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HEAD COOK AND BOTTLE-WASHER.

LONG, COMPLETE SCHOOL TALE OF TOM MERRY.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD

AN ANGRY CONTRIBUTOR!

MELLISH SCOWLED UNAMIABLY. "I'LL MAKE YOU SORRY FOR THIS, TOM MERRY, BEFORE I'VE DONE WITH YOU!" HE SAID.

NO. 32. VOL. 2.

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NEXT THURSDAY: "TOM MERRY'S WEEKLY." By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

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

HEAD COOK AND BOTTLE WASHER.

A Tale of Tom Merry's Schooldays.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

Something Like an Idea.

"MERRY!"

Tom Merry did not reply. His eyes were fixed upon his blotting-paper, over which his pen was travelling slowly, and he was evidently so much interested in his occupation that he did not hear the Form-master's voice.

"Merry!"

Mr. Linton's voice was a little louder. Mr. Linton was master of the Shell at St. Jim's, and the Shell Form was honoured by the presence of the Terrible Three—Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther. Manners and Lowther were looking towards Tom Merry now, wishing they could warn him that the Form-master's eye was upon him, but they were not near enough.

"Merry!"

Mr. Linton pronounced the name for the third time, in a sharp voice that roused Tom from his preoccupation at last.

He started and looked up.

"Adsum!" he exclaimed hastily.

The class giggled.

Tom Merry's thoughts were plainly far away. He had heard Mr. Linton at last, and answered as if he were answering to his name at calling-over.

Mr. Linton smiled grimly.

"Merry, you seem to be intensely occupied. I have never noticed this extreme absent-mindedness in you before. It is quite a new development."

Tom Merry turned red.

"Yes, sir," he said meekly.

"You were busily engaged, I believe, in writing upon your blotting-paper," said the Form-master, in the same tone. "Something extremely interesting, I suppose, Merry? Perhaps a caricature of your master, or something of that kind?"

"Oh, no, sir!"

"Ah, perhaps you were deep in study, and writing out the conjugation of the verb we have just been discussing!" suggested Mr. Linton. "Is that the case, Merry?"

Tom's colour deepened.

"No, sir."

"Then will you kindly acquaint me with the matter which has absorbed your attention for some time and quite taken it away from the lesson?" asked Mr. Linton, with elaborate politeness.

Tom Merry was silent. His hand slid over the blotting-paper as if to conceal what he had written there, and Mr. Linton had very little doubt that it was some impertinence reflecting upon him, the Form-master. He made a step towards Tom.

"Merry, bring your blotting-paper to me here."

"My blotting-paper, sir?"

"Yes, your blotting-paper, and at once."

Tom Merry rose reluctantly.

"Shall I bring Gore's blotting-paper, sir; it is cleaner than mine?"

"Bring your own, Merry!" roared Mr. Linton, getting exasperated. "And step out here at once!"

Tom Merry had no choice but to obey.

Blotting-paper in hand, he made his way out before the class, the boys of the Shell watching him curiously, and wondering what was going to happen.

"Hold it up for me to see, Merry!"

"Certainly, sir."

Tom Merry held up the blotting-paper.

Mr. Linton fixed a stern glance upon it, and then a puzzled look came over his face. Upon the paper was written, or rather, scratched, the words:

"TOM MERRY'S WEEKLY."

Tom had scratched the words there in big letters, and finished with a flourish, evidently very pleased wtih his handiwork.

Mr. Linton glanced at the words, then at Tom Merry, and then at the mysterious inscription again. Then he fixed his eyes on Tom's face.

"Tom Merry's Weekly," he said. "What does that mean, Merry? What have you written those meaningless words for, instead of attending to your lessons?"

"I—I wrote them, sir——"

"Yes, I know you wrote them, Merry. What I want to know is, why did you write them?"

"It's an idea, sir. It came into my head during the lesson."

"Indeed! I must ask you to explain yourself a little more fully."

"I was thinking of starting a school newspaper, sir," said Tom Merry. "A really ripping paper, to be called 'Tom Merry's Weekly.'"

There was a buzz in the Shell.

"Good wheeze!" murmured Monty Lowther. "Old Tommy always gets there, every time! Jolly good wheeze, Manners!"

And Manners nodded assent. Mr. Linton looked grim.

"I see, Merry. This is, doubtless, a matter of the greatest importance——"

"Certainly, sir! You see, we shall publish the paper in the School House, and it ought to take the shine out of the New House. Don't you think so, sir?"

"I think, Merry, that you must learn to think of other matters in class. You will go back to your place, and will write out the words you have written there, one hundred times, this afternoon, and bring them to me this evening."

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry, rather glad to escape so cheaply.

And he went back to his desk.

The lesson proceeded, Mr. Linton keeping a sharp eye upon Tom, but the hero of the Shell was not found wanting again.

The idea was still working in his active brain, but he contrived to bestow some attention upon his work, and escape further hauling over the coals.

When the class was dismissed, Manners and Lowther joined Tom Merry going out. They linked their arms in his and the three walked away together.

"Good wheeze!" said Monty Lowther. "How did you come to think of it, Tom?"

"Oh, one gets good ideas sometimes!" said Tom Merry modestly. "The thing has been done before, you know."

"Well, it's done at St. Jim's, for that matter!" remarked Manners. "The Sixth have their monthly magazine, and awful piffle it is, too!"

"Yes, don't I know it? Natural history by Barker, fearfully long reports of the debating society, and that rot. Nobody ever reads it, even in the Sixth."

"No, I suppose not. Of course, the chaps who write it don't expect it to be read. That would be asking too much."

"They're going to read our magazine," said Tom firmly. "Ours is to be read and—and enjoyed. We ought to get up a big circulation in all the lower Forms, and in the Fifth, too, perhaps in the Sixth. It all depends upon making the thing readable."

"Of course, that's the great point. It's not easy."

"Perhaps not, but we're going to do it. We always manage to do anything we set our minds to," Tom Merry remarked. "We shall have to make up a list of contributors in the first place, and see what can be done in that way. We're not going to publish a lot of piffle to please anybody."

"Suppose we call a meeting," suggested Manners. "We can't run the thing alone. At all events, we don't want to. Study No. 6 would very likely start an opposition paper."

"Yes," said Lowther; "and Figgins & Co. might do the same over in the New House. That would rot the whole thing."

Tom Merry looked thoughtful.

"We could take Figgins & Co. into the firm," he remarked. "They ought to be able to contribute something decent, I think, and if we let them into the thing, it would keep them from starting in opposition."

"We'll call them to the meeting after dinner," said Manners. "Very likely Figgins will want to be editor, or some nonsense of that sort, but we shall have to make him see reason."

"Oh, that would be rot!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"I should say so," echoed Lowther. "I don't think there's much doubt as to whom the editor ought to be. My uncle has shares in a newspaper."

"Has he?" said Tom Merry, with an air of polite interest.

"Yes," said Lowther warmly, "he has; and as the thing is in the family, so to speak, I think I ought to be asked to become editor."

"Come, old fellow, don't be an ass, you know! The paper is going to be called 'Tom Merry's Weekly,' and so I simply must edit it."

"I don't see it."

"Blessed if I do, either," said Manners. "If you give your name to the paper you ought to be willing to let me have the editorship."

"You!" exclaimed Lowther. "Of all the nerve!"

"I know a chap whose brother writes for the London papers," said Manners obstinately. "I've picked up all sorts of wrinkles from him."

"Oh, hang!" said Tom Merry. "Don't let us start on that topic now. It stands to reason that every kid let into the thing will want to be editor, and we must find some way of settling it. The first thing is to call a meeting of the principals in the undertaking—our noble selves, and Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy, and Figgins & Co., from the New House. That'll be enough for a start, anyway. Now it's time to feed. After dinner I'll go and get that beastly imposition written out, and you two can fetch in Blake and Figgins."

"Right you are!"

And when the midday meal of the juniors had been disposed of Tom Merry went to the quarters of the Terrible Three to get the task imposed by Mr. Linton done before the meeting in the study came about.

His pen travelled rapidly over the paper, and the work grew under his hand. A cheerful face looked into the study and saw him busily engaged.

"Hallo!" said Jack Blake cheerily. "Busy, old son?"

Tom Merry looked up.

Blake, from Study No. 6, stepped into the study. He stared in amazement at the paper Tom Merry had been covering with more or less legible writing.

"What the dickens are you doing?" he exclaimed.

For this is how the imposition looked.

"Tom Merry's Weekly. Tom Merry's Weekly. Tom Merry's Weekly. Tom Merry's Weekly. Tom Merry's Weekly. Tom Merry's Weekly——" and so on, ad lib.

"Tom Merry's Weekly!" said Blake. "You've spelt it wrong, kid! You ought to have put w-e-a-k-l-y, and added 'in the head!'"

Tom laughed.

"It's an imposition!" he explained. "Old Linton gave it me because I wrote that on my blotting-paper, and forgot that he was talking."

"I see. But what's the idea?"

"Haven't you seen Manners?"

"No, I just looked in to see if you were coming down to the footer."

"More important business on hand," said Tom Merry impressively. "Manners has just gone to find you and Herries and D'Arcy, to call you to the meeting."

"The meeting! What meeting?"

"A meeting to discuss this idea," explained Tom. "We're thinking of starting a school newspaper, and we want you to join in it."

"Good idea! We did it once before in No. 6," said Blake. "But only one number came out, and it died a natural death. We did it almost on our lonesome, and there weren't enough of us in it, you see, and Figgins & Co. were up against it."

"My idea is to take Figgins & Co. into the wheeze."

"Good! Only don't forget that Figgy has nerve enough for a regiment. He'll want to be editor."

"Then he'll get sat on! Of course——"

"I was editor of the one we started once," said Blake casually. "I shall be happy to place my experience at your disposal, and occupy the chair again."

Tom Merry laughed.

"There are likely to be enough editors!" he remarked. "Hallo, here's Manners, and he's got your two specimens with him! Two more editors, I expect!"

Manners came in with Herries and D'Arcy from Study No. 6. The chums of No. 6 were in the Fourth Form, and frequently on terms of hostility with the Terrible Three.

"Come in!" said Tom Merry, pushing his paper aside. "I haven't finished this beastly thing, so it will have to stand over. You've told them the idea, Manners?"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Mannahs has explained, and I weally think it is a beastly, jolly good ideah, you know, deah boy. I have not the slightest objection to editing the papah for you, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't be an ass, Gussy!" exclaimed Herries. "You're a funny fish, but you don't know how to edit a paper. That's my job, if it's anybody's."

"Ha, ha, haf"

"I weally wondah how you can pwopose such a thing, Hewwies. Tom Mewwy is quite wight to smile. My deah fellah——"

"Oh, rats!" interrupted Tom Merry. "We shall have to settle that point by discussion. Monty will be here in a minute, and if he brings Figgins & Co. with him, he'll bring three more editors, you mark my words. Here he comes."

CHAPTER 2.
The Meeting.

FIGGINS & CO. were coming out of the New House when Monty Lowther arrived there in quest of them. Lowther called to them, and they stopped, looking at him rather suspiciously.

"Hallo, kid," said Figgins, "what do you want? Looking for a thick ear, my son?"

Monty Lowther shook his head.

"If I were, there's nobody here could give me one," he observed. "But I haven't come over here to rag you, kids. We want you to come to a meeting."

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn exchanged glances.

"What's the meeting about?" asked Figgins guardedly. "No more of that detective business, I hope. We've been fed up with that."

"Nothing of the kind."

"I suppose it's a feed," said Fatty Wynn, smacking his lips anticipatively. "Tom Merry gives ripping feeds. It's jolly good of you to come over and tell us, Lowther."

"I——"

"Where is Merry giving it? In his study?"

"No, he isn't, he——"

"In the field behind the barn, I suppose, where Gussy gave those feeds when he was trying to get up a Co.," said Fatty Wynn. "A lot of chaps coming, I suppose?"

"No, I tell you. He——"

"Well, I like a big party, but the fewer the guests the more grub to go round, so that's all right," said Fatty. "We're coming, aren't we, chaps?"

"But I keep on telling you——"

"My dear chap, you needn't tell me anything except that there's to be a feed, and I'm on at once," said Fatty Wynn. "I've never refused an offer of that kind. Nobody could say it of me."

Figgins and Kerr were chuckling. Lowther became quite red in the face in his efforts to explain.

"I tell you there's not going to be a feed," he shouted, at last. "Nothing of the kind. It's just a meeting."

Fatty Wynn looked disappointed and wrathful.

"What the dickens is the good of a meeting without a feed?" he demanded. "Like your cheek to come and ask us, if you want my opinion."

"Look here, you New House wasters——"

"What did you want to make me believe there was a feed for, if there wasn't one?" went on Fatty Wynn, indignantly. "You've made me feel quite hungry, and I suppose I can go on feeling hungry for all you care, you outsider."

"I suppose you've had some dinner," said Monty Lowther, "or do they starve you in the New House? I know it's a beastly rotton place."

"You'll get that thick ear, I'm afraid, Lowther," said Figgins darkly.

"Dinner!" said Fatty Wynn, contemptuously. "Yes, I had a meat pie, and half-a-dozen potatoes, and some bread and butter and cheese, and a cake, and a few apples and biscuits, and a tart or two. Of course, I'm still hungry."

"Then you can go and eat coke," said Lowther. "This is a meeting, not a grub-hunt. We are going to start a newspaper——"

"To start a what?" exclaimed Figgins excitedly.

"To start a newspaper, called 'Tom Merry's Weekly,'" said Lowther loftily. "We want you chaps to come into the thing, if you feel inclined."

Figgins slapped him on the shoulder.

"Well, that's decent of you," he exclaimed. "It's a good idea, but naturally a bit above your weight, and I don't mind running the thing for you."

"Don't you? I rather think——"

"I haven't edited anything so far," said Figgins, "but I'm ready to try my hand. There may be faults, but, of course, I shall run the paper better than you fellows could. You can consider me quite at your service."

"If you think we want——"

"You don't want to give me trouble. That's nothing, simply nothing. You School House chaps are not much class, but I'm always willing to help a lame dog over a stile."

"Jolly good of you," said Monty Lowther sarcastically. "But you see, we're not looking out for an editor. Office-boy would be nearer your mark."

"Look here, Lowther," began Figgins indignantly.

Kerr, the Scottish member of the Co., interrupted him.

"I don't usually agree with Lowther," he remarked; "but I must say I'm at one with him there, Figgins. You're not built to be an editor. Now I could do the trick in a really first-class way, I flatter myself. I——"

"Yes, you do flatter yourself, if you think that, Kerr," said Fatty Wynn. "I suppose the long and short of it is, that Lowther has come over to ask me to edit the paper. I don't mind doing it, but I think there ought to be a feed to the editor as a start-off."

"Bosh!" said Monty Lowther.

"Eh? What's that?"

"Bosh! B—o—s—h bosh!" said Lowther, deliberately and emphatically. "We haven't decided yet whom the editor is to be, but you can be sure on one point, that he'll be a School House chap, and not a rotter from that old casual ward you call a house."

"Then you can be equally sure of one thing more," said Figgins, "and that is that we sha'n't be on the staff, and that we shall start an opposition paper."

"Good wheeze!" exclaimed Kerr. "That's the idea, and we'll get ours out first, too. We'll call it the 'New House News.'"

"Oh, I say, play the game, you know," urged Monty Lowther. "Come to the meeting, anyway. Don't be cads, you know, if you can help it."

"May as well go to the meeting first," said Figgins. "When is it to be, Lowther?"

"Now. Tom Merry's waiting for you."

"Come along then, my children."

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn accompanied Lowther to the School House. They entered Tom Merry's study and found Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy already there.

"Welcome, gentlemen," said Tom Merry, with a bow. "I suppose Lowther has acquainted you with the object of this most important meeting."

"Certainly," said Figgins. "I understand that I am wanted to edit a newspaper——"

"Then there's something wrong with your understanding, Figgy. You're not wanted to do anything of the kind."

"Not much," said Manners. "You New House wasters are wanted to keep in your place, and do what you're told, and——"

"Yaas, wathah! I am weally astonished at your feahful cheek, Figgins."

"Order, order!" cried Tom Merry, thumping on the table.

"Are you addwessin' me, Tom Mewwy?"

"I'm addressing everybody. Order!"

"If you are addwessin' me, I must beg you to observe that I am not accustomed to be intewwupted or called to ordah," said Arthur Augustus frigidly. "I wegard the wemark as wude."

"Oh, ring off! You talk too much. Silence for the chair."

"I wefuse to wing off. You have no wight to wequest me to wing off. I am accustomed to bein' tweated with pwopah wespect, and unless——"

"Order!"

"Shut up!"

"Cut the cackle!"

"I distinctly wefuse to cut the cackle. I decline to shut up. Unless Tom Mewwy addwesses me in a way consistent with my dig., I shall considah it imposs. to wemain in this study and take part in this meetin'. Such a submission to diswespect would go against my conch. I am sorry to——"

"I'll make you sorrier if you don't dry up," said Manners, picking up a stick. "Now, are you going to ring off?"

"Certainly not! I have a gweat deal more to say while I am on the subject. I say——"

"Choke him!"

"Suffocate him!"

"I will wetire fwom the meetin'," said the swell of the School House, with much dignity. "My wemarks would pwobably take me no longah than a quartah of an hour to uttah, but if you will not listen to me, I am weady to wetire."

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy walked towards the door.

Blake inserted a couple of fingers in the back of his collar, and jerked him into a chair. D'Arcy gasped and squirmed.

"Blake, I insist upon your weleasin' me. You are soilin' my collah."

"Are you going to be quiet?"

"Certainly not! I distinctly wefuse to be quiet. I wegard it as absolutely inconsistent with my dig. to be quiet. Undah no circs. will I agwee to be quiet."

"Herries, old man, bring that red ink over here. Gentlemen, I am sorry our pet lunatic is wasting time, but I'll soon stop him."

"The sooner the quicker," said Figgins.

"I object to bein' chawactewised as a pet lunatic," said Arthur Augustus. "Pway welease me, Blake. Your mannahs are so wuff. Hewwies, pway keep your distance with that wed ink. You might possibly spill some on my waistcoat."

Blake grinned.

"That's exactly what he's going to do, Gussy, if you don't keep quiet. Keep your eye on him, Herries, and the first time he makes himself obnoxious, swamp his waistcoat with red ink. Mind, Gussy!"

"I wefuse to have my waistcoat swamped with wed ink. I distinctly——"

"Take care! Now shut up."

"I wefuse. I——"

"I'll give you one more chance. When I hold up my hand, Herries, swamp it over him."

"Righto!" said Herries.

Gussy looked at Blake, and looked at the red ink, and relapsed into indignant silence. Order was at last restored, and Tom Merry mounted upon his chair to address the meeting.

CHAPTER 3.

A Vexed Question.

TOM MERRY looked round him and held up his forefinger for silence.

"Gentlemen of the Shell and the Fourth Form——"

"Excuse me a moment," said Figgins politely. "A little mistake——"

"What do you mean?"

"The Fourth Form comes first, of course. You should say, 'Gentlemen of the Fourth Form and the Shell.'"

"Bosh! Rot! The Shell takes precedence of the lower Forms, I suppose."

"Rats!" said Blake. "I agree with Figgins. Can't you count? First Form, Second Form, Third Form, Fourth Form, Shell, Fifth Form——"

"Right enough," said Kerr. "There's no getting out of that."

"We are the higher Form," said Manners. "You know well enough——"

"It's a question of precedence," said Figgins, "and we're not going to be put upon. I'm willing to leave it to the vote."

"Good enough," said Blake.

That was a safe enough course, as there were six Fourth-Formers present, and only three of the Shell. Tom Merry did not trouble to take the vote.

"Oh, have it your own way!" he said resignedly. "Gentlemen of the Fourth Form and the Shell, you are called together to consult upon an idea that has come into my head—a really good and original idea——"

"I don't want to be carping," said Blake. "I'm about the last chap in the world to carp or criticise. But I must be allowed to say that the idea isn't the most original one that was ever originated. We chaps in Study No. 6 started a paper not so long ago."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"So then we claim to be the originators of the idea at St. Jim's. I repeat that I don't want to carp——"

"Or trout?" asked Figgins, with interest.

"Order!"

"Yaas, wathah! Ordah, deah boys!"

"Very well," said Tom Merry. "We'll admit that Blake produced some sort of a rag of a kind before I came to St. Jim's. That admitted, let's go on with the washing. The idea is to start a school newspaper, but not a dead-and-alive fearful bore of a rag like the Sixth Form magazine. Nothing of that sort! It's got to be readable, and bright, quite alive from start to finish."

"Hear, hear!"

"As the leaders of the juniors of both houses at St. Jim's, we have met together to discuss the project. If we decide to carry it out, there are enough of us to manage the thing without outside help."

"Quite enough," said Figgins. "Perhaps too many."

"Anyhow, it's settled that the editor is to be chosen from among ourselves," said Tom Merry. "One of us nine is to be head cook and bottle washer, so to speak."

"Hear, hear!"

"After that appointment is made, sub-editors and so on can be appointed. Then we'll see about getting out the first number. The question of the editorship is, of course, the most important, and has to be settled first."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Just a second," said Blake, holding up his hand. "I——"

Sloosh!

A terrific yell broke from Arthur Augustus.

They all turned towards him. His waistcoat was streaming with red ink. Herries had half emptied the bottle.

"You howwid wuffian," wailed D'Arcy. "You have wuined my waistcoat."

"What on earth did you do that for, Herries?" demanded Blake.

Herries stared at him indignantly.

"Well, blessed if that isn't a nice question to ask," he exclaimed. "I only did what you told me to do, hang you!"

"I told you! I——"

"You told me to swamp the red ink over his waistcoat as soon as you held up your hand, and you just did it."

"Ha, ha! I was holding up my hand because I was going to speak——"

"How was I to know that?"

"Oh, my waistcoat! Wuined! My waistcoat!"

"Never mind, Gussy," said Tom Merry soothingly. "It was a mistake, and Herries withdraws everything—don't you, Herries?"

"Certainly!"

"Except the red ink," remarked Figgins. "I don't see how you are going to withdraw that."

"Oh, my waistcoat!"

"Gussy, old chap, it was all a mistake. Herries apologises, and there's an end."

The swell of St. Jim's smiled again.

"If Hewwies apologises, I am satisfied," he declared. "He has wuined my waistcoat, but as a gentleman I must accept the amende honorable."

"That's right. As a gentle ass, he accepts your apology, Herries. Now, as I was saying, the question of the editorship would be easily settled if you chaps would listen to reason. It's so perfectly plain that I ought——"

"That you ought to dry up," said Figgins. "It's as plain as your face, and goodness knows that's plain enough. Why don't you do it, then?"

"Don't interrupt, Figgy. You've got no manners in the New House."

"No, we haven't got any Manners, or Lowther, or Merry," said Figgins, "and a jolly good thing, too. If we had, we'd boil 'em."

"I didn't mean that. I meant——"

"Don't explain what you meant, old fellow. We can't stay here all night. The question is, am I going to be editor-in-chief?"

"Certainly not," exclaimed Lowther. "Like your cheek to think of such a thing."

"I don't see it. It stands to reason that a New House chap can manage a thing of this kind better than any of you fellows. I don't want to be rude, but it's no good blinking facts."

"Oh, take a back seat! If you weren't such a blessed conceited ass, you'd know who the right man is, and that's——"

"Me!" said Herries.

"You? Why, you——"

Tom Merry thumped upon the table.

"Order, order! You won't settle the point by nagging and ragging one another. Why can't you make up your minds to concede a little to one another, and live in complete harmony like good little boys in a book?"

"Oh, rats! Look here——"

"Order! It seems to me that we can't agree about the editorship, and the point will have to be settled in accordance with the general sense of the meeting——"

"But there isn't much sense in this meeting," said Figgins, shaking his head. "If we three went back to the New House, there wouldn't be any."

"It's no good putting it to the vote," said Tom Merry, unheeding. "Each of you conceited bounders would vote for himself——"

"Whom would you vote for?"

"Myself, I suppose, from a sense of duty, because I should be the best——"

"Oh, come off! What are you going to suggest?"

"I suggest that each of us in turn takes the chair, and explains why he considers himself best fitted for the post of editor," said Tom Merry. "The meeting to decide which makes out the best claim."

"Well, that's not a bad idea," Figgins assented thoughtfully. "I fancy I could make out a pretty good case, and that's more than any of you fellows could do."

"Is it agreed, then?" asked Tom Merry, looking round.

There was a buzz of assent.

"You can start, Merry," said Figgins. "Go on, and give us your precious reasons."

Tom Merry stood upon the chair. Every eye was fixed upon him, and it could not be said there was much sympathy in the glances. It was pretty plain from the start that Tom Merry's claims would be met in a hostile spirit.

"Gentlemen, I consider that I am entitled to the post of editor of the new paper for these reasons. It was my idea——"

"You boned it, you mean," said Blake.

"The weekly is named after me——"

"I don't see why it should be, and that's not a reason."

"And I consider myself the fittest person to conduct the paper. That's all."

"Enough, too," remarked Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry stepped down, and Monty Lowther took his place. He was subjected to the same steady and disconcerting gaze that had been fixed upon Tom Merry.

"Gentlemen," said Monty Lowther, "I am far from detracting from the—the ability, and so on, of my respected friend, Thomas Merry, Esquire."

"Hear, hear! Good old Thomas Merry, Esquire! Go hon!"

"I repeat that I am far from detracting——"

"No ditto repeato," admonished Blake. "Get on with the washing."

"But though I do not detract from the—the character of Tom Merry, I consider myself a little better fitted for the editorial chair. There you are!"

"And there you are," said Figgins, as Monty Lowther stepped down, "and there you had better remain. You won't do. Who says Tom Merry?"

"Nobody."

"Who says Monty Lowther?"

"Nobody!"

"So your goose is cooked," said Blake. "Your turn now, Manners."

Manners looked a little nervous as he mounted the chair. Eight pairs of eyes fastened upon him like gimlets.

"I—I really think I should run the paper in first-class style," he said. "I know a chap whose brother writes for the London papers, and I've picked up an awful lot of wrinkles from him. I think I'm the man."

"Who says Manners?"

"Nobody!" came the general verdict.

"You can step down, Manners. You're not the man."

Manners stepped down. Monty Lowther put his foot on the chair again. Blake pushed him off.

"You've had your say. I suppose you don't want to start again."

"There's a point I forgot to mention."

"Too late now. Figgins comes next."

"It's not too late. I appeal to Tom Merry."

"Let him speak," said Tom at once. "It won't take a minute, I suppose?"

"Oh, go on!" said Blake, in a tone of resignation. "Spout away, Monty."

"Gentlemen, I forgot to mention that my uncle holds shares in a newspaper, and so the publishing business is really a sort of family concern with us. I——"

"Rats! Who says Lowther, once more?"

"Nobody!" howled the meeting with one voice.

Monty Lowther blushed and retired. Figgins mounted the chair. He wasn't in the least disconcerted by the steady gaze fixed upon him, and he stood in an easy attitude with his hands in his pockets.

"I haven't got much to say," he began.

"Well, that's one jolly good thing," commented Blake.

"Shut up, Blake. I haven't much to say, but I must compliment the meeting on the sense they've shown in rejecting the candidates who have had the cheek to put themselves forward so far."

"Hear, hear!"

"Rats!"

"Do the sensible thing," said Figgins, "and elect a chap who knows how to handle the paper properly. I'm the man. I'm not conceited——"

"My hat! He says he's not conceited!"

"I'm not conceited," repeated Figgins. "I wouldn't put myself forward, only I want the thing to be a success. That's my motive."

"Finished?" asked Blake, with much politeness.

"Yes, that's about all," said Figgins, stepping down from the rostrum.

"Who says Figgins?"

"Nobody!" was the unanimous verdict.

"Jolly sensible meeting, this is," said Blake approvingly. "Fatty Wynn, it's your turn to get on your hind legs and talk some more rot."

Fatty Wynn, the Welsh partner in the famous Co. of the New House, mounted into view. He was blushing, but he had something to say, and said it.

"I really think I ought to be editor," he remarked. "A chief part of an editor's duties, I believe, is standing dinners to the staff. I've heard so. Now, when it comes to standing feeds, you can't find a better man for the job than I am. I say that with confidence, and I defy contradiction. Either in purchasing the grub, or in cooking it afterwards, there's not a fellow in the New House or the School House to beat me. There you are!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't see what you're sniggering at. If you don't vote for me, I shall know jolly well who ought to be editor, all the same."

Fatty Wynn sniffed disdainfully as he stepped down from the chair. Blake looked round inquiringly at the meeting.

"Who says Fatty Wynn?"

"Nobody!" announced eight emphatic voices, in a kind of chorus.

"Kerr, my Scottish friend, have you got anything to say for yourself?"

Kerr took the place of the rejected candidate.

"Yes, I have," he said. "I think I ought to be editor, for a jolly good reason, and one you can't possibly get away from."

"Shall be glad to hear what it is," said Tom Merry curiously.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I am a Scotsman——"

"What on earth's that got to do with it?"

"A jolly lot," said Kerr, with a superior smile. "It's well known that Scotsmen manage things better than any other people."

"Some of them manage to blow their own trumpets pretty well, I'll admit."

"You don't know so much about the newspaper world as I do," continued Kerr. "Why, bless you, nearly all the papers are edited or sub-edited by us. We run them for you, because the home-grown brain isn't equal to the task. We govern most of your institutions, preside at most of your societies. We provide you with a Prime Minister, and a Leader of the Opposition. You can't do anything without one of us to help. You ought to be thankful that you've got a Scotsman among you to edit your paper. It's really kind of me to offer."

"We won't take advantage of his kindness, will we, chaps?"

"No, that we won't. Come off!"

"Now, don't be asses," said Kerr patiently. "I'm talking sense, and you ought to know it. Wherever there's a Scotsman he's bound to come to the top; that's an old saying, and you may as well admit it first as last."

"Rats! Bosh! Come off! Who says Kerr?"

"Nobody!" came in a roar that shook the study.

"Very well," said Kerr, shrugging his shoulders, as he retired from public view. "You've had your chance, and you've lost it. You've only got yourselves to thank if you make a muck of the thing."

"We'll risk it. Now, Herries, up you go."

Herries mounted into view, looking rather confused. He opened his mouth several times without uttering anything. Tom Merry looked at him curiously.

"Is that a new system of jaw gymnastics, Herries?" he inquired.

"N-no," said Herries, turning red. "I think I could manage the paper as editor. I'm a pretty sensible chap——"

"You may be sensible," said Lowther, "but blessed if you're pretty."

"I mean—that is to say—I didn't mean——"

"If we stay here to listen to all that he meant and didn't mean," said Manners, "the meeting will never break up."

"Oh, give the chap a chance!" said Blake. "Go on, Herries! Say your say! I expect it will be rot, but it's a free country, and there's no reason why you shouldn't say it."

Thus encouraged, Herries went on with more confidence.

"I helped to edit the paper we started once before," he said. "I've had practice. I'm willing to do my share of the work. I've got a bulldog——"

"What the dickens has his bulldog got to do with it?"

"I'll explain. If I can manage Towser I can manage anything," said Herries. "A fellow who can edit a bulldog can manage a paper—I mean a fellow who can manage an editor can edit a bulldog—that is to say, if a fellow can paper a bulldog, he can easily edit a manager—I mean——"

A yell of laughter interrupted the speaker, who was certainly getting a little mixed. Herries quite lost the thread of his argument, and stepped down from the chair.

"Who says Herries?" asked Blake.

"Nobody," was the general verdict.

"Now, Gussy, it's your turn. Get up and chatter."

"Certainly not, deah boy. I could not be so wude as to pwecede you," said D'Arcy. "Pway, leave me till the last, my esteemed friend."

"Oh, go on! Do as you're told, and don't rot!"

"I assuah you that I weally have not the slightest intention of wotting," said D'Arcy. "I weally desire you to take pwecedence, deah boy."

"Oh, very well!" Blake stepped into the place vacated by Herries. "Kids, I'm the man to run that paper! The only other possible candidate—to be quite frank—is Tom Merry, and, as we know, Tom Merry's weakly——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"So you will have to choose me or else make up your minds to bust the whole concern. I don't care much which you do. I'm the man, and if you lose your chance of securing me, I'm sorry for you."

"That's really kind of you, Blake," said Tom Merry. "You'll have to turn on the sorrow, then, as we're not going to secure you. Who says Blake?"

"Nobody," was the unhesitating reply.

"Oh, don't mind me," said Blake, stepping down. "You can make a muck of the thing if you like. I expect you will want me to come and get you out of all sorts of fixes, and then I shall very likely tell you to go and eat coke. Gussy, old kid, get up and talk."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Arthur Augustus mounted gracefully to the chair, and screwed his eyeglass into his eye to survey the meeting. The steady stare he was greeted with did not disconcert him in the least. He beamed upon the meeting.

"Gentlemen," he began—"It is with gweat pleasuah that I wise to addwess you on this important and auspicious occasion——"

"Cut it short!"

"I wefuse to cut it short. I appeal to the meetin' for fair play. I have listened patiently to all your wemarks, and most of them were vewy stupid."

"Order! Order!"

"And now I considah that I am entitled to make some wemarks myself. I shall not detain you, gentlemen, for more than a quartah of an hour, or half an hour at the longest."

"You won't detain me," said Figgins, "for more than a quarter of a minute, or half a minute at the longest, Gussy."

"I insist upon explainin' my views at length," said D'Arcy. "This is an important matter, and ought to be gone into.

If I am willin' to hear you fellahs talkin' nonsense, I should think you could make it a point to hear me talkin' sense."

"Well, it would be a change!" said Figgins. "When are you going to begin?"

"That wemark is objectionable, as it implies that——"

"Rats! Come to the point! Not so much gas!"

"Vewy well! Now, gentlemen, in the first place, you will admit that the post of editor wequires a fellah of tact and judgment, and gweat firmness of chawactah."

"Hear, hear!"

"That bein' admitted, I do not see how you can overlook me," said Arthur Augustus modestly. "I'm the last fellah in the wide world to put myself forward in any way, but it is useless to blind oneself to facts."

"Who says——"

"Stop a minute! I haven't finished yet. I weally and twuly insist upon my wight to go into the matter at length," said D'Arcy, with a great deal of dignity.

"Well, that's only reasonable," said Figgins, thoughtfully, "if we are allowed to insist upon our right of clearing out of the blessed study. I'm off!"

And the great Figgins shook the dust of Tom Merry's study from his boots.

"I wegard that as wude of Figgins," said D'Arcy. "But to continue. Undah the circs., it is your duty to select the most appwopwiate person for the post of editah, and—where are you going, Fatty Wynn?"

"Going to speak to Figgins," said Fatty Wynn, slipping out of the study.

"How wude!" said D'Arcy. "But, as I was sayin', the most appwopwiate person is certainly a fellah of tact and judgment—what has Kerr gone out for?—and firmness of chawactah, and certainly—Tom Mewwy, are you going?"

"I've got to keep an appointment with myself," said Tom Merry.

And he left the study with Manners and Lowther at his heels.

"Wude—vewy wude!" said D'Arcy, shaking his head. "But to wesume. I think it will be admitted that I have proved—Blake! Blake!"

Blake did not answer. He was already gone.

"I nevah expected such tweatment from Blake," said Arthur Augustus. "I doubt if I shall be able any longer to wegard him as a fwiend. Hewwies, old man, I——"

But Herries was gone, too!

Arthur Augustus screwed his monocle tighter into his eye, and looked round the study with an air of offended dignity. It was empty, save for himself.

"Weally, this is extwemely wude!" he exclaimed. "I wegard this treatment as vewy diswespectful. I think I shall wefuse to be editah now, if they wequest me. Yaas, wathah, if they wequest me on their bended knees, I shall distinctly wefuse. Yaas!"

And D'Arcy, too, left the study. The first meeting was at an end without the important question being settled as to who was to be editor of the new paper.

CHAPTER 4.

Arthur Augustus Solves the Difficulty.

"ROT!" said Gore. "That's what I call it—rot!"

"That's it!" agreed Mellish. "Simply rot!"

They were talking about the new idea of a school newspaper to a group of Fourth Form and Shell boys in the passage, and they spoke with additional emphasis as they saw Tom Merry coming by.

"Rot!" said Gore. "The thing will be a blessed failure. They haven't even asked us to contribute. Not that we want to! Ha, ha!"

"Certainly not!" said Mellish. "We wouldn't. I certainly couldn't consent to demean myself by contributing to such a rag. I have been asked to contribute to the Sixth Form magazine, but have refused."

"My hat!" said Tom Merry, stopping. "Mellish, old man, you do take the Huntley and Palmer!" You collar the Abernethy! You hop off with the whole blessed Peek Frean!"

"I wasn't talking to you, Merry," said Mellish loftily. "I'm not going to contribute to your paper. I call it rot!"

"That's it," said Gore. "Rot! Not that anybody'd have much chance of contributing, as they haven't settled who's to be editor yet, and they're not going to bring out the first number till that point's settled. Ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha!" said Mellish. "I suppose it will end in a row as usual, and nothing will come of it. I expect so!"

"You'll see," said Tom Merry. "But, I say, any of you fellows can contribute if you like. We shall be glad. Of course, the magazine won't hold more than a certain amount, and we shall have to pick out the best. If you agree to that, you can all send in stuff, and we'll promise to read it over carefully, at any rate."

"And reproduce it as your own, if it's good, with your signature under it," said Mellish, with a sneer.

Tom Merry turned red.

"That's a mean, caddish thing to say, Mellish," he exclaimed. "I fancy the fellows know me too well to take any notice of an insinuation like that. Only a coward would make it."

"Oh, I don't know!" said Gore. "I agree with Mellish!"

"Yes," said Tom Merry, contemptuously. "You two always agree when there's any beastly mean thing to be said or done; but you'll have to learn not to make an accusation like that against me. I'll trouble you to take back your words, Mellish."

Mellish looked rather uneasy.

"I don't want to quarrel with you," he said.

"You won't have any choice in the matter," said Tom Merry grimly. "You are going to quarrel with me here, on the spot, unless you withdraw what you have just said."

"Well, I won't!" said Mellish nervously. He would have been glad enough to withdraw, but he simply could not, with so many eyes upon him. "I'm entitled to my opinion, Tom Merry."

"And I'm entitled to ask you not to express it when it's such a dirty, blackguardly opinion as that," said Tom. "Are you going to take it back?"

"No, confound you, I'm not!"

"Then take off your jacket, Mellish!"

Tom Merry pushed back his cuffs in a business-like way. Mellish receded a step.

"Look here, Tom Merry——"

"Put up your hands!"

As Tom Merry was advancing upon him, Mellish had no choice but to obey. He put up his hands, but Tom Merry speedily dashed them aside, and planted his fist full upon Mellish's rather prominent nose.

The junior gave a howl and fell on his back.

He did not rise, but lay there on the floor of the passage, with one hand on his nose, from which a crimson stream was issuing.

"Get up!" said Tom Merry contemptuously.

"I can't! I've sprained my back. I'd get up and give you a hiding if I could move! You know you've seriously injured me!"

"I know you're a coward as well as a beastly mean rotter," said Tom Merry. "Lie there, if you want to, only don't insult me again, or you'll get it a little warmer."

"You beast, you've sprained my——"

Tom Merry walked away, whistling.

Mellish rose slowly to his feet, the sprain in his back apparently cured by the departure of the hero of the Shell.

The juniors round him were grinning with amusement, even Gore grinning away with the rest

"Fearfully hurt, aren't you?" asked Walsh. "Sprained in the back? Horrid!"

"Awful!" said Jones. "He ought to see a doctor."

"Or go home to his mamma," said Gore.

Mellish turned a savage look upon the latter.

"I didn't notice you stand up to Tom Merry," he sneered. "You had enough to say until he cut up rusty, and then you shut up fast enough."

"Do you think I am afraid to stand up to him?" demanded Gore.

"Yes, I do; in fact, I know you are."

"I'll jolly soon show you that I'm not afraid of you, at all events," said Gore.

And he hit out with his right, and his knuckles landed on the same spot where Tom Merry's had landed a few minutes before; and once more the unfortunate Mellish measured his length in the passage.

"You—you beast!" he gasped. "You hit me when I wasn't looking."

"All right," said Gore. "Get up, and I'll hit you when you are looking, if that is what you want, old chap!"

Apparently it was not what Mellish wanted, for when he rose he avoided Gore, and walked away, with his hands in his pockets.

He was in an extremely bad temper, having not only fallen to Tom Merry's prowess, but having fallen out with his sometime chum, whom he had depended upon to help him to upset Tom Merry in his new project.

"I'll get even with both of them," muttered Mellish; "but with Tom Merry most of all. I'm going to give him a dig somewhere. How can I manage it?"

He strolled out into the quadrangle, mopping his nose with his handkerchief every few minutes. He passed Tom Merry, who was talking to Manners and Lowther.

"My old governess will stump up like a brick," Tom Merry was saying. "She's bound to see the importance of the matter when I point it out to her. I don't know whether we ought to get the 'Weekly' printed at the office of the 'Rylcombe Times,' or to get a printing press ourselves in the study. I dare say we could buy a printing-press cheap for a few pounds, and do the printing. We shall have to look into it."

Mellish's eyes glittered.

"His governess!" he murmured. "Righto, my boy; that's the hint I wanted! I'll bring the old girl down on you for that tap on the nose you gave me."

"Hallo, Mellish! I say, Mellish!"

Mellish stopped, and looked back at Tom Merry, mopping his nose. Tom came towards him with a concerned face. Tom could get angry, but never for long.

"I say, Mellish, I'm sorry for that little row just now. You made me wild, you know, by what you said; but I'm sorry I punched your nose."

Mellish scowled unamiably.

"I'll make you sorrier before I'm done with you," he replied; and he turned and walked away with a scowling brow.

Tom coloured. He never liked being on bad terms with anybody, but it was hard to pull easily with Mellish.

"Never mind the pig!" said Lowther. "Let's get to business. It's a bit rotten, Tom, that we can't decide who ought to be editor."

"You're right there," said Manners. "There's no getting it out of the head of Figgins that he could work the oracle, and the same with Blake. Same with all of us, I reckon."

Tom Merry nodded.

"Right enough. We've put it to the vote, but with nine candidates, each voting for himself, that's not much good. What we want is a new idea."

"I say, deah boys!"

It was the voice of Arthur Augustus. The swell of St. Jim's came towards the chums of the Shell, his eyeglass screwed into his eye.

"Hallo, image!" said Tom Merry. "Where's that monocle taking you?"

"My dear kids, I've thought of an ideah, a weally wippin' ideah," said D'Arcy.

"Get it off your shirt-front, then."

"We can't manage to decide which of us ought to be editor of the paper," said D'Arcy; "and until that's decided, we can't start the papah. That is a serious dwawback to getting into pwint at an early date, deah boys."

"Well, yes, I suppose it is, genius."

"My idea is to settle at once who shall be editor, and I've thought of a bettah plan than puttin' the question to the vote," explained D'Arcy. "You are all so extwemely obstinate, and I may say conceited, that it is absolutely useless to argue with you. You won't elect me, in spite of all that I can say to induce you to do the sensible thing——"

"Ha, ha! Not much sense in it if we did."

"Well, I won't argue that point," said D'Arcy loftily. "As a mattah of fact, a fellah of tact and judgment and firmness of chawactah is wequired, and that's exactly the kind of fellah I am. But I don't want to put myself forward. I've got a plan."

"So you've said before, but you haven't told us what it is."

"I'm coming to the point. You have heard, I pwesume, of the limewick competitions which have been goin' on for a long time in the wawious papahs?"

"The what? What is a limewick?"

"A limewick is a verse of——"

"Oh, you mean a limerick! Yes, I know what a limerick is."

"Are you sure? I don't mind explainin'——"

"Oh, yes, I can make 'em up," said Tom Merry blandly. "How's this?

"There was a young monkey named D'Arcy,
Who fancied himself rather classy,
With his waistcoat and tie
And a glass in his eye,
Classy D'Arcy looked simply jackassy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" howled Manners and Lowther. "Is that how you like 'em done, Gussy?"

"I wegard that limewick as distinctly personal," said D'Arcy. "I wefuse to admit the descwiption as bein' in the slightest degwee cowwect. But to come to the point. You all know what a limewick is, and I dare say you can w'ite them aftah a fashion. I can w'ite vewy good ones myself. Now, my idea is this: that all of us shall wite limewicks, and the chap who w'ites the best one shall become editah of the papah."

The Terrible Three looked at one another.

It was certainly a new and original idea, and there was no reason why it should not answer. D'Arcy looked at them anxiously.

"Well, what do you think, deah boys? I have pwoposed it to Blake, and he says that he leaves it to you, Tom Mewwy."

"I make it spades," said Tom Merry. "I mean, it's a jolly good idea, and I think it ought to get us out of our difficulty. But who's to judge which is the best limerick?"

"We were thinkin' of forming a committee of a dozen members of the Shell and the Fourth Form to decide that point."

"That ought to be satisfactory. I'm agreeable."

"Then I will go and pwopose to Figgins."

And D'Arcy made his way to the New House. Figgins & Co. were standing by the steps, talking together, when the swell of the School House came up.

"Figgins, I want to pwopose to you——"

"Oh, this is so sudden, Gussy!" exclaimed Figgins, falling upon D'Arcy's breast and hugging him round the neck. "But I am yours."

The Co. gave a yell of laughter at D'Arcy's look of bewilderment.

"Figgins, are you off your wockah?"

"Not at all. If you want to propose to me, I'm yours, love, and you needn't ask mamma."

"You silly ass!" said Arthur Augustus. "I want to pwopose a plan to you."

"Well, why didn't you say so?" said Figgins. "I could only conclude that you had fallen in love at first sight. What's the plan?"

D'Arcy explained.

"Good wheeze," said Figgins; "we're on. If we can't knock spots off you School House kids at writing limericks, you can use my head for a football."

"Rather!" said Kerr. "This makes it easy for me."

"For me, you mean," observed Fatty Wynn. "I've written millions of limericks—at least, I've done six or seven, and——"

"Vewy good," said D'Arcy. "As you've agweed, and all the othahs have agweed, it's all wight. The next step is to form the committee."

"Equal number of representatives from both houses," said Figgins, "and same number from the Fourth Form and the Shell?"

"Exactly! Then the thing will be perfectly fair, deah boy."

"It's settled, then."

And D'Arcy, feeling extremely proud of himself for having solved what had seemed like an insuperable difficulty, marched off to acquaint Study No. 6 with his success.

CHAPTER 5.

The Telegram—Figgins & Co. at Work.

"HALLO, Mellish! What's that?"

It was Gore who asked the question. He had suddenly come upon Mellish in a corner of the quadrangle, with a book on his knee and a telegraph-form spread on the book, a pencil in his hand.

Mellish covered the form with his hand as Gore looked over his shoulder.

"Nothing," he said hastily, turning rather red.

Gore laughed.

"I saw the address," he remarked. "What are you sending a telegram to Tom Merry's old governess for, Mellish?"

"I—I'm not doing anything of the kind."

"Won't wash, my dear chap. I tell you I saw the address—Miss Priscilla Fawcett, Laurel Villa, Huckleberry Heath. I read that."

"You needn't go chattering about it to Tom Merry, then."

"Let me into the wheeze, and I'll keep mum as an oyster," said Gore. "I sent that charming old lady a telegram myself once, so I'm naturally interested."

"Keep it dark, and I don't mind."

Mellish uncovered the telegraph-form. Gore stared at it, and burst into a laugh.

"My hat, that sounds funny! 'Tom Merry's Weekly'! Ha, ha!"

Mellish grinned.

"It's a little joke," he explained. "'Tom Merry's Weekly' is the talk of the school now, and why shouldn't his old governess know all about it?"

"Ha, ha! Why not? Ha, ha!"

"She can draw what conclusions she likes from the telegram," said Mellish. "There's nothing to identify us with it, is there?"

"Nothing at all. I expect it will bring her to the school."

"That's what I expect. Tom Merry doesn't like her fooling over him and making him look an ass before all the fellows, but he's so fond of her that he can't say anything. It will be a good jape to work off on him."

"Good! Let's go down to Rylcombe and send it off."

And the precious pair of jokers walked down to the village without losing time, and the wire was despatched from Rylcombe Post-office.

It was a couple of days after the first mooting of the "Weekly"—to be exact, a Friday. The pair were back in time for afternoon lessons, and they were careful to tell no one of their expedition and its object.

Meanwhile, the nine would-be editors had consulted together upon the great idea of Arthur Augustus, and the limerick plan was unanimously approved. The next question was to form the judging committee, and that was not easy.

It was agreed that the committee should consist of a dozen members, chosen in equal numbers from both Forms and both houses. Many names were submitted, each aspirant putting

In those of his personal friends, with a pardonable desire to have the committee favourable to himself, but not one was passed without a majority of votes being recorded for him. By this process the dozen committee men were at last selected, and Pratt of the New House was made chairman, and allotted a casting-vote.

"And now when is the competition to come off?" Tom Merry asked. "We want to get the matter settled as soon as possible, and to get the first number of the paper out."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"How long will it take us to write the limericks?" said Figgins. "A few hours ought to be enough for any of us, I should think."

"Suppose we have the committee in our study at five to-morrow," said Manners. "That will give us this evening and Saturday afternoon to write the limericks, and being a half-holiday, the committee will be at liberty to-morrow. We can give the committee tea in the study, as a reward for their labours."

"I expect the committee will pass that unanimously," grinned Figgins. "It's a good idea. That's plenty of time to write the limericks."

The rest of the candidates agreed.

After afternoon school that day, the nine aspirants might have been seen—and, as a solemn matter of fact, were seen—in studies and passages, or under the elms in the quadrangle, pencil and paper in hand, jotting down lines and rhymes.

Seniors, who did not know the great question that was rife in the lower Forms, regarded this new development with surprise, and the masters were amazed. The budding poets had grown absent-minded and careless, thinking of nothing but their limericks, and angry Sixth-Formers called for their fags in vain.

When Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, went into his study to tea, he found the table bare and the fire out, and he went to the door and shouted for Figgins, whose duty it was to fag for him.

"Fag! Figgins! F-a-a-g!"

His voice echoed through the corridors of the New House, but no Figgins replied. The prefect picked up a cane and started out to search for the chief of the Co.

He came up to Figgins's study, and the sound of voices told him that the Co. were there. He knew that they must have heard him calling, for the door was open. They had heard, but heeded not, and Monteith was wrathful.

He stopped at the open door and looked in, wondering what could be the occupation that so absorbed Figgins & Co. The New House trio were gathered round the table, pen and paper in hand, with serious, earnest faces.

"How are you getting on, Figgy?" asked Kerr presently.

"Pretty well," said Figgins. "How is it with you?"

"Oh, so-so! I think I shall do all right."

Monteith looked and listened in blank amazement.

Fatty Wynn, who had been chewing the handle of his pen for some minutes, looked up with a worried expression.

"I say, you chaps, does Tom Merry rhyme with extraordinary, do you think?" he asked.

"Ha, ha! That's rather a big order," said Figgins, "I dare say it will do."

"I don't see why I shouldn't put it in," said Fatty Wynn. "It's a very witty limerick, and I think it ought to come out first before the committee."

"Stick to it," said Figgins. "After you've written it, go over it again and knock it into shape. Keep on doing that till it's perfect. That's what I'm going to do. There was Monteith yelling at me just now, but, bless you, I'm not going to take any notice of him. I'm too busy."

"Are you?" said an angry voice at the door. "I think I shall teach you, Figgins, not to be too busy to come when I call."

Figgins started as Montieth stepped into the study. He kept a wary eye on the cane in the prefect's hand.

"I say, Monteith," he exclaimed, "I'm awfully sorry I couldn't come. But we're awfully busy. The competition closes to-morrow, you see."

"Do you mean to say that you're going in for a limerick competition, you young rascals?"

"Not exactly; it's quite a private competition," explained Figgins. "The winner becomes editor of 'Tom Merry's Weekly.'"

"Oh, I see. I dare say it's a most important matter, Figgins——"

"Awfully important, Monteith. I should say so, rather!"

"But I want my tea," went on the prefect. "I brought this cane along to remind you that you are a fag, and not yet monarch of all you survey. Do you want me to use it?"

"N-no," said Figgins. "Couldn't you go without your tea this time, Monteith, just for once?"

The prefect made a threatening motion with the cane, and Figgins moved towards the door. He went to Monteith's study, and did his duties as a fag, but all the time the limerick he was compiling was working in his brain.

Sefton and Baker were coming in to tea with Monteith, and when they arrived the table was set. Figgins placed the steaming tea-pot on the table.

"Can I go now, Monteith?" he asked meekly.

The prefect looked round the table.

"Where's the marmalade, you lazy rascal? Where's the jam?"

"There isn't any jam; you finished that up yesterday. Here's the marmalade," said Figgins, getting a jar out of the cupboard; "you'll have to have the jar, as the dish was busted yesterday, unless you'd like me to put some in the soap-dish. It's not very dirty."

"The jar will do. Have you made the toast?"

"N-no. St. Jim's is the top of the tree, for football or cricket, you see——"

"What are you mumbling about? Make that toast."

Figgins obediently took the toasting-fork, and began to make toast. He made limericks at the same time, and the toast suffered in consequence.

"St. Jim's is the top of the tree—no, that won't do. Let's see—This jolly old coll. takes the bun, for football, and cricket, and fun—that's better—and——"

"You're burning that toast."

A fearful smell of burning was spreading through the study.

"Sorry, Monteith. I'll look after the rest. I——"

"Oh, get out! I've had enough of you and your mumbling."

"Right you are, Monteith," said Figgins, with alacrity. "Thanks!"

And he cleared out of the study.

"What's the matter with that kid, Monty?" asked Baker.

The prefect laughed.

"He's making limericks for some silly ass game the youngsters have got on," he explained. "They all seem to have it on the brain now."

Monteith picked up the tea-pot and began to pour.

A clear stream of steaming water issued from the spout.

"Hallo, what's the matter with your tea?" asked Sefton. "It looks weak."

Monteith stared at the hot water that filled the tea-cup he had been pouring into.

"I—I—my hat! The little beast must have forgotten to put the tea in," he ejaculated. "Ha, ha, ha!"

Monteith shoved the kettle on the fire again. The tea was obtained at last, without calling any further upon the assistance of Figgins. Figgy was already back in his study, with a wet towel round his manly brow, composing limericks.

CHAPTER 6.

A Visitor for Tom Merry.

"TOMMY, my darling Tommy!"

Tom Merry gave a jump.

He was standing near the gates, talking to his chums, when the voice of Miss Priscilla Fawcett suddenly fell upon his ears.

Miss Fawcett was about the last person in the world he expected to see at that moment, and the hero of the Shell was naturally surprised.

"My darling Tommy!"

Miss Priscilla had alighted from the station cab at the gates, and she caught sight of Tom Merry and made a dash for him at once.

Before he knew what was happening, Tom was clasped in a pair of affectionate arms and hugged.

"My sweetest boy! What is the matter?"

"Matter!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Nothing."

"You are weakly."

"Weakly!"

"Yes. Your telegram——"

"What telegram?"

"I have received a telegram," said Miss Fawcett, releasing Tom Merry, and drawing a crumpled form from her purse. "Here it is, dear child. It was sent to me by someone, I suppose, who takes a kind and generous interest in your welfare."

Tom Merry stared at the telegram.

He could not help grinning at what he saw there.

"Tom Merry's Weakly."

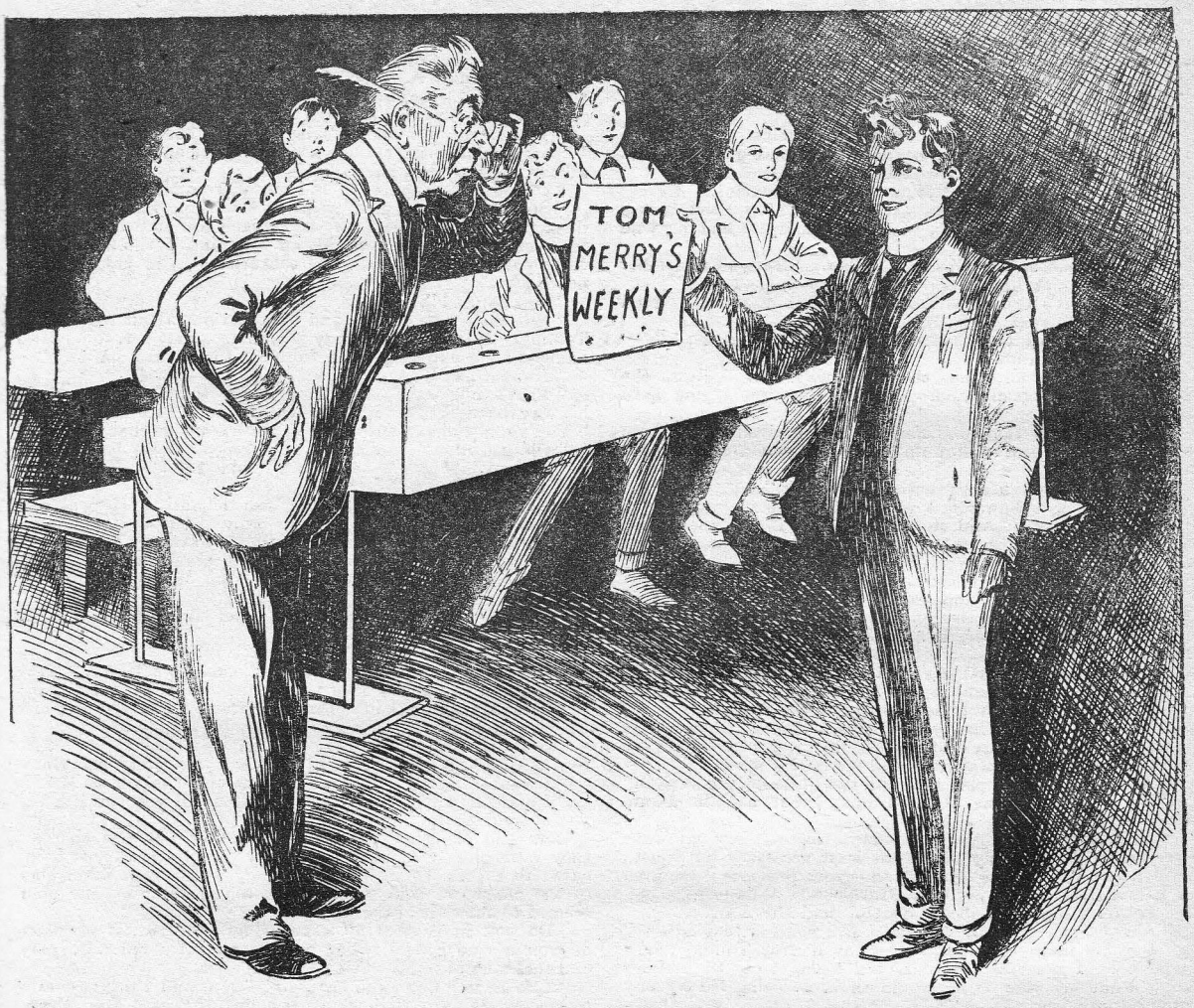
"Some beastly practical joker," growled Tom. "It's only a joke, dear. I'm all right; as right as rain, and as fit as a fiddle."

"But the wire would not be sent unless someone were anxious about you——"

"It was a joke."

Miss Priscilla shook her head. Tom Merry was one of the heartiest lads at St. Jim's, but Miss Fawcett was always anxious about his health. She sent him all sorts of medicines and compounds that he never swallowed, and wrote to him every week urging upon him the great necessity to take care of his delicate constitution.

"My dear child, I know how brave you are, and that you will never admit that you are ill," she said tenderly; "but I know better, my darling."



"'Tom Merry's Weekly'!" said Mr. Linton. "What does that mean, Merry? What have you written those meaningless words for, instead of attending to your lessons?"

"This wire is a silly joke, nurse."

"No, no! I am sure that no one at the school could be so heartless as to cause me needless anxiety," said Miss Fawcett. "Some kind friend is anxious about your health, my dear Tommy."

"Nothing of the kind. I——"

"My sweet child, do not be obstinate, and perhaps sacrifice your health for a lifetime," said Miss Fawcett. "You must let me take care of you. That hectic flush in your cheek——"

"Hectic rot! I've just been playing footer."

"Football! When you are in such a weak state of health! Oh, my rash darling!"

Tom Merry turned crimson.

Manners and Lowther were trying not to laugh, but other fellows who had gathered round were not trying. They were laughing heartily.

Miss Priscilla did not care for little things like that, but Tom Merry did, and he wished from the bottom of his heart that Miss Fawcett was back at Huckleberry Heath.

"I'm not in a weak state of health," said Tom. "I tell you that telegram was a joke, and when I find out the joker I'll make him wriggle,"

"I am sure you would do nothing violent, Tommy. You would not raise your hand in anger against your school-fellow."

"Wouldn't I just!" said Tom Merry.

"My dearest child, I cannot see you exposed to the evening air when you are weakly," said the old lady anxiously. "Pray come into the house."

Tom Merry was glad enough to assent.

The quadrangle was a little too public a place for Miss Fawcett's anxious affection to be displayed, and already boys were coming from near and far to look on.

Tom Merry walked into the School House with his affectionate governess's arm round his neck, and there was a rush of the boys to follow. But Monty Lowther and Manners, like true chums, blocked up the doorway and stopped the rush, standing shoulder to shoulder there.

"Get out of the way," exclaimed Gore; "we're going to see the fun."

"No, you're not," said Monty Lowther coolly. "There's some fun for you to go on with," And he gave Gore a push on the chest that sent him rolling down the steps.

"Dear me," said Miss Fawcett, looking round, "there seems to be quite a noise. How fond your dear school-mates are of you, Tommy."

"Yes, they are, awfully," said Tom. "They all want to follow me. I wish I knew the kind school-mate who sent you that wire."

"Yes, I should like to give him a small present," said Miss Fawcett. "If you can discover the dear youth, Tommy, will you let me know his name, and I will send him a volume of 'Kind Georgie; or, the Schoolboy who was Good.' I am sure he would like it."

"I'm sure he would," grinned Tom Merry. "That kind of literature would go down here awfully. But I say, nurse——"

"You must go to bed now, Tommy."

"Go to bed! It's not dark yet. I——"

"And I will send for a doctor."

"A doctor! I'm not ill. I——"

"Now, my dearest child, you know how you terrify me when you are so obstinate," said Miss Fawcett pathetically. "Dearest Tommy——"

Tom Merry melted at once. In spite of many absurdities, he was really and deeply attached to his kind old governess.

"Oh, I'll go to bed if you like!" he said resignedly. "By George, I wish I could find that festive telegrammer! I'd Kind Georgie him!"

"If you go to bed quietly and get a nice sleep, it may not be

necessary for me to send for a doctor, or to stay all night," said Miss Priscilla.

"I'll go as quietly as a lamb."

"Then do so, dearest, while I see your kind housemaster. Where is his room?"

Tom Merry indicated the door of Mr. Railton's study, and then went dismally up to the dormitory and got into bed. Manners and Lowther followed him.

"Going to bed?" asked Manners, in amazement.

"Got to," groaned Tom. "If I don't, Miss Fawcett will stay all night and coddle me. Oh, kids, do try to find out who sent that wire."

"May have been Gore," said Lowther. "Do you remember he played a trick like that on you once before, Tom?"

"Yes. If it's Gore this time I'll make him squirm. Find out for me."

"Rather! But I say, when is the kind soul going?"

"Blessed if I know."

Miss Fawcett came into the room with Mr. Railton, the master of the School House. Mr. Railton was trying hard not to smile.

"Merry, I hear that Miss Fawcett has received a wire from someone at St. Jim's informing her that you are in a poor state of health."

"It was some beastly practical joker, sir."

"Ahem! Miss Fawcett is very anxious about you——"

"Oh, so anxious," said Miss Fawcett. "If you knew what a dear, delicate lad he is, Mr. Railton, you would understand my anxiety."

"Exactly, my dear madam. He——"

"He has a fictitious appearance of boisterous health," said Miss Fawcett, "which deceives almost every eye but mine. But my medical adviser, Dr. Bones—you have heard of Dr. Bones?"

"I—I am afraid that I have not had that pleasure."

"He is the most famous man in the medical profession at the present day," said Miss Priscilla simply. "I have it from his own mouth. He is the inventor of the Green Globules for Pining Patients. I have brought with me a box containing one hundred for Thomas, which will last him a week."

"Ahem, yes! I suppose they will last quite as long as that."

"I am very anxious about Tommy; but as you assure me——"

"I do assure you, my dear madam, that the boy will have every care. It is really not in the least necessary for you to remain overnight, and as you say that your presence is required at Laurel Heath—that is to say, Huckleberry Villa——"

"Laurel Villa, Huckleberry Heath," said Miss Fawcett.

"Ah, yes, exactly; my mistake. But you were saying——"

"I would make any sacrifice for my darling Tommy; but, if possible, I must return to Laurel Villa to-night. I don't know what my poor Polly would think at being fed by any hand but my own. I——"

The housemaster consulted his watch.

"Then you have time to catch the evening train from Rylcombe, Miss Fawcett. May I order the trap? I assure you that Tom Merry will be looked after by the house-dame and myself to the best of our ability."

"Very well—unless Tommy very much wishes me to remain——"

"Of course I should be glad," said Tom; "but there's no need, and I wouldn't keep you away from Polly for anything. I shall be all right, dear."

Miss Fawcett kissed him on both cheeks.

"Then good-bye, my dearest child, and do not forget to take the green globules, six before every meal and six just before going to bed."

"I certainly sha'n't forget the green globules, dear, now that I am a pining patient," said Tom Merry demurely.

"Do you think they will be sufficient, Tom?" asked Monty Lowther gravely. "Wouldn't you like some terra-cotta tabloids for purple persons?"

Fortunately Miss Fawcett did not hear that remark, and Mr. Railton gave Monty a warning glance. Miss Fawcett's adieux lasted five minutes more, and then the housemaster led her out to the trap. Tom Merry sat up in bed.

"She's a jolly good sort," he said, with rather a challenging air. "She cares for me ten times more than I deserve, and I'm awfully fond of her. Anybody who starts chipping about her will get a thick ear on the spot."

"We're not going to chip," said Lowther; "but I fancy you'll have to distribute some thick ears in the Form if you mean what you say."

"I do," said Tom Merry, jumping out of bed as he heard the sound of wheels in the quad, which announced that Miss Fawcett was gone. "I mean it every word, as you'll see. I'm going now. Chuck those pills out of the window."

Tom Merry was soon dressed. The Terrible Three went downstairs together, and came face to face with Mr. Railton. The housemaster smiled.

"I congratulate you upon your rapid recovery, Merry," he said.

"Thank you, sir!" said Tom, colouring.

It was getting dusk in the quadrangle as the chums of the Shell went out. A group of juniors were talking loudly over the late occurrence, and the voice of Mellish could be heard, punctuated with chuckles.

"Tom Merry's weakly!" he said. "That was the joke. I knew it would bring her down to the school, and guy him before all the fellows. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, so it was Mellish!" murmured Tom Merry.

"She's a queer old girl," went on Mellish, not noticing in the dusk that the Terrible Three had joined his audience. "Her face has been trodden on by an elephant, I think, in some early part of her career, some centuries ago, to judge by appearances."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But she's a good sort, and very anxious about her darling Tommy. Her darling Tommy is anxious about her, too. He's anxious for her to keep away from St. Jim's. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's not true," said Tom Merry sharply. He pushed his way through the crowd, and came face to face with Mellish. "You've no right to speak of my governess like that, Mellish."

"Oh, get out!" said Mellish. "I'll speak of her how I like."

"Then you'll get a thick ear," said Tom. "It was you sent that telegram?"

"Gore and I sent it," said Mellish defiantly. He was emboldened by the fact that Gore, the bully of the Shell, had been his partner in the joke, and was bound to stand by him now.

"So we did," said Gore. "It was ripping fun to bring the old girl tearing down here, and get Tom Merry sent to bed. Sent to bed like a baby! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Your old tricks again, Gore," said Tom Merry quietly. "Stand back you fellows!"

"Here, what are you going to do?"

"I'm going to lick you two chaps," said Tom Merry. "Not because you've worked off a jape on me. I don't mind that; but because you make fun of my governess. I should be a cad if I let you do that."

"Oh, get out! We're together in this, and if you start rowing you'll get a licking, not a fight, so I warn you," said Gore.

"I want a licking if you can give me one," said Tom Merry. "I'll take the two of you on together, and if you can lick me you're welcome to."

Gore and Mellish looked at one another. It was an offer they were greatly inclined to accept. Singly neither of them cared to attack Tom Merry, but they would have been glad of the chance of taking him down a peg or two. His offer seemed to show them the way.

"Do you mean that?" asked Gore. "Mind, if we start on you it's no good howling out afterwards about fair play and that sort of thing. It's your own offer."

"I mean it. Come on, the pair of you, and I'll give you a lesson, or else you shall give me a licking," said Tom Merry determinedly.

He threw his jacket to Monty Lowther, and rolled up his sleeves. Gore and Mellish speedily peeled for the fight, and the juniors formed a ring for the combatants.

"I say, Tom," whispered Monty Lowther, "that's rather a big order, you know. Hadn't you better let me take Gore off your hands?"

Tom Merry smiled and shook his head.

"They'd refuse to fight, you see. But now they can't get out of it, and I'm sure that I can lick them. They've no pluck."

"Well, go in and win, old fellow," said Monty.

And Tom Merry stepped towards his two opponents, who waited confidently for him to come on.

CHAPTER 7.

A Lesson for Two.

TOM MERRY did not wait to be attacked. He opened the ball by advancing upon his two opponents, his guard perfect, his eyes keen and on the alert.

"Go it, Gore!" said Mellish.

"Go it yourself!" said Gore, receding a step or two.

Mellish promptly followed his example, and Tom Merry found both his foes retreating before him, and he followed them up to the edge of the ring.

"Here, go it!" shouted Walsh, pushing Mellish back as he would have retreated further. "This isn't a walking-match, you know."

"Mellish wishes it were," said Blake, who had arrived on the spot at the scent of a row. "He doesn't care whether it's a walking-match or a running-match; he'd like either better than a slogging-match, wouldn't you, Mellish?"

"You shut up!" growled Mellish.

"Certainly, but don't keep us waiting all night, old chap."

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "Why don't you wush on Tom Mewwy and stwike him a feahful blow, Mellish? That's the pwopah way to do the twick."

"Ha, ha! Mellish is afraid of getting a fearful blow himself," said Manners.

"Who's afraid?" growled Mellish. "Come on, Gore!"

"You come on then," said Gore.

"I'm coming. Rush the beast."

And having screwed up their courage to the sticking-point, the two rushed at Tom Merry. Tom met them with perfect coolness.

It had seemed a good idea to Gore and Mellish to tackle Tom Merry, two against one, but now that they came to do it, they found the task unpleasantly hard. Tom Merry's guard was perfect, and his fists seemed like lumps of iron, his blows like flashes of lightning.

Neither Gore nor Mellish got in a blow at the cool, smiling face before them, but both of them felt the weight of Tom Merry's arm, and when Monty Lowther called time for the first round, all the damage was on the side of the two.

Mellish's nose was streaming with "claret," and Gore had a trickle of red proceeding from the corner of his mouth.

"Time!" said Lowther.

The combatants rested for one minute. Then they faced each other again, Gore and Mellish showing each a strong desire to keep modestly in the background.

"Oh, come on!" said Tom Merry. "I'm got going to follow you all over the blessed quadrangle, you know. Why don't you buck up?"

"Yaas, wathah! Buck up, dear boys! Don't be frightened."

The two, assailed by chaff and chipping on all sides, did buck up, and again they rushed desperately at Tom Merry.

Tom ought really to have been overborne by that rush, and sent flying, but he wasn't. The blows aimed at him seemed to be brushed aside like flies, and his right came with a sounding clump upon Gore's nose, and Gore gave a yell and went down upon his back on the cold, cold ground. The next second Tom Merry's left was under Mellish's chin, and Mellish dropped like an ox, right across Gore as he sprawled.

"Here, get off!" shouted Gore. "What the dickens do you mean by flopping on me?"

"Can't help it," grunted Mellish. "Confound you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" howled Blake. "He really couldn't help it, Gore. He happened to run against a fist, you know. Accidents will happen, even to the greatest fighting men."

Tom Merry stepped back. His adversaries slowly regained their feet, looking very damaged and sheepish. It was evident that they had had enough fighting.

"Time!" said Monty Lowther sententiously.

"I can't go on after Mellish knocking all the breath out of me like that," grunted Gore. "I'm not made of beastly iron."

"I'm not going on without Gore," said Mellish. "If he cries off, I'm done. I knew he wouldn't have the nerve to stick it out."

Tom Merry took his jacket from Lowther.

"Well, don't be so free with your remarks in the future," he said. "I don't want to have rows with anybody, and you two are not worth taking off one's jacket for. Why can't you try to act decently for a change?"

And the Terrible Three strolled away. Tom Merry had hardly been touched, though he might have had a very rough time if the precious pair had had grit enough to force the fighting.

"The show is over, gentlemen," said Blake. "The walking-match is finished, and has been easily won by Gore and Mellish. Tom Merry was simply nowhere."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gore and Mellish, growling at one another, walked away under a shower of chaff. Arthur Augustus stood with his monocle screwed into his eye, and a thoughtful shade upon his brow, after the group had dispersed. Blake gave him a slap on the back that brought him out of his reverie with a start, and jerked off his eyeglass, which hung at the end of its cord.

"A farthing for your thoughts, old kid!" exclaimed Blake. "What are you looking as solemn as an Egyptian mummy about?"

Arthur Augustus wriggled with annoyance.

"I weally wish you would not be so feahfully wuff, Blake," he expostulated. "You have given me a distinct pain in my beastly spinal column."

"Go hon! What are you mooning about? You look like a chap on the stage, thinking about the rose-clad cottage of his youth, where he spent his innocent days of boyhood before he started stealing the spoons," said Blake severely. "What have you got in your head?"

"I was thinkin', Blake. An ideah cwossed my mind for a limewick."

"Oh, I see! Limericks to right of us, limericks to left of us, limericks——"

"Oh, dwy up! I was thinkin' of composin' a limewick dealin' with that wow——"

"Wow! What do you mean by wow?"

"That wow between Tom Mewwy and Goah and Mellish."

"Oh, that row! You're going to limerick that, are you?"

"Yaas, wathah! I hadn't found a subject. How do you think this sounds—something in this style, deah boy?" Arthur Augustus contracted his brows thoughtfully.

"There was a young boundah named Mewwy,
Whose tempah was violent—vewy.
He——"

"But his temper isn't violent," said Blake; "he's the best-tempered chap at St. Jim's."

"Yaas, I know he is; but that makes no difference in a limewick. You see, that's poet's licence," explained Arthur Augustus.

"Does poet's licence mean that you can tell whoppers?" asked Blake, with interest.

"Well, not exactly whoppahs," said D'Arcy; "but, of course, you can't stick to just plain facts in poetwy, or else you might as well be w'itin' pwose and have done with it."

"I see. Then you'd better take out a poet's licence," said Blake. "I don't know much about it myself. Does it cost as much as a dog licence?"

"Oh, weally, Blake, you know——"

"Herries pays seven-and-six a year for that beastly bulldog of his. I'm blessed if I'd pay as much as that for the privilege of telling whoppers."

"I believe you are wotting, Blake, and are not such an ass as you pwetend to be," said D'Arcy severely. "But I am willin' to explain——"

"Don't bother. I'm off."

"Yaas, wathah, I think you are—off your beastly wockah!" said D'Arcy, as Blake walked away. "Fancy not undah-standin' the diffewence between a poet's licence and a dog licence. It is weally too widiculous. But I weally think that that limewick will be a success, and that I shall be selected as editah of the papah."

And D'Arcy turned that limerick over in his mind, and thought about nothing else for the rest of the evening. Most of the other candidates were similarly engaged.

Manners was discovered engaged in an energetic hunt through a dictionary, looking for rhymes, when bedtime came. Monty Lowther took up a sheet of foolscap to the dormitory with him, scribbled all over illegibly. Tom Merry had a pencil and paper in his hand, and a far-away look in his eyes.

The next morning there were at least nine youths at St. Jim's, who did not give their lessons the attention that the masters thought right and proper. Indeed, in the Fourth Form, Blake, being asked suddenly by Mr. Lathom what was the capital of Italy, recklessly replied "Limerick," much to the amazement of the Form-master.

Figgins was not much better. In the Latin lesson, when his turn came to construe, he was thinking out his limerick, and it ran off his tongue before he knew where he was.

"You will go on from there, Figgins. Talia jactanti stridens Aquilone——"

Figgins stood up and spoke.

"This jolly old coll. takes the bun,
For cricket and football and fun,
Both houses are great,
But I——"

"Figgins!"

"Ye-e-s, sir?" said Figgins, recollecting himself and turning very red.

"You will take fifty lines. You will go on, French."

The whole class giggled as Figgins sat down. Glad enough were they all to be dismissed, and free to devote their whole attention to the important matter in hand.

Football was for once neglected on that Saturday afternoon. Limericks filled up every mind. The committee of judges were filled up with a due sense of their importance, and they expected to be filled up with something more solid in Tom Merry's study that afternoon before they pronounced judgment.

The nine candidates had clubbed together for the feed, and a handsome spread it was, in the quarters of the Terrible Three. Five o'clock was the hour fixed for the meeting of the judges, and before that time they began to drop in.

The table was laid, and on either side of it was a form to seat the committee, and a board placed across from the table to the window-sill increased the dining accommodation. The whole was covered with a white cloth, and where that did not extend there was a neat covering of newspapers.

Pratt, who was the first member of the committee to arrive, looked round with great satisfaction as he noted the array of good things on the table.

"This is jolly," he commented. "We're going to feed first, I hope."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Certainly," said Tom Merry. "Then the table will be shifted out into the passage, to make room. The candidates will recite their limericks and the judges record their votes, for or against, on cards provided for the purpose. The majority of votes elects the editor of 'Tom Merry's Weekly.'"

So it was arranged. Before five had struck the committee were all in their places, and the candidates joined them in the feast. The quarters were certainly a little crowded, but Tom Merry's study was unusually roomy for a member of the Shell, and the juniors managed.

The feed was an excellent one, and it put the judges into an

excellently gracious humour. The table was shifted into the passage after the feed was over, and the forms were arranged in rows for the judges at one side of the study, the other half being left clear for the limerickers.

Each of the judges had a card and pencil in his hand. On each card was a list of the names of the candidates. Each vote was to be recorded in pencil, and the total cast up at the conclusion of the proceedings.

"Now we're ready," said Pratt. "Time!"

The candidates were standing in a group, some of them looking very nervous. Tom Merry signed to Figgins to go forward.

"You first, Figgins!"

"Right you are," said Figgins. "Here goes!"

And Figgins stood up before the committee of judges and started the ball rolling.

CHAPTER 8.

The Limericks—The New Editor.

FIGGINS was a little bit nervous, but he did not show it. With his hands in his pockets he stood up and recited his limerick.

"This jolly old coll. takes the bun,
For cricket and football and fun;
Both houses are great,
But I beg leave to state,
That the New House is much the best one."

"Jolly good," said Pratt.

"Rather a weak ending," Walsh remarked.

Figgins gracefully retired.

"Next man in," said Pratt.

Monty Lowther stepped into view. There was no nervousness about Monty Lowther, and he faced the music and related his limerick without turning a hair. The judges, assuming serious expressions, listened with great attention to Lowther's effusion.

"We are thinking of starting a mag.,
Which we don't want to turn out a rag;
For that reason, you see,
I think I should be
Selected to edit the mag."

"Good!" said Walsh. "Not so bad, anyway."

"Too many mags.," said French, shaking his head.

"Oh, rot!" said Lowther warmly. "You can repeat a rhyme if you like. I think I know as much about writing limericks as you do, French, you New House bounder!"

French promptly put down a mark against Lowther's name on his card. Monty Lowther stalked back to his place.

"I consider it rot," said French. "I may be alone in my opinion, but I stick to it. There were too many mags., and the rest was weak, very weak. That's what I say."

"Yaas, wathah! I don't want to be personal," said Arthur Augustus, "but I think it must be admitted by all the gentlemen pwesent, without diswespect to Lowthah, that the limewick he has just wecited is simply wot."

"Order, order!" exclaimed Pratt. "Next man in. Your turn, Herries."

"Righto!" said Herries, diving into one pocket and then into another, and finally producing a crumpled and very soiled piece of paper, scribbled over in pencil. He peered into the scrawlings and scratches as he stood up before the judges, but apparently the limerick was not to be easily disentangled.

"Well, why don't you go on?" asked Jimson.

"I'm just going to," said Herries, confused. "I can't quite make it out—it seems to have got mixed up a little bit."

"Don't you remember it?" asked Tom Merry.

"No, not all of it. I'm just getting on to the thing. Wait a tick."

"Oh, take your time!" said the chairman resignedly. "We can wait. Better see if you can sort it out before bedtime, if possible."

"I've got it," said Herries. "Here goes. Listen."

"Silence for the limerick! Go ahead, Herries, we're listening."

Herries went ahead.

"There are three jolly fellows in Study No. 6,
Who are always up to some tricks,
They always get the upper hand
Of Figgins and Co.,
And they sometimes get the Terrible Three into a fix."

A yell of laughter greeted the limerick. Herries, rather red in the face, looked round with an indignant eye. He saw nothing particular to laugh at.

"I like that," said Jimson. "I really like it. The thing I like best about it is the feet—or, perhaps, I should say hoofs."

"It rhymes in places," said Pratt. "It's like the egg in the story—it's good in parts. I hardly think that Herries will ever be buried in Poet's Corner in Westminster Abbey, though."

"He ought to be buried somewhere," said French, "before he composes any more limericks. I really think so."

Herries put his paper into his pocket and retreated. The judges all made marks on their cards against his name. It was pretty plain that, whomsoever was selected by the committee to be editor of "Tom Merry's Weekly," the selection would not all upon Herries.

"I don't care," said Herries. "It was a jolly good limerick, and the trouble is that it's a bit above their comprehension, that's all."

"Next man in," said Pratt. "You're the next, Wynn. Walk up, Fatty!"

Fatty Wynn, looking rather important, walked up. He had no paper in his hand, evidently depending upon his memory for the limerick. Silence was restored as Fatty Wynn delivered his composition.

"There's a fellow I know named Tom Merry,
Whose cheek is extraordinary,
He says he can edit,
Which none of us credit,
In fact, we think quite the contrary."

Fatty Wynn placed the accent in "extraordinary" on the second syllable, and in "contrary" on the penultimate, in order to twist the words in satisfactorily. But his effort did not seem to satisfy the judges.

"Go on!" said French, when he left off.

"Go on?" said Fatty. "What do you mean? I've done!"

"You've what? Aren't you going to say your limerick?"

"I've said it. What are you getting at?"

"Oh," said French, with an air of astonishment, "was that a limerick? Sorry; my mistake. Limericks are usually in rhyme, you know, not in blank verse!"

"That's in rhyme!" howled Fatty Wynn. "What do you mean?"

"Oh, I didn't notice the rhymes, that's all! Sing it over again to me."

Fatty Wynn, looking extremely indignant, went through his limerick again. The committee listened with their heads cocked thoughtfully on one side.

"Yes, you're right," said French. "Edit rhymes with credit. But there ought to be more than two rhymes in a verse of five lines."

"In a stanza of five verses, you mean," said Pratt, with an air of superior knowledge. "You know very well, French——"

"Oh, dry up! Don't work that off on me. I know what I'm going to decide about that apology for a limerick."

"I say, it's all right, you know," said Fatty Wynn anxiously. "I'll say it over again for you if you like, you know."

"Oh, don't trouble," said Walsh. "We've heard it twice too often now. Please take a back seat, Fatty, old man; and, whatever you do, don't write any more poetry."

"If you want a thick ear, Walsh——"

"Thick ears are off," interrupted Tom Merry. "The opinion of the umpire—I mean the judge—must be respected. You go in next, Gussy."

"Yaas, wathah! I weally think, deah boys, that I am goin' to give you a tweat in the way of limewicks," said the swell of the School House, as he came forward. "I'm not the kind of fellah to blow my own twumpet, you know, but I can't help seein' that my limewick is bettah than the feahful piffle we have been listenin' to."

"Well, I like a chap to be modest," said French. "Blessed is he that bloweth his own trumpet. Get that limerick ff your chest, Gussy."

"Yaas, wathah! Pway listen with attention, as I do not wish to be put to the twouble of wepeatin' it, deah boys."

"I don't think you're likely to be put to that trouble. Start!"

Arthur Augustus started. He read his limerick out from a paper he held in his hand, with his eyeglass screwed into his eye to assist his vision.

"There was a young boundah named Mewwy,
Whose tempah was violent—vewy;
He wiped up the floor
With Mellish and Gore,
And left them more dismal than mewwy."

"There's a pun there," Arthur Augustus explained. "He

left them more dismal than mewwy—and more dismal than Tom Mewwy. See ?"

French scratched his head.

"No, I don't think I quite see," he remarked. "Explain it again."

"They were more dismal than mewwy when he left them," said D'Arcy, "and therefore they were more dismal than Mewwy—Tom Mewwy."

"But he didn't leave them. I saw it all from the beginning, and they left him."

"That's a minor point," said Arthur Augustus. "That's a poet's licence. It don't matter whethah they left him or he left them, deah boy."

"Then they were not merry at all——"

"No. Don't I say they were left more dismal than mewwy ?"

"Yes ; but if they were more dismal than merry, that implies that they were merry to some extent," argued French. "Now, I know they were not. They felt quite rotten."

"If you are going to be hypercwitical——"

"Who are you calling a hypocrite ?"

"I didn't say hypocwitical ; I said hypercwitical," said Arthur Augustus. "I will explain——"

"Please don't ! Next gentleman !" said French.

"But weally, French, I do not think that you see that pun yet——"

"I don't want to see it."

"But, you see, deah boy——"

"I'll take your word for it, Gussy. Anyway, this is a limerick competition, not a punning bee. Get out, and make room for Kerr !"

"Yaas, wathah ! But weally I think that——"

"Oh, travel !" said the committee with one voice ; and Arthur Augustus travelled, and Kerr came forward, limerick in hand.

"If a paper we start, I declare
I'm most fit for the editor's chair ;
I'm a native-born Scot,
Which you others are not,
So I'm best to run the affair."

"Well, of all the howling cheek !" exclaimed the committee simultaneously. "Of all the fearful, awful cheek, that takes the bun !"

"It's a plain statement of fact," said Kerr stoutly. "You can like it or lump it, but there you are ! You can't get away from the fact, whether you like it or not."

"Well, in my opinion, Kerr, you won't be editor."

"Can't help that. If I'm not, the paper will be a rank failure. You need a brain at the head of the thing, and a Scottish brain——"

"Oh, clear off ! You're too much and too often," said French.

"I repeat that a Scottish head——"

"Oh, somebody thump him on his Scottish head if he won't move off !"

Kerr retreated as several of the committee rose to suit the action to the words. He sniffed disdainfully as he returned to his place. The committee could decide what they liked, but Kerr was of his own opinion still.

"Now, then, Manners," said Pratt, "come forth !"

"What do you mean ?" said Manners. "I'm seventh I——"

"Ha, ha ! Step out, then, if you understand that better."

Manners stepped out. The committee listened to him with exemplary fortitude as he proceeded to recite his limerick. Manners was certainly not a great poet, but he had done his best. His muse had taken a serious turn, and the faces of the auditors grew serious as they listened.

"It is pleasant to sit under the trees
And list to the sweet summer breeze,
By the bank of a flowing stream,
And fall into a dream,
As you lie there at your ease."

"My only pyjama hat !" said French faintly. "Did you do that all by yourself, Manners ?"

"Yes, I did," said Manners.

"Is it comic or serious ?"

"Serious," said Manners, turning red. "What do you mean, French ? Of course it's serious ! I wasn't going to write funny piffle, like all the rest."

"It seems funny, though," said French thoughtfully. "Let me see, how does it go ?

"'It is pleasant to sit in a tree
With another chap's girl on your knee——'"

"That's wrong !" exclaimed Manners. "'And list to the sweet summer breeze.' That's it."

"My mistake. And then, in a dream,
'To fall into the stream——'"

"Ha, ha, ha !" howled the committee.

Manners looked daggers at French, whose face was as solemn as a judge's ought to be. Manners believed he was making those mistakes on purpose.

"You've got it wrong, French. 'By the bank of a flowing stream, and fall into a dream——'"

"I see. 'By the bank of a flowing stream, and fall into a dream, as you lie——' But you said you were sitting just now !" broke off French. "You can't sit and lie at the same time."

"I didn't say I could. I——"

"Yes, you did. You're sitting in the first line and lying in the last."

"That's so," said Pratt ; "unless he's lying when he says he's sitting in the first line."

"Ha, ha, ha !"

"You're a set of silly asses !" said Manners. "Call yourself judges——"

"Time for you to travel. Get along !"

"Call yourself judges ! You ain't fit to judge a dog fight !"

"Make room for your uncle, kid ! Travel along !"

"Lot of good you are to judge anything. You could judge a bottle of ginger-pop, perhaps, or a jam-tart. That's about your mark !"

"Order ! Order ! Get off ! Blake, your turn next."

Tom Merry drew the indignant Manners away, and Blake came forward, limerick in hand. He read out his effusion with his usual coolness.

"There's a New House outsider named Wynn——"

Fatty Wynn started up indignantly.

"Is there ?" he exclaimed. "Are you out on a hunt for thick ears, Blake ?"

"Silence !"

"Order !"

"Shut up !"

"Let Blake shut up, then ! Think I'm going to hear him——"

"Order !"

Figgins pushed the indignant Fatty back into his chair, and sat on his knees to keep him there.

"Quiet, kid !" he said. "We're all in this. Go ahead, Blake."

"Yaas, wathah ! I wegard your intewwuption, Wynn, as bein' extwemely bad form," said D'Arcy. "Undah the circs., any gentleman pwesent is entitled to say what he likes, and to use any expwessions that please him ; and I really wondah——"

"Oh, dry up !" exclaimed Tom Merry. "You're stopping the show !"

D'Arcy looked at him frigidly through his eyeglass.

"I wefuse to dwy up until I have finished my wemarks. As I was sayin'——"

"Dry up ! Ring off, fathead !"

"I object to that oppwobious expwession, and before the pwoceedings go any further, gentlemen, it will be necessary for me to thwash Tom Mewwy——"

"Sit down !"

"Shut up !"

"Order !"

"I wefuse to sit down or to shut up or to ordah—I mean to keep ordah—until I have thwashed Tom Mewwy——"

"Put a muzzle on him !"

"Chain him up !"

Herries seized D'Arcy and plumped him into a chair, and held him there with a grip of iron on his collar. Arthur Augustus was forced to subside.

Blake was allowed to continue reading out his limerick at last, and this time, with the exception of a snort from Fatty Wynn, he was not interrupted.

"There's a New House outsider called Wynn,
Who can't be regarded as thin ;
He eats day and night,
And it's marvellous quite,
Where he puts all the stuff he crams in."

"Ha, ha, ha !" giggled the committee. "That's better. That's Fatty Wynn's portrait. Now, then, Tom Merry, you're the last."

Last, but not least, Tom Merry stepped forward as Blake retired.

"Go ahead, Merry," said French encouragingly. "We're listening."

"Here you are !" said Tom.

"It was I who first thought of the plan,
And I'm willing to do all I can ;
So I declare meekly,
If 'Tom Merry's Weekly'
Wants editing—I am the man !"

"Bravo !"

The competition was over. The committee began to compare notes, while the nine competitors waited for the verdict. They waited rather anxiously. Some of the judges had voted for, and some against, each candidate, as each had his friends and admirers there.

The votes for and against were counted carefully, and it was soon seen that Herries, Wynn, and Kerr had no chance. Then D'Arcy was eliminated, and then Manners and Lowther. Figgins followed.

"It's a tie!" exclaimed French—"a tie between Tom Merry and Blake."

"Chairman has the casting vote," said Tom Merry.

Pratt hesitated.

"I don't want all that responsibility," he remarked, "and I really can't see a pin to choose between the two. There's another way of settling it."

"What's that, Pratt?"

"It stands between Blake and Tom Merry. Let each of them write a new limerick, and we'll decide between them. We'll allow five minutes for the limerick to be written, and if one doesn't finish in the time, he's out of it."

"That's fair," said Tom Merry.

"Quite fair," said Blake. "I'm agreeable."

And pens and paper being produced, the two competitors set busily to work, while every member of the committee who possessed a watch brought it into view to time them.

"Just five minutes," said Pratt. "Go ahead."

Tom Merry gnawed the handle of his pen and scratched his head. Blake wore a decidedly worried look. Silence was maintained in the study.

Silence for the space of five minutes was rather a severe strain upon a crowd of juniors, but they stood it out manfully.

The fourth minute had elapsed when Tom Merry's pen began to scratch swiftly on the paper. An idea had evidently flashed into the mind of the hero of the Shell. He dashed it off quickly. Blake was working away slowly and steadily. Pratt suddenly closed his watch with a snap.

"Time!" he exclaimed.

"I'm ready," said Tom Merry.

Blake looked troubled.

"Ain't you ready, Blake?" demanded half a dozen voices from the committee.

"Oh, yes!" said Blake. "I was going to make an improvement, but it will have to stand now. I think it's all right."

"Read yours out then, Blake. Silence there!"

"Silence! Order!"

"Yaas, wathah! Ordah, deah boys!"

"Shut up, Gussy. Go on, Blake!"

Jack Blake promptly read out his latest effusion:

"If I were you I should be chary,
Of selecting that bounder Tom Merry,
He won't do much good,
Though he would if he could,
If you make him editor you'll be sorry."

"My only maiden aunt Mary Ann Jackson!" groaned French. "Is that a limerick? Who told you that 'chary' rhymes with 'Merry,' or either of them with 'sorry'?"

"And the feet—the fearful feet!"

"My dear chaps, you mustn't expect too much of a young man in a hurry," said Blake. "I've done my best in the time allowed, and no man can do more."

"Well, if Tom Merry can't beat that, he ought to be beaten himself!" said Jimson. "Go ahead, Merry, and let's see what fearful thing you've perpetrated."

"Silence for Tom Merry."

"Order! order!"

Tom Merry stepped up, paper in hand. He wasn't oversatisfied with his new limerick, but he felt that it couldn't possibly be much worse than Blake's, which was one comfort.

"I hope you won't make the mistake
Of selecting that duffer called Blake,
You are bound to be right,
And all satisfied quite,
Chaps, if I and not Blake take the cake."

"Bravo! That beats Blake's, anyway!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The voting of the committee was soon over. Nearly every voice was for Tom Merry, and Blake did not dispute it.

"Gentlemen," said Pratt, "the committee has now done selecting. Tom Merry is selected as the winner, and according to the terms of the competition, he becomes the editor of the soon-to-be-published journal known as 'Tom Merry's Weekly.'"

"Bravo!" shouted the committee.

And, their work being done, they departed. The nine juniors were left alone in the study to discuss their future plans.

"Tom Merry's editor," said Figgins. "That's settled. After all, we couldn't all be editors, and it had to come to one of us; and it was Merry's idea from the first. Now, what about bringing out the first number, Tom Merry?"

"Yaas, wathah! What about the first numbah, Tom Mewwy?"

"Certainly," said Blake. "When are we to expect the first number?"

"That's it," chimed in Kerr and Wynn. "When is the first number coming out, Tom Merry?"

Tom ran his fingers through his curly hair.

"Here, don't jump on a fellow's neck all of a sudden like that," he protested. "Give us time to breathe. We'll have the first number out by the time you've all got your contributions in—and I think we'll say next Saturday. There's a couple of bottles of currant-wine left; let's drink to the new paper!"

"Bravo!"

And with that harmless liquor, the youthful journalists drank to the prosperity of "Tom Merry's Weekly."

THE END.

(Another grand, complete tale of Tom Merry next week. Please order your GEM in advance.)

Stormpoint

A School Tale. By MAURICE MERRIMAN.

READ THIS FIRST

Rex Allingham, Jim Fisher, and Bob Bouncer are three well-known chums at Stormpoint College. Hal Trehearn, the captain of the school, favours them; but they are bullied by Jardon and Symes, two Fifth-Formers, who play many spiteful tricks upon them. A new boy named Alburton comes to Stormpoint, and the chums object to his swaggering disposition, so nickname him "Swipes." A paper-chase is arranged by the Head, and Bob and Rex are chosen for the hares. This causes a certain amount of jealousy among the bullies, and some silly remarks are thrown at the chums.

(Now go on with the story.)

The Start of the Paper-Chase.

"If I were your master," retorted Bob, to Jardon's silly remark, "I would feed you on hogwash for a month, and give your food to the pigs. The poor creatures are of some use, because you can turn them into pork, but no one could turn you into anything useful."

"Go to bed, you viper, unless you want me to kick you!" growled Porker.

"You are too fat and foolish to kick anything. I hope you have that bet against us, and that you will lose your bet. I expect you have done so, and you can go to your sty with the comfortable conviction that we shall do all in our power to make you lose."

"You look after yourselves, you beauties. I hope you will enjoy yourselves to-morrow. I hope it's pouring wet, with thunder and lightning and hail. It would serve you both right if you got struck by lightning!"

Porker's amiable wishes were not to be realised, for the morning was beautifully bright, and as the boys had a whole holiday they were in a state of high spirits.

The hounds were very numerous, and Jardon and his chums were amongst them. Jardon looked particularly black at the chums, but he said nothing because Hal was there to start the hares.

"You will have ten minutes' grace," said Hal. "Off you go!"

Now, in a sprint for a hundred yards Rex could easily beat Bob; he could also have beaten him over a half-mile course. But this was a long-distance run, which was a very different matter. Bob was far more heavily built, and he had

wonderful powers of endurance, while he was one of those lads who won't give in. Knowing all this, Rex let him set the pace, and, considering they were ascending a ridge of hills, the summit of which was one of the highest points in that part of the country, the pace at which Bob started was rather extraordinary, and not, to Rex's way of thinking, particularly wise.

"We mustn't pump ourselves out, old chap," panted Rex, as they toiled up the height, still in view of the hounds.

"It's all downhill the other side," answered Bob. "I want to tantalise old Jardon. If he loses his temper he will do all sorts of extraordinary things. Wait till we get on the top, and then I'll show you a bit of fun."

Rex had a struggle to keep pace with his chum, and before they reached the top of the height they were both so winded that they could hardly speak.

"Sit down there!" panted Bob. "In full view of the hounds, you know. Jardon is sure to come up fast, because he won't like to be beaten by us, and he will guess the captain is timing us. Wait a minute. I went over the course last night—at least, a good way over it, and I hid one or two little things that we are likely to fancy. I've got some lemonade here, for the start. Only a bottle each, 'cos we mustn't drink too much if we want to run. Here they come. It will be pleasant to see them romp up, because we know exactly what it feels like."

"I wouldn't care to go over that piece of ground again!" exclaimed Rex, opening his lemonade.

"We shall have got our wind back long before those louts get up," said Bob. "Then, you see, we shall be fresh for the race down the other side, and they will be pretty well pumped out."

"Right you are! But we must not let them catch us, especially at the start."

Bob, however, seemed to be quite at his ease, and when the hounds drew within hailing distance he commenced to chaff Jardon, who was leading the way up the height at the best pace he could command, while the remainder of the hounds came panting after him.

"Want a pair of bellows, Jardon?" howled Bob. "You are waddling like some old duck. Can't you run better than that? You go as though one of the masters had been giving you a caning lately. Ha, ha, ha! You have fallen now. That's through getting too excited. You shouldn't throw yourself about in that ridiculous fashion. It is apt to make people laugh at you, and I know you don't like being laughed at. Here's your very good health. This is a nice, cool drink. Sorry we are not going to leave any for you. Take his hand, some of you, and give the poor child a help up. You are getting too fat for running purposes, Jardon. If you ever get to the top of this hill, I would advise you to roll down the other side."

Jardon was furious, and he came on at the greatest pace he could command, which was not exactly wise, for he was tiring himself out at the very start. However, this was exactly what the chums wanted, and they continued to chaff him until he got so close that they dared wait no longer.

They were fresh again now, and they went down the hill at full pace, leaping over the bracken and boulders in fine fashion. They had scarcely used any "scent" so far, as they were in full view of the hounds. It would have been wiser had Jardon taken a short rest, but he would not do this, and he howled to the rest of the hounds to come on, although even now there were a good many stragglers, and some of the younger ones, who did not want the hares to be caught, slunk off to enjoy themselves in some other manner.

Rex and Bob knew the ground well, and they led the hounds over the very roughest of it, and thus mile after mile they covered, with the hounds in view most of the distance.

Jardon stuck to his work. He appeared to be determined to catch them, but when they reached the low ground the hares crossed a broad swamp.

"If we can only get over this without sinking up to our necks we ought to be safe!" panted Bob. "Jardon may try to get round it. If he does, we shall gain a lot of ground. We shall have to throw out scent here."

They got across the swamp all right, although they were smothered from head to foot with black mire; then they crossed a small coppice, and after that a large stretch of open ground lay before them. Once or twice they caught sight of the hounds, but they were a considerable distance in the rear, and it looked very much as though the hares would get home, barring accidents, for both of them were determined not to give in.

"We are coming to the river now!" exclaimed Rex at last. "We can go over the bridge, and then cross the withy-bed. That will be nice and sloppy for Jardon to follow."

"I know!" exclaimed Bob. "But look at those two fellows on the bridge! They are watching us. Suppose Jardon has planted them there to stop us?"

"Why, in that case we must get past them somehow. We must cross the river, you know. Perhaps they are only fishermen, or something like that."

All doubt concerning the matter was soon set at rest, for as the chums drew near, the two men, who were ruffianly-looking fellows, stepped forward, evidently with the intention of stopping them.

"Here, you young ruffians," cried one of them, "you ain't got no right to come along this lane! It's private property, and the owner has given instructions to stop anyone as comes this way!"

"Just what I expected," growled Bob, drawing back, as the two men barred the way. "This is Jardon's doing. He means to win his bet, and get us caught. Well, I'm just as determined he sha'n't."

"Quite so, Bob," exclaimed Rex. "But you have got to recollect that the hounds are not very far behind us, and that we must cross the river before we can get back to the college. If we attempt to swim it, we are certain to get caught the other side by those two beauties, and if we don't swim it, we are certain to get caught this side by the hounds."

"All right! We have kept the course planned out, so we are all right; now we will give them a little extra run. Do you mind running a little risk?"

"Not a bit, so long as we don't get caught," answered Rex cheerfully.

"All right; then you leave it to me," growled Bob. "I say, you ugly-looking ruffians, how much did Jardon pay you to stop us?"

"Never saw him in my life," retorted one of the men. "You ain't passing this way."

"We don't intend to pass that way. It is a lucky thing that they put a black cap over a criminal's face before they hang him, else yours would certainly have frightened the executioner when your turn comes. I would advise you to take that face home, and give it a good scrubbing with a brush; after that if you bring it to us we will try to punch it into shape. Oh, it's useless running after us! A bandy-legged old badger like you would never be able to catch us. We haven't time to throw you into the river, but a good wash would do you all the good in the world."

One of the men remained on the bridge, but the other gave chase, as the chums raced down the river-bank towards the sea. He did not follow very far, but as he turned the hares caught sight of the hounds coming on at fine speed with Jardon at their head.

"They won't be pleased at this extra run," exclaimed Rex. "I know Jardon hates the work, and he would never have followed if it had not been for the bet."

"We will lead them a dance before we have done," declared Bob. "The tide is coming in, so that will suit our purpose down to the ground. Are they gaining on us?"

"No!" answered Rex, looking round. "Jardon has slackened speed. Probably he knows that he must catch us now. See that! The hounds are spreading out so as to cut us off if we leave the river-bank."

"We are not going to leave the river-bank," declared Bob. "We are going to follow it till we reach the mouth of the river, and then we are going to swim across."

"All right," cried Rex, "I'm ready, only I don't quite see how we are going to round Stormpoint. There is a pretty stiff wind, and the waves will be bursting upon it."

"That's all right. Let's get across the river for the start, and I'll show you one of the finest finishes of a paper-chase you have ever witnessed. I wouldn't be a bit surprised if there is a little excitement about it."

"Neither would I," gasped Rex. "If we get across the river, something is going to happen. I'm running short of scent."

"So much the better. Shove the rest into your pockets, then chuck the bags away. We don't want them to impede our swimming, and we sha'n't want much scent to carry us home. Here we are at the mouth of the river. Jardon thinks he's got us now. He's going to find out his mistake. Slacken down a bit; we shall need all our breath for the swim."

On that side of the river the ground was sandy and level, but on the opposite shore great rocks towered up three hundred feet above the sea, forming Stormpoint, a rocky cliff against which huge seas were bursting.

"You are caught!" shouted Jardon, spreading out his men. "Do you give in?"

"Not yet, you honourable and noble sportsman!" retorted Bob, plunging into the water, closely followed by Rex.

"You mad young villains!" roared Jardon. "You will be drowned."

A scornful laugh was his only reply, and in his fury he also plunged in, calling to the rest to follow him.

Symes did so, accompanied by about half a dozen others, but the rest decided on retracing their way along the river-bank until they reached the bridge, though, of course, this

STORMPOINT (*continued*).

would render it quite impossible for them to catch the daring hares.

Bob and Rex had got such a start that there was not the slightest chance of Jardon capturing them before they got across; but he did not make any special effort, feeling confident that if they once got across he would have them to a certainty, and it would only mean recrossing the river, or at the worst waiting till the tide fell.

"It's all right, old chap!" exclaimed Bob. "The breast-stroke will suit us. The hounds are not exerting themselves, so we will follow their example, 'cos, don't you see, we shall need all our strength on the other side. Nice and cooling this, isn't it?"

"Grand! I felt awfully fagged before that dive."

"So did I, but we've got the consolation of knowing that the hounds felt just the same. We are getting along famously. The tide is carrying us up a bit, but that doesn't matter."

They were both excellent swimmers, Bob being especially good at a long distance, the same as he was at running. They had a long distance swim on this occasion, but they reached the opposite side in safety, and what they considered better still was that they were considerably in advance of the hares.

"All right, Jardon, you fine old sporting bully!" shouted Bob, flinging some wet paper on the ground, though, of course, it was not at all necessary, because they were well in sight. "There's some scent for you. A hound like you ought to be able to follow. You think you have caught us, do you? Well, you are what Porker would call mistook. We are not anything like caught yet!"

Then Bob clambered along the rocks towards the sea.

It was difficult work, because they were very precipitous and, being covered with seaweed, extremely slippery; but the chums were active, and as they went they shouted out chaff to the pursuers, occasionally scattering a little paper.

"Mind how you come, Jardon!" bawled Bob, as the bully got ashore. "You are very bloated, you know, and a fall on these sharp rocks might what Porker would call puncture your tyres! Sorry to have made you wet. That's silly, now; I felt certain you would fall. This way. Watch us climb, and then you will know how to follow. Poor old pudden; you've scraped your noble brow. I believe you have knocked your putty head out of shape. The forehead appears to recede even more than it does in its natural state."

Bob's language was nothing like refined, but it was not to be compared to the insults Jardon heaped on their heads, as he followed with the remainder of the hounds who had ventured to cross the river.

Now, about a quarter of the distance up the front of Stormpoint there is a broad ledge. It is formed by a break in the rocks, and comparatively easy to reach. Rex and Bob had reached it once when caught by the tide, which comes in very swiftly just there, and it is lucky that they did so, or they would have been drowned. On that occasion they had remained on the plateau until the tide turned, and had then returned by the gully, which is about a mile further along the shore, and which can only be reached when the tide is down.

On the present occasion they gained the plateau in safety, and sprinkled a little paper on Jardon's head as he climbed after them.

"You are much too fat and stupid for this climbing work, Jordan!" cried Bob. "You had better go home like a good hound. You can't catch us, you know, and you will only hurt yourself if you try to ascend in that reckless fashion."

"All right, you little brute!" yelled Jardon. "You may think yourself very clever, but I am bound to have you now; and perhaps when I do catch you, you will get hurt!"

"Now, you see, Rex," exclaimed Bob. "My idea is that with a bit of luck it would be possible to climb to the very summit of Stormpoint."

"I say, Bob—well, we will try. I'm ready, only, mind you, it is dangerous."

"Think so?"

"I feel perfectly sure of it. However, we will have a try, and I dare say we shall succeed. There's one thing. If we do succeed, we are not at all likely to get caught, because I don't believe one of those hounds will come after us."

"We can easily find out," said Bob, commencing the ascent.

It was not only fearfully difficult, but it was terribly dangerous. A fall would have meant certain death, and in many places it seemed to be quite impossible for the youngsters to proceed further.

"We are getting on nicely, aren't we?" exclaimed Bob, when they had ascended about half the fearful height.

"Splendidly!" exclaimed Rex, clutching at the rocks. "The best of it is Jardon and the rest of the hounds are not attempting to follow."

"I expect it's too steep and high for them," observed Bob; "but there's one thing about the job, now we have got so far we are bound to do the rest. We must gain the top else we are bound to get caught, and after all the trouble we have taken it's not likely that we are going to let that happen. Mind that piece of rock; it's loose, and it would be painful to fall from this height. Get a fine sea-view from here, don't you?"

"Capital! But I tell you candidly, Bob, I don't like the look of the cliff above us."

"Eh? Oh, it will look nicer as we get nearer to it."

"All right. We have the consolation of knowing that it can't possibly look nastier."

Jardon and the remainder of the hounds who had gained the plateau shouted to the daring youngsters to come down, but they made no attempt to follow. Anxious as the bully was to win his bets, which were quite beyond his means, he was far too cowardly to risk his life in attempting to ascend the height. He did not believe for a moment that Rex and Bob would accomplish their perilous task, and he watched them grimly, each moment expecting to see one of them fall.

Several times they slipped, but both were remarkably active, while each kept warning the other to be cautious.

They had nearly gained the summit of the great point when they arrived at a spot where further progress appeared to be out of the question.

They were standing on a boulder, and as they glanced downwards they realised for the first time how perilous had been their ascent. The rocks fell away in what was almost a sheer precipice as far as the plateau, and the lads beneath looked quite small, so great was the height.

Above their heads was the summit of the cliff, but it was several feet beyond their reach, while the face of the rocks as far as the top was perfectly smooth, so that it was absolutely impossible to climb them.

"That's a pity," growled Bob. "Seeing that we have got so far in perfect safety, it would be beastly to get caught! Fancy that lubber waiting for us down below while some of the others got round!"

"They will have to wait till the tide goes down," said Rex. "They can't possibly get off that plateau now. The sea that is running would dash them on the rocks."

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