

Jolly Good Sport!

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I

“**W**E’VE got to play Oakshott,” said Tom King.
“We’ve got to!” agreed Dick Warren.

“But——”

Tom King paused at that.

There was a “but”: and it was a large size in “buts”.

The cause of the trouble was a rag in the French class. Monsieur Pin, who had the thankless task of driving his beautiful language into reluctant heads at Felgate, was born to be ragged. He was a dutiful and kind-hearted little gentleman, and the Felgate fellows really rather liked him. But schoolboys are thoughtless sometimes.

The Felgate Fourth would no more

have thought of ragging Charne, their form-master, than of pulling a tiger’s tail. Charne was the man to make a ragger tired of life, even life at Felgate. But Mossoo was conciliatory, placatory, eager for peace at any price. He was ragged, not because he deserved it, but because the ragers could get away with it.

But on this especial occasion the rag had assumed unwonted proportions. Slamming desk-lids, dropped books, affected ignorance and idiotic questions, were quite usual in Mossoo’s class-room. But what happened on this occasion was not usual.

Third school, that morning, for the Fourth, was French with Mossoo. It was a glorious summer’s morning. Sunshine streamed in, with a balmy

breeze, at the open windows. The juniors were restless. With Charne they would have controlled that restlessness. With Monsieur Pin they saw no necessity for doing so. Many of them were thinking of the Oakshott match booked for the afternoon. The mere thought of cricket made the dusky old class-room seem more dusky and dusty than ever. Never had French irregular verbs seemed so weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable. A rag was much more lively and interesting. It was Reece, who never seemed to know that there was a limit, who whizzed a Henriade across the room, dropping it at Mossoo's feet and making him give a convulsive jump and drop his own book. It was Preece who rushed out officiously to pick up that book for Mossoo, and contrived somehow to collide with the blackboard and send it whirling with its easel. The crash of the blackboard was the signal for general uproar. A dozen fellows crowded round to set it up again, shoving and pushing and making confusion worse confounded. In vain Mossoo shrieked for order, gesticulating with both hands, almost with his feet, dancing on the edge of the *mêlée*. Nobody heeded him. Up went the easel, and down again with another crash—up again, and down again—crash on crash. The French class were fairly letting themselves go, and enjoying this ever so much more than French verbs.

The door opened in the midst of it, and Mr. Charne looked in.

No doubt the uproar had reached his ears. And the tremendous din in Mossoo's class-room ceased as if by magic. Sudden silence fell. With

Charne on the scene, the matter had ceased to be a joke. It had become awfully serious.

"What is all this?" Mr. Charne asked, quietly.

"Hem! We—we—we're setting up the blackboard for Monsieur Pin, sir," ventured Dick Warren.

"It—it went over, sir," said Skip Ruggles.

"Ciel! Zat you take ze place!" gasped Monsieur Pin. "Je vous dis, take ze place. Assez, assez, je vous dis, assez."

"I quite understand," said Mr. Charne, still very quietly. "Quite! The Form will go into Extra School this afternoon, from three to five."

Charne, having said that, walked away. He did not need to say more. From that moment Monsieur Pin had no more trouble with his class during third school. It was a great relief to Mossoo. He was almost happy. But in the ranks of the Fourth, as by the yellow Tiber of old, there was tumult and affright. For Extra School that afternoon clashed fatally with the Oakshott match: and the fact that they had asked for it, indeed sat up and begged for it, was no comfort at all to the cricketers.

Afterwards, in Study Four, they discussed it in deep dismay.

"We've got to play Oakshott," Tom King declared, for the umpteenth time.

"We've got to," Dick Warren agreed, also for the umpteenth time.

"But——" They both groaned together.

Reece and Preece, Parrott and Bullinger, were there, but they had nothing to suggest. Tom King told Reece that

he was a born fool to have started that rag on a match day, adding that Preece was a blithering idiot to have carried on with it: true statements, but no present help in time of need. It was Skip Ruggles who had a suggestion to make. Skip had been thinking it out, which was really sporting of Skip, as he had no place in the team, and was going to be nothing but a "looker-on in Vienna" if the match was played. Skip had set his wits—such as they were—to work.

"Why not cut?" said Skip.

His suggestion was received ungratefully.

"Ass!" said Tom King.

"Fathead!" said Dick Warren.

"Ditherer!" said Reece.

"Blitherer!" said Preece.

"For goodness' sake, shut up," said Bullinger.

"Sit on his head, somebody," said Parrott.

"But look here——" said Skip.

"Shut up, ass!" roared the whole meeting, and Skip shut up.

Nobody else had any suggestion to make. A dismal meeting broke up dismally when the dinner-bell rang.

II

SKIP'S suggestion had been received with ingratitude, derision, and contumely. It was, in the general opinion, the sort of idiotic thing Skip would suggest. Yet, strange to relate, it was Skip's suggestion which, at long last, was adopted.

The circumstances favoured that desperate expedient.

Desperate, indeed, it was: for a



"Why not cut?" said Skip.

fellow who cut Extra was booked inevitably for six of the very best. Neither, in ordinary circumstances, was it possible to get away with such an expedient. A Home match could not have been played under the eyes of all Felgate by fellows booked for Extra. But it was an away match, so that, so far, was all right. Once at Oakshott, out of sight and sound of Felgate, they could carry on. For six, or sixteen, on the bags, no cricketer cared a hoot, so long as the match was played. But—there was still a large size in butts. What about Charne?

Mossoo was negligible. He would go to his class-room at three, and find that not a man had turned up for Extra. He would duly make his report:

and later on, the truants would get toco. That did not matter. But Charne? Charne, of course, knew all about Oakshott, he would know at once where the absentees had gone, and he was the man to follow on, and order them—indeed, yank them off the field by their back hair, if need were. That made it hopeless, and Skip's suggestion merely his accustomed dithering, till Reece brought the glorious news that Charne was going to London with the Head in his car.

That clarified everything.

With Charne, in the majestic company of Dr. Leicester, eating up the miles on the Hertfordshire roads, there was nothing to fear.

Twenty fellows watched the Head's car roll away from the gates of Felgate, and they felt like cheering him as he went: Charne being with him, not to return till a late hour.

Faces were bright when the car had disappeared. Charne was gone, and all was clear. Mossoo did not matter. Nobody gave Mossoo a thought. They were accustomed to regarding Mossoo as a trifle light as air. Mossoo was nobody and nothing. Once Charne had disappeared into space, Tom King and Co. were only thinking of packing cricket bags and getting off to Oakshott.

"So you're going to cut after all?" asked Skip.

"Sort of," agreed Tom King.

"It was my idea."

"Was it? Oh! Yes! Hand me that bat."

"And I jolly well think you ought to give me a show in the game," said Skip, warmly. Tom King laughed. He could laugh—now that all was clear!



They proceeded to pile up eighty runs.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm not joking!" roared Skip.

"You are!" assured the captain of the Fourth. "One of your best! You'd better turn up for Extra, old fat man—no need to get six for nothing."

"I'll watch it," grunted Skip.

Skip went with the cricketers. So did all the Fourth; the lawless example of the cricketers being catching, as it were. Stumps were to be pitched early at Oakshott, and they lost no time: very soon after the Head's car had disappeared, the Fourth Form at Felgate had disappeared also.

They walked to the bus stop, crammed on the motor-bus, and rolled away merrily for Oakshott. It was rather exciting, to be cutting Extra, and playing

cricket when, according to law, they should have been sitting in the French class-room, absorbing knowledge of French. They grinned as they pictured Monsieur Pin's little sallow face, with its little pointed beard, staring into an empty class-room at three. No doubt he would be furious: and there was no doubt at all that when they came back, and Charne came back, there would be the dickens to pay. But they were not going to worry about what could not be helped: they were going to play cricket, and beat Oakshott if they could: and afterwards, take what was coming to them. King Cricket, at the moment, was the monarch whose rule they acknowledged. And they arrived at Oakshott in great spirits: and Tom

King having won the toss, and elected to take first knock, they proceeded to pile up eighty runs in the first innings: and then went into the field as fresh as paint and cheery as crickets, not even dreaming of what was just about to happen!

III

"NOM d'un nom!" breathed Monsieur Pin.

If he was not exactly furious, there was no doubt that Monsieur Pin was very angry. Otherwise, certainly he never would have called upon the name of a name. He stood looking into the class-room, inhabited solely by empty desks, and his little black eyes flashed, and his little black beard bristled.

Patient and long-enduring as was Mossoo, this was the limit. Fellows had been known to cut Extra before. But never a whole class. Sometimes the good-natured Mossoo would not even report such delinquents. Nevertheless, there was a limit to his patience. Even Froggy could reach explosion-point. He reached it now. Gazing into that empty class-room, Mossoo boiled over.

"Nom d'un nom d'un chien!" he breathed. Which showed that he was on the boil. Never before, since he had been French master at Felgate, though he had had many trials, had Mossoo invoked the name of a name of a dog! Now he did!

Prompt at three Mossoo had arrived to take his detention-class. Nobody was waiting for him at the door: and when he looked into the room, nobody was there. His first impression was that the fellows were late. But when he



"It is too mooch! I do not stand him!"

had waited five minutes, ten minutes, he knew. It was then that he invoked the name of a name, and still more emphatically, the name of a name of a dog! With utter disregard of him, disregard amounting to contempt, the Felgate Fourth had walked out on him, as it were. And Monsieur Pin was not standing this. It was the limit, and then some, and a lot over. He breathed wrath.

Breathing wrath, he whisked away to Charne's study—finding it as vacant as the class-room. Then he whisked away to Common-Room, where he found Kye and Morney and other beaks, and learned from them that the Fourth-form master was gone up to town with the Head. The beaks, on learning that his detention-class was missing, smiled compassionately, adding fuel to the fire of Mossoo's wrath. He spluttered with indignation.

"C'en est trop!" he declared. "It is too mooch! I do not stand him! Non! non! Jamais! I stand him not!"

That Mossoo was a good little ass all Felgate knew. That he could be a fierce little ass they did not yet know.

Mossoo knew, of course, what Charne would have done. Charne would have rounded up those truants and marched them back to Extra, if he had had to follow them half, or quite, round the globe. Charne would not have tolerated this for a split second. And why should Mossoo? Was he to be defied, disregarded, smiled at by pitying beaks in Common-Room, set at naught, treated as a negligible nobody? Jamais de la vie! Never in life! Mossoo, for once, was not standing it.

He debated in his mind as to where

the truants could be. Not a man of them was to be seen about the school. Then he remembered that he had heard of the Oakshott match. That was it! That was where the young rascals were—playing cricket at Oakshott. Charne, he knew, would have shot across to Oakshott to herd them back—had Charne been there. But, of course, it was because Charne was safe off the scene that they had ventured. He, Monsieur Pin, did not matter—they did not care about him! Did they not? They should!

Five minutes later, an excited little gentleman with a pointed beard, in a tightly-buttoned coat and a top hat, was walking briskly to the bus stop. Grim as Charne's own was Monsieur Pin's face as the motor-bus rolled him over to Oakshott. They were going to see whether he, Adolphe Pin, could be disregarded and derided in this flagrant manner. He was going to make sure that they were playing at Oakshott, by the evidence of his own Gallic eyes. Then he was going to order them back to Felgate, game or no game. And if they ventured to disregard that order, an appeal to the head-master of Oakshott would settle the matter. They were not going to get away with this. They were going to learn that Adolphe Pin was a man to be respected. He was coming down on those truants like a ton of bricks: as fierce as Charne: indeed, out-Charning Charne. If they were, indeed, playing "le cricket" at Oakshott—

They were: for when he arrived, he needed no guidance but a roar that fell on his ears from the cricket-ground.



"I say, here comes Mossoo!"

"Well bowled, Warren! Oh, well bowled!"

"C'est ça!" breathed Monsieur Pin.

"Good man, Warren!"

"I give zem good man, Varren!" murmured Monsieur Pin.

There was a goodly crowd round the cricket ground at Oakshott. Plenty of Oakshott men had turned up to watch the game, and among them were spotted the blue-and-white caps of Felgate. All the Felgate Fourth who were not playing cricket were watching Tom King and Co. do it. And at the moment they were making the welkin ring with cheers for Dick Warren, who had captured three Oakshott wickets one after another. It was worth while to cut Extra, with all its risks and penalties, to see Warren put up the hat-trick!

"Tophole, old man," chuckled Tom King. "Give us another!"

And Dick Warren, favoured by fortune, did give them another, as a little gentleman in a tightly-buttoned coat and a glimmering hat arrived on the ground. It was the last ball of the over, and Oakshott were eight down for forty, which looked good for Felgate. Felgate men cheered and waved caps: and the Felgate field looked, and felt, very pleased with themselves as they crossed over: till a sudden startled yell from Skip Ruggles at the pavilion made them jump.

"Oh, scissors! Froggy!" yelled Skip. "I say, here comes Mossoo!"

Tom King looked round. He almost fell down, at what he saw.

"Great pip! Froggy!"

"Mossoo!" gasped Dick Warren.

"Mossoo!" articulated Reece.

"Mossoo," moaned Bullinger.

The Oakshott men wondered what was up. The Felgate men stood rooted to the ground, staring at the sallow face and the pointed beard under the tophat. They gazed at Monsieur Pin with startled, dismayed, almost unbelieving eyes. They did not need telling why he was there. They had never dreamed that Mossoo, little mild Mossoo, was capable of such things. Charne, yes—but not Mossoo—that little ass Mossoo! But as soon as they saw him, they knew. The little beast was taking a leaf out of Charne's book: and he had come there to stop the cricket, and order them back to Felgate. They gazed at Mossoo, petrified; as Priam may have gazed at the dread figure that drew his curtains at dead of night.

"SOLD!" muttered Tom King.

"And what a sell!" moaned Dick.

"Look here," muttered Bullinger, "that little ass isn't going to play Charne at us! Chuck him out if he butts in."

"Oh, don't be an ass! He's only got to say a word to the beaks here, or the pre's. The game's up!"

Fellows who cut Extra often had cause for repentance. But never had truants repented so deeply as Tom King and Co. did just then.

Mossoo, it was true was not Charne: he was only Mossoo. Nevertheless, he was the embodiment of Fate to the hapless cricketers. More than one fellow in the eleven would willingly, had it been practicable, have collared the little gentleman, and run him off the cricket-ground, and pitched him, top-hat and all, anywhere out of the way. But that was a futile idea, only likely to occur to a bull-head like Bullinger. No game, obviously, could go on, with a Felgate master on the spot demanding the return of truants. One word from Mossoo was as effective as Jove's nod on Olympus. The game was up.

From the bottom of their hearts, the Felgate cricketers wished themselves in the French class-room at Felgate. For not only was the game a goner: but leaving it in the middle was worse than never having started it: and they were going to look priceless fools to the Oakshott men, marched off the field under a beak's eye! Grinding French verbs at Felgate would have been a genuine pleasure, compared with this! This was awful! They had asked for it.

Perhaps they even deserved it. But it was awful—horrid!

They gazed at Monsieur Pin. He gazed at them. Oakshott men exchanged wondering glances. The batsmen were waiting. But the bowler and the fielders were petrified. The pause was brief but terrible.

And then——!

Monsieur Pin turned and walked off.

That was the very last thing the Felgate cricketers expected him to do. They gazed at his departing back.

"What the thump——?" breathed Tom King.

"Is he going?" murmured Dick Warren, in utter wonder.

"Ain't he going to butt in?"

"Is he crackers?"

"He's gone!"

Had he gone to speak to Oakshott masters? That did not seem to be it, for he had not gone towards the House. Had he merely dropped in at Oakshott to ascertain that the truants were there, without intending to intervene? It hardly seemed possible. They could hardly believe it. But he was going—going—gone!

"He's gone!" said Tom King.

"What are we going to do?" asked Warren.

"Carry on!" said Tom.

"But he can't mean to let us——"

"Carry on, and see."

It was a bewildering situation. Why Mossoo was there, unless to round up the truants, what he was going to do, if he was going to do anything, no fellow could guess. There was nothing to do but to carry on, and see! So they carried on—and saw!

They piled into the game. Oakshott

were dismissed for fifty. Nothing was seen of Mossoo when Felgate started batting again, securing seventy. Then there was a pause for tea, and still nothing was seen of Mossoo. The cricketers went back to the field wondering. But by that time they were feeling fairly confident. If Mossoo had been going to butt in, he would have butted in before this, surely. He couldn't be playing with them like a cat with a mouse. And in cheery mood once more, the Felgate cricketers proceeded to mop up Oakshott, beating them by a hatful of runs.

V

TOM KING solved the mystery, as the Felgate cricketers, pleased but puzzled, rolled home in the motor-bus in the summer sunset.

"Froggy's a sport," he said.

"How, which, and why?" asked Dick Warren.

"He came over boiling. You could see that in his mug. He was going to round us up and march us off. But—he's a good sport. He wouldn't spoil our game."

"Fat lot Froggy knows, or cares, about games!" said Bullinger.

"Not a lot," agreed Tom. "But he knows we do! He came over to handle the chopper: but when he saw us looking so jolly sick, he decided not. That's it! I tell you, Mossoo's a sport. He let us finish the game because he's a jolly good sport. And I tell you fellows this, that if there's any more ragging in Mossoo's class this term, the ragger's going to be booted all over Felgate. We shall get a report to



They piled into the game.

Charne, and a whopping all round—that's what we expected. Froggy was a good sport to let us play out the game, and nobody's going to rag him."

There was, of course, a report to Charne, and a whopping all round. It was worth it, to play Oakshott; though it was decidedly painful until it wore off. And the next time the Fourth were up to Monsieur Pin for French, and Bullinger as usual banged his desk-lid, Tom King gave him a warning look: and made the warning more effective, in the corridor later, by banging Bullinger's head on the old oak wall. For that term, at least, Mossoo found life at Felgate School ever so much more peaceful: the just reward for having shown himself a jolly good sport!