

Every

Wednesday.



Complete Stories for All, and Every Story a Gem.



==THE== WRONG TEAM!

A Splendid, New, Long, Complete
School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.

By **MARTIN CLIFFORD.**

CHAPTER 1. Most Important!

"**P**WAY leave all the talkin' to me!"

"Rats!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Bosh!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"My impression is," said Monty Lowther, "that Gussy had better be left out of the deputation. He is sure to begin talking when we get into the Head's study, and then all the fat will be in the fire."

"Weally, Lowther—"

"Hear, hear!" said Jack Blake.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jammed his monocle into his eye, and surveyed his comrades with a scornful glance, which ought really to have withered them up on the spot. But the juniors of St. Jim's were tough; and they showed no signs of withering.

There were quite a crowd of them. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther, the Terrible Three of the Shell, were taking the lead. Blake and Herries and Digby and D'Arcy, of the Fourth, were also taking the lead. Figgins & Co. of the New House, too, were taking the lead. Kangaroo of the Shell, and Reilly of the Fourth, were the only members of the party, in fact, who weren't taking the lead.

With so many leaders, the deputation certainly ought to have been well led. But they had halted in the passage outside the study of Dr. Holmes, the Head of St. Jim's, in warm dispute. Perhaps too many leaders spoil the deputation, as it is said that too many cooks spoil the broth.

"Be reasonable, D'Arcy, old man," said Reilly, the Irish junior. "Sure you know that you niver open your mouth without puttin' your foot in it—"

"Weally, Weilly—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Better let me explain to the Head," said Tom Merry; "as the eldest fellow here—"

"This isn't a matter for age to count," said Figgins, with a shake of the head. "I suggest letting the most sensible chap do the talking; and that bars you out."

"Why, you New House ass—"

"You School House fathead—"

"Look here—"

"Look here—"

"Order!" said Kangaroo. "The chief thing is, that we've got to persuade the Head to give us leave out this afternoon. We can't do that by all talking at once."

"Faith, and I think—"

"Just what I was wemarkin', deah boy. Bettah leave the talkin' to me. As a fellow of tact and judgment—"

"Oh, ring off, Gussy!" said Blake, in a tired voice.

"I wefuse to wing off. Besides, as a chap connected with the chaps we are goin' to see, I have some authority to speak in the mattah," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with considerable dignity.

"You don't know the Theban team!" exclaimed Manners. "My bwothah knew a chap who used to belong to it, when he was at Oxford," said Arthur Augustus; "therefore—"

"Rats!"

"You uttah ass—"

"I think—"

"I considah—"

"Cheese it!"

"Look here, you fellows—"

"Leave it to me—"

"Br-r-r-r-r!"

Next Wednesday:

"THE FLOODED SCHOOL!" & "BIRDS OF PREY!"

The door of the Head's study suddenly opened. The juniors, in the excitement of the moment, had forgotten how near they were to that sacred apartment. Dr. Holmes looked out into the passage with a severe glance.

"Boys!" he exclaimed.

The buzz of voices died away quite suddenly.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "You have disturbed the Head, you noisy asses. I weally beg your pardon, sir. Pway allow me to apologise for these duffahs."

"Well, of all the cheek—" murmured Tom Merry.

The Head frowned.

"What are you gathered here in the passage for?" he asked. "It is very nearly time to go into your Form-rooms. Pray run away."

"Yaas, sir, but—"

"You see, sir—"

"It's like this, sir—"

"Under the circumstances, sir—"

"Faith, and sure I—"

"Dear me!" said Dr. Holmes, in astonishment. "What is the matter? Have you juniors come here to say anything to me?"

"Yaas, wathah, sir."

"It's very important, sir!"

"Then you may come into my study," said the Head. "But please do not all speak at once. I should understand you far better if you talked one at a time."

And the Head stepped back into his study. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gave his companions a warning glance.

"I told you so," he murmured. "Pway leave the talkin' to me!"

"Ass!"

"Oh, wats!"

The juniors marched into the study. Dr. Holmes surveyed them severely. His first impression was that he was to listen to some complaint, as the Fourth-Formers and Shell fellows had evidently come to him as a deputation.

"Well?" he said inquiringly.

"Pway allow me to explain, sir—"

"This afternoon, sir—"

"We want—"

"The Thebans are playing at Abbotsford, sir—"

"And we want to see—"

"The footer match—"

"If you please—"

"Weally, you fellows—"

Dr. Holmes held up his hand.

"Silence!" he exclaimed. "You may explain, Tom Merry. The rest of you keep silent."

"Weally, sir—"

"Silence, D'Arcy!"

"Oh, vewy well, sir! I'm afwaid that Tom Mewwy won't be able to put it to you pwopahly, sir, that's all. You see, sir—"

"Silence! Go on, Tom Merry."

Tom Merry gave a little cough.

"Well, sir, this is how it is. The Thebans have come to Abbotsford—"

"The Thebans!" repeated Dr. Holmes, in surprise.

"Yaas, wathah, sir."

"I do not quite understand," said the Head. "The Thebans were a race of ancient Greece, inhabitants of Thebes in Boeotia. I do not understand how—"

The juniors grinned. They could not help grinning, in spite of their great respect for the Head. Dr. Holmes was not so well posted as his juniors in football matters.

"They're not very ancient Thebans, sir," said Tom Merry, in explanation. "They—they're modern Thebans, sir. It's the name of a footer team, sir—a 'Varsity team. Of course, you've heard of the Corinthians, sir. Well, the Thebans are a team like the Corinthians—regular cough-drops, sir."

"Regular what, Merry?"

"Ahem! I mean, splendid footer players, sir. They're at Abbotsford now, sir, and they're playing a match with

the County Ramblers. We wondered if you'd let us off lessons this afternoon, sir, to see the match."

"Really, Merry—"

"Of course, we know it's an awful cheek to ask you, sir," said Tom Merry, hurriedly. "But—but you're always so kind, sir—"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"That—that we thought—it's a wonderful match, sir—Thebans against the best amateur team in Sussex, sir. The match will really have an educational value, sir," said Tom Merry, rather proud of that choice of words.

"Yaas, wathah!"

The Head smiled.

"And we should like awfully to go, sir," said Figgins of the Fourth. "It's not often we get a chance to see a match like the Thebans against the County."

"Yaas, wathah, sir. And as I am connected with the Theban team—"

"Ah! You have a relation playing in the team, D'Arcy?" asked the Head, perhaps seeking in his mind for an excuse for granting the somewhat excessive request of the juniors.

"Not exactly a relation, sir," said D'Arcy. "But when my bwotah Conway was at Oxford, he knew a man who was in the team, sir. He's mentioned it to me."

Dr. Holmes smiled.

"That is rather a shadowy connection, D'Arcy," he remarked. "I am afraid you are asking a great deal, to miss your lessons for the remainder of the day—"

"Yes, we know we are, sir," said Tom Merry meekly. "But it's such a rare chance of seeing a first-class amateur match, that we throw ourselves on your kindness, sir."

"Faith, and so we do, sir!"

"Yaas, wathah, sir!"

"Well, well," said the Head. "If this is really such an extraordinary match—"

"Oh, it is, sir! They're the Thebans, you know, sir."

"Mr. Railton knows all about them, sir. He played in the Thebans once," said Monty Lowther eagerly.

"Yaas, wathah; a weguh wippin' team, sir."

"Very well; I will speak to your Form-masters," said the Head, smiling. "You will promise, of course, not to get into mischief, and to come back directly after the match."

"Oh, yes, sir!"

"Thank you so much, sir!"

"You are very kind, sir!"

And with expressions of very sincere gratitude, the juniors trooped out of the study. Arthur Augustus looked very pleased with himself.

"Jollay luckay I was with you," he remarked. "Of course, the Head couldn't vewy well wefuse, aftah the way I put it to him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you fellows—"

"The Head's a brick," said Tom Merry. "Let's get off! We shan't be at Abbotsford in time for the beginning of the match, anyway, unless we hurry."

And Tom Merry & Co. rushed away to make their hasty preparations.

CHAPTER 2.

The Unknown.

ALL St. Jim's knew that the Thebans were at Abbotsford, playing the County Ramblers that afternoon; and all the school would have been glad to go to see the match. But only Tom Merry & Co. had had cool "cheek" enough to ask the Head to excuse them from lessons for the purpose.

If the other fellows had known of Tom Merry & Co.'s success, there would probably have been a rush to the Head's study for similar permissions.

But the juniors who had been granted leave, very considerably kept the fact to themselves. As Monty Lowther remarked, it would hardly be fair to the Head to let a whole crowd of slackers swarm into his study asking for leave from lessons.

Tom Merry & Co. quitted the school quietly, while the other fellows were going into the Form-rooms for afternoon lessons.

Even Arthur Augustus D'Arcy did not stay to adorn his person; but jammed on to his aristocratic head the first silk hat that came to hand.

It was a sharp, somewhat misty October afternoon; just the weather for a quick walk, and the crowd of juniors set off at a good pace.

"We'll take the short cut through the wood," Tom Merry remarked, as they reached the stile in Rylcombe Lane. "Then we can catch the local train at Wayland for Abbotsford."

"Good egg!" said Figgins.

They tramped on the footpath through Rylcombe Wood.

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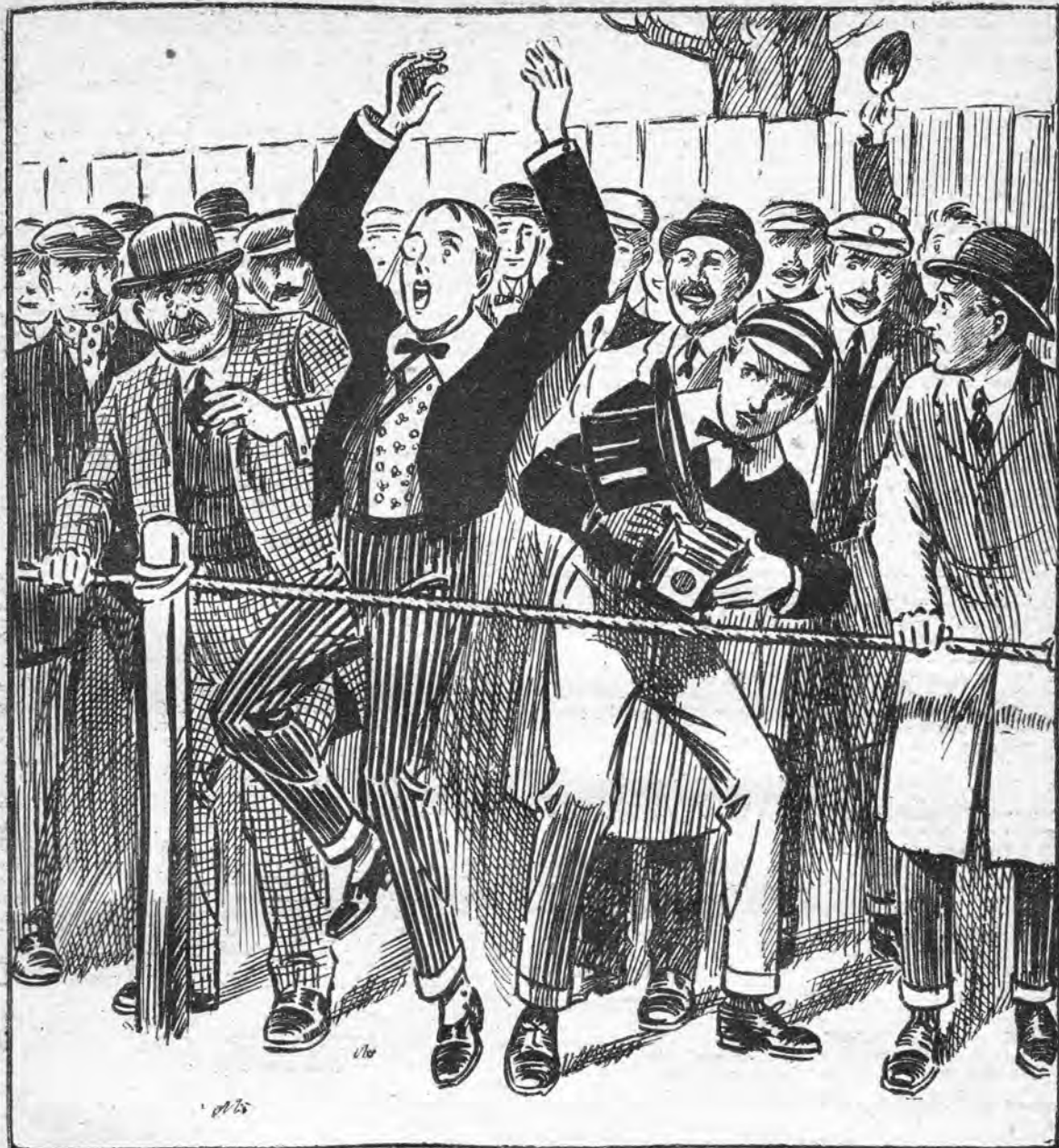
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(See column 2, page 27 of this issue.)

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"THE BULLY OF THE THAMES." or "THE FIGHTING BARGEMAN."



Arthur Augustus D'Arcy clutched off his silk topper, and flung it frantically into the air, not caring whether it came down again or not. He clapped his hands and danced, quite forgetful of the dignity of a scion of the noble race of D'Arcy. "Yaroo!" roared Manners, as the topper crashed down upon his camera, which was focussed on the group of footballers before goal. "Huwway! Bwavo! Huwway!" (See Chapter 16.)

The fallen leaves were thick under their feet, and brown old leaves were falling from the branches over their heads, and fluttering on the wind. On the thick carpet of leaves, their feet made hardly any sound as they strode on. There was a very thoughtful expression upon the face of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and once or twice he glanced about him into the dusky depths of the wood.

"What's wrong?" asked Tom Merry, noticing it.

"Nothin', deah boy. I was thinkin' of the footpads."

"By Jove!" said Blake. "Quite right; there was a man attacked on this path only yesterday, by a couple of ruffians. They're not likely to bother us, though, even if they're here now; we're rather too many for them, I should think."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, there are twelve of us," he remarked. "We should be rather a big mouthful for a couple of tramps."

"Yaas, wathah! You need not be nervous, deah boys."

"Eh?"

"You need not be nervous. I am with you, you know."

"Who's nervous, you ass?"

"I wefuse to be called an ass—"

"Hallo!" exclaimed Monty Lowther suddenly. "What's that?"

He held up his hand and listened.

From the winding footpath, ahead of them in the misty depths of the wood, a sudden sharp cry had come to the ears of the juniors.

"Oh, help!"

"Bai Jove! It's somebody in twouble, deah boys!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Somebody goin' to the footah match, pewwaps, and those wascals—"

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A Splendid, New, Long, Complete School Tale of the Chums of St. Jim's. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"THE FLOODED SCHOOL!"

"The footpads!" said Tom Merry, with a deep breath. "Talk of the Prince of Darkness! Come on; we're just in the right place at the right time."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry broke into a rapid run as he spoke.

The rest of the juniors dashed after him, at top speed.

There was no doubt that the cry they heard came from some solitary pedestrian in the heart of the wood, who had fallen in with the two footpads who had committed a robbery on that very path the day before. The St. Jim's juniors dashed at top speed to the rescue. There were enough of them to tackle a couple of tramps, certainly; but they did not give a thought to any possible danger.

Their footsteps were soundless on the thickly fallen leaves. Tom Merry was well ahead of the others, and he came round a turn in the path first of the party, and burst upon a startling scene.

A young man was struggling fiercely in the grasp of two roughly-dressed, stubby-bearded ruffians, who were trying to hurl him to the ground. Just as Tom Merry came in sight, one of them brought down a heavy cudgel with a crash upon the young man's head. Tom Merry heard a low groan as the victim fell.

The two footpads were on their knees beside the fallen man in a moment, rifling his pockets.

"You scoundrels!" shouted Tom Merry.

The man with the cudgel sprang to his feet.

"You look arter the stuff, Pincher!" he muttered; and he faced Tom Merry, swinging up the cudgel.

"Brain 'im, Billy!"

Tom Merry halted.

He had outstripped his comrades, and the man Billy had the cudgel raised to strike him down as soon as he came within reach.

"Come on, you fellows!" shouted Tom Merry.

"Urry up, Pincher!" muttered the man with the cudgel.

"There's more of 'em!"

"I'm through."

Pincher sprang up from the fallen man, who had not moved. He lay quite still and motionless, hardly seeming to breathe. There was a trickle of red over his forehead, where the cruel blow had struck him.

Tom Merry's comrades came up with a rush.

"Come on!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

And he led the attack. A dozen sturdy juniors rushed right at the two footpads; but they did not stop to face them. Pincher had cleared out the pockets of the fallen man; and the two rascals, without waiting to face the juniors, darted into the bushes and disappeared.

"After them!" shouted Figgins.

"Hold on!" said Tom Merry quickly. "Better look after this chap!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry threw himself upon his knees beside the fallen man. He was quite insensible, and his eyes were closed. His face was deadly white, save where a red trickle ran down the forehead and across the pale cheek.

"My hat! He's had a hard knock!" muttered Manners.

"Is he dead?"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"No; stunned. Poor chap! I wonder who he is! If we knew where he belonged, we might get him home."

The juniors gathered round the fallen man. He had been stunned by the savage blow from the tramp's cudgel, and he showed no sign of returning to consciousness. The St. Jim's juniors regarded him with dubious glances. To go on their way and leave him there was impossible.

"Some of us will have to look after him," said Blake doubtfully.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"That means missing the Thebans' match," said Herries.

"Can't be helped," said Tom Merry, with a sigh. "Still, we needn't all miss it. Two or three of us will be enough to look after this poor chap, and get him somewhere."

They were silent.

Nobody wanted to miss the Thebans' match at Abbotsford. At the same time, all of them would rather have missed it than have abandoned the insensible stranger. The question was, which of them should make the sacrifice.

"I'll stay here, for one," said Tom Merry quickly. "Somebody's got to do it, and as I'm the leader of the party—"

This time Tom Merry's leadership was not disputed.

"Well, it's rough on you," said Figgins.

"That's all right."

"We'll tell you about the match when we get back," said Kerr.

"Yes, rather; we'll do that," said Fatty Wynn heartily.

Tom Merry smiled.

"The question is, who's going to stay with me?" he said. Monty Lowther grunted.

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"I'm going to, of course," he said.

"And I," said Manners.

"Good! You fellows may as well buzz off, then."

The juniors hesitated.

"Sure you'll be able to manage?" asked Blake.

"Oh, yes!"

"Pewwaps I'd bettah stay, too—"

"That's all right, Gussy; you'd only be in the way."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Buzz off!" said Tom Merry. "Three of us can manage this chap all right. We may get away in time to see the finish of the match, too. No good your missing it. Buzz off!"

"Undah the cires—"

"Buzz off!" said Monty Lowther.

"Oh, vewy well!"

And the juniors went on their way, leaving the Terrible Three alone with the unfortunate stranger. They disappeared along the footpath in the direction of Wayland.

CHAPTER 3.

Good Samaritans.

TOM MERRY was kneeling beside the fallen man.

He had wiped the blood from his face, and was resting the man's head upon his knee. The pale face was set and grim, and the man's breathing very faint.

"He looks pretty bad," said Monty Lowther, bending over the insensible man.

Tom Merry nodded.

"Yes; but he's only stunned. It was a hard knock, though. Lucky we're not very far from Rylcombe Lane. We had better carry him there, and get a lift for him into the village to Dr. Short's. He'll look after him."

"Good!" said Manners. "One of us can buzz off first and stop anything that passes in the lane. Shall I go?"

"Yes; that's a good idea."

Manners ran back towards Rylcombe Lane. He reached the stile, and waited there to stop the first vehicle that should pass, to afford a lift for the injured man. Tom Merry and Lowther remained with the fallen man. A bowler hat lay near him, where it had fallen off in the struggle, and Lowther filled it with water at a stream in the wood near the path, and they bathed the man's face. But he did not recover his senses.

"I wonder who he is?" said Lowther. "A stranger in this neighbourhood, I should say. I've never seen him before."

"Those brutes have taken all his things, so there's no finding his name," said Tom Merry. "If we knew, we might get him to his home."

"Might be in his hat. Some chaps have their names written there," said Lowther, picking up the bowler hat.

"Is it there, Monty?"

"Only the initials," said Lowther, looking into the hat—

"T. M."

"T. M.," repeated Tom Merry. "Same as mine!"

"Yes. I don't know what they stand for, though."

"He doesn't seem to be coming to," said Tom Merry, scanning the white face anxiously. "We'd better get him along."

"Right-ho!"

The insensible man was sturdily built; but the two juniors were sturdy, too, and they raised him without much difficulty, Tom Merry taking his shoulders, and Lowther his legs. They carried him along the footpath back to Rylcombe Lane.

"Come on!" called out Manners, as they came within sight of the stile. "I've got a lift."

"Good!"

A cart going towards Rylcombe had halted in the lane, at Manners's call. The driver dismounted to help the juniors place the insensible victim of the footpads in the vehicle.

"We'd better go along with him, to explain to Dr. Short," said Lowther, "and we shall have to go to the police-station about it, too."

"Yes."

"Get in, young gentlemen," said the carter. "There be room for all of you."

"Thank you!"

Tom Merry supported the unknown man's head upon his knee as the cart drove to Rylcombe. It stopped outside Dr. Short's house, and the insensible man was carried in.

Dr. Short, the local medico, who attended the St. Jim's boys, was fortunately at home. He was very much surprised to see his visitors.

"Bless my soul!" he exclaimed. "What is the matter? An accident?"

"A robbery, sir," Tom Merry explained. "This gentle-

man was knocked down by footpads in the footpath, and we've brought him to you, sir."

"Quite right—quite right, my lad! What are you doing out of school this afternoon, though?" asked the doctor.

"We had leave to go over to Abbotsford for the Thebans' match, sir; though we've missed it now, owing to this," said Tom Merry.

"Never mind, you have played the good Samaritan," said Dr. Short. "You may have saved the man's life. Do you know who he is?"

"No, sir; only his initials are T. M."

"H'm! I have seen him before," said the doctor, scrutinising the insensible man, who had been laid in his surgery. "I fancy he was a guest of Sir Julian Marlow, at St. James's Lodge. I am not sure. He is a stranger in this neighbourhood, anyway. If you lads wish to know how he gets on, you may wait in the next room."

"Yes, sir."

The Terrible Three waited in the adjoining room.

They were anxious to know how the injured stranger progressed, but they could not help thinking about the Thebans' match as they waited. That match had started long ago, and it was probably near the interval by this time.

"Just our luck!" said Manners, with a sigh. "I've got my camera with me, and I was going to take some snaps of the Thebans. That's done it now."

"Can't be helped," said Tom Merry. "I hope this chap will come round. I'm feeling jolly anxious about him. He looks a very decent chap, too."

"Here's the doctor," said Lowther at last.

Dr. Short came into the room with a very serious face. The juniors could see by his manner that he had not a favourable report to make.

"Has he recovered?" asked Tom Merry.

Dr. Short shook his head.

"No; he is still insensible. I hope it will not prove to be concussion. I am going to keep him here, Merry, for the present; at all events, until I find out where he has been staying."

"He is not"—Tom Merry's voice faltered—"not in danger, doctor?"

"Not so bad as that, but there is no telling how long he may remain unconscious. I have not been able to find any clue to his name, either; only his initials. You boys had better go and give information at the police-station."

"Very good."

And the Terrible Three left the doctor's house.

They called in at Rylcombe Police-station, and informed the inspector there of the occurrence, and then strolled down the lane.

"The match is jolly near over now," said Lowther. "We shan't see the Thebans."

"May as well walk and meet the fellows coming back."

"Yes, I suppose so."

The chums of St. Jim's turned into the footpath through the wood again. They walked to Wayland, and waited at the railway-station for the juniors who had gone to the match. A train came in from Abbotsford, and Jack Blake was the first who jumped out of it.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Blake, catching sight of the Terrible Three on the platform. "You fellows here? How's that chap?"

"Laid up at Dr. Short's," said Tom Merry. "How did the match go? Was it a good one?"

"Ripping!" said Blake enthusiastically. "The Thebans are top notch. They won hands down. My hat, I believe they'd beat a League team hollow!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus, following Blake out of the carriage in a more leisurely way. "They are certainly vewy wippin' playahs. Their captain, Vivian, is a weally wippin' forward. I saw him take a goal that I couldn't have beaten myself."

"Go hon!" said Digby.

"Yaas, wathah! I mean it, deah boys."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"They're simply splendid!" said Figgins. "I've enjoyed that match. Beats grinding Latin in the Form-room—just a bit!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry sighed.

"Well, it can't be helped," he said. "It was rotten to miss it, but somebody had to look after that chap."

"Who was he?" asked Kangaroo, as the juniors trooped out of the station.

"I don't know; his initials are T. M., but he hadn't anything left on him with his name on it."

"Hasn't he come to?" asked Reilly.

"Not when we left the doctor's."

"Poor chap!"

"I hope those rotters will be arrested," growled Manners. "I was going to take snaps of the Thebans—"

"Good egg!" exclaimed Herries. "It wouldn't be a bad idea for us to track down those tramps, you know. It's a half-holiday on Wednesday, and we could take Towser out and track them down. You know how Towser can follow a track."

"Yes, a railway track, when he's in a train," grunted Blake.

"Look here, Blake, you ass—"

"I've got an idea," said Fatty Wynn modestly. "It's beastly rough on those Shell chaps missing the Thebans' match. We'll stand them a feed when we get back to St. Jim's. Mrs. Taggles has got in some new steak-and-kidney pies to-day."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"They're ripping!" said Fatty Wynn. "After all, I'd sooner go to a feed than to a footer match. We'll make it up to you, Tom Merry."

Tom Merry laughed. The most luscious steak-and-kidney pies were not likely to console him for having missed seeing the famous amateur footer team. But, as he said himself, it could not be helped, and the Terrible Three tried to take it cheerfully.

When they reached St. Jim's, the Head was informed of the affair in the wood, and he had a word of praise for the chums of the Shell, which helped to console them.

"You have acted like good Samaritans, my lads," he said. "I am very glad you were there to render this aid to the injured man. I am very pleased with you."

"Well, that's all right!" Monty Lowther remarked, as they quitted the Head's study. "If the Head's pleased with us, we may get another afternoon off if the Thebans play another match anywhere near here. Something in that!"

And the Terrible Three walked over to the New House, to Figgins's study, to share the steak-and-kidney pies with Figgins & Co.

CHAPTER 4.

An Amazing Letter!

"LETTER for you, Tommy!"

It was the following day, and the morning lessons were over. Monty Lowther was looking over the letter-rack, and he fished out a letter addressed to his chum, and tossed it over to him.

Tom Merry caught it.

"From Miss Fawcett, I expect," he said. "I expect there's a remittance in it; and if there is, we'll have some more of those steak-and-kidney pies before Fatty Wynn has scoffed all Dame Taggles' stock."

"Hear, hear!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy of the Fourth, who had been scanning the letter-rack anxiously through his famous monocle. "I was expecting a wemittance myself—I wote to my patah yestahday, and told him particularly that I was in need of a fivah. It is wathah wemarkable that it has not awvied. It's a vewy exaspewatin' thing when a chap's governah gwows so careless in sendin' wemittances."

"Not Miss Fawcett," said Tom Merry, glancing at the superscription on the letter. "I don't know this fist!"

"Pewwaps it is for me, aftah all, deah boy—"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Yes if your name's T. Merry," he said. "This is rather a queer address, you fellows. 'St. James's,' without the 'School.'"

The juniors glanced at the letter in Tom Merry's hand. The address ran:

"T. Merry, Esq., St. James's, Rylcombe."

"Careless ass who wrote that," said Monty Lowther. "There's a house called St. James's in the district, and it might have gone there by mistake."

"Well, there's only one Tom Merry, I suppose," said the captain of the Shell. "The postman has brought me enough letters to know my name. I wonder who it's from?"

"Might be a good idea to open it and see," suggested Lowther.

"Right!"

Tom Merry opened the letter.

He unfolded the sheet inside and glanced at it, carelessly enough—and then his glance became fixed—in amazement. He stared at the letter in blank silence.

"What's the matter?" exclaimed Manners, "Bad news?"

"My hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"Anything wrong?" asked Lowther.

"Great Scott!"

"Bai Jove! I twust it is not someone ill, Tom Mewwy."

"Great Christopher Columbus!"

"What is it?" yelled Lowther. "Explain, you ass."

"My only Aunt Jemima Ann!"

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"THE FLOODED SCHOOL!"

Lowther and Manners seized their chum, and backed him against the wall, and held him there.
"Now explain, you fathead!" said Lowther, "before we bang your silly napper on the wall!"
"Hold on!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Well, what is it?"
"I—I don't understand it."
"Fathead! Who's it from?"
"Chap named Stacey—"
"Stacey!" said Arthur Augustus. "I wemembah that name somewhah. It's the name of the secwetawy of the Theban Football Club."

"Yes; that's the chap!"
"What! You've got a letter from the secretary of the Thebans!" exclaimed Jack Blake, coming along at that moment.

"Yes."
"Gammon!"
"Rats!"
"Yes; wathah, wats!"
"Fact!" said Tom Merry. "Blessed if I can quite believe it myself. But there it is—you can all read it if you like."

He held up the letter. The juniors crowded round to read it, and there were loud exclamations of astonishment as they did so. For a letter addressed to a junior schoolboy, it was amazing enough. It ran:

"Dear Merry,—I'm sorry you were unable to come over for the match yesterday. We had a good game, though the team here is hardly up to playing the Thebans. We should be very glad to meet your team if you could come over to-morrow afternoon. We are staying down here till Thursday, and the Abbotsford fellows have given us the run of their ground, as they will be away. We have no match on till Saturday; so if you're free for Wednesday afternoon, and can bring your men over, we shall be glad to give you a good reception. Let me know by wire; just 'yes' or 'no' will do, as I am going away this evening to stay the night. Address me at the County Hotel here.

"Always yours,
"J. STACEY."

The juniors read the letter, and re-read it, and stared at it, and stared at Tom Merry, and stared at one another. Blank amazement was in every face.

That a first-class team like the Thebans—a team that had entered for the English Cup, and had a good prospect of carrying it off—a team that included well-known Blues, and at least one International—that such a team should send a challenge to the junior captain of a school—was sufficient to take their breath away.

If Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, had had a chance of meeting the Thebans with the First Eleven, he would have jumped with joy, but he would never have dreamed of such a distinction falling to his lot.

But the Junior Eleven!
It was astounding.

"My only chapeau!" said Jack Blake, with a deep breath. "I—I can't get on to this at all. It must be a mistake!"

"He must have heard about you, Tommy, and fancied that you're captain of St. Jim's, instead of captain of the Junior Eleven!" said Manners slowly.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"That's impossible!" he said. "If he's heard of Tom Merry at all, he's naturally heard who Tom Merry is. It's clear that he knows I was coming over to see the Thebans play yesterday, and was disappointed."

"Yes," said Lowther, looking at the letter again. "He says plainly, he's sorry you were unable to come. That shows he knew you were coming."

"Perhaps that chap who was hurt by the footpads was a friend of his, and so he may have heard about you through that," Blake said reflectively. "The chap was very likely going over to the match."

"Yes, that's possible."

"That might be the reason of his sending this invitation, if you've looked after a chap he knows," Lowther remarked.

"Anyway, he's sent it," said Tom Merry. "Whatever his reasons may be, he's sent it; and we're challenged to take over a team to meet the Thebans."

"Bai Jove!"
Tom Merry's eyes gleamed.

"Kildare would give his little finger to get that challenge," he said. "It was a leg up for the County Ramblers to play the Thebans. We're in luck."

"By George, it's simply ripping!"

"I—I suppose there can't be a mistake?" said the cautious Manners.

"Where could the mistake come in? The letter's written to me; he alludes to my being prevented from coming over yesterday," said Tom Merry. "It's plain enough."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"After all, we've got a good team, and we've licked the fellows at Abbotsford School often enough," said Tom Merry. "I daresay the Thebans have heard about it, and they're willing to test us."

"But we've only a junior eleven—"

"Maybe they expect us to take the strongest team possible," suggested Blake. "It would be a good idea to get some of the seniors to play for us—Kildare, Darrel, and Monteith, perhaps."

Tom Merry nodded.

"Yes, rather. I shall make up the strongest team I can, you may be sure."

"That means some of the Eleven being left out, if you put the seniors in," remarked Blake.

"Well, on an occasion like this, fellows must expect to stand down," said Tom Merry. "They can come over and watch us playing the Thebans. That will be better than playing themselves in an ordinary match."

"Yaas, wathah! It will be wippin'. Perhaps, undah the cires, it would be a good ideah to have a fwesh skippah, on such a vewy important occasion," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked, in a thoughtful way.

Tom Merry frowned a little.

"You mean we might ask Kildare?" he said. "But that would make it into a senior team, if we had a senior skipper. And we're jolly well not letting this match get into senior hands. It's a bit too good to give away."

"I did not mean Kildare, deah boy."

"If we had a senior skipper, it would have to be Kildare."

"I was not thinkin' of a seniah."

"Why, you ass!" exclaimed Tom Merry wrathfully. "Do you think I ought to resign the captaincy to another junior, then, on an occasion like this?"

"Yaas, certainly, to incwease the chances of beatin' the Thebans."

"Rats! What junior in the whole giddy school could skipper the team better than I do?" demanded the captain of the Shell warmly.

"I don't want to put myself forward in any way," said D'Arcy modestly. "But for the good of the cause, deah boy, I weally considah it would be bettah to leave the skipship in my hands for once."

"Yours!" yelled Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah! You see—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I see nothin' whatevah to cackle at," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "I wegard that as the pwopah capah, undah the cires—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Gussy is right on one point," Blake remarked thoughtfully. "Of course, Gussy couldn't captain a team of white mice. But I should not be unwilling myself—"

"Weally, Blake—"

Tom Merry laughed.

"I dare say quite a lot of fellows wouldn't be unwilling to take on my job to play the Thebans," he remarked. "But I'm sticking to it."

"My deah chap, you weally ought to considah the good of the cause, and for that weason, I weally think—"

"I'm going to consider the good of the cause, Gussy, and for that reason, I'm going to leave you out," said Tom Merry cheerfully.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What!"

"You're hardly up to playing the Thebans," said Tom Merry. "I'm sorry; but I shall have to be awfully careful in selecting my team for a match like this."

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"I presume that you are jokin'," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity.

"Not at all!"

"I should refuse to be left out."

"That wouldn't make any difference, old son. I'm going to get the strongest team together that I possibly can," said Tom Merry. "It's a case of F.S.D., you know—Family Stand Down." But I say, isn't this a stroke of gorgeous luck? Fancy playing the Thebans!"

"Oh, it's ripping!"

"Hurrah!"

And the Terrible Three, in the exuberance of their spirits, joined hands, and executed a cakewalk down the passage.

CHAPTER 5.

Many Candidates.

THE amazing letter received by Tom Merry was the one theme of discussion among the juniors of St. Jim's after that. In a quarter of an hour all the fellows knew of it; and Tom Merry had had so many applications from fellows who wanted to read the famous letter, that he pinned it up on the wall of his study, so that all St. Jim's might run and read, so to speak.

Fellows came to the study, read the letter, gasped, and offered their services as members of the team that was to meet the Thebans.

After dinner Tom Merry & Co. walked down to Rylcombe Post Office to send the wire to the secretary of the Thebans, at the County Hotel at Abbotsford.

Tom Merry wrote out the reply on a form:

"Letter received. Very glad to bring a team over to-morrow. Will do best to give you good match. Expect us Abbotsford ground at half-past two.—MERRY."

The telegram was duly despatched.

The chums of the Shell left the post-office in great spirits.

"It seems like a giddy dream," said Tom Merry. "Never dreamed of such luck as this, though. It's jolly decent of the Thebans to play us."

"Yes, rather!"

"Even if they're only doing it for practice, to keep in form, it's a gorgeous honour," said Manners. "Kildare would leap at it. My hat! It will be a feather in our cap for ever and ever, amen!"

"It's gorgeous!"

"Might as well call in at Dr. Short's, while we're here, and inquire of him about that chap," Lowther remarked.

"Good egg!"

The Terrible Three stopped at the doctor's house. Dr. Short was out, but they were given information of the patient. The man was going on well, but had not yet recovered consciousness, and had not therefore been able to give his name.

The juniors returned to the school. They felt concerned about the unknown stranger who had been so roughly handled by the footpads in Rylcombe Wood; but the thought of the morrow's match with the Thebans soon drove him out of their minds.

They returned to the school just in time for afternoon lessons. As the Terrible Three joined the crowd of fellows going into the Shell Form-room, Kangaroo of the Shell nudged Tom Merry on one side, and George Gore nudged him on the other.

"I say," whispered Kangaroo, "I suppose it's all right?"

"Yes; I've sent the telegram," said Tom Merry.

The Cornstalk stared.

"Telegram!" he said. "I'm not talking about any telegram. I said I supposed it was all right—about me, I mean?"

Tom Merry glanced at the Cornstalk in surprise. The sturdy, ruddy-faced junior certainly looked all right.

"Yes, I suppose you're all right, Kangy," said Tom Merry.

"Ass! About the match, I mean!"

"Oh!"

"I usually play in the Junior Eleven," Kangaroo remarked.

"Ye-es!"

"I suppose it's all right."

"I'm going over the team after tea, and then I'll let you know," said Tom Merry.

"Better decide it now," urged the Cornstalk. "No time like the present, you know. You'll want me as sure as a gun."

"Then I'll let you know."

"Now, look here, Tom Merry—"

"Do shut up, and give a fellow a chance to speak, Noble!" growled Gore. "I say, Tom Merry, I haven't played much for the Junior Eleven lately, but on an occasion like this, I'm going to buck up, and do my level best for the team."

"That's very good of you," said Tom Merry.

"Yes, I want to do the decent thing. Now, I can play either half or back rippingly, and I'm willing to go into the team just where you like."

"I'm afraid—"

"I'll keep goal for you, if you like."

"Fatty Wynn will keep goal," said Tom Merry.

"Rats! Are you going to play a gang of New House bounders?" growled Gore. "I should think you might keep a match like this for the School House."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Fair play's a jewel," he replied. "The junior team represents both Houses, and both Houses are going to have a show in playing the Thebans, if they've got the players. Fatty Wynn of the New House is the best junior goalkeeper at St. Jim's; and he'd make a lot of League shots look sick if he were keeping goal against them. I think he'll be rather a surprise to the Thebans. I hope so."

"Well, look here, as centre-half—"

"Ahem!"

"Or in the front line, if you like—"

"H'm!"

"Look here, Tom Merry—"

"I'm afraid there won't be room for you, Gore."

"Why, you silly ass—"

"Come into the Form-room, you babbling burlbers!" called out Monty Lowther politely. "You'll be late!"

And the Shell went in.

During lessons, several notes were passed along the desks to where Tom Merry sat. When he read them, they all bore the same words, more or less:

"Am I down for the eleven?"

Tom Merry grunted.

"The chaps are getting anxious about it," murmured Monty Lowther. "Everybody who can kick a footer half a yard in a straight line thinks he's entitled to play the Thebans. It will be a feather in the cap of every member of the team, and they're all out for feathers."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Yes; if I let them have their way, we shall take over a team of ninety or a hundred fellows for the match—like one of the old Rugger teams we read about."

"Merry!"

Mr. Linton rapped out the name of the hero of the Shell.

Tom Merry looked meek.

"Yes, sir," he said.

"Please do not talk in class."

"Certainly not, sir."

"You have been receiving notes for the past hour," said Mr. Linton. "You have a large collection of them under your desk. Kindly hand them over to me."

"Oh, sir—"

"Please hand me those notes, Merry!"

There was no help for it. The notes were handed over, and Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, read them in great astonishment.

"Got my name down?—Thompson," "Put me in—Reilly," "I hope you're not leaving me out—Dane," "Don't forget my name—Glyn," and so on.

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Linton. "What ever does this mean?"

"Ahem!"

"What does it mean, Merry?" asked the master of the Shell sternly.

"The chaps want me to put their names down for a footer team, sir," said Tom Merry reluctantly.

"Oh," said Mr. Linton, with a grim smile. "Very well. You must learn, my boys, to settle these matters outside the class-rooms. Meanwhile, I will put down your names for a hundred lines each, and I shall expect the lines before bedtime to-night."

"Oh!" said the unfortunate letter-writers.

And Mr. Linton put the notes into the Form-room fire.

CHAPTER 6.

A Surprise for the Seniors.

KILDARE, of the Sixth, the captain of St. Jim's, was in his study with Darrel and Langton, of the Sixth. They were having tea. Frayne of the Third had made huge piles of toast and boiled eggs galore, and then left the seniors to themselves. Kildare and his chums were talking football, just now the one topic of exceeding interest at St. Jim's.

"Do you know the Thebans are over at Abbotsford?" Langton remarked.

Kildare nodded.

"Yes; I should have gone over to see them play if it had been a half-holiday," he said. "I hear that a lot of the juniors got leave from the Head to go."

"That's so," said Darrel. "Tom Merry among them; THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 243.

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and they found a chap stunned on the footpath, who'd been knocked out by a couple of tramps, and took him to Dr. Short's."

"And missed the Thebans, then, I suppose?"

"Yes; so I hear."

"Very decent of Merry," said Kildare. "It is like him. It's amazing to me now that we let that cad Bingham make us believe anything against Tom Merry. I'm glad he's sacked. Tom Merry seems to be in very high feather lately."

Tap!

"Come in!" called out Kildare.

The study-door opened, and the junior they had been speaking of entered.

"Hallo, Merry!" said Kildare cordially. Kildare was very cordial to Tom Merry lately, for only a very short time ago he had been bitterly unjust to him, and he wanted to make up for it. But Tom Merry was not the fellow to remember injuries.

"Can I speak to you, Kildare?"

"Go ahead!"

"Matter very private?" asked Darrel, with a smile.

"Oh, no; I should like you to hear it too, Darrel, and Langton as well! In fact, it concerns you two fellows as well as Kildare."

"That sounds interesting," said Langton.

"Pile in, kid!"

"Are you chaps specially engaged for to-morrow afternoon?" asked Tom Merry.

"The Sixth are playing the Fifth," said Kildare.

"I suppose that could be postponed?"

Kildare stared. So did Langton and Darrel.

"Well, I suppose it could," said Kildare; "but it's jolly well not going to be! What are you driving at, Tom Merry?"

"Well, the fact is—"

"Well?"

"The fact is—"

"What?"

"I was going to ask you fellows if you'd care to play for me?"

"Wha-a-at!"

"We're playing the Thebans to-morrow," explained Tom Merry, "and—"

The three seniors jumped up.

"You're playing what?" roared Kildare.

"The Thebans."

"The Thebans?"

"Yes."

"You young ass! Why don't you say you're playing Manchester United!" exclaimed Langton, laughing. "How do you expect us to swallow that?"

"You'll be in the Cup Final next, I suppose, Merry?" said Darrel.

"Don't be a young ass, Merry," said Kildare, frowning. "If this is a joke, I don't see where it comes in. It's not 1st of April."

"But I've told you the truth," said Tom Merry. "We're playing the Thebans to-morrow afternoon at the Abbeotsford ground."

"You young ass—"

"We've received a challenge from their secretary, Stacey."

"Oh, ring off!"

"I've got the letter here."

"Rats!"

"Read it."

Tom Merry laid the letter on the tea-table. He did not blame the seniors for their incredulity with regard to the challenge. Indeed, at moments he found it rather hard to believe in his good luck himself.

Kildare, Darrel, and Langton bent over the letter and read it. They read it once, and read it again, with blank amazement.

"Did you write this yourself?" asked Langton, looking suspiciously at Tom Merry.

"No fear."

"Is it really the Thebans' secretary?"

"Of course!"

"There's no doubt on that point, Kildare," said Darrel. "I know that fist. My brother knows Stacey, the Thebans' secretary, and I've seen letters from him. It's his hand."

"There you are! exclaimed Tom Merry triumphantly. Kildare looked lost in astonishment.

"But it's impossible for the Thebans to send a challenge to a junior schoolboy team!" he exclaimed. "Even if they were playing reserves, you kids couldn't touch them."

"We're going to do our best," said Tom Merry.

"Your best—against a team that has beaten both Universities, and beaten League teams, and could beat an International team!" roared Kildare.

Tom Merry nodded.

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"Can't do more than our best," he said. "They've challenged us, and we've accepted the challenge, and there you are!"

"You've accepted it?" said Kildare dazedly.

"Yes, rather!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"I'm trying to make up a really ripping team for the match," said Tom Merry. "I shall remain captain, of course. But I want to get the best players possible into the team, and I thought that, as it's a very special match, you might care to play, Kildare."

The captain of St. Jim's stared.

"To play in a junior team!" he ejaculated.

"Well, it's against the Thebans, you know," urged Tom Merry. "Precious few school chaps ever have a chance of playing the Thebans."

"Yes; but—"

"Why don't you ask Kildare to skipper a team against them, you young ass!" said Langton.

Tom Merry shook his head decidedly.

"No fear! That would make it a senior team. And the Thebans have challenged St. Jim's juniors. That's us."

"But what sort of a chance do you think you will have against a team of giddy giants like the Thebans?"

"We're going to play hard. And if Kildare will agree to play centre-forward for us, and Langton inside left, and you, Darrel, centre-half, it will strengthen the team wonderfully."

"Go hon!" said Darrel, laughing.

"I'm going to ask Monteith of the New House, too; that will make four seniors in the team, if he accepts," said Tom Merry. "I think that will be all right. I'm going to ask Lefevre of the Fifth to play back. It's only fair to give the Fifth Form a look in; and he's a good back."

"And what are you going to do?" asked Kildare.

"Inside-right, and skipper."

"And you've got the cheek to ask your captain to play for you under your lead?"

"Well, think of the honour and glory for St. Jim's if we beat the Thebans!" urged Tom Merry.

"Beat them!" shouted Kildare.

"Yes, beat them."

"You ass! Why, the First Eleven, playing two masters as well, as we sometimes do, couldn't beat the Thebans!"

"I dare say," agreed Tom Merry calmly. "But we're not talking about the First Eleven now."

Kildare stared at him speechlessly, and Darrel burst into a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha! He thinks the juniors will have a better chance than the First Eleven!"

"Why not?" said Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cheeky young ass!" growled Kildare.

"You see, I'm selecting a team from all the Forms, and picking out the very best, wherever I find it," said Tom Merry. "I don't see why we shouldn't have a good chance against the Thebans. I know they're frightfully hot stuff; but nobody's invincible. We're going to have Fatty Wynn in goal, and I'll bet you that the Thebans won't find it easy to send the leather in, with Wynn of the Fourth there."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There will be four of the Sixth, one of the Fifth, three of the Shell, and three of the Fourth, as I figure it out at present," said Tom Merry.

"None of the Third or Second?" asked Darrel sarcastically. Tom Merry laughed.

"No; we draw the line at fags."

"This is a very extraordinary thing," Kildare said, after another look at the letter from the secretary of the Thebans. "I suppose there's no mistake about it?"

"How could there be? Darrel even knows the writing."

"Sure enough," said Darrel.

"And you've answered the challenge, Merry?"

"Yes."

"Well, that ought to settle it," said Kildare, rubbing his chin. "If there was any mistake in the matter, Stacey would set it right when he had your wire. He would send a wire back to say so."

"Well, he hasn't."

"That makes it clear," said Langton. "I suppose it's really a joke on the part of the Thebans, to see whether these kids would have the cheek to play them."

"Might be simply good-nature," Darrel remarked. "Of course, they know how any chap here would jump at the chance of playing them, and they seem to have an empty afternoon they can give to the match."

"That's so!"

"Anyway, we're playing them," said Tom Merry. "Now, I think you ought to play for us, you chaps, for the honour of the school. Even if you play under a junior skipper, you'll be playing the Thebans all the same, and



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Lord Mauleverer groaned and started. Bob Cherry, Nugent and Tom Brown followed him, with their boots ready to help him on his wild career. Chairs were overturned for him to jump over, and the juniors stood ready to stop him dodging them. The Removites roared as he tore round the room at breakneck speed, gasping for breath the while. (For the above incident see the grand, long, complete tale of Harry Wharton & Co. at Greyfriars, entitled "THE SCHOOLBOY SLEEPWALKER!" by Frank Richards, which is contained in this week's splendid issue of our popular companion paper, "THE MAGNET" Library. Now on Sale. Price One Penny.)

you don't often get a chance like that. And if you back us up, we may win."

Kildare nodded.

"I'll play for one," he said. "Langton and Darrel can suit themselves."

"Oh, I shall play, if you do," said Darrel. "It's good enough for me if it's good enough for you. And you don't often get a chance of playing a howling first-rate team like the Thebans."

"My idea, too," said Langton. "I'm on."

Tom Merry's face brightened up.

"Good!" he said, taking a crumpled sheet of paper and a stump of pencil from his pocket. "I'll put your names down—Kildare, centre-forward; Darrel, centre-half; and Langton, inside-left. Good egg! Much obliged!"

And Tom Merry left the study. The seniors looked at one another when he was gone.

"It's extraordinary!" said Kildare.

"Yes, rather—but I'm glad of a chance of playing the Thebans, for one," Darrel remarked.

"Oh, yes. Some of the fellows will sniff at the idea of us playing under a junior captain," said Kildare. "But I think it's up to us to do it! If St. Jim's could beat the Thebans, it would be a feather in our cap!"

"Hear, hear!"

And the Sixth-Formers, amazed as they were, looked

forward with great keenness to the match with the Thebans; in spite of the unheard-of circumstance that they, the champion senior footballers of St. Jim's, would on this occasion be playing under the lead of a junior skipper!

CHAPTER 7. Methods of Barbarism.

"HERE he is!"

There was a shout, and a rush of feet, as Tom Merry came out of the Sixth-Form passage in the School House.

The hero of the Shell glanced round hastily; but in a second he was grasped in three or four pairs of hands.

"Bring him along!" shouted Kangaroo.

"Got him!"

"Hold on!" roared Tom Merry. "Look here—ow—what's the game—yow—"

"This way, kids!"

"Right-oh!"

Four sturdy juniors had grasped Tom Merry. He was whirled off the ground, and hurried along into an empty box-room, and bundled in and left on the floor. Kangaroo of the Shell closed the door. Kangaroo, Clifton Dane, Bernard Glyn, and Thompson, gathered round the gasping, breathless captain of the Shell.

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY

"THE FLOODED SCHOOL!"

Tom Merry stared at them as he panted for breath. "What are you up to, you silly asses?" he roared.

"Business!" said Kangaroo. "Cold business," said Clifton Dane, the Canadian, with a chuckle. "We want to know how you're making up the team for the Thebans' match?"

"That's my business!" "And ours, too!" grinned Bernard Glyn. "What-ho!" said Thompson.

Tom Merry staggered to his feet. In an instant the four Shell fellows had pinioned him. Tom Merry struggled in their grasp, but he struggled in vain.

"Now, Tommy, old man, take it quietly," said Kangaroo persuasively; "we're all your friends, and we want to be friendly."

"Lemme go, you fathead!" "We want to know how the team's to be made up?" "Rats!"

"Are you going to tell us?" "No!" roared Tom Merry.

"Very well; I'm sorry, but we shall have to bump you till you tell us," said Kangaroo regretfully. "You take his hoofs, Dane and Thompson, and we'll take his head. Now, then, up with him."

The struggling captain of the Shell was whirled off the floor.

"Going to tell us?" asked Kangaroo politely. "No!" roared the prisoner. "I haven't fully decided yet. Go and eat coke!"

"Better make up your mind now," suggested Glyn. "Rats!"

Bump! "Yar-o-o-o-p!"

"Now, then, have you decided?"

"No! Oh! Yow! Help!"

Bump! "Yo-o-o-o-o-o-o-p!"

"Decided yet?"

"Ow! Ow! ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You see, we've talked this over, and decided that you can't be allowed to put in the wrong fellows, and leave out the right fellows," Kangaroo explained.

"Gr-o-o-h!"

"Who's centre-forward?"

"Kildare," growled Tom Merry.

"Well, that's all right. What are you going to do for wingers?"

"Myself—"

"Well, that's rather conceited, Tommy; but we'll pass you," said Kangaroo generously. "I suppose you're inside. Who are the others?"

"Figgins, outside-right—myself inside-right, Langton inside-left, Blake outside-left," gasped Tom Merry.

"I don't think that will do," said Kangaroo, with a shake of the head. "But it all depends. Who's in goal?"

"Fatty Wynn!"

"Well, we'll pass Fatty Wynn in goal. What about the second line?"

"Darrel centre-half, and Lowther and Manners."

"H'm! What about the backs?"

"Monteith and Lefevre."

"Why, that leaves us all out!" exclaimed Kangaroo.

"Yes."

"Is it settled?"

"Not quite settled—I haven't fully decided yet—but I think that's how it will go! Now leggo, you silly ass."

Kangaroo shook his head.

"Can't be did! The team will have to be rearranged a bit before we let you go. We're going to play—not because we want to specially, but for the sake of the side."

"Br-r-r-r!"

"I suggest Glyn, and Dane, and myself as halves. Thompson wouldn't mind standing down, as he's only a New House chap."

Thompson of the Shell glared.

"Why, you silly chump—"

"Now, be reasonable, Thompson—"

"I'm going in as back!" roared Thompson.

"What do you say, Tom Merry?"

"I say rats!"

"Am I going in as back?" roared Thompson.

"No fear!"

"Why not?"

"Because you're not up to the mark?"

"Why, you fathead—"

"Yes, be reasonable, Thompson. What do you say to us three as halves, Tommy?" asked Kangaroo.

"The same thing—rats!"

"You don't mean to say that you've got the uncouthly

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cheek to leave us all out?" demanded Clifton Dane warmly. Tom Merry snorted.

"I can't put you all in, fathead. Do you want me to take twenty-two, or thirty-three, over to Abbotsford to play the Thebans?"

"Put in the best men!" suggested Bernard Glyn.

"That's what I'm doing."

"Bosh! You're leaving us out!"

"Exactly."

"Lucky we thought of talking it over with him quietly, in a quiet place," remarked Kangaroo. "You see, Tom Merry, we don't play a footer match with a team like the Thebans every day, and we've simply got to persuade you to put in the best men. Are you going to put us in?"

"No!" roared Tom Merry.

"Then we shall have to bump you till you see reason," said Kangaroo thoughtfully. "I'm sorry; but I don't see that there's anything else to be done."

"Same here," said Clifton Dane, with a nod. "I daresay he'll see reason in time. What do you think yourself, Tom Merry?"

"I think you're a set of silly asses, and I'll jolly well give you thick ears all round, if you don't stop playing the giddy ox!"

"You are going to shove us in?"

"No, fathead!"

"Bump him!" said Kangaroo. "Sorry, Tommy, but it's the only way, as they say in the play. Go it! One, two, three—"

"Bump!"

"Yaroop!"

"Have you decided to put us in?"

"Yow! No! Oh! Yah! Help!"

Bump!

"Ow! Rescue—rescue!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Rescue!" yelled Tom Merry.

There was a rush of footsteps in the passage, and the door of the box-room was flung open.

CHAPTER 8.

Blake Thinks it is All Right.

QUITE A crowd of visitors rushed into the box-room. There were Blake, and Herries, and Digby, and D'Arcy, the chums of Study No. 6, and Reilly and Kerruish, also of the Fourth Form, and Bishop and Lorne. They rushed headlong into the box-room before Kangaroo & Co. had a chance of getting to the door. The four Shell fellows released Tom Merry, and turned upon the rescuers, with their fists up.

"Get out, you Fourth Form fags!" yelled Kangaroo.

"Rescue!" gasped Tom Merry, who had collapsed breathlessly upon the floor.

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy!"

"Go for 'em!" roared Jack Blake. "They've been trying to get into the team. I guessed as much when I saw them lurking at the end of the passage. It's a giddy plot!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Faith, and we'll wipe up the floor with 'em, Tom Merry, darling!" said Reilly.

"Give 'em socks!" roared Herries.

"Hurray!"

The eight Fourth-Formers closed in upon Kangaroo & Co., and as they were two to one, they soon had the Shell fellows upon the floor. There they proceeded to sit upon them. Tom Merry staggered to his feet, dusty and breathless.

"Bump them!" he exclaimed. "They've been bumping me!"

"Because they're left out of the eleven?" asked Digby.

"Yes."

"Then we'll jolly well bump them!" said Blake indignantly. "We don't allow our footer skipper to be coerced. Bump the bounders!"

"Leggo!" roared Kangaroo.

"Bump the boundahs, deah boys!"

Bump! Bump! Bump! Bump!

The four Shell fellows struggled desperately, and the din in the box-room was terrific. But the odds were on the side of the rescuers. Tom Merry laughed as he dusted himself down.

"That will do!" he remarked. "Now, Kangy, old man, don't be a silly ass any more! I can't play the whole giddy school, and I've got to leave you out. Can't be helped."

"Yow-ow-ow-ow!" was the only reply of the baffled conspirators.

"Come on, Tom Merry!" said Blake very affectionately, slipping his arm through Tom Merry's. "We'll see you safe home."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Thanks!" said Tom Merry.

"Not at all; it's our bizney to back up our skipper."

"Yaas, wathah, Tom Mewwy!"

"Faith, and we'll back ye up through thick and thin, Tom Merry, darling!"

Tom Merry grinned. The affectionate regard of the Fourth-Formers was a little new, and, without being unduly suspicious, he could not help setting it down to their keen desire to figure in the eleven to be played against the Thebans.

The rescuers marched him out of the box-room, leaving the plotters gasping there in the midst of clouds of dust.

Blake & Co. brought Tom Merry into the Fourth Form passage, but they did not allow him to go on to his own quarters.

"You're coming in to tea, of course," said Jack Blake, pausing outside the door of Study No. 6.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Thanks," he said, "I'm having tea with Monty and Manners."

"We'll give you a better tea, old man, and Manners and Lowther can come along as well," said Blake.

"Excuse me—"

"Can't take any excuses," said Blake. "Come in!"

"But I say—"

"This way!"

Tom Merry had not much choice in the matter. The Fourth-Formers half-led and half-pushed him into Study No. 6, and Blake closed the door. Tom Merry was placed in the armchair, and the Fourth-Formers gathered round him.

"Tea ain't quite ready yet," Blake remarked. "I'll tell you what, Tom Merry. While we've got a few minutes to spare, we might run over the team."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Have you decided anything about the eleven yet, Tom Merry?"

"Yes," said Tom Merry, with a rather longing glance towards the door. It occurred to him that he had been rescued out of the frying-pan into the fire, and that he was not much better off in Study No. 6 than he had been in the box-room with Kangaroo & Co. "Yes, I've practically decided on the team."

"I am willin' to play eithah forward or half, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy modestly. "In fact, I will keep goal, if you like."

"I'm afraid there's no room for you, Gussy."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"You see, under the special circumstances, I've strengthened the team by asking some of the seniors to play."

"That's a good idea," said Blake, "so long as you don't leave out the old guard. Of course, I don't see anything to object to in leaving out Kangaroo or Dane or Glyn or Thompson. Manners and Lowther might go, too."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Faith, and ye might make a clean sweep of the Shell fellows!" Reilly suggested. "I'm thinking that with some of the seniors and a good allowance of the Fourth we might make up a really illigant team, intirely."

"I don't see how you could do without me at back," said Kerruish thoughtfully. "To make a team really effective, there ought to be at least one Manx chap in it."

"Sorry I can't put you in, Kerruish—"

"Eh?"

"Sorry I can't put you in. Or you, either, Lorne. You're only a new chap, anyway."

"But—"

"Or you, either, Bishop. You're not up to this."

"Look here—" began Bishop.

"Or you, either, Reilly. I'm sorry, but I can't play more than eleven chaps."

"Faith, and what's the good of a footer team without an Irish chap in it, to give it a backbone?" demanded Reilly.

"Well, Kildare's going in, and he's real Irish," said Tom Merry, "so that difficulty's met."

"Sure, there ought to be two—"

"Sorry, but it's settled."

"Faith, and I think—"

"Look here—"

"Hold on!" said Blake. "I don't think the footer skipper ought to be bothered by a lot of useless candidates. You fellows had better clear."

"What!"

"Yaas, wathah! Cleah out, deah boys, and leave Tom Mewwy to us!"

"Rats!"

"Oh, buzz off!" said Blake. "We can't have you noisy kids in our study, you know. Run away and play!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Why, ye omadhauns—"

"Clear out! Buzz off! Absquatulate! Vamoose the ranch!" roared Herries.

The chums of Study No. 6 advanced in warlike array upon Reilly & Co. Reilly, Lorne, Bishop, and Kerruish retreated out of the study, with many uncomplimentary remarks concerning Blake & Co., not sparing even their features, their manners, and their personal appearance generally. Jack Blake closed the door after them, and stood with his back against it—perhaps because he saw Tom Merry rise from the armchair and make a movement towards the door.

"Now those fags are gone, we can talk the matter over quietly," Blake remarked.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You see, Tom Merry, this study is bound to be represented in the team. You are practically a new fellow at St. Jim's yourself; we were all here before you, and, as a matter of fact, I really am junior captain," said Blake. "Taking all these things into consideration—"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Shut up, Gussy, while your uncle's talking!" said Blake severely.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Taking all these things into consideration—"

"I considah—"

"Into consideration," roared Blake, "I don't see how you can possibly leave out Study No. 6."

"Wathah not!"

"The trouble is, I don't see how I can possibly put Study No. 6 in," grinned Tom Merry. "You see, there are other things to be taken into consideration; we want to win, for instance. A footer skipper is bound to think of that."

"Why, you ass—"

"You uttah duffah—"

"Look here!" roared Blake. "How are you making up the team?"

Tom Merry produced his crumpled paper.

"Figgins, T. Merry, Kildare, Langton, Blake—forwards."

"Good enough!" said Blake heartily.

"Yaas, but—"

"Manners, Lowther, Darrel, halves."

"H'm!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Monteith and Lefevre, backs."

"Ahem!"

"Fatty Wynn, goal."

"Hum!"

"I wegard the awwangement as pwepostewous. You have left me out."

"I'll make you a linesman, Gussy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wefuse to be made a linesman. I wefuse to be left out of the team. I wefuse—"

"Sorry!"

"Vewy well; I accept your apology. I will play centre-forward."

"No fear!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

Tom Merry crossed to the door. Blake politely stepped aside to make room for him. The information that he was to play winger in the great team had had a wonderfully mollifying effect upon Blake of the Fourth. His opinion of Tom Merry as a football skipper had gone up by leaps and bounds.

"Well, I dare say the team could be improved," said Blake. "But I must say that the selection is pretty good, and reflects credit on Tom Merry as skipper. I must say that, in fairness."

"You ass!" roared Herries. "Where do I come in?"

"And where do I come in?" demanded Digby.

"Yaas, wathah; and where do I come in?"

"Can't play everybody!" said Tom Merry. "Good-bye!"

"Stop him!" roared Herries. "We'll jolly well bump him till he finds out that this study ought to be played! Hold him!"

"Yaas, collah the silly ass!"

Tom Merry dragged open the door and fled. Jack Blake spread out his arms and stopped the rush of his excited chums in pursuit.

"Hold on," said Blake—"hold on, you know. You can't rag a footer skipper into putting you into the team; that's quite outside, you know!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Why, what did we bring him here for?" yelled Herries. "You said yourself that if he didn't play this study, we'd bump the boulder bald-headed."

Blake coughed.

"Ahem! That—that was only a figure of speech, you know. I think—"

"You're satisfied because you're in the team!" shrieked Digby. "You fathead! He's got to play the whole study!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But there are so many claimants!" said Blake pacifically. "Better take it calmly. You can all come and watch me play, you know, and cheer my goals."

The three juniors glared at him. The prospect of watching Blake play, and cheering his goals, did not seem to appeal to them somehow.

"You frightful ass!" stuttered D'Arcy.

"You fathead!"

"You chump!"

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Blake warmly. "I think Tom Merry is doing very well, under very difficult circumstances. He's picked out the best player in the study, and he can't reasonably be expected to do more than that."

"The—the best player! My hat!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Yes," said Blake firmly. "I think Tom Merry is showing up very well in this matter. I really consider—"

"Well, Tom Merry's gone now, and we can't bump him!" growled Digby. "We'd better bump Blake instead, and see if we can bump some of the giddy conceit out of him."

"Good!"

"Here, hold on!" roared Blake, as his three exasperated chums advanced upon him. "I say, you know—chuck it—don't play the—ow!—giddy ox—yow!—leggo!"

Bump!

"Ow, ow! Yow!"

Bump, bump!

"Yoop! Leggo! You frightful asses—groooo—oh!"

Bump!

"There!" gasped Herries. "Now we'll go and talk to Tom Merry!"

And leaving Blake in a dazed state upon the study carpet, Herries and Digby and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy rushed along to Tom Merry's study in the Shell passage. But the door was locked, and they banged on it in vain. There was a sound of cheerful voices and clinking teacups within; but no reply came to the sulphurous remarks they made through the keyhole, and they banged on the door in vain, and retired in great disgust.

CHAPTER 9.

In Great Demand.

TOM MERRY came quietly down the Shell passage about an hour later, and descended the stairs almost on tiptoe, as if he were bound upon some exceedingly secret expedition. As a matter of fact, he was only going over to the New House; but he was afraid of being kidnapped at every step by eager seekers of football fame. Nearly everybody in the School House had made up his mind that, whomever else was left out, he personally ought to be played against the Thebans; and some of them were planning really desperate measures for bringing Tom Merry to reason. Tom Merry slipped out of the School House into the dusky quadrangle; but he was sighted in the quad., and there was a yell from D'Arcy minor of the Third, and a crowd of fags, who were evidently looking for the junior skipper.

"Here he is!"

"Collar him!"

Wally D'Arcy, and Jameson, and Curly Gibson, and Joe Frayne, and a swarm of fags, came dashing up, and Tom Merry fairly took to his heels.

It was undignified for the head of the Shell, and the junior captain of St. Jim's, to run from the fags; but there was no help for it. Tom Merry dashed across the quad. at top speed, with Wally & Co. whooping on his track.

The captain of the Shell dashed breathlessly into the New House, and the fags of the Third chased him to the very doorway.

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn met Tom Merry as he came panting in. They brandished their fists at the fags, and Wally & Co. retreated, to wait for Tom Merry in the quadrangle.

Figgins & Co. were very nice to Tom Merry. At any other time they might have bumped a School House fellow who came into their House, and especially Tom Merry, who was the great chief and leader of the School House juniors in the endless House raids. But just now Tom Merry was a sacred person; it was in his power to select or reject candidates for the eleven—that was to play the Thebans. Hence the great politeness with which Figgins & Co. received him.

"Jolly glad to see you, old man!" said Figgins hospitably. "Come up to the study and have tea."

"We've got some new steak-and-kidney pies!" said Fatty Wynn temptingly.

"And a new jar of jam," said Kerr.

"Better came to my study," said Redfern, of the Fourth.

"We're making toffee."

"First-rate toffee!" said Lawrence. "Owen has nearly finished it. It's ripping!"

Tom Merry grinned.

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"I've come over to see Monteith," he said.

"Better see us," said Redfern. "We want to talk over that Theban match with you. You will want some New House chaps in the eleven, you see; it will be necessary to have a really good team to fight the Thebans."

"Ahem!"

"Oh, you cheese it, Reddy!" said Figgins. "You're only a new boy, anyway!"

"New boy or not, Tom Merry wants the best possible material in the team," said Redfern.

"He's coming to our study for that!"

"Oh, don't be funny, Figgy!"

"Look here, you ass—"

"Look here, you fathead—"

"I tell you—"

"And I tell you—"

Tom Merry slipped past the New House juniors while they were still arguing, and made his way into the Sixth-Form passage. He knocked at Monteith's door, and opened it. Monteith, the Head prefect of the New House, was there. He looked inquiringly at Tom Merry.

"Hallo!" he said. "What's this I hear about your being challenged by the Thebans? All spoof, I suppose?"

"No fear!" said Tom Merry. "Real bizney!"

"Oh, stuff!"

"Look at this letter!" said Tom Merry, holding out the famous letter from the secretary of the Thebans.

Monteith read the letter, and whistled.

"Well, that looks like the real thing!" he admitted. "Blessed if I can understand it. If they want to play a St. Jim's team, why the dickens don't they play the First Eleven?"

"I dare say they know what they're about, you know. They may be wanting a really good match," said Tom Merry. The prefect grinned.

"Kildare's going to play for us," said Tom Merry. "I've come over to ask you if you'd care to go in the team, Monteith?"

Monteith looked thoughtful.

"Well, that's sensible of you, anyway," he said. "You want me to captain the eleven?"

"Ahem!"

"I don't mind; of course, it will be rot playing any juniors in it, but I would leave you in, Merry, as you had the challenge," said Monteith generously. "I should fill up the rest of the places with seniors. It's all right; I'll take it on!"

"Ahem!"

"It's settled," said Monteith.

"Ahem! It's not quite settled," said Tom Merry.

"What do you mean?"

"I'm not looking for a skipper," Tom Merry explained. "If I wanted that, I should ask my own captain. I'm going to captain the team myself."

"What rot!"

"Well, that's how it is," said Tom Merry. "Rot or not, I'm skipping the eleven. But if you'd like a chance of playing the Thebans, I'd like to put you in as back."

"Under your lead?" sneered Monteith.

"Yes."

"You cheeky young ass!"

"Well, Kildare's going to play under my lead," said Tom Merry warmly. "I don't see that you need object to playing too. What's good enough for Kildare is good enough for a New House prefect."

"Oh, buzz off," said Monteith.

"You won't play?"

"I'll skipper you, if you like."

"No, thanks!"

Tom Merry turned to the door. Monteith watched him undecidedly, and as his hand was on the door, he spoke again.

"You say Kildare has agreed to play under you, Merry?"

"Yes."

"What place do you want to give me?"

"Right back!"

"All serene, I'll play."

"Good!" said Tom Merry. "We shall be jolly glad to have you, Monteith. Now you're in the team, we've got practically all the first-class players in the school. Thanks very much."

Monteith was not above a little compliment, and he smiled quite genially.

"All right, Merry, you can depend on me."

"Thanks, Monteith, I'll put your name down."

And Tom Merry quitted the study.

At the end of the passage, Figgins & Co., and Redfern & Co., and four or five other fellows were waiting for him. They surrounded him, and gently but firmly barred his further progress. Tom Merry paused in dismay. He felt that he was in for it again.

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CHAPTER 10.

Wet!

"Might we inquire how you're making up the team?" inquired Redfern politely.

"Yes, if you like," said Tom Merry, with a yawn.

"How many New House chaps?" asked Figgins.

"Three."

"Oh, that's us, I suppose!"

"Us, you mean," said Redfern. "We're three, self, Lawrence, and Owen."

"What price me?" demanded Pratt of the Fourth.

"And me!" said Dibbs.

"And me?" demanded Thompson of the Shell.

"I can't play the whole giddy school," said Tom Merry.

"Of course he can't," said Redfern indignantly. "I'm surprised at you fellows. When he comes over here specially to tell us he's playing us, I really think you bounders might give him a little peace."

"But I'm not playing you!" said Tom Merry.

"Eh?"

"I'm not playing you, Reddy."

"Well, you ass—"

"Of course, he couldn't leave us out," said Kerr.

"I'm not playing you, Kerr—"

"Why, you silly fathead—"

"Whom are you playing, then, you ass?" demanded Figgins warmly. "I suppose your selection is about the rottenest that any silly ass could possibly make."

"Most likely," said Fatty Wynn.

Tom Merry grinned.

"Well, I'm playing Figgins and Wynn—"

"Oh!"

"Hum!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Redfern. "You're right, Figgy; he's made about the rottenest selection any silly ass could possibly make."

"H'm! I take that back!" said Figgins. "What about Kerr, though? You know what a ripping forward Kerr is, and he can play half like—like an angel."

"I've never seen an angel play half," said Tom Merry. "I know Kerr is ripping, but as I said before, I can't play the whole school. I'm looking for a footer eleven, not an army."

"It's all right," said Kerr generously.

"So long as he plays you Figgy, and Fatty, our study will be well represented. I'm willing to stand down. I'll come and yell 'goal!'"

"Well, you're a reasonable chap, anyhow," said Tom Merry, in relief. "I wish the others were as reasonable as you are, Kerr. I'm being chased and kidnapped up hill and down dale by fellows who think they can select a team better than I can."

"Who's the third New House chap?" demanded Redfern belligerently.

"Monteith of the Sixth!"

"Well, he's all right. But where do we come in?"

"You don't come in at all!"

"If you're being funny, Tom Merry—"

"I'm not being funny," said Tom Merry in a tired voice.

"I'm doing the best I can. Do give me a rest. I can't play forty or fifty chaps."

"I don't want you to. Play me, and—"

"Rats!"

"Figgy is a reasonable chap—he'd be willing to make room for a better man—"

"So I would, if I could be introduced to the better man," said Figgins. "I haven't seen anything of him so far."

"Now, don't be an ass, Figgy—"

"Good-night," said Tom Merry, starting for the door.

"Hold on!" shouted a dozen fellows. "Wait a bit! Look here—"

Tom Merry made a rush for the doorway. Nine or ten fellows made a rush for Tom Merry. Figgins & Co. loyally rushed to the rescue, and held back the eager candidates, while the captain of the junior eleven escaped into the quadrangle.

Tom Merry ran down the steps of the New House, and disappeared into the darkness of the quad. He left Figgins & Co. and Redfern & Co., and the rest, engaged in a decidedly heated argument.

Tom Merry chuckled as he crossed the quad. He had forgotten for the moment about the watchful fags. A rush of feet warned him of his danger, and he broke into a run; but before he could reach the School House, Wally & Co., of the Third, were upon him.

"COLLAR him!"
"Got him!"
"Hold him!"

"Don't let him get away!"

Tom Merry struggled desperately in the grasp of the ink-fingered heroes of the Third. There were ten or twelve of the Third-Formers, and they meant business. They dragged the Shell fellow away, and backed him up against one of the elms, and held him fast there. It was useless to resist; they were too many for him.

"Now, then," said Wally. "I've got something to say to you."

"Pile in!" said Tom Merry. "If you want my friendly advice, I should suggest your washing your neck, and putting on a clean collar."

Some of the fags chuckled, and Wally frowned.

"I don't want any of your cheek," he said. "The fact is, I'm rather anxious about this match with the Thebans. I'm afraid that if it's left in your hands, you'll muck it up."

"Hear, hear!" said Joe Frayne.

"Pretty certain, I should say," remarked Curly Gibson. "Blessed if I know why they sent him the challenge. Kildare was the proper person to get it—or else us!"

"What I'm thinking of is this," said Wally. "On a tremendous occasion of this sort, the whole school ought to be represented in the eleven. It's not a time for ordinary methods; good players ought to be picked out wherever you can find them."

"That's what I'm doing," said Tom Merry.

"What's the list so far?"

"Figgins, Tom Merry, Kildare, Langton, Blake, Manners, Darrel, Lowther, Monteith, Lefevre, Fatty Wynn!" said Tom Merry wearily.

"Well, that's not a bad team," said Wally grudgingly. "I think you stick to your own study a bit too much, though. You can easily leave out Manners or Lowther, and they won't be missed. I don't approve of favourites myself. I'm very friendly with Curly, here, for instance, but if I were making up a footer team, I should leave him out."

"Oh, would you, you silly ass!" roared Curly Gibson.

"Yes, or Jameson, either—"

"Why, you cheeky young fathead!" howled Jameson.

"I don't say that you ought to shove in a crowd of the Third,"

continued Wally, addressing Tom Merry, and ignoring his followers' remarks. "I think that if you put in one Third Form chap, it will be all right."

"Go hon!"

"I'm willing to take any place you like—I prefer centre-forward, but I'd play on the wing; or keep goal if you like," said Wally generously.

"You're too good," said Tom Merry. "I'm not going to take advantage of your goodness, though. I'm not playing any fags."

"I expected some rot of that sort," said Wally patiently. "If you're playing my major, you can play me; I can make rings round Gussy—"

"But I'm not playing your major," grinned Tom Merry. "My only Aunt Jane! You don't mean to say that you've got the cheek to leave my major out of the team!" exclaimed D'Arcy minor.

"Yes; I've got the cheek, and I've done it!"

"Well, I'll overlook that, if you put me in," said Wally magnanimously.

"Can't be did!"

"You must play at least one of the Third, you know."

"Can't be did!"

"Look here," roared Wally, "are you going to listen to reason? I'm being very patient with you."

"We're all being very patient," growled Jameson. "If you think the Third are going to be left out of a match like this, Tom Merry, you're mistaken."

"Yes, rather!"

"Ear, ear!" said Frayne.

"Now, then, what's the verdict?" asked D'Arcy minor.

"Can't be did."

"Do you mean that?"

"Yes," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Bring him along!" said Wally. "When we've ducked him in the fountain, he may change his mind." Yank him along!

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SEE PAGE III. COVER.

"Hold on!" roared Tom Merry, in alarm, as the crowd of fags dragged him bodily along in the dusk. "Hold on! Chuck it! Don't you dare—"

"Yank the silly ass along!"

"Horrah!"

"Stop it! I'll—I'll—"

"Will you play one of the Third?"

"No!" roared Tom Merry.

"Then in you go!"

"Duck him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The swarm of fags had reached the fountain with their helpless prisoner. Tom Merry was raised in innumerable hands, struggling wildly.

Splash!

"Gerooooooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Groo—poof—poof—groooh!"

Tom Merry's head came out of the marble basin of the fountain, and he gasped and snorted. He rolled out of the fountain, bringing a flood of water with him, and the fags were splashed right and left.

"Now, then," howled Wally, "are you going to play one of the Third?"

"Groo! No—ow! No!"

"Chuck him in again!"

Tom Merry seized Wally and whirled him in the air, and tossed him into the fountain. There was a terrific splash of water, and a great wave came over the verge of the marble basin, and fairly flooded the crowd of fags. They backed away, gasping; and Tom Merry, seizing his opportunity, broke through them and fled towards the School House.

Wally rolled dripping from the fountain.

"Groo! My only Aunt Jane! Yowp! After him! Collar him! Don't let him get away!" he spluttered.

The fags dashed in wild pursuit.

Tom Merry ran at top speed for the open lighted door of the School House, squelching out water at every step.

He was a good runner, and he kept his lead, and dashed up the steps of the School House, and into the hall, drenched and dripping. There was a yell of surprise from the fellows who saw him come in.

"Bal Jove!"

"Is it raining?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gerooooooooh!" gasped Tom Merry.

"My hat! You look wet!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "Have you been taking a bath with your clothes on, or walking into the river by mistake?"

"Bal Jove! Your clothes will be ruined, Tom Merry!"

"Ow!" gasped Tom Merry. "It's those blessed fags! They've ducked me in the fountain, because I won't play fags against the Thebans."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't see anything to laugh at!" roared Tom Merry indignantly. "I'm wet!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly, cackling asses—"

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

Tom Merry snorted, and tramped away upstairs to change his clothes. He left a trail of water behind him as he went. He rubbed himself down in the Shell dormitory, and put on dry clothes. As he came out of the dormitory, he caught sight of Kangaroo, Clifton Dane, and Bernard Glyn in the passage. They were looking for him.

"Here he is!"

Tom Merry fled desperately downstairs, and burst into the common-room with Kangaroo & Co. at his heels. He jerked the poker out of the grate, and brandished it.

"Buzz off!" he roared.

"About that eleven, Tommy—"

Tom Merry lunged out with the poker, and the Cornetalk jumped away.

"Hold on!" he gasped. "Are you potty? I—"

"Buzz off! I'm going to carry this poker around after

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this!" gasped Tom Merry. "Every fellow who speaks to me about a place in the team will get it in the neck. I mean business. Buzz off!"

And Tom Merry sat down with the poker across his knees. And for a short space he had a rest; and the eager candidates for football honours ceased to press their claims.

CHAPTER 11.

Good for Redfern!

THE next morning, Tom Merry stopped Kildare as he came out of the dining-room after breakfast. The captain of St. Jim's looked down at the junior, with a smile. It was a new sensation for the captain of St. Jim's to regard a Shell fellow as his football skipper.

"I finished fixing up the team last night, Kildare," said Tom Merry. "But it's rather important for us to get some practice together, before we meet the Thebans, don't you think so?"

Kildare nodded.

"But we meet the Thebans this afternoon?" he remarked.

"Yes. As head prefect, you might speak to the Head," suggested Tom Merry, "an hour off from lessons this morning, for the members of the team, would give us a chance to get a little practice. Don't you think so?"

"Good!" said Kildare. "I'll put it to the Head. It's a very special occasion, and I don't see why we shouldn't get it. We want twenty-two, though, if we're to have a really effective practice."

"That would be better. We ought to play a senior eleven, and see how we shape."

"Right—ho!"

And after prayers Kildare paid the Head a visit. Dr. Holmes was considerably surprised when he heard what the captain of St. Jim's had to say.

"Extraordinary!" said the Head. "So you are playing under the captaincy of Merry of the Shell, Kildare?"

Kildare coloured a little.

"Yes, sir. It's a bit unusual, of course; but I wanted to back up the school. It would be a big thing for St. Jim's if we could beat the Thebans, or even draw with them. I can't understand how they came to challenge a junior team; of course, the juniors wouldn't have the slightest look-in with them. Tom Merry is acting very sensibly in asking seniors to play for him. He has put in five seniors—four of the Sixth and one of the Fifth—and the team is a really good one. Of course, one can't expect him to give up the captaincy; though that would really be better."

The Head smiled.

"You may certainly have leave this morning, as long as you think fit, for practice, Kildare," he said. "I trust to your judgment entirely."

"Thank you, sir," said Kildare.

And during the morning, while the other fellows were at lessons, Tom Merry & Co. were hard at practice on the football field. They did not over-do it, as they did not wish to be stale for the afternoon, however.

The mixed eleven, seniors and juniors, pulled together very well; and they easily got the better of an eleven picked out of the Fifth and Sixth to oppose them. Fatty Wynn, in goal, was in his very best form. The scratch eleven tried again and again to beat him, but in vain. Every ball that went into the goal found the Welsh junior ready for it; a foot or a fist or a head always met the leather and sent it hurtling out again.

When the practice was over, Kildare clapped Fatty Wynn on the shoulder.

"That was ripping, Wynn," he said. "Keep that up, and even the Thebans won't find it easy to score this afternoon."

Fatty Wynn grinned modestly.

"Hear, hear!" said Monty Lowther. "And if they don't score at all, Fatty, we'll stand you a first-class feed when we come home—steak-and-kidney, pies and all."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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The swarm of fags had reached the fountain with their helpless prisoner. Tom Merry was raised in innumerable hands, struggling wildly. Splash! "Gro-o-o-oh!" Tom Merry's head came out of the marble basin, and he gasped and snorted. "Now will you put one of us in the team?" demanded Wally D'Arcy. (See Chapter 10.)

Tom Merry was very well satisfied with the result of the practice. He certainly had the best footballers in the school on his team, senior and junior. There were two other fellows he would have liked—Kangaroo and Redfern. But he could not play thirteen against the Theban eleven.

After morning lessons, when the fellows came out of the Form-rooms, however, Kangaroo was on the warpath once more. He slipped his arm into Manners's, in the most friendly way, and walked with him down the passage. Manners looked at him suspiciously.

"I've been thinking," Kangaroo remarked.

"About getting into the eleven?" grinned Manners. You're wasting your mental powers on that subject, Kangy. You can come and watch."

"Not only about that," said Kangaroo. "But what about keeping records of the match?"

"Eh?" said Manners.

"If I were a ripping photographer like you, I should want to take photographs of the match, and the players," said the Cornstalk junior solemnly. "I should go to Abbotsford with a camera, instead of in footer-boots; and I should take photographs."

Manners started. In the keen interest of the Theban match, he had forgotten even his ruling passion. Manners was a very excellent amateur photographer, and certainly this was an opportunity that would never recur.

"By Jove!" said Manners. "There's something in that! Not much good playing the Thebans, if we don't keep some pictures of the game. It looks like being a fine day, too. I could take two or three rolls of films with me, and have a splendid set of pictures."

Kangaroo nodded.

"Just what I was thinking," he said. "Of course, if you take photographs, you'll have to stand out of the match. But I should be willing to play half in your place."

Manners chuckled.

"I daresay you would!"

"Well, you know, if you get a good set of pictures, it'd be better than just playing half, isn't it?" urged Kangaroo.

"Quite right! We can have some of them enlarged, and stuck up round the studies," said Manners enthusiastically. "That would be ripping."

"Splendid!" said Kangaroo, with equal enthusiasm.

"I'm jolly glad you mentioned this, Kangy."

"So am I," said Kangaroo sincerely. "It came into my head in class this morning, when I was thinking about—about photographs."

Manners hurried away in search of Tom Merry. He found him talking to Redfern in the quadrangle. He tapped the captain of the great eleven on the shoulder.

"Tommy, old man," said Manners anxiously. "If I

stood out of the eleven, do you think you could fill my place?"

Redfern's eyes gleamed.

"I suppose so," said Tom Merry. "Kangaroo or Redfern would do all right, or Reilly, for that matter. But surely you don't want to stand out?"

"I don't want to," said Manners; "but there's the camera, you know."

"What the dickens—"

"If I took my camera, I could take a set of photographs of the match, and all the players, and keep them as records of our match with the giddy Thebans," Manners explained.

"They would be worth having—what?"

"By Jove! yes," said Tom Merry. "I'd like some pictures like that to hang up in the study. If you're willing to take photographs instead of playing, it would be ripping to keep a record like that of the game."

"Well, I'm willing," said Manners heroically. "I know it's a lot to give up, but for the sake of having some really good souvenirs of a match like this, I think I ought to do it. Put somebody else in as half."

"Put me in!" said Redfern promptly. "The New House isn't too well represented in the team, you know; only three against eight School House, so far."

"Well, that's so," said Tom Merry. "You and Kangaroo are much of a muchness; but I think he expects—"

"Blessed are those who don't expect!" grinned Redfern. "Come now, it's only cricket to give the New House a look-in."

"Well, yes—"

"I'll play up like thunder," said Redfern. "Besides, you know I can play half first rate. And I'm in top form today! Put me in, there's a good kid."

Tom Merry took the crumpled paper out of his pocket.

"All serene," he said. "I suppose it's only fair to give the New House a show."

"Got my name down?"

"Yes; here it is!"

"Hurrah!"

And in the exuberance of his feelings, Redfern hugged Tom Merry enthusiastically.

Meanwhile, Manners went to his study to prepare his camera, and look out his films. He intended to take a good allowance of films, and fill them all if he could. Manners was an economical fellow, and films cost three shillings a dozen; but on an occasion like this, Manners felt that it was time to be liberal. Certainly he was never likely to have another opportunity of photographing St. Jim's juniors in play with a team like the Thebans.

Kangaroo came into the study while Manners was packing up his camera and films. The Cornstalk was looking rather anxious.

"Have you decided?" he asked.

"Yes," said Manners. "I thought I had another roll of films here. I wonder where they've got to."

"You've spoken to Tom Merry?"

"Yes. Have you seen a roll of films about?"

"Is he leaving you out?"

"Yes. Oh, here they are! Just like that ass Lowther to shove them on the mantelpiece."

"Then I'm going in!" exclaimed Kangaroo.

"Eh?"

"I suppose you mentioned my name for your place?"

"My hat!" said Manners. "I forgot all about you. I was thinking of the photographs, you see. That's four rolls of films I've got; that will make forty-eight pictures; I should think that would be enough."

"Then I'd better cut off and see Tom Merry myself," growled Kangaroo, moving towards the door.

"No good," said Manners. "I forgot to tell you, Redfern's in."

Kangaroo stood petrified.

"Redfern!" he gasped, glaring at Manners as if he would eat him.

Manners nodded.

"Yes. Redfern's got my place in the team. It was only fair to give the New House a show, you know; this only makes them four against seven School House. Do you think forty-eight pictures will be enough, Kangy?"

"Forty-eight pink rats!" yelled Kangaroo. "Blow your pictures! Blow your silly films! Blow your rotten photographs!"

"Eh?"

"Do you think I care twopence about your silly camera-dodging?" yelled the exasperated Cornstalk. "Redfern! My hat! What's the good of squeezing you out of the eleven, if Redfern squeezes in instead of me! Blow!"

"I'll give you some of the photographs—"

"Bust the photographs!"

"I say, Kangy—"

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

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And Kangaroo rushed away in a towering rage, to look for Tom Merry. He found Tom Merry; but he found also that the vacant place had been irrevocably bestowed upon Redfern of the Fourth. Tom Merry was sorry, but it could not be helped. He kindly offered to take Kangaroo over to Abbotsford as a reserve. Kangaroo received the offer with a snort. And he snorted still more emphatically when Redfern thanked him politely for having been the means of getting him into the eleven!

CHAPTER 12.

No Luck.

"LOWTHER, old man!"

Monty Lowther smiled softly.

The gentle and affectionate cadence in Kangaroo's voice warned him that an attack was coming on his place in the eleven.

The St. Jim's fellows had had their dinner, and the eleven were making preparations for the journey to Abbotsford. Nearly everybody else at St. Jim's was making preparations for a similar journey. Such a match was not often to be seen; and as it was a half-holiday, St. Jim's was transporting itself bodily to the scene of the match. Some of the fags, who had to walk, had already started, and some fellows were getting their bicycles out to ride. Monty Lowther was in the Shell dormitory, getting his best footer boots out, when Kangaroo came in, and sat on a bed, and addressed him in affectionate tones.

"Lowther, old man, I've been thinking—"

"How to get a place in the team?" inquired Monty Lowther blandly. "My dear chap, you could think till you were black in the face, without being able to do it."

Kangaroo coughed.

"Not exactly that," he said. "You see, I—I've been thinking about that chap who was bifed on the napper the other day, in Rylcombe Wood."

"What about him?"

"You fellows took charge of him, you know, like good Samaritans," said Kangaroo. "The latest news from Dr. Short was that he was all right, but wasn't able to speak yet."

"Well?"

"Well, you know, don't you feel a bit anxious about him?"

"No," said Lowther; "if he's getting on all right, what is there to be anxious about?"

"Well, he—he might have a relapse."

"So he might," said Lowther; "you might go and inquire after him, while we're gone to play the Thebans."

Kangaroo breathed hard through his nose.

"You fellows took charge of him, you know," he said. "It's very mysterious, who he is, isn't it? Might turn out to be somebody important. It's a half-holiday to-day, you know; and it occurred to me that one of you chaps—if you happened to think of it—might like to go and sit with the invalid for a bit."

"Never thought of it," said Lowther.

"It would be a jolly good deed, wouldn't it?" said Kangaroo. "Quite in keeping with the part of a good Samaritan, you know."

"So it would!" agreed Lowther blandly. "It never occurred to me, but now you mention it, I think it is a jolly good idea."

Kangaroo looked eager.

"It would look well, too," he said.

"Yes, it would, quite."

"It would show that a fellow didn't think more of playing a game of footer than of the—the claims of moral duty, and—that sort of thing."

"Exactly."

"I'm glad you look at it like this, Lowther."

"Not at all. Now you mention it, I wonder I never thought of it," said Monty Lowther.

"Then you're going?" asked Kangaroo.

"Oh, no!"

"What!"

"I can't!" explained Lowther. "I shall be at Abbotsford. But you can go."

"I!" roared Kangaroo.

Monty Lowther nodded.

"Yes, you, Kangy. You're unoccupied this afternoon, you know, and you could do it as well as I could. It would look well, you know. Show that a chap didn't think more of watching a footer match than of the claims of the—the—moral duties. And you've really got a nice, pleasant bedside manner, you know, when you try."

Kangaroo glared.

"You silly ass!" he roared.

Lowther looked astonished.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "Don't you think it's a good idea?"

"Br-r-r-r!"

And Kangaroo went out of the dormitory and closed the door with a terrific bang. And Monty Lowther chuckled softly.

Kangaroo looked in at Study No. 6 as he went down. The voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy could be heard, addressing Blake.

"I wegard it as wathah wotten, Blake. I twust you do not suppose I am thinkin' of myself in this mattah. But I did want the eleven to win."

Blake chuckled.

"I was goin' to do my best for St. Jim's," D'Arcy remarked.

"You're doing that now," said Blake.

"Weally, Blake, what do you mean? I'm out of the team?"

"Yes, that's what I mean."

"You uttah ass—"

Kangaroo stepped in. Jack Blake was carefully packing his football things into a bag, to take over to Abbotsford.

"You're going?" asked Kangaroo.

"Yes, rather!"

"I've been thinking, Blake, that as Herries and Dig and D'Arcy are left out, perhaps you'd rather be left out, too," suggested Kangaroo. "You ought to stick to the study, you know."

"You've been thinking that?" asked Blake.

"Yes."

"Well, there's something wrong with your thinking apparatus, then," said Blake. "I should recommend having it seen to."

"Yaas, wathah! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Br-r-r-r!" said Kangaroo.

And he departed.

He met Lefevre, of the Fifth, in the lower passage. Lefevre was looking in a particularly good humour. He had a bag in his hand.

"Ready to start?" asked Kangaroo.

The Fifth-Former nodded.

"Yes," he said. "Bit off-side for a senior to be playing under a junior skipper. That's what I say. But I'm going to do it."

"Just what I was thinking," said Kangaroo eagerly. "Don't you think it's rather infra dig. for a member of the Fifth Form—captain of the Form, too?"

"It certainly is," agreed Lefevre.

"It means a loss of personal dignity, playing in a junior team, doesn't it?" said the Cornstalk. "I'm not surprised that you think so, Lefevre. I'll tell you what: if you like to chuck it up, I'll take your place."

Lefevre stared at him.

"You cheeky young ass!" he said. "If you say I'm losing personal dignity, I'll give you a thick ear for your cheek, you young rascal!"

"Ahem! I didn't mean exactly that," said Kangaroo pacifically. "I—I meant that it's hardly up to you, you know. I should be quite pleased to take it off your hands."

"You'll take a dot in the eye off my hands, if you don't buzz off," growled the Fifth-Former. "That's what I say."

"Look here, Lefevre, old man—"

"Oh, get out!"

Kangaroo got out. He strolled into the quadrangle, and sighted Fatty Wynn. Fatty Wynn was outside the school shop, casting longing eyes into the interior. But the Falstaff of the New House was barred from entering. Figgins and Kerr had threatened him with dire threats of what would happen if he ventured to stuff himself with pastry just before the Thebans' match; and as an additional precaution, they had taken all his money away and locked it up in the study, and cautioned Dame Taggles not to give him any credit.

Kangaroo tapped Fatty Wynn on the shoulder. The fat Fourth-Former gave him a doleful look.

"Hungry?" asked Kangaroo.

"Yes, rather! I'm going to have some sandwiches in the train," said Fatty Wynn lugubriously. "What are the good of a few sandwiches to me? I've pointed out to Figgins that you can't play a good game unless you lay a solid foundation first. He says I had a solid dinner; but I hadn't you know. Only the usual school dinner, with some sausages and a pie and a steak-and-kidney pudding extra, and the tarts and cake. I—"

"You must be famished," said Kangaroo sympathetically.

"Well, not exactly famished," said Fatty Wynn judiciously. "but peckish, you know. The best thing I could do would be to lay a solid foundation before the match. But Figgins is an obstinate ass, you know. Kerr's an obstinate ass, too."

"And you're so delicate, too," said Kangaroo. "You

want feeding up. I'll tell you what we'll do, Fatty. If you like, I'll take your place in goal this afternoon—"

"Eh?" said Fatty Wynn.

"I'll take your place in goal, and you can stay here and have a jolly good feed. I've had a tip from home, and I should like to stand you a jolly good feed, Fatty. I—I've been thinking of it for some time. Steak-and-kidney pies—"

"Look here, Kangaroo—"

"And ham patties, and currant buns—"

"Look here—"

"Jellies, and preserved fruits, and ginger-beer—"

"Oh!" murmured Fatty Wynn dreamily. "Don't!"

"And cake—seed and currant cake—and buns, and dough-nuts—"

"I—I must play, you know."

"And jam—whole jars of jam—"

"My hat! I—"

"And meringues, and cream-puffs—"

"Hallo!" exclaimed the voice of Figgins. "I've been looking for you, Fatty. I thought I should find you round the tuckshop. Come on! It's time to pack up your things."

And Figgins dragged Fatty Wynn away. Kangaroo glared after them. For once he had been near to success, and his chance was gone! Perhaps Figgins suspected something; at all events, he kept his grip upon Fatty Wynn, and marched him into the house, and did not leave his side again till they were starting for Abbotsford.

CHAPTER 13. A Mistake Somewhere.

A BRAKE carried Tom Merry's eleven to the railway-station in Rylocombe, and it carried as many other fellows as could crowd into it. It was followed by fellows on bicycles, and preceded by fellows on foot who meant to go by the same train. As the brake drove into the old High Street of Rylocombe, Tom Merry caught sight of the stout figure of little Dr. Short, and he jumped down from the brake to speak to him.

"How is the patient, doctor?" he asked.

"Very well," said the medico, with a nod. "He has recovered sufficiently to speak this morning, fortunately, and I have been able to send for a friend of his, who was in Abbotsford, and who will be with him soon. He is going on very well, but he has had a narrow escape of concussion of the brain. But I think he will be almost himself again in a few days now. I have told him about what you and your friends have done for him, and he is anxious to see you."

"Good! I'll come in and see him with pleasure, sir, after I come back," said Tom Merry. "We're just off to a football match, doctor. Playing the Thebans," he added.

"Indeed!"

"Yes. Good-bye, sir!"

And Tom Merry raised his cap and ran after the brake, which had nearly reached the railway-station. Kangaroo jumped down. He was in the brake with the footballers.

"How's the giddy invalid?" he asked.

"Going on well," said Tom Merry cheerily.

"Good! Can he talk yet?"

"Dr. Short says yes."

"Then he'd like one of you chaps to go and sit with him," said Kangaroo hopefully. "It's up to you, Lowther."

Monty Lowther laughed.

"Or Blake."

"Rats!" said Blake cheerfully.

"Bai Jove, it's not a bad ideal!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "You can go and sit with the poor chap, Blake, dear boy, and I will take your place in the team. I'm wathah a dab at playin' outside-left, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why, you ass," said Kangaroo warmly, "if Blake stands out, I take his place, of course!"

"Weally, Kangaroo—"

"Look here, D'Arcy—"

"I wegard you—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake. "You needn't quarrel over the lion's skin before you've caught the lion, you know. I'm not standing out."

"Come on!" called out Tom Merry from the station.

"Right-ho!"

The footballers and their numerous followers were crowded upon the platform. The local train to Wayland Junction was crammed, and some fellows were left behind to wait for the next train. At Wayland Junction the team had to change into the train for Abbotsford, which was at a good distance; and at the junction they found many St. Jim's fellows who had walked through the wood to take the train.

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there. The train from Wayland to Abbotsford was simply alive with St. Jim's fellows, all of them in the greatest of spirits.

"No chance of a giddy accident on this line," growled Kangaroo, as the train ran out of Wayland Junction.

"Why, you ass, do you want an accident?" demanded Blake.

"Of course I do. I'm a reserve."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you got a leg broken, or Lowther got his brains knocked out—though that would be rather difficult in the biggest railway accident—"

"Why, you silly ass—" said Monty Lowther.

"Or if Monteith or Figgins would only get run over," said Kangaroo, with a sigh. "I don't mind which one, so long as one gets crooked."

"No blessed fear!" chuckled Blake. "We're not getting crooked on the eve of a match like this! No fear!"

"Not at any price!" said Redfern, with a grin. "But you shall look on, and see us play, Kangy. It was jolly thoughtful of you to suggest to Manners to take photographs instead of goals. Very thoughtful indeed!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, gr-r-r!" growled Kangaroo.

"Abbotsford!" shouted Wally from the last carriage, as the train stopped; and D'Arcy minor and a crowd of Third-Form lads were the earliest out of the train.

Abbotsford platform was alive with St. Jim's caps in a few seconds.

Tom Merry looked round for the Thebans, thinking that perhaps Vivian or Stacey or some of the amateur team would be there to meet the St. Jim's eleven.

But there was no sign of them.

"Nobody here to meet us!" said Kildare. "Well, it's only a few steps to the ground."

Abbotsford football-ground, belonging to the Abbotsford Ramblers, was close by the station. The St. Jim's team walked out, with their bags in their hands. A regular army of juniors and seniors followed them. The ground was well enough known to the St. Jim's seniors, who had played the Ramblers there before.

The gates were open, and St. Jim's juniors, and fellows from Abbotsford School, and townspeople of Abbotsford, were going in. Everybody wanted to see the Thebans play, who had an opportunity; and there was no charge for admission, which probably increased the local enthusiasm.

Tom Merry's heart beat as he walked into the field with his team. In spite of the undoubted fact that he had been challenged by the Thebans, and that he had the Theban secretary's letter in his coat-pocket, it seemed almost too good to be true. Here was he, a St. Jim's junior—a Shell fellow—actually leading in a team to play the Thebans—the most famous of amateur elevens. And that tall, handsome fellow with a sunburnt face and flaxen hair was Vivian, the Theban captain—Tom Merry knew him at once from photographs he had seen in the papers; and the fellows who had seen him play on Monday knew him from recent observation.

Vivian came to meet them, with a puzzled expression upon his handsome face.

He was evidently surprised.

The bags the St. Jim's fellows carried showed that they had come to play footer; and the Theban captain ought to have been expecting them, but apparently he wasn't.

Kildare and Darrel exchanged quick glances. The thought that there had been a mistake flashed into their minds at once, as they looked at the Theban captain. In fact, the thought had been in their minds on and off from the beginning; only the secretary's letter was so explicit that it did not seem to admit of doubt.

"Mr. Vivian?" asked Tom Merry, raising his cap.

The Theban skipper nodded.

"Yes; I'm Vivian," he said. "What can I do for you?"

"Ahem! We've come."

Vivian smiled.

"Yes, I can see you've come," he assented. "I don't remember having had the pleasure of meeting you before, but you're welcome. I suppose you've come to see the match?"

"See it?" gasped Tom Merry.

"I suppose so. The other team hasn't come yet, but they'll be here soon, I expect."

"Eh?"

"My only hat!"

"But we're the other team!" blurted out Tom Merry, growing crimson.

Vivian stared at him.

"You!" he ejaculated.

"Yes."

"You're not Merry?"

"Yes—I'm Merry!"

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Vivian almost jumped.

"But—you're only a kid!" he exclaimed, in amazement. "You don't seriously mean to say that Stacey has planted this on us!"

"Didn't you know?" demanded Tom Merry warmly.

"I certainly didn't," said the Theban captain. "You're a schoolboy team. I should suppose?"

"St. Jim's Juniors," said Blake.

"Juniors! My hat!"

"But we're playing some seniors," said Tom Merry hastily. "This chap is Kildare, the captain of our school; and quite up to any Theban ancient or modern."

Vivian grinned, and nodded to Kildare.

"But there's some mistake in the matter," he said. "We're down here to-day, and we thought we might as well play a match to keep in practice; and Stacey said he had a friend in the neighbourhood who could get a team together—a chap who captains an amateur team somewhere in this county. He wrote to him to fix it up, and the man wired back that he was fixing it up, and would be over here this afternoon. But—"

"Well, I'm the chap!"

"Impossible!"

"Where's Stacey?" asked Tom Merry. "He can settle it."

"He's not here now," explained Vivian. "He had a wire from Rylcombe, and he's gone over to visit a friend who's been injured. He said only a word or two before he went; but I certainly understood from him that the man who was injured was his friend Merry, who was going to bring a team over here. I was wondering whether the team would turn up after all, under the circumstances."

"We're the team!"

"B-b-but—"

"Look here!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Here's Stacey's letter."

"What!"

"Read it!"

Tom Merry fumbled in his pocket, and fished out the letter from the Theban secretary. Vivian took it, and read it, and several more of the Theban team, who had come up, read it over his shoulder.

"That's the letter right enough," said Vivian. "I was with him when he wrote it. And you say he sent this letter to you?"

"Yes."

"Your name's Merry?"

"Yes."

"And you sent him the wire in reply yesterday?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'm blessed if I can understand it!" said Vivian, in amazement. "Stacey must have planted this on us for a joke, I suppose; though he isn't the kind of fellow to play an idiotic joke of that sort. But I can't understand it otherwise. I suppose from this that you are the genuine team; but I certainly never expected a schoolboy team to come over and play—us!"

"My hat, no!" said Hilton, the Theban goalkeeper. "It's too funny!"

"I don't see anything funny in it!" said Tom Merry stoutly. "We're a jolly good team, and we'll give you all the game you want."

"What-ho!" said Lefevre of the Fifth. "That's what I say!"

Kildare bit his lip.

"It's all a mistake," he said. "I don't see how it came about; but it's a mistake somewhere. We've come over here for nothing, and we can't force the Thebans to play us. We'd better get out!"

"And the sooner the quicker!" murmured Monteith. "Fancy being dragged into a ghastly mess like this! Oh, my only aunt!"

"Rotten!" growled Langton.

Vivian wrinkled his brows.

"Hold on!" he exclaimed good-naturedly. "I don't want you chaps to come over here for nothing. And there's a big crowd come in to see the match; they'll be disappointed if there isn't one. There isn't any other team coming, evidently; and as you are here, you may as well play us. It will be a little exercise for you, and we'll go easy!"

"We don't want you to go easy, thanks!" exclaimed Tom Merry indignantly. "There are some fellows in this team who will give you all the trouble you want."

Vivian laughed.

"Well, the Thebans are not in the habit of playing school-boys!" he said. "Still, it seems to be all the mistake of our sex, though goodness knows how it came about. Look here, you must excuse what I've said—I was very much surprised; but we don't want to cut the match. We'll play you with pleasure."

"Well, if you mean that—" said Tom Merry.
 "Honest Injun!" said the Theban skipper, smiling.
 "Right-ho, then!"
 "Look here," said Kildare. "If you'd rather the matter dropped—"

"But we wouldn't," said Vivian genially. "It will be a bit of an experience for us, anyway; and we don't want to turn out for a match for nothing any more than you do. As you're on the ground, and we're on the ground, we'd better play out the match. We'll play a couple of men short to give you a chance."

"That you jolly well won't!" said Tom Merry emphatically. "You'll play us man for man, or you won't play us at all."

"Hear, hear!" said Redfern.

Vivian chuckled.

"All serene!" he said. "Man for man, then. Let me show you to your dressing-room. We're ready as soon as you are."

And the footballers were soon changing for the match.

"Seems to have been a giddy mistake somewhere," Jack remarked. "But it's not on our side; and mistake or no mistake, we're here; and we're going to play the giddy Thebans. So that's all right!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Yes, that's all right," he agreed. "We're going to play footer, even if we are only a schoolboy team!"

And the team said "Hear, hear!"

CHAPTER 14.

Light at Last!

THE Thebans were smiling as they went into the field. Tom Merry had won the toss, and he selected his goal, leaving it to Vivian to kick off. The St. Jim's team were not smiling; they were in deadly earnest. Fatty Wynn, in goal, was looking as if the whole weight of the combat lay upon his shoulders, like a new Atlas supporting the world. The smiles of the Thebans spurred the Saints on to great efforts. They vowed inwardly that the Thebans should soon have something else to do than to smile. Round the field there was a large crowd; nearly all St. Jim's had come over, and they cheered the eleven as they lined up. Conspicuous among them was Manners of the Shell, with his camera ready for business. He had already been snapping, and at every interesting point in the game, snap went his camera again. And there were very many interesting points in that game.

Kildare, Darrel, Langton, and Monteith, at all events, were worthy antagonists, even for the Thebans; and Fatty Wynn, although only a junior, was a marvellous goalkeeper. Some of the spectators remarked that the ball hadn't much room to pass him, even if it came between the posts; but that was an exaggeration. Fatty Wynn's glance was like lightning, his judgment never at fault, his movements almost too rapid for the eye to follow. In the first five minutes of the game, Vivian and the other forwards came sweeping through the defence, and piled shots upon Fatty Wynn. But the Welsh junior was "there" every time, and he cleared the ball out to the halves at last, and Darrel sent it away to midfield, and then the forwards were upon it.

Then Vivian & Co. discovered that the schoolboy team were not only hot stuff, but very hot indeed.

Figgins, Tom Merry, Kildare, Langton, and Blake, the forward line of St. Jim's, worked together like clockwork, and they swept up the field, by a series of short passes to and fro, baffling the defence of the Thebans, and they brought the ball right up to goal, Tom Merry centring to Kildare at the last moment, and Kildare putting in a shot that very nearly beat Hilton, the Theban custodian. Hilton just contrived to save, and then the backs had difficulty in clearing. By that time the Thebans had ceased to smile.

They had had a quarter of an hour of work as hot as they wanted, and they realised that the schoolboy team was going to give them plenty to do.

They settled down to a tussle, and the vicissitudes of the game kept the spectators watchful and alert.

Loud cheers greeted the Saints at every little advantage they gained; all St. Jim's was hanging upon their movements.

But the first goal fell to the Thebans, and it was no discredit to Fatty Wynn that he was beaten by a drive almost from midfield from the foot of Vivian, the skipper.

Wynn just missed the leather, throwing himself at full length after it, and it lodged in the net. And there was a shout from the crowd:

"Goal!"

But half an hour had passed; it had taken the famous Thebans thirty minutes to score a single goal against the schoolboy team.

Fatty Wynn's face was glum as he tossed out the ball.

"Never mind, Fatty!" called out Tom Merry encouragingly. "You've done splendidly, old man!"

"Yaas, wathah!" came Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's voice from behind the goal. "I couldn't have done bettah myself, deah boy."

Fatty Wynn grunted.

"Buck up, Fatty!" said Figgins. "No more of those you know!"

The fat Fourth-Former nodded.

"It sha'n't happen again!" he growled determinedly.

"That's right. Stick to that."

The teams lined up again.

Tom Merry kicked off, and a rush of the Thebans followed. They had the leather down to the visitors' goal in a minute or less, and there was a rain of shots from the Theban forwards for Fatty Wynn to save.

But Fatty Wynn was fairly on his mettle now.

Whatever the Thebans sent in, Fatty Wynn sent back. His foot, or his fist, or his head, seemed always ready, and as quick as lightning. He sent the ball out to Redfern at last, and Redfern drove it far, and the game swooped away to midfield on the touch-line. Fatty Wynn panted after his exertions, and a cheer came from behind him:

"Bwavo, Fattay, deah boy!"

"My hat!" murmured Vivian. "For a giddy schoolboy team they're giving us a ridiculous lot of trouble. Wire in, we want a goal!"

But to the great astonishment of Vivian and his men, the goal, when it came, did not come to the Thebans.

The right wing of St. Jim's worked the ball along the touch-line at top speed and with wonderful skill, beating the Theban defence all the way. Figgins passed to Tom Merry as the backs tackled him, and Tom Merry centred to Kildare just as he was charged, and Kildare drove the ball right in, taking Hilton off his guard this time.

There was a gasp from the Thebans, a yell of joy from the St. Jim's crowd.

"Goal! Goal! Hurrah!"

"Bravo, Kildare!"

"Well passed, Tom Merry!"

"Hooray! Hooray!"

"Yaas wathah! Huwway, deah boys! Huwway!"

The Theban goalie lifted out the ball, and looked blue.

It was the first time in his career as a first-class footballer that a schoolboy had put a ball into his net. But it was there. The score was one to one. St. Jim's had equalised, and, beaten or unbeaten, they would for ever be able to boast of having scored a goal against the great Thebans.

"My hat!" said Vivian. "My only hat!"

"Blessed young Corinthians, all of them!" growled another member of the team.

St. Jim's lined up again in high spirits.

The Thebans were playing with deadly earnestness now, and St. Jim's were very hard pressed. But soon came the welcome shriek of the referee's whistle. The first half was over, and the players had a well-earned rest.

Just as they came off, breathing hard after a gruelling half, a man in a Norfolk jacket came striding up, and Vivian called out:

"Hallo, Stacey!"

"Hallo," murmured Tom Merry, "here's the giddy secretary, the man who makes mistakes!"

Stacey came up with astonishment writ large upon his face.

He was evidently amazed at the sight of the St. Jim's juniors just coming off for the interval.

"What on earth does this mean?" he exclaimed.

"That's what I want to know," said Vivian, rather tartly.

"You'd better tell us what it means."

"What's this team?" demanded Stacey.

"St. Jim's!" said Tom Merry, speaking up cheerfully as the captain of the team Stacey wanted to know about.

"St. Jim's?" repeated Stacey. "Never heard of it. What do you mean? Where do you come from?"

"If you've never heard of St. Jim's, it only shows that your education has been neglected, my son," remarked Monty Lowther.

Stacey frowned.

"But look here," he exclaimed, "I don't understand this—"

"I don't either," said Vivian. "But it doesn't matter; we're getting a good match."

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A Splendid, New, Long, Complete School Tale of the Chums of St. Jim's. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"And I don't, either," said Tom Merry. "But we're playing the Thebans, and that's all that we care about."

And the St. Jim's footballers grinned.

"As for your not having heard of St. Jim's, I don't catch on," said Tom Merry. "You must be dreaming, Stacey! If you haven't heard of St. Jim's, how on earth did you come to write me a letter there?"

The Theban secretary jumped.

"Write you a letter?" he exclaimed.

"Yes; asking me to bring a team over."

"My hat! You're dotty! I didn't do anything of the sort!" shouted Stacey. "I shouldn't be likely to write to a schoolboy to bring over a team to play the Thebans!"

"Well, I thought it was queer," said Tom Merry modestly.

"Still, we were glad of the chance, and we jumped at it."

"But I didn't write to you!" yelled Stacey. "I wrote to a friend staying in Rylcombe. I've seen him to-day, and it seems that he never had the letter. He's met with an accident; but, as far as I can make out, the letter wasn't even delivered. I've not written to anybody else, and certainly not to you."

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Vivian. "I've seen the letter."

The Theban secretary staggered.

"Seen the letter?" he gasped.

"Yes."

"My letter—to this kid?"

"Yes."

"Then I must have developed a habit of writing letters to schoolboys in my sleep," said Stacey in bewilderment, "for I certainly don't remember writing a letter to him; and I never even heard of St. Jim's."

"Show him the letter, Merry."

"Merry!" roared Stacey.

"That's my name," said Tom Merry.

"Oh, I see!"

"Blessed if I do, then!" said Vivian.

"This kid Merry has received the letter I wrote to my friend Torrence Merry at Rylcombe," said Stacey. "Some idiotic mistake of the postman, I suppose."

"But it was addressed to me!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Have you the envelope?"

"Here it is."

Stacey looked at the envelope.

"That's right," he said. "'T. Merry, Esq., St. James's, Rylcombe.' That's the envelope I addressed to Torrence Merry."

"St. James's is the name of our school," said Tom Merry. "We call it St. Jim's for short, but the name is St. James's. I wondered the word 'school' wasn't put in. I put that down to an oversight in addressing it; it came to me all right."

"It came to you all wrong, you mean," said Stacey. "It ought to have been delivered to Torrence Merry, at St. James's—Sir Julian Marlow's house near Rylcombe, where Merry was staying as a guest."

It was clear enough now.

"Well, the postman is in the habit of bringing letters to me, addressed to T. Merry, at St. James's School," said Tom Merry. "Your giddy T. Merry was new in the district, and he didn't know the name; that's how it came about. Can't be helped now. But it's jolly queer that your Merry didn't let you know something on the subject. Of course I wired in reply to this letter, as you asked me to do—I mean, as I thought you asked me to. If you hadn't asked for a wire in reply, I should have written you on the school paper, and you'd have found out the mistake. But a wire from the post-office didn't give it away, of course. It's jolly odd, all the same. If your friend Merry was expecting a letter from you about playing the Thebans, how is it you haven't heard from him, as he certainly didn't get this letter?"

"He's been hurt," said Stacey.

"Oh!"

"He was knocked down on the footpath in the wood on Monday, as he was coming over to see us play the County Ramblers," Stacey explained.

The St. Jim's fellows exchanged glances. Tom Merry remembered the initials, "T. M." in the hat of the injured man, and he thought he understood.

"He was stunned by one of the rascals, and left insensible," went on Stacey. "Some schoolboys found him, and took him to the house of the local doctor in Rylcombe. He didn't recover sufficiently to speak until this morning, and then I had a wire from Dr. Short, and went over to see him. I found him laid up, and I was coming back here

to tell Vivian the match was off. As Merry hadn't had my letter, and hadn't sent the reply telegram, I couldn't make head or tail of that matter. But—"

"If he'd had his name on him we should have known," said Blake.

"You would have known!" exclaimed Stacey.

"Yes. We were the chaps, who found him in the wood and took him to the doctor's," explained Tom Merry.

"By Jove!" exclaimed the Theban secretary, in astonishment. "You!"

"Yes, rather! But we didn't know his name. He had the initials 'T. M.' in his hat, but we didn't know what name they stood for."

Stacey held out his hand.

"If you looked after my old chum I'm much obliged to you," he said. "Give me your fist. Torrence is full of gratitude to the schoolboys who brought him in. He doesn't know who they were, and he's anxious to see them."

"Jolly queer business!" said Vivian. "Well, I'm glad it's explained. I was beginning to wonder if you'd taken to drink in your old age, Stacey."

The Theban secretary laughed.

"So you're playing the match, after all?" he exclaimed.

"Yes."

"Well, it's only fair, as the kids have been brought over here," said Stacey. "Where are you now—fifty up?"

"One to one!" said Vivian grimly.

"My aunt! Not really?"

"Yes, really!"

"Oh, great Scott! Then this team is quite as good as the one Torrence was going to bring along, and you've lost nothing," said Stacey, in astonishment.

"They've lost nothing so far," murmured Tom Merry to Figgins, as they went into the dressing-room; "but they're going to lose something if we can possibly work it—what?"

Figgins chuckled.

"Yes, rather, old man—the giddy match!"

And the St. Jim's fellows prepared for the second half in a grim humour, resolved to conquer or die.

CHAPTER 15.

Bravo, St. Jim's!

TOM MERRY & CO. looked pretty fresh when they came into the field again. The arrival of the Thebans' secretary, and the explanation of the strange mistake and how it had come about, took some time; and so the interval was a considerably longer one than it would otherwise have been. Both sides needed the rest, however, and were glad of it. The Thebans had not quite recovered from their astonishment at being given so hard a game by their youthful opponents. But they had fully realised that they had to play hard if they wanted to win. And the St. Jim's fellows were in the grimmest of humours. They still remembered the lofty smiles with which Vivian & Co. had started the match, and they intended to avenge those smiles.

Round the ground the crowd were keen and eager. From the moment of the kick-off every movement of either team was followed with intense interest by hundreds of eyes. The St. Jim's goal in the first half had given the Saints great hopes. The possibility of not only playing the famous Thebans, but of actually beating them, almost dazzled the St. Jim's fellows. There were few Saints there who would not have given a whole term's pocket-money to see the red shirts of St. Jim's victorious.

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked to Manners, as the amateur photographer of the Shell slipped a fresh roll of films into his camera ready for the second half. "Bai Jove, Mannahs, old man, the youngsters look vewy fit, don't they? I'm sowwy I'm not in the team; that would make it a sure thing."

"It would!" agreed Manners. "But a sure licking isn't so much to be longed for that I know of."

"I did not mean that, Mannahs, you ass—"

"There they go!" roared Kangaroo. "On the ball, Tom Merry! Go it! Pass—pass out to Figgy! Hurrah—hurrah!"

"Huwwah, deah boy!"

The crowd roared and stamped.

Almost at the start of the second half St. Jim's had had wonderful luck. The ball came out to Figgins on the wing, and the halves of the Thebans made a pass impossible; but Figgy, instead of attempting to pass, took a long and a daring shot for goal.

It was a thousand-to-one chance, and for that very reason, perhaps, it materialised, for Hilton, in goal, certainly wasn't looking for anything of the sort.

The crowd went almost into hysterics as the goalkeeper,

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clutching a second too late, missed the ball, and it lodged in the net.

"Goal! Goal! Goal!"

"Hurrah!"

"Bravo, Figgy!"

"Good old Figgins!"

"Hip-pip!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy clutched off his silk topper, and flung it frantically into the air, not caring whether it ever came down again. He clapped his hands and danced, quite forgetful of the dignity of a scion of the noble race of D'Arcy.

"Huwwah!"

"Yaroooh!" yelled Manners, as D'Arcy's hat came down. The silk topper descended upon Manners' camera, which was aimed at the group of footballers before goal.

"Huwwah! Bwavo! Huwah!"

"You ass!" roared Manners.

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"If you've damaged my camera, you fathead, I'll jolly well damage your boko!" yelled the photographer of the Shell.

Arthur Augustus sniffed.

"Wats! Huwah! Hip-pip! This isn't a time to think of wotten camewahs! Huwah!"

"Goal!" roared Kangaroo. "Bravo, St. Jim's!"

The crowd rocked and swayed, and yelled and roared.

If Tom Merry & Co. had been playing in the Final for the English Cup, and had just taken the winning goal, the crowd could not have been more enthusiastic. They stamped and roared and clapped their hands in a continuous roll of sound.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, gasping for breath after his efforts. "Bai Jove! I couldn't have beaten that myself! Huwah! By the way, where's my hat? Have you seen my hat, Mannahs, deah boy?"

"There's something crunching under my boot," said Manners, who was examining his camera carefully. "All right; it's not hurt."

Arthur Augustus glanced down at his beautiful topper, which had Manners' foot upon it, and was a complete wreck.

"You fweightful ass!" he gasped. "Not hurt?"

"Not at all! It had a knock, but it hasn't damaged it."

"You uttah ass! Look at it, then!" shrieked D'Arcy.

"I am looking at it, ain't I?" said Manners, in astonishment.

"I'm speakin' of my hat—"

"Oh! I was speaking of my camera," said Manners.

"You uttah ass—"

Snap!

"Got Tom Merry patting Figgy on the back!" said Manners, with a chuckle. "This will make a beautiful set of pictures. Did you speak, D'Arcy?"

"Yaas, you feahful ass!" said Arthur Augustus, in a sulphurous voice. "Take your silly hoof off my toppah, will you?"

"Certainly!"

Manners disentangled his boot from D'Arcy's topper, and the swell of St. Jim's picked it up. He jammed his monocle into his eye, and surveyed the topper ruefully. It was a complete wreck, and as D'Arcy tried to punch out the dents in its sides his fist came through.

"Oh, you uttah ass!" he murmured.

"It will do to wave," said Kangaroo comfortingly.

"Weally, Kangawoo—"

"Bravo, St. Jim's! Hurrah!"

The rival teams lined up again. Tom Merry's word ran along the St. Jim's ranks:

"Stick to it, and don't let them equalise!"

And the Saints did stick to it.

Vivian & Co. fought hard for victory. They were a splendid team, and but for the presence of Fatty Wynn in goal, probably all Tom Merry & Co.'s efforts would have been in vain. The Thebans charged up to the St. Jim's goal again and again; but they could not penetrate that impregnable citadel. Fatty Wynn was on his mettle; and he defended like a Trojan. The fat Fourth-Former seemed tireless, and he was never caught napping. Good shots who had been accustomed to beating all sorts of goal-keepers, found themselves baffled by the Welsh junior. Fatty Wynn was a born goalie; and on this famous day he surpassed all his previous records.

The enthusiasm of the St. Jim's crowd, especially the New House fellows, grew and grew. If Fatty Wynn did not let the leather through, St. Jim's would finish up a goal ahead, and the Thebans would be beaten.

It was a goal-keeper's game now; and never did a goalie merit more hearty cheers than did Fatty Wynn on this great occasion.

He was simply unbeatable.

Again and again the St. Jim's forwards and halves and backs were baffled and beaten by the Thebans; but ever, as they swooped upon the goal, they found Fatty Wynn ready—alert, quick, cool, unconquerable.

Six or seven times at least, in the second half, the Thebans were on the very point of scoring; again and again it looked as if they were certain to win with goals galore to their credit; but every time Fatty Wynn put "paid" to their efforts.

And the time was getting close now!

The referee was seen to glance at his watch; the spectators were looking at their watches, too; Fatty Wynn had only to defend his citadel successfully for ten minutes more—five minutes more—three minutes!

The shouts of the St. Jim's crowd rose and swelled to a wild roar.

"Stick it out, Fatty!"

"Don't let her through, old man!"

"Play up for St. Jim's!"

"Never say die!"

Fatty Wynn did not seem even to hear the shouts. He was as cool as a cucumber; he had eyes only for the game, and the spectators might not have existed for him. Two minutes more—one minute!

The Thebans made a last desperate effort. To be licked by a schoolboy team; a team that had provoked their smiles when they entered the field; the mere thought was intolerable; and the Thebans played up at the finish as if they were fighting the last struggle for the English Cup! In that last minute, Fatty Wynn played the game of his life! And he won it! Even as the whistle whipped, the ball went out to mid-field from Fatty Wynn's foot, taking the last chance of the Thebans with it.

Phe-e-e-p!

It was the whistle—and the finish!

The game was won and done!

The crowd roared.

"St. Jim's wins! Hurray! hurray! hurray!"

Vivian and his men looked blank. The schoolboy team had won—the schoolboys had beaten the Thebans; it was incredible, but it was true. The team of International renown had been beaten by St. Jim's!

When the whistle had rung out for the finish, the field was blackened with a rushing crowd. Shouting, yelling, cheering, the St. Jim's fellows surrounded their champions, bore them shoulder-high off the field. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was waving his wrecked topper in the air; careless now whether it was a wreck or not; Manners, equally enthusiastic, was waving his camera; Kangaroo had snatched a bowler hat off a perfect stranger, and was waving that.

All the St. Jim's team came in for a wild ovation; but Fatty Wynn was the hero of the hour. Fatty Wynn had saved the match; there was no doubt about that; Fatty Wynn had snatched victory from the jaws of defeat; and his comrades could not make enough of the plump hero.

Fatty Wynn bore his blushing honours thick upon him with becoming modesty. The only remark he had to make was that he was hungry; and he devoured sandwiches while the other fellows sang his praises; and he gave much more attention to the sandwiches than to the praises.

Vivian shook hands heartily with Tom Merry when the St. Jim's team left. St. Jim's marched to the railway station in a body, the victorious team in their midst; and the march was like a Roman triumph of old. Eager fellows had whizzed off to St. Jim's on their bikes already, to announce the wonderful victory.

When the victorious eleven reached the school, they were carried in on the shoulders of their comrades, and the Head himself met them at the door, to congratulate them.

There had been a great deal of criticism of Tom Merry's selection of the team. But criticism was silent now. The only thing that was remarked upon was the wonderful judgment Tom Merry had shown in the selection of the team.

Needless to say, St. Jim's celebrated the glorious victory loud and long. There was a really gorgeous feed in Tom Merry's study, to which the senior members of the team came as well as the juniors; but the place of honour was given to Fatty Wynn of the Fourth. And what Fatty Wynn valued even more highly than the place of honour, was an unlimited supply of the best tuck that Dame Taggles' establishment could afford.

The next day Manners' photographs were in great demand; and enlargements of them were hung up in dozens of studies as perpetual souvenirs of the great victory Tom Merry & Co. had won as the Wrong Team!

THE END.

(Another splendid, long, complete school tale of Tom Merry & Co. next Wednesday, entitled: "THE FLOODED SCHOOL," by Martin Clifford. Order your copy of the "GEM" LIBRARY in advance. Price One Penny.)

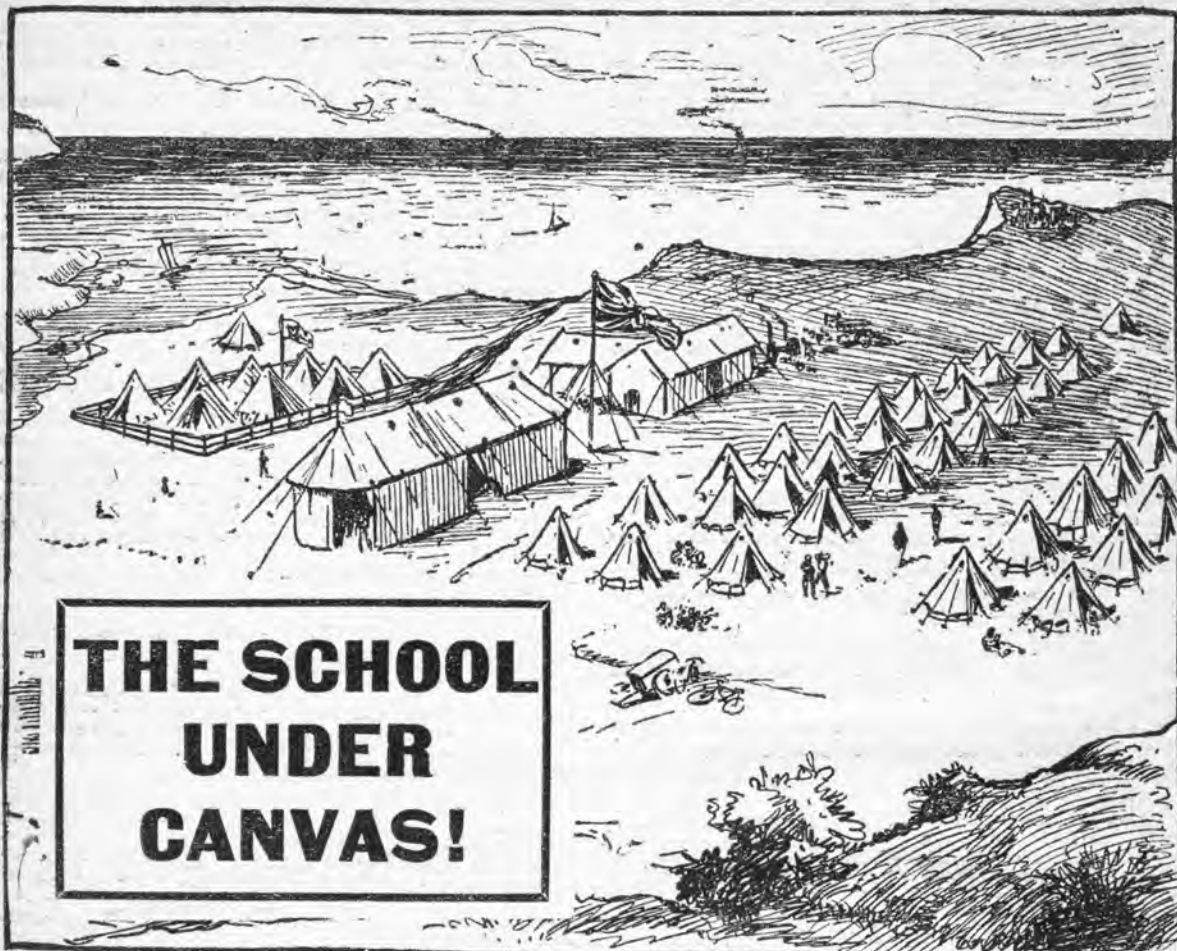
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WHAT HAS HAPPENED SO FAR.

"The School will assemble in Big Hall at half-past six o'clock. An important announcement will be made."

"(Signed), E. MONK, Headmaster."

The appearance of the above brief notice on the school board is the first hint that the Rylcombe Grammar School receives of the great change in its circumstances that is pending—nothing less than the removal of the whole school into temporary quarters under canvas by the sea, on the Essex coast. Just at this time the ranks of the Fourth Form are reinforced by Gustave Blanc—immediately christened Mont Blong—a new boy from across the Channel. Mont Blong, who attaches himself to Gordon Gay & Co., is a slim and elegant youth with a peculiar flow of English, but he quickly shows his worth by holding his own with Carker, the bully of the Fourth. Amidst great excitement the Grammarians travel down to their new abode. During the first few days Gordon Gay discovers that there is more in Mont Blong than at first meets the eye, and that the French junior can speak English

fluently. Gordon Gay and Frank Monk & Co. one day see Herr Hentzel in secret conversation with two German military officers in a cave on the seashore. They are surprised to hear from Mont Blong that the three are spies, and that the French junior himself is a Secret Service agent.

One day Mont Blong disappears, and shortly afterwards Herr Hentzel is arrested by the police as a spy. Gordon Gay & Co. rescue Mont Blong from a cellar, where he had been imprisoned by Herr Hentzel, and, with the French junior's aid, subsequently trap the leader of the spies.

Frank Monk disguises himself as the new German master who is expected, and determines to jape Gordon Gay & Co. by making them think he is another spy. The Cornstalk Co. get wind of the jape, however, although they keep the fact dark, and go to meet the new master, much to the amusement of Lane and Carboy, who are watching from the distance.

(Now go on with the story.)

Sentenced to Death.

Gordon Gay & Co. escorted the German gentleman into their tent.

A few glances followed the new arrival; but there were not many of the Grammarians in camp just then. The half-holiday and the fine weather had tempted them out, and most of the Grammar School were scattered along the shore or the headland, or in boats on the bay. Herr Huckaback rolled into the tent, and accepted a camp chair from Gordon Gay, and sat down with his back to the light.

"Tired after your walk, sir?" asked Gay.

"Ja wohl."

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 243.

"**BIRDS OF PREY!**" Our Grand, New Serial Story of NELSON LEE, Detective. **STARTS NEXT WEDNESDAY!**

"It's nice and shady here," said Wootton major, "we'll get you some tea in two twos, sir. You'll like some tea?"

"Thank you, mein boy."

"Not at all, sir. It's a real pleasure to do anything for a friend of Herr Hentzel's."

"My hat—mein Gott!"

"What did you say, sir?"

"Nothing. Tat is all right."

"Herr Hentzel was wonderfully popular here, sir, you've no idea," said Jack Wootton. "There wasn't a dry eye in the school when he went away, sir. I am sure we shall like you as much as we did Herr Hentzel, sir."

"Goot!" gasped the German gentleman.

"And you have letters for him, sir?" Gordon Gay remarked.

"Ja wohl."

"Important letters, perhaps, sir?"

"Ferry important, ain't it."

"Oh, good. Collar him!"

Gordon Gay had lowered the flap of the tent, and the juniors were screened from the view of anybody who might pass. At the Cornstalk's signal, they piled suddenly upon Herr Huckaback. The fat German gentleman rolled upon the ground, and the Cornstalk Co. sat upon him. Herr Huckaback was jammed face downwards upon the ground, and Jack Wootton sat upon his shoulders, and Wootton major upon his legs, and Mont Blong took a business-like grip upon his ears.

He struggled, and shouted.

"Ach! Let me go, you idiots! I mean, tat you let go, ain't it! Yar-o-o-o-p!"

"Tie him up!" said Gordon Gay. "Don't yell, Herr Huckaback, we've got you, and there's nobody to help you. Herr Hentzel was a German spy, and you're another. We're going to have those important letters, and send them to the War Office."

"Yes, razzar."

The prisoner burst into a chuckle.

"Cackling at us, by Jove!" said Gordon Gay. "Hold him tight. Never heard of such cheek. Do you understand, Herr Huckaback; we know you're in the plot."

Another chuckle.

Gordon Gay jerked a packet of letters from the pocket of the German gentleman's coat. He did not open the packet. He knew that it was a "spoof" packet, probably with some humorous message from the Old Co. within.

"Here are the letters," he said. "Now we're going to make him confess. He's got confederates about here, of course. Confess, you villain!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"All right; we'll make him confess," said Gay. "Under the circumstances, I think cutting off his head would be justifiable, if he doesn't confess."

"Hear, hear!"

Gordon Gay dragged back the collar of the German gentleman, and a sharp edge was pressed to the neck of the disguised junior.

The German gentleman roared.

"Hold on, you young asses! Chuck it!"

"Hallo! he's speaking good English now," said Gordon Gay. "That's a very suspicious circumstance."

"Very suspicious!" said Wootton major.

"Zat is so!"

"Confess, you villain!"

"Better saw his head off," said Jack Wootton. "It isn't any good, you know; it was made in Germany!"

"Quite true. Here goes."

"Yar-o-o-h!" yelled the unhappy prisoner. "Take that knife away!"

"Sorry; can't be done."

"You'll hurt me."

"Go hon!"

"You dangerous ass!" shrieked the disguised junior. "You'll be cutting me in a minute. You'll hurt me, fat-head!"

"Can't cut your head off without hurting you," said Gordon Gay. "Keep still; I want to make a clean job of it."

"Yes, razzar."

Gordon Gay was pressing the keen edge of a sheet of notepaper to the German gentleman's neck. But as the German gentleman's face was downward, and his features were grinding into the earth, he could not see it, and he imagined that it was a knife. He struggled frantically in the grasp of the Cornstalk Co. But he had no chance of getting loose.

"Keep him pinned down!" said Gay. "I'm sorry to have to do this, but a spy can't expect anything better."

"Certainly not."

"Cut it off, for goodness' sake, and have done with it," said Wootton major.

"You dangerous asses!" shrieked Frank Monk. "You'll be hanged—"

"Oh, no, don't you worry about us," said Gordon Gay. "This will be a case of justifiable homicide—or, more properly, justifiable Germanicide."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Keep his head still, Wootton major. How on earth do you expect me to cut it off when it's bobbing up and down like this."

"Sorry; I'll sit on his head."

"Gr-o-o!"

"That's better—keep it steady."

The edge of the notepaper glided along the disguised junior's neck, and it felt as if the skin were being divided. Frank Monk gave a yell of horror. He had never suspected the Cornstalks of such savage methods, and he could only imagine that excitement had carried them away.

"Stop it!" he said, in a muffled voice. "I'm not a German! It's a jape! Don't be a silly ass! I know you're only fooling, but take that knife away! It's dangerous!"

"Not German! Rats!"

"I'm not! Gro-o! It's a jape! Ow! I'm Frank Monk!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Lemme gerrup!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Fancy the awful villain trying to take us in with a yarn like that!" roared Gordon Gay. "Frank Monk! That's good! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Too thick!" grinned Wootton major.

"Yes, razzar, my shums."

"Yow!" roared Monk. "I tell you I'm Frank Monk you fatheads! Yar-o-o-h! Take that knife away, you dangerous lunatic! Ow!"

"Frank Monk must have grown yellow whiskers very quickly, if you're Franky," grinned Gordon Gay. "He hadn't any at dinner-time."

"Not a whisker," said Jack Wootton.

"Ow! It's a disguise, you ass! Pull the whiskers, and they'll come off! Gro-o-h!"

"Rats!"

"Leggo!"

"Can't swallow a yarn like that," said Gordon Gay. "You're Herr Huckaback, and a German spy right enough. Look here, this chap's neck is very tough. Perhaps it would be less trouble to bleed him to death. They bleed pigs like that, you know, so it's quite a suitable thing to do."

"Ow!"

"Get that basin, Mont Blong; we don't want to muck up the floor."

"Oui, oui, my shum!"

"Hold it here, and don't spill the claret," said Gordon Gay ferociously.

"Yes, razzar!"

Mont Blong placed the basin close to the German gentleman's neck, so that the cold contact made him shiver. Then he took the kettle, and holding it so that the disguised junior could not see it, he let the water trickle slowly from the spout into the basin.

Trickle! Trickle!

Frank Monk shuddered at the sound.

Trickle!

"Yow! Help! Murder!"

"He won't last long at that rate," said Gordon Gay. "I haven't cut him very deep, either. He'll peter out soon."

"Yes, that's all right. I suppose there won't be any trouble over this, Gay. It is a case of justifiable Germanicide, isn't it?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Ow! I'm not a German! Yow! I'm Frank Monk! Gro-o-h! You'll be hung, you idiots! Yo-wow! Bind up that cut! Ow! I'm dying! Yar-o-o-o-p!"

"Of course you're dying," said Gordon Gay. "What did you expect? Chaps can't be bled to death without dying, it stands to reason."

"Unreasonable beast," said Wootton major. "You see it's a bit risky taking up the business of a foreign spy, Herr Huckaback. Have you any last message for your relations in Berlin? Any farewell message to the Kaiser?"

"Yow! Yah! I'm Frank Monk!" gurgled the unhappy Grammarian, struggling in vain to turn his head. He could not move it.

Trickle! Trickle!

"Ow! ow! ow!"

"I suppose you made your will before you came here, Herr Huckaback?"

"Gr-o-o! I'm Monk!"

"Queer how he sticks to that yarn, isn't it?" said Gordon Gay calmly. "After he's finished off, we'll have a tug at the whiskers, to make sure. Are you suffering much, Herr Huckaback?"

"Yow! Help! Murder!"

"Oh, dry up," said Gordon Gay. "Face the music, you know. You should take these things calmly. Your friend Hentzel didn't make a fuss like this."

"Groo! I'm Frank Monk! Ow! Ow! Help!"

Trickle!

"There, I think that's enough," said Gordon Gay. "Turn the beast over on his back, and let him die in peace."

"Right-oh!"

And Frank Monk was turned over, and he sat up dazedly, and clapped his hand to his neck to stop the bleeding. He looked a pitiable object. His flaxen wig was on one side, his beard and whisker were sideways, and half his blonde complexion had been rubbed off. The padding in his clothes

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 243.

A Splendid, New, Long, Complete School Tale of the Chums of St. Jim's. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

had been displaced, and bulged out here and there, looking as if he had immense bumps on various parts of his body.

He took his hand away from his neck, and looked at it. It was not stained. There was a yell of laughter from the Cornstalks.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"M-m-my hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Frank Monk blinked at his unstained hand. Then he felt his neck again. There was no sign of a cut. He looked at the basin, and saw that it was half filled with water. Then he understood.

"Ow!" he murmured. "Ow! You rotters! You knew it was I all the time! Groo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You came here for a jape," grinned Gordon Gay, "and you've got it, Monkey."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you rotters!"

Frank Monk scrambled up, and doubled his fists. But in a moment the grasp of the Cornstalks was upon him, and he was on the ground again. The jape was not over yet.

Gordon Gay & Co. pulled a cord from a bag, and tied the captured junior hand and foot. Frank Monk resisted in vain. He was helpless in the hands of his captors. He tried to yell to Carboy and Lane, but Wootton major jammed a folded handkerchief into his mouth, and tied it there with a piece of twine, wound round and round his head. The chief of the Old Co. lay upon the floor, helpless, and unable to yell. He glared up in speechless wrath at the grinning Cornstalks.

"Lane and Carboy's turn next," grinned Gordon Gay. "Shove that blanket over him, you fellows. Lane and Carboy are coming to see the dead body."

The juniors shrieked.

Frank Monk tried to speak, but in vain. He could only make a faint mumbling sound, and that died away as Wootton major jammed in the gag a little more tightly.

Gordon Gay jammed a tent-peg into the ground, and hammered it in. Frank Monk was tied to it, so that he could not roll away. Then the blanket was thrown over him, and he disappeared from sight.

"It's all right," said Gordon Gay. "Lane and Carboy will be here soon, Monkey, and they'll look after you. They're going to be in at the death."

"What next?" murmured Jack Wootton.

Gordon Gay removed the cork from a bottle of red ink. He proceeded to dab his hands with the fluid, and the juniors, catching the idea at once, followed his example. In a few minutes they were as red-handed as if they had just come from a scene of fearful crime. Gordon Gay arranged a few artistic spots upon their collars, and one on his own cheek. Then he took the wood-chopper, and dabbled red ink upon the steel.

"Come on!" he said.

He opened the flap, and the juniors looked out into the camp. Among the tents Lane and Carboy could be seen, laughing. They ceased to laugh as they saw the Cornstalks looking out, but they could not become quite grave. But they looked very curious as they saw Gordon Gay wrapping an old newspaper round the chopper.

"Come on," said Gordon Gay, in a whisper; "and if anybody laughs I'll scalp him!"

"Oui, oui, my shum!"

The Cornstalks left the tent, with faces of almost preternatural gravity. Lane and Carboy stared at them as they came up, and glanced with very strange expressions at the spots of red. Then they fixed their eyes upon the queer bundle in Gordon Gay's hand.

"Hallo!" said Lane uneasily. "What on earth have you fellows been up to? Had an accident?"

"No," said Gordon Gay, in a hollow voice.

"What's happened? Have you cut your hand?"

"No!"

"Look here, what's the matter? What have you got in that newspaper?" demanded Lane.

"Hush!"

"Why, what—"

"Look! Only, for mercy's sake, don't say a word!"

Gordon Gay unrolled the newspaper, and showed the red-stained chopper. Then he hastily wrapped it up again, with trembling hands.

"Good heavens!" muttered Lane. "What have you been doing?"

"It was Gay did it," muttered Wootton major. "I—I didn't want to kill him!"

"He resisted," said Gay. "You can't say he didn't resist, Harry. You'll have to bear witness that he resisted, if it all comes out."

"Yes, razzler! I vill swear zat he resisted my shum, and THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 243.

zere was nozzing else to be done," said Mont Blong. "He vos only a spy; it is really nozzing."

Lane and Carboy felt their blood run cold.

"What have you done?" asked Lane hoarsely. "You mad idiots, what have you done?"

"I should think you could guess," said Gordon Gay gloomily. "It was his own fault."

"Yes, razzler!"

"But—but what—"

"You saw that German chap come in—Herr Huckaback, the new German master?" breathed Gay.

"Yes, yes."

"You took him into your tent," said Carboy.

Gordon Gay shuddered.

"He's still there!" he whispered.

"But—but what—"

"He wasn't a German master," muttered Gordon Gay. "He was a spy; a friend of Herr Hentzel's. We seized him, and—and he resisted, and—and it wasn't our fault."

"I vill swear zat it was not my shum's fault," He resisted."

"He struggled like anything," said Jack Wootton. "Of course, we couldn't let him go. He was a spy, and he had to be captured, alive or dead."

Lane and Carboy gazed at the Cornstalks, speechless with horror.

"We're going to wash off the stains in the sea, and chuck this chopper there," said Gay. "We may be able to keep the whole bizney dark. I suppose you fellows will be willing to help us get rid of the body to-night? You're really in the bizney as much as we are."

"The—the body!" said Lane hoarsely.

"Yes."

"Good heavens!"

"He was only a spy, you know," said Gordon Gay. "Of course, I never meant to kill him. But when you biff a chap with a chopper, in the heat of the moment, you never can be sure of what's going to happen."

"Oh, oh! You mad ass!"

"Well, he resisted. Suppose he had drawn a pistol?" said Gordon Gay.

"Yes, razzler! It could not be helped. My shum was not to blame."

"You mad idiots!" groaned Lane. "It was a jape. It wasn't a German at all; it was Frank Monk. He was japing you."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Gordon Gay, aghast.

"It—it can't be true!" moaned Wootton major.

"Zat is too fearful!"

"It's true!" yelled Lane. "Come on, Carboy, for goodness' sake!"

Lane and Carboy dashed madly towards the Cornstalks' tent. They burst into the tent, and almost stumbled over the still form beneath the blanket.

"Here it is!" muttered Lane.

"Oh, dear! This is—horrible!" groaned Carboy.

The two Grammarians stood staring down at the outlines of the form under the blanket. They were afraid to draw the blanket aside, in terror of the fearful sight that would burst upon their eyes. Lane turned a haggard look upon his chum.

"What an awful ending to a jape!" he groaned. "I—I can't touch it, Carboy."

"He—he may not be quite dead," said Carboy, between his chattering teeth. "Oh, dear!"

They touched the blanket gingerly, and drew it from the still form.

Frank Monk lay there—still, motionless—but his eyes were very much alive. He glared at the two juniors.

"He's not dead!" gasped Lane.

"Thank goodness!"

Monk rolled his eyes wildly.

Lane tore the handkerchief from his mouth. Frank Monk mumbled incoherently.

"Thank goodness you're alive, old man!" panted Lane.

"Groo!"

"We thought those mad duffers had finished you."

"Gro-o-o-oh!"

"I—I can't see his wound," faltered Carboy.

"Wound!" howled Monk, finding his voice. "I'm not wounded. Untie me, can't you?"

"Not wounded!" stuttered Lane. "But—but didn't it wound you when they hit you with the chopper, Monkey?"

"Chopper! They didn't hit me with any chopper, you dummy!"

"Eh! They didn't?"

"No, ass! Untie me!"

"M-m-my hat! But—but they said—"

"Lemme loose!" said Frank Monk, in a sulphurous voice.

"How long are you going to stand there like jabberwocks, while I'm getting the cramp all over, you dummies?"

"BIRDS OF PREY!"

Our Grand, New Serial Story
of NELSON LEE, Detective.

STARTS NEXT WEDNESDAY!

"B-b-b-but—"
 "Untie me!" shrieked Frank Monk.
 "It—it's a jape!" gasped Carboy.
 "Of course it's a jape!" yelled Monk. "They knew I wasn't a German at all. They knew it when they brought me into the tent. One of you silly asses must have given the show away somehow! Untie me, can't you?"
 "M-m-my only aunt! I—"
 "Will you untie me?" shrieked Monk.
 Lane and Carboy, almost dazed with astonishment, opened their pocket-knives, and cut their leader's bonds. Frank Monk staggered to his feet.
 "Ow! I've got pins and needles!" he snorted. "Why didn't you come before, you asses? Nice sort of silly chumps you are to back a fellow up! Yow!"
 "We—we— we thought they'd killed you!" stuttered Lane.
 "Oh, quite!"
 "W-w-where did all the blood come from, if nobody's hurt?" demanded Lane.
 Carboy pointed to the empty bottle on the ground, labelled "Red Ink." Then Lane understood.
 "The villains!" he gasped. "It's some more of their giddy acting. They were pulling our leg all the time."
 "The awful spoofers!"
 Frank Monk snorted.
 "They've done us from beginning to end!" he growled.
 "We shall never hear the end of this. Hark at them now!"
 From outside the tent came a yell of laughter.
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

the summer—and the school under canvas. Gentlemen, there is going to be a moving job."

The juniors looked interested. They had had a very good time, upon the whole, in school under canvas. But the days were drawing in now, and sooner or later the time had to come for the return to the old Grammar School at Rylcombe.

"So we're going back?" asked Jack Wootton.

"Yes."

"You've heard it?"

"I had it from Delamere," said Gordon Gay, "and our respected skipper had it from the Head. Everything comes to an end. But I've been thinking that we ought to celebrate the wind-up of our summer camp in a fit and suitable manner."

"Hear, hear!" said Jack Wootton.

"Ecoutez, écoutez!" grinned Mont Blong.

"Feed's a good idea," said Wootton major thoughtfully. "We might stand a real, big, stunning feed, and ask all the Fourth."

"Yes, razzer!"

"I've been thinking of that," said Gordon Gay, with a nod. "But that's not enough. What price a gala performance of the Amateur Dramatic Society?"

"Good!" said Wootton major. "An open-air performance would be a good dodge—a theatrical representation on the sands, with Chinese lanterns. We could ask the Head to come, in case the Old Co. should try any funny bizney."

"That's the wheeze! But I was thinking of asking

"BIRDS OF PREY."

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The Old Co. looked out. Gordon Gay and his comrades were yelling. Gordon Gay waved the red-stained chopper in the air.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This is where we smile!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Old Co. had nothing to say. They could only glare. The Cornstalks, dangerously near the verge of hysterics, staggered away to wash off the red ink. Frank Monk glared at his comrades.

"You asses!" he said. "This is what comes of your rotten wheeze for getting up a disguise like a rotten German spy!"

"Well, I like that!" howled Lane. "Whose idea was it?"

"Oh, don't jaw!" said Frank Monk crossly. "Help me to get this rubbish off before we have a crowd round!"

"Look here—"

"Oh, shut up!"

And the argument waxed very warm among the members of the Old Co.

Gordon Gay's Great Idea.

"Everything," said Gordon Gay sententiously, "comes to an end."

"Go on!" said Wootton major sarcastically. "Have you thought that out for yourself, or did you find it in Shakespeare?"

"Everything comes to an end," repeated Gordon Gay calmly, "Herr Hentzel's little game as a German spy, and

Monkey to take a hand," said Gordon Gay. "Of course, those chaps can't act as we can—"

"Rather not!"

"But they can take small parts; and we shall want a good many actors," said Gay, in a thoughtful way. "We can think out the play we're going to give, and arrange all the parts, and then ask 'em to come and join us. That will save argument."

"I don't know that it will," grinned Wootton major. "Frank Monk will find a lot of things to say if we arrange it on those lines."

"Well, it can't be helped. Of course, we must keep the management in our own hands. We can't have a lot of amateurs mucking the thing up," said Gordon Gay. "My idea is to go in for the real thing—Shakespeare!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Shakespeare's all right," said Jack Wootton, a little dubiously; "but the fellows prefer something funny, as a rule."

"Blow the fellows!"

"Yes; but they are the audience, you know. You have to consider the audience to a certain extent when you're shoving a play at them."

"What rot!" said Gay. "The audience must take what they can get; same as they do in a real theatre. And they ought to be thankful for it. They can thank their lucky stars that we don't give 'em Sophocles or Æschylus. There are worse things than Shakespeare that you can spring on an audience, I can tell you. Now, which play would you fellows suggest?"

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A Splendid, New, Long, Complete School Tale of the Chums of St. Jim's. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"THE FLOODED SCHOOL!"

The juniors looked very thoughtful. It was a knotty point.

"What about 'Julius Caesar'?" said Wootton major, after a pause. "I can do Brutus in pretty good style, I think."

"I was thinking of 'Hamlet,'" said Jack Wootton modestly. "I rather fancy myself as the Prince of Denmark, you know."

Gordon Gay grinned.

"Well, I was thinking of 'Othello,'" he said. "The fact is, I've been mugging up the part of Othello, and I can do it down to the ground."

Mont Blong chuckled.

"I zink zat zere will be plenty of principals," he remarked; "but it is not possible for all my shums to play ze title-role, I zink."

"Well, no; somebody will have to stand down," said Gordon Gay, with a nod. "I suggest that you two chaps stand down."

"Well, I wouldn't mind standing down, so far as that goes," said Wootton major; "but, you see, I'm thinking of the play. A chap must think of the success of the piece; that comes before considerations of friendship. So I think that if I do Brutus—"

"I agree with Harry, there," said Jack Wootton, thoughtfully. "The success of the piece is the first consideration."

"You back me up in 'Julius Caesar'?" asked his major.

"No fear!" said Jack promptly. "I mean that we'd better have 'Hamlet,' with me in the title-role, in order to make the thing go."

"Well, of all the cheeky asses—"

"Yes, I must say that Jack seems a cheeky ass, to me," said Gordon Gay. "But you are another, old fellow. The piece will have to be 'Othello,' because we want a really good lead, and I've been mugging up the part."

"Put it to the vote," said Wootton major.

"All right. Hands up for 'Julius Caesar'!"

Wootton major's hand went up. Gordon Gay chuckled.

"Now hands up for 'Hamlet'!" he said.

Wootton minor put his hand up.

"Now hands up for 'Othello'!"

And Gordon Gay put his own hand up. Mont Blong followed it. Wootton major and minor glared at the French junior.

"What are you wagging your paw for?" demanded Harry Wootton indignantly. "What do you know about 'Othello'?"

"Nozing," said Mont Blong modestly. "But I am backing up my shum."

"Fathead!"

"Look here, Mont Blong's vote doesn't count in a matter like this!" said Jack Wootton warmly. "We've taken him into the Co., but he's not a member of the Dramatic Committee."

"Rats!" said Gordon Gay. "I'm president of the Dramatic Committee, and I can admit him as a member. I do admit him as a member, so there you are!"

"That's all very well—"

"Of course it is. Now it's settled we're to have 'Othello.'"

"But it isn't settled!" roared Wootton major.

"Of course it's settled! Didn't you suggest yourself putting it to the vote?" demanded Gordon Gay. "Now it's put to the vote, and the voting's gone for 'Othello.' Besides, 'Othello' is a ripping play, and the fellows will like to see a character on the stage with his chivvy made up with soot."

"Blessed nigger minstrel turn!" said Jack Wootton, with a sniff.

"Oh, rot! Macaulay says that 'Othello' is the greatest work in the world, or something like that."

"Blow Macaulay! Who's he, anyway?"

"Blessed if I know! I think he wrote history, or something. Anyway, he said that I read it somewhere. He wrote the 'Lays of Ancient Rome.'"

"My hat! I'm not going to accept the opinion of a chap who could do that!" said Wootton major. "Blow Macaulay! I think that 'Julius Caesar'—"

"Hamlet!"

"Othello!"

"Look here—"

"Fathead!"

"My shums, zat zere is peace. I giff ze vote for 'Othello,' and zat is all right. But zere are good parts for ze ozzers." "Yes, you can have Iago, Harry," said Gordon Gay. "He's an awful villain, but has a ripping good part. We'll put you down for Iago."

"And where do I come in?" demanded Jack Wootton.

"Cassio; that's a good part. And you have to sing a drinking song, too. The fellows will have to listen."

Wootton minor glared.

"Look here, you fathead—"

"That's three parts filled," said Gordon Gay, jotting it

down on an old envelope. "I don't know what we're to do with Mont Blong, unless we shove him in as Desdemona."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I zink, perhaps, I play ze part of Desdemona all ripping," said Mont Blong modestly.

"Well, you see, it isn't a farce," said Wootton major, "if it were, you'd do first-chop. Mont Blong can be the Doge of Venice, or a soldier, or something, and keep his head shut."

"I zink—"

"Good!" said Gordon Gay. "Mont Blong can speak civilized English when he tries very hard, and he won't have much to say as Duke of Venice. Let's go along and see Monkey, and see if the kids are willing to take their proper places. You know what a nerve they've got. I shouldn't wonder if they want to do the leading parts."

"Of course, in that case we shall have to come down rather heavy."

"You bet!"

And the Cornstalk Co. strolled away in search of their rivals in the Fourth, whom they found on the beach, sitting on the edge of an upturned boat, deep in discussion. Monk and Lane and Carboy looked rather grimly at the Cornstalks. They had not quite got over the jape Gordon Gay had played upon them, at the time when Monk had disguised himself as a new German master, and had been captured in Gordon Gay's tent.

"Hallo!" said Monk. "I wanted to see you. We've been talking about a rather good wheeze. I suppose you know we're breaking up here shortly."

"Yes," said Gordon Gay.

"Well, we've got an idea of giving a grand wind-up entertainment, and asking all the school-seniors, prefects, masters, and Head!" said Monk. "I shall persuade my pater to come, and if he comes, all the masters will come. When father says turn, they all turn, you know. We've been planning a nigger-minstrel show—I'm going to be corner-man, and Lane and Carboy will do the rest of the talking. But you fellows can come into the show, and do a banjo bit, and sit round with your chivvies blacked, you know. Might even give one of you a song—we'll see. What do you say?"

Gordon Gay grinned at his chums.

"What do we say?" he asked.

"I say rats, for one," said Wootton Major.

"Rats!" said Jack Wootton.

"Very well; rats!" said Gordon Gay.

"Ze rats, and many of zem!" said Mont Blong.

Monk and Lane and Carboy glared.

"Well, you cheeky asses—" began Frank wrathfully.

"The fact is," said Gordon Gay; "we've been talking over a somewhat similar idea, and we've come to ask you to take a whack in it. We're going to do 'Othello.'"

"Poor Othello!" said Lane. "He will be done—brown!"

"Oh, quite!" said Carboy.

"Making a comic skit on it?" asked Frank affably.

"No!" roared Gordon Gay. "It's a tragedy, you ass."

"Tragic for you, and comic for the audience," suggested Lane.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We've arranged the parts," said Gordon Gay, frowning. "I'm Othello, and Wootton major is Iago, and Jack is Cassio. Mont Blong is the Doge of Venice. You can be Roderigo, if you like Monkey."

"Thank you for nothing."

"Lane can be Emilia—he can make up as an old girl—"

"M-yes!"

"And I'll tell you what, Carboy has got a smooth chivvy and a squeaky voice; so we'll let him have Desdemona's part!"

"Rats!" said Carboy.

"I don't mind doing the reasonable thing," said Monk thoughtfully. "We'll do 'Othello,' if I have the title-role. Lane can do Iago, and Carboy Cassio."

"Rats!"

"Bosh!"

"Rubbish!"

"Then I fancy we'll go ahead with our nigger-minstrel show," said Lane.

"Yes, rather," said Monk emphatically; "and I think our nigger-minstrel show will knock spots off your Othello." "I daresay we sha'n't be quite so funny as Gay's tragedy," remarked Carboy. "But we'll do our best."

"Ass!" said Gordon Gay politely. "We jolly well won't let you into the play, now. B-r-r."

"We won't let you into the nigger-minstrel show," said Monk. "After all, you would make the thing too miserable, if you tried to be funny. Go and eat coke!"

The Cornstalks exchanged a glance, and laid violent hands upon the boat the Old Co. were sitting upon. They jerked it up, and the three juniors rolled off upon the sand. The

Cornstalks rolled the boat over upon them, and walked away, leaving Frank Monk & Co. imprisoned under the boat, and yelling for help.

"Now, there's no time to waste," said Gordon Gay, as the chums entered the school camp. "Those bounders will be trying to rope in the good actors in the Fourth into their rotten nigger-minstrel performance, to keep them out of our ripping play. We must go round and collar all the actors, and get them to put their names down for rehearsal—we can bag the whole Fourth; all of them will be glad to get on the stage, you know, and act—even if it's only as extra soldiers or a Venetian crowd."

"Hear, hear!"

On the beach, Frank Monk and Lane and Carboy struggled out from under the boat, and dusted the sand out of their clothes wrathfully.

"The bounders!" growled Frank Monk. "It's just like them to come along with a giddy drama to bust up our show. I'll tell you what we'll do, kids—we'll make it an extra big nigger troupe, and bag all the fellows in the Fourth who can act, and promise 'em a song each—and keep 'em rehearsing—and those three duffers will be left to play 'Othello' all on their giddy lonesome."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the Old Co. hurried off to carry out their idea. The fellows in the Fourth Form of Rylcombe Grammar School were much given to amateur theatricals; but just now there was likely to be an unprecedented demand for histrionic talent!

The Old Co. in a Fix,

"Done!" growled Frank Monk.

And Lane and Carboy nodded a lugubrious assent. It seemed, certainly, as if the Old Co. were "done."

Gordon Gay & Co. had made a "scoop" of the amateur theatrical talent in the Fourth. For some unexplained reason, the Fourth-Formers of Rylcombe Grammar School preferred to play Shakespeare, to blacking their faces and appearing in an amateur nigger troupe!

It was really inexplicable.

For there was very little doubt that, if it had been a question of being in the audience, the juniors would have preferred the nigger-minstrel show as an entertainment. But when it came to acting, they preferred to act Shakespeare. If they were on the stage, they were heartlessly indifferent to the sufferings of the audience. It was really very unreasonable of them; but so it was, and the Old Co. had to make the best of it.

Nigger minstrels were off. Even Tadpole declined to black his face and swell the ranks of Frank Monk's followers, having been tempted by the chance of playing extra soldier in "Othello."

Nobody in the Fourth wanted any nigger parts. Every fellow who could do anything at all in the dramatic line was led away in the triumph of Gordon Gay. Gay was very liberal with parts. Shakespeare never errs on the side of having too few characters, certainly. But Gordon Gay was willing to increase the number, if necessary. Extra soldiers, extra guardsmen, extra sailors, extra Venetian nobles—he would have piled them in without limit, and kept them all rehearsing night and day, if necessary. And against this Monk & Co. had no chance. Fellows had no time for nigger minstrels. Too busy rehearsing for "Othello," was their explanation to Monk.

And after a day of disappointments, Monk gave up the idea.

"We could give a performance another night, you know," Lane suggested, as the Old Co. discussed the question on the sand.

Monk shook his head.

"Gordon Gay's bagged the night before we break up here. That's the right time for a send-off performance, isn't it? We can't give it later, because the next day we shall pack and bunk. And we can't give it earlier, because all the Fourth are full up with rehearsing for that disgusting drama."

"Looks as if we're sold."

"Oh, quite!"

Monk sniffed.

"I'm jolly well not sold," he growled. "We've got to score somehow. Dash it all, we can't let those giddy Cornstalks beat us all along the line."

(This school serial will be continued in next Wednesday's GEM, when our grand new serial of Nelson Lee, Detective, entitled, "BIRDS OF PREY," by Maxwell Scott, will commence. Order your GEM Library in advance. Price 1d.)

A NEW FREE CORRESPONDENCE EXCHANGE.

The only names and addresses which can be printed in these columns will be from those readers living in any of our Colonies who desire Correspondents in Great Britain and Ireland.

Colonists sending in their names and addresses for insertion in the columns of this popular story-book must state what kind of correspondent is required—boy or girl, English, Scotch, Welsh, or Irish.

Would-be correspondents must send with each notice two coupons. One taken from "The Gem," and one from the same week's issue of its companion paper, "The Magnet" Library. Coupons will always be found on page 2 of both papers, and requests for correspondents not containing these two coupons will be absolutely disregarded.

Readers wishing to reply to advertisements appearing in this column must write to the advertisers direct. No correspondence with advertisers can be undertaken through the medium of this office.

All advertisements for insertion in this Free Exchange should be addressed: "The Editor, 'The Gem' Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C. England."

C. S. Merrett, P. O. Box 696, Christchurch, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with a girl reader, age about 16 years of age.

T. A. Summerville, Greta, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader of "The Gem" in England.

V. Prentis, c. o. Mrs. Neill, Rose Bank, Royal Terrace, Kingsland, Auckland, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with a Russian reader.

A. Singer, 385, St. Charles Borromeo Street, Montreal, Canada, wishes to correspond with a girl reader in England, age 18.

R. J. Preece P.O. Box, 430, Cape Town, South Africa, wishes to correspond with a girl reader, age 17, living in England.

Miss D. R. Fish, Katoomba Street, Katoomba, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with a reader age 24 or 15 years.

S. Edward Peterson, Y.M.C.A., London, Ontario, Canada, wishes to correspond with a girl reader from 16 to 36, living in any part of the British Isles.

H. T. Wear, H.M.C.S. Niobe, Halifax, N.S., Canada, wishes to correspond with a boy or girl reader, age 17, living in London.

E. F. Stratton, 38, Guillaume Street, Longueuil, Montreal, Canada, wishes to correspond with a girl reader, age 14, living in England.

J. E. Biggerstaff, 712, MacIntyre Block, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, age 16, would like to correspond with a girl reader about the same age, living in England.

B. Darlot, age 20, of Chelsworth House, Ivanhoe, Melbourne, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader, age 20 or 21.

L. Jacobs, 10, Worden Street, Beach Hill, East London, S. Africa, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in England, age about 18.

W. Chesterton, Poste Restante, Benoni, Transvaal, S. Africa, wishes to correspond with girl readers of "The Gem" living in England.

F. Franks, Van Der Lingen Street, Lower Paarl, Cape Province, South Africa, wishes to correspond with a girl reader, living in England, of between 18 and 20 years of age.

J. R. Huddle, P.O. Benoni, Transvaal, S. Africa, wishes to correspond with girl readers living in England, age 17-19.

P. Obsen, P.O., Box, 960, Cape Town, South Africa, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in England, between the ages of 16 and 17.

G. E. Billingsley, 218, Bellwoods Avenue, Toronto, Canada, wishes to correspond with a boy or girl reader in England.

H. Lazarus, 20, Delver Street, Johannesburg, Transvaal, S. Africa, wishes to correspond with a girl reader.

The Editor specially requests Colonial Readers to kindly bring the Free Correspondence Exchange to the notice of their friends.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 243.

A Splendid, New, Long, Complete School Tale of the Chums of St. Jim's. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"THE FLOODED SCHOOL!"

OUR SPECIAL WEEKLY FEATURE—

For Next Wednesday.**"THE FLOODED SCHOOL!"**

by Martin Clifford, is the title of the next splendid, long, complete tale of Tom Merry & Co., who have an adventurous time, indeed under conditions that are without parallel in the history of the old school. The floods are out, and the whole countryside is under water, but the juniors naturally make the most of the respite from ordinary school work, which is forced upon them by

"THE FLOODED SCHOOL!"

Note.—Don't forget to tell your newsagent NOW to reserve you a copy of next Wednesday's "Gem" Library, and also the first number of "The Penny Popular"—out next Friday.

OUT NEXT WEEK!

Next week will be marked by the publication of the "New story paper that everyone has been asking for"—that is, of course,

"THE PENNY POPULAR."

The exact date upon which this notable and long-wished-for event will take place is

FRIDAY, OCTOBER THE ELEVENTH,

and I want all my readers to make a very careful note of this date, and to make a special point of telling their newsagents in advance to order them a copy of this wonderful new publication. The first number will contain three magnificent, long, complete stories of

**TOM MERRY & CO.,
JACK, SAM, AND PETE, and
SEXTON BLAKE.**

without doubt the most popular characters in the whole world of fiction.

With such a list of contents,

"THE PENNY POP"

will be a worthy companion paper to the famous "Gem" and "Magnet" Libraries, and as such cannot fail to appeal to every one of my numerous reader-chums.

Don't forget, then,

"THE PENNY POPULAR,"

the paper that the readers of "The Gem" and "The Magnet" Libraries would have, will be

OUT ON FRIDAY, OCTOBER 11th.**A Note from Australia.**

The following little note from an Australian reader emphasises the value of "The Gem" Library to Colonials as a link with the Motherland. My reader, C. Van de V., did not realise the true worth of the two good old companion papers until he went to live far away over the sea, thousands of miles away from home and the familiar scenes of his early life. Out there in Australia, however, came the full appreciation of what "The Gem" and "The Magnet" really mean to him, and he takes care never to miss a single number.

"Melbourne, Australia.

"Dear Mr. Editor,—I am writing to tell you how I like 'The Gem' and 'The Magnet.' I think they are the best papers in the world. I have been in Australia four and a half months, and feel as happy as ever. I did not take them in every week in England, but it is so nice to be able to look forward to them every week out here.

"I will tell you how I came to read 'The Gem' and 'The Magnet.' I was walking in the gardens at Broadstairs, when I saw a paper left on a seat. I got it, and looked at it, and found it to be a 'Gem.' I was so interested in it that I have it in every week. I think it would be a very good idea if

everyone who has a 'Gem' or 'Magnet' that they do not want would leave it on a seat.—I remain, your true reader,

"C. VAN DE V."

An excellent idea, C. Van de V., and one which many Gemites already make a point of carrying out. Many thanks for writing.

Our Grand New Serial.

I have another splendid surprise in store for my readers next week! In next Wednesday's issue of "The Gem" Library will appear the opening chapters of a grand new serial story, entitled

"BIRDS OF PREY!"

by Maxwell Scott. The principal character in this magnificent story will be

Nelson Lee, Detective,

whose fame as a crime investigator is known all the world over, and whose amazing adventures and thrilling experiences provide material for a narrative so powerful in its intense human interest as to hold the reader spellbound in its grip.

In the opening chapters of

"BIRDS OF PREY!"

in next Wednesday's "Gem" Library, my readers may look forward to a rare treat which they would be ill-advised to miss on any account. Truly, with the publication of our wonderful new paper, "The Penny Popular," and the commencement of this grand new serial, next week will be a notable one indeed!

Some Lighting-Up Time Tips.

Now that the days are growing shorter, cyclists out for their evening spin are apt to be caught by "lighting-up time" while still several miles from home. Not infrequently, when one attempts to light the lamp, the discovery is made that it contains

no oil,

or that the wick is too short, or the candle burnt out, or that some defect or other has developed since the lamp was last used. The following few tips may serve to help some Gemites out of little difficulties of this kind that may crop up at lighting-up time.

When you have no oil, unscrew the burner, and turn the wick down until it falls out into your hand. Then reverse, and reinsert

the charred end

of the wick from the top, being careful not to squeeze the end which has been in the oil-well. That end is still full of oil, and will last you for twenty to thirty minutes.

Candle-lamps burn longer and steadier if

a pinch of salt

is placed round the wick in the little cup of melted wax, not touching the wick. If you have to fall back on an ordinary candle, which has an awkward habit of shooting up under the pressure of the spring, use quite short pieces of candle, and push some crumpled pieces of paper in the coils of the spring. This is always effective.

If you have no lamp, and do not wish to buy one, and are in a town or village, seek a toy-shop or a confectioner's. Buy

a penny Chinese lantern

—there are always some left over and stored away—and a halfpenny candle.

Cut the candle into small pieces, and renew as required; otherwise, you'll have a conflagration. The swing of the lantern must be steadied by string, and a piece of turf, cut and fitted round the candle-holder in the lantern, will make a most excellent piece of ballast.

THE EDITOR.