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No. 806.
Vol. XXIV.
July 21st, 1923.



A TOUGH FIGHT FOR RIVER HONOURS!

(Leaving the Starting Post for the Greatest Race of the Year. A Thrilling Incident from the Grand, Long School and Sporting Story, entitled: "SPORTSMEN OF THE RIVER!" contained in this issue.)



Address all letters: The Editor, The "Gem" Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Write me, you can be sure of an answer in return.

OUR COMPANION PAPERS.

"THE BOYS' FRIEND" Every Monday
 "THE MAGNET" Every Monday
 "THE POPULAR" Every Tuesday
 "CHUCKLES" Every Thursday
 "THE HOLIDAY ANNUAL" Published Yearly

My Dear Chums.—When you pick up your copy of the GEM each Wednesday you know you have got hold of something real—something which is right on the wicket—the brightest paper to be obtained. It is my pleasant task to keep this famous paper thoroughly up to its eyes in its excellent reputation, and you hardly need be telling that the coming yarn of St. Jim is more than equal to the best.

"MANNERS HOLDS HIS OWN!" By Martin Clifford.

That is the title of next week's splendid tale. It is pitched in the happiest key. This is doubly the case, for a certain key-hole figures in the narrative. You will most likely jump to the conclusion that Baggy is found listening in at the aperture in question. Not so. The personage who is caught trying to pick up unconsidered trifles of information at the little orifice is not the august Trimble. It is Mr. Selby, the master of the Third. Wonders will never cease! Who would ever have imagined that Mr. Selby would stoop to any such meanness? Well, there is an end that lies behind all this, and it is not my intention to take the keen edge off the fascinating yarn by dropping into details. It would not be fair to you, to Mr. Martin Clifford, nor to the GEM.

WHEN TYRANTS SING SMALL!

It is a great story, anyhow, and Mr. Selby passes through some of the weirdest experiences which it has ever been the fate of the somewhat fractions Third Form magnate to encounter. It falls out this way. Manners gets a firm hold on Mr. Selby. The latter cordially dislikes the notion of it being known that he could condescend to stand at attention with his ear fast to a keyhole. The position is not the most dignified one in the world. Baggy himself always denies that he listens to what is taking place the other side of the door. The world is tremendously prejudiced against fellows who show curiosity of the kind. The thing is not done in the best circles. But there are some things which cannot be denied. Manners knows too much for Mr. Selby's peace of mind. The master of the Third has to toe the line, and many amusing situations are the result. And, of course, there is immense jubilation among the hard-pressed fags, who have no very special reason to admire their superior.

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ANOTHER TAGGLES ISSUE!

Look out for the new number of the "St. Jim's News." It is extra special. I am putting in this additional Taggles' Number at the urgent request of readers. It was wanted, as the letters I have received amply show. And it is a scream from first to last. Taggles has a majestic personality. He may drop his h's; he may have arbitrary methods; but the St. Jim's fellows like him, and are more than ready to his defects, if any! What he says is this 'ere! The worthy janitor of St. Jim's would be asked his opinion of the matter, the hilarious supplement, he would say it was just the goods! Which it is.

"RUN DOWN!" By Stanley Austin.

This is just about the finest and most dramatic sporting yarn ever written. Stanley Austin is a master of the art of describing a sporting event; but, of course, he does not stop short at the graphic details appertaining to a spirited cross-country run. There is more—much more—and you cannot help but admire the clever handling of the theme with its thrilling element of mystery, to say nothing of the adacious novelty pervading the whole story. It is not reasonable to expect a tragic wind-up to a run, but the chief figures in this captivating tale find themselves in a very queer place at the end of the sprint. The plain fact is they have unwittingly put themselves in the power of an unscrupulous plotter, who has reason to believe the runners have scented a secret hiding-place which he is guarding very jealously. Just make a note of what has been concealed. He is desperate when he imagines the game is up, and stops at nothing to make all safe for himself. The story sweeps you along with it in fine style, and there

will be praise unstinted for the manner in which the victims of the rogue "face the music." There will be no pity for the scoundrel, who, as events show, has to play second fiddle before the curtain drops.

£300 CRICKET COMPETITION!

In this issue of the GEM you will find full details of the big offer. The competition is the finest ever put before readers. There is plenty of inducement here for every fellow to get going. The test calls for a bit of hard thinking and a good knowledge of cricket, but GEM readers all possess that. I am sure all my friends will have a shot at this new competition, which is worthy of the GEM. No need to say more on that point. Just study the details, and then send in your coupons.

TUCK HAMPERS!

But don't overlook the admirable Tuck Hamper offer in the rush and hurry and excitement of the new feature. The Tuck Hamper Competition swings on its triumphant way in best fashion. Week by week it gets more popular, for the Tuck Hamper is an institution which is never out of season. And then our bright little storyette department brightens up the Wednesday paper tremendously.

A BUMPER NUMBER!

The August Bank Holiday Number will resemble the Iron Duke, for it can face all the winds that blow, and regard each and every rival with calmness, for it will be a positively record issue. That week the St. Jim's story will run to 25,000 words, and Mr. Martin Clifford has a subject worthy of him and the great story weekly which has brought him unlimited fame.

We would refer our readers to the announcement appearing elsewhere in this issue with regard to "THE PRACTICAL WOODWORKER," which is the most comprehensive work ever issued on this subject dealing with Woodworking from A to Z, with thousands of illustrations, and "how to do it" drawings and diagrams.

Readers should take advantage of the publishers' offer regarding a free booklet giving full particulars which will be of great interest.

ARE WE DOWNHEARTED?

I am well aware the answer is in the negative. But there are times when it is impossible not to feel depressed. It is just bound to be like that. It is on these occasions that the victim to some bad chance has to pull up his socks. He can thank Fate for giving him difficulties. Difficulties bring out the best. Take a spell of bad luck. You feel you are not making any headway. Worse still, you sort of sense that the world has taken a dislike to you. That's where the shoe pinches. Well, there is only one cure for this particular ill—take measures so that the world has thumping good cause to revise its opinion. It is a plain duty to try some hard reasoning when the times seem out of joint. Maybe there has been an impression that life was really an easy affair. It isn't. If it were, half the latent energies of the fellows who are out to make good would never be called upon at all. That would mean disaster. You can only learn by sets-back. They compel a re-start, and a better one. They make you realise what's really in you. And then, later on, comes some cheery word of encouragement. That does it. Encouragement sends the fire roaring, and makes the irons red-hot.

**ALL SPORTS
FOOTBALL
ANNUAL**

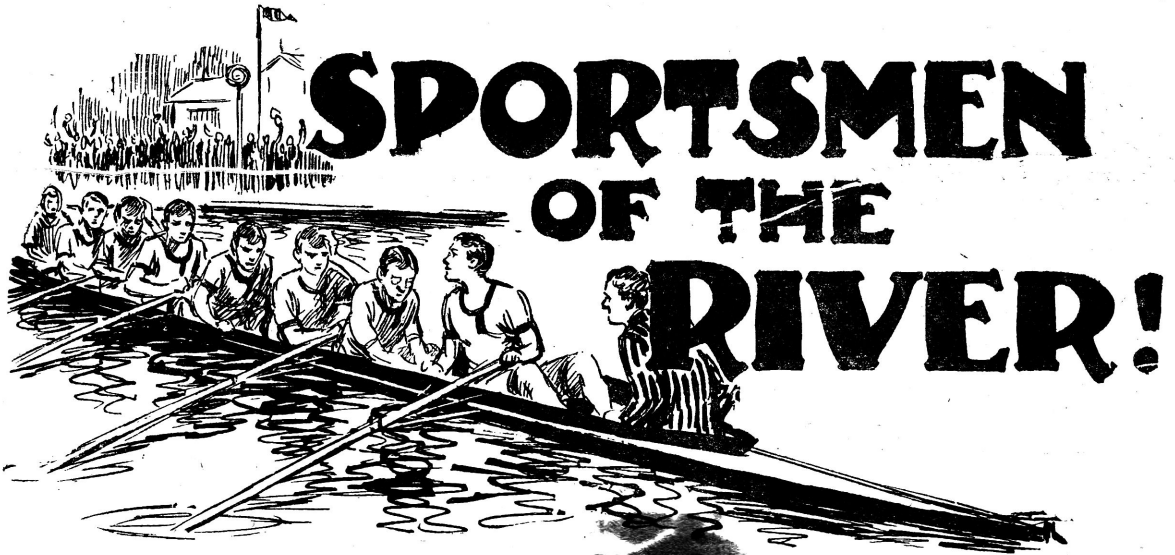
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A Topping Tale of the Famous Tom Merry & Co. at St Jim's, telling of their tough tussle for River Honours against the Grammarians and the Doughty Village Eight.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

The Challenge.

TOM MERRY was looking thoughtful. The youthful leader of the Shell at St. Jim's was seated on the study table, and he had just finished reading a note he held in his hand. It was rather a grubby-looking note, but apparently, from the expression on Tom Merry's usually sunny countenance, its contents had given him much food for thought.

With Tom Merry in Study No. 10 were Monty Lowther and Manners, his chums and study-mates, and they were both grinning—or, rather, Manners was grinning, while Lowther was chuckling aloud.

"Rather a corker, isn't it, Tommy?" grinned Manners. "Cheek, I call it!"

"Nerve, and no mistake!" chuckled Monty Lowther. "It's funny enough to see the lads of the village blossoming forth into giddy oarsmen; but to have the cheek to challenge us—"

"It's a scorcher," said Manners. "Why, they've hardly had time to find out the right end of an oar yet! I'll admit they don't play cricket and footer badly, for villagers; but rowing—"

"Rowing!" added Lowther. "My hat! What a nerve!" Tom Merry shook his head slowly.

"I don't know," he said reflectively. "I don't know at all. Grimes and his pals are hefty beggars, you know. And remember, they've got that parson chap—Pascall, who's an old 'Varsity Blue and goodness knows what—to coach 'em. I like their grit, though. After all, they're only beginners, and—"

"Rats! It's cheek," said Manners.

"Read it out, again," requested Lowther.

Tom Merry held the note up, and after clearing his throat, began to read.

"Dear Merry," he read. "As the junior skipper of the Rylcombe Village Rowing Club, I hereby challenge your crew to a mile race to take place on the Rhy! any time you likes, and what will decide what crew's to be head of the river this year. You chaps held the honour last year by licking the Grammar School, and from all accounts you'll do the trick again this year. But you won't lick us, I'll promise you, Master Merry. We're going strong, and we'll lick your heads off. So look out. I've also sent a challenge to the Grammar School chaps, and it's up to you and them to decide whether you'll meet us both together or separately.

"You'd best get red-dy for a rare licking, Master Merry!"

"Yours sportingly, H. GRIMES."

As he finished reading the remarkable document, Tom Merry grinned in spite of himself. The cheery leader of the St. Jim's juniors had a host of friends, and he counted

Grimes as one of them. In Grimes, the redoubtable leader of the village youths, Tom had met a foeman worthy of his steel in more than one stiff tussle on cricket-pitch and footer-field. And now it looked as if he was to meet him in a trial of strength and skill on the river. But whatever Grimes' abilities in handling an oar might prove to be, his spelling and letter-writing certainly left much to be desired.

"The letter's rather a corker," said Tom. "But the meaning's clear enough. We'll accept, of course, though I'd better see the fellows. Hallo, here's Blake now!"

At that moment Jack Blake, the leader of the Fourth in the School House, looked in at the open doorway. Behind Blake were his chums—Herries, Digby, and last, but not least, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Hallo, you mouldy old shell-fish! Not had tea yet?" was Blake's greeting. "Why this thushness?"

"Trot right in, kids," said Tom Merry. "Look at this, Blake."

He handed over the note from Grimes, and Blake looked at it. Then he read it, whistled, and passed it to his chums. Herries and Digby read it and roared. Arthur Augustus read it, then, after taking out his eyeglass and polishing it on a delicate cambric handkerchief, he read it again.

"Bai Jove!" he ejaculated, handing the note back to Merry. "What feahful cheek! Gwimey is weally a vevy decent chap, and I admiah him gweatly. But, weally, the deah boy cannot expect us to take such a challenge seviously."

"The cocky beggars have got swelled heads over this new rowing stunt of theirs," laughed Digby. "Lick our heads off—eh? What hopes they've got!"

"Sheer cheek and brag!" grunted Herries.

"I'm not so sure," remarked Blake thoughtfully. "I saw the crew out yesterday, and they weren't doing so badly. They'll give the Grammar School crew a run anyway, I'll bet."

"Just my view," said Tom Merry. "I believe the beggars are picking it up quickly, and they've lots of time to train. Besides, they'll stick like glue to rowing while we've cricket and other things to think of as well. Mustn't treat 'em too lightly."

"You're going to accept, then?" asked Herries.

"Why not? No reason why we shouldn't," said Tom Merry. "What do you think, Blake?"

"No, reason at all, Tommy," agreed Blake, nodding. "Does Figgy know about this?"

"I'm going across to see him about it now," said Tom. "You fellows had better come, too."

"As a bodyguard, eh?" grinned Blake. "Yes, we'll come."

Tom Merry laughed and led the way out of the study to visit Figgins, the lanky leader of the New House juniors. There was endless warfare between the two rival houses of

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St. Jim's, and though they were going on a peaceful errand, it was just as well to enter the enemies' stronghold in force.

The seven juniors streamed across the sunlit quad, and entered the open doorway of the New House. There were lots of New House juniors about, and they eyed the School House juniors suspiciously. But Tom Merry and his chums reached Figgins' study unmolested.

The door was slightly ajar, and Tom Merry kicked it wide open and strode in briskly. He wished he had not been quite so brisk about it the next moment.

As the door swung open a pile of books that had been nicely balanced on the top edge, came down with a rush. From Tom Merry, and Blake and Lowther, who were just behind, there came wild yells of surprise and pain as the weighty tomes rattled about their heads.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins & Co. were at home—there was no doubt about that. The three cheery New House juniors had been standing regarding the doorway rather expectantly, but now they

The Chance of a Lifetime!

Turn to Page 26 NOW—

were doubled up with laughter. Apparently their expectations were realised, and they seemed highly amused.

"Ow! Oh crumbs! Oh, my napper!" groaned Tom Merry, sitting up painfully, and rubbing his head. "You—you howling chumps! What did you want to put those things there for?"

"Because we happened to see you School House worms coming across from your casual ward," explained Figgins, with bland frankness. "If you will barge into the enemies' country as if you owned it, you must expect little surprises like that."

"You—you silly dummies!"

"Thanks!" said Figgins. "Is this a friendly visit, or does it mean war, my pippins?"

"I've a jolly good mind to make it war!" snorted Tom Merry. "You've jolly nearly busted my napper!"

"Better not," advised Figgins, grinning. "You're seven to three, but I've only got to yell, and you'll have every New House chap here in two ticks. Well?"

Tom Merry burst into a laugh. His sunny good humour never left him for long.

"Oh, rats! It's pax, Figgy!" he grinned, handing over the note from Grimes. "We've come to see what you think about that."

Figgins took the note, read it, and handed it to his chums, Fatty Wynn and Kerr.

"Awful cheek!" was Fatty's comment.

"Poor old Grimey!" grinned Kerr. "He evidently means business!"

"It's cheek right enough," remarked Figgins. "Well, we'll take 'em on and knock some of the cheek out of 'em!"

"I thought you'd say that, Figgy," said Tom cordially.

"We'll accept them. I'll run over this evening, and see Gordon Gay about fixing it up. So that's that. They won't stand an earthly, of course. But—"

"I'm not so sure about that," said Figgins, shaking his head.

"Eh? What do you mean, ass?"

"Not as our crew stands at present," said Figgins.

"They'll lick us with only two New House chaps in our crew. You've only put Kerr and me in, and that's not enough. Stands to reason—"

"Rats!"

"Bosh!"

"Rubbish!"

"With six School House duds in the crew and only two chaps who can row," said Figgins warmly, "you can't hope to win. Eh, you chaps?"

"Rather not," agreed Fatty Wynn and Kerr together.

"Now, if you'd only be sensible and pitch that silly tailor's dummy, Gussy, and his blessed eyeglass, overboard, and put in—"

"Bai Jove, Figgay, you awful wottah!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "I uttahnly wufese to be chawactewised as a tailor's dummy. Figgay, you wude wottah—"

"Why, aren't you a tailor's dummy?" ejaculated Figgins. D'Arcy turned back his sleeves, his aristocratic features pink.

"Pway put up your hands, you wottah!" he demanded warmly. "I intend to give you a feahful thwashin' for that wude—"

"Certainly, old top," said Figgins.

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He put his hands up; one of them, open, flicked Gussy's eyeglass from his eye; the other, closed, tapped the swell of the Fourth gently on his aristocratic nose.

"Oh, bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

He stood a moment, clutching his injured nose, and then, throwing to the winds his aristocratic repose, he gave a warlike yell. With fists waving like the arms of a windmill, he went for the grinning New House chief.

Next instant, locked in a deadly embrace, they were waltzing round the study, struggling mightily. They staggered into Kerr, who staggered backwards into Lowther, the back of his head violently striking Lowther's nose, making him yell fiendishly.

That did it. In a flash the study was the scene of a wild, whirling scrimmage. It went on for a few seconds, and then Figgins, seeing they were hopelessly outnumbered, gave a roar.

"Rescue, New House! School House rotters! Quick! Rescue!"

And rescue came quickly enough. There was the sound of doors opening, followed by the scamper of feet. In the doorway appeared Redfern, Lawrence, and Owen. They glanced in, and then, grasping the situation, they flung themselves into the fray. They were quickly followed by a herd of New House juniors.

Tom Merry and his men put up a stout fight, but they were now, in their turn, hopelessly outnumbered. They were all down at last, gasping and panting, with New House chaps sitting all over them.

"Hear me smile!" chortled Figgins, staggering to his feet, his homely, good-humoured face hot and dusty. "We'll teach the measly School House rotters to come here making trouble. Frog-march the bounders out, and pitch 'em into the quad, you chaps!"

"There's a tin of syrup in the cupboard, Figgy," said Fatty Wynn. "It's mouldy, and has been there a long time."

"Good! Just the very thing, Fatty!"

The tin of syrup that was mouldy, and that had been there a long time, was produced. There was not much of it, but it went quite a long way, what there was. It was trickled over the heads of the School House fellows, in turn, and it trickled down their faces and necks.

That done, the grinning New House juniors frog-marched their hapless victims out into the passage and down the stairs. The triumphant procession stopped in the hall, and Tom Merry and his chums were sent sprawling one after the other into the quad.

"Who's cock-House now?" chortled Figgins. "Next time you come on a peaceful visit, Tom Merry, I'd advise you to leave that tailor's dummy at home! Good-bye!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The New House juniors streamed back into the house, laughing. The School House juniors staggered to their feet, groaning, and dusted themselves down.

"Ow! Oh, my hat!" gasped Blake. "Who would have expected this to happen?"

—AND READ ABOUT

Our £300 Cash Offer!

"Figgins is right!" groaned Monty Lowther crossly. "We might have expected it—taking an ass like Gussy with us!"

"Bai Jove! Weally, Lowthah, you boundah—"

"Oh, don't squabble!" said Tom Merry, laughing ruefully. "It can't be helped, and we'll get our own back, never fear! Anyway, I'm going in for tea. Blow Figgins!"

And the Terrible Three went in to tea. The peaceful visit had certainly ended far from peacefully. But they had got what they went for—they had got Figgins' view of the challenge. And Tom Merry, at least, was satisfied.

CHAPTER 2.

An Undesirable Element!

AFTERNOON, young gent!"

Tom Merry looked round. The captain of the Lower School at St. Jim's was walking along the towpath of the Rhyll, glimmering cool and placid in the early evening sunshine. True to his intention, he was on his way to visit Gordon Gay, of the Grammar School, to get his views on the challenge sent by Grimes of the village.

Naturally, the news had caused no little excitement and interest among the juniors, and though, in general, they



As Tom Merry & Co. kicked open the door of Figgins' study, a pile of books which had been nicely balanced on the ledge above came down with a rush about their heads. "Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins & Co. "Yaroo! Oh, grooooh!" roared Tom Merry & Co. (See page 4.)

considered the challenge "fearful cheek," it was agreed that it should be accepted. Grimes & Co. were foemen worthy of being taken seriously, and there was no knowing what they might accomplish—even in their new role of "wet-bobs."

So, immediately after tea was over, Tom had started out for the Grammar School, taking the path along the river. He was alone—though not from choice. Manners had stayed at home on the grounds that he had some films to develop; Lowther had stayed behind to write an imposition for Mr. Linton. The humorist of the Shell had ventured to perpetrate a pun in the Form-room that afternoon, and Mr. Linton had rewarded his rashness with a hundred lines—lines that had been doubled when Lowther, unwisely, had attempted to explain the point of the pun more clearly.

As Tom Merry looked round on hearing that rather hoarse, but extremely affable greeting, he frowned.

The greeting came from a portly, purple-faced gentleman who was seated on the fence lining the towpath, and smoking a cigar. By his side was a thin, pimply-faced youth, who was smoking a cigarette.

"'Arternoon, young gent," repeated the purple-faced gentleman; "or, I should say, 'evening!' seeing as it's arter teatime."

Tom Merry looked away again, and walked on. He was usually polite and genial enough to the villagers; but he had no politeness or geniality to waste on Mr. Joseph Banks, racing tout and billiards sharper. He certainly had no desire to be seen talking to such an unsavoury character.

But apparently Mr. Banks had anticipated Tom's point of view in that respect. Before Tom had taken three steps away, the racy gentleman had unstuck himself from the fence, and was standing in his path.

"Well, and 'ow are we, Master Merry?" asked Mr. Banks agreeably. "You're looking in the pink, I must say, young sir!"

"I'm all right," said Tom curtly. "Will you let me pass, please, Mr. Banks?"

"In 'ard trainin', I suppose," proceeded Mr. Banks, unheeding. "Well, there ain't nothin' like it. We was just discussin' this 'ere boatrace when you comes along, Master Merry. I 'ear as this new village crew 'as challenged you, Master Merry."

"That's quite true," said Tom impatiently.

"It's roused a rare old commotion in the village, an' no mistake!" said Mr. Banks. "Them kids means business—I 'ear they're fairly gettin' into their stride. You'll meet 'em, of course, Master Merry, bein' sports?"

"Yes; we'll meet them," said Tom briefly. "Will you allow me to pass, please? I'm in a hurry."

"And you'll lick 'em, if I ain't mistaken," said Mr. Banks, still unheeding Tom's impatience. "That is, o' course, if you ain't makin' any changes in the crew from last year. I suppose you ain't doin' that, Master Merry?"

Tom Merry bit his lip, and his eyes gleamed.

He fancied he saw the game now. In more than one sporting event between the village and St. Jim's a considerable amount of betting had taken place among a certain undesirable element in the village. And the prime mover in these proceedings had been Mr. Joseph Banks, racing tout and rascal. Apparently the same thing was to take place over the rowing race. And here was Mr. Banks obviously attempting to "pump" him for inside information.

A wave of hot anger surged through the junior at the thought.

"I shall tell you nothing, Mr. Banks!" he snapped. "Let me pass, please! You'll get nothing out of me to help you in your rotten betting!"

The eyes of the sharper glinted a trifle, but he stepped aside quickly enough. He was used to sailing very close to the wind where the police were concerned; but he never sought trouble unnecessary if he could help it.

But at that point the flashily-dressed youth took a hand in the proceedings. In professional life he was the billiards-marker at the Green Man Inn a few yards along the river,

and he appeared to be in a pugnacious mood that evening. He knew Tom Merry was no "customer" of his, nor ever likely to be. And he had no fear of "trouble" as had Mr. Banks.

He planted himself in the junior's path. "Ere, who d'you think you're talkin' to, young shaver?" he said aggressively. "Too 'igh and mighty to answer a civil question—eh?"

"Yes, to suit his rotten purposes!" snapped Tom. "Let me pass!"

"When you've answered this gent's civil question, not afore," said the youth stubbornly. "Some o' you kids from the college needs takin' down a peg. Now then, me cock-sparrer—"

"Ere, Jim, let the kid pass!" murmured Mr. Banks.

"Not likely. Now then, are yer—"

"I don't want trouble," said Tom Merry quietly; "but if you don't allow me to pass I shall make you! I—"

"Oh, will yer? Yer'll do a fat lot! 'Ere, who're yer pushin'? Don't you push me!"

But Tom Merry had already pushed. Losing patience, he raised his arm and sent the pugnacious youth staggering aside. Then he walked on, thereby just missing a vicious swing from the marker's fist.

"Ere, 'old on, Jim!" exclaimed Mr. Banks, in alarm.

"None of that, you idjut!"

But the hot-headed Jim did not heed. That disdainful push in the chest had quite upset his temper. His first wild blow having missed its mark, he made a savage rush and tried again.

But Tom Merry was ready. He saw there was no hope of avoiding trouble now, and he did not intend to let the pimply youth have it all his own way.

As the youth made his wild rush Tom stood his ground, and his fist thumped into his opponent's chest. Jim collapsed like a pricked balloon, and sat down with a thump.

"I don't wish to fight," said Tom grimly, "but if you insist you can have it!"

Jim did insist, and he had it. He jumped to his feet with a savage yell, and went for the junior, his arms waving like flails. The next moment they were fighting furiously.

The billiards-marker had the advantage in height and weight and age, but he was hopelessly outclassed in fitness and skill. In a few moments, gasping and panting, and with the perspiration streaming down his unwholesome features, he was backing under a rain of blows from his more agile and scientific opponent.

Backwards and forwards, now on the cindered towpath and now on the grassy bank they tramped as Jim made savage rushes, only to be driven back again by Tom Merry's hard fists. And it was during one of Jim's desperate rushes that Mr. Banks saw a chance to end the struggle in his own way.

As Tom Merry backed towards him, fighting coolly and steadily, Mr. Banks thrust out a stealthy foot, and, tripping over it, the junior went flat on his back on the cinders.

In a flash his opponent was upon him, and, digging a knee into the junior's chest, he rained down savage blows on his almost helpless enemy. Vainly Tom strove to defend himself, and he was taking brutal punishment when a sound came from upstream.

It was the measured click of oars in rowlocks. It came nearer, and then came a sudden shrill shout of "Easy all!" It was followed instantly by the musical swish of feathered blades.

Mr. Banks wheeled swiftly and gasped his alarm. The boat—a racing eight—had stopped, and was being skilfully manœuvred towards the bank, swiftly and without confusion. The bank was low, and as the oar-blades slithered over the grass cox grasped the bank and held on.

Then Mr. Banks seemed to wake up.

"Chuck it, Jim! Hook it!" he hissed. "'Ere's more of them blamed skool kids!"

But Mr. Banks himself had left his retreat just a little too late. Even as he turned to slip away the crew of the eight leaped ashore one by one, and in a flash Mr. Banks, his friend, and Tom were surrounded.

"Well, old tops, what's all this rumpus about?" asked the stroke of the eight, with a grin. "My hat! It's dear old Tom Merry, though he don't look so merry now. What's the trouble, Tommy, old son?"

Tom Merry blinked up and recognised Gordon Gay, the leader of the Grammarians. Gordon Gay grinned down at him. The St. Jim's junior was a wreck. His nose was bleeding, and his collar wrenched loose, and his clothes were crumpled and dusty.

"Oh—oh crumbs!" he gasped, mopping his nose with his handkerchief, as he staggered to his feet. "That—that fat brute tripped me up, and—"

"We saw that, Tommy, old son," said Gordon Gay. Though the Grammarian leader was grinning, as he usually

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was, there was a note in his voice and a gleam in his eyes that Mr. Banks, looking on rather uneasily, didn't at all like. "But what started the little tussle?"

"Look 'ere, young gents!" said Mr. Banks, before Tom could speak. "There ain't no cause for you gents ter interfere. We was jest arskin' this 'ere young rip a few civil questions and 'e insulted us."

"Just like these ill-mannered Saints," observed Gay, shaking his head. "Tommy, you rude, insulting ass, what were the questions?"

"About the boatrace," said Tom briefly. "They were trying to pump me about our chances. You can guess why, Gay."

"Oh, so that's it?" remarked Gordon Gay, becoming suddenly grim. "So these beauties are betting on the race—eh?"

"Only a little flutter. No 'arm at all, young sir," assured Mr. Banks uneasily. "Jest a few small bets atween a few chaps in the village. It don't concern the schools, and ain't no business o' any—"

"But it's going to be our business, old top," said Gay blandly. "You're too much of a sportsman, old son, that's what's the matter. You want your ardour cooled down a bit. And here's the river nice and handy—eh, you chaps? Collar the rotters!"

The grinning Grammarians laid hands on Mr. Banks and his friend Jim, and they were none too gentle about it. Despite their grins they were inwardly seething with wrath. They had witnessed Mr. Banks' cowardly little trick on Tom, and they had also witnessed Jim, the marker's, brutal attack afterwards. For that alone they felt the rascals deserved a ducking.

But the thought that bets were being made on a school race angered them still more.

"Ere, leggo!" roared Mr. Banks, struggling frenziedly as he realised their intention. "I can't swim. I'll 'ave the police on you young 'ounds!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Grammarians roared at the thought of the racy, rascally bookie enlisting the aid of the police. But their hilarity did not prevent them carrying out their intention. At a word from Gay, Mr. Banks, raving and yelling, was swung into the air and let go. He descended into the gleaming river with a howl and a splash. And next instant the shivering Jim had followed him.

"Pity to poison the fishes," remarked Gordon Gay. "But it's for the general good of humanity. Besides, they both needed a bath badly. Hallo, here they come!"

Luckily the river wasn't deep hereabouts, and, after floundering about in the muddy depths, Messrs. Banks & Co. staggered ashore, gasping and spluttering and swearing, and looking anything but racy and flashy now.

Jim, the marker, was the first ashore, and he made a wild rush through the laughing juniors, and went staggering away along the towpath. Mr. Banks stopped to pass a few remarks.

"I'll make you young 'ounds sit up for this!" he spluttered, shaking his fist and glowering at Tom Merry. "You jest wait!"

"He's just like the Germans," said Gay. "Doesn't seem to be either chastened or repentant. Better repeat the dose, I— Hallo, he's off!"

Mr. Banks was off. He went scudding along the towpath as if for a wager. Gordon Gay watched him until he vanished in the direction of the Green Man, whose rusty-red roofs just showed above the foliage, and then he turned to Tom Merry.

"And now I think we'd better treat this St. Jim's dummy the same, you fellows!" he grinned. "A ducking will take—"

"Hold on, you ass!" grinned Tom Merry hastily. "It's pax, you chaps! I was just coming along to see you, Gay. We've had a challenge from old Grimey, Gay—"

"So've we!" said the Grammarian leader, chuckling. "Rather a scream, what? You're going to accept, of course—we are!"

Tom Merry nodded.

"Yes; but the question is, are we to meet 'em separately or when we race you? We plump for a single race. Make it much more exciting."

"Just what we think," said Gay. "Though I expect the race will really be between your lot and Grimey's—for second place, I mean!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What about last year?" grinned Tom. "Anyway, I can take that as settled, then, Gay?"

"Well, yes. We can talk over details later," said Gordon Gay. "We've got to get home and changed before call-over, old son! Cheerio! Sorry we can't stay—to duck you, Tommy!"

And with that the cheery Grammarian led his men back to their ship. Tom Merry watched them embark, and



From the thickly-wooded bank came a sudden chorus of hoots and lurid cat-calls. The next instant the air round the St. Jim's boat was thick with flying missiles. Hefty lumps of turf whizzed through the drowsy summer air, and rained down upon the heads of the St. Jim's oarsmen. (See page 8.)

disappear up-river, and then he turned back and started for home.

He had carried out his errand satisfactorily, but his usually sunny face was clouded. He was thinking, not of Gordon Gay & Co., but of Mr. Banks, the racy, purple-faced bookie. The thought of betting taking place over a keen sport like rowing filled him with anger and disgust. And he had an uneasy feeling that he had not finished with Mr. Joseph Banks yet.

Had he only known it, he had good cause to feel uneasy.

CHAPTER 3. Trouble Brewing!

TOM MERRY wrote that same evening accepting the villagers' challenge. And for the next few days the juniors settled down in earnest to the hard work of training for the forthcoming race.

With one solitary exception, Tom Merry's crew was the same as last year, when St. Jim's had beaten the Grammar School crew. And that exception was Ralph Reckness Cardew, the slacker of the Fourth.

In that memorable race Cardew had shown brilliant form—had astonished St. Jim's by his unusual energy and enthusiasm in training, and his masterly handling of an oar. But this year the slacker of the Fourth had steadfastly refused to row. Rowing, to use his own words, was "too much beastly fag, y'know!"

So Tom Merry had given the vacant place to Herries of the Fourth. Herries was a beefy youth, whose rowing was not brilliant, but who had plenty of strength, and could be relied upon to pull his own weight—and more.

The St. Jim's crew had little fear of not beating their hereditary rivals from the Grammar School. They had licked them last year when at their best, and this year they were not at their best. One member of their crew had left the school, and another had been forbidden to row—by the doctor's orders.

But with the village crew it was different. Grimes & Co. were an unknown quantity, and Tom Merry was taking no

risks. Moreover, rumour had it that the gallant village lads were as keen as mustard, and showing unexpected form.

So that every minute Tom Merry could spare from cricket and other matters, he had his men out on the river, and hard work and strict training was the order of the day. And in the meantime Tom Merry had consulted with the Grammarian leader, and the date and other details were fixed up.

After that all had gone swimmingly, and it was not until one afternoon some days later that an event happened which opened Tom Merry's eyes to the fact that all was not to be plane sailing after all.

It was a Wednesday "half"—a drowsy summer's afternoon of cloudless blue sky and sweltering heat. Tom Merry had taken his men out for a practice "spin," and they were not enjoying it. On the shimmering river, under a broiling sun, rowing was gruelling work, and even Curly Gibson, the coxswain, was grumbling and growling.

But Tom Merry was unrelenting, and he kept them on the job like galley-slaves. It was hot—there was no doubt about that. Save for their own, there was hardly a craft to be seen on the river. Rowing was decidedly "off"—as a pleasure. Those who had taken boats out had tethered them under overhanging trees, or drawn them up on grassy banks, and were lazily drowsing the afternoon away, at ease, in the shade.

But for the St. Jim's crew there was no respite. And it was with deep gasps of heartfelt relief that the perspiring oarsmen obeyed the shrill command to "Easy, all!" after doing the full course at a punishing pace.

As the craft slowed down with a rippling swish of feathered oars, Tom Merry twisted in his sliding seat, and turned a grinning, heated face on his limp and exhausted crew.

"Good—jolly good!" he panted. "But we can do better than that, I fancy. We'll do the full course again back, and put your beef into it this time, old sports!"

"Oh, help!"

"Oh crumbs! Have mercy, Tommy!"

"Bai Jove! Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

A chorus of groans and expostulations ran along the boat from the "old sports." After that punishing run they had expected a gentle paddle back to the boathouse.

"If anybody happens to want me when we get back to the boathouse," groaned Monty Lowther pathetically, "they'll find a greas-spot about the size of a sixpence on my slide; that'll be all that's left of me."

A chuckle ran through the boat, and Tom Merry's grin broadened.

"Oh, well, perhaps it is a bit too warm!" he remarked, with a chuckle. "Anyway, I think we can afford to slack a bit for once. If we can keep our present form up, I don't think we've anything to fear from the Grammarians or the village lads. Just a gentle pull back, Cox."

Curly Gibson nodded, and under his skilful orders the light craft was turned.

"Touch her, bow!"

Figging, the lanky leader of the New House, was bow, and a few gentle touches of his oar straightened the boat. Then the crew came forward and waited the word to "paddle."

But that order never came.

Even as the eight oarsmen waited, bodies tensed and muscles braced, something startling and utterly unexpected happened.

From the thickly wooded bank nearest them there came a sudden chorus of hoots and lurid catcalls. The next instant the air round the St. Jim's boat was thick with flying missiles. Hefty lumps of turf, stones, and chunks of clay whizzed through the drowsy summer air, and rained down remorselessly upon the heads of the St. Jim's oarsmen.

"What the thump—"

"Oh, my hat! Here, what the— Yarrrough!"

Whiz! Smack! Thud!

A chorus of amazed ejaculations went up, in most cases ending in muffled howls and stifled yelps as many of the flying missiles found a billet.

In a moment the wildest confusion reigned in the rocking boat as the startled juniors dodged and ducked to avoid the hurricane of flying objects, while the water round the boat fairly hissed with falling missiles.

Curly Gibson was the first to recover his scattered wits at the unlooked-for attack, and his voice went up in a shrill yell:

"It's a crowd of village louts in the wood!" he shouted. "Quick! Let's get out of this. Come forward—paddle!"

"Yes, pull, you chaps!" called Tom Merry. "Steady!"

There was a moment's scrambling confusion as the oarsmen recovered their oars with desperate haste. From No. 7 in the boat there came a sudden, alarmed gasp.

"Bai Jove! Pway wait a moment, Tom Mewwy! I have dropped my eyeglass! Don't— Yawwough!"

But the rest of the crew hadn't waited for Arthur Augustus to recover his eyeglass—unluckily. They came forward frantically just as Arthur Augustus was bending forward, groping in the bottom of the boat for his eyeglass. And the end of No. 6's oar took the swell of the Fourth in the small of his back with a painful dig, and Arthur Augustus howled and slid forward helplessly.

But that was not the worst.

If the boat was in confusion before, it was much more so now. They were already dazed and bewildered with the storm of pelting stones and turf that still rained upon them, and D'Arcy's delay in getting to work put the finishing touch to the disorganised crew.

Oars fouled each other, and Blake and Kerr caught shocking crabs, and suddenly the inevitable happened.

"Look out!" yelled Tom Merry. "Steady, you asses—"

But it was too late. The light shell gave a sudden wild lurch, and next thing it capsized, flinging its yelling crew into the river.

With a succession of splashes they went sousing under, to reappear next instant gasping and spluttering amid a medley of oars and sweaters and mufflers.

It was delightfully cool in the river after broiling under the sun, but the juniors did not seem to be very delighted at the sudden change.

Their faces were red with wrath, and they shook their fists towards the wooded bank, as a triumphant howl of laughter greeted their reappearance. They could see their assailants now—half a dozen or more village youths in ambush amid the thick trees.

Tom Merry's face was dark as he trod water and glanced about him. His temple was bleeding from a nasty cut by a stone, and more than one of his men had received similar hurts.

"Look after the boat first, you chaps," he sang out grimly. "We can deal with those rotten hooligans afterwards."

But looking after the boat in such circumstances was easier said than done, especially as the village louts opened fire again directly salvage operations had commenced.

But luckily all the juniors were expert swimmers, and they

stuck to the job doggedly despite the shower of missiles hissing into the water around them.

Like engineers working under fire they struggled desperately with the task of righting the boat and collecting oars and other belongings, and at last the boat was brought close up to the wooded bank.

This resulted in an immediate cessation of fire, as the cowardly hooligans retreated a little into the wood. There they stopped to watch developments, apparently thinking the juniors would board their craft and pull away again.

But if they imagined this, they were soon grievously mistaken.

The moment their precious craft was safe at the bank the juniors scrambled ashore, and Tom Merry's voice rang out again.

"Now, you chaps, we'll give those rotters what for. Go for 'em!"

With clenched fists and angry yells the St. Jim's juniors charged into the wood.

CHAPTER 4.

Was it Grimes & Co.?

FROM the youths in ambush came yells of surprise and alarm, and they scattered pell-mell into the deeper recesses of the trees.

"After them!" shouted Tom Merry.

And the incensed juniors went after them, bent on vengeance. Ignoring the brambles and trailing creepers that tore at their bare legs, they dashed through the trees in pursuit.

Tom Merry glimpsed a roughly-clad figure before him, and, making a desperate leap, he sprang on to the fellow's back and brought him crashing down.

Figgins, who was just behind him, stumbled over the two, and next second the three of them were rolling over in a struggling heap amid the undergrowth.

"Leggo, hang you!" panted the fellow frantically. "Leggo, or I'll smash you!"

And had not Figgins been at hand he would have given Tom Merry a rough time undoubtedly. He was at least seventeen years of age, and burly and strong to boot. But between the two of them the juniors had him helpless at last.

At that moment Lowther came tramping back, empty-handed, and he grinned his delight at sight of the capture.

"You've collared one of the cads! Oh, good!" he gasped.

"The rest of 'em seem to have got clear, worse luck!"

"We'll make an example of this rotter, anyway," said Tom grimly. "Bring the cad along—"

He broke off, as a sudden yell of warning in a shrill, piping treble came from the direction of the towing-path.

"Rescue, St. Jim's—quick! Rescue!"

"That's young Curly!" hissed Tom Merry. "Look after this merchant, you chaps."

Leaving the sulking village lout to the tender mercies of his chums, Tom dashed off back through the trees. And he was only just in time.

On the grassy bank, close to the water's edge, was Curly Gibson of the Third, and he was struggling, with plucky desperation, with a village youth of twice his size.

Close by was a second village hooligan, and he was in the act of dashing a huge stone through the bottom of the shell-like racing eight.

Tom Merry came at the rascal with the force and speed of a thunderbolt. His lowered head took the youth in the small of the back, and with a wild yell he went headlong into the river—and the stone went with him. Then Tom turned, and his fist took the second lout clean under the chin.

He staggered back and, with the plucky fag still clinging to him, tripped and went down with a crash. In a flash Tom Merry was upon him, pinning him down on the cinders.

At that moment Lowther and Figgins came through the trees with their prisoner. At sight of them the first youth, who had been about to clamber out of the river, turned back and started to swim away from the bank.

"Oh, let him go!" panted Tom Merry. "We've got two of the cads, anyway. Wonder if the others have collared any?"

But they hadn't. One by one the other five tramped out of the wood, empty-handed and growling. But their growls changed to satisfaction at sight of the captives.

Tom Merry soon explained what had happened.

"The beggars must have hidden and waited their chance, or slipped round and got behind us," he remarked grimly. "Jolly good job we left old Curly behind, or our boat would have been smashed up. What shall we do with these precious cads, you chaps?"

The juniors surrounded the sullen captives in a savage, angry crowd.

"Ere, I say, it was only a joke," stammered one of them, blinking in alarm at the furious juniors. "Only a lark—"

"A joke, eh? Pelting us with stones and trying to smash our boat?" said Tom Merry through his teeth. "Well, we'll see if you think it's a joke when we've finished with you."

But first of all, who put you up to this game? You must have had some motive for it."

"That's fairly obvious," grunted Herries. "These chaps must be pals of Grimey, and—"

"Oh, but that's rot!" said Tom Merry warmly. "Old Grimey's a sport, and wouldn't do dirty tricks like this. Rubbish!"

"Yaas, wathah, Tom Mewwy," agreed D'Arcy.

"I don't say Grimey had a hand in it," argued Herries stubbornly. "But these cads want them to win, so they've started this game. Looks to me like it, anyway."

Despite themselves, vague suspicions began to take root in the juniors' minds at Herries words. Grimes and Pilcher, and Grimes' immediate chums were generally considered to be good fellows; but that didn't say that their village companions in general were.

Tom Merry's face clouded.

"Does Grimes know about this game?" he asked the shivering village youths abruptly.

The two were silent for a moment, and then one of them—a sandy-haired youth—muttered sulkily:

"I ain't a-going to tell you nothin'. You let us go, or you'll be sorry. We ain't goin' to give our pals away like that!"

"So Grimes does know?" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"You'd best find out, hang yer!" was the answer. "We ain't givin' Grimey away—eh, Bert?"

The juniors looked at each other meaningly. Had they not been quite so excited and angry they might have seen the quick glance the sandy-haired youth had given his companion, and they might have taken the answer for what it was—a cunning falsehood.

"Well, I'm hanged!" breathed Blake, his eyes gleaming.

"So it was Grimey's lot. I'd never have believed it—"

"Neither would I—and I can scarcely believe it even now!" snapped Tom Merry, his jaw setting hard. "But—but this cad's given 'em away, and no mistake! Anyway, we'll see Grimey himself about this. We'll give these merchants a good ducking, and get off now."

"What about the ditch?" remarked Blake. "Pity to soil the river with those cads!"

"Oh, good!"

The suggestion was received with acclamation from all but the two villagers. They had supposed that by putting the blame on to Grimes & Co. they would escape lightly themselves. They were soon undeceived.

Determined hands were laid upon them, and, despite their frantic struggles, they were dragged along the towing-path to where the ditch broadened out into a green, slime-covered pool, thick with rotting vegetation.

"Ere, don't you dare chuck us in that filthy muck!" howled Sandy-hair. "If yer does— Yarrough! Oh crumbs!"

Splash!

Tom Merry and his men had dared and done. The yelling cad flew through the air, and descended into the evil-smelling conglomeration with a thick, dull splash.

"Now the other!" sang out Tom Merry. "We'll teach 'em—"

Tom Merry did not finish. At that moment there emerged from the wood, some twenty yards along the towing-path, nine or ten village youths. They were about to turn away in the opposite direction, when the howls of the victim in the pond attracted their attention.

They looked round, and as they did so Blake gave a yell.

"It's Grimey and his pals!" he shouted. "Quick—deal with the rotter, and let's go after them!"

But even as the juniors tightened their grip on the rascal he flopped down on the towing-path, and raised his voice in a desperate yell for help:

"Rescue, village! Help, Grimey! Rescue, you lads!"

"Quick—in with the squealing rotter!" gasped Tom Merry.

But this was easier said than done. Kicking and fighting madly as he lay on the cinders, the rascal resisted all efforts to raise him, and a moment later Grimes and his companions ran up.

"Allo! What's up 'ere?" said Grimes, eyeing the scene with a cheery grin. "Who's that you've—"

"'Elp, Grimey!" howled the struggling village youth. "Stand up fer the villagers! See fair play! These 'ere collogers is bullyin' us! Rescue!"

"Oh, that's it, is it?" ejaculated Grimes, frowning; and his companions pressed forward with angry growls. "Ere, easy on, Master Merry!"

"We'll talk to you presently, Grimey!" snapped Tom Merry. "In with this merchant, you chaps!"

"What-ho!"

The struggle began again with redoubled fury. The juniors were boiling with rage now. The arrival of Grimes & Co. just then so close to the spot added to their suspicions a hundred-fold. They naturally supposed that the village crew had been with the village louts, or had been at hand

to render help, if necessary. In their rage, it did not occur to them that there was a path through the woods to the village at that spot, and that their appearance just then might have been merely coincidence.

"Ere, you stop that, Master Merry!" cried Grimes, setting his lips. "Leave that chap alone! I don't want no trouble—"

"We're going to put the rotter through it, Grimey!" snapped Tom Merry. "Stand aside! He's tried to smash our boat, and, pal of yours or not, he's going—"

"E's no pal of mine!" said Grimes, his cheery face grim now. "But we ain't seein' no villager knocked about. We've always bin friendly-like, us and you, but if you don't let 'im go I'll 'ave to make yer!"

"An' bloomin' quick!" added Pilcher menacingly.

He pushed his chum forward as he spoke, and as Herries tried to stop them, Grimes gave him a push in the chest.

That started it. In a flash the two were struggling together in deadly embrace. And, almost before he knew it, Lowther found himself at grips with Pilcher.

"Rescue, village!" yelled Sidney Pilcher. "At 'em, lads!"

"Back up, you fellows!" muttered Tom Merry desperately.

The next instant a general fight was in progress. To do the village youths justice, they had no desire to save the lout, from a personal point of view. They recognised him as one of the village "bad eggs"; he was certainly no pal of theirs. But just as the juniors would have gone to help any St. Jim's fellow against an outsider, so Grimes & Co. went to the help of their own clan. The old feud between village and college was reopened.

Backwards and forwards, now on the grassy bank, now on the cindered towing-path, the battle went on with increasing vigour. The two hooligans saw their chance, and bolted; but, even so, the juniors were outnumbered. But they fought manfully to stem the tide.

"Drive 'em inter the river, lads!" yelled Pilcher, above the uproar. "Go it, the village!"

And the village "went it," in earnest. But they had no chance to carry out Pilcher's project, could they have done it. For at that moment there arose a sudden alarmed shout from the outskirts of the struggle:

"Look out, you fellers—ere's the curate! Oh, my 'at! Stop it! 'Ere's Mister Pascall!"

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Grimes.

He dropped his hands in a flash, and his supporters did likewise. The juniors also ceased the struggle as if by magic. Looking round, Tom Merry saw that the warning was genuine enough. Some hundred yards or so along the towing-path a tall figure was approaching with brisk, athletic stride. And even at that distance he recognised the clerical garb.

"Oh, my hat!" he panted.

"Better chuck it, Master Merry!" muttered Grimes, in alarm, mopping his nose. "We can settle this agen with you fellers. Can't let 'im catch us scrapping. 'Sides, 'e's comin' to coach us, and we oughter bin stripped by now."

Tom Merry nodded curtly. He had a great deal of respect and admiration for the sporting clergyman, and he had no more desire to be caught "scrapping" by him than had Grimes & Co.

With a few last muttered threats to their enemies, and hurriedly mopping eyes and noses, the village youths dodged into the wood, to make their delayed way to the boathouse for practice by a roundabout way.

"Buck up!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "No time for talk—let's get away from here—quick!"

In a very few seconds the juniors had taken their places in the soaked boat, and they were soon afloat and pulling away from the scene of the struggle. All were showing signs of wear and tear; even Curly Gibson had accepted battle with the youthful village coxwain. But there was little attention given to rowing as they pulled silently back to the boathouse. Besides their hurts—which were many and painful—all were still wet and decidedly uncomfortable. In addition, their thoughts were filled with this new development. The friendly rivalry had come to an end, for the present, and all felt that there was trouble ahead. And they were right, as events proved.

CHAPTER 5.

Almost a Tragedy!

THAT afternoon's adventure proved to be but the first of a long series of outrages and annoyances to which the St. Jim's crew were subjected.

At almost every practice spin after that the St. Jim's crew were either ambushed and pelted from the banks, or some other equally effective method of retarding practice and annoying the juniors was resorted to by the village louts.

It was significant, however, that the louts left the Grammar

School severely alone. Apparently they did not fear them; their only object appeared to be to spoil the Saints' practice and to do all in their power to prevent them winning.

Naturally, such conduct roused the juniors to a pitch of indignation at such unsportsmanlike trickery, and the general view was that Tom Merry should call the event off—should refuse to meet the villagers. But Tom Merry would have none of it.

"We should never hear the last of it, if we did," he told his men grimly. "They'd say that we funk'd meeting them, and I'd rather go through anything than that. No; we'll see this thing through, and we'll pay 'em back by licking them to a frazzle when the time comes! I'm blessed if I can understand old Grimey doing this sort of thing. It beats me!"

It "beat" the rest of the juniors also. They had always known Grimes and his chums to be clean sportsmen, and many fellows, in addition to Tom, could not help having doubts as to whether they were at the bottom of the trouble, especially as Grimes & Co. never seemed to take any actual part in the outrages.

But, unfortunately, no opportunity to "have it out" presented itself. As if by mutual consent both crews ignored each other's existence after that fight on the towing-path. Apparently neither side wished to renew hostilities. Scrapping would do not good, and was certainly not a pastime to indulge in while training.

So, though the rival crews often met on river and in the village, there was no exchange of greetings, either friendly or otherwise. Grimes & Co. sulked, whilst Tom Merry & Co. treated them with lofty disdain and contempt. But the outrages still went on, and at last became so serious that Tom Merry, reluctant to report to the authorities, was glad to avail himself of the services of Grundy and a host of willing supporters to act as bodyguards. And after the louts had been put to rout on several occasions, the St. Jim's crew were left severely alone.

But the peace thus secured did not last. For some time—right up to the evening before the day of the great race, in fact—the crew continued their practice unmolested. And then their false sense of security was rudely shattered in a manner which showed that the hooligans were only lying low, awaiting their chance.

Immediately after tea Tom Merry had taken his crew out for a last practice run before the race, and he was feeling immensely pleased with the form of his crew. Trouble with the villagers was far from his mind, so that he was puzzled when Curly Gibson, in the middle of a last trial at racing speed, brought his crew to a halt for no apparent reason.

"What's the matter now, Curly?" he panted, resting on his oar. "Is Gussy bucketing again, or—"

"Look behind you—on the island," said Curly, staring ahead keenly. "I fancied I spotted several forms sneaking about there. Might be those village louts again."

Tom Merry's face darkened as he twisted in his seat and looked round. The island was long and narrow, formed by an offshoot of the main river, which, about a hundred yards lower down, thundered over the weir, to rejoin the main stream still another hundred yards farther on.

Even as he looked he caught a brief glimpse of stealthy movements amid the thickets.

"I believe you're right, kid!" he snapped. "We'd better go carefully."

"Going on, then?" asked Curly.

"Yes, we'll risk it," said Tom. "Just a gentle paddle past the island, though; and you fellows be ready to quicken if I give the word."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Next moment the boat was on the move again. They pulled on towards the island, all the juniors, in addition to cox, keeping a weather-eye open for trouble.

And trouble came sure enough, though in a manner as sudden as it was unlooked for.

They were creeping steadily on, and had almost reached abreast of the island, when Curly Gibson gave a sudden shrill, startled yell.

"Look out! Steady! Oh my! Hold her, chaps—hold her all!"

Crash!

The juniors' frantic efforts to hold the boat came too late. There was a splintering crash, followed instantly by a violent shock, and the next thing the crew knew they were sousing into the river.

Tom Merry was the first to reappear, and as he trod water, among the flurry of oars and upturned boat, his first thought was of his crew. He glanced anxiously round, hoping that all had succeeded in freeing their feet from their stretcher-straps.

But, to his great relief, they all reappeared one by one, and then Tom saw the cause of the disaster.

Stretching right across the river was a huge boom of wood, and as he saw it Tom's face set hard. It was the boom

that, in the ordinary way, was chained across the off-shoot, and obviously it had been removed from its rightful position and placed there with malicious intent.

"The rotten scoundrels!" gasped Tom Merry. "All right, you chaps. Look after the boat now."

Fortunately, though her slender prow was smashed and buckled, the craft was still afloat; and, ignoring everything else, the juniors set about the business of getting her to the shore of the island.

It was no light task, but it was done at last; and then the juniors began to look about them, their eyes gleaming dangerously.

"This is getting too thick altogether, you chaps," said Tom Merry through his teeth. "If we had been going at full speed the boat would have been smashed to bits, and some of us might have been badly injured or drowned."

"Let's go after the brutes," said Blake. "They can't have gone far."

"We're going to. Curly, you stay with the boat. Come on!"

And Tom Merry led the way through the thickets. The juniors' blood was up, and they crashed their way through the undergrowth in a savage crowd. It would have gone hard with the villagers could the juniors have got into touch with them just then.

But as Tom Merry burst through at last on the far side he pulled up with a disappointed growl.

"Too late!" he grunted. "Look! There the cads go!"

"There they don't go!" exclaimed Kerr excitedly. "See what's happened? Oh, my hat!"

There was a general gasp as the juniors saw what Kerr had already seen.

Out in midstream was a steamer's dinghy, crowded with village youths. They were standing up in the rocking, unwieldy craft, and from them came a wild medley of alarmed yells. And the juniors saw the reason now.

Several yards downstream from the dinghy a single oar floated gently along. Apparently the rascals had seen the juniors coming, and in their frantic haste to escape they had lost the oar.

CHAPTER 6.

Saved by Their Enemies!

THE oar now floating away on the stream had been used to propel the craft along from the stern, and was their only means of moving or guiding the unwieldy craft. They were at the mercy of the current, which even now had the dinghy in its grip, and was carrying it along, broadside on, with ever-increasing speed.

The village youths knew the danger only too well. The roar of the weir was already dinning into their ears, and they sent appealing yells for help to their enemies as they appeared on the bank.

"Steady, you fools!" shouted Tom Merry. "Tear up the floorboards and use them as paddles, can't you?"

But evidently they couldn't; indeed, they seemed to be too terrified to do anything but yell for aid. Plainly, they had lost their heads.

"Bai Jove!" gasped D'Arcy, very much distressed. "The poah beggars will go ovah!"

"We must do something, cads as they are," said Tom Merry, looking quickly about him. "I've got it. This way, you fellows!"

In view of the rascals' danger, all anger left the juniors now. They followed Tom willingly as he ran along the bank ahead of the drifting boat with its luckless crew. Tom's objective was soon seen.

Further downstream, and moored to the bank, was a small steam-tug, used by the local navigation authorities for the repair and maintenance of the river-banks. It was deserted now, and Tom leaped aboard, and glanced quickly about the deck.

He soon saw what he wanted—a coil of rope lying on the deck. Whipping it up, the junior tied one end swiftly to an iron ring in the deck planking.

He finished only just in time. As he straightened himself the drifting boat, with its crew of yelling youths, came along less than twenty yards away, and, swinging his arm, Tom sent the coil of rope with all his strength towards it.

At that distance Tom Merry could scarcely have missed had he tried. And he did not miss. As it uncoiled the rope fell across the dinghy.

Then what Tom had half-feared happened. There were six of the village youths in the boat, and as the rope came whizzing over them they all ducked and made frantic clutches at it.

The result was that the dinghy rocked and lurched alarmingly, and all but capsized. In the wild, scrambling confusion which followed there sounded a wild yell and a splash.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Blake. "One of 'em's gone overboard!"

He had. But if his companions knew it they ignored the



Determined hands were laid upon the two villagers, and despite their frantic struggles, they were dragged along the towing-path and hurled into the slime-covered pool. Splash! "Yaroooh! Groogh!" they cried. "Gug-gug-gug!" (See page 9.)

fact. They were too busy saving their own skins. Two of them grasped the trailing rope as it fell, and they held on desperately, and in a moment had tied it to the ring in the prow of the dinghy.

But Tom Merry's eyes were scanning the surface anxiously. The youth who had gone overboard was not to be seen, but even as he looked Tom saw his head and hands reappear some yards further downstream. And from his frantic, futile struggles Tom saw at once that he could not swim.

"Watch that rope, you chaps!" cried the junior. "I'll see to him!"

As he spoke, Tom Merry took a header into the stream. He came up several yards out, and struck out strongly, swimming easily with the current.

In a few strokes he had reached the struggling youth, and his grasp fell upon him.

"Steady, you ass!" panted the junior. "Don't struggle!" But the terrified youth was in no state to hear or heed. He clung on desperately, and in desperation Tom released one hand and struck him a blow on the temple.

It was not a heavy blow, but it was enough. It dazed the fellow for the moment, and, turning him over, Tom struck out with powerful kicks for the dinghy.

Fortunately, the weir was some distance away yet, and the current was not strong. Moreover, the dinghy was still drifting, and almost before he knew it the junior saw it looming above him.

His hand went up, and even as he clutched it the rope between the tug and the dinghy tightened, and the dinghy stopped moving.

At the feeling of safety this gave, two of the occupants of the boat, recovered themselves sufficiently to lean over and take the half-drowned youth from his grasp. Next moment Tom, gasping and panting, had scrambled in after him.

As he did so a wild cheer went up from the tug-boat. "Good for you, Tommy!" sang out Figgins. "We'll soon have you safe. Pull away, you fellows!"

And pull they did. The seven juniors bent their weight

on the rope, and in next to no time the dinghy was bumping against the sides of the tug.

It had barely touched when the five cowardly rascals scrambled out, and, dodging as though they expected the juniors to attack them, they dashed pell-mell across the tug and leaped ashore.

The juniors made no effort to stay them—they were too concerned about their chum. In a moment rescued and rescuer had been helped on to the tug, where they lay for some moments gasping and panting and exhausted.

But they soon recovered, and as Tom Merry staggered to his feet at last the fellow he had rescued did likewise.

"You'd better cut," said Tom curtly. "And remember that—"

"I ain't goin' to," said the youth half sullenly, half defiantly. "I ain't like them blokes. I'm ready to take my gruel. I bin up agen you, and I'm ready for a lickin'."

"Go on!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Lowther, quite overcome.

They fairly blinked at the youth. They recognised him now as the sandy-haired fellow whom Tom Merry had captured in the wood that day. The juniors knew him well by sight, having often seen him hanging about the stables of the Green Man Inn, where he worked.

Tom Merry grinned.

"We aren't going to touch you," he said grimly. "You can cut off. But if we catch you up to these tricks again—"

"I ain't never goin' to," was the quick, sullen answer. "An', what's more, I wish I never 'ad done nothin'. You've saved me goin' over that there weir, Master Merry, and I ain't goin' to forget."

He hesitated a moment, and then, obviously amazed at his enemies' generosity, he stumbled across the tug, and went squelching after his fleeing companions, water dripping from his clothes.

"Well," grinned Herries, "he's grateful, anyway." "Got a bit of pluck, too," said Tom Merry. "Well, the cads have gone now. I suppose they're making for the

footbridge over the weir. And now how the thump are we to— Oh, good! Here's old Kildare."

At that moment two seniors in boating flannels came hurrying across the island. They were Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's and his chum, Darrell.

"What's happened, Merry?" asked Kildare, as he ran up. "Young Gibson tells me you went after the scoundrels who placed that boom across the river."

Tom Merry explained what had taken place, and Kildare was looking grim when he had finished.

"The police must be put on the rascals' track," he said angrily. "Though even that won't do much good. Anyway, you chaps had better hurry back and get your wet things off. We'll ferry you across. We'll see to your boat. You'll have to use your other boat for the race to-morrow, of course."

"That's the rotten part about it," groaned Tom Merry.

The Most Stupendous

Cash Offer Ever Made—

"It takes time to get used to a new boat. Oh, what shocking luck!"

And when the juniors trotted back to the boathouse a little later their faces were gloomy and worried. The extent of the calamity was dawning in upon them now. The second of the two boats allotted to the Lower School was as good a craft as their own. But they had been weeks using that one now, and they felt at home in it. Would they feel the same in another? They doubted it.

It was, as Tom Merry had said, "Shocking luck."

CHAPTER 7.

Captured!

"ONE moment, my dear Merry—"

Herbert Skimpole, the scientific genius and champion bore of the Shell, stopped Tom Merry as the juniors were going up to bed that same evening.

Tom's chums were with him, as were quite a number of Shell fellows, and all were excitedly discussing the great race that was to take place on the morrow.

It was usually a great deal easier to start a conversation with the long-winded Skimpole than to end one. But Tom Merry was the soul of cheery good nature, and he was always patient, even with Skimpole.

He stopped and dropped behind the others.

"What's the trouble now, Skimmmy?" he asked. "A lecture on Determinism, or is it Socialism this time?"

"My dear Merry, it is neither," exclaimed Skimpole, taking Merry by the third button of his waistcoat in the rather objectionable way he had. "I merely desired to hand you this missive. It was handed to me at the gates by a village urchin just after tea. I regret that I had completely forgotten it until this moment."

And after fumbling absently in his pocket, Herbert Skimpole produced a letter and handed it over. It was rather a crumpled, dirty-looking envelope, and Tom grinned as he saw some notes in Skimpole's handwriting scribbled on the back of it.

"I see you've been using it—" he began, when at that moment Kildare came up to them, and clapped a kindly hand on Tom's shoulder.

"Bedtime, kids!" he said genially. "You'll want all the sleep you can get to-night, Merry. Feeling fit?"

"Fit as a fiddle, Kildare," rejoined Tom Merry, smiling.

He shoved the letter carelessly into his pocket, and with the hand of the good-natured skipper of St. Jim's still on his shoulder, strolled along with him, discussing their chances in the morrow's race.

That, indeed, was the only matter worth discussing to the St. Jim's juniors just then; and not until the juniors were in bed and Kildare had seen lights out did Tom Merry remember Skimpole and the letter.

"S'pect it's nothing important—a note from Grimney perhaps," mused the junior drowsily. "Anyway, it can wait. I'm off to sleep."

And Tom Merry turned over with a grunt.

But, curiously enough, he could not sleep, try as he would. The thought of the mysterious letter persisted in his mind. And after tossing on his bed for an hour or so curiosity got the better of him at last.

"P'r'aps I'll sleep when I've seen what it is," he muttered, yawning. "What a life!"

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He slipped from his bed and fumbled in his jacket pocket for the letter. He got it, and in the light from a bit of candle he found in his locker he tore the missive open and read it.

Then he gasped, for the letter—ill-spelt and ill-written—ran as follows:

"Dear Master Mery,—This is written by a feller what doesn't want his name to be known. You bin thinking as young Grimes and his lot 'as bin mucking up your rowwing praktises. They ain't, as I can prove. The chaps what did it is Joe Banks and his pals. They got a lot of dibs on the race, and they don't intend your lot to win so what hapens. Look out. I hapen to no as they is going to play some dirty trick with your oars to-night. They got to no where they is kept, and they knows how to get into the boathouse. Watch out. This leter is the goods.

"A FRIEND AND WELWISSHER."

With his chums and fellow-juniors sleeping softly around him, Tom Merry sat on the edge of his bed, and fairly blinked at the extraordinary document.

What did it mean? Was it a hoax? After some moments' reflection Tom decided that it was not. He knew well enough that Mr. Joseph Banks was quite capable of such work—and worse. And he could not help remembering the sandy-haired youth whom he had rescued that afternoon. The fellow had appeared to be genuinely grateful, and it was quite possible he had sent the note out of gratitude.

Then Tom remembered his adventure, with Mr. Banks and the billiards-marker weeks ago, and that settled all Tom's doubts.

With sudden decision he jumped up, and began to slip his clothes over his pyjamas. It certainly might be only a hoax; but he felt he could not afford to take the risk.

He was soon dressed, and then he stood a moment debating in his mind whether to wake his chums or not. In the usual way, he would certainly have done so. But the race was on the morrow; it was bad enough for him to lose his sleep, without risking the fitness of Lowther and Manners also. If he were only certain that the warning was genuine now—

Perhaps unwisely, Tom Merry decided not to wake his chums. He slipped the letter into his jacket pocket, and got his pocket torch. Then he crept from the dormitory, and some minutes later had dropped from the box-room, leads into the quad.

It was a mild summer's night, dark, but not too dark for the junior to see his way. A gentle breeze stirred the leaves and branches of the old elms in the silent quad.

It was not far to the boathouse, and, after a cautious but uneventful journey Tom came in sight of the glimmering river. Then the boathouse, dark and still, loomed up before him, with the river rippling and murmuring past the wide landing-stage that fronted it.

Tom Merry stopped in the shadow of the building, his eyes fixed keenly on the great double doors. No light, no sign of movement came from the building. Stealthily he crept nearer. The double doors were closed.

He stood where he was a moment, undecided what to do. And even as he stood thus, from within the dark building came a faint sound—a hollow crash, as if an oar, accidentally disturbed, had fallen.

£300 in an Easy Cricket Contest.

Can You Afford to Miss It?

The junior tensed, his nerves tingling with excitement. Then, his eyes gleaming, he stole softly round to the back of the boathouse.

Yes, the little side door was closed, and locked. But one of the dressing-room windows at the back was open. Without hesitation Tom Merry pulled himself up, and dropped silently into the dressing-room beyond.

After standing a brief moment listening, he tiptoed to the open dressing-room door, and peered into the long boathouse. Near the oar-racks at the end of the building a white light gleamed. The rest of the building was shrouded in darkness.

There was no room left for doubt now. The junior took a deep breath and stepped softly through the doorway. A moment later he was feeling his way cautiously between the tiers of boats, his rubber-soled shoes scarcely making a sound.

Presently, after moving as near as he dared in safety, he stopped. He could hear the mutter of voices now, and see two dim forms behind the shaft of light. Even as he looked



Tom Merry stepped softly through the doorway of the boathouse, and his eyes fell upon Banks and his confederate. The former had an oar held rigid across his knees, and in his hands was a fine, wire-like saw. Even as the junior took in the scene, he heard the saw bite into the wood. (See this page.)

both the miscreants stooped down, and their faces came full into the light.

One was the purple-blotched, walrus-moustached face of Mr. Joseph Banks, the bookie, the other was the thin, pimply face of Jim, the billiards-marker.

Jim was holding the light. Mr. Banks had an oar held rigid across his knees, and in his hand was a fine, wire-like saw. Even as the junior took in the scene he heard the saw bite into the wood.

"The scoundrels!" breathed Tom Merry.

Shaking with anger, the junior moved a step nearer, hardly aware that he did so, and almost at once disaster overtook him.

As he stepped along with hands outstretched, his knee struck something, and he lurched forward, unable to stay himself. It was a boat-trolley, left carelessly in the path, and Tom went headlong over it with a crash.

There was a startled gasp in the gloom. Mr. Banks dropped the oar and leaped to his feet. His companion wheeled round with the light, and as its rays fell upon the prostrate junior, there sounded a furious oath.

For a tense moment they stared, petrified, and then, with surprising speed for such a portly gentleman, Mr. Banks leaped upon the dazed junior's back, and pinned him down with a heavy knee.

"Quick, Jim, you fool—your scarf!"

Jim recovered his scattered wits with a gasp, and wrenched his scarf from his neck. Mr. Banks snatched it, and wound it tightly round the junior's eyes, effectually blind-folding him. Jim then cut a length of rope from a boat, and, despite Tom's frantic squirms and struggles, his wrists were tied behind him.

Beneath the portly man's weight Tom Merry could scarcely breathe, much less resist. But he attempted a desperate yell, and as he opened his mouth the quick-witted Mr. Banks snatched the junior's own handkerchief from his jacket pocket, and stuffed it into his mouth.

"Yell, would you, you little 'ound?" hissed the bookie. "And me somethin' to tie 'is mouth, Jim! We'll soon—What's up now?"

For Jim had given vent to a sudden savage exclamation. He was standing with a slip of cheap notepaper in his hand—

a letter that had dropped from the junior's pocket as Banks snatched his handkerchief out.

It was the warning letter that had brought the luckless junior to the boathouse. Idly enough, Jim had picked the missive up and glanced at it. It was enough.

His face was flushed with fury as he handed the letter over to Mr. Banks.

"Look at that!" he hissed.

Mr. Banks read it slowly; then he exploded.

"The—the little rat!" he hissed, his face swelling with rage and indignation. "E's blowed the gaff! It's young Alf, the sneakin' little rat!"

"Must be!" muttered Jim. "E's the only bloke as knowed we was comin' ere to-night!"

"I'll—I'll take 'is 'ide off him for this," whispered Mr. Banks, gritting his teeth. "Come on, let's be gettin' outer this, case there's any of this chap's pals about!"

"What about the job? We ain't started it yet!"

"That ain't necessary now," said Mr. Banks grimly. "We've got their stroke, an' they'll find it a 'ard job to get a feller to take 'is place. Let's get 'im outer this."

"But—but it's risky!"

"You leave it to me," said Mr. Banks softly. "E ain't seen us, and if he had 'e couldn't prove anythin'. We got that note, and 'e can't prove nothin'. Come on, you scared fool!"

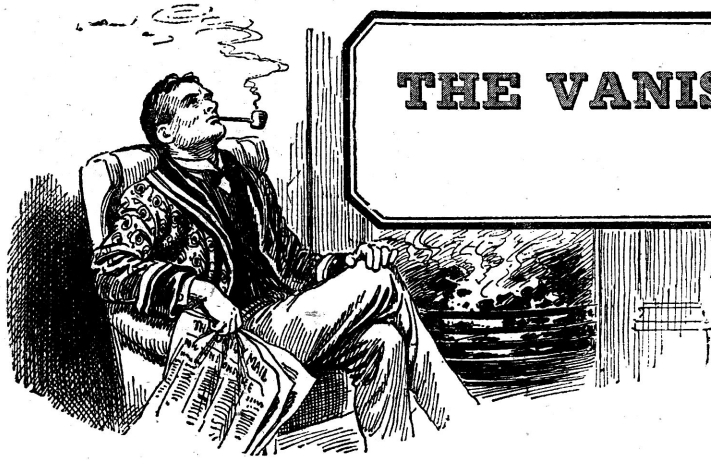
The conversation had been in a hoarse whisper, and through the thick muffler, wound tightly round eyes and ears, the junior had only caught snatches of it. But he had heard enough, and his heart sank. He had already realised their intention.

The next moment he heard the oar replaced on the rack, then came another low mutter of voices, and he felt himself lifted. Then he heard the little door set in the double doors opened, and as they passed through he heard it close and lock itself after them.

Then he felt the breeze blowing on his face, and heard the crunch of their feet on the cindered towing-path as they carried him along. Presently this ceased, and from their stumbling footsteps and the swish and crackle of parting foliage, he knew they were in the woods.

(Continued on page 16.)

OUR SHORT SNAPPY DETECTIVE TALES ARE TOPPING!



THE VANISHED RACEHORSE!

BY EDMUND BURTON.

Another of the Amazing Exploits of
ANTHONY SHARPE—Investigator.

CHAPTER 1.

The Troubles of John Armitage—The Faked Racer!

ANTHONY SHARPE seldom took much interest in racing from the backer's standpoint, partly because he considered betting a mug's game, and partly because he had little leisure time in which to follow "form." But, being a lover of thoroughbred horseflesh and a clean sportsman to his finger-tips, he felt strongly attracted by this case which his latest client, Mr. John Armitage, put before him.

Armitage was well known on the Turf as one of the straightest "pillars" of the sport of kings, and his healthy, clean-shaven face now wore a most worried and mystified look as he sat back in his chair to confirm the main points of the story he had just told Sharpe while the latter ticked them off on his fingers.

"You have given me the principal details very clearly, Mr. Armitage," the famous investigator said. "Firstly, you have entered your horse, White Blaze, for the Taunbridge Plate—the chief event of the forthcoming meeting in your district. Secondly, you know the animal's capabilities so intimately that you have backed him heavily, and stand to lose a large sum if he fails to win. Thirdly, you have just discovered that the horse in your stable is not White Blaze at all, but another mount bearing an astonishing resemblance to him; yet up to yesterday White Blaze was certainly safe and sound.

"That's so," Armitage nodded. "It was yesterday morning, as I said, that I spotted the difference, and I could scarcely believe my eyes. The nag in my stable is practically a second White Blaze in build and markings. Where there was any difference such clever faking had been resorted to that it was little wonder even I was fooled. But though you may copy a horse's appearance, you can't copy its gait, and that was how I had my first suspicion aroused. This new beast goes well enough, but he lacks the spring and stamina of the horse he's the double of. White Blaze had given every satisfaction on his trials the day before, and I couldn't understand why he should crack up so unexpectedly, nor could the vet find anything the matter—and it was then, in the strong sunshine, that I spotted the difference between—"

"Quite so!" Sharpe interrupted. "You have already described that. Now, sir, I understand that the Taunbridge event is a 'selling plate,' and, apart from the amount of money won, I fancy the successful horse should fetch a long price in the market?"

"That's a certainty," Armitage agreed. "It is the most prominent selling race of the season down our way, and the winner always realises a goodish figure."

Sharpe pondered for a moment.

"Now, sir," he presently resumed, "tell me this, if you can. Was any additional entry made just before the list of starters closed—an entry, I mean, by anyone who wasn't expected to run a horse, and, more

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especially, by someone not a great distance from your stable?"

Armitage stared at his interrogator almost as one would stare at a magician. Then he smiled.

"You seem to know as much about the arrangements as I do, Mr. Sharpe—even to the apparently unnecessary details," he said. "Anyway, you're right; an entry was made just before closing, and from a man living quite close by—a newcomer to the district."

"Ah! Who is he?" the detective queried. "And please remember that the 'unnecessary details,' as you term them, may in the end prove to be the most important."

"This last entry is from an individual named Lennox," Armitage explained. "We don't know very much about him, except that he did well up North until he crashed, and is now trying to recover in a small way. He has only three or four horses at the moment, and one of these he has entered for the Taunbridge event."

"What's the animal's name, and what's it like?"

"It's called Postillion, according to the card, but that's all we know about it," the other replied. "It's a dark horse in the fullest sense. Nobody has seen it, either stabled or on its trials, which were conducted most secretly."

"Unlike yours, which were held more or less openly?"

Armitage nodded at once.

"I've never seen any necessity for secrecy in these matters, sir," he said. "If I've got a promising nag, I'm proud of it, and the advertisement is good for business. I'm trainer for others, as well as owner, you know."

"A horse called Postillion, which was entered at the last moment, and never seen," Sharpe murmured dreamily. "And the owner is named Lennox, who went smash, and is now trying to recover. You've met the man himself, I suppose? What's he like?"

"Oh, yes; I've spoken to him once or twice," Armitage answered. "He seems quite all right. He's a big-bodied chap, red-faced, and appears to be hail-fellow-well-met with everyone."

"Did he mention White Blaze?"

"Only once—as a kind of joke. He said last time that Postillion would lead the field at the finish, and that White Blaze would 'flicker out' with the rest."

"Your horse is so named principally on account of the markings on his head, I think you mentioned?"

"Yes; he's a white splash extending almost from between his eyes to his nostrils, and also two white stockings. Otherwise he's dark chestnut. It was in the stockings that I noticed the difference and discovered the faking."

Sharpe nodded.

"Well, sir," he said, "I think I have now all the information I need at the moment. I shall go down to Taunbridge, with my assistant, by the afternoon train. We shall be dressed for the occasion"—he smiled—"as a rather horsy-looking couple. You understand? After that we shall do what we can for you, but it will need to be quick work, since the race is fixed for Friday next."

CHAPTER 2.

Overheard on the Train—The Two Racers—Unmasked!

TANBRIDGE was a goodish distance from London, and the trains, consequently, of the corridor type, to which, strange though it may appear, Anthony Sharpe owed much of his success in unravelling the mystery of the missing racehorse.

Some two-thirds of the journey had been accomplished, and Sharpe chanced to be passing along the corridor, when some words spoken close at hand reached his keen ear and caused him to linger, ostensibly looking out of the window at the sunset across the fields.

At the same time, from the tail of his eye, he took swift stock of the compartment whence the words had proceeded. It was marked "Reserved" and contained two occupants only—a big-bodied, red-faced man, and a horsy-looking fellow who was apparently a groom.

Not caring to risk lingering longer, Sharpe



Anthony Sharpe spun round, and the gleam from his electric torch fell upon two men coming down the ladder from the living-room above.

hurried back to his own carriage, where, to his assistant's amazement, he said:

"We're travelling in excellent company, lad. Friend Lennox is on the train, and has just been speaking of White Blaze."

"You—you don't say, gov'nor—"
"Fact, my boy—a positive fact!" Sharpe laughed. "Indeed, my previous suspicions are pretty well confirmed—that Lennox knows all about this affair—we're going to investigate—so we'd best keep our eyes peeled."

"What did he say, sir?" O'Carroll asked eagerly, in a low voice.

"Only a few words, but quite enough," Sharpe replied. "He merely said: 'Well, we've done old Armitage properly in the eye over the selling plate'—quite a friendly remark, eh?"

"What will you do, sir?" Tim inquired. "Have 'em arrested when the train stops?"
"No; let 'em have plenty of rope until I confer with Armitage," his master rejoined. "After all, we don't know what course our client means to adopt in the event of Lennox being proved guilty of the affair."

At Tanbridge Station Anthony Sharpe confirmed, by means of a low-spoken inquiry put to the ticket-collector at the barrier, that the bigger of the two men just in front was certainly Lennox. Then he and his young assistant made all speed for Armitage's place.

The detective's plans were by now cut and dried. Buttonholing his client, he spoke rapidly for a little while, and Armitage presently nodded assent.

"Yes; that's a good notion," the trainer said. "And now you'd best see the horse that's been palmed off on me as White Blaze."

He led the pair to the end box of a long row, and unlocked the door. A fine, well-set-up animal stood just within—a beast that to all outward appearances was fit to run for a kingdom.

"Oh, he's a good nag enough," Armitage said, interpreting Sharpe's thoughts. "Quite a good 'un—but not a patch on White Blaze. I told you how he behaved on his gallop, didn't I? And now, see here." He pointed to the white "stockings" on the hind legs. "There's the faking. On my horse the stockings are rather shorter."

The detective inclined his head, stroking the racer's glossy neck as he did so. Then, after sundry further examination, they left the stable.

Shortly after eleven that night a dark figure might have been seen prowling round Lennox's headquarters, now halting, now passing on, and finally stopping at one of the locked horse-boxes.

This was the only stall which possessed a living-room overhead, and as the light gleaming through the partly-closed shutters suggested that the apartment above was occupied, it was more than likely that the box beneath contained an unusually precious animal which necessitated a constant watch kept upon it.

Presently a second light flashed out—the gleam of an electric torch—and Anthony Sharpe, the prowler, busted himself with the lock of the door. It offered little resistance to an expert in such things, and a few minutes later he found himself gazing upon a fine, pure chestnut, possessing no white blaze down the nose and no white stockings—at which the detective smiled grimly.

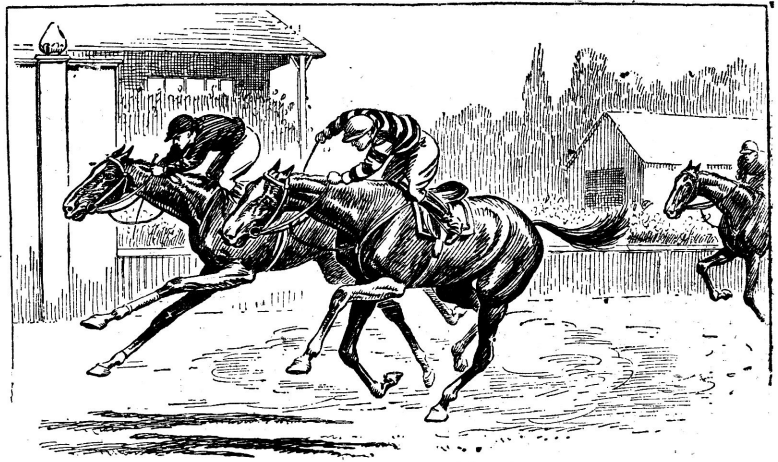
"Who's that?"

Sharpe, his examination interrupted, suddenly swung round. Half-way down a ladder which led to the living-room above a man was standing, a thick cudgel gripped in his fingers. He was a big man, red-faced and strong-looking. And, just behind him, a little higher up the ladder, crouched a smaller fellow of an unmistakably horsey appearance. Indeed, Sharpe had little difficulty in recognizing both of them as the pair he had seen on the train coming down, when he suddenly turned the beam of his torch in their direction.

"Good-evening, gentlemen!" he greeted, swiftly covering the newcomers with his automatic. "Don't move, please! There need be no trouble so long as you are reasonable. In the first place, Mr. Lennox, kindly throw down that nasty stick!"

"Who are you?" gasped the big man again, at the same time obeying Sharpe's command with reference to the cudgel. "What's this mean? If you've come to play tricks with Postillion—"

He was interrupted by a quiet chuckle from the detective.



Colonel Anderson's jockey glanced sharply round and saw White Blaze racing hard on his mount's heels. He gave "Silver Spur" a touch with the whip, and the big horse bounded forward.

"Postillion!" the latter echoed. "My good man, haven't you made a slight mistake? This beast is not Postillion; it is Mr. Armitage's horse, White Blaze, plus a little extra chestnut colour. Surely you must have known that, since you are responsible for this strange—"

"Confound you!" Lennox snarled. "What d'you mean? Who are you, once more?"

"My name's Anthony Sharpe," the investigator replied. "I'm a detective of sorts, as you may have heard, and Mr. Armitage, your near neighbour, asked me to look into this queer affair. I can assure you that I know exactly what took place, and that your game's up. You had watched White Blaze on his gallops, and knew that he had a great chance of winning the Tanbridge Plate, which you coveted mainly on account of the big price the winner would fetch when sold. Therefore, the night before last you brought your horse, Postillion, to your rival's place and substituted it for White Blaze. John Armitage, being a straight man himself, and apt to trust other sportsmen, saw no necessity for having his animal specially guarded, so you had no opposition. You succeeded in opening the stable door with a key that did not quite fit—possibly one of a bunch you tried—as I discovered from a close examination of the lock. You had already faked up Postillion to resemble White Blaze—an easy enough job, since the two nags were naturally almost line for line in build—and now I see you have stained the lighter parts of White Blaze, here, to make him look like another horse. You intended, of course, to enter him as Postillion, trusting that the trick would not be discovered; and you might have succeeded only for Postillion suddenly going off his galloping form and causing a very close examination to be made. That's the case as clearly as I can put it, I fancy."

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" Lennox graded.

"That depends entirely upon you," Sharpe returned, giving a shrill whistle, at which Tim O'Carroll suddenly appeared, leading the real Postillion by the bridle. "Mr. Armitage doesn't want to soil his hands with you, but unless you're well away from here by the end of the week he'll have all the facts known in the proper quarter. Here's your horse—quite a good animal, which might have been worth running in Friday's race in a fair and square manner; but that's out of the question now. You must withdraw your entry and clear out!"

The pair on the ladder made no reply—merely continued to glare dumbly as Tim O'Carroll led White Blaze into the open and put Postillion back in his place.

This done, Sharpe and his assistant returned to the anxious Armitage, who was eagerly waiting to hear the result of their exploit.

"It's all right!" was Sharpe's greeting. "Here's White Blaze, safe and sound. He only needs a sponging with spirit to restore his outstanding points. As to our friend the

enemy yonder, he'll take your advice. I reckon, for he saw he was beaten to the wall."

CHAPTER 3.

The Tanbridge Selling Plate—White Blaze Wins.

THE day of the big race was fine and sunny, and the course just outside Tanbridge presented an animated appearance.

Sharpe and O'Carroll, having decided to stay and see the race run, had seats on the grand-stand.

A rolling murmur, and the starting-gate rose. They were off—first bunched together, then stringing out like a comet's tail, with White Blaze third from the front. Before him were Colonel Anderson's Silver Spur and the Hon. Bertie Wintringham's Balladmonger—fine animals both, who had been well backed by their owners and friends, who believed what their owners told them.

Two minutes later there were only these three horses in the race. The rest of the "field" had dwindled away, finding the pace too hot for them, and White Blaze was now second, with Balladmonger a close third.

Silver Spur, a huge black, was going strongly, pounding along the turf like some equine monster whom nothing could stay; but the jockey who rode White Blaze knew his business, and was content to let Anderson's man set him his pace until the last lap was entered upon—the race was a two-mile one.

Presently Balladmonger dropped behind and mingled with the gasping field, but the leading pair still stuck closely together. Colonel Anderson's jockey glanced sharply back, saw the proximity of White Blaze, and gave Silver Spur a touch of the whip. The big horse bounded forward, but even at the same time Armitage's fancy did likewise. Neck and neck they raced down the straight, flashing past the post with so little to spare between them that it was not until the numbers were run up upon the board that the winner was known to be White Blaze—by less than half a head.

Anthony Sharpe and Tim O'Carroll stayed just long enough in Tanbridge after the race to see Lennox's stables deserted, and their owner gone to seek fresh fields and pastures new, as was anticipated.

White Blaze was sold at a big price, although Tim vowed he would never have parted with such an animal ever for treble the amount.

"A simple enough case, but a very interesting one," the detective remarked, as the pair were returning to town. "Just the kind of affair that breaks the monotony of personal danger—eh, lad?"

THE END.

(Look out for another thrilling Anthony Sharpe detective story soon.)

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At last these sounds ceased, and he heard a voice say, "Carefully now!" Then came the hollow tramp of feet on planks, a queer, dull thud, and he felt himself lowered on to a wooden floor. Then he was surprised to feel the rope cut from his wrists and the muffer whisked from his face.

In his nostrils was the unpleasant stench of bilge-water and rotting wood. He blinked round him dazedly. It was pitch-dark around him, but above his head showed a square patch of starlit sky. Even as he looked there came that queer, dull thud again, the patch of sky was blotted out, and blackness descended upon him. Then, save for the gurgle and ripple of water around him, silence fell, and he was alone.

CHAPTER 8. By Sheer Chance!

RISING-BELL brought the juniors of St. Jim's tumbling out of bed with unusual alacrity on the morning of the great boatace.

It was a bright, sunny morning, and there were cheery faces among the juniors. Monty Lowther and Manners were amongst the first up, and they discovered almost at once that Tom Merry was absent from the dormitory.

"Hallo!" ejaculated Lowther, grinning. "Old Tommy's up and about already. What energy!"

"Gone down to the river for a dip, I expect," growled Manners. "Silly ass! Why didn't he wake us up. I could have done with a splash this morning."

The juniors began to dress quickly, their faces merry and bright. There was only one topic for discussion that morning, and that was the boatace. Tom Merry's absence did not occasion any alarm—as yet. Why should it? It was his custom during the summer to go for a dip on fine mornings, though usually he insisted on his immediate chums accompanying him, whether they liked it or not. But occasionally he went alone, and they imagined he had gone alone now.

The juniors were soon dressed, and they went downstairs and out into the sunlit quad to await Tom's return. But Tom Merry did not put in an appearance, nor did he show up at chapel. Even then they were not alarmed. And it was only when Tom Merry failed to appear at breakfast that they began to realise that something was wrong. At the breakfast-table Mr. Linton, the Shell master, had looked grim as he noted the junior's absence; but even he did not take it so seriously as the juniors did.

And they had good reason to. They knew by now that the village louts would stick at nothing to gain their ends.

As the juniors streamed out of the dining-room Blake and his chums of the Fourth joined Lowther and Manners. It was obvious from their grave faces that they knew of Tom's absence.

"What do you fellows make of it?" asked Blake. "We think it's jolly fishy. If those brutes have collared him—"

"If he went down to bathe alone it's quite likely," nodded Lowther gloomily. "What's to be done, Blake?"

"We could go in search, of course. But— Oh, shove off, Skimmy!"

Blake ended with an irritable shake as he felt his arm clutched, and Skimpole of the Shell introduced a bony forefinger into the discussion.

"But, my dear Blake," protested Skimpole, blinking with mild indignation at Blake, "I merely desired to ask you a question! I wish to know the whereabouts of Tom Merry."

"So do we, ass!" grunted Manners. "Why—"

"It is of the utmost importance," said Skimpole. "I must see Tom Merry before he destroys the envelope. When I handed him that letter last evening—"

"Eh? What letter's that?" demanded Blake, with sudden interest.

"I will explain, my dear Blake," said Skimpole. "As you are possibly aware, I have been engaged for some considerable time upon the writing of a book on Determinism. Last evening, whilst studying a book on the same subject by Professor Balmcyrumpet, I took some extremely valuable notes, and—"

"Blow Professor Balmcyrumpet, and blow your notes!" howled Blake. "What was the letter, and who sent it, ass?"

Skimpole explained, though by the time he had finished

the juniors were dancing with impatience. It appeared that, in the absence of more suitable paper, the genius of the Shell had scribbled down his notes taken from Professor Balmcyrumpet's valuable work on the back of Tom Merry's letter—in his usual absent-minded way. They were—according to Skimpole—extremely valuable notes, and Skimpole wanted that envelope back.

"Well, my hat!" breathed Blake. "And this village youth—what was he like, Skimmy?"

"Really," said Skimpole, pressing a bony forefinger to a still bonier forehead reflectively, "I do not— Ah, yes! His hair was, I remember, of a decided auburn tint—what, I believe, boys of your limited intelligence would call ginger—or perhaps sandy."

"Bai Jove!"

Blake's eyes were gleaming now. He took Skimpole gently by the ear, and led him a few yards away. He then planted a gentle kick behind him. It was a hint to Skimpole to depart; and, being used to such hints, the mild genius departed, somewhat bewildered.

"So that's it!" snapped Blake, returning to his chums. "We're going to visit that sandy-haired rotter, my infants."

"But—but—"

"Can't you see?" hissed Blake. "They've decoyed Tommy away with a letter—a letter delivered by that sandy-haired kid Tommy rescued last night—the kid who works in the Green Man stables. We'll just do it before lessons. Come on! And if we don't get the truth from him I'll—I'll—"

And, without waiting to finish, Jack Blake set off for the gates at a run. He knew what he intended doing, and he didn't intend to waste time explaining further. He knew, also, that the others would follow.

And they followed quickly enough. By the time Blake was out in Rylcombe Lane they had caught him up. The dogged Yorkshire junior set a stiff pace and he kept it up. It was not a far cry to the Green Man Inn, but all the juniors were panting hard by the time they reached it.

They stopped in a breathless group outside the entrance to the inn stable-yard, and looked questioningly at each other.

It was no light matter to break the school rules by entering the premises of such a disreputable riverside inn, and they all hesitated.

And then, at that moment, the problem was settled for them in an unexpected manner.

From the stable-yard there came a sound as of a carpet being beaten. It was followed by a series of wild yells and groans. The juniors jumped as they heard the commotion.

"My hat!" hissed Blake. "That's the very kid himself yelling. I wonder what on earth—"

He broke off, and, running forward, peered into the inn yard. His chums followed quickly enough then. And as they took in the scene being enacted there they understood the meaning of the yells.

The sandy-haired village youth was there, sure enough. And with him were Mr. Joseph Banks, the bookie, and Jim, the billiards-marker. The stable-boy was wriggling desperately in the combined grasp of Mr. Banks and Jim. In his free hand the portly Mr. Banks held a riding-whip; his face was red and fiendish with passion, and he was bringing the whip down across the hapless stable-boy's shoulders with savage, vicious blows.

"I'll larn you to blow the gaff on me, you little rat!" he was hissing through his teeth. "Give us away, would you! I'll—"

The rest of the ruffian's words were lost amid the unfortunate victim's yells. It was a brutal, sickening scene, and the juniors looked on for a moment in disgust and helplessness. But, as the lad's yells sank to sobs, the scene proved too much for the good-hearted Gussy.

"Bai Jove, you fellahs," he panted, "that young wottah deserves a thwacking—but—but I weally cannot stand this! We must stop it, bai Jove!"

"Yes, rather!"

The juniors rushed forward; but Arthur Augustus was first. He jumped and grabbed at the raised arm of Mr. Banks. That gentleman turned savagely, and without looking to see whom the newcomer could be, he struck at the junior with the whip.

But Blake was too quick for him. He came up with a rush, and his lowered head took Mr. Banks in the middle of his gorgeous waistcoat. The blow went wide, and the bookie collapsed like a pricked balloon.

But that was not all. As he staggered backwards, doubled up and grunting, he came up against the low sides of the horse-trough behind him. His portly body went back, and his legs came up, and there followed a splash and a dismal yell.

"Hook it, kid!" yelled Blake. "Now, you chaps!"

The juniors had tackled Jim, the billiards-marker, and, finding himself free, the stable-lad went like the wind. With a combined rush the boys sent the billiards-marker staggering

on top of Banks. Then, leaving the rascals floundering in the horse-trough, the juniors took to their heels.

They were not afraid of Mr. Banks, or of a dozen flabby rascals of his type. But they had no desire to be seen brawling in an inn yard.

They overtook the fleeing stable-lad about a hundred yards along the towing-path, and then Blake called a halt. The luckless youth was still sobbing; but there was no time for ceremony. What was the meaning of the scene they had just interrupted they did not know; but they wanted to get on the track of Tom Merry.

"We were just coming to have a chat with you, my pippin," began Blake grimly. "You took a letter to Merry at St. Jim's last night, didn't you?"

"Yes; I did," mumbled the youth, eyeing the juniors uncertainly. "It—it was about that there letter they was lamming me jest now. They found out I'd blabbed to Master Merry, as I might 'ave knowed they would. But I don't care. I ain't going back there agen—I can easy get another job. 'Ave you blokes found Master—"

"What on earth are you gassing about?" ejaculated Blake. "Blabbed! What do you mean?"

The youth stared. "Oh, I thought as you must 'ave knowed, askin' about that letter," he said. "I wrote to Master Merry, warning 'im as Banks was going to saw 'is oar 'arf through last night. I wasn't goin' to see the dirty played on Master Merry arter what 'e did for me on the river yesterday. 'E saved my life, and—"

"But—but—" gasped Manners. "Where is Tom Merry—do you know?"

"I knows, an' I'll bloomin' soon tell you!" said the youth, with a revengeful glance back at the inn. "'E must 'ave gone to the boathouse last night, and they collared 'im. I 'eard Banks talkin' about it this mornin', and I 'eard as they knowed it was me as split. But they collared me afore I could get away. You fellers—"

"But where is Tom Merry—quick, you idiot!" exclaimed Lowther impatiently.

"They've took 'im to that old 'ulk as is 'arf sunk near Layland's Mill," muttered the youth. "They means to keep 'im there till after the race. That's the goods, that is!"

CHAPTER 9.

The Race!

A GLORIOUS afternoon of sunny blue skies and a slight, welcome breeze to temper the heat of the day. The grassy banks and towing-paths of the Rhyl hummed with merry voices and laughter and were ablaze with colour. The red-and-white of St. Jim's mingled freely with the green-and-black of the Grammar School and the green-and-gold of the village club.

It only wanted sixty seconds to the start of the race, and the three crews were already being jockeyed into position, amid a wild medley of partisan cheers.

At the starting point Mr. Railton crouched in the stake-boat, with pistol raised. In the three racing "ships" the crews sat, tense and resolute. Tom Merry was looking as fit as he ever had looked, and he grinned a fleeting, cheery grin across at Gordon Gay, the stroke of the Grammar School boat.

But it vanished from the faces of both strokes as Mr. Railton's "Are you ready?" rang across the wide river. Their faces became as grim and determined as was the rugged, healthy face of Grimes, the village stroke.

A tense moment of waiting—as tense almost for the impatient crowd on the bank as for the oarsmen themselves, and then:

Bang!

They were off!

"Go it, St. Jim's! Bend to it!"

"Oh, good start, School!"

"Villidge! Villidge! Go it—show 'em what's what!"

In one magic second, the crowded mass awoke to a medley of cries, yells, shrieks—blared from brass lungs, howled shrilly through home-made megaphones.

The yelling, shrieking mob swept forward, first in solid, jumbled mass, only to break up into a galloping, hysterical stream. A continuous roar of voices accompanied the flying "shells" along the shining river.

And no wonder! All three crews had got away well, and, what is more, they were keeping it up. The village crew were pulling like Trojans—the village lads held their own with the skill and grace of polished oarsmen.

But the Saints and Grammarians were also pulling a mag-

£300 IN CASH PRIZES!

THE NEWEST AND MOST NOVEL CRICKET COMPETITION EVER PLACED BEFORE READERS!

SEE PARTICULARS ON PAGE 26—AND ENTER NOW!

The juniors stared blankly. They hardly grasped it all yet; but they grasped the main point. Before the startled youth had realised the fact, almost, he was alone, and the juniors were speeding hot-foot along the towing-path.

They knew the old hulk the youth had mentioned quite well. It was grounded in a quiet backwater of the Rhyl, not very far from the boathouse. They left the towing-path presently, and, by cutting through the woods, they reached the spot well under three minutes.

The hulk lay quite close up against the bank, its hold half-filled with scum-covered, stagnant water. Blake reached it first, and, leaping on to the roiting deck, he raced to the fore-deck of the old barge. A flat-topped scuttle was there, its lid clamped down and secured by a peg of wood. Blake kicked it out, and wrenched at the heavy lid.

It came up, and fell over with a thud. As the light streamed into the gloomy, musty-smelling cabin beneath, Blake glimpsed a white face below, and he gave a yell of joy.

"He's here—it's Tommy, right enough, you chaps!"

It was. Tom Merry certainly thought so a minute later as he stood blinking in the bright sunlight, dusty and towled, but grinning feebly, and with his overjoyed chums around him. But there was time only for brief explanations then. Blake tried to insist upon calling to discuss the matter with Mr. Banks without delay, but Tom Merry would have none of it.

"Our little settling up can wait," he said grimly. "It was pretty rotten in that awful hole; but I managed to get some sleep, and, after a good meal, I'll be all right, my infants. Anyway, come on; the sooner we get back the better."

"We ought to report it!" grunted Blake. "The police—"

"We don't want the police brought in, ass!" said Tom. "What's the good? We can't prove anything, and I'd rather settle with dear old Banks myself. Old Linton will never dream I've been out all night, and I'll just get a whacking impot for cutting chapel and brekker. And now for home. I'll soon show you if I'm fit or not!"

And he did. He set a pace back to St. Jim's that soon satisfied his anxious chums that his brief imprisonment hadn't impaired his fitness.

nificent oar, and a splendid race was being promised. It was amazing. The Saints had been generally expected to win an easy victory—with the villagers outclassed and the Grammarians hopeless also-rans.

But it was not so. Right up to the half-way post it was a ding-dong struggle, with scarcely an inch between the three boats. And then came a triumphant roar from the Grammar School supporters.

"Oh, well rowed, School! You're going up—you're going up!"

It was true enough—to everyone's amazement. By means of some magnificent pulling, Gordon Gay had managed to work his boat a good yard ahead.

"Buck up the villidge!" shrieked the villagers.

"Buck up, Saints!" yelled the St. Jim's supporters madly. "For the love of Mike, pull! They're leaving you!"

But though Tom Merry heard the appealing cries, he only smiled, and pulled on with his steady, powerful swing, confident and serene.

The inexperienced Grimes, however, challenged the lead of the Grammarians with a sudden, desperate spurt. And a gleeful roar went up from their supporters as the village boat began to leave the St. Jim's boat, and creep steadily nearer to the Grammarians' cutting prow.

"Keep it up, lads!" shrieked the villagers wildly. "Oh, good old Grimey!"

And, with dogged strength and courage, the village crew kept it up. Another fifty yards, and they were on terms with the Grammarians. Still another fifty yards, and they were leading the Grammarians by a good half-length, with the St. Jim's boat racing steadily along half a length behind the Grammarians.

Over three-quarters of the course run now. From the banks the St. Jim's supporters were hoarsely appealing to their crew, and even Kildare, jostling his way along the towing-path, was wondering if Tom Merry was not leaving it until too late.

But even as the thought crossed the mind of the skipper of St. Jim's, Tom Merry decided that the time had come. A whispered word to Curly Gibson, and that excited junior's shrill yell went up.

(Continued on page 27.)

A THRILLING STORY OF THE ADVENTUROUS WEST!



Telling of the Further Daring Adventures of the Six Stalwart Chums of Thunder Creek.

CHAPTER 1.

A Cool Piece of Work!

“WHAT we want,” said Pat O’Hara, “is a job in the city. So you can bite on that, Jim. You may be the leader of us Sportsmen, but you’re not going to have things all your own way!”

“Who wants to have ‘em all my own way?” asked Jim Raven rather testily. “You’ve had your own way up to now. You’ve left Sam Knapp’s bridge-building job, and you’ve got down to Edmonton. So you’re in the city now. Want me to find you a job here, or something?”

“We’ll find our own jobs,” said Pete Craddock. “Now we’re away from that bridge-building work your responsibilities are ended. Don’t get peeved!”

“Well, who wouldn’t get fed up?” asked Jim Raven. “Here you are, all blaming me, as leader of the Sportsmen of Thunder Creek, because you can’t all get twenty-thousand-a-year jobs, with no work attached to them! What’s the matter with you, anyway? And what sort of work do you mighty workmen want?” he added. “Didn’t you get enough of it at Knapp’s Rolling River Camp?”

“Too much,” chorused the Sportsmen fervently. “But not enough sport. Here in Edmonton we ought to get a decent eight-hour day and lots of recreation.”

It was true that the whole six of them, those stalwart chums of Thunder Creek, had suddenly “jumped” their jobs at Knapp’s Rolling River Camp, greatly to the disgust and pain of Sam Knapp, the genial superintendent in charge of operations there. And the reason had been just one of “go-fever.” After several strenuous weeks up in that isolated spot they had all, with, perhaps, the exception of Jim Raven, suddenly got bitten with the wanderlust. They had been earning pretty good wages—for labourers—and they had also had quite a lot of sport. And yet they had suddenly packed up their kits, mounted their horses, and struck for the south.

“Here, in Edmonton,” said Jim Raven, “we sha’n’t find so many cushy jobs as you fellows expect. It’s the same in all Canadian towns. We did wrong coming here.”

“Well,” Smiler Dickinson, the only Canadian amongst the Sportsmen, put in; “there’s Dominion Day coming off very

shortly, and that means lots of sports, with prizes thrown in. So amongst us we might manage to make an honest dollar or two—for Syd.”

“Yes,” said Digger Harrison, the Australian, “for Syd! That’s the reason why we’re never satisfied with what we’re making. We’ve got to think of Syd. And now,” he added, as though he had not been disturbed in the slightest, “and what’ll that be?”

Perhaps he did not start around quickly; perhaps all any of the Sportsmen did was to turn his head. But it is pretty safe to say that most of the people in Edmonton stopped dead in their tracks. Perhaps some of them cringed and held their hands over their ears. Anyway, whatever the people did, there was no denying the fact that the whole town shook suddenly, as a dull, deep, reverberating roar filled the air. The window of the room in which the six Sportsmen of Thunder Creek were sitting

Young Syd Patterson, son of a man in prison for stack-burning, is being educated in England by the Sportsmen of Thunder Creek. These stories tell how his youthful “godfathers” raise the funds.

arguing fell into the room in a shower of splintered glass. Other windows went to shivers, too, it would seem. And some horses that had been walking sedately up the main street suddenly reared and got out of control. Various motor-cars acted queerly as their startled drivers forgot what they were driving and turned their heads. One Ford car went clean through a big store window. Another one collided with an electric light standard, greatly to the detriment of both. And a horse that was being ridden by a cowboy-like person frankly bolted, nor could the cowboy hold the creature in.

A moment later there was silence outside. The people in the street stood and stared. Some of them rubbed their aching ears. Then men began to hurry. A policeman went past the boarding-house in which the six Sportsmen were sitting, at the double, waving his club and shouting rather excitedly. Another policeman, of the Mounted species, went

straight across the street and entered the boarding-house in which the Sportsmen were, now staring through the broken window.

The Mounted Policeman was Corporal Nevin, friend of the six chums of Thunder Creek. His eyes were gleaming a trifle, but no excitement had yet managed to make him drop the monocle that he always affected, whether on duty or off.

“Blowing something up, aren’t they?” Jim Raven asked.

Corporal Nevin brushed off some of the dust that was clinging to his tunic. Then he took out his monocle and carefully polished it.

“They have blown something up,” he announced, “and I strongly suspect it’s the railway-station, or somewhere near to it.”

“Then, by Jove,” exclaimed Jim Raven, “are you suggesting that—that this wasn’t a piece of legitimate work? We’re so used to seeing explosions up at Knapp’s camp that—well, we weren’t extra interested when we heard that one.”

Nevin pointed to the broken window of the room he was in. He also pointed to the rear of the motor-car that had tried to climb into the drug-store window. He also pointed to another hurrying city policeman.

“Looks like what you say, Raven,” Nevin drawled. “But I’m off duty to-day. Anyway, why worry? Nobody seems to be hurt.”

The Sportsmen looked at him carefully. Nevin sometimes took quite a bit of reading. Then, as they heard a bell clanging, they looked through the broken window again, to see a motor fire-engine dashing up the street, fully manned. Immediately after this came a motor ambulance. Yes, Edmonton is well equipped with civilised things these days.

“Think we might be getting along,” said Jim Raven, reaching for his hat. “If they’ve turned the fire-brigade out and the ambulance this thing must be a bit serious. Come on, fellows!”

He dashed out of the boarding-house, followed by his five faithful chums. Nevin came last, and walked with all the dignity that was due to the famous force he adorned, after his irresponsible young friends.

By now, it seemed, the best part of the population of that Northern city was running full pelt after the fire-engine and

ambulance. Straight for the depot these contrivances went. And at top speed after them the Sportsmen of Thunder Creek ran.

These young men may have been hard up, for they religiously sent every spare dollar that they had to help keep and educate young Syd—but they were in the top niche of physical fitness. They quickly outstripped the flabbier citizens who were racing depot-wards. They even kept pace with a man who was making that way on horseback. And they got there just as the fire-engine had unloaded its crew, just as the men were seeking the hydrants and were running out the hose. As they arrived they knew that the fire-engine was needed, for streamers of smoke were arising from the station.

The Sportsmen crowded into the depot, where they saw a crowd of railway officials attempting to keep back the mob that was invading them. They worked their way past an excited stationmaster; and when they had come out to the platforms they saw a sight that made them halt. For a train was there near the platform. The engine was lying on its side, and several of the coaches were on their sides as well. And from these coaches many men were dragging passengers who had evidently been inside them at the moment of the explosion.

"What's it all about?" shouted Jim Raven, scratching his head. Then he saw a hand waving feebly from a smashed window. From that moment both he and his friends were busily engaged in rescuing inmates of the overturned coaches, with the result that they had soon got four or five out. This, seeing the coaches were alight in places, was no easy task; but they thought nothing of the difficulties and dangers that

attended their work of mercy. They almost enjoyed the job, and they were all black and sweating when Corporal Nevin came on the scene.

Nevin spent a great deal of time and skill tending the injured travellers. They said that Nevin had walked a hospital in London once, before being bitten by the lust for adventure and joining up with the North-West Mounted. Anyway, he was very efficient, and certainly relieved the two or three doctors who were present on the station of a great part of their duties.

At length, the Sportsmen were satisfied that there was nobody else to rescue. To the amazement of most people, it was also found out that nobody had been killed in the wreck, though several were more or less seriously injured. The fire-engine had its part of the job well in hand; there was no danger of the station going up in smoke. And so, when everything had been done for the unfortunate passengers, Corporal Nevin had time to look about him. His Sportsmen friends accompanied him as he examined the track near and beneath the wrecked train.

CHAPTER 2.

Hiram Coult's Strange Story!

"**B**EEN blown up, all right," said Nevin. "Bomb, or dynamite! Deliberate attempt to blow the train up and kill the passengers. Right in the station, too! Cool, desperate piece of work."

But the city police had the case in hand. Nevin was not on duty; indeed, he was on a few days' leave from farther north, where he was stationed. He had no right to be butting into this

outrage. What he found out from his investigations he kept to himself.

"Old chap there seems to have felt it a bit," remarked Smiler Dickinson, jerking his thumb in the direction of a couple of police officers, who were apparently trying to pacify an elderly man. The latter was shouting something excitedly to the senior of these two police officers; and they did not seem at all inclined to listen to him. Indeed, they were trying to talk to the engineer of the wrecked train. The elderly gentleman insisted on thrusting his way into this conversation, received several rebuffs; and, at length, he broke away from them, making a gesture of helplessness with his arms.

About this gentleman's head was a bandage. He had no hat; and his clothing was somewhat dishevelled and dusty.

"A passenger on the train, I take it," said Jim Raven. "Wants to tell the police his version of the affair. Hallo! He's spotted you, Nevin!"

The old gentleman had, apparently. For he hurriedly up to the uniformed Mounted corporal, and at once began to address him. His tones were excited; which, seeing what he had so recently come through, was not very surprising.

"You're a man that's got some sense in your head!" the gentleman shouted. "But those others cops—sha! They can't see farther than their own noses! They're asking the engineer all sorts of foolish questions that don't matter, and won't let me tell 'em I know who blew this tarnation train up!"

Nevin raised his eyebrows in surprise. The Sportsmen gathered more closely around the excited old gentleman. Perhaps they did not believe all he said;



It was no easy task, rescuing the inmates of the overturned coaches, but the Sportsmen of Thunder Creek dodged about and thought nothing of the difficulties and dangers that attended their work of mercy.

but they were deeply impressed by his earnestness, just the same.

"I'm Hiram Coutts!" he announced. "Maybe you know me?"

The Sportsmen did not know him. But Nevin seemed to.

"You're the colonising gentleman, sir," said Nevin civilly. "We've heard a lot about you in the Mounted. You've settled several groups of colonists down, and you have helped materially to solve the immigration problem for the Government. Yes?"

"Well," said Hiram Coutts, placing his hand to what was undoubtedly an aching brow, "this is a deliberate attempt to get at me! It's a fellow named Crozier who did this!" He waved a hand expressively towards the wrecked train from which he had made such a fortunate escape. "He threatened he'd do me in!"

"Crozier? Who is he?" asked Nevin, picking at his little moustache. "Never heard of him."

"Fellow who wanted to come into my latest colonising scheme!" shouted Mr. Coutts. "But he insisted on having a certain quarter-section of land, and no other. Why he should want that one, I don't know, but when I refused to let him have it, when I handed that over to a decent British settler, he sent me a note, threatening to have his revenge. On the other hand, he offered, if I'd let him have that quarter-section of land after all, and give another one to that Britisher, he'd call everything quits. That's what I tried to tell those police ginks; and they shoved me aside, and thought the engineer could tell them more!"

"Would you come along with me, sir?" said Nevin, and he nodded at the interested Sportsmen of Thunder Creek. "This would bear a bit more talk, only more private than here. Probably the city police are not inclined to listen to you; but I am—ex-officio, of course—I'm Corporal Nevin, on leave."

"Gosh!" said Mr. Coutts. "I'd rather the Mounted had this job in hand than the town ginks. Say, you just come along with me!"

He led the way out of the station. Nevin and the six Sportsmen followed him. Outside he hailed a taxi; and they all piled into it. In a few minutes the hired car came to a halt outside a rather handsome mansion, situated on the outskirts of the town. Here they alighted, and Mr. Coutts invited them all to enter.

"My Edmonton house, this," he said. "I've come on ahead. Next week most of my new colonists will have turned up, then I'm going to show them where I've picked their farms. You'll know Blind Elk Lake? Got forty sections of land along that. Good land, too. But why Crozier should insist on having the north-east quarter of Section No. 27, beats me!"

"Some men do take odd fancies," said Nevin, who knew the Blind Elk Lake district very well. "The land's all excellent round about there, if a long way from the railroad. Well, sir, can you describe this man Crozier? And can you give me any proof that he did attempt to murder you by blowing you and that train up?"

"Proof? Course I haven't got any proof—except a note I got from him when I landed at Montreal, last week," said Coutts. "And I was so peeved at getting that that I chucked it away. But it was Crozier's handwriting, all right. Think I don't know? Crozier and I have had dealings before this."

"Then the man Crozier must be hanging around the city even now," said Nevin. "I think I'd better report

this to our own superintendent. Dynamiting, eh? Nasty crime, that! Long time since any was done out West; but down in the States it was once a popular sort of pastime."

"Crozier's a great, dark-skinned fellow, aged about forty; talks with a New York accent," said Mr. Coutts. "Chief thing about him is that he's got a birth-mark behind his right ear. He's known back east as a bit of a crook; working in with a shady company-promoting concern. Done a thing or two in Liverpool, too. He was suspected of firing some oil-tanks near Liverpool once. Oh, he's a criminal, all right, and won't stick at much to get what he wants. Say, there's a heap of money for anybody who can get hold of Crozier, even if it can't be proved that he dynamited that train. I'll pay a fine reward, because I'm nervous as long as he is abroad. He's going to get even with me for refusing to let him have that quarter-section of land."

"It's a police job, certainly," said Nevin; but he looked at the Sportsmen of Thunder Creek as he spoke; and his eyes began to pucker slightly around their corners. "Still, the city police are—" He shrugged his shoulders, but said nothing more about the city police. "Well," he went on, "it would be a feather in our caps, boys, if we could trail that chap for Mr. Coutts."

"It'll be a thousand dollars for you if you can get him taken prisoner," said Mr. Coutts. "I'll find a crime to charge him with, even though I mightn't be able to prove he blew that train up. Yes, by gosh, I'm feeling nervous about this man!"

"Don't blame you, either," said Corporal Nevin. "Dynamiters are poison, wherever they are. But why don't you give in to the man; let him have the land he wants; then, when he comes along to claim it, snaffle him?"

"Because the land is already allotted to a decent chap, and I won't be frightened into going back on my word by a scoundrel like this Crozier!" said Coutts. "Besides, how'd I get into touch with him again, unless I advertised? That chap's keeping hidden from now on—till he's done me in. Then, maybe, he'll try to get that bit of land by some crooked means. Darned if I know why he wants the land—unless there's some mineral stuff on it!"

Shortly afterwards the Sportsmen and Corporal Nevin left the house. They returned to the boarding-house. All they had listened to had been interesting, but it had not been very profitable. They were wanting a job more than anything.

CHAPTER 3.

A Fight at Fisticuffs!

"**T**HINK you'd best go back to Knapp's camp and beg his pardon for quitting him," said Nevin. "You'd no grouse against him, except that you all got bitten with the urge to be moving about. But what you fellows can do in a super-civilised city like Edmonton beats me. You'll be sick of it in a week—after the Dominion Day sports are over."

"Well, we'll stick it till they are," said Smiler Dickinson. "We'd like to try one job in the city."

"Then hunt the city through and find

Crozier—that'll earn you a thousand dollars," said Nevin, grinning. "And beat the city police at their work."

"Bet we could hit old Coutts for a fine job, if we found his enemy," said Jim Raven. "A coloniser like him could give us lashings of well-paid work. I'd rather like helping new settlers to shake down. But—well, we'll begin to look for work to-morrow."

But it was a long time till the morrow, and none of the Sportsmen cared about loafing away those intervening hours. There were many parts of Edmonton that they did not know, and, after they had had their supper, they began to explore. Not far did they go before they saw a poster exhibited that, they being sportsmen, interested them mightily. The poster announced that, at a place named Fisticuffs, a grand boxing programme was going to be presented.

"We'll go and see that," said Jim Raven.

Being a boxer of merit himself, he was all eagerness to see boxing. Besides, according to an announcement on the poster, there might be a chance to put the gloves on himself. And he had not had a rousing mill with anybody for a long while. His own chums, knowing him, usually made some excuse when he asked them to take a turn against him.

The boxing-show was timed to begin at eight o'clock. It had begun by the time they had all found their way to Fisticuffs. Not that the hall was crowded; they found good seats easily, and for the next hour or so watched some quite excellent boxing.

At the end of an hour a man entered and took a vacant seat directly in front of Jim Raven. None of the Sportsmen noticed him particularly, because, as it happened, they were all very interested just then in a rousing mill that was going on between a black boxer of great skill and hardihood and a French-Canadian who was as quick upon his feet as any cat. Here was real boxing, and so the Sportsmen naturally were absorbed in it. The fight lasted seven rounds, and then the French-Canadian got in a blow on the point of the nigger's jaw that put a sudden end to things. As the scrap ended as the Sportsmen were hoping it would, they all heaved sighs of satisfaction, and relaxed, waiting for the next item on the programme. This was to be a light-weight contest between two local boys, and promised to be good.

"Going in for this?" asked Smiler Dickinson, handing his programme over to his leader. "Fifty dollars if you can stand three rounds with Saqui. Worth trying for? We're all broke."

Jim shrugged his shoulders. Then he turned his head sharply, for he felt a touch on his shoulder. He looked right into the eyes of Corporal Nevin, in mufti now. Evidently Nevin had come into the building whilst the Sportsmen had been absorbed in the last fight.

"Hallo!" asked Jim. "Wanting me, old chap? Why not come and sit here?" He indicated an empty seat at his side.

"Not staying long," whispered Nevin. "Thought I'd point that out to you, though." Might mean a thousand dollars to you.

He indicated the man seated directly in front of Jim. Jim looked at the fellow's back. He seemed to be a dark man. He certainly was quite a big one, with a pair of immense shoulders on him.

"Look behind his right ear, man!" whispered Corporal Nevin; and Jim looked. Then he started slightly. For, when he looked for it, he could see a strange, blue-tinted birthmark behind the man's ear! And what Hiram Coutts had said that afternoon all came back

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"Stand back," rasped Crozier, "or I'll blow you——" The Sportsmen heeded not, but charged at the arch villain. Jim Raven's shoulders caught him lustily in the chest, and he staggered back into a coal cellar, his gun going off harmlessly. Jim then closed with the fellow, tackling him low.

to him in a flash. Indeed, he was about to lay his hand on the big man's shoulder, only the hand of Corporal Nevin on his own drew him backwards. Another glance at the monocled Mounted man told Jim not to do that, however. For Nevin was shaking his head.

"Follow him if he moves away before the end of the show," the corporal said. "It might be worth while."

Then the light-weight contest began, and this lasted out for the full advertised ten rounds. Towards the end of it the man with the birthmark began to scan his watch rather frequently. The hour now was close on ten o'clock.

The boxer Saqui, who had thrown out a challenge to anybody or about his weight in Edmonton to take him on for three rounds, next entered the ring. One man took up the challenge before Jim could decide whether to put the gloves on or not. That man retired precisely half a minute later, dazed, while the audience were shown that Saqui had not been bluffing in making his challenge.

"All right," said Jim; "I'll take you on, old chap!" And he came to his feet. He was ushered downstairs into the dressing-rooms of Fisticuffs. In a few minutes he had returned, stripped for the fight, and climbed into the ring.

He glanced down towards his chums. Corporal Nevin had vanished, he found. But the big man with the birthmark was still sitting there in front of the seat Jim Raven had vacated. But he looked at his watch again as Jim glanced down at him.

The boxing that followed was lively enough. Jim got through the first two rounds of the three without undue trouble, and managed to hand out a considerable amount of punishment to Saqui, who, as a result, began to treat the presumptuous Jim with far more respect than he had at first shown. And

when the third round opened most of the spectators were leaning forward eagerly; for people of those northern and western cities love to think that locally they can produce a boxer able to stand up with credit against men who visit them and issue challenges.

This third round was very fast, and much punishment was handed out by both fighters. Jim Raven, though, was thoroughly enjoying himself by this time, and the challenger was looking rather worried; probably anxious about his fifty dollars.

Once Jim Raven was sent to the floor with a thud; but he was up again in an instant, and closed with his opponent, who tried to fight him off. Before he could manage that Jim had sent in two terrific short-arm jabs to the body that made Saqui gasp. And by this time the audience were almost on their feet in their tenseness. Indeed, the man with the birthmark was on his feet; and out of the tail of his eye Jim Raven saw this. Probably seeing this caused Jim to change his tactics. It came to Jim that the man with the birthmark had risen to leave the building. Nevin had wanted him to follow the man out if he left.

So Jim tried to end the encounter quickly. Up to this moment he had been satisfied to fight so that he could last out the three rounds, without any real thoughts of administering the k.o. But almost before he knew what he was doing he stepped back half a pace, then braced himself and brought his right round with a mighty swing. His glove connected with Saqui's jaw chuggingly. Down went Saqui without a murmur, and at once Jim turned his eyes towards the big man with the birthmark.

The man was still there. He had sat down again, as a matter of fact; and Jim bent over his opponent, who was

being counted out monotonously—perhaps rather disgustedly—by the referee.

He just waited till the tenth count; then, seeing the man with the birthmark again coming to his feet, he hopped down from the ring, ignoring the applause he had earned for himself. He dived down into the dressing-rooms, hurriedly donned some of his clothes, put the rest under his arm, and came up again. Even as he made for his seat he saw the broad back of the man with the birthmark passing through the door which was the way out.

"Come on, Sportsmen!" he called to his chums, and went out himself.

Naturally, everybody else in the hall was interested in his odd behaviour; and his chums were quite astounded, though they also passed out.

CHAPTER 4. Tracked Down!

JIM could see the man passing up the street. He turned off sharply to the right; and Jim Raven, not answering his chums' surprised questions, followed him. Of Nevin there was now nothing to be seen.

The streets through which this man walked were fairly deserted now, for the hour was getting rather late. The man walked very quickly, though he never looked backwards. And so he led them out of the streets of stores and offices into a residential part of the city. At one gateway he turned in. Jim dodged into the gateway of the next-door house, and hissed to his chums to do the same. They did so, though they asked more questions, and Pat O'Hara ventured the opinion that his leader had gone clean "off his nut."

"It's the man with the birthmark, you
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ass!" said Jim. "Nevin's got something up his sleeves, and he's told me to track him. 'Sssh! Here he comes again!"

Sure enough, the man had emerged from the garden into which he had gone, and now he carried something under his arm. He set off to walk quickly again, and the Sportsmen followed him. Jim Raven had the greatest difficulty in keeping his doughty comrades quiet, for they wanted to know so many things.

For the best part of a mile their quarry led them. Then he turned in through another gate.

"Why," said Smiler Dickinson, "this is old Coutts' house, isn't it? What's the game now?"

They walked stealthily up to the gate of this fine mansion. Even as they turned in through it a figure emerged from behind some bushes, and in the moonlight stood before them.

"Nevin!" exclaimed Jim Raven. "Say, what's the idea?"

"I'm having a 'busman's holiday,'" drawled the corporal of Mounted. "Doing the private sleuth stunt. Watching that guy?" He jerked his head in the direction of the man with the birthmark, who was now walking up a fine motor-drive, though keeping largely to the shadows cast by trees that edged it. "Watch him very closely now; but don't be seen. This is going to be worth a thousand dollars all right!"

"Then that's Crozier, you think?" asked Jim.

"Expect so. Anyway, he's going to make his way into that house, so watch him," said Nevin; "but don't grab him yet. I'd like to know just what he's going to do."

They followed the man stealthily. They saw him slip around to the back of the big house. Hiding in the bushes they found there, the Sportsmen saw him fumbling away at a sort of grating that was let in the wall of the house, quite close to the ground. Indeed, this was what the Sportsmen—or the Britishers amongst the Sportsmen—had seen several times at home. It was a coal-

trap. Coutts had had his house built according to English plan.

The man lifted this grid carefully, and secured it when it was raised to its limit. Then, still carrying his parcel, he crawled inside.

"Burgling, then!" grunted Jim Raven. He stepped softly up to the grid, let it down silently, and, seeing a big stone lying near, lifted that and placed it so that the grid could not be opened again from the inside. Then he dusted his hands together.

"That's got him, so far," he said. "Now we'd better alarm the house."

He walked up to the front door and rang the bell. After a little wait a maid appeared.

"Mr. Coutts in?" Jim asked, touching his forehead, for he had no hat on.

"No," said the girl, who appeared nervous. "Who are you?"

"Hard luck, that," said Jim. "But, as a matter of fact—well, I don't want to scare you, but can we come in?"

"Oh, no! I'm all alone here, and I'm frightened to death, with all these explosions!" cried the girl.

She began to dab her eyes with her handkerchief.

Just then, well indoors, a dog began to bark. The girl screamed, turned, and bolted.

"Dash this!" growled Jim Raven; and he went inside the house uninvited.

He saw the dog, and it was not barking at him or his comrades. But it was scratching frantically at a door inside a passage that led off the entrance hall presumably to the kitchen regions below. Jim guessed this door led down to the cellar, and threw it open forthwith. Down the steps all was very dark, but his groping hand found an electric light switch. He turned this on, and at once the lower region of the house was illuminated.

The dog, barking still, dashed down the concrete steps. Almost as soon as it went down there was a booming report, followed by a howl of agony. The man down below had fired a shot.

None of the Sportsmen of Thunder Creek was armed. It is against all laws of Canada to carry firearms in the cities. But their lack of weapons did not cause them to hesitate for a moment. They almost fell over each other in their haste to dash down.

They found a man standing there, framed by a doorway. It was the man with the birthmark all right. And in his hand he held a revolver. This he menaced the Sportsmen with, and he snarled as he did so, like some trapped animal. At his feet, writhing, lay the dog he had shot.

"Stand back," he rasped, "or I'll blow you—"

But the Sportsmen did not stand back. They charged the man. Jim Raven's shoulder caught him lustily in the chest, and he staggered back into a coal-cellar. His gun went off harmlessly, and Jim closed with the fellow, tackling him low.

Down they both came with a thud, right amongst the coal. The man gave out a frightful yell, and struck at Jim with his clubbed weapon. Jim got it fairly in the forehead, and fell away from him, momentarily dazed. On his knees, the man with the birthmark aimed with his revolver. But he did not aim at any of the Sportsmen; he aimed at a box that was standing there on top of a great lump of coal.

That certainly did deter the Sportsmen, for they knew what was in that box. They had worked at bridge-building long enough to be acquainted with gunpowder and the boxes it is packed in.

"You make a move," growled the man, "and I'll fire! That'll mean we'll all get blown to bits, by—"

But one fellow did make a move—an astonishingly quick one. And that was Sandy Graham. He stooped with the speed of light, picked up a hunk of coal weighing about ten pounds, and in almost the same movement hurled it.

It caught the man with the birthmark fairly behind the ear. Without a cry he dropped, right on top of the dynamite box, and when the Sportsmen went to examine him they found him stunned.

"Dynamite, detonators, and fuse," said Corporal Nevin, as he examined the contents of the box. "Pretty obvious what he was setting out to do. He was going to mine the house, and blow it skyhigh when Coutts was in it! This ought to convince any jury that he also blew up that train. But if it doesn't, we've got enough against him to put him away for a good many years. For goodness' sake, somebody, go up and tell that girl everything's all right again, or she'll scream the house down!"

"This," said the graceless Pat O'Hara, "is our first taste of work in the city. I'm wondering whether I like it. But, at the rate we'll be paid, it seems lucrative enough, bedad! If we get some more like it we'll soon be starting young Syd up as a millionaire. Works out at about a thousand dollars an hour! Good pay, that! Better money even than we make out of sport."

It was good pay; and it was promptly paid, too. For Coutts was grateful to the Sportsmen for what they had done, and he quite gave them the credit for it all; though Corporal Nevin, when asked a few questions by his friends, smiled.

"I was having a 'busman's holiday,'" was all he said. "I enjoyed the few preliminaries; but I gave you fellows the real work to do."

Which is all the Sportsmen ever knew of Nevin's share in their first job in the city.

THE END.

(Look out for a grand sporting yarn next week, boys: "RUN DOWN!" You will vote it one of the most exciting yarns you have ever read.)

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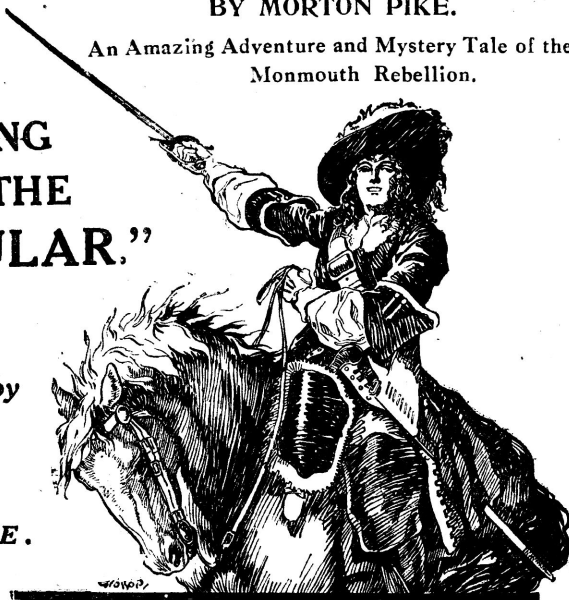
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THE OPENING CHAPTERS.

TOM COMPTON, a young piecer, formerly of Barton's Mills, sets out to track down the "Spider," whose evil power has become the curse of Lancashire.

Mill after mill has suffered at the hands of this treacherous foe. At last Tom, by chance, actually catches the Spider in Barton's Mill. He gives chase, but the Spider, a sinister figure in blue goggles, makes good his escape. He drops a pocket-book, however, from which Tom Compton obtains valuable information.

Later, another mill is threatened, and Peter Grant, the manager, calls for Compton's assistance. Tom hurries to the scene, and is just in time to avert disaster. After this Tom receives a strange message—a call for help from Mr. Kane, who is made prisoner by the Spider in an old bulk out at sea. Tom effects a rescue, and a fierce fight with the Spider's men ensues. Tom makes good his escape, however, only to find that Kane has mysteriously disappeared again.

Reaching Hargreave Buildings in private, he rushes noiselessly up to Kane's safety office, and is just in time to see a picture slide back into position, covering a secret exit from the room.

Very shortly afterwards, Tom discovers that there is a secret lift, and that pictures conceal doors giving on to the lift. He enters the Spider's office through one of these doors, and then makes the startling discovery that Morton Kane and the Spider are one and the same man. The Spider is furious.

Tom wards off his attack, however, and by means of the secret lift, gains admittance into another office, where he meets Dick Stearns. Stearns informs Tom that Reynolds, the Spider's right-hand man, will shortly arrive. A plan is quickly arranged, and Tom waits to receive him.

(Now read on.)

An Effective Disguise!

IT was a large room Tom was in. There was a chair by the hinge side of the door, which would not be seen at once by anyone entering from the corridor outside. Tom went quietly to the window, took the two red worsted ropes off the window-curtains, put them on the chair, and sat on them.

"He's not much of a scrapper," said Tom to himself. "If I can only prevent him making a row, I believe I can manage the rest."

Used as he was to secret attacks and unpleasant discoveries, Tom's head was fairly singing with what he had learned during the past half-hour. The unmasking of the Spider seemed to be ancient history now, recent as it was. As for the plan for Tom's escape, which had passed between the two boys with hardly a word spoken, that needed no more thinking over; it would be put through

within a minute, or sooner. Tom stepped across to the table, annexed a wet stamp-sponge that lay in a china pot, and sat down again, quite ready for Mr. Reynolds.

It was the revelations about Dick Stearns that had stirred Tom most. First the overheard confession about the sinking of the two cotton steamers, and Dick's share in it, which stamped him as the Spider's servant and involved in all the arch-criminal's schemes. Then followed Tom's fierce accusation of him, till the boy was turned again by what Dick had written on the card:

"Secret agent, U.S.A."

That was all. It was enough to have made Dick's death as important to the Spider as Tom's, and the young man had not dared to breathe it, for it was not his secret alone. So much was at stake that he had licked the writing away, burnt the scrap of pasteboard, and ground the ashes to powder.

Secret agent to the United States! That explained all. Tom had long known that the ruin of the British cotton trade, and the sinking of American freights on their way across, was upsetting the industry in the States and hitting them desperately hard. She supplied the raw cotton that brought millions to her revenue, and she was England's friend.

Formerly the American cotton gambling had done much harm, but that was better now, and the two trades depended on each other. To lose the order of mill after mill, and to have great freights of cotton sunk at sea, was terrible for the Southern States.

Tom had known that some secret power was at work thwarting this destruction, but he never dreamed that Dick—the slow, easy-going Dick—was the worker of it. And Dick had let his young friend know, too, that the two supposed sunk cotton steamboats were not sunk, but saved. Plainly the Spider did not know that yet.

"By George, what a post to hold!" thought Tom. "In the Spider's pay, but working against him, the secret servant of a great nation, and his supposed master has never even suspected him! It's as big a job as mine. What would his life be worth? And what delicacy he must have to use! It's all head work, though. I couldn't sit still all the time and scheme. I must be up and doing as well. By George, here comes my chance, too!"

He heard a footstep down the passage, a sidling, sneaking tread that he knew

well. The door opened, and in came the Spider's right-hand man—Reynolds.

There was a look of smug triumph on his face, as though all were going well with him. Reynolds had just come from the Spider's room, and he knew that the boy he hated and feared was in the power of the gang at last. He swung the door open confidently, whistling a jaunty air through his teeth.

Suddenly he found himself gripped from behind by two capable arms, his elbows pinned to his sides, and the first surprised cry for help cut short and stifled by an evil-tasting wet sponge crammed into his mouth.

He choked and struggled, but he might as well have fought against a screw-vice. His legs were kicked from under him. He fell on his face on the floor, and the sinewy young piecer, of whose violent death he hoped so soon to hear, sat on the small of his back.

"So far, so good!" remarked Tom, producing one of the curtain-ropes and proceeding to bind his prisoner's arms with it. "You didn't expect a call from me, Mr. Reynolds, did you? If you try to spit out that gag it will be my painful duty to stun you with a ruler!"

Reynolds, shivering with nervousness, left the gag where it was, and Tom bound a handkerchief over his mouth to keep it there. The man dared not move, but he squinted up at his young captor, and there was a world of cunning and hatred in his green eyes.

"There," said Tom, binding the rascal's ankles together with the second curtain-ropes, "you'll do very nicely like that! Now then, we'll see if—"

He was about to use Dick's name, but checked himself. That would not do. However, the time had come to test what his friend had told him, and on seizing Mr. Reynolds' towy locks and giving them a sharp tug, he found that Dick was right. The tow-coloured hair was a wig, and came away in his hand. Tom grabbed the close-cropped, sandy whiskers, and they, too, parted from their owner's face. Tom held up the bunch.

"There's hair!" he said admiringly.

Reynolds grunted despairingly, and Tom glanced down at him. Stripped of his feathers, he was as bald as an egg, though not over thirty-five, and a very unpleasant-looking creature into the bargain.

"You're certainly no beauty without your hair and whiskers," said Tom, "and not much better with them. But I'm going to borrow this scalp of yours and

the weepers. I rather expect, you know, that your amiable master is having the exits watched, with a view to letting his ruffians make a certainty of wiping me out. I dare say they'll examine everybody pretty closely who goes out; but I don't suppose they'll try to knock the excellent Mr. Joseph Reynolds on the head, so I'll go as yourself. It isn't a part I like to play, and it will be some time before I get rid of the taste of passing myself off for such a ruffian as you

BIG CASH PRIZES

are! In the meantime, I'll have to trouble you for those twenty-five-shilling reach-me-downs of yours."

Tom had to loosen the rascal's bonds in order to divest him of his coat and trousers, but he soon had Reynolds trussed up again, and threw the hearth-rug over him to keep him warm.

"And that's more than you deserve," he said; "but you're a chilly-looking animal, and you'll never be properly warm till you quit this world for another. You'll make up for it then!"

It did not take Tom more than a minute and a half from the time Reynolds entered the room till the boy was dressed in his clothes, and had fixed on his own head, to his entire satisfaction, the towy wig and the whiskers. He was about Reynolds' height, and, by copying the man's stoop and slouching walk, made a passable copy of him.

The plan that Dick Stearns had the credit of, and which was instantly seen by Tom, had, so far, gone very well.

It was the one possible disguise which Tom could get hold of, and by which he might just possibly escape.

Reynolds' appearance was an unmistakable one; his clothes, and his hair and whiskers were all well known. Moreover, after the Spider, he was the most important person in the offices, and came and went as he pleased.

And Dick's knowledge that those whiskers and that hair were false, and might by a bold stroke be borrowed, came in in the nick of time.

Tom bent over Reynolds, and made sure that the gag and cords were secure. He stood for a moment, looking down with a sardonic smile at his prisoner, who glared back at him with silent hatred.

Then, with a polite farewell, Tom went to the door, passed through and locked it from the outside, pocketed the key, and walked down the corridor with an air of owning the whole building.

Despite his confidence, his heart beat quickly. Would his disguise pass, or might there be an order to stop and overhaul anybody who tried to leave, even the great Mr. Reynolds?

He passed by two clerks in the gloom of the corridor, who looked at him, but took no notice. The staircase had a good many people passing up and down, and a burly looking man, who did not look genuine in respectable, clerky clothes, and in whose tail-pocket Tom caught a glimpse of the butt of a life-preserver, was loafing aimlessly about and trying to look innocent.

The great Mr. Reynolds did not go down the stairs, however. Tom pressed the bell, and the passenger-lift shot up to meet him. His heart beat faster yet as he stepped in.

If there was the tiniest suspicion of what had happened, they had him in

their hands. The lift would be precipitated headlong to the bottom, and death or disablement was certain. The lift-boy would not count.

Cool as he was, Tom felt a curious creeping sensation in the soles of his feet as the lift descended.

His fears were not realised. The lift reached the bottom safely, the doors were pulled back, and he stepped out. It was only a few steps to safety now, but the most imminent steps of all.

Four men, who were obviously neither more nor less than the Spider's assassins—men who could be bought for any crime or any risk by a big enough offer—lounge in the doorway. They stared evilly at him as he approached.

Suddenly the big, uniformed door-keeper stepped out to bar Tom's passage. Then, seeing who it was—as he thought—the man drew back, and touched his cap respectfully. The ruffians in the porch stepped aside to let him pass.

Tom walked coolly out into the street—free!

The Return Blow!

"BY George!" muttered Tom to himself. "Dick, old chap, I owe this to you. I never expected to get out alive!"

He drew a long breath. It was no time to loiter, and yet it would not do to be seen to hurry. He kept up Reynolds' shuffling walk till he was round the corner, and then stepped out briskly.

At any moment Reynolds' plight might be discovered. News travelled fast in Hargreave Buildings, and not a

MUST BE WON

moment would be lost in putting the seekers on his track.

Reynolds was a busy man; his room was constantly being entered. They would have to break open the door, but that would not take long.

Tom would have liked to get rid of his disguise at once—it would make him the more easily tracked if he wore it—but he was in a busy street now; there was no turning up which he could dodge, and he feared to attract attention by getting rid of his wig and whiskers where he was. He made his way along, and, before he cleared the street, glanced back.

"So soon!" he muttered. "By Jove, they've lost no time!"

The pursuers were on his track already. Evidently the plot had been shown up, for two of the ruffians who had been in the porch of the office were following him at a rapid walk, and overtaking him fast.

Tom threaded quickly through the crowd, and let the men gain on him. The street narrowed farther on, and was much less populated by wayfarers. It was getting dark. They would have an excellent chance to strike him down and run for it.

But now he was out of the stronghold of his enemies Tom laughed at such clumsy scoundrels as these. They came up fast; but there was a cab-rank at the broad end of the street, with half a dozen four-wheelers standing on it. Tom stepped off the pavement, and opened the door of the front cab.

"Where to, sir?" said the cabman. "Stanford Street Police-station!" replied Tom, stepping noisily into the cab, and quietly out again through the farther door.

Away rattled the four-wheeler, and Tom, slipping into the shadow of the street-corner, chuckled to see the two rascals nudge each other and follow it at a sharp trot.

Tom slipped a little way down the street, and looked round a corner after the cab, as the cabby took a short cut down a narrow turning. He saw the two ruffians run ahead and catch it up. One seized the horse's head and stopped it with a jerk, while the other sprang at the cab door.

The surprised oaths of the two rascals travelled down the street to Tom, capped by the still more urgent voice of the cabdriver, who ardently desired to know what the stars they thought they were doing.

Tom waited to hear no more, but doubled back and up another by-street, divesting himself of the towy wig and whiskers as he went, and throwing them over the wall of a mill-yard.

It was not till then that Tom realised how utterly done-up he was, and what a terrible strain he had put upon himself.

It was forty-eight hours since he had slept, and, though he had no serious injuries, he had some pretty bad superficial hurts, and had lost a certain amount of blood.

The excitement and danger had kept him from thinking of pain and stress and hunger, but now the strain was over they came back upon him with full strength, and he reeled and faltered in his walk.

For a moment he thought he must swoon. He sat down on a doorstep, and rested until he felt able to go on again.

"I must have food and a long sleep, whatever happens," he said to himself. "If I can get into some safe lodgings before they get on my trail again, I shall be able to rest. Flesh and blood won't stand it."

Tom's knowledge of Dunchester was probably better than that of any other inhabitant, and he was not long in reaching a cheap but respectable lodging, where he knew there was the least possible chance of being traced.

He was not known there, and nobody had seen him enter. He had plenty of money, and after a hearty meal he fell asleep over the table.

Being awakened, he managed to reach his bed, and slept like the dead for nearly fifteen hours. The day was well advanced

DON'T DELAY,
but turn to page 26 NOW!

when he awoke, a little stiff, but otherwise fresh and fit as ever. All was well, so far. He ordered breakfast.

"I'm out!" he said to himself—"free, and on my own! It's my turn to strike now, and, by George, I'll do it!"

He left as soon as the meal was finished, and made his way straight to Dick's house. He knew he must get the papers he relied on—the copies of the Spider's secret ledger and the cipher key—at any cost. He wondered if the house was being watched, and what he should do if it was?

There were no signs of it, at any rate. After all, they were not likely to expect him to go there; it would be too

dangerous for him. They did not know his treasured papers were hidden there. The search for them had been given up long ago. He went round and got in by the back way.

In five minutes he had possessed himself of the papers, and buttoned them securely in his inner breast-pocket.

"They must always go with me," he thought. "There's no safety for me now by land or sea. I shall never be able to visit the same place twice.

"No, these papers must never leave me. One more little item, and the game's in my hands. These papers prove what the Spider has done, but not who he is. I can prove that, though, if I'm confronted with him in a court of law. It isn't my word alone now. I've got Dick to back me, and all the evidence I've got together in the last four days. The Spider can't explain all that away, and I'll bet he knows it. The net's drawn tight round him—tighter than he's ever drawn it round me. I'll go to the bank now if I can, and draw my balance. I shall want every penny."

Tom grew still more pensive at finding himself unmolested. Surely they must have got wind of him by this time? He had bought a pistol before reaching Dick Stearns' house, and was armed, at any rate. They would not stand for that, though.

"Can they have drawn in their horns, and laid another trap for me instead?" he thought, and then he started as a sudden thought occurred to him; "or can the Spider have thrown up the game, and bolted, now he knows I've escaped with his secret? For all he knows, it may be in the hands of the police by now!"

"No," he muttered, after a moment's thought, "he'll never give in. He'll fight to the bitter end. It's his life or mine!"

Keeping to the frequented streets, Tom reached the bank, but no attack was made on him. He could not even tell if he was being shadowed. It took some time to withdraw the balance—at least, Tom left £100 in, but drew the rest of the money he had earned by the saving of Grant's Mill—taking £3 in silver and the rest in notes. It might have seemed a risk to some, but Tom was in the extreme of danger already. Nothing could add to his peril, and he felt he was best with the sinews of war ready to his hand.

He hurried off to make some purchases. When he had done, the afternoon was spent, and a dismal brown fog was settling down on Dunchester.

"That's bad!" muttered Tom. "It'll give the Spider his chance. They'll be able to nobble me anywhere now, and I want a place to be quiet in for three or four hours' hard work. I'd like to be out of Dunchester while this fog lasts. Hallo, Dennis! By George, is that you?"

"H'sh!" said a shadowy little figure, suddenly appearing round the corner through the fog, and laying its fingers on its lips. "Be that you, Tom? There's a note from Dick Stearns, an' he says there ain't a moment to lose!"

"Well done, Denny!" said Tom in a whisper. "I was just wishing I could get hold of Dick. Are there any spies about?"

"Nay; I dodged 'em all," replied Denny. "Tha' can open an' read it here, Tom. I'll keep watch."

Tom had the note open in a moment, and his heart leaped as he read.

"The Spider has thrown up the sponge and bolted," ran the message, "or else he's getting up steam for something extra bad. He's gone to Queenstown, where

he'll be able to catch the next boat to the United States. It looks as if he didn't dare stay in England till the Umbria sails from Liverpool, but has gone on to pick her up at Queenstown. For Heaven's sake, Tom, go there and stop him, by hook or by crook, never mind how. He must not be allowed to escape!

"I send this by Dennis. Take next train to Liverpool, and go by cotton-freight steamer, Liburna, to-night, which will put you ashore at Queenstown. I enclose note for the captain; show it him, and he will not refuse. Best luck to you, old boy—strike quick and hard! I can't get away from here. DICK."

The note was scrawled in blue pencil, and evidently in a great hurry. Tom scanned it carefully, and looked at his watch.

"By George!" he said, "just time to catch the 5.40. I'll do it! Denny! Hallo! Where's the boy?"

He looked round hastily, but Dennis had disappeared.

"Confound! Well, he knows what he's about, I reckon. I wanted to send a reply to Dick, but I can't wait. I must hurry like blazes."

Away he went to the station, and as he hastened along he scrawled a hurried pencil note on a leaf of his pocket-book as best he could:

"Just got your message by Denny, who has gone off. Taking Liburna, as per your directions. Will stop Spider at Queenstown at any cost. Have just struck plan to nail the whole gang. TOM."

"I'll send that by messenger from the station," he thought, breaking into a run as soon as he had finished it, "though I fear it will be intercepted. That won't do. Better not send it at all than that. Dash it all! Why didn't Denny wait?"

He reached the station with barely a moment to spare, and at the booking-office door, to his amazement, he found Dennis, who ran towards him.

"I've been waitin' for thee, Tom. I thought thou'd come," whispered the boy.

"Well, why the dickens didn't you wait just now instead?" said Tom hurriedly, as he took his ticket. "What made you cut round here?"

The boy stared. "Here, I haven't a minute!" said Tom, thrusting the note into Dennis'

hand. "Get this to Dick Stearns as soon as you can, and take care you're not stopped on the way. If you are, chew it up and swallow it. Don't let it fall into the enemy's hands, whatever happens! Good-bye, lad!"

"Tom—Tom, wait a second!" cried Dennis, running after him. "What did that mean by—"

But Tom was gone. He waved hastily to Dennis to stop running, lest the boy should attract attention, and Tom had barely time to swing himself on the train as it steamed out.

"A narrow shave!" muttered Tom, as he sank down in a corner seat. "If the Liburna sails to-night, the next train might miss her. Let's see, what is she? A cotton steamer, I think, one of the American line. Her directors know Dick, no doubt. Very likely he's saved her for them before now. He says the captain won't refuse to take me."

There were four other passengers in the carriage. Tom studied them attentively when they were not looking, but decided there was nothing to fear from any of them. The journey passed without any events, the first part of it very slow owing to the fog, and in due course Tom stepped out at Liverpool, and left the station as unobtrusively as possible.

"That fog may have been a blessing, after all," he thought. "It's quite possible that the Spider's men lost track of me, and didn't see me get away by train. That's a great score, but I mustn't count on it. Better go down to the docks and see the Liburna's skipper at once, and then keep out of the way till the minute she sails."

The fog was nearly as bad at Liverpool as it had been at Dunchester, a light westerly breeze having driven in a wet sea-mist that mingled with the smoke of the city.

It was very welcome to Tom, and he felt himself much more secure from being followed, unless he had been shadowed from the start, in which case the fog offered a fine chance for the shadowers to knock him on the head and drop him over a wharf into the Mersey tide that gurgled and swirled among the black piers.

Tom did not trouble the shipping office, but made inquiries of a dock policeman, who directed him to a quay some way farther along the water front. On arriving there the boy found himself on a large, wet wharf, covered with

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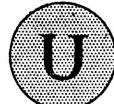
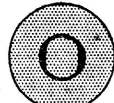
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packing-cases and bales and bollards and coils of rope, where two dim gas-lamps only seemed to make the murky fog more dense.

Against the side of the wharf lay two large steamers, one ahead of the other, and looking very alike in the gloom. Both had green-painted boats, grained ventilators, funnels much the same, as far as Tom could see, and their plates were red with rust, for they were high and light. Both were raising steam, but their decks seemed nearly deserted.

Tom was about to hail one of them, and ask if she were the Liburna, but on second thoughts he chose a safer way, and went over to a dock labourer who was crossing the head of the wharf.

"Which of those ships is the Liburna?" he said.

The docker took his pipe from his mouth, spat, and jerked his thumb towards the foremost of the two steamers. Wishing that everybody would give directions as briefly and quietly as the docker, Tom went to the vessel and stepped aboard by the gang-plank. He found himself on the after-deck, close by the galley, and the first person he met was the steward.

"Where's the captain?" asked Tom.

"He's where you won't see him," was the reply, "so sling your hook! We ain't no vacancies for cook's boys. The nerve of 'em! Walks about like a blessed Customs' clerk, an' wants to see the old man! Get off here before you're put!"

Tom slipped five shillings into the steward's hand. The dish-bearer gaped,

looked Tom up and down, and then touched his cap.

"I want to see the skipper," said Tom. "Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir," said the steward. "An' here he comes."

A short, stout man in merchant captain's uniform stepped out of the saloon, and Tom went up to him. Before the skipper had time to properly express his surprise at the liberty, Tom handed him Dick's note. The captain read it, and then looked at Tom carefully.

"All right," he said. "We sail at seven a.m., at the top of the flood. I'll put you into Queenstown. Will you stay aboard till seven or sleep ashore?"

"I'll be with you when you sail," said Tom.

And the short skipper nodded and went ashore.

Tom waited till he had gone, and then addressed the steward again.

"Do you see that?" he said, holding up a half-crown. "You do. But you didn't see me come aboard, if anyone asks you."

The steward smiled, took the coin, and stuck it in his eye.

"I can still see with the other eye," he said.

Tom gave him another half-crown. "You can't see through both."

"No," said the steward. "I'm coming aboard at seven," said Tom. "There'll be two more for you then, if you've told nobody."

(There's a thrill in every line of next week's grand long instalment of this powerful serial.)

RESULT OF THE GREAT "KENT" CRICKET COMPETITION.

In this competition one competitor sent in a correct solution of the picture. The first prize of £5 has therefore been awarded to:

N. WILLIS,
Whelford,
Leckhampton,

Cheltenham Spa. The second prize of £2 10s. has been awarded to the following competitor whose solution contained one error:

T. Sanderson, 63, Charles Lane, Milnrow, Rochdale.

The ten prizes of 5s. each have been awarded to the following ten competitors whose solutions contained two errors each:

W. Boyd Barrie, 19, Barrie Terrace, Ardrossan; Mrs. Kernick, 62, Ivor Road, Sparkhill, Birmingham; William Mitchell, 5, North Shore Street, Cambeltown, N.B.; Eleanor Stockdale, 2h, Devonshire Buildings, Barrow-in-Furness; Ernest Vincent, 56, Nichols Street, Leicester; Bernard Wallis, 14, Egerton Road, Bishopston, Bristol; Leslie Wallis, 14, Egerton Road, Bishopston, Bristol; Ralph Smith, 45, Brereton Road, Rugeley, Stafford; Winnie Cave, 18, Ollerton Road, Retford, Notts; E. Nelson, 29, Ley Street, Ilford.

SOLUTION.

Kent is among the old cricket counties. The first fully recorded match was the Kent versus England game nearly two centuries ago. The magnificent play of the team gained the championship four times during the nine years before the big war. Kent's present eleven contains numerous noted cricketers, such as Woolley, Hardinge, Freeman, etc.

GREAT COMPETITION FOR CRICKET LOVERS!
FIRST PRIZE £100. SECOND PRIZE £50. THIRD PRIZE £30.
AND 120 PRIZES OF £1 EACH.

CAN YOU FORECAST HOW THE COUNTIES ARE GOING TO FINISH UP?

WE offer the above splendid prizes to the reader who is clever enough to send us a list showing exactly in what order the seventeen first-class County Cricket Clubs will stand at the end of the season. For your guidance we publish the order in which each of the clubs stood last year, which was as follows:

- | | |
|---------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Yorkshire. | 9. Sussex. |
| 2. Nottinghamshire. | 10. Somerset. |
| 3. Surrey. | 11. Derbyshire. |
| 4. Kent. | 12. Warwickshire. |
| 5. Lancashire. | 13. Gloucestershire. |
| 6. Hampshire. | 14. Leicestershire. |
| 7. Middlesex. | 15. Northamptonshire. |
| 8. Essex. | 16. Glamorgan. |
| | 17. Worcestershire. |

What you have to do is to fill in on the coupon on this page your forecast of the order in which the counties will finish up. To the reader who does this correctly we shall award a prize of £100, and the other prizes in the order of the correctness of the forecasts.

In the case of ties any or all of the prizes will be added together and divided, but the full amount of £300 will be awarded.

All forecasts must be submitted on coupons taken from this journal, or from one of the other publications taking part in this contest.

You may send as many coupon forecasts as you like. They must all be addressed to "Cricket Competition," Gough House, Gough Square, E.C. 4, and must reach that address not later than Thursday, August 16th.

You may send in your forecasts at once if you like, but none will be considered after August 16th.

The decision of the Editor in all matters concerning this competition must be accepted as final and binding, and entries will only be admitted on that understanding.

Employees of the proprietors of this journal are not eligible to compete. This competition is run in conjunction with "Football Favourite," "Sports Budget," "Magnat," "Young Britain," "Champion," "Boys' Realm," "Boys' Friend," "Pluck," "Union Jack," "Rocket," "Nelson Lee Library," "Boys' Cinema," and "Popular," and readers of these journals are invited to compete.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 806.

I forecast that the Counties will finish the season in this order :

No. 1	
No. 2	
No. 3	
No. 4	
No. 5	
No. 6	
No. 7	
No. 8	
No. 9	
No. 10	
No. 11	
No. 12	
No. 13	
No. 14	
No. 15	
No. 16	
No. 17	

I enter "Cricket" Competition in accordance with the Rules as announced, and agree to abide by the published decision.

Name

Address

.....

Closing date, August 16th, 1923.

G.

"SPORTSMEN OF THE RIVER!"

(Continued from page 17.)

"Now! Jump on it! Pick it up! Up, up, up, you old cripples!"

And pick it up they did. It was magnificent. The entreaties and exhortations from the banks changed suddenly to a roar of praise and hope.

"Oh, well rowed, St. Jim's! You're doing it—you're doing it, you beggars!"

And they did it, sure enough. They ate up the patch of daylight between them and the Grammarians amid a perfect bedlam of sound. The Grammar School craft dropped behind, inch by inch. Then Gordon Gay spurted again in his turn.

But it was only a flash in the pan. They had shot their bolt. In the moment of trial Gordon Gay's two scrawls men failed him. Both were cracking up, and knew it. They were splashing wildly, and the boat was rocking. Its rhythm and swing was gone.

After that the race was between St. Jim's and the village—what was left of the race. Tom Merry's splendid effort was slacking a little now. But they still crept up, still gained on Grimes and his gallant men, amid indescribable excitement. They were level now. The boats swept on towards the finishing-post.

Passionately the village cox yelled to his men for a spurt again, but though they responded gallantly it was useless. Tom Merry and his men were invincible that day.

For, with twenty yards to go, there came a wild command from Curly Gibson.

"Now, you blessed bolsters! Give her ten—ten good 'uns! Up, up, up!"

And they gave them, though they were hardly conscious of the fact that they did—ten mighty strokes that sent the nose of the boat forging to the front. Then—

Bang! The race was over.

As if from afar, Tom Merry heard the frenzied roar from the banks. His heart thumped madly, and his ears sang. He turned in his slide and was just in time to see the St. Jim's colours being run up on the judge's boat.

He turned a grinning, perspiring face to his exhausted men.

"Well rowed, you chaps!" he panted hoarsely. "We've done it!"

And they had—by a clear length.

When the cheers for victors and vanquished had died down Tom Merry & Co. went in search of Grimes & Co. They had something to say to those youths, and they said it like men.

"We thought you chaps were at the bottom of that trouble with those hooligans," Tom Merry said, holding out his hand frankly to the flushing Grimes. "But we know differently now. And we're only sorry we ever doubted your sportsmanship, Grimey. Give us your flipper, old son!"

And Grimes gave it gladly enough.

"I heard about it all jest now," he said, "though I'd knowed what was going on afore, and we tried to stop it. We did think as you might 'ave known us better than that, Master Merry. Owever, it's all right now, ain't it?"

"Right as rain!" said Tom Merry heartily.

And it was. That same evening Gordon Gay & Co. and Tom Merry & Co. joined forces and purses—in a tremendous spread and celebration at the village tuckshop, and they invited Messrs. Grimes & Co. to it. And what a feed and celebration it was!

But before that came to pass the three friendly Co.'s joined forces in another little ceremony—immediately after the race, in fact. With grim looks on their faces, they trooped along the towing-path in search of a certain book-maker and a certain billiards-marker. They found them seated in gloomy confabulation on a gate at the back of the Green Man Inn.

Both Mr. Joseph Banks and his pal, Jim, were looking extremely dejected. St. Jim's had won after all, and it had been a very bad day financially for Mr. Banks especially. But their looks of dejection changed abruptly to terrified alarm as the crowd of determined juniors and village youths swept around them and hauled them yelling from the gate. And after they had been soundly bumped, and ducked in the nearest horse-pond, and had made a close acquaintance with a bucket of mixed tar and whitewash and a sack of feathers the avengers had provided themselves with, Mr. Banks and his pal, Jim, found good cause to regret that they had interfered in the affairs of the Sportsmen of the River.

THE END.

(Next week's yarn of the chums of St. Jim's will be absolutely great. Make a note of the title: "MANNERS HOLDS HIS OWN!" and be sure that you order your copy well in advance.)



Tuck Hampers and Money Prizes Awarded for Interesting Paragraphs.

(If You Do Not Win a Prize This Week—You May Next!)

All Efforts in this Competition should be Addressed to: The GEM LIBRARY, "My Readers' Own Corner," Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C.4.

THIS WINS OUR TUCK HAMPER. WOODEN HEADED.

Little Willie had taken up fretwork as a hobby, and his mother was showing a friend a cupboard Willie had just finished. "Don't you think it is lovely?" said Willie's mother. "Yes," answered her friend. "But where did Willie get the design?" "Ah!" replied the mother. "Willie made it out of his own head!"—A Tuck Hamper filled with delicious Tuck has been awarded to Edward Pearson, 5, Aven House, Offord Road, Barnsbury, N.

IMPOSSIBLE!

"You, Sambo—you have fed the pigs?" "Yes, massa; me fed 'um," replied Sambo. "Did you count them?" "Yes, massa; me count them all but one." "All but one?" "Yes, massa; all but one. Dere be one little speckle pig, he frisk about so much me couldn't count him!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to B. Cassels, 152, Duke Street, Glasgow, Scotland.

(Continued on next page.)

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GEM S., 1923.

"EASE OFF!"

The colonel of a battalion of soldiers on a route march was on horseback. As he was not an accomplished rider, and the animal was very spirited, it was as much as he could do to keep his seat. In attempting to keep watch on his movements, the soldiers were soon out of line, and the commanding officer gave the order, "Ease off!" "Naw," said the new Cockney recruit, "e ain't off yet, but e soon will be!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Wm. Tannahill, Overton Cottages, Greenock, Scotland.

ONE BETTER!

A professor went out hunting for fossils, and getting tired he sat down on a milestone. While he was sitting there a labourer joined him and they chatted cheerfully together for some time, when the professor said: "Isn't it wonderful how far these grasshoppers can jump? I once saw one jump twelve times its own length." "Oh, that's nothing!" replied the labourer. "I once saw a wasp lift a fourteen-stone man

three feet in the air!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to B. Archer, Wapenham, near Towcester, Hants.

ALL CASH!

A man at the seaside wanted to go for a row. He went up to an old boatman and asked if there was a boat he could hire. "You cannot go to-day, sir," said the boatman. "There's a big swell on." "A big swell?" "Yes; on the water." "Well, my money's as good as his, isn't it?" asked the visitor.—Half-a-crown has been awarded to P. Unwin, The Orchard, Battlefield Road, St. Albans, Herts.

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