NEXT THURSDAY: "The Faithful Fags." Another Splendid Tale of the Juniors of St. Jim's, by MARTIN CLIFFORD.

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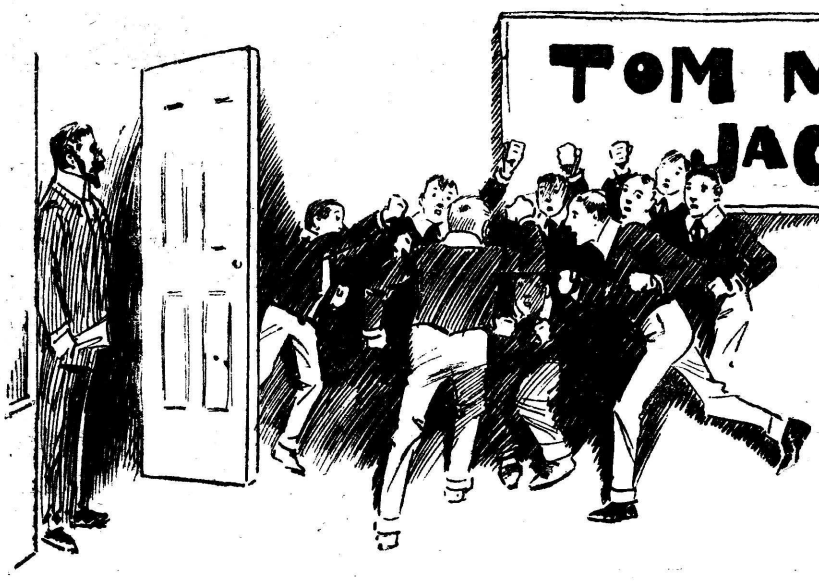
[Our Readers are informed that the characters in the following Story are purely imaginary, and no reference or allusion is made to any living person. Actual names may be unintentionally mentioned, but the Editor wishes it to be distinctly understood that no adverse personal reflection is intended.]



TOM MERRY v JACK BLAKE

A Splendid, Long, Complete Tale of "THE CHUMS OF ST. JIM'S."

BY MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.
A Chance for Lumley!

TOM MERRY wore a worried look.

There really seemed to be no reason why Tom Merry, the captain of the Shell Form at St. Jim's, should wear a worried look that day.

It was a fine, keen winter's afternoon, and the sun was shining into the window of his study in the School House. Outside, on the playing fields, the voices of crowds of fellows could be heard. It was a Wednesday, a half-holiday at St. Jim's, and most of the "Saints" were turning out for football. Tom Merry, as a matter of fact, should have been getting ready for the House match that was coming off that afternoon; and instead of that, there he was standing in his study with his hands thrust deep into his trousers' pockets, and a gloomy expression of thought upon his face.

There was no doubt about it. The usually sunny face—as a rule the most cheerful in the School House—was clouded. Tom Merry was worried.

"Hang it!" he said at last, breaking the silence of the study. "Blessed if I know what to do!"

From the school clock rang the half-hour.

Half-past two.

"Bless that chap!" murmured Tom Merry. "The kick-off's at three, and——"

He was interrupted.

A junior of about his own age came into the study. It was not one of Tom Merry's chums. Manners or Lowther might have come in at any moment to call him, or Jack Blake, or one of the fellows from Study No. 6; but this was not one of them. This was a youth with a somewhat weedy, and yet wiry, form, and a hard, keen face, and a pair of eyes of uncertain colour that seemed as hard, and bright, and sharp as steel.

"You're here, Merry."

Tom Merry swung round to face the newcomer

"I'm waiting for you, Lumley."

Jerrold Lumley—or Lumley-Lumley, as he called himself by preference—sneered slightly as he looked at the captain of the Shell. He saw the signs of uneasy thought plainly enough in Tom Merry's face.

Lumley-Lumley—the son of Lascelles Lumley-Lumley, the millionaire—was a peculiar youth, and had peculiar ways, and of late his ways had not endeared him to the juniors of St. Jim's, and, above all, not to Tom Merry & Co. Even unlimited pocket-money could not condone for his utter want of principle—his habitual caddishness—and his persistence in acting in a way that the blackest sheep at St. Jim's regarded as outside the limit. Jerrold Lumley-Lumley had been called the Outsider at St. Jim's, and never since his return did a fellow deserve a nickname more.

He had never seemed to care. He was as hard as nails. From the first day of his coming to St. Jim's he had been on the worst of terms with Tom Merry and his comrades until the time of his illness, and he had gone back again to the pleasure of flouting them.

Now, however, there seemed to be something of a change in his manner. He could not keep the sneer from his face, but he had nothing hostile in his manner as he entered Tom Merry's study in the Shell passage.

"What do you want, Lumley?" said Tom Merry, twisting a fragment of paper in his fingers, with an uneasiness unusual to him. "You wanted to speak to me!"

Lumley glanced at the twisted fragment.

"That's the note I passed you in class?"

"Yes."

Tom Merry allowed it to drop to the floor.

"I want to speak to you, just as I said in that note, and alone," said Lumley.

"Well, here I am—only buck up; Manners or Lowther may come in any minute to fetch me down to the footer."

"I sha'n't keep you many minutes, I guess."

"Well, go ahead!"

"We've got on pretty badly since I've come to this school," said Lumley, in a quiet, even voice, his eyes watching Tom Merry with strange intentness. "You hated me from the first, and I——"

"That's not correct," said Tom Merry, sharply. "We were all willing to give you a chance. But you were such—such——"

"Such an outsider," said Lumley, coolly. "Exactly. I had been brought up in a poor quarter in New York—I was half foreign to your ways here—and my ideas weren't anything like your ideas here, I guess. It wasn't a surprising thing that we didn't pull together. You've nicknamed me the Outsider, and you all treat me as one. Well, I've been here some time now, and I'm beginning to catch on to things. Don't you think it's time you gave me a chance."

"I don't understand you."

"Suppose we let bygones be bygones?" said Lumley-Lumley. "Take me as you find me, and start fresh."

Tom Merry looked at him in silence.

The Outsider had always been so hard and unfeeling that the hero of the Shell had certainly never expected an appeal of this sort.

Tom Merry was not the fellow to be hard upon anyone, and he would willingly have given his worst enemy a chance—but Lumley! Instinctively he felt that Jerrold Lumley was not to be trusted. The Outsider had proved it over and over again.

"Well?" said Lumley, after a pause.

"What do you want me to do?" asked Tom Merry.

"I want you to stop treating me like an outsider. Give me a chance to be an insider, to put it like that," said Lumley, with a slight grin. "You won't find me a bad sort. I am a bad enemy but a good friend. I have heaps of money, for one thing——"

Tom Merry's face hardened.

"There you go at once," he exclaimed. "Do you think I want any of your rotten money, or would take it, anyway?"

Lumley shrugged his shoulders.

"Some of the fellows are glad enough to take it," he said. "Fellows who speak of me as the Outsider, too. Still, let the money drop. I'm not a bad sort if I'm treated well. I'm willing to take up the sports—I've done a lot of practice at footer, too, and can play. That's a change, and shows I'm in earnest."

"Yes, I've had an eye on that."

"Then give me a chance. Play me in the House match to-day, to show the fellows that we're starting fresh, and I'll promise you you won't be sorry."

Tom Merry hesitated.

On first coming to St. Jim's, Lumley-Lumley had been loud in his contempt for football, and all manly games, and had found his pleasure in smoking and playing cards at the Green Man in the lane.

That, however, had been stopped.

Certainly Lumley had had no choice in the matter. He had been flogged for his visits to the public-house, and would have been expelled, only the Head was under a certain difficulty in getting rid of him. But of late he certainly had taken up footer of his own accord, and had become a fairly good player—as good as the average in the junior team, Tom Merry thought. Of course, he was nothing to players like Tom Merry, Blake, Figgins, or Fatty Wynn. But he was very nearly as good as any of the others.

This was to his credit. And if a chap who had been in bad ways was earnest to reform, Tom Merry was the last fellow in the world to hinder him. Tom Merry would go out of his way any time to help a lame dog over a stile.

Lumley was watching him still with keen intentness.

"Give me a chance," he repeated. "Mind, I said I could be a good friend—and I can be a bad enemy too. If you make me an enemy, you will have reason to be sorry for it. That's plain English."

Tom Merry's lip curled.

"I can only say rats to that," he replied. "You know very well that your threats wouldn't make any difference to me, and you're a fool to make them."

Lumley gave another shrug.

"Well, well, I'm sorry I said it, then. I mean what I said in coming here. I want a chance to become anything but the outsider you call me."

"I suppose everybody's entitled to a chance," said Tom Merry. "You've had chances and haven't made much of them. But I'm willing to do anything in reason. What do you want me to do?"

"Stand by me, and help me," said Jerrold Lumley. "Give me a chance, as I said. Look here, Herries is not playing in the match this afternoon. His dog's sick, and he's sticking out in the kennels with him. You haven't decided whom to play in Herries's place, have you?"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"No; I've only just had word from Herries. I can easily find somebody, I suppose."

"Play me."

Tom Merry started.

"You!"

"Yes," said Lumley, coolly, "you'll admit that I'm as good a player as Herries, and I take the same place, too—centre-half. You played me once before. Play me again."

"But——"

"It will show the whole school that we're on a new footing," urged Lumley-Lumley. "That's what I want."

Tom Merry drew a deep breath.

"I hope you're in earnest, Lumley," he said, slowly, "I'll give you a chance. But mind, if you are fooling me this time, you'll never get another word from me.'

"I guess that's all right."

"Then I'll play you."

CHAPTER 2.

Not Popular!

"HERE he is!"

"Where have you been?"

"I was just coming to look for you, Tommy."

"Well, here I am," said Tom Merry cheerfully, "as large as life and twice as natural. It's still ten minutes to kick off."

Monty Lowther and Manners looked at their chum keenly. The clouds had not quite gone from Tom Merry's handsome face.

"Anything wrong?" asked Lowther.

"Not exactly."

"You know Herries is not playing?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Yes. Towser's sick, or Herries thinks he is, and he's nursing him."

"I suppose you'll play Dane in Herries's place?"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Not Dane," said Lowther. "Glyn, then, I suppose?"

"No; not a Shell fellow."

"Oh, I say," exclaimed Manners. "There are only four of the Shell in the team—us three, and Kangaroo. There are seven of the Fourth—Blake, Herries, Digby, D'Arcy, Reilly, Jones, Kerruish. Better shove a Shell fellow in."

"No, I've decided whom to play, as a matter of fact."

"Who's the chap?"

"Lumley!"

"What?"

"Jerrold Lumley!"

Monty Lowther and Manners stared blankly at their chum. If Tom Merry had said that he had decided to play Toby, the boot-boy, or Mrs. Mimms, the house-dame, he could not have astonished them more.

"Lumley!" said Lowther.

"Lumley!" said Manners, crescendo.

"Yes."

"I suppose you're joking."

"Not in the least."

"Then you're off your rocker!" said Lowther, with friendly frankness. "You know what happened last time you played him, and, besides, he's no good."

"Oh, he plays fairly well at half."

"But he's such a rank rotter. He's certain to come some trickery—foul play of some sort," said Manners, warmly.

Tom Merry looked troubled.

"I confess I didn't think of that; but I hope not."

"You didn't think of it!" repeated Lowther. "I don't see how you could think of anything but tricks and foul play where that outsider is concerned."

"Look here," said Tom Merry, abruptly, "he's asked me to give him another chance——"

"Stuff!"

"I've promised to."

"Piffle! He's fooling you!"

"Pulling your leg!" said Manners.

Tom Merry coloured.

"It's possible," he admitted. "I can't say I trust him. Still, we've all been down on him pretty heavily for being such a rank outsider, and it's only fair to lend him a helping hand if he wishes to reform."

"He doesn't."

"He says he does," said Tom Merry; "and I think he really means to try."

"Blessed if I know what the other fellows will say to playing him," said Manners. "You know the terms he's on with all of them."

"Oh, rats! I'm football captain, I suppose," said Tom Merry. "I can play whom I like, if it comes to that."

"That's not the way to treat the fellows."

"Oh, blow the fellows!"

"Well," said Manners quietly, "if those are the lines you're captaining the team upon, I can only say that you'll have a rocky time."

Tom Merry made an impatient gesture.

"I've promised him now," he said. "That settles it. I must play him. If he doesn't behave himself, I'll never give him another chance. If he does, I take it that the chaps must admit that he means well."

"Oh, all right; I'm done!" said Monty Lowther, with a shrug of the shoulders.

They walked down to the football ground. Tom Merry was still wearing that worried look. He certainly was football captain, and could play Lumley in the eleven if he liked. But it was a question how the other fellows would take it. Tom Merry hated trouble with his friends; and it was rather rough on him to have to quarrel with his friends for the sake of one who had been an enemy to him. But this was not the first difficulty, by many a one, that Tom Merry's easy-going nature had led him into.

"We're weady, deah boy," remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, as Tom Merry came up. "Where have you been, you know?"

"Selecting the new man."

"I twust you are playin' one of the Fourth," said D'Arcy. "In my opinion—I don't say my opinion is conclusive——"

"It isn't," said Lowther.

D'Arcy gave Lowther a glare through his eyeglass, but disdained any verbal rejoinder.

"I don't say my opinion is conclusive," he went on, with emphasis; "but in my opinion there are too many of the Shell in the House team now!"

"Hear, hear!" said Digby.

"Oh, come off," said Blake, who was in the Fourth, but was a keen footballer, and a keen, sensible fellow too. "Dane or Glyn would do."

"I'm playing a Fourth-Former," said Tom Merry.

"Oh, good!"

"Vewy good!" said D'Arcy. "It's all wight. I twust it is a playah that I can appwove of, deah boy?"

"Oh, rats!" said Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"I suppose Tom Merry can play whom he likes," said Lowther warmly.

Tom Merry grinned. This was rather different from the language Monty Lowther had been using a few minutes ago; but Lowther was nothing if not loyal to a chum. He took a friend's privilege of ragging Tom Merry as much as he liked himself, but he would never allow anybody else the right to do so.

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus. "I considah——"

"Rats!"

"If you say wats to me, Lowthah——"

"Well, I do," said Monty Lowther. "I say rats—heaps of rats—armies of 'em!"

"I twust you will not object to delayin' the match a little, Tom Mewwy, while I give Lowthah a thwashin'."

Tom Merry laughed.

"I rather think I should, Gussy."

"Weally, deah boy——"

"But whom have you decided to play?" asked Jack Blake. "You haven't told us that yet."

"You are intewwuptin' me, Blake."

"I'm quite aware of that, Gussy. Whom have you decided to play, Tom Merry?"

"Lumley-Lumley!"

"Which? Which?"

"Lumley-Lumley—Jerrold Lumley-Lumley!"

"Joking, of course?"

"Nothing of the sort! I'm playing Lumley-Lumley, and he'll be on the ground here in a minute. Look here, I've been jawed by Manners and Lowther about it already, and I don't want you chaps to begin," said Tom Merry, somewhat irritably.

"Bai Jove!"

"You're playing Lumley-Lumley again!" said Blake, in measured tones. "You're playing the chap who breaks bounds of a night, and goes down to the Green Man to drink and gamble!"

"Well, that really has nothing to do with footer, you know."

"The chap," said Digby, breathing hard, "who'd have been expelled from St. Jim's half a dozen times only his father tricked the Head into signing an agreement to keep him here for three years!"

"Well, that's not our biznay."

"The chap," said Kangaroo, of the Shell, taking up the tale. "The chap who never tells the truth if a lie will serve his turn!"

"Well, he won't tell any lies in a footer match."

"Faith!" said Reilly, the boy from Belfast. "Ye're goin' to play the spalpeen who's the meanest rotter that ever came to St. Jim's!"

"He's going to reform."

"Rats!"

"Bosh!"

"Piffle!"

"I've promised him now," said Tom Merry desperately. "I'm going to give him a chance! Look here, it's rotten for you fellows to jump on me like this. It's not cricket!"

"I should say not," said Lowther indignantly. "But what can you expect of a lot of Fourth-Form kids?"

"Just what I say," agreed Manners. "Manners—I mean good manners—are not included in the curriculum of the Fourth!"

"Bai Jove——"

"Look here, you rotten Shell-fish——"

"Rats! Tom Merry's football captain, I suppose, and he could play the gardener or the boot-boy if he chose," said Lowther heatedly.

"What-ho!" agreed Manners.

"I wouldn't object to either the gardener or the boot-boy, if he could play footer," said Jack Blake. "I object to a chap who's not fit to talk to a decent fellow!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I'm playing him!" said Tom Merry quietly.

Jack Blake's eyes flashed.

"Then you're jolly well not playing me!" he exclaimed angrily. "I resign!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy; "and I wesign, too."

"And I!" said Digby.

Tom Merry flushed red.

"You resign on the very point of playing!" he exclaimed. "The kick-off's in three minutes—and you resign."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Rather than play with that cad," said Blake steadily. "He'll play some dirty trick again, and disgrace the House. It's not fair to Figgins & Co. either. You've gone out of your senses, I think, Tom Merry, to let that cad talk you over like this."

"I'm going to play him!"

"Then we resign!"

Tom Merry's eyes blazed.

"Resign, and be hanged to you!" he exclaimed.

The chums of Study No. 6 did not reply. They drew together, and walked away in a body. After a moment's hesitation Reilly walked after them. The Terrible Three were left standing alone.

CHAPTER 3.

All Against Him.

FIGGINS, of the New House, came over to the junior football ground in a long coat, under which Figgins's slim calves could be seen. Figgins was tall and long-limbed, and as strong as a horse, but it could not be said that his limbs were plump. His calves, in fact, formed the subject of a great deal of jesting among the St. Jim's juniors—jesting that was usually kept under, however, in Figgy's presence. For if Figgy had slim calves he had a mighty fist, and some of the merry jesters who had felt the weight of it did not want to feel it again.

Figgins nodded to Tom Merry. Kerr and Wynn, his inseparable chums, were with him. Kerr, the cool and canny Scotsman, was as fit as a fiddle, as he always was—quiet and keen, and steady as a rock. Fatty Wynn was beaming with good humour all over his plump face. Figgins & Co. had arranged for a little feed in the study after the House match, and Fatty Wynn, keen footballer as he was, was looking forward to the finish of the match more than to its beginning.

"Hallo!" said Figgins. "Ready?"

"Eh?"

"Time!" said Kerr. "What's the matter? Anything gone wrong?"

"Yes," growled Tom Merry. "Sorry to have to keep you fellows waiting a bit."

Fatty Wynn's face fell.

"Keep us waiting," he repeated.

"Yes."

"You don't want the match delayed?"

"Only a bit——"

"I—I say, it won't be light for play, you know," said Fatty Wynn anxiously. "No good delaying a match, you know. And—and——"

"And we shall be late for tea," grinned Figgins. "That's what Fatty's thinking of. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, you see, you know——"

"Can't be helped," said Tom Merry ruefully. "I'm in a fix. Four of my men have resigned, and——"

Figgins gave quite a jump.

"Four! Resigned!"

"Yes."

"Just before a match!" exclaimed Figgins, in astonishment. "What do you mean? What has happened?"

"It's just as I've said."

"Who's resigned?"

"Blake, D'Arcy, Digby, and Reilly."

Figgins gave a whistle.

"Four of the best!" he said. "Look here, what's wrong? They wouldn't leave you in the lurch like this unless—unless——"

Tom Merry forced a laugh.

"Unless I was in the wrong," he said, finishing the sentence for Figgins.

"Well, yes," said Figgins. "You must have put their backs up somehow. What have you done?"

"That's it," said Kerr, with a shake of the head. "You've done something, Tommy, my son; you're the guilty party."

"I suppose I can play whom I like in my own team?" said Tom Merry, turning red.

"Oho! You're playing somebody they object to."

"That's it."

"Who is it?"

"Lumley-Lumley."

Figgins & Co. stared at Tom Merry blankly.

"You're playing Lumley-Lumley—after what happened last time?"

"Yes," said Tom Merry peevishly.

"Then I'm not surprised that Blake resigned," said Figgins, with some heat. "I'm blessed if I feel inclined to play myself, if that rotter's in the team against us."

"Same here!" said Kerr.

"Hang it all——"

"Oh, here he is!"

Jerrold Lumley-Lumley, in football attire, came down to the ground. The Outsider of St. Jim's had not a good or a well-developed figure, but he looked strong and wiry. The glance of his eyes was very keen.

"I'm ready, Tom Merry," he remarked.

"All right!"

"So you're playing?" said Figgins savagely.

The Outsider nodded.

"Yes, I'm playing."

"You've talked Tom Merry into this business because he's a good-natured ass."

"Hang it all, Figgins," broke out Tom Merry, "I suppose you're not going to begin to dictate to me whom I play?"

"You oughtn't to play that fellow, and you know it!"

"Mind your own bizney."

Figgins flushed.

"For two pins I'd have the match off!" he exclaimed. "That chap's not fit to play us, and you know that, Tom Merry. You know how he fouled when he played in a House-match before."

"You know how he tripped Kerr, and pretended it was an accident?" said Fatty Wynn. "I saw him, and know it was on purpose."

Tom Merry bit his lip.

"Lumley says that was an accident."

"He'd say anything."

"Look here!" said Jerrold Lumley. "Tom Merry's playing me. I've told him I'm going to play the game. That's enough. Tom Merry can do as he like in the matter, I suppose? If you're afraid to face us, better say so at once."

"Afraid!" said Figgins fiercely.

"That's the word, I guess."

"By George——"

"Shut up, Lumley!" said Tom Merry. "Don't have a row here. Goodness knows there's been trouble enough already. I don't know what I shall do for a team."

"Ready, lads?" said a strong, cheery voice.

The juniors swung round. It was Kildare of the Sixth, the captain of St. Jim's. The big, handsome Sixth-Former nodded cheerily to the juniors. Kildare had consented to referee in the House match, an act of condescension towards a junior match for which the youngsters were duly grateful. Head of the Sixth as he was, and captain of the School, Kildare was not above taking a keen interest in junior football.

"Not ready?" he asked, glancing over the clouded and troubled faces of the juniors. "Anything gone wrong?"

"Ye-es," said Tom Merry. "Four of my chaps have resigned, because—because they object to my playing a fellow."

Kildare's brow darkened.

"Resigned on the eve of a match! Impossible—it can't be allowed! Where are they? Fetch them at once, some of you."

There was no gainsaying the captain of the school. In his own special department, Kildare exercised an authority as great and as irresistible as that of the Head himself. The juniors would as soon have thought of disregarding Kildare as of disobeying Dr. Holmes to his face.

The captain's message was quickly taken to Jack Blake and his chums, and they came back to the football ground looking clouded and uneasy. They were not quite satisfied themselves with the action they had taken in the heat of the moment. They stood looking very sheepish before Kildare.

The keen eye of the captain of St. Jim's ran over them.

"What does this mean?" he exclaimed. "You can't desert your side like this. You ought to be ashamed of yourselves."

"Bai Jove!"

"Oh, I say, Kildare——"

"I mean what I say. You'll play, do you hear?"

"We'll play if you say so, of course," said Blake. "But——"

"That's enough."

"Weally, Kildare——"

"I say that's enough."

Lumley-Lumley grinned. The other fellows all looked worried. But Kildare's sharp words settled the matter. Jack Blake and his comrades went on to the field with Tom Merry & Co., and Lumley-Lumley lined up with the rest.

The Outsider of St. Jim's had had his way. But how was the match to turn out? Tom Merry's mind was very troubled upon that point.

— — —

CHAPTER 4.
The House Match.

THE kick-off fell to the School House, and Tom Merry kicked the ball. There was a very unusual slackness visible in the play at first. Figgins & Co., after their high words with Tom Merry, were out of humour. The Terrible Three were in a state of annoyance, and Blake & Co., of course, were exasperated and worried. The play was slack, and the only fellow on either side who seemed at all at his ease was Jerrold Lumley-Lumley.

The Outsider of St. Jim's was quite himself.

He was by no means sorry to see division and animosity among those who had always been good friends.

His desire to reform and to make a fresh start, was doubtless genuine enough, as long as it lasted. But he was no more good-natured than he had ever been.

And he could not but see that he had a better chance of getting on with Tom Merry, if Tom was at variance with his former friends.

For that reason, it is probable that the Outsider of St. Jim's rejoiced in the division he had caused.

But as the game progressed, the clouds vanished from the faces of the juniors, and the old keenness made itself visible.

In the stress of the game, they forgot division and disagreement, they forgot even that the obnoxious Lumley-Lumley was playing, and thought only of the play.

Round the ground a number of juniors collected to watch the match, and to cheer their own champions, and they expressed their disgust loudly enough at observing the Outsider of St. Jim's in the team.

The general opinion was that it was rotten, and that Tom Merry must have been right off his rocker to allow the Outsider to talk him over.

But even these hard critics could not deny that the Outsider was playing remarkably well.

The Outsider was one of those fellows who can do things if they like. As a rule, he did not like to do anything the other fellows liked doing. But now that he had thrown himself into football, he showed a considerable aptitude for the game. He played half, and both in attack and defence he was of real use to his side. The other fellows had had some idea of "starving" him, but they gave it up. Lumley was filling his place well, and finding that he could do it, and would do it, they treated him as a comrade.

"Plays as well as any fellow on the field," said Mellish, the cad of the Fourth, and Jerrold Lumley-Lumley's special chum and study mate.

"Bosh!" said Clifton Dane, the Canadian. "Figgins is better, and Blake, and Tom Merry, and Kangaroo, and Reilly. But Lumley's playing much better than one would have expected."

"Seems to have a good wind, considering that he smokes," Bernard Glyn remarked."

"Useful player," said Pratt. "But wait till he loses his temper. Then he'll begin to foul, you mark my words."

"Yes, that's so."

Pratt's opinion was the general one. The Outsider could be as cool as ice when he pleased; but his temper, when he let it go, was so savage and spiteful, that he stopped at nothing at such times.

But the first half wore on without any outbreak, such as the spectators were mostly looking for, on the part of the Outsider.

But his best friends, if he had any, could not have denied that he was a selfish player. He knew perfectly well the duties of a half, but he could not restrain himself from attempting a goal when he ought by all rules to have let a forward have the ball. As it happened, one of his attempts in this way came home, and the crowd gave him a cheer.

The ball had been captured by the Outsider, who dribbled it on, and, disregarding the forwards who were ready to receive it, he kicked straight for goal. The goalie—the best goalie the junior teams ever had, Fatty Wynn himself—wasn't ready for the shot. It was a shot no good player would ever have made, and as Fatty Wynn said afterwards, no wonder he wasn't ready for it, when it was a rotten trick, and hadn't one chance in a thousand of coming off. But by the wildest of flukes, it did come off, and Fatty Wynn, to his astonishment, found the ball in the net.

It was the first blood to the School House, and the Outsider had kicked the goal. Tom Merry's brow contracted; he was not pleased, but quite the reverse; but to the crowd a goal was a goal, and they cheered.

"Bravo, Lumley!"

"Goal! Goal!"

The Outsider's eyes glittered.

He cast a triumphant glance at Jack Blake, who gave him a frown in return. As they walked back to the centre of the field, Lumley nudged Tom Merry.

"Glad now you played me, eh?" he said.

"No!" said Tom Merry curtly.

Lumley coloured.

"I've scored for you, at all events," he said.

"That doesn't matter. You oughtn't to have taken the shot. It was too big a risk, and the goal was a dead cert if you had passed to Blake, as you ought to have done."

Lumley sneered.

"Blake thinks so, of course."

"I think so," said Tom Merry sharply. "I tell you your play's too selfish all through. You try to keep the ball instead of feeding the forwards."

"Oh, rot!"

"If you speak to me like that, Lumley, I'll send you off the field," said Tom Merry, with a blaze in his eyes. "I've stood enough on your account, without any confounded cheek from you as well."

Lumley choked back what he would have liked to say.

"All right; I'm sorry," he muttered.

"Keep it in mind, that's all."

"I guess so."

The teams lined up again. The crowd were looking on at Lumley-Lumley with a better humour now, but his comrades were not any better pleased with him. He was not the kind of player to be liked in the team he played for.

After the restart, Lumley-Lumley showed that he was bearing Tom Merry's words in mind. The selfishness that had been so prominent a feature of his play disappeared, and when Tom Merry took a goal a little later, it was due to Lumley's capturing the ball and then stopping a rush of the New House fellows.

"He can play if he likes," remarked Bernard Glyn.

"Wait till he loses his temper," said Pratt oracularly.

"Then we'll see fireworks," said Gore.

"Shouldn't wonder."

But the first half ended without any fireworks being seen. The teams turned off the field for a brief rest, with the score at two goals for the School House and nil for Figgins & Co.

Figgins took his men to task in the interval. The result of the first half was not pleasing to him.

"We've got to beat them!" he exclaimed. "We're as good as the School House any day, and with that rank rotter playing for them we ought to walk over them easily."

"He's playing up very well," French remarked.

"Yes, but he's no good; and we've got to beat them. Play up your hardest."

"What-ho!" said the New House fellows heartily enough.

And they did play up when the second half commenced. Instead of showing any signs of being blown, the New House team played up, when the whistle went, like giants refreshed with wine. The conquering career of the School House was stopped. In the first ten minutes of the second half Figgins put the ball into the net.

Then followed hard and heavy play, interesting enough to watch, but lacking in detail for description. The ball was constantly changing ends, and both goals had narrow escapes, but for some time the score remained unchanged.

Then came a brilliant stroke by Kerr, Lumley-Lumley had the ball, and just as he was passing to Tom Merry, Kerr hooked the ball away from his foot, and was off with it.

A black, savage look came over Lumley's face as there was a laugh round the field—a laugh that changed into a ringing cheer as Kerr sent the ball to Figgins, and Figgins centred fairly into the net.

"Hang it!" said Lumley, aloud.

"Rats!" said Blake.

Lumley gave him a look, but did not reply.

The score was level now, and the game had entered upon its last quarter of an hour. All the players were keen enough now. Each side was determined that the match should not end in a draw.

The New House made a fierce attack, and Figgins & Co. swept through the School House forwards, and the ball flew for goal. But out it came again, and another shot was stopped, too; and then a back cleared, sending the leather to Lumley-Lumley. The Outsider of St. Jim's captured it, and got it away from the eager enemy, but as he was passing to Monty Lowther, Kerr charged him off the ball. It was a perfectly fair charge; but Lumley, unprepared for it, was sent flying, and he came heavily to the ground. The ball was whisked away by Figgins, and Lumley rose dazedly. Kerr gave him a helping hand, stopping his play to do it.

"Sorry," he said. "Didn't mean to hurt you, you know."

"Hang you!" muttered Lumley-Lumley fiercely. "You did it on purpose! I'll give you back as good for it, too!"

Kerr did not stop to listen to the threat. He was off again, and in the thick of the play. The New House attack was pressing the defence hard, Lumley's failure to get the ball away having given the assailants a new chance. Lumley plunged into the conflict with his eye, not upon the ball, but upon Kerr. The moment predicted by Pratt had come at last. Lumley had lost his temper, and he did not care what he did.

Kerr had the ball again when Lumley-Lumley charged him from behind. It was a foul charge in the first place, and as Lumley brought his opponent down, he caught him as if by accident and drove an elbow into his side. Kerr crashed to the ground and lay there helpless, white as a sheet. Kildare's whistle rang out instantly.

The play stopped.

Tom Merry's face was blazing. Kildare had not seen the elbow business, though he saw that there was a foul; but Tom Merry had seen it all. Kildare simply intended to order a penalty, and as the foul had taken place within the dreaded penalty area that was bad enough for the School House. But Tom Merry had seen it all, and he was not thinking only of that. He strode towards Lumley-Lumley with his face white with rage and his eyes on fire.

"You cad!" he shouted. "You cad! Get off the field!"

CHAPTER 5.

Kicked Out!

TOM MERRY'S voice rang out like the note of a clarion. Lumley-Lumley stood cowed.

On the ground Kerr lay and gasped and gasped, his face deadly white, and his features contracted with pain. Figgins was supporting him. The rest of the players stood round with anxious faces.

Tom Merry's hand was raised, his finger pointed to Lumley-Lumley.

"Get off the field!"

"Hang it!" muttered Jerrold. "I—I—I——"

"What is this?" said Kildare. "It was a foul, Merry. I shall award a penalty kick to the New House. But as for Lumley——"

"He fouled Kerr on purpose, and tried his hardest to hurt him!" said Tom Merry, his voice trembling with rage. "He put his elbow in Kerr's ribs for him to fall on! Didn't he, Kerr?"

"Yes!" gasped the fallen junior. "The cad! I—I'm afraid I'm done, Figgy! I—I sha'n't be able to finish the match!"

Kildare's brow grew black.

"So that's your style of play, Lumley?" he exclaimed. "You'd better get off the field at once, I think!"

Lumley-Lumley was white.

"It was an accident!" he muttered. "I—I didn't mean ——"

"Liar!" said Tom Merry fiercely. "You did mean it! You meant to do the worst you could, like a cowardly hound!"

"Hang it, Merry, I won't stand these words from you or anybody else!"

"You'll get off the field, or you'll be thrown off!" roared Tom Merry, who was in such a passion as his friends had never seen him in before. "I was a fool to play you! I might have known you'd play some dirty trick!"

"I guess——"

"Don't talk to me! Get off the ground!"

Lumley-Lumley bit his lip till it spurted with blood. But there was no resistance possible. With a scowl of defiance round at the juniors, he strode off the football field.

A deep groan and hiss from the crowd greeted him. He held his head high as he walked away, defiance still in his face, but bitterness and dismay in his heart.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, "I feel as if I can bweathe more fweely now that that awwant wottah is gone!"

"Same here, Gussy!"

"Yes, rather! The cad!"

Tom Merry knelt beside Kerr.

"I'm awfully sorry for this, Kerr," he said. "I needn't say that that rotter will never play for the School House again so long as I'm captain. But—but——"

"It's all right," said Kerr, with a faint smile. "I don't blame you. Help me off the ground, some of you."

Kildare lifted the junior in his strong arms and carried him off the ground as if he had been a baby.

"I shall have to play a man short," said Figgins. "You fellows are in the same boat though, so that's all serene."

Tom Merry nodded.

"All Merry's fault for playing that rotter!" said Blake resentfully.

"Yaas, wathah! It is all Tom Mewwy's fault, of course."

"Oh, don't pile it on!" said Tom Merry. "I sha'n't be taken in again by that rotter, I promise you that."

"Yes, shut up, Gussy!" said Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"Tom Merry ought to have known better than to trust him," said Digby. "It wasn't for want of being warned, I know that."

"Wathah not!"

"Oh, cheese it!"

Kildare returned to the field, and the talk ceased. The referee awarded a penalty kick to the New House, and it materialised into a goal, placing the New House team one goal ahead on the score.

Then the play was resumed for the little time that remained, each side playing ten men.

The School House crowd was not very hopeful now. If Tom Merry & Co. equalised in the short time that remained to play, it was all they could be expected to do. A School House victory was now out of the question.

"Just like Tom Merry to throw his chances away!" sneered Mellish. "If he had held his tongue about Lumley, and let him go on playing, the School House would have pulled off the match."

"Cad!" said Dane scornfully. "Would you like your team to win by foul play?"

"I suppose we're playing to win."

"Yes, if we can win fairly. Tom Merry was quite right. I'd rather see the School House licked in every match of the season than win by rotten tricks like Lumley's!"

"Hear, hear!" said Glyn.

And Mellish relapsed into silence.

There may have been some others who shared Mellish's view, of the matter, but they were not numerous. The general opinion was that Tom Merry had acted quite rightly in exposing Lumley's rascality and kicking him out of the team, but that he had been an utter muff to play the Outsider in the first place.

That could not be helped now, and there was no doubt at all that Tom Merry was as sorry as anybody.

The play went on, the School House team making desperate efforts to equalise the score. But the New House, though not now attacking so keenly as they had been, were strong in defence, and every School House rush was stopped, and "paid" put to every attempt to break through.

Again and again Tom Merry & Co. strove, but it was not to be. Time was up at last, and the whistle went, and the score remained at three goals for the New House and two for the School House.

And as the whistle rang out there was a roar of cheering from the New House crowd round the ropes and packed behind the goals.

"Hurrah, New House!"

"New House wins!"

"Hurray! Hip-pip!"

And as Figgins & Co. came off the field, they were surrounded by a yelling and whooping crowd of admirers, among whom was Kerr, still looking a little pale, but nearly himself again.

Very different were the looks of the School House fellows from those of the victors. They had been beaten, and that wasn't pleasant; and they had been disgraced, which was worse still. And the fellow who had disgraced their team and lost them the match was Jerrold Lumley-Lumley, the rank Outsider, whom Tom Merry had persisted in playing against the will of both friends and opponents.

No wonder the popularity of Tom Merry seemed on the wane that afternoon, and that even his chums Manners and Lowther, loyal as they were, found little to say.

Tom Merry's face was gloomy. He realised that he had made a blunder, and that others had had to pay for it as well as himself.

"Cheer up, Tommy!" said Jack Blake. "After all, I suppose this is the end of this sort of thing."

But Blake's sentiment found no response. Tom Merry would evidently want a lot of cheering up to-day, and he continued to walk on in silence.

The chums were sorry for him, but they could not forget how obstinate he had been about playing the Outsider. Blake was right. Jerrold Lumley-Lumley, to use his own language, had finished.

"Come on, old chap!" said Monty Lowther. He condemned his chief's action, but he had stuck close to his side all the time. "It's just as rotten for all of us."

"Yaas, wathah! I suggest hot baths!"

"Yes, we must get the mud off. Cheer up, Tom!"

"Oh, let me alone, Blake!"

The juniors stared at Tom Merry. Surely the Outsider's baseness was not going to change their leader's genial nature! It certainly looked like it, for he was walking away from them in the direction of the Shell passage without a word.

"But you must be currycombed, like us, I suppose!" cried Jack Blake.

"Better let him alone," said Manners. And they did.

CHAPTER 6.

Tom Merry Speaks His Mind.

TOM MERRY flung himself into a chair when he reached his study in the Shell passage.

"What an ass I was to think of playing that fellow!" he thought. "The cad! Kerr is a good sort, but how can a fellow be expected to forgive a captain who plays a man like Lumley? Blake was right. There's more mud to take off than he thinks. Bah! The rotter is absolutely unspeakable!"

Twice the leader of the Shell endeavoured to shake the matter off. But each time he arose from his chair he found that his gloomy thoughts would not be denied. Try as he would, the disgraceful spectacle of Kerr's deliberate fouling would loom larger than anything else, and he sat with clenched fists as he saw the Outsider's dastardly play again in his mind.

"Oh!" he cried, jumping to his feet. "What will the fellows think of me after this! Such a foul was never known on any St. Jim's field before! Oh!"

And the leader of the Shell began to pace up and down the room. It was well for Jerrold Lumley-Lumley that he was not in reach of Tom Merry's hands.

"The dirty cad! The dirty cad!" said the Shell captain, stopping in his walk as the vivid picture of his side's disgrace once more flitted across his mind.

Continuing to stride about the room as if he were treading Lumleys underfoot by the dozen, he at length became somewhat calmer.

"Hallo, Merry! Can I come in?"

Tom Merry stopped, speechless with amazement. Surely his ears deceived him. Even Lumley-Lumley could not push matters to this point. But the Outsider set all doubt at rest by walking into the room as Tom Merry did not answer.

"Leave this room!"

"Why, Merry——"

"Leave the room, I say!"

"But why?" said the other, in a tone of surprise. "You don't suppose, along with the rest, that I fouled Kerr on purpose, do you, Merry?"

"Suppose! I saw you do it!"

"It was an accident, as I told you on the field!"

"You are lying! But it doesn't matter now. Get out!"

"Oh, all serene! I've got a lot to say yet!"

"Then you'd better get it over quick!" said Tom Merry laying aside his overcoat.

The thought that the Outsider could take the lie so easily from him convinced him more than ever how mistaken he had been to give the fellow a chance at all.

"You're rough on me, Merry," went on Lumley. "You must admit the referee did not see it."

"That makes no difference!"

"All serene again, I dare say! But you must admit there's a good deal in what I say?"

The leader of the Shell stared at the millionaire's son. His indignation nearly choked him.

"It's not only that you've always been a cad," he said, "you've abused my confidence! But after what you promised unasked——"

"But——"

Tom Merry looked for a moment as if he were going to kick Lumley-Lumley from the study. The cool cheek of the Outsider was amazing. Tom Merry sat down again.

"Do you mean to say that mine was the only slip on the field to-day?" said Lumley. There was no answer. "Don't sulk, Merry! Do you?"

"Yes."

The Outsider drew back a little. Tom Merry's quick breathing and flashing eyes were a little trying, even to him.

"What! You mean to say that when Kerr took the ball from off my toes you didn't know he really meant to trip me——"

"You base hound!"

"Answer my question! I know all the things you call me!"

"If you dared to make that imputation to Kerr, he'd thrash the life out of you!"

"You're all good at dishing out hidings, aren't you? But suppose you take a sensible view of this affair. I was on your side, and you ought to take my part."

Tom Merry's feet twitched. Lumley was very near danger. Tom Merry needed no reminders of that sort. His chin fell slightly towards his chest. Lumley-Lumley thought he had made an impression, and proceeded to follow it up.

"Of course, I'm willing to overlook that. You were naturally excited when you accused me——"

"Get out!"

"Stuff! I tell you Kerr meant it for a trip, and Kildare's a blundering idiot not to have piped him for it!"

"Are you going?"

"And you're cutting a pretty figure over this, I must say! You know very well that your side was defeated through your sending me off——"

The Outsider stopped short at the blaze in Tom Merry's eye.

"Go!" said Tom Merry hoarsely, pointing to the door.

"Really, Merry? You are treating me badly. Because I speak the truth, no doubt."

"Go!" shouted Tom Merry, nearly beside himself with anger.

But the Outsider could not perceive his danger.

"You make too much of a trifle——" he began.

Tom Merry leapt to his feet like lightning.

"Oh, cheese it!" sneered Lumley. "But if you're thinking of chucking me out, I guess it'll not be so easy this time!" And his hand came quickly from behind him with a cricket stump in it.

"You coward!"

"Well, will you hear me out?"

"Never!"

"Then I guess I'll have to make you——"

The Outsider paused as a hard, steely light came into Tom Merry's eyes.

"I thought I could bring you to reason, Merry——"

"Get out!"

A bitter sneer crossed the Outsider's face.

"You're a fool, Tom Merry; and, like all fools, you deceive yourself! For you know jolly well that all this business that you fellows play at is all bunkum! Being in authority, you have to keep up all the humbug——"

"Liar!"

"I'm just sick of that talk," said Lumley. "Stop it, I say!"

But Lumley-Lumley reckoned without his host. If Tom Merry hesitated when he saw the cricket stump, it was soon gone. And as the Outsider advanced on him he sprang forward. The Outsider's arm descended as the Shell leader rushed at him again. The blow was dodged, and he gave a snarl of rage.

"Now, you unspeakable hound," cried Tom Merry, his blood up, "defend yourself! You'd better!"

The Outsider had managed to retain hold of the cricket stump. On he came, with a furious expression on his face.

But the captain of the Shell was a trained athlete, and the cigarette-smoking, card-sharping youth was absolutely ignorant of many tricks of the sports field. His blow at Tom Merry missed its mark, for as he advanced again Tom Merry dived at his knees, Rugby fashion, and in a second he was flung heavily to the ground. To put his foot on the wrist of the hand that held the stump was the work of a second to the Shell fellow. In another, it was wrenched from the Outsider's grasp. Lumley-Lumley had now to fight it out in fair fight.

"Now," said Tom Merry, flinging the weapon away, "you shall have it!"

The Outsider endeavoured to regain possession of the stump.

"No, you don't!" cried Tom Merry, barring his way.

Lumley-Lumley came on, however. A powerful body-blow from Tom Merry sent him spinning to the opposite wall.

"Put your hands up!" said Tom Merry.

The Outsider, after his fashion, was no coward. Seeing that he had to fight, he put up his hands. But he was no match for the captain of the Shell. Wildly striking at his opponent, he endeavoured to rush him, but Tom Merry easily parried all his furious onslaughts. On he came again, and Tom Merry again knocked his blows aside like chaff, and letting go with his right, Lumley-Lumley measured his length upon the floor. He was up again in a moment.

"You—you bounder!" he gasped. "I'll—I'll——"

But he had no time for more words. Tom Merry's right drove home again, and the Outsider of St. Jim's caught it full upon the chin. He staggered back as if a steam-hammer had struck him. Then, with a crash, he dropped upon the floor. Tom Merry stood over him, with blazing eyes.

"Now get out of the study!" he said. "I give you one minute!"

"Hang you!"

"Go!"

Jerrold Lumley staggered up. His nose was streaming red, his face was bruised; but where it was not dark with bruises it was deadly white. He moved slowly to the door. He had had enough of trying conclusions with Tom Merry. But as he backed away his eyes never left Tom Merry's face, and there was a glitter in them of deadly hate.

"I'll go!" he muttered thickly. "I guess I know when I've had enough! But I'll make you sorry for this, Tom Merry!"

Tom Merry made a scornful gesture.

"Oh, get out!" he exclaimed.

Jerrold Lumley gritted his teeth.

"I'm going! But mark what I say—you'll be sorry, I guess! I've offered to be your friend, and you won't have it. I guess I don't make that offer again! I'm your enemy now, Tom Merry—your enemy! Remember that!"

"I'd rather you were my enemy than my friend," said Tom Merry, with a curl of the lip. "Your enmity is a compliment to any decent chap, I should think."

Lumley-Lumley made no reply. He stepped unsteadily out of the study, and went down the passage. Tom Merry remained alone, and the cloud was lighter on his face now. That little tussle with Lumley-Lumley seemed to have lifted a weight from his mind. He had erred in giving the Outsider a chance, and Lumley-Lumley had taken unscrupulous advantage of it; but, at all events, he had left the Outsider of St. Jim's with no doubt as to what he thought of him, or the footing they were to be upon in the future.

CHAPTER 7.

Tom Merry is Bumped!

As a rule there was cheery good-humour in the School House after a football match. Even in the case of a defeat the fellows generally had reason to be pretty well satisfied with what they had done, and it was seldom that they put up such a show as they had any cause to be ashamed of.

But on this particular evening at St. Jim's there was a "plentiful lack" of cheeriness among the juniors, especially those who had taken part in the football match. The School House juniors had been beaten. That was not all. They had been beaten through the fault of one of their own men.

And the fault in the first place lay upon the junior football captain, Tom Merry. The fellows were dissatisfied with the result, dissatisfied with their skipper, and dissatisfied with themselves.

There were gloomy faces round the fire in the common-room.

When Lumley-Lumley came in presently, there was a very perceptible hiss from some of the juniors. But the Outsider's face showed very plain traces of his recent handling in Tom Merry's study, and some of the fellows who were inclined to take active measures dropped the idea, thinking he had had enough.

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked. "The wottah looks as if he's been thwough it, you know."

"I hear there was a row in Tom Merry's study just after the match," said Blake.

"I twust the boundah had a feahful thwashin', then."

Jack Blake grinned.

"He looks like it," he remarked.

"Yaas, wathah, so he does. But of course it was Tom Mewwy's fault for playin' the wottah in the first place."

"No doubt about that."

"Tom Merry ought to have had more sense," said Kangaroo. "But hang it all, let the matter drop now. It's over and done with."

"The footer season isn't over and done with. That licking goes down in our record for the season," growled Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Here the bounder is."

Tom Merry came in alone. It was very unusual to see the hero of the Shell going about without either Manners or Lowther, and the fellows looked at him. The Terrible Three were usually inseparable.

No one spoke as Tom Merry advanced towards the fire. Lumley-Lumley coughed. His punishment at the hands of the captain of the Shell did not prevent him from showing that he gloated over the estrangement between the chums and their leader.

Digby made room for Tom Merry, but the Shell skipper took the first chair he came to. Silently he sat down somewhat behind the juniors.

Still no one spoke. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy took a survey of the circle through his monocle.

"If the wottah only had the decency to see that he ought to wetire, deah boys," he murmured.

"Well, I'm not jolly well going to retire, Gussy."

D'Arcy stared at Tom Merry.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I am amazed!" he said. "I did not mean you, deah boy."

"Then who the dickens did you mean?" said Tom Merry, who had not seen the Outsider as he came in.

Downcast as they were the chums could not help but grin. There was a low chuckle at the other end of the room.

Tom Merry turned his head in obedience to a nod from Jack Blake. Then he understood.

"Sorry, Gussy."

"Pway excuse me, deah boy, for chippin' in. But, after this afternoon, I am not sure we can continue to wegard you as a fwiend."

The chums growled. They were plainly for backing up the swell of the School House for once.

"We think your conduct extwemely wepwehensible, Tom Mewwy, in lettin' us down to-day——"

"So do I," said Tom Merry. "You can't blame me more than I do myself."

"Vewy good," went on Arthur Augustus. "That's alwight for the Shell, I suppose. But as the wepwesentative of the Fourth——"

Blake and Digby groaned.

"Buck up, Gussy!" they said resignedly.

Arthur Augustus looked daggers at them.

"As the wepwesentative of the Fourth, Tom Mewwy," he

resumed, "we wish to know why you persisted in intwoducin' such a wank outsidah into the team?"

"Look here!" said Tom Merry, addressing the chums generally. "I'm about fed up with this business. I'm captain of the team, Gussy, and I put in who I like."

"Then I'm afwaid we cannot accept that view, deah boy. A captain has no wight to play a wottah who is personally objectionable to the west of the team——"

"Oh, yes, he has! When he happens to be Tom Merry, Gussy," broke in Jack Blake sarcastically.

"I agwee with you, Blake. What have you to say, Tom Mewwy?"

"Rats!"

"Oh, hang it, Merry!"

"Pway leave him to me, Digbay, deah boy," said D'Arcy, with great dignity. "I wepeat, Tom Mewwy. What have you to say?"

"And I repeat, Gussy. Rats!"

"Weally, deah boys! This is not to be enduahed. Do you weally mean to say, Tom Mewwy, that you are not goin' to make any westitution to the Fourth?"

"What do you want?"

"Bai Jove! I hadn't thought of that."

"And you mean to say that I am to stand you worrying me like this, when you haven't made even up your mind what you want from me! Can't you understand I had quite enough ragging before the match from Manners and Lowther?"

"I wish they had locked you up," growled Jack Blake.

"Kangawoo, deah boy, will you kindly take on the office of Speakah. I find these intewwuptions vewy detwimental to pwogwess?"

"Righto! On with the motley. I mean the washing!"

Arthur Augustus seemed to have his doubts about the Speaker. But he prepared to go on.

"We can weadily sympathise with the Shell, as the Shell, of course, Tom Mewwy——"

"I must call you to order, sir," broke in Kangaroo. "As the Shell is not parliamentary."

"Thank you, Kangawoo. I apologise. But pway do not intewwupt. I wish to go wight on until I have passed sentence on Tom Mewwy."

"Eh? What's that?" said Manners, as he and Lowther entered the room. "Who's passing sentence on Tom Merry?"

"Weally, Mannahs——"

"Shift up a little bit farther, Gussy. You can't have all the fire. And if you can't talk better than that when you get on your hind legs, it's time you sat down."

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"No. Don't thank me."

"I haven't the least intention, Lowthah. You think then, Tom Mewwy ought to be let off. You don't blame him?"

"Yes we do," retorted Manners. "But we're not taking any from the Fourth."

"He's jolly well going to be bumped for it, anyhow," said Jack Blake, jumping up.

"Is he?" said Manners and Lowther, catching sight of the odious grin on the Outsider's face together. "We'll see about that. Who'll do it?"

"We will!"

"Oh, cheese it," said Monty Lowther, with a sniff. "There's been enough said about the matter. I'm tired of it! Let it drop."

"Wats!"

"Yes, rats," said Blake. "We'll let it drop, after we've let Tom Merry drop. The side's been let down, the School House licked, and a rotten foul put on our record—all through Tom Merry. Bump him!"

There was a shout at once from a crowd of the juniors. The idea of bumping Tom Merry was a relief to their feelings.

"Bump him!"

"Go it, Fourth!"

Tom Merry clenched his fists. He was in no humour for fun of this sort. Blake & Co. rushed straight at him to collar him, and Tom Merry hit out.

"Oh!" roared Herries as he dropped with Tom Merry's right on his chin. "Yow!"

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stumbled over Herries, and sat on him. Blake and Digby seized Tom Merry and whirled him round.

Instantly Lowther and Manners rushed to the rescue. They might rag their chief as much as they pleased themselves, but no one else was to be allowed to do so.

But three of the Shell were no match for the angry Fourth-Formers. Manners was hurled into a corner, and Lowther dropped upon him heavily. Then three or four pairs of hands grasped Tom Merry.

"Bump him!" roared Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! Bump him!"

Bump!

The hero of the Shell came down on the floor in a sitting posture, with a terrific bump.

Bump again!

"Ow!"

Bump!

"Oh!"

"Rescue Shell!" roared Manners, staggering to his feet.

Bump!

CHAPTER 8.

Friends Divided.

TOM MERRY was struggling in the grasp of the bumpers, without being able to get away. They were too many for him. Bump again, and again! The Fourth-Formers were wildly excited, and they were letting themselves go now. But a number of the Shell were rushing to the rescue now. Clifton Dane and Bernard Glyn, and Kangaroo and Gore piled in, and Tom Merry succeeded in dragging himself away from the bumpers. But they did not allow him to go in peace.

"Sock it to 'em!" roared Blake.

"Buck up, deah boys!"

"Kick them out!"

"Bump him!"

The uproar was terrific. The fellows were wildly excited, and many of them had lost their tempers, and were hitting out hard.

In the midst of the din a stalwart form appeared in the doorway, and the stern face of Mr. Railton, the House-master of the School House, looked into the room.

"Stop this disturbance instantly!"

"Ow!"

"Ow!"

"Cave, you asses!"

The conflict ceased.

The juniors, very dusty and dishevelled, stood looking sheepishly at the House-master.

"What does this mean?" demanded Mr. Railton sharply. "Merry, you are the head boy present! What does this mean?"

Tom Merry gasped for breath.

"I—I—I—I—only a little fun, sir!" he panted.

"Yaas, wathah, sir! We were bumpin' Tom Mewwy."

"You will take fifty lines each, every boy in the room," said Mr. Railton curtly. "If I hear any further disturbance you will be punished severely."

And the House-master rustled away.

"Oh, rotten!" said Kangaroo, mopping his nose with a handkerchief.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"All Tom Merry's fault!" grunted Blake.

"How do you make that out?" exclaimed Tom Merry indignantly. "Do you think I wanted you to play the giddy ox, you chump?"

"If you hadn't played Lumley——"

"Oh, let that alone, for goodness' sake!"

"I agwee with Blake. If you hadn't played that wottah——"

"Oh, cheese it!"

"I wefuse to cheese it. I considah——"

"Ring off, Gussy!"

"I decline to wing off! Undah the circs——"

"Rats!"

Tom Merry walked out of the room. He was very much in need of a wash and brush down.

Blake snorted.

"Precious set of duffers you are!" he exclaimed, looking at the Shell fellows. "What did you want to chip in for? If ever a chap ought to have been bumped hard, that chap was Tom Merry."

"Oh, rats!"

"If you say wats to my fwiend Blake, Lowthah, I shall give you a feahful thwashin'!"

"Bosh!"

"Weally, you know——"

"Tom Merry's played the giddy ox, I know," said Kangaroo. "But we're not taking any cheek from the Fourth. That's how it is!"

"Weally, Kangawoo——"

"Draw it mild, Gussy!"

"You uttah boundah!"

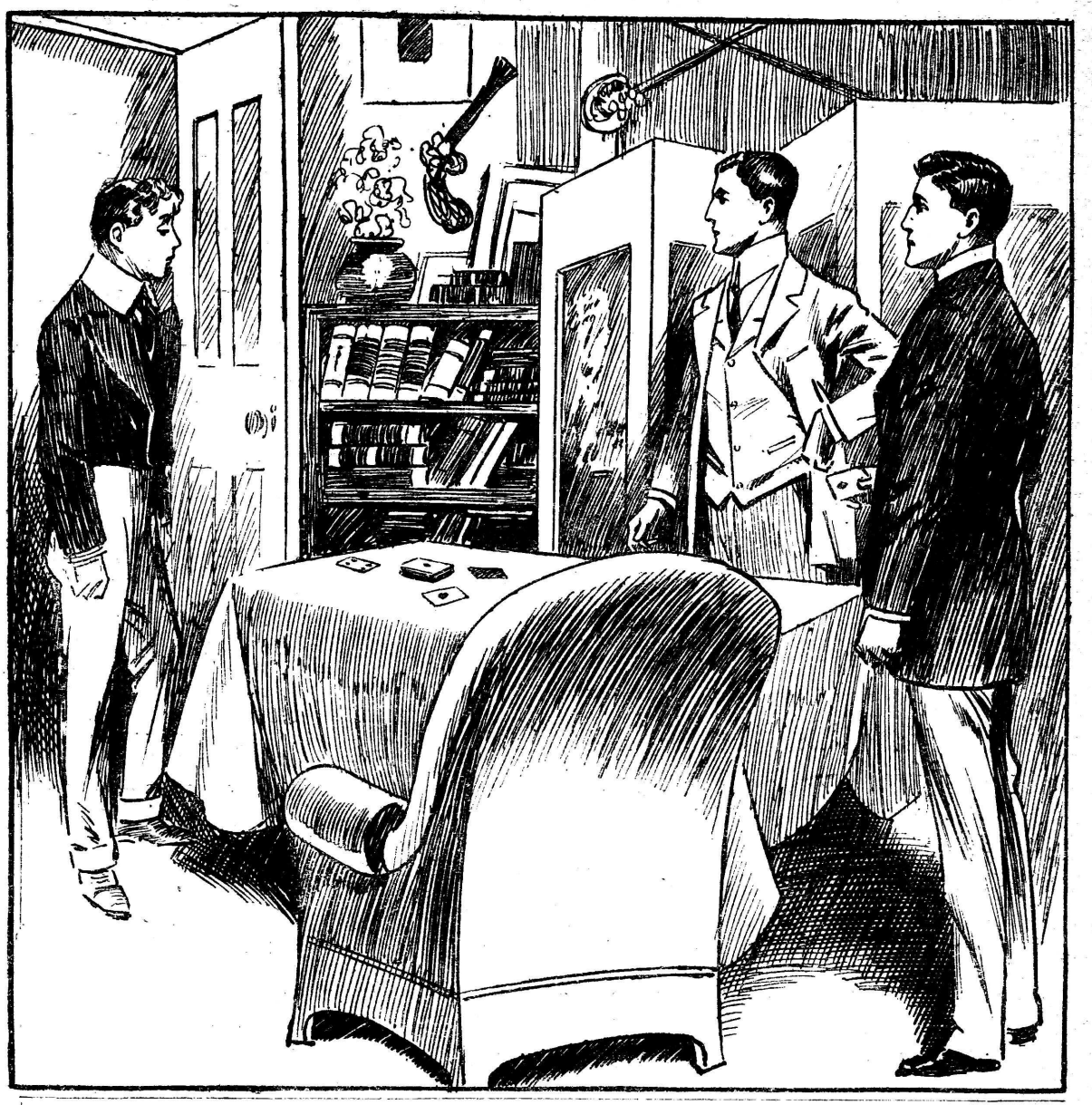
"Scat!"

Kangaroo walked away. D'Arcy breathed hard through his nose. But after Mr. Railton's words, it was impossible to renew the combat.

There were sore tempers in the Lower School that evening.

Fifty lines each was a bother, to say the least, and the juniors, as they scribbled away in their studies or in the Form-rooms, growled over the task, and laid all the blame on Tom Merry.

The original fault lay with him, and they heaped all the trouble upon his head, and it is safe to say that the once most popular



"Have you seen that pack of cards before, Tom Merry?" asked Kildare sternly. (See page 17.)

fellow in the School House was at that particular time as unpopular as a fellow could be.

Tom Merry himself was in no good humour.

The general condemnation found an echo in his own heart; but he felt that the fellows were very hard on him.

He sat alone in his study doing his prep. when Monty Lowther and Manners came in. They were looking very glum.

Manners cleared a place on the table, and sat down to his work, without a word. Monty Lowther stirred the fire.

Tom Merry glanced at them, but they did not speak. A crimson flush came into the cheeks of the captain of the Shell.

"Well, have you turned Quakers?" he asked irritably.

"Eh! What's that?"

"Can't you talk?"

"Nothing to say," said Manners.

"Nothing that I know of," said Lowther, giving his swollen nose another dab with his handkerchief.

"Why don't you start again about my playing Lumley in the Form match?" said Tom Merry sarcastically. "I haven't heard enough of that yet, you know."

Manners was silent. He saw that Tom Merry was in a worried and touchy mood, and he forbore to provoke him. But Lowther, with the red still oozing from his damaged nose, and a general feeling as if he had been under a particularly heavy motor-car, was as touchy as Tom Merry himself could be.

"Well, if you want my opinion again, it's the same as before," he said tartly. "I think you were a silly ass to play Lumley, and I suppose you'll admit that it's caused enough trouble all round."

"I can't help the fellows making fools of themselves!"

"One fool makes many, I suppose!"

Tom Merry started to his feet. Manners rose, too.

"Chuck it!" he said. "There's been trouble enough; we don't want any in this study. Stop it, Lowther!"

"Stop what?" said Lowther warmly.

"Well, it's no good ragging Tommy any more."

"Who's ragging him?"

"You are!"

"Who started it, then?" exclaimed Lowther. "I never said a word when I came in, and you know that, Manners!"

"Well, don't say any more," said Manners pacifically.

"Let him say what he likes!" said Tom Merry. "I don't care! I think my own chums might have stood by me, that's all!"

"So we did, against the Fourth!" grunted Lowther. "But among ourselves——"

"Among ourselves you want to jaw me as much as you like. Well, I've had enough of it!" said Tom Merry.

"Rats!"

'Look here, Lowther——"

"Bosh!"

Tom Merry clenched his hands. Manners threw an arm round his shoulder.

"Stop it, Tommy! Don't be an ass! Lowther'll be sorry in ten minutes for what he's saying now!"

"I jolly well shan't!" growled Lowther.

And to emphasise his words he stamped out of the study, and closed the door behind him with a ringing slam.

Tom Merry sat down to the table again. His face was very hard and set.

CHAPTER 9.

A Bitter Enemy!

JERROLD LUMLEY-LUMLEY came into his study in the Fourth-Form passage in the School House, with a faint grin upon his face. Mellish was there, doing his preparation, and he looked up at once. The Outsider of St. Jim's gave him a nod, and flung himself into the armchair by the fire.

"Jolly row in the common-room!" he remarked.

Mellish grinned.

"Yes, I hear you've all got fifty each. I wasn't there, luckily."

"You can do my fifty," said Lumley.

Mellish shifted uneasily.

"I haven't done my prep," he said. "Of course, I'd like to oblige you, Lumley, but——"

"I guess you'll do my lines!" said the Outsider coolly. "How much do you owe me, Mellish?"

"If you put it like that——"

"I guess I do!"

"Well, I suppose it amounts to a few pounds by this time," said Mellish, with a very uneasy look. "You've got my signature for all of it."

"I guess I have. Suppose I were to tell you I'm short of money, and wanted to draw in my little account?"

"Oh! You're not short of money!"

"As it happens, I'm not; but I might be if you don't do my lines."

Mellish smiled a sickly smile.

"Of course, I shall be glad to oblige you, Lumley, as I was saying just now. I'll knock them off as soon as I've done my prep."

"Make the hand as much like mine as you can," said Lumley-Lumley. "Last time I noticed Railton eyeing the paper in a suspicious way. I think he smelt out something."

"I'll be careful."

Lumley-Lumley burst into a laugh.

"I guess you needn't look down in the mouth about it," he said. "You asked me for a couple of bob this afternoon. You can have it when you've done the lines."

The cad of the Fourth brightened up.

"Thank you, Lumley. You were always a generous fellow."

"Oh, get off that!" said Lumley. "I know what all that's worth. It's no good with me, I assure you. It cuts no ice with me, as we used to say over there."

"Over there" was Jerrold Lumley's way of alluding to his former dwelling-place on the other side of the Atlantic. The fellow who had roughed it among the street arabs of the Bowery in New York was sometimes strangely out of place in the old school in Sussex. The experience which Jerrold Lumley-Lumley had gained in many strange places marked him off from the boys of St. Jim's. In those days he had been Jerry Lumley; the doubling of the name came with the success of Lumleys, Limited. Lascelles Lumley-Lumley, the father, was a power in the financial world, and it was a surprise and an annoyance to Jerrold that he was not a power, too, in his new circle. There were many fellows, of course, who were willing to be very civil to the millionaire's son, whatever sort of a fellow he was. But there were many who showed very plainly that if Jerrold had been in possession of all his father's millions, they would have regarded him in exactly the same light—as a bounder and a rank outsider.

Mellish only smiled in a sickly way; he was used to those little rebuffs from the fellow he had chosen to toady to.

Lumley-Lumley sat silent in the chair for a few minutes. Then he rose and locked the door, and sat down again, and lighted a cigarette. The rules against the boys smoking at St. Jim's were very strict, and it was safer to lock the door. A prefect who should look in and discover a junior smoking was likely to make things very warm for that junior.

Lumley-Lumley smoked the cigarette through, and lighted another. He had smoked since he was five or six years old, which probably accounted for his weedy figure and general state of being out of condition.

Mellish glanced at him curiously several times. He could see that deep thoughts of some sort were working in the brain of Lumley-Lumley, and he wondered what was the subject of the Outsider's meditations.

Jerrold Lumley broke the silence at last.

"The hound!" he muttered.

Mellish looked at him quickly.

"What's the trouble?" he asked.

"I'm thinking of Tom Merry!"

"Oh! Tom Merry!"

"He turned me off the field, because—because—well, I suppose I played the fool a little," admitted Lumley. "But Kerr came very near tripping me, and I only paid him back in kind. We should have won the match easily if Tom Merry had kept his temper."

"Well, there was bound to be a row after a foul like that," said Mellish.

"Tom Merry ought to have stood by me. And when I told him I was sorry afterwards, he wouldn't hear a word."

"Just like him."

"He chucked me out of his study," said Lumley-Lumley, breathing heavily.

"Yes, I heard the fellows talking about it," said Mellish, with some pleasure in dwelling on the circumstances. He was Lumley's chum, but he found a peculiar relish in repaying the Outsider for some of his many insults. "They said you looked a regular guy when Tom Merry had finished with you."

Lulmey scowled.

"Oh, did they?"

"Yes! Kerruish said you took a cricket stump into the study with you, and Tom Merry took it away, and then licked you."

"I guess——"

"Of course, you couldn't expect to stand up to him," said Mellish. "He could easily lick a chap like D'Arcy, and D'Arcy has licked you, hasn't he?"

"I'm going to make Tom Merry sorry for it," said Lumley, without pursuing that subject, which he, perhaps, found disagreeable. "I've done my best to make him a friend, and he won't have it. From this moment I'm up against him!"

"Good!" said Mellish cordially. "I'm with you in anything against that set of rotters!"

"I shall want you to help me."

"Of course, it's no good having a row," said the cad of the Fourth, in some alarm.

Lumley sneered.

"Don't be afraid! That's not the idea, I guess. Do you remember I said to you once, that if Tom Merry persisted in standing out against me, I'd make St. Jim's too hot to hold him."

Mellish nodded.

"I remember you said so," he assented.

"And you didn't think I could do it?"

"Well, no."

"I guess I'm going to do it," said Lumley. "Do you savvy? I'm going to make St. Jim's too hot to hold Tom Merry; he's going to be expelled from the school!"

Mellish whistled.

"That's a big order!"

"I guess so!"

"You can't do it! Tom Merry's the most popular chap in the Lower School. Everybody likes him. He's rather under a cloud just now, but that won't last. Why, the New House fellows who are up against the School House all the time, like him," said Mellish. "Even Gore, who was as bitter against him as a chap could be, has come round a little, and stands up for him now. The seniors like him. Kildare thinks a lot of him. Even the masters like him, and it's a jolly rare thing at school for a chap to be liked by the masters without being disliked by the other fellows. But Tom Merry has managed it—how, I don't know. My dear chap, if you try to damage Tom Merry in that way, you might as well butt your head against a brick wall."

"I guess I'm going to do it, though—and now's the time to strike, while Tom Merry's at loggerheads with the other fellows," said Jerrold coolly. "I've got the whip hand. They can't expel me from the school. The Head signed an agreement with my father, before popper went to South America, to keep me here for three years, and now I'm back again it still holds good. He can't break it. I've nothing to fear. But Tom Merry—suppose Tom Merry did as I have done—suppose we were both found gambling at the Green Man—visiting races, getting mixed up in betting, and so forth—what would be the result?"

"You would be flogged, and Tom Merry sacked from the school," said Mellish. "But——"

"That's the game, I guess."

"But Tom Merry will never get mixed up in anything of the sort," said Mellish, with a stare. "He's the last chap in the world for that sort of thing."

"It may be made to appear that he's mixed up in it."

"Oh!"

"Do you see?" asked Lumley-Lumley, with a curl of the lips,

"Tom Merry can beat me when it's a question of fisticuffs—I don't claim to be a big fighting-man. But with brain against brain I guess I shall have him by the short hairs. What?"

"By George! I shouldn't wonder!"

"I guess that's the game, then," said Lumley-Lumley, between his teeth. "I'm going to drive Tom Merry from St. Jim's. And you're going to help me."

Mellish opened his lips to speak, but did not. If he had been about to voice an objection, it remained unuttered. The savage spite of the Outsider's face, the malice in the gleaming eyes, almost scared Mellish, and he remained silent. Jerrold Lumley-Lumley threw the stump of a cigarette into the fire.

He did not say another word upon the subject, but Mellish knew that it was in his mind, that the keen, cunning brain was working steadily towards one end—to ruin Tom Merry and drive him from St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 10.

A Curious Visit.

THE next day the cloud had not passed. Many of the juniors were showing very plain traces of the row in the common-room, and some of them, who had not done their lines, had had their impots doubled, and were greatly annoyed thereby. Kerr appeared in his place in the Fourth Form looking the same as usual, quite recovered from the foul on the football field; but Figgins & Co. were not quite their usual genial selves. Such an incident as the foul by Lumley-Lumley was not easily forgotten. The general condemnation had no perceptible effect upon the Outsider himself. He was as cool and self-possessed as usual, and on the occasions when he came near Tom Merry was quite civil to him. But Tom Merry had no civility to waste. When the Outsider would have spoken to him, Tom Merry turned his back without ceremony. At which Lumley-Lumley's eyes gleamed with a curious red light, and his teeth came together hard. If there had been any wavering in he determination he had expressed to Mellish the evening before, it was firm enough again now. Tom Merry had made an enemy who would pursue him relentlessly to the bitter end.

The hero of the Shell seemed quite unconscious of any such feeling on Jerrold Lumley's part. He simply wanted to take no notice of the Outsider, and have nothing to say to him.

That was all, and Tom Merry expected Lumley to understand the situation and accept it. If he would not understand, so much the worse for him.

But after that one experience, Lumley was careful to let Tom Merry alone. He did not come up to speak to him again.

There was a coolness still between Tom Merry and Monty Lowther. Manners had been mistaken in thinking that Lowther would be sorry in ten minutes—or at all events that he would admit it. Lowther had let the sun go down upon his wrath—a very rash thing to do at any time. And by dint of not speaking to each other for a dozen hours or so, the chums had come to regard each other with some coldness. Monty Lowther carefully avoided going into the study when Tom Merry was there, and Tom Merry did not linger in the passages if he saw Lowther coming. Manners was torn between the two, and did not know which side to take; and, as usual in such cases, he ended by exasperating both, in his endeavours to steer a middle course.

"I suppose you're coming down to the footer, Manners," Tom Merry remarked after lessons that day.

Manners hesitated.

"Is Lowther coming?" he asked.

"I don't know, and don't care."

"I say, Manners, old man, coming out on your bike?" said Monty Lowther, coming along the passage, and carefully avoiding looking at Tom Merry.

"Bike!" repeated Manners.

"Yes, it's a lovely spin down to the woods, you know."

"Tom's just suggested footer practice——"

"Oh, goodness knows we've had enough footer lately," said Lowther. "We don't score such brilliant successes at it, that we want to stick to it all the time."

Tom Merry flushed red.

"If you're beginning that old subject again——" he exclaimed.

"I was speaking to Manners."

"I'm speaking to you. And I say——"

"Hold on," exclaimed Manners hurriedly, "don't get your rag out. Will you come down to the footer, Lowther?"

"I'm going out. If you prefer to go with Tom Merry, of course I've nothing to say. I dare say Kangy will come for a spin if I ask him."

"Well, you see, I don't particularly want to play footer, but——"

"If you want to go out with Lowther, don't let me stop you," said Tom Merry, turning red, and he swung round on his heel and walked away.

Manners looked distressed.

"Oh hang!" he exclaimed. "Now there's Tom gone off in a huff! I really think you might be a little more tactful, Monty. What the dickens do you want to go out for a spin for? Why can't you come to the footer?"

"Because I don't want to," said Lowther. "I don't want you to come with me on the spin, either, for that matter, Harry Manners."

And he walked away in another direction.

Manners was left alone, looking very much worried.

Tom Merry strolled down to the footer ground, but did not feel inclined for practice. He strolled back to the School House, and looked in at his study. The fire was out, and the room looked cheerless.

He walked along to Study No. 6 in the Fourth-Form passage. It was empty. Blake & Co. had gone out.

The hero of the Shell, feeling very despondent, sat down in the broad window-seat at the end of the passage, musingly. A youth with large spectacles, a bumpy forehead, and weedy legs which seemed hardly able to support the weight of his body, and a thin neck which seemed to be in the same difficulty respecting his head, came along the passage, with a big book under his arm. Tom Merry made a movement to go—the appearance of Skimpole of the Shell was always a sign for a general exodus. But it was too late, the brainy youth of the Shell had spotted him, and was ambling up. Skimpole was a genius, and the "isms" and "ologies" that he did not know weren't worth knowing; but like many great intellects, he was a terrible bore. He seized Tom Merry by a button, in the objectionable way he had, and blinked at him.

"Just the fellow I was looking for," he said. "I've just looked in at your study for you, Tom Merry, but you weren't there."

"No, I'm here."

"I wanted to speak to you very particularly. This book is the latest volume by Professor Balmycrumpet, on the subject of Determinism as Applied to Non-Existent Problems. I will read you an extract from the first chapter——"

"Oh, cheese it, Skimmy; I'm worried, and I can't stand Determinism now."

Skimpole did not even hear. He opened the volume.

"I will commence here. As soon as I read this chapter, Merry, I wished to communicate it to you, as you are above the average of intelligence in the Shell, and I really think you may be able to understand it."

"I'm sure I can't."

"'What is the science of Determinism? Determinism is the science which proves that everything which is as it is, is as it is, and does not exist in any other form than the form in which it has its existence. Anyone denying this is a liar, a fool, and a dishonest rascal.' There!" said Skimpole, breaking off, and blinking at Tom Merry through his big spectacles. "Isn't that splendidly put."

"What does it mean?"

"Mean!!!"

"Yes, what does it mean. I suppose it's supposed to mean something."

"Undoubtedly. I can't explain off-hand what it means—you can't expect that in a book on Determinism," said Skimpole, a little indignantly. "It's a very deep subject, you know."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Why don't you chuck it, and take up footer?"

"Really, Merry——"

"Must be off," said Tom Merry, getting off the window-seat.

"Really, Merry! I said to Lumley-Lumley just now, when I met him in your study, that——"

"What!"

"I said that Determinism——"

"Ass! You met him in my study?"

"Yes. I said that Determinism——"

"When?" demanded Tom Merry sharply.

"About five minutes ago. I went there to speak to you. I explained to him that Determinism——"

"Look here, I was there myself ten minutes ago. Are you sure you're not mistaken, Skimmy?"

"Oh, yes. I explained to him——"

"What was he doing there?"

"I really do not know. I explained——"

But Tom Merry left the genius of the Shell to talk to the desert air, and strode away towards his study with a contracted brow.

What did the Outsider of St. Jim's want there? Hadn't he had lesson enough? Did he want telling more plainly to keep clear of Tom Merry's quarters?

Tom Merry found the door of the study closed. He threw it open and strode in. The Outsider was there.

He was near the table, but turned towards the door with a flushed face as it was thrown open, and faced Tom Merry.

His eyes met those of the Shell fellow, and his glance wavered, and the red flush deepened in his cheeks.

"What are you doing here, Jerrold Lumley?"

The Outsider did not speak for a moment. He was too startled.

"I suppose you will think it strange, Merry," he began.

"What are you doing here?" demanded Tom Merry, sternly.

"Say," answered Lumley-Lumley, "I've been thinking it over. Won't you shake hands and start fresh?"

"If I could believe you, Lumley, I might think of it——"

"I'm sorry, really. I came here to tell you. Honest!"

Tom Merry hesitated. No! A truce with the Outsider now would make the whole thing look like a farce. Besides, the Outsider's word was worthless.

"I'm sorry, too," said Tom Merry, generous to a fault. "But after what has happened, how can you expect me to trust you? We've nothing in common."

"But think of what we might do together. You don't try to trust me. How do you know my way isn't the right one?"

Tom Merry felt the hot blood rush to his face.

"How do I know that black is not white, Lumley?" he said scornfully.

Lumley-Lumley gave Tom Merry a curious stare.

"You don't mean it, Merry?" he said grinning. "I reckon the answer's easy."

"But not easier than the answer to your question——"

"Then you mean to say my way is——"

"Not my way," said Tom Merry firmly.

"Come," said the Outsider. "Shake, Merry. You've not too many friends just now, you know——"

But the captain of the Shell turned away from the proffered hand. It was not in his nature to bear malice. But he was determined not to listen to Lumley-Lumley a second time.

"You had better go, Lumley," he said icily.

"Oh, bosh! I guess you might might let bygones be bygones."

But Tom Merry took no notice. The Outsider was not to impose on him again.

"Oh, all serene," said Jerrold Lumley. "You are a bit cocky, you know, for a fellow without any friends. Your own chums have turned on you, as all the school knows."

Tom Merry wheeled round quickly and walked towards the Outsider. He pointed to the door. He did not speak, but no words were necessary.

"Oh, all right, I'll go."

"You'd better," said Tom Merry.

And without another word the Outsider of St. Jim's went. But there was a different look on his face. Now, there was a gleam in his eyes that even Tom Merry might have been startled to see. But there was no one to see Lumley-Lumley's face as he went slowly down the corridor.

CHAPTER 11.

D'Arcy the Peacemaker.

"LOWTHAH, deah boy!"

No answer.

"Lowthah, I say!"

But Arthur Augustus might as well have addressed the air. Monty Lowther was staring in front of him as if D'Arcy did not exist.

"Bai Jove! I've a good mind to come back when he's finished his dweam," said the swell of the School House to himself.

An indistinct jumble of words came from between Lowther's compressed lips. D'Arcy made out the words, footer, rotter, Merry, rotten, boko, and Gussy.

"Lowthah, deah boy! I'm speakin'!"

"Go on speaking."

Arthur Augustus put up his monocle. His attitude literally breathed astonishment.

Again that smothered flow from the joker of the Shell.

"Merry's 'n ass. Serv'm right. Call tha' footer. Cause 'f comm'n-room shindy. Dab D'Arcy 'n nose wh'n I see h'm. Give h'm dottin' m' snitch like this."

The monocle dropped from Arthur Augustus's eye with a little thud. His eyebrows nearly touched the rim of his hat, and his mouth was in the position for saying "Stewed prunes."

Surely Lowther had gone mad to mumble like this! Gingerly the swell touched his friend on the shoulder.

"Oh!" said Lowther, coming to a halt. "Is that you, Gussy?"

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"Oh! You want to borrow something?"

"Weally, Lowthah, I——"

"No? Don't mention it, Gussy. Buzz off! I haven't got any, so it'll make no difference."

"If you make such an imputation, Lowthah, I'll——"

"Pop off!"

"I wefuse to pop off! Have the goodness to wemain stationawy for a moment. I won't wun about the quad. like this. I had enough twouble lookin' for you, deah boy."

"Then you want a thick ear in exchange for that knock on the nose you gave me last night?"

"I nevah knocked your beastly nose, Lowthah. At least, I don't wemembah the incident——"

"Incident!" cried Lowther, stopping in good earnest this time. "Accident, you mean, fathead. It couldn't occur any other way."

"What wubbish, Lowthah!"

"You'll force me to do it, you know," said Monty Lowther. "Can't you see I'm worried? Do buzz off! Travel! Absquatulate! Go and eat coke! Buzz off and chop chips!"

"Weally, Lowthah! It is about that I wish to speak. I am in some measuah wesponsible——"

"Yes, I know. Good-bye, Dolly Grey!"

"Gweat Scott, Lowthah! You must be off your wockah!"

"You'll be the death of me, yet, Gussy."

"I shall ovahlook this flippancy for once, Lowthah. My purpose in comin' here, is to apologise——"

"Of course," said Monty Lowther, beginning to walk away again. "What an ass I was, not to tumble that you were here on your usual bizney——"

"I shall administah a thwashin', Lowthah, if you don't wetwact——"

"But you'll give me time to get one or two of the fellows here to sweep up the bits, surely?" said Lowther banteringly. "Bye-bye!"

"I wefuse to say bye-bye. But I will be quick."

"No!"

Arthur Augustus gave Lowther an icy look as the joker of the Shell came to a halt again. He did not appear to be in a hurry as he put up his monocle once more.

"I wish to apologise, Lowthah," he said. "For any unnecessawy woughness I may have exerted on you last night. I think it only wight and pwopah."

"Go hon!"

"And I cannot help but notice, that it has led to a further estwangement between you and your fwiends. I have come to heal the bweach. Tom Mewwy and you——"

"Here! That'll do!" cried Lowther. "You can ring off that at once."

"You are intewwuptin' me, Lowthah——"

"On the nose if you go on."

"Weally——"

"Rats!"

"You are walkin' away again, Lowthah!"

"And you ought to be glad, Gussy. You've never been quite so near to getting a prize thick ear, you ass."

"I should uttahly wefuse to have a thick eah!"

"I don't want to hurt you. Run away, there's a good lad."

The swell of St. Jim's could hardly believe his ears.

"Lowthah, you uttah wottah, stop at once! Do you heah?"

"Good-bye, Bluebell!" And Monty Lowther hurried away.

But he was right. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was a good lad. He did not mean to give up his attempt to make peace.

"I'll twy Mannahs," he murmured. "Mannahs is the pwopah person to assist me in my posish as intewmediawy."

And off he went to find Manners.

Manners was not in the quadrangle, and Kangaroo, applied to for information, thought he had seen him in his study as he passed.

D'Arcy hurried away to Tom Merry's study; or rather; he went as quickly as he could consistently with his personal dignity. D'Arcy never actually hurried. Even on the football field his manners and customs were reminiscent of the repose that stamps the caste of Vere de Vere.

Manners was in his study. He was cutting films, and his scissors gave a jerk as D'Arcy opened the door of the study and put his head in. The film he was cutting was not improved by that jerk of the scissors.

Manners turned his head wrathfully.

"You ass!" he exclaimed. "Look here."

"Weally, Mannahs——"

"Look what I've done!" roared Manners

D'Arcy adjusted his monocle, and looked at the gash in the film. The angry amateur photographer looked at him.

"Well?" said D'Arcy, "what did you do that for, deah boy?"

Manners nearly choked.

The film was very nearly ruined, and to be calmly asked what he had done it for was a little too much.

"You—you utter ass!" he shouted, laying down the scissors, "you made me do that, by poking your gargoyle of a chivvy into the study."

"I uttahly wefuse to have my chivvay alluded to as a gargoyle, Mannahs. I wegard you as a wude beast."

"Oh, scat!"

"But for the fact that I came here on a mission of a fwiendly chawactah, I should feel in dutay bound to administah a fealiful thwashin', Mannahs."

Manners snorted.

"Howevah," resumed the swell of St. Jim's, "As I am here on a fwiendly mission, I will ovahlook your howwid wudeness, Mannahs, and pwoceed."

"Don't!"

"I will pwoceed," said Arthur Augustus, ignoring Manner's

interruption. "It is wathah a delicate mattah, you know, Mannahs, so put away that wubbish and listen to me."

"Put what away?"

"That wubbish."

"You—you chump!"

"I twust you will not compel me to bweak my wesolution of not thwashin' you, Mannahs," said the swell of St. Jim's, with great dignity. "I came here on a fwiendly mish."

"A friendly what?"

"Mish—mission, you know."

"Ass!"

"Weally, Mannahs!—howevah, to wesume. There seems to be an unfortunate misundahstandin' between you and Lowthah and Tom Mewwy."

"Oh, rats!"

"Undah the circs., I feel it to be my dutay to make fwiends between you. As a fellow of tact and judgment——"

"Oh, ring off!"

"Weally, deah boy——"

Manners took the swell of St. Jim's by the shoulder, and gently pushed him out of the study and closed the door after him. D'Arcy, too astonished by this curious proceeding to make any resistance, found himself in the passage.

"Bai Jove!" he gasped.

He grasped the handle of the door and turned it. But he turned it in vain. The door did not budge. It was locked.

"Mannahs!" shouted D'Arcy through the keyhole.

"Go and eat coke," said Manners. "You've made me spoil one film already."

"I came here to make peace——"

"Rats!"

"But undah the circs. I feel I have no wesource but to give you a feahful thwashin'."

"Go hon!"

"I insist upon your openin' the door at once, Mannahs, so that I can give you a feahful thwashin'."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah wottah! Open this door!"

"Scat!"

D'Arcy breathed wrath and vengeance. Manners had proved even less susceptible to the voice of the peacemaker than Monty Lowther.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus, desisting at last from rattling the handle of the door, as Manners did not open it. "Bai Jove! I wegard them as a pair of wank wottahs, and I have a gweat mind to dwop the whole mattah! But dutay is dutay, and I suppose I had bettah twy what I can do with Tom Mewwy."

And he set forth in search of the hero of the Shell. He had not far to look. He encountered Tom Merry on the steps of the School House.

Tom Merry was passing him with a gloomy expression without even seeing him, when D'Arcy stopped him. It was easy to see that the captain of the Shell was very much out of sorts.

"Tom Mewwy, deah boy——"

Tom Merry halted.

"What is it?" he asked shortly. "I'm feeling a bit rotten and I don't want to talk now, D'Arcy. If you're going to begin about that blessed footer again, I warn you to drop it."

"I was not goin' to do anythin' of the sort, Tom Mewwy"

"Well, well, what is it?"

"You and Mannahs and Lowthah have fallen out——"

"That's our business!" said Tom Merry curtly.

D'Arcy coloured.

"I wathah think that the mattah could be made up, Tom Mewwy, by the intervention of a fellow of tact and judgment——"

"Better let it alone."

"I twust, Tom Mewwy, that you do not mean to tweat me with the same gwoss diswespect as Mannahs and Lowthah? In that case, I should have no alternative but to administah a feahful thwashin'."

"Oh, chuck it, Gussy, old man."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Don't bother."

Arthur Augustus pushed back his cuffs, with a warlike gleam behind his eyeglass.

"Where will you have it, deah boy?" he asked, with great politeness.

Tom Merry stared at the swell of the School House for a moment, and then he grasped him, and, before D'Arcy knew what was happening, sat him down upon the lowest step. The bump on the step shook most of the breath out of the swell of the Fourth, and his eyeglass jerked away to the end of its string.

"Bai Jove!" he gasped.

He jumped up, red and wrathful. But Tom Merry had gone. The swell of St. Jim's rejoined his chums with a clouded brow.

"Well!" said Blake, with a grin. "Is it all right?"

"I have no desire to mix myself up in Shell mattahs again," said D'Arcy, loftily. "I shall decline to attempt to make peace with those wotten boundahs any furthah. I shall uttahly decline to take any furthah notice of the mattah!"

And he did.

CHAPTER 12.

A Startling Discovery.

"DEAR me!" said Skimpole. "I've let myself run out of foolscap. Whatever shall I do to finish this chapter?"

The Socialist of the Shell sat at his table. Everything else was propitious, as he said, that afternoon, Gore having gone out early. So the brainy youth had been "pushing" on with the three-hundred-and-ninetieth chapter of his great work on Determinism as applied to non-existent problems.

The solving of a matter like this was quite easy to a fellow like Skimpole. But how to get a little more manuscript seemed to be quite a puzzle.

His head was so full of Determinism, that it took him quite a time to bring his giant mind down to paper. Nursing his bumpy cranium in both hands, he blinked at the litter of scribbled manuscript on the table.

"Ah," he exclaimed, "I have it! Merry is the chap. Tom Merry can be relied upon for anything! I know he had a lot of foolscap yesterday, too."

In his haste to get to Tom Merry's study, which was next door, he knocked over several things. But a Determinist author could not be expected to pick them up.

"Dear me," he said, as he entered the den of the Terrible Three, "they do keep their place nice! I must impress that fact upon Gore. I don't see any paper," murmured Skimpole. "How stupid not to leave such an important thing in sight."

After polishing his glasses to make sure, he concluded he must search for what he wanted.

"There must be some about," he murmured. "Tom Merry has it, I know. I am certain I saw a quantity here."

And Skimpole began to search in the most unlikely places. First he tried a box under the window which was used by the chums as an ottoman.

If he had been an ordinary junior, he would have known that the Terrible Three kept their sports kit in it. Everybody else did. But Herbert Skimpole was never ordinary.

Then he tried the boot-cupboard in a corner near the fire. It was well for him that the Terrible Three were not there to see him looking for "paper."

"No!" he said. "Wherever can they keep it? Ah! The bookcase!"

But the bookcase was as innocent of foolscap as Mother Hubbard's famous piece of furniture. Then Skimpole's eyes developed the light of revelation. There was the table in the middle of the room. It was in the table-drawer, of course!

"Ah! Here we are!" he exclaimed.

But the sheet of foolscap he lifted out of the drawer proved to be an old score-sheet.

"How very annoying!" he murmured. "But there must be some here."

And without more ado Skimpole began a thorough rummaging. But, after putting several things on the table, he suddenly stopped.

In his hand he held a pack of cards.

"Dear me! I had no idea Merry was a fellow like that! I shall certainly speak to him about this!" exclaimed Skimpole, aghast.

A heavy footstep sounded in the passage.

In his haste to put the cards back again, Skimpole fumbled them. Making another grab at them, he made matters worse, and they fell in a shower all round the table.

The heavy footsteps had entered the next study—his study.

Skimpole dropped on his knees in a moment, wildly trying to pick up the cards.

"Oh, oh! So Tom Merry is going in for card-sharping, is he, Skimpole?" demanded a mocking voice.

"Really, Gore, I'm sure I don't know. I came in here for some manuscript——"

"Oh, you came in for some manuscript, did you?" said Gore, grinning into the study. "You've made rather a discovery, then?"

"You see, Gore——"

"Playing-cards, by George!" said Gore, staring at the painted pasteboards scattered on the floor. "Cards! I never should have guessed it myself!"

"You see, Gore, it was most important! I was stopped in the middle of the three-hundred-and-ninetieth chapter of my great book on Determinism, by the want of foolscap——"

"Blow the foolscap! These cards were in the table-drawer, I suppose?"

"Yes. But——"

"Well, it's a bowl-out for Tom Merry, and no mistake!" said Gore, with a whistle. "This is the chap who preaches to us—who keeps up such jolly good appearances—and holds his head so high when a chap makes a slip!"

"Really, Gore, I understood that you had become quite friendly with Tom Merry! I am surprised to hear you speak about him in this caddish way!"

"This what way?" roared Gore.

"Caddish way."

"Do you want me to bang your head on the wall, Skimmy?" demanded Gore, advancing in a threatening manner.

The amateur Socialist of St. Jim's dodged round the table in alarm.

"Certainly not, Gore. I consider that a ridiculous question. How could I possibly want anything of the sort?"

"Well, you'll get it, whether you want it or not, if you're not jolly careful!" growled Gore. "I'll say what I like."

"Yes, but——"

"As for Tom Merry, he's taken us all in. I can see that now."

"I think not. I am sure not. I——"

"What are these cards here for, then?" Gore demanded.

"I really do not know. But——"

"But——!" sneered Gore. "Of course you know what they're here for. And Manners and Lowther must be in it, too. Tom Merry hadn't the cards here to play patience, I suppose. These three chaps gamble here."

"My dear Gore——"

"And perhaps that's what some of Tom Merry's little parties are for, when he doesn't invite a chap from the next study," said Gore. "It's all very well to say they're getting up the issue of 'Tom Merry's Weekly,' and that they lock the door to keep out interruptions. I know better than to swallow that, now!"

"Really, Gore——"

"It's all as plain as daylight. Tom Merry has been taking us in. It was always a maxim of mine," said Gore, "never to trust a chap who made out that he was better than other fellows. But Tom Merry does it so well that he took even me in. He won't pull the wool over my eyes any more, I promise you."

"I—I suppose I'd better put the cards back where they were?" said Skimpole. "Tom Merry mightn't like them to be seen."

Gore laughed scoffingly.

"You can bet he wouldn't like them to be seen!" he exclaimed. "When they're seen, he'll be shown up to the whole School House. You'll leave them where they are, Skimmy, and I'll call in some of the fellows."

"Really, Gore, I think——"

"Don't touch them——"

Skimpole stooped to gather up the cards.

"Really, Gore, I think I had better replace them, and——"

Gore stepped towards Skimpole as he stooped, and reached out with his foot. Skimpole gave a yell, and rolled over from the toe of his boot.

"Ow! Yooh!"

"Ha, ha! Let those cards alone, then!"

"Gore! You are a beast! Although, as a Socialist, it is my duty to return good for evil, yet, as a Determinist, I am justified in yielding to the influence of my heredity and environment, and punching your nose."

And Skimpole rushed at Gore, brandishing his bony fists. Gore caught a crack on the nose from sharp knuckles before he was aware.

"Ow!" he gasped. "Ow! You ass! Why, I——"

"Really, Gore, I am now satisfied, if you are, and——Yow! Yarooh!"

Gore was pummelling away as if Skimpole were a punching-ball. The amateur Socialist was no boxer. Gore drove him round the study, trampling over the cards on the floor, punching him at every step. Skimpole gasped and yelled and roared, but Gore was implacable. His nose was aching, and the concussion had brought the water to his eyes. He did not spare Skimpole.

But a sudden voice was heard in the doorway. Skimpole's yells had brought a senior to the spot. Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, strode in.

"What does this mean?" he exclaimed. "Gore! Stop that instantly! How dare you use Skimpole in that manner, you young brute?"

And, as Gore did not immediately cease, Kildare caught him by the collar, and swung him across the study, with a swing that sent him crashing against the wall. Gore stood there, his hands back against the wall to support him, gasping for breath, his face black and sullen.

"Dear me!" gasped Skimpole. "Thank you very much, Kildare. Gore has caused me considerable pain."

"You young bully——"

"I wasn't bullying him!" snarled Gore. "He punched my nose!"

"You kicked me first!" said Skimpole;

"Hang you! I——"

"Hold your tongue, Gore!" said Kildare, frowning. "I had thought that there were signs of improvement in you lately, Gore, but it seems I was mistaken. You will come to my study. You ought to be ashamed of yourself for striking a weedy fellow like Skimpole in that way. Suppose you had struck his glasses, too—you might have blinded him. I shall give you a lesson about this, Gore. I——"

Kildare broke off suddenly, as he caught sight of the cards scattered on the floor. He stared at them in astonishment.

"How did those cards come there?" he exclaimed.

Gore sneered.

"Ask Skimpole. You probably wouldn't believe me."

Kildare looked sternly at Skimpole.

"Do those cards belong to you, Skimpole?"

"Certainly not."

"Do you know how they came there?"

"They fell from the drawer in the table. You see, I was looking for some manuscript to finish the three-hundred-and-ninetieth chapter of my book on 'Determinism,' and——"

"Do you mean to say that those cards were in Tom Merry's table drawer, Skimpole?"

"Yes, certainly. I was looking for——"

"You are certain?"

"Quite certain. You see, I——"

"Pick them up and give them to me.'

"Certainly. I was looking——"

"That will do."

The cards were picked up and handed to Kildare. He frowned as he slipped them into his pocket. Then he made a sign to Gore.

"Follow me, Gore."

The bully of the Shell unwillingly obeyed. Skimpole blinked round the study, and rubbed his aching bones.

"Dear me!" he murmured. "Gore is certainly a rough brute. But I suppose I must not blame him, as it is really due to the combined influences of his heredity and his environment. Hence he ought not to be blamed or punished. It is wrong of Kildare, really, to cane him. But, Kildare, of course, is acting under the influence of his heredity and environment, which cause him to cane Gore. So I cannot blame Kildare. Yet although I ought not to blame him, yet if I did blame him I should not be to blame, because I should be acting under the influence of my heredity and environment. Dear me! It sounds like a puzzle, really. I think I will take the manuscript and get on with that chapter."

And Skimpole left the study with a packet of Tom Merry's foolscap under his arm.

Meanwhile, Gore had followed Kildare into his room. The captain of St. Jim's selected a cane and gave Gore two on each hand. He did not think anything about heredity or environment; he knew that Gore had acted badly and deserved caning, and that a caning would probably keep him better behaved for some time. But that was common sense, and common sense, of course, had nothing to do with Determinism.

CHAPTER 13.

Marked Cards.

WALLY D'ARCY, the younger brother of the great Arthur Augustus, came along the Sixth Form passage in the School House with his hands in his pockets, whistling. Wally was about the only fag at St. Jim's who would have ventured to whistle in the Sixth Form passage. But Wally was incorrigible. The highest and mightiest grandee of the lofty Sixth Form could not impress the scamp of St. Jim's in the slightest degree. The Sixth Form might be the "palladium" of the school, but to Wally it was only as other Forms were, and not half so important, as a matter of fact, as the Third Form—the Form that Wally honoured by belonging to it.

But even D'Arcy minor's cheery whistle ceased as Kildare looked out of his study. He ceased to whistle, but he looked at Kildare, and nodded with a friendly grin, at the same time preparing to dodge down a side passage if the captain of St. Jim's came towards him.

But Kildare did not do so.

"I'll go now!" muttered the Outsider thickly. "I guess I know when I've had enough. But I'll make you sorry for this, Tom Merry!" (See page 7.)

"That you, D'Arcy minor? I thought I knew the noise!" he said. "Run and find Tom Merry, and tell him I want him."

"Righto, my noble juke!" said Wally cheerily. "If he won't come, I'll carry him. Ta-ta!" And he scuttled on.

Kildare stepped to the next study and looked in. Darrel, of the Sixth, was sitting there by the window, reading a letter. An envelope lay on the table beside him with an American postmark upon it. There was a grave and thoughtful shade upon the handsome face of Darrel of the Sixth.

"Busy, Darrel, old man?"

Darrel shook his head and rose, slipping the letter into his pocket.

"No; only reading over an old letter," he said. "Do you want me, Kildare?"

"Will you step into my study for a minute?"

"Certainly."

Darrel, looking somewhat surprised, followed Kildare into his room. There was an unusual gravity about Kildare's face that showed something unusual had happened. The captain of St. Jim's closed the door.

"Well?" said Darrel inquiringly.

"Look at that," said Kildare.

He laid a pack of cards on the table before the prefect. Darrel looked at them, and then at Kildare again.

"Well?" he said.

"Those cards were found in the drawer of the table in Tom Merry's study."

Darrel started.

"How's that?" he asked.

Kildare explained quietly. The prefect listened without a word, and then quietly turned the cards over in his hands.

"I don't quite make that out," he said. "Of course, a lad might have a pack of cards about him innocently enough; there's no harm in playing snap or patience. But it's a strict rule of the school that boys shall not possess cards, and Tom Merry knows it as well as anyone. As head of the Shell it's his duty to stop anything of the sort. I simply can't understand this. Merry never impressed me as the kind of boy with a secret of this sort."

"Exactly how I feel about the matter."

"Better question Merry. Even if he had the cards there to play a harmless game it was a serious thing, as he knew how much against the rules that was. But——"

Darrel paused as he turned the cards over in his hands. His brows came darkly together. The pattern on the back of the cards was a large arabesque tracery, and something about it seemed to have caught Darrel's close attention.

"But what?" asked the St. Jim's captain.

"These cards were never intended for a quiet harmless game."

"Why?"

"Because they are marked."

"What!"

"They are marked cards," said Darrel quietly. "I've come upon marked cards before, and I know this very device. Look here! You see that this scroll in the corner nearly touches the edge of the card?"

"Yes," said Kildare, examining the arabesque with keen interest.

"Now look at the face of the card."

"The ace o spades."

"Exactly. Now look at this card with the scroll on the back nearly touching the edge."

"The ace of hearts."

"Good! All the aces are so marked. Now look at this one with a good space between the scroll and the joint of the curve."

"King of clubs."

"Yes, that is the sign of the king. All the court cards are distinguished in a similar way. Anybody who had studied the backs of these cards could deal himself an invincible hand and could see what cards were in the hands of his opponents," said Darrel quietly. "This is one of the cunningest kinds of marking."

Kildare was aghast.

"Marked cards!" he exclaimed, as if he could scarcely credit what his ears and eyes told him. "Marked cards!"

The prefect nodded.

"Yes," he said. "With a little practice anybody could use these cards so as to be quite certain to win whenever he chose. The fellow these cards belong to is in the habit of cheating."

"Good heavens!"

"And they were found in Tom Merry's study?"

"Yes, there's no doubt about that. Skimpole is an ass, but he is truthful, and there is no doubt that he found them."

"Well, marked cards wouldn't be there for a harmless game of patience," said Darrel. "If they belong to Tom Merry, Tom Merry is a gambler—and a cheat!"

"Good heavens!" said Kildare again.

His face was very pale now.

The prefect laid the cards in a pack again. Kildare, with his hands deep in his pockets, strode about the study in a state of agitation.

"It's impossible!" he exclaimed. Seldom had the calm, cool captain of St. Jim's been so disturbed. "I've always had such a high opinion of Tom Merry. He's always seemed to me the most decent chap in the Lower School. I can't believe it, Darrel."

"It's hard to believe."

"Yet—it's curious. You have noticed that fellow Lumley-Lumley——"

"An utter blackguard, if I am any judge," said Darrel.

"Quite right. He would have been expelled from the school before now only that his father tricked the Head into signing a contract to keep him here for three years. Well, all the juniors know him as he is; they call him the Outsider. Yet just lately Tom Merry has taken up with him, and, I hear, quarrelled with all his old friends on account of this fellow. It looks as if he was under Lumley-Lumley's influence."

"I should be sorry to hear that. Better question Merry."

"I have sent for him."

And Kildare strode to and fro in his study, a deep shade on his honest face, as he waited for Tom Merry to come.

CHAPTER 14.
Wally is Incorrigible.

"KID, you're wanted!"

No one but Wally would have ventured to address a Shell fellow—and the captain of the Shell at that—as "Kid." But D'Arcy minor did it without turning a hair.

Tom Merry was strolling in the quadrangle—alone. Tom Merry had been a great deal alone during the days that had elapsed since the football match in which Jerrold Lumley-Lumley had played.

The breach between the old friends, instead of healing, had grown wider. None would be the first to speak in the old way; and with time, of course, they fell into the new way of not speaking, or of exchanging only distant remarks. And this grew.

Tom Merry felt that the Fourth-Formers had been too hard on him. He had made a mistake, true; but he had admitted it—not so freely as the juniors thought he should do, however. But if they thought he was going to eat humble pie they were mistaken, was what Tom Merry said to himself.

So in these days he had little to say to Study No. 6, and they had little to say to him.

With Figgins & Co. relations were not so strained, but they belonged to the rival house, so, of course, Tom Merry was not thrown much in contact with them.

But it was the division in his own study, with his own close chums, that cut Tom Merry most deeply, though he never showed it. Tom Merry was not the fellow to wear his heart upon his sleeve. But he felt all the more deeply because of that.

Monty Lowther had taken to frequenting the end study a great deal with Kangaroo and Clifton Dane and Bernard Glyn, and he was frequently absent from the once cosy tea-table in Tom Merry's study. It was awkward for fellows to sit in the same small room and not exchange a word, and Monty had cut the Gordian knot, as it were, by keeping out of the study to a great extent.

Manners, who was always a quiet and peaceable fellow, was much worried between his two friends. He blamed Tom Merry for the football fiasco, but at the same time he was not inclined to back up Lowther in breaking up the study in this way. Between the two he hesitated and paused, and as a natural result was treated with coldness by both. Manners, never a talkative fellow, had become more silent than ever now.

Tom Merry did not show that he missed his chums—except in one way—he made no others. The football business was blowing over now, and the fellows already ceasing to talk about it, and Tom Merry could have had his pick of the School House if he wanted friends. But he picked no one. And that was the only outward indication he gave that he missed the fellows he had always chummed with. It was not easy for a loyal nature like Tom Merry's to change.

Tom Merry was strolling under the old elms, his hands in his pockets, thinking of things, when Wally came up.

Wally looked at him curiously. In the Third-Form room, of course, the politics of the Lower School were eagerly discussed, and the trouble in the Shell and the Fourth was fully known and commented upon.

Tom Merry was very popular with the Third. He was so kind and good-natured that the fags forgave him for being in the Shell. He always put down bullying, and more than once had taken on a tough encounter for the sake of some diminutive, inky little rascal who had fallen foul of Gore or some other bullying fellow in the Middle School. Wally was inclined to patronise Tom Merry, and in a vague sort of way the scamp of the Third had determined to "back up" old Merry now that his own friends had turned against him.

Tom Merry gave him a pleasant nod. Wally's cheek only amused him, where it would have brought an angry word or a cuff from Gore.

"What's wanted, Wally?" Tom Merry asked.

"You are."

"Is this one of your Third-Form jokes?" asked Tom Merry.

"No. Honest Injun! Kildare sent me for you."

"Oh, Kildare?"

"Yes. And look here," said Wally cautiously, "he was looking rather waxy. He called in on Darrel as I came away. Looks to me as if you're in for something. Keep your eyes open. I thought I'd warn you."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Thanks, Wally! But I don't think I can be in Kildare's bad books this time. I think it will be all right."

"Well, I hope so," said the fag. "But Kildare looked as if it was all wrong. Look here, Merry, shall I cut off and get you an exercise book?"

The Shell fellow stared.

"An exercise book? What for?"

Wally made an impatient gesture.

"To stuff in your bags, of course, in case it's serious."

"Ha, ha! No, it's all right. I don't suppose it will be so serious as that, Wally."

And Tom Merry walked away towards the School House. Wally stood with his hands in his pockets, and a thoughtful shade—to say nothing of a smear of ink—on his youthful brow.

"Rotten for Merry!" he murmured. "I believe there's going to be trouble—Kildare looked like it. I'm jolly well going to stand by Merry, and if the Fourth——"

"Wally, deah boy!"

Wally stared at his major, the handsome and elegant swell of the Fourth. A look of admiration was upon the fag's inky countenance. He admired his major very much, though he never left off chipping Arthur Augustus about his elegant manners and customs. The swell of the School House was looking in great form just now. Nothing could have exceeded the gloss of his silk hat, unless it was the shine of his elegant little boots. But his glance at Wally was not admiring. He jammed his monocle into his eye, and took a decidedly unfavourable survey of the Third-Form fag.

"Wally! You have a smeah of ink on your face."

"Go hon!" said Wally cheerfully.

"Your hair is fwightfully untiday!"

"Rats!"

"Weally, Wally, I have tried time and again to impwess upon

you that it is gwossly diswespectful to say 'Wats' to your majah!"

"Mice, then!" said Wally. "Anything for a quiet life!"

"I wegard that wemark as widiculous! Wally, your untiday dwess and generally wagged appeawance is an eyesoah to me!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy impressively. "Your collah is soiled!"

"Can't help it!"

"Your necktie is cwooked."

"Good!"

"Your boots are down at the heel."

"Good again!"

"Your waistcoat has lost a button."

"Hip-pip!"

"Your hands are inky."

"Hurray!"

"Weally, Wally——"

"Keep it up, Gus, old man!" said Wally cordially. "I like to hear you, you know. Is there anything the matter with my cuffs, for instance?"

"They are soiled."

"Good! And my sleeves?"

"They are fwayed."

"And my—lemme see—my bags?"

"They are baggay at the knees."

"And anything else?"

D'Arcy took a survey of his younger brother through his monocle.

"I do not notice anythin' else at pwesent," he said.

"Well, that's a relief, anyway!" said Wally. "But I should really like you to point out a few more things. It's cheering to hear you!"

"I twust you do not make that wemark in a mockin' spirit, Wally! I wish I could inspiah you with a pwopah wegard for appearances. Do you think it is worthy of a D'Arcy?" said Arthur Augustus majestically, "to go about with a smeah of ink on his bwow, Wallay?"

Wally wetted his sleeve-cuff with his lips, and drew it across his brow. As the sleeve had been used for wiping slates and many things before, the effect was to turn a smear of ink into a huge smudge extending over half his face, giving him a curious appearance of having had both eyes blacked.

"That better?" asked Wally.

"Weally, Wallay——"

"Little bit worn, perhaps," said Wally, looking down at his clothes. "But I'll tell you what, Gus. Next time the governor sends you a fiver, you shall hand it over to me, and I'll get some new togs!"

"Weally, Wallay——"

"I can't say fairer than that, now, can I?" said Wally argumentatively.

"You young wascal!"

"Hallo! Here's Jimmy looking for me! Sorry I can't stay longer, Gussy!"

Jameson of the Third came up with Curly Gibson. He gave Wally an indignant look.

"I've been hunting for you," he exclaimed. "What do you mean by sticking here talking to a blessed Fourth-Former?"

"Weally, Jameson——"

"Oh, scat!" said Jameson. "Come on, Wally!"

"Gussy's only got as far as sixthly," said Wally. "Never mind, Gus! I'll hear seventhly and lastly, and a few words before we part, and in conclusion, some other time!"

"You diswespectful young scamp——"

The three Third-Formers walked away, laughing, with linked arms, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was left looking after them with great indignation.

CHAPTER 15.

Under Suspicion.

TOM MERRY made his way to Kildare's study in the Sixth-Form quarters in the School House. In spite of Wally's warning, the hero of the Shell was not alarmed. He could not think of any infraction of the rules of late that could have given Kildare cause of offence, and Kildare was not the kind of fellow to rake up old troubles. Tom Merry thought simply that it was on some point of Form discipline, or a football matter, that the St. Jim's captain wished to speak to him.

But when he reached Kildare's study he realised that there was something more serious than that in the air.

Kildare bade him come in, and he entered, and found Darrel in the room. Darrel was standing by the table, near the pack of cards. Tom Merry did not for the moment notice the cards. He glanced at the grave face of the captain of the school.

"Wally said you wanted me, Kildare," he said.

Kildare nodded.

"Yes, I want you, Merry."

"Well, I'm here!"

Kildare paused for a moment before speaking again. Tom Merry looked at him in growing astonishment.

"I hope there's nothing wrong, Kildare," he said.

"There is something wrong—something very wrong!" said the captain of St. Jim's. "Something that will mean trouble unless you can clear it up, Merry!"

Tom Merry compressed his lips a little. Troubles seemed to be thickening upon him from all sides of late.

It would be another blow if he lost the good opinion of the captain of the school. But he had felt many blows just lately, and he was ready for this one, if it came. A feeling of anger rose in his breast, but he suppressed it, and he was very quiet, and he met Kildare's eyes steadily.

"If it is anything against me, Kildare, I suppose I shall be able to explain it," he said quietly. "But I haven't the faintest idea what you are driving at. Will you tell me?"

Kildare pointed to the table.

"Do you see that pack of cards?"

Tom Merry glanced at it.

"Yes."

"Have you seen them before?"

"I don't know."

"Look at them closely, then."

"What does this mean?"

"Do as I tell you!" said Kildare harshly.

Again that feeling of anger burned for a moment in the junior's heart, but it did not reach his lips. He stepped quietly to the table, and turned the cards in his hands, glancing at the faces of some of them, and then at the pattern on the backs. Kildare and Darrel watched him closely the while.

"Well?" said Kildare. "Have you seen that pack of cards before, Merry?"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"No."

"They do not belong to you?"

"Belong to me'?" ejaculated Tom Merry, in astonishment.

"Don't prevaricate, Merry! Do they belong to you or not?"

Tom Merry flushed crimson.

"I didn't intend to prevaricate, Kildare! You've never accused me of prevaricating before!" he exclaimed.

Kildare's look softened.

"Well, answer my question," he said. "This is a serious matter, and I want direct answers. Do those cards belong to you?"

"Certainly not!"

"Then how came they in your study?"

"In my study?"

"They were found there."

"Found in my study?" repeated Tom Merry, in blank amazement.

"Will you call Skimpole, Darrel?"

"Certainly."

The prefect stepped from the study, and returned quickly with Skimpole. The genius of the Shell was looking very uneasy. Determinist as Skimpole was, he was a very good fellow in other respects, and it was dawning upon his mighty brain that he had been the means of getting Tom Merry into trouble. And, although he was sometimes exasperated by the utter indifference Tom Merry showed on the subject of Determinism, he liked the hero of the Shell, as nearly everybody else at St. Jim's did.

He blinked in great distress at Tom Merry.

"I suppose it's about those cards you want to see me, Kildare," he exclaimed.

"Yes," said Kildare.

"I'm very sorry about it, Merry."

"I don't see what Skimpole has to do with it," said the captain of the Shell.

"Tell him, Skimpole," said Kildare briefly.

"You see, Merry, I had reached the three hundred and ninetieth chapter of my great book on Determinism, when I ran out of foolscap," said Skimpole. "I am writing a splendid book on the same subject treated by Professor Balmycrumpet, but I flatter myself in a somewhat superior style, for I shall take cognisance of——"

"Cut that out!" said Kildare. "Come to the point——"

"Really, Kildare——"

"Tell Tom Merry how you came to find the cards."

"I was coming to that. I required some more foolscap, and I went to your study to get some, Tom Merry. Some weak-minded persons might imagine that I had no right to do so. That is nonsense. Under Socialism, all foolscap will, of course, be nationalised. Requiring a quantity to complete the three hundred and ninetieth——"

"Do cut it short!" said Kildare.

"I really am hurrying very much, Kildare. These interruptions, however, throw me into considerable confusion. Requiring some foolscap to complete the three hundred and ninetieth chapter of my great book, I went to your study, Merry, and after a search of some length, at last discovered what I wanted in the drawer of your table. Unfortunately,

I dropped that pack of cards, which I removed from the drawer in my search."

"That is the point," said Kildare. "The pack was there?"

"Of course it was, or I could not have removed it," said Skimpole in mild surprise. "I am astonished by the question, Kildare. It should be clear even to a low intellect that unless it was there in the first place, I could not——"

"That will do. Do you doubt Skimpole's word, Tom Merry?"

"No."

"You do not accuse him of speaking untruly?"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"I know Skimmy would not lie," he said.

Skimpole beamed on him through his big spectacles.

"You do me only justice, Merry," he said. "It is impossible for a sincere Socialist to lie!"

"Shut up!" said Kildare. "You——"

"Really, Kildare, if you knew anything about Socialism, you would be aware that a sincere and genuine Socialist seldom or never shuts up!"

"You can go, Skimpole."

"Very well. You are sure you have finished? I should not like to be interrupted again, as I am getting to a very interesting part of the three hundred and ninetieth chapter of my book. I am dealing with the vexed question whether the human race originated in a speck of jelly floating in a primeval sea——"

"You can go!"

"Or in a rotten fruit of some species on an antediluvian river bank, which turned to life in the heat of the tropic sun——"

"Get out!"

"A most interesting question, of course, and one which—— Ow! Yow!"

Darrel took the amateur Determinist by the ear, and led him to the passage, and closed the door upon him. Skimpole rubbed his ear, and returned to his study and the three hundred and ninetieth chapter of that great book.

In Kildare's study there was a grim silence for some moments. The captain of St. Jim's broke it.

"What have you to say, Tom Merry?"

"Nothing."

"You deny that the cards belong to you?"

"Utterly!"

"You deny having seen them before?"

"Yes."

"But you admit that Skimpole found them in your study?"

"Yes."

"Well! What is your explanation?"

"The only possible explanation is that someone placed them there," said Tom Merry. "And as they must have been placed there to be found, I should say it is a jape—or else they were placed there with the deliberate intention of getting me into trouble!"

"You have never played cards in the study?"

"Never!"

"Never had a pack of cards there?"

"Never. Except——"

Tom Merry paused.

Kildare's face set grimly.

"Except when?" he asked, at once.

"Except once. It was just after Lumley came to St. Jim's. He showed us some card tricks there, but he took the cards away with him."

"Oh! Lumley-Lumley! Your new friend!"

Tom Merry flushed.

"He is no friend of mine!" he exclaimed.

"According to what I hear, you have been quarrelling with most of your old friends on his account."

Tom Merry was silent.

Kildare drummed upon the table with his fingers. He evidently did not know what to do. If Tom Merry had had the cards in his study, it was a serious matter. But if they had been placed there to injure him by their discovery, it was a more serious matter still, and needed to be looked into. Where was the truth? Kildare did not know. He looked at Darrel, but the prefect had no counsel to give him.

Tom Merry waited.

"Do you know that those are marked cards?" asked Kildare abruptly.

Tom Merry started.

"Marked cards?"

"Yes."

"I did not know it. I have never seen any marked cards that I remember," said the hero of the Shell, looking at Kildare fearlessly. "I don't suppose I should know them."

Kildare compressed his lips.

"You can go, Merry," he said. "I don't know what to think. I must reflect on this. For the present I shall say nothing about it outside this study. You can go."

"Very well. I give you my word of honour, Kildare, that I know nothing about the cards. If you cannot take my word, I cannot help it; but if you ask any fellow in the School House, he'll tell you that my word is all right."

Kildare only nodded, and Tom Merry left the study with a heavy heart.

CHAPTER 16.

A Surprise for the Lower School.

"BAI Jove, you chaps——"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy burst into Study No. 6, in the Fourth Form passage, with that exclamation, and an excited look upon his aristocratic face. The calm repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere was gone for the moment.

Blake, Herries, and Digby were doing their preparation. Blake looked up with a snort as a blot dropped from his pen.

"You ass!" he exclaimed. "Look at that!"

"Bai Jove! That's vewy clumsay of you, Blake, deah boy."

"You fathead!" howled Blake. "It was your fault."

"Weally, Blake——"

"You startled me, ass!"

"I decline to be called an ass! I——"

"But what's the news?" exclaimed Digby, interrupting the swell of St. Jim's. "I suppose you came to tell us something, as you rushed in barking like that."

"I wefuse to have my wemarks chawactewised as barkin'——"

"What is it? Get to bizney."

"You keep on intewwuptin' me, you see. But the fact is, I am vewy much surpwised. I weally nevah suspected anythin' of the sort, you know."

"Of what sort?" demanded Blake, exasperated.

"About Tom Mewwy, you know."

"Oh, rats! I'm getting fed up with Tom Merry," Blake grunted. "We've had enough of him lately, with losing footer matches, and gettin lined for rows in the common-room. Give Tom Merry a rest!"

"But it is weally vewy wemarkable, you know!"

"What is, ass?"

"I decline to be——"

Blake caught up a ruler.

"Come to the point, you fathead! Now, then, what is it?"

D'Arcy kept a wary eye on the ruler.

"Weally, Blake——"

"Come to the point!" roared Blake.

"Certainly, deah boy. Pway do not get excited. They say that Tom Mewwy has been up to Lumley-Lumley's twicks, you know."

"What!"

"They've discovahed packs of marked cards and sevewal bottles of whisky in his study, and a whole set of churchwarden pipes, Mellish says."

Blake sniffed.

"Oh, Mellish!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You know Mellish! It's all lies, of course!"

"Yaas, but Skimpole found the cards!"

"Skimpole!"

"Yaas, wathah! And Skimmay's an awful ass, you know, but he wouldn't tell a lie."

Jack Blake looked serious. Digby whistled softly.

"Can't be anything in it," said Herries. "Tom Merry's an ass in some things, such as selecting a team for a footer match, but he's decent all through. He's fond of dogs."

"Let's go down," said Blake abruptly. "We can finish the prep. presently. This is a thing that ought to be looked into. I don't believe it against Merry for a moment. What does Tom Merry himself say, Gussy?"

"I weally don't know. I haven't asked him."

"It's curious, though," said Digby. "Of course, there's nothing in it. But it would account for his sticking up for Lumley-Lumley in this way, if it were true."

"Bai Jove!"

Blake did not reply. The chums of the Fourth left the study, and descended to the common-room. They found the room in a buzz.

Kildare had said he would say nothing of the matter outside his study, and Tom Merry himself was not likely to speak. Skimpole, buried in deep questions concerning the origin of the human race, probably forgot the whole matter in five minutes. But there was Gore. Gore was not likely to keep silent—and he did not.

Gore was in his element now. Tom Merry had taken him in with his saintly ways, and now that he had found Tom Merry out, he felt it to be his duty to show Tom Merry up. At least, that was how Gore put it, and perhaps he believed it himself. At all events, he certainly lost no time in spreading the story over the School House.

That Tom Merry, who had always been heavily down on the so-called smart set of St. Jim's, who stopped the fags from smoking, and had licked Gore once upon a time for giving a picnic with smokes and beer—that Tom Merry should have

been discovered in the same practices himself, was amazing to the juniors. They simply refused to believe it at first. But it is an old saying that if mud is thrown often enough and hard enough, some of it is sure to stick.

There were not wanting fellows to welcome the story, and to repeat it with every kind of cunning exaggeration. Mellish was well to the front in this. The discovery that Tom Merry was no better than himself afforded inexpressible joy to the cad of the Fourth. Lumley-Lumley was another. There were two or three more of the same kidney—not many, but enough to keep the ball rolling.

The story spread—and grew!

The pack of cards had really been found, and Gore's statement, doubted at first, was backed up by Skimpole when he was questioned. Skimpole told the simple truth, and he was well known to be truthful, although not particularly bright intellectually. Skimpole's word carried weight where Gore's word would have been disregarded.

The pack of cards had been found, and so the rumour, originating no one knew where—unless Mellish could have told—that smokes and whisky had been discovered, too, gained ground and credence.

A bottle of whisky, half a dozen bottles of brandy, a magnum of champagne, a bundle of cheroots, a box of cigars, all or some of these had been discovered hidden in Tom Merry's study—in the table-drawer, in a nook in the chimney, under the coals in the locker. Anything, in fact, had been found anywhere. Details could be filled in to please individual tastes.

The junior common-room was in a buzz with the talk.

Tom Merry had been called over the coals by Kildare, and was to be flogged, was to be expelled, had already been asked to leave the school. One fellow knew for a fact that a wire had been sent to Miss Priscilla Fawcett announcing Tom Merry's impending return; another knew for a fact with equal certainty that it was only owing to Miss Fawcett's illness, which rendered it impossible to communicate with her, that Tom Merry was not sent away at once.

And all these stories, contradictory and self-contradictory as they were, found some believers, or half-believers.

The juniors had to agree that things looked black against Tom Merry.

Even Blake & Co., who, whatever might be their differences with the hero of the Shell, firmly believed him to be a clean and honourable lad, were staggered.

The great question was, of course: What would Tom Merry himself have to say about it? That was the question, and the fellows were most anxious to put it to Tom Merry. But Tom was not to be found. He had gone out on his bicycle alone, and some of the scandal-lovers hinted that he had run away from school.

"Of course he's run away!" said Mellish, with a grin, in the common-room. "That's just what he would do. He's afraid to face it out."

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy promptly. "Tom Mewwy isn't afraid of anybody. You're a slandewin' wottah, Mellish!"

"You can stand up for him if you like," sneered Mellish. "Why isn't he here to stand up for himself?"

"It's all rot!" said Jack Blake. "He can't have run away!"

"Bosh!" said Bernard Glyn.

"Piffle!" said Digby. "And I don't believe there's anything in it. If the cards were found in his study——"

"There seems to be no doubt about that," said Kangaroo, with a worried look. "The question is, how they came there."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Tom Merry's taken us all in," said Mellish. "He's a rotten blackguard——"

"Here he is!"

Mellish turned quite white, and his eyes went wildly to the doorway of the common-room. A sturdy figure in a Norfolk jacket and cycling knickers had appeared there.

It was Tom Merry!

A dead silence fell in the room.

CHAPTER 17.

The Storm Bursts.

TOM MERRY looked into the room in wonder. He had not caught Mellish's words, and he knew nothing of the ferment the Lower School was in on his account. He had gone out on his bicycle after the interview with Kildare, and had only just returned. He had noticed that several fellows looked at him in a peculiar way as he came in, but had attached no great importance to it. Many things had been uncomfortable at St. Jim's for the last few days, and Tom Merry was getting accustomed to having things a little out of the usual groove. But the sudden dead silence that greeted his appearance in the junior common-room struck him with astonishment.

The juniors looked at him, and said nothing. He walked into the room. Under other circumstances he would have spoken to Blake or one of his chums, but since the football match with the New House he had had little to say to them. He turned his eyes upon Kerruish of the Fourth.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

The Manx junior shifted uneasily.

"The matter?" he repeated.

Tom Merry stared at him.

"Yes, what's the matter? What are you all struck dumb for the moment I come in? You were making buzz enough a minute ago. I heard you at the end of the passage."

Kerruish coloured awkwardly. Tom Merry's eyes left his face, and travelled round the faces that crowded there, all of them peculiar in their expression. He was more and more astonished.

"What does this mean?" he exclaimed. "Is it a jape?"

"Wathah not, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, taking it upon himself to reply.

"Then what do you mean?"

"Nothin', deah boy."

"You were talking when I came in, Mellish," said Tom Merry; "I'm not sure, but I think I caught my name, too."

Mellish turned a sickly colour, but did not speak.

"What were you saying?" asked Tom Merry.

"N-nothing!" muttered Mellish.

"You fellows were all very much interested in something just now—only a minute ago. What is it?"

There was no reply.

Tom Merry's lip curled scornfully.

"Well, if you were talking about a fellow behind his back, and can't repeat what you've been saying to his face, I don't think much of you, that's all!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"It's not a question of that," said Jack Blake, flushing. "I'll tell you what it is, if you like."

Tom Merry shrugged his shoulders.

"Seems to me you could have done that at once, without all this rot."

"I wefuse to have our conversation chawactewised as wot, Tom Merry——"

"Oh, ring off, Gussy!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Rats! We were talking, Tom Merry, about the things the fellows are saying."

"You are intewwuptin' me, Blake——"

"Yes, I know; but dry up. I'm talking to Tom Merry."

Arthur Augustus gasped. Words would have been no use in any case. Tom Merry and Jack Blake were too intent on one another to have listened to him.

"Things the fellows are saying?" said Tom Merry angrily. "What do you mean?"

Then the truth dawned on him. The story of the cards had got abroad. They had been discussing him—discussing the discovery Skimpole had made in his study!

"Yes," said Blake; "but we were not talking behind your back."

"That sounds well, after the silence as I came in, anyway."

Jack Blake coloured.

"And you'd rather not say any more!" suggested Tom Merry scornfully.

Jack Blake started as if he had been stung. Tom Merry looked round the circle of faces. No one seemed to care to meet his eyes for the moment.

"I'll say just as much as I jolly well like!" said Blake, coming a step nearer.

"Wathah! It's a bit wotten about those beastly cards, Tom Mewwy. You must admit that, deah boy."

"Oh!" said the hero of the Shell. "So that's it, is it?"

"Yaas, wathah! It's wotten bad form, deah boy, to go for whiskay——"

"What!" almost shrieked Tom Merry.

"Weally, deah boy! Are you ill?"

"Oh, shut up! Let Blake speak—if he cares to speak now I'm here!"

The tone of Tom Merry's voice was gall to Blake. He had been making great efforts to keep his temper. But this was too much for him.

"Yes," he burst out; "yes, I will speak! This isn't the way to make us believe you are innocent, Tom Merry."

Tom Merry's eyes blazed. If Jack Blake was tinder, Tom Merry was more than flint and steel. His temper was tried. He could bear no more, even from fellows who had been his chums. He could and would bear no more. He took a step to meet Blake's advance.

Blake's eyes blazed at Tom Merry. The hero of the Shell looked him steadily in the face.

"Keep back, Blake! Don't tempt me to hurt you!"

"Rats!"

Tom Merry's fists were clenched hard.

"Oh, keep that for the Amateur Dramatic Society!" said Blake angrily. "You wouldn't find it so easy to hurt me!"

Tom Merry's hands went up, and Blake's coat flashed off hi

back. But Tom Merry was ready. The hero of the Shell cross-countered like lightning, and Blake adopting the same manœuvre on his part, they darted back for a fresh assault.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, still entertaining hopes of being a peacemaker, rushed in where angels feared to tread.

"Ow!" he yelled, as he received two terrific blows. "You uttah wottahs! You disgwaceful wuffians!"

But though D'Arcy's ears would certainly correspond to the description "thick" for a day or two, his action gave the juniors their cue.

The idea of letting Tom Merry and Jack Blake fight like this was not to be thought of. Neither clearly knew what it was about.

The juniors closed on them, and, struggle as they would, they were separated. But they took some holding, as one or two found to their cost. Even then Tom Merry broke loose.

"Now, Blake," he said, "you can get away from them if you choose. Come on!"

Digby and Herries ran at Tom Merry to restrain him. But with two left and right drives he sent them flying.

Then Blake came on again. With a great effort he got away from D'Arcy and Kangaroo, the Cornstalk having his mouth knocked on one side in the process.

Straight at Tom Merry he went. But he came with his head too far down, and Tom Merry, taking the chance, hooked him with a flashing upper-cut. Blake went down on his back quicker than a comedian in a cinematograph picture.

The juniors did not interfere again. Something was due to Blake. The Fourth-Form champion was up again like a flash.

Almost any of the others would have been "laid-out" by that upper-cut. But not Jack Blake. On he came again. Feinting with his left, he almost got right home with a tremendous right counter. Quick as he was in dodging it, Tom Merry did not get his head quite clear. The blow sogged like a mallet on his left cheek, and he staggered back a pace or two.

"Bai Jove!"

A dead silence had settled on the room, when D'Arcy's remark brought them once more to a sense of what was forward. Tom Merry and Jack Blake were facing one another like two champions of the ring.

The Shell fellow returned to the charge readily. Anyone could see that Blake's dash would ultimately break itself against Tom Merry's steadfast defence. In rushed the Fourth-Form junior again. But the Shell captain was using every inch of his length.

Leading off with his favourite hit, Blake made a counter with his left. Like lightning Tom Merry's arm slipped past his neck.

The Fourth-Former saw what was impending, and made a valiant effort to get his head back. But the Shell fellow was too quick for him. His right hand was behind Blake's head, and with one terrific swoop he brought the Fourth-Form champion's head down, and he was in "chancery."

But this was too much for the Fourth, and they fell on them in a body before Tom Merry could do any execution.

"Stop them!"

"Hold the duffers back!"

"Chuck it, Tom Merry!"

"No chancery!"

Tom Merry, in the wild excitement of the moment, would probably have given Blake some very severe punishment. Jack Blake was quite at his mercy now.

But strong hands fell upon them from all sides, and the two combatants were wrenched apart.

Tom Merry was swung away and back by the juniors, while Herries and Digby and D'Arcy forced Blake to retreat. Blake struggled fiercely in the grasp of the chums of No. 6.

"Let me go!" he roared. "Let me get at him!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Let go, you duffers!"

"I wefuse to be called a duffer. I think——"

"Chuck it!"

"Oh, stop it, Blake," said Herries. "Blessed if you're not as much trouble as Towser when he gets after young Wally's mongrel. Stop it, I say."

"Bai Jove! He's loose!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's eyeglass had fallen out, and he had caught it to replace it. Blake had taken advantage of the relaxation of the hold upon him.

He wrenched himself away from Herries and Digby, and sprang towards Tom Merry.

"Now, then!" he shouted. "Come on!"

CHAPTER 18.

To a Finish.

TOM MERRY would willingly have come on. But Kangaroo and Clifton Dane and three or four more were holding him back. His eyes blazed at Blake.

"So you want to go on!" he exclaimed fiercely.

"Yes, I do!"

"Then shove yourself in the position you were in when they separated us," said Tom Merry. "Fair play's a jewel!"

Jack Blake hesitated. His head had been in chancery at that moment, and naturally enough he did not want to put it there again. But Tom Merry's suggestion was reasonable enough. If the fight was to go on, Blake had no right to benefit by the interference.

Tom Merry laughed, not the cheery laugh the juniors knew as Tom Merry's, but a hard and taunting laugh, very strange from his lips.

"You don't care to?" he exclaimed.

Blake gritted his teeth.

"Yes, I do; we'll go right on. Let him alone, you fellows."

"Rats!" said Kangaroo coolly.

"Look here, Kangaroo, what are you interfering in this for?" demanded Blake fiercely.

"Because you're a pair of silly asses!" said the Cornstalk, in his cool way. "You ought to have more sense."

"Mind your own bizney!"

Kangaroo grinned.

"You can't rag me into going for you, Blake. Look here, this has got to stop."

"Rats!"

"What are you fighting about? Stop it, I say, before you get the prefects here."

"Hang the prefects!"

"Yaas, wathah! I twust no gentleman pwesent would think of allowin' a pwefect to intefere in an affaih of honah. At the same time, Blake, I weally think that this affaih should cease, you know."

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

"I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort, I think——"

"Ring off, Gussy. Now, Tom Merry, you've chosen to take this thing in this way, and it's got to go on now."

"I'm ready! I'm ready to meet any fellow who slanders me behind my back!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

Blake flushed crimson.

"Do you say that I slandered you?"

"What else do you call it?"

"Well, if a fellow gambles and drinks in secret, he must expect the matter to be discussed when it comes out."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"So that is what I am accused of?" asked Tom Merry steadily.

"Bai Jove! The cards were found in your studay, deah boy; and somebody said they were marked cards. Then there was a bottle of whisky hidden in the coal locker——"

"Who says so?"

"I weally don't know. Somebody said so——"

"Somebody was a liar, then!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"As for the cards found in my study, I don't know how they got there, excepting that they must have been put there to get me into trouble—perhaps by one of the fellows who are making so much noise about it now."

"That's for me, of course," said Blake, between his teeth. "You lie, Tom Merry, and you know it!"

Tom Merry made a terrible effort to wrench himself free.

"Let me go!" he said hoarsely.

"Not this time," said Bernard Glyn.

"Hang you! Let me go!"

"Look here, this has got to be fought out," said Jack Blake. "Tom Merry, I'll meet you in five minutes, behind the chapel."

"Good!"

And Blake swung out of the room. His chums followed him. The Shell fellows released Tom Merry, who stood trembling with anger and excitement.

"I suppose this must go on," said Kangaroo.

"Yes," said Tom Merry, between his teeth.

He strode from the common-room. He was looking very torn and dishevelled, and his face was badly bruised; but he did not notice that. His heart was beating violently, his breath coming thick and fast.

The harassed lad felt as if all the school were turning against him, and his patience and good temper had reached the limit of endurance. He would hit out now for some of the blows he had received, and if Blake chose to take the lead against him. Blake should be the scapegoat. Let Blake suffer for the part he had taken.

As Tom Merry strode from the School House he encountered Manners and Lowther. They had been out, but not together. They were as estranged from one another as from Tom Merry. But at the sight of the hero of the Shell, both of them forgot the estrangement, for the moment, and remembered only the old friendship.

"Great Scott! What's the matter, Tom?" cried Lowther.

"Nothing!"

"Tom! What's the row?" exclaimed Manners.

"Only a row with Blake."

"Blake! You've been fighting?"

"I'm going to."

"I say, Tom, you'd better think better of it. I——"

"I know my own business best, I suppose," said Tom Merry curtly, and he strode away in the direction of the chapel.

Manners and Lowther exchanged glances. The juniors pouring out of the School House soon enlightened them as to the cause of the trouble. The astonishment of Manners and Lowther on learning of the discovery made in their study was proof enough that they had known nothing of the cards being there, whether Tom Merry had known or not.

The general opinion was against Tom Merry. The way in which he had taken the accusation had placed him in the wrong; though the poor lad, feeling himself persecuted and slandered, might be pardoned for losing his temper.

Lowther ran after Tom Merry.

"Tom! You'll want a second!"

Tom Merry stopped and faced him.

"You've heard what the fellows are saying?" he demanded.

"Yes."

"They say I'm a secret gambler, and I don't know what else. Do you believe a word of it—a single syllable of it, Monty Lowther?"

Lowther met his eyes.

"I can't, Tom."

"Do you stand by me against the others—all the time, and in everything? If you don't, I don't want your friendship, and I can do without a second?"

But Lowther did not falter. Tom Merry's tone was almost threatening, but Lowther saw the mood he was in, and he would not allow his own rising temper to prevail.

"I stand by you against all comers, as far as this fight is concerned, Tom," he said. "You must have a second, old chap."

"As far as this fight is concerned," said Tom Merry bitterly. "That isn't enough. Then after the fight to go back to the old footing—sneers and jeers, and the rest of it, and pretending not to see a fellow when he passes you. I don't want aid of that sort, Monty Lowther. I can fight without a second!"

"But——"

"That's enough!"

Tom Merry strode away, leaving Monty Lowther standing where he was. But Lowther followed him no further. He had a temper, too, and it was rising now.

CHAPTER 19.
Knocked Out.

JACK BLAKE was already on the ground, and a crowd of juniors had gathered round him there. It was easy to see that Blake had all the sympathy on his side. Whether Tom Merry was guilty or not of the charge brought against him, the way he had taken it had put up the back of the School House fellows. They did not make sufficient allowance for the excited and troubled state of his mind, and the natural indignation he felt at being accused of a disgraceful act. As Tom Merry came on the scene alone, without even a second, no one looked at him. Blake was the popular hero, and if Tom Merry defeated him he would be the popular hero still.

Jerrold Lumley-Lumley came on the scene with the Fourth-Formers. His eyes were gleaming under his thick brows. But he said little on the matter. The tide had set against Tom Merry, and he was content to leave matters to take their course, without appearing openly himself.

"I am ready!" said Tom Merry.

Blake was already stripping for the combat. His expression showed that it was to be a serious one.

Digby was his second, and Herries was there to help. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had appointed himself referee and timekeeper, and had produced his famous twenty-five guinea watch to keep time with. With the gold watch in his hand, and his monocle jammed tightly into his eye, Arthur Augustus considered that he looked very business-like. Chum of Blake's as he was, nobody dreamed for a moment that he was likely to favour the Fourth-Form champion in any way. D'Arcy might have some peculiar manners and customs, but he was the soul of honour and fair play.

He nodded to Tom Merry in a rather distant way. He was a little doubtful whether he should raise his silk hat, under the serious circumstances; but finally decided that a nod would do.

"Who's your second, deah boy?" he asked.

"I have none," said Tom Merry shortly.

"Bai Jove!"

"You must have a second," said Digby. "Can't you find anybody to back you up?"

Tom Merry flushed.

"I don't want anybody!"

"If you like——" began Kangaroo.

"I've said that I don't want anybody," said Tom Merry, very distinctly.

The Cornstalk bit his lip.

"Oh, all right," he said, stepping back.

"Weady, deah boys?"

"I'm ready!"

"So am I!" said Blake, rolling back his sleeves.

Tom Merry threw jacket and cap to the ground. The expression upon his face was not pleasant. It was Tom Merry against the whole school, it seemed; for not even his oldest and best chums were there to back him up. But he did not care. He faced Blake with a grim face.

"Time!"

"My only Aunt Jane!" exclaimed a voice, as D'Arcy minor came on the scene. "What's this? Naughty boys!"

"Weally, Wally——"

"Oh, don't you begin, Gussy!" said Wally cheerfully.

"You young wascal——"

"Get off the place, you Third Form fags!" exclaimed Gore. "None of you wanted here!"

Wally sniffed.

"Have you bought up the blessed place, Gore? Go and eat coke, or smoke farthing cigarettes—that's in your line!"

Gore made a rush at the fag, who promptly dodged among the crowd. There was a shout of protest.

"Stop that!"

"We want to watch."

"Chuck it, Gore!"

And Gore, breathing vengeance, deferred the punishment of Wally till a more favourable opportunity.

The first round had fairly commenced now. The two combatants were hard at it. The fight was hard and fast from the start. The juniors, in an ever thickening circle, watched eagerly. Fellows were coming from all quarters to see the contest. The news that Tom Merry was fighting Blake without gloves was exciting enough. It had spread to the New House, and Figgins & Co., and Pratt and French, were on the scene to watch. Fatty Wynn was munching chocolate as he watched, but the rest were wholly intent on the tussle. That it was to be a hard one was evident from the first round. When D'Arcy called time, both the juniors had received some punishment. Both had paid more attention to attack than to defence. Blake's nose was red and swollen, and Tom Merry's lip was cut. Blake sank down on his second's knee to rest. Tom Merry retired to a corner of the ring, and stood alone. Wally tapped him on the shoulder. Tom Merry turned round angrily. The once best-tempered fellow in the school seemed quick to anger now. But he nodded as he saw Wally. There was no mistaking Wally's eager expression.

"Haven't you got a second, Tom Merry?"

"No; I don't want one!"

"Stuff! I'm going to be your second, then."

"Oh, it's all right!"

"Can't allow you to fight without a second," said D'Arcy minor, as if he had been a Sixth-Former, at least. "I'm the man! Get a sponge, Curly!"

"Right-ho!" said Curly Gibson.

"I'll get some water," said Wally. "Your chivvy wants a damping! Where the dickens is there a basin! Somebody lend me a hat!"

Nobody volunteered to lend a hat.

"Time!"

The opponents toed the line again. D'Arcy stood, watch in hand. Wally grinned, and as the second round commenced he stepped up to his major and jerked the silk hat off his head.

"Bai Jove!"

D'Arcy turned round. Wally was dashing off with the topper, and D'Arcy yelled after him wrathfully.

"Wally! You young wascal! Bwing that hat back!" Wally did not even turn his head. "Wally! I——"

"Now then, ref.," roared the juniors, "watch the fight!"

"Weally, you fellows——"

"Look at the fight!"

"Mind your bizney, referee!"

D'Arcy almost snorted with exasperation. As referee and timekeeper, he could not quit the scene. He trembled for his topper, but there was no help for it. He had to resign it to its fate.

The round was getting exciting, and once the referee had to order the pair to break away. He forgot the topper for a moment.

Wally came speeding back before the round finished. He had Gussy's topper in his hands, full of water. He had filled it at the fountain. Curly Gibson had brought the sponge, and it was floating in D'Arcy's hat.

"Time!"

The round was over, and the combatants retired for the one-minute rest. D'Arcy insisted upon the rules being rigidly observed, and no one wished to say him nay.

"Bai Jove!" gasped the swell of St. Jim's, as he saw Wally squeezing the sponge in his silk topper. "You awful young sweep!"

"Here you are, Tom Merry!"

"Give me my toppah, I say, Wally——"

"You look after the clocking, and cheese it!"

And before Tom Merry could stop him, Wally was sponging his face. Tom Merry had no need of such attention, but the coolness of the dripping sponge was very pleasant.

"I shall thwash you, Wallay, when my pwesent duties are ovah!"

"Rats! Conducting a scrap without a towel, to say nothing of a bucket of water!" said Wally, with a sniff. "Like this sponge? Dig, catch!"

And everyone laughed as Digby received the wet sponge on his chin. Blake's nose was really very sore, and the sponge was a relief.

"Time!"

The combatants stepped forward keenly enough.

"Give the cad a good hiding, Blake!"

"You uttah cad, Mellish! I vote we make him stand up to the winnah, deah boys!"

"Rather!" cried the juniors, turning round; but Mellish was not to be seen.

"That was his wotten slang! I'll wagah anythin', deah boys——"

"Eyes front!" cried Wally. "Rats to Mellish, or whoever it was! Keep an eye on business, Gussy! Eyes front, old son!"

"Weally, Wallay——"

But the thud of fists brought Arthur Augustus to the business in hand. Tom Merry and Jack Blake had not waited. A little more prudence, and Blake would have been a very stiff opponent indeed for Tom Merry. His dash was splendid. But Tom Merry was as steady as a wall. Left and right counters came and went like rain, but only once did the Fourth fellow get in. Even then he only grazed the side of Tom Merry's face. And Tom Merry was back upon him in a second.

Blake staggered under the return body-blow, but his guard was ready as Tom Merry led off at his head. Then he attempted a rash move. In-fighting should not be indulged in by the lighter man. Blake forgot this, to his cost. Tom Merry, seeing what was coming, stepped to the right, and the Fourth champion reeled into the arms of Digby from a crashing left-hander under his chin.

D'Arcy looked anxiously at his watch. There was another minute to finish the round. But Digby, who had retained the sponge, swished it over Blake's face, and he came up to scratch. And Tom Merry felt that stern joy that warriors feel in foemen worthy of their steel.

A murmur ran round the ring. Smypathy was undoubtedly with Blake. Straight to business he went again, and with good result. The last knock had taught him a little prudence, and his hands were now held as high as Tom Merry's. He led off again. Feinting like lightning with his left, he successfully drew Tom Merry's right. Like a flash he ducked, and Tom Merry staggered into the corner. Blake had got right through his guard. He had found the angle of his opponent's jaw with a tremendous right-hander.

"Time! Mind my toppah, Tom Mewwy!"

But Tom Merry did not fall on D'Arcy's hat. The blow that finished the round was as heavy a one as he had ever received in any fight. A determined light shone in his eyes as Wally splashed the water over his face and hands.

"Couldn't you get a bucket, or somethin', Wallay?" asked Arthur Augustus, looking forlornly at his topper.

"And miss the fight? Off your rocker, Gus?"

D'Arcy gave the matter up, and in a few seconds he called time again. Both men were somewhat spent, Blake a little more, if anything, on account of his rushing tactics. But he came on hotly. Quick as thought Tom Merry saw his chance. Blake could not resist leading off with his left at the last moment, and before his arm was fully extended Tom Merry had ducked and got right home with his right. It was a terrible blow. A hit six inches above the mark is no light matter, and Blake crumpled up like an empty sack. He just managed to come up to scratch. For the first time he wavered. He knew only too well that Tom Merry was lasting better than he was, but he was real grit. Take it and give it he would while he could stand. All his determination, however, could not keep his hands from drooping. The spirit was as keen as ever, but the flesh was weak. He managed to stop some blows, and even got in one or two in return; but the light of victory already shone in Tom Merry's eyes.

For two minutes the fight was close and punishing, then Tom Merry drove in a heavy blow just on the mark. Blake gasped, and his arms flew up. Down came his hands to the guard again, however. Then Tom Merry's arm shot out like a piston-rod, and the Fourth-Former went down. Tom Merry stood back, panting. Blake did not move. There was a buzz of deep-drawn breath in the crowd. Wally's face was glowing, but no other. All feeling was with the fallen champion. Tom Merry stood alone. Arthur Augustus fixed his eyes upon the watch to count the seconds. There was a breathless hush in the crowd as D'Arcy counted. Blake lay gasping where he had fallen. Would he rise in time?

Tom Merry stood back. Strictly speaking, and by the rules of the Ring, he was entitled to knock Blake down if he attempted to rise; but Tom Merry was ever generous to a fault. He had his hands down, and he would not have touched Blake till he was upon his feet and prepared to defend himself. But could Blake rise?

"One, two, three, four——"

Jack Blake had made no motion.

"Five, six, seven, eight——"

The hero of the Fourth made an effort. But his senses were swimming, and he sank back with a low moan.

"Nine!"

Another effort, but weaker than the first. It was clear to all that Blake was done. He had fought a gallant fight, but he had fought it out. The end had come. There was a tense silence.

"Ten!"

Blake did not rise. A buzz of deep-drawn breath, and silence. Then the voice of the referee, with a slight falter in it. For the fallen man was D'Arcy's best chum, and it went right to D'Arcy's heart to see him lying so.

"Tom Mewwy wins!"

The fight was over, and Jack Blake was licked. Herries and Digby raised him in their arms. They did not look at Tom Merry.

The victor in the fight looked round at the silent, grim crowd with an almost haggard face. He had won, but it was an empty victory. Not a voice was raised to congratulate him. Every face condemned him; every glance of sympathy was for Blake.

Tom Merry choked back something in his throat as he turned away, then a sound was heard. It was a hiss as he left the ground. Tom Merry did not turn his head.

"It's all ovah," said D'Arcy, in a faltering voice. "Blake, old boy, how do you feel?"

"Rotten!" said Blake, his voice a weak whisper. "Get me out of this!"

They helped him away, and the crowd moved off, silent and grim. On the scene of the combat remained an inverted silk hat, still half-full of water. Arthur Augustus had forgotten it, which was a silent proof of how deeply the swell of St. Jim's was moved.

But if Tom Merry had lost his friends in his own Form, and in the Fourth, there was one, at least, who was true to him. It was Wally. Wally was burning with indignation at the treatment of the one who had always been his hero, though he had "cheeked" him as often as anybody else. And Jameson and Gibson stood by Wally in the matter.

"It's a shame!" said Wally, with tears of rage in his eyes. "It's a shame—a rotten shame! They've all turned on him, you chaps! But he's got one fellow left to stand by him, and that's me! The Third Form are going to back him up!"

And Wally's chums in the Third heartily concurred. Though what form exactly their backing up would take, and what use it would be to Tom Merry, was a question.

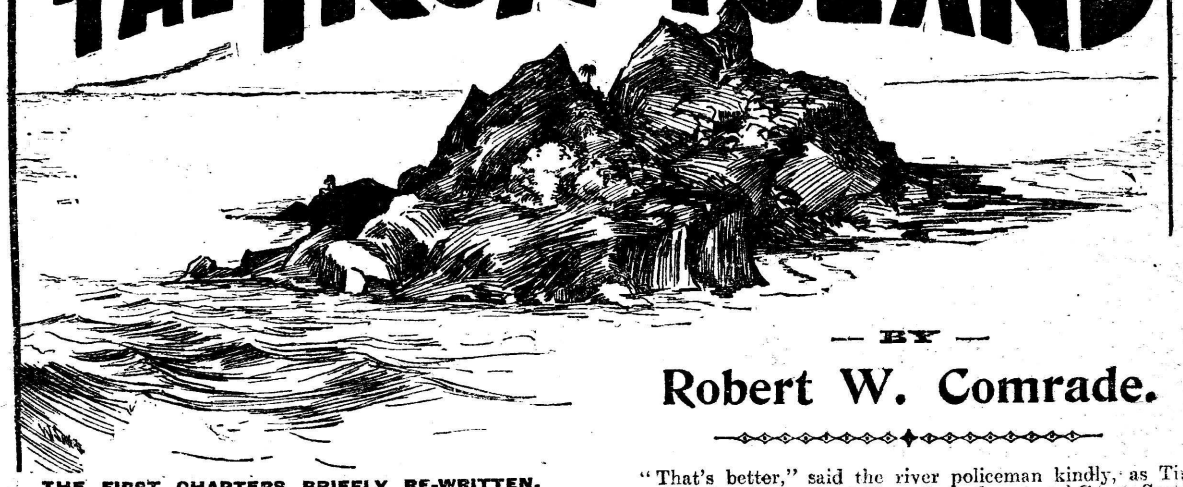
THE END.

(Another splendid, long, complete tale of Tom Merry & Co. next Thursday, entitled "The Faithful Fags," by Martin Clifford. Order in advance. Price One Penny.)

[Our Readers are informed that the characters in the following Serial Story are purely imaginary, and no reference or allusion is made to any living person. Actual names may be unintentionally mentioned, but the Editor wishes it to be distinctly understood that no adverse personal reflection is intended.]

A Thrilling Adventure Tale.

THE IRON ISLAND



— BY —

Robert W. Comrade.

THE FIRST CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RE-WRITTEN.

Philip Graydon is a young Englishman, who for eight years was marooned on an uncharted island in the Pacific—the Iron Island—by a criminal society called the Brotherhood of Iron, of which he was once a member. A lucky chance brings to his aid Dolores de las Mercedes, a beautiful Parisian actress, who has incurred the displeasure of the French Government. Graydon escapes from the Iron Island, and lands in England with Dolores. As Frank Kingston and Miss O'Brien, the two begin a secret campaign against the pernicious Brotherhood, and seven prominent members are

BROUGHT TO BOOK.

Carson Gray, a detective, informs Kingston that he is on the track of William Haverfield for the murder of a man named Whyte, and that he intends to pay a visit to the man's house in Chelsea. Kingston knows that Haverfield is a member of the Brotherhood, but refrains from telling Gray. He sends Tim, a lad he has taken care of, to follow Gray to the house in case he may be of assistance to him. The detective enters the house, but on sitting down in a chair to examine something of importance, arms swing out from either side, and he is clasped tightly round the chest. He is unable to free himself, and the next moment Haverfield enters the room and declares that Gray shall not leave the house alive. Tim hears that Gray is to be dropped into a sewer which runs under the house, and races to the road, enters a manhole, and makes his way to the sewer. After a while the bound body of the detective comes sweeping down. Tim clasps Gray round the body, and the two are carried by the rushing water to the river Thames.

(Now go on with the story.)

Rescued!

Carson Gray's eyes were wide open, staring eagerly over Tim's shoulder. Before he could speak, however, they were both submerged beneath the water. Tim fought desperately, and again they rose. It was only a question of seconds now.

"The police-boat!" spluttered Carson Gray. "Call out for assistance—they will hear! Help! Help!"

The sound came in a hoarse whisper, and Tim took up the cry, his voice rising to a shrill, discordant shriek. It was heard, however, for in a moment a river-police boat darted up. Gray had seen it laying stationary near the embankment.

"All right, mates, you ain't dead yet!" exclaimed a voice quickly. "Here, Bob, lend a hand; there's two of 'em!"

Tim was hauled in first. The rescue had come in the nick of time, for the brave boy was well-nigh unconscious with cold and exhaustion. Carson Gray being bound and helpless, was chilled to the marrow. It had been the nearest squeeze of his career, and the experience was one he would remember vividly to his dying day. The terrible feeling of helplessness would have affected most people's nerves for life.

"That's better," said the river policeman kindly, as Tim was laid in the boat. "Now the other one. Great Scott, the man's bound hand and foot!"

The constable uttered the words in amazement, and with some difficulty the detective was hauled aboard. In a trice his ropes were slashed through, and his aching form laid beside Tim's.

"Well, this 'ere's a rum go, an' no mistake!" exclaimed one of the officers. "Looks as if there's bin foul play o' some sort."

"Bound up just like that chap Whyte," said the other. "Lucky thing we was within hearin'. This kid's got some pluck, though. Did you see 'ow 'e was clutchin' 'old of the gentleman?"

"They'd 'ave gone down in another minute, certain. Better get them to the station quick, an' strip their clothes off. There ain't nothin' the matter with them except cold."

The boat shot through the water, and very shortly afterwards Carson Gray and Tim found themselves before a huge fire, wrapped in blankets, gradually regaining their usual strength. The pleasant feeling of warmth was very grateful, but the detective, as soon as he felt steady enough to walk, realised that there was no time to waste. The night had been a phenomenally strenuous one, but the work was not over even yet.

"You do not recognise me?" were the first words he uttered to the sergeant in charge. The officer gave his questioner a keen scrutiny.

"No, sir," he said. "I couldn't give you a name, although your face seems kind of familiar."

"Well, I am Carson Gray."

"The private detective, sir?"

"Yes; and I have just had about as narrow an escape from death as a man could have. I have no time to explain fully now how it came about, but fetch me some clothes immediately, and some for this brave lad here. Had it not been for his splendid behaviour, I should have been floating lifeless on the surface of the river by this time. You yourself saw how bravely he was supporting my bound and helpless figure."

"There's no doubt about it, sir, he's a plucked 'un!" exclaimed the sergeant. "But how did you get into such a hole, Mr. Gray?"

"I will explain," returned the detective, with a glance at the motionless form of Tim. The youngster had fallen into a doze before the cheerful fire. Gray briefly told the sergeant of his visit to Haverfield's house, of his capture, and of his rescue by Tim, whom he represented as his assistant.

This was a wise step on Gray's part, for Kingston's name could not be mentioned. Gray himself was puzzling his brains as to where Tim had sprung from, and how he had found his way into the sewer.

"The clothes," he said to the amazed officer. "I mean to raid Haverfield's house without delay. He will certainly have

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flown—the men are sure to have seen my rescue—but in the hurry might possibly have left a clue behind him."

The sergeant hurried off to procure the clothes, leaving Carson Gray and Tim alone. The latter still had his eyes closed, and Gray's heart was full as he looked upon the lad's open and straightforward countenance.

"He risked his life to save mine," thought the detective. "I know nothing of the details—how he knew I was in the sewer—but as long as I live, I shall regard Tim Curtis as the bravest boy I know. For to-night he has performed a task the mention of which would have terrified most boys, and which, moreover, very many men would have shrunk from attempting. Yes, Tim, you're a hero, and I only wish I was lucky enough to have you for an assistant."

The Police Raid.

"That's better! Jove, your fire has put new life into me, sergeant!"

Carson Gray stood upright in a suit of rather ill-fitting tweeds. They were dry, however, and that was the main thing. Tim also was rigged out in another suit, and both of them, now that the chill feeling had been replaced by a warm glow, felt almost their old selves.

"You have wired to the police-station for a posse of men?" asked Carson Gray of the sergeant.

The river policeman nodded.

"Yes, sir," he answered. "They are going straight to the house. There is a cab waiting outside, so if you are ready——"

"Good!" said the detective. "We'll be going. Come along, Tim. I want to be there before the police if possible. Good-bye, sergeant! You'll see me again before long. I shall not forget how attentive you have been to-night."

Before the officer could answer Carson Gray had left the room, and, followed by Tim, stepped into the waiting four-wheeler. The driver was an ordinary plain-clothes constable, so there was no necessity to state the destination.

Gray thought it best to raid the house of Haverfield immediately, for there was a chance that the murderer was unconscious of his peril, that the men had not seen Tim in the sewer. This chance was a bare one, however, and the detective really relied on finding some clue or other on which he could work.

"Well, Tim, we haven't finished yet," he said, as the cab rattled along. "It is getting well into the small hours, and since I started out to-night many strange things have happened. By rights both you and I ought to be in bed. After that terrible journey down the sewer neither of us are fit for further work."

"It has to be done though, sir," said Tim. "I don't feel exactly in the pink myself, but I ain't dyin'!"

Tim was thinking of Haverfield and his connection with the Brotherhood. Now that Carson Gray had escaped, Haverfield would be—if not captured immediately—a fugitive from justice, a detected criminal. This being so, Tim reasoned, he could hide in one of the Brotherhood's retreats until the affair had blown over.

"'E knows 'oo it was 'oo tracked 'im down though," reflected Tim, "and 'oo gave 'im away to the coppers. An' 'e'll tell the Brother'ood. Then they'll 'old a meetin' an' decide to kill Mr. Gray. I know; they'll say 'e's too dangerous to live. I shall 'ave to tell the guv'nor immegitly I git 'ome, so's 'e can warn Mr. Gray, 'oo don't know nothin' about 'Averfield's connection with the Brother'ood."

The youngster was shrewd enough and guessed exactly how things would go. He didn't mean to tell Gray, however, anything about Haverfield—it was Kingston's place to do that.

The ride was not a long one, but the pair managed to clear things up a bit before they alighted. Gray wanted to know exactly how Tim had been at hand at the opportune moment.

"Well, you see, sir," replied Tim, "the guv'nor—Mr. Kingston—knew you was goin', an', knowin' as 'Averfield was a dangerous feller, sent me after yer, in case I was needed—so's I could warn yer if there was danger."

"I see, Tim. Mr. Kingston was very thoughtful."

"I follered yer to the house, an' see yer git in the winder. When that there chair got 'old of yer I was that surprised I couldn't do nothin'. Nex' minnit 'Averfield comes into the room an' starts talkin' to yer. Lummy, I did feel bad, sir! There didn't seem no way out."

"And you were outside the window all the time, looking on?" said Carson Gray. "You're a little wonder, Tim!"

"When 'e said 'e was goin' to bind you up an' send you down the sewer I said to myself as it was all up. I knew you'd be drowned in 'arf a mo', an' I couldn't do nothin'—leastways, I thought I couldn't. It was rainin'—pourin', sir—lot worse than it is now—an' it suddinly 'its me that these 'ere sewers 'ave man'oles in the middle o' the street. I was on like a shot, an' as soon as they'd carried you away I rushed out into the road an' dragged one o' them coverin's up."

"But did you not think of the risk? It was a terribly dangerous feat to attempt."

"I was that excited, sir, I couldn't think o' nothin' else but 'elpin' you. I dare say I should 'ave 'esitated if I'd stopped to consider. Any'ow, I'm jolly glad I didn't!"

"And so am I, Tim! And your bravery in risking your own life to save mine has made me your friend as long as I live. I have been in danger of my life many times, but never was I so close to death as to-night."

"But 'ow did yer git in the sewer, sir?" asked Tim.

"There is a trap-door in Haverfield's cellar—a large stone slab—which leads directly down into the sewer. The door opening into the tunnel is in the roof, and is composed of brick, like all the rest of the sewer. When it is closed its presence cannot be even suspected."

"I wonder 'ow many people 'ave bin killed like that, sir? Seein' as the water runs into the Thames, there can't be no clue as to 'ow the body got there."

"That is the terrible part of it, Tim," replied Carson Gray gravely. "Haverfield is a murderer of the worst kind. My only fear is that you were seen, and that the bird will have flown."

"We shall soon see, sir."

"Yes, my lad, for we alight here. The cab had better not enter the square. The police have evidently not yet arrived."

Carson Gray stepped out of the cab rather shakily, followed by Tim. The road they were in was absolutely deserted. The rain was still falling, but now in the form of a drizzle.

"It is time they were here," said the detective. "Every minute is of value now. I want to surround the house first, then demand admittance. If Haverfield is still there we shall have him absolutely trapped."

"Look there, sir!" said Tim suddenly. "That's them comin' now, ain't it?"

He pointed up the road to an ordinary-looking motor-omnibus which was rapidly approaching. The vehicle seemed entirely out of place there in that quiet road and at that time of night.

"Yes, Tim," answered Gray, "that is certainly the police. It is only a matter of minutes now before we enter Haverfield's house."

The motor-'bus pulled up with a jerk, and the policemen crowded off on to the pavement. Gray stepped forward with an exclamation of welcome, as he saw among the new arrivals Detective-inspector Richards, of Scotland Yard.

"Ah, Richards," he said, "I hardly expected to see you to-night! You happened to be in Chelsea, I suppose?"

"Yes, and was concerned when I heard of your narrow escape. According to what I hear, you were about as near death as a man could well be."

"The facts were not exaggerated," replied Carson Gray. "I will explain fully after this business is over. Personally, I think we shall draw blank, but it would be senseless to leave the matter to chance."

"I agree with you, Mr. Gray. And, even if Haverfield has flown, in the hurry to depart he may have left a clue. You can be sure the news of his flight will be flashed over the whole of England before daybreak. This case you are on is a big one."

"Yes, fairly. After the raid is over I have a few words to say to you, Richards, about my companion here. You may have heard that he is the person responsible for my presence here now?"

"Yes, I heard it, and was rather inclined to be sceptical," began Richards. "But come! I must see after my men!"

He moved away; and five minutes later, had anyone been in the square in which Haverfield's house was situated, they would have been considerably surprised to see numerous constables gliding along the dark pavements. But no one was there—no one besides the policemen, Carson Gray, and Tim.

"The boy had better remain in the road," whispered Detective-inspector Richards, as he and Gray stood at the gate, watching the men form a cordon round the house.

Carson Gray turned sharply.

"The boy," he said, "will remain with us. My assistant has proved himself to be smarter than myself over this particular case, and it would be rank injustice to leave him out at the finish. Tim wishes to come as much as anybody."

"Rather, sir!" agreed Tim.

"But the risk——" began Richards.

"The risk? Come, Richards, after what the boy has done to-night you surely ought not to talk of risk! His nerves are stronger than most men's, and his ingenuity far above the average."

"Very well, he may come; but I am not responsible if anything happens to him."

"I shall be all right, sir!" said Tim. "Mr. Gray won't

let me git 'urt. But look! The coppers are all round the 'ouse now. Suppose we go an' bash at the door?"

"I have charge of this matter," said the inspector, "and will give my orders when I think the time has arrived."

He moved off to one side and spoke in a low tone to one of the policemen.

Gray smiled, but said nothing. As a matter of fact, he was longing for the affair to be over and done with, so that he could hurry home to bed. The night's work had been the most strenuous he had ever experienced.

Haverfield's house was in perfect darkness, and the rain, falling faster again, hissed through the branches of the trees which surrounded the front garden. Nobody passing along the pavement would suspect the presence of the police, for just there the lamp-posts were few and far between.

"Everything is ready," whispered Richards. "We will go to the door and knock. I have my revolver in my hand, and shall be prepared for any emergency. It is quite possible the inmates—if there are any—are armed themselves. If that is the case, there may be a repetition of the Sidney Street affray."

Carson Gray smiled.

"Hardly as bad as that, Richards," he said. "Our men are not Anarchists, all said and done. I may be wrong—I sincerely hope I am—but I fear Haverfield has taken the opportunity and escaped. There has not been a single sign of movement from the house the whole time we have been here."

"That says nothing," said the inspector, stepping to the door. "They may be in bed, utterly unsuspecting."

He raised the knocker and gave a sharp double rat-tat. He stepped back, revolver in hand, and waited, motionless and without saying a word.

For a full two minutes nobody spoke. Then Richards gave the detective a glance.

"Try again," suggested Carson Gray.

Once more the knocker was brought down, this time with hammering force; and once more the inspector stepped back and waited. But no result was forthcoming. Either the house was empty, or the occupants did not mean to answer the summons.

"It is very evident," said Gray, "that Tim was seen in the sewer. The men gave the alarm, and Haverfield has either made his escape or is now in the house, like a caged tiger, waiting for the attack to commence."

"We must break the door down," said Richards decidedly. "This is no time for gentle measures. I think two or three of my men are capable of the task."

"Quite so! But would it not be easier to gain admittance by means of the French windows at the back?" suggested Carson Gray.

"No," replied the inspector. "Shutters have been placed in position everywhere, and the door will be easiest to break down—it is not a heavy one."

A minute later three stalwart constables stood before the door, ready for the word to charge.

Richards did not waste a moment.

"Now!" he said sharply. "For all you are worth."

With one accord the police officers threw themselves forward; with stunning force their shoulders met the door, and, with a splintering crash, the portal gave way before the rush and collapsed inwards, pitching the three constables face downwards into the hall.

At Great Portland Street.

"You were rather too precipitate!" exclaimed Carson Gray to the policemen as they scrambled to their feet. "No harm is done, however."

Inspector Richards stood perfectly still, motioning the others to follow his example. Not a sound could be heard save the dismal drip-drip of the water from the trees outside.

"The house is empty," said the detective suddenly. "As I imagined, the boy was seen as he grasped hold of me in the sewer. Haverfield thought flight the safest plan. But come,

"The police-boat!" gasped Carson Gray. "Call out—they will hear! Help! Help!" (See page 23.)

before we look round for traces we will search the house from roof to cellar."

"It is the best way," exclaimed the inspector, "for there is a possibility you are wrong. This is a very big affair, Mr. Gray, and I must congratulate you on your smartness in tracing the murder of Philip Whyte to Haverfield. To tell the truth, Scotland Yard is entirely on the wrong scent."

Carson Gray smiled.

"In my own opinion I have made a mess of the whole thing," he said. "I may have succeeded in tracing the crime to this house, but as to getting the criminal—well, he seems as far off as ever."

"Don't you believe it," declared Richards. "He won't go far, I'll warrant, before he finds the grip of the law on his shoulder."

A thorough search of the house proved Gray's surmise to be correct. In almost every room were traces of a hurried departure—cupboards with their contents on the floor, chests of drawers turned inside out, and everything, in fact, topsy-turvy.

In the study the disorder was greater than anywhere, and Carson Gray stood gazing for a moment at the innocent-looking chair. It was in position now, and to an ordinary

observer was merely a commonplace, leather-padded desk-chair.

"That article," he said thoughtfully, "was the cause of my undoing. I think I can honestly say I have never been more surprised in my career than when I found myself fixed in its merciless grip."

"It fair took my breath away, sir, when I see the light go up an' see you a-sittin' there unable to move an inch," put in Tim.

"The chair certainly appears to be straightforward enough," said the inspector, bending over it gingerly. "I presume it is set ready for action?"

"Very probably. I assure you, though," laughed Gray, "that I am not going to put it to the test personally. Would you like to try, Tim?"

The youngster grinned.

"Not me, Mr. Gray!" he answered. "I've seen all I wants to."

The inspector fetched a walking-stick from a corner, and gently pressed the end into the cushion seat. Nothing happened for a moment, then a click sounded, followed by a sharp snap, as the two arms flew upwards, while at the same moment the leg clamps sprang into position.

"Good gracious!" said Inspector Richards. "I can well imagine how impotent you felt, Mr. Gray. The chair is indeed a terrible weapon."

"You are helpless in a moment. It gives you no chance of escape. Poor Whyte was not so lucky as I," replied Carson Gray, patting Tim gently on the shoulder. "He had no rescuer."

"Without a doubt your assistant is worthy of the highest praise. He has the making of a splendid detective in him."

Tim's face glowed with pleasure as Richards uttered the words. The lad knew, of course, that his connection with Frank Kingston was unknown to the inspector, and he was suddenly struck by a thought If the news of this affair came out in the papers, his name was sure to be mentioned, and that was the last thing he desired.

"Will all this 'ere story come out in the evenin' papers to-morrer, sir?" he asked of the inspector.

"It is bound to, sonny."

"Well, you won't let me be mentioned, will you, sir?"

Richards stared.

"Won't let you be mentioned?" he repeated. "Why, good gracious, boy, what is the matter with you? Having performed such an heroic action, you want to get no credit?"

"No, sir. I don't want to be talked of everywhere as if I'd bin doin' things like a blessed 'ero. I'd rather be left out of it, sir."

"You will respect the lad's wishes?" asked Carson Gray, who had intended speaking to Richards on the same subject himself. "It would be best to say nothing about this chair, either. Just state the bare facts that Haverfield is proved to be the murderer of Philip Whyte, and that he has escaped and is at large. The Press would only distort the true story out of all recognition."

"Certainly, Mr. Gray, if you wish it!" replied the inspector. "This is your case, and perhaps it would be better for the public not to know too much. I will instruct my men to give no information to inquisitive reporters."

"Good! Now, I really think, Tim, that it is time we had some sleep. I have not finished here, by any means, but I am only a human being, and simply cannot go on without a little rest. I dare say you, Tim, are feeling shaky."

"Just a little, sir. That there water—ugh, wasn't it cold!—ain't made me feel no better, I can tell yer. You ain't goin' to stop 'ere no longer, then, sir?"

"No, Tim, we are going straight home. You will leave a man on duty here, Richards?"

"Yes," returned the inspector—"two men, as a matter of fact. I am going round now on a systematic examination, and hope to be rewarded for my pains by finding a very substantial clue."

"Then I wish you good luck," said Carson Gray, shaking the Scotland Yard man by the hand. "The cab outside is at my service, I presume?"

"Certainly, Mr. Gray!"

"Good! Come along, Tim, there's nothing to keep us here further."

The detective turned and left the room, Tim following close on his heels. In a moment or two they were sitting back in the cab. It was now early morning, and several people were collected outside the house, staring curiously at the building. The rain was falling just the same as before.

Gray lay back in the cab, feeling thoroughly tired-out and done up. The journey with Kingston to the Essex marshes, the death of Jacob Lowenwirth, and the conversation with Prince Malabari, all seemed to have happened days ago, instead of only a few hours—that same night.

Tim, too, was feeling decidedly off-colour. The long immersion in the icy-cold water had had its effect. In a story-book, perhaps, both Carson Gray and Tim would have felt no effect after getting into dry clothes. But in real life such things cannot be done with impunity.

So, although there was much to talk about, neither of them spoke hardly a word on the way to Great Portland Street. Arriving there, the detective showed Tim into a little bedroom, advised him to get between the sheets with all speed, and forthwith retired to his own room.

A very few minutes later both of them were fast asleep. It was not until ten-thirty that Carson Gray rose, had a quick, hot bath, and attired himself with his customary neatness. The sleep had done him a world of good, and now, indeed, he felt on his right legs again.

"Up you get, Tim!" he cried, entering his young visitor's room, and half pulling the bedclothes off. "I'm sure I don't know what your master would say if he knew you were in bed at this time of the morning."

Tim sat up and blinked.

"Time, sir?" he said, looking about him. "'Ow long 'ave you bin up?"

"You've got me there, Tim, I must confess," laughed the detective. "The time is nearly eleven, and London has been awake and about its business for hours."

Tim hopped out of bed on to the floor.

"Crumbs!" he said. "The guv'nor'd 'ave somethink to say if 'e knew! 'Leven o'clock! I'm up at 'arf-past six as a rule, sir!"

"Then this is the exception to it, Tim. We had a strenuous night, so our excuse is a good one. That's right, hurry up and get your things on! There's a hot breakfast waiting for us in the next room."

Tim grinned.

"I'll be there afore you if you ain't quick, sir," he said. "I dunno whether it was the swim last night or the excitement, but I'm as 'ungry as a 'unter."

"Splendid!" exclaimed Gray. "If you've got a good appetite, that's sufficient proof that your immersion last night hasn't given rise to ill effects."

"I dunno what you mean, sir, but I ain't ill," replied Tim. "I ain't never bin ill, not that I knows of."

After a good wash the lad appeared in the other room. His hair was plastered down to his head, still damp from the wash, while the glow on his honest little face clearly showed that he had quite recovered.

"When am I goin' back to the 'otel, sir?" he asked presently, his mouth just emptied of egg and bacon. "The boss—I mean Mr. Kingston—will be wonderin' what's become o' me. O' course, 'e never knew there'd be all that how-d'ye-do larst night. I shall 'ave to explain it all to 'im."

"That will not be necessary, Tim, for I mean to run round to the Cyril immediately breakfast is over. I will tell him everything from start to finish, and hear what he has to say on the matter. It ought not to be a very difficult task to find friend Haverfield."

"I bet it will be, sir," replied Tim sagely. "The cops—I mean Scotland Yard—won't never nab 'im without the 'elp of the guv'nor."

"You evidently have a deal of faith in your master, Tim."

"Faith, sir! Why Mr. Kingston's the wonderfullest man alive! There ain't nobody like 'im—nobody 'oo can do what 'e can!"

"You are quite right, Tim," said the great detective thoughtfully. "Mr. Kingston is a man alone—a being apart from the rest of us. Those years of exile on the Iron Island are responsible for his amazing powers. Upon my soul, but they have made more than a man of him!"

"Look 'ow 'e's doin' in the Brother'ood, sir!" whispered Tim, his voice full of admiration. "Look 'ow 'e saved me from the Night 'Awk, an' then blew 'er up! Why, the Brother'ood ain't got a chance; the councillors are droppin' out an' disappearin' like—like these 'ere eggs an' bacon are."

Carson Gray laughed.

"You are right again, Tim. The infamous organisation certainly has no chance; and it is equally impossible for them to discover their terrible assailant. I myself am taking a keen interest in the battle, and am wondering who will be the next Inner Councillor to fall."

"Yes, sir, I wonder 'oo it'll be?" said Tim, though he was practically certain in his own mind that William Haverfield was the man destined to follow Lowenwirth. Gray, however, knew nothing of Haverfield's connection with the Brotherhood, and it was not Tim's place to say a word.

Breakfast was over very shortly afterwards, and without loss of time Gray and Tim departed for the Hotel Cyril. It was noon when they arrived, and the detective walked straight up to Frank Kingston's suite of rooms. Fraser opened the door, and ushered the pair into Kingston's study.

The latter was lolling languidly in a huge easy-chair before the fire, with his feet resting on a pile of cushions. He nodded smilingly to his visitor.

"Ah, my dear Gray, delighted to see you!" he drawled. "Excuse my rudeness, but I find I am in such a really comfortable position that it would be a pity to move."

"Those words sound strange from your lips, Kingston," replied Carson Gray, shaking the well-manicured hand which was extended towards him.

"When I am thinking, Gray, I am quite a lazy person. I have been running over the many events which have happened since I left the Iron Island a few short months ago. Jove, but it seems years since I was on that desolate rock!"

"The amount of work you have done, and the objects you have achieved are truly remarkable," said the detective, seating himself. "But to get to the matter in hand——"

"Yes, Gray," interrupted Kingston. "I am sorry to see you have failed to bring off your coup. However, I shall be interested in your story if you will tell it me."

"I have not said that I have been unsuccessful."

"Not with your tongue. Your expression and manner, though, told me immediately that Mr. William Haverfield has eluded your attention. I am sorry for that, but tell me all about it. There are cigars in that box if you care to smoke."

"Thanks!"

Gray lit up, and thereupon told his companion of the night's adventures, bearing particularly on the splendid heroism of Tim Curtis. The lad sat on his chair thoroughly uncomfortable, for, as he muttered to himself, "'E 'ated all this blessed fuss made over nothink!"

When the detective had finished Frank Kingston rose to his feet without a word, and crossed over to Tim.

"Before another word is spoken," he said quietly, "I want to shake you by the hand, my boy. When I set you the task last night, I wanted you to acquit yourself well in case of need. It pleases me beyond measure to learn how well-placed my trust is. Young 'un, I'm right down proud of you!"

Tim blushed crimson as he felt his hand clasped in Kingston's powerful grip; but the blushes were those of pleasure and embarrassment. Those few words from Kingston were worth a priceless amount to Tim. And the lad could not help noticing that though Kingston had not risen to greet Carson Gray, he had disturbed himself now.

He did not seat himself again, but stood in his favourite position with back to the fire.

"So Haverfield succeeded in getting away," he said slowly. "That chair of his must be a terrible instrument. I wonder how many incautious people have been caught in its exceedingly affectionate arms? Do you know, Gray, I expected something serious would happen to you?"

"So you sent Tim after me in case of need? I thank Heaven you did, Kingston, for without him I should now have been dead. But why did you suspect? You know nothing of this man, Haverfield."

"On the contrary, my dear Gray, I know a very great deal about the gentleman. Although you are unaware of the fact, he happens to be No. 5 of the Inner Council——"

"Of the Brotherhood of Iron?"

"Precisely!"

A Curious Old Gentleman.

Carson Gray sprang to his feet.

"Haverfield an Inner Councillor?" he cried. "Are you serious, Kingston?"

"Decidedly so. What I have told you is the perfect truth. Perhaps you understand now why I sent Tim after you last night?"

"Yes. But you said nothing to me——"

"No, Gray, I said nothing to you, because I knew how pleased you would have been if successful in your venture. You have failed through no fault of your own—no man living could have suspected danger in that innocent-looking chair. Even had you known of the Brotherhood's connection with Haverfield you could not have been more cautious than you were."

"No," said Gray thoughtfully, "I suppose not. But let me think. Those men, of course, were common-members?"

"You mean the servants who carried you into the sewer?"

"Yes."

"They were undoubtedly common-members. And, I fear, Inspector Richards will be a little disappointed. It is quite certain he will never succeed in tracing Haverfield. The scoundrel is secure in one of the Brotherhood's hiding-places—probably at the Chief's house—and no amount of police methods will show him up. No, Gray, the task is left for you and I."

"How will you set to work to bring him to justice?"

"That I cannot say now. I shall have to wait and see how things go. For the present I advise you to disguise yourself here, go home, and remain indoors—feign illness if necessary."

Carson Gray looked surprised.

"But, Kingston," he said, "whatever for? You surely don't think the Brotherhood has intentions on my life?"

"I surely do. Haverfield will say at once that you are on his track—might possibly fabricate and say you know he is a member of the Brotherhood—and Mount-Fannell will instantly set machinery in motion to treat you to a quiet death. And let me tell you this, the machinery of the Brotherhood is not light and fragile; it is strong and powerful, and not easily checked."

Carson Gray sat in his chair for a moment silently puffing at his cigar.

"But it seems cowardly," he protested. "I don't like the idea of crawling into a hole and hiding away."

"My good chap, you'll not find it necessary to crawl into any hole," said Kingston calmly. "I am merely advising you to take precautions. I know what the Brotherhood is, and can assure you now that your life is in serious danger. A shot from an air-gun as you are walking along the street would not be very comfortable, neither would a quiet stab in the dark."

"Then, in tracking Haverfield down I have, unwittingly, run my head into a noose?"

"Yes, and I shall now make it my duty to remove that noose. All I ask you to do is to follow my advice. Surely you can trust in me, Gray?"

The great detective laughed shortly.

"Of course I can trust in you," he cried. "What do you say, Tim?" he added, turning to the lad who was sitting in a chair listening eagerly to the conversation.

"Why, Mr. Gray, there ain't nothing the guv'nor can't do!" cried the lad. "If you was on the gallows about to be 'ung, I believe 'e'd rescue you afore it was too late."

"I sincerely hope I shall never occupy the cheerful position you mention," laughed Gray. "But, to be serious, Kingston, you think I ought not to show myself in my own personality?"

"Not at present. As I said, Haverfield will tell everything, and, knowing you for the clever detective you are, will be a little nervous. Yes, your life is certainly in danger."

"What are you going to do as a first step?"

"Think, my dear fellow—think!" replied Kingston. "Before I commence I mean to have everything clear in my mind. And, while I am thinking, I shall send Fraser round to our friend Crawford——"

"The common-member who is in the Brotherhood, but who has turned traitor? The man who supplies you with valuable inside information?"

"That is right. He is a friend of Fraser's, and, as I have found from experience, a trustworthy man. He does not know my identity, but would go to any length to see the Brotherwood wiped out of existence."

"A handy fellow to know."

"Quite so. When the time comes he will find himself handsomely rewarded for his loyalty to me. Now, I really think there is nothing further to discuss. It is already well past twelve, so Fraser must be off. You, Tim, had better change into your page's clothes without delay. You have proved your worth, my lad, and in future you will find yourself called upon to assist me with considerable frequency."

Tim's eyes sparkled.

"Lummy, sir," he exclaimed, "I don't know what to say! I ain't good enough to——"

"If you are good enough to have saved Mr. Gray's life, then you are good enough for me," replied Kingston. "Now, run along, young 'un, there'll be work for you sooner than you expect, perhaps."

Tim dashed out of the door, hardly able to believe that he—a little, uneducated street-waif—was to help Frank Kingston in his great and noble work against the Brotherhood of Iron. Soon he was relating everything that had occurred to Fraser, who was almost as eager as himself.

In the study Kingston stood before the fire still talking to Gray. But the conversation only lasted a few minutes longer. Then the detective rapidly disguised himself as an elderly man, and departed.

Immediately he had gone Kingston left his room and crossed the corridor to Dolores. He had already seen her that morning, and had related the whole story concerning Jacob Lowenwirth, who was now settled with. Only an hour before Kingston had struck the Jew's name from his pocket-book.

"I am soon back," remarked Kingston, as he was shown into Dolores's presence. "Mr. Carson Gray has just paid me a visit, and he has, I regret to say, failed."

Kingston seated himself leisurely on the couch and looked at Dolores with that sleepy expression which he always wore when discussing the most urgent and vital matters. He had already informed his fair companion of Gray's visit to Chelsea.

"Let me hasten to add," he went on, "that the failure

was from no fault of his own. Indeed, I should probably have fallen into the trap myself. Mr. Gray owes his life to the splendid pluck and ingenuity of our little friend, Tim."

"Tim?" repeated Dolores. "Has he been distinguishing himself, then?"

"He has been doing wonders. I will tell you all about it."

Kingston did, and when he had done Dolores sat for a moment thoughtfully looking at the pattern on the carpet. Then she raised her eyes to the level of Kingston's.

"Mr. Gray is in great danger," she said, "for, since Haverfield knows the detective is on his track, he will probably give instructions to have him killed."

"That is what I am afraid of, Dolores," replied Kingston. "That is why I have advised Gray to remain indoors. Naturally he does not like the idea."

"What will be your first step? From what I can understand, Mr. Gray will never be able to show himself in public again."

"Oh, no Dolores, it is not so bad as all that! When I have settled with Haverfield, I shall set to work to prove to the Brotherhood that Gray's detection of the councillor was a mere chance—that he really knew nothing of the Brotherhood at all—which is all perfectly true. After that the Council will almost certainly agree to let Gray live."

"That is quite a good idea," smiled Dolores; "but really, I see no possible way in which you can convince the Brotherhood. How can you even lay the facts before them?"

Kingston lay back on the couch and closed his eyes.

"There are many ways," he drawled—"very many ways. Which particular one to adopt I have not yet decided. You may rest assured, however, that I shall, in some manner, make Carson Gray's life safe from interference from the Brotherhood of Iron. The first step to take is to learn what passes at the next meeting of the Council. There is bound to be one very soon."

"Again, Mr. Kingston, I cannot see how you will do it—unless, of course, you again hypnotise a member and make him repeat everything to you afterwards."

"That would be risky, as well as difficult. Let me see, the time is just a quarter-past one," exclaimed Frank Kingston, glancing at the watch on Dolores' wrist—it mattered not to him that its dial was upside down and so tiny that from where he was sitting an ordinary man would only have seen a blur—"I shall send Fraser round to Crawford instantly. The latter can easily get to know if there is a Council meeting imminent. I, myself, will partake of luncheon and then run round to Great Portland Street."

Ten minutes later Fraser had started on his errand and Kingston had descended to the restaurant and was partaking of luncheon. A plan was already forming in his head, but two things which were to happen that afternoon would alter matters considerably.

Kingston started out for Carson Gray's address, but never got there. The reason was simple, and will now be explained. For a change he elected to travel by motor bus, and it was while crossing Piccadilly Circus that the incident occurred which altered his plans.

The traffic happened to be very congested at the moment, and the roads were covered with thick grease. The vehicle Kingston was on—he sat outside—was travelling slowly across the Circus when a sudden shout went up. In a second Kingston saw what was the matter.

Directly below him, in the muddy roadway, which on that side was clear, an old man with white beard was lying at full length, struggling to rise to his feet. He had slipped as he dashed across the road.

But the cause of the cry was the sight of a motor-omnibus which was speeding rapidly towards him from the opposite direction to that which Kingston was travelling. It was clear to everybody that if the driver applied his brakes a terrible skid would be the result; and the old gentleman in the road found it impossible to spring to his feet like a young man could have done.

In one second Kingston realised that unless something was done the old fellow would undoubtedly be run over. Before the other passengers on the 'bus could realise what had happened he sprang to his feet, threw his legs over the side of the 'bus, and disappeared from view, having leapt to the ground as if the distance had been a mere foot or two.

He alighted without the least jar, picked up the elderly gentleman in his arms like a baby, and dashed to one side. Although taking much space to describe, the incident from start to finish occupied no more than five seconds.

The driver of the oncoming 'bus had applied his brakes when Kingston landed, and the massive vehicle slewed round bodily as the wheels were gripped. Unable to stop, it collided, with a splintering crash, into the very 'bus Kingston had been travelling on. Without a single doubt the unfortunate old gentleman would have been killed, had not Kingston acted in the nick of time.

To him it was nothing—the leap to the ground he took as a matter of course, and now stood on the pavement steadying the rescued man, who was shaking from head to foot with the shock. A crowd was gathering with the usual rapidity, and the two motor-'buses were soon surrounded. They were both much damaged, though the passengers had escaped with a severe shaking.

"It's all right, constable," said Kingston to the policeman, who was rapidly approaching him; "the old gentleman is merely suffering from shock. Your services would be more useful, I imagine, over the road."

He nodded to the scene of the smash, and bent over his charge once more, taking no heed of the staring and ordinary crowd.

"Love us, sir, I never see anything like it!" exclaimed the policeman. "The way you 'opped off that there 'bus——"

Kingston tapped the constable's arm.

"You see that taxi-cab over there?"

"Yes, sir."

"Go and fetch it, will you? I think I had better see the old gentleman home; he's a little too shaky to go alone."

"Very good, sir."

The officer forced his way through the crowd, and very soon the taxi drew up against the kerb where Kingston was standing, one arm supporting his charge. He wanted to get away from that crowd without delay.

"Here you are, my man," he said, handing the constable half-a-crown. "I haven't time to waste here; you can settle the matter as to whose fault the smash was among yourselves. It was nothing to do with me, so I will go."

Without waiting for a reply, he assisted the old man into the cab, and clambered in after him, the constable unable to find a reason for detaining them.

"Where to, sir?" asked the chauffeur.

"Anywhere," replied Kingston, "for the present."

In another moment the cab started, and the crowd gazed after it in wonderment, for most of them had seen Kingston's wonderful leap. Inside the taxi Kingston was congratulating himself.

"I managed to get away nicely," he told himself. "It would have been serious if my name came out in the papers in connection with the affair. Jove, but it was a near shave for both of us!"

He looked at his companion.

"Do you feel any better now, sir?" he asked, as the other coughed slightly and raised his head. So far, he hadn't uttered a word.

"Yes, I'm better now, thank you! Good gracious! I thought for a moment I was to be killed! But no; my time has not yet come. Before I die I have other great discoveries to make, to leave behind me, to be marvelled at after I am dead and gone."

Kingston was a little surprised. The old man spoke in a low, gruff, and powerful voice. From the size of his frame, the voice sounded inappropriate. His words, too, were not what might have been expected. It seemed that he was either a scientist or a harmless lunatic.

(To be continued.)

Printed and published weekly by the Proprietors, 23, Bouverie Street, London, England. Agents for Australia: Gordon & Gotch, Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide, Brisbane, and Wellington, N.Z; South Africa: The Central News Agency, Ltd., Cape Town and Johannesburg; Canada: The Imperial News Co., Ltd., Toronto. Subscription, 7s. per annum. Saturday, February 25th, 1911.