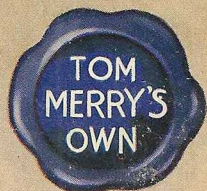


Who punched a New House prefect in the dark? Tom Merry and Co. do not believe that it was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and they rally round Gussy, and bar out the "beaks".

# RALLYING ROUND GUSSY

by MARTIN CLIFFORD



*Author of*  
TOM MERRY & Co.  
of ST. JIM'S

*The SECRET of the STUDY  
ETC.*

MANDEVILLE PUBLICATIONS

*By the same Author*

TOM MERRY & CO. OF ST. JIMS  
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RALLYING ROUND  
GUSSY

MARTIN CLIFFORD

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## CHAPTER I

### MYSTERY OF THE MISSING TOPPER

" THAT ass! " sighed Jack Blake.

" That image! " said Digby.

Herries grunted.

Tom Merry laughed. Monty Lowther grinned. Manners shrugged his shoulders.

Six fellows were waiting.

They loafed on the steps of the School-House, at St. Jim's, with more or less patience—probably less rather than more—waiting for Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

The seven of them were walking over to Wayland that afternoon to see a show. Six were ready to start. They waited on the steps while Arthur Augustus went up to Study No. 6 for his hat.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was a leisurely youth. They expected him to be gone three or four minutes. But he had been gone ten minutes, and there was still no sign of his return.

" Gussy couldn't come in a cap, like a common mortal! " remarked Manners, sarcastically.

" Of course he couldn't," growled Blake, " Doesn't he just love taking his topper for a walk? "

" Well, why doesn't he come? "

" Brushing that topper, perhaps," suggested Monty Lowther, " When Gussy's brushing a topper, he forgets time and space."

Blake glanced up at the clock-tower.

" We've waited over ten minutes," he said, " We'll give

him another minute, and if he doesn't show up, we'll go up to the study and yank him out by his ears."

"Hear, hear!"

The minute passed. Blake looked in at the doorway.

"He's not coming! That does it! Come on, you fellows."

Six fellows marched into the House. They marched up the stairs, half-expecting to meet Arthur Augustus on his way down. But the swell of St. Jim's was not on his way down. Neither was he to be seen on the study landing when they crossed it. Nor was he visible in the Fourth-form passage. Arthur Augustus, apparently, was still in Study No. 6, busy with that topper.

"The ass!" said Blake, "Come on."

They reached Study No. 6. The door stood wide open. There was an elegant figure in the study: that of the best-dressed fellow at St. Jim's. Arthur Augustus, with his eyeglass screwed in his noble eye, was staring about the study, seemingly in search of something. On the study table stood an empty hat-box. But the beautiful topper that was generally parked in it was not visible.

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus's voice was heard, as Tom Merry and Co. arrived in the doorway, "Where is that hat? What feahful wottah has been playin' twicks with my toppah?"

Arthur Augustus's aristocratic countenance was usually serene. But it was quite excited now. It was pink with mingled excitement and wrath, and his noble eye gleamed behind his eyeglass.

"Now, you ass!" hooted Blake, as the juniors crowded into the study.

Arthur Augustus glanced round.

"Weally, Blake——."

"Do you think we're going to wait till calling-over, while you brush your silly hat?" roared Blake.

"I have not been bwushin' my hat, Blake! I cannot.



find my hat. I have been lookin' for it. It is not in the hat-box."

"Well, shove on a cap," suggested Tom Merry.

"I wefuse to shove on a cap, Tom Mewwy. I am goin' in a toppah. But some pwactical jokin' ass has abstwacted my toppah. I shall certainly not go out while that toppah is missin'. And I wequire to know," continued Arthur Augustus, in tones of concentrated wrath, "who has playin' twicks with my toppah. Was it one of you fellows?"

Arthur Augustus scanned six faces in turn. Evidently he had a strong suspicion that one of his friends was responsible for the missing topper.

To his friends, the fact that that glossy, shining, beautiful topper was missing, was not a matter of the first importance. It was not one of the tragedies of life. But to the Honourable Arthur Augustus D'Arcy it was evidently very serious indeed.

"Have you seen my toppah, Blake?"

"Blow your topper!" hooted Blake.

"That is not an answah to my question, Blake! I am goin' to punch the nose of the uttah ass who has been larkin' with my toppah. I uttably wefuse to have my toppah messed about with. I shall punch the wottah's nose, and I shall punch it vewy hard. Have you seen my toppah?"

"No, ass!"

"Have you seen my toppah, Dig?"

"No, fathead!"

"Have you seen my toppah, Hewwies?"

"No, chump!"

"Have you seen my toppah, Tom Mewwy?"

"No, burbler."

"Have you seen my toppah, Mannahs?"

"No, ditherer."

"Have you seen my toppah, Lowthah?"

"Yes!" said Monty Lowther.

It was the first reply in the affirmative. Arthur Augustus's eyes gleamed at Monty Lowther. Lowther was, in fact, the very fellow he would have suspected of larking with his precious topper. Lowther was a tireless, though perhaps tiresome, practical joker: born to japing as the sparks fly upward. His admission that he had seen the missing topper was enough for Arthur Augustus.

"You uttah ass! You pwactical jokin' wottah! I am goin' to punch your nose for larkin' with my toppah."

"Here, I say—I mean——Oh!" roared Monty Lowther, as Arthur Augustus rushed on him, and punched, "You mad ass! Ow! By gum, I'll——."

"Chuck it!" Tom Merry hastily pushed between, "Look here, Monty, if you've been larking with Gussy's silly hat——."

"I haven't!" yelled Lowther. He pressed his hand to his nose. Like Marian's in the ballad, it was red and raw. Slim and elegant as Arthur Augustus was, there was a good deal of force in his punch. Lowther's nose had a momentary feeling that it had been driven through his head, like a nail. "I don't know anything about his idiotic topper! But I'm going to punch his silly head."

"You said that you had seen it, Lowthah, you pwactical jokin' ass——."

"So I have seen it, you blithering cuckoo! I've seen it on your silly head!" roared Lowther, "I saw it there yesterday."

"Oh! Bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the juniors.

Monty Lowther, evidently, had been making one of his little jokes—on a subject that seemed to Arthur Augustus far too serious for joking. He had made that little joke without counting upon Arthur Augustus going into action so very promptly. His reward was a red and suffering nose, and a yell of laughter from his friends.

"Bai Jove! If you have not been larkin' with my

toppah, Lowthah, I am sowwy that I punched your nose," said Arthur Augustus, "If it was only one of your sillay jokes—."

"You'll be sorrier in a minute," said Monty Lowther, ferociously, "I'm going to mop up the study with you."

"You're not, old man," said Tom Merry, laughing, "You shouldn't be so jolly funny, Monty. Come on."

"I tell you——."

"Take his other arm, Manners."

"Look here——."

Tom Merry and Manners marched Monty Lowther out of Study No. 6, by either arm. Lowther went objecting, but he went. In Study No. 6, Blake and Herries and Digby gazed at their aristocratic study-mate expressively.

"Are you coming, image?" asked Blake.

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

"Are you coming?" shrieked Blake.

"Not until I have found my hat! Some awful wottah has abstwacted my hat, and goodness knows what may happen to it."

"We shall be late for the show," bawled Herries.

"I am sowwy for that, Hewwies. But I must find my hat. It has disappeahed fwom the study——."

"Can't you come in a cap?" yelled Dig.

"Pewwaps I could, at a pinch, come in a cap, Dig: but I cannot go out till I have found my toppah. It must be in the House somewhah! Pewwaps you fellows would like to cut out the show this aftahnoon, and help me look for my hat!" suggested Arthur Augustus.

Blake and Herries and Digby gave him a look, which indicated with great clearness that they did not like the idea of cutting out the show and spending the afternoon looking for Gussy's hat! Then they marched out of the study: leaving Arthur Augustus to follow in a cap, or to go on looking for his hat, just as the spirit moved him to do.

Only five fellows out of seven, as it turned out, went to

that show at Wayland that afternoon. Monty Lowther was busy bathing a red and bulbous nose, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, roaming all over the School House like an unquiet spirit, looked for his missing topper, but found it not.

## CHAPTER II

### WHOSE HAT ?

“ HA, ha, ha! ” yelled Kerr and Wynn.

Figgins grinned.

“ Like my new hat? ” he asked.

“ Ha, ha, ha! ”

They seemed very hilarious, in Figgins's study in the New House at St. Jim's.

George Figgins, long and lean, with rugged features and unruly hair, did not look his very best in a top hat. Still, it certainly looked very nice: it was undoubtedly a very handsome hat.

Any fellow looking into that study in the New House might have wondered what all the hilarity was about. Toppers were not common usage at St. Jim's: still, on special occasions fellows did sport toppers: so really there seemed nothing to cause such chuckles and chortles in the study, in the mere fact that George Figgins was trying on a new hat under the inspection of his chums.

But clearly Figgins and Co. were very much amused.

Figgins, grinning, looked at his reflection in the glass. Kerr and Wynn watched him, laughing.

“ Looks nobby, what? ” asked Figgins.

“ Quite! ” chuckled Kerr, “ It doesn't suit you quite so well as it suits Gussy—he was born for top hats! But it looks nobby.”

“Top-hole,” said Fatty Wynn. “Ever so much better than your own, Figgy. Yours always looks a bit like a busby.”

“Gussy looks after his hats,” chuckled Figgins, “I believe he spends hours and hours brushing them, and always keeps his topper in a hat-box—so a fellow knows just where to look for it.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“It’s such a jolly good hat, that I’ve a jolly good mind to stick to it,” declared Figgins, “But we’ll let Gussy have it back—as a happy surprise for him. You got that old hamper, Kerr?”

“It’s under the table.”

“Good egg! Then I may as well park this tile in it now. I’ve a good mind to walk over to the School House in it: but perhaps Gussy might get suspicious, if he’s missed his topper.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

Tap!

The study door opened.

“Oh!” ejaculated Figgins.

It was the elegant figure of Arthur Augustus D’Arcy, of the Fourth Form, that presented itself in the doorway of the study.

Figgy’s hand shot up to the hat. But he dropped it again. It was too late to whip off that hat before it met the eyes of its proprietor.

Arthur Augustus was an unexpected caller. He had taken Figgins and Co. by surprise. There was George Figgins, right under his eyes, with Gussy’s missing top hat on his head! He was caught in the act, as it were.

For the moment, Figgins and Co. supposed that Gussy had guessed where to look for the missing hat, and had called for it. That would quite have spoiled the little joke planned by Figgins and Co., with regard to the further adventures of that hat.

But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was not a suspicious fellow. He was warranted not to see anything that stuck out less than a mile. Often and often did Arthur Augustus try on a new hat in his study, so he saw nothing unusual in George Figgins of the New House doing the same. Figgins was standing before the looking-glass, as any fellow might do, trying on a hat. That was all.

"Pway excuse my buttin' in, deah boys, if you are busy," said Arthur Augustus, gracefully.

"Not frightfully busy," said Figgins, genially, "Just trying on a hat, that's all."

"Well, as a mattah of fact, deah boy, I nevah like bein' intewwupted when I am twyin' on a hat or a necktie," said Arthur Augustus, "My ideah is that when a fellow is doin' anythin' weally important, he wants to give it his undivided attention. But if you don't mind——."

"Not at all, old tulip," assured Figgins.

"Trot in," said Fatty Wynn.

"Welcome as the flowers in May," said Kerr, solemnly.

Arthur Augustus ambled gracefully in. Figgins grinned at his reflection in the glass, under the top hat. Kerr and Wynn grinned at one another. Evidently, the swell of the School-House had no suspicion whose hat was adorning George Figgins' head at that moment!

"Like my hat, Gussy?" asked Figgins, airily.

"Yaas, wathah!" Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass on the top hat, and scanned it, "That is a good hat, Figgins."

"Glad you like it," said Figgins, affably, "I don't know so much about toppers as you do, Gussy, and I'm jolly glad to have your opinion. You really think it's a good hat?"

"Certainly, deah boy. If I may say so, you look unusually wespectable in that hat," said Arthur Augustus' "Genewally your hat is wathah a wag, deah boy. But that hat is weally the goods."

"So glad you think so! Gussy knows all about these

things, you fellows," said Figgins, glancing at his chums, "It's straight from the horse's mouth, really. When Gussy says that a hat is a hat, why, it's a hat!"

"Yaas, wathah," assented Arthur Augustus, innocently, "I'm not the fellow to bwag, I hope, but I weally think I know somethin' about hats! It's wathah a coincidence," went on Arthur Augustus, "that I have just come ovah to speak to you fellows about a hat."

"You getting a new one too?" asked Figgins, blandly.

"Oh no—I have lost one."

"You've lost a hat? Blew away in the wind, do you mean?" asked Figgins, winking at Kerr and Wynn with the eye that was furthest from Arthur Augustus.

"No! It has been abstwacted fwom my study," explained Arthur Augustus, "I was goin' out with Tom Mewwy and the west, ovah to Wayland, and my hat was missin', so I couldn't go! I thought at first that that ass Monty Lowthah had been playin' twicks and punched his nose——."

"Oh, crikey!"

"But it appeahs that it was not Lowthah! I have asked pwactically ewevy man in the School-House, but nobody seems to have seen my hat. I am wathah wowwied about it, as it may get wuffed in careless hands. That would be pwetty sewious."

"Awful!" said Figgins.

"Horrid!" said Fatty Wynn.

"Dreadful!" said Kerr.

And all three New House juniors looked as solemn as owls.

"Well, to tell you the twuth, deah boys, as it doesn't seem to have been a School-House man larkin' with my hat, I wathah wondahed whethah some New House wottah was the offendah. That is why I have come ovah. I am goin' to thwash the wottah who has abstwacted my hat, as a warnin' to him not to lark on sewious subjects: but, of course, I must know who it is before I thwash him."

“ Well, yes, that’s a jolly old sine qua non, I should say,” agreed Figgins, with a nod, “ Must know who the miscreant is, before you strew the churchyard with his hungry bones! I know just how you feel about it, Gussy—just as I should feel if some ass larked with this nice new hat I’m trying on now! Kerr, have you been borrowing Gussy’s hat from the School-House? ”

“ Not guilty,” grinned Kerr.

“ Have you been scoffing Gussy’s topper from the School-House, Fatty? ”

“ No fear! ” chuckled Fatty.

“ I’m glad to hear it,” said Figgins, severely, “ It’s a very serious matter, as Gussy says. It could hardly be more serious. House rags are all very well : but hats are hats! Especially top hats! I’m jolly well going to take this matter in hand—I shouldn’t wonder if Gussy is right in thinking that it was a New House man who bagged the hat. In fact, I believe I could spot the man! ”

“ Bai Jove! Do you think so, Figgins? ”

“ I feel practically sure of it,” declared Figgins, “ And I’ll jolly well let you know later.”

“ I should be feahfully obliged, deah boy,” said Arthur Augustus gratefully, “ I am goin’ to give him a feahful thwashin’ when I know who it is——.”

“ Hem! ” said Figgins, while Kerr and Fatty Wynn gurgled, “ Well, I’ll let you know who the man is, Gussy, not later than tea-time. Rely on that.”

“ Bai Jove! That’s jolly good of you, Figgins,” said Arthur Augustus, gratefully.

“ Not at all,” said Figgins, airily, while Kerr and Wynn, almost suffocating with suppressed merriment, turned away their faces to hide their emotions!

“ I shall be vewy glad indeed to know who the wottah is, and give him the thwashin’ he deserves,” said Arthur Augustus.

“ I’ll jolly well be there when you do it! ” declared Figgins,



"Now you leave it in my hands, Gussy, and you won't have to wait longer than tea-time."

"Thank you vevy much, deah boy."

"Oh, don't mench."

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, considerably relieved in his noble mind, departed from the study.

Figgins and Co. grinned at one another when the door closed on the swell of the School-House. Figgins took off the hat.

"If he'd seen inside this, and seen his own name in it, think he'd have guessed that it was his hat?" he asked.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Kerr and Wynn.

"I hope he'll change his mind about thrashing the fellow who bagged his hat! I should hate to have to strew Gussy about in little pieces."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the study echoed to the hilarity of Figgins and Co.—what time Arthur Augustus walked back to his own House, still a little anxious about his hat, and wondering who had abstracted it from Study No. 6—and still happily unconscious that he had seen it on the head of George Figgins.

### CHAPTER III

#### A HAMPER FROM HOME?

TAGGLES stared.

The ancient porter of St. Jim's was quite surprised.

Taggles had left his lodge, to have a word with Mrs. Taggles at the school shop, which establishment was kept by Dame Taggles. Returning to his lodge, Taggles was surprised by the sight of a hamper on the step.

It was quite late in the afternoon : and never before had Taggles known the carrier to deliver goods late in the afternoon.

But it certainly looked as if the carrier must have called, and, not finding Taggles at his lodge, dumped down that hamper and departed: for on no other theory could its presence on the doorstep be accounted for.

“ Ho! ” grunted Taggles.

He frowned at the hamper.

It was not a large hamper: but evidently it had to be carried somewhere, and Taggles did not like carrying things.

But the frown melted from his gnarled brow as he peered at the label. It was addressed to A. A. D’Arcy, Esq., School-House, St. James’s School, Sussex.

A. A. D’Arcy, Esquire, was always good for a tip if anyone rendered him a service. Taggles did not like carrying hampers: but, on the other hand, Taggles did like pocketing tips.

It was just on tea-time: and a hamper was sure to be very welcome in a junior study at tea-time. A shilling was a certainty: a half-crown a probability. So Taggles, quite cheerful again, stooped, grasped the hamper, and heaved it up.

He nearly went over backwards with that heave. The hamper was unexpectedly light in weight—amazingly so. Taggles hadn’t expected it to be a feather-weight in hampers.

“ Ho! ” grunted Taggles, again.

He rather wondered what could be in that hamper, to weigh so lightly. It was not uncommon for a hamper to arrive from Eastwood House for Arthur Augustus D’Arcy of the Fourth Form, but as a rule such hampers were fairly well filled. This particular hamper seemed hardly heavier than it would have been empty.

However, that was all to the good, as Taggles had to carry it. And he was proceeding to do so, when five fellows came in at the gates—Tom Merry and Co. back from the show

in Wayland just in time for tea. And those five fellows, coming in hungry after a fairly long walk, naturally felt an interest in the sight of a hamper.

"Hallo, that's something for somebody," remarked Jack Blake, "Let's hope it's for our study!"

"What-ho!" agreed Dig.

"Or ours!" said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Might be for the New House, though," said Blake, thoughtfully, "What about holding Taggles up for it, if it's for the New House?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jack Blake planted himself directly in Taggles' path. He jerked a pencil from his pocket, and levelled it at the ancient porter's gnarled countenance in the manner of a revolver.

"Halt!" he rapped out.

"Look 'ere——!" grunted Taggles.

"Stand and deliver!"

"Look 'ere——."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You get out the way, Master Blake, and don't worrit a man with your little jokes," grunted Taggles, "I got to carry this 'amper in for Master D'Arcy, I 'ave."

"Oh! That alters the case," agreed Blake, returning the pencil to his pocket, "If it's for Gussy, all right! Pass on, friend, and all's well."

Taggles, with another grunt, marched on with the hamper. Tom Merry and Manners, Blake and Herries and Digby, followed him, with smiling faces. A hamper for one member of Study No. 6 was a hamper for the whole study, and for friends of that study. And as Tom Merry and Co, had expended most of their available funds on the show in Wayland, it had looked like tea in hall—before they saw that hamper. So it was a glad sight, like corn in Egypt in the lean years.

Monty Lowther was in the doorway of the House, looking

out for his friends. Monty's nose was still red, and a little raw. It had been well and truly bathed, but evidently had not quite recovered from the jolt administered by Arthur Augustus.

"Danger!" ejaculated Blake.

"Eh! What?" Tom Merry looked round, "What's up?"

"Oh! It's all right—only Lowther's nose! I thought for a minute it was a danger-signal!"

"You silly ass!" hooted Monty Lowther, while the other fellows chuckled, "I'm going to give that idiot D'Arcy one to match."

"This isn't a time to row with Gussy, old chap," said Tom Merry, laughing, "Gussy's just getting a hamper."

"Blow him and his hamper!"

"You know what Gussy's hampers from home are like," said Blake, "Better join up."

"Look at my nose!" hooted Lowther.

"Can't," said Blake, "Too jolly dazzling! Wait till I get some smoked glasses."

"Ha. ha. ha!"

"By gum, I—I—I'll——."

"Oh, come on," said Blake, cheerily, "There's going to be a spread in our study. Bring your nose with you, and we shan't have to turn on a light."

Blake and Herries and Dig followed Taggles up to Study No. 6, grinning. Tom Merry and Manners took Monty's arms, one on either side, and walked him after the Fourth-formers. There was nothing for tea in No. 10 Study in the Shell: and this was a chance not to be missed. On all occasions when a hamper arrived for the Honourable Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, Study No. 6 was like unto a land flowing with milk and honey.

Blake and Herries and Dig arrived at Study No. 6 on the heels of Taggles: and the three Shell fellows arrived on the heels of Blake and Co. Arthur Augustus was in the study.

It was tea-time: but Arthur Augustus was not, at the moment, thinking of tea. He was standing before the study glass, trying on a new necktie. So absorbing was that important occupation, that he did not seem aware of the new arrivals, till Taggles dumped the hamper on the study table. Then the swell of St. Jim's looked round.

"Bai Jove! You fellows back," he said.

"'Amper for you, sir," said Taggles. He leaned one horny hand on the table, and passed the other over his brow as if to wipe away perspiration. "'Eavy, sir, carrying up them stairs, sir."

"Thank you vewy much for bwingin' it up, Taggles," said Arthur Augustus, "Pway accept this half-cwown, Taggles."

Taggles accepted the half-crown, adding a gasp or two to indicate that he had fairly earned it by carrying that hamper up the staircase. Then he departed, and the juniors gathered round the hamper—only Arthur Augustus turning back to the looking-glass.

"Aren't you going to open that hamper, fathead?" inquired Jack Blake.

"Yaas, deah boy. But I am wathah busy at the moment. I have some new neckties I am twyin' on."

"Would you like me to chuck those neckties out of the study window, Gussy?"

"Eh! Certainly not."

"Then you'd better open this hamper before you try on any more. If it's not open in two ticks, say good-bye to your neckwear!"

"Weally, Blake——."

"We've come in hungry, fathead!" hooted Herries, "We've been walking in the open air, not fooling about with neckties."

"Weally, Hewwies, I have not been foolin' about with neckties," said Arthur Augustus, mildly, "I suppose it is necessawy for a fellow to twy on a necktie befoah decidin'

to wear it. That is the only way I know of makin' suah that it is in harmony with the west of his clobbah, at any wate."

"Open the window, Dig," said Blake. "Hand over those neckties, Gussy. They're going out into the quad."

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus, "If you fellows are hungwy, I will certainly open the hampah at once, and twy the neckties on aftah tea."

And Arthur Augustus, taking out his ivory-handled pen-knife, cut the cord that secured the hamper, and raised the lid.

Six fellows gathered round with keen interest. They had healthy youthful appetites, and were ready for tea—and the more substantial the tea, the better. Usually, in Gussy's hampers from home, were such things as cold chickens, sausages, cakes, jam-rolls, and other such delectable items. Whatever the quantity, there were enough fellows gathered in Study No. 6 to do it full justice. And all eyes were fixed on the hamper as it was opened.

Arthur Augustus threw back the lid.

And then——!

"Bai Jove!" he ejaculated.

"What——."

"Great pip!"

"Oh, gum!"

"Good Lord!"

"Oh, holy smoke!" gasped Jack Blake, "Have your people gone off their rockers, Gussy? Are they crackers at Eastwood House! What in the name of Mike have they sent you a top hat in a hamper for?"

## CHAPTER IV

### NOT A FEED!

TOM MERRY and Co. stared.

They stared blankly.

There was no cold chicken in that hamper. There was no cake. There was not the ghost of a sausage, or the spectre of a jam-roll. There was a top hat!

Arthur Augustus gazed at it, in wonder.

“Gweat Scott!” he said, “A—a—a hat! Nothin’ but a hat! It is vevy nice of the patah to send me a new hat—but weally—who evah heard of sendin’ a fellow a hat in a hampah? It is vevy wemarkable.”

“Can you beat it?” gasped Blake. “Didn’t you know that there was insanity in your family, Gussy?”

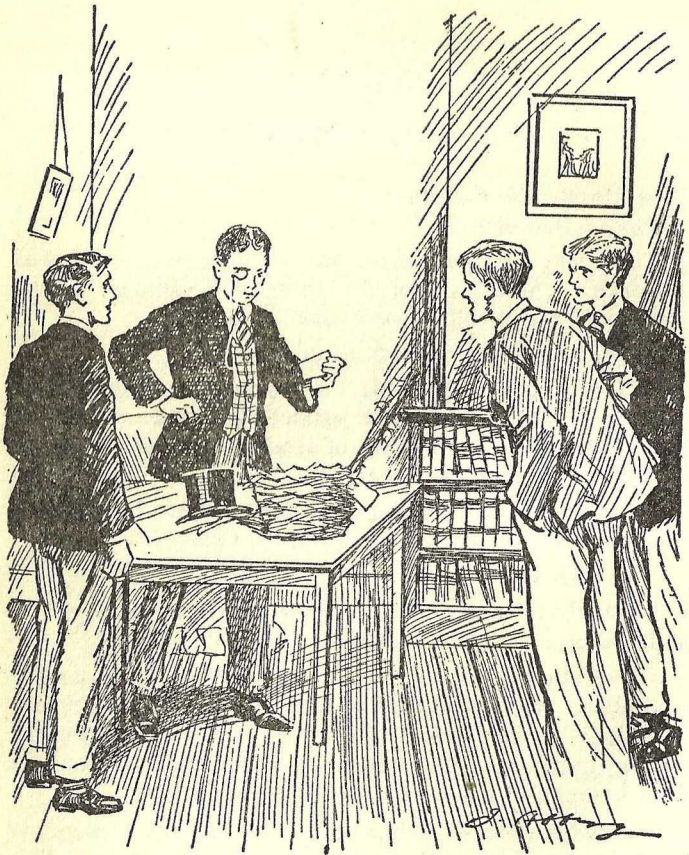
“Weally, Blake——.”

“Has Lord Eastwood taken to practical jokes in his jolly old age?” asked Manners.

“I weally do not undahstand this at all,” said Arthur Augustus. He picked the hat out of the hamper and eyed it ruefully, “It has wolled about and got feahfully wuffled in that hampah! Fancy anybody packin’ a top hat loose in a hampah? I quite fail to undahstand it.”

“Perhaps there’s a letter with it, to explain,” suggested Tom Merry, “It really does want some explaining. This really isn’t up to the best traditions of the House of Lords, Gussy!”

“Bai Jove! Heah is a card!”



There was no cold chicken. There was no cake. There was not the ghost of a sausage. There was a top-hat!



A slip of cardboard fell out of the hat. Arthur Augustus picked it up from the table, and looked at what was written on it. Then there was a roar of wrath in Study No.6.

"The wottah!" roared Arthur Augustus, his aristocratic face crimson with wrath and indignation, "The cheekay wottah!"

"Eh?"

"What?"

"The uttah wapscallion!" shrieked Arthur Augustus, "Bai Jove! I will give him a feahful thwashin' for this!"

"Steady the Buffs!" said Tom Merry, "What does Lord Eastwood say?"

"You uttah ass——."

"Is that what Lord Eastwood says?"

"No! Of course, not, you ass! This is not from my patah at all! You are an uttah ass, Tom Mewwy, look at that!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

He held up the card that had fallen from the hat. Six pairs of eyes fixed on it, and six voices howled, in chorus:

"Figgins!"

It was a brief message on the card. It was written in George Figgins's well-known sprawling hand. And it ran:

Dear Gustavus,

I had a jolly good mind to keep your hat, after you told me it looked so nice on me.

Now put a wet towel round your head, and work out who bagged it.

G. Figgins.

"It is my hat, you know," gasped Arthur Augustus, "It is the missin' hat! That fwightful wottah Figgins bagged it from this study, and he has sent it back in that hamper! Bai Jove! This is a wotten New House jape. Why, I went ovah to the New House, you know, and Figgins was twyin' on a hat in his study, and I nevah guessed that it was my hat——."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled six fellows.

"He asked me what I thought of it, and I said it was a vevy good hat——."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you fellows, there is nothin' to cackle at! Figgins actually had my hat on his head, and I nevah knew——."

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Tom Merry and Co.

"Pullin' my leg all the time, you know," exclaimed Arthur Augustus, in great wrath, "Makin' out that it was a new hat he was twyin' on, and it was my hat all the time, and that New House wuffian had abstwacted it——."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I do not wegard it as a laughin' mattah, I shall give Figgins a feahful thwashin' for this! I do not wegard it as a joke to abstwact a fellow's toppah, and send it back to him in a hampah! Look at it! It is all wuffed——."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I shall have to bwush that hat like anythin'——."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you fellows think it is funnay——!" roared Arthur Augustus.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Apparently the fellows did! They roared with laughter.

The mystery of the missing hat was solved. It was a New House jape—merely that and nothing more. Figgins had bagged that hat, and returned it in a hamper, timing the arrival of the hamper for tea-time. The circumstance that Gussy had visited the New House, and seen that hat on Figgins' head, without dreaming that it was his own, did undoubtedly strike Tom Merry and Co. as funny, and they yelled.

"Well," gasped Blake, "You've got your hat back, Gussy, if that matters. But we can't eat it!"

"We can't!" agreed Tom Merry.

"What a sell!" sighed Digby, "I thought there was

going to be a feed out of that hamper! And it's only Gussy's silly hat!"

"What about tea?" grunted Herries.

"That awful wottah Figgins——."

"Oh, blow Figgins," said Herries, "What about tea?"

"That indescwivable wuffian Figgins——."

"Bother Figgins!" roared Digby, "And bother your hat! We want tea, see?"

"Weally, Digby——."

"Shell out, Gussy," said Blake, "Figgins has diddled us over that hamper. We'll make him sit up for it, some time! But never mind Figgins now. It's past tea-time. We're all stony, so it's up to you—you can't expect us to eat what was in that hamper——."

"I am sowwy to say that I am stonay too, Blake."

"Fathead! You changed a ten-bobber in the tuck-shop this morning, and had half-a-crown change——Trot it out."

"Yaas, but I tipped Taggles with that half-cwown, for bwingin' the hampah up to the study——."

"Oh, my hat! You tipped Taggles with the last half-crown in the study, for bringing up a hamper with nothing but a hat in it!" yelled Blake.

"Yaas, wathah."

Blake and Herries and Digby regarded their noble chum very expressively. Tom Merry laughed.

"We're all in the same boat," he remarked, "It's the door-steps in hall for us—unless you've got anything, Monty."

"Well, as it happens, I've got a note," said Monty Lowther, feeling in his pocket. "If it's any good, you're more than welcome, my infants."

"Oh, good egg!" exclaimed Blake, "If it's only a ten-bobber, it will see the lot of us through for tea."

"It isn't a ten-bobber," said Lowther.

"Well, if it's a pound note, all the better."

"But it isn't a pound note."

"Oh, my hat! Mean to say you've got a fiver?"

"No fear! I don't get fivers like Gussy."

Blake stared at him.

"Well, if it isn't a ten-bobber, or a quid, or a fiver, what the thump note is it?" he demanded.

"It's a note from the outfitter's at Wayland——."

"Wha—a—at?"

"——to say that my new shoes are ready, if I call for them," said Monty Lowther, affably, "If it's any use to you fellows, here it is."

If Monty Lowther expected that little joke of his to raise a laugh, he was disappointed. Hungry schoolboys who were late for tea did not seem in a mood to appreciate the jests of the funny man of the Shell.

"Idiot!" said Blake.

"Ditherer!" said Digby.

"Blitherer!" said Herries.

And they marched out of Study No. 6, to go down to hall for tea before it was too late even for the "door-steps."

"Fathead!" said Tom Merry.

"Ass!" said Manners.

And they followed Blake and Co.

Monty Lowther sighed and followed on. Like many humorists, he found sometimes that he lived in an unappreciative world.

"Coming, Gussy?" yelled Blake, from the passage.

"I am goin' ovah to the New House to thwash Figgins, Blake."

"Br-r-r-r-r!"

And six fellows went down to hall to tea, while Arthur Augustus, regardless of tea, sallied forth from the School-House, to march across the quad to the other House, and give George Figgins the thrashing which, in Gussy's opinion, he so richly deserved.

## CHAPTER V

### A LITTLE LIVELINESS

MONTEITH of the Sixth, captain of the New House, glanced rather curiously at an elegant junior who walked into that House.

School-House juniors sometimes paid friendly calls on fellows they knew in the other House. But the expression on Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's noble visage did not hint that he was paying a friendly call.

In fact, Arthur Augustus, judging by his looks, was understudying the gentleman on the Alps: "his brow was set, his eye beneath flashed like a falchion from its sheath!"

Monteith was standing by the staircase, in conversation with Kildare, the captain of the school, who had come over from the School-House to talk games. Arthur Augustus, at the moment, noticed neither of the great men of the Sixth. He was bound for Figgins's study: and had no attention to bestow even on such tremendous personages as the captain of St. Jim's and a house-captain. And Monteith, after glancing at him, gave him no further heed, being more interested in his talk with Kildare than in a Fourth-form junior.

But a minute or two later, after Arthur Augustus had disappeared up the staircase, the visitor from the other House was recalled to his mind.

There was a sudden outburst of voices somewhere above. The distance was considerable: but the voices seemed to be on their top notes. They were mingled with sounds of laughter.

“ Figgins, you wottah——! ”

“ Ha, ha, ha! ”

“ Welease me, you wuffians! ”

“ Ha, ha, ha! ”

“ If you do not welease me immediately, I shall thwash you all wound.”

“ Get on with it, Gussy! ”

“ Go it, Gustavus! ”

“ Ha, ha, ha! ”

Bump! bump! bump! bump!

“ Yawoooooh! ”

“ Ha, ha, ha! ”

It was quite an uproar, and it was coming nearer. It was, in fact, clear that somebody was being bumped across the landing, and was resisting strenuously.

Kildare, who was speaking, paused. Monteith frowned. Both of them looked up the staircase. No doubt the juniors on the landing had no idea that the two great men were in the offing. But really the uproar was so terrific that it might have reached as far as Mr. Ratcliff's study, and brought the house-master on the scene.

“ Hold on a minute, Kildare,” said Monteith, “ I'd better look into this.”

And he ascended the staircase.

Quite a startling and interesting sight met his eyes on the landing. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was struggling and wriggling in the grasp of three New House juniors—Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn. Owen, Redfern, Lawrence, Pratt, Diggs, and five or six more New House juniors were looking on and laughing. Arthur Augustus was being bumped all the way from Figgins's study to the stairs—and evidently he was not enjoying the process.

Arthur Augustus had, in fact, bitten off more than he could masticate, in visiting Figgy's study with hostile intent. He had ventured, like Daniel, into the lion's den, but with much worse luck than Daniel. Arthur Augustus feared

no foe : but the odds were to many for him, all the same. Whether the swell of the School-House could have thrashed the long-limbed, muscular Figgins was, perhaps a doubtful question. But he was not given a chance to try it on. Nobody in Figgy's study wanted to damage Gussy. They just collared him and walked him away, tapping him gently on the floor as they bore him to the stairs. Wriggling, struggling, spluttering, Arthur Augustus went—he could not help it! And they were half-across the landing to the stairs when Monteith of the Sixth, coming up, beheld the interesting sight, and stared at it.

“ You uttah wuffians! ” shrieked Arthur Augustus, with a frantic wriggle, “ I ordah you to welease me at once. I have come ovah heah to thwash Figgins——.”

“ My dear chap, you couldn't begin to thrash one side of me,” said Figgins, soothingly, “ Mustn't lose its ickle temper.”

“ Ha, ha, ha! ”

“ If you'll go quietly, old son, we won't roll you down the stairs,” said Kerr.

“ I wefuse to go quietly——.”

Bump!

“ Ow! wow! wow! ”

“ Ha, ha, ha! ”

“ 'Ware pre's! ” shouted Owen, catching sight of Monteith's head and shoulders rising into view on the staircase.

“ Oh, my hat! ”

“ Cut! ”

“ Hook it! ”

Bump! Arthur Augustus was dropped, as suddenly as if he had become red-hot, and the whole crowd of juniors scampered back to the Fourth-form studies. A dozen fellows seemed to melt into thin air in a split second.

Arthur Augustus, however, was quite unable to melt into thin air. He sprawled on the landing, spluttering

for breath.

“Ow! Ooooh! Bai Jove! Oh, cwikey! Ow!”

Monteith stepped on the landing.

“You young ass!” he exclaimed.

“Ooogh!” Arthur Augustus sat up, and blinked dizzily at the New House captain. He groped for his eyeglass, fluttering at the end of its cord, jammed it into his eye, and gurgled, “Wooogh!”

“Get out!” said Monteith, “Keep your House rags outside the House, you young duffer. Now, then, sharp!”

Arthur Augustus staggered to his feet. Monteith, house-captain and prefect, naturally expected him to go meekly downstairs and depart. But Arthur Augustus was too wildly excited to heed even a prefect: moreover, Monteith was a New House prefect, and Gussy was a School-House man. Instead of obeying the command, he turned, not in the direction of the stairs, but in the direction of the Fourth-form studies. He had come over to the New House to thrash Figgins: and Arthur Augustus was a sticker, when his noble ire was roused.

Monteith stared at him, blankly, for a moment. Then, as he realised that the excited School-House junior was disobeying prefectorial authority, he made a stride after D'Arcy and grasped him by one ear.

Using that ear as a sort of handle, he swung Arthur Augustus round, and led him to the stairs.

“Wow!” roared Arthur Augustus, “Welease my yah at once! Do you heah me, Monteith? Welease my yah immediately.”

Monteith did not reply: neither did he release the suffering ear. Keeping a grip of steel on it between finger and thumb, he led Arthur Augustus down the staircase. Kildare staring up at them from below.

Arthur Augustus went unwillingly, but he had to go. His ear went, and a parting would have been painful! Like the little lamb that followed Mary everywhere Arthur



Augustus followed his noble ear.

"Will you let go my yah?" gasped Arthur Augustus, "I wepeat, Monteith, will you let go my yah? I should be sowwy to punch a pwefect : but you are askin' for it."

"What?" ejaculated Monteith. Punching a prefect was a rather unheard of performance : and Arthur Augustus, in a less widly excited state, would hardly have thought of it. It appeared that he was thinking of it now!

"I wepeat that I will punch you in the eye!" roared Arthur Augustus.

Kildare, at the foot of the staircase, jumped, as he heard that.

"D'Arcy!" he roared.

Monteith laughed, and gave Arthur Augustus a swing by his ear, pitching him towards Kildare.

"O.K." he said, "The kid's a bit excited! Cut off to your own House, you young ass!"

Arthur Augustus staggered breathlessly against the stalwart captain of St. Jim's. Kildare grasped his shoulder.

"D'Arcy! I heard what you said to Monteith!" Kildare was not often angry, but he looked very grim now, "How dare you!"

"Weally, Kildare——," gasped Arthur Augustus.

"Go back to your House at once, and wait for me in my study!" said Kildare, sternly.

He twirled Arthur Augustus towards the door. There was no doubt that Arthur Augustus was excited : in fact his noble blood was on the boil. But if he had not heeded Monteith, he had to heed Kildare : and, with deep feelings, he walked out of the New House.

## CHAPTER VI

### SIX FOR GUSSY!

“ You fellows heard ? ” asked Baggy Trimble.

Trimble of the Fourth asked that question, as he came into the junior day-room in the School-House after tea. Nobody answered.

There were plenty of fellows in the room. Tom Merry was talking cricket with Talbot of the Shell. Lowther was seated at the table, composing a limerick of unequalled comicality—in Monty’s opinion—for the next number of Tom Merry’s Weekly. Manners was showing some of his photographs to Levison, Clive, and Cardew, of the Fourth—Cardew affecting a deep and intense interest in them, partly to conceal boredom and partly to pull Manners’ leg, and occasionally winking at his friends when the enthusiastic photographer was not looking. Kangaroo of the Shell was slanging Bernard Glyn for making their study ‘ hum ’ with his chemicals. Gore was telling Skimpole what a fathead he was, Skimpole blinking at him like an owl through his spectacles. Grundy, Wilkins, and Gunn were arguing about something : Wildrake and Mellish were arguing about something else. Blake and Herries and Digby were wondering what had become of Arthur Augustus, undecided whether to go over to the Hew House and look for him. A dozen other fellows were variously occupied. And of all the crowd, not a single individual even looked round as the fat Baggy rolled in. The lack of interest in Baggy Trimble was unanimous.

“ About D’Arcy ! ” went on Trimble.

That made a difference! Every fellow in the day-room looked round at once. The change was quite remarkable. A moment before, nobody had wanted to hear what Baggy had to impart. Now, apparently, everybody did.

"What about D'Arcy?" called out Blake.

Trimble grinned.

"He's for it," he announced, cheerfully. "Waiting in Kildare's study to be whopped."

"What?" exclaimed a dozen fellows.

Blake and Herries and Digby came over to Trimble. Baggy eyed them warily. They looked rather as if they were going to up-end him for his news.

"You fat pie-faced tick," said Jack Blake, "What do you mean? D'Arcy's gone over to the New House——."

"He's been kicking up a shindy there," grinned Baggy, "I've just had it from Pratt—he heard it all. Rowing with a prefect——."

"What?" exclaimed Blake, Herries, and Dig, all together.

"Rot!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"I tell you I had it from Pratt of the New House," grinned Baggy, "He heard D'Arcy tell Monteith he'd punch him in the eye——."

"D'Arcy did!" yelled Blake.

"Yes, he jolly well did——."

"Rubbish!" said Levison.

"Bosh!" said Clive.

Blake and Herries and Digby looked at one another, and at Baggy. Whether this startling and dismaying news was well-founded or not, there was no doubt that the fat Baggy was enjoying the sensation he was making by imparting it. And their look at Baggy was very expressive.

"Figgins and Co. were ragging him, it seems," Trimble went on, "Then Monteith chipped in to stop the shindy, and D'Arcy told him he'd punch him in the eye—and Kildare sent him back here—he's going to whop him for checking a pre. D'Arcy's the man to ask for it, ain't he?"

He, he, he." Baggy chuckled. The next moment his fat chuckle changed to a frantic yell, as Blake and Co. collared him, and banged his head on the door. Baggy's yell, as his fat head established sudden contact with hard oak, woke all the echoes.

"Ow! wow! Yaroooooh!" yelled Baggy.

"Come on, you chaps," exclaimed Blake, "Let's go and look for Gussy. The howling ass said he was going over to see Figgins—let's go and see what's happened, for goodness sake."

Leaving Baggy Trimble rubbing a fat head, and all the other fellows speaking at once, Blake and Co. ran out of the day-room. Arthur Augustus's wild adventures in the other House might seem amusing to the fat Baggy: but Gussy's chums were alarmed and anxious.

They cut off at once to the Sixth-Form studies, to ascertain whether their noble chum was there, as Baggy had stated. Three Sixth-Form prefects—Darrell, Langton, and Rushden—were talking in a group: and all three looked round as the juniors rushed into the passage.

"Well?" rapped out Darrell.

That monosyllable recalled to Blake and Co. the fact that Lower boys were not expected, or allowed, to scamper about in the quarters sacred to the high and mighty Sixth Form.

"Oh!" Blake stammered, "We're going to Kildare's study, Darrell."

"Then you'd better go quietly."

"Oh! Yes!"

And the three juniors, with great meekness, proceeded at a walk instead of a run: the three great men resuming their conversation, and taking no further notice of such inconsiderable atoms.

Kildare's door was ajar: and Blake pushed it open. An elegant figure standing by the window turned, and an eyeglass gleamed at them.

"Oh! You're here!" exclaimed Blake.

"Yaas, wathah."

"Trimble said you were here," said Herries, "Have you been kicking up a shindy in Ratcliff's House?"

"I twust, Hewwies, that I am not the fellow to kick up a shinday, as you express it, anywhah," answered Arthur Augustus, with dignity.

"Didn't you go over to row with Figgins?" asked Dig.

"I went ovah to thwash Figgins, Dig., for his fwightful cheek in messin' about with my toppah."

"Well, what's happened?" hissed Blake, "Trimble says you got into a row with a pre, and told Monteith you'd punch him in the eye. I suppose that was only Trimble's gammon."

"Not at all, deah boy," answered Arthur Augustus, calmly, "Monteith had the cheek to take hold of my yah, and I certainly did mention that I would punch him in the eye if he did not welease it."

"Oh, holy smoke!" gasped Blake.

"I wegard it as extwemely dewogatory to a fellow's dignity to be taken by the yah," said Arthur Augustus, "I did not come to St. Jim's to be taken by the yah. These New House men have fwightful mannahs."

"You howling ass——."

"Weally, Blake——."

"Do you know that you might be sent up to the Head for saying such a thing to a prefect?" howled Blake.

"I should be quite willin' to explain to Dr. Holmes my vevy stwong objection to bein' taken by the yah, Blake."

"Oh, you chump!" said Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies——."

"You born blitherer!" groaned Digby.

"Weally, Dig——."

"I've always said that we ought to keep him on a chain, said Blake, "He ain't safe running about loose."

"I wegard that wemark as asinine, Blake." Arthur

Augustus glanced from the window. "Heah comes Kildare! You fellows had bettah cut."

Blake and Herries and Digby left the study rather hastily. They were at the corner of the passage, when Kildare came in. The St. Jim's captain glanced at them in passing, and went on to his study, and disappeared therein.

The three juniors waited.

Their concern for their aristocratic chum was deep. And there was good reason for it : for about a minute later, a sound was heard from Kildare's study, like unto the sound of the beating of carpet.

Whop! whop! whop!

"Poor old Gussy!" sighed Blake.

Whop! whop! whop!

It was a full "six" : and judging by the distinctness with which the whops reached the ears of the anxious trio at the corner of the passage, well laid on!

Then Kildare's door opened again, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy emerged. He came down the passage to where his friends waited for him, but not with his usual elegant ease. He walked quite stiffly, and with an occasional wriggle, and was breathing very hard.

"Had it bad, old chap?" murmured Blake.

"Yaas!" said Arthur Augustus, briefly.

They walked him away, silently sympathetic. But Arthur Augustus came to a halt, glancing at the open doorway of the House, and the quad beyond. There was a look in his eye that his friends did not like.

"Come on, Gussy," said Blake.

"Come up to the study," said Herries.

"It will wear off, old chap," said Digby, "We've all had it, you know, one time or another. Let's go up to the study."

"I am not complainin' of a lickin', deah boys," said Arthur Augustus, "It was wathah tough, but I can take it, I twust. But I wegard it as wank injustice."

“Kildare couldn’t do anything else, after what you said to a New House pre,” urged Blake.

“I am awah of that, Blake. I am not blamin’ Kildare. He weally had no choice in the mattah. But that New House smudge Monteith——.”

“Monteith ain’t so bad,” said Dig, “He might have reported you to Railton or the Head for cheeking him.”

“I wegard him as a smudge, Dig! He took me by the yah,” said Arthur Augustus, his voice trembling with indignation, “I should not have told him I would punch him in the eye, if he had not taken my by the yah. One does not expect vewy much of the New House : but that is the limit. I am now considewin—whathah to go ovah to the New House again——.”

“What?”

“And punch Monteith in the eye.”

“Wha-a-at?”

“I have had six on the bags—vewy hard ones, too, all because that New House smudge took me by the yah! I wegard that as wank injustice, and I am thinkin’ of goin’ ovah and punching Monteith in the eye aftah all——pway let go my arm, Blake—let go my othah arm, Dig—stop pushin’ me, Hewwies——.”

Blake and Dig did not let go, and Herries did not cease to push. Until Arthur Augustus D’Arcy calmed down sufficiently to abandon, wholly and completely and utterly, any idea of punching a Sixth-Form prefect in the eye, his friends were not likely to let him run loose. They walked Arthur Augustus away to the staircase—they walked him up the stairs—they walked him across the study landing—they walked him into the Fourth-Form passage—and they walked him into Study No. 6. That, in the opinion of his affectionate chums, was the safest place for him, so long as any idea lingered in his noble mind of punching a prefect in the eye!

## CHAPTER VII

### NOT GOOD ENOUGH!

“TROT in, Gussy!” said Cardew, heartily.

Levison and Clive looked round, but did not speak.

“Prep” was on, in the Fourth. In Study No. 9, Levison and Clive were at work: and Cardew was yawning over his books. Juniors were not supposed to leave their studies during prep: but Arthur Augustus D’Arcy, apparently, was forgetting or disregarding that rule. For there he was, looking into No. 9 through his celebrated eyeglass.

Ralph Reckness Cardew gave him a welcoming look. His study-mates seemed rather less hospitable. True, Gussy was persona grata in that study, as in almost every other junior study in the House. But prep was prep. Mr. Lathom had to be considered, in the form-room in the morning. Welcome as Arthur Augustus was, on his own account, Levison and Clive would have preferred him to defer his call till after prep.

Not so Cardew! Actually, he did not care a boiled bean about his distant relative, Arthur Augustus D’Arcy: but he looked as if he loved him as a brother at that moment.

“I twust that I am not intewwuptin’ you fellows,” said Arthur Augustus: always thoughtful and considerate.

“You are, old bean,” answered Cardew, “That’s why I’m so jolly glad to see you. Trickle in.”

“Has Lathom let you off prep this evening, D’Arcy?” inquired Clive.

“Not at all, deah boy.”

“Well, hadn’t you better be getting on with it?” suggested



Levison.

"I have a wathah more important mattah to think of than pwep, Levison," explained Arthur Augustus. "I am chancin' it with Lathom."

"Good man!" said Cardew, "I'll follow your excellent example! If slacking spoils your work, give up work—what?"

"Bai Jove! I cannot quite agwee with that, Cardew. I twust I shall nevah be a slackah. But I should weally like to speak to you, if you are not feahfully busy."

"Take a pew, old man, and pile in," said Cardew, rising from the study table, and twirling an armchair towards the visitor, "What's the jolly old topic, Gussy? I hear you've been telling the world that you're going to punch a New House pre in the eye. Punched him yet?"

"Certainly not, Cardew. I am not goin' to do anythin' of the kind. On weflection, I considah it much bettah not."

"Much better," grinned Clive, "No end better, old man."

"Tons!" agreed Levison.

"I was feahfully exaspewated with Monteith," explained Arthur Augustus, "I may say that I was enwaged. But punchin' a pwefect in the eye is not only against the wules, but it is vewy bad form. I have decided to wegard the fellow simply with contempt."

"That will make him feel fearfully small, if he hears of it!" remarked Cardew, with great gravity.

"Yaas, wathah," assented Arthur Augustus, innocently, while Levison and Clive gurgled over their prep. "I shall simply take no furthah notice of Monteith, except to wegard him with contempt. Neithah am I goin' to thwash Figgins."

"Not?" murmured Cardew, while his tudy-mates gurgled again.

Arthur Augustus shook his noble head.

"You see, I wathah lost my tempah," he said, "I think

any fellow might lose his tempah, when his toppah was abtwahted, and weturned to him in a hampah——.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“But aftah all, it was only a jape,” continued Arthur Augustus, “Figgins is wathah a fathead, and he doesn’t wealise that it was an act of vandalism. He meant it as a jape, and may even have wegarded it as funnay—goodness knows how he might wegard it, with a bwain like his. I am not goin’ to thwash Figgins—I am goin’ to jape him back, see?”

“And how?” murmured Cardew.

“I have been thinkin’ that out, and I have it all cut and dwied,” said Arthur Augustus, cheerfully, “What pwice baggin’ his clothes fwom his dormitowy in the New House——.”

“Eh?”

“And weturnin’ them by parcel post, what?” grinned Arthur Augustus, “A Woland for an Olivah!”

Cardew, Clive, and Levison gazed at the swell of St. Jim’s. He seemed rather to have taken their breath away.

“Bagging a New House man’s clothes from his dormitory!” said Levison, blankly.

“Yaas, wathah! Fancy his face when he turns out in the mornin’ and finds his clobbah gone!” chuckled Arthur Augustus.

“Oh, my hat!” said Clive, “I can fancy his face—but——.”

“He can go down in the mornin’ in a blanket, if he likes,” chortled Arthur Augustus, “Or he can hang awound in his pyjamas till they get him some othah clobbah! I wathah think that that will be gettin’ back on Figgins all wight for playin’ twicks with my toppah.”

“But—!” gasped Levison.

Ralph Reckness Cardew, leaning back in his chair, fixed a very keen and penetrating look on Arthur Augustus. He did not speak, but he watched Gussy’s face as if seeking to

read his thoughts. Levison and Clive, however, took up the tale.

"But you can't do it, Gussy," urged Clive, "You can't break House bounds after lights out."

"Easy as fallin' off a form, deah boy. I shall simply go down quietly fwom the dorm, and dwop out of the lobby window."

"It will mean a fearful row if you're spotted."

"Yaas, I am awah of that : but I shall not be spotted, you see. You can wely on a fellow of tact and judgment to take care of that."

"You could get out of this House, I suppose, if you're ass enough," said Levison, "But you couldn't get into the New House after lock-ups."

"That is all wight," smiled Arthur Augustus, "I know a window where I can get in. Bakah of the Sixth went home to-day and won't be back till tomowwow—and that means that his study will be empty, see? I shall get in at the window of Bakah's study, as there will be nobody there."

"Oh! But——."

"All I wequiah is a fellow to come along and give me a bunk up."

"Oh!" said Levison, Clive, and Cardew, all together. They understood now why Arthur Augustus had called in at No. 9.

"Wathah a bwight idea, what?" asked Arthur Augustus, "Figgins and Co. will be fast asleep at midnight, of course. They won't have a suspish. I cweep into their dorm, bag Figgy's clobbah, and cweep away, without wakin' anybody up. They won't know a thing, till wisin'-bell, when Figgins will discovah that he hasn't any clobbah to put on! Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus laughed merrily.

No. 9 Study did not join in his merriment. They were all staring at him—Levison and Clive in dismay, Cardew with a very curious expression on his face. Cardew was

keen—perhaps a little too keen sometimes—and he had an idea that he saw more in this than either of his study-mates dreamed of.

“That is why I have come heah,” Arthur Augustus proceeded to explain, rather unnecessarily, “Blake and Hewwies and Dig wefuse to have anythin’ to do with it, though they are my own pals in my own study——.”

“I should jolly well think so,” said Clive.

“Shows their sense,” remarked Levison.

“I weally believe they would stop me, if they could,” added Arthur Augustus, “They called me all sorts of names when I told them. But of course I am goin’ on just the same.”

“Did they call you a fathead and a silly ass?” asked Levison.

“Yaas, wathah.”

“Then they were right on the wicket.”

“Weally, Levison——.”

“For goodness sake, chuck it up, Gussy, urged Levison, “You’ll land yourself in an awful row if you try it on.”

“Wats!”

“You can’t do it, Gussy,” urged Clive.

“As a mattah of fact, I did not come heah for advice, but for a fellow to bunk me up to Bakah’s window to-night,” said Arthur Augustus, “Are you game, Cardew?”

“Game enough, old bean,” said Cardew, “But——.”

“It is wathah in your line, in a way,” said Arthur Augustus, “You have been out of the House aftah lights out, befoah this, Cardew. I wegard it as vewy wepwehensible, but you have. But this is only a jape—nothin’ shady like your own goin’s on, you know.”

Cardew laughed. Levison and Clive regarded him rather uneasily. The scapegrace of the Fourth was utterly reckless, and, chiefly for Gussy’s own sake, they hoped that he would not find any fellow to back him up in his hare-brained scheme, and that he would, in consequence,

“ chuck ” it.

“ Look here, Cardew——! ” said Levison.

“ You’re not going——! ” began Clive.

“ Pway let Cardew speak for himself,” said Arthur Augustus, “ I wequiah a fwiend to bunk me up at the window of Bahak’s study in the New House to-night. Will you play up, Cardew? ”

“ Better give it a miss,” said Cardew, much to the relief of his study-mates.

“ Weally, Cardew——.”

“ Not good enough! ” said Cardew, shaking his head.

“ Does that mean that you wefuse, Cardew? ”

“ What a brain! ” said Cardew, “ Gussed it in one, old bean.”

Arthur Augustus D’Arcy rose from his chair. His manner was extremely dignified.

“ Vewy well,” he said, icily, “ Sowwy I’ve intewwupted you! ” And with his noble nose slightly elevated, Arthur Augustus walked out of the study. Cardew grinned as he closed the door after him.

“ Thank goodness you had sense enough not to back him up,” said Levison, “ Ten to one he’d be spotted, and land in a fearful row.”

“ I’d have backed him up fast enough in a jape on Figgins,” drawled Cardew, “ I wouldn’t mind a spot of risk. But I rather fancy that Gussy wasn’t putting all his cards on the table, my beloved ’earers.”

“ I don’t see——.”

“ Lots of things you don’t see, Ernest, old bean. D’Arcy has been singing out all over the shop that he’s going to punch that New House pre——.”

“ He’s thought better of that.”

“ Has he? ” drawled Cardew, “ or has it dawned on that solid chunk of wood he calls a brain that a fellow can’t punch a prefect, without getting flogged or sacked—if he’s seen doing it. In the dark he wouldn’t be seen.”

“What?” exclaimed Levison and Clive together.

“He’s goin’ into the New House after lights out, if he can get some silly ass to back him up, and bunk him up—but I don’t fancy Figgins is his game. That, my unsuspecting infants, is eye-wash,” drawled Cardew, “Gussy’s after bigger game than a japin’ fathead in the Fourth Form—and if he does trickle into the New House to-night, I’ll bet we’ll hear in the mornin’ that Monteith of the Sixth has hit a spot of trouble in the dark.”

“Rot!” said Levison.

“Rubbish!” said Clive.

Cardew laughed again.

“Nous verrons,” he said, “Which being translated means we shall see! Now I suppose I’d better have another shot at that rot for Lathom.”

And prep was resumed in No. 9 Study.

## CHAPTER VIII

### AFTER LIGHTS OUT!

“BEASTLY dark, bai Jove!” murmured Arthur Augustus D’Arcy.

He peered about him in the shadows.

It was a dark night. Hardly a star glimmered in the sky. It was not easy for a fellow to see his way about in the old quadrangle of St. Jim’s: and especially a fellow like D’Arcy of the Fourth, wholly unaccustomed to nocturnal prowlings.

His relative, Cardew, was not so unaccustomed to such things. More than once or twice had Ralph Reckness Cardew broken House bounds, and School bounds, after lights out. There were other fellows in the House, like

Racke and Crooke of the Shell, and Cutts of the Fifth, who were reputed to have done likewise. But it was a very new experience for Arthur Augustus to hear the chimes at midnight.

Now he had heard them. Blake and Herries and Digby, sleeping the sleep of the just in the Fourth-Form dormitory in the School-House, little dreamed—if they were dreaming at all—that their noble chum was outside the House: probably the only person awake at that hour in all the great pile of St. Jim's.

But there he was—fully dressed, with his eyeglass glimmering in his eye, peering in the dim dark shadows of the night.

He had been very cautious. His comrades had not only refused most emphatically to back him up in a harebrained raid on the New House in the middle of the night, but they had told him that, if they caught him at it, they would sit on his head till he gave up the idea. They were ready at all times to jape Figgins and Co. of the New House: but there were limits: and they were going to keep Gussy within the limits, if they could. For which reason had Arthur Augustus crept out of the dormitory on tiptoe, leaving Blake and Co. in happy ignorance of the fact that he was gone.

By a window in the junior lobby, Arthur Augustus had dropped into the open air. Every light was out in the House—everybody gone to bed—there was no one to hear or to see—it had been, in fact, quite easy. The difficulties lay ahead.

But Arthur Augustus was not the man to be daunted by difficulties. The opposition of his chums, and the rebuff in No. 9 Study, had only made him, if possible, more determined. Arthur Augustus was a sticker, and opposition only made him, as it were, stickier!

He was going to carry out that great idea. He was going to jape Figgins in a quite thorough-going way. He was

going to show Blake and Herries and Digby that he was the man to do it with success. And as he had nobody to bunk him up to that particular window in the New House, he was going to manage somehow without bunking. Difficulties or no difficulties, he was going ahead—right ahead!

But it was very dark—frightfully dark—and he groped his way slowly, peering about him. And suddenly the silence of the night was broken by a loud, sharp exclamation of mingled surprise and pain :

“Ow! ow! Ooooh!”

Arthur Augustus, with all his careful groping, had walked into something in the dark. He banged his noble nose on it rather hard.

“Oh! Oh, cwikey! Oh!”

He backed away from the unseen object, pressing his hand to a rather painful nose. Then, from the silent night, came another sound.

“Bow-wow-ow! Boo-woo-woo!”

“Oh, cwumbs!” breathed Arthur Augustus.

He knew the note of Taggles’ dog. Evidently that dog was running loose, and had heard unaccustomed sounds. A series of loud sharp barks sounded almost like machine-gun fire.

Arthur Augustus breathed hard. It was very annoying. Being new to this kind of adventure, he had never even thought of the dog. Taggles’ dog was quite a nice dog, and Gussy was on quite friendly terms with him—in the daytime. But that dog’s business was to give the alarm if any intruder ventured into the precincts of St. Jim’s by night : and the noise Arthur Augustus had made had been enough to set him going.

Bark, bark, bark, bark!

“Oh, wotten!” breathed Arthur Augustus.

He groped again, and discovered that it was the fountain in the middle of the quad into which he had walked. There



was a lingering pain in his nose—but he had his bearings now, at any rate.

He moved on towards the New House.

That building loomed up before him, dark against a dark sky. Not a single light gleamed from it. The New House, like the School-House, was sleeping at that late hour.

Arthur Augustus found the door. That gave him his bearings again. He moved on, groping, to find the Sixth-Form windows. The particular window he wanted was that of Baker's study.

Baker was a Sixth-Form man. Sixth-Form men, in both Houses at St. Jim's, had studies which were bedrooms by night. And that night, as Arthur Augustus was aware, Baker of the New House was away from the school. Baker's study was therefore certain to be unoccupied. It was an easy and simple way into the House, for one who knew that the room was empty.

In the daytime, nothing would have been easier. After dark, as Arthur Augustus now proceeded to learn, it was not so easy—for it was rather a puzzle to pick out Baker's window from nine or ten others in a row. And Arthur Augustus certainly did not want to barge into an occupied room, and wake up a startled New House Sixth-Form man.

He groped along the old stone ivied wall, peering up at the windows. He was almost sure that Baker's was the sixth in the row—but not quite sure that it was not the fifth, or even the seventh, or possible the eighth. Obviously he had to be sure before he commenced operations.

Bark! bark! bark! bark! bark!

There was a sudden scamper of feet in the dark.

Evidently Taggles' dog was suspicious, and was looking round. He seemed to know that somebody was near the New House, judging by the proximity of his barking and scampering.

"Bothah that howwid bwute!" breathed Arthur Augustus.

Scamper! scamper! Bark, bark!

Far in the distance, a window was heard to open, the distant sound coming faintly in the deep silence of the night.

"Oh, cwikey!" breathed Arthur Augustus, in dismay. It was not a New House window that had opened, and he wondered what window it might be, till he heard a distant but familiar gruff voice.

"'Ere! Tadger! Tadger! Drat that dorg! Wot's the matter with that dorg! 'Ere, Tadger! You be quiet, drat you."

Evidently the barking had awakened Taggles. To Arthur Augustus's immense relief, he heard the dog scampering away in the direction of his master's voice. At a considerable distance, Taggles was looking out of an open window in one of the rooms over the school shop. Tadger scampered off in that direction, and Arthur Augustus fervently hoped that he would stay there.

Relieved of the unwelcome attentions of Tadger, Arthur Augustus resumed groping along the Sixth-Form windows in the New House.

He stopped at the sixth window.

He was almost sure that it was the right one. He would have preferred to be absolutely sure: for Baker's window was next to Monteith's, and he assuredly did not want to barge in on Monteith by mistake.

But he had to take the chance, or give up the whole thing: which was not to be thought of.

It was at this point that he felt the need of a comrade's helping hand. The Sixth-Form studies were on the ground floor but the windows were high from the ground outside. Arthur Augustus could reach the broad stone sill with his hands, and no doubt he could clamber up: but certainly he would have liked a "bunk" from below. Blake or Herries or Dig, or even Cardew, would have come in very useful.

However, as no "bunk" was available, he set himself to

the task.

There was thick ivy on the wall, and that gave some aid. Some of the tendrils came loose from the old stones, as he clambered : and the swaying and rustling sounded alarmingly loud in the night silence.

That was unwelcome, but it could not be helped, and he clambered on, and landed, at last, gasping a little, on the broad stone sill.

In the distance, Tadger was barking again, apparently trying to understudy a machine-gun. Arthur Augustus paid no heed. He was on the sill, and his next activity was to grope for a pocket-knife, with which he was going to push back the catch of the window from outside. At that point, however, he discerned that the window was open a few inches at the top.

Windows open at the top were, of course, quite normal in occupied rooms : but somebody must have been very careless, Arthur Augustus thought, to leave the window of an unoccupied room on the ground floor unfastened at night. But it was all to the good, from Gussy's point of view : for, as the sash was unfastened, all he had to do was to push it up.

He was just proceeding to do so, when a sound from within the room startled him, and made him catch his breath.

" Bai Jove! " murmured Arthur Augustus.

He ceased instantly to shove at the sash, and remained quite still on the sill, staring at the faintly-glimmering glass. For the sound within was that of a bed creaking, as if some fellow was getting up.

D'Arcy's heart stood still for a moment.

It was borne in upon his startled mind that this couldn't, after all, be the window of Baker's unoccupied room. He had got the wrong window! That, no doubt, was why the window was open at the top—it was not an empty but an occupied room!



"What the dickens—!" came a voice above his head. Arthur Augustus knew that voice.

“ Oh, cwikey! ” gasped Arthur Augustus.

He dropped promptly from the sill.

He was only just in time, for hardly a moment later, the lower sash of the window was pushed up from within, and a head was put out.

Arthur Augustus huddled in the darkness, under thick ivy, below the window. His heart was thumping. Somebody, evidently, had heard him at the window, and was alarmed.

“ What the dickens—! ” came a voice above his head.

Arthur Augustus knew that voice. It was the slightly strident voice of Monteith, captain of the New House.

It was not Baker’s study. It was the one next to Baker’s—Monteith’s. And he had alarmed and roused out Monteith.

“ Who’s there? ”

Monteith was peering into the deep gloom. Arthur Augustus could only hope that he would not look downward. Darkness and ivy concealed him, but not wholly. If Monteith thought of looking down under the window—

He did! For his next exclamation was :

“ Who’s that? Is that a junior? What are you doing out of the House? ”

Arthur Augustus’s heart almost missed a beat. Monteith could not make him out in the darkness, crouching under the ivy : but evidently, from his words, he could see that the shadowy figure below was that of a junior.

“ Answer me at once, you young rascal! ” Monteith’s voice came sharply and angrily, “ Who are you, and what are you doing out of the House at this time of night? ”

It was natural that Monteith should suppose that it was some junior of his own House. Arthur Augustus was only too glad to leave him supposing so. Gussy was a sticker : but even Gussy realised that the game was up, and was no longer thinking of getting into the New House and japing Figgins in his dormitory—after he had roused out a Sixth-Form prefect! Prompt retreat was indicated : and Arthur

Augustus did not delay. He shot away into the night : Monteith catching a shadowy glimpse of an unrecognisable figure as he shot.

“ Stop! Do you hear me? Stop at once.”

Arthur Augustus was not likely to stop.

He flew!

And Monteith of the Sixth, in an extremely bad temper, turned on his light, and hurried on his clothes, to go in pursuit.

## CHAPTER IX

### DONE IN THE DARK!

TAGGLES grunted.

Taggles was annoyed.

Taggles did not like being disturbed in the middle of the night.

But it was plain, from Tadger's persistent barking, that something unusual was going on. Taggles, in a state of great annoyance, came out to investigate.

He emerged from the side door, next to the school shop, and stood staring into the gloom. Tadger pranced round him, obviously considering it his duty, as a faithful watchdog, to give the alarm.

“ Ho! ” grunted Taggles, as a sound reached his ears from the darkness. He was not quite sure what it was, but it sounded to him like hurried footsteps.

Tadger, evidently, heard it too, for he gave one sharp, loud bark, and charged away in the direction of the sound.

Taggles breathed hard.

There was someone in the quadrangle, hidden by the darkness. Whether it was some tramp, who might have

penetrated into the school precincts as a snapper-up of unconsidered trifles, or some St. Jim's fellow out of his House, Taggles could not know—but he suspected a tramp.

“ Good dorg! ” said Taggles, “ Fetch 'im! ”

Tadger disappeared into the darkness, evidently doing his best to “ fetch ” the unseen lurker of the night.

Taggles tramped after him.

The scampering of Tadger died away in the distance. Taggles came to a halt, staring round him with frowning brow.

Then he became aware of a light glimmering in the distance. It came from the direction of the New House.

Taggles blinked at it.

It was distant, and a mere glimmer : but it seemed to him that it came from one of the Sixth-Form windows on the ground floor. Someone in the New House, it was clear, had taken the alarm, as well as Taggles.

Taggles started at once in that direction, to inquire.

What happened next took Taggles entirely by surprise. It came with a shock like an earthquake.

That someone was up in the New House he was aware, from the glimmer of the light. That that someone had come out of the House in pursuit of an unrecognized junior Taggles, of course, was not aware. Nor could he possibly guess that that someone, hearing his footsteps, took it for granted that they were the footsteps of the junior he was seeking.

All Taggles knew was that there was a sudden sound of running feet, that a dark shadowy form crashed into him suddenly, and that a hand clutched at him.

Taggles did not stop to think.

He hit out.

It was quite a natural proceeding on the part of Taggles, who suspected that there was a tramp about, and who suddenly found himself charged and clutched in the darkness.

Crash!

A set of hard, horny knuckles landed in an unseen face, and there was a yell of mingled surprise and pain, and a heavy fall.

Taggles panted.

Invisible, but extremely audible, someone was sprawling at his feet, knocked down by that hefty jolt : sprawling on his back, and yelling.

“ Oh! Ow! Oh! My eye! You rascal! Oh! Ooooh! My eye! Oh! ”

Taggles jumped.

He knew that voice.

It was certainly not a tramp's voice. It was the voice of a senior of St. Jim's : of Monteith of the Sixth, captain of the New House.

It was a Sixth-Form man who was sprawling there in the dark, yelling frantically. Taggles almost tottered.

He blinked in the darkness, overcome with horror at what he had done. His ancient brain almost swam.

“ Ow! Oh! Oooh! My eye! Oh, my eye! ”

Taggles felt like fainting.

His horny fist, evidently, had landed in Monteith's eye. He did not need telling that, if that terrific jolt had caught Monteith in the eye, the New House captain would have a black eye—black as the ace of spades, or blacker.

What would happen if it came out that he, Ephraim Taggles, school porter, had blacked the eye of a Sixth-Form man and a house-captain, Taggles did not know. But he knew that it would be very unpleasant.

He could almost see Dr. Holmes's frowning face, and hear his stern voice : “ Taggles, you are discharged! ”

He hardly breathed.

“ Ow! ow! Help! Oh, gad! My eye! ”

Monteith was sitting up blindly, his hand clasped to a suffering eye. Taggles backed away.

He had not meant to knock Monteith down and blacken



his eye. It was all a mistake due to excitement and the dark. Nevertheless, he had done it—and the consequences might be awful.

Taggles backed off.

It seemed to him that this was a case of "least said, soonest mended." It was all Monteith's own fault—rushing at a man in the dark and grabbing him. He did not know who had knocked him down, and he was not going to know. He could suppose that it was some intrusive tramp, if he liked : anyhow he was not going to know that it was Ephraim Taggles.

"Ow! ow! ow! Ooooh!"

Monteith was staggering to his feet now.

But Taggles had already backed to a safe distance. With one eye, already swollen and black, Monteith could hardly have seen anything in the daylight. With the other, he could see nothing in the dark. Neither was he thinking of looking for anybody further. With his hand pressed to his anguished eye, Monteith tottered away towards the New House.

Taggles retreated quietly in at the side door of the school shop. Taggles was sagely going to keep his own counsel. He was not going to be sacked because a silly "idjit", as he expressed it to himself, had run on his horny fist in the dark.

The door closed quietly on Taggles : at that time the window of the junior lobby in the School-House was closing on Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Arthur Augustus had dodged Tadger, and got back to his House. Happily unaware of what had happened behind him after he had fled, Arthur Augustus was thankful to find himself in the School-House again. Softly and cautiously he crept up to his dormitory in the dark, and turned in : without a single eye opening to spot him.

Arthur Augustus had sagely decided to leave his great jape on Figgins till the morrow night. And if he dreamed, when his noble eyes closed in slumber, he certainly did not

dream what was destined to happen before the morrow night came!

## CHAPTER X

### THE MORNING AFTER THE NIGHT BEFORE!

“YAW-aw-aw-aw-aw!”

Mr. Lathom glanced sharply at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. A dozen fellows in the Fourth looked round at him. Arthur Augustus coloured. He had not meant to yawn in class. It was quite involuntary on his part.

The fact was that he couldn't help it! He was sleepy!

The previous night, Arthur Augustus had been wide-awake while other fellows slept. It was a natural consequence that he was now sleepy while other fellows were wide awake! He had been heavy-eyed at breakfast. Now, in the form-room, he seemed hardly able to keep his eyes open. And so it came to pass that that tremendous yawn escaped him, of its own accord, as it were.

“D'Arcy!” rapped Mr. Lathom, frowning.

“Oh! Yaas, sir!” stammered Arthur Augustus, red with confusion.

“Take fifty lines.”

“Oh! Yaas, sir.”

Mr. Lathom, frowning, let it go at that. They were doing the Aeneid in the Fourth, and Ernest Levison was on “con”—which had been interrupted by that unexpected and prolonged yawn from Arthur Augustus. The Fourth-Form master signed to Levison to proceed.

Blake and Herries and Digby eyed their noble chum.

“What on earth's the matter with you, Gussy?” whispered Jack Blake, when his form-master's attention was con-

centrated on Levison.

"Nothin', deah boy."

"You look half-asleep," grunted Herries.

"Weally Hewwies——."

"Oh, my hat!" breathed Digby, "He was talking some rot in the study about going over and ragging Figgins after lights out! You dithering duffer, have you been up in the night?"

"I wefuse to be called a dithewin' duffah, Dig."

"Oh, you image!" breathed Blake, "Is that it? Didn't we tell you we'd sit on your silly head if you tried that on?"

"Weally, Blake——."

Mr. Lathom glanced round, and the whispering hurriedly ceased. But Blake and Co. had little doubt now why Arthur Augustus was so drowsy that morning. They had fully intended to stop him by the most drastic measures if he sought to carry out his scheme of ragging Figgins in the New House after lights out, even to the extent of sitting on his noble head. But they had slept soundly after turning in, and known nothing of Gussy's subsequent proceedings. But they had no doubt that they could guess, now.

And there was another fellow in the Fourth who had guessed already. Cardew's eyes were on Gussy, and there was a grin on his face. He too had slept soundly the previous night, and known nothing of D'Arcy's nocturnal activities. But he did not need telling why the swell of St. Jim's looked as if he might nod off to sleep any moment. He had not the slightest doubt that Arthur Augustus had been up in the night: and he wondered, with a careless amusement, what might have happened at the New House.

"D'Arcy!"

Mr. Lathom rapped the name out suddenly and sharply.

"Oh! Yaas, sir!" Arthur Augustus pulled himself together.

"You will go on, D'Arcy."

Levison sat down. Arthur Augustus blinked at his book.

As a matter of fact, he had not heard a single word of Levison's construe, and had not the faintest idea where to go on.

"Did you hear me, D'Arcy?" Mr. Lathom's voice had an ominous note.

"Yaas, certainly, sir," stammered Arthur Augustus.

"Then go on at once."

Arthur Augustus would willingly have gone on at once, had he known where to go on from. But he didn't.

"Have you lost the place, D'Arcy?"

"Oh! No—yaas—I——."

"You are not attending to the lesson, D'Arcy."

"Oh! Yaas—no——."

"Proceed immediately," snapped Mr. Lathom.

"Go on from 'pectore vocem,'" came a faint whisper behind Arthur Augustus. It was George Figgins who ventured to whisper.

It was only a faint whisper. Mr. Lathom was not always pervious to whispering in class. But he was in an annoyed state now, and unusually sharp.

"Figgins!"

"Oh! Yes, sir," stammered Figgy.

"Were you giving D'Arcy the place?"

"Um! Yes, sir."

"Take fifty lines, Figgins. Go on at once, D'Arcy."

Figgy's good nature had earned him fifty lines: but at least Arthur Augustus knew the place now. He concentrated on it, under the frowning stare of his irritated form-master.

"O dea, si prima repetens ab origine pergam——" mumbled Arthur Augustus, wondering dizzily what it might mean.

As he had told No. 9 Study, Arthur Augustus had had matters on his mind more important than prep, the previous evening. He had not, in fact, prepared that lesson. And now his noble mind was heavy with loss of sleep, and in no state to deal with unprepared Latin.

“D’Arcy! If you do not go on immediately——.  
“There was a deep rumble in Mr. Lathom’s voice.

“Yaas, sir!” Arthur Augustus had to translate, whether he could or not,” “Oh, dear!”

“What?”

“Oh, dear——!”

“Bless my soul!” ejaculated Mr. Lathom, his eyes almost popping at Arthur Augustus, “Did—did—did you say ‘oh, dear,’ D’Arcy? Is it possible that you are translating ‘O dea’ as ‘Oh, dear’!”

It was, unfortunately, not only possible but true. Arthur Augustus was no whale at Latin: but in normal circumstances he certainly would not have translated “O dea!” as Oh, dear!” Even Baggy Trimble would hardly have done so. Now, however, Arthur Augustus did! Instead of “O goddess!” the hapless Gussy actually handed out “Oh, dear!”

“I—I—I mean’t——” he stammered.

“You may sit down, D’Arcy,” thundered Mr. Lathom, “You have not prepared this lesson. After class, you will write out the whole lesson six times.”

“Oh, dear!” gasped Arthur Augustus: not, this time, as a translation of “O dea!” but as an expression of his feelings.

“Silence! You will go on, Blake.”

Jack Blake went on: and Mr. Lathom, after a portentous frown at the most elegant member of his form, gave him no further heed.

Neither did Arthur Augustus give his form-master any further heed.

The drone of voices, as one fellow after another went on “con,” had a lulling effect upon him. He had not the slightest intention of nodding off in class. Never, since he had adorned St. Jim’s with his presence, had Arthur Augustus ever done such a thing. Never had he dreamed that such a thing could happen. But now it did happen.

He was sleepy. He was quite unaccustomed to nocturnal activities. Even after his safe return to the House, it had been some time before he could compose himself to slumber after that spot of excitement. He had not awakened even at the clang of the rising-bell: and might have slumbered on, had not Blake and Herries and Dig gathered round his bed, and kindly hooked off his bedclothes. Now, sitting in class, drowsiness supervened.

His noble head nodded. He blinked. Several times he blinked, and then his eyelids remained closed.

Unconscious of his form-master, unconscious of his form-fellows, he glided imperceptibly into balmy slumber.

He had been asleep about a minute, when Mr. Lathom's eyes fell on his unconscious face. The master of the Fourth gazed at him, as if he could not quite believe what he saw.

"D'Arcy!" gasped Mr. Lathom.

No reply.

"D'Arcy!"

"Oh, my hat!" breathed Jack Blake, and he gave his chum a hasty nudge. Arthur Augustus jumped, and his eyes opened.

"D'Arcy!" thundered Mr. Lathom.

"Oh! Did—did you speak, sir?"

"D'Arcy! What do you mean by falling asleep in class?"

"Oh, cwikey!"

"You were asleep, D'Arcy—actually asleep in class!" exclaimed Mr. Lathom.

"W-w-w-was I, sir?"

"What do you mean by this, D'Arcy?"

"Oh! Nothin', sir," stammered Arthur Augustus.

Cardew winked at Levison. Most of the Fourth were staring blankly at Arthur Augustus. Mr. Lathom gave him a long, hard, penetrating look: and then, rather unexpectedly, let the matter drop. And Arthur Augustus, with a great effort, managed to prop his noble eyelids open, and did not go to sleep again.

## CHAPTER XI

### EXIT!

TAGGLES coughed.

"Skuse me, sir," he mumbled.

"Proceed, Taggles," said Dr. Holmes, kindly.

"Yessir," mumbled Taggles.

And he coughed again.

Dr. Holmes, head-master of St. Jim's, was a kindly and benevolent gentleman. But he was also a busy gentleman.

The ancient porter of St. Jim's had asked leave to speak to him, and leave had been granted. The Head was quite willing to give Taggles a few minutes of his valuable time. But he was almost due in the Sixth-Form room, and had no minutes to waste. His manner, kind and benevolent as it was, indicated as much.

Taggles coughed for a third time.

"Pray come to the point, Taggles," suggested the Head.

"Yessir! Suttingly, sir!"

Taggles eyes roved uneasily round the Head's study, as if he were seeking inspiration from the old panelled walls, or the bookcase, or the bust of Socrates that surmounted the bookcase. Then his wandering eyes came back, a little furtively, to Dr. Holmes.

"The fact is, sir—!" said Taggles.

"Yes?" said the Head, patiently.

"If you wouldn't object, sir," said Taggles, "I've 'eard from my nevvie, sir."

"Your what?" asked the Head.

The head-master of St. Jim's knew many things : his

knowledge was wide and deep on many subjects. But he did not know what a "nevvv" was.

"My nevvv, sir—young George, my nevvv—."

"Oh!" Dr. Holmes grasped it, "Your nephew?"

"Yessir, I said my nevvv. I'd like to go and see 'im, sir, and take the missus, if so be you 'ave no objection, sir."

"Oh!" said the Head.

"I know it ain't the regler time, sir," said Taggles, apologetically, "But young George would like us to see his bung—."

"His what?"

"He's got a bung, sir, at Southend-on-Sea—."

"A bung!" repeated the Head, quite puzzled.

"Yessir, and he's asked me and the missus a good many times to go and see his noo bung," said Taggles.

Dr. Holmes gazed at him. So far as the head-master of St. Jim's was aware, a bung was something appertaining to a cask. Taggles' nephew George might, imaginably, have a bung, if he had a cask that needed one. But why he should wish Taggles and his missus to travel from Sussex to Essex to see a bung, was quite a mystery to the Head.

He gave Taggles a very sharp look. He could hardly suspect the ancient porter of drinking, so early in the morning. But this undoubtedly seemed very strange.

"I do not quite understand you, Taggles," said Dr. Holmes "You, say that your nephew has a—a—a bung—."

"Yessir."

"And that he has asked you and Mrs. Taggles to go to see it?"

"That's it, sir."

"To see a—a—a bung!" articulated the Head.

"Yessir, and stay a week," said Taggles, "It's a noo bung, sir and the hair's very 'ealthy."

"The hair?"

"Yessir."

Dr. Holmes wondered dizzily whether there might be



some sort of a bung with hair on it.

"Very 'ealthy hair sir, at Southend," said Taggles, "And I ain't been feeling any too well jest lately, sir."

"Oh!" The Head grasped it again, "You mean the air——."

"Yessir : I said the hair," said Taggles, innocently, "And George has got room for us in the bung, sir, and if you don't object, I'd like to go for a week, sir."

"Your nephew has a house at Southend?" asked the Head.

"Not a 'ouse, sir—a bung."

"Oh!" Once more Dr. Holmes grasped it, with sudden illumination, "Do you mean a bungalow, Taggles?"

"Yessir : one of them noo bungs," said Taggles, "Very roomy, too, George says. Very 'ealthy hair, too, in that quarter, sir. If you wouldn't mind for a few days, sir, me not feeling any too good jest lately."

"I understand," said the Head. He smiled, "Your nephew George desires you and Mrs. Taggles to spend a holiday with him at a bungalow. Is that it?"

"Jest that, sir! I got a man who'd take my place for a week, sir—'Arry 'Odge, of Rylcombe. He's a nonnest man, sir, and very capacious."

"Capacious?"

"Yessir, quite as capacious as me, at least for a week, sir," said Taggles, "All Rylcombe knows 'im to be capacious."

"Oh!" Once more Dr. Holmes grasped it, "A capable man! I understand."

"Yessir, very capacious is 'Arry 'Odge, sir. And Mrs. 'Odge would take the missis's place in the school shop for a week, sir—very capacious woman she is, sir. She'd do in Mrs. Taggles place, sir, like what the doctors call a local tenant."

"A local tenant?" But this time Dr. Holmes was at a loss only for a moment, "Oh! Quite! Locum tenens—"

quite."

"So if you wouldn't mind, sir, for a week, I'd arrange with 'Arry 'Odge and his missis this morning, sir, and—."

The Head smiled benignantly.

"Not at all, Taggles! Not in the least! If you think that a change to sea air would be beneficial, by all means accept your nephew's invitation. I trust that both you and Mrs. Taggles will have a very enjoyable holiday at the—the bungalow, at Southend-on-Sea."

"Thank you kindly, sir," said Taggles.

"Not at all," said the Head, graciously.

And Taggles, ducking his ancient head respectfully, backed out of the study, leaving the head-master at liberty to concentrate on Thucydides and the Sixth Form.

Taggles left the House much relieved in his mind.

The old porter of St. Jim's was a worried man that morning. The disastrous happening of the night before haunted him with uneasiness. And it seemed to him quite a brain-wave to accept that long-standing invitation from his nephew George, and get off the scene for a week or so. It was certain that there would be a tremendous row about Monteith's black eye: and while that row was going on, Taggles felt that he would be easier in his mind with a hundred miles between him and the row. No doubt the affair would have blown over, by the time he returned with the missis from Southend-on-Sea.

And, having obtained leave from the Head, Taggles lost no time. Mrs. Taggles, no doubt, was surprised by so sudden a determination to accept an invitation that had been hanging about a long time: but she was quite prepared to take a holiday. And while the Head was busy in the Sixth-Form room, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy nodding off to sleep in the Fourth-Form room, a taxi was bearing Mr. and Mrs. Taggles, and a considerable number of bags and bundles, to Wayland Station: and when the St. Jim's fellows came out in break, they found a new face in the

porter's lodge, and another new face behind the counter in the tuck-shop.

## CHAPTER XII

## STARTLING NEWS!

"TOM MERRY!"

"Hallo, Figgy."

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther came out cheerily in break. A lingering glow in Monty Lowther's nose was no longer reflected in his temper. The "Terrible Three" of the Shell were all merry and bright: rather a contrast to Figgins and Co. of the New House, who were looking unusually serious, not to say solemn.

"Anything up, Figgy?" added Tom, as he noted the serious aspect of Figgins, Kerr, and Fatty Wynn.

"Well, yes, rather," answered Figgins, "Something's happened in our House."

"Something out of the common?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Yes, rather."

"Some New House man started washing?" inquired Lowther, affably.

Figgins and Co. gave him a glare.

"Shut up, Monty," said Tom Merry, laughing, "Figgy looks as if the jolly old sky's fallen. Give it a name, Figgy."

"Any of you School-House ticks been larking over on our side last night?" asked Figgins.

"Not guilty, my lord. But what's happened?" asked Tom.

"I'm dashed if I can make it all out," said Figgins,

"But there's going to be an awful row, and a flogging or the sack for somebody. It can't have been a New House man did it—so it must have been a School-House man."

"But what was it?" demanded Manners.

"Somebody was out in the quad last night. According to what Monteith has said, somebody was trying to get in at his window—."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Can't have been a New House man," said Kerr, "Any fellow in the House, if he wanted to get at Monteith, could go in by the door—he wouldn't go outside the House and burgle the window."

"And nobody in the New House would want to black a New House man's eye, either," said Fatty Wynn.

"Black his eye!" ejaculated Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther, all at once.

"Monteith's got a black eye this morning," said Figgins.

"Oh, holy smoke!"

"It's the talk of the House, of course. Monteith cut class in the Sixth this morning, nursing his eye. He's got an eye that you could see a mile off," said Figgins, impressively, "It seems that he was woke up by Taggles' dog barking, and heard somebody at his window. He looked out, and saw a junior—he's sure it was a junior, from the size I suppose—skulking under his window—he couldn't see who it was in the dark, of course, but he's sure that it was a Lower boy. Not one of your chaps?" added Figgins, scanning the chums of the Shell with a dubious eye.

Tom Merry laughed.

"Count us out," he said, "We were fast asleep in bed last night. Carry on with the thriller, old bean."

"Well, Monteith called to the kid, whoever he was, and the chap cut off at a run," continued Figgins, "Monteith supposed that it was some fellow out of the House after lights out, and of course went after him. Well, he heard him, in the dark, and rushed up to collar him, and the

fellow, whoever he was, hit him in the eye and knocked him spinning.”

“ Phew! ”

“ Whoever the chap was, he got away,” said Figgins, “ I fancy Monteith was a bit dazed—anyhow, he never saw who knocked him down, and he came back to the House, and called Ratcliff.”

“ And then they soon found out that it wasn't a New House man,” said Kerr, “ Ratty made the rounds of the House at once : and every fellow was in bed.”

“ So it must have been a School-House man,” said Fatty Wynn, “ I believe Ratty went over to see Railton about it, as soon as he was up this morning.”

“ And Monteith's really got a black eye? ” asked Tom.

“ Black as the inside of a chimney.”

“ That means an awful row for somebody,” said Tom.

“ Head's flogging at least! ” said Monty Lowther, “ Might be the sack. Somebody must be feeling a bit uneasy this morning.”

“ But who the dickens—! ” said Manners.

“ Echo answers who! ”

“ Some School-House man who had it in for Monteith,” said Figgins, “ That's what it looks like to me. If that was so, he got him all right—Monteith looks a picture this morning, and he's in a frightful temper. Somebody's for it, when it comes out—glad it wasn't one of you chaps.

Figgins and Co. walked away to their own House, leaving the School-House trio looking very thoughtful. If a Sixth-Form prefect was adorned with a black eye, to such an extent that he had cut class, it was certain that there was going to be a most tremendous row. And they could not help realising that it looked as if some man in their own House was the culprit.

Jack Blake came out of the School-House, glancing about him, apparently in search of somebody. He cut across to the Shell fellows.

"Seen Gussy?" he asked.

"Not since brekker," answered Tom.

"The howling ass cut off the minute we were out of the form-room," said Blake, breathing hard, "I believe he jolly well knows that I wanted to ask him something. Bother him."

"Heard the news?" asked Lowther.

"Eh! No! What——."

"Head-line news from the New House," grinned Monty, "We've just had it from Figgins. Somebody punched Monteith of the Sixth in the eye last night——."

Blake almost staggered.

"What?" he gasped.

"They think it was a School-House man, but nobody seems to know who it was, yet," said Manners.

"Pip-pip-punched Monteith in the eye," stuttered Blake, "Oh, crumbs! Look here, don't rag! Is that straight?"

"So Figgins said." Tom Merry looked very curiously at the Fourth-former, "What's the matter, Blake? It wasn't you blacked Monteith's eye, I suppose?"

"No, fathead! But—— Oh, gum! Oh, scissors! Oh, holy smoke! Oh, great Christopher Columbus! Did—did you say blacked his eye?" gasped Blake.

"According to Figgy, he's got an eye you could see a mile off," answered Tom Merry.

"Oh, crikey!"

"He had to cut class this morning on account of it——."

"Oh, jiminy!"

Jack Blake almost tottered away. The three Shell fellows exchanged startled looks.

"There's one chap who knows something about it," remarked Manners, drily.

"By gum, it looks like it," said Monty Lowther, with a whistle, "But it wasn't I like—he said so. Looks as if he knows who it was, though."

"But who——?" said Tom Merry, blankly.

"One of his pals, on his looks," said Manners. "He looked fairly knocked out when he heard. He jolly well knows who was out of the House last night—and why."

"Blessed if I make it out," said Tom, "Blake certainly looked as if he knew something—but——."

"He knows," said Manners.

"But who——?"

"Ask me another." Manners shrugged his shoulders, "Some School-House man had it in for Monteith, as Figgins said. I don't know who it was—but I'll bet that Blake does."

The chums of the Shell strolled on, under the old elms, very thoughtful and considerably disturbed. From the way Jack Blake had taken the New House news, it was plain that he was alarmed, and that could only mean that he knew something about what had happened in the night. Who was the man?

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Monty Lowther, suddenly.

"What——?"

"The one and only! Look!"

And the three Shell fellows came to a halt, and stared. On one of the old oaken benches, on the path between the elms and the school wall, sat an elegant figure. It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form—and he was fast asleep!

### CHAPTER XIII

#### POOR OLD GUSSY!

TOM MERRY and Co. stared.

From what Blake had said, it appeared that Arthur Augustus had disappeared the moment the Fourth came out

of their form-room. From what the "Terrible Three" beheld, it appeared that he had retired to this quiet and secluded spot—and gone to sleep there. He sat leaning back on the trunk behind the seat, his eyes closed : too deep in the embrace of Morpheus to hear the footsteps or the voices of the three Shell fellows.

"Oh!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"Phew!" murmured Manners.

"The sleeping beauty!" grinned Lowther, "What the jolly old thump is Gussy playing Rip van Winkle for this morning?"

"He's fast asleep!" said Tom Merry, in wonder.

"Jolly old Epemenides hasn't a thing on him," agreed Lowther, "Safe in the arms of Morpheus! Slumber's chain hath bound him! If it were Cardew, I should think that he had lost his beauty sleep, getting out on the razzle after lights out, and was making up for it in the morning. But Gussy never kicks over the traces like that jolly old relation of his."

"Hardly," said Tom.

"But what the dickens is the matter with him, then?" asked Lowther, "Who ever heard of a fellow going to sleep in morning break?"

Their voices did not disturb Arthur Augustus. He slept on peacefully. Whatever was the mysterious reason, there was no doubt that he was deep in slumber.

Tom Merry looked puzzled. Manners looked very grave. But Monty Lowther's eyes glimmered joyously.

"Got your fountain-pen, Manners?" he asked.

"Yes : why?"

Lowther chuckled.

"What about a spot of ink on Gussy's boko?" he asked, "Looks as if he won't wake up till the bell goes for third school. Rather a jest for him to walk into the form-room with an inky nose, what?"

Tom Merry laughed, and shook his head.



"Forget it, you ass," he said.

"My dear man, I can ink his nose without waking him up," said Lowther, "No end of a jest——. Shell out that fountain-pen, Manners."

"Don't rag, old chap," said Manners, quietly.

"Look here, don't spoil sport," said Lowther, warmly, "Trot out that fountain-pen, and leave me to do the decorating."

"Chuck it! Can't you guess why Gussy's gone to sleep in the morning?"

"Blessed if I know! Why?"

"There's only one reason that I can think of," answered Manners, "He must have lost sleep in the night. He wouldn't be sleepy now, if he hadn't."

"Oh, my only summer bonnet!" Monty Lowther gave quite a jump, "You mean——?"

Tom Merry caught his breath.

"Manners! You think Gussy was up in the night——?"

"What does it look like?" asked Manners.

"But—but it couldn't have been Gussy who—who——" stammered Tom, "Oh, crumbs! Is that why Blake looked so knocked over when we told him—did he know that Gussy—oh, my hat!"

He broke off, in dismay, Monty Lowther whistled. He was no longer entertaining the bright idea of inking Gussy's nose while he slumbered. Even the funny man of the Shell realised that it was no time for japing. Someone had been up in the night, and had blacked a prefect's eye—and if Arthur Augustus had been up in the night—and it certainly looked as if he had——!

"Better wake him up, I think," said Manners, "If Gussy's the man, he's giving himself away pretty thoroughly, if anyone saw him. He must have been a mad ass to do such a thing, but we don't want him spotted, do we?"

"No fear!" said Tom and Lowther together.

Manners shook the sleeping junior gently by the shoulder.

Arthur Augustus's eyes opened, and he yawned.

Then he blinked at the chums of the Shell.

"Bai Jove!" He blinked again, "What are you shakin' me for, Mannahs?"

"You were asleep, old chap," said Tom.

"Yaas! I am wathah dwowsy this mornin'," confessed Arthur Augustus, "A chap can't miss sleep in the night without feelin' wathah dwowsy in the mornin', can he?"

"Oh!"

"The fact is, I came heah to get forty winks," explained Arthur Augustus, "I cut off the minute we got out of form. I couldn't go up to the dorm of course, and it would have been no use in the study—Blake and Hewwies and Dig would have come up. I know they want to know all about last night. So I wotired to this quiet spot."

"Last night?" said Tom.

Arthur Augustus smiled.

"You see, I was up in the night," he said, cheerfully, "Don't mention it to anybody, of course. I don't mind you fellows knowin', but I don't want the beaks to get wise to it. I had six fwom Kildare yestahday," added Arthur Augustus, reminiscently, "I don't want six fwom Wailton to-day."

"Oh!"

Arthur Augustus settled back comfortably again, apparently with the intention of resuming his nap in that shady and secluded spot. The Shell fellows gazed at him.

"So it was you, D'Arcy," said Tom, at last, "We've heard from Figgins what happened over at the New House last night. Of course we shan't say a word. But—what on earth did you do it for?"

"Potty?" asked Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah——."

"There's going to be an awful row, D'Arcy," said Manners.

"Yaas, I pwesume there will be wathah a wow," admitted

Arthur Augustus, "It was vewy unfortunate wousin' Monteith out like that."

"Very!" said Manners, drily.

"But why——?" said Tom.

"It was wotten luck, weally," explained Arthur Augustus, "I was goin' to wag Figgins——."

"In the middle of the night!" ejaculated Tom.

"Yaas, wathah." Arthur Augustus chuckled, "You see, I was goin' to bag his clobbah fwom his dorm, in weturn for playin' twicks with my toppah. Wathah a bwight ideah, what?"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"And Bakah bein' away, I was goin' to get in his study window, see? Only in the dark I got Monteith's window by mistake, and woke him up."

"You would!" agreed Monty Lowther.

"Weally, you know, any fellow might have made a mistake like that in the dark. But it was wathah unfortunate, all the same, for I couldn't cawwy on, you know, and I came back without waggin' Figgins at all. Of course I have got to keep it vewy dark that I was out of the House aftah lights out."

"No doubt about that," said Manners.

"That's all wight: they won't spot me," said Arthur Augustus, "All that New House tick Monteith knows is that a fellow was out. Blake and Hewwies and Dig know, and I shouldn't wondah if Cardew does, and pewwaps Levison and Clive—and I've told you fellows—but that's all wight. So long as the beaks and pwe's don't know, it's wight as wain."

"But——!" said Tom.

"If you fellows will excuse me, I'd like to close my eyes again," said Arthur Augustus, "I don't want to nod off in third school, and I might. You see, I came heah to snatch a spot of sleep, out of the way. I shall wake up all wight when the bell goes."

“ You don’t want to be spotted as the man who was out last night? ” inquired Manners, sarcastically.

“ Wathah not. ”

“ You don’t think anyone would guess, if he happened to see you fast asleep in the morning? ”

Arthur Augustus started.

“ Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that! ” he ejaculated.

“ Well we guessed at once, when we saw you asleep, ” said Manners, “ And if a beak or a pre saw you, your number’s up. ”

“ Oh, cwikey! ”

Arthur Augustus sat bolt upright. He was no longer thinking of finishing his interrupted nap. He stared at the Shell fellows in dismay.

“ Bai Jove! ” he breathed, “ Do you weally think so, Mannahs? ”

“ Bank on-it, ass. ”

“ Do you think so, Lowthah? ”

“ Yes, fathead! ”

“ Do you think so, Tom Mewwy? ”

“ Safe as houses, ” answered Tom, “ For goodness sake, old chap, keep as lively as you can, and don’t let it be seen that you lost your beauty sleep. ”

Arthur Augustus drew a deep, deep breath.

“ It’s wathah too late to think of that, deah boys, ” he said, “ You see, I noddod off in form this mornin’. ”

“ What? ”

“ Lathom was wathah watty, but he let the mattah dwop. But I noticed that he gave me a vevy sharp look, aftah Blake woke me up— ”

“ Oh, Christopher Columbus! ” gasped Tom Merry, “ You went off to sleep in the daytime under a beak’s nose! ”

“ Yaas. I wondah if Lathom suspected anythin’! ” said Arthur Augustus, with a worried wrinkle in his noble brow, “ It stwuck me that he had a vevy penetwatin’ look in his eye! ”

Tom Merry and Co. gave one another rather hopeless looks. Arthur Augustus might wonder whether Mr. Lathom suspected anything: but to the Shell fellows it was a certainty, as soon as Lathom heard the news from the New House. How could he fail to connect Gussy's unaccountable sleepiness in the morning, with the fact that a School-House junior was known to have been out of his House during the night?

"Think my numbah's up, you fellows?" asked Arthur Augustus. "Well, if it comes out, I shall have to stand the wacket, that's all. Aftah all, it was only a wag, and I considah——."

Arthur Augustus was interrupted. Kildare of the Sixth came through the elms, with a knitted brow.

"D'Arcy!"

Arthur Augustus rose from the bench.

"Yaas, Kildare."

"I've been looking for you everywhere. You're wanted in your house-master's study."

Again Arthur Augustus drew a deep, deep breath. But his manner was quite calm as he replied:

"Vewy well, Kildare! Sowwy you had to look for me—I did not know that I was wanted, you know."

"Cut off!" said Kildare.

"Oh, yaas."

Arthur Augustus walked away towards the School-House. Kildare followed him. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther looked at one another.

"That tears it," said Lowther.

"Gussy's number's up," said Manners.

"But what on earth did he do it for?" asked Tom, "It's not like Gussy—blacking a man's eye in the dark——."

"Goodness knows! May have hit out without stopping to think, when Monteith grabbed him. Poor old Gussy!"

"Poor old Gussy!" repeated Tom, dismally.

"Poor old Gussy!" said Lowther.

The chums of the Shell went to look for Blake and Co. They found Study No. 6 looking about as cheerful as boiled owls. They had seen Arthur Augustus going into his house-master's study. It was a bright and sunny morning, and most St. Jim's fellows were enjoying the fresh air and sunshine in break—but there were six faces gloomy as that of the ancient king who never smiled again.

## CHAPTER XIV

### TAKEN TO THE HEAD!

MR. RAILTON, house-master of the School-House, fixed his eyes on Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as that youth came into his study.

His face was very grave : and, as he scanned Arthur Augustus, a little puzzled.

The junior looked serious. It was a serious matter to break House bounds at night, even for so harmless and playful a purpose as a "rag" on a fellow in the other House. It mean't "six" from the house-master's cane in case of discovery : and as Arthur Augustus has told Tom Merry, he did not want six from Railton after six from Kildare the day before. But so far, Arthur Augustus was quite unaware that the matter was more serious than that. St. Jim's was fairly buzzing, by this time, with the story of Monteith's black eye : but Arthur Augustus had heard nothing about it so far. He had not the remotest idea that anything had happened in the dark quad apart from his own misadventures.

So though he was serious, the swell of St. Jim's was not in the least alarmed. He certainly did not want "six" from Railton : but if it had to come, he could "take it". The

calmness of his aristocratic visage puzzled the house-master : in view of the storm that was to burst on Gussy's devoted head.

" You sent for me, sir," said Arthur Augustus.

" Yes, D'Arcy! Some junior of this House was out of House bounds at a late hour last night, and I have reason to believe that it was you."

" Indeed, sir! "

Arthur Augustus made that non-committal reply with an impassive face. He was not going to give himself away, if he could help it.

" The junior was seen, but not recognized in the dark, by a New House prefect," went on Mr. Railton.

" Indeed, sir! " repeated Arthur Augustus.

" Mr. Ratcliff has reported the matter to the head-master, who has requested me to make inquiries in this House," continued Mr. Railton, " I have done so, D'Arcy, and have learned from your form-master that you fell asleep in class this morning——so very singular and unusual an occurrence, that the conclusion is obvious.

Arthur Augustus was silent.

" You were up during the night, D'Arcy? "

" Yaas, sir," answered Arthur Augustus, quietly.

" You left the House? "

" Yaas, sir."

" You went to the New House? "

" Yaas, sir."

" I am glad that you are so frank, at least," said Mr. Railton.

" I twust, sir, that I should not be likely to deny what is twue, when I am asked a diwect question," said Arthur Augustus, calmly, " You have a wight to question me, as my house-mastah, and I am bound to answah twuthfully."

Mr. Railton coughed.

" Quite so, D'Arcy! As it is now established that you were the boy concerned, the matter will pass to Dr. Holmes."

Arthur Augustus raised his eyebrows.

"Am I to be sent to the Head, sir?" he asked.

"Certainly."

"Pewwaps you will allow me to explain, sir, that it was only a wag," said Arthur Augustus, "I twust, sir, that you do not suppose, for one moment, that I left the House last night for any weason I should be ashamed to admit. I did not go out of School bounds, and nevah intended to do so."

"I am aware of that, D'Arcy."

"Then I quite fail to see, sir, why I am to be sent to the Head," exclaimed Arthur Augustus, warmly, "I am awah, of course, that it is bweakin' the wules to go out of the House aftah lights out, and I am pwepared to take the consequences. But a wag on the New House is only a wag, aftah all."

"A rag?" repeated Mr. Railton, "You call what you did last night a—a—a rag, D'Arcy?"

"Yaas, sir!"

"Apparently you do not realise the seriousness of your action, D'Arcy," said Mr. Railton, drily, "However, what you have to say must be said to your head-master. I shall take you to him immediately."

"Vewy well, sir."

Mr. Railton rose. He opened the door, and signed to the junior to follow him. Arthur Augustus followed, with his noble head very erect, and a faint frown on his brow. Matters of House bounds were dealt with by a house-master, and Arthur Augustus could see—so far!—no reason at all for dragging the Head into the affair. He was feeling indignant.

There were six fellows at the corner of the passage when Mr. Railton came along with the swell of St. Jim's at his heels. Blake and Herries and Digby, Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther, all looked glum—even Monty Lowther was glum and serious for once. They were evidently waiting to learn what was going to happen to



Gussy. Mr. Railton passed them, apparently not noticing that they were there : but Arthur Augustus paused.

"It's all wight, you chaps," he said, "Nothin' to look so jolly solemn about, you know."

"You're going to the Head?" muttered Blake.

"Yaas. I entiahly fail to see why the Head is dwagged in," said Arthur Augustus, without troubling to lower his voice, though Mr. Railton was looking round, "I should have expected my house-mastah to deal with this twiflin' mattah."

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Tom Merry.

"It isn't a trifling matter, old chap," groaned Blake, "It's awfully serious—frightfully serious, old chap."

"Wubbish, Blake. It would be vewy sewious if a fellow bwoke out to play the giddy ox, but Mr. Wailton does not suppose that I was goin' out pub-cwawlin', or anythin' of that kind. And I quite fail to see——."

"D'Arcy!"

"Yaas, sir."

"Follow me at once."

"I am comin', sir!" Arthur Augustus moved on, but he paused another moment, to speak over his shoulder, "It's all wight, you fellows——don't you wowwy! I shall explain to the Head that it was merely a wag, and it will be all wight."

And Arthur Augustus walked on after his house-master.

"Is he crackers, or what?" breathed Blake, "Doesn't he know that it's a matter for sacking, to punch a prefect in the eye?"

"Blessed if I make him out," said Tom Merry.

"He was fairly shouting out yesterday that he was going to punch Monteith in the eye," groaned Blake, "Now he's done it! And—and he calls it a rag! He may be turfed out for it."

Arthur Augustus, still with his noble nose in the air, and still happily unconscious of what he was supposed to have

done, followed Mr. Railton to the Head's study. His house-master ushered him into that rather dreaded apartment.

"Here is the boy, sir! It is D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form, and he has admitted quite frankly that he is the boy concerned."

"Thank you, Mr. Railton. Please send Monteith here."

The house-master withdrew from the study, shutting the door on Arthur Augustus, and leaving him in the dread Presence. The bell was ringing now for third school, and the St. Jim's fellows going to the form-rooms. Mr. Railton, in a very thoughtful frame of mind, went to the Sixth-Form room, where he had to take the Sixth, and Arthur Augustus's friends went into form. But there were three fellows in the Fourth who did not give Mr. Lathom much attention, and three fellows in the Shell who did not listen very attentively to Mr. Linton. Study No. 6 and the "Terrible Three" could not help thinking of Arthur Augustus, and wondering what was going on in the Head's study.

## CHAPTER XV

### A SURPRISE FOR ARTHUR AUGUSTUS.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS waited.

Dr. Holmes was writing at his table. He had given the junior one keen glance, and then resumed writing. Arthur Augustus understood that he was to wait until Monteith of the Sixth arrived, as the Head had asked Mr. Railton to send him to the study. Why, he did not know. He had admitted the charge—so far as he knew—and did not see why the New House prefect was wanted. However, he

waited with calm patience.

There was a tap at the door a few minutes later, and Monteith came in.

Arthur Augustus gave quite a jump as he saw him.

One of Monteith's eyes was black—black as soot. It was not only black but swollen. Seldom, or never, had a prefect of the Sixth Form at St. Jim's been seen in such a state. Arthur Augustus very nearly ejaculated "Bai Jove," as he saw that eye! He gazed at it in amazement.

Monteith glanced at him, with his other eye. Visibility was very bad with his black eye! No doubt he guessed, from D'Arcy's presence in the study, that this was the culprit: for his sound eyes glinted at the swell of St. Jim's.

Dr. Holmes laid down his pen.

He too glanced at Monteith's black eye—it was really the sort of eye to attract all other eyes! But he did not look surprised like Arthur Augustus—he had seen that eye before.

"Monteith! This is the junior who was out of House bounds last night," said Dr. Holmes, "I desire you to be present when I question him."

"Yes sir," said Monteith.

"Mr. Railton tells me that D'Arcy has admitted that he is the boy concerned," went on the Head, "We shall now go into the matter, D'Arcy!"

"Yaas, sir."

"It appears that you admit that you left your House after lights out last night?"

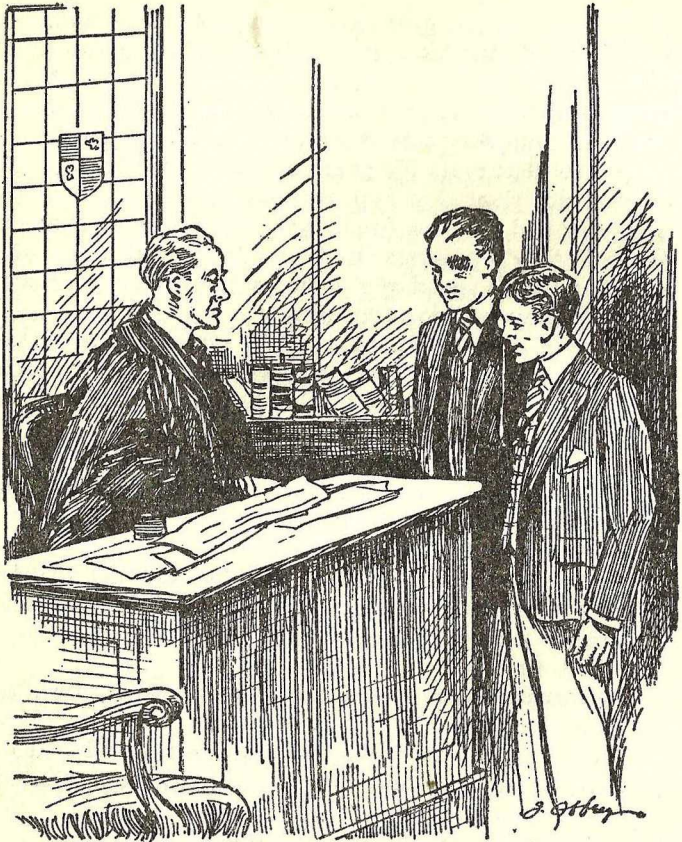
"Certainly, sir. Mr. Wailton asked me, and I had to answer him, though, of course, I should have preferred not to mention it."

"You went across to the other House?"

"I have told Mr. Wailton so, sir."

"You are the junior whom Monteith saw under his window when he opened it?"

"Yaas, sir."



[ He remained rooted where he was, staring blankly at his head-master.  
" Do you hear me, D'Arcy? "

Dr. Holmes, like Mr. Railton before him, gave the swell of St. Jim's a puzzled look. He could not understand the calmness with which Arthur Augustus made these frank admissions, in view of what impended over his head.

"The matter is, then, beyond doubt," said the Head, slowly, "It was you, D'Arcy, who were guilty of an act never before known in the history of this school—an act requiring the most condign punishment."

"Weally, sir——."

"It remains only for me to deal with you," went on the Head, "I must consider whether to expel you from the school——."

"Eh?"

"Or whether to administer a flogging——."

"Wha-a-t?"

I shall consider your sentence, and shall also consider the views of the prefect who still bears the marks of your reckless violence," said the Head, sternly.

Arthur Augustus blinked at him.

"For the present, you may leave my study——."

Arthur Augustus made no motion towards the door. He remained rooted where he was, staring blankly at his headmaster.

"Do you hear me, D'Arcy?"

"Yaas, sir! But I do not undahstand you," said Arthur Augustus, "I have done nothin' at all to mewit eithah the sack or a floggin', and I have not the faintest ideah what you mean by weckless violence."

"You do not appear to realise the seriousness of your act, D'Arcy."

"I am quite awah, sir, that it is a sewious mattah for a fellow to bweak House bounds aftah lights out. But as it was only a wag——."

"A—a what?"

"A wag, sir—as it was only a wag, I wegard it as a mattah that my house-mastah could vewy well deal with, without

wepartin' me to my head-mastah. Mr. Wailton has dealt with such mattahs befoah, and I weally do not know why I have been bwrought to you."

"D'Arcy!"

"If I had gone out of the House for any questionable weason, sir, I quite undahstand that it would be diffewent," continued Arthur Augustus, "But I am not suspected, I twust, of anythin' of that kind."

Dr. Holmes gazed at him.

"As for bein' sacked, or flogged, for a wag on a New House man, I am bound to say that it passes my com-pwehension," said Arthur Augustus, firmly.

"Is this what you call a rag, D'Arcy?" asked Monteith, quietly, touching his black eye with his finger.

Arthur Augustus blinked at him.

"I should certainly not call it a wag, givin' a fellow a black eye, Monteith. I should wegard it as a vewy wuffianly act. But it is nothin' to do with me, I suppose."

"What does the boy mean?" exclaimed the Head.

"Possibly, sir, he may not have known that my eye was blacked," said Monteith, as puzzled as the Head, "He could not have seen the effect of his blow in the dark."

"No doubt! No doubt! But he struck the blow——."

Arthur Augustus gave a bound. His feet almost left the floor of the Head's study.

"I—I—I stwuck the blow!" he stuttered.

"You did!" said Monteith.

"Are you off your wockah, Monteith?"

"What?"

"Are you makin' out that I gave you that black eye?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, quite bewildered between astonishment and indignation, "What do you mean?"

Monteith stared at him with his sound eye.

"Are you denying it?" he asked, blankly.

"Of course I am, as I nevah did anythin' of the kind," exclaimed Arthur Augustus, his eyes flashing, "Bai Jove!

Is that what I am accused of? Is that why Mr. Wailton bwrought me heah, sir?" He looked at the Head, "Am I supposed to have done that, sir?"

"I fail to understand you, D'Arcy. You have confessed that you were the School-House boy who left this House last night and went across to the New House, and were seen by Monteith under his study window——."

"That is twue, sir."

"Then the rest follows, as a matter of course," said Dr. Holmes, sternly, "The boy whom Monteith followed struck him in the dark—with the result you see. You have confessed that you were the boy——."

"I nevah stwuck Monteith, sir. I nevah dweamed of such a thing. Why, I couldn't have weached him at the window to hit him in the eye, even if I had wanted to," exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "And if Monteith followed anybody, he certainly did not follow me. I nevah saw anythin' of him, anyhow."

"Bless my soul!"

The head-master, and the New House prefect, gazed at Arthur Augustus. That noble youth breathed hard through his noble nose. He understood, at long last, what the accusation was, on which he had been brought before the Head. He realised that it was serious, awfully serious—a matter for at least a Head's flogging, if not the "sack"—for somebody! But as he was not that somebody, he was much more indignant than alarmed. And he met the concentrated stare of head-master and prefect quite fearlessly.

## CHAPTER XVI

### GUILTY!

DR. HOLMES spoke at last.

“D’Arcy!”

“Yaas, sir,” said Arthur Augustus, respectfully but firmly.

“As it appears that you now deny this act, I shall question you. Did you, or did you not, go to the New House yesterday afternoon, and enter into a scuffle with some of the juniors there?”

“Oh! Yaas, sir, there was wathah a wow——.”

“When Monteith intervened, and took you downstairs, did you, in the hearing of a School-House prefect, as well as several New House boys, threaten to strike him?”

Arthur Augustus started. He had almost forgotten that little incident, exciting as it had been at the time. Neither would it ever have presented itself to his mind in the words used by Dr. Holmes.

“I—I said I would hit him in the eye if he did not let go my yah, sir,” admitted Arthur Augustus, after a rather painful pause.

“Kildare heard this, and sent you back to your House, and caned you for uttering such a threat?”

“Yaas, sir: but I did not wegard it as a thweat,” said Arthur Augustus, colouring, “I did not mean that at all! I—I—I just said I would punch him in the eye if he did not let go my yah. Pewwaps I was wathah excited, sir.”

“Did you intend to carry out this intention later?”

“Certainly not, sir! I wealised that I had wathah



talked out of my hat, and forgot all about it. I wemembah wemarkin' to Cardew that punchin' a pwefect was not only against the wules, but vevy bad form."

"Did you leave the School-House last night with such an intention in your mind under cover of darkness?"

"Certainly not, sir."

"Did you make an attempt to open Monteith's window from outside?"

"That was all a mistake, sir! I got the wong window in the dark."

"You attempted to open Monteith's window—yes or no?"

"Yaas, sir."

"You ran away when he looked out to see who it was?"

"I wetired fwom the spot, sir," said Arthur Augustus, "I certainly wetired vevy wapidly."

"And when Monteith followed——."

"I was not awah that he followed, sir! I nevah knew that he had come out of his House at all."

"When Monteith followed you, and caught you, did you or did you not strike him a sudden blow in the eye, as you had already threatened to do in the hearing of several persons?"

"Oh, cwikey!"

"Answer me, D'Arcy."

"Monteith nevah caught me, sir. I got away all wight, with Taggles' dog barkin' after me," explained Arthur Augustus, "I dodged that bwute, and got back into the House, and that was all."

"Monteith has informed me, D'Arcy, as he informed his house-master last night, that he followed the boy he saw under his window—a junior—that he came on him in the dark, and was knocked down——."

"I nevah knocked him down, sir! I wepeat that Monteith did not catch me, and I nevah knew that he came aftah me at all."

Dr. Holmes drew a deep breath.

"If you did not go to the New House, D'Arcy, with the intention of carrying out the threat you had made, why did you go there at all?"

"It was a wag, sir! I was goin' to get in at Bakah's window, as he was away, and bag Figgins's clobbah fwom his dorm. But as I had woke up Monteith by gettin' at the wong window, I gave it up, and came back."

"Monteith!"

"Yes, sir."

"You followed the junior you had seen under your window?"

"Yes, sir, as soon as I had put a few clothes on."

"You caught him in the quadrangle?"

"Yes, sir! I did not see him, of course—it was too dark. I heard him, and ran to collar him, and was knocked down."

"He then escaped?"

"Yes, sir! I was too dazed to do anything further."

Dr. Holmes fixed his eyes on D'Arcy.

"Have you anything further to say, D'Arcy?"

"Only that Monteith is quite mistaken, sir! He certainly nevah came neah me in the quad, and I nevah touched him."

"Are you suggesting, D'Arcy, that some other boy was out of his House, and that it was he who struck Monteith in the dark?"

"I weally don't know, sir! I don't know anythin' about it! All I know is that I nevah did it."

"You have no doubt in your mind, Monteith?"

"None, sir."

"Weally, Monteith——."

"I can only say, sir, that I went out into the quad to look for the boy I had seen under my window, and that I was struck down in the dark," said Monteith, "My first impression, seeing a junior under my window, was that some boy of my own House was playing some foolish trick. But when I reported what had occurred to my house-master,

Mr. Ratcliff immediately made an investigation, and every boy in the House was found in bed."

"The matter is clear," said Dr. Holmes, "The person concerned obviously was a School-House boy. D'Arcy confesses that he was out of his House, that he made an attempt to open your window at midnight: and when you pursued the boy you had seen, he struck you down. The matter could not be clearer."

"I nevah——."

"You persist in your denial, D'Arcy?"

"I am tellin' you the twuth, sir! I wepeat that Monteith nevah came anywhah neah me, and I nevah touched him, or dweamed of doin' so."

Monteith stared at D'Arcy with his sound eye. After the swell of St. Jim's had admitted so much, he could not understand why the junior did not admit the rest. There was not the remotest doubt in his own mind. Neither was there in the Head's. Indeed, the thing seemed to speak for itself. Nobody in the Head's study was thinking of Taggles, or likely to think of him in such a connection.

There was a long pause. Then the Head spoke again, slowly.

"I have said that the matter could not be clearer, D'Arcy. Nevertheless, as you persist in your denial, I shall request Mr. Railton to make a further and most rigid investigation, to ascertain whether—possibly—some other School-House boy may have been out of the House at the same time. It is extremely improbable, but the investigation shall be made. If no discovery is made—and I do not expect any such discovery—you will be punished, and I have to decide whether I can permit you to remain in this school after what you have done."

"But, sir——."

"That will do, D'Arcy."

"But weally, sir——."

"Silence!"

"May I speak, sir?" asked Monteith, "It does seem to me very likely that the boy acted unthinkingly—that he struck out without realising what he was doing, when I caught him——."

"That is not in accordance with his own words, Monteith, which were a distinct threat to do exactly what has been done."

"I know, sir! But——it does seem to me possible that he lost his head and hit out widly, and that that might be taken into consideration."

Arthur Augustus blinked at the New House prefect. As Monteith obviously believed that he was the culprit, he had not expected the prefect to put in a word for him. He was about to speak, but Dr. Holmes made him a sharp sign to be silent.

"I shall consider what you say, Monteith," said the Head, "D'Arcy! You may now leave my study, and go to your form-room."

"Vewy well, sir! But I wepeat——."

"I have told you to go, D'Arcy."

"Yaas, sir, I am goin' But I wepeat——."

"Leave my study this instant, D'Arcy," thundered the Head.

And Arthur Augustus, with the rest of his remarks unuttered, quitted his head-master's study.

## CHAPTER XVII

### OR NOT GUILTY?

MR. LATHOM raised his eyebrows.

Every fellow in the Fourth-Form, School-House and New House, stared.

Third school was well on its way when the door of the Fourth-Form room opened, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came quietly in.

Every eye was fixed on him. All the form knew that he had been taken to the Head, and on what charge. He had not been expected to return to the form-room. But there he was : walking in very much as if nothing out of the common had occurred.

"D'Arcy!" ejaculated Mr. Lathom.

"Yaas, sir! I am sowwy I am late for class, sir," said Arthur Augustus, calmly, "It was not my fault, sir, as the Head desiahed to see me in his study."

Mr. Lathom coughed.

"Did Dr. Holmes tell you to come here, D'Arcy?"

"Yaas, sir."

"Very well : you may take your place."

Arthur Augustus took his place in form. As he passed Cardew, on his way, he caught a whisper.

"Not sacked, then?"

"Wats!" answered Arthur Augustus.

And he went to his place and sat down.

Cardew stared after him, and then gave Levison and Clive a puzzled look. Cardew, most certainly, had not expected to see Arthur Augustus there again.

"What the dooce," murmured Cardew, "They wouldn't be keen to sack the son of Lord Eastwood, I daresay—but blackin' a prefect's eye—it's the limit."

"Did he?" said Levison.

"Don't we all know he did?"

"It's not like him," said Clive.

"Didn't he go over to the New House last night, specially to do that very thing? Didn't I say so at the time?"

"Cardew! Take fifty lines for talking in class!" said Mr. Lathom, evidently catching the whispering.

After which Cardew said no more.

Blake and Herries and Digby eyed Arthur Augustus

with anxious inquiry. It was an immense relief to them to see him come back into form. He had not been "turfed out"—not yet, at all events. But they were deeply anxious. At the first opportunity, when Mr. Lathom's attention was elsewhere, Blake whispered :

"Is it all right, Gussy?"

"I twust so, Blake."

"But what did the Head say?" breathed Herries.

"Did you own up?"

"Weally, Hewwies——."

"What are they going to do?" hissed Digby.

"They are goin' to twy to find out who blacked Monteith's eye, Dig, from what the Head said."

"Oh!" breathed Blake, "Then they don't know?"

"Appawently not, Blake."

"Silence in the form!" rapped out Mr. Lathom.

The whispering ceased.

Third school seemed very long to the chums of Study No. 6 that morning. It was only the usual hour : and that hour contained only sixty minutes as usual : but each minute seemed to drag along an unusual length. Arthur Augustus's calm composure was reassuring, in a way : but his friends were intensely anxious to know what had happened. Obviously, Arthur Augustus was not "sacked," and he did not look like a fellow over whose head a flogging impended. But they wanted to know.

At length the welcome dismissal came. In the corridor, when the Fourth came out, D'Arcy was surrounded immediately by an eager crowd. Baggy Trimble, in his eagerness for information, clutched his sleeve with a fat hand.

"I say, ain't you bunked, D'Arcy?"

"Weally, Twimble——."

"Is it a flogging?" asked Lumley-Lumley.

"Or what?" inquired Kerr.

"Give us the news, Gussy," urged Clive.

"I guess we're all keen to know," said Wildrake, "Cough it up, old-timer."

Nine or ten other fellows were asking questions at the same time.

"Weally, deah boys, I have vevy little to tell you," said Arthur Augustus, "It appeahs that Monteith, of the New House, had his eye blacked last night——."

"That's ancient history," said Figgins.

"Is it? I was not awah of it till I saw him in the Head's study, Figgins. It was wathah a shock to me."

"You didn't know his eye was blacked?" ejaculated Fatty Wynn.

"How should I know, Wynn, when I hadn't seen him this mornin'?"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Gussy!" gasped Blake.

"He must have had a tewwific jolt in the eye, to judge by his looks," said Arthur Augustus, "It was wathah wuff luck."

"And you don't know who gave him that jolt?" asked Cardew, with a grin.

"How should I know, Cardew?"

"Oh, great gad!"

"Gussy——!" gasped Herries.

"For some weason, which I do not quite undahstand, he appeahs to think that I did it," said Arthur Augustus, "The Head appeahs to think the same. I am wathah surprwised at such an ewwah of judgment on the part of the Head: but pwobably even head-mastahs make mistakes sometimes."

"Gussy!" murmured Dig.

"Didn't you own up, then?" asked Lawrence.

"Natuwally I owned up to that what was twue, Lawrence. I twust that I should not be likely to pwevawicate."

"Fan me, somebody!" murmured Cardew.

"Do they know you were out of the House last night?"

breathed Blake. "Did Lathom tumble, after you nodded off in class this morning?"

"Oh, yaas! They know that," said Arthur Augustus, calmly, "They are awah that I went ovah to the New House for a wag. I have told them so. They also know that I gave it up aftah Monteith woke up, and came back."

"Do they?" murmured Cardew.

"Yaas, wathah, because I have told them so. But I am sowwy to say that the Head appeahs to have some doubt on the subject," said Arthur Augustus, more in sorrow than in anger, "Monteith thinks that he caught me in the quad——."

"Thinks!" stuttered Figgins.

"Yaas, and that I hit him in the eye——."

"Didn't you?" yelled Figgins.

"Certainly not."

"Oh, crikey! Who did, then?"

"That appawently wemains to be discovahed. Some othah fellow must have been out of the House at the same time, pwesumably."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Gussy, old man——."

"Draw it mild, old bean."

Arthur Augustus drew himself up to his full height. He jammed his eyeglass into his noble eye, and glanced over the crowd of excited faces. His glance was rather like cold steel.

"I have already said, that I did not black Monteith's eye," he said, quietly, "He did not catch me in the quad—I nevah even knew he came aftah me. If he caught anybody, it was somebody else. I nevah knew that anythin' had happened to him at all, until I saw him in the Head's study. I shouldn't wondah if he wan into a twee, or somethin', and gave his silly eye a knock, and nevah caught anybody at all. But if he did catch somebody, it was not I, and I nevah touched him. And if there is any fellow



present who doubts my word on the subject, I shall be obliged to him if he will kindly keep his distance, and not speak to me again."

With that, Arthur Augustus walked away, his noble nose in the air. Blake and Herries and Dig exchanged bewildered glances, and followed him. They left behind them a buzzing excited crowd.

"Does he take the cake?" asked Cardew, "Does he prance off with the giddy biscuit? They only had to find out who was out of the House when Monteith got his black eye—and D'Arcy's owned up to that! He needn't have—but he did—."

"He had to, as it was true," said Clive.

Cardew laughed.

"Isn't the rest true?" he asked.

"D'Arcy says it isn't."

"Dear me!" said Cardew.

"Dashed if I make it out," said Levison, "We were all taking it for granted—but from what D'Arcy says now——."

"He can't have forgotten punching Monteith in the eye!" said Kerr, blankly. "But—he says he didn't!"

"He, he, he!" from Baggy Trimble, "Think a chap would say he did?"

"Shut up, Trimble."

"Beats me," said Figgins, "Of course I thought they'd got the man, as soon as they found out who was out of the House. But—it can't have been D'Arcy, if he says it wasn't."

"Who, then?" grinned Cardew.

"Oh, go and eat coke."

There were divided opinions in the Fourth. But undoubtedly the general view was that already taken by the Head, that the matter could not be clearer: and that it was the aristocratic fist of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy that had landed in James Monteith's eye the previous night. Arthur Augustus had been heard to declare that he would

punch Monteith in the eye. Monteith had been punched in the eye : and Arthur Augustus, and apparently nobody else, had been on the spot! And that, in the general opinion, was that!

## CHAPTER XVIII

### ARTHUR AUGUSTUS TAKES IT CALMLY!

TOM MERRY blinked.

“ You didn’t! ” he ejaculated.

“ No! ”

“ You didn’t! ” repeated Monty Lowther, like an echo.

“ No! ”

“ You didn’t! ” Manners repeated the echo.

Arthur Augustus D’Arcy raised his eyebrows.

“ I have already weplied twice in the negative! ” he said,

“ How many times would you like me to wepeat the word ‘ No ’? ”

“ But——! ” said Tom.

The chums of the Shell stared at Arthur Augustus. Then they stared at Blake and Herries and Dig. Then they stared at one another. Then they stared at Arthur Augustus D’Arcy again.

They were all in Study No. 6. Arthur Augustus was very quiet and very calm. His comrades were worried, perturbed, dismayed, bewildered. They simply did not know what to think or what to believe.

To doubt the noble word of the swell of St. Jim’s was unthinkable. Yet how was it possible to believe that he had not punched Monteith of the New House?

As Cardew had said, they only had to find out who was out of the House when Monteith got his black eye. The

rest followed. D'Arcy had owned up to having been out of the House at that very time. But the rest, according to him, did not follow. It was a hopeless puzzle.

"Look here, Gussy," said Tom, at last, "Let's have this clear. We've all taken it for granted that you gave Monteith that eye, as you were on the spot. If you didn't——."

"Did you say 'if,' Tom Mewwy?"

"Yes, ass."

"Then pway allow me to point out that there is no 'if' in the case. I have said that I did not."

"Oh! Yes! Quite! But look here, tell us what you did, and let's see if we can make head or tail of it."

"I went ovah to the New House to wag Figgins. Monteith woke up and I chucked it and came back. That is all."

"But they say you tried to get in at Monteith's window ——," said Manners.

"After yelling out that you were going to punch him in the eye!" hissed Blake, "What does it look like?"

"I am not wesponsible for what it looks like, Blake. It is quite twue that I said that I would punch Monteith in the eye because he gwabbed my yah. I had a gweat mind to do so, aftah Kildare gave me six. But on weflection I wealised that it would be vevy bad form to punch a pwefect, even when he so fah forgot himself as to take a fellow by the yah. I dismissed the mattah entiahly fwom my mind, and, as I wemarked to Cardew, decided to tweat him with contempt. I have tweated him with contempt evah since, and that is all."

"But about his window——!" urged Tom Merry.

"That was an ewwah in the dark, Tom Mewwy. I was goin' to get in at Bakah's study window, as he was away, but in the dark it was not easy to pick out the wight window. That was how I woke up Monteith."

"Oh!" said the six fellows in the study, all at once.

"Just like Gussy!" added Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies——."

"And then——?" asked Tom.

"Then I cut, Tom Mewwy. It did not appeah vewy useful to cawwy on, with a pwefect lookin' at me out of his window!"

"What happened next?" asked Manners.

"Nothin' deah boy. Taggles' dog was aftah me, but I dodged him, and got back into the House, and went back to bed. That is all."

"You never saw anything of Monteith?" asked Lowther.

"Nothin' at all, aftah that glimpse at his study window. I did not know that he came aftah me."

"Well, he certainly did," said Tom, "And he ran into somebody in the dark whom he took for you."

"So it appeahs," assented Arthur Augustus.

"And that somebody landed him in the eye," said Manners.

"Appawently."

"And—and—and it wasn't you!" said Monty Lowther.

"Wats!"

"Does that mean yes or no?"

"It means that I wefuse to keep on weplyin to fwivolous questions, Lowthah."

"If it wasn't you, it was somebody else" said Herries.

"Bai Jove! Did you work that out in your head, Hewwies?" Arthur Augustus seemed to be growing sarcastic!

"Well, who was the somebody else?" hooted Herries.

"I haven't a clue, Hewwies."

"Well, it beats me," said Tom, "I suppose some other chap might have been out, but—but—but—they've proved that no New House man was out, anyway. And why the dickens should any School House man want to punch a New House pre—except——." He paused.

"Except the silly ass who said he would!" snorted Blake. Arthur Augustus's eyeglass gleamed at Jack Blake.

"I twust, Blake, that you do not entahtain any doubt of my word on the subject?" he said, icily, "If you do, I am sowwy to say that our fwriendship is at an end."

"Fathead!"

"Weally, Blake——."

"Ass!"

"Don't get on the high horse, old chap," said Tom Merry, "It's too jolly serious for that. We're bound to take your word : but you can't expect the Head or Railton or Monteith to swallow a story like that. Unless it comes out that some other chap was out of the House at the same time, and that he had a special down on Monteith, you're for it."

"The Head is instwuctin' Wailton to make inquiries, Tom Mewwy. I twust that the twuth will come to light."

"And if it doesn't——?"

"Then I am to stand the wacket!" said Arthur Augustus, "Howevah, as somebody else punched Monteith in the eye, I shall expect Wailton to find out the facts. He is a vewy capable man, at least I have always supposed so : and I wely upon him."

Tom Merry and Co. exchanged glances.

There was a step in the passage, and D'Arcy minor, of the Third Form looked into the study. Wally of the Third was looking excited. Evidently he had heard the news about his major.

"Oh, you're here, Gus," he exclaimed, "I've been looking for you! Trimble says it was you gave Monteith of the Sixth his black eye——."

"Twimble is mistaken, Wally. I had nothin' to do with it," answered Arthur Augustus, calmly.

"Oh, good," said Wally, "I thought even you wouldn't be quite ass enough to black a pre's eye——."

"Weally, Wally——."

"O.K." said Wally, and he departed, evidently relieved in his mind. Arthur Augustus smiled at six serious faces,

a slightly sarcastic smile.

"My young bwothah appawently wegards my word as good enough for him," he remarked, "I should be wathah glad to heah you fellows say the same. Othahwise I feah that I can no longah wegard you as fwiends."

"Fathead!"

"Ass!"

"Chump!"

"Ditherer!"

"Weally, you fellows——!"

"Well, as Gussy says he didn't do it, I suppose he didn't!" said Tom Merry, "He's only done everything he could possibly think of to make it look as if he did."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——."

"There goes the bell."

And as the dinner-bell rang, the meeting in Study No. 6 broke up: six fellows looking worried and glum: but Arthur Augustus, apparently buoyed up by the consciousness of innocence, as calm and serene as was his wont. His friends, judging by their worried looks, might have been "for it" themselves: but Arthur Augustus, at least, was taking it calmly.

## CHAPTER XIX

### CARDEW IS CONVINCED!

"STOP a minute, D'Arcy."

"Sowwy, Cardew! I have to go to the Head!"

"Hold on a minute."

Cardew caught Arthur Augustus by the arm.

He had been waiting for the swell of St. Jim's at the corner of the corridor. His usually careless face was

unusually serious.

It was after tea, and Arthur Augustus had been in the junior day-room, with a crowd of other fellows, when Toby, the House page, brought him a message that he was to go to the head-master's study. Quite calmly and composedly, Arthur Augustus proceeded on his way thither—leaving his friends in the day-room in a very worried and anxious state.

Why Cardew had waylaid him in this manner, Arthur Augustus did not know : neither was he interested to learn. He shook his arm free.

But as Cardew planted himself directly in his path, he was unable to pass on his way. Evidently the scapegrace of St. Jim's was determined to speak.

"Weally, Cardew——!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, impatiently.

"Listen to me a minute," said Cardew, quietly, "A few minutes won't make any difference, and I've got to speak to you. I've got more sense in my little finger than you've got in your silly head, as I daresay you know."

"Wats!"

"You're going to the Head to get your sentence," said Cardew, "I suppose you know what it will be. They won't sack you : but you'll be up for a flogging—you know that."

"I know nothin' of the kind, Cardew."

"Execution in hall, after third school, with all St. Jim's looking on—both Houses assembled for the show!" said Cardew. "That isn't what you want, is it?"

"Certainly not, Cardew."

"Then don't ask for it," urged Cardew. "Do listen to a chap's advice. We're relations, though that doesn't cut much ice : we're not pals, and never likely to be—but I should hate to see you flogged in hall—"

"I should wefuse to be flogged in hall, Cardew."

"Oh, gad!"

“ Now pway let me pass.”

“ But they’ve got you,” gasped Cardew, “ You’ve owned up, practically, that you’re the man—by owning up that you were out of the House when Monteith got his black eye last night——.”

“ Wubbish! ”

“ They’ve been nosing all day, beaks and prefects, to find out whether any other man was out. Everybody knows that nobody was——and now it’s as good as proved. Nobody but you.”

“ There must have been somebody, Cardew, unless Monteith got his black eye by wunnin’ into a twee or somethin’ in the dark.”

“ Oh, don’t be a goat,” exclaimed Cardew, “ Look here, do you know why I refused to go with you last night and give you the bunk you wanted? It was because I jolly well knew that it was gammon about ragging Figgins, and that you were on Monteith’s track.”

“ Bai Jove! ”

“ You said you’d punch him in the eye, and you did,” continued Cardew, “ As soon as I heard that Monteith had a black eye, I knew you’d pulled it off—done exactly what you went to do.”

Arthur Augustus gazed at Ralph Reckness Cardew. He gazed silently, as if Cardew had taken his breath away.

“ So what’s the good of talking rot about it? ” went on Cardew, “ I know you did it, and knew in advance that you were going to do it, if you could. Everybody else knows you did it. The Head knows. But what nobody knows is, why you’re denying it, after admitting enough to fix it on you.”

“ Bai Jove! ”

“ Can’t you see it’s no use? ” urged Cardew, “ I know any man would stretch a point, up before the Head! I’d stretch all the points in the compass, myself, to dodge a flogging. But there’s no sense in telling a lie that can’t be



believed."

"Did you say tellin' a lie, Cardew?"

"The Head couldn't believe you, if he wanted to ever so much. What do you expect him to do? Let off the man he knows did it, and start a hunt for some other man who didn't?"

"You wottah——!"

"I'm trying to make you see, sense. You haven't the brains of a bunny-rabbit, but surely you can see that denying what everybody knows happened, won't get you anywhere. Take my tip, old chap, and make the best of it, not the worst. Own up that you did it——."

"Weally, you wottah——."

"——and make the best of it. You can explain the matter away, almost to the extent of making out that it was an accident. That's the line to take."

"It was not an accident, Cardew, as it did not happen at all."

"Oh, do come off that!" exclaimed Cardew, impatiently, "Take my tip! Own up to what you did—but tell the Head that you were so startled, when you were suddenly collared in the dark, that you landed out before you knew what you were doing."

"That would not be twue, Cardew."

"It would go down, and that's what you want. I know you went over to the New House specially to get Monteith—but the Head doesn't! Say you lost your head, and landed out wildly—it's just what might have happened, and it makes the whole thing look more or less of an accident. You didn't know it was Monteith grabbing you, in the dark—you hit out without thinking—can't you see that that will see you through. The Head will lap it up."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy breathed hard.

"Pwobably you are wight, Cardew. But there are two weasons why I cannot take your tip, though I do not expect you to undahstand them," he said.

"Give them a name! I'll try to understand, with my inferior intellect!"

"In the first place, it would not be twue. In the second place, I wely on my head-mastah to see justice done," said Arthur Augustus, "Monteith did not collah me, and I did not hit him, and know nothin' whatevah about his silly black eye. If I had done it, I would wathah be flogged a dozen times ovah, than tell lies about it. But as I nevah did it, I expect the Head to wealise it, and I certainly do not expect a floggin' for somethin' I nevah did."

"Then you're sticking to denying it?"

"Natuwally."

Cardew shrugged his shoulders.

"O.K." he said, carelessly, "I thought I'd tip you : but though you bray a fool in a mortar, yet will not his folly depart from him! Go ahead and tell your own lies your own way."

He stepped aside. But Arthur Augustus did not go ahead. His noble face was crimson with wrath.

"Are you sayin' that I am goin' to tell lies to my head-mastah, Cardew?" he asked, his voice trembling with anger.

"Aren't you?" jeered Cardew.

"I have only one weply to make to that," said Arthur Augustus, "I am goin' to knock you down, Cardew. Put up your hands, you wottah."

And Arthur Augustus, quite forgetting in his wrath and indignation that they were quite near the Head's study, clenched his fists and advanced on Cardew, hitting out.

"You mad ass!" exclaimed Cardew, backing away, "Keep off—oh, gad!" He staggered, as knuckles rapped on his nose, "You potty fathead, do you want to bring the Head out of his study?"

"I am goin' to thwash you, you wottah——."

"Oh, you dithering ass!" gasped Cardew, backing away, and warding D'Arcy's angry punches as he backed. He did not want the Head to look out of his study, and see a

fight going on in the corridor, though the excited swell of St. Jim's did not seem to care, "Oh, gad! Sit down, you ass."

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus, as a sudden thump on the chest sat him down, with a bump, "Wooh!"

Cardew had disappeared by the time he was on in his feet again. And Arthur Augustus, still flushed, and breathing hard, went on to the Head's study, tapped at the door, and went in.

Ralph Cardew lounged up to the Fourth-Form passage—occasionally rubbing a reddened nose—with a very curious expression on his face. Levison and Clive stared at him, as he came into No. 9 Study.

"What's the matter with your nose?" asked Levison.

"Is anythin' the matter with it?" drawled Cardew.

"Looks as if you'd had a knock," said Clive.

"Dear me! Now I come to think of it, I had. But never mind that." Cardew surveyed his study-mates, with a whimsical look, "Either of you fellows got the faintest idea who dotted Monteith's eye last night?"

"You've been saying all day that it was D'Arcy," answered Levison. "Have you changed your mind about it?"

"Oh, quite!" drawled Cardew, "I've been having a pleasant chat with D'Arcy, and he has convinced me. He's going to get the flogging," went on Cardew, thoughtfully, "But who the dooce was it did the trick? I wonder!"

## CHAPTER XX

### UNEXPECTED!

“ HERE he comes! ”

There was a buzz in the junior day-room.

Tom Merry and Co. were waiting there, anxiously, for Arthur Augustus's return. Many other fellows were anxious, too, as well as D'Arcy's own immediate pally circle. All eyes were turned on the doorway, as the most elegant figure at St. Jim's appeared there.

“ Gussy, old man——.”

“ What's the verdict? ”

“ Tell us, old chap.”

There was a change in D'Arcy's look, since he had left the day-room to go to the Head's study. His absence had been brief : Dr. Holmes had not kept him long. But he had come back quite a different fellow. He had gone quiet, calm, and apparently nothing doubting. He came back with a set face, a glinting eye, and compressed lips. He was still quite calm : but it was easy to read the deep wrath and indignation under that calmness.

“ Cough it up, old man,” muttered Blake. He was worried already : and still more worried by that unusual expression on his chum's face.

“ Certainly, deah boy.”

“ Well, what's the sentence? ”

“ Accordin' to the Head, I am to be flogged in hall, aftah third school to-mowwow, in the pwesence of all St. Jim's,” answered Arthur Augustus.

“ Oh! ” said a dozen fellows.

"The Head was kind enough to say that my sentence would have been more severe, had not Monteith spoken up for me."

"That was decent of him, as you b'acked his eye," said Gore.

Arthur Augustus seemed deaf to that remark.

"What did Monteith say for you, then?" asked Tom Merry.

"Monteith is undah the impwession that he collahed me in the quad, last night, and that I hit him in the eye. Undah this impwession, he thinks that pwobably I stwuck out wildly without thinkin', and that it was not a delibewate act. I am bound to say that that is wathah decent of him, as he believes that I did it. In othah wespects I wegard him as wathah a wottah, as he wefuses to take my word on the subject."

"Oh!"

"Howevah, Monteith is only a New House man, and does not mattah vevy much," went on Arthur Augustus, "I can afford to diswegard him."

"Oh!"

"But I am vevy surprisid and shocked by findin' that the Head and Wailton both take the same view," continued Arthur Augustus, "A fellow natuwally welies on his head-mastah and house-mastah for fair play. This is weally too sewious a mattah for them to make mistakes."

"Oh, crumbs!" said Crooke of the Shell, "Are they making mistakes?"

"He, he, he!" from Baggy Trimble.

"It's rough luck, old chap," said Talbot, "But it might have been worse. The beaks have to go by the evidence, you know: and they don't know you as we do."

"Yaas, I have considahed that, Talbot," said Arthur Augustus, with a nod, "And I shall make what excuses I can for them."

"Oh, my hat!"

"But I shall not, of course, take a floggin' for somethin' I have not done. That is quite imposs."

"Eh?"

"Gussy, old man——."

"It's tough," said Tom Merry, "But——."

"But, old chap——!" said Blake.

"Oh, scissors!" ejaculated Trimble, "Are you going to tell the Big Beak you won't be flogged, D'Arcy?"

"Wemarkable as that may seem to you, Twimble, that is pwecisely what I am goin' to do," answered Arthur Augustus, calmly, "I shall wefuse to be flogged."

"Gussy!" groaned Blake.

"But—but—but——" stuttered Tom Merry, "My dear chap, you can't! The prefects will handle you if you give any trouble."

"I shall wesist, Tom Mewwy."

"Oh, holy smoke!" said Gore, "Are you going to give Kildare a black eye, to match the one you gave Monteith?"

"I should be vewy sowwy to give old Kildare a black eye, Goah, but I shall certainly do so if he lays a fingah on me."

"Fan me!" said Gore.

"Gussy, old chap——."

"It is quite useless to argue the point, Blake. I uttahly wefuse to be swiped for somethin' I have not done. I shall definitely wefuse to be flogged, and if a hand is laid on me, I shall wesist to the utmost in my powah."

"It's going to be exciting in hall to-morrow!" grinned Gore. "I wouldn't miss it for worlds."

"I twust you will be amused, Goah!" said Arthur Augustus, with sarcastic disdain.

"Gussy, old fellow——" said Tom Merry.

"Pway dwop the subject, Tom Mewwy. I have made up my mind on that point, and nothin' would induce me to change it."

"Look here, you ass——!" exclaimed Herries.

" Weally, Hewwies——."

" You can't do it, fathead," hissed Digby.

" Weally, Dig——."

" Do listen to reason, old chap——" said Manners.

" I wefuse to listen to weason, Mannahs——I mean, I wefuse to discuss a mattah that is definitely settled," said Arthur Augustus, " I am not goin' to be flogged, and that is that! "

" Look here——! " roared Blake.

" Pway do not wear at a fellow, Blake! I have wemarked befoah that I weally dislike bein' woared at."

" You can't——! "

" Wats! "

And to put an end to the argument, Arthur Augustus walked out of the day-room, his head erect, and his noble mind evidently quite made up, in a decision as fixed and immutable as the laws of the Medes and Persians.

He left the day-room in a buzz of excitement : and his friends utterly dismayed. That it was tough, extremely tough, every fellow who believed in him admitted : and in spite of the evidence that seemed overwhelming and irrefutable, many fellows did believe in him——though if D'Arcy had not blacked Monteith's eye, they could not begin to imagine who had. But even his staunchest pals had to admit that the Head could only decide on the evidence, and that in the circumstances it was practically impossible for him to decide other than as he had done. And even if a mistake had been made, Arthur Augustus really had asked for it, by having broken House bounds after lights out, and thus placed himself under suspicion. All this was clear to Gussy's friends—but did not seem clear to Gussy himself. He was prepared to face the just punishment for what he had done—but he was not prepared to take it for what he had not done—and he was not going to! And that, as he had said, was that!

" He means it," groaned Blake, " I know that look in

his eye! Oh, gum, if he kicks up a shindy in hall to-morrow, what's going to happen?"

"He can't do it," said Tom.

"I know he can't! But he will, all the same."

"Obstinate as a mule!" said Dig.

"A mule's got nothing on him," grunted Herries, "He's getting off cheap with a flogging, really. They'll bunk him if he kicks up a row in hall, and he's going to do it."

"The ass!"

"The fathead!"

"The image!"

"We can't let him," said Tom, "But——what can we do?"

To that question there was no answer. In fact, there was nothing that Arthur Augustus's anxious friends could do.

D'Arcy's sentence, and his statement, made in the hearing of fifty fellows, that he was not going to submit to it, was the one topic in the School-House that evening. If Arthur Augustus had cared for the spot-light, he certainly had it now. Arthur Augustus was making history!

## CHAPTER XXI

### CARDEW KNOWS HOW!

"BUSY?"

Three impatient stares were turned on Ralph Reckness Cardew, as he sauntered into No. 10 Study in the Shell, in prep.

Not that Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther were busy with prep. No doubt they ought to have been, but at the moment, things were not quite as they ought to have



been. Tom Merry had not looked at his books. Monty Lowther was strolling about the study with his hands in his pockets, apparently thinking of anything but prep. Even Manners, the methodical, was at work in a very desultory way, with long dismal pauses.

But though they certainly did not seem busy, the "Terrible Three" of the Shell did not seem to want visitors—at any rate a visitor named Cardew.

"Yes! No! Don't bother," said Tom, curtly.

"Not enjoyin' life at the moment?" asked Cardew, blandly.

Tom Merry gave him a dark look.

"You know what's up, Cardew," he said, "I suppose it wouldn't seem serious to you—as nothing does. But we don't want any of your rot now. Cut off."

"You don't want to hear what I've come to say?"

"No!" said Tom, bluntly.

"Take it away and boil it," said Lowther.

"And shut the door after you," said Manners.

It could not be called a warm welcome in No. 10 Study. But Cardew did not seem to mind. Quite coolly, he shut the study door, and stood leaning on it, with his hands in his pockets, surveying the Shell fellows with a smiling face.

"Waiting to be chucked out?" asked Lowther.

"No! I'll walk out quite peaceably, when I've said my say," answered Cardew, imperturbably, "It's about the one and only."

"We don't want to hear you on that subject," said Tom, savagely. "The less you say about D'Arcy the better."

"You believe in him?" asked Cardew.

"Yes, we do."

"Against all the evidence?"

"Yes, yes, yes! Now get out."

"Dear man!" said Cardew, "Evidence is all bunk, really, isn't it? It's a queer business—I just can't figure

out who did it—and I'm pretty keen. Wasn't one of you fellows, was it?"

"Look here——."

"Lookin'! All we know for certain is, that it wasn't D'Arcy," said Cardew, meditatively, "That leaves a lot to choose among."

"So you've changed your tune?" asked Tom, staring.

"Why not?" drawled Cardew, "I hadn't a doubt that it was D'Arcy. What did it look like? But I had a talk with him just before he went to the Head—and he's convinced me."

"And how did he do that?"

"Punched me nose, among other things," said Cardew, airily, "Thinkin' he was goin' to tell the Head the silliest crammers ever, I offered him a better assortment—for which he had no use. He signified the same by punchin' my nose."

"I hope he punched it hard."

"Fairly! But never mind that! It's all over the House that D'Arcy's going to kick up a shindy when they commence operations to-morrow in hall. I suppose you know they'll turf him out if he does."

"Well?" growled Tom.

"Well, why should a fellow go through a Head's swishing in hall—public execution with bell, book, and candle, and the whole bag of tricks—when he hasn't done a thing? I'm backin' D'Arcy up."

"Much good that will do him," grunted Manners.

"And as you fellows are his pals, I fancied you might be disposed to back him up too," added Cardew.

"What can we do?" asked Tom. He was eyeing the scapegrace of the Fourth doubtfully and suspiciously. Cardew's own chums in No. 9 Study did not always quite know how to take him: and the captain of the Shell had no use whatever for his airy persiflage. "If you're serious——."

"Sober as a judge," assured Cardew.

"Well, what can a fellow do?" demanded Tom, "There's precious little we wouldn't do to see D'Arcy through this awful scrape. But what——?"

"Well, think it over a minute," said Cardew, "Monteith got a jolt in the eye last night, and D'Arcy was out of the House. That settles it for the beaks—added to his singin' out that he was goin' to punch that New House tick. But we know better, bein' much wiser coves than the Head——."

"Cut it short."

"If D'Arcy didn't do it, somebody else did, as it happened," said Cardew.

"We'd guessed that one," said Monty Lowther, sarcastically.

"Who it was, is a jolly old mystery at present," went on Cardew, "But mysteries are always solved in the long run. Everything comes out. Secrets are never kept. Sooner or later the facts will come out."

"Fat lot of good that will be, if D'Arcy gets the swishing to-morrow, and the facts come out the week after next, or the week after that!" snapped Manners.

"But if the flogging were put off——!" suggested Cardew.

"Are you going to ask the Head to put it off?"

"He wouldn't listen to me," said Cardew, sadly, "He doesn't know that I'm a wiser cove than he is."

Tom Merry breathed hard.

"If you've got anything sensible to say——!" he began.

"Lots!" said Cardew, "and lots! And then some! The Head wouldn't put it off. But suppose we put it off for him?"

"What?"

"That's the big idea," said Cardew, smiling at three astonished faces, "The chopper comes down after third school to-morrow—if D'Arcy's available for the execution. If he isn't on the spot, it will be a case of performance unavoidably postponed. Well, my idea is that the one and

only isn't goin' to be on the spot. No flogging—no shindy—no anythin'!”

“But how——?” yelled Lowther.

“That's what I'm comin' to. We park the happy victim in a safe place, and keep him out of their clutches. See?”

“Wha—a—t?”

“Ever heard of a barrin'-out?” asked Cardew.

Three fellows jumped.

“A—a—a barrin'-out!” stuttered Tom Merry.

“Such things happen,” drawled Cardew, “There's been one at this very school. Quite simple, really! You bar out the beaks, and that's that.”

The Shell fellows gazed at him.

“This wouldn't be a barrin'-out on the grand scale,” went on Cardew, “Nine fellows in ten believe that they've got the right man, and that there's nothin' to kick about. We know better, bein' such brainy blokes. We couldn't bar the House, as happened on the great and historical occasion I've mentioned. But we could pick some jolly old spot, stack ourselves in it with Gussy, and hold out against all comers——.”

“Oh!” gasped Tom.

“And get the sack all round,” said Manners.

Cardew nodded.

“That's a risk, of course,” he agreed, “But nothing venture, nothing win, you know. But I don't see how they'll sack fellows who are holdin' the fort and can't be collared. We don't surrender till——.”

“Till what?”

“Till the flogging's off, and all is calm and bright.”

“Do you think the Head would let us dictate to him?” asked Manners.

“Quite—if he couldn't help it.”

“Oh!”

“Besides, the Head is a just old bean,” continued Cardew,

“ He would be jolly glad he never swished the wrong man, when the facts come out. Might even pat us on the head, and say ‘ Good boys! I’m proud of you! ’ ”

“ Oh, don’t be a silly ass! ”

“ Well, perhaps it wouldn’t run to that,” admitted Cardew, “ But you can bank on it that it would be O.K., if it came out that Gussy wasn’t the man.”

“ It might,” said Tom, “ But if it didn’t——! ”

“ The barring-out goes on till it does,” said Cardew, “ We hold the fort till they find the right man. That’s fair! After all, it’s up to them to find the right man, and not get the wrong pig by the ear.”

“ That’s true,” said Tom.

“ Right on the wicket,” said Monty Lowther, “ But——.”

“ But——! ” murmured Manners.

“ Well, that’s the idea,” said Cardew, and he detached himself from the door, “ Chew it over! The one and only isn’t a pal of mine, but I’m ready to back him up——and you fellows can’t very well do less, as you’re his pals. The chaps in No. 6 will join up, you can bank on that. I fancy Levison and Clive will do the same. And a few more—Talbot, and Kangaroo, and some others. We shall be quite a crowd—quite enough of us to bar out the beaks, and keep the one and only at a safe distance from the Head’s birch. And it will be no end of a lark! ”

With that, Cardew strolled out of No. 10 Study.

He left Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther staring at one another, in silence. Cardew’s startling proposition had rather taken their breath away. There was a long silence in the study.

Tom Merry broke it at last.

“ It’s up to us! ” he said.

And his chums nodded assent.

## CHAPTER XXII

### A SURPRISE FOR MR. HODGE

MR. HARRY HODGE, of Rylcombe, dismounted from his bicycle at a wicket gate, set in the old stone wall of St. Jim's, in the fresh dewy morning.

It was a very early hour : but the sun was up, over the Sussex downs, a balmy breeze rustled the foliage of the old trees : and Mr. Hodge was in cheery spirits. He whistled as he leaned his machine against the wall, and groped in his pocket for a key.

Having found it, he opened the little gate, wheeled his bike in, and closed the gate after him.

Then, still whistling—but in a lower key now that he was within the school precincts—Mr. Hodge walked to Taggles' lodge, to open it up for the day. After which, it was his duty to ring the rising-bell, and then to open up the school shop in readiness for Mrs. Hodge, who was to follow on the 'bus, a little later than her lord and master, having arrangements to make for the family before she left home.

Mr. and Mrs. Hodge had cheerfully undertaken to replace Taggles and Dame Taggles, at the lodge and at the tuck-shop, during the Taggles' holiday at Southend-on-Sea. But as there were half-a-dozen younger Hodges, large and small, they had not taken up their quarters in the school. They continued in their cottage at Rylcombe, Mr. Hodge coming along in the morning on his bike, and Mrs. Hodge on the 'bus ; to return home in the same manner when duty was done at close of day.

Mr. Harry Hodge unlocked the lodge, set the windows open to admit the fresh air, and came out again. All St. Jim's, so far, was quiet : and if not sleeping, there was nothing to indicate that anyone was yet wakeful. When Mr. Hodge's plump hands pulled at the bell-rope, and the clang of the rising-bell rang over the old school, he had no suspicion that that clanging fell upon ears already extremely awake. He was to learn that before very long, however.

Clang! clang! clang!

The last clang was still echoing, when Mr. Hodge walked to the tuck-shop, taking the key of the side-door from his pocket as he walked.

He inserted the key into the lock, turned it back, and pushed at the door.

To his surprise, it did not open.

He pushed again, and yet again. But the door remained fast. It appeared to be bolted inside : but that really seemed impossible, for the building had been left untenanted when the Hodges had locked up the night before.

" My eye! " said Mr. Hodge.

Something was the matter with the door, at all events. It would not open. It was useless to try the shop door, for that was locked inside, and the key on the inside of the lock. Mr. Hodge was rather at a loss. He stepped back and stared at the building, perplexed.

" My eye! " he repeated.

It was not a large building. There was the shop, a parlour behind it, kitchen, and two or three rooms above, with a side passage and a side door. Having scanned it, with a puzzled brow, wondering how he was to get in, Mr. Hodge decided to walk round, and see whether he could open a back window.

" My eye! " said Mr. Hodge, as he stopped at the kitchen window.

Somebody had been before him—it had been opened already. That was surprising enough. But still more

surprising was it, to find that the kitchen was occupied.

In great astonishment, Mr. Hodge stared in at the open window.

Several persons—apparently schoolboys—were there. One was filling a kettle at a tap. Another was slicing bread at the kitchen table. Another was lighting up the gas-cooker. Two were sorting things out of a larder. One or two were carrying things in from the shop. In blank astonishment, Mr. Hodge stared at this utterly unexpected scene of activity. What it might possibly mean, he could not begin to guess.

“My eye!” said Mr. Hodge, for the third time, “’Ere! Wot’s all this?”

“Bai Jove! Heah’s somebody, deah boys.”

And all the schoolboys turned towards the window.

Mr. Hodge knew a good many of the St. Jim’s fellows by sight. He recognized Arthur Augustus D’Arcy, his friends Blake and Herries and Digby, and Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther. And as Arthur Augustus spoke, three more fellows came in from the shop or the passage—Cardew, Clive, and Levison. Altogether, it appeared that there were ten fellows present: and they all grinned at Mr. Hodge’s astonished face.

“My eye!” repeated Mr. Hodge, once more, “What you young fellers doing ’ere?”

“Getting brekker,” answered Tom Merry, cheerily.

“But you can’t come ’ere,” said Mr. Hodge.

“Looks as if we can,” remarked Blake.

“Yaas, wathah,” chuckled Arthur Augustus.

“Oh!” said Mr. Hodge, “That’s why I couldn’t get in at that there door! You been a-bolting of it.”

“Guessed it in one!” assented Monty Lowther.

“Look ’ere, I got to get in,” said Mr. Hodge, “I don’t know what you boys is a-doin’ of ’ere, but I got to get in and open the shop for the missus.”

Tom Merry shook his head.



"Can't be done," he answered, "Better let Mrs. Hodge know in time that the shop won't open to-day, and save her the journey."

"Yaas, wathah! And pway expwess to Mrs. Hodge our pwofound wegwet if she is put to any inconvenience," said Arthur Augustus.

"Look 'ere, if this 'ere is a schoolboy lark, you chuck it," said Mr. Hodge, "I'm coming in."

And Mr. Hodge prepared to climb in at the window.

"All hands repel boarders!" called out Cardew.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The crowd of schoolboys blocked the window. Mr. Hodge, on his knees on the sill, had to come to a stop. He blinked at the row of grinning faces.

"Look 'ere, wot's this game?" he demanded. "I've only jest rung the rising-bell. 'Ow'd you get 'ere so early?"

"We've been here more than an hour," explained Tom Merry, "And we're staying. We've taken up our quarters here, for the present."

"But wot's the game?" gasped Mr. Hodge.

"It's a barring-out!"

"Wot?"

"We're barring-out the beaks," said Tom, "There's a spot of trouble on in our House, Mr. Hodge. You'll probably hear all about it later. We had a council of war, and decided on this spot to hold the fort. If you're writing to Taggles, tell him we hope he's having a jolly time at the seaside, and that we're tremendously obliged to him for clearing off, and leaving us a well-provisioned fortress."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My eye!" said Mr. Hodge, blankly.

"Couldn't have happened better," said Blake, "Tons of grub in the shop, water laid on, gas-cooker and everything. It was the best idea Taggles ever had in his life, to walk off just when we wanted exactly this! Don't forget to tell him we're awfully obliged."

"Yaas, wathah."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I s'pose you're 'aving a little joke," said Mr. Hodge, "But like I said, I got to get this 'ere place open for the missus, what's coming along on the 'bus. Now you let me in and don't worrit a man."

"No admittance," said Cardew, shaking his head.

"Can't be done," said Tom."

"Sowwy, and all that," said Arthur Augustus, "The fact is, Mr. Hodge, that we're holdin' on heah till the Head comes wound."

"The Head will come round fast enough when he hears of this 'ere," said Mr. Hodge.

"I don't mean till he comes wound—I mean till he comes wound——."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you fellows——."

"Look 'ere, you're wasting a man's time," said Mr. Hodge, showing signs of temper at last, "If this 'ere is a lark, that's enough of it."

"But it isn't a lark," said Manners, "We mean business."

"Business from the word 'go,'" said Cardew, "You'd better go and see Railton. Tell him we'd be glad of a chat if he likes to come along."

"I'm coming in!" roared Mr. Hodge, quite excited by this time. And he made a heavy plunge inward.

But he did not get very far. Six or seven pairs of hands grasped him at once, and he was gently pushed off the window-sill. There was the sound of a heavy bump, and the louder sound of an angry yell, as Mr. Hodge sat on the cold, unsympathetic earth.

He staggered to his feet.

"Look 'ere——!" he roared.

"Run away and play, old bean," said Jack Blake.

"You young raskils——!"

Slam! The window shut, interrupting the flow of

Mr. Hodge's eloquence.

He stood for some moments, blinking at the shut window. Within, the rebels of St. Jim's continued their preparations for breakfast. And Mr. Hodge, at length, took his departure, and hurried across to the School-House, to acquaint Mr. Railton with the unprecedented and extraordinary state of affairs he had so unexpectedly discovered at the tuck-shop.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### BARRED OUT!

"EXTRAORDINARY!" said Mr. Lathom, blankly.

"Very!" said Mr. Linton, frowning.

Mr. Railton knitted his brows.

The three of them were standing on the School-House steps, looking in the direction of the school shop, half hidden by the old elms in the distance.

Several School-House prefects—Kildare, Darrell, Langton, Knox, Rushden—were looking out of the big arched doorway, with surprise in their faces.

In the House there was a buzz of excitement. Fellows coming down from the dormitories knew that something very unusual was on, though as yet they did not know exactly what. But the Shell and the Fourth knew, at all events, that three members of the former were missing, and seven of the latter. No one in the Shell knew what had become of Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther: no one in the Fourth knew what had become of Study No. 6 and Study No. 9. Not a word had been whispered of the intentions of Tom Merry and Co. outside their own select circle.

Fellows who planned a "barring-out," planned to occupy

the vacant tuck-shop and hold it as a fortress, could not be too wary—until they were safely installed in their stronghold. And they had been very wary indeed. All the juniors knew, so far, was that ten fellows were missing from the House, and that beaks and prefects were looking preternaturally solemn and serious. They wondered and conjectured and surmised what was up, with growing excitement.

“Incredible!” went on Mr. Lathom.

“Quite!” said Mr. Linton.

“I fail to understand this,” said Mr. Railton, “I will go and speak to the boys at once. What Hodge has told us is quite incomprehensible. Such an outbreak as this is unheard of. I will speak to them.”

And Mr. Railton, descending the steps, walked away across the quad, leaving Mr. Lathom still blank, and Mr. Linton still frowning, and the prefects exchanging curious glances: and the rest of the House buzzing rather like a hive of bees.

The house-master, arriving at the school shop, tried the side door. It did not open. He next tried the shop door. Neither did that open. He was about to pass round to try the back door, when a front window over the shop opened, and he glanced up.

Tom Merry appeared at the window. Mr. Railton fixed his eyes grimly on the captain of the Shell.

“Good-morning, sir!” said Tom, politely.

The house-master did not reply to that greeting.

“Nice mornin’, sir!” said another voice, as Cardew appeared beside Tom, and he gave his house-master a cheery nod, which caused Mr. Railton to compress his lips.

“Merry!” rapped Mr. Railton.

“Yes, sir!” said Tom, respectfully.

“What does this mean?”

“It’s a barring-out, sir!”

“A—a—a—a WHAT?” Mr. Railton seemed afflicted

with a stutter, "Wha-a-t did you say, Merry?"

"A barring-out, sir!" said Cardew, "We're barrin'-out the beaks, sir—holdin' the jolly old fort, an' all that."

"Are you in your senses, Cardew?"

"Oh, quite! Are you, sir?"

Mr. Railton seemed to gasp. There was a chuckle in the room over the shop, and then Jack Blake's voice.

"Can it, Cardew! Don't cheek Railton."

"Yaas, wathah!" came another voice, more emphatically, "Cardew, I wegard it as in the vewy worst of taste to cheek Wailton."

"Dear me!" said Cardew.

"I shall deal with you later, Cardew," said Mr. Railton, "For the present, be silent, while I speak to Merry."

"Passed to you, partner," said Cardew to Tom Merry, and there was another chuckle from the fellows behind.

"Merry! If you have not suddenly taken leave of your senses, explain to me at once what this means!" exclaimed Mr. Railton.

"Certainly, sir," answered Tom, "It's about D'Arcy—."

"The one and only!" interjected Cardew, as if to make the point of identity quite clear.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Cardew——."

"Dry up, you chaps," said Tom, "You see, sir," he went on, addressing the astonished and angry house-master staring up, "We feel bound to stand by D'Arcy. He has been sentenced to a flogging after third school——."

"That is no concern of yours, Merry."

"We think it is, sir," said Tom, quietly, "D'Arcy gives his word that it was not he who blacked Monteith's eye the other night——."

"Nonsense."

"I know all the evidence is against him, sir, and that nobody can blame the Head for deciding as he has done. But we ourselves all take D'Arcy's word that he had

nothing to do with it, and we're standing by him."

"Upon my word!"

"No disrespect to you, sir, or to the Head," said Manners, looking out over Tom's shoulder, "Only we feel it's up to us to stand by a pal who's going to be flogged for nothing."

"That's all, sir," said Monty Lowther.

Mr. Railton gazed up at them. He seemed to have some difficulty in believing his ears. It was some moments before he found his voice again.

"Merry! Am I to understand that you dispute your head-master's authority—that you have ventured to withdraw a boy who is sentenced to a public punishment—that you hope, or dream, that by this act of rebellion you will prevent the head-master's sentence from being carried out?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Oh!" gasped Mr. Railton.

"We're sorry, sir," said Tom, "We don't want any row——."

"Don't we?" murmured Cardew.

"Shut up, Cardew."

"We don't want any row," repeated Tom, "All we want is justice for D'Arcy. He never did it, sir——."

"That will do, Merry."

"Very well, sir! But we are holding on here, and standing by our pal, until the flogging is washed out," said Tom, steadily, "We all believe that it will come out sooner or later who blacked Monteith's eye. Until then, we're seeing that the wrong man doesn't get the swishing."

"Hear, hear!"

Mr. Railton breathed very hard.

"The head-master has decided, Merry, that there is no doubt in that matter," he said.

"It's a mistake, sir."

"The flogging will take place after third school."

"Not if we can stop it, sir—and we think we can," said

Tom.

“ Yes, rather! ”

“ What ho! ”

“ D’Arcy! Is D’Arcy there? Let him come forward,” rapped Mr. Railton.

“ Roll up, Gussy,” said Monty Lowther.

The elegant form of Arthur Augustus D’Arcy appeared at the window. His eyeglass gleamed down at the house-master.

“ Heah I am, sir,” said Arthur Augustus, cheerily, “ Pway pwoceed, sir, and you may wely upon me to listen to you with pwopah wespect.”

“ It appears, D’Arcy, that this rebellious outbreak is on your account,” said Mr. Railton.

“ Yaas, sir! My fwiends are standin’ by me, just as I would certainly stand by them in similar circs. You see, sir, I had nothin’ to do with blackin’ that New House smudge’s silly eye——.”

“ Kindly say nothing more on that subject, D’Arcy. That is settled and decided, and I desire to hear no more about it.”

“ Vewy well, sir! I will say nothin’ more whatevah about it, except to wepeat that I had nothin’ to do with blackin’ his eye——.”

“ Ha, ha, ha! ”

“ And as I had nothin’ to do with blackin’ Monteith’s eye, I assuwedly wefuse to be flogged for blackin’ his eye,” continued Arthur Augustus, “ It was my intention, sir, to wefuse to be flogged, and to wesist to the utmost in my powah. I should have gweatly wegwetted such a scene in hall : but it was my only wesource—until my fwiends thought of this vewy bwight ideah.”

“ You will be flogged after third school, D’Arcy.”

“ Wats! ”

“ What—what—what did you say D’Arcy? ”

“ I said wats, sir! With all pwopah wespect to you, sir,

wats! ”

“ Ha, ha, ha! ”

“ D’Arcy! Are you aware that all these boys, who are so foolishly seeking to save you from punishment, are liable to very severe punishment themselves for their action, and that you are responsible? ”

“ Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that! ” said Arthur Augustus, “ Do you fellows wegard me as wesponsible for your actions? ”

“ Not at all, old bean! You’re not even responsible for your own,” said Monty Lowther, affably.

“ Ha, ha, ha! ”

“ Weally, Lowthah——.”

“ O.K., Gussy,” said Tom Merry, laughing, “ We know what we’re doing, and we’re standing by you to the finish.”

“ Of course, I don’t want to land any fellow in a wow on my account,” said Arthur Augustus, “ If you fellows would wathah steeah cleah of a wow, pway walk out befoah the twouble begins, and I will cawwy on heah on my own.”

“ Fathead! ”

“ Weally, Tom Mewwy——.”

“ Ass! ”

“ Weally, Blake——.”

“ You have heard what I have said, D’Arcy,” rapped Mr. Railton, “ Now come out of that building at once, and let this folly end.”

“ I wefuse to come out of this buildin’, sir, unless I weceive an assuwanche that the floggin’ is washed out. I uttahly and absolutely wefuse to be flogged for somethin’ I have not done.”

Mr. Railton compressed his lips hard.

“ I shall now return to the House,” he said, “ If all the boys here attend at breakfast, as usual, nothing more will be said of this nonsense : and your sentence, D’Arcy, will be carried out at the due time.”

“ In weply to that, sir, I can only wepeat, wats! ”



“You will be given until the breakfast bell rings, Merry, to return to obedience,” said Mr. Railton, “Otherwise, force will be used, and every participant in this rebellion severely punished. I warn you all to reflect before you carry this disrespectful folly further.”

“Well roared, lion!” said Cardew, and there was a chuckle.

Mr. Railton gave the scapegrace of the Fourth an expressive look, turned on his heel, and walked back to the School-House, with a frowning brow. And Tom Merry and Co. proceeded to get their breakfast, in Taggles’ kitchen : and were disposing of the same when the bell rang. In the School-House there were ten vacant places at breakfast : indisputable evidence that Tom Merry and Co., regardless of their house-master’s behest, were carrying on with the barring-out.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### RECRUITS FOR THE REBELS

“STAND back there!” rapped Knox of the Sixth.

Nearly all St. Jim’s seemed to have crowded into that corner of the old quad. All the forms were out, in break : and every man in every form was keenly and excitedly interested in the startling state of affairs at the tuck-shop. Both Houses swarmed to see what was going on.

Mr. Railton had, perhaps, expected the rebels to take heed of his warning, and return to their House when the breakfast-bell rang. If so, he had been disappointed. They were still in their stronghold : and a sound of hammering and banging that echoed across the quad, seemed to indicate that they were strengthening their

defences, in readiness for the "force" to be used, at which their house-master had hinted.

What Railton's next step was going to be, nobody knew—perhaps not even Mr. Railton himself. Possibly he hoped that reflection would supervene, and that the rebellion would fizzle out if left alone. Anyhow, nothing was done as yet: and the rest of St. Jim's went into form as usual, with three places vacant in the Shell and seven in the Fourth.

But the form-masters found their task unusually difficult that morning. The fact that a "barring-out" was going on in the school was wildly exciting. Mr. Linton could hardly make the Shell give even desultory attention to the lesson. Mr. Lathom almost gave up the attempt to do so, in the Fourth. In the Third, the fags whispered incessantly, and Mr. Selby handed out lines, and even swipes of the cane, in vain. Even in the Fifth, a senior form, there was excitement: and Mr. Ratcliff rapped out again and again at Cutts, and St. Leger, and Lefevre, and other fellows, who seemed to give more attention to sounds echoing across the quad, than to his crusty voice. Indeed, even in the Sixth Form, under the eye of the Head himself, there were occasional wanderings of thoughts. St. Jim's, in fact, was experiencing a thrill, from end to end.

And in break, fellows of all forms, and both Houses, swarmed off in the direction of the tuck-shop: most of them with eager curiosity, some probably with the idea of joining up with the rebels.

But they found that access to the rebels' stronghold was barred. Railton had instructed the prefects to see that there was no communication between the mutineers and the rest of the school. The example of insubordination was not to be allowed to spread!

So there was Knox of the Sixth, his ashplant under his arm, walking up and down in front of the tuck-shop, at a distance from it: and warning off all comers.

"Look here, Knox," protested Wally of the Third, "I want to go and speak to my major."

"So do I, Knox," said Manners minor, "My brother's there."

"And so's mine," said Levison minor.

Knox did not answer them. He slipped his ashplant down into his hand. Knox was an unpopular prefect, much given to the use of the ash, in season and out of season. Certainly he was too great a man to argue with fags of the Third Form.

Swipe! swipe! swipe!

D'Arcy minor, Levison minor, and Manners minor, uttered three loud yells that seemed blended into one. They backed off the scene before Knox could carry on the good work.

Gerald Knox tucked his ash under his arm again, and resumed sentry-go.

More and more fellows arrived on the scene : but they did not pass the line marked by Knox's sentry-go. They crowded there, in a swarm, staring past Knox towards the tuck-shop, and buzzing with excitement. Harry Noble, who was called "Kangaroo" in allusion to his native land, nudged Talbot of the Shell.

"You game to join up, Talbot?" he asked, in a low voice.

Talbot nodded.

"I'm going to," he answered, "If Tom Merry thinks it's good enough, it's good enough for me."

"Same here," said Kangaroo, "They'll need all the help they can get, when Railton gets going. Knox will try to stop us."

"Let him," said Talbot.

Kangaroo chuckled rather breathlessly.

"Come on, then," he said.

They could see, in the distance, several faces at the window over the shop. They waved, and Tom Merry

and Co. waved back. Knox came to a stop, and stared at the two Shell fellows.

"Now, then, stop that!" he rapped, "You're not allowed to signal, or anything else, to those young sweeps. Go back to your House."

Instead of obeying that command, the two juniors made a rush, Talbot passing Knox on one side, Kangaroo on the other.

"Stop!" roared Knox.

He made a jump, and grabbed Kangaroo by the collar. The Australian junior struggled. Talbot turned back to his aid. Two pairs of hands fastened on Knox, and his leg was hooked. To his surprise, and still more to his wrath, Knox found himself suddenly sitting on the earth, spluttering.

"Cut!" panted Talbot.

They ran towards the tuck-shop, leaving Knox sitting and spluttering. There was a shout from the open window, and a waving of hands.

"Two giddy recruits," grinned Cardew, "I fancy there'll be more, if the pre's don't watch out."

"Cut down and get the side door open," exclaimed Blake.

"Yaas, wathah."

Two or three of the rebels cut down the stairs, to unbolt the door. Knox of the Sixth had scrambled up, and was in hot pursuit, ashplant in hand. Further off, Kildare and Darrell could be seen, hurrying up.

Talbot and Kangaroo put on speed, and reached the door. But Knox, going all out, reached it the next second, before the door was open. He grasped the two juniors, one in either hand, and shouted to the other prefects.

"Kildare! Darrell! Langton!"

The door flew open. Tom Merry and Blake and Levison jumped out. In a moment Gerald Knox was strewn on the earth again.

"Quick!" panted Tom.

"Help!" roared Knox, as he sprawled.

"Get in," exclaimed Levison, breathlessly.

The juniors crowded back into the doorway, Talbot and Kangaroo with the rest. Knox bounded to his feet, and leaped after them. As the door closed, he jammed in his foot, just in time.

"Come on!" he roared.

"We're coming!" shouted back Kildare.

"Bai Jove! Get that door shut, deah boys, or we shall have all the pwefects wushin' in," exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

"Shove!" yelled Blake.

Half-a-dozen fellows shoved. But Knox's foot was planted in the way. He gave a howl as his foot was compressed, but he did not withdraw it. Knox was going to keep that door open till the other prefects arrived, when a shove from a bunch of powerful Sixth-Form men would settle the matter. All depended on getting it bolted before the enemy arrived in force.

"Get that red-hot poker from the kitchen," shouted Cardew.

"Oh, gad!" gasped Knox.

He did not wait for the red-hot poker! He wanted to keep that door ajar: but there were limits!

Knox's foot disappeared. The door was jammed shut, and Tom Merry shot one bolt, while Blake shot the other.

"Good egg!" gasped Tom.

"Yaas, wathah! Knox did not want a wed-hot pokah," chuckled Arthur Augustus, "Wathah lucky there was a wed-hot pokah all weady, what?"

"Is there?" asked Cardew.

"Bai Jove! Isn't there?" ejaculated Arthur Augustus.

"Not that I know of."

"Oh, cwumbs! But you said—I thought fwom what you said that there was a wed-hot pokah all weady—."

"So did Knox!" drawled Cardew.

“Ha, ha, ha!” yelled the juniors.

Thump! thump! thump! came on the outside of the door. Then it creaked as several hefty shoulders shoved. But the bolted door held fast, and the prefects shoved in vain. Tom Merry gave Talbot a clap on the shoulder.

“Jolly glad you’ve joined up, old chap! And you, Kangy! The more the merrier.”

“Yaas, wathah! The more the mewwiah, deah boys.”

“Open this door, you young rascals!” came a shout from Kildare, outside.

“Bow-wow!”

“Wats!”

“Go and eat coke!”

“A round dozen of us now,” said Blake, “And there’ll be more, if the pre’s don’t keep their eyes wide open.”

“Yaas, wathah.”

But the pre’s, apparently, did keep their eyes open, for no more recruits reached the garrison of the tuck-shop during break. The bell rang for third school, and the crowd in the quadrangle broke up. Mr. Linton frowned still more portentiously when he found two more places vacant in his form. And Tom Merry and Co. cheerfully confident that a dozen fellows could hold the fort against all comers, waited with equanimity for the enemy to make a move : which the enemy were not likely to be long in doing.

## CHAPTER XXV

### THE ATTACK!

“EXECUTION’S off!” remarked Cardew.

“Yaas, wathah!” chuckled Arthur Augustus D’Arcy. A bell was ringing. Third school was over, and the

St. Jim's fellows coming out of their form-rooms.

The next item on the programme, according to schedule, was the assembling of the school in hall, for the administration of a public flogging to D'Arcy of the Fourth Form. But, as Cardew remarked, the "execution" was off. D'Arcy of the Fourth Form was in safe quarters, surrounded by loyal comrades: and the Head's birch was a distant sword of Damocles, which did not seem likely to fall, for the present at least.

So far, no attempt had been made to dislodge the rebel juniors from the tuck-shop. But they knew that it could not be long in coming: and they were watchful and wary.

Looking from the window over the shop, Tom Merry and Co. could see a crowd of fellows in the distance. But prefects were on duty to keep them away: Kildare, Farrell, Knox, Langton, of the School-House, and Monteith, Baker, Webb, and two or three more of the New House: and if any more fellows were thinking of joining the rebels, they had no chance of doing so.

"Nothin' doing yet," went on Cardew, with a yawn, "Railton is taking his time. It wants thinkin' out, I suppose."

"This is wathah a new one on Wailton," smiled Arthur Augustus.

"He's giving us time to think it over and chuck it," said Clive.

"That's it," agreed Levison, "Well, we're not chucking it, if he gives us a week to think it over."

"Wathah not!"

"They can't leave us alone much longer, though," said Tom Merry, "There's a spot of liveliness coming."

"The sooner the better," yawned Cardew, "Otherwise, my beloved 'earers, a barring-out will turn out a bore like everything else."

"Wats!"

The dinner-bell rang, and the crowds of St. Jim's fellows

disappeared into the Houses. The prefects, however, remained in the quad, and they were joined there by Mr. Railton.

"No tiffin for us, yet," said Cardew, "They're coming."

"Let 'em all come!" said Blake.

Mr. Railton came striding towards the tuck-shop, his face set. Following him came Kildare, Darrell, Langton, Knox, and Rushden, of the School-House Sixth. The New House prefects were not joining in, no doubt because the rebellion was a School-House affair—so far, at least.

The School-House master stopped, and fixed his eyes on the crowd at the upper window over the shop.

"Merry!" he rapped.

"Adsum!" said Tom, cheerily.

"You are, I conclude, the ring-leader in this outbreak?"

"Sort of, sir," admitted Tom, "As junior captain of the House, it's up to me."

"I have given you time to reflect, in the hope that you would return to your duty," said Mr. Railton, "You have not done so."

"We shall all be very glad to do so, sir, as soon as we are assured that the flogging is off."

"Shall we?" murmured Cardew. "Speak for yourself, John!"

"Dwy up, Cardew, you ass."

"I shall not discuss that with you, Merry," said Mr. Railton, frowning, "I am here to tell you, for the last time, to leave that building. All of you will be caned, and D'Arcy will be flogged, and the matter will end there—if you return to your duty at once."

"My fwiends are doin' their dutay heah, sir," said Arthur Augustus, "It's a fellow's duty to stand by a pal."

"Silence, D'Arcy! What is your answer, Merry?"

"We're holding out, sir, till the flogging is off."

"Then force will be used," said Mr. Railton.

"Heave ahead, my hearties," called out Cardew,



"Kildare, old boy, do you want an eye to match Monteith's? This way, if you do."

"Dwy up, Cardew! It is bad form to cheek a pwefect."

"Oh, gad! Satan rebukin' sin!" sighed Cardew.

"Weally, Cardew——."

"Listen to me," said Mr. Railton, in his grimmest tone.

"The House pfects will now force an entrance——."

"If they can," grinned Monty Lowther.

"They won't get in, in a fearful hurry," remarked Herries.

"——and any boy who resists the pfects, will be expelled from this school," went on Mr. Railton, disregarding interruptions, "I have consulted the Head, and that is Dr. Holmes's decision."

"Bai Jove!"

"Isn't that rather wholesale, sir?" inquired Cardew, "Twelve fellows sacked in a bunch! There'll be a spot of excitement under a good many parental roofs when that happens."

"Silence, Cardew."

"Tired of my conversation, sir?" asked Cardew, "Well, I'm a little tired of yours, only I was too polite to mention it."

Mr. Railton seemed to choke, for a moment. Some of the pfects grinned, but became grave again instantly as the house-master's eye turned on them.

"Kildare! Proceed at once," said Mr. Railton.

"Very well, sir."

Five Sixth-Form men, with Kildare in the lead, advanced to the door of the tuck-shop. Kildare had a crowbar under his arm, and Darrell a coke-hammer. The captain of St. Jim's adjusted the crowbar to the door, and held it in position, while Darrell proceeded to bang with the hammer. Loud clanging rang all over the school, echoing across the quad and in both Houses.

Bang! bang! clang! clang! Bang! clang!

Mr. Railton stood watching, with a grim brow. The



shop door was fairly strong, and it was locked and bolted inside. But it was clear that it would not stand long, if the assault went on uninterrupted.

But it did not go on uninterrupted. If the hefty Sixth-Form men got in, followed by the stalwart house-master, the game was up : even a dozen juniors would not have been of much use against such formidable opponents. The rebels of St. Jim's were being put to the test now : they had to keep the enemy out, or let the barring-out end at the first blow. Which was not in the least according to the ideas of Tom Merry and Co.

Bang! bang! clang! clang!

From the open window above the shop doorway, the edge of a tin bath appeared, held by Tom Merry, Blake, and Kangaroo. It was pushed out over the sill, and tipped.

Splash!

That tin bath, evidently, had been filled with water in readiness. A torrent descended on Kildare and Darrell at the door.

" Oh! " spluttered Darrell, dropping the hammer, as the flood descended on his head.

" Ooooh! " gasped Kildare, as he was suddenly drenched, and the crowbar, suddenly released, remained sticking in in the door.

" Oh, my hat! " ejaculated Langton, jumping back as he got a few splashes. Knox and Rushden jumped back at the same moment.

" Upon my word! " stuttered Mr. Railton.

" Fill up, quick! " shouted Tom Merry.

The empty tin bath disappeared. The gurgling of a tap was heard. While the bath was being refilled, Cardew playfully tossed out a couple of tomatoes, one catching Knox in the eye, the other landing on Rushden's ear.

Kildare and Darrell, drenched to the skin, stood spluttering. Mr. Railton's face was a picture. For a moment or two he seemed at a loss for words. Then he rapped

out to the prefects :

“ Proceed at once! That door must be forced! Kildare—Darrell—lose no time—go on with it at once.”

“ Ooogh! groogh!” gasped Kildare, “ We’re rather wet, sir——.”

“ Gurrirggh!” gurgled Darrell.

“ I am waiting, Kildare,” rapped Mr. Railton.

Kildare and Darrell gouged water from their eyes and their hair. Then they grasped hammer and crowbar again, and set to work.

Bang! clang!

The tin bath had been refilled by that time. It edged out of the window again. Another torrent of water descended on the two prefects. It was too much for them. They were ready and willing to carry out their house-master’s orders, quite keen to reduce the rebels to obedience : but the torrent from above fairly washed them out.

Drenched and dripping, spluttering for breath, soaked to the skin, they retreated from the door. From the windows tomatoes came whizzing—the rebels recklessly using Taggles’ stock of that juicy vegetable as ammunition. The prefects were fairly driven back by the shower of missiles. They backed off, further and further : and Mr. Railton was left standing alone under the window, with an expression on his face that the fabled Gorgon might have envied.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### ROUGH ON RAILTON

“ HUWWAY!” shouted Arthur Augustus.

“ Hip-pip!” chortled Monty Lowther.

“ Our win!” chuckled Blake.

"Feeling wet, Kildare?"

"Bit damp, Darrell?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There were jubilant faces at the windows over the tuck-shop. The first attack had been driven off: it was round one to the rebels! Kangaroo whizzed a final tomato, which squashed on Langton's nose—and there was a hurried further retrograde movement of the prefects. A hammer and a crowbar lay in a pool of water outside the shop door. Mr. Railton stood gazing at them, then at the prefects—then at the laughing faces above. He breathed very hard.

"Shove those tommies this way," exclaimed Cardew, "We'll let Railton have one, if he sticks there."

"Chuck that!" exclaimed Tom Merry, as Cardew selected a very ripe tomato.

"I'm goin' to chuck it—at Railton."

"Weally, Cardew——."

The tomato whizzed, but Talbot knocked up Cardew's arm just in time, and it missed the house-master by a foot.

"There is such a thing as pwopah wespect to a mastah, Cardew," said Arthur Augustus, severely, "Give Wailton a miss."

"Rats!" said Cardew.

"I wepeat, Cardew——."

"You're always repeating yourself, Gussy! Give us a rest."

"Bai Jove! I considah——."

"Look out!" exclaimed Manners, "Railton's on the job."

"Oh, my hat!"

Mr. Railton had been inactive since the retreat of the prefects, apparently at a loss. Now he seemed to make up his mind all of a sudden. He strode towards the shop door, grasped up the crowbar and hammer, and started, taking up the work where Kildare and Darrell had left it off.

Bang! bang! clang! clang! clang!

Loud and heavy rang the blows of the hammer on the crowbar, driving it in between door and door-post. Tom Merry and Co. stared down. Once that crowbar was driven well in, lock and bolt would not withstand a powerful wrench by the house-master's sinewy arms. And the prefects were moving nearer, ready to rush in when the house-master had opened the way.

Tom Merry set his lips.

"We've got to stop that!" he said.

"Yaas, wathah."

Cardew burst into a laugh.

"May I chuck a tomato now?" he inquired, sarcastically.

Tom Merry did not heed him. He leaned out of the window, and called to the house-master below.

"Mr. Railton! Please stop that!"

Bang! clang! was the only reply from Railton.

"We shall have to stop you, sir!"

Bang! clang!

"No choice about it," said Digby, "We've got to stop him, or chuck it."

"Shove that bath this way!"

"Go it!"

The tin bath, almost overflowing with water, was pushed out of the window, and tipped. There was no help for it. Reluctant as the rebels were to use warlike measures against their house-master—with the exception of Cardew, who seemed rather keen on it—they had to stop the attack, or give in. And they were not going to give in.

The torrent swamped down on Victor Railton, drenching him from head to foot. He gave a spluttering gasp. Perhaps Mr. Railton had supposed that the rebels would not venture to go to such a length. If so, he was deceived. He staggered, fairly swimming in water.

But he paused only for a few moments. Then, heedless of the fact that he was drenched and dripping, running with water, he resumed hammering the crowbar in.

Bang! bang! clang! clang!

"He's a sticker," grinned Cardew.

"Bai Jove! Old Wailton is made of sternah stuff than the pwefects," said Arthur Augustus, "He looks feahfully wet, but he is stickin' it out."

Bang! clang! bang! clang!

"He's got to stop!" said Tom, determinedly.

Whiz! No one intervined now as Cardew started with tomatoes. He had an accurate aim. The first "tommy" squashed in Railton's neck—the second in his ear—the third in his eye. Then six or seven came in a shower, squashing all over him.

Few would have liked to stand up to so juicy a fusillade. But it had no more effect on Victor Railton than water on a duck. Heedless of squashing toma oes, he hammered and hammered and hammered at the crowbar. Bang! clang! bang! clang!

"Bai Jove! He's a stickah!"

"Good old Railton!" said Blake, "Give him another wash."

"Can't wash him out," said Kangaroo, "and tommies won't shift him. Try him with onions and spuds."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Dame Taggles, enjoying the salt breezes with her lord and master at Southend-on-Sea, would have had the shock of her life, could she have guessed that a dozen rebellious St. Jim's juniors were making so free with the stock in her shop. But it was no time to bother about Dame Taggles, or to stand upon ceremony. The Australian junior's suggestion was acted upon at once: and much harder missiles than tomatoes fairly rained on the house-master from above. Onions and potatoes crashed on him right and left. Cardew, always ready to go a length ahead of the rest, followed them up with a huge vegetable marrow, which landed on Railton's ear, and fairly bowled him over.

He tottered and fell, and the hammer clanged on the

earth.

“Man down!” chuckled Cardew.

“Bai Jove! That is wathah wuff on poor old Wailton!”

“La guerre est la guerre, old bean. War is war,” said Cardew, “If he don’t trickle off, we’ll let him have a lump of coal next.”

They stared down at the house-master. He was sitting up, in a pool of water, rubbing his head, with quite a dizzy look. Kildare, heedless of missiles, ran forward to give him a hand up.

Railton staggered to his feet.

“Going?” called out Cardew, “I’ve got a chunk of coal here. You’re getting it next if you don’t buzz.”

“Give them a few tommies to go on with,” exclaimed Herries.

Whiz! whiz! whiz!

Kildare retreated again, with tomatoes bursting all over him. Mr. Railton stood where he was, rubbing his head. Then, as he stooped to pick up the hammer, apparently with the intention of resuming the attack, Cardew took aim with a chunk of coal. Tom Merry raised his hand to intervene—but dropped it again! The enemy had to be driven off, or the game was up: and gentler measures had failed. War, as Cardew had said, was war!

Whiz! bang!

Mr. Railton gave a jump as the chunk of coal landed on his head. The hammer fell from his hand again. He stared up, and jumped back as another chunk whizzed. Then, rather hastily, he walked away—squelching water from his shoes as he went. No doubt it had dawned upon him, by that time, that the rebels of St. Jim’s were in deadly earnest, and that they could stop him, and were determined to stop him. But the juniors were glad to see him go. Everyone liked old Railton, and hated to damage him. Never had they been so glad to see anyone’s back.

“That’s that!” said Tom Merry, with a deep breath.



"As that Indian chap at Greyfriars would put it, the thatfulness is terrific." remarked Monty Lowther.

"We win!" grinned Cardew.

"Yaas, wathah! But I cannot wholly approve of buzzin' coal at a house-mastah's nut," said Arthur Augustus, shaking his noble head, "I cannot help thinkin' that it is lackin' in pwopah wespect. It is vevy wuff on Wailton."

"You'd rather be flogged in hall?" asked Cardew.

To that question, the swell of St. Jim's made no reply. Probably, as the alternative was a flogging in hall, he was able to reconcile his noble mind even to buzzing coal at a house-master's nut! All the rebels agreed that it was rough on Railton : but the enemy had to be driven off, and that, as Tom Merry said, was that! And the enemy having been driven off, the rebels of St. Jim's sorted out supplies from Dame Taggles' stock for dinner : and ate the same with good appetites, while keeping wary eyes open for further hostilities.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### FIGGINS AND CO. TOO!

GEORGE FIGGINS rubbed his nose, and then ran his fingers through his untidy hair. Which indicated that Figgy was in deep thought.

Kerr watched him with a faint smile.

No doubt Fatty Wynn might have been interested, too : but Fatty's interest, at the moment, was concentrated upon sausages sizzling in a frying-pan over a spirit-stove in the study grate. A fragrant aroma ascended from the frying-pan which Fatty sniffed with appreciation. Absorbed in his occupation, David Llewellyn Wynn did not heed Figgy

and his symptoms of unusual cogitation.

Prep was over. Most of the New House juniors had gone down from the studies. But Fatty lingered to fry sausages, and his study-mates lingered also—though less interested in the sosses.

Figgins having rubbed his nose till it was nearly crimson, and ruffled his hair till it resembled the quills upon the fretful porcupine, broke the silence at last.

“It wasn’t D’Arcy,” he said.

Kerr, who had been following Figgy’s train of thought as easily as if it had been as visible as a railway train, nodded.

“It wasn’t,” he agreed.

“Mind, if a School-House tick did black a New House pre’s eye, flogging would be too good for him,” said Figgins, “I’d scrag any School-House man myself, if he did it. But he says he didn’t : and his word’s good enough for me.”

“And for me,” said Kerr.

“What do you think, Fatty?” asked Figgins.

“I think they’re just on done,” answered Fatty Wynn, “I’ll give them just one more turn, and then they’ll be ready.”

“What is that dithering ass talking about?” asked Figgins.

“Sosses,” grinned Kerr.

“Eh?” Fatty Wynn looked round from the frying-pan, “You fellows hungry? They’ll be done to a turn in less than a minute. Got the plates?”

“Blow the plates!” hooted Figgins.

“Well, you’ll want plates for sosses,” said Fatty, puzzled, “Dash it all, you’re not going to use your fingers, are you, for sosses?”

“Blow the sosses!”

“Ain’t you hungry?” asked Fatty, “I am.”

“Are you ever anything else?” said Figgins, “I asked

you what you thought about D'Arcy."

"I wasn't thinking about D'Arcy. I was thinking about cooking these sosses. What about D'Arcy?"

"Do you think he blacked Monteith's eye?"

"Oh! No! He said he didn't!"

"Well, then, look here——."

"Wait a minute while I turn out the sosses! They'll burn."

Kerr obliged with a plate, and the sizzling sausages were turned out of the pan. Relieved in his mind on this urgent and important matter, Fatty was able to give Figgins his attention.

"D'Arcy said he never did it, and he never did," said Figgins, "Blessed if I know who did—somebody must have jolted Monteith in the eye. But it wasn't D'Arcy."

"Oh, no," agreed Fatty, "Have a soss?"

"You fat cannibal, can't you think about anything but sosses?" hooted Figgins.

"They're jolly good," said Fatty, warmly, "and cooked to a turn! I can cook sosses, I can tell you. If you don't want any——."

"I'll have one," agreed Figgins, "But never mind them, all the same. We've got to decide what we're going to do."

"We're going to eat them, ain't we?" asked Fatty.

Figgins breathed hard, and Kerr chuckled.

"About D'Arcy," said Figgins, "His friends in his House are backing him up. You know they've barred themselves in the tuck-shop—there's eleven School House men standing by him. They've beaten the pre's, and Railton too, and the beaks have given them a rest since. But that won't last long."

"It can't," said Kerr, shaking his head, "The beaks will have to get the upper hand somehow."

"Well, if they can hold out, they can make terms of peace," said Figgins, "The beaks may be glad to come to terms, if it goes on. But I haven't much faith in School-

House men making a success of anything. They want some New House men there to give them a backbone."

"Hear, hear!" grinned Kerr.

"It's a pretty serious matter, you know, St. Jim's fellows barred in the tuck-shop, and holding it like a jolly old fortress," said Figgins.

"I should jolly well say so," said Fatty Wynn, "The tuck-shop hasn't been open to-day. That man Hodge is sticking in Taggles' lodge, but Mrs. Hodge has gone back to Rylcombe—nothing for her to do here while the tuck-shop's barred. We haven't been able to get a thing from the school shop, and I had to bike down to Rylcombe for these sosses. And from the look of things, the tuck-shop won't be open tomorrow either."

And Fatty Wynn looked very serious, indeed solemn, at that awful prospect. Figgins gave him a withering glare.

"The question is this," he said, "Are we backing up D'Arcy like Tom Merry and his gang? The more fellows they get to join up, the more likely they are to pull through. And one New House man is worth any two in the School-House."

"Or three," agreed Kerr, "Or four, if you come to that."

"Well, that's what I've been thinking out," said Figgins, "I'm jolly well going to join up and back up old Gussy. What about you fellows?"

"I'm with you, Figgy," said Kerr, at once.

"Jolly good idea," said Fatty Wynn, heartily, "As the matter stands, we're cut off from the tuck-shop. But if we join up, we shall be inside, and can help ourselves. I say, Figgy, it's a jolly good idea."

"It's a spot of risk, of course," said Figgins.

"Well, I know Mrs. Taggles had a new lot of doughnuts in this week," said Fatty Wynn, his eyes glistening, "and——"

"Fatty wouldn't mind getting sacked, if he went with a bag of doughnuts under his arm," said Figgins, sar-

castically, "But look here! They're talking about the whole lot getting sacked—but that's bunk. They can't sack a dozen fellows in a bunch. And if we join up, it will make a crowd of fifteen! Who ever heard of fifteen fellows being sacked from any school at one go? The fact is, the bigger the crowd, the safer they are. See?"

"Quite," agreed Kerr, "But it won't be easy to join up, Figgy. You can bet that the School-House pre's are on the watch till dorm. Talbot and Noble got through to-day, but there's been none since."

Figgins made a gesture towards the study window.

"It's dark," he said.

"Eh! It generally is, at night, isn't it?"

"The School-House pre's aren't cats, are they?" asked Figgins.

"What the dickens——?"

"If they're not, they can't see in the dark," explained Figgins, "Well, if they're not on the watch, O.K. If they are, we dodge 'em in the dark. Easy as falling off a form."

"Not so jolly easy, old chap."

"Easy or not, that's the programme." Figgins rose, briskly, "It's still nearly an hour to dorm. We can drop out of a back window and nobody the wiser. We shan't be missed till dorm—and long before that we shall be parked in the tuck-shop along with Tom Merry and his gang. You fellows ready?"

"There's still one more soss, Figgy——."

"For goodness sake, Fatty, scoff it, and let's hear no more about sosses," hissed Figgins, "You and your sosses!"

It did not take Fatty Wynn long to dispose of the final sausage. Then Figgins turned off the light in the study, and they went down.

They did not head for the House day-room as usual. With a very casual air, they loitered about, till they were sure that no eyes were upon them, and then faded away

down a dark passage, which had a window at the back of the House.

So far it was, as Figgins had said, as easy as falling off a form. They dropped from that window, silent and unsuspected. Figgins jammed the window shut after them.

"All clear!" he murmured. "Don't make a row, though. We've got to be jolly careful. Follow me, and keep quiet! If you speak, speak in a whisper—but better not speak at all. Yaroooooh!"

Figgins finished with a sudden loud yell, as he barked his shins on something unseen in the dark.

"Oh, crikey! Ow! Wooh!" howled Figgins.

"I say, you ain't whispering," said Fatty Wynn.

"You silly owl!"

"Well, look here——."

"You burbling chump!"

"Well, I think——."

"Fathead!"

Kerr was tactfully silent, and he pressed Fatty's arm, as a hint to follow his example. Figgins rubbed a painful shin, but remembering the need for caution, made his further remarks in a more subdued tone.

"Come on," he grunted, at last, "and mind you don't make a row."

Fatty Wynn opened his lips—but closed them again. Kerr grinned in the dark. And in silence, they followed their great leader round the New House, and emerged into the shadowy quad.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### KILDARE KNOWS HOW!

"HIST!" breathed Kerr.

"Eh! What are you histing for?" grunted Figgins. With a lingering ache in his shin, Figgy was perhaps a little "edge-wise."

"Quiet, for goodness sake! Listen."

The three New House juniors came to a halt in the darkness.

The night was very dark. The stars that gleamed in the sky overhead seemed only to make the darkness visible, as it were. If School-House pre's were on the watch in such deep gloom, they had no easy task in hand.

But that they were on the watch was soon clear, for as Figgins and Co. listened, the murmur of voices came to their ears. Somebody, obviously, was out in the dark quad—more than one person.

"That's Kildare speaking," Kerr whispered barely audibly, "I can't hear what he's saying, but I know his voice."

"They're fairly in front of us," breathed Figgins, "Might have walked into them."

"Oh, crikey!" murmured Fatty Wynn.

"They haven't heard us. Get a bit nearer, and we can pick up just where they are!" whispered Kerr.

Following the murmur of voices, the New House trio crept nearer, on tiptoe: even Figgins not making a sound. A sharp voice, louder than the others, came clearly.

"I'm getting fed up with this."

"Not much good getting fed up, Knox," came Kildare's more pleasant voice, "We've got orders."

Grunt from Knox! Gerald Knox was not an over-dutiful prefect: and evidently he preferred a cosy study, to the dark and windy quad.

"The fact is," came Darrell's voice, "if we don't keep a look-out, a lot of the young rascals will be joining up with Tom Merry."

"Think so?" asked Langton.

"Yes, I do! That young ass D'Arcy has plenty of friends in the House, and a lot of them would think nothing of joining up in this nonsense."

"I suppose the little donkeys think it a lark," came Rushden's voice.

"Well, there's more than that in it," said Kildare, "They're sticking by a pal. They're young asses, but they believe that D'Arcy never had justice."

"That's rot," growled Knox, "He was getting off cheap with a flogging, after blacking a prefect's eye."

"He's denied having done it, and they believe him," said the captain of St. Jim's, quietly, "and I can't believe myself that the kid would tell lies about it, either, though the evidence seems pretty clear."

"You know better than the Head?" sneered Knox.

"The Head had to judge on the evidence, and couldn't do anything else. Whatever I think about it, I shall carry out my house-master's orders. A rebellion like this can't go on."

"I should say not. It will get into the papers if it does," said Knox, "They're cackling about it in Rylcombe already."

"How the deuce is Railton going to handle them?" asked Darrell. "We don't seem to have got very far, as yet."

Figgins and Co. wrapped in darkness within easy hearing of the School-House prefects, remained as still as mice.



They were getting quite interested in this conversation.

"I don't know what Railton intends to do," answered Kildare, "Perhaps he thinks that the House prefects ought to be able to handle a dozen mutinous juniors. And my idea is that we can."

"And how?" grunted Knox, "I'd be glad to see the end of it. I'm sick of this."

"Carry on, Kildare," said Darrell, "You said you had something to suggest—well, cough it up! We're all ready to back you up, if there's anything doing."

"Those young rascals are barred in the tuck-shop, with doors and windows locked and bolted," said Kildare, "But if a fellow could get inside and unfasten a door, all the rest's plain sailing."

"If!" said Knox. "How's a fellow going to get in?"

Figgins and Co. almost trembled with eagerness to hear. They realised that this was a council of war among the School-House prefects. Kildare had some plan of campaign, which he was going to communicate to the others—that was why they were in a group there in the quad. At the moment, Figgins and Co. were scouts, eager to learn the plans of the enemy. And they listened with all their ears. They hardly breathed.

"I expect they're on the watch." Kildare was speaking again.

"Bank on that," said Darrell.

"On the watch or not, they can't see in the dark, and it's easy enough for a fellow to get close up without being spotted."

"What's the good of that, when they'll hear the first sound at a door or a window?" grunted Knox, "I don't want a flood on my head."

"If you'll listen instead of exercising your chin, Knox, I'll tell you. One of us can climb on the roof without much difficulty. And——."

"And what?"

"And slip down the chimney," said Kildare.

"Oh, my hat!"

"They've got a fire in the kitchen—for cooking, I suppose. But the chimney over old Taggles' sitting-room, or parlour, or whatever it is, hasn't shown any smoke to-day. You've all seen it, and know it's one of those old-fashioned chimneys that the sweeps used to climb up and sweep from inside. Where a chimney-sweep could go, a hundred years ago, a fellow could go now."

Knox gave a sarcastic laugh.

"I daresay he could! Quite a bright idea, so long as you don't ask me to be the fellow."

"I'm not asking you! I believe I'm head-prefect in our House, and I've an idea that a leader's place is to lead, not to follow," said Kildare, coldly, "I believe it could be done quite easily, and I'm pretty certain that those young rascals are not watching the chimneys, or dreaming of doing so."

"Some of them might be in the room," said Darrell.

"I've thought of that! It's nine o'clock now," said Kildare, "There it goes from the clock-tower. You can give me half-an-hour. Then you start a sham attack, and draw them all to the front windows. At exactly half-past nine, you'll be going strong with it—and I shall be slipping down the parlour chimney—and opening a door to let you all in. Then the sham attack becomes a real one—you all rush in, and that's that."

"By gum!" said Darrell, "It will work."

"Like a charm," said Langton.

"They won't give us much trouble if we get to close quarters," said Rushden, "It's right as rain—but a pretty filthy job going down a chimney, Kildare."

"I can stand that! I'll cut in and change into the oldest clothes I've got. Wait here, and I'll join you in ten minutes. Is it a go?"

"O.K."

Figgins and Co., hardly breathing, heard Kildare tramp

away in the direction of the School-House. The other prefects remained in a group, discussing that masterly plan, evidently not doubting its certain success. But Figgins and Co. did not stay to hear more.

With infinite caution, they crept away in the darkness : and did not make the faintest sound, till they were at a safe distance.

Then George Figgins permitted himself a breathless chuckle.

“ Bit of luck for Tom Merry that we came out, what ? ” he whispered.

“ What ho ! ” said Kerr, “ They’d have had them ! Fancy old Kildare doing a chimney-sweep stunt ! He’s got a nut on him, Kildare has ! ”

“ Forewarned is forearmed,” grinned Figgins, “ It was a certain winner—those kids in the tuck-shop wouldn’t have dreamed of anything of the kind. They’d have been crowding to the front windows, and never knowing a thing till Kildare had the door open, and the whole gang of prefects barging in. But now——.”

“ Now—— ! ” chuckled Fatty Wynn.

“ Now, I fancy Kildare will get a bit of a surprise, when he does his chimney-sweep act ! ” gurgled Figgins, “ Come on—the sooner we join up, and put those School-House ticks wise, the better. Didn’t I tell you that they couldn’t pull it off without New House men to help ! Come on ! ”

And Figgins and Co. with grinning faces, but still very cautious, crept through the darkness to the tuck-shop, guided by the glimmering windows in the distance.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### FRIENDS IN NEED!

**TAP!**

“ Look out! ”

Tap!

“ The jolly old enemy! ”

Tom Merry and Co. were on the alert at once.

They had had a rest from the enemy since the attack on the tuck-shop that had ended so unpleasantly for Mr. Railton and the prefects. But they did not expect that respite to last very long. In fact, as the daylight attack had failed, they more than half-expected the enemy to try it on after dark : and they were ready and watchful and very much on their guard.

The light was turned on in every room in the little building. During the day, furniture and boxes and all sorts of articles had been stacked against the doors. Planks, recklessly ripped from the counter in the shop, had been nailed across windows. The garrison felt fairly secure against sudden rush tactics. And if a “ frontal attack ” came, they were prepared to stand up to it. In the meantime they were gathered to supper in Taggles’ parlour behind the shop. At the first sound of the enemy, in any quarter, they were ready to rush to the point assailed. In the prefects’ council of war, overheard by Figgins and Co., Darrell had suggested that some of them might be in the room, where Kildare was to gain access by the chimney. As a matter of fact, they were all there : disposing with good appetites of supplies from Dame Taggles’ stock in

the shop. There was a cheery buzz of conversation going on, when it was interrupted by the sound of a tap at the window.

Tap!

Supper was immediately forgotten. The juniors, all on their feet, gathered at the window, which overlooked a little paved yard behind the house.

The window was shut. Outside was deep darkness. In that darkness, the juniors dimly made out two or three shadowy forms.

"Here they are!" murmured Jack Blake.

"Yaas, wathah."

"Jolly obliging of them to tap at the window, and let us know they're there," remarked Cardew, "What on earth's their game?"

"Blessed if I make them out!" said Tom Merry, puzzled, "Tapping at the window——!"

Tap! A dim hand tapped on a pane again, softly. Tom Merry peered out between the planks nailed across the window. But with the light inside, and the black darkness outside, he could make out no more than a shadow.

Arthur Augustus stepped into the shop. He came back with a soda-syphon in his hands, and a grin on his aristocratic visage.

"Open the window, Tom Mewwy," he whispered, "It's safe enough, with the planks nailed acwoss. They couldn't get in."

"But what——?"

Arthur Augustus held up the syphon.

"I'll get them with this, deah boy. It will be wathah a surpwise for them, what?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"O.K. Hold it ready."

"I've got it all weady, deah boy, with my fingah weady to pwess——."

Squish! Arthur Augustus inadvertently pressed with his

noble finger, and there was a sudden jet of soda water, and a wild splutter from Jack Blake, as he caught it with his ear.

“Oooooogh! Oooooch! You mad ass——.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Bai Jove! I did not mean to let it go, Blake——.”

“You dangerous maniac.”

“Weally, Blake——.”

“This way, Gussy,” said Tom Merry, laughing, “Don’t get me in the eye, if you can help it.”

“Weally, Tom Mewwy——.”

“Here you are,” said Tom. He pushed up the lower sash of the window.

Arthur Augustus went into action at once with the soda-syphon. He shoved the nozzle into the open space between sash and sill, and let fly.

Squisssssssssssh!

A jet of soda water shot out into the night. A gurgling howl came in answer. Evidently, somebody had stopped that jet with his face, chiefly his mouth.

“Oooooooooooooogh!”

“Got him!” chuckled Arthur Augustus.

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Irrrggh! Oooooch! Grooogh!” came from the darkness, “You School-House fatheads—oooooh! You’ve drenched me! Woooooch!”

“Bai Jove! That isn’t a pwefect!” exclaimed Arthur Augustus, in astonishment.

“It’s Figgins!” ejaculated Tom Merry.

“Figgins!” exclaimed Blake.

A streaming face peered in under the sash. George Figgins of the New House gave the School-House crowd a wet and infuriated glare.

“You potty chumps!” he hooted, “Is that how you welcome a chap that’s come to join up, you balny blitherers? Occogh!”

"Oh, cwumbs! Have you come to join up, Figgins?" gasped Arthur Augustus, "Then I wegwet vewy much——."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Three of us here," came Kerr's voice, "Let us in, will you?"

"Glad to," said Tom Merry, "We shall have to get a plank loose—we've got the window barred. All hands here, you fellows."

One of the planks nailed across the window was wrenched away. Tom pushed the sash higher. Figgins, dripping soda water, clambered in, and Kerr and Fatty Wynn followed him, while Figgy mopped his face with his handkerchief.

Then the window was promptly closed and fastened again, and the plank replaced, and secured with innumerable nails.

"Jolly good of you to come, Figgy," said Tom, as he dropped the blind into place, "If we'd guessed it was you——."

"Well, a School-House fathead couldn't be expected to guess anything," snorted Figgins, "They overlooked your House when brains were served out."

"Hem! Seen anything of the giddy enemy?" asked Tom.

"Lots," said Kerr, as Figgins dabbed at his drenched face and neck, "They were holding a council of war. We listened in, in the dark."

"I say," began Fatty Wynn.

"Go it," said Tom.

"Well, I know Dame Taggles had a fresh lot of doughnuts in. I—I hope you fellows haven't scoffed the lot."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You see, the tuck-shop's been shut all day," said Fatty, "I—I ain't blaming you for standing by D'Arcy, of course. We're backing you up. Still, I know they were jolly good doughnuts. But if you've scoffed them——."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No : lots left," said Tom Merry, with a chuckle.

"Bai Jove! Did you come heah to back us up or to scoff doughnuts, Wynn?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"Both!" said Kerr, laughing. Fatty Wynn did not trouble to answer. He plunged into the shop in search of doughnuts.

"We jolly well came to see you through," said Figgins, "I told Kerr, School-House men would never make a success of it, without New House help. Didn't I, Kerr?"

"You did!" grinned Kerr.

"Oh, draw it mild," exclaimed Jack Blake, warmly, "If you think we couldn't carry on without the New House, you can go to sleep and dream again."

"Yaas, wathah."

"Cheek!" grunted Herries.

"Look here——!" roared Figgins.

"Chuck it, old man," said Kerr, "We've come here to help—not for House rags. You fellows, it's a quarter past nine : and in another quarter of an hour the pre's will be banging on the doors. That's official."

"They can bang as hard as they like," said Manners, "But they won't get in."

"We sort of fancy we can keep them out—even without help from the New House," remarked Monty Lowther.

"Think so?" snorted Figgins.

"Well, we hope so, old man," said Tom Merry, "They haven't got in so far, at any rate."

"Wathah not!"

"Oh!" said Figgins, "And when they come, what are you going to do?"

"Man the jolly old defences, and keep them off," answered Tom, "We've got all the doors barricaded, and the windows barred with planks—they won't push inside in a hurry."

Figgins looked at Kerr, who chuckled. Fatty Wynn coming back from the shop with his mouth full, and a



doughnut in either hand, grinned. All the School-House fellows stared at them. Figgins looked at his watch.

"Seventeen minutes past nine," he said, "In thirteen minutes, the pre's will be banging away——."

"Let them!"

"And you fellows will be manning the jolly old defences——."

"Just that!"

"And Kildare will be sliding down that chimney!" said Figgins, pointing to the big open grate, which was adorned by a large blue vase, "A Present from Margate," stuffed with artificial flowers.

"What?"

"And opening a door to let them in——."

"Oh!"

"And that," remarked Figgins, "would be that—if a New House man hadn't come along to put you wise!"

"Bai Jove!"

Tom Merry drew a deep breath.

"Oh, my hat! Is that the game? Sure?"

"We heard them chewing it over," said Kerr.

"By gum! They might have had us——!" said Blake.

"No 'might' about it—they would have!" said Figgins.

"Thank goodness you came, Figgy, at any rate," said Tom Merry, "You're the right man in the right place! Now we're wise to it, old Kildare can drop in as soon as he likes——we'll put paid to him!"

"Yaas, wathah!" chuckled Arthur Augustus, "You are a fwiend in need, Figgy."

And fifteen fellows waited, impatiently, for the half-hour to chime out from the clock-tower.

## CHAPTER XXX

### PRISONER OF WAR!

ERIC KILDARE listened.

Half-past nine chimed in the night.

The St. Jim's captain was standing on a slate roof, holding with one hand to a massive chimney-stack. Kildare was active and athletic, and he had found little difficulty in climbing to the roof of the little building. He was well on time, and had been waiting a few minutes when the half-hour chimed out. Close by him yawned the dark cavity of the chimney by which he was to descend—unsuspected—into the very midst of the rebel stronghold.

He was not anticipating that descent with any pleasure. There was plenty of room for him in the ancient chimney, and it was as easy for him to negotiate it, as it had been for the chimney-sweeps of former times. But it was certain to be very sooty, probably very cobwebby, and undoubtedly very unpleasant indeed. Unpleasant as it was, he was going through with it.

Bang! crash!

The chime was followed by sounds from below. The sham attack, which was to draw the rebels to the windows, had started.

Crash! bang! bang! The School-House prefects were getting busy, banging and crashing on the shop door. A clattering crash told that a pane in the shop window had gone. It was a sham attack, but the prefects were putting plenty of energy into it.

Voices floated up in the night.

" Here they come! "

" Shy those spuds at them! "

" Get going with that syphon! "

" Tip that bath on their nuts! "

That was enough for Kildare. The attack was going on, the defenders were facing up to it : and it was time for him to weigh in. He swung himself into the chimney, and groped about for support. The rusty old irons clamped to the bricks within, to assist sweeps in the ancient days of chimney-sweeping, were still there. Descent was sooty and unpleasant, but it was simple enough. Kildare swung himself downward.

His descent dislodged clouds of soot. He choked and sneezed and coughed. But like Æneas descending into Avernus he found it facile. Scarcely a minute after he had started, his feet were swinging in the wide grate in Taggles' parlour, knocking over the " Present from Margate " and scattering Dame Taggles' collection of artificial flowers.

A moment more, and he was standing on the old hearth, and stooping to disengage his head from the chimney.

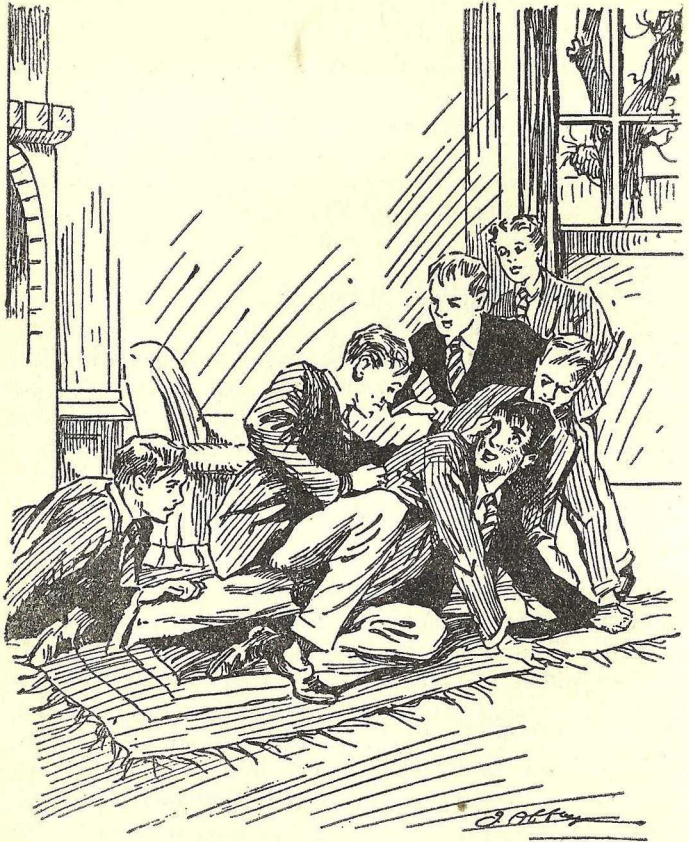
And then——!

Had Tom Merry and Co. not been put upon their guard, the stratagem could hardly have failed. The room would have been empty : Kildare within the defences, and the opening of a door or window would have been brief work. And as Kildare had not the faintest idea that the rebels had been put on their guard, he had not the slightest suspicion that Tom Merry, Talbot, Figgins, Blake, and Harry Noble, were waiting and watching for him. He made that unexpected discovery as he emerged, smothered with soot, from the chimney.

" Bag him! " shouted Tom Merry.

Before Kildare could begin to guess what was happening, five pairs of hands were grasping him, and he went over in their grasp, with a crash.

Clouds of soot rose from him, as he crashed on the



Five juniors were piling on him, grasping him. But they had plenty to do to hold him.

carpet of Taggles' parlour. He landed on his face, gasping, and a rather bony knee, belonging to George Figgins, was promptly planted in the middle of his back, pinning him down.

"Got him!" grinned Figgins.

"Hold him!"

"Get hold of his fins."

It was unexpected. Kildare was taken quite by surprise. But he rallied at once, and struggled.

Five juniors were piling on him, grasping him. But they had plenty to do to hold him, as he heaved in their grasp.

But hefty senior as Kildare was, the five were too many for him. He struggled, and heaved, and wrenched, but he was pinned to the floor again, with Figgy's bony knee grinding into his back.

"No go, Kildare," gasped Tom Merry, breathlessly, "Chuck it, old man—we don't want to damage you."

"You young sweeps!" gasped Kildare.

"Oh, my hat! You're rather more like a sweep than we are, Kildare!" chuckled Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Let me go!" roared Kildare, struggling again.

"Likely!" said Figgins.

"Take it calmly, old bean," said Kangaroo, "We've got you, and we're keeping you. Couldn't part with you."

"Nice of you to drop in, in this informal way, Kildare," remarked Cardew, strolling in and watching the scene, but keeping clear of the scattering soot. Five fellows were considerably sooty, from contact with Kildare: but the dandy of the Fourth did not want any.

"Will you let me go?" roared the captain of St. Jim's.

"Will we?" chuckled Blake.

"Not so's you'd notice it, old man," said Figgins.

Kildare made another frantic effort. Five fellows rocked, as he struggled. But he was flattened down again, gurgling for breath. He had to realise that he was helpless in the

hands of the Amalekites.

"Are you going to take it quietly, Kildare?" asked Tom Merry.

"By gum! I—I—I'll——" panted Kildare, evidently not in the least disposed to take it quietly.

"Then we shall have to tie your fins," said Tom.

"I've got a cord here," said Cardew.

"If you dare——!" gasped the hapless prefect.

"Bow-wow!"

Kildare struggled again, frantically. But his hands were drawn behind him, and held there: and Cardew knotted a cord round his wrists.

Then he was allowed to get on his feet.

He stood unsteadily, panting for breath, black with soot, glaring at the grinning juniors. Kildare of the Sixth was a good-tempered fellow. But his good temper seemed quite to have failed him now. He gave a fierce wrench at his wrists: and had he got them loose, there would certainly have been some hard hitting in Taggles' parlour. But Cardew had knotted the cord too securely for that.

"Got him, you fellows?" Arthur Augustus's eyeglass gleamed in at the doorway, "Bai Jove! You look a wathah disweputable object, Kildare."

"You young rascal——."

"Pway do not lose your tempah, Kildare. Wah is wah, you know," said Arthur Augustus, cheerfully, "You must take the wuff with the smooth, you know. Nobody asked you to butt in."

"Sorry to have to handle you like this, Kildare," said Tom Merry, politely, "We all like you, you know. But——."

"Jolly old war is jolly old war," said Cardew, "What are you going to do with him, you fe lows? Drop him out of a window, or lock him in the coal-cellar?"

"Neither," said Tom Merry, laughing, "You're a prisoner of war, Kildare——."

"You young villain!"

"Opprobrious remarks will not get you anywhere, Kildare," said Arthur Augustus, severely.

"By gum! I—I—I'll——" Kildare seemed to choke.

"Are you going to keep quiet?" demanded Tom.

"I'm going to give you the thrashing of your lives, as soon as I get my hands loose!" bawled Kildare.

"Then you won't get loose in a hurry. Stick him in that armchair, you fellows, and fix him there."

Kildare made another frantic effort at resistance. But it booted not. He was sat down, with a bump, in Taggles' armchair, and Blake and Figgins, grinning, tied his ankles to the legs of the chair. Thus safely disposed of, the captain of St. Jim's could do nothing but pant for breath and glare at his captors with a glare like unto that of the fabled Gorgon—which did not seem to affect their cheerful equanimity in the least.

Banging and crashing were still going on at the shop door. Half-a-dozen fellows, at the upper windows, were pelting the prefects below, with tomatoes, potatoes, and anything else that came to hand. The Sixth-Form men were not enjoying it: but they industriously kept up the sham attack, in the expectation every moment of seeing the side-door open for their admittance. Tom Merry's smiling face joined the others looking down from the window.

"You may as well chuck that, Darrell," he called out, "We've got Kildare."

Darrell jumped, and stared up.

"What?" he ejaculated.

"Dropped into our hands like a ripe apple," explained Tom, "We've got him tied up in an armchair. He won't be letting you in just yet."

"Wathah not!" chuckled Arthur Augustus.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, gad!" said Darrell, blankly.

"Give them a few more 'tommies," exclaimed Blake,

“ We’ve got lots.”

Whiz! whiz! whiz!

“ So that’s that, is it? ” snorted Knox, “ They’ve got him! Well, I’ve had enough of this! ” And Gerald Knox stalked away, a tomato from Blake’s unerring hand catching him in the back of the neck as he went.

The other prefects exchanged glances, and, with one accord, followed Knox’s example. They disappeared into the night, followed by a whizzing shower of varied and assorted missiles. Tom Merry shut the window.

The School-House prefects had departed, in great wrath : and Mr. Railton, no doubt, was equally wrathful : and even the Head was probably feeling some loss of his accustomed urbanity. But in the rebels’ fortress there was happy satisfaction, and everyone looked merry and bright—with the single exception of the captain of St. Jim’s wriggling uncomfortably in Taggles’ armchair—a prisoner of war!

## CHAPTER XXXI

### NO GO!

“ RATTY! ” ejaculated Figgins.

“ Bai Jove! Watty! ”

It was a bright morning. There was cheery sunshine in the old quad of St. Jim’s. There were cheery faces at the windows over the tuck-shop, as Tom Merry and Co. looked out.

Fatty Wynn, appointed cook by general consent, was busy in the kitchen, preparing breakfast, his fat face beaming over the foodstuffs. Two or three fellows were sorting supplies out of the shop, depleting Dame Taggles’ stores with a rather reckless hand. Talbot of the Shell, who had



a head for figures, was making a list of all goods thus annexed, which were to be duly and honourably paid for at some future date. But most of the rebels were looking out into the sunny quad, when the tall lean figure of Mr. Ratcliff, house-master of the New House, was seen approaching.

Figgins whistled. Kerr shrugged his shoulders. Fatty Wynn, in the kitchen, remained unaware that his house-master was coming : and would not have cared anyway. Breakfast was quite enough to occupy Fatty's thoughts.

Mr. Horace Ratcliff had a portentous frown on his brow. Clearly, he was not in a bonny temper that bright morning. At a little distance behind the New House master, Monteith and Baker and Webb and three other New House prefects were to be seen. Monteith's black eye showing up to great advantage in the sunshine. Evidently, hostilities impended.

Hitherto, Tom Merry and Co's barring-out had been a School-House affair. It had been dealt with by the School-House master and the School-House prefects. It had had nothing to do with the New House—till Figgins and Co. joined up! Now it had!

Indeed, Mr. Ratcliff had been rather sourly amused by the apparent inability of his colleague, Mr. Railton, to keep order in his House. He had flattered himself that no such mutinous outbreak could occur in the House under his own superior sway. The New House prefects, too, had smiled sarcastically over the unavailing efforts of School-House prefects to handle a mob of rebellious juniors. Now both the house-master and the prefects had a similar task before them : and it remained to be seen whether they would have better luck.

“ Ratty looks shirty,” murmured Figgins.

“ He would! ” agreed Kerr.

“ Yaas, wathah! He certainly looks vewy disgwuntled,” remarked Arthur Augustus, “ Wathah lucky you're not

within weach of his cane, Figgy."

"Shall I let him have a tomato?" asked Cardew.

"Pway do nothin' of the sort, Cardew! There is such a thing as wespect to a house-mastah," said Arthur Augustus, severely.

Figgins looked warlike.

"You buzz a tommy at my house-master, and you'll want a new nose," he said, warningly, "That one will be pushed through the back of your head."

"Hear, hear!" said Kerr.

"If any fellow here thinks he can push my nose through the back of my head, he's welcome to try!" drawled Cardew.

"I'll jolly well——."

"Order!" exclaimed Tom Merry, "For goodness sake, don't rag! Keep that tomato till it's wanted, Cardew."

"O.K." yawned Cardew, "Ratty looks as if he's going to ask for it. I'll keep it till he does."

Mr. Ratcliff came whisking on, followed by his prefects. He came to a halt under the upper windows, and turned his glance upward. His frown intensified at the sight of Figgins and Kerr among the School-House crowd.

"Figgins!" he rapped.

"Yes, sir!" answered Figgins, respectfully.

"I find you here!" said Mr. Ratcliff.

"Um! Yes, sir," assented Figgins.

"Last night," said Mr. Ratcliff, "It was reported to me that three junior boys were missing from the House. I can see that Kerr is with you Figgins, and I presume that Wynn is with you also."

"Yes, sir," admitted Figgins.

"I have come to take you back to your House," said Mr. Ratcliff, "I did not anticipate, Figgins, that the example of reckless insubordination set in the School-House would be followed in my House. This will not be permitted to continue. You will come out of that building at once, with Kerr and Wynn, and all three of you will be severely

caned."

"What an inducement!" murmured Levison, and there was a chuckle.

"Do you hear me, Figgins?"

"I hear you, sir."

"Then come at once. I am waiting."

"Sorry, sir——."

"Will you come out of that building at once, Figgins?"

"Sorry, sir, but we can't," explained Figgins, patiently,

"We're backing up D'Arcy, sir——."

"The School-House boy who attacked and disfigured a prefect of your own House," exclaimed Mr. Ratcliff.

"He didn't, sir! It was somebody else," said Figgins.

"What? What? What do you know about the matter, Figgins?"

"Only what D'Arcy says, sir."

"Upon my word! I will not listen to this nonsense," exclaimed Mr. Ratcliff.

"Weally, Mr. Watcliff, you have no wight to chawacterise Figgins's wemarks as nonsense," exclaimed Arthur Augustus, warmly, "Figgins is statin' the facts, sir. I had nothin' to do with blackin' Monteith's eye, and all my fwriends are pwepared to take my word on the subject."

"That's how it is, sir," said Kerr.

Mr. Ratcliff breathed hard through his thin nose.

"Listen to me," he said, "I will not allow boys of my House to take part in this rebellion against authority. With Mr. Railton's boys I have nothing to do: but boys of my House will obey my commands. Figgins, come out at once."

Figgins made no answer to that.

"Kerr! I command you to leave that building."

No reply from Kerr.

There was a pause. Apparently Mr. Ratcliff had expected his commands to be immediately obeyed. But he had had no better fortune than Mr. Railton. He had to realise that

Figgins and Co. were not coming out.

"Very well," said Mr. Ratcliff, at last, "I shall direct my prefects to remove you by force. I warn you that your punishment will be all the more severe."

With that, the New House master turned away.

"Tomato time?" asked Cardew.

"You School-House tick——! began Figgins.

"You New House smudge!" answered Cardew politely.

"Shut up, both of you," rapped Tom Merry.

Mr. Ratcliff was speaking to his prefects.

"Monteith! Kindly remove Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn from that building, and bring them to my study," he said.

And Mr. Ratcliff walked away to the New House, leaving that somewhat difficult proposition up to Monteith and Co. Evidently he did not intend, as Mr. Railton had done the previous day, to take a personal part in the proceedings. He had given his instructions to his prefects, and he left it at that.

Monteith, Baker, and the rest, looked at one another. They had been quite sarcastic, among themselves, about the failure of the School-House prefects to handle the rebels. Now that the task was up to them, however, they seemed to realise that it was one of some magnitude.

"Come on," called out Jack Blake, from the window.

"Don't be shy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas, wathah," chuckled Arthur Augustus, "I did not give you that black eye, Monteith, but I shall be vewy pleased to give you anothah if you twy to butt in heah."

"You little rascal!" exclaimed Monteith.

"You big wascal!" retorted Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, come on," growled Monteith, "We've got Ratcliff's orders." And the head-prefect of the New House came on.

"Please may I buzz this tomato now?" asked Cardew, meekly.

"Carry on," said Tom Merry, laughing.

Whiz! squash!

It was a quite ripe tomato—perhaps a little over-ripe. It landed fairly on Monteith's nose, and burst there. There was a spluttering howl from the New House prefect, as ripe tomato spread over his features.

"Woooooooch!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Baker, "You look a picture, old man. Wow!" he added, in a yell, as a potato crashed on his ear.

"Go it!" shouted Tom Merry. "Give them all you've got."

There was a shower of missiles from the windows. The New House prefects ducked and dodged, but they came on. Six hefty Sixth-Form men put their shoulders to the shop door, and shoved with all their strength. The door creaked, and almost cracked, under that mighty shove. But the bolts, and the barricade behind, held fast, while missiles rained from above.

"No go!" gasped Monteith.

"Yaroooh!" roared Baker, as a sardine-tin landed on his neck.

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Webb. A pot of jam cracked on his head, and he yelled, "Oh! Ow! Let's get out of this!"

There was sudden retreat. The door held fast: and the window was barred with nailed planks. Tomatoes, potatoes, chunks of coal and tins of sardines, came like hail on the hapless prefects. It was more than they could stand. They could not get in—but they could get out—and they got out, at a run! They had had no better luck than the School-House pre's.

"Bai Jove! They're wunnin'!" yelled Arthur Augustus,

"Give them some more!"

"Go it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Six Sixth-Form men were running—fairly running for it!

The fusillade followed them till they were out of range. Not till then did Monteith and Co. halt—breathless, considerably damaged, and in the worst tempers ever. If Mr. Ratcliff was waiting for Figgins and Co. to be brought to him in his study in the New House, he seemed to be booked for a long wait!

## CHAPTER XXXII

### SHOCK TACTICS!

“LOOK!” yelled Jack Blake.

“Bai Jove!”

“They mean business this time!”

“All hands on deck!”

There was a thrill of excitement in the garrison of the St. Jim's tuck-shop. They packed the upper windows, staring.

The bell had rung for school. St. Jim's—with exceptions—had gone into the form-rooms. Fifteen juniors were absent from their places in Fourth and Shell: and a good many of the Sixth from their form-room. If Dr. Holmes was expounding Thucydides that morning, he was expounding that ancient author to a depleted form. And the Fifth were getting on somehow without their form-master, for Mr. Ratcliff, who was form-master of the Fifth, was in the quad with Mr. Railton.

Both house-masters were standing there, looking towards the tuck-shop. Now that juniors of both Houses were among the rebels, the powers that were, in both Houses, had joined forces. School House and New House prefects were evidently allied: for they were all in the quad with the house-masters—the only one absent being Kildare, still a

prisoner of war.

Monteith, Baker, Darrell, and Langton came in sight, carrying among them a long heavy ladder. Tom Merry and Co. knew that ladder—it belonged to Taggles, now happily disporting himself at Southend-on-Sea, far from the scene of war.

"Business this time, and no mistake," said Cardew, "But they won't get in at the window in a hurry."

"Wathah not!"

"Somebody is going to get damaged this time," remarked Figgins. "They're jolly well not getting in."

"No fear!"

As they watched the prefects with the ladder, Tom Merry and Co., had no doubt that it portended an attack by way of the upper windows. They were ready for it, and they watched and waited, with piles of ammunition at hand in the shape of tomatoes, potatoes, sardine-tins, and chunks of coal. And if the prefects used Taggles' ladder as a sealing-ladder, they were prepared to deal with them hand-to-hand at the windows—and that was what they expected.

But it was not the expected that happened. Four more prefects joined the four who were carrying the ladder. Eight pairs of hands were now grasping it, and long and heavy as it was, so many hands made light work of it. And, at a sign from Mr. Railton, the eight prefects, ladder in hand, made a sudden rush for the tuck-shop.

Whiz! whiz! whiz!

Missiles from the window began to fly fast. But the prefects did not raise the ladder to the window-sill, as the juniors expected. They kept it at a level, directed towards the door of the tuck-shop.

Crash!

It was a terrific concussion. The end of the heavy ladder, with the momentum of the rush, came on the door like a battering-ram. There was a loud crack as the door split under the shock.

" Oh! " gasped Tom Merry.

He understood now.

That ladder was not a scaling-ladder to reach the windows. It was a battering-ram to force the door!

" Phew! " murmured Cardew.

" Oh, the rotters! " gasped Figgins, " That's their game! "

" Bai Jove! "

" Pelt them! " shouted Blake.

The juniors pelted from the window, as the prefects below retreated with the latter—evidently for another rush.

But in a minute, the enemy were out of effective range, halting and getting their breath to rush at the door again.

Tom Merry whistled. Faces were grave among the defenders now. The shop door was locked and bolted : a barricade was piled behind it. But nobody needed telling that neither the door nor the barricade would stand long against shock tactics like these. A few more determined rushes with the heavy ladder, and the door would be in fragments, the barricade scattered.

" Oh, gum! " said Levison, " It looks——! "

" It does—it do! " murmured Monty Lowther.

" We're not giving in! " said Blake.

" No fear! But——."

" Here they come again! Pelt the rotters! "

" Yaas, wathah."

The juniors packed the windows, hurling missiles. But the prefects came on through the fusillade, and again the end of the ladder crashed on the door.

This time it went through. The prefects dragged it out, and retreated once more, all sorts and varieties of things raining on them as they went. Some of them were getting damaged, there was no doubt about that. But they were quickly out of range, taking breath for another rush.

Cardew shrugged his shoulders.

" They've done us," he said, " We can't stop that! "

" They'll be inside under ten minutes," said Herries,



" We'll jolly well give them a tussle when they get in."

" They've not quite done us yet," said Talbot, quietly.

Tom Merry gave him a quick look.

" What——?" he began.

" We can't keep them out now," said Talbot, " They'll get in on the ground floor. But we can barricade the staircase, and hold the upper floor. They can't get that long ladder inside the house."

Tom Merry's face brightened.

" Good man!" he said, " That's the big idea! We're not beaten yet."

" But I—I say—!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn, in alarm.

" I—I say, all the grub's downstairs—what about grub?"

" Trust Fatty to think of that!" snorted Figgins.

" Ha, ha, ha!"

" Well, I expect we should all be thinking of it, about dinner-time," said Tom Merry, laughing, " Cut off, Fatty, and begin getting the grub upstairs."

" What ho!" said Fatty, and he cut off promptly.

Tom Merry slammed the window shut.

" No time to lose," he said, " They won't be long getting through, and pelting won't stop them! Every fellow get going—quick! Grab everything you can, and scoot it into the upper rooms. Come on!"

" Yaas, wathah! We'll beat the wottahs yet."

No time was lost. Another terrific crash came at the shop door, and again the end of the ladder came through into the barricade. But the rebels did not heed it. It was clear that the defences would soon be down, and they had not a moment to waste.

Dame Taggles' stock was raided with reckless haste. Bags, boxes, and every kind of receptacle that could be found were crammed with goods from the tuck-shop, rushed up the stairs, and dumped into the upper rooms. Many hands made light work: and fifteen fellows, working at top speed, soon cleared the shop of almost everything in the edible line.

Not a single pot of jam escaped the eagle eye of David Llewellyn Wynn.

Crash! Came at the door again, and the barricade rocked. The door was in mere splinters by this time, and the barricade showing signs of wear and tear. But it still held, for the moment : and the juniors, having cleared out the shop, left it empty.

"We've got time!" panted Tom Merry, "But quick! Bundle out the furniture and block the staircase."

Chairs and tables from the lower rooms were bundled out. Dame Taggles, could she have seen the excited crowd of juniors thus breaking up the happy home, would probably have been unable to find words in which to express her feelings. But there was no time to bother about Dame Taggles. War was war!

"What's going on now, you young rascals?" exclaimed Kildare, as three or four fellows dragged away the parlour table.

"We are!" answered Monty Lowther, affably.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Kildare gave him a glare. Good-tempered fellow as he was, he was not in a good temper that morning. He had been released from the armchair, and hospitably allowed to share the rebels' breakfast : but they were prudently keeping his hands tied, and he was still a P.O.W. in Taggles' parlour. So far from looking his accustomed good-tempered self, he looked as if he were boiling, and on the point of boiling over.

"Bring that armchair along," called out Tom Merry.

"What are you up to?" roared Kildare.

"Snuff!" answered Tom, cheerily.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Buck up, you fellows."

Chairs, tables, boxes, stools, anything that came to hand, piled up on the staircase. It was a narrow staircase, not more than four-feet wide, with a turn in it half-way up :

and could not have been better designed for its present purpose. Jack Blake, hammer in hand, drove in nails in almost every spot where there was room for a nail, fixing chairs, tables, and other articles of furniture, immovably to stairs and banisters and one another. Tom Merry and Co. retreated up the staircase, barricading behind them, leaving the stairs completely blocked : and then furniture from the upper rooms was added to the stack, blocking the staircase all the way up to the landing.

Meanwhile, crash on crash sounded and echoed at the shop door. Taggles' property piled against it was going fast to pieces. It was a matter of moments now. But Tom Merry and Co. had worked swiftly : and their second line of defence was ready, by the time the way was open and Mr. Railton strode in over the wreckage with the prefects at his heels.

### CHAPTER XXXIII

#### NO SURRENDER!

MR. RAILTON, cane in hand, stared round the havocked and denuded tuck-shop. The prefects, crowding in behind him, with their ashplants ready for action, stared round also, rather blankly.

Dame Taggles' shop, ordinarily a very neat, tidy, and orderly establishment, looked rather as if it had been struck by a hurricane. And it was vacant.

Had the rebels been on the spot, all would have been plain sailing : for fifteen juniors, howsoever determined, would not have been of much use hand-to-hand with a dozen stalwart men of the Sixth, led by the house-master. But not a rebel was to be seen.

Mr. Railton, with compressed lips, strode on into the parlour behind the shop. There he discovered a solitary inhabitant. It was Kildare of the Sixth, red with anger, wrenching for the umpteenth time at the cord round his wrists, without being able to loosen it.

“ Oh! ” ejaculated Mr. Railton, “ Kildare! ”

“ Yes, sir! ” Kildare’s face, already red, became crimson. It was not pleasant to be discovered in his present position, tied up like a turkey, and helpless to help himself. Some of the prefects, looking in from the shop, grinned—two or three of the New House men winked at one another. “ Will you—will you get me loose, sir? ”

Mr. Railton cut the cord with a penknife and the St. Jim’s captain was free.

“ Where are the juniors, Kildare? ”

“ In the upper rooms, sir! I think they’ve blocked the staircase. ”

“ Oh! ” said Mr. Railton, and he compressed his lips harder.

He left the parlour by the door on the passage. That passage ran from the side-door to the staircase at the back. The house-master tramped along it to the stairs, followed by the prefects.

He came to a halt at the foot of the narrow staircase. It was blocked from top to bottom with up-ended furniture. Above, several faces could be seen, looking over and through table-legs and chair-legs, surmounted by a bedstead.

“ Oh, gum! ” murmured Darrell : and Monteith gave a low whistle. The Sixth-Form men had taken it for granted that, once they had forced an entrance, all that remained was to collar the rebels and march them off to punishment. But the length of a barricaded staircase was still between them and the rebels : and it dawned on them that instead of being at the end of the campaign, they were not much further on than the beginning.

“ Upon my word! ” breathed Mr. Railton. He stood a

little nonplussed.

There was a buzz of voices above.

"Here they come!"

"We're ready!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Come up, you ticks!" shouted Blake, "Like a pot of jam in your eye, Darrell? Looking for another black eye, Monteith?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come on, Knox!" called out Monty Lowther, "We're all ready to give knocks for Knox!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry and Co. seemed to be in cheery spirits. They had a strong position, and were ready to hold it against all comers. And the Sixth-Form men, though ready for the fray, did not seem quite to see how they were going to get up that staircase.

There was a step behind the seniors in the passage, and Mr. Ratcliff appeared, with a frowning brow.

"Where are the boys?" he rapped, "Monteith, why have you not taken Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn out of this building? What are you waiting here for?"

Monteith breathed rather hard.

"We can't get at them, sir," he answered.

"What?" ejaculated Mr. Ratcliff, "What? What? Nonsense!"

"The boys are barricaded on the upper floor, Mr. Ratcliff, said Mr. Railton, a little acidly, "You can see——."

"It appears to me, Mr. Railton, that time is being wasted," snapped the New House master, "This rebellion has gone on long enough—too long! Now that boys of my House are mixed up in it, it must end." He stared up the staircase, and called out "Figgins! Kerr! Wynn! Come down immediately!"

"Bai Jove! That's Watty!" came the voice of Arthur

Augustus D'Arcy, "Watty sounds as if he's in wathah a wage, you fellows."

Mr. Ratcliff became purple.

"Figgins! Kerr! Wynn!" he roared, "Do you hear me?"

There was no reply from Figgins and Co. But several School-House voices answered :

"Go home, Ratty!"

"Take your face away and bury it!"

"Put a sock in it, Ratty!"

"Run away and play old bony bean!"

Mr. Ratcliff gurgled.

"Upon my word! Monteith, are you laughing? Do you see anything amusing in the impertinence of these School-House boys, Monteith?"

"Oh! Er—No, sir!" gasped Monteith.

"I expect my prefects to be able to deal with mutinous juniors," bawled Mr. Ratcliff, "Monteith! Baker! Webb! Go up at once and fetch down the three boys of my House."

The three New House prefects named exchanged glances, and advanced to the foot of the staircase. There they paused. Getting through that mass of nailed and jammed furniture, blocking the staircase from side to side and to a good height, did not seem so easy to them, as perhaps it seemed to their house-master.

"Come on, you New House ticks!" roared Jack Blake, "Look out for another eye to match the one you've got, Monteith!"

"Yaas, wathah."

"This reminds me of something in Macaulay's Lays," said Monty Lowther, and he proceeded to recite :

"Was none who would be foremost  
To lead such dire attack,  
While those behind cried 'Forward!'  
And those before cried 'Back!'"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the rebels.

"Come on, Ratty," called out Cardew, "Why don't you lead the way? I've got a jam pot all ready for your nut!"

"Bai Jove! Watty isn't plucky like Wailton," came Arthur Augustus's voice, "He won't do anythin' but wag his pwefects."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go on at once, Monteith!" shrieked Mr. Ratcliff.

"We shan't see anything of Ratty," said Monty Lowther, "Ratty's learned his tactics from the Duke of Plaza-Toro!" And the funny man of the Shell proceeded to chant:

"In enterprise of martial kind,  
When there was any fighting,  
He led his regiment from behind,  
He found it less exciting!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Monteith!" Mr. Ratcliff seemed to be choking, "I command you to remove the three boys of my House immediately. If you do not do your duty you are no longer a prefect of my House!"

"It is not an easy matter, sir!" exclaimed Mr. Railton, sharply.

"I insist, sir, upon my prefects doing their duty, and without delay! I will not allow rebellion on the part of boys of my House to continue a moment longer."

"By gum, Ratty's getting jolly shirty," said Blake, "He'll be scrapping with Railton next!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the rebels.

"Merry!" called out Mr. Railton.

"Here, sir!" answered Tom, from the landing.

"This must end at once, Merry! I have the headmaster's instructions to use any measures that may be necessary to end it. Let this riot cease, before further damage is done."

"Only too glad to, sir, if the flogging's off! Will the Head agree to put off the flogging till he finds out who blacked Monteith's eye?"

“Yaas, wathah! If the Head agwees to that, Mr. Wailton, it's all wight! We ah all vewy sowwy to wowwy the Head, and I assuah you, sir, that I did not black that New House smudge's eye!”

“If that's a go, O.K.” said Jack Blake, “Is it, sir?”

“You are very well aware that I can discuss no such thing,” exclaimed Mr. Railton, “D'Arcy will certainly receive his flogging——.”

“Wats!” called out Arthur Augustus.

“What? What did you say, D'Arcy?”

“I said wats, sir : and I wepeat, wats!”

“And many of them,” said Herries.

“Merry! For the last time——!”

“Nothing doing, sir!” answered Tom, “We're standing by D'Arcy, and the barring-out's on till the flogging is off!”

“And so say all of us!” said Cardew.

“Hear, hear!”

“Mr. Railton,” barked Mr. Ratcliff, “You are wasting time parleying with those disrespectful young rascals! Force must be used. Monteith—Baker—Webb——.”

Mr. Railton glanced at the School-House prefects.

“Follow me!” he said.

“We're ready, sir,” said Kildare.

And with Mr. Railton leading the way, followed by the whole crowd of prefects of both Houses, there was a rush at the barricaded staircase——Mr. Ratcliff looking on from the passage, evidently favouring, so far as he personally was concerned, the tactics of the Duke of Plaza-Toro!



## CHAPTER XXXIV

### HOT WORK!

"Go it!" shouted Tom Merry.

"Pile in, you fellows!"

"Give them beans!"

Missiles whizzed down the staircase. Mr. Railton and his followers were under heavy fire, as they scrambled up the barricade. But they came on determinedly, the house-master in the lead. At the top of the stair, the rebels of St. Jim's crowded, hurling down almost everything that came to hand.

Railton had told Mr. Ratcliff that it was not an easy matter—and he found that it was very far from easy. With "spuds" and tomatoes and tinned goods crashing on him right and left, he pushed on resolutely: till, half-way up the stairs, his legs slipped into the interstices of piled chairs and tables, and he struggled in vain to get them out again. He struggled and wrestled and wrenched, doing enormous damage to Dame Taggles' furniture, but unable to extricate himself.

"Bai Jove! Wailton's stuck!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Kildare was next after Railton. He passed him, and scrambled on desperately. The missiles did not stop him, and he came within reach of the defenders at the top. But at that point his last state was worse than his first. Jack Blake reached over with a long-handled mop, wet and clammy, which landed in the middle of the St. Jim's



"Bai Jove! Wailton's stuck," exclaimed Arthur Augustus.  
"Ha, ha, ha!"

captain's features, and rolled him back. As he strove to rally, a bath broom wielded by Tom Merry caught him under the ear. Arthur Augustus took aim with a soda-syphon : but in the excitement of the moment, Gussy's aim was a little wild, and the jet landed on Mr. Railton instead of Kildare, and the house-master spluttered frantically as he caught it. But the mop and the bath-broom were enough for Kildare, and he rolled helplessly.

Behind them came Darrell and Monteith : but on the narrow staircase, Railton and Kildare blocked the way of their followers. Behind Darrell and Monteith came the rest, but there was no room for them to pass. Kildare sprawling and rolling, Railton stuck fast in the furniture, filled the available space : and the result was that the whole party were under hot fire, without being able to get a foot nearer the top.

Mr. Ratcliff watched from below, with astonishment and dire wrath mingled in his speaking countenance. He gave a sudden jump as a potato whizzed down and landed with a bang on his sharp nose.

" Oh! " stuttered Ratcliff. His hand went to his nose. Then he jumped away, narrowly escaping a second potato. After which, the New House master remained at a respectful distance from the fray—tenderly rubbing his nose.

" Come on, you wottahs! " shouted Arthur Augustus, waving his eyeglass in great excitement, " Come on, Kildare! Come on, Wailton! Come on, Dawwell! "

" Oh! ow! Oh! " gasped Kildare, " You young scoundrels—ow! ow! ow! "

" Here's a jam pot for you, Kildare," called out Clive.

" Oh! " roared Kildare, as the jam pot cracked on his head.

" And here's a tin of sardines," said Levison.

" Ow! Oh! Oooogh! "

" Ha, ha, ha! "

Nobody would have guessed that Eric Kildare was the

best-tempered senior at St. Jim's, judging by his look at that moment. He made a frantic effort to get onward : and both the mop and the bath-broom crashed on him, simultaneously. And Cardew, leaning over the upper banisters, landed a swipe with a saucepan. Kildare rolled again, in quite a dizzy state.

"Give a fellow room," called out Monty Lowther, and the juniors gave him room, as he arrived with a pail of water filled from the tap on the landing. Up went the pail and the contents shot down the staircase, showering over the whole party of prefects. There was wild gasping and spluttering : and Knox, who was bringing up the rear, jumped away. Knox had had enough.

"Get on, you in front," shouted Langton, from behind. "You're blocking the way."

"We can't stick here," gasped Baker.

Monteith made an effort, and squeezing between Kildare and the banisters, pushed on up. The bath-broom caught him under the chin, and he clutched at it. Then the mop lunged, and he let go the broom to clutch at the mop. Then he gave a frantic yell, as a saucepan established contact with the top of his head, he let go the mop. Then a terrific charge from the bath-broom sent him rolling, and he crashed on Kildare and Railton.

"Bai Jove! What have you got there, Lowthah?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, as Monty Lowther came back with the pail.

"Soot!" answered Lowther, cheerfully, "I've raked it down the chimney! You chaps down there like a spot of soot?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! Don't bwing it neah my clobbah, Lowthah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, in alarm, and he hurriedly dodged away.

"Oh, gum!" exclaimed Langton, "That's rather too thick!"

"Stop that, you young villian!" roared Rushden.

There was a wild scramble of the prefects lower down the staircase to get away. Evidently, they did not want a spot of soot. Monty Lowther, with a cheery grin, whirled up the pail.

Swoooooosh! A volume of soot swept down the staircase. There was a yell of laughter from the juniors above, and suffocated splutterings from the Sixth-Formers below. They spluttered, coughed, sneezed, and gurgled, and scrambled away. In less than a minute, the staircase was clear of all but Kildare and Railton—the latter still struggling wildly to extricate himself from tangled furniture, with a face black as the ace of spades, and red with wrath where it was not black with soot.

"It—it—it's no go, sir!" gasped Kildare. Kildare had tons of pluck but he scrambled out of reach of the broom and the mop and the saucepan. "We can't get through, sir."

Mr. Railton did not answer. His mouth was full of soot, and he had, for the moment, an impediment in his speech! All he could utter was "Urrrrrggh!"

"Oh, have another go, Kildare!" called out Cardew, "You're not half licked yet. Getting tired of this saucepan?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Mind your clobber, Gussy," chortled Monty Lowther, "I've got another pail of soot."

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus retreated in haste.

"Give it to Kildare!" yelled Blake, "Kildare would like another spot of soot before he goes."

Kildare scrambled away after the other prefects. The defence was too strong for the attack, and he had to admit it. And it did not seem very useful to remain where he was, and collect the second pail of soot. He had had all he wanted of that, and some over!

"Kildare's going!" chuckled Kangaroo.

"Let Railton have it!" shouted Cardew.

"No! Stop!" exclaimed Tom Merry, "Hold on, Monty! Not unless he comes up."

"Rot!" said Cardew, "In for a penny, in for a pound! Let him have it."

"Shut up, Cardew."

"Yaas, wathah! You should wemembah the wespect due to a house-mastah, Cardew," said Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, gad!" said Cardew, "Railton looks as if he's had the respect due to a house-master, doesn't he?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's a limit," said Tom, laughing.

"Pewwaps Mr. Wailton will be kind enough to wetire, now that he can see that there is nothin' doin'," said Arthur Augustus, "Mr. Wailton, will you have the goodness to wetire, and not dwive us to the painful extwemity of knockin' you ovah with a bwoom?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We should all be extwemely sowwy to bang you on the nappah with a bwoom, sir," continued Arthur Augustus, "Will you wetire, sir?"

Mr. Railton did not answer. His look was expressive, and his feelings were obviously deep: but he did not put them into words. He wrenched himself out of the tangle at last, and the juniors above kindly held their fire, to give him a chance to retreat. He looked up at them. The broom, the mop, the saucepan, and the pail of soot, were all ready, with unnumbered missiles in other hands. And Mr. Railton, realising clearly that, as Arthur Augustus pointed out, there was nothing doing, scrambled away down the staircase and disappeared.

A sharp voice floated up.

"Mr. Railton! What does this mean? Does this mean, sir, that you are permitting this rebellion to continue?"

Railton's voice was equally sharp as he answered.

"You are welcome, Mr. Ratcliff, to take the matter in hand yourself."

"Really, Mr. Railton——!"

"Really, Mr. Ratcliff——."

"Do come up, Ratty!" shouted Cardew, "We all want to give you one for your nob!"

"Yaas, wathah."

Mr. Ratcliff did not accept that invitation.

"Bai Jove! We've beaten them, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus, jubilantly, "They can't do a thing—and the bawwin'-out is goin' on till the Head comes wound!"

"Hurray!"

It was victory for the rebels of St. Jim's: and the barring-out was going on: though whether the Head was likely to "come round" was quite another matter.

## CHAPTER XXXV

### TAGGLES ON THE TELEPHONE

**BUZZZZZZZ!**

It was the telephone in the Head's study.

There were three in the study: the majestic Head himself, Mr. Railton, and Mr. Ratcliff. They were in consultation: in point of fact, holding a council of war.

The state of affairs at St. Jim's was distressing, upsetting, and indeed, almost bewildering to Dr. Holmes. St. Jim's boys in rebellion against authority had him quite at a loss.

To concede the point demanded by the rebels, and cancel the flogging awarded to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form was impossible. No head-master could possibly yield to compulsion in such a matter. The Head did not consider that for one moment.

The alternative was to put down the rebellion with a firm hand, administer condign punishment to the rebels, and carry out D'Arcy's sentence as a matter of course. But there were unexpected difficulties in the way.

Mr. Railton had been given full powers to deal with the rebels. Unluckily those powers had produced no effect. Instead of being put down and punished, the rebels were going as strong as ever. The house-master, backed by the whole force of Sixth-Form prefects, had failed.

The Head would not and could not give in. The rebels had no intention whatever of giving in. So matters seemed rather at an impasse.

Consultation did not seem to get the Head and the house-masters much "forrarder." The three agreed that the rebellion must be sternly put down, and without delay: Mr. Ratcliff adding that punishment must be very severe. But that did not solve the problem of "how." That, as Hamlet remarked of old, was the question: and to that question no answer had yet been found.

The discussion was interrupted by the buzz of the telephone. Dr. Holmes took up the receiver.

"That 'ere the school?" a voice came through, which the Head thought he recognized.

"Dear me! Is that Taggles?" asked Dr. Holmes.

"Yessir! You the 'Ead?" asked Taggles, from the other end.

"Dr. Holmes, speaking. What is it, Taggles? I trust that you are having a very enjoyable holiday at Blackpool——"

"Southend-on-Sea, sir!"

"Oh! Yes! Quite! I trust you are having a very pleasant holiday at Southend-on-Sea, Taggles. But I am busy at the moment. What is it?"

Dr. Holmes was urbane. He was always urbane. Nobody employed at St. Jim's ever had anything to complain of in that respect. But he was just a little impatient now.



A head-master had plenty of matters on his mind—especially with a barring-out going on in the school. Really and truly he did not want to be rung up by the school porter from the seaside.

"Oh! Yessir!" said Taggles, "Young George's bung is O.K., sir, and the missis is quite comfortable, and——."

"I am glad to hear it, Taggles. Good-bye!"

"'Old on a minute, sir. That ain't all," said Taggles, anxiously, "I 'ad a letter this morning, sir, from 'Arry 'Odge, wot made me wonder what things was a-coming to, sir. I did that!"

"Indeed!" said the Head, restively.

"'Arry 'Odge, sir, wot's taking my place while I'm away," continued Taggles, "Dropped me a line, he did, and when I read it, sir, you could have knocked me down with a bloater. You could that, sir! Accordin' to wot 'Arry 'Odge says, says he, there's a rumpus on."

"A—a—a rumpus!" repeated the Head. Rumpus was not a word in the head-master's vocabulary.

"I mean, a blooming row, sir," said Taggles.

"Oh!" Dr. Holmes knew what a blooming row was, though he deplored the adjective. "Undoubtedly, Taggles, matters are not wholly as usual. But you need not concern yourself about that."

"Needn't I just!" exclaimed Taggles, "Look 'ere, sir, from what I 'ear, a lot of the young rips——."

"The—the—the what?"

"The boys, sir——."

"If you mean the boys, Taggles, you had better say the boys," said Dr. Holmes, tartly. "And now I am afraid I can spare no more time—I am in consultation with my house-masters at the moment——."

"About the blooming row, sir, I s'pose! I 'ear that the young rips—I mean the boys—'ave took the tuck-shop, and barred themselves in——."

"Yes, yes! Order will soon be restored. Good-bye,

Taggles."

"You 'old on, sir," said Taggles, "I'm worried about this! Wot's the missis going to say when she 'ears that a lot of young ribs—I mean boys—has took 'old of the place, and is a-turning of heverything hupside-down? I ain't said a word to the missis yet, sir, but you can lay to it that she will go off at the deep end when she 'ears about it."

The Head coughed.

"Mrs. Taggles may be assured that all damage will be made good," he answered, "Any damage or loss of property will be fully compensated. Now good-bye——."

"'Old on, sir! That ain't all."

"I have told you that I am engaged at the moment, Taggles——."

"It can't be 'elped, sir! I'm worried! 'Arry 'Odge says in his letter, sir, that the young ribs is getting up to this game because young D'Arcy was going to be flogged. He says, says he, it's the talk of the school, he says."

"That is correct, Taggles."

"And he says, says he, that young D'Arcy was to be flogged for 'itting Monteith of the Sixth Form in the blinking eye, sir, the other night after dark."

"Yes, yes, yes! I wish, Taggles, that you would select your adjectives with a little more care when addressing me. But what you say is substantially correct. Good-bye."

"'Arf a mo', sir! Was it on Wednesday night it 'appened, sir?"

"It was, Taggles."

"Oh, jiminy!" came over the wires.

"Good-bye, Taggles."

"'Old on, sir! 'Ow do they know it was Master D'Arcy wot 'it young Monteith in the eye on Wednesday night."

"Really, Taggles, I cannot continue this!" exclaimed the Head, impatience entirely washing out urbanity, "I have no more time to waste. Surely you must be aware that the most careful investigation was made before a junior

boy was awarded so severe a punishment. Good-bye!"

"But, sir, I tell you I'm worried," almost wailed Taggles, "I think a mistook has been made—I mean a mistake, sir—I—I—I don't believe it was young Master D'Arcy wot 'it young Monteith in his blinking eye——."

"Have you been drinking, Taggles?"

"Not a drop, sir!"

"Then I cannot understand your impertinence in offering an opinion upon a matter that does not concern you," said the Head, sternly, "Say no more! Good-bye."

And Dr. Holmes, with a deep frown on his brow, jammed the receiver back on the hooks, cutting off Taggles at the other end: leaving a very worried school-porter in a call-box at Southend-on-Sea.

He turned back to the two house-masters, who had waited for him to finish: Mr. Railton with quiet patience, Mr. Ratcliff with an impatience and irritation that he did not trouble to conceal.

"Something must be done, sir," said Mr. Ratcliff, "The present state of affairs is quite intolerable: and the example of rebellion, sir, may spread. Already the prefects have great difficulty in preventing other boys from approaching the school shop."

"What do you suggest, Mr. Ratcliff?" asked the Head.

"The very sternest measures, sir."

"Perfectly so! But what precise measures?" There was, perhaps, a faint note of sarcasm in the head-master's voice. "If you have formed a plan for dealing with this outbreak, Mr. Ratcliff——?"

He paused, like Brutus, for a reply. Like Brutus, he did not get one. Apart from wrath and irritation, Mr. Ratcliff seemed to have no contribution to make. He frowned and was silent: and the Head turned to the School-House master.

"What do you suggest, Mr. Railton?"

"I think, sir, that it may be practicable to force an

entrance into the building by way of the upper windows. I am ready to make the attempt, with the assistance of the prefects, if you think so."

"You have an absolutely free hand, Mr. Railton."

"Thank you, sir! Then I will see about it now."

The house-masters left the Head's study, leaving him in deep and worried thought. His meditations were interrupted by a sudden buzz from the telephone. With less than his usual patience, Dr. Holmes jerked off the receiver, and almost barked into the transmitter.

"Well?"

"Is that the 'Ead?" came a familiar voice, "We was cut orf, sir."

"Bless my soul! Is that Taggles again?" exclaimed the Head.

"Yessir! We was speaking about young Master D'Arcy when we was cut off, and I got to say, sir, that you're barking up the wrong tree, sir——."

Bang! It was quite a bang as the Head replaced the receiver, and the telephone rocked. Once more a worried school-porter was left disconnected in a call-box at Southend-on-Sea.

Dr. Holmes, deeply frowning, resumed his troubled meditations. He hoped, at least, that he was finished with Taggles, who, he could hardly doubt, must have been drinking. But he was not quite finished yet. Five minutes later, the telephone bell was ringing again. Dr. Holmes lifted the receiver.

"That you, sir? We was cut orf again——."

"Taggles," said Dr. Holmes, in a deep voice, "If you ring me on the telephone again, you are discharged. In that case you need not trouble to return to the school at all. Another ring on the telephone means your dismissal, Taggles."

The receiver was jammed back.

This time the Head really was finished with Taggles.

No further ring came on the telephone, and the Head was able to meditate and cogitate as long as he liked, without interruptions from the school-porter far away at Southend-on-Sea!

## CHAPTER XXXVI

## PINNED!

"WEADY, deah boys!" called out Arthur Augustus.

"We're ready!" chuckled Figgins.

"All hands repel boarders!" said Monty Lowther.

"Railton's a sticker," remarked Cardew, "I wonder what the game is this time."

"We'll put paid to it, whatever it is," said Tom Merry, cheerfully.

"Hear, hear!"

There was no doubt that the rebels of St. Jim's were full of beans. The success of the rebellion had not exactly gone to their heads: but they were certainly feeling quite pleased with themselves and things generally: and confident of their ability to hold the fort. Not one of the garrison of the tuck-shop felt the slightest alarm, when the enemy appeared in sight.

They crowded the upper windows, ready and watchful, as Mr. Railton, with half-a-dozen prefects, came across from the School-House. Precisely what the enemy planned to do, they did not know: but they could see that another attack was coming.

The long ladder that had been used in the morning as a battering-ram lay on the ground, at a little distance. Mr. Railton and his followers halted when they reached it, and Kildare, Darrell, and Monteith lifted it. It was borne

onward towards the tuck-shop! And then Tom Merry and Co. knew what was coming.

“Frontal attack!” grinned Blake.

“Bai Jove! They’re comin’ up to the window, deah boys.”

“That’s the idea,” said Tom, “It’s a scaling-party! Well, they can come up only one at a time : and I don’t envy the man in the lead.”

“Wathah not!” chuckled Arthur Augustus.

There was a pile of ammunition stacked by the windows, and the rebels opened fire as soon as the enemy were within easy range.

“Give ’em beans!”

“Go to it!”

“That’s one for Kildare!”

“And that’s one for Darrell!”

“Here’s one for Monteith!”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Oh, gad!” gasped Kildare, as one of Dame Taggles’ tins of peaches crashed on his chin, and he staggered, and let go the ladder. At the same moment a tomato squashed in Monteith’s black eye, and a chunk of coal caught Darrell on the tip of the nose. They too let go the ladder, and there was a crash as it went to the ground.

“Wooooogh!” gurgled Monteith, as he wiped juicy tomato from his eye with his handkerchief.

“Oh, crumbs!” breathed Darrell, with a hand to his nose. The “claret” trickled through his fingers, “Oh! The young villians—ow!”

“Sorry, old beans,” called out Tom Merry, “Keep your distance, and chuck it. If you ask for it, you’ll get it.”

“Yaas, wathah.”

Mr. Railton strode forward, and, grasping the ladder, whirled it up, and strode forward with it. Heedless of a rain of missiles, he reared it up, and planted the top against the window-sill.

Three or four pairs of hands grasped it to fling it back. But the stalwart house-master held it in position. Kildare was the first to reach it, and he scrambled up the ladder, ashplant in hand, while the others lent Mr. Railton their aid in holding it below. Held in strong hands, and with Kildare's weight on it, it could not be dislodged, and the captain of St. Jim's seemed indifferent to the missiles that descended on him like hail. Up he came, holding with his left hand, the ash ready in his right, as resolutely as an ancient Crusader mounting the scaling-ladder on the walls of Ascalon.

Arthur Augustus reached out with a poker. He brandished it over Kildare's head.

"Anothah step, and I shall cwack your nut, Kildare," he said, warningly, "Sowwy to damage you, deah boy, but you are not wanted heah. If you come within weach of this pokah, I shall—yawoooooh!"

Swipe!

Kildare's ash landed across Arthur Augustus's arm, and he uttered a frantic yell and dropped the poker. His yell was echoed by another below, as the poker landed on Darrel's head.

"Oh, cwikey!" howled Arthur Augustus. "Oh, cwumbs! Yawoooooh!"

Up came Kildare, rung after rung, lashing out with the ash as he came. Tom Merry caught a swipe, and then Blake, and then Figgins. For a moment they backed from the window, and Kildare's head and shoulders appeared there, and he got a grasp on the window-frame. And now Monteith and Darrell were coming up the ladder behind him.

Jack Blake lunged with the mop, Tom Merry with the broom. Kildare dodged both lunges, and threw himself in at the window.

Head and shoulders were inside now: and in another moment, Kildare would have been tumbling headlong

into the room.

It was a critical moment. Nobody liked the vigorous lashes of the ashplant at close quarters. But it was neck or nothing now.

“Keep him out!” shouted Tom Merry.

“Collar him!”

“Scrag him!”

“Yaas, wathah! Come on, deah boys.”

And the whole crowd of juniors pounced on the St. Jim's captain, and grasped him on all sides. Kildare was half-way in, his waistcoat resting on the window-sill, his cane lashing out on all sides. Six or seven of the defenders got the lashes, hard and fast, as the whole crowd collared him : but collared he was, and in so many hands, he was pinned in the window, and his ashplant wrenched away.

“Shove him out!” yelled Blake.

“Pitch him out!”

“Get out, Kildare, you fathead!”

But Kildare did not get out—he struggled valiantly to get in. But his arms, his neck, and his hair and his ears, were all held : and Cardew, grasping the window-sash, brought it down on his back.

“Oh!” gasped Kildare, as he was pinned by the sash.

“Got him!”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

Up the ladder came Darrell, with a rush. But he had to dodge back to escape Kildare's wildly-kicking legs.

The captain of St. Jim's was helplessly pinned in the window, under the sash. He heaved frantically to push it up : but Cardew, Talbot, Levison, and Kerr, held it down, and he could not raise it an inch. He had been a P.O.W. in the hands of the rebels before : now he was a prisoner in the window, blocking the way of the others coming up the ladder. He twisted and struggled and wrenched, panting for breath : but he could not push up the sash, and he could not get his arms loose——Tom Merry and Manners



held one, and Lowther and Digby the other, while Herries had his hair in a deadly clutch.

"Will you let go, you young villians?" panted the St. Jim's captain.

"Not a lot," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Sorry you called?" asked Cardew.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I warned you that you were not wanted here, Kildare," grinned Arthur Augustus, "Now you are fairly bunkahed, deah boy."

"You—you—you young ruffians—" gurgled Kildare.

"Bai Jove! I wefuse to be called a wuffian, Kildare! I have a gweat mind to pull your nose for usin' such an oppwopwious expwession, and I should certainly do so, but for my wespect for a pwefect!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the juniors. In the exciting circumstances, respect for prefects seemed to be rather conspicuous by its absence!

"Weally, deah boys——."

"What about giving him a taste of his own ash?" asked Cardew. "We've nearly all had a taste of it."

"Good egg!" said Herries.

"Six for Kildare!" chuckled Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Chuck that," said Tom Merry, laughing, "You can shove it down his back."

"Yaas, wathah! It would be wantin' in pwopah wespect to whop a pwefect, deah boys, but shove it down his back."

Kildare wriggled wildly as the ashplant was shoved down his back. But he had to have it! He was helpless in the nest of hornets into which he had so valiantly and recklessly thrust his head—as helpless as an infant in so many hands, and he had to take what came to him.

"Oh, you young demons!" he gasped.

"Got your hammer and nails, Blake?" asked Cardew.

"Yes—what——?"

“Shove a nail or two into this sash. I’m gettin’ tired of holdin’ it.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“What ho!” chuckled Blake.

There was a loud banging, as Blake drove long nails, with mighty smites, into the window-sash, fastening it immovably to the window-frame. After which, it was no longer necessary to hold the sash or to hold Kildare. The juniors released him and moved out of his reach, leaving him pinned in the window—a helpless prisoner there—his head and shoulders in the room, and his legs thrashing the air outside—a remarkable and interesting sight for all St. Jim’s, gathered in a crowd to stare at the strange sight from a distance.

## CHAPTER XXXVII

### VICTORY!

VICTOR RAILTON stared up, rather blankly.

Darrell and Monteith, on the ladder, the other prefects below, also stared up.

They had, like the rest of St. Jim’s, a view of Kildare’s legs, sticking out of the window and thrashing and wriggling.

“Upon my word!” breathed Mr. Railton.

“They’ve got him! Pinned in the window, by gum!” muttered Langton.

Darrell looked down at the house-master.

“I can’t pass Kildare, sir! He seems to be fixed in the window.”

“Come down off the ladder, Darrell! We must try the other window!”

“Very well, sir.”

Darrell and Monteith jumped off the ladder. All hands grasped it to move it along. There was another window a few yards to the right of the one where Kildare was pinned

under the sash. The top of the ladder banged on the sill. The moment it was in position, the house-master started up, the Sixth-Form men holding the ladder below.

But the window was crammed with faces. One window was effectually blocked by Kildare : Tom Merry and Co. crowded at the other.

“Heah comes Wailton, deah boys.”

“Look out!”

Tom Merry leaned out of the window.

“Mr. Railton! Stop!” he rapped, “We don’t want to handle our house-master. But you’re not coming in! Will you stop?”

Victor Railton did not trouble to reply. He came up the ladder, cane in hand, his brow set and grim.

“He’s got to have it!” said Blake.

“Why not?” said Cardew, lightly.

“There are lots of weasons why not, if we could help it, Cardew,” said Arthur Augustus, severely, “But it appeahs to me that Wailton is askin’ for it, and won’t take no for an answah.”

“Sitting up and begging for it,” said Figgins, “Let him have that pail of soot, Lowther.”

“Oh, my hat! Poor old Railton!” said Manners.

“We’re not letting him in,” said Tom, “Go it, Monty.”

Monty went it—with the pail of soot. Railton’s head was only three or four feet below the window, when Monty Lowther up-ended the pail of soot over it. The soot shot out in a black mass, landing fairly on the house-master. In a split second Victor Railton was transformed into a Hottentot.

“Oh, gad!” gasped Monteith, staring up from below. Victor Railton’s face was as black as Monteith’s eye!

Mr. Railton stopped in his ascent—he could not help it. There was soot in his eyes and nose and mouth, as well as spread all over him, and he was choked and blinded by it. He clung to the ladder, spluttering soot.

Cardew grabbed the bath-broom from Tom Merry. He swung it out of the window with both hands, and the bristly end clumped on Railton's head. Blake reached out with the mop and shoved. It was no time for half-measures—for if the athletic house-master reached the window, he was likely to be much harder to handle than Kildare had been. The rebels had to keep him out—and they threw all other considerations to the winds, and kept him out. Blinded by soot, and with a bath-broom and a mop lunging at him from above, Railton simply had no chance, and he slid down the ladder. He missed his footing at the bottom, stumbled over, and rolled among the prefects.

"Poor old Wailton!" sighed Arthur Augustus, "It weally goes against the gwain to tweek him like that! But if he keeps on askin' for it, what's a fellow to do?"

"Here comes Monteith?"

"Give him all you've got!" roared Blake, "He's only a New House tick, anyway."

"Oh, is he?" exclaimed Figgins, warmly, "You School-House ass——!"

"You New House fathead——."

"Shut up, and go for Monteith!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah."

Monteith came up with a rush, to be met by the bath-broom under his chin, and the mop in his black eye. He roared, and went down faster than he had come up.

Tom Merry waved the broom from the window.

"Come up," he called out, invitingly, "You taking a turn, Darrell? Have a go, Langton! Don't be shy about it."

"You young rascal!" hooted Darrell.

"You young ruffian!" exclaimed Langton.

But they did not come up the ladder. Neither what had happened to Railton, nor what had happened to Kildare, seemed to be attractive to them. They would have given a good deal to get Tom Merry, within reach of their canes.

But they evidently did not want to go within reach of the bath-broom.

Railton staggered to his feet. He had collected a good many bumps and bruises, he was black with soot, and spluttering for breath. Soot hung about him in clouds. He made a movement towards the ladder. Then he paused.

"We can't make it, sir," muttered Darrell.

Mr. Railton seemed to realise that that was correct. He gave a long look up at the window, crammed with faces and bristling with all sorts of weapons. He drew a deep breath—flavoured with soot. Then he nodded. He was reluctant to admit defeat : but the defeat was there, whether he admitted it or not. So long as the garrison stood stoutly on their defence, there was no scaling the windows of the tuck-shop : and that was that. The attack had failed, and he had to make the best of it.

"Put the ladder back," he said : and the prefects dragged the ladder back to the window where Kildare's legs were still kicking the air.

"Merry!"

"Yes, sir!" answered Tom.

"Release Kildare!"

"Does that mean that you're going, sir?"

There was a pause before Mr. Railton replied. But he had to get it out. He could not go, leaving his most valiant follower pinned in the window. And he had to go.

"Yes!" he rapped, at last.

"Right ho, sir!" said Tom cheerfully.

He turned to the other window. Kildare met him with a glare that showed that the St. Jim's captain's good temper had completely failed him. He really looked as if he could have bitten the cheerful junior.

"O.K., Kildare," said Tom, "Railton's made it pax! Getting tired of that window?"

"You young rascal! Let me out of this!" hissed

Kildare.

"It won't be so jolly easy," said Blake, "It's easier to drive nails in than to get them out, Kildare. You'll have to wait a bit."

"Yaas, wathah! Be patient, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus, encouragingly, "It is absolutely no use losin' your tempah, you know."

There was hammering and wrenching at the nailed sash, and Kildare was released at last. He looked much more disposed to plunge forward into the room than to retreat down the ladder. Blake flourished the hammer under his nose.

"Going?" he asked.

And Kildare, with deep feelings, went. He slid down the ladder, and rejoined his fellow-prefects. Cardew grasped the top of the ladder, and hurled it outward with a powerful shove.

"Stand from under!" he shouted.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The prefects jumped clear, in haste. The ladder clattered on the earth. Mr. Railton, with a set face under a coating of soot, strode away towards the School-House. No doubt he realised that what he chiefly needed was soap and water. The prefects followed him.

They had to run the gauntlet of a staring crowd of St. Jim's fellows—kept at a distance by several prefects, but watching the scene with great interest and a good deal of merriment. Railton's face was probably crimson under the soot: but his blushes could not be seen.

"Oh, crikey!" squeaked Baggy Trimble, "Look at Railton! Ain't he black?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Railton was glad to disappear into his House.

From the windows of the tuck-shop, Tom Merry and Co. waved to the crowd in the distance, and many fellows waved back, regardless of prefectorial frowns. It looked as if the

sympathy of the St. Jim's fellows was mostly on the side of the rebels. There were cheers and laughter as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy waved his eyeglass from the window.

"Bai Jove!" remarked Arthur Augustus, "I wathah think we're all wight, you fellows. They've twied evey way of gettin' at us, and we've put paid to all of them! The Head will have to come wound, if he doesn't want this bawwin'-out to go on for the west of the term."

"Hear, hear!" chuckled Blake, "They can't do a thing!"

"Not a thing!" agreed Tom Merry.

"Not the jolly old ghost of a thing," said Monty Lowther.

The rebels were all agreed on that point. And really it seemed that they were right. The Head, certainly, showed no sign whatever of "coming round," and it was not likely that he was thinking of washing out the flogging which was the bone of contention. But there was no further attack. Every means of getting at the rebels had been tried, and had failed one after another: and the enemy seemed to have decided, for the present at least, to leave them alone. And Tom Merry and Co., quite content to be left alone, with Arthur Augustus D'Arcy safe out of the reach of the Head's birch, rejoiced in their success, and waited cheerfully for whatever might be going to happen next.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII

### THE RETURN OF THE NATIVE

"TAGGLES!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Jolly old Taggles!" said Figgins.

"Bai Jove! He doesn't look feahfully jolly!" remarked Arthur Augustus.

Which was a fact!

Ephraim Taggles looked anything but jolly, that sunny morning. Indeed his crusty old countenance indicated that he had collected most of the troubles of the universe, and brought them all back to St. Jim's with him.

It was Monday morning. For quite a long time—a time, indeed, that seemed to them very long—the rebels of St. Jim's had been left on their own. Masters and prefects seemed content with isolating them from the rest of the school: and taking watchful care that no more recruits joined their ranks. It could not, of course, go on—sooner or later, something had to happen. But so far nothing had happened—and some of the rebels were rather wishing that the enemy would make a move, and provide them with a spot of excitement.

Late in the morning, while third school was going on—with fifteen absentees as usual from the form-rooms—Tom Merry and Co. found a spot of interest in the sight of Taggles—whose existence they had almost forgotten. So far as they remembered him at all, they supposed that he was still at Southend-on-Sea, as his week's leave was not yet up. But here he was—coming towards the tuck-shop, his expressive countenance telling only too plainly that he was what he would have called “worrited.”

“Ho!” said Taggles as he came to a halt, staring alternately at the wreck of the shop door, and the faces that smiled at him from the upper windows.

“Good-morning, Taggles,” called out Tom Merry, politely.

“Ho!” repeated Taggles.

“Top of the jolly old morning, Taggles,” said Monty Lowther, “How are they getting on at Southend? Whelks and winkles all right?”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Ho!” said Taggles, for the third time, “Nice goings hon!”

“Quite nice, thanks,” said Cardew.



“ Bai Jove! We weally owe Taggles an apology, for makin’ so fwee with his quartahs,” said Arthur Augustus, “ Taggles, old scout, we are vewy sowwy to knock the place about like this! But there was weally no choice in the mattah, and we twust that you will excuse us, in the circs.”

“ Young rips! ” said Taggles.

“ It’s a barring-out, Taggles,” explained Tom Merry, “ We’re very much obliged to you and Mrs. Taggles for going away on a holiday, and leaving the place to us.”

“ Yaas, wathah.”

“ I know all about it,” grunted Taggles, “ I’ve ’eard all about it you young rips. Nice goings hon! ”

“ Has the Head sent for you to handle us, Taggles? ” asked Blake, grinning.

“ Ha, ha, ha! ”

“ Try it on, Taggles,” chuckled Cardew, “ We’ve beaten the beaks, and beaten the pre’s. Take your turn, old tulip.”

Taggles grunted. He fixed his gaze on the aristocratic face of Arthur Augustus D’Arcy, eyeing him curiously.

“ You ain’t been flogged yet, Master D’Arcy? ” he asked.

“ Certainly not, Taggles.”

“ And that’s what it’s all about, ain’t it? ” asked Taggles, “ That’s what ’Arry ’Odge told me.”

“ Yaas, wathah! Pewwaps you have heard that Monteith of the New House had a black eye,” said Arthur Augustus, “ It was the night befoah you went away, I think——.”

“ I’ve ’eard all about that,” grunted Taggles.

“ Well, the Head thinks that I jolted Monteith in the eye, which is an ewwah on his part, Taggles. So my fwiends are standin’ by me. I should, of course, wefuse to be flogged for somethin’ I had not done. I was quite wesolved on that, as a mattah of course. So that is why we are bawwin’-out the beaks, and I assuah you, Taggles, that we vewy much wegwet knockin’ the place about like this, and we shall certainly pay up honouwably for all the stock we have used

fwom the shop. You can wely on that, Taggles."

Grunt, from Taggles.

"Glad to see you back, Taggles," said Blake, "But we can't let you in. Do you mind sticking around ornamenting the landscape?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You can't keep this 'ere game up," said Taggles.

"We've kept it up a good while," said Tom Merry, cheerfully, "And we're keeping it up till the flogging's off, Taggles. Sorry to have to keep you out of your quarters: but that's that."

"It won't do," said Taggles, shaking his ancient head, "I never knowed this was going on, till I 'eard from 'Arry 'Odge I been proper worried since I 'eard. I ain't dared to tell the missus. She'd go off at the deep end, she would, if she knowed. I don't rightly understand it. 'Ow'd the 'Ead think it was young D'Arcy wot 'it Monteith in the eye, I'd like to know."

"Oh, Gussy asked for that," said Blake.

"Weally, Blake——."

"You see, he was ass enough to break House bounds that very night," explained Blake, "I suppose you've known him long enough to know what an ass he is, Taggles."

"Bai Jove! Look heah, Blake——."

"He was coming over to the New House to pinch my trousers," explained Figgins, "He's only got twenty-seven pairs of trousers himself, and he was after mine."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It was nothin' of the sort," hooted Arthur Augustus, indignantly, "I was goin' to bag your clobbah, Figgins, because you bagged my hat, as you know vewy well. And I have not got twenty-seven paihs of twousahs at all. I have nevah had more than six paihs of twousahs——."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's how it happened, Taggles," said Levison, "Some person or persons unknown jolted Monteith in the

eye, so D'Arcy specially asked the Head to think that he did it——."

"Weally, Levison——."

"And the Head, being an obliging old gent, did as Gussy asked," said Cardew, "And he was going to be flogged, as he seemed to want it so much——."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Cardew, you ass——."

"But D'Arcy had nothing to do with it really," said Tom Merry, "All D'Arcy did was to work very hard to make it look as if he had."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——."

"So we're standing by him till the flogging's off," said Tom, "I expect it will come out some time who did jolt Monteith in the eye."

"Ho!" said Taggles. "So Master D'Arcy was out of his 'Ouse that night, was he? That's why the dorg was barking, I suppose."

"That beastly dog chased me all ovah the shop, Taggles. He came vewy neah takin' a piece out of my twousahs."

"And me thinking it was some tramp 'ad got in!" grunted Taggles, "You young raskil——."

"Weally, Taggles——!"

"It was all your own fault," yapped Taggles, "You 'ad to get out of your 'Ouse and start the dorg, and make me think there was a tramp about. Blow you!"

"Oh, Gussy does these things," said Blake, "After this, we're going to keep him on a chain at night."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah ass, Blake——."

"You silly young idjit!" said Taggles, morosely, "And me thinking it would all blow over if I got away for a week, and now all this! But right's right."

Tom Merry and Co. stared blankly at Taggles. What he could possibly mean by that cryptic remark was a mystery to them.

"I come back to set it right," went on Taggles, "It's 'ard on a man, and so it is, but right's right. I can't let you be flogged for wot you never did, silly young idjit as you are! Blow you!"

"Weally, Taggles——."

"Blow you," repeated Taggles, with emphasis, "Blow you, you silly young hass! I'd like to box your years for you! Blow you!"

And with that by way of valediction, Taggles turned, and trudged away to the School-House. The rebels of St. Jim's stared after him as he went.

"What the dickens did he mean, if he meant anything?" asked Figgins.

"Goodness knows," said Tom.

"By gum!" exclaimed Talbot, "Can Taggles know anything about it? The dog seems to have woken him up that night. He may have seen who it was punched Monteith."

Tom Merry whistled.

"Oh, my hat! He said he'd come back to set it right! If he knows who did it——."

"Bai Jove!"

"What a sell!" sighed Cardew, "Gentlemen, cads, and ticks, it looks as if this jolly old barring-out is coming to a finish! What a rotten sell!"

"Fathead!" said Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove!" repeated Arthur Augustus, "If Taggles can weally set it wight, he is the wight man in the wight place. Of course we had to have a bawwin'-out in the circs, and it was vevy decent of all you fellows to stand by a pal in such a wippin' mannah. But——" went on Arthur Augustus, shaking his head, "I cannot help thinkin' that all this is wathah lackin' in pwopah wespect to our house-mastah, and that it is vevy wuff on Wailton, and that is a vevy painful wefflection, deah boys."

"Awful!" said Blake, solemnly.

And the other fellows chuckled.

## CHAPTER XXXIX

### LIGHT AT LAST!

DR. HOLMES frowned.

He was annoyed.

There was quite a gathering in the head-master's study after third school. The two house-masters were there, with Mr. Linton and Mr. Lathom : and the two house-captains. The Head had decided—quite decided—that something drastic had to be done, to end the rebellion at St. Jim's. It could not go on—it was impossible to allow it to continue. A new week had started—and fifteen junior boys were still barring-out those set over them in authority—a quite intolerable position. It had to end—and how it was to end, was the subject of discussion in the Head's study.

Unluckily, it was just the “ how ” that somehow escaped the meeting. Mr. Railton was ready for anything—if there was anything to be done. Mr. Ratcliff was emphatic that the rebels should be quelled and punished. Mr. Linton agreed that it was intolerable : Mr. Lathom that it was unheard of. Kildare and Monteith were prepared to carry out orders. But no one—not even the Head—seemed to have any clear idea just how Tom Merry and Co. could be dealt with. Everyone contributed his quota to the discussion : but so far, it had not got them anywhere : when it was interrupted by a tap at the study door.

That door opened to reveal Ephraim Taggles.

Wherefore did the Head frown portentiously. He did not want interruption from anyone just then : least of all

from Taggles.

There was an unusually sharp note in his voice as he rapped :

“ Taggles! I am busy! Kindly shut the door.”

“ Yessir! ” said Taggles.

He came into the study, and shut the door.

Dr. Holmes gave him a glance like a basilisk. He had intended Taggles to shut the door, with himself on the further side of it. Taggles, though he did not seem to realise it, was superfluous at the meeting.

“ Taggles,” said the Head, in a deep voice, “ You are interrupting me! Leave my study at once.”

“ I got to speak, sir,” said Taggles.

“ At the moment, I am busy! Go! ”

“ I got something to tell you, sir.”

“ Another time! ” rapped the Head.

“ Another time won't do, sir,” said Taggles, doggedly, “ I come up special from Southend-on-Sea, arter I 'ear from 'Arry 'Odge about the goings hon 'ere! It's ard on a man, and I thought it over a long time afore I come up, but I 'ave come up, sir, and now I got to tell you.”

Dr. Holmes breathed very hard.

“ This passes all patience,” he said, “ Taggles, leave my study immediately.”

“ One moment, sir,” interposed Mr. Railton, with a curious glance at Taggles' worried old gnarled face, “ Taggles says that he came up because he had heard of what is going on here, from Hodge. He may have something to tell you bearing on the matter.”

“ That's it, sir,” said Taggles.

“ I fail to see how,” said the Head, “ What do you mean, Taggles! Explain yourself.”

“ About Master D'Arcy, sir,” mumbled Taggles.

“ That does not concern you.”

“ It do, sir, as I knows well enough that young D'Arcy never 'it Mr. Monteith in the heye,” said Taggles.

"Oh!" exclaimed the Head, taken aback.

There was a general movement of interest in the meeting. All eyes were fixed on Taggles. Monteith passed a hand over his eye—which was turning, by this time, from black to mixed shades of blue and green.

"You know something about this matter, Taggles!" exclaimed Mr. Railton.

"Course I do, sir, or I shouldn't be 'ere, a-interrupting of the 'Ead!" answered Taggles.

"It is established that D'Arcy of the Fourth Form was the culprit," said Mr. Ratcliff, "The evidence was conclusive, sir."

"Certainly it appeared so," said Dr. Holmes, "But I must hear what Taggles has to say. What do you know of the occurrence, Taggles?"

"I knows it wasn't young D'Arcy, sir."

"You were up that night?" asked Mr. Linton.

"Yessir! The dorg woke me up barking, and I come out!" said Taggles.

"You came out!" exclaimed the Head.

"Yessir."

"And you know that it was not D'Arcy, of my form, who struck Monteith?" exclaimed Mr. Lathom.

"I does, sir."

"I fail to see——!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff.

"I am bound to say," said Mr. Lathom, interrupting the New House master, "That I have had a lingering doubt. From all I know of the boy D'Arcy, he is extremely unlikely to speak untruthfully. I have had a doubt——."

"I confess that I have not felt sure about it, sir," said Kildare. "After all, Monteith never saw the fellow who punched him in the dark."

"I certainly thought that it was the junior I followed in the quad," said Monteith, rather tartly, "And I still think so. But if Taggles knows differently——."

Dr. Holmes set his lips. It was not a pleasant reflection

that perhaps a mistake had been made : and that only Tom Merry and Co's barring-out had prevented an act of injustice. He gave Taggles a grim look.

" Taggles! " he rapped.

" Yessir! " mumbled Taggles.

" You say that you know that it was not D'Arcy of the Fourth Form who struck Monteith? "

" Yessir. "

" Whatever you know of the matter, Taggles, you should have reported to me, before leaving the school for your holiday, " said the Head, sternly, " According to what you say, you allowed an innocent boy to be brought before me, and sentenced to a flogging——. "

" I never knowed, sir! " gasped Taggles, " There wasn't nothing of the sort afore I 'ooked it——. "

" You what? "

" I mean, afore I went, sir! 'Ow was I to guess that young D'Arcy would be picked on, when he 'ad nothing to do with it? "

" Oh! " said the Head, " I remember now——you had gone before D'Arcy was brought before me. Nevertheless, if you know that it was not D'Arcy who dealt that blow, you must know who it was—you must have seen the occurrence. "

" Yessir. "

" You know who it was? " exclaimed Mr. Railton.

" Yessir. "

" Upon my word! " exclaimed the Head, in just indignation and wrath, " You knew who the guilty party was, Taggles, and never reported what you knew to me. You allowed me, the head-master of a school, to fall into an error, to the extent of committing an injustice, because you failed to make a report which it was your duty to make! "

" I—I—I——! " stammered Taggles, " I—I—Yessir! You—you see, sir 'ow'd I know 'ow you'd take it, sir, if



you knowed? 'Ow'd I know you wouldn't give a bloke the push, sir."

"The push!" repeated the Head, "what do you mean, Taggles? Are you wandering in your mind? How could you imagine that I should push you? Have you been drinking?"

"I mean the sack, sir," gasped Taggles, "when I says the push, sir, I means the sack—the long 'op, sir."

"Taggles means that he feared that you might dismiss him, sir," interpreted Mr. Railton, hastily.

"Oh!" said the Head, "I—I understand! But I quite fail to see why Taggles should fear anything of the kind, for doing his duty in reporting the culprit to me. He seems to be speaking in riddles. Taggles, tell me at once who it was that struck Monteith that night, if you know."

"I knows all right, sir," mumbled Taggles, "None better! The dorg was kicking up such a hullabaloo, sir, that I comes out, thinking it was a tramp that 'ad got into the place. Then I 'eard somebody, and then all of a sudden a bloke jumps at me and grabs me in the dark——."

"Oh!" ejaculated Monteith.

"Oh!" gasped Kildare.

"Oh!" said Mr. Railton.

"Oh!" said Mr. Ratcliff.

"Oh!" said Mr. Linton.

"Oh!" said Mr. Lathom.

It dawned on them all at once!

"Grabs a bloke in the dark, and me thinking there was a tramp about," went on Taggles, "I 'it out, like any man would 'ave done, and knocked 'im over."

"Oh!" gasped the Head.

"'Ow was I to know Mr. Monteith was out of his 'Ouse in the middle of the night?" argued Taggles, "I thought that blooming tramp had got 'old of me, and 'it out. Then I knowed it was Mr. Monteith, because he yells out about his eye, and I knowed his voice. You could 'ave knocked

me down with a fried kipper when I found it was Mr. Monteith, sir."

"Bless my soul!" breathed the Head.

"So I goes in and says nuffin," continued Taggles, "Least said soonest mended, I thinks to myself. Me a married man, sir, and the missus sure certain to jaw my 'ead off if I got the sack. It wasn't my fault nohow, but school porters ain't supposed to give the young gentlemen black eyes: and 'ow'd I know 'ow you'd take it, sir! So I says nuffin, and the next morning asks you, sir, for leave to go on a 'oliday to young George's bung, sir, thinking I'd be safer off the spot while they was looking for the bloke, sir, and never dreaming that they'd get the wrong pig by the blinking ear——."

"Bless my soul!" repeated the Head. "I—I think I understand your motives, Taggles, though you have acted very foolishly. Very foolishly indeed. You should have told me at once what you are telling me now."

"I got to tell you now, now you got the wrong pig by the ear, sir," mumbled Taggles, "Young Master D'Arcy is a young idjit, but 'ow could a man let 'im be flogged for what a man 'ad done 'imself? Right's right, sir. And if you give me the push for blacking Mr. Monteith's eye, I got to take it, though 'ow I shall stand the missus a-jawing of me I don't know."

Dr. Holmes gazed at him.

Monteith rubbed his discoloured eye. He knew now that it was not the elegant fist of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, but the horny knuckles of Taggles, that had jolted him that eventful night. It was Taggles he had collared in the dark, and Taggles who, startled out of his ancient wits by that sudden clutch, had hit out hastily with such dire effect. Nobody had thought for a moment of Taggles—but Taggles it was! Monteith coughed.

"I hope, sir, that you will excuse Taggles," he said, "I had no idea that he was out that night, and he must have

been very startled when I collared him——.”

“Made a cove jump out of his skin, sir,” said Taggles, “Me thinking that there was a tramp about——.”

“You have acted very foolishly, Taggles,” said Dr. Holmes, “But you have certainly acted very well in coming here to tell me the facts, though so late. The boy D’Arcy placed himself under suspicion by his own folly: but I am glad—very glad indeed—to learn the truth. I am obliged to you, Taggles.”

Taggles’s “worried” face brightened.

“Then it ain’t the push, sir?” he asked, anxiously.

“No! No!”

“Orlright, then, sir,” said Taggles, in great relief, “I ain’t dared to say a word to the missus yet—you knows what wimmen is, sir, you being a married man yourself——.”

“That will do, Taggles,” said the Head, hastily, “You may leave my study.”

“Yes, sir, and thank you kindly, sir: and thank you kindly too, Mr. Monteith, and I ’ope your eye will soon be better, sir,” said Taggles. And he left the Head’s study, a relieved and happy Taggles.

The meeting exchanged glances when he was gone. There was a long silence. Dr. Holmes broke it at last.

“We know the facts now,” he said, “It was not D’Arcy—and all of us, I think, must feel glad that the flogging was not, after all, administered. In the circumstances, I hardly know how I can justly punish the boys whose conduct, rebellious as it was, has prevented an act of inadvertent injustice. My view is that all may be forgiven, if the boys return to their duty immediately, as no doubt they will be glad to do in the changed circumstances. If you agree——?”

He paused, and looked at the masters.

“Quite!” said Mr. Railton, at once.

“Undoubtedly,” said Mr. Lathom.

“Certainly,” said Mr. Linton.

And Mr. Ratcliff, last and very slowly, mumbled:

“ No doubt! No doubt.”

Dr. Holmes rose.

“ I shall speak to the boys! ” he said.

And the meeting in the Head's study broke up.

## CHAPTER XL

### HONOURS DIVIDED!

“ THE Head! ”

“ Oh! ”

“ Who cares? ” drawled Cardew.

But all faces except Cardew's were grave, as the rebels of St. Jim's looked from the windows over the tuck-shop, and beheld the stately form of their head-master approaching.

They were not going to give in. Arthur Augustus was not going to take his flogging. That was fixed and settled. But nobody, excepting perhaps Cardew, liked the idea of defying the Head in person. They had stood up against the house-masters and the prefects, and so far the Head had not appeared on the scene. Now, at last, he appeared, and Tom Merry and Co. could not help feeling uneasy as he came.

“ We're not giving in,” said Blake.

“ No fear! ”

“ Wathah not,” said Arthur Augustus, “ That is quite imposs. But pway be careful to tweek the Head with pwopah wespsect, you fellows.”

Cardew picked up a tomato.

“ I could get him fairly on the boko! ” he remarked.

“ Bai Jove! You uttah ass——! ”

“ Chuck that, you fathead! ”

"My dear men," drawled Cardew, "We've told Railton and Ratcliff where they get off! Now it's the Old Bean's turn! Give a fellow room."

Tom Merry interposed between Cardew and the window.

"Shove that tomato down his back, some of you!" he said.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Cardew hastily dropped the tomato.

Dr. Holmes, probably without the slightest suspicion that he had narrowly escaped a tomato squashing upon his majestic nose, came on with stately pace—a crowd of St. Jim's fellows watching him breathlessly from a distance, wondering what was going to happen now that the Head was taking a hand.

He halted, glanced at the dismantled tuck-shop, and then raised his glance to the faces crammed at the windows.

Tom Merry and Co. noted, with some relief, that he did not look "wrathy." Some of them wondered whether he might have learned anything from Taggles which might have had an ameliorating effect. It was an anxious moment.

"Merry!" said the Head.

"Yes, sir," said Tom, in his most respectful manner.

"I desire to speak to D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form."

"Here he is, sir!"

"Heah, sir!" said Arthur Augustus, as the crowd of juniors made room for him at the window, "Good-mornin', sir! I twust you will allow me to say——"

"I have come here to speak to you, D'Arcy——"

"Yaas, sir, but pway allow me to say that we all wegwet vewy much the pwesent state of affaihs, and we twust that you wealise that no diswespect to you is intended, sir! We——"

"Will you listen to me, D'Arcy?"

"Certainly, sir, with the gweatest wespect. I was only pointin' out——"

"Shut up, you ass!" hissed Blake.

“ Weally Blake——.”

“ Shove a sock in his mouth, somebody,” said Monty Lowther.

“ Weally, Lowthah——.”

“ I have come here to say,” went on the Head, in a deep voice, “ that certain new facts have come to my knowledge. It has now transpired, D’Arcy, that it was not you struck Monteith of the Sixth Form one night last week.”

“ Bai Jove! ”

“ By your own thoughtless folly, you placed yourself in such a position that no other conclusion could be reached——.”

“ Weally, sir——.”

“ Nevertheless, I have now learned that you were not concerned in the matter. Taggles has now apprised me of the facts. It transpires that it was Taggles who, mistaking Monteith for a tramp in the dark, struck the blow.”

“ Oh! ” gasped all the juniors together.

“ Taggles having learned of what was happening here, returned to the school to-day to inform me of the fact.”

“ Good old Taggles,” said Blake.

“ Yaas, wathah! That was feahfully decent of Taggles! ”

“ In the circumstances,” continued the Head, “ Your sentence is, of course, rescinded, D’Arcy. The flogging will not take place.” The Head paused for a moment, and then resumed, “ I may say that I am glad that it has not taken place already, in view of what is now known. The matter is now at an end.”

“ I am vewy glad to heah it, sir.”

There was another pause, during which the Head gazed at the rebels, and the rebels gazed at the Head.

“ Merry! ” said the Head, at last.

“ Yes, sir! ”

“ In the—the—the——” Dr. Holmes coughed, “ In the circumstances, and in view of the fact that D’Arcy is proved now to be innocent of what was laid to his charge, I am

disposed to overlook this outbreak of—of rebellion. On condition," added the Head, sternly, "That all the boys who have been concerned in these proceedings return immediately to their duty."

"Immediately, sir!" said Tom, at once.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"My house-masters are in agreement with me that the whole matter may be forgiven and forgotten, if order is restored at once."

"Thank you, sir! We'll come out now," said Tom.

"Very good!" said the Head.

And he turned, and paced in his most stately manner back to the School-House. The rebels looked at one another. The barring-out at St. Jim's was over.

"Bai Jove, you fellows, the Head is wathah a bwick!" remarked Arthur Augustus.

"Not a bad old lad," agreed Cardew, "I'm rather glad I didn't let him have that tomato!"

"We win," said Blake, "Or do we?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Honours divided!" he said, "Gussy doesn't get the swishing, so we win—and the barring-out is chucked, so the Head wins! Anyhow, it's all over, and the sooner we're out of this the better."

"Peace with honour!" said Figgins.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Fact is, we're well out of it," said Tom, "And after this, it will be up to you to keep Gussy on a chain at night——."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——."

"And now let's get out," said Tom.

And they got out.

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TAGGLES, once more in possession of his lodge, gazed with a somewhat morose eye at an elegant figure as it approached. Taggles had played up, at the risk of what he described variously as the push, the sack, and the long 'op. So his

conscience was clear, which was no doubt a comfort to him. But he was anticipating with much uneasiness what Mrs. Taggles was likely to say when she came back and beheld the havoc in the tuck-shop. Taggles looked pessimistic : and his pessimism did not seem much relieved by the sight of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's smiling and benignant countenance. He eyed him morosely.

" Taggles, deah boy," began Arthur Augustus.

" Ho! " said Taggles.

" It was fwightfully decent of you, Taggles, to weigh in as you did," said Arthur Augustus, " I wegard you as havin' played the game, Taggles."

" Ho! " said Taggles.

" And I should vewy much like to weward you with a tip, Taggles."

Taggles looked a little less pessimistic.

" You're very good, sir," he said.

" Not at all, Taggles," said Arthur Augustus, benevolently, " I wegard you as havin' played up vewy decently indeed, and if evah a portah deserved a weally good tip, I considah that you do, Taggles."

" Very kind of you, sir," said Taggles.

" I was thinkin' of makin' it a pound, Taggles."

" Thank you kindly, sir."

" Only," added Arthur Augustus, regretfully, " I have contwibuted all my cash towards payin' for the damage at the tuck-shop, so I shall not be able to do so. Othahwise, it would have been a weal pleasuah, Taggles."

And Arthur Augustus walked gracefully away : Taggles gazing after him, as he went, with the most expressive of expressions on his gnarled countenance. Just at that moment, perhaps, Taggles rather wished that Arthur Augustus had had the swishing from which he had been saved by Tom Merry and Co's Barring-Out!



