

EXCITING XMAS YARN OF TOM MERRY & CO.—INSIDE.

THE
GEM
2^D

*The "Worm"
takes the
Count!*





Blake Answers Back!

Jack Blake's here to answer your letters and deal with your queries. Write to him, c/o The GEM, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Be as candid as you like—Jack Blake likes a plain speaker, being by nature a John Bull himself! But keep your letter SHORT.

J. Abily, of Shanghai, Kiangsu, China, writes:

I know you are famous at answering questions. How many provinces are there in China? Is the Island of Hainan a part of Kwang-tung, or is it a separate province? What is the capital of Gen. Chiang-Kai-Chek now the Japanese have captured Nanking and Hankow? Chinese shopkeepers often offer me old GEMS, saying: "This blong velce latest one, mistel!" I am French!

ANSWER: *There are, or were before General Slip-Yu-A-Krick-Wau and Company started mucking about, eighteen provinces in China. There is a province of Hunan, but I can't trace Hainan. The new capital of Gen. What's-His-Name has probably changed a dozen times since you wrote, so don't let's worry, shall we? I'm sorry about your being unable to get current issues of the GEM. I'll have to drop Gen. Hoo Slung Mud a strong note. I'm glad to welcome you to our band, however—thanks for writing, mon cher ami!*

Miss D. B. W., of Plymouth, writes:

Here's a real corker for "Detective" Kerr; I give him a year to do it in. Add two more figures to 191 to bring it to less than 20. I am also a regular reader of the "Magnet," and jolly good it is!

ANSWER: *19.191 looks like the right reply to me—or to you, rather. "Detective" Kerr took rather less than you allowed to solve it, though he said it's the sort of problem that might put "years" on a fellow who didn't happen to spot it.*

A. B., of Edgware, writes:

I think TRICHLOROPHENYLMETHYLIO-DOSALICYL, 32 letters, knocks Mr. Jey of Durham's word into a cocked hat. Try this code: 14-5-3-11-2. 1. 22-4-4-24. 25-4-24-2. 9-21-1-11. 24-4-16-11. 7-4-5. 11-21-3-16-19. Yours till Trimble washes himself. Bet you won't print this because you won't be able to solve the code!

ANSWER: *Tri., etc., is a grand word, though technical. It has "oomph," not to mention "boomph" and "zoomph" as well! Codes give me a headache. Form-masters don't allow me enough time to elucidate every problem, but would anybody else like to try? Yours till Trimble takes on a really big job—like washing elephants!*

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Chan Leng, of Plymouth, Devon, writes:

Could a Chinese schoolboy be included in the "Saint Jim's" stories? Make him silent, but deadly. I, being Chinese, would be honoured if you would make the Chinese in your story notorious and feared. I enclose the emblem of my tong. Show this to any Chinese, and you shall be able to command them.

ANSWER: *O mighty Chan Leng, in fear and trembling I thank you for your letter. Also the emblem. I am now looking for a Chinese millionaire, and hope to be able to command him to buy me a yacht!*

"A Banstead Reader" writes:

Blake, I like you best of all.

ANSWER: *Deep bow. Yes, it's often puzzled me how Trimble ever passed the entrance exam. Miracles DO happen sometimes, don't they?*

Iris Bristow, of Rumney, Cardiff, writes (backwards):

(Yes, I had to hold the letter to the light to read it; calligraphy perfect!) Here's a fifty-eight letter Welsh town: LLANFAIRPWLLGWYNGYLOGGERYCHWYRNDROBWLILLAN-DISILIOGOGEOCH. It means: "The Church of St. Mary, in a hollow of White Hazel, near to a rapid whirlpool, and to St. Tisilio's church, near to a red cave."

ANSWER: *I've nothing to add, look you! Is it possible to add anything?*

Nina Rutterford, of Leeds 2, writes:

You wouldn't think the boy was my twin brother, would you? But he is.

ANSWER: *To look at Gussy, you'd never think he was my twin triplet, would you? Well, he isn't! Cliff House is about one mile from Greyfriars and sixty-one from St. Jim's.*

"Another Wise Guy," of Malvern, Johannes- burg, writes:

I've drawn a picture of a cow eating grass. The grass is eaten and the cow has gone away.

ANSWER: *I'm not in!*

The "WORM" takes the COUNT!



James Silverson gave a gasping yell as he crashed on his back in the passage. Mr. Linton's door flew open, and the next moment Mr. Railton looked out. "Merry! What has happened here?" exclaimed the Housemaster.

THE LOCKED STUDY!

"BAI Jove! What's up?" asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Silverson's back!" answered Monty Lowther.

And there was a chuckle.

Mr. Silverson, the master of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, had his back up—there was no doubt about that, judging by appearances.

Dozens of fellows, crowding round the corner of Master's passage in the School House could see that.

James Silverson was standing at the door of his study in the early morning. He was wrenching at the door-handle of that study. For some reason the door did not seem to open—and James wrenched at it, and wrenched again, and gave the door a powerful kick that made the panels ring.

The breakfast-bell had not yet rung. It was nearly due to ring. But even Baggy Trimble forgot breakfast when the news spread that something was "up" in the

beaks' quarters, and the crowd gathered at the corner. Many faces wore cheery grins. It looked as if somebody had been japing Silverson—and if anybody japed Silverson, most of the St. Jim's fellows wished more power to his elbow.

The door rang again under another hefty kick. James Silverson seemed quite to have lost his temper—never very good!—at his failure to get that door open.

"Nice-man!" murmured Manners of the Shell.

"Nice example to set our innocent youth!" murmured Monty Lowther.

Tom Merry's lips curled.

"He will have all the other beaks along here if he kicks up that row!" he said. "I wonder what Railton would think of that exhibition."

"Here they come!" grinned Jack Blake.

Mr. Railton, the Housemaster, came out of his study—and Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, from his. Two more masters came along from Common-room. Evidently the din had reached many ears.

**There's Not a Dull Moment
in this Grand Yarn of the
Chums of St. Jim's**

By

MARTIN CLIFFORD

"My dear Silverson," exclaimed Mr. Railton, "what is the matter?"

James Silverson turned from the door. His eyes glistened at Tom Merry, among the crowd at the corner, and then he looked at the House-master.

"I have no doubt that Merry can answer that question better than I!" he snapped.

"I do not quite see—"

"This door is locked!" snapped Mr. Silverson. "The key is gone! I have been locked out of my study!"

"Indeed!" said the Housemaster. He glanced round. "Merry! Do you know anything of this?"

"No, sir!" answered Tom.

Mr. Railton gave him a sharp glance. Then he favoured Mr. Silverson with a frown.

The trouble between Tom Merry of the Shell and James Silverson, master of the Fourth, had gone on all through the term. Railton was feeling rather fed up with both of them. He was glad that the term was near its end, and that the temporary master of the Fourth would be going when the school broke up, not to return.

But that happy relief was still a week ahead. In the meantime, it was clear that there was another spot of trouble on hand.

"Why do you suppose that Merry knows anything of this, Mr. Silverson?" asked the House-master quietly.

"I have not the slightest doubt of it, sir!" snapped Mr. Silverson. "It would not be the first time, by very many, that Merry has played disrespectful tricks in my study. Someone has locked the door and taken away the key. Some boy must have come down from his dormitory in the night and done so. I do not doubt that it was Merry."

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, in icy tones.

James glared round at him.

"You may call it nonsense, if you please, Mr. Linton!" he hooted. "That young rascal is in your Form. If he were in mine, I should order him to turn out his pockets, here and now, and I have no doubt that the key would be found."

"Nonsense!" repeated Mr. Linton. "I see no reason whatever—"

"Will you order the boy to turn out his pockets, as he is in your Form?" snapped James.

"No!" said Mr. Linton. "Certainly not! Not unless you can give me some better reason than idle suspicion."

"Good old Linton!" whispered Monty Lowther. "He's a bit of a crusty old stick, but he's the man to tell Silverson where he gets off."

"Yaas, wathah!" grinned Arthur Augustus. "Bai Jove! That wat has his knife feahfully deep into poor old Tom Mewwy. I weally think he would fancy that it was Tom Mewwy's fault if he caught a cold in the nose, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Railton glanced round.

"Silence, please!" he said. "Merry, please step here!"

Tom Merry compressed his lips as he walked up the passage to where the masters stood. His own Form-master, Linton, had discerned long ago that James had his knife, as Gussy expressed it, in the captain of the Shell. It was high time, Tom thought, that Railton saw as much, too, and ceased to take any notice of Silverson's incessant accusations.

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"You repeat, Merry, that you know nothing of this?" asked the School House master.

"Nothing at all, sir!" answered Tom.

"You did not leave your dormitory during the night?"

"No, sir!"

"It is clear that someone did!" said Mr. Railton. He paused. "The key of Mr. Silverson's study is gone. Have you any objection, Merry, to turning out your pockets, as Mr. Silverson has suggested?"

Tom Merry flushed with anger.

"I will do so if you tell me to, sir!" he answered. "My Form-master has said that he does not think it necessary."

"Neither do I, Merry!" said Mr. Linton. "Nevertheless, please do as your Housemaster desires."

"Very well, sir!" said Tom.

Half a dozen masters in the passage, and a crowd of fellows at the corner, watched Tom Merry as he turned out pocket after pocket.

Clang!

A key dropped to the floor at Tom's feet. It dropped as he carelessly jerked out the lining of a pocket.

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Mr. Railton. "What key is that? Is that one of your own keys, Merry?"

Tom stared at the key at his feet.

"No, sir!" he answered. "That is a study key—my study key is in the door where it belongs."

"A study key!" repeated Mr. Railton grimly. He stooped and picked up the key. "Pray try this on your door, Mr. Silverson."

James Silverson, with a sneer on his face, took the key. He inserted it in the lock of his study door and turned it! Evidently it was the missing key that belonged to that door.

Tom Merry stood crimson and dumb. The crowd of juniors at the corner of the passage exchanged glances.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Tom Mewwy had the key, aftah all!"

"He said he hadn't!" muttered Herries blankly.

"Yaas—he must have forgotten that he had it!"

"Merry!" Mr. Railton's voice was deep. "That is the key of Mr. Silverson's study—and it was in your pocket! You—"

He was interrupted by an exclamation, or, rather, a roar, from James Silverson. The master of the Fourth stood glaring into his study, now that the door was open.

"Look!" he roared.

"What—"

"Look!" Silverson roared again.

"Oh!" gasped Mr. Railton, as he looked into the study. And the crowd of fellows at the corner, greatly excited and curious, pushed along the passage to see what startling sight was to be seen in the study that had been locked. And there was a general gasp!

"Oh!"

BY WHOSE HAND?

"O H!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Great pip!"

"Some rag!"

"Oh, my only hat!"

It was indeed a startling sight in Mr. Silverson's study.

Studies had been ragged before at St. Jim's—many a time and oft. But this was a Master's

study, and it was an extraordinary rag. In the ragging line, it was rather the limit.

Not an article in the room had been left in its place. The table was upended, the chairs piled in a heap over it. Bookshelves had been cleared of books, which were scattered about the floor. Over them ashes and cinders from the grate had been scattered, with heavy splashes of ink from the inkpot. The clock lay in fragments in the fender; the glass over the mantel was cracked in three or four places. On the armchair, upside down, the hearthrug was draped, dripping ink. Soot, shovelled from the chimney, had been flung right and left, smothering everything.

"Bai Jove, what a wag!" gasped Arthur Augustus, staring into the study as if he could scarcely trust his celebrated eyeglass to see a right.

"Oh crumbs!" murmured Digby.

"Tom, you ass—" muttered Blake.

"This means a fearful wow, Tom Mewwy!" breathed Arthur Augustus. "It weally is wathah ovah the limit, you know."

"Just a few!" grinned Racke of the Shell.

"He, he!" gurgled Baggy Trimble. "I say, it looks as if the Huns had been there! Oh jiminy!"

"Tom—" breathed Monty Lowther, aghast.

Tom Merry did not answer or heed. He stood gazing into the study as if transfixed.

"Upon my word!" Mr. Railton had stepped into the study with Silverson. He stood looking round him with horrified eyes. Thunder gathered in his brow.

He turned to Tom Merry.

"Merry, you have done this!"

Tom found his voice.

"No!" he gasped. "No, sir! I haven't been in the study. I know nothing about it at all!"

"It is obvious," said Mr. Railton, in a grinding voice, "that it was done by the same person who locked the study and took away the key. That was you."

"It was not!" exclaimed Tom. "I never locked the study, and never touched the key."

Mr. Railton almost jumped clear of the floor.

"What?" he exclaimed. "You dare to say so, Merry, when the key was found in your pocket only a few minutes ago?"

"Yes, I do!" Tom Merry steadied his voice. "I had nothing to do with it. I never knew that key was in my pocket till it fell out."

"You never knew that the key was in your pocket!" repeated Mr. Railton, as if he could hardly believe his ears.

"No, sir!"

"Upon my word, this is too much! Silence! Say no more! Merry, you will be taken to your headmaster. Whether Dr. Holmes may decide to flog you, or to expel you from the school, I cannot say. Now you may go—go at once. You will be taken to Dr. Holmes after second school. Now, go!"

"I repeat that I know nothing about this, sir!" Tom's voice rose almost to a shout. "I never put that key in my pocket. I don't know who did."

"Silence!"

Tom Merry looked at his housemaster. Mr. Railton's face was dark with anger. He glanced at his Form-master in the passage. Mr. Linton's face was set and grim. Then his eyes turned on James Silverson, and he read the gloating triumph in the eyes of the man who had always been his enemy. And as he read that look, it suddenly flashed on Tom.

His face flamed. His hand rose and pointed at James Silverson.

"That is the man!" he exclaimed, his voice husky with rage. "Ask Mr. Silverson who did this! Ask him who put the key in my jacket pocket while I was fast asleep in the dormitory last night. Ask that scoundrel!"

"Merry!" gasped Mr. Railton.

James' face whitened a little under Tom's accusing eyes. Mr. Linton gave a sudden start.

"Merry!" he ejaculated.

There was a buzz in the passage. Tom Merry did not heed. He stood pointing at James Silverson, his eyes blazing.

"That is the man!" he shouted. "He has done this, as he has done things just as rotten a dozen times before all through the term! That man wants to get me sacked from the school, and he has done this—"

"Silence!" roared Mr. Railton. "Go this instant!"

James Silverson breathed hard.

"This insolence is of a piece with Merry's con-

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duct all through this term," he said. "But this is beyond all bounds—"

"I have told you the truth, sir, and that man knows it!" panted Tom.

The Housemaster grasped him by the shoulder and spun him into the passage. He staggered among the fellows there.

"Go!" thundered Mr. Railton.

Tom Merry turned back, his eyes ablaze. Manners and Lowther caught him promptly by either arm, and walked him away down the passage.

"Come on, old chap!" murmured Monty.

"Keep cool, old bean!" muttered Manners.

Tom Merry panted. He allowed his chums to lead him into the quadrangle. He came to a halt there, his face in a flame, his chest heaving.

"It was that cur!" he said thickly. "His own doing! He's tried again and again to get me landed, and now—this!"

"He's rotter enough!" muttered Manners. "But his own study, Tom—"

Tom laughed scornfully.

"Of course it was his own study he wrecked—to put it on me. What does he care about the study, so long as he gets by with his game? He picked his own study for this so that nobody would fancy that it was his handiwork, that's why. If you can't see it, you're a fool!"

"I'm not a fool, I hope!" said Manners quietly. "But—"

"His own study!" Lowther shook his head.

"You're a fool, too, then!" said Tom.

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"Thanks!" said Monty Lowther dryly.

"Who else did it?" exclaimed Tom passionately. "Do you think that I did, when I tell you that I didn't?"

"No," said Manners slowly. "But every man in the Fourth loathes him. Any Fourth Form chap might—"

"And slip the study key into my pocket in the dorm to put it on me!" snapped Tom. "Can you name any chap in the Fourth who would do that?"

Manners and Lowther were silent.

They knew only too well that James Silverson was Tom's enemy. They knew that he had schemed and plotted all through the term to bring their chum into disgrace. They knew that he regarded Tom as his rival for the fortune of old Miss Fawcett, and that there was little at which he would stop to get that rival out of his way. But—

If James had done this, he had planned cunningly. For even Tom's chums could not quite believe that he had ragged his own study, and damaged his own property, in order to have Tom Merry sent up to the Head. And if Manners and Lowther, who knew so much of James and his scheming, found it hard to believe, it was certain that the rest of St. Jim's would find it harder.

Tom stood looking at his chums with a knitted, angry brow.

It was all clear to him—clear as noonday! He had read it in James' gloating eyes in the study, if he could not have guessed otherwise.

"You don't agree?" he snapped, at last.

"Well—" said Lowther slowly.

"Well—" said Manners.

"Oh, think what you like!" snapped Tom. "I'm going to be sacked for this. That cur has got by with it at last! If you can't see what's been done the Head won't—or Railton, either. This is the finish!"

He turned away from his chums and tramped across the quad, leaving them dismayed and silent.

"Tom Mewwy!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy cut across and intercepted the captain of the Shell.

"Oh, don't bother now, Gussy!" said Tom curtly.

Arthur Augustus looked at him.

"I should be vewy sowwy to bothah you, Tom Mewwy, or to have my remarks wewarded as a bothah," he said, with dignity. "I was goin' to ask you a question, deah boy. Did you wag Silvahson's studay or not?"

"No!" snapped Tom, "and if you don't believe me you can go and eat coke."

Arthur Augustus raised his eyebrows.

"But I do believe you, deah boy," he answered mildly. "I weward your word as bein' as good as gold. I am goin' to look into this."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Go ahead, old bean!" he said; and he walked on, while Arthur Augustus D'Arcy went back into the House with a thoughtful frown on his noble visage.

D'ARCY THE DETECTIVE!

"BREKKER, Gussy!" called out Jack Blake.

"Bothah bwekkah!" answered Arthur Augustus, glancing down over the banisters. "I have no time for bwekkah!"

"But the bell's gone!" exclaimed Herries.

"Bothah the bell, Hewwies!"

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"Silverson's in Hall!" said Digby.

"Bothah Silvahson, too!"

Blake and Herries and Dig stared up at their noble chum, in surprise. Why Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was starting to mount the stairs when the bell had rung for breakfast, and a hungry crowd was pouring into Hall, they did not know, and could not guess.

"Look here, don't play the goat, Gussy!" exclaimed Blake. "You know how Silverson's down on our study—and he's in a specially rotten temper this morning. If you're late, you'll get lines. I tell you, Silverson's gone into Hall."

"Yaas, I am awah of that, Blake! That's why I'm goin' upstairs."

Jack Blake blinked at him.

"You're going upstairs because Silverson's in Hall!" he ejaculated.

"Yaas, wathah!"

And Arthur Augustus went up—leaving his astonished chums staring. Levison of the Fourth called to them:

"The bell's stopped, you men! You'll be late—and Silverson's got a nasty look in his eye this morning!" Ernest Levison hurried on.

"Gussy!" howled Blake.

Arthur Augustus disappeared round the bend of the big staircase. Whatever it was that Gussy had in his noble nut, it seemed that it was more important to him than brekker, or lines from Mr. Silverson.

"What is that mad ass up to?" asked Blake blankly.

"Goodness knows!" said Dig. "But we're not going to let the Worm get a chance at him! Let's go after him and lug him back."

"Let's!" agreed Herries.

And the three chums of Study No. 6 cut up the staircase after Arthur Augustus, to lug him back and keep him out of a row with his Form-master, whether he liked it or not.

Arthur Augustus was hurrying. To the astonishment of his chums, as they came cutting up to the landing, he was not taking the direction of Study No. 6, or the schoolboys' quarters at all. From the landing, he shot along the passage on which the Masters' rooms opened.

At St. Jim's the Masters' studies were on the ground floor, their bed-rooms over the studies, on the floor above. Why Gussy was heading for that quarter was an absolute mystery to his friends—they could not begin to imagine what business he could possibly have there.

"Is he off his nut?" ejaculated Dig.

"Is he ever on it?" sighed Blake. "Cut after him!"

They cut after Gussy, and caught him in the passage, near the door of Mr. Silverson's room. Blake grabbed him by an arm.

"Now, you ass!" he exclaimed.

"Wewase me, deah boy—I have no time to waste!" said Arthur Augustus. "I have got to get through while Silvahson is at bwekkah in Hall."

"What are you up to?" hissed Blake. "If you're not potty—"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Well, if you're not, what's the game?"

"I am goin' to investigate, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus calmly. "Sort of detective, you know!"

"Sort of—of detective! Oh, my hat! You! You couldn't detect anything but a silk hat!"

"Or a new necktie!" said Dig.

"Pway be sewious, deah boys! If you care to

wisk losin' your bwekkah, I will explain!" said Arthur Augustus. "You heard Tom Mewwy say that he nevah wagged the Worm's studay?"

"Hem! Yes."

"I twust, Blake, that you do not wegard Tom Mewwy as capable of uttahn' a fabwicatian."

"Um! Oh, no! Still, fellows do stretch a point sometimes, when they're going to be up for the sack! He had Silverson's key in his pocket."

"Nobody blames Tom Merry!" said Dig. "The Worm's been ragging him all this term, and the more he gets back, the better."

"I'd jolly well rag the rat's study myself!" said Herries. "We've ragged that rat a good many times already; and we'll jolly well rag him again."

"Yaas, wathah! But I asked Tom Mewwy specially, and he gave me his word!" said Arthur Augustus. "That settles it—Tom Mewwy nevah did it! He thinks that the Worm did it to fix it on him."

"Thick!" murmured Blake. "His own study!" "Too thick!" said Herries. "Man wouldn't wreck his own quarters."

Digby shook his head.

"But what the thump are you up to, anyhow?" demanded Blake. "Trimble will bag your egg if he gets half a chance."

"I twimble can bag all the eggs in the House, Blake, so long as I spot that wottah!" said Arthur Augustus. "If that wat wagged his own studay, to plant it on poor old Tom Mewwy, I am goin' to spot him, if I can."

"Some if!" grinned Dig.

"I wathah think that I have a gift as a detective. I have told you fellows so befoah. Of course, I don't claim to be as good as Fewwahs Locke," said Arthur Augustus modestly.

"Not really!" gasped Blake.

"No, weally! But if that wottah has left a clue, I fancy I shall spot it."

"A—a—a clue!"

"You fellows looked into the study while old Wailton was jawin' Tom Mewwy there. You noticed that ewerythin' was smothahed with soot dragged down from the chimney."

"What about it?"

"This!" said Arthur Augustus, with a smile of superior wisdom. "If a man thwows soot all ovah the shop he is vewy likely to get some on his clothes. He is vewy likely to leave twaces of it about where he goes next. If the Worm sneaked down last night to wag his own studay, wely on it that he left at least a speck of soot or two about when he went back to his woom."

"Oh!" gasped Blake and Herries and Digby all together.

They gazed at their noble chum.

"See?" asked Arthur Augustus complacently. "I am goin' to look, and if there is so much as a spot of soot about—"

"By gum!" said Blake. "Some ass said once that the age of miracles was past—yet here's Gussy talking sense!"

"Weally, you ass—"

"Come on!" said Blake.

He stepped to Mr. Silverson's door and opened it. His three chums followed him in.

Blake shut the door at once. It meant six all round if juniors were found trespassing in a Master's room.

But it was safe enough. The whole House was at breakfast; not a soul was on the upper floors. The maids had not yet started the daily

round of the rooms, and were not likely to start yet. For a quarter of an hour at least, probably longer, the schoolboy investigators were safe.

Blake and Herries and Dig were dubious, but they admitted that Gussy's idea was worth trying out.

Silverson, after all, was mean enough for anything; thick as it seemed, it was possible, considering what a rank outsider the Worm was! Arthur Augustus, perhaps, was not feeling any great certitude. That Tom Merry had not done it he was certain, because Tom Merry said that he hadn't. He was not so certain that Tom was right in his suspicion of Silverson. But he was going to see.

Four fellows stared about Silverson's room—left as the Fourth Form master had left it when he went down in the morning. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jammed his eyeglass firmly into his eye and scanned the apartment with an intent gaze.

"Bai Jove!" he ejaculated suddenly.

Blake winked at Herries and Dig.

"Found the body, Mr. Detective?" he asked. Herries and Dig chuckled.

"Eh? I am not lookin' for a body, you ass!" said Arthur Augustus. "I am lookin' for a spot of soot—and I have found one!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Look, deah boys!" Arthur Augustus pointed to a speck on the floor just inside the door.

Blake and Herries and Digby gazed at it breathlessly. It was only a speck—a tiny flake of soot. But it was soot!

Evidently it had fallen from a shoe that had stepped on some particle of soot, no doubt unknown to the wearer.

"Soot!" breathed Blake.

"Only a speck!" said Herries.

"Ex pede Herculem, deah boy!" grinned Arthur Augustus. "Fwom the foot, you deduce Hercules—and fwom a speck of soot, you deduce a lot more! How did that speck of soot get here?"

"How, indeed!" said Blake grimly. "There's an electric fire here—fires are never lighted in the bed-rooms. No soot about here—unless Silverson went specially to the chimney and raked some down. And—he didn't!"

"He certainly did not, deah boy! He brougth that speck up with him last night on his shoe!"

"By gum!" said Dig.

"He twod on it, and a little bit stuck to his shoe," said Arthur Augustus. "I would like to know where Silvahson twod on soot—and so would Tom Mewwy's Form-mastah, I have no doubt."

Study No. 6 gazed at that telltale speck! It was too tiny to catch a casual eye—unseen, unless specially looked for! But the St. Jim's detective had looked for that very thing—and found it!

Gussy was not finished yet! He went round the floor of that room, bent double, his noble eye gleaming through his eyeglass.

"Look!" he ejaculated suddenly.

"Oh gum!"

It was another tiny flake of soot, near the dressing-table. The maid, when she "did" the room later, would not have noticed it. Silverson, certainly, had not noticed it! But Gussy noticed it!

Breathless with eagerness now, Study No. 6 searched and searched. Twice again they found tiny flakes of soot. And on the pillow,

on the bed, Gussy's eyeglass picked up a grubby mark—slight enough, but sufficient to indicate that a speck of floating soot had clung to a head of hair!

"That about does it!" said Blake. "Cut now, we mustn't be copped here!"

"I wathah think that my investigations are complete," said Arthur Augustus. "We may now as well go down to bwekkah—if there is any left."

Study No. 6 hurried down.

They were late—very late—for breakfast. Fellows at the Fourth Form table in Hall stared at them as they came in. Mr. Silverson, at the head of the table, gave them a very grim look. Silverson did not like Study No. 6.

"Blake! Herries! Digby! D'Arcy! You are late! You will take a hundred lines each!" he rapped.

"Yes, sir," said Study No. 6 meekly.

And they sat down to a belated breakfast, which they had not finished when they had to rise from the table. Study No. 6 had healthy appetites—but they agreed that the discovery they had made in Silverson's room was worth half a breakfast!

A SURPRISE FOR JAMES!

"WHAT—what is it, D'Arcy? I am occupied now. Please shut the door."

Mr. Linton spoke sharply.

After breakfast the master of the Shell was in his study in a worried and troubled mood. Linton was a calm, sedate gentleman, seldom disturbed—but he was deeply disturbed now.

He stood at the study window, looking out into the quadrangle. Plenty of fellows were to be seen there, some of them snowballing while they waited for the bell for classes.

But there were three who were not joining in. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther stood in a group, with clouded faces—one of them angry as well as glouided.

For once the Terrible Three of the Shell were not wholly in agreement; and Tom Merry, with the prospect before him of being sent up to the Head, was not quite so good-tempered as usual.

His Form-master could not hear what was said. Perhaps that was just as well, as Tom was calling his loyal chums a pair of fools.

Mr. Linton's brow was dark and troubled.

That scene in the doorway of Silverson's wrecked study haunted him. In Mr. Railton's eyes, Tom Merry's action had been an outbreak of sheer mutinous disrespect—his accusation against Silverson too wild to be listened to for a moment. But Linton was not so sure.

More than once during that troubled term Tom Merry's Form-master had found serious fault with him—Tom had been in a good deal of trouble. But Mr. Linton was a very keen gentleman. He had realised that, every time Tom was in trouble, whether he was apparently to blame or not, Silverson was somehow mixed up in it. That had opened Mr. Linton's eyes to a good deal.

But the climax had come when he had actually caught James out in one of his surreptitious trickeries. He knew that the man actually had tried to fasten a false charge on the captain of the Shell. He had gone to the length of warning James that he had found him out, and warning him that he would keep him under

observation so long as he remained at the school. As it was so short a time to the end of the term, he was willing to leave it at that.

Now he was sorely troubled and doubtful.

It looked as if Tom Merry had ragged Silverson's study—the evidence was clear enough for the Head to judge him guilty. Yet, in view of what had happened once before, there was a troublesome, lingering doubt in the mind of the master of the Shell.

Of James' designs on old Miss Fawcett's money, and his schemes to oust Tom from his guardian's favour, Mr. Linton, of course, knew nothing. He attributed James' actions to a bitter dislike of his schoolboy relative. And he had to acknowledge that, bitter as he had seen that dislike to be, it was unlikely that a man would go to the length of wrecking his own quarters as part of a miserable scheme against a relative he disliked.

Yet he could not be sure.

In that disturbed and worried frame of mind the master of the Shell was not pleased to hear a tap at his study door, and to see it open to admit the elegant figure of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form.

He had nothing to do with Silverson's boys, and did not see why one of them had come to his study. So he waved Arthur Augustus away like a troublesome insect.

Arthur Augustus, however, was not to be waved away. He stepped into the study and closed the door behind him.

"D'Arcy, leave my study!" snapped Mr. Linton angrily. "I cannot be disturbed now—and you have no business here. Go away at once!"

"Pway excuse me, sir!" said Arthur Augustus politely. "But I have a mattah of vewy great importance to weport to you!"

"You had better go to your own Form-master."

Arthur Augustus grinned involuntarily. He was not likely to report to Mr. Silverson the discovery he had made in Mr. Silverson's room!

"It's about Tom Mewwy, sir!" he said.

"Merry!" Mr. Linton took notice at once. "Do you mean to say that you know something about last night's occurrence, D'Arcy?"

"Yaas, sir!"

"Indeed!" said Mr. Linton quite cordially. "In that case, D'Arcy, you may speak."

"Vewy well, sir!" said Arthur Augustus cheerfully. "I pwesume, sir, that you heard what Tom Mewwy said at Mr. Silvahson's door this mornin'—"

"Kindly be brief!"

"Oh, yaas, sir! Tom Mewwy said that Mr. Silvahson was the man who had wagged that studey and landed it on him—"

"I cannot discuss this with you, D'Arcy! If that is all that you have to say—"

"Not at all, sir! Pwobably you noticed that Mr. Silvahson's studey was smothahed with soot, waked down from the chimney—"

"What of it?" snapped Mr. Linton.

"This, sir!" said Arthur Augustus. "I have come to you as Tom Mewwy's Form-mastah. I think, sir, that you might like to ask Mr. Silvahson, befoah Tom Mewwy goes to the Head, to explain how soot came to be twodden about his room upstairs—"

"Wha-a-t!"

"There was a feahful lot of soot smothahed ovah that studey, sir! It occurred to me that

the chap who chucked it about there might have taken some trace of it away with him, so I went up to Silvahson's bed-room while he was at breakfast and investigated—"

"Bless my soul!"

"There are twaces, sir, of soot havin' been twodden there!" said Arthur Augustus. "Pewwaps you will ask Mr. Silvahson the reason, sir, befoah Tom Mewwy is taken to the Head!"

Mr. Linton stood as if rooted, staring at the swell of St. Jim's. He was silent for a full minute.

"You—you should certainly not have taken this upon yourself, D'Arcy!" he said at last. "But—if you are sure of what you say—"

"I am quite sush, sir—I went specially to look. And I felt bound to weport it to you, sir, as Tom Mewwy's Form-mastah."

Mr. Linton breathed hard.

"Thank you, D'Arcy! You may go!" he said. "One moment—kindly ask Mr. Silverson to step to my study."

"Certainly, sir!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy marched off cheerfully. Mr. Linton was left in deeper thought than ever—and with a glint in his eyes.

He had doubted before. It had seemed unlikely, almost impossible, that even a malicious and unscrupulous man would carry his enmity to such a length; but Mr. Linton's mind was almost made up now.

With a grim expression on his face, he waited for Mr. Silverson.

In a few minutes there was a tap at the study door. James Silverson entered, and gave him an inquiring, wary look. James was well aware that the master of the Shell distrusted him, and he did not quite know what this meant, and he was on his guard.

"I was told that you desired to speak to me, Mr. Linton," he said. "If the matter refers to Merry of your Form, discussion seems to me useless. It is for Merry's headmaster to judge him."

"Quite!" said Mr. Linton. His keen eyes searched the hard, sharp face before him. "In such a matter as this, Mr. Silverson, proof cannot be too conclusive. This is a matter for expulsion. Someone last night wrecked your study and smothered it with soot. If Merry is adjudged guilty of this outrage he will probably be expelled."

James' eyes glimmered.

"Probably," he said. "That is for Dr. Holmes to decide."

"As a great quantity of soot was handled in your study, Mr. Silverson, it is probable that the person concerned took some traces away with him. I desire you to accompany me to ascertain whether such was the case."

"Willingly!" said Mr. Silverson. "Let us go to Merry's dormitory at once. I am quite at your service, Mr. Linton."

The two masters left the study together and proceeded to the stairs. There was a faint smile on James' face. He had wondered whether Mr. Linton had doubts. This looked, however, as if Linton was as keen as himself on bringing home the charge to the accused.

They ascended the stairs to the landing. James, nothing doubting that the master of the Shell was heading for the dormitory of his Form, turned towards the upper staircase. Mr. Linton turned towards the passage that led to the Masters' bedrooms!

James Silverson stared round.

"This way, Mr. Linton!" he said, in surprise. "On the contrary, sir, this way," said Mr. Linton grimly.

"I fail to understand you, sir!" James compressed his lips.

"I will make my meaning clear, then, Mr. Silverson. With your permission, and in your company, I am going to your room."

"To my room!"

"Precisely!"

James Silverson looked at him. Then, quickly passing the master of the Shell, he stepped ahead of him into the passage. He faced round, blocking Mr. Linton's way to the bed-rooms.

"Will you explain why you desire to go to my room?" he asked, between his closed lips.

"Certainly, if it is not already clear to you. I am going there to ascertain whether traces of soot may be discovered, which would substantiate Merry's accusation against you, Mr. Silverson."

James caught his breath.

"Will you proceed, Mr. Silverson?" asked the master of the Shell ironically. If he had doubted D'Arcy's discovery before, he could not doubt it now. He could read the mingled rage and fear in James' face.

James did not proceed. He stood facing the master of the Shell, barring his way.

"Will you permit me to pass, Mr. Silverson? Have I your permission to make such an investigation in your room?"

"No!" James' voice was husky. "I shall certainly not allow anything of the kind—certainly not!"

"I shall not insist," said Mr. Linton. "I will say only this, Mr. Silverson. If Merry of my Form is taken before his headmaster to-day, I shall be present, and I shall place Dr. Holmes in full possession of the facts as they appear to me. If you care to face the consequences, sir, that is a matter of your own choice. I leave you to decide."

With that, the master of the Shell turned on his heel and went down the stairs again. James was left standing in the passage, breathing in gasps.

A ROW IN THE SHELL!

TOM MERRY'S face was clouded when he came into the Form-room with the Shell that morning.

Manners and Lowther were worried. All eyes in the Form turned on Tom. Racke and Crooke exchanged cheery grins. Those two members of the Shell were not sorry to see the captain of the Form up against bad trouble.

"Still here?" grinned Racke, as the Shell fellows went to their places.

Tom looked at him.

"Not sacked yet?" asked Crooke. "When is it coming?"

Tom Merry did not answer in words. His temper was not so good that morning as was its wont, and, with the interview with the Head hanging over him, he had no patience to waste on the two bad hats of the Form.

He made a sudden grasp at Racke with one hand and at Crooke with the other. Before they knew what was happening their heads came together with a crack that rang through the Form-room like a pistol-shot.

"Ow!" yelled Racke and Crooke simultaneously.

Mr. Linton, at his high desk, stared round. There was a buzz in the Shell. Tom Merry

headed neither the Form nor the Form-master. He glared at the two weedy slackers wriggling in his grip.

"Anything more you'd like to ask?" he snapped savagely.

"Let go!" yelled Aubrey Racke.

"Let go my collar, you rotter!" spluttered Crooke.

"Merry!" exclaimed Mr. Linton.

"Tom, old man—" breathed Manners.

"Merry, what are you doing? Release Racke and Crooke this instant!" thundered the master of the Shell.

"Yes, sir," answered Tom.

He released Racke and Crooke—with a swing of his arms that sent them tumbling over headlong among the forms. They yelled as they tumbled.

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Mr. Linton. He caught up a cane from his desk, and came towards the Form. "Merry, what—"

Tom Merry faced him, with dogged defiance in his face. He knew only too well what to expect from his interview with the Head, and the prospect made him defiant and reckless.

"Merry, what does this mean?" exclaimed Mr. Linton sternly.

"Those two cads wanted to know whether I was sacked yet," answered Tom coolly. "That was how I answered them. You can cane me, if you like."

"Tom, you ass—" hissed Lowther.

"Shut up!" breathed Manners.

"Oh rats!" snapped Tom. "What does it matter now? I'm going to be bunked for something I haven't done. That cur has got by with it at last. What the dickens does it matter now?"

"Merry, you will control your temper in this Form-room!" thundered Mr. Linton.

"Why should I?" said Tom.

"What?"

"A fellow has a right to expect his Form-master to stand by him and see justice done," said Tom. "You know as well as I do that that man Silverson is a plotting rascal. You've had proof of it once."

"Silence!"

"I won't be silent!" Tom Merry's eyes flashed. "I'll shout it out at the top of my voice for all St. Jim's to hear! James Silverson, the master of the Fourth Form here, is a plotting rascal! He's tried a dozen times to get me sacked, and now he's getting by with it. He ragged his own study, and sneaked into my dorm and shoved the key in my pocket—"

"Tom!" exclaimed Talbot.

"Shut up, old man!" whispered Kangaroo.

"Merry, will you be silent?" exclaimed Mr. Linton.

"No! Every fellow here is going to know—the whole school is going to know!" roared Tom Merry. "I know what's coming, and when I'm turned out, all St. Jim's is going to know that that cur did the whole thing."

Tom's angry voice rang through the Form-room.

The Shell fellows gazed at him in almost stupefied silence. The expression on Mr. Linton's face was extraordinary.

The juniors expected to see him jerk Tom Merry out from the form and lay on the cane, or else march him off to the headmaster. Tom expected it as much as any other fellow, and he did not care.

But Mr. Linton, to the general astonishment,

did nothing of the kind. He stood for some moments in silence, looking at Tom Merry's crimson, angry face. Then he said quietly:

"Take your places, my boys."

He went back to his desk.

Tom blinked after him. The whole Form stared. It seemed impossible that such an outbreak in the Form-room—such an accusation, shouted out for all ears to hear, against a master of the school—could be passed over. Yet apparently Mr. Linton was going to pass it over.

Tom Merry sat down in astonishment. Linton was a whale on discipline, yet he was letting that pass without a word. Tom could only stare in astonishment.

Lessons began in the Shell Form Room. To the further surprise of the Form, Mr. Linton took no special notice of Tom Merry. He was not called on to construe, and once or twice, when Mr. Linton had to speak to him, his manner seemed to be kinder than usual.

When the bell rang for break and the Shell were dismissed, Mr. Linton called to Tom Merry.

"Merry! Remain a few moments."

"Yes, sir!" said Tom in a subdued voice.

The Shell fled out; and Tom waited at his Form-master's desk. He could not quite understand the look on Mr. Linton's face.

"You will go to your Housemaster's study, Merry!" said the master of the Shell.

"I know, sir!"

"Whether Mr. Railton adheres to his intention to take you before your headmaster, I do not yet know!" said Mr. Linton. "But if he does, Merry, I shall be present; and I do not think that you have much to fear—although," he added, with a touch of dry sarcasm, "you do not seem to expect your Form-master to see justice done."

Tom crimsoned.

"I'm sorry, sir! I—I never meant to cheek you—at least, I—I mean—" he stammered.

"Go to your Housemaster now, Merry."

"Yes, sir!" said Tom.

He left the Form-room with his brain rather in a whirl. Manners and Lowther were waiting in the passage.

"What—" they asked together.

"Blessed if I can make it out—unless Linton knows!" said Tom. "I believe he's going to stand by me, after all! I can't make it all out."

"Jolly decent of him if he does, after the way you cheeked him!" grunted Manners.

"Oh, don't rub it in! I've got to go to Railton now—"

"Don't cheek him, as you did Linton!" said Manners sarcastically.

"I shall cheek him fast enough if he asks for it!" retorted Tom Merry; and he walked away to the School House master's study, leaving his chums in a far from comfortable frame of mind.

D'ARCY DID IT!

MR. RAILTON was standing by his study table when Tom came in. There was a thoughtful, puzzled expression on his face—his brows were knitted, as if over a problem. Railton had had a talk with James Silverson that morning—and it had left him puzzled, perplexed, perhaps suspicious. He started a little as Tom came in, and coughed.

"Oh! You, Merry!" he said. His manner was hesitating.

"Mr. Linton told me to come here, sir!" said Tom. "I'm ready to go to the Head! And," he



"Who threw that book?" roared Mr. Silverson. By way of answer three more books came whizzing through the air and landed on the Form-master. He staggered back, gasping with rage.

added savagely, "I'm ready to tell the Head the truth, whether he believes it or not!"

Mr. Railton coughed again.

"I have decided not to take you to your headmaster, Merry!" he said slowly.

Tom looked at him.

It was good news so far as it went. But Tom did not need telling that the Housemaster had not changed his mind without reason. If there was a change in the programme, it could only mean that James Silverson jibbed at carrying on with his latest scheme. The junior's lip curled bitterly.

"I'm not going to the Head?" he asked.

"No!"

"Does that mean that Mr. Silverson has changed his mind?" asked Tom bitterly. "Is he afraid that something might come out?"

"Merry!"

"The Head might be able to see through that scoundrel, though you cannot, sir!" said Tom coolly.

"Merry! How dare you use such expressions in reference to a master in this school—a master of Dr. Holmes' staff!" exclaimed the Housemaster.

"I dare to call him what he is!" said Tom. "I've said too little—now I'm making up for it! All St. Jim's is going to know what that man is—whether I can prove it or not! He doesn't trouble much about proof himself—why should I? All through this term—"

"That will do, Merry!" Railton's face was troubled as well as thoughtful. "It is at Mr.

Silverson's request that I have decided to drop this matter."

"I know that!" said Tom coolly.

"What! How could you know it, Merry! What do you mean?"

"I'll tell you what I mean, sir! If that man has backed out, it's because he's afraid to carry on! That's what I mean."

Mr. Railton looked at him fixedly. It was possible that some such doubt had risen in his own mind. He was sorely troubled.

"I suppose he gave a reason, sir!" said Tom. "As I'm accused, and as I was going up for the sack, may I know what the reason was?"

"I intended to tell you, Merry! Mr. Silverson informed me that, having reflected on the matter very carefully, he desired no punishment to be administered for the outrage in his study from concern for a very estimable lady—Miss Fawcett, your guardian, who is also his relative."

Tom gave a scornful laugh.

"So that was the lie, was it?" he said.

"Merry!"

"A lot he cares for Miss Fawcett!" said Tom. "Every week she gets a letter from him, worrying and upsetting her. I can't tell her what a plotting scoundrel he is, because she believes in him, and trusts him, and it would only worry her more—he's got me there! But—"

"I cannot listen to this!" said Mr. Railton.

But the fact that he had listened to a single word of it was proof enough that doubt and suspicion had risen in his own mind!

"Very well, sir!" said Tom. "But I've nothing to thank that man for, for letting me off! He would carry on if he dared."

"Leave my study, Merry!"

Tom Merry left the study. From the fact that he left it without having received the whopping of his life he knew that Raitlon doubted James Silverson—and doubted him deeply. Nothing but such a doubt, amounting almost to a certainty, could account for the Housemaster's patience.

Manners and Lowther joined Tom at once, and they went out into the quad. They were surprised to see him come out alone; they had expected to see Raitlon taking him to the Head.

"What——" asked Manners.

"How——" asked Lowther.

Tom Merry laughed.

"It's all washed out!" he said.

"Washed out!" exclaimed Manners and Lowther together.

"Just that! Dear old James has asked for me to be let off because he's so concerned about Miss Priscilla!" said Tom, with bitter sarcasm. "Nice of him, isn't it?"

"Did Raitlon tell you that?"

"Yes; and I told him it was a lie of Silverson's."

"Tom!"

"And he never loked me!" said Tom. "He knows the rat was lying—Linton knows somehow, and Raitlon knows! That cur has overdone it—he's as big a fool as rascal—but I suppose all rascals are fools, really. Any kid could tell them that honesty is the best policy, but they fancy they know better!"

"Then—it's all over!" said Manners blankly.

"Over and done with—and all I want to know now is: what frightened Silverson off?" said Tom. "I'm rather curious about that! He had it all cut and dried—and now he suddenly cries off. Something must have scared him at the last minute—I wonder what?"

"Blessed, if I make it out!" said Monty Lowther. "If it was a rotten plot, and he did the whole thing himself, as you thought, I don't see why he should chuck it at the last minute like this!"

Four Fourth Form fellows came up, with grinning faces. Blake & Co., if nobody else in the School House, had expected that storm to blow over.

"All serene?" asked Blake.

"Right as rain!" answered Tom. "All washed out—that cur got frightened, goodness knows how or why!"

"Gussy, thy name is goodness!" said Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Herries and Dig.

"Weally, Blake——"

"You fellows don't know anything about it, surely?" exclaimed Tom, staring at Study No. 6.

"Don't we!" grinned Blake.

"Sort of!" chuckled Herries.

"Just a few!" beamed Dig.

"Yaas, wathah!" chortled Arthur Augustus. "We know a fwrightful lot about it, deah boy—the whole bag of twicks!"

"But how——"

Jack Blake pointed to Arthur Augustus.

"Know that chap?" he asked.

Tom blinked at him.

"What do you mean, ass?" he asked.

"Only what I say!" answered Blake. "Do you

know that chap? Looking at him, you might take him for a common or garden tailor's dummy——"

"Weally, you ass——"

"But you don't know him," continued Blake. "Is he merely a tailor's dummy? No. Is he merely a schoolboy with a shining, morning face, as Shakespeare so happily expresses it? No. What else is he? Guess!"

"Potty?" asked Tom.

"Let me introduce you," said Blake. "Gussy Adolphus Algernon D'Arcy, the greatest detective of modern times."

"Wha-a-a-t!"

"Sherlock Holmes was a fool to him," said Blake. "Ferrers Locke an infant in comparison. This is D'Arcy, the detective; Gussy, the sleuth; Adolphus, the investigator—the man who has got Scotland Yard beaten at its own game. Next time there's a trunk mystery, I expect them to send for Gussy. Next time they lose the plans at the War Office or the blue prints at the Admiralty, there will be an urgent telegram for Gussy. If they lose their heads at the Ministry of Misinformation, Gussy will be called in."

"You uttah ass!"

"What are you burbling about, you ass?" howled Tom Merry.

Blake chuckled.

"Had your Christmas tips yet?" he asked. "I don't know what this detective's fees are, but——"

"I weward you as a howlin' ass, Blake. If you will leave off wottin', I will explain to Tom Mewwy."

"Go it!" said Blake. "The famous detective always explains in the last chapter. You can look on this as the last chapter, Tommy. The celebrated criminologist is about to explain how he did it."

"Wats! Pway shut up, and let a fellow speak!"

"Carry on. This is where we all say 'wonderful!' " said Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus, getting a chance to speak at last, explained, the Terrible Three listening in great amazement.

"Well, my hat!" said Tom, with a deep breath. "So that was it. Gussy, old man, Linton got it from you, and he must have warned that rotter off."

"Yaas, wathah!" grinned Arthur Augustus.

"D'Arcy did it," said Blake. "D'Arcy, the detective; Gussy, the giddy bloodhound. Later on Gussy is going to have rooms in Baker Street, and we three are going to be his boy assistants."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gussy, old man, you've pulled me through," said Tom Merry. "Blessed if I thought of anything of the kind!"

"It wathah wequiahs bwains you know," said Arthur Augustus modestly. "That's where it's wathah useful to have a pal who is a fellow of tact and judgment, you know."

"What-ho!" said Tom Merry, laughing.

"But, by gum, how will Silverson hold his head up, after this?" said Monty Lowther. "It will be a jolly long time before he hears the end of this."

"He won't hear the end of it, so long as he has the neck to stick at St. Jim's," said Tom Merry grimly.

OPEN WARFARE!

JAMES SILVERSON sat in his study after class the next day, with a brow as black as the black-out.

He lighted a cigarette, but threw it away, half-smoked, with a savage gesture.

Then, rising from his chair, he moved about the study restlessly, his brows knitted, his eyes glinting under them.

The study was in a normal state once more, though there had been a lot of work required to clear it up after the rag.

That rag had been a sheer waste of effort on the part of the schemer of St. Jim's.

James had planned it carefully enough. What he had done in the night had been unseen, unsuspected. No one had seen him, or heard him, come down to his study in the small hours; no one had seen him, or heard him, steal on tiptoe to the Shell dormitory, and slip the study key into the pocket of the jacket beside Tom Merry's bed. It had seemed to James a winner. Who was going to suspect that a man had ragged his own quarters, damaged his own property? Even Tom's angry outburst, his fierce accusation, though it had come rather unexpectedly, had not worried him much. He had felt sure that he had Tom fixed this time. All had gone as he had planned without a hitch—right up to the finish—and then—

His only doubt had been of Mr. Linton, who knew something of his trickeries. But how, after all, had Linton guessed about that soot in his room?

James had been very careful. So far as he knew, he had spilt no soot about, great as was the quantity he had handled. But, after his interview with Linton, he had examined his room with a searching eye, and detected the few tiny flakes that had been spotted by the Fourth Form detective. Had he permitted that examination by Mr. Linton, he would have been spotted, yet his refusal to allow the master of the Shell to enter the room and examine it, came to much the same thing.

He had done the best he could in the circumstances. It was defeat, and he had done his best to make it short of disaster.

His explanation to Mr. Railton was more or less plausible. Anyhow, he had to get out of it, because he dared not carry on. The master of the Shell was prepared to speak out to the Head if James carried on; and he dared not face it.

For Mr. Linton's contempt he cared nothing, but he feared the quiet, calm dry-mannered master of the Shell. Linton was standing by Tom Merry now all along the line. That was the final result of James' scheming.

And that was not all.

Since that episode Mr. Railton had carefully avoided him, so far as he could. Other masters in Common-room showed a disinclination for his company. Even Mr. Selby, with whom he had a good deal in common, answered him in monosyllables, if he spoke, and got away from him as soon as he could.

A couple of days of that kind of thing made James realise very clearly what his position was now like.

He paced about his study with a scowling brow, thinking it over. His feelings towards Tom Merry had never been so bitter.

But he had a feeling that his teeth had been drawn.

What was the use of further scheming? What

was the use of planning to throw suspicion of any kind on the schoolboy he persisted in regarding as his rival for a fortune? He had overdone his work at St. Jim's. A measure of success had been his at first, but the outcome was that he had failed, and failed dismally.

It was said of old that great is truth, and it will prevail. James could not help realising that it was true. He was powerless to do Tom further harm—truth had prevailed.

No accusation that he could bring would weigh now. He knew that it would not be listened to. Even if something happened, in which his hand was not seen, it was likely to be laid down to his account. Linton knew him as he was; Railton doubted him; the other masters regarded him with dubious eyes. Only the headmaster as yet knew nothing of it, and at his next move against Tom Merry the headmaster would hear. Linton would take care of that.

James gritted his teeth.

He had failed. He had jumped at the chance of getting to St. Jim's as a temporary master to carry out his plotting, and after weeks of it he had failed—the ultimate result being that he was cold-shouldered by all his colleagues, openly defied by Tom Merry—an object of scorn to a crowd of fellows, even in his own Form.

Everybody had heard of Tom Merry's accusation; and since Silverson had allowed the matter to drop, it found plenty of believers.

Blacker and blacker grew the brow of the wretched schemer, whose schemes had come tumbling down about his ears like a house of cards.

He opened his study door at last. He had been an hour in that study—Common-room was not attractive in the circumstances. But he was going to show up in Common-room. He did not want to acknowledge that he was avoiding the public eye.

But he hesitated in the doorway. If Linton was in Common-room he would get up and walk out, in the most pointed manner, if James entered. He had done so several times. If Railton was there he would affect not to see Mr. Silverson in a rather obvious manner. It was very awkward and uncomfortable for James—a very unpleasant ordeal.

As he stood there a junior came along the passage. It was Tom Merry going to his Form-master's study with a Latin exercise in his hand.

James Silverson's eyes fixed on him with a deadly look.

This schoolboy was the cause of the disastrous discomfiture—not his own rascality—in James' estimation. As Tom came up the passage with a cheery face, James felt as if he could not keep his hands from smacking that cheery face, right and left.

Tom, glancing at him, saw him standing in the study doorway. His lip curled as he looked at him.

That look of open contempt was too much for James, already in a state of rage and anger. He made a step out of the study doorway.

"You impudent young rascal!" he said, between his teeth.

"You cur!" retorted Tom.

"Wha-a-t?" James fairly stammered. "What?"

He had not expected that—or anything like it. He was a master at St. Jim's, whatever else he was! Tom had never found it easy to treat him with the respect due to a master—and more than once he had been in trouble with Mr.

Linton for that reason. James had not expected open warfare.

But that was what he was getting! Tom Merry had made up his mind on that point—since the episode of the rag in the Fourth Form master's study. Then he had openly accused the Fourth Form master of plotting against him—and James had let the matter drop! From that time Tom had, so to speak, taken the button off the foil! If James did not like it, he could carry the matter before the headmaster—Tom was ready to face him in Dr. Holmes' presence, if he liked.

"You—you—you—you dare—" spluttered James.

"Why not?" asked Tom coolly. "You're found out now, Mr. Silverson! I wonder you have the face to stay in the school!"

"Wha-a-t?" James stammered again.

"You must have a neck to stick on here!" said Tom. "I've told every chap I know in both Houses what a plotting rat you are! Every man at St. Jim's has heard it! You've as good as admitted it by backing out from taking me to the Head! Take me to him now—if you dare!"

James stood panting.

This was the limit!

"You've had it your own way for a good time now!" went on Tom, in the same cool tone. "You are a master here, and a fellow can't say anything against a master! You had me there! But that's all over now—you've given yourself away by backing out. I told Mr. Railton that what you said to him was a lie. Do you think he'd have let me say anything of the kind if he hadn't thought so, too?"

"Oh!" panted James.

"The fellows here know you now!" said Tom. "The masters know you! If you've the cheek to stick on here, keep clear of me—you'll get plain English if you have the impudence to speak to me! Keep to yourself, you cur!"

James gave him one look—and then fairly leaped at him. Tom Merry jumped back. His Latin paper went to the floor, and he clenched his fists.

"Hands off, you cur!" he said. "Or—"

James' grasp was on him the next moment. And Tom Merry, with flashing eyes, hit out, crashing his fist on the Form-master's chin—and James Silverson went headlong back and crashed in the passage.

JAMES HAS TO TAKE IT!

CRASH!

James Silverson landed on his back with a concussion that rang along the passage. He gave a gasping yell as he crashed.

Mr. Linton's door flew open.

"What," exclaimed the master of the Shell as he looked out in amazement at that uproar in those sacred quarters—"what—"

He broke off, staring at the sprawling James.

Mr. Railton's door opened the next moment and the Housemaster hurried out. He stared at Mr. Silverson.

James staggered up. He stood unsteadily, panting with rage. Tom Merry picked up his Latin paper. His face was cool, though his heart was beating.

"Merry, what has happened here?" exclaimed the Housemaster.

"Mr. Silverson laid hands on me, sir!" answered Tom. "I knocked him down!"

"You—you knocked him down!" gasped the Housemaster.

"Yes, sir!"

"Upon my word!"

"You hear him?" James' voice came, suffocated with fury. "You hear him, sir? You hear this boy admit that he has struck a master?"

"Merry—" breathed Mr. Linton.

"I had no choice, sir," said Tom steadily. "I could not let that scoundrel handle me!"

"You hear him?" gurgled James. "You hear him—you hear the name he applies to a master in this school? You hear?"

"I will apply that name to you in the headmaster's presence, if you choose to take me to him!" said Tom Merry fearlessly. "You laid hands on me, Mr. Silverson, and I knocked you down—and I would do the same again! Take me to Dr. Holmes, and let him judge."

"You hear this boy?" panted Silverson.

Mr. Railton stood silent. Such a happening was utterly unheard-of at St. Jim's; such an act on the part of any boy, junior or senior, meant immediate expulsion—in ordinary circumstances. But the peculiar circumstances made a very great difference.

Mr. Linton's face set grimly.

"Perhaps Mr. Silverson will explain why he laid hands on this boy of my Form?" he said dryly.

"He was insolent, sir!" roared James.

"In that case, you should have reported him to me. You are not permitted to deal with boys in my Form, Mr. Silverson."

"And what is the use, sir, of reporting him to you?" howled James. "You have heard what he has just said—"

"Unfortunately," said Mr. Linton, "what he has said happens to be true. I advise you, Mr. Silverson, during the few days that you still have to remain at this school, to keep your distance from that boy of my Form. If you are not satisfied, take the step the boy suggests—take him immediately to his headmaster and report this occurrence to Dr. Holmes."

"I—I—" stuttered James.

"I will accompany you!" said Mr. Linton in his dry, sarcastic manner. "I will come with you now, sir! If you desire—"

"Certainly," said Mr. Railton, "this is a matter for the headmaster to deal with—take the boy to Dr. Holmes, sir."

James stood panting.

He dared not take Tom Merry to Dr. Holmes. He dared not let the headmaster hear what Mr. Linton undoubtedly would explain fully, if the captain of the Shell came up for judgment.

It was to this that his cunning, his scheming, his plotting had brought him. His teeth had been drawn with a vengeance.

"You—you stand by this boy, after what you know he has done?" he stuttered at last.

"I do!" said the master of the Shell. "Merry, I am assured, would not have provoked this disgraceful scene. Keep your distance from the boy, Mr. Silverson—if you are so brazen as to remain here at all! Merry, you may go into my study."

"Yes, sir!" said Tom.

James made a movement as Tom passed him to go to his Form-master's study. He could barely keep his hands off the junior.

Tom's eyes gleamed. But James controlled his fury, and the captain of the Shell passed him. Mr. Linton followed him into the study and shut the door.

James, in the passage, looked at the Housemaster. Mr. Railton gave him a cold glance in response.

"If you care for advice from me, Mr. Silverson," he said quietly, "I should recommend you to cut short your stay in this school. The term has only a week to run. Your engagement here expires with break-up, and I should certainly advise you—"

"My post here, sir, was assigned me by Dr. Holmes, not by you, and I shall please myself about that!" snarled James.

And he went back into his study and slammed the door.

Mr. Railton shrugged his shoulders and returned to his study.

James Silverson paced to and fro in his room—occasionally rubbing his chin where Tom Merry's knuckles had landed. If he had been enraged before, he was doubly enraged now—but he was powerless. He realised, too, more clearly than before, the estimation in which he was now held by the other members of the staff. What was the Housemaster to think of his refusal to carry the matter before the headmaster, after the junior had knocked him down? It was a confession that he dared not! But he dared not—and that was that!

Indeed, as the wretched schemer moved restlessly about his study, he wondered whether he had not better take the Housemaster's advice.

What was the use of remaining longer in an atmosphere of suspicion, and doubt, and contempt? Linton, if he chose, could get him kicked out—he was only allowing the matter to rest because his remaining time at the school was so short! Why not cut it shorter and go?

But he shook his head and gritted his teeth. There might yet be some chance—some last chance of scoring over his schoolboy enemy in the few days that he still had. If there was the remotest chance he was not going to lose it. He was not going to leave St. Jim's with his work undone, if he could help it!

The chime of six interrupted his bitter reflections. It reminded him of a member of his own Form. D'Arcy of the Fourth had lines—lines had fallen thick in the Fourth Form Room that day—and he had been ordered to show them up at six! He had not come!

Any victim was welcome to James in his present mood. And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy specially annoyed him in many ways—any pal of Tom Merry's was sure of James' hostility. He was not going to give the junior a minute's grace—D'Arcy had not shown up his lines on time, and that was excuse enough!

James picked up a cane, put it under his arm, and left the study—to go up to Study No. 6 in the Fourth to inquire about those lines! It was a comfort to him in his present mood to make a pal of Tom Merry's pay scot-and-lot for the punch Tom Merry had handed out—there was going to be a record whopping in Study No. 6 when James arrived there!

A SHINDY IN STUDY No. 6!

"THE wat—"
"Yes, but—"
"The wottah!"

"Rat and rotter and all that, he wants his lines

all the same, Gussy!" said Jack Blake. "Better take them in!"

"Beak, you know!" said Dig.

"Yaas, but—"

"We shan't have much more of the brute!" said Herries. "We break up next week, old bean! Lathom will be back next term—we shall be done with Silverson. Don't give him an excuse to whop you—you know how he lays it on."

"Yaas, but—"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had been alone in Study No. 6 when his three chums came in to remind him of those lines for Silverson. Silverson might be a rat, and a rotter, and a long list of equally disagreeable things—he might have become an object of contempt to almost every fellow at St. Jim's—masters might cut him, prefects shrug their shoulders when he passed by—but the fact remained that he was master of the Fourth, with the power of the cane, and much given to its use.

"For goodness' sake," said Blake, "don't give the rat a chance at you, Gussy! He loathes this study."

"The lines were given me for nothin', Blake." "I know that, ass! A dozen fellows got lines for nothing to-day! But they've got to be done!"

"Yaas, but—"

"Well, what, fathead?"

"I should take the lines in to Silvahson, deah boy, but—"

"But what, image?"

"But I have not w'ritten them!" explained Arthur Augustus. "Not havin' w'ritten them yet, I am quite unable to take them in."

"Oh, my hat! You've been up here an hour, and you came up to write your lines!" hooted Blake. "Why haven't you?"

"The fact is, I had a lettah fwom Cousin Ethel, and I ansvared it!" explained Arthur Augustus. "I could hardly leave Cousin Ethel's lettah unanswered, on account of a wat like Silvahson."

"Cousin Ethel wouldn't have whopped you—and Silverson will!" said Blake. "You'll get six of the very best, Gussy!"

"I am not at all suah, Blake, that I shall allow Silvahson to give me six!" said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "I do not wegard him as a Form-mastah, but as a plottin' wat! I am not at all suah that it is consistent with a fellow's wopwah wegard for his dig to let a plottin' wat whop him!"

"Oh dear!" groaned Blake. "Now the old chump's getting on the high horse—"

"The man is a wat!" said Gussy. "I always knew that he was a wat, but I nevah undahstood befoah what a feahful wat he was—till I bowled him out yesterday. What would have happened to poor old Tom Mewwy, if I hadn't spotted that soot in Silvahson's woom, and put Linton wise?"

"Better not tell him all that!" grinned Blake. "He would take the skin off you, if he knew, Gustavus."

"Oh, look out!" gasped Herries. "Cave!"

But the warning of "cave" came too late! James Silverson stepped into Study No. 6.

The juniors had not heard him coming. Fellows never heard the Worm coming. He had a stealthy tread.

Blake & Co. looked at him in utter dismay. The expression on his face told them that he had heard what had been said in the study. His face was almost white with rage.

Perhaps James had wondered, once or twice, how Mr. Linton had spotted that clue in his room. If so, he knew now! The activities of D'Arcy the detective were now known to him. And the cold rage in his face was rather unnerving to see.

"D'Arcy!" He gasped, rather than spoke, as he gripped his cane. "Bend over that chair!"

Arthur Augustus jammed his celebrated eyeglass a little more securely in his noble eye, and regarded him calmly.

"Are you goin' to cane me for what I was just sayin', sir?" he asked. "You had no wight to listen to what I was sayin'. A fellow has a wight to speak fweely in his own studay. I wegard you with contempt, sir!"

"What?" roared James.

"With uttah contempt!" said Arthur Augustus, his noble eye gleaming. "Words, indeed, cannot express fully the contempt I feel for an eavesdwoppah!"

"Gussy!" gasped Blake.

"Shut up!" breathed Dig.

"I wefuse to shut up, Dig! If Mr. Silvahson chooses to play the eavesdwoppah at a fellow's study door, he must expect to be told what a fellow thinks of him. I wegard him with contempt! I shall tell him so quite plainly. Mr. Silvahson, I wegard you with contempt!"

"Oh scissors!" murmured Herries.

James did not tell Arthur Augustus to bend over again. He grabbed him by the shoulder, bent him over the table by sheer force, and laid on the cane, with all the strength of his arm.

Swipe, swipe, swipe!

"Oh ewikey!" gasped Arthur Augustus, struggling wildly. "Oh cwumbs! You wottah—oh scissahs!"

Swipe, swipe!

"Yawwooooh!"

"Look here, sir—" gasped Blake.

James gave him a glare.

"I shall cane this whole study!" he said.

"Each of you will be caned in turn. Wait!"

Swipe, swipe!

"Ow, wow! Yawwoogh! Wescue, deah boys!" roared Arthur Augustus, struggling and squirming under the savage swipes of the cane.

Swipe!

"Yoo-hoop!"

That cut came down with savage force. It was too much for Gussy's charms! Beak or not, they were going to stop him.

Up went the cane for another swipe. Blake rushed in and grabbed it, and wrenched it from Silvahson's hand.

"Stop it, you brute!" he shouted.

"What!" roared Mr. Silvahson. He made a jump at Blake to grab back the cane. Herries put out a prompt foot, and the master of the Fourth stumbled over it, and rolled on the study carpet.

"Ow, wow, wow!" wailed Arthur Augustus, staggering away from the table. "Ow! Oh ewikey! Wow! The wotten wat—ow! The feahful cad! Ow! The wascally, wotten wuffian—wow, wow!"

James Silvahson scrambled to his feet with a face of fury! This was mutiny—in his own Form!

Mutiny it was—with a vengeance! Study No. 6 had had enough of James and his cane. The man was a rascal—all the school knew him now for what he was! It was only the custom

of obedience that had made the St. Jim's Fourth tolerate the tyrant of the Form. Now, all of a sudden, custom broke down—the limit had been reached, and James had gone too far! With one accord, the four juniors ran at him and collared him.

"Chuck him out of the study!" roared Blake.

"Yaas, watah!" panted Arthur Augustus.

"Kick the brute out!" shouted Herries.

"Boot him!" yelled Dig.

James, hardly knowing what was happening to him, struggled frantically, and dealt blows on all sides. But the four juniors were too many for him. They swung him to the door and pitched him headlong out of the study.

There was a yell from fellows in the Fourth Form passage as Mr. Silvahson came out of Study No. 6—on his neck!

He bumped in the passage, spluttering.

"Oh gad!" yelled Cardew. "That's Silvahson!"

"They've chucked him out!" gasped Levison.

"Oh jiminy!" squealed Baggy Trimble. "I say, you know, they've chucked Silvahson out—they've chucked the Worm out on his neck! Oh jiminy!"

James leaped up. Breathing fury, he rushed back into the study—for his cane and vengeance!

"Back up!" roared Blake.

Study No. 6 backed up as one man! They collared James and hurled him forth again! For the second time, Mr. Silvahson sprawled headlong in the passage.

"Oh jiminy! Here he comes again!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pile in, you fellows!" shouted Cardew. "Roll him home!"

Blake & Co. came out of the study. Perhaps on the principle that a fellow might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb, they were going to give James all he had asked for—and a little over! James, as he struggled up again, was seized, and bundled headlong along the passage. Cardew rushed in to lend a hand—two or three other fellows followed his example—excitement and wild uproar reigned in the quarters of the Fourth.

James Silvahson, struggling, yelling, spluttering, hardly knowing whether he was on his head or his heels, went bundling down the passage to the landing. He went bundling headlong across the landing to the staircase. Wild and frantic howls came from James as he bundled.

"Go it!" roared Blake.

"Kick him out!"

"Roll him home!"

"Down with the Worm!"

"Hurrah!"

On the landing there were more than a dozen excited fellows round Silvahson. Mutiny was catching and every fellow was glad of a chance at Silvahson! He could not have counted the hands that grabbed him, or the boots that shoved him. Headlong, he bundled across the landing to the stairs and went rolling down!

Bump! Bump! Bump!

"Wriggle away, Worm!"

"Go home, Silvahson!"

Bump! Bump!

"Good widdance to bad wubbish!"

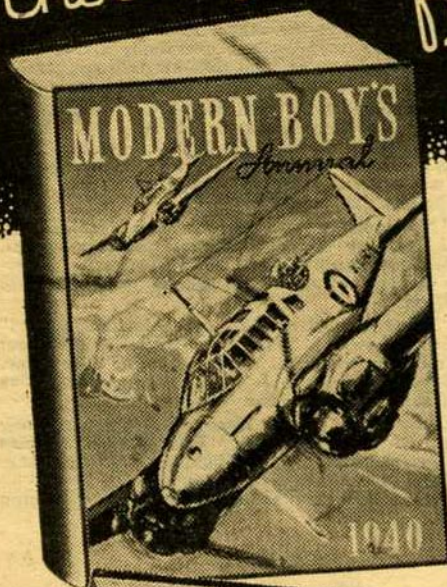
"Hear, hear!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

James rolled down six or seven stairs before he got to his feet again. And when he got on them

(Continued on page 18.)

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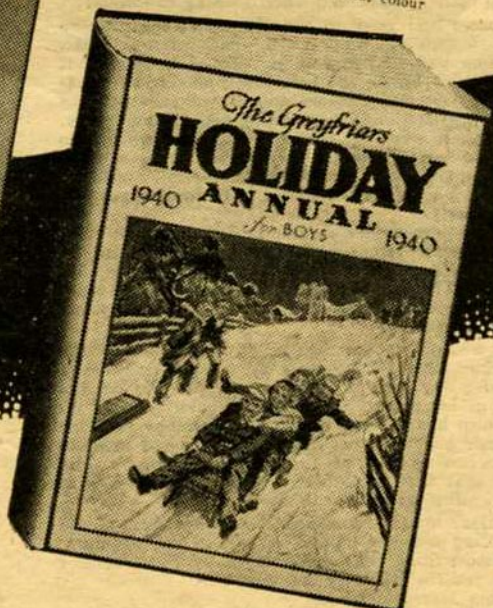
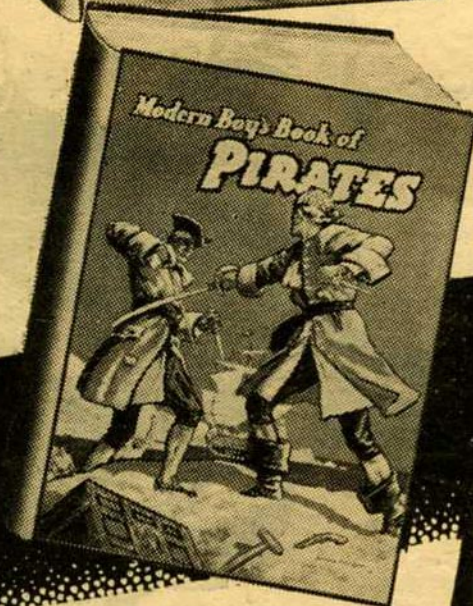
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they did not lead him upward! He scuttled, panting, down the staircase, followed by a roar of derision from the Fourth Formers on the landing.

JAPING JAMES!

TOM MERRY smiled. Monty Lowther winked. Manners chuckled.

After third school the following day, the Terrible Three were in the quad when Mr. Silverson came along. The look that Silverson gave Tom, if looks could have slain, might have terminated his youthful career on the spot.

Looks, however, couldn't; and that deadly glare only elicited a smile from Tom, a wink from Lowther, and a chuckle from Manners.

James walked on slowly. How he had the face to walk in the quad—or indeed to remain at the school at all—was a puzzle to Tom Merry & Co., and to many other fellows.

True, he could stay till the end of the term, so long as the headmaster did not order him out; and as yet, Dr. Holmes was unaware of what everybody else at St. Jim's knew.

But his stay could not have been pleasant.

He was known in his true colours. Mr. Linton treated him with open contempt. Mr. Railton ignored him. No other member of the staff spoke to him. Even James' nerve was not equal to facing Common-room now, and he avoided that apartment.

Even in his own Form-room his tyranny was at an end. He could no longer take it out of the Fourth when other victims failed.

What had happened in Study No. 6 put the stopper on that.

Blake & Co. had wondered, rather uneasily, what was going to follow that outbreak. They were rather astonished when nothing followed!

James had gone to the Housemaster. But he had found no support in that quarter. Mr. Railton had told him curtly that if he could not handle his Form, the best thing he could do was to go. Obviously, he wanted Silverson to go, and was surprised and disgusted by his continued stay. Indeed, it was only the fact that the term was so near its end that prevented Mr. Railton from putting the whole matter before the headmaster—in which case, James would have had to go, and go quickly.

That morning the Fourth had had an unusually easy time. James had not even picked up the cane! He did not want another shindy like that in Study No. 6. It had been hard for him to keep his temper in check—but he had managed somehow to do it.

It was no wonder that he gave Tom Merry the blackest of black looks as he passed him in the quad. James was feeling that he was at the end of his tether. His rascality had recoiled on his own head—he could do his schoolboy rival no further harm—it was he himself who had to leave the school in disgrace instead of Tom Merry. The fact that that was exactly what he deserved was no comfort to James at all.

"Dear man!" remarked Monty Lowther, as the scowling schemer passed on. "Tommy, old man, I almost think that that relation of yours doesn't love you, to judge by his looks!"

Tom Merry laughed.

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"Not a whole lot!" he agreed. "He's done!" said Manners. "His game's up here! What a neck the man must have to hang on! Cut in Common-room—chucked out of a study by his own Form—and still he sticks on." "He's got a neck, and no mistake!" agreed Tom.

"Linton's put the other beaks wise, I fancy," said Lowther. "Anyhow, everybody knows what you accused him of, and that he dare not take it to the Head! That's plain enough for anybody!"

"We've got him," said Manners. "Got him on toast! Now that he's shown up, he's done! What is he sticking on for? He can't like it here! I'll tell you what—he's still thinking that there may be a chance of planting something on you, Tom—the last shot in the locker."

"Not much chance for him now!" said Tom. "If anything happened again, whatever it was, everybody would know it was a plant, with Silverson at the bottom of it—and he would have to get out."

"Hope springs eternal in the human breast!" grinned Lowther. "Bet you that's what he's got in mind, or even that rat would quit! Our game, my beloved 'easers, is to make him quit! I've got something here for the dear man."

Leaving his chums, Monty Lowther ran along the path after Silverson. With perfect coolness he bumped into his back, sending him staggering.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Tom. James Silverson spun round, with a flaming face.



As Dr. Holmes came to a halt, Mr. Silverson shot along the sliid the Head's legs, and sent the venerable

"Oh! Sorry!" said Lowther.
 "You young rascal, you rushed into me on purpose!" roared James.
 "I mean, I'm sorry to have touched you—you're not nice to touch!" explained Lowther.
 And he cut back to his friends before James' outstretched hand could reach him.
 James made a stride towards the Terrible Three. They lined up, ready for him. It was so plain that they were ready to handle him if he asked for it that James gave up the idea. With deep feelings, he turned again and walked on.

"See?" smiled Lowther.
 "Oh, my hat!"
 Monty's chums saw now why he had barged into Silverson's back. On the Fourth Form master's back a card had been hooked with a fish-hook! He was quite unconscious of it—he had no eyes in the back of his head and he did not suspect the real reason for that barge.

On the card was written in large capital letters:

"I'M A WORM!"

Happily unaware of it, Mr. Silverson continued his walk in the quad. Every fellow he passed burst into a howl of laughter as he saw his back.
 "Bai Jove, you fellows!" howled Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Look!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "We knew he was a worm!" chuckled Dig.
 "Now he's telling the world."
 "Yaas, wathah!" chortled Arthur Augustus.
 "Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Study No. 6.

James Silverson spun round on them. He was quite aware that that outburst of merriment was to his address, though he was not aware of the cause of it.

"You young rascals, how dare you!" panted Silverson. "I shall cane you—"
 "You won't!" said Jack Blake coolly.
 "Wathah not!" said Arthur Augustus. "Pway wetime frowm 'this spot, my deah fellows—I do not like to be seen speakin' to that wat!"

Study No. 6 turned their backs on Mr. Silverson and walked away—still laughing!

James gazed after them. This was what it had come to now!

James was not going to enjoy his last week at St. Jim's. Fellows in his own Form laughed in his face and turned their backs on him in the quad under a hundred pairs of eyes! And he could do nothing. He had no support to expect from the Housemaster—and to the Head he dared not go.

As he stood, there was another roar of laughter behind him. He spun round again to see Figgins & Co. of the New House yelling.
 Spluttering with rage, James made a rush at them. They scattered promptly, still yelling with laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Who's a worm?" chortled Fatty Wynn.
 "Silverson says he is!" chuckled Kerr.
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 James, almost foaming, walked back to the House. He had had enough of this. Howls of laughter followed him as he went. All eyes were on the card hooked on his back.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Who's a worm?"
 Mr. Railton stepped out of the House as James arrived at the door. He was frowning as he glanced over a sea of laughing faces.

"What—" he began.
 James gave him a furious look.
 "Is this to be permitted?" he spluttered. "Is this to go on, Mr. Railton? Is this—"
 "But what—" Then as James turned to glare at the yelling crowd, he saw the card. "Oh! Upon my word! Mr. Silverson, what are you doing with that card on your back?"

"What?"
 "There is a card on your back."
 "Rubbish!"
 "That, I suppose, is the cause of this unseemly demonstration," said Mr. Railton, trying not to laugh himself. "Pray allow me to remove it."

He unhooked the card from the Fourth Form master's back. James gazed at it. Then he understood.

"Who—who—who did that?" he gasped. "I—I— Merry, of course! Merry—" "Merry!" called out Mr. Railton.

"Yes, sir!" answered Tom cheerfully.
 "Did you hook this card on Mr. Silverson's back?"

"No, sir!"
 "You lying young rascal!" roared James.
 "Lying rascal yourself!" retorted Tom Merry coolly. "Every fellow here knows who is a lying rascal!"

"Yaas, wathah!"
 "Silence!" exclaimed Mr. Railton hastily. "Let there be no more of this! Mr. Silverson—"

But Mr. Silverson had disappeared into the House. He left a crowd in the quad rocking with laughter.



not along the slide. The Fourth Form master crashed against the venerable schoolmaster tottering.

MUTINY!

"HE, he!"

Baggy Trimble emitted that podgy chortle in the Fourth Form Room. Plenty of fellows were grinning when James came in to take his Form that afternoon. Baggy chortled.

Mr. Silverson looked over his Form! His brow was black, his eyes glinted. He was aware that all the juniors were thinking of that ridiculous scene in quad, when he had paraded labelled as a "worm."

Not long ago, that black look on Silverson's face would have caused the St. Jim's Fourth to be very circumspect. It would have made them play up as a model Form! Every fellow would have been anxious to avoid catching that glinting eye!

But there was a change now—a change with a vengeance. Nobody cared for Silverson's black looks.

Even Baggy Trimble, who had trembled at his frown, chortled. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy adjusted his eyeglass in his eye and surveyed him with calm contempt. Figgins & Co. smiled at him. George Herries shuffled his feet under his desk. Only a few days ago that would have been excuse enough for Silverson to handle the cane. He would have been very glad to handle it now. But he did not pick it up.

It was useless to tell Herries to step out before the Form and bend over. Herries would simply have stared at him. Authority had broken like a reed in the hands of the man who had made himself an object of contempt to the whole school.

"Silence in the class!" said Mr. Silverson, in a choking voice.

Ralph Reckness Cardew yawned. He yawned fairly in Silverson's face. James' eyes glinted, but he said nothing. Often and often he had caned that reckless member of his Form. But he did not venture to cane him now. He was aware that Cardew was keen to start a row in the Form-room.

Breathing hard, James went to his desk. He lifted the lid—and gave a start as he saw a large sheet of paper lying inside the desk. On it was daubed, in large letters with a brush:

"WRIGGLE AWAY, WORM!"

James gazed at it. He grasped his cane, and gave the Fourth Form an almost homicidal look. Still he contrived to control his temper. He did not want a row. The tyrant of the Fourth was fallen from his high estate, and great was the fall thereof!

He crumpled the paper and tossed it into the wastepaper-basket. Then the lesson began.

Openly, fairly under Silverson's eyes, Baggy Trimble chewed toffee. That would have meant a whopping a few days ago. Now the hapless fallen tyrant affected not to see the toffee.

Bang! A desk-lid dropped with a crack like a rifle-shot. James gave a jump.

Bang, bang, bang, bang! came from different directions. It was a rag—the desk-lids going now like machine-gun fire! That sort of rag was often perpetrated in Monsieur Morny's French class. It had never been tried on Mr. Silverson before!

"Silence!"

Bang!

"Cardew, if you drop your desk-lid again——"

"Did you speak to me?" asked Cardew.

"You know I did!"

"Well, don't!"

"Wha-a-t?"

Cardew's desk-lid dropped with a terrific bang, and he smiled at James.

"He, he!" gurgled Baggy Trimble.

James turned on the fat Baggy. His temper was boiling—and Baggy was the easiest victim! He stepped towards Trimble, and administered a swipe of the pointer.

Baggy's fat chortle changed into a frantic yell!

"Ow! Oh, jiminy! Wow!"

Swipe, swipe, swipe! came the pointer, and Baggy yelled and roared and squirmed. James was finding solace in this, and he took it out of the hapless Baggy. He swiped and swiped!

Whiz! A schoolbook sailed through the air and caught James in the ear. He turned away from the yelling Baggy, foaming.

"Who threw that book?" he roared.

Whiz, whiz, whiz! By way of answer, three more books flew through the air, and landed on the Form-master. James staggered.

His temper boiled over. He gripped the pointer, and rushed at Cardew, from whose hand one of the missiles had come.

"Oh, gad! Rescue!" yelled Cardew, as the pointer showered swipes on him.

Levison and Clive jumped up together and grasped Silverson. Jack Blake snatched away the pointer and pitched it across the Form-room.

"Collar him!" roared Figgins.

"Yaas, watah! Wag the wotah!"

"Scrag him!"

"Yow-ow-ow-ow!" bellowed Baggy Trimble.

"Yow-ow-ow-ow!"

James tore himself loose and jumped away from the Form, panting. The whole Form swarmed out after him. Blake & Co., and Figgins & Co. reached him together. James struggled frantically in the grasp of many hands.

"Wag him!" shouted Arthur Augustus.

"Bump him!" roared Figgins.

"Oh, my-hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Release me!" shrieked James. "You young rascals—ruffians—Ow!"

Bump!

James smote the floor hard!

Bumping a Form-master had never happened in the history of St. Jim's. But it happened now! James, struggling, yelling, foaming, was bumped on his own Form-room floor, good and hard.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Give him another!"

"Bump the wotten wat!"

"Go it!"

Bump, bump, bump!

It seemed like a nightmare to James! The whole Form swarmed round him, eager to get a grasp on him. But there was not enough of James to go round!

"Let me get at him!" yelled Baggy Trimble.

"Let a fellow get at him! I say, roll him over, and I'll give him some of his own pointer!"

"Oh, good egg!"

"Go it, old grampus!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Baggy Trimble, wriggling with anguish, was not going to lose this chance of giving James "some of the same." He grabbed up the pointer, and a crowd of fellows rolled James over and pinned him down, face on the floor.

Swipe, swipe, swipe!

Baggy wielded the pointer with a heavy hand. The swipes fairly rang and echoed on Silverson.

Wild roars came from James! The din in the Form-room was simply terrific by this time. The swipes of the pointer, and James' frantic roars, and yelling of laughter, rang far and wide.

The door opened suddenly.

Mr. Railton looked in with an astonished face. "What is going on here, Mr. Silverson?" he exclaimed. "What—" The Housemaster broke off as he saw what was going on.

Baggy Trimble dropped the pointer as if it had suddenly become red-hot, and bolted back to his place. Three or four other fellows bolted after him at sight of the Housemaster.

The rest released James Silverson, and stood looking at Mr. Railton rather in dismay. James sat up, spluttering.

"Mr. Silverson!" gasped the Housemaster.

"Oooogh!" spluttered James. "Grooogh!"

"Is this how you keep order in your Form-room, Mr. Silverson?"

"Urrrggh! Oooogh!"

"Boys, how dare you make this disturbance! Go to your places at once!" thundered the Housemaster.

The Fourth Form went back to their places. James staggered to his feet. He was wildly rumped and dishevelled. His mortar-board was gone, his gown a rag, his face crimson, and he gurgled for breath.

Mr. Railton's eyes fixed on him with unconcealed contempt.

"You had better leave this Form-room, Mr. Silverson," he said icily. "It is clear that you cannot keep order here."

"I—I— Grooogh! I—I— Ooogh!" spluttered James. "These young scoundrels— Ooogh! These young ruffians— Grooogh!"

"Leave this Form-room, sir!" rapped the Housemaster.

James gave him a look. But he was, in fact, anxious to leave the Form-room while the Housemaster's presence protected him. He had had enough of the Fourth in their present state. He tottered to the door.

"This Form," said Mr. Railton, "will be taken by a Sixth Form prefect for the present. You are relieved of your duties, Mr. Silverson. If you are not satisfied, you may refer the matter to the headmaster. Now leave this Form-room!" James tottered out.

Mr. Railton stood looking at the Fourth. Every fellow was in his place, looking as meek and mild as he could, under the Housemaster's eye. There was a long minute of silence.

Mr. Railton spoke at last.

"I shall place Darrell of the Sixth Form in charge of this Form-room," he said. "If a sound reaches my ears again, every boy in the Form will be flogged!"

He quitted the Form-room. A few minutes later Darrell of the Sixth was in charge. And not a sound reached Mr. Railton's ears again. Darrell had quite an easy task with the Fourth. They were as good as gold. When they were dismissed they went out with cheery faces.

"We're done with Silverson," said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!" chuckled Arthur Augustus.

There was no doubt about that. The Fourth had long since had enough of James; now James had had enough of them, and they were done with him.

THE END OF HIS TETHER!

DR. HOLMES, the headmaster of St. Jim's, smiled—a benevolent smile.

The headmaster came out of the gate of his private garden which opened on the quad. He walked slowly and carefully, for the ground was covered with snow, and he did not want to slip. He paused, and looked on at a merry scene.

Slides in the quadrangle were strictly forbidden. They were altogether too dangerous. Nevertheless, youth would be thoughtless at times, and fellows would forget that things were forbidden. Anyhow, there was a slide, and a crowd of juniors whizzed and spun along it, one after another.

Rules were rules, and discipline was discipline; but the Head was in a genial mood, and he smiled. It was, after all, a pleasant scene—a crowd of bright and cheery faces of fellows enjoying life with boyish exuberance.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther went spinning along the slide; after them whizzed Blake and Herries, Digby and D'Arcy; then came Figgins & Co.; then Levison, Clive, and Casdew, Talbot and Grundy, Wilkins and Gunn; after them a dozen more fellows.

"Oh cwikee!" came a sudden howl.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Man down!"

"Clumsy ass, Gussy!"

"Yawwooh! Gewwoff! Wow!"

Dr. Holmes smiled as he looked. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had side-slipped somehow. Now he was rolling in snow, and Blake, Herries, Digby, and Figgins rolled headlong over him.

It was quite a mix-up. From the bottom of the mix-up came Arthur Augustus' noble voice on its top note.

"Ow, gewwoff! Yawwooh! Take your elbow out of my wibs, you sillay ass! Gewwoff my neck, you wuffian! Wow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Dr. Holmes was quite near at hand, standing by the garden wall under frozen branches, but the juniors were too busy to observe him. He looked on at the scene with a benevolent smile; but that smile changed a little at the sight of a figure coming towards the spot.

It was Mr. Silverson, the temporary master of the Fourth Form.

For one reason and another, Dr. Holmes was not quite satisfied with that temporary master, and he was glad that the term of his engagement was approaching its end. He was far from pleased at the expression on Mr. Silverson's face. Form-masters at St. Jim's were not supposed to walk in the quadrangle, scowling like demons in a pantomime.

James did not see the Head; he did not even see the juniors till he was close at hand. He was walking with his hands driven deep into his pockets, his eyes on the ground, his brow black as midnight.

Yesterday the Fourth Form had been taken out of his hands. To-day, like Othello, he found his occupation gone.

He was still at the school; he could stay, if he liked, unoccupied. Mr. Railton was firm on that point. Mr. Silverson was referred to the Head if he was dissatisfied. James certainly was not keen on work; but his position had now become ridiculous, as well as disagreeable. He was debating in his mind whether to stick it out till break-up day, or go. His chief reason

now for staying was that everybody was anxious to see the last of him, and he did not want to gratify everybody by going. His hope of dealing another foul blow at his schoolboy rival was now down to zero.

He tramped moodily on, unaware of the disapproving majestic eye fixed on his frowning face from a little distance—unaware of the juniors on the slide till he was quite close at hand, and the voices and laughter made him look up.

Then the Head was quite startled by the look that came over James' face—the glare of bitter, savage animosity that he fixed on Tom Merry.

"Bless my soul!" murmured Dr. Holmes.

Tom was giving Arthur Augustus a hand up from the snow. There was a shout from Monty Lowther:

"Cave! Here comes the Worm!"

"Blow the Worm!" said Blake. "Who cares for the Worm?"

"Oh cwikey! I am feahfully wumped!"

"Get on with it!" said Tom Merry. "Never mind the Worm!"

James panted.

His temper was seldom held in check, even when he had much to lose by losing it. Now he had little to lose. His game was up at St. Jim's, in any case. With a blaze in his eyes he rushed straight at the captain of the Shell, his fists clenched.

"Look out, Tom!" yelled Lowther.

"Ware Worms!"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

Tom Merry jumped back, and put up his hands. James came at him with left and right.

In his bitter rage he forgot that he was a master, and his enemy a schoolboy. He forgot everything, except his savage desire for vengeance—to hammer that handsome, scornful face with his fists. In a moment more they were fighting furiously—master and boy—but, boy as he was, Tom Merry was manfully holding his own. The other fellows crowded round in breathless excitement. Dr. Holmes, a short distance away, looked on, thunderstruck.

"Collar him!" shouted Lowther.

"Wag him!" roared Arthur Augustus.

"Bag that Worm!" yelled Figgins.

Twice James' furious fists landed, and Tom panted under the blows. But twice his own fists came crashing in return, and James blinked. A moment or two, and the whole crowd of juniors would have collared James; but Dr. Holmes, recovering from his dizzy astonishment, strode forward, and dawned upon the view of the St. Jim's fellows.

"The Head!" gasped Figgins.

"Bai Jove! The Head!"

James did not hear or heed. Tom Merry had no time to heed. He was too busy defending himself against a furious attack.

He staggered under a fierce drive, leaped back, and landed on the slide. Another quick backward jump saved him from slipping. James, rushing after him, trod on the slide, which he did not even see.

He slid!

James hardly knew what was happening. It seemed to him that the solid globe was slipping away under his feet.

He shot along the slide, lost his balance, and sat down on it. But the momentum of his speed kept him going, and he shot onward in a sitting position, his arms flying wildly in the air.

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"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a roar of laughter as he went.

"Look out, sir!" yelled Blake, shouting a warning to the Head. Dr. Holmes, approaching the spot, had almost reached the end of the slide! James, shooting along it, had almost reached the Head!

Blake's warning came too late! Dr. Holmes came to a halt, but as he did so, James reached the end of the slide, whizzing, and shot off it, tumbling over in the snow. There was a crash as he landed against the Head's majestic legs and sent the venerable schoolmaster tottering. Dr. Holmes sat down—suddenly.

James sat up, and they looked at one another, gasping.

"Oh, my hat!" breathed Tom Merry. He dabbed his nose where James' knuckles had landed hard. All eyes were on the startling scene at the end of the slide.

"Ooooh!" gasped the Head.

"Wutrggh!" spluttered James.

Three or four fellows rushed to give the headmaster a hand up. Dr. Holmes tottered to his feet—with eager assistance.

He stood and fixed his eyes on James Silverson, still sitting in the snow, panting for breath. The look on the Head's face was petrifying.

"Mr. Silverson!" His voice came like a thunderclap. "I saw your action—I saw your attack upon a junior boy—I could scarcely believe my eyes, sir! You leave this school to-day! You hear me? I saw—"

James glared up at him. He was too enraged to measure his words as he snarled his answer.

"I don't care what you saw, you old fool!"

"Wha-a-t!" stuttered the Head.

If James' number had not already been up at St. Jim's, it would have been up then!

The Head's face became purple.

"Go!" he gasped. "Go! Leave this school immediately—I will have you turned from the gates if you are not gone within the hour."

"That will do, you doddering old dummy!" snarled James, as he scrambled to his feet.

"Bai Jove! He's checkin' the Head!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Wag the wottah for checkin' the Head!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Collar him!"

"Scrag him!"

"Give him beans!"

There was a rush of the whole mob of juniors at Silverson. Dr. Holmes stood as if petrified. The mob closed round James, and he was swept off his feet.

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"Woll him ovah!" yelled Arthur Augustus, waving his eyeglass in great excitement. "Woll the wottah in the snow!"

"Bump him!"

"Rag him!"

"Boys!" gasped the Head.

But for once the headmaster's voice was not heeded. James Silverson went rolling headlong in the snow, kicking and yelling. Over and over he went, gathering snow as he rolled, amid shouts and yells of laughter.

He tore loose at last, and bounded to his feet. Before he could be collared again, he started for the School House at a wild run.

"Aftah him!"

"After the Worm!"

"Collar him!"

The whole crowd went whooping on James' track, leaving the Head gasping for breath.

James ran as if for his life. Snowballs whizzed after him, crashing and smashing all over him as he fled. Panting and gasping, he fairly raced—chased as far as the doorway of the School House.

He darted into the House like a rabbit into a burrow, leaving the crowd behind him in a roar.

Tom Merry chuckled breathlessly.

"I fancy that's the finish for the Worm!" he said.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Nothing for him to do now but to wriggle away!" chuckled Monty Lowther. "By gum! He came here to dish you, Tommy—but whom has he dished?"

"Not me!" said Tom, laughing.

"It's the end of his tether!" said Manners.

It was!

An hour later a taxicab ground away through the snow, with Mr. Silverson and his luggage.

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A crowd of St. Jim's fellows saw him off—and his eyes fixed, for the last time, in a glare of rage on Tom Merry's face, smiling and scornful. A loud and prolonged hiss followed him as he went—and then St. Jim's had seen the last of James Silverson. And everyone at St. Jim's was glad to have seen the last of him!

NOT THE FINISH!

"JOLLY, isn't it?" said Monty Lowther, a few days later.

"Topping!" said Manners.

"I'm sure the Worm would be no end bucked if he knew how jolly he's made all of us by wriggling off the scene!" said Monty.

Manners chuckled.

"Perhaps!" he said.

Tom Merry did not speak. He was opening a letter. As he looked at that letter, he gave a start and whistled.

"Anyhow, we're done with the Worm now!" went on Lowther. "The happy prospect of never seeing him again has solved the ancient problem—is life worth living? It is!"

"It are!" agreed Manners.

"Oh, my hat!" said Tom.

His chums looked at him.

"Letter from home?" asked Monty.

"Yes!"

"About Christmas?"

"Yes!"

"What's up, then?"

Tom Merry made a grimace.

"We're not done with the Worm yet!" he said.

"Listen to this—it's from Miss Fawcett." And Tom read out from the middle of a lengthy letter:

"And I am sure, my darling Tommy, that you will be glad to hear that dear James will be with us for Christmas. I have heard from dear James that, owing to circumstances over which he had no control, he had to leave your school before break-up for Christmas. This must have been a great disappointment to him, as he is so attached to you. However, he will be with us for Christmas, and though you will not see him next term at the school, you will be able to enjoy his company in the holidays, which I am sure will be very, very pleasant for you."

Tom Merry looked at his chums. His chums looked at him. Monty Lowther gave a long whistle.

"More James!" he sighed.

"You fellows are coming home with me," said Tom. "But if you think you can't stand it—"

"Fathead!" said Manners. "Think we'd let you down—a poor little lamb with the wolf around—"

"The Big Bad Wolf!" said Lowther.

Tom laughed.

"Well, James or no James, we'll manage to have a merry Christmas!" he said. "Blow James! Both James! Let's forget all about him till we break up here, at any rate!"

Tom Merry was not yet quite done with James. James' number was up at St. Jim's, but James still had a shot in the locker. There was going to be a spot of excitement in Tom Merry's Christmas holiday.

Look out for the Final Exciting Story of this Great Series; it's called:

"SILVERSON ON THE SPOT!"

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TOLD IN THE TUCKSHOP!



THE BET!

"I'M hanged if I know what to do!" said Russell major of the Fifth Form at Greystones, perching himself on a stool by the tuckshop counter. "I'm supposed to be spending the holidays at Sandbeach with my family, and I know they're looking forward to having me with them, and now along comes an invitation from an uncle of mine to spend the holidays on a tour abroad with him. I'd like that no end; but, after all, one's got to consider one's family."

"Well, if you want my advice," began Dawson of the Fifth, "what you should do is—"

"Excuse me!" cut in a voice firmly.

The company knew that voice. They realised that Goffin, the new boy, was in their midst.

"Excuse my butting into what may be a purely private conversation," went on Goffin, surveying the company with his honest blue eyes, "but I couldn't help overhearing Dawson on the point of proffering Russell some advice. I haven't the slightest doubt whatsoever that whatever advice Dawson was about to offer was good, sound common sense, but if he knew what I know he'd keep it to himself."

"What the dickens are you talking about?" demanded Dawson wrathfully.

"I'm talking about my Uncle Wibley and a man named Potter," replied Goffin. "It was one of the most astounding occurrences of which you've ever heard, and illustrates in a most remarkable manner the futility of giving advice, the folly of heeding advice, and the peril of not heeding advice. In other words, it proves con-

clusively that the giving of advice should be suppressed by law as being both a pestilent and pernicious custom."

By GEO. E. ROCHESTER.

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This Week's Story:

THE FREAK WAGER!

My Uncle Wibley (said Goffin) was a man as inoffensive and as mild-mannered as you could wish to meet. He had an office in the City, and used to travel up to business every day from his neat little villa in the suburbs.

He was popular with everyone, because he was that rather rare type of person—a good listener. He was always most awfully interested in everything anybody told him, and at his club, where he invariably lunched, he was to the club bore what a ventriloquist's doll is to the ventriloquist. In other words, he never tried to dodge away; he always listened most attentively, and he always gave the appropriate answers.

In the matter of advice my Uncle Wibley was always ready to accept advice from other people. If Smith advised him to try a new brand of tobacco, then Uncle Wibley would try it. And if Robinson advised him not to miss such and such a film when it was shown locally, then Uncle Wibley would take great pains not to miss it.

Now, at the time of which I'm speaking there was a certain member of Uncle Wibley's club who in every way was the exact opposite of Uncle Wibley. This man's name was Potter, and he knew all the answers to everything. At least, he thought he did, which amounted pretty well to the same thing. If anybody told a story, Potter would wade in with a better one, and if anybody tried to give him advice, he'd just laugh



in his face and say he knew what he was about, and wasn't born yesterday, and all that sort of thing.

He used to sneer terrifically at Uncle Wibley, and call him a rabbit and a milksop for always accepting advice from people; and he used to ask him if he hadn't a mind of his own, and, if he had, why didn't he use it.

If Uncle Wibley hadn't been the last man in the world to want a row with anybody he could have had lots of rows with Potter, but he never said a word until one day at lunch, when Potter was sneering at him more cuttingly than usual.

The whole thing started through Uncle Wibley having ordered a mixed grill, then changing his mind and ordering steak-and-kidney pie on the advice of a friend of his named Weatherspoon, who was sitting at the same table.

"I suppose if somebody advised you to try a dose of rat poison you'd try it?" sneered Potter, who was also sitting at the same table.

"No, I wouldn't do that," said Uncle Wibley mildly. "I know where to draw the line, Potter."

"You astonish me!" retorted Potter. "It's always been a mystery to me," he went on, "how you run your confounded business, the way you're always taking people's advice."

"I appreciate advice," said Uncle Wibley mildly.

"Which just shows what a blithering fool you are!" returned Potter, with a loud laugh. "Now, I'm a man who's never taken a word of advice from anybody. On the contrary, whenever anybody tries to give me advice I invariably do exactly the opposite just to show him how wrong he was."

"Folks are not always wrong," protested Uncle Wibley. "I've had some very good advice given me in my time, and have often benefited by it."

"Is that so?" sneered Potter. "Well, then, I'll tell you what I'll do," he went on, leaning across the table. "I'll bet you fifty pounds that there's a jolly sight more bad advice given than good advice, and I'll tell you how we can prove it."

"How?" asked Uncle Wibley.

"We'll take from breakfast-time to-morrow morning until lunch," said Potter. "Between breakfast and lunch you're to act upon all the advice which may be given you, and I'm to act directly contrary to all the advice which may be given me. We'll meet here at lunch and compare notes, and Weatherspoon here can be the umpire. If he decides that you've benefited more than me, then I'll pay you fifty pounds. But if he decides that I've benefited more than you, then you'll pay me fifty pounds. D'you follow me?"

"I think so," said Uncle Wibley slowly. "Between breakfast-time and lunch to-morrow I am to obey all the advice which may be given me, whilst you are to act directly contrary to any advice which may be given you. The one of us who benefits the most wins fifty pounds from the other."

"That's it exactly!" cried Potter. "Well, what about it? Are you on, or aren't you?"

Uncle Wibley hesitated.

"You take him on; Goffin," put in Weatherspoon heartily. "You can't lose!"

"All right, then, I'll take you on, Potter," said Uncle Wibley. "Between breakfast and lunch to-morrow I will act upon all the advice given me, whilst you will act exactly opposite to any advice given you, the one of us who benefits the most to win fifty pounds from the other."

"Done!" cried Potter triumphantly. "Your fifty pounds is as good as in my pocket, Goffin!"

### ADVICE GALORE!

WHEN Uncle Wibley awoke the next morning (continued Goffin) he had a vague feeling that there was something on his mind. Then suddenly he remembered the wager Potter had made with him, and a gentle smile came to his face.

Poor, foolish, headstrong Potter, he thought! How silly the fellow had been to make such a bet, for he was bound to lose! No one ever gave Uncle Wibley advice which wasn't for his own good, so he couldn't see how he could possibly fail to benefit by accepting it and acting upon it.

Uncle Wibley had half a mind to ring Potter up there and then and cancel the bet for Potter's own sake; but, knowing the stubborn, mulish sort of fellow Potter was, he came to the conclusion that it would be a waste of time to ring him up and suggest cancelling the bet.

So pushing back the bedclothes, Uncle Wibley rose, bathed, and dressed, and went downstairs for breakfast.

"It's a nasty wet morning, dear," said Aunt Emma, his wife. "You must put your thick overcoat, muffler, and goloshes on as well as taking your umbrella."

"Yes, dear," said Uncle Wibley meekly, although it seemed such a muggy sort of morning outside that he'd have preferred wearing his lighter overcoat and dispensing with the muffler.

But by the terms of the wager he had to act upon all advice given him; so after breakfast he set off for the station in his heavy overcoat, muffler and goloshes, and carrying his umbrella.

He hadn't got very far before footsteps behind him overtook him, and a man named Haddock fell into step beside him. This man Haddock lived near Uncle Wibley, and travelled up to town with him nearly every morning.

"Beastly morning, Goffin!" exclaimed Haddock, by way of greeting. "Warm and close in spite of the rain. I say, aren't you jolly hot in those things?"

"What things?" asked Uncle Wibley.

"Why, that great heavy overcoat and muffler," said Haddock. "You ought to throw 'em away and get a light raincoat for a morning like this."

"Throw—throw 'em away, did you say?" inquired Uncle Wibley faintly.

"Yes, throw 'em right off and wear a sensible raincoat," cried Haddock, who was one of these big, hearty sort of men. "You'd feel a jolly sight more comfortable, I'll bet!"

"Yes, perhaps you're right," said Uncle Wibley weakly.

Closing his umbrella, he handed it to Haddock; then, peeling off his overcoat and muffler, he flung them over an adjoining fence.

"I say—I say!" gasped the astounded Haddock. "What the dickens are you playing at?"

"Well, you told me to throw 'em away, didn't you?" said Uncle Wibley defensively. "You said quite distinctly that I should throw 'em away!"

"Yes; but I didn't mean throw 'em away like that!" protested Haddock, staring hard at

(Continued on the next page.)

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Uncle Wibley. "When I said throw, I meant you should discard them and hang them up in your wardrobe, or on the hallstand or somewhere. I didn't mean you should fling them over the confounded fence."

"Well, you should say what you mean, and then I'd know," said Uncle Wibley a trifle petulantly, taking possession of his umbrella. "I'll pop into Watson's, the gent's outfitters, and get myself a light raincoat, as you suggested. You'd better go on without me, because I won't be able to catch my usual train now. I'll have to catch the next one."

But Haddock didn't hurry on. Instead, he lingered by Uncle Wibley's side as the latter made his way towards Watson's, the outfitters.

"I say, you're feeling all right, aren't you, Goffin?" he said uneasily. "What I mean to say, you haven't been overdoing it at the office lately, or anything like that, have you? You don't think you ought to see a doctor, do you?"

"No, I feel all right," said Uncle Wibley.

"Still, I'd see a doctor, if I were you, old man," advised Haddock. "I've noticed you haven't been looking quite yourself lately. You go and see a good doctor and let him give you a thorough overhaul!"

"I will," said Uncle Wibley. "I'll go and see one now!"

Turning abruptly on his heel, he set off in search of the nearest good doctor, leaving Haddock staring after him in blank astonishment. Then, recollecting what little time he had left in which to catch his train, Haddock gave an ominous shake of his head, and, turning, jogged it rapidly towards the station, quite certain in his own mind that poor Wibley Goffin had gone clean off his nut.

As for Uncle Wibley, he was thinking how very awkward this business of having to accept advice was turning out to be. Still, by the terms of the wager he was forced until lunch-time to act upon every piece of advice given him, and he determined to do it, no matter what the cost.

As he walked on in search of a doctor, he saw a man named Wilkinson coming pounding along the pavement towards him. This man Wilkinson was another who travelled up to town with Uncle Wibley every morning, and as he reached Uncle Wibley, he grabbed him by the arm and swung him round, crying:

"Come on, Goffin, you'd better run, or you'll miss the train. We've only got three minutes!"

Well, there was nothing else for it but for Uncle Wibley to accept this latest piece of advice; so he set off running by Wilkinson's side. They made such excellent time that, as they neared the station entrance, they overhauled and passed Haddock, whose eyes nearly popped out of his head at sight of Uncle Wibley dashing along with Wilkinson.

"Here, I say, Goffin, I thought you were going to see a doctor?" cried Haddock, also breaking into a run.

"No. Wilkinson advised me to run for the train," shouted Uncle Wibley, over his shoulder.

They caught the train all right, and they all got into the same compartment together with some other men whom Uncle Wibley knew.

"You changed your mind pretty quickly about seeing that doctor, didn't you?" said Haddock, sitting staring hard at Uncle Wibley.

"What's that?" cut in a man named Straw, lowering his newspaper. "Goffin going to see a doctor? What's the trouble, Goffin?"

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"Nothing that I know of," said Uncle Wibley. "Haddock said I haven't been looking myself lately, and he said I ought to see a doctor."

"Pooh! Rubbish! You're all right!" exclaimed Straw. "What you want is more exercise. If you'll take my advice, you'll go in for these physical jerks which are becoming all the rage. You know—hands on hips and knees bend, and all that sort of thing!"

Mutely laying aside his paper and depositing his hat and umbrella on the rack, Uncle Wibley rose, placed his hands on his hips, and commenced doing the knees bend exercise.

"Not here, you ass!" exclaimed Mr. Straw, aghast. "I didn't mean you to do 'em here!"

"Oh, I see!" said Uncle Wibley thankfully, resuming his seat. "I thought perhaps you did!"

Opening his newspaper he commenced to read it, but he couldn't help feeling that everybody in the compartment was looking at him very queerly, and from the corner of his eye he noticed that Haddock was whispering to Straw behind his newspaper.

Keeping well behind his newspaper and pretending to be engrossed in the news, Uncle Wibley managed to steer clear of any further conversation and advice until the train reached London. But as he was passing through the ticket barrier, a hand fell on his shoulder, and, turning, he found himself face to face with a friend of his named Crayshaw.

"Hallo, Goffin!" cried Crayshaw. "You're the very man I want to see. Here, come here!"

He took Uncle Wibley by the arm, and with a feeling of foreboding, Uncle Wibley permitted himself to be piloted clear of the throng hurrying through the barrier.

"I've got an absolute snip for you, Goffin!" said Crayshaw, retaining his grip on Uncle Wibley's arm, and lowering his voice confidentially. "There's a horse running to-day at Gatwick races which simply can't be beat. Galloping Jack's the name, and he'll come home alone. You take my tip and put your shirt on him!"

"My-my shirt?" stammered Uncle Wibley, goggling at him in horror.

"Well, you know what I mean!" laughed Crayshaw. "You put every ha'penny you've got on him, and you'll rake in a fortune. Now, don't forget—Galloping Jack's the name, and he's got the race in his pocket!"

With that he slapped Uncle Wibley heartily on the back and vanished into the throng, leaving poor Uncle Wibley standing there faced with the dreadful prospect of putting every ha'penny he possessed in the world on some wretched horse named Galloping Jack.

### STONY-BROKE!

**N**OW it might occur to you, as it occurred to Uncle Wibley (went on Goffin), that he wasn't absolutely bound to accept Crayshaw's advice and back Galloping Jack with every ha'penny he possessed in the world.

He could refuse to act upon Crayshaw's advice. By so doing he would simply lose fifty pounds to Potter, which, to some minds, might be infinitely preferable to losing his entire fortune on some beastly quadruped running in a race at Gatwick.

I say such a course might be preferable to some minds, but not to Uncle Wibley's. No, indeed. He had entered into a verbal contract with Potter to act upon every piece of advice given him between breakfast-time and lunch, and



Uncle Wibley rose from his seat, placed his hands on his hips, and commenced doing the knees bend exercise. "Not here, you ass!" exclaimed Mr. Straw.

he intended to do so, no matter what the cost. But the cost in this case looked like being complete ruin, because Uncle Wibley had had experience before of Crayshaw's tips, which were remarkable only for the consistent manner in which they became completely unstuck.

So, smothering a groan, and wondering how he'd break the news to Aunt Emma when he got home that evening, Uncle Wibley boarded a bus and set off for his bank.

"Yes, I want to draw out every ha'penny," he said to the astonished cashier behind the grille. "Every ha'penny, please!"

"But, Mr. Goffin, you're not closing your account with us, surely?" exclaimed the cashier, in dismay.

"I'm afraid I am," replied Uncle Wibley sadly. Some little while later he quitted the bank, carrying in his attache-case his entire fortune in notes and cash. As he walked dismally along, wondering which bookmaker he should hand his money over to, he almost cannoned into a man, who exclaimed:

"Hallo, Goffin, what the dickens are you looking so miserable about?"

"Oh, halla, Bulstrode!" said Uncle Wibley, recognising the man as a friend of his on the Stock Exchange. "How are you?"

"I'm very well!" cried Bulstrode, who was a big, genial sort of man. "But I'm hanged if I can say the same about you. You look pretty seedy to me. What's the trouble?"

"Oh, nothing!" said Uncle Wibley. Then added: "I wonder if you can tell me the name of some deserving bookmaker—some poor fellow who would like some money?"

"I know plenty of 'em, and they all like money," said Bulstrode, staring at him hard. "What d'you want a bookmaker for?"

"I wish to back a horse," explained Uncle Wibley.

"What's its name?" demanded Bulstrode.

"Galloping Jack," said Uncle Wibley.

Bulstrode laughed witheringly.

"Don't be a silly cuckoo, man!" he cried. "You leave that brute alone and save your money. He hasn't got an earthly. You keep off him, d'you hear?"

"Yes, indeed, I do!" cried Uncle Wibley fervently, gripping Bulstrode by the hand. "Oh, Bulstrode," he went on, in a voice shaken with emotion, "how ever can I thank you for this splendid—this noble advice? Keep off Galloping Jack, you said, and save my money. I will—I will!"

"Well, there's no need to do a song and dance about it," said the astonished Bulstrode. "Anybody who knows the first thing about form knows that the brute couldn't win if they gave him half the race start. How much did you intend to have on him, anyway?"

"Eight thousand three hundred pounds eleven



shillings and tenpence ha'penny," said Uncle Wibley.

"Wha-a-at?" gasped Bulstrode, staring at him in pop-eyed amazement. "Say that again!"

Uncle Wibley said it again; and, taking him by the arm, the stunned-looking Bulstrode guided him into a coffee-shop and pushed him into a chair.

"Now, d'you mind telling me why you were going to put all that money on a cripple like Galloping Jack?" he demanded.

"I was advised to," said Uncle Wibley.

Bulstrode leaned back in his chair and stared at him as though he'd never seen him in his life before. Then he gave vent to a low whistle of sheer amazement.

"Well, they say there's one born every day—a mug, I mean—and I'm beginning to agree with 'em," he said. "I don't know whether or not you've come in for a fortune, Goffin, but whoever told you to put all that money on a brute like Galloping Jack ought to be locked up in a home. But, by Jove, Goffin, you must have plenty of money to throw about these days!"

"I haven't!" protested Uncle Wibley.

"You must have if you were going to put eight thousand odd quid on a horse," said Bulstrode. "Now, I can tell you what to do with that money—"

"No!" cried Uncle Wibley hastily, attempting to rise.

"I say, I can tell you what to do with that money!" repeated Bulstrode, grabbing him by the jacket and hauling him back on to his chair. "You give it to me and I'll buy you shares in the Wizard Gold Mining Company with it. I know everybody thinks the Wizard Gold Mining Company is a complete wash-out, but they're wrong. I tell you the shares are due to go up and up at any minute, and if you'll take my advice you'll hand that money over to me and I'll make your fortune for you!"

Poor Uncle Wibley could only sit staring at him in speechless dismay. Talk about landing out of the frying-pan into the fire, he thought desperately, for this advice of Bulstrode's was far worse than had been that of Crayshaw's. In spite of what Bulstrode had just said about Galloping Jack, the horse must stand some chance of winning, or else he wouldn't be entered for the race. But it was common knowledge that anybody with money in the Wizard Gold Mining Company stood no chance at all of ever seeing a ha'penny of his money back, for up to the moment the Wizard Gold Mining Company hadn't mined as much gold as would fill a back tooth.

"Yes, you take my tip and hand that money over to me," said Bulstrode. "What, have you got it here?" he went on in astonishment, as, with a groan, Uncle Wibley handed him the attache-case. "Pon my word, Goffin, what an extraordinary fellow you are! Fancy walking about with all this money on you! Why, you must be a blessed millionaire!"

"No," said Uncle Wibley, rising unsteadily to his feet. "I am now a complete pauper, Bulstrode!"

"Ha, ha, you can't make me believe that, Goffin!" laughed Bulstrode genially.

Uncle Wibley made no reply. Leaving Bulstrode happily counting the money on the marble-topped table, Uncle Wibley passed dazedly out to the street.

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## UNCLE WIBLEY WINS!

YOU will recollect (proceeded Goffin) that Crayshaw had advised Uncle Wibley to put every ha'penny he possessed on Galloping Jack. That money had now passed into the possession of Bulstrode to be invested on Uncle Wibley's behalf in shares in the Wizard Gold Mining Company. Consequently, it was without a single ha'penny in his pocket that Uncle Wibley stood on the pavement outside the coffee-shop, wondering what he should do.

There didn't seem much point in going to his office now that he was utterly and completely ruined, but he supposed he'd better go along there and break the unhappy news to his staff. So, still in a sort of daze, Uncle Wibley stepped off the pavement in order to cross the street.

As he stepped from the curb, however, there came the sudden screech of hastily applied brakes, and a taxi missed knocking him down by inches only.

"Can't you look where you're going, you silly old fool!" bawled the taxi-driver, poking his head out.

"I— I'm very sorry!" stammered Uncle Wibley, stepping back on to the curb.

"Aw, go and boil your head!" advised the taximan wrathfully, as he let in his clutch and drove away.

Uncle Wibley stood staring after the retreating cab. Go and boil his head, the man had said! Oh, well, reflected Uncle Wibley, in the depths of utter dejection, perhaps it was the best advice he'd received all morning. By the time he'd boiled his head his troubles would be all over. It was a singularly unpleasant way of passing out, but a not unfitting end for such a chump as he. The point was, how exactly should one set about boiling one's head?

Still pondering this somewhat difficult problem, Uncle Wibley arrived at his office. His typist and office-boy gave him a respectful "Good-morning" as he passed through the outer office into his inner sanctum.

Hanging up his hat and umbrella, he pressed the bell. In response the office-boy appeared.

"Have you got any money?" asked Uncle Wibley.

"Money, sir?" repeated the lad, staring.

"Yes, money!" said Uncle Wibley, a trifle petulantly. "You know what money is. Have you any in your pockets?"

"I've got about ninepence, sir," said the lad.

"Do you think you could borrow half-a-crown from Miss Gregson, the typist?" asked Uncle Wibley.

"Yes, sir, I think so," said the lad.

"Very well, do so, then go out and buy a saucepan," said Uncle Wibley. "A large saucepan. One large enough to take my head."

"Do you—do you want to wear it, sir?" stammered the office-boy, in blank bewilderment.

"No, I don't want to wear it!" snapped Uncle Wibley. "Don't stand gaping there! Go and buy one!"

The office-boy departed, to return some ten minutes later bearing a large saucepan.

"Fill it with water, and place it on the gas-ring in the outer office to boil!" ordered Uncle Wibley.

This gas-ring was used for making the afternoon tea, and when he judged the water in the saucepan must be about boiling, Uncle Wibley stepped out of his private sanctum into the outer office.

"It is my painful and distressing duty to inform you that the firm of Wibley Goffin is now closing down," he said, addressing the highly intrigued Miss Gregson and the office-boy. "There is no need for me to go into details, but the truth is I stand before you a ruined man. You have served me loyally and well, and I thank you for your devoted service to me. You will be paid your wages when my home and furniture have been sold. You will now put on your hats and coats and quietly go."

"But is there—is there no hope of our pulling things round, Mr. Goffin?" sobbed Miss Gregson, applying her handkerchief to her eyes.

"No hope at all, I am sorry to say," replied Uncle Wibley. "Now dry your eyes, my good girl, and go!"

"But—but what are you going to do with the saucepan?" quavered Miss Gregson, when she and the office-boy had donned their hats and coats, and were on the point of departure.

"I will tell you," said Uncle Wibley. "I am going to boil my head. I was advised to do so by an angry taximan. I have received a lot of advice in my time," he went on, in a voice charged with emotion, "but never such excellent and timely advice as I received from that man. If I had not listened to the advice of others, I would not be standing here before you now—a ruined man. Never—never listen to advice. Those are my last words to you, and if ever either of you are tempted to listen to advice, think of me, Wibley Goffin, the man whom the advice of well-meaning friends drove to boiling his head in a saucepan. Now go!"

Miss Gregson stared at him in incredulous horror for a moment; then, grabbing the scared-looking office-boy by the arm, she yanked him out of the office, slamming shut the door behind them.

Turning the key in the lock, Uncle Wibley carefully removed his jacket, his collar and tie. Well; this was the end, he thought, for the water in the saucepan was bubbling merrily on the gas-ring.

He wondered, not for the first time that morning, how Potter was getting on. He must be doing marvellously, he thought. If only the boot had been on the other leg, and it had been he, Wibley Goffin, who had had to act directly opposite to all advice given him that morning, what a happy position he'd now have been in.

Oh, well, it was too late to think of that now, thought Uncle Wibley. Potter had been proved right, and he'd been proved wrong, and that was the end of it. He was only sorry that he hadn't fifty pounds left to send to Potter in settlement of the wager; but he'd left a note in the inner office, saying that Potter was to be paid out of the proceeds of the sale of his house and furniture.

Approaching the saucepan, Uncle Wibley stared down at the boiling water. He wondered how long it would take his head to boil. Turnips and things like that took quite a time, he thought. However, after the first few moments of immersion, he'd be beyond worrying about how long it would take for his head to boil.

Stooping over the saucepan, he steeled himself for what was to come. It would take every bit of nerve he'd got to thrust his head into the pan of boiling water and keep it there, but he meant to do it.

He took a deep breath. Well, here goes, he thought!

In that same instant there came a quick, heavy tread outside the door; the handle rattled, and a man's voice called imperatively:

"Open this door—d'you hear? Open this door at once!"

With a gasp of relief Uncle Wibley straightened up.

"Who's there?" he called.

"Oh, Mr. Goffin, please open the door!" came Miss Gregson's tearful voice. "Please do what I say, and open the door!"

Stepping forward, Uncle Wibley unlocked the door. It burst open, and he found himself confronted by Miss Gregson, the office-boy, and a big policeman.

"What're you up to in here?" demanded the policeman suspiciously. "What're you doing with that saucepan?"

"I was going to boil my head, officer," said Uncle Wibley.

"Ho, were you!" said the policeman. "That's what this young lady told me. Well, I'm taking you in charge for attempted suicide, and I'd advise you to come along to the station quietly."

"I will!" gulped Uncle Wibley fervently. "I'll come as quietly as you like."

A few minutes later he was on his way to the police station, escorted by the constable. But when he arrived there he received one of the greatest shocks of his life; for who should be standing in the charge-room but Potter! And such a Potter! His clothes were hanging in

(Continued on page 36.)

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#### FOES!

**H**ARRY WHARTON looked up as Frank Nugent came into Study No. 1 in the Remove. Wharton was at his prep, and he was nearly finished when Nugent came in.

Nugent's face was clouded. There was a dark ring round his left eye, and a swelling on his nose. He dropped into a seat at the study table without a word.

"You're late for prep, old man," said Wharton amicably.

"I know."

"I'll lend you a hand—"

"You needn't trouble!"

"Hem!"

Wharton resumed his work in silence. Frank Nugent fumbled listlessly with his books. He was in no mood for work; he was still feeling the effects of the fight with Jack Drake in Friar-dale Wood that afternoon. He pushed back his chair at last, and rose.

"Hang prep!" he growled irritably.

"Better have a whack at it, old chap," said Harry. "There's Quelch in the morning, you know—"

"Hang Quelch!"

"Hem!"

"I'm going to chance it," growled Nugent, and he threw himself angrily into the armchair. "I'm fed-up!"

"You ought to do something about your eye, old chap—"

"I've done all I can. It doesn't matter, anyhow; Mr. Quelch's seen it, and given me a hundred lines for it," said Nugent bitterly.

"I dare say Drake will get the same."

"Oh, no! He hasn't a black eye—I couldn't give him one. I was a fool to think I could handle him, of course," said Nugent. "I can see that you think so, too."

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# THE BOY WHO WOULDN'T FIGHT!

By Frank Richards.

Evidently Nugent was in a rather unreasonable mood.

Wharton made no answer; perhaps thinking that this was one of the occasions when silence was golden. But his silence seemed to irritate his chum, who went on in the same bitter tone.

"I suppose I couldn't let him bully my minor, under my nose. Of course, you think it was all Dicky's fault, without even knowing what happened. You would!"

"Dicky isn't exactly an angel," said Wharton gently, "and I must say that Drake doesn't seem to me the chap to bully a fag for nothing. But what happened? You haven't told me."

"I found him pitching into my young brother in the wood, and Rodney looking on."

"But why?"

"I didn't stop to ask him, naturally. Nobody's going to bully my minor if I can stop him!"

Wharton coughed slightly.

He could not help thinking that Dicky Nugent must have provoked Drake very much to cause that sunny-tempered youth to pitch into him.

But he knew that it was useless to argue with Frank on the point. On the subject of his minor, Nugent was not amenable to reason.

It was easy enough for Frank Nugent to read his thoughts, however, and Frank's brow grew blacker.

"You're down on Dicky," he said. "So are the others—Bob Cherry thinks the same as you do, and Bull, and even Inky!"

"I don't think we're down on him," said Wharton mildly. "Dicky's a good little chap in his way, but he's been spoiled at home—"

"Oh, I've heard all that before!" interrupted Nugent rudely.

Wharton compressed his lips.

His own temper was not of the most patient kind, and his chum was trying it sorely now.

"Well, I think you might have asked Drake what the trouble was, before starting in to handle him," he said. "We've had some trouble with Drake, in one way and another, but I've never heard him accused of bullying before."

"Which means that you don't believe me?"

"You've said yourself that you don't know what happened!" exclaimed Wharton. "Do try to be a little reasonable, Frank. If Drake was bullying the kid, as you think, and you got licked standing up for him, there's one thing to be done—"

"What's that?"

"You can leave Drake to me, or to Bob!" said Harry quietly. "One of us can set the matter right. If it's as you say, he wants a licking, and one of us will give it to him!"

Nugent's clouded face cleared a little.

There was a tap at the door before he could reply, however, and as the door opened, Jack Drake was seen on the threshold.

Nugent gave him a dark look.

"You fellows finished prep?" asked Drake, a little awkwardly.

"I have," said Harry. "Nugent's cutting it. You can come in."

Drake came in.

"I—I wanted to speak to Nugent," he said, hesitating. "We had a bit of a row this afternoon—"

"You were bullying my minor," said Frank Nugent. "I stopped you."

Jack Drake flushed.

"You were mistaken about that, Nugent," he answered. "I wanted to explain—"

"I saw you thumping him!"

"You didn't see him throw a stick at me, and land me on the back of the head," said Drake sharply. "I've got a bump there now."

"He didn't do that for nothing, if he did it at all," said Nugent coldly. "You must have interfered with him in some way."

"That's true—"

"I knew that!" sneered Nugent. "You needn't go any further."

"I can tell you why I interfered—"

"You needn't! You licked me," said Nugent, his eyes glowing. "But that isn't the finish. I'm going to take you on again to-morrow!"

"You're not!" answered Drake curtly. "I'm above your weight, and you know it. I'm not going to fight you. I thought I should find you a bit cooler by this time, and—"

"You mean you came here to crow!" said Nugent contemptuously.

"Frank!" murmured Wharton.

Nugent jumped to his feet.

"You're going to meet me in the gym to-morrow, Drake," he said, "and now you can get out of this study!"

"You hot-headed ass!" exclaimed Drake. "If you won't allow a fellow to explain—"

"I won't allow you to spin me any yarns about my minor! I'll allow you to get out of this study, sharp, if you don't want to be chucked into the passage!"

Drake smiled slightly.

"I don't think you could chuck me into the passage," he said; "but I don't want any more trouble; I'll go."

"I'll see you in the gym to-morrow after lessons."

"You won't!"

"If you don't turn up I'll find you fast enough and give you the coward's blow before all the Remove!" said Nugent savagely.

"Rats!"

With that, Jack Drake strode out of the study—only just in time, for in another moment or two there would have been a fight going on. Frank Nugent seemed about to follow him into the passage, but Wharton closed the door quickly.

"That's enough, Frank," he said.

"I'll lick the cad to-morrow, somehow," muttered Nugent.

"But—"

"Oh, give us a rest!"

Harry Wharton did not argue the matter further. He could only hope that wiser counsels would prevail on the morrow.

## DOWN ON DICKY!

FRANK NUGENT received a good many glances the next day—glances that were directed chiefly towards his eye.

That eye was not quite black, fortunately; but it was certainly very darkly circled, and it was painful.

Mr. Queleh frowned upon him; discoloured eyes did not win favour from the Remove master.

Nugent seemed quite changed from his old self.

He had always been considered the sunniest-tempered fellow in the Remove; indeed, many fellows thought that his good temper amounted almost to "softness."

But there was nothing sunny about him now.

He was feeling deeply the humiliation, as he considered it, of his defeat; and feeling still more keenly what he regarded as a want of sympathy from his chums.

The Co. sympathised, so far as that went. But on the subject of Dicky they could not see eye to eye with Frank.

Nugent's championship of his minor was something like a standing joke among the juniors, and the patience of his chums had often been severely exercised on that subject.

Nugent's view that Jack Drake was a bully in the style of Bolsover major, and that Dicky was a suffering innocent, naturally did not impress Harry Wharton & Co. very much. In fact, they knew perfectly well that Nugent's view was prejudiced and mistaken. So, naturally, they could not share his angry animosity against Drake. Had the latter youth shown any sign of "crowing" over his victory, there were four fellows who were ready to jump on him at once.

But so far from crowing, Drake carefully avoided Nugent, and it was quite clear that he was sorry for the quarrel. In the circumstances, it would have been hopelessly unreasonable to pick a quarrel with Drake.

But Nugent was not very reasonable just now, and he was angry and irritated at his chums' attitude in the matter.

According to his view, they were "down on Dicky," and anybody who was down on Dicky was sure to obtain Nugent's keen resentment—as a reward.

After morning lessons Nugent avoided joining his chums as usual, and went out into the quad by himself.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! This way, Franky!" called out Bob Cherry.

Nugent seemed deaf.

"The esteemed and ludicrous Frank has got his inestimable back up," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh ruefully. "He does not deign to shed the light of his beatific countenance upon his pals."

Johnny Bull gave a grunt.

"Silly ass!" he commented.

Wharton looked worried.

"We can't have trouble in the happy family circle," he said. "I can't help thinking that Franky's a bit wrong-headed this time—"

"Hear, hear!" granted Johnny.

"But he is our esteemed and ridiculous chum," remarked Hurree Singh.

"Bother that chap Drake!"

"Suppose I go and wallop him?" suggested Bob Cherry thoughtfully. "If it would be any satisfaction to Frank, I don't see why Drake shouldn't be walloped. He's rather cheeky, anyhow."



"It's all Nugent minor's fault," growled Johnny Bull. "That's plain enough for anybody but Frank to see, and there's none so blind as those who won't see!"

"Let's go and see Dicky," said Wharton. "We may get out of him what really happened yesterday."

"Good egg!"

The four proceeded in search of Nugent minor. The Second Form were out, and they found Dicky in the quadrangle with his chums, Gatty and Myers. Gatty appeared to be busy slanging Dicky as the Removites came up.

"Sneaking off on a half-holiday all by yourself!" Gatty was saying warmly. "If I had a remittance from an uncle I should ask my pals to come out with me and help me spend it!"

"Same here!" said Myers. "What were you up to yesterday afternoon, Dicky, that you didn't want us to know?"

"Oh, don't worry!" said Dicky. "Never saw such a set of chaps for asking questions!"

"Well, look here, you young sweep—"

"You jaw too much, Gatty, old chap!"

"Have you got any of that remittance left?" demanded Gatty hotly.

"No, I haven't!"

"Then you're not going to stand a feed in the Form-room?"

"Can't!"

"What have you done with it, then? It was two quids."

"Well, it's gone!"

"Oh, I know what he's done with it!" said Myers satirically. "Sammy Bunter saw him with old Banks, that shady sharper at Friar-dale—"

"Oh, shut up, Myers!" exclaimed Dicky, flushing.

"Yah!" said Gatty, throwing all the disgust and contempt he was capable of into that monosyllable.

"Look here—"

"Come on, Myers! Leave the young rotter alone!" said Gatty.

And the two fags marched off in great indignation, leaving Nugent minor scowling. In that pleasant mood, Harry Wharton & Co. dropped on him.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" Bob Cherry greeted him cheerily.

"Well, what the thump do you want?" asked Dicky politely.

"Just a little heart-to-heart talk, my merry pippin," said Bob; "just a little of your priceless conversation!"

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

"You don't want to be kicked round the quad, I suppose?" asked Johnny Bull. "If not, you'd better be a bit more careful how you talk, Nugent minor!"

"Br-r-r-r!" grunted Dicky.

"There was a row in the wood yesterday," said Wharton. "Frank pitched into Drake—"

"More fool he!" said Dicky.

"What did you do to Drake to make him whack you?"

"Heaved a stick at him!"

"But why?"

"Because he was a cheeky, interfering cad!" said Dicky Nugent sourly. "Same as you fellows are, in fact!"

With that sweet remark, Nugent minor turned

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and stalked away. Johnny Bull made a stride after him, but Wharton caught him by the arm.

"Hold on, Johnny—"

"Are we going to let a Second Form fag talk to us like that?" demanded Johnny, breathing hard.

"We don't want a row with Nugent."

"If Nugent thinks—" began Johnny Bull hotly.

"Shush! There's enough trouble as it is," said Bob Cherry soothingly. "We don't want any scrapping in the family circle."

Johnny Bull grunted, and was silent.

"Well, we haven't learned much," said Bob. "Only it's pretty clear that Dicky was asking for trouble yesterday and found it, and Frank butted in like a silly goat. We've got to see that this goes no further."

"If we can," said Harry doubtfully.

Nugent did not speak to his chums when they came in to dinner. Perhaps it was just as well, for conversation would only have revealed the fact that, beyond the shadow of a doubt, they were "down on Dicky."

## NO FIGHT!

"DRAKE!"

"Hallo!"

"Will you come into the gym now?"

"No, I won't!"

Lessons were over at Greyfriars, and there was a crowd of fellows in the junior corridor.

Frank Nugent stopped in front of Drake, and as he spoke a score of juniors heard his raised voice and looked round.

Harry Wharton & Co. gathered on the scene at once.

They had settled that, if possible, they were to see that the hapless affair went no further; but success seemed very problematical. Nugent was taking the bit in his teeth, as it were.

Drake and Rodney would have passed on, but Nugent was standing in the way, and as Drake moved, he moved; so Drake had to stop again.

"Frank, old man—" began Bob Cherry.

"Leave me alone!"

"But—"

"I want you to meet me in the gym, Drake!" said Nugent, in a loud, clear voice. "If you don't, you're a funk!"

Drake smiled rather scornfully.

"You can call me any names you like," he said. "We had a fight yesterday, and I don't think you found me funkling. But once is enough, and I'm not going to hammer you again."

"Are you afraid, you cad?"

"You're welcome to think so if you choose," said Drake. "Now, let me pass."

"He, he, he!" came from Billy Bunter. "Nugent wants another eye to match that one!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Give him another, Drake!" urged Skinner. "That one looks quite lonely on its own!"

"And there's room for improvement in his nose!" said Bolsover major. "It would swell a little more to the left!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Nugent flushed crimson.

His chums looked very uncomfortable.

Frank's challenge to Jack Drake was, in the eyes of all the Removites, absurd; it was clear to all that he was no match for the fellow he challenged.

"Don't play the goat, Nugent," said Vernon-Smith. "What's the good of asking for a bigger bite than you can chew?"

"Mind your own business!"

The Boulder shrugged his shoulders.

"You're playing the giddy ox!" he said.

"Drake could make rings round you if he liked!"

"Ease off, and don't be an ass!"

"I'm not asking for your advice, Smithy!"

snapped Nugent. "No need for you to butt in that I can see. I'm dealing with Drake."

"Lucky for you Drake won't deal with you!"

remarked Skinner, and there was another laugh.

"Drake, you cad—"

"Go it!" said Drake resignedly. "You can call me all the names you can find in the dictionary if you like!"

"Do have a little sense, Nugent!" exclaimed Rodney. "What are you trying to force a quarrel on Drake for?"

"He wants another blue eye!" chortled Skinner.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You rotter, Drake!" exclaimed Nugent, trembling with passion. "If you refuse to come into the gym you'll fight me here and now, you rotten bully!"

Drake bit his lip.

"I'll leave it to the fellows to say whether I am a bully," he said quietly. "Nobody but you has ever said so, Nugent."

"For goodness' sake, Frank—" began Wharton.

"Shut up!"

"Frank!"

"Dear me!" said Skinner. "His High Magnificence Wharton has been told to shut up! Stand clear, you fellows! The skies are going to fall!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Removites.

"He, he, he!" cackled Bunter.

"Now, Drake—"

"Let me pass!" exclaimed Drake impatiently. "I'm not going to fight you, Nugent; you know you've got no chance, or you would know it if you had any horse-sense! Now, let me pass!"

"You rotten bully—"

"Oh, rats!"

Nugent made a stride towards Drake, his face flaming and his fists clenched. The derision of the Remove crowd cut him more deeply even than Drake's disdainful refusal to fight.

At that moment Mr. Quelch stepped out of the Form-room.

The Remove master started at the sight he beheld in the corridor.

"Nugent!" he thundered.

"Cave!" breathed Bob Cherry.

Mr. Quelch strode wrathfully upon the spot. Nugent dropped his hands sullenly.

"I punished you yesterday for fighting, Nugent!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch sternly. "Now I find you attempting to provoke another fight! You had better take care, Nugent!"

The junior was sullenly silent.

"You will go into the Form-room," continued Mr. Quelch, "remain there till six o'clock, and write out French verbs, Nugent!"

In silence, Frank went back into the Remove-room. Mr. Quelch, with a frowning brow, rustled on down the passage, and the crowd of juniors broke up. Drake's brow was troubled as he went out into the quadrangle with Rodney.

"Jever see such a silly ass?" he queried. "Blessed if I know what to do with him. I can't fight him again; the howling ass would only crumple up! He ought to have more sense."

Rodney nodded.

"All because of that confounded fag!" grunted Drake. "I've a good mind to look for Nugent minor and boot him across the quad!"

"That isn't the way to avoid trouble with his major," remarked Rodney, with a laugh.

"If the ass would only let me explain," continued Drake. "If he knew that I chipped in to get his minor away from that blackguard Banks! But he won't listen to a word. Anyhow, I'm not going to fight him again. He's a good sort, though he's an unreasonable ass! A chap can't help liking him, really."

Rodney laughed.

(Continued on the next page.)

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"But to the silly owl the sight of me seems like a red rag to a bull," continued Drake. "I'm going to steer clear of him till he gets over it—if he ever does. I won't hammer him again; it made me feel rotten walloping him yesterday, though he made me do it. Look here, Rodney, you can talk like a Dutch uncle. He's in the Form-room now. Suppose you go and have a chin with him, and see if you can get him to see reason? Tell him why I chipped in with his minor yesterday."

"I'll try," said Rodney, not very hopefully. He left his chum and went into the School House. He found Frank Nugent alone in the Remove-room, with a French grammar and a sheaf of impot paper before him, a pen in his hand, and a black look on his face. Nugent had not started on his French verbs yet. He was scowling blackly into space, and his scowl grew blacker at the sight of Rodney.

"What the thump do you want?" he demanded. "Have you come to tell me that Drake will meet me in the gym?"

"No. I—"

"Then get out!"

"I want to tell you why Drake chipped in with your minor yesterday."

"I don't want to hear!"

"It was for the kid's own sake," said Rodney quietly. "Drake thought—"

"I don't want to hear what Drake thought!" interrupted Nugent savagely. "I want the cad to put up his hands and give me a chance of licking him! If he doesn't I shall give him the coward's blow in public! Perhaps that will make him willing to show a little pluck!"

"You silly ass!" exclaimed Rodney, his temper flaring up. "Drake could dust up the floor with you without half trying! He won't fight you because you're no match for him, and you know it!"

Nugent sprang up from his desk.

"Is that what you've come to say?" he exclaimed furiously. "Well, then—"

He rushed across the Form-room towards Rodney.

Dick Rodney stepped out into the corridor. He had not come there to fight with Nugent, and the exasperated junior was evidently in a mood to fight anybody just then, friend or foe. He closed the Form-room door and walked away.

"All serene?" asked Drake, when his chum rejoined him in the quadrangle.

"No fear! I've nearly had a scrap with the hot-headed ass myself!" growled Rodney.

Drake whistled.

"Well, I shall have to keep out of his way, that's all," he remarked. "Hallo! There goes his merry minor."

Dicky Nugent was swinging out of the gateway, apparently in a hurry. Gatty and Myers called after him, but the fag did not heed. He had no use just then for the company of his old friends. Gatty and Myers exchanged glances of disgust.

"Serve him right if a prefect spotted him!" said Gatty, loud enough for the two Removites to hear. "I know what he's after."

"Let's go and stop him," suggested Myers.

"Oh, rats! Let him go and eat coke!" grunted Gatty. "Come down to the football."

Drake and Rodney exchanged a glance as the two disgusted fags walked away.

"Precious young rascal!" muttered Rodney. "He's off to see that rogue Banks again, and his friends know it."

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"I wonder whether we ought to stop him?" said Drake.

"My dear chap, you've got trouble enough on your hands already through that confounded fag! Let's go for a stroll."

Drake assented, and Dicky Nugent was left to his own devices. As they came back from a stroll through the village, however, the chums of the Remove sighted Master Dicky again. He was squeezing through a hedge that bordered a field adjoining the Bird in Hand Inn, and he dropped into the lane almost in front of them.

The fag gave them a startled look.

"So that's where you've been, you young rascal!" exclaimed Drake, with a jerk of his thumb towards the red-tiled building.

"Mind your own business!" retorted Dicky Nugent coolly.

He scudded off; and Drake, glancing through the gap in the hedge, caught sight of the fat and florid Mr. Banks, leaning on a fence, smoking a big cigar. His face was thoughtful as he walked on to Greyfriars with his chum. It was pretty clear that Nugent minor was getting himself into a serious scrape.

"The young ass!" muttered Drake.

"The young rotter, you mean!" growled Rodney.

The chums did not reach Greyfriars till calling-over. After call-over, Frank Nugent left the Hall without a glance at Drake, and the latter began to hope that the disagreeable affair had blown over.

#### THE BLOW!

"NOW, Franky, old fellow—"

Bob Cherry spoke haltingly. Prep was over, and the Famous Five had gathered in Study No. 1 just before bed-time.

Nugent was reading—or affecting to read. Certainly he did not turn the pages of the book he held open on his knees.

The Co. were exchanging uncomfortable glances, or looking at Nugent, for some time before Bob broke the ice.

"Better out with it," said Harry Wharton at last. "Frank, do you mean to pick a row with Drake in the dormitory to-night?"

Nugent looked up.

"I've told you so!" he answered.

"I hoped you didn't mean it."

"Well, I did mean it, and I do mean it! Anything else?"

"He doesn't want to fight you!"

"I'll make him!"

The Co. looked at one another hopelessly. This unreasonable fellow seemed quite unlike the Frank Nugent they had known. Johnny Bull's brow was growing darker and sterner.

"I'll tell you what I think, Nugent," he said in his deliberate way. "I think you're beginning to understand that the row was really your minor's fault, and you don't want to admit it to yourself. That's why you're so dashed keen on being down on Drake."

Nugent's face flushed red. Perhaps Johnny Bull's words went home. But Frank did not answer. He rose, threw down his book, and walked out of the study.

"Now the fat's in the fire!" said Bob Cherry dismally. "Johnny, old man, you talk too much."

"Oh, rot!" grunted Johnny Bull. "Plain talk is wanted sometimes. I believe I hit the nail on the head."

"No need to hit it so hard, though, old scout."

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said Bob Cherry. "Well, we'd better get off to dorm, or we shall have Wingate on our trail. I suppose there's going to be trouble."

Wingate of the Sixth, shepherded them off, and left them in the Remove dormitory, with the remark that he would be back in ten minutes. When the door closed behind the Greyfriars captain there was a slight buzz in the dormitory, and most of the eyes turned on Nugent and Drake. It was an open secret that Frank Nugent intended to bring matters to a head in the dormitory, where there was no possibility of the encounter being eluded.

Drake sat on his bed and kicked his shoes off, carefully avoiding looking at Nugent.

"Now for the circus, you fellows!" murmured Skinner, and there was a chuckle from some of the juniors.

"Frank," whispered Wharton in a tone of appeal, as his chum made a movement towards Drake.

Nugent did not heed.

He walked across to Drake's bed, and the junior looked up quietly.

"Well?" he said.

"After lights out you're going to turn out of bed and put up your hands, Drake," said Frank.

Drake shook his head.

"I'm not!" he answered curtly.

Nugent clenched his hands.

"I've told you what I shall do if you refuse," he said.

Bolsover major's voice boomed out.

"Why don't you lick him and have done with it, Drake? He won't be happy till he gets it!"

"He, he, he!" cackled Billy Bunter.

Drake did not answer Bolsover. He was feeling sorry for Nugent, irritating as that junior was at the present moment. He knew that it was the worry of his minor as much as anything else that had got on Nugent's nerves, and that he was acting in a way very unlike himself. Whatever might happen, Drake was determined not to be forced into a fight with the fellow he had defeated once, and whom he knew he could easily defeat again. All the Remove knew that, as a matter of fact, and most of them wondered at Jack Drake's forbearance. But the mere suspicion that Drake was forbearing towards him



was maddening to Nugent in his present frame of mind.

Drake went on coolly taking his shoes off, Nugent watching him with burning eyes.

"You refuse to fight me again, then?" he asked at last.

"Yes!"

"For the last time?"

"The last time," assented Drake.

"Then take that!"

Frank Nugent made a sudden step forward, and with the back of his hand struck Jack Drake across the face.

The slap sounded like a pistol-shot in the still dormitory.

Drake gave a sharp, startled cry.

Nugent had threatened what he would do, but somehow Drake had not expected him to go so far.

He sprang to his feet, his eyes blazing.

Nugent stopped back a pace, his hands up, his eyes looking over them at Drake, with a glitter: "Now come on!" he said. "You've had the coward's blow, and if you don't come on—"

## THE FREAK WAGER!

(Continued from page 29.)

rags, and his face was a mass of cuts and bruises.

"Why, what on earth are you doing here?" gasped Uncle Wibley.

"It's all the fault of that ridiculous wager!" burst out Potter savagely. "You know I was to act absolutely contrary to all the advice I received this morning. Well, I have, and I've had the very dickens of a time! I missed my breakfast on purpose, because my wife told me to hurry up and have it. I missed my train because a friend of mine told me to hurry up, or I would miss it, and when I arrived at the office, I missed making ten thousand pounds because I refused to handle certain business which my chief clerk advised me to handle."

"But your clothes and your bruises?" demanded Uncle Wibley. "How did you get in this condition? And what are you doing here?"

"I'm coming to that," snarled Potter. "I went out for a coffee with a friend of mine about half an hour ago. He advised me not to cross the street, except at the near-by pedestrian crossing. I deliberately attempted to cross from where I was standing. A lorry nearly ran me over, and the driver advised me, in pretty choice language, to get out of the way. I had to refuse, so I stood stock still right in front of his bonnet. A constable barged up, and advised me, for my own good, to get back on to the pavement. I refused. I had to, by the terms of our wager. Then he arrested me for obstruction, and advised me to come quietly. Again I refused, and hit him on the jaw. Then the lorry-driver and a few more piled in, and that's how I got these bruises. It was some fight—I'm telling you—and it took four policemen to get me to the station. But what the dickens are you doing here?"

Uncle Wibley told him, and after the pair of them had been baited out, and Potter had got some new clothes, they met again at their club to relate their experiences to Weatherspoon.

"Well, I don't know what to say," said Weatherspoon dubiously, when he'd heard both

"Now watch the fireworks!" murmured Skinner.

For one moment it looked as if Drake would rush on Nugent, hitting out. But self-command came in time. He dropped his hands and unclenched them, and, with a rather pale face, turned aside.

There was a buzz in the dormitory.

Nugent stared at him blankly; then, as he understood, a bitter sneer crossed his lips.

With a curling lip he turned away. Jack Drake had taken the coward's blow, and taken it quietly. Nugent went to his bed, looking neither to the right nor to the left. Immediately after Drake turned in. The Remove dormitory was quiet when Wingate came back to put out the lights.

Lights out, the juniors dropped to sleep one by one. But it was long before Jack Drake's eyes closed. On his cheek, burning in the darkness, he still seemed to feel the smart of the coward's blow.

Next week: "THE FAG'S FEAR!"

stories. "Potter admits losing about ten thousand pounds worth of business, and Goffin admits losing over eight thousand pounds in cash, and you both finished up at the police station. So, if you ask me, my decision is that the contest has ended in a draw."

"And so it would have been a draw," said Goffin, drifting towards the door, "if just at that moment Bulstrode hadn't burst into the club with the news that the Wizard Gold Mining Company had struck a rich reef of gold that morning at eleven o'clock, and that Uncle Wibley's shares were worth about ten times what he'd paid for 'em—over eighty thousand pounds. And that's what I meant when I said that the giving of advice should be absolutely prohibited by law. It never does the recipient any good, whether he accepts it or whether he doesn't. Well, s'-long!"

"Here, but wait a minute!" exclaimed Dawson. "Bulstrode's advice certainly did your Uncle Wibley a jolly lot of good. It netted him a fortune."

"It didn't," said Goffin gently. "You see, he advised Uncle Wibley to hang on as the shares were bound to soar even higher in price, but they didn't. The reef of gold suddenly petered out, and the shares collapsed, and Uncle Wibley was very lucky to get back the original sum he'd invested. Very lucky indeed! Cheerio!"

The door closed quietly on his retreating form. There was a moment of silence. It was broken by Dawson.

"Would anyone advise another ginger-beer?" he asked.

"I think we might," said his bosom pal Potts. "Right-ho, fill 'em up!" said Russell major to the tuckshop dame. "Now about these holi-days of mine. The point is—should I join my people at Sandbeach, or go abroad with my uncle?"

"We'll advise you later when we've had time to consider it," said Dawson.

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