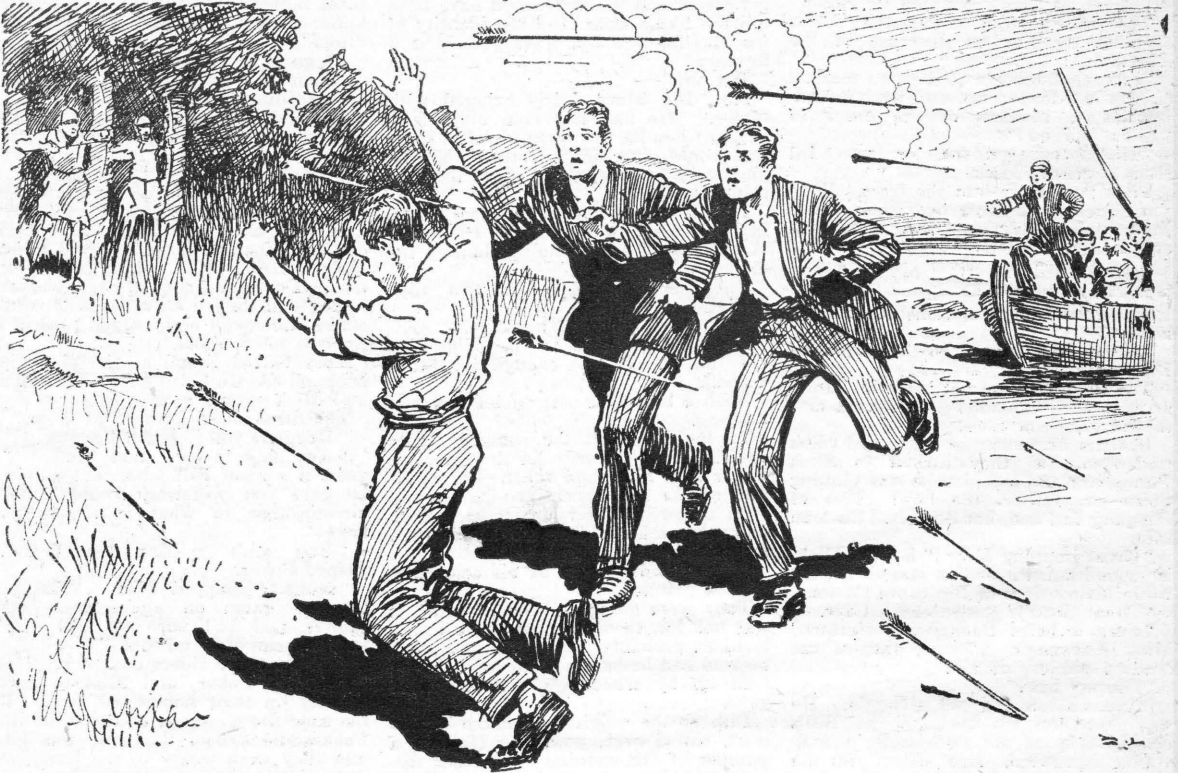
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The SECRET WORLD!



As Church and McClure ran towards Handforth in order to drag him to the boat, a flight of arrows swept across the beach. Next moment, with a cry, Handforth collapsed in a heap. "Oh!" cried Church. "He's hit!"

By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS.

To the Rescue!

IN a galley the boys of St. Frank's are patrolling a large lake which separates Northestia and Gothland, two countries of a lost medieval world, in which Nelson Lee and the schoolboys have been stranded, when they come upon a raft on which a woman is bound.

The St. Frank's juniors are in the service of Northestia, who are at war with Gothland, and they are watching for signs of an enemy attack when they sight the raft. They learn from the woman, a Gothlander, that the soldiers of Kasker, the brutal ruler of Gothland, have turned her adrift because her husband was a deserter from the army.

The poor woman is grief-stricken, because, as a further example to others of the village in which she lived, her children are to be burned at the stake!

The juniors decide to go to the rescue, leaving three of their number in charge of the galley. They reach the village of Gernfrith in safety, to discover that the five children are about to be burned to death. Without hesitation, they dash to the rescue!

The juniors were already on the outskirts of the village, still running hard, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,423.

and quite breathless. They were meeting the first of the fleeing inhabitants, and they instinctively prepared themselves for fighting. But they were not interfered with. The people were so full of their own panic that they scarcely gave a second glance at the running schoolboys. And then, a minute later, the entire group burst into the market square.

About fifty or sixty people remained here, the majority of them too old to move quickly. They were all looking dazed. They stood watching the rescuers in a sort of trance.

There were soldiers, too—two of them. Obviously they had been left on guard, so that the victims of the stake would not be released. Edward Oswald Handforth gave a wild bellow as he spotted them.

"You chaps go for the children!" he roared. "I'll do the scrapping!"

But Nipper wouldn't hear of it. "All of us!" he panted. "We'll settle these fellows first!"

And, with one accord, they hurled themselves upon the startled units of Kasker's army. The two men were not even prepared for fighting, for they had expected no attack from any quarter.

Before they could even draw their swords, the crowd of juniors swept upon them.

Crash!
Handforth, of course, was well in the

lead, and he got home a beautiful upper-cut in the first rush. Nipper, at the same time, was taking on the other soldier, helped by half a dozen others.

The battle was swift and sure.

Both the Gothlanders were burly brutes—powerful, muscular men of the type that the juniors had previously seen. But they stood no chance against such an onslaught.

Crash! Biff! Thud!

Howling and cursing, the soldiers simply vanished beneath the pile of infuriated juniors. The brutes were participating in the terrible torture, and they deserved nothing but death. But as the members of the St. Frank's Remove were not in the habit of killing people, those Gothlander soldiers were lucky.

They suffered nothing worse than a score of bruises. They were flung to the ground, their wrists were bound behind them, and their ankles were tied together. Then they were left.

Nipper, breathing hard, looked round. "Good egg!" he murmured. "The coast's clear!"

Great News!

HANDFORTH glared round aggressively.

"Any more?" he thundered. "Where are the rest of the rotters? It's a swindle! Mrs. Bessber

said there were twenty soldiers, and we've only found two!"

"Quite enough!" rapped out Nipper. "Now for the children!"

They were within a few yards of the stakes.

The poor youngsters were nearly crazed with fright, and it was quite clear that the rescue had only come in the nick of time. The faggots were all in place, and the juniors were quite convinced that had they come ten minutes afterwards, they would have been too late.

It was pitiful. Two of the children were mere babies—not more than two or three. The others ranged upwards, the eldest being perhaps seven. They were all timid children, however. To burn them at the stake in this fashion was not merely an outrageous crime, but an offence against humanity. Once again the St. Frank's juniors boiled with utter rage.

"Poor little beggars!" panted Nipper, as he cut one of them free. "It's all right, kiddie; you're safe now."

But the child in his grasp was screaming with fresh fright, for the poor, half-demented mite probably thought that it was only being taken to some other torture. All the youngsters were in the last stage of terror.

Happily the rescuers were not interfered with.

Numbers of the villagers were looking on. Women had returned by the score, and for a moment Nipper had feared that they were about to snatch the children away. And this, of course, would have been fatal for them, since the soldiers would only have reclaimed them, and continued the interrupted orgy after the raiders had gone.

But perhaps these unhappy people had an inkling of the truth. The soldiers had been attacked and beaten, and that was surely a welcome sight to these oppressed peasants. It was an indication also that these strangers were not ill-disposed towards the children.

"We've got them!" shouted Handforth triumphantly, as he hugged one of the mites to his chest. "Everybody else ready?"

"Yes."

"Good! Then let's make a move!"

"Hurrah!"

"Back to the galley!"

From first to last the raid had not occupied more than four minutes, and it was this very speed, in fact, which had ensured the success. The idea was to rush back to the galley, and get well out upon the lake before there could be any intervention.

Then for Northestria!

Over there the Gothlander woman and her children would be safe. Nelson Lee would make certain of that, even if the Northestrians were disposed to treat the enemy family otherwise. But this was hardly likely, for the subjects of Princess Mercia were gentle, kindly people.

But the raiders hadn't escaped yet.

And while they were in the thick of all this, fraught with perils on all sides, there was a little breath of excitement miles away on the Northestrian coast.

Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore, in fact, were on the beach, near Dunstane, the capital. They were superintending the manufacture of some great floats.

And there were signs of feverish activity. For Northestria, since Nelson Lee had taken command, was a changed country. From end to end the people were awakened, and were training as soldiers.

"I've got an idea that these new destroyers will be somethin' special," Dorrie was remarking, with a grin. "Rather a pity to disarrange the old

tanks, though—they did well in that first attack."

"I know they did, Dorrie," agreed Nelson Lee. "But I think they'll be much more effective on the water. We want to keep the enemy out—we want to prevent them from ever setting foot on this soil. So the tanks will have to be sacrificed."

They were looking upon two unwieldy monsters which stood upon the beach. Each was provided with enormous wheels, and the bodies could be recognised easily enough. They were the main engine gondolas of the wrecked airship.

Having served their time as tanks, they were now, apparently, to be converted into water craft. The designs were Nelson Lee's, and the huge floats were already under construction. A great army of joiners and carpenters were at work.

"Any news from the boys to-day, sir?" asked one of the airship engineers, as he passed by.

"No, but we shall probably hear something later," replied Nelson Lee. "I'm not worried about them. They're well out of mischief on that galley—playing at pirates."

"I wouldn't be so sure of that!" grinned Lord Dorrimore. "I'd back those youngsters anywhere, old man. If they haven't managed to find some excitement, you can call me a Solomon Islander!"

But Nelson Lee smilingly shook his head.

"There's nothing to be afraid of in midlake," he replied. "The boys are well out of trouble, and—"

"Ye gods! Here comes Sparks! An' he looks excited!" interrupted Lord Dorrimore, as another figure came hurrying up.

The newcomer was the airship's wireless operator, and he was bursting with his news.

"I am receiving signals, sir!" he panted.

"Definite signals?" asked Lee quietly.

"Not yet, sir; but they're getting stronger," replied Sparks. "Several words have come through pretty clearly, but no actual message. I believe our transmission is being picked up all right, but we can't seem to get into direct communication with anybody. But I'm hopeful—"

"I'll come along and have a look at this for myself," said Lee. "If only we can establish communication with the outer world, we shall be in luck. We shan't feel so utterly isolated."

There was more in this than Nelson Lee cared to say. Ever since landing in this oasis, the non-working of the wireless apparatus had been one of Lee's chief worries.

Lord Dorrimore was a philosophical individual, and he never worried over anything. Yet, nominally, he was in charge of the whole party, and responsible for its safety. Actually, it was Lee who took the responsibility on his shoulders.

One of his greatest anxieties was to get in touch with home, so that he could tell the parents of all the boys and girls that they were safe and well.

He could easily imagine the consternation that had been caused by the airship's disappearance into the Arctic zone. In all probability, the entire ship's company had been mourned long since, and were still being mourned.

What joyous news, if only word could be got through! But wireless signals seemed to be difficult to get through. Perhaps the volcanic surroundings were responsible, coupled with the continuous storms which raged all round the oasis.

Whatever the reason, no definite communication had been established.

So Lee was naturally anxious, now that there was a chance.

"Yes, I'll come with you, Sparks," he repeated. "You'd better stay here, Dorrie, and keep your eye on—"

"Nothin' doin'!" interrupted his lordship indignantly. "Don't you think I'm interested in—"

"Great Scott!" interrupted Lee. "What was that?"

"What was what?"

"Didn't you hear something?"

"Nothin' in particular—"

"A kind of vague report, sir," said the wireless operator. "It seemed to come from over—"

"Listen!" snapped Nelson Lee.

He was staring out across the lake, and he frowned angrily as a number of the carpenters set up a clattering noise near by. But, in spite of this din, a distinct, far-away report sounded.

"Gad!" muttered Dorrie. "I heard it that time."

Nelson Lee pointed.

"Look over there!" he said. "If that's not a smoke signal, I've never seen one!"

"But it can't be!" protested Lord Dorrimore. "You mean that little puff, low down, near the edge of the lake? There's another one now—"

"And here's the report," said Lee, after an appreciable spell.

"But those smoke signals are powerful things; they explode nearly a thousand feet in the air," said his lordship. "These are low down—"

"Proof positive that they are being fired at a great distance; pretty nearly on the Gothland shore, I should think," interrupted Nelson Lee. "If it wasn't for this clear atmosphere, and the absence of wind, we should neither hear nor see them."

"The boys!" said Dorrie.

"Of course. Who else?" replied Lee. "They're in trouble."

"Good glory! I knew it! Didn't I say so?"

"But how?" said the famous detective. "I gave them strict instructions—"

"My dear Lee!" broke in Dorrie. "Haven't you learned that it's of no earthly use to give instructions to those high-spirited young monkeys? An' Nipper's no exception, either, let me tell you. You've got an awful amount of faith in that youngster, but if there's any excitement or adventure in the wind, he smells it like a bally retriever!"

Nelson Lee slowly shook his head.

"I'll admit that Nipper is as ready for adventure as any healthy youngster ought to be, but he wouldn't get into trouble with that galley unless there was something very exceptional in the wind. It's the prearranged signal, Dorrie. I don't suppose the boys are in danger, but it means that something important has happened."

"By the Lord Harry!" said Lord Dorrimore, staring. "You mean, the beginnin' of another invasion?"

"Doesn't it look like it?"

"By the beard of St. Attalus, it does!" said his lordship, with a happy smile. "Rather a pity we couldn't get these gondolas fitted up in time—"

"Never mind them now; we'll shoot out at once," said Nelson Lee. "The motor-boat's all ready. We'll be across in forty minutes or less."

"Why not go by plane?"

"Because she isn't fitted with floats, for one thing; and, besides, we may have to stop in the lake," said Lee briskly. "Coming, Dorrie? We can

leave the wireless until afterwards, Sparks; I've got to attend to this other affair at once."

"Shall I sound any warnings, sir?" asked the young wireless officer.

"Not yet. I want to verify the meaning of these signals," replied Lee. "Say nothing, Sparks; just carry on as usual. I don't think anybody else has noticed those reports. Lord Dorriore and I will hurry out."

They went down to the motor-boat, which was moored just off the beach, near at hand, and none of the North-eastrians took much notice of them as they set out. The natives had grown accustomed to these things by now.

"Don't look so serious, man," said Dorrie, as they purred out across the lake. "I don't suppose it's anything particularly grave."

"Well, I believe it is," replied Lee. "Nipper gave me his word that he wouldn't fire those rockets unless the emergency was genuine. And they must have been let off extraordinarily near the enemy coast. That's what I don't like."

"By the ribs of Offa, you're right!" nodded Dorrie. "It's certainly a bit significant. Notice how I'm catchin' these picturesque native expressions?"

Lee grunted. "I notice that you're still as irresponsible as a child, if that's what you mean," he replied. "Upon my word, Dorrie, when will you learn to treat life seriously?"

"Never!" said his lordship promptly. "Why should I? For one thing, life isn't serious, and, for another thing, I'm too old to change my habits now." "Old!" growled Lee. "You're just about fourteen!"

Dorrie chuckled, and went forward upon this trip with a perfectly light heart.

The Ambush!

REGGIE PITT'S face was glowing with triumph. "We've done it!" he panted victoriously. "I don't know how the dickens we did it, but we've got clean away."

"And the rest is easy," said De Valerie. "Just through this wood, and then we can be on board in no time."

"Yes, but we aren't out of the wood yet!" remarked Church.

"Is that supposed to be witty?" demanded Handforth, with a glare. "The only thing I'm wild about is that we left too soon. We ought to have waited until those other soldiers came back, so that we could have a good smack at 'em!"

"Some chaps are never satisfied," said Nipper. "Let's all be pleased that we're safe and sound. And Church is right, too—we're not out of the wood, by any means. I shan't be comfortable until we're out on the lake."

The raiders had successfully got out of the village, with its crowds of startled, half-paralysed inhabitants. Those unfortunate people had been altogether too bewildered to even question the schoolboy party. They had seen the children being carried off, but nobody had interfered.

From their dazed manner, the boys had easily read the truth. All these peasants were terrified by the fear of Kasker's soldiers.

As for the soldiers, none of the others had been seen; just those two who had been left on guard, but no more.

Handforth was quite confident that the main body had fled, and he was fairly disgusted. He was still anxious to try conclusions with the brutes.

Nipper was not so optimistic. There wasn't a fellow in the Remove who was more confident than Nipper, but he never made the mistake of counting his chickens before they were hatched. And, although everything looked so smooth now, he was prepared for trouble.

Not a moment was lost. The juniors were hurrying through the wood at the double, five of them carrying the still sobbing children. It would be days, perhaps weeks, before those unhappy youngsters got over their terrible fright. Possibly their nerves would be affected for life. But, at least, they were saved.

There was no difficulty in following the trail. Nipper led the way, and he made sure that Handforth kept comparatively near to him.

Handforth was Nipper's chief anxiety, for the leader of Study D, at the slightest provocation, would dash off on his own, searching for somebody to fight!

But he seemed safe now, for the edge of the wood was at hand.

They broke out upon the open beach, and Nipper took a swift glance to right and left. He breathed a sigh of relief. Not a soul! The long beach was empty, and there was the boat, waiting. A hundred yards out lay the great galley, and a frantic figure was waving on it, to be instantly joined by two other frantic figures.

"Hurrah!" yelled the crowd. "We're safe!"

"We've done it!" grinned Handforth. "Didn't I say we should? It's been so jolly tame that I think we ought to go back—"

"Collar him, somebody!" growled Pitt. "Let's be thankful that we've got through unharmed. By Jove, doesn't it make you feel good to see the old galley? We'll soon be on board now, and then we can snap our fingers at Mr. Kasker and his cut-throats."

They were all exuberant. The thing seemed too good to be true. Not only had they landed on enemy soil, but they had penetrated inland, and would soon be restoring those five frightened little children to their bereaved mother. It was a thought which made all the fellows happy.

Tommy Watson was dancing madly on the deck of the galley, and he was waving his arms so strenuously that he seemed to have gone off his mind. Nipper rather wondered, for it wasn't like Tommy to be so demonstrative. But, perhaps, in the circumstances, his usual stolidity had deserted him.

And then the reason for Watson's behaviour became clear.

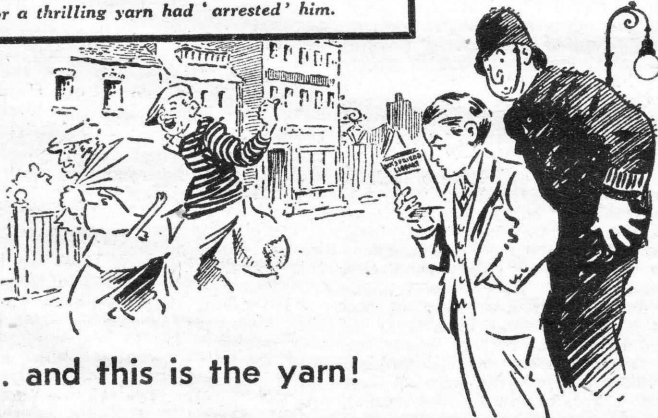
Without warning, something came hissing through the air past Nipper's head. It struck the ground close against the water's edge.

"An arrow!" "Quick!" roared Nipper. "An ambush! They've been waiting for us. And the brutes are afraid to come out into the open!"

"All aboard!" yelled Buster Boots. Tommy Watson, out on the galley, had ceased his gymnastics, for he could now see that it was too late. He had only seen the danger a few moments earlier—just before the juniors had appeared.

A lurking figure or two among the trees had first attracted his attention. He had caught the gleam of uniforms. And then, almost at the same minute, the St. Frank's fellows had burst into view, apparently unconscious of the

Bill and Jim passed by and chuckled with glee,
And the 'copper' was far too busy to see.
He didn't arrest either Bill or Jim,
For a thrilling yarn had 'arrested' him.



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danger. Small wonder that Watson had made such frantic signals! And the juniors had mistaken them for gesticulations of welcome!

Hiss! Hiss!

Arrows were now coming across the beach in ever-increasing numbers. By great good fortune, the majority of the fellows were near the boat, and they piled in, the five little children being placed in safety first.

"For goodness' sake, buck up!" panted Nipper.

"You rotters!" roared Handforth, turning and shaking his fist at the invisible foe. "Why can't you come out in the open, and fight like men?"

An arrow fell almost at his feet, and he seized it and hurled it back. That movement of his was to mean a lot. For the brief action delayed him. Only a moment, but during that time the others had got into the boat, and were ready to push off. Even now the danger was acute. This adventure was not to end so easily, after all.

"Come on, Handy!" gasped Church, in an agony.

"Buck up, you ass!"

With one accord Church and McClure left the boat—in order to drag Handforth in by sheer force. The leader of Study D was glaring defiance at the trees. He turned contemptuously.

"Think I'm afraid of 'em?" he asked, with a snort.

At that second a flight of arrows swept across the beach. How they missed Church and McClure, the two juniors never knew. Edward Oswald Handforth fell. With a cry he collapsed in a limp heap.

"Oh!" sobbed Church. "He's hit!"

There was no doubt on the point. The unfortunate Edward Oswald was put out of action, and the dramatic suddenness of his collapse struck his chums with the force of a blow.

"Quick!" yelled Church. "Help me, Mac!"

They rushed to Handforth's side and bent over him.

Nipper and the others were on the point of getting out of the boat to help, too, but Nipper shouted out a warning. For he had seen something which the others missed. Nearly a score of soldiers were bursting out from the trees. And even before the first Removite could leave the boat Handforth & Co. were surrounded.

"Heaven help them!" muttered Nipper huskily.

"They'll be killed!" panted Pitt. "Can't we—"

He broke off, expecting to see the unfortunate trio hacked to pieces by those brutal soldiers. For these men of Kasker's were not only armed with swords, but they carried wicked-looking pikes—weapons which resembled spears, with arrowheads as sharp as a razor-blade.

"Come on—rescue!" yelled Boots desperately.

And even Nipper was prepared to risk everything in an attempt to save the lives of the trio who had been cut off. But it was not to be. Over half the men had seized Handforth & Co., and were rushing them into the wood. The other soldiers were turning towards the boat, and they were fixing arrows into their bows.

Nipper realised in a flash that it would be suicide to face this peril. They had no means of retaliation, and to charge against these arrows would be fatal. Nothing on earth could save all of them from death. Even as it was, their chance of escape seemed remote.

"We can't do it!" shouted Nipper hoarsely. "Row, you 'chaps—row!"

JUST MY FUN

Monty Lowther Calling



Hallo, everybody! "Breeding pedigree dogs is expensive," says Herries. It isn't the initial cost, it's the "pup-keep." You know boxers mustn't over-eat? In the ring you aren't allowed a second helping! Got it? "The upkeep of a car is the trouble," writes a motorist. With a friend of ours it was the "turnover"! Television sets will cost about £50, I hear. If you can't afford one, you won't get a look in. Ow! Excuse me—the phone's ringing. What's that? Oh, it's Gore! He says he's very sorry he won't be able to give his lecture in the Common-room to-night on "The Secret of Good Health"—because he's, in the "sanny" with 'flu. Then there was the driver of the coal cart who turned down a side street without warning. "Why didn't you signal?" yelled a motorist, who had nearly run into him. "Signal?" answered the coalman. "Why, I always

And they all knew the truth. In order to save their own lives they must go—and abandon Handforth & Co. to the enemy!

What else was there for it? How could they aid the unhappy three by getting themselves all killed?

The arrows hissed round the boat in a deadly shower.

Thud! Splash! Thud!

Many of those deadly shafts entered the water, but others buried themselves in the woodwork of the boat.

"Down—down for your lives!" exclaimed Nipper.

And as they wielded the oars, they crouched low, offering very little target to the archers. One arrow struck Pitt on the shoulder, inflicting a painful cut. Christine was hit in the arm, and two other juniors had narrow escapes.

But the tension was soon over.

The boat rapidly drew away, and got out of effective range. The Gothlanders went right to the water's edge, sending their arrows skimming over the water. But the juniors were safe now.

And thus the galley was reached.

But what a sorry end to the great adventure! Those five Gothlander children had been saved. But what was the cost? In order to rescue five enemy children, three of the British boys had been lost. It was too tragic to be realised during those first tense moments.

On the beach the Gothlanders were retiring. They went back into the wood, and within another minute there was no sign that the peace of this spot had ever been disturbed. And what of Handforth & Co.? Where were they? Alive, or dead? None of the others could answer these questions.

Tommy Watson was leaning over the galley's side as the boat came up.

"I tried to warn you!" he shouted.

"Thank Heaven you've got here!" "Ods tragedies and horrors!" said Archie Glenthorpe. "But where's Handforth? I don't see the dear old lad—"

go down that street!" A parrot brought into the Wayland Police Court refused to utter a word. It resented the presence of a rival "beak"! An Australian paper reports: "The closing score was 1/6 for seven." "Cheap wickets! As the spendthrift son said: "Here's my hotel bill, dad." "Well, don't buy any more hotels!" snapped his father. "10,000 men combine to put the morning bottle of milk on the doorstep," says an industrialist. Yes, it sounds like it! Mr. Rateliff is trying to get his golf balls cheaper. He wants to "drive" a bargain! Sad reflection: We think our money must be streamlined—it goes so fast! "One of my cylinders is missing," complained the motorist to P.-c. Crump. "Well, I'm blowed!" said Crump. "Seems them motor thieves will take anything!" As Pat Reilly said: "Who wouldn't be a policeman, entirely? Nothing to do but stand still while he walks round listening for anything he can see!" Think it out! Then there was the absentminded professor who, after being rescued when near drowning, suddenly remembered that he could swim. One from Scotland: "Just my luck!" remarked the Scot, reading an advert. "Medicine going at half-price, and I'm in perfect health!" Last shot: "The scoundrel nearly throttled me!" gasped the householder. "Splendid!" said the detective. "We'll examine your neck for finger-prints!" Cheery-bye, chaps!

"They got him!" groaned Nipper.

"Good gad!"

"Church and McClure, too!" shouted one of the others. "Handy was hit—killed, I think, and his chums, like bricks, went to his help. And they were all swooped on by these devils!"

"It was all Handy's fault!" said Christine chokingly. "He would stop behind and shake his fist. If he had only come with all the rest of us—"

"It's no good saying that now, old man," broke in Nipper. "Handy might have been hit just the same—we can't tell. But I'm afraid there's no hope now. What a terrible end, just when we had been congratulating ourselves, too!"

"And poor old Church said that we weren't out of the wood!" muttered De Valerie. "The chap must have had a presentiment."

They got back on board the galley listlessly, with their hearts as heavy as lead. Of hope they had none. Their joy at rescuing the children had turned to gall. Why had they ever gone on that mad exploit? And yet they couldn't justify this attitude. For their mission had been successful. Those helpless little children had been saved from death by burning at the stake. And Handforth & Co., it seemed, had sacrificed their lives in the noble adventure.

A Forlorn Hope!

"MY children—my little ones!" The mother's joy was good to see, and afforded some slight compensation for the tragedy. Poor Mistress Bessber had come on deck now, probably aroused by the commotion, but it was far more likely that she had heard the voice of one of her mites.

And there she crouched on the deck, with the children nearly smothering her. They, poor little innocents, only knew that they had their mother back.

Perhaps they had seen her cast away on that raft, and had thought her dead.

Nipper bent over the woman. "We'll take you to Northestia," he said quietly. "One of the other cabins is being prepared for you, and—"

"I know not what to say, fair youth!" sobbed the woman, looking up with shining eyes. "Thou hast restored my children to me! How can I ever thank thee? My heart is full—"

"That's all right!" muttered Nipper, trying to swallow a lump in his throat. "We tricked the soldiers, and saved your little ones just in time. You can't land on your own soil again, but must go with us to Northestia."

For a moment she looked alarmed. "Is it safe?" she asked tremulously. "I'll swear that you will be well cared for."

"I believe thee," she murmured. "For thou hast done this for me. In Northestia they are gentle people. Do I not know this? My own grandfather did serve his Northestrian masters, and was ever treated well. There, in that land, I may be happy."

Nobody told her that three of the rescuers had failed to return.

Why should they mar any of her joy by such a disclosure? And so she was taken to one of the cabins on the other end of the galley, her children with her. And she heard nothing of the doleful talk that went on among the miserable and horror-stricken school-boys.

The galley scarcely moved, for even Nipper did not know what to do. There was no danger now, for there were no Gothlander boats within miles. The fellows could only stand on deck, staring helplessly at the shore.

"Well, we can't keep on like this," said Nipper at length. "I'd better have a look at your shoulder, Reggie, old man. And you're hit in the arm, aren't you, Bob?"

"Never mind about my shoulder!" muttered Pitt. "What does it matter?"

"My arm's only scratched," added Christine. "What about Handy? That's the terrible—"

"It won't do any good to talk about the poor chaps," said Nipper. "They've gone. And by this time I expect they'll be dead."

The others were silent, for they had the same thoughts.

They still stood there, gazing at the beach. Perhaps they half-expected to see the remains of Handforth & Co.

flung out of the woods, mutilated and crushed. To imagine that their lives had been spared was impossible. They knew from past experience that the Gothlander soldiers were worse than savage cannibals. They shed blood for the sheer love of it, and it was well known that Kassker the Grim had set a price on the heads of these British boys.

This thought gave Pitt a momentary flash of hope.

"I say!" he burst out. "Hasn't Kassker offered big rewards for our capture?"

"So we've heard," said Nipper.

"Then—then perhaps they've kept those chaps alive," said Reggie.

"Don't you see? They'll get the reward if they can hand them over to Kassker!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Ods hopes and visions!" exclaimed Archie. "A brainy idea, laddie! Perhaps the dear old cucumbers are still in the land of the living, what? Perhaps the old tissues are still throbbing with chunks of vitality! I mean, if only we can discover—"

"Don't, Archie!" interrupted Nipper. "It's no good raising your hopes like that."

"But Kassker's put a price on our heads!" insisted Pitt.

"Dead or alive?" said Nipper quietly.

They stared at him for a moment, and then groaned.

"Oh!" exclaimed Reggie Pitt. "I'd forgotten that! They'll get the same price, won't they? And they'll never deliver their victims alive, if they've got a chance of murdering them first. Poor old Handy! And Church and McClure, too. Three of the best!"

Watson nodded miserably.

"We were always chipping Handy, and always ragging him," he said. "But there wasn't a better chap breathing."

There was one junior there who had scarcely said a word from the very beginning. But now he came across from the other side of the deck, where he had been left alone with his grief.

And that junior, of course, was Willy.

"I don't believe it, you chaps," he said quietly. "Ted's alive!"

"It's no good, Willy—"

"I tell you he's alive!" insisted Willy stoutly. "I think we ought to go ashore again. Are you chaps game?"

It's, my brother, you know—and his chums. I can't go away from this spot

until I know for certain. 'I believe Ted's alive!' 'I don't know why, but it's too awful to think—'

"Poor old Willy!" murmured Nipper, gripping his arm. "It's a bigger blow to you than to anybody, and yet you're keeping a stiff upper lip. You're a plucked 'un, old son. We'll go ashore, if you want us to, but I don't think it'll be any good. We shall be too late. It was too late a minute after your brother fell."

Willy's reserve broke down.

"I don't believe it!" he burst out passionately. "How do we know for certain? Ted may have been only winged! Perhaps they've taken him prisoner—"

"I've been trying to hope the same thing myself, but there's no earthly reason why they should take him prisoner," said Nipper gently. "Poor old Willy, I'd like to give you a shadow of hope, but—"

And then came a welcome interruption.

"The motor-boat!" shouted somebody.

"The gov'nor!" said Nipper, turning. "Oh, my hat!"

He was both relieved and worried. What could he say to Nelson Lee? He had been in command, and he had permitted this affair. But Nipper set his teeth, and resolved to tell the full story. He was ready to face the music.

Willy was left alone again, standing there against the clumsy bulwark of the galley, gazing across to the shore.

The others gave their attention to the lake. The motor-boat was still a mile distant, but speeding up rapidly. In next to no time she seemed to swing alongside, leaving a great wake of foam in her rear.

A minute later, Nelson Lee and Lord Dormimore were on board.

They could tell at the first glance that something tragic had happened. Seldom had they seen these happy-go-lucky juniors looking so pale and haggard. On every hand there were the same horrified expressions.

"What has happened, Nipper?" asked Nelson Lee quietly. "Why did you send up those signal rockets?"

"Handforth and his chums are dead, sir," said Nipper.

"Great gad!" muttered Lord Dormimore.

(Are Handforth & Co. dead—or is there still hope for them? Don't miss next week's thrilling chapters, in which Nelson Lee & Co. make a raid into Gothland!)

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