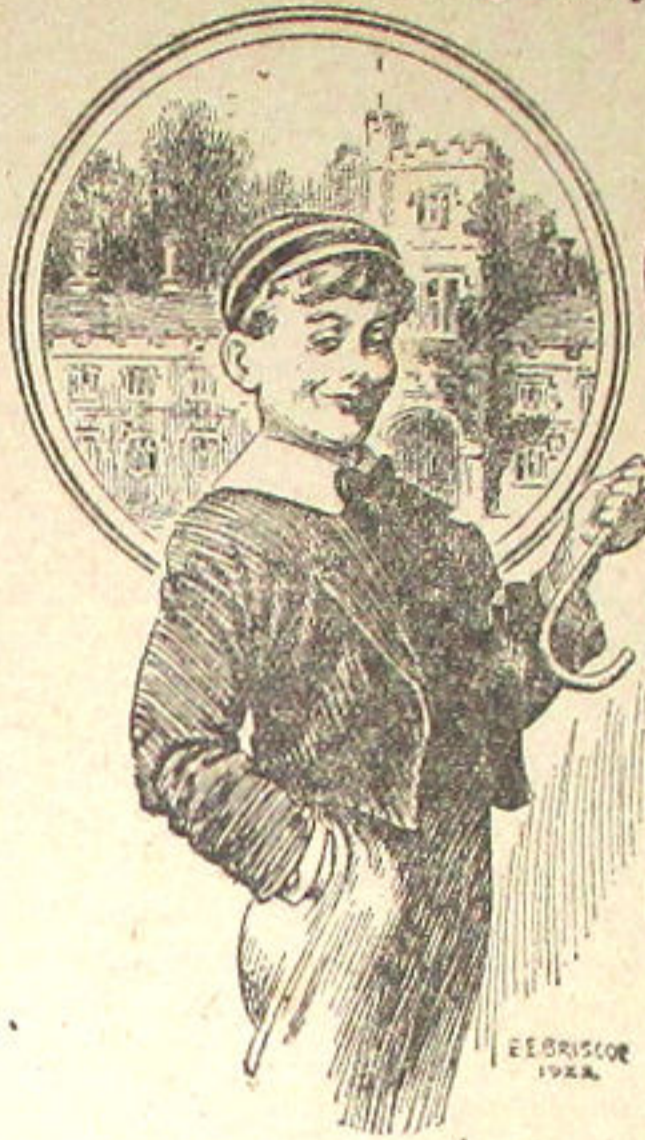


A Specially Exciting Story of School Life.



Captain of St. Jim's!

A Magnificent, Long, Complete
Story of Tom Merry & Co., the
Famous Juniors of St. Jim's

By MARTIN CLIFFORD

Illustrated by E. E. Briscoe

THE FIRST CHAPTER

The Unexpected Happens!

"THERE'S somethin' goin' on, deah boys!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's imparted that information with a sage shake of the head.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther, the Terrible Three of the Shell, were talking footer, but they politely left off as Arthur Augustus made his remark. The swell of the Fourth Form was looking very serious indeed.

"Well, what's the news?" asked Tom Merry.

"I'm afwaid it's somethin' sewious."

"Your tailor sent his bill in?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Wats!"

"Or has the order gone forth that juniors' collars are to be limited to a height of six inches——"

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"Nothing happened to your monocle, I hope?" asked Lowther, with an expression of real concern.

"Pway, don't be an ass, Lowthah," said

D'Arcy, with some asperity. "I wish you could be sewious at a time, and on a sewious subject. It's somethin' to do with old Kildare."

"Kildare!"

The Terrible Three were interested at once. Kildare of the Sixth, the captain of St. Jim's, was the idol of the Lower School. Certainly, he sometimes came down rather heavily on the chums of the Shell; but not more than half as often as they deserved. And, although he had a really "hefty" way of laying on the cane when he used it, the Terrible Three never faltered in their loyalty to old Kildare.

"What's happened?" asked Manners.

"In the first place a telegwam awwived——"

"That's happened before, and no bones broken," Monty Lowther remarked. "I've had telegrams myself."

"Pway don't talk wot, Lowthah. Kildare looked fwightfully wowwied when he wead the telegwam, and Levison says he heard him say 'My poor uncle!'"

"His uncle!" said Lowther reflectively.

"Ah, that lets in light on the matter! 'Oh, my prophetic soul, my uncle!' as Hamlet

remarks. Kildare has been putting his Sunday topper up the spout, and that wire was from his 'uncle' to remind him that the ticket was up! Poor old Kildare!"

"You uthah ass, it could not have been that kind of uncle. Aftah that, Kildare went at once to the Head."

"What did he say to the Head?"

"How should I know, you duffah?" demanded D'Arcy.

"Didn't Levison hear anything? Couldn't he get anywhere near the keyhole?"

"I weally do not know; and in any case I should wefuse to listen to anythin' heard at a keyhole," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity.

"But, aftah that, Kildare huwwied like anythin' to his study, and started packin'."

"Packing!" exclaimed the Terrible Three in a breath.

"Yaas; Levison says he's packin' his bags."

"Keyhole again!" grinned Manners.

"But what is he packing his bags for?" said Lowther, with a perplexed look. "Is he going somewhere where he will require a change of trousers?"

"You silly duffah!" exclaimed D'Arcy, exasperated. "When I say his bags, I do not mean his bags, I mean his bags, you ass!"

"Lucid, I must say!" commented Lowther.

"Levison says he is packing two bags——"

"A pair of bags?" suggested Lowther.

"Two twavellin' bags!" howled Arthur Augustus. "Twavellin' bags, you duffah. Not twucks—twavellin' bags! That looks as if he is goin' away. That's why I say there's somethin' sewious goin' on. I suppose even you silly asses would wegard it as sewious if old Kildare cleared off."

"By Jove! I should jolly well say so!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "But why should he be going? If he's had bad news——"

"I weally think it's up to us to go to him and expwess our sympathy," said Arthur Augustus; "that's what I was thinkin' of. At the same time, we can ask him what's on, you know."

Jack Blake of the Fourth came down the passage with Digby and Herries—all three of them looking rather excited.

"You fellows hear?" asked Blake.

"They say Kildare's leaving," said Digby.

"Levison says——" began Herries.

"Yes, we've just heard from D'Arcy that he's packing his trousers!" said Lowther.

"His bags!" shrieked D'Arcy.

"Same thing. I suppose when a chap starts packing his trousers, it means that something serious has happened," went on Lowther, imperturbably. "Let's go and ask him."

"Rather a cheek, don't you think?" said Blake.

Lowther nodded calmly.

"Certainly; but we're famous for our cheek. Come on!"

And Monty Lowther led the way towards Kildare's study. In spite of his humorous remarks, Lowther was as concerned as the others at the idea that old Kildare might have had bad news. But he could not resist the temptation to pull the aristocratic leg of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

There was a group of juniors in the passage outside Kildare's study, talking somewhat excitedly. Evidently the news had spread. Levison was the centre of the group, and he was the object of interest. Levison, as usual, had gained information by applying to the keyhole.

"He looks awfully cut up," said Levison, "and he's shoving the things anyway into his bags. He's going—that's a cert."

"If he goes for good, there will be a new captain wanted for St. Jim's!" remarked Gore of the Shell.

"Chance for Knox!" observed Mellish.

"Or Cutts of the Fifth!" said another. "Cutts came very near putting up for election last time, you know."

"Oh, rats; a Fifth-former!" sniffed Reilly of the Fourth. "We're not going to have a Fifth Form chap for captain of the school—especially Cutts."

The next moment Reilly gave a yell, as a finger and thumb closed like a vice upon his ear. Gerald Cutts of the Fifth Form had come down the passage in time to hear his observation.

"What's that, Reilly?" said Cutts pleasantly, as he compressed his grip upon the junior's ear. "Taking my name in vain, eh?"

"Ow!" yelled Reilly. "Leggo, you beast!"

I said we wouldn't have you for captain of the school at any price, and we won't intoirely! Yow-ow!"

Cutts gave his ear another twist, and smiled genially and walked on. Reilly looked after him with a sulphurous expression.

"The baste!" he said, rubbing his ear. "The bullyin' baste!"

"Well, you asked for it," grinned Levison. "Why shouldn't Cutts be captain of the school? I think it would be a pleasant change after Kildare."

"You're a rotter," growled Jack Blake. "You'd like another rotter to be captain of the school, of course. Shut up!"

"Look here——"

"Shut up!" roared Blake.

And Levison considered it more judicious to shut up.

"But Kildare isn't gone yet," remarked Tom Merry.

"You're rather previous in settling the point. Let's speak to Kildare."

"I was wondahin' whethah we should be justified aftah all, in wowwyin' Kildare at a time like this——"

"Go on wondering, Gussy!" said Monty Lowther genially, and he knocked at Kildare's door.

"Come in!"

Lowther opened the door, and the chums of the School House crowded in. There were certainly many signs of departure in Kildare's study. Two large travelling bags were wide open, half-packed, and all sorts of articles were strewn on the chairs, the table, and the floor. Kildare, in his shirt-sleeves, was looking red

and hurried, as he jammed article after article into the bags.

"Excuse us, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus gracefully. "We are wathah concerned about you. May we venchah to inquiah whethah you have had any bad news?"

"Yes," said Kildare, concisely.

"Awf'ly sowwy!"

"Very sorry, Kildare," said Tom Merry; "but you are not leaving?"

"My uncle in Ireland is ill," said Kildare quietly. "It may be very serious. I'm going at once; I'm catching the next train at Rylcombe."

"But you're coming back!" exclaimed Tom in dismay.

"Yes, I'm coming back, but I don't know when. It may be a week or two — or months," said Kildare. "It all depends."

"Oh, crumbs! How are we going to get on without you, Kildare?"

Kildare smiled.

"I dare say the school will run on without me, Merry. Of course, there will have to be an election for a new cap-

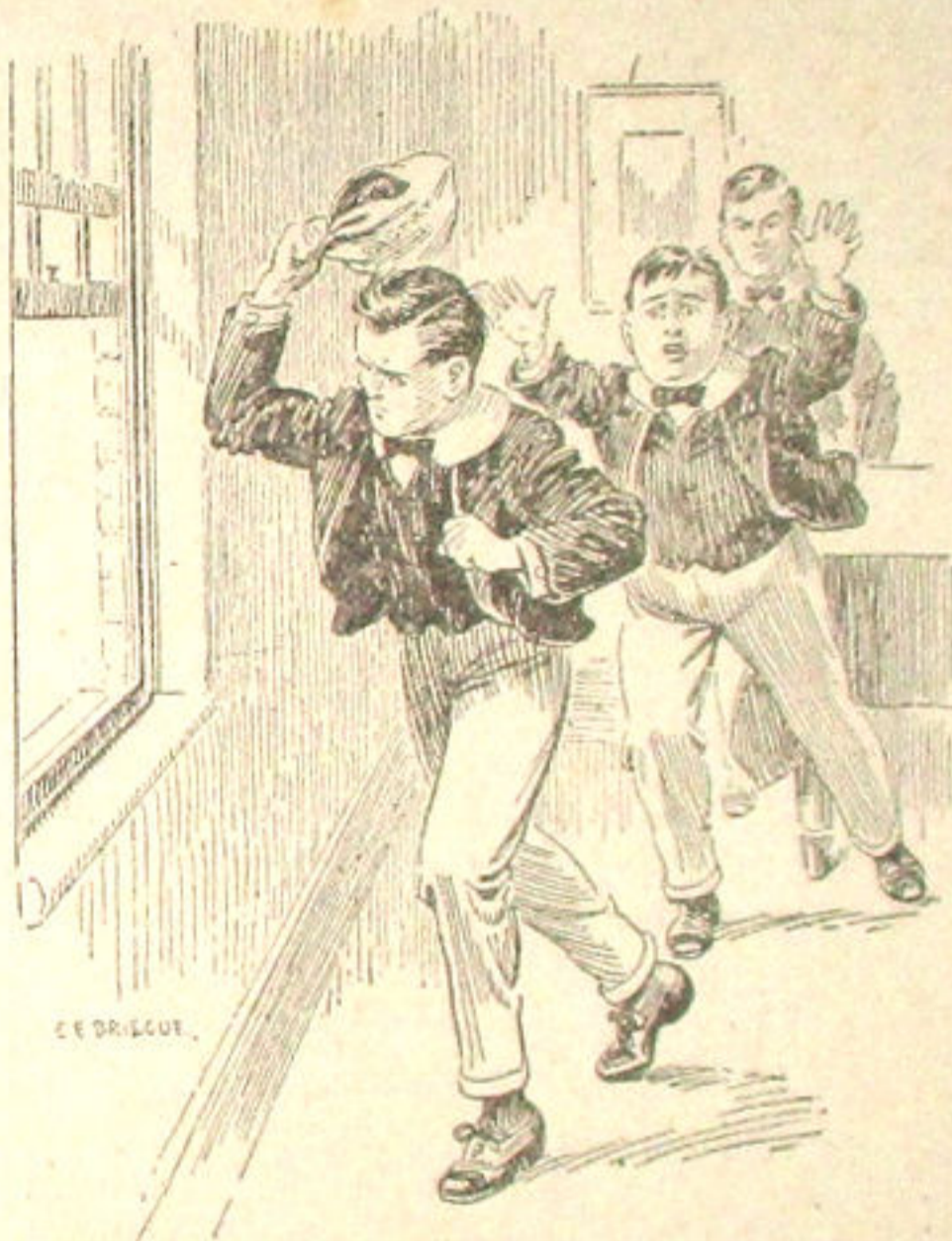
tain. I hope you kids will vote for the right man."

"Oh, you can rely on that!" said Blake promptly. "We'll take jolly good care that a School House chap gets in, and that it isn't left to a New House bounder."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Depend on that, Kildare!"

"I didn't mean exactly that," said Kildare, laughing. "The right man might be a New House fellow."



Figgins grabbed Fatty Wynn's bag of tarts and hurled it out of the window. (See page 276)

"Oh, imposs., deah boy!"

"It's up to the School House, of course," said Manners.

"We'll keep the rotters out!" said Blake confidently. "I'll put up for captain myself, rather than let a New House rotter sneak in!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Well, you'll have to settle for yourselves," said Kildare. "Buzz off now, will you! I'm rather busy."

"Can't we help you pack?" asked Blake.

"Thanks! I can manage."

And Kildare, who had not ceased packing while he spoke, turned away, as a very plain hint to the juniors that their presence was not required. Tom Merry & Co. left the study, and closed the door.

"Well, that's news, and no mistake!" said Tom, with a whistle. "There's going to be some excitement now. An election for a new captain will buck things up."

"Yaas, wathah! You chaps wemembah that I put up for captain once——"

"We remember!" agreed Blake. "But if you start being funny like that again, we shall take you into a corner and suffocate you!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Weally, you fellahs——"

"Rats!" said Tom Merry. "Gentlemen, we're going to give old Kildare a send-off, and then we'll meet in committee and decide upon our candidate."

"Hear, hear!"

And when Kildare started for the station, with his bags, in the trap driven by Taggles, more than half the school gathered at the gates to see him off, and sent a thunderous cheer after him. And when he had gone one great question was debated in every corner of the old school with the keenest interest, one question that interested everybody, from the head prefect to the smallest and inkiest fag in the Lower School, the question as to who was to take old Kildare's place as captain of St. Jim's!

THE SECOND CHAPTER

The Crisis!

FIGGINS of the Fourth rushed into his study in the New House at St. Jim's, his face blazing with excitement.

Kerr and Wynn were there, looking quite calm and sedate, as if nothing unusual were happening.

Kerr was working out some weird problem in mathematics, and did not even look up as Figgins rushed in. Kerr did that kind of thing for pleasure. He was built that way. Fatty Wynn was demolishing a bag of tarts, which was his way of taking pleasure. That was the way he was built.

"Have you heard?" gasped Figgins.

No reply. Kerr was deep in his problem, and Fatty Wynn had his mouth full of jam tart. Reply was impossible under the circumstances.

Figgins snorted.

"Wake up, you silly asses!" he shrieked. "Talk about Julius Cæsar fiddling while Rome was burning——"

That woke Kerr up. He looked up from his problem.

"It was Nero, you ass!" he said.

Then he looked down again, and resumed his mental labours.

"I don't care whether it was Nero or Julius Cæsar, or—or Lloyd George!" howled Figgins. "Wake up! Put that rot away!"

And the excited and energetic Figgins jerked the paper away from the table before Kerr, and tossed it into the study fire, and then grabbed Fatty Wynn's bag of tarts, and hurled it out of the window.

Both juniors were upon their feet in a second.

"You ass!" yelled Kerr.

"You silly chump!" roared Fatty Wynn.

"Collar him!"

"Bump him!"

"Shut up!" shouted Figgins. "Can't you understand? I tell you this is the chance of a lifetime for the New House to score, and here you sit eating mathematics and working out tarts—I mean, eating tarts and working out filthy mathematics!"

"What's happened?"

"Don't I keep on telling you?" howled Figgins. "It's our big chance—the chance of a giddy lifetime!"

"You haven't told us anything so far," remarked Kerr.

"I think I'll buzz out and look for my

tarts," said Fatty Wynn, making for the door. "I'll hear your news when I come in, Figgy."

Figgins grasped his fat chum by the shoulder, whirled him away from the door, and plumped him into the armchair with a concussion that shook the whole study.

"You'll hear it now, fathead!" he roared.

"Ow!" gasped Fatty Wynn. "Groogh! Ow!"

"Has anything happened?" asked Kerr, interested at last.

It was not like Figgins to be so wildly excited over nothing.

"Anything happened?" hooted Figgins. "If you hadn't been sticking here in the study like a pair of—of—of Chinese mandarins, you'd have heard. The New House might go to the giddy bow-wows, and the School House score all along the line for all you'd care, so long as you had plenty of filthy tarts and disgusting mathematics."

"Those tarts were prime!" said Fatty Wynn warmly. "Mrs. Taggles made 'em fresh to-day, and they were twopenny ones."

"Cheese it! If you say tarts again I'll bump you on the floor!" said the indignant Figgins.

"But those tarts—— Oh! Ow! Yaroooh!"

Figgins was as good as his word. He grasped the fat Fourth-former, hauled him out of the armchair, and bumped him on the hearthrug. Fatty Wynn roared.

"Ow, ow, ow! You silly ass! Yow-ow!"

"There!" panted Figgins. "Now perhaps you'll listen, and stop talking about tarts. I tell you this is the time of our lives, the time to get a New House chap as captain of St. Jim's."

"What!"

"News to you, of course," snorted Figgins.

"You don't know that Kildare has gone——"

"Kildare gone!" ejaculated Kerr.

"Kildare gone!" gasped Fatty Wynn, as he scrambled up, and, in his astonishment, forbore to rush upon Figgins and hammer him in return for the bumping on the hearthrug.

"Of course you didn't know. So long as you have plenty of filthy——"

"Oh, ring off, and tell us the news!" said Kerr. "What has Kildare gone for?"

"His aunt, or something, is ill in Ireland, or Scotland, or somewhere," said Figgins,

rather vaguely. "He's gone, and he'll be a long time away. Perhaps won't come back at all."

"Sorry for that."

"Yes, yes; I'm sorry, too. But this is a time to be up and doing! Don't you see, this is where we get a New House chap in as captain of the school!" said Figgins excitedly. "It's the chance of our lives. Don't you see? We'll put up Monteith, or Baker, or somebody as candidate. It doesn't matter whom, so long as the New House scores."

"Is there going to be an election?"

"Haven't I told you so fifty times?" demanded Figgins. "Of course there is! And what do you think, those School House rotters are scheming already to get a School House chap in as captain. I call it disgusting! Old Kildare hardly out of the place, and they're laying plans to get a chap of their House into his shoes."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Kerr.

Figgins glared at him.

"What are you cackling at, you image?"

"Aren't you planning to get a chap of our House into his shoes, then?" grinned Kerr.

"That's different, of course, quite different. I suppose you'll agree that the School House isn't going to have a walk-over in this election," said Figgins hotly.

"Yes, rather!"

"New House hasn't much chance," said Fatty Wynn, with a shake of the head. "There are nearly twice as many fellows in the School House, and the rotters will stick together like glue to keep us out."

"Yes, that's like them!" growled Figgins. "Tom Merry & Co. are always up against Blake & Co., but they'll stick together as thick as thieves to keep the election in the School House. I call it disgusting the way they do it. Still, if we all stand together over here, and vote as one man, we may pull it off. United we stand, divided we fall, you know, and every fellow must back up his own House. What are you grinning at, Kerr, you blithering ass!"

"Oh, nothing!" said Kerr blandly. "I agree with you. We've got to get a New House candidate, and get him in. New House for ever!"

THE THIRD CHAPTER

A Peaceful Visit!

"Hear, hear!" said Fatty Wynn heartily. "And if there's more than one candidate on the School House side the vote will be split, and we shall have a look in."

"That's just it," said Figgins eagerly. "I've heard already that two School House chaps are going to put up—Knox of the Sixth and Cutts of the Fifth. They'll divide the vote in the House, while we shall vote solid for one man."

"Cutts has a good many friends in this House," Kerr remarked thoughtfully. "A lot of the New House seniors are in his set."

"If any New House chap votes against his House he'll be ragged and hanged, drawn, and quartered!" said Figgins darkly. "Senior or junior, no chap is going to be allowed to go back on his House. That's settled. Why, it's dog's ages since a New House chap was captain of St. Jim's. Those rotters over the way claim to be cock-House because they always elect a School House chap captain. We're going to alter all that this time. This is where we come in!"

"Hear, hear!" said the Co. heartily.

"In fact, I was thinking that we might call on Tom Merry, and put it to him as a man and a brother," said Figgins. "Nobody wants a cad like Knox or Cutts as captain of the school. We could point out to Tom Merry that our man—Monteith—is just the man that's wanted."

"We could point it out," agreed Kerr, "but I don't feel sure that you'd get Tom Merry to see it."

"He's on fighting terms with both Knox and Cutts," said Figgins.

"That wouldn't make any difference when it's a question of backing up his own House against this side," said Kerr sagely.

"Well, it ought to," said Figgins warmly.

"Perhaps it ought, but it won't. You'll see——"

Kerr was interrupted by a knock at the door.

"Oh, come in!" rapped out Figgins.

The door opened, and the Terrible Three came in. Figgins & Co. looked at them rather grimly. They had come just in time for Figgins to put it to Tom Merry as a man and a brother, as he expressed it.

"**A**HEM!" said Tom Merry. "Well?" demanded Figgins. "Ahem!"

"Got a cold?" asked Kerr, with concern.

"A cold? No!"

"Then what are you coughing about?"

"Ahem!"

"Don't hurry," said Figgins kindly. "There's lots of time—though you might get your vocal exercises over before you pay a visit. But take your time."

Tom Merry coloured a little.

"Ahem! You see, we've come to speak to you chaps on a rather important matter. The fact is, Figgy, I've come to talk sense to you."

"Rather a change, eh?" said Figgins.

"Look here——" began Tom Merry warmly. But Manners touched him on the arm, and he coughed again, and became exceedingly polite. "The fact is, Figgy—ahem——"

"Go it!" said Figgins encouragingly. "Only I'm afraid you'll wear out the inside of your neck at this rate. But don't mind me."

"You know Kildare has gone——"

"I saw him off."

"And we're going to have a new election for captain——"

"I suppose so."

"It's admitted on all hands," continued Tom Merry, "that the captain of St. Jim's is always selected from the School House."

"Is it?" said Figgins grimly.

"Oh, yes! Now, I've come to talk to you like an uncle," said Tom Merry. "It occurred to me—ahem!—that you fellows might have got some wild idea into your heads of putting up a New House chap for captain."

"Barely possible, ain't it?" said Figgins sarcastically.

"My idea," went on Tom, "is that we should all stand together—all St. Jim's as one man, you know, on this question. Union is strength. United we stand, divided we come a mucker. The whole school ought to stand shoulder to shoulder at a time like this, and elect the right candidate, irrespective of the House he belongs to."

Figgins thawed visibly.

"Now you're talking hoss-sense!" he exclaimed heartily. "I agree with you all along the line. That's just what I think."

"Oh, good!"

"I was only just saying to Kerr that I was going to suggest that very thing to you," said Figgins. "You've got a lot of influence with the kids on the other side, and lots of them will follow your lead. You do the right thing, and we'll get the right man in in old Kildare's place."

"Figgy, you're a jolly sensible chap!" said Tom Merry admiringly. "I must say I never expected you to take such a sensible view of the case."

"I never expected it of you, for that matter," said Figgins. "We seem to be in agreement. The right man has got to get in, and blow what House he belongs to!"

"Hear, hear!" said the Terrible Three unanimously.

"And you'll vote for our man?" asked Figgins.

"Eh?"

"Our candidate——"

"But you haven't one," said Lowther.

"We're going to have one."

"Not a New House chap!"

"Yes, a New House chap, of course!" said Figgins warmly. "Haven't you just said that the right man has got to get elected, irrespective of his House?"

"Ye-es; but, of course, he's going to be a School House chap," said Tom Merry. "That's understood."

Figgins snorted.

"Oh, rats! There you go again! Our

opinion is that it's time a New House chap was captain of the school, and we're going to get our head prefect, Monteith, to put up. What have you got to say against Monteith?"

"Oh, nothing, except—except that he isn't the right man."

"Why isn't he?" demanded Figgins.

"Ahem! We've got a lot of better fellows on our side—Darrel, or Rushden, or Langton——"

"Bosh! Monteith's the man!"

"Now look here, Figgy! This is a time for all St. Jim's to stand together, shoulder to shoulder, and——"

"And elect your man?" sniffed Figgins.

"Well, yes, I suppose it comes to that," admitted Tom Merry.

"I want to put this to you, as a reasonable chap."

"I was going to talk to you as a reasonable chap, but it doesn't seem much good," said Figgins. "You chaps have a weird idea in your heads that the School House is cock-House of St. Jim's——"

"Well, isn't it?" demanded the Terrible Three, with one voice.

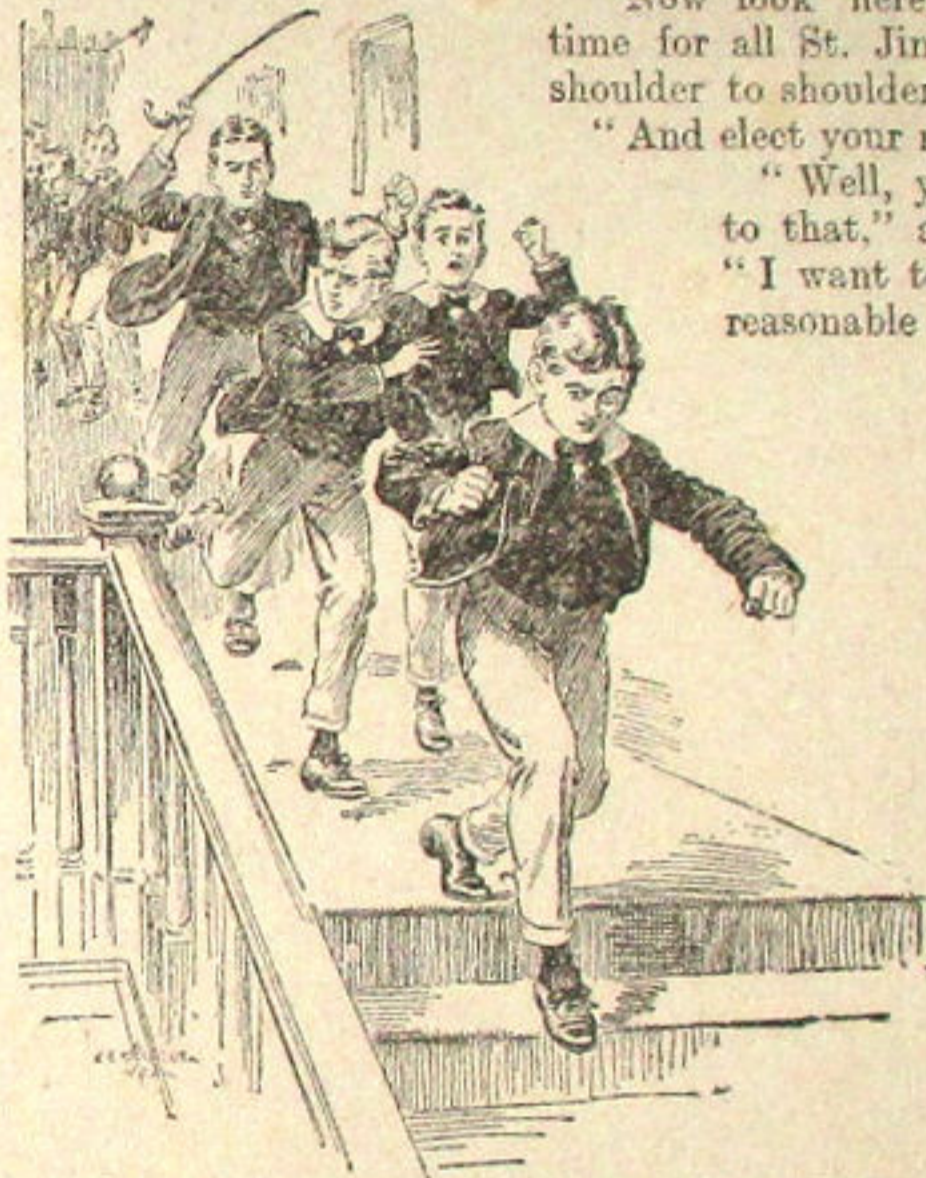
"Oh, don't be funny!" said Figgins crossly. "Besides, what candidates have you got? Knox of the Sixth—a rotten bully—and Cutts

of the Fifth—a beastly blackguard! You know as well as I do that Cutts is a gambler, and a regular black sheep. Nice kind of a captain for St. Jim's, I must say!"

"We don't want either Knox or Cutts," said Tom Merry promptly. "There will be a better man put up. There hasn't been time yet."

"And the better man will belong to this House," said Figgins.

"Rats!"



The Terrible Three ran for the stairs, with Monteith behind them, still lashing out with his cane. (See page 281)

"If Figgins cannot take the matter seriously——" began Manners.

"It's you silly asses who're not taking it seriously!" hooted Figgins. "We won't have Knox or Cutts at any price!"

"But what about Darrel or Langton?"

"Blow Darrel or Langton!"

"Besides, they won't put up, most likely," said Kerr. "Darrel's working for an examination now, and he won't have the time, and Langton never shoves himself forward in anything. All the good men are on our side—Monteith, or Baker, or Webb——"

"Hot!"

"You've got two candidates," said Figgins, "and they're the rottenest you could scrape up, even in that old casual ward you call a House. You can't say that either Knox or Cutts would make a good captain of the school."

"Admitted," said Tom Merry.

"Then you'll vote for our man!"

"No fear! Must be a School House chap!"

"I suppose I was an ass to think for a moment that you could talk sense," said Figgins disdainfully. "You'd rather have a cad like Cutts, or a bully like Knox, than a really decent man from this side."

"Well, your Monteith is rather a bully, if you come to that. You've had plenty of rows with him yourself," said Lowther.

"One forgets little personal differences at a time like this," said Figgins loftily.

"Then we can forget our little personal differences with Cutts of the Fifth."

"That's different."

"How is it different?" demanded Lowther.

"No good talking sense to a silly ass!" said Figgins. "There's none so blind as those who won't see. Any silly chump could see at once that Monteith is the right man."

"That accounts for your seeing it, I suppose!" Lowther remarked reflectively.

And Tom Merry and Manners chuckled.

"If you're looking for a thick ear, Monty Lowther, you've come to the right shop!" said Figgins darkly. "In fact, if you fellows are going to play the giddy ox over this section, it wouldn't be a bad idea to start by giving you a jolly good walloping all round."

"Might knock some sense into them," assented Kerr.

The Terrible Three looked warlike at once. They, too, were exasperated by their rivals' obstinate view of the case.

"We came here on a peaceable errand," said Tom Merry warmly. "But we're quite ready to wipe up the study with you chaps, if you come to that."

"Pile in, then!" said Figgins defiantly. "Here's the study, and here's us!"

"Look here——"

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

"For two pins I'd wipe up the floor with you, Figgins!" roared Tom Merry.

Figgins promptly searched on the mantelpiece, found two pins, and extended them to the captain of the Shell.

"There you are!" he snorted.

"You silly ass!"

"You burbling chump!"

No more was said. Tom Merry's left arm was embracing Figgins's neck the next moment, and his right was very busy. Both Figgins's hands were busy. And in less time than it takes to tell, as a novelist would put it, Kerr and Wynn and Manners and Lowther were mixed up in a wild and whirling tussle.

Tramp—tramp—tramp!

"Ow, you rotter!"

"Groo! You lathead!"

"Yow-ow! School House cad! Yow!"

"New House rotter! Groo!"

"Chuck the cads out!" roared Figgins.

Manners went out first, and landed in the passage with a bump. But it was Figgins who followed him, chucked out of his own study. Kerr and Lowther came whirling out together, and stumbled over Figgins and Manners, and made a wild and wriggling heap in the passage. Tom Merry and Fatty Wynn staggered out after them—chucking one another out. The uproar in the passage was terrific, and the excited juniors did not hear steps upon the stairs.

Monteith of the Sixth, the head prefect of the New House, came up the stairs three at a time, with a cane in his hand.

He did not stop to talk. There was no need for words. Action was required, and the prefect's actions were prompt and emphatic.

Whack! whack! whack! whack!

"Yow-ow! Ow! Yarocoo!"

SHOULDER HIGH!



To face page 281

CHAIRING THE NEW CAPTAIN!

The combatants separated suddenly. Figgins & Co. bolted back into their study, and slammed the door. The Terrible Three ran for the stairs, with Monteith behind them, still lashing out with the cane.

Tom Merry and his chums were feeling decidedly ill-used by the time they escaped from the New House and fled across the quadrangle. Monteith grinned at them from the doorway.

"And that's the rotter Figgins wants us to vote for!" growled Monty Lowther, as they dodged into the School House.

"Catch us voting for him!" sniffed Manners.

"Blessed if I wouldn't rather have Cutts!" grunted Tom Merry.

"Seems to me we've had cuts—too many of them," said Lowther.

"Oh, don't be funny now!"

And in Figgins's study in the New House the Co. were rubbing their injuries, and grumbling with emphasis.

"Monteith is rather a handy beast with the cane," Figgins remarked.

"Rotten!" groaned Fatty Wynn. "I got three!"

"And I got two!" growled Kerr. "Blessed if I haven't half a mind to vote for a School House man after all."

But Figgins shook his head.

"We're going to vote for Monteith, if he skins us!" he said. "It's up to the New House."

And the Co. grunted and agreed.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER

A Most Important Meeting!

"THREE giddy candidates!" Jack Blake remarked.

It was the morning.

The previous evening the St. Jim's fellows had discussed the question of the vacant captaincy in all its bearings.

The School House fellows were almost unanimously of opinion that the new captain must be a School House chap. They really felt that the stars in their courses would object to anything else. That was a rule as firmly fixed as the solar system, or the laws of Medes and Persians.

The New House fellows, on the other hand,

were perfectly unanimous in declaring that the time had come for a change, and that it was high time the New House had a look in.

A popular candidate on the School House side, standing alone, would have been assured of an easy victory, for the School House had nearly twice as many occupants as the smaller House over the way.

But it had to be admitted that neither Knox nor Cutts was popular.

Also, the candidates split the vote.

With the School House divided between the two, the New House had an excellent chance of getting their man in—especially as many School House fellows in the senior Forms undoubtedly preferred Monteith to either Knox or Cutts.

Cutts, the dandy of the Fifth, was popular with a certain set, but he was a black sheep, and all the more thoughtful fellows were against him. Knox was a bully, and very much disliked in the Lower School.

Monteith of the New House had his faults, but he was a good footballer, a good captain of his House, and he had a great deal of influence. He was likely to make a better captain of the school than either of the others. As Tom Merry remarked, if he had only been in the School House there wouldn't have been any doubt about the election; they'd have plumped for Monteith, and left both Cutts and Knox out in the cold.

As it was, the matter was in great doubt.

After morning lessons, Tom Merry called a meeting in the junior common-room to discuss the election. The meeting was well attended. Most of the juniors looked to Tom Merry to give them a lead.

"The question is, are we going to vote for a cad like Cutts, or a brute like Knox, or let a New House chap romp home?" said Lumley-Lumley of the Fourth.

"It's wathah a difficult mattah," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked thoughtfully. "We don't want that boundah Cutts, and we don't want that bwute Knox—but above all, we don't want a New House fellah."

"Hear, hear!"

"Seems no way out of it," said Jack Blake; "but we can't let the New House man get in, that's a dead cert."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Gentlemen——" began Tom Merry.

There was a buzz of talk, and Monty Lowther rapped on the table.

"Silence for the chair!" he shouted.

"Who's the chair?" demanded Blake.

"I'm chairman of this meeting——"

"Who made you chairman?" a dozen voices inquired at once.

Rap, rap, rap!

"Order! Gentlemen, Tom Merry will now address the meeting——"

"I have some wemarks to make myself, Lowthah——"

"You can go out into the passage and make them, D'Arcy. Tom Merry will now address the honourable meeting——"

"I wefuse to go out into the beastly passage and make my wemarks——"

"Order!"

"I wefuse to ordah——"

"Chuck that heckler out!" shouted Lowther. "Blessed if he isn't worse than a blessed suffragette. Boot him out!"

"You wottah——"

"Silence!" shouted Manners. "Pile in, Tommy!"

"Gentlemen! I——"

"I was goin' to say—— Ow-yow! Leggo, Mannahs, you silly ass, or I shall stwike you."

"Order!"

"Yes, shut up a bit, Gussy," said Blake. "You can have your whack after Tom Merry's finished!"

"Wats! Let Tom Mewwy have his whack aftah I am finished."

"But you never are finished, you know," remarked Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, I considah——"

"Silence!"

The united efforts of Blake and Herries and Digby reduced Arthur Augustus to indignant silence at last, and Tom Merry proceeded:

"Gentlemen, we have now reached an important and unequalled crisis in the history of St. Jim's——"

"Hear, hear!"

"Correct!"

"Silence!"

"The good old school is in danger of falling

from its high estate, and, in plain English, of sliding off to the giddy bow-wows."

"Is that plain English?" said Blake, in astonishment.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!"

"We are in danger," resumed Tom Merry, "of getting a New House chap as captain of the school. Gentlemen, that calamity must be warded off! Such a state of things must never come to pass. Every fellow must buck up and keep the New House man out. Is any here who would give his own House the go-by, and let in a rotter from over the way? If any, speak, for him have I offended!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Give Shakespeare a rest, and come down to business," implored Blake.

"Gentlemen, if there are none here who would go back on their own House, and let in a bounder from the rival show, let none speak, for none have I offended," went on Tom Merry, who had prepared that speech in advance, and was naturally determined to deliver it in its entirety. "Gentlemen, I had rather be a dog, and bay the moon, than such a Roman!"

"Hear, hear!"

"It is settled, therefore, gentlemen, that a School House chap must prance off with the Peek Frean——"

"Hear, hear!"

"And any outsider who tries to wedge in must get it where the chicken got the chopper—in the neck!" said Tom Merry, waxing more eloquent as he proceeded, "but behold——"

"Well, that's a good word!" murmured Blake.

"Behold, at this crisis in our history, there is a split in the House. Two candidates have put up to divide the vote. And it must be admitted, that neither candidate possesses the confidence of this House."

"Vewy twue——"

"Yes, rather; pair of rotters."

"I guess that's so," said Lumley-Lumley; "but any old thing is better than having a New House man."

"Yaas, wathah! That would be the howlin' limit."

"Gentlemen, there is therefore only one thing to be done——"

"Pile in!"

"What's the wheeze?"

"There must be another candidate found."

"Oh!" said the meeting in surprise.

"We must discover a candidate more acceptable to the feelings of this House," said Tom Merry, firmly. "Some more respectable and respected person must be made to come forward, and then Knox and Cutts will get the marble eye."

"Hear, hear!"

"Pway allow me to speak——"

"Order! Silence! Shut up!"

"I insist upon sayin' a word——"

"Boot him out!"

"I wefuse to be booted out. I have a candidate to suggest."

"Members of the meeting are allowed to suggest candidates," said Tom Merry, graciously. "Buck up, Gussy, and give him a name."

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"I weally wegard myself as a wight and pwopah person to be skippah of this coll. I have the honour to pwopose myself for the suf-wages of this hon-ouwable meetin'," said the swell of the Fourth, with dignity.

"Order!"

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"Kick him out!" roared the meeting.

Business was interrupted for a few moments while Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was deposited in the passage on his neck. Kangaroo of the Shell slammed the door upon him, and his indignant voice was no longer heard.

"Now to business," said Tom Merry, briskly. "Gentlemen, there are plenty of Sixth Form chaps in the School House in whom we have confidence. I may say that no person could possibly make a good captain of the school who had not the confidence of the juniors."

"Hear, hear!"

"Old Kildare was the right sort!"

"Good old Kildare!" chorused the meeting.

"Unless the Lower School bucks up, I fear there will be a worse come in his place," said Tom Merry. "Gentlemen, I suggest a deputation of the Lower School to wait upon a proper candidate, and make him come forward. Darrel of the Sixth is our man."

"Bravo!"

"Darrel is hiding his light under a bushel at present. But this isn't a time for him to blush unseen and waste his sweetness on the desert air. At this crisis in our history he has got to come forward, and if he won't come he's got to be made."

"Hurray!"

"Gentlemen, I appoint myself chairman of a deputation——"

"Like your cheek!" said Blake.

"I select Lowther, Manners, Blake, Kangaroo, Herries, Digby, Reilly, and Lumley-Lumley as members of the deputation——"

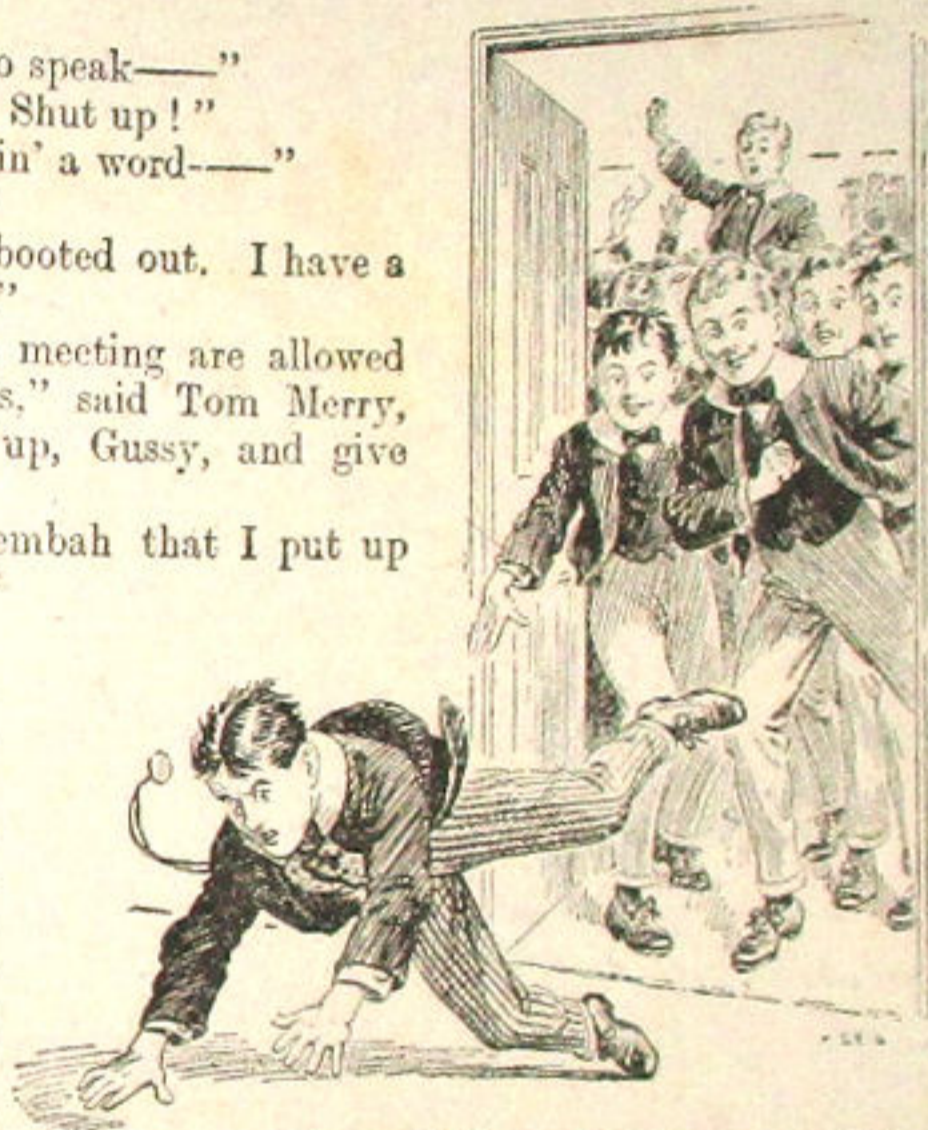
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"At a time like this, with the fate of the old school trembling in the balance, it's no time for Darrel to do the thinking of disgusting examinations."

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"It's up to us to point out his duty to him and see that he does it. Gentlemen, the deputation will now accompany me to Darrel's study, and all the other fellows can come along and stay in the passage, and cheer when I give the signal."

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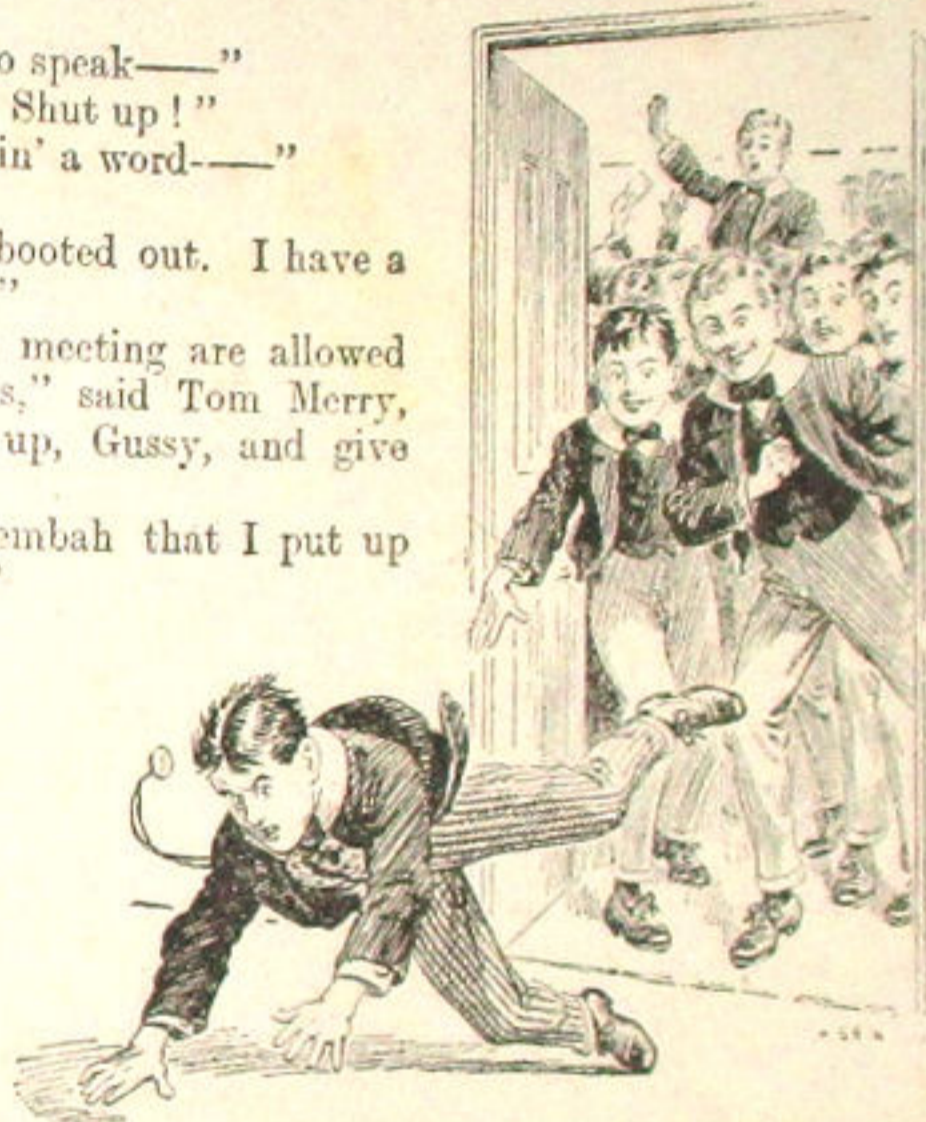
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"And as there is no time like the present, I vote that we strike the iron while it is hot, and get to Darrel at once. He's in his study now, swotting over some filthy exam. or other. Let's have him out."

"Hear, hear!"

Tom Merry's proposal was carried unanimously. The captain of the Shell marched off, followed by the deputation; and the rest of the meeting marched after them like an army. And in a few minutes the Sixth Form passage was swarmed, and buzzing like a hive of bees.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER

No Luck!

KNOX of the Sixth looked out of his study doorway.

Knox's face was unusually amiable.

As a rule, Knox was what the juniors described as a beastly bully, and if he found a junior within reach of his hand, that was generally sufficient reason for Knox to cuff him. That little habit of Knox's did not endear him to the Lower School.

But Knox the bully, and Knox the candidate for the captaincy, were two quite different persons. Knox was very keen to get in as captain of the school. And he knew that he had not the slightest chance of getting in unless he could ingratiate himself with the juniors and obtain their votes.

So Knox twisted his displeasing countenance into an unaccustomed grin as he looked at the juniors in the Sixth Form passage.

"Hallo, what are you kids after?" he asked.

Blake winked at his comrades. He could not resist the opportunity of pulling the leg of the unpopular prefect.

"We're a deputation," he said, gravely.

"Oh, are you?" said Knox, amiably.

"About the election, I suppose?"

"That's it. We've come to see the Sixth Form candidate."

"Oh, good!" said Knox.

"We want to impress upon him that he's going to get all our votes, and that it's his duty to keep all rival candidates out," explained Blake.

Knox nodded with satisfaction.

"That's right," he said. "You back up the Sixth Form candidate. It's simply ridicu-

lous for Cutts to put up for election. There never was a Fifth-former captain of St. Jim's that I know of."

"That's what we all say," remarked Monty Lowther, entering into Blake's little joke. "Cutts is simply out of it."

"Certainly!" said Knox.

"Like his cheek to put up, don't you think so, Knox?"

"Decidedly."

"Besides, he isn't the kind of captain we want."

"Of course he isn't," agreed Knox.

"What we want is a really straight, out-and-out fellow—a chap one can rely on—a fellow who's as good as his word, and can always be depended on to play the game," said Manners.

Knox grinned again; a little uneasily. That description did not apply to him, and he knew it, and he was surprised to hear Manners speak like that. But it had not yet occurred to him that the deputation had come to the Sixth Form quarters to see anybody but himself.

"Ye-es, exactly," said Knox.

"You approve of our views, Knox, I hope?" asked Blake solemnly.

"Most certainly," said Knox.

"Then you'll come with us to ask Darrel to put up?" said Blake, innocently.

Knox's jaw dropped.

"Darrel!" he ejaculated.

"Yes; we want Darrel to put up as a candidate—that's what we've come here for," Blake explained, apparently not noticing the change in the Sixth-former's face.

Knox's teeth gritted together, and his eyes gleamed with fury.

"You—you've come here to ask Darrel to put up?" he shouted.

"Yes; didn't you know?" said Blake, with angelic innocence.

"You—you young rotter!"

"Why, just now you said you agreed with us, and approved!" exclaimed Blake, in astonishment. "There seems to be no pleasing you, Knox."

"You—you—I thought—I mean——"

"Won't you come with us to ask Darrel to put up?"

"No, I won't!" roared Knox. "Get out of this passage at once. How dare you fags crowd round the senior studies like this?"

"But we've come to——"

"Clear off at once!"

There was a howl of laughter from the crowd of juniors. Knox's change of attitude, as soon as he discovered that the deputation was for Darrel and not for himself, was very striking. But the juniors did not mean to be ordered off. They had come there to interview Darrel, and they meant to interview Darrel.

"Sorry!" said Tom Merry, with great politeness, as Knox repeated his angry order. "We're here on business, you know, and we're not going just yet."

"I order you to clear off!" shouted Knox.

"You're not a prefect now, you know," said Blake, coolly. "The Head sacked you from that, after you went to the races."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We take orders only from prefects," said Monty Lowther. "You are a bad boy, Knox, and we don't take any notice of you."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you don't clear out of this passage, I'll come and boot you out!" roared Knox, furiously.

"Well, if you can boot fifty chaps out, you're welcome to try it on," said Jack Blake, laughing. "I fancy somebody will get hurt, and I suspect that it won't be us. But come and begin the booting, Knoxey."

Knox did not come and begin the booting. Since he had been deprived of his prefectship by the Head his authority was gone; and as for using force, the juniors were rather too many for that to be successful. So Knox went back into his study and slammed the door forcibly, and the juniors chuckled with glee.

"This is where Knoxey takes a back seat," Blake remarked. "Now let's get on with the washing. Have old Darrel out."

Tom Merry thumped at Darrel's door, and opened it. Darrel of the Sixth was seated at the table, with books and papers round him. He did not look pleased at the intrusion as the junior deputation marched into his study.

"Hallo, what do you young shavers want?" said Darrel, which was not encouraging for a beginning. But Tom Merry did not falter.

"We want you, Darrel!" he said directly.

"Eh, what's that?"

"You're wanted to put up as captain of St. Jim's in the election now pending. We're a deputation from the Lower School, and we've come to ask you."

Tom Merry made a signal to the crowd in the passage, and there was a roar of cheering at once.

"Hurray!"

"Darrel captain! Hurray!"

Darrel of the Sixth smiled, and shook his head and said:

"Sorry! I've decided not to stand."

"Yes, we know that," said Tom Merry. "But we want you to alter your decision, you see."

"Sorry!"

"You admit, Darrel, that it won't do to let in rotters like Knox and Cutts——"

"You mustn't talk of seniors like that, unless you're looking for a thick ear," said Darrel, frowning. "But if you're not satisfied with Knox and Cutts, there's another candidate—a really good man—Monteith of the New House."

"Oh, rats!"

"What?" exclaimed Darrel, rising. Darrel was a Sixth-former and a prefect, and he was not accustomed to such rejoinders to his remarks.

"Ahem! I don't mean rats!" said Tom Merry hastily. "That was a slip of the tongue. What I mean is, that we can't have a New House bounder as captain of the school."

"Monteith's just fitted for the post," said Darrel. "I'm going to vote for him myself."

"You are?" gasped the juniors.

"Certainly! I think he's the best man."

"But he's a New House chap!" howled the deputation.

"What about that?"

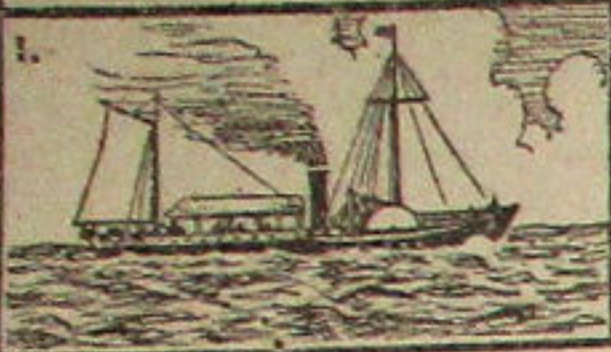
"Well, it's up to the School House, you know."

"Nonsense."

"Wha-a-at!"

"Vote for Monteith," said Darrel. "He's the right man, in my opinion. And I think it's time the New House had a show, too. The school captain has always been elected from this House. Turn about is fair play."

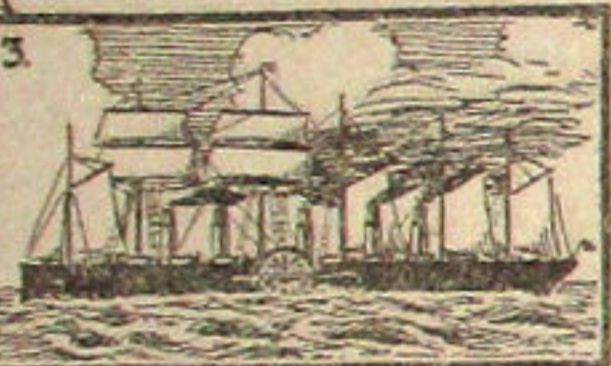
The Development of the Steamship.



The first real attempt at steam navigation took place about the year 1780, when experiments were being carried out in England, France, and America, but the original successful steamboat must be accredited to Robert Fulton. After many failures and disappointments he at last constructed the Clermont (see Fig. 1). This was undoubtedly the first boat driven by steam that was of any practical use. She made her trial trip in 1807 and was only 133 ft. in length. What a midget when compared with the present-day Atlantic liners!

One of the first two steamships to cross the Atlantic (they both arrived in America on the same day—April 23, 1838) was the Great Western, shown in Fig. 2. This boat was 212 feet long, registered 1,349 tons, and took 14 days for the trip.

From this date onwards shipbuilding went ahead by leaps and bounds, and it is an interesting fact that from the very first, right up to the present day, the world's finest boats have always been on the Trans-Atlantic services.



The first Atlantic company to be founded was the famous Cunard Co. Their original vessels were the Britannia, Arcadia, Columbia, and Caledonia, all paddle steamers with an average speed of 8½ knots. Perhaps the most celebrated present-day "Cunarders" are the Mauretania, Aquitania, and Berengaria. The Mauretania at one time was the fastest ocean passenger steamer afloat, and held all the Atlantic records. The Berengaria was the German ship Imperator. She has a tonnage of 52,000, and a length well over 900 feet.

Before leaving paddle steamers we must mention the colossal Great Eastern (Fig. 3), which had five funnels and six masts, and the Scotia (Fig. 4). The Scotia was built in 1832, and was the last great ocean-going paddle steamer. She was the finest boat of her time, and made the Atlantic crossing in 8 days 22 hours. Her length was 367 feet, and she was of 3,871 tons burden.

After this, screw propellers were exclusively used for steamship propulsion, and remain in use to-day, although of course the engines have improved vastly.

The year 1874 saw the beginning of what has proved an unbroken and hotly sustained contest for the leading

place in the race across the Atlantic.

The leading Trans-Atlantic companies to-day are the Cunard and White Star, and the floating hotels run by these lines are marvels of luxury, speed, and size.

Space forbids mention of more than one of these palaces, but the following particulars relating to R.M.S. Majestic (Fig. 5), are full of interest, especially when compared with Robert Fulton's little Clermont.

The Majestic is the largest vessel in the world. She has a length over all of 956 feet, a breadth of 100 feet, a gross tonnage of 56,000, and a displacement of 46,000 tons when loaded to her marks.

The turbine machinery will develop a maximum of 100,000 h.p., boilers cover an area of about 5 acres, and her average speed is 23 knots. She has one anchor weighing 15 tons and four of 10 tons each. There are 450 fire alarms and three wireless stations, the largest of which is capable of maintaining permanent connection with both America and Britain during the whole of the voyage.

The Majestic carries about 4,000 passengers and has a magnificent swimming-bath that can be supplied with about 125 tons of warm sea water in the short time of 25 minutes.

The world is now witnessing a revolution in shipping. Oil as a fuel for ships is now firmly established. The Majestic burns oil. The principal economy effected in the use of oil fuel is that a ship can carry sufficient fuel for the return journey, as against one journey only with coal.

The machinery and boiler plant of the Majestic is the largest ever installed on a passenger vessel.

To provide for the feeding of the population of this floating town, the foodstuffs carried for one voyage only include about 25,000 lb. of fresh meat, 48,000 eggs, 26,000 lb. of vegetables, and 31,000 lb. of milk.

The weight of fuel, water, provisions, baggage, mail, passengers, and crew constitutes nearly the whole deadweight capacity of the vessel. There is, therefore, not much room for cargo, but the Majestic is essentially a passenger vessel, and a truly wonderful example of the shipbuilders' art she is, too.

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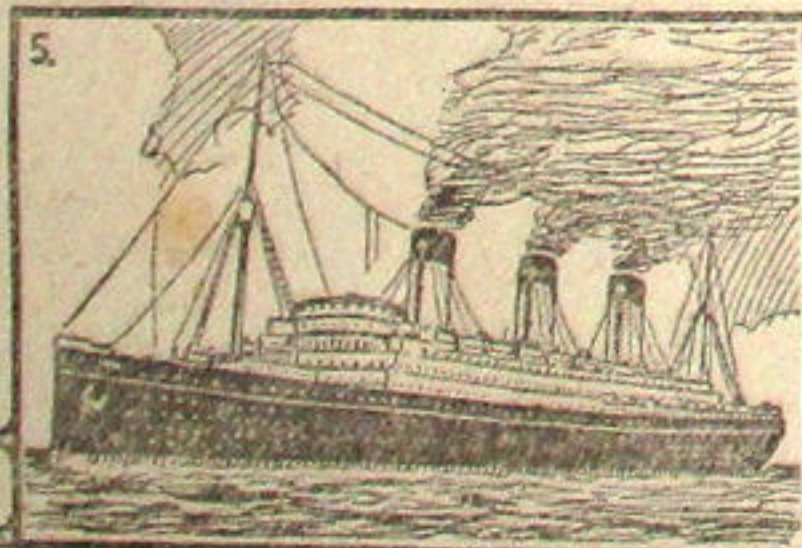
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"Thou, too, Brutus!" said Monty Lowther, rationally.

"Ob, draw it mild, Darrel," said Tom Merry, in indignant expostulation. "Surely you can see that we simply must get a School House chap in?"

"I don't see it at all."

"You're not going back on your own House, are you, Darrel?" howled Blake.

"Stuff!" said Darrel. "Why shouldn't a New House chap be captain? You can't expect the Sixth to take notice of your blessed fag rows."

The deputation gazed at Darrel in speechless indignation. Their great warfare with the New House described as "fag rows!" The terrific importance of getting a School House fellow elected as captain regarded as nonsense! They could scarcely believe their ears. As Blake said afterwards, more in sorrow than in anger, he never would have believed it of old Darrel. The only possible explanation was that Darrel had been working too hard for that blessed exam., and had gone off his chump.

"Well," said Tom Merry at last, in almost tragic tones. "I never expected you to speak like this, Darrel. If you can't see the importance of having a School House chap as captain of St. Jim's, there's no more to be said."

"Quite so," said Darrel. "Close the door after you, will you?"

It was dismissal with a vengeance. Tom Merry had said that there was no more to be said, but he had intended to say a good deal more, all the same. But Darrel stood with his hand on the open door, and there was nothing for it but to go. The deputation filed slowly and sorrowfully out of the study.

"Well," said Gore, in the passage; "is this where we cheer?"

"No, it isn't!" snapped Tom Merry. "Shut your silly head!"

And he led his followers sorrowfully away.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER

Declined with Thanks!

LANGTON of the Sixth was on the footer ground, chatting with Rushden, when he noticed quite an army of juniors marching up to him. Langton glanced at

them in surprise, and Rushden whistled. The two Sixth-formers waited for the army to come up. Tom Merry and his chums were in the lead, and more than fifty School House juniors brought up the rear. And they were all looking very serious.

"Hallo, what is it—house on fire?" asked Langton.

"Ahem! No. We're a deputation," Tom Merry explained.

"My hat!"

"We've come to speak to you, Langton."

"Pile in!" said Langton genially. "No extra charge!"

"We've talked it over," said Tom Merry, with a wave of the hand towards his supporters, "and we have decided that you are not the kind of fellow to let the old school go to the dogs, if you can help it."

Langton looked astonished.

"Certainly not!" he agreed. "If I see St. Jim's on the move in the direction of the bow-wows I will hold it back with both hands. Any signs of it?"

The deputation looked a little uncomfortable. It was such an awfully serious matter that they really wished old Langton wouldn't take it in this humorous way.

"The fact is," said Tom Merry, after a brief pause, "there's going to be an election for a new captain, now Kildare's hooked it."

"I believe I've heard something of it," assented Langton.

"There are three candidates—one of them a New House chap, and the others two awful rotters; the whole crowd quite impossible," Tom Merry explained. "We want you to come to the rescue, Langton."

"We want you to put up as skipper," said Blake.

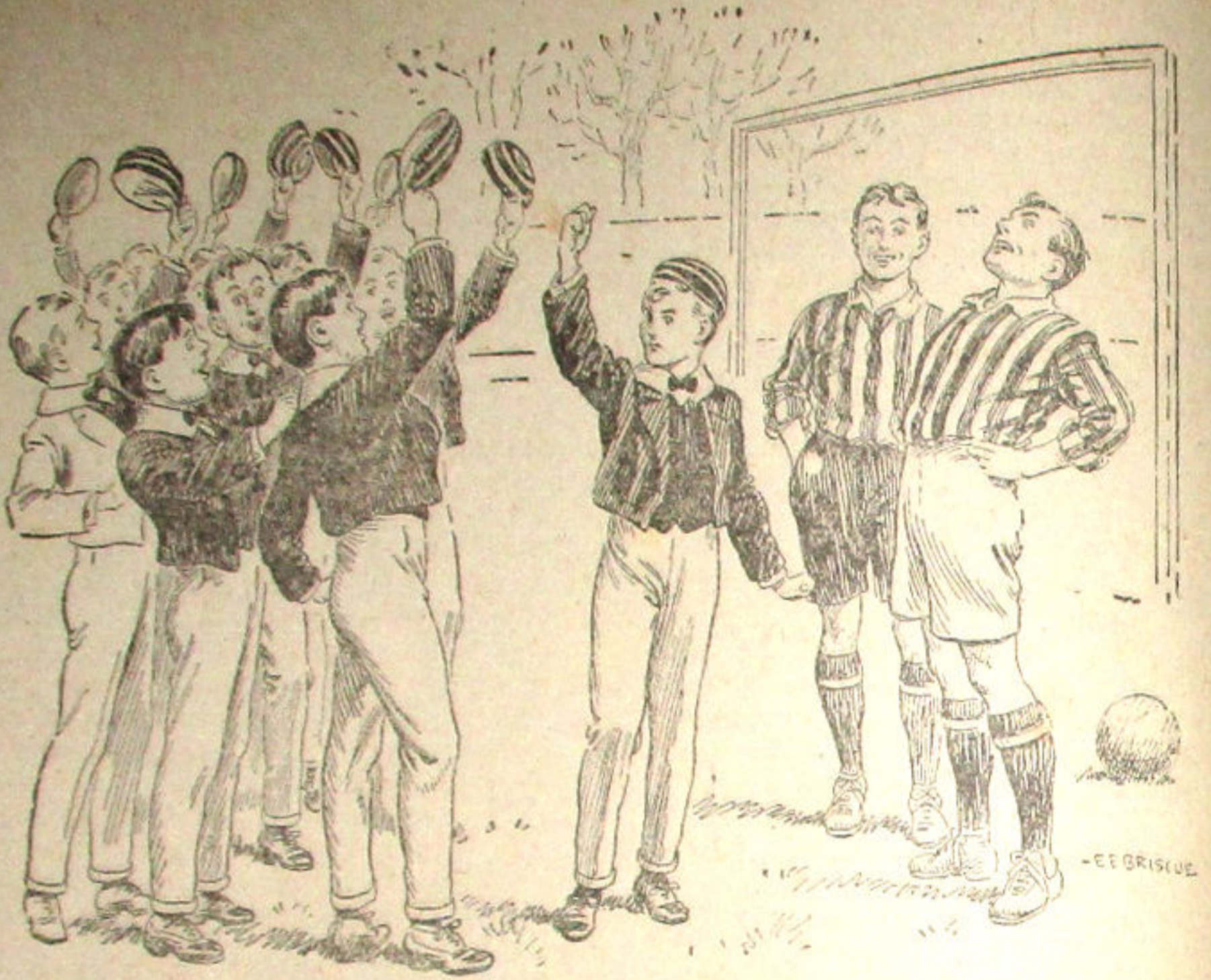
Tom Merry raised his hand as a signal to his followers, and they burst into a cheer, as previously arranged.

"Langton captain! Hurray!"

Langton stared at them.

"Hold on!" he exclaimed. "You may as well save your breath. There are three candidates already, and I don't want to stand in their light. I haven't the slightest intention of putting up as captain."

"Never mind standing in their light," said



Rushden broke into a roar of laughter. The situation seemed to strike him as funny. He put his hands to his sides, and yelled. (See opposite page)

Tom Merry. "That's what we want you to do. You know Knox is no good as captain."
 "Well?"
 "And Cutts is in the Fifth. Now you'll admit that we don't want a captain out of any Form but the top Form in the school."
 "Yes, I do think that," agreed Langton.
 "Good! And Monteith is a New House chap, so he's barred. You see, some other chap must put up. You're the man!"
 And the crowd cheered again.
 "Langton for captain! Hurray!"
 "But I'm not going to put up," said Langton calmly. "I'm not ambitious, and I think Monteith's a good man. Personally, I'm going to vote for Monteith."
 "What about the prestige of the School House?" demanded Blake hotly.
 "Oh, the juniors can look after that," said

Langton genially. "It will be quite safe in your hands."
 The deputation looked a little sheepish.
 "We're not going to have the New House man at any price," said Tom Merry flatly. "We'd rather have even Cutts of the Fifth. You ought to put up, Langton."
 "Thanks, no!"
 "We're a deputation!"
 "You've told me that before."
 "And we've come to put it to you as a decent chap."
 "Oh, cut off!"
 "It's your duty——"
 "Stuff——"
 "Very well," said the chairman of the deputation, with dignity. "There are others! If you don't want to be captain of St. Jim's, Langton, there are other fellows who do!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Find 'em, then, and give me a rest," yawned Langton.

Tom Merry turned to Rushden, who was listening with a grin on his face. All the deputation and the crowd turned to Rushden, too, giving Langton the cold shoulder, which did not seem, however, to worry Langton very much.

"Rushden," said Tom Merry, "as a good footballer, you are just the chap to be captain of St. Jim's."

"I!" ejaculated Rushden, in surprise.

"Yes, you! We're a deputation of the Lower School——"

"My hat!"

"And we request you to stand for election!"

Tom Merry raised his hand to the crowd, and they burst into a ringing cheer once more.

"Rushden for captain! Hurray!"

Rushden broke into a roar of laughter. The situation seemed to strike him as funny. He put his hands to his sides, and yelled.

"Ha, ha, hā!"

Tom Merry regarded him indignantly. The crowd looked restive and wrathful.

"What are you cackling at?" demanded Tom.

"Well, it struck me as humorous," said Rushden. "Thanks awfully for your good opinion, and for giving me the second offer after Langton; but I'm really not looking out for glory. Declined with thanks."

"Now, look here, Rushden——"

"'Nuff said!" yawned Rushden. "Buzz off!"

And he walked away with Langton, to put an end to the interview, leaving the deputation standing where they were, and looking decidedly wrathful and very disappointed.

"Well, this beats the band!" said Monty Lowther. "All the blessed Sixth have grown very modest all of a sudden, and want to hide their giddy illumination under a bushel."

"They don't want to stand in Monteith's way," growled Blake. "That's what it is. As for the prestige of the House they don't care twopence for it. Disgusting, I call it!"

And the disappointed deputation walked away, and the crowd broke up. Evidently there was nothing doing.

Arthur Augustus met the angry and excited deputation as they came into the School House. His eyeglass gleamed at them inquiringly.

"Well, has it gone all wight?" he asked.

"No," growled Blake.

"Won't the Sixth-Form boundahs stand?"

"They won't!"

"Then you will have to come back to my proposition," said Arthur Augustus firmly. "You had better resolve to elect me as captain of St. Jim's, and—— Yah! Oh! Yawoooooh!"

The deputation were fed up. If Langton hadn't been a Sixth-former and a prefect they would have bumped him on the footer ground. D'Arcy wasn't either a Sixth-former or a prefect, and he had happened along just in time to provide the angry deputation with a victim. They seized the swell of St. Jim's, and, in disregard of his yells of protest, bumped him in the doorway, and rolled him down the steps.

Then, somewhat relieved in their feelings, they went their way, leaving the swell of the Fourth in a dazed and dishevelled and breathless state at the foot of the School House steps.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER

A Sporting Offer!

GERALD CUTTS of the Fifth Form came along after lessons that day, and looked into Knox's study. Knox of the Sixth was sitting at his table with a pencil in his hand and a paper before him. Cutts grinned as he noted that the paper contained a list of names. The Sixth-former was evidently going over the list of his possible supporters in the forthcoming election.

Knox scowled and hid the paper with his hand as he saw Cutts looking in.

"It's a common custom to knock at a door before shoving oneself into another fellow's room," he remarked.

"Oh, we needn't stand on ceremony with one another," said Cutts, coming into the study, and closing the door after him. "We're pals, you know."

"Not much like an old pal, setting up against me in this election," growled Knox. "I never expected it of you."

"It's the unexpected that always happens, you know," said Cutts pleasantly. "It's the election I've come to speak to you about."

"Are you going to stand down, then?"

Cutts laughed.

"Not much."

"Then I don't see that there's anything to be said."

"I do. You know Monteith is putting up on the other side, and he will get a lot of support in this House. Most of the Sixth will plump for him. They don't want a Fifth-former to be captain, and they don't want you, Knoxey."

"They may have to have me, whether they want me or not!" snapped Knox.

"We're splitting the vote on this side," resumed Cutts. "It looks to me as if the New House man will get in if we keep it up like this."

"Stand out, then!"

"I might as well ask you to stand out."

"You can if you like," said Knox grimly.

"Can't we come to some arrangement?" Cutts asked. "Look here, we're both sportsmen. Will you toss for it?"

Knox stared at him blankly.

"Toss up for it!" he repeated.

"Exactly! We can't both get in as captain, that's a dead cert, and if we remain rivals for the House vote we shall most likely both get left, and the New House candidate will romp home. I'm willing to toss up for it—a single chuck or best two out of three."

"Well, my hat! You ass!"

"I think it's a fair offer. You've as much chance as I have, and it would be a sporting way of settling the point," said Cutts.

Knox felt in his pocket for his double-headed penny, and failing to find it there, he shook his head.

"I don't believe in settling things that way," he said. "I'm going to stand for the election, and get in if I can. I think I've got a pretty good chance. You're really out of it being in the Fifth. The captain of St. Jim's has always been a Sixth-former."

"And a prefect," added Cutts. "You're not a prefect now."

"I shall get round the Head to give that back to me when I'm elected. Anyway, that's not essential. I can be elected without being

a prefect. It was your fault I lost it. Your rotten scheme of an afternoon at the races!" growled Knox.

"Considering that you're in the Head's black books just at present, I fancy he won't be very pleased at your candidature."

"I don't care whether he is or not. He can't interfere. It's always understood that the fellows elect whomsoever they please as captain of the school."

"Yes; they elected a junior once," grinned Cutts. "The Head would have interfered, though, I think, if the kid hadn't got out of his own accord."

"He can't interfere with me. He might with you."

"Oh, rats! You won't come to an amicable arrangement, then?"

"I won't toss up for it, if that's what you mean. I think the idea's idiotic."

"You're not a sport," said Cutts, with a shake of the head. "Now, look here, Knox, I want very much to get in as captain, and if you don't split the vote I think I shall win it hands down. What will you take to stand out?"

"What will I take?" said Knox, in wonder.

"Yes. I'm in funds now. I had good luck over my last little speculation on the Turf. Will you take a tenner to stand out?"

"Keep your beastly money!" said Knox, with a flush.

"I'll see that you become vice-captain," said Cutts, unheeding. "I'll make you my right-hand man if you back me up. We'll change everything when we get the thing into our hands. I'll make it easy for you to pay off your old grudges against Tom Merry and his friends, and we'll have a regular high old time. Lots of fellows have been very restive under Kildare's rule. They'll be glad of a change. In a week or two we'll make such a change that Kildare won't know the school if he comes back. I've got all sorts of plans in my head. You back me up——"

"You back me up, if you come to that," said Knox. "Go and tackle Monteith. He may be willing to stand aside to oblige you, I don't think. Offer him a ten-pound note to stand out—if you want to leave the New House on your neck."

PROMINENT JUNIOR FOOTBALLERS AT ST. JIM'S CAUGHT BY THE CAMERA!



Top Row, reading from left to right: Jack Blake, Fatty Wynn, George Kerr. 2nd Row: Ernest Levison, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, Harry Noble, Monty Lowther. 3rd Row: George Figgins, Richard Redfern, Reginald Talbot. Bottom Row: Harry Manners, Tom Merry, Robert Digby and George Herries. (291)

"I don't know," said Cutts thoughtfully. "Monteith is Kildare's other self now, but he used to be one of the boys. We were very thick together once, and he knew what it was to go on the razzle after lights out. I'll go and have a little talk with him about old times. If he'd stand aside and get me the New House vote I should beat you hollow, Knox!"

"You're welcome to try!" growled Knox.

"Thanks, I will!"

Cutts of the Fifth swung out of the study. He crossed the quadrangle towards the New House with a thoughtful brow. He had a pleasant smile or a cheery nod, however, for everyone he met. He was fully alive to the value of every vote. And Cutts, blackguard as he undoubtedly was, was popular in a way. He was rich, handsome, well-dressed, and the leader of fashion in the Middle School. Many fellows were anxious to get into Cutts's "set." Not to know Cutts was to be oneself unknown, as it were. It was an honour that was much appreciated to be asked on a "Sunday walk" with Cutts of the Fifth. And the stories that were whispered about Gerald Cutts made him a sort of mysterious and romantic figure in the eyes of many of the juniors. There was something very impressive, in a way, in the whispered rumours that Cutts "kept it up" at night with a card-playing set in the village, that he gave bridge parties in his study with the door locked, and kept a box of cigars in his locker. A fellow who ran daily the risk of being expelled from the school must possess plenty of courage and nerve, and there was no doubt that Cutts did not know the meaning of the word fear. And, reckless and dissipated as he was in the hidden portion of his life, outwardly he was frank and genial, a generous fellow with his money, and a first-class footballer and cricketer. There were a large number of fellows, especially in the Fifth Form, who considered that Cutts would make a first-rate successor to Kildare in the captaincy of St. Jim's.

That was Cutts's great ambition, and if he succeeded there was certain to be a big change after the Kildare regime. Kildare had kept down the fast set in the Upper School with an iron hand; but under Cutts's leadership they would have everything their own way.

And to be captain of the school while still in the Fifth Form—it was a distinction that was worth a struggle.

Cutts entered the New House, and he grinned as he heard a loud buzz of voices from the common-room at the end of the passage. He guessed that an election meeting was going on. Both Houses were in a buzz of excitement over it. He could hear Figgins's voice addressing the juniors, and he caught his own name.

"Plenty of canvassing, that's the watch-word!" Figgins was saying. "We've got to point out to all the School House fellows that they simply must vote for our man, or else they'll be landed with a bully like Knox or a blackguard like Cutts."

"Hear, hear!"

Cutts grinned, and went on to Monteith's study, and knocked at the door. There was a buzz of voices in the prefect's study also. Monteith called out to the newcomer to enter, and Cutts went in. Baker and Gray and Webb, of the Sixth, all New House fellows, were with the prefect, and they were evidently talking over the election.

"Hallo! One of the giddy rival candidates!" said Baker, as Cutts came in.

"I hope I'm not interrupting," said Cutts smoothly. "I wanted to have a few words with Monteith; but another time——"

"Oh, that's all right," said Baker, rising. "We're only jawing over the election. Give you a look in later, Monty."

"Right!" said Monteith.

The three seniors sauntered out of the study. Monteith looked inquiringly at Cutts. He did not know what the younger School House candidate could want with him.

"Squat down!" he said. "What is it? Are you going to resign from the election?"

"Not much!"

"What is it, then?"

"You see, we're landed in a three-cornered contest," Cutts remarked, coming to business at once. "We've got an overwhelming vote on our side, but it's split."

"All the better for me," remarked Monteith.

"Yes. Though I don't think you'll get in, all the same."

Monteith shrugged his shoulders.

"Most of the Sixth are for me," he said. "Darrel and Langton and Rushden have been over to tell me that they are going to vote for me, and a lot of your fellows will follow their lead."

"I've come over to propose an arrangement," said Cutts.

"Go ahead!"

"You used to be rather a sport, Monty. It's not so very long since we used to go down to the little parties at the Green Man together, and I haven't forgotten that there used to be sounds of revelry by night in your study."

The New House prefect frowned.

"That's all over," he said quietly. "That's quite finished with. I chucked that kind of thing for good some time back."

"Honest Injun!"

"Yes, honest Injun."

"I wish you joy of your good resolutions," said Cutts, with a yawn. "By the way, I made thirty quid on the races last week."

"How much did you lose the week before, and the week before that?" asked the prefect sarcastically.

Cutts did not reply to the question.

"If you weren't so dead set on your new resolutions, I could give you a tip——"

"Will you have the kindness to remember that you're talking to a prefect, Cutts?" said Monteith, with a gleam in his eyes. "I'll treat what you've just said as said in confidence, only don't talk like that any more. If I become captain of St. Jim's, I shall put my foot down on all that kind of thing. Any

senior discovered mixed up in betting will be reported to the Head, and sacked."

"Satan rebuking sin!" grinned Cutts.

"You can put it how you like, but I'm going to carry on Kildare's work just where he left it off if I can. The fellows know it, and that's why they're backing me up."

"Then it's not much good my making you a sporting offer?" said Cutts.

"Oh, you can make it."

"Will you toss up which of us withdraws from the election? Chap who loses stands out and does his best to back up the other party."

Monteith laughed.

"I'm not likely to settle a matter of this kind on the toss of a coin," he said. "No, I won't do anything of the kind."

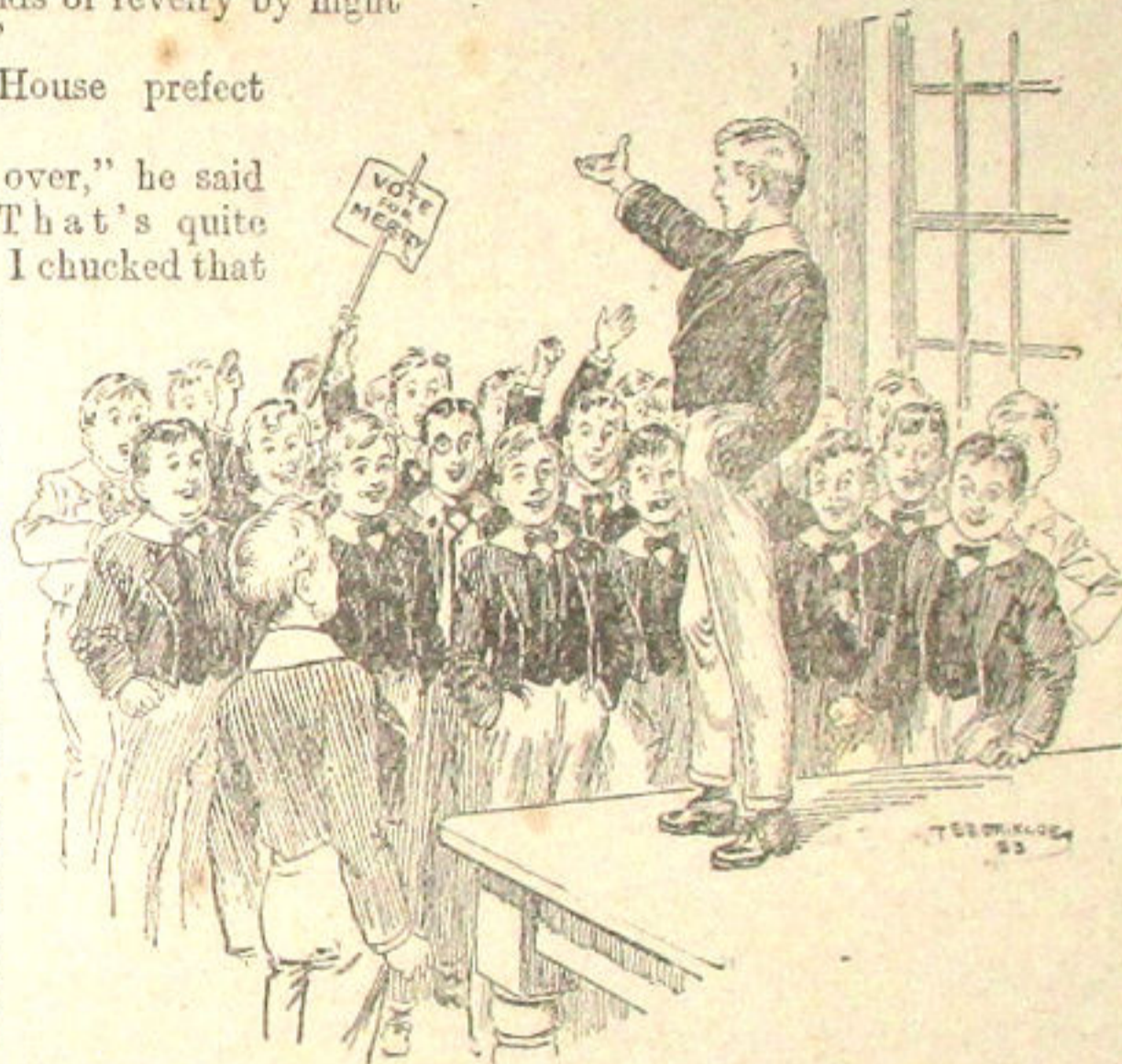
"You won't get in as captain," said Cutts between his teeth. "That's a fair and sporting offer, and if you had any of the sport in you, you'd accept."

"Then we'll take it that I haven't. Good-bye!"

"I'm not done yet. I'll make it impossible for you to get in as captain if you refuse my offer."

"And how will you do that?" asked Monteith contemptuously.

"Some of the things you have forgotten might be revived," said Cutts meaningly. "You were never so careful in covering up your tracks as I was. Bits of paper with your name on them may still be in existence."



"Gentlemen," said Tom Merry. "Why shouldn't a junior be captain of St. Jim's?" (See page 311)

"What!"

"If the Head knew about your little games of old, I fancy he would come down pretty heavy on your candidature."

Monteith looked fixedly at the Fifth-former.

"Do you know what you're doing?" he asked.

"Talking business," said Cutts.

"It's what people would call blackmail."

"Call it what you like. If you don't meet me fair and square, you'll find me a dangerous enemy," said Cutts. "I'm willing to settle the matter like a sportsman, and you refuse. Then look out for trouble. The offer's still open." Cutts took a shilling from his waistcoat pocket. "Now, then, be a sport—head or tail! If you guess right, I'll stand out of the election and back you all along the line. If you're wrong, you stand out and back me up. Call!"

"I shall do nothing of the sort!"

"Then look out for squalls!" said Cutts, returning the coin to his pocket.

Monteith made no reply; but he rose, crossed to the door, and threw it open. Baker and Webb and Gray were talking in a group in the passage, and Monteith called to them.

"Will you fellows come here a minute?"

"Certainly!" said Baker.

And the three seniors, somewhat surprised by Monteith's look, came back to the study.

Cutts had risen to his feet, looking a little alarmed.

Monteith did not seem to notice him.

"Cutts has just made me an offer, and I want you fellows to hear it," said the New House prefect. "He offers to toss up which stands out of the election. If I refuse, he is going to try to rake up some old stories to disgrace me with the Head and put a stopper on my candidature. That's his programme."

"My hat!" said Baker.

"The filthy cad!" said Webb.

"Kick him out of the House!" said Gray.

The three Sixth-formers came towards Cutts, who faced them with glittering eyes. He had not expected for a moment that Monteith would have the nerve to give him away in this manner, and even the cool and astute blackguard of the Fifth was a little at a loss.

"You needn't trouble to kick me out," he said calmly. "I'm going. Monteith has exaggerated a little."

"I've repeated exactly what you said," said Monteith, "and I defy you to do your worst. I won't make any terms with you."

"Shall we chuck him out, Monteith?" asked Baker. "The cad can't come here and insult our captain, and get off scot-free. He ought to go out on his neck."

"Keep your hands off!" said Cutts disdainfully. "There isn't a fellow in the New House who could chuck me out!"

"By Jove! I'll jolly soon show you!" exclaimed Baker.

He made a spring at Cutts. Baker was a bigger fellow than the Fifth-former, but Cutts was a master of the boxer's art, and he was as quick as lightning. His right came out in a flashing upper-cut, and Baker rolled over on the floor, feeling as if his jaw had been knocked through the top of his head. Gray had advanced at the same moment—just in time to get Cutts's left in the eye, and he sat down on the floor with a gasp. Cutts made a leap for the door and gained the passage.

"Ta-ta!" he said, with perfect coolness.

And he walked down the passage rather quickly, and strolled into the quadrangle whistling.

Before half an hour had passed the affray in Monteith's study was the talk of the school.

Jameson of the Third had seen it from the passage, and he had told his chum, Wally D'Arcy, and D'Arcy minor told the School House generally.

The cause of the trouble was not known, but the trouble itself was discussed in every study with great interest and breathless excitement.

The story grew at each repetition.

Ere long, all the School House firmly believed that Cutts of the Fifth had gone over to have a friendly talk with the New House candidate, and that he had been set on by Monteith and his friends, and that he had licked four or five of them in a stand-up fight, and then walked out of the house as cool as a cucumber, nobody daring to lay a finger on him. Needless to say, Cutts's popularity in his own House went up with a bound in consequence.

THE GREYFRIARS ALPHABET



THE GREAT MAN OF THE FIFTH

By HORACE COKER

A's ADMIRATION, which I always gain
Except from the fellows who think I'm
insane!

B is for BLUNDELL, our skipper, you see;
But I'd make a better, I think you'll agree.

C's COKER MINOR, my swotting young
brother,
I'm thanking my stars that I haven't
another!

D is for DOMINOES, wonderful game,
The championship of the Fifth I can claim.

E is for ENGLAND, the land of my birth,
But one of these days I'll possess all the
earth!

F is the FIFTH, a magnificent Form,
And I'm its *real* leader, in study and dorm.

G is for GREENE, he belongs to my
study,
And ruins my rugs when his boots are all
muddy.

H is for HILTON, who once tried to be
The head of the Fifth, what an insult to
me!

I's INSPIRATION, I'm getting it now,
A cooling ice-towel has been tied round my
brow.

J's for my JUDGMENT, it never goes wrong,
I give sound advice to the weak and the
strong.

K's for the KNOWLEDGE I often display
When difficult problems are put in my
way.

L is for LANGUAGES: German and
Spanish

I speak like a native. I also know Danish.
M's for my MOTOR-BIKE, ripping
machine!

And goodly to look at —whenever it's
clean!

N is for NICKNAME, I've got quite a few,
But they're never uttered while I am on
view!

O is for ORGAN, of nasal variety.
My own is a beauty—it shines in society!

P is for POTTER, a comic old chump,
Though others admire him, he gives me the
hump!

Q's for the QUERY, "Is Coker insane?"
The answer is "No; he's a wonderful
brain!"

R's for ROMANCE: though I'm only six-
teen

I've fallen in love with a sweet Fairy Queen.

S is for SILENCE, I never observe it,
But jaw all the time, and my comrades
deserve it!

T's for my TALENTS, I have quite a lot.
You all must agree I'm the Man on the
Spot!

U is for UMPIRE, he wears a white coat,
And when he says "Out!" he quite gets my
goat!

V is for VALOUR, of course I possess it.
I'm really a hero, not many would guess it!

W's for WHARTON, a cheeky young fag,
Who writes horrid things about ME in his
rag!

X is a letter which baffles me, quite.
I can't find a word though I've swotted all
night!

Y is for YAWN: if you read all these
rhymes

You'll do it yourself some dozens of times!

Z is for ZERO: your spirits will drop
Down below it, for Coker has now got to
stop!

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER

Figgins Works the Oracle!

Even Tom Merry & Co. felt some of their opposition to Cutts melt away at that thrilling account of how he had stood up for the honour of his House in the lions' den, as it were.

"The beggar is plucky, there's no mistake about that!" Tom Merry observed. "If he wasn't such a rotter, I wouldn't ask for a better captain."

"Fancy licking a whole gang of them!" chuckled Blake. "Cutts knows how to stand up for his own House, at any rate."

"I dare say the yarn's a bit exaggerated."

"Well, I saw Gray of the Sixth, and he's got an eye as black as the ace of spades," said Monty Lowther. "No doubt about his eye."

"And young Jameson says that Baker can't talk, his jaw's so bad," remarked Herries.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And Cutts only went over for a friendly talk, when they jumped on him," remarked Manners. "It was a rotten thing to do."

"Well, we haven't heard Monteith's account, you know," Tom Merry remarked cautiously.

"There's no doubt there was trouble," said Blake, "and I suppose Cutts couldn't have started it on his own accord, with four or five fellows against him."

"No, that's reasonable."

"Yaas, wathah! They're up against the School House candidate, of course," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked. "I weally think I shall give Cutts my vote, deah boys, for standin' up for the honour of the House in that wippin' way."

"Well, I think I'd rather have Cutts than Monteith," confessed Tom Merry, "and certainly rather than Knox."

"Oh, Yaas; Knox is out of it, anyway!"

"We've got to make our choice among them," remarked Kangaroo, the Cornstalk junior. "We can't get another candidate on this side."

"We don't want any of them," growled Blake. "But Cutts seems the best of the bunch. If we must have one of them, let it be Cutts."

The juniors assented, but there was no enthusiasm. They did not want Gerald Cutts for captain of St. Jim's.

TOM MERRY & Co. were in a dilemma, and that day and the next there might have been observed unusual clouds of thoughtfulness upon their youthful brows.

It was a peculiar and really difficult situation.

Saturday had been fixed for the election, and on that day a new captain had to be selected for St. Jim's. The juniors had hoped to hear from Kildare that he was returning. But though news had been received from the old captain of St. Jim's, it was to the effect that his uncle was no better, and that he was going to remain with him—probably for a very considerable time. Kildare's return, therefore, being out of the question, the election would proceed.

On Saturday a new captain would come into his post, and who was it to be?

On previous similar occasions, Tom Merry & Co. had had a candidate to back up, and they had backed him up right heartily.

But the present situation was out of the common. There were three candidates, of all of whom they disapproved most intensely.

They had the keenest possible interest in the election, and yet they felt that they could not vote for any of the candidates.

To remain away from the election and not vote at all, was one resource, but that would leave the school on its way to the bow-wows. Suppose the New House man got in? It was quite likely, especially with the School House vote split; more than ever likely if a number of School House fellows refrained from voting at all.

And the Co. confessed that, rather than have a New House captain, they'd prefer Gerald Cutts of the Fifth—or even Knox at a pinch.

Yet it was difficult to make up their minds to vote for Cutts or Knox. Both the School House candidates were "rotters," there was no denying that. Monteith had his faults, but he was better than either of them.

Tom Merry's idea of getting another School House candidate to put up had been an excellent one—it had only one drawback—that it would not work.

The School House seniors were satisfied with Monteith as a candidate; many of them really thinking that it was time the New House had a show; others backing up Monteith because it was guessed that Kildare had wished them to do so when he left.

The disastrous result of electing a New House fellow to the captaincy did not seem at all apparent to the seniors, though the juniors never forgot it for a moment.

"We simply must get another candidate to put up!" Tom Merry declared. "If the Sixth won't take it on, we might tackle the Fifth. If Cutts has the cheek to put himself forward there may be other Fifth-formers with just as much nerve. Suppose we try old Lefevre—he's not a bad sort."

"Rather an ass," said Monty Lowther.

"Well, King Log is better than King Stork," said Tom. "Better have an ass like Lefevre than a rotter like Cutts!"

"Yes, that's true," remarked Manners. "But I hear that Lefevre is backing Cutts up. Nearly all the Fifth are for Cutts. They're as pleased as Punch at the idea of a Fifth-former getting in as captain of the school."

"It's no go," said Kangaroo. "Lefevre is going round canvassing for votes for Cutts. He was jawing to me to-day. He can't go back on his own man."

"That settles it, then. Where are we going to dig up a candidate?" demanded Tom Merry in despair. "Here's the captaincy of a good old school going begging, and nobody will take the trouble to pick it up."

"It's a rotten position," said Blake. "It looks to me as if we shall have to make our choice among the three of them."

"I have already made a suggestion, deah boys——"

"Shut up!" roared the juniors all together. They were quite fed-up with Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's suggestion of himself as a possible captain.

The study door opened, and George Figgins looked in upon the anxious conclave. Tom Merry & Co. glared at Figgins.

"Well, what do you want, you New House waster?" growled Blake. "Come to tell us your man has withdrawn?"

"No fear!" said Figgins promptly. "I've

come to talk to you. The election is pretty close now, and it's time you fellows made up your minds."

"We've made 'em up," grunted Tom Merry. "We're not going to let in a New House man at any price."

Figgins nodded.

"We're solid for Monteith, over the way," he said, "and nearly all the Sixth-formers in the School House are for our man, and some of the Fifth. We've got a jolly good chance, so long as your vote is split over here."

"Oh, rats!"

"What I'm afraid of is that Knox and Cutts will come to some arrangement," said Figgins. "They're a pair of rotters!"

"Oh, cheese it! And let our candidates alone!" growled Blake, which was rather cool, considering the opinions he had himself expressed of the candidates in question.

"I want you fellows to look at it sensibly," said Figgins calmly. "This is a matter affecting the whole school. Cutts came over the other day and made a row with our man."

"Licked half a dozen of your fellows off his own bat!" grinned Blake.

"Oh, rot! Do you know what the cause of the row was?"

"No. I suppose they started ragging him."

"They didn't," said Figgins quietly. "The row started because Cutts tried to threaten our man. First, he offered to toss up with him which should retire from the election, and as Monteith refused, he threatened to rake up some old stories to discredit him with the Head!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"How do you know?" asked Tom Merry.

"It's got out," said Figgins. "Monteith called in three or four seniors, and told them what Cutts had said in Cutts's presence; then the row started. It's the talk of the House now. Between ourselves, it's pretty well suspected that once upon a time Monteith wasn't quite up to the mark, like he is now. There used to be trouble between him and Kildare about it. But he's straight as a die now. All you fellows will admit that."

"Oh, he's straight enough, I believe!" admitted Tom Merry.

"And Cutts isn't," said Figgins. "What do you think of the kind of fellow who'd use such a dodge for getting a rival out of the electon?"

"Rotten!"

"Caddish!"

"Just like Cutts."

"Wank outsiders!"

"And that's the fellow you're going to vote for," said Figgins. "You'll keep out a really decent chap like Monteith because he belongs to our House, and you'll let in a blackmailing rotter like Cutts!"

Tom Merry shifted uneasily in his seat.

"We're not sure we're going to vote for Cutts," he said.

"Knox, then—is he any better?"

"Oh, we sha'n't vote for Knox at any price—he's quite outside the limit!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then it's Cutts or nobody," said Figgins. "Now, look here, I've been thinking this over. It's all very well to stand up for one's own House; but I tell you candidly, if Cutts were our man and Monteith your man, I'd vote for your man, and blow his House."

"Honest Injun?" said Blake.

"Honour bright!" said Figgins solemnly.

"What's going to become of the school with a rotten outsider like Cutts for captain?"

"But—but——"

"I think you fellows ought to vote for Monteith, the only decent candidate," said Figgins. "I'd do it in your place—honour bright!"

The juniors looked at one another. Figgys's manner was very grave and serious, and they knew that he meant what he said. And they could not help admitting that there was something in his arguments.

"Now, what do you say?" asked Figgins persuasively.

"Well, after what you've told us we won't vote for Cutts," said Tom Merry, looking round. "I think that's agreed."

"Yes, rather."

"And—and perhaps we'll vote for Monteith," said Tom, taking the plunge. "I—I think we can say that unless another School House candidate puts up in time, we'll vote for your man, and chance it."

And the meeting nodded assent.

Figgins's face

immediately brightened up.

"That's the tune!" he exclaimed. "You won't be sorry for it. You'll find that Monteith will give the School House fair play. Darrel's satisfied about that, so I should think you may be. You'll vote for Monteith?"

There was a long pause. Figgys's earnestness had made a deep impression upon the juniors; and he had only voiced, too, thoughts



The deputation, somewhat relieved in their feelings, went their way, leaving the swell of the Fourth dazed and dishevelled and in a breathless state, at the foot of the School House steps. (See page 289)

that had been lurking in their own minds. And they felt, too, a sort of glow in making such a generous concession to the rival House.

"Yes!" said Tom Merry & Co. at last.

"Good egg!" said Figgins heartily.

"It's understood that if a decent School House candidate puts up, we vote for him," said Tom Merry, "otherwise we back up your man."

"That's good enough," said Figgins.

And he departed, to carry the good news back to the New House. There it was received with the keenest satisfaction. There was no doubt now as to Monteith's success. For Tom Merry & Co. would carry the bulk of the School House juniors with them, and both Knox and Cutts were certain to be left out in the cold. And the New House rejoiced at the prospect.

When Figgins had gone, the chums of the School House looked at one another rather glumly.

"I suppose it's the only thing to be done," said Blake.

"There is weally an alternative, deah boy."

"Oh, rats!"

"After all, we'll give Monteith a trial," said Tom Merry generously, "and old Figgy is a good sort, too, and he's pleased as Punch about it."

"But a New House chap captain of St. Jim's!" grunted Herries. "I don't like the idea."

"Can't be helped. Better than Knox or Cutts."

And the juniors admitted that this was the case. But they did not like it; and they looked forward to the election with feelings of anything but enthusiasm.

THE NINTH CHAPTER

Rogues in Council!

LEVISON of the Fourth came into Gerald Cutts's study with a curious expression on his face. Levison was Cutts's right-hand man in the election, and he kept the Fifth-form candidate informed of the state of feeling among the junior electors. He formed the head of a committee of canvassers who were seeking votes for Cutts, and he had had a certain amount of success. Cutts was taking the election very seriously, and bending all his

energies to the task of getting in as captain of St. Jim's.

Cutts was looking very cheerful just now. He had been comparing notes with Knox, and lists of supporters, and he had convinced the Sixth-former that he had very little chance of getting in. By standing for election, Knox would only split the House vote and jeopardise Cutts's chances. And Cutts made that clear to him, and he knew that Knox was very likely to withdraw altogether, if it was made worth his while.

"Hallo, what's happened now?" asked Cutts, noticing the expression upon the face of the cad of the Fourth at once.

"Trouble," said Levison. "I've just heard that Tom Merry & Co. have gone over to the enemy."

Cutts frowned.

"Which means——"

"They're going to vote for Monteith," said Levison. "Figgins has talked them over somehow, and two-thirds of the juniors of this House will vote the way Tom Merry votes. That's a cert. He has a lot of influence."

"I know he has, hang him!" said Cutts, gritting his teeth. "I never expected this. What about loyalty to the House?"

Levison grinned.

"They don't want you at any price," he explained. "They'd rather have a New House chap or any old thing."

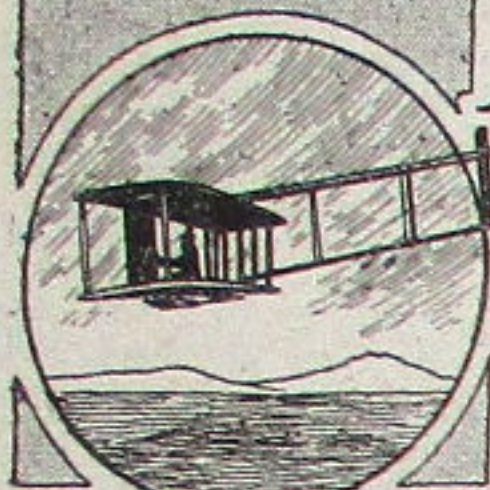
"Don't be cheeky, you rat!" growled Cutts. "Well, I shall put a spoke in their wheel, if that's the little game. If Knox stood out, I should beat Monteith at the polls, and I can arrange it with Knox. But this news changes it all. Monteith will have to stand out now."

Levison whistled.

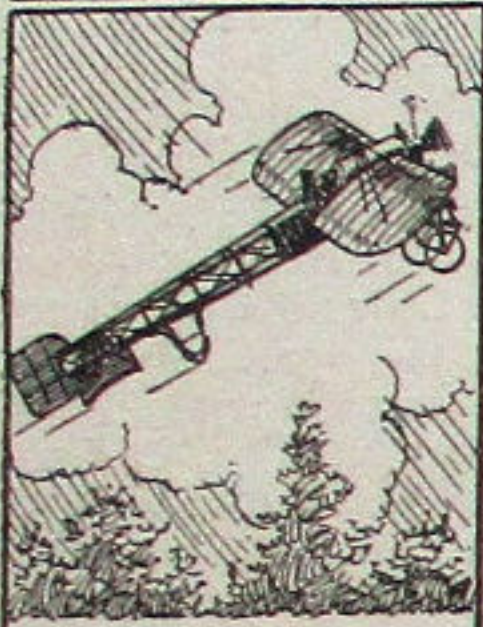
"But will he?" he asked.

"He will be made to; then Knox can stay in to keep up appearances. I don't specially want a walk-over. Monteith will get it in the neck, that's all. I've got the plan cut and dried. I've made ready, you see, in case it was necessary; and it is necessary now, and he will stand out so late before the election that his party won't have much time to replace him with another man. Besides, the School House won't vote for any fellow

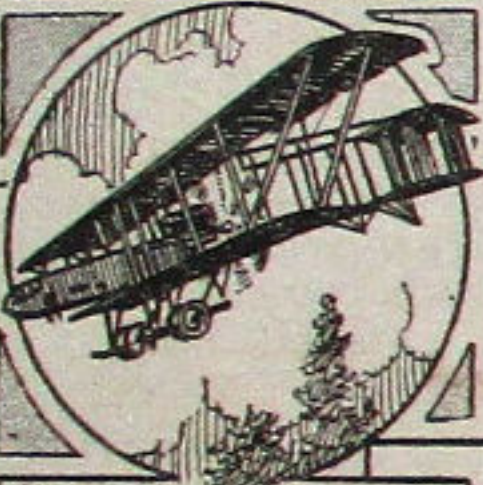
The Development of the AEROPLANE.



1. Wright Glider.



3. Bleriot Monoplane.



5. Grahame-White Biplane.



Although so short a period has elapsed since man first flew in an aeroplane, progress has been so amazingly swift that the pioneer machines are as great a curiosity in the flying world as Stephenson's "Rocket" is in the railway world.

The famous Wright brothers were the first to perfect a machine that would actually fly, but at the time the whole world jeered, and said it was impossible. Little did people think that in a few years flying would seriously compete with rail and motor as a means of travel and transport.

The first aeroplanes were engineless gliders, and our first sketch shows one of the Wright brothers on a machine of this type in 1902.

At first, progress was very slow, but in the year 1908 flying began to develop in earnest.

About this time Bleriot, A. V. Roe, the late S. F. Cody, Henry Farman, and other men now famous, put up some remarkable flights on what, to-day, would be regarded as very unsafe and crude machines.

Sketch No. 2 illustrates one of the celebrated Farman biplanes, and No. 3 is a picture of Bleriot's wonderful monoplane. It was in this machine that the famous Frenchman flew the Channel on July 13, 1909.

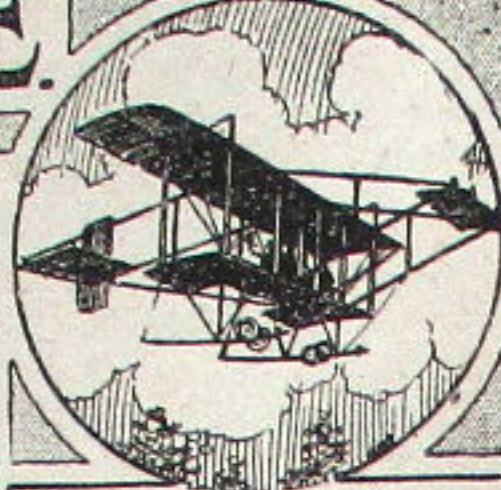
Illustration No. 4 shows the Caudron biplane, built by the Caudron brothers in 1912. This was the first biplane to "loop the loop."

No. 5 is a sketch of the Grahame-White 5-seater, passenger-carrying biplane. In its test it carried ten in addition to the pilot. It was made in 1913 and much used at Hendon for passenger flights.

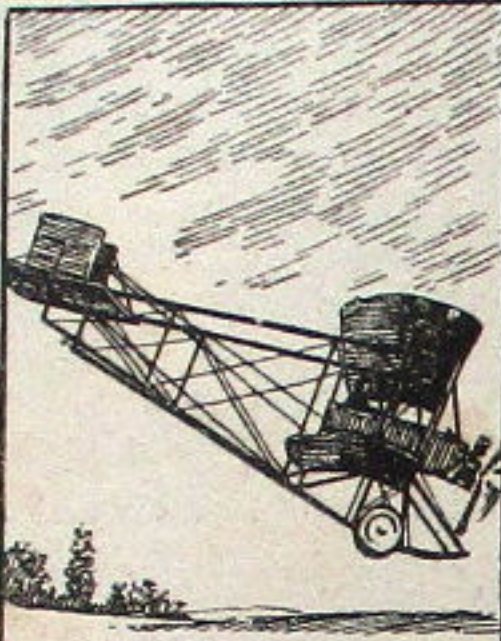
The great war came along in 1914 and did more for progress in aviation than probably 25 years of ordinary experimenting would have done. So many types of machines were invented and used that it is obviously impossible to show them in the space of one page, but sketch No. 6 shows an Airco machine on the daily London-Paris route.

One cannot omit mention of the wonderful performance of the Vickers-Vimy aeroplane shown in our last illustration. This was the machine piloted by the late Captain Sir John Alcock across the Atlantic—a distance of two thousand miles in 16 hours!

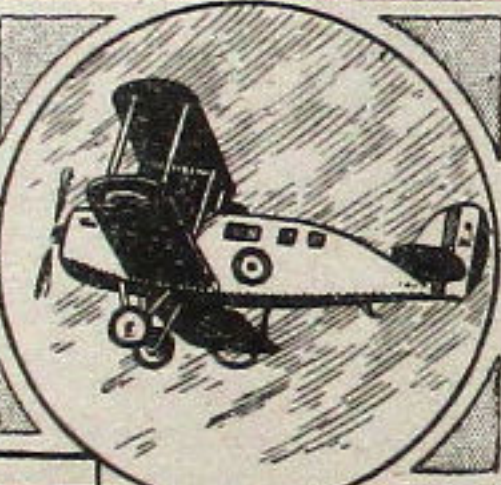
If flying progresses as rapidly in the future as it has in the past we shall soon see the day when it will be as common an occurrence to pay our visits by aeroplane as it is to take a motor trip to-day!



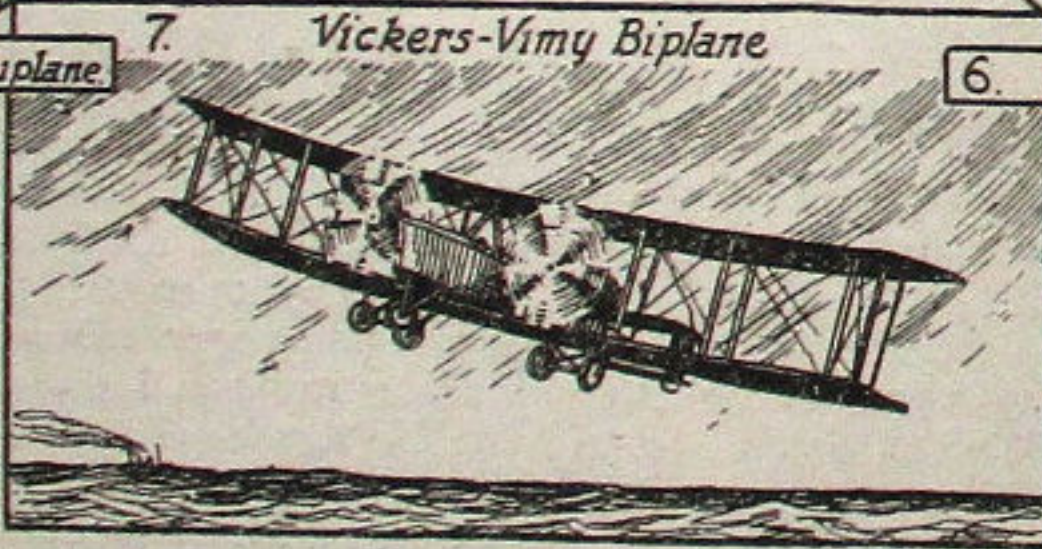
2. Farman Biplane.



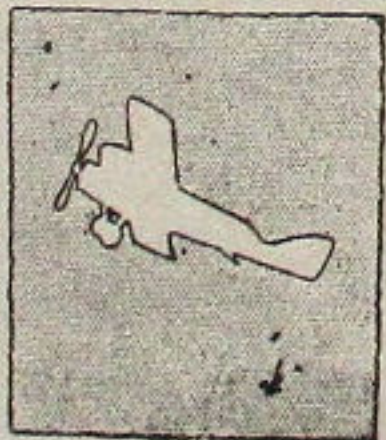
4. Caudron Biplane



6. Airco Biplane



7. Vickers-Vimy Biplane



they put up in Monteith's place. His withdrawal will break their party right up, I think."

"Not much doubt about that," said Levison. "But how on earth are you going to get him to withdraw? I never saw a fellow so dead-set on anything as Monteith is on this election. He's much keener than he was when he contested it with Kildare."

"I've got a way, and you are going to help me."

"I'll do anything I can, of course," said Levison. "I'm on your side, Cutts. You know how to make it worth a fellow's while to back you up."

Cutts smiled sneeringly for a second.

"Exactly," he said. "Now, you've heard the stories some of the fellows tell about Monteith—it was before your time here, but you must have heard."

"I've heard some things from Mellish," said Levison. "Monteith used to be one of the boys, I understand."

"Just so. He used to go the pace more than I did," said Cutts.

"Then he must have gone it hot!"

"He did, and he hasn't as much sense in his head as I have in my little finger!" said Cutts. "I never put anything on paper, but Monteith used to. He thought nothing of sending a note to Joliffe, the landlord of the Green Man, in his own hand. He would send notes to bookmakers about putting money on horses."

"The silly ass!" said Levison contemptuously. "I wonder why they didn't blackmail him."

"He was blackmailed, and I understand it cost him a pretty penny to get some of his paper back," said Cutts. "Kildare helped him."

"Oh, I see!"

"But very likely some of those bits of paper are still in existence," said Cutts. "Monteith can't know whether they are or not."

"No, but——"

"And if one were sent to the Head—say, a note in Monteith's hand fixing up a meeting at the Green Man——"

"Cutts!"

"Well?" said Cutts savagely, "why not?"

"That would be playing it horribly low down!" faltered Levison. "You were in the same game with Monteith at that time; now you'd give him away!"

"Are you going to start preaching to me, you young rascal?"

"N-no; but—but how am I going to help you?" said Levison sullenly. "I don't like the scheme, and I can't see how I can help."

"You're the only fellow who can help. That note of Monteith's to Joliffe—it happens that I can't lay hands on it. I've asked Joliffe, but he says he never kept any of the papers. I think he doesn't care about betraying Monteith, or he may be speaking the truth: I don't know. But the paper's got to be found."

"Well, I can't find it," said Levison.

"Yes, you can!"

"I don't understand——"

"That paper," said Cutts slowly, "is worth a couple of quid to me. I'll hand over two notes as soon as you bring it to me."

"But—but——"

"Oh, don't pretend to be a fool!" said Cutts irritably. "You make half-crowns by writing out impositions for fellows, because you can imitate handwriting so well, it can't be detected."

Levison turned pale.

"You—you don't want me to—to——"

"I want you to bring me that note from Monteith to Joliffe, fixing up a meeting at the Green Man," said Cutts grimly. "I don't care how or where you get it."

"But—but suppose it came out——"

"How could it come out? Monteith couldn't possibly smell a rat. He knows that some of his old notes may still be in existence; in fact I told him that I could lay hands on one of them. If it's a spoof note, he won't know it. He'll think, naturally, that it was got from Joliffe."

"I—I suppose he would——"

"I can tell you almost word for word a note that I saw in Joliffe's place once, written to him by Monteith," said Cutts. "Joliffe chucked it into the fire after reading it, I remember, but Monteith doesn't know that."

I can give you the wording; I've got a good memory."

Levison shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, it's all in the game," he said. "I'm hard-up, and when a fellow's hard-up, he can't afford to be too particular. Is the note worth five quid to you, Cutts?"

"No, it isn't!" snapped Cutts.

"Then I'm afraid I sha'n't be able to find it," said Levison coolly.

Gerald Cutts glared at him.

"If you begin haggling with me, you greedy young scoundrel——"

"I'm on the make, same as you are!" said Levison, with another shrug of his thin shoulders. "There's a certain amount of risk, and it's a dirty, caddish thing to do, anyway! I'm not going to do it for nothing! You've done very well out of the races lately. I saw several fivers in your pocket-book yesterday!"

"I've a jolly good mind to——" began Cutts, laying his hand on a ruler.

Levison did not flinch.

"If you touch me with that ruler, I'll go straight to Darrel and tell him what you've said to me!" said the junior, between his teeth.

Cutts laid down the ruler. For some moments he stared at the cad of the Fourth, Levison meeting his stare with cool effrontery.

"Well, it's a go!" said Cutts at last.

He felt that he had met his match in his precious supporter.

"Five quid?" said Levison.

"Yes," said Cutts reluctantly.

"Cash down?" said Levison.

"Look here——"

"Cash down, or it's no go!"

Cutts set his teeth hard. He opened his pocket-book, took out a crisp five-pound note, and passed it to the Fourth Former.

THE TENTH CHAPTER

The Shadow of the Past!

DR. HOLMES, the Head of St. Jim's, sat in his study with a letter in his hand, and a wrinkle of deep and painful thought on his brow. The letter—a half-sheet of impot paper with a few lines scrawled on it—had evidently just arrived

by the post. The doctor had read it several times, and then touched the bell and sent Toby to call Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House. He was waiting for the arrival of the Housemaster now.

The door opened and Mr. Railton came in.

"You sent for me, sir?"

The doctor nodded.

"I want to ask your advice about this, Mr. Railton. Pray read it."

The Housemaster, in some surprise, took the letter and glanced at it. Then he uttered an exclamation.

"You know the writing, Mr. Railton?"

"I think I have seen it before, sir."

"Whose writing do you think it is?"

"Monteith's, sir."

"And it is signed 'J. M.'?" said the Head.

"I am afraid this was written by Monteith of the Sixth, sir. But may I ask how it came into your hands?"

"I have just received it by post," said the Head, indicating an envelope that lay on his desk. "It was sent anonymously. The envelope contained nothing but that note, and by the postmark it was posted in Rylcombe."

"Anonymously!" said Mr. Railton, with a frown.

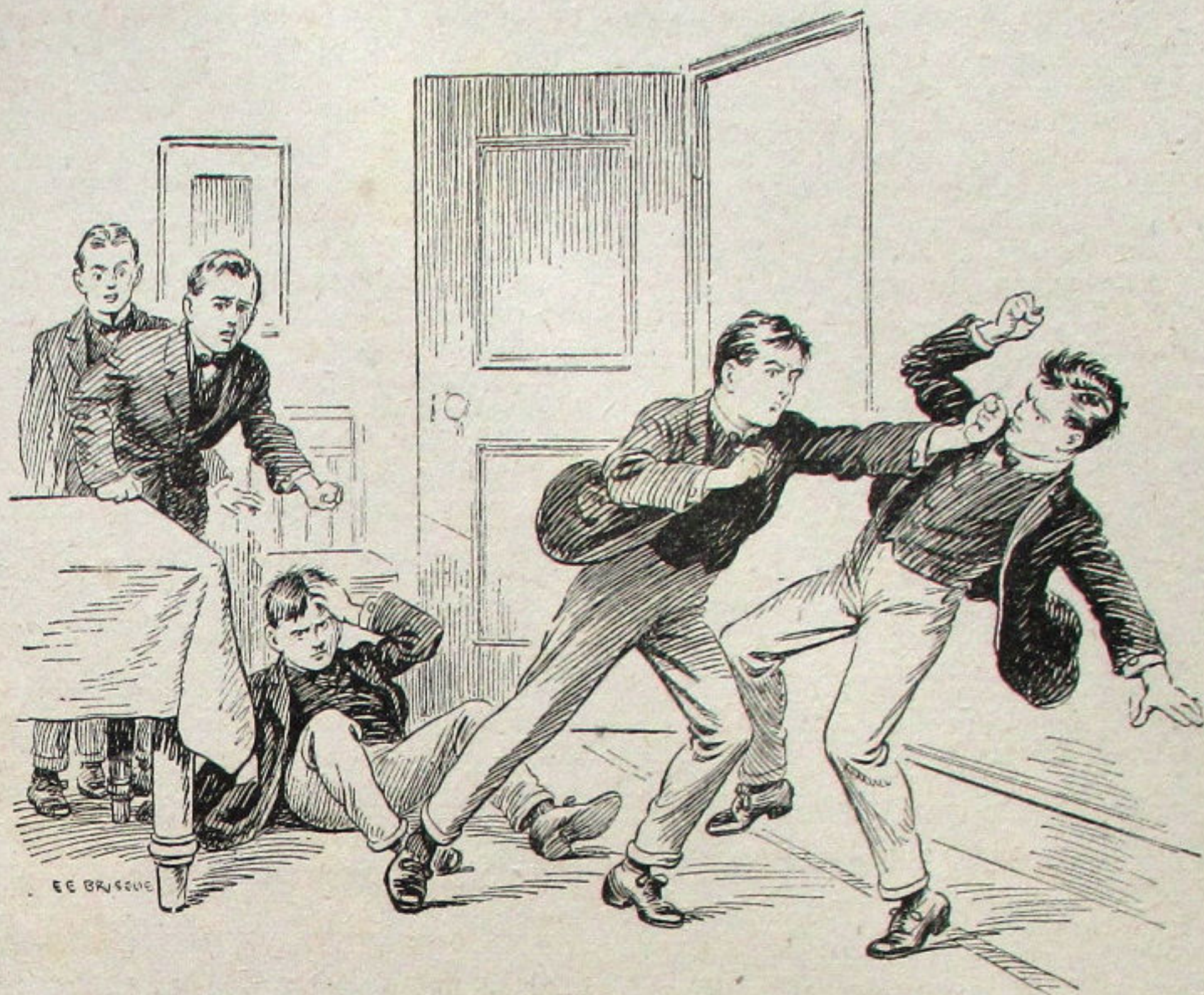
"Yes. Of an ordinary anonymous letter I should not, of course, take any notice; but this is different. Someone has evidently come into possession of that note, and sent it to me to open my eyes as to Monteith's conduct."

"Perhaps this man Joliffe himself—there may have been some dispute, and he has revenged himself by betraying Monteith to you."

"It is possible."

"Or perhaps it has been done by someone desirous of injuring Monteith's chances in the pending election for captain of the school," said Mr. Railton thoughtfully. "The election takes place to-morrow, and there is a great deal of feeling on the subject."

"In that case, whoever sent it to me may have been actuated by a sense of duty. In the light of that letter, Monteith is certainly not a fit person to become captain of the school!"



Baker rolled on the floor. Gray advanced at the same moment—just in time to get Cutts's left in the face. (See page 294)

“Most decidedly not!”

“I do not know the writing on the envelope,” said the Head. “It appears to me to be a disguised hand, but that is of little moment. It does not matter very much who sent it to me. The question is, what to do in the matter now?”

“Monteith must be allowed to make what explanation he can.”

“Undoubtedly, and the sooner the better. Will you send for him, Mr. Railton; or, better still, fetch him here? I wish you to be present.”

“Very well, sir.”

And Mr. Railton left the study.

Monteith was at practice on the football ground when Mr. Railton found him. A group

of juniors were watching the practice, and Jack Blake was remarking, perhaps a little grudgingly, that Monteith was really in splendid form. So far as the winter game was concerned, there could be no doubt that Monteith would make a worthy successor to Kildare.

“I suppose we shall have to have him!” said Blake, with a sigh. “It will be a come-down for the School House, but there you are!”

“Que faire!” said Digby sagely, in his best French.

“Oh, keep that for the Form-room!” said Blake, with a snort. “It’s a rotten position, but I suppose electing Monteith is the best way out of it.”

"Hallo! What does Railton want?" said Tom Merry. "He's calling Monteith, and looking as grave as a giddy judge!"

"Somethin's up!" said Arthur Augustus. Monteith had come to the ropes as Mr. Railton called to him.

"Am I wanted, sir?" he asked.

"Yes," said Mr. Railton. "The Head wishes to see you, Monteith."

"Anything important, sir?" asked Monteith, surprised by the gravity of the Housemaster's manner.

"Very important, Monteith."

"I'll come at once, sir."

And Monteith threw on an overcoat and muffler, and, without stopping to change, he followed the Housemaster from the field. The juniors, who had heard the remarks exchanged between the two, regarded one another curiously.

"Looks like trouble for Monteith," Lowther remarked.

"Oh, rot!" said Figgins uneasily. "Can't be anything about the election. I know the Head must look on our man as the best man for the job."

But Figgins was feeling uneasy. Until the election was over, he could not feel safe about his candidate. Monteith was feeling uneasy, too; he hardly knew why, as he followed the Housemaster to the Head's study. Mr. Railton's gravity had a disquieting effect upon him. He did not ask the Housemaster any questions, however, but accompanied him in silence, and they entered the Head's room.

Dr. Holmes's expression increased Monteith's inward alarm. He knew now that something untoward had happened as soon as he saw the doctor's face.

"I have sent for you, Monteith, on a most unpleasant matter," began the Head.

"What is wrong, sir?"

"Read that letter!"

Monteith glanced at the letter, and for a moment the room seemed to reel about him. He understood now. For this is what he read in his own handwriting:

"Dear Joliffe,—I shall be down at eleven to-night as usual. Get Banks there if you can

I want to ask him about the chances of Bonny Boy for the Leicestershire.—Yours,
"J. M."

Monteith's face went white as a sheet.

He felt the Head's stern, grave glance upon him, and he strove to recover himself. But he could not. The sudden blow had knocked him over. He could only clutch the tell-tale paper, which crumpled in his hand, and stare at the floor.

There was a long silence, and the Head's deep voice broke it at last.

"Well, Monteith?"

The prefect licked his dry lips.

"I am waiting for your explanation, Monteith."

"I—I——" Monteith's voice trailed away miserably.

"That letter is in your hand, Monteith."

"Yes, sir," groaned the prefect.

"You admit it?"

"Yes."

"Joliffe is the name of the landlord of a low public-house in Rylcombe, I believe?"

"Yes."

"You wrote that letter to him?"

"Yes."

"That is all I need to ask," said the Head drily.

"I—I—I can explain, sir. I—I—— This is an old letter, a very old letter," said Monteith. "It was written long ago—long ago!"

"How long ago?"

"I—I don't exactly know. It's not dated, but it—it was at least two terms ago, sir," muttered Monteith. "I—I used to play the giddy ox, I admit it. I was a fool. But—but it was all over long ago. I got myself into trouble, and Kildare helped me out, like the brick he was. I promised him to get clear of that gang, and I kept my word."

"Then Kildare knew?"

"He knew, sir."

"It was his duty as head prefect of the school to acquaint me with your conduct," said the Head sternly.

"He would have told you, sir, only he knew I'd keep my word," said Monteith miserably. "I'd been a fool, but I stopped it."

THE GREYFRIARS ALPHABET

THE SLACKER

By LORD MAULEVERER



A's the **ARMCHAIR**, where from earliest dawn

Till late in the evenin', I nestle an' yawn.

B's for the **BOOT** which is hurled by Bob Cherry

To rouse me from slumber; a heartless trick, very.

C's for the **CUSHIONS**, on which I recline,
They're soft an' invitin', with dainty design.

D's for the **DRUDGERY** fellows go through
When tearin' about on the footer field.
Groo!

E's for the **ENERGY**, really amazin',
That other chaps show, while "your humble" is lazin'.

F's for the **FIVERS**—they all come in handy
For lightin' the gas or for wrappin' up candy.

G's for the **GIRLS**, an' with rapture I'm mad
When off to Cliff House to adore 'em,
begad!

H is the "**HERALD**": it makes a chap blub
To see midnight oil bein' burned by the tub!

I is for **INKY**, as black as can be.
The way he gets goals is a marvel to me!

J's for the **JAPERS**, who won't let me rest.
Bob Cherry, for one, is a nerve-rackin' pest.

K is for **KNOWLEDGE**, by Quelchy possessed.

But lessons are loathsome; I'd much rather rest.

L is my **LOUNGE-SUIT**, of neat navy blue:
The fellows admire it; the damsels do, too.
M's for **MYSELF**, of the line of Mauleverer;
There isn't a chap who is smarter or cleverer.

N's for my **NECKTIE**: it's right for a fellow
To sport one with green stripes, an' splashes
of yellow.

O is for **OVID**, a stupid old fool
Who should be abolished straightway from
the school.

P's for the **PILLOWS** I pile up at night;
The raggers may rag, but I slumber all right.

Q's for the **QUEEN** of Cliff House; she's a
maiden

Named Phyllis, who fills me with rapture
love-laden.

R's the **RELIEF**, so refreshin' and splendid,
That comes when the lessons in Form-room
are ended.

S, gentle reader, is **SPATS**; I avow,
The chap who's deficient should buy a pair
now.

T's for my **TROUSERS**, of heather and grey;
I keep 'em turned up in the orthodox way.

U's for the **UNCLE** who whacks out the
cash,

Enablin' his nephew to cut quite a dash!

V's for the **VIGOUR** which Bob Cherry
shows

In dottin' me hard on my aquiline nose!

W's for **WORK**, which is stiff, an' no error!
It weighs down my mind with a feelin' of
terror.

X is for '**XERCISE**, out in the Close.

Kind fellows, oh, save me from takin' a dose!

Y's for the **YAWNS** which I always give
way to,

From sunrise to sunset, at work an' at play,
too.

Z's for the **ZEST** with which bounders *will*
jaw,

When a chap's feelin' drowsy an' wants
to—Yaw-aw!

It's been over and past long ago. I've never had anything to do with those rotters since, on my honour."

The Head looked at him very hard.

"I am glad to believe that," he said. "But that does not alter the fact that you, a prefect, acted in the way indicated by that letter. You say it was long ago, and I believe you. You say you have led a straight life since Kildare helped you out of the matter. I believe that, too. I shall not think of punishing you, Monteith, for a wrong done so long ago, and since repented. But you must see as well as I do, that you are not a fit person to become captain of the school."

Monteith bowed his head.

"That punishment at least, cannot be spared you," said the Head. "If you are sincerely repentant for having done wrong, you will be willing to face that. You must resign from your candidature."

"Must I, sir?"

"You must!" said the Head sternly.

"Very well, sir."

"Nothing more will be said about the matter then," said the Head. "I shall not deprive you of your prefectship. I shall not make this public."

"Thank you, sir."

"That is all, Monteith. I shall expect you to make your resignation as a candidate for the captaincy public to-day."

A glitter shot into Monteith's eyes.

"And what about Cutts, sir?" he exclaimed.

"Cutts!" said the Head, puzzled. "What has Cutts to do with this?"

"Didn't Cutts give you this letter, sir?" asked Monteith, in astonishment. "I understood——"

"Cutts did not give it to me. I have no reason to suppose that he knows anything about the matter. The letter came to me anonymously by post."

"Oh, he's very deep!" said Monteith bitterly. "It was sent to you by Cutts, sir."

"Indeed? That would make no difference, however."

"Cutts was as bad as I was, or worse," the prefect exclaimed. "He was in with me, with Joliffe and his gang. If I'm not fit to be

captain of the school, what about Cutts? I gave up that kind of thing. Cutts keeps it up!"

"You accuse Cutts——"

"Yes, I do."

"Have you any proof to offer for your statements?" asked the Head coldly.

"Proof!" repeated the prefect.

"Yes. You can hardly expect me to take your bare statement against Cutts without proof of any kind."

"I—I haven't any proof, of course. I don't suppose Cutts ever put anything down in black and white, and if he did I couldn't get it from Joliffe. He's up against me ever since I refused to have anything more to do with him. Of course, I can't prove it, but it's true."

"I decline to believe such a thing of Cutts, or of anyone else, without the strongest and clearest proof."

"I—I knew this was going to happen. Cutts told me the other day that if I stood for the election he would work some trick of this kind."

"Did anyone hear him say so?"

"No-no; but I told some fellows immediately afterwards, and they——"

"It all rests on your bare word apparently," said the Head dryly. "The word of a boy who, as it now appears, has deceived me and abused my confidence. You can scarcely expect me to attach any importance to what you say on that subject, Monteith. You had better say no more. You may go."

And Monteith went.

The Head sighed, and tossed the letter into the fire. It was consumed in a moment.

"That ends the matter," he said. "You agree with me that I could take no other step, Mr. Railton?"

"Quite so, sir. There was nothing else to be done. In the light of that letter, it would have been impossible to allow Monteith to become captain of the school."

"I am sorry, too, and painfully shocked," said the Head. "I had confidence in Monteith. This is a most unpleasant surprise to me, and I do not think I have been hard upon him. His disappointment in the election will be his punishment, and it is not too

heavy a punishment, I think. It is a wretched business altogether. As for his accusation against Cutts, it would be wrong to attach the slightest importance to it. I am afraid he spoke out in the bitterness of his disappointment, without stopping to think."

And Mr. Railton nodded. He took the same view. Gerald Cutts had played his cards very well indeed.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER

Brought to Book!

"HALLO, Monteith! What's the matter?" Darrel of the Sixth asked the question in alarm, as he met Monteith, after his departure from the Head's study. Monteith's face was white, and his eyes were burning. He was striding on swiftly, and almost ran into Darrel. The senior stopped him with a hand on his shoulder.

"What's happened, old man?"

Monteith stopped and burst into a bitter laugh. Tom Merry & Co. had just come in from the footer-ground, and they, too, looked at the New House prefect in surprise. Several other fellows had gathered round. Monteith was the centre of a crowd in a couple of minutes. He did not seem to notice it.

"What's happened?" he repeated. "Nothing. Only I'm not standing for the election to-morrow, after all. That's all."

"Not standing!" exclaimed Darrel, in amazement.

"No."

"Why not?"

"The Head's ordered me to withdraw."

"My hat? Why?"

"Cutts has worked it."

"Cutts!" exclaimed several voices.

"Cutts!" said Darrel. "What rot! How could Cutts possibly make the Head order you to withdraw? You're dreaming!"

"He has let the Head know something about me—something that's old and done with, as he knows jolly well," said Monteith. "A rotten old story dead and done with long ago!"

"You mean he has slandered you?"

"Yes."

"But if he's told lies they can be disproved."

Monteith laughed bitterly.

"It doesn't happen to be lies, it happens to be the truth," he said.

"Oh!"

"An old yarn about my being mixed up in betting, and so forth," said Monteith. "You know about it, Kildare consulted you when he helped me out. You know I've been as straight as a die ever since."

"I know," said Darrel.

"But Cutts has fished out an old letter in my handwriting from somewhere, and sent it anonymously to the Head," said the New House prefect. "What do you think of that for an election dodge?"

"Rotten!"

"Shame!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah! Distinctly caddish, I call it!"

Monteith looked round, seeming to notice the juniors for the first time. His face was almost haggard.

"Well, you've got rid of the New House now!" he exclaimed bitterly. "You can have your Cutts for captain now, and I wish you joy of him."

"We don't want Cutts!" exclaimed Tom Merry indignantly. "We had already fixed it up with Figgins to vote for you, Monteith. We'd rather have you than Cutts any day, though you're a New House bounder—I mean, chap."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I'm going to see Cutts now," said Monteith, between his teeth. "He came and made a row in my study the other day. One good turn deserves another."

He strode away in the direction of the Fifth Form passage. Darrel hurried after him.

"Monteith, it's not much good making a row!"

"I'm going to lick Cutts. He's not going to get off scot-free after playing me a trick like this."

"Are you sure he——"

"Of course I'm sure! I don't think he'll have the cheek to deny it—even Cutts."

Monteith strode on, and Darrel hesitated. The juniors followed Monteith like an army. Their sympathy was all with him. For once they forgot House rivalry. Cutts had played the game low down, and they would have

liked nothing better than to see him licked by the New House prefect.

Monteith reached Cutts's door, and threw it violently open without knocking. Cutts was in his room, with Gilmore of the Fifth, his study-mate. Both of them jumped up as the white and furious prefect strode in.

"Hallo! What's the trouble?" Cutts exclaimed.

Smack!

Monteith's open hand across his face was the reply.

Cutts staggered back, his cheeks going pale, with a red mark across the skin where the New House prefect's hand had fallen.

"Bravo!" chirruped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy from the passage. "Go for the wottah!"

"Now, you cad, come on," said Monteith, throwing off his coat and muffler. "You've swindled me out of the captaincy, and now you're going to pay for it!"

"I'll come on fast enough!" said Cutts, recovering his coolness.

"There isn't a fellow in the New House I can't lick. I think I showed you that the other day. But first, I'd like to have some

faint idea what the trouble is about."

"You know well enough, you cad!"

Cutts shrugged his shoulders.

"If it's the election——"

"You know it is!"

"So we're to fight because we're rival candidates?" asked Cutts. "Hadn't we better call Knox in, in that case, and make a three-cornered scrap of it? Knox is a candidate, too, you know."

There was a laugh from some of the fellows

in the passage. Cutts's coolness tickled them.

"I don't want to bandy words with you," said Monteith, his eyes burning. "I'm here to thrash you within an inch of your life!"

"Oh, good!" said Cutts calmly. "But isn't that rather a primitive way of settling an election? What have you got your rag out so suddenly for? Do you know, Darrel?"

Darrel looked keenly at the Fifth-former.

"The Head has got hold of some old paper in Monteith's hand," he said. "Monteith thinks you sent it to him."

"Oh, I see! Quite a mistake, of course!"

"You didn't do it?"

"I hope no one here suspects me of playing such a dirty trick?" said Cutts, looking round with an expression of virtuous indignation. "If I had, Monteith would be right to be ratty about it. But I haven't."

"Who did then?" said Monteith.

"How should I know? If it's something you wrote to Joliffe or Banks, they may have sent it to the Head. They don't like the way you chucked them. But if you suspect that it

was a rival candidate, why not suspect Knox as much as me? He knew all about your little games, you know."

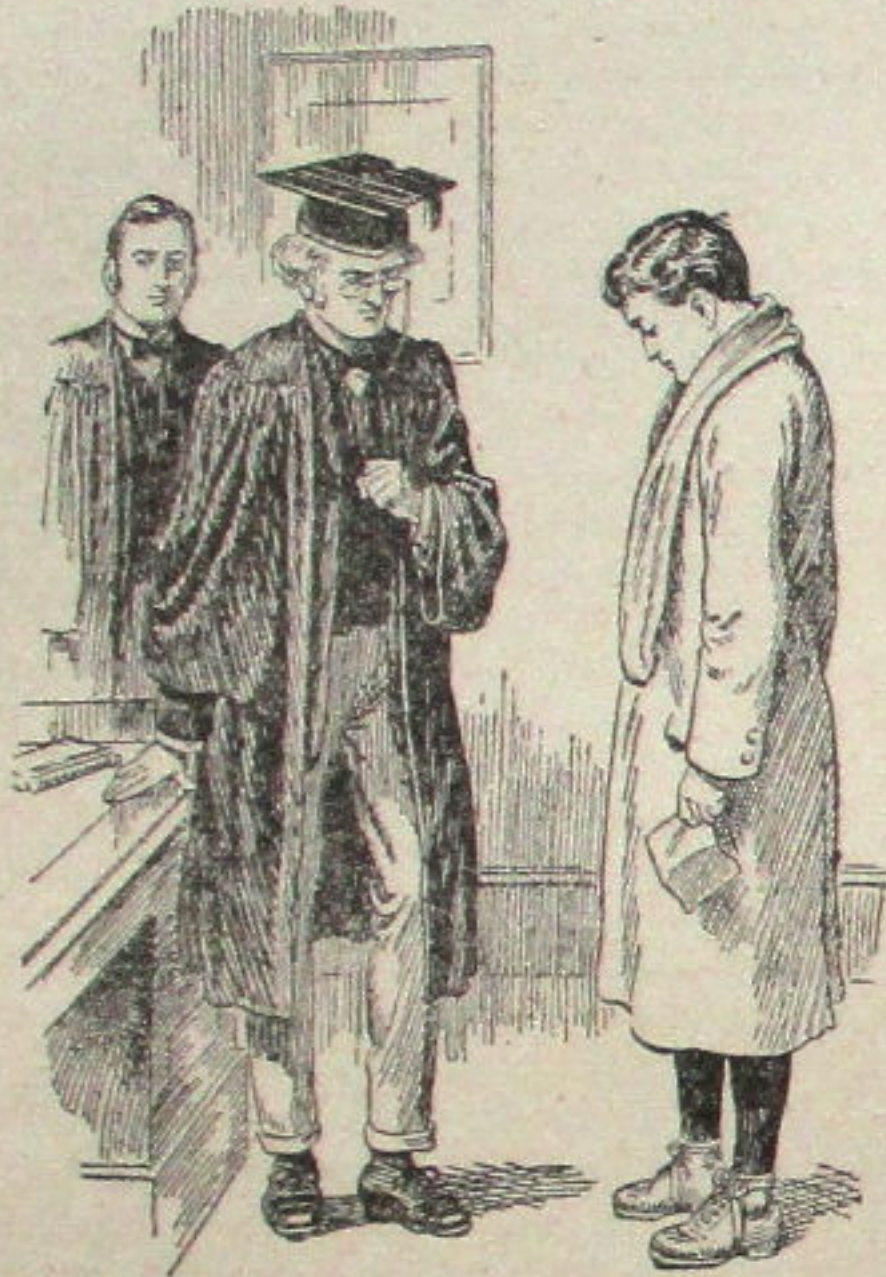
"Bai Jove! There's somethin' in that!"

Monteith set his lips.

"I know it was you!" he said. "You threatened me with it the other day unless I should withdraw."

Cutts shook his head.

"You misunderstood me," he said. "I merely meant to ask you whether you con-



Monteith's face went white. He felt the Head's stern, grave glance upon him. (See page 304)

sidered yourself a fit person to be captain of the school, considering the kind of fellow you are. I said the Head wouldn't think you a fit person if he knew. Apparently I was quite right, as it turns out. As for threatening you, that's all rot. Such a thought never even crossed my mind. I thought that in common decency you ought not to want to be captain of St. Jim's. That's all."

"You liar!"

Monteith did not waste further words upon the Fifth-former. He rushed upon him, hitting out furiously. The other fellows cleared back to give them room. Cutts had barely time to throw off his jacket, when the Sixth-former was upon him. From all sides fellows came crowding along the passage to see the struggle. A fight between a Fifth-former and a prefect of the Sixth was naturally very rare, and it caused tremendous excitement. A throng of fellows—seniors and juniors—crammed themselves into the passage, struggling towards the doorway.

But Tom Merry & Co. held front seats, so to speak. They were wedged in the doorway, and they refused to budge. They had what Lowther described afterwards as a splendid view of the fun.

But it was not fun for the combatants.

Both the seniors were powerful fellows, both good boxers, and both plucky. At any other time Cutts, with his imperturbable coolness, would probably have got the better of the fight. But Monteith was so furious that he did not care for the punishment he received. He took without heed the most terrific drives, and came on without a pause, and all the time his fists were hammering on Cutts.

Darrel walked away. He could not stop the fight, as Monteith was a prefect, but he felt that he ought not to witness it. But nobody else was unwilling to witness it. There was a struggle for places, in fact, while the two seniors were tramping to and fro in the study, hammering one another furiously.

There were no rounds in that fight. The two savagely angry foes fought on to a finish, and it was Cutts who finished first. He was fairly knocked out by the fierce onslaught of the indignant prefect of the New House.

Crash!

The Fifth-former went down at last, and lay on the study carpet, gasping. His eyes were half closed, his nose seemed swollen to double its usual size, his mouth was cut and bleeding. He was evidently "done."

Gilmore of the Fifth bent over him.

"You can't go on," he muttered.

Cutts shook his head feebly.

Monteith glared down at the Fifth-former, his anger still unappeased. He was showing severe signs of the conflict himself.

"You're done, you cad!"

"Looks like it, doesn't it?" said Cutts, cool still, in spite of his exhausted state. "You have knocked me out. I'll try you again another time."

"Well, you've had your punishment, and if the fellows are rotten enough to make you captain of St. Jim's, why, they'll deserve to have such a captain as you'll make!" said Monteith bitterly.

And he strode from the study and returned to his own House.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER

A Really Stunning Idea!

THERE was a meeting in Tom Merry's study after the row.

The juniors were in a state of perplexity. The late happening had knocked all their plans to the winds. They had settled on Monteith at last as their candidate, and that solution of the problem, though far from satisfactory, had at all events settled the question. Now it was all unsettled again. There was a notice on the board in the hall that Monteith's candidature had been withdrawn.

That finished Monteith.

The contest for the captaincy remained now between Cutts and Knox, unless a fresh candidate should come forward at the eleventh hour.

"And Cutts is quite impossible!" said Tom Merry firmly. "He can deny it till he's black in the face, but we all know that he played that rotten trick on Monteith."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"After that, we can't stand him," said Blake.

"Imposs!"

"Some other New House chap may take Monteith's place," said Kangaroo. "We're not bound to vote for him, though. We gave in about Monteith, but we sha'n't do the same again for another of them."

"No fear."

"Not much chance of that either," said Monty Lowther. "The New House are awfully indignant about Monteith's being ordered to withdraw his name. Nobody else will take his place; they won't hear of it. I heard it from Figgins, Baker and Webb and Gray have all refused to stand, though Monteith asked them."

"Right enough too," said Tom Merry. "I dare say most of the New House fellows won't vote at all. And Cutts has a big majority on this side. I reckon he'll get a third more than Knox, at least."

"Then Cutts is going to be captain," said Blake gloomily, "after playing that mean trick. It's rotten!"

"Disgustin', deah boys. I'm afwaid you'll have to come back to my pwoposition, aftah all," said D'Arcy, with a wise shake of the head.

"Fathead!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Most of the seniors will be for Knox, and a crowd of juniors for Cutts," said Tom Merry. "If there were a pin to choose between them, we could turn the scale. But——"

"They're a pair of rotters!" growled Manners.

"Monteith was a man, after all. But he's out of it now. Hallo, Figgy!"

Figgins came into the study, looking very glum. The School House juniors gave him sympathetic glances. They knew what a blow it was to Figgins, the fact that Monteith had been "done" out of his chance.

"What are you going to do?" asked Figgins. "About the election, I mean?"

"Blessed if we know. Your man's out of it."

"He is," said Figgins bitterly, "and that cad Cutts has done him out of it. I think you ought to be ashamed of yourselves if you let Cutts become captain of the school, after that."

"What can we do?" said Digby. "We

don't want Cutts, but there's only Knox up against him now. And I don't think Knox has an earthly."

"I've got an idea," said Figgins quietly. "I've been talking it over with Kerr and Wynn, and they agree with me."

"Go ahead, Figgy."

"You were going to back our man up, and one good turn deserves another," said Figgins. "We're ready to back up the School House now, as there isn't a New House candidate. Anybody but Cutts."

"But none of the Sixth——"

"Blow the Sixth!" said Figgins. "I'm fed up with the Sixth!"

"But none of the Fifth will stand against Cutts. They're all backing him up to a man," said Lowther.

"Blow the Fifth!"

"Then what——"

"What price the Shell?" said Figgins.

"What!"

"My hat!"

"If a Fifth-former can become captain of the school, why not a junior?" said Figgins steadily. "The Shell is only one Form below the Fifth, anyway. That's my idea. If Tom Merry chooses to put up for captain, I'll answer for all the New House junior votes."

"I?" exclaimed Tom Merry in amazement.

"Yes, you!"

"Great Scott! I—captain of St. Jim's!"

"You'd make a better captain than Cutts, any day!"

"Well, that wouldn't be hard," admitted Tom Merry. "I couldn't make a worse one, that's a cert. But——"

"The Head would never allow it," said Manners.

"He can't interfere. You remember once there was an election, and D'Arcy put up. He was elected all right."

"Yaas, wathah! And I considah——"

"But that was only a lark," said Monty Lowther.

"Yes; but the Head didn't interfere. And he won't interfere this time. You put your name up, Tom Merry, and we'll plump for you. Every chap in the New House will vote for you, if only to get even with Cutts!" said

Figgins savagely. "What we want to do is to keep Cutts of the Fifth out."

"I see!" said Tom Merry slowly.

"All your friends will back you up, and most of the juniors will follow suit. They will be awfully taken with the idea of having a junior captain of the school," said Figgins eagerly. "You will simply romp home. I shouldn't wonder if you poll four or five times as many votes as Knox and Cutts put together."

"I considah——"

"Bravo!" exclaimed Blake. "It's the only way, Tommy. Of course, the captain ought really to be selected from the Fourth Form——"

"Yaas, wathah; and I considah——"

"And I should make a jolly good captain, too," continued Blake. "But I waive my claims. Who says Tom Merry for captain?"

There was a shout from the meeting at once. As soon as they had recovered from their astonishment at Figgy's audacious suggestion they received the idea with enthusiasm. It was the very thing. Cutts would be defeated, and good old Tom Merry would be captain of the school. There wouldn't be a New House captain, and St. Jim's would be saved from all danger of going to the bow-wows. There was a ringing cheer that echoed the whole length of the Shell passage.

"Hurray! Tom Merry captain! Hurray!"

Tom Merry hesitated. The suggestion had taken him completely by surprise, and he had his doubts. But the idea of being captain of the school even for a time was, naturally, a very attractive one. His eyes began to sparkle.

"Well, if you fellows think so——"

"We do—we do!"

"I considah——"

"Hurray! Tom Merry captain! Hurray!"

"Yaas," said Arthur Augustus in a burst of generosity. "Yaas, and I will back you up, deah boy. I weally considah that I have a bettah claim, especially as the captain of the school wequires to be a fellah of tact and judgment. But I withdwaw my claims, and I will back you up like anythin'. Huwway!"

"Then we'll put it to the fellows," said Tom Merry. "Let's get down to the common-room, and we'll see how they take it."

And the meeting adjourned to the common-room.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER

The New Candidate!

"GENTLEMEN——"

"Pile in!"

"Hear, hear!"

Tom Merry stood on the table in the junior common-room in the School House. The room was crowded with the Shell, the Fourth, and the Third. News of the meeting had gone round, and the fellows had swarmed in to attend it. Figgins & Co. were there, too, with a crowd of new House juniors.

"Gentlemen," resumed Tom Merry, "Monteith has withdrawn his candidature. We are all sorry to hear it."

"Hear, hear!" from the New House contingent.

"Two candidates are left—Knox and Cutts!"

Groans.

"Knox is a rotten bully, and we don't want him!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Cutts played a dirty trick in giving Monteith away to the Head, for we all know he did it, whatever he says."

Groans for Cutts.

"It is necessary, therefore, to put up a new man to save the good old school from going to the dogs!"

"Bravo!"

"Figgins of the New House has suggested me."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Gentlemen, why shouldn't a junior be captain of St. Jim's?"

"Echo answers why," said Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah, echo would answah St. Jim's to that wemark," said Arthur Augustus.

"Echo always answahs the last word, you know."

"We've got to show Cutts what we think of his knavish tricks," went on Tom Merry. "And I really think I should make a pretty decent captain for the school."

"Blessed is he that bloweth his own trumpet!" grinned Gore.

"Order!"

"Under my rule," said Merry, growing enthusiastic, "St. Jim's will flourish like the bay-tree beside running waters. There will be liberty, equality, and fraternity—freedom for all, combined with respect to authority—every chap will do just as he likes, and discipline will be firmly enforced."

"Hear, hear!"

"It will be my aim to carry on the good work commenced by the late lamented Kildare——"

"Good old Kildare!"

"I shall do my best to keep up the football and cricket traditions of the old school—more especially by a judicious mixture of juniors among seniors in the First Eleven——"

Frantic cheering.

"I shall use my influence with the Head to get a certain number of juniors made into prefects, to keep the Sixth in order——"

Wild applause.

"In a word, everything will go rippingly, if you decide to elect me captain of St. Jim's, I promise to stand up for the rights of the juniors."

"Hurray!"

"If the Sixth cut up rusty, they'll get it in the neck."

"Down with the Sixth!"

"Fagging will be abolished——"

"Bravo!"

"Bullying will be put down with a firm hand——"

"Hear, hear!"



Monteith's open hand fell across Cutts's face. Cutts staggered back, his cheeks going pale. "Now you cad, come on," exclaimed Monteith. (See page 308)

"And—and all will be calm and bright," said Tom Merry in conclusion. "Gentlemen, hands up for myself as captain of St. Jim's."

A forest of hands went up.

There was no doubt that the candidature of Tom Merry of the Shell was popular in the extreme—at least, with the Lower School.

Tom Merry glanced with a sparkling eye over the crowded and enthusiastic meeting. There were enough fellows present to elect him, if it came to that.

"Gentlemen, I thank you——"

"Hear, hear!"

"I will now proceed to put a notice on the board, announcing my candidature. All of you can come with me."

"What-ho!"

And Tom Merry jumped down off the table, and led his excited and enthusiastic followers to the notice-board in the hall. Monty Lowther found a pencil, and Manners a sheet of paper torn from a pocket-pook, and Tom Merry wrote out the notice and pinned it on the board. It ran:

"Thomas Merry, of the Shell Form, has the honour of announcing himself

as a candidate for the captaincy of St. Jim's now vacant. He appeals for the suffrages of all St. Jim's fellows, School House and New House alike. Roll up!"

"Hurray!" roared the crowd.

"What's all that dashed noise about?" exclaimed Knox of the Sixth, pushing his way angrily through the crowd. "What rot are you putting on the board, Tom Merry?"

Tom Merry looked defiantly at the bully of the Sixth.

"I'm putting up my election notice," he said calmly.

"Your what?" ejaculated Knox, staggered.

"My election notice."

"What do you mean, you young idiot?" said the senior harshly.

"I'm standing for captain of St. Jim's."

"You!"

"Me—I mean I," said Tom Merry coolly. "and I fancy I'm going to pull it off, Knox. I'm backed up by both Houses."

"You silly young ass!" exclaimed Knox furiously. "Take that idiotic paper off the board at once. Do you hear?"

"I hear!" said Tom, with a nod.

"Take it down!"

"Rats!"

"What!" yelled Knox.

"Getting deaf?" asked Tom Merry pleasantly. "I said rats! R-A-T-S—rats! However, I'll say it again if you didn't quite catch it. Rats!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas, wathah! Wats, Knoxey, deah boy! You wun off. You've no wight to interfeah with the free and independent electahs of St. Jim's!"

"If you don't take that paper down, I'll take it down, and liek you!" shouted Knox.

"You've no right to touch it, and you won't be allowed to."

The senior gave a snort of fury, and made a grasp at the paper on the board. But the juniors were ready for him. They weren't afraid of Knox. Hands grasped the unpopular bully of the Sixth on all sides, and he was whirled away from the notice-board before he knew what was happening.

"Bump him!" yelled Blake.

"Hurray! Bump him!"

"Let me go!" shrieked Knox, hitting out wildly.

"Yow-ow! My nose—ow——"

"Gweat Scott! My eye——"

Bump! Bump! Bump!

Knox roared as he was bumped on the floor—hard. Darrel came out of his study with a cane in his hand.

"It's all right, Darrel," said Tom Merry

reassuringly. "We're only bumping Knox. He wanted to take down the election notice of a rival candidate. That's not allowed, is it?"

"Certainly not," said Darrel.

Knox tore himself free, looking very dishevelled. His collar was torn, and his jacket split at the back.

"That young hound Merry is setting up as a candidate!" he hooted. "Are we going to have the election turned into a silly joke?"

Darrel started.

"Merry! You're not such an ass——"

"I'm standing for captain!" said Tom Merry sturdily. "A respectable and influential party of electors have done me the honour to select me as their candidate——"

"Tom Merry captain! Hurray!"

"You young duffers!" said Darrel, and he went back to his study laughing. Knox tramped off, gritting his teeth. He made no further attempt to remove the notice from the board. The electors were evidently not to be trifled with.

"Darrel seems to take it as a joke," said Tom Merry a little uncomfortably. "I don't see anything to laugh at myself."

"He laughs best who laughs last," said Blake sagely. "The Sixth won't laugh when you romp home at the election as captain of St. Jim's."

"Wathah not!"

"I wonder how the Head will take it!" murmured Manners.

Most of the fellows were wondering, too, how the Head would take it. But the general opinion was that he couldn't interfere. From time immemorial the St. Jim's fellows had possessed the right of electing their own captain without interference. It was a custom, certainly, for the captain of the school to be in the Sixth, and to be a prefect. But it was not a rule.

Besides, there had been no interference with the candidature of Knox and Cutts—and Knox wasn't a prefect, and Cutts wasn't in the Sixth. Without gross inconsistency, the Head couldn't interfere with Tom Merry on those grounds. He mightn't like it, Tom admitted; but then, by acting as a really capable and first-class captain, he would soon

convince the Head that it was all right. That was the way Tom Merry looked at it.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Railton imparted the news to the Head soon after the notice was put on the board. The Housemaster was half-smiling as he imparted it.

Dr. Holmes could not help smiling too.

"Bless my soul!" he said. "The boy cannot be in earnest."

"I fear that he is very much in earnest, sir."

"But the others—they will not be so foolish as to elect a junior captain of the school, I am sure."

"I trust not, but——"

"I do not see how I can interfere," said the Head thoughtfully. "I do not want to give the juniors the impression that they are treated with injustice. I think I shall leave it to the good sense of the boys."

Which he did.

Only the boys did not have exactly the same idea of "good sense" as the Head had, and so they were keenly and enthusiastically determined to bring their candidate in—and their candidate was Tom Merry!

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER

Foiled at the Finish!

ELECTION day!

There was almost breathless excitement in the old school.

Had the contest remained among Cutts, Knox, and Monteith, the excitement would have been nothing like it. But a junior was standing for the captaincy—and that made all the difference.

Of four candidates, one—Monteith—had withdrawn, and the other three were going to the poll—at all events, it was supposed so. But Knox and Cutts had had a talk together, and doubtless the Fifth-former had made it worth Knox's while to give him a free run, for on Saturday afternoon it was known that the Sixth Form candidate had followed Monteith's example, and withdrawn.

Knox had realised, undoubtedly, that he had no chance. Cutts's followers far outnumbered his, to say nothing of the crowd that supported Tom Merry. If both the seniors had stood, both would have been hopelessly beaten,

but with one withdrawn, the other still had a chance.

Knox and his friends were supporting Cutts now; and Gerald Cutts hoped to pull it off. The juniors were determined that he shouldn't. Canvassing had been going on briskly on both sides.

In the New House, Figgins & Co. were indefatigable in Tom Merry's cause. Tom's generous backing of Monteith had touched their hearts; and, besides that, they were eager to get even with Cutts. Not a fellow in the New House would dream of voting for Cutts. Even some of the seniors intended to vote for Tom Merry, to mark their displeasure at the exclusion of their own candidate.

Some of them, indeed, were of the opinion that, if a junior were elected to the captaincy, the Head would rescind his order, and allow Monteith to take the post after all. For a junior captain was really unthinkable as a permanency—to senior minds, at least. The juniors saw nothing unthinkable about it.

The contest rested now between Tom Merry and Cutts, and though the Fifth-former still had hopes, Tom Merry had ample confidence.

A large number of the seniors did not mean to vote at all, but the juniors intended to roll up in great force for their men. And almost all the juniors of both Houses were for Tom Merry.

The election was fixed for four o'clock in the afternoon, in the big hall of the School House.

Long before four o'clock the hall was crowded.

Tom Merry's backers whipped in the voters from all quarters, from the gym. and the footer ground and the river and the studies. Not a fellow who possessed a vote was allowed to be anywhere but in Big Hall.

Mr. Railton and Mr. Lathom were tellers on the important occasion, and a little before four o'clock they came in.

Both of them were looking very grave. They did not like Cutts or his candidature, but they hoped sincerely that he would be elected. A junior as captain of the school was a new departure, of which the masters were not likely to approve.

Cheers greeted the appearance of the two masters.

"Now we sha'n't be long, deah boys," remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Bai Jove, we'll have a celebvation when we've elected Tom Mewwy captain. I still considah that I should weally make a bettah captain, you know, but I'm backing up old Tommy."

"It will be a gidly walk over!" chuckled Monty Lowther. "Look at Cutts! He doesn't look very jolly, does he?"

"Wathah not!"

"He knows he's going to get it in the neck," said Tom Merry. "Now, who's going to propose me?"

"Bettah leave that to me, deah boy. I will put it vewy nicely."

"Right-ho! Pile in!"

Four o'clock struck. Mr. Railton raised his hand for silence, and the buzz of voices died away in the crowded hall.

"My boys," said the Housemaster, in his deep voice, "you are met to elect a new captain for the school, in the place of Kildare, whose departure we all regret."

Mr. Railton was interrupted by cheers for Kildare. Then he resumed:

"I understand that there are two candidates. I trust that the boys of St. Jim's will make a wise selection, and not commit themselves to a reckless innovation."

"That's up against you, Tom Merry," whispered Levison.

"Oh, rats!" said Blake. "Railton means that we're to vote for the right candidate, and the right candidate is Tom Merry."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Knox is up!" grinned Kangaroo. "Go it, Knox."

Knox rose to propose his friend, Gerald Cutts, of the Fifth Form, as captain of St. Jim's. There were cheers from a section of the assembly.

Tom Merry & Co. looked round them, and they were satisfied that not more than a third of the fellows present were cheering for Cutts. Quite a hundred fellows were absent from the Hall, fellows who would not vote for a junior, and who did not choose to vote for Cutts.

"Now, Gussy!" said Blake.

Arthur Augustus came gracefully forward.

"Gentlemen of St. Jim's——"

"Hurray!" came a roar, which completely put in the shade the late cheering for Cutts. "Go it, Gussy!"

"Gentlemen, I have the honour to pwopose my esteemed fwiend, Tom Mewwy, for the post of captain of St. Jim's!"

"Hear, hear!"

"I need not dilate upon the eminent qualities of my fwiend, Tom Mewwy. You all know him."

Cheers!

"You knew him for a good man and twue—kindest fwiend and noblest foe—a chap who's as stwaight as a die, and always plays the game."

"Hurray!"

"Mr. Wailton, the majowity of votes bein' evidently in favour of my fwiend Tom Mewwy, I claim to have my fwiend Tom Mewwy declared captain of St. Jim's."

"I demand a show of hands!" said Cutts, between his teeth. Cutts was pale with rage; he had little hope left now.

He had played his cards well—too well, perhaps. Cunning as he had been, his schemes had toppled over at last, like a house of cards; he was foiled at the finish. The unexpected had happened, for the candidature of a junior was certainly one of the most unexpected things that could have been thought of. And Cutts of the Fifth saw his castles in the air fading away.

"Hands up for Cutts of the Fifth!" said Mr. Railton.

Hands went up on all sides, and they were carefully counted, and then Mr. Railton and the Fourth Form-Master compared notes as to the total. A note was made of the number, and then a show of hands for Tom Merry was called for.

To the most casual glance it was evident that the number was far greater.

But the counting was gone through carefully. Then there was a hush of silence, as Mr. Railton stood up to make the announcement of the result. The excitement was breathless.

"Votes for Cutts of the Fifth—eighty-five."

"Oh!"

"Votes for Tom Merry of the Shell—two hundred and thirty."

"Hurray!"

"Tom Merry of the Shell is declared to be duly elected captain of the school!" said Mr. Railton, with quite a queer expression upon his face.

"Hip, hip, hurray!"

Cutts of the Fifth drove his hands deep into his pockets, and strode from the hall, his face white with rage. But few regarded Cutts of the Fifth. A wildly excited and enthusiastic crowd surrounded Tom Merry, and raised him shoulder-high, and bore him round Big Hall in triumph, and the old rafters rang with cheers for Tom Merry, Captain of St. Jim's.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER

Unprecedented!

ST. JIM'S was in a state of excitement.

A stranger looking in on the old school that Saturday afternoon would have wondered what was on. It was only too evident that something was "on."

The Lower School was in a state of extraordinary exuberance. Junior fellows clapped one another on the back when they met, or shook hands, or burst into cheering without any apparent rhyme or reason.

The senior fellows, it might have been noticed, did not seem to share in the general exuberance. They looked serious and solemn.

Whatever was "on," it was evidently some-

thing that pleased the Lower School very greatly, and was not regarded with favourable eyes by the Upper School.

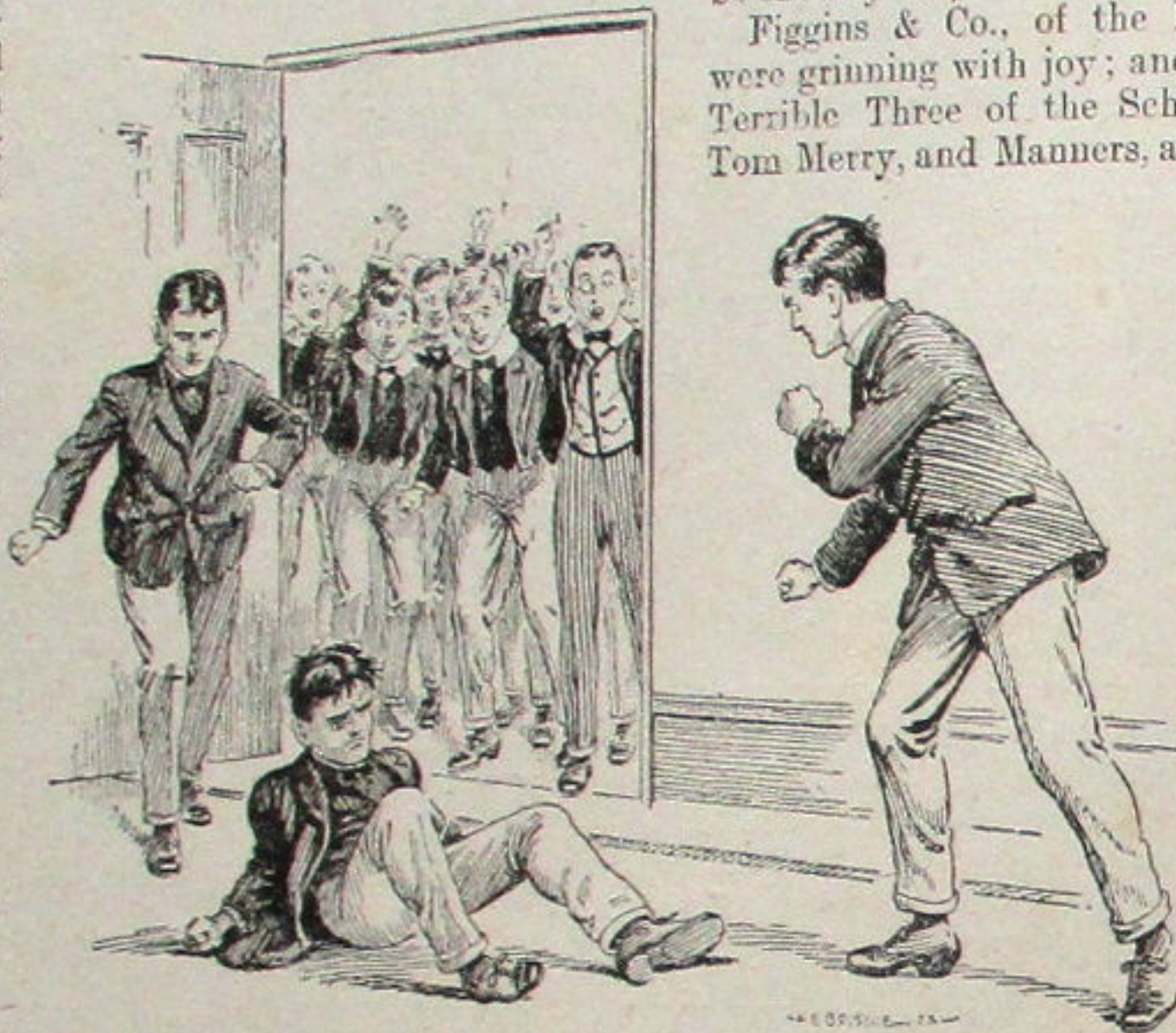
In the Shell passage in the School House there was a terrific crowd, all of them noisy, and all of them joyous. Tom Merry's study was crowded.

Tom Merry was holding a reception.

Juniors of both Houses—School House and New House—came in swarms. The rivalry between the two houses of St. Jim's seemed to be entirely suspended.

Figgins & Co., of the New House, were grinning with joy; and so were the Terrible Three of the School House—Tom Merry, and Manners, and Lowther.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form wore an unusually expansive smile, though he was so squeezed by the crowd in Tom Merry's study that his elegant clothes were in very great danger of being sadly crumpled.



Crash! The Fifth-former went down at last, and lay on the study carpet gasping. Monteith glanced down at him, his anger still unappeased. (See page 309)

"It's simply wippin'!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy declared for the twentieth time at least. "I wegard it as simply wippin', deah boys!"

"Gorgeous!" said Jack Blake.

"Topping!" chimed in Figgins of the New House.

And all the fellows crammed in the study and the passage burst into a cheer:

"Hurrah! Hip-pip—hurrah!"

The din in the Shell passage must have been heard all over the School House, and on most occasions it would have caused some exas-

perated prefect to come along with a cane. But just now the prefects seemed to be keeping off the grass, so to speak.

Tom Merry himself was looking very elated. It was natural, under the circumstances. Naturally, too, he was holding a reception of the electors, and every fellow who had voted for him came to the reception, with the result that the study and the whole passage were crammed with an uproarious throng.

Refreshments had been provided on a generous scale. The Co. had gladly clubbed together to their last sixpence to celebrate that unique and never-to-be-forgotten occasion.

The fellows in the study, lucky to be on the spot, demolished the things with great heartiness, and passed out helpings to their less fortunate comrades in the passage.

Fatty Wynn of the New House stood on the table, tucking into a huge pie, his plump face shining like a full moon. There was no room to sit down. There wasn't very much room to stand, for that matter.

Every now and then the feed and talk were interrupted by bursts of cheering. On election days the fellows were entitled to make a row if they liked. They took full advantage of the privilege.

Besides, now that Tom Merry was captain of the school, they could do as they liked; the new captain would see them through.

And they wanted the seniors to hear them rejoice. They wanted the prefects to understand that there was a new regime now.

In fact, they wouldn't have been sorry to see some interfering prefect come along. Under the orders of the captain of the school, they would have been justified in ejecting the said prefect "on his neck." And to eject a prefect on his neck would have been bliss to the juniors.

"Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!"

"We shall have Darrel or somebody along here soon, if we don't put the soft pedal on," Kangaroo of the Shell remarked.

"Let 'em all come!" said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "We'll jollay soon show them that we don't care a wap for them!"

"What-ho!"

"Prefects have no right to interfere with

the captain of the school," said Tom Merry seriously. "I've been going over the Ordinances of the School——"

"The which?" ejaculated Figgins.

"The ordinances!" said Tom Merry.

"They're in a book in the library—the laws of the school, you know, that even the Head has to respect. I've copied out the ordinances that affect the captain of the school, and I know my rights. I'm going to live up to them. I'm sure all you fellows will back me up in exercising my proper authority."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Hurrah!"

There was a shout from the crowded passage:

"Here comes Darrel!"

"A blessed prefect!"

"Who are you shoving, Darrel?"

"You get off! We don't want any of the Sixth here!"

"Get out!"

Tom Merry struggled to the door and looked out into the passage. Darrel of the Sixth, with a very red face, was pushing his way through the throng amid roars of protest and indignation. He was making his way to the study, but it was slow work.

Tom Merry waved his hand to his excited backers.

"Let Darrel pass, you fellows!" he called out.

"We don't want any prefects!" howled the crowd.

"Darrel's a good sort. Let him come in. If Knox comes along you can chuck him out—or Cutts—on my authority."

"Hear, hear!"

Darrel squeezed through, and arrived in the study in a somewhat breathless and dishevelled state. Darrel was a very popular fellow, only second in that respect to old Kildare himself, the captain of St. Jim's, who had left suddenly, and whose place as captain Tom Merry had taken.

But, popular or not, Darrel couldn't be allowed to interfere with the rights and duties of the new captain. That wasn't to be thought of for a moment.

"You kids must make less noise!"

Darrel gasped. "Do you know you can be heard over the whole House and across the quadrangle?"

"I shouldn't wonder," said Tom Merry calmly.

"Well, you've got to shut up!"

"Rats!"

"What!" shouted the prefect, grasping his cane.

Tom Merry raised his hand warningly.

"Put that cane down, Darrel!"

"Wha-a-at!"

"Don't you know that I'm captain of the school?" demanded Tom Merry. "Listen to this: Bye-law No. 67 of the Ordinances of St. James's Collegiate School. 'The captain of the school, by virtue of his position, takes precedence of all prefects, who are under his directions.' Got that, Darrel?"

"You—you cheeky young ass——"

"Hold on!" said Tom Merry sternly. "No slanging. Listen to this: Bye-law No. 79. 'Any disrespect to constituted authority shall be punished by flogging, detention, or caning upon the hands, as may be deemed fit and suitable.'"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's nothing to laugh at," said Tom Merry, looking round severely. "This is a serious matter. I don't want to flog you, Darrel——"

"What!"

"Or detain you—or cane you upon the hands——"

"Wha-a-at!" stuttered the Sixth-former.

"But I must insist upon proper respect for constituted authority. Kindly lay down that cane at once!"

"You—you——"

"Take that cane away from Darrel!" said Tom Merry.

The cane was whipped out of the prefect's hand in a second. Darrel clenched his fists, but unnumbered fists were clenched round him at once.

"Take it calmly, Darrel, old man," said Tom Merry. "We don't want to hurt you——"

"Hurt me!" spluttered the prefect. "I'm deaming, I suppose. I must be dreaming."

"Kindly return to your study, Darrel, and

consider yourself detained there for one hour," said Tom Merry.

Darrel stood transfixed.

"Do you hear me, Darrel?"

"I—I hear you! I'll thrash you!"

"Remove that insubordinate person," said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Throw him out!"

"Hurray!"

Darrel wondered whether he was on his head or his heels. Hands grasped him on all sides, and he was hustled out of the study. In the passage the crowd hustled him on. He was breathless, his collar was torn, and his jacket split up the back by the time he reached the stairs. He went back to his study in a dazed state. In Tom Merry's study, and the parts adjoining, the celebration continued with undiminished din.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER

A Difficult Situation!

DR. HOLMES, the Head of St. Jim's, sat in his study, with a worried brow.

Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, was with him, and he, too, was looking decidedly worried.

The state of things at the old school was extraordinary—it was a state that could not possibly be allowed to continue, and yet there did not seem to be any ready means by which it could be put an end to.

A junior captain of the school!

It was unthinkable.

But what was to be done? Without what everybody in the Lower School would have considered an utterly unjustifiable and tyrannical exercise of authority, the Head could not quash the result of the election. He shrank from taking such a step as ordering Tom Merry to resign the captaincy to which he had been elected.

But unless Tom Merry was directly commanded to do so by the Head, it was plain that he wouldn't even think of resigning. He was quite satisfied with himself as captain of the school.

"It is an unheard-of state of affairs," the Doctor said, with a troubled frown. "Of course, it is impossible to allow it to continue."

"Impossible!" agreed Mr. Railton.

"Yet it seems equally impossible to interfere."

"It would certainly be difficult."

"I confess, Mr. Railton, that I really do not know what is to be done under such extraordinary circumstances."

Mr. Railton nodded. He did not know either.

"It is very unfortunate," he agreed.

"There were four candidates—Monteith and Knox of the Sixth, Cutts of the Fifth, and Tom Merry of the Shell. Unfortunately, it is the junior who has been elected."

"Of course, I could not foresee that contingency when I directed Monteith to withdraw from his candidature," the Head remarked. "I had no alternative, when it was revealed to me that at one time he had been mixed up in disgraceful proceedings with a set of betting men."

"Quite so," agreed the Housemaster. "But the juniors had a suspicion that it was Cutts of the Fifth who made that revelation to you, in order to spoil Monteith's chances for the election, and they all turned against him at once."

"It is possible, of course, that they were right."

"Probably. And as Knox withdrew also—I think by some arrangement with Cutts—only the two remained; and Cutts became so extremely unpopular, Tom Merry was elected by an overwhelming majority. It is not as if the majority had been small. In that case a new election might be considered. But the majority was more than a hundred; and a new election would certainly have the same result."

The Head drummed on the table with his fingers.

"But a junior captain of the school, Mr. Railton! It is impossible!"

"It is certainly very awkward."

"The captain of the school has authority over the prefects, and, of course, should be a prefect himself."

"But neither Knox nor Cutts was a prefect, and they were allowed to stand. I fear it is too late to raise that point, sir."

"Of course, this is an entirely unexpected

turn of events, and one that could not be prepared for," said the Head. "But something must be done. All the seniors, for instance, will be against the new captain; they cannot be expected to obey a junior—though, by the rules, they are bound to obey the captain of the school."

"They will certainly ignore a junior captain."

"Which will lead to great friction and dispute."

"I fear so."

"But what am I to do? If I order the junior to resign, and make a new law on the subject, all the Lower School will regard it as an act of tyranny. And, to a certain extent, they would be right."

"It would undoubtedly make a very bad impression."

"Yet what is to be done? Something should be done before the matter has gone too far and caused trouble that will not be easily suppressed."

"I quite agree with you, sir. Perhaps an appeal to the good sense of the junior may have some effect. He might listen to you, sir, or to me."

"I will leave it in your hands, Mr. Railton," said the Head, looking relieved. "Pray see what you can do in the matter. I trust that Tom Merry will have sufficient good sense to listen to you. After all, he is a sensible lad."

"I will do my best, sir."

"And perhaps it would be as well to lose no time," said the Head. "The affair cannot be put an end to too soon."

"Quite so. I will see Merry at once."

And Mr. Railton left the Head's study.

His brow was very thoughtful as he went towards the stairs. He could hear the din of the celebration in the junior quarters. It was true that Tom Merry was a sensible lad—quite true; but the Housemaster knew that the junior's point of view might not coincide with his own. However, he determined to do his best to bring Tom Merry to reason.

There was a buzz in the Shell passage as Mr. Railton came upstairs. The juniors respectfully made way for the Housemaster. It was not very easy to make way, in that tremendous crowd, but they contrived to allow Mr.

Railton to pass. The Housemaster reached the crammed study, and the din died away as he looked in.

"Come in, sir," said Tom Merry cordially. "It's very kind of you to come to congratulate me, sir."

The juniors grinned. They guessed easily enough that the Housemaster had not come there to congratulate the newly elected captain of the school.

Mr. Railton coughed.

"Ahem! I came to speak to you, Merry."

"Yes, sir."

"But — ahem! — I think a more private occasion —"

"Oh, pile in, sir — I mean, go on! These chaps don't mind. In fact, sir, if it's anything about the captaincy, I'd rather they heard it, too. You see, I'm forming my pals into a committee to help me run things, now I'm captain. I'm rather young to be captain of a school like St. Jim's."

added Tom Merry, with becoming modesty.

"Yaas, I'm goin' to act as advisah to Tom Mewwy, sir. He wequires the assistance of a fellah of tact and judgment."

"Speak out, sir," said Jack Blake encouragingly. "The managing committee will be very pleased to hear you, sir."

"Yaas, sir, we wegard you as a fwieend as well as a Housemastah," said Arthur Augustus graciously.

"The fact is," said Mr. Railton, "this election has had a most unexpected and absurd result, Merry."

Tom Merry looked surprised.

"Unexpected, sir, perhaps; but I don't see how it can be considered an absurd result, when the best candidate was elected."

"Hear, hear!"

"You see, sir, Monteith was ordered to get out, by the Head himself, because Cutts gave him away about some ancient history or other. And, naturally, the fellows weren't going to vote for a sneak like Cutts."

"No fear!" said Figgins emphatically.

"He dished our man, and so we dished him!"

"As for Knox, he wasn't a suitable chap, anyway, and he never had an earthly," said Tom Merry. "It was between Cutts and me; and I think I can say, without swanking, that I'm the better man of the two."

"Hear — hear!"

"Bwavo!"

"Ahem! But it is quite impossible for a junior to be captain of the school," said

Mr. Railton. "In the first place, the senior boys will not pay you any regard."

"They're bound to, sir, by the rules."

"I am afraid they will disregard the rules, under the circumstances."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"They won't be allowed to disregard the rules, sir. I'm going to keep the Sixth in order."

"What!"

"I sha'n't be a tyrant, of course, but I shall exercise authority with a firm hand," said Tom calmly. "All the juniors will back me up."



"Bump him if he resists," said Tom Merry calmly. Knox did resist. He struggled like a lunatic, but the juniors were too many for him. (See page 324)

"Yes, rather!"

"Huwway!"

"The Sixth will have to toe the line, and I'll soon make 'em see that," said Tom cheerfully. "Don't you worry about that, sir. It will be all right."

"Ahem!" said Mr. Railton, far from assured on that point. "Then there is the fact that you are a junior, and not a prefect, Merry. The captain of the school has always been head prefect."

"The Head can make me a prefect if he likes, sir."

"Jolly good wheeze!" said Monty Lowther heartily.

"Good egg!" said Blake. "You might suggest that to the Head, sir. Then there won't be any more difficulties on that point."

"And the captain of the school is head of the games," said Mr. Railton, his brow growing more worried. "I suppose you are not thinking of undertaking to captain the First Eleven, and direct the sports, Merry?"

"That's just what I am thinking of, sir," said Tom Merry, at once. "I fancy I should do it better than Cutts, for instance."

"Cutts is a senior——"

"I know he is, sir; but, as a junior myself, naturally I sort of feel that a junior could run things better than a senior. All the fellows here agree with me."

"Yes, rather!"

"What-ho!"

"I'm going to do my best to carry on Kildare's work where he left it off, sir," said Tom Merry. "I don't say I shall be as good a captain as old Kildare was. He was a chap in a thousand. But a fellow can't do more than his best."

"Besides, I'm to be advisah-in-chief——"

"To come to the point, Merry," said Mr. Railton, plunging into business at last. "I'm afraid this election cannot be allowed to stand."

There was a loud buzz at once. Even respect for the Housemaster could not repress that demonstration of indignation.

"Oh, really, sir!" exclaimed Tom Merry warmly. "I don't see that! The result of an open and fair election must be allowed to stand."

"In this case, under the peculiar circumstances, I think the Head will order the result to be set aside—unless you anticipate him by resigning, Merry."

"Impossible, sir! The Head can't do it!"

"What!"

"Listen to this, sir," said Tom Merry, referring at once to his collection of valuable extracts from the Ordinances of the School. "By-law No. 98. In case of misconduct of any kind on the part of the captain of the school, the Headmaster shall have the right and power to dismiss him from his post, but otherwise the free choice of the electors shall be ratified, and shall be considered inviolable."

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus. "That hits the wight nail wight on the head."

"You see, sir, that settles it," said Tom Merry. Mr. Railton's face was a study. "The Head can't dismiss me excepting for misconduct—and I'm not the kind of chap to misconduct myself in any way. In fact, I'm going to be jolly careful. I'm sure Dr. Holmes wouldn't transgress his authority in that way—but if he did, I should have to appeal to the Board of Governors."

"Hear, hear!"

Mr. Railton compressed his lips.

"So you refuse to listen to my advice, Merry——"

"Not at all, sir. But the captain of a big school like St. Jim's must be supposed to be capable of forming an opinion for himself, don't you think so, sir?"

"In a word, you refuse to resign from this ridiculous position to which you have so unfortunately been elected?" the Housemaster exclaimed tartly.

"I shouldn't put it like that, sir. But I certainly feel it my duty to live up to the position to which my schoolfellows have elected me, and to do my duty by them and by St. Jim's!" said Tom Merry.

"Then I have nothing more to say."

And the Housemaster quitted the study.

"Bai Jove!" remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "That looks as if the powahs that be don't quite like the way things are goin', deah boys!"

"They can lump it, then," said Tom Merry emphatically. "One thing's jolly certain——"

I'm captain of St. Jim's, and I'm going to remain captain!"

And there was a roar of applause and approval.

"Hurrah! Hip-pip-hurrah!"

And that roar accompanied the Housemaster as he went downstairs.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER

The New Captain!

WHAT was going to happen was a mystery so far.

Tom Merry of the Shell was captain of St. Jim's, but that he could be allowed to remain captain seemed impossible to the seniors, at least.

Many of the juniors, too, expected the chopper to come down, as Monty Lowther put it.

But it did not come down.

Whether the Head, as well as Tom Merry, had been looking up the bye-laws of the school, or whether he was simply hesitating in doubt—whatever the reason, the fiat did not go forth for the junior to stand out of the captaincy.

On Monday Tom Merry was still captain of St. Jim's, and showed every intention of sticking to his post and living up to it.

The Sixth Form had held a council on the subject in the privacy of the prefect's room; and although the result was not known to the juniors, they guessed easily enough that the top Form of the school had decided to be "up against" the new regime.

That, of course, was only to be expected.

The Sixth and the Fifth would "kick," but however hard they kicked, they could not kick Tom Merry out of the captaincy, and that was the important point.

It was known that Cutts of the Fifth was especially furious. It was not only his defeat in the election, but his defeat at the hands of a junior that rankled in the breast of the black sheep of the Fifth. He had outwitted Monteith of the New House, he had bought off Knox of the Sixth, and he had been beaten at the finish by a Shell fellow!

It was no wonder that Cutts was furious, but Tom Merry & Co. did not care twopence for his fury. The new captain of St. Jim's felt quite equal to dealing with the Fifth-

former if he turned rusty. Gerald Cutts could scheme revenge as much as he liked; the captain of St. Jim's went on his way unregarding.

Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, looked at Tom Merry in a somewhat peculiar way, when he came into the Form-room on Monday morning.

It was the first time Mr. Linton had had a captain of the school in his class.

Tom Merry was, in fact, the cynosure of all eyes at this time. His old enemies, Gore and Crooke and Levison and Mellish, were remarkably civil to him. However short a time his command might last, while it lasted he had it in his power to make things very warm for them if he liked; and they knew it. Not that Tom Merry was in the least likely to act the bully. But he did not mean to stand any nonsense, and he made that plain from the start.

The opposition of the seniors was counterbalanced by the support of the Lower School. There was hardly a junior in either House who was not prepared to back Tom Merry up through thick and thin.

Curiously enough the new captain was as popular in the New House as in his own House. The New House candidate had been "dished" by Cutts. And the New House fellows had rejoiced in "dishing" Cutts, in his turn, by voting for Tom Merry. And having elected Tom Merry, they were prepared to stand by him.

The new reign, therefore, was inaugurated by an unusual peacefulness between the juniors of the rival Houses, though how long that would last was a question.

For the present, however, the barometer was set fair, so to speak.

Figgins announced in the New House that he was backing up Tom Merry, and that he would punch the head of any other fellow who didn't back him up, and Figgy's argument was considered conclusive.

The juniors felt that Tom Merry was one of themselves, and that it was up to them to support him against the seniors, and they felt a natural rejoicing at the idea of "giving the Sixth a fall."

Tom Merry, as captain of St. Jim's, found

that he had a good many new duties on his hands. In standing for election, he had made many promises in the exuberance of the moment. He might have forgotten them—as candidates sometimes do after election—but the other fellows did not intend to let him forget them.

Wally—D'Arcy minor of the Third—brought to his recollection the fact that he had promised to abolish fagging. That was to be one of the reforms under the new regime. Knox's fag reminded him that he had undertaken to stamp out bullying—Knox's fag having had great experience of that. All the junior footballers remembered—and mentioned—the circumstance that he had agreed to play junior members in the First Eleven.

That was rather a pressing matter. On Wednesday one of the last fixtures of the football season was to take place—the match with the First Eleven of Rylcombe Grammar School. As captain of St. Jim's, Tom Merry was football skipper, and he would naturally take the command. And something like forty or fifty juniors were looking forward to places in the team. Unless Tom Merry decided on something like the old-fashioned Rugby game, with half a hundred a side, it was difficult to see how he was to satisfy all claimants. The way of the new captain of St. Jim's evidently did not lie through beds of roses. But Tom Merry faced all his difficulties calmly and courageously. And so far the juniors were united in backing him up against all comers.

Knox of the Sixth was the first of the seniors to fall foul of the new captain. Knox had loudly announced that he regarded the election as "rot," and that he hadn't the slightest intention of taking any notice of the cheeky Shell kid. Some of the juniors wanted Tom to drop on Knox at once, under Rule 79 of the Ordinances of St. Jim's, which forbade disrespect towards the captain of the school. But Tom Merry left it till Knox proceeded from words to actions.

After lessons on Monday, while Tom was chatting with a group of his supporters on the footer-ground, discussing the coming First Eleven match, Wally of the Third dashed up in great excitement.

"Where's Tom Merry?" he shouted.
"Where's the skipper?"

"Here I am," said Tom Merry. "What's wanted, kid?"

"Kid!" said Wally, forgetting Rule 79 for a moment. "Whom are you calling a kid? Kid yourself and be blowed!"

"None of your cheek!" said Tom Merry, frowning. "I'm carrying an ash-plant now, to keep cheeky kids in order. Look out!"

And indeed Tom Merry had taken to carrying that symbol of authority, which he was certainly entitled to use as captain of the school.

"Yaas, tweat your skippah with pwopah wespect, Wally," said Arthur Augustus. "I expect my minah to set a pwopah example to the othah fags, you know."

"Oh, rats!" said Wally.

"Wally, you young wascal——"

"Oh, don't you begin, Gus!" implored Wally. "Tom Merry, you're wanted. You're captain of St. Jim's, ain't you? And you promised to put down bullying."

"Who's bullying whom?" asked Tom.

"Knox. He's licking young Curly in his study!" howled Wally. "Curly's my chum, and that beast Knox isn't going to lick him!"

"What has Curly done?"

"What does it matter what he's done?" howled Wally. "Ain't you going to keep your blessed election promises, and put down bullying? Knox is licking him with a cricket-stump!"

"I must inquire into this!" said Tom Merry, in a stately way. "I shall go to Knox's study at once. Some of you fellows had better come, in case there's trouble."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hear, hear!"

"We'll back you up!"

Tom Merry walked off towards the School House, with quite an army at his back. The juniors were very keen to try conclusions with the worst bully in the school, and this was the first time they had had the chance of doing so under the lead of a captain of the school. Judging by the looks of the juniors, it might have been predicted that there was a high old time in store for Knox of the Sixth.

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER

Tom Merry Exercises His Authority!

"Yow-ow-ow!"

That Knox was putting in a good deal of energy with the cricket-stump was evident, from the howls of anguish that proceeded from his study as Tom Merry & Co. came up the Sixth Form passage.

"Yow-ow-ow! You beast, Knox! I'll tell Tom Merry! Ow!"

Knox's angry voice could be heard in reply as the army neared the door of the study.

"You'll tell Tom Merry, will you? Take that! Tell him, too, that I'll give him some of the same if I have any of his cheek! Take that—and that—and that!"

Whack—whack—whack!

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"You hear him?" yelled Wally.

Tom Merry threw open

the door of Knox's study, and strode in. Knox had Curly Gibson by the collar, and was larruping him with energy and a cricket-stump. He paused in the castigation, however, to glare furiously at Tom Merry and the excited juniors at his back.

"Get out of my study!" he snapped.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"The captain of the school has a right to enter any study, to put down malpractices of any kind," he replied. "I refer you to By-law No. 45—"

"You cheeky young cad! If you don't get out, I'll boot you out!" roared Knox.

"Put down that stump!"

"What!"

"You hear me?" said Tom Merry sternly.

"I don't allow bullying."

"You—you—you don't allow!" spluttered Knox.

"Exactly."

"You—you—"

"Are you going to put down that stump, or are you not?"

"Not!" shrieked Knox.

"Take that stump away from him, you fellows!" ordered the captain of St. Jim's.

"You bet!"

"What-ho!"

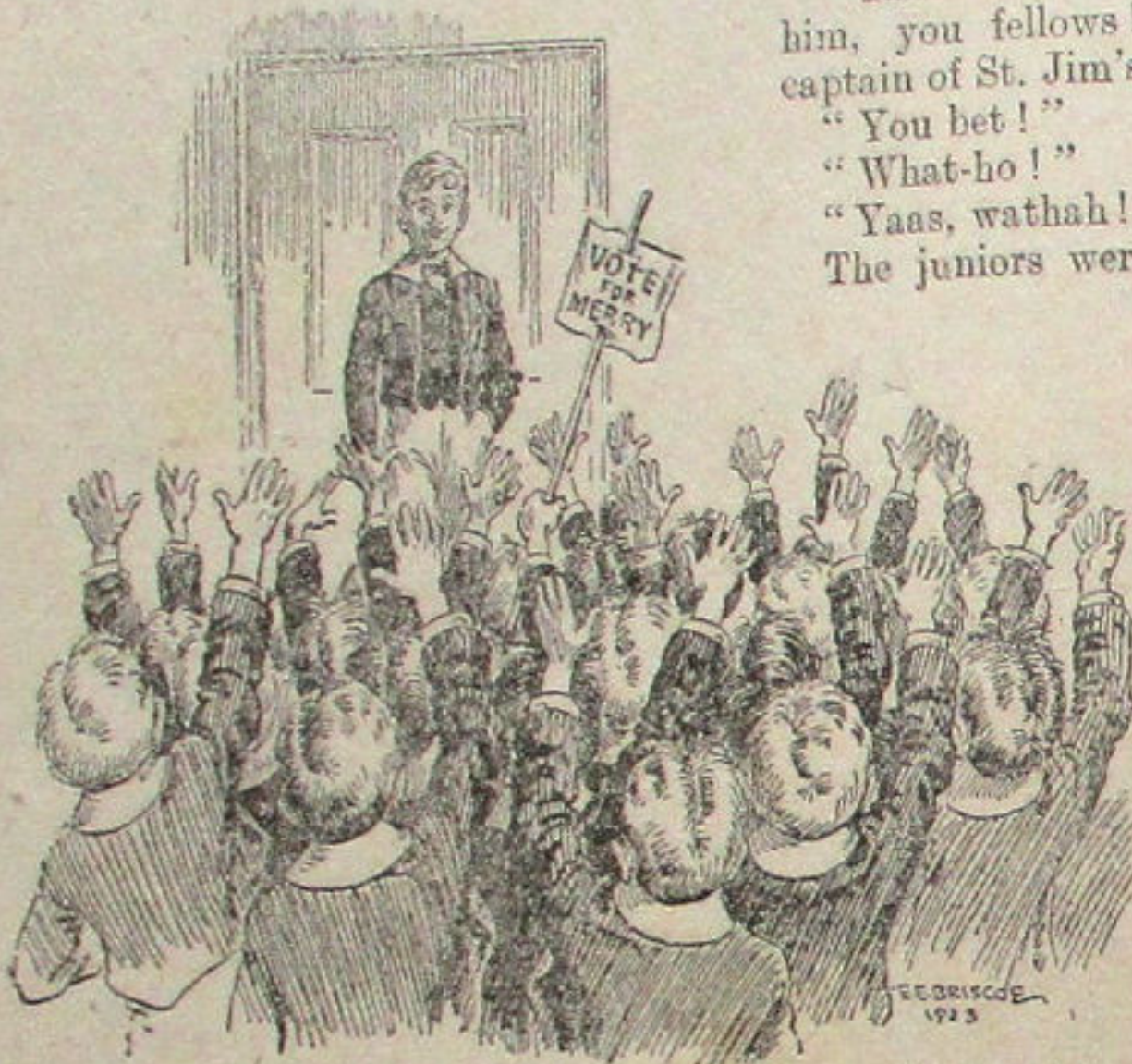
"Yaas, wathah!"

The juniors were only too keen

to obey. They swarmed at Knox. The bully of the Sixth whirled the stump above his head. His face was crimson with rage.

"Stand back, or I'll brain you!" he shouted.

"I wefuse to be bwained, and I wefuse to stand back!"



"Gentlemen," said Tom Merry, "hands up for myself as captain of St. Jim's." (See page 312)

"Collar him!"

"Down with the bully!"

There was no telling what Knox might have done, but Tom Merry chipped in with his ash-plant, and knocked the stump out of Knox's hand. The next moment the bully of the Sixth was struggling in the grasp of the juniors.

"Bump him if he resists," said Tom Merry calmly.

Knox did resist. He was struggling like a lunatic, but the juniors were too many for

him; they simply swarmed over him. Knox was whirled off his feet, and bumped on the floor with a concussion that shook the study.

"Sit on him, two or three of you!"

They sat upon Knox.

"This insubordination will do you no good, Knox," said Tom Merry loftily. "Resistance to constituted authority has to be put down with a strong hand. I shall now proceed to inquire into this matter. You have been thrashing young Gibson in a brutal manner."

"Ow! He's half killed me!" groaned Curly.

"I'll finish him, too!" yelled Knox.

"Shurrup!" said Blake, pressing his boot gently but firmly on the mouth of the floored bully. "You talk too much, Knox."

"Groooooogh!"

"Yaas; keep the wottah quiet. He weally deafens me, you know. Your voice is weally not at all pleasant to listen to, Knox, deah boy."

"Gerrrooogh!"

"Now, Curly, let me see whether he's hurt you," said Tom Merry. "Take your jacket off."

"I'm half flayed!" gasped Curly.

"Let's see."

Curly Gibson stripped off his jacket and shirt. There were livid marks across his back where he had been thrashed, and there was a buzz of indignation from the juniors at the sight.

"You hound!" said Tom Merry, fixing his blazing eyes upon Knox. "You ought to be boiled in oil!"

"Boiling in oil for bullies isn't in the by-laws, is it?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shut up, Monty! Don't be funny now. This is serious!"

"It's going to be serious for Knox!" growled Wally.

"You shut up, too! Don't you jaw when your captain is talking. Knox, kindly explain what you were licking Curly for. I'm going to judge this case on its merits. Take your boot off his mouth, Blake."

"Certainly!" said Blake.

He removed his boot, and Knox recovered his voice, but did not explain why he had been

licking Curly Gibson. Instead of that, he burst into a torrent of language that would have done credit—or discredit—to an intoxicated bargee.

"Stop him!" said Tom.

Blake's boot came into use again. Knox's voice died away in a suffocated growl.

"Bad language is punished by flogging or caning, according to circumstances—see Rule No. 33," said Tom Merry. "Is there a cane in this study?"

"Here's one," said Digby.

"Good! Knox will sit up and hold out his hand. You hear, Knox? You won't? Very well. Cane him across the shoulders."

Knox was jammed face downwards on the carpet. Then Digby started off with the cane. The bellows of Knox resembled those of a maddened bull. But Digby did not cease to lash till Tom Merry held up his hand at the twelfth stroke.

"'Nuff!"

"I'm not tired yet!" panted Digby. "I could go on, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That is enough for bad language," said Tom Merry. "We must be just, but not vindictive. Now, Knox, will you have the great kindness to explain why you were licking Curly?"

"Groooooogh!"

"Every time he doesn't answer, Dig, give him another cut."

"Oh, rather!" said Digby.

Whack!

"Stop it!" shrieked Knox. "I—I'll answer. I licked him for burning my toast and cheeking me. Ow!"

"You thrashed a kid in that brutal manner for burning your toast, you brute?"

"He's my fag, ain't he?" howled Knox.

"You won't have a fag in future. For your present misconduct, you are deprived of the right of fagging anybody. I order that, as captain of St. Jim's."

"Bravo!"

"And you will receive twelve cuts with the cane for bullying and ill-treating Curly Gibson. If you are tired, Dig, Herries can lay them on."

"Give me the cane," said Herries, at once.

"Oh, I'm not tired!" said Dig. "Leave it to me."

"Pile in," said Tom Merry. "I'll say when."

Digby "piled in." Knox roared and squirmed under the heavy lashes of the cane. Digby put so much energy into the last cut that the cane broke in two. Knox's uproar was heard the length of the passage, and beyond. Voices could be heard in the passage now, and the door of the study was hurled open. Darrel and Rushden and several other Sixth-formers thrust their way in.

"Rescue!" half sobbed Knox. "These young scoundrels are ragging me!"

"How dare you come here?" exclaimed Darrel, angrily. "How dare you lay hands on a Sixth-former?"

"I'm acting by my authority as captain of the school."

"Don't talk rot! Get out of this study!"

"Rats!"

"Yaas, wathah; wats, and many of them, Dawwel, deah boy!"

"I order you, as a prefect, to get out of this room!" roared Darrel.

"I refuse, as captain of St. Jim's, to do anything of the kind," retorted Tom Merry, with perfect coolness.

"Throw the cheeky young beggars out," said Langton of the Sixth.

"Better not try it!" said Manners. "You'll go out on your necks yourselves if you do. We're all backing up the captain of the school."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Order!" said Tom Merry, calmly. "I trust you'll have too much good sense to interfere with the captain of the school in the execution of his duty. Darrel?" Tom Merry's flow of language was unusually impressive, as befitted his new and exalted station. "If it is necessary to use force I shall use force, and I shall call up all the juniors to help me enforce my commands, if necessary."

"Do you mean to say that you're trying to make a riot in the school?" exclaimed Rushden.

"You are making the riot."

"Us! Why——"

"If you don't clear out of this study at once I shall call in Mr. Railton," said Darrel, compressing his lips.

"Call him, and be blowed!"

"I mean it, you young idiot!"

"And I mean it, too, you old idiot!" said Tom Merry, independently.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"D'Arcy minor, go and ask Mr. Railton if he will kindly step here."

Wally did not stir.

"Do you hear me?" exclaimed Darrel angrily.

"I hear you," said Wally, cheerfully, "but I don't take orders from any of the Sixth. Fagging is abolished. I'll take orders from my captain. My captain's Tom Merry."

"Quite right!" said Tom approvingly. "Darrel, I object to your giving orders in my presence. It savours of disrespect."

Darrel gasped. He could do nothing else.

"However, we'll have Mr. Railton on the scene, if you want him," said Tom Merry.

"I'm not afraid to act openly. Wally, will you cut along and call Mr. Railton? Tell him that the captain of the school will be glad if he can step here for a few minutes."

"Right-ho!" grinned Wally.

And he cut off.

Then there was a pause in the study as the crowd of fellows waited for the arrival of the Housemaster.

THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER

Quite Justified!

TOM MERRY waited with perfect calmness. Some of the juniors were feeling uneasy, not quite knowing what view the Housemaster might take of the matter, but Tom Merry did not share their uneasiness. He was acting within his rights as captain of the school. What was there to be uneasy about? Mr. Railton, as a Housemaster, was bound to back up the captain of the school in the exercise of his just authority. That was how Tom Merry looked at it.

Knox stood gasping and groaning, and rubbing his injuries. His eyes were gleaming with malice. He felt sure that he would be avenged as soon as the Housemaster arrived upon the scene.

The heavy tread of the Housemaster was heard in the passage at last. Mr. Railton's form appeared in the doorway. His face was grave.

"I am wanted here, I understand?" he exclaimed.

"You are, sir," said Darrel. "I—I——"

"Hold on, Darrel!" said Tom Merry, steadily. "It's for the captain of the school to speak."

"You young rascal——"

"Silence!"

"Why, I—I—I——" stuttered Darrel.

"Silence! Mr. Railton, I report to you what has happened as captain of the school reporting to his Housemaster," said Tom Merry, with dignity.

"Play up, Tommy!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"What has happened?" asked Mr. Railton, quietly.

"Knox has been discovered in the act of bullying and thrashing a Third Form boy in a very brutal way. I have administered punishment to him, as was my right and duty. Darrel has interfered, but I am sure that Darrel will apologise for chipping in when he has had time to think calmly about it. I excuse him!"

"You—you—you excuse me?" stuttered Darrel. "Oh, this beats everything!"

"They've been ragging me, sir!" howled Knox. "The whole crowd of them piled on me."

"The juniors obeyed my orders, as captain," said Tom Merry. "They were bound to do so by Rule No. 23."

"Very important to stick to the wules, sir," remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"So long as I am captain of St. Jim's I shall make it a point to put down bullying with a firm hand, sir," continued Tom Merry.

"Hear, hear!"

"If these young cads are to be allowed to invade a Sixth Form study, and rag the seniors, sir——" began Knox, passionately.

Mr. Railton pursed his lips.

"Show him your back, Curly," sang out Wally.

"Yes, I want Mr. Railton to see that I was bound to interfere, since the prefects have thought fit to report this matter," said Tom Merry, with dignity. "Go it, Curly."

"Oh, all right!" said Curly.

And his shirt came off again.

Mr. Railton gazed at the deep marks made by the thrashing Knox had inflicted upon the fag, and uttered an exclamation of anger and indignation.

"Did you do that, Knox?" he exclaimed, fixing his eyes upon the bully of the Sixth.

Knox bit his lip. The matter was not turning out so well for him, after all.

"I licked him, sir," he admitted.

"You made those marks?"

"I—I suppose so."

"Then you have acted in a brutal manner!" said Mr. Railton, sharply. "You had no right to use a fag in that way. If you had not already been discharged from your duties as a prefect, Knox, I should report this matter to the Head. You are certainly not fit to hold any authority at all. Darrel, I trust that you do not uphold Knox in treating a boy of the Third Form in this way?"

Darrel flushed uncomfortably. Certainly he disliked Knox's methods as much as anybody could, and his feelings towards the bully of the Sixth at that moment were anything but amiable.

"No, sir," he said. "I had not seen that. I suppose someone ought to have interfered."

"I should think so!" the Housemaster exclaimed. "And it seems that the prefects did not interfere, and yet they find fault with Merry for doing so."

The Sixth-formers exchanged glances, and so did the juniors. The glances of the latter expressed satisfaction. Tom Merry's exercise of authority was evidently justified in the eyes of the Housemaster.

"Merry has certainly done right in interfering in this matter," said Mr. Railton. "Knox appears to have been punished—certainly not more severely than he deserved, otherwise I should punish him myself."

"Bwavo!" chirruped Arthur Augustus.

"Silence!" said the Housemaster, frowning. "Knox, if you are guilty of such conduct again I shall report it to the Head, and suggest that you be sent away from this school. Tom Merry, you know that I do not approve of your holding the captaincy of St. Jim's, but in this matter you have acted quite rightly."

"Thank you, sir!"

Mr. Railton strode out of the study.

There was a brief silence. The Housemaster had delivered his judgment, and he had delivered it in favour of Tom Merry.

There was nothing more to be said.

Darrel and the other seniors followed the Housemaster without a word. Then Tom Merry spoke, severely:

"Are you satisfied, Knox?"

Knox ground his teeth.

"I'll make you smart for this yet!" he muttered.

"Silence!"

"You—
you—"

"Dwy up, Knox. You mustn't threaten the captain of the school; it's against all the wules," said D'Arcy chidingly.

"You have been punished, Knox," said Tom Merry, wagging his forefinger at the bully of the Sixth. "The matter is now closed. You will not, however, be allowed to have a fag again, so long as I am captain of the school. Kindly remember that."

"Hear, hear!"

"Wally, you will please tell the Third and Second that they are not allowed to fag for Knox. Any fellow fagging for Knox will be licked!"

Wally chortled joyously.

"That's all right!" he said. "I'll tell 'em. I say, skipper, can we wreck the study before we go?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "Order, you young bounder! Gentlemen, our business here is now finished. I thank you for supporting me in the exercise of my just authority as captain of the school."

"Don't mench, deah boy! You can always wely on us."

"Yes, rather."

And Tom Merry walked off, followed by the juniors in a grinning and very hilarious crowd, leaving Knox alone in his study—very sore in body and in mind.



Hands grasped the unpopular bully of the Sixth on all sides and he was whirled away from the notice-board. (See page 313)

THE TWENTIETH CHAPTER

A Message to
the Sixth!

DARREL'S study, in the Sixth-Form passage, was crowded.

It was a meeting of the seniors.

Half the Sixth were there, and Monteith and Baker of the New House

had come over to the meeting.

The happenings in Knox's study had excited the Sixth Form tremendously.

They had met, with Darrel as chairman, to discuss the unprecedented situation, and decide what was to be done.

Several of the Fifth Form had come to the meeting, too, prominent among them being Gerald Cutts.

Cutts was known to be an extremely clever

and "deep" fellow, and the others expected that he would be able to give some good advice upon the difficult situation.

It was only too evident that something had to be done.

Knox's bullying conduct had unfortunately placed the seniors in the wrong, when the late occurrence was brought to the notice of the Housemaster. But for that Tom Merry's captaincy might have been brought to a sudden termination. As it was, his position was stronger than ever. He had now received the official approval of the Housemaster, and that strengthened his hands very much.

Most of the seniors disapproved of Knox and all his works; but they were very sore over the victory of the juniors.

If a junior was to run the show, as Rushden remarked, the Sixth might as well go out of business altogether. But how were they to get rid of the junior skipper? That was the worrying question to which they could find no answer.

Darrel addressed the excited meeting in a few words. Darrel was very much in earnest about it.

"There's no need to say much," he said. "You fellows all know what a rotten state things are in. A kid in the Shell is captain of the school. It's ridiculous, but there doesn't seem any way of getting rid of him. If he allowed the seniors to advise him, and run the show for him, it wouldn't be so bad. But he means to be independent, and run things according to his own ideas—the ideas of the Lower School. It's impossible, of course. What's to be done? Knox's playing the fool has given him a chance to start on us and he's taken his chance. There will be lots more trouble soon. On Wednesday we're playing one of the most important football fixtures of the season. Tom Merry intends to captain the First Eleven."

"He wouldn't have the nerve!" said Rushden aghast.

"He has said so!" replied Darrel. "And he's going to put some juniors in the team."

"It can't be allowed!" exclaimed Monteith.

"It's out of the question."

"The Grammarians will walk over them!"

"It will be a defeat for St. Jim's!"

"It's impossible!"

Darrel shrugged his shoulders as he listened to the indignant exclamations of the seniors. They all agreed in their view of the case. But nobody seemed to have anything of a definite and business-like nature to suggest.

"The question is, what's to be done?" said Darrel.

"Give the young idiot a sound licking," suggested Lefevre of the Fifth. "That's what I say—wallop him black and blue!"

"No good. The juniors will stand by him, and it would simply mean a riot. He's acting within his rights as captain of the school."

"Captain of Colney Hatch!" growled Baker. "The whole thing's ridiculous!"

"Utterly absurd!" said Monteith.

"If anybody's got anything to suggest——" said Darrel again.

"I have!" said Cutts.

"Go ahead, Cutts!"

And all eyes turned upon Cutts of the Fifth. There was a general feeling that Cutts of the Fifth would be able to sever the Gordian knot, if anybody could.

"We can postpone the match with the Grammar School, or scratch it altogether," said Cutts quietly. "Darrel's secretary—he's only got to write to them, and tell them that, owing to unforeseen circumstances, we sha'n't be able to play the match on Wednesday. Nothing need be said to the kids about it. Simply scratch the match, and they can go on laying their plans just the same—till Wednesday, when the Grammarians won't arrive."

"My hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Darrel grinned. It was a simple way out of the difficulty, but it had not occurred to him. The seniors all chuckled over it. For Tom Merry to remodel the First Eleven for a match on Wednesday, and then for the opposing team to fail to turn up, would be a screaming joke on the junior captain of St. Jim's.

"Hold on," said Baker. "The secretary isn't empowered to scratch matches without consulting the captain, you know."

"I don't recognise that Shell kid as captain of St. Jim's," said Darrel. "I have decided to take no notice of his election."

"Quite so!" agreed the others.

"I'll write and scratch the match," said Darrel. "That's settled! That'll see us over this week, as far as footer's concerned."

"And they can remodel the team and get all ready," grinned Cutts. "Not a word to Tom Merry, of course, or he will be writing to the Grammar School, too!"

"Not a syllable!" chuckled Monteith.
"Ha, ha, ha!"

The senior meeting roared with laughter. They anticipated with great glee the looks of the junior captain when the Grammarian team failed to arrive.

There was a tap at the door of the study, and it opened, and the cool and cheeky countenance of Wally of the Third looked in.

"Get out, you fag!" Langton exclaimed.

"I've got a message from the captain of the school," said Wally calmly. "Not so much noise in this study!"

"Wha-a-at!"

"There's too much noise here," said Wally imperturbably. "Tom Merry doesn't want to interfere with you, so long as you keep within limits, but he can't have so much noise in the Sixth-Form passage. That's his message!"

The seniors stared blankly at the fag.

That a Shell fellow should send a message to the Sixth, commanding them to make less noise, took their breath away.

"You—you cheeky little imp!" gasped Monteith.

"That's the captain's message!" said Wally calmly. "Not so much noise."

And he slammed the door and walked away whistling.

The seniors looked at one another.

"Well, that takes the cake!" exclaimed Rushden. "The awful cheek of it! Orders from the Shell to the Sixth! My only aunt!"

"It's not to be stood!" gasped Langton.
"I won't stand it!"

"It's intolerable!"

"Let's make a fearful row!" suggested Lefevre. "That's what I say—let's raise Cain, and see what the cheeky young blighter will do."

Darrel shook his head quickly.

"We can't act like a gang of cheeky fags!" he exclaimed. "It's beneath the dignity of the Sixth to enter into a controversy with a

Shell kid. Besides, there's no getting out of it—the captain of the school has the right to send such an order if he chooses, and we were making rather a row, you know."

"But—but it's intolerable."

"We've got to get rid of the young cad somehow," growled Cutts. "Anyway, we've settled him for the Grammar School match on Wednesday; that's some satisfaction."

It was the only satisfaction the exasperated seniors had.

THE TWENTY-FIRST CHAPTER

Not Easy!

"MADE up the list?"

Monty Lowther asked the question.

It was Tuesday, the day before the Grammar School senior match, and Tom Merry sat at his study table with a pencil and paper. His youthful brow was corrugated with thought.

He had about forty names on the paper before him, and he had been crossing them out one after another, trying to reduce the list to manageable proportions.

"I've more than made it up," said Tom ruefully, looking up from his task. "The trouble is to cut it down. Lots of the fellows expect to play in the Grammarian match tomorrow. Of course, I must play, as captain of St. Jim's."

"Of course!" assented Manners and Lowther at once.

"I have heard from Darrel that all the Sixth refuse to play under a junior captain," said Tom.

"All the better," said Lowther at once. "That makes all the more room for juniors in the First Eleven."

"Yes; but a senior eleven composed wholly of juniors will be rather—rather a novelty," said Tom Merry. "I don't know what the Grammarians will think, playing the same team that their junior eleven meets."

"Let 'em think what they like. We'll lick 'em, and that will give them something to think about!"

"But can we lick them?" said Tom. "After all, they're seniors, and a good team. They used to give old Kildare and his eleven a tussle!"

"Oh, we'll lick 'em!" said Lowther; "and if we don't, it will be the fault of the seniors for standing out, and we can't help it!"

"I'm willing to play six seniors out of eleven players," said Tom. "I think that's a good enough concession to the Sixth."

"I should jolly well say so!"

"But Darrel doesn't see it—and the others don't. They won't be satisfied with anything but a Sixth-Former captaining the team, which is——"

"Rot!"

"Exactly—rot!" agreed Tom. "Not to be thought of for a moment. I've got to consider my personal dignity as captain of the school."

"Well, if the seniors are understudying Achilles, and sulking in their tents, the team will have to be all juniors, that's all," said Manners. "After all, you've got plenty of players to choose from, Tommy."

"Oh, plenty!" said Tom. "Too many, in fact. You see, such a blessed lot of the fellows expect to be put in. You two chaps ought to be in, as—as members of this study."

Manners and Lowther nodded emphatically.

"That goes without saying," assented Lowther.

"Quite so!" agreed Manners.

"Then Study No. 6 expects to go in, all four of them."

"That's rather a cheek!"

"Awful nerve!"

"Then Kangaroo and Clifton Dane and Glyn all expect places."

"Better put in Kangy and give the others the go-by."

"Then there's the New House chaps. After the splendid way Figgins & Co. backed me up in the election I can't very well leave them out."

"Well, I suppose there ought to be one or two of the New House," admitted Monty Lowther rather grudgingly. "Say Figgins."

"Figgy says we can't possibly beat Fatty Wynn as goalkeeper, and he's really right, you know. Fatty keeps goal like a cherub."

"Yes, I suppose Wynn had better go in."

"And then Kerr——"

"Oh, never mind Kerr!"

"And then there's Redfern and Owen and Lawrence, all good men, and they all backed us up like Trojans over the election."

"You can't put the whole blessed New House into the eleven," said Lowther warmly.

"Then, besides the New House chaps, there are the fags."

"The fags!" said Manners and Lowther together.

Tom Merry nodded.

"Yes; the Third Form stood by me over the election, you know. Young Wally wants to go into the team——"

"Oh, rats!"

"He says he'll be satisfied with three places for the Third—himself and young Frayne and Jameson."

"Cheeky young beggar!" said Lowther. "I suppose the Second Form will be wanting places next."

"Well, they haven't asked for any so far, thank goodness!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "Of course, we can't play fags of the Third, either."

"Of course we can't."

"The team must be made up of the oldest fellows possible, if the seniors intend to sulk."

"All Shell fellows would be best," agreed Manners.

"Only, you see——"

"Well, put in Figgins, Fatty Wynn, and Blake, and make up the rest from the Shell." Monty Lowther suggested.

"Then there will be a row."

"Let there be. I suppose you expect some rows before you've been captain of St. Jim's long? Besides, what's life without a row every now and then?"

"Ahem! Only, you see, if the juniors don't stand together the seniors will get the upper hand over us. It's only by the Lower School being solid behind me that I can keep my ground. If they could make out that the school is dissatisfied with me as captain all round, the Head would chip in."

"Jolly difficult bizney, I admit," assented Lowther. "There's something in that. But you can't play more than eleven chaps in a Soccer team; that's a dead cert."

"And the other fifty or so will get their backs up," Manners remarked.

There was a tap at the door, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth came in. He grinned at the Terrible Three in a very genial manner.

"I heah that the seniahs are standin' out of the match to-morrow," he remarked.

"That's so," said Tom.

"I wegard it as weally a stwoke of good luck. It would have been wathah wuff to push them out, but as they are standin' out of their own accord it will give us a good opportunity of showin' what the juniahs can do."

"Or what they can't do."

"Oh, that will be all wight! I intend to play the game of my life to-morrow," said Arthur Augustus confidently.

The chums of the Shell exchanged glances. The difficulties were beginning.

"Ahem!" said Tom Merry. "Speaking about the match to-morrow—ahem—"

"I suppose you'll have to play a New House chap or two?" Arthur Augustus remarked. "Figgin's and Fatty Wynn and pewwaps Weddy. Are you fellahs playin'?"

The Terrible Three glared at him. Were they playing! Were they playing, indeed!

"We are!" said Tom briefly.

"That's thwee," said D'Arcy. "Our study makes it seven, as there's four of us, and I pwesume you'll put in Kangawoo; then thwee New House chaps will make up the team."

"The fact is——"

"Oh, don't wun away with the ideah that I'm twyin' to wun the show!" said Arthur

Augustus generously. "I'm only givin' you advice, you know, as a sort of expert. You can't do bettah than take advice fwom a fellah of tact and judgment."

"The fact is——"

"Of course, I shouldn't pwesume to dictate in the least how the team is to be composed, so long as Study No. 6 is shoved in."

"The fact——"

"We're all in wippin' form, and we're goin'

to give the Gwamma-wians the kybosh, you know. We've beaten the Gwammah School juniahs often enough, so why shouldn't we beat the beastly seniahs? What?"

"The fact is, I'm afraid your study won't be able to go in."

"Eh!"

"Can't play the lot of you," Tom Merry explained.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy carefully and calmly extracted his eyeglass from his waistcoat pocket, jammed it into his eye, and fixed a freezing and withering glance upon the captain of St. Jim's.

"Pway wepeat that wemark, Tom Mewwy!" he said, with crushing dignity. "I am not at all suah that I have undahstood you awight."

"Can't put in all four of you."

"And why not?"

"Only eleven players wanted, and as we're meeting a senior team we want the oldest fellows possible. Must be mostly Shell chaps, you see."

"I don't see at all."

"Well, I'm sorry for that. I see myself, and that's really enough, isn't it?"

"I do not wegard it as enough; not at all,



Cutts of the Fifth drove his hands deep into his pockets, and strode from the hall, his face white with rage. (See page 316)

Tom Mewwy. In fact, I wathah think that Studay No. 6 will wefuse to be left out."

"I shall be playing one of you——"

"Well, of course, in that case, I will do my best to make Hewwies and Dig. and Blake take it weasonably——"

"The one I shall be playing is Blake."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"And you're going to take it like a sport, Gussy, and back me up all the same," said Tom Merry. "We've got to stand together against the seniors, you know."

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"I am certainly weady to back you up against the seniahs, or anybody, deah boy, in all weasonable things. But when I see you delibewately awwangin' to thwow away an important match, I must beg leave to pause and considah."

"Now, look here, Gussy——" began the Terrible Three together.

Arthur Augustus waved his hand in a lofty manner.

"It's no good talkin' wot to me, Tom Mewwy. I will go and consult Blake and the othahs about it, and we will see what is to be done. The best thing I can think of is for you to wesign the captaincy into my hands."

"Fathead!"

"I wefuse to be called a fathead!"

"Ass!"

"Unless you play the game I shall wefuse to wecognise you as captain of St. Jim's. I thought, of course, that you were goin' to do the sensible thing. If you persist in playin' the giddy ox, I cannot wegard you as a suitable captain for the school."

"Chump!"

"I will not entab into a slangin' match with you," said Arthur Augustus loftily. "I may wemark that I am disappointed in you, Tom Mewwy—extwemely disappointed. That is all. I will now wetire."

"Time you did!" growled Lowther.

"I will weturn——"

"Oh, don't trouble about that!"

Slam!

The study door closed, and the swell of the School House was gone. The chums of the Shell exchanged glances.

"Trouble!" groaned Tom Merry.

"Looks nke it. Can't be helped," said Lowther. "After all, if we beat the Gram-marians to-morrow that will rally the fellows round us again."

"If we beat them?"

"I mean, when we beat them," said Lowther. "We must beat them! Now get that blessed list done, and let's stick it up in the hall, and then the fellows will know where they stand, and they'll know it's no good talking."

"Right-ho!" said Tom Merry, not very cheerfully.

And the list was finished at last, after much mental effort on the part of the Terrible Three, and was duly posted up on the notice-board in the School House, where it was read by the juniors with the keenest interest and with many signs of an approaching tempest.

THE TWENTY-SECOND CHAPTER

The New House Cuts Up Rusty!

"NEW HOUSE Bounders!"

"What's the row?"

"Looks like a blessed raid!"

It did.

Quite an army of New House juniors came marching into the School House, with faces that were grave and determined.

There were Figgins and Kerr and Wynn, the famous Co.; and Redfern and Owen and Lawrence, and Pratt and Diggs, and Thompson of the Shell.

They looked neither to right nor to left, but marched for the stairs, and made their way up to the Shell passage in state.

Such an invasion at any other time would probably have led to a "rag"; but just now the juniors of the rival Houses were on terms of peace, so Figgins and his party were allowed to pass unchallenged.

They marched down the Shell passage, and stopped at Tom Merry's study door. Upon that door George Figgins bestowed a heavy thump.

"Come in!" called out Tom Merry's voice in somewhat weary tones.

Figgins opened the door, and the army marched in. The Terrible Three were doing their preparation, but they suspended that labour as the New House crowd appeared.

They knew that the long-foreseen trouble was coming.

But Tom Merry worked up an affable smile for his visitors.

"Hallo, glad to see you!" he said, very heartily. "How do you do—ahem?"

"We've come on bizney," said Figgins grimly.

"Something to do with me as captain of the school?" asked Tom Merry amiably.

"All right. Go ahead! Always willing to hear you."

Figgins grunted.

"You've put up a silly list on the notice-board," he remarked.

"I've put up a list," agreed Tom Merry.

"I suppose it's a sort of joke?"

"No; it's quite serious."

"I've read the names," said Figgins.

"Yes; they were put up there to be read, you know," said Tom mildly.

"Merry, Manners, Lowther, Noble, Dane, Glyn, Thompson, Figgins, Wynn, Blake, Herries!" enumerated Figgins solemnly.

"That's right."

"That's three New House, and eight School House."

"Quite so."

"That's what we've come to talk to you about," said Redfern.

"Nothing to talk about," said Tom Merry.

"The matter's settled."

"Then it had better be unsettled again, and jolly quick," said Kerr. "You can't deal with the New House in this way."

"No fear!"

"Or with the Fourth!" said Lawrence.

"Only four of the Fourth, and seven of the Shell!"

"Rotten!"

"Out of the question."

"If that's the way you're going to run things, Tom Merry, it seems to me there was a big mistake made at the election."

"That's what I was thinking."

"Same here."

"Yes, rather."

"Well, I don't know about playing any more of the Fourth," remarked Thompson of the Shell; "but certainly there must be some more chaps of our House in the team, either

Fourth or Shell. I think we can leave that point to Merry."

"Thank you!" said Tom sarcastically.

"Not at all," said Thompson; "so long as you play the game, we recognise that you are captain of St. Jim's. But our House has got to have a show."

"Yes, rather! You bet!"

"I'll help you revise the list, if you like, Tom Merry," Figgins suggested generously.

"Thanks; it doesn't need revising."

"We don't want to cause any trouble, especially at a time when the seniors are only waiting for a chance to jump on us. For that reason, we're ready to make really big concessions. We shall be satisfied with six New House chaps in the eleven."

"Ahem!"

"As cock-house of St. Jim's, we ought to have more, but——"

"As what?"

"Cock-house of St. Jim's," said Figgins firmly.

"Rats!"

"Ass!"

"Fathead!"

Figgins's brow began to grow wrathful. After practically electing the captain of the school, Figgins & Co. felt that they were entitled to a show. But it wasn't merely that. They had a serious conviction that the eleven wouldn't be any good without themselves in it. And they didn't want the new régime to start with a serious defeat at footer. It was necessary, therefore, for Tom Merry to see reason from a New House point of view. The difficulty was that he saw reason from a School House point of view, which made all the difference.

"Now, look here, we came here for a friendly talk," said Figgins. "We're willing to give you any amount of advice to save you from coming a mucker in this matter."

"There isn't a chap here who isn't willing to advise you, Tom Merry," said Redfern reproachfully.

"I'm sure we all agree with that," said Kerr. "You're perfectly welcome to our advice on any point."

"Any point whatever," said Fatty Wynn heartily.

"I'm not looking for advice, as a matter of fact," Tom Merry explained. "If I wanted to be advised, there are plenty of silly asses in my own House with yards of it all ready for me."

"Well, I'll tell you what," said Figgins, with a magnanimous air. "For the sake of peace, and to keep shoulder to shoulder, and so on, we'll be satisfied with five New House chaps in the eleven. That's risking losing the match, I know, but we want to pull together at a time like this."

"It wouldn't be risking it," said Monty Lowther sweetly. "It would be giving it away."

"Look here——" roared Figgins.

"Yes, look here——"

"What I think is——"

"Gentlemen," said Tom Merry, "I'm sorry I can't meet your wishes in this matter. As captain of St. Jim's, it's my duty to pick out the best eleven possible to beat the Grammar School. I've done it."

"Rats!"

"Bosh!"

"Piffle!"

"Tommy-rot!"

"And as captain of St. Jim's, I cannot allow myself to be dictated to by juniors," said Tom Merry with great dignity.

"Juniors!" yelled Redfern. "And what are you, pray? Have they shoved you into the Sixth Form all of a sudden, by any chance?"

"I am captain of St. Jim's, Redfern, and I request you to speak more respectfully to your captain."

"Then the sooner St. Jim's gets a new skipper the better," said Redfern.

"Hear, hear!"

"This interview is now over," said Tom Merry.

"Then you decline to talk sense?" demanded Figgins. "You won't do the only sensible thing? You won't take advice from fellows who know?"

"What I have said, I have said!" retorted Tom Merry firmly.

"What you have said is blithering piffle, and you know it."

"Gentlemen, there is the door."

"Bust the door!"

"If you prefer the window as a means of exit——"

"I'd like to see the chap who could put me out of the window, or the door either!" said Figgins truculently.

"You will kindly retire from my study, and please learn better manners before you call on your captain again."

Figgins looked round at his followers.

"Gentlemen, chaps, and fellows," he said, "I think we're all agreed. We backed up this School House bouncer to keep that cad Cutts out of the captaincy. We agreed to back the silly duffer up like men and brothers. But we can't back him up in throwing away football matches and making St. Jim's a guy. This is where we draw a line."

"Hear, hear!"

"Unless, therefore, Tom Merry stops playing the giddy ox, we don't back him up any more."

"Hear, hear!"

"We can't be parties to throwing away matches and things of that sort. It's our duty to draw a line. You understand that, Tom Merry?"

"Oh, rats!" said Tom Merry warmly. "What I understand is that if you don't clear off, you'll be booted out."

"Get on with the booting, then!" said Figgins grimly.

"Wreck the blessed study as a warning to them," suggested Owen.

"Hurrah!"

Tempers were very excited by that time on both sides. It needed only a word, and the word had been spoken. The New House juniors were looking very dangerous; and at that moment Manners gave Figgins a gentle push towards the door. The next moment Manners was lying on his back on the carpet, and in one more moment the Terrible Three and the New House crowd were mixed up in a wild and whirling struggle.

THE TWENTY-THIRD CHAPTER

Keeping Order!

"KICK them out!"

"Give 'em socks!"

"Down with the School House!"

"Pitch the table over!"
 "Hurray! Wreck the blessed place!"
 Tramp, tramp, tramp, tramp!
 "Ow, ow! My eye!"
 "Rescue, School House!"

There was a rush of feet in the passage. A crowd of School House juniors had gathered there in anticipation of trouble as raised voices were heard from Tom Merry's study. At the sounds of conflict and the shout for rescue they rushed in.

The study was crammed with fighting juniors.

There wasn't much room for a big crowd to struggle in the study. In a few minutes the room was a wreck. The furniture was hurled in all directions, and struggling juniors rolled on the floor and on one another.

More and more School House fellows rushed upon the scene, and the New House invaders were extracted from the room one by one and rushed away, struggling and yelling, each in the grasp of two or three self-constituted chuckers-out.

Along the passage and down the stairs they went, roaring and wriggling, and one by one they were hurled forth from the School House into the quadrangle.

It was a House row now, with a vengeance. In the excitement of the moment all the excellent intentions of the juniors were for-

gotten, and they remembered only that they were School House and New House, ancient rivals and foes.

Darrel of the Sixth came on the scene as the last of the invaders were sent rolling down the School House steps into the dusky quad.

His face was very angry.

"Are you going to stop this confounded row?" he shouted.

Tom Merry turned upon him. Tom was excited, and he

was not inclined to take any nonsense from anybody at that moment.

"We shall suit ourselves about that," he exclaimed, "and I'll thank you to speak more civilly to your captain, Darrel."

"You—you cheeky young scamp—"

Tom Merry raised his hand.

"Go back to your study, Darrel!"

"What!" roared the Sixth Former.

"Go back to your study at once."

"Why—why, you—you——"

"I order you to go back to your study."

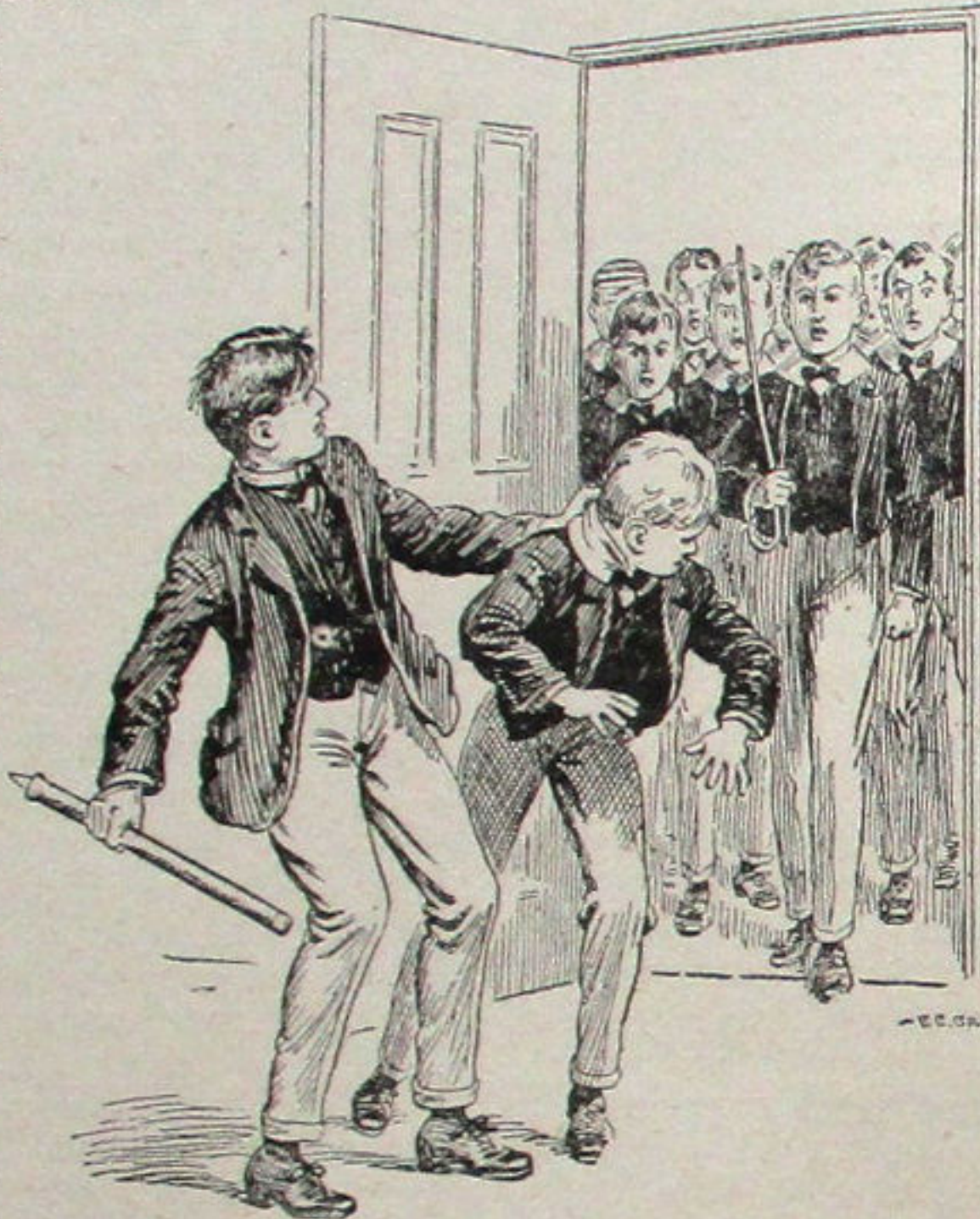
"You—you—you order me!" spluttered Darrel.

"Yes; and if you don't go you'll be put!"

"Put!" shrieked Darrel.

"Yes, and at once, too."

That was enough for Darrel of the Sixth. He made a jump at Tom Merry, and grasped



Tom Merry threw open the door of Knox's study, and strode in. Knox had Curly Gibson by the collar, and was larruping him with a cricket stump. (See page 324).

him. It would have gone hard with the captain of St. Jim's at that moment but for his faithful followers. His New House backers were gone, breathing vengeance and fury, but the School House juniors were still loyal.

"Back up!" yelled Monty Lowther, as he rushed at Darrel.

A dozen other fellows rushed at the prefect at the same moment.

Darrel was whirled away from Tom Merry, whipped off his feet, and rushed back to his study, and tossed in like a sack of coke.

He sprawled on the floor, breathless and enraged, and Lowther slammed the study door.

"That settles Darrel!" chuckled Lowther.

"Hurray!"

"I'll keep order in this House!" panted Tom Merry. "I'll have order kept if we have to have a row every five minutes!"

"Hear, hear!"

Mr. Railton, who had been with the Head, came upon the scene just after the sudden disappearance of Darrel. The excited voices died away at the appearance of the House-master.

"What is this riot about?" exclaimed Mr. Railton.

"There isn't any riot, sir," said Tom Merry steadily. "I have had to use somewhat severe measures with one of the Sixth, that is all, sir."

"We can't allow them to cheek our captain, sir," said Kangaroo.

Mr. Railton seemed about to say something exceedingly emphatic, but he changed his mind, and walked away to his study.

Tom Merry hurried to the notice-board, with a crowd of juniors behind him. He took out a pencil to make some alterations in the football list.

There was a cheer as he drew the pencil through the New House names on the list.

"Gentlemen," said the captain of St. Jim's, "after the insubordinate conduct of Figgins & Co. it is impossible to play any New House fellows to-morrow."

"Bravo!"

"I have therefore scratched Thompson,

Figgins, and Wynn. I shall play Digby, Reilly, and D'Arcy instead."

"Hear, hear!"

"Perfectly wippin' ideah, deah boy!"

"Good egg!" said Jack Blake heartily.

"That lets in the whole of Study No. 6, and I must say you're not such an ass as I was thinking, Tom Merry. I think you make a jolly good captain of the school."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Do you?" hooted Gore of the Shell.

"Well, I don't. I think there ought to be more Shell fellows in the team. I think it's silly rot to cram in Fourth Form fags in this way. I consider that Tom Merry's a silly ass. I think——"

"Shut up, Gore!"

"Rats! I'm going to give my opinion, for what it's worth."

"That's nix!" said Blake. "Dry up!"

"Yaas, wing off, Goah, deah boy! You make me tiahed."

"I think that Tom Merry is playing the giddy ox. I think——"

"Order!" said Tom Merry.

"Oh, rats!"

"Go back to your study, Gore, and consider yourself detained for one hour!" said Tom.

"Detained!" shrieked Gore.

"Yes, certainly."

"By—by you!"

"Yes, by me."

Gore burst into a roar of scornful laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha! Detained by a Shell kid! Oh, don't be funny! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Are you going back to your study as ordered by your captain?" demanded Tom Merry, raising the hand of command.

"No, I'm jolly well not! I——"

"Take Gore to his study!" said the captain of St. Jim's.

"Look here, I—— Hands off! I'll punch your nose! I—I—— Ow! Yow!"

Gore's voice died away in gasps as he was rushed away by five or six juniors, and pitched headlong into his study.

The Terrible Three returned to their own quarters. Their quarters required some renovating before they could get on with their preparation. There was a somewhat humorous

expression on Monty Lowther's face as he sat down to work at last.

"Not all plain sailing, is it?" he remarked.

Tom Merry dabbed his nose with his handkerchief. The nose of the captain of the school ought to have been a sacred object, but it had been punched hard!

"No!" agreed Tom. "But we're going to keep order. I suppose it was bound to come to a row sooner or later with those New House kids. They were bound to kick over the traces. We shall teach them manners in time."

"Ahem! I hope so!"

"Anyway, I'm going to keep on in the way I've started," said Tom. "I'm captain of St. Jim's, and St. Jim's is going to toe the line. That's flat!"

And the Terrible Three settled down to work, only pausing every now and then to dab a nose or caress a discoloured eye.

THE TWENTY-FOURTH CHAPTER

A Match That Did Not Come Off!

ON the following morning there was only one topic in the School House at St. Jim's.

It was the Grammar School match of the afternoon.

The seniors having retired, like Achilles, to sulk in their tents, so to speak, and the New House fellows having been scratched off the list, the match was left to Tom Merry & Co. It was an entirely School House affair, and an affair of the juniors.

Tom Merry & Co., on their own, were to meet and defeat the Grammarians—if they could.

As they generally found it difficult enough to keep their end up against Gordon Gay & Co., the juniors of the Grammar School, it might have been supposed that their chances against the senior eleven would be slight.

But they were very sanguine.

Not the least suspicion did they have, so far, of the step that had been taken by the seniors, especially by Darrel, as secretary of the football club.

That the match had already been scratched by Darrel, and that the Grammarians would

not arrive at all, never entered their minds. The seniors had kept their own counsel on that point.

So the junior eleven were full of keen anticipations for the afternoon—anticipations that were destined to be disappointed most severely.

After dinner the School House fellows began to gather on the football ground. As it was a senior match, they gathered on Big Side.

The seniors were conspicuous by their absence. Some of them grinned as they saw the juniors gathering for the match that would not come off, but otherwise they took no notice of Tom Merry & Co. at all.

Figgins & Co., however, turned up in great force.

The truce between the rival Houses was at an end. The lion and the lamb no longer lay in peace.

Figgins & Co. had come to see the School House junior team wiped off the ground by the Grammarians, and to condole with one another over the disgrace that the School House was bringing upon St. Jim's.

They greeted Tom Merry's eleven with a deep groan.

The eleven looked very fit and well in their red shirts as they came out on the field and started punting a footer about.

But the remarks of the New House spectators were not complimentary. They passed their remarks in loud tones for the footballers to hear. Figgins & Co. were very much on the warpath now.

"It's going to be the joke of the season!" Redfern remarked. "Blessed if I know whether to laugh or to weep a weep!"

"I say, Gussy, you've forgotten your eyeglass!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The Grammarians don't seem to be hurrying themselves," Thompson of the Shell remarked presently, looking at his watch. "Time they were here."

"Time for the circus to begin!" said Fatty Wynn.

"This is where the fun ought to start," said Figgins. "But where are the Grammarians? I wonder if they've heard?"

"Heard what, you silly asses?" demanded Tom Merry, turning round at last upon the New House fellows.

"Heard that they're expected to play a parcel of silly duffers!" explained Figgins. "If they have, they mayn't come, you know."

"They mayn't have such a taste for comedy in football as you kids have," Kerr suggested.

"A screaming joke, if they don't come!" grinned Owen. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the New House crowd.

"Oh, shut up!" said Tom Merry crossly. "Of course they're coming!"

"Well, they ain't here yet."

"Sister Anne, Sister Anne, do you see anybody coming?" piped Redfern.

And the New House juniors roared again.

Tom Merry & Co. looked rather anxiously at the clock-tower.

The Grammarians were certainly late. Kick-off was timed for three o'clock, and it was already turned three. It was certainly very odd that the team from the Grammar School should be so unpunctual. Blake cut down to the gates to look for the Grammarian brake, but he returned with the news that there was no sign of it.

Tom Merry & Co. ceased punting about the footer, and gathered in a group to talk the matter over. Their brows were growing anxious. They hardly knew what to make of the Grammarians' failure to appear. If the team didn't turn up, evidently the match would not come off, and then they knew what a howl of laughter there would be from all the school, especially the New House.

Figgins & Co. were already chuckling with great enjoyment. As Figgins said, it was the very best thing that could have happened, if the Grammar School team didn't come. It would be a lesson to those cheeky School House kids, and it would save St. Jim's from the disgrace of recording an overwhelming defeat. From the New House point of view, it was the best of all possible things that could have happened.

But the School House view was different. The looks of the junior footballers grew

glummer and glummer as the big hand crawled round the dial on the clock in the tower.

"Half-past three," said Monty Lowther. "They're frightfully late!"

"Feahfully late, deah boy!"

"I can't understand it," said Tom Merry, his brow wrinkled in puzzled thought. "Why ain't they here? Yorke isn't the kind of silly ass to be half an hour late for a footer match. It isn't as if they had to come a long way by train."

"Is it possible——" began Herries doubtfully.

"Is what possible, ass?"

"I mean, suppose they have heard that they've got to play a junior team, and—and don't choose to come?"

"Oh, rot!"

"Figgins thinks so."

"Blow Figgins!"

"They wouldn't tweek us with such wotten diswespect," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a shake of the head. "It would be wotten bad form! They would send us a note, at least."

"Of course they would!" said Tom Merry. "It can't be that."

"Then what the deuce is it?" said Blake. "Hallo, Wally! Is there any sign of the silly goats?"

Wally had just come up from the gates. He shook his head.

"I've been as far as the corner," he said. "No signs of them."

"Suppose we send them a telegwam?" suggested Arthur Augustus.

"They must have started already, if they're coming at all," said Digby.

"Yaas; but if they're not comin'——"

"It's nearer to go to the Grammar School than to the telegraph office," said Manners. "One of us might cut over on a bike."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"If they don't choose to come, we're not going to go hunting them!" he said. "We've got to consider our dignity as the St. Jim's first eleven!"

"Yaas, wathah! We're the first eleven now, you know. We're bound to considah our personal dig. in the mattah!"

"Then what on earth's to be done?" exclaimed Kangaroo.

"Nearly a quarter to four!" said Clifton Dane.

"Bai Jove, it's wotten! Look at those New House boundahs cacklin'!"

Blake cast a wrathful glance towards Figgins & Co. The New House fellows undoubtedly were cackling. They seemed to be enjoying the afternoon famously.

"Let's clear those cads off the ground, anyway!" Blake exclaimed.

"Good! Let's go for them!"

"Sure, it will pass the time, anyway!" Reilly remarked.

"No rags now," said Tom Merry. "It's not a time for it. Let the beasts cackle. But I wish I knew what we'd better do. It's ridiculous to stand here like this."

"Yaas, wathah; quite widiculous!"

"There must have been some trick played," said Monty Lowther thoughtfully. "Yorke wouldn't do a mean thing like this without letting us know."

"What price the telephone?" asked Manners.

"Oh, good!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "The Grammar School is on the telephone, and we can use the 'phone in the prefects' room."

"Ahem!" said Bernard Glyn dubiously. "This isn't exactly the time for asking the prefects favours, is it?"

"No favour about it! The captain of the school has a right to use the prefects' room and the telephone as much as he pleases."

"Good! I forgot that."

"You fellows may as well come with me, though, in case there's any rot," said Tom Merry, as an afterthought.

And the footballers put on their coats and mufflers, and walked in a body off the ground.

Loud yells from the New House contingent followed them.

"Ain't you going to play?"

"You've forgotten the match, haven't you?"

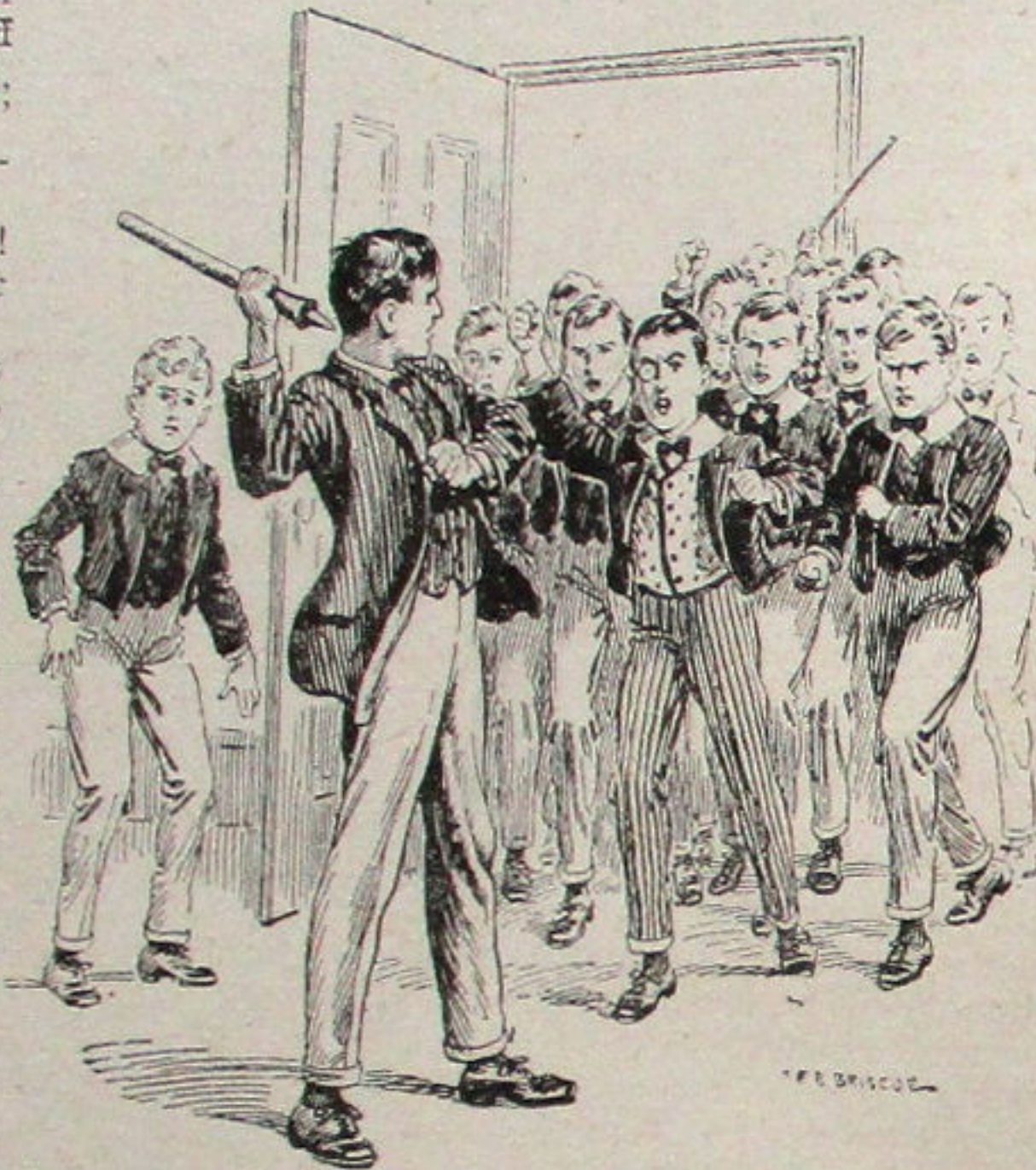
"Going to play marbles instead? That will be more in your line, won't it?"

"Ha, ha!"

Tom Merry & Co. walked on with lofty

heads, disdaining to take the least notice of their old rivals; but their cheeks were burning.

They felt keenly the absurd side of the matter. The most crushing defeat at the hands of the Grammarians would not have been so ridiculous as this. They were glad enough to get inside the School House, leaving Figgins & Co. in possession of the field, laughing like hyenas.



The bully of the Sixth whirled the stump above his head. "Stand back!" he shouted. (See page 324)

THE TWENTY-FIFTH CHAPTER

Pure Cheek !

TOM MERRY threw open the door of the prefects' room and strode in, with his followers at his heels.

The prefects' room was a tremendously sacred apartment. It was devoted to the use of the prefects solely, common or garden members of the Sixth only being tolerated there by favour. The Fifth did not use the room, and as for juniors, mere juniors could not possibly enter it except for fagging purposes, or when some good-natured great person allowed them to use the telephone there.

But Tom Merry & Co. marched in now as if the place belonged to them.

At the big window overlooking the quadrangle several prefects were standing in a group, chatting and smiling. They turned and bestowed freezing stares upon Tom Merry & Co., ceasing to smile as if by magic.

"What do you kids want here?" exclaimed Darrel.

"Silence!"

"Look herē——" Rushden exclaimed hotly. Tom Merry pointed to the door.

"Get out!" he said.

"Eh?"

"Get outside! I'm captain of the School, and I want this room for a bit. I don't want you fellows bothering me here. Travel off!"

"Yaas, wathah! Hop it, deah boys!"

The prefects stared at the juniors, looking as if they would eat them. For prefects to be ordered out of the prefects' room by a junior was quite the limit—in fact, it was miles past the limit. It was unbelievable, incredible, impossible; but there it was! Tom Merry did not intend to let the seniors overhear his talk on the telephone. He knew there would be a chorus of chuckles as it went on, and he was in a mood just now to give the Sixth all the trouble they wanted.

"You cheeky sweep——" Langton was beginning.

But Tom Merry interrupted him sharply without the least ceremony.

"Outside! If you don't go, you'll be put! See those fellows out of the room, you chaps!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Come on!" said Kangaroo.

"Kick them out!"

The juniors advanced to the attack. The prefects exchanged helpless glances. To be involved in an undignified scrimmage with the juniors, and finally ejected by force—for the odds were too great for them—would never do. Darrel settled the matter by walking out of the room, and the others followed him. Jack Blake slammed the door after them victoriously.

"Bai Jove, we're teachin' the Sixth mannaahs alweady!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked, with a chuckle. "The boundahs are learnin' to toe the giddy line!"

"Now pile in with the 'phone!" said Blake.

Tom Merry took up the receiver. He called up the exchange, and was put on to the Grammar School at Rylcombe in a few minutes.

"Through?" asked Blake.

"Yes." Tom Merry spoke through the 'phone: "Is that Rylcombe Grammar School?"

"Yes," came the reply. "Who is that?"

"This is St. Jim's. Tom Merry speaking. Is Yorke of the Sixth there?"

"I will call him, sir. Hold on."

"Right."

Tom Merry waited. Yorke of the Sixth, the Grammar School footer captain, was evidently at home. The Grammarian team had not yet started for St. Jim's, and it was close on four o'clock. Clearly, they did not intend to play, as it was too late now for them to reach St. Jim's and play the match before dark.

Tom Merry's brows knitted darkly as he waited. Something must have happened to cause the Grammarians to act in this unaccountable way; he was sure of that, and he was about to learn what it was. And if it was a trick on the part of anybody belonging to St. Jim's, that anybody would feel the full weight of the wrath of the captain of the school. Tom Merry was determined upon that.

Yorke's voice came through the telephone at last:

"Hallo!"

"Hallo! Is that Yorke — Grammar School?"

"Yes. What's wanted?"

"This is St. Jim's—captain of the school speaking!"

"Yes?"

"You didn't turn up for the match to-day. I want an explanation!"

"What!"

"Why didn't you turn up this afternoon?"

"Who's speaking?"

"Tom Merry—captain of St. Jim's!"

"Look here, if this is a jape——"

"It's not a jape. I've been elected captain of the school!"

"My only hat!"

"We expected you for the match to-day. You didn't come."

"The match was scratched."

"What!"

"We had a letter from your secretary, Darrel, scratching the match, owing to unavoidable circumstances."

"From Darrel?" yelled Tom Merry.

"Yes, your secretary. Wasn't it in order?"

"No, it wasn't. It was a rotten trick!"

"Oh, crumbs! Of course, we didn't know that. We answered the letter. Isn't Darrel your secretary now?"

"Ye-es; but never mind. Darrel scratched the match?"

"Yes."

"All right. We only wanted to know. Sorry to bother you. Of course, it's too late for you to come over now?"

"Well, yes, rather!"

"Sorry. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!"

Tom Merry hung up the receiver. Then he turned to his companions with blazing eyes.

They had not heard what the Grammarian skipper said, but they had heard all that Tom Merry had said, so they were fully enlightened. Their looks were grim and threatening.

They understood now only too clearly. Darrel, the secretary of the senior football club, had taken it upon himself to scratch the match, deliberately ignoring the authority of Tom Merry as captain of St. Jim's.

"Well," said Blake, with a deep breath, "this beats the band."

"Rotten!"

"Dished and done!"

"Scratched by Jove!"

"And Darrel's done it!" said Blake, in a tone more of sorrow than of anger. "I always thought Darrel was a decent chap."

"Yaas, I shouldn't have suspected old Dawwel of playin' a wotten twick like this!" said Arthur Augustus, with a sad shake of the head.

"It's because the blessed Sixth have got their blessed backs up," said Manners. "And we had better show them they can't do these things."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Why, it's an awful cheek," said Lowther

"Fancy scratching a match without consulting the captain or any of the team!"

"They don't look on Tommy as the captain, or us as the team, you see," Digby remarked.

"Then they've got to learn to," said Tom Merry grimly.

"Hear, hear!"

"Darrel's done this, and Darrel's got to undo it."

"H'm! I don't quite see how that's going to be worked," said Blake thoughtfully. "It's too late for the Grammarians to play us now."

"They can play the match another day—their first vacant date," said Tom. "Darrel, as secretary, will write to them and explain, and ask them to."

"I fancy he'll refuse to act as secretary, then."

"Refusals won't be allowed. He's taken it upon himself to write once, and now he's got to write again."

"But if he won't?"

"If he won't, he'll be made."

"But how?"

"I shall order him to do so, as captain of the school and head of the sports!" said Tom Merry, with dignity.

"Ahem! But he won't, all the same."

"Then we shall use force. A licking will do him good!"

Blake gasped.

"A licking! Darrel!"

"I suppose Darrel can be licked as well as anybody else?" said Tom, with asperity.

"I—I—I don't know about licking a prefect."

"Well, I do. If we stand this, we may as well chuck the whole thing up. If the Sixth are to be allowed to scratch First Eleven matches, what's the good of our being the First Eleven at all?"

"Not much, certainly," agreed Blake.

"And they'll be doing it too," said Lowther. "I shouldn't wonder if Darrel has written to other clubs already, scratching matches."

"The cheeky beast!"

"The fwightful wottah!"

"It's got to be nipped in the bud," Tom Merry declared. "I suppose all you fellows are ready to back me up in enforcing discipline?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Then come on," said Tom Merry. "We're going to see Darrel!"

"Hurrah!"

And Tom Merry & Co. marched off in great dudgeon to see Darrel.

THE TWENTY-SIXTH CHAPTER

Caned by the Captain!

DARREL of the Sixth had retired to his study, after his inglorious retreat from the prefects' room.

Darrel was not in a good temper.

The late happenings at St. Jim's had exasperated him, and that morning he had received a letter from Kildare, informing him that there was no immediate prospect of the return of the old captain of the school.

Apparently, the reign of the junior captain was to continue, and things were to go from bad to worse, unless the Head interfered. And as yet the Head had given no sign.

Perhaps he was waiting for the school to get "fed up" with their junior captain before he came down with the mailed hand of authority. Probably he would not have long to wait.

The New House juniors had already fallen away from their allegiance, and the School House had already showed signs of division. After a time only Tom Merry's personal

friends, probably, would be standing by him, and then an act of authority on the part of the Head would be generally popular, and would not appear in the light of an injustice.

But, so far, the Head had not appeared to notice that anything was amiss. Whatever he thought of the new state of affairs, he kept his own counsel so far as the boys were concerned.

Darrel was usually a very good-tempered fellow, but his voice was quite snappish as he rapped out "Come in!" in answer to a knock at his door.

Tom Merry & Co. came in.

The juniors were still in their coats and mufflers, over their footer garb. They had not lost any time in coming to see Darrel.

Eleven sturdy fellows crowded into the study, and Darrel rose to his feet, with an angry frown upon his brow.

"Get out of my study!" he exclaimed. "I'm fed up with your nonsense! Get out at once!"

"All in?" said Tom Merry, without heeding Darrel.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry turned the key in the lock. Then he turned round and faced the angry Sixth-Former.

"We've come here on business, Darrel——"

"Will you get out?" shouted Darrel.

"No, we won't!"

"Then I'll——"

"You'll shut up and listen to what I've got to say, or there'll be trouble!" said Tom Merry determinedly.

"Heaps of twouble, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus cheerfully. "Pway listen to weason, Dawwel, and don't play the giddy ox!"

"We don't want to hurt you," Monty Lowther explained. "We like you all right, Darrel, only we can't allow you to kick over the traces."

"That's how it stands, Darrel."

"I have nothing to say to you," said Darrel, biting his lips. "I refused to recognise Tom Merry as captain of St. Jim's. You know that!"

"Then-you've got to be taught to toe the line," said Tom.

Darrel laughed angrily.

"I have just been on the telephone," went on the captain of the school. "I rang up Yorke at the Grammar School, to ask why they hadn't been over to-day."

A smile flickered over Darrel's face for a moment.

"Well?" he said.

"York explained," said Tom Merry. "You wrote to him as secretary and scratched the match for this afternoon."

Darrel nodded.

"Well, as you choose to write as secretary, you're to write as secretary again," said Tom. "You'll tell Yorke it was a mistake, or tell him you were playing the giddy ox, just as you like, and ask him to fix up the match for another date."

"I certainly shall do nothing of the kind," said Darrel.

"You will!"

"Nonsense!"

"Do you refuse?"

"Most decidedly!"

"Very well, then you'll be licked for your cheek in interfering in matters that concern the First Eleven, you being no longer a member of the eleven."

"Licked!" said Darrel faintly.

"That's what I said."

"Is this your idea of a joke?" asked Darrel, unable to believe that the junior captain was in earnest.

"You'll jolly soon find that it isn't a joke. Give me that cane, Gussy."

Arthur Augustus picked up the prefect's cane from the table, and handed it to Tom Merry. Tom swished it in the air, in quite the manner of a Form-master.

"Hold out your hand, Darrel!" he said.

"Wh-a-at!"

"Getting deaf? I'm going to cane you, and I told you to hold out your hand."

Darrel stared at Tom Merry as if his eyes would start out of his head. It evidently wasn't a joke; none of the juniors laughed, or even smiled. They were all looking as serious as judges.

"M-m-my hand!" stuttered Darrel.

"Yes."

"Not your foot, you know," murmured Monty Lowther, who could never repress his troublesome sense of humour for long. "It's the cane, you know, not the bastinado. Put out your little paw."

"And buck up!" said Tom Merry.

Darrel breathed hard through his nose.

"It can't be possible that you're lunatic enough to think that you can cane a prefect," he stammered.

"I am going to cane you, unless you immediately write that letter

to the Grammar School, and apologise for your unwarranted interference."

"You—you—you—"

"Will you write the letter?"

"No, you young idiot!"

"Will you hold out your hand?"

"No, you fool!"

"Then it will be held out for you," said Tom Merry. "Collar him!"

It seemed like a dream to Darrel; it really seemed that it couldn't possibly be anything but a dream. But the hands that grasped him, and dragged him before Tom Merry, were



"Put that cane down, Darrel!" "Wh-a-at!" gasped the prefect. "Don't you know I'm captain of the school?" said Tom Merry. (See page 318)

real enough. Darrel was so overcome with astonishment and rage that for the moment he did not even resist.

"Put his paw out for him," said Tom Merry.

Then Darrel began to struggle. The Sixth-Former was a powerful fellow, and he could probably have accounted for any three or four of the juniors. But eight or nine of them at once were too many for him.

He swayed to and fro in the midst of a clinging throng of them, and went over, sprawling on the floor of the study, with the juniors sprawling over him.

"Sit on him!" panted Blake.

"Sit on his beastly head, deah boys."

"Jump on his legs!"

"Hold him!"

"Let me go!" roared Darrel. "Rescue, Sixth! Rescue!"

"No good yelling," said Tom Merry calmly. "The door's locked. The Sixth can't get in. Besides, I shouldn't allow them to interfere."

"Help! Rescue!"

"Hallo! What's the row in there?" called out Rushden's voice from the passage as the handle of the door was tried on the outside.

"Nothing that concerns you," said Tom Merry. "Buzz off!"

"Eh! What's going on?"

"Go to your study at once, Rushden!"

"You young idiot——"

"Go to your study and stay there, or I shall cane you!"

"M-m-my hat!"

"Never mind that duffer!" said Blake.

"Get on with the washing. Are you going to keep still, Darrel, old fellow?"

"No!" roared Darrel, struggling violently. "Rushden, bring the fellows here—these rotten fags are ragging me!"

"Right-ho!" shouted back Rushden. And his footsteps could be heard hurrying away down the passage. Blake whistled softly.

"There's going to be a glorious rumpus with the Sixth now," he said. "I shouldn't wonder if they bust in the door."

"Let them!" said Tom Merry. "For the last time, Darrel, are you going to write that letter to the Grammar School, as directed by your captain?"

"No!" shrieked Darrel.

"Hold out his hand, if he won't hold it out himself," said Tom. "I'm going to give him three on each hand, as a warning."

"Hear, hear!"

Darrel was still struggling, but his struggles were unavailing. Five or six juniors held him round the body, as he sat on the carpet; and a couple stood on his legs. His right arm was held as in a vice; his left arm was forcibly extended, and his hand was forcibly held out for the cane.

"Open your hand, Darrel!"

"I won't!"

"You'll get it across the knuckles then!"

"Hang you!"

Swish! The cane came down, and it came across Darrel's clenched hand, and there was a yell of pain from the prefect. He writhed and struggled in the grasp of the juniors; but he could not get loose, and neither could he withdraw his hand.

"Better open your hand now," said Tom Merry grimly. "You're going to have six cuts, and it hurts less on the palm. I've been there, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas, don't be a silly, obstinate ass, Dawwel, deah boy!"

Swish! Darrel opened his hand now; as he was going to be caned, he felt that it was more sensible to have it in the least painful way. Swish again!

"Now the other hand!" said Tom Merry, authoritatively.

Darrel's other hand was forced out. Thrice the cane came down upon it with a heavy and sounding swish.

The prefect was white with rage.

"And now you've been caned," said Tom Merry calmly, "you'll apologise for your interference in the business of the First Eleven, or I shall give you lines!"

"Hang you!"

"Very well; you will take five hundred lines of Virgil, Darrel; and you will bring them to my study this evening, or I shall cane you again."

Bump! Bump! It was a loud concussion at the door. Rushden had returned with a party of the Sixth.

THE TWENTY-SEVENTH CHAPTER

The Vials of Wrath!

TOM MERRY unlocked the study door. The punishment of Darrel had been finished—unless he refused to do his lines—as was very probable indeed. In that case there would be another caning for him in the evening. But, for the present, Tom Merry's duty was done. He opened the study door, therefore, and revealed a crowd of angry seniors in the passage outside.

Darrel struggled to his feet. He was stuttering with rage.

"What have they been doing?" exclaimed Langton.

"Ragging me!" stuttered Darrel. "Collar the young cads! Thrash them—thrash them within an inch of their lives!"

"What-ho!"

"Stand back!" exclaimed Tom Merry sternly. "As captain of the school——"

"I'll captain of the school you!" growled Rushden.

The seniors rushed upon Tom Merry & Co. There was a dozen of them, and they had, of course, all the advantage on their side. There was a wild scrimmage in the study; the juniors put up a desperate fight. But the powerful seniors made short work of them. They were rushed and kicked out of the study, bundled along the passage in the roughest possible manner, and kicked out of it.

In the next corridor eleven breathless and dishevelled juniors sprawled at full length, feeling as if they had been smitten suddenly by a particularly powerful hurricane.

The seniors retired and left them there.

Tom Merry was the first to sit up. He felt his head to ascertain if it was still on his shoulders, and gasped.

"Oh, my hat!"

"Ow, bai Jove!" groaned Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Look at my clobber, deah boys! My clothes are uttably wuined!"

"Ow! My nose!"

"Groooh! My eye!"

"Oh, dear!"

"Faith, and it's kilt intirely I am!"

The juniors staggered up. Other fellows were gathering round, seeming to take rather

a humorous than a sympathetic view of the case.

"Bitten off more than you could chew, eh?" Levison of the Fourth inquired.

"Looks like a giddy captain of the school, doesn't he?" Gore wanted to know.

"Who handled you like this?" asked Kerruish.

"Darrel and the Seniors!" gasped Tom Merry. "But they're going to have a lesson about it. Call up the fellows."

"What's the little game now?" asked Blake.

"All School House juniors to meet here in a quarter of an hour," said Tom Merry, panting. "The Sixth have got to be brought to their senses. We are going to rag the Sixth Form passage from end to end."

"Bai Jove!"

"Hurrah!"

"Pass the word round," said Tom Merry. "I'm going to bathe my eye."

"It needs it," grinned Gore.

"Both yours will need it if you don't ring off," said Tom Merry. "Get the fellows here—every kid in the House, mind."

And the badly-used eleven went up to their dormitories to change and bathe their injuries, while the word passed round for the gathering of the clans, as it were.

There were many groans as the juniors bathed darkened eyes and swollen noses; but they had one consolation, and that was the thought of the heavy punishment that was to fall upon the Sixth.

Seniors, and big fellows as they were, the Sixth Form, of course, would have no chance in a pitched battle with the juniors, who outnumbered them immensely. It was only a question of starting on them. Under ordinary circumstances such a proceeding would have been impossible and undreamt of, but the circumstances were not ordinary.

Tom Merry, a junior, was captain of St. Jim's, and the juniors were bound to obey their captain's orders. The Sixth were the rebels. Ragging the Sixth was now the only means of restoring order and discipline, according to the ideas of the captain of the school. And his intention was to rag the Sixth so effectually and thoroughly that they

would toe the line without giving any further trouble. It was a case for the mailed fist, as Monty Lowther remarked; and Tom Merry intended that the mailed fist should come down heavily.

"Ready?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Quite ready!"

"Follow your leader then!"

And Tom led the way downstairs to the wide flagged corridor where the juniors had already gathered at the word of command. A hundred fellows were already there, all of them eager and excited. To "go for" the Sixth, under the orders of the captain of the school—which, of course, secured them from punishment at the hands of the masters—was a great joy to the Lower School.

Shell and Fourth, Third and Second, had turned up in great force. Some of them had brought pillows from the dormitories, some of them had cricket-stumps or knotted stockings, in case weapons should be wanted.

Tom Merry ran a gleaming eye over the numerous and eager force.

"Gentlemen, it's up to us to teach the Sixth to toe the line, and obey the orders of the captain of the school. Are you all ready to back me up?"

There was a roar.

"Yes. Back up!"

"Bravo!"

"Hurrah!"

"Lead on, Macduff!"

"Follow me!" shouted Tom Merry.

And, with another excited roar, the army of juniors marched into the Sixth-Form passage. The Sixth were mostly indoors now for tea, and some of them came out of their studies at the sound of the uproar, to see what on earth the matter was. They stared at the sight of the swarming juniors.

"What is it now?" gasped Langton.

"You'll see!" said Tom Merry. "Darrel's study first, you fellows. Darrel was the worst of them, and we'll start by making an example of him."

"Hear, hear!"

Kangaroo kicked Darrel's door open.

Darrel was at tea with Rushden, both of them looking decidedly glum as they discussed the parlous state into which things in general

at St. Jim's had drifted since old Kildare went away.

They jumped up angrily as the juniors swarmed in, but Tom Merry & Co. did not waste a word of explanation. They started business at once.

"Over with the table!" said Tom.

Crash!

The table, seized by half a dozen hands, was hurled bodily into the fender. There was a terrific crashing and smashing of crockery-ware. Darrel and Rushden gave a simultaneous roar of rage.

They rushed at the invaders, but they were collared and tossed out of the way without the slightest ceremony.

"Pitch them into the passage!" said Tom Merry.

"Out they go!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bump, bump!

Darrel and Rushden rolled along the passage. The juniors proceeded to wreck the study in a thoroughly workmanlike manner. Tom Merry intended that it should be a lesson never to be forgotten by the Sixth; and certainly it was likely to be remembered. There was crash on crash as the furniture went flying in all directions. Crash on crash answered from the other studies, where other raggers were already busily at work. Yells from the raided seniors sounded along with the crashing of furniture and the break of crockery.

In the Sixth-Form passage senior after senior sprawled, gasping with rage, as he was tossed out of his study by the invaders.

After them came chairs and carpets, tables and books and bed-clothes, all sorts and conditions of things. The juniors were doing their work conscientiously.

The din was terrific.

Cutts of the Fifth came along to see what was the matter, and he was greeted with a shower of missiles, and fled again immediately. He fled in the direction of the Head's study. Mr. Railton was out that afternoon, or he would have been on the scene before. Cutts of the Fifth rushed into the Head's study with the startling news that the juniors had all gone mad and were wrecking the House.

Meanwhile, the ragging went on unabated.



"Pitch them into the passage!" said Tom Merry. "Out they go!" Bump! Bump! There was crash on crash, as the Sixth-Formers' furniture went flying in all directions. (See previous page

The excitement grew, and the damage done was greater than had been originally intended, as is generally the case in a riot.

In the midst of the wild uproar there was a sudden shout from the passage.

"Cave!"

"The Head!"

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"Here comes the Head! Blessed if I hadn't

quite forgotten that there was such a thing as a Head!"

"Bai Jove! There'll be a wow now!" exclaimed D'Arcy.

"Nothing to be afraid of," said Tom Merry, with undiminished calmness. "You are acting under my orders as captain of the school—in keeping order here."

"Keeping order!" murmured Blake, sur-

veying the strewn passage. "Keeping order! Oh, my hat!"

The Head advanced majestically. Tom Merry stepped to meet him, picking his way among chairs and carpets and broken cups and saucers and books turned inside-out. And there was a breathless hush.

THE TWENTY-EIGHTH CHAPTER

How it Ended!

DR. HOLMES looked round him, as if he could scarcely believe his eyes.

Certainly no such scene had ever met his reverend gaze before within the precincts of the old school.

The Sixth-Form passage looked as if a horde of Huns and Vandals had descended upon it, and done their very worst.

In the midst of the wreckage stood juniors in crowds, dusty and flushed and excited, and seniors stuttering with rage.

"Boys!" gasped the Head. "Boys! Have you taken leave of your senses? What does this mean? I demand to know who is responsible for this riot!"

"It isn't a riot, sir," said Tom Merry.

"Wathah not, sir."

"We are keeping order, sir," the captain of St. Jim's explained.

"Keeping order!" stammered the Head.

"Yes, sir."

"What do you mean, Merry?"

"The Sixth have refused to recognise my authority as captain of the school, sir," said Tom Merry steadily. "They have acted with disrespect and violence towards me on the occasion of my caning Darrel for insubordination."

"Wank insubordination, sir!"

"Caning Darrel!" gasped Dr. Holmes. "You caning a prefect!"

"In the execution of my duty, sir, as captain of the school."

"Merry!"

"The Sixth chipped in, and as captain of St. Jim's I had no alternative but to administer a severe lesson to them, to keep order. After this they will understand better."

"Merry! If you intend to be impertinent——"

"Not at all, sir. I have done my duty as captain of the school. I hope I shall always do so, so long as I remain captain."

"Bwavo!"

"So this is your idea of your duty as captain of the school, and your idea of keeping order in this House?" said the Head.

"A fellow can only do his best, sir."

"And is this your best?"

"Certainly!"

"Then I fear, Merry, that some alteration will have to be made. You will kindly follow me to my study. You other juniors will go to your own quarters at once, and stay there."

Tom Merry held his head high as he followed Dr. Holmes to his study. He had acted within his rights, he considered, and he had nothing to fear.

In the study, the Head was silent for a full minute, regarding thoughtfully the handsome face of the junior.

"Merry," he said, at last, "I am not angry with you. I think you have acted from a sense of irresponsibility, natural in a very young lad placed in a position for which he is not fitted. But this cannot continue."

"I hope the Sixth will see reason now, sir."

"I am afraid they will never see the reason of submitting to the authority of a junior," said Dr. Holmes, with a shake of the head. "I have not interfered hitherto. Merry, I hesitated to do so, because you were elected by a majority of the voters in the school."

"A very large majority, sir. Cutts was a very bad second."

"Quite so. But it cannot continue, Merry."

"What cannot continue, sir?"

"Your captaincy of St. Jim's."

Tom Merry's lips tightened.

"The fellows won't think it just, sir, to override a free and independent election," he said. "They had the right to elect me if they chose."

"I do not dispute that, Merry. On future occasions some new rules will be made on that subject. For the present, Merry, I fear that I cannot allow you to hold a post which is only suitable for a senior. But,"—the Head's voice was very gentle—"Merry, I do not wish to appear to act harshly."

"I am sure of that, sir."

"I prefer to make an appeal to you, to your good sense and right feeling, my boy," said the Head.

"Oh!" murmured Tom Merry.

"I think you should resign, and allow the captaincy to go to the senior candidate—Cutts of the Fifth. It is understood that when Kildare returns he will resume the captaincy of the school; and I hope it will not be for long that he remains absent. Meanwhile I ask you as a personal favour to myself to resign."

Tom Merry was silent.

"Come, Merry," said the Head. "I am sure that the duties of this unaccustomed position have interfered with your usual amusements and occupations. You will probably not be sorry, upon the whole, to be rid of the trouble and responsibility. Come, now, will you do as I ask?"

Tom Merry heaved a little sigh,

"Very well, sir."

"You resign?"

"If you wish it, sir."

"I do wish it," said the Head.

"Then I resign the position of captain of St. Jim's, sir."

"Thank you very much, Merry," said the Head gravely.

"If there's going to be another election, sir——"

"I do not think we need have the excitement and disturbance of another election," said the Head, very hastily. "For the time that Kildare remains absent, Cutts of the Fifth will fill the post very well. I understand that he is acceptable to the Sixth. After what has happened they will be glad to have a senior for captain, at all events. As you resign, the captaincy goes to the next candidate. I am very much obliged to you, Merry, for relieving me in this way, and I shall not forget it. Now you may go! Kindly put a notice on the board to the effect that you have resigned."

"Very well, sir."

And the Head shook hands with Tom Merry and dismissed him.

Tom's brow was very thoughtful as he walked away from the study. After all, he was not wholly sorry that his brief period of authority as captain of the school had come

to a termination. It had brought him very little but trouble; and possibly he had had an inward feeling himself that in the long run it would not do.

His chums met him in the passage with anxious looks.

"Well?" said a dozen voices together.

"The Head asked me to resign," said Tom Merry quietly. "I've done it. I'm going to post it up on the board."

Monty Lowther grinned a little.

"Well, that's over," he remarked. "After all, it was fun while it lasted."

"Yaas, wathah. We have given the seniahs a wippin' time, at all events. If there is anothah election, I shall put up!"

"There isn't going to be another election," said Tom Merry. "The captaincy goes to Cutts of the Fifth!"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"I wish the fellows joy of him when they get him," said Tom. "Blessed if I think I'm quite sorry it's over."

And Tom Merry posted up a notice on the board, to the effect that he resigned the captaincy—a notice that was read with mixed feelings by the juniors, and with pure joy by the seniors.

A little later, Darrel of the Sixth dropped into Tom Merry's study. The Terrible Three looked at him rather grimly. But Darrel was good-humoured and friendly. He held out his hand to Tom Merry.

"I think you've done the right thing, kid," he said, "and I've looked in to tell you that I don't bear you any malice for what's happened. Well, suppose we let bygones be bygones, and start afresh. What do you say?"

Tom Merry smiled, and shook hands cordially enough with Darrel.

"Right-ho!" he said. "It's a go!"

And so—after a time of excitement such as the old school had seldom or never seen before—ended the reign of Tom Merry as captain of St. Jim's.

