

"FOR FREEDOM & THE CUP!" Grand School and Football Story in this Issue.

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"RENTON OF THE ROVERS!"
A Thrilling Footer Serial.

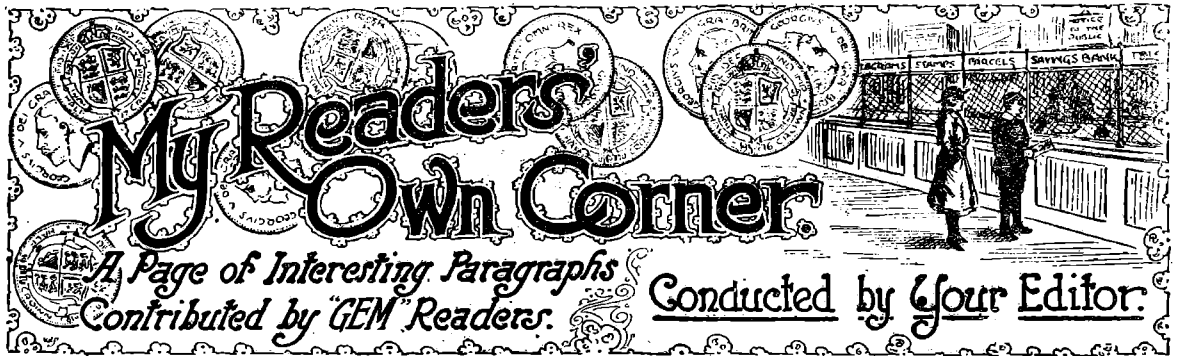
"FOR FREEDOM & THE CUP!"
A Tale of Tom Merry & Co.

"SLAVE ISLAND!"
A Grand Adventure Story.



FRIEND OR FOE? Talbot's Strange Awakening in the old Manor House.
(A Dramatic Incident from our Grand Long Complete School Tale inside.)

IS YOUR CONTRIBUTION IN THIS WEEK ?



NOTE.—Half-a-crown will be awarded to the sender of every paragraph published on this page.

THE EXPLANATION.

John was late, and the teacher asked the reason. "I've been sick," said John. "You don't look it." "I am better, but I was sick." "You go right home," said the teacher, "and get a letter from your mother, or you will be punished severely." John came back inside ten minutes with a letter, which the teacher did not seem to fancy in the handwriting of John's mother. John was bland and innocent. The letter read: "Please excuse John bein' late this mornin', as he broke his leg.—Mrs. BROWN.—D. Gratwick, 103, Dixons Green, Dudley, Wores.

NAMING THE TWINS.

"And how are the twins?" asked the vicar, when he met the elder sister running errands in the village. "Getting on nicely, thank you, sir," shy Annie stammered. "A week old to-day, are they not? What are you going to call them?" the clergyman went on. "Y-y-yes, sir," answered the girl, more confused than ever. "We are going to call them Steak and Kidney." The vicar was puzzled, but that was all he could learn. A fortnight later he was asked to bestow the names of Kate and Sidney on the nites. —Gordon Hatton, 11, King's Square, Bridgewater, Somerset.

THE ECHO.

"Fellow-citizens," shouted the orator, "what, I ask, is our country coming to? And echo answers 'What?'" "Pardon me, sir," interrupted a mild-looking individual in the body of the hall, "but did I understand your question to be, 'What is our country coming to? And echo answers 'What?'" "Yes, sir," replied the orator. "Then there is something wrong with the apostrophs of this hall," said the mild person, shaking his head in perplexity, as he resumed his seat.—C. Hall, 2, Peshurst Road, E. 9.

AMBER.

Amber was the first substance which was known to possess the electric property—that is, when it was rubbed briskly it attracted feathers and other light bodies.—G. Gibbons, Glyn-y-Coed, Port Talbot.

HISTORICAL HIGHGATE.

Highgate has several historical places. Lauderdale House, now the refreshment house in Waterlow Park, was once the residence of Nell Gwynne. It is open free to visitors. Then there is Dick Whittington's Stone at the bottom of Highgate Hill, and some way up the hill is Cromwell House, where Oliver Cromwell lived. On Parliament Hill Fields there is a large mound, which is said to be the burial place of Boadicea, the Queen of the Iceni in Ancient Britain, whose statue is now on the Thames Embankment.—John Penn, 125, Dartmouth Park Hill, Highgate, N. 19.

AN EASY TRICK.

Get a slip of paper four inches long and three-quarters of an inch wide, and a tumbler. Lay one end of the paper on the edge of the tumbler, and balance a penny on the paper and the edge of the tumbler. Then ask a chum to draw the paper from between the penny on the edge of the tumbler without moving either penny or tumbler. It is quite easy. Hold the loose end of the paper in the left hand, then drop the first finger of the right hand on the middle of the paper quickly, and the trick is performed. After a little practice you will find it simple enough.—Miss Jennie Taylor, 22, Third Street, Bensham; Gateshead.

THE SMALLEST HOUSE IN BRITAIN.

When staying at Conway I went to see the smallest house in Great Britain. It is very small, and is built in the same way as most houses, but it is coloured a bright pink, and stands in the middle of a row of other houses. Nobody lives in it now, and a charge is made for admission. The whole house consists of two rooms. The downstairs room has been used as a kitchen, the room upstairs as a bed-room. The stair is a short ladder, and rather difficult to ascend. The roof of both rooms is so low that one would think the house had been built by dwarfs.—W. A. Stewart, Elswick, Kilmalcolm, Renfrewshire, N.B.

WHALES.

The whale belongs to the Cetacea. There are two classes, toothed and whalebone whales. The whalebone is not bone, but baleen, very similar to horn. The blue whale is rare. The finner supplies a large amount of oil, in some cases as much as a thousand gallons. The sperm whale is rare in British waters. It is valued at about three hundred pounds. The whale has oftentimes stood between men and starvation. The modern method of killing whales is by a harpoon-gun, which fires a harpoon-gun carrying an explosive shell.—Andrew R. Inkster, Ingaville, Scalloway, Shetland, N.B.

What is the game we all adore?
(It makes us long for more and more.)
What gives us joyful times galore?

Why, football!

What is the game for British men?
What takes the place of football when
The summer weather comes again?

Why, cricket!

What sport stands out among the best?
What sport expands your lungs and chest,

Performed on back and side and breast?

Why, swimming!

What always lets you take the lead,
As o'er the countryside you speed
Upon a smooth, fast, winged steed?

Why, cycling!

What makes each boy so muscular?
What makes him run both near and far,
Or jump clean o'er a five-foot bar?

Athletics!

What sport for everyone was made,
In which there's nought to be afraid?
What makes you want a lemonade?

Why, rambling!

What is that ripping indoor game,
Though outwardly it looks quite tame,
In which 'tis well to gain a name?

Why, chess, boys!

What paper is the first and best?
What makes your pleasure unsuppressed?
What's crammed with joking, wit, and jest?

The GEM, boys!

—Ronald Royston, 19, Stafford Road,
Norfolk Park, Sheffield.

Contributions are invited from readers of the "GEM" for publication on this page. Anything will do, so long as it is interesting, short, and concise—a good joke, a description of a holiday, a bright idea for increasing the popularity of the "Gem," a good anecdote. "Pars" should not be more than three hundred words long—the shorter the better. They can be sent in on a postcard. Address all contributions to The Editor, The "Gem" Library, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4, and mark them "Readers' Own Corner."

RENTON OF THE ROVERS!



A Magnificent New Football Serial. By PAUL MASTERS.

Synopsis of First Chapters.

JIMMY RENTON, an excellent fellow and a footballer of marked ability, works for a time on the staff of a provincial paper. He strikes up a friendship with

BILLY DESMOND, a fellow-reporter, a cheery, fun-loving youth; and he incurs the enmity of a cad named

LUKE RAYNER, who brings about Jimmy's dismissal from the newspaper office.

Shortly afterwards the paper closes down, and whilst Jimmy Renton is tramping the country, seeking an engagement as a League footballer, he is joined by Billy Desmond, who undertakes to do all he can to further his chum's ambitions.

Jimmy and Billy are staying at the Forest Arms, a fine old inn situated in the King's Forest; and there they learn that Madge Trevor, the fifteen-year-old daughter of one of the directors of the Belmont Rovers Football Club, has been kidnapped by gypsies. They stumble across the kidnapers by a lucky chance, and after a fierce fight they succeed in rescuing the girl. Miss Trevor, who had been without food for some time, is taken to a hotel by the boys, and there they introduce them-

selves. After a meal, they sit talking until Jimmy Renton decides it is time to make another move.

(Now go on with the story.)

Billy's Suggestions.

"**W**E'D better see about getting you home, Miss Trevor," said Jimmy Renton. "Your people will be fearfully

anxious about you." "It's a long way to Belmont, where I live," said Madge.

"But the motor-bike will make short work of it," said Billy Desmond. "Are you ready?"

"I'm awfully grateful to you—"

"The pleasure's ours, dear girl."

Billy Desmond produced a road-map from his pocket, and after studying it carefully for a moment he went outside, and started up the engine of his machine.

The other two followed. Madge got into the side-car, and Jimmy Renton perched himself on the carrier.

The front and rear lamps were lighted, and the machine was soon speeding away through the darkness.

It was a glorious ride, and the little town of Belmont was reached all too soon, so far as Jimmy and Billy were concerned, at any rate; for they had

greatly enjoyed Madge Trevor's company.

Madge pointed out her father's house, standing in its own grounds on the outskirts of the town; and Billy Desmond turned the machine into the drive.

On the front steps stood Mr. Trevor, chatting with a police-sergeant, who had come to report that there was no news of the missing girl.

And then a voice rang out through the darkness.

"Father!"

Mr. Trevor turned, and came hurrying down the steps with a cry of joy.

"Madge!" he exclaimed, as the girl alighted from the side-car and advanced to meet him. "Thank Heaven!"

"This is no place for us, Jimmy!" murmured Billy Desmond, as Madge ran forward to embrace her father. "Let us retreat in column of fours, as they say in the Army."

But before the two chums could retire from the scene, Madge Trevor called to them. In a few hurried sentences she had described the rescue to her father; and Mr. Trevor, a tall, distinguished-looking gentleman, shook the two chums warmly by the hand.

"I am deeply grateful to you both," he said. "You have shown great pluck

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and resource, and you have relieved my mind of terrible suspense and anxiety. Will you come indoors?"

Jimmy and Billy hesitated. "Do, please!" urged Madge. "All serene," said Billy Desmond. "But there's nothing to fuss about, Mr. Trevor, I assure you."

"You have proved yourselves to be very gallant lads," said Mr. Trevor warmly. "You needn't wait, sergeant," he added, addressing the gaping police-officer. "My daughter is safe and sound."

"If you want a job, sergeant," said Billy Desmond, "go and arrest those beastly Romanies. They're somewhere in the King's Forest. Sorry I can't be more explicit."

The sergeant bade Mr. Trevor good-night, and strode away, muttering to himself. And the little party passed into the house.

"May I offer you some food?" inquired Mr. Trevor.

"No, thank you," said Jimmy Renton. "We had some just before we came away."

Mr. Trevor led the way to the drawing-room. Arrived there, he beckoned to the two chums to be seated, and proffered his cigarette-case.

Billy Desmond took a cigarette, and apologised on behalf of Jimmy Renton. "Jimmy's a non-smoker and teetotaler, sir," he said. "Perhaps he wouldn't say no to a stick of chewing-gum—"

"Shurrup, you idiot!" growled Jimmy.

"Now," said Mr. Trevor, with a smile. "I should like you to give me full details of your gallant action."

But he found both Jimmy and Billy very reticent on the subject of their heroism; and it remained for Madge Trevor to give her father a detailed account of the adventure.

Mr. Trevor listened attentively to the narrative. Then he turned to Billy Desmond.

"I should like to be allowed to reward you in some way—" he began.

"Eh? What for, sir?" "For rescuing my daughter from the clutches of those rascally Romanies, of course!"

"But it was Jimmy Renton who did the rescue work, sir. I merely looked on from a safe distance and advised him."

"You can hardly expect me to believe that. You are both brave lads, and I should like to show my appreciation of your bravery in some tangible form. Would you be offended if I suggested making you a monetary gift?"

"We don't want money, sir," said Jimmy Renton quickly. "But—"

"Well?" "I know exactly what he wants to say, sir; but he can't bring himself to say it, so I'll act as spokesman," said Billy Desmond. "You happen to be a director of Belmont Rovers—Jimmy's favourite team. Could you possibly use your influence and get him a billet as a professional player in your club?"

Mr. Trevor looked astonished. He hesitated before replying, and Jimmy Renton and Billy Desmond hung upon his answer!

The Goal of His Ambition!

THIAT is rather an awkward request, Desmond," said Mr. Trevor at length. "At least, I find it rather awkward to answer. As a director of the Belmont Rovers Club I certainly possess a good deal of influence. At the same time, I always make it a point never to exert

that influence unfairly. In other words, I don't believe in recommending any young fellow, no matter how much of a gentleman he may be, unless he is an exceptionally fine footballer."

"Jimmy Renton comes in that category, sir," answered Billy Desmond promptly.

Mr. Trevor smiled. "Do not misunderstand me," he said. "Belmont Rovers is one of the finest teams in the country—"

"Hear, hear," said Jimmy Renton heartily.

"And a player has to touch the hallmark of excellence before he can hope to get an engagement with the club. You say that Renton is an exceptionally fine footballer. I have heard that said about others, and when they have come to be given a trial they have shaped like novices."

"There's not much of the novice about Jimmy, sir," said Billy Desmond. "He can keep his end up in any company. He's as fast as a streak of lightning, and he can shoot and pass like a giddy genius. In fact, genius is just the word for Jimmy!"

Mr. Trevor did not seem to be convinced. He turned to Jimmy Renton.

"You have rendered me a very great service, my boy," he said, "and it would be churlish of me not to recognise and reward your gallantry. But I would prefer to do it in some other way than that which your friend suggests. If you stand in need of employment—"

"I do," said Jimmy. "Then I can offer you a remunerative position on my estate."

"That's awfully decent of you, sir. But my heart's in football, and I'm afraid that nothing short of a League footballer's job would satisfy me."

"He seems awfully enthusiastic, dad," chimed in Madge Trevor, who had been listening with great interest to the conversation. "Why don't you give him a trial?"

"For whom have you played, my boy?" inquired Mr. Trevor.

"For Burchester United, sir—"

The director of Belmont Rovers raised his eyebrows.

"And I'm on trial at the present time with Bourne Athletic. But I'd much prefer to get an engagement with your club, if possible. You see, Belmont Rovers has always been my favourite team."

Mr. Trevor nodded. "If, as you say, you are on trial with Bourne Athletic," he said, "you must be a player of unusual merit."

"If you'll get into touch with Mr. Robinson, one of the Bourne directors, he'll confirm that Jimmy's a top-hole man, sir," said Billy Desmond.

"I happen to know Mr. Robinson intimately," said Mr. Trevor. "I will get into communication with him at once."

And he crossed over to the telephone. "I doubt if you'll find Mr. Robinson at the football club, sir, at this time of night," said Jimmy Renton.

"But I can get through to his private house. Hallo! Give me Bourne double-two six, please."

"That's a trunk call, sir," said the operator. "I'll ring you as soon as Bourne comes through."

"Thank you!" said Mr. Trevor. And he hung up the receiver.

After an interval of twenty minutes, during which Mr. Trevor and his daughter chatted pleasantly with Jimmy Renton and Billy Desmond, the telephone-bell rang.

"Your call to Bourne, sir," said the operator.

The next moment a languid voice sounded over the wires.

Mr. Robinson, who had just been on the point of retiring for the night, was not best pleased at being summoned to the telephone. But when he became aware that it was his friend Mr. Trevor who had called him up his annoyance vanished.

"Hallo, Trevor!" he said genially. "Is this a business call?"

"Yes. I wish to speak to you with reference to a young fellow called Renton. I understand you are giving him a trial?"

"That's so."

"What is his form?" "He's a top-notch," said Mr. Robinson. "He played in a practice match only this afternoon, and he gave an excellent display."

Mr. Trevor was impressed. He knew that his friend was not in the habit of giving praise unless praise was due.

"Then you regard Renton as a suitable candidate for League football?" he said.

"Most certainly! But for the fact that there are no vacancies in our first team I should secure Renton a place right away."

"He is very anxious to get an engagement with Belmont Rovers," said Mr. Trevor.

"Then I shall not stand in his way. A player of his ability doesn't deserve to be idle. I hope you'll give him a trial, Trevor. If you do, he will amply bear out what I have said of him."

"He shall certainly be given a trial," said Mr. Trevor. And Jimmy Renton could not repress an exclamation of joy. "I am much obliged to you, Robinson, for your information. Good-night!"

"Good-night!" said Mr. Robinson. And there the conversation ended.

Mr. Trevor replaced the receiver on its hooks, and turned to Jimmy Renton.

"I must apologise for being so sceptical just now, when your friend was telling me of your footballing abilities," he said. "Mr. Robinson has satisfied me that you are well worth a trial with Belmont Rovers, and you shall have one to-morrow, if you like."

"Hurrah!" chortled Billy Desmond. "Mr. Robinson's a sport. I knew he'd turn up trumps. Do you mind if Jimmy and I waltz round your drawing-room, Mr. Trevor? We feel sort of elated."

"You can be as elated as you please, but not at the expense of my furniture!" said Mr. Trevor, laughing. "Will you turn out to-morrow afternoon, Renton, for a practice match?"

"Of course, sir!" said Jimmy. "What time?"

"Two o'clock. Do you know where the ground is?"

"No, sir. But I'll jolly soon find out!"

The two chums prepared to take their departure. They shook hands with Mr. Trevor, and then with Madge, who murmured:

"I shall see you both to-morrow."

"At our usual trysting-place, I suppose—the old rustic bridge by the mill?" whispered Billy Desmond, with the air of a lovelorn swain.

"Certainly not!" said Madge haughtily. "I shall see you in the grandstand on the ground."

"All serene," said Billy. "We'll sit and whisper sweet nothings to each other, and keep an eye on Jimmy Renton, who will be engaged in chasing the bounding leather, and banging it into the net every time he gets within shooting distance. Farewell, Miss Trevor!"

"Good-night!" said Madge.

The two chums were soon speeding homewards.

Jimmy Renton lay back contentedly in the side-car, happy in the knowledge that his long-cherished ambition was practically attained.

If all went well on the morrow—if he play at the top of his form—he would soon find himself a playing member of the Belmont Rovers Football Club, and he would wear the colours of that famous team, which he had admired ever since he had been old enough to take an interest in football.

Billy Desmond was feeling very bucked with life, too. In his unselfish way, he rejoiced that his chum's great opportunity had arrived at last.

"You must play up to-morrow, Jimmy," he said, "in a manner that will astonish the natives. You must go through the opposing defence like a knife through butter!"

"Trust me to play up all I know!" replied Jimmy. "I say, wasn't it a stroke of luck that we came across Madge Trevor? If we hadn't met her I should never have got this gilt-edged chance of playing for Belmont Rovers!"

"It was providential, dear boy," said Billy Desmond. "Dame Fortune has not merely smiled on us. She's absolutely guffawed, if one may say so. Madge Trevor's father happened, by the luckiest chance imaginable, to be a director of the Belmont Rovers. If he had been a pork butcher, or a chimney-sweep, or an itinerant vendor of old iron, you'd never have had this gilt-edged chance, as you rightly termed it."

"That's true enough," said Jimmy. "And now that I've got the chance I mean to make the most of it."

The machine raced on through the shadows, and it was past midnight when the two chums arrived at the Forest Arms.

They were fagged out after the strenuous exertions of the evening, and they turned in at once, looking forward to the morrow, when Jimmy Renton would be given an opportunity of making good.

In the Limelight!

THE course of a would-be football champion never did run smooth, to misquote Shakespeare. And when Jimmy Renton arrived in the dressing-room of the Belmont Rovers club on the following afternoon there was a nasty shock in store for him.

Among the players who were preparing to take part in the practice-match was an individual whom Jimmy had neither wished nor expected to see again.

It was the fellow who had wronged him in the past—the fellow with whom he had been at daggers drawn—Luke Rayner!

Jimmy gave a violent start.

What was Rayner doing here?

The only explanation that occurred to him was that Rayner, like himself, was being given a trial for Belmont Rovers.

Jimmy was furious to think that such a sporting club as the Rovers should be contaminated by the presence of a rank outsider like Rayner. He realised, too, that his own prospects of success would be jeopardised by his having Rayner as a clubmate. The mischief-making cad who had caused Jimmy to be sacked from the staff of the "Burchester Times" would now do his utmost to make further trouble. Jimmy felt sure of that.

Rayner, who was in the act of donning a jersey, looked up. He, too, gave a start. For although he had vowed that he would cross Jimmy Renton's path sooner or later, he had not expected to meet him under such conditions as these.

"You here!" snarled Rayner.

Jimmy nodded coolly. He had regained his composure by this time.

"Are they giving you a trial for the Rovers?" asked Rayner.

"Yes."

Rayner sneered.

"I s'pose you've been curryin' favour with one of the directors?" he said.

"Steady on!" said Jimmy warningly. "You ought to know from the past experience that I never allow anybody, least of all you, to talk to me like that! And what, might I ask, are you doing here? Are they giving you a trial as well?"

"Yes. Not that a trial's necessary in my case. I shall turn out for the Rovers' first team on Saturday for a cert."

"You seem jolly confident about it."

"I've got reason to be. You see, my pater happens to be a director of the club."

"What!"

"Gottin' deaf in your old age? My pater's here, an' he means to keep a fatherly eye on my welfare."

Jimmy Renton understood now why Rayner was being tried for Belmont Rovers.

Mr. Rayner, the man who had swindled Jimmy's father in business, was now one of the Rovers' directors; and he had no doubt been instrumental in securing a trial for his unworthy son.

Jimmy felt very uneasy.

With Rayner senior a director of the club, and Rayner junior a playing member of it, there would be many obstacles set in Jimmy's path.

Before further conversation could ensue the two elevens took the field.

In the grand stand Madge Trevor and Billy Desmond sat side by side exchanging cheerful banter.

Several seats behind them sat Mr. Trevor, Mr. Rayner, and another director, a meek-and-mild individual named Dodds.

Jimmy Renton was assigned to his usual position—outside-left. He noticed that Rayner occupied the same position on the opposite side. It was unlikely that they would come into direct contact during the game, and Jimmy felt relieved on this score.

The three directors seated in the stand were not there merely as idle spectators. They had a duty to perform.

Bob Hughes, the man who usually figured at outside-left for Belmont Rovers, had been badly crooked on the previous Saturday. It would therefore be necessary for a deputy to take his place for many weeks to come. That deputy would be either Jimmy Renton or Luke Rayner. The one who showed up best in this practice-match would be selected to play for the first team in its next League engagement.

Rayner knew that this was so, and Jimmy Renton guessed it. And each was determined to put up the best game he knew.

It was Jimmy who first came into the picture.

Directly the ball was kicked off it was sent out to him on the wing, and he put in one of his fleetest runs, winding up with a scorching shot which the goalie was lucky to divert round the post for a corner.

"Bravo, Jimmy! Keep it up, old man!"

Jimmy recognised the voice as Billy Desmond's, and he smiled. Both Billy and Madge Trevor returned his smile.

As for Luke Rayner, his face was darkened by a sullen scowl. His rival was in the lime-light already, whereas he—Rayner—seemed to be unable to get a look-in. And when, after ten minutes'

play, the ball did come to him, he bungled the pass badly; and one of the opposing half-backs easily cleared.

"My son," remarked Mr. Rayner to his fellow-directors, "is somewhat off-colour. He informed me before the game commenced that he had a splitting headache, and I trust, gentlemen, that you will not attach too much importance to any minor blemishes he may make."

"I certainly don't think much of his form up to the present," said Mr. Trevor bluntly.

Throughout the first half Jimmy Renton enjoyed himself immensely. He happened to be playing on the same side as the captain of Belmont Rovers—a dashing, bustling inside-left named Kennedy. He and Jimmy formed an ideal left wing, and their side led by a goal to nothing at half-time. It was from a pass by Jimmy Renton that the solitary goal had been scored.

Rayner had bucked up as the game proceeded, and he had put in one or two useful sprints. But even at his best he was no match for Jimmy Renton.

Kennedy clapped Jimmy on the shoulder as the teams came off at the interval.

"You're a dead cert. for the first team," he said. "You're every bit as good as Bob Hughes, our usual outside-left; and praise can't go higher than that."

"Oh, good!"

As Jimmy passed into the dressing-room with the others he was heartily clapped by Billy Desmond and Madge Trevor. And Madge's father called out to him, "Capital, my boy—capital!" But Mr. Rayner was scowling even more fiercely than his hopeful son.

In the second half of the game Jimmy maintained his good form.

There was one unpleasant incident which escaped the referee's notice.

Jimmy's side was attacking holly, and there was a melee in front of goal following a corner-kick.

Rayner had dropped back to assist the defence, and by means of a sly trip he sent Jimmy Renton sprawling.

Jimmy was badly shaken up, and he knew who had fouled him; but he refrained from making a scene.

As soon as he had scrambled to his feet Jimmy received the ball from Kennedy. He trapped it smartly, and then, working his way through a solid group of defenders, he sent the leather crashing into the net.

"Goal!"

Jimmy's fellow-forwards surged round him to congratulate him. And Rayner, who had hoped to put his rival out of action, was almost beside himself with rage and chagrin.

In the grand stand, Billy Desmond made a megaphone of his hands, and shouted: "Good work, Jimmy! Keep the pot boiling!"

Towards the end of the game Jimmy Renton came within an ace of scoring another goal. But the goalie's outstretched hand clutched the ball just as it was about to cross the line.

Then the final whistle rang out, and the teams returned to the dressing-room.

"I think, gentlemen," said Mr. Trevor, turning to his colleagues in the grand stand, "that there is no doubt as to Renton's suitability for a place in the first eleven."

"I protest! I protest most strongly!" snapped Mr. Rayner.

(Another instalment of this grand football serial next week.)

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YOU MUST NOT MISS READING THIS GRAND SCHOOL TALE!



With one accord the juniors sprinted up to Talbot. "Hurrah! He's turned up just in time for the match!"

CHAPTER 1.

Missing from School!

"A NY news, Tom?" Marie Rivers asked the question anxiously, as she stepped into Tom Merry's study in the Shell passage.

The junior looked up from the list of football players he was compiling, and shook his head.

"No news at all, Miss Marie," he said. "Nobody seems to have the slightest inkling of old Talbot's whereabouts."

"A search-party was sent out this morning, I understand?"

"Yes; and they came back empty-handed. They didn't pick up a single, solitary clue! It's awful!"

Tom Merry looked deeply distressed, but not more so than his companion.

Two days had now elapsed since the mysterious and startling disappearance of Talbot of the Shell. And no word had reached St. Jim's concerning the junior's whereabouts.

Strange, indeed, were the circumstances attending Talbot's disappearance. He had been travelling with the St. Jim's team to Greyfriars, where an important match was to be played, and he had failed to show up at his destination.

Tom Merry & Co. had missed their chum, and they had had the train searched at the next station on the line. But there had been no sign of Talbot. He had failed to turn up during the match; in fact, he had not been seen since.

It was with heavy hearts that the footballers had returned to St. Jim's. They had defeated Greyfriars after a strenuous game, but the absence of Talbot had taken the gilt off the gingerbread, so to speak.

Talbot's chums could not help suspecting that there had been foul play. Everything pointed to the fact that Talbot had fallen among foes; for he certainly would not have gone off of his own accord, on the very eve of an important football-match.

During the two days of anxiety and suspense which had followed Talbot's dis-

appearance search-parties had scouted the surrounding countryside.

The police, also, had been instructed by the Head to keep their eyes open. But no news had come to hand—not a single clue had been picked up—and Tom Merry & Co. were well-nigh in despair of ever seeing their chum again.

As for Marie Rivers, the girl had had no rest since the fateful afternoon when Talbot had vanished. She, too, suspected foul play. And now, for the first time, she put her suspicions into words.

"I cannot help thinking, Tom," she said, "that Pat Donovan is at the bottom of this business."

"Pat Donovan?" queried Tom Merry. "Yes. He is a wild Irishman—a member of Jim Dawlish's gang of crackmen."

"My hat! But—but I thought Dawlish was dead. Wasn't he thrown from the parapet of Stormpoint Lighthouse some time back?"

"He may have been rescued, or possibly he was able to scramble ashore. But whatever his fate may have been, Pat Donovan is still very much alive. I saw him myself, only a few days before Talbot disappeared."

"You did?" exclaimed Tom Merry excitedly.

"Yes; and I warned Talbot against him."

"By Jove! If that precious scoundrel was hanging around here, you can safely wager that he's connected in some way with Talbot's disappearance!"

Marie nodded.

"I strongly suspect that he has kidnapped Talbot," she said.

"But why should he do that?"

"He may have acted from several motives. But the chief one, I think, would be to try and induce Talbot to join the gang. You see, Talbot's brains and skill would be invaluable to the scoundrels."

Tom Merry was silent for a moment. "Then you think, Miss Marie," he said presently, "that Pat Donovan was on the train the other afternoon, and that he got Talbot into his clutches?"

FOR FREEDOM & THE CUP!

A MAGNIFICENT, LONG, COMPLETE SCHOOL STORY OF TALBOT & TOM MERRY & CO., SPECIALLY WRITTEN FOR THE "GEM" LIBRARY—

By

MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"That is exactly what I do think."

"And, assuming that he overpowered Talbot, where would he be likely to take him?"

"There you have me beaten. The gang has a good many resorts, and practically all of them are unknown to me."

"In that case, it would be as easy to find a needle in a haystack as to find old Talbot?"

"I'm afraid so. But I've been hoping that news would come. This suspense is terrible!"

"I wish the Head would give a party of us permission to go away for a week and make a thorough search," said Tom Merry. "But, of course, that's out of the question. All we can do is to sit still and wait. The police are on the look-out, and I believe the Head's going to engage a detective."

"I do hope that no harm has come to Talbot!" said Marie. Her face paled as she spoke, and she clenched her hands tightly. "Donovan is an unscrupulous man, and—"

"We must hope for the best, Miss Marie," said Tom Merry. "Perhaps Talbot will be able to send us a letter soon; or, better still, make his escape."

But the junior's tone was not very hopeful. And after Marie Rivers had left him, he sat for a long time with his head in his hands, thinking of his absent chum.

Tom Merry was roused from his reverie by the sudden entry of four juniors. They were Manners and Lowther—his two study-mates—and Jack Blake and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

The faces of the quartette were glowing with excitement, and Tom Merry looked up eagerly, hoping to hear tidings of Talbot.

But he was disappointed.

"Heard the news, Tommy?" said Jack Blake breathlessly.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Is it about Talbot?" he asked quickly.

"No, worse luck! It's about the footer competition for the Shirley Bright

Cup. We're drawn against Rookwood in the semi-final."

"An' the match is to be played on our own g'round, deah boy!" chimed in Arthur Augustus.

"When?"

"On Wednesday."

"Jove, that's jolly short notice! Still, I've mapped out the team in advance."

"If Talbot doesn't turn up by Wednesday, you'll play Levison in his place, I suppose?" said Manners.

"Yes. Levison put up a topping show against Greyfriars—he won the match for us, in fact—so I can't drop him."

"From what I hear of these Rookwood merchants," said Monty Lowther, "they're hot stuff. They fairly put it across the Grammarians in the first round of the competition."

"Yes; we shall have all our work cut out to lick them," said Tom Merry. "But lick them we shall and must. That silver cup's going to repose on the mantelpiece in this study."

"Hear, hear!" said Manners. "I've already cleared a space for it, as a matter of fact."

St. Jim's—particularly the junior section of the school—had the football fever badly.

Mr. Shirley Bright was an old boy, and the editor of the "Athlete," and he promoted a great football tournament, in which eight well-known schools had taken part.

Four of the schools had already been knocked out, and those still in the running were St. Jim's, Rookwood, Highcliffe, and Courtfield County Council School.

Talbot's disappearance had cast a gloom over the St. Jim's Eleven. But they were no less keen on winning the cup. And they were hoping against hope that their absent schoolfellow would turn up in time to take part in the semi-final with Rookwood.

"We'll have a tremendous spread to celebrate our victory, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus, with enthusiasm.

"I suggest that we win the cup first, and talk about the tremendous spread afterwards," said Manners. "There's many a slip, you know."

"And even if we lick Rookwood, we shall still have the final to tackle," said Jack Blake.

Tom Merry rose to his feet.

"Come along, kids," he said. "Time's short, and we'll get in some practice while we can."

And the juniors collected the other members of the eleven, and adjourned to the football-ground.

CHAPTER 2.

A Bid for Freedom!

MEANWHILE, what of Talbot? The handsome Shell fellow had passed through some unenviable experiences. He was no stranger to adventure, but seldom had he found himself in such sore straits as he was now.

On the afternoon of the Greyfriars match, Talbot had been followed into the railway-carriage by Pat Donovan. He had failed to recognise the man at first, for Donovan was disguised as a bearded, benevolent-looking gentleman of the schoolmaster type.

The scoundrel had not found it a difficult matter to get Talbot into his clutches. He had passed himself off as a headmaster, engaged in tracking down a runaway pupil. And the other people in the compartment had believed his story.

Talbot had not submitted without a struggle.

When Donovan forced the junior to alight from the train at one of the

intermediate stations Talbot had fought like a tiger. But he was no match for the hefty Irishman, who had hustled him into a waiting taxi and rapped out some instructions to the driver.

Talbot's brain was in a whirl as the vehicle sped through the town of Wayland and into the open country beyond.

He had little dreamed that Pat Donovan would attempt to kidnap him in so public a manner.

But the unexpected had happened. The scoundrel had told a plausible story to the other occupants of the carriage, and now he had the St. Jim's junior in his power.

Where was he being taken? What was going to happen to him?

Was Jim Dawlish, the leader of the gang, still alive? And, if so, was he going to make yet another attempt to induce Talbot to join his party of law-breakers?

These, and a hundred other questions the junior asked himself as the taxi sped on through the narrow lanes.

Escape was impossible—at the moment, at any rate. For a leap from the vehicle would have meant serious injury, perhaps death. Besides, the presence of Pat Donovan prevented such a leap from being taken.

Several miles had been covered before any word was spoken.

It was Talbot who opened the conversation.

"Where are you taking me?" he demanded.

Donovan chuckled.

"Is that a conundrum?" he asked.

"I want to know—I insist on knowing!"

"You insist, do you? Well, I'm not goin' to tell you."

"I suppose you realise the risk you're running?" said Talbot. "You'll be sent to prison for this. Kidnapping isn't looked upon as a light offence."

Donovan shrugged his shoulders.

"Before a man can be sent to prison he's got to be found out, begorrah!" he said. "An' how's anybody to know about this stunt?"

"I shall put the police on your track directly I'm free."

"Directly you're free! Ho, ho, ho!" Donovan laughed uproariously, as though enjoying a rare jest. "Faith, an' your freedom's a long way off, Toff," he added.

"I shall shout—I shall raise an alarm."

"Better not try it on," said Donovan, "or I shall be under the painful necessity of gaggin' you."

Talbot was silent. He knew that he was in the man's power—that if he wished to escape he must bide his time.

Rain began to fall heavily. It splashed against the closed windows of the taxi.

Talbot thought of the match at Greyfriars. He wondered how his schoolfellows were getting on without him. And his heart grew very bitter as he reflected that it might be a long time before he could assist the St. Jim's eleven again.

He glanced once or twice through the window, down which the rain was streaming. But he had no idea where he was being taken. The taxi kept turning corners and darting down side roads. As for the driver of the vehicle, Talbot concluded that he was a confederate of Donovan's, and a member of the gang.

After a time Donovan spoke again.

"If you give no trouble, Toff," he said, "you'll be all right, an' you won't be treated as a common or garden prisoner. But if you try to get away, shure, an' it's mighty sorry you'll be!"

"Where are you taking me?"

"That's the second time you've asked me that, an' I'm not in a position to satisfy your curiosity. But I'll tell you this much. You're goin' to one of Jim Dawlish's retreats."

That conveyed nothing to Talbot, for Dawlish had several places of resort where he planned his nefarious schemes and concealed his plunder.

"I don't believe Dawlish is alive," he said.

"He's very much alive!" replied Donovan, with a chuckle.

"I sha'n't believe it until I've met him in the flesh."

At that moment there was a loud report.

One of the front tyres of the taxi was punctured.

The vehicle halted, and the driver, uttering words which were not to be found in the dictionary, started on the necessary repair work.

Talbot was glad of the stoppage. He hoped that somebody would come along and ask questions.

But the mishap had occurred in a very lonely lane, and the puncture was repaired without any interruption.

"Fixed it up, Ned?" inquired Pat Donovan, at length.

"Yes," growled the driver.

"Off we go, then!"

Dusk was now beginning to fall.

Talbot knew that he must be many miles from St. Jim's, but he had no clue as to his actual whereabouts.

It was quite dark by the time the taxi halted again.

Donovan opened the door and alighted. He signalled to Talbot to follow.

As he stepped out of the vehicle, glad of the opportunity of stretching his cramped limbs, Talbot peered around him in order to take stock of his surroundings.

Of two things he was certain—that he stood on a great height, and that he was near the sea, for the booming of breakers sounded far below.

The taxi could proceed no further, for it had come almost to the edge of a cliff.

It was a lonely, forsaken spot, and Talbot knew that it would be futile to shout for help.

Besides, a storm was raging, and his voice would have been drowned in the roar of the sea and the thunder of the elements.

The junior felt cold and hungry and dispirited. But he pulled himself together and resolved to make a bid for freedom there and then. There could be no sense in waiting till he was imprisoned within four walls.

"This way, Toff!" said Pat Donovan.

"Come!"

And Talbot came—much quicker than the scoundrel had expected. He clenched his fists and rushed at his captor, hoping to take him by surprise.

He succeeded, too, for Donovan staggered back under a rain of blows.

Had Donovan been his only foe, Talbot's bid for freedom might have proved successful.

But there was the driver to be reckoned with. He was a big, powerfully-built fellow, and when he saw what was happening he promptly rushed to Donovan's assistance.

The odds were heavy against him, but Talbot fought with the strength of desperation. He dealt Donovan a terrific blow between the eyes, and the scoundrel measured his length in the rain-soaked grass.

Before the junior could gain an instant's breathing-space, however, the other man was upon him. He was clasped round the middle by a pair of sinewy arms; and, try as he would, he could not break free from that crushing grip.

The pressure became almost unbearable, and Talbot could not refrain from crying out.

"Pat told you what to expect if you gave any trouble!" said the driver. "You've got men to deal with, my son—not weaklings!"

Talbot felt himself weakening beneath that awful grip. The perspiration stood out on his forehead; his strength was fast ebbing away. But he managed to make one more desperate attempt to break away. And this time he succeeded.

A deep, sobbing breath of relief escaped him. Then he turned and stumbled blindly away into the darkness.

But it was a case of out of the frying-pan into the fire.

Talbot had gone only a few yards when he pitched forward, as it seemed, into nothingness. His senses swam; he had a vague notion that he was dropping into an abyss. There was a great roaring in his ears, and then all became a blank, and he knew no more.

CHAPTER 3. Blank Despair!

IN that terrible moment Talbot of St. Jim's had given himself up for lost.

He realised, in a vague sort of way, that he had fallen over the edge of the cliff, and it seemed to him that he was going to a terrible fate.

He was consequently surprised beyond measure when he awoke to consciousness, and found himself, not lying maimed and bruised among the rocks at the base of the cliff, but in a bed.

With difficulty he raised his bandaged head and looked about him.

He was in a small, not unpleasant room. The walls were bare, but the furniture was of the antique order.

The bed was very old-fashioned and was overhung with a canopy. On a small deal table close at hand a lamp was burning. But this was unnecessary, for the daylight streamed in at the solitary window.

Talbot looked at the window curiously. Through the glass he could discern a number of iron bars, and he shuddered a little. There could be no doubt that he was a prisoner—presumably in some old manor house.

The junior pressed his hand to his throbbing temples. He was conscious of feeling very weak and ill. But he discovered that he was sound in limb, and for that, at any rate, he was immensely thankful.

He tried to piece together in his mind the events that had gone before. The last thing he could remember was the sensation of dropping into what seemed unlimited space. But he had no idea how he came to be in his present surroundings.

He endeavoured to get out of bed, but the effort proved too much for him, and he sank back again on to the pillows. His bedclothing was clean, and he was evidently being well cared for.

"After all, things might have been a jolly sight worse!" was his reflection. And then he succumbed to the feeling of drowsiness which assailed him, and dropped off to sleep.

When Talbot awoke he was no longer alone in the room.

A middle-aged man—a complete stranger to Talbot—was bending over

the table, and stirring something in a basin.

"Drink this," he said. And his tone was not unkind.

Talbot obeyed, and at once began to feel better. He looked searchingly at the man who had waited upon him.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"Never mind who I am," was the reply.

"A member of Dawlish's gang, I suppose," thought Talbot. Then he added aloud:

"How long have I been here?"

"Thirty-six hours."

"Great Scott! Have I been unconscious?"

"You have been very ill."

"How did I come here? The last recollection I had was of falling over the edge of the cliff. How is it I wasn't killed?"

"You were fortunate. At that part of the cliff there is a ledge a little way down, and you fell on that ledge. You lay exposed to the elements for some time before you were rescued."

"And who rescued me?"

"The two men with whom you had been struggling."

Talbot began to feel more kindly disposed to Pat Donovan and to the taxi-driver. He realised that but for them he might have died.

But what was to happen to him now that he had been saved? How long was he to be kept a prisoner in this place?

Eagerly he questioned the man who was apparently his warder. But he could get no information as to the plans concerning his future.

The man was cultured and well-spoken, and there was nothing villainous about him. But he was undoubtedly a tool of Jim Dawlish, and he had probably been instructed to disclose no information to the captured schoolboy.

"I will bring you some books to read," he said.

"Thanks!"

"I think you are well on the mend now, but you have had a bad time. You must hurry up and get quite fit again."

"And what's going to happen to me when I'm fit?" asked Talbot.

But the man went out of the room without replying.

Talbot sat up in bed and listened.

All was silent within the house; but from without came the roar of the breakers, and the junior knew that his place of confinement was close to the sea.

"As soon as I'm a bit stronger," he murmured, "I'll try and have a peep out of the window, and see if I can get my bearings."

Talbot's warder returned with some books, and Talbot read solidly for a couple of hours. Then a good meal was brought in to him, after which he felt more like his old self again.

His thoughts reverted to St. Jim's.

Were the fellows searching for him? he wondered. Were they alarmed at his protracted absence?

Marie Rivers, he knew, would be very anxious on his account. He wished that he had some means of communicating with her. But when he asked his warder if he might write a letter, the man said "No!" in such a tone of finality that Talbot did not repeat his request.

The day dragged slowly by.

Just before dusk fell Talbot got out of bed and crossed over to the window. It cost him a big effort, but he was determined to find out where his prison was situated.

He stood on a chair, and peered

through the aperture. And then his senses seemed to swim, for he found himself gazing into a cauldron of seething waves.

The house in which he was imprisoned stood on the very edge of the cliff.

Far below, the breakers dashed tumultuously upon the rocky shore.

It was an impressive scene, but the St. Jim's junior gave a groan as he realised that there was no escape for him via the window.

He crept back into his bed, and reviewed his position. He tried to think how he might effect his escape, and the only plan which occurred to him was this. He must wait until his strength had fully returned to him, and then overpower his warder.

But even if he were successful in this, it did not follow that he would be able to escape from the house. For there might be other men in that lonely place, in which case his exit would be barred.

Another twenty-four hours passed. At the end of that time, Talbot felt capable of making a supreme effort.

A golden opportunity soon presented itself.

The warder came into the room with some food. He set the tray down on the table, and bent over it, with his back to Talbot.

It would have been the easiest thing for the junior, who was in bed with his clothes on, to spring out and attack the man.

But at the crucial moment Talbot drew back. He felt that there was something mean and despicable in attacking a man from behind. Moreover, he reflected that this man had been very good to him. So he hesitated; and as he did so he heard the sound of men's voices from the corridor without.

That settled it.

Talbot knew that it would be rank folly to attempt to escape just then. So he pulled the bedclothes over him once more, and pretended to be dozing.

His warder served him with food, and spoke quite civilly. But he was very guarded in his statements, and he gave Talbot no information which was likely to prove of value to him.

The junior did not see the man again until nightfall. And then he noticed that his warder's face was flushed and his hands unsteady. It was not difficult to see that he had been drinking.

"Now's my chance," thought Talbot. "I'll pump him for information."

And he did.

"Look here," he said aloud, "I'm fed-up with this everlasting secrecy! For goodness' sake tell me something! Who arranged for me to be brought here?"

The warder hesitated a moment. He had had a good deal to drink, but he was far from being intoxicated. However, his tongue was loosed.

"Who arranged for you to be brought here?" he echoed. "Why, Jim Dawlish, of course!"

"Is it a fact that Dawlish is still alive?"

"Certainly!"

"Then why doesn't he come and see me?"

"He's got more important matters to attend to."

Talbot was still unconvinced. He believed Dawlish was dead, and that for some reason the members of the gang would not admit the fact. He believed, also, that Pat Donovan was now the leader of the cracksmen.

"Tell me," said Talbot insistently, "how long I'm to remain here?"



Blake was running full pelt, when he cannoned into one of the Rookwood backs and rolled over heavily. The game was immediately suspended, and a crowd gathered round the injured junior. Blake's face was pale. "I think my knee has given out!" he said. (See page 10.)

"This will be your last night in this house, my friend."

"And then—"

"You'll proceed to Southampton."

"Southampton!" echoed Talbot, in amazement. "What the thump—"

"You're going to accompany Pat Donovan and another member of our little band to America."

"My hat!" Talbot sat up in bed, his eyes gleaming. "Are you telling me the truth?"

"Absolutely!"

"But why are they taking me to America?"

"There's work to be done in the States—difficult and delicate work—and your skill and craftsmanship will come in very useful."

"They'll never get me across!" said Talbot passionately. "They'll never get me on board even! I'll expose them!"

"You'll find that extremely difficult—impossible, in fact. All arrangements have been made—every precaution has been taken."

Talbot's heart sank. He felt that he was completely at the mercy of the gang. He hadn't the heart to ask further questions of his warder; and even if he had, it would have been futile, for the man realised that he had already said too much.

The prospect which lay before the un-

happy junior was anything but inviting. This would be his last night in the lonely house on the cliff.

In the morning he would be removed to Southampton, and taken on board one of the outgoing liners. He had no doubt that Pat Donovan had all his plans cut and dried, and that he would tell a plausible story if any inquiries were made.

For hour after hour Talbot lay awake, peering into the darkness.

He had failed to take advantage of his one chance of escape, and he was not likely to get another.

The door of his room was a stout one, and it was securely locked on the outside. And the barred window afforded no outlet.

Black despair had Talbot in his grip. And it was past midnight when he eventually sank into a troubled slumber.

CHAPTER 4.

The Routing of Rookwood!

TALBOT had now been absent for some days from St. Jim's.

Search was still being made for him, and efforts were made to get on the track of Pat Donovan.

All inquiry and investigation, however, proved futile.

The day of the Rookwood match came round, and Talbot was still absent.

His place in the junior eleven was taken by Levison major, who had played such a great game against Greyfriars.

Jimmy Silver & Co., of Rookwood, arrived at St. Jim's full of confidence. And there was good reason for their confidence. They had put Rylcombe Grammar School to rout in the first stage of the competition, and they hoped to go one better by defeating St. Jim's.

They found Tom Merry & Co. in a subdued mood.

"You fellows look as if you're attending your own funerals," remarked Jimmy Silver. "What's the trouble?"

"One of our best players has disappeared," said Tom Merry.

"What?"

The captain of the Shell explained that Talbot had been missing from school for some days.

"And you've no news of him?" ejaculated Jimmy Silver, in astonishment.

"None."

"But do you mean to say he disappeared on his own account?"

"That's hardly likely. It's more probable that he was kidnapped."

"My hat!"

"An' it will go hard with the kidnappah if evah we come across him!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy grimly.

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"There's a pretty big 'if' about that," said Manners. "The fellow, whoever he is, must be miles and miles away by now."

"Have the police been informed?" asked Tommy Dodd, of Rookwood.

"Yes," said Tom Merry. "There's a 'lec on the track, too. But so far there's nothing to report."

"How jolly rotten!" said Jimmy Silver. "Have you got a good man in Talbot's place?"

Tom nodded.

"Levison will fill the bill," he said. "He bagged the winning goal for us against Greyfriars."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus heartily. "Levison's a wippin' playah—hardly in the same class as myself, of course, but—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The swell of St. Jim's jammed his monocle into his eye, and frowned at the footballers.

"I fail to see that I have said anything to excite your visibility—" he began.

But nobody heeded Arthur Augustus, and his threat to administer "a feahful thwashin' all round" was ignored.

The rival elevens wended their way to the football-ground, where a huge crowd had foregathered.

It was observed that the Head was among the spectators. He was chatting to a tall, distinguished-looking young man. This was Mr. Shirley Bright, the editor of the "Athlete," and the promoter of the great football tournament.

Mr. Bright nodded and smiled as Tom Merry & Co. came on to the field in their football garb. And he wished them well, for he was an old boy of St. Jim's, and nothing would delight him more than to see his old school carry off the cup.

Marie Rivers had turned out to watch the match—though it must be confessed that the girls' thoughts strayed far away from the football-field at that moment. She was thinking of her absent chum, and wondering if he had gone out of her life for ever.

Marie had not been idle. She had communicated with her father, John Rivers, now a detective in the employ of Scotland Yard, and he had told her that he would leave no stone unturned in his efforts to find Talbot.

But the days had passed, and no word had come from John Rivers. As a result of his silence, Marie had practically lost hope.

Her friendship for Reginald Talbot was deep and sincere. She could not bear the thought of anything happening to him. And yet she feared that he must be in dire peril, or surely he would have managed to send her a communication of some sort.

Whilst these thoughts were passing through Marie's troubled mind, the two teams lined up.

Tom Merry & Co. appeared to be less merry and bright than usual, but they were determined not to allow their anxiety for their absent chum to spoil their game.

Rookwood had a very formidable team, and they played with rare dash from the outset.

One of their speedy wingers, a fellow called Mornington, was a constant thorn in the side of the St. Jim's defence.

Mornington frequently beat Figgins for pace, but he could not get the ball past Fatty Wynn, who was exhibiting his usual coolness and resource in the St. Jim's goal.

And then the homesters did a spell of attacking. Their forwards combined with perfect harmony, and Levison went close with a scorching drive.

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After twenty minutes' fast, keen play, St. Jim's opened the scoring.

Dick Redfern fired in a tremendous volley from near the half-way line, and the Rookwood goalie misjudged the flight of the ball, which eluded his clutch and dropped into the net.

"Goal!"

"Well played, Reddy!"

"Keep it up, St. Jim's!"

Rookwood strove hard for an equalising goal, but their forwards did not experience the best of luck.

Jimmy Silver hit the crossbar, with Fatty Wynn beaten. And a moment later Mornington threaded his way through a crowd of players, only to have the mortification of seeing his shot go inches wide.

Rookwood continued to exert pressure, and the St. Jim's backs were greatly relieved when the whistle went for half-time.

"I fancy we've got 'em weighed up," remarked Monty Lowther, during the interval. "We shall have the wind in the second half."

"I think I had better pop wound to the tuckshop, an' ordah the grub for to-night's celebration," said D'Arcy.

"You'll do nothing of the sort, Gussy!" interposed Tom Merry. "Wait till we're about four goals to the good before you start thinking of celebrations."

Whilst this conversation was taking place, Jimmy Silver & Co. were mapping out a plan of campaign for the second half. It was an excellent scheme, but unfortunately it failed to come off.

The St. Jim's halves, who had been rather ragged in the early stages, now played a spoiling game, and all the Rookwood attacks were broken up.

Then came a period of thrills.

Levison raced away, and showed the Rookwood defenders a clean pair of heels. He drew the Rookwood custodian out of his goal, and then deftly touched the ball back to Tom Merry, who came tearing up behind, and who drove it into an unguarded net.

"Goal!"

"Two up!"

"Bravo, Tommy!"

Two minutes later another nail was driven into Rookwood's coffin.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy centred the ball finely, and Tommy Dodd, in a moment of thoughtlessness, put his hand to it.

"Hands!" came a roar from the touch-line. And it was instantly followed by a roar of:

"Penalty!"

The referee had sounded his whistle, and pointed to the penalty-mark.

Figgins was entrusted with the kick, and he made no mistake. He scored with a fast, low shot, which gave the goalie no chance.

It was now realised on all hands that Rookwood were a beaten side. They were three goals behind, and only by extraordinary play could they hope to wipe off that deficit. To give them credit, they never left off trying, and after persistent pressure, Jimmy Silver scored for them.

But that goal was merely an oasis in the desert, so to speak. For St. Jim's took up the running again, and Levison and Harry Noble scored a goal apiece.

The crowd, by this time, was almost delirious with enthusiasm.

"One—two—three—four—five!" they kept shouting. And a score of voices added:

"Make it six, you fellows!"

Only a few more minutes remained for play.

Jack Blake dashed away on the wing amid great excitement. He was running full pelt when he cannoned into a Rookwood defender, and rolled over heavily.

The game was immediately suspended, and a crowd gathered round the injured player.

Blake's face was very pale, but he forced a grin.

"I think my knee's given out," he said.

"Oh crumbs!"

"What bad luck!"

The leader of the Fourth could take no further part in the game. A number of spectators assisted him to the sanatorium, and it afterwards transpired that his knee would not be right again for a week or more. This meant that Jack Blake would be unable to take part in the final when it came off.

"More trouble!" said Manners. "First we lost Talbot, and now we've lost Blake."

"And I doubt if we shall be able to get another Levison to take Jacky's place," said Tom Merry. "Never mind. We've wiped up the ground with Rookwood!"

They had, indeed! For when the final whistle rang out, St. Jim's were victorious by five goals to one.

"Wonder who we shall have to meet in the final?" said Dick Redfern.

"Highcliffe, most likely," said Tom Merry. "They're pretty certain to put paid to Courtfield County Council School."

And so it proved.

A telephone message came through that evening to the effect that Highcliffe had beaten Courtfield by two goals to nil.

This meant that Highcliffe and St. Jim's were to meet in the final, which was to be played on a neutral ground.

Mr. Shirley Bright informed Tom Merry & Co. later in the evening that the all-important match would be played at Greyfriars.

"On to-day's form," he added, "you'll lick Highcliffe into fits!"

"I don't know so much," replied Tom Merry. "You see, we shall be without Jack Blake, and he's one of our best men. Still, we shall go all out. And if that silver cup doesn't repose on the mantelpiece in my study, it won't be for want of effort on our part."

"That's the spirit!" said Mr. Bright approvingly.

"Will you stay and have tea with us, sir?" asked Tom. "D'Arcy's providing the spread."

"Delighted!"

It was a very pleasant celebration which took place in the junior Common-room. But Tom Merry & Co. were less boisterous than usual, in spite of their handsome victory over Rookwood.

And the reason for their subdued spirits was not far to seek.

They missed Talbot. And they felt that life would never be the same until he came back to them.

CHAPTER 5.

The Escape from the Lonely House!

WHEN Talbot awoke out of the troubled slumber into which he had fallen it was broad daylight.

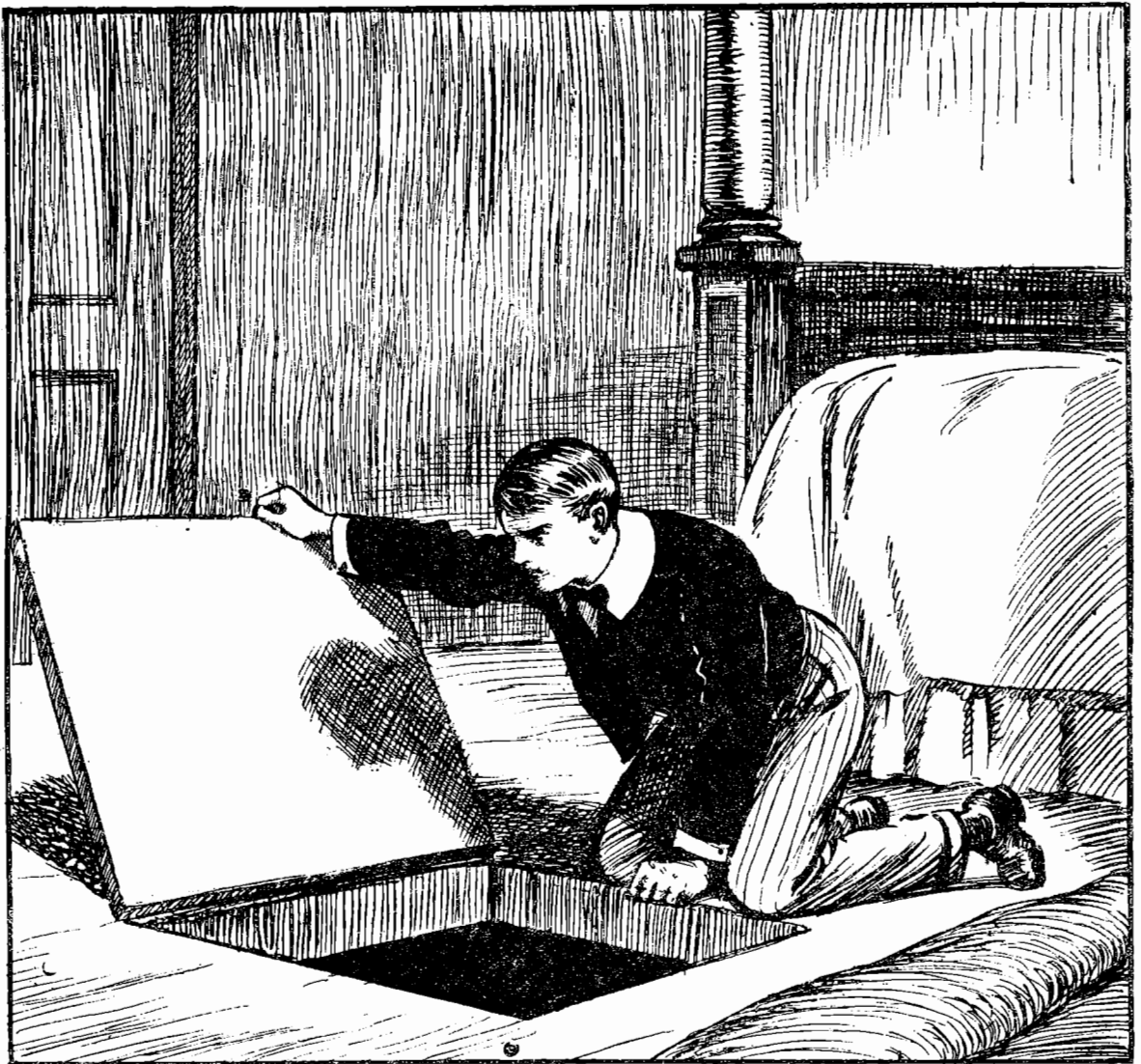
For a moment the junior imagined he was in the Shell dormitory at St. Jim's, but only for a moment.

Talbot gave a groan as the realisation of his unhappy plight came to him.

He had spent his last night at the house on the cliff.

A new day dawned, and Pat Donovan would soon come and take him away.

Talbot was much better in health, but he was far from being strong. Lack of exercise and fresh air had sapped his vitality, and he was not physically capable of putting up a strong resistance to Donovan. The scoundrel would take



Talbot drew out his penknife, inserted the blade in one of the cracks of the trap-door, and prised it up. Then he peered through the aperture, and beheld a room very similar to the one in which he had been imprisoned. (See Page 12.)

him across to America, and none of his old chums at St. Jim's would know where he was or what was happening.

The thought was maddening. Talbot got out of bed, and washed and dressed. Then he sat down on the bed and awaited developments.

Presently he heard footsteps in the corridor, and his heart beat faster than usual.

They were coming to take him away. A moment later the key grated in the lock and the door opened.

But it was not Pat Donovan who entered. It was the man who had guarded Talbot during his captivity.

"Good-morning!" he said. "I've brought your breakfast. Eat it, and enjoy it, for I don't know when you will get your next meal."

"Is Donovan coming for me this morning?"

"Yes."
"Will he be alone?"
"There will be another with him."

Then, as if he had read the junior's thoughts, the man added:
"Take my advice, and make no resistance. It will be the worse for you if you do."

For a moment Talbot was silent. He gazed eagerly into the eyes of his warder.

"Look here," he said presently. "I don't know your name—in fact, you seem pretty much of a mystery man to me—but although you're a member of the gang you're different from the others. You're a gentleman, and I fancy you're a sportsman, too. You've done everything possible for my comfort while I've been here."

"I merely obeyed orders," was the reply. "My instructions were that you were to be confined to this room, but that you were to receive decent treatment."

"I want my freedom," said Talbot, quietly but earnestly.

"I dare say you do."
"And you can make it possible for me."

"Does that mean that you wish me to aid you to escape?"

"It does!" ;
Talbot's tone was eager. Breakfast was forgotten in his excitement.

But the warder shook his head.
"It is impossible, my friend," he said.

"I must be loyal to my colleagues. I am sorry for you. I realise that a cracksmen's life doesn't appeal to you, and that you have no wish to go to America. But I cannot help you."

"Is that final?" asked Talbot.

"Absolutely!"
The junior sighed. The determination in the man's tone clearly showed him that he could expect no help from that quarter.

"I can't understand why a man like you should take to this sort of game," he said, at length. "You're in league with Donovan and the others, of course?"

"Yes."
"And therefore a cracksmen?"

"Yes. And I'll tell you why. Before the war I held a responsible position under Government. For that reason I could easily have evaded military service, had I so chosen. Moreover, I was beyond military age. There was no call upon me, but I felt that I ought to go. And I went, backed up by the assurance that if I came through all right I should automatically return to my job. And what happened? I went to the war. I

saw service in France and Egypt and Mesopotamia; and then I volunteered to go to Russia. I was not demobilised until nearly twelve months after the signing of the armistice. I returned to the place where I was originally employed, and what did I find? Why, that another man—a precious little jack-in-office, who didn't know his job—had been engaged in my place! He had successfully dodged military service, and instead of making way for me, a returned Army officer, he clung to his job like a limpet!"

"But the Government?" queried Talbot.

"The Government backed him up, and informed me that they had no further use for my services. Think of it! For five years I had served my country faithfully in many battle-areas, and on my return I was calmly told that I wasn't wanted. I was furious beyond measure. I resolved, there and then, that I would never again trust the Government—that I would never again seek an honest livelihood. And I became a cracksmen—a looter, a plunderer."

The man spoke bitterly. He evidently felt very strongly on the subject of his grievance.

"You weren't justified in taking that step," said Talbot. "Dash it all, you couldn't expect the Government to keep your job vacant until you were demobbed!"

"No; but the very moment I returned they should have given me my rights."

"Perhaps your deputy gave so much satisfaction that they were unwilling to let him go?"

"That's no reason why I should have been cast off like a worn-out glove!"

"I won't argue," said Talbot. "But, personally, I should never sink my honour and become a cracksmen just because the Government had treated me unfairly. That sort of thing's awfully feeble."

"I have been scurvily and shabbily treated, and I consider I am quite justified in becoming a law-breaker," was the reply. "But, there! It's not to be expected that you will see eye to eye with me. I must be going now. I doubt if I shall see you again. Good-bye!"

The man shook hands with Talbot and withdrew. He did not omit to lock the door after him.

When he had gone Talbot turned to his breakfast. It was cold and un-

appetising by this time, but the junior ate as much as he could. He remembered what the warder had said to him about the uncertainty of his next meal.

He expected Donovan to come in at any moment. But the hours passed, and no one came near his place of detention.

Talbot glanced at his watch, and saw that it was midday. Then he stepped to the door and examined it closely. Even in his despair he wondered if he could possibly effect his escape at the eleventh hour.

But the door was stout and unyielding.

The junior thought of wrenching away one of the iron bars from the window, and attempting to prise the door open. But the noise of such a proceeding would most certainly echo through the house, and Talbot abandoned the idea.

He crossed to the window, and, mounting a chair, he peered through.

Far below, the waves dashed themselves upon the shore.

Even if the junior succeeded in removing the iron bars he would be unable to escape, for there was a sheer drop of a hundred feet or more.

Then, realising that he was in a very old house, Talbot carefully examined the walls, in the frail hope of discovering a sliding-panel, or some similar means of exit.

After carefully tapping the walls all round, however, he came to the conclusion that there was no outlet of that description.

But Talbot's investigations were not yet finished.

"I'll take the carpet up," he muttered. "Not that it's likely to reveal anything, though."

He shifted the carpet as noiselessly as possible, and commenced to roll up the thick carpet. He scarcely dared to hope that he would find a means of egress in the floor.

But before Talbot had rolled the carpet back a couple of yards he discovered a couple of hinges, and he wondered vaguely why they were there.

And then he uttered a low cry of exultation.

The hinges belonged to a trap-door in the floor!

Talbot could scarcely contain his delight. He drew out his penknife, inserted the blade in one of the cracks of the trap-door, and prised it up. Then he peered eagerly through the aperture, and beheld a room very similar to the one in which he had been imprisoned.

Without hesitation Talbot lowered himself through the opening, and dropped down on to the floor of the room beneath. The floor being thickly carpeted his descent was accomplished without noise.

Talbot realised that he was not yet out of the wood. Indeed, this was but a preliminary. He had merely got from one apartment into another.

What if the door of the room he was now in was locked?

The junior went towards it, and to his delight he found that it opened readily, whereupon he stepped cautiously into the corridor.

The place appeared to be deserted.

Talbot stole along the corridor and went down the stairs. It was his intention to make his exit from the house by the main door.

When he reached the ground floor, however, he halted.

Voices were audible. Several men were in conversation in the hall, and Talbot recognised the voice of Pat Donovan.

It would be unsafe to linger where he was. And as it was now impossible for him to make his way to the main door,

Talbot plunged down a flight of stone steps which led to the cellar.

He found himself at length in a dark and gloomy vault.

In one corner of the place stood a large safe, which evidently contained plunder. In the opposite corner a number of wine-bottles had been stacked.

"Wonder if there's a way out of this place?" muttered Talbot.

He groped his way round the cellar, but could find no outlet. Then he examined the floor, and presently he espied an iron grating. He stooped down and tried to raise it, but it refused to budge.

Talbot put forth all his strength, and presently the grating yielded. Talbot heaved it up, and then, bending over the dark aperture, he lighted a match.

An iron ladder was revealed to the junior's gaze.

A descent into the bowels of the earth, as it were, was anything but inviting.

But Talbot did not hesitate. He squeezed himself through the cavity, and went down the iron ladder.

He found himself in a dark, narrow tunnel, the floor of which was of sand.

By this time, the junior was nearly exhausted. The effort required in order to raise the iron grating had taxed his strength to the utmost. And the excitement of trying to escape had made him dizzy.

Even now he doubted if he was any better off than he was before.

Where did this tunnel lead? He would follow it, anyway, in the hope that it led to freedom.

As he went, the tunnel narrowed considerably, and it was only with difficulty that Talbot was able to make progress.

Once or twice he stopped and listened, as if expecting to hear the sound of pursuers.

But all was silent. Evidently the junior's escape had not yet been discovered.

It was very cold in the underground passage. A chilling gust of wind swept through it, and Talbot's teeth chattered. He was feeling ravenously hungry, too. Many hours seemed to have elapsed since he had eaten his breakfast.

However, he kept going somehow, and presently, to his delight, he saw a beam of light far ahead of him.

"The end of the tunnel!" he muttered. "Thank Heaven! A few minutes more, and I shall be free!"

He staggered on. It was as much as he could do to drag one foot after the other. But he knew that he dared not pause. At any moment the hue-and-cry might be set up, and the thought of again getting into the clutches of Pat Donovan was unbearable.

Presently the tunnel widened, and Talbot found himself in a small cave.

The place had evidently been a resort of smugglers a century before, and it would have been difficult to find a more convenient and out-of-the-way retreat.

Another tunnel led from this cave, but it was so low and narrow that Talbot was obliged to squirm his way through it on all fours. As he did so, there was a roaring in his ears, and he knew that he was close to the sea.

The beam of light which he had seen a few minutes before was now much stronger.

Fortunately, the tunnel through which he was crawling was only a short one, and Talbot soon emerged into the clear light of day.

The junior found himself amid a group of rocks. The tide was out, or the rocks would have been covered.

"Free!" exclaimed Talbot. "Free at last!"

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And he sank down upon one of the rocks in a state of exhaustion.

Glancing around him, he beheld a magnificent bay, on the shore of which several fishermen's cottages were dotted about.

There was something familiar about the scene. Talbot felt that he knew this place. At some time or other he had been here before.

And presently it dawned upon him that he was within a stone's throw of the little fishing-village of Pegg. A little over a mile away was Greyfriars School.

As for the lonely house in which he had been imprisoned, Talbot saw no sign of it. It was probably a good distance away, for the underground tunnel through which he had passed was a very long and winding one.

Wearily and spent though he was, Talbot's heart was light.

His period of captivity was over. And never again would he fall such an easy prey to Pat Donovan. He made up his mind that he would expose the scoundrelly Irishman, and set the police on his track. But that could be done later. Meanwhile, he must get to some place where he could obtain a good square meal.

For some moments he remained seated on the rock. Then he rose to his feet, and with difficulty made his way from the spot. A little later he was toiling up the cliff path, and eventually he reached the road which ran from Pegg to Courtfield.

As he stumbled along his feet felt like leaden weights, and his temples were throbbing painfully.

He glanced down at his clothes, and saw that they were in an appalling state—covered with dirt and grime. He had no doubt that his face was in the same condition. Certainly his hands were.

“My hat! A nice sort of wreck I must look!” he muttered. “Hallo! Who are these fellows?”

Five schoolboys were walking along the road towards him. When they drew nearer, Talbot recognised them as Harry Wharton and Co., of Greyfriars.

It is doubtful, however, if the Famous Five of the Greyfriars Remove would have recognised Talbot had he not revealed his identity. Then they halted, and stared at the St. Jim's junior in astonishment and wonder.

“My only aunt!” ejaculated Bob Cherry, at length. “What are you doing here, Talbot? How did you come here? What's happened?”

Talbot smiled wearily. “It's a long story, you fellows,” he said. “I'll tell you all about it as we go along.”

“But—where are you going?” asked Wharton.

“Somewhere where I can get some grub.”

“Better come with us into Courtfield, then.”

“All serene.”

And the six proceeded along the road, the Greyfriars juniors gazing wonderingly at Talbot, as if he were a ghost from the past.

CHAPTER 6. The Cup Final!

“WE heard all about your disappearance, old man,” said Harry Wharton. “Tom Merry told us. He's up at Greyfriars now.”

Talbot stared.

“Merry—at Greyfriars?”

“Yes, with the rest of the St. Jim's team. The cup final comes off this afternoon.”

Talbot looked dazed.

“The—cup final?” he stammered.

“Yes. Oh, I forgot, you wouldn't know anything about it. You've been away, and you know nothing of how the footer tournament had been progressing.”

“From what you say, I gather that St. Jim's are in the final with Greyfriars?”

“No, not with us,” said Frank Nugent.

“With Highcliffe. Only the match is being played on neutral ground, see?”

“I should like to hear how St. Jim's reached the final,” said Talbot, his eyes glistening.

“They licked us on our own ground,” explained Bob Cherry. “After which they mopped up Rookwood to the tune of five goals to one. That brought them to the final.”

“Good.” Talbot had forgotten his weariness and discomfort in his excitement. “I fancy our fellows will lick Highcliffe.”

“I'm not so sure,” said Johnny Bull.

“One of your best men is crooked, so Tom Merry was telling us.”

“Who is that?”

“Jack Blake.”

Talbot gave a start. He knew that the absence of a clever and speedy player like Blake would greatly weaken the St. Jim's forward line. And he at once made up his mind to get to Greyfriars with all speed, and to take his place in the St. Jim's eleven.

But he must get a good meal first, and a bath. These things were essential. Until he had them, he would be in no fit condition to take part in a strenuous football match.

“Let's put the cup final on one side for a moment,” said Harry Wharton.

“Tell us all about your adventures, Talbot.”

“Misadventures is the more appropriate word,” said Talbot, with a smile.

“You've had a rotten time?”

“Beastly!”

“How did you come to disappear?”

“Do you recollect a fellow called Pat Donovan, who tried to kidnap me while you chaps were staying at St. Jim's?”

“Yes, rather!” said Bob Cherry. “We chipped in and overpowered the rotter, and handed him over to the police.”

“Well, he got away.”

“My hat!”

“I thought he would, somehow. You see, he wasn't handcuffed, and it was the easiest thing in the world for him to fool old Crump, the Rylcombe bobby. Anyway, he slipped through Crump's fingers, and when we went to Greyfriars for the replayed match, he boarded the train, and got into the same carriage as me. He wore a false beard and a pair of spectacles, and he looked for all the world like a schoolmaster. He pretended to be the other people in the carriage that I was a runaway pupil, and that he was about to take me back to my school. They believed him, and he had no difficulty in bundling me out of the train, at the next stopping-place, and hustling me into a taxi.”

“But surely you didn't submit without a struggle?” exclaimed Nugent.

“It isn't much use struggling with a man like Donovan. The fellow's muscles are made of steel. He got me away in the taxi, and took me miles and miles across country, until we came to a lonely cliff on the coast. I made another attempt to get away, and just as I was on the point of succeeding I tumbled over the edge of the cliff.”

“Great Scott!”

The Greyfriars juniors looked aghast.

“Luckily, though,” continued Talbot,

“I didn't drop far, for there was a ledge a little way down. I was dragged up—

I was unconscious at the time—and

taken to a quaint old house that stood practically on the edge of the cliff.”

“What part of the coast was this?” inquired Bob Cherry.

“I didn't know at the time, but I've found out since. It was Pegg—about a mile to the west of the village, I should say.”

“My hat! Then it must have been the haunted manor—a house that has stood empty for years!”

“Well, it's empty no longer,” said Talbot. “It's one of Donovan's retreats. I was kept a prisoner there until this morning, and then I got away.”

“How?” asked the Greyfriars juniors breathlessly.

Talbot explained the manner and method of his escape. He also told his hearers that it had been effected in the nick of time, for Donovan had arranged to take him to Southampton that very day, and ship him across to the States.

“By Jove! You've had some jolly thrilling experiences, Talbot, and no mistake!” said Harry Wharton. “If ever you decide to write the story of your life, you won't lack material.”

Talbot laughed.

“I've enough material to fill a dozen books,” he said.

“Your chums will be awfully bucked to see you again,” said Johnny Bull.

“They've practically given you up, and they're very down in the dumps.”

“Is Miss Marie Rivers at Greyfriars with them?” asked Talbot.

“Yes.”

It was as much as Talbot could do to restrain himself from going to Greyfriars there and then. He badly wanted to see Marie, and reassure her as to his safety. He also had an intense longing to rejoin his old chums.

But he realised that he could not possibly present himself at the school in his present plight. Already the youths of Courtfield were sniggering at his unkempt and dishevelled appearance.

“Here we are!” said Bob Cherry, at length.

They passed into Chunkley's Stores.

Chunkley's was a vast emporium which attended to every public need. It contained bath-rooms, dining-rooms, and a hair-dressing saloon; in fact, it was several establishments rolled into one.

Chunkley's made it a boast that there was nothing that they could not supply at a moment's notice.

Talbot spent exactly an hour at the place.

By the end of that time he had effected a complete transformation. He had had a bath and a change of clothing, and he had partaken of a substantial and nourishing meal. And the former feeling of weakness and exhaustion had left him. He was the Talbot of old—active, alert, and full of energy.

As he quitted Chunkley's, with Harry Wharton & Co., he glanced at his watch.

“Half-past two,” he remarked. “What time does the match start, you fellows?”

“Three o'clock,” said Wharton.

“Good! Then I shall be just in time.”

“You're going to play?”

“Yes, rather!”

“The St. Jim's fellows will go mad with joy when you turn up,” said Bob Cherry. “Talk about a dramatic moment! Why, they'll tear you limb from limb in their giddy excitement!”

“They'd better not,” said Talbot, laughing. “I shall need to be all in one piece if I'm going to bag goals.”

The juniors set out with swinging strides for Greyfriars.

When they got there they found the Close and the corridors deserted.

Everybody was on the football-ground.

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"This way!" said Harry Wharton.

And Talbot followed eagerly in the wake of the Famous Five.

The first person to catch sight of him when he arrived on the field was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

The swell of St. Jim's gave vent to a gasp of stupefied astonishment at first. Then he found his voice.

"He's heah, deah boys—he's heah!"

"Eh? Who's here?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Old Talbot! He's turned up—an' just in time for the match, too! Huwvah!"

The rest of the St. Jim's players shared Gussy's excitement. With one accord, they sprinted up to Talbot, whose hands were seized and shaken like pump-handles, and whose back was thumped until it ached.

Bob Cherry's prediction that Talbot would be torn limb from limb by his excited schoolfellows looked like coming true.

"Talbot, old man—"

"What's happened to you all this time?"

"Where have you been?"

Talbot's eyes were misty, and he had some difficulty in controlling himself. The great and whole-hearted reception he had received had brought a lump to his throat.

"I'm awfully glad to be with you fellows again!" he said. "But don't you think we'd better have the match first and the explanations afterwards?"

"All serene, old chap," said Tom Merry. "But we're simply dying to know all about it."

Talbot glanced towards the dressing-room. The Highcliffe eleven were in the act of coming out.

"I take it you can find room for me in the team, Tom?" he said.

"Find room for you? Why, my dear old duffer, of course I can! I was going to play Clive as eleventh man, but I'd ten thousand times rather have you! We shall be at full strength, except for Blake."

"What about togs?"

"Clive will lend you his. He's in the dressing-room."

Talbot made his way thither, and as he did so Marie Rivers came quickly towards him.

There was a glad light in the girl's eyes, but her face wore an anxious expression.

"Reginald!" she murmured. It was seldom that she addressed Talbot by his Christian name, but she did so now. "You are safe?"

"Safe and sound, Marie!" replied Talbot cheerfully, as he clasped the hand of his girl chum.

"You look older and thinner."

"That's hardly surprising. Taking it all round, I've had a pretty rotten time. But it's all right now. Everything in the garden is lovely!"

"You were kidnapped?"

"Yes."

"By that scoundrel Donovan?"

Talbot nodded.

"I'll tell you all about it after the match, Marie," he said. "Meanwhile, I must put a jerk in it!"

Talbot hurried into the dressing-room, from which he emerged just as the teams were lining up.

The crowd was by way of being a record one.

All Greyfriars had turned out, and practically all Highcliffe had come over. And, in addition, there was quite an army of St. Jim's fellows.

Mr. Shirley Bright was there, of course, to witness the final contest for the silver cup which he was presenting. And his eyes lit up with pride as the St.

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Jim's players took their places. Several years before, he himself had played in the familiar red-and-white colours of St. Jim's.

Even though they had a strong team, however, the Saints had no easy task.

Frank Courtenay & Co., of Highcliffe, looked footballers every inch. Both fore and aft, so to speak, they were strongly represented. Their goalie—Smithson—was almost as good as Fatty Wynn, and that was saying a great deal. Their backs—the brothers Benson—were strong and resolute tacklers. Their half-back line compared very favourably with the St. Jim's middle line. But it was in the forward line that their real strength lay. Ruperl de Courcy—nicknamed the Caterpillar—possessed a great turn of speed; while Frank Courtenay and Flip Derwent were magnificent goal-getters.

What was more, Highcliffe had made up their minds to a man that they would carry off the cup. And when Frank Courtenay & Co. made up their minds to a thing, they were not to be turned from their purpose.

Tom Merry had won the toss, though there was little advantage to be gained thereby. And then the whistle rang out, and there were shouts of:

"Now they're off!"

"Play up, St. Jim's!"

"Go it, Highcliffe!"

The tussle had begun.

CHAPTER 7.

The Best Team Wins!

FROM the outset it was a game of thrills.

The Caterpillar broke away on the Highcliffe left, and although tackled in turn by Manners and Figgins, he went right through, cheered on with great gusto by the Highcliffe supporters.

"Shoot, man—shoot!"

"Drive it through!"

The Caterpillar steadied himself, and shot. It was a low, fast drive, and Fatty Wynn threw himself full length to save. He managed to push the ball clear, but Frank Courtenay rushed up full-pelt and sent the leather crashing into the net.

"Goal!"

"Hurrah!"

The Highcliffe partisans were almost beside themselves with excitement. Their team had scored in the first minute.

But even before the shouting had died away, St. Jim's had drawn level. From the kick-off, their forwards had raced away with the ball, and a wonderful bout of passing led up to a great goal from the foot of Tom Merry.

Smithson had come out from his goal in the hope of retrieving the ball, and Tom Merry had coolly lobbed it over his head into the net.

It was now the turn of the St. Jim's supporters to shout and clap and cheer; and the noise they made might have been heard a mile away.

Five minutes later the Highcliffe defence got in a tangle. They were so hard pressed that Benson major passed the ball back to his goalie. In the excitement of the moment, however, he kicked it harder than he intended to, and Smithson muffed it. There was a roar as the ball lodged in the net.

"Goal!"

"The Saints are on top!"

Benson major was the most unhappy fellow on the field at that moment. He coloured to the roots of his hair as he realised the enormity of what he had done. He had scored a goal for the opposing side!

After this amusing incident—amusing, that is, to everybody but the Highcliffians—play quieted down a little.

The ball remained, for the most part, in midfield. Highcliffe was trying hard to get it away, but they found Dick Redfern a tower of strength at centre-half.

The crowd's appetite for goals had been whetted. They had seen three scored, and they clamoured loudly for more.

But neither St. Jim's nor Highcliffe obliged. Once, from a sudden break-away, the Caterpillar tested Fatty Wynn with a dangerous cross-shot, but Fatty rose to the occasion, and punched the ball clear before any of the other Highcliffe forwards could get to it.

Half-time arrived with St. Jim's leading by 2—1.

"I wathah think, deah boys, that we're winnin'!" remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Go hon!"

"If we pweess our advantage home in the second half, we shall lick Highcliffe by a twemendous margin. How do you feel, Talbot, deah boy?"

"First-rate!" answered Talbot.

He had not been much in the limelight, so far. Perhaps the fact that he had had no practice had something to do with it.

When the game was resumed, however, Talbot got fairly into his stride. His passing and shooting left nothing to be desired; and within ten minutes of the re-start he scored a fine goal.

Frank Courtenay & Co. were looking very grim now.

"We're a couple of goals behind, Franky," said the Caterpillar. "This is a serious business, begad!"

"It is!" agreed the Highcliffe skipper. "Unless we can make up the leeway, we're done."

And then Highcliffe attacked as they had never attacked before. Their forwards swarmed round the St. Jim's goal, which was subjected to a fierce bombardment.

It was extremely fortunate for St. Jim's that they had such a capable goalie as Fatty Wynn, or the Highcliffe attack would have yielded goals galore.

As it was, Highcliffe scored twice. Flip Derwent headed the ball into the net from a corner-kick, and a few minutes later the Caterpillar netted in great style.

Loud bursts of applause greeted the scoring of these two goals.

Highcliffe were now level with their opponents, and, what was more, they were still going strongly.

But the St. Jim's defenders played heroically, and attack after attack was beaten off.

At last relief came. Figgins punted the ball well up the field, and it was promptly fastened upon by Levison, who rushed goalwards.

"Come along, Levison!"

"Let's have you!"

"Shoot!"

Out of the corner of his eye Levison saw Arthur Augustus D'Arcy waiting for a pass. He slipped the ball across to the swell of St. Jim's, who, standing unmarked a few yards from the goal, had no difficulty in scoring.

"Goal!"

"Four to three!" panted Monty Lowther, who had been playing a sterling game at right-half. "Jove, what a game!"

"We shall have to go all out," muttered Tom Merry. "We can't afford to take things easy."

But the St. Jim's players were beginning to show signs of distress. The defence had been overworked, and the strenuous pace of the game was beginning to tell.

The Highcliffe players were far from

fresh, but they were in great trim by comparison with their opponents. They set up another strong attack, and Fatty Wynn had his hands full. He was for ever listing out shots, and once he was nearly beaten by a close-range drive from Frank Courtenay.

The time wore on, and five minutes from the end it looked as if St. Jim's would cling to their lead and win.

But Highcliffe were not to be denied. If they could not win the game they told themselves they would at least save it.

The Caterpillar worked his way through the St. Jim's defence, and a goal appeared certain.

Fatty Wynn knew that he would have no chance with the shot, if it came, for the Caterpillar was close upon him. So Fatty dived low, with the object of taking the ball from the toes of the would-be marksman.

But the Caterpillar was too quick for him. With a quick jerk of his right foot he sent the ball into the net. And the applause which greeted his effort can be better imagined than described.

"A draw!" yelled the Highcliffians on the touchline. "They've made a draw of it! The Caterpillar's saved the game! Hurrah!"

So great was their enthusiasm that the Highcliff supporters failed to realise that three minutes still remained for play.

But the St. Jim's players realised it, and they meant to crowd all their effort and energy into those three minutes.

The ball was kicked off from the centre of the field, and Tom Merry passed it to Harry Noble, who in turn passed it to Talbot. And Talbot went away like a hare.

The Highcliffe players packed their goal. It was the only thing to do in the circumstances.

Talbot must not be allowed to score, they told themselves grimly.

Then followed a moment of tense excitement.

Talbot shot hard and true for goal, but Benson major got his head in the way, and the ball came whizzing out again. It came to the feet of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who took a first-time shot. But once again Benson major headed out from under the bar.

Then Harry Noble sent in a truly terrific shot, but the Highcliffe goalie

leapt into the air and tipped the ball over the bar.

"Corner!" rose the cry.

The referee was already glancing at his watch, and the St. Jim's players did not need telling that everything depended upon that corner-kick. It was taken by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and the St. Jim's supporters groaned as they followed the flight of the ball. For it seemed a "dead cert." that it would go behind.

But no! It dropped just in front of the goal, and Talbot and Smithson sprang at it at the same time—Talbot in an endeavour to get it in, and Smithson in a frantic effort to keep it out.

And Talbot won. He got his head to the ball, and it went crashing into the net.

Then a perfect pandemonium prevailed. The referee's whistle rang out, but it was drowned by the delighted shouts of the St. Jim's supporters.

"Goal! Goal!! GOAL!!!"

"We've won!"

"Thanks to Talbot!"

"Good old Talbot!"

"Hurrah!"

The scene on the Greyfriars football ground almost beggared description.

Talbot was lifted shoulder-high and carried in triumph from the field. And the Highcliffe players, defeated but not disgraced, joined in the cheering.

It was a scene that Talbot would not soon forget.

He had scored the winning goal for his side. And, thanks mainly to him, St. Jim's had won the Shirley Bright Cup. By five goals to four, in one of the keenest games on record, they had defeated the stalwarts of Highcliffe.

And Talbot thanked his lucky stars that he had been able to escape from his place of captivity, and bring about this joyous consummation.

CHAPTER 8.

The Conquering Heroes!

AFTER the great match, a bumper celebration took place in the junior Common-room at Greyfriars.

And whilst the feed was in progress, Talbot's chums listened eagerly to his description of all the adventures he had passed through since his disappearance.

"My hat! It's a jolly lucky thing

that you came across that underground passage, old man!" said Tom Merry, when Talbot had finished his narrative.

"Yes," said Talbot quietly, "if I hadn't found it, I shouldn't be here now. I should be on the high seas, I reckon."

"But Pat Donovan could never have got you on board a liner against your wish!" protested Manners.

"You don't know Donovan. He's a very plausible scoundrel, and he'd pitch some sort of a tale. Anyway, I managed to escape, and there's the end of it."

"The end? No jolly fear!" said Dick Redfern. "It's up to us to visit that old manor house on the cliff, and force Donovan and the others to surrender."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I agwee with Woddy that that is the pwopah capah. It isn't safe for a scoundrel like Donovan to remain at large."

After further discussion, it was decided that a large party of fellows, including Harry Wharton & Co., of Greyfriars, should proceed to the old manor house in which Talbot had been imprisoned.

"First of all," said Tom Merry, "I think I'll ring up St. Jim's, and tell the Head that you're safe, Talbot. He's been fearfully anxious about you."

Talbot assented, and a few moments later Tom Merry was in conversation with Dr. Holmes.

Needless to say, the kindly old Head was greatly relieved to learn that Talbot was safe. Like many others, he had begun to despair, and Tom Merry's reassuring message removed a great load of anxiety from his mind.

Dusk was descending as the members of the expedition set out from Greyfriars.

It did not occur to the juniors that they were running a grave risk—that Donovan & Co. would probably be armed, and would not stand upon ceremony. Filled with a keen desire for adventure, the juniors left these sinister possibilities out of their calculations.

Marie Rivers had insisted on accompanying the party. Talbot had protested, but his girl chum had made up her mind.

It was the intention of the juniors to force an entry into the lonely house, capture those members of the gang who happened to be there, and march them off to the nearest police-station. They anticipated having about three men to deal with; and as their own party was over twenty strong, no difficulty was likely to present itself. So the juniors thought, anyway.

As they drew near to their destination, however, they became less confident.

In the deepening dusk, the old manor house, standing in solitary isolation, presented a gloomy and forbidding appearance. Even the bravest members of the party felt uneasy.

"There are no lights at any of the windows," muttered Tom Merry. "The place seems unoccupied."

"Unoccupied by human beings, perhaps, but not by grisly, gruesome spectres!" said Monty Lowther.

"Dry up, Monty!"

"Let's go round to the back entrance," suggested Harry Wharton.

"There isn't one," said Talbot. "The back of the house overlooks the cliff. There's only one entrance; that's in front."

"Lead on, then."

Somewhat to their surprise, the juniors found the door unlocked.

The hall was in darkness, and there

(Continued on page 19.)

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When Standish returns home, he discovers that this girl is none other than his long-lost daughter, who had been missing for many years.

CAPTAIN DIRK KENTISH, R. N. R., a retired sea captain, is employed by Dick's father to search for him. The captain visits Chinatown to recruit a crew to sail with him on his strange quest. He meets some old friends.

Having completed his tour of the Chinese quarters, he is threading his way homewards when he sees an old enemy, one Guiseppe Gaglietto, an Italian, who is in the company of Peter Van Lardent, a Dutch acquaintance of Mepppel's. Kentish follows the two to the former's opium-den, and, through a successful ruse, he gains admittance.

(Now go on with the story.)

Captain Kentish Hits Out!

NEVER for a moment did Captain Kentish lose the character he had assumed, and he stumbled to the stairs and up them. At the door across the landing, he again gave the signal that had gained him admittance below, and, after a similar spy-hole had been opened and he had been cautiously scrutinised by yet another Chinaman, he was allowed to enter.

"You wantee allee play fan-tan, sailorman?" the doorkeeper suggested, his slit-like eyes still fixed upon the captain half-suspiciously.

"No; pipe," Kentish responded, speaking thickly. "I've been on a long voyage, and run out of the stuff, and I'm nearly dying for the want of it."

As he spoke, he kept his eyelids lowered, being aware that the Chinaman would know in an instant that he was no opium-slave if he could look fully into his eyes. The man seemed no longer to have any doubts concerning him, however, for he beckoned the captain to follow and led the way through the rows of Chinamen who squatted on the floor, gambling at fan-tan and other games of chance.

The Chinese flung open the door of THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 666.

the adjoining room, and the acrid fumes of the loathsome drug came out in a gust, sickening the skipper and making him want to cough.

His keen eyes peered through the haze and into the room, taking in all it contained in a glance.

He saw the double row of frowzy mattresses running down either side of the long room, which was illuminated by a single oil-lamp swinging from the blackened ceiling—saw the indistinct forms of the smokers lying on their couches in varying stages of their vice, and the stout old Chinaman who sat at a table cooking the little pellets of opium over a tiny lamp.

At a second table at the far end of the den were five men. Dim though the light, Captain Kentish quickly picked out both Gaglietto and his dupe, and recognised two of the others—they were Chinamen—as the Italian's hirelings.

Hearing him enter, Guiseppe Gaglietto casually turned his head, and the skipper only avoided being recognised by staggering quickly to the nearest unoccupied mattress and prostrating himself in the gloom.

The Chinese attendant came from his table, a charged pipe in his podgy hands, which he handed to the captain, with a half-bow. Kentish made a pretence of inhaling the drug, but in reality the bamboo stem of the curiously-shaped pipe was merely pressed against his cheek, and his eyes were upon a skylight situated directly above the table, at which Peter Van Lardent and the others were grouped. It was open no doubt, with the idea of letting out some of the overpowering fumes.

Kentish knew that, now he was fairly in the place, he carried his life in his hands, and, in the skylight, he saw a chance of making a swift bid for freedom if it became necessary.

Coolly, yet alertly, he watched the men at the table. Van Lardent had apparently been given a generous supply of the whisky that stood in a bottle in its centre. He was nodding drowsily, and now, as Captain Kentish continued to watch, he saw the Italian lean forward and slip something into the sailor's glass.

"Come, my friend," Gaglietto said, rousing Van Lardent. "Finish your drink and have another. Then, if you like, you can have a game of cards."

Van Lardent stretched out his hand for the glass and half-raised it to his lips. But he was not destined to drink. Quick as thought, the skipper tossed aside his opium-pipe and came to his feet.

"Stop, you fool!" he thundered. "It's drugged! They mean to rob you!"

The glass dropped from the surprised Van Lardent's hand, and almost simultaneously Gaglietto's chair went over with a crash, as he bounded up and spun round on his heels.

"Captain Kentish—you!" he gasped. Then, as he whipped a knife from his hip: "At last, signore, we meet again! At him, Sam! At him, Ah Sing! This time he shall not leave here alive!"

One of the Chinamen had picked up a sandbag from beneath his chair, and before Captain Kentish could move a hand to prevent him, the yellow man had brought it down upon the Dutch sailor's temple and sent him, stunned and senseless, to the floor.

Their knives flashing from the baggy sleeves of their blouses, the three Chinamen, with the Italian and Gaglietto himself, made a combined rush for the intrepid skipper. But they recoiled for a moment as they found him levelling his revolver at them.

"Keep back!" he ordered through his teeth. "I'll shoot to kill if a man of you moves! You, too!" he rapped out, shooting a glance out of the corner of his eyes at the Chinese attendant, who had risen and drawn a knife. "That man yonder leaves here right now with me!"

"Does he, signore?" Gaglietto sneered, with a snarling laugh. "We shall see!"

"We shall!" the fire-eating little skipper retorted; and acted like lightning.

With a bound he clutched at the swinging oil-lamp and tore it down. Then, blazing like a comet, he hurled it full amongst the group by the table.

Through the now almost total darkness the captain rushed. Before his enemies could beat out the flaring oil that had sprinkled their clothes, before they quite realised at all what was happening, Captain Kentish was in their midst.

He sent the Italian flying with a swinging left to the point of the jaw, and, stooping swiftly, heaved the heavy body of Van Lardent up in his arms.

With an agility that only equalled his amazing strength, the skipper leapt from a chair on to the table, and, putting forth an almost superhuman effort, he hurled the inert figure of the Dutchman clean through the skylight on to the roof.

As two of the Chinamen recovered themselves sufficiently to jump at him, he gave a spring, and clutched at the framework of the skylight, with the intention of drawing himself up and scrambling through the opening

Captain Kentish's Clue—Off to Slave Island.

THE skipper's powerful fingers had closed firmly about the framework of the skylight, and, with the agility of a trained athlete, he drew himself swiftly upwards.

One of the Chinamen struck viciously at his swinging legs with a knife, and, ripping through his trouser-leg, the razor-like blade missed Captain Kentish's calf only by a fraction of an inch.

Another of the yellow men grabbed quickly at his ankle, and clutched it tightly in his skinny fingers; but the next moment he received a kick in the mouth from the Britisher's other foot that sent him flying, and then, with one swift effort, the skipper was through the opening and scrambling on to the flat roof.

He saw a pair of yellow hands grab at the edge of the aperture, and kicked the skylight shut upon them. He smiled very grimly as he heard the howl of pain that came from the owner.

But it was no time as yet to feel triumphant.

Captain Kentish knew that he was far from being out of danger. He had yet to get away with Gaglietto's intended dupe, and it would be no easy matter.

The neighbourhood would abound with other Chinamen who would be only too ready to come to the assistance of those below, and scour the vicinity to capture him.

The skipper lost no time in picking up the unconscious Van Lardent. With a heave he had his inert body lying over his shoulder, and, seeming scarcely to notice its weight, he ran to the edge of the roof, and peered down into the yard of the disused factory.

The corrugated-iron roof of some sort of work-shed lay directly beneath him, and, transferring the Dutch sailor to his arms, Captain Kentish took the twelve-foot leap that divided him from it.

Even as he jumped he heard a shrill cry from behind him, and set his teeth hard. Evidently one of his pursuers had been climbing through the skylight, and had seen the direction in which he had gone.

The little skipper landed upon the roof of the shed, stumbled because of his burden, but just managed to keep his balance.

In a trice he was at its brink, and yet again he jumped, clinging tightly to Van Lardent.

This time it was an even greater leap—quite sixteen feet—and the captain fell and rolled over with the Dutchman in the mud. He was unhurt, however, if a little shaken, and he was quickly on his legs once more.

Crack! A bullet whistled past the skipper's head, and for a moment he left Van Lardent lying upon the ground, and turned swiftly, at the same time whipping out his revolver.

The moon had shone out suddenly, as a cluster of clouds had drifted from before its face, and, silhouetted against its pale radiance, a Chinaman stood at the edge of the roof of the opium-den. He was in the act of firing for the second time; but Captain Kentish was too quick for him.

The skipper's arm went up like lightning, and he took a pot shot at the yellow man. The Chinaman coughed oddly, flung up his arms, and spun round on his heels, then pitched from the roof of the house, and crashed on to that of the shed beneath.

For a fleeting second the skipper waited, but there was no movement from him. Even as Kentish stooped to pick up Van Lardent, however, more figures rushed into view on the house-top.

Excited cries told the captain that he had been seen, and next instant a perfect fusillade of lead hissed about him and the unconscious man he now held in his arms.

He wheeled about, and took to his heels. It almost seemed that he must possess a charmed life. The bullets whizzed about his very ears, yet not one as much as grazed him; and before a second volley could be sent hurthing after him, Captain Kentish had mingled with the shadows thrown by a row of what had once been workshops.

Trembling with suppressed excitement, the dare-devil seaman clung to Van Lardent, and dashed along under their projecting roofs. His bulldog-like strength enabled him to carry the none-too-light Dutchman as if he had been a child, and, in spite of his burden, he ran with the rapidity of a deer.

As he went, he heard a clanging thud, followed almost immediately by another, and he knew that at least two of his foes had taken the leap to the corrugated iron roof of the shed lying below the house-top.

In the open doorway of one of the disused and now half-ruined work buildings the captain pulled up.

He listened, straining his ears to their utmost capacity. He could hear the patter of running feet; but there came no further sounds to indicate that any more of his enemies had dared to take the two formidable jumps necessary to gain the factory yard.

The captain again placed Van Lardent's limp form upon the ground. The sounds of running footfalls had been abruptly silenced, and he knew that his pursuers were creeping warily towards him through the shadows. He swung up his weapon, and suddenly sprang from his refuge.

The Italian, Gaglietto, and the stout Chinese attendant who had waited on the smokers in the opium-den stood not ten yards away from him.

They tried to leap into cover, but the skipper was like a "bad man" of the Far West when it came to being quick with a revolver, and, seeming on neither occasion to take any particular aim, he fired twice in rapid succession.

The right arm of Gaglietto fell uselessly at his side. He had raised it to fire, but the skipper's bullet had "winged" him before he had had time to pull the trigger; whilst, as for the Chinaman, he reeled back, screeching with pain and clutching at his shoulder, where the seaman's second shot had lodged.

Again Captain Kentish snatched up the bulky figure of Van Lardent, and yet again he was off. He had disappeared into the gloom long ere the Italian scoundrel and his hireling had recovered from their pain and discomfiture.

Keeping under cover of the several buildings and stacks of rubbish dotted about the yard, the captain hurried right across it to the farther wall.

In this was an opening where some high gates had originally stood, and, beyond, a wharf and the river.

Captain Kentish heard the wounded Gaglietto and the Chinaman stumbling after him over the debris that littered almost every part of the yard, which seemed to have been used as a dumping-ground for lumber and unwanted articles of all kinds.

More—many more of the gang the Italian had at his beck and call—might also be taking up the pursuit by this time, and there was only one safe way of eluding them.

That was to take to the water, but, as the little skipper could swim like the proverbial duck, that did not greatly trouble him.

Running with his burden to the edge of the wharf, he slipped into the black waters as quietly as possible, and by the time Gaglietto and his companion had found their way on to the wharf the skipper had swum with Van Lardent behind some barges which were moored near.

To his ears faintly floated the excited voices of his enemies, but he felt almost certain that he had eluded them now for good, and, as he turned over on his back, holding the mouth and nostrils of the Dutch sailor clear of the water, he was convinced he had given them the slip.

Whether the two, or any of their unwounded confederates secured a boat or boats, and scoured the river for him, the skipper never knew.

Without hearing or seeing any signs of further pursuit, he reached a flight of simple steps which led up to an alley-way at no great distance from the marine store of his friend and one-time first-mate, Patrick O'Hara; and it was only a few seconds later that he had carried Van Lardent ashore.

The alley was deserted, and, getting the sodden and still-unconscious sailor over his shoulder, the captain hurried through it, and made his way as speedily as possible to O'Hara's residence.

He passed a few women and some men of the loafer type, who hung about the doorsteps of the tumbledown houses; but, although they stared after him curiously, they made no open comment or any attempt to molest him.

He found O'Hara's shop shuttered and in darkness; but, in response to his lusty kicking and knocking upon the door, one of the upper windows was flung up, and the tousled head of the son of the Green Isle was thrust out.

"Go away, ye spalpeen! Phwhat do you want at this time o' night—O'moight say mornin'! Bejabbers—"

"Let me in, O'Hara! It's I—Kentish!" the skipper shouted back.

An exclamation of astonishment came from O'Hara.

"Beg pardon, cap'n!" he apologised. "O'it'll be down in half a jiffy!"

He was as good as his word. Clad in shirt and trousers, with a candle in his hand, he opened the door of the shop, and Captain Kentish entered with the man he had rescued.

"Faith! Phwhat have you got there, cap'n?" O'Hara gasped.

Captain Kentish carried the unconscious Dutchman through into the living-room, where O'Hara lit the gas. The skipper placed Van Lardent on a sofa standing over against the farther wall, then he poured his story into his old friend's astonished ears.

"Begorra! Phwhat a man for adventures you are!" O'Hara exclaimed. "Phwhat'll you do—go to the police, an' have that Italian spalpeen's den raided this time, I suppose?"

Captain Kentish thought for a moment, then shook his head.

"Why, no, Pat," he answered. "The police, we'll suppose, would raid the place and perhaps capture a few of them. They'd probably be remanded by some long-winded old magistrate, and that would mean that we should have to hang about for days—even a week or longer—before we could start our voyage to try to find this island."

"The island—Slave Island! Jah! I your tell how to find the man who owns it, mynheer, for the von thousand pounds you promised me in Bleakmoor Briston! Slaves—all are slaves who work under the lash of the overseers and Meppel—Meppel—"

The skipper and Patrick O'Hara spun round on their heels, and stared in amazement at the man on the couch; for it was

from him that the startling words had come.

They saw that his eyes were open, though dazed, but as his voice—it was terribly weak and low—trailed off into silence, his lids drooped, and he seemed once again to lapse into unconsciousness.

"Holy smoke! gasped Kentish. "You heard, Pat—you heard!"

"Shure, cap'n!" O'Hara cried. "Bejabbers, phwhat's ut mane? You didn't say anything about slaves or slavery, and yet this man here—"

"Spoke of an island where slavery existed!" Captain Kentish cried, his voice unsteady with excitement. "By James, O'Hara, the fellow might almost have been to the island we are going in search of, and know where it is!"

"Faith, yis! Yet, can it be possible? Ut's almost too great a coincidence!"

The skipper strode to Van Lardent's side, and gently shook his shoulder; but he did not stir. His recovery had been but temporary, and he had once more lost his senses.

"Coincidence or not!" the skipper said, still staring at the Dutchman. "We have got to bring him round and question him. Have you any sort of stimulant—brandy for preference?"

"Shure, Oi have a little Oi bought when Oi'd the dickens of a toothache!" answered O'Hara, who was a strictly abstemious man, for all the many years he had followed the sea and mixed with heavy drinkers.

He brought the spirit to the skipper. Kentish did not administer it to Van Lardent immediately; but first, with the Irishman's assistance, undressed him and gave his cold limbs a vigorous towelling.

Having rolled him in some blankets, lit a fire, and drawn his couch near its blaze, the skipper took up the bottle. He poured a little of the brandy between the Dutch sailor's lips; but the experiment had to be repeated several times before he showed any signs of returning life.

Then, when he did open his eyes, it was to glare wildly up at the two men, and to mutter deliriously. The blow he had received had been a severe one, and he was rapidly developing a temperature.

He rolled over on his side, and after Captain Kentish had changed into a dry suit, loaned him by his friend, he and O'Hara seated themselves near, and heard him babble of things that interested them greatly.

Van Lardent spoke again and again of Slave Island, and the thousand pounds given him by Jasper Standish. Then, just as Captain Kentish was wondering whether he ought not to go for a doctor, words fell from the Dutchman's muttering lips that arrested his departure.

"Far South," Van Lardent babbled, and in his fevered mind he was back in the day months ago when he had agreed to take Jasper Standish to Hans Meppel—"far South, out of the course of ships, uncharted, and shut in by great black towering rocks von hundredt feet high! Who knows of the island dot lies behind t'em? The boy will never pe heard of agin, mynheer, never agin!"

He laughed in a manner that was not pleasant to hear, and the eyes of the Irishman and the skipper were alight with excitement as they met.

"Pat, it's the hand of Fate!" Captain Kentish declared. "It was Fate—pure Fate—that prompted me to go after and rescue this man to-night. He not only knows of this Slave Island, but of the lad, young Harmer, who has been taken

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there. In fact, it seems on the cards that this fellow was bribed to help get the poor kid banished into slavery!"

"Ut's almost too wonderful, cap'n, but Oi'll be hanged if Oi don't think you're roight!" the ex-first-mate answered, nodding.

The Dutchman grew quieter, and presently fell into a sound sleep. Knowing that he would probably awaken from it vastly refreshed and with his delirium gone, Captain Kentish put off seeking medical aid, and sat for a long time with a deep furrow of thought between his dark brows.

Suddenly he uttered an exclamation that caused O'Hara to start, and the Dutch sailor to stir and moan a little in his sleep.

"Great black towering rocks a hundred feet high!" Captain Kentish murmured. "Great rocks that hide an island far south—in the South Pacific, of course!"

He slapped his knee.

"Pat, I've fixed that island!" he cried, with sudden triumph.

"You mane you know where ut is exactly—can go and find ut?" O'Hara demanded eagerly.

"Yes," Captain Kentish answered, with conviction. "The mention of the rocks—the great black towering rocks that rise a hundred feet out of the sea—has stirred a chord of memory. I can recall how many, many years ago, when I was a ship's boy on an old tub of a schooner, we got blown far out of our course, and almost came to grief against them! By James, though, no one aboard dreamed an island lay behind 'em!"

"You think they're the same rocks—that the island exists, and loies behind 'em, and that ut wasn't just the talk av delirium, cap'n?"

"I do think they are the same. I feel sure of it, Pat! Man and boy I've sailed the South Seas, and I've never seen or heard of any others like 'em. And, well, from what we know ourselves, I don't think it was empty talk this fellow babbled, though he was mightily fevered."

The captain sat watching Van Lardent for some moments, then he rose to his feet.

"I reckon we'll turn in together, if your bed is large enough, Pat," he suggested. "He seems to be sleeping peacefully and he may be O.K. in the upper storey in the morning. If he is we'll not let the lubber go until we've got the whole truth out of him!"

But the morning brought a surprise.

When Pat and the skipper came downstairs they found Van Lardent gone.

It was evident that he had been stronger and more normal when he awoke, and, probably finding that his banknotes were still in his clothes, he had donned the latter, and whilst his money and life were still his, slipped out of what he probably took to be some den belonging to those who had felled him on the previous night.

The skipper was more than disappointed at not being able to question the man, but, as he was so sure in his own mind that he could now find Slave Island, he was not down-hearted.

Forty-eight hours later, Captain Kentish's tramp steamer left Salcombe Harbour, bound on her long voyage to the South Pacific.

Smoking a long, strong cigar, and with his pet monkey on his shoulder, the skipper himself stood at the wheel; his wooden-legged servant and O'Hara,

now installed as first-mate, were by the rails, taking a long farewell of Old England.

"Bravo for Slave Island and any adventures we run into, bejabbers!" the Irishman said, as the vessel steamed into the open sea. "Pattrick, me boy, this is life again!"

The Escape!

DICK HARMER cut listlessly at a bunch of the yellow fruit the sight of which he had grown so tired of seeing.

Near him worked Elaine, who had been spared from further punishment after her terrible experience in Hans Meppel's arena; and the boy and the girl presented this evening a striking contrast to one another.

For many weeks Dick had continued to be indignant at his treatment, and, in consequence, rebellious; but on Slave Island might was right, and eventually he found it impossible to do anything save submit to the tyranny of Hans Meppel.

The boy had grown haggard, and there was a hint of despair in his eyes to-day as he worked in the banana plantation near the water-way which, when the swinging rock was opened, led into the sea.

On the other hand, Elaine's pretty, girlish face was flushed and at times so curiously eager that Dick wondered. There were twenty or more other slaves in sight, but none of them working very near the boy and girl, and, as the overseer in charge of the party moved away, Elaine edged closer to the lad.

"Dick!" she breathed.

"Yes, Elaine?"

He went on cutting the fruit and did not look round as he answered. Months had passed since he and the girl had made their bid for freedom, and in that period Dick had learned caution and discretion.

"The steamer is leaving to-night," she whispered, with a significant note in her voice. "I heard one of the overseers tell another, and I have no reason to think it was not correct."

Dick Harmer glanced towards the waterway. Hans Meppel's ugly and dirty steamboat, which had recently brought in a load of supplies, was anchored there, and at the moment apparently deserted.

"What's in your mind, Elaine?" the boy asked quickly; though already he half guessed, and a thrill of mingled excitement and hope had shot through his breast.

"Can't you guess, Dick?" Elaine asked, still speaking softly. "In half an hour the short twilight will be here! We are usually kept working until it is dark. What is to stop us slipping away through the banana trees, swimming to the vessel, and stowing ourselves away?"

As she finished her suggestion her voice was shaking with eagerness, and, fired by her enthusiasm, Dick gave a quiet whistle.

"My hat! It might work!" he breathed back. "There's every possibility we shouldn't be missed when the other slaves are marched to their sleeping quarters, and, if we get aboard and hide, we should at least be carried past those horrible rocks, whatever happened afterwards."

"Yes," she agreed.

"But if we were caught and brought back"—he shuddered as he thought of her—"it would probably mean death!"

"Isn't death in the way of being

preferable to life-long slavery here?” the girl asked, almost passionately: “Dick, if you will come with me, I am going to take the chance!”

“Of course, I’ll come, Elaine,” he replied, without hesitation. “Yes, I am almost inclined to think you are right. To remain here for always, toiling under the blows and insults of these brutes who are over us, doesn’t bear thinking of. Yes, we’ll do it, little girl, and risk the consequence if we fail!”

They fell into silence as the overseer strolled near.

The boy and the girl worked on steadily, though they were inwardly racked with suspense. Would the man never change his position? both were asking themselves. In a few minutes the twilight would come, soon afterwards the darkness of the tropical night and—

Ah! At last! Swishing his whip, the overseer had strode off to bully some of the slaves working at a distant tree, whom he had noticed slackening in their efforts.

The sun sank lower and lower until it had dipped like a glowing ball of red fire behind the towering rocks that shut in Slave Island and made it invisible from the sea.

It disappeared altogether, at length, and its afterglow was replaced by the glorious purple of the half-light of late evening. With the quickness peculiar to the tropics, that, in turn, was blotted out by the blackness of night.

Dick and Elaine heard the overseer shouting to the slaves to cease work and fall in to march to their sleeping quarters, and the lad’s hand shot out and clasped hers.

“Now!” he said, through his teeth; and in another second they were stealing away through the trees.

Dick Harmer and Elaine went onwards through the tall, grotesque-looking banana-trees.

The boy still held the hand of the girl, and the hearts of both were beating hard.

Every moment they expected to hear signs of pursuit; for they had taken a slender chance when they had relied upon not being missed. The seconds flew by, and they went farther into the plantation, however, without any alarming sounds reaching them from the rear; and now, through the trees, they could see the water gleaming ahead.

It was caressed by the soft light of the moon. It had been quite dark when they had stolen away from the spot where the other slaves had been listlessly preparing to march to their sleeping quarters; but now the moon had peeped out from behind a cluster of clouds.

By the last of the banana-trees Dick halted, and held up his hand for silence.

They listened, straining their ears. A second or two elapsed, then both sighed with relief. All was as still as the grave from the direction whence they had come.

“The steamer lies this way—to the left,” Dick said. “Come! The sooner we are aboard and hidden away, the better. Even if we are eventually missed, no one may think of searching it for us.”

The girl followed him, as, just over the fringe of the plantation, he crept along. They came abreast of where Hans Meppel’s dirty tramp-steamers lay in the waterway, and for the time being taking care to remain hidden by the foliage, they studied it anxiously.

(Another instalment of this grand adventure serial in next week’s issue of the GEM. Look out for it!)

FOR FREEDOM & THE CUP.

Continued from page 15.

was no sign that the house was tenanted.

Several of the juniors had electric torches, and these were flashed into all the rooms.

Of Donovan and his accomplices, however, there was no trace.

“They’ve sloped off, it seems,” said Talbot. “Let’s go down into the cellars.”

“Groo!”

A good many of the searchers did not relish the prospect of descending to the lower regions. They remained on the ground floor, while Talbot, together with Tom Merry and Harry Wharton, went down the flight of stone steps.

When they reached the cellar, Talbot uttered a sharp exclamation.

“This morning, when I made my escape, there was a safe here, apparently full of plunder,” he said. “It’s gone now.”

“My hat!”

“So there can be little doubt that Donovan has cleared out,” said Harry Wharton. “He found that you had escaped, and he was funky that you’d put the police on his track, so he looked it.”

“That’s about it!” said Tom Merry. The voice of Arthur Augustus D’Arcy sounded from above.

“Found anything, deah boys?”

“Nothing,” answered Tom Merry. “The rotters have gone, and taken their plunder with them.”

The news naturally came as a big disappointment. At the same time, the juniors were not sorry to quit that gloomy place.

“We’ve had our journey for nothing,” said Figgins, as the party started back to Greyfriars. “Donovan’s escaped, and you won’t have the pleasure of giving evidence against him at the next Assizes, Talbot.”

Marie Rivers was looking grave.

“This means,” she said, addressing Talbot, “that you are still in danger. Donovan will do his best to get you into his clutches again.”

Talbot laughed lightly.

“Then all I can say is, Marie, that he’ll be jolly unlucky!” was his comment. “I shan’t be caught napping a second time.”

When the party arrived at Greyfriars, the St. Jim’s fellows found that it was time for them to start back to their own school. So they bade their Greyfriars friends a hurried farewell, and proceeded to the station, to catch the last train to Rylcombe.

Next day there was an impressive scene at St. Jim’s.

Mr. Shirley Bright, in the presence of the whole school, presented the silver cup to Tom Merry.

In addition, there was a medal for each member of the victorious eleven. And as the juniors walked up to the raised platform, in turn, to receive their just reward, cheers rang out.

And the heartiest cheer of all was given when the name of Reginald Talbot was called. For everybody realised what a sterling fellow Talbot was, and everybody was eager to pay homage to the junior who had passed through so many grim adventures, and who had proved successful in his great fight for Freedom and the Cup!

THE END.

(Another grand, long story of the chums of St. Jim’s next week, entitled “THE SACRED IDOL!” Order your copy EARLY.)

YOUR EDITOR’S CHAT.

Address: Editor, The GEM, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4.

Attractions for Next Wednesday.

There will be another lot of splendid new stories for next week’s number of the Gem Library which will appeal to all my loyal chums. The first story will be a long complete school tale dealing with the adventures of Tom Merry and Co. and the Chums of St. Jim’s, under the title of

“THE SACRED IDOL!” By Martin Clifford.

Excitement is the keynote all the way through, and Koumi Rao has the narrowest possible escape from the terrible danger which threatens him at the hands of several mysterious Hindus. His chums help to guard him day and night, although “Jammy” thinks it quite unnecessary, and they come in for their share of the adventures. Altogether

“THE SACRED IDOL!”

is sure to prove an extra popular story, and my readers will be very well advised to order their copy of next week’s number well in advance.

Our two splendid serials,

“RENTON OF THE ROVERS!” By Paul Masters,

and

“SLAVE ISLAND!” By Matthew Ironside,

a football and adventure story respectively, will be as thrilling as usual. Both these talented authors tell me they are working up to a fine climax, which they will be revealing to my readers in a very short time.

There will also be a corner devoted to contributions sent in by keen Gemites, and paid for at the rate of Half-a-Crown for each paragraph published, under the title of

“MY READERS’ OWN CORNER.”

And, lastly, there will be a small corner for my little contribution,

“THE EDITORIAL CHAT.”

A FINE QUALITY.

It is good to be popular. The best type of popularity is that of the man who does not even know that he is popular—does not trouble to think about the matter at all. There was a fellow who occupied an important position at an establishment where education was dealt in wholesale and retail, and he never hardly went out and mixed with his contemporaries as his colleagues did. He was too busy. But if anybody wanted to see him the door to his sanctum was open. He never shut himself up. His room was piled high with books and papers. It was a hard job to find a perch, but the owner of the den was wise, and he was cheery and generous, and he liked helping others. He knew the right word to say. There were not many compliments. This was something a sight better.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 666.

Going Ahead.

We do not get on by quarrelling about things. That is a dead certainty--or, rather, a live one. You want to leave the gate open, as it were, on disagreements. Some fellows are much given to the abused word, "Never." Never is a long time. Some thinkers say there is no such thing at all. Whichever way it is, what is the good of declaring that the dispute you have had with Brown, or Smith, is final and will never be made up?

You know this is not true. You know, too, that you don't mean half the things

you say about the chap who has angered you. Now, disputes, which are generally trivial, whether they occur in a village or a town, or concern individuals or nations, are just the things which prevent progress. We are all wanted for something, and that something is certainly not quarrelling.

The fellow who is out to do his duty must bring something in his kitbag. Out of nothing--nothing. The man who is ready with some extra bit of knowledge, some cheery way of acting to his fellows, some little knack of solving a problem, will succeed. You can all profit by the

experience of the middle-aged. I suppose there is not anybody who has passed a certain term of life who does not wish at times he could go back and put his mistakes right. If you can take a lesson from the seniors, you will not make half as many errors as they did. That is one of the prime advantages of being young.

Your Editor



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