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LONG, COMPLETE
SCHOOL
TALE.

By
MARTIN CLIFFORD.



A
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(See page 12.)

NO. 2.

VOL. 1.

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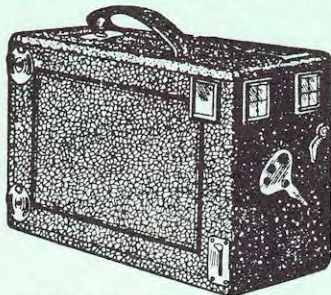
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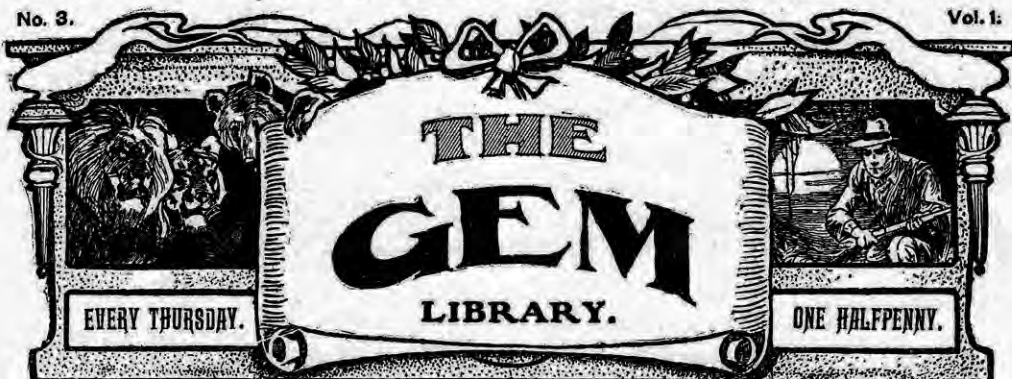
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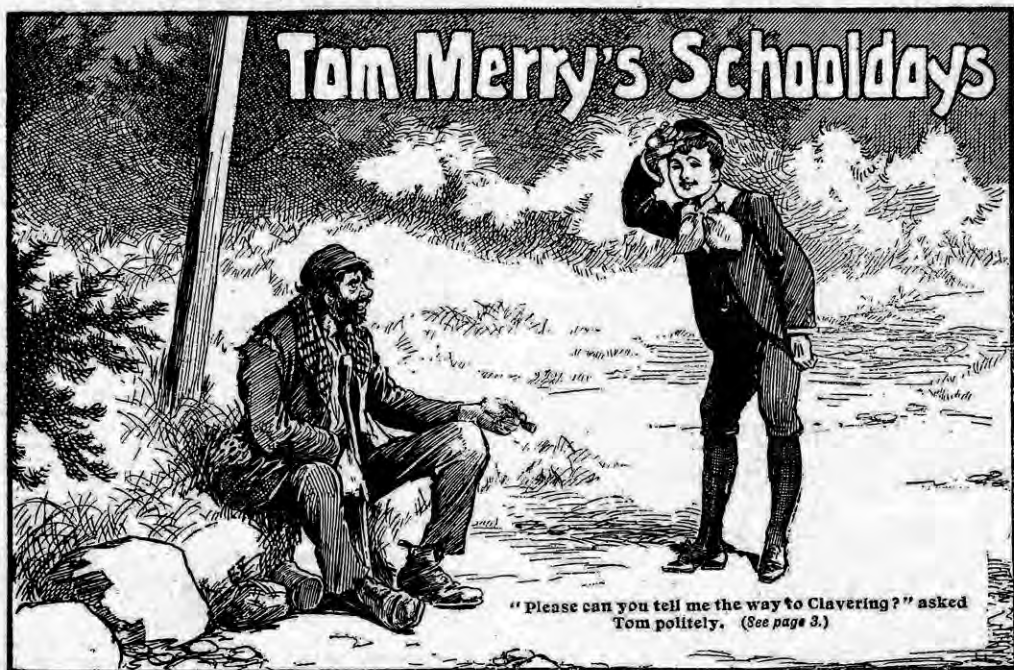
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No. 3.

Vol. 1.



A COMPLETE STORY FOR EVERYONE, AND EVERY STORY A GEM!



A Tale of School Life and Adventure. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

Tom Merry Takes French Leave.

"TOM—Tom!"

Tom Merry heard his name called, and saw Miss Priscilla Fawcett looking excitedly up and down the platform; and he promptly dodged behind a pile of luggage. "Tom—Tom!"

But Tom was not forthcoming. He was quietly making his way to the exit from the platform; so he had no time to attend to Miss Priscilla Fawcett.

There had been a smash at Westholm. The train had run into a stationary engine with a terrific crash. Nobody was hurt, but everybody was greatly alarmed. The train was damaged, and the line was blocked. The passengers crowded the platform, talking excitedly and all at once. Tom Merry had slipped away in the confusion. It was his first oppor-

tunity of escaping the eagle eye of Miss Priscilla, and he had not been slow to take advantage of it, for Tom was in a mischievous mood. Tom was an orphan, and Miss Priscilla had had charge of him since he was a baby. Tom had grown up since then, but Miss Priscilla did not seem to have realised that fact. She had the kindest heart in the world, and she was devoted to Tom; but she drew the rein a little too tight sometimes. Tom was getting on for fifteen. Miss Priscilla seemed to think that he was still six or seven.

Tom was very fond of his old nurse; but he was very fond of having his own way, too. He had developed an independence of mind that was a sore trial to Miss Priscilla. To-day he was bound for Clavering College, to enter the, as yet unknown world of public school life.

Miss Priscilla had watched him all the way as a hen watches a favourite chicken. She had been afraid that he would fall out of the train. She had bought him sweets

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CHAPTER 2.

Tom Meets With An Adventure.

and made him eat them; she had called him Tommy before the other passengers. Tom had resolved that he would not be marched into Clavering College under the wing of Miss Priscilla. He had determined to bolt at the first chance. Now the chance had come, and he had taken it.

"Tom—Tom!"

In the shock and confusion of the accident, Miss Priscilla had had to take her eyes off her charge. Now he was gone from her gaze like a beautiful dream.

"Oh dear! Where is Tommy? Dear Tommy is lost! He is certainly killed! Tom—Tom—Tom!"

Miss Priscilla's voice rose crescendo.

"Tom—Tom—Tom!"

But still no answer came. Miss Priscilla rushed up to the stationmaster, and in her excitement threw her arms round the neck of the astonished official.

"Where is he? Oh, where is he?"

"Why—what the—who the—how the—"

"Where is my darling boy?"

"How on earth should I know? Madam, please release me. I—"

"He is gone! Tommy is gone! I thought I saw him safe on the platform, but he must have been crushed under that dreadful train!"

"Utter nonsense, madam! Nobody has been hurt. If you have lost a boy, he's on the platform somewhere, and you'd better go and look for him, and leave me to attend to my duties!" snapped the stationmaster, wriggling in the embrace of Miss Priscilla, and growing very red in the face.

"You are sure—you are quite sure he is not killed?"

"Of course I am. Can't you see for yourself?"

It had not occurred to the excited lady to see for herself. The stationmaster jerked himself free, and proceeded to address some strong remarks to the porters, who were grinning as if they found something amusing in the scene.

"Tom—Tom—Tom!"

The passengers were smiling; but their smiles were lost upon Miss Priscilla.

"Tom, my darling boy, where are you? Has anyone seen Tommy?"

"What is he like?" asked a sympathetic passenger.

"A dear little boy, in a sweet velvet suit," gasped Miss Priscilla, "with the sweetest blue eyes and curly hair!"

"Ah, a little chap of six, I suppose?"

"N—no; he's fifteen, and—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Sir!"

"He, he, he! Has anybody seen a boy of fifteen, in a sweet velvet suit, with the sweetest blue eyes and curly hair?" the sympathetic passenger demanded in a loud voice.

"Tom—Tom—Tom!"

"Perhaps he's left the platform," the passenger suggested, his merriment calming down somewhat. "He may have wandered off, ma'am!"

Miss Priscilla took the hint and hurried to the exit.

"Has a little boy passed you?" she demanded of the ticket-collector.

"No, ma'am."

"My goodness gracious!" wailed Miss Priscilla. "My dearest Tommy, where can he be?"

"Oh, is it Tom Merry you mean?"

"Yes, yes. Have you seen him?"

"Yes!" growled the man. "A young chap passed me five minutes ago, and he says, says he, if anybody inquires for Tom Merry, tell 'em he's gone on to Clavering, says he."

"And you said he had not passed you!"

"I said a little boy hadn't passed me, ma'am. He was a strapping chap of fifteen, I should say—but his clothes! Well, his clothes!"

The man burst into a chuckle. Miss Priscilla gave him an indignant look, and hurried from the station. She wanted to get on the track of Tom Merry.

"Willful Tommy!" she murmured. "How like him to take this wild idea into his head, and how thoughtful of him to leave word so that I should not be anxious. But I must find him; the reckless child will never succeed in reaching the college unprotected."

As it was only five miles from Westholm to Clavering, and as Tom Merry was fifteen years old and had plenty of money in his pockets, it might have been supposed that he was capable of getting to the school without any very dreadful calamity happening.

But Miss Priscilla thought otherwise. She wouldn't be satisfied to leave Tom until she had placed him in the very hands of the Head of Clavering. Even then it was probable that she would have a lingering uneasiness about him. But though Miss Priscilla looked this way and that way, there was no Tommy to be seen. He had made the most of his opportunity. He had expected pursuit, and he was already too far away for recapture.

TOM MERRY was Merry by name and merry by nature. No matter what happened to Tom, his high spirits could never be damped for long. He always came up smiling. There was always a gleam of fun in his bright blue eyes. He frequently got into scrapes, but, as he had an equal facility for getting out of them again, that did not trouble him very much.

It was late in the afternoon when Tom Merry walked out of Westholm Railway-station. He had left word that he was going on to the school, and that was his intention, but he had not the faintest idea where it was, or whether it was distant five miles or fifty.

Tom's appearance was certainly somewhat striking. He was an active and well-formed lad, but, as we have said, Miss Priscilla did not realise that he was growing up. He was dressed in a suit of dark blue velvet that was certainly pretty and would have looked charming on a boy of eight. Upon the growing form of a boy of fifteen it was calculated to cause smiles; so was the big bow he wore. Tom's face was very smooth and handsome, and he looked younger than he really was; but he could not possibly look young enough for those clothes and that bow.

Miss Priscilla expended a great deal of time and attention upon the adornment of Tom's person. Tom had hitherto lived a very quiet life at Huckleberry Heath, where Miss Priscilla resided. His tutor had been more careful to keep in Miss Fawcett's good graces than to bring Tom up in the way that he should go. Neither Tom Merry nor Miss Priscilla foresaw what a sensation his appearance was likely to create at Clavering.

"Can you tell me the way to Clavering?"

Tom took off his cap and bowed politely as he asked that question of a stout policeman who was standing at the corner of the street. Tom had been carefully trained to the most exquisite politeness by Miss Priscilla, and Lord Chesterfield was simply "not in it" with Tom Merry.

The policeman looked at Tom and grinned. He did not seem to think it necessary to answer Tom's question, but just looked him over and grinned.

"Pardon me!" exclaimed Tom, with unabated politeness.

"I asked you a question."

"He, he, he!"

"Dear me!" soliloquised Tom aloud. "I wonder whether the man is deaf or only silly?"

The policeman's merriment ceased, and he frowned portentously.

"Or, perhaps he has been drinking?" murmured Tom. "His nose is certainly very red, and—"

The policeman's face became as red as his nose, and he reached out at Tom.

"You cheeky young himp—"

Tom Merry promptly dodged.

"Don't lose your temper, my good man. Take it calmly. You must not get excited. Sudden excitement is bad for fat people, and—"

"I—I—I—"

The guardian of the law looked really angry. Tom thought it wiser to beat a retreat, and he promptly fled. The policeman was making a rush after him, and Tom turned round the first corner he came to and ran for his life.

"You clumsy ass, where are you going to?"

Tom felt himself clutched by the collar and stopped. He had run right into a youth of about his own age, dressed in Etons. The boy had promptly collared him, and was shaking him violently.

"I beg your pardon!" exclaimed Tom. "I really did not see you."

He was interrupted by a roar of laughter from the boy in Etons. He held Tom at arm's length, staring at him.

"Hallo! What do you call yourself?"

"My name is Tom Merry!"

"Tom Pool would be a better name, I fancy. Manners, old man, come and look at this funny merchant!"

Another lad in Etons, who was lounging in the doorway of a confectioner's shop, came out and joined the boy who had caught hold of Tom. He also burst into a roar of laughter at the sight of the boy in the velvet suit.

"Oh, chase me!" he exclaimed. "Where did you pick that up, Monty?"

"It ran into me," said Monty. "Funny animal, ain't it?"

"Please release my collar," said Tom meekly.

"Rats! I'll do as I like, baby. How did you get out of the nursery?"

Tom jerked himself free.

"You are very rude," he said, with offended dignity, smoothing his ruffled collar. "You have made my collar"

quite crumpled and dirty. Miss Priscilla would be very angry if she saw it."

Manners stared at Monty, and Monty stared at Manners. "Oh, my hat!" gasped Manners. "Where did it come from? Did it leave its ickie feeding-bottle at home, then?"

"We want that chap at Clavering," giggled Monty. "We would put him through something—eh, Manners, old boy?"

"Rather!" said Manners.

Tom Merry caught the word. He looked at the two boys curiously.

"Do you belong to Clavering College?" he exclaimed.

"Can't you see our caps, fathead?" said Manners disdainfully, as if he thought all the world ought to know the Clavering cap—as indeed he did.

"I am going to Clavering," said Tom.

"You are going to Clavering?" gasped the two together.

"Yes; will you show me the way? I will walk with you if you like, as I wish to be on friendly terms with all the boys."

Manners staggered against the confectioner's doorway as if overcome.

"That is coming to Clavering!" he said faintly. "Do you hear, Monty? Take it away somewhere and kill it, quick!"

"Oh, don't be ungrateful, Manners!" said the other. "He offers to walk home with us. That's really kind of him; and you can't deny it. We should make a giddy sensation, I fancy, going in with this merchant."

"He must be joking. Kid, you're not really going to Clavering?"

"Yes, I am," said Tom. "Why shouldn't I?"

"Why, you'll be killed. In that rig! Oh, my!" Manners went off into a fit of laughter. "My giddy Aunt Matilda Ann! What are we coming to?"

"If you do not desire my company," said Tom, with great dignity, "I will not walk with you. But I shall be obliged if you will tell me the way to the school."

Manners winked at Monty Lowther.

"Certainly," he said blandly. "Go along that street, and it'll take you into the high-road; turn to the left, and keep on till you get to Clavering. You've only got to keep straight on long enough, and you come to the school."

"Thank you!" said Tom.

And he started off. Manners giggled.

"Nothing like telling the exact truth," he said to Monty. "If he keeps on long enough that way he'll get to Clavering. He'll have to keep on for about twenty-five thousand miles, that's all. He may find a few oceans and continents in the way; but if he keeps right on he'll get to Clavering, won't he?"

"He will," said Monty. "Now, let's go in and have that feed."

And these two charming youths disappeared into the confectioner's shop. Quite unsuspecting of the little joke perpetrated by the humorous Manners, Tom Merry followed his directions faithfully. He reached the high-road, and turned to the left. Then he stepped out briskly, little dreaming that his back was towards the good old school of Clavering.

As Manners said, the direction was all right, if he went right round the world. Otherwise he would not get to the college.

The dusk of evening was falling, and Tom was getting hungry. He was still cheerful, however. He came to cross-roads, and halted in doubt. There was a signboard at the top of a post, but the weather had long obliterated whatever had been written on it. A man was squatted at the bottom of the post smoking a dirty, black pipe. He looked up at Tom.

He was about the most villainous-looking fellow Tom Merry had ever seen. He was thick-set and bull-necked, with a rough face and a straggling beard. He was ragged and dirty and unkempt; but Tom, with never-failing politeness, took off his cap as he addressed him.

"Please can you tell me the right way to Clavering?"

The tramp—for such the man evidently was—looked at him curiously.

"Wotcher want at Clavering?" he asked.

"I am going to school there," said Tom. "I have just walked from Westholm. I should be extremely obliged to you if you could tell me which road to take."

The tramp grinned.

"What's it worth to yer?" he asked.

Tom looked puzzled.

"I don't understand you, my good man!"

"I mean, wot will you stand for a straight tip?"

The words were Greek to Tom, but he guessed the man's meaning.

"Do you mean that you wish me to pay you for information?" he inquired.

"That's about the size of it, young gentleman."

"I consider the request most mercenary!" said Tom hotly. "However, I will give you a shilling."

"Don't believe you've got it about yer!"

"It is most impolite to express doubt of a gentleman's word," said Tom; "but perhaps that will convince you."

He drew out a handful of money, and showed it. The tramp's eyes glinted evilly.

"Right-ho!" he said, getting up. "It's all right, young gentleman. I was only joking. I wouldn't take your money for nothing. I wouldn't. Come with me, and I'll show you the way to the school. It's t'other side of that there wood."

"How kind you are!" exclaimed Tom simply. "I shall be ever so much obliged."

"Oh, don't mention it, sir! Come along!"

The tramp led the way into a footpath through a dusky wood. Tom followed him without suspicion. He had not learned at Huckleberry Heath to be distrustful of too obliging strangers.

"I should like to know your name, my good man!" he exclaimed. "Miss Priscilla would like to see you, I am sure, and thank you for your kindness to me."

"I'm Jim Jones," said the tramp. "They call me Honest Jim. Honest Jim I am, and honest I always was, young sir."

Tom thought how deceptive appearances might be. He would never have taken Honest Jim for an honest man, judging by his looks.

"Are you sure you are not leaving the path, Mr. Jones?" he exclaimed, as he noticed that the footpath had vanished and they were treading through grass and ferns.

Mr. Jones did not reply, but he stopped and listened. All was silent in the dusky wood. In the gloom Honest Jim looked more villainous than ever, and the red glow in the bowl of his foul-smelling pipe.

"What have you stopped for, Mr. Jones?" inquired Tom.

"I'll 'ave that shilling now," said Honest Jim, with a chuckle; "also any more you've got about yer, young shaver; also that watch and chain; also them studs. If they're the real thing, they're worth something, I s'pose. 'And 'em over!"

"Dear me!" said Tom, in amazement. "The man must have been drinking. Why should I give you my money and my personal property?"

"Because I shall knock you silly if you don't!" snarled Honest Jim, seizing him by the collar. "And 'em over, I say!"

"You—you ruffian! You are a thief!"

"Are you goin' to 'ave 'em over?" roared Mr. Jones. Tom Merry's eyes flashed. He was certainly a simple lad, for his education had made him so; but he was plucky, and he could be very determined.

"No!" he said firmly. "I consider you a great rascal, and I shall certainly not do anything of the kind. I should like to point out to you—"

What Tom would have liked to point out to Honest Jim was destined never to be pointed out to that gentleman. A swinging cuff on the head cut short the flow of Tom's eloquence, and it made his brain reel.

He saw a thousand lights dancing in the dusky wood. He came to himself, to find that he was pinned against a tree, and that Honest Jim was going through his pockets with a scientific thoroughness which showed that this was not the first time the same trick had been performed by that honest man.

He evidently thought that Tom's resistance was at an end, for he was holding him very carelessly. Tom Merry drew a deep breath. Tom very seldom got angry, but if anything roused his anger it was meanness and treachery.

Honest Jim had taken him for a nincompoop from his attire. He was to find out his mistake.

Honest Jim was dragging off the gold watch-chain, when Tom, suddenly jerking his right arm free, gave him a terrific slap on the side of the head.

The unexpectedness of the blow as much as its force made Honest Jim reel, and before he could recover himself Tom leaped forward and butted him over.

Honest Jim rolled on the grass with a loud grunt, and Tom sprang away and ran for his life. He went crashing through the brushwood. In a few moments the tramp was on his feet and pursuing him with savage imprecations.

Tom heard him in fierce pursuit, and he ran hard. In spite of his absurd get-up, Tom was strong, and a good runner. He went through the wood, reeling and stumbling continually, but always picking himself up again, and the less active ruffian dropped behind.

At last, panting and exhausted, Tom stopped to take breath. His clothes and face were torn by the brambles, and his heart thumping against his ribs. He listened intently, but could hear no sound of Honest Jim. The tramp had quite lost the track.

Tom was in a bad plight. He had not the faintest idea where he was. He was in the middle of a wood, that was all he knew, and had not the faintest idea in which direction Clavering lay; but he was satisfied with himself.

He had baffled the tramp. His watch-chain still hung from his waistcoat, and his gold watch was attached to it. Most of his money had been taken away, but Tom, who had never been kept short of money by his doting nurse, did not care much for that.

"H'm! Yes," murmured Tom, "I've got away from that brute, but now the question is, where on earth am I, and how am I to get out of this beastly wood?"

There was nothing for it but to go forward and trust to luck, and so at a more moderate pace he proceeded, keeping a wary eye open for Honest Jim.

By luck, he came out presently into a footpath, and though he could not guess whither it led, he deemed it advisable to follow it.

He blundered against a stile in the dark, clambered over it, and found himself in a road. There was a signpost there, fortunately low enough for Tom to read it by striking a match.

"Clavering, six miles."

Tom gave a whistle of dismay. He did not know that he was further from Clavering now than when he started, still having no suspicion of Messrs. Manners and Monty's little joke; but six miles seemed a long walk when he was fatigued and hungry.

A sound of wheels on the road caught his ear. He looked in the direction, and saw a heavy market-cart lumbering along through the gloom. The carter was half asleep on the near shaft. The cart seemed to contain nothing but a few flour-sacks. It was going towards Clavering. Tom stepped quickly into the road.

"Excuse me," he said politely to the carter, "will you give—"

A sleepy grunt was the only response. Tom ventured to tap the drowsy man as the cart came by.

"Excuse me—"

The carter started, and gave a vague cut round with his whip. Tom got the lash round his legs, and gave a yell.

"Get 'ee away!" said the carter, waking up. "Three limb, get 'ee gone!"

And he nodded off again. Tom gave up the attempt to beg a lift, but he meant to have the lift, all the same. He slipped behind the slow-going cart, and swung himself into it.

Taking care to make no sound to alarm the surly carter, he laid down in the sacks with which the bottom of the cart was thickly covered. The repose was very grateful to his tired limbs, and, though he had no intention of falling asleep, in five minutes he was safe in the arms of Morpheus. He had drawn a couple of sacks over him for the sake of warmth, for the night was chilly, and he slept contentedly, unconscious of the fact that he was smothered from head to foot with flour, and that his head was resting in a little heap of the same, spilled from one of the sacks. He slept on till he was suddenly awakened by the stopping of the cart and the sound of voices.

CHAPTER 3.

How Tom Merry Arrived at Clavering.

TOM MERRY awoke with a start. The cessation of motion was sufficient to awaken him, but he did not quite realise where he was for the moment. He lay and listened to the sound of voices. All round him was darkness.

"Back it in there, Garge!"

"Roight, Maister Giles!"

The latter voice was the carter's. Then Tom Merry realised what had happened. He had slept while the cart reached its destination, and it was being backed into a yard, the carter quite unconscious of the boy lying there among his flour-sacks.

Tom Merry did not wish to be backed into a yard and locked up for the night, and he thought it was quite time he left his present quarters. He pushed off the covering sacks, and sat up. He was white from head to foot, and his face, smothered with flour, was positively ghastly. He was quite unaware of it.

"Is there anything aloe in the cart, Garge?"

"Naw, Maister Giles."

"I thought I heerd something move."

"Ain't nothing there, but sacks."

"I beg your pardon!" said Tom.

He started up from the cart before the two astonished men. There was a glimmer of a lantern in the hand of Master Giles, but it was only a glimmer. They saw Tom very indistinctly in the dimness, and stared at him in amazement and terror.

"It's a ge-ge-ge-ghost!" gasped Garge, and he took to his heels.

Master Giles was not long in following him. Tom was left looking after them in amazement.

"H'm!" muttered Tom. "I wonder what is the matter? They appeared to be quite startled. Well, I must get out of this."

He descended from the cart. The yard, paved with cobblestones, was very gloomy. Tom Merry felt his way towards the gate. There was a sound of voices.

"I tell 'ee I saw 'un plain."

"Stuff and nonsense!" said a woman's voice. "Give me the lantern. You've been drinking, Garge. Get away! I'm ashamed of you!"

"I tell 'ee—"

"Give me the lantern."

"Doan't go—doan't 'ee go, Mistress Giles—"

"Pooh! I'm not afraid, and I've not been drinking, Garge," sneered Mrs. Giles.

The lantern light came glimmering across the yard.

Tom Merry was a little bit alarmed. His appearance was usually productive of smiles; now it seemed, for some reason unknown to himself, to excite terror. He thought it best to keep out of sight, and he dodged behind a barrow that was up-ended in the yard.

A stout lady, with a white apron and a red face, marched across the cobblestones, lantern in hand. Behind her, visibly trembling, came Garge, the colour of chalk. He was still adjuring Mrs. Giles not to risk it; but that lady took not the slightest notice of him. They passed the barrow where Tom Merry crouched, and now if they had turned their heads they would have seen him. But they did not turn; they marched on towards the cart. Mrs. Giles put a foot on the near shaft and looked into it.

"There's nowt here but flour-sacks," she said, in tones of withering contempt.

"It was a gig-gig-ghost!"

"You great baby, frightened at a shadow!" Mrs. Giles stepped down. "Get along with you, do! You ought to be ashamed of yourself! Oh gracious! Save us!"

Tom, thinking this a good opportunity for making his escape, had stolen forth, and was heading for the open gate, where Mrs. Giles turned and saw him.

The sight of a ghostly form flitting through the darkness was too much for the good lady's nerves. She gave a loud shriek, and the lantern fell from her hand and smashed on the cobblestones. Garge, with a groan of terror, dived under the cart.

"Save us!" screamed Mrs. Giles. "It's a g-g-ghost!"

Tom wondered what on earth made them take him for a ghost; but he was not the boy to desert a lady in distress. Instead of running out of the gateway, as he might easily have done, he hurried towards Mrs. Giles to proffer assistance and reassure her. The stout lady staggered back against the cart.

"The ghost!" she screamed. "Help!"

"Pray pardon me!" exclaimed Tom, in his politest tones.

"I have not the faintest idea why—"

"Help!"

"Madam, I assure you you are in no danger, and—"

"Help!"

"Help!" yelled Garge from under the cart.

"I beg of you to listen to me, madam—"

"Help!"

"All right!" came the voice of Master Giles from the distance. "I've got the blunderbuss. I'm coming!"

Tom shook in his shoes. Even his politeness was not equal to that test. He wanted to reassure Mrs. Giles, but he didn't want to receive a charge of shot. He turned and bolted for the gate, and ran full tilt into Master Giles, who was coming from that direction. Down went the blunderbuss with a crash, and down went Master Giles, and Tom sprawled over him.

In a moment, however, he was up again, and sprinting for dear life. He was out of the gate like a flash, and running down the road. As soon as he discovered that he was not pursued, he stopped to get his breath and to attempt to discover where he was. A man was coming up the road, and Tom walked towards him to inquire.

"Excuse me, but can you—"

The man stared at him for a second, and then fled, with a yell. Tom stood lost in amazement.

"I think the people here must be all mad!" he murmured.

"Ah, here is a policeman! I will ask him."

He went quickly towards the policeman. He heard the guardian of the law give a gasp; then a lantern flashed on him. A red, angry face looked at him from behind the lantern.

"You young rascal, you give me a start! What do you mean by it? Blessed if I don't run you in, and chance it!"

And a strong hand closed on Tom's shoulder.

"I beg your pardon, but—"

"Come alonger me, you young rascal! I'll teach you to play your tricks on the King's 'ighway!" exclaimed the constable.

Tom, with a desperate wrench, tore himself loose and fled. He heard the heavy beat of footsteps behind him, and put on a frantic spurt. The footsteps died away. Tom halted again, breathless, and very much astonished. Fortunately he discerned a way-sign a few minutes later, and learned that it was half a mile to Clavering.

He set out at a swinging trot.

He was as hungry as a hunter, and his watch told him that it was past eleven o'clock. He had not intended to arrive at the school in the middle of the night, but now he had no choice in the matter. A big building behind a stone wall loomed up on the right, and Tom guessed that it was the college, which he knew was on the outskirts of High Clavering. He stopped at the big gates, and, having discovered the bell, tugged at it. He heard a distant peal ringing through the silence of the gloomy buildings. But there was no response.

He rang again and again, and at last there was the sound of a movement. He heard a fumbling and a grumbling, and then a voice demanding his business.

"If you please, I am Tom Merry," said our hero, in his politest tones. "I have unfortunately been delayed, and—"

"So you've come, 'ave you?" growled the voice. "Jolly good hiding waiting for yer, that's one comfort. Come in, do! Waking a honest man up in the middle of the night."

"I am truly sorry!" exclaimed Tom, as he passed in. "I assure you that it was— Why, where is the man gone?"

The school porter had expected to see a boy enter, and not a spectre. He gave a gasp at sight of the ghostly figure, and retreated into his lodge.

"What is the matter, my good man?" called out Tom.

"You—you young himp, giving me a turn like that! I'll complain to the 'Ead, that's what I'll do! What do you mean by it?"

"Mean by what? I do not grasp your meaning."

"I'll grasp your blooming ear if you don't cut along, you young rascal!"

"But where am I to go?"

"Go up to the house, of course. There's a master gone to Westholm to look for you, and a old lady a-setting up in hysterics, and the 'Ead a-setting up along with her. You'll catch it 'ot, you will, and no mistake. See that window with a light in it? Go there."

Tom obeyed. The close was very dark, but he soon reached the window from which the light glimmered, and he found a door beside it, at which he promptly knocked. There was a cry of joy within.

"It is Tom! I am sure it is my darling Tommy!"

Tom knew his old nurse's voice. The door flew open and Miss Priscilla appeared. She had flown to it without waiting for the slower movements of the Head of Clavering, who was also sitting up waiting for the truant. The Head wasn't so anxious as Miss Priscilla. He was more inclined to be angry.

Miss Priscilla had arrived at the school minus her charge. She had made her anxiety felt by nearly everybody at Clavering. Herr Schneider, the German master, had gone over to Westholm to look for Tom. Miss Priscilla never dreamed of leaving Clavering till she was assured that Tom was safe, though the Head solemnly vowed and declared that it would be all right. She stayed at the college as a matter of course; and the Head, finding that she was determined to sit up till Tom arrived, sat up, too. The Head was a young man, Henry Railton by name, but a fine schoolmaster. He sat up with Miss Priscilla patiently enough; but, at the same time, he resolved to give Master Tommy a lesson when he arrived, but he did not confide his intention to Miss Priscilla. The anxious lady thought him rather heartless because he ate his supper without any apparent loss of appetite, although Tom was missing. Miss Priscilla touched nothing.

At the knock on the door she immediately guessed that Tom had arrived, and flew to it as we have related.

"I am really sorry—" began Tom, taking off his cap.

He got no further. Miss Priscilla's scream brought Mr. Railton to the spot, and he was in time to catch her swaying form. He gave a start himself at the sight of Tom; but he was an athlete, and his nerves were strong and steady.

"Is that Thomas Merry?"

"Yes, sir," said Tom, bowing.

"How dare you come here in such a state? How dare you, I say? You have frightened this good lady, and—"

"Is it really Tom?" murmured Miss Priscilla faintly. "I thought he had been killed, and that it was his go-go-ghost!"

"I really fail to perceive why people should take me for a ghost," said Tom.

"Look at yourself in that glass," said the Head sternly.

Tom stepped in and obeyed, and gave a start of astonishment.

"I—I—I— It must have been the flour!" he gasped.

"Calm yourself, Miss Fawcett. The boy is quite safe. Pray calm yourself," said Mr. Railton, wishing Miss Priscilla and her precious charge at the ends of the earth.

Assured of her darling Tommy's safety, Miss Priscilla recovered. She disengaged herself from the Head's support, much to his relief, and flew at Tom and hugged him.

"My dear, dear boy! My sweetest little Tommy!"

"Oh, don't!" said Tom. "I ain't a little boy, and I don't like being called Tommy."

"My sweetest child! How anxious I have been!"

"I am exceedingly sorry," said Tom. "I had no intention of causing you alarm. But pray do not hug me any more. And perhaps Mr. Railton will let me have some supper. I am exceedingly hungry."

"You do not deserve it," said Mr. Railton. "However, you shall not go to bed hungry. There is a cold supper already laid for you. Lose no time. I think you have kept Miss Fawcett and myself up long enough."

"I really had no intention—"

"You can explain to-morrow morning. Eat your supper."

Tom felt to, as soon as Miss Priscilla allowed him. The lady sat on the other side of the table, watching him, as if afraid that he would melt from her sight all of a sudden. The Head of Clavering was watching him, too, with a very peculiar expression.

Although Tom was caked with flour, the Head could see the extremely unusual style of his garments, and though he said nothing on the subject then he thought a great deal. He noticed, too, Tom's rather peculiar way of expressing himself, and reflected that that wouldn't do for Clavering. Tom was really the reverse of a prig by nature, but his training had been peculiar, under a doting old lady's charge, and so he had fallen into a way of expressing himself that was not exactly in accordance with his years. Sir Charles Grandison, in his boyish days must have been a great deal like Tom at this period of his life. Tom finished his supper.

"My most sincere thanks for this really excellent repast," he said, with a bow to the Head. "I am really—"

Mr. Railton rose to his feet.

"Come with me, Merry. I will show you to your room, as all the servants are in bed," he said.

"Good-night, my darling boy!" said Miss Priscilla, hugging Tom.

"Good-night!" said Tom. "I declare you have covered yourself with flour. Good-night!"

And the new boy at Clavering followed the Head.

In an upper corridor Mr. Railton opened a great oak door, and the light of the candle he carried flickered into a great apartment, in which Tom dimly made out an apparently endless row of white beds.

"This is your bed," said Mr. Railton.

He pointed to an empty one. All the others were tenanted by boys who were mostly snoring. In the next bed to the vacant one Tom saw a face he knew; a face with a large mouth that was now half open. Manners was his neighbour.

"Get in," said the Head. "I shall come back for the candle in five minutes."

He left the dormitory. Tom Merry glanced along the big, dark room and shivered a little. It was not like his cosy little room at Huckleberry Heath. Neither was there a hot-water bottle, he found, to put at his feet, although the night was cold. This was an omission he resolved to mention to Mr. Railton when he returned, never doubting that it had been overlooked.

He tumbled into bed quickly enough. When Mr. Railton came back for the candle, Tom's floury face looked up at him from the pillow.

"Good-night, Merry!" said the Head.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Tom. "They seem to have overlooked the hot-water bottle."

"The what?"

"The hot-water bottle."

"What hot-water bottle?"

"I always have one on a chilly night," explained Tom, in the innocence of his heart.

Mr. Railton smiled grimly.

"I am afraid, Merry, that you must accustom yourself to its absence," he said. "You will certainly not be molly-coddled while you stay at Clavering. If you want to warm yourself before going to bed, I should recommend Indian clubs or an exerciser."

"But really I must insist—"

"Good-night!"

The dormitory door closed behind Mr. Railton, and Tom was left in darkness to insist as much as he chose, but minus a listener.

"I declare, this is too bad!" murmured Tom.

But he was very sleepy, and ere long, for the second time that night, he dropped off and slept soundly.

CHAPTER 4.

Tom's First Day at Clavering.

DAYLIGHT was streaming into the tall, narrow windows, high up the dull-blue walls of the dormitory when Tom Merry's eyes opened. He heard voices, some of which seemed to be familiar to his ear. "That's the funny merchant." It was Manners who was speaking. "Monty and I ran into him in Westholme yesterday, didn't we, Monty?"

"No; he ran into us," said Monty.

"Oh, don't be funny! This is the kid, chaps. He was wearing these same clothes, though they seemed a bit cleaner then. He was a regular mammy's baby boy. Talked like a Dutch uncle, too. Offered to walk to Clavering with us."

"Ha, ha!"

"We weren't taking any, were we, Monty?"

"Not much!" said Monty. "They recommend you to walk with an object. But I wouldn't walk with an object like that."

"Ha, ha! Object is the name for it."

"You are excessively rude," said Tom Merry, sitting up in bed and looking round him. "It is not good form to make these personal remarks."

There were a dozen boys about the bed in various stages of deshabille. Some were staring at Tom, others were examining his clothes. Tom had folded them up carefully on a chair. But the boys of Clavering were evidently no respecters of persons or of apparel. The jacket was on the floor, the waistcoat was being passed from hand to hand, and Monty Lowther was holding up the knickerbockers for inspection. Another lad had taken the gold watch, and was winding it up. Tom had wound it up over-night, for he had been taught to be careful and methodical. But Master Jimson seemed to find some more winding to do. A peculiar buzz from the watch seemed to hint that something had gone wrong with the works.

When Tom Merry spoke all eyes were immediately fixed upon him.

"What did you say?" asked Manners, with elaborate politeness.

"I think you must have heard my remark," said Tom. "It is, therefore, unnecessary for me to repeat it. Please give me my watch."

"I'm winding it for you," said Jimson. "I've been winding the blessed thing for five minutes, and the knob's still going round. How long does it usually take, kid?"

"You've broken it!" exclaimed Tom. "How stupid of you!"

Jimson laid down the watch and came towards Tom.

"What did you call me?" he inquired.

"Stupid," said Tom. "Exceedingly and unpardonably stupid, my lad."

"Dot him on the boko, Jimson," said Manners.

"Rather!" said Jimson. "Mamma's pet must not be cheeky."

And he promptly brought his fist into sharp contact with Tom's nose, and Tom lay down again with a thump.

"If you want some more," said Jimson, "you've only got to say so. I'm the most obliging fellow in the world."

"You are very rude," said Tom. "I disapprove of violence as a general rule, but in this case I think the circumstances call for severe measures."

He got out of bed.

"That chap," said Manners, "has been eating a dictionary, or a Greek lexicon, or something, or else he's the reincarnated spirit of Dr. Johnson. I say, look out, Jimmy; he's going for you!"

Jimson had turned his attention to the watch again. He turned back quickly at Manners' warning, and put up his fists. Tom Merry went for him pluckily enough. But Tom knew just as much about boxing as he knew about flying. Jimson brushed his hands aside, and gave him a second tap in the same place, and Tom Merry sat down. Miss Priscilla Fawcett considered boxing brutal, and she would never have had her protegee instructed in the manly art of self-defence. It had not occurred to her that inability to protect oneself is about the surest way to get attacked.

"Now, don't be an ass!" said Jimson good-naturedly. "I don't want to hurt you, baby. Keep off the grass, can't you, fathead!"

"Certainly not," said Tom. "I shall fight you, unless you apologise for your unwarrantable conduct."

Jimson pretended to faint in the arms of Monty Lowther.

"Where does he get those words from?" he gasped.

"Have I really been guilty of anything as dreadful as that? Does he always bring out four-point-seven words like those, I wonder?"

"Now, then, kids!"

It was a sharp voice at the door. A prefect looked into

the dormitory, with a severe frown on his face. The frown was not a real one, however, for the face was a fat and extremely good-natured one. Daly was Clavering's fattest and best-tempered prefect.

"What are you dawdling about this morning for?" demanded Daly.

"We're examining this new thing," said Manners. "We found it here when we woke up. Thought it was a nightmare at first. Funny article, ain't it?"

"Well, you'd better be quick down, that's all."

The boys hurriedly proceeded with their dressing, and the "row" between Tom and Jimson ended for the present. Tom washed and dressed, and carefully brushed down his clothes. He could not get quite all the flour out of the velvet, but he did his best. He was the last boy out of the dormitory. Although he had not had much of a night's rest, he was looking very bright and cheerful.

Daly, the prefect, tapped him on the shoulder in the passage. The fat prefect looked him over with a grin of amusement.

"I say, I suppose you're the new kid, Merry, ain't you?"

"Yes; my name is Tom Merry," said Tom, with a bow. "I am very happy to make your acquaintance."

"Oh, you are, are you?" said Daly, staring. "I'm gratified to hear it. Where did you get those clothes from?"

"These clothes? I came to Clavering in them."

"Then the sooner you get a change the better."

"I shall do so immediately my box is unpacked," said Tom, thinking the prefect was referring to the dusty state of his garments. "I was unfortunately smothered with flour last night, owing to—"

"Keep all that. You talk too much!"

"Well, I declare!" said Tom. "I was only answering—"

"Dry up! The Head has asked me to see to you. You're to breakfast with him instead of in Hall; I really don't know why."

"Neither do I," said Tom.

"Dry up!" said Daly. "Come along!"

Tom Merry followed the prefect. He was shown into a large room with sunny windows, where the breakfast-table laid for three looked very inviting. Miss Priscilla was there, and she immediately kissed Tom on the forehead in full view of the prefect.

"My dearest Tommy, how do you feel this morning after your dreadful adventure?"

"Quite well, thank you," replied Tom, "and jolly hungry!"

Mr. Railton came in. He looked hard at Tom, and said "good-morning" to him, and the three breakfasted together. Mr. Railton had had no choice but to ask his housekeeper to find accommodation for Miss Priscilla the previous night, but he was anxious to get rid of the good lady at the earliest possible moment. He had looked out a train for her to catch, and ordered the trap.

Miss Priscilla insisted upon hearing a full narrative of Tom's adventures, and looked inclined to faint when he told of his encounter with Honest Jim. She made Mr. Railton promise that the police should be informed, so that they could be set on the track of the miscreant without delay, and expressed the opinion that hanging was a great deal too good for him. Mr. Railton, who was only anxious to be rid of the good lady, assented to everything, and heaved a sigh of relief when the trap came round for Miss Fawcett.

Tom, of course, conducted Miss Priscilla to the trap in his most Chesterfieldian manner. He rather wished he hadn't, however, when Miss Priscilla took a pathetic farewell before a dozen grinning boys, including Manners, Lowther, and Jimson.

"Good-bye, dearest Tommy," she said, kissing him for the twentieth time. "Mind, and don't forget all I have told you. The hot-water bottle on cold nights—"

"Yes," said Tom; "that's all right."

"The flannel vests—"

"I won't forget."

"And never, never get your feet wet. If you do—"

"I will be careful."

"And don't forget to write to me if you should want anything."

"I promise."

"Remember your chest is delicate, and—"

"It isn't," said Tom. "It's as sound as a bell. But I won't forget. Good-bye!"

At last Miss Priscilla was safe in the trap. As it drove off she called out to Tom, and he ran after it to hear what she said. So did Manners and Lowther. What she said was:

"Above all, remember the flannel—"

The rest of the parting adjuration was lost in the rattle of

the wheels. Tom waved his hand, and Miss Priscilla disappeared.

"Dearest Tommy," said Manners, "I beg of you to take especial care not to get your dear little tootsies wet."

"Don't forget your chest-protector, Tommy," said Monty Lowther, "and take particular care of your flannel socks. Above all, remember the feeding-bottle."

Tom flushed red. The sight of Mr. Railton caused the jokers to leave him alone. Mr. Railton beckoned to Tom, who joined him, and the Head of Clavering led the way to his study.

"You may sit down, Merry," he said.

Tom Merry sat down. He rather wondered what the headmaster had to say to make him look so extremely serious.

"Now, Merry," said Mr. Railton, "I have to speak seriously to you. You have, I believe, been in the charge of Miss Fawcett for a long time?"

"Ever since I was a baby, sir," said Tom cheerfully.

"Ah, that accounts!" murmured Mr. Railton.

"Accounts for what, sir?"

"You must not ask your headmaster questions. You have many things to learn. I am afraid you have been somewhat coddled, Merry. Have you always worn those clothes?"

"Certainly, sir."

"You should have been provided with others on coming to Clavering. The usual list was supplied to Miss Fawcett, but seems to have been overlooked. I suppose you must continue to wear them until you can be provided with others. Now, I suppose you know you were guilty of a great breach of discipline in leaving Miss Fawcett yesterday without permission, and causing so much anxiety. Why did you leave her?"

"I felt inclined to, sir."

Mr. Railton concealed a smile.

"You must not always do what you are inclined to, Merry. You must learn to submit your will to the will of your elders, who are wiser than you are."

"I have always had my own way," said Tom.

"That will be changed now that you are at Clavering. You will discover that I have my way here, and that you must submit to discipline, like the rest," said Mr. Railton patiently. "If any other boy had done what you have done, I should have flogged him. I overlook it in your case, under the peculiar circumstances; but mind, nothing of the kind must occur again."

Tom was silent. He began to realise that life at Clavering would not be much like life at Laurel Villa at dear old Huckleberry Heath. Still, in spite of his peculiar little ways, he was not the fellow to complain. He was true grit at heart, and he resolved to "face the music" pluckily.

"I shall be sorry to have to punish you," said Mr. Railton; "but that must come unless you learn to respect your elders and to obey orders. Do you play cricket or football?"

"No, sir. Nurse says they are rough games."

"Hum! You will learn, and they will do you a great deal of good, I think. And now we will have a little examination, if you please."

Mr. Railton had licked all sorts of boys into shape, but he had never had to deal with one exactly like Tom before. But he had a keen eye, and could see that the boy's faults were all on the surface. It was, indeed, surprising that a boy who had been so utterly spoiled should have turned out half so well.

And the young Head of Clavering was agreeably surprised when he came to make an examination of the new boy's mental attainments.

Tom's tutor had let him have his own way almost to any extent, and the boy had studied whenever he thought he would. Mr. Railton naturally expected to find him an ignoramus; but Tom was a bright boy, and had a gift of industry, in spite of his training.

He had in consequence made pretty good progress. Mr. Railton had expected to have to put Tom, big as he was, in the Lower Fourth, if not lower still in the school. He was agreeably surprised to find that Tom was by no means the fool one might have taken him for.

With a good deal of satisfaction he realised that the new boy could go into the Shell, where, though as yet he was not aware of the pleasure in store for him, Tom Merry would have the excellent company of Manners, Lowther, Jimson, & Co.

So, after the examination, Tom Merry was turned over to the tender mercies of Mr. Quelch, the master of the Shell. He made his first appearance in Form during second lesson, and a general grin went round.

Mr. Railton had explained a few things to the Shell master, and Mr. Quelch did not smile when he beheld Tom, but the Form did.

Some of the young gentlemen, in fact, were indignant as much as they were amused.

"Cheek to stick that funny animal in here with us!" exclaimed Manners. "We don't want him in the Shell. Might as well have put him up into the Fifth while they were about it. His proper place is in the Third, with the giddy infants."

"We'll make the Shell too hot to hold him," said Gore, a big, overgrown fellow, who ought to have been well up the Fifth long ago, but stuck in the Shell by reason of an incurable laziness. "Nice to be seen out with that bouncer. Won't the fellows chip us when old Quelch takes us for a walk, and that thing along with us!"

"You are talking, I think, Gore!" said Mr. Quelch.

"Nunno, sir! I was only—"

"Take fifty lines for talking, and fifty more for telling an untruth!"

"Yes, sir," said Gore.

He ground his teeth. He rather unreasonably blamed Tom for the imposition, and inwardly resolved to make the "spooney" sit up for it when he could get at him.

But this was not the only offence Tom Merry committed against the high and mighty Gore. There was never too much space at Clavering, and an influx of new boys at the beginning of the term had packed the studies unusually close.

The Fourth Form went four to a study, and sometimes five, according to its size. Boys in the Shell and the Lower Fifth as a rule shared a room among three, sometimes four. For some time Manners, Lowther, and Gore had had a study to themselves. Their feelings may be imagined when they learned, after morning school, that Tom Merry had been assigned to them for a study mate.

Manners and Monty Lowther were wild, but Gore was furious. They held a council of war in the study, but they could come to no more useful decision than to give the newcomer a high old time.

When Tom came there he knocked at the door before entering, and came in with the politest bow. He was greeted by unfriendly looks.

"Get out!" said Gore.

"P'raps excuse me!" said Tom. "I was told that I am to share this room and prepare my lessons here. Mr. Quelch said also that probably some of my study mates would help me to prepare at first till—"

"Yes, I can see us doing it!" sneered Gore. "Look here, you're not coming into this study!"

"But Mr. Quelch said so."

"I don't care a rap for silly old Quelch!"

"Indeed!"

The angry face of the master of the Shell looked in at the door. Mr. Quelch had come there, guessing that Tom Merry's reception would not be a cordial one, and intending to bring the weight of his authority to bear. As he was not far behind Tom, he was in time to hear Gore's flattering reference to himself.

Gore was nearly frozen with terror. He would willingly have bitten his tongue off to recall those words, but as that was not feasible, he stood and stared at the master in blank dismay.

"I am glad," said Mr. Quelch furiously—"I am glad, Gore, to learn the manner in which you refer to your master behind his back. Come with me, please, and I will give you reason to remember this occasion!"

Gore unwillingly accompanied the incensed master.

"Well, kid," said Manners, not unkindly. "I'm sorry for you when old Gore comes back, that's all. You'll get it!"

"I am deeply sorry for this unfortunate occurrence!" exclaimed Tom. "It was not my fault, and I really do not see why Gore should be angry with me."

"My eye!" said Monty Lowther impressively. "He'll skin you!"

It was some minutes before Gore returned. He came in in a towering rage, rubbing his hands, which were smarting from a severe affliction.

"Now, you young brute," he hissed, "now I'll settle with you! Don't let him get away!"

Tom Merry showed no desire to get away.

"I say, don't go for him too much, Gore," said Manners. "He's only a silly kid, and he can't use his fists, you know. Draw it mild!"

"Shut up, Manners! I'll ask for your advice when I want it!"

"But, I say, you know—"

"Do you want a thick ear?"

"Well, I can't say I do particularly, but—"

"Then shut up, or you'll get one jolly sharp!"

And Gore went for Tom. Tom put up his fists promptly, but, as we have already mentioned, he was quite innocent of any knowledge of the noble art of self-defence. Gore sent him flying with the first thump, and he fell in the grate.

"Get up!" roared Gore. "Get up and have some more!"

Tom was feeling too dazed to get up just then. Gore

stooped over him and seized him by the ears with the idea of lifting him. Tom lashed out with his fist, and caught the bully a terrific crack between the eyes, and Gore sat down. "Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Manners. "You weren't looking for that, Gore!"

Gore scrambled up in a fury. He seized a walking-cane, and began to thrash Tom. The new boy scrambled to his feet under a shower of blows. As Gore had a weapon, Tom thought it would be fair play for him to have one, too, and he snatched a cricket-stump from a corner, and faced the bully pluckily.

Slash came the cane across his shoulder, and then crack went the stump on Gore's head, and the bully of the Shell saw stars. Then Tom gave him a dig in the ribs, and followed it up with a cut across the shoulders, and Gore began to beat a retreat.

"The fellow's mad!" he gasped. "Keep him off! He'll brain me with that stump. He's dangerous. Hold him!"

Neither Manners nor Monty was inclined to hold Tom. On the contrary, they cheered him on, quite pleased to see the bully of the Form scared by the new boy.

"Go it, Spoooney!" cried Manners. "Lay into him!"

"Break his cocoanut for him, Baby!" cried Monty Lowther.

Tom was warming to his work. He was smarting and tingling all over from the lashing of the cane. He would never have used a stick so long as Gore kept to his fists, and would rather have taken a thrashing; but the cane justified the stump. And now that he had started, Tom Merry wasn't inclined to leave off till he had made the bully properly sorry for himself.

Gore retreated round the table, and the victorious new boy followed him excitedly, cutting and digging at him. Twice round the table they went. Round they went again, and then Gore made a wild break for the door.

"After him!" yelled Manners, choking with laughter.

Tom Merry needed no bidding. He was after Gore like a shot, and the bully, unable to get the door open in time, collapsed in a heap close to it, and frantically put up his arms to protect his head.

"Don't!" he yelled. "You'll kill me! Manners, hold him off! Lowther, talk to him! He's mad as a hatter! Keep him off!"

Tom brandished the stump, and crashed it against the door over Gore's head, and the bully wriggled in terror.

"Will you apologise if I let you off?" demanded Tom.

"Yes, yes! I am sorry—I'm awfully sorry!"

"Then I will overlook your offence," said Tom magnanimously. "You have made a most wanton and unjustifiable attack upon me merely because your master discovered you expressing yourself in a reprehensible manner; but if you sincerely apologise I am satisfied."

"Oh, my only hat!" gasped Manners. "Where does it all come from?"

Gore staggered to his feet. He would have liked to hurl himself upon Tom, but Tom still had the stump in his hand, and the bully dared not risk it.

"Oh, won't I pay you out for this!" he snarled, and he went out of the study and closed the door with a slam.

"Ha, ha, ha!" shouted Monty Lowther. "I never saw old Gore so taken down in all his life before! The new kid isn't such a spoooney, after all, Manners."

"No, more he is," said Manners. "But, I say, kid, I'd advise you to learn how to use your fists, you know. You won't always have a cricket-stump handy."

"I can't box," said Tom, in his frank, engaging way. "I have never really fought in my life. I wish somebody would teach me."

"I will!" said Manners, in a burst of generosity.

"Oh, thank you so much!" said Tom, beaming. "That will be nice. By the way, are you fellows fond of tarts and sweets and things?"

"Are we?" murmured Monty Lowther. "Oh, no, not half!"

"I've got a lot in my box, and—"

Manners, much to Tom's astonishment, fell upon his neck as if he recognised in him a long-lost brother.

"Monty, old man, his heart's in the right place, if he hasn't got any brains," said Manners. "Kid, where's that giddy box?"

"I think it has been put up in the box-room, but I don't know where that is."

"I'll show you. Come on, Monty. Follow the man from Cook's. This way."

And Manners, with his arm linked quite affectionately in Tom's, marched him off, and Monty Lowther brought up the rear.

CHAPTER 5.

Tom Makes a Better Impression, but Herr Schneider is Not Pleased.

TOM MERRY'S box had been packed with loving care by Miss Priscilla, and that good lady had not overlooked the eatables. Manners and Lowther rather stared when they saw what a supply of really first-class eatables Tom had brought with him to Clavering. They were not long in falling to, and they did full justice to the "feed."

"This is a bit of all right!" said Manners, starting on his sixth jam-tart, after having demolished a rabbit-pie and half a cake. "Tommy, my son, that dear old lady is a scorcher—a regular scorcher. She knows what a chap wants. Nothing mean about her. I wish I had a few old aunts of the same brand."

"Rather!" said Lowther. "This ginger-pop is really ripping. Hallo, there's Gore looking in! Hallo, Gore, what do you want?"

"Wondered what you kids were up to here," said Gore, looking into the box-room. "Hallo, where did you get all that tuck?"

"It's the new kid's spread, and he's invited us."

Gore looked enviously at the spread. He wished that he had not been quite so hasty in sitting on the new boy. But Tom was not the fellow to bear malice.

"Come in," he said. "There's plenty, and you're very welcome. I shall be honoured if you will join us."

"Well," said Gore; "you're a howling prig, but there's nothing wrong with the grub, so here goes."

And he joined the feasters.

"We shan't be able to eat any dinner," said Manners; "but that doesn't matter. You don't get rabbit-pies like that at Clavering. Try one of them, Gore, I can recommend them."

"Thanks, I will," said Gore, opening his pocket-knife, for cutlery was the only thing that was wanting at the feast. "I think I can negotiate one. Hallo, there's Jimson!"

Jimson was looking in at the door.

"You fellows got a spread, and enjoying it all by your little selves?" he demanded. "Well, that's what I call piggy!"

"Tain't our spread," said Manners. "It's the new kid's, and he's invited us."

"Well, he's surely going to invite me, too," said Jimson.

"I would your watch for you, you know, Merry."

Tom laughed.

"Yes, and broke it," he said.

"Of course, accidents will happen."

"Come on," said Tom hospitably. "You're welcome."

"Well, that's decent of you, after the way I dotted you on the boko!" said Jimson. "You're a good sort, and I suppose you can't help being a silly ass!"

And he sat on a corner of the box and started. A few minutes later a couple more heads were poked in at the door. Somehow, the news that a feed was going on in the box-room seemed to spread, and it brought the boys of the Shell from near and far. Tom was hospitality itself. He invited each new-comer to join in the banquet, and, generous as the supplies were, they began to diminish rapidly.

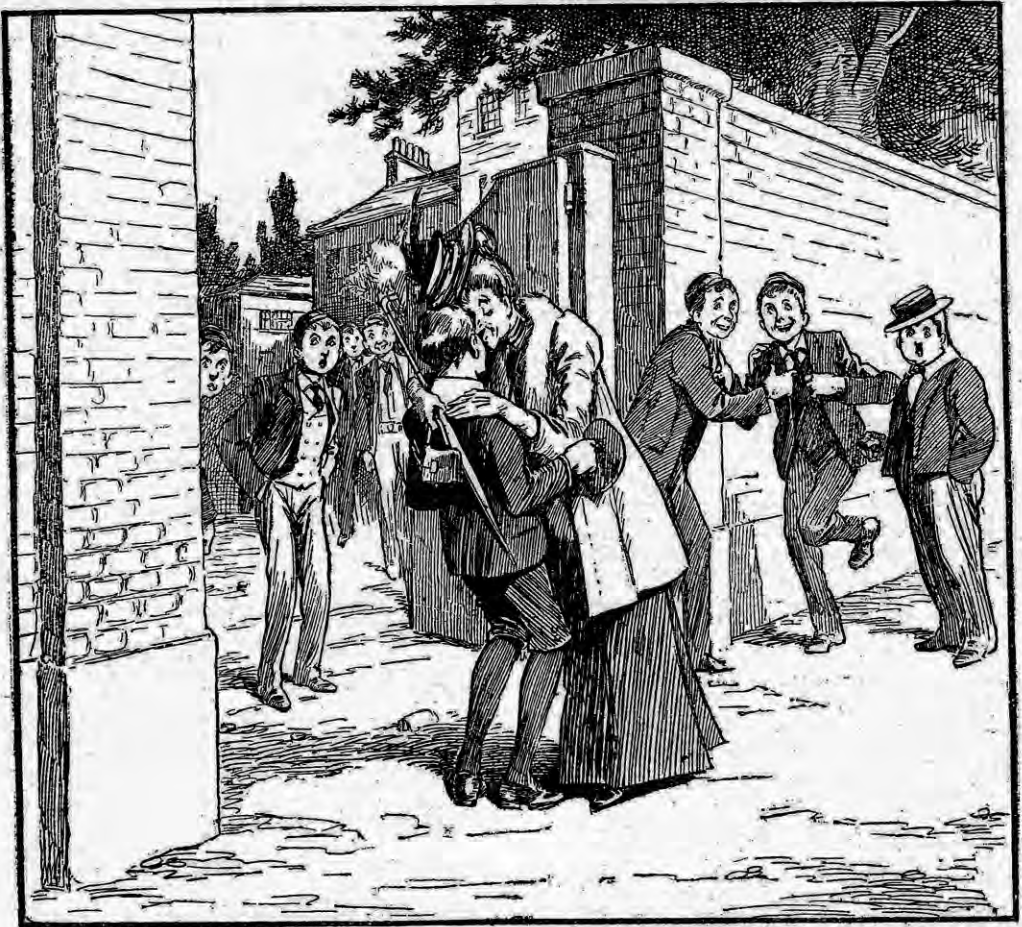
There were soon a couple of dozen boys of the Shell and the Lower Fifth in the box-room, enjoying themselves immensely, and they all agreed that Tom Merry was a brick. The dinner-bell called them away at last, when there was little left but crumbs, and they went into the dining-hall and took their places, but they ate nothing. They had had enough; in fact, most of them had more than enough.

Tom's generosity and his forgiving temper naturally made something of a diversion in his favour. The boys, as was to be expected, chipped him incessantly, but their "chipping" was mostly good-natured. The feast in the box-room, in fact, had paid Tom's footing in his Form, and when he was licked into shape a little by public school life, he was likely enough to become very popular in his Form.

In the evening he prepared his lessons in the study with Manners, Lowther, and Gore. The latter, as soon as the immediate effects of the feed had worn off, relapsed into hostility; but Manners and Monty were good-natured enough. Manners helped Tom with his preparation, and Monty promised to teach him how to play cricket.

Football was over, and King Cricket reigned in its stead. The boys of Clavering were eagerly discussing forthcoming matches now. The talk was so much Greek to Tom, whose education had been sadly neglected so far as sports were concerned; but he was an intelligent lad, and he did not, like an ignoramus, affect to despise what he did not understand. He was eager to learn.

"Funny place you were brought up in, and no mistake," said Monty condescendingly but good-naturedly. "Here's a chap nearly fifteen, dressing in a baby's velvet knicker."



"Good-bye, dearest Tommy!" said Miss Priscilla. "Mind and not forget the hot-water bottle on cold nights."
(See page 8.)

bookers, and never bowled a ball in his life. Do you know the difference between a bat and a boundary, kid?"

"No," said Tom.

Manners and Lowther roared.

"Credit he'll be to Clavering," said Gore, with a sneer. "I wish you joy of your pupil, Lowther. Why don't you cut him?"

"Oh, rats!" said Monty. "He's a decent sort, and that's more than you are. He stood a jolly good feed. You didn't talk about cutting him then."

Gore growled, but he had no reply to make to that. Preparation over, Manners got out his boxing-gloves. Manners rather prided himself on his boxing, and the fellows in the Shell did not like standing up to him. He was glad to have a pupil, as a matter of fact, and Tom's open-hearted admiration was very gratifying to him.

"Now for the first lesson," he said. "Get that table out of the way, Monty."

"You're not going to box here," growled Gore. "There ain't room."

"Oh, you're a pig. Go into the common-room if you ain't satisfied."

And Gore grunted and took himself off. The table was pushed into a corner, and the chairs and bookcase placed upon it to clear a space for Tom Merry's first lesson in the manly art of self-defence.

He put the gloves on, with Monty's assistance, and faced Manners cheerfully. He was not looking quite so cheerful after a few minutes. Manners's idea of instructing was to hit Tom on the nose as often and as hard as he could, leaving

it to Tom to learn how to guard his nasal organ. Tom was floored half a dozen times in quick succession, and it says much for his pluck and determination that after each fall he came up smiling, with undiminished keenness.

"My hat!" ejaculated Monty Lowther, who was sitting on a chair on the table, and looking on with the air of a critic. "He sticks it out well, Manners. When he's dressed in clothes suitable for a civilised chap, instead of a monkey, you may be able to make something of him. Go it, Spooney!"

Tom came up for the seventh time. He had observed now how Manners guarded himself, and, as his nose was feeling decidedly the worse for wear, he did his best to guard it. Somewhat to the instructor's surprise, in the seventh round, Tom knocked his hand up, and countered neatly, with a heavy smack on Manners's own nose.

The unexpectedness of it made Manners stagger.

"Bravo!" cried Monty. "That's one for your boko, Manners!"

Manners smiled a sickly smile.

"You're improving!" he said. "Keep on, kid."

Tom kept on. Manners found it less and less easy to knock him down, and Tom was certainly in good condition; for, after a round dozen falls, he still came up freshly, and Manners was beginning to blow a little now.

"Well, he can stick it out," said Monty Lowther. "Hallo, look out!"

The warning came too late. The door of the study opened, and a fat figure appeared. It was that of Herr Schneider, the German master. The German's fat, red face was very angry. His study was under that occupied by Manners and

Lowther, and the terrific tramping and stamping of the boxers overhead, and the loud thump whenever Tom went down, had excited him to a state of frenzy. He had come up at last with a cane in his hand to remonstrate. He opened the door of the study and bounced in at an unlucky moment.

Tom was just warming to his work, and he was hurling himself at Manners, who was nearest the door. By rare luck he got through Manners's guard, and his right came on Manners's chin with a thump. Manners went flying, and would have brought up against the door if it had been shut. As it was, he brought up against Herr Schneider. The German wasn't prepared for the impact. Manners crashed into his portly form, and he reeled back onto the passage and sat down, and Manners sat down, too, on the top of the German.

"Oh, 'or'!" gasped Monty Lowther. "There will be a row!"

Monty was right. Manners jumped up as quickly as if the German master was red hot, and stood gazing at the gasping master in dismay. Herr Schneider was fat and unyielding and slower to rise, and, moreover, nearly all the breath had been knocked out of him. He puffed and panted and put his hand against the wall of the passage for assistance in getting upon his feet.

Here was a chance for Tom Merry's unfailing politeness, and he did not let it pass him. He stepped quickly into the passage, and extended his hand to Herr.

"Pray let me assist you, my dear sir!" he said.

To his astonishment, the Herr replied with a sounding box on the ear, which sent him flying into the study again. Then Herr Schneider finished getting upon his feet without assistance. Tom rubbed his ear, which felt as if it was on fire.

"How extremely ungentlemanly!" he exclaimed.

"Mein Gott!" exclaimed Herr Schneider. "Tat poy! I nefer saw run like it before. Lowther, Manners, you vill each of you write vun hundred lines for making such a noise mit yourselves in dis room!"

"Yes, sir!" said Manners and Monty Lowther together.

"You vill come mit me," said Herr Schneider, seizing Tom by the arm.

"I beg your pardon!" exclaimed Tom. "Manners is just instructing me in boxing, and I particularly wish to finish the lesson: so, if you do not mind—"

"Come mit me!" roared Herr Schneider.

"But really—"

The German jerked him bodily out of the study.

"Come mit me, and I vill see what to Head say to your impertinence!" he panted.

"Poor old Spooney!" murmured Manners. "Fancy talking to a master like that! He's goin to catch it hot, Monty!"

"Well, he is a cough-drop!" said Monty, getting off the table. "Come to think of it, you were making rather a row. I'm sorry for baby boy."

Herr Schneider led Tom, still with a grip on his arm, directly to the headmaster's study. Herr Schneider had not taken a liking to Tom. He had gone over to Westholm the previous day to look for the truant, and had not enjoyed taking the trouble. Now, on the new boy's first night in his study, he had made a tremendous disturbance. When that was followed up by what Herr Schneider regarded as impertinence, the cup was filled to overflowing.

Herr Schneider was not a bad fellow at heart, but he was crusty—decidedly crusty. He was down on sports and anything like horseplay, and he liked to see boys still as mice. As he could never get any human boys to keep as still as mice, he was never satisfied.

"Come in!" said Mr. Railton's cheerful voice.

The German marched in with Tom Merry.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Railton. "What is the matter?"

"Tat poy," said Herr Schneider, releasing Tom, and pointing an accusing forefinger at him—"tat poy have been most insolent. I bring him to you, sir. He make a tundering noise, and call me—me, Otto Friedrich Schneider—me, unsentlemanly!"

The Head's brows became very stern.

"Merry, have you dared to apply such a term of disrespect to Herr Schneider?"

"The facts are these, sir," said Tom. "By an unfortunate accident, Herr Schneider was overturned in the corridor, owing to an unforeseen collision between Manners and himself, which was due to his sudden and unexpected appearance—"

"You must not speak like that, Merry," said Mr. Railton, hiding a smile. "I really never met a boy with such a peculiar phrasology before."

"Indeed, sir, I am explaining with concision and lucidity—at least, I was under that impression," said Tom. "But, as I was saying, Herr Schneider then committed an unlooked-for and unprovoked assault upon me, and naturally I characterised such conduct as being in the last degree ungentlemanly, when,

as it happened, I was in the act of proffering him assistance, which I believed he needed."

"Tere nefer was such a poy!" murmured Herr Schneider. "Nefer—nefer!"

"Are you not aware, Merry, that you must not pass such remarks upon a master?"

"No, sir, I wasn't aware of that."

"You are aware of it now, and if it occurs again you will be severely punished. This time I shall try to persuade Herr Schneider to pardon you. Leave the room!"

"Certainly, sir."

And Tom quitted Mr. Railton's study.

At this dismissal of Tom, Herr Schneider looked a great deal as a cat might look from whose claws a mouse has just escaped. Mr. Railton turned to him. He knew it wouldn't be easy to pacify Otto Friedrich Schneider, but he meant to try.

"I trust you will overlook this fault of Merry's, Herr Schneider," said Mr. Railton. "I must explain to you that he is a somewhat peculiar lad, and his training has been very peculiar. You saw Miss Fawcett yourself yesterday, and you will acknowledge that a boy trained by that really excellent lady is not likely to fall into public school ways at once."

"Nein, nein!" assented the German. "Vat he needs mooch is a good thrashing."

"I hope that will not be necessary. I wish first to see what patience will do."

"Poys are all the same, Herr Railton. Dey haf high spirits till dey are vell peaten. All poys require peating every morning."

Mr. Railton smiled.

"I hope not, Herr Schneider. In the case of Merry in particular I am convinced that the boy is really sound at heart, and that his faults lie on the surface."

"If you wish me to overlook his fault, Herr Railton, I will do so, of course," said the German, looking about as pleasant as if he were having a tooth out.

"I do wish it," said Mr. Railton, with a pleasant smile.

"He was determined not to see that Herr Schneider was grumpy. Mr. Railton was a young man, and most of the masters at Clavering were older than himself. Herr Schneider was old enough to be his father. This fact made Mr. Railton reluctant to use his authority as he might otherwise have done."

Herr Schneider, with the stiffest of bows, quitted the Head and went back to his own quarters. He passed the study where the boxing-match had taken place; but it was dark and empty. Tom had rejoined his two friends, and they had gone with him to the common-room. The Herr passed within hearing distance of that apartment, and the strains of a song floated out to his ears:

"Schneider, Schneider,

Schneider, how you was?"

It wasn't Manners's fault, or Monty Lowther's fault, if the gentleman mentioned in the song happened to bear the same name as the respected German master of Clavering. They couldn't help it. They had not written the song. But it was really an unfortunate coincidence, and the Herr took it personally.

"The next time," he muttered, as he strode on—"the next time tat poy overstep to line I vill not take him to te Head. I vill take him to mein own study, and gif him a lesson tat he vill remember."

CHAPTER 6.

More Trouble for Tom.

CLANG! Clang! The unwelcome sound of the rising-bell awoke Tom Merry. He opened his eyes and blinked in the light that streamed in at the high windows of the dormitory.

At Laurel Villa, at dear old Huckleberry Heath, Tom had generally risen at whatever hour suited him best. Although he was as strong and sturdy as a boy well could be, Miss Priscilla had persisted in regarding him as delicate, and he had been allowed all the indulgences of an invalid. Now he awoke, and lay calmly regarding the other boys as they dressed, feeling in no hurry himself.

"I say, Spooney," called out Manners, as he fastened his collar, "buck up, or you won't get any breakfast."

"Oh, all right!" said Tom lazily.

Some of the boys were already gone. Tom's movements were leisurely, and the others were mostly out of the dormitory before he was out of bed. Manners, in fact, helped him to make up his mind to rise by jerking off his bedclothes in sheer kindness of heart.

"Ugh!" shivered Tom.

"Oh, buck up!" said Manners. "Don't be a milksop!"

"Hallo! Where are my clothes?" demanded Tom.

He had placed them on a chair beside his bed when he

undressed the previous night, but there was no signs of them now.

"Give it up," said Manners, looking round.

"I say, if this is a lark—"

"Haven't touched them, honour bright," said Manners.

"Have you seen Spooner's togs, Monty?"

"No," said Monty, who was going out. "Better come along, Manners. Quelch will spot us if we're late for prayers."

"Right-ho!"

And Manners followed his chum.

Tom was dismayed. His clothes had been removed. On the chair, neatly folded up, was a large, coarse sack, but at first he did not understand what its presence there meant.

"I say, what am I to do?" he called out. "I can't come down without them."

"Don't ask me riddles," said Manners. "There's a sack there. Shove that on and come down."

"Don't be an ass! I should present an exceedingly ludicrous appearance, and—"

"Oh, if you're going to fire those words at me, I'm off!"

And Manners and Lowther hurried away.

Tom was left alone in the dormitory. He hunted high and low for his clothes, but they were not to be found. Some practical joker had evidently made away with them. His underclothing was there, and he donned it, but in that light and airy attire it was hardly possible to descend. His eyes fell on the sack again.

A senior put his head in at the door. His face was angry. Mr. Quelch had sent him to look for the absentee, and he didn't like the trouble.

"Merry, where are you?"

"I am here," said Tom. "I am in a most unfortunate predicament—"

"Come down."

"I should be happy indeed to do so, I declare, but some individual has—"

"If you ain't down in one tick you'll get a thrashing!"

And the messenger disappeared, without waiting for Tom's explanation.

Tom was desperate. It was evidently necessary to go down, and there was nothing for it but to don the sack. He picked it up and shook it out. Two slits had been cut in the sides of it, evidently for a wearer's arms to pass through, and another in the bottom for his head. Tom turned the sack upside down and slipped it over his head.

Gore looked into the dormitory.

"Are you coming down, Merry, or is Mr. Quelch to come up for you?"

"Somebody's taken my clothes," said Tom.

"Ha, ha!"

"I believe it was you."

"Ha, ha!"

"I'll punch your head—"

"Well, come down in the sack; it suits you awfully well, Ha, ha!"

And Gore went away, roaring with laughter.

Tom's appearance was certainly comical. His head came out of the slit in the bottom of the sack, which hung on his shoulders. It came down as far as his knees.

"Well, I've got to go," said Tom to himself. "It's not my fault. Here goes!"

And he left the dormitory. He passed one or two people on the stairs, who stared at him in amazement, and burst out laughing. Then he reached the big hall where Clavering was now at breakfast.

The boys of the Shell were at a table next to the Fifth, and Mr. Quelch, their master, was at the head of it. He looked up as Tom came in. The next moment the hall shook with the yell of laughter that went up. Seniors and juniors joined in the shout. But Mr. Quelch frowned darkly.

"Merry!" he cried, as soon as he could make his voice heard. "Merry!"

"Yes, sir."

"What is the meaning of this—this masquerade?"

"I regret exceedingly, sir—"

"Explain yourself."

"Owing to an unfortunate—"

"Explain yourself instantly."

"How can I explain myself, sir, if you will not afford me an opportunity?" exclaimed Tom. "I had no desire to appear in this unusual and absurd attire, but—"

"Merry, go back to your dormitory immediately!"

"Yes, sir."

"Dress yourself properly, and return. I will deal with this flagrant piece of impertinence presently."

"But—"

"Go this instant."

"Permit me to explain—"

"Go!" roared the master of the shell; and he rose from his seat, with the intention of giving Tom a start.

Tom Merry did not wait for it. He scuttled out of the hall, and returned disconsolately to the dormitory. There he sat on his bed, resigning himself to the loss of his breakfast.

A quarter of an hour later Mr. Quelch looked in. He had a cane in his hand and a gleam in his eye.

"Now, Merry, I will deal with you. As you have not chosen to dress yourself, you can take your punishment minus your clothing, and I have no doubt that you will be sorry. Remove that sack."

Tom slipped off the sack. Mr. Quelch seized him by the shoulder, and gave him half a dozen stinging cuts, which he would certainly not have felt so keenly if he had been wearing his usual attire. Tom was hurt, and as indignant as he was hurt. It wasn't his fault that his clothes had been taken away; but the angry master would listen to no explanation.

"There!" said Mr. Quelch. "Now, dress yourself, and come down immediately. If you are not in your Form at the same time as the other boys, beware!"

"Well, I declare!" exclaimed Tom. "If I am to go into the Form I shall have to go in the sack, and then I shall be caned again. It is most unreasonable!"

It was evidently useless to stay in the dormitory, so he put the sack on again, and made his way to the class-room. A howl of laughter went through the shell at his appearance, which the master's presence could not restrain.

Mr. Quelch looked at Tom as if he could scarcely believe his eyes. His eyes followed Tom Merry as if he were mesmerised as the boy calmly marched in and took his place on a form.

"Merry," he gasped, at last, "this is—this is incredible!"

"If you had allowed me an opportunity, sir," said Tom, "I should have informed you that—"

"Silence! Step out here!"

"If it is your intention to inflict a second castigation, I protest—"

"Step out!" cried Mr. Quelch, in a voice of thunder.

Tom unwillingly rose from his seat. But at the same time Manners rose.

"If you please, sir, somebody's collared Merry's clothes," he said quickly. "His togs are not in the dormitory."

"Oh!" said Mr. Quelch. "Is that the case, Merry?"

"Yes, sir. I had no others there, and so—"

"Why did you not explain this before?"

"I endeavoured to do so, sir, but—"

"Go back to the dormitory, and wait there till some clothes are brought to you," said Mr. Quelch angrily.

Tom left the room.

"If I knew who had played this trick upon a new boy," said Mr. Quelch, "I should cane him severely. Manners, you can go and find some clothes for Merry."

Manners followed Tom. Gore sent a scowl after him. He thought Manners had spoiled an excellent joke by enlightening the master as to the true state of affairs.

When Tom Merry reappeared in the class-room he was clad in a beautifully-new velvet suit, with a pretty bow. Mr. Quelch frowned at the sight of him, but made no remark. Later in the day, Tom's purloined clothes turned up. They were found in a bundle outside one of the dormitory windows. But the practical joker was not discovered, although Tom had a pretty shrewd idea as to his identity.

CHAPTER 7. A Boundary Hit.

"NOW, then, stop that!" called out Monty Lowther.

It was the first lesson in cricket. Monty had not forgotten his promise. He took Tom down to the ground with him, and perhaps he regretted his generous offer a little when a howl of laughter greeted him and his protegee.

The Head had taken measures to have Tom supplied with a garb more suited to a boy in the shell at Clavering School, but that naturally would take some time, and so for the present Tom still appeared in the charming attire which was the delight of Miss Priscilla's eyes.

"I say, you do look a giddy guy, Merry," said Monty nervously. "Still, a promise is a promise. Come on, ass!"

And he took Tom under his wing. Tom was quite ignorant of the noble summer game, and the merest rudiments were Greek and Hebrew to him. A crowd of interested fellows gathered round to watch the course of instruction.

"Now, then, stop that!"

"That" was a cricket-ball which Monty tossed for Tom to catch, skillfully aiming it to plump on Tom's chest if he did not stop it. Tom stopped it—with his chest.

"Ha, ha!" howled Gore. "I envy you your pupil, Monty."

"Oh, you shut up!" said Lowther. "Who got a couple of duck's eggs against Redclyffe, eh?" Gore coloured.

"You needn't talk!" continued Lowther victoriously. "The new kid knows as much about cricket as you do, anyway. Now, Merry, I'm going to bowl you. If you get leg before wicket, I pity you."

Tom took the bat rather gingerly. "He doesn't know how to hold it," grinned Gore. "How should he?" said Jimson. "Let me show you, young 'un."

"Thank you very much," said Tom gratefully. "See, look," said Jimson. "You take hold of the broad end, so; then, when the ball comes you poke at it with the narrow end—so—just as if you were spearing salmon, you know. Yes, that's right."

Monty had gone to bowl, leaving Tom at the wicket, and so he did not hear this precious information given to his pupil. The boys, hugging themselves with mirth, stood round waiting for Tom to carry out Jimson's instructions. Tom, in the innocence of his heart, obeyed Jimson to the very letter.

"Over!" yelled Monty Lowther. Down came the ball. When Tom stepped quickly before the wicket, and thrust at the ball with the handle of the bat, Monty's face was a study.

"You ass!" he shouted. "What on earth are you doing?" Tom shouted, too—but with pain; for the ball had, of course, not been stopped by his novel method of batting, and it had cracked on his leg with considerable force.

"Leg before wicket!" chuckled Jimson. "You're out!"

The boys were screaming with laughter. Monty Lowther came running along the pitch. He glowered at poor Tom. "What do you mean by holding the bat like that, Merry? Are you off your rocker?"

"But Jimson told me—" "Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jimson. "He was only rotting," said Monty, grinning in spite of himself. "For goodness' sake take hold of the handle! Let me show you."

He gave Tom some instruction in holding the willow, adjured him to keep a straight bat, and then bowled to him again. Tom, a good deal to his own surprise, stopped the ball on the crease.

"Good!" said Lowther approvingly. "Oh, jolly good!" said Gore sarcastically. "Wish the captain were along now. He's sure to snap Merry up for the first eleven as soon as he sees his form."

The suggestion sent some of the boys into hysterics. Tom took no notice of Gore. Another ball came down from Monty, and Tom swiped at it, with all the vigour of a young beginner. He hit the ball, marvellously to relate, and the ball hit Gore, catching him on the chin.

"Ow!" roared the bully of the Shell, clapping his hands to his chin, and dancing about like a lunatic. "Ow, ow!"

The boys were still laughing, but Gore's antics were now the cause of their merriment. Tom made his politest bow to his injured enemy.

"I am truly sorry!" he exclaimed. "It is really not safe to stand so close to the wicket when I am batting."

"By Jove, he's right there!" muttered Manners; and he beat a prompt retreat.

Gore thought he had better do the same, and the rest of Tom's lesson passed without any further "chipping." At the end of it Monty Lowther expressed himself as upon the whole satisfied with him.

"You must practise every day," he said. "I'll put you up to all I know. You must watch others at practice, too, and see a good game whenever you get a chance; that's the way to improve your form. You'll want some flannels; I never saw such a guy as you look on a cricket-field in all my natural. And if you've got any tin you'd better invest in a bat of your own."

"Oh, I've plenty of money!" said Tom. "Miss Fawcett allows me as much as I like. She's very fond of me."

"I wish she were fond of me, then," said Monty. "Blessed if I don't make love to her when she comes to see you again! I never have enough money."

When afternoon school was over the lessons in the great game were continued, and Tom Merry proved himself a very apt pupil. Before very long he was able to wield the willow, and though his batting was clumsy, it was creditable to such a complete tyro. Monty gave some instruction in the mysteries of bowling, and as Tom was eager to learn he began to pick it up.

"Will you come down to the village with me and buy a bat?" Tom asked his new friends.

Manners and Lowther looked at one another.

"Will we, Monty?" said Manners.

Lowther coughed.

"Well, I don't want to speak unkindly, Merry," said Monty. "But if you'll excuse us we'll wait till you're dressed in a rather more civilised style."

"You see," said Manners, "not to put too fine a point on it, people might take you for a guy, and throw things at us."

"Dear me!" said Tom. "I shall be glad when I have the new clothes the Head has ordered for me; I shall, indeed."

"So shall we," said Manners. "The fellows have already nicknamed our study the 'nursery,' and it ain't nice."

Tom blushed. He had felt very satisfied at one time with his garments, but since coming to Clavering he had grown more and more uncomfortable in them. He was looking forward to the time when he would exchange them for the "common or garden" Etons.

"We shall have a practice match on to-morrow afternoon," Monty Lowther remarked. "You can look on, Merry. It's a half-holiday, you know. But we'll have time for half an hour at the nets, if you like, before it starts."

"Thanks awfully!" said Tom. "You fellows are very good to me."

"Oh, rats!" said Monty.

Tom looked forward to the following afternoon; but there is many a slip 'twixt cup and lip, as he was destined to discover. Herr Schneider had not forgotten his grudge against Tom, and that morning he took the Shell in German. He soon showed that he had a very keen eye on the new boy. Tom had a sort of smattering of German, but it was his weakest point. The Herr soon discovered that he had him at his mercy, and he did not spare him.

"Mein Gott!" said Herr Schneider, when he had worried Tom for about five minutes. "Tat poy is the stupidest tat nefer vas. You should be in the Lower Fourth, Merry, and not in the Shell at all."

"Yes, sir," said Tom; "Mr. Railton put me in the Shell, but I suppose he didn't know any better. Shall I tell him what you say, sir?"

Manners nearly exploded.

"Oh, my hat!" he murmured. "Old Schneider will have a fit, I think."

The German master had become almost purple in the face. "Merry, take feefy lines for impertinence!"

"Certainly, sir; but it was far from being my intention to be guilty of impertinence."

"Mein Gott! Hold your tongue! You talk too much."

"Yes, sir."

"You vas more stupid tan efer vas. You know noting. You vill go down to te bottom of te class. Take tat sentence again. 'Des grimmes unrecht ihr gethan.' If you cannot tell me te English of tat, I deal mit you severely after."

"I am afraid, sir, that I cannot satisfy you in this matter," said Tom politely. "My knowledge of German is not yet sufficiently extensive—"

"Silence! You cannot answer?"

"I regret that I am unable—"

"Enoff! You stay in dis afternoon, and in my stüdy I vill gif you some instruction."

"Impossible, sir," said Tom; "I am engaged already. I am very sorry, but I have promised to go down to the cricket-field."

The whole class giggled joyously. Herr Schneider rapped his desk with his cane.

"Silence!" he roared. "Merry, I vill deal mit you later. Tat impertinence passes all bounds. Manners, if you laugh vunce more I gif you feefy lines. You vill construe tat line instantly, sir. Speak!"

"You are committing a great injustice, sir," said Manners meekly.

"Vat?" roared the German; and he strode towards Manners.

"Well, you asked me," said Manners.

"I—I—" The German paused. Manners's rendering of the line was a passable one, and it was difficult to take exception to it, but he knew very well that Manners intended the remark for him personally. "I—hum! Ah, ve vill pass on."

He glowered at Manners, and passed on to the next boy.

The class were almost in hysterics trying not to laugh. The line the German master had chosen to puzzle Tom with had afforded Manners an excuse for being impertinent. Manners had certainly had the best of it, and the Shell were delighted. But Herr Schneider was not delighted. He was very angry, and his face was very flushed during the remainder of the lesson, and when he dismissed the class he reminded Tom of that appointment in his study.

"Must I go, Manners?" asked Tom, as they left the classroom.

Manners whistled.

"Well, I should say so. Sorry about that cricket practice. Never mind, we'll wake the old humbug up. He'll sit in his armchair reading his beastly old Deutch newspaper, while

you are sweating away at German. We'll see that he isn't allowed too much quiet."

When the boys were dispersing in various directions to spend the half-holiday, Tom Merry was tapped on the shoulder, and he found the German master at his side.

"Come mit me, Merry."

"Will you please let me off, sir?" said Tom meekly. "I really should like to go out and get some cricket practice."

"Certainly not! You need to learn Sherman more than you need to learn cricket, I suppose. You boys get too much time already before to do brute brutal cricket and football. You will come to my study."

And he marched Tom Merry off to his quarters. There he sat the new boy down at his table, opposite himself, and set him to work. The sun was shining in at the window, and the cheery voices of the birds came in from the old close. Far off sounded the schoolboys' shouts. Never had German seemed so dry and uninteresting to Tom Merry. Herr Schneider meant well; but, as a matter of fact, he was going the best way to work to make study laborious and distasteful.

"Now you will write," he said. "I will keep mein eye on you, while I read mit meinsel mein baper. Go on!"

"Yes, sir," said Tom heavily.

His pen scratched on the paper slowly and unwillingly. The German characters had never sprawled over an exercise in a more spider-leggy manner than they did now under Tom's reluctant pen. Herr Schneider, satisfied that he was teaching the new boy habits of industry, opened his German newspaper to read his news of the Vaterland.

The sun, shining in at the window, glimmered upon the bald spot on the top of his head, and Tom, whose attention soon flagged from his work, found himself watching that shiny spot. Herr Schneider looked up suddenly.

"Vy you nod work, Merry?"

Tom coloured.

"I—I was thinking, sir."

"Hein! And vat were you tinkin' about?"

"Nothing in particular," stammered Tom.

The German gave him a sharp look.

"Indeed! Answer my question immediately!"

"I was thinking—er—"

"Go on!"

"Well, sir, I was thinking how funny that bald spot on the top of your head looks, with the sun on it!" said Tom, with candid simplicity.

The German seemed about to choke. Every morning he spent five minutes before the glass arranging his scanty locks to cover up that tell-tale spot, and he had flattered himself that it was really not very noticeable.

"You—you—you go on mit your writing!"

Tom's pen scratched away. The German breathed hard. There was a sudden roar outside the window. The strains of a song floated in:

"Schneider, Schneider,

Oh, Schneider, how you vas?"

Tom giggled. The German master sprang to his feet, and rushed to the window and threw it up. The song came in then with a roar:

"Oh, Schneider, how you vas?"

Herr Schneider shook his fist at Manners, Lowther, and a dozen boys of the Shell, who were singing at the top of their voices, apparently oblivious of him.

"Poy, go away immediately!"

"Hallo!" said Manners, in an injured tone. "Mustn't we sing in the close, sir?"

"No!" roared the Herr. "Go away, or I come down mit myself after!"

"Oh, very good, sir; but I think it very hard that we must not practise singing in the open air. It's awfully good for the voice."

"Manners, I vill—"

"All right, sir; we're off!"

And the heroes of the Shell marched away, grinning. The German slammed down the window, and went back to his seat. Tom was grinning, but his face instantly became grave as Herr Schneider glared at him.

But there was no peace for the Herr yet. The singing-party had been got rid of, but a game of cricket commenced as near to his window as Manners dared; and the boys of the Shell, entering into the spirit of the thing, cheered and shouted themselves hoarse. The German opened his window again.

"If you make so much noise I vill stop you mit tat game!" he shouted. "Go further away!"

"Oh, hang it!" said Manners. "Some people are never satisfied. I don't see why we should shift our pitch to please

that unreasonable old bouncer. I shouldn't wonder if a ball were to go through his window, chaps!"

"Oh, I say!" said Monty.

"I don't say it will; but his window is now in the line of fire, isn't it? And accidents will happen in the best-regulated cricket matches."

Tom Merry, considerably comforted by the kind efforts of his Form-fellows to avenge his detention, pursued his task. His pen seemed to crawl, but every now and then the German's twinkling eyes looked up from his paper, and then it travelled a little faster.

Suddenly there was a terrific crash. The German gave a jump as if he were electrified, and even Tom started. There was a splintering of glass, as a cricket-ball smashed through the window, and the German master started to his feet. He was in a direct line with the window, and the moment was unfortunate. The ball would have passed over his head. He rose just in time to stop it—with his head!

There was a bellow in the study not unlike that of an angry bull. The ball came off the German's head and dropped on the inkpot, scattering ink in all directions, and then, as if satisfied with what it had done, rolled into a corner.

Herr Schneider clapped both hands to his head, and danced about the room like an inmate of Colney Hatch.

"Ach!" he roared. Mein head; it is broken!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom. "That's a boundary to us, anyway!"

"Mein Gott! Mein head—mein head! Mein Gott!"

There came a sweet and gentle voice from below the window:

"If you please, sir, would you mind giving us our ball?"

It was the last straw. The German master caught up a cane, and dashed out of the study to visit summary vengeance upon the cricketers.

As he sprinted along, with his left hand clasped to his head and the cane brandished in his right, he excited amazement and mirth, and a yell of laughter greeted him in the close; but the cricketers ran as they laughed. Herr Schneider was not safe just then at close quarters, and that game of cricket proved an unfinished match.

Meanwhile, Tom, thinking it scarcely prudent to wait for the Herr's return in his present mood, hastened to leave the study, and when Herr Schneider returned, his vengeance unsatisfied and simmering with fury, Tom Merry had vanished.

CHAPTER 8.

The Feast that Didn't Come Off.

"WELL, you look a bit more like a Christian now!" exclaimed Manners.

Tom Merry had just entered the study, arrayed in the new Etons that had been provided by the care of Mr. Railton. The velvet suit and the big bow were gone for ever. Tom's appearance was indeed changed.

Instead of looking like an overgrown child, he now looked what he was—a handsome, sturdy, well-set-up lad of fifteen.

"Yes, by Jove, he's clothed, and in his right mind at last!" said Monty Lowther, eyeing Tom critically. "I don't mind coming with you to buy that bat now, Merry."

"Thank you!" said Tom. "But I don't know whether Miss Fawcett will like it when she sees the change."

"Oh, she's bound to," said Manners. "Anyway, we like it better, and that's the great point, isn't it, Monty?"

"Just so," said Monty. "By the way, Merry, there's a letter for you. Lady's handwriting, too, if I'm not mistaken."

Tom took up the letter. He recognised Miss Priscilla's hand at once.

"It's from nurse," he explained.

"My hat! Nice big boy you are to have a nurse!"

"Well, she has my nurse, you know, and I still call her nurse," said Tom; "but I'll read the letter, if you will excuse me."

"Will we excuse him, Monty?" giggled Manners.

"We will," said Monty.

Tom slit open the letter, and read it. It was a long letter, and we need not reproduce it all here. It expressed Miss Priscilla's anxiety at his passing from her care into that of indifferent strangers, and impressed upon him the necessity of keeping his feet dry, and never neglecting his chest. It contained valuable hints about socks and flannel vests; but at the end was a piece of information which Tom valued more than all the rest.

"I am sending you a little parcel, my dear boy, containing things I believe very necessary to you; and you will receive it soon after this letter. Write and tell me how you are getting on, and acknowledge the parcel. I have packed it very carefully."

Tom read that portion of the letter aloud. "Containing things necessary to you!" said Manners, with a lively recollection of the feast in the box-room. "That must be the grub, of course?"

"I suppose so," assented Tom. "The old lady knows how to pack a hamper," said Monty Lowther, with a reminiscent smack of the lips. "I intend to be on hand when that parcel arrives."

"I, too!" exclaimed Manners. "Merry is a jolly good fellow, and he wouldn't want to keep a feed to himself."

"Hardly," said generous Tom. "I'm more than willing to share out to the study, and to any of the fellows who like to come in."

"That's the right sort! How big do you think the supply will be? It depends upon that, you know, how many fellows we invite."

"Well, Miss Fawcett isn't mean," said Tom. "There's bound to be plenty."

"Well, we want to be sure to have enough to go round," Manners remarked cautiously. "We won't have a big party like that one in the box-room. No sense in having all the tommy scoffed up in a couple of minutes. Suppose we have us three, and Jimson, and Steele, and Harris. Gore, too, as he belongs to the study."

"All serene!" said Tom.

A week ago he would have said, "I approve of your suggestion," so it will be seen that his education was progressing.

"That letter's been here some time," remarked Monty Lowther. "I shouldn't wonder if the hamper was at the porter's lodge already. Lazy old Tibbs won't carry it up till you hunt him. You and Manners go and get it, while I call the chaps in."

"Good idea!" said Manners.

The idea was acted upon. Monty went to call together the feasters, while Tom Merry and Manners hastened to the porter's lodge to claim the consignment. They found old Tibbs there, in a crusty temper, as usual, and the parcel for Master Merry proved to have arrived.

"Hand it over!" said Tom. "We're going to carry it in, Tibbs, to save you the trouble. You might look a little grateful."

"I shall have to take it in to the 'Ead fust," said Tibbs, "to see if it contains any syrupstittious grub."

"It contains what?"

"Syrupstittious grub. Clever kid you are, not to know what syrupstittious means!" sneered the porter.

"Never came across the word," said Tom.

Manners giggled.

"He means surreptitious," he said. "Don't you, Tibbs?"

"I said syrupstittious," said Tibbs obstinately, "and I mean syrupstittious; and you don't ave that parcel till it's passed the 'Ead!"

"But, I say, Tibbs—"

"Get along with you!"

"All right. I was only wondering if this shilling would be any good to you. Might get you some of that stuff, you know, that the doctor orders for your rheumatism."

Tibbs's eyes glistened.

"Thank you kindly, Master Manners!" he said, taking the shilling. "If that there parcel is took while my back is turned, I may not notice it, and I may forget to mention it to the 'Ead. My memory ain't what it was."

He forthwith turned his back, and the boys picked up the parcel and took it away. It was not quite so big as Tom expected—still, it was large enough to contain a feed for seven, closely packed.

"I say," said Tom, whose heart was very tender, "can't Tibbs really afford to buy what the doctor orders for his rheumatism?"

"Oh, you innocent!" grinned Manners. "He hasn't got rheumatism any more than I have. That's a fancy name he has for rum."

"Oh!" said Tom.

They reached the study. Monty Lowther was there, with Gore and Harris and Steele and Jimson. They were sitting round the table, looking expectant. Some of them had brought their own cutlery, and Jimson had provided a couple of plates, and Steele a dish. All was ready for the feed.

"So you're back," said Jimson. "Haven't you opened the giddy thing? Here's a knife, Merry; cut the string."

"And buck up," said Harris; "I'm jolly hungry. That was a good spread in the box-room, and if the kind old soul has sent you another like that, we'll bless her. The parcel ain't a big one, though. Why didn't she send a hamper while she was about it?"

Tom cut the string. Then he opened the parcel. It was wrapped very carefully, and he took off half a dozen layers of brown paper without coming to the contents. The guests began to look impatient.

"My hat!" said Harris, who was evidently disposed to be

critical. "There won't be much of a feed, I fancy, when you do come to it!"

"Oh, shut up!" said Manners politely.

"Well, let's see what it is, anyway."

Tom went on unpacking. More rolls of paper, till at last something which looked like flannel came into view. He looked rather dismayed as he unfolded it, and revealed a chest-protector.

"Are we to eat that?" demanded Harris sarcastically.

Tom laid it down, and went on. The next thing that came to light was a bottle, and he began to hope; but his hopes were shattered as he read the label. The whole party in the study read it, too, with a howl of indignation.

"Cod liver oil!"

The words were repeated in every variety of tone:

"Cod liver oil!"

"My only maiden aunt Selina! Cod liver oil!"

"Are we to drink that?" demanded Harris.

Tom, in desperation, dragged out the remaining articles in that fatal parcel. A really well-knitted comforter, and other articles of the same description, lay on the table, and he added to them a packet of cough lozenges, a rubber hot water bottle, and a bottle of a wonderful medicine in which Miss Priscilla believed implicitly, and which the manufacturer claimed would cure all the diseases under the sun.

Tom gazed at the collection on the table, and the disappointed feasters gazed at Tom. Harris rose to his feet, and gathered up his knife and fork. He looked inclined to stick both of them somewhere in Tom's person.

"I say, I'm awfully sorry, you chaps!" said Tom, colouring to the roots of his hair. "Of course, I didn't know—"

"I should think you didn't," said Harris, with emphasis. "Suppose we scrag him, chaps, and pour his blooming cod liver oil down his throat?"

"Jolly good idea," said Steele; "and we'll make him eat all the giddy cough lozenges!"

"No, you won't," said Manners. "It's a ghastly frost, but he meant well. Sorry the feast is off, chaps. Good-bye!"

Manners and Monty Lowther sided up with Tom, and the disappointed guests abandoned their design. They marched indignantly to the door.

"The next time you ask me to feed, Spooney," said Steele, "I'll knock your head against the wall!"

"And I'll jump on your neck!" said Harris.

"And I'll dot you on the nose!" exclaimed Jimson.

"Oh, I say!" said Tom. "I'm awfully sorry. I'll get feed and—"

"Yah!"

And the indignant boys marched out of the study, and Gore followed them, and slammed the door. Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther looked at one another.

"I'm sorry!" said Tom.

"It can't be helped," said Manners, with an effort; "a pity we invited the chaps. It's all right, Merry; we'll look over it!"

And this generous forgiveness quite touched Tom Merry. He determined that he would make up for that lost feast as soon as he could.

"What shall be done with this stuff?" he asked.

"Do as your respected nurse wishes," replied Manners.

"Eat the cough lozenges, drink the cod liver oil, and stick the giddy chest-protector on your manly chest. Come on, Monty."

And they left the study, leaving Tom alone with his undesired possessions. He wrapped them up again, carried the parcel out, and hurled it over the wall; and what became of Miss Priscilla's well-meant gifts after that he never knew.

CHAPTER 9.

A Surprise For Miss Priscilla.

TOMMY—my dearest Tommy!" It was a half-holiday again, and Tom, arrayed in spotless flannels, was going down to the cricket field with Manners and Monty Lowther, when the voice of Miss Priscilla suddenly fell upon his ears.

"Hallo, here's the old lady!" muttered Manners. "Bunk, Tom!"

But Tom, though he felt inclined to take his friend's advice, could not find it in his heart to treat the dear old soul with such contumely. He turned towards Miss Fawcett, and doffed his cap in the politest way.

"How do you do, nurse?" he asked.

A crowd of boys immediately gathered to watch the interview, which promised to be a peculiar one. Miss Priscilla's eyes nearly started from her head as she looked at Tom.

"Tommy," she said faintly, "what are you wearing those strange garments for?"

"Flannels?" said Tom. "I'm going to play cricket."
Miss Priscilla shrieked.
"My dearest boy! Suppose the ball should strike you? Suppose you should over-exert yourself? My dear child, I entreat you—"

Tom turned as red as fire. The giggle that went round the group of interested boys did not add to his comfort.

"I'm all right, nurse," he said. "Don't make a fuss. Cricket's a jolly good game. It ain't rough, and only silly asses run it down!"

"What an expression! Where did you learn that?"

"Oh, I suppose I picked it up. Will you come and see the match. It's only a practice match, you know, but Manners is putting me up to some wrinkles—"

"Some what?"

"Tips," said Tom. "Points, you know. Allow me to introduce Manners. Manners—Miss Fawcett. Hallo, what are you up to now?"

Miss Priscilla had seized him, and was unbuttoning his shirt in the neck.

She only wanted to sound his chest, but Tom looked as if he thought she was going to bite him.

"I say, back-pedal!" cried Tom.

The boys were shrieking.

"My dear Tommy"

"Back - pedal!"

howled Tom, jerking himself free.

"My beastly chest is all right."

"Your — your what? Oh, my child — my child — you never used such expressions as that at Laurel Villa, at dear old Huckleberry Heath!"

"I've had some sense knocked into me since then!" said Tom. "I fancy I was a giddy guy at Laurel Villa, though I wasn't aware of it, and thought myself all there and all serene! None of that rot at Clavering, you know!"

"My goodness gracious!"

"This is a jolly place," said Tom.

"The Head's a brick, and the masters are all the proper sort of thing, except old Schneider, and he's a cough-drop; but won't you come and see the match?"

Miss Priscilla was so overcome by Tom's new and unexpected flow of language that she submitted to being led away without a word.

Tom, who, though he had changed a great deal, had lost none of his politeness, found her a seat, and sat her down to watch the cricket. It was only a practice match between two teams belonging to the Shell, but it showed how much Tom had learned since coming to Clavering College.

He batted and bowled quite respectably, and though Miss Priscilla trembled whenever the ball was bowled to Tom, she gradually became reassured as she saw that he was not, after all, hit by it, and that there seemed to be really no danger of his getting an arm or a leg broken. And when Tom made a boundary hit, and the boys gave him a cheer, she felt something like pride in his performance, and realised that cricket was not the idiotic and useless game she had deemed it. The healthy, happy faces and cheery voices of the cricketers could not fail to impress her. But after the game, she had another shock when Tom had changed, and he came to rejoin her in his school clothes.

"Tommy, where are your own clothes?"

"Gone!" said Tommy, with much satisfaction. "Manners and Monty and I made a bonfire of them in a corner of the close, and there isn't a cinder left!"

"My dear child, your sweet-sweet velvet suit, and that lovely bow—"

"Ye-es," said Tom; "but I'm not a kid of seven, you know. I was chipped nearly to my death before I got rid of those silly togs."

"Those wh—wh—what?" gasped Miss Priscilla faintly.

"My old duds!" explained Tom.

"You— you never talked slang at Laurel Villa."

"No," said Tom cheerfully. "We live and learn, don't we?"

"My sweet Tommy—"

"Oh, rats!" said her sweet Tommy. "I wish you'd call me Tom. If any of the chaps heard you, I should be sweet Tommy for the rest of my life."

"I—I will take you home with me if you wish, and—"

"That you won't!" said Tommy promptly. "I'm a Clavering chap now, and I like it. I'm jolly proud of it, too."

Miss Priscilla changed the subject.

"Did you take the cod liver oil I sent you, Tommy?" she asked, with tender solicitude.

"Ye-es," said Tom; "I took it out into the close, and shied it over the wall!"

"Tommy?"

"Jolly good rid-dance to it, too, nurse!"

"But—the cough lozenges—"

"They went along with the chest-protector; and the chest-protector went along with the comforter; and the comforter went along with the cod liver oil!"

"Oh, Tommy— Tommy!"

"My dear nurse," said Tom, kissing her on the cheek,

"you don't know anything about boys. I don't want to be coddled. I can see now what an ass I might have grown. You got me into a nice pickle with that cod liver oil."

"How, Tommy?"

Tom explained about the intended feast, and the frost it had ended in.

"The least you can do now," he said, "is to stand a feed to the whole of the Shell. The Head would give his permission if you asked him, and it would be ripping."

"It would be what?"

"Ripping—spiffing, you know!" explained Tom. "I owe the chaps some compensation. You'll stand the feed, won't you?"

And Miss Priscilla, who was so amazed by the change in Tom that she hardly knew whether she was awake or dreaming, consented. The Head's permission was obtained, and Manners and Monty Lowther gave expert advice as to the purchase of the provisions. All Miss Priscilla had to do was to find the cash, which she cheerfully did. She was even prevailed upon to join the honourable company of the Shell at the table, and join in the feast, and it passed off splendidly. The boys voted Tom a brick, and Miss Priscilla another. And when Miss Priscilla finally left the school, she was persuaded that she had not, after all, made a mistake in sending Tom Merry to Clavering College.

(Another Tale dealing with Tom Merry soon Meanwhile, please note that next Thursday's GEM will contain a splendid extra long, complete Adventure Story by Lewis Bird.)

NEXT THURSDAY'S COVER



THRILLING I

FASCINATING I

Here is a small reproduction of the cover of "The Gem" Library, No. 4, which will contain an extra long, complete tale of mystery and adventure in the depths of the Amazonian Forest, entitled "A Secret Quest," by Lewis Bird.

NEW READERS CAN START READING THIS TALE NOW!



Stormpoint

A School Tale. By MAURICE MERRIMAN.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Rex Allingham, a typical British schoolboy, kicks the winning goal for Stormpoint College in an important match, and so gets in favour of Hal Trehearn, the captain of the school. But Jardon, a Fifth Former noted for his strength, bullies Rex, and under the pretence of asking him to make some toast gets him into his study and bullies him. Rex, with his two chums, Jim and Bob, break bounds one night and row out to sea to fish. They have plenty of sport, and light a fire in a small stove to cook their "catch." (Now go on with the story.)

"Bob Burns!"

Bob had just got the frying-pan full of boiling fat when a big sea caught the boat. Jim received the frying-pan in his lap, and, uttering a wild yell, he leapt to his feet, kicking over the stove, and very nearly knocking Rex overboard. As for Bob, the contents of the stove shot into his chest, and he went bounding forward, sprawling over Rex in his wild career.

"Are you chaps trying to play Rugby?" inquired Rex, picking himself up, and gazing calmly at the two worthies, who were dancing about in the most extraordinary manner. "Or are you only inventing some new sort of dance?"

"I've got a quart of scalding fat all down my chest!" observed Jim.

"And I've got a painfull of fire in my lap!" growled Bob.

"It was hot, too, I can tell you!"

"Fire very often is!" observed Rex. "But look here, Bob, that ignited lard is setting the boat on fire!"

"Phew! There's no danger!" groaned Bob. "Only pain."

"There's a good deal of that, too," observed Jim. "I don't know whether I have got my half-share, but it seems to me that I have got a good three-quarters of the bodily suffering."

"You may be right, my dear Bob, about there being no danger," observed Rex, "but if you were to ask my opinion I should say it was not so thumping safe. Ha, ha, ha! The seat is blazing up now!"

"The wind will blow it out directly," growled Bob. "I'm smouldering myself, but I shall go out—at least, I hope so."

"You are more sanguine than that skipper I was talking about," exclaimed Rex, trying to stamp out the fire, and burning his trousers considerably. "I believe old Ford must have tarred this boat inside as well as out." (Ford was the owner of the boat.)

"Look here, Jim, the sooner we get ashore the better. You know Bob is a bit risky. Up anchor. If it is so easy to put out that fire, Bob, just you start about it, and the sooner the better. Can't you get the anchor up, Jim?"

"No; I believe the beastly thing has got hitched on a rock."

"Cut the cable, old chap. I wish you would attend to that fire, Bob."

"It's getting on all right without my attention," growled Bob. "I keep saying I'm burnt."

"You will be worse burnt if you don't put that fire out."

Bob took the bailer, and slopped some water on the flames, and he soon got it out, although the boat was not improved in appearance by the time he had succeeded. Rex and Jim were now rowing for the shore, and the boat was leaping over the waves in rather a startling manner. In a very few minutes the chums were drenched with spray. Jim said it was cooling to his burns, and Rex declared that in his present condition it seemed to him that burns must be rather nice on such a night.

Jim set a very quick stroke, but Rex responded, and so the boat ran towards the shore.

Suddenly there was a crash that caused Rex to tumble backwards over the seat, and bang his head on the floorboards of the boat, while he gave Jim a kick at the back of the head that sent him into Bob's lap. Up went the boat on a big wave, then down it came with a second crash upon the rocks. It went up no more, for the simple reason that there was a six-foot square hole in her bottom, and the next wave rolled her over, while the three fishermen were struggling in the water.

If any of my readers have been scholars at Stormpoint they will remember that it is compulsory every boy shall learn to swim. The three in question could swim like ducks. The short distance to the shore was nothing to them. They merely stuck together, and Rex observed that he was afraid they would get wet. At any rate, they gained the shore, if not in safety, at any rate, in security.

"It has cooled my burns," said Bob.

"Bob Burns!" murmured Jim. "He is getting poetical!"

"Oh, dry up!" growled Rex.

"I wish I could, old chap! I'm as wet as washed oysters, and as cold as compressed air! I believe I could freeze all the fish in Billingsgate; and, talking of Billingsgate, what will Ford say?"

"I paid him three bob for the hire of his boat," observed Bob.

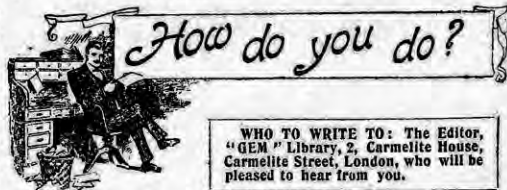
"Keerect!" exclaimed Rex. "You've had your three bob's worth."

"If he gets his anchor again it will be by a fluke," said Jim.

"If he gets his boat," said Rex, "I reckon she will float about as well as his anchor."

"You think he will hanker after his boat, then?" inquired Jim.

(To be continued in next Thursday's "Gem." Order it in advance.)



Here is a number! Crammed full of good reading matter to the last inch!

I don't expect you will quarrel with this, though, for you will appreciate my design in giving you as much for your money as I can possibly get into sixteen pages.

I have only just room to say "How Do You Do?" and remind you to send me a postcard stating what you think of this issue; and I also want to ask you to comply with my notice on page 3 of the cover.

Trusting to meet you again next Thursday,

THE EDITOR.

P.S.—The long, complete tale in our next issue will be "A Secret Quest."

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