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LONG COMPLETE TALE

GORDON GAY'S NEW PART

BY DELICED HOWARD



THE SCHOOLBOY ACTORS' MAKE-UP.

FOR THE "EMPIRE LIBRARY" NEXT WEEK: "GORDON GAY'S
NEW CHUMS."

THE EMPIRE LIBRARY

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GORDON GAY'S NEW PART

A splendid, long, complete tale of
Rylcombe Grammar School.

CHAPTER I.

A Solemn Discussion.

"NOW, the question is, what are we going to do?"
It was Frank Monk, junior captain of Rylcombe Grammar School, who spoke. The earnestness of his tone and the serious faces of Lane and Carboy, his chums, who formed his audience, showed that the famous Co. of Study No. 1 were face to face with a critical situation.
"Ah, that's the question, Monkey," said Carboy, shaking his head wisely, and looking extremely profound. "That's just it!"

Lane, ever practical, gave a short.
"Of course that's it, Carboy, you ass!" he said briskly.

"That's what Monk said. Now, my idea is this—"
"Hold on a minute!" interrupted Monk. "Not so fast, Lane, old man! Let's see where we stand first. Here's—"

"We aren't standing at all at present—we're sitting!" murmured Lane. But Frank Monk took no notice of the frivolous interruption.

"Here's young Gordon Gay, come from some outlandish place—the Fiji Islands, or somewhere—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"And before he's been here a month he's jolly nearly bossing the show!"

And Frank Monk paused dramatically to let this astounding fact sink into the minds of his two listeners.

"Hear, hear!" said Carboy.

"That's so!" said Lane.

"Blessed if he won't want to be Form captain in another fortnight if something isn't done!" continued Monk heatedly.

"Ha, ha!"

"Looks like it!"

Frank Monk warmed to his subject.
"Though there were only three of them in the cosy little study, and Monk had convened the 'confab' specially 'to talk matters quietly over,' in his own words, he now raised his voice almost to a shout, in the depth of his feeling.

"Look at Gay's theatrical company!" he went on. "He's had the fearful nerve to start a company on his own, without regard to us, and the next thing we hear is that the chucky bouncer has actually got my cousin, Miss Phil, and her friend, Miss Vera, in it!"

"The nerve!" exclaimed Carboy.

"Awwful!" agreed Lane.
"Blessed if he doesn't go and have a performance before the whole school, then," continued Monk, now fairly wound up; "and, of course, with Miss Phil and Miss Vera in it, it

BY
PROSPER
HOWARD

was a howling success! Gentlemen, I ask you—I mean, what do you think of that, chaps?"

"Rotten!" said Carboy sympathetically.

"Rotten!" agreed Lane, with a slight grin.

"And Miss Phil's my cousin, remember—not Gay's, but mine!" said Monk indignantly. "Gay had not even known her for more than five minutes—or Miss Vera either—when he asked her to join his blessed company!"

"Like his blessed cheek!"

"Rotten!"

"Well, what are we to do about it?" exclaimed Monk, looking round with an air of inquiry. "Because we jolly well must do something if we're going to be head junior study in this school any longer!"

"Hear, hear!"

"You're right, Monkey!"

"We must do something, then. But what?"

"Bump him!" suggested Carboy laconically.

Frank Monk hesitated.

"Of course, we could do that, but—"

"Yes, there is that, but—" agreed Carboy instantly.

"You mean that that is rather a crude way of doing it?"

said Lane keenly. "It would look as if we were rather feeble

—in whatever, of course, I mean—eh?"

"That's it!"

"Exactly!"

"Besides, we—we"—Monk looked rather ashamed, as if he were about to make a confession of weakness—"we can't help liking the young huggar, cheeky bouncer though he is, can we?"

Lane and Carboy turned rather red, and muttered "That's so!" in assent.

"Well, then, you see, we've got to think of some wheeze—something really good—to show the Form that we're still top dogs, and mean to stay so!" finished Monk.

"That's right!" muttered Carboy.

"Well," said Lane, "I've already said that I've got an idea, so if Monk's quite finished—'revising the situation,' as the newspapers say, perhaps he'll shut up a bit, and let me expound."

"Let's have it, then!" growled Monk.

"Out with it!" murmured Carboy.

Thus adjured, Lane cleared his throat and proceeded:

"Well, my idea is this, you chaps. Gordon Gay scored a triumph with his blessed pantomime, didn't he?"

"Of course he did!" exclaimed Monk impatiently. "Get on!"

"Right! Well, then, why shouldn't we get up a play on our own, and not let him into it at all? We can have something better—more classy—than a blessed pantomime! What do you say?"

There was a moment's tense silence, which was broken at last by a distinct snarl from Monk.

"Well, if that's all your precious idea, Lane, all I can say is it's a blessed rotten one!" said the leader of Study No. 1 dispassionately.

"Simply a crib of young Gay's wheeze!" roared Carboy.

Lane surveyed his chums wrathfully.

"Well, you are a pair of asses, I must say!" he said, with feeling. "Blessed if I'll tell you any more good wheezes!"

"Good wheeze!" echoed Monk. "Why, you lunatic, it's an absolutely rotten wheeze!"

"What do you mean, you ass?" demanded Lane wrathfully.

"Why, you cuckoo, what made Gay's pantomime such a success! Simply Miss Phill and Miss Vera being in it, of course! And now they're going they won't be able to help us. We should mess the thing up without them, of course!"

"Rather!" murmured Carboy.

"I don't see that at all!" cried Lane. "That's just it! Everybody knows how the girls helped Gordon Gay. It's up to us to get up a successful play without the girls, or Gordon Gay either! That's what I say!"

Frank Monk sat upright in his chair.

He began to think.

"But could we do it without the girls?" he said slowly and doubtfully.

"Ah, that's the question!" said Carboy solemnly.

"We must!" exclaimed Lane excitedly. "It's up to us to do something to show the Form we're cock study!"

"True enough! But—but—"

"Oh, rats to 'buts,' Monkey! Let's do it! We can lath, set, & batten, and Carboy will make up into a ripping girl!"

"What do you mean, you ass?" demanded Carboy.

Monk and Lane grinned.

"Why, your aristocratic features would make up into quite a decent looking girl," said Lane. "We should have to have a girl in almost any piece we did, too."

"You're like a girl, you know, without any make-up," explained Monk kindly.

Carboy glared.

"Why, you ass—"

THE EMPIRE LIBRARY—No. 2

For the
"Empire"

Next Week:

"GORDON GAY'S NEW CHUMS."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You carking idiots—"

"He, he, he!"

"You grinning lunatics—"

"Ha, ha, he!"

Carboy gave it up, and Monk and Lane, after some time, managed to stop chucking.

Carboy was in high dudgeon, but good humour was restored between Lane and Monk, and the latter was able to look upon the proposal of the former in a more favourable light.

The matter was discussed from every possible point of view, Lane arguing most eloquently in favour of his idea.

Lane was one of those fellows who are sometimes found who can do anything almost.

A good athlete, a good footballer and cricketer, he was also top-notch at the Fourth in German and French, and Latin prose seemed to have no terror for him.

He was also musical, and could, as his chums knew, hold his own with most amateur actors.

In any affair such as that which he now proposed, therefore, he would be a tower of strength, and the knowledge of this gave his chums confidence.

After half an hour's further arguing Lane won a complete victory.

Monk and Carboy were convinced of the possibilities of the scheme, and, once convinced, entered into it as enthusiastically as the proposer himself.

"Well, do it!" cried Monk excitedly, just as the bell summoned the Grammar School into the hall for dinner. "We'll do it, and, by gum, we'll make a jolly big success, too! But, above all things, don't let Gay into this!"

"Rather not!" said Carboy. "It's time we did something to show that it isn't necessary for that cheeky young villain to be in everything that goes on in the Fourth!"

"Hear, hear!"

And Monk & Co. trooped into dinner with the rest of the Form, full of excitement at their scheme, but saying nothing about it as yet to their Form-fellows.

CHAPTER 2.

The New Governees.

"FINISHED yet?"

Frank Monk turned to Carboy, who was sitting on his left at the long Fourth-Form dinner-table, and then repeated the question to Lane, who was on his right.

"I think I have," replied Lane, looking down the table to see if he had missed anything.

"Come on, then."

And Monk & Co. pushed their chairs back, and rose to their feet. There was nothing to detain them longer, for their Form-master had left the table a moment or two before, and as soon as Monk & Co. rose, there was a general rush to the door.

"What shall we do, chaps?" said Lane, as the three juniors left Hall. "Go and have some putting into goal!"

Monk stared at his study-mate in amazement.

"Don't be an ass, Lane!"

"What d'you—"

"Don't be a fathead!"

"Look here, unless you want—"

"Shouldn't think you're off your rocker suggesting football, when we've got to fix up this theatrical wheeze properly," interrupted the Fourth-form leader.

"Fix it up!" said Lane, raising his voice. "Why, what do you mean! Aren't you captain? Can't you fix up a little thing like that? Can't you—"

Frank Monk grinned.

"If we're going to take a lead on young Gordon Gay, we must all put our shoulders to the wheel!"

Lane went red in the face, and was just about to roar out some retort to Monk's little reproach when all three stopped suddenly as two girls came out of the head-master's study room twenty yards ahead of them.

The girls' faces were beaming with smiles, which brightened—if possible—when they caught sight of Monk & Co.

"My cousin!" murmured Frank Monk.

"Yes, it's Miss Phyllis!" replied Lane.

"And Miss Vera!" added Carboy.

For a moment or two the three juniors remained standing as they had posed up, but as the two girls advanced toward them, Monk & Co. gradually broke into broad grins, and they raised their caps simultaneously.

"Hallo, Frank!" said Miss Phyllis Monk, holding out her hand. "I've got some ripping news—at least, Vera and I think it's good news."

Frank Monk smiled at his pretty cousin.

"What is it, Phil?" he said. "Have you been to ask the doctor to let us have a half, or something?"

"N-no. Certainly not. It's something much better than that."

Miss Vera Stanhope, the pretty Lancashire girl and Phyllis Monk's school friend, nodded her head in agreement.

"We haven't got to go back to-day," she said quickly.

"You're goin' to stay at the school longer?"

"Yes."

"Hurrah!"

The three juniors wared their eyes in the air excitedly, but the next moment the Fourth-Form leader let his arm fall to his side.

Frank Monk had suddenly recollected that they had decided not to have the two girls in their cast for the theatricals, and his convayed his thoughts very quickly as he stared at Lane and Carboy.

Now that Miss Phyllis and Miss Vera were not going home, should they confide the great secret to their girl chums, and solicit their help in the cast?

"Aren't you glad we're stopping?" said Miss Vera, nothing the sudden change in Frank Monk & Co.'s behaviour.

"Because if you aren't we don't mind!"

"Of course we're glad, Miss Phyllis!" replied Carboy quickly.

"Then why are you all three looking so miserable?"

"W-we're not!" faltered Frank Monk.

"I think you are—don't you, Vera?"

The Lancashire girl nodded her head in agreement, and Monk & Co. stared at one another sheepishly.

"Shall I ask them, chap?" muttered Frank Monk.

"Yes, rather, instead!"

The two girls coughed to remind the juniors of their presence, and this little hint made Frank Monk go crimson in the face.

"I—I'm awfully sorry, Phil," he faltered, "but we've got a—a wheeze on, and we want you and Miss Vera to help us if you will."

The two girls smiled, and Frank Monk continued:

"We thought it would be a good idea to have another theatrical company, you know, so—"

"But Gordon Gay has only just had one!" interrupted Miss Phil.

Frank Monk stared at his two lieutenants with a frown on his handsome face.

"Y-yes," he said, "we know that; and as it was such a howling success, I—or—I mean, we thought it would be a good leg up for the Fourth Form if we repeated it on a better scale, you know."

"But Gordon Gay's pantomime went off splendidly!"

"Yes; didn't it?" assented Frank Monk. "You and Miss Vera were absolutely ripping!"

"And so was Gordon Gay," added Miss Vera.

"Y-yes; wasn't he?" faltered the three juniors, in halting chorus.

"What play are you thinking of doing, Frank?" said Miss Phil, after a pause. "Is it going to be another pantomime?"

"We haven't quite fixed it up yet," replied the leader of the Fourth, "but if you two will come along to Study No. 1, you might help with it."

"But you will soon have to go into class, won't you?" Frank Monk looked at his watch.

"We've got three quarters of an hour yet," he said.

"Come along, then," laughed Miss Phil. "If it will be a 'log-up,' as you call it, for the Fourth, I should love to help you!"

The three juniors grinned at one another with relief.

"That's ripping of you!" they said.

The two girls fell into step by the side of the juniors, and they soon gained Study No. 1.

Miss Phyllis Monk and Miss Vera Stanhope entered the study, and Frank Monk & Co. followed them.

"Chuck over that cushion, Carboy!"

"What?"

"There it is," muttered Frank Monk, "in the fireplace, instead!"

Carboy matched the cushion up from its strange resting-place at a moment when the two girls turned away from him, and in a second Frank Monk had given it a shake, and placed it in the wicker armchair.

"Will you sit down here, Phil?"

The two girls were made as comfortable as possible, and then the three juniors drew up three hard chairs to the table.

"Now, what are we going to perform?" said Frank Monk.

"We must have something fairly easy and funny, because we want to work it off as soon as possible."

"Hear, hear!" assented Lane and Carboy.

"Would it be too much to try and do something from a Gilbert and Sullivan opera?"

Frank Monk smiled.

"Yes, I think it would, Miss Vera," he said. "Y-you see, it's such a job to get a chap to get up and sing."

"Jolly tipping if we could, though!" murmured Carboy.

"I think the 'Misanthrope' is stunning!"

"It would be hoastly stunning if we did it, anyway!" laughed Lane.

Meanwhile Frank Monk had risen to his feet, and was now rummaging in one of the study cupboards.

"There's no grub there!" said Carboy. "We've only got that pie and a bit of condensed milk left."

"I'm not looking for grub!" growled Frank Monk, from the interior of the cupboard. "But I've got a book with a play of some description in it."

"You have!"

"Ah, here it is!" Frank Monk gave a gasp of relief as he drew a very red face from the dusty cupboard.

"What is it, Frank?" said Miss Phil, with a smile.

"It's called 'The New Government,' and I remember when I read it some time ago it made me roar with laughter."

"Good egg! Let's have a look at what kind of cast it wants," said Carboy.

The amateur actors crowded round Monk as the leader of the Fourth Form turned over the pages.

"Three ladies, anyhow!" said Lane, after a pause.

"And five chaps."

The three juniors and their girl chums looked at one another and smiled.

"Jolly good!" said Monk, at last. "But what can we do for another girl?"

"What's wrong with Horace Tadpole?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Or Snipe?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Frank Monk. "We don't want the thing to be a failure!"

"Well, who is there beside Miss Phil and Miss Vera?" said Lane.

"There's Carboy!"

"My only hat!" gasped Lane. "Carboy ought to be able to make up as a tipping girl!"

"What do you think, Miss Vera?"

The Lancashire girl smiled pleasantly.

"I—I think he would make a very good girl on the stage," she said. "But don't you think Gordon Gay would—"

"Now there's the chaps to pick!" interrupted Frank Monk sharply. "Who shall we have besides Lane and myself?"

"There's Tadpole!" said Carboy.

"And Gor—"

"And Carpenter!" added Lane, drawing Miss Phil's voice, as he saw she was about to suggest Gordon Gay.

"O'Donnell will not do the final."

Frank Monk jotted down the names as they were suggested, and the three juniors of Study No. 1 looked at one another anxiously, as they sought to avoid any mention of Gordon Gay's name.

"But aren't you going to have that nice Austral—"

"Bang! Bang!"

A violent knock on the door of Study No. 1 interrupted Miss Phil's remark, and the three juniors gave a gasp of relief.

"Come in!" shouted Lane.

The door slowly opened, and a huge, light-covered book gradually showed itself.

"It's Tadpole!" said Frank Monk.

"And his sketch book!" added Carboy, with a laugh.

Tadpole, Gordon Gay's study companion in Study No. 13, entered the room, and blinked with surprise as he saw that Monk & Co. had visitors.

"I—I beg your pardon, Monk," he faltered, "but I only came along to ask you a favour."

"Oh, that's all right, Taddy!" laughed the leader of the Fourth. "What is it?"

Horace Tadpole placed the massive sketch-book down very carefully on the table, and nodded politely to the two girls.

"I only want to ask you to allow me to finish off my sketch here. Gordon Gay says he has just invented a new make-up paint, and he is cooking a number of greases in Study No. 13."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Frank Monk. "What about it, Taddy?"

"Well, it only stands to reason that it is impossible to work in an atmosphere made objectionable by boiling greases and coloured—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I think you would understand better if you just went along to find out for yourself."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Carboy. "Not for me, thank you, Taddy!"

Miss Phil and Miss Vera rose to their feet.

"I think we had better be going over to Dr. Monk's hours now," said Miss Phil.

"Oh, don't go yet!" said the three juniors in chorus.

"I—I think we had better, don't you, Vera?"

The Lancashire girl nodded her head and smiled.

"Well, look here," said Frank Monk, after a pause.

"We ought to fix up something about rehearsals, you know."

"Rehearsals!" said Tadpole, blinking with surprise.

"Y-yes, Taddy, I want to speak to you in a minute."

brother. So that, although the younger boy is, I believe, of an age when he would ordinarily be put into a lower form, if it can be managed Dr. Monk intends to put him in the Fourth, so that he may be in a study with his brother."

"Good!" murmured Gordon Gay. "I trust, however," continued Mr. Adams pompously, "the Australian lad severely—I trust, Gay, that the eyeing the Australian lads being together will not last of you these Australian lads being together will not prevent Study No. 13 from being perfectly quiet and orderly."

Gordon Gay looked demure. "I hope not, sir!"

Mr. Adams gave a grant. In spite of Gordon Gay's hope, he seemed to have his doubts.

"You may go, Gay," was all he said, however. And Gordon Gay, in high spirits, went.

The Woodtons were due at Ryelcombe station at three o'clock in the afternoon, and Gordon Gay, of course, detoured to meet them. He meant to do the right thing by his prospective chums, and to do it well, and to that end he had in a great stock and in a great store of good things from the school shop, and prepared a feast "fit for the Head himself," as he remarked to Tadpole as he surveyed the completed arrangements in the study some half-hour after dinner.

Tadpole assented rather absent-mindedly. "Yes, indeed, Gay!" he said, taking up his huge sketch-book and edging towards the door. "And now everything is ready. I think I will walk up to Ryelcombe Wood, and sketch that big oak which was struck by lightning the other day. I'll be back by—"

But Gordon Gay jumped to the door. "None of that, Taddy. What about our rehearsal?"

"Our—our rehearsal?" he stammered.

"Yes, you—you shirker! Didn't you promise to go over your part with me after dinner to-day?"

"I—I believe I did, Gay," said Tadpole, looking very disappointed. "But I—I thought—"

"You thought I'd forgotten, and that you could slip out," said Gordon, in a tone of severe reproof. "That's it, isn't it?"

"N—not exactly, Gay. I—I thought you were going down to the station to meet—"

Gordon Gay looked at his watch. "No I am, but it's not half-past two yet, and the Woodton's train does not get in till three. I needn't start before a quarter to, so we have just time for a little rehearsal. Come on!"

Tadpole put down his sketchbook reluctantly. "Really, Gay, this fine afternoon—"

But Gordon Gay was adamant. His enthusiasm for things theatrical was tremendous, and he demanded, though he hardly got it, equal enthusiasm from the members of the theatrical company that he had started at the Grammar School, under the imposing title of "Gordon Gay's Company."

"The Merchant of Venice" was now on the tapis, and Gordon Gay was hammering away at his company to make them rehearse as often as he saw any of them.

There was one member of the company, at least, who could not escape him, and that was Tadpole.

Consequently the unfortunate Tadpole spent a good deal of his spare time going over his part with Gordon Gay.

And he had to work hard, too, to satisfy that critical enthusiast.

"Now, come on!" said Gordon Gay briskly. "We'll begin at the Trial Scene. You're Shylock and I'm Portia, and this study is supposed to be a court of justice in Venice. Let's just shove the table against the wall."

Beginning to look more interested, for the Australian lad's enthusiasm was always infectious, Tadpole assisted in shifting the table.

"Now, that's the bench, or whatever it's called, where we Duke of Venice sits to judge," explained Gordon Gay. Tadpole blinked at the table.

"I understand, Gay."

"Now, come on! You'd better take the book, Taddy, but don't read your own part more than you can help. You ought to know it, you know!"

Tadpole looked injured.

"Really, Gay!" he remonstrated. "Consider the length of it!"

"Rats!" said Gordon unfeelingly. "What about mine? It's nearly as long, and I know it by heart."

"Yes, but that's different. It stands to reason that—"

"More rats!" interrupted Gordon Gay, rather rudely.

"Get on with it, Taddy!"

Thus adjured, Tadpole began, he and the Australian junior reading the other parts between them, and reciting

the parts of the Jew and Portia as far as possible from memory.

"Good!" exclaimed Gordon Gay, as Tadpole, who had now quite caught his study-mate's enthusiasm, brought Shylock's first long speech in the Trial Scene to a conclusion with a flourish. "Jolly good, Taddy! Blessed if anybody'll know you're really a jolly amateur artist if you say it like that!"

"Really, Gay!" said Tadpole, looking offended. "I shall refuse to go on with the rehearsal if you are going to make personal remarks."

Gordon Gay grinned. "Oh, rats!" he said cheerfully. "Get on!"

Tadpole blinked indignantly for a moment, then, as Gordon Gay did not take the slightest notice, he got on.

He spat out away, quite losing himself in the interest of his part, and Gordon Gay grinned with delight as he watched the quaint figure of the amateur artist as he walked up and down the study, blinking and gesticulating.

Portia did not join in until the act was half through, and Gordon Gay awaited his cue impatiently.

"Give me your hand. Come you from old Bellario?" read Tadpole, at length. And Gordon Gay's turn came at last.

"I did, my lord."

The two-part rehearsal then went on with a swing. Tadpole and Gordon Gay both forgot all else but the lines of the wonderful play. The memory of the old oak he had been so anxious to sketch faded from Tadpole's mind, and Gordon Gay, for his part, never gave a thought to the two "new chums" from far Australia, whom he intended to meet.

Dang, dang, dang!

The big clock in its tower on the Grammar School struck three, but the musical chimps passed unheeded by the enthusiastic rehearsers.

Gordon Gay's enthusiasm reached a climax as he began the famous speech of Portia's:

"The quality of mercy is not strained;
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath."

Gordon was a born actor, and for a boy his elocution was wonderful. He gloried in his part, and for the time being was so wrapped up in it that he was oblivious to all else.

He and Tadpole, with flushed faces, carried the famous Trial Scene through to the end. Gordon Gay had just uttered Portia's final words:

"Well, peace be with you!"

when the school clock chimed out the quarter past the hour.

Dang!

This time Gordon Gay caught the sound. He stared at Tadpole for a moment in horror.

"Why, what's that striking?" he gasped. "It—it can't be—"

Tadpole gazed back at him, not daring to suggest an answer to his question.

"Why, my only hat, it is!" shouted Gordon Gay, snatching out his watch. "My only aunt, it's a quarter-past three!"

"A—a quarter-past three!" repeated Tadpole stupidly.

"Really, Gay, that is absurd!"

"I tell you it is, see! Look there!" exclaimed Gordon excitedly, showing his watch under Tadpole's nose.

Tadpole blinked at the watch incredulously.

"It stands to reason, Gay, that your watch must be wrong."

"You—you dummy! It isn't! It's exactly right. Besides, didn't you hear the school clock strike?"

"I—I certainly heard something."

"My only Panama hat! What about those two Australian chaps? And nobody to meet them!"

"Good gracious, yes!" said Tadpole absently. "But what annoys me is that I shall hardly have time to make a complete sketch of that oak now. However, there's that old tree in the playground I want to do again, so—"

"Oh, rats to that!" exclaimed Gordon Gay excitedly. "I'm off to meet those two Chirstalks!"

And seizing his cap, he bolted from the room, followed by Tadpole, who stayed only to clutch his precious sketch-book, and tuck it under his arm.

The quad was absolutely deserted when Gordon Gay dashed into it.

Ryelcombe Grammar School, to a man, was departing stiff on the playing-fields or wandering over the countryside in long rank files.

From the football fields, where ordinarily Gordon Gay would have found himself at this time, came the sounds of referees' whistles and faint shouts.

But Gordon Gay had no thought of football at the present moment.

He scudded across the quad, towards the school gates with an anxious face, feeling that he would like to kick himself for his forgetfulness.

"What a silly ass I am!" he muttered disgustedly.

"What a silly, fat-headed idiot!"

He was rapidly nearing the gates now.

Suddenly he gave a gasp.

"By Jove!" he muttered. "There they are!"

CHAPTER 4. The New Chums.

THE figures of two boys, wearing overcoats and coloured caps, appeared in the gateway of the Grammar School just as Gordon Gay came running up.

They looked about them with a certain air of hesitancy, and then fixed their gaze on Gordon Gay questioningly.

They were two extremely pleasant-looking fellows, apparently between fourteen and fifteen years of age.

Gordon Gay, as he ran panting up, instantly decided that he liked the look of them.

"Hallo, you chaps!" he exclaimed, smiling cheerfully, and holding out his hand to each in turn. "Here you are! I came your way up all right, I see. My name's Gordon Gay."

The two strangers exchanged glances of surprise.

Then one of them, who had fair, curly hair and merry, blue eyes, winked slightly.

Whereat the one with the dark-brown hair and ruddy complexion winked back comprehendingly.

Each shook the proffered hand of Gordon Gay solemnly.

"How do you do?" said the fair-haired stranger. "So you expected us?"

"Rather!" exclaimed Gordon Gay, who was in such a state of excitement and flurry that he had failed to notice the exchange of winks between the two newcomers. "I should have met you at the station if—if"—he blushed slightly, and hesitated—"if I had not mistaken the time, you know?"

"Oh!" said the curly-haired stranger. "I see!"

And another significant glance was exchanged with him of the brown hair.

"Yes, rather!" Gordon Gay rattled on. "But come on in, and I will show you round. You've left your luggage at the station, of course? I'm an Australian, too, you know."

"Are you really?" said the curly-haired stranger, looking a little startled. "Who'd have thought it? I—I mean—By Jove! Fancy that!"

Gordon Gay glanced at the speaker in a slightly puzzled way for a moment. But his glance was returned so gravely that any suspicions he had were at once allayed.

"Yes," he went on, "and you are going to share the study with me, you know. We shall have to form a Cornstalk Co., of course."

"Of course!" assented both the strangers.

Gordon Gay piloted his new chums across the quad. Except for the distant figure of Tadpole, which was making for the big elm-tree in the far corner, the quad was absolutely deserted.

The brown-haired new-comer glanced round him curiously.

"Are there any boys at this school besides you and us?" he asked.

Gordon Gay gazed at him in dumb amazement. The stranger looked perfectly innocent.

"My—my hall!" muttered Gordon to himself. Then, aloud, he said:

"Rather! I should think so! There are about two hundred of us altogether."

"What a funny little place!" remarked the curly-haired boy, with interest.

Gordon Gay's eyes nearly started out of his head. He opened his mouth to make a suitable remark, but at the moment he decided that this was impossible.

With a gasp he subsided.

He conducted the two new-comers, who did not seem at all impressed by anything they saw, up to Study No. 13, in silence.

He threw open the door.

"Welcome to Study No. 13," he exclaimed hospitably.

The two future denizens of Study No. 13 moved into the room slowly, and gazed around them.

Gordon Gay watched them anxiously.

His was proud of Study No. 13, though that apartment was not very large for four people. The four chairs and the table which it now contained occupied practically the whole of the floor space, as a matter of fact.

Still, the little room was cosily furnished.

Gordon Gay expected that it would make an impression on the two "new chums."

Consequently the first remark of the curly-haired youth fairly staggered him.

"Is this where you keep your football things?" Gordon Gay gasped like a newly-landed fish.

"W—what?" he managed to stammer.

The curly-haired boy looked round the study with great interest. His brother seemed to be suffering from a choking kind of cough.

"Why, is this where you keep your things? It's a cupboard, isn't it?"

"A—cupboard?"

Gordon Gay began to fear that he would faint.

"Why, what's the matter?" asked the curly-haired youth, in surprise.

Gordon Gay gulped, made a great effort, and recovered himself.

But his head was in a whirl.

"This—this is the study," he said faintly.

Both the strangers looked extremely surprised.

"Oh!" said the curly one politely. "It's the study, is it? I'm sorry! I thought it was a kind of locker, you know?"

"We're beastly sorry, you know!" added the other one easily.

Gordon Gay felt dazed.

"It's—it's all right. It's a bit small, I know!"

"Oh, no, not at all!" murmured the two strangers politely.

"But all the studies are like this, you know."

The curly-haired one nodded thoughtfully.

"I see!"

Gordon Gay felt hopelessly puzzled. Somehow the two Woottons were not at all what he expected them to be.

Everything was new and strange to them, of course, he thought, but yet there was something about them that he could not understand.

"Look here, you two Woottons," he said, with an effort to break what threatened to be a long pause in the conversation. "You have not told me anything about yourselves yet. Which of you is major and which minor? Blessed if I know by the look of you!"

The two Woottons looked at one another.

"I'm the major," said the one with the curly hair. "You see, I'm—"

"Rats!" broke in the brown-haired one decisively. "I'm the major, of course!"

The curly-haired one looked at the other one expressively.

"Of course, that's rat!" he said, addressing Gordon Gay.

"I am the major. You can see I'm the older yourself, can't you?"

"Really—" began Gordon Gay, in astonishment.

But the brown-haired stranger broke in vehemently:

"I tell you I'm the major, Tom! I—I mean—"

He broke off in confusion, while his brother gave him a withering glance.

"You *ras!*" he muttered.

Gordon Gay looked helplessly from one of these amazing brothers to the other. He began to wonder whether they were not both a little wrong in the head.

"Surely you know which of you is the elder?" he said, in wonder. "Blessed if I can tell by looking at you, but Mr. Adams said one of you was much younger than the other."

The curly-haired stranger cleared his throat, at the same time darting his brother a warning look.

"Of course. I'm the major really. It was only my—er—brother's rot. I'm older than he is!"

"Only about a non—" began the other; but the curly-haired one hastened to interrupt.

"We aren't much alike, are we?" he asked hurriedly.

"No," answered Gordon slowly. "Blessed if I should have known you were brothers at all. I suppose you're Jack, then, and your brother is Harry?" he added. "What did your brother call you Tom for just now?"

"Oh, well, you see—" began the curly-haired one, looking confused.

"I—I just call him that sometimes for fun!" explained the brown-haired one hastily.

Gordon Gay looked more puzzled than ever.

He began to think that the brothers Wootton were the most extraordinary couple he had ever come across.

They seemed much harder to get on with than the lads he used to meet "down under," though they seemed decent enough fellows in their way.

However, Gordon Gay felt that he must keep the conversational ball rolling somehow.

"How is Australia getting on?" he asked cheerfully.

"Very well indeed, thank you!" answered he who claimed to be the elder brother, as if Gordon Gay had asked after the health of a relative.

Gordon looked flabbergasted at the answer, and looked up sharply as he thought he heard a subdued chuckle burst from

the brown-haired brother. But the face that met his glance was as solemn as a judge's.

"It's a ripping place, isn't it?" he said foolishly. "We've never—I mean, rather?" stammered the younger Wootton.

"Al!" assented the elder one, glancing at his brother in a way that totally puzzled Gordon Gay.

The younger Wootton looked worried for a moment, and glanced half unconsciously at the table laden with the materials for tea.

Gordon Gay saw the glance. He welcomed the idea of tea, thinking to himself that perhaps the brothers Wootton would be different and easier to get on with when their tongues had been loosened by a good tea.

"Shall we have tea at once?" he said, speaking as cheerfully as he could, though the new chums from his native country certainly were having a depressing effect on him. "Take off your things, and we'll start. There's another chap sharing this study with us, but he won't be in for ages yet, probably. He's an amateur artist, you know."

The two Woottons murmured "Oh, indeed?" politely, on hearing it is interesting piece of intelligence.

They took off their caps and removed their coats, revealing themselves as dressed in neat Eton suits.

Gordon Gay eyed the caps, which were evidently some school colours, with interest and surprise.

"Your last school colours?" he asked.

"Eton—yes; that's it!" said Wootton major, with what seemed to Gordon unaccountable hesitation.

"Seen anything sort of chaps, both of 'em?" he thought. "Was it a big school?" he asked aloud.

"Rather!" answered Wootton promptly. "Knocked this place into a cocked hat!"

Gordon Gay gasped.

"Eh? What?" he exclaimed, absolutely staggered.

Wootton II. seemed to collapse. He darted an apologetic and appealing glance at his brother, who favoured him with a glare that might have withered a statue.

"You see?" exclaimed Wootton I. wrathfully.

Gordon Gay could only stare from one brother to the other in helpless bewilderment.

"I—I—I—" stammered Wootton II.

"You cuckoo!" Wootton I. turned to Gordon Gay, with rather a forced smile. "My roving brother—"

There was a distinct snort from Wootton II., but Wootton I. affected not to notice it.

"My young brother—is so keen on Australia, you know," he explained. "Of course, this—this is a jolly good school!"

"Of—of course!" assented Wootton II. faintly.

"I see," said Gordon Gay dazedly.

He felt that his brain would give way in another few minutes.

There seemed something so extraordinary, so inexplicable, about the two "new chums" that he could not stand being in their company much longer.

A sudden idea struck him.

There was heaps for tea, he thought. He would get someone else in—Frank Monk, for choice. He owed him a tea, at least, to atone for the inhospitable way in which he had received him the night before.

Gordon Gay stepped to the door, still looking dazed.

"If you'll excuse me for a minute or two," he said to the two Woottons, who had seated themselves at the table with a businesslike air. "I'll just run along and ask another chap to join us at tea!"

Wootton I. looked at the well-spread table doubtfully.

"Seems a pity to ask anyone else, doesn't it?" he suggested.

"I should have thought so," said Wootton II. thoughtfully.

But Gordon Gay was desperate.

"Oh, I—I think it will be all right!" he said weakly. "You'll like this chap—Mork, his name is. He's our Form captain. I'll just run and fetch him!"

And Gordon Gay fairly bolted out of the study and down the passage.

CHAPTER 5.

The Impostors.

LEFT alone in Study No. 13, when Gordon Gay dashed off in search of Monk, the two new chums did a surprising thing.

They burst simultaneously into a roar of laughter, which Gordon Gay, had he been in less of a hurry, must have heard as he went down the passage.

"Ha, ha, ha!" called Wootton I., fairly rolling about in his chair with mirth. "This is too rich! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" echoed Wootton II. "I thought I should have burst! Ha, ha, ha!"

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For the
"Empire" Library

Next Week: "GORDON GAY'S RIVALS!"

For a full minute the two "brothers" were helpless, speechless with merriment.

If Gordon Gay had seen them then his suspicions that they were both "off their rockers" would instantly have been converted into a certainty.

At last Wootton I. pulled himself together, and wiped the tears of mirth from his eyes.

"My—my hat!" he gasped. "This reminds me of the time I came here disguised as Jimson, Blake! It really is the limit!"

"Giddy Australians, we are!" chuckled he addressed as Blake. "Wootton major and Wootton minor! Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't think!"

The two went off into irresistible chuckles again for the space of a further half minute.

"You jolly nearly gave the show away once or twice, Blake, you see!" said the curly-haired junior, recovering himself again. "If it hadn't been for me—"

"Rats!" said Blake promptly.

"Look here, Blake—"

"Look here, Tom Merry—"

Tom Merry, for such was the curly-haired "Wootton I.'s" real name, burst into a laugh.

"Well, we'd better not argue about it," he said cheerfully. "Better start on the grub rightaway. Monkey will be in in a minute, and then it will be all up!"

"Rather!" grinned Blake. "Come on!"

And the two started on the provisions so thoughtfully set before them by Gordon Gay with hearty appetites.

Tom Merry and his chum, Jack Blake, were two of the leaders of the junior school at St. Jim's, the big public school less than a mile away from the Grammar School.

They were well known to every Grammarian of more than a term's standing, and many were the rubs which they and their schoolfellows, in perfectly friendly rivalry, had with the Grammar School juniors.

Gordon Gay, being quite a new boy at the Grammar School, had never, to his knowledge, seen them before, and had not doubted for a moment that they were the new chums from Australia.

"Fancy his not spotting our caps!" said Jack Blake, with his mouth full. "Lucky we had our footer caps on, and not the ordinary school ones."

"Yes; you're right! That was lucky," replied Tom Merry. "He'd have spotted the ordinary coll. caps at once. But I don't suppose he's ever seen our junior eleven caps before. He's a new chap this term, of course."

"Yes; and a jolly decent sort of chap, too," said Jack Blake. "I like him."

"So do I," agreed Tom Merry heartily.

The two nunched away at the Australian lad's provisions steadily.

"Rather rough on Gay, stuffing his grub like this, isn't it?" said Tom Merry thoughtfully, after a time.

"Well, yes; it seems a bit rough, certainly," admitted Jack Blake. "But the stuff's awfully good, and I'm hungry!"

"So am I!" laughed Tom Merry. "We must stand him in to a jolly good study feed after this at St. Jim's."

"Of course," assented Blake. "But we must eat the tea Gay has so kindly provided for us; it's the best part of a good jape!"

"Ha, ha! Rather!"

"Wonder where the real Cornstalks have got to!" said Blake, after a time. "Perhaps they haven't come!"

"If they have, we shall have to buzz down to the shop and lay in a feed for 'em instead of this one," said Tom Merry seriously. "Of course, we can't guzzle all the grub and leave them without anything."

"Of course not!" agreed Blake. "Pass the sausages!"

"Here you are!"

"Ham, too, please!"

"Here you are, then!"

"Thanks! Now"—Blake lifted up a glass of frothing ginger-pop—"here's health to our kind host, Mr. Gordon Gay, from Australia!"

"Good! Gordon Gay's health, the founder of the feast!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the two impostors drank their absent host's health with the greatest gusto, and then turned to again upon his provisions with hearty appetites.

CHAPTER 6.

The Mystery Cleared Up.

ON leaving Study No. 13, with his head in a whirl, Gordon Gay made straight for Frank Monk's study at the other end of the Fourth-Form passage.

He felt that if he didn't get somebody in to help entertain the two eccentric new chums from Australia his reason would give way.

He would prefer to have Frank Monk to anyone else he thought.

The only thing was, was Frank Monk in?
It seemed to Gordon Gay only too probable that he would be out on the playing fields, like everyone else.

His joy, therefore, may be imagined when he saw, while he was still only half way down the passage, none other than Frank Monk himself come out of the study, and advance along the passage to meet him.

"By Jove, Monkey," exclaimed Gordon, mightily relieved, "you're just the man I want!"

Frank Monk laughed.

"That's funny," he said, "'cos you're just the man I want, too!"

Gordon Gay started.

"You want me, Monkey?"

Monk nodded.

"What for?"

"You first," he said. "What do you want me for?"

"Well, I'll tell you," said Gordon Gay. "Look here—"

"Yes."

"You remember that those two Australian chaps, the Woottons, were coming to-day, don't you?"

Frank Monk started.

"Yes. What about them?"

"They're here!" said Gordon Gay laconically.

"I know that," said Monk, looking still more astonished.

"How—"

Gordon Gay jumped.

"W-what! Have you seen them?"

"Yes. Have you?" said Monk, in a very surprised tone.

Gordon Gay grinned.

"Have I? I should just think so! That's what I was coming down to your study about!"

Frank Monk looked puzzled.

"Well, that's funny!" he said. "I didn't know you knew."

Gordon Gay stared.

"Knew what?"

"Why, that the Woottons had come!"

"Didn't know that the Woottons had come!" shouted Gordon Gay. "Why, you ass, they're in my study!"

"What!" yelled Frank Monk, his eyes bulging half out of his head.

"They're in my study, I tell you!" shouted Gordon Gay.

"In your study?" howled Frank Monk. "Why, you fat-head, they're in my study!"

Gordon Gay stood as if petrified.

One of them must be mad, he thought dully, and it must be Monk, because he—Gordon—had only just this minute left the Woottons in his study.

"In your study!" he said faintly. "Oh, come off it, you know! I've just left them in mine!"

"And I've just left them in mine," hooted Monk.

"Oh, rats!"

"What do you mean?"

"What do you mean, you mean!"

The two stared at one another helplessly for a full minute, both of them too amazed for words.

"My—my hat!" said Monk, at last, with conviction.

"One of us is dotty, that's certain."

"Right off his rocker!" muttered Gordon Gay.

There was another pause, and then Frank Monk pulled himself together.

"Well, we'll see," he muttered rosdutely. "Come on! And if the two young Woottons aren't in my study you can put me in a mad house!"

"And if they are," said Gordon Gay firmly, "you can jam me in one!"

Frank Monk led the way to the door of his study, hesitated a moment, as if dreading to take the step, and then flung it open.

There were four juniors in the study, Gordon Gay saw, and they all looked up, startled, as the door was opened so unceremoniously.

Two of the juniors were Lana and Carboy, Frank Monk's study mates, and the other two, a boy about fifteen apparently, and one, very like him, but some two years younger, were strangers to Gordon Gay.

Frank Monk turned to Gordon Gay gravely.

"Gay," he said, "let me introduce you to Jack Wootton—Jack Wootton, Gordon Gay."

The elder of the strangers, who had both been looking rather puzzled, came forward with a smile on his frank, pleasant and sunburnt face, and proffered his hand to Gordon Gay, who took it like one in a dream.

"Gordon Gay—Harry Wootton," went on Monk, in the same expressionless voice. "Harry Wootton—Gordon Gay."

The younger of the two strangers came forward in his turn, and took Gordon Gay's hand.

"Glad to meet you!" he said, with a smile on his flushed, rather reckless, but open face. "Come from 'down under' ion, don't you?"

"Yes!" said Gordon Gay mechanically.

"Now, come along, and see my Woottons," he said, turning to Monk.

"Excuse me," said Monk, hurriedly to the strangers, and he and Gordon hurried down the passage together.

Both were terribly puzzled, especially Gordon Gay. The two Woottons in his study were certainly not the same as those in Frank Monk's study. All the same, Gordon refused to consider the possibility of their being anyone else.

He threw open the door of Study No. 13 with a bang which caused the two feasters within to spring to their feet.

"There!" he said defiantly. "Who are those chaps, if they're not the Woottons, Monk?"

Frank Monk took one look at the occupants of the study. He gave a yell.

"Tom Merry!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blake!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you bounders!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gordon Gay stood as if paralysed, while Monk joined the two imposters in peal after peal of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha! Ha, ha!"

Then suddenly the explanation dawned upon Gordon Gay. He saw it all.

And what could he do, but join in the laughter of the others!

The yells of mirth brought Lane, and Carboy, and the two real Woottons down the passage to see what was happening, and when the others could control their mirth sufficiently to explain, the yells broke out afresh.

"Blessed if we don't lump you for your nerve!" gasped Monk, when he felt better about five minutes later. "Of all the cheek!"

"Rather!" put in Lane. "Let's bump 'em!"

"Good egg!" said Carboy heartily.

But the sentence, just though it undoubtedly would have been, was not carried out.

Tom Merry and Blake calmly announced that it was "pax," though that would scarcely have protected them from assault had the Grammarians been so inclined.

The Grammararians, however, were generous, and pax it was.

Frank Monk had a big feed prepared in his study, to which he was on his way to invite Gordon Gay at the time of their meeting in the passage, and a general adjournment was made to the study.

The remnants, of which there was a considerable quantity, of the interrupted feast in Gordon Gay's study were taken along to Monk's quarters as well, and it was a jolly party that sat down to the combined feast.

"We thought you had forgotten about meeting the Cornstalks," explained Frank Monk to Gordon Gay, as he wrestled with a cold chicken. "And we thought it would be one to us to meet them ourselves. And a jolly good job, too, that we did!"

"It was!" Gordon Gay agreed. "I was so busy rehearsing with Taddy that I forgot all about the time. And when I saw these bounders at the gates, of course I thought they were the two Cornstalks."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a tap at the door, and the next minute the long nose of Tadpole was put round the door.

"Come in!" shouted Monk hospitably. "There's plenty of room."

This was not strictly accurate, but Tadpole was squeezed in, after being duly introduced to the two Woottons.

He did not, of course, see anything funny in the story, which was related to him by many tongues at once. But that did not damp the merriment of the party, but rather increased it, and the feast proceeded gayly.

"Pass the sausages, please!"

"Here you are!"

"Ham this way!"

"Right-oh!"

CHAPTER 7.

The Feed in Study No. 1.

THE scene was an unanimated one, and the two new Australian juniors already felt quite "at home!"

Gordon Gay had Jack Wootton on his right, and Tom Merry on his left, and Gordon Gay had an eager listener in the lad from "down under"

"I've got a ripping theatrical company!" said Gordon Gay. "And—"

"Pass the sardines, Gay!"
"Of course you'll join in now you're in Study No. 13!"
Jack Woolton munched away at the sausage he was eating, and nodded his head eagerly.

"M-m-m-m, y-yes, rather!" he mumbled.
"Pass the sardines, Gay, please!"
Horace Tadpole raised his voice, as for the second time he asked Gordon Gay to pass the sardines; but the Australian junior was far too engrossed in his subject to hear him.
"Good egg!" he said enthusiastically. "I'm jolly glad you're keen on acting, Woolton. We've done Cinderella, and—"

"Pass the sardines, Gay, if you please."
"Frank Monk's company did 'The New Governors,' continuing Gordon Gay, "but I japed them, and took the leading part instead of Lane."

Tadpole blinked across the table in amazement.
"Really, Gay!" he said. "I don't want to ask you to pass the sardines again."

Gordon Gay looked up from his plate.
"Hallo, what's that, Taddy?"
"I say, I don't want to ask you to pass the sardines again."

"Right ho, dummy! Woolton and I'll be able to finish 'em."

"Of course it stands to reason that if you've forgotten your manners to such an extent as that, Gay, I must—"
"What's the matter, you duffer?" interrupted Gordon Gay, in surprise.

Horace Tadpole's face went crimson, and he blinked stupidly at the juniors as the company in general ceased their conversation and stared at him.

"I—I—that is, I asked you to pass the sardines, Gay," he faltered, "and you did not take any notice." Under the circumstances it only stands to reason that—"
"You father!" roared Gordon Gay. "You said you didn't want to ask for the sardines again."

Frank Monk jumped to his feet.
"Hallo!" he said excitedly. "What's that?"
"It's nothing much," laughed Gordon Gay; "only Taddy says he doesn't want to ask for the sardines again."

"Oh-h, what's wrong with 'em?"
"I—I—I—!" began Tadpole falteringly, but Frank Monk interrupted him.

"Pass the tin along, Tom Merry," he said, "and let's have a look."

The St. Jim's junior passed the sardines along to the leader of the Fourth, and Frank Monk put the half-emptied tin up to his nose.

Sniff! Sniff!
Horace Tadpole blinked along the table at his host in surprise.
"Really, I—I—I—!"

"There's all right!" interrupted Frank Monk, with some feeling. "And anybody who says they aren't is talking through his hat."
"I—I—I—I didn't mean that," faltered Tadpole. "I—I—I—"

"You have a sniff, Lancy!" interrupted Frank Monk.
The sardines were passed along to Lane, who repeated the inspection in the same manner in which his leader had done.

"Of course they're all right!" he snapped. "And anyhow we shouldn't put rotten grub on the table at an important feed like this. You have a sniff, Carboy."

The tin was passed on, and Carboy glared across ferociously at Tadpole as soon as he had taken one sniff.
"As fresh as heerings!" he growled. "Aren't they, Blake?"

Jack Blake grinned, and took the tin.
"Fresh as a daisy!" he assented. "And they're the same as we got at St. Jim's, aren't they, Merry?"

Tom Merry reached across and glanced at the tin.
"Look here," said Tadpole. "I said to Gay that I wouldn't ask him to pass the sardines again, because—"
"What up, Taddy?" roared Frank Monk.

"It was because—"
"Dry up, or I'll bump you!"
Tom Merry laughed.

"Anyhow, I'll take the liberty of helping myself to a couple," he said. "They say that the proof of the pudding is in the eating."

"That's right," said Gordon Gay. "And I'll have a couple as well."
Horace Tadpole went crimson, and Frank Monk caught his eye just as he was going to open his mouth to remonstrate with them.

"Now, shut up, Taddy!" said the leader of the Fourth. "They're quite all right, and I'll have some if there are any left."
"Coming down, Monkey!" exclaimed Gordon Gay. "I've left a couple for you."

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"Thanks!"
And as the sardine-tin was passed down the study table the conversation broke out again in a loud buzz.
Horace Tadpole brushed back his long hair angrily, and then tapped the table with his knuckles as he rose to his feet.

Tap, tap, tap!
"Hallo, Taddy!" laughed Gordon Gay. "Any more complaints?"

"No," replied Tadpole. "I have never made any complaints about the food; but I should just like to explain to you all about that little matter of the bad sard—"
"They weren't bad!" roared Frank Monk; and Horace Tadpole jumped with alarm.

"No," he said, after a pause. "I didn't mean that. I—I was somewhat annoyed with Gay when I told him I didn't want to ask for the sardines again."

"Buck up, dummy!" exclaimed Lane.
"I was annoyed with him," continued Tadpole, ignoring the interruption, "because I had requested him at least half a dozen times to pass the sardines to me, and—and as he ignored my request it only stands to reason that—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"It only stands to reason that I should—!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say it only stands to reason that I should make some cutting remark to Gay. Now I always find that sarcasm draws a fellow—"

"Get on with it!" interrupted Frank Monk. "Tom Merry and Blake will have to be going back to St. Jim's soon."

Tom Merry pulled out his watch, and looked at the time in surprise.

"My only aunt!" he said quickly. "We shall have to be getting back to the coll. at once. We'll listen to Tadpole's speech when we've a week's holiday."

"Right-ho!" laughed Jack Blake. "I'm ready, old son, but hadn't you better let Monk & Co. know what mission we came on?"

"Great Scott! I'd forgotten all about it."
"Hallo!" exclaimed Frank Monk. "What's this?"
Tom Merry grinned at the leader of the Fourth.

"Well," he replied, "we—we—that is, Blake and myself—thought it would be a good wheeze if we had a foster match with you kids; your junior team against ours; you know."

"Rather!" said Frank Monk & Co. in chorus. "We're quite ready to give you a licking."

"Give us a what?" shouted Jack Blake.
"To wipe the field with you, of course!"
"We shall see," laughed Tom Merry, as Jack Blake spluttered angrily. "And now we must fix up the date. Can you manage next Saturday?"

Frank Monk pulled out his football fixture-card, and consulted it with a frown on his brow.

"I—I'm afraid we can't on Saturday, Merry," he said. "We're playing Puhurst."
"Next Wednesday, then?"

"Can't be did!" mumbled Frank Monk. "We're fixed up on that day, too."
"Saturday week, then?"

"Myes," said Frank Monk. "The Fourth have got a match against the Fifth; but we can postpone it."
"Jolly good, then!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Shall we come over to you, or will you play at St. Jim's?"

Frank Monk & Co. looked at one another inquiringly. Should the Grammarians play away or at home? The playing-fields at St. Jim's College certainly required a lot of beating, and although Frank Monk & Co. always stood up stoutly for their own school ground, in their own minds they knew it did not quite come up to St. Jim's. And perhaps a better game might be played on their pitch.

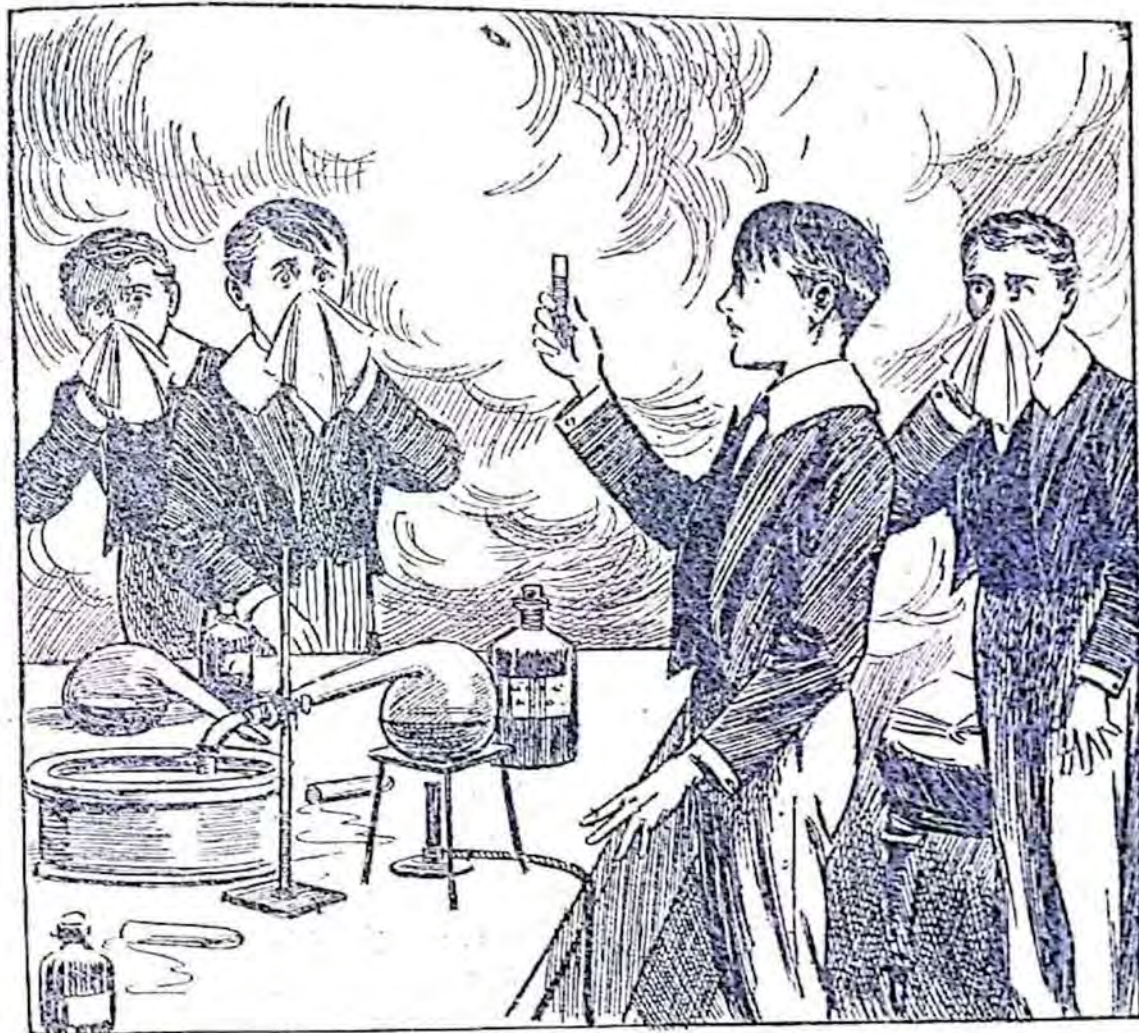
"Which shall we make it?" muttered Frank Monk.
"Ours!" whispered Carboy.
"Theirs!" mumbled Lane.

Frank Monk frowned.
"Well, look here, Tom Merry," he said, after a pause. "I'll write to you in a day or so, if I don't see you before, and then I'll let you know whether we'll visit you or not."

"Right-ho, old son!"
"You see," explained Frank Monk, "we must have a meeting before we come to a proper decision. Anyhow, it won't make much difference in the result."
"No, of course not."

"I'm glad you recognize that," put in Carboy. "You see, we've got a ripping team this season, and now the two Wooltons have come there's no doubt about the result."

Tom Merry winked at Blake.
"There isn't any doubt, is there, Blake?" he said.



"Phew!" gasped Gordon Gay, holding his nose firmly between finger and thumb as the abominable odour increased. "Duke de dube off de Habe, you howling dubbay, Dadbole!"

"Not an atom; we shall pound the goalkeeper to a pulp!"

Gordon Gay stared at Tom Merry.
"Of course," said the Australian junior seriously, "you St. Jim's kids will get licked."

"We sha'n't, ass!"

"You will!"

Gordon Gay and Tom Merry glared at one another ferociously.

"Now then, chaps," shouted Frank Monk, "make it pax now, and finish your argument when we play the match."

"All right, Monkey!" laughed Gordon Gay. "Only it wasn't an argument; I was only stating a fact."

Tom Merry ignored the Australian junior's remark, and pushed back his chair.

"Anyhow," he said, with a grin, "Blake and I have had two jolly good feeds, and you kids have treated us like lords!"

"Been jolly ripping!" assented Jack Blake, rising to his feet. "And I'm beastly sorry we've got to go."

"We'll see you safely out," laughed Frank Monk.

The juniors crowded out of Study No. 1, and looped along the corridor, and then out into the open.

"Good-bye, kids!" said Frank Monk, when they had

gained the Grammar School gates. "See you on Saturday week."

"Rather!"

"Good-bye, Tom Merry!"

"Tata, Blake!"

The Grammarians waved their hats until Tom Merry and Jack Blake had disappeared along the Bykombe Road, and then Gordon Gay turned to his new chums.

"You chaps would like to see Study No. 13 now, wouldn't you?" he said. "It's about the easiest of the Fourth-Form studies, and we ought to liven things up a bit between us."

Jack and Harry Wootton grinned as they noted the grim look on Frank Monk & Co.'s faces.

"It's struck me as being pretty slow, so far," said Harry Wootton; "especially that chap Longpole."

"Longpole?" murmured Gordon Gay.

"Yes, that chap who keeps on making speeches."

"Ha, ha! You mean Tadpole, dummy!"

Hurree Tadpole shifted the big sketch book he was carrying under his left arm, and looked at the youngest of the three Australians.

"Really, Wootton," he said, "I hope you don't intend to encourage horseplay of any description in your new quarters. If you do, it only stands to reason that my work will suffer."

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and in the short time that Gordon Gay has been at Rylcombe Grammar School he has ruined some of my drawings which without any doubt would have been hung—

"Hung?" muttered Harry Wootton. "Is there a prison near this shanty, then?"

The Fourth Form juniors looked at one another, and then concentrated their gaze on Wootton minor.

"What did you say, young Wootton?" growled Frank Monk.

"I asked Longpole if there was a prison near this shanty."

"Did you mean to call Rylcombe Grammar School a shanty?"

"Rats! Don't be a duffer!" Frank Monk's face went crimson.

"I'll lump you!" he roared, as a titler went round the small knot of juniors.

"Well, if you—" "Shut up, kid!" interrupted Jack Wootton and Gordon Gay in chorus.

"Now then, dry up, you two!" exclaimed the young Australian junior. "I want to know more about this hanging business from this chap Longpole."

"My only aunt!" muttered Frank Monk. "What a cheeky young blunder!"

Gordon Gay whispered into Jack Wootton's ear, and the next moment they each grasped Harry Wootton by an arm apiece.

"Come along, kid!" muttered Gordon Gay.

"But I want to—" "Taddy will tell you when we get to the study."

"Let go, I tell—" "Take the naughty little boy home, Gay!" laughed Frank Monk & Co.

Gordon Gay flushed.

"Come on, Harry, you duffer!"

"But—" "Ran the kid in!" interrupted Jack Wootton. "Come on!"

"Rathar!"

And a roar of laughter went up from Frank Monk & Co. as the juniors of Study No. 13 tore up to the entrance of Rylcombe Grammar School with Harry Wootton straggling violently between them.

CHAPTER 8.

Horace Tadpole's Patent Make-Up Paint.

"FINISHED yet, Gay?" Gordon Gay looked up from the impot. he was working at, and shook his head with a frown on his handsome face, as for the sixth time Harry Wootton repeated his irritating question.

Jack Wootton and his minor were seated in the two arm-chairs before a blazing fire in Study No. 13, while Gordon Gay and Horace Tadpole were scribbling away at lines which their Form-master had showered on them in the course of the afternoon's lessons.

Scratch, scratch, scratch! Gordon Gay worked away like a machine, and Harry Wootton growled aloud with impatience.

"How long will you be, Gay?" he said, a minute or two later.

"Shut up!" "I think I've got the hang of what this clown chap's got to do in 'The Merchant of Venice,' only I—" "Dry up!" growled Gordon Gay.

"Yes, I wish you would keep quiet, Wootton," added Horace Tadpole. "If you will persist in interrupting, it only stands to reason that—"

"Oh, get on with your beastly lines, then!" interrupted Wootton minor. And he settled himself down in the comfortable chair, and waited with what patience he could muster until at last Gordon Gay and Tadpole threw down their pens with a sigh of relief.

"At last!" exclaimed Gordon Gay. "Now, what's your trouble, Harry?"

"Trouble!" "Yes; what have you been growling about for the last half-hour?"

"Oh, I only wanted to tell you that I've got the hang of Launcelot Gobbo all right."

"You dummy!" "What d'you mean?"

"You've frabjous ass!" roared Gordon Gay. "Here have you been interrupting me about a hundred times, and then you only wanted to say that!"

"Yes; I think—" "Oh, dry up," interrupted Gordon Gay, "and let me go through my part in peace and quietness!"

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For the Empire Library.

Horace Tadpole turned his head from the study cupboard where Gordon Gay kept a multitude of scientific appliances, and blinked at the three juniors seated round the fireplace.

"I—I hope, you chaps won't make any row for at least half an hour," he said.

"Hallo! What's up, Taddy?"

"Nothing, Gay."

"Then what are you growling about?"

"I—I think I've discovered something, and I just want to work it out."

Gordon Gay grinned, and then settled down over his copy of "The Merchant of Venice."

"I say, Gay, the clown starts off a bit funny in the second scene in act two, doesn't he?"

"Dry up, Harry!"

"But I don't understand it!" exclaimed Harry Wootton. "It seems as though somebody wants Launcelot Gobbo to bunk, and he doesn't want to, and then he does; but his conscience— My only hat! I don't know what he doesn't want to do."

Gordon Gay looked up from his book with a grin.

"Don't you understand that you're in the service of Shylock, the usurer, and you, being honest, think you ought to run away; but you are rather inclined to funk it at first, and then just as you have made up your mind, in walks Old Gobbo, your father?"

"My only aunt!" growled the young Australian. "I suppose I shall have grasped it by the time I'm an old man!"

Gordon Gay settled down once more, and silence reigned in Study No. 13 for a few brief moments.

"G-gay!" "Hallo, Jack! What is it?"

"If I'm going to be the merchant in this play of yours, I suppose I shall be safe when Tadpole comes along with the knife for his pound of flesh?"

"Of course you will be!" laughed Gordon Gay. "You know when Peria comes into the court of justice disguised as a doctor of law, she does the same in the eye over that pound of flesh business."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Wootton minor.

"Yes; but I hope Taddy isn't— Phew!"

Jack Wootton grasped his nose firmly between finger and thumb, and turned round to look at Horace Tadpole, who was standing before a chemical retort and holding a test tube over the flame.

A brownish smoke was rising from the test tube, and it quickly filled the study with an abominable odour; but Tadpole still stood calmly before the retort.

"What's de matter, Daddole?"

Horace Tadpole looked up suddenly, and blinked through the lazy atmosphere at the three juniors, who had all grasped their noses firmly between finger and thumb.

"I think I've got it at last, Gay!" he said enthusiastically.

"What you mean, you dabbay?"

"Really, Gay, I don't know what you are talking in that absurd manner for. It only stands to reason—"

"Phew! Duke de dube off de flabe, you howling dabbay!"

The three Australian chums were gradually going redder in the face as the terrible odour increased, and, still grasping their noses firmly, they jumped to their feet.

"Duke de dube off de flabe!"

Gordon Gay dashed to the window, and flung it up violently, while Jack Wootton flew to the door, and opened it.

"What's the matter, chaps? Is there a fire?"

"You dabbay?"

"You howling fadhead!"

"You sibby ludatic!"

Horace Tadpole extinguished the flame, and poured the boiling contents of the test tube into large crucible.

"I've got it! I've got it!" he jabbered excitedly.

"You've got what?"

"Really, Gay, I do wish you would speak distinctly. During the actual process of boiling the mixture there was perhaps an undesirable odour in the study; but I can assure you it has almost entirely disappeared now." And Tadpole gave a long sniff through his nose.

Gordon Gay released the pressure on his nasal organ, and glared at Horace Tadpole.

"What have you been burning, you howling duffer!" he shouted.

"I haven't been burning anything, Gay."

"Then, what's this awful—er—awful smell?"

"Really, Gay, I understood you know something about chemistry, and I should have thought that you would have recognised the odour which arises from boiling gray

colouring."

"Boiling what?"

Next Week: "GORDON GAY'S RIVALS!"

"It is gray colouring mixed with three sorts of prepared grease. There is that finest coconut grease which I took from the make-up box, and—"

"My only stick of grease!" howled Gordon Gay.
"Yes; and I also emptied in that tin of gelatine-gum, which I understand your pater gave to you."

"You boulder!"
Horace Tadpole blinked in surprise.
"Really, Gay, I don't think you'll say that when you see what a success my patent is."

"Patent did you say, Taddy?" laughed Jack Wootton.
"Yes; it's a patent make-up paint."

Gordon Gay snorted, and opened his make-up box hurriedly.
"My grease stick!" he gasped, glaring at Tadpole.

"Yes, Gay."
"And my specially-prepared gelatine gum?"
"Yes!"

"And my stick of yellow ochre?"
"Yes, Gay; but I—"
"And that bottle of gray colouring!"

Horace Tadpole nodded his head in reply.
"And you've mixed them altogether, you frajions ass?"
"Yes, Gay, and I shall be able to prove to you in a few moments what a splendid idea I've struck on."

Gordon Gay shut his make-up box with a snap.
"Good!" he said. "And, meanwhile, we can give you a jolly good bumping for acting the giddy goat."

Tadpole stopped back, and blinked stupidly as Gordon Gay stepped forward with hands stretched out threateningly.
"Really, Gay, I—"

"You're going to be bumped!" interrupted Gordon Gay.
"Come on, kids, lend a hand!"

Jack Wootton and his minor threw themselves forward, and Horace Tadpole was hoisted into the air.
"My stick of coconut grease!" howled Gordon Gay.

"Bump him!"
"Hang!"
"Ow!"

"My gelatine gum!"
"Bump!"
"My yellow paint!"
"Bump!"

"My bottle of gray colouring!" panted Gordon Gay.
"Bump!"
"Ow! Leggo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Harry Wootton. "And now a final one for the bossily smell!"
"Yes, rather! All together!"

"Bump!"
"Ow!"

Horace Tadpole landed on the study floor with a bang, and he blinked up stupidly at the three laughing juniors.
"Dear me!" he gasped. "I shan't let you see my patent make-up mixture now. It only stands to reason that a lot of—"

"Oh, dry up, Taddy!"
Horace Tadpole scrambled to his feet as Harry Wootton reached out for the crucible which the strange concoction had been poured into.

"It's quite cool now," he said, "so let's see what happens." Tadpole forgot his bumping in a moment, and he put his finger into the crucible.

"You see," he explained, "the stuff is all ready now to be rubbed on to the actor's face. It stands to—"

"Shove some on then, dummy," interrupted Frank Monk, "and let's see the result."
"Certainly."

The three Australian juniors waited patiently, with broad grins on their faces, whilst Tadpole smeared the strange mixture over his own features before the mirror. He gave a final touch to his nose, and then turned round.

"My only hat!" gasped the chums of Study No. 13.
Tadpole's face looked bronzed, as though he had only just returned from a tropical climate, and it was very hard to tell that it was due to artificial means.

"Hippin!" muttered Gordon Gay.
Horace Tadpole blinked with satisfaction, and he smeared more of the mixture over his hands.

"You see, Gay," he said, "it's just the right colour for the bronzed complexion which is required for a chap's make-up on the stage."

"Absolutely the correct thing!" assented Gordon Gay.
"And if you fellows hadn't been so impatient, it only stands to reason it would have saved me from that savage attack which you all made upon me."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"I can assure you it is no laughing matter to be bumped in that rough style, and I feel quite ill in consequence."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"I thought I must be looking pale—er, of course, I forgot

that I had made-up; but, nevertheless, under this wonderful mixture of mine, no doubt I look pale, and—"

"Ha, ha, ha! Dry up, you duffer!" interrupted Gordon Gay, shutting down the study window, although the unpleasant colour of the looking-glasses had not by any means disappeared yet.

"In going to shove on some of this beastly stuff, Taddy!" said Harry Wootton, banging the study door to.

"Do, by all means, Wootton."
"Smear some over my dial, will you, Taddy? It'd save my hands."

"But you will—"
"Oh, go on," interrupted the young Australian—"and back up!"

Horace Tadpole smeared his hand with the strange mixture, and rubbed it well into Harry Wootton's features.
"I think that if— Hello, who is this?"

"Tap, tap, tap!"
There was a loud rapping on the study door, and Gordon Gay locked up with a jerk from the crucible of paint.

"Hello!" he shouted. "Come in, father!"
The door opened before he had finished his sentence, and Nicky O'Donnell put his head into the room.

"P-p-pshaw!" he whistled, and he drew back into the corridor like a streak of lightning.

"Hi!" shouted Gordon Gay. "Come here, Ireland!"
"Sure, an' what's happened?" came Nicky O'Donnell's muffled voice through the closed door.

"Nothing's happened, you dummy!"
"Begorra, then I'm not coming in until you've put your cheese away, entirely!"

Gordon Gay sprang across the study, and flung open the door.
"What d'you mean, Ireland!" he exclaimed, as Nicky O'Donnell seemed about to walk away from the door altogether. "We haven't got a bit of cheese here!"

"Sniff—sniff!"
"It's something funny," muttered Nicky. "Have you had any eggs in the study?"

"N-no."
"Sniff!"
"There must be a fire somewhere, then."

Gordon Gay broke into a broad grin as he suddenly comprehended the meaning of Nicky O'Donnell's strange behaviour.

"My only aunt!" he exclaimed. "I knew what you've run into! It's the beastly smell which Taddy made when he was boiling some grease in our study. I couldn't make out what you meant at first, as we've got accustomed to it now."

"Well, I don't think I'll stop, Gay, dear, under the circumstances."

"B-but I was just going to call a rehearsal for 'The Merchant of Venice.'"
"Oh!"

"Will you go and dig the chaps out, and ask them to trot along!"
Nicky O'Donnell grinned, and nodded his head.

"Sure, an' I'll drive them as far as the door, but I can't guarantee that I'll get 'em any farther."
And the Irish junior dashed off down the corridor to Study No. 2.

CHAPTER 9.

Gordon Gay's Interrupted Rehearsal.

GORDON GAY entered the study again, and stared at his three chums in amazement as they looked round from the looking-glass with their faces bronzed by Tadpole's wonderful new mixture.

"My only hat!" he gasped. "Let me shove some on, too! We won't have a dress rehearsal, but we may as well have our faces made-up!"

"Jolly good practice!" said Harry Wootton, touching up his eyebrows with a stick of paint from Gordon Gay's tin.

"Pass the mixture, Taddy!"
"Certainly, Gay; but I should just like to say that it—"
"Oh, dry up, you duffer!" interrupted Gordon Gay. "We shall have the chaps along in a minute, and then—"

The manager of the theatrical company ceased sneaking, and held up his hand for silence as a shuffling of footsteps seemed to be approaching the study door.

"Sounds like the Triple Alliance, Gay," murmured Horace Tadpole, breaking the silence.

"Yes, it is," replied the Australian quickly. "Come on! Chuck over that mixture of yours, and I'll smear my face!"

Tadpole handed over his precious crucible, and Gordon Gay clutched hold of it eagerly.

"Ta!" he exclaimed. And the next instant he had liberally bronzed his face with the strange-looking mixture. However, the Australian junior knew something about make-up cosmetics, and as he looked into the mirror he smiled with satisfaction.

The bronzed complexion suited him splendidly, and as the shuffling footsteps out in the corridor stopped suddenly, he got into line with the three juniors, and all three grinned expectantly at the study door.

"Bang, bang!"
"Come in!" roared Gordon Gay. "And don't lick the blessed door down!"
"Has it gone yet, Gay?" came Nicky O'Donnell's voice.
"What d'you mean?"
"You know; that awful—er—that—well, you know what I mean."

The four juniors stared at one another in amazement.
"What's he talking about?" whispered Jack Wootton.
"Sssh! He means the awful smell that Taddy made when he boiled that grease with the gray colouring."

"Oh!"
The study door opened, and Nicky O'Donnell's head was once more put into the room.
"That's all right, Ireland!" laughed Gordon Gay.
"Come in, and don't act the puddy goat!"

"R-but Taffy and Donaldson won't chance it."
Harry Wootton tittered, and winked at Gordon Gay as the leader of Study No. 13 turned and glared at him.
"That's all right, Gay!" laughed the young Australian.
"You cheeky blunder! Shut up, or we sha'n't be able to get on with the rehearsal if these chaps don't buck up and come in!"

Nicky O'Donnell had bobbed back into the corridor, and the three members of the Triple Alliance were now carrying on a heated argument.

"Well, I dinna ken what you think, Taffy," exclaimed Donald Donaldson, "but I will na go into the study with that awful atmosphere!"
"But what about 'The Merchant of Venice,' whatever?" replied David Morgan, excitedly.

Gordon Gay sprang across the study as he heard the Welsh junior's remark, and he flung open the door with a shout.
"That's right, Taffy! Come in, and let's get on with the rehearsal!"

"But I dinna like the atmosphere, Gay," said Donald Donaldson. "Nicky described it to us, an' that's enough for me."

Gordon Gay frowned.
"But it's all gone now, Donaldson," he said. "Come along."

The Scotch junior hesitated, and then walked slowly into the study, followed by Taffy; and Nicky O'Donnell brought up the rear, with a broad grin on his face.
"Good old Ireland!" whispered Gordon Gay, as he passed in.

Donald Donaldson and David Morgan grinned at the juniors of Study No. 13.

"Hallo! What are you laughing at?" said Horace Tadpole.
"Nothing whatever—only it strikes me that you're looking jolly healthy."

"Really, Taffy, if you're joking, it only stands to—er—I forgot! You must mean my mixture!"

"Your mixture, fathead!"
"Yes," replied Tadpole. And then he explained to the Triple Alliance the manner in which he had invented the new make-up paint.

"Jolly good, Taddy!" exclaimed Morgan enthusiastically.
"You might shove some on my face before we start the rehearsal!"

"Sure, an' I'll paste some on as well!"
"An' so will I!" added Donald Donaldson.

Gordon Gay had meanwhile shifted the table into a corner of the study, and he had piled the chairs on top of the table, so that there was plenty of room for the rehearsal to take place.

"Come on, chaps!" he said. "Buck up, and let us get on with the washing."

The three juniors from Study No. 2 had helped themselves freely from Tadpole's precious crucible, and they turned three highly-bronzed laces to the manager of the theatrical company as he appealed to them to hurry up.

"My only aunt!" laughed Gordon Gay. "It is ripping stuff! Why, you three kids look absolutely natural!"

Nicky O'Donnell bowed low.
"Sure, an' on behalf of the Triple Alliance I thank you for the flattering remark, an' I'm only sorry I can't reply in the same strain."

"That's all right, Nicky," replied Gordon Gay, with a grin; "but all get to the side of the room, and then we can proceed with the business."

Jack and Harry Wootton leaned against the wall, and one by one the rest of the juniors followed suit.

"Now, then," exclaimed Gordon Gay, consulting his copy of "The Merchant of Venice"—"the play opens with Wootton major, who is going to be Antonio, the merchant. If you all know your parts all right!"

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For the
"Empire" Library

"Yes."

"Well, get on with it, Jack," said Gordon Gay.
And Wootton major shuffled into the middle of the room. He recited his words somewhat nervously at first, but soon felt at his ease; and Gordon Gay's eyes brightened with pleasure as his new chum waxed eloquent in true professional style as he warmed to his work.

So eloquent did the Australian junior wax, indeed, that Gordon Gay and the rest of his company stared at him in some alarm as his face gradually deepened into a dark-brown complexion, instead of bronze.

"I say, Wootton," faltered Horace Tadpole; "don't get too excited over the beauteous play, you know. It only stands to—"

"Shut up, Taddy!"
Jack Wootton ignored the interruption, and threw his arms about with renewed vigour, and although Gordon Gay was pleased to see the serious manner in which Antonio was doing his part, he felt some concern for his new chum's face.

It had gone quite a dark brown now, and as Gordon Gay glanced round at the gaping juniors he was surprised to see that their faces, too, were gradually assuming a strange hue.

"I—I say, Wootton, stop a second!"
But Jack Wootton continued without a pause.
"Just dry up for a minute, there's a good chap!" repeated Gordon Gay, holding up his hand.

Jack Wootton frowned, and wiped his perspiring brow with his handkerchief, and he stared in surprise at the lines to find that the colour of his make-up had not come off.

"Hallo, this mixture of Taddy's has stuck on jolly well, chaps."

"Mixture?" gasped the juniors. "Why, we thought you were going to have a fit, or something!"

"Why?"
"Your face!" faltered Taffy. "It's all gone funny!"
"Funny!"
"Yes. It's gone a dark brown—looks like a football, in fact."

Jack Wootton sprang across the study, and peered into the looking-glass.

"Great Scott, I've gone just like you chaps!"
"What!" howled the amateur actors in chorus.

"I say, my face has gone a beastly colour, like all yours."
"R-but I haven't gone that beastly colour, have I?" muttered the juniors, looking at one another inquiringly.

And they moved mechanically to Jack Wootton's side, and glanced hastily into the mirror.

"Whew!"
"Just look!"
"Is that my face?"

The Fourth-Formers stared at one another in alarm.
"It's the gray colouring!" gasped Gordon Gay. "I bet it's the gray colouring that that woin Taddy put into the test-tube!"

"Gray-colouring!" repeated the Triple Alliance.
"Yes!"

Donaldson, Taffy, and Nicky O'Donnell glared at Horace Tadpole, as the inventor of the wonderful mixture stepped back—his own face as brown as a football.

"I—I—I say, you chaps," he faltered. "You know, it'll come off in time. In the course of a few days—"

"A few what?" roared the juniors.
"I—I say that it stands to reason that—"

"My only hat!" muttered Gordon Gay, as a sharp rattle on the door interrupted Tadpole's sentence. "Supposing—supposing it's Mr. Adams?"

"Bang! Crash! Bang!"
The caller, whoever he was, kicked his foot violently on the door, and a sigh of relief went up from the juniors in Study No. 13.

"It can't be a master," whispered Donaldson; "no chance a call, Gay."

Gordon Gay nodded his head, and his dark brown face wrinkled into a grin.

"Hallo!" he shouted. "What d'you want?"
"Oh, you are in, are you?" came Frank Monk's voice.

"Well, I've come to tell you that a practice game will start in ten minutes."

"A practice game?" shouted Gordon Gay. "But we can't turn out now, we've got a rehearsal on."

"Oh-h, who is w?"
"Triple Alliance and Study No. 13."

"Well," replied the captain of the Fourth Form, "you'll have to let the rehearsal slide now, because I want to see what sort of team I can raise to play against St. Jim's on Saturday week."

"But we're rehearsing, you dummy!"
"I don't care about that, Gay dear," laughed Frank Monk. "And if you chaps in there aren't out on the field in ten minutes' time, I shall shove some other chaps into the team."

There was a pause, and then Frank Monk's footsteps retreated down the corridor. The Triple Alliance looked at one another eagerly.

"Come on, chaps!" shouted Nicky O'Donnell. "Let's get changed!"

"But you can't, you duffer!" roared Gordon Gay desparately. "What about 'The Merchant of Venice'?"

"Oh, jump on him!"

"But you must rehearse the play, you lunatic!"

"Not before a game of footer, old son," said Nicky O'Donnell. "What about you two Cornstalkers? I suppose you play footer?"

"Rather!"

"Come on, then!" said Nicky O'Donnell, rubbing his face hard with his handkerchief. "Let's get this beastly colouring off our faces, and we can hop into our clothes in a jiffy!"

"Look here," roared Gordon Gay, "you must finish the rehearsal first!"

"Rats!"

"Footer first!"

The juniors were all rubbing their faces energetically; but they made no impression on the dark brown colouring. It seemed to have fixed itself permanently.

"Nearly five minutes gone, whatever!" gasped Taffy.

"I'll leave my face until afterwards."

"What! Play footer with your face that colour?"

"Yes; and I'll bump Tadpole afterwards!"

"Oh, really, Morgan! It only stands to reason that gray colouring, under the influence of extra warmth, would—"

"Shot up, and got into your togs for footer!"

"Rather!" shouted the juniors. "We've got another five minutes!"

Gordon Gay frowned with annoyance. His rehearsal had been spoiled by Frank Monk's untimely arrival, and it was obvious that the cast to "The Merchant of Venice" was going to play footer, to a man.

"Come on, Gay!" laughed Jack Wootton. "Get into your togs!"

The leader of Study No. 13 obeyed mechanically, and within eight minutes of Frank Monk's warning the amateur actors were trooping down to the football field.

They walked along rubbing savagely at their painted faces; but Horace Tadpole's mixture would not budge, and so they were obliged to make up their minds to receive the chaff which was bound to be hurled at them on their arrival in the pavilion.

CHAPTER 10.

The Practice Game.

FRANK MONK & Co. waited patiently for the arrival of Gordon Gay and his company of actors on the football field.

"See if they're coming, Lancy," said Frank Monk, as he extracted a football from the pavilion locker. "Their ten minutes is up now, and we don't want to hang about."

Lans and Carboy looked out of the pavilion door.

"Many only aunt, what's the giddy procession?" gasped Lans, in amazement, as he saw Gordon Gay leading the juniors of Studies No. 2 and No. 13 in the direction of the pavilion.

"Why—why, it looks as though they had got a fever of some sort. Come and have a look, Monk!"

Frank Monk sprang to the door, and peered over the shoulders of the crowd of waiting juniors.

"Ha, ha, ha! Looks ripping!"

"Don't be an ass, Monkey!" growled Gordon Gay.

"It does, though, really! Ha, ha, ha!"

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

Gordon Gay snatched off his coat.

"Come on, then!" he growled. "You don't want to stand here all day like a pack of laughing hyenas!"

The laughter quickly subsided when Frank Monk roared out that they were going to start the game, and in a moment or two all the Fourth-Formers had trooped out of the pavilion.

"Where have you two chaps been used to playing?" said Frank Monk, turning to Gordon Gay's two new chums.

"Both of us play forward," replied Jack Wootton.

"Good egg?"

"I played three quarters once, but—"

But Frank Monk had walked away.

"What did you say, Wootton?" said Tadpole.

"Nothing, forehead; but it strikes me you play footer a

little differently here to what we do in Australia."

"Oh h!"

"Yes. What's wrong with the ball—and the goal posts?"

"Nothing's wrong, you—"

Phipp! Phipp!

The referee's whistle sounded, and Horace Tadpole blinked in surprise as Jack Wootton ran on the field without waiting for him to finish his remark.

There were twenty-two juniors in all, and Frank Monk quickly divided them into two teams; and while he recruited one himself, he set Lane the task of recruiting the other.

"Now come along, kids!" shouted Lawson, the head of Ryckmbe Grammar School, who had offered to referee the game.

"Rather!" shouted the two teams. "Get on with it!"

Frank Monk had the kick-off, and he grinned at the chums of Study No. 13, who were all in the forward line in Lane's team.

Phipp!

Frank Monk winked at Carboy and Donaldson, and the two nodded knowingly in return. The next moment the leader of the Fourth-Form kicked.

Carboy was away like the wind with the ball, and then, just as it looked as though Nicky O'Donnell was going to take it from him, he kicked the ball neatly across to Frank Monk, who got command of it at once, and followed on brilliantly.

"Stop him, Wootton, you ass!" shouted Lane excitedly.

Harry Wootton's eyes sparkled keenly, and as Monk once more kicked the ball across to Carboy, the Australian junior jumped high into the air, and intercepted the pass by clutching the ball in his hands.

"Oh-h!"

A groan went up from the players; but Harry Wootton did not heed it, and he dashed off with the ball tucked comfortably under his arm.

"Go on!" roared Jack Wootton. "In you get, kid!"

The Fourth-Form juniors were flabbergasted, as also was Lawson.

The Australian junior flew like the wind, and although he was surprised that the juniors only stared at him as he rushed by, he threw himself over the goal line, and touched the leather down.

"Try!" yelled Jack Wootton. "Jolly good, kid!"

Frank Monk dashed up to Harry Wootton just as the Australian junior sprang to his feet.

"Oh, you—you lathard!" roared Frank Monk. "D'you think we're playing Rucker?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the Fourth-Form footballers.

"Shut up, chaps!" said Gordon Gay, when the laughter subsided. "It's a natural mistake that young Wootton's made, after all."

Lawson came up to the crowd of juniors with a smile on his face.

"I don't suppose you've ever played Soccer before, have you, kid?" he said, looking down at Harry Wootton's indignant face.

"Soccer?"

"Yes, Association football."

"N-no; but I've played football in Australia."

"Ha, ha! I suppose you mean Rugby?"

"Yes, football."

The perplexed juniors looked at one another, and there was a long pause.

"Well, look here," said Lawson, breaking the silence, "we must get on with the game, and you two Woottons must try and learn to play as we go on."

"Rather!"

"You must not handle the ball at all, but just play it with your feet."

Gordon Gay's new chums nodded their heads.

"Then come on!" laughed Lawson. "You must start the game again."

"Right ho!" muttered Frank Monk. "Come on, kids!"

And the practice game commenced once more. This time the Woottons were able to restrain themselves from handling the ball, and everything passed off splendidly.

Frank Monk's team won easily, by five goals to one; but nevertheless the Fourth-Form captain acknowledged that there were some "jolly good players on Lans's side," and he foresaw trouble when the time should come to select the team to play against the Fourth-Form of St. Jim's.

As for Gordon Gay and his fellow actors, they spent the best part of that evening in their study behind a locked door, and scap and hot water played a prominent part in removing the "football" colour from their smarting faces.

THE END.

(Another splendid, complete tale of Gordon Gay of the Grammar School in next week's "Empire Library," entitled "Gordon Gay's Rivals," by Professor Howard. Order your "Empire Library" in advance. Price One Halfpenny.)

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