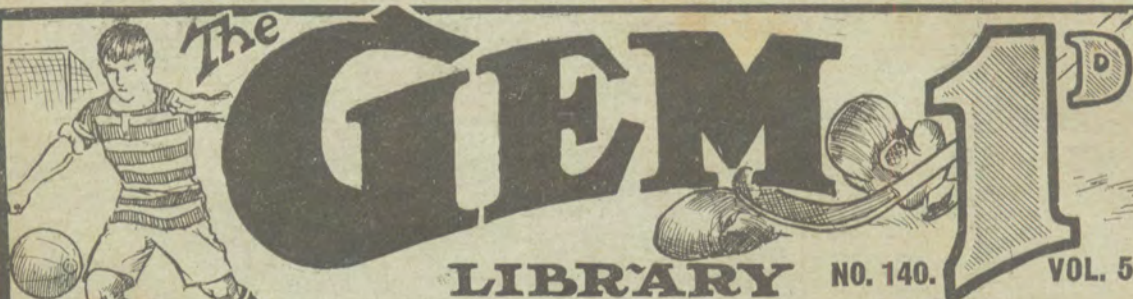


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THE RUGGER FOURTH.A Splendid, Long, Complete School Tale of
TOM MERRY & CO. at ST. JIM'S,By **MARTIN CLIFFORD.**

CHAPTER 1.

A Stormy Committee Meeting.

"Of course not!" said Tom Merry, somewhat warmly.

And Manners and Lowther, who always backed up their chum, right or wrong, without stopping to reflect about rights or wrongs, as a matter of fact, chimed in:

"Of course not! Of course not, indeed!"

"But—" said Jack Blake. Tom Merry made a gesture of finality.

"Of course not, Blake!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy

"Of course not, D'Arcy."

"Oh, hang it!" said Figgins. "I don't see—"

"Of course not, Figgins!"

And Tom Merry sat down.

There was a loud murmur in the room. It was the club-room of the Merry Hobby Society, on the ground floor of the School House, but it was being used for a meeting of the committee of the Junior Football Club. And that meeting looked like being a warm and excited one.

In the Junior Football Club all the footballers of the Lower School were enrolled—all, that is, who belonged to the Shell and the Fourth Form. Lower than the Fourth the "Infants" had infantile clubs of their own, which they were conceited enough to think quite as good as the Junior Club.

Fellows of both Houses belonged to the Junior Football Club. Tom Merry, of the Shell, a School House fellow, was junior captain, but after Tom Merry the best forward in the team was Figgins, of the New House, and the inimitable goalkeeper was Fatty Wynn, also of the New House. In football matters the juniors of St. Jim's allowed to sink the rivalry which existed between the two Houses.

It was not a House dispute that was on now, though that was not of infrequent occurrence at committee meetings. It was a matter in which the Shell fellows did not agree with the



Tom Merry held up the contents of the parcel. It was a single feather, a white feather! The juniors looked at it in grim silence. (See Page 6.)

Fourth-Formers, and it looked like finishing up with a Form row.

Tom Merry was quite pink, and Jack Blake was very red. Even Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the Fourth, who generally cultivated that repose which is said to stamp the caste of Vere de Vere, was looking excited, and his eyeglass was continually dropping out of his eye, and once, in his excitement, he had jammed it into his left eye by mistake.

There was a moment's pause after Tom Merry had sat down.

Manners took advantage of it to add, more emphatically:

"Of course not!"

Jack Blake snorted.

"Of course not!" said

Monty Lowther defiantly.

"Rats! Bosh!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said

D'Arcy. "Wats! Wubbish!"

"Rot!" said Digby and

Herries of the Fourth, speaking with one voice.

"I don't see it," said Harry

"I agree with Tom Merry.

Noble, otherwise Kangaroo. What I say is—

"Piffle!" said Blake.

"Look here, Blake—"

"Bosh!"

"If you want a thick ear—" began the Cornstalk junior warmly.

"I want all you can give me!" said Blake promptly.

"Then I'll jolly well—"

"Hold on!" exclaimed Tom Merry, pushing back the excited Cornstalk. "Don't have any rows in committee.

Look here—"

"I think—"

"Weally—"

"Let's discuss it calmly," said Tom Merry, who did not look very calm. "You will admit that you've been talking rot—"

A DOUBLE-LENGTH TALE OF TOM MERRY NEXT THURSDAY.

"Wats!"

"You've been talking piffle!" said Blake. "You want St. Jim's to back down—"

"I don't!"

"Yes, you do! Back down before a team like Tipton!" exclaimed Blake indignantly. "Why, I tell you—"

"I tell you—"

"Don't you interrupt me, Tom Merry!"

"Wathah not! I wegard it as most ungentlemanly to nteuwupt a gentleman while that gentleman is makin' wemarks!"

"Cheeso it, Gussy!"

"Lowthah—"

"Ring off!"

"I wefuse to wing off! I wegard you as a wottah, Lowthah—a wank outsidah! I have a great mind to thwash you!"

"Rats!"

"If you say wats to me—"

"Well, I do, and many of them!"

"Bai Jove—"

"Order!" roared Manners. "Order!"

"Shut up, Manners!"

"Rats!"

"Hold Gussy, somebody—he'll get hurt!"

"Weally, you know—"

"I want to speak of this matter cahuly," roared Jack Blake. "Do you hear, you frabjous fat-heads? This matter has got to be talked over quietly and calmly."

"It's settled—"

"Ass!"

"Chump!"

"We're not going to play Tipton—"

"We are!"

"We're not!"

"Ass!" shrieked Tom Merry. "Chump! Fat-head! Why can't you be quiet and calm about it, and talk it over civilly like I'm doing?"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"We're not going to play Tipton—"

"We are!"

"We don't play Rugger—"

"We can learn."

"Bosh! Not in the time."

"Most of us have played Rugger before."

"Yes, but—"

"We can play it again."

"Yaas, wathah, and lick those Tipton wottahs, you know! Yaas, I wathah think so!"

"Chump!"

"I wefuse to be chawactewised as a chump! I—"

"I wish you'd wefuse to be one—"

"I wefuse to wefuse—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you know—"

"The meeting's over!" said Tom Merry, bawling to make his voice heard. "We don't play Tipton! Of course not! That settles it!"

"Of course not!" said Manners and Lowther.

"Rats!"

"Look here—"

"Bosh!"

"Yaas, and wubbish!"

"I'll jolly well—"

"No, you won't—"

"Go for those blessed Shellfish! Hurrah!"

"You Fourth-Form kids—"

"Hurrah! Sock it to 'em!" roared Blake, who was completely beside himself with excitement by this time. "Chuck 'em out!"

"Back up, you chaps!"

The next moment the junior football committee of St. Jim's had resolved itself, apparently, into a junior prize-fighting committee. There was a wild and whirling tussle, and chairs and the table went flying.

Trampling feet, and bumping bodies, and gasping breath, and loud war-cries made a terrific din.

The juniors had quite forgotten that the club-room was near the prefects' and the masters' studies, and that the terrific uproar could not possibly pass unheard.

In the midst of the deafening din the door opened.

Mr. Railton, the House-master of the School House, appeared upon the threshold. He had a cane in his hand, and a frown upon his face.

"Boys!"

"Bai Jove! It's Wailton!"

"Cave!"

And the uproar ceased, and the juniors stood gasping and dishevelled and sheepish under the frowning eyes of the House-master.

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CHAPTER 2.

Catching It.

"B AI Jove!"

That exclamation of D'Arcy's was all that was heard in the sudden silence that fell upon the juniors.

Mr. Railton surveyed them grimly.

They did not present a pleasing spectacle. Noses were swollen and streaming, collars were torn out, neckties hanging loose, hair rumpled and ruffled.

And the whole party looked extremely sheepish. They realised that they did not cut anything like an imposing figure in the House-master's eyes.

"Well?" said Mr. Railton.

That monosyllable did not seem to call for any special reply, and no one answered.

"Well?" repeated the House-master. "What does this mean?"

Tom Merry was called upon to reply as junior captain, but he hesitated. Herries nudged him.

"Go ahead, Tom Merry!"

"Ahem—"

"Pewwaps I had bettah explain," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy thoughtfully. "I could put it bettah to Mr. Wailton, pewwaps. You see, sir—"

"I'll explain—"

"Pway don't intewwupt me, Tom Mewwy—"

"You see, sir—"

"You see, sir—"

"One at a time, please," said Mr. Railton. "You first, Merry."

"Weally, sir—"

"Go on, Merry."

"Certainly, sir. You—you see, we—we've held a meeting, sir, and—and discussed football subjects, that's all, sir."

The ghost of a smile glided over Mr. Railton's face.

"Do you usually hold your meetings in this way, Merry?" he asked.

"Yes, sir—I—I mean no, sir. Very seldom, sir."

"Football is, I believe, a very interesting topic," said Mr. Railton, "but even a football discussion should be kept within bounds. You have been making a terrific noise."

"We are sorry, sir," said Tom Merry meekly.

"Yaas, wathah, sir! We're sowwy," said D'Arcy. "On behalf of the Fourth-Formahs pwsent, sir, I beg to tendah an apology for havin' disturbed you."

"Chuck it, Gussy, you ass!" came in a stage whisper.

"Weally, Blake—"

"We're all sorry, sir," said Figgins. "We didn't realise—"

"That these Shell chaps were making so much row," said Digby.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We were only trying to point out reason to these Fourth-Form chaps, sir," said Tom Merry. "But—"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Oh, ring off, Gussy!"

"I wefuse to wing off! I—"

"Ahem!" said Mr. Railton. "You have made a great disturbance. I have had complaints from all along the passage. I shall not take it upon myself to decide who was to blame. As you were all equally concerned, I shall cane you all."

"Oh!"

"Weally, sir—"

"You will leave the room one at a time, and hold out your hands," said Mr. Railton.

"Oh, sir!"

"You first, Merry."

Tom Merry made a grimace, and obeyed. As he passed the doorway he held out his hand, and received a cut upon it that made him gasp.

Then followed Blake, and received the same, and D'Arcy, and the rest, till the file of juniors had passed, and they went down the passage, sucking or squeezing their right hands.

Mr. Railton turned out the gas, and closed the club-room door, before he went away.

The meeting was evidently over for that evening.

At the end of the passage a wrathful group gathered.

"Ow!" murmured Digby, sucking his palm. "How that chap can lay it on! I think House-masters ought to be forbidden to exercise with Indian clubs."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It was all Tom Merry's fault, of course?" said Blake.

"Oh, of course!"

"Bosh!" said Tom Merry.

"Howling bosh!" said Monty Lowther and Manners.

"Shrieking bosh!" said Kangaroo.

"Look here—"

"Oh, ring off!"

"YORKSHIRE CRIT."

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"THE BOYS' FRIEND." 1^D.

"I agree with Blake," exclaimed Figgins warmly.

"I—"

"Hear, hear!" said Kerr.

"Of course, you Fourth-Form kids hang together," said Lowther. "Now, I consider you all a set of duffers!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"I was thinking—" began Fatty Wynn.

"Oh, don't you begin to think, Fatty!" urged Manners.

"I was thinking that we might as well adjourn the meeting," said Fatty, undisturbed. "I left some potatoes to bake by the fire in the study, and I think they'll be done by this time."

"About time you kids were done, too," said Manners. "Isn't Tom Merry captain of the footer team, I want to know? Isn't it his business to decide whether we play Tipton or not?"

"Yes; but—"

"There are no buts in the matter."

"But—"

"Rats!"

"Look here—"

"Railton's left his study door open," said Kangaroo warningly. "No good beginning again here. We'll have him down on us like a sack of coke."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, I'm sorry you chaps won't listen to reason," said Tom Merry. "I'm sure I've tried to make you."

"I tell you—"

"It wouldn't do to play Tipton. They play Rugby, and we don't. I know we have played a Rugby match once, and won it, but we had the assistance of seniors, and we were lucky to win—and it wasn't a very strong team we were opposing, either. It's different with the Tipton lot."

"But we can't refuse a challenge—"

"Yes, we can."

"They'll crow at us."

"Let 'em."

"That's all very well, but—"

"But I'm jolly well going to look after those potatoes!" said Fatty Wynn. "They'll be overdone."

And the Falstaff of the New House started off, and Figgins and Kerr, after a moment's hesitation, followed him. The Terrible Three and Kangaroo went upstairs to the Shell studies. The chums of Study No. 6—Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy—were left alone. They looked at one another grimly.

"Well, what do you say?" demanded Blake.

"It's wotten!"

"Yes, rather," said Digby; "but I suppose we can't accept the challenge if Tom Merry decides not."

"I suppose not."

"But it's wotten!"

"I think we ought to play them," said Blake.

And then the subject dropped, as the Fourth-Formers moved away to repair damages. Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther were putting themselves tidy in their study. Now that the excitement of the argument and the combat were over, Tom Merry was looking extremely thoughtful.

"Of course, we can't play the Tiptons," he remarked, looking at his chums.

But Manners and Lowther were silent. In the committee-room they had backed up their leader loyally, as in duty bound; but their faces wore a different expression in their own room.

"You don't agree with Blake, do you?" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Well, you see—" began Monty Lowther cautiously.

"We can't play Tipton."

"But—"

"They would walk over us as easily as anything, and then they'd crow; and, besides, we should look a set of fools for accepting a challenge to a game we don't play, if we were licked."

"Yes; but—"

"Hang it all!" exclaimed Tom Merry warmly. "You were backing me up like anything only ten minutes ago."

"That was against the Fourth, of course."

"Bound to stand by one another against the Fourth," said Manners solemnly. "But, taking one consideration with another—ahem!—"

"You agree with Blake?"

"Not exactly; but—"

"You'd like to play Tipton?"

"Yes."

"Then you're an ass, Manners!"

"Thank you!"

"And you're another, Lowther."

"Thanks!"

And in that unsatisfactory manner the subject dropped among the Terrible Three.

CHAPTER 3.

Not Accepted.

IT was not often that a serious difference arose among the chums of St. Jim's. True, there was always the rivalry between the two Houses. That, like the poor, was always with them. But there was no bitterness in that; it was productive of athletic emulation and fun more than anything else.

Then there was the old question, never satisfactorily settled, whether Tom Merry, of the Shell, or Jack Blake, of the Fourth, was to be considered leader of the School House juniors. But, as Blake himself had remarked, they could jog along pretty comfortably with that question unsettled. But now, at last, there had arisen a real difference, and one that could not, apparently, be bridged over.

It was natural that there should be a difference of opinion.

Among the most enlightened and candid of people differences of opinion will arise, and, of course, argument—intended to clear the air—only has the result of confirming each fellow in his own opinion.

Thus it was with the juniors of St. Jim's.

Tom Merry was junior football captain. Although the seniors of St. Jim's, the high and mighty Sixth and the Fifth, scarcely deigned to notice their existence, the junior footballers thought as much of themselves as the Sixth could possibly do—which was saying a great deal.

School matches were the senior matches, played by Fifth and Sixth-Form fellows, captained by Kildare, and sometimes by Monteith, the head prefect of the New House. But the juniors kept a careful record of junior matches, and attached quite as much importance to them as the Sixth did to the First Eleven affairs. And Tom Merry, as junior football captain, felt his responsibility heavy upon him.

The usual troubles of a football captain he could face with equanimity. When a match was won, he would cheerfully hear the victory attributed to this chap's kicking, or that chap's passing, or the other chap's goalkeeping. When the match was lost, he would hear, with equal cheerfulness, that it was the skipper's fault, and would listen unmoved to loudly-expressed wonder that he didn't know better than to play this chap, or that chap, or the other chap.

To take the blame in case of failure, and to see most of the praise given to others in case of success, and to bear the whole responsibility all the time, are not uncommon experiences of a football skipper. Tom Merry tolerated them with fortitude.

But the matter was different now. It was a question of accepting or declining a challenge, and Tom Merry's natural impulse was to accept it. But there were considerations that made him pause.

Tipton Ramblers had challenged the St. Jim's juniors to a Rugger match. Now, Tipton were a junior team, about the same age as St. Jim's juniors, and, in all probability, of about the same standing.

But Tipton played Rugger.

St. Jim's played the Soccer game, and the fact that a

BOYS WHO DO NOT READ "THE GEM."



The Boy who is TOO clever!

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NEXT THURSDAY: "A SHADOW IN THE SCHOOL."

Another Splendid Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's.

Rugger match had once been played at St. Jim's made no difference to that.

Tom Merry's eleven was a Soccer eleven.

Some of them had played Rugby, and most of them had an idea of the game; but what was that? What chance would they naturally have against a practised Rugger team? And the date was so near. Hobson, the Tipton skipper, had learned that St. Jim's had a vacant date, and he had sent his challenge for that date. There was no getting out of it on the score of having all dates full. Tom Merry would not condescend to prevaricate; and, besides, Tipton knew the fact.

Tipton fellows knew well enough that St. Jim's did not play Rugger. Under ordinary circumstances they would not, of course, have challenged them. But Blake was really at the bottom of that.

It could not be denied that Tipton were a set of "swankers." They swanked abominably, and the St. Jim's fellows—who had a very good opinion of themselves, but would have indignantly denied that they had the slightest tendency to swank, for their part—found Tipton hard to tolerate.

As the two colleges were far apart, and the fellows met but seldom, their mutual antipathy might not have been the cause of trouble, but for that unfortunate affair of Blake.

The chums of Study No. 6 had met Hobson and a crowd of Tiptonians at a footer match in Wayland, and, naturally, had fallen into a discussion of football. Hobson had remarked, in the modest and unassuming way he had, that if he and his men played Soccer, he hadn't the slightest doubt that they would walk all over St. Jim's at that game. He added that he wished they played Rugger, so that he might have an opportunity, by means of a sound licking, to show them exactly what real footer was.

To which Blake somewhat rashly retorted, in the heat of the moment, that he'd undertake to raise a team at St. Jim's to play Tipton at Rugger, or any other game, and wipe them off the face of the earth!

And only the next day had come a letter from Tipton, in which the Tipton secretary reminded the juniors of those rash words, and held them as a promise. Of course, Blake had not meant anything of the sort.

He had forgotten the words an hour afterwards. But when Tipton thus reminded him, he wanted to live up to them.

His idea was that Tipton were a set of swankers, and that St. Jim's could raise a team to lick them hollow.

Tom Merry's view was that Tipton certainly were an abominable set of swanking duffers, but that they had played Rugger for years, and, naturally, would be able to wipe up the ground with any scratch team hastily got together in a couple of days at St. Jim's.

Tom Merry held fast to his point.

Tipton were taking an unfair advantage in pressing the challenge, and he did not mean to record a crushing defeat among St. Jim's experiences that season, simply because of a few hasty words Blake had spoken.

That was Tom Merry's position. He was junior football captain, and responsible, and he didn't mean the junior eleven to make an ass of itself.

The Fourth-Formers disagreed.

Hence the difference that had arisen, which had been thrashed out at the committee meeting; and the difference, as we have seen, was not the only thing that was thrashed out.

After argument, which had culminated in the punching of noses, each fellow was, of course, only confirmed in his original views.

Blake was rather inclined to look upon Tom Merry as a "funk"—not personally, of course, but in his capacity as football captain.

Tom Merry regarded Blake as a rash duffer who had let his team in for a challenge they weren't prepared to meet, and who was willing to throw every other consideration aside, merely for a chance to get at the enemy.

What was to be done was a perplexed puzzle, but what Tom Merry meant to do was quite clear.

He meant to decline the challenge.

And if his decision was not accepted by the football committee he meant to resign the captaincy.

That meant, of course, that his decision was accepted, and that a letter was to be written declining the challenge on the grounds that as Tipton played Rugger and St. Jim's Soccer, a meeting was impossible.

That was reasonable enough, but it did not explain away Blake's words to Hobson, or make his position any the better. The letter was written and despatched.

After it had been consigned to the postbox Jack Blake came into his study—No. 6 in the Fourth Form passage—with a gloomy brow.

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"It's all up!" he announced.

"What is?" asked Herries.

"The letter's sent."

"Oh!"

"Bai Jove! And the challenge is declined?"

"Yes."

"Wotten!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"St. Jim's is jolly well disgraced," said Blake gloomily.

"It's the first time we've ever refused a challenge. Why, if a party challenged us to play marbles we ought to take them on."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, it can't be helped," said Digby. "Figgins & Co. feel just as rotten about it as we do. Between ourselves, I fancy that Manners and Lowther only back up Tom Merry for the sake of appearances. They want to play Tipton."

"Everybody does except Tom Merry, and perhaps Kangaroo."

"Yaas, wathah! Weally, deah boys," said D'Arcy thoughtfully—"weally, you know, I don't know about givin' in like this."

"Tom Merry's captain."

"Yaas, but—"

"Oh, we can't back up against the skipper," said Digby.

"That wouldn't be cricket. But I'm surprised at Tom Merry—I am, really."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Tipton will crow over us royally," said Blake, with a snort. "Of course, perhaps I oughtn't to have said what I did that time to Hobson, just as Tom Merry says. But I did say it."

"Of course you did! He was enough to provoke anybody."

"And having said it, we ought to stand by it."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But Tom Merry doesn't see it in that light. Well, I suppose we shall have to give in, but it's rotten."

"Vewy wotten, deah boy."

"Tipton will crow, that's the worst of it, and—"

"And you've given 'em a right to crow by what you said to Hobson," Herries remarked, in his slow and thoughtful way.

"Oh, rats!" said Blake. "Let's do our prep."

And the subject dropped.

CHAPTER 4.

Hobson Looks In.

THE subject was dropped by common consent at St. Jim's. It was impossible to agree upon it, but Tom Merry, as footer captain, had been allowed to have his way. That was the end of the matter.

But it left irritated feelings behind it.

The next morning Jack Blake wore a gloomy look when he met Tom Merry. He also wore a darkened eye, a souvenir of the previous evening's argument.

Tom Merry stopped to speak to him.

"You don't agree with me yet, Blake?" he asked.

"No, I don't!"

"I wish I could make you see it as I do," said Tom Merry patiently. "It was silly to start punching one another's heads. That wasn't the way to settle the matter. Look here, Blake, old man—"

"Tipton will think we've funk'd."

"Well, there's no harm in funking a thing you know you can't do," said Tom Merry. "We should be fools to accept a challenge to a game we don't play, and without more than a few days being allowed for practice, too. Tipton know very well that we'd have no chance. It would simply mean marking down a defeat on our record for the season."

"Better that than funking."

"It's not funking to decline a challenge like that. Tipton wanted to take us at an unfair advantage."

"I know that."

"Well, then, did you want to fall into a trap—?"

"I wanted to play them."

"Hang it all, Blake," exclaimed Tom Merry, "you make a fellow tired! I think I did quite right in refusing the challenge."

"I don't."

"You're an ass!"

"You're another!"

"Yaas, wathah!" chimed in Arthur Augustus. "I certainly wegard you as an ass, Tom Mewwy!"

"Oh, rats!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Well, you've had your way," said Blake, "that's enough. I suppose it's no good talking about it any more?"

"I suppose not," said Tom Merry. "I wish I could get you to see it as I do."

Blake laughed good-humouredly, the cloud vanishing from his face.



"Hold on!" murmured Digby, as he saw Blake clench his fists. "You can't give 'em any of that, Jacky; they're on a friendly visit, you know." (See this Page.)

"It's all right, old man," he exclaimed. "We don't agree, but no need to scowl at one another. I feel rather rotten about it, because Tipton will crow. But it can't be helped; let it drop."

And it was let drop.

But the subject which the juniors agreed to say no more about was not destined to be got rid of so easily. The Tipton fellows, as Blake had anticipated, weren't inclined to let it drop so easily.

That afternoon was a half-holiday, and the juniors were, as usual, preparing to go down to the footer, when four cyclists rode up to the gates and dismounted. They wheeled their machines in, leaning them against the wall of Taggles's lodge, and walked towards the house.

They were in time to meet a crowd of juniors coming out of it.

Tom Merry's brow contracted as he saw them.

"Hallo!" he muttered. "Here's Tipton!"

"Tipton cads!" said Blake.

Hobson, the Tipton captain, came up with a grin. The three fellows with him, Bates and Marker and Crane, were three of the least pleasant of the Tiptonians. All four of them had been seen at St. Jim's before, and none was liked there.

"Hallo!" said Hobson, with a genial nod. "Just in time to see you, I see. Thought we'd run over and talk about it."

"Oh!" said Tom Merry.

"You know Bates, our sec., and Marker and Crane. Now, what's that about declining our challenge?" said Hobson, in a boisterous way.

"Sorry you've taken the trouble to call about that," said Tom Merry calmly. "I thought it was all made clear in the letter."

"Oh, yes, it's clear enough that you funk the match," said Hobson.

Tom Merry flushed.

"Nothing of the sort," he said. "I suppose you would decline a challenge to a Soccer match if we sent you one?"

"I don't know about that," said Hobson; "but that's neither here nor there. Blake says there's a team at St. Jim's ready to lick us at Rugger, and we accept the hint, and send you a challenge in proper form. Now you decline it."

"Yes, we decline."

"Well, I want to know why. I suppose you want us to understand that Blake was talking out of his hat?"

Blake turned crimson.

"Hold on!" murmured Digby, as he saw Blake clench his fists. "You can't give 'em any of that, Jacky."

"The rotter—"

"I know; but they're on a friendly visit."

Blake unclenched his hands. He realised that it would not do.

"Never mind what Blake said or didn't say," replied Tom Merry brusquely. "I wasn't there, anyway, and didn't hear it. The fact remains that you've challenged us to a game we don't play, and we decline the challenge. There's no more to be said that I know of."

Hobson laughed, and shrugged his shoulders.

"It's no good saying you haven't the date open," Bates remarked. "We happen to know that you have."

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 140.

NEXT
THURSDAY:

"A SHADOW IN THE SCHOOL."

Another Splendid Long, Complete School
Tale of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's.

"I haven't said so."

"Well," said Marker, "we've kept the date open, too, relying on what Blake said about your being willing to meet us."

"You can't have kept it open long, as it's only two days since Blake made the remark you're making such a song about."

"I think you ought to accept."

"We shall please ourselves about that."

"I suppose you know what we shall think of you if you persist in refusing?" said Hobson.

"You can think what you like!" said Tom Merry shortly.

"We shall think that you're a set of funks."

"Hear, hear!" said Bates, Marker, and Crane all together.

There was a murmur among the St. Jim's juniors.

"You won't twit me into making an ass of myself by accepting your rotten challenge," said Tom Merry calmly.

"If you think we're funks, meet us at Soccer. That would be as fair for you as Rugger would be for us."

"That's not the question now."

"And if you think I personally am a funk, I'd be happy to prove to you that I'm not, if you'll come into the gym."

Hobson backed away a pace.

"I didn't come here for a row," he said.

"Then you'd better pick your language a little more carefully."

"Oh, all right!" said Hobson defiantly. "I shall know what to think, anyway. You fellows swank about meeting us at Rugger if we like, and as soon as we challenge you, you find an excuse for sneaking out of it."

"I'd accept fast enough if I were skipper," said Blake.

"Oh, you can gas!" said Hobson. "I've heard you at it before—day before yesterday, as a matter of fact. So you definitely refuse?"

"Definitely," said Tom Merry.

"We've come over here for nothing, chaps," said Bates.

"Looks like it."

"Blessed set of funks!" said Marker.

"Bai Jove, I'm not goin' to stand that! Markah, you wotah, I will trouble you to put up your fists and answah for your wotten wemahs."

"Rats!"

"Bai Jove! I'll—"

Tom Merry pushed the excited swell of St. Jim's back.

"Chuck it, Gussy!" he exclaimed. "You can't touch them when they came over to see us—it's a point of honour, my son. Of course, they'll take advantage of it—we knew before that they were cads."

"Well, we'll go," said Hobson. "But, mind, you chaps haven't heard the end of this. You've given us a journey for nothing. But you'll play that match, my sons, and take your gruel, or you'll be made to sing confoundedly small, I warn you. Come on, you chaps; we've been here long enough."

"Quite long enough," agreed Monty Lowther.

And the Tipton fellows went back to their bicycles and rode away. They left the juniors of the School House looking decidedly glum.

"We shall never hear the end of it," growled Digby.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, it can't be helped," said Tom Merry. "Let's get down to the footer!"

"I've got a suggestion to make," remarked Kangaroo.

"Let's practise the Rugger game this afternoon, and see the kind of form we're in. I used to play Rugger, you know, at home in Victoria, and Fatty Wynn is a wonderful Rugger man. Let's see what sort of a team we can raise."

Tom Merry hesitated. He did not see the use of it. But the feeling of the juniors was evidently with Kangaroo, and the captain of the Shell did not oppose it.

"Very well," he said shortly.

And the juniors, for that afternoon, abandoned the Soccer game, and threw themselves into the unaccustomed Rugger.

CHAPTER 5.

The White Feather.

"TOM MERRY!"

"Hallo!"

"Parcel for you!"

"Good!"

The football practice was over long since, and most of the junior players were thinking of tea. The Rugby practice had been successful in its way; but it had chiefly shown up the fact that the St. Jim's juniors would want a lot of practice before they could play a Rugger team.

Tom Merry & Co. were gathering about the tuckshop, to lay in provisions for tea, when Tom's name was called.

Three or four fellows were calling it, all interested in the parcel that was arriving for Tom Merry. Binks the page

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 140.

had taken it from the carrier, and was bringing it, and the juniors announced its arrival. For Tom Merry was in the habit of receiving all sorts of packages from his old governess and guardian, Miss Priscilla Fawcett, of Huckleberry Heath. True, the parcels from home sometimes turned out to contain only comforters or chest protectors, worked by Miss Fawcett's own fingers; but on other occasions they brought to Tom Merry luscious fruits, or delicious cakes baked by Miss Fawcett herself at Laurel Villa, and sometimes jam or honey in nice big jars.

The parcel Binks was bringing now was not a large one, but a great many juniors gathered round Tom Merry as he received it.

"Which there's sixpence to pay the man, Master Merry," said Binks.

"Here you are, Binky!"

Tom Merry cut the string of the parcel.

There was no postmark or carrier's mark on it, the only direction being "Tom Merry, St. Jim's," in a large handwriting that was certainly not Miss Priscilla Fawcett's.

Tom Merry looked a little puzzled.

"I don't think this is from home," he remarked.

Fatty Wynn was watching him, and a shade of disappointment came over his plump face as Tom Merry spoke.

"Not from home!" he said.

"I think not."

"H'm! I was thinking perhaps it was one of those cakes," said Fatty Wynn, with a reminiscent smack of the lips.

"You remember the last?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"This isn't a cake. It feels too soft, and it's not large enough. It's not from Miss Fawcett at all. I wonder what it is?"

His expression grew more surprised as he unfastened several wrappings of paper. The juniors watched him with keen interest.

"What the dickens can it be?" exclaimed Lowther.

"Blessed if I know."

"Anyway, it's nothing to eat; it's too soft."

"It might be—a jelly," said Fatty Wynn, as if unwilling to give up the last shred of hope.

"Bet you it isn't."

"Buck up, Merry, let's see what it is!"

"Here you are, then."

Tom Merry opened the last wrapping of brown paper. Inside was a sheet of tissue-paper, in which something small and soft was wrapped.

Tom Merry, with a curious expression dawning upon his face, opened the tissue-paper, and exposed the contents.

It was a single feather—a white feather.

The juniors looked at it, and a grim silence fell upon the group. A little fragment of paper, pencilled on, had fluttered to the ground. Manners picked it up, and held it up for the juniors to read. It contained but a single line.

"From Tipton."

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "The white feather!"

"The white feather," said Tom Merry. "From Tipton! The cads!"

Exclamations of anger broke out on all sides.

The white feather!

"The rotten cads!" exclaimed Figgins. "The—the beasts! That means they think we're afraid to meet them!"

"It means they pretend to think so, to get our backs up," said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Oh, hang it!" exclaimed Blake. "We must play them."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Look here, are we going to have them calling us cowards, and sending us white feathers?" demanded Blake excitedly.

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"Wathah not!"

"No good taking any notice of it," said Tom Merry steadily. "We should be fools to allow them to chip us into doing what we don't want to do."

"Wats!"

"Look here, Gussy—"

"I wepeat, wats! I think we ought to play them."

"Yes, rather!"

"Well, I don't!"

"Oh, that settles it," said Digby. "The great chief hath spoken!"

"Oh, cheese that, Dig! I don't see any reason for parting from our decision, just because Tipton choose to act like cads!"

Tom Merry was very firm in his opinion. But he was almost alone in it. Manners and Lowther backed him up, but not heartily.

But Tom Merry felt that he was right.

The Tipton fellows wanted to take them at an unfair advantage, and inflict a defeat upon them, and Tom Merry would not have it.

He was not called upon to take his team into the field, and let it be walked over, because Blake had spoken a few hasty words.

The juniors dispersed with gloomy faces.

They would have liked very much to be within hitting distance of the Tipton fellows, to show them that they weren't afraid in that way, at all events.

But Hobson, Marker & Co. were nowhere at hand.

The fellows had to grin and bear it—or, at least, to bear it, if they did not grin. They did not bear it patiently.

The chums of Study No. 6 went into tea with glum looks. Blake jammed the kettle on the fire with a force that spilt half its contents over the embers. Digby growled as steam and blacks flooded the study.

"Clumsy ass!"

Blake scowled.

"Oh, shut up!" he said.

"Rats!"

"You ass—"

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

"Weally, deah boys—"

"Oh, don't jaw, Gussy!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Ring off!"

"I wefuse—"

"Pooh!"

"Blake—"

"Pish!"

"Weally," said D'Arcy, keeping his temper admirably—"weally, you know, I don't think it's sensible of us to wag one another because we're wowwed about those Tipton wottahs. I weally think we'd bettah take it more sensibly."

Blake burst into a laugh.

"You're right, Gussy. No good getting our backs up."

"Just so," said Dig. "I'm sorry I spoke as I did, Blake. But I feel so wild about those rotten Tipton bounders, with their blessed white feathers—"

"So do I."

"It's wotten, deah boys. But—weally, Binks, you should not come in so suddenly. You intewwupt me."

Binks grinned.

"Postcard for Master Blake," he said.

"Hand it over."

Binks grinned as he handed it over. He was grinning as he left the study. Blake soon discovered the cause of the grin.

The postcard contained no message. It was addressed to Blake, and on the back of it was a neat drawing in pen and ink of a white feather.

Blake brought his teeth together hard.

"What is it, deah boy?" asked D'Arcy.

"Look!"

"Bai Jove! The white feathah again!"

Blake snapped his teeth.

"We can't stand this!" he exclaimed desperately.

"Wathah not!"

"We shall be bothered to death by those cads if we don't play them," said Blake. "Look here, we're going to play them!"

"But Tom Mowwy—"

"Hang Tom Merry!"

"With pleasure, deah boy, but—"

"Look here, we can raise a team ourselves, unofficially, and play the rotters," said Jack Blake. "A Fourth-Form team, leaving out the Shell."

"Bai Jove!"

"What do you think?"

"Vewy wiskey, deah boy!"

"I don't care," said Blake determinedly. "I'll go and ask Figgins about it, and talk it over."

"We're just going to have tea—"

"Hang tea!"

And Blake swung out of the study. His chums followed him, without saying anything further about tea.

CHAPTER 6.

Arthur Augustus Makes a Suggestion.

"**R**OTTEN!" said Figgins gloomily. Figgins was cutting bread-and-butter in his study in the New House. Fatty Wynn was carefully attending to baking potatoes on the grate. Kerr was opening a tin of bloater-paste. The chums of the New House were about to have tea, with less of an appetite than usual.

"Yes, it was rotten!" said Fatty Wynn, looking up from the grate with a glowing face. "I made sure there was something to eat in the parcel, you know, and it turned out to be only a rotten white feather."

"It's rotten!"

"I should say so. And we've only got potatoes and bloater-paste for tea—"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Figgins irritably. "I'm thinking of the insult to the school, not of your unearthly appetite!"

"Look here, Figgy—"

"We've been called cowards—kicked; jumped on—in effect," said Figgins. "That's what the white feather implies."

"It's rotten!" growled Kerr. The cool and canny Scottish junior was very seldom excited, but his eyes were gleaming now.

"The potatoes are done," said Fatty Wynn.

"Blow the potatoes!" roared Figgins ferociously. "Is this a time to be talking about potatoes, you—you fat boulder?"

"Well, I suppose we're going to have tea?"

"Blow tea!"

"I'm hungry," said Fatty Wynn. "I feel the insult as much as you do, of course, but you can't mend matters by going hungry—in fact, if you've got any trouble to bear, you can stand it better by laying a solid foundation. I've always noticed that, Figgy, and you can take my word for it."

"Ass!"

"The potatoes are—"

"Chump!"

"—done!"

"Chuck 'em out of the window," said Figgins, "or put 'em in the fire!"

"Rats!" said Fatty Wynn warmly. "I think you must be off your rocker, Figgy. I— Hallo! What do you School-House boulders want?"

Jack Blake strode into the study, followed by his three chums. The New House fellows looked at them far from agreeably. They were not in an agreeable mood. The insults from Tipton had had a rasping effect upon all tempers.

"Hallo!" growled Figgins.

"Want anything?" grunted Kerr.

"No."

"Then good-bye."

Blake snorted.

"Look at that!"

"What is it—a giddy picture postcard? Bury it!"

"Look at it, ass!"

"Who are you calling an ass?" demanded Figgins belligerently.

"You! Look!"

Figgins looked.

"Oh! The white feather again!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"From Tipton, of course?"

"Of course!" said Blake. "We've come over to talk to you chaps about it. I've got an idea."

"If you've got any idea about going for Tipton and taking them down a peg or two, this is the right shop!" said Figgins eagerly.

"Look here," said Blake, "Tom Merry's skipper of the Junior Eleven, and he refuses to play Tipton at Rugger."

"We know that."

"Perhaps he's right!"

"And perhaps he isn't."

"Exactly! Perhaps he isn't. But if we can't play Tipton with the official team, why can't we make up an eleven—or, rather, a fifteen in this case—to play them on our own—a Rugger team in the Fourth?"

Figgins started.

"Tom Merry doesn't want a licking at Rugger to be put down in the season's record," said Blake. "He's right, as far as that goes—only we can't stand these blessed insults from Tipton."

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NEXT
THURSDAY:

"A SHADOW IN THE SCHOOL."

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"Right!"

"If we raised a Fourth-Form Rugger team, and played Tipton on our own, he wouldn't have the right to interfere, and the match wouldn't count among the regular matches of the junior eleven, you see."

"My hat!"

"Good egg!" said Kerr.

"It would simply be a private venture of the Fourth," said Blake. "Just a dodge to fill up the afternoon, you know, because the junior team has no match on for that day."

"Good!"

"Tom Merry wouldn't have the right to interfere, even if he wanted to—and as we shouldn't play any Shell fellows, the team couldn't be supposed to be the official junior team."

Figgins's eyes sparkled.

"Blake, old man, you're a daisy!" he exclaimed enthusiastically. "Why, the idea is simply ripping!"

"Gorgeous!" said Kerr.

"What do you think, Fatty?"

"I think I'll have a little more butter," said Fatty Wynn, looking up from the plate upon which he was busily engaged.

"Eh?"

"The 'taters are rather dry."

"Ass! What do you think of playing Tipton with a Rugger Fourth team?"

"Oh, that's all right!" said Fatty. "I was brought up on Rugger, and I'd like it better than anything."

"It's settled," said Figgins. "Why, the idea's worth a guinea a box!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We'll call a meeting of the Fourth Form—both Houses," said Figgins warmly. "And we can select the fifteen this evening, to save time, and have the first practice to-morrow morning, before brekker."

"Good!"

"I'm jolly glad you chaps like the idea," said Blake. "If we back one another up, we shall get the team together all right. We can't have any of the Shell in it, or the Tiptons would have a right to pretend that they were playing the regular junior team. Besides, the Fourth Form is able to stand alone."

"Of course."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"In fact, I dare say we shall be all the better without the Shell," said Blake, rather loftily. "Fatty Wynn is first-rate at Rugger, and there are some other Fourth-Formers who know the game like a book. I've played myself at home in Yorkshire, though I don't claim to be up to Fatty's form."

"Then there's Evans," said Figgins. "He's a Welshman, and all Welshmen can play Rugger first-rate."

"Good! Of course!"

"Then it's settled. We'll call a Form-meeting this evening."

"Yaas, wathah! I say—"

"I'll write out the notice and put it up," said Blake.

"You are intewwuptin' me, Blake."

"I know that, Gussy. Come on; our tea will be cold."

"I have a suggestion to make—"

"Leave it till to-morrow, old chap."

"I refuse to do anythin' of the sort! I have a vewy valuable suggestion to make!" said D'Arcy indignantly. "It flashed into my bwaain—"

"Found plenty of room there, I expect," said Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Come on," said Blake. "I've got to draw up the notice to the Form. You draw one up to put up in the New House, Figgy. We'll hold the meeting in the Form-room."

"Right you are!"

"Weally, deah boys—"

"That's settled, then."

"I insist upon makin' my suggestion."

"Oh, go ahead!" said Blake resignedly.

"Get it over!" said Digby.

"Wats! Look heah, it doesn't mattah wheah we get the wecwits fwom, does it, so long as we get a team togethah to lick the Tipton wottahs?"

"Not a bit," said Blake. "We'll have the postman and the butcher's boy if they can play Rugger."

"Vewy well. I have an ideah."

"Buck up!"

"I wish you would not huwvy me. It thwows me into confusion. Undah the cires—"

"What's the ideah?" bawled Blake.

"I am comin' to it as fast as I can. I was thinkin' about those chaps at Gweyfwahs, you know."

"Greyfriars!"

"Yaas, wathah! They play Soccer, the same as we do, but they have played Wuggah—I wemmabah Hawvy Wharton tellin' me so—and some of them were bwrought up on Wuggah at home, just like Fatty. They have a chap named Linley,

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who comes fwom Lancashire, who is a wegular marvel, Wharton told me."

Blake gave a sort of jump.

"My hat! You're a genius, Gussy!"

"Yaas, wathah! I mean, weally—"

"It's a good wheeze," said Blake, turning to Figgins.

"We want to get together a team to lick Tipton, and if we could get three or four Greyfriars chaps to play, it would be ripping. What do you think?"

"Good!"

"Ripping!" said Kerr.

"Then we'll write to Greyfriars to-night and ask them. Those chaps—Wharton and the rest—belong to the Lower Fourth there—the Remove. If they come in, it will still be a Fourth-Form team. If three or four of them come, it may make all the difference to us. Of course, they may have a match on for Saturday afternoon—in fact, most likely they have—but it's a chance."

"And we'll try it," said Figgins.

"That's settled, then."

And the School-House chums quitted Figgins's study, feeling much more satisfied than they had felt for some time.

CHAPTER 7.

No Admittance!

"HALLO! Wherefore this thushness?" exclaimed Monty Lowther.

The Shell fellow had stopped before the notice-board in the Hall, and as he stopped, Tom Merry and Manners stopped too. The Terrible Three had strolled down after tea, when a new notice on the board caught Lowther's eye.

"What is it?" asked Tom Merry.

"A notice to the Fourth."

"Nothing to do with us, then," remarked Manners, with all the loftiness of a Shell fellow.

"That's where you're wrong," said Lowther. "Read it."

And the chums of the Shell read the notice. It ran as follows:

"NOTICE TO THE FOURTH FORM.

"A meeting of the Fourth will be held in the Form-room at seven o'clock precisely. Means will be discussed of shutting up the Tipton fellows. As the matter only affects the Fourth Form, Shell fellows are requested to stay away.

"Signed, J. BLAKE."

"Well, my hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"Cheek!" said Manners.

Tom Merry wrinkled his brow thoughtfully.

"Hang it all, this won't do!" he exclaimed. "We can't have the Fourth mucking up things like this! We shall have to go!"

"Of course."

"It's close on seven now," Monty Lowther remarked, glancing at his watch.

"Let's look in at the Form-room, then."

The Terrible Three made their way towards the Fourth-Form room. They noticed now that a crowd of Fourth-Formers were going in that direction. Tom Merry caught Arthur Augustus D'Arcy by the sleeve.

"Gussy, old man—"

"Pway don't detain me, deah boy," said D'Arcy, turning his eyeglass upon the captain of the Shell. "I am in wathah a huwvy."

"What's this rotten meeting about?"

"It's—it's about to take place, deah boy."

"Ass! I mean—"

"I refuse to be called an 'ass.'"

And D'Arcy jerked his sleeve away and hurried on. The Terrible Three surrounded Reilly, of the Fourth, and stopped him in the passage.

"Look here, Reilly—"

"Faith, and let me get on!" said Reilly. "Sure, the meeting's going to begin."

"What's it about?"

"But what do you mean—"

"I mane to get to the meetin' entirely."

And Reilly hurried on.

Tom Merry looked exasperated.

"We'll attend the meeting ourselves," he exclaimed. "We can't have the Fourth-Form duffers taking matters into their own hands and mucking them up."

"Hear, hear!"

And the Terrible Three joined the stream that was setting towards the Fourth Form-room. New House fellows mingled with School House boys on the best of terms. But quite uncordial glances were cast at the heroes of the Shell.

"Shell-fish barred," said Hancock, in the doorway, as the Terrible Three appeared.



"I say, it's not a very good idea, having Rugger practice before breakfast," Jones remarked.
 "Suppose we put it off until Ow-ow ow!" (See page 11.)

"Rats!" said Lowther.
 "No admittance for Shell-fish."
 "More rats!"

And the Terrible Three pushed their way in, shoulder to shoulder. There was a roar at once from the Fourth.

"No admittance."
 "Get out!"
 "Chuck those Shell bounders out!"
 "Kick them out!"
 "Yaas, wathah!"

The Terrible Three pushed in. But there was a rush of the Fourth, and they were hurled out again by force of numbers. A crowd of Fourth-Formers blocked up the door. Tom Merry picked himself up rather dazedly in the passage.

"My hat!" he ejaculated.
 "My head!" gasped Lowther. "It's been banged against something awfully hard—against some wood, I think."
 "It was against my head," groaned Manners, rubbing his cranium. "Ow!"
 "Well, I said some wood—"
 "Ass!"
 "Chump!"

"Chuck it!" said Tom Merry crisply. "Look here, we're going to attend that meeting. Call up the Shell."

"What-ho!"
 Some Shell fellows were soon on the spot, and they backed up the Terrible Three in endeavouring to push a way into the Form-room. Kangaroo, and Clifton Dane, and Glyn, and Gore, and French, shoved away heartily. But the cram in the doorway was too thick for them. There was no admittance for the Shell.

Again the Shell fellows were hurled forth.
 "Keep the wottahs out," said D'Arcy, surveying the scene through his eyeglass. "We can't have those duffabs muckin' up the meetin'!"

"Outside, you Shell fish!"
 "Look here," roared Tom Merry, "we're coming in."
 "Your mistake, you're going out."
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Rush them again!" shouted Manners.
 "Hurrah!"

The Fourth-Formers were all in now—or nearly all. The Shell were gathering in great force. All of them were indignant at the idea of being excluded from the Form meeting. True, it was a Fourth Form affair, but as Lowther said, the kids ought to have felt honoured at Shell fellows

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coming to it. Anyway, the Shell fellows were determined to come, whether the Fourth felt honoured or not.

Tom Merry gathered his followers for a mighty rush. But the Fourth-Formers were closing the door now, and Blake had his foot behind it.

"Lock the door," said Blake.

"Buck up, chaps!" shouted Tom Merry. "They're going to lock the door."

The Shell fellows pushed on resolutely. There was a wild scramble in the doorway, and the door was slowly jammed shut all the time. The attack was hurled back once more, and Blake snapped the door to.

Tom Merry hurled himself upon it the next moment.

But Blake had his foot to it, and he held it fast while Digby turned the key in the lock.

Snap!

The door was locked, and the baffled Shell hammered upon the outside of it in vain. And the sound of a master's voice calling warned them to leave off the hammering, and they scuttled away in hot haste, and the Fourth-Form were left to hold their meeting in peace.

CHAPTER 8.

The Fourth Form Mean Business.

JACK BLAKE grinned the grin of triumph as he heard the footsteps scuttling away in the passage.

"They're gone!" he remarked.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Now to business!" said Figgins.

"Hear, hear!"

Jack Blake mounted upon a form.

"Gentlemen of the Fourth—"

"Hear, hear!"

"That's what I want you to do, so don't make a row," said Blake politely. "You all know that we've been challenged to a Rugger match by Tipton school."

A groan for Tipton.

"We've refused—or rather Tom Merry has refused—"

A groan for Tom Merry.

"He has his reasons," said Blake generously. "As football skipper he feels himself responsible, and he thinks he ought to decline the challenge. Well, we know how to play the game, and we've given in on that point."

"Oh!"

"But at the same time, though the junior team doesn't officially accept the challenge of the Tipton rotters, I think a team ought to be got up to meet them."

"Hear, hear!"

"Hurrah!"

"And so we've got the idea of meeting them unofficially—"

"Hurrah!"

The cheer rang through the Form-room. It was evident that the proposition was a popular one with the Fourth Form at St. Jim's.

"I think it ought to be a wholly unofficial affair, that is, the Fourth Form ought to manage it entirely, and leave the Shell quite out," said Blake.

"Hear, hear!"

"This meeting is called to put the matter to the Form, and take votes upon it. Shall we make up a Rugger Fourth team, and play the Tiptonians?"

There was a yell of approval.

The fellows who had never played Rugger in their lives were as loud in shouting applause as Fatty Wynn himself.

Blake looked very pleased. It was gratifying to have his idea received in this enthusiastic way.

"Good!" he exclaimed, when something like silence had been restored. "I'm glad to see that you approve of the idea."

"Hear, hear!"

"And we'll arrange the matter at this meeting. We've written to Greyfriars, to ask some of the Fourth Form fellows there to play for us, if they can get away on Saturday, and if they can, I've no doubt we can make up a team to beat Tipton."

"Hear, hear!"

"If they can't we'll do the best we can without them," said Blake. "In any case, we'll make up a fifteen to meet Tipton."

"Hurrah!"

"Bravo!"

"You're all agreed?"

"Yes, rather! Hear, hear!"

"Hands up for playing Tipton with a Rugger Fourth team?"

A forest of hands went up.

"Good! Now, hands up against it."

There was not a single hand elevated in the air at this

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appeal. It was evident that the Fourth Form of St. Jim's were all of one mind on the subject.

Blake's eyes glistened.

"Good," he exclaimed again. "That's bizney. Now, pending the reply from Greyfriars, we'll make up fifteen players here, and get to practice first thing in the morning. If we get some recruits from Greyfriars, we'll leave out the weakest players we have. That's about the best idea."

"Hear, hear!"

"Fellows who have played Rugger at home stand out here."

A number of juniors came forward. Foremost was Fatty Wynn—who was known to be as good at Rugger as at Soccer, which was saying a good deal; for Fatty Wynn was one of the pillars of the Junior Eleven. He usually kept goal for the eleven, but he could play either back or half very well in the front line on occasion.

Following him came Kerr. Kerr was one of those fellows who seem to be able to do nearly everything. He could rattle off German and Latin as easily as English, and he played the violin as well as he played forward in the football team, and he batted as well as he bowled at cricket, and did both as well as he cycled and swam. He was one of the quietest of fellows, too, not at all given to talking about his powers, and it was a surprise to many when he came forward as a Rugby player. But when he did come forward, nobody doubted for a moment that he could play the game, and play it well.

Evans and Kerruish came forward, too, and one or two others.

"Well, that's a beginning," said Blake. "A lot more of us have played Rugger once in a way, too, and we shall be able to make up a fifteen."

"Yaas, wathah! I am wathah a dab at Wuggah myself, deah boys."

"Anything you're not a dab at, Gussy?" asked Reilly.

"Weally, Weally—"

"Well, that's a beginning," repeated Blake. "I'll make up the list of the fifteen now. And we'll make up a second fifteen, too, to see how the chaps form, and to play against the first fifteen in scratch matches. We haven't much time before Saturday, you know, and we shall want all the practice we can put in."

"Good egg!"

"Hear, hear!"

And Jack Blake took pencil and paper, and made up his list.

It ran: Jack Blake, Digby, Herries, D'Arcy, Figgins, Kerr, Wynn, Evans, Kerruish, Hancock, Jones, Harrison, Pratt, Wilkins, Reilly.

"There!" said Blake. "I don't think that can be improved on at present; but everybody here who's so much as seen a Rugger ball has got to practise. We shall be able to manage this affair rippingly without the Shell."

"Hear, hear!"

"Rats!"

"Hallo! Who said rats?"

"Bai Jove!"

"Rats!"

Jack Blake looked round wrathfully.

"Tom Merry!" shouted Figgins.

He pointed to the Form-room window.

It was half open, and Tom Merry's face could be seen looking cheerfully in from the darkness of the quadrangle.

The hero of the Shell was on the window-sill, and he had opened the window unseen and unheard in the excitement of the meeting.

"Well, you ass!" said Blake wrathfully. "What do you mean?"

"What I say," said Tom Merry. "Rats!"

"We're jolly well going to manage this affair without the Shell," said Blake loftily. "You Shell-fish can go and eat coke!"

"You'll be licked!" said Tom Merry.

"We'll risk that!"

"You're a set of duffers!"

"Chuck him out!" exclaimed Digby.

A rush was made for the window.

Blake was in the lead, and D'Arcy close behind. Tom Merry grinned, and squeezed a squirt that was concealed in the palm of his hand.

Squizz-z-z-z!

"Ow!" roared Blake.

"Yoop!" gasped D'Arcy.

A stream of red ink played upon their faces for a moment. The Fourth-Formers stopped their rush. Tom Merry laughed and disappeared from the window. Blake dabbed his face with his handkerchief, which came away crimson.

"Ow!" he gasped. "The beast! Yow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins.

"You ass! What are you cackling at?"

"THE BOYS' FRIEND," 1^D.

"Ha, ha! You look comic!"
 "You New House dummy!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Ow!" groaned Arthur Augustus. "Groo! I have got some of that howlid ink in my beastly mouth, you know! Ow!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Weally, Kerr—"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Oh, kick those New House bounders out!" exclaimed Blake, exasperated.
 "Rats!"
 "Kick them out!"
 And the Fourth-Form meeting broke up in wild confusion.

CHAPTER 9.

The Rugger Fourth.

EARLY the next morning Jack Blake sat up in the Fourth-Form dormitory in the School House. It was not yet time for the rising-bell, and it was not Blake's habit to waken before that clang rang through the morning air. Something had awakened him, and as he sat up in bed, wondering what it was, he heard a clink at the dormitory window.

Clink! Clink!
 "My hat!" ejaculated Blake.
 Clink!
 The junior jumped out of bed, and ran to the window, and mounted to it, and looked out.
 In the dim light of dawn three or four figures were visible below.

"Hallo!" said Blake.
 "Hallo!" came back the voice of Figgins. "Get up, lazy-bones! Have you forgotten the Rugger practice before breakfast?"

"You're up jolly early!" yawned Blake.
 "Well, if you School House chaps are going to slack—"
 "Rats! We'll be down in a jiffy!"
 "We're waiting for you."
 Blake turned back into the dormitory.
 The Fourth-Formers were still sleeping in blissful unconsciousness of the early rising of Figgins & Co.; but Blake soon changed that.

He whipped the bedclothes off D'Arcy's bed, and the swell of St. Jim's started up with an exclamation.

"Bai Jove!"
 "Jump up, Gussy!"
 "Bai Jove! I—"
 "Time to get up!"
 "Weally, Blake—"
 "No slacking," said Blake severely.
 "I am not slacking," said Arthur Augustus, groping for his eyeglass. "But I dislike bein' woke up so vewy abruply. I wegard you as an ass. You have thwown me into quite a flutah!"

"Help me to wake the others!" said Blake, going to Dig's bed. He had Digby's bedclothes off in a twinkling, and Dig gave a yell.

"Yurrooh! Oh!"
 "Time to get up!"
 "Yaw-aw-aw!"
 "Herries, old man—"
 "Keep that rotten sponge away, Blake, or I'll jolly well punch your head!" exclaimed Herries, rolling out of bed.

"Reilly—"
 "Faith, and I'm getting up."
 "Hancock—"
 "I'm up, you chump! Keep that sponge away!"

Blake chuckled. The juniors were turning out fast enough. In a few minutes they were bolting into their football things.
 "Gr-ro!" said Kerruish. "It's c-c-cold!"

"Yaas, wathah!"
 "I say, it's not a very good idea having a practice before breakfast," Jones remarked. "Suppose we put it off till—Ow—ow—ow!"

"Anybody else suggest putting it off?" asked Blake, dipping the squeezed sponge into the water again, and looking round blandly.

No one else suggested it.
 The Fourth-Formers were soon ready to go down, and they followed Jack Blake from the dormitory, surprising the early housemaids by their unexpected appearance.

Figgins & Co. were waiting in the quadrangle.
 It was a very fine and clear morning, and as soon as they were in the open air, the juniors felt keen enough. Some of them were already munching, and there was a great flavour of bullseyes about Fatty Wynn.

Blake had brought out a Rugger ball, which he was fortunately in possession of, and the juniors lost no time in getting to work.

As Blake was the originator of the Rugger Fourth idea, it had been taken for granted that he was to be the captain, Figgins gracefully refraining from putting forward any claim to that position.

But Blake, who was generally quite willing to take the lead—perhaps a little too willing—was too businesslike to think of doing so when there was an evidently better leader to be had, for the special occasion of fighting Tipton.

He tapped Fatty Wynn on the shoulder as they reached the footer ground.

"Fatty, old man, I want you to take—"
 "Take what?" asked Fatty quickly. "As a matter of fact, I'm jolly hungry, Blake. I've had nothing this mornin' but a pie and some bullseyes."

Blake laughed.
 "Nothing to eat, Fatty."

Wynn's face fell.
 "Oh!" he said.

"I want you to take the lead!"
 "The lead!"

"Yes. You're the best Rugger man here, and I think you ought to captain us against Tipton."

"Hear, hear!" said Figgins and Kerr heartily.
 Fatty Wynn looked very pleased.

"Well, I suppose I play Rugger about the best of this lot," he assented. "I was brought up on the game. I'll skipper if you like."

"That's settled, then."
 "And it's jolly decent of you, Blake, although you're a School House chap," said Figgins.

"Go hon."

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard Blake as havin' done the pwopah thing, except that I wegard it as wathah wotien to have a New House chap for a leadah."

"Oh, ring off, Gussy!"
 "I decline to wing off! I was thinkin'—"

"Ready there!"

"I was thinkin' that Blake is weally hardly up to the posish of leadah, so he has done quite wight to weisign. But he should have asked me to take ovah the posish."

"Rats!"

"I wegard myself as wathah a dab at Wugby, and I have no doubt that Fatty Wynn will wecognise the fact that I am a more suitable person to take the lead, and will weisign in my favah," said D'Arcy, turning his eyeglass upon the fat Fourth-Former.

Fatty Wynn grinned.
 "No jolly fear!" he remarked.

"Weally, Wynn—"
 "Play up," said Blake.

"Pway don't be in a huwwy, Blake. I wegard this as a vewy important question."

"But it's settled."

"No; Wynn has not yet weisigned in my favah," explained D'Arcy.

"Ass!"
 "I wefuse to be called an ass. I put it plainly to Fatty Wynn. Now, weally, Fatty Wynn, don't you sewiously considah that I am more suitable to be skippah?"

Fatty Wynn looked D'Arcy over.
 "Well, that's according," he remarked. "If it was to be skipper of a team of tailor's dummies, or of white rabbits, I should say yes; but—"

"Weally, Wynn—"
 "Oh, come on, Gussy," said Blake, dragging his elegant chum on to the field. "You'll go on talking till breakfast bell."

"Weally, Blake—"
 "Line up, there."

And the team fell to practice.

Blake had brought out his full force, and there were thirty of the Fourth-Formers on the ground, and under Fatty Wynn's direction they soon fell into shape.

Fatty may not have been an ideal captain, being too fat and easy-going and good-natured to keep in order a team that required much management. But much management was not required now.

The fellows were all bucking up and doing their best to get into good form, for the sake of triumphing over Tipton, and Fatty had only to tell them what to do.

In the keen interest of the play, the juniors did not notice that the rest of St. Jim's was gradually getting astir, and did not see the Terrible Three and a crowd of the Shell fellows coming down the ground.

Tom Merry stared at the Rugger players.

"My hat!" he ejaculated.

"Playing Rugger, by Jove!" said Monty Lowther.

"This is the result of the giddy meeting, then."

"The young asses!"

"Cheeky young duffers!"
 "Blake! Here, Blake!"

Blake turned his head for a moment.
"Can't talk now," he said. "See you later."

"But—"
"No time."

"Back up there!" rang out Fatty Wynn's voice.

And Blake was too busy to speak again.

The Shell fellows remained watching till, a few minutes before breakfast time, the Fourth-Formers came off the ground, and put on their coats, and hurried back to their Houses to change into everyday attire. The Terrible Three joined Blake as he went towards the School House at a rapid walk.

CHAPTER 10.

A Fourth Form Affair.

TOM MERRY was looking concerned. He thought he knew the little game of the Fourth-Formers now, and it bothered him. He did not quite know how to deal with this new development.

"Blake," he exclaimed, as he kept stride with the Fourth Former, "what's the little game?"

"Rugger," said Blake innocently.

"Ass! I mean—"

"A variety of football," explained Blake. "You see, there are two varieties of the game, called Soccer and Rugger—or Association and Rugby—for short. We—"

"Don't be an ass! What are you Fourth Form kids practising Rugger for?"

"To get into form."

"For what?"

"The match."

"What match?"

"With Tipton."

"When?"

"Saturday afternoon," said Blake serenely.

Tom Merry sniffed.

"Look here, Blake, the Junior Club has already declined to play Tipton."

"We're not going to play them as members of the Junior Club. I'm writing to Hobson to tell him we're raising a Fourth Form team, unofficially to meet him, if he cares to take us on."

"If they lick you—I mean when they lick you—they'll regard it as a victory over St. Jim's."

"They can regard it as they like."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Besides, they won't lick us," said Blake, with a shake of the head. "I'm in hopes of getting some recruits from Greyfriars."

"Greyfriars!" repeated Tom Merry.

"Yes, rather—fellows like Linley, you know. If we can make up a strong team, and lick Tipton—"

"Rats!"

"Well, we're going to try."

"Look here, Blake, it won't do. The Junior Club—"

"The Junior Club's got nothing to do with this," said Blake grimly. "It's quite a private venture of our own, in the Fourth. We're not admitting any Shell fellows at all."

"Wathah not!"

"It won't do. The Tiptons will look on it as the regular St. Jim's team, and they will crow just the same if they lick you."

"Can't help that. Besides, I'm explaining the matter fully to Hobson. He will know it's a Fourth Form team. Anyway, we're playing Tipton—on our own. The Fourth Form can do as it likes, I suppose."

"I wathah think so. As a matter of fact, we should uttably wefuse to be instructed in anythin' by the Shell, you know."

The juniors went in to breakfast, and the subject dropped. Tom Merry wore a worried look. He did not quite know how to deal with the matter. As junior captain, he had declined to play Tipton. But he had no control of the juniors outside the pale of the club. If the Fourth-Formers chose to take the reins into their own hands, and play Tipton "on their own," he did not see what he was to do.

Jack Blake looked very pleased with himself during breakfast. The morning practice had turned out very well, considering everything.

A great deal depended upon the answer to his letter to Greyfriars; but apart from that, Blake was not without hope of beating Tipton.

After morning school that day the Fourth-Formers went down to the Rugger practice with as much assiduity as they had ever shown in turning up for Soccer.

A great number of the Shell fellows came to look on, and some of the Shell, too, sought out Tom Merry, and wanted to know what he thought about it.

The captain of the Shell told them, with his usual frankness.

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ness. He explained that he considered Blake an ass, and all his backers asses too.

"Are you going to let them play Tipton?" Gore wanted to know.

"I don't see how I'm to prevent them, Gore."

"You're junior captain."

"But this isn't the junior team that's playing," said Tom Merry. "They're playing as private individuals on their own."

"Well, then, tell them that every chap who plays for Blake will be excluded from the junior eleven in future," said Gore.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"No good cutting off one's nose to spite one's face, Gore, old man. We don't want to lose half a dozen of our best players in the next Soccer match."

"Rats!"

Tom Merry shrugged his shoulders.

"If that's all you've got to say, Gore—"

"It isn't," said Gore. "My idea is that you ought to kick the Fourth-Formers out of the junior eleven. Then you could play more Shell fellows."

Monty Lowther burst into a laugh.

"My hat! Gore is thinking that he'd like his cap for the junior eleven, Tommy."

Gore turned red.

"Well, I don't see why not," he exclaimed.

"You'll have your cap, if you're ever fit for it," said Tom Merry, "but not at the cost of turning out better men, my son."

"Look here, if Blake is allowed to play Tipton, the team ought to be as strong as possible," said Gore, changing his ground. "A few Shell fellows would give it a backbone, I think."

"They won't play the Shell, they say."

"I dare say they would if they had an offer from the Shell."

"Well, you can try if you like."

"I jolly well will."

And Gore strode away angrily towards the football ground. Tom Merry looked after him, and smiled, and turned to Monty Lowther.

"Gore's been turning over a new leaf lately," he remarked.

"But I fancy there's a lot of the old Adam left in him. How jolly quick he was to jump at the chance of getting one of the other fellow's caps for the eleven."

Monty Lowther sniffed.

"That's Gore all over," he remarked.

And it certainly was. Gore had taken up football lately, and as his usual amusements had been more in the line of smoking and betting on horses, when he had an opportunity, he felt very virtuous about it, and considered that he ought to be backed up. Tom Merry was quite willing to back him up, as far as that went, and was pleased to see him developing a decent character, but not to the extent of playing him in the junior eleven while there was a better man going.

Gore arrived on the football ground, and found the Fourth-Formers hard at it. He called to Blake, but Blake was far too busy to talk. He called to Figgins, and then to D'Arcy, but received no reply.

Scowling, he waited for the practice to be over.

The juniors stopped it at last, and as they came off the ground Gore spoke to Jack Blake. He assumed his most agreeable smile for the occasion.

"I hear you're getting together a team to play Tipton, Blake," he remarked.

"We've got it together," said Blake.

"Looking for decent players, of course?"

"Oh, yes."

"Look here, I've played Rugby at home," said Gore. "I think you'd find me useful, and I should be quite willing to play."

"Sorry! We're not playing anybody from the Shell."

"Hang it all! If I'm willing to play in a team of kids, I should think you'd be willing to have me," exclaimed Gore angrily.

Blake smiled.

"You may think so, but you're wrong," he replied coolly. "We're not willing to take anybody from the Shell. This is wholly a Fourth Form affair—the Rugger Fourth, you know. Sorry, of course."

"You'll be licked."

"Thanks!" said Blake lazily.

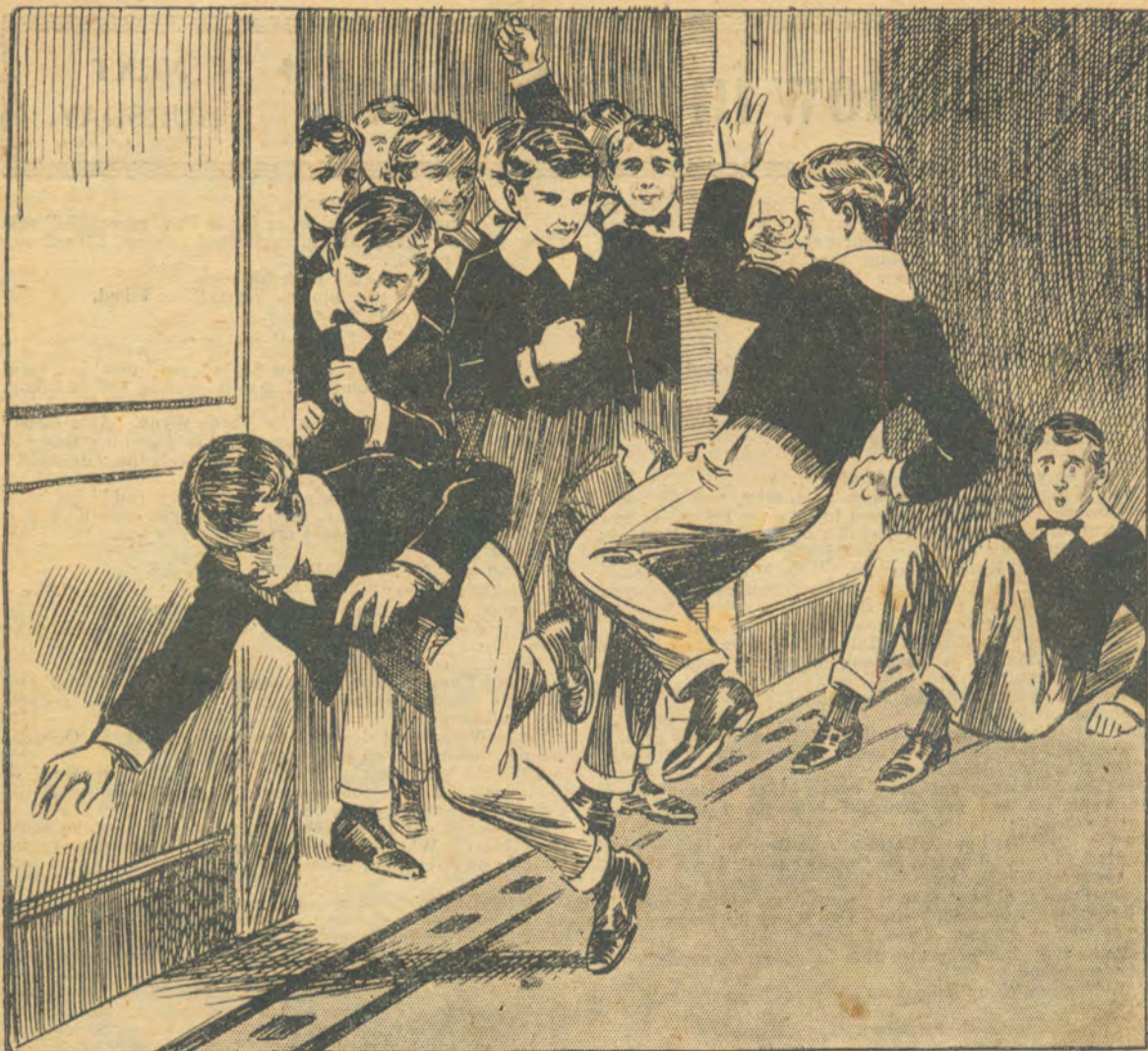
"Look here, are you captaining the team?"

"No; Fatty Wynn. He's our best Rugger man."

"Oh, then I needn't waste my time on you," said Gore angrily.

"Certainly not!" said Blake, laughing.

Gore hurried over to Fatty Wynn, and slipped his arm through Wynn's in the most friendly manner. Fatty looked at him.



"No admittance for Shell-fish!" yelled the Fourth-formers. "Rats!" retorted the Terrible Three, and pushed in. But there was a rush of the Fourth, and they were hurried out again by force of numbers. (See page 9.)

"I want to speak to you, Wynn. Are you willing to—"

"What is it? A feed?"

"A feed! No."

"Then I'm in rather a hurry," said Wynn, drawing his arm away. "Excuse me, won't you?"

"Look here, Wynn, I'm willing to play for the Rugger team."

"No Shell-fish allowed."

"But I can play—"

"Sorry; not possible."

And Fatty Wynn went into the New House with Figgins and Kerr, and Gore retired baffled.

CHAPTER 11. Not Wanted.

IT was rather a novel experience for Tom Merry to stand aside, and see excitement and busy doings in the Lower School, in which he took no part. It was a new experience, but there was no help for it. He was not inclined to recede from his original position. All the reasons that had influenced him to refuse the Tipton challenge were as good as ever. And he could not take part in the Rugger game without accepting the Tipton challenge as junior football captain. So he had to become merely a "looker-on in Vienna," as Kerr, who was strong on Shakespeare, put it.

The Shell chafed at the state of affairs, and were greatly inclined to lay the blame upon Tom Merry.

Tom Merry stood it patiently.

When he was asked to reconsider his position, and accept the Tipton challenge, his reply was always the same—"Rats!"

Rats! was not a polite reply, or an argumentative reply, but it was emphatic enough, and answered the purpose.

Monty Lowther and Manners, loyal as ever, backed up their chum in public; and—like many loyal friends whom we all know—compensated themselves for the public support they gave him by ragging him a little in private. But, as Lowther would have said, who has a better right to rag a chap than his own chums?

"I think you're an ass, you know, Tommy!" he remarked.

"Thanks, Monty! I know you are!" said Tom Merry.

"And a chump!" said Manners.

"Are you speaking of Lowther?"

"No; of you, Tommy. You ought to play Tipton."

"Rats!"

"Blake will go ahead on the strength of this rotten Rugger match. If they win, there will be no standing the Fourth Form after this. And if they lose, all the school will blame you."

"Let 'em!"

"Oh, bosh!"

"Stuff!" said Manners.

"Change your mind, Tommy, and play Tipton."

"Rats!"

"Look here, if you've got nothing else to say—"

"More rats!"

And so that discussion ceased.

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NEXT
THURSDAY:

"A SHADOW IN THE SCHOOL."

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Tale of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's.

"A Shadow in the School"

NEXT
THURSDAY.

A good many of the Shell fellows, finding that Tom Merry was obdurate, offered their services to the Fourth-Formers to strengthen the team. But to their surprise they found that Blake & Co. did not consider that the team would be strengthened by playing them.

Besides, Blake and Figgins pointed out repeatedly, if any of the Shell were played, it would give the team an official character, as being the junior team of St. Jim's. They wanted to avoid that.

"Oh, stuff! What does it matter?" demanded French, of the Shell.

"A lot, my son," said Figgins. "Tom Merry's junior captain, and he's refused to play his team. To play his team without him would be bad form."

"Rats!"

"Same to you!" said Figgins affably.

Even Kangaroo, a mighty man at Rugby, was declined. The Cornstalk junior was inclined to take the refusal in bad part, and offered to fight any member of the Fourth Form on the spot. Blake spoke to him soothingly.

"It's all right, Kangy," he said. "Nothing at all against you, you know. If you weren't in the Shell we'd play you like a shot, and we'd leave out Reilly—"

"Faith, and would ye?" from Reilly.

"Like a shot!" said Blake affably. "But we can't play a Shell-fish. This is, so to speak—ahem!—a wholly non-piscatorial team!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Fourth.

Kangaroo frowned.

"If any of you chaps feel inclined to step into the gym," he said, "I'll talk the matter over, with or without gloves!"

"Oh, go home!" said Blake.

And the matter was not talked over with or without gloves. But Kangaroo was not admitted into the Fourth Form Rugger team.

Nor were all the Fourth-Formers who were willing to play admitted. Lumley-Lumley, the Outsider of St. Jim's, offered his services, which were politely but firmly declined. Lumley-Lumley did not take the refusal patiently, either.

"Look here," he said, "since I've taken up footer I can play as well as the best of you, I guess!"

"There's a kind of praise that is no recommendation," Blake remarked.

"And I can pick up Rugger as quick as the next man."

"Possibly."

"Well, give me a chance, then. I want to play."

"Can't be did."

"Anyway, you're not captain," said Jerrold Lumley scornfully. "I'll speak to Wynn about it."

"Go ahead!" said Blake cheerfully.

He was quite sure that Fatty Wynn's answer would be the same as his own.

And it was. Lumley-Lumley discovered Wynn, and treated him to one of his most agreeable smiles. Fatty Wynn did not smile back. He did not like the Outsider. Since Lumley-Lumley's first day at St. Jim's, when he had treated Fatty Wynn, and twitted him with it, the Falstaff of the New House would have nothing to say to the Outsider.

But Lumley-Lumley was determined to speak now. He started in his friendliest tone.

"I hear you're going to captain the team against Tipton, Wynn," he remarked.

"That's so," said Fatty.

"Couldn't have a better skipper, I guess."

"Thank you!" said Fatty Wynn, with a curl of the lip that brought the colour into Jerrold Lumley's face.

"I'd be willing to play," said Lumley. "I should be useful, I guess."

"You won't play in my team!"

"Look here, Wynn—"

"Oh, drop it!"

"But I say, Fatty—"

"I don't mind being called Fatty, by my friends," said Fatty Wynn coldly; "but, if you want to speak to me, I've got a surname!"

"Well, Wynn, then, I should play quite up to the mark, and—"

"I wouldn't play a chap like you," said Fatty Wynn, "if you were at the top of form! You'd be quite capable of playing any mean trick, or of getting a penalty against us by fouling the other side!"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 140.

"I'd undertake to—"

"You'll undertake nothing, as far as I'm concerned!" said Fatty Wynn. "Now, if you've finished talking, I'll get on; I'm due for practice."

Lumley-Lumley choked back his rage.

"Look here, are you hungry, Wynn?" he asked.

"I'm usually ready for a feed."

"Come and have one, then!"

"Rats!"

"Dame Taggles has a new lot of pork-pies in," said Lumley-Lumley. "Come and jaw it over in the tuckshop, anyway!"

It was a strong temptation for Fatty Wynn. As a matter of fact, funds had been rather short in Figgins's study of late, and the plump Fourth-Former had felt the "draught." But Fatty Wynn nobly resisted.

"You treated me once, and acted like a cad!" he said. "I paid you every penny, or, rather, Figgy and Kerr did. I'd starve before I'd touch a crust from you again!"

"Look here—"

"Nuff said! Let me alone!"

"Confound your cheek!" yelled Lumley-Lumley. "I've a jolly good mind to wipe up the ground with you!"

Fatty Wynn turned upon him, with a glitter in his quiet eyes.

"Go it!" he said.

Lumley-Lumley gave him a savage look, but did not "go it." He thrust his hands deeply into his trousers pockets and walked away.

Fatty Wynn went down to the practice, and the Outsider did not tackle him on the subject again.

After the practice that evening, when Blake returned to the School House he found a letter waiting for him with the Friardale postmark on it.

He read it out to the gleeful juniors. It was the reply from Harry Wharton, of the Remove Form—the Lower Fourth—at Greyfriars School:

"Dear Blake,—Glad to hear from you, and glad, too, that we can help you in the way you want. We have only a very small match on for Saturday, and we can easily make up a strong enough team without four of the fellows who usually play, and they are quite willing to come over and lend you a hand. They are Bob Cherry, Mark Linley, Tom Brown, and David Morgan. You have met them all here. They all play Rugby, and Linley, for one, plays it better than Soccer, and I think you will find them useful. They'll be over as early as possible Saturday.—Always yours,

"HARRY WHARTON."

"Bravo!" exclaimed Figgins.

"Hurray!" said the juniors in chorus.

"Good!" said Jack Blake. "We'll leave out the four weakest players to make room for them; and, between us, my sons, we'll give Tipton the licking of their lives."

And the Fourth-Formers shouted again:

"Bravo!"

CHAPTER 12.

Lumley-Lumley's Little Game.

JACK BLAKE looked rather anxiously at the letter-rack after lessons on Friday. Tom Merry, coming out of the Shell Form-room with his chums, stopped, and looked, too.

"Expecting cheques and postal-orders, Jacky?" asked Monty Lowther. "If so, don't forget your best chum, Monty!"

Blake shook his head.

"No," he said; "I'm expecting a reply from Tipton."

"Haven't they answered yet?"

"No," said Blake, with rather a worried expression. "I wrote to say that we were getting up a team to meet them, and I expected an answer; but it hasn't come. I suppose the cads can't be intending to leave the letter unanswered, can they? It would be just like Hobson to back out of the match now that he knows we'll play."

The Terrible Three grinned.

"I shouldn't be surprised," said Tom Merry. "Serve you right for your cheek in taking on a thing like this."

"Oh, rats!"

"Perhaps they're coming over to see you about it," suggested Manners.

"They're leaving it jolly late, then."

"Come on, kids!" said Tom Merry. "If we're going to get a spin before dark, we'd better get the bikes out. No time to lose."

"Right you are."

And the Terrible Three hurried out.

Blake took a last look over the letter-rack. He was surprised at a letter not having arrived from Tipton. Even if Hobson meant to get out of the match, he might be expected to write and say so.

He felt a touch on his arm, and looked round, to see the Outsider. Lumley-Lumley had been first out of the Form-room. He was lounging about the hall when Jack Blake came along to look for his letters.

"Well?" said Blake shortly.

"Have you ever thought over what I said to you?"

"About playing for us, do you mean?"

"I guess so."

"No," said Blake.

"Are you going to think it over?"

"No."

"You don't want me?"

"No."

"Thanks!" said Lumley. "You're very candid!"

"I mean to be!" said Blake grimly.

The Outsider strolled away. He went in the direction of the bicycle-shed, and paused as he saw the Terrible Three

wheeling their machines out. The chums of the Shelf mounted and were gone before Lumley entered the shed.

Before he took his machine from the stand, the Outsider of St. Jim's drew a crumpled postcard from his pocket, and read it.

The postcard was addressed to J. Blake, School House, St. James's. The Outsider of St. Jim's had taken it from the letter-rack himself.

It was from Tipton School, and ran:

"Dear Blake,—I've received your letter, and am glad to hear that some of you have grit enough to play. We'll come over this evening on our bikes and arrange details. You can expect us about six."

"J. HOBSON."

The Outsider grinned, and stowed the postcard carefully away again.

"The fools!" he muttered. "I guess I'll make 'em sorry for leaving Jerrold Lumley out of this combine!"

And the Outsider wheeled his machine out.

Jerrold Lumley-Lumley was followed by several glances as he went out. Mellish, of the Fourth, walked quickly after him, and overtook him at the gates.

"Going for a spin?" he asked.

"I guess so."

"Like me to come?"

"I guess not."

Mellish bit his lip. The Outsider mounted in the road



"I hear you're going to captain the Rugger team against Tipton, Wynn," said the Outsider. "I'd be willing to play. I'd be useful, I guess." "You won't play in my team, Lumley," said Patty Wynn. (See page 14.)

and pedalled off. Lumley had a very blunt way of dealing with his toady. Had he not been the wealthiest junior at St. Jim's, it is doubtful if even the cad of the Fourth would have stood it.

"Your polite friend gone out?" asked Kangaroo, glancing at Mellish, as he strolled in with a dark face. "Queer taste to go out for a spin alone."

"Oh, some dirty trick on, I suppose!" said Mellish viciously.

Kangaroo laughed.

"That's a nice way to speak of a chum."

"He's no chum of mine."

"I suppose not," assented the Cornstalk. "Blessed if I know how you two chaps stand one another. You can't call it chumming."

"Oh, Lumley's gone exploring!" said Kerruish. "He borrowed my county cycling map this afternoon."

"What on earth for?"

"To learn up the roads, I suppose."

"Odd!"

It might have been a little odd of Lumley-Lumley, but he knew what he was about. He had ridden a considerable distance from St. Jim's when he dismounted, opened Kerruish's cycling map, and spread it out over the seat of his bicycle. He scanned it carefully.

"Ah, here's Tipton!" he muttered. "They must take the high-road coming over, as far as Wayland at all events, and then they've the choice of three. If I get past Wayland, and watch for them on the high-road, I'm bound to meet them, I guess."

He folded up the map, slipped it into his pocket, and remounted. Then he scorched. The Outsider of St. Jim's was a slacker as a rule, but he could work hard when he liked. He liked now.

The ground fairly flew under the flashing wheels.

Jerrold Lumley passed through the old market town of Wayland, and left it behind, and came out on the broad, white road bordering the moor.

There he slackened speed.

Unless the Tipton fellows had passed Wayland, he must meet them now. They were certain to come on bicycles, and this was the only road they could take as far as Wayland. And, calculating their arrival at St. Jim's for six o'clock, he did not think they could have passed through Wayland before he did.

His conjecture was quite correct.

He loitered on the road, and soon sighted three cyclists coming towards him at a good pace. He recognised the Tipton fellows at once. He waved his hand to them, and the three, recognising a St. Jim's cap, stopped. They were Hobson, Marker, and Crane.

"Hallo!" said Hobson.

"Blake asked me to come and meet you," said Lumley, lying with that ease which had come of old habit.

"Oh, he did, did he?"

"Yes. He thought it no good your coming to St. Jim's for nothing."

"What do you mean?" demanded the Tipton captain.

"We're coming to arrange the details for the footer match to-morrow."

"It's off."

"Off!" shouted the three Tiptonians.

Jerrold Lumley nodded coolly. He had dismounted from his machine, and was standing leaning on the saddle.

"I guess so," he said.

"Oh, you guess so, do you?" snarled Hobson. "Blake wrote to us to say he'd raised a team to play us. And now it's off, is it?"

"Yes; quite off. You see, the Fourth and the Shell couldn't agree about it. Tom Merry's against playing, and he's got his way."

"I knew Tom Merry wouldn't give in," said Marker, with a nod. "You remember, I said they must be leaving him out, Hobby, old son."

"Yes, I remember."

"Well, that's all," said Lumley-Lumley lazily. "Blake's rather cut up about it, and he says he's sorry. He thinks he'd have licked you."

Hobson snorted.

"Well, it's no good going on, then," he said. "Tell Blake he can go and eat coke, from me; and tell Tom Merry he's a worm!"

"Certainly."

"Let's get back, you chaps."

The Tipton juniors mounted, and rode back the way they had come. Jerrold Lumley-Lumley looked after them with a jeering smile.

"I guess Blake will be sorry he wouldn't play me," he murmured.

He took out Blake's postcard, tore it into fragments, and threw them away, and then rode back towards Wayland.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 140.

CHAPTER 13.

A Hostile Meeting.

TING-TING-TING!

Buz-z-zzz!

"Tipton chaps, by Jove!" said Tom Merry.

Three cyclists came scorching along the road towards Wayland. Tom Merry and his chums had been on a long spin, and they were scorching to get back to St. Jim's before dark.

They had a long way to go yet, and they were putting on the pace with a will. They rang simultaneously as three riders appeared on the road coming towards them. Tom Merry was the first to recognise the three as Tiptonians.

"Hobson and Marker and Crane," said Monty Lowther.

"They've been over to see Blake, then?"

"I suppose so; and they're going home."

Buz-z-zzz!

The three Tipton fellows came closer up. They released their right handle-bars as they came, snapping their fingers together at the St. Jim's juniors.

"Cowards!" they shouted with one voice.

The Terrible Three stared.

"What on earth—" began Tom Merry.

"Cowards!"

Then the Tiptonians were past.

Tom Merry flushed crimson.

"My hat!" he exclaimed. "We'll jolly well show them whether we're cowards or not. Get after them!"

"What about calling-over?" said the cautious Manners.

"Hang calling-over!"

"Oh, all right!"

The Terrible Three, with hardly a slackening of pace, swung round in the road, and scorched back after the Tipton fellows.

Hobson & Co. did not expect that, and they were overtaken in a very few minutes. Not, probably, that they would have fled, anyway.

"Stop!" shouted Tom Merry.

Hobson looked over his shoulder.

"Hallo! What do you want?" he asked.

"What did you call out to us just now?"

"Cowards!"

"Get off your machine."

"What for?"

"Because if you don't I'll ride you down!" said Tom Merry angrily.

The Tiptonians jumped down.

Tom Merry and his comrades dismounted, swinging their machines to the roadside, and they advanced upon the Tiptonians with clenched fists and flashing eyes. The Terrible Three did not look an easy handful to tackle at that moment, and Hobson & Co. felt a slight misgiving.

"Now, then," said Tom Merry. "You've chosen to call us by a pretty name, and you can make it good, I suppose?"

"Look here—"

"I suppose you're referring to our refusing to play you?" said Tom Merry. "You know my reasons; I wouldn't meet a Rugger team with my men, who've always played Soccer. If you like to play a Soccer eleven, we'll meet you fast enough. I refused to play, and I stick to it. But I'll show you plainly enough that I'm not a coward. We're three to three. Come on!"

"But—"

"And take that for a start."

And Tom Merry's knuckles rapped forcibly upon Hobson's nose.

Hobson needed no more.

He ran straight at Tom Merry, and they were hotly engaged in a moment. Crane singled out Lowther, and went for him hotly; while Manners and Marker squared up to one another more cautiously.

In a moment there was a furious fight going on.

Panting, gasping, and trampling of feet, flying dust and pommelling fists!

"There, you rotter!"

"Take that, you cad!"

"Yah!"

"Take that!"

"Yow!"

"Oh, oh! Yah! Groo! M-m-m-y nose!"

"Go it, St. Jim's!"

"Back up, Tipton!"

"Oh!"

"Ow!"

Hobson was down in the roadway now, with Tom Merry standing over him. Monty Lowther and Crane were whirling round in a deadly embrace, trampling up enough dust for three or four motor-cars.

Manners and Marker, perhaps wiser in their generation

certainly cooler, were still squaring up scientifically, feinting and countering, and neither had as yet received a scratch.

"Had enough, Hobson?" panted Tom Merry.

"Ow!"

"Get up, then."

"Groo!"

"You'll take back what you called us before we're done."

Hobson snorted.

"I jolly well won't!" he snapped. "I didn't mean it for you specially, but for all St. Jim's—specially Blake and his lot. It's cowardly to challenge a chap, and then to back out of it."

"We haven't."

"I'm speaking of Blake now."

"Blake! Do you mean to say Jack Blake has backed down?"

"Yes, I do."

"Rot!"

"Oh, it's rot, is it?" said Hobson, sitting up in the dust, and rubbing his swollen nose. "Well, you can ask him yourself when you get back to St. Jim's. Blake wrote to me, and accepted the challenge for himself and a team he said he was raising."

"That's right—a Rugger Fourth team."

"Now he's sneaked out of it."

"Rats!"

"If you won't take my word, you'll take Blake's, I suppose," snapped Hobson. "You can ask him for yourself."

"I don't mean to say I won't take your word," said Tom Merry, looking perplexed. "But there's some mistake. Did Blake tell you this himself?"

"We haven't seen Blake."

"Then how—"

"He sent a chap to meet us and tell us."

"Stuff! When I left St. Jim's Blake was waiting to hear from you, and was jolly anxious at having had no letter," said Tom Merry.

"I sent him a postcard."

"He hadn't had it."

"Well, I sent it, and then he sent a messenger to meet us on the road, and tell us it wasn't any good coming to St. Jim's to see him, because the match was off!"

"It's rot!" exclaimed Tom Merry excitedly. "Somebody has been japing you. Are you sure it was a St. Jim's fellow?"

"He had a St. Jim's cap."

"Some blessed japer, then. Do you know him—his name?"

"No. He was an American, I think—he was guessing at every other sentence, and he had a giddy accent in his nose."

Tom Merry started.

"Lumley-Lumley, for a thousand pounds!"

Hobson staggered up. Manners and Marker had agreed to leave off their mutual sparring now, but Lowther and Crane were still hammering away, and both were showing very plain signs of wear and tear.

"Here, chuck it!" said Tom Merry. "It's a mistake. It's a rotten jape of Lumley-Lumley's—he's been spoofing these chaps!"

"Oh!" said Lowther.

"He's not an American," Tom Merry explained to Hobson. "But he was brought up in New York, and he talks like a Yank. It's Lumley-Lumley, as sure as a gun. It's another of his rotten tricks!"

Hobson grunted.

"Well, it's off now, anyway!" he said.

"Not at all! Come back to St. Jim's with us, and you can see Blake and fix it up."

The Tipton fellows exchanged dubious glances. But they finally assented, and the six juniors rode back to St. Jim's together.

CHAPTER 14.

Called to Account.

"THEY'VE come!"

"Here they are!"

"Bai Jove! It's time, too!"

Jack Blake and a crowd of the Fourth Form were standing at the gates of St. Jim's, looking for possible visitors from Tipton. They had kept up the Rugger practice till dusk forced them to stop. Then they had leisure to be anxious about the failure of a reply from Tipton.

Glad enough was Jack Blake when he saw the three Tipton fellows cycling up with the chums of the Shell.

It was a great relief.

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus remarked. "I nevah thought I should be glad to see a Tipton cad, you know, but I am, you know."

The cyclists came to a halt.

"So you've come, Hobson," said Blake, rather grimly.

"Yes, here we are!"

"Might have come before, or written, I should think."

"I did write."

"Oh! I've had nothing from you!"

Tom Merry broke in, and explained. Blake's brow grew very grim.

"Somebody boned the postcard, then," he said. "Same chap who told you that lie on the road. Lumley-Lumley, of course. Have you fellows been slogging one another?" he asked, looking at the damaged faces.

"A little misunderstanding," grinned Tom Merry.

"It's all right," grunted Hobson.

"Come in!" said Blake. "There's some tea going in the study."

Hobson shook his head.

"Thanks!" he said. "We've got to get back, or we shall be shut out. We lost a lot of time through turning back on the road."

"We'll make that fellow smart for it. We're really sorry," said Blake.

"Oh, never mind!"

Hobson said never mind, but he was evidently sulky. He had been considerably hurt in the tussle with Tom Merry, and it did not improve his temper.

But Blake bore with his ill-humour very patiently. He did not want anything to go wrong with the match for the morrow. After the match was over he could tell Hobson what he thought of him.

"We'll make the arrangements now," said Hobson, standing with his hand on his machine. "We won't come in, thanks!"

"Oh, just as you like! Look for that cad Lumley, you fellows, and bring him along," said Blake. "Here, where's Wynn? He's skipper!"

"Wynn! Where's Wynn?"

"In the tuckshop, I expect," said Kangaroo, with a grin.

"Ha, ha! Most likely!"

"Come into the tuckshop and jaw it over there, you fellows!" said Blake hospitably. "They've got some jolly cakes and coffee, too!"

Hobson shook his head. He preferred to keep up his lofty attitude of ill-humour.

"Thanks, no!"

Blake compressed his lips.

"Oh, very well! I'll fetch Wynn!"

He ran to the school shop, while Herries and Dig and some of the others went to look for Lumley-Lumley. That the Outsider would lie about his exploit they knew, and they wanted him to be identified by the Tipton fellows before they left.

Blake, as he expected, found Fatty Wynn in the school shop. The fat Fourth-Former was finishing a plate of tarts.

He looked at Blake with an affable smile.

"Hallo!" he remarked. "Try these tarts. I'm on the last of my lot. I'm sorry, but Mrs. Taggles has got lots more, haven't you, Mrs. Taggles?"

"Plenty, Master Wynn!"

"I haven't come here for tarts," said Blake. "I've come for you. Come on!"

"What's on?" asked Fatty, bolting his last tart.

"Fellows from Tipton want to see the Rugger skipper. Come on!"

And Blake grasped Fatty Wynn by the arm and dragged him out. The fat Fourth-Former coughed and turned purple in the face.

"Groo-hoo!" he gasped. "D-d-don't! I'm chook-choking!"

"Well, you can choke in the quad, just as well as here," said Blake practically.

"Ow! Ooh! Groo!"

Blake patted Fatty Wynn on the back—or, more correctly, thumped him. The fat New House fellow roared.

"Ow! Hoo! Groo! Silly ass! Chuck it!"

"Feel better?" asked Blake.

"Yah! Ass! Lemme alone!"

And Fatty Wynn jerked himself away, and coughed without Blake's assistance. They arrived at the gate, Fatty Wynn still grunting.

"Gläd to see you—hoo-hoo!" grunted Fatty Wynn. "Excuse me—hoo-groo—just swallowed a tart, and silly ass punched me in the back—hoo-groo! It's all right now—groo-groo-groo!"

"We've come over to make the arrangements for to morrow," said Hobson loftily.

"All right—groo!"

"I suppose you'll come over to our ground, as it's Rugger match!"

"Certainly—hoo-groo!"

"What time will suit you?"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 140.

NEXT
THURSDAY:

"A SHADOW IN THE SCHOOL."

Another Splendid Long, Complete School
Tale of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's.

"Late as possible," whispered Figgins to Fatty Wynn. "Give time to the Greyfriars' fellows to get here." "Good! Groo! Late as possible!" said Fatty Wynn. "Friends coming from a distance to play. Hoo-groo!" "Say kick off at three," said Hobson. "Half-past three," said Figgins. "Half-past three," said Fatty Wynn. "Hoo-hoo-groo!" "Oh, all right! It's settled!" "Quite settled."

"It seems that we're not playing the junior team," Marker observed. "A team picked out of the Fourth Form, isn't it?"

"Yes, with some friends who are playing for us. 'Groo!'" "Not oldsters, I suppose?"

"Oh, no, Fourth-Form chaps like ourselves—in fact, Lower Fourth!"

"Good! That's all right," said Hobson.

"Won't you come in and groo-grooo-groo—" coughed Fatty Wynn. "I mean, won't you come in and he-hem-hem—that is, have some refreshment?"

"No, thanks!"

"Time we were off," said Crane. There was a shout from the dusky quadrangle.

"Here he is."

Herries and Digby and Reilly appeared, dragging the Outsider of St. Jim's towards the group at the gates.

Jerrold Lumley was looking very excited, and somewhat alarmed. He resisted very much as the juniors dragged him to the gates, but his resistance did not make much difference to the three sturdy Fourth-Formers.

"Here the boulder is!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Is this the chap who yarned to you on the road at Wayland, Hobson?" asked Tom Merry, pointing to the Outsider.

Jerrold Lumley's jaw dropped when he saw the Tipton fellows. He understood now what he was wanted for.

He made a desperate effort to break loose in vain. The grasp upon him was too tight.

Hobson peered at him in the gloom.

"That's the chap," he said.

"It's a lie!" growled Lumley.

"That's the chap," repeated Hobson. "I know him, you know."

"Yes, rather!" said Crane.

"And I'd know his voice again, anywhere," remarked Marker.

"Thanks!" said Tom Merry. "We'll deal with him presently. If you chaps won't come in and have some tea—"

"Must be off, thanks!"

And the Tipton trio mounted their machines and pedalled away into the dusk. The juniors of St. Jim's gathered round the Outsider.

"Now," said Blake grimly, "what have you got to say for yourself?"

Jerrold Lumley gave him a savage look.

"Nothing!"

"You lied to Hobson—"

"Find out!"

"You wanted to get the match put off, or stopped rather, because we wouldn't play you in the fifteen," said Blake.

Lumley-Lumley shrugged his shoulders.

"Isn't that so?" demanded Blake, his voice rising.

"I guess so," said Lumley-Lumley coolly. "I told you you'd be sorry for not playing me, you know."

"You took my postcard off the letter-rack."

Lumley gave another shrug.

"I suppose you know you'd be flogged if a thing like that were reported to the Head," said Blake. "It's a rather serious matter meddling with another chap's correspondence."

"Report it to the Head if you like."

"I sha'n't do that—"

"Then shut up about it!"

Blake's eyes gleamed.

"I sha'n't do that either," he said. "You're going to pay for it. You won't play dirty tricks like this and then grin at us. Bring him into the gym."

"Look here—"

"Bring him in!"

And Jerrold Lumley, vainly struggling in the grasp of his captors, was marched forcibly into the gymnasium.

CHAPTER 15.

No Ragging.

LUMLEY-LUMLEY was looking pale and furlous, but he did not look afraid. The Outsider of St. Jim's seemed incapable of fear. He was marched into the gym, which was dusky and deserted just then. Blake put on a light, and the group of juniors and the Outsider stopped. Lumley-Lumley looked at them furiously.

"Let me go!" he snarled.

"Not just yet."

"Wathah not!"

"You're going through it," said Blake quietly. "It's no good fighting you, because you're no match for me—I've done it once. Even Gussy has licked you as easy as sitting on a hat."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Don't interrupt, Gussy."

"I object to your remarks. You speak as if it were remarkable for me to be able to lick anybody," said D'Arcy indignantly. "I wegard it as the easiest thing in the world to give the Outsidah a feahful thwashin'."

"Order!"

"I wefuse to ordah—I mean, I wegard you as an ass, Weilly! As a maffah of fact, I should be glad to pwove my words by givin' a feahful thwashin' to any gentleman pwesent."

"Any takers?" grinned Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Figgins—"

"If Gussy has finished," said Blake, in a tone of exquisite resignation, "I will go on—"

"Weally Blake—"

"Otherwise we'll all take a five-bar rest, and let Gussy rip."

"I wegard you as an ass!"

"Go hon!"

"I wefuse to say anothah word!"

"Hurrah!"

"Weally, you know—"

"Look here, I guess you'd better chuck this," said Jerrold Lumley. "I've got my prep. to do, when you're done playing the fool."

"Weally, Lumley—"

"We're not quite done playing the fool," said Blake cheerfully. "You're going to pay for having played the fool yourself, you see. Have you got anything to say?"

"I guess not, except cut it short."

"Bai Jove!"

"And keep that duffer quiet."

D'Arcy turned crimson.

"Gweat Scott! It is imposs. for me to ovahlook this gwoss impertinence, Blake. I beg you to stop the pwocceedin's for a few minutes while I give that wank outsidah a feahful thwashin'."

"Cheese it—"

"I decline to cheese it! I—"

"Order!"

"Weally, you know—"

"Rats!"

"If you say wats to me, Kerr—"

"Shut up!" roared Blake. "We've got biznay in hand. Take hold of that rotter and give him the frog's march round the gym, and knock some of the lies out of him."

"Hear, hear!"

"Let me alone!" yelled Lumley, fighting hard. "I'll—I'll— Oh!"

He was dragged down, and grasped in a dozen hands.

"Now, then, the frog's march!"

Lumley struggled furiously.

His face was white, his eyes blazing with rage. But suddenly his struggles ceased, and his limbs became quiet and still. He lay like a log in the grasp of the juniors.

"Quiet, now!" grinned Herries.

"March him!"

"Hold on!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Hold on, I say!"

"Oh, get back!"

"Stop! There's something wrong! He's ill!"

"Rats!"

"Stuff!"

"He's shamming!"

"Let me look at him," said Tom Merry, forcing them to lay Lumley-Lumley on the floor.

The Outsider's eyes were closed, and his mouth tightly drawn. He did not seem to be breathing.

The juniors released him now, and stood round in alarm.

What was the matter with Lumley?

He was so untruthful, so utterly unreliable, that, sick and white as he looked, most of the juniors believed that he was shamming.

"It's all rot!" said Hancock. "He's humbugging us!"

"All spoof!" said Jones minor.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 140.

ANSWERS

"YORKSHIRE CRIT,"

A Stirring New Serial, telling of a Yorkshire boy's fight against the world, commences this week in "THE BOYS' FRIEND," 1st.

"Faith, and ye're right!"
 "Yaas, wathah!"
 "I think not," said Tom Merry quietly. "This is genuine enough. He's ill, or something. Look here, get some water."
 "But—"
 "Water, quick!"
 "Oh, all right!" said Blake, convinced by Tom Merry's earnest manner, and he hurried away.
 Tom Merry loosened the collar and tie round Lumley's neck and raised his head. The teeth of the Outsider were tightly clenched, and his eyes still shut. His breathing was faint and low.

The juniors realised now that there was some cause for alarm.

"He has fainted," said Kerr.

But it did not seem like an ordinary faint.

Blake brought the water, and Tom Merry dashed it into Lumley's face. Even then, for some minutes, the Outsider did not open his eyes.

"Better get a doctor," said Kerr.

"He's coming to," exclaimed Herries.

Lumley's eyes opened.

He gazed round in surprise and dazed bewilderment at the anxious, bending faces of the juniors.

"Wh—what—" he stammered.

"Better?" said Tom Merry softly.

"What? What is it?"

"You fainted."

Lumley sat up. The colour flushed into his cheeks. His hand went up dazedly to his unfastened collar, dripping now with the water that had been splashed upon his face.

"What have you been doing?" he exclaimed angrily.

"What is it? What do you mean by saying that I fainted?"

"Well, you did."

"It's a lie!"

Tom Merry compressed his lips. But he would not allow his anger to rise against one who had been in so strange a state, and who had evidently not yet fully recovered from his attack.

"It's the truth, Lumley," he said quietly.

"It's not!"

Jerrold Lumley struggled up away from Tom Merry's supporting arm. He gave a glare of defiance round at the juniors.

"I'm all right," he exclaimed. "I never fainted."

"Then you were shamming," said Blake.

Lumley's eyes gleamed.

"I guess that was it," he said. "I took you all in, too, I guess."

Blake turned away. He did not believe Lumley. If the fellow had been shamming he would have kept it up. It was genuine, and the Outsider was ashamed to own up to the physical weakness that was the cause of it.

The juniors left the gym, leaving Lumley fastening his collar, and scowling. They were very silent.

"That was a curious thing," Blake remarked, at last.

Tom Merry nodded.

"Yes, and lucky it turned out no worse."

"You believe it was genuine?"

"I'm quite certain of that."

"Then why couldn't the fellow have owned up to fainting?" said Figgins.

"He wouldn't. He wants to be thought hard all through. He wouldn't admit to a fainting-fit to save his life. But it wasn't exactly a faint, either," said Tom Merry. "It was a queer attack. My belief is that he ought to see a doctor."

"Not much good suggesting it to him."

"I suppose not."

Shamming or not, Lumley-Lumley's strange attack saved him from the wrath of the juniors, and nothing more was said about his having lied to the Tiptonians on the Wayland Road, and very nearly deprived the Fourth Form of their Rugger match.

CHAPTER 16.

A Warning in Time.

THE next morning there was one topic in the Fourth Form at St. Jim's—Rugger.

Rugger was in their minds, and Rugger was on their lips. Rugger had been in their dreams on the previous night.

They gloried in the title they had given themselves of the Rugger Fourth. They swanked as the only exponents at St. Jim's of the older game. They patronised the Shell in a way that brought about many warm arguments, and not a few fustian encounters.

"You fellows should really take up Rugger," said little Thompson of the Fourth, in an insufferably patronising manner, addressing the Terrible Three, the mighty footballers of the Lower School. "You should, really, you know. Splendid for developing you, you know."

And little Thompson drew himself up to the full height of his five feet one.

Tom Merry grinned.

"Rats!" said Monty Lowther and Manners together.

"Splendid thing for you if you did," said little Thompson.

"I don't like to see you fellows slacking about."

"What?"

"Of course, we couldn't have you in our team—I'm down as a reserve. But you might get up some sort of a team of your own."

"Eh?"

"Yes, some sort of a team, in the Shell," said little Thompson. "I really don't see why you shouldn't."

Some sort of a team! It was too much. With one accord the Terrible Three grasped little Thompson, and rolled him down the steps.

Blake & Co. were at practice that morning before breakfast, and there was no doubt that there had been a great improvement in form.

The fifteen were pulling together well, and there was no doubt, either, that the team would be improved when the Greyfriars fellows came.

Tom Merry watched them at practice.

"Good!" he said. "I don't know if they'll lick Tipton, but they'll put up a fairly good show, and that's really quite as much as can be expected of the Fourth."

"Quite!" agreed Lowther.

"Oh, rats!" said Jack Blake, coming off the ground in time to hear the remark. "You just come along and see the match, my sons, and see us lick 'em."

"We'll come along," said Tom Merry. "If you do lick Tipton, you'll need to have some friends on the ground, my boy."

"How do you mean?"

"I know the Tipton little ways. I was told the other day about their playing the Grammar School. Gordon Gay and his men licked them hollow, playing Rugger, too, and the Tipton fellows got up a row with them on the ground."

"Rotten!" said Blake.

"Well, as the Grammarians had only about eighteen fellows there in all, they were pretty badly rushed."

Blake looked grave.

"I hadn't heard about that," he said. "It's rotten! We're going to beat Tipton if we can, of course."

"Oh, I don't suppose you're in much danger."

"Rats! It would be beastly to be rushed by a crowd of them if we licked Tipton. But perhaps some of the fault was on the Grammar side. Those fellows are always getting into rows. They have rows with us, you know."

Tom Merry laughed.

"I know they do. But I fancy Tipton got their backs up because they were licked. Anyway, you want to look out."

"Bai Jove, yaas!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I shall make it a point to look out. If the Tipton chaps begin any wotten twicks, you know, I shall give them a fearful thwashin'."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"We simply must go over," Monty Lowther remarked. "It's worth the journey, to see Gussy thrashing all Tipton at once!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you duffahs—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

D'Arcy walked on with his nose high in the air. But Blake was not laughing. He knew that there was something in the warning Tom Merry had given him.

The Tipton fellows were known to be very unsportsmanlike. They had sent that challenge to St. Jim's in the full expectation of licking the Saints, if the challenge had been accepted. Would they have sent it if they had anticipated a fair game on equal terms?

Blake knew that the answer to that question was "No." They wouldn't; and so it was pretty certain that they would get ratty if they were beaten.

Blake would never have expected even fellows who were unsportsmanlike, and never so ratty, to rush players who had come to meet them on their own ground.

But the story of the Grammarians' experience there was a clincher. There was no getting out of that.

Blake related what Tom Merry had told him, to the Fourth-Formers, and they all looked grave over it.

"I shouldn't wonder if we have to look for something of the sort," said Figgins. "That won't prevent us from licking them if we can, of course."

"Wathah not!"

"But we shall have to look out, that's all."

"We'll make the whole Fourth go with us," said Kerr.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Tom Merry says he's coming with the Shell crowd, to see fair play," Blake remarked thoughtfully.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 140.

NEXT THURSDAY: "A SHADOW IN THE SCHOOL." Another Splendid Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's.

"That's jolly decent of him, after the way we've taken the affair out of his hands," Figgins exclaimed.

"Well, Tom Merry is decent, jolly decent; always was!"

"Yaas, wathah! I will say that for Tom Mewwy. He doesn't always tweek a fellow with pwopah wespect; but he is jolly decent."

"Only the Tiptonians will be such a big crowd that we may get walked over, anyway, if they cut up rough," Kerr remarked.

"That's likely enough. But—"

"We'll try to keep on honey terms," said Monty Lowther.

"A soft answer turns away wrath, you know."

"Something in that."

"Oh, lots!" said Lowther. "If Hobson says we can't play footer for toffee, we'll say that we like the way he does his front hair. If he declares that we are duffers and bounders, we'll say that his sweet voice haunts us still."

"Oh, don't be an ass, you know. But we'll keep on peaceful terms if we can, and if we can't, we'll give 'em all the fight they want."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And that was the best decision the St. Jim's Fourth could come to. It was too late in the day to think of making any alteration in the plans; and after all, the Tipton crowd might play the game.

As soon as the time came, Blake and his men waited at the gates for the arrival of the big brake that was to take them to the station, and the Greyfriars fellows too.

Blake had wired the time of departure to Greyfriars, and he had no doubt that the Removites from that famous school would arrive in time.

As Blake and his chums stood looking out down the white road, three cyclists went by in a cloud of dust. They were Gay, Monk, and Wootton, of the Rylcombe Grammar School. The Saints gave them a yell, and the Grammarians slackened down and came tearing back.

It looked like a hostile demonstration for a moment, and the St. Jim's juniors were ready for it; but Gay waved his hand in sign of friendship, and jumped off his machine.

"No larks!" he exclaimed. "Pax! Look here! I hear you fellows are sending a team over to Tipton this afternoon."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, taking it upon himself to reply.

"Well, look out for squalls if you win, that's all," said Gay. "We played them at Rugger last Saturday—you know we've a lot of Rugger players. We beat them hollow; they're not up to much form. And they cut up rusty, and there was a row on the ground. I told Tom Merry about it."

"Yes, I heard," said Blake.

"How many fellows are you taking?"

"Oh, there'll be forty or more of us in all."

"Good! But look out all the same."

"Thanks!" said Blake. "We'll look out."

The Grammarians rode on. Gordon Gay was silent for some minutes, as they passed out of view of the St. Jim's fellows.

"We've had lots of rows with the Saints," he remarked at last.

Frank Monk grinned assent.

"Lots!" he said.

"But they always play the game."

"Always."

"And Tipton don't."

"They don't."

"Then," said Gordon Gay, "I think we may as well stroll over to Tipton this afternoon to see that Rugger match."

"Not much to see."

"No, but after the match—"

"But we're playing at home, Gay."

"We play early, and they must be playing late, as they haven't left St. Jim's yet," said Gordon Gay. "We shall have time to get over to Tipton by the time they finish."

"But—"

"And if there's any foul play, my sons, that's where we come in strong," said Gay. "Last Saturday they rushed us. If there's any trouble this afternoon, we'll pay them back in their own coin. What do you say?"

And Monk and Wootton said:

"What-ho!"

the best of tempers. The St. Jim's juniors greeted them warmly.

"Jolly glad to see you!" said Blake. "Jolly good of you to come. And here's the brake. Tumble in, you chaps."

The fifteen and the friends for whom room was found in the brake were soon aboard. All the cargo belonged to the Fourth.

The Shell fellows stood round to see them off.

The Greyfriars four looked at them in surprise. Bob Cherry and his comrades did not yet know of the Rugger Fourth scheme.

"Who's skipping this team, then?" Bob Cherry asked, as the driver shook his reins out, and the brake started.

"Fatty Wynn!"

"Oh!"

"It's a Fourth-Form match," Blake explained. "Tom Merry, as junior captain, refused to play Tipton, because we don't play Rugger. We've raised a Fourth-Form team to beat them."

"Oh, I see!"

"With you fellows helping I think we shall do it."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We'll try our hardest," said Mark Linley. "It will be a pleasure to me, at least, to play a Rugger game again. I always used to play Rugger at home in Lancashire."

The brake soon reached the station, and the fifteen took the train for Tipton.

Meanwhile, Tom Merry and most of the Shell were walking down to the station, or had taken their machines out for a spin across country to the scene of the football match.

It was a merry party in the train going to Tipton. D'Arcy volunteered to sing a tenor solo, and was howled down, and was still in a state of considerable excitement when the train stopped at Tipton.

There were no Tipton fellows there to meet the team, and no vehicle, when Blake looked round for one.

Blake gave an expressive sniff.

"These Tipton chaps are simply pigs," he said to Bob Cherry. "We're only playing them to take them down a peg or two. They're not a side that we like to meet, you know."

"I understand," said Bob.

The juniors walked down to the school, carrying their bags, and inquiring their way.

They reached Tipton.

"Oh, here you are," said Hobson, meeting them, and staring at them in a far from friendly manner. "You've come."

"Didn't you expect us?" said Blake.

"We thought you'd most likely funk it at the last minute."

Jack Blake breathed hard through his nose.

"Well, we haven't," he said, as calmly as he could.

"Here we are."

"You're going to play—eh?"

"I suppose so."

"Here they are, you fellows!" called out Hobson.

"They're going to play after all."

There was a laugh from some of the Tiptonians. The greeting could not be called polite. Bob Cherry and his friends said nothing, but their looks told a great deal. However, the rudeness of the Tiptonians was none of their business; they had come there to play for St. Jim's, that was all.

"Here's the pavilion," said Hobson. "You'd better change. We're quite ready. Matter of fact, we thought you were never coming, and we were getting up a practice match with the Fifth here."

"We're not late."

"Oh, it's all right, as you've come!"

"What do you think of the pigs?" demanded Blake, as he stripped off his jacket in the dressing-room. "What's your opinion of them?"

"I wegard them as wotten boundahs."

"Bounders isn't the word," said Bob Cherry. "We've got a chap at Greyfriars we call the Bounder, but he's a perfect gentleman compared with these chaps."

"Hogs," said Figgins. "Never mind; we'll cure 'em."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at, Kerr?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What the—"

"Very good."

"What's good?" demanded Figgins.

"Why, that pun."

"What pun?"

Kerr stared.

"Might have guessed you did it by accident," he said. "I never knew you make a good one before, Figgy."

"Blessed if I know what you're jawing about," said Figgy. "I never made any pun. I said they were hogs, and we'd cure 'em."

CHAPTER 17.

Off to Tipton.

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, of the Greyfriars Remove, as he came swinging up with his long stride. "Here we are!"

And he shook hands with Blake.

Bob Cherry, Mark Linley, Tom Brown, and David Morgan, of the Greyfriars Remove, looked in the best of form and

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 140.

"YORKSHIRE GRIT," A Stirring New Serial, telling of a Yorkshire boy's fight against the world, commences this week in "THE BOYS' FRIEND," 1^d.

"Cure 'em—see?" said Kerr. "Hogs—bacons cured, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins, seeing his own joke. "Jolly good! I'll put that in 'Tom Merry's Weekly.'"

"Yes, we'll cure 'em, and show them that they're rasher than they think," said Hancock, venturing to carry the pun further.

At which there was a howl.

"Gammon!"

"My only hat!" said Blake, in astonishment. "If it were a punning match, I dare say we should win hands down."

"Yaas, wathah! I considah—"

"Gussy, are you going to be all the afternoon getting into your things?"

"I consider—"

"Change first and consider afterwards, old boy."

"Weally, Dig—"

"Buck up!" said Blake. "Those chaps are ready now. We don't want to keep them waiting. They're pigs."

Fatty Wynn's fifteen sallied out of the dressing-room.

They found Hobson & Co. quite ready, talking rather loudly among themselves, and to the crowd round the field.

Half Tipton seemed to have turned up for the match.

They looked on in anticipation of fun, not thinking for a moment that St. Jim's would make any show against the home side; and this opinion they expressed without taking the trouble to lower their voices.

Tipton may have been an excellent college in other respects, but certainly manners did not seem to be included in the curriculum, as Blake remarked to his friends.

The Tiptonians thought nothing of laughing directly at their visitors, and criticising their probable play in tones quite loud enough for them to hear. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's eyeglass came in for its share of this well-bed-commentary, and the swell of St. Jim's was soon quite crimson with indignation.

"Bai Jove!" he murmured to Blake. "I wathah think that I shall thwash some of these fellows before we leave Tipton, you know."

"I'd jolly well like to get a dozen of them into the gym. at our show, with five or six of ours," said Blake. "We'd show 'em. But we're in too small a minority here, Gussy. Even those worms would lick us, so many against us."

"Yaas, but—"

"Ready, there?" said Fatty Wynn.

"Yaas, wathah!"

The Tipton fellows were ready, too. Round the ground was a swarm of Tiptonians, most of them laughing and exchanging jeering remarks. It was a new experience for the St. Jim's fellows, and their cheeks were burning.

CHAPTER 18.

The Rugger Match.

THE kick-off fell to Tipton. The Tiptonians commenced with a swagger that showed how low they rated their opponents, and that alone would have been sufficient to put the St. Jim's backs up. Jack Blake and his comrades were in a grim humour. They meant to show the swanking Tiptonians that there was something in them.

It was soon evident, too, that Tipton methods were of the roughest. Many of the Tipton players belonged to the Shell, and so the average age and weight was above that of Fatty Wynn's fifteen. This gave them an additional advantage in rough play; and Blake soon observed that the referee had a way of keeping one eye closed when the Tipton fellows offended.

The referee was a Sixth Form fellow of Tipton school, and the Saints had taken it for granted that he might be relied upon to do his duty; but they soon discovered that all the Tiptonians were tarred with the same brush.

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as Hobson charged him from behind, and sent him sprawling. "Gweat Scott!"

Blake gave him a hand up.

The swell of St. Jim's was very shaken; but his eye was gleaming hard.

"All wight, deah boy," he said quietly.

"Hurt, Gussy?"

"Nothin' to speak of."

D'Arcy was not likely to speak of it, if he was hurt. But he kept an eye on Hobson after that.

His chance came presently.

Hobson, who was playing three-quarter for his side, got away with the ball, and looked like clearing a path through the St. Jim's defence.

Blake and Figgins, and two or three other forwards tried to stop him in vain, the Tipton skipper either shouldering them off or eluding them.

But a St. Jim's three-quarter was on his track.

It was Arthur Augustus.

The swell of St. Jim's cleared over the ground with a fleetness that astonished those who had chiefly observed him lounging round with an eyeglass in his eye. It was evident that there was real stuff in Arthur Augustus.

Fatty Wynn was full-back, and he was ready for Hobson. It was doubtful if the Tipton skipper would have got past him. But Hobson realised that, and instead of carrying out his original intention of touching down, he tried to drop a goal.

But just as the ball was leaving his fingers, or, rather, just as it rose for his foot, two arms were flung round Hobson, and he was whirled over.

He came to the ground with a crash, and Arthur Augustus fell across him, and seemed disinclined to move.

Hobson lay with his brain swimming, hardly knowing what had happened; but with a general impression that there had been a terrible earthquake, and that he had been in the very centre of it.

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" he gasped blindly.

"Bai Jove!"

Kerr had dashed in and collared the ball in a twinkling, and was off with it towards the Tipton goal-line.

"Ow!" gasped Hobson. "Yow! Gerroff!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy slowly drew his elegant limbs off the Tipton skipper, and gave him a sweet smile as he rose.

"Yow!" groaned Hobson.

"Quite a fair tackle, deah boy," said D'Arcy. "Wathah diffewent fwom your style of chargin'—quite fair and above board, you know."

And the swell of St. Jim's ambled off contentedly.

Hobson staggered to his feet in a deserted field—deserted save by Fatty Wynn. The players were massed towards the Tipton goal.

For Kerr—Kerr, the fellow who had never talked about what he could do at Rugby, Kerr, the dark horse—Kerr was streaking through the enemy like lightning, and he had handed off or shouldered off half a dozen opponents, and charged over two, and eluded more of them, and now there was only Marker, the full-back, to stop him from touching down right under the crossbar.

Marker was watching him, ready.

Kerr came straight on, at dashing speed, as if he meant to charge the full-back direct, and Marker stood steady and ready.

Within three feet of the back, Kerr swerved off with a suddenness that took Marker wholly by surprise, and in the twinkling of an eye had reached the goal-line well to the side of the goal, and touched down with perfect coolness.

There was a roar from the Saints.

"Bravo, Kerr!"

"Hurrah!"

"Try! Try! Try!"

There wasn't any doubt on that subject.

It was a try—the first score of the game, and scored with surprising ease. The Tipton fellows simply glared; and the Saints overflowed with delight.

Figgins gave his chum a mighty slap on the back.

"Good old Kerr!" he bellowed. "Scotland for ever! Hurrah!"

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy. "I wegard that as weally neat, you know. Those Tipton wottahs are all swank. If we'd had an extwa week's pwactice before the match, we'd have walked all ovah them, deah boys."

And the dear boys fully assented.

The ball was carried out, and Tom Brown, of Greyfriars, was asked to take the kick. Tom Brown's quality was well-known at St. Jim's, and they knew he had been brought up on the Rugger game in New Zealand.

He kicked, and the leather sailed gracefully over the crossbar.

The Saints shrieked.

"Goal!"

"Goal! Hurrah!"

Perhaps it wasn't quite the thing for the Saints to cheer themselves, but after the Tipton jeers and swank, they couldn't help it. It seemed so comic that goal and try both should come to them, the first taken in the game, after the airs the Tipton fellows had assumed.

Hobson was looking furious.

He didn't take the trouble to conceal what he felt. He was angry and savage. He had been very much shaken up by that terrific tackle from D'Arcy, and he didn't like that. And the St. Jim's score was exasperating.

He spoke in low tones to his men when they lined up, and they were all looking far from pleasant.

The Saints knew what was coming.

From the restart the game was rougher and more lawless. The Tiptonians were taking full advantage of their weight and size, and of the favourable eye of the referee.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 140.

NEXT THURSDAY: "A SHADOW IN THE SCHOOL."

Another Splendid Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's.

In the scrum, too, they had an advantage naturally, without foul play, and they generally got the better of the close play; but in the open the Saints seemed able to hold their own with their Greyfriars allies.

Blake was more and more satisfied with the latter as the game wore on.

Bob Cherry dropped a goal, and Mark Linley scored a try in the first twenty minutes, and the score of the visitors was already at twelve points.

Against this, the Tipton fellows could count three for a try, and three for a penalty goal, the latter a point stretched in their favour by the referee.

No wonder the St. Jim's fellows were feeling elated, and showing it, and no wonder the Tiptonians were feeling savage, and showing that, too.

And by this time the fellows from St. Jim's were beginning to drop in at the ground by twos and threes.

The Terrible Three arrived together, dusty from a fast cycle spin, and their first question on getting to the ground, was:

"How's the score?"

The score was all right—St. Jim's twelve to six. Most of the points had been scored by the Greyfriars allies, but that, didn't matter. So long as they were scored against Tipton, that was all right.

Tom Merry gave a gleeful laugh as he read the score.

"Twelve to six!" he exclaimed. "This is gorgeous!"

"Splendid!" said Monty Lowther.

"All the same, I was quite right to refuse to play with the official team," said Tom Merry seriously. "In the regular St. Jim's team we couldn't have played Greyfriars fellows, of course; and without them—"

"Without them, I fancy the Fourth would be getting a holy licking," Manners remarked. "You can see that it is Mark Linley, and Brown, and Cherry, and Morgan who're holding the Tipton cads."

"Yes; and Kerr and Fatty Wynn. The others have more keenness than skill, I rather think; but with a little more practice—"

"With a little more practice they'd crawl all over Tipton."

"Exactly," said Tom Merry, with a nod. "But, as it stands, with the match to-day, and no time for practice, I was quite right to refuse the challenge. But I'm jolly glad to see Tipton getting licked all the same."

"And they will be licked."

"What-ho! Look at that chap Linley—he's simply making hay of them," said Tom Merry enthusiastically.

Mark Linley, of Greyfriars, was certainly playing up wonderfully. Keen, and cool, and quiet, he was always ready, always fleet, never taken by surprise, and the Tipton fellows had no man within miles of him for form.

"Look—only look!" shouted Tom Merry.

Mark Linley had the ball in his hands, and was breaking for goal.

The way he simply walked through the clumsy Tipton forwards was a delight to watch. The defence was helpless against him.

Marker, the full-back, tackled him fairly before the goal, but the Lancashire lad dropped his tackle off as if it had been a flimsy thread thrown upon him, and leaving Marker on his back, he touched down under the bar.

The goal, of course, was taken, and five points more were added to the score of the visitors, making it jump to seventeen.

Seventeen points to twelve!

And so closed the first half.

CHAPTER 19.

St. Jim's Wins.

FATTY WYNN and his fifteen quitted play in very cheerful spirits. There was no jealousy about them, and they gave their Greyfriars allies their full due. And the latter were very pleased. They had never heard of Tipton before they heard of that match, and had never met the Tiptonians anywhere. But their brief acquaintance had been long enough to implant in their breasts a very keen dislike for Hobson & Co., and they enjoyed the prospect of licking the cads quite as much as the Saints themselves did.

"And we shall lick them," said Bob Cherry. "Seventeen to twelve! They can't make that up, unless they play in a very different style, my sons."

"Wathah not!"

"They're taking to fouling all the time," Jack Blake remarked. "It's rotten, and the referee ought to pull them up for it; but he won't."

"Oh, they've never heard of playing the game."

"But it's a good sign, look you," remarked Morgan, of Greyfriars. "They wouldn't begin foul play if they thought they could win fairly, whatever."

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"YORKSHIRE CRIT,"

A Stirring New Serial, telling of a Yorkshire Boy's Fight Against the World, commences this week in

"Yaas, wathah!"

"That's right enough," said Figgins. "But with all their foul play, we'll beat them all the same. They can't play for toffee, as a matter of fact, and if we were in practice, we'd squash them after the style of the All Blacks. But, as it is, we've only two players in really good form—Wynn and Kerr. If it wasn't for you Greyfriars chaps, the cads would lick us hollow."

"Yaas, wathah, that's vewy twue, Figgay, though you have missed out the name of one more who's in wathah good form," said D'Arcy modestly.

Figgins grinned, affecting not to understand.

"Do you mean Blake?" he asked.

"Certainly not."

"Oh, Dig, I suppose?"

"I wasn't thinking of Dig."

"Herries, of course?"

"Wathah not."

"Kerruish?"

"Weally, Figgins—"

"Time's up," said Blake. "Look out."

And the players turned out upon the field again, without the swell of St. Jim's disclosing the name of the "one more" who was in good form.

The Tiptonians lined up, looking decidedly sullen.

The laughter and jeering remarks among the crowd, too, were missing. The Tipton crowd began to realise that their champions were in a bad way, and they didn't like it.

Little cared the Saints what they liked or disliked.

They threw themselves into the game cheerfully and energetically.

More and more fellows had arrived from St. Jim's by now, and there were two score of them gathered round the field looking on.

Tom Merry, anticipating trouble in the long run, called them all together, and warned them to look out for anything that might happen, and so the Saints remained in a compact group, ready to stand by one another if necessity should arise.

Tom Merry believed that it would arise.

The faces of the Tiptonians, both on the field of play and off, were lowering and threatening, and if Hobson & Co. were beaten, Tom Merry was certain that there would be trouble.

And it certainly looked now as if they would be beaten.

Hobson and his men were playing like hooligans now, taking the most unfair advantages of the preference of the referee, and of their weight.

Fouls of the most glaring description were passed over when they were committed by the Tiptonians, and the Saints had already learned how useless it was to appeal to the referee. That gentleman either wasn't looking at the time, or was of a different opinion, and never once did he decide in their favour. But if one of the Saints retaliated with a little roughness, then the referee was looking—there was never any doubt about that. The whistle would shrill out instantly, and the offending player would be called to account.

Twice in the second half penalties were awarded to Tipton, and they scored, adding six points to their total; and the gross unfairness of it did not seem to worry the crowd at all. In fact, the Tiptonians seemed to regard the referee rather as a sixteenth man in the team, than as an umpire who should have been upright and unprejudiced.

But, even so, the St. Jim's score went ahead.

Tipton was mainly swank, and rough play, though it helped them, could not win the game for them, and with all the help of the referee, they could not expect actually to win the match on penalty goals.

So while the Tipton score crept up, the St. Jim's total was advancing by leaps and bounds.

Mark Linley was specially marked by the Tiptonians. The Lancashire lad had scored three tries in succession, in the space of ten minutes, and then Hobson resolved to be rid of him. Five or six of the heavy Tipton forwards found an opportunity of piling on him, and when Linley was extracted from beneath the heap, he was looking very white and shaken. The Saints were simply furious, and but for Blake's efforts, there might have been a free fight on the field then. But Mark Linley backed up Blake in keeping order.

"I'm not hurt!" he exclaimed. "I can go on. Keep it up, and lick them, that's all."

"The cads!" said Arthur Augustus. "The wotten cads! Look here, let's wufuse to finish the match, and give them a fearful thwashin' instead."

"No—no! Go on!"

Mark Linley continued to play, but the cowardly device had succeeded; he was quite off his form now, limping instead of running like a deer. But for that, the St. Jim's score would have leaped up faster and faster, for the Tiptonians were very groggy now, and their defence grew weaker every minute.

But even without the aid of their best man, the Saints

"THE BOYS' FRIEND," 1st.

scored on, less fast, but fast enough to knock the Tipton chances sky-high.

Hobson and his men had given up hope now. The St. Jim's score was at forty points, and their own was under twenty, including all the penalty goals they had taken without being entitled to them.

The game was degenerating into a scramble, in which the Tiptonians played as roughly as they could, and did everything but use their fists against their opponents.

The referee was too watchful for the Saints to retaliate in kind, penalties swooping down upon them at once at a sign of anything of the sort.

They remained patient, contenting themselves with the knowledge that they were beating Tipton hollow.

And they were—beating them as hollow as a drum, as Tom Brown put it. Forty-five points now—the last try and goal being taken almost without resistance on the part of the Tiptonians, so blown were they.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "If we had a little longer to play, you know, we'd wun up a score of a hundred, you know."

Jack Blake laughed breathlessly.

"Yes, rather! They're on their last legs."

"Bai Jove! You wottah!" shrieked D'Arcy.

Crane had charged the swell of St. Jim's, and tackled him low, and in bringing him down, had contrived to get a knee into his ribs. But for D'Arcy's quickness in squirming a little aside, he would have been utterly disabled. As it was, he had a very painful knock.

Crane grinned in his face as he staggered up.

It was too much for D'Arcy. He brought his open palm upon Crane's cheek with a sounding smack.

"There, you wottah!" he gasped.

"Serve you right, you Tipton cad!" roared Blake.

"Foul!" shrieked the Tiptonians. "Where's the referee?"

"He fouled D'Arcy—"

"Referee!"

"Foul!"

The whistle was already ringing out. The referee pointed a dramatic finger at the swell of St. Jim's.

"Get off the field!" he said.

"What?"

"I order you off the ground."

"Bai Jove!"

"Go!"

The swell of St. Jim's looked dazed. He had certainly acted hastily in slapping Crane's face, but Crane's foul had been seen by everybody; there was not even any concealment about the cowardly action.

"He fouled me!" gasped D'Arcy.

"I didn't see it."

"You don't see anything but what you choose," said Blake fiercely.

"Any more lip, and I'll order you off too," said the referee.

There was no help for it. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy walked off the field. Play was resumed with St. Jim's a man short.

Time was up now, but the referee, taking advantage of the powers vested in him of allowing extra time as he thought fit, affected to regard the fouling of Crane as a reason for prolonging the game, and gave the Tiptonians another five minutes. In that five minutes he helped them to a penalty goal, but it was all he could do. The game had to finish, and it finished with the St. Jim's score at forty-five, and the home total just over half that number.

Tipton had been soundly licked.

The Saints went off the ground, jubilant at their victory and savage at their treatment. The Tipton fellows went off, scowling and angry, with looks of thunder.

CHAPTER 20.

Well Licked.

TOM MERRY put his head into the dressing-room where the St. Jim's fifteen were changing. His look was very serious.

"Better buck up," he said, "there's going to be trouble. Stick together. There's enough of us to make 'em look sick, I think."

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy.

"Sorry to have got you chaps into this," Blake remarked, looking at his Greyfriars recruits. "It's rough on you."

Bob Cherry laughed.

"Oh, it's ripping fun!" he exclaimed. "We'll enjoy a tussle with the cads. Feeling a bit fitter now, Marky?"

Mark Linley laughed cheerfully.

"Oh, yes, I'm all right now!" he said. "Ready to give those cads as good as they send, too, Bob!"

"That's right."

The St. Jim's fellows left the pavilion, and joined their friends outside. Hobson & Co. had changed, most of them, and were scowling and talking loudly to their friends. There

was no doubt that they meant trouble, but even unscrupulous rascals must never be without some justification for their conduct, and Hobson had found a justification in the pretended fouling of Crane. That Crane had fouled D'Arcy in the most flagrant manner he knew perfectly well, but he did not choose to recognise the fact.

"Well," he exclaimed, as he saw Blake, "you've pulled it off!"

"Just so," agreed Blake.

"You wouldn't if you'd played fair," said Marker.

Blake's face flamed.

"Played fair! Our play was only too fair!" he exclaimed. "I wasn't going to speak about it, but since you've mentioned the subject, I'll tell you what I think of you! You're a set of sneaks and cads! Your referee was ruling unfairly all the time, and two-thirds of the score you did make was a bare-faced swindle! You're not fit to play a team of Second-Form fags, and your style of play is only fit for hooligans! I've heard that you refused to play a working-club team because they weren't good enough for you. Why, there isn't a working-lads' footer club in England that isn't worth fifty of you! If it hadn't been that we wanted to take down your swank, we wouldn't have soiled our hands playing you! That's plain English!"

"By George, it is!" grinned Tom Merry.

Plain English was apparently not to the Tipton taste. There was a yell as Blake concluded, and Hobson and several more dashed at him. Blake laid Hobson on his back with an uppercut that lifted him off his feet first, and Hobson, like the gentleman in the ballad, found that the subsequent proceedings interested him no more. But the others rushed on furiously, and in a moment or two there was a wild and whirling conflict going on.

"Shoulder to shoulder!" shouted Tom Merry.

Shoulder to shoulder, the St. Jim's fellows forced their way to the road. They were cumbered with their bags, but they fought their way out, many hard knocks being given and taken on both sides.

In the road the Tiptonians rallied in greater force, and renewed the attack, and the further progress of the Saints was stopped.

Another fierce rush of the Tiptons, and the St. Jim's group was almost broken. They hit out fiercely, and many of their foes were rolling in the dust; but the Tiptonians were furious, and numbers were telling. In the midst of the uproar there came a sudden buzzing of bicycle bells.

"Here they are! Grammar School to the rescue!"

"Hurrah!"

The road seemed alive with cyclists. Neither the Tiptonians nor the Saints knew how they came there, or why they came there—but there they were. In a crowd, the Grammar School juniors flung themselves into the conflict.

They came in the nick of time. The Tiptonians, assailed by the new enemy, broke up at once. They were still in greater force, as far as numbers went, but they didn't want any more. The Grammarians knocked them right and left, and strewed the road and ditch with yelling Tiptonians.

"My hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "It's Gay!"

Gordon Gay laughed.

"Here we are!" he exclaimed. "We thought you might have an experience like ours last Saturday, and we came over!"

"Jolly good of you! You're a brick!"

"Yaas, wathah!" gasped D'Arcy. "You are a wegulah bwick, deah boy!"

The Tiptonians were flying in all directions now. Arthur Augustus wanted to chase them, and inflict upon every individual one of them a fearful thrashing, but he was persuaded to moderate his warlike ardour, and to walk quietly to the railway-station instead.

Saints and Grammarians returned home in the highest of spirits and on the best of terms. Tipton had been licked, at football and at fists, and they were done with Tipton.

When they reached St. Jim's, one of the merriest parties that famous apartment had ever known assembled in Tom Merry's study. It was so numerous that it overflowed into the passage, and chairs were set up along the wall there; but nobody minded. The defeat of Tipton had delighted everybody, and everybody was in the highest good-humour. Even the discovery that one of his eyes was turning a decidedly dark colour did not damp D'Arcy's spirits. He was as cheerful as anybody, where all were very cheerful. And there was the wildest enthusiasm when a toast was proposed and drunk in lemonade, tea, ginger-beer, and many other liquids, to the Rugger Fourth.

THE END.

(Another splendid tale of the Boys of St. Jim's next Thursday, entitled "A Shadow in the School," by Martin Clifford. Order your GEM LIBRARY in advance. Price One Penny.)

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NEXT THURSDAY: "A SHADOW IN THE SCHOOL." Another Splendid Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's.

Splendid New Nature-Story Feature.

MUS, The Explorer.

By F. ST. MAR'S.

Of course, it was all a mistake—only, mistakes are unpardonable things in Nature. Also, they are few, because, in nine cases out of ten, the mistaker dies, and so never makes another.

Now, Mus, the mouse, had elected to sleep in a bundle of clothes against the hot-water pipe, which was warm, instead of in his hole, which wasn't. That was the mistake.

It was bitterly cold. Outside, the roar of London traffic was deadened by a mantle of snow, and there were ceaseless shouts of "Doorway, mum!" but the mouse knew nothing of these things. He knew it was daylight by the light which filtered in through chinks, and he wormed his way right into the middle of the bundle, because the light troubled his beady little black eyes.

Came suddenly, after an interval, banging as of doors, and that shaking thunder which Mus knew was the sound of human walking. Followed a worse banging than ever, and roaring as of things being dragged about the floor, chinking as of keys, and the clothes' cupboard door was flung open. He knew it was by the extra light, and because he could hear quite plainly, as it were over his terrified little head, the voice of one saying:

"Buck up, Sausage! You'll lose the train!"

To which another answered:

"All right. Keep your wool on, Fatty!"

Next instant—oh, horrors!—the mouse nearly died of fright. The bundle of clothes was seized bodily, lifted up, carried somewhere, and jerked down into something with a bang that nearly dislodged the mouse from his hold, and gave the show away.

Followed next a great pressure from above, the voice of someone cursing the trunk—it was a trunk he was in—and its maker for a long period, a terrific bang, and darkness such as the darkness of the blackest holes in the coal-cellar, where the mouse knew that the rats lived.

Next, before the mouse had time to ease his limbs from their flattened position, the whole world turned upside-down, and he was kicking on his back. From then onward for four hours followed nightmare, awful and terrifying. Never at any time was there silence which mice love. Always was noise which they fear—bumping, thunderings, jolts which sent Mus and all the rest of the things in the trunk from one end to the other. Always there was a roaring as of continuous thunder, and it was powerfully stuffy. He could hardly breathe. But he found a bag of biscuits that consoled him, and a whisky-flask with the stopper off, and that nearly killed him.

At last, after one final cataclysmal series of bumpings, the trouble came to an end, and there was silence and stillness.

Then, after a space and without warning, there came a click, the lid of the trunk was flung back, and Mus found himself coiled inside a felt hat in the full glare of a lighted candle. He caught one glimpse of an amazed and horrified human face within a foot of him, and then jumped.

In the matter of jumping, Mus was no fool. It was part of his education. He moved in jumps. He was all jumps. A single one took him to the floor, while a second amazed human grabbed a stick and fell upon him. From floor to chest of drawers went he, thence under to the bed. Next to the fender, under it, and out again for dear life when the fender was lifted, and a blow fell within an inch of his tail. Then under a rug, out at the other end; under a curtain, up it, along the curtain-pole—the enemy in hot pursuit—down the other curtain, into an open drawer, out of it in one bounce on to a human's lap—this produced a scream—and from there to a window opened for a few seconds because the room was stuffy, and then—gone!

A pear-tree grew against the wall beneath this window, for the place was a farmhouse very far away in the country, and down this natural ladder Mus climbed. His heart was nearly bursting, and his sides heaved, but he felt the keen wind, and heard the rustle of dry leaves in the darkness, and thought he was safe. That was because he had lived in a town all his life, and had never before come face to face with Nature. Nevertheless, he was no fool.

He scrambled down the tree, wandered through railings, and out on to the straw floor of a cowyard with sheds round it. He rustled across the straw in his self-important way—not knowing that the first lesson the wild folk learn is to go

quietly—and promptly a huge shadow dropped upon him with an awful sigh out of nowhere.

Mus heard the sigh, and jumped backwards without waiting to look. He had learnt that trick through dealing so much with traps. And a great feathered tail brushed his nose, and huge talons, sharp as a razor edge, dug into the straw at the very spot where he had been three-fifths of a second before.

Huge, round, flaming eyes turned and glared at him, and Mus fled. The thing was an owl. He did not know that, because he had never heard of such a thing as an owl before. He remembered the fact, however, and added sighing birds which fly—unlike other birds—silently to his already long list of foes. I fancy, by the way, that he connected it in some dim way with the parrot he had seen in the London house from whence he had come.

Having reached one of the sheds safely, Mus began to explore it. It was mighty cold, and he was looking for a fire and warmth, hot-water pipes, cupboards, and all his other London luxuries. Poor Mus! It must have been an awful jar to him, this everlasting open air, cold as water, and only straw to keep you warm—straw everywhere.

He ran up what looked like a low sofa to investigate, and the arrangement turned over bodily with a grunt, and nearly squashed him. That was a pig—also a new creature to him. Pigs, too, were added to his list of foes.

Next he found a trough and barley-meal, which tasted uncommonly good. He stayed there to have a good feed; and just as he was cleaning his whiskers, and polishing his face and fore-paws—as was his invariable custom after a meal—something came up behind him and sprang at him.

Mus leapt to one side, rolled twice over, and up on to his legs, and away all in one motion—which was a smart piece of work, occupying about as long as it takes one to wink. The thing that had sprung at him was a polecat—a creature which has nothing to do with either poles or cats, but is own cousin to, and much like, a big ferret, only black instead of white. The polecat is always hungry, and snow-time is famine-time in the country for the wild folk, anyway.

Mus ran into a hole in one of the sheds. At first he was only glad to get inside. Next, he found it was a tunnel bored by some animal unknown. Then he became terrified, and raced on up the tunnel, and—oh, whiskers!—bashed into the arms, or, rather, the nose, of another polecat. No; a smaller beast. The two rolled over and over in the darkness, struggling and kicking for dear life.

Came then to Mus as he kicked a pain as if a red-hot needle had that moment entered his leg. He had no delusions over the matter. It was the pain of a bite. "Now," he thought to himself, "it is all up. I must fight for my life."

He, therefore, went on biting; grappling and fighting with a fury and spirit you would never have believed possible if you had seen him being hunted across the bed-room in the farmhouse an hour or so before.

The other creature, too, was not backward in coming forward. Probably because, like Mus, it thought it was fighting for its life. Quickly, however, to the mouse's unholy joy—and somewhat to his surprise—he found that he had the weight of his opponent; not only the weight alone, but the strength also. Twice he bowled it over, and nearly got it by the throat, but each time it wriggled free in a way that would have turned the average eel green with envy.

At the third attempt it wriggled free and kept free. Spinning like any top on its own tail, it bolted ignominiously up the hole, Mus, now triumphant, after it.

Its tail flicked his face.

The tail did it, I fancy. It was a long, scaly tail like his own, and Mus's anger went from him. He followed now out of curiosity—surely that tail had a familiar smell—followed till the hole suddenly gave out on a stackyard flooded with moonlight.

The hunted one bounced out, slipped, fell exhausted, rolled clean over twice, and sat up. Mus, putting on all brakes, legs dipping straight out in front, head back, tail hard down, pulled up in a little puff of snow, to find himself face to face with—his own wife!

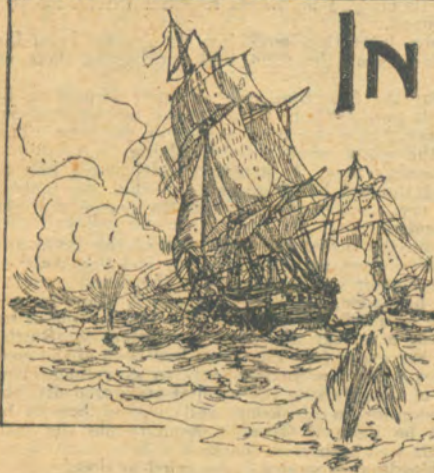
She it was—she whom he had been fighting, and fighting because he was too blindly frightened to recognise her or anything else. She had made her nest among some clothes at the bottom of the very same trunk in which Mus at the top had travelled all the way from London. She had escaped while it was being unpacked about five minutes after Mus's retreat out of the window; only, she had not got away by the window. She had gone up the chimney, and from thence had descended down another fruit-tree growing against the wall, and wandered aimlessly about, a sooty image. No wonder Mus had not recognised her.

(Another of these wonderful little stories next Thursday.)

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Oswald Yorke, one-time knight of the road, joins the Navy as a midshipman under the name of John Smith. His first ship, the frigate Catapult, is wrecked under peculiar circumstances, and Oswald is one of the few survivors. His next ship, the Fireball, is despatched to the Isle of San Andrade to investigate the conduct of a certain family of planters named Wilson, who are suspected of complicity with the notorious pirate Kester. Scouting round the house in the dark, Oswald gathers clear evidence of the planters' guilt, but is captured and hastily thrust into a dark cupboard. His men enter later, but their suspicions are disarmed by the Wilsons, and they leave again. Norah Wilson eventually saves Oswald from being killed by the Wilsons, and later on is the means of getting Oswald away from the island in a canoe. The young midshipman finds that his ship has sailed, and he is suffering the agonies of hunger and thirst when he is picked up by a "trader," called the Peter and Mary Harris.

Oswald is well attended to, when two pirate boats are sighted, and preparations are immediately made to repel any attack.

Miss Harris, the skipper's daughter, bears herself bravely, but Mrs. Harris and her coloured servant are terribly alarmed.

(Now go on with the story.)

A Near Thing.

"We are all going to be killed, June—massacred, all of us, by horrible pirates!" cried Mrs. Harris.

The negress sent up a shrill, ear-piercing yell.

"Oh, oh! We all gwine to be massacred by de pirates!" she howled.

In vain Oswald and Miss Harris tried to comfort the two women. They would not be comforted. June howled at the top of her lungs, and Mrs. Harris sobbed.

"We had better leave them. We can do no good staying here, and we may be useful above."

She spoke with the quiet assurance and courage of a man. Oswald almost forgot that she was a girl as he walked beside her back to the deck.

Here they found the skipper, white, haggard, and hopeless, his eyes fixed continually on the schooners, grown nearer and larger even during the little while they had been below deck.

The second mate had gone below, and presently reappeared, followed by the ship's boy, both with their arms filled with muskets. The girl went up to her father, and slipped her hand through his arm; but neither spoke a word. The second mate went below again, to reappear in a few minutes with more arms and ammunition.

There was no bustle, no confusion, no excitement, and no fear visible. The men were still going quietly about their duty, getting every inch of speed out of their vessel that was possible; the sails strained at their bolts, filled out tight and hard as a drum by the wind. Now and again the ship heeled over, and a bright sheet of sparkling water spread over her deck, and then ran away, rushing and roaring, in the scuppers. Salt spray filled the air; it blew keen and damp into their faces and filled their eyes. A cloud was flying from her bows, a churning sheet of foam followed in

her wake. Yet still the pirate schooners drew closer and closer.

In fancy Oswald could see Kester's impatient figure standing on the deck of the Rattler, looking out, with eager, covetous eyes, at the prey that was making such ineffectual efforts to escape.

"I wonder if he will recognise me, and wonder how I came on board this ship?" Oswald thought. He did not know whether Kester would look upon a living face or a dead one, or even if Kester would see him at all.

The skipper beckoned to the first mate, gave him a few orders, and then, with his daughter's hand still resting on his arm, he walked to the fore-castle.

Glancing towards them, Oswald could see that the old man and the girl were in deep and earnest conversation.

The fresh colour had deserted the girl's cheeks; she had gone pale as death, and a look of horror had come into her eyes. The skipper took something from his pocket and gave it to her, and as he did so Oswald looked away, with a curious smarting sensation in his eyes, and a choking feeling in his throat.

It was an hour after this that the foremost schooner, the Rattler, opened the first shot. They saw the white puff come from her bows, and as it lifted it was blown back by the wind among her sails and rigging. The next moment a shot struck the water far astern of the brig.

They were still out of range, still safe from the pirate's guns. But for how long?

Another quarter of an hour passed before the pirate attempted to fire again; and this time, as before, the shot splashed into the sea astern, but so near this time that Oswald knew that in a very little while now they would be within range.

Captain Harris now came aft. He was steady and self-possessed—far cooler now than Oswald had seen him yet. His face was white as death, but the strength had come back to his voice and the fire to his eyes.

"I have tried to prevail on my daughter to go below, but she will not listen to me," he said. "I have my work to do—my duty to attend to. Will you watch over her and keep her out of harm's way—for the present—for me?"

"I will do all I can, with pleasure," Oswald replied. He glanced down as he spoke, and in the belt of the girl's dress saw a small pistol, that had not been there before to his certain knowledge.

She saw the direction of his glance, and flushed, then paled.

"My father's present to me," she said, in a whisper—"perhaps his last."

In a moment the weakness was gone, and she turned a bright, cheerful, even smiling face, towards him.

"Come, Mr. Smith, my father has put me under your orders; tell me what I can do."

"I don't think you can do anything," said Oswald, "except keep down out of harm's way."

"Look, she has fired again!" the girl suddenly cried. Again the white puff of smoke was whirled away by the wind from the bows of the Rattler. At the same instant as they heard the report of the gun a shot came crashing into the brig's stern, and at that same instant, too, the man at the look-out hailed the deck with a hoarse yell.

They could not hear his words; they were drowned by the

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sound of the ripping and tearing of the woodwork as the white splinters flew.

"A sail, a sail!" shouted the look-out man.

Another enemy, or a friend?

"If the latter, he has come too late" said the captain between his clenched teeth.

He glanced aloft at the straining masts. He had still a few square inches of canvas left to set; but would the masts stand the strain? It seemed impossible. Already they were bending like whips. But he would risk it. It was worth the risk, even if it gave them only a few minutes' respite—respite until they knew if the new-comer was friend or foe.

He gave an order, and half a dozen men sprang into the rigging. It was a hard battle to set the sail; the mast beneath them creaked and groaned like a living creature in agony.

But it was done at last, and in a moment its effects on the speed of the vessel was noticeable.

She drew away a little from her pursuers. Another shot fired from the bows of the Rattler fell short this time.

The Albatross was still far astern. It was the Rattler from which they had to fear most at present.

"A frigate on the starb'd bow!" shouted the look-out.

Oswald's heart gave a bound.

"A frigate! The Fireball, perhaps, at last!"

His companion looked at him quickly.

"What is it? What does it mean? Does it mean hope?"

"Yes, yes; it must mean hope! It is an English frigate.

Even if it is a French one, she could never desert us now."

"But France is our enemy," the girl said.

"The pirates are the common enemies of France and

England, and of every other civilised country. An English

vessel would never desert a foreigner beset by pirates,"

Oswald answered warmly.

Captain Harris was pacing up and down the deck, his eyes

turned now towards the pursuing schooner, now upwards.

Evidently the schooner had not seen the new sail, or, if

she had, dreaded nothing from its interference, for she kept

on her course, and was once more gaining on the brig.

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"YORKSHIRE CRIT,"

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"A British frigate! She has run her colours up!" shouted the look-out.

Captain Harris clasped his hands together for an instant, and his lips moved.

A few minutes later they could see the frigate from the deck. She was tacking the wind, and approached them on a bow-line.

And now, for the first time, the schooner seemed to be awakening to its peril. There were signs of hesitation about her movements. Again she fired a shot at the brig. This time it sent the white wood splinters flying. A splinter glanced by Oswald's face. It struck the girl beside him on the cheek, and the red blood gushed out; but she uttered no sound, no cry. She scarcely seemed to realise that she had been wounded.

And now from the throats of every man of the Peter and Mary Harris crew went up a shout of joy and thankfulness.

The pirate schooner had had enough; she dared come no further. She had seen, probably recognised, the foe, and knew that her own safety lay in flight. Already the Albatross was beating a retreat, and the next moment the Rattler was following her example. The chase had been abandoned, and the pirates were now anxious only to save themselves.

With a cry of thankfulness the skipper staggered aft, and caught his daughter in his arms, and pressed her to his heart. Then he gripped Oswald's hand, while the tears rolled down his weatherbeaten cheeks.

"You are bleeding—wounded!" he cried anxiously.

She dashed the blood away with her hand.

"It is nothing—nothing—only a scratch! I will go below, and tell them that we are safe."

And now the tables were turned. The pirates were fleeing in their turn, while the gallant frigate, with every inch of canvas set, came swooping down over the tumbling seas like some great white-winged bird.

Oswald watched the noble vessel with a heart that swelled with pride, for did not he belong to her—was she not his, and he hers?

He sprang into the stays and waved his arm and cheered frantically, and the rest of the crew of the brig caught up his cheer.

For a moment the deck of the merchantman was a pandemonium, the men shouting and cheering themselves hoarse, while they waved their arms and flung their caps into the air.

An answering cheer came back faintly over the tumbling seas as the Fireball raced past them, in hot pursuit of the discomfited and flying pirates.

Juno Comes to Grief—Oswald Receives an Extraordinary Offer—Kingston—On Board the Cynthia.

Captain Harris sent half his crew aloft to reef sails, for the wind was momentarily increasing in violence, and the strain upon the masts and rigging had become unbearable.

Hardly had the men gone aloft when the skipper's wife, followed by her black attendant, came tumbling on to deck.

"We are saved!" shrieked Mrs. Harris hysterically, throwing her arms round her husband's neck.

"Sabad!" shrieked the negress.

And flinging her arms round Oswald's neck she, to his extreme discomfiture, treated him to a sounding kiss.

At the same moment the vessel heeled over to starboard, and Oswald and the black lady went down with a crash, and, rolling over one another, finally settled in the scuppers.

"Oh, massa, done desert me!" shrieked the black woman, who for a moment thought the pirates had returned.

Oswald lunged her to her feet—no easy matter, for Juno was of even more generous proportions than her namesake.

But no sooner had he got her set upon her pins again than a lurch to leeward sent her down on hands and knees, scuttering over the deck in the most undignified manner.

Those of the crew who remained on deck roared with laughter. After the excitement and tension of the anxiety they had just known a less comical sight than Aunt Juno wallowing on the deck would have made them laugh.

"Ho, yo' villains, yo' hangman's ties! On'y wish I had broom-handle to mash yo' faces! Go 'bout yo' work, or I speak wid yo' cap'en!" shouted the black lady, shaking her fists at the shouting men.

Even the skipper laughed. After the awful anxiety of the past few hours the laugh did him good.

"Help the old lady up again, my lad!" he cried to Oswald.

"Set her going again!"

Again Oswald hauled Mrs. Juno to her feet, and conducted her to the companion hatch, while the crew shouted at the antics of the old lady, who could not keep her feet an instant on the heaving deck.

As they reached the hatchway she turned to Oswald, and made a low curtsy.

"I tank yo', sah, fo' you bery politeful, an' I hab the honah to wish yo' a bery good—"

"THE BOYS' FRIEND," 1st.

The last word was cut off in its prime. Once more the vessel lurched, and Oswald had a fleeting glimpse of a pair of black cloth boots pointed up to the sky for an instant, then followed a series of bumps and bangs and squeals, and Aunt Juno did the journey to the lower regions backwards.

Oswald sprang down the companion to find out if the old lady had hurt herself, and found her sitting at the bottom of the stairs in a very indignant frame of mind.

"I tink one ob dem tiefs played dis trick wid me!" she said indignantly.

It was useless to explain to her that the crew had nothing to do with her fall. She stuck to her opinion, and retired to put arnica on her bruises.

That night it came on to blow half a gale, and under bare poles the brig laboured through the water until dawn.

At daybreak the wind slackened, but during the night the Peter and Mary Harris had been taken considerably out of her reckoning, so Captain Harris's anticipation of seeing Kingston Harbour that day was not verified.

For some reasons Oswald did not regret this slight lengthening of the voyage. He had taken a great liking to, and had a great admiration for, the plucky girl who had not flinched in the face of danger. He told her of Norah, and of how she had saved his life from her kinsmen's fury.

"And I suppose you will try and find her, and then, when you succeed, you will marry her?" the girl said quietly.

"Marry her! Whatever put that thought into your head?" cried Oswald, with a laugh.

"Oh, that is how it usually ends up—at least, it does in the books I have read."

"But this isn't a book—it's real life. And as for marrying, I don't think I am ever likely to do that. I am only a midshipman, you know," he explained, "and I have nothing in the world but my pay, and that isn't large. Besides, there—there are other things."

He broke off short, and changed the conversation, nor would he allow it to drift back again to the subject, though she, like all women, preferred to talk about love and matrimony more than anything else on earth, except, perhaps, dress, and as Oswald was very ignorant on that subject, it was no good talking to him about it. It was not until late in the afternoon of the day following that they sighted land.

By this time Oswald had got sincerely attached to the staunch skipper, and, though he was anxious to find out if the Cynthia and Maxwell were still at Kingston, he did not look forward to parting with his new friends.

He was standing by the rails, watching the still distant shore, when he felt a touch on his arm, and, turning round, found himself face to face with Aunt Juno.

"I want to know what yo' hab been say to my Missy Mary?" said the old woman sternly. "What fo' you hab unseper her so much?"

"Me—what?" gasped Oswald.

"Oh, yo' need not look so innocent! Yo' hab bery bad tempah. I see un in de shape ob yo' mouf. Yo' hab been say someting to unseper my Miss Mary, otherwise what fo' she down in her cabin and cry out her eyes, eh? Yo' answer me dat!"

"I swear solemnly——"

The old woman stopped up her huge ears with her equally large hands.

"Done yo' use dat bad langwige! I tink yo' hab a shocking bad tempah, and no wondah dat yo' make leetle missy cry. De oder yesterday I say yo' bery politeful young man. Den I was wrong. I wish yo' to understan', sah, dat I widdraw dem words dat I spoke!"

"I understand," said Oswald, half inclined to laugh, half to be angry.

"Bery good! Den habing 'spress my 'pinion, I take my leab!"

Which the old lady did, only stopping to cuff the ears of the ship's boy, whom she caught in the act of grinning at her.

"I don't know what on earth she was talking about!" muttered Oswald. "How on earth should I make Miss Mary cry?"

Then he turned to the shore-gazing again, and promptly forgot all about Aunt Juno, and Miss Mary, too.

There were two frigates at anchor in the harbour, and in one of them Oswald recognised the Cynthia, and his heart leaped with delight at the thought that he would soon see Maxwell again. The two had become great and very close friends, but neither had realised how close their friendship was until the time had come for them to part, so the thought of seeing Maxwell again banished almost every thought from Oswald's head—every thought but one, and that one was of Norah—Norah, who had saved his life, and whom he had left in peril.

"Thank Heaven that it has seen us safely through the perils of the deep and brought us to port at last!" said the skipper. "Once I gave up all hope of ever seeing dry land

again. I'm getting old—too old for a seafaring life." He looked meditatively at Oswald while he spoke. "If there was someone as I could put in charge of the Peter and Mary, someone as would work in my interests, and whom I could trust, I'd go ashore, and never trouble salt water again."

"I should think it would not be difficult for you to find such a man."

"I don't know—I don't know. There's a lot of villains in this world! I shouldn't care how young the man was, or how inexperienced. I'd give him good officers, and—and—well, it would be a comfortable berth for him. And whenever he came into port he could make his home with us if he liked, and my girl——"

The skipper paused in confusion, and Oswald watched him, wondering what he was talking about.

"I suppose in the Navy midshipmen don't marry?" said the skipper, after a pause.

"Marry—midshipmen? No?" said Oswald, laughing.

"So my girl told me, and so I thought. I was thinking—Well, Mr. Smith, what do you say to it?"

"What do I say to what?" cried Oswald, in astonishment.

"To what I have been talking about—about this vessel, and—that."

"Do you mean that you offer me the post?" asked Oswald, opening his eyes.

"That's it—the post—that's the word!" cried the skipper.

"But you have known me only three days. You don't know who I am, or anything about me. For all you know I— I might be an impostor, a thief, sailing under false colours."

"Not you!" said the skipper warmly. "You carry your colours in your face, lad! I'd trust you anywhere! And my daughter, she—she was saying——"

He paused again; then held out his hands.

"What do you say to it? It ain't an offer a young man'll get any day of his life. There's good pay, and—and after I'm gone there's——"

"I can scarcely believe that you really mean this offer. I am not fit for the position you would place me in. I do not know enough."

"No; I have thought out all that. You'd be skipper in name only. Boyd could manage the navigating, and you'd jest be on board to watch over my interests—that's what I mean."

"I am deeply grateful to you. I do not deserve your trust and kindness——"

"Don't say that."

"But I do say it! And—and I thank you from the bottom of my heart."

"That means you refuse?" said the skipper, with a discomfited look on his face.

"I must. I have promised to serve my King and country. It is on those conditions——" Oswald stopped hurriedly. "It is enough," he added. "I have given a solemn promise, which I cannot, must not, break, to one who has been a friend, and more than a friend, to me. My life is at his disposal, and he has told me I am to serve the King."

"Then—then there's no more to be said. It's done and ended," said the skipper. "Well, I promised that—that I'd put it before you. My girl was set on it, and—well, it doesn't matter, I suppose."

And without another word he walked aft.

"Why should Miss Mary take such an interest in me, I wonder?" thought Oswald. "I have known her so short a time; it is not as if she could possibly feel any great friendship for me."

Wondering still, he took a last look at the harbour for that night, for darkness was fast descending.

The skipper's daughter did not put in an appearance at dinner that evening. It was the first time she had missed since Oswald had come on board. Nor did he see her during the evening. He was conscious of a strained feeling in the atmosphere, and was at a loss to understand it.

All this made him feel exceedingly uncomfortable, and he was very glad when the evening came to an end, and he turned into his bunk, and slept soundly till daybreak.

"You will be anxious to get ashore," said the skipper the following morning. "I'll put a boat at your disposal after breakfast. If there is anything I can do I am at your service, Mr. Smith."

"You have been very good to me. I shall never forget the kindness I have received at your hands. I don't know whether I am more glad to see my old shipmates again, or more sorry to leave you."

"And—and you've thought over what I said, and are still of the same mind?" asked the skipper.

"I have no choice," Oswald replied.

"Oh, well, come to breakfast. There's no harm done in the asking."

Miss Mary was at breakfast this morning, looking, Oswald thought, pale and rather ill. Against the pallor of her face the scar of the wound she had received showed up distinctly.

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and served to remind Oswald of how plucky she had been in the face of a great danger.

"I suppose you are glad to leave us?" she said.

"You must think me ungrateful to say that," he answered.

"Ah, I know; but you will be glad to see your friends again."

"Very glad, but very sorry to part with them, too."

"You mean us?"

"Yes. May I not think of you as my friend?"

"I hope you will always," she said.

True to his word, the skipper placed a boat and a boat's crew at Oswald's disposal; and, after taking leave on board, Oswald entered the boat, and was rowed ashore.

Although he was expectantly looking forward to seeing Maxwell again, his first visit must be to the admiral, and he made his way to the house of the admiral's agent.

The admiral was breakfasting; but when Oswald's name was taken in to him, he sent word that Oswald was to be admitted at once.

As Oswald entered the room the old man sprang to his feet.

"My dear lad, what does this mean?" he cried anxiously. "Nothing has happened to the Fireball?"

"No, sir; I think not. Two days ago she was afloat, and in the best of trim, in hot chase of a couple of pirates—the pirates."

"Then how—how does it come that you are here? I don't understand."

In a very few minutes Oswald had given a rough sketch of his adventures since he left Kingston, and the details were filled in in the form of answers to the admiral's questions.

"Then there is not the slightest doubt that these two Wilsons—father and son—are in league with the pirates—are, in fact, pirates themselves?" cried the admiral.

"There is not the slightest doubt in the world, sir. It was because I discovered the truth that they meant to murder me, and would have done so had not Mr. Wilson's niece saved me at great peril to herself."

"She must be a noble girl. Strange that she should have the blood of those rascals in her veins! You saw, of course, that the Cynthia is here yet. Captain Garvin is waiting his sailing orders. He shall receive them this very day, and you will go with him, Oswald, to this island, and assist in the arrest of those villains."

"If it is your wish, sir; but—but—"

"Ah, I understand! But the girl will be better out of their hands. She shall be brought here and treated with every consideration. I think you may be content to leave that to me."

"I am, sir," said Oswald gratefully. "I owe her my life, and I—I—"

"You are anxious to save her from any unhappiness. It is only natural and worthy of you, my boy. Have you breakfasted?"

"Yes, sir, a couple of hours ago. I have been treated with very great kindness on the brig that brought me here. The skipper is a very worthy and good man."

"I shall see him and thank him before he leaves port," said the admiral. "And now," he added, rising from the table, "we will go at once to the Cynthia and see Captain Garvin."

Side by side the admiral and the midshipman, in his travel and war-worn uniform, walked down the hot, sandy street of the town to the harbour. One of the Cynthia's boats happened to be moored off the quay, and the admiral and Oswald entered it, and were promptly rowed over to the frigate.

Captain Garvin received the admiral on board, and looked in speechless surprise at Oswald. His first thought was that in some extraordinary manner Oswald had deserted his ship, and had found his way back to port. But that thought was to be soon dispelled.

Down in the captain's cabin the admiral, Captain Garvin, and Oswald had a long interview, and meanwhile the news had passed from mouth to

mouth that Mr. Smith had returned, apparently dropped from the skies.

"Smith—the Smith who was with us on the Catapult?" said Maxwell disbelievingly. "Oh, rot! It is someone else like him. How could he come back? There isn't a sign of the Fireball. He couldn't have got out and walked."

"I assure you—" said Garvin.

"Toll that yarn to the Marines!" said Maxwell unbelievably.

But even he had to confess that it was really Oswald when they came face to face.

"Where on earth—or, rather, sea—have you come from? How did you get here? Where is the Fireball? Has it gone to the bottom, too?" cried Maxwell, as he gripped Oswald's hand tightly.

"No; the Fireball is all right."

And again Oswald told his tale, while Maxwell and Garvin and the others stood around him, listening.

"And, after all, those Wilsons were in it, the villains!" said Maxwell. "And Norah saved your life! She is a little brick, that girl!"

"She is," said Oswald feelingly. "If she has come to any harm because—"

He clenched his fists, and the others understood and nodded in sympathy.

"And what is going to be done?"

"We sail in an hour for the island. Those are the admiral's instructions."

Maxwell threw his hat in the air.

"Hurrah! Perhaps we will fall in with the pirates."

"We may, if the Fireball hasn't sunk them," said Oswald.

"But—but there is one thing no one has told me yet."

"I know!" cried Maxwell. "The court-martial?"

Oswald nodded.

"Yes."

"It is over, and we sha'n't be worried with that precious pair again—Burgoyne and Brab. They have been dismissed the Service, and they have both disappeared. You should have heard the admiral. He told Burgoyne that he was a coward and a traitor, and deserved death, but that the Court was inclined to leniency, and the sentence would be that both he and Brab should be dismissed the Service, as unworthy and unfitted for its duties."

Oswald drew a sigh of relief. His worst enemy was disposed of. Burgoyne would never cross his path again. He was free of the man for ever.

Little did he know how and when they next should meet.

While the boys were talking on deck, the admiral, followed by Captain Garvin, came up.

"Men of that kind," the admiral was saying, "are even more dangerous than the pirates themselves, for without their assistance it is hardly possible the pirates could exist. Smith's evidence is very clear. These Wilsons, father and son, are the pirates' agents, therefore they are pirates themselves, and it will go ill with them when they are caught and brought here for trial. When will the tide serve, Captain Garvin?"

"In about an hour and a half, sir."

"An hour and a half!" The admiral beckoned to Oswald. "Is that the brig you spoke of—the Peter and Mary Harris?"

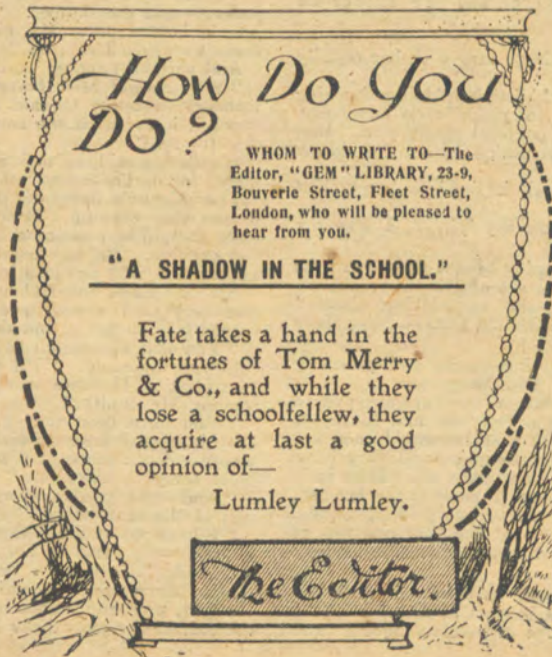
he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Will you kindly put a boat and a crew at my disposal for an hour, Captain Garvin," asked the admiral, "and spare Mr. Smith to accompany me? I should like to pay my respect to the captain of that brig, and compliment him on his escape from the pirates. Mr. Smith would also probably like to bid his friends there good-bye."

To Oswald's considerable surprise, Maxwell, with a wink at him, slipped over the side, and coolly took his place also in the boat, uninvited. However, no one seemed to notice the act, and the admiral and Oswald descending into the boat, it was pulled away in the direction of the brig.

(Another splendid instalment of this thrilling series in our next issue.)



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