FULL OF GOOD THINGS—LIKE A CHRISTMAS STOCKING!

The GEM

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The Fed-up Poet!

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ST. JIM'S HAS A LIMERICK COMPETITION TO DECIDE WHO—

JOURNALISTS

CHAPTER 1.
Something Like An Idea!

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

"Merry!"

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

"Merry!"

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

He started and looked up.

"Adsum!" he exclaimed hastily.

The class giggled.

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

Mr. Linton smiled grimly.

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

Tom Merry turned red.

"Yes, sir," he said meekly.

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

"Oh, no, sir!"

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

Tom's colour deepened.

"No, sir."

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

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

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

"My blotting-paper, sir?"

"Yes, your blotting-paper—and at once!"

Tom Merry rose reluctantly.

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

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

Tom Merry had no choice but to obey.

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

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

"Certainly, sir."

Tom Merry held up the blotting-paper.

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

"TOM MERRY'S WEEKLY."

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

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

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

"I—I wrote them, sir——"

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

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

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

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

There was a buzz in the Shell.

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

And Manners nodded assent. Mr. Linton looked grim.

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

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

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

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry, rather glad to escape so cheaply. And he went back to his desk.

The lesson proceeded, Mr. Linton keeping a sharp eye

—SHALL BE EDITOR OF TOM MERRY'S NEW WEEKLY PAPER!

OF ST. JIM'S!

BY

MARTIN CLIFFORD.

upon Tom. But the hero of the Shell was not found wanting again.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Tom Merry looked thoughtful.

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

"We'll call them to the meeting after dinner," said Manners. "Likely Figgins will want to be editor."

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

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

"Has he?" said Merry.

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

"The paper is to be called 'Tom Merry's Weekly,' and so I simply must edit it."

"I don't see it."

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

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

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

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

"Right you are!"

And when the midday meal of the juniors had been eaten the meeting in the study came about.

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

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

Tom Merry looked up.

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

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

For this is how the imposition looked:

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

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

Tom laughed.

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

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

"Haven't you seen Manners?"

Who invented this paper?
"I," said Tom Merry.
"I'm proud of it, very!
I invented this paper!"

Who shall be Editor?
"I," answered all the boys.
"I shall be the 'big noise'!
I shall be Editor!"

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

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

"The meeting! What meeting?"

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

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

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

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

"Then he'll get sat on! Of course——"

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

Tom Merry laughed.

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

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

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

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

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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

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

CHAPTER 2.
The Meeting!

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

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

Monty Lowther shook his head.

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

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn exchanged glances.

"What's the meeting about?" asked Figgins guardedly.

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

Figgins slapped him on the shoulder.

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

"Don't you? I rather think——"

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

"If you think we want——"

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

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

"Look here, Lowther——" began Figgins indignantly.

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

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

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

"Bosh!" said Monty Lowther.

"Eh—what's that?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Come along, then, my children."

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

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

"Certainly!" said Figgins. "I understand that I am wanted to edit the newspaper——"

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

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

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

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

"Are you addwessin' me, Tom Mewwy?"

"I'm addressing everybody! Order!"

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

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

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

"Order!"

"Shut up!"

"Cut the cackle!"

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

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

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

"Choke him!"

"Suffocate him!"

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

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy walked towards the door.

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

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

"Are you going to be quiet?"

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

"Herries, old man, bring that red ink over here!"

Gentlemen, I am sorry our pet lunatic is wasting time, but I'll soon stop him."

"The sooner the better," said Figgins.

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

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

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

"Take care! Now, shut up!"

"I wefuse! I——"

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

"Right-ho!" said Herries.

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

A terrific yell burst from Arthur Augustus, and everybody turned towards him. His waistcoat was streaming with red ink! Herries had half-emptied the bottle over him!

CHAPTER 3.
A Vexed Question.

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

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

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

"What do you mean?"

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

"Bosh! Rot! The Shell takes precedence of the Lower Forms, I suppose?"

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

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

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

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

"Good enough!" said Blake.

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

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

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

"Yaas, wathah!"

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

"Or trout?" asked Figgins, with interest.

"Order!"

"Yaas, wathah! Ordah, deah boys!"

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

"Hear, hear!"

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

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

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

"Hear, hear!"

"After that appointment is made, sub-editors and so on can be appointed."

"Yaas, wathah!"

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

Swish!

A terrific yell broke from Arthur Augustus.

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

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

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

Herries stared at him indignantly.

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

"I told you! I——"

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

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

"How was I to know that?"

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

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

"Certainly!"

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

"Oh, my waistcoat!"

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

The swell of St. Jim's smiled again.

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

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

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

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

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

"I didn't mean that. I meant——"

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

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

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

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

"Me!" said Herries.

"You? Why, you——"

Tom Merry thumped upon the table.

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

"Oh, rats! Look here——"

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

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

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

"Whom would you vote for?"

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

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

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

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

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

There was a buzz of assent.

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

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

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

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

"The 'Weekly' is named after me——"

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

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

"Enough, too!" remarked Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

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

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

"Hear, hear! Good old Thomas Merry, Esq.! Go hon!"

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

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

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

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

"Nobody."

"Who says Monty Lowther?"

"Nobody!"

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

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

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

"Who says Manners?"

"Nobody!" came the general verdict.

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

Manners stepped down.

And one after another they all got up and said their piece, but the result was always the same. Nobody voted for anyone else.

At last only D'Arcy and Blake remained to be heard.

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

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

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

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

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

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"So you will have to choose me, or else make up your minds to bust the whole concern. I don't care much

which you do. I'm the man, and if you lose your chance of securing me, I'm sorry for you."

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

"Nobody," was the unhesitating reply.

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

"Yaas, wathah!"

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

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

"Cut it short!"

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

"Order! Order!"

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

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

"I insist upon explainin' my views at length," said D'Arcy. "This is an important mattah, and ought to be gone into. If I am willin' to heah you fellows talkin' nonsense, I should think you could make it a point to hear me talkin' sense."

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

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

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

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

"Hear, hear!"

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

"Who says——"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Blake did not answer. He had already gone.

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

But Herries had gone, too!

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

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

And D'Arcy, too, left the study.

The first meeting was at an end without the important question being settled as to who was to be editor of the new paper.

CHAPTER 4.

Augustus Solves the Difficulty!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Tom Merry turned red.

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

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

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

Mellish looked rather uneasy.

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

"You won't have any choice in the matter," said Tom

(*Continued on page 8.*)

Merry grimly. "You are going to quarrel with me here, on the spot, unless you withdraw what you have just said."

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

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

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

"Then take off your jacket, Mellish!"

Tom Merry pushed back his cuffs in a businesslike way. Mellish receded a step.

"Look here, Tom Merry——"

"Put up your hands!"

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

The junior gave a howl and fell on his back.

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

"Get up!" said Tom Merry contemptuously.

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

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

"You beast! You've sprained my——"

Tom Merry walked away, whistling.

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

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

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

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

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

Mellish turned a savage look upon the latter.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mellish's eyes glittered.

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

"Hallo, Mellish! I say, Mellish!"

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

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

Mellish scowled amiably.

"I'll make you sorrier before I'm done with you!" he

replied; and he turned and walked away with a scowling brow.

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

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

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

Tom Merry nodded.

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

"I say, deah boys!"

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

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

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

"Get it off your shirtfront then!"

"You have heard, I presume, of the limerick competitions which have been goin' on for a long time in the vawious papahs?"

"Yes, I know what a limerick is."

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

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

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

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

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

The Terrible Three looked at one another.

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

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

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

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

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

"Then I will go and pwopose the plan to Figgins."

And D'Arcy made his way to the New House.

Figgins & Co. were standing by the steps, talking together, when the swell of the School House came up.

"Figgins, I want to pwopose to you——"

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

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

"Figgins, are you off your wockah?"

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

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

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

D'Arcy explained.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"It's settled, then?"

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

CHAPTER 5.

Figgins & Co. at Work!

"HALLO, Mellish! What's that?"

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

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

Mellish grinned.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Miss Priscilla caught sight of Tom Merry and made a dash for him at once. Before he knew what was happening Tom was clasped in a pair of affectionate arms, and hugged, much to the amusement of his friends!

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

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

Gore laughed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

It was agreed that the committee should consist of a dozen members, chosen in equal numbers from both Forms and both Houses. Many names were submitted, each aspirant putting in those of his personal friends, with a pardonable desire to have the committee favourable to himself, but not one was passed without a majority of

votes being recorded for him. By this process the dozen committeemen were at last selected, and Pratt of the New House was made chairman and allotted a casting vote.

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

"Yaas, wathah!"

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

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

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

The rest of the candidates agreed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Monteith looked and listened in blank amazement.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"But I want my tea," went on the prefect. "I brought

(*Continued on page* 12.)

YOU'LL FIND IT IN—

Address all letters : The Editor, The GEM, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4.

HALLO, chums! It's getting near Christmas, but amidst the good things on show at this season of the year the good old GEM is not overlooked. It's gaining in popularity with every passing week. Certainly a Christmas without your weekly copy of the GEM is not to be thought of. For instance, in next week's grand number you will find a real best-seller by popular Martin Clifford. Make a note of this title :

"TOM MERRY—EDITOR ! "

and then look forward to Monday of next week, and another cheery meeting with Tom Merry & Co. The wait will be well worth while. Owen Conquest is again "on the programme "—this time with a delightful story of Jimmy Silver & Co. of Rookwood, entitled

"SILVER'S SPOOK SUCCEEDS."

And then here's the really big news of the week! In next week's number you will meet three new pals : Percy Vere, the millionaire, known as Dumps ; "Sprouts" Martin, ex-middleweight champion of England ; and "Skid" Collins, the boy who can turn his hand to any old thing. Just wait till next Wednesday, and then meet

THE PUNCHER PALS !

They're all knock-outs, every one of them ! Potts, the Office Boy, refuses to be squeezed out of next week's bumper issue, so you'll find him there as large as life and twice as funny. Now let's see what tit-bits we have in the notebook.

"LUCKY BOY ! "

Is he lucky ? Well, just listen to this. He's only a youngster, still at school swotting all those beastly subjects that you and I have groaned at, but in six months this lucky boy has "picked up" two consolation prizes, each of a hundred pounds value, in the two latest Irish sweepstakes. What do you think of that ? His nom de plume in both cases has been "Lucky Boy." When the terrific odds against anyone drawing a prize in the mammoth Irish sweepstake are taken into account, the luck of this Middlesex boy is almost phenomenal, for he has done the trick twice in succession. If this is going to become a habit, Francis Macmillan, of Hayes, Middlesex, bids fair to join the ranks of the glorious company of millionaires before he is half-way through life.

WOULD YOU BELIEVE IT ?

It was Jackie, the mongrel dog of a London man, that was the indirect cause of this true story, for Jackie was playing high jinks with a tennis ball one day and inadvertently tossed it up into the branches of an apple-tree. There the tennis ball, pierced in places by Jackie's sharp teeth, remained for the whole of the summer. The next time that tennis ball was seen by human eyes there was a full-grown apple in it! Phew! you may ejaculate. But it's true, nevertheless, and the explanation is quite simple. The apple "sucker" from a particularly inquisitive branch of the tree must have nosed its way through one of the holes in the tennis ball made by Jackie's sharp teeth, and blossomed in due course. Then along came the apple, growing and growing until such time as it grew tired of its cramped quarters within the tennis ball, whereupon it promptly burst and fell to the ground.

HIGH JUMP PHOTOGRAPHY.

The plane was travelling at eleven thousand five hundred feet above the ground. In the rear cockpit was one of those intrepid photographers who supply us daily with picture thrills. At a signal from the pilot the "man in the back seat" took a leap into space. No, he wasn't committing suicide, for there was a parachute strapped to his back. And he didn't shut his eyes and hope for the best. Oh, dear, no ! This thrill merchant calmly took photographs as he whizzed through space. It was twenty-seven minutes before he touched terra firma, and during that time he had "snapped" eight pictures. We hope, after all that trouble and risk, that the photographic merchant responsible for developing and printing the negatives didn't make a hash of the job !

IT'S TRUE !

It was a cold day in November—the sort of day when everyone grouses and starts to wish that summer and a glorious sun could jump forward a few months. True there was a "spot" of sun somewhere in the heavens, but it seemed hardly warm enough to melt a handful of snow. Yet the strange thing about this "spot" of sun was that it succeeded in setting fire to a house. How ? You might well ask the question. So did I. But here's the fact of the matter. In a certain house there was a magnifying shaving mirror and the sun's rays streaming through the window were attracted and concentrated thereby on to the hanging curtains. The curtains smouldered and fell to the floor, and then the skirting boards joined in the blaze. We are able to report that firemen quickly put out the blaze that ensued, and really satisfied themselves that the fire had started in the way described above. So much for the sun, then, in November.

THE LIMIT !

The scene is Vienna. On board a bus is a certain expert in the matter of pickpockets. What he doesn't know about those gentry and their wiles is hardly worth knowing. Suddenly the bus jolted and a man fell at the feet of the expert. Followed the good turn for the day, for the expert helped the fallen man to his feet and assisted him off the bus. The point of the story is reached when the pickpocket expert felt in his pocket. His wallet, containing an extremely useful sum of money, was missing. Moral—even experts live and learn.

HEARD THIS ONE ?

Jimmy Smith was not at all in love with school, so that when a friend came along and asked him to spend a day fishing with him, he was only too keen.

For some time he was rather worried as to just what he was going to do about school. Playing truant might be rather painful—afterwards ! At last his mind was made up. On the morning in question he went to the phone and rang up the master at his school.

"Hallo ! " said the master.

A very hoarse voice came from the other end : "Jimmy Smith can't come to school to-day, he's got a very bad cold ! "

"Who is that speaking ? " asked the master.

And the hoarse voice at the other end answered : "My father ! "

"STAND AND DELIVER ! "

A certain Chicago millionaire was holding a party. Society leaders of both sexes were present, of course. Costly jewellery gleamed and scintillated in the blaze of light. Then the unexpected happened. Through the doors of the dance-room a number of up-to-date bandits appeared, armed with sawn-off shot guns. Like the highwaymen of old, they stalked round the room tearing necklaces, rings, and brooches from the lady guests. Then, when the loot had been gathered in, the guests were ordered to lie on the floor and not to attempt any tricks. But one trick was played at the right moment—a real trump of a trick, nothing less than the pressing of a secret alarm bell which was connected with the nearest police station. Just as the robbers were departing from the house the police in fast motor-cars were arriving. That spoiled the whole show. The bandits had had practically all their work for nothing, for the major portion of the jewellery was recovered and handed back to its outraged owners.

HIS BIG THRILL !

The friends of a certain deck-hand on the 43-ton yacht Sus are congratulating him on his marvellous escape from a watery grave. Certainly his story is one of the strangest that have ever "come from the sea." The yacht Sus was in difficulties in a raging storm in the vicinity of Plymouth. Her rigging was carried away, her cabin was flooded. Then a huge wave swept the deck-hand clean over the side. His companions jumped for a life-belt, but before it could be thrown, back came the deck-hand, caught up in the embrace of another wave, which swept him over the gunwale. He clung on for dear life and now lives to tell the tale of his greatest thrill.

YOUR EDITOR.

JOURNALISTS OF ST. JIM'S!

(*Continued from page 10.*)

this cane along to remind you that you are a fag, and not yet monarch of all you survey. Do you want me to use it?"

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

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

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

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

The prefect looked round the table.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"You're burning that toast!"

A fearful smell of burning was spreading through the study.

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

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

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

And he cleared out of the study.

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

The prefect laughed.

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

Monteith picked up the teapot and began to pour.

A clear stream of steaming water issued from the spout.

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

Monteith stared at the hot water that filled the teacup he had been pouring into.

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

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

CHAPTER 6.
A Visitor for Tom Merry!

"TOMMY, my darling Tommy!"

Tom Merry gave a jump.

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

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

"My darling Tommy!"

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

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

"My sweetest boy! What is the matter?"

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

"You are weakly."

"Weakly!"

"Yes. Your telegram——"

"What telegram?"

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

Tom Merry stared at the telegram.

He could not help grinning at what he saw there.

"Tom Merry's Weakly."

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

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

"It was a joke."

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

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

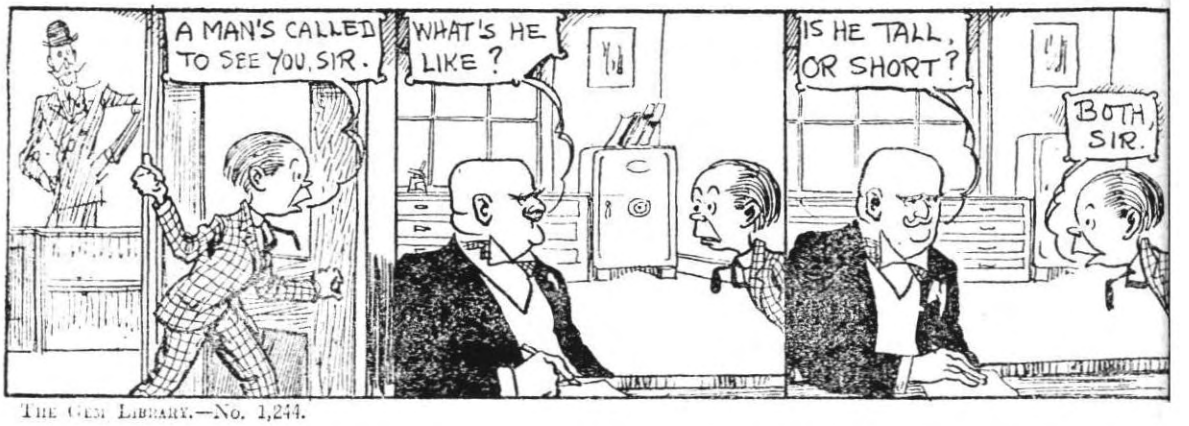
"This wire is a silly joke, nurse."

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

"Nothing of the kind. I——"

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

Potts, the Office-Boy!



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

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

Tom Merry turned crimson.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Tom Merry was glad enough to assent.

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

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

"Get out of the way!" exclaimed Gore. "We're going to see the fun!"

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

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

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

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

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

"You must go to bed now, Tommy!"

"Go to bed! It's not dark yet! I——"

"And I will send for a doctor."

"A doctor! I'm not ill! I——"

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

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

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

"If you go to bed quietly and get a nice sleep it may not be necessary for me to send for a doctor, or to stay all night," said Miss Priscilla.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Blessed if I know!"

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

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

"It was some beastly practical joker, sir!"

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

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

"Exactly, my dear madam! He——"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Housemaster consulted his watch.

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

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

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

Miss Fawcett kissed him on both cheeks.

The Long and Short of It!

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

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

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

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

Tom Merry sat up in bed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Here, what are you going to do?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Tom Merry smiled and shook his head.

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

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

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

Gore and Mellish charged together, urged on by the cr knocking him down, and almost immediately Mel

CHAPTER 7.
A Lesson for Two!

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

"Go it, Gore!" said Mellish.

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

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

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

"Mellish wishes it were," said Blake, who had arrived on the spot at the scent of a row. "He doesn't care whether

it's a walking match or a running match; he'd like either better than a slogging match, wouldn't you, Mellish?"

"You shut up!" growled Mellish.

"Certainly! But don't keep us waiting all night, old chap!"

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

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

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

"You come on then!" said Gore.

owd. Next moment, Tom's right caught Gore on the nose, clip on the jaw which sent him sprawling over Gore!

"I'm coming! Rush the beast!"

And, having screwed up their courage to the sticking-point, the two rushed at Tom Merry.

Tom met them with perfect coolness.

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

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

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

"Time!" said Lowther.

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

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

"Yaas, wathah! Buck up, deah boys! Don't be fwightened!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Time!" said Monty Lowther sententiously.

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

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

Tom Merry took his jacket from Lowther.

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

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

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

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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

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

Arthur Augustus wriggled with annoyance.

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

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

"I was thinking, Blake. An ideah cwossed my mind for a limewick——"

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

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

"Wow! What do you mean by wow?"

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

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

"Yaas, wathah! I haven't found a subject. How do you think this sounds—something in this stylo, deah boys?"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy contracted his brows thoughtfully:

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Oh, weally, Blake, you know——"

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

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

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

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

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

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

The next morning there were at least nine youths at St. Jim's who did not give their lessons the attention that the masters thought right and proper. Fatty Wynn had sat up half the night, thinking out a suitable limerick. In the Fourth Form, Blake, being asked suddenly by Mr. Lathom what was the capital of Italy, recklessly replied "Limerick," much to the amazement of the Form master. Fatty Wynn merely went to sleep!

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

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

Figgins stood up and spoke:

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

"Figgins!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"You first, Figgins!"

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

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

CHAPTER 8.
The New Editor.

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

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

"Jolly good!" said Pratt.

"Rather a weak ending," Walsh remarked.

Figgins gracefully retired.

"Next man in!" said Pratt.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Right-ho!" said Herries, diving into one pocket and then into another, and finally producing a crumpled and very soiled piece of paper, scribbled over in pencil.

He peered into the scrawlings and scratchings as he stood up before the judges, but apparently the limerick was not to be easily disentangled.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Herries went ahead:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"If you want a thick ear, Walsh——"

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

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

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

(Continued on the next page.)

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

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

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

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

"There's a pun there," Arthur Augustus explained. "He left them more dismal than mewwy, and more dismal than Tom Mewwy. See?"

French scratched his head.

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

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

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

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

"Then they were not merry at all."

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

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

"If you are goin' to be hyperewitical——"

"Who are you calling a hypocrite?"

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

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

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

"I don't want to see it."

"But, you see, deah boy——"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I repeat that a Scottish head——"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Yes, I did," said Manners.

"Is it comic or serious?"

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

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

"It is pleasant to sit under the trees
With another chap's girl on your knee——"

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I didn't say I could. I——"

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

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

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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

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

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

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

Fatty Wynn started up indignantly.

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

"Silence!"

"Order!"

"Shut up!"

Blake was allowed to continue reading out his limerick

(*Continued at foot of page* 26.)

EASTWOOD SHIELD LEAGUE

Below are the results of this week's matches and the League table to date.

RESULTS.

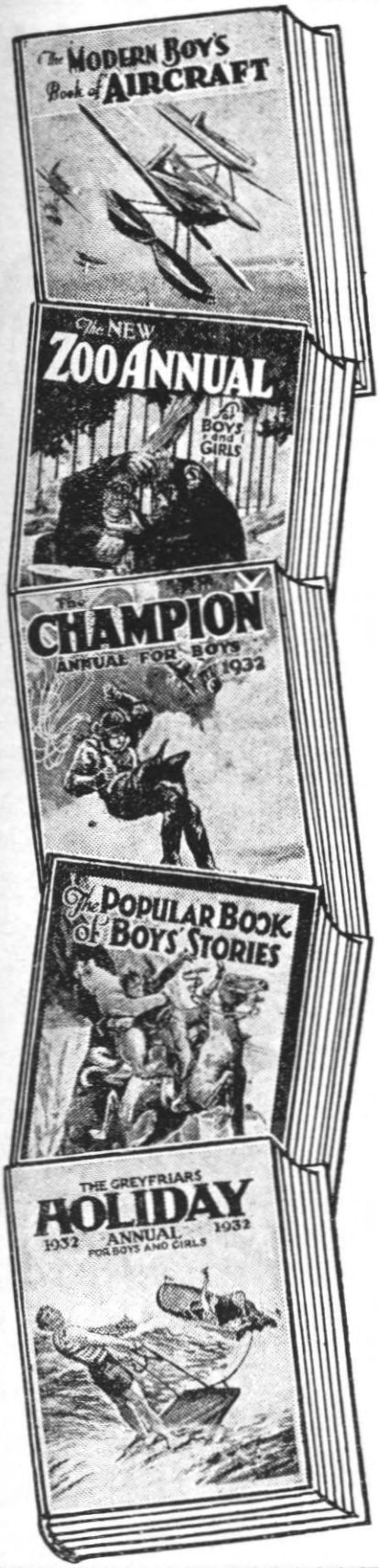
BAGSHOT	0	ST. JIM'S	9
		Talbot, Merry (4), Figgins (2), Blake, D'Arcy.	
GREYFRIARS	3	RYLCOMBE GRAM. SCH.	0
Wharton (3).			
HIGHCLIFFE	4	ABBOTSFORD	1
Courtenay (2), De Courcy, Jones, Minor.		Fane.	
REDCLYFFE	3	ROOKWOOD	4
Stoker, Mills, Judd.		Grace, Dodd (2), Lovell.	
ST. FRANK'S	5	CLAREMONT	0
Pitt, Christine, McClure, Handforth (penalty), Tregellis-West.			
ST. JUDE'S	0	BANNINGTON GRAMMAR SCHOOL	0

LEADING GOAL SCORERS.

Merry ..	10
Wharton ..	10
Courtenay ..	8
Gay	6
Dodd	6
Nipper	5
Baxter	5
Fane	5

LEAGUE TABLE TO DATE.

	P.	W.	D.	L.	Goals F.	Goals A.	Pts.
St. Frank's ..	5	4	1	0	18	3	9
St. Jim's ..	6	4	1	1	24	8	9
Highcliffe ..	5	4	0	1	16	8	8
Rylcombe ..	6	4	0	2	12	9	8
Rookwood ..	6	4	0	2	15	15	8
Greyfriars ..	5	3	0	2	17	7	6
Bannington ..	6	1	2	3	5	10	4
St. Jude's ..	5	1	2	2	4	10	4
Redclyffe ..	5	1	1	3	7	11	3
Bagshot ..	5	1	1	3	7	19	3
Claremont ..	6	0	2	4	8	17	2
Abbotsford ..	6	0	2	4	7	23	2



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MUFFIN FINDS THE WAY!

By OWEN CONQUEST.

CHAPTER 1.
High Words!

"RIPPING!"

"What-ho!"

"Gentlemen, chaps, and fellows!" said Jimmy Silver. "This looks something like Christmas."

Jimmy Silver, Newcome, Lovell and Raby were looking out of the window of the breakfast-room at the Priory, Jimmy Silver's home, where they were spending their holiday.

The grounds of the Priory were covered by a thick mantle of snow on which the wintry sun shone with dazzling effect. To the Rookwood juniors it was a very pleasing spectacle.

"Just what the doctor ordered," grinned Lovell. "I vote we get out of doors and do a bit of snowballing. Got a supply of skis and bob-sleighs in the house, Jimmy?"

"If we haven't, I'll do my best to rake out some substitutes, old bean," replied the leader of the Fistical Four. "By the way, did you fellows hear any more of the ghost last night?"

Lovell and Newcome and Raby shook their heads.

"Not a sound," said Lovell. "It's my belief that that old codger, Dowling, must have been dreaming."

"Not so sure about that," remarked Newcome thoughtfully. "We heard those weird rappings ourselves in the library, remember."

"And there's that chessboard that vanished," added Raby. "How the thump could it have gone into thin air, as it did, unless there were spooks about?"

"Give it up! Anyway, none of us actually saw a ghost, whereas Dowling said the blessed thing stood at his bedside—a skeleton with a long cloak on."

"Dowling's potty!" snorted Lovell. "Let's forget him, and get out into the open air."

Mr. Dowling, the sour-tempered visitor who had been forced by the snowstorm to remain at the Priory overnight, was not popular with the Rookwood juniors. It was doubtful, indeed, whether a man with Mr. Dowling's peculiar temper could be popular with anybody.

The juniors had not got up that morning, however, with the intention of worrying their heads about Dowling. They dismissed him from their minds, and made a move for the door.

They were reminded of him again, however, within a very short space of time. As they went out into the hall they couldn't help hearing the sound of angry voices raised in argument from the direction of the library.

One voice they knew to be that of Mr. Silver, Jimmy's father, and in the harsh tones of the other they recognised Dowling.

"Sounds like trouble," remarked Jimmy Silver, with a wry grin. "Listen!"

The door of the library was half-open, and the juniors could hear the two men quite clearly.

"You agree, my dear Mr. Silver, that I am quite within my rights in claiming possession of this house on Christmas Day?" they heard Mr. Dowling say.

"Legally, you are quite entitled to do so," was Mr. Silver's reply. "Morally, you have no such right. I took over the lease of this house originally on the distinct understanding that I should have the option of renewing it if I wished."

"Circumstances, my dear Mr. Silver, have altered, and——"

"Precisely," said Mr. Silver, with a trace of bitterness in his voice. "The circumstances have altered to the extent that I have improved and modernised the Priory out of all recognition."

"I can only say, my dear sir, that I wish to take possession of the property myself, with a view of converting it into my own residence."

"I cannot blame you for that," said Mr. Silver. "The desire to obtain something for nothing is not uncommon."

"Mr. Silver!"

"Sir!"

"All serene, you chaps! We can go on. I don't think they'll come to blows," said Jimmy Silver.

Lovell and Newcome and Raby nodded, and followed their leader out of the front door.

"Seems to me old Dowling's a nice kind of chap not to know," remarked Raby. "Nothing to do with us, of course. But does this really mean that if Dowling feels like it, he can have you slung out on Christmas Day?"

"Just that, my pippin," answered Jimmy Silver. "And all because we've looked after the house so well. It has always been an understood thing that we could live here

When there's piles of grub at Christmas to be eaten,
Enough to keep a chap at work all day,
Then there's just one chap who never will be beaten,
For Tubby Muffin's sure to find a way!

as long as we liked. But now, dear old Dowling has decided that this place'll just suit him."

"'Outlook uncertain,' as they say in the weather reports," said Lovell, with a faint smile. "Well, if you want Dowling chucked out on his neck, here's one who'll help!"

"Same here!"

"Let's hope there'll be no trouble of that kind," said Jimmy Silver. "Perhaps something'll crop up to put things right before Christmas Day. And now for a few manœuvres in the snow."

"What-ho! Coming over!" yelled Lovell, hastily gathering up a handful of snow and hurling it at Raby.

In a few moments a wild and whirling, but thoroughly enjoyable, snowfight was in progress.

For quite half an hour the juniors put heart and soul into the battle. At the end of that time they were hardly distinguishable from the snowclad landscape.

In the excitement of the fight they did not notice Mr. Silver's chauffeur bring out the big car from the garage and drive it to the front of the house. Nor did they observe Mr. Silver and Mr. Dowling emerge from the house and go down the steps to the car.

The first indication they had of that happening, in fact, was when a snowball, flung with all the force of Raby's strong right arm, missed Lovell, for whom it had been intended, and hit Mr. Dowling full in the face.

Smack!

"Whoooosh!" yelled Mr. Dowling.

Then he slipped on the bottom step, and collapsed into the snow with another and equally fiendish howl.

"Shot, sir!" said Newcome.

"Ha, ha!"

"Whooosh! Groooogh!" gasped Mr. Dowling, staggering to his feet and glaring almost wolfishly at the juniors. "You young villains, I'll—— Whoooosh!"

"My fault, sir! Sorry!" said Raby.

"Quite unintentional!" gasped Jimmy Silver. "We didn't even see you there, pater."

"I imagine not," said Mr. Silver, whose twinkling eyes rather belied the somewhat grim set of his lips. "Mr. Dowling, we are not parting on the best of terms, but I assure you that I regret this accident, and trust you are not hurt."

"How do you think I could avoid being hurt?" roared Mr. Dowling, furiously gouging snow out of his eyes. "If I needed anything to decide me over that lease, the treatment I have received from your son and his ruffianly friends would do it. Let me get into that car."

"Really, my dear sir——"

"Unless you would like me to tramp down to the station on foot?" sneered Mr. Dowling. "If that is the extent of your hospitality, I will do so."

Mr. Silver compressed his lips.

"I cannot think that I have given you any reason for that remark, sir. Williams, you may stay here. I will drive Mr. Dowling to the station myself."

"Very well, sir," said the chauffeur.

Mr. Silver got into the driver's seat. Mr. Dowling sat down in the back of the car.

A few seconds later the car was running smoothly over the hard snow down to the gates.

"Looks as if your pater's failed," Lovell remarked to Jimmy Silver, as they gazed after the retreating vehicle.

The leader of the Fistical Four shrugged.

"Looks like it, certainly. I'm jolly glad that old bounder's gone, anyway. Good riddance!"

In which phrase Jimmy Silver epitomised the general feeling on the subject of Mr. Dowling.

CHAPTER 2.
Tubby Muffin Again!

"BEASTS!"

Thus Tubby Muffin of the Rookwood Fourth. The fattest junior at Rookwood was not feeling in the best of tempers.

That was hardly to be wondered at. He was sitting on a leather suitcase in a snow-clad country lane, from which no sign of human habitation could be seen. Tubby wouldn't have objected to that so much if there had been some sign of human food. But there was none.

"Beasts!" repeated Tubby venomously.

He was referring to Jimmy Silver and his chums.

Two days before, on breaking-up day at Rookwood, the Fistical Four had induced him to get on a London-bound train under the impression that he was going to Silver's home.

Tubby Muffin hadn't forgiven the Fistical Four for that little jape. As a result of it, he had been compelled to go to his own home instead of the Priory.

Now he was near the Priory—within a mile of it, as a matter of fact. He had stayed at home just long enough to raise the requisite fare from his paternal relative. He had started out soon after breaktast that morning, but now he didn't feel very happy about things. So far, there was nothing to show that he was anywhere near the Priory, and Tubby was tired, and, above all, hungry.

But the darkest hour is proverbially before the dawn, and even as the fat junior gloomily contemplated a cold and clammy end in a snowdrift, a sound smote his ears which brought new life to him.

It was the sound of a motor-horn in the distance.

Tubby Muffin stood up and looked.

"Oh, good!" he ejaculated aloud.

Luck was indeed with him. For the car that was approaching was, as Tubby recognised at a glance, one belonging to Jimmy Silver's father.

Tubby's brain worked quickly. The first possibility that occurred to him was that some of the Fistical Four might be in it. In that case, as Tubby frankly permitted himself to realise, the chances were that he would get a lift back to the station, but certainly not to the Priory.

Even if it were only Mr. Silver, the beasts might have warned him, with the result that the same thing would happen.

Fortunately inspiration came to the fat junior. He kicked over his suitcase into the snow. Then, just before Mr. Silver's car rounded the bend of the lane and came into sight, he flung himself down on the snowy road, right in the path of the oncoming vehicle.

Finally, Tubby emitted a bellow like the bellow of an agonised bull.

"Help! Save me! Help!"

He heard the car drawing nearer, running lightly over the powdered snow.

"Help!" roared Tubby Muffin. "Save me!"

There was a sudden sound of grinding brakes. The car came to a dead stop. One of the doors flew open, and the driver of the car stepped out.

"My dear boy! What has happened?"

Tubby Muffin recognised the voice of Mr. Silver. Quickly suppressing the grin which instinctively came to his fat face, he uttered a heartrending groan.

"Help me, sir! I—I've sprained my ankle and fractured my spine!"

"Goodness gracious! Surely, my dear boy, I recognise you! You are a schoolfellow of my son's—Silver?"

"Muffin's my name, sir. I was just on my way to your house when it happened. I sort of slipped up on the road, you see, sir, and—— Ow-ow! Whoooooh!" finished up Tubby, doing his best to express the last degree of agony.

"Dear me! I must get you into the car at once, and run you back to the house!" exclaimed Mr. Silver. "You are sure you are really injured?"

"Ow! Fearfully injured, sir! It feels as if I've broken my neck, and——"

"But I thought you said it was your ankle and your spine, just now."

"So it is, Mr. Silver, and my neck as well. Shouldn't be surprised if I haven't dislocated my collar-bone as well. Ow-wow-ow! Whoooooh!"

"Goodness gracious me! Do you think you can stand?"

"I'll try, sir. Oh, thank you!" gasped Tubby, accepting Mr. Silver's proffered assistance and helping himself up. "I—I dunno whether I can get to the car. Oooooh!"

"I must certainly drive you back to the house and summon a doctor!" said Mr. Silver. "You will not mind, Mr. Dowling?"

Mr. Dowling glared at the fat newcomer.

"I cannot say that I welcome the interruption, sir! I want to catch that train without fail. It will snow before the day is over, and I may not be able to catch another; but I am in your hands."

"Very well," said Mr. Silver curtly. Jimmy Silver's father was a patient man, but he was getting a little tired of Dowling.

Groaning and moaning in a really alarming fashion, Tubby Muffin allowed himself to be helped into the back of the car, where he collapsed into the seat with a final groan that would have melted a heart of stone.

"I—I say, Mr. Silver, you'll be quick, won't you?" he said, in a faint whisper. "I feel as if I might die any minute!"

"Bless my soul!"

Mr. Silver, who did not know Tubby Muffin very well, got back into the driver's seat looking quite scared. He hurriedly reversed, and started back for the Priory at top speed.

And thus it came about that the Fistical Four, having changed their clothes after the snow-fight trooped downstairs into the hall to find Tubby Muffin staggering in the door on the arm of a freely perspiring Mr. Silver.

"Tubby!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver. "Well, my hat!"

"So the fat cormorant has found us, after all!" grinned Lovell. "What's the matter, Tubby?"

Tubby Muffin responded with a deep, deep groan.

"I say, you fellows, I believe I'm dying! Knowing how disappointed you'd be if I didn't turn up for Christmas——"

"Wha-a-at!"

"I came through the blinding snow to find you," went on Tubby, discreetly ignoring the juniors' derisive yell. "I suppose I must have got tired and exhausted, for I collapsed in the lane and seriously injured myself. I've dislocated my collar-bone and broken my neck and sprained my ankle and fractured my spine and——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, you chaps! I might have perished out there in the snow if Mr. Silver hadn't come along."

"Bit of bad luck for us!" commented Jimmy Silver. "Why didn't you run him over, pater?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Really, Jimmy, I should hardly have thought Muffin's injuries a matter for laughter!" remonstrated Mr. Silver. "I propose to telephone for a doctor at once."

"I'll show you a quicker way of putting Tubby right, pater!" grinned Jimmy Silver. "Feel like a snack, Tubby?"

Tubby Muffin's lethargic attitude seemed to disappear suddenly. He abandoned Mr. Silver, who had been supporting him, and stood upright without any difficulty, while his eyes became wonderfully bright.

"I say, Silver, old chap, that's not a bad idea!" he exclaimed. "Where do I go?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Told you so, pater!" grinned Jimmy Silver.

Mr. Silver gazed at Tubby Muffin.

"Muffin! Boy! Can it be possible that you were deceiving me? You told me you had had an accident and were injured."

"So I am, sir—fearfully injured!" said Tubby Muffin cheerfully. "Still, it's wonderful what a snack will do, even in the most serious accidents. Possibly after I've had something to eat, I shall feel all right again!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Dowling appeared in the doorway at that moment. Evidently it had began to snow again, for his shoulders were covered with snowflakes. Evidently, also, Mr. Dowling was in a rage. His cheeks were flushed, and his eyes were fairly glittering.

"You fat villain!" he roared, shaking a furious fist at the cheerful Tubby. "Your bogus accident has lost me my train, and condemned me to another day in this house!"

"Pray do not get excited, my dear Mr. Dowling!" exclaimed Mr. Silver. "There is another train this afternoon, and I shall be very happy to drive you to the station in time to enable you to catch it."

"Pah! That's precisely what you will be unable to do!" snarled Mr. Dowling. "It has just begun to snow again, and by the look of the sky it's going to keep on snowing for the rest of the day! You fat, fraudulent young scoundrel!"

Tubby Muffin blinked.

"Are you talking to me? That means, then, I suppose, that you'd have left me out in the snow to starve and freeze to death. You—you heartless old rotter!"

"How dare you address me in that disrespectful manner!" roared Mr. Dowling. "I don't know who you are, young man, but I can tell you, without knowing more about you, that you're an overfed, unscrupulous young rascal! What you need, sir, is a sound thrashing! What's more, I am the man to give it you!"

And Mr. Dowling, having, so to speak, reached his top note, seized a walking-stick which happened to be at hand and made a rush.

Tubby Muffin was not usually a very agile fellow. But there were moments when he could display surprising agility.

This was one of them.

As Mr. Dowling raised the stick and brought it down again, Tubby seemed to fly out of the danger-zone.

Mr. Dowling missed his mark—missed it by a yard. He had not expected that. The natural result was that he overbalanced and pitched on to the floor with a fearful concussion.

Bump!

"Whoooooop!" howled the unfortunate Mr. Dowling.

"Serves the rotter right!" snorted Tubby Muffin, without another glance at his prostrate assailant. "Now, what about that snack, Silver, old chap?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This way!" said Jimmy Silver, leading Tubby towards the kitchen.

And while Mr. Silver helped his luckless guest and landlord to his feet again, the Rookwood juniors walked away fairly yelling with hilarious mirth.

CHAPTER 3.
In the Night!

"PASS the chocs!"

"Don't you think you'd better keep 'em?" asked Jimmy Silver sarcastically, as he handed Tubby Muffin the large box of chocolates for which he had asked. "Save me the trouble of passing them ten times a minute, then!"

Tubby Muffin nodded cheerfully. Sarcasm was wasted on the cormorant of Rookwood.

"Jolly good idea!" he said. "Wonder you didn't think of it before! But, of course, you're not exactly lavish in your hospitality here, are you?"

"Great pip!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Dashed if I see anything to laugh at!" said Muffin peevishly. "I'm not grumbling. The grub here is plain and wholesome; but it's not exactly plentiful. You don't mind my speaking plainly, Silver?"

"Not at all!" grinned Jimmy Silver. "Perhaps you'd like to speak plainly about other matters besides the grub?"

"Not a bit of it! I could go on all night!" answered the fat junior cheerfully. "But talking won't put things right, I suppose. I'll have another choc. Pass that box, Jimmy, old chap!"

"Certainly!" said Jimmy Silver obligingly.

He passed it—rather quickly. So quickly did he pass it, in fact, that the box travelled beyond Tubby Muffin's outstretched hand and landed on his podgy face, squashing its black and sticky contents on every square inch of his features.

"Gug-gug-groooogh!" came a muffled howl from Tubby Muffin.

"Now you've got the lot, old bean!" said Jimmy Silver, rising and yawning. "Can't grouse about our hospitality now, can you?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bed-time now, I fancy!" chuckled Lovell. "Good-night, Tubby!"

"Groooogh!"

"You know your bed-room, of course?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"Groooogh!"

"That's as near as he can get to 'Yes.'" said Jimmy Silver, with a nod. "We'll get upstairs, then, you chaps. Pleasant dreams, Tubby!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Fistical Four went upstairs to bed. Tubby followed them as far as the nearest bath-room. This time he made no comments on the Silver brand of hospitality. Even if he had wished to do so, it was doubtful whether Tubby's limited vocabulary could have expressed all that he felt.

The silence of the night soon reigned over the Priory.

It must have been one in the morning when Tubby woke up, conscious that he was suffering from internal discomfort.

Another fellow with Tubby's record for the previous day might have been inclined to put it down to overdoing it at the dining-table. Tubby Muffin, however, concluded that he must be hungry.

He got up, covered his podgy frame with a dressing-gown which Jimmy Silver had lent him, and quitted his bed-room. Tubby knew how to find his way to the kitchen; in fact, what Tubby didn't know about the culinary department at the Priory, brief as his stay had been, was not worth knowing.

He went out on the landing and tiptoed down the broad staircase.

Silence brooded over the house. Tubby fancied it was rather an eerie silence. For a moment he felt inclined to turn back. But the thought of a snack impelled him on.

He reached the hall. Before him he saw the dining-room, illuminated by the pale light of the moon.

Then Tubby Muffin jumped. His eyes became fixed on a corner of the dining-room. He saw something.

What he saw caused his heart to miss a beat, and every hair on his bullet head to stand upright.

It was a ghost!

Tubby had never seen a ghost before. But he knew that that was what it was. It was gliding out of what seemed to be a hole in the panelled wall—a weird, white figure, with only a skeleton of a face!

The fat junior stood stock still, rooted to the floor with sheer horror. He tried to shout; but only a dry, croaking sound came from his throat. Fear had temporarily deprived him of the power of speech.

The ghost, if such it was, seemed to see him. It moved towards him.

Tubby Muffin collapsed in a state of paralysed, inarticulate terror.

If anybody had told Tubby at that moment that within half an hour he would be back in his bed-room, turning into bed without a thought of ghosts, he would have treated the suggestion as absurd.

Yet that was what actually happened.

How it happened was a matter on which Tubby, for reasons best known to himself, decided, for the time being, to keep silent.

CHAPTER 4.
Very Mysterious!

"HE, HE, HE!"

"Hallo, hallo! Swallowed a fishbone, Tubby?" asked Jimmy Silver cheerily, as that unmusical cachinnation emanated from the fat junior at the breakfast-table next morning.

"He, he, he!" Tubby wiped the tears of merriment from his eyes and tried to bring a semblance of seriousness to his plump face. "I didn't say I knew anything about the ghost of the Priory, did I? But you can take it from me that I know what I know!"

"And that's not much, if we know anything about you!" grinned Jimmy Silver. "But what exactly are you getting at, Tubby?"

"Ah! That'd be telling!" was Tubby Muffin's mysterious reply, accompanied by a fat and even more mysterious wink. "You'd like to know, wouldn't you?"

"Potty?" asked Newcome politely.

"Oh, really, Newcome! I'd like to tell you fellows a thing or two!" said Tubby, bestowing another fat wink on the mystified Fistical Four. "But I'm afraid I'm not at liberty to do so yet. All I can say is, I know what I know!"

"Fathead!"

"In the meantime," went on the fat junior, loftily ignoring Raby's disrespectful appellation, "if you chaps feel at all scared of ghosts at any time, just come and tell me; I'll see you righted!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We were thinking of having another trot round the secret passage, old fat man!" said Jimmy.

"I'll come!" said Tubby promptly. "There might be a disembodied spectre or something knocking about. In that case, you'll need me there!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Dashed if I know what you're cackling about! When are you going?"

"Right now!" replied Jimmy Silver briskly. "Ready?"

Tubby signified his readiness, and all five adjourned to the lofty, oak-panelled dining-room, from which they could gain access to the secret passage.

Jimmy Silver pressed the hidden spring, and one of the panels swung back, revealing a dark cavity beyond.

The Fistical Four stepped through into the secret passage. Tubby Muffin, who seemed by no means anxious, despite his boasts, to sample the creepy air of the passage, came last.

In the darkness, Jimmy Silver nudged Lovell and Newcome and Raby in turn.

The Rookwood juniors took a few cautious steps forward. Tubby still in the rear. Then, suddenly, Jimmy Silver uttered a yell:

"Look! Look!"

"Oh crikey! A ghost!" roared Lovell, taking his cue. "Just look at the horrible thing! Save us, Tubby!"

"It's coming for us!" howled Newcome. "Keep it back, Tubby! We'll run for it!"

"Run!" yelled Jimmy Silver, in tones of terror.

The Fistical Four turned and made a rush back to the entrance.

But before they could get near it, a wild and terrified yell pierced the air of the passage, and a fat form fairly hurtled across the space between the juniors and the dining-room.

It was Tubby Muffin.

Tubby fell through the aperture leading into the dining-room and collapsed in a heap on the carpet, fairly howling with fear.

"Help! Murder! Police! Save me! Keepitoff!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I really don't know what we'd have done without you!"

A snowball which Raby had flung at Lovell, missed its mark—and hit Mr. Dowling full in the face! With a yell he shot forward, slipped in the snow, and sat down with a bang!

grinned the leader of the Fistical Four. "We'll always call you in when we're expecting ghosts in future!"

"Ha, ha, ha!

"You—you——" stuttered Tubby Muffin feebly.

"Like to come down and finish it out with us?" chuckled Raby. "We shall feel safer while you're about it! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tubby got up and made as if to speak. Then he changed his mind and rolled out of the dining-room. Tubby's moments of silence were few and far between. But he had come to the conclusion that silence was the best thing possible in the present circumstances.

Nothing more was heard from Tubby that day about his bravery where ghosts was concerned. As to his secret regarding the ghost of the Priory, that, surprisingly enough in Tubby, remained a secret still.

END OF SECOND STORY.

(Tubby certainly seems to know something about this ghost! Read next week's ripping yarn "SILVER'S SPOOK SUCCEEDS!" and learn Tubby's Secret!)

"WINGS" OF THE MOUNTED!

By ERIC WOOD.

CHAPTER 1.
The Red 'Plane!

"THERE she is, Wings!" Hal Rawlings shouted into the phone to Jimmy Welford—"Wings," of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, who was piloting the Service plane at top speed south-eastwards from Edmonton.

"Yep—I've spotted her, Hal!" Wings called back, and put his nose down for a landing, choosing a flat space some distance from where a big airplane lay all crumpled up. It was the Trans-continental Air Mail carrier, which had developed engine trouble and crashed about a hundred miles from Edmonton, where the Mounted Flying Detachment was stationed. The mail pilot had managed to get down without hurting himself or the machine burning. He had walked several miles to a ranch, and phoned for help—help to get the mail through on time.

"Off you go, Wings," Welford's O.C. had commanded; and the Flying Detachment had lost no time in making a getaway from Edmonton.

Now, Wings settled his plane down, and he and Hal clambered out, trotted over to the crashed mail-carrier, and were greeted by Pilot Leighton.

"She can't be repaired on the spot, boys," Leighton told them. "Haven't got a big mail, but a valuable one—including a hundred thousand dollars of negotiable bonds. Vancouver's the destination. Can you make it?"

"Sure thing," Wings grinned. "They're sending a lorry from Edmonton to get your crate along. Come on—let's load up!"

Bag after bag of mail was taken from the machine and packed into the Service plane. It meant that both Wings and Rawlings would be cramped, but that was nothing to get humped about.

"Thanks!" said Leighton, as he shook hands with the Mounties when everything was set. "Thanks—and good luck! It's the first time I've failed, and I don't like it!"

"It's all in the air game, partner," Wings grinned, "and I guess always will be until they throw steel rails through the air for us to travel on. And then we won't like it! S'long!"

And the plane roared along earth for thirty seconds when Wings pulled off and nosed skyward.

FOLICEMAN BECOMES A POSTMAN!
Wings carries the air mail—and fights a terrific duel in mid-air?

They came at last over the Canadian Pacific Railway at Banff, where they landed to take on fuel, since they had not loaded to capacity owing to the extra weight of the mail. From Banff they roared through the air, leaving the line for the more direct air-route, and there, high up amongst the Rockies, ran into a heap of trouble.

From out of a cloud-mass above them there roared a blood-red plane—a plane that had been waiting for the mail. The occupants of the stranger took the Service machine for the mail plane, because Wings Welford had made up the lost time, and the pilot of the waiting machine, having seen the other at a good distance, had naturally thought it must be the mail.

Like a tornado the stranger swept out of the clouds on to the tail of the Service plane. The roar of his own engines drowned any other sounds for Wings, and the first intimation he had of anything amiss was the spatter of bullets through the wings on either side of him.

Startled, astonished, Wings flung his machine into a vertical bank until his left ear was parallel with the ground. Then he rolled away, taking the stranger by surprise. Its pilot had not expected the manœuvre, and, bent on forcing the other down, only just missed colliding. At the moment of passing he gasped, for he saw for the first time the insignia of the Mounted blazoned on Welford's wings. But he also saw something else—the tied-down mail bags in the cockpits!

He barked a startled exclamation to his companion in the rear pit.

"Mail must have crashed, Bartley," the other returned. "A bad break for us—this plane's armed!"

He had seen the two machine-guns in the Service machine. They were something of the bandits had not reckoned on, because the mail-carrier was not fitted with guns.

Bartley cursed, accelerated, levelled out, nosed for height, turned, and went zooming away as Hal Rawlings splashed metal-jacketed bullets across the intervening space.

"Shall have to make a run for it, Moss!" Bartley roared at his companion. "This'll be Wings Welford, and—he gets his man!"

"Haw! Fight him, Bart!" yelled Moss. "I——"

"Looks like we've got to," gritted Bartley. "He's coming after us!"

Wings Welford was. He was going like a wailing fury after the fleeing bandit, and his synchronised gun was pouring out hot lead as he went. He realised what had happened—these bandits had been waiting for the mail, and had mistaken the Service plane for it.

It was a grim setting for a grim encounter. High above rolled cloud masses; down below snow-clad mountains seemed like giant teeth of cavernous mouths that were valleys. Wings knew that if the bandits had met, and shot or forced down the mail plane, it might have been weeks before the wreck was discovered—and the robbers would have been thousands of miles away with their loot.

Away and safe!

"It's different now!" snapped Wings, as he zoomed—and showed Bartley that the Mounties had the wings of him. Welford's machine was speedier. It was rapidly overtaking the bandits, and was—climbing.

"He'll ride us down, Bart," said Moss. "Better turn and meet him! We shall stand something of a chance."

Bartley agreed, though he didn't say so. He simply went into a loop that brought him round to face Wings—and both bandits' guns rat-tatted viciously. The planes were level now, and tearing wildly towards each other, at a combined velocity of nigh on two hundred and fifty miles per hour.

"Will he side-step?" Wings asked himself the grim question. He meant to go the limit before doing so, but what would the bandit do? A head-on collision would mean a Viking's funeral for them all, and—Bartley suddenly lost his nerve. It was sheer suicide, he knew, to hold on, and in the last split second he jammed his stick forward and dived in a wild effort to save himself.

A shadow that travelled with the speed of light flicked over him, and he could feel the heat of the slip-stream of the Service plane as it skimmed overhead, its wheels not more than three feet above. And Hal Rawlings was pouring down lead that sprayed the bandit plane from nose to tail.

The dog-fight was indeed on!

The two planes whipped across the sky in apparent rough-and-tumble, but each pilot was calm and cool now—each knew that this was a fight to the death. The bandits could not get away from the speedier plane, and therefore would have to fight it out. Wings Welford could have got away—but that was not Welford's way. He would get his men, dead or alive, or else go West in the effort!

Back of the seeming chanciness of it all there was method in each flyer's actions. Every banking, every stalling, every roll, was an attempt to outwit the other; and with it all the bullets slashed bitingly until wings were but ribbons and fuselages ripped and torn to sieves.

And yet no vital spot had been touched by either side, and the machines were still air-worthy.

Once, Welford's gun jammed, just as he thought he must surely have the other pilot as they tore head on again. Against his will, Wings went into a dive. It was the only thing he could do to avoid disaster. Then he savagely hauled at the stick, and, using the diving speed, came round in a climbing screwing turn which put his tail almost straight to the earth; and as he climbed Hal Rawlings pumped lead while Wings frantically worked to ease his jammed gun.

And then, suddenly, something white fluttered from the bandit plane. Its engines had stopped, as Wings could tell by the absence of smoke.

"They're giving in, Hal!" Wings yelled into the phone. "Giving in, and going down!"

"Looks so," said Rawlings. "But be careful, Wings. May be a bluff."

"I'll be careful all right!" grunted Welford.

The bandit was going down in a long, graceful glide, under perfect control, despite silent engines. Welford followed it. There was only one spot where a landing could be made, and Wings Welford frowned as his practised eyes told him that there was but room for one machine.

"What's it mean?" he wondered, and roared in the wake of the bandit, hanging low on its tail. He had an idea that if the pilot were bluffing, and his engines were working, the fellow would take fright and open out again. But Bartley did nothing of the kind. He held on in his glide, down towards the confined space of landing.

"Know what this means, Hal?" Wings jerked into his phone.

"Reckon yes," Hal told him. "It means that if those fellows are kidding us, and their engines are O.K., they can land and keep us helpless in the air. Also, if something has gone wrong, they can, maybe, tinker it up, and we can't do anything. 'Cos neither you nor I, Wings, could shoot down fellows who've shown the white flag, and who're not shooting back. Hey?"

"You've got it right, Hal," Wings admitted, and wondered whether the bandits were bluffing or not. Down there on the only landing-place they could keep the Service machine in the air, wasting fuel, flying around helplessly, until the Mounties must either sheer off, or, flying low, shoot relentlessly at men who did not fire back. Which, to Wings Welford, would seem very much like cold-blooded murder, even if the victims were bandits.

"We'll see what happens when they get down, Hal," he told Rawlings. "Gosh, he made a beauty of a landing."

The bandits had got down to earth, and the chums had noticed the queer handling of the machine. It was brought down, so that it was absolutely impossible for Wings to take advantage of any space to land. The bandit plane blocked the terrain.

Down went Welford, cutting off his engines, and skimming low over the other machine. Only the twang and hiss of wires interfered with his voice as he yelled:

"Come out! Haul to end of valley for us to land!"

Then he had opened again, and was zooming up, to come around for a repetition of the manœuvre. If the bandits obeyed his command, and man-handled their machine to the valley's end, it would just be possible for the Mounties to make a landing.

Down over the bandits Welford went, silent-engined again, rasping out his command. But no answer came from the men in the other machine, although Hal Rawlings caught the sound of hammering.

"Doing a repair job inside, Wings!" he shouted, as the engines roared into life again. "Are we justified in firing?"

"We'll not do that—we'll take a chance," was Welford's decision. "See that mountain to the left of us?" He flung out a hand, indicating the one he meant. It was about a mile away from where the bandits lay.

"It's pretty flat-topped," Wings went on, "and I'm going to risk trying to land on it, rather than just fly around, wasting juice and doing nothing else. Then we'll see what we see!"

"Okay with me," said Hal, and the machine went roaring up and away. Looking behind, Rawlings saw a figure come out of the bandit plane and wag a derisive hand, which then went fan-wise to nose.

"Think they've beaten us!" gritted Hal. "But, by heck, we'll show 'em!"

CHAPTER 2.
The Dog Fight!

A MILE away, and three thousand feet up, Wings Welford prepared to make his landing on the mountain. Flat he had called it, but if it was flat, then the moon is made of cheese and the sun's a nursery night-light!

Hal Rawlings looked down, and saw the horrible mess that was to be made a landing-place. He shuddered involuntarily, then took a grip of himself.

"Wings will do it," he grated. "He sure will!"

And Wings Welford did, although the plane well-nigh capsized when it struck. Welford, however, got wheels and tail skid set, and cut off right at the very edge of the mountain top, whence through their binoculars the Mounties could and did keep watch on the bandit's machine, away down in the distant valley.

The sun was westering by now, and Wings said:

"I'll bet they try to make a break for it in the darkness, Hal!"

"That's the stunt, of course," Rawlings agreed. "Say, Wings, I think we ought to give it to 'em, in case, although I hate the thought!"

"So do I," said Welford, "so much that I won't do it, old chap. Let's wait and see. We should hear their engines, and we've got the searchlight."

"And we'll want it," said Hal. "Gosh, Wings, think of a night scrap amongst these mountains!"

"I daren't," Wings smiled wryly. "But if it's got to be, then we'll have to take it up."

The sun went down. The bandit plane was hidden—hidden and unheard until an hour later. Then there came to the Mounties the roar of engines.

"We were right, old chap," said Wings. "Pile in! The hunt's up!"

They had kept the motor idling slowly against this emergency, even although it meant using precious fuel. Now they clambered into their cockpits. Wings opened out, and sent the plane screeching off the mountain top. Hal brought his searchlight into play and picked out the now rising bandit plane.

"That ought to put the wind up 'em!" he chuckled. "Guess they hadn't expected we'd have a light aboard! Go it, Wings! Go it!"

Awesome was the scene. The great lengthening finger of the light held the bandits in its widening end. Bartley tried to roll out of it, but Hal Rawlings was an adept, and Welford was overhauling the bandits, who were climbing, climbing, climbing, to get a-top the mountains to open air for a wild dash for freedom.

Then Wings had his machine above them, and Hal's light, depressed, bathed them vividly. Welford pumped lead as he pushed the nose of his machine down, and the bandits wriggled and rolled away. Wings lost height as he scurried right over the bandit plane, and bullets spattered into the Service machine from the rear.

Hal had spun his light, blinding the pilot of the other plane, which was fortunate for the Mounties, perhaps.

Wings Welford, also, was blinded—blinded by the darkness around him. Ahead were the mountain sides. He might crash into them at any moment.

"Swing the light round, Hal!" he bawled; and Rawlings, understanding the reason, obeyed. The light streaked through the empty air, finished on emptiness. Rawlings fixed it in position, and turned to his gun. A half drum he triggered through, and then the thing jammed. The sudden breaking off must have told the bandits the truth, for Rawlings knew by the sound of the plane that it had turned back from a half-turn to get away, and was coming full pelt after the Mounties. He yelled his news to Wings Welford, who choked as he heard it.

"Gosh, Hal," he shouted back, "we're in a mess! The wind has just taken my last drum as I was going to slip it on! You got any?"

"Only the half-drum that's in the gun!" gasped Rawlings. "We've been burning lead, remember. I'll try to get the drum out."

"All right!" Wings was calm now. An idea had come to him. He looked back, and in the back-glare of the searchlight saw the vague shape of the bandit plane, tearing after him. Ahead, the searchlight streamed into nothingness. Wings could have come about, and, with the light doused, could have eluded the enemy; but that was not his way. He knew he had the wings of the enemy, and he used them—used them while Hal Rawlings wrestled with the fractious gun, and had to confess himself beaten.

On and on and on, with the enemy hard in pursuit. The bandits knew that something was very wrong with the Mounties, and they meant to take advantage of whatever it was. They could have slipped away, but ahead of them was the plane with the mail they had set their evil designs on, and they seemed to stand a chance to get it after all!

Wings drove his machine at limit, keeping out of range of the bandits' guns—except when, now and again, he eased up to lure them on. On and on he went, not rising now, but driving on an even keel straight into nothingness and at—what? Wings knew what he was doing, and he did it.

Presently the end of the searchlight seemed to spray out. It was the split second for what Wings Welford had been waiting and working for!

"Douse light!" he snapped into the phone, and, wonderingly, Hal Rawlings obeyed. Darkness fell, except for the lights on the dashboard.

Rawlings was aware of a new movement of the plane. Wings had put the tail down, the nose up, and was—climbing.

Just then Hal eased the jam, and was wondering whether to let Wings have the half drum or to use it himself. But he did neither.

There was no need for the use of a gun.

The Mounties' plane climbed, and Hal Rawlings had a blurred vision of a dark shape that hurtled past and below—the bandit plane. He saw the lights on the dashboard, and then it seemed to Rawlings as if the world had split apart. Above the roar of their machine Rawlings heard a terrific crash. It was followed by a great out-spewing of flame—flame that shot out and up, and then went spiralling down into the void of night.

"Light on—Hal!" came the crisp voice of Wings Welford into Rawlings' ears. "Quickly!"

Hal knew the need for speed then; he knew what had happened—knew that his chum had played one of the wildest games of chance that the flyer could try. He had deliberately flown towards an unseen mountain, trusting to the searchlight showing it to him in the split fraction of time that would enable him to pull the stick for a straight-up climb that might, indeed, have developed into a tail-spin!

Wings had played that game, and, tearing along behind them, the bandits had known nothing about it until the lights went out.

It was too late then for the pilot to avoid disaster. He hadn't even seconds to play with. He could not pull out of his terrific rush in time to climb as Welford had done—for Welford had known what he was doing.

Like a torch the bandit plane was dropping, lighting the mountains and the valleys. Hal Rawlings was shaking in his safety-belt, and thankful that he had it on, for the plane was still climbing in that almost vertical line. Rawlings played the light, which crept up the mountain-side, presently to lose it.

"We're up, Wings!" he choked, and a second later Welford zoomed to safety, banked, rolled, and even-keeled.

"We can't do anything down there, Hal," he said shakily. "We couldn't land, and if we could there's no hope for those poor devils! I just had to do it, Hal, or we'd have gone under. Let's go!"

He swirled the machine round, took his direction from his instruments, and went roaring into the night, leaving down there below a glowing red mass that once had been a plane, and was now a funeral pyre.

Silence reigned between the chums. Although the men they had just sent to death had been bad men, it was not an over-pleasant thought that what had been done had been necessary.

"How's the juice?" Wings asked presently. His eyes were blinded by the glare of the light that streamed ahead of him. "Shall we have enough to make the trip, or shall we have to go back to Banff, Hal?"

"Should just be able to do it, Wings," said Hal. "The mail'll be late, won't it?"

"Yeah; but it'll be there!" snapped Wings Welford—and it was.

The wires of a continent buzzed from Vancouver when the Mounties told their news; but Wings and Rawlings did not wait for anything more than refuelling. Then they were winging their way back over the Rockies—back to the litter of mountains that had been the scene of their grim adventure. They picked up the spot on which the bandits had landed, and, using that as a centre, worked in concentric circles searching the earth for the wreckage.

They found it at long last, and then Wings repeated his trick, landing on a mountain top—the only possible place for one. From there the chums went into a mountaineering stunt, reached the wreckage, and found nothing but a tangled, twisted mass of metal work, and charred somethings that once were men.

(And now good-bye to Wings and Hal, but in next week's GEM you will meet "THE PUNCHER PALS!" They're great guys. Don't miss 'em!)

JOURNALISTS OF ST. JIM'S!

(*Continued from page* 18.)

at last, and this time, with the exception of a snort from Fatty Wynn, he was not interrupted.

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

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

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

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

"Here you are!" said Tom.

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

"Bravo!"

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

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

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

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

Pratt hesitated.

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

"What's that, Pratt?"

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

"That's fair," said Tom Merry.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Pratt suddenly closed his watch with a snap.

"Time!" he exclaimed.

"I'm ready," said Tom Merry.

Blake looked troubled.

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

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

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

"Silence! Order!"

"Yaas, wathah! Ordah, deah boys!"

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

Jack Blake promptly read out his latest effusion:

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

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

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

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

"Silence for Tom Merry."

"Order! Order!"

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

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

"Bravo! That beats Blake, anyway!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

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

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

"Bravo!" shouted the committee.

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

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

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

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

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

Tom ran his fingers through his curly hair.

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

"Bravo!"

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

THE END.

(How will Tom fare in his new job? Don't miss next week's ripping yarn "TOM MERRY, EDITOR."

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