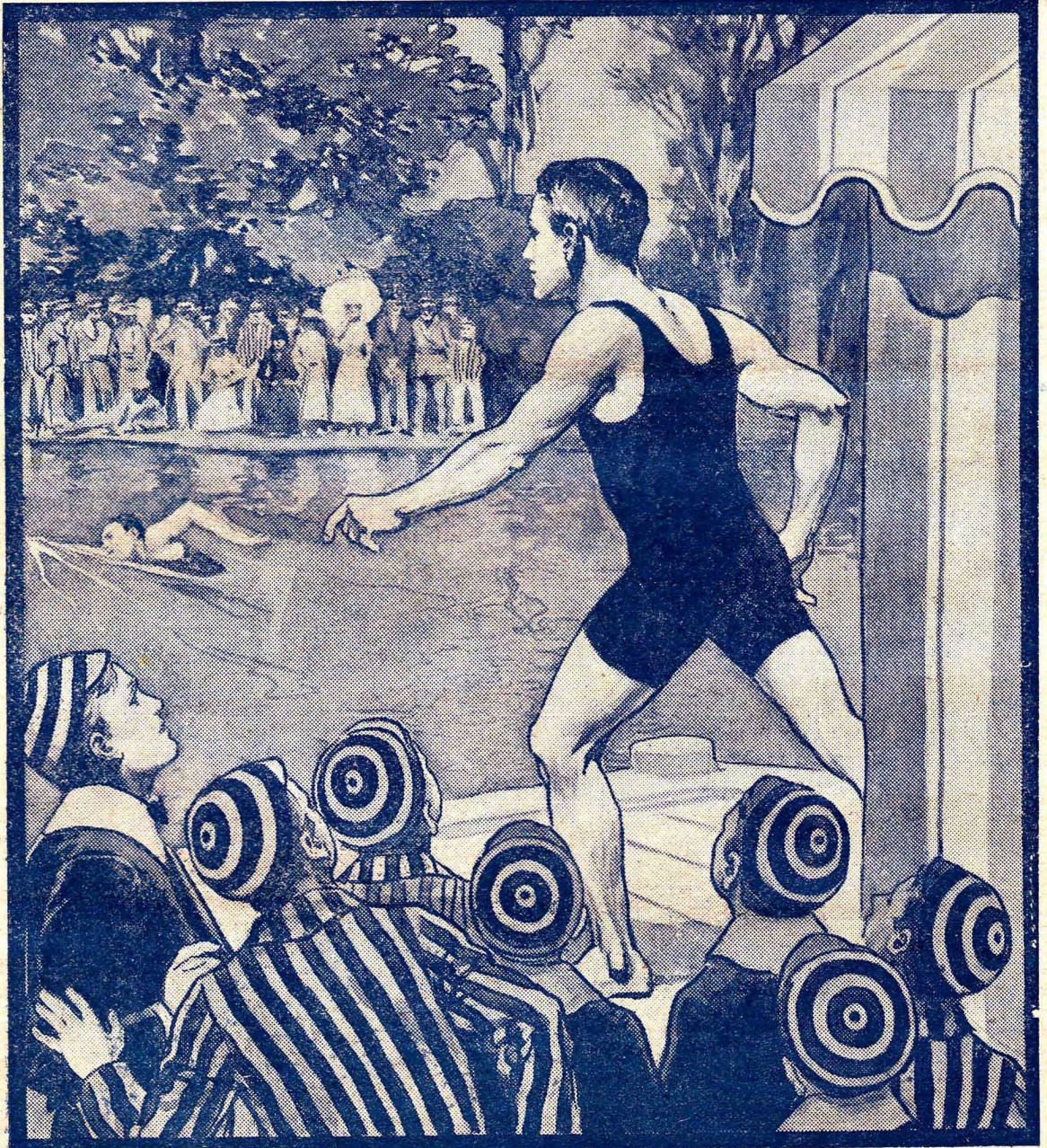
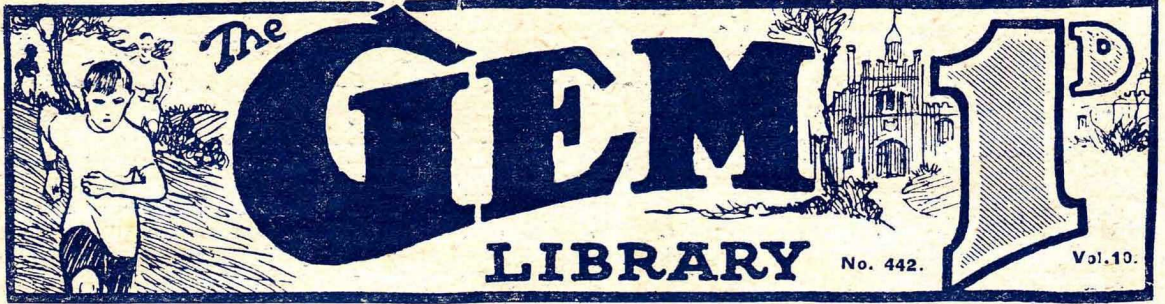


THE SCHOOLBOY REPORTER!

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.



REDFERN'S REMARKABLE REAPPEARANCE!

(A Dramatic Scene in the Magnificent Long, Complete School Tale in this issue.)



THIS WEEK'S CHAT



Whom to Write to — — — — —
EDITOR "THE GEM" LIBRARY.
 THE FLEETWAY HOUSE, FARRINGDON ST. LONDON. E.C.
 OUR · · THREE · · COMPANION · · PAPERS!
 "THE MAGNET" THE "PENNY CHUCKLES."
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 EVERY MONDAY | EVERY FRIDAY. | EVERY SATURDAY.

For Next Wednesday :

"GRUNDY THE DETECTIVE!"

By Martin Clifford.

The fine story which appears next week displays our old friend, the great George Alfred Grundy, in a new role. His failures have not disheartened him. Indeed, he is not aware that he has ever had a failure. To him his exploits as cricketer, footballer, hypnotist, ventriloquist, or in any other line, seen through the haze of self-conceit, appear great. And now he takes up the detective business with the same complete assurance that in his hands it cannot fail to be a success. The camera which Manners prizes so much disappears, and Grundy, taking on the part of Sherlock Holmes, is confident that he can find it by a process of deduction. Nothing more screamingly funny than Grundy on the deductive track could well be imagined. He blunders in the true Grundy fashion; his clues are absurd. Yet, in the end, he actually does find the culprit; and, though St. Jim's at large, and even the loyal Wilkins and Gunn, may scoff, George Alfred himself is absolutely satisfied with the success of

"GRUNDY THE DETECTIVE!"

OUR MEN AT THE FRONT.

Now and then I get rather an impatient letter from a reader who, having sent back numbers and letters to some soldier asking for them through our notices, has received not a line by way of reply. "He might have said 'Thank you!' anyway," they say—or words to that effect.

I don't think they would write in this strain if they only realised the dangers and difficulties of our men. The man thought ungrateful may be dead, or lying near to death, in some hospital. Peril is a part of his trade. A little incident lately told in a reader's letter will serve to illustrate this.

"Not long ago," she writes, "I saw a notice on one of your Chat pages from a soldier who wanted back numbers and letters from readers. He was in a hospital at the time. I wrote to him, and sent him a parcel of papers. The other day our dog, who acts as our indoor postman, trotted in with a long envelope in her mouth. It was marked 'O.H.M.S.' and addressed to me, and I could not think what was inside it. But when I opened it, I found my own letter, muddled, and marked across with the Postal Authorities' blue pencil. It had been to Cairo, and had gone on from there to Alexandria, then to another base hospital; but it had never found the man it was meant for. I suppose the papers I sent are 'somewhere in Egypt'; I hope someone enjoyed them. But I should like to know what became of the poor fellow they were sent to."

SOME OPINIONS OF THE COMPANION PAPERS.

"My boy is thirteen," writes a Wakefield father, "and I only allow him to read the companion papers. In fact, I do not think that he wants to read any other; he is perfectly satisfied. I only wish the GEM and 'Magnet' had been on sale when I was a boy! I am sure they are the finest of all papers a boy can read."

From that large address, "B.E.F., France," comes this: "I think the GEM is really great. Give me a copy of it, and a cigarette, and the Huns may send over as many souvenirs as they like. I'm not worrying till I stop one of them, and it's likely enough that I sha'n't know enough about it to worry much then!"

From Tasmania: "I have been away for quite a long time in a place where it was impossible to get your papers at all. Now I am back again to civilisation, and, my word, it's just great to have them!"

NOTICES.

Leagues, Correspondence, Etc.

Miss Murielle Chapman, 45, Stallard Street, Trowbridge, would like to correspond with a girl reader aged 18-20.

E. Westwick, 51, Roxburgh Terrace, Whitley Bay, Northumberland, wants to correspond with a boy reader of his own age (15) interested in stamp-collecting.

Miss Alma Harris, Kenwyn, George Street, Albury, N.S.W., Australia, would be glad if some girl reader in the U.K. would correspond with her, and exchange picture postcards.

Gunner Walter Green, 22, Bell Road, Norwich, would like to correspond with a boy reader or two.

John Whiteside, 7, High Cross Row, Seaton Burn, Dudley, R.S.O., Northumberland, would like to hear from any reader in Canada or West Australia interested in coal-mining or farming, or both.

Albert Fletcher, Parkgate, Rotherham, wishes to thank heartily the reader at Ryde who sent him a back number he specially wanted.

H. Cooper, 53, Fleet Street, Leicester, wants to start a Correspondence Club. He is particularly anxious to hear from colonial readers who would like to join.

Cricket and Football.

Adelaide Ramblers C.C. (average age 16) want matches within a six-mile radius of Southall. Hon. Sec.: A. Victor Moss, 15, St. John's Road, Southall.

Fitzroy F.C. (ground, Boston Manor; average age 17) want home and away matches for next season. Hon. Sec.: P. A. Jone, 16, Meek Street, Chelsea, S.W.

St. Mary's C.C. (average age 14-15) want matches with other clubs in their district. Hon. Sec.: H. Akers, 34, Morley Road, Lewisham, S.E.

Back Numbers, &c., Wanted.

(Will readers please note that the requests from soldiers and sailors are naturally for free copies? As regards the others, it may be assumed that the reader whose name and address is given intends payment, unless there is any indication to the contrary.)

By H. Binderman, 149, High Street, Shoreditch, London, E.—"One of the Best."

By Driver W. J. Davies, 1435, E. Sub. Sec., 47th Battery, 4C Reserve Brigade, R.F.A., Weedon, Northants—Some reader to send him "Gem" and "Magnet" each week.

By Sergeant Follett, 19013, C Coy., 13th (S.) Batt., Welsh Regt., B.E.F., France—Back numbers of Companion Papers.

By J. Bobbitt, 144, Walpole Street, Peterborough—"Figgins' Fig-Pudding."

By Private H. Apperley, 1994, 14th Platoon, D Coy., 1/8th Westchestershire Regt., B.E.F., France—Back numbers of Companion Papers.

By Horatio Coley, 3, Park Villas, Park Road, East Finchley, N.—"Gem" and "Magnet" Nos. 200-360. Please state price.

By S. Rolinson, 20, Charlwood Street, S.W.—"The Boy Without a Name," "Captain D'Arcy," and "Figgins' Folly." Will give double price.

By B. J. Stoner, 3, Rugby Terrace, West Worthing—"Caught Red-Handed." Offers 2d.

Alfred Coutts, 74, Wingrove Gardens, Newcastle-on-Tyne, wants to buy "Figgins' Fig-Pudding," and other back numbers of the "Gem," "Ashamed of His Father," and No. 194 of the "Magnet," and "Through Thick and Thin."

By Corporal A. Goad, Recruiting Office, Kirkwall, Orkney—Back numbers of the "Gem" (earlier than 427) to send to his chums in the trenches, whence he has himself lately returned.

By A. Adderley, 60, Bedford Street, Crewe—"Figgins' Folly," "Figgins' Fig-Pudding," "Bob Cherry's Barring-Out," and numbers 50 to 75 of the "Magnet."

By Driver Foster, 1840, 1/3 S.M.B., R.F.A., 3rd Section, D.A.C., 48th Division, B.E.F., France—Back numbers of the "Gem."

Your Editor

PUBLISHED IN TOWN
AND COUNTRY EVERY
WEDNESDAY MORNING



COMPLETE STORIES
FOR ALL, AND EVERY
STORY A GEM!

THE SCHOOLBOY REPORTER!

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's.

By **MARTIN CLIFFORD.**



Redfern entered the inner office, turning down the collar of his macintosh as he did so. He glanced round, and just as he was taking stock of the inky-fingered printer's devil, the editor's rasping voice roused him from his musings. "Who are you, hey?" (See Chapter 5.)

CHAPTER 1.

What's the Matter with Reddy?

COMING down to cricket?" Fatty Wynn, the Falstaff of the New House at St. Jim's, put his beaming face in at the doorway of Redfern's study and asked that familiar question. Behind him came Figgins and Kerr, garbed in immaculate flannels, and looking at peace with all the world.

Redfern's reply was everything that brevity and directness could desire.

"Blow the cricket!" he said.

Fatty Wynn almost fell down.

"What! You don't mean to say you're fed-up with cricket already, when we haven't long started the season?"

Redfern grunted.

"I don't always want to be chasing a ball about," he said. "Go and get on with your marbles, or hopscotch, or whatever it is, and give a chap a bit of peace!"

Next Wednesday,

"GRUNDY THE DETECTIVE!" AND "CORNSTALK BOB!"

Figgins forced his lanky frame past Fatty Wynn into the study.

"What's up, Reddy?" he asked solicitously. "Somebody been stroking you the wrong way?"

"Rats!"

"Had bad news from home?" suggested Kerr.

"More rats!"

"Monteith been on the warpath?" asked Fatty Wynn.

"No, hang you!"

The New House trio paused, irresolute, and exchanged glances. Dick Redfern was usually as sunny as the day, and the very mention of cricket sent a thrill through his youthful veins. But other and sterner matters were preying on his mind now; that was certain.

"Look here!" said Figgins abruptly, after one of those uncomfortable pauses when no one knows exactly what to say or how to say it. "Are you aware that we're playing the School House to-morrow, you chump?"

"Go on!" said Redfern absently. "Now I come to think of it, I heard Lawrence and Owen jawing about it in the quad after dinner. But what's it got to do with me?"

"Everything!" almost shrieked Figgins. "It's up to us to lick Tom Merry & Co. into a cocked hat, and how the merry dickens are we going to do that if you slack in the study, and don't put in an ounce of practice?"

Redfern rose and stretched himself.

"I s'pose I must humour you," he said.

"You'd better!" said Figgins grimly. "As skipper of the team, I'm not going to stand slacking at any price! Come on down to the nets!"

Redfern hesitated a moment. Perhaps he resented having to obey at Figgys' beck and call. But the hesitation was only temporary, and he donned his blazer and buckskin boots, and strolled out with the others into the summer sunshine.

The conditions were ideal for cricket, and Figgins felt in fine form as he made imaginary strokes in the air with his "willow king," and took up his stand at the wicket.

"Care to bowl?" asked Fatty Wynn generously, offering Redfern a ball.

"Go and eat coke!"

Fatty Wynn snorted, and prepared to bowl himself.

Figgins had quite an enjoyable quarter of an hour. It was not often that Fatty Wynn was nonplussed, and unable to break through his defence, but such was the case on this occasion. The ball went speeding to all parts of the field, and it was not until Kerr brought off a magnificent catch that the batsman retired.

"Come on, Reddy!" said Figgins, a little more amiable after his good fortune. "Stop mooning about like a lost lamb, and show us what you're made of!"

Redfern had been absorbed in a deep reverie, from which he was aroused by the sound of Figgins' voice.

"What's that?" he muttered. "I'm to have the next whack? Right-ho! Sling the giddy bat over!"

It was not difficult to see, after he had been at the wicket two minutes, that there was something radically wrong with Redfern. When in form he was a stylish, forceful bat, with a delightful habit of relieving the monotony of the game by lifting the ball clean out of the ground when it pitched a little short.

On this occasion, however, Reddy's display would have disgraced a fag of the Second. He mistimed every ball, and Fatty Wynn spreadeagled his stumps thrice in quick succession.

"I might as well chuck it!" said the batsman gloomily. "It's more like a game of cocoanut-shies than anything else."

Figgins flared up again.

"You'll stick there till you do something worth doing!" he growled. "Bowl up, Fatty!"

The Terrible Three of the Shell, together with Jack Blake and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the luminous lights of the Fourth, came strolling towards the scene. They glanced curiously at Redfern, who was giving a most inglorious exhibition.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Gussy, adjusting his celebrated monocle, and stopping short, with an expression of amazed incredulity on his aristocratic face. "Is that weally Wedfern batten', deah boys, or a cheap imitation of him?"

"He's putting up a putrid show, anyway!" remarked Tom Merry. "Look at that!"

A lob from Owen had trickled gently past Reddy's bat and cannoned into his wicket, with just sufficient force to dislodge the bails.

"My hat!" said Monty Lowther. "Let's hope he gives us a ditto repeato of this in the House match to-morrow. If all the New House crowd are as rotten as Redfern we shall have a proper walk-over!"

The exasperation of George Figgins was perceptibly THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 442.

increased when he saw that the School House fellows had a clear view of Redfern's ignominious display. The New House leader strode up to the batsman, and flourished his fist in his face.

"I don't want to have to wipe up the ground with you," he said, "but I jolly soon will if you don't stop playing the giddy ox!"

"You don't like my batting?" inquired Redfern.

"What do you call it?" retorted Figgins, with crushing sarcasm. "You're bowled five times out of six, and when you do hit the blessed ball, which is only once in a blue moon, you don't exercise the strength of a mouse!"

"I'll try and remedy that defect," was Redfern's answer.

And then a most startling thing occurred. It took place with such unexpected suddenness that the onlookers fairly gasped. Fatty Wynn sent down a ball, and it happened to pitch short. With a look of grim amusement on his face, Redfern leapt out at it and swung his bat through the air with fiendish joy.

The next moment there was a terrible smashing sound, as of Zeppelin bombs dropping on cucumber-frames. The sphere had whizzed with deadly velocity towards the main building, to travel with a crash and a clatter clean through the window of Mr. Ratcliff's study!

"Bai Jove!" gasped Gussy.

"Reddy, you madman!" roared Jack Blake. "What have you done?"

The juniors gazed up in awe at the ragged hole in Mr. Ratcliff's window-pane. They were awed, not only by thoughts of what Mr. Ratcliff might say and do, but by the wonderful muscular power which had enabled Redfern to slog the ball such an enormous distance.

Fatty Wynn was almost weeping with vexation. The champion bowler among the St. Jim's juniors, he felt the situation most acutely. Never before had one of his deliveries been dealt with in such a merciless manner.

Everybody waited breathlessly for the sequel to Redfern's Jessianian hit. It was not long in coming.

Mr. Horace Ratcliff, the sour, ill-tempered disciplinarian who was responsible for keeping law and order in the New House, had been checking some exam. papers in his study when the calamity occurred. He had taken advantage also of the opportunity to load and light his favourite French briar, it being one of the Head's rules that masters should not smoke in the presence of the boys.

Mr. Ratcliff was sending up some perfect smoke-rings, and making a mental note to punish Redfern for the inaccuracy of his Latin paper, when the cricket-ball crashed through on its soaring flight, and, colliding violently with Mr. Ratcliff's pipe, sent it whirling into the fireplace, leaving the master choking and spluttering like a demented being.

Mr. Ratcliff was not a slow-witted man, and it did not take him long to put two and two together. He caught up his cane and rushed out of the study, his gown flapping in undignified fashion behind him.

The cricket had come to a temporary standstill, and Redfern was resting on his bat-handle when the irate master rushed up.

"Redfern!"

"Sir?"

"Were you responsible for the recent act of hooliganism which has been perpetrated?"

"I don't understand you, sir," said Redfern coolly.

Mr. Ratcliff danced about like a cat on hot bricks.

"Did you or did you not smash the window of my study a moment ago?"

"Now I come to think of it, I heard a bit of a shindy," confessed Redfern. "It was quite an accident, sir."

"Yes, rather, sir!" seconded Figgins.

"Silence, Figgins! You are not called upon to champion this wretched boy in his wanton criminality! Hold out your hand, Redfern! I am about to thrash you most severely!"

Redfern looked rebellious.

"I've already told you it was an accident, sir," he said. "Fellows ought not to be caned for accidents."

"Do you presume to show me in which direction my duty lies?" thundered the angry Housemaster. "Do as I tell you at once!"

"I won't!"

The words flashed defiantly from Redfern's lips.

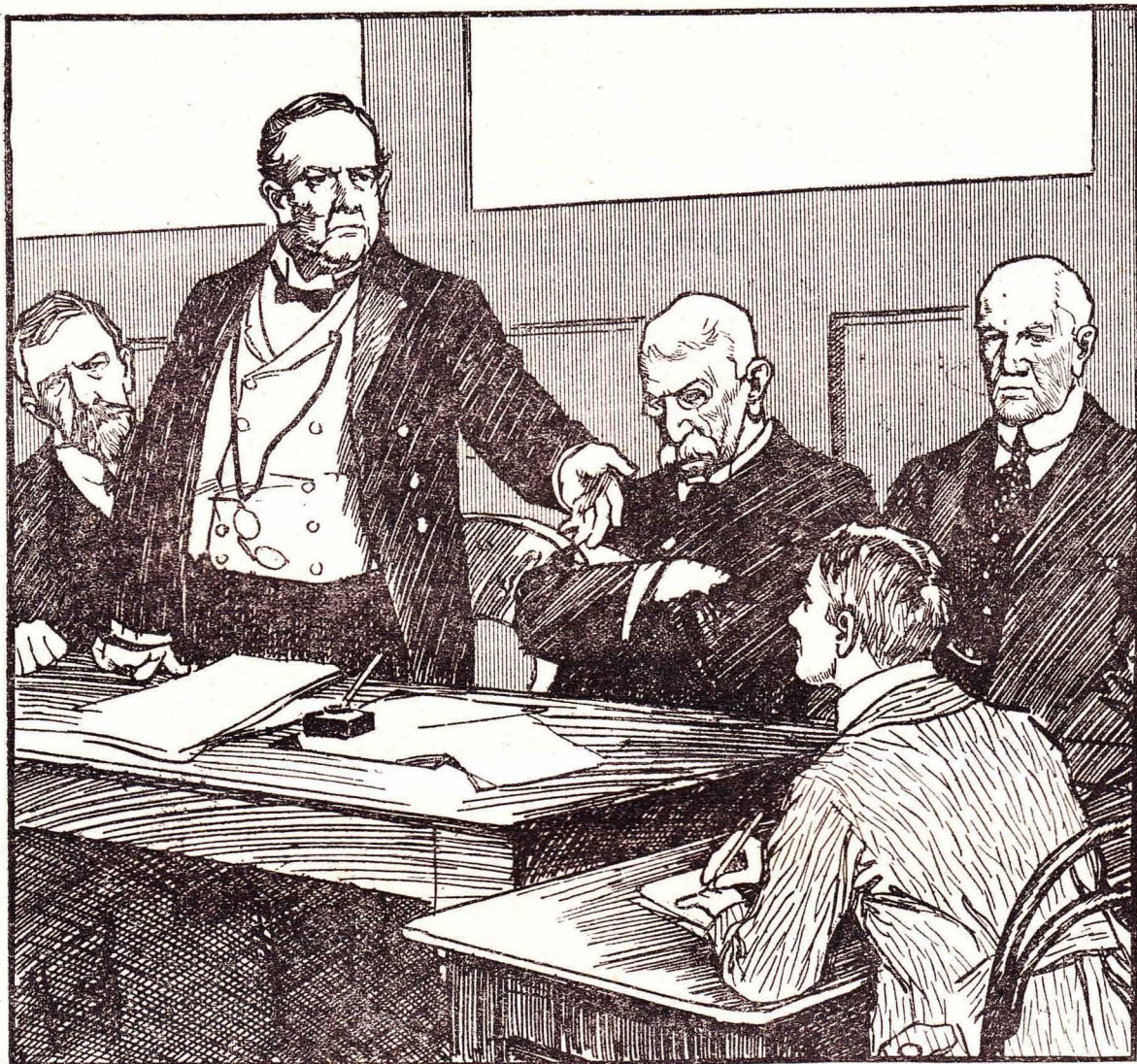
"Bwavo, deah boy!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy involuntarily.

Mr. Ratcliff spun round like a flash upon the swell of St. Jim's.

"Take a thousand lines, D'Arcy, for aiding and abetting this incorrigible rascal!" he snapped.

"Oh, cwumbs!"

Then, without waiting to ask Redfern to hold out his hand a second time, Mr. Ratcliff proceeded to pile in with his cane. It lashed upon the junior's back and shoulders till



"There!" thundered the mayor, apparently addressing his colleagues. "There is a young man without an armlet, who looks eminently suitable for the Army! Why are you not in khaki, reporter? Have you evaded the Military Service Act?" "Nunno!" stammered Redfern, in great alarm. (See Chapter 11.)

Reddy, though he had pluck in plenty, was obliged to execute a sort of war-dance on the turf.

Swish, swish, swish!

"Yarooooooop!"

Redfern dodged and ducked as the stinging weapon swept down upon him with unrelenting vigour.

"Shame!" murmured half a dozen voices.

Mr. Ratcliff gave a jump.

"Who said that?" he rapped out.

"I did, sir!" said Tom Merry indignantly.

"Same here!" said Manners and Lowther and Blake together, and Figgins and Kerr chimed in.

"Take five hundred lines, each of you!" panted Mr. Ratcliff. And then he turned his attention to Redfern once more.

Never before had Reddy experienced such a terrific castigation. He was almost dazed with pain when Mr. Ratcliff finally desisted.

"There!" gasped the obnoxious Housemaster. "I trust that will be a lesson to you, Redfern! A recurrence of your impertinence and defiance, and I shall administer a severer dose! You will remain under detention from one to three o'clock to-morrow afternoon!"

"But the House match is to be played to-morrow, sir—" began Figgins.

"Hold your tongue!" barked Mr. Ratcliff. "It is high time these childish indulgencies, such as cricket, were abolished. Redfern will do as I tell him, or things will go hard with him!"

And with this Parthian shot Mr. Ratcliff turned on his heel and rustled away, to give instructions to Taggles concerning the repairing of his study window.

CHAPTER 2.

Deadly Rivals!

LIKE Christmastide, the great cricket match between School House and New House came but once a year, and it was always viewed by the fellows in both Houses as an event of terrific importance.

Figgins & Co., as they changed into their flannels after dinner next day, looked decidedly glum. Redfern, one of their mightiest men, was grinding out Latin verbs within the confines of the Form-room, and, with Mr. Ratcliff's hawk-like eye upon him the whole time, escape was a sheer impossibility.

Nothing remained, therefore, but to go through the game until three o'clock without Redfern. Tom Merry had agreed to let Figgins field a substitute—a suggestion which the New House skipper declined with thanks. It was to be a case of Redfern or nobody.

"The chap must be demented!" said Kerr. "Fancy cheeking old Ratty like that on the eve of an important match! He might have known what he was up against!"

"I can't understand Reddy at all these days," observed Lawrence. "He's no longer the bright, beaming infant we used to know. Owen and I are supposed to be no end chummy

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"GRUNDY THE DETECTIVE!"

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with him, yet he hasn't spoken a word to us for a dog's age. There's trouble of some sort weighing on his mind, that's certain."

Figgins nodded.

"We must jog along as best we can till three o'clock," he said. "It's a single-innings match, and if only we can win the toss and send the School House in to bat first Reddy will get his innings all right."

"That's so!" said Fatty Wynn. "I say, has anyone got a chunk of toffee about him? I can bowl tons better with something sweet and sticky in my mouth."

Koumi Rao, the Indian junior, tossed over a huge packet of butterscotch.

"Here's to a good game!" said Tom Merry when the rival teams met in front of the pavilion. "Call to this, Figgy!"

"Tails!" said Figgins.

"Tails it is! You'll go in first, of course?"

"Do you see any green in my eye?" grinned Figgins. "I'm likely to bat first with only ten men—I don't think!"

"But you'll only have ten in the field, so it cuts both ways!"

"Redfern's a jolly sight more valuable with a bat than he is in the slips," said Figgins. "Send your first two victims to the slaughter!"

Tom Merry opened the School House innings with Talbot, who had already made his mark in the St. Jim's world of cricket. Fatty Wynn and Koumi Rao, both excellent bowlers, were responsible for the New House attack.

Tom Merry got off the mark in great style. Leaping out of his crease, he sent Fatty Wynn's first ball soaring to the boundary.

"Huwway! Well hit, bai Jove!" shrieked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who was sitting by the side of Marie Rivers, the school nurse. "Stick it, Tom Mewwy! Keep the flag flyin' deah boy!"

The School House batsmen warmed to their work. 10 went up on the scoring-board, then 20, and then 30, and Fatty Wynn was sweating like a bull.

"I can't shift 'em, Figgy!" he muttered helplessly. "P'raps after I've had a rest and another chunk of butterscotch my hand will get back its lost cunning."

Figgins grunted and took the ball himself.

The change had the desired effect, as such changes often do. Tom Merry mistimed Figgy's first ball, which was a clever break from leg; and Jack Blake took his captain's place.

Blake didn't stay long. He mastered the bowling of Figgins all right, but Koumi Rao always had him in difficulties, and when he had scraped together 6 he was sent back to the pavilion, with his middle stump lying flat—the handiwork of the Indian junior.

"Well bowled, Imp of Darkness!" said Figgins genially. "Keep it up, there's a sport!"

Koumi Rao grinned, showing a row of pearly-white teeth. Praise from such a hardened veteran as George Figgins was praise indeed.

Monty Lowther followed in. His was a short innings and a gay one. He slopped the Indian youth's first ball into the long-field, and ran 4; the second missed his off stump by the merest fraction of an inch; and the third promptly put paid to his account, making a fearful mess of the Shell fellow's wicket.

"This is stunning!" said Fatty Wynn, his plump face distorted by a huge chunk of butterscotch. "We shall have 'em all out under the 100 now if we're lucky!"

But Talbot was still going strong. Changes in the bowling had no effect whatever on his sound and solid display. Fast balls and slow balls, volleys and full tosses, all came alike to him; and although batsmen came and went at the other end, Talbot's defence remained impregnable.

Fatty Wynn relieved Figgins after a time, and the tail of the School House wagged but feebly. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy contributed a big round 0, and the side was eventually dismissed for 90.

It was half-past two, and in half an hour Redfern would be released from his enforced detention. Figgins & Co. were in high spirits. They did not doubt their ability to hold the fort until the junior came.

"Now, then, New House!" came in a mighty roar from the assembled crowd, as Figgins and Kerr sauntered forth to the wickets. "Keep your end up, you fellows!"

That was easier said than done. Talbot opened the attack, and his bowling was almost as good as his batting, which is saying a great deal. He whizzed the ball down, and Kerr's leg-stump looped the loop in mid-air.

"Hurrah!"

"Well played, School House!"

"Good old Talbot!"

Lawrence followed on, and got to work in brisk fashion, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 442.

lifting Talbot's next ball clean over the railings—a feat which was loudly applauded.

Steadily rose the score, and twenty runs were registered in a quarter of an hour. Then Lawrence retired, a victim to a l.b.w. decision.

Pratt, who took up the running, stayed long enough to get into double figures, and Tom Merry spread-eagled his stumps precisely as three chimed out from the old clock tower.

Then the eyes of the New House supporters were gladdened to see Dick Redfern come running towards the ground, with his blazer tucked under his arm.

"Good man!" said Owen. "Tom Merry & Co. made ninety, and we're forty-five for three, which isn't at all bad. Well played, Pratt, old fellow! Now, then, Reddy, it's up to you to do great things!"

Redfern said nothing. He seemed to be thinking of other things—a very bad omen indeed in an important cricket-match, when a player's sole attention should be riveted upon the game.

A cheer greeted Reddy as he strode out to the wicket. Usually his face would flush up at such an ovation, but he scarcely seemed to notice it now.

Figgins saw the far-away look in his schoolfellow's eyes, and called to him to buck up, in peremptory tones.

The command had a similar effect to that of the day before, when Redfern had smashed Mr. Ratcliff's study window. He pulled Tom Merry's first ball, and the batsmen ran four, amid the delighted shouts of the New House contingent.

After this, Redfern was like a man possessed. He ran out at anything and everything, and smote like a second Samson. The score rose up by leaps and bounds, and seventy went up on the board when Figgins was caught by Monty Lowther in the long-field.

Figgy's had been a glorious innings. He had made twenty-eight—quite a respectable score for the captain of any side, especially when opposed to bowling like Talbot's and Tom Merry's.

The School House pulled themselves together for a last desperate effort. The tide of battle was going against them, and they didn't like it at all. Talbot's pace became faster and fiercer, and a lot more ginger showed itself in Tom Merry's attack. The fielding, too, bucked up all round.

In these circumstances, it was not surprising that the next four New House batsmen should fail. None of them was an exceptionally brilliant player, and Figgins & Co. were still fifteen runs behind when the last man but one came in.

The new-comer was Owen, one of the best cover-points at St. Jim's, but no great shakes as a batsman. He stayed with Redfern long enough for them to take the score to eighty-five, and was then clean bowled by a hot volley from Talbot.

The excitement was at fever-heat when Fatty Wynn, the final batsman of the New House, and the hope of his side, went in to take Owen's place.

"Play up, Fatty!"

"Put it across 'em, porpoise!"

Fortunately for the New House, Fatty Wynn never suffered from nerves. Time was when he had played in a professional match before a gigantic multitude without turning a hair. He realised how much depended upon him on this occasion, but did not allow himself to be unduly worried.

Five to tie—six to win! With Redfern batting like a demon, and Fatty Wynn firm as a rock, things looked extremely rosy for the New House, who would have shouted to the housetops a victory over the redoubtable Tom Merry & Co.

Talbot sent down the very best ball he knew how. Fatty Wynn was quite ready for it, and cut it cleverly to point.

"Come on!" shouted Redfern; and he pelted down the pitch.

"No, no! Go back!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn, in a frenzy, as he saw Harry Noble whip up the ball with the alacrity for which he was famous in the field.

But Redfern, heedless of the danger which threatened, rushed on. The next instant Noble whizzed the ball in with unerring aim, and Redfern's stumps lay scattered.

The School House had won by five runs!

CHAPTER 3.

A Battle Royal.

FIGGINS & CO. took their defeat badly. They were good enough sportsmen, as a rule, and could be relied upon to bear up with good-humoured composure against the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.

But on this occasion they were righteously angry. Just when a sporting chance had presented itself of pulling the game out of the fire, Redfern had failed, utterly and completely.

TUCK HAMPERS ARE GIVEN AWAY TO READERS OF THE "BOYS' FRIEND," 1^D.

No excuse could have been found for him, even if his comrades desired to find any, which they didn't. Redfern had let his side down in attempting a run which even Grundy would have seen was sheerly impossible.

Fatty Wynn was almost weeping as he came off the field. The Falstaff of the New House had entertained great hopes for his side, especially as Redfern's display had been faultless up to the time of his bad blunder.

The colour mounted to Reddy's face. He surveyed his ruined wicket with an almost comical expression, and wended his way towards the pavilion like a fellow in a dream.

Figgins intercepted him at the pavilion steps.

"You dummy!" he roared. "You prize maniac! What sort of a game d'you think you've been playing? A chap who was as blind as a bat could have seen that there wasn't an earthly chance of making a run there! It couldn't very well be worse if you'd been bribed to sell the match!"

Redfern might have been expected to leap into fury at this, but he didn't. Instead, he became quite penitent.

"I'm sorry," he said meekly.

"Sorry!" snorted Figgins. "I should just think you were! You played like a Trojan for goodness knows how long, and then you go and chuck the match away like that! You might just as well have got clean bowled first go off! It's sickening!"

"Putrid!" said Kerr. "We must hold some sort of a court-martial over this. Redfern sha'n't get off scot-free."

Tom Merry & Co. were in high feather as they trooped off the field. Indeed, their elation seemed to be carried a little too far.

"What price the School House now?" chortled Tom Merry, as he passed Figgins & Co., who were standing together in a group.

"And what price Noble's throw-in?" grinned Monty Lowther. "I consider it was very noble of Noble."

"Oh, dry up!" growled Figgins. "Your potty puns set a chap's teeth on edge. The New House would have won hands down if it hadn't been for this—this burbling jabber-wock!"

Figgins seemed on the verge of choking as he indicated Redfern.

"Rats!" said Manners. "The New House is out of the running, so far as cricket's concerned, at any rate. You were duffers, you are duffers, and you're likely to remain duffers till the end of the chapter. Hopscotch, now, or marbles—"

The taunt stung Figgins into action. He clenched his hands hard, and squared up to Manners.

"You think you're funny, don't you?" he shouted. "Why, everybody knows that the New House knocks your confounded Home for Incourables into a cocked hat! Keep your rat-trap closed, or you'll have it closed with my fist!"

Figgins did not usually wax so warlike, but he was feeling angry and exasperated owing to the recent defeat of his House, and was certainly not in the mood to turn the other cheek.

"Bah!" said Manners contemptuously. "I tell you the School House is top-dog all along the line! As for your prize lunatics—"

Smack!

Figgins kept his word. His hand came with a sharp report over the speaker's mouth, and Manners staggered back with a gasp of pain.

That blow, though not a severe one, was sufficient to rouse the fighting blood of the School House fellows. It was the signal for a general commencement of hostilities.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, his eyes gleaming with wrath. "I wefuse to see my fwiend Mannahs knocked about in that bwital mannah! You will now have to deal with me, Figgins! Put up your hands, you feahful wottah!"

The next moment a wild and whirling battle was in progress. Flannelled figures rushed hither and thither, and chaos and confusion reigned supreme. There had been much bad blood between the rival Houses of late, and it found vent now in a dramatic overflow.

The air was full of shrill battle-cries. The crowd who had been watching the match, seeing what was afoot, were swift to join in, save Mellish, Croke, and a few more who valued their skins, and had no notion of House loyalty.

Free-fights on such a gigantic scale were few and far between at St. Jim's. Moreover, the malcontents were waging war in full view of any masters or prefects who happened to be glancing from the windows of their studies.

But nobody cared. There was some safety in numbers, and with this reflection the juniors consoled themselves as they dashed into the fray.

The School House rapidly began to assert their superiority. They were numerically superior, and had more stomach for

the fight than their opponents, who were sickened by the recent licking dealt out to them on the field of play.

The Terrible Three were here, there, and everywhere, doing great execution. Figgins floored Arthur Augustus D'Arcy with a smashing, straight left, but paid the penalty the next instant, Manners sending him sprawling with a jolt on the jaw.

"Hooray!" roared Monty Lowther, in ecstatic tones.

"Rally round the banner, boys! Give 'em socks!"

"Rather!"

"School House for ever!"

Some of the participants began to show obvious signs of wear and tear. The claret was streaming from Kerr's nose, and Fatty Wynn was the nucleus of a struggling, animated mass on the ground. It was as though a bun-fight were in progress, with Fatty as the bun.

"Yow-ow-ow! Gerroff me chest!" gasped the Falstaff of the New House. "You—you're killing me!"

"Ain't pigs meant to be killed?" grinned Grundy of the Shell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

So fierce was the fighting, and so terrific the din, that it was not surprising that the sounds of strife penetrated to Kildare's study in the Sixth-Form passage.

The captain of St. Jim's sprang to his feet, caught up an ashplant from the table, and rushed to the window.

He was staggered by the scene which met his gaze. Accustomed as he was to the school rules being set at defiance, Kildare had scarcely expected to see the cricket-field converted into a bear-garden, with scores of fellows heaving, shoving, and trampling. The sight struck him as having a distinct resemblance to a Rugger scrum on a gigantic scale.

Kildare hastened along the passage, and looked in at the door of the senior Common-room. Darrel and Rushden, with Monteith and Langton, were there, talking cricket.

"Lend a hand—quick!" said the captain of St. Jim's. "Can't you hear that confounded din going on—like Bedlam let loose?"

The seniors listened, heard the sounds of distant warfare, and looked questioningly at Kildare.

"It's a scrap," said the latter, "and a pretty hefty one at that. We must get it under control at once, or there'll be the dickens to pay. If the Head were to see the young hooligans—"

Kildare shivered at the bare idea. He dashed out of the Common-room, and his four colleagues were not long in joining him. They rushed on to the cricket-pitch, and expostulated with the clamorous, surging mob.

But they might just as well have requested a brick wall to take unto itself wings and fly. Their voices were lost in the uproar, which was as terrific as the booming of breakers on the beach.

"Into them!" panted Kildare.

Swish, swish, swish!

Five ashplants started operations at the same time. They lashed round dozens of legs, inflicting many casualties. Panic-stricken, the fighters dispersed, many of them stampeding into the building as if for their lives. The five seniors were left, red of face, scant of breath, but indisputably masters of the situation.

"Good!" gasped Kildare, mopping his heated brow. "I'm inclined to think there won't be any more scrapping to-day!"

And he was right.

CHAPTER 4.

Not Lost, but Gone Before.

THE fight was over, and Figgins & Co. felt decidedly sore. With wolfish eyes they hunted for Redfern, who seemed to have disappeared. Reddy, they argued, was at the bottom of the whole sorry business. He had lost the match for his side, and had been the cause of the terrific melee, which had ended disastrously for his Housemates—with the result that those Housemates meant to have his blood.

But though they searched far and wide, and ransacked every likely place, there was not a sign or a shadow of Redfern to be seen.

The avengers scoured the entire New House, and drew blank. They went to the tuckshop, and Dame Taggles had not set eyes on the missing junior all the afternoon. They visited the gym, the library, the Common-room, but picked up no clue as to the whereabouts of their intended victim. Redfern had vanished as mysteriously and completely as if the earth had opened and swallowed him up.

"Where can the bounder have got to?" growled Figgins. "I'm simply longing to scalp him! He's responsible for the whole rotten business, from beginning to end! If he hadn't checked Ratty yesterday he wouldn't have been kept in, and

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 442.

the match would have gone swimmingly. I wonder where the merry dickens he's sloped off to?"

"He fears the wrath to come, I expect!" grinned Lawrence. "It's not exactly an enticing prospect, to fall into the hands of a score of fellows who are thirsting for one's gore!"

"But it's not like Reddy to skulk away and not face the music," said Owen, who was beginning to feel gravely concerned. "Where can the silly ass have stowed himself away?"

"Blow Redfern!" grunted Fatty Wynn. "Let's have tea! I've never felt so beastly famished in my life!"

The party dispersed, and went their several ways. Redfern's absence puzzled them, for, as Owen had said, Reddy was not the sort of fellow to funk an ordeal, however painful it might be. Why he should suddenly disappear off the face of the earth, as it were, was a fair poser.

Thinking that he might possibly have gone into Rylcombe, the juniors decided not to renew the search immediately after tea, but to wait until locking-up time. They questioned each of the prefects, but not one of them had given the junior a pass out of gates, which clearly indicated that, if he were not in the school building, he must have set the law at defiance and broken bounds.

Locking-up time arrived, but not Redfern. Presently the juniors were shepherded up to bed by Monteith.

"Has Redfern come in yet?" asked the prefect grimly.

"No, Monteith."

"Does anybody know where he is likely to be?"

"We haven't the remotest idea," said Figgins. "He never breathed a word to anybody!"

"Has he been unhappy or down in the dumps these last few days?"

"Well, he hasn't been very chirpy," said Owen. "I'm his chum, but he hasn't shown himself at all friendly. What makes you ask?"

Monteith compressed his lips.

"If he's been feeling fed-up," he said, "the facts are obvious. He's run away!"

"What!"

"Reddy run away!" gasped Lawrence. "Rats! He'd be the very last fellow to do that!"

"I'm not so sure," said Monteith. "You share his study, Lawrence?"

"I do."

"Have you been there at all this evening?"

"No; Owen and I have been in the Common-room."

"Then go along and see if his cap is missing."

Lawrence sprinted away down the passage, the rest of the juniors waiting breathlessly on the staircase.

Five full minutes elapsed before Lawrence returned. When he came he was looking dazed and stupefied. In his hand he held a note.

"Well?" said Monteith.

"You—you're right, after all!" said Lawrence, with a queer gulp, for he was deeply attached to the blithe, easy-going Redfern. "Look here! He left this note on the mantelpiece for me!"

Lawrence handed the missive to Monteith. It was very vague, and gave no clue as to the runaway's whereabouts, or his intended destination:

"Dear Lawrence,—I leave St. Jim's to-night, never to return. I should like to be able to tell you where I'm going and what I propose doing, but it's absolutely necessary that I should take no risks. To be brought back to the school in disgrace would be more than I could bear.

"I was jolly happy at St. Jim's, and you and Owen were the best chums a fellow ever had; but I felt that I was wasting my time grinding out Latin verbs under Ratty's eagle eye, and have gone to follow out an occupation very dear to my heart.

"I know you'll take this smiling, and not distress yourselves. There is bound to be another fellow in the New House who will worthily take the place of

"Your Old Chum,

"R. H. REDFERN."

"My hat!" gasped Monteith.

He stared at the letter, and read it through again, as if to assure himself that it wasn't a practical joke on the writer's part. That Redfern would suddenly sever the knot of school life by running away was a contingency he had not thought possible, even though he had suggested it to the juniors. And what was the occupation Redfern spoke of following? It was most unusual for a fellow of fifteen to think of following any occupation, save one of eating and drinking, and banging balls to the boundary. The whole thing passed Monteith's comprehension, and it was some time before he spoke again.

"Redfern's run away," he said at length, addressing the

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 442.

inquiring crowd. "The silly ass can't have got far, and we'll soon rout him out."

"May we form a search-party?" asked Figgins at once.

"It won't be necessary. If there's any searching to be done, the prefects will carry it out. Get along to bed now, you kids. I'm going to inform Mr. Ratcliff what's happened."

The New House juniors retired to their dormitory in a state of seething excitement. All their animosity against Redfern had vanished now. They thought of him tramping the lonely country lanes under the burden of his belongings.

It was a wild night. A storm had arisen, terrific in its intensity and fierceness. Was Redfern out in it, buffeted by the angry wind, and soaked by the sheets of rain which descended in a pitiless cascade from the heavens? If he was, then it was extremely doubtful if he would reach his destination, wherever it was, in a state to secure employment.

"It's a rummy business altogether," said Figgins, as he sat on his bed and kicked off his boots. "What sort of a craze has taken hold of poor old Reddy?"

"P'raps he's gone on the stage, like Lowther did once," suggested Pratt.

"Or the cinema may have fascinated him," said somebody.

"I should have thought Lowther's wretched experience would have made him fight shy of that," said Fatty Wynn.

"Still, there's no accounting for chaps' actions when they get like that. Let's hope the silly ass will come to his senses before the morning. I'm off to sleep!"

And Fatty Wynn suited the action to the word. The dormitory reverberated with his snores a few moments later.

But the rest of the fellows got no sleep until long after the midnight chimes had tolled from the old clock-tower. They were thinking of their absent schoolfellow, and how he was faring amid the furious elements.

And over and over again they asked themselves, in their minds:

"What had become of Redfern?"

CHAPTER 5.

Reddy's Resolve.

AND what of Dick Redfern? Why had he so suddenly and unaccountably run away from the school in which he had cut so prominent a figure?

Redfern was certainly suffering from a craze. He had been suffering from it for weeks past, in fact; but it was not stage-fever, neither a desire to elope with some high-born maiden, as Monty Lowther humorously put it, when news of the missing junior reached the School House.

Reddy's craze was an altogether unusual one, but it was just as eager, just as absorbing, as Monty Lowther's passionate desire to thump the piano at the cinema, or dance before the footlights. To put it plainly, and without further preamble, Redfern had determined to become a shorthand reporter on the staff of the county paper, if that were at all possible.

His knowledge of shorthand, like Sam Weller's knowledge of London, was extensive and peculiar. He had swoited up Pitman's Teacher, and made a big inroad into the reporting style. Then, in order to gain confidence in himself, he had taken down the Head's sermon, or Colonel Lyndon's lecture on the war. By this means he was swiftly able to master speed, and at last the day came when he deemed it prudent to take the plunge.

It may seem a queer sort of craze for a fellow to become obsessed with—to exchange the cricket-field and the swimming-bath for the multitudinous duties which fall to the lot of the "penny-a-liner," as those heroic souls are called who struggle to eke out an existence on provincial papers.

But Redfern had weighed everything in the balance. It was not as if he would actually have to bid good-bye to the cricket-field and swimming-bath. He would be there often—not participating in games and races, but reporting them for the county Press, and the thought sent a thrill through Redfern's heart. He had the reporting craze badly.

With all the fervour and imagination of a fellow of fifteen, he built day-dreams, and looked into the future with a maximum of hope. He saw himself enjoying a Bohemian existence in comfortable lodgings, speeding round Sussex on a bike attending police-courts, inquests, military tribunals, cricket-matches, glove-fights, town council meetings, and the like. Many would have regarded such a life as one of drudgery, but not so Redfern. He was a lover of excitement, and realised that between the vigorous, varying life of a journalist, and the sordid existence of the tame and timorous city clerk there was a great gulf fixed.

It was a wrench to part from his chums, who had been loyal and true to him ever since—as a humble scholarship boy—he had come to St. Jim's.



"Redfern, what are you doing here?" exclaimed Marie Rivers, the charming young nurse who held sway in the school sanatorium. (See Chapter 5.)

But to tell those chums what he purposed doing would have been fatal. They would have rounded furiously upon him, called him a prize idiot, and restrained him by force from putting his plans into effect.

Therefore, Redfern had to act without taking anyone into his counsel. By the time the cricket-match against the School House came along the craze had bitten him very badly indeed, and he determined to shake the dust of St. Jim's from his feet at the earliest opportunity.

That opportunity presented itself whilst the free fight was in progress. He would not wait for dusk, but would pack his belongings—or such as he could conveniently carry—and leave the school premises by way of the Head's garden.

It was a glorious afternoon, and most of the fellows were either on the cricket-field, or improving the shining hour by gliding in canoes or punts over the sparkling waters of the Ryll. It was as though Fate had purposely granted him this opportunity of breaking away from his old associations, and beginning life afresh under novel and exciting conditions.

Redfern sped away to his study whilst the rival Houses were disputing, with straight lefts and smashing right-handers, which was top dog. He packed his things into a bag, and indited the epistle which Lawrence ultimately discovered on the mantelpiece. Then, with something like a sigh, he took a last survey of the cosy little apartment which had harboured him so long; and, feeling in his pocket, satisfied himself that

he had a couple of sovereigns wherewith to make a start in the matter of lodgings.

Perhaps for a moment he felt just a little doubtful about his projected enterprise. Redfern had a conscience, a strong sense of right and wrong. Was it altogether playing the game, he reflected, to renounce his old chums in so summary a manner, and leave them without any clue as to where he was going, sowing the seeds of anxiety in their hearts?

Then the other side of the question appealed to him, and with far greater force. If he stayed at St. Jim's he would not be able to fight down the craze which had taken deep root in him. He would be an eyesore to his House, a mere passenger in sports, for how could he put his whole heart and soul into games when his thoughts were continually roving elsewhere?

"It's no go!" he muttered. "I simply can't stop! I should like to have said good-bye to Lawrence and Owen, but it would only mean that they'd sit on my chest until I swore I wouldn't desert 'em. No! I've said I'd go, and I'm going!"

Luckily, the corridors were deserted. The sight of a junior with a bag would most certainly have aroused suspicion. The renegade caught sight of Mr. Ratcliff stalking in the quad, and waited until the coast was clear before pursuing his flight.

At length, with a breath of relief, he entered the Head's garden. Henceforward, all would be plain sailing. He was

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY

"GRUNDY THE DETECTIVE!"

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of
Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

beyond the view of boys and masters, and there was little likelihood of anyone accosting him now.

But stay! As he passed between the rows of apple-trees, which were beginning to blossom forth in all their glory, there came the sudden rustle of a skirt, and a surprised girlish voice exclaimed:

"Redfern, what are you doing here?"

The speaker was Marie Rivers, the charming young nurse who held sway in the school sanatorium.

CHAPTER 6.

The Girl who Knew Him.

"MISS MARIE!"

Redfern stopped short in the garden-path. His heart was thumping wildly. The girl's presence caused him to give a guilty start, and the colour mounted to his face.

"Miss Marie!" he repeated feebly.

"What are you doing here?" asked Marie Rivers again, though there was no suspicion of resentment or anger in her tone. "Juniors are not allowed in the Head's garden, you know!"

"I—I—" stuttered Redfern.

"And you are carrying a bag," added the girl, raising her eyebrows. "What does that mean?"

Redfern did not answer. His tongue seemed to cleave to the roof of his mouth.

Marie Rivers divined in an instant that all was not as it should be. A junior who had been granted permission to go home to his people usually shouldered his bag or portmanteau, and left the school in the orthodox way; he did not surreptitiously steal through the Head's private garden.

"Will you not answer me?" said Marie. "I do not wish to be inquisitive, but feel anxious about you. It seems that something is wrong for you to be leaving the school in this way. Have you got into trouble with Dr. Holmes?"

"No, Miss Marie."

"Have you done something—something wicked—which has caused you to run away?"

Redfern laughed, in spite of himself.

"Not so bad as that," he said.

"Then what is it? Do tell me!"

Marie Rivers took more than a passing interest in Dick Redfern. She had her favourites among the St. Jim's juniors, and Redfern, in company with Talbot and Tom Merry, took pride of place. She wished Redfern well, and felt deeply concerned about him.

"Look here, Miss Marie," said the junior desperately. "if I tell you what the little game is, will you promise to keep it a deep, dark secret?"

Marie nodded.

"You may rely upon me not to tell a soul," she said. "But—but I do hope it's nothing serious!"

She drew him into the summer-house. It was risky for him to remain in the pathway.

"It's like this," said Redfern, lowering his voice. "For some time now I've been longing to get a junior reporter's job on the county paper."

Marie Rivers gave a start.

"The 'Sussex Chronicle'?" she queried.

"Yes."

"And you are running away from St. Jim's to put your foolish project into effect?"

Redfern felt rather nettled. To his mind, it was a very sound and sensible project, and he didn't see where the word "foolish" applied at all.

"All my ambitions are centred on getting the job," he explained. "If I wait till I've finished my time at St. Jim's I shall be too late. At present, owing to the war, they are jolly short-handed, and it'll be as easy as falling off a form for me to get the post."

"Has it actually been offered you?"

"N-no. But that'll be quite all right."

Marie looked as if it would be quite all wrong.

"I'm not so sure," she said uneasily. "If you will pardon my saying so, I know the world better than you, and am only too well aware of the pitfalls which boys frequently fall into. I entreat you, for your own sake, and for the sake of all who entertain a regard for you, to do nothing rash!"

She gave the junior such an appealing look that he was tempted for a brief instant to abandon the prospect and make an effort to settle down once more in his normal sphere of life.

But his passion for the pen was too powerful to be warded off. Redfern had rosy dreams of the future—dreams of success following success in his journalistic career. Why, he might, a couple of years hence, aspire to a position on one of the big London dailies! The whole thing was so entrancing and enticing that he could not for the life of him bring himself to give it up.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 442.

"There's no risk, Miss Marie," he said, a trifle impatiently. "Girls always magnify things, and put obstacles in the way. Without any wish to blow my own trumpet, I'm hot stuff at shorthand, and have got a pretty good notion of how to write up cricket-matches and meetings and all the rest of it. It's no good asking me to stop here. I wouldn't go on grinding out verbs and mugging mathematics—not for a pension!"

Marie Rivers looked greatly distressed.

"Don't you think," she said softly, "that it's rather cowardly to run away like this?"

Redfern coloured.

"I—I suppose it is. But I daren't tell any of the other fellows what my plans are—not even my closest chums. They'd keep me back by sheer force if necessary."

"Where are you going to live?" asked Marie. "Your home is in Hampshire—Southsea, is it not? Surely you are not going backwards and forwards every day?"

"Of course not. I shall go into digs at Wayland."

"But some of the masters might see you."

"I shall have to adopt some sort of disguise, that's all. A false moustache, and a touching-up with some grease-paints, ought to do the trick. Besides, the risk of being spotted will add to the excitement."

"I don't like it at all," said Marie Rivers frankly. "The whole idea seems to be too wild and woolly. If you had actually been engaged by the 'Sussex Chronicle' it would be different. But do you seriously think they will give employment so readily to a boy of fifteen with no previous experience?"

"They'll have to," said Redfern resolutely. "I'll keep on worrying them till they do."

"Then it's no use my appealing to you to stay?"

"Not a bit, Miss Marie. I'm sorry; but my mind's made up, and I wouldn't go back on my plans for anything."

Marie Rivers put out a slim, white hand, which Redfern took as if it were a piece of delicate Dresden china.

"Good-bye!" said the girl softly.

"Good-bye, Miss Marie! And you—you'll keep mum, won't you?"

"I shall not tell a soul. But I hope you will think better of it before you have gone very far, and come back to St. Jim's. Look at the sky! There's going to be a dreadful storm presently, I feel certain."

Redfern laughed lightly.

"I don't funk storms," he said.

"Have you sufficient money to tide you over for a time? If not, I can—"

Redfern cut the girl short.

"That's all right," he said. "I've got a couple of quid."

"That won't see you far."

"It'll last me a week easily. And I shall be drawing my first week's wages soon."

Marie shook her head rather doubtfully. She stood at the entrance to the summer-house and watched the junior disappearing down the fragrant path with his bag.

Redfern had taken the plunge now with a vengeance. St. Jim's, with its numerous and happy associations, was left behind; and the world was at his feet, for him to conquer. At least, that was how it seemed to him. Possibly he would, in the course of events, experience a rude awakening.

CHAPTER 7.

In the Teeth of the Storm.

REDFERN was obliged to walk to Wayland by a devious route, in order to avoid detection. He was still in Etons, and saw no prospect of getting out of them until he had saved sufficient money to buy a new suit.

As to his wages, he hadn't the faintest notion how much he would receive. He had heard that provincial reporters were poorly paid, depending for their existence mainly on the paragraphs and articles they transmitted to the big London papers. Besides, his youth told heavily against him, and it did not seem likely that he would be given more than a pound a week for a start, excluding his expenses, which he presumed the proprietors of the "Sussex Chronicle" would meet.

Overhead, the clouds loomed black and ominous, and presently the rain began to descend—slowly at first, then with a steady patter which gave no sign of ceasing.

Redfern had taken to the fields, and there was no available shelter so far as the eye could see. He put on his mackintosh, and buttoned it around his neck. Then, setting his lips tightly together, he trudged on, the tropical deluge beating right into his face.

"This is rotten!" he growled. "Marie was quite right. I didn't expect a blessed deluge like this, though!"

Dusk fell rapidly, and as it fell so the wind rose, bending

giant trees in its angry vehemence, and militating considerably against the runaway's progress.

It was a storm without parallel in the memory of even the oldest inhabitant. Redfern began to fear lest one of the trees should be uprooted in his vicinity and strike him down.

But he plodded on resolutely, groping his way with difficulty in the darkness. Luckily, he had a good idea of his whereabouts, or he might easily have been stranded.

He peered at the watch he wore on his wrist and saw that it was eight o'clock. He wondered vaguely if he would find anyone at the "Sussex Chronicle" office. It was Wednesday night, the evening on which the paper went to press, and he was pretty sanguine that the editor or one of his assistants would be in harness.

Neither the wind nor the rain abated. Everything for miles around was at the mercy of the storm.

At last, after what seemed an eternity, the lights of Wayland came in sight. They were not very luminous, being screened to comply with the Government regulations, but they twinkled a friendly welcome to the wanderer, all the same.

Redfern shook himself like a drenched terrier. Despite his mackintosh, the rain had soaked through, rendering him like a limp rag. But with an effort he kept smiling, and be thought himself of the future, bright with hope and radiant with speculation.

Redfern had little to fear now, and he walked boldly through the darkened streets. Turning into the High Street, he stopped before a neat little building, which he recognised at once as being the place where the "Sussex Chronicle" was printed and published.

He entered the inner office, turning down the collar of his mackintosh as he did so.

A singular sight met his gaze.

The apartment was small, dingy, and dirty—anything but romantic. And, besides being small, dingy, and dirty, it was crowded—uncomfortably so. Four men—or, rather, three men and a boy—were busily engaged in clipping and checking and filing, and it was only with difficulty that Redfern was able to force his way in.

Mr. Lillywhite, the editor, was a stout, irascible sort of man, who had a not altogether agreeable habit of repeating most of the things he said, as though his hearers were too dense to grasp his first delivery. Mr. Lillywhite was in his shirt-sleeves, and his attitude was that of a man straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel. Instead of being engaged in the task of preparing the paper for press, and tackling the job wholeheartedly, he was tinkering about with a pair of scissors, and growling at the fact that he would have to walk home in the rain.

The other two men impressed Redfern very favourably. Both had their coats on, and both sported armlets. One of them certainly looked as if he belonged to one of the later married groups under the Derby scheme; but his colleague would not have been more than one-and-twenty, and Redfern wondered idly why he had not been called up for service with the colours.

Then, just as he was taking stock of the inky-fingered printer's devil, the editor's rasping voice roused him from his musings.

"Who are you, hey? Who are you, I say? And how came you here? How came you here, I repeat?"

Redfern bit his lip. He had wanted to speak to the editor in private—not before the entire staff of the "Sussex Chronicle."

However, there was no help for it, so he said:

"If you please, sir, I've come to apply for the job as junior reporter."

Mr. Lillywhite's short hair fairly bristled. The other two men spun round as if they had just seen Hamlet's ghost, and the small boy gave vent to a titter, which sounded unearthly in the awkward, strained silence.

"What! What!" gasped Mr. Lillywhite, at length. "Is this a joke, boy? Is this a joke, I say? How dare you, a mere puppy of a schoolboy, have the effrontery to make such a brazen and insolent request? How dare you, I say?"

"I'm not joking, sir," said Redfern quietly. "I was never more in earnest in my life."

The editor glared.

"But it is absurd!" he said incredulously. "It is absurd, I repeat! What qualifications have you?"

"I am well advanced in shorthand—"

"How many words a minute?"

"A hundred and twenty," answered Redfern proudly.

The other two men stared, and arched their eyebrows. The printer's devil ceased to titter, and stared also.

"Hum! What else can you do?" snapped Mr. Lillywhite doubtfully.

"Lots of things, sir," said Redfern, with great equanimity. "I can write a good hand, can report anything you like—"

in fact, I feel certain I could take the job of junior reporter all serene. I heard you were shorthanded, and that's why I came along to offer myself."

"But you are a schoolboy! You are a schoolboy, I say!"

"Not now, sir," said Redfern grimly.

"Run away—what?"

"Right on the wicket first time, sir!"

Mr. Lillywhite treated himself to a good hearty laugh. As he laughed he swayed about from side to side, like a buoy among the breakers.

"Ho, ho, ho!" he roared. "So that's the little game, is it? Well, I don't blame you. Run away from school myself once, in the dim and distant past. What was the trouble?"

"I was fed up with lessons, and longed to take a hand at newspaper work. I entreat you to give me a job, sir—or, at least, a trial."

The editor surveyed the applicant with mingled pity and condescension.

"Poor kid!" he said gruffly. "Poor kid, I say! You don't know when you're well off, or you wouldn't hanker after a job in a Press office—would he, Merton?"

The younger of the two armleteers shook his head.

"I guess not," was his comment.

"But, I—I say," began Reddy, with his jaw dropping.

"Now, look here," said the editor. "Don't you be a silly young idiot! Run along back to your school, like a good little boy, and tell your kind pastors and masters to keep a tighter rein on you in future."

"I can't go back!" panted Redfern. "I've broken away from it once and for all. To go back would probably mean a public expulsion."

The editor became impatient.

"That's your look-out," he said. "That's your look-out, I repeat. I couldn't think of engaging you in this office, though it's a fact we're short-handed, and will be losing the services of Mr. Cartwright"—he indicated the elder armleteer—"in a few days. It would be most unreasonable for me to employ an inexperienced schoolboy—most unreasonable!"

"Then it's no go?" said Redfern, almost haggard.

He felt sick at heart. All his dearly-cherished schemes had come tumbling down like a pack of cards, and he looked so utterly dejected and forlorn that Mr. Merton darted him a swift glance of sympathy.

"No," said the editor. "It's not a bit of use a stripling like you asking for employment. Now, get out! Get out, I say! I don't want to be hard on you, but it's press night, and we're busy—doocid busy! Hand me that proof of the Reverend Drinkwater's address on 'Temperance in wartime,' will you, Cartwright?"

Feeling decidedly down in the dumps, Redfern turned, and groped his way from the stuffy little room. His wet clothes clung to him, rendering him wretchedly uncomfortable. His cap felt like a heavy lump of porridge poised on his head, and his boots squeaked out water as he walked.

And, amid it all, he could not help saying to himself, over and over again:

"Hang it all! I was a fool to bunk from St. Jim's! But I can't go back now. I simply can't! I've made my bed, and now I must lie on it!"

CHAPTER 8.

A Good Samaritan.

REDFERN'S experiences during the hours that followed were anything but pleasant. He squelched through the streets of Wayland, one of the few pedestrians abroad in that awful storm.

He was in quest of lodgings. The two sovereigns nestling in his trouser-pocket made merry music as he strode along. He had the necessary money to pay his footing, and foresaw little difficulty in finding a good house and a motherly landlady.

But he was destined to receive a series of rude shocks. The first house at which he made application was a somewhat stately one, standing back from the road. He noticed a card in the window, bearing the word "APARTMENTS" in large capitals, and rang the bell boldly.

A night-porter appeared in response to the summons. He was a surly fellow, and, pulling Redfern into the passage, examined him critically under the gas-jet. Then, having finished his mental summing-up, he growled:

"Wotcher want?"

"Digs," said Redfern briefly. "I want a bed-room for the night, at all events, and if the room is suitable I may require it permanently."

"No go!" said the man gruffly. "Don't you go for to try none o' them games on 'ere!"

"What do you mean?"

"Why, any old fool can see as you're a schoolboy, wot

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'ave run away, most likely. We don't want no scandal in this 'ere ouse. "Op it!"

Redfern had no choice in the matter. He was opening his mouth to expostulate with the man, when he found himself suddenly propelling from the steps. On rising to his feet, a closed, forbidding door stared him in the face.

Reddy could not understand it at all. "The fellow must have been drinking!" he soliloquised. "Good thing he did chuck me out on my neck, I'm thinking. Never mind. Bad beginnings mean good endings."

But he soon discovered that his luck was dead out. He went from house to house, and nobody would run the risk of taking him in. They saw clearly what he was, and whence he came, and all the pleading and protestation in the world availed Redfern nothing.

The dampness of his clothing was most discomforting, and he began to feel ravenously hungry. But the hour was late, and no shop of any kind was open to the public. He became footsore, too, when he had traversed half the town without achieving any tangible result.

"Hang it!" he muttered. "This is the absolute giddy limit! I should have thought the sight of gold would have been good enough for these confounded householders!"

Reddy was yet to learn that money, whilst it accomplishes many things, is not everything.

"I s'pose I'd better try the Railway Hotel," he mused at length. "It's the only way."

He wrung the water from his soaking cap, with the St. Jim's badge on it, and put it in his pocket. But his Etons remained, showing plainly what he was.

The hotel proprietor promptly sent him about his business. He threatened, moreover, to inform Dr. Holmes of the boy's whereabouts.

Redfern had plenty of pluck and spirit, but he had never come more closely to making a fool of himself than he did at that moment. He felt so utterly forlorn and helpless that he could almost have blubbed outright. No one would assist him in his sorry plight.

What was to be done?

It would be madness—sheer, unadulterated madness—to remain out all night in the rain and wind.

The only course open to him seemed to be to return to St. Jim's, and make a clean breast of the matter to the Head, throwing himself on the latter's mercy. But the humiliation of it all would well-nigh madden him, and he could not bring himself to play the part of the prodigal son.

Whilst he stood there, kicking his heels on the familiar pavement of Wayland High Street, a hand fell upon his shoulder, and he spun round, startled. Was it a master, or a prefect, or a constable, who had successfully run him to earth? If so, Redfern reflected grimly, he would enter upon a fierce fight for freedom.

But the next moment a deep and not unpleasant voice reassured him, and he looked up into the smiling face of Mr. Merton, the younger of the two attested men he had seen at the Press office.

"Hallo!" said the reporter, whose tone was kindness itself. He wore no overcoat, and his grey suit was sodden. "Still mooning about in Wayland—what?"

Redfern nodded.

"I've had an awful time!" he said; and there was something in his tone which went right to the heart of his listener. "I've applied here, there, and everywhere for digs, and nobody will take me. They're afraid to shelter a runaway. That's what it amounts to."

Merton stroked his chin meditatively.

"Best thing," he said, "is for you to go back to the school."

"I can't—I simply can't!" said Redfern wildly. "You don't understand, Mr. Merton. Life won't be worth living if I go back; and the Head might even expel me. I daren't let my people suffer."

"Well, look here," said Mr. Merton. "It's no good standing still and making mud-pies of ourselves. If you'd care to come along to my digs, I'd undertake to make you comfy for the night, and afterwards, if you like."

"Oh, I say! That's awfully good of you! But—"

"But to me no buts! Come along, and I'll soon put you to THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 442.

rights! My digs are in River Street, and they're better than one might expect, considering the situation."

Side by side, these two rain-soaked individuals, practically strangers to one another, made their way to Merton's apartments. Redfern was shown into a pleasant sitting-room, with just sufficient furniture to give it a free-and-easy atmosphere. Over the mantelpiece stood a pipe-rack, and Redfern could not refrain from bursting into a chuckle as he noticed how it was loaded up.

There were at least fifteen pipes there. Calabashes and churchwardens rubbed shoulders with each other, so to speak; French briars and cherry-woods nestled snugly side by side.

Mr. Merton noticed his companion's merriment, and laughed himself.

"I'm a heavy pipe-smoker," he said, by way of explanation. "Never touch anything else. Cigarettes are half paper, and therefore, harmful, and cigars play the dickens with my interior. You're not a smoker, by any chance?"

Redfern shook his head.

"That's a pity, because I've just got hold of some tip-top tobacco. It's called Bulldog mixture, and it's great! 'Glorious in the pipe, mellow, rich, and ripe,' as the immortal Byron has it. It runs pretty expensive, but there! It's one of the few luxuries I ever permit myself. Squatty-vo—er—"

"Redfern," supplemented the junior.

"Ah, I recall your name!" said Merton, igniting the fire, which had been laid in case of emergency, and proceeding to dry his clothes. "I remember you showed up to great advantage in a footer-match a few months ago, when young Merry's team was on tour. It was against the Leamshire Regiment, if my memory serves me correctly."

Redfern recalled the game well. He had never participated in such a thrilling encounter in his life.

Presently Mr. Merton's landlady, housekeeper, or factotum, whichever he styled her, appeared on the scene with a couple of steaming chops and a dish of vegetables. Then, with a little curtsy, she said:

"Pudden' to foller, Mr. Merton, sir!" And whisked out of the room.

"That's Mrs. Lynn," said Merton, as the door closed. "She's a good old soul, and looks after me almost as well as my mater did when I lived at home. When I was ill for three months last year, and couldn't keep up the rent of the rooms, she was as good as gold, and waited on me hand and foot. Most landladies would have given a chap the order of the boot when they saw he was becoming convalescent."

Redfern nodded.

"I don't want to be nosey," he said; "but you spoke of your mater. Doesn't she live in Wayland?"

"No," said the journalist, dabbing his spoon in the mustard. "She is of impaired health—has been since my pater died—and is compelled to reside in the Cotswold Hills, under doctor's orders. I keep her going—for money and all the rest of it, you know—and on that account was granted a conditional exemption by the local Tribunal—bless 'em!"

"I don't see that they could very well have done otherwise," said Redfern warmly. "Fellows who keep widowed mothers are doing their bit, even though it doesn't happen to be in the trenches of Flanders."

Mr. Merton smiled.

"The need for men was so insistent," he said, "that I honestly didn't expect to get off. But Lillywhite put in a claim for me on business grounds, and the two things combined influenced the Tribunal's decision. By the way, it was rather novel. I always attend the Tribunals as the Press representative, and on that occasion I reported my own case."

"Is Lillywhite such a Tartar as he seems?" asked Redfern.

"Oh, no! He's a real white man at heart. But he naturally didn't take kindly to the idea of giving you a job. Schoolboys aren't usually expert reporters, you know."

"Look here," said Redfern earnestly. "May I show you after supper what I can do?"

"Yes, if you like."

The first course finished, Mr. Merton rang for the "pudden," and Mrs. Lynn brought it in. It was Redfern's favourite—jam poly-poly—and he pitched into it with alacrity.

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A wild and whirling battle was in progress. Flannelled figures rushed hither and thither, and chaos and confusion reigned supreme. There had been much bad blood between the rival houses of late, and it found vent now in a dramatic overflow. The air was full of shrill battle-cries. (See Chapter 3.)

All his wretchedness and despondency had vanished under the genial influence and good-humour of Merton, with whom he was already on the best of terms.

When the meal was over, Reddy borrowed a notebook and pencil from his host, and requested the latter to dictate something to him.

Which Mr. Merton did. He rattled off an imaginary speech at breakneck speed, more by way of a joke than anything else, and little dreaming that Redfern would be able to tackle it.

Suddenly he paused.

"You don't mean to say you're getting it down?" he gasped.

"Of course," said Redfern. "Fire away!"

Mr. Merton galloped on, and desisted in a few moments. Then he said to Redfern:

"I'll wager you six to one in doughnuts that you won't be able to translate it!"

"Done!" said Redfern promptly.

And, rising from the table, he went over to the little desk in the corner, on which stood a neat-looking "Royal" typewriter. Then, seating himself before it, he clattered away at the keys, Mr. Merton watching him in profound astonishment.

Twenty minutes later Redfern triumphantly drew out the sheet of foolscap paper on which he had been working, and handed it to his friend.

"My eye!" gasped Mr. Merton. "My eye! Don't speak to me again till I tell you to. I'm knocked all of a heap!"

Then the journalist solemnly knocked the ash out of his favourite French briar, and proceeded to load it.

He had scarcely been able to believe the evidence of his own eyes. Redfern had translated the whole of the speech, word for word, without a solitary error!

At last Merton spoke.

"How did you do it?" he asked.

"Practice, that's all," replied Redfern modestly.

"My word! You're hot stuff, and no mistake! If only Lillywhite had seen a sample of your work to-night, he'd have jolly soon changed his tune! Are you original?"

"I think so."

"Can you do much in the essay line?"

Redfern nodded.

"D'you think you could write up an accident, or a fire, or a concert?"

"I've no doubt that I could manage it O K."

"Then," said Merton solemnly, as he went to the side-board, and passed a dish of doughnuts over to the junior—"then you're a find! In the morning, my son, I'll bring the chief to reason, and tell him if he doesn't engage you he'll be missing the chance of a lifetime!"

"Thanks, awfully!" said Redfern, with real feeling.

"Don't mench! Cartwright's clearing off to shoulder a rifle and help knock a few nails in the Kaiser's coffin; and we badly want somebody in his place. You're just the chap!"

Redfern's heart beat high with hope. Out in the rain, the tide of battle had seemed to turn against him and bear him under; here, in the cosy sitting-room of the young reporter, everything was different. The atmosphere was cheery and inviting; and Merton himself was one of the best.

"You'd better trot off to bed now," said the journalist, "or

you'll be fagged and stale in the morning. I'll show you the way up, if you like."

"Thanks!"
Fortunately, Mr. Merton had a spare bed-room, which he always kept ready, in case a London reporter, too late to catch the last train back to town, was compelled to spend the night at Wayland. Into this room Redfern was ushered, and within a quarter of an hour of his entry he was wrapped in the arms of Morpheus, for the numerous and exciting events of the day had made him weary.

He dreamed strange dreams that night—probably the result of having sampled too many doughnuts at supper-time. He saw Mr. Lillywhite holding out his arms and bidding him accept a handsome position on the "Sussex Chronicle," while Mr. Merton stood beaming by; then Mr. Ratcliff and Monteith, somehow, got mixed up in the dream. They were making hideous faces of mockery at him, and the clinking of steel handcuffs could be heard. A breathless dash for liberty ensued, and then—

Redfern woke up. He blinked through the window at the starry sky. Then, smiling as he realised that he was safe and sound from the talons of such vultures as Ratty, he composed himself once more and dropped into a sound slumber.

CHAPTER 9.

Reddy the Reporter.

EARLY next morning Mr. Merton was astir. Redfern could hear his footstep on the stairs, and he was humming a lively tune. Outside, birds were twittering, and the pleasant morning dew was visible in the fields which extended right across to Rylcombe.

The handle of Redfern's bed-room door was turned softly, and Mr. Merton looked in. He wished to assure himself that his protege was sleeping soundly.

"What! Awake?" he exclaimed, in tones of self-reproach. "There now! I s'pose it was my elephant boots on the stairs that did it."

"Not at all!" smiled Redfern. "I'm accustomed to waking early."

Mr. Merton was in flannels, and a thick towel was slung over his shoulder.

"I'm going for a dip in the river," he explained. "There's nothing like it to begin the day on. Makes you as lively as a cricket and fresh as a swallow, by gad!"

"Can I come?" asked Redfern eagerly.
"Certainly! I've got a spare costume you can have, and we'll beg, borrow, or steal another towel."

Redfern hastily slipped on his things, and a few minutes later the early risers sallied forth to the river.

"Look here, Reddy," said Merton. "No objection to my calling you Reddy, what? I was thinking furiously last night, and I've come to one or two conclusions concerning you. First of all, to prevent recognition, you'll have to rig yourself out in a fresh suit of clothes. A reporter in Etons would—ahem!—be sort of regarded as the eighth wonder of the world. Then, again, we shall have to fit you up with a slight moustache, and paint your chivvy a bit, or else put some sunbronze on. In ordinary togs, with a moustache, and

a darkened complexion, no one would take you for a fifteen-year-old schoolboy.

"That's so," said Redfern, "but—"
"But what?"

"I've only got a couple of quid, and I want to economise it as much as possible. If I start buying togs it'll run away with the tin."

"That's all right," said Mr. Merton genially. "I've got a suit at home that'll be a perfect fit, if my judgment doesn't deceive me. And I know a fellow who'll lend me a make-up box. After brekker, we'll rig you up so's your own mother wouldn't know you."

"I owe you a big enough debt already," said Redfern. "It's awfully good of you to take an interest in me like this, Mr. Merton."

"Fiddlesticks! You'll make my head swell so much that it'll go off like an inflated gas balloon. Here we are!"

They had reached the river, cool and shady and inviting; and a few moments later they were speeding along side by side in the sparkling water, rapturous with delight, for both were splendid swimmers.

Inavigated by the early morning dip, they returned to the rooms in River Street, where Mrs. Lynn was well under way with a dish of eggs and bacon.

The landlady lingered in the room, and squeezed her hands together.

"Ow long is Master Pinkfern a-stayin' with us?" she inquired.

Merton grinned.
"His correct cognomen, ma'am, is Redfern," he said. "Master Redfern hopes to be with us quite a long time." Then he added to Redfern, in an undertone:

"I should hang on here, if I were you. It's reasonable, and as comfy a place as you'd find anywhere."

The truant nodded.

An hour later the two friends stepped out into the street together. A startling transformation had been effected in Redfern's appearance. Garbed in an old suit of Mr. Merton's, and with a slight, fair moustache and a sunbronzed countenance, he was as unlike the real Redfern as possible.

Mrs. Lynn, who was engaged in the somewhat arduous task of scrubbing the steps, almost fell down the whole flight as she caught sight of him.

"Lawk-a-mussy-me!" she gasped.
Mr. Merton shot out his strong arm to support her.

"Don't be alarmed, Mrs. Lynn!" said he. "Our young friend has merely been taking a course of hair restorer on his upper lip. Moreover, he was out bathing this morning, and the sun seems to have caught his face."

Leaving the landlady gaping speechlessly on the top step, Mr. Merton proceeded with Redfern to the office.

The editor was in. This rather surprised Redfern, who had always understood that editors were irresponsible beings, who came at twelve and went at four, and took two hours to digest their lunch. Mr. Lillywhite was, apparently, something new in editors, and, therefore, deserving of great respect.

"What!" he said, swinging round in his revolving-chair. "That young puppy again? That young puppy again, I

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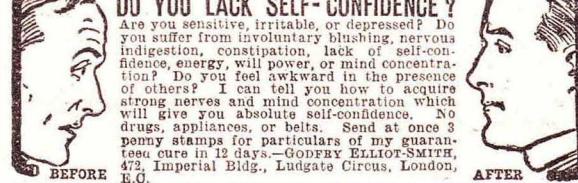
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repeat? I can recognise him, in spite of his colour and his confounded moustache! What does this mean, Merton?"

"It means," replied Merton grimly, "that you nearly let the catch of the season slip through your fingers. Master Redfern here is as competent at shorthand as anybody I've met. He knows all the contractions and grammalogues, and can take down speeches at a hundred and twenty a minute."

Mr. Lillywhite looked incredulous.

"You must be romancing! I say, you must be romancing!"

"I'm not, sir," said the reporter doggedly. "Just you try him, and see."

"Here!" snapped the great man, beckoning Redfern, as if he were a refractory fox-terrier. "Here, I repeat! Take this down!"

And he rattled off a fierce tirade of expressions, while Redfern scribbled away industriously with his pencil.

When Mr. Lillywhite concluded his mock oration, he smiled grimly.

"Huh! I guess you've made a hash of that, hey?"

"Not at all, sir," said Redfern coolly. "Would you like me to read it out to you, sir?"

The editor nodded.

Five minutes later he bade Redfern take a seat.

"You'll do," he said. "Admirably! Admirably, by Jove! I'm not sure that I ought to be aiding and abetting a kid who's run away from school, but, hang it all, I ran away from school myself once. Boys will be boys."

"You'll engage me, sir?" asked Redfern breathlessly.

"Yes, yes! How much money do you expect?"

"A pound a week's not bad for a start," said Redfern guardedly.

"Impossible! Sheerly impossible!"

"Will you give me a month's trial at a pound, sir, and then, if you think I'm not worth the money, cut me down to fifteen bob?"

Mr. Lillywhite reflected.

"Right you are!" he said, after a pause. "Right you are, I tell you!"

"And, if you don't mind, sir, I should like to—ahem!—change my name, sir, whilst I am in your employ."

"Just as you please. If there is trouble about it, the blame will rest with you. It will rest with you, I repeat."

"Very well, sir. I think I'll call myself Browne—Brown with an 'e.'"

"So be it. Merton! You are reporting the police-court proceedings at eleven, are you not?"

"That's so, sir."

"Then take Mr. Red—I mean Browne—along with you, so that he will see how things are done."

"Very good, sir."

Mr. Merton pulled out his pipe, filled it, and, applying a match to the fragrant tobacco, puffed his way contentedly along at Redfern's side.

He was obliged to knock out his pipe when the court was reached, greatly to his chagrin. Then he led his assistant into the great building, and up to the Press table, which was set aside solely for reporters. A middle-aged man was already seated there.

"Who's that?" Redfern ventured to remark.

"Oh, that's the representative of the 'Rylcombe Recorder.' We jog along very well together. There's always a spirit of esprit de corps between rival reporters, you know. Come on! The first case will be heard in a jiffy."

The magistrate sat in pompous state in his big chair, above which appeared a banner bearing, in huge gilt letters, the words:

"BE JUST AND FEAR NOT."

Everything was new and strange to Redfern, alias Mr. Browne, and he enjoyed himself immensely. There were no cases of great importance. Most of them dealt with unscreened lights on vehicles and in houses. A notorious toper was fined twenty shillings for being drunk and disorderly on the previous night. And when the proceedings were over Redfern congratulated himself that the reporting of the cases was as simple as falling off a form.

When the reporters came out into the summer sunshine, Redfern gave a guilty start. Mr. Railton, the School House-master, was strolling along on the opposite pavement.

He nodded cheerily to Merton, with whom he seemed to be familiar, and stepped across the street to speak to him.

"I am rather distressed, Mr. Merton," he said, "concerning a St. Jim's boy named Redfern, who is believed to have run away from the school last evening. You can throw no light on the matter, I suppose?"

Mr. Merton solemnly shook his head.

"I'd assist you if I could, Mr. Railton, as you well know," he said; "but in this case I fear I am helpless. Can you help the gentleman out with any information, Mr. Browne?"

"I'm afraid not," answered Redfern, in an assumed tone of gruff regret, though his knees were fairly knocking together lest Mr. Railton's keen eye should penetrate his disguise, as Mr. Lillywhite's had done.

But he remained undetected, and heaved a great sigh of relief when the Housemaster gave Mr. Merton a friendly nod, and strolled away.

"Good!" muttered Mr. Merton, delving into the recesses of his pocket for his pipe. "If the keenest master at St. Jim's doesn't smell a rat, you're as safe as houses!"

"Houses can no longer be styled safe with Zepps about," was Redfern's smiling rejoinder.

"Blow the Zepps!" grunted Mr. Merton. "Let's go and explore the mystery-pudding which Mrs. Lynn has prepared for dinner."

CHAPTER 10.

Mr. Browne Comes Out Strong.

ST. JIM'S was shaken almost to its foundations by Redfern's sudden and mysterious departure. The disappearance of a fellow like Levison, or Mellish, or Knox the prefect, would have been regarded as a boon and a blessing to them. There would have been no sack-cloth and ashes, no weeping and gnashing of teeth.

But in the case of Redfern it was different. Few fellows had enjoyed such a wide popularity.

Tom Merry & Co., though the usual House feud had generally placed them at loggerheads with the absent junior, liked and respected him, and were the first to bemoan his dramatic disappearance. Redfern was one of those fellows who kept things alive in the little world of school. He was for ever organising japes, and acting as the prime-mover in raids and scraps.

And now he had gone, without leaving a single solitary clue as to his whereabouts!

Marie Rivers, the only person in the know, said nothing, in accordance with her promise; but she thought often of the absentee, and wondered if his sanguine expectations had come anywhere near realisation.

There was one troubled conscience in connection with Redfern's abscondment, and that conscience belonged to Mr. Horace Ratcliff. The sour, ill-tempered master of the New House realised that he had acted in excess of his rights in thrashing Redfern so relentlessly on the day of the study window episode, and, try as he might, he could not banish from his mind the haunting thought that the junior's action in running away was but a sequel to the castigation, and a direct result of the same. Wherefore Mr. Ratcliff was uneasy, and the fellows noticed that he was much more subdued than before.

Search-parties had been organised, but with scant success. Herries had declared to all and sundry that his magnificent bulldog, Towser, would root out the missing junior in a brace of shakes; but even Towser's judgment was evidently at fault, for he had followed the trail only as far as the nearest rabbit-burrow.

Mr. Railton had learned from various people in Wayland that Redfern had been scouring the town for lodgings on the evening of his quitting St. Jim's; but although the Housemaster pressed his inquiries, he could not discover where Redfern had eventually pitched his tent, and concluded that the runaway, finding Wayland too hot to hold him, had proceeded elsewhere by train.

The most vigilant search had been made in other quarters, too, but nothing of a satisfactory nature had transpired therefrom. Redfern's father had been written to, but he was away on active service, and Mrs. Redfern replied that her son had not been home. The good lady was greatly distressed, and was amazed to receive a letter from her offspring a day or two later saying that he was junior reporter on a paper which should be nameless, and urging her not to worry on his behalf.

Had Redfern been an ordinary boy, of average abilities in the playing-fields and elsewhere, the school would have settled down again, and pursued the even tenor of its way without giving much further thought to the nine-days' wonder created by his disappearance. But Redfern was not an ordinary boy. He was one of the very best all-round sportsmen among the juniors, and his comrades missed him sorely.

"I say, you fellahs!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, approaching Tom Merry & Co. in the quadrangle after dinner. "There's a Twibunal meetin' in Wayland this aftahnoon. Shall we walk oval? We may see somethin' of Wedfern, you know."

"That's not a bad wheeze," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "It would be a fine feather in our cap if only we could root him out."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Is the Tribunal open to members of the public?" asked

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 442.

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"GRUNDY THE DETECTIVE!"

Manners. "Of course. Kildare went over last week, because he was interested in one of the cases."

"Kim on, then!" said Monty Lowther. "We might be able to pick up a clue of some sort in Wayland. I hope so, for Reddy's sake, and the school's as well. St. Jim's has lost a good man."

The Terrible Three sauntered out of the gates in company with the elegant swell of St. Jim's. Jack Blake joined them, and together they walked across the fields to Wayland.

"Hallo!" said Tom Merry, stopping short in the High Street. "What's all this?"

Outside a newsagent's shop stood a board bearing the "Sussex Chronicle" placard.

The juniors paused on the pavement, and perused the boldly-displayed lines.

"Wayland Warrior Wins D.C.M." quoted Monty Lowther. "Rev. Peter Stiggins Dies in His Bath." "Tales to Tell at the Tribunals." "Fun and Fiction in the Court."

Then Lowther paused, in astonishment, as the next line, bolder than all the rest, caught his eye:

"DRAMATIC DISAPPEARANCE OF SUSSEX SCHOOLBOY!"

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, adjusting his gleaming monocle. "How did those weporthal fellahs get hold of that, I wondah? The Head seemed most anxious to keep Wedfern's wunnin' away out of the papahs."

Tom Merry hastened into the shop, and came out with a copy of the "Sussex Chronicle." The report was on the front page.

"Listen to this, you chaps!" he said.

"On Wednesday evening last the authorities at St. James's College, Rylcombe, were given cause for grave concern, owing to the sudden and altogether mysterious disappearance of Richard Henry Redfern, a handsome, popular junior in the Fourth Form of the New House.

"Redfern is believed to have run away during the terrific storm which raged over the countryside on the night in question, and it is a very singular and ominous coincidence that he was mercilessly thrashed by his Housemaster for a trivial offence only the day before."

"My hat!" whistled Jack Blake. "That's a nasty rap over the knuckles for Ratty! Wonder how he'll take it? He's bound to see the paper."

Tom Merry continued to read:

"Certain Wayland householders assert that they saw the runaway in the town on Wednesday evening, seeking for lodgings. We feel certain that these good people must be romancing, for it is scarcely feasible to suppose that the absentee, whose natural desire would be to place as great a distance between himself and Rylcombe as possible, would run the risk of residing in such close proximity to the school from which he absconded.

"Vigorous efforts have been, and are being made to trace the missing junior, but at the time of going to press we learn that the searchers have met with no success.

"Redfern was a mighty wielder of the willow, as evidenced by the fact that on Tuesday last he smote a ball with such vehemence that it smashed a window-pane, the property of Horace Ratcliff, Esq., of St. James's College.

"We venture to express the opinion that he will not easily be found."

"Well, I'm jiggered!" ejaculated Monty Lowther, when his chum had finished this recital. "The chap who wrote that must know all about the school and all about Redfern—as we know ourselves, in fact. It's simply amazing!"

"Yaas, wathah! Won't Watty be watty?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Little did the juniors dream, as they walked on down the street, that Redfern himself was the author of that exciting paragraph. He had endeavoured to throw would-be captors off the track by hinting that the absentee would not be found in Wayland; he had succeeded in showing Mr. Ratcliff up in a very ugly light over the business; and he had been in the most novel position of being able to chant his own praises in print, by describing himself as "a handsome, popular junior." He had written this more in a spirit of frivolity, however, than out of a desire to blow his own trumpet.

Mr. Lillywhite had sanctioned the insertion of the paragraph, and it really seemed, in view of his clever disguise, that the schoolboy reporter "would not easily be found."

CHAPTER 11.

Mysterious Behaviour of Mr. Browne.

REDFERN was settling down speedily to his new life. He lived, moved, and had his being in Merton's company, and the more he saw of his new acquaintance, the more he came to like him. Honest, sincere, true, and just in all his dealings—even though he was a Journalist!—Mr. Merton struck Redfern as being one of those very rare products for which Diogenes is said to have searched in vain—a Man!

Without this guide, philosopher, and friend to show him the ropes, Redfern would have floundered hopelessly in the mire of ignorance. But in a day or two, he soon got the gist of what was expected of him, and rose to the occasion in splendid style. Redfern was a worker, and a hard worker at that, when the task agreed with him. In class, under the much-detested Ratty, he had been pretty much of a slacker. But as a paid reporter, it was vastly different. He put his shoulder to the wheel, and toiled assiduously in the interests of that fearful and wonderful production, the "Sussex Chronicle."

All his out-of-pocket expenses were met by the editor, who also provided him with a Raleigh bicycle, which skimmed along the country roads like a swallow. Mr. Cartwright had used the machine before, and as he was a man of Redfern's stature, the bicycle was eminently suitable for the new reporter.

Redfern loved cycling for cycling's sake. He did not regard it as business, but as a pleasure, to scorch for miles and miles through the charming Sussex countryside. Occasionally he came to grief through rounding sharp corners carelessly, or playing fast and loose with the speed-gear; but he never sustained anything more serious than a few bruises.

"Reddy," said Mr. Merton, as he beamed down upon one of Mrs. Lynn's rare and refreshing rabbit-pies. "I'm going to London this afternoon—to the Law Courts, to report the Rylcombe slander case. Therefore, my merry lad, I shall expect you to do the Wayland Tribunal off your own bat."

"That's all right!" said Redfern cheerfully. "I've sort of found my sea-legs now, and feel as if I could tackle anything."

"Good man!"

After dinner, Redfern sallied forth to the Municipal Buildings, where the weekly meetings of the local tribunal took place. He had attended the Tribunal before, as a spectator, and took a delight in hearing some of the cases, which provided a fund of humour for everyone save the poor applicant.

The room in which these proceedings took place was not particularly spacious, and everybody could see everybody else. At the back were several rows of chairs, on which sat the applicants and any members of the general public who chose to attend.

Redfern gave a sudden start as he entered. Seated in the front row were five fellows whom he knew full well—the Terrible Three, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and Jack Blake.

But his disguise seemed impenetrable, for, although the St. Jim's fellows watched him as he took his place at the Press table, they did not seem to notice anything out of the ordinary.

Then the mayor and the rest of the members of the Tribunal took their seats on the raised platform; and the town clerk, a soapy antiquary, with a wheezy voice, summoned the first applicant.

"George Thomas Greenberry!"

A stolid rustic clumped his way to the fore, touching his forehead respectfully to the grave and reverend seigneurs on the platform. "Ere I be," he said affably. "Nice weather for the time of year, ain't it, gents?"

"We are not here to concern ourselves with the climatic conditions," said the mayor drily. "Mr. Piper, pray read the application."

The town clerk obeyed, his glasses slipping down his nose as he read:

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"Me, George Thomas Greenberry, aged 35, living at 7, Merry Mews, Wayland, wants to be let off from serving in his Majesty's Army, because I don't hold with no bloodshed and slaughter, and all them there horrors that we reads about in the papers."

The mayor snorted. His snort was echoed right along the bench, and Mr. Greenberry looked—and felt—very uncomfortable.

"You are one of those creatures classified as conscientious objectors, are you not?" rasped the mayor.

"That's it, sir; only me not bein' a scholar, I couldn't spell the words, so left 'em out."

"Why do you conscientiously object?" asked Mr. Bunn, a prominent member of the Tribunal in more senses than one.

"Which I've already said on that there paper as 'ow I can't abide bloodshed!" said Mr. Greenberry. "I cut me 'and on the ploughshare t'other day, an' it 'urt an' bled summat awful, it did! Goodness knows wot it'd feel like to 'ave a German bay'net shoved through me stummock!"

"You shall be given the opportunity of discovering," said the mayor grimly. "Your application is refused."

The verdict was hailed with great approval by those present. Men like Mr. Greenberry were hardly of the type that made Old England's name; but, perhaps a few months' training in the wind and sun, and the graphic descriptions of Hun atrocities on the Continent, would make more of a man of him.

"Next, please!" barked the mayor.

"James Garth!" called the town clerk.

A young, good-looking fellow stepped forward, and Mr. Piper proceeded to read his application:

"I, James Garth, of Hillside, Brighton Road, Wayland, schoolmaster, wish to claim total exemption from military service on the grounds that I am the sole support of my widowed mother, who is of impaired health, and of my sister, who is prevented through incapacitation from doing work of any description. This Tribunal has already granted me an extension of three months, but since that time I have had the misfortune to lose my only brother in action; and under the exceptional circumstances of my case, I submit that I am entitled to total exemption."

The mayor's tone became softer and more sympathetic. This was one of the cases mentioned by the Prime Minister in the House of Commons—the case of a young man who, although single, was the support and stay of persons who were his relatives, and who had lost his only brother in the war.

"How old are you, Mr. Garth?" asked the mayor.

"Twenty-five, sir!"

"Unmarried, I understand?"

"Yes, sir, I can't marry whilst I am under the responsibility of providing in every way for my mother and sister."

The mayor nodded. Then he consulted in low tones with his colleagues, all of whom seemed to assent to the proposal he had put forward.

"Very well, Mr. Garth," he said. "This Tribunal grants you complete exemption from military service. Should there be any change in your domestic circumstances, however, the onus is upon you to report such change to the military authorities."

"Thank you, gentlemen!"

"Huwway!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy involuntarily. "I agree that it would be monstrous to take a man in that posh for service!"

"Rather!" said Tom Merry.

Mr. Garth passed out, looking as if a great load had been lifted from his mind. It was not that he didn't want to be a soldier. Nothing would have suited him better than to fight shoulder to shoulder with his comrades in the trenches against the common foe. But conscience had told him, over and over again, that, strong and athletic though he was, his duty was at home, meeting the needs of his ailing mother and enfeebled sister. His had been a hard battle to fight, for the taunts and jeers of the Wayland rabble, even his own pupils, had stung him to the quick scores of times.

But all that was over now; and the people who discovered for the first time, what his domestic position was, would treat him with respect proportionate to their previous ridicule.

There were a dozen further cases, most of them in connection with important business, the discontinuance of which, the applicants pointed out, would be detrimental to the interests of the nation. The Tribunal exercised capital judgment, giving a month's exemption here, three months there, and occasionally a point-blank refusal.

Redfern had been scribbling away industriously, covering many sheets of paper. He thought how pleased Mr. Merton would be when he got back from town, and found the report of the Tribunal neatly typed out on his "Royal." In the absorbing interest of his work, Reddy had almost forgotten the presence of the St. Jim's juniors.

And then a strange thing happened—a most remarkable thing, without parallel in the brief but exciting history of the Wayland Tribunal.

The final case had been heard, and judgment passed accordingly, the mayor, who seemed like Alexander of old, to be seeking fresh worlds to conquer, suddenly jumped to his feet, and glared across to the Press table.

"There!" he thundered, apparently addressing his colleagues. "There is a young man without an armet, who looks eminently suitable for the Army! Why are you not in khaki, reporter? Have you evaded the Military Service Act?"

"Nunno!" stammered Redfern, in great alarm.

"Have you been medically rejected? If not, your case shall be looked into without a moment's delay!"

Redfern gave one wild glance round the room, whipped his notebook up from the table, reached for his cap, and before the astonished Tribunal could call him back, he had completely vanished.

"Extwaowdinawy!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "That weportah chap must be a desertah, or somethin'!"

"It looked jolly fishy, bunking off like that!" said Tom Merry. "I wanted to speak to him, too, to ask if he'd heard any news of Reddy. Never mind! Let's get back to St. Jim's. I'm simply dying to see Ratty's face when he reads that report in the 'Sussex Chronicle.'"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Banishing the recent amazing occurrence from their minds, the five juniors quitted the Municipal Buildings, and stepped out at a brisk pace for St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 12:

Playing with Fire.

THE new recruit to the reporting-staff—such as it was—of the "Sussex Chronicle," took quite a long time to get over the effects of his fright at the Wayland Tribunal.

Reddy had entirely forgotten the fact that his moustache made him look five or six years older than he really was, and that, not being in possession of an armet, he might easily be mistaken for a slacker, or for an absentee who had not reported himself to the military authorities.

He narrated his experiences to Mr. Merton on that gentleman's return from London. The journalist grinned as he groped for his favourite briar.

"A close call!" he said. "Better tread warily in future. If you attend the Tribunal again, the mayor will pounce on you, and it might lead to some awkward disclosures. I'll report the proceedings after this."

"Good!" said Redfern, greatly relieved.

The following day was Saturday, and Reddy discovered that the St. Jim's junior eleven, captained by Tom Merry, had an important cricket-fixture to fulfil with Teddy Baxter & Co., the youthful champions of Clarendon School.

"I wouldn't miss the match for worlds!" he confided to Merton. "Do let me go up and report it! In the excitement, I don't suppose they'll take any notice of me!"

Mr. Merton nodded.

"It will be a good test of the effectiveness of your disguise," he said. "But be careful, for goodness' sake! It would be too rotten if you were spotted."

At the appointed time for the match to commence, Redfern rode in at the gates of St. Jim's on his bicycle. He arrived at the ground just in time to see Tom Merry and Talbot open the innings for the home side.

Redfern's heart was thumping wildly as he passed through the throng of fellows clustered round the ground. What if he were recognised by any of them? The game would be up, with a vengeance, and he could expect scant mercy from his schoolfellows.

He caught sight of Lawrence and Owen, standing together, and the expression on their faces made him feel a cad.

"I thought as much!" he muttered. "They're missing me already. Wonder if I should be justified in going up to them, and telling 'em who I am?"

Then he heard Arthur Augustus D'Arcy exclaim:

"Look! That's the fellah who scooted from the Twibunal yastahday!" And Redfern hastened on with burning cheeks. Then he came to where Marie Rivers was standing, and raised his cap.

"Good-afternoon!" he said.

Marie started back in surprise.

"You have the advantage of me," she said. "I do not remember having seen you before."

"Not in the Head's garden?" smiled Redfern.

Then Marie understood.

"So it is you!" she said eagerly. "Tell me, how are you faring?"

"Splendidly!" answered Reddy. "Except for the first

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night, which was pretty awful, it's been a dream! Everything's come up to my expectations, and I'm getting a quid a week salary."

"I am indeed glad to hear you say so," said Miss Marie. "I am surprised, too. How did you manage it?"

"Another of the reporters, a chap named Merton, gave me a leg-up," explained Redfern. "He lent me these togs, and dabbed on the disguise. I tell you it's been fine sport!"

Marie looked grave. "But it cannot last," she said. "Sooner or later you are bound to be caught out."

Redfern said nothing. He sat down on one of the chairs which had been set out for the accommodation of visitors, and watched Tom Merry and Talbot smiting the ball to all parts of the field.

St. Jim's were in fine form. It was to be a single-innings match, and the two opening batsmen laid a splendid foundation. The innings lasted two hours, Tom Merry & Co. being ultimately dismissed for the useful total of 120.

Against this, Claremont put up a much better fight than might have been expected. They were rather younger than the St. Jim's fellows, but speedily showed that their batting knowledge was all right. Teddy Baxter himself made 25, and the others all put up a good show; but the tail could not wag freely enough against the fine bowling of Tom Merry and Fatty Wynn, with the result that St. Jim's won a spirited and well-sustained struggle by 11 runs.

It did not take Redfern long to write up his report. Mr. Lillywhite had told him to boil it down as much as possible, owing to the ban which certain good people placed upon cricket in war-time. Then the writer gave a sudden start, as, looking up, he saw D'Arcy and Jack Blake standing behind him.

"Hallo!" he said feebly.

Jack Blake grinned.

"We've been watching you write out the report," he said. "Your writing's almost identical with Redfern's."

At that precise moment Tom Merry and Talbot emerged from the pavilion, much to Redfern's relief. They had towels and costumes in their hands.

"What's on now?" asked the bogus Mr. Browne.

"Swimming race," said Jack Blake briefly. "Teddy Baxter & Co. have been licked at cricket, and now they think they can make shavings of us at a relay race in the water."

"You think St. Jim's will win?"

"I'd feel a jolly sight more certain about it if we had Redfern!" said Jack Blake, with a sigh.

"Yaas, wathah! Comin' down to weport, deah boy?"

The Press representative nodded, and a few moments later he was one of the immense crowd which skirted the banks of the shining Ryll.

And, although the rest of the fellows did not know it, there was not one of them more strongly and keenly desirous that St. Jim's should pull off the "double event" than Mr. Browne, of the "Sussex Chronicle."

CHAPTER 13.

Loyal to the Last!

MANY curious glances were directed at Mr. Browne as he stood, notebook in hand, at the water's edge, and not for an instant did anyone suspect his identity.

St. Jim's were none too sanguine about the forthcoming contest with Teddy Baxter & Co. Tom Merry, Talbot, and Figgins, who were representing them, were splendid swimmers, possessing wonderful speed in the water; but Manners, the fourth man, was weak. Redfern usually made up the team, and his absence would probably spell defeat to the stalwarts of St. Jim's.

Mr. Railton had appointed himself master of the ceremonies, and at his sharp command Tom Merry and Teddy Baxter plunged in from the landing-stage, and sped away for all they were worth.

"Go it, St. Jim's!" came in a mighty roar from the clamorous, eager crowd. "Put your beef into it, Tom Merry!"

"Come on, Claremont!" shouted the sprinkling of juniors who had come over to render homage to their heroes. "Strong and steady does it, Baxter!"

There wasn't much to choose between the two swimmers. Tom Merry had a slightly longer reach, however, and was the first to gain the rope which was outspread across the river thirty yards lower down. He maintained a slight advantage on the way back, and reached the landing-stage a few yards to the good.

"Now, then, Talbot!" rose the cry.

In went Talbot with a clean, graceful dive, and a second later his powerful arms were cleaving the water, and he was

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 442

flashing along at a better pace than even Tom Merry had put up.

But the second Claremont man—Dick Merivale—was also hot stuff. He battled his way through the water like another Burgess, and finished level with his rival. There was a roar as the third man on each side plunged in.

"Come on, Figgy!"

"Put the pace on, old man!"

"St. Jim's! St. Jim's! Buck up, St. Jim's!"

But Figgins, strong swimmer though he was, had met his match on this occasion in Aubrey St. Clair, who was the third man of the opposition. St. Clair was known as "The Water-rat" to some of his intimate chums, and he fully justified the sobriquet as he flashed along. Figgins found himself hopelessly left, and the crowd began to groan. They realised only too well that Manners would never make up the leeway.

"It's rotten!" groaned Jack Blake, who was standing at Mr. Browne's side. "Why did old Reddy want to run away? He would have filled the breach like a Trojan. Manners hasn't got any fight in him. He can't help it, I know. But, hang it all, why did Reddy want to turn traitor?"

Mr. Browne's complexion went the colour of a beetroot, and his hand shook as it clasped the notebook.

Never had Dick Redfern felt so utterly sick with himself as now.

He saw at last the truth underlying the remarks Marie Rivers had made to him. He was selfish to desert the place which wanted him; and as a direct result of his selfishness, St. Jim's were losing the swimming contest with Claremont.

Claremont's third man was leaving Figgins far in the rear, and the affair seemed to be all over bar shouting. Whilst Redfern watched, his disengaged hand tightly clenched, a hand fell on his shoulder from behind, and he spun round, startled, to meet the gaze of Mr. Merton.

"Poor kid!" said that worthy sympathetically, and in low tones. "I've got bad news for you—deuced bad!"

"What is it?" panted Redfern hoarsely.

"The 'Sussex Chronicle' is closing down. I learnt it from the chief half an hour ago. It's official!"

Redfern's next action was truly amazing. He dashed into the marquee near by, and was out again in next to no time—not in the grey suit belonging to Mr. Merton, but in a tightly-fitting bathing costume he had found in the corner. His moustache, too, had been discarded, and there was a shout of wild surprise from the crowd as he dashed on to the landing-stage.

"Redfern!"

The wanderer had returned, and never could he have returned at a more opportune moment!

Sweeping Manners aside, Reddy waited till Figgins touched; then away he went, neck or nothing, in pursuit of Claremont's last man, who had at least a dozen yards' start.

Redfern seemed to be possessed of almost superhuman energy. He sped through the water like a submarine, and the breathless crowd knew that he was swimming as he had never swum before.

"Reddy! Reddy!" they cried, in an ecstasy. "Good old Reddy! That's stunning, old man—simply stunning!"

It was. Redfern's speed and pluck seemed alike inexhaustible. Inch by inch he gained upon his opponent, until, when within a few yards from the finish, they were dead level.

"Spart!" shouted Manners, glad to be relieved of a task which he knew in his heart he could never have performed.

"Three more strokes, Reddy!"

With a desperate final effort, Redfern flashed over the intervening distance, winning one of the finest races on record by a bare yard!

Then the crowd fairly let themselves go. Never had such a demonstration been heard or witnessed on the banks of the Ryll. Caps went whirling into mid-air, their owners entirely regardless as to whether they recovered them again or not.

Lawrence and Owen, their faces radiant, rushed up to their old familiar chum, and thumped his back until he was obliged to howl for mercy.

"Reddy, you old duffer!" said Lawrence, half laughing and half sobbing. "Where the merry thunder have you been hiding yourself?"

Other people wanted to know that besides Lawrence. Mr. Railton strode up to the dripping junior, and bade him give a concise explanation of what had happened to him since that memorable night of the storm.

Redfern made a clean breast of everything.

"And what do you think of doing now, Redfern?" asked Mr. Railton.

"I'm ready to face the music, sir," was the steady reply. "I can hardly expect Dr. Holmes to cook the fatted calf in my honour. He's more likely to expel me!"

"I do not think that," smiled Mr. Railton. "On the

TUCK HAMPERS ARE GIVEN AWAY TO READERS OF THE "BOYS' FRIEND," 1^D

contrary, I believe, when he knows the circumstances, he will grant you a free pardon."

A free pardon! Redfern could scarcely credit the prospect of such great good fortune.

But Mr. Railton's surmise proved correct. The Head interviewed Reddy in his study an hour later, and he came out looking just a little chastened, perhaps, but feeling that the lecture he had received from the kindly old gentleman would serve its purpose. He felt, also, that he would be able to fight down the reporting craze until the time came when he was ripe to take his place in the great world of work beyond.

When he came out into the quad the first person he sighted was Mr. Merton, and his heart overflowed with sympathy towards the young journalist, who, he presumed, had been practically ruined by the sudden failure of the "Sussex Chronicle."

"I—I say, Mr. Merton," he said, approaching his friend, "the Head's a brick! He's let me go scot-free! But I'm awfully sorry the paper's gone smash!"

"I'm not!" was Merton's smiling answer. "This leaves me free to take up a remunerative position on the staff of the 'Chimes.'"

Redfern put out his hand impulsively, and congratulated Merton heartily upon his appointment with the "Chimes," the tiptop paper of the day.

"And now you must stay and have some grub in the study," said Redfern. "I've reason to believe that there's a substantial spread under way, and I sha'n't enjoy it unless you participate!"

What a feast it was! Teddy Baxter & Co. had gone back to Claremont, defeated but not disgraced, and by the invitation of Lawrence, who was the founder of the feast, the Terrible Three came along to assist in the demolishment of the good things. Other distinguished persons present were Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, Talbot, and the girl who had, so faithfully guarded Reddy's secret—Marie Rivers.

CHAPTER 14.

Redeeming the Past.

EXCITEMENT reigned supreme within the historic walls of St. Jim's. Redfern had returned—returned under circumstances as thrilling as they were dramatic.

He had come back to the fold at a most opportune time, too. On the following Saturday the St. Jim's juniors were to play against Greyfriars—always a keen and exciting meeting.

Junior cricket had suffered with Reddy out of the team. It was likely to revive with full force now, for, as the wanderer declared, he had never felt fitter in his life.

Redfern's experiences had left their mark. He was as bright and as buoyant as ever, but had acquired more earnestness to counterbalance it. His eye was steadier, and his strength of character appreciably increased.

Great things were expected of Richard Henry Redfern when the match came to be played, and his schoolfellows were not destined to be disappointed.

The fact that it was Saturday admitted of a whole day's match, and therefore two innings for each side. Tom Merry & Co. and Figgins & Co. were aware that Harry Wharton and his warriors were very tough nuts to crack. They knew the game inside out, and it was necessary for a side to be very good and very consistent in order to beat them.

"Here come the merry jossers!" exclaimed Monty Lowther, who was looking out for the Friars. "A giddy brake-load of 'em! Come on, kids!"

The St. Jim's juniors hastened to greet their rivals from Greyfriars. Harry Wharton & Co. sprang down from the brake looking very fit and strong and sturdy. Their faces were familiar to Tom Merry & Co., with whom they had done battle on innumerable occasions, nearly always providing a close finish.

"It's good to see your angelic chivvies again, kids!" said Tom Merry, gripping Harry Wharton's hand in friendly greeting.

"Same here!" said Harry. "We always count the days to a trip to this jolly old show. All serene to start?"

Tom Merry nodded, and spun the coin.

"Tails!"

"Tails it is. What are you going to do?"

"Bat!" said Wharton promptly.

"And I will stand at thy right hand, and keep the bridge with thee," said Bob Cherry humorously.

Greyfriars started strongly. Fatty Wynn and Figgins opened the offensive, and were flogged all over the field with scant ceremony by the enterprising batsmen. Ten was telegraphed on the board, then 20, then 30, and Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry were still going strong.

With the score at 35, however, Talbot brought off a magnificent catch in the long-field, and Bob Cherry retired to the pavilion, having put together a very useful 20.

It was not until Figgins and Fatty Wynn were taken off, and Tom Merry and Redfern went on in their stead, that the wickets began to fall fast. Greyfriars were eventually disposed of for 120—quite a useful total.

The Saints, although they batted strongly and well, finished up 20 runs behind their opponents. Then came the luncheon interval.

When the game restarted, it seemed more obvious than ever that the Saints were doomed. Vernon-Smith, who was a mighty wielder of the willow, scored a brilliant 50 for Greyfriars, and St. Jim's found themselves two hours later, with no less than 172 runs to get in order to win.

Tom Merry and Talbot sauntered forth to the wickets, to start upon their gigantic undertaking.

Tom Merry had an "off" day. He was bowled first ball by Hurree Singh, the Indian wizard. Redfern took the skipper's place, and started off in a manner which reminded the spectators of G. L. Jessop at his best. He sent Hurree Singh to the boundary three times in succession, and continued to hit in stirring fashion.

Redfern was indeed in fine form. He exercised little or no caution; at the same time he gave the impression that he was perfectly safe. Everything came alike to him. He slogged Hurree Singh's expresses and Harry Wharton's slows with scant mercy, and Talbot, at the other end, backed him up loyally.

Talbot left with the score at 70, and Figgins took up the running. The long-limbed leader of the New House was a batsman of considerable renown, and he helped Reddy to take the score to a level hundred before one of Wharton's leg-breaks curled round his bat and gently snicked off the balls.

"A hundred for two!" said Tom Merry. "This is gorgeous!"

But a chapter of accidents followed. Fatty Wynn and Manners and Monty Lowther contributed the inglorious aggregate of 5, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, greatly to his chagrin, spooned up an easy catch at his first ball. A hundred for two had sounded impressive; 103 for six sounded vastly different.

But Redfern, undaunted and indomitable, still kept on in the way he had begun, and with Harry Noble rendering him loyal assistance, the hopes of the Saints began to revive again.

With the score at 140 Noble was clean bowled. A few overs later the next batsman succumbed, and presently the score stood at 160 for nine. Twelve runs were needed for victory, and only another five minutes remained prior to the drawing of stumps.

The last man in was Kerr of the New House. With true Scottish stolidity he survived the remaining balls of the over.

It was for Redfern to make or mar the issue. He faced Hurree Singh fearlessly—a handsome figure in his perfectly-fitting flannels.

The first ball was too good to hit. Reddy let it pass. The second he ran out at, and sent it soaring over the railings for 6, to the accompaniment of a perfect storm of cheering.

"Another two minutes!" muttered Tom Merry, his face tense with anxiety. "Will he do it?"

The captain of the Shell need have had no fears. Redfern saw that Hurree Singh was going to send down the swiftest ball he knew how. It was off the wicket, and the batsman, with a deft movement of his wrists, simply gave it a flick, and it sped through the slips and onwards to the boundary.

"Two more to win," said Monty Lowther.

And a dead silence followed.

Redfern smiled as he took guard. He didn't anticipate much difficulty in dealing with the next ball. Opening his shoulders to it, he sent it speeding away along the turf. Harry Wharton clutched at it, missed, and the next instant it cannoned into the railings.

"Hurrah!"

The great match was over and won, and Greyfriars had been routed on the post!

That evening was the best and brightest of Redfern's school career. He would be likely to remember it as long as he lived. Never had he been held in such high esteem by his schoolfellows; and a new feeling of loyalty for the grand old structure of St. Jim's sprang up in the breast of him who had, a few short days before, figured as the Schoolboy Reporter!

THE END.

(Do not miss next Wednesday's Grand, Long Complete Yarn of the Chums of St. Jim's, entitled "GRUNDY THE DETECTIVE!" by Martin Clifford.)

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A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

The Opening Chapters of a Great New Story!



CHAPTER 1.

Treachery.

Young Bob Hilder, a well-built lad of about sixteen years of age, came cantering through the scrub on his way to Katfarit, his father's homestead. That morning he had started on the ride to the bank at Birchquill, forty miles distant, and, having delivered a letter to the bank manager, and received one in reply, he had mounted his gallant steed, Brave Bess again, after a couple of hours' rest, and had headed for home.

Over the dusty trail from the town, into the path along the bush, up over the hills, and down across the valleys, with dense trees on every side and thick brushwood under foot, he had sat his horse with the ease and grace that comes with a lifetime in the saddle; whilst the myriad birds of marvellous plumage flashed from branch to branch like the splash of jewels, and the kangaroos hopped jabbering away on his approach, and the wild cats and other denizens of the bush crouched in their lairs.

Except for the noisy chatter of many of these, all was silence. The sun beat down mercilessly even through the leaves; the songs which Bob had trolled, keeping time with the measured beating of his horse's hoofs on his way to the bank did not come to his lips now. His resolute, sunny young face was clouded, and he was riding fast that he might hear and face the worst without delay.

Some thirty miles out from Birchquill, he rode into a paddock a thousand acres in extent, and here herds of cattle were grazing. Away to the left he got a peep of a wooden homestead with outhouses of zinc, and he could hear the crack of whips, the barking of dogs, and the musical tinkle of a bell as the cows were being rounded up and driven to the yard. Across another paddock he sped, and another, and again he saw a homestead.

Then he rode up a hill, and down below him was his father's house, nestling comfortably in the middle of some tilled ground, with a great stretch of land around, fringed on all sides by thick woods. For the first time he drew rein and eyed it sadly. For all its appearance of comfort and contentment, trouble had been there for some years. Was he bringing worse trouble to it in his pocket now? With a sigh he jogged on.

At a bend of the path a man jumped out from a wooden paling on which he had been seated, and Brave Bess, startled by the sudden apparition, reared, and sprang to one side. Bob's face grew stern on the moment, for of all men he knew, this was the one he most disliked.

"Why, do you want to frighten the horse? Didn't you hear me coming, Boardman?" he protested, as he sought to soothe the animal. "Is it a game you are trying to have? If so, you haven't got me out of the saddle, after all!"

Boardman, a thick-set, black-bearded man, with glittering eyes, laughed raucously, and clutched at the rein.

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"Have you been to Birchquill?" he cried. "Mickie Costello told me you were going to the bank there?"

"Yes, I have, if you want to know; but mind your own business!" Bob rapped back. "It's not friendship that makes you ask the question."

"Isn't it, then! You're a young cub to speak to me like that!" Boardman replied, with simulated indignation. "Where has your father a better friend than me—ch? But it's you that's having a game now, for well you know I think the world of him. How did you get on at the bank? Did Summers, the manager, say he'd fix things up?"

He clutched again at the reins, but Bob was too quick for him.

"Come along to the house, and ask my father, if you like," he answered. "You're not going to get anything out of me."

He touched the horse, and it sprang forward. Boardman, thwarted, and livid with wrath, uttered a savage imprecation. "You'd sauce me!" he snarled. "Like father like son! Neither of you any good! Then take that to remember your cheek by!"

He whirled his big stick, and slashed at the lad. The blow came down on the horse, which sprang forward at a bound. Bob's face went white, and his mouth grew hard as he pulled at the reins. Whirling round, he cantered back, and Boardman stared at him in surprise. On Bob came, his whip tightly clenched.

"That was a low trick, and I heard what you said, too!" he panted. "You think I'm afraid of you; then I'm not. And just to show you, take that in return."

His whip fell across Boardman's face, and, jumping back with a yell of pain, the bully staggered into a dense thicket. Bob had Brave Bess round in a trice, and as Boardman rushed at him again he shot past. When he looked back he saw the bully standing in the middle of the path nursing his face and bawling bloodcurdling threats after him. Steadying the horse, the lad rode on, his heart seething.

He rode into the yard, and, dismounting, he led his gallant steed into the stable. From there he crossed over to the back door, touched the latch, and walked to the kitchen. On the threshold he stopped. His father was sitting before the fireplace, his figure crouched, both hands to his head. And at this hour he was usually out on the farm and hard at work!

"Father!" Bob cried.

Old Tom Hilder turned a weary, ashen face. He rose nervously, and held out a trembling hand. Bob gave him the letter. The old man hesitated before breaking open the envelope. Very slowly he read the letter; then, with a groan, he let it flutter to the floor.

"Ruin!" he gasped. "It's come at last! The bank won't wait!"

He sank back on to the chair as if unable to stand, and Bob stepped to his side to comfort him.

"Perhaps it's not quite as bad as that," he urged, laying

TUCK HAMPERS ARE GIVEN AWAY TO READERS OF THE "BOYS' FRIEND," 1^D.

his hand on his father's shoulder. "You've been so worried, father, that you're only looking at the worst side. Besides, I don't understand."

"No, you don't; and it would have been better had I told you all!" the old man gasped. "But I was trying to save you from worry, and hoping for the best. It's too late now, though. The crash has come. Just for the want of a thousand pounds I must sell up. The bank won't wait."

"A thousand pounds!" Bob cried. "To lose all this land after all you've done for it, and all the cattle and horses and the rest! Why, father—"

"Ah, I know!" the old man interjected bitterly. "It's worth more, far more; but if it has to go by auction, and after the drought these last two years, and before the next boom comes, it will be bought for next to nothing. I was a fool to start borrowing money. I see that now. If only I hadn't listened to Boardman—"

"Boardman!" Bob exclaimed.

"Yes," old Tom Hilder went on, not noticing the lad's consternation; "it was he who advised me. He knew Summers and I didn't, and I found Summers very friendly at first. I can't think why he's changed. There's no use crying out, though. That never did any good. There's the letter, and you can read it if you like."

Bob picked up the letter. His father had always been of an openhanded, generous nature, and therefore one of the last to suspect evil designs in anyone. But Boardman and Summers were friends. Were they working together to ruin Tom Hilder so that Boardman could get the land cheap? Bob felt certain that this was the case, and his mind was in a whirl. With a great effort he pulled himself together and read carefully. Then he drew a deep breath.

"I see that Summers can't sell up at once," he said.

"Oh, no. There are legal steps necessary. But what's the use of that?"

"You might raise a thousand pounds elsewhere and pay off the bank?" Bob suggested.

"Where?" his father asked, without a ray of hope.

Bob's mouth felt parched, so great was his excitement. He moistened his lips before speaking again.

"Listen to me, father," he said earnestly. "You've often told me that your greatest friend in life was a man called Henry Norman. You were boys together. You roamed all over this country together, sharing every danger. He became rich, and some years ago he wrote to you from Sydney asking you to go down there and spend a month with him. Why shouldn't you go now and tell him everything? At least, he can only refuse, and I don't believe he will."

Old Hilder jumped to his feet, a flush was creeping into his pallid face, his eyes were shining with a new hope.

"Bob, you've hit the nail on the head!" he cried. "And to think that a youngster like you should have found a way out of this disaster that has baffled me! Henry Norman was always staunch as steel, and he'll have good security. He'll only have to wait for his money till things mend, and—"

"Then go at once, father."

"I will! I'll start to-morrow! My boy, through you all will come right yet."

He warmly wrung Bob's hand, and, with the cloud lifted, the evening passed happily. At dawn on the following day old Tom Hilder rode away to catch the train, having promised to write without a moment's delay, and Bob, his heart at rest again, set about the day's work. There was much to be done. For some years now he had put his hand to everything, and the men on the farm were willing workers, too. All went well. The cows were milked in time for the train every morning, the land was ploughed, the fences looked after, the trees felled and split for the saw-mills, and for three days Bob waited patiently to hear the news from Sydney. The three lengthened out to five, and he began to grow anxious. Eight passed without a letter from his father, and he was becoming alarmed. On the tenth, the bullock-driver, back with his team from the mills, came to see him.

"That you, Kerr?" Bob cried, as he recognised the fine athletic figure of the bullock-driver, and his manly face.

"Yes. Have you heard from Sydney yet?" Kerr asked.

"No."

Kerr whistled. He drew a hand across his mouth, and then thrust his thumbs into his belt.

"They were talking about your father at the mills to-day," he said. "I thought I'd call round and tell you."

"Talking about father! What do you mean?" Bob asked.

Kerr bent a trifle closer.

"You remember that wastrel Dickson who had to clear out of here a while back?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Well, he's been back again and chumming up with Boardman. Dickson could never keep a grip on his tongue, and he's been letting it wag the last few nights. Everyone round here likes your father, and few trust Boardman, and with good reason. Twig what I mean?"

Bob's heart began to beat fast and slow by turns.

"You think there's something crank?" he asked hoarsely. "I haven't heard from father for ten days, and he promised to write at once."

"Then you'd do well to go after him," Kerr said earnestly. "Folks in the bush don't gossip as in the towns. I can tell you this, that Boardman and Dickson were seen taking tickets for Sydney two days ago. Bob, your place is there."

The lad staggered back.

"You believe—" he began.

"I'm sure there's no time to lose," Kerr said gravely. "And if you ride hard you'll catch the night mail."

"I'm off at once!" Bob cried. "Come, help me to saddle Bess! I'm away like a streak of lightning!"

And ten minutes later he was galloping as hard as he could for the railway-station.

CHAPTER 2.

Found and Lost.

After a tremendous race, Bob just managed to catch the train, and, jumping into a carriage, he sank into a corner to think over what he had heard. With this news of a meeting between a wastrel like Dickson and Boardman, his father's long delay in writing took on an ominous significance. Ten days without a word from him! What might have been happening during those ten days? A terrible fear gripped the lad.

All through the night the train rolled along, stopping often at the up-country stations, and to Bob it seemed as if the journey would never end; but as morning broke and almost immediately afterwards the sun rose—as is the way in semi-tropical climates—and as if by a wizard's wand all that had been blackness became suddenly flooded in a golden light, the train drew into Redfern Station.

Men came tumbling out of every carriage—rich, well-dressed merchants from Melbourne, and sunburnt, bearded bushmen in blucher-boots, moleskin trousers, frayed jackets, and sombrero hats. They bustled out, and the lad followed, overawed by this, his first glimpse of a great city. His father was here, one of very many thousands. But how was he to find him? On all sides men were hurrying to work, intent on their own business. Who amongst them had ever heard of Tom Hilder of Katfarit?

None looked at the lad. The endless rows of houses, the puzzling maze of streets, the vast shops, the 'buses rolling up from the suburbs, the din of traffic, all dazed his mind and made him realise the magnitude of the task on which he had embarked.

Without knowing the direction he was taking, he came along Market Street and turned into King Street. There he saw Hyde Park, and wandered into it. Before long he realised that he was going out towards the suburbs, so he retraced his steps. He walked along Philip Street, and, descending a slope, he came suddenly on the harbour. Like so many born in the bush he had never caught sight of the sea before; his heart seemed to jump into his mouth; far as the eye could pierce the harbour stretched, the most beautiful in the world. Gigantic ships lay moored, small steamers were scurrying in every direction. He rubbed his eyes and stared, and in happier moments he would have been overwhelmed with delight; but not for an instant could he forget the quest that had brought him there. He was at Circular Quay now with North Sydney on the far side, and the small steamers bringing across the toilers for the day's work. Here, at least, was a spot where he could rest and think. He went to a seat and sat down.

Again he asked himself how he was to find his father. If he had been looking for anyone in the bush that question would not have troubled him. Tell him the direction, give him a hint as to where his father had last been seen, and Bob would have picked up the trail and followed it by a hundred signs by day, and by the stars at night. But of city ways he knew nothing. There was no getting on Nature's track here. For the first time in his life he felt baffled. Yet by some means or other his father must be found. On that he was determined.

Suddenly he sprang to his feet. He would go to Mr. Henry Norman. Mr. Norman lived at a place called Mossman's Bay, Bob remembered, so he stopped the first man he could and asked him the direction.

"Mossman's Bay!" the other said, in reply. "Why, it's to the right of the harbour, of course! Go down to the small pier and take a ticket. The steamer runs frequently."

Bob hurried along, and soon was aboard the steamer. Across the harbour it sped, bearing always to the right, and in twenty minutes he landed again. Here he had no difficulty; Henry Norman was known to everyone, and a fine house standing on a slight eminence was pointed out as his

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residence. It was not long before the lad was there eagerly knocking at the door.

"Can I see Mr. Norman?" he inquired of the elderly woman who answered the summons.

She looked at his up-country garb in some surprise.

"Mr. Norman!" she ejaculated.

"Yes, I'm inquiring for my father!" Bob exclaimed.

"For your father!"

"He came to Sydney ten days ago to see Mr. Norman, and I haven't heard from him since," Bob went on. "My name is Hilder."

"Ah, I remember!" she replied. "It must have been almost that time ago that your father called and saw Mr. Norman. But Mr. Norman has left now. He's gone on a long voyage for his health."

Bob's face grew pale, his lips began to twitch.

"Then Mr. Norman did see my father?" he persisted.

"Yes."

He thanked her, and turned away. Sick at heart, he walked along, and found himself presently at the water's edge again. Why had not his father returned home? In an agony of mind he crossed the harbour, and went up the streets. The worst that he had feared must have come to pass. His poor father! What had happened to him?

Walking into a large domain, he sank on to a seat near the entrance. He was tired and hungry, and yet he could neither close his eyes nor taste food. He did not notice that many men were around, a few on the seats, others stretched on the grass; some of them honest toilers out of employment, many of them the riff-raff of the great city, a dozen or so bushmen like himself, up for a holiday and enjoying the fresh air and the novelty of the scene. One of the latter presently sauntering along noticed Bob, and sat down beside him.

"Cheer-ho, mate!" he said. "What's the trouble?"

Bob looked up. One glance was enough. Here was a man of his own ways of life, one who would understand, and in whom he could confide. He told the tale, and as he went on the bushman's face grew very grave. He took the pipe from his mouth, and with it he indicated the harbour in the distance and the houses around.

"I guess this ain't my line any more than yours," he said. "But I'm not altogether what you call a stranger in Sydney, and if I don't know the ropes I know those who do. We'll get a move on, and search around. Don't worry; Sid Bennett will stand to you!"

They left the domain together, and Bennett first took him to a restaurant, where they had a meal. Then they went out of the broad streets and into narrow ones frequented by Chinese and other foreigners, where all was different from what Bob had seen before. Here and there Bennett made inquiries, and at last met a city man he knew named Cliff. Having explained the case, the latter enlisted himself in the cause, and they set out to make the search.

All that day they tramped around, diving into different haunts, seeing types of men far different from the splendid fellows to whom Bob was accustomed, and in time they got on the track. After much whispering over a counter, Cliff came back to Bob and Bennett quickly.

"Hilder hasn't been here, but some chaps have been talking about him," he said. "I know the crowd, too, by sight."

"What sort are they?" Bennett asked.

Cliff whispered so that Bob might not hear.

"A well-dressed, dangerous lot," he said. "They've got hold of Hilder, that's certain. He's been taken in evidently; that's the way they always work. Folks judge 'em on their looks, and none can speak more pleasantly. Come along, and don't let the lad hear anything to alarm him. If we can't find Hilder ourselves we'll have to warn the police, that's all."

They went on, and now Cliff took them away in an opposite direction. Here the streets were wide and fairly fashionable. They went from restaurant to restaurant, and night closed in whilst they still searched. All the time Cliff was getting hotter on the scent, and growing more eager. At about ten o'clock he bade Bob wait at the corner of a street, promising that they would not be long, and he and Bennett hurried away.

The lad stood, tired out and anxious. Minutes passed, and lengthened into half an hour, and Bennett and Cliff did not return. Suddenly a revolver-shot rang out, and at once a great crowd gathered far down the street. Bob could hear hoarse cries, police-whistles, and the clatter of feet. The din grew louder every moment; stunted figures with evil faces rushed past him, at first singly, and then in couples and groups. He stood, not knowing what was best to do. Every second the tumult increased, and he half feared that Bennett and Cliff were in the middle of it.

Staring through the darkness, he looked for them; and then he gasped, sprang forward and stopped, too utterly amazed to move. A man was running towards him and

glancing behind occasionally—an elderly man, respectable, exhausted, and yet anxious to push on. After a long, searching stare on Bob's part, there was no mistaking him. Despite the astonishing spectacle, this man was his father!

"Father!" he shouted.

Old Tom Hilder heard him. His face grew less strained, and he ran the faster. They met and clasped hands before they could stop.

"Father——" Bob began again.

"Come along—come along!" old Hilder gasped, clutching Bob's arm. "Down that street, Bob, out of the crowd! There's bad work going on below! Hurry on—hurry on!"

He was too exhausted to speak more, and Bob too dazed to question him. They took three turnings in succession, and were out of ear-shot of the tumult. Then old Hilder stopped and dived his hand into his pocket. He pulled out a bundle of banknotes.

"There's the thousand pounds!" he gasped. "Take it and get out of this, my lad! A train leaves in half an hour. Lodge it in the bank, and we're quits with Summers. Don't delay, or you'll miss the train."

"But father——" Bob protested.

"Not a word, but hurry off, or you'll be late!"

"But aren't you coming too?" Bob demanded, aghast.

"I can't!" his father answered, in a choked voice. "I won't be home for some time. If only Norman had stayed in Sydney——"

"You got the money from Mr. Norman?"

"Of course I did. He gave it to me like a shot. And that night it was stolen from me, and I went after the scoundrels," he continued, his voice vibrating with indignation. "I've been working to get it back ever since, and a terrible time I've had. But—but, Bob, can't you see?" he implored, in his misery. "I'm mixed up with the gang in the eyes of the police. They'll lock me up if they can get me. I can't go through that, and Norman isn't here to explain. I must lie low."

He groaned, but quickly pulled himself together.

"Make off to the train and lodge the money," he urged. "I'll let you know how I'm getting on from time to time. What luck that you came here to look for me! If that money was found on me the police would, of course, take it from me till too late to save the farm."

On the night breeze arose a murmur, growing louder every moment. The crowd was coming that way. His father clutched Bob's arm.

"If you're seen with me you'll be arrested, and it will be taken from you, too," he urged. "Then farewell for ever to our home. Good-bye, my lad!" he continued, as his hand closed like a vice on Bob's, and tears sprang into his eyes. "The cloud will lift, all will be well when Norman returns. I've only to stick it out till then. Keep everything going in the meantime, and a happy future lies before us."

Next moment he had crossed the street, and Bob, heart-broken for his sake, was left standing alone.

CHAPTER 3.

Trapped!

Bob watched his father till his figure was swallowed up in the darkness. Then he dashed his hand across his eyes and wheeled round.

"It's a shame!" he muttered hoarsely. "Oh, those scoundrels! If ever I come across them, won't I make them smart for this! Poor old dad, the straightest man that ever lived, now hunted by the police! It's almost more than I can stand. But—but to carry out his wishes is the first thing. Then I'll think out what I can do."

He was walking swiftly as these thoughts raced through his agitated mind. Glancing continually at the clocks he passed, he hurried on, and arrived at Redfern Station in time for the train. Then began the return journey after a day of such fatigue and intense excitement. It all seemed almost unreal. Until that morning he had not seen a city! Nor the sea! For long hours he had tramped, anxiety gnawing at his heart. In the moment he had least expected he had come face to face with his father, harried and hunted. Just a few hurried words, and they had parted, and what the future held in store it was impossible to surmise. But at least there was the means now of saving the home, and Bob gripped his pocket and felt the crisp touch of the banknotes. Then, worn out, he fell asleep.

He awoke in the middle of the night, and from that on he dozed. At daybreak he alighted from the train, and went into the hotel yard where he had stabled Brave Bess. The gallant steed neighed on his approach, and, saddling her, he mounted and cantered away. The bank door had

(Continued on page iii of cover.)

CORNSTALK BOB!

(Continued from page 20.)

hardly opened in Birchquill when he rode up, threw the reins over a post, and walked in.

Summers, the bank manager, was seated in a small office to the side, and Bob could see him as he stepped into the bank. The lad went straight into the room and walked to the table. Summers was busy opening and reading his letters, and when he raised his head he stared his surprise.

"Hallo!" he said curtly. "Has your father sent you to me again?"

"Yes, Mr. Summers."

"I'm afraid it's no use. I've been patient as long as I can, but—"

"I haven't come to ask a favour," Bob explained.

"Eh? Then what brings you here?"

"To pay the money and get a receipt for it," Bob answered. And he laid the notes on the table.

Summers sat back in his chair and stared. There was more, too, than surprise in his face. Bob, gazing at him fixedly, thought he detected a look of disappointment. Very gingerly Summers picked up the notes and counted them. From them he looked at Bob and back again. Then he got up, with the notes still in his hand, walked to the window, and looked on to the dusty road bleached by the scorching sun. After some moments he turned round.

"You say you got these notes from your father?" he queried.

"Yes."

"And where did he get them?"

"From his friend, Mr. Henry Norman of Mossman's Bay."

"Oh!"

Summers stood deep in thought.

"All right!" he said curtly. "I'll give you a receipt."

He wrote one out and handed it across the table.

"Good-morning!" he said.

"Good-morning!" Bob replied, and, wheeling round, he left the bank, sprang into the saddle, and cantered homewards. Summers' disagreeable manner had impressed him unfavourably.

"The cur!" he muttered. "And he pretended to be our friend! He's in league with Boardman against us. That's as plain as a pikestaff now. Well, neither of them can do us any harm. That's fixed up, anyhow."

And he laughed aloud.

Outside the town he saw a long streak of bullocks and a waggon raising a cloud of dust as it approached, and the figure of the driver by their side, his long whip across his shoulder. At one glance he recognised them, and, rising in the stirrups, he waved his hat. A minute later he had reined up alongside.

"Kerr!" he cried.

"Whoa, there!" Kerr cried to his team. "Spot! Nugget! Whoa!" And he ran to the waggon and clapped on the brake.

"Glad to see you back, Bob!" he then began. "And what's the news? It's good, I bet, from the look in your face."

"I met father, but he won't be back for some time. I'll tell you more when you get home to-morrow night. You know all about our trouble. That's squared up now."

"Bully for you!" Kerr cried cheerily. "I'd sooner that than a six months' cheque! I'll wait to hear the rest."

Waving each other a salute, they parted, and Bob rode on. He got home by midday, and was welcomed by all the men. With them he worked, and tried as best he could to look on the bright side of things. But the danger in which his father stood was ever in his mind, and his heart lay heavy. As the day went on, his spirits sank lower and lower. The foreboding of a great catastrophe increased with time.

The evening closed in, all work was suspended, and Bob, entering the homestead, lit the fire and prepared his lonely meal. He had finished it, and was about to go to the stables to bed down Brave Bess for the night, when his acute hearing detected an unusual sound. He listened intently. Yes, he was not mistaken. A horseman was journeying that way.

The noise, that at first had seemed like an echo, took definite shape, and came from the road on which he had travelled.

As it grew louder Bob noticed that the traveller was not merely riding fast, he was galloping hard. If he intended to carry on along the main path, the noise would soon be lost for several seconds in a ravine. But no; it grew even louder, and the lad's heart sank. The horseman was coming to the homestead, and he must be the bearer of some urgent news.

Bob's premonition of impending evil grew greater. News of his father, of course! What could it be but bad? He flung open the door, his face strained. Down the hill the horse

now was galloping, but it was too dark to see it. The rider swung off the path alongside the doorway and pulled up. Bob staggered back.

"Kerr!" he gasped. "You here, and on horseback! And you meant to stay till to-morrow in Birchquill!"

"The police!" Kerr cried. "They're coming this way! I rode like a fiend, but they can't be far behind!"

"The police!" Bob cried in amazement.

"Yes. They're after you!"

"After me!" the lad almost yelled incredulously.

"Yes. Summers has put them on your track."

"Why?"

"I don't know. But if you don't clear out you'll be gaoled," Kerr replied, drawing his breath hard. "Get away into the bush and hide for a couple of days, and I'll find out everything. Make for Lone Pine Gully, and I'll bring you food to-morrow. Clear out, I tell you, Bob! There's not a moment to— Ha! Listen to that!"

Away in the distance was the sound the lad had heard before. He reeled against the door.

"But what have I done? Why should I fear them?" he cried passionately.

"There's crook work of some kind, and you're in it. That's all I can tell you," Kerr urged desperately. "Don't stop talking, but bolt whilst you have the chance. We'll know all from the police to-night when you've gone. This horse is played out. He'd never get you away. Look sharp, for Heaven's sake!"

Bob saw the wisdom of adopting Kerr's suggestion.

"Brave Bess is in the stable," he managed to say.

"Then fetch her out."

Bob rushed through the homestead out across the yard and into the stable. In two minutes he had the gallant steed saddled and bridled. As he led her into the yard and vaulted into the saddle he heard the thunder of hoofs coming down the hill. But Lone Pine Gully lay in the opposite direction.

He shot away, and, looking back after some seconds, he saw his pursuers gallop past the homestead straight on his track.

Up the hill he went, and out of the valley. The police were riding hard, and they were well mounted. Brave Bess, after the ride in from Birchquill that morning, was not fresh. Still, she ought to be able to hold her own. Once on the crest, he swung away to the left, making for the gully. With the wind whistling past his ears, and Brave Bess pounding the hard ground, it was difficult to judge the distance of his pursuers behind. But suddenly the moon began to peep from behind a cloud, and he heard a shout. The troopers had seen him again.

Still his chance of escape was good. If only he could keep ahead for half a mile he could go down into a very narrow and deep ravine where the moonbeams never shone. There half a dozen troopers could not find him during the night, search as they would.

He had to use the whip; and Brave Bess, surprised and indignant, snorted at the touch and sprang forward wildly.

Crack! Crack!

The trooper had come within firing distance, and two bullets whistled past Bob's ears. Crouching lower in the saddle, he raced on. The ground seemed to fly away back beneath him. The pace was terrific. Only a minute or so now, and he would be out of danger.

Crash!

Without the slightest warning, Brave Bess went over on her head. Bob span through the air. Half stunned, yet still desperately determined to make a last bid for liberty, he tried to stagger to his feet. He was clutched and flung back, and a raucous laugh he recognised with a shudder of horror broke forth close to his ear.

As he still struggled desperately to rise, the trooper galloped up and jumped from his horse.

"Robert Hilder," he cried, "I arrest you in the King's name!"

"The charge! The charge against me!" Bob shouted wildly.

"You are charged with forging and passing bad money," the trooper said sternly. "Those notes you lodged in the bank to-day are false."

"False!" Bob raved.

Again there was the same malicious laugh.

"Ay, false as you and your rascal of a father!" a voice croaked. "Good job I brought him down with a rope across the path, trooper. I'm quit of them for ever! We'll gaoled them both now, father and son!"

And, looking up, Bob saw for the first time the evil face of Boardman, a grin on his coarse mouth and triumph in his glittering eyes.

The banknotes false! The thieves had taken his father's, and given him the false ones! Bob's senses began to reel.

Then, with a despairing moan, he fell into a dead faint.

(Another thrilling instalment of this grand new serial story next week. Order your copy of "THE GEM" LIBRARY early.)

INTO THE UNKNOWN!

The Concluding Instalment of our Popular Serial Story.

Civilisation Once More.

Everyone was amazed at the gigantic brute's enormous size, and strength, at the thickness of its red-brown coat, and its extraordinary capacity for stretching its neck to browse on the higher leaves.

But it was still allowed nothing to eat.

"Elephants are, on the whole, amenable to kindness when they have been captured and starved," observed Mr. Whittaker. "I see no reason, in the face of having read that these huge creatures may have been tamed and subdued by pre-historic man, why we should not do the same."

"It's quite possible that we can tame it," put in the doctor.

"Hurrah!" shouted the boys in unison.

"We shall have Sing Loo riding on its back yet," grinned Larry.

The Chinaman's face turned a sort of sickly green.

"I'm afraid you'll have to learn to ride it," said Mr. Whittaker, with a smile, and glancing up at the huge creature which, though in a half-crouching attitude, towered above him like some colossal thing.

The Chinaman was the first to try his hand at feeding the brute. Tearing off some young and succulent branches from the high part of a tree up which he climbed, he descended, and very gingerly approached the sloth, waving the green stuff in front of his nose as high as he dared.

The sloth seemed very chary at biting, and slowly stretched out his neck, very suspiciously sniffing at the food. But hunger suddenly got the better of him, and he made an unexpected grab at the leaves, which he bolted with avidity.

"Bravo, Sing Loo!" cried the doctor. "You've done something no Eastern man has ever done before—fed a live giant sloth. But don't give him any more. It won't do for him to get his strength back too quickly."

A few days passed, during which the enormous animal had just sufficient food given him to keep him alive, and then a consultation was held as to the best and quickest way of regaining some sort of civilisation.

"About five hundred and fifty miles from here, nor-nor-west," said Mr. Whittaker, "is a town belonging to the Portuguese and Brazilians. It's our nearest place of safety, so we must make for it."

Toothy Jim, with other natives, succeeded in hobbling all the legs of the giant sloth, giving him sufficient length of chain and ropes with which to get along.

Toothy Jim, with seven other natives belonging to the other explorer's expedition, was told off to give a hand at leading the captive giant sloth, who, after a slight resistance, offered very little reluctance at being made to bestir himself.

It was evident that the huge, seemingly untamable and unwieldy beast was by no means ungrateful for kindness and possessed a considerable amount of sagacity. There was no doubt about it—the giant sloth could be tamed.

"My hat!" cried Reggie, one day to Larry, when they were once more journeying towards civilisation, and more than half the distance was covered, without meeting with any startling adventures. "If we could only get the sloth over to England alive!"

"Well, you never know," replied the doctor, who was walking beside him, "what perseverance and good luck will accomplish. In any event, we have accomplished what we set out to achieve. If we can't get the giant sloth back alive to England, we shall have the most wonderful living pictures of the brute, providing no accident happens. But what I am looking forward to is the sight of Sing Loo entering the little Patagonian town for which we are making, riding on the back of the giant sloth. It will astonish the natives."

The boys were delighted at this idea, and could talk of nothing else.

At length their long journey was accomplished without any untoward event happening, and at an early hour, with a shout of joy, they saw the first village they had seen for many months.

By this time the giant sloth had accustomed himself to the ways of his captors, and he was getting quite docile and submissive. The Chinaman had overcome his fear of the brute, and, with the help of the boys and Toothy Jim, succeeded in climbing on the beast's back.

In this way, with the Chinaman leading the way on the giant sloth's back, the expedition reached the village.

The natives and Portuguese who saw this extraordinary

sight, did not know at first whether to be alarmed or amused. They had, needless to say, never seen such an animal before. Finally, they burst into cheers, and two Portuguese came running out in the wildest state of excitement, to welcome the cavalcade. They were both explorers in a mild way, and when they heard the whole story of Mr. Whittaker's party, they were loud in their praises and admiration of the success achieved.

The governor, also a Portuguese, gave them a royal welcome, and soon messengers were despatched to the nearest town with the news, which, in turn, was flashed over the American continent and to England, of the wonderful things that Mr. Whittaker's expedition had accomplished.

"Well," said Mr. Whittaker to the three boys on their last night in the village, preparatory to going to the nearest port and embarking for England, "they'll give us a rousing welcome at the Royal Geographical Society."

"It wouldn't surprise me, Whittaker," put in the doctor, "if they made you a knight, or even something more."

"I don't know about that," returned Mr. Whittaker modestly, "but I reckon that you and I and the boys'll be pretty busy rushing about England and Europe lecturing, and we can do a big American tour afterwards."

"Say," drawled the American film-operator, who had obtained some of the finest and most valuable "movies" that any film-operator had ever produced, "I reckon that it'll be an honour to me and my friend if you'll let us join you, and help you to illustrate your lecture."

"That's just what I was going to suggest," said Mr. Whittaker. "Some day, perhaps, we'll all of us start on another expedition, and we can take you to the Rock City, and introduce you to the lava-river, if the whole thing wasn't destroyed by that earthquake."

"I reckon that'll be fine," said the American warmly; "and I'm with you!"

It took nearly five days before Mr. Whittaker hoped to hear from the Royal Society and Royal Geographical Society of London, for the nearest telegraph-station was five days' journey from their village.

During this time the expedition were very busy overhauling their animals and stock, and discarding what they would not require again. There was a boat they could catch from the nearest port, after a three weeks' journey on horse and mule. This vessel would take them to Buenos Ayres, and there they would all embark on a R.M.S.P. liner, which would take them to Southampton.

It was arranged that Toothy Jim, who had been so faithful a servant and friend, should accompany Mr. Whittaker back to England. At a farewell luncheon in their temporary home a cablegram was handed to Mr. Whittaker. It contained eulogistic messages of congratulation and astonishment on the marvellous success of the expedition. Mr. Whittaker read it out amidst a thunderous burst of cheering.

"It's you boys who've really done it," beamed Mr. Whittaker at his three young charges.

"No, no, no!" they shouted in chorus. "We only had a bit of luck. The success of the thing is up to you, sir."

"Three cheers for Mr. Whittaker!" shouted Larry.

There must surely be some lusty lungs in the world if they could have yelled louder than those happy people at this farewell lunch in a remote Patagonian village.

Everyone was toasted, even Sing Loo, Toothy Jim, and all the boys in turn.

Outside, in his huge wooden cage, the giant sloth, now tamed and as harmless as a captive elephant, must have wondered what was happening.

When silence reigned once more, Mr. Whittaker rose and asked the assembled company to listen to his reply cablegram to the Royal Geographical Society. It ran:

"Impossible to express our gratitude for your generous and kindly message, which is ample compensation for all we have endured. Our whole policy throughout has been unity and trust. Arriving England June 25th, with cinematograph-films of sloth. If undamaged, will show them at lectures, and all over England. The giant sloth will follow, if he lives, and can stand the voyage.

"WHITTAKER, Patagonian Expedition."

With a mighty burst of cheering, the assembled company broke up, and an hour later Reggie, Larry, Jimmy, with the doctor and Mr. Whittaker, Toothy Jim, and the American and English explorers, headed by the giant sloth, started on their homeward journey to bright, merry England.

THE END.