

Splendid School Tale of Tom Merry in this Issue.

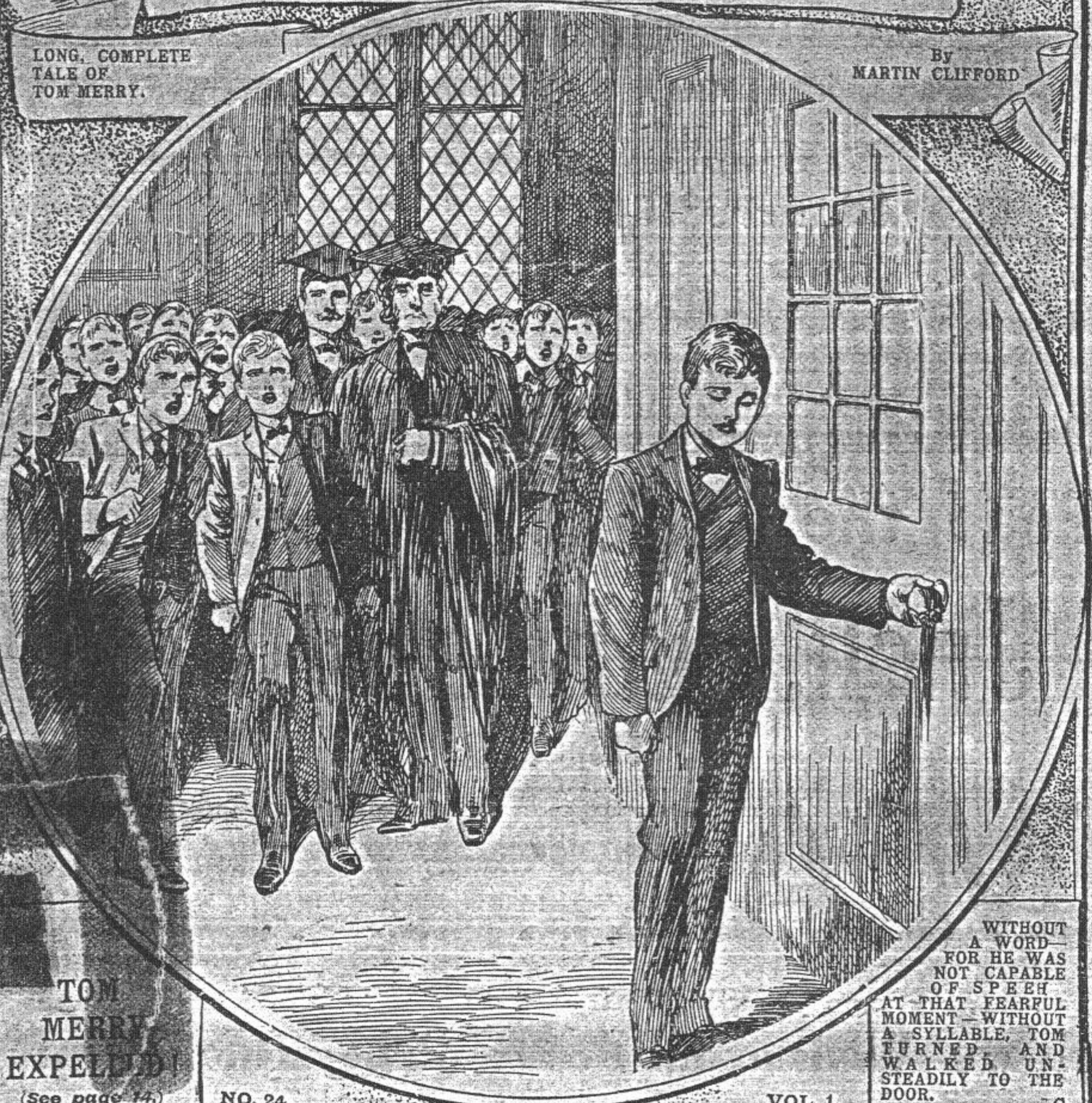
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EXPELLED FROM ST. JIM'S.

LONG, COMPLETE  
TALE OF  
TOM MERRY.

By  
MARTIN CLIFFORD



TOM  
MERRY  
EXPELLED!

(See page 14.)

NO. 24.

VOL. 1.

WITHOUT  
A WORD—  
FOR HE WAS  
NOT CAPABLE  
OF SPEECH  
AT THAT FEARFUL  
MOMENT—WITHOUT  
A SYLLABLE, TOM  
TURNED, AND  
WALKED UN-  
STEADILY TO THE  
DOOR.

G

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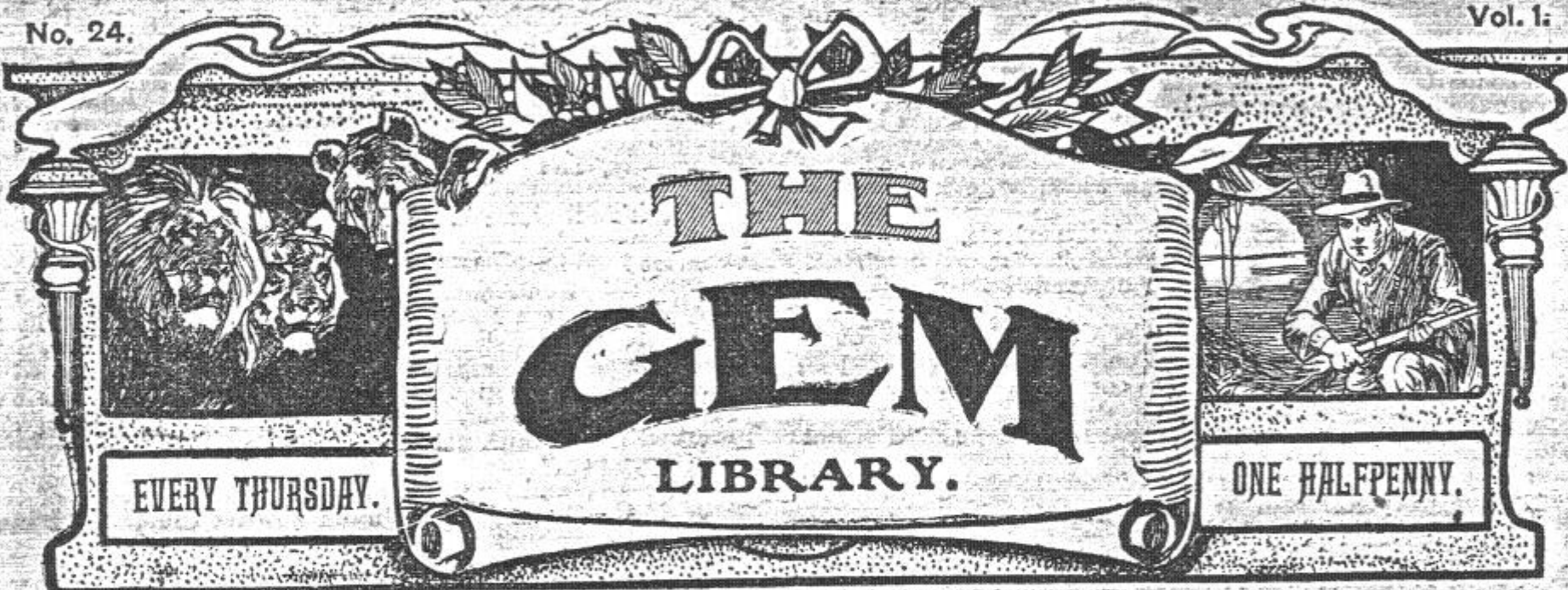
NEXT  
THURSDAY.

"TOM MERRY'S CAMP"

A COMPLETE SCHOOL  
STORY OF TOM MERRY.

No. 24.

Vol. 1.



A COMPLETE STORY FOR EVERYONE,  
AND EVERY STORY A GEM.

# EXPELLED from ST JIM'S.

A Tale  
relating the  
greatest event  
in  
TOM MERRY'S  
SCHOOLDAYS  
by  
MARTIN  
CLIFFORD.



The ruffian mumbled, and shuffled along the lines of boys, his shifty eyes seeking their faces. He stopped as he came to the Shell, and his hand rose to point to Tom Merry.

## CHAPTER 1. The Referendum.

RAP, rap! Tom Merry rapped on the desk before him with an empty inkpot, and the buzz of talk in the junior common-room in the School House at St. Jim's subsided to some extent. The common-room was pretty full. The Fourth Form, Lower and Upper, and the Shell were very strongly represented, nearly all the boys belonging to those Forms who boarded in the School House being present. A matter of unusual interest to the juniors of the School House was evidently about to be discussed, or Tom Merry would certainly never have succeeded in getting so many youngsters together indoors on that sunny summer afternoon.

It was Wednesday, a half holiday at St. Jim's, and most of the "Saints" were out on the cricket-field or the river. Through the open windows of the common-room the assembled juniors could hear the merry click of bat and ball from the pitch where Figgins & Co., of the New House, were at practice.

Rap, rap! Tom Merry brought the inkpot down upon the

desk with a concussion which endangered its existence, but fortunately the inkpot was a very solid one, and stood the strain.

"Silence!" said Manners.

"That's it," said Tom Merry. "Silence! This isn't a giddy conversation—it's a meeting of the School House Junior Cricket Club."

"Oh, get on!" said Gore. "We know you want to do all the talking. You always do."

Rap, rap!

"Gentlemen of the Shell and the Fourth Form," said Tom Merry, with a disdainful disregard of Gore's remark, "you know why we are met together—"

"Then you needn't tell us," said Gore.

"Dry up, Gore! You chatter like a blessed magpie. I think we're all here," continued Tom Merry, looking round.

"No, we're not," said Mellish. "Study No. 6 haven't turned up."

"Blow Study No. 6!" said Tom Merry. "Blake had proper notice of the meeting, and if he doesn't choose to come in time—"

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"Keep your wool on, Thomas, old son!" said a cheerful voice at the door.

Study No. 6 marched in. Jack Blake, Herries, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy were in flannels, and had evidently looked in at the meeting on their way to the cricket-field. Blake had a bat under his arm, Herries a ball in his hand, and Arthur Augustus, although he was in flannels, had an eyeglass screwed into his eye, through which he took a languid survey of the meeting.

Tom Merry looked across at the late arrivals.

"Well, you're only just in time, kids."

"Who are you calling kids?" demanded three voices in unison.

"Oh, rats! For goodness' sake don't let us row on a warm afternoon indoors," said Tom Merry. "We want to get this meeting over, and get out to cricket. Figgins & Co. have been at it ever since school."

"Well, get on with the washing," said Blake. "I'm not stopping you."

"Yes, get on!" urged Herries. "Cut it short, you know."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus.

Rap, rap!

"Everybody shut up," said Tom Merry; "especially Study No. 6! Now, gentlemen of the Shell and the Fourth Form, we have met together to choose a cricket captain for the forthcoming match with the New House."

"Hear, hear!"

"Instead of leaving the matter to the committee—"

"Hear, hear!"

"The idea is to take the views of every subscriber to the club on the question. It's agreed on all sides that the choice lies between two chaps—"

"Hear, hear!"

"One of them is Jack Blake, an individual well known to you, and rather good at cricket."

"Hear, hear!"

Blake jumped up.

"Who's rather good at cricket?" he demanded excitedly.

"What do you mean, you boulder? Rather good! I like that!"

"Well, if you like it, what are you growing about?"

"I—I— Who took your wicket first ball of the first over in a practice match, Tom Merry?"

Tom Merry appeared to reflect.

"Did anybody?" he asked innocently.

"Did anybody?" howled Blake. "I should say so! I did! And who knocked up sixty not out against the best bowling the Shell could put in the field? I did! Rather good. Gr-r-r-r!"

Rap, rap!

"Gentlemen, I stand corrected," said Tom Merry calmly.

"Blake is not rather good at cricket. Is that what you want to make out, Blake?"

"You boulder—I—"

Rap, rap!

"The other individual," said Tom Merry, continuing, "is your humble servant. The choice of cricket captain lies between Blake and myself. Now, Blake is only a kid in the Fourth—"

There was a roar from forty throats at once. For some time Tom Merry rapped in vain.

"Withdraw! Withdraw!"

"Yaas, wathah!" cried Arthur Augustus, dropping his eyeglass in his excitement. "Withdwaw! We insist upon your withdwawing that wemark, Tom Mewwy."

"I withdraw," said Tom Merry. "For goodness' sake, let's get on!"

The hubbub subsided.

"I was going to say that, Blake being in the Fourth, and myself in the Shell, I ought naturally to take the lead."

"Hear, hear!" shouted the Shell, as one man.

"Rats! Rats!" roared the Fourth Form in reply.

"But, on the other hand, it is pointed out that Blake was at St. Jim's before I came, and was at one time considered leader of the juniors of the School House."

"At one time!" exclaimed Blake. "And who's leader now, I'd like to know?"

"We won't go into that," said Tom Merry loftily. "I'm stating the facts of the case. Now, the question of who should be captain was an open one, till a certain incident that occurred the other day, after which Blake announced his intention of standing out in my favour."

"Hear, hear!" said Blake.

And there was a shout from Fourth Form and Shell together.

"Bravo, Tom!"

Tom Merry coloured. The incident he referred to was still the talk of the school. Tom Merry had risked his life in rescuing a monkey belonging to Figgins, which had perched on the clock in the tower, and then had been too scared to get out of its perilous position. Tom Merry had saved it, at imminent risk to himself, and then Blake, in

the warmth of his heart, had announced his intention of leaving the cricket captaincy to the heroic rescuer.

Rap, rap!

But the juniors still cheered. Rap—crash! Tom Merry brought down the inkpot on the desk with a force that smashed it to pieces, and the fragments flew in all directions.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake. "Whose inkpot is that, kid?"

"Oh, it's all right," said Tom Merry, "it's yours! Now gentlemen—"

"Mine? Why, you—"

"Silence! Gentlemen, I wish to state that it is not my intention to accept Blake's generous offer. I feel that he is not just to his own claims in standing out in my favour, and really the affair of Figgy's monkey has nothing to do with cricket. The committee can't settle the matter, as Blake has the casting vote, and he has voted for me, although I promised him a thick ear if he did."

"Hear, hear!"

"Therefore and thusly, I have called this meeting of the whole of the School House Junior Cricket Club, and I suggest settling the matter by a referendum."

"A what?"

"A referendum."

"What the dickens is a referendum?"

The juniors were silent with keen interest now. The word was certainly an imposing one, and Tom Merry's prestige was decidedly increased by the use of it.

"A referendum," said Tom Merry; "that's referring to the people, you know, on questions the Government isn't competent to settle. Everybody has a voice in the matter. They do it in Switzerland, you know, and it answers first-rate. That's what a giddy referendum is. Now, I really think that a referendum is exactly the proper caper in this matter."

"Hear, hear!"

It was a shout of enthusiasm. The idea of a referendum tickled the fancy of the juniors immensely, for there is no one more thoroughly democratic than the average school-boy.

"Hands up for the referendum!" said Tom Merry.

Every hand in the room went up.

"Passed unanimously," said Tom Merry. "Now, it's going to be put to the vote whether Blake or myself shall captain the cricket team. You agree to that, Blake?"

"Oh, yes," said Blake, "if you like! I meant what I said when I said I'd stand out, and I think you would make a pretty good captain. Still, to be quite candid, there isn't much doubt that I should make a better one; so, for the sake of the side, I agree to the refer-refer-ref—"

"Referendum!"

"That's it. I'll stand by the verdict of the club."

"Hear, hear!"

Tom Merry stepped down. Manners stepped up in his place, and raised his hand for silence.

"Gentlemen, I beg to propose my esteemed friend Thomas Merry, Esq., of the School House, for the position of cricket captain of the School House Junior Eleven."

"Hear, hear!"

"He's a splendid cricketer, a jolly good sort, and stands ripping feeds! I hope you'll all vote for Tom Merry. You will if you're not asses."

"Oh!"

"That's all I've got to say."

"About enough, too," said Gore. "I second Tom Merry."

"Now, then," said Blake, "one of you kids get up and propose me."

"I shall have gweat pleasure in doin' so," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Get a move on you, then!"

Arthur Augustus rose to the occasion.

"Gentlemen, I have the extreme pleasure and honah of pwoposin' my fwiend Jack Blake, Esq. as captain of the cwicket team," he said, surveying the meeting through his eyeglass. "I need not dwell upon the qualities of my esteemed fwiend. He is known to you all. He is a good cwicketah, and a twue chum, though sometimes wathah wuff, but he always means well."

"Ha, ha!"

"Hear, hear!"

Herries seconded.

Then the matter was put to the vote. The first show of hands was demanded for Tom Merry, and the result was a total of thirty.

Votes for Blake were counted next. They totalled twenty-eight.

Tom Merry had been elected by a majority of two votes. Blake made a grimace.

"Well, it's only the same as if Tom Merry had accepted my offer," he remarked. "Merry, old kid, I congratulate you."

"Thanks!" said Tom, shaking hands with Blake. "The referendum's a big success, isn't it?"

"For you, anyway!"

"Ha, ha! I know you'll back me up, Blake, for all you're worth. We've got to beat Figgins & Co., and take the New House down a peg or two."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I hear that Figgy is coming on wonderfully with his bowling. We shall have to stand shoulder to shoulder, and put up a jolly good game if we are going to beat them!" said Tom Merry. "So long as we do that, it doesn't matter much which of us is captain."

"Hear, hear!" said Blake heartily. "Well, now that's settled, let's go out and get some practice at the nets."

"Right-ho!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

And the juniors streamed out of the School House into the sunny quadrangle.

## CHAPTER 2.

### Figgins in Form.

CLACK! The cheery sound of bat meeting ball rang over the junior cricket pitch.

"Hallo, there's old Figgy bowling!" exclaimed Tom Merry, as he came out of the School House, with Manners and Study No. 6. "Let's go and have a look at him. I hear that he's been staggering humanity lately with his bowling."

"Yes, by Jupiter," said Blake, "Figgy has been coming on wonderfully, and if we lose the House match, kids, it will be Figgy's bowling that does it!"

"His batting is jolly good, too," Manners remarked. "When I saw him at practice yesterday, he was hitting like a giddy Jessop, and he had some jolly good bowlers to deal with, too."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Oh, rats!" said Tom Merry. "Figgy's not going to beat us in the House match, if I have to knock him on the head with a cricket bat!"

"Ha, ha! Well, let's have a look at him."

The juniors stopped and looked on at the New House practice.

Figgins & Co. were there in all their glory. Figgins, the long-limbed chief of the New House juniors; Kerr, the canny Scotsman, and Wynn, who hailed from Wales, were the three inseparable chums known throughout St. Jim's as Figgins & Co.

They were hard at practice now on the cricket pitch, and most of the New House junior eleven were with them.

It was not a regular match, simply practice with bat and ball; but it was ample to show the proficiency which Figgins & Co. had attained in the grand old game.

Kerr was at the wicket, and Figgy had just grasped the round red ball again to bowl. He looked up as the School House juniors stopped to watch him.

"Hallo, kids!" was Figgy's greeting. "Come to see how we're going to lick you?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Let's see what you can do with that ball, Figgy," said Blake curiously. "Bet you twopence it goes within a yard of the wicket, Tom Merry!"

"Done!" said Tom promptly.

Figgins snorted. He put extra care into bowling that ball, and the result was disastrous for Kerr. The ball broke in true for the middle stump, and whipped it right out of the ground. Figgy cast a triumphant look at Tom Merry.

"How's that for high?" he exclaimed.

"Oh, anybody could get a New House silly ass out!" said Tom. "You wouldn't find it so easy to bowl a School House batsman, Figgy!"

"Go to the wicket and see," said Figgins grimly. "Kerr, old man, give Tom Merry that bat; he's going to do wonders with it!"

"Oh, I won't take a hand; thank you!" said Tom airily. "I don't want to interfere with your cricket—you call it cricket, don't you?"

"Bosh! You're afraid to face my bowling!"

"Rats! I'll bat if you like," said Tom Merry instantly.

"Well, go to the wicket, then, and shut off the gas!"

"Right-ho!"

Tom Merry took the bat from Kerr, and went to the wicket. The ball was tossed back to Figgins, who gripped it and prepared to bowl.

Every eye was bent curiously upon the pair. Figgins was captain of the junior eleven of his House, as Tom Merry was of the School House juniors, and so this contest between them was extremely interesting, and might give some idea of how the House match was likely to go.

Figgins had a rather peculiar style of delivery. He ran

about six yards, and then turned himself into a kind of catherine-wheel, and sent the ball down like a 4.7 shell.

The spectators often grinned when they saw Figgy bowl. But the batsmen usually looked solemn enough.

"Go it, Figgy," murmured Blake, as Figgins prepared to bowl to Tom Merry—"go it! But, for all our sakes, old chap, don't tie yourself into a knot that won't come undone!"

Figgy took no notice of Blake's appeal. All his attention was given to the work in hand. He took his run, and catherine-wheeled himself, so to speak, and the ball went down like lightning.

Crash! There was a shout as Tom Merry's wicket was seen to fly to pieces. Tom himself looked amazed.

He had played that ball with great care, and yet, somehow or other, it had eluded his bat, taken the middle stump out of the ground, and scattered the bails.

"How's that?" roared every New House boy on the ground.

And they replied to their own question with another roar: "Out!"

Tom Merry glanced down at his wrecked wicket, and then at the grinning Figgins.

"You can't do that a second time, Figgy!" he called out.

"Well, I don't know whether I can or not," said Figgy, with becoming modesty; "but if you like to stick the wicket up again, I'll have a jolly good try!"

The wicket was set up. Tom Merry grasped the cane handle of the bat with an air of determination.

The New House boys were grinning with anticipation, while those of the School House looked considerably serious.

Tom Merry was certainly the best junior bat in the School House, not excepting Blake.

If Figgins handled him so easily, it was a bad look-out for the School House in the House match on Saturday.

Figgins gripped the ball and took his little run. Up and over went his sinewy arm. Down went the ball, and it broke in with a cunning twist on it that would have baffled many a county batsman.

It was a ball that Figgins had practised long and often, and which he seldom found to fail him. It did not fail him in this case.

Tom Merry played a shade too forward, and the clack of a falling wicket followed. The bails were on the ground.

And the New House juniors were yelling:

"How's that?"

"Out!"

"Good old Figgy!"

"What price the House match?"

Figgins grinned.

"Like to try again, Tom Merry?"

"Yes, hang it!" said Tom, looking puzzled. "I used to think I could bat a little! Give us one more, Figgy!"

Again the bails were put on, and Tom Merry took his stand, and the chief of the New House juniors prepared to bowl.

The School House eyes were fixed anxiously upon Tom.

If his wicket fell again, it would show that Figgy's bowling was destined to win a victory for his House on Saturday, in the opinion of most present.

Down went the ball.

Clack!

The off-stump was jerked from the ground, and the bails fell.

Tom Merry dropped the bat on the crease.

"Thanks, Figgy; that will do!"

"Good old Figgy!" shouted the juniors. "What price the House match?"

The School House boys strolled on, Tom Merry looking rather red.

"My hat!" said Manners. "I never dreamed that Figgy was in such awful good form. Why, he bowls like a county professional!"

Tom Merry made a grimace.

"Yes; Tom Merry made a rotten show against him!" said Blake.

"If you can make a better show, Blake, I'm willing to leave the position of captain to you!" said Tom.

"Thanks; but I don't mean that! You can bat as well as I can, and if you can't stand up to Figgy, I can't, either. But it's beastly!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We've counted on winning that match on Saturday," said Blake. "As a matter of fact, to tell the solid, candid truth, we've crowed a little bit!"

"Just a little bit," said Herries.

"As a mattah of fact," said D'Arcy, "I weally think that some of you fellahs have cowed a gweat deal about that wicket match!"

"Well, we thought we had a sure thing," said Tom Merry.

"We've always given the New House the kybosh; and

who'd have thought of seeing Figgins develop into a giddy Fielder and Kotze and Hirst rolled into one!"

"It looks serious," Blake observed thoughtfully. "I don't see what's to be done, unless we come back to Tom Merry's suggestion."

"What's that?"

"Why, knocking Figgins on the head with a cricket bat!" "Oh, don't rot!" said Tom. "This is too serious a subject for joking. We shall never hear the end of it if the New House win! They'll chip us no end!"

"And all the chaps in our own House, who think they ought to have been in the eleven, and who've been left out, will start chipping us, too!"

"And after the way we've talked, it will make us look a lot of silly asses!"

"Well, so we are!" said Tom Merry desperately. "It's a jolly good idea not to gas, and we ought to have known it. We took too much for granted. We didn't really mean all we said, but it will be all brought up against us if we get licked on Saturday. It's too rotten! Look here, we are not going to be licked! We must win—we will win—we shall win!"

Tom spoke in deadly earnest.

"We'll do our level best," said Blake. "But with Figgy bowling like that—" He concluded with an expressive shrug of the shoulders.

"That's it!" said Manners gloomily. "Unless Figgy falls down somewhere and breaks his neck before Saturday, we shall be done in!"

"Excuse me, young gentlemen—"

It was a stranger's voice.

The juniors had been so absorbed in the painful discussion that they had not observed him before.

"Excuse me, young gentlemen, I think one of you is named Tom Merry?"

Tom Merry looked round.

### CHAPTER 3.

#### The Man from India!

A MAN of about thirty, with a darkly bronzed face and penetrating black eyes, was looking curiously at the juniors. Although they had not observed him before, he had been looking at them for some time, and hardly a word of their conversation had escaped his keen ears. Tom Merry looked at him inquiringly.

"I am Tom Merry," he said. "Do you want to speak to me?"

The bronzed stranger smiled. His face was not a pleasant one, nor had his smile a pleasant effect, having something unconsciously satirical and cynical in it.

"Yes; certainly!" he said. "I see you do not know me." Tom scanned his face cautiously. Then he shook his head.

"I don't think I have met you before, sir," he replied.

The stranger laughed.

"You have, Tom, but it was a good many years ago, and you were quite a little fellow. I should not have known you, either, had I not caught your name uttered by one of your friends. I am your cousin, Philip Phipps, from India."

Tom Merry made a step back. Philip Phipps! The name brought back keen and unpleasant memories. For it was not long since Amos Keene, the master of the Shell, had left St. Jim's in disgrace, and ere he went, he had confessed that he had been in the pay of Philip Phipps, and had come to the school with the especial purpose of causing the ruin of Tom Merry. Had he told the truth?

His confession had been made to Tom Merry and the Head of St. Jim's, but whether he had lied or not, it was impossible to tell. Tom had not known what to believe, but the matter had soon passed from his mind altogether; he had plenty of more pleasant things to think about. It had, in fact, quite slipped his memory until this moment, when the stranger's words brought it all back keenly enough.

"My cousin," he stammered, "Philip Phipps!"

"Yes!"

Phipps was holding out his hand in a very frank and friendly way. Tom Merry hesitated for a moment. But it was only for a moment. It was surely unfair to condemn Philip Phipps on the word of a man who had been proved a rascal, and who was a villain by his own confession.

It was only fair, at least, to give Philip Phipps the benefit of the doubt. And so, after that brief, and almost imperceptible hesitation, Tom Merry took his cousin's hand, and shook it cordially enough.

"I did not know you, Philip," he said. "I knew you were in England—"

Phipps gave a start.

"How could you have known that?"

"Mr. Keene told me," said Tom Merry, looking at him steadily.

"Keene! Amos Keene!"

"Yes; he was a master here. You wrote to him from India while he was here."

"Ah, yes!" said Phipps, carelessly. "I knew him at college, you know. We were at Trinity at the same time. I remember writing to him here, now I come to think of it. I have heard nothing of him since he left, though I fancy he went to the bad."

"He went to prison afterwards."

"Ah, poor chap!" said Phipps, indifferently, but watching Tom's face keenly while he spoke. "I dare say he talked a good deal about me."

"No; he only spoke of you once, just before he left."

"H'm! I believe I'm detaining you," said Phipps, looking round. "You were just going on to practice, I believe."

"Yes!" said Tom. "These are my friends; we're playing the New House on Saturday."

He introduced the juniors.

"Happy to make your acquaintance," said Philip Phipps cordially. "I won't interrupt your practice. I'll see you in your study afterwards. Unless customs have changed since I was at St. Jim's, there are sometimes quite excellent feasts given in the studies."

All the juniors thawed at once.

"You used to be at St. Jim's, sir!" exclaimed Blake.

Philip Phipps smiled.

"Yes; and I was a School House boy, too. Fifteen years ago I played for the School House against the New House at cricket."

"And you won?" asked half a dozen keenly interested voices.

"Oh, yes; we beat them hollow!" said Philip Phipps, laughing. "I hope you will have as good luck on Saturday. Who is your captain?"

"Tom Merry!"

"My Cousin Tom! I am glad! Of course, you'll beat them, Tom!"

"We're going to try," said Tom. "But—"

"Nonsense; you're going to win. I shall stay over the Saturday, and see the match," said Philip Phipps. "I'm putting up in Rylcombe for a few days, and I shall certainly see the House match. I have heard from your old governess, Miss Fawcett, that you have become a wonderful cricketer Tom."

"I'm getting on," said Tom, smiling. "Miss Priscilla thinks everything I do wonderful. But about the House match, I'm afraid—"

"Come; you won't let me see you licked. "You've got to beat the New House, Tom. I won't keep you from your practice any longer."

And Philip Phipps, with a nod round, walked on towards the principal's house. He left the juniors looking rather dubiously at one another.

"Your cousin seems a nice sort of chap, Merry," Blake remarked. "I didn't know you had any old St. Jim's boys in the family. Fancy his playing the New House fifteen years ago! Before some of us were born! I say, it will be rotten if we let them lick us, with an old School House boy looking on!"

"Especially as the School House beat the New House in that match," said Tom. "You know the way old boys have—they always say things have gone down since they left the school, and it would be rotten to have Phipps chipping us."

"Well, we must make up our minds to beat them, that is all."

The juniors set to work to practice with an earnestness worthy of the occasion. Meanwhile, Philip Phipps was shown in to the principal of St. Jim's.

Dr Holmes's maner was very formal as he received the gentleman from India. He had not forgotten the confession of Amos Keene, and he, like Tom Merry, had never been able to make up his mind as to how much of it was truth.

He did not condemn Phipps in his mind, and neither did he exculpate him. Phipps was quite keen enough to see that something was working in the doctor's mind, preventing him from being as frank and cordial as he would otherwise have been to an "old boy," revisiting the school after long years spent in a foreign land. Exactly what it was, of course, he could not know, and the Head was not inclined to tell him; but Phipps set to work to remove the unfavourable impression. He succeeded pretty well. He could talk well and fluently, and he had seen much of the world, and his attachment to his old school, real or pretended, was exactly the thing to please the doctor, to whom St. Jim's was something like the centre of the universe.

And during the half-hour he spent with Dr. Holmes, he did very much to remove the unfavourable impression the Head had of him, and when he left, it was with an invitation to lunch with the Head on Saturday, and see the House match afterwards. There was a smile upon Philip Phipps's face as he strolled away from the principal's house.

"Keene must have said something," he murmured to himself. "But it cannot have been anything very definite, and I do not think it will interfere with me in any way. I am glad I came here—I have come at an opportune moment, and, if I am not mistaken, all will go well."

He stopped at the cricket-ground to watch the School House juniors at practice. Tom Merry was at the wicket, facing Blake's bowling. He faced it well, and cut the leather all over the ground, and made a very good figure at the wicket. But Philip Phipps, before he spoke to Tom, had seen the incident of Figgy's bowling, and he was a judge of form at cricket. That Tom Merry, would, in time, be a first-class cricketer, was probable enough, or, rather, certain, but Phipps did not believe that by Saturday his form would have improved sufficiently to enable him to face Figgins's bowling with confidence.

The New House will win if Figgins plays," murmured Philip Phipps; and there was a strange smile hovering round his lips, as if an amusing idea was working in his brain.

Tom Merry left the wicket while Phipps was still there, and he came to speak to his cousin.

"You haven't forgotten that feed in the study?" he asked. "We're going to knock this off at five. Do you care to watch a practice-game?"

"Immensely!" said Philip Phipps. "Nothing I like better!"

Tom laughed.

"Then you won't mind waiting?"

"Not at all!"

Phipps sat down under a tree, and smoked a cigar, while the juniors went through their practice. At times that peculiar smile came upon his face again. The practice over, the juniors adjourned to the School House, very red and healthy, and Philip Phipps was conducted in state to Study No. 10, the quarters of the Terrible Two—Tom Merry and Manners.

Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy went off to their own quarters, rather surprised that Tom Merry did not ask them to the feed. The fact was that Tom, in the generosity of his heart, had asked his relation from India to a feed in the study, overlooking the fact that the larder was in a state of unexampled bareness.

The fact was that the Terrible Two were in a very low state, financially, and supplies in the study had run so low that they had been driven to taking their tea lately at the common table in the dining-hall, a thing the juniors never did when they could raise the wind sufficiently to provide the meal in their own quarters.

Tom was feeling a little uncomfortable with this knowledge weighing on his mind. Philip Phipps looked round the study with much admiration.

"Jolly quarters," he remarked. "This part of the house has been put up since I was at St. Jim's. They make the studies more roomy now."

"Yes," said Tom. "This is the new wing of the School House."

"Very comfy. I feel like a boy again here."

Phipps sat down in the only easy-chair, and stretched out his legs, which were very long and thin, and took up a great deal of room.

"I say, excuse me a minute, will you?" said Tom Merry. "There's something I've forgotten to say to Blake."

"Certainly!" said Phipps agreeably.

Tom, leaving Manners to entertain the visitor, rushed off to Study No. 6. He heard Blake's voice as he came up to the open door.

"I should like to have a jaw with that chap from India, who used to be in the School House. I really wonder Tom Merry didn't invite us in."

"Perhaps the grub's short," said Herries.

"Yaas, wathah. Tom Mewwy and Mannahs have had their tea downstairs sevewal times lately, deah boys."

"Well, if that's the case, he ought to know he could call on us," said Blake. "We'd come to the rescue, to the last bone in the larder—"

"Thanks, awfully!" gasped Tom Merry, bursting into the study.

The trio looked at him.

"Hallo, you look excited."

"So I am. Look here, I've asked my cousin to a feed, and there's simply nothing in the cupboard. Can you chaps stump us something, and I'll settle with you afterwards. We can't let an old School House boy go away unfed. It'll make the house look horrid mean."

"Right-ho!" exclaimed Blake heartily. "You've come to the right place. You're welcome to everything there is in the cupboard, old chap."

"Thanks! You're a good sort, Blake!"

"Don't mention it!" said Blake, throwing open the door of the cupboard with the air of a prince. "There you are."

Tom Merry looked into the cupboard. Then he looked at Jack Blake. Then he looked into the cupboard again.

There was half a loaf, and a fragment of a cake that had seen better days. There was a morsel of butter and a cracked egg. There was the remnant of a ham, which gave the whole cupboard a distinctive odour, for the weather was hot, and the ham had been there for a long time. There were a few other remnants.

"Thank you, Blake!" said Tom Merry. "I'll wait till my cousin makes his will in my favour before I feed him on that mouldy ham."

"Well, the supplies have run down rather low, and no mistake!" said Blake thoughtfully. "I had my doubts about that ham yesterday. I thought there must be something wrong with it when Herries's bulldog wouldn't eat it."

"If you think I'm going to feed my cousin on what Herries's bulldog turns up his nose at—"

"Don't get ratty, old chap! We can only offer what we've got. I wish it were more, for your sake. But, I say, you can get any amount of tommy at the school shop by paying for it, you know."

"Broke!" said Tom tersely. "Manners is busted, too!"

"That's bad. We're in the same fix, I believe."

Blake ran his hands through his pockets. He brought all sorts of odds and ends to light, but of cash there was the sum of twopence-halfpenny, neither more nor less. Herries added sixpence.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who was usually rolling in wealth, went through all his pockets, and shook his head solemnly.

"I've got a fivah somewhah," he said. "I wemembah havin' it, and I put it somewhah, but whah I cannot wemembah."

"Hunt for it," said Tom Merry. "I don't know what my cousin will think of my staying away all this time. I hope he won't smell a rat."

D'Arcy felt in all his pockets again; but it was hopeless. The fiver refused to come to light.

"It is weally most annoyin'!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's. "I am awfully, feahfully sowwy, deah boy. The beastly thing's got lost somehow."

"Oh, this is rotten!" said Tom Merry. "We're already in debt at the tuck-shop as far as old Dame Taggles will let us go. We can't tell Phipps we can't feed him. What's going to be done? I—"

"Hallo!" exclaimed Herries suddenly.

"What is it?"

"Look here!"

Herries was staring out of the window. They stepped towards the window and looked out in the quadrangle, following the direction of Herries's finger.

"My hat!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

The figure of Kerr could be seen issuing from the school shop with a basket in his hand. There was no doubt as to what that basket contained.

"Corn in Egypt!" gasped Tom Merry. "I heard some of them say that the New House Eleven were standing a feed to Figgins, because he's going to knock spots off us in the House match. They've sent Kerr to get the grub. Kerr always gets the best for the money. Kids, we are on to this."

"It will be risky," said Blake. "As soon as we show ourselves there'll be a crowd of them on to us, and—"

"Look here, we've got to fix it. This is my idea: We'll make a rush, and one of us will bolt with the tommy, leaving the others to cover his retreat. It don't matter if the others get jumped on, so long as the one with the basket clears off safely."

"Right-ho!" said Blake. "I'll collar the basket."

"I was thinking of doing that myself."

"Oh, no, you can stay and be jumped on!"

Tom Merry grinned.

"Oh, I don't care. Come on!"

"We're ready."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Collar the basket, and bolt with it, and take it straight to my study. You three had better come and feed with us. We want to make a party of it, and there's bound to be enough in the basket for a party of six. Come on!"

They rushed down the stairs. To get out into the quadrangle, and to sprint off so as to get between the New House junior and his destination, was the work of a few minutes.

Kerr spotted the four at once, and he stopped, as he saw that they had cut him off from the New House. He did not need telling what their intentions were.

"Rescue!" roared Kerr. "New House, rescue!"

There was an instant rush of juniors from the direction of the New House. Kerr was so near to that building that none of the New House juniors dreamed that the enemy would dare to venture so far from their own quarters to make an attack upon the basket; and indeed even Tom

## CHAPTER 4.

## A Study Feed.

Merry would not have made the venture had he not been in such a desperate strait.

"Rescue—rescue!"

The four School House juniors rushed on Kerr. He set down the basket and put up his fists, like the valiant Scotsman he was, to defend it till his comrades could arrive upon the scene.

Tom Merry received a terrific rap upon the nose, which brought the water to his eyes; but, unheeding, he leaped upon Kerr, and the two went to the ground together.

"Rescue!" yelled Kerr.

"Bolt!" roared Tom Merry.

Blake's grip was on the basket in a moment. He promptly bolted with it. The rescuers were very near at hand, and running hard to get on the spot. Herries and Arthur Augustus threw themselves in the way to cover Blake's retreat with the basket. Tom Merry tore himself loose from Kerr, and rushed to help them.

Figgins went rolling in the quadrangle, with Tom Merry's arms entwined lovingly round his neck. Fatty Wynn and Pratt were each seized by Herries, who clung to them in spite of terrific punches. Arthur Augustus seized a New House junior and struggled with him frantically, yelling at the top of his voice:

"School House! Come on, deah boys! Wescue—wescue!"

There were a good many School House juniors in the quadrangle, and the noise attracted their attention. Without stopping to ask questions, they rushed into the fray. A free fight was soon in progress. Meanwhile, Blake was running as if on the cinder-path for a big wager, with the basket in his hand.

He reached the School House, went tearing up the steps, and headlong into the hall, with blind and breathless haste. There was a yell.

"You young-ass! Where are you running to?"

It was the voice of Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's. The change from the bright, sunny quadrangle to the shady hall had blinded Blake, and he had rushed right into the captain of the school.

The concussion sent Kildare reeling, and it made Blake sit down suddenly, and the basket went to the floor with a thump.

There was a crash of breaking crockery, and a stream of red spurted from the basket; while oranges and apples and nuts and biscuits flew in all directions. Blake stared dazedly at Kildare.

"I'm sorry!" he gasped.

"I should think you were!" said Kildare grimly. "What the dickens were you bolting into the house like that for? What's that row in the quadrangle?"

"New House cads!" gasped Blake.

Kildare's good-humoured face broke into a smile.

"Ah, another house row, I suppose."

"Yes, that's it."

"I see you've got a supply of grub there. The New House kids after it?"

"Yes, that's their little game."

"Oh, I see. Well, if they're trying to collar your tommy—"

"It isn't exactly like that, Kildare," murmured Blake.

"What do you mean?"

"You see, I've collared their tommy," said Blake. "That's why they're after me. All's fair in war, you know."

Kildare laughed heartily.

"Get along, you young rascal!"

Blake picked up himself and the basket, and gathered the fallen loot, and made his way a little more slowly to Tom Merry's study.

He was safe from pursuit now. The New House juniors would not venture into the School House. Kildare went out into the quadrangle. Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, had also sallied out with a cane in his hand. The appearance of the two seniors put an end to the fight that was raging far and wide.

The antagonists separated, all of them looking considerably the worse for wear. Figgins called off his bruised and battered band.

"They've done us," said Figgins, grinning. "They've got the grub. We'll have to go without; but we'll make 'em sit up for this on Saturday, kids."

"Go without!" said Fatty Wynn, in consternation. "Go without, when we have made up our minds to a feed! Oh, Figgy!"

"Ha, ha! You'd better go into the School House and ask for the grub, then."

"We'll have a whip round, and get a fresh supply," said Kerr. "We'll go for those bounders another time. We've lifted their tommy often enough, and it's only tit for tat. Come on, let's get some more!"

So the feast came off in Figgy's study, after all. But it is with the feast in the School House that we have to deal.

BLAKE entered Tom Merry's study in the School House and set down the basket. Philip Phipps was yawning over a cigar. Manners had tried to entertain him, but the conversational powers of Manners were not extensive, and the man from India was bored. But he looked up with interest as Blake entered.

"Hallo!" he remarked. "Where's Tom Merry?"

"He's just coming," said Blake diplomatically. "He'll be here in a minute. He's been laying in some tommy for tea."

Manners looked at the basket in amazement.

"Where did you—" he began.

Blake winked. Manners took the hint, and asked no awkward questions. Blake began to set out the contents of the basket. The crash on the floor had not improved them. There was a bottle of red currant wine broken, and the spilt fluid had soaked into the ham sandwiches and the loaf, and this could hardly be considered in the light of an improvement. But there was ample more.

There were puddings and pies and cakes, oranges and apples and bananas galore. Figgins & Co. had certainly intended to "do" themselves well that time.

"Shove the kettle on, Manners," said Blake. "Better get the tea made. Tom Merry will be here in a minute."

"Right you are."

The fire was low, for the afternoon was warm; but Manners stuck the kettle right down into it, and poked the fire underneath. There was a hurried step in the passage, and Tom Merry came in.

"Hallo!" said Phipps, staring at him. "Had an accident?"

"No," said Tom; "only a little row with the New House."

"Oh! You look as if you'd been under a lawnmower or something."

Tom was certainly looking rather disreputable.

His collar was torn out, his cap was gone, and his hair ruffled, and his nose was swollen, and a thin stream of "claret" was oozing from it.

"I'm all right!" he said cheerfully. "Or I shall be in a jiffy. Sorry to keep you waiting so long, Cousin Phil."

"Oh, don't mention it!"

"There are a few guests coming," said Tom Merry. "The chaps I introduced to you on the cricket-field, you know; so you know them. Six is a comfy number to feed in a study this size. Don't you think so?"

"Oh yes, rather!"

"Here's Herries! Come in, Herries, old chap!"

Herries was looking as worn and dilapidated as Tom himself.

He had a black eye, a cut lip, and his jacket was split down the back.

"Another row with the New House?" drawled Philip Phipps.

"Yes," said Herries. "You see, we collared their—Ow!"

The last ejaculation was caused by Tom Merry treading heavily upon Herries's toe.

"I say, Merry, mind where you're stamping with your big hoofs!" exclaimed Herries, who was always rather dense. "You've fair squashed my little toe!"

"Oh, blow your little toe!"

"Well, that's jolly civil to a guest, I must say! As I was saying, Mr. Phipps—"

Blake dug his elbow in Herries's ribs. The would-be narrator broke off with a gasp.

"I say, Blake, what are you shoving for?"

"Hold your row!" whispered Blake fiercely.

"That's all very well. Tom Merry stamps on my foot, and you nearly puncture me in the ribs, and then you want me to hold my row. I—"

"Shut up!"

"Well, then, let me finish what I was saying. We collared—"

"Hallo, here's D'Arcy!" exclaimed Blake hurriedly.

"Hallo, Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus came into the study. He was looking even worse than Tom Merry or Herries. His beautiful waistcoat had been ripped open, and his nice tie torn out. His trousers were crumpled and muddy. His boots had been trampled on, and his hair ruffled. There was a thin stream of red issuing from the corner of his mouth, and his nose was swollen to about twice its usual size.

"More rows?" asked Philip Phipps, with interest.

"Weally, those New House juniars are extwemely wuff," said D'Arcy. "Of course, I don't mind a wow every now and then, but weally some of them are feahful wuffians. Pwatt actually jumped on my eyeglass and bwoke it!"

"Horrid!" said Tom Merry.



"Weally, it is extwemely howwid, Tom Mewwy, for it is the tenth eyeglass that has been bwoken this term, and they are awfully beastly expensive, don't you know."

"Shocking! Never mind; let's have tea. Have you got the tea made, Manners?"

"Just on," said Manners.

"I'm afwaid I can't sit down to tea in this extwemely shockin' state," said Arthur Augustus, looking down at his clothes. "It would not show a pwopah wespetch for Mr. Phipps."

"Oh, don't mind me!" said Philip Phipps. "This reminds me of old times, when we used to row the New House fifteen years ago."

"Weally, how intewestin'!" said D'Arcy. "But I weally think that I had bettah go and change, deah boys. I shall not keep you waitin' more than half an hour, and—"

"Collar him!" said Tom Merry, as Gussy turned towards the door.

Blake promptly collared the swell of the School House and plumped him down in a chair.

"Blake, don't be so wude and wuff!"

"Sit there! If you move we'll slaughter you!"

"But—"

"Dry up!"

"I wefuse to dwy up. And unless you cease this extweme wuffness, Blake, our fwiefndship will come to a sudden termination."

"You'll come to a sudden termination yourself, if you don't look out," said Blake darkly. "If you get off that chair I'll stick this pin into you. Not a word! Dry up! Manners, old man, how's that tea getting on?"

"I've made it," said Manners. "The pot's hardly big enough for six, but we can add some water afterwards. Here we are."

Manners had filled the teapot to the brim with boiling water. He brought it across to the table, and stumbled over Philip Phipps's long legs, and a spurt of the scalding tea escaped from the spout. Phipps gave a fiendish yell.

He leaped to his feet, so startling Manners that the teapot fell from his hands and went to the floor with a crash. It broke into a dozen pieces, and the tea was splashed far and wide, nearly everybody in the study coming in for a few drops.

"Ow, ow, ow!" yelled Phipps, clasping his leg and dancing. "You silly ass! You've scalded me! Ow, ow!"

"I'm sorry," said Manners.

"You've busted the teapot," said Tom Merry. "You are an ass, Manners!"

"Well, he startled me, jumping up like that."

"Ow!" gasped Phipps. He was looking furious, but he calmed down a little as the pain abated, and he remembered where he was. "By Jove, you scalded me! Never mind."

He sat down again, still nursing his leg tenderly.

"I say, we're all awfully sorry," said Tom Merry. "Manners is a clumsy owl! I hope you're not hurt very much, Cousin Phil."

"Er—no—it's all right," said Phipps unamiably.

"Buzz off to Gore's study and get his teapot, Manners," said Tom. "He's out, so you'll be able to borrow it."

And Manners buzzed off. He was not trusted to make the tea a second time, Tom Merry taking charge of the teapot, and Philip Phipps taking more care of his legs.

This time the tea was successfully made and poured out, and the tea commenced. In spite of the late fray, and the prominent signs of it they bore, the juniors enjoyed the feed, and Philip Phipps appeared to have a good time.

He was very chatty with the juniors, telling them stories of tiger-hunting and pig-sticking and polo in India, and old yarns of former days at St. Jim's, to which they listened with breathless interest. He showed, too, a keen interest in the House match, and asked all sorts of questions, and was especially curious about the splendid form Figgins had lately shown.

"But you don't mean to say that the New House are going to win!" he exclaimed.

"Well, we can't say, Mr. Phipps," said Blake. "But unless we try Tom Merry's idea with Figgy, I fancy he'll give us a lot of trouble."

"Tom's method! What is it?"

"Why, knocking him on the head with a bat just before the match."

Phipps laughed.

"Well, I hope it won't come to that," he said. "But really you must make up your minds to win. I've heard old boys say that the School House spirit has gone down since their time; that the New House is always cock-house now. I don't believe it."

"It isn't so!" exclaimed Tom Merry indignantly. "We beat the New House hollow all along the line. We give 'em the kybosh at rowing, running, fives and tennis, and—"

"At everything except cricket?" said Phipps slyly.

Tom turned red.

"We'll beat them at that, too!" he exclaimed.

Phipps rose to his feet.

"Well, I hope you will," he remarked. "There are some of the old School House fellows at Boggleywallah, and when I go back I should like to tell them that the old house is keeping its end up."

And Philip Phipps, with many thanks for the study feed, took his leave. He left a rather unpleasant impression behind him. He had been very agreeable, yet he had contrived to convey the impression that he didn't consider that the juniors were keeping up the honour of their house in an adequate way—a point the youngsters were, of course, very sore upon.

Tom Merry looked round uncomfortably.

"It's beastly that that chap should visit us just now," he said. "It would be bad enough to be licked by the New House, but to have the tale told all over the world is distinctly rotten. It's unfortunate."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"The only thing is," said Tom Merry, clicking his teeth, "we've got to beat the New House. We're not going to have that chap sneering and chipping us, and saying we can't play cricket, and the School House isn't keeping its end up like it did in his time. Hang it all! You hear, kids! We're going to beat the New House by hook or by crook."

## CHAPTER 5.

### The Mysterious Disappearance of Figgins.

**S**ATURDAY! A fine summer's morning. The day of the House match had dawned at last. All the juniors of St. Jim's had been looking forward to it with mingled feelings. In the New House was an anticipation of triumph, all the more keen because it was really only of late weeks that the New House hopes had risen high.

The School House were dubious. They hoped, but they lacked the feeling of certainty that usually preceded any of their contests with the rival house at St. Jim's. The senior House match had been won by the School House; a fact which made Figgins & Co. all the more keen to win the junior match for their house.

Great interest was taken in the match at St. Jim's. Both elevens were in good form, and the match was certain to be a splendid one for juniors, whichever side gained the victory. Kildare, captain of St. Jim's, and Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, had been appointed umpires, and most of the Sixth and the Fifth had signified their intention of being present and seeing the match.

As only an afternoon was at the disposal of the cricketers, and the batting was likely to be good on both sides, a single-innings match had been agreed upon, in order that there might be a good chance of finishing before the time came for the stumps to be drawn.

Stumps were to be pitched at two o'clock, giving the juniors the whole of a long summer's afternoon for the contest.

The Terrible Two came down in good time to the pitch. Tom Merry looked very fit in flannels, with his bat under his arm, but his usually cheery face was serious. The importance of the match was weighing upon his mind. Philip Phipps was already on the ground, and he nodded to Tom.

"Fine day for your match, Tom," he remarked. "Splendid cricketer's weather."

"Yes, we're getting some summer at last," said Tom. "We couldn't expect anything nicer than this, Phil. Hallo, Kerr!"

Kerr was looking rather worried.

"Have you seen Figgins?" he asked.

Tom stared at him.

"Figgins? No. Where is he?"

"That's just what I want to know," said Kerr; and he walked away towards the New House.

"Nothing wrong with Figgins, I hope," Phipps remarked. "Of course, it would be a bit of luck for you if he were ill or anything."

"We don't want luck like that," said Blake, joining in. "Better get licked than win because Figgy was ill. But he's not ill."

"Have you seen him?" asked Fatty Wynn anxiously.

"Yes, I saw him go out half an hour ago. Hasn't he come in yet?"

"We can't find him anywhere."

"Look in the gym. He might be there."

And Fatty Wynn walked away to the gymnasium.

Tom Merry glanced at his watch.

"I say, this is queer of Figgins!" he exclaimed. "It's time in five minutes to toss for choice of innings, and Figgy seems to have disappeared."

"Well, I saw him go out," said Blake. "Something has detained him, I suppose."

New House juniors were running in all directions looking for Figgins.

Fatty Wynn came out of the gym, and Kerr returned from the New House, and both looked disappointed.

Questions were asked on all sides, but a satisfactory answer could not be obtained.

Others besides Blake had seen Figgins go out at the gates just before half-past one, but no one had seen him return.

Juniors went out into the road to look for him, but up or down the long white lane there was no sign of Figgins.

"I say, what's the trouble here?" exclaimed Kildare, coming up to Tom Merry. "Where's Figgins? It's time you tossed."

"I know, Kildare; but Figgins isn't here."

"Not here?"

"No; we can't find him anywhere."

Kildare looked puzzled.

"I don't understand this at all," he said.

"I don't, either. He left the school, and hasn't come in. I hope no accident has happened to him. It would be too rotten just before the match."

Kildare looked at the Terrible Two keenly.

"I suppose this is no little trick of yours?" he said quietly.

Tom Merry stared.

"Trick! I don't know what you're driving at, Kildare."

"I mean, none of you know anything about Figgy's disappearance?"

Tom flushed indignantly.

"You surely don't think we're capable of trying to keep him out of the match, Kildare, because he's in good form?" he exclaimed.

"No, certainly not. I thought it might be one of the pranks you juniors are so fond of playing upon one another, that is all."

"We shouldn't trick on a fellow in the opposing eleven just before a match," said Manners.

"No, I suppose not."

"I say," exclaimed Monteith, the New House prefect, and Kildare's fellow-umpire, coming up—"I say, Kildare, this is queer news about Figgins. He's gone out and not come back."

"It seems very queer, Monteith."

"What can the young ass be up to? He can't have forgotten the match."

"Forgotten the match!" exclaimed a dozen astounded voices. "Forgotten the House match!"

Monteith laughed. Such an idea savoured of something like sacrilege to the juniors.

"Well, what has become of him, then?" said Monteith.

Kildare looked worried.

"I can only imagine that an accident has happened," he said.

Monteith glanced at Tom Merry.

"I suppose there's no practical joking in this matter?" he said. "It isn't one of the junior's tricks?"

"I have just asked Merry about that, and he has assured me—"

"Well, I was only thinking—"

"What were you thinking?" asked Kildare quickly, seeing that the prefect had something in his mind that he had not uttered.

"Well, I was talking to Mr. Phipps just now, and he told me—for a joke, of course—of some remark of Tom Merry's to the effect that the School House could only win the match by getting rid of Figgins first."

There was a general buzz. Every eye was fixed upon Tom Merry.

Tom went scarlet and then pale, and his eyes flashed with indignation.

"Philip Phipps had no right to say anything of the kind," he exclaimed. "It was just a joke I made, that was all, and I didn't put it like that. I just said that it would be a good wheeze to knock Figgy on the head with a cricket-bat, or something to that effect. I don't remember the exact words. It was only fun."

"Of course, there was nothing in it," said Kildare. "You surely wouldn't suspect any of the School House boys of keeping Figgins out of the match, Monteith?"

At one time the head prefect of the New House would have seized upon the chance of saying unpleasant things. But of late he had grown to be more just to Kildare than of old, and the two Sixth-Formers were on very friendly terms.

Monteith now had no desire to cause trouble, but he was naturally of a suspicious nature, and had very little faith in anybody at all.

"Well, I shouldn't like to say so," he replied, shaking his head, "but in the light of Figgy's disappearance, Tom Merry's words seem queer, that's all. The remark as Mr. Phipps told it to me didn't sound exactly as Merry puts it.

But we shall know for certain when Figgy turns up. He's bound to come back some time, I suppose."

Kildare looked at his watch.

"Suppose we put off the match for half an hour, and give him a chance?" he said.

"Good! If he's coming, he'll come by then; and if he doesn't, the match will have to be played without him, that's all."

The New House boys looked dismayed.

Figgins was their great man. He was to the New House eleven what Fielder was to Kent, Jessop to Gloucestershire, or Schwarz to the South African team.

With Figgins at their head, the New House were certain of success. But without Figgins! It would be an extremely doubtful struggle, if not a certain defeat!

And some of the New House juniors, who happened to be, like Monteith, of a suspicious turn of mind, were looking very dubiously at Tom Merry.

Tom understood their looks, and his face was slightly haughty in expression as he turned away.

To one so frank and honourable as Tom was, it was mortifying in the extreme to be suspected for a moment of a mean action.

"This is awfully queer," Manners remarked to Tom. "It was silly of Phipps to say that to Monteith. If anything has happened to Figgy, it will give those chaps the impression that you had a hand in it."

Tom looked worried.

"I hope to goodness he will turn up for the match!" he exclaimed.

"I should think he's bound to," said Manners.

They waited anxiously for the half-hour to expire.

Kerr and Wynn mounted their bicycles, and went scouring up and down the road, one either way, to look for Figgins.

They did not come in until the half-hour's grace had almost expired, looking hot and dusty and disappointed.

"You haven't seen Figgins?" asked Kildare.

"No," grunted Fatty Wynn. "I went as far as the village, but he hasn't been seen there, that I can find out."

"And I've been a mile up the road," said Kerr. "There's no sign of him anywhere. I can't understand it a bit."

Kildare wore a worried look.

"You don't either of you think that this is a trick of the School House kids?" he asked.

"Oh, no, Kildare," exclaimed the Co. together instantly; "of course it isn't!"

"I'm glad to hear you say so. Some of the juniors in your house have been saying things."

"Silly asses!" said Kerr. "Why, Tom Merry wouldn't dream of keeping Figgins out of the match; and besides, it would be bound to come out afterwards."

"Of course!" said Fatty Wynn. "We play little games on each other, but in a matter like this we shouldn't think of anything of the kind."

Monteith joined them. He was looking very serious.

"That's all very well, Wynn," he said, as Fatty made his last remark, "but it's peculiar what Tom Merry said about getting rid of Figgins; and his account of the words he used doesn't agree with what I heard from Mr. Phipps."

Fatty Wynn looked puzzled.

"Perhaps Phipps didn't remember correctly," he suggested. "I don't see what he wanted to bring the matter up at all for. But one thing's jolly certain, and that is, that Tom Merry never had a hand in keeping Figgins away from the match."

"Quite certain," said Kerr. "He's not that sort."

"But it's true, isn't it, that Figgins was in such form that the match would be practically a walk-over for our house?" said Monteith.

"Well, yes."

"And the School House had been crowing about their expected victory."

"Well, we always crow at one another, you know."

"I hope there's nothing in it," said Monteith. "I suppose we shall find out for certain when Figgins turns up. Meanwhile, it's impossible to keep back the match any longer. Don't you agree with me, Kildare?"

The captain of St. Jim's gave a nod.

"Certainly, Monteith. If the match is to be played to-day, it will have to start now."

The Co. looked dismayed.

"Start without old Figgy?"

"Well, what else is there to be done?"

"It means a licking for us," said Kerr. "Figgy is the only bowler we've got who could touch Tom Merry's wicket."

"Have you anything else to suggest?"

"N-no, I suppose not. It wouldn't be possible to postpone the match?"

"That could hardly be done without inconvenience to everybody concerned. Besides, a single player missing from



Tom Merry swung round. It was not a New House boy who had spoken, but Gore of the School House. Tom's face went scarlet. "What did you say, Gore?" he shouted.

the eleven is not a sufficient reason. You can play a substitute."

"We've nobody a patch on Figgy. But I suppose it must be so."

"Another thing. If Figgy turns up while the match is going on, you can withdraw the substitute and play him. I am sure Tom Merry will agree to that."

Kerr brightened up.

"Yes, that's a good idea. I'll ask him."

They adjourned to the dressing-tent on the junior ground. Tom Merry was waiting for them, a shade upon his face.

"You haven't heard anything of Figgins?" he asked.

"No," said Kerr; "it's jolly mysterious."

Tom Merry looked straight at the Co.

"Look here, you chaps," he said, "some of your fellows have been muttering that I know something about this matter, because of a joke I made the other day, which has got twisted into something I never said at all. Do you think I know anything about Figgy's being missing?"

"No!" said the Co. together.

"Mind, if you did suspect me of any dirty meanness of that kind, I wouldn't play in the match," said Tom Merry.

"If you don't, we'll go ahead."

"It's all rot," said Kerr; "we know you're true blue."

"Of course we do," said Fatty Wynn. "I can't understand Figgins staying away like this, and I suppose something must have happened to him, but you haven't had any hand in it, and I'll punch the head of any fellow that says you have."

And Fatty Wynn glared round him in a decidedly warlike way.

Tom Merry's eyes were dimmed for a moment.

This faith in him, from his rivals of the New House, touched him deeply, all the more because he knew how worried and troubled the Co. were by Figgy's disappearance.

"Thanks, chaps!" he said, in a low voice. "You're quite right; I wouldn't have kept Figgy out of the match for anything. It wouldn't be playing the game. If you believe that, we can go ahead; and I know you do."

"Rather!" said Kerr. "Now, I shall captain the eleven in Figgy's absence, and until the poor old chap turns up. We shall play a substitute. If Figgy comes in before the match is ended, are you willing for him to come into the team, and drop the substitute? It's Kildare's suggestion."

"Of course!" said Tom Merry instantly. "I only hope the old chap will turn up, that's all. If he does, you'll play him, of course?"

"You know jolly well he won't, then!" murmured a voice.

Tom Merry swung round. It was not a New House boy who had spoken, but Gore, of the School House. He was Tom's old enemy, his dislike of our hero dating from the days before either had come to St. Jim's.

Tom's face went scarlet.

"What did you say, Gore?"

Gore gave him a defiant look.

"I say that it looks mighty suspicious, that's all," he replied; "and I want it understood that, whatever comes out, the School House generally didn't have a hand in it, and that you did it all on your own!"

"Did what?"

Gore shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, you know better than I do what you've done!" he said.

Tom Merry made a step towards him, his eyes blazing and his fists clenched. Blake jerked him back.

"Hold on, Merry! No good fighting now, just before a cricket-match," he said. "We'll shut that cad up. You've got to toss with Kerr."

Gore looked alarmed as Study No. 6 closed round him.

"Here, you fellows, hands off—"

Blake had him by the collar in a jiffy.

"You're going off the ground!" he said. "Chaps of your kidney are not wanted. Lend a hand, kids!"

"Right-ho!" said Herries.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus.

Gore struggled in the grip of three pairs of hands. Study No. 6, in spite of his struggles, dragged him ruthlessly off the cricket-ground, and no one seemed inclined to come to his aid. Kildare, who might have interfered, studiously turned his back, and seemed too engrossed in conversation with Monteith to notice what was going on.

Gore was plumped down at a distance, looking extremely red and hot and dishevelled.

"Let me catch you on the ground again!" said Blake, wagging a warning finger at him. "You'll get slain next time, you howling cad! Come on, chaps!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Study No. 6 returned to the cricket-ground. Tom Merry, who still looked very flushed and annoyed, had tossed Kerr, the new captain of the rival side, and Kerr had won.

The New House breathed a sigh of relief. Having won the toss, they could bat first, and as the School House would be batting later in the afternoon, there might yet be time for Figgins to turn up and bring his wonderful bowling powers into play.

Good batsman as Figgins was, it was not at the wicket that he would be most missed by his comrades, but as a bowler, and so there was a chance yet.

It was high time for the match to commence, and now the crowd thickened round the ropes, and there was a buzz of interest as Tom Merry led his men out to field, and Kerr and Wynn opened the innings for the New House.

## CHAPTER 6.

### The House Match.

**T**OM MERRY bowled the first over, against Kerr's wicket. Tom was looking somewhat uncomfortable, and not at all his usual self. The thought that among the spectators were some, at least, who suspected him of treachery towards his opponents, was humiliating and disturbing. It was like a weight upon his mind, and it kept him off his form.

The first over gave Kerr 10 runs, and the New House cheered the splendid start made in the innings.

Jack Blake looked worried. Tom Merry was not bowling as Blake had seen him bowling at the nets in practice, and if his falling-off in form continued, the results might be serious.

But Tom Merry was too good a captain to commit blunders. He realised in the first over that he was not up to his bowling form, and at the end of it he tossed the leather to Blake, and took his place at point.

"Not feeling fit?" said Blake, looking at him.

Tom shook his head.

"I shall be all right presently. Just now you and Manners had better have the bowling."

"Right you are!"

Blake bowled to Fatty Wynn.

Fatty took a single, and brought Kerr opposite Blake, and Kerr made 8 for the rest of the over.

Kerr was evidently in fine form, and the New House cheered him loudly. Manners bowled to Fatty Wynn, and Blake fielded, and caught Fatty out at mid-off. Clack! went the ball into Blake's palm, and up it went straight as a dart, to fall into the fieldsman's hand again with a click.

"How's that?"

"Out!" said Kildare.

Fatty Wynn carried his bat back to the dressing-tent for a single run.

But Kerr was still knocking up runs, and partners came and went, and he was still batting. At the end of an hour's play the New House score was 80 for four wickets, and of that total 60 belonged to the Scotsman.

Blake and Manners had exerted themselves against Kerr's wicket in vain. Herries and D'Arcy had taken a turn, but equally without avail.

Tom Merry was feeling more like his old self now. The green turf, the bright sun, the cheers and shouts, the merry click of bat and ball, were enough to drive dismal thoughts from any mind but a confirmed misanthrope's, and Tom Merry was too sound and healthy to be anything like a misanthrope.

His merry face was merry once more, his eyes sparkled, and he was the keen and eager cricketer that his comrades knew so well.

"I say, Merry, you'd better take an over," said Blake, as the field crossed once more. "Do you feel up to bowling Kerr?"

Tom Merry nodded.

"I was thinking so myself, Blake."

"Here you are, then!"

Blake tossed the ball to Tom Merry, who went to the bowler's end. Kerr saw him go, and prepared for squalls. He knew that Tom was the finest bowler in the School House team, and wondered why he had not taken a hand earlier. Tom Merry took a little run and sent down the ball.

Clack! Kerr gave a gasp as his off-stump flew out of the ground. Tom had bowled him first ball.

There was a frantic cheer from the School House crowd.

"Hurrah!"

"Bravo, Merry!"

"Hurrah! Well bowled!"

Kerr carried out his bat for 60, a splendid score in a junior match, and one that the New House might well be proud of.

The New House juniors cheered him loudly as he went.

Another New House batsman took his place, and Tom Merry prepared to deliver his second ball. Tom's eyes were sparkling, and he looked in fine form now.

He had done well to relinquish the bowling while he was not feeling fit, but now he was quite his old self again, and prepared for conquest.

Down went the ball like lightning. The New House batsman did his best, but he never really knew where the ball was, until he heard the crash of a falling wicket.

"Out!"

The unfortunate batsman, dismissed for a duck's egg, walked away disconsolate, and warned the next man in to look out for a ball that came down like a rifle-bullet.

Next man in promised to do so, and did; but the next ball, as it happened, was a slow one, with a puzzling leg-break on it, and it beat the batsman all the way.

Clack! The bails were on the ground once more.

The School House yelled themselves hoarse.

"The hat-trick!"

"Bravo!"

"The hat-trick! Hurrah!"

Loud and long were the cheers.

The School House captain had stemmed the tide of the New House success with a vengeance, three wickets falling to three successive balls.

The board now read seven down for 80, last man 0.

Tom Merry's eyes sparkled. Like every true cricketer he found keen enjoyment in doing well for his side, and the cheers that greeted a fine feat were music to his ears.

He was in a mood now to conquer worlds, and he did not intend his success to stop with the "hat-trick," if he could help it.

The next batsman in was very wary. But he might as well have been rash for all the good his wariness did him. For Tom sent down a "googly" that was a hidden mystery to the batsman, and his bails were down in a twinkling.

"My hat!" shouted Blake. "This is ripping! Keep it up!"

The School House boys cheered loudly.

The New House youngsters were mostly silent. If this sort of thing continued, the New House innings would peter out in a lamentable way.

As the cheers died away there was another sound heard on the cricket-field—the sound of a distinct and prolonged hiss.

Tom Merry started as if he had trodden on an adder.

Blake looked round him savagely.

"His-s-s-s!"

There was no mistaking the sound.

Then a voice was heard:

"Yah! What have you done with Figgins?"

Tom turned deadly pale. He took no notice of the taunting words, affecting not to hear them, but gripped the ball to bowl again as a new batsman came to the wicket.

"Silence, there!" called out Kildare angrily.

The fellow who had called out, whoever he was, relapsed into silence. But Tom Merry's hand was trembling as he bowled again.

It was a ball that a child could have stopped, and Pratt, who was at the wicket, cut it away to the boundary for four without the slightest difficulty.

The last ball of the over gave him three.

Then Tom walked away from the bowling-crease.

"Don't let that cad's words worry you, Merry," said Blake

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anxiously. "I'll give the rotter something to howl about when the match is over!"

Tom Merry nodded without speaking. He was too deeply hurt for words.

The taunt, called out in the presence of the whole school, showed that there were some—or, at least, one—who believed that he had deliberately planned to win the match unfairly.

Tom hardly felt angry, but a feeling of wretchedness such as he had never before experienced took possession of him.

"You'll take the next over, Blake," he said, after a moment or two.

Blake took the ball. Blake's bowling had not been able to touch Kerr's wicket, but it was a little too strong for Pratt, and at the third ball the wicket went to pieces.

Pratt carried out his bat for 7; the New House total being now 87. Nine down for 87.

"Last man in!" said Kerr.

Last man in did not remain there long. Manners bowled to him, and Mellish caught the ball, and last man in went out again for a duck's-egg.

The New House innings was over. The score was 87, but if Tom Merry had been in good form all through the match, and untroubled by other matters, it was highly probable that the figure would not have been more than half that. Still, as it was, the School House had every hope of reaching a higher one, and in the School House breasts there was little doubt that they would pull off the match.

The New House were disappointed and annoyed. Figgins had not returned. The innings had lasted two hours, and in that time nothing had been heard or seen of the missing New House captain.

It was now certain to all minds that something must have happened to Figgins, and opinion was growing that Tom Merry knew something about it.

## CHAPTER 7.

### The School House Wins.

PHILIP PHIPPS patted Tom Merry on the shoulder as he came off the field.

"I congratulate you, Tom!" he exclaimed. "Four wickets for four balls was an achievement, and no mistake. You are not looking very pleased, though."

"I am not feeling pleased," said Tom shortly.

Phipps looked astonished.

"Why, what is the matter?"

"Oh, nothing!"

"You haven't any worry on your mind, have you? I say, Tom!" Phipps lowered his voice, but it was perfectly audible to several persons near at hand, as he fully intended it should be. "Tom! There's surely nothing in what some of the boys are saying—that you know anything about the disappearance of Figgins?"

Tom bit his lip.

"Do you think I know anything about it?" he asked, looking his cousin straight in the face.

"How should I know?"

"You ought to know," said Tom, with some heat. "You ought to feel certain that I am incapable of such baseness. You have no right to doubt my honour!"

Phipps coloured a little at his tone.

"I don't doubt your honour, Tom. But you were set on winning the match, and now Figgins has disappeared—and then there was what you said—"

"Which you repeated and twisted into something quite different," said Tom bitterly. "Look here, Cousin Philip, we may as well have this out! If you believe for one moment that I could be guilty of foul play, I don't ever want to speak to you again. Unless you believe that I am a decent fellow, you oughtn't to want to speak to me either."

"I really don't know what to think about the matter."

"Then don't speak to me again, please!"

"Tom—"

The boy swung round without waiting for him to finish.

Phipps bit his lip.

"Merry seems to take this matter very much to heart," he remarked to Kildare.

"Naturally; I should say," replied the captain of St. Jim's.

"I hardly like to believe that there can be anything in it, yet Merry's manner is certainly very much against him," Phipps observed. "It's an unfortunate occurrence altogether."

"Very unfortunate," said Kildare drily.

Tom Merry joined Manners, looking white and worried.

"I say, don't let this bother you so much!" said Manners.

"It will all be explained when Figgy turns up, and they will know you had nothing to do with it!"

"Where can he be?" said Tom, in a low voice. "It's

horrible! They suspect me of foul play—me! I should think they might have known me better."

"Only a few cads think so."

"I don't know. Most of the New House fellows are looking at me as if they thought I had murdered Figgins somewhere," said Tom bitterly.

"It's a rotten business! Where on earth can he be?" muttered Manners.

The pitch was being rolled, and during the interval there was a buzz of talk, and Tom Merry was certainly right in thinking that opinion was growing against him in the New House. The Co. still remained firm in their belief, but many of their followers openly said that Tom Merry could tell where Figgins was if he liked.

The interval between the two innings ended, and still there was no sign of Figgins. The School House opened their innings with Blake and Herries. Kerr and Pratt took charge of the bowling.

The "Saints" crowded round the ropes again to watch, many of the New House boys muttering darkly to one another. Without Figgins, the mighty bowler, it was very probable that the School House innings would end in a triumph, and that the batsmen would pass the New House total with only five or six wickets down. And indeed it soon looked like that.

Blake made 24 before he was caught out by Fatty Wynn, and Herries was responsible for 10. Then Manners obtained 12, and D'Arcy put on 8. Arthur Augustus was batting with his eyeglass on, and it brought him disaster. He stopped to screw it into his eye, to take a better view of a ball Kerr was sending him, with the result that the ball scattered his bails long before he was ready for it.

"I say, that was a twial, I suppose!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Rats!" howled the New House. "You're bowled!"

"Oh, weally, I wasn't weady!"

"You're out!"

"I wefuse to considah myself out," said D'Arcy. "I await the opinion of the umpire, to whose decision, I must, of course, bow with wespsect!"

The umpire grinned.

"You're out, you young ass!" said Kildare.

D'Arcy stared at him frigidly.

"What did you say, Kildare?"

"I said you were out."

"You added an extwemely wude observation—"

"Oh, get out!"

"I considah that an apology is due to me."

"Are you going?"

"Certainly not, until I am tweated with pwoper wespsect. I wefuse to submit to bein' chawactewised as an ass!"

"Oh, kick him out, somebody!" said the umpire.

"I wefuse—"

"Chuck him out!" roared the New House, with one voice.

Two grinning fieldsmen laid hold of the swell of St. Jim's, and bundled him off the field. His voice was still heard in indignant protest after the game had been resumed.

The School House were now 54 for four wickets, and Tom Merry and Mellish were batting now. Tom was looking pale and worried. He batted well, because he was exerting himself to play up for his house, but it was not the keen pleasure to him that it would otherwise have been.

He defended his wicket steadily, however, and it soon became apparent that none of the New House bowlers could touch him.

Kerr was bowling well. He succeeded in performing the "hat-trick" as Tom Merry had done in the previous innings, but against Tom Merry's wicket he laboured in vain. Tom added 20 to the score in as many minutes, the other batsmen putting on 4 between them, so after the "hat-trick" by Kerr, the School House were 78 for seven wickets.

They only wanted 10 more to win when a fresh batsman came in to join Tom Merry. Tom had the bowling, and he was cutting it all over the field. Two boundaries and a single came from the first three balls of the over, and the School House score leaped to 87, and the sides had tied.

Grim and glum were now the faces of the New House juniors. The School House wanted only a single run to win, and they had three more wickets to fall. All hope of a victory was now given up by Kerr.

Walsh had the bowling now, and his wicket went down to a yorker from French. Eight down for 87!

Next man in lived through the over, and the last chance of the New House was gone. They knew that Tom Merry's wicket would not fall. But Kerr meant to have a try. It would be something to tie with the rival house, and save the humiliation of a defeat after their triumphant anticipations. And the Scotsman looked very grim and determined as he took the ball for the next over.

Tom Merry was alert and watchful.

"Yah! Where's Figgins? What have you done with Figgy?"

It was a sudden yell from an incensed New House junior. Tom Merry gave a start, and at the same moment the ball flew.

"Clack!"

The bails flew wide apart, and the middle stump reclined at an inebriated-looking angle.

"Out!" yelled the New House, with one voice.

Tom Merry glanced quietly at his wicket, and then put his bat under his arm.

"Stop!" yelled Kerr.

Tom looked back.

"You're not out! I won't have it! It was that cad howling that put you off the ball! Stop where you are!"

It was generous of Kerr.

But a roar rose from the New House crowd, and a frantic storm of appeals to the umpire. Monteith was umpire at the batsman's wicket, and with him the decision rested.

He hesitated.

"How's that?" yelled the New House. "How's that, Monteith?"

The prefect walked across to speak to Kildare, and the two seniors were seen consulting for a few moments. Then Monteith spoke:

"Out!"

And Kildare nodded. It was the game, and the game had to be played. Tom Merry had waited for the umpire's decision, and now he walked away to the tent.

Blake looked deeply chagrined.

"Hard cheese, old fellow!" he said, as Tom came into the tent. "It was decent of Kerr, but the umpire's decision was all right!"

Tom Merry nodded.

Nine down for 87! If one more wicket fell without a run being scored, the New House would have succeeded in making it a draw. Keenly, eagerly, the New House juniors watched the game now.

Tom Merry's place at the wicket was taken by Jones, of the Shell, and Jones was a cautious batsman. He knew how much depended upon him, and he was extremely careful. He stopped five successive balls of the over without attempting a run, and the sixth was carefully flicked away through the slips.

Two New House fieldsmen made a frantic dive for it, but it was useless. The batsmen had crossed! The single run wanted was scored! The School House were cheering wildly. With a rush they swept on to the field, and Jones was slapped on the back till he ached, for having scored that single run.

"Who's the cock-house at St. Jim's?" yelled a jubilant School House junior.

And his comrades yelled:

"We are! We are!"

But from a New House group came a taunting shout:

"Yah! What have you done with Figgins?"

And at that taunt the cheering died away. The School House had beaten their old rivals, had pulled off the House match; but in the midst of the triumph was a canker. Had the match been won by fair play? There was a peculiar smile upon the face of Philip Phipps as he left St. Jim's.

## CHAPTER 8.

### The Return of Figgins.

"FIGGINS!"

"Figgins!"

"Figgins!"

"Here he is!"

The match had long been over; the cricket field was deserted. Half-past six had chimed out from the clock-tower of St. Jim's. Many of the juniors, as soon as the match was concluded, had gone off to hunt for Figgins, a good many of the seniors also joining in the hunt.

Some of them had returned, tired and disappointed and unsuccessful. Most of them were discussing the mystery, and the fact that the Head had sent a message to the police-station in Rylcombe, informing the police of the disappearance of Figgins, and requesting that he might be searched for.

That showed that the Head believed there was something very wrong. Just as the half-hour chimed from the tower a shout went up near the gates, and it was echoed and repeated all through the quadrangle:

"Figgins!"

A dusty, dishevelled figure came running in at the open gate, red with exertion, gasping for breath. It was Figgins—Figgins, looking as if he had been through an extremely rough time, and as if he had run at express speed to get back to the school, as, indeed, he had.

A crowd surrounded him at once. The Co., who had come

in a few minutes before from a useless search, were the first to spot him, and they rushed upon him in a twinkling.

"Figgy!"

"Where have you been?"

"What's the matter?"

"What happened?"

"Gimme something to drink!" gasped Figgins. "I'm parched!"

Kerr rushed to the fountain in the quadrangle, and in a moment returned with his cap full of water. Figgins plunged his red, burning face into it, and drank. Then he gasped like a fish.

"My hat! I've had a time! How's the match gone?"

"School House won!"

"Hang!"

"By a single run!"

"Beastly!"

"Why didn't you come? We should have beaten them hands down. We thought there was an accident. Why didn't you turn up?" demanded Kerr.

"Because I couldn't."

"Why couldn't you?"

"I've been kept away. Where's Tom Merry?"

"There he is, coming this way. What—"

"I want to speak to him."

Figgins wiped his face with his handkerchief, and pushed his way towards Tom Merry. The two leaders of the rival juniors of St. Jim's met face to face, with a buzzing crowd thronging round them. Tom looked at Figgins, and met his eyes steadily.

"I am glad to see you again, Figgins, and to see that you're not hurt," he said quietly. "I was afraid there had been an accident as you did not turn up."

Figgins did not speak. He seemed to have a struggle going on in his mind.

"Some of the fellows," said Tom, "have been saying that I had a hand in keeping you away, so that you couldn't bowl against us in the match. I think you'll be able to say now that it isn't true."

Figgins started a little.

"Who says that?" he asked hastily.

"A good many of the fellows of your house."

"And some of your own, too," said a New House voice.

Figgins was silent. Every eye was fixed upon him, and never had the chief of the New House juniors been seen to look so extremely uncomfortable.

"Why don't you speak?" said Tom Merry. "You know your reason, whatever it was, for staying away, and I suppose you know that I had nothing to do with it."

Figgins turned redder.

"Tell us all about it, Figgy!" exclaimed a score of voices.

"I—hang it!—I've got nothing to tell you," said Figgins at last. "I was kept away from the match by a beastly ruffian, who shut me up in the old woodman's hut in the Castle Wood, that's all I know about it."

There was a buzz of amazement.

"Figgy, look here—"

"Oh, let me get away! I'm tired, and want a rest."

"You're keeping something secret!" howled Pratt.

"Make him tell it out, chaps. He's trying to screen Tom Merry!"

Tom gave a start.

"There's no reason why Figgins should try to screen me!" he exclaimed. "I haven't the slightest objection to his speaking out. I would much rather he did, of course."

"Here's Mr. Railton!"

The housemaster of the School House was coming through the crowd. He had seen the arrival of Figgins. The boys respectfully made way for him. Figgins showed a strong desire to escape, but Mr. Railton signed to him to stop, and he had no choice but to obey.

"Figgins, I am very glad to see you return unhurt," said Mr. Railton quietly; "but you must give us an explanation. The police have been notified of your disappearance, and asked to search for you. What has caused you to act in this unaccountable manner?"

"I couldn't help it, sir."

"Tell me the reason."

"I was set upon by Black George, sir—you know, that ruffian who hangs about Rylcombe—and he shut me up in the old hut in the wood, and wouldn't let me go till six o'clock."

Mr. Railton looked astounded.

"You amaze me, Figgins! What could the man's motive possibly have been for such an action?"

Figgins coloured uncomfortably.

"Speak out, Figgins! I cannot see what motive you can have for concealing anything."

"I—I—"

"Come, come, speak out!"

"Well, the ruffian said I was to be shut up there till six

o'clock, and from words he let drop I gathered that someone had put him up to it," confessed Figgins. "Of course, he had no motive of his own for wasting an afternoon keeping me shut up there."

Mr. Railton's brow darkened.

"That is very true. He was not intoxicated?"

"He was quite sober, sir."

"It is impossible to suppose that he acted in such a way for nothing," said Mr. Railton slowly. "Is that all, Figgins?"

"Ye-e-es, sir!"

"He hasn't said why he left the school before the match at all, sir!" howled Pratt.

"Oh, you shut up!" said Figgins.

But Mr. Railton instantly took up the point.

"Pratt is quite right, Figgins. This tale you have told is so extraordinary that it is a tax upon my faith in your honesty to believe it. Mind, I do believe you, but you must keep nothing back. Everything will have to be explained. Why did you leave the school only half an hour before an important match in which you were expected to play as captain?"

"I—I had a note, sir."

"A note!" said Mr. Railton, looking puzzled. "From whom?"

"I don't know, sir."

"This is inexplicable, Figgins!—Have you the note now?"

"Yes, sir."

"Give it to me."

Figgins drew a crumpled sheet of paper from his pocket, and handed it to the housemaster. There was a buzz at once. The paper was of a delicate, pearl-grey colour, and scented, and a score of boys knew it at once as the note-paper upon which Miss Priscilla Fawcett was in the habit of writing to Tom Merry.

The number of letters Tom Merry received from his old governess was a standing joke at St. Jim's, and the stationery the old lady used was distinct enough to be known at once.

This note which had been written to Figgins was written upon a half-sheet of paper, which had evidently been torn off one of Miss Priscilla's letters.

Tom Merry noted it at once, and a look of wonder came upon his face. Several pairs of eyes as well as the housemaster's read that note. It ran as follows, in a sprawling, boyish hand:

"Dear George,—Can you come out and speak to me for a minute? I'm in fearful trouble at Greyfriars, and I've bolted. I'm waiting at the top of the lane. ARTHUR."

Mr. Railton looked puzzled.

"What does this mean, Figgins?"

"Arthur is my cousin, sir, at Greyfriars School, and that note was given to me by a kid from the village, and I never thought that it was—was a hoax. I thought Arthur was in trouble, and had bolted from the school," said Figgins. "I noticed that—that the paper—"

"What about the paper?"

"That it was like Tom Merry gets from his old governess, sir," stammered Figgins. "I might have thought it a joke of his, only there didn't seem any sense in it; and then I knew Tom Merry was in St. Jim's, and hadn't been outside the gates since morning school, so I reckoned he couldn't have sent it. Besides, as it was only a couple of minutes to the top of the lane, I should have gone, anyway."

"And you went?"

"Yes, sir; and just round the corner under the trees a trap was waiting. I thought it must be all right, and that Arthur had come in the trap, and then that ruffian Black George suddenly set on me and slammed me into the trap, and held me down there with a rug over me, while another brute drove off. I didn't know what to make of it, but when Black George shoved me into the old hut, and wouldn't let me go till six o'clock, I thought that—"

Figgins halted.

"Well," said the housemaster quietly, "what did you think?"

"I'd rather not say any more, sir."

"You must go on, Figgins."

"Well, from that and what he said, I thought that I was being kept away from the match, and that somebody had put Black George up to it," said Figgins unwillingly. "I remembered that the note looked like Tom Merry's paper, and then when I examined the writing it didn't seem much like my cousin's. I hadn't noticed that at first."

"So, in short, you believed that Tom Merry had put the ruffian up to this outrage."

"No," exclaimed Figgins vehemently, "I didn't! I—I—I admit the thought crossed my mind, and when I came back I wanted Merry to explain, but I—I couldn't believe him guilty of such a thing. It's impossible!"

"Yaas, wathah, quite imposs.!" said D'Arcy.

Tom Merry was white as death. He had listened to the tale with amazement as absolute as that of any present—amazement greater than ever as he heard his own name connected with the outrage.

Surely Figgins did not mean it!

Surely this was some joke, or else a strange and horrible nightmare, and he was not awake at all. Figgy's final words brought a rush of tears to Tom Merry's eyes.

"Thank you, Figgy!" he said, his voice shaking a little. "I can only say that I know nothing at all of the matter. I am in the dark as much as you are."

There was a murmur from the crowd of boys. It was a murmur in which amazement was blended with disbelief. Tom looked round proudly.

"Does anybody here doubt my word?"

He flung out the question like a challenge.

"It is not a question of that, Merry," said Mr. Railton, quietly. "This is a matter for proofs, and proofs will, I think, be easy to obtain. This ruffian, Black George, can be found, and when he is arrested he may be compelled to speak the truth."

Tom drew a deep breath.

"I hope so, sir."

Mr. Railton looked at him keenly. Was it possible that Tom Merry was guilty? He had always known the boy as frank, and brave, and true, yet the evidence against him was almost overwhelming, and the housemaster knew how keenly in earnest Tom had been to win the match for his side. Was it possible that the boy had yielded to that temptation?

"The matter will be reported to the Head at once," said the housemaster quietly. "Then it must stand over till Black George is captured."

He was turning away when Gore's voice was heard.

"Let him explain how the note came to be written on his paper, sir."

"I have said that the matter shall stand over for the present," said Mr. Railton. "However, if Merry has an explanation to give, it is only fair that he should be allowed to give it at once. You are quite right, Gore."

Gore coloured a little. He had not meant his remark for Tom Merry's benefit, but quite the reverse, as Mr. Railton probably knew.

The housemaster looked at Tom.

"If that note was written by the poacher, or somebody else, Merry, can you explain how your note-paper came into his hands?"

Tom shook his head.

"You do not deny that it is yours?"

"No, sir! It has been torn off a letter sent by my old governess, I think. I have never seen any other paper at St. Jim's like it."

"Then it must have come from your study."

"I suppose so, sir!"

"Nothing in that," said Jack Blake. "It may have been chucked away with old rubbish in the waste-paper basket, and picked up by somebody."

"It is quite clean," said Gore.

"It does not look as if it had been thrown away," said Mr. Railton. "Still, it is possible. I am going now to speak to the Head. I earnestly counsel you lads not to make up your minds about this matter until definite proof has been obtained. It is very easy to commit an act of great injustice by proceeding hastily."

And Mr. Railton walked away towards the principal's house, with the letter in his hand. Kildare and Monteith hastily followed him.

Tom Merry remained standing, white and silent. Some of the boys hissed him, or gave him derisive looks. He did not seem to see them. Manners slipped his arm through Tom's.

"Come on, old chap, no good sticking here!"

Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy came nearer to the Terrible Two.

"I want to say," said Blake, looking round, with an extremely aggressive manner, "that I believe Tom Merry is innocent of doing anything underhand, and that I'm willing to fight anybody who doesn't agree with me. I can't say fairer than that."

"Right-ho!" said Herries.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Blake was looking at Figgins. Poor Figgins was looking the picture of misery. The Co. were silent; they did not know what to think. Tom Merry and Manners turned to

# ANSWERS

go, and Study No. 6 prepared to march with them as a sort of guard of honour, to testify to their faith. Figgins started forward.

"Stop a minute, Merry! I want to speak to you."

Tom turned his head.

"What is it, Figgins?"

"Look here! Things look suspicious—you'll admit that?"

"I can't help admitting that."

"But all the same, I don't believe you had anything to do with it, Merry, and there's my fist on it," said Figgins, holding out his hand.

Tom grasped it warmly.

"Thank you, Figgy, old man! If you believe in me, I can stand what the rest think. I shouldn't like you to believe I could play a blackguardly trick like that."

"I don't believe it for a moment."

Somewhat comforted, Tom Merry went on his way, leaving the crowd in a buzz behind him. In spite of Figgy's act of faith, and his influence in his house, it was pretty plain that most of the New House had made up their minds that Tom Merry was guilty.

Meanwhile, Kildare and Monteith were speaking to the housemaster before he entered the principal's office. The same thought had occurred to both.

"Don't you think, sir," said Monteith, "that it would be best to keep the police out of this matter, if possible? We don't want a scandal, to make St. Jim's the talk of the country."

"That's what I was thinking," said Kildare. "If the poacher is arrested, and confesses that he was bribed to commit this outrage by a fellow of St. Jim's, it will ring through the country. I cannot quite believe that Merry is guilty. But if he is, we don't want St. Jim's to be disgraced."

Mr. Railton looked thoughtful.

"But we must hear the poacher's evidence," he said.

"We might find him, sir, and make him come here. He must know he is liable to a term of imprisonment, and so if we find him I expect he will be submissive enough; if a chance of escape is held out to him. Otherwise, even if he is arrested, he may prove obstinate, and refuse to say anything."

"You are right. If you can get the scoundrel here, so that we can satisfy ourselves, every useful purpose will be served," said the housemaster.

"We will manage that, sir."

Mr. Railton nodded, and left them. Kildare glanced at Monteith.

"We can arrange it, Monteith?"

"Rather; if we have to wring the rascal's neck for him first," said the prefect. "We'll get him here."

## CHAPTER 9.

### Expelled from the School.

DR. HOLMES was in discussion with Mr. Railton, in his study, and looked extremely worried about an hour later when a tap came at the door.

"Come in!" called out the Head of St. Jim's.

Kildare entered. Behind him came Monteith, with his arm linked in that of a black-bearded, ruffianly-looking fellow, in a fur cap. The latter stood shambling and shuffling nervously, his shifty eyes wandering round the study, and refusing to look steadfastly at anything.

"Who is this man?" asked the Head.

"Black George, sir. We found him skulking in the wood, and persuaded him to come," said Kildare. "We have promised him a safe conduct if he tells you all you ask him, sir."

"Very good! Was he willing to come?"

"I didn't ask him, sir," said the captain of St. Jim's simply. He had to come, or take a fearful hiding, and then be carried here. I suppose he liked to walk best."

Dr. Holmes smiled slightly. He adjusted his pince-nez, and looked steadily at the ruffian.

"My man," he said, quietly, "you know you are liable to arrest for kidnapping a junior belonging to this school. You may be allowed to escape if you tell the whole truth. Why did you do it?"

"I did it for a five-pun' note," said Black George sullenly.

"Who employed you?"

The ruffian hesitated.

"That is the important point," said the Head. "If you refuse to answer, I shall detain you here and telephone for the police."

The ruffian shifted uneasily.

"It was a boy belonging to this 'ere school," he said at last. "He said as it was only a joke to keep a feller away from a cricket match, and I never thought any harm."

"What was the name of the boy?"

"I dunno!"

"Would you know him again?"

"Oh, yes; but—"

"Mr. Railton, will you kindly have the whole school assembled in hall at once? This man will then pick out the boy he mentions."

"Certainly, sir!" And Mr. Railton left the study.

Black George was looking more uneasy than ever. He fumbled with his fur cap, and shifted from one leg to the other.

"I don't see as I want to give 'im away!" he mumbled.

"You have no choice in the matter. That is the price of your release."

"I didn't think any harm. He said it was a joke—"

"Possibly; but it happens to have been more than a joke. You need say no more."

There was silence in the study, till Mr. Railton returned to say that the school were assembled in the hall. The doctor rose—and proceeded thither with Mr. Railton, followed by Kildare and Monteith with the poacher.

There was a buzz in the hall. All the boys were there in the order of their forms, and Tom Merry could be seen in his place in the Shell. Manners was by his side, but the rest of the Shell seemed somewhat desirous of giving Tom a wide berth. Silence fell as the doctor entered and mounted the dais.

"Boys," said the Head, slowly, "this—this person"—with a wave of the hand towards the shambling poacher—"has confessed that he kidnapped Figgins this afternoon, being employed to do so by a boy of this school, who told him that Figgins was to be kept away from a cricket match for a joke."

There was a murmur.

"He will now proceed to pick out the boy, whose name he does not know," resumed the Head. "All of you remain where you are. You can proceed, my man."

"I don't want—"

"Do as you're told, and at once."

The ruffian mumbled, and shuffled along the lines of boys, his shifty eyes seeking their faces. He stopped as he came to the Shell, and his hand rose to point to Tom Merry.

"There he is!"

Tom Merry started.

"It's a lie!" he cried huskily. "A lie—a foul lie!"

"I didn't want to give you away," said Black George, mumbling. "You told me it was only a joke on the other chap, and now they say it's a matter of prison. It's your own fault."

"You—you foul liar! I never said anything of the kind to you—I—"

Tom's voice was drowned by the roar that went up.

"Tom Merry did it!"

"He's guilty!"

"Shame!"

"Boo!"

"Kick him out!"

Tom was white as chalk. Manners had dropped his arm; his own chum was staring at him with dazed eyes, as if he believed it, too. Was the whole world gone mad—or was he dreaming? Could it really be that he, Tom Merry, was being howled at and hissed at by his schoolfellows; that in the faces round him he could read nothing but hatred and scorn? The doctor's voice rang through the din.

"Silence! Step out here, Merry!"

Tom almost reeled out from the ranks of the Shell. He was dazed, almost stupefied. The doctor's face was black with wrath.

"Merry, you are guilty—guilty of this wicked and cowardly outrage, calculated to bring undying disgrace upon the school if it becomes public. The proof is complete; do not add to your guilt by falsehood. Unhappy boy! What could have induced you to be guilty of this cowardly and abominable treachery?"

Tom did not reply. His tongue clove to the roof of his mouth, and he stared wildly at the doctor.

"You do not speak," said the Head. "I do not wonder. What, indeed, could you have to say? Merry, you must be aware that now your guilt is known, there is but one step I can take. You have disgraced the school and yourself! You leave St. Jim's to-morrow morning, sir! You are expelled from the school! Go!"

Without a word—for he was not capable of speech at that fearful moment—without a syllable, Tom turned, and walked unsteadily to the door. A howl of scorn and contempt followed him as he disappeared.

THE END.

And did Tom Merry quit St. Jim's and leave the good old school with a stain upon his name? Did the School House know him no more?

That is what we shall relate in our next story.





# Stormpoint

A School Tale. By MAURICE MERRIMAN

READ  
THIS  
FIRST

your whip, Bob!" cried Jim Fisher. "If I can't stop him, I'll jolly well hurt him!" (Now go on with the story.)

## Bob Stands Treat.

Jim was a remarkably strong lad, and, seizing the whip, he commenced to lash at the bully, who uttered some wild yells, and quickly drew his horse back.

"That's all right, Bully Jardon!" exclaimed Jim. "If you haven't had enough, just get down, and I will give you a little more."

"I'll make you smart for this!" cried Jardon.

"All right!" exclaimed Jim. "I'm inclined to think that I have made you smart already! If not, just you get down, and I'll jolly well soon make you smart! Look here, Bob," added Jim, stepping up to the back of his chum, "we have got to shift that old idiot, Jones! You can't lash him without lashing the horses, and that might cause another accident. Now, I am going to get down, and if I can't shift him from the horses' heads, I shall be surprised; then you drive on, and I will run after you. I am bound to be able to run faster than Jones, and you can pull up so that I can catch you up."

"Good idea, old chap!" exclaimed Bob. "You are an excellent lasher, and I do not see how you can fail to shift the old buffer. He's a nasty, bad-tempered fellow, too, and deserves a thrashing for his language."

Jim leapt out of the waggonette, and went to the horses' heads.

"You are in the way, Jones!" he cried, giving him a cut that caused him to leap into the air and howl. "Go and attend to your motor-car. The beastly thing looks as though it needed a lot of attention. Ha, ha, ha! Your front wheel has turned off at a tangent, Bob. I don't believe you will be able to drive the thing like that."

"I'm determined to drive it!" declared Bob. "Just you shift that man, and I'll drive the thing, even if I drive it into the ditch."

"Shift, Jones! You are not wanted."

"You varmint!" If you strike me again I'll break your head!" yelled Jones, as he received another stinging cut.

Jardon, in the dogcart behind, saw his opportunity, and he lashed at Bob's chums in a manner that must have hurt them. Their yells testified that.

"Drive on, Bob!" howled one of them.

"Don't be so impatient!" exclaimed Bob, who was beyond the range of the whip.

"Impatient be sugared! It's all right for you up there, but—woohoo!—it's not all right down here."

"Catch his whip!"

"I am! I'm catching it all over my body, and it hurts."

"The smart will soon go off," said Bob.

"Bother it! I don't want it to come on."

"You can't get things exactly as you like them," said Bob.

"Woohoo! They are not coming a bit like I like them."

Jim succeeded in shifting Jones by this time; then he gave the horses a cut, and they went prancing onwards, while Bob had to drive them at an angle, because that bent front wheel appeared to be determined to bowl into a ditch. Jim succeeded in clambering up behind, and all the time Jardon lashed him, until Jim succeeded in catching the thong of the whip. Then commenced a tug of war, while the thong came off the whip, and so settled the matter.

"We are all right now," observed Bob. "I wish our wheel was something like straight; all the same, we shall

get along famously directly I learn how much to allow for leeway."

Bob was lucky. It is true that on several occasions he nearly went into the ditch, but as he did not quite go into it no harm resulted, and he was perfectly satisfied, especially as he succeeded in preventing Jardon passing him in the narrow lane.

All went well until they reached a turning in the lane, and here it was considerably broader. It was at this spot that Jardon made a dash to pass them, and the worst of it was that he succeeded. He took a lot of the paint off the waggonette, and damaged the front wheel a little; but he got past, and that was all he cared for.

"Now, you little demons," he shouted, "we are going to wolf all your grub! I happen to know you have ordered a feed, and we are going to eat it. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Perkins has told him all about it," growled Bob. "I shall never be able to overtake them with these damaged wheels. I believe we are sold this time."

"Well, go as fast as you can, Bob," exclaimed Rex. "I should very much like to get to windward of that bully. It's disgusting to think that he is going to wolf all your provisions."

"Why, so it is!" growled Bob. "All the same, I do not see how we are going to help it, unless—eh? Why, there is just a chance!"

The chance Bob wanted made its appearance some distance along the lane in the shape of a sailor, who was walking in the same direction in which they were driving.

"Like a lift, Jack?" inquired Bob, pulling up.

"Well, young gents, I rather think I would. You see, I'm on leave, and my mother lives some ten miles on ahead. I'm going to spend a few days there."

"Then jump up, and listen to this little lot," exclaimed Bob. "We were going for a picnic, and I've ordered a fine spread, but some beastly bullies have got past us, and they are going to wolf our food. Now, they are too big for us to tackle, but if you will punch their heads for us, why, you shall have a ripping feed."

"I'm on to that like barnacles on a ship's bottom. I dare say I shall be able to bring them to their senses, 'cos I'm rather good at boxing, and I haven't the slightest doubt I shall be able to convince 'em they ain't right. But you've got a list to port!"

"Yes; a beastly motor-car ran into us."

"Haw, haw, haw! Did it damage itself?"

"We couldn't see; it was in the ditch, and I don't expect they have got it out yet."

"Well, you've got an awkward craft to steer this voyage, I must say. Still, if you keep clear of the ditch, that will be all right."

Fortune favoured Bob. Although he went very fast, he reached the little inn without mishap, and he learnt from the old lady who kept it that Jardon and his friends were just about to commence their dinner. They had told her the dinner was for them, and she had served it up in the grounds at the back.

"How long have they been at it?" inquired Bob.

"They are only just commencing."

"Come on, Jack! Come on, you fellows! We shall have something to say about this."

It was really an excellent feed. Bob had not spared expense, and cold fowls, cold beef, ham, and all sorts of

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STORMPOINT (continued).  
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good things were spread on the grass, on a beautifully white tablecloth.

Jack, as they all called him, picked out Jardon as being the biggest one, and, approaching him, made his presence known by catching him a slap over the head that knocked him backwards. Jardon's temper would not submit to that sort of treatment. He leapt to his feet, and went for Jack for all he was worth, and the next moment there was a free fight, for the others joined in. Jim gave Swipes a bad black eye, while Jack pitched the unfortunate Jardon head-first into a clump of rose-bushes, and when he came out of them all the fight was knocked out of him.

"I say, Jardon," exclaimed Bob, "you have damaged your dial. You look as though you had been fighting tom-cats, and had got the worst of it."

"You little viper, I will make you sorry for this!" roared the infuriated bully, making a rush at Bob. But Jack bore down on him, knocked him head over heels, and pitched him into the rose-bushes again; then Bob sent Perkins after him.

"You are spoiling my roses!" cried the old woman, hurrying towards the spot.

"Yes, ma'am, and we are a-spoiling these here young chaps," said Jack. "I shouldn't be a bit surprised if some of 'em gets scratched. They will want a fresh coat of paint on their hulls. Haw, haw, haw! Sheer off, you beauty, else I'll pitch you in again!"

"What's it got to do with you?" snarled Jardon.

"Never you mind what it has got to do with me, young swell. You will find as it has got something to do with you if you don't sheer off. It's lucky we were in time to stop 'em starting. Well, you have got a fine spread here, I must say!"

"It is mine!" declared Jardon.

"I don't care whose it is," said Jack. "I'm invited to the spread, and I'm going to have a feed."

"Sit down, Jack!" exclaimed Bob. "Seeing that I paid the money for the spread, and ordered it specially, I don't see how it can be that long-nosed thief's; but, then, Jardon never can tell the truth. Ha, ha, ha! Just look at his face! You had better go and buy some sticking-plaster, Jardon. You are scratched all over. Sure you wouldn't like another round?"

"Only wait till I get you back to the college!" cried Jardon. "I'll have vengeance for this!"

"Go and drown yourself!"

"Serve us up some food," snarled Jardon, turning to the landlady.

"You had better get the money in advance, Mrs. Biggs," said Bob. "You are never likely to get it if you don't."

"I have only got bread and cheese in the house," said Mrs. Biggs, "and there's not so very much of that. If that will suit you, you can have some, but you will have to pay me twopence each in advance."

"Do you mean to say you haven't got anything better than that?" demanded Jardon.

"Only what these young gents have got. There will be more there than they can eat. I don't know whether they will let you have it after they have done with it."

"Do you think I am going to eat the leavings of those young black-guards, woman?"

"Then you will have to put up with bread and cheese. I have got nothing else."

Bob did not need nearly all the food he had got, but he was determined not to let the bullies have any. Perkins had a try to make friends, but it was a failure.

"You go away, and have dinner with Jardon," said Bob.

"But he hasn't got any dinner. We can get better grub than bread and cheese in the college. I can't possibly go all day without food."

"Then go home, you little sneak! It was through you that Jardon tried to steal our provisions. You sha'n't have a mouthful! I detest sneaks. There they go, and you had better run after them, Perkins, for you are not coming home with us—and so I tell you!"

The unlucky Perkins made a rush for the dogcart, but Jardon refused to stop.

"Oh, I say, this is too bad!" exclaimed Perkins. "You can't possibly be so greedy as to wolf all that stuff, Bob, and not give me a taste!"

"If you had been a decent chap instead of a miserable little sneak, you would have been one of our party; now you sha'n't have a bit. And if you take my advice, you will start walking home, for I'm not having you in the waggonette at any price."

"It's too bad, and I shall tell the doctor. I won't be treated like this. You are a lot of cads, but I'll get level with you, just you see if I don't."

Then Perkins commenced his long walk, and the chums overtook him in the waggonette late in the afternoon; but Bob absolutely refused to give him a lift. Perkins, however, had a little bit of revenge, for as Bob was turning round chaffing him, he ran his wobbly front wheel into the ditch; and as he whipped up the horses, with a view to getting it out again, the wheel smashed off.

"He, he, he! Ain't I jolly glad!" roared Perkins. "I wish you had broken your necks. It serves you right. I am glad!"

"It's more than Jones will be," observed Rex. "How are you going to get home, Bob?"

"We shall go along all right," declared Bob. "That wheel wasn't much use, anyhow. It's all down hill, so it won't matter. The axle dragging along the ground will save us the trouble of putting on the brake. I'm perfectly satisfied."

"I have grave doubts whether Jones will be," said Rex.

"Oh, you never can satisfy him!" exclaimed Bob. "In fact, it's not often that I try to do so."

"You haven't tried so jolly hard on this occasion. Hadn't we better pick up the wheel?"

"It's no good; it's the most duffing wheel I ever saw. Now, you see, we are getting on a treat. It's a little lopsided; still, that can't be helped."

About half an hour later they reached the livery stable, where Jones was waiting for their return.

"Bust me!" he gasped, when he caught sight of his damaged waggonette. "Why, you young varminents! I'll make you pay for this!"


"It was all your doing, Jones," declared Bob.

"If you choose to drive motor cars on the wrong side of the lane, you must put up with the consequences. You will find that waggonette goes all right without its wheel. You can hire it out to Jardon and that lot. Good-bye! I haven't time to listen to all that. Come on, old chaps! We will have a bit of fun in the village."

Then off they rushed, leaving Jones storming at the top of his voice; and, having had their fun in the village, they succeeded in getting back just before the gates were closed.

(Another long instalment of this splendid school story next Thursday. Order your GEM in advance.)

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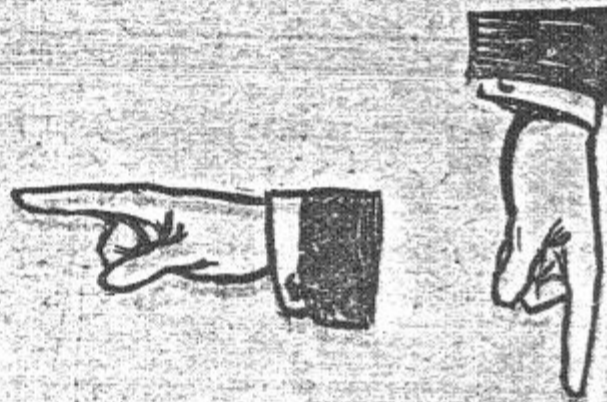


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