

Next
Thursday:

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

By Martin Clifford.

CHAPTER 1. King Cricket.

TOM MERRY ran in at the doorway of the little tuck-shop, where a group of St. Jim's juniors were refreshing themselves after morning lessons. It was a bright April day, and the sun was streaming in at the tiny windows of Dame Taggles's little shop. The juniors were having a hurried drink of ginger-beer before rushing out into the sunny quadrangle, when Tom Merry ran in and held up his hand.

"Attention!" he sang out.

"Oh, rats!" said Jack Blake of the Fourth Form cheerfully. "Go and eat coke, my son!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the same Form. "I must weally wequest you not to delay me, Tom Mewwy, as I have to pay a visit to my tailah as soon as I have finished this gingah-beer!"

"And I've got to go and feed my bulldog in a minute," said Herries.

Tom Merry's hand remained uplifted.

"Halt! Attention!"

"Rats!"

"Wats!"

"You fellows haven't looked at the notice-board," said Tom Merry. "Go and look at it at once, and don't jaw!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"What's on the notice-board?" asked Blake. "Anything interesting?"

"Yes, rather—a notice by me!" said Tom Merry.

"Oh, what rot!"

"Look here, Blake—"

"More rats!"

"It's about the cricket," Tom Merry explained. "Cricket practice for the junior Forms begins, and—"

"I'm afwaid I shall have no time for cwicket just now, Tom Mewwy," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a shake of the head, as he put down his glass. "My tailah has sent home my waistcoat too tight at the waist, and I have to see him about it."

"Then you won't have any time to play in the junior eleven?" retorted Tom Merry.

"Oh, I will find time for that!"

"You'll find a thick ear if you're not careful," said Tom Merry. "Go and read the notice on the board, all of you."

A crowd was already gathering round the notice-board in the school hall.

Among the other papers pinned up there by masters and prefects—papers of lesser importance, of course—was one in the bold handwriting of Tom Merry, and signed with his name. A crowd of juniors read it out at once. Tom Merry of the Shell was captain of the junior eleven. He had been junior football captain, and he was going to be junior cricket captain, without a dispute. There was no question about that. But Tom Merry made a troublesome captain in some respects—he never allowed any playing member to slack, and cricket had to be taken seriously by any fellow who hoped to play for his House or for the School.

"NOTICE!"

"All members of the Junior Cricket Club of St. Jim's are requested to turn up for first practice after morning lessons. Signed, TOM MERRY, Captain."

Blake grunted.

"I suppose we'll go?" he remarked. "We get a match with the Grammar School next Saturday, and we want to be in form."

Next Thursday:

"TOM MERRY'S PERIL!" AND "WINGS OF GOLD!"

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"Yes, rather," said Figgins of the Fourth, a New House fellow. "I'm keen to begin. Of course, the New House will have to buck up things, as usual, if we're to make any show against the Grammarians."

"Oh, tosh!" said Blake politely.

"But what about my tailah, deah boys?"

"Oh, hang your tail!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"I dare say some other chap would take your place in the eleven if you're very anxious about your tailah," said Tom Merry. "There are some new fellows in the New House—Redfern and Lawrence and Owen, you know—if you'd like to resign—"

"Weally, deah boy—"

"Oh, that's no good!" said Blake. "Those County Council school chaps can't play cricket. Cricket is only played properly at public schools. You all know that."

"Yaas, wathah! I quite agree with my friend Blake—"

Tom Merry nodded.

"Yes, I must agree to that, too," said Figgins thoughtfully. "Although Redfern and Owen and Lawrence are New House chaps, and very decent fellows, I shouldn't recommend trying them for the eleven. It wouldn't be any good."

"Rather not," said Kerr.

Tom Merry laughed.

"I wasn't speaking seriously," he said. "That's all right. Redfern & Co. are decent chaps, and we all like them, but, of course, they take a back seat where cricket is concerned. But every fellow who wants a chance of being selected for the eleven must turn up to practice regularly, and begin now."

"But my tailah—"

"Rats! Come on, you fellows!"

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther, the Terrible Three of the Shell, marched out together, Manners with a bat under his arm. Blake and Herries and Digby and D'Arcy, the chums of the Fourth, followed them, D'Arcy deciding to leave the visit to his tailah over for a more opportune occasion. Figgins & Co. were not left behind—and a crowd more of the juniors of both houses streamed down to the cricket-field after Tom Merry.

The newly-rolled ground looked very cheerful and inviting. Quite a crowd gathered round the ropes to watch the practice begin.

There was some keen competition between New House and School House fellows. Although they united loyally enough on all occasions when they had to stand up for the School, as in matches with outside teams, they never forgot that they were rivals, and that each House claimed to be cock-house of St. Jim's.

Fatty Wynn soon showed that a season of footer had not robbed his hand of its cunning when he began to bowl. Fatty Wynn of the New House was the champion junior bowler of St. Jim's, and although he was not quite in form now, he showed that he was "all there," and that a little practice would soon make him as dangerous as of old.

The merry click of bat and ball rang over the junior cricket-ground, and cheers from the onlookers greeted every good hit.

"Bravo, Tom Merry!"

"Well bowled, Fatty!"

"Hurrah, New House!"

Fatty Wynn captured Tom Merry's wicket, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth took his bat in. The swell of St. Jim's adjusted his eyeglass, and glanced along the pitch at Fatty Wynn, who was grasping the ball again. D'Arcy's manner indicated that he was prepared to knock the fat Fourth-Former's bowling into the middle of next week, or still further along the calendar. But it did not work out exactly like that.

Smack!

The middle stump was whipped out of the ground, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy glanced down at it in surprise.

"Bai Jove!" he ejaculated.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins. "How's that?"

"Out!" grinned Tom Merry.

"Weally, you fellows, that was only a twial ball—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If Fatty twies again, I will undahtake to knock him sky-high!"

"Ha, ha! Try again, Fatty!"

Fatty Wynn grinned, and caught the ball as Kerr tossed it to him. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stood very much upon his guard. The ball came down with all Fatty Wynn's old cunning, and there was a startled gasp from the swell of St. Jim's. The ball seemed to curl round the willow in some mysterious way, and the middle stump was sent on its travels again.

"How's that?" chuckled Fatty Wynn.

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"Ha, ha! Out!"

"Twial ball, deah boys!"

"Rats! Get off the pitch!"

"I am wathah out of form just now, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as he walked off, quite unperturbed. "But I shall buck up all wight for the Grammash School match, and I will undahtake to knock the Gwanumawians into a cocked hat!"

"Yes, I dare say you'll undertake to do it," Monty Lowther remarked sarcastically. "But what kind of an undertaker do you think you'll make?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Next man in," said Tom Merry.

And the remainder of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's remarks were lost as the cricket practice continued.

CHAPTER 2.

Three Left Out.

THREE juniors had strolled down to the cricket-field, and stood looking on at the junior practice. They were Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence of the Fourth and the New House. The trio were the County Council school-boys who had come to St. Jim's upon County Council scholarships. Although there had been some prejudice upon this subject when the three chums had first arrived, Redfern & Co. had speedily made themselves respected. They were three fellows as thoroughly decent in every way as any others in the school; and they had shown, too, that they could stand up for themselves when necessary.

Although some of the more snobbish sort—like Levison and Mellish—affected to look down upon the County Council "bounders," Redfern & Co. were accepted upon equal terms by all St. Jim's. And Levison and Mellish did not venture to make their unpleasant remarks in the hearing of the New Firm.

Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence had been put in the New House, where they had shown no disposition to follow the lead of Figgins & Co. Indeed, it was generally supposed that sooner or later there would come a contest between Redfern and Figgins for the leadership of the New House juniors. Any hint of that kind of thing was enough to put the great Figgins's back up at once, and so there reigned a sort of suppressed warfare between Figgins & Co. and the New Firm.

But Figgins & Co. had concluded quite innocently and cheerfully that the new boys couldn't play cricket. Tom Merry and Blake and most of the fellows jumped to the same conclusion. It was really an assumption based upon ignorance, but they were quite in good faith about it.

Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence stood looking on, with their hands in their pockets, while batsmen and bowlers practised. "I think we ought to be on in this scene," Redfern remarked.

Lawrence nodded.

"There's a notice on the board about cricket practice beginning," he remarked. "I suppose it begins for us as well as the others?"

"Unless we're left out," said Owen.

Redfern's eyes gleamed.

"They won't leave us out!" he said.

Levison of the Fourth, who was standing near the trio, burst into a chuckle, and the three juniors turned round to look at him at once.

"What's the matter with you, Levison?" demanded Redfern.

Levison laughed again.

"Nothing," he replied. "But you won't get a look in here. You can't expect it."

"Why can't we expect it?" asked Owen.

"You can't play cricket."

"How do you know?"

"Stands to reason you can't."

"I don't see how it stands to reason," said Redfern quietly. "As a matter of fact, we are rather pleased with ourselves when we play cricket, aren't we, you chaps?"

"What ho!" said Lawrence and Owen.

"Oh, rot!" said Levison. "I don't see how you could learn to play cricket in your County Council school."

"Oho!" said Redfern. "That's it, is it?"

"Of course it is. You can't play."

"Not to be expected," said Mellish loftily. "I could play if I liked, only—"

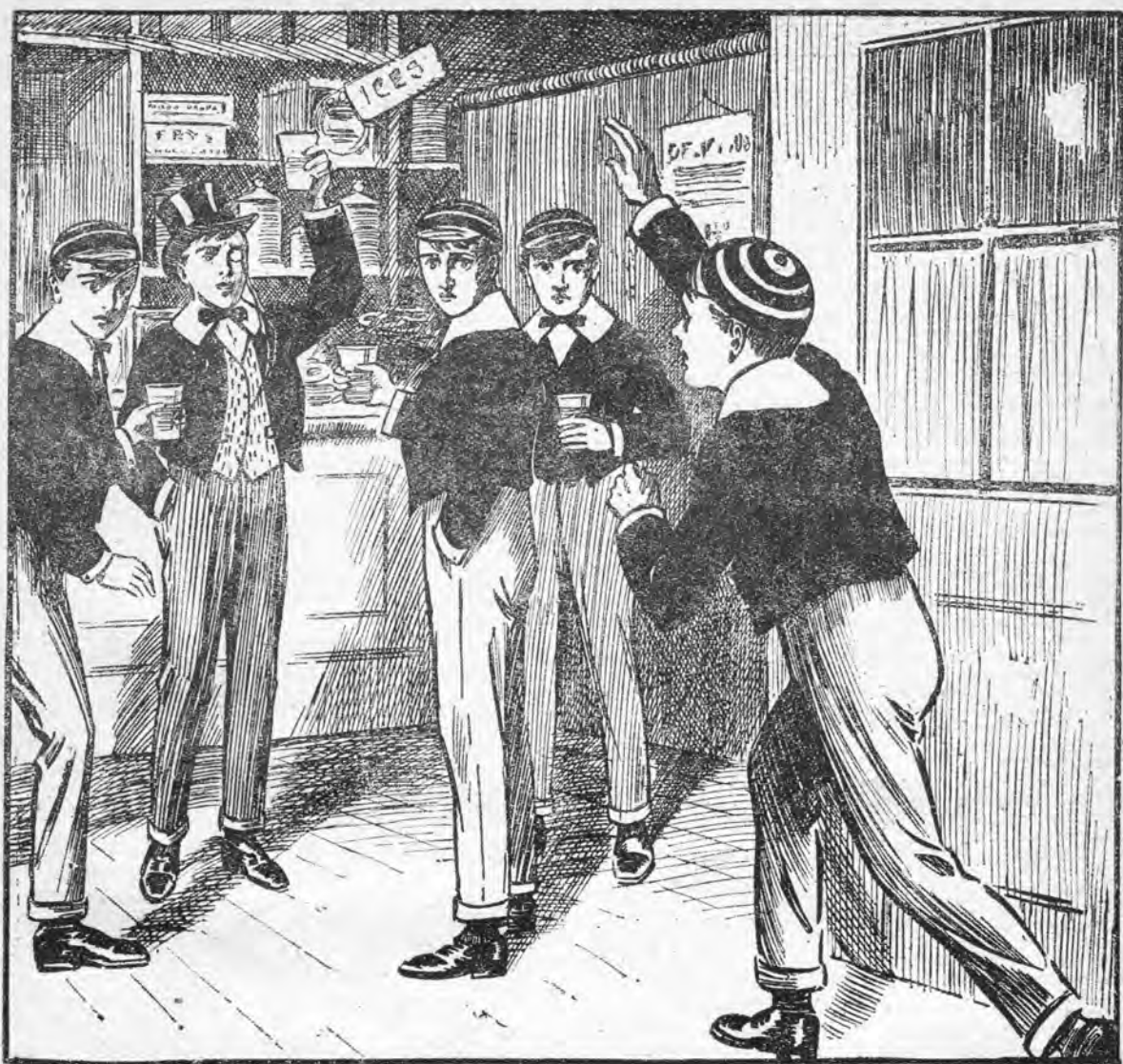
"Only you're a rotten slacker," suggested Redfern.

"Only I don't care to take the trouble," said Mellish angrily. "But you Board-school bounders can't play, anyway. You don't know one end of a bat from another."

"Us what?" said Redfern quietly.

Mellish backed away a pace.

"Board-school bounders!" he repeated.



Tom Merry ran into the little tuck-shop, with his hand raised. "Attention!" he sang out. "Oh, rats!" said Jack Blake of the Fourth, cheerfully. "Go and eat coke, my son!" (See Chapter 1.)

"I pass the Board-school," said Redfern, "but I object to the word bounders. You will kindly apologise."

"Rats!"

"Then put up your hands!"

"Of—of course, I—I didn't mean to offend you," said Mellish hastily, as Redfern strode towards him, "I—I—"

Biff!

Mellish was sitting on the grass before he had time to finish his remarks.

"Yow!"

"Got anything more to say upon that subject?" asked Redfern courteously, as he stood looking down upon the cad of the Fourth, who was holding his nose in his hand, and showing no disposition to rise.

"Ow! No! Oh!"

"You got anything to say, Levison?" queried Redfern, with the same urbane politeness.

Levison backed away.

"No!" he growled.

"Good. I thought you might have. Let's get away from these cads, you chaps, they make me feel ill."

And the New Firm strolled round the ropes, to where Figgins and Korr and Blake and Arthur Augustus were looking on and chaffing.

"Beginning cricket practice, I see," Redfern remarked.

Arthur Augustus nodded.

"Yass, wathah, deah boy! I have put off seein' my

tailah specially for the purpose. A fellow must make some sacrifice for the team, when he's a chap who can't be spared."

"Where do we come in?" asked Redfern.

"Eh?"

"Getting deaf?" asked Redfern pleasantly. "We were thinking that we should like to become ornaments of the junior eleven."

"My deah chap—"

"Anyway, suppose we turn up to practice?" said Lawrence.

"I suppose there's no objection to that," said D'Arcy thoughtfully, "as for any chance of playin' in the eleven, of course that's all bosh."

"Oh, bosh!" agreed Blake.

"And why is it all bosh?" asked Redfern, his eyes beginning to glitter. "Because we come here on County Council scholarships! Is that it?"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jammed his eyeglass into his eye, and took a survey of Redfern, beginning at his face, and travelling down to his feet, and then ascending to his face again.

"Well?" said Redfern cheerfully.

"I twust, Wedfern, that you do not mean to insult me," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, very loftily. "If a chap insults me, I always give him a fearful thwashin'."

"I asked you a question," said Redfern.

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"TOM MERRY'S PERIL!"

"Your question implied that I might allow snobbish considerations to interfere in cricket matters, Wedfern."

Redfern laughed.

"Oh, I see!" he replied. "Then it isn't because we come from the County Council school?"

"Certainly not."

"We're not snobs," said Blake, reddening. "Of course, it's nothing of the sort."

"Then why is it?"

"Because you can't play cricket."

Redfern grinned.

"But we think we can play cricket," he said.

"We've got a ridiculous little idea that we play the giddy game rather well," Lawrence remarked.

Blake laughed indulgently.

"Yes, what you would call playing it," he assented; "but, you see, we play public school cricket—quite out of your line. We should play you fellows' heads off. It wouldn't be much good your practising with us, either. You'd better begin by practising with the fags, I think. Young Wally, of the Third, will give you some tips."

"Yaas, wathah! My young bwother would be vewy pleased, I'm sure," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy graciously.

"Practise with the fags!" repeated Redfern. "Why shouldn't we practise with the Fourth, our own Form, or the Shell, for that matter?"

"You're not up to their weight, you see."

"How do you know?"

"Oh, we know, you know!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence looked at one another. They seemed to be meditating whether to commit instant assault and battery upon the St. Jim's fellows. But the Saints were evidently so innocent in their assumption, that it was really impossible to be angry with them. St. Jim's was not the only school that fancied that cricket was never really played well outside its walls.

"I think Tom Merry's junior cricket captain," Redfern remarked, at last.

"Yes," said Lowther.

"I'll speak to him."

"He's batting now."

Tom Merry was batting again, against Digby's bowling, and was making a very good show. Redfern cocked his eye at him in a critical way.

"He shapes fairly well," he remarked.

Blake glared.

"Fairly well!" he repeated.

Redfern nodded cheerful assent.

"Yes, fairly well."

"Well, you ass," said Figgins, "Tom Merry's the champion bat of the Lower School. Why, you fathead, I can't bat better than Tom Merry!"

"I should jolly well say you couldn't!" remarked Monty Lowther.

"Look here, Lowther—"

"That doesn't alter the case," said Redfern serenely, "he bats fairly well, but I think I could knock spots off that bowling."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at?" demanded Redfern.

"Ha, ha, ha! Your blessed cheek! Ha, ha, ha!"

The St. Jim's fellows chuckled in chorus. School House and New House juniors found a common ground for laughter in the cheek of the New Firm. They were not even curious to see Redfern & Co. at the wickets, so firmly convinced were they that the County Council trio could not play cricket.

Tom Merry, not out, gave up his bat to Kangaroo, of the Shell, and strolled off the pitch, and joined the group at the ropes. He nodded cheerfully to the New Firm. He looked very handsome, with his face flushed and his eyes bright.

"Jolly game!" he said. "I'm sorry to part with the footer, but we shall have some ripping cricket this summer."

"What-ho!" said Blake.

"Pity you chaps can't play," said Tom Merry, sincerely enough, to Redfern & Co. "You ought to try to get a little practice at the nets, and Figgins would give you some tips, as you're in his House."

"Certainly," said Figgins generously. "I'd always help a chap who's never had a chance of playing."

"Quite sure we can't play already?" asked Owen sarcastically.

Figgins smiled good-humouredly.

"Oh, what you'd call playing, I've no doubt!" he said.

"Knocking a ball about anyhow. But we play cricket at St. Jim's," added Figgins, with stress on the word cricket.

Redfern laughed.

"Then you're not thinking of giving us a chance for the junior eleven, Merry?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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"Funny, isn't it?" asked Redfern. "That's the cheek you'd naturally expect from us Board-school chaps! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, it is rather thick, you know," said Reilly. "Faith, it's too thick intirely!"

"Yes, I suppose so. And you chaps don't even want to see us play before setting us down as hopeless duffers," said Redfern.

Tom Merry hesitated.

"We'll see what you can do this—evening," he said. "We haven't time now before dinner. But, of course, you see, the kind of cricket you've been used to isn't exactly what we play here—"

"But if you buck up, deah boys—"

"Next term, you know—"

"After lots of practice—"

"And coaching—"

"There's no telling—"

Redfern yawned.

"No chance for us to play in the first match of the season, against the Grammarians?" he asked.

The juniors yelled.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No, I think not," said Tom Merry, with tears of mirth in his eyes. "No; I don't think you're likely to be quite up to the form of Gordon Gay & Co., of the Grammar School! Ha, ha, ha!"

Redfern thrust his hands deep into his pockets.

"Right-ho!" he said. "But perhaps we'll play in the Grammar School match, all the same."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Stranger things have happened, you know," suggested Redfern.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the New Firm strolled away, leaving the crowd of juniors still yelling.

CHAPTER 3.

Redfern Suggests a Rag.

TOM MERRY & CO. finished their practice and went in to dinner, feeling very well-satisfied with themselves. Figgins & Co. came into the New House to dinner, smiling. They smiled still more broadly as they met Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence going into the dining-room.

"Any joke on?" asked Redfern.

"Three," said Kerr.

"Three! What are they?" asked Redfern, puzzled.

"Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence," Kerr explained.

And Figgins & Co. chuckled. The New Firm laughed, too. "You are a funny merchant," Redfern remarked. "I suppose it is frightfully comic of us to think of playing in the eleven against the Grammar School, or, in fact, to think of playing cricket at all."

"Well, no," said Figgins, very considerably; "I approve of every chap trying to play cricket, whether he can or not. But for you chaps to think of playing in an out match for the school—well, that is rather rich, you know. You won't be up to the weight of a House match even for a long time to come."

"How do you know?"

"My dear chap, we do know. There's no need to argue about it," said Figgins, with condescension.

And they went in to dinner.

Redfern & Co. were rather silent during dinner. Perhaps they were a little annoyed at being set down as duffers at cricket, without even being given a trial. But they had a sense of humour, which enabled them to take it cheerfully.

Redfern's suggestion that he might be played in the eleven

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against the Grammar School was soon known all over St. Jim's, and was taken as a great joke.

Even the fags of the Third and Second Forms permitted themselves the liberty of chuckling over it.

When Redfern & Co. turned up in the Fourth Form classroom that afternoon, they were greeted with a general chuckle, which made Mr. Lathom, the Form-master, look round.

"Silence in the class-room!" he said severely.

Redfern and Owen and Lawrence took their places imperturbably.

After school, they had to run the gauntlet of many remarks as they came out of the Form-room.

Tom Merry stopped them in the quad.

"We're going to have some practice after tea," he said.

"If you fellows specially want to show what you can do, we'll give you a chance."

Redfern smiled sweetly.

"Haden't we better practise with the fags, as you suggested?" he questioned.

Tom Merry looked relieved.

"Well, yes, it would be more sensible," he agreed.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Owen.

Redfern gave his chum a severe look.

"Well, I'll tell you what," said Redfern, turning to Tom Merry again, when Owen was reduced to order. "Let's ask some of the Third Form kids if they'll practise with us, and we will come out after tea, and you can look on."

"Good! I'll fix it for you with young D'Arcy minor, of the Third."

"Thanks, awfully!"

"Not at all!"

Redfern & Co. walked on towards the New House. Lawrence and Owen looked at their leader, and their eyes were beginning to gleam. As a rule, they were satisfied with Redfern's leadership, and had no fault to find with him. But on this occasion they showed unmistakable signs of restiveness.

"You crass, utter, unspeakable ass!" said Lawrence, in measured tones, as soon as Tom Merry was out of hearing.

"You one-eyed cuckoo! What do you mean by it?"

"What do you mean?" said Owen. "You fathead!"

Putting us down to play cricket with the fags! You ass!"

"You chump!"

"You owl!"

"Patience, my sons, patience!" said Redfern. "It's a rag!"

"Nice kind of a rag, putting us to play with fags!"

"Wait till we get into the study, my sons, and I'll explain. You follow your uncle," said Redfern serenely.

Lawrence and Owen followed their leader into their study in the Fourth Form passage in the New House. They were looking very wrathful. They did not understand what sort of a rag could justify letting them down in the sight of the whole school in this way.

Redfern closed the door of the study, and turned to his chums with a grin.

"You're a pair of goats!" he began. "You ought to have faith in your Uncle Reddy. What?"

"That's all very well—" began Owen.

"Of course it is," said Redfern, interrupting him. "Very well, indeed! Now, I've got on to a big rag—a glorious rag! We're going to play cricket with the fags—"

"We know that. But—"

"And as all St. Jim's seems to have made up its mind that we can't play cricket for toffee, we're going to let them have their way."

"What!"

"We're going to play so rottenly that the fags will turn up their noses at it."

"You ass!" roared Owen.

"What!" yelled Lawrence. "Us—who could play their silly heads off if we liked! Us—who could bowl them bald-headed, and bat them off their feet! You chump! Why, Tom Merry and Blake couldn't stand up to us for a brace of shakes, and you propose—"

"That's why I propose it," said Redfern calmly.

"But why?"

"We're going to give St. Jim's the impression that we're a set of hopeless duffers, and can't play cricket for monkey-nuts."

"They've got that impression already."

"Then we'll confirm it."

"But what for?" yelled Lawrence and Owen together.

"Because, after that, we're going, by hook or by crook, to make Tom Merry play us in the eleven against the Grammar School!" said Redfern quietly.

"What!"

"My hat!"

"And then, when they think we're three awful mugs, they'll be on tenterhooks all the time, and that will be a

jolly good punishment for having set us down as duffers without ever seeing us play."

The juniors chuckled.

"It would be a ripping rag," Lawrence agreed, "but—"

"But what?" demanded Redfern.

"But you can't get Tom Merry to put you and us into the junior eleven against the Grammar School. It stands to reason you can't."

"We've got to work it."

"But we can't work it!" growled Owen.

"We've got to."

"Do you mean to say you can find a way?"

"I mean to say that you've got to follow your uncle's lead, and not jaw at him like silly asses," said Redfern severely.

"Don't I always bring you up in the way that you should go? Don't I?"

"Well, yes; but—"

"Nuff butts! Get some tea, and then get into your flannels, and we'll go down to the cricket-ground and astonish the natives."

And Lawrence and Owen gave it up, only promising Redfern in the most earnest manner that if the rag were a failure, and he made them look asses before the whole school for nothing, they would give him a record bumping—a promise which Redfern received with unruffled serenity.

CHAPTER 4.

D'Arcy Minor Takes It On.

WALLY—more formally known as D'Arcy minor, of the Third Form—grunted. Tom Merry was talking earnestly, like a Dutch uncle, as he expressed it, but Wally did not seem to be very much impressed.

"That's all well enough," said D'Arcy minor, "but we don't want a set of silly asses monkeying round on our ground."

"But to help new chaps on in cricket," Tom Merry urged.

"Why can't the Fourth do it?"

"Fourth are busy," said Jack Blake. "We don't get much light after tea, and we've got to get in all the practice we can, with a match coming on Saturday."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "As a mattah of fact, Wally, I must wequest you to oblige us by takin' Wedfern & Co. off our hands. I wequest it as your majah."

Wally snorted.

"I wish you would not make those disagreeable noises, Wally," said the swell of St. Jim's severely. "I considah—"

"Oh, rats!" said Wally. "You go and eat coke, Gussy!"

"Weally, Wally—"

"I don't feel inclined to waste time over the three asses," said Wally. "Of course, they can't play cricket."

"Look here, we'll stand you a feed in the study afterwards," said Tom Merry.

Wally's face cleared a little. Funds had been low for some time past, and provisions accordingly scarce out of regular meal hours.

"What sort of a tea?" asked Wally, who had an eye to a bargain. "Eggs and herrings?"

"Yes, if you like."

"And jam-tarts?"

"Yes," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Can I bring Jameson and Gibson and young Frayne?"

"Oh, yes!"

"It's a go, then!" said Wally.

"Good! I'll tell Redfern."

Tom Merry went out of the School House relieved in his mind. He was a kind-hearted fellow, and he wanted to help Redfern & Co. in every possible way with their cricket, but he really did not want to be bothered with duffers and beginners just then. He knew that Gordon Gay's team at the Grammar School were making strenuous efforts to get into form, and he did not want St. Jim's juniors to be licked in the first game of the season.

He met Redfern, Lawrence and Owen in the quadrangle. They were strolling down to the cricket-ground.

"Hallo, you chaps, I've fixed it!" he exclaimed.

"Fixed what?" asked Redfern.

"About the practice. Young Wally is going to take you on, and give you some tips. The fags are ready for you on their ground."

"Thanks, awfully!"

"We shall give you a look in, to see how you're getting on," Tom Merry promised.

"You're too good!" said Owen.

The New Firm walked away to the section of the playing-fields sacred to the efforts of the heroes of the Third.

Wally greeted them with a more or less friendly grin.

"I hear you chaps want instructions in playing cricket?" he exclaimed.

Redfern nodded.

"Yes," he replied cheerfully. "We've heard about the game, and we're feeling very curious to play it, you know."

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NEXT THURSDAY: "TOM MERRY'S PERIL!" A Splendid, New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co, at St. Jim's. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Lawrence and Owen burst into an irrepressible chuckle. Wally stared.

"Do you mean to say that you've never played cricket before, you heathens?" he shouted.

"Well, yes; but Tom Merry says it isn't what you'd call cricket here," Redfern explained.

"I suppose it isn't," said Wally, with a grunt. "I'm not running you chaps down, but I don't see how you've had any chance to learn the game."

"Exactly!" said the chief of the New Firm. "You hit it off precisely. It shows there's a lot of truth in that old saying about wisdom emanating from the mouths of babes and sucklings."

"Yes, rather!" assented Owen and Lawrence solemnly.

Wally began to look warlike.

"If you're alluding to me as a babe and suckling——" he said.

"My dear kid, you are practically our grandfather in these matters," said Redfern. "But let's get to work. What do we do first?"

"Oh, we bat," said Lawrence gravely. "I've always noticed that in cricket one chap bats, while another throws the ball."

"I've noticed it myself," said Owen.

"That's the best of you observant chaps," said Redfern admiringly. "You can pick up a lot of tips by keeping your eyes about you. Isn't that so, D'Arcy minor?"

Wally snorted. Such frightful depths of ignorance on the subject of cricket simply staggered him. He began to be sorry that he had taken on the task of instructing the New Firm, even with that tea in Tom Merry's study as a reward to come.

"Oh, you make me tired!" he said. "Have you brought your bats?"

"Bats!" said Redfern vaguely.

"The things you hit the ball with, Reddy," Lawrence explained. "Come, old man, you know that much, if you think for a minute."

"Of course I do!" agreed Redfern, brightening up. "The bat is what the batsmen use. That's why they're called batsmen, in all probability."

"I shouldn't wonder," assented Owen.

"And the ball is bowled by the bowler," said Redfern wisely. "That's why he's called the bowler. You can tell that by the resemblance between the two words. It's possible for a chap to learn a lot of cricket, simply by a little reflection. It's really quite obvious when you come to think of it."

Wally looked suspiciously at the New Firm. The suspicion came into his mind that they were "rotting" him, and pulling his leg, as he would have expressed it. But Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence were as grave as judges. There did not seem to be a shade of mirth about them; they evidently felt that they were in for a very serious thing.

"Oh, come on!" grunted Wally. "There are some old bats in the pavilion, and you can use them."

"Good egg!"

Redfern, Lawrence, and Owen were provided with bats. Wally threw a cricket ball to Jameson, of the Third. A crowd of Third Form fags had gathered in flannels for cricket practice, but most of them seemed quite willing to give the duffers of the Fourth a show. They anticipated fun, and, truly enough, they were not disappointed. As some of them remarked, Herries's bulldog Towser knew more of cricket than the County Council School trio seemed to know.

"Give them a ball or two, Jamie!" said Wally.

Jameson grinned as he caught the ball.

"Right you are!" he replied. "Put a man at the wicket! They don't seem to have sense enough to get there by themselves!"

"Man in!" called out Wally.

The trio stared at him.

"Did you speak to us?" asked Redfern politely.

"Yes. Man in!"

"What does that mean?" asked Lawrence, with a wonderful expression of wonder.

"Go in, one of you!" yelled Wally.

"Go in?" repeated Redfern.

"Yes, fathead!"

"But what for?" demanded the three juniors together.

Wally turned crimson with wrath and impatience, and there was a yell from the Third and a crowd of Fourth and Shell fellows, who were gathering round the fags' ground to see the fun.

"Jameson is just going to bowl!" shouted Wally desperately. "Go in, one of you!"

"Which one?"

"It doesn't matter which."

"Shall I go in?" asked Redfern.

"Yes, yes; you'll do!"

"Oh, very well!"

And Redfern tucked his bat under his arm, and walked

towards the distant School House. The fags stared after him in bewilderment.

Wally put his hands to his mouth, and roared:

"Come back, you ass!"

Redfern turned round.

"Come back?" he repeated.

"Yes, idiot!"

"But you told me to go in!" said Redfern, with a puzzled look. "I don't see why I should go in, but you told me to, and I was going!"

The fags shrieked with laughter. Wally almost exploded. "You frabjous idiot!" he shrieked. "I told you to go in and bat! Go to the wicket, you chump—go in and bat at the wicket, you frabjous bungler!"

"Oh, I see!" said Redfern.

And he returned serenely to the field, and took up his position at the wicket.

Wally wiped the perspiration from his brow.

"My only Aunt Jane!" he murmured. "This is the last time I'll undertake to teach a howling duffer cricket! Br-r-r-r!"

CHAPTER 5.

The Rotters.

TOM MERRY & CO. were at practice on the junior ground, but the yells of laughter from the fags' section drew all their spectators away, and Tom Merry & Co. fell off one by one, too, to watch the display by Redfern & Co. Even the cricket practice could not hold them back from the sight. And it was a sight that was worth watching. It could not be denied that cricket was a funny game when the County Council trio played it.

Jameson bowled to Redfern, and Redfern promptly put out his foot and blocked the ball with his boot. Then he hit it with the bat, and sent it daisy cutting.

There was a terrific yell from the fags. Redfern looked round proudly.

"How's that?" he asked.

"Splendid!" exclaimed Lawrence and Owen together.

"Fathead!" raved Wally.

"Why, what's the matter now?"

"You have to hit the ball with the bat, idiot!"

"Well, so I did!"

"Not stop it with your boot, idiot!"

"Do you mean to say I'm to take my boot off before I stop the ball?" demanded Redfern.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the fags.

"Mustn't stop it with your boot at all!" gasped Wally.

"Oh, I see!"

"Only with the bat, you burbling jabberwock!"

"Oh, very well! I don't mind playing according to the rules, if you tell me what they are!" said Redfern. "Isn't it jolly hard, though, to stop it with the bat?"

"You have to learn to do it, ass! Give him another ball, Jimmy!"

"Ha, ha! All right!"

The ball came down again. Redfern made a terrific swipe with his bat, missed the ball, spun round, and sat down on the crease. The ball knocked the wicket to pieces.

"Ow!" gasped Redfern.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My only Aunt Jane!"

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, turning his eyeglass upon the scene. "Bai Jove! This is weally amazin'!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake.

"What do you think of their wicket, Blake, deah boy?"

"Oh, ripping! I think they ought to be played against the Grammar School—rather! Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's weally remarkable!"

"Am I out?" asked Redfern, getting up and rubbing his leg with a very rueful expression.

"I should say you are, you silly ass!" growled Wally.

"Let one of the other idiots go in!"

"Into the house?" asked Owen.

"No; in to bat, fathead!"

"Oh, all right!"

Lawrence went in to bat, taking the willow away from Redfern. Jameson sent down another ball, and Lawrence cut at it, hit his wicket, and scattered the bails.

"How's that?" shrieked Jameson.

"Out!" roared the fags. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"The ball didn't hit the wicket!" said Lawrence, with an injured expression.

ANSWERS

"You didn't leave much wicket for it to hit!" grinned Jameson. "But you're out, my son, and you can walk your chalks!"

"Put Owen in, Wally!" yelled Blake. "Let's see if he's as good as the others!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm ready!" said Owen modestly. "I'm not really so good a bat as Reddy, but I'll do my best!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Owen took up his stand at the wicket. The first ball Jameson sent down knocked his leg stump out of the ground.

"Dear me!" said Owen.

"Dear me!" mimicked Wally. "Oh, my only Aunt Jane!"

"The wicket's down!" said Owen, apparently very much surprised.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go home!" said Wally sarcastically. "You'd better stand in front of it next time, and perhaps you'll be able to keep it up!"

"All right!" said Owen innocently.

Jameson took the ball again, and made a little run. Owen stepped directly in front of the wicket, with a blissful smile. The ball came down, and glanced on his leg, and he gave a terrific yell.

"Yaroo!"

"You—you unspeakable ass!" roared Wally. "What did you do that for?"

Owen roared. He danced on one leg, clasping the other with both hands.

"Ow, ow, ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake threw himself upon the grass, and kicked up his feet in an ecstasy of mirth.

"Oh, carry me home to die!" he shrieked. "This is too good for anything! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove, that chap does take the cake!"

"Look here, this isn't playing the game!" said Owen indignantly. "Jameson oughtn't to have pitched the ball at me! Ow, ow!"

"What did you get in front of the wicket for?" howled Wally.

"Why, you told me to!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, you're too funny for anything!" gasped Wally. "Look here, you'd better see what you can do bowling! I'm fed-up with your batting!"

"I'm fed-up, too!" growled Owen. "I don't call it cricket, chucking a ball at a fellow!"

"You were both legs before wicket!" yelled Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jameson tossed the ball to Redfern. Redfern made a clumsy catch at it, and missed it, and it dropped in the grass.

"Yah! Butterfingers!" said Jameson, with a sniff.

Redfern picked up the ball.

"Where do I stand?" he asked.

"On your silly head, if you like!" growled Wally.

"But I couldn't bowl if I stood on my head, could I?" asked Redfern, with an air of great bewilderment.

"You couldn't bowl, anyway, I expect!" said Wally. "Go and stand where Jameson was standing, and don't jaw!"

Redfern went down the pitch. Wally picked up his bat, and took up his position at the wicket.

"Now, don't brain me with the ball," he said, rather apprehensively. "Pitch it at the wicket, if you can."

"Oh, that's easy enough!" said Redfern confidently.

"Well, do it, then, you ass!"

Redfern hurled the ball. Wally dropped the bat, and leaped into the air with a wild howl.

"Yaho-o-o-op! Oh! Yaro-o-op!"

"What's the matter?" asked Redfern.

"You hit me!" yelled Wally.

"Did I? Well, never mind—"

"Never mind! I'll never mind you!" shouted Wally, grasping his bat and making a run down the pitch at Redfern.

Redfern dodged away.

"Is this part of the game?" he asked breathlessly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll game you!" yelled Wally.

"Hold on, Wally, dear boy!" said Arthur Augustus pacifically. "Suppose you put them to bowl to one another?"

Wally stopped. He could not catch Redfern, and D'Arcy major's suggestion struck him as being a very good one. It did not matter how much the three duffers damaged one another—at all events, that was the way Wally looked at it.

"Get to the wicket, Lawrence!" he called out.

"Certainly!" said Lawrence.

"You can bowl again, Redfern!"

"I'm ready!"

Redfern took the ball, and bowled again. The grinning onlookers stood well back from the pitch. But Redfern was quite equal to that. He bowled, with such a shocking bad aim that the ball flew almost at right-angles, and caught Tom Merry on the side of the head, as he came strolling over to see what was going on. The blow was not a hard one, but it was startling, and Tom Merry gave a yell and staggered.

"Oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Who threw that ball at me?" shouted Tom Merry wrathfully.

"It's only Reddy bowling!" shrieked Figgins. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"My hat!"

"Where did that ball go?" asked Redfern, looking round.

"On my napper, you ass!" yelled Tom Merry. "You don't get me near you again when you're bowling! Is that how you wanted to play against the Grammarians! Yah!"

And Tom Merry strode away, rubbing his head. Redfern took the ball again, and there was a general rush of the juniors to escape. There was no telling where the ball might come next.

Wally grasped his bat, and flourished it.

"Get off the ground, you dangerous asses!" he shouted.

"I'm fed up! Buzz off, or we'll lay the stumps about you! Do you hear?"

"But you were going to teach us cricket," said Redfern.

"We—we'll squash you if you don't go!" howled Wally.

"Oh, very well!" said Redfern, with an offended air. "We'll get off, only don't say we weren't ready to practise and ready to take any tips in cricket!"

And the New Firm walked off the cricket field. They were quite solemn and serious until they were once more in their own study, with the door closed. Then they gave vent to their pent-up feelings.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Redfern, rolling in the armchair.

"Did you ever see a set of mugs so thoroughly rotted before?"

"Never!" gasped Lawrence. "Ha, ha, ha!"

And the New Firm yelled in chorus.

CHAPTER 6.

Something at Cricket.

TOM MERRY was standing in the gateway of St. Jim's after morning lessons the next day, when Redfern & Co. came by. The captain of the Shell glanced in surprise at the Fourth-Formers. Redfern and Lawrence carried their bats under their arms, and Owen had a large green baize bag, which evidently contained stumps and a ball. The three juniors of the New House looked as if they were going out to cricket practice, but why they should go beyond the walls of St. Jim's for that was a puzzle.

"Going out?" asked Tom Merry.

Redfern nodded.

"Looks like it, doesn't it?" he said.

"What are you taking those things with you for?"

"Cricket practice."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Oh, you're still sticking to the cricket, then?" he asked.

"Oh, yes! Do you know," said Redfern confidentially,

"we quite think we shall take to the game in the long run, when we have fairly learned the difference between a bat and a cricket-stump, and between a leg-ball and a long-on."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I know what long-on is," said Owen. "It's something they keep in the pavilion to rub the players with when they're stiff."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "You would make a splendid fieldsman, I don't think. But why can't you practise on the ground here? There's plenty of room. I don't suppose anybody would come very close to you while you're playing."

"The fact is, we don't want the school to see our cricket."

"Well, it is a bit thick," Tom Merry agreed. "But the fellows would leave off laughing in the long run."

"We prefer to keep it quiet for a time," said Redfern. "As it's a half-holiday to-day we thought we'd go out and practise a bit on the quiet. When we've improved, we'll let you chaps see us play."

"That's the wheeze," said Lawrence, with a nod.

"Well, mind you don't run into the Grammar cads," said Tom Merry. "They may give you a wilder time than we do, if they see you playing cricket."

"We'll keep our eyes open. By the way, the Grammar School match comes off on Saturday, doesn't it?" Redfern remarked.

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NEXT THURSDAY:

"TOM MERRY'S PERIL!"

"Yes."
"You haven't altered your mind about playing us?"
Tom Merry stared.
"I don't think I'm likely to alter my mind about that, till you've picked up a little," he said sarcastically.

"We want to play."
"You're likely to want for a long time, then."
"I'm going to try to persuade you," said Redfern.
"Ha, ha, ha!"
Tom Merry was still laughing as the New Firm walked out into the road. Redfern looked back, and smiled sweetly. He chuckled as they went down the lane, and the gates of St. Jim's were lost to view.

"There's a surprise in store for that young merchant," Redfern remarked. "If he saw us at practice it might alter his opinion of our powers. We'll get out on the moor. There's a quiet spot there where the village kids play sometimes, and it's pretty level, and will suit us very well. And none of the fellows will be likely to come that way."

"Good egg!"
And the three juniors sauntered on easily through the woodland footpath, and came out on the sunny stretches of Wayland Moor. There, in the quiet spot selected by Redfern, they set up their stumps, and began practice. Redfern was fully determined that by hook or by crook he would play in the Grammar School match, and for that purpose it was necessary to get in all the practice that was possible. But to let the St. Jim's juniors see them at practice would be to give the whole show away, and spoil the great rag.

Had Tom Merry & Co. seen the three chums at practice now they would have opened their eyes very wide.

Redfern batted to Lawrence and Owen alternately, and both Lawrence and Owen showed a skill with the ball that would have drawn admiration from Fatty Wynn himself.

But they found it very hard to touch Redfern's wicket. No matter what kind of ball they sent down Redfern was always ready for it, and he cut most of them away in a style that showed that boundaries would be, if not as thick as leaves in Vallombrosa, at all events frequent enough when he was playing upon a regular pitch.

The junior's face flushed, and his eyes gleamed, as he warmed to the work.

Some fellows are born cricketers, and Redfern of the Fourth was one of them. The willow seemed to live in his hands. If it had been a magic wand, guided by all the powers of the black art, it could hardly have been more effectual in guarding the wicket.

"My hat!" Lawrence exclaimed, as he came panting back with the ball. "My only summer hat! I wish those mugs could see you now, Reddy."

Redfern chuckled.
"I'm jolly glad they can't," he said. "It would spoil the joke."

"Yes. But if Tom Merry saw you now, he'd play you on your form."

"I suppose he would. But they've made up their little minds that we can't play cricket."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And we're not going to undeceive them," said Redfern, with a grin. "The Grammar School match on Saturday will be time enough for that."

"If they let us play."

"They'll have to."

"How are you going to make them?"

"Get them in a fix, and put 'em on ransom," grinned Redfern. "I'll work it somehow, never fear, and make 'em agree. You leave that to your Uncle Reddy. Now, play up!"

And the merry click of bat and ball sounded over the moor again.

Four youths in mortar-board caps came strolling over the moor, and they paused as they saw the cricket practice going on in that retired spot.

They were Gordon Gay, Monk, Lane, and Wootton major, of the Fourth Form, at Rylcombe Grammar School, and the deadly rivals of Tom Merry & Co., of St. Jim's, and four of the best, as Tom Merry & Co. would freely have admitted.

They looked on with great interest at the practice, strolling nearer. And Redfern, as he sent the leather on its journey, suddenly observed them. Gordon Gay ran a little out of his way, and returned it to Lawrence, who was fielding. Lawrence caught the ball, though the Cornstalk junior gave him a very difficult catch.

"Good!" said Gordon Gay.

Redfern gave the Grammarians a rather grim look. He had taken his cricket practice out of the way of the St. Jim's fellows, and he was not pleased at being caught by the Grammarians in this way.

"Hallo!" said Redfern, rather gruffly. "What do you fellows want here?"

"Nothing," replied Gordon Gay cheerfully. "But what's THE GEM LIBRARY, No. 218.

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the little game? What are you fellows practising out here on your lonesome for? You belong to St. Jim's."

"I remember that chap," said Monk. "He's a new kid there. He chipped in when we were bumping Gussy the other day."

Redfern grinned.

"Yes, I remember you," he said. "We're playing you at cricket on Saturday, the first match of the season. Look here, you fellows have found us out, and we want you to keep this dark!"

"Keep what dark?" asked Gay, puzzled.

"The St. Jim's chaps jumped to the conclusion that we couldn't play cricket, because we were brought up at a County Council school," Redfern explained. "They set us down as duffers at the game, without waiting to see whether we could play. So we've rotted 'em that we can't play, and we're doing our practice out here so that they won't smell a rat. See? It's a jape, and you don't want to spoil it."

Gordon Gay laughed.

"Right ho!" he said. "You're a cheeky young beggar, but I wouldn't spoil a jape for toffee. You bat rather well."

Redfern laid his hand upon his heart, and bowed to the ground.

"Thanks, mighty lord!" he replied.

"Ha, ha, ha! Look here, I'd like to bowl you!" said Gordon Gay eagerly. "We pride ourselves on being able to play a bit, you know."

"Give him the ball, Owen?"

"Right you are!"

Owen tossed the ball to Gordon Gay, and the Cornstalk caught it. He went to the bowling end, and Redfern dropped the end of his bat on the crease.

"Out first shot!" said Wootton major, who knew the powers of his chum.

Redfern heard the words, and smiled serenely. The ball came down red-hot, but the bat was ready for it. Click! The round red ball sailed away, and away, and away. And if Redfern had taken the trouble to run it would have been a four.

Gordon Gay gave a soft whistle.

"My word! The County Council kid is hot stuff!" he remarked.

"Looks like it," agreed Monk. "Try him again!"

Gordon Gay tried Redfern again, and again, and again, but the batsman was "there" every time. Gay gave it up at last, and took the bat, and Redfern took the ball to bowl. Gay was well upon his guard, but a scorching from the St. Jim's fellow whipped his middle stump out of the ground at the beginning of the over.

"My hat!"

"Have some more?" said Redfern sweetly.

"Yes, please."

Redfern & Co. were glad enough to get the Grammarian champion to join in their practice. It gave them a hint of what quality they were to meet on the following Saturday if they succeeded in getting into the school eleven.

Gordon Gay & Co. were good, very good. But they did not seem to be quite up to the weight of the three Saints. Gay remarked that it wasn't his day, and perhaps that was so. But Redfern & Co. had reason to be satisfied with the result. When the Grammarians bade them good-bye, Gordon Gay's brow was thoughtful as he walked away with Monk and Lane and Wootton.

"It's rather lucky that those chaps are rotting Tom Merry about the cricket," he remarked. "If they were put in the St. Jim's eleven we should have a hard nut to crack."

And Monk and Lane and Wootton agreed with him.

Redfern & Co. packed up their stumps and bats as the sun went down. They were tired, but in high good humour with themselves, and they chatted cheerfully as they sauntered back to St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 7.

Tom Merry Missing.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY met the New Firm as they came in, and he smiled as he saw the cricket-bag and the bats. The swell of St. Jim's was inclined to take Redfern & Co. under his wing.

"Been practising, dear boys?" he remarked.

"Yes; just knocking the leather about a bit," said Redfern. "Of course, we haven't been doing anything like you would do."

"I should hope not," murmured Lawrence.

"Yaas, wathah! You can't expect to!" said D'Arcy, unconscious of Lawrence's remark. "I am wathah a brilliant bat myself! How do you fellows like the game?"

"I think it's all right when you get used to it."

"Yaas, wathah—you need experience!" said the swell of St. Jim's, with a nod. "I should be very pleased to give



The old soldier halted in the doorway and stared in. Harry Wharton, Johnny Bull, and Frank Nugent scrambled up, while Bob Cherry turned a sooty face towards the visitor. "The dickens," ejaculated Colonel Wharton, "what does this mean, Harry?" (An incident from "Harry Wharton and Co.'s Windfall," the splendid complete school tale of the chums of Greyfriars contained in this week's issue of "The Magnet" Library. Now on sale. Price One Penny.)

you fellows some tips. Young chaps beginnin' can't do better than take advice from an old cricketer!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Owen and Lawrence.

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass upon them.

"I fail to see any cause for wibald laughter!" he said.

"Of course!" said Redfern, with a severe look at his chums. "Don't take any notice of them; the silly asses go off like cheap American alarm clocks, at any minute! Come on, you chaps; I want my tea."

"I should be vewy pleased if you would come and have tea in my studay, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus, in his graceful way. "As a matter of fact, I have had a fivah from my governor, and I am standin' a little feed. Tom Mewwy is comin', you know—when he comes in."

"Pleased to come," said Redfern. "Never shall it be said that the New Firm of the New House refused a feed!"

"Never!" said Lawrence and Owen solemnly.

Arthur Augustus bowed in a stately way.

"Vewy good, deah boys! I suppose you haven't seen Tom Mewwy—the ass has not come in yet. He went out in his skiff—he's pwactisin' for boatin', you know."

"Let's go and fetch him in," said Lawrence. "He's been out long enough, and I'm hungry."

"Yaas, wathah! I weally think that it is wotten to keep a good feed waitin' when fellows are hungwy!"

There were a good many St. Jim's fellows out on the river that afternoon, but as the sun went down they came in, and when D'Arcy and his companions reached the river bank the Ryll seemed to be deserted.

There were fellows in the boathouse, putting up their skiffs, but Tom Merry was not among them.

"Have you seen Tom Mewwy, Kangaroo, deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"He was playing cricket with us this afternoon," said Kangaroo.

"Yaas; but he went out in his skiff after that."

"Then I dare say he's in it still; his boat isn't here."

Arthur Augustus went down to the towing-path, and looked along the river. The shadows were beginning to creep over the waters of the Ryll, and the wide surface of the river was deserted.

"I twust nothin' has happened to Tom Mewwy," D'Arcy remarked. "He went for a pull down past the bwidge. Suppose we walk in that direction?"

"Right-ho!" said Redfern.

The towing-path ran under Ryleombe Bridge, an ancient stone structure that had spanned the stream for centuries. As far as the bridge, nothing was seen of Tom Merry. The juniors halted on the towing-path, looking up and down in puzzled wonder. They knew that Tom Merry was a keen oarsman, and he might not have counted the time when he was pulling down the river—and the current would be against him in returning. But—

"Let's look on the other side of the bridge," said Redfern.

D'Arcy's face grew serious.

"It's the Pool there!" he said. "It's dangerous! I twust—"

The swell of St. Jim's did not finish, but he hurried on along the towing-path under the bridge.

Some little distance beyond the bridge the stream spread out into a wider space, which was known locally as "The Pool."

The shores here were thickly wooded, and the water in places was shallow, with ridges of mud showing above the surface, and in other places was very deep, and the whole pool was a maze of tortuous currents.

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NEXT THURSDAY: "TOM MERRY'S PERIL!"

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In the gathering dusk of the night the river banks were deserted and silent, and the whole scene was sombre and solitary.

The deepening gloom made it difficult for the juniors to scan the wide river, and they strained their eyes across the dusky waters.

"Look!" exclaimed Redfern suddenly.

He dashed down to the water's edge.

In the thick masses of reeds along the steep bank a boat was bumping. It had been caught in the reeds and rushes, as it drifted without guidance, and the current was seeking to tear it away.

Redfern caught the nose of the boat, his leg going to the knee in the water as he grasped at it.

"It's an empty boat!" he said, in a low voice.

"Bai Jove!"

"My hat!" muttered Owen. "That looks rotten!"

"Look at the name on the boat, Reddy!" said Owen.

"I know the boat!" said D'Arcy, in a strained voice. "It's Tom Mewwy's boat! And—and he's not in it!"

That fact was evident.

Redfern felt in his pocket for matches, and struck one, and held it to the name painted on the boat.

"Ethel!"

"That's the name!" said D'Arcy. "It's named aftah my Cousin Ethel, you know. What did Tom Mewwy leave his boat here for, deah boys?"

"He didn't leave it here," said Redfern quietly; "it's drifted here!"

"Then where is Tom Mewwy?"

"Goodness knows!"

The boat swung round suddenly, swirling in the current, and Redfern was dragged into the water as he clung on to it. Lawrence made a grasp at him, and caught him by the leg, and held on fast.

Redfern's head went under water, and he had to let go the boat and strike out. He came up, sputtering wildly, and regained the bank with some difficulty, for the current was tearing and sucking at him like a hungry animal. But for the steady grasp of Lawrence, Redfern would probably have been swept after the boat.

He scrambled out, drenched with water and smothered with mud, and rolled, gasping, in the grass on the bank.

"Ow!" he gasped. "Groo!"

The boat disappeared in the dusk, whirling out into the middle of the stream, and reeling away on the swift river.

"Bai Jove! The boat's gone!"

"It will go ashore somewhere near the village," said Owen. "The boat will be all right! But where the dickens is Tom Merry?"

Redfern rose to his feet, still panting for breath.

"Tom Merry didn't let his boat go adrift on purpose!" he said. "Goodness knows where he is, or what has happened—but we must search for him!"

"Yaas, watah!"

"We might be within a dozen yards of him, and we can't see him in the dusk," said Lawrence. "Suppose we shout?"

"Good egg!"

"All together!" said Redfern. "Loud as you like!"

And the juniors shouted in unison.

"Hallo! Tom Merry! Hallo-o-o-o-o-o!"

They paused to listen. From the wood the echo of their shout came clearly back. And then, faint and far, but audible to their ears in the stillness, came the cry:

"Help!"

CHAPTER 8.

Redfern to the Rescue.

AND where was Tom Merry?

In the deepening dusk of night a white face was glimmering above the curling waters. Out in the Pool, amid the swirling currents, the hero of the Shell was clinging to a half-submerged tree, his strength almost exhausted, his senses swimming, only instinct keeping his grasp firm upon the swaying branch, while the waters strove to suck him away to doom.

Tom Merry had, as the juniors supposed, gone farther than he had intended, and he had found the current strong against him as he returned. In the gathering darkness, as he rowed singly against the powerful current, the boat had run upon the half-hidden tree that grew upon a low bank far out in the water. The mudbank amid the shallows and deeps of the Pool was below water, and the tree that grew upon it was sunken, and the branches swept the running river. The boat, colliding with the sunken branches, had reeled with the shock, and almost capsized, and Tom Merry, taken by surprise, had been pitched fairly into the water.

The boat had whirled away, but by good fortune he had caught hold of the tree, and he clung there. As he had

fallen, he had struck his head, whether upon the boat or the branch, he did not know. With his senses spinning, he had clung on, with the wild waters and the gathering darkness round him.

As his senses cleared, he had scanned the dusky river; but night had swallowed up the banks, and only the gleam of the water was round him.

He knew that he was in the midst of the dangerous Pool, but the shores had faded from sight, and at that hour the river was deserted.

To let go the bough and drift on the water, swimming as best he could, seemed his only chance; but his head was aching and spinning, and he felt that to trust himself to the treacherous currents of the Pool was death.

And the banks, too, were high and steep, if he succeeded in reaching them; and he had no strength left to drag himself from the water. A picture of himself, floating helplessly on the river, the sport of the dashing currents of the Pool, came into his mind, and he shuddered.

He clung to the branch, and shouted for help.

But on the lonely riverside there was none to hear, only the echo of his shouts came back to him. He had had a lingering hope that some boatman might have heard—that some belated rower from St. Jim's might be on the Ryll. But the hope died in his breast.

There was no one—there was no help!

As his strength was exhausted, and his brain grew less clear, his shouts died away; in numb silence he clung to his hold, knowing full well that when he let it go, it was to let go of life as well.

He hardly realised his surroundings by this time.

His head was aching and unsteady, lights danced before his eyes, and the chill of the water was creeping into his very bones.

He knew that the end was near; but he was stupefied; his senses too dulled by exhaustion and cold to feel fear.

Ring from the darkness of the distant bank came the shout of the juniors who were seeking him, and it came through the mists that were clouding over his senses, and brought a gleam to his eyes, a fresh beat to his heart.

Exerting all his strength, he shouted in return:

"Help!"

Then, striving with all his power to keep his wandering faculties together, he listened. Again the shout from afar:

"Hallo-o-o-o!"

"Help!" cried Tom Merry.

"Where are you?"

It was Redfern's voice. Tom Merry knew it, and he remembered seeing Redfern in the swimming-bath at St. Jim's, and remembered how all the fellows had remarked upon Redfern's powers as a swimmer. Was there a chance of rescue yet?

Where was Redfern? On the shore somewhere, but he could not see him, and it was difficult to tell from which direction came the echoing voice.

"Here!"

"In the Pool?" came Redfern's voice from the shadows.

"Yes."

"Swimming?"

"Holding on a tree!"

"Where is the tree, then?"

"On a mud flat."

"Can you hold on longer?"

"I—I'll try!"

Redfern shouted again, but Tom Merry could not reply. He was exhausted, and only a dry rattle came from his throat.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus, with white lips.

"Has he gone undah, deah boys?"

"If he hasn't, he will soon," said Redfern. "You can tell from his voice that he's almost at the last gasp."

D'Arcy shuddered.

"Poor old Tom Mewwy! He's got to be saved, somehow." The swell of St. Jim's gazed wildly up and down the river. "If we had the boat—"

"But we haven't," said Redfern crisply.

"What is to be done?" said D'Arcy helplessly. "I know I can't swim that; but I'm goin' to try, if we can't save him any other way."

"You're not going to try," said Redfern quietly, "I'm going to try. I'm stronger than you are, Gussy, old man, and a better swimmer, if you don't mind my saying so."

Redfern was kicking off his boots already.

D'Arcy was turning pale.

"I—I know you're a bettah swimmah than I am, deah boy," he muttered; "but—but you can't swim the Pool, and aftah dark, too. It—it's death."

"I must!"

"You can't!"

"I'm going to try."

"For goodness' sake think what you're about, Reddy!"

muttered Lawrence hoarsely. "You know you can't swim the Pool, it's impossible."

"I think I might do it."

"But—but the risk—"

"What will happen to Tom Merry if I don't?"

Lawrence groaned.

Tom Merry was doomed unless some strong, bold swimmer reached him; but it was a task from which the bravest swimmer might have shrunk. As the juniors stood on the bank, all they could see of the river was the swirling current, with its wickedly gleaming eddies in the darkness.

"It's tempting Fate!" muttered Lawrence, with dry lips.

"You can't do it, Reddy!" groaned Owen.

"It's imposs., deah boy!"

Redfern threw down his jacket and waistcoat beside his boots and his cap.

"I'm going in," he said. "We should be a set of rotters to stand here while a chap drowned. I'm fittest to go, and I'm going. One of you cut off to the school for help, and the other two stay here to help me if I get back."

"If!" said Lawrence, with a shudder.

Redfern stared into the darkness of the river, and shouted again.

"Tom Merry!"

A faint cry answered.

"Tom Merry, call out as often as you can, to guide me—I'm coming for you!" shouted Redfern. "Can you hear me?"

"Yes."

"Good!"

Redfern dived from the steep bank into the river.

Splash!

The three juniors on the bank watched him in horror-stricken silence.

Darkness swallowed up the gallant junior from their eyes; but for some minutes they could hear his steady strokes in the water.

Then that sound was merged in the rush and the whirl of the river, and they could hear him no more.

From the dim distance came a cry again from Tom Merry, to guide the swimmer.

"Help!"

Redfern, as he gallantly breasted the current, heard it, and swerved a little, and kept right on for the sunken mud-bank.

"Heaven help him!" muttered Lawrence. "Cut off to the school, Owen; I'll stay here with D'Arcy!"

Owen hesitated a moment; he did not want to leave the spot. But someone had to go, and he dashed off at top speed. Lawrence and D'Arcy, with faces white as chalk, gazed out upon the dark river, and strained their ears to listen.

"Help!"

It was a faint cry again.

Redfern heard it, and again he fought with the current to keep direct for Tom Merry. It seemed to the swimmer, strong as he was, that invisible forces were fighting against him, striving to drag him below the surface, to whirl him away into the vortex of the Pool.

But he fought on!

A white flash glimmered in the gloom, and Redfern gave a gasp. Tom Merry was before him, and in a few moments more Redfern had a grasp upon the swaying branch with one hand, and upon Tom Merry's collar with the other.

"Got you!" he gasped.

Tom Merry struggled to speak.

"That's you, Redfern?"

"Yes."

"Oh, Reddy! You've done this for me!"

"You'd have done it for me."

"Yes, that's true, I hope—"

"It's all serene," said Redfern, trying to speak cheerfully. "Owen and Lawrence and old Gussy are on the bank there, waiting to help. It's about a hundred yards from here, as near as I can guess, and if it wasn't for the current—"

"We shall never do it!" muttered Tom Merry.

"We've got to!"

"Save yourself, Reddy."

"Rats!"

Tom Merry groaned. He had hardly strength enough left to hold on to the swaying branch, and he knew that he could not make a single stroke to save himself. He would be a dead weight upon Redfern.

"Can you swim a bit, if I help you?" asked Redfern anxiously.

"I—I can't! When I let go I shall go down like a stone."

"You won't go down while I'm holding you."

"I—I believe the branch is going, too," said Tom Merry. "I've felt it swaying; it won't hold the two of us, I know that."

Redfern had already realised that.

"We've got to make the attempt," he said.

"I shall drag you down."

"We'll chance it. Hold on to me, give as little trouble as you can, and I'll pull you through."

Tom Merry did not reply. His hand had slipped from the bough, and he hung a dead weight upon Redfern. He was insensible. The long struggle with the racing waters had worn him out at last.

Redfern set his teeth.

"The sooner the quicker!" he muttered. "I sha'n't be able to hang on long myself."

And, with his grasp firm upon Tom Merry, and his teeth set, Redfern quitted his hold of the bough, and plunged out into the swirling river.

CHAPTER 9.

From the Jaws of Death.

TOM MERRY made no movement; he was insensible, like a log upon the arm of his rescuer. But it was better so; feeble movements would only have embarrassed the swimmer. Redfern, supporting the Shell fellow, swam out into the current, and in a moment was fighting for his life, and Tom Merry's life, in the swirling waters of the Pool.

From the distant bank a light gleamed for a moment, and went out. Then it gleamed again.

Redfern understood.

His chums on the bank knew that he could see nothing in the darkness, and they were striking matches to guide him.

Match after match gleamed and expired.

It was quite enough to guide the swimmer.

Redfern fought on, feeling that his strength was going. Tom Merry's dead weight dragged him down, and once he went right under, but he struggled up again.

His feet seemed to be of lead, and he was aching with fatigue; but he fought on. But for the glimmering of the matches on the bank, he would probably have been lost. But the gleam of the lights guided him, and at last he fought his way close to the shore.

"Reddy!"

"Hallo!"

"Reddy!"

Redfern called back faintly.

"Here, you fellows!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Thank goodness!" exclaimed Lawrence, plunging down the bank. "Thank goodness! Have you got him?"

"Yes."

"Oh, good!"

Redfern made a tremendous effort, and plunged on. He grasped at the bank, but the reeds came away in the mud. There was a splash as Lawrence leaped into the water. It came up to his neck close to the bank, but he grasped Redfern, and helped him, and the hero of the Fourth breathed again.

"Good old Reddy!"

D'Arcy scrambled down the bank.

"Can I help you, deah boys?"

"Give us a fist if you can," gasped Redfern. "If you could take Tom Merry, we could manage for ourselves."

"All wight."

Crouching on the steep bank, regardless for once of his clothes, Arthur D'Arcy clung to a root with one hand, and grasped Tom Merry's collar with the other, as Redfern pushed him ashore.

With a strength that few would have deemed the swell of St. Jim's capable of, D'Arcy dragged the heavy weight up the bank.

"Got him?" sputtered Redfern.

"Yaas, wathah!"

D'Arcy dragged Tom Merry up through the crashing reeds, and laid him upon the grass. The Shell fellow lay like a log.

But D'Arcy had no more attention for him for the moment. He turned back to help Redfern and Lawrence.

They were striving to get a grip on the bank, but the reeds came out in their hands as they grasped them, the soft mud tore away at their touch. And all the time the current was sucking and plucking at them.

"Give us a hand, Gussy!" Redfern gasped.

"Here you are, deah boy!"

Redfern grasped the hand that was stretched down to him.

"All right, I can climb now," he said.

He sprawled up the bank, his feet in the water, his hands grasping at the roots of grass on the level above.

"Catch hold of my legs, Lawrence, and climb over me," he gasped.

"Good egg!"

Lawrence obeyed. Redfern's clothes offered him a good grasp, and he climbed over his chum to the firm earth.

Then Redfern was dragged up, and he sank down beside Tom Merry, his senses swimming in utter exhaustion.

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A Splendid, New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

NEXT
THURSDAY:

"TOM MERRY'S PERIL!"

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Bai Jove!" Redfern and Lawrence could not move. But the swell of St. Jim's knelt beside Tom Merry.

"He's fainted," he said; "but—but I think he will be all right! I wish help would come."

"It's coming!" muttered Lawrence. Lights were gleaming across the dark fields, voices could be heard calling from the distance.

Five minutes later, Owen dashed up, breathless, sick with desperate running. A crowd of St. Jim's fellows were behind him.

"Reddy safe?" panted Owen. "Safe as houses, my son," said Redfern, sitting up in the grass. "Rather wet, but otherwise, right as rain."

"Oh, good! And Tom Merry?"

"Here he is."

Manners and Lowther ran up, with white faces. Blake and Kangaroo, and Kildare, of the Sixth, were the next to arrive. Tom Merry was raised up in the arms of two stalwart seniors, and carried off at once in the direction of St. Jim's. Piggins tore off to the village to fetch the local doctor.

Kildare looked rather grimly at the muddy Fourth-Formers.

"You kids all right?" he asked.

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "I'm afraid we've wuined our clothes, but othahwise ewewythin' in the garden is lovely."

"Who fetched Tom Merry out?"

"Weddy."

"Give us your fist, kid," said the captain of St. Jim's cordially.

Redfern flushed with pleasure.

"Sure you can walk all right?" Kildare added.

"Oh, I'm all serene!"

And Redfern tramped off with the rest to St. Jim's. The story was over the whole school like wildfire, and Redfern, when he came out of the Fourth Form dormitory after changing his clothes, met with an ovation. Everybody knew how he had risked, and almost lost, his life to save Tom Merry, and they cheered him till the old school rang again with the sound of it.

Redfern flushed.

"Oh, cheese it!" he exclaimed. "What's the blessed row about?"

"Hurray!"

"Chuck it, I say!"

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

"Oh, rats! Where's Tom Merry?"

"Shell dorm. Hurrah!"

Redfern escaped to the Shell dormitory, to get away from the cheering. Tom Merry was in bed, sitting propped up with pillows, and looking very white. Dr. Short, of Rylcombe, was in the room, and Mr. Railton, the master of the School House, and Manners and Lowther. Redfern looked in rather shyly.

"All right?" he asked.

"Come in, my lad!" said Mr. Railton kindly. "We have heard of your bravery, Redfern. Tom Merry has told us all."

Redfern coloured uncomfortably.

"Oh, it wasn't much, sir!" he stammered.

"I think it was very much," said Mr. Railton gravely, "and I think Tom Merry thinks so, too."

"Yes, rather, sir!" said Tom Merry.

Mr. Railton left the room with the doctor. Redfern approached the bed, with a grin.

"Well, I'm jolly glad you're all right, old son," he said. "It was a bit of a twist for both of us."

"You're a jolly good chap, Reddy!"

"Oh, rats! Chaps are bound to be able to do something, even if they can't play cricket," said Redfern, with a chuckle.

"I'll never say a word about your cricket again, Reddy."

"Rot!" said Redfern. "Say as many words as you like. This doesn't make any difference. I say, I'm ready for tea."

Tom Merry laughed.

"You're not going to get off the subject like that," he said. "Look here, Reddy, you've saved my life!"

"Sorry!" said Redfern politely.

"Don't be an ass! And you nearly got done in doing it."

"Yes; and now I want my tea."

"I've only got one thing to say," said Tom Merry earnestly. "I sha'n't forget this; and if ever you want anything I can do for you, Reddy, you've only got to say so."

Redfern started, and his eyes twinkled.

"Anything?" he asked.

"Yes."

"You mean that?"

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"Honour bright!"

"I may hold you to your word some time."

"You'll find it's all right, if you do."

"Good!" said Redfern, holding out his hand. "It's a bargain. Shake on it."

And they shook on it.

CHAPTER 10.

The Hero of the Hour.

"WEDDY, old man—"

Redfern was stopped in the passage, as he came down, by Arthur Augustus's hand upon his shoulder. The hero of the hour turned a somewhat hostile look upon the swell of St. Jim's.

"Chuck it!" he exclaimed.

"Weally, Wedfern—"

"Chuck it, I say! I'm fed up!"

"I weally don't quite compwehend."

"I've had enough of it," said Redfern.

"Enough of what, deah boy?"

"That blessed swim. You'll make me wish that I had left Tom Merry where he was," said Redfern belligerently.

"I'm fed up, I tell you."

"But weally—"

"Chuck it, I say!"

"But I wasn't goin' to speak about the swim this time," said D'Arcy, with a chuckle. "It's about the feed."

"Oh!" said Redfern.

"You see, I had awwanged a nice feed, and it's jolly late now, but that only makes us all the hungwiah," explained D'Arcy. "You must be wathah peckish."

"I could eat a rocking-horse," said Redfern.

"But we can't leave Tom Mewwy out of it," said D'Arcy thoughtfully. "How is he now?"

"He seems all right, but the doctor won't let him get up."

"Pewwaps we might have the feed in the Shell dorm., then," said Arthur Augustus, struck by a bright idea.

"That would be wipping."

"Hear, hear!" exclaimed Redfern.

"I'll ask Mr. Wailton."

D'Arcy presented himself at Mr. Railton's study. Dr. Short had gone, after assuring the Housemaster that Tom Merry was all right and needed only rest and wrapping up, to guard against taking cold after his immersion.

"If you please, sir," said D'Arcy, "we want Tom Mewwy to come to a little feed."

Mr. Railton smiled.

"I am afraid that that is not possible, D'Arcy," he said.

"Dr. Short has directed that Merry is not to leave his bed again till to-morrow morning."

"Yaas, sir. Of course, I should always respect a medical man's ordahs," said Arthur Augustus. "But I suppose there would be no harm in havin' the feed in the Shell dorm., sir, so that Tom Mewwy would not be left out? He hasn't had his tea, sir, and must be fwightfully hungwy."

"Well, certainly there would be no harm in that, D'Arcy, but you must be careful to have nothing exciting. It would be bad for Merry."

"I will be vewy careful to keep the chaps in ordah, sir."

The Housemaster smiled again.

"Very well, D'Arcy; I see no objection to it."

"Thank you vewy much, sir."

And Arthur Augustus quitted the study, very pleased. The other fellows joined in the project with great gusto. Piggins & Co., and Redfern and his friends were already in Study No. 6, and the provisions had been brought in from the tuckshop.

"You fellows cawwy up the gwub and the ewockery and things," said Arthur Augustus. "As for the cooking, Fatty Wynn can do that at the studay fire here."

"Quite ready!" said Fatty Wynn.

"And the tea can be made here," remarked Blake.

"We'll borrow some teapots along the passage, and take them up full."

"Good egg!"

"Yaas, wathah! I'll go and tell Tom Mewwy," said D'Arcy; and he made his way to the Shell dormitory.

The light was on there, and Manners and Lowther were sitting on either side of the bed, talking to their chum.

Tom Merry was sitting against a heap of pillows, with the bedclothes carefully jammed round him, and there was a little colour in his face now. He had been through a trying time; but he had the soundest of constitutions, and he was always perfectly fit, and he was pulling through well.

"Hungwy, deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"What-ho!" said Manners feelingly. "I dare say Tommy could take something, too."

Tom Merry grinned.

"I dare say I could," he said.

"I've got Mr. Wailton's permish, to bwing tea up here,"

said Arthur Augustus, beaming. "The fellows will be up here with it in a few minutes."

"Ripping idea!" said Lowther.

"Fatty Wynn's cookin' some special hewwings for you, Tom Mewwy," said Arthur Augustus. "We are goin' to look ahtah you, you know."

"Oh, rats!" said Tom Merry ungratefully. "If you try to make a giddy invalid of me, there will be ructions."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Hurry up with the grub, old son. I'm famishing."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Blake and Herries and Digby came in with parcels, and Figgins and Kerr followed them, laden with crockery. Kangaroo had knives and forks and spoons in both hands. Lawrence and Owen had chairs under either arm. Reilly and Bernard Glyn followed, with more chairs. Tom Merry chuckled.

"Quite a little party," he remarked.

"Reddy's helping Fatty Wynn," Lawrence explained.

"How are you feeling, Merry, old man?"

"Hungry."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

More chairs were found, and a table was dragged in and set beside Tom Merry's bed, and crockery was set out and bags and parcels opened. Certainly Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had been expending his fiver in a princely manner. Numerous as the guests were, there was likely to be much more than enough for all. Tom Merry did not look much like an invalid as he eyed the good things.

"Ripping!" he exclaimed.

There was a pleasant smell of herrings as Redfern and Fatty Wynn came in carrying a fresh burden on trays.

"Here you are!" Redfern exclaimed cheerfully. "Fatty has cooked them to a turn."

"Well, I think they're rather nicely done," said Fatty Wynn complacently.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Help the invalid first," said Manners.

"None of your blessed invalid," growled Tom Merry.

"If you say that word again, you'll get a pillow on the chivvy."

"Here you are, Tommy!"

A tray was set upon Tom Merry's bed, resting upon his knees, and he began. No one would have imagined that he had lately been in peril of his life, to see the way he disposed of the herrings. Certainly they were very nice herrings, and very well cooked. Fatty Wynn was as great as a chef as he was as a bowler or a goalkeeper.

"Oh, good!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Jolly good!" said Jack Blake. "What do you say, Figgy?"

"Prime!" said Figgy.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Weddy is the guest of honour," went on Arthur Augustus. "I propose that we fill our glasses—I mean, our teacups—and dwink to the hewo of the hour."

"Hear, hear!"

Redfern coloured.

"Oh, cheese it!" he exclaimed. "I've told you that I'm fed up!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hurrah for Reddy!"

And the toast was drunk in hot tea.

"Now leave it alone, for goodness' sake," said Redfern.

"Modesty, thy name is Redfern!" grinned Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Great heroes are ever modest," said Blake. "It's the same with me—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas, wathah! I pwopose that some sort of a testimonial is pwesented to Weddy, in wecognition of his hewoic conduct."

"Rot!" roared Redfern.

"I second the motion," said Figgins. "We're proud to have him in the New House! I second the motion with pleasure!"

"Hear, hear!" roared the juniors.

A glimmer of fun came into Redfern's eyes. He rose to his feet.

"Gentlemen—" he began.

"Hear, hear!"

"Speech!"

"Yaas, wathah! Silence for the hewo of the hour, dear boys!"

"Gentlemen, I have but a few words to say. Tom Merry has sworn a solemn swear to do anything that I may ever ask him, no matter what it is, because I had the honour of fishing him out of the Ryll."

"I mean it," said Tom Merry.

"Hear, hear!"

"Am I to understand that all you fellows back him up, and will stand by him in what he says?" asked Redfern.

"Yes, yes!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Very well, then," said Redfern composedly. "I've something to ask, and I hold Tom Merry to his word, and you fellows to your word."

"Go it!"

"Out with it, Reddy!"

"Good! I ask Tom Merry to play us—Lawrence, Owen, and myself, in the junior team against the Grammar School on Saturday."

CHAPTER 11.

In Honour Bound.

DEAD silence followed Redfern's speech.

The juniors had not known what to expect when he began to speak; but certainly they had not expected that.

They looked at one another, and did not speak.

Even Fatty Wynn ceased his attentions to the cold beef, and paused, with his fork half-way to his mouth.

Redfern looked around upon the silent, startled party.

A peculiar smile curved his lips.

"You seem to have gone dumb all of a sudden," he remarked casually. "I didn't hear anybody say 'Hear, hear!'"

"Hear, hear!" said Lawrence and Owen.

But nobody else said it.

Tom Merry & Co seemed to be deprived of the power of speech.

Redfern glanced at the hero of the Shell. Tom Merry's face was dark and troubled. He had given his word, and certainly he would keep it. There could be no question about that. But he had never expected to be held to it in this way. It was hardly playing the game, to transfer a private obligation into cricket matters. Tom Merry's duty as cricket captain of the Lower School was a different matter from Tom Merry's business merely as Tom Merry of the Shell. Redfern ought to have known that. But Tom Merry's word was given, and Tom Merry's word was his bond.

"Well?" said Redfern. "Will anybody pass me the jam?"

Monty Lowther passed the jam without a word.

"May I trouble you for the toast, Blake?"

Blake passed the toast.

"Chuck us over a knife, D'Arcy?"

D'Arcy pushed a knife across.

Still there was dead silence.

"I didn't know you fellows were Quakers," Redfern remarked. "I thought this was a dorm. feed, not a Quaker meeting. My mistake."

"Anybody got a pain?" asked Lawrence.

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy broke the painful silence at last. He broke it with that single remark. He seemed incapable of saying more.

Redfern fixed his eyes on Tom Merry.

"You heard what I said, Tom Merry?" he asked.

Tom Merry nodded.

"Got anything to say?"

"I—I suppose so."

"Well?"

"I shall keep my word."

"Good!"

"I shall play you fellows on Saturday, if you ask it. But—but I wish you had asked anything else, Redfern."

"I don't want anything else," Redfern explained, with an air of simplicity.

"Ahem!"

"We want to play," said Redfern. "I rather think that we shall surprise you, you know, when you come to see us play."

"It will surprise the Grammarians!" groaned Jack Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It means marking off the first match of the season as lost," said Kangaroo. "Look here, Reddy, do you call this playing the game?"

"Certainly!"

"Tom Merry didn't mean that when he promised, and we didn't mean—"

"You didn't mean what you said?" asked Redfern.

"Well, yes," said Kangaroo, colouring. "we did mean what we said, only we didn't mean—well, you see, this is altogether too thick."

"Yaas wathah!"

"You oughtn't to ask anything in cricket matters," Blake explained. "It—it isn't cricket, you know."

"If you don't want to keep your word—"

"Weally, Weddy—"

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"I'll release Tom Merry from his promise, if he asks me," said Redfern.

Tom Merry flushed red.

"I don't!" he said sharply.

"Then you'll keep your word."

"I've said so."

"Good! We play the Grammarians on Saturday?"

"Yes."

"Oh, it's too rotten!" exclaimed Herries. "You might as well play my bulldog Towser—better, in fact. The Grammar cads will laugh at us."

"They'll yell!" said Kangaroo dolorously.

"They'll shriek!"

"And they'll be right!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I don't know," said Redfern. "Of course, you must understand that we shouldn't want to play for St. Jim's, if we weren't sure that we should do the side credit."

"Yes, rather!" said Lawrence and Owen. "That's understood, of course."

"Credit!" snorted Herries. "If you play, it simply means that we play three wickets short, and three men short in the field."

"Of course, we shall do our best."

"A pretty best, I expect."

"Rats!"

"Yah!"

"You seem to be getting ratty about something," sighed Redfern: "and only ten minutes ago I was the hero of the hour. Things change, don't they?"

"You—you're the hero of the hour still, Reddy," said Tom Merry heavily. "You—you don't seem to understand cricket matters, and I suppose it's no good blaming you. You haven't had a chance to play cricket as we have."

"Yaas, wathah! How could we expect the poor chaps to comprehend?" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "It would be silly to be angry with them; they simply don't know what they're doing."

"That's it," said Blake glumly. "But we know; and it's rotten!"

"Yaas, wathah! It's wotten enough, deah boy."

Redfern grinned.

"Of course, we don't know anything about the subject at all," he agreed. "You fellows made up your minds about that, without ever seeing us play. It would be disrespectful of a new chap like me to say that you might be mistaken."

"Oh, don't be funny!" said Blake crossly. "Look here, Redfern, this looks to me very much like revenge on your part, and revenge is no class."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Looks to me like spite!" growled Kangaroo.

"Well, we're no class," said Redfern blandly. "What could you expect of three fellows brought up not to play cricket. We don't know any more about being class than we do of playing cricket, do we, you chaps?"

"Not a bit!" said Lawrence.

"It's not to be expected," said Owen.

"So you see, that's where it is," said Redfern. "We want to play in the match on Saturday, we want to win for St. Jim's, and we'll undertake to do our best."

"Your best!" snorted Digby.

"Chap can't do more than his best," said Redfern philosophically. "That's what we're going to do. If we lose the match—"

"If," growled Blake.

"There's no if about it!"

"Then we'll grin and bear it. I can answer for it that Owen and Lawrence and myself will bear it quite cheerfully."

"Certainly," said Owen and Lawrence.

"Oh, rats!"

"They don't understand," said Tom Merry sadly. "They don't see any more in a game of cricket than in a game of marbles. It can't be helped."

"Well, it's rotten."

"I've given my word, and you fellows have all promised to back me up. We can't get out of it now."

"Hang it!"

"Rotten!"

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"It's not playing the game."

"Yah!"

Redfern rose to his feet again, and Lawrence and Owen followed his example.

"Thanks for the tea!" he said. "I think we'll be getting along, as we have our prep. to do. You fellows would be relieved a bit if we went, I think. You are feeling inclined to say things, and it's rotten that you should have to hold 'em in out of politeness. Good-bye, my sons."

And the New Firm walked out of the dormitory, and Redfern closed the door. They walked down the stairs with grave and sedate demeanour. No one could have guessed from their demeanour that they were playing off one of the biggest rags ever played at St. Jim's. Not till they were in their own study in the New House did their faces relax.

Then they chuckled.

"What price that?" asked Redfern.

"Oh, gorgeous!" gasped Lawrence and Owen breathlessly.

"I had an idea of ragging 'em into it," said Redfern reflectively. "I was going to get Tom Merry & Co. into a fix, and make 'em promise to play us, as a condition for letting 'em out. I could have done it—"

"Of course you could, Reddy," said his admiring followers, readily enough.

"My hat! I believe you could do anything you jolly well chose," added Owen.

Redfern nodded complacently.

"Well, at all events, I can rag those cheeky bounders," he remarked. "I'm sorry to be putting 'em through it like this; but it's their own fault. They've got to go through it. When they find that we can play cricket after all, they will be consoled."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What's happened to-day saves us the trouble of planning a rag, and catching Tom Merry & Co. on the hop," remarked Redfern. "They can't possibly wriggle out of this. They've been caught nicely!"

"Yes, rather!"

"It would serve them right if we muffed up the game, and played as they expect us to play," said Redfern severely. "But we won't do that! We'll win the match for them—heap coals of fire on their heads!"

Redfern's face broke into a smile.

"Good egg!" agreed his chums.

Redfern's face broke into a smile.

"But I wish I could hear what they are saying at this moment!" he exclaimed.

And the three juniors roared.

CHAPTER 12.

Quite Obstinate!

TOM MERRY & CO. were saying things.

Perhaps Redfern would not have been gratified, after all, if he had heard them, for the juniors were very angry.

Tom Merry was sitting very silent. He had even left his herrings unfinished. Fatty Wynn was at work again upon the spread, but the other fellows seemed to have lost their appetites. True, they had nearly finished their tea when

Redfern had dropped his thunderbolt upon the meeting.

"It's not playing the game!" said Blake resolutely. "It's rotten! It's not what I should have expected of Redfern. He's no right to place us in an awful fix like this."

Arthur Augustus nodded assent.

"I must say that I am wathah disappointed in Wedfern," he remarked. "But I suppose he doesn't understand."

"That's it!" said Herries bitterly. "How is the boulder to understand how we look at cricket? It's the same as a game of hop-scotch to him."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"He doesn't care twopence if the Grammarians lick us in the first match of the season," said Kerr. "He doesn't understand. That's the only possible excuse for him. He doesn't understand how serious the matter is."

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"Got him!" sputtered Redfern. "Yaas, wathah!" Regardless for once of his clothes, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy grasped the insensible form of Tom Merry, and dragged him up the bank. (See Chapter 2.)

"It's his bringing-up, of course," said Patty Wynn, looking up from his tenth tart. "What should the poor chap know about cricket?"

"Quite twee."

"But it's rough on us."

"Howwid wuff, deah boys!"

"I—I suppose there's no getting out of it?" said Kerr, hesitatingly.

Tom Merry frowned.

"We've promised," he said. "I gave my word, and all you fellows said that you would back it up, whatever it was."

"But if we had known that he would ask an outrageous thing like this—"

"We didn't," said Kangaroo.

"Faith, and that makes no difference," said Reilly, with a shake of the head. "A fellow must keep his word, intirely, even if he didn't foresee how it would work out."

"Yaas, wathah! It would be uttably imposs. to bweak faith with Weddy."

"Confound him!" said Kerr.

"Yaas, wathah! Confound the twoublesome ass as much as you like, but there can't be any question about playin' him if he sticks to it."

Tom Merry's downcast face brightened a little.

"He might be persuaded out of it," he remarked. "I can't very well tackle him on the subject, seeing the obligation that I'm under to him. You New House chaps might have a jaw to him when you go back."

"We will," said Figgins.

"Pewwaps it had bettah be left to me," suggested D'Arcy

thoughtfully. "In a case of this kind, what is weally required is a fellow of tact and judgment."

"Oh, rats!"

"Weally, Kerr—"

"I don't think they'll be talked out of it," said Kerr. "Redfern is as obstinate as a mule. Look here, suppose we postponed the match with the Grammarians, or cut it altogether?"

"I'm afraid that would amount to breaking faith with Reddy."

"Confound him!"

"He's an ass!" said Monty Lowther. "There's no doubt about that. He's every possible kind of an ass; but we can't wriggle out of playing him."

"Imposs, deah boys."

"Unless he consents to give it the go-by," said Figgins hopefully.

"Yaas, wathah!"

The little party in the Shell dormitory broke up in a very disappointed mood. They were all very angry with Redfern of the Fourth. He had certainly fallen very quickly from his high estate as hero of the hour. Tom Merry could not forget that Redfern had faced death to save him. But the other fellows had not been rescued by Redfern, and they felt that they had a right to be angry.

Figgins & Co. walked over to their own House with glum faces. They went directly to Redfern's study, to try the force of their persuasive eloquence upon the New Firm. They found the three juniors busy with their preparation. Figgins opened the door of the study, and looked in.

The occupants of the study knew perfectly well why they had come. But they looked with bland and innocent smiles at Figgins & Co.

"Hallo!" said Redfern. "We're rather busy just now; we've left prep. a little late. And you haven't done yours either, have you?"

"Never mind prep. now," said Figgins.

Redfern grinned.

"Mr. Lathom won't say that in the morning," he remarked.

"Blow Mr. Lathom," said Figgins crossly.

"Just as you like; but I'd rather get my prep. done, if you don't mind. I'm not out looking for lines."

"Hang the prep., I tell you!" said Figgins angrily. "I've come to speak to you about the cricket match on Saturday."

"Oh, about arranging for practice, I suppose," said Redfern blandly.

Figgins snorted.

"Blow practice! Looks to me as if you fellows would need ten years of practice before you were any good."

"I think we might pick up a bit in two years," said Redfern modestly. "But, of course, you know more about it than I do."

"Much more," said Owen and Lawrence gravely.

"Look here," said Figgins, "I'm going to make an appeal to you. Will you chuck up this rotten idea for the good of the school?"

"What rotten idea?"

"Why, your silly idea of playing the Grammarians on Saturday."

"But that isn't a rotten idea!" exclaimed Redfern, in astonishment. "That's a jolly good idea. Isn't it, you chaps?"

"Jolly good!" said Owen and Lawrence dutifully.

"You'll muck up the game for us," said Figgins. "Three good players will have to be left out to make room for you, and you'll ruin our chances of winning the first match of the season."

"How do you know?"

"Of course I know!" roared Figgins. "You can't play cricket."

"There's such a thing as a beginner's luck, you know," suggested Redfern. "Suppose, by a series of flukes, I took a lot of goals?"

"Goals!" shrieked Figgins & Co. with one voice.

"I mean wickets," conceded Redfern. "You see, knowing so little about the game, a fellow is liable to be confused. Of course, I mean wickets."

"Oh, my hat! And that's the kind of man we're going to play against, Gordon Gay!" groaned Figgins. "A fellow who hardly knows the difference between cricket and footer."

"Of course, I know the difference," said Redfern indignantly. "In cricket the ball is thrown by hand, instead of being kicked by the foot. And there is no goal-keeper in cricket—at least, I believe so," he added hesitatingly.

"There's a wicket-keeper, but it's much the same thing, I believe," said Lawrence, wagging his head with the solemnity of an owl.

"And cricket is played in the summer, and football in the winter," said Owen. "There's a big difference there."

"And you don't wear shorts to play cricket," said Redfern. "You see, we know practically all about it, Figgins. Excepting for some minor points, I dare say we know as much about playing cricket as about playing marbles."

"My hat!" said Fatty Wynn. "It's no good talking to them, Figgins. You might as well talk to a set of bunny rabbits. They're simply got no sense. They don't understand cricket any more than rabbits understand algebra."

"We live and learn," said Redfern cheerfully. "The more matches we play in, the more we shall learn to distinguish the little differences between cricket and football and marbles and other games."

"The little differences," said Figgins dazedly. "You're right, Fatty. It's no good talking to them. Suffocating them is the only thing to meet the circumstances, I think. Let's get out. They make me quite ill."

The New Firm grinned blissfully at one another as the door closed behind the dismayed and disgusted juniors.

"Gorgeous, ain't it?" murmured Redfern.

"But don't pile it on too thick, Reddy, or even those glorious asses will begin to see through it!" grinned Lawrence.

Redfern shook his head.

"They wouldn't see through it in seventy centuries," he said. "They're so wrapped up in their notion that we can't play cricket, that if I asked them whether cricket was played by steam or electricity, I believe they'd take it seriously."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tap!

"Oh, here they come again!" groaned Redfern. "Come in, if you must!"

But it was not Figgins & Co. returning. It was the elegant

figure of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy that was revealed when the door opened.

"Can I speak to you fellows a minute?" asked the swell of St. Jim's, in his gracefully courteous way.

Redfern took out his watch.

"Certainly," he said. "We're very busy, but we'll give you one minute, as you make a point of it. I'll time you."

"Weally, Wedfern—"

"Ten seconds gone!"

"It's about the cricket match on Saturday," said D'Arcy.

"Good! Twenty seconds!"

"I trust that when I have fully explained the circs. of the mattah to you fellows, you will wefwain fwom placin' us in a widiculous posish—"

"Forty seconds."

"By gwacefully withdwawin' your claims to play in the team. Of course, we are goin' to keep our word if you insist upon it."

"Fifty seconds."

"But we twust that upon wedeflection you will come to see that it weally won't do, and that undah the circs. you will—"

"Minute's up!" said Redfern, closing his watch with a snap. "Sorry, but we shall have to go on with our prep."

"But weally—"

"Now, do be reasonable, Gussy. You asked for a minute, and we've given it to you. Now do buzz off like a good little boy."

"Weally Wedfern—"

"Run away and play!"

"Weally, Lawrence—"

Redfern gently pushed the astonished swell of St. Jim's outside the study, and closed the door. He turned the key gently in the lock.

Arthur Augustus stood for some moments lost in astonishment. Then he rapped on the door with his aristocratic knuckles.

"Weddy, deah boy—"

No reply.

"You fellows, you know—"

Silence.

"Bai Jove, I weally wegard this as wotten!"

There was a soft chuckle in the study, but no other sound. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy walked away with his noble nose very high in the air. And Redfern & Co. finished their preparation without any further interruptions.

CHAPTER 13.

In the Eleven.

THE next day Tom Merry was very little the worse for his adventure in the river. Redfern was none the worse. Tom Merry was, perhaps, a trifle paler than was his wont, but that was all. Tom Merry was not thinking about his narrow escape on the river. He was thinking of the future, not of the past. The day after the morrow was Saturday, and on Saturday the first cricket match of the season was to be played. And Tom Merry was in honour bound to play Redfern & Co. in the eleven. And with a burden like that upon his mind, Tom Merry naturally had a clouded brow that day.

That day much eloquence was wasted upon Redfern and Lawrence and Owen.

Fellows, even fellows who had no chance of playing in the eleven, plied them with persuasion to give up their ridiculous idea of playing for St. Jim's Juniors.

It was pointed out to them that they were duffers, mugs, fatheads, chumps, and various other uncomplimentary substantives. Many adjectives, too, were expended upon them, such as silly, stupid, fatheaded, unreasonable, idiotic, cheeky, impertinent, obstinate. Substantives and adjectives alike failed in having any effect upon the determination of the New Firm.

To one and all they had the same reply. Tom Merry was junior cricket captain, and if Tom Merry chose to play them in the junior eleven, play they would.

"All expostulations and remonstrances should be addressed to the cricket captain," Redfern explained.

"But he doesn't want to play you!" roared Blake, when Redfern made that reply to him.

"He's put us in the team!" said Redfern.

"Against his will!"

"That's his own bizney, of course."

"You are holding him to a rotten promise!"

"The promise can't be rotten if it holds good," Owen remarked.

"Oh, rats! Look here, you fellows ought to resign!"

"Seems to me that resignation is more needed for you fellows," Lawrence remarked, and the trio chuckled. Truly, the junior cricketers of St. Jim's were showing very little resignation over the matter. Blake snorted angrily.

"You ought to be jolly well walloped!" he exclaimed. Redfern sighed.

"And only yesterday evening I was the hero of the hour, and was having dormitory feeds stood in my honour!" he said sadly. "Thus are the mighty fallen!"

"Well," said Blake, softening a little, "I don't say that you weren't a giddy hero last evening, and we all feel just the same about that. But you're mucking up everything with this ridiculous idea of playing in the junior eleven."

"I don't see it."

"Of course you don't!" growled Blake. "I don't expect you to see it. But I see it."

"Well, if I don't see it, of course you can't expect me to alter my plans, can you?" said Redfern politely.

"Oh, rot! You ought to keep out of the eleven."

"I don't see it," Redfern repeated, unmoved.

"Then you're a silly ass!"

"Thanks!"

"And an obstinate mule!" roared Blake.

"Thanks again!"

"And—and—and a frabjous idiot!" shrieked the enraged junior.

Redfern bowed.

"Pile it on!" he murmured.

"And—and—and a babbling, jabbering lunatic!"

"Go it!"

Blake clenched his fists. His vocabulary was almost exhausted, but he had not succeeded in disturbing Redfern's serenity.

"I—I—I'll jolly well give you a good hiding!" he exclaimed.

Redfern shook his head.

"Not just before the match!" he said. "We ought to be in our best form for the match. A chap who's just had an awful hammering won't be able to play well."

"You won't be able to play well, anyway."

"Oh, I wasn't thinking of myself!" said Redfern sweetly. "I was thinking of you."

"Me!" roared Blake.

"Yes, old fellow. If I hammered you now——"

Blake could stand no more. He rushed upon Redfern. The trio seized upon him at once, and he was whirled off his feet, and bumped in the quad. Redfern & Co. walked away, leaving him sitting there somewhat dazedly.

Jack Blake did not try any further persuasion with the New Firm, but other fellows did; but they were no more successful than Blake. Some of the junior cricketers urged Tom Merry to put it plainly to Redfern. But that the hero of the Shell steadily refused to do.

Redfern had saved his life, and he had passed his word, and if Redfern held him to it he would not ask to be released from it. He could not be guilty of such ingratitude as that. Besides, Tom Merry had a shrewd suspicion that Redfern meant business, and that he would not give him his promise back.

For some reason, whatever it was, the New Firm were determined to play, and as they evidently did not understand the harm they were doing, it was useless to be angry with them. Indeed it was useless to be angry anyway, as they were quite determined to have their own way in the matter, and anger had not the slightest effect upon them.

Dark and angry looks did not affect them in the least, and cold stares and shrugs of the shoulders left them unruffled.

By Thursday night the juniors of St. Jim's understood one thing quite clearly, and that was that the New Firm were going to play on Saturday, unless Tom Merry broke faith with them, a thing that was not to be dreamed of.

Tom Merry accepted the situation with what philosophy he could muster, and told the three juniors to turn up to practice the following morning before breakfast, which they readily agreed to do.

That evening a meeting of the cricket committee was held in Tom Merry's study, for a most important question had to be settled. Which of the players were to be left out to make room for the three new-comers. Tom Merry could not play a team of fourteen men against the Grammarians, and so three of them would have to go.

Tom Merry and Blake and Figgins and Fatty Wynn were certainly indispensable. The changes would have to be made among the others. Manners heroically resigned, and Herries, after some hesitation, followed his example.

Lumley-Lumley of the Fourth had been put down for the eleven, and all eyes were turned upon him. Lumley-Lumley coloured, and looked at D'Arcy.

"Seems as if it rests with me to make a suggestion," he remarked.

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "It weally weats with you, Lumley-Lumley, deah boy, and I am sure you will do the sensible thing."

"Good! I suggest that Gussy resigns."

"What!"

"Hear, hear!" said Kangaroo.

"Good egg!" said Figgins heartily.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jammed his eyeglass into his eye, and turned a freezing glance round upon the grinning committee.

"I pwesume that this is a joke!" he remarked.

"I guess not," said Lumley-Lumley. "Are you going to resign?"

"Certainly not, you uttah ass!"

"For the good of the team, you know, Gussy!" urged Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah——"

Lumley-Lumley burst into a laugh.

"It's all right!" he exclaimed. "I guess it's my turn to go, but you'll give me a chance another time, Tom Merry!"

"That I jolly well will!" said Tom Merry at once.

"Good, then; I stand out."

"That settles it, then," said Tom Merry. "The team stands like this—Merry, Figgins, Kerr, Wynn, Kangaroo, Blake, D'Arcy, Lowther, Redfern, Lawrence, Owen!"

And a groan from all present greeted the last three names.

CHAPTER 14.

The Day of the Match.

REDFERN & CO. kindly consented to practise.

As they were to play in the Grammar School match on Saturday, Tom Merry made the best of a bad job, and took them in hand.

He had a faint hope that by coaching and constant practice they might learn, at least, not to get in the way, and make it no worse than playing three men short.

Redfern & Co. certainly improved a little.

They no longer asked whether long-on was something to rub a bruise with, or whether mid-off was another name for the bails.

Redfern, when he bowled on Friday after school, succeeded in sending the ball several times somewhere near the wicket, and fellows could look on without danger of being brained. And that, as Jack Blake said, was an improvement.

But Tom Merry was content that they should leave bowling practice alone. He was bound to put them on to bat in the match, and they would have to field somewhere, but he would never give them a chance of bowling. From that disastrous experiment at all events he would be saved. Fatty Wynn and Blake and Monty Lowther would do all the bowling that was necessary.

But at batting the New Firm seemed hopeless.

Sometimes they stopped a ball when it was thrown to them, and oftener they did not. But if they did, it was in the clumsiest possible way. And then they would take runs when there was not the slightest chance of the thing coming off. In a word, three more unutterably hopeless duffers had never been discovered on a cricket field before, and the general verdict was that they ought to be kicked off it, and never allowed within the ropes again.

But they were to play on Saturday!

Sometimes it seemed like a bad dream to Tom Merry when he thought of it. But there the thing was, and it could not be altered.

Perhaps Redfern might have taken pity on the cricketers, and relieved their minds by playing a little better at practice, but for the way the juniors looked at the matter. For they were not surprised at what they saw. They concluded in the most natural way in the world that Redfern & Co. were playing as might be expected of chaps brought up at a County Council school.

And that cool assumption on the part of Tom Merry & Co. kept Redfern's back up, as he expressed it to his chums, and he did not relent.

The St. Jim's fellows would find out their mistake on the playing fields when they met the Grammarians, and that would be soon enough. The dismay they were now suffering from was a just punishment for their cheek.

And Tom Merry & Co. were indeed dismayed.

They heard accounts of the progress of the Grammar eleven over at the Grammar School, and they heard that Gordon Gay & Co. were in wonderful form.

Gay himself, especially, was shining as a batsman, and Harry Wootton was famous for a certain dangerous ball he had been cultivating, and which he intended to put to a test upon the unfortunate Saints.

"And we've got to leave three good men out, and put in three awful muckers," groaned Tom Merry.

"It's simply awful!" said Manners.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sadly. "I've always stood up for Weddy like anythin', but I must admit that he makes me tired now. I wegard him as an ass!"

"He's more than an ass!" growled Jack Blake. "He's a dangerous lunatic!"

"If only he'd get crooked before the match!" sighed

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Lowther. "Somebody else would have to be played then. But he keeps in a most disgusting state of good health."

"Yaas; it's wotten!"

"We've simply got to grin and bear it," said Tom Merry. "I shall put them in last, and count as if we were only playing eight men. We shall have to make eight wickets do duty for eleven, that's all."

"Oh, it's beastly! I could kick Redfern."

"I could squash him if he hadn't pulled me out of the river!" said Tom Merry ruefully. "But you can't get your back up against a chap who risked his life for you!"

"Look at him at practice!" groaned Figgins. "He bats like a windmill, and runs like a frog. Oh, dear!"

But complaints had proved useless, and persuasion had failed, and black looks only provoked genial smiles in return from the culprits. Tom Merry & Co. had to bear it, even if they could not grin.

On Saturday morning the cricketers were by no means in the merry mood with which they had expected to greet the morning of the first match of the season.

Tom Merry was very thoughtful during morning lessons. When the Forms came out after lessons he met Redfern in the passage, and nodded to him in a friendly way enough. Perhaps he had a lingering hope that Redfern would relent at the last moment, and resign his place in the junior eleven. If he hoped anything of the sort he was doomed to disappointment. Redfern had no intention whatever of resigning.

"When do the Grammar chaps get here?" asked Redfern cheerily.

"Two o'clock."

"Good! We'll be ready! It's a single-wicket match, isn't it?"

Tom Merry stared.

"Single wicket! Do you think we're a set of fags in the First Form?" he exclaimed. "No, it isn't, you frabjous ass!"

"I'm sure I heard Blake say it was single something!" persisted Redfern.

Tom Merry smiled.

"Single innings," he said. "That's it! As we've only got the afternoon for the match, and there will be some good batting on both sides, I expect, we've arranged a single innings for each side, you see. If we had two innings each, the game would be left unfinished."

"What's the difference between single innings and single wicket?" asked Lawrence innocently.

"Oh, don't ask me your giddy conundrums now!"

"I suppose you'll want us to open the innings?" Redfern suggested.

"No fear!" said Tom Merry promptly.

"Which side bats first?" asked Owen.

"You shrieking ass! How do I know till I've tossed with Gordon Gay?"

"Going to toss with Gordon Gay?" asked Lawrence.

"Yes, fathead!"

"What are you going to toss?"

"A coin, I suppose!"

"Is pitch-and-toss allowed here?" asked Redfern, in surprise.

Tom Merry felt as if he would faint.

"It isn't pitch-and-toss!" he shrieked. "It's tossing for innings!"

"What's the difference?"

"Ow! Don't talk to me!"

And Tom Merry ran away with his fingers in his ears. Redfern & Co. exchanged a grin. They were keeping up the rag till the very last moment.

After dinner the juniors got into their flannels, and Redfern & Co. followed the example of the rest. The New Firm certainly looked very fit and well in flannels, as the St. Jim's fellows had to admit. But it was all show, of course—or so they concluded. The fellows could look like cricketers, but they couldn't play cricket.

"Pewwaps if I wemonstivate with them, the uttuh boundabs may change their minds at the last moment!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked, while the cricketers were awaiting the arrival of the brake from the Grammar School.

Jack Blake grunted.

"Might as well talk to a set of mules!" he said.

"I will twy!" said D'Arcy.

"No good if you do!"

But Arthur Augustus strolled over to the three, who were sunning themselves outside the pavilion. They looked at him.

"I'm goin' to say a last word to you fellows," said D'Arcy seriously.

Redfern shook his head.

"Impossible!" he declared.

"Eh? What do you mean by imposs., deah boy?"

"You couldn't possibly say a last word!" Redfern

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"HARRY WHARTON & CO.'S WINDFALL"

explained. "Some fellows leave off talking at times; but you're like the little brook—you go on for ever!"

Arthur Augustus turned red, as he heard a chuckle behind him. He turned round, and swept the group of cricketers with an icy glance.

"I fail to see any cause for laughter in Wedfern's idiotic remark, deah boys!" he said.

"Your own idiotic remarks are funny enough, though!" Redfern suggested.

"Weally, Wedfern—"

"Hallo! Here's the brake!" called out Gore, of the Shell.

"I was goin' to say, Weddy—"

"Here's the brake!" said Redfern.

"I was goin' to—"

"Rats, old son! We know what you are going to say, and you can save your breath!" said Redfern kindly. "You will need all your breath to field the leather when I'm batting!"

"Field when you're batting!" shrieked D'Arcy. "We're on the same side, you awful ass!"

"Well, what about it?" demanded Redfern.

D'Arcy looked at him weakly.

"It's—it's no good talkin' to you!" he gasped.

"Well, I've told you that already, haven't I?"

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gave it up.

Gordon Gay & Co. had arrived, and the St. Jim's fellows greeted them warmly enough. The Grammarians were looking very fit. Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence kept carefully in the background. They did not want to attract the eye of Gordon Gay, and evoke any injudicious remark.

"We're going to beat you, Tommy, old son!" said Gordon Gay, as he shook hands with the junior captain of St. Jim's.

"I shouldn't wonder if you do!" said Tom Merry.

Gay stared at him.

"Well, that doesn't sound like your usual opinion of yourselves, I must say," he replied. "Is there anything wrong with your team?"

"Only we're playing three rank duffers in it, owing to an idiotic promise I made!" said Tom Merry glumly.

"Who are the duffers?"

"They're in the pavilion—three new kids in the New House—Redfern, Lawrence, and Owen!"

Gordon Gay started.

"Redfern, Lawrence, and Owen?"

"Yes."

"You're playing them?"

"Yes," grunted Tom Merry.

"And they're duffers, are they?"

"Unspeakable duffers!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Gordon Gay.

"What are you cackling at, Gay?"

"Oh, never mind!" said the Grammar School captain, still grinning. "Ha, ha, ha! I—I mean, let us toss for innings! Ha, ha, ha!"

And they tossed for innings, with the cause of Gay's merriment still unexplained. Tom Merry won the toss, and elected to bat first, and he went in to open the innings with Jack Blake, and Gordon Gay placed his men to field.

CHAPTER 15.

Amazing!

REDFERN looked on from the pavilion, with a slight frown upon his face. He had played a great deal of cricket in his time, and in the teams he had played in he had not been accustomed to being last man in. But it was inevitable in the present case; the rag had been only too successful in making Tom Merry believe that he was a hopeless duffer who ought not to have been played at all. Tom Merry intended to put off the inevitable loss of three wickets to a score of duck's eggs till the last possible moment. Redfern chafed a little as he watched the innings open, but it could not be helped, and he had to stand and watch.

It was all the harder, because fortune was going against St. Jim's.

Tom Merry & Co. had had little practice at the summer game as yet, and there was no doubt that they were not in their best form. Perhaps the thought of the three dead wickets to come had a bad effect upon them, too. They could see that Gordon Gay & Co. were in fine fettle, and they felt that they were playing eight men against eleven. Perhaps that had something to do with their failure, or perhaps it was because they were at the start of the season, and had not found their feet yet. Whatever the reason, certainly Tom Merry & Co. did not make a brilliant show in that innings.

And luck was on the side of the Grammarians, too. For Gordon Gay, in the second over, took Tom Merry's wicket, when the hero of the Shell had but four runs to his credit.

Tom Merry was a sportsman, and could take a hard knock

as well as most fellows; but even his jaw dropped a little when his wicket went down.

He knew, without conceit, that he was the best batsman on his side, and he had lost his wicket for four.

It was cruel luck.

Had he escaped that ball, he might have batted for an hour, and seen four or five partners in and out, as he had done many times before.

But it was not to be; his wicket was down, and Monty Lowther went in to take his place, giving him a rather glum look in passing.

The Grammarian fieldsmen grinned at one another. They had got rid of the most dangerous batsman on the St. Jim's side at a low figure. Gordon Gay & Co. were already anticipating a sweeping victory to start the cricket season.

Jack Blake piled up twenty before he was caught out by Wootton major, but the fall of his wicket was immediately followed by that of Lowther. Figgins and Kerr were at the wickets now, and Tom Merry looked on hopefully, for Figgins was a mighty hitter.

He almost groaned as Figgins, trying for a run too many in his eagerness to make up lost ground, was stumped by the wicketkeeper.

Four down for 29.

"All up!" muttered Tom Merry to D'Arcy, who was drawing on his batting-gloves to go in next. "It's a regular rot!"

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"Not all up yet, deah boy!" he said cheerfully. "I'm goin' in, you know!"

Tom Merry smiled.

"Keep your eye on Gordon Gay, Gussy!"

"Yaas, wathah! I wathah think I shall make the fur fly, you know!"

And Arthur Augustus went in to take the wicket that Figgins had vacated. He took up his stand there in his usual graceful attitude. There was a cheerful confidence in his face as he confronted the bowling. Perhaps he was a little too confident. At all events, his wicket went down to the first ball.

Tom Merry gave a grunt.

"Five down out of eight!" he muttered. "It's all over bar shouting—and the Grammar bounders will do all the shouting this time!"

"Perhaps not," said a quiet voice at his elbow.

Tom Merry looked round and saw Redfern.

"Oh, rats!" he said irritably. "You fellows have mucked it up!"

Redfern flushed a little.

"Why—how's that?" he asked.

"It's got on the nerves of the other fellows, your playing at all," said Tom Merry, rather bitterly, "and we're practically playing only eight men. You three are no good! When three more wickets are down, we are done!"

"Not quite!"

"Perhaps these chaps will pull the game out of the fire,"

Monty Lowther suggested sarcastically.

"Perhaps," said Redfern, with a nod.

"Oh, rats!"

"A game isn't lost till it's won, you know!" remarked Lawrence.

"This game jolly well looks lost!" said Figgins. "It's like a rot setting in—when wickets go at that rate, they don't stop in a hurry. There goes Kerr's!"

Kerr was out. The score stood at 34, with six wickets down. It was nothing like the scoring that the St. Jim's juniors had been accustomed to. The Saints who clustered round the ropes were very silent; there was not much to cheer. But a crowd of Grammarians, who had walked over to see the match, were not silent. They cheered and cheered, and the field rang with their cheering. The Saints could not blame them; Gordon Gay & Co. were doing excellently well.

Fatty Wynn and Kangaroo were at the wickets now. The Cornstalk did some fine batting, Fatty Wynn sturdily stone-walling and leaving the hitting to the Shell fellow. The runs piled up a little; but when fifty had been passed, Kangaroo was clean bowled by Frank Monk.

Tom Merry turned to Redfern & Co. with a grim smile.

"Man in!" he said.

"Which man?" asked Redfern.

"I don't care twopence! I'm only sending you in as a matter of form!"

Redfern turned pink.

"Shall I go?" he asked.

"If you like!"

"Very well."

Redfern picked up his bat and walked out to the wicket, passing Kangaroo on his way back to the pavilion. The Cornstalk gave him a glum look.

"Don't make them laugh more than you can help!" he said as he passed Redfern.

Redfern grinned.

"I'll try not to," he said.

He took up his position at the wicket. The fellows were all watching him. Frank Monk, the second best bowler in the Grammarian team, was still bowling, and everybody expected to see Redfern's wicket fall to the first ball. Yet those who felt most certain of that could not help admitting that, so far as looks went, he shaped very well at the wicket. He made a fine figure of a young cricketer as he stood there, alert, ready, watchful, his hands steady and strong upon the cane handle of the bat.

Frank Monk knew more of Redfern's real form than the Saints did, and he sent down his best ball. Redfern seemed to flick at it carelessly, and the Saints looked for the wicket to fall. But it did not. The ball was whizzing away—away—far from the reach of the fieldsmen, and Fatty Wynn, at the other end, was starting to run, when Redfern called to him coolly:

"Stand where you are, Fatty; it's a boundary!"

And a boundary it was.

Four to the good.

The St. Jim's fellows gasped.

"Who said the age of miracles was past?" murmured Monty Lowther.

"My hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "My only summer hat!"

It was all he could say. He was too astonished for more. What did that quiet confidence of Redfern's mean. And he had said so surely that it was a boundary. He knew! Was this the duffer at whose cricket the Third Form fags had howled with laughter? Tom Merry felt as if his head were turning round.

"It's a fluke, of course!" said Kerr.

Tom Merry nodded; but he felt that that did not explain it. There was something more in it than that, and he watched eagerly for more.

Monk sent down the last ball of the over, and Redfern cut it away neatly through the slips. Two runs—easily taken!

The field crossed over, and Fatty Wynn had the bowling. Alas for Fatty Wynn! He was a splendid bowler, and he could stone-wall with great success; but he was not up to the weight of the bowling that was turned upon him now. The first ball from Gordon Gay sent his bails flying.

"Man in!" said Tom Merry.

Lawrence went in to join Redfern at the wickets.

A few minutes before, and all the St. Jim's fellows would have considered the innings practically at an end at that juncture. But now a strange hope was rising within them. Redfern was not the hopeless duffer they had imagined. It was not a case of flukes; in some mysterious way the fellow at whose cricket the whole school had laughed had developed in a few minutes into a youthful edition of Jessop, Hayward, and Fry all rolled into one.

"My hat!" Jack Blake muttered. "I can't understand it! I don't see it at all! But—but the game isn't over yet!"

"Wathah not," murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy—"wathah not! It's a most amazin' mystewy, but that swabjous ass can bat!"

He could! Frabjous ass or not, he could certainly bat! A single run by Lawrence gave Redfern the bowling again, and he proceeded to make hay of it. Three twos and a boundary. And the St. Jim's fellows gaped.

"Bravo, Reddy!" shouted Owen.

And the cry was taken up.

"Hurray, Redfern!"

"Go it!"

"Pile it on!"

Redfern grinned. He felt himself in splendid form. He knew that he was master of the bowling. Barring accidents, he would keep his wicket as long as he liked. He faced the bowling with cool confidence, but not a whit too much confidence. The eyes of all the Lower School of St. Jim's were upon him, watching with wonder.

The next half-dozen overs were happenings to be long remembered at St. Jim's. Gordon Gay, and Monk, and Wootton major exhausted their bowling upon Redfern's wicket, and they exhausted it in vain.

And the runs piled up.

Lawrence was backing up his leader well, and he had taken fifteen to his own credit when Gordon Gay caught him out.

"Last man in!"

Owen walked out to the wicket.

"Last man in!" murmured Blake. "Lawrence, you boulder, what does it mean? What do you mean by it? How did you learn to bat like that?"

Lawrence looked astonished.

"Bat!" he repeated. "I can't bat!"

"But you've been batting splendidly," shouted Figgins—

"You and Reddy!"

Lawrence shook his head.

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A Splendid, New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

NEXT THURSDAY:

"TOM MERRY'S PERIL!"

"Quite a mistake!" he said blandly. "We can't bat! We were brought up at a County Council school, you know, and cricket is never played well outside a public school!"

"Weally, Lawrence, that is quite covevvel; but—" "But it doesn't square with the facts," said Figgins. "Wathah not!"

"How did you do it, Lawrence?"

"Lawrence shrugged his shoulders.

"Must have been a complete set of flukes," he said.

"Oh! Look at Reddy!" roared Figgins.

Redfern had the bowling again, and he was giving the Grammarians enough leather-hunting to last them for weeks. Panting fieldsmen toiled after the elusive ball, and always sent it in too late. Gordon Gay prided himself upon the fielding of his team; but their fielding was not quite up to the mark this time. It was good, but the batting and the run-getting was better.

"My only hat! He's a giddy Jossop!" said Fatty Wynn.

"Look at that swipe! That's a boundary!"

"Bai Jove!"

"They can't touch him!" said Tom Merry gleefully.

"My hat! We've been deceived in that young bounder!"

"Hurrah, Reddy!"

"Well hit!"

"Bravo!"

Redfern grinned serenely at the wicket. He was getting comfortably set now, and he knew that he could do what he liked with the bowling. So long as Owen backed him up, he was safe to pile up runs. And Owen was a cautious player. He loyally stone-walled for Reddy's benefit, and left most of the run-getting to his chief. And he had his reward, in seeing the score go up by leaps and bounds.

The St. Jim's fellows raised a cheer when the score passed the level hundred; but the innings was by no means finished yet. Redfern was batting away as if he had only just started, and almost before the juniors knew what was happening, the board showed a hundred and fifty.

Gordon Gay made a grimace to Frank Monk as the field changed over again.

"Can't touch that young bounder!" he said. "Stick to the other chap—though he seems as firmly set as a giddy rock!"

"I'll have him out, or bust!" said Monk.

Gay grinned ruefully.

"Well, do your best!" he said.

Frank Monk did his best. But Owen was not to be drawn. Not the most tempting ball could draw him into recklessness. He never gave the fieldsmen a chance, and the hungry wicket-keeper went hungry. Owen was sturdily and stolidly guarding his wicket, so that the great bat could go on batting, for the life of the innings depended upon the last man in. And when Owen stole a run, it was sure to be an odd run at the beginning of an over, so as to give Redfern the batting. And then Redfern would take even numbers, sometimes losing a good chance of a single, so as to keep it. They played into one another's hands like clockwork, and the St. Jim's juniors looked on, and looked, and stared, and looked, and were astounded. It was like a dream to them—but a very pleasant dream.

There was a sudden roar from the crowd. Redfern had topped his century—a century all on his own! A hundred runs to the duffer whose cricket had been a joke in the school! Redfern was a centurion! What did it mean? The St. Jim's fellows felt that miracles were happening under their eyes. What could it mean?

And he was still batting away, as fresh as paint. Nearly two hundred runs to the credit of St. Jim's, and more than a hundred of them belonging to Redfern! And there he was at the wicket, cool, smiling, serene. And the bowlers and the fieldsmen were looking warm—very warm, and red—very red, and some of them a little exasperated. They had not expected, as Gay remarked, to dig up a county batsman in a junior school match.

Jack Blake rushed up to Lawrence, as he stood looking on and grinning, and grasped him by the shoulder and shook him. Lawrence chuckled.

"What does it mean?" yelled Blake. "Explain it, you ass! Is Reddy mesmerised, or what?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You've been takin' us all in, you boundahs!" said Arthur Augustus, turning his eyeglass severely upon Lawrence. "I couldn't bat like that myself!"

"Go hon!" grinned Lawrence.

"Reddy's going to keep it up all the giddy afternoon, unless you stop him, Tommy!" said Monty Lowther, with a chuckle. "He's set for the day!"

"He could keep it up for a giddy three days' match if he liked!" said Lawrence. "You'll have to declare, of course!"

"Declare!"

Tom Merry simply gasped.

Until Redfern went to the wickets, he had looked upon that innings as the rottenest in his experience. And as it was a single-innings match, there would have been nothing for St. Jim's to do but to try to keep down the Grammar School score by hard bowling and fielding. Even then Tom Merry had had no hope of winning the match. But a change had come over the spirit of his dream. Redfern's amazing batting had changed everything. For the score had gone up to an undreamt of figure, and if the Grammarians were to have a chance of batting at all, it would be necessary for Tom Merry to declare the St. Jim's innings at an end.

And so Tom Merry declared. St. Jim's finished their innings for a total of two hundred and thirty runs, Redfern and Owen not out. And glad enough were the Grammarians to rest their weary legs, and strive to get their wind back.

A roaring crowd met the two victorious batsmen as they came off. Redfern was flushed with exertion, and his eyes were twinkling. The juniors rushed round him, and Tom Merry brandished a clenched fist playfully under his nose.

"You bounder!" he exclaimed. "You horrid bounder!"

"Not satisfied?" asked Redfern.

"Satisfied!" roared Tom Merry. "Why, you've batted like Kildare, of the Sixth! You've won the match! But what do you mean by it? You told us you couldn't play cricket!"

"That I jolly well didn't!" said Redfern promptly. "I told you I could play cricket, but you thought I couldn't, without seeing what I could do."

"Oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lawrence and Owen.

"Then," said Tom Merry, with a deep breath, but beginning to laugh—"then it was a rag!"

"A wag, bai Jove!"

Redfern nodded cheerfully.

"Yes," he said serenely, "it was a rag. We three have played cricket since we were high enough to hold a bat, and we rather fancy ourselves as cricketers, you know. You chaps made up your minds that we couldn't play, so we made up our minds to rot you on the subject, and I think we've done it."

"Bai Jove! Yaas, wathah, you have, Weddy!"

"I meant to get into the eleven by hook or by crook," Redfern went on coolly. "I had a scheme in my head, but I didn't need to use it, owing to your little upset on the river. That was why I took you at your word, you see. If I couldn't have played up for the school, I shouldn't have been such a rotter, I hope, as to shove myself into the eleven. You ought to have known that."

"I—I suppose we ought!" said Tom Merry, quite meekly. "Of course you ought!" said Redfern. "And you oughtn't to have supposed we couldn't play cricket without seeing us try. That's why we ragged you."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry laughed, and held out his hand.

"Give us your fist, Reddy, old man! We've been a set of asses, and you've given us just what we deserved, and I own up for one."

"And I for another!" said Jack Blake, slapping Redfern on the shoulder. "Good old Reddy! He's worth his weight in toffee! Three cheers for Reddy!"

And there was a roar of cheering.

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

Little need to tell further the story of the first junior match of the season at St. Jim's.

The Grammarians played their innings, and they struggled manfully against adversity. But they had no chance from the first of reaching the huge score piled up by the Saints. When stumps were drawn, the Grammarians had knocked up a very respectable total, but it fell more than a hundred short of the St. Jim's score, and the defeat was complete. But Gordon Gay & Co. took it in great good-humour. As Gay remarked, they did not often come upon a batsman like Reddy—which was very true; and as he added, they would have licked St. Jim's if Reddy hadn't batted—which was quite true, also.

But St. Jim's had won, and Redfern was the hero of the hour—even more so than he had been after pulling Tom Merry out of the river. After the match, Saints and Grammarians fraternised at a really splendid spread in the Hobby Club-room in the School House, and they parted on the best of terms. And afterwards, Figgins & Co. marched the New Firm off to the New House with a proud air of proprietorship. Outside the School House a crowd stood and cheered them as they went a sufficient proof that Tom Merry & Co. had forgiven Redfern's Rag.

(Another splendid complete tale of the Chums of St. Jim's next Thursday, entitled "Tom Merry's Peril," by Martin Clifford. Order your "Gem" Library in advance. Price One Penny.

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OUR NEW SERIAL STORY.

WINGS OF GOLD!

The Story of the Most Terrible and Amazing Journey Ever Made By Man.

Edited from the Notes of Maurice Fordham, Esq.

By **SIDNEY DREW.**

CHARACTERS IN THIS GRAND STORY.

MAURICE FORDHAM and **LANCE MORTON**—Two healthy and wealthy young Britons, owners of the yacht *Foamwitch*, and the wonderful aeronef, *Wings of Gold*.

PROFESSOR LUDWIG VON HAAGEL—The famous German scientist, also noted for his clumsiness.

CROOKS—The ship's cook.

JOSEPH JACKSON or **SHOREDITCH JOSE**—A Cockney member of the crew, whose constant companion is a game bantam named the Smacker.

TEDDY MORGAN—Ship's engineer.

WILLIAM TOOTER—The hairy first mate.

The *Foamwitch* is on an expedition with the object of exploring the strange land which is believed to lie beyond the barrier of eternal ice near the South Pole.

As soon as the first land is reached the construction of the aeronef, *Wings of Gold*—which has been carried in pieces on the *Foamwitch*—is proceeded with, and in it begins a wonderful voyage into the heart of the Antarctic.

Fearful creatures, thought to be extinct since prehistoric times, are encountered when the adventurers reach a mysteri-

ous mountain country never before trodden by the foot of civilised man.

Once the aeronef is wrecked; but, by dint of much ingenuity and hard work, is repaired, and her head is turned towards the North. A terrific wind, however, springs up, and *Wings of Gold* is forced through a ravine in the mountains, and the crew find themselves flying over a large inland lake, surrounded by the vast, unknown mountains. They encounter such fearful creatures here that they decide to go back and return to the *Foamwitch*; but investigation reveals that the ravine is now blocked up, and they are prisoners in that vast enclosure.

Their tinned provisions have all gone bad, but the larder is replenished by Lance, who shoots a huge elk.

To their intense excitement, the adventurers, cruising gently along, come across a human being, a jet-black giant full nine feet high. Having made friends with him by signs, they push on further in the hope of discovering a village before dark. The evening meal is just being served in the cabin when the aeronef, floating as it is at a considerable height from the earth, suddenly becomes alive with wild-looking figures. Before the startled Englishmen can resist, they are all prisoners.

(Now go on with the story).

A Little Fighting.

What had happened, and what did it mean? Had those fierce-looking creatures wings? As they stood, pinned by black, powerful hands, the question flashed through Fordham's mind. Their savage captors might have fallen from the skies. Their long grey hair made them doubly hideous. One of them swung his spear. Crooks, with almost superhuman strength, burst free, and felled the man with the first weapon he could seize—a bottle.

It was a foolish action. Crooks was down at once, and tied hand and foot. Resistance was only madness.

"Chuck it, boys," said Lance hoarsely; "we're cornered."

They were quickly bound. Von Haagel puffed and snorted and gnashed his teeth as he lay on his back. Little Jackson nearly swooned with terror. His illness had taken away all his nerve. Then Morgan was dragged in and propped up against the wall. He was as calm as ever.

"You're not hurt, Teddy?" asked Maurice.

"By thunder, I ought to be, sir," answered the engineer. "I've made a mess of things for not keeping a better watch. They were on me before I knew it."

"How did they get here?"

"Get here? By thunder, they must be monkeys! Some fool let the grapnel slip, or else it slipped itself. I'll swear I tied it up enough. Now we're in for it. I wonder if the brutes are cannibals?"

"Oh, teufel of ein man, I have ruined you!" wailed Von Haagel. "I remember now! I catch hold of der rope, and I play mit der knot. Dear lad of mine whom I love, I haf you ruin!"

"They climbed the rope, then?"

"Yes," growled Morgan. "They've got a big canoe below. It's no use worrying about it. I thought we were as safe as bats in a church steeple. I ought to have kept higher."

The weird-looking savages were muttering together. Lance counted fourteen of them. They were sturdy, muscular fellows, but their faces were painted repulsively. One of them bent over Crooks, and pointed to him.

"Yes, my beauty," snarled the cook, "if I'd got a loose

fist I'd break your jawbone! Why not? If I hadn't got a lame arm I was out of these lashings in less nor two seconds. Haw, haw! I dusted one! Why not?"

The man he had knocked down was still insensible. None of his comrades paid any attention to him.

"Crooks!" said Morgan.

"Why not, Teddy?"

"I can get at the switch, and you're nearest the door. By thunder, roll for it, and get to my cabin! There's a razor and revolvers. Are you ready?"

"Why not?" growled the dauntless cook.

"Steady a minute now!"

The room was plunged in darkness as Morgan clicked down the switch. He dropped down, and shot out both legs. There was a howl of agony from the savage who stood closest as Morgan's thick-soled boots crashed into his ribs. Morgan flung himself over and over along the corridor, amid a din of shouts and howls. Then his back was against the cabin door.

"Are you here, Crooks?"

"Why not? Haw, haw!" chuckled the cook's voice.

"The razor?"

"Got him!"

A light flashed out. Crooks sprang, and turned the key. Two slashes freed Morgan.

"What now?" he asked. "You was a bit white, why not?" said the one-eyed man with iron nerves.

Little wonder Morgan's tanned face had paled a little, as he listened to the ferocious yells and the scampering of feet. The enraged savages might murder his comrades, and what could they do?

"Open the door—why not?" growled Crooks.

"You're mad, old boy!"

"Put it there!"

The cook felt the engineer's pulse.

"It was not bad," he said. "We was men! Open the door!"

Morgan obeyed. They were backing at it with spears. He only opened it a bare half-inch, and then banging his shoulder against it, forced it to again.

"Open it! I was ready!" said Crooks. "Take the key!"

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NEXT
THURSDAY:

"TOM MERRY'S PERIL!"

A Splendid, New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.,
at St. Jim's. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"I'll do the rest! Why not? They will come in. We shall go out!"

"I see," muttered Morgan grimly. "Get ready!" Crooks took a string from his pocket, and hitched it over the switch. Then he took the end between his teeth.

"Go!" The door swung back. Two men went down, and two more fell over them.

The light was out, and Morgan and Crooks sprang into the corridor. Crooks fired, and a human body fell with a thud. Then the two men raced off for the deck, shooting as they ran.

"Pull the slide half-way, why not, Teddy?" Arrows and spears clattered against the ladder, but they were through.

They frantically tore the slide over. A yell rang out from behind, and a bow twanged. Crooks spun round and fired. A savage with a broken arm swung back, screaming, against the rail, and fell into the lake.

"Good shooting—good shooting, indeed!" said Morgan.

"Why not? Haw, haw! Keep 'em busy, Teddy! Pump lead at 'em! Lead was good for gutters and niggers! You have 'em bottled up, why not? Haw, haw! I was going to peep! There was cartridges in the wheelhouse!"

Two bullets fired down the ladder caused a sudden check. Crooks rushed back, and crammed a handful of cartridges into Morgan's pocket. Teddy did not stop to ask the cook his plan. That was quite unnecessary. Crooks could look after himself and other people, too. He was a splendid man in an emergency.

A silence came so much more terrible than the uproar that Morgan's heart sank. Had the fiends murdered his comrades? He threw himself down, and peered cautiously into the dimly-lighted corridor. One man lay dead at the foot of the ladder, his own spear in his side. Further back were other figures, crouching and motionless. Teddy pulled out his handkerchief, and lowered it. An arrow clipped between the rungs of the ladder, and tore the handkerchief from his hand.

"Good shooting on both sides!" muttered the engineer.

"Wonder what the cook is up to?"

The cook was busy. He found it both painful and difficult to use his wounded arm, but he did use it. Placing his foot in the noose of a rope, he let himself gently over the rail. It was very dark, but as he looked down he saw a black patch on the water.

"Canoe, why not?" was his verdict.

His foot found the porthole. Luckily, the porthole was open.

"Ach, derrible, derrible! I die mit sorrow! Oh, der glumsiness of me, it is doo much!"

The professor's dismal wail was richest music to the cook.

"Mr. Lance!" he whispered.

"Yes. Where are you?"

"Outside, why not? Hutch up here, sir, and let me feel you! Haw, haw! That was Teddy!"

Another shot rang out. Lance managed to get upon his feet. A hand slid along his arm.

"It was always safer to cut down than up!" growled the cook. "That was it, why not? Was any of the dogs here?"

"I don't think so."

"Haw, haw! That was a barker! Lock the door, why not? We shall settle them!"

Lance found himself free, and, clutching a revolver, he felt his way to the door. He closed it gently, and turned the key. Then he switched on the light just in time to see the savage Crooks had knocked down glaring at him. The man gripped his spear, but he was a second too late. Lance struck him with a revolver, and he dropped again.

"Haw, haw!" came the cook's pleased chuckle. "They was bottled!"

The turning of the tables was almost magical. Lance and Fordham shook hands. Tooter cheered, and Von Haagel, when it dawned upon him that he was free once more, tried to dance a hornpipe. The cook grinned at them from outside.

"How do we stand now?" asked Maurice.

"They was bottled, sir! Why not? Teddy holds the ladder, and you was here! They was comin'! Shoot—why not? Haw, haw!" Spears cut and slashed at the door. "Shoot—why not?"

Lance did not like to, but the cook had no such compunctions. He thrust his arm in the porthole, and bored a hole through the panels with a bullet.

"Haw, haw!"

The hammering and slashing ceased. Crooks pulled himself on deck again, and then a whole bundle of revolvers came dangling down, followed by fifty rounds of ammunition, wrapped in a handkerchief. The savages trapped in Morgan's cabin had broken out. Crooks heard an unaccustomed sound—the sound of paddles. Another canoe was

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rushing over the lake. The cook cut the grapnel rope, and lighted his pipe.

"How goes it, Teddy?" he growled. I was down below. They was all safe in the saloon, wif the door fast and a revolver each. Why not? Haw, haw!"

"You're not the ass you look!" said Morgan.

"We has to look arter 'em!" grinned the cook. "What was the advice? Shall we shoot them?"

"By thunder, we can't commit murder!"

"Why not? We has to get 'em out!"

The savages were acting cautiously now. They had discovered the deadliness of the unknown weapons. At the very lowest computation there were seven or eight of them below.

"There was more arriving," said the cook, "but they can't get upstairs. Why not? I have busted the staircase. Haw, haw! Go away!"

"Is it another canoe?"

"Why not?"

"Don't shoot!" said Morgan quickly. "I've got a dodgy to bolt those rascals down there."

"Are you all right down there?" called out the engineer.

"Right as rain!" answered Fordham's voice.

Morgan drew back his head as an arrow hissed through the air from below.

"Mr. Maurice!"

"Hallo, Teddy!"

"You mustn't mind if you get your feet wet. I'm going to pump the life out of those rats!"

In a moment he was reeling the hose off the drum, and dragging it across the deck. Crooks fired, and the savages, now quite scared, tumbled over each other in their eagerness to escape. The bulkhead prevented that. The cook's big eye gleamed down, and the cook chuckled with undiluted joy.

"They was bottled up, corked, and sealed down, Teddy!" he grinned. "Who was throwing stones?"

A flight of arrows from the canoe rattled against the aeroplane's keel. Morgan dropped the hose, and pulled a lever to raise the vessel. He did not want any of the lamps to be broken by the arrows. Loud yells of rage and disgust greeted the louder fr-r-r of the screws.

"Now we'll soak them!" said Morgan, pushing forward the long brass nozzle of the hose.

"Why not?" growled Crooks. "They was dirty enough to need a wash! Squirt in on 'em, Edward!"

Morgan set the pump working, and Crooks, in no hurry, waited till there was a good pressure. One of the savages came creeping forward like a cat, his bow bent and an arrow fitted to the string. Crooks levelled the nozzle under the slide, and took aim between the bars and the ladder.

The white, shining stream struck the man in the pit of the stomach with terrific force. He shrieked, and doubled himself up. Crooks had not finished with him. He washed all the fight out of him in thirty seconds, and then directed the stream into the centre of the huddled group.

They dropped their spears and bows. They charged, but not a single one of them reached the steps. Teddy kept firing, but only to frighten, not to kill. Shrieks of terror shrilled above the hiss of the water and clang of the pumps.

"Keep 'em at it another minute, cooky!" cried the engineer.

"Why not? It was washing-day! Haw, haw!"

Once more the engineer bent down.

"Can you hear me?" he shouted.

"Yes, Teddy!"

"Our chance has come, by thunder!" said Morgan.

"They're dead beat. Break up a chair or two and charge. There'll be no need to shoot the poor beggars. Turn the lights on full, and don't be afraid of hitting."

Lance and Maurice soon knocked a chair to pieces, and armed themselves with a leg apiece. Von Haagel seized another, and Tooter the fourth one. The professor was thirsting to do something to make amends for his carelessness in dropping the grapnel. He swung his club ferociously.

"Open der door, and let me at der prutes get!" he panted. "Shaf! I shall gif dem der—der what you call der stockings, or was it der socks? Pouf! How angry I am! Open der door, I dell you! Ach! Der impatience of it, I cannot bear longer!"

"Altogether, lads!" said Lance. "And don't forget to yell!"

He flung open the door, flooding the corridor with light. Uttering the wildest howls, they rushed upon the foe. Crooks, with a mop in his hand, skimmed down the ladder, and made the mop sing in the air. After him sprang the engineer. There was a tremendous din, a splashing, a thudding, a shrieking. Von Haagel roared like an infuriated bull, felled one of the invaders, flung away his club, and told him to surrender or die.

The terrible Mr. Crooks had two of them by the throat,

and was hammering their heads together. Buffeted, beaten, breathless, and terrified, the others crouched down. The careful engineer collected the weapons.

"Take a spear each, lads," he said. "They'll understand what that means."

A spear was levelled at every naked breast.

"Haw, haw! Why not?" chuckled the cook. "This was joy!"

"Yes, but what shall we do with them now that we've got them?"

"Make 'em swim for it," said Morgan. "Their pals are below to pick them up. Here's a rope. Collar that chap, cook."

Crooks pounced on the man's wrists and held them together.

"One!" said Morgan. "Next, please!"

Lance shuddered at the idea of forcing their captives into that terrible monster-haunted lake, but he could see no other way out of the difficulty.

It was impossible to keep them and put them on land—that would have been too risky. It was too dark for a descent that night, and they had no secure place in which to confine their captives. One of them was senseless. He was quite a lad, and Von Haagel had mauled him badly. There were five corpses, and one man had been shot in the shoulder. He, at least, could not possibly swim.

They forced the quaking prisoners up the ladder. They seemed, by their terrified looks, to expect instant death. The searchlight went flashing through the mist and gloom, and glided over the water. Into its great white circle rode the tall prow of a huge canoe crowded with men. Then Morgan switched on every light.

The howl that rose might have come from a pack of wolves as the savages saw their comrades drawn up in a line on the aeroplane's deck, each with a spear pointed at his heart. Their paddles fell and churned the water; the canoe rushed forward.

"Now," said Morgan, raising his knife, and pointing to the water. "You go first."

The man recoiled, expecting a stab. Teddy cut the rope.

"Come on! Why not? We are waiting for the performance to begin."

Crooks pricked the native gently with a spear. The men in the canoe backed water. Bows were bent. The savage took one leap over the rail, straightened himself out in mid-air, and cleft the water with hardly a splash. He rose, caught a paddle, and was dragged on board.

The others needed no persuasion to make the fifty feet plunge into the lake.

Wings of Gold had extinguished her lights, and was safe and invisible.

Shivering on a chair in the cabin, Lance found the young native.

Von Haagel, with the chair-leg in his hand, was dancing about the room in a state of great excitement.

"Ach, dear lads," he panted, "it is suplime, it is peautiful! What is this? Dell me, what is this?"

Von Haagel pulled at his own nose.

"What's happened to you?" asked Lance, in amazement.

"What's this? Dell me."

"Your nose."

"It is not—nein, nein! It is not nose—it is 'boog'! He tell me," panted the professor. "I am learning the language. Ach, it is vunderful! Und what is this, you plack, ugly rascal? Dell me quick, or on der boog of you I shall smite you, and then gif you ein kick with der dzalai of me! What is it?"

"Boog, dzalai."

Von Haagel had indicated his arm.

Lance burst out laughing.

"Why, dad, you old silly," he chuckled. "you've pretty near scared the lad's hair off. He doesn't know from Adam what you want. Those words mean 'Mercy, chief,' or something like that. 'Nose-foot'! Oh, dad, you make me smile!"

The professor rubbed his head, feeling that Lance was very near the truth.

"Shaf!" he muttered. "Dot may be so, but it matters not much. I shall keep der poy and learn der tongue. Ach, yes."

Crooks and His Prisoner Get to Understand One Another—Hercules Again—The Boy Ape-fighter—The City of Triangles.

The necessity for replenishing their water supply, and of getting rid of the wounded men, made a descent imperative. The rain Tootter prophesied kept off, and a beautiful day dawned. The nose of the aeroplane was turned in the direction of the river where Crooks had had the unpleasant experience with the plesiosaurus.

There was rather a heated argument over the young native. Von Haagel was most eager to keep him on board, but

Morgan was of another opinion. The youngster seemed quiet enough, and had eaten some breakfast. Fordham stood aloof.

"I leave it to Teddy," he said.

"And I say clear him out, sir. We don't know what he'll do. He might cut the throats of two or three of us."

"Ach, do not say dot, Morgan," pleaded Von Haagel.

"Der advantages may save us all. I am quick to learn der tongues, und der poy he know der country. He may show us where to find game dot is fit to eat; he may even show us ein way to escape."

"And he may cut your throat in the night," said the engineer doggedly.

"But he will not, Morgan."

"How do you know, sir?"

"There's no doubt the chap could tell us a lot, Teddy," said Lance, as the professor looked at him appealingly; "and dad has a marvellous gift for picking up languages. Why not let him stay?"

"Because—"

Crooks stepped forward.

"Why not?" he growled. "It is useful to have him. Teddy. There are no risks. I'll take care on him. He would have to get up soon to cut my throat. Haw, haw!"

The aeroplane descended on to the slopes above the river, and the man was put ashore. Lance threw him his spear. He was quite capable of making the journey. He waved his spear and plunged into the reeds.

"They're plucky scoundrels," said Maurice. "Fellows who dare sail on the lake must have some nerve. You'd think the sight of the aeroplane would have frightened them sufficiently to keep them running for a month."

"I guess if you had been accustomed to pterodactyls and other gentlemen Wings of Gold wouldn't scare you much," said Lance. "Plucky isn't the word for it. I hope he gets home safe."

The tank was promptly filled, and Wings of Gold bore round again. They had removed all traces of the fight except the nasty lump on Morgan's head.

Crooks sauntered below. He had tied the boy in the galley.

"Well, cockroach," he said genially. "how are you?"

The young savage had lost his terrified expression. Crooks unbound him, and gave him a pat on the shoulder.

"I was your boss, why not, Cockroach? I was a good boss till you rile me, and then I was thunder and lightning, wi' ailstones chucked in. A rope's-end was made for boys. Haw, haw! There was a rope's-end—see? And 'ere was somethin' else, which I calls a conkyonka. That was bad for boys. Why not?"

Crooks lifted the axe Hercules had given him from its position in the corner. The lad uttered a cry of grief and terror.

"I was only jokin'—why not?" said the cook.

The young savage, trembling violently, sprang upon a chair, raised his hands above his head, spread out his arms, expanded his chest, and pretended to wield an imaginary axe. Then he threw himself down, and lay still, his eyes fixed beseechingly on the cook.

"Why not?" growled the cook, whose wits were as bright as his eye. "He wants to know where I got the conkyonka. He tried to make himself big; he was fighting, and now he was dead. Why? I know. He was trying to be the monkey-fighter, and was axin' is 'e dead? Why not? I will show him."

Crooks swung the axe, and had a desperate struggle with the air. He, too, lay down, and sprang up again, shaking his head. Then he put the axe in the lad's hand, and took out his knife. With a bow he passed the knife to the lad, and made gestures to the youthful native to give him the axe in return.

The cook was a born genius in the art of making himself understood in dumb show. The next moment the boy was kneeling before him, pressing his big, bony hand. His black face shone with joy, and his eyes sparkled. Von Haagel looked in and saw the sight.

"Shuf!" he puffed. "Dot was goot. You haf then friends made."

"Why not, sir?"

"You make friends mit der oder mans, too," said Von Haagel. "when he is not like us. Ach, you haf der gift, Crooks! I am glad! He is not afraid of you."

"Not a bit, sir. Haw, haw! I believe he was the other chap's relation. Why not?"

Crooks growled out a description of what had happened.

"Dot was vunderful!" panted the professor. "He dink you kill der big man when he see you haf der axe, and he is wild mit joy and gratitude when you show him dot do axe is ein present. Ach, Crooks, you haf der art to act. I must tell der dear lads."

It seemed quite probable that Hercules and the youngster were related. Lance was quite convinced on the point.

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NEXT THURSDAY: "TOM MERRY'S PERIL!"

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"Well, it's easy enough to decide," said Maurice, who was more sceptical. "We've only got to visit the old giant. He seemed quite a decent sort, and I suppose even a nigger has feelings. If the kid is his son he'll be glad to know that his son's alive."

The aeroplane skimmed over the lake. Morgan kept her high as she swung round by the ruined aqueduct.

"I can see the place," said Maurice.

"And I can see the man—why not?" growled Crooks.

Wings of Gold dropped gently. There stood the mighty black figure. He swung his ponderous axe in salute. The aeroplane sank lower, and rested against the barricade.

"How was things, old cock?" asked Crooks, swinging himself down the ladder.

The giant shook hands with him gravely.

"Get the boy up, William," said the engineer.

Tooter sprang below, and brought up the young savage. He shouted as he saw the giant. Hercules looked up in surprise. The boy began to talk swiftly. The giant's hand began to tighten on the axe, and his great chest rose and fell. He bit his lips, his eyes blazed, and he beat the air with his clenched fist.

"Blacking-pot was not pleased, why not?" growled the cook.

"He's coming aboard, by Jove!" said Lance.

The savage mounted the ladder. He was trembling with passion. He held out his hand to Crooks, and pointed up the aqueduct.

"What does he say, cook?" puffed the professor.

"I was not knowing the lingo," said Crooks. "And why not? Because I never learned it. It was double Dutch. He was angry. Why not? It was sunnatin the boy telled him."

"About the attack on us, perhaps," said Lance. "He wants us to go somewhere."

"That was a fact, sir."

Both natives were pointing astern now, eagerly and impatiently.

"Put her along, Teddy," said Maurice. "I'm sure Hercules means no mischief, and if he does we can soon settle his hash."

The giant seemed to feel that they distrusted him, for he gave his battle-axe to Lance.

"Round we go, and chance it," said the engineer. "Here, where's the kid going?"

The lad had suddenly shouldered the axe, and was on the ground beside the cave.

"He can't be going to leave that kid there to fight the dog-apes," said Lance. "Why, it's murder!"

"But none may turn up," said Maurice. "That's the idea, I'm pretty sure. He knows his own business best. Let him alone. Move along, Teddy."

Hercules never looked back. With a scowl on his face, he stood beside the wheelhouse.

"Seoot, Teddy, old chap," said Lance. "I don't know what he's after, but let's get there and back again, for I'm jolly uncomfortable about that plucky kid."

The boy's heart was swelling with pride, and Lance need not have worried about him. Hercules, the guardian of the gate, was his father, and the dream of his life had been fulfilled. He longed for one of the fierce baboons to come galloping and howling along the aqueduct.

Now and again the giant motioned with his hand to direct the steersman. The aeroplane sprang high above the mighty trees. They saw something that was new to them. The aqueduct, raised on arches which still defied the hand of time, spanned what was either a sluggish river or a narrow arm of the lake.

On either side were quays built of stone, and a barrier crossed as if to dam up the water. This, too, had once been solid masonry, but now its mouldering gaps were patched with huge logs. Tethered to the bank was a whole fleet of canoes, some large enough to hold five score warriors, others so small that only an intrepid swimmer would dare to go afloat in one. The opening in the barrier was just wide enough to allow the biggest canoe to pass. Rows of ballista—the great catapults—were mounted on the flat top of the dam.

"These people must live in a constant state of siege," said Maurice.

"Ach, yes, by der land and by der water!" said Von Haegel. "By der land come der dog-apes and we know not what oder beasts; and in der water are der ichtyosauri, der plesiosaurs, der great crocodiles, and perhaps der octopi. See how narrow is der passage, and how high and strong dey have built der wall. Shuf! It is ein teufel of ein place—animals dot should not be born, and baboons dot should not yet lif! Pshaw! I hate the place!"

"Port your helm, Teddy! Hercules wants us to go round that street!" cried Lance.

But Morgan reversed the screws, and brought the aeroplane

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up dead. The water made a right angle. A mighty ravine opened before them—a vast, straight streak in the mountain-side. A child could have flung a pebble from side to side. High above the sky seemed like a grey thread. Wherever they could find foothold shrubs grew in dense masses. Teddy Morgan was in no hurry to enter. What if the big man meant treachery! What if hundreds of savage bowmen lay hidden among the dense bushes ready to pour down clouds of arrows and stones!

"There are times, by thunder, when a man ought to stop and think!" growled the engineer. "This is one of them. To a botanist the bushes might be interesting. There may be more in them than meets the eye, as the burglar said when he put his hand into the cashbox and got it caught in a rat-trap."

"There was nothing I could spot," said the cook; "and my heye was as sharp as a gimlet, why not?"

The giant waved his hand impatiently. Crooks pointed to the dark masses of verdure, and pretended to be shooting with a bow. The savage drew the knife he had given him, and turned the point towards his own heart.

"Shuf! Dot is as plain as talking, dear lads," said Von Haegel. "He will himself stab if dere is treachery!"

"Yes, that's all right," said Morgan; "but his death won't do us any good. I'll get up pretty high, and don't forget to yell if you scent danger."

With her screws screaming, the aeroplane ascended four hundred feet, and sailed between the cliffs like a big bird. So deep and narrow was the ravine that it was filled with a kind of twilight. They sailed over a second dam, but saw no human being, though a few canoes swung lazily on the water.

"Shuf!" puffed Von Haegel, who had craned his short neck until it was stiff. "This is der great canon. There is not in der world its equal. Dree thousand veet and more it was deep, and straight as ein ruler. Ach, it is suplime!"

The grandeur of the scenery did not make much impression on the others just then. They were too eager to learn where their big guide was taking them, and how the adventure would end. The length of the ravine seemed interminable.

"Shouldn't like to be underneath that, sir," growled the cook. "Why not? They would bust us."

Lance leaned over. At intervals, great boulders, many of them verging on a ton in weight, were slung over the cliffs by networks of rope. The aeroplane was well above them.

"What was them for, Liquorice?" inquired Crooks. "Things as swims—eh?" he added, watching the giant's explanatory gestures. "Haw, haw! They throw little stones at icky what-was-thems?"

"It's not a nice watering-place to spend a week-end at," said Lance. "You'd get a squint at the famous sea-serpent here, I wager. Poor beggars! They must live in a constant state of terror."

"Perhaps they don't mind, Lance. You can pretty well get used to anything."

Mr. Crooks slewed round his eye, and fixed it on Mr. Tooter.

"I denies it, sir, and begs to differ," he growled.

"Why not, cook?"

"Because," said the cook, digging up his foghorn voice, "there was one thing I could not get used to if I was to live ten billion year and three minutes later. That was William's face, and there was 'air on it. Haw, haw!"

"Can't you let my face alone, wall eye?"

"If I was meddlin' wi' it, I apologise," said the cook. "But I was not—and why not? My 'ands was in me pockets, and your face was sticking to yer whiskers. There's 'air! Haw, haw!"

Lance and Fordham ran forward. Raising himself on tiptoe, the engineer shaded his eyes. A white slit cut through the blue haze of the cavern. A dozen revolutions of the screws sent the aeroplane into clear daylight.

"A village!" cried Lance.

"Ein city!" puffed the professor.

"Yes, a city of triangles," added Fordham.

Fordham's description was perfect. It was a city, and it was a city of triangles, guarded by a moat that formed a triangle about a triangular wall.

They examined it eagerly and silently. Thousands of houses stood in lines parallel with the walls, thus forming a series of triangles, growing smaller and smaller as they approached the centre of the town. They were intersected by narrow streets. The huts—they could hardly be called anything better—had domed roofs, and looked oddly like a collection of huge ostrich eggs buried in the ground up to the middle of the shell. In the centre of the city, far superior to the rest, and of great size, was a white pyramid.

"This is the queerest place we've tumbled across yet, Morry," said Lance.

"I don't like it," said Fordham. "It reminds me of Euclid at school. I never could get on with that stuff about triangles."

"You used to get tanned first, I recollect," said Lance. "My stars! Look at the people!"

The narrow streets had suddenly become black with human beings. They swarmed out of their huts like ants. A roar of many voices ascended.

"They're all armed, by thunder!" said Teddy, who was making use of his binoculars.

"They think we've come to pay back what we owe them for last night, dear lads," snorted the professor. "Shut! They were not kind to us last night."

Hercules was pointing down.

"No, thanks!" said Teddy. "We're not taking any."

"Why not, Teddy? We would be porcupines in two minutes. And why? They would stick us full of arrows."

"There's no reason why Hercules shouldn't go," said Fordham. "We can drop him and watch what happens."

As the aeroplane sank, well out of bowshot, one of the gates of the city of triangles opened, and hundreds of figures leapt into the moat and began to swim across. The giant stood ready to jump. Wings of Gold was quite twenty feet from the ground when he sprang. He fell on his feet. Then the suspensory screws buzzed, and the vessel soared up again.

The savages formed up on the bank and began to run.

"Jove!" said Lance. "Those fellows are drilled! They're picked men, too, by the size of them."

It was a fine sight to see them swinging along in perfect step, with the light flashing on their spears.

"Ach! Der man in front!" puffed the professor. "He is as fat—I mean, as pig as Hercules."

The leader was truly a giant. He alone was armed with a battleaxe, and he wore a girdle of feathers that shone like gold. They could hear the rhythmic beat of naked feet on the hard, sandy soil. Then Hercules lifted his hand. The column halted, and the two giants stood face to face.

All would have given much to know what they were saying. The second giant turned round and gave an order. The column wheeled and retreated.

"Big Ben's chuckled down the chopper. Why not?" growled Crooks.

"And Hercules wants us," chimed in Lance.

"Down we go, then."

The winged vessel dropped slowly.

"Old Hercules has put in a good word for us, evidently," said Maurice. "Keep hold of your barkers all the same. The other Johnny may be the king. He must be our friend's brother, anyhow, for they're as like as two peas."

It was a truce at last. The giant in the golden girdle carried no weapon. While displaying such confidence it was impossible to think he was plotting treachery. Thousands of savages lined the walls of the town, all staring in the direction of the aeroplane. Hercules climbed the ladder, and after a short hesitation the other magnificent specimen of uncivilised manhood followed him. Crooks walked straight up to him and shook him by the hand.

"How was you feeling this good after-morning, Mr. Inky-mug?" he inquired, to the amusement of Mr. Tooter. "You was pretty fit? Why not? I was pleased to 'ear it. What a lovely taste you has in trousers! No, they was trouserines. And why? They was too short for trousers. Will you stay and share a kipper wi' us?"

Hercules displayed the hunting-knife, and appeared to be informing his fellow giant it was a gift from Crooks. Then quite unexpectedly the second giant jumped over the side, and ran towards the town.

"What's the game now?" asked Morgan.

"Nothing bad, I'll wager," said Lance. "Hercules looks pleased. I shall be jolly glad if we can make friends with these beggars. I say, cookey, can't you show him some of that beastly meat, and hammer it into his big head that we can't eat the stuff, and want something more tasty?"

"Why not?" growled Crooks.

"Ach, he can to dem talk as if it were mit words!" puffed Von Haegel.

Crooks brought up a piece of flabby, pale-looking elk-fish. The contortions he made to express hunger and disgust made Mr. Tooter roar. Finally, Mr. Hercules took the meat and hurled it away.

"I believe he understands," said Lance.

"Why not? If he doesn't he was dotty," said Crooks. "There was Big Ben coming again."

Big Ben was running like a deer. He vaulted on board.

"Look out!" shouted Teddy. "He's going to choke you!"

But Teddy had shouted too soon. Over the cook's lean neck fell a gold chain of quaint workmanship, to which a flashing, trembling jewel was suspended. The cook opened his mouth and said:

"Haw, haw! Was there a pawnshop about? Why not? Mr. Snowball, you was a gent."

"Ach, der diamond!" cried Von Haegel. "Dear lads, it is priceless!"

"A beauty!" said Lance. "Crooks, you're in luck!"

Again the giants were conversing in rapid tones. This

time it was Hercules who sprang down. The big man smiled at them. Lance gave him a splendid pocket-knife, and he looked delighted as Lance showed him how the blades opened and shut.

"Ach, it is vunderful, it is suplime!" beamed the professor. "It is grand to know dot der peace is made. Dear lads, Crooks deserves der big diamond."

"By thunder, though, I don't let go this lever till I know more," said the cautious engineer. "These fellows seem to be bosses, but the man who trusts a savage too much is a fool."

"Hooray!" yelled Crooks, of the needle-like eye. "Haw, haw!"

Fleet as the wind, Hercules was dashing towards them, carrying something on his shoulder.

"Hao!" he shouted warningly, and the carcass of a fat deer thudded down on the deck.

They all cheered except Von Haegel. His face was a study of woe and misery.

"What's the matter? Aren't you jolly glad to see good meat, dad?" said Lance.

"Glad? Shaf, it murdered me!" yelled Von Haegel. "Take it away and hide it. Oh, teufel of ein prute, I hate you! Take it away! I haf no right to lif yet. Ach, this is of all der most vicked plow! I am ruined—I am ruined! Ja, ja! I would mit joy be dead. It haf no right to lif yet for ten million years. Oh, teufel of ein land, I loathe you! It is—it is—"

Von Haegel turned purple in the face, and became incoherent.

"It's the very picture of a common deer with elk's horns," said Fordham.

It was too much for the professor. The animal had lived too soon for him and his pet scientific theories.

"Where's mine Shagspeare?" he moaned. "Der vicked land haf broken mine heart. I go to ped."

And to bed he went.

Crooks had fascinated the two giants. They seemed delighted when they saw the iron-muscled Crooks throw the heavy carcass over his shoulder without so much as grunting.

They followed him below fearlessly. It was clear enough that they had implicit confidence in the white strangers. Even Morgan was impressed.

"They seem to trust," he said. "But who can tell, by thunder, if it is not their treachery, and just a dodge to trap us?"

"I'd stake my life they don't mean treachery," said Lance. "It's a funny thing how they all seem to take to Crooks. Let's go down and see what he's up to, Morry?"

Crooks and his black friends were in the cold storage room. Both savages were hunters, and there is as much skill in cutting up an animal as in striking it down. The way Crooks set to work on the deer seemed to please them immensely, and they helped him enthusiastically.

"It was just fit for eating," said the cook, "and it was as fat as butter. I shall make a venison pie, and I shall ax Coal-Box, and his pal, Penn'orth-o-Blackin', to dine. Why not?"

"Just as you like, cook," said Lance. "I'm very well pleased about all this."

"I'll give you a tanner for your diamond," said Maurice jokingly.

"It was yours for nothing, sir."

"Oh, rats!" said Fordham. "I wouldn't take it. Don't lose it, though. Let me put it away for you, and when we get home you'll be made for life."

"When they got home!" When would that be? Maurice looked out at the terrible peak, and shrugged his shoulders.

"It was grand meat!" growled the cook, breaking an awkward silence.

The walls of the City of Triangles were still thronged. The warriors stood immovable beside the moat.

"Might as well get a bit closer," thought Teddy.

"Big Ben" jumped as he heard the shriek of the suspensory screws, but at a reassuring nod from Hercules he resumed his squatting attitude. Thousands of eyes watched the approach of the aeroplane. She halted over the pyramid. Teddy leaned over the rail and smoked his pipe.

Looking white and thin, Jackson crawled on deck. Tooter was quick to get him a chair.

"How goes it, Josh?"

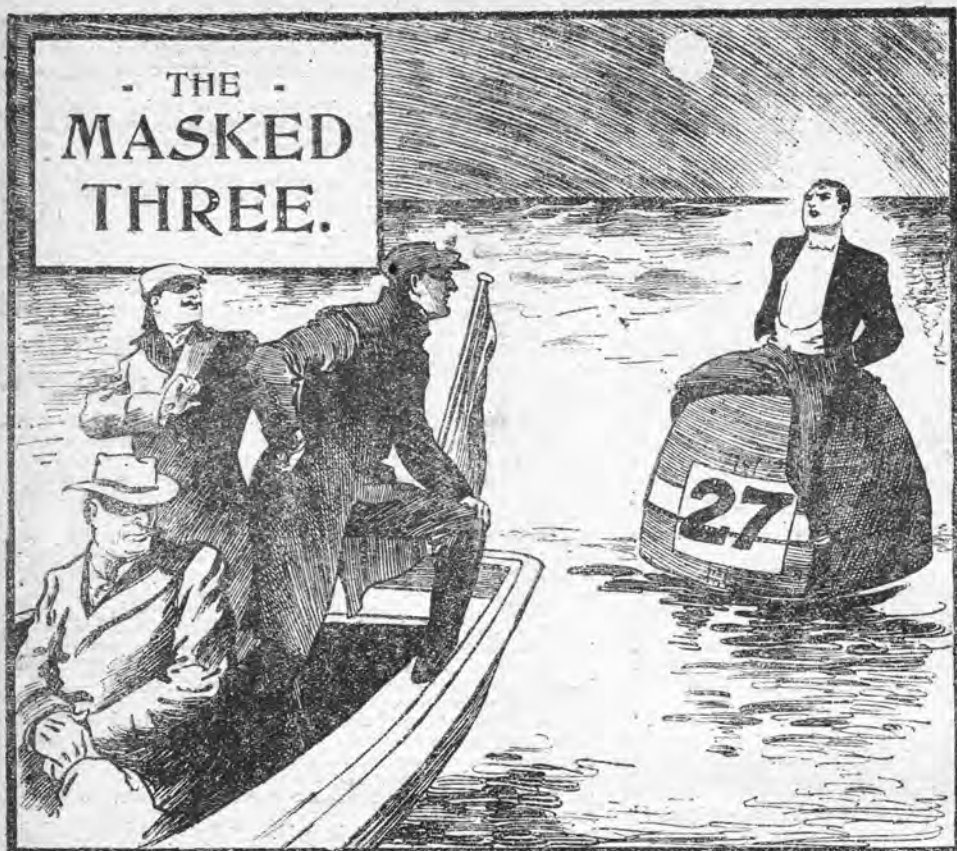
"Oh, I'll be able to chase meself soon, Bill, not 'arf," said the cockney cheerfully. "What does yer say abart it, Smacker?"

The bantam strutted about, flapped his wings, and crowed. Jackson had been looking out of his cabin port-hole. He was too ill to ask many questions. Tooter put a pillow under his chum's head, and stumped below to find a mild cigarette and some champagne for the invalid.

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CHAPTER I.

The Midnight Visitor.

"**S**PLENDID! Exactly as the professor said! By jingo, that man's a wonder!"

Frank Kingston murmured the words as he bent over his laboratory bench at No. 100, Charing Cross. He had just completed an experiment shown to him previously by his old friend, Professor Polgrave, a remarkably clever scientist. A few weeks previous, Kingston had had one of his rooms fitted up as a laboratory, and on many an occasion the great detective could be found absorbed in an experiment in the early hours of the morning.

On this occasion, the clock declared the time to be ten minutes to twelve. Kingston had arrived home from a reception at eleven, had flung a dressing-gown over his evening-dress, and had forthwith retired to his laboratory to make an experiment with certain poisons. It had been highly successful.

"Hallo, Tim! What do you want?"

Kingston looked round as his young assistant entered the apartment. Tim Curtis's bright face wore a slight grin.

"Chap just come to the door, sir," he declared. "Says he wants to see you real urgent. I told him it was jolly late, but he wouldn't take 'no' for an answer. What'd I better do, sir?"

"Show him into the consulting-room at once, youngster," replied Kingston briskly.

Tim disappeared, and when the detective heard him show the late visitor into the consulting-room—which adjoined the laboratory—Kingston opened the communicating door and entered. The man who stood on the hearthrug was short, round-shouldered, and clean-shaven. He was dressed fairly well, but in his eyes there was an angry glint. His fists were tightly clenched. For a moment he looked at Kingston almost defiantly, then he dived his hand into an inner pocket.

"What's that, Mr. Kingston?" he demanded abruptly, handing the detective a crisp piece of paper.

Kingston took it, without a sign of surprise on his immobile features; and while he examined it the other looked on eagerly and anxiously.

"It's a five-pound note," declared Kingston, after a few moments.

"Ah!" The exclamation left the lips of the round-shouldered man.

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shouldered man in a tone of triumph. Then his eyes blazed anger, and he grasped Kingston's arm. "You think it's a five-eh?" he cried. "Well, it will interest you to know that I made it myself—paper, printing, and everything!"

"You mean it's a forgery?"

"It is; but I defy any living man to detect it from this real article. I made it, as I've made scores of others. And although you're a detective, I haven't hesitated to come to you. My name's Ralph Kerridge, and I've been wanted by the police for years!"

Frank Kingston raised his eyebrows.

"Then why do you come to me?" he questioned curiously.

"Because I know you'll help me," replied Kerridge quickly; "because I know you to be a fair and honest man. I come to you in confidence, and I know positively well that you won't hand me over to the police."

Kingston sat on the corner of the table.

"Let us thoroughly understand one another, my friend," he said quietly. "There is evidently a good reason for your visit, and I should like to hear it."

"There's not much to say. Six months ago I discovered how to turn out banknotes identical with the real thing," said the visitor, "and I disposed of them without difficulty. Then I met two fellows, known as Dick Askwith and Abe Collier—two smart cracksmen—and being several kinds of a fool, I took them into my confidence. The result was, we agreed to form a combine."

"To forge the notes, and place them in circulation?"

"That's it. All went well for a month or two, then Abe Collier brought home a treacherous hound named Prince—a Yankee!" exclaimed Kerridge. "From that minute onwards there was trouble. To be brief, the three of them planned to murder me and clear me out of the way. They made the attempt this evening, and I'm dead—to them!" he added significantly.

"You mean they think they succeeded in their object?"

"Yes; but they'll find out how wrong they are before many hours have passed!" cried the other, pacing up and down. Suddenly he came to a stand directly before the tall form of Frank Kingston. "Look here!" he exclaimed tensely. "This is my position. If I let them know I'm still alive, they will make another attempt to kill me—and will succeed. I'm not over strong, and it was only by chance that I escaped death to-night. They've done me out of what absolutely is mine, and I'm hanged if they're going to

profit by it! They're murderers in spirit! I didn't go to the police because, if I had done so, they'd have nabbed me in a tick. I want you, Mr. Kingston, to see that they're all arrested. I'm not rounding on my pals; I'm simply—"

"I think I understand," interrupted Kingston thoughtfully. "These men have treated you in the worst possible manner, and deserve any punishment. But you place me in a peculiar position, for I ought to hand you over to the police. As soon as your former companions have been imprisoned, you will recommence your operations."

"No—no!" cried Kerridge quickly. "I give you my word of honour, Mr. Kingston, that I intend to clear off to Australia. The very instant the Masked Three, as they call themselves, are under lock and key, I swear I will take a passage to Australia. A pal of mine, who reformed, went out there, and he's asked me to join him. This forging business is too nerve-breaking for me."

Kingston looked into the other's eyes, and knew that he was telling the truth. Kerridge's story had interested him greatly, and he told himself that the three treacherous scoundrels deserved no consideration whatever. They had attempted to murder the man who had taken them into his confidence. Kingston listened to a full account of the occurrence, and nodded.

"I'll do as you ask, Kerridge," he said. "Mind, I don't sympathise with you in the least, for you've been a scoundrel. But I do believe you mean to reform, and will help you to capture these Masked Three. You say their workshop is on the coast?"

"Yes; it's a place Askwith found," replied Kerridge, looking pleased. "It's a large cavern high up in the cliff. The only entrance is by water, so there's no chance of their being seen or overlooked."

And he gave Kingston further details.

"Very good," said the detective at last. "We'll start right away. There's no object to be gained by delaying matters."

"Yes; but there are no trains," protested Kerridge, hardly prepared for the detective's decision to start immediately. "At this hour—"

"At this hour, or at any other hour, a good motor-car is better than any train," put in Kingston, touching the bell. "My Rolls-Royce is ready to start at a moment's notice. Tim," he added, as the lad appeared, "tell Fraser to get the car round at once. And get yourself ready for going out."

Tim Curtis grinned with delight.

"Goin' to start on a case now, sir?" he cried. "Crikey, that's top-hole!"

CHAPTER 2.

In the Underground Cavern—The Masked Three.

"THERE, I think you'll do now, Kerridge," said Kingston, some few minutes later, as he surveyed the ex-criminal critically.

He had just disguised the man so that no resemblance of his former self remained. This was done as a precaution, in case he allowed himself to be seen by his traitorous companions before the denouement came.

Kingston did not wait to change out of his evening-dress, but simply donned a light overcoat. Then, accompanied by Tim and Kerridge, he descended to the street, where the Rolls-Royce was waiting, pulsating with quiet patience. Fraser sat at the wheel, well wrapped up, for the April night was raw. The time was exactly half-past twelve.

The large landaulette was fitted with brilliant lights, and splendid time was made.

It was eighty miles to the spot on the bleak cliffs where the forgers' cave was situated, but Kingston had given Fraser directions to make for a large seaport somewhat nearer.

"At the docks there," explained the detective, "is a small submarine-boat of mine, which will be of good service to us. I always keep it in readiness for departure, and we shall arrive at our destination sooner, if anything. The Dart is a speedy little vessel, and we shall be able to creep up without fear of being seen."

The car swept on through the night, and the occupants did not converse much. Kingston had been out that evening with Dolores, his fiancée, and when he had said good-night he never imagined he would be engaged in another adventure so quickly.

The seaport was reached, and in less than ten minutes the party had transferred themselves to the little submarine. Very soon it was cutting through the water at a remarkable speed, travelling on the surface, for the water was smooth and calm. A full-moon shone through a layer of watery clouds, and the air was chill. But in the Dart everything was warm and cosy.

Kingston trusted Kerridge, for he was convinced in the man's sincerity. Not much was said, and Kerridge stood

against the window, watching the coast-line. The entrance to the cavern was from the sea. Askwith, Collier, and Prince always using a small motor-launch to reach it.

"That's the place," said Kerridge suddenly—"just against that headland."

The Dart crept up, and at last came to a standstill. But apparently there was no need for caution, for the dark entrance to a rough cave was silent and deserted. Tim Curtis and his master landed, followed by Kerridge. Fraser was instructed to dive below the surface and come up in thirty minutes' time.

In the cave itself a motor-launch was moored to a rock; but the trio passed it, and cautiously commenced the ascent of a winding tunnel. This led upwards for a considerable way, Kingston being in advance, holding an electric-torch. Tim was hugely enjoying himself, for the experience was a novel one to him.

"Hallo!" he said suddenly. "What's this?"

Kerridge stopped, and looked down on the dusty floor. Tim had seen something glittering, and after a moment's search found it to be merely a piece of broken glass. Of a sudden there was a yell of surprise from someone, a quick scuffle, and a muttered curse. The sudden commotion was startling, and Kerridge gripped Tim's arm and pointed up the tunnel. Kingston had gone on ahead, and had turned a corner—evidently to come face to face with one of the forgers.

"Don't make a sound!" whispered Kerridge tensely.

"They haven't seen us."

"But the governor!" gasped Tim excitedly. "They'll—"

"We can help him a lot better by not letting ourselves be seen," urged the other, and Tim realised that he was right.

For once Frank Kingston had been taken by surprise, and before he could have time to defend himself, he found three strong men piled upon him. Had he been out in the open, he could easily have defended himself; but in the confined space of the passage he was handicapped.

The three had a task, but at last they succeeded in roping the detective up in a manner which even he could not defy. The scuffle had taken place at a sharp turning just before the cavern was reached, and the forgers had no suspicion that Kingston had companions with him.

He found himself in a large apartment, well lighted, with benches and curious machines on every side. Kingston surveyed the place quite calmly, then took stock of his captors. All three wore a small, black mask over their eyes, and Askwith and Collier were medium-sized men. Prince, the Yankee, was large, with heavy features and thick lips. A soft-felt hat reposed on his head, and he chewed a rank-smelling cigar.

They discovered their prisoner's identity almost immediately, and chuckled delightedly at having captured him so easily. Tim and Kerridge crouched at the bend, listening to every word that was said with beating hearts.

"Gee!" chuckled Prince. "It's a puzzle to me why these 'tecs. are so fond of rumm' their heads into danger! I guess you ain't realised what you've let yourself in for, Mister Kingston—have you? There's going to be real trouble around here just directly!"

"I'm well aware of that," replied Kingston calmly, "though you appear to be under a wrong impression. The trouble will be yours, not mine."

"Well, you've got a good nerve," said Prince. "A mighty good nerve. I reckon we shall have to look out for ourselves, boys," he added, with a wink. "Mister Kingston is goin' to raise the dust some!"

"Oh, dry up, old man!" protested Collier. "The interfering brute has stopped our work enough as it is. It's very certain we can't allow him to go free; if we did, the game would be up completely. It's a mystery to me how he got to know of this place."

"Yes, it's a puzzler," said Askwith, with an evil glint in his eyes, "but the fact remains that he's here. And the sooner we rid ourselves of him the better. I'm not going to mince matters—we shall have to kill him if we don't want ourselves nabbed."

The others agreed after a few moments' consideration. There was no other way to safeguard themselves.

"We must do the job in such a manner that no sign of him will remain," declared Askwith. "Look here. We've got that explosive in the cupboard, haven't we? Well, I suggest we take him out to Buoy Number 27, a mile out to sea, and tie him to it. Then we can set the bomb, and—well, in five minutes it'll be all over."

The scoundrels discussed Kingston's death as though he had been a rat; they seemed utterly callous. They made it a rule to always keep a waterproof bomb handy in case of a sudden raid, and the scheme Askwith had outlined would indeed be effective. The buoy was a small one a mile from the shore, which at this point was drear and deserted.

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Tim almost gasped when he heard the sentence passed on his master, and he flushed with indignation and anger. Kerridge was a little pale, and he was trembling. These were the men who had tried to kill him—who thought they had killed him. And now they were planning the death of Frank Kingston! The situation was really ludicrous, for Kingston was well aware that Tim and Kerridge were on the watch near at hand. They would soon—

"Ah-h!"

The sound came from Tim's lips in a low gasp. He had laid a hand on the rough floor to alter his position, and in the darkness had placed it directly upon a jagged piece of rock, which pierced his flesh. The pain was not great, but the gasp had been forced from the lad's lips involuntarily. And it so happened that there was a silence in the cavern at the time.

Prince started to his feet with an oath.

"By thunder," he cried, "there's some of Kingston's pals in the passage!"

"Quick!" yelled Tim. "We'll—"

Misfortune seemed to be dogging the lad's actions, for as he scrambled to his feet in the darkness he did not notice that Kerridge was immediately in front of him. Consequently the pair collided violently, staggered for a second, and then tripped. Before they could recover themselves they were pounced upon by the Masked Three.

By sheer misfortune the chance of preventing the carrying out of the plan to murder Frank Kingston had been lost; the trio of villains had everything their own way.

CHAPTER 3.

The Buoy—Another Entrance—Just in Time.

"THIS is awful!" cried Tim Curtis helplessly.

A minute before, the forgers had taken their departure with Frank Kingston, for they still intended carrying out their original scheme. They had, of course, not recognised Kerridge, and thought he was a detective. The scoundrels were taken by surprise, and did not waste time thinking matters over. They were momentarily panic-stricken, and hardly knew which way to turn. Tim and Kerridge had been roughly bound and thrown on the floor. There was no fear of their escaping, for the cavern had a door of solid rock which would have defied a charging elephant.

"They're goin' to kill Mr. Kingston, after all!" cried Tim, wrenching vainly at his bonds. "Love a duck, but I've never heard o' such rotten luck! Here we are absolutely helpless, while the master's gettin' done in!"

And while Tim and the ex-criminal were endeavouring to get free, the motor-launch glided swiftly over the smooth water. The moon shed a faint light on the sea, and the Masked Three were silent—they were thinking. If Kingston had learnt of the secret cavern he had very probably told other people, and it would be extremely dangerous for Askwith & Co. to return. They thought of all this, and at last came to a decision.

"It's a thundering nuisance," growled Prince savagely, "but we'd better slide off this hemisphere good'n sharp. Someone's been blowing the gaff, an' we ain't exactly lyin' on a feather-bed. Our best plan'll be to move off right now—as soon as this job's done."

"You're right, Prince," agreed Collier. "I can smell danger—and all on account of this infernal brute here!" he added, giving Kingston, who lay at the bottom of the boat, a sharp kick. "But we'll carry out our original plan, and rid England of our worst enemy."

"Well, we shan't come off so badly. We're all carrying about twenty thousand pounds worth of notes on us, and if we get rid of them quickly, we can cross to the States rich men."

A few minutes later the launch came to a standstill alongside a small buoy, on which was painted a bold "27." The work of removing Kingston from the boat and fastening him to the buoy was quickly accomplished. The forgers knew Kingston's amazing strength, and had used rope which even the great detective could never hope to break. He submitted to his captors' taunts without a word, but sat there as immobile and emotionless as ever. Talking would only have made matters worse, so he wisely refrained. The bomb was a very small affair, and Askwith placed it in one of Kingston's pockets. Then the launch was allowed to drift a few feet away.

"There, my friend," exclaimed Askwith sneeringly, "I think you're in about as tight a hole as you've ever enjoyed. That bomb's a small affair, but when it goes off in twenty minutes' time it will blow you and the buoy into about a thousand and one pieces. I shouldn't struggle, if I were you, or you may cause it to explode before its time."

Kingston merely smiled. His nerve was tremendous, but he began to have qualms. He knew that the scoundrels had got the upper hand, and it did not seem possible that Tim could escape in time to effect a rescue.

But the lad had already freed himself of his bonds. Knowing how impregnable the cavern was, the Masked Three had not tied the prisoners very tightly. Tim hastily cut through Kerridge's bonds, and he noticed that the man's face was flushed and excited.

"What's up?" asked the youngster quickly. "There don't seem to be nothing to get excited about. We're shut up here like rats in a blessed trap. An' Mr. Kingston's being tied to that buoy without no one to help him!" he added miserably.

"Wait a minute!" cried Kerridge. He darted to a portion of the wall opposite the door, felt about for a moment, then a portion of the wall swung back, revealing a cavity.

Tim Curtis gasped.

"We made that door in case of a sudden raid," explained Kerridge quickly. "You see, we could fasten the main door, and then escape this way. Thank Heaven Mr. Kingston disguised me! If he hadn't done they'd have known that I knew of the secret door. It leads out on the top of the cliff, and we shall have to run like mad to a gully half a mile away. There's a fisherman's boat at the bottom of it, and we might just manage to be in time."

"Chick!" yelled Tim. "Let's get goin'!"

They stumbled up the rough tunnel, and in a few minutes found themselves under the sky. It was a race for life, and never before had Tim exerted himself so much. He and Kerridge ran like deer, and at last the fisherman's boat was pushed off. Although both man and boy were tired and breathless, they made the boat simply shoot through the water. At last the cave entrance was reached, and the coming-tower of the Dart could be seen above the water. Fraser had come to the surface, according to instructions.

In a minute Tim and Kerridge had hustled aboard, and startled Fraser was sending the submarine at full speed for the buoy. The vessel travelled under water, and bobbed up twenty yards from No. 27. Then it edged closer.

"Well, upon my word," exclaimed Kingston calmly, "this is really good of you. I hardly expected—"

"The bomb, sir!" gasped Tim frantically.

"Oh, yes! It's in my left pocket here. Throw it away, will you?"

Tim leaned out from the submarine, and gingerly felt in the pocket. The hard, heavy explosive was there, and Tim flung it across the water with all his strength. It struck the water with a splash, and then followed a tremendous roar. Water spouted everywhere, and a great wave caused the Dart to heave giddily.

"Look!" cried Kerridge suddenly.

He pointed, and the others saw the motor-launch, containing the Masked Three, speeding away shorewards. The scoundrels had waited to see the climax, though they hardly expected it to be what it was.

"After them!" directed Kingston evenly.

It had been short work to cut him free, and the submarine darted across the water at remarkable speed. Kingston and Tim stood on deck, the former holding in his hands a peculiarly-shaped revolver. The distance between the two boats was lessening every second, and the result of the chase was soon apparent.

Suddenly there was a report and a flash of flame from the launch, and a bullet slid along the Dart's plated side.

"The brutes!" cried Tim. "They're firin' at us!"

Frank Kingston did not answer, but waited until the Dart had crept closer still. Then he raised his weapon. There was a slight click, and Collier fell face forwards over the gunwale, where he hung limp and senseless. Two other clicks followed, and Prince and Askwith followed their companion's example.

Tim knew quite well the cause of their sudden collapse, although he marvelled at it greatly. Kingston's revolver had been presented to him by Professor Polgrave, and it contained, instead of bullets, tiny darts. The points of these were impregnated with a drug which brought on insensibility. A tiny scratch—a pin-prick—was enough to bring about the desired result. The weapon was a wonderful invention, for it immediately placed an enemy hors-de-combat without doing any serious injury.

The rest was tame, and it merely remained for Kingston to hand over the three senseless men to the police authorities. Ralph Kerridge was as good as his word; Kingston saw his name among the list of passengers of a large liner which was leaving for Australia a week later.

THE END.