

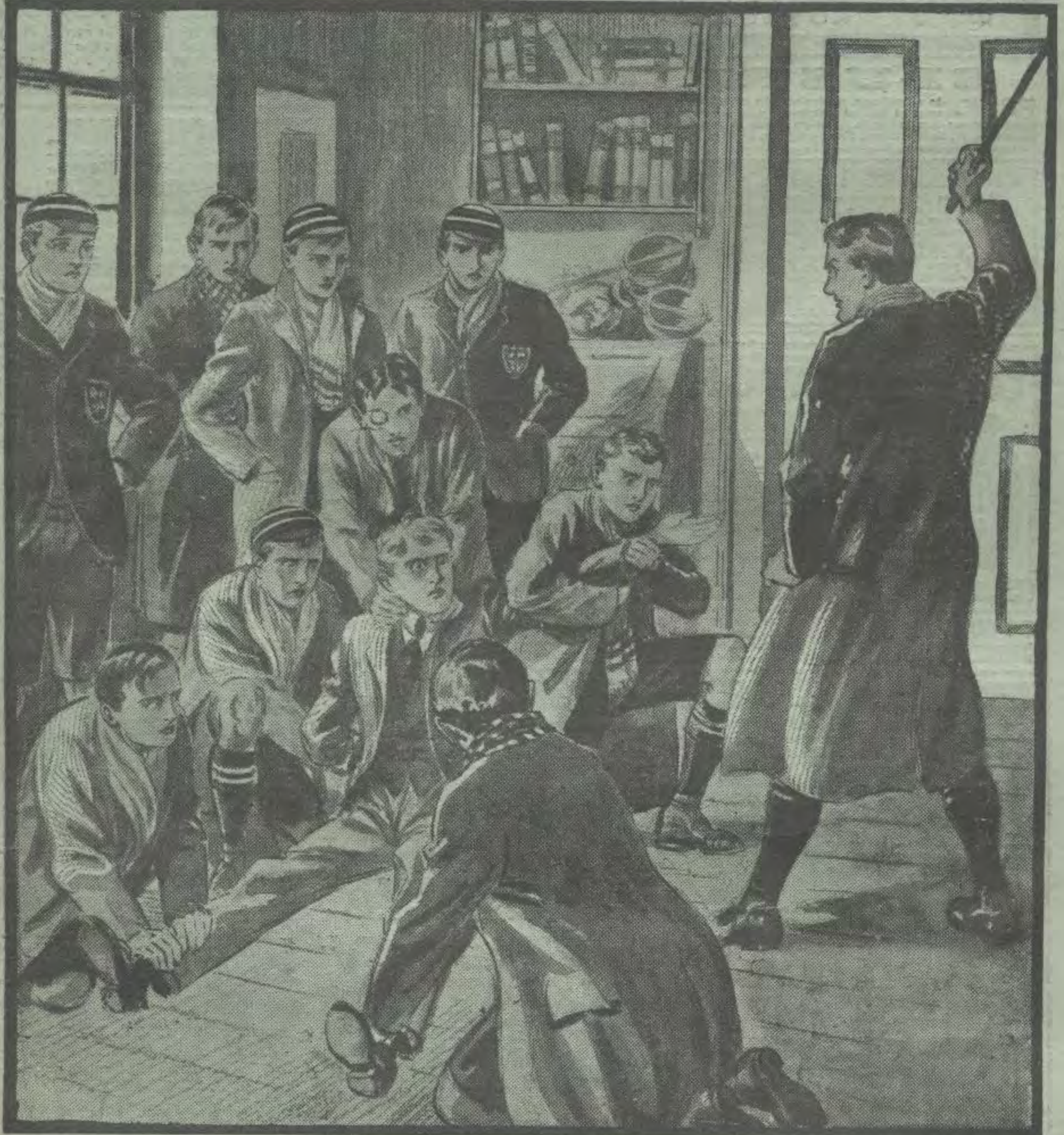
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"Hold out his hand, you fellows!" said Tom Merry. "I'm going to give him three on each hand as a warning to the others!" Darrel roared and struggled, but it was of no avail. Swish! came the cane, and the prefect yelled with pain. (Darrel, the prefect, caned by a junior! For the exciting incidents leading up to this startling episode, see the grand, long, complete tale of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's contained in this issue.)

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CAPTAIN TOM MERRY!

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

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.



"You kids must make less noise!" said Darrel, pushing his way into the room. "Rats!" replied Tom Merry coolly. Darrel gasped, and raised his cane threateningly. "Put that cane down!" went on Tom Merry, holding up a warning hand. "Don't you know I'm captain of the school?" (See Chapter 1.)

CHAPTER 1. Unprecedented!

ST. JIM'S was in a state of excitement. A stranger looking in on the old school that Saturday afternoon would have wondered what was on. It was only too evident that something was "on."

The Lower School was in a state of extraordinary exuberance. Junior fellows clapped one another on the back when they met, or shook hands, or burst into cheering without any apparent rhyme or reason.

The senior fellows, it might have been noticed, did not seem to share in the general exuberance. They looked serious and solemn.

Whatever was "on," it was evidently something that pleased the Lower School very greatly, and was not regarded with favourable eyes by the Upper School.

In the Shell passage in the School House there was a terrific crowd, all of them noisy, and all of them joyous. Tom Merry's study was crowded.

Tom Merry was holding a reception.

Juniors of both Houses—School House and New House—came in swarms. The rivalry between the two Houses of St. Jim's seemed to be entirely suspended.

Figgins & Co. of the New House were grinning with joy; and so were the Terrible Three of the School House—Tom

Merry and Manners and Lowther. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form wore an unusually expansive smile, though he was so squeezed by the crowd in Tom Merry's study that his elegant clothes were in great danger of being crumpled.

"It's simply wippin'!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy declared for the twentieth time at least. "I wegard it as simply wippin', deah boys!"

"Gorgeous!" said Jack Blake.

"Topping!" chimed in Figgins of the New House.

And all the fellows crammed in the study and the passage burst into a cheer:

"Hurrah! Hip-pip—hurrah!"

The din in the Shell passage must have been heard all over the School House, and on most occasions it would have caused some exasperated prefect to come along with a cane. But just now the prefects seemed to be keeping off the grass, so to speak.

For it was election day!

And the crowd of juniors were celebrating the election of their candidate. And the candidate was Tom Merry of the Shell!

It is said that it is always the unexpected that happens; and certainly nothing could have been more unexpected than the election of a Shell fellow to the captaincy of St. Jim's.

Next Wednesday:

"THE HOUSEMASTER'S PERIL!" AND "PLAYING THE GAME!"

No. 318. (New Series). Vol. 8.

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A junior captain of the school!
It seemed impossible—but it had happened.
Tom Merry of the Shell had been elected captain of St. Jim's, beating his rival, Cutts of the Fifth by a huge majority.

And naturally the Lower School rejoiced.
Tom Merry himself was looking very elated. It was natural, under the circumstances. Naturally, too, he was holding a reception of the electors, and every fellow who had voted for him came to the reception, with the result that the study and the whole passage were crammed with an uproarious throng.

Refreshments had been provided on a generous scale. The Co. had gladly clubbed together to their last sixpence to celebrate that unique and never-to-be-forgotten occasion.

The fellows in the study, lucky to be on the spot, demolished the good things with great heartiness, and passed out helpings to their less fortunate comrades in the passage.

Fatty Wynn of the New House stood at the table, tucking into a huge pie, his plump face shining like a full moon. There was no room to sit down. There wasn't very much room to stand, for that matter.

Every now and then the feed and the talk were interrupted by bursts of cheering. On election day the fellows were entitled to make a row if they liked. They took full advantage of the privilege.

Besides, now that Tom Merry was captain of the school, they could do as they liked; the new captain would see them through.

And they wanted the seniors to hear them rejoice. They wanted the prefects to understand that there was a new regime now.

In fact, they wouldn't have been sorry to see some interfering prefect come along. Under the orders of the captain of the school, they would have been justified in ejecting the said prefect "on his neck." And to eject a prefect on his neck would have been bliss to the juniors.

"Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!"

"We shall have Darrel or somebody along here soon, if we don't put the soft pedal on," Kangaroo of the Shell remarked.

"Let 'em all come!" said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "We'll jollay soon show them that we don't care a wap for them!"

"What-ho!"

"Prefects have no right to interfere with the captain of the school," said Tom Merry seriously. "I've been going over the Ordinances of the School—"

"The which?" ejaculated Figgins.

"The ordinances!" said Tom Merry. "They're in a book in the library—the laws of the school, you know, that even the Head has to respect. I've copied out the ordinances that affect the captain of the school, and I know my rights. I'm going to live up to them. I'm sure all you fellows will back me up in exercising my proper authority."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Hurrah!"

There was a shout from the crowded passage:

"Here comes Darrel!"

"A blessed prefect!"

"Who are you shoving, Darrel?"

"You get off! We don't want any of the Sixth here!"

"Get out!"

Tom Merry struggled to the door and looked out into the passage. Darrel of the Sixth, with a very red face, was pushing his way through the throng amid roars of protest and indignation. He was making his way to the study, but it was slow work.

Tom Merry waved his hand to his excited backers.

"Let Darrel pass, you fellows!" he called out.

"We don't want any prefects!" howled the crowd.

"Darrel's a good sort. Let him come in. If Knox comes along you can chuck him out—or Cutts—on my authority."

"Hear, hear!"

Darrel squeezed through, and arrived in the study in a somewhat breathless and dishevelled state. Darrel was a very popular fellow, only second in that respect to old Kildare himself, the captain of St. Jim's, who had left suddenly, and whose place as captain Tom Merry had taken.

But, popular or not, Darrel couldn't be allowed to interfere with the rights and duties of the new captain. That wasn't to be thought of for a moment.

"You kids must make less noise," Darrel gasped. "Do you know you can be heard over the whole House and across the quadrangle?"

"I shouldn't wonder," said Tom Merry calmly.

"Well, you've got to shut up!"

"Rats!"

"What!" shouted the prefect, grasping his cane.

Tom Merry raised his hand warningly.

"Put that cane down, Darrel!"

"Wha-a-at!"

"Don't you know that I'm captain of the school?" demanded Tom Merry. "Listen to this. Bye-law No. 67 of the Ordinances of St. James's Collegiate School. 'The captain of the school, by virtue of his position, takes precedence of all prefects, who are under his direction.' Got that, Darrel?"

"You—you cheeky young ass——"

"Hold on!" said Tom Merry sternly. "No slanging. Listen to this. Bye-law No. 79. 'Any disrespect to constituted authority shall be punished by flogging, detention, or caning upon the hands, as may be deemed fit and suitable.'"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's nothing to laugh at," said Tom Merry, looking round severely. "This is a serious matter. I don't want to flog you, Darrel——"

"What!"

"Or detain you, or cane you upon the hands——"

"Wha-a-at!" stuttered the Sixth-Former.

"But I must insist upon proper respect for constituted authority. Kindly lay down that cane at once!"

"You—you——"

"Take that cane away from Darrel!" said Tom Merry.

The cane was whipped out of the prefect's hand in a second. Darrel clenched his fists, but unnumbered fists were clenched round him at once.

"Take it calmly, Darrel, old man," said Tom Merry.

"We don't want to hurt you——"

"Hurt me!" spluttered the prefect. "I'm dreaming, I suppose! I must be dreaming!"

"Kindly return to your study, Darrel, and consider yourself detained there for one hour!" said Tom Merry.

Darrel stood transfixed.

"Do you hear me, Darrel?"

"I—I hear you! I'll thrash you!"

"Remove that insubordinate person!" said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Throw him out!"

"Hurray!"

Darrel wondered whether he was on his head or his heels. Hands grasped him on all sides, and he was hustled out of the study. In the passage the crowd hustled him on. He was breathless, and his collar was torn out, and his jacket split up the back, by the time he reached the stairs. He went back to his study in a dazed state. In Tom Merry's study and the parts adjoining the celebration continued with undiminished din.

CHAPTER 2.

A Difficult Situation.

DR. HOLMES, the Head of St. Jim's, sat in his study, with a worried brow.

Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, was with him, and he, too, was looking decidedly worried.

The state of things at the old school was extraordinary—it was a state that could not possibly be allowed to continue; and yet there did not seem to be any ready means by which it could be put an end to.

A junior captain of the school!

It was unthinkable.

But what was to be done? Without what everybody in the Lower School would have considered an utterly unjustifiable and tyrannical exercise of authority, the Head could not quash the result of the election. He shrank from taking such a step as ordering Tom Merry to resign the captaincy to which he had been elected.

But unless Tom Merry was directly commanded to do so by the Head, it was plain that he wouldn't even think of resigning. He was quite satisfied with himself as captain of the school.

"It is an unheard-of state of affairs," the doctor said, with

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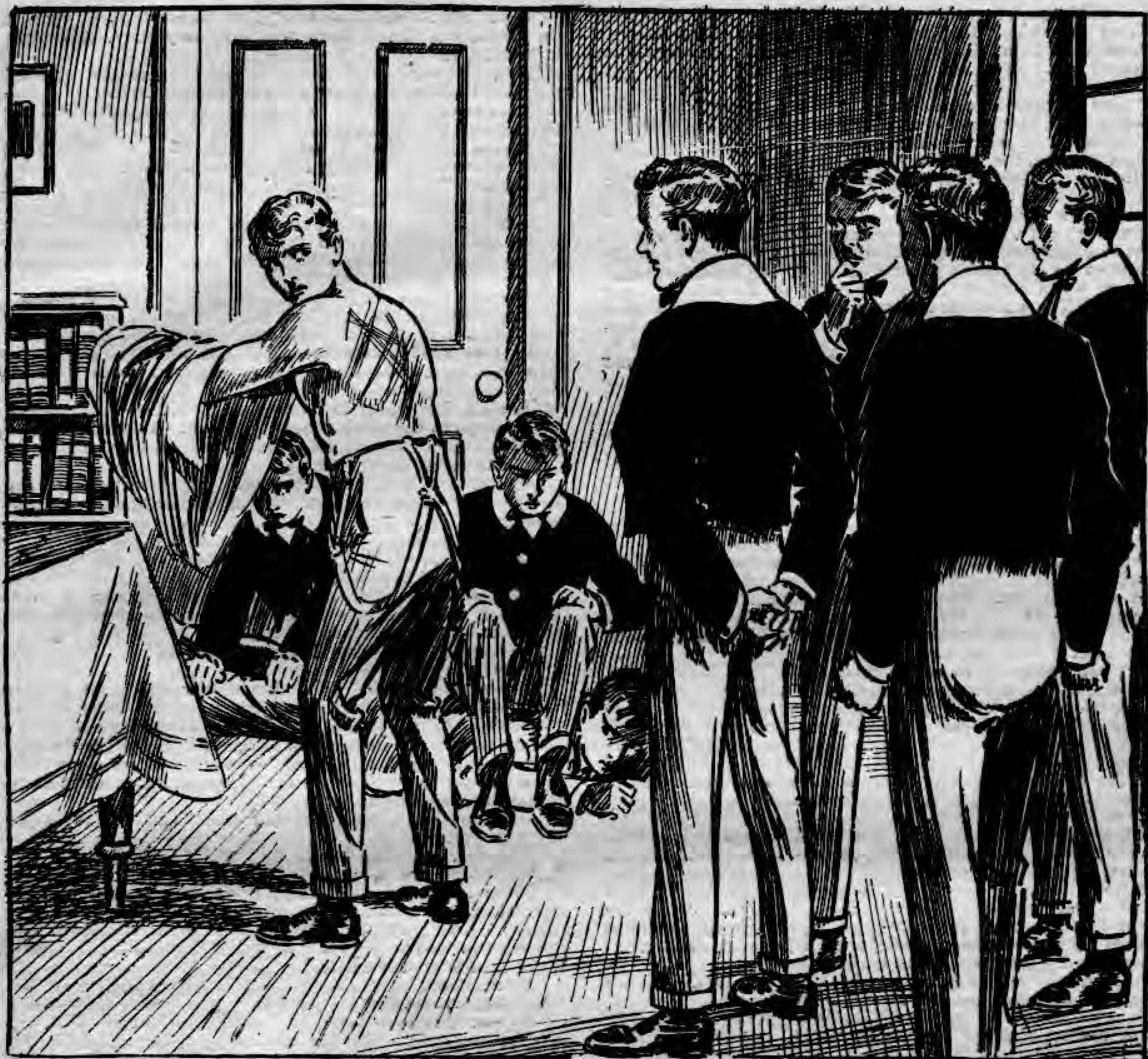
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Curly Gibson stripped off his jacket and removed his shirt. There was a buzz of indignation from the juniors at the sight of the cuts and weals on the fag's back. "You hound, Knox!" said Tom Merry contemptuously. "You ought to be boiled in oil!" (See Chapter 4.)

a troubled frown. "Of course, it is impossible to allow it to continue."

"Impossible!" agreed Mr. Railton.

"Yet it seems equally impossible to interfere."

"It would certainly be difficult."

"I confess, Mr. Railton, that I really do not know what is to be done under such extraordinary circumstances."

Mr. Railton nodded. He did not know either.

"It is very unfortunate," he agreed. "There were four candidates—Monteith and Knox of the Sixth, Cutts of the Fifth, and Tom Merry of the Shell. Unfortunately, it is the junior who has been elected."

"Of course, I could not foresee that contingency when I directed Monteith to withdraw from his candidature," the Head remarked. "I had no alternative, when it was revealed to me that at one time he had been mixed up in disgraceful proceedings with a set of betting-men."

"Quite so," agreed the Housemaster. "But the juniors had a suspicion that it was Cutts of the Fifth who made that revelation to you, in order to spoil Monteith's chances for the election, and they all turned against him at once."

"It is possible, of course, that they were right."

"Probably. And as Knox withdrew also—I think by some arrangement with Cutts—only the two remained; and Cutts being so extremely unpopular, Tom Merry was elected by an overwhelming majority. It is not as if the majority had been small. In that case a new election might be considered. But the majority was more than a hundred; and a new election would certainly have the same result."

The Head drummed on the table with his fingers.

"But a junior captain of the school, Mr. Railton! It is impossible!"

"It is certainly very awkward."

"The captain of the school has authority over the prefects, and, of course, should be a prefect himself."

"But neither Knox nor Cutts was a prefect, and they were allowed to stand. I fear it is too late to raise that point, sir."

"Of course, this is an entirely unexpected turn of events, and one that could not be prepared for," said the Head.

"But something must be done. All the seniors, for instance, will be against the new captain; they cannot be expected to obey a junior—though, by the rules, they are bound to obey the captain of the school."

"They will certainly ignore a junior captain."

"Which will lead to great friction and dispute."

"I fear so."

"But what am I to do? If I order the junior to resign, and make a new law on the subject, all the Lower School will regard it as an act of tyranny. And, to a certain extent, they would be right."

"It would undoubtedly make a very bad impression."

"Yet what is to be done? Something should be done before the matter has gone too far and caused trouble that will not be easily suppressed."

"I quite agree with you, sir. Perhaps an appeal to the good sense of the junior may have some effect. He might listen to you, sir, or to me."

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY—

"THE HOUSEMASTER'S PERIL!"

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of
Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"I will leave it in your hands, Mr. Railton," said the Head, looking relieved. "Pray see what you can do in the matter. I trust that Tom Merry will have sufficient good sense to listen to you. After all, he is a sensible lad."

"I will do my best, sir."

"And perhaps it would be as well to lose no time," said the Head. "The affair cannot be put an end to too soon."

"Quite so. I will see Merry at once."

And Mr. Railton left the Head's study.

His brow was very thoughtful as he went towards the stairs. He could hear the din of the celebration in the junior quarters. It was true that Tom Merry was a sensible lad—quite true; but the Housemaster knew that the junior's point of view might not coincide with his own. However, he determined to do his best to bring Tom Merry to reason.

There was a buzz in the Shell passage as Mr. Railton came upstairs. The juniors respectfully made way for the Housemaster. It was not very easy to make way, in that tremendous crowd, but they contrived to allow Mr. Railton to pass. The Housemaster reached the crammed study, and the din died away as he looked in.

"Come in, sir!" said Tom Merry cordially. "It's very kind of you to come to congratulate me, sir."

The juniors grinned. They guessed easily enough that the Housemaster had not come there to congratulate the newly-elected captain of the school.

Mr. Railton coughed.

"Ahem! I came to speak to you, Merry."

"Yes, sir."

"But—ahem!—I think a more private occasion—"

"Oh, pile in, sir—I mean, go on! These chaps don't mind. In fact, sir, if it's anything about the captaincy, I'd rather they heard it, too. You see, I'm forming all my pals into a committee to help me run things, now I'm captain. I'm rather young to be captain of a school like St. Jim's," added Tom Merry, with becoming modesty.

"Yaas, I'm goin' to act as advisah to Tom Mewwy, sir. He requires the assistance of a fellow of tact and judgment."

"Speak out, sir!" said Jack Blake encouragingly. "The managing committee will be very pleased to hear you, sir."

"Yaas, sir, we wegard you as a friend as well as a Housemaster," said Arthur Augustus graciously.

"The fact is," said Mr. Railton, "this election has had a most unexpected and absurd result, Merry."

Tom Merry looked surprised.

"Unexpected, sir, perhaps; but I don't see how it can be considered an absurd result, when the best candidate was elected."

"Hear, hear!"

"You see, sir, Monteith was ordered to get out, by the Head himself, because Cutts gave him away about some ancient history or other. And, naturally, the fellows weren't going to vote for a sneak like Cutts."

"No fear!" said Figgins emphatically. "He dished our man, and so we dished him!"

"As for Knox, he wasn't a suitable chap, anyway, and he never had an earthly," said Tom Merry. "It was between Cutts and me; and I think I can say, without swanking, that I'm the better man of the two."

"Hear, hear!"

"Bwavo!"

"Ahem! But it is quite impossible for a junior to be captain of the school," said Mr. Railton. "In the first place, the senior boys will not pay you any regard."

"They're bound to, sir, by the rules."

"I am afraid they will disregard the rules, under the circumstances."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"They won't be allowed to disregard the rules, sir. I'm going to keep the Sixth in order."

"What?"

"I sha'n't be a tyrant, of course, but I shall exercise authority with a firm hand," said Tom calmly. "All the juniors will back me up."

"Yes, rather!"

"Hurway!"

"The Sixth will have to toe the line, and I'll soon make 'em see that," said Tom cheerfully. "Don't you worry about that, sir. It will be all right."

"Ahem!" said Mr. Railton, far from assured on that point.

"Then there is the fact that you are a junior, and not a prefect, Merry. The captain of the school has always been head prefect."

"The Head can make me a prefect if he likes, sir."

"Jolly good wheeze!" said Monty Lowther heartily.

"Good egg!" said Blake. "You might suggest that to the Head, sir. Then there won't be any more difficulties on that point."

"And the captain of the school is head of the games," said Mr. Railton, his brow growing more worried. "I suppose you are not thinking of undertaking to captain the First Eleven, and direct the sports, Merry?"

"That's just what I am thinking of, sir," said Tom Merry at once. "I fancy I should do it better than Cutts, for instance."

"Cutts is a senior—"

"I know he is, sir; but, as a junior myself, naturally I sort of feel that a junior could run things better than a senior. All the fellows here agree with me."

"Yes, rather!"

"What—ho!"

"I'm going to do my best to carry on Kildare's work where he left it off, sir," said Tom Merry. "I don't say I shall be as good a captain as old Kildare was. He was a chap in a thousand. But a fellow can't do more than his best."

"Besides, I'm going to be advisah-in-chief—"

"To come to the point, Merry," said Mr. Railton, plunging into business at last, "I'm afraid this election cannot be allowed to stand."

There was a loud buzz at once. Even respect for the Housemaster could not repress that demonstration of indignation.

"Oh, really, sir!" exclaimed Tom Merry warmly. "I don't see that! The result of an open and fair election must be allowed to stand."

"In this case, under the peculiar circumstances, I think the Head will order the result to be set aside—unless you anticipate him by resigning, Merry."

"Impossible, sir! The Head can't do it!"

"What?"

"Listen to this, sir," said Tom Merry, referring at once to his collection of valuable extracts from the Ordinances of the School. "'Bylaw No. 98. In case of misconduct of any kind on the part of the captain of the school, the Headmaster shall have the right and power to dismiss him from his post, but otherwise the free choice of the electors shall be ratified, and shall be considered inviolable.'"

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus. "That hits the wight nail wight on the head."

"You see, sir, that settles it," said Tom Merry. Mr. Railton's face was a study. "The Head can't dismiss me excepting for misconduct—and I'm not the kind of chap to misconduct myself in any way. In fact, I'm going to be jolly careful. I'm sure Dr. Holmes wouldn't transgress his authority in that way—but if he did, I should have to appeal to the Board of Governors."

"Hear, hear!"

Mr. Railton compressed his lips.

"So you refuse to listen to my advice, Merry—"

"Not at all, sir. But the captain of a big school like St. Jim's must be supposed to be capable of forming an opinion for himself, don't you think, so, sir?"

"In a word, you refuse to resign from this ridiculous position to which you have so unfortunately been elected?" the Housemaster exclaimed tartly.

"I shouldn't put it like that, sir. But I certainly feel it my duty to live up to the position to which my schoolfellows have elected me, and to do my duty by them and by St. Jim's!" said Tom Merry.

"Then I have nothing more to say."

And the Housemaster quitted the study.

"Bai Jove!" remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "That looks as if the powahs that be don't quite like the way things are goin', deah boys!"

"They can lump it, then," said Tom Merry emphatically. "One thing's jolly certain—I'm captain of St. Jim's, and I'm going to remain captain!"

And there was a roar of applause and approval.

"Hurrah! Hip-pip-hurrah!"

And that roar accompanied the Housemaster as he went downstairs.

CHAPTER 3.

The New Captain.

WHAT was going to happen was a mystery so far. Tom Merry of the Shell was captain of St. Jim's, but that he could be allowed to remain captain seemed impossible to the seniors, at least.

Many of the juniors, too, expected the chopper to come down, as Monty Lowther put it.

But it did not come down.

Whether the Head, as well as Tom Merry, had been look-

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ing up the bylaws of the school, or whether he was simply hesitating in doubt—whatever the reason, the fiat did not go forth for the junior to stand out of the captaincy.

On Monday Tom Merry was still captain of St. Jim's, and showed every intention of sticking to his post and living up to it.

The Sixth Form had held a council on the subject in the privacy of the prefect's room; and although the result was not known to the juniors, they guessed easily enough that the top Form of the school had decided to be "up against" the new regime.

That, of course, was only to be expected.

The Sixth and the Fifth would "kick," but however hard they kicked, they could not kick Tom Merry out of the captaincy, and that was the important point.

It was known that Cutts of the Fifth was especially furious. It was not only his defeat in the election, but his defeat at the hands of a junior, that rankled in the breast of the black sheep of the Fifth. He had outwitted Monteith of the New House, he had bought off Knox of the Sixth, and he had been beaten at the finish by a Shell fellow!

It was no wonder that Cutts was furious, but Tom Merry & Co. did not care twopence for his fury. The new captain of St. Jim's felt quite equal to dealing with the Fifth-Former if he turned rusty. Gerald Cutts could scheme revenge as much as he liked; the captain of St. Jim's went on his way unregarding.

Indeed, instead of waiting for Cutts to "go for" him, it was quite likely that Tom Merry would begin by "going for" Cutts.

Tom had some inside knowledge of his little ways—of his betting on races, his visits to a certain public-house in Rylcombe; the bridge parties that he gave with locked doors in his study. Cutts had tried on one occasion to get Tom Merry into his rascally ways—and another time he had almost succeeded in inveigling Monty Lowther in his snares—and so the Terrible Three knew all about Cutts—much more than old Kildare had known, in his time.

Such practices as those of Cutts and his friends were, of course, strictly forbidden in the school, and it was the duty of the captain to put them down, and Tom Merry intended to do his duty in that respect, as soon as occasion should arise.

Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, looked at Tom Merry in a somewhat peculiar way, when he came into the Form-room on Monday morning.

It was the first time Mr. Linton had had a captain of the school in his class.

Tom Merry was, in fact, the cynosure of all eyes at this time. His old enemies, Gore and Crook and Levison and Mellish, were remarkably civil to him. However short a time his command might last, while it lasted he had it in his power to make things very warm for them if he liked; and they knew it. Not that Tom Merry was in the least likely to act the bully. But he did not mean to stand any nonsense, and he made that plain from the start.

The opposition of the seniors was counter-balanced by the support of the Lower School. There was hardly a junior in either House who was not prepared to back Tom Merry up through thick and thin.

Curiously enough, the new captain was as popular in the New House as in his own House. The New House candidate had been "dished" by Cutts. And the New House fellows had rejoiced in "dishing" Cutts in his turn, by voting for Tom Merry. And having elected Tom Merry, they were prepared to stand by him.

The new reign, therefore, was inaugurated by an unusual peacefulness between the juniors of the rival Houses, though how long that would last was a question.

For the present, however, the barometer was set fair, so to speak.

Figgins announced in the New House that he was backing up Tom Merry, and that he would punch the head of any other fellow who didn't back him up, and Figgy's argument was considered conclusive.

The juniors felt that Tom Merry was one of themselves, and that it was up to them to support him against the seniors, and they felt a natural rejoicing at the idea of "giving the Sixth a fall."

Tom Merry, as captain of St. Jim's, found that he had a good many new duties on his hands. In standing for election, he had made many promises in the exuberance of the moment. He might have forgotten them—as candidates sometimes do after election—but the other fellows did not intend to let him forget them.

Wally—D'Arcy minor of the Third—brought to his recollection the fact that he had promised to abolish fagging. That was to be one of the reforms under the new regime. Knox's fag reminded him that he had undertaken to stamp out bullying—Knox's fag having had great experience of

that. All the junior footballers remembered—and mentioned—the circumstance that he had agreed to play junior members in the First Eleven.

That was rather a pressing matter. On Wednesday one of the last fixtures of the football season was to take place—the match with the First Eleven of Rylcombe Grammar School. As captain of St. Jim's, Tom Merry was football skipper, and he would naturally take the command. And something like forty or fifty juniors were looking forward to places in the team. Unless Tom Merry decided on something like the old-fashioned Rugby game, with half a hundred a side, it was difficult to see how he was to satisfy all claimants. The way of the new captain of St. Jim's evidently did not lie through beds of roses.

But Tom Merry faced all his difficulties calmly and courageously. And so far the juniors were united in backing him up against all comers.

Knox of the Sixth was the first of the seniors to fall foul of the new captain. Knox had loudly announced that he regarded the election as "rot," and that he hadn't the slightest intention of taking any notice of the cheeky Shell kid. Some of the juniors wanted Tom to drop on Knox at once, under Rule 79 of the Ordinances of St. Jim's, which forbade disrespect towards the captain of the school. But Tom Merry left it till Knox proceeded from words to actions.

After lessons on Monday, while Tom was chatting with a group of his supporters on the footer-ground, discussing the coming First Eleven match, Wally of the Third dashed up in great excitement.

"Where's Tom Merry?" he shouted. "Where's the skipper?"

"Here I am," said Tom Merry. "What's wanted, kid?"

"Kid!" said Wally, forgetting Rule 79 for a moment. "Whom are you calling a kid? Kid yourself and be blown!"

"None of your cheek!" said Tom Merry, frowning. "I'm carrying an ash-plant now, to keep cheeky kids in order. Look out!"

And indeed Tom Merry had taken to carrying that symbol of authority, which he was certainly entitled to use as captain of the school.

"Yaas, tweat your skippah with pwopah wespect, Wally," said Arthur Augustus. "I expect my minah to set a pwopah example to the othah fags, you know."

"Oh, rats!" said Wally.

"Wally, you young wascal—"

"Oh, don't you begin, Gus!" implored Wally. "Tom Merry, you're wanted. You're captain of St. Jim's, ain't you? And you promised to put down bullying."

"Who's bullying whom?" asked Tom.

"Knox. He's licking young Curly in his study!" howled Wally. "Curly's my chum, and that beast Knox isn't going to lick him!"

"What has Curly done?"

"What does it matter what he's done?" howled Wally. "Ain't you going to keep your blessed election promises, and put down bullying? Knox is licking him with a cricket-stump!"

"I must inquire into this!" said Tom Merry, in a stately way. "I shall go to Knox's study at once. Some of you fellows had better come, in case there's trouble."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hear, hear!"

"We'll back you up!"

Tom Merry walked off towards the School House, with quite an army at his back. The juniors were very keen to try conclusions with the worst bully in the school, and this was the first time they had had the chance of doing so under the lead of a captain of the school. Judging by the looks of the juniors, it might have been predicted that there was a high old time in store for Knox of the Sixth.

CHAPTER 4.

Tom Merry Exercises His Authority.

"YOW-OW-OW!"

That Knox was putting in a good deal of energy with the cricket-stump was evident, from the howls of anguish that proceeded from his study as Tom Merry & Co. came up the Sixth-Form passage.

"Yow-ow-ow! You beast, Knox! I'll tell Tom Merry! Ow!"

Knox's angry voice could be heard in reply as the army neared the door of the study.

"You'll tell Tom Merry, will you? Take that! Tell him, too, that I'll give him some of the same if I have any of his cheek! Take that—and that—and that!"

Whack, whack, whack!

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"You hear him?" yelled Wally.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 318.

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Tom Merry threw open the door of Knox's study, and strode in. Knox had Curly Gibson by the collar, and was larruping him with energy and a cricket-stump. He paused in the castigation, however, to glare furiously at Tom Merry and the excited juniors at his back.

"Get out of my study!" he snapped.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"The captain of the school has a right to enter any study, to put down malpractices of any kind," he replied. "I refer you to Bylaw No. 45—"

"You cheeky young cad! If you don't get out, I'll boot you out!" roared Knox.

"Put down that stump!"

"What!"

"You hear me?" said Tom Merry sternly. "I don't allow bullying."

"You—you—you don't allow!" spluttered Knox.

"Exactly."

"You—you—"

"Are you going to put down that stump, or are you not?"

"Not!" shrieked Knox.

"Take that stump away from him, you fellows!" ordered the captain of St. Jim's.

"You bet!"

"What-ho!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The juniors were only too keen to obey. They swarmed at Knox. The bully of the Sixth whirled the stump above his head. His face was crimson with rage.

"Stand back, or I'll brain you!" he shouted.

"I wefuse to be bwained, and I wefuse to stand back!"

"Collar him!"

"Down with the bully!"

There was no telling what Knox might have done, but Tom Merry chipped in with his ash-plant, and knocked the stump out of Knox's hand. The next moment the bully of the Sixth was struggling in the grasp of the juniors.

"Bump him if he resists," said Tom Merry calmly.

Knox did resist. He was struggling like a lunatic, but the juniors were too many for him; they simply swarmed over him. Knox was whirled off his feet, and bumped on the floor with a concussion that shook the study.

"Sit on him, two or three of you!"

They sat upon Knox.

"This insubordination will do you no good, Knox," said Tom Merry loftily. "Resistance to constituted authority has to be put down with a strong hand. I shall now proceed to inquire into this matter. You have been thrashing young Gibson in a brutal manner."

"Ow! He's half killed me!" groaned Curly.

"I'll finish him, too!" yelled Knox.

"Shurrup!" said Blake, pressing his boot gently but firmly on the mouth of the floored bully. "You talk too much, Knox."

"Groooooogh!"

"Yaas; keep the wottah quiet. He weally deafens me, you know. Your voice is weally not at all pleasant to listen to, Knox, deah boy."

"Gerrroooogh!"

"Now, Curly, let me see whether he's hurt you," said Tom Merry. "Take your jacket off."

"I'm half flayed!" gasped Curly.

"Let's see."

Curly Gibson stripped off his jacket and shirt. There were livid marks across his back where he had been thrashed, and there was a buzz of indignation from the juniors at the sight.

"You hound!" said Tom Merry, fixing his blazing eyes upon Knox. "You ought to be boiled in oil!"

"Boiling in oil for bullies isn't in the bylaws is it?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shut up, Monty! Don't be funny, now. This is serious."

"It's going to be serious for Knox!" growled Wally.

"You shut up, too! Don't you jaw when your captain is talking. Knox, kindly explain what you were licking Curly for. I'm going to judge this case on its merits. Take your boot off his mouth, Blake."

"Certainly!" said Blake.

He removed his boot, and Knox recovered his voice, but did not explain why he had been licking Curly Gibson. Instead of that, he burst into a torrent of language that would have done credit—or discredit—to an intoxicated bargee.

"Stop him!" said Tom.

Blake's boot came into use again. Knox's voice died away in a suffocated growl.

"Bad language is punished by flogging or caning, according to circumstances—see Rule No. 33," said Tom Merry.

"Is there a cane in this study?"

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"Here's one," said Digby.

"Good! Knox will sit up and hold out his hand. You hear, Knox? You won't? Very well. Cane him across the shoulders."

Knox was jammed face downwards on the carpet. Then Digby started it with the cane. The bellows of Knox resembled those of a maddened bull. But Digby did not cease to lash till Tom Merry held up his hand at the twelfth stroke.

"'Nuff!"

"I'm not tired yet," panted Digby. "I could go on, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That is enough for bad language," said Tom Merry. "We must be just, but not vindictive. Now, Knox, will you have the great kindness to explain why you were licking Curly?"

"Groooooogh!"

"Every time he doesn't answer, Dig, give him another cut."

"Oh, rather!" said Digby.

Whack!

"Stop it!" shrieked Knox. "I—I'll answer. I licked him for burning my toast and checking me. Ow!"

"You thrashed a kid in that brutal manner for burning your toast, you brute!"

"He's my fag, ain't he?" howled Knox.

"You won't have a fag in future. For your present misconduct, you are deprived of the right of fagging anybody. I order that, as captain of St. Jim's."

"Bravo!"

"And you will receive twelve cuts with the cane for bullying and ill-treating Curly Gibson. If you are tired, Dig, Herries can lay them on."

"Give me the cane," said Herries at once.

"Oh, I'm not tired!" said Dig. "Leave it to me."

"Pile in!" said Tom Merry. "I'll say when."

Digby piled in. Knox roared and squirmed under the heavy lashes of the cane. Digby put so much energy into the last cut that the cane broke in two. Knox's uproar was heard the length of the passage and beyond. Voices could be heard in the passage now, and the door of the study was hurled open. Darrel and Rushden and several other Sixth-Formers thrust their way in.

"Rescue!" half sobbed Knox. "These young scoundrels are ragging me."

"How dare you come here!" exclaimed Darrel angrily.

"How dare you lay hands on a Sixth-Former!"

"I'm acting by my authority as captain of the school."

"Don't talk rot! Get out of this study!"

"Rats!"

"Yaas, wathah; wats, and many of them, Dawwel, deah boy!"

"I order you, as a prefect, to get out of this room!" roared Darrel.

"I refuse, as captain of St. Jim's, to do anything of the kind," retorted Tom Merry, with perfect coolness.

"Throw the cheeky young beggars out," said Langton of the Sixth.

"Better not try it," said Manners. "You'll go out on your necks yourselves, if you do. We're all backing up the captain of the school."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Order!" said Tom Merry calmly. "I trust you'll have too much good sense to interfere with the captain of the school in the execution of his duty, Darrel." Tom Merry's flow of language was unusually impressive, as befitted his new and exalted station. "If it is necessary to use force I shall use force, and I shall call up all the juniors to help me enforce my commands, if necessary."

"Do you mean to say that you're trying to make a riot in the school?" exclaimed Rushden.

"You are making the riot."

"Us! Why—"

"If you don't clear out of this study at once I shall call in Mr. Railton," said Darrel, compressing his lips.

"Call him, and be blowed!"

"I mean it, you young idiot!"

"And I mean it, too, you old idiot," said Tom Merry independently.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"D'Arcy minor, go and ask Mr. Railton if he will kindly step here."

Wally did not stir.

"Do you hear me?" exclaimed Darrel angrily.

"I hear you," said Wally cheerfully; "but I don't take orders from any of the Sixth. Fagging is abolished. I'll take orders from my captain. My captain's Tom Merry."

"Quite right," said Tom approvingly. "Darrel, I object to your giving orders in my presence. It savours of disrespect."

Darrel gasped. He could do nothing else.

"However, we'll have Mr. Railton on the scene, if you want him," said Tom Merry. "I'm not afraid to act openly. Wally, will you cut along and call Mr. Railton. Tell him that the captain of the school will be glad if he can step here for a few minutes."

"Right-ho!" grinned Wally.

And he cut off.

Then there was a pause in the study as the crowd of fellows waited for the arrival of the Housemaster.

CHAPTER 5.

Quite Justified.

TOM MERRY waited with perfect calmness.

Some of the juniors were feeling uneasy, not quite knowing what view the Housemaster might take of the matter; but Tom Merry did not share their uneasiness. He was acting within his rights as captain of the school. What was there to be uneasy about? Mr. Railton, as a Housemaster, was bound to back up the captain of the school in the exercise of his just authority. That was how Tom Merry looked at it.

Knox stood gasping and groaning, and rubbing his injuries. His little eyes were gleaming with malice. He felt sure that he would be avenged as soon as the Housemaster arrived upon the scene.

The heavy tread of the Housemaster was heard in the passage at last. Mr. Railton's form appeared in the doorway. His face was very grave.

"I am wanted here, I understand?" he exclaimed.

"You are, sir," said Darrel. "I—I—"

"Hold on Darrel," said Tom Merry steadily. "It's for the captain of the school to speak."

"You young rascal—"

"Silence!"

"Why, I—I—I—" stuttered Darrel.

"Silence! Mr. Railton, I report to you what has happened as captain of the school reporting to his Housemaster," said Tom Merry, with dignity.

"Play up, Tommy!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"What has happened?" asked Mr. Railton quietly.

"Knox has been discovered in the act of bullying and thrashing a Third Form boy in a very brutal way. I have administered punishment to him, as was my right and duty. Darrel has interfered, but I am sure that Darrel will apologise for chipping in, when he has had time to think calmly about it. I excuse him."

"You—you—you excuse me!" stuttered Darrel. "Oh, this beats everything."

"They've been ragging me, sir!" howled Knox. "The whole crowd of them piled on me."

"The juniors obeyed my orders, as captain," said Tom Merry. "They were bound to do so by Rule No. 23."

"Very important to stick to the rules, sir," remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"So long as I am captain of St. Jim's I shall make it a point to put down bullying, with a firm hand, sir," continued Tom Merry.

"Hear, hear!"

"If these young cads are to be allowed to invade a Sixth Form study, and rag the seniors, sir—" began Knox passionately.

Mr. Railton pursed his lips.

"Show him your back, Curly," sang out Wally.

"Yes, I want Mr. Railton to see that I was bound to interfere, since the prefects have thought fit to report this matter," said Tom Merry, with dignity. "Go it, Curly."

"Oh, all right," said Curly.

And his shirt came off again.

Mr. Railton gazed at the deep marks made by the thrashing Knox had inflicted upon the fag, and uttered an exclamation of anger and indignation.

"Did you do that, Knox?" he exclaimed, fixing his eyes upon the bully of the Sixth.

Knox bit his lip. The matter was not turning out so well for him, after all.

"I licked him, sir," he admitted.

"You made those marks?"

"I—I suppose so."

"Then you have acted in a brutal manner," said Mr. Railton sharply. "You had no right to use a fag in that way. If you had not already been discharged from your duties as a prefect, Knox, I should report this matter to the Head. You are certainly not fit to hold any authority at all. Darrel, I trust that you do not uphold Knox in treating a boy of the Third Form in this way."

Darrel flushed uncomfortably. Certainly he disliked Knox's methods as much as anybody could, and his feelings towards

the bully of the Sixth at that moment were anything but amiable.

"No, sir," he said. "I had not seen that. I suppose someone ought to have interfered."

"I should think so," the Housemaster exclaimed. "And it seems that the prefects did not interfere, and yet they find fault with Merry for doing so."

The Sixth-Formers exchanged glances, and so did the juniors. The glances of the latter expressed satisfaction. Tom Merry's exercise of authority was evidently justified in the eyes of the Housemaster.

"Merry has certainly done right in interfering in this matter," said Mr. Railton. "Knox appears to have been punished—certainly not more severely than he deserved, otherwise I should punish him myself."

"Bwavo!" chirruped Arthur Augustus.

"Silence!" said the Housemaster frowning. "Knox, if you are guilty of such conduct again I shall report it to the Head, and suggest that you be sent away from this school. Tom Merry, you know that I do not approve of your holding the captaincy of St. Jim's, but in this matter you have acted quite rightly."

"Thank you, sir!"

Mr. Railton strode out of the study.

There was a brief silence. The Housemaster had delivered his judgment, and he had delivered it in favour of Tom Merry.

There was nothing more to be said.

Darrel and the other seniors followed the Housemaster without a word. Then Tom Merry spoke, severely:

"Are you satisfied Knox?"

Knox ground his teeth.

"I'll make you smart for this yet," he muttered.

"Silence!"

"You—you—"

"Dwy up, Knox. You mustn't threaten the captain of the school; it's against all the rules," said D'Arcy chidingly.

"You have been punished, Knox," said Tom Merry, wagging his forefinger at the bully of the Sixth. "The matter is now closed. You will not, however, be allowed to have a fag again, so long as I am captain of the school. Kindly remember that."

"Hear, hear!"

"Wally, you will please tell the Third and Second that they are not allowed to fag for Knox. Any fellow fagging for Knox will be licked."

Wally chortled joyously.

"That's all right," he said, "I'll tell 'em. I say, skipper, can we wreck the study before we go?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No," said Tom Merry laughing. "Order, you young boulder! Gentlemen, our business here is now finished. I thank you for supporting me in the exercise of my just authority as captain of the school."

"Don't mench, deah boy! You can always wely on us."

"Yes, rather!"

And Tom Merry walked off, followed by the juniors in a grinning and hilarious crowd, leaving Knox alone in his study—very sore in body and in mind.

CHAPTER 6.

A Message to the Sixth.

DARREL'S study, in the Sixth-Form passage, was crowded.

It was a meeting of the seniors.

Half the Sixth were there, and Monteith and Baker of the New House had come over to the meeting.

The happenings in Knox's study had excited the Sixth Form tremendously.

They had met, with Darrel as chairman, to discuss the unprecedented situation, and decide what was to be done.

Several of the Fifth Form had come to the meeting, too, prominent among them being Gerald Cutts.

Cutts was known to be an extremely clever and "deep" fellow, and the others expected that he would be able to give some good advice upon the difficult situation.

It was only too evident that something had to be done.

Knox's bullying conduct had unfortunately placed the seniors in the wrong, when the late occurrence was brought to the notice of the Housemaster. But for that, Tom Merry's captaincy might have been brought to a sudden termination. As it was, his position was stronger than ever. He had now received the official approval of the Housemaster, and that strengthened his hands very much.

Most of the seniors disapproved of Knox and all his works; but they were very sore over the victory of the juniors.

If a junior was to run the show, as Rushden remarked, the Sixth might as well go out of business altogether. But how

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 318.

were they to get rid of the junior skipper? That was the worrying question to which they could find no answer.

Darrel addressed the excited meeting in a few words. Darrel was very much in earnest about it.

"There's no need to say much," he said. "You fellows all know what a rotten state things are in. A kid in the Shell is captain of the school. It's ridiculous, but there doesn't seem any way of getting rid of him. If he allowed the seniors to advise him, and run the show for him, it wouldn't be so bad. But he means to be independent, and run things according to his own ideas—the ideas of the Lower School. It's impossible, of course. What's to be done? Knox's playing the fool has given him a chance to start on us, and he's taken his chance. There will be lots more trouble soon. On Wednesday we're playing one of the most important football fixtures of the season. Tom Merry intends to captain the First Eleven."

"He wouldn't have the nerve!" said Rushden aghast.

"He has said so!" replied Darrel. "And he's going to put some juniors in the team."

"It can't be allowed!" exclaimed Monteith.

"It's out of the question."

"The Grammarians will walk over them!"

"It will be a defeat for St. Jim's!"

"It's impossible!"

Darrel shrugged his shoulders as he listened to the indignant exclamations of the seniors. They all agreed in their view of the case. But nobody seemed to have anything of a definite and business-like nature to suggest.

"The question is, what's to be done?" said Darrel.

"Give the young idiot a sound licking," suggested Lefevre of the Fifth. "That's what I say—wallop him black and blue!"

"No good. The juniors will all stand by him, and it would simply mean a riot. He's acting within his rights as captain of the school!"

"Captain of Colney Hatch!" growled Baker. "The whole thing's ridiculous!"

"Utterly absurd!" said Monteith.

"If anybody's got anything to suggest——" said Darrel again.

"I have!" said Cutts.

"Go ahead, Cutts!"

And all eyes turned upon Cutts of the Fifth. There was a general feeling that Cutts of the Fifth would be able to sever the Gordian knot, if anybody could.

"We can postpone the match with the Grammar School, or scratch it altogether," said Cutts quietly. "Darrel's secretary—he's only got to write to them, and tell them that, owing to unforeseen circumstances, we sha'n't be able to play the match on Wednesday. Nothing need be said to the kids about it. Simply scratch the match, and they can go on laying their plans just the same—till Wednesday, when the Grammarians won't arrive."

"My hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Darrel grinned. It was a simple way out of the difficulty, but it had not occurred to him. The seniors all chuckled over it. For Tom Merry to remodel the First Eleven for a match on Wednesday, and then for the opposing team to fail to turn up, would be a screaming joke on the junior captain of St. Jim's.

"Hold on," said Baker. "The secretary isn't empowered to scratch matches without consulting the captain, you know."

"I don't recognise that Shell kid as captain of St. Jim's," said Darrel. "I have decided to take no notice of his election."

"Quite so!" agreed the others.

"I'll write and scratch the match," said Darrel. "That's settled! That'll see us over this week, as far as footer's concerned."

"And they can remodel the team, and get all ready," grinned Cutts. "Not a word to Tom Merry, of course, or he will be writing to the Grammar School, too!"

"Not a syllable!" chuckled Monteith.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The senior meeting roared with laughter. They anticipated with great glee the looks of the junior captain when the Grammarian team failed to arrive.

There was a tap at the door of the study, and it opened, and the cool and cheeky countenance of Wally of the Third looked in.

"Get out, you fag!" Langton exclaimed.

"I've got a message from the captain of the school," said Wally calmly. "Not so much noise in this study!"

"Wha-a-at!"

"There's too much noise here," said Wally imperturbably. "Tom Merry doesn't want to interfere with you, so long as

you keep within limits, but he can't have so much noise in the Sixth-Form passage. That's his message!"

The seniors stared blankly at the fag.

That a Shell fellow should send a message to the Sixth, commanding them to make less noise, took their breath away.

"You—you cheeky little imp!" gasped Monteith.

"That's the captain's message!" said Wally calmly. "Not so much noise."

And he slammed the door and walked away whistling.

The seniors looked at one another.

"Well, that takes the cake!" exclaimed Rushden. "The awful cheek of it! Orders from the Shell to the Sixth! My only aunt!"

"It's not to be stood!" gasped Langton. "I won't stand it!"

"It's intolerable!"

"Let's make a fearful row!" suggested Lefevre. "That's what I say—let's raise Cain, and see what the cheeky young blighter will do."

Darrel shook his head quickly.

"We can't act like a gang of cheeky fags," he exclaimed. "It's beneath the dignity of the Sixth to enter into a controversy with a Shell kid. Besides, there's no getting out of it—the captain of the school has a right to send such an order if he chooses, and we were making rather a row, you know."

"But—but it's intolerable."

"We've got to get rid of the young cad somehow," growled Cutts. "Anyway, we've settled him for the Grammar School match on Wednesday; that's some satisfaction."

It was the only satisfaction the exasperated seniors had!

CHAPTER 7.

Not Easy.

"MADE up the list?"

Monty Lowther asked the question.

It was Tuesday, the day before the Grammar School senior match, and Tom Merry sat at his study table with a pencil and paper.

His youthful brow was corrugated with thought.

He had about forty names on the paper before him, and he had been crossing them out one after another, trying to reduce the list to manageable proportions.

"I've more than made it up," said Tom ruefully, looking up from his task. "The trouble is to cut it down. Lots of the fellows expect to play in the Grammarian match to-morrow. Of course, I must play, as captain of St. Jim's."

"Of course!" assented Manners and Lowther at once.

"I have heard from Darrel that all the Sixth refuse to play under a junior captain," said Tom.

"All the better," said Lowther at once. "That makes all the more room for juniors in the First Eleven."

"Yes; but a senior eleven composed wholly of juniors will be rather—rather a novelty," said Tom Merry. "I don't know what the Grammarians will think, playing the same team that their junior eleven meets."

"Let 'em think what they like. We'll lick 'em, and that will give them something to think about!"

"But can we lick them?" said Tom. "After all, they're seniors, and a good team. They used to give old Kildare and his eleven a tussle!"

"Oh, we'll lick 'em!" said Lowther, "and if we don't, it will be the fault of the seniors for standing out, and we can't help it!"

"I'm willing to play six seniors, out of eleven players," said Tom. "I think that's a good enough concession to the Sixth."

"I should jolly well say so!"

"But Darrel doesn't see it—and the others don't. They won't be satisfied with anything but a Sixth-Former captaining the team, which is——"

"Rot!"

"Exactly—rot!" agreed Tom. "Not to be thought of for a moment. I've got to consider my personal dignity as captain of the school."

"Well, if the seniors are understudying Achilles, and sulking in their tents, the team will have to be all juniors, that's all," said Manners. "After all, you've got plenty of players to choose from, Tommy."

"Oh, plenty!" said Tom. "Too many, in fact. You see, such a blessed lot of the fellows expect to be put in. You two chaps ought to be in, as—as members of this study."

Manners and Lowther nodded emphatically.

"That goes without saying," assented Lowther.

"Quite so!" agreed Manners.

"Then Study No. 6 expects to go in, all four of them."

"That's rather a cheek!"



Tom Merry took up the receiver. "Hallo! Is that the Grammar School? This is Tom Merry, Captain of St. Jim's, speaking. Your team did not turn up for the match to-day—I want an explanation!" (See Chapter 11.)

"Awful nerve!"

"Then Kangaroo and Clifton Dane and Glyn all expect places."

"Better put in Kanga and give the others the go-by."

"Then there's the New House chaps. After the splendid way Figgins & Co. backed me up in the election I can't very well leave them out."

"Well, I suppose there ought to be one or two of the New House," admitted Monty Lowther rather grudgingly. "Say Figgins."

"Figgy says we can't possibly beat Fatty Wynn as goal-keeper, and he's really right, you know. Fatty keeps goal like a cherub."

"Yes, I suppose Wynn had better go in."

"And then Kerr—"

"Oh, never mind Kerr!"

"And then there's Redfern and Owen and Lawrence, all good men, and they all backed us up like Trojans over the election."

"You can't put the whole blessed New House into the eleven," said Lowther warmly.

"Then, besides the New House chaps, there are the fags."

"The fags!" said Manners and Lowther together.

Tom Merry nodded.

"Yes; the Third Form stood by me over the election, you know. Young Wally wants to go into the team—"

"Oh, rats!"

"He says he'll be satisfied with three places for the Third—himself and young Frayne and Jameson."

"Cheeky young beggar!" said Lowther. "I suppose the Second Form will be wanting places next."

"Well, they haven't asked for any so far, thank goodness!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "Of course, we can't play fags of the Third, either."

"Of course we can't."

"The team must be made up of the oldest fellows possible, if the seniors are going to sulk."

"All Shell fellows would be best," agreed Manners.

"Only, you see—"

"Well, put in Figgins, Fatty Wynn, and Blake, and make up the rest from the Shell," Monty Lowther suggested.

"Then there will be a row."

"Let there be. I suppose you expect some rows before you've been captain of St. Jim's long? Besides, what's life without a row every now and then?"

"Ahem! Only, you see, if the juniors don't stand together the seniors will get the upper hand over us. It's only by the Lower School being solid behind me that I can

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 318.

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

NEXT
WEDNESDAY—

"THE HOUSEMASTER'S PERIL!"

keep my ground. If they could make out that the school is dissatisfied with me as captain all round, the Head would chip in."

"Jolly difficult bizney, I admit," assented Lowther. "There's something in that. But you can't play more than eleven chaps in a Soccer team; that's a dead cert."

"And the other fifty or so will get their backs up," Manners remarked.

There was a tap at the door, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth came in. He grinned at the Terrible Three in a very genial manner.

"I heah that the seniahs are standin' out of the match to-morrow," he remarked.

"That's so," said Tom.

"I wea d it as weally a stwoke of good luck. It would have been wathah wuff to push them out, but as they are standin' out of their own accord it will give us a good opportunity of showin' what the juniahs can do."

"Or what they can't do."

"Oh, that will be all wight! I intend to play the game of my life to-morrow," said Arthur Augustus confidently.

The chums of the Shell exchanged glances. The difficulties were beginning.

"Ahem!" said Tom Merry. "Speaking about the match to-morrow—ahem—"

"I suppose you'll have to play a New House chap or two?" Arthur Augustus remarked. "Figgins and Fatty Wynn and pewwaps Weddy. Are you fellows playin'?"

The Terrible Three glared at him. Were they playing! Were they playing, indeed!

"We are!" said Tom briefly.

"That's thwee," said D'Arcy. "Our study makes it seven, as there's four of us, and I pwesume you'll put in Kangawooh; then thwee New House chaps will make up the team."

"The fact is—"

"Oh, don't wun away with the ideah that I'm twyin' to wun the show!" said Arthur Augustus generously. "I'm only givin' you advice, you know, as a sort of expert. You can't do bettah than take advice fwom a fellah of tact and judgment."

"The fact is—"

"Of course, I shouldn't pwesume to dictate in the least how the team is to be composed, so long as Study No. 6 is shoved in."

"The fact—"

"We're all in wippin' form, and we're goin' to give the Gwammawians the kybosh, you know. We've beaten the Gwammah School juniahs often enough, so why shouldn't we beat the beastly seniahs? What?"

"The fact is, I'm afraid your study won't be able to go in."

"Eh!"

"Can't play the lot of you," Tom Merry explained.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy carefully and calmly extracted his eyeglass from his waistcoat pocket, jammed it into his eye, and fixed a freezing and withering glance upon the captain of St. Jim's.

"Pway wepeat that wemark, Tom Mewwy!" he said, with crushing dignity. "I am not at all suah that I have undahstood you awight."

"Can't put in all four of you."

"And why not?"

"Only eleven players wanted, and as we're meeting a senior team we want the oldest fellows possible. Must be mostly Shell chaps, you see."

"I don't see at all."

"Well, I'm sorry for that. I see myself, and that's really enough, isn't it?"

"I do not wegard it as enough; not at all, Tom Mewwy. In fact, I wathah think that Studay No. 6 will wefuse to be left out."

"I shall be playing one of you—"

"Well, of course, in that case, I will do my best to make Hewwies and Dig and Blake take it weasonably—"

"The one I shall be playing is Blake."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"And you're going to take it like a sport, Gussy, and back me up all the same," said Tom Merry. "We've got to stand together against the seniors, you know."

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"I am certainly weady to back you up against the seniahs, or anybody, deah boy, in all weasonable things. But when I see you delibewately awwangan' to thwow away an important match, I must beg leave to pause and considah."

"Now, look here, Gussy—" began the Terrible Three together.

Arthur Augustus waved his hand in a lofty manner.

"It's no good talkin' wot to me, Tom Mewwy. I will go and consult Blake and the othahs about it, and we will see

THE GEN LIBRARY.—No. 318.

what is to be done. The best thing I can think of is for you to wesign the captaincy into my hands."

"Fathead!"

"I wefuse to be called a fathead!"

"Ass!"

"Unless you play the game I shall wefuse to wecognise you as captain of St. Jim's. I thought, of course, that you were goin' to do the sensible thing. If you persist in playin' the giddyay ox, I cannot wegard you as a suitable captain for the school."

"Chump!"

"I will not entah into a slangin' match with you," said Arthur Augustus loftily. "I may wemark that I am disappointed in you, Tom Mewwy—extwemely disappointed. That is all. I will now wetire."

"Time you did!" growled Lowther.

"I will weturn—"

"Oh, don't trouble about that!"

Slam!

The study door closed, and the swell of the School House was gone. The chums of the Shell exchanged glances.

"Trouble!" groaned Tom Merry.

"Looks like it. Can't be helped," said Lowther. "After all, if we beat the Grammarians to-morrow that will rally the fellows round us again."

"If we beat them?"

"I mean, when we beat them," said Lowther. "We must beat them! Now get that blessed list done, and let's stick it up in the hall, and then the fellows will know where they stand, and they'll know it's no good talking."

"Right-ho!" said Tom Merry, not very cheerfully.

And the list was finished at last, after much mental effort on the part of the Terrible Three, and was duly posted up on the notice-board in the School House, where it was read by the juniors with the keenest interest and with many signs of an approaching tempest.

CHAPTER 8.

The New House Cuts Up Rusty.

"NEW HOUSE bounders!"

"What's the row?"

"Looks like a blessed raid!"

It did.

Quite an army of New House juniors came marching into the School House, with faces that were grave and determined.

There were Figgins and Kerr and Wynn, the famous Co.; and Redfern and Owen and Lawrence, and Pratt and Diggs, and Thompson of the Shell.

They looked neither to right nor to left, but marched for the stairs, and made their way up to the Shell passage in state.

Such an invasion at any other time would probably have led to a "rag"; but just now the juniors of the rival Houses were on terms of peace, so Figgins and his party were allowed to pass unchallenged.

They marched down the Shell passage, and stopped at Tom Merry's study door. Upon that door George Figgins bestowed a heavy thump.

"Come in!" called out Tom Merry's voice in somewhat weary tones.

Figgins opened the door, and the army marched in. The Terrible Three were doing their preparation, but they suspended that labour as the New House crowd appeared. They knew that the long-foreseen trouble was coming.

But Tom Merry worked up an affable smile for his visitors.

"Hallo, glad to see you!" he said, very heartily. "How do you do—ahem?"

"We've come on bizney," said Figgins grimly.

"Something to do with me as captain of the school?" asked Tom Merry amiably. "All right. Go ahead! Always willing to hear you."

Figgins grunted.

"You've put up a silly list on the notice-board," he remarked.

"I've put up a list!" agreed Tom Merry.

"I suppose it's a sort of joke?"

"No; it's quite serious."

"I've read the names," said Figgins.

"Yes; they were put up there to be read, you know," said Tom mildly.

"Merry, Manners, Lowther, Noble, Dane, Glyn, Thompson, Figgins, Wynn, Blake, Herries!" enumerated Figgins solemnly.

"That's right."

"That's three New House, and eight School House."

"Quite so."

"That's what we've come to talk to you about," said Redfern.

"Nothing to talk about," said Tom Merry. "The matter's settled."

"Then it had better be unsettled again, and jolly quick," said Kerr. "You can't deal with the New House in this way."

"No fear!"

"Or with the Fourth!" said Lawrence. "Only four of the Fourth, and seven of the Shell!"

"Rotten!"

"Out of the question."

"If that's the way you're going to run things, Tom Merry, it seems to me there was a big mistake made at the election."

"That's what I was thinking."

"Same here."

"Yes, rather."

"Well, I don't know about playing any more of the Fourth," remarked Thompson of the Shell; "but certainly there must be some more chaps of our House in the team, either Fourth or Shell. I think we can leave that point to Merry."

"Thank you!" said Tom sarcastically.

"Not at all," said Thompson, "so long as you play the game, we recognise that you are captain of St. Jim's. But our House has got to have a show."

"Yes, rather! You bet!"

"I'll help you revise the list, if you like, Tom Merry," Figgins suggested generously.

"Thanks; it doesn't need revising."

"We don't want to cause any trouble, especially at a time when the seniors are only waiting for a chance to jump on us. For that reason, we're ready to make really big concessions. We shall be satisfied with six New House chaps in the eleven."

"Ahem!"

"As cock-house of St. Jim's, we ought to have more, but—"

"As what?"

"Cock-house of St. Jim's," said Figgins firmly.

"Rats!"

"Ass!"

"Fathead!"

Figgins's brow began to grow wrathful. After practically electing the captain of the school, Figgins & Co. felt that they were entitled to a show. But it wasn't merely that. They had a serious conviction that the eleven wouldn't be any good without themselves in it. And they didn't want the new regime to start with a serious defeat at footer. It was necessary, therefore, for Tom Merry to see reason from a New House point of view. The difficulty was that he saw reason from a School House point of view, which made all the difference.

"Now, look here, we came here for a friendly talk," said Figgins. "We're willing to give you any amount of advice to save you from coming a mucker in this matter."

"There isn't a chap here who isn't willing to advise you, Tom Merry," said Redfern reproachfully.

"I'm sure we all agree with that," said Kerr. "You're perfectly welcome to our advice on any point."

"Any point whatever," said Fatty Wynn heartily.

"I'm not looking for advice, as a matter of fact," Tom Merry explained. "If I wanted to be advised, there are plenty of silly asses in my own House with yards of it all ready for me."

"Well, I'll tell you what," said Figgins, with a magnanimous air. "For the sake of peace, and to keep shoulder to shoulder, and so on, we'll be satisfied with five New House chaps in the eleven. That's risking losing the match, I know, but we want to pull together at a time like this."

"It wouldn't be risking it," said Monty Lowther sweetly.

"It would be giving it away."

"Look here——" roared Figgins.

"Yes, look here——"

"What I think is——"

"Gentlemen," said Tom Merry, "I'm sorry I can't meet your wishes in this matter. As captain of St. Jim's, it's my duty to pick out the best eleven possible to beat the Grammar School. I've done it."

"Rats!"

"Bosh!"

"Piffle!"

"Tommy-rot!"

"And as captain of St. Jim's, I cannot allow myself to be dictated to by juniors," said Tom Merry, with great dignity.

"Juniors!" yelled Redfern. "And what are you, pray? Have they shoved you into the Sixth Form all of a sudden by any chance?"

"I am captain of St. Jim's, Redfern, and I request you to speak more respectfully to your captain."

"Then the sooner St. Jim's gets a new skipper the better," said Redfern.

"Hear, hear!"

"This interview is now over," said Tom Merry.

"Then you decline to talk sense?" demanded Figgins. "You won't do the only sensible thing? You won't take advice from fellows who know?"

"What I have said, I have said!" retorted Tom Merry firmly.

"What you have said is blithering piffle, and you know it."

"Gentlemen, there is the door."

"Bust the door!"

"If you prefer the window as a means of exit——"

"I'd like to see the chap who could put me out of the window, or the door, either!" said Figgins truculently.

"You will kindly retire from my study, and please learn better manners before you call on your captain again."

Figgins looked round at his followers.

"Gentlemen, chaps, and fellows," he said, "I think we're all agreed. We backed up this School House bouncer to keep that cad Cutts out of the captaincy. We agreed to back the silly duffer up like men and brothers. But we can't back him up in throwing away football matches and making St. Jim's a guy. This is where we draw a line."

"Hear, hear!"

"Unless, therefore, Tom Merry agrees to stop playing the giddy ox, we don't back him up any more."

"Hear, hear!"

"We can't be parties to throwing away matches and things of that sort. It's our duty to draw a line. You understand that, Tom Merry?"

"Oh, rats!" said Tom Merry warmly. "What I understand is that if you don't clear off, you'll be booted out."

"Get on with the booting, then!" said Figgins grimly.

"Wreck the blessed study as a warning to them," suggested Owen.

"Hurrah!"

Temper were very excited by that time on both sides. It needed only a word, and the word had been spoken. The New House juniors were looking very dangerous; and at that moment Manners gave Figgins a gentle push towards the door. The next moment Manners was lying on his back on the carpet, and in one more moment, the Terrible Three and the New House crowd were mixed up in a wild and whirling struggle.

CHAPTER 9.

Keeping Order!

"KICK them out!"

"Give 'em socks!"

"Down with the School House!"

"Pitch the table over!"

"Hurrah! Wreck the blessed place!"

Tramp, tramp, tramp, tramp!

"Ow, ow! My eye!"

"Rescue, School House!"

There was a rush of feet in the passage. A crowd of School House juniors had gathered there in anticipation of trouble as raised voices were heard from Tom Merry's study. At the sounds of conflict and the shout for rescue, they rushed in.

The study was crammed with fighting juniors.

There wasn't much room for a big crowd to struggle in the study. In a few minutes the room was a wreck. The furniture was hurled in all directions, and struggling juniors rolled on the floor and on one another.

More and more School House fellows rushed upon the scene, and the New House invaders were extracted from the room one by one, and rushed away, struggling and yelling, each in the grasp of two or three self-constituted chuckers-out.

Along the passage and down the stairs they went, roaring and wriggling, and one by one they were hurled forth from the School House into the quadrangle.

It was a House row now, with a vengeance.

In the excitement of the moment all the excellent intentions of the juniors were forgotten, and they remembered only that they were School House and New House, ancient rivals and foes.

Darrel of the Sixth came on the scene as the last of the invaders was sent rolling down the School House steps into the dusky quad.

His face was very angry.

"Are you going to stop this confounded row?" he shouted.

Tom Merry turned upon him. Tom was excited, and he was not inclined to take any nonsense from anybody at that moment.

"We shall suit ourselves about that," he exclaimed, "and I'll thank you to speak more civilly to your captain, Darrel."

"You cheeky young scamp——"

Tom Merry raised his hand.

"Go back to your study, Darrel!"

"What!" roared the Sixth Former.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 318.

NEXT
WEDNESDAY—

"THE HOUSEMASTER'S PERIL!"

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of
Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"Go back to your study at once."

"Why, you—you—"

"I order you to go back to your study."

"You—you—you order me!" spluttered Darrel.

"Yes; and if you don't go you'll be put!"

"Put!" shrieked Darrel.

"Yes, and at once, too."

That was enough for Darrel of the Sixth. He made a jump at Tom Merry, and grasped him. It would have gone hard with the captain of St. Jim's at that moment but for his faithful followers. His New House backers were gone, breathing vengeance and fury, but the School House juniors were still loyal.

"Back up!" yelled Monty Lowther, and he rushed at Darrel.

A dozen other fellows rushed at the prefect at the same moment.

Darrel was whirled away from Tom Merry, whipped off his feet, and rushed back to his study, and tossed in like a sack of coke.

He sprawled on the floor, breathless and enraged, and Lowther slammed the study door.

"That settles Darrel!" chuckled Lowther.

"Hurrah!"

"I'll keep order in this House!" panted Tom Merry. "I'll have order kept if we have to have a row every five minutes!"

"Hear, hear!"

Mr. Railton, who had been with the Head, came upon the scene just after the sudden disappearance of Darrel. The excited voices died away at the appearance of the House-master.

"What is this riot about?" exclaimed Mr. Railton.

"There isn't any riot, sir," said Tom Merry steadily.

"I have had to use somewhat severe measures with one of the Sixth, that is all, sir."

"We can't allow them to cheek our captain, sir," said Kangaroo.

Mr. Railton seemed about to say something exceedingly emphatic, but he changed his mind, and walked away to his study.

Tom Merry hurried to the notice-board, with a crowd of juniors behind him. He took out a pencil to make some alterations in the football list.

There was a cheer as he drew the pencil through the New House names on the list.

"Gentlemen," said the captain of St. Jim's. "After the insubordinate conduct of Figgins & Co. it is impossible to play any New House fellows to-morrow."

"Bravo!"

"I have therefore scratched Thompson, Figgins, and Wynn. I shall play Digby, Reilly, and D'Arcy instead."

"Hear, hear!"

"Perfectly wippen' ideah, deah boy!"

"Good egg!" said Jack Blake heartily. "That lets in the whole of Study No. 6, and I must say you're not such an ass as I was thinking, Tom Merry. I think you make a jolly good captain of the school."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Do you?" hooted Gore of the Shell. "Well, I don't. I think there ought to be more Shell fellows in the team. I think it's silly rot to cram in Fourth-Form fags in this way. I consider that Tom Merry's a silly ass. I think—"

"Shut up, Gore!"

"Rats! I'm going to give my opinion, for what it's worth."

"That's nix!" said Blake. "Dry up!"

"Yaas, wing off, Goah, deah boy! You make me tiahed."

"I think that Tom Merry is playing the giddy ox. I think—"

"Order!" said Tom Merry.

"Oh, rats!"

"Go back to your study, Gore, and consider yourself detained for one hour!" said Tom.

"Detained!" shrieked Gore.

"Yes, certainly."

"By—by you!"

"Yes, by me."

Gore burst into a roar of scornful laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha! Detained by a Shell kid! Oh, don't be funny! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Are you going back to your study as ordered by your captain?" demanded Tom Merry, raising the hand of command.

"No, I'm jolly well not! I—"

"Take Gore to his study!" said the captain of St. Jim's.

"Look here, I— Hands off! I'll punch your nose! I— Ow! Yow!"

Gore's voice died away in gasps as he was rushed away by five or six juniors, and pitched headlong into his study.

The Terrible Three returned to their own quarters. Their

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quarters required some renovating before they could get on with their preparation. There was a somewhat humorous expression upon Monty Lowther's face as he sat down to work at last.

"Not all plain sailing, is it?" he remarked.

Tom Merry dabbed his nose with his handkerchief. The nose of the captain of the school ought to have been a sacred object, but it had been punched hard!

"No!" agreed Tom. "But we're going to keep order. I suppose it was bound to come to a row sooner or later with those New House kids. They were bound to kick over the traces. We shall teach them manners in time."

"Ahem! I hope so!"

"Anyway, I'm going to keep on in the way I've started," said Tom. "I'm captain of St. Jim's, and St. Jim's is going to toe the line. That's flat!"

And the Terrible Three settled down to work, only pausing every now and then to dab a nose or caress a discoloured eye.

CHAPTER 10.

A Painful Duty.

"I WEGARD it as a captain's dutay!"

Thus Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

The swell of the School House was laying down the law in the junior common-room when the Terrible Three came in, after finishing their preparation.

Tom Merry, as captain of the school, was entitled to use the prefects' room if he chose. But his friends were not entitled to admittance there, so Tom forbore to make use of that privilege. Solitary state was not at all to his liking. And the atmosphere of the prefects' room would certainly have been rather freezing.

Tom Merry heard Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's remark as he came in, and he looked inquiringly towards the elegant Fourth-Former.

"Hallo! What's up now, Gussy?" he inquired.

"It's Cutts, deah boy."

"Gussy's hungry for the warpath," explained Jack Blake. "You know Kildare used to be down on Cutts's little games, though Cutts kept them pretty dark from old Kildare. Old Kildare didn't know all we know."

"Wathah not, or he would have jumped on Cutts like anythin'."

"The fact is," said Blake confidentially, "it wouldn't be a bad idea to make an example of Cutts of the Fifth. Some of the kids are beginning to slack already, and making an example of a senior would buck them up."

Tom Merry laughed.

"What's the matter with Cutts, though?" he inquired.

"It's one of his blessed bridge parties in his study," said Blake. "He's got got Knox of the Sixth, and Gilmore and Sefton from the New House, and they're playing bridge. Real game, too. They play half-a-crown a hundred."

Tom frowned.

"Gambling!" he said.

"Well, we all know that Cutts gambles," said Blake. "When you come to think of it it is your duty, as Gussy says, to put it down."

"No doubt wathah about that," said Arthur Augustus. "I wegard it as bein' up to Tom Mewwy to step vewy hard upon such disgwaceful pwoceedin's."

Tom Merry looked thoughtful.

There certainly couldn't be any doubt that it was the bounden duty of the captain of the school to put down such practices, if he knew about them, and Tom did know about them. He had known about Cutts's little ways long enough, for the matter of that.

And there was something, too, in the suggestion that "making an example" of a senior would have the effect of bucking up the juniors.

Tom was somewhat in the position of a revolutionary leader, who must always do something or other to excite and dazzle the crowd, in order to keep them from wavering.

Gerald Cutts, in fact, was standing his little bridge party in the very nick of time.

"Not a bad idea," said Monty Lowther, looking at Tom. "It's a jolly good maxim, you know; always do your duty when there's nothing else on."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Lowthah, a chap ought to do his dutay at all times, wathah there's anythin' else on or not. If you only do your duty when you've got nothin' on—"

"Your first duty would be to put something on, I should think," remarked Lowther thoughtfully—"unless, of course, you were in a swimming-bath."

"You uttah ass—"

"Quite sure about Cutts's little party, Blake?" asked Tom Merry, with a chiding gesture to Lowther, as a warning to him that it was not a time to be funny.

"Oh, yes!" said Blake. "They've been making great

preparations. And Mellish has just been saying that he passed Cutts's door, and heard Cutts say "Two hearts."

"What on earth did he say two hearts for?" demanded Tom.

"They're playing auction bbridge, of course," said Arthur Augustus. "They play it at home, you know, and I've seen them, though the patah doesn't let me play. Two hearts means that he makes hearts twumps, and undahtakes to get two twicks."

"And then Knox said two lily," added Blake. "I don't know what it means, but it's something to do with bridge."

"Weally, Blake, two lily means—"

"Never mind what it means," said Tom Merry. "It's plain that they're gambling. But I don't know about acting on information received from Mellish. It's caddish to listen at a door, and Mellish must have listened. Where is he?"

"Mellish, you're wanted."

Mellish came forward, rather pleased to find himself in demand.

"It's a fact," he said, "they're playing bridge. They often do—for money, too. Cutts has gold on the table."

"How do you know?"

"Ahem! You see, I—I—"

"You looked through the keyhole?" said Tom sternly.

"Well, suppose I did?" said Mellish sulkily. "They're breaking the rules, ain't they, in playing cards at all, especially for money? If the Head knew there was a pack of cards inside the school he'd come down like thunder!"

"Quite so; and as captain of the school I am going to put an end to such things. But I am also bound to be down on eavesdropping and spying!"

"Oh, rats!" said Percy Mellish.

"Bump him!" said Tom.

"What!" howled Mellish.

"Bump him twice!"

"Look here, you needn't take any notice of what I've told you if you don't want to."

"I'm bound to take notice of it, as captain of St. Jim's. I'm bound also to punish you for spying!"

"You silly ass—"

"Bump him three times!"

"Look here, you idiot—"

"Four times!" said Tom Merry sternly. "The extra bumps are for lacking respect in addressing the captain of the school!"

"You—you burbling dummy—"

"Five times!"

Mellish left the rest of his choice names unuttered. His punishment was going up by leaps and bounds, and five bumps were more than enough. He was collared, and he descended upon the floor with a loud concussion, and a louder yell. Five times in succession he was bumped by Tom Merry's faithful followers, and each time he let out a yell that would have brought a prefect into the room at any other time. But the prefects did not appear now. They were evidently learning their lesson!

"Oh, you rotters!" groaned Mellish, as he escaped from the hands of the bumpers. "Oh, you beasts! Yow-ow-ow!"

"I think that pewwaps one more—"

But Percy Mellish fled before Arthur Augustus could finish.

"Now for Cutts!" said Blake briskly.

"Yaas, wathah."

"We'll jolly well bump him, and rag his study, bedad!" chuckled Reilly.

"Hurrah!"

"Down with the Fifth!"

Tom Merry raised his hand.

"Order!" he said. "No rags and no larks! This is a serious business. I am standing up for the good name and reputation of the school, and you fellows are backing me up as in duty bound!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Follow me, and keep order!"

"Yaas, wathah. Order, deah boys!"

And Tom Merry led the way to the Fifth-Form passage—with about fifty juniors after him. They did not really look as if they were going to keep order; they looked rather as if they were on the warpath, and anticipating heaps of fun. In spite of the really serious nature of the business in hand, somehow the juniors seemed to have the idea that they were simply "going for the Fifth," and to go for the Fifth seemed to them a most exhilarating and joyous proceeding.

Lefevre of the Fifth met the army en route. Lefevre of the Fifth stopped to stare at them, not amiably.

"Hallo! What do you fags want here?" he demanded.

Tom Merry waved his hand.

"Kindly stand aside, Lefevre!"

"You kids have no bizney in the Fifth-Form passage,"

said Lefevre. "That's what I say. You just cut off—do you hear?"

"Go to your study, Lefevre, and stay there!"

"Wha-a-at!"

"Take Lefevre to his study!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Why, what—how—who—yow—yaroooooh!"

Lefevre was swept off his feet and hurled into his study before he knew what was happening. He came rushing out again a second later like a mad bull, and he was promptly collared and hurled in again. This time he stayed.

Then Tom Merry & Co. walked on to Cutts's study. As they reached it, a voice—the voice of Sefton of the Sixth, a New House fellow—was audible:

"Three hearts!"

"Three no trumps!" said Cutts's voice.

Tom Merry knocked at the door, and there was a sudden silence in the study.

CHAPTER 11.

An Interrupted Bridge-party.

KNOCK!

Silence.

Whether another of the bridge-players had intended to go something better than "three no trumps" or not, the knock on the study door effectually put a stop to the "auctioning."

The thought that it might be a master, and that he might have overheard their incautious voices, was enough almost to freeze the blood in the veins of Cutts & Co.

Knock!

Tom Merry turned the handle of the door. The door was, as he had expected, locked. Cutts did not run unnecessary risks.

As Tom turned the handle, he heard a sound in the silent study—of a drawer being opened, of cards being whisked off the table, of money clinking into pockets.

Cutts was a quick-change artist in that way. More than once he had had to conceal tell-tale traces in a marvellously short space of time to avoid discovery.

"Who's there?" called out Cutts's voice, cool and bland as usual.

It was very seldom that Gerald Cutts lost his nerve.

"The captain of the school!" Tom Merry called out in reply.

He heard a muttered curse. Cutts was both relieved and enraged to find that it was only a junior outside the door.

"Go away, hang you!" he said, between his teeth.

"Open this door, Cutts!"

"What do you want?"

"You are gambling there, and I'm going to put a stop to it!"

"You cheeky young hound!" roared Cutts, in a fury. "If you don't clear off at once I'll come out and break every bone in your body!"

"Come out, then!"

"I—I—"

"If you don't open this door, Cutts, we shall fetch the bench along the passage and burst it open!"

"You hound! You don't dare!"

"You will see," said Tom Merry calmly. "You know very well you've no right to lock out the captain of the school. Are you going to open this door?"

"No!"

"Get the bench, you fellows," said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hurrah!"

The roar of voices told Cutts that Tom Merry had plenty of backers with him. The black sheep of the Fifth was pale with rage, but he did not want his study door burst in. It would lead to too much talk on the subject of the bridge party. Cutts did not want talk on that subject. Even if he cleared himself, it would cause the eye of authority to be directed upon him, and would make his peculiar proceedings more difficult and dangerous in the future.

It was wiser to temporise with the juniors, and get out of the affair without such a terrific disturbance, if possible, Cutts promptly decided.

"Hold on!" he exclaimed. "I'll open the door."

"You'd better," said Tom briefly.

Cutts strode to the door, unlocked it, and threw it wide open and surveyed the crowd of juniors outside with a scowling brow.

"Now, what do you want here?" he snarled. "Don't come into my study. I don't want a gang of fags here."

"It isn't a question of what you want, but of what you're going to get!" chuckled Monty Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I am here as captain of the school," Tom Merry ex-

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY—

"THE HOUSEMASTER'S PERIL!"

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plained. "I'm coming in. Will you kindly stand out of the way, Cutts?"

"No, I won't!" roared Cutts.

"Put him aside!" said the captain of St. Jim's.

Cutts jumped aside as the juniors advanced upon him. It was only too plain that Tom Merry & Co. meant business; and the odds were too great. The Fifth Form passage was swarming with juniors, all eager for a row with the Fifth.

Tom Merry strode in.

The four bridge-players regarded him with savage scowls. Cutts and Gilmore of the Fifth, and Knox and Sefton of the Sixth, formed the party. The table was clear; the cards had disappeared, and the markers also. The ashtrays had been whisked out of sight. There was not a cigarette to be seen; but in the atmosphere there hung a scent of tobacco—that was the one trace Cutts had not been able to get rid of in a hurry.

"You have been smoking," said Tom Merry, raising a magisterial hand.

"Mind your own business!" said Knox savagely.

"It is my business, as captain of the school."

"Yaas, wathah! I wecommend Tom Mewwy to make an example of you boundahs."

"And you have been gambling," went on Tom Merry. "I will thank you to produce the cards and the bridge-markers."

"The what?" said Cutts.

"You heard what I said."

"Never had such things in my study," said Cutts calmly.

"I really don't know what you are talking about!"

"You were playing bridge when I knocked at the door."

"Not at all. We were talking about the Grammar School match to-morrow. Sefton thinks your team will make a record for St. Jim's, don't you, Sefty?"

"Oh, don't bandy words with the young cad!" growled Sefton. "What business is it of his? Chuck them out of the study!"

"Things are coming to a pretty pass, when seniors are ragged in their own quarters!" said Gilmore. "Get out, you cheeky kids!"

"Silence!"

"Why, you—you—"

"If you interrupt me again, Gilmore, I shall order you to be bumped!"

Gilmore gave Tom Merry an almost homicidal look. But there was no help for it. He had to give in. The Fifth-Formers could have been called in to eject the intruders, but that would have led to a general scrimmage—and publicity. And Cutts knew what a search of his study would reveal, if it came to that. He wanted to get out of the matter without a row, if possible.

"Yes, cheese it, Gilly!" he said. "We've got to recognise the fact that Merry has been elected captain of the school."

"I don't!" growled Gilmore.

"Nor I!" snarled Sefton.

"Same here!" said Knox.

"I'll never recognise a Shell kid as captain of the school. I think that's rather too funny!"

"Silence! Cutts, I know you've been gambling, and I've come here to put a stop to it, and inflict a suitable punishment."

"Hear, hear!" chorussed the juniors.

Cutts almost panted with rage, but he contrived to keep cool.

"I tell you—" he began.

"On this occasion," said Tom Merry, "I shall not report your conduct to the Head. That is really my strict duty. But I don't want to be hard, even on you. You would be sacked from the school, and you know it."

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"You'd have to prove it," remarked Knox.

"I can prove it quite easily by searching the study. And that is what I'm going to do now, if you don't hand out the cards."

"You're going to search my study?" said Cutts, his teeth setting hard.

"Certainly—as captain of the school. You know Kildare would have done the same when he was here if he'd had information that you were gambling. Only he would have brought the Housemaster with him. Would you prefer me to fetch Mr. Railton to be present at the search?"

Cutts turned almost green. He was quite in the junior's hands, and he could not help realising it. Mr. Railton had only to be told what had been going on, to make him search the study most rigorously, and then all would be up.

"You can do as you like," said Cutts at last. "I've told you that there are no cards here."

"I'm sorry I cannot take your word, Cutts."

"Wathah not! I feah vewy much that you are tellin' awful whoppahs, Cutts, deah boy."

"Ananias was a little joker to that chap," remarked Blake, with a shake of the head. "And Baron Munchausen was first cousin to George Washington by comparison."

"Are you going to stand this cheek, Cutts, in your own study?" howled Sefton.

"He's got to," said Manners.

"It can't be helped, you fathead!" muttered Cutts. "Do you want the Housemaster brought here? You know what that would mean."

"Well, I'm not going to be jawed by juniors. I'm off."

And Sefton strode towards the door.

"Come back, Sefton!" rapped out Tom Merry. "You're to stay here until the investigation into this scandalous matter is finished."

Sefton made no reply and took no notice. He strode on. But at a sign from Tom Merry half a dozen juniors grasped him and whirled him back into the study. The Sixth-Former struggled furiously, but the juniors jammed him down into Cutts's armchair and held him there by main force.

"Help me, you rotten funks!" Sefton yelled furiously to the rest of the bridge party.

But they did not help him. The odds were too great against them.

"Keep that fool quiet!" said Tom Merry. "If he makes a row, Lowther, pull his ears!"

"Certainly!" said Monty Lowther.

"Leggo!" roared Sefton. "I—oh, ow!—let my ear alone, you young beast! Yarook!"

"Shush!"

"I'll—you, ow!—I say—yarooooop!"

"Shush!" repeated Lowther chidingly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Sefton of the Sixth had "shushed" at last, his ears feeling as if they had become semi-detached. Lowther had been very energetic.

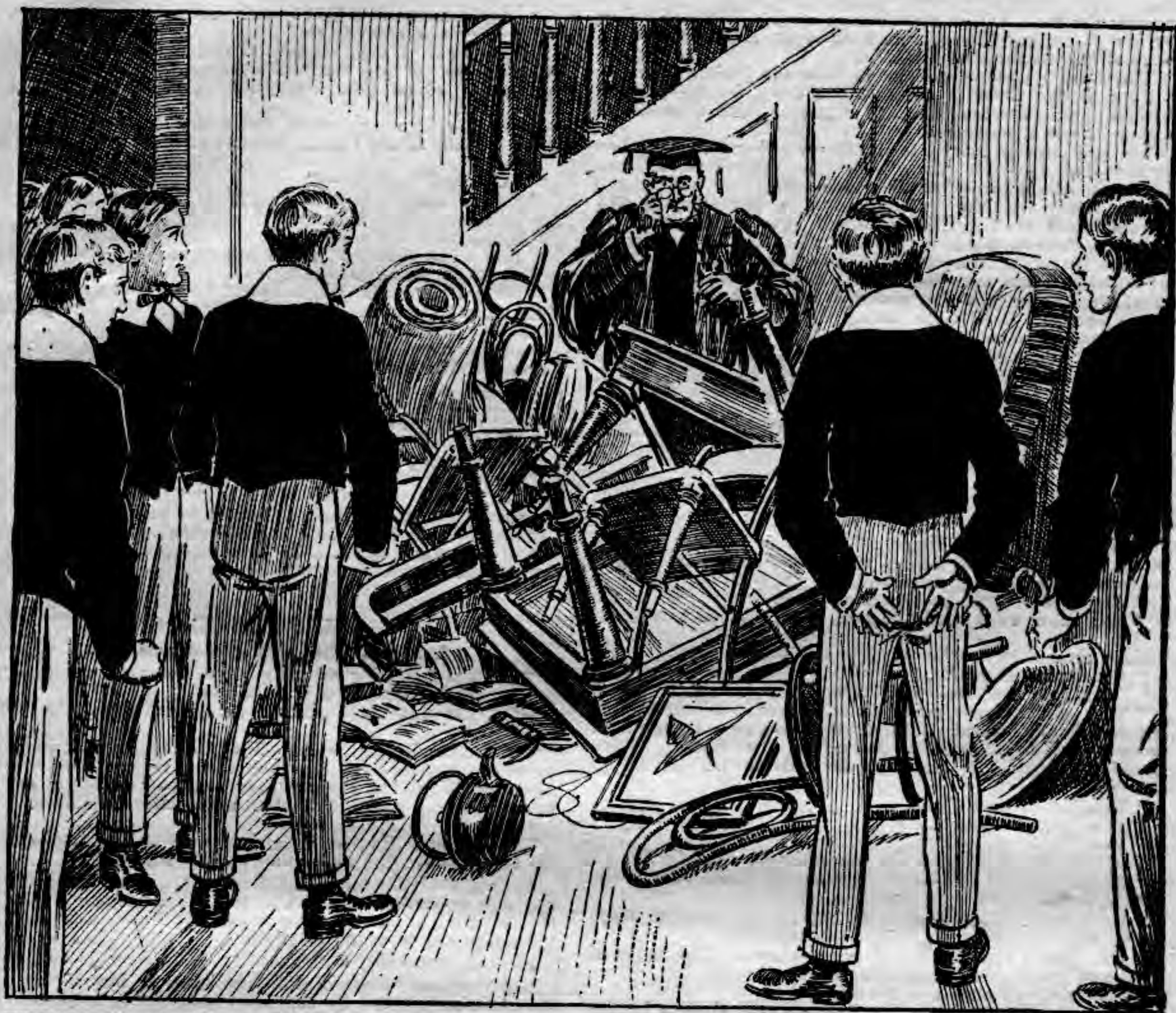
"And now," said Tom Merry calmly, "we will proceed with the investigation of this scandal. Cutts, do you still deny that you have been gambling?"

"Yes," said Cutts, livid with rage.

The pride of the Fifth-Former was cruelly humiliated by the necessity of answering stern questions put to him by a junior. But there was no help for it. Tom Merry mightn't be a school captain like Kildare, but in such a matter as this he had all the authority of the college behind him. It was better to put up with anything from the juniors than to have the Housemaster or the Head there.

"Very well," said Tom. "As I cannot accept your word, Cutts, the study must be searched!"





Dr. Holmes looked round the disordered passage as if he could scarcely believe his eyes. "Boys!" he gasped. "Boys! Have you taken leave of your senses? Who is responsible for this riot?" "It's not a riot, sir," replied Tom Merry respectfully. "We're keeping order!" (See Chapter 15.)

"Let's wreck the place intirely!" exclaimed Reilly.
 "Order!"
 "Yaas, ordah, Weilly, deah boy! Modewate your twansports, old chap!"
 "Blake!" said Tom Merry.
 "Adsum!" grinned Blake.
 "Kindly turn out the table drawer for a start."
 "Right-ho!"

And Blake started the investigation under the stern directing eye of Tom Merry, watched by the bridge players with scowling brows, and by the crowd of juniors with joyous grins.

CHAPTER 12.

The Hand of Authority.

JACK BLAKE was perhaps a little rough and ready in his methods. Perhaps he did not consider it necessary to stand upon ceremony with the Fifth-Formers. Cutts & Co. had never stood on ceremony with him, and Study No. 6 had all sorts of old scores against Cutts. Blake piled in cheerfully and unceremoniously. He turned out the table-drawer by pulling it clear out of the table.

Crash!
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

The drawer went to the floor, and the contents were scattered over the study carpet. There were papers, and pens, and ink-bottles, and indiarubbers, and all sorts and conditions of things of quite an innocent character.

There were no cards or bridge-markers to be seen, or cigarettes either.

Tom Merry was a little puzzled. He was certain that he had heard a drawer open and closed before the study door

was unlocked. But he guessed at once that an astute black-guard like Cutts would have some secret place of concealment for the tell-tale paraphernalia of gambling.

"Nothing here," said Blake, surveying the scattered articles.

"Nothin' of a suspicious chawactah," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked, turning his eyeglass upon the strewn carpet.

"Examine the drawer," said Tom Merry.

"It's empty."

"Quite empty, deah boy."

"Nothing there," said Kangaroo, with a shake of the head.

"See if there is a false bottom to it," said Tom quietly.

"Bai Jove!"

"My hat! I shouldn't wonder!" said Blake.

And he picked up the drawer and shook it. There was a rattling sound. The drawer evidently was not as empty as it looked.

Cutts bit his lip hard.

He knew that the little secret was discovered now. A master searching the study would hardly have thought of such a contrivance. But the juniors knew Cutts—knew him only too well.

"Somethin' heah, aftah all!" Arthur Augustus exclaimed excitedly. "Bai Jove, you know, I nevah thought of that!"

"Blessed if I did, either," said Blake. "But here we are! There's a false bottom to the drawer—it's two inches shallower inside than it is out. How do you open this thing, Cutts, old pal?"

"Find out!" snarled Cutts.

"Good! I will!"

Blake found out. He found out by crashing the drawer

against the table, with a most terrific crash. It flew into four or five pieces, and then the contents of the hidden receptacle were strewn on the carpet also.

There was a howl of excitement from the juniors then.

Four or five packs of cards, half a dozen bridge-markers, two or three ash-trays, boxes of cigarettes, and a packet of cigars—it was a find indeed!

The bridge-party looked at the discovered proofs, and then at the open doorway. They were in a state of terror now. The noise might bring Darrel or Rushden along the passage at any time. And the prefects, much as they might dislike the captaincy of Tom Merry, would have no hesitation in bringing Cutts to book, if they saw what had been revealed by Jack Blake's drastic method of searching. The fate of the wretched gamblers trembled in the balance. Already, in their mind's eye, they saw the crowded Hall—the Head's stern face—heard his stern voice telling them that they were expelled from the school they had disgraced.

"Looks like business, don't it?" remarked Manners. "I suppose you have these things here simply to look at, Cutts, and never to play with?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! You are discovered now, Cutts, you wottah!"

"A clean bowl-out!" chuckled Blake.

"Report him to the Head!"

"Fetch Railton here!"

"Have him sacked!"

"Hurrah!"

"Order!" said Tom Merry. "As this is the first exercise of my authority as captain of the school, so far as Cutts is concerned, I am going to be lenient. Cutts!"

"Well?" said Cutts, in a choking voice.

"You know what would happen, I suppose, if I reported you?"

Cutts ground his teeth.

"Answer me, Cutts!"

"Yes!" muttered the Fifth-Former.

"Very well! I am going to take your punishment into my own hands instead. I leave you the choice, however, of being reported to the Head instead, if you choose. Which would you prefer to deal with the matter—the Head or myself?"

"You!" muttered Cutts.

"As captain of the school?"

"Ye-es."

"In that case, you recognise my authority officially?"

"Ye-es," ground out Cutts, between his teeth, pale to the very lips with fury.

"Very good! Take those cards and markers, and put them in the fire."

Cutts, almost suffocating with rage, obeyed. The packs of cards and the bridge-markers blazed up.

"Now the cigarettes and the cigars."

Those valuable articles followed the others. Quite a bonfire blazed up Cutts's chimney. Enraged as the seniors were, they were greatly relieved to see those proofs of their delinquency destroyed. It was worth anything to them to get the things out of sight.

"And now," said Tom Merry severely, "you will tell me what you have won from one another. Who has been winning?"

The seniors did not speak.

"Each fellow will state his exact winnings and losings, immediately," said Tom Merry. "If you refuse to answer, I shall have no alternative but to call in the Housemaster."

"I've won ten shillings!" muttered Cutts.

"I've won five!" snarled Sefton.

"I've lost seven-and-six," said Knox, his voice barely audible.

"Same here!" said Gilmore.

"Very well. Lay the winnings on the table, Cutts and Sefton."

They obeyed. Tom Merry separated the half-crowns.

"There's your seven-and-six each, Knox and Gilmore," he said. "Put the money in your pockets. Do you hear?"

They put it in their pockets.

"That's done!" said Tom cheerfully. "Now, there's to be no more of this gambling, do you understand? I won't make you promise, because I don't believe that you would keep your word. But I warn you that I shall keep a very strict eye on this study in the future, and the next case of gambling will be reported directly to the Head. I am letting you off lightly this time."

The seniors did not answer. They were too enraged to speak.

"We are finished here now," said Tom Merry. "Upon the whole, I shall not cane you."

"Cane us!" stuttered Cutts.

"Yes—I have authority to cane you, as captain of the school. I suppose you know that."

"I—I—you—you—"

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"Do you know it or don't you?" demanded Tom Merry.

"I—I—yes, I suppose so."

"Very well. I shall let you off this time; but I shall not be so lenient the next time. I leave you now to meditate on your sins," added Tom Merry loftily, as he turned to the door.

"I say, ain't we going to wreck the study, bedad?" exclaimed Reilly of the Fourth, in tones of deep disappointment.

"No!"

"Faith, and I think—"

"Yaas, wathah; I should certainly wecommend bumpin' the boundahs, Tom Mewwy."

"Better give 'em a licking."

"Just a few whacks!" urged Kangaroo.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"What I have said, I have said!" he replied, with dignity. "Gentlemen, you will kindly follow me. We are finished here."

And the crowd departed. The door was closed; and then Cutts & Co. looked at one another. Their looks were almost murderous.

"And we've got to stand this?" Knox muttered.

Cutts shrugged his shoulders.

"What could we do? We should have been sacked to-morrow morning if that young villain had brought Railton on the scene."

"We've got to get rid of him somehow," said Sefton, between his teeth. "How is it going to be done?"

"How?" said Cutts, with another shrug.

And that was a question the black sheep of St. Jim's could not find an answer to.

CHAPTER 13.

A Match That Did Not Come Off.

ON the following morning there was only one topic in the School House at St. Jim's.

It was the Grammar School match of the afternoon.

The seniors having retired, like Achilles, to sulk in their tents, so to speak, and the New House fellows having been scratched off the list, the match was left to Tom Merry & Co. It was entirely a School House affair, and an affair of the juniors.

Tom Merry & Co., on their own, were to meet and defeat the Grammarian seniors—if they could.

As they generally found it difficult enough to keep their end up against Gordon Gay & Co., the juniors of the Grammar School, it might have been supposed that their chances against the senior eleven would be slight.

But they were very sanguine.

Not the least suspicion did they have, so far, of the step that had been taken by the seniors, especially by Darrel as secretary of the football club.

That the match had already been scratched by Darrel, and that the Grammarians would not arrive at all, never entered their minds. The seniors had kept their own counsel on that point.

So the junior eleven were full of keen anticipations for the afternoon; anticipations that were destined to be disappointed most severely.

After dinner, the School House fellows began to gather on the football-ground. As it was a senior match they gathered on Big Side.

The seniors were conspicuous by their absence. Some of them grinned as they saw the juniors gathering for the match that would not come off; but otherwise they took no notice of Tom Merry & Co. at all.

Figgins & Co. however, turned up in great force.

The truce between the rival Houses was at an end; the lion and the lamb no longer lay in peace.

Figgins & Co. had come to see the School House junior team wiped off the ground by the Grammarians, and to condole with one another over the disgrace that the School House was bringing upon St. Jim's.

They greeted Tom Merry's eleven with a deep groan.

The eleven looked very fit and well, in their red shirts, as they came out on the field, and started punting a footer about.

But the remarks of the New House spectators were not complimentary. They passed their remarks in loud tones for the footballers to hear. Figgins & Co. were very much on the warpath now.

"It's going to be the joke of the season!" Redfern remarked. "Blessed if I know whether to laugh or to weep a weep!"

"I say, Gussie, you've forgotten your eyeglass!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The Grammarians don't seem to be hurrying themselves,"

Thompson of the Shell remarked presently, looking at his watch. "Time they were here."

"Time for the circus to begin!" said Fatty Wynn.

"This is where the fun ought to start," said Figgins. "But where are the Grammarians? I wonder if they've heard?"

"Heard what, you silly asses?" demanded Tom Merry, turning round at last upon the New House fellows.

"Heard that they're expected to play a parcel of silly duffers," explained Figgins. "If they have they mayn't come, you know."

"They mayn't have such a taste for comedy in football as you kids have," Kerr suggested.

"A screaming joke if they don't come!" grinned Owen. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the New House crowd.

"Oh, shut up!" said Tom Merry crossly. "Of course they're coming!"

"Well, they ain't here yet."

"Sister Anne, Sister Anne, do you see anybody coming?" piped Redfern. And the New House juniors roared again.

Tom Merry & Co. looked rather anxiously at the clock-tower.

The Grammarians were certainly late. Kick-off was timed for three o'clock, and it was already turned three. It was certainly very odd that the team from the Grammar School should be so unpunctual. Blake cut down to the gates to look for the Grammarian brake, but he returned with the news that there was no sign of it.

Tom Merry & Co. ceased punting about the footer, and gathered in a group to talk the matter over. Their brows were growing anxious. They hardly knew what to make of the Grammarians' failure to appear. If the team didn't turn up, evidently the match would not come off, and then they knew what a howl of laughter there would be from all the school, especially the New House.

Figgins & Co. were already chuckling with great enjoyment. As Figgins said, it was the very best thing that could have happened, if the Grammar School team didn't come. It would be a lesson to those cheeky School House kids, and it would save St. Jim's from the disgrace of recording an overwhelming defeat. From the New House point of view, it was the best of all possible things that could have happened.

But the School House view was different. The looks of the junior footballers grew glummer and glummer as the big hand crawled round the dial on the clock in the tower.

"Half-past three!" said Monty Lowther. "They're frightfully late."

"Feahfully late, deah boy!"

"I can't understand it," said Tom Merry, his brow wrinkled in puzzled thought. "Why ain't they here? Yorke isn't the kind of silly ass to be half an hour late for a footer match. It isn't as if they had to come a long way by train."

"Is it possible——" began Herries doubtfully.

"Is what possible, ass?"

"I mean, suppose they have heard that they've got to play a junior team, and—and don't choose to come."

"Oh, rot!"

"Figgins thinks so——"

"Blow Figgins!"

"They wouldn't tweek us with such wotten diswespect," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a shake of the head. "It would be wotten bad form. They would send us a note at least."

"Of course they would!" said Tom Merry. "It can't be that."

"Then what the dooce is it?" said Blake. "Hallo, Wally! Is there any sign of the silly goats?"

Wally had just come up from the gates. He shook his head.

"I've been as far as the corner," he said. "No sign of them."

"Suppose we send them a telegwam?" suggested Arthur Augustus.

"They must have started already, if they're coming at all," said Digby.

"Yaas. But if they're not comin'?"

"It's nearer to go to the Grammar School than to the telegraph-office," said Manners. "One of us might cut over on a bike."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"If they don't choose to come, we're not going to go hunting them," he said. "We've got to consider our dignity as the St. Jim's First Eleven."

"Yaas, wathah! We're the First Eleven now, you know. We're bound to considah our personal dig in the mattah."

"Then what on earth's to be done?" exclaimed Kangaroo.

"Nearly a quarter to four!" said Clifton Dane.

"Bai Jove, it's wotten! Look at those New House boundahs cacklin'!"

Blake cast a wrathful glance towards Figgins & Co. The New House fellows undoubtedly were cackling. They seemed to be enjoying the afternoon famously.

"Let's clear those cads off the ground, anyway!" Blake exclaimed.

"Good! Let's go for them!"

"Sure, it will pass the time, anyway," Reilly remarked.

"No rags now," said Tom Merry. "It's not a time for it. Let the beasts cackle. But I wish I knew what we'd better do. It's ridiculous to stand here like this."

"Yaas, wathah; quite widiculous!"

"There must have been some trick played," said Monty Lowther thoughtfully. "Yorke wouldn't do a mean thing like this without letting us know."

"What price the telephone?" asked Manners.

"Oh, good!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "The Grammar School is on the telephone, and we can use the 'phone in the prefects' room."

"Ahem!" said Bernard Glyn dubiously. "This isn't exactly the time for asking the prefects favours, is it?"

"No favour about it. The captain of the school has a right to use the prefects' room and the telephone as much as he pleases."

"Good! I forgot that."

"You fellows may as well come with me, though, in case there's any rot," said Tom Merry, as an afterthought.

And the footballers put on their coats and mufflers, and walked in a body off the ground. Loud yells from the New House contingent followed them:

"Ain't you going to play?"

"You've forgotten the match!"

"Going to play marbles instead? More in your line!"

Tom Merry & Co. walked on with lofty heads, disdaining to take the least notice of their old rivals. But their cheeks were burning. They felt keenly the absurd side of the matter. The most crushing defeat at the hands of the Grammarians would not have been so ridiculous as this. They were glad enough to get inside the School House, leaving Figgins & Co. in possession of the field, laughing like hyenas.

CHAPTER 14.

Pure Check.

TOM MERRY threw open the door of the prefects' room and strode in, with his followers at his heels.

The prefects' room was a tremendously sacred apartment. It was devoted to the use of the prefects solely; common, or garden, members of the Sixth only being tolerated there by favour. The Fifth did not use the room; and as for juniors, mere juniors could not possibly enter it except for fagging purposes, or when some good-natured great person allowed them to use the telephone there.

But Tom Merry & Co. marched in now as if the place belonged to them.

At the big window overlooking the quadrangle several prefects were standing in a group chatting and smiling. They turned and bestowed freezing stares upon Tom Merry & Co., ceasing to smile as if by magic.

"What do you kids want here?" exclaimed Darrel.

"Silence!"

"Look here——" Rushden exclaimed hotly.

Tom Merry pointed to the door.

"Get out!" he said.

"Eh?"

"Get outside! I'm captain of the school, and I want this room for a bit. I don't want you fellows bothering me here. Travel off!"

"Yaas, wathah! Hop it, deah boys!"

The prefects stared at the juniors, looking as if they would eat them. For prefects to be ordered out of the prefects' room by a junior was quite the limit—in fact, it was miles past the limit. It was unbelievable, incredible, impossible. But there it was! Tom Merry did not intend to let the seniors overhear his talk on the telephone. He knew there would be a chorus of chuckles as it went on. And he was in a mood just now to give the Sixth all the trouble they wanted.

"You cheeky sweep——" Langton was beginning. But Tom Merry interrupted him sharply without the least ceremony.

"Outside! If you don't go you'll be put! See those fellows out of the room, you chaps!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Come on!" said Kangaroo.

"Kick them out!"

The juniors advanced to the attack. The prefects exchanged helpless glances. To be involved in an undignified scrimmage with the juniors, and finally ejected by force—for the odds were too great for them—would never do. Darrel settled the matter by walking out of the room, and the others followed him. Jack Blake slammed the door after them victoriously.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 318.

WEDNESDAY—"THE HOUSEMASTER'S PERIL!" A Magnificent New Long Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"Bai Jove, we're teachin' the Sixth mannahs alweady!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked, with a chuckle. "The boundahs are learnin' to toe the giddy line!"

"Now pile in with the 'phone!" said Blake.

Tom Merry took up the receiver. He called up the exchange, and was put on to the Grammar School at Rylcombe in a few minutes.

"Through?" asked Blake.

"Yes." Tom Merry spoke through the 'phone: "Is that Rylcombe Grammar School?"

"Yes," came the reply. "Who is that?"

"This is St. Jim's—Tom Merry speaking. Is Yorke of the Sixth there?"

"I will call him, sir. Hold on."

"Right!"

Tom Merry waited. Yorke of the Sixth, the Grammar School footer captain, was evidently at home. The Grammarian team had not yet started for St. Jim's, and it was close on four o'clock. Clearly, they did not intend to play, as it was too late now for them to reach St. Jim's and play the match before dark.

Tom Merry's brows knitted darkly as he waited. Something must have happened to cause the Grammarians to act in this unaccountable way—he was sure of that; and he was about to learn what it was. And if it was a trick on the part of anybody belonging to St. Jim's, that anybody would feel the full weight of the wrath of the captain of the school. Tom Merry was determined upon that.

Yorke's voice came through the telephone at last:

"Hallo!"

"Hallo! Is that Yorke—Grammar School?"

"Yes. What's wanted?"

"This is St. Jim's—captain of the school speaking!"

"Yes?"

"You didn't turn up for the match to-day! I want an explanation!"

"What!"

"Why didn't you turn up this afternoon?"

"Who's speaking?"

"Tom Merry—captain of St. Jim's!"

"Look here, if this is a jape——"

"It's not a jape. I've been elected captain of the school!"

"My only hat!"

"We expected you for the match to-day. You didn't come!"

"The match was scratched."

"What!"

"We had a letter from your secretary, Darrel, scratching the match, owing to unavoidable circumstances."

"From Darrel?" yelled Tom Merry.

"Yes; your secretary. Wasn't it in order?"

"No, it wasn't. It was a rotten trick!"

"Oh, crumbs! Of course, we didn't know that. We answered the letter. Isn't Darrel your secretary now?"

"Ye-es; but never mind. Darrel scratched the match?"

"Yes."

"All right. We only wanted to know. Sorry to bother you. Of course, it's too late for you to come over now?"

"Well, yes, rather!"

"Sorry. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!"

Tom Merry hung up the receiver. Then he turned to his companions with blazing eyes.

They had not heard what the Grammarian skipper said, but they had heard all that Tom Merry had said, so they were fully enlightened. Their looks were grim and threatening.

They understood now only too clearly. Darrel, the secretary of the senior football club, had taken it upon himself to scratch the match, deliberately ignoring the authority of Tom Merry as captain of St. Jim's.

"Well," said Blake, with a deep breath, "this beats the band!"

"Rotten!"

"Dished and done!"

"Scratched, by Jove!"

"And Darrel's done it!" said Blake, in a tone more of sorrow than of anger. "I always thought Darrel was a decent chap!"

"Yaas, I shouldn't have suspected old Dawwel of playin' a wotten twick like this!" said Arthur Augustus, with a sad shake of the head.

"It's because the blessed Sixth have got their blessed backs up!" said Manners. "And we had better show them they can't do these things!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Why, it's an awful cheek!" said Lowther. "Fancy scratching a match without consulting the captain or any of the team!"

"They don't look on Tommy as the captain, or us as the team, you see," Digby remarked.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 318.

FERRERS LOCKE, DETECTIVE,

is the principal character in one of the complete stories contained in

CHUCKLES, 1st.

"Then they've got to learn to!" said Tom Merry grimly.

"Hear, hear!"

"Darrel's done this—and Darrel's got to undo it!"

"H'm! I don't quite see how that's going to be worked," said Blake thoughtfully. "It's too late for the Grammarians to play us now!"

"They can play the match another day—their first vacant date," said Tom. "Darrel, as secretary, will write to them and explain, and ask them to."

"I fancy he'll refuse to act as secretary, then."

"Refusals won't be allowed. He's taken it upon himself to write once, and now he's got to write again!"

"But if he won't?"

"If he won't, he'll be made!"

"But how?"

"I shall order him to do so, as captain of the school and head of the sports!" said Tom Merry, with dignity.

"Ahem! But he won't, all the same."

"Then we shall use force. A licking will do him good!"

Blake gasped.

"A licking! Darrel!"

"I suppose Darrel can be licked as well as anybody else?" said Tom, with asperity.

"I—I—I don't know about licking a prefect!"

"Well, I do. If we stand this, we may as well chuck the whole thing up. If the Sixth are to be allowed to scratch First Eleven matches, what's the good of our being the First Eleven at all?"

"Not much, certainly," agreed Blake.

"And they'll be doing it, too," said Lowther. "I shouldn't wonder if Darrel has written to other clubs already, scratching matches!"

"The cheeky beast!"

"The fwightful wottah!"

"It's got to be nipped in the bud!" Tom Merry declared. "I suppose all you fellows are ready to back me up in enforcing discipline?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Then come on!" said Tom Merry. "We're going to see Darrel!"

"Hurrah!"

And Tom Merry & Co. marched off in great dudgeon to see Darrel.

CHAPTER 15.

Caned by the Captain!

DARREL of the Sixth had retired to his study, after his inglorious retreat from the prefects' room.

Darrel was not in a good temper.

The late happenings at St. Jim's had exasperated him, and that morning he had received a letter from Kildare, informing him that there was no immediate prospect of the return of the old captain of the school.

Apparently, the reign of the junior captain was to continue, and things were to go from bad to worse, unless the Head interfered. And as yet the Head had given no sign.

Perhaps he was waiting for the school to get "fed up" with their junior captain before he came down with the mailed hand of authority. Probably he would not have long to wait.

The New House juniors had already fallen away from their allegiance, and the School House had already showed signs of division. After a time, only Tom Merry's personal friends, probably, would be standing by him, and then an act of authority on the part of the Head would be generally popular, and would not appear in the light of an injustice.

But, so far, the Head had not appeared to notice that anything was amiss. Whatever he thought of the new state of affairs, he kept his own counsel so far as the boys were concerned.

Darrel was usually a very good-tempered fellow, but his voice was quite snappish as he rapped out "Come in!" in answer to a knock at his door.

Tom Merry & Co. came in.

The juniors were still in their coats and mufflers, over their footer garb. They had not lost any time in coming to see Darrel.

Eleven sturdy fellows crowded into the study, and Darrel rose to his feet, with an angry frown upon his brow.

"Get out of my study!" he exclaimed. "I'm fed up with your nonsense! Get out at once!"

"All in?" said Tom Merry, without heeding Darrel.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry turned the key in the lock. Then he turned round and faced the angry Sixth-Former.

"We've come here on business, Darrel——"

"Will you get out?" shouted Darrel.

"No, we won't!"

"Then I'll—"

"You'll shut up and listen to what I've got to say, or there'll be trouble!" said Tom Merry determinedly.

"Heaps of twouble, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus cheerfully. "Pway listen to weason, Dawwel, and don't play the giddy ox!"

"We don't want to hurt you," Monty Lowther explained. "We like you all right, Darrel, only we can't allow you to kick over the traces!"

"That's how it stands, Darrel."

"I have nothing to say to you," said Darrel, biting his lips. "I refuse to recognise Tom Merry as captain of St. Jim's. You know that!"

"Then you've got to be taught to toe the line!" said Tom. Darrel laughed angrily.

"I have just been on the telephone," went on the captain of the school. "I rang up Yorke at the Grammar School, to ask why they hadn't been over to-day."

A smile flickered over Darrel's face for a moment.

"Well?" he said.

"Yorke explained," said Tom Merry. "You wrote to him as secretary, and scratched the match for this afternoon."

Darrel nodded.

"Well, as you choose to write as secretary, you're to write as secretary again," said Tom. "You'll tell Yorke it was a mistake, or tell him you were playing the giddy ox, just as you like—and ask him to fix up the match for another date."

"I certainly shall do nothing of the kind," said Darrel.

"You will!"

"Nonsense!"

"Do you refuse?"

"Most decidedly!"

"Very well—then you'll be licked for your cheek in interfering in matters that concern the First Eleven, you being no longer a member of the eleven."

"Licked!" said Darrel faintly.

"That's what I said."

"Is this your idea of a joke?" asked Darrel, unable to believe that the junior captain was in earnest.

"You'll jolly soon find that it isn't a joke. Give me that cane, Gussy."

"Heah you are, deah boy."

Arthur Augustus picked the prefect's cane from the table, and handed it to Tom Merry. Tom swished it in the air, in quite the manner of a Form-master.

"Hold out your hand, Darrel!" he said.

"Wha-a-at!"

"Getting deaf? I'm going to cane you, and I told you to hold out your hand."

Darrel stared at Tom Merry as if his eyes would start out of his head. It evidently wasn't a joke; none of the juniors laughed, or even smiled. They were all looking as serious as judges.

"M-m-my hand!" stuttered Darrel.

"Yes."

"Not your foot, you know!" murmured Monty Lowther, who could never repress his troublesome sense of humour for long. "It's the cane, you know; not the bastinado. Put out your little paw."

"And buck up!" said Tom Merry.

Darrel breathed hard through his nose.

"It can't be possible that you're lunatic enough to think that you can cane a prefect," he stammered.

"I am going to cane you, unless you immediately write that letter to the Grammar School, and apologise for your unwarranted interference."

"You—you—you—"

"Will you write the letter?"

"No, you young idiot!"

"Will you hold out your hand?"

"No, you fool!"

"Then it will be held out for you," said Tom Merry. "Collar him!"

It seemed like a dream to Darrel; it really seemed that it couldn't possibly be anything but a dream. But the hands that grasped him, and dragged him before Tom Merry, were real enough. Darrel was so overcome with astonishment and rage that for the moment he did not even resist.

"Put his paw out for him," said Tom Merry.

Then Darrel began to struggle. The Sixth-Former was a powerful fellow, and he could probably have accounted for any three or four of the juniors. But eight or nine of them at once were too many for him.

He swayed to and fro in the midst of a clinging throng of them, and went over, sprawling on the floor of the study, with the juniors sprawling over him.

"Sit on him!" panted Blake.

"Sit on his beastly head, deah boys."

"Jump on his legs!"

"Hold him!"

"Let me go!" roared Darrel. "Rescue. Sixth! Rescue!"

"No good yelling," said Tom Merry calmly. "The door's

locked. The Sixth can't get in. Besides, I shouldn't allow them to interfere."

"Help! Rescue!"

"Hallo! What's the row in here?" called out Rushden's voice from the passage, as the handle of the door was tried on the outside.

"Nothing that concerns you," said Tom Merry. "Buzz off!"

"Eh! What's going on?"

"Go to your study at once, Rushden!"

"You young idiot—"

"Go to your study and stay there, or I shall cane you!"

"M-m-my hat!"

"Never mind that duffer!" said Blake. "Get on with the washing. Are you going to keep still, Darrel, old fellow?"

"No!" roared Darrel, struggling violently. "Rushden, bring the fellows here—these rotten fags are ragging me!"

"Right-ho!" shouted back Rushden. And his footsteps could be heard hurrying away down the passage. Blake whistled softly.

"There's going to be a glorious rumpus with the Sixth now," he said. "I shouldn't wonder if they bust in the door."

"Let them!" said Tom Merry. "For the last time, Darrel, are you going to write that letter to the Grammar School, as directed by your captain?"

"No!" shrieked Darrel.

"Hold out his hand, if he won't hold it out himself," said Tom. "I'm going to give him three on each hand, as a warning."

"Hear, hear!"

Darrel was still struggling, but his struggles were unavailing. Five or six juniors held him round the body, as he sat on the carpet; and a couple stood on his legs. His right arm was held as in a vice; his left arm was forcibly extended, and his hand was forcibly held out for the cane.

"Open your hand, Darrel."

"I won't!"

"You'll get it across the knuckles, then!"

"Hang you!"

Swish! The cane came down, and it came across Darrel's clenched hand, and there was a yell of pain from the prefect. He writhed and struggled in the grasp of the juniors; but he could not get loose, and neither could he withdraw his hand.

"Better open your hand now," said Tom Merry grimly. "You're going to have six cuts, and it hurts less on the palm. I've been there, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas, don't be a silly, obstinate ass, Dawwel, deah boy."

Swish! Darrel opened his hand now; as he was going to be caned, he felt that it was more sensible to have it in the least painful way. Swish again!

"Now the other hand!" said Tom Merry.

Darrel's other hand was forced out. Thrice the cane came down upon it with a heavy and sounding swish.

The prefect was white with rage.

"And now you've been caned," said Tom Merry calmly, "you'll apologise for your interference in the business of the First Eleven, or I shall give you lines."

"Hang you!"

"Very well; you will take five hundred lines of Virgil, Darrel; and you will bring them to my study this evening, or I shall cane you again."

Bump! Bump! It was a loud concussion at the door. Rushden had returned with a party of the Sixth.

CHAPTER 16.

The Vials of Wrath.

TOM MERRY unlocked the study door.

The punishment of Darrel had been finished—unless he refused to do his lines—as was very probable indeed. In that case, there would be another caning for him in the evening. But, for the present, Tom Merry's duty was done. He opened the study door, therefore; and revealed a crowd of angry seniors in the passage outside.

Darrel struggled to his feet. He was stuttering with rage.

"What have they been doing?" exclaimed Langton.

"Ragging me!" stuttered Darrel. "Collar the young cads! Thrash them—thrash them within an inch of their lives."

"What-ho!"

"Stand back!" exclaimed Tom Merry sternly. "As captain of the school—"

"I'll captain of the school you!" growled Rushden.

The seniors rushed upon Tom Merry & Co. There were a dozen of them, and they had, of course, all the advantage on their side. There was a wild scrimmage in the study; the juniors put up a desperate fight. But the powerful seniors made short work of them. They were rushed and kicked out.

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY—

"THE HOUSEMASTER'S PERIL!"

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of
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of the study, bundled along the passage in the foughest possible manner, and kicked out of it.

In the next corridor, eleven breathless and dishevelled juniors sprawled at full length, feeling as if they had been smitten suddenly by a particularly powerful hurricane.

The seniors retired and left them there.

Tom Merry was the first to sit up. He felt his head, to ascertain that it was still on his shoulders, and gasped.

"Oh, my hat!"

"Ow, bai Jove!" groaned Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Look at my clobber, deah boys! My clothes are uttably wuined!"

"Ow! My nose!"

"Groogh! My eye!"

"Oh, dear!"

"Faith, and it's kilt intirely I am!"

The juniors staggered up. Other fellows were gathering round, seeming to take rather a humorous than a sympathetic view of the case.

"Bitten off more than you could chew—eh?" Levison of the Fourth inquired.

"Looks like a giddy captain of the school, doesn't he?" Gore wanted to know.

"Who handled you like this?" asked Kerruish.

"Darrel and the seniors!" gasped Tom Merry. "But they're going to have a lesson about it. Call up the fellows."

"What's the little game now?" asked Blake.

"All School House juniors to meet here in a quarter of an hour," said Tom Merry, panting. "The Sixth have got to be brought to their senses. We are going to rag the Sixth-Form passage from end to end."

"Bai Jove!"

"Hurrah!"

"Pass the word round," said Tom Merry. "I'm going to bathe my eye."

"It needs it," grinned Gore.

"Both yours will need it if you don't ring off," said Tom Merry. "Get the fellows here—every kid in the House, mind."

And the badly-used eleven went up to their dormitories to change and bathe their injuries, while the word passed round for the gathering of the clans, as it were.

There were many groans as the juniors bathed darkened eyes and swollen noses; but they had one consolation, and that was the thought of the heavy punishment that was to fall upon the Sixth.

Seniors, and big fellows as they were, the Sixth Form, of course, would have no chance in a pitched battle with the juniors, who outnumbered them immensely. It was only a question of starting on them. Under ordinary circumstances, such a proceeding would have been impossible and undreamt of, but the circumstances were not ordinary.

Tom Merry, a junior, was captain of St. Jim's, and the juniors were bound to obey their captain's orders. The Sixth were the rebels. Ragging the Sixth was now the only means of restoring order and discipline, according to the ideas of the captain of the school. And his intention was to rag the Sixth so effectually and thoroughly that they would toe the line without giving any further trouble. It was a case for the mailed fist, as Monty Lowther remarked; and Tom Merry intended that the mailed fist should come down heavily.

"Ready?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Quite ready!"

"Follow your leader, then!"

And Tom led the way downstairs to the wide flagged corridor where the juniors had already gathered at the word of command. A hundred fellows were already there, all of them eager and excited. To "go for" the Sixth, under the orders of the captain of the school—which, of course, secured them from punishment at the hands of the masters—was a great joy to the Lower School. Shell and Fourth, Third and Second, had turned up in great force. Some of them had brought pillows from the dormitories, some of them had cricket-stumps or knotted stockings, in case weapons should be wanted.

Tom Merry ran a gleaming eye over the numerous and eager force.

"Gentlemen, it's up to us to teach the Sixth to toe the line, and obey the orders of the captain of the school. Are you all ready to back me up?"

There was a roar.

"Yes. Back up!"

"Bravo!"

"Hurrah!"

"Lead on, Macduff!"

"Follow me!" shouted Tom Merry.

And, with another excited roar, the army of juniors marched into the Sixth-Form passage. The Sixth were mostly indoors now, for tea; and some of them came out of their studies at the sound of the uproar, to see what on

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 318.

earth the matter was. They stared at the sight of the swarming juniors.

"What is it now?" gasped Langton.

"You'll see!" said Tom Merry. "Darrel's study first, you fellows. Darrel was the worst of them, and we'll start by making an example of him."

"Hear, hear!"

Kangaroo kicked Darrel's door open. Darrel was at tea with Rushden, both of them looking decidedly glum as they discussed the parlous state into which things in general at St. Jim's had drifted since old Kildare went away.

They jumped up angrily as the juniors swarmed in, but Tom Merry & Co. did not waste a word of explanation. They started business at once.

"Over with the table!" said Tom.

Crash!

The table, seized by half a dozen hands, was hurled bodily into the fender. There was a terrific crashing and smashing of crockeryware. Darrel and Rushden gave a simultaneous roar of rage.

They rushed at the invaders, but they were collared and tossed out of the way without the slightest ceremony.

"Pitch them into the passage!" said Tom Merry.

"Out they go!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bump, bump!

Darrel and Rushden rolled along the passage. The juniors proceeded to wreck the study in a thoroughly workmanlike manner. Tom Merry intended that it should be a lesson never to be forgotten by the Sixth; and certainly it was likely to be remembered. There was crash on crash as the furniture went flying in all directions. Crash on crash answered from the other studies, where other raggers were already busily at work. Yells from the raided seniors sounded along with the crashing of furniture and the break of crockery.

In the Sixth-Form passage senior after senior sprawled, gasping with rage, as he was tossed out of his study by the invaders.

After them came chairs and carpets, tables and books and bed-clothes, all sorts and conditions of things. The juniors were doing their work conscientiously.

The din was terrific.

Cutts of the Fifth came along to see what was the matter, and he was greeted with a shower of missiles, and fled again immediately. He fled in the direction of the Head's study. Mr. Railton was out that afternoon, or he would have been on the scene before. Cutts of the Fifth rushed into the Head's study with the startling news that the juniors had all gone mad and were wrecking the House.

Meanwhile, the ragging went on unabated. The excitement grew, and the damage done was greater than had been originally intended, as is generally the case in a riot.

In the midst of the wild uproar there was a sudden shout from the passage.

"Cave!"

"The Head!"

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Monty Lowther. "Here comes the Head! Blessed if I hadn't quite forgotten that there was such a thing as a Head!"

"Bai Jove! There'll be a wow now!"

"Nothing to be afraid of," said Tom Merry, with undiminished calmness. "You are acting under my orders as captain of the school—in keeping order here."

"Keeping order!" murmured Blake, surveying the strewn passage. "Keeping order! Oh, my hat!"

The Head advanced majestically. Tom Merry stepped to meet him, picking his way among chairs and carpets and broken cups and saucers and books turned inside-out. And there was a breathless hush.

CHAPTER 17.

How it Ended.

D R. HOLMES looked round him, as if he could scarcely believe his eyes.

Certainly no such scene had ever met his reverend gaze before within the precincts of the old school.

The Sixth-Form passage looked as if a horde of Huns and Vandals had descended upon it, and done their very worst.

In the midst of the wreckage stood juniors in crowds, dusty and flushed and excited, and seniors stuttering with rage.

"Boys!" gasped the Head. "Boys! Have you taken leave of your senses? What does this mean? I demand to know who is responsible for this riot!"

"It isn't a riot, sir," said Tom Merry.

"Wathah not, sir."

(Continued on page 22.)

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A speedy result of hair neglect is the accumulation on the scalp of scurf and greasy matter.

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YOU LOOK YEARS OLDER THAN YOU OUGHT TO LOOK.

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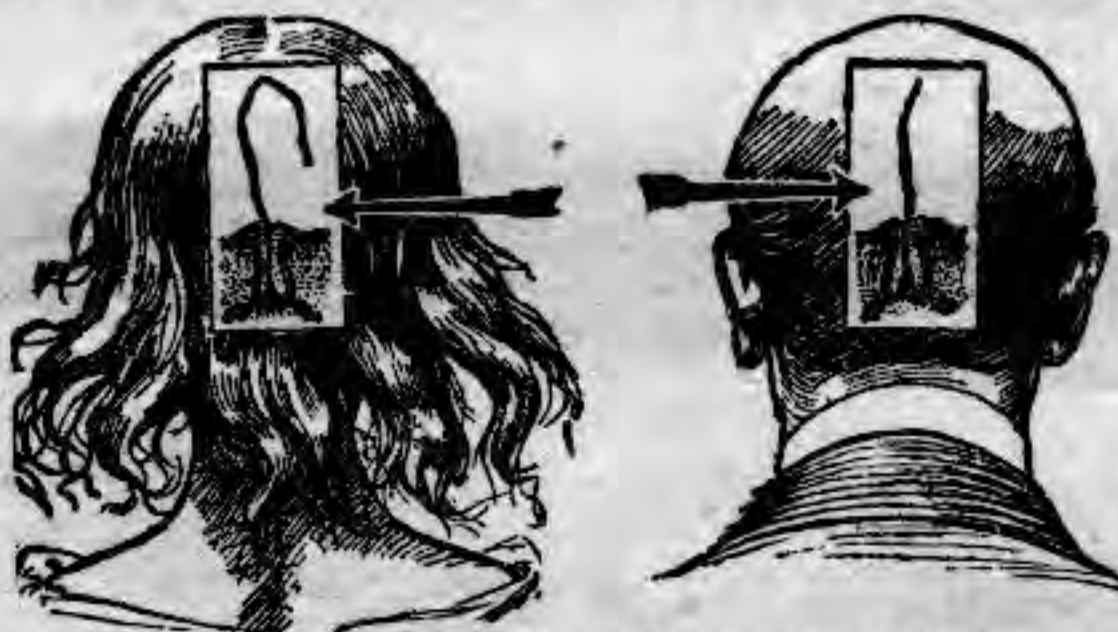
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The Gem, 14/3/4.

"We are keeping order, sir," the captain of St. Jim's explained.

"Keeping order!" stammered the Head.

"Yes, sir."

"What do you mean, Merry?"

"The Sixth have refused to recognise my authority as captain of the school, sir," said Tom Merry steadily. "They have acted with disrespect and violence towards me on the occasion of my caning Darrel for insubordination."

"Wank insubordination, sir!"

"Caning Darrel!" gasped Dr. Holmes. "You caning a prefect!"

"In the execution of my duty, sir, as captain of the school."

"Merry!"

"The Sixth chipped in, and as captain of St. Jim's I had no alternative but to administer a severe lesson to them, to keep order. After this they will understand better!"

"Merry! If you intend to be impertinent——"

"Not at all, sir. I have done my duty as captain of the school. I hope I shall always do so, so long as I remain captain."

"Bwavo!"

"So this is your idea of your duty as captain of the school, and your idea of keeping order in this House?" said the Head.

"A fellow can only do his best, sir."

"And is this your best?"

"Certainly!"

"Then I fear, Merry, that some alteration will have to be made. You will kindly follow me to my study. You other juniors will go to your own quarters at once, and stay there."

"Pway allow me to point out, sir——"

"I will allow you to be silent, D'Arcy. Follow me, Merry."

"Yes, sir."

Tom Merry followed the Head. The raiders dispersed with somewhat glum looks. The Head was evidently very angry; and it was equally evident that he did not approve of the junior captain of the school's methods of keeping order.

Tom Merry, however, held his head high as he followed Dr. Holmes to his study. He had acted within his rights, he considered, and he had nothing to fear.

In the study the Head was silent for a full minute, regarding thoughtfully the handsome face of the junior.

Then he smiled slightly.

"Merry," he said, at last, "I am not angry with you. I think you have acted from a sense of irresponsibility, natural in a very young lad placed in a position for which he is not fitted. But this cannot continue."

"I hope the Sixth will see reason now, sir."

"I am afraid they will never see the reason of submitting to the authority of a junior," said Dr. Holmes, with a shake of the head. "I have not interfered hitherto, Merry. I hesitated to do so, because you were duly elected by a majority of the voters in the school."

"A very large majority, sir. Cutts was a very bad second."

"Quite so. But it cannot continue, Merry."

"What cannot continue, sir?"

"Your captaincy of St. Jim's."

Tom Merry's lips tightened.

"The fellows won't think it just, sir, to override a free and independent election," he said. "They had the right to elect me if they chose."

"I do not dispute that, Merry. On future occasions some new rules will be made on that subject. For the present, Merry, I fear that I cannot allow you to hold a post which is only suitable for a senior. But"—the Head's voice was very gentle—"Merry, I do not wish to appear to act harshly."

"I am sure of that, sir."

"I prefer to make an appeal to you, to your good sense and right feeling, my boy."

"Oh!" murmured Tom Merry.

"I think you should resign, and allow the captaincy to go to the senior candidate—Cutts of the Fifth. It is understood that when Kildare returns he will resume the captaincy of the school; and I hope it will not be for long that he remains absent. Meanwhile, Merry, I ask you, as a personal favour to myself, to resign."

Tom Merry was silent.

It was rather hard to give up the post he considered he had filled in a very able manner, especially when he was having such marked success in keeping order.

But it was impossible to refuse the Head. It was better to yield to a request than to submit to a command, and if the request was refused, there was no doubt that the command would follow. But the Head was very gentle and amiable about it.

"Come, Merry," he said, "I am sure that the duties of this unaccustomed position have interfered with your usual amusements and occupations. You will probably not be sorry, upon the whole, to be rid of the trouble and responsibility. Come, now, will you do as I ask?"

Tom Merry heaved a little sigh.

"Very well, sir."

"You resign?"

"If you wish it, sir."

"I do wish it," said the Head.

"Then I resign the position of captain of St. Jim's, sir."

"Thank you very much, Merry," said the Head gravely.

"If there's going to be another election, sir——"

"I do not think we need have the excitement and disturbance of another election," said the Head, very hastily.

"For the time that Kildare remains absent, Cutts of the Fifth will fill the post very well. I understand that he is acceptable to the Sixth. After what has happened, they will be glad to have a senior for captain, at all events. As you resign, the captaincy goes to the next candidate. I am very much obliged to you, Merry, for relieving me in this way, and I shall not forget it. Now you may go! Kindly put a notice on the board to the effect that you have resigned."

"Very well, sir."

And the Head shook hands with Tom Merry and dismissed him.

Tom's brow was very thoughtful as he walked away from the study. After all, he was not wholly sorry that his brief period of authority as captain of the school had come to a termination. It had brought him very little but trouble; and possibly he had had an inward feeling himself that, in the long run it would not do.

His chums met him in the passage.

"Well?" said a dozen voices together.

"The Head asked me to resign," said Tom Merry quietly.

"I've done it. I'm going to post it up on the board."

Monty Lowther grinned a little.

"Well, that's over," he remarked. "After all, it was fun while it lasted."

"Yaas, wathah. We have given the seniahs a wippin' time, at all events. If there is anothah election, I shall put up!"

"There isn't going to be another election," said Tom Merry. "The captaincy goes to Cutts of the Fifth!"

"Oh, bai Jovel!"

"I wish the fellows joy of him when they get him," said Tom. "Blessed if I think I'm quite sorry it's over."

And Tom Merry posted up a notice on the board, to the effect that he resigned the captaincy—a notice that was read with mixed feelings by the juniors, and with pure joy by the seniors.

A little later, Darrel of the Sixth dropped into Tom Merry's study. The Terrible Three looked at him rather grimly. But Darrel was good-humoured and friendly. He held out his hand to Tom Merry.

"I think you've done the right thing, kid," he said, "and I've looked in to tell you that I don't bear any malice for what's happened. We'll let bygones be bygones, and start afresh. What?"

Tom Merry smiled, and shook hands cordially enough with Darrel.

"Right-ho!" he said. "It's a go!"

And so—after a time of excitement such as the old school had seldom or never seen before—ended the reign of Captain Tom Merry!

THE END.

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CHAPTER 1.

Grovehouse—A Question of Selection—The Voting in the Great Hall—Foster Wins His Place in the Team.

Never in all the history of Grovehouse, which history was as old and as honourable as that of any public school in the kingdom, had such a state of excitement been known as obtained upon the night when the selection of a member of the cricket club to fill the vacancy in the team to meet Headlingham College in the great match of the year was to be finally decided.

All day long a spirit of unrest had seized the school. The boys paid little or no attention to their lessons. Many who had never been found wanting before were called over the coals and set severe impositions, and the masters, alive at length to the source of the trouble, decided to view the affair leniently, knowing full well that after the selection of the member to the vacancy in the team had been decided, the school would settle down to its ordinary dull routine again.

When supper had been despatched, there was a regular flow of schoolboys towards the big School House, and there, in the great hall, they foregathered, Bangley Jeffcock whipping up his followers who were to vote solid on behalf of Sidney Weames, upon the one side; and William Hewitt, the captain of Grovehouse, who favoured the pretensions of Geoffrey Foster, haranguing a crowd of schoolboys, on the other.

Bangley Jeffcock was a big, broad-shouldered lad, with not a bad-looking face. Yet there was something shifty in the gleam of his small eyes, and untrustworthy in the sneering set of his lips. He was a good man at games, excelling in all kinds of field sports, and one of the best in the school at cricket.

He was distinguished by reason of his hatred for Geoffrey Foster, as nice and as gentlemanly a lad as could be found in Grovehouse, and his dislike and jealousy of his captain, William Hewitt, to whose credit might be attached any success the school had achieved in athletics during the time he had held the reins.

"Now, then, Talbot," cried Bangley Jeffcock, strolling up to a youngster who was doing his best to stifle a yawn, having returned tired from the river after bathing that evening, "you're going to vote for Weames, of course?"

Jeffcock's eyes darted fire at the boy, and his fists clenched as he spoke. Jellotson, one of the heroes of Grovehouse, and also as nice a fellow as ever breathed, called this "Jeffcock's attitude of coercion."

"I suppose I must," said Talbot, a little afraid. "And after all, Sidney Weames is as good a man for the team as

Foster. I'm surprised at Hewitt sticking up for the Fifth Form youngster."

"Hewitt would stick up for anybody," exclaimed Jeffcock, moving away to the next boy, who happened to be Bob Haines, a powerfully-built, sluggish kind of lad, who would never permit himself to be put out, and who was as solid as a rock. No coercive methods would serve to influence him. Bangley Jeffcock seemed to be aware of this, for his manner was more conciliatory than he had adopted with Talbot.

"You're voting for us, of course, Haines," he said, making a note on his cuff with a piece of lead pencil.

"If you mean Weames by 'us,'" said Haines, with a slow drawl, "I'm not. I'm voting solid for Foster."

Jeffcock didn't seem to like it.

"Why?" he asked.

"I'll tell you why," answered Haines, looking the big lad straight in the eyes, "and there are a number of reasons. First of all, I look upon Foster as a better cricketer than Weames. Weames is showy, but not reliable, and besides, is a toady of yours."

"Secondly, I reckon Hewitt's judgment to be unmatched. Not because he is captain of the school, but because I've never known anyone since I've been at Grovehouse so quick to spot a cricketer or a promising athlete like him. He reckons there should be no question of choice at all, and that if the school wasn't stone blind, Foster would be elected to the vacant position without a dissentient voice."

"Thirdly, you've put up all this trouble for Foster, Jeffcock, simply because you've taken a dislike to the lad. Why, none of us know, but it's very plain. Foster is a jolly good chap. He's generous, open-handed, would share his last sixpence with a pal, and think nothing of it. He's the most obliging duffer in Grovehouse, and is worth a bagful of your Sidney Weames's. It will be a rotten precedent for the school if Weames is chosen."

Bob Haines paused for breath, and Jeffcock regarded him with a sneer.

"Have you finished?" he asked.

"Not yet," cried Haines. "I was getting breath, that's all. Well, then, fourthly, you've been planning this affair in order to try and undermine the authority of our captain, William Hewitt, and you've packed this meeting with your set. You've not been honest in your methods of carrying on your warfare against Foster, and I shall be very surprised indeed if any decent boy in the school records his vote for Weames."

Lastly, Foster comes of a grand cricketing family, the Hedley Fosters, and for that reason alone ought to be given a chance of distinguishing himself at Grovehouse; and besides, the lad has remained in the background, content to

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leave his selection entirely to the club committee. The club committee were fools enough to divide their opinion, even when Hewitt put in his casting vote, leaving the selection of the last man for the eleven in the hands of the school. It's rotten bad form, that's what I call it, and very unfair to our captain and to Foster, and so I shall vote for the non-favourite, Jeffcock."

The big boy regarded Haines for a moment in scornful silence. He felt as if he could knock his head off willingly, but the imperturbable Haines, who read his thoughts quite easily, did not seem in the least disturbed.

"You're mad," said Jeffcock, and he passed on to the tall and aristocratic Jellotson; handsome, fair-haired, blue-eyed, good-natured Jellotson of the Upper Sixth.

"I say, Jellotson," said Jeffcock eagerly, "you're going to vote for us, aren't you?"

Jellotson eyed Bangley Jeffcock critically.

"My dear sir," he said, with a smile, "in such cases as this, where one faction is bitterly opposing the other, and also the authority of the captain of the school, and manifesting vindictiveness in every phase of the campaign, I always make it a rule to abstain from voting. If there happens to be a tie in the number of votes—a very unlikely occurrence—I shall give my casting vote to Foster. But otherwise I shall not vote at all, but will carry round a ballot-box with the greatest of pleasure."

Jeffcock bit his lip. He could never face the composed and stylish Jellotson without being conscious of his great inferiority.

From rank to rank Bangley Jeffcock made his way, arguing and coaxing, bullying and threatening the boys as he thought best. On the other side, Captain William Hewitt, with a calm and confident smile, merely stood apart from the crowd of schoolboys who were eagerly discussing the event, conscious that the school would stand by him in the main.

The last of the boys had now arrived, and the folding doors of the great hall were closed and bolted.

"Schoolmates and fellow comrades!" cried the Grovehouse captain, getting upon a low rostrum, so that all might see and hear him. "The reason for our meeting here to-night is well known to you all. A weakness of the cricket club committee has thrown the responsibility of selecting the last member of our cricket team, which is to meet Headlingham College in the great match of the year, upon you. The two candidates are Sidney Weames and Geoffrey Foster."

"I will say nothing about their respective qualifications for the vacant place, but leave you, who know them so well, to judge of them for yourselves. I will merely content myself by saying that Geoffrey Foster, with that generous instinct that characterises him in his actions, has offered to withdraw and give Weames the place rather than put the school to the painful necessity of holding this meeting. That withdrawal, boys"—here the Grovehouse captain raised his voice—"I would not for one moment permit. We are fighting for a question of principle, and if"—his voice sank into a tone of grave seriousness—"if I judge the school aright, there can be but one result of the ballot that is now about to take place."

He stood down then, and a burst of cheering, led by Bob Haines with a loud "Bravo!" shook the very rafters of the great hall.

Bangley Jeffcock, who had listened to the captain's speech in amazement, for he had never expected him to adopt such an attitude of toleration, or to hear that Geoffrey Foster had offered to withdraw in Weames' favour, stood biting his lips, obviously ill at ease. And well he might be, for Geoffrey's generous action and the captain's modest speech had won the school round, and all the waverers promptly went over to the captain's side.

Then, amidst almost solemn silence, the ballot-boxes were carried round, and the slips of paper on which the names of the candidates were printed, and which were marked by the schoolboys according to their fancy, were placed within, and the boxes, when the last paper had been collected, were taken to the end of the great hall, and their contents turned out upon the huge oaken benches there, and counted by the tellers.

During the counting, which necessarily occupied some time, a buzz of excited conversation went round. Amidst it all Jeffcock, anticipating defeat, hurried from one of his supporters to another, endeavouring to arouse a fresh opposition against Foster should he get the place.

He was determined, come what might, that Geoffrey Foster should not play for Grovehouse against Headlingham College if he could possibly prevent it. There was no spirit of fair play in any of Jeffcock's actions, and his very unscrupulousness endeared him to many boys of weaker nature than himself.

His most earnest effort was spent in bringing the wavering

and frightened Talbot over to his side by means of threats and promises.

He was interrupted in this endeavour by the captain mounting the rostrum again.

"Boys," cried the Grovehouse captain, his voice ringing quite clearly through the hall, "I have to announce that the school has given its vote in favour of Geoffrey Foster—"

At his words a mighty shout went up, and it was a minute before the captain could proceed.

"The figures," William Hewitt went on, "are as follows: Geoffrey Foster, one hundred and fifteen votes; Sydney Weames, eighty-eight. Many of the boys present abstained from voting. I thank the school from the bottom of my heart for the confidence they have shown in me."

There was another mighty cheer.

"And so," said the captain, when the noise had subsided again, "the matter is finally settled, and Geoffrey Foster will play for the school. Foster, I congratulate you!"

And leaping down to where Geoffrey Foster stood, blushing and confused, he caught his hand in a hearty grip, and shook it warmly. But at that very moment, when everything seemed to be going so smoothly, Bangley Jeffcock leapt upon a form, and raised his hand in the air.

"The school is not satisfied," he cried. "We protest against the selection of Geoffrey Foster in preference to Sidney Weames." This was the signal for an uproar. "Boys," cried Jeffcock, turning and addressing himself to a faction that he knew was with him, "is Foster to play for the school?"

The answer came loud and strong:

"No, no, no!"

CHAPTER 2.

The Captain of Grovehouse Puts His Foot Down—A Question of Resignation—Bangley Jeffcock Meets with a Rebuff.

As the Grovehouse captain listened to the uproar that followed, his face became as pale as death. His lips quivered, his eyes gleamed with a fierce light of resentment, and the boys saw him more agitated than ever they had seen him before. The insulting breach of etiquette and defiance of his authority that Jeffcock was guilty of hurt him deeply.

But what did Jeffcock care? He stood shouting and raving like a madman on the form, calling upon the boys to vote solid for Weames, and protest against the result of the ballot, which, he declared, was unfairly given. He had good reason to know, he said, that more than eighty-eight votes had been given to Weames.

The reopening of the sore, when Captain Hewitt had looked upon it as being completely healed, irritated him and Jellotson and one or two of the more responsible members of the school beyond description.

The captain waited for the uproar to subside, then jumping upon the rostrum for the third time that evening, he held up his hand for silence. Talbot and one or two more of Jeffcock's toadies would have continued the noise, but one glance at their captain's face told them that they had better be silent.

"Boys of Grovehouse," said the captain quietly, his voice trembling with emotion, "I hardly expected this of you. With the selection of Foster, all legitimate discussion of the merits of Weames and Foster is at an end until it is decided on the field who is the better man. I cannot tolerate Jeffcock's interference now."

"Oh, oh!"—derisively from Jeffcock.

"And, what is more, I will not tolerate it. I was elected by you as captain of Grovehouse, and while I hold the reins I intend to govern the school to the best of my ability, and with due regard for all your welfare. If you cannot place your confidence in me"—William Hewitt raised his voice so that all might hear him more clearly—"I have no wish to remain your captain. I will resign, and you can elect Jeffcock as captain in my place. As your captain, he might legitimately direct you, but as a mere member of the cricket club I cannot tolerate his impertinent interference."

"Impertinent!" growled Jeffcock sullenly.

"I used the word as being most applicable," said the captain sharply. "Your behaviour, to say the least of it, Jeffcock, is not strictly moral. You have adopted means to enforce the vote of many of the boys that were quite unfair; but that I overlooked, being confident in the judgment of the school. Since you have defied the school, and flouted your captain, I will put the question to the school now."

"Boys," he shouted, his clarion tones rising to the very rafters, "do you wish me to resign?"

"No!" came the reply in a hundred voices, sounding like thunder, and drowning the feeble "Yes" of the Jeffcock faction.

"Are you content to acknowledge me as your captain until another shall be properly elected in my place at the end of the year?"

"Yes!"

"Are you satisfied with the result of the ballot in Geoffrey Foster's favour?"

"Yes!" in a roar, in which the "No" of the other side could not be heard at all.

"Do you consider the count as being fair?"

"Yes!"

"Or shall I refer all the papers to our Head for him to give his judgment on them?"

"No!"

The captain paused. When silence reigned again he turned his eyes coldly upon Bangley Jeffcock, who made no attempt to conceal his rage at the bitterness of his defeat.

"I think," said William Hewitt, "that even Bangley Jeffcock, hard to please though he is, will agree with me that there is nothing more to be said. Should he continue his opposition to Geoffrey Foster after this the whole school will know what to think of his attitude, and will condemn him accordingly."

He waited for a reply, but none came.

"And now," said the captain, "having brought this meeting to a successful close, and having done my best to satisfy all parties, I declare it closed, hoping that the harmony of the school will remain undisturbed by anything that has happened here to-night."

"One moment," cried Jeffcock, rising to his feet, his voice trembling with half-concealed emotion, "I have something to say. The matter has not ended here. The school has elected Geoffrey Foster to the vacancy in the cricket team to meet Headlingham College. Well and good. They can please themselves, I suppose. But"—here he raised his voice—"there is no law of Grovehouse to compel any of us to play in the team with him. Talbot here, and Haines, have agreed with me that they will not play should Foster persist in taking his place in the team."

"That's a lie!" put in Haines coolly. "Jeffcock has no right to include me with the rest of his cads."

There was a laugh at Jeffcock's expense.

"And so," said Jeffcock angrily, "Talbot and myself will withdraw."

The school remained silent. What would their captain have to say to this?

"Boys," said William Hewitt gravely, after a pause, "I must say I was scarcely prepared for this. Jeffcock has always shown the most vindictive dislike for young Foster. Why, I fail to understand, since their fathers are such great friends. There is nothing wrong with Foster, and so I say here and now that under no circumstances will I permit him to withdraw from the team to which he has been elected by so big a majority. Do you agree with me, Jellotson?"

"Emphatically!" drawled the handsome aristocrat. "We can't do without Foster. There never should have been any question about his selection at all."

"And therefore," continued the Grovehouse captain, "if Jeffcock and Talbot persist in their present course of action, the cricket club committee will have no option but to accept their resignation from the team, and to appoint two others in their stead. We should all be sorry, for we could ill spare such good bats as Jeffcock and Talbot, but they will force us to exclude them if they continue in their opposition to young Foster."

"We shall persist," growled Jeffcock, white with rage.

"Then," shouted the captain, "you can send in your resignations to-morrow morning, both of you, to the club secretary, and I'm sure Adams will be only too glad to have them! This wrangling has gone on long enough. Gentlemen and fellow-schoolmates, the meeting is dissolved!"

With a roar the boys leapt up from their seats, and a rush was made for the school captain. They surrounded him, Jellotson, and young Foster; and would have chaired the three round the great hall if they could have had their way.

"Three cheers for Hewitt!" cried Bob Haines. "He's all right!"

They were given with a heartiness that schoolboys alone can utter.

"And three for Arthur Jellotson!" bawled Adams, the cricket club secretary.

The three were given.

"And three for young Foster!" shouted Haines when he could be heard. "It's a shame they're down on him!"

These three were the loudest of them all, and Geoffrey Foster, whose heart was too full for words, turned away to hide the tears that would spring unbidden to his eyes. He was not a baby, but the confidence and love of his comrades touched him to the heart.

Then, singing "For he's a jolly good fellow," a crowd of

the bigger boys, surrounded by a mob of juniors, escorted the Grovehouse captain to the doors, which were by this time unbolted, and rushed him pell-mell into the corridor.

They had urged him past Jeffcock, leaving that miserable worthy unnoticed, and, grinding his teeth with rage, the big Sixth Form boy turned to Sidney Weames and Fred Talbot, who were standing near.

"Weames," he said, "I did my best to get you in. I had no idea Hewitt and Foster were so popular. It beats me altogether. I thought I had sounded the school well enough. It only shows you how much these fellows can be led by outward show. Foster's offering to resign, and the captain pretending to be scrupulously fair with the election, were only tricks. Confound them! But"—he spoke vindictively—"it isn't all over yet. We've a week to the big match, and I'll take jolly good care that Foster doesn't play."

"How are you going to prevent it?" asked Sidney Weames eagerly, for it was an affair in which he was most concerned.

"Just you wait and see!" cried Jeffcock bitterly. "I owe Foster one, and I always pay my debts. I'm itching to get my hands on him. He'll suffer for this, and in a way he won't like. Meanwhile, say nothing, you chaps; but leave him to me!"

And Bangley Jeffcock, hanging his head in thought, walked gloomily from the great hall that had witnessed his defeat.

CHAPTER 3.

A Glimpse into the Past—At the Nets.

During the days that immediately followed the dramatic scene in the great hall, when Geoffrey Foster had been selected to fill the vacancy in the school team, the lad had ample time to review his career at Grovehouse, and very bitter were his reflections as he recalled the injustice he had suffered at the hands of the other boys, most of them influenced by Jeffcock and his dislike for the lad who should in reality have been very dear to him.

Locked in the drawer of his desk in his private study, which he shared with Adams, and which had been luxuriously furnished by his father, were letters from Gilbert Foster, who enjoined his son, for reasons that were obvious, to cultivate the friendship of Bangley Jeffcock.

When Geoffrey Foster had first come to Grovehouse his heart was filled with the greatest affection for the lad who had turned out to be his bitterest enemy.

The two lads had never met before, and never while life should last would Geoffrey Foster erase from his memory the feeling of instinctive dislike and repulsion he felt towards Bangley Jeffcock when they met in the playground on the morning after his arrival.

Jeffcock's manner had been rude, repellent, from the first. He had, so far as was possible, insulted the new boy before the whole school.

Geoffrey had restrained himself, meeting insult with civility, and thus winning for himself the respect of William Hewitt, the school captain, of Jellotson, and of Haines—a respect which, with them, had never diminished.

Bangley Jeffcock's attitude towards him had ever since been a source of the greatest wonderment. What did it mean? The boy asked himself the question again and again.

Their fathers were closely and tenderly allied. Their acquaintance had begun during the war in South Africa, when both had served their Queen in the 29th Regiment of Hussars. They were both junior captains at the time of the outbreak of the war, and through his desire to see active service, Gilbert Foster had been drafted into the 29th, bringing with him a fine organising reputation. His skill in warfare had soon been shown, and after the affair of Sorenberg, when the 29th had been badly mauled by the enemy, on the death of Major Cartwright, who fell gallantly at the head of his troops, Captain Foster had been promoted to that command. It was reported at the time that his promotion had been hailed with delight by his comrades, and Captain Rufus Bangley Jeffcock had been loudest in his congratulations.

Major Foster had ruled his men with a firm hand, gaining their sincere respect and admiration. He was a soldier born and bred, and from the time of his promotion until the affair of Botha's Bluff, when the regiment had been surrounded by the enemy, and burnt out of their retreat through the firing of the grass by the Boers, to perish, most of them, under the fire of the encircling sharpshooters, he had led them with distinction and unparalleled courage.

The history of that engagement was engraven upon Geoffrey's mind with indelible characters. The story of the escape of the few survivors was the most thrilling bit of

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history of the entire Transvaal campaign, and how Captain Jeffcock had succeeded, at great personal risk, in carrying the wounded and unconscious form of his major from the fire zone to a place of safety has since been told a thousand times.

Major Foster had been struck by the flying portion of an exploded shell, and when brought into hospital with a gaping wound in his head he had been given up for dead. But a sound constitution and an heroic courage saved him, and he lived to bestow his gratitude upon the man who had saved his life.

Captain Jeffcock did not escape unscathed, for at the very moment when he appeared in view of a relieving force of mounted infantry, who had been hurried to the scene by the orders of General French, he was struck in the leg by a spent bullet, and brought to earth, to lie, with his rescued comrade, incapable of moving another inch.

The cheering soldiery testified to the captain's gallantry, for even then the bullets were still falling about them; and, after being mentioned in despatches, Captain Jeffcock, promoted to major in the place of Gilbert Foster, who was put upon the retired list owing to his unfitness for further service to his country, was rewarded with the gift of the Victoria Cross—an honour granted to but few even of the bravest of soldiers.

But the wound in the major's leg proved stubborn to heal. Gangrene ensued, and almost cost the Hussar his life and his leg, but by some miracle of Nature quite unexplained, he survived, and he, too, retired from the Service.

Geoffrey Foster had been a youngster when all this happened, but he recalled now how his father's narration of that thrilling incident, when he had been toppled out of his saddle, to lie upon the burning veldt, with death threatening him on every side, with brave Trooper Patrick Mulready watching over him, and Captain Jeffcock cowering behind his horse a few paces away, had thrilled him through and through.

The fire had approached nearer and nearer. The air had got stifling and choked with smoke. The enemy's bullets fell all around, and shells burst here and there, making the position insufferable. Yet the band of heroes had fought on. Major Gilbert Foster was never tired of telling how, just when consciousness was leaving him, he felt himself lifted bodily from the ground, to be carried away, with Patrick Mulready's shout ringing in his ears like sweet music.

Then oblivion had come, and the rest was told by the troops who hurried to the relief of the 29th.

They had arrived not a moment too soon, and when they retired they carried to the hospital the wounded body of Trooper Mulready, who, carbine in hand, had defended the retreat of his captain and his major. Mulready was also mentioned in despatches, but when the war was over he fell on hard times, retiring from the Hussars, and, as Major Foster feared, taking to drink.

A friendship cemented by such a deed as that of brave Captain Jeffcock's was bound to be lasting, and it did not seem extraordinary to Geoffrey Foster, in reviewing events, that his father and his enemy's should become partners in many big business concerns in the City. Gilbert Foster was a poor man. Bangley Jeffcock was a rich one. Rich Major Jeffcock found the money; poor Major Foster found the brains. The combination was a good, sound commercial one, and so when Major Foster sent his boy to Grovehouse School, where the son of his saviour and benefactor was also being educated, he had looked upon his selection as an ideal one, and had enjoined his son to cultivate the friendship of his friend's son.

How Geoffrey Foster tried and failed can easily be read in the description of Jeffcock's attitude towards the boy when Hewitt, the captain of the school, had proposed Geoffrey for the vacant place in the school cricket team.

For the hundredth time since that meeting in the great hall Geoffrey Foster allowed his mind to review the events briefly recorded above as he made his way to the nets in the cool of the evening. He was clad in his flannels, and wished to get in some bowling practice. He felt fairly sure of his batting, but he had made up his mind, judging by the two records of Grovehouse and Headlingham College for that season, that if the school wished to win the big match, they would have to win it by their bowling.

At the nets he found Hewitt, Jellotson, and Jeffcock batting. Fred Talbot, Bob Haines, and club-secretary Adams were bowling. As he approached, Jeffcock, opening his shoulders, sent a loose ball flying against the side of the net, and Adams, mopping his brows for relief, looked round.

(This grand serial will be continued in next week's issue of *The GEM Library*. Order NOW.)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 318.

FERRERS LOCKE, DETECTIVE,

is the principal character in one of the complete stories contained in

CHUCKLES, 1st.

"THE GEM" LIBRARY FREE CORRESPONDENCE EXCHANGE.

The only names and addresses which can be printed in these columns are those of 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."

F. Burfitt, Blatan Mati, Singapore, S.S., wishes to correspond with girl readers in Canada, age 21.

Miss P. M. Flight, 87A, Gouger Street, Adelaide, South Australia, wishes to correspond with a boy reader in England, age 19.

A. McGregor, 83, Cape Road, Port Elizabeth, South Africa, wishes to correspond with a girl reader in British Colonies, age 16-17.

W. Rowan, Winton, Southland, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with readers who are interested in stamps.

H. B. D. Coxen, 47, Blacking Street, Beaconsfield, South Africa, wishes to correspond with girl readers, age 15-20.

Oswald Millea-Caldwell, 202, Karangahape Road, Auckland, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with readers in all parts of the world.

A. Thomas, 4, Francis Street, off Bridge Street, South End, Port Elizabeth, South Africa, wishes to correspond with readers living in the British Isles.

W. C. S. Sanders, care of Sargood Bros., Flinders Street, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in Canada, age 16-17.

W. Sparkes, Panyul, Strathewen, via Arthur's Creek, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with a young lady reader living in the British Isles.

A. Bradshaw, care of J. Bell, 19, Freeman Street, North Fitzroy, Melbourne, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in the South of England (Hampshire preferred), age 18-19.

J. J. M. dos Remedios, of Messrs. China and Japan Trading Co., Ltd., Shanghai, China, wishes to correspond with readers interested in postcards, age 17-22.

Alex. Harvey, 1122, Bordeaux Street, Montreal, Canada, wishes to correspond with a Scotch girl or boy reader, age 14-15.

H. Bampton, Jamieson Street, Rosatake, Port Adelaide, South Australia, wishes to correspond with readers in the British Isles, age 17-18.

R. B. O'Reilly, 284, Faraday Street, Carlton, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with readers in Ireland and America.

Miss E. Gillies, Barrington Avenue, Kew, Melbourne, wishes to correspond with readers, age 21.

Walter Butler, 122, Michael Street, North Fitzroy, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with girl readers interested in picture postcards, age 15-16.

Miss Valeria Ruth Cochrane, care of Captain Cochrane, Bath Street, Parnell, Auckland, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with readers, age 20-23.

Miss T. Minchin, Pent Lyn, Balkuling, via York, West Australia, wishes to correspond with readers in all parts.

The Editor specially requests Colonial Readers to kindly bring the Free Correspondence Exchange to the notice of their friends.

SECRET SERVICE!

By "AGENT No. 55."

(THE CLOSING CHAPTERS OF THIS GREAT ADVENTURE STORY.)

The Prisoners.

Well guarded, Elton and Jerry left the 'plane, and were escorted to where stood a red-haired, red-bearded, tall, and thin man wearing overalls.

"Herr Richtschnur Commandant, I have to bring to your notice the two Englishmen concerning whom I have already sent a wireless message. They had attacked the steamer Vaterland, as reported," said the officer, very respectfully.

"I received your message, captain," said the red man carelessly.

"Then with you, sir, I leave them—the Herr Elton, Herr Osborne." And the officer indicated the prisoners.

"Ach, the Herr Elton!" And the red man's indifference vanished, and he shot a piercing look at Elton. A puzzled expression came into his eyes. "Herr Elton!" he exclaimed. "You are mistaken."

"He is quite correct," interposed Elton.

And for half a minute, all those within earshot having gathered round, Max Elton and Richard von Preusser, the two greatest authorities in the world on aerial matters, eyed each other curiously. Said Von Preusser:

"Herr Elton, I am more than glad to meet you." And he looked at him. Then he added grimly: "Now at last you are Germany's guest we shall be careful not to lose your company with great haste."

And neither Elton nor Jerry had need to ask what he meant by those words. At any risk, Max Elton, the greatest stumbling block in the path of the German Empire's aggressive policy, must be retained a prisoner.

Hardly a German on the ground but knew Elton by name and reputation. That he should be a prisoner was a stroke of good luck hardly to be credited. They pressed nearer, eager to see him more thoroughly. Jerry Osborne found himself quite out in the cold. He might just as well have been absent.

And absent in very truth was he when, a few minutes later, Herr von Preusser gave orders for the prisoners to be lodged in the arsenal beyond the flying-ground.

Pursued!

"Together? No, separately. When two Englishmen are together there is mischief also," replied Von Preusser. "The arsenal, I suppose, holds two suitable empty chambers?"

It was this reply of the director-commandant concerning the prisoners' confinement that awoke the amazed crowd to the fact that one of the said prisoners was missing. Officers, airmen, mechanics stared in silent amazement at the discovery.

"Henker!" gasped a burly fellow, fairly scared. "Why, Herr Officer, he was standing by my side but a moment ago!"

"Fool! Do you fall asleep when guarding a prisoner?" shouted the enraged officer. And he struck the man in the face.

There were shouting and twenty contradictory orders, there were oaths and cries of wonder. Thirty men scattered with a simultaneous rush, running heedlessly in all directions, and half a score bunched themselves quickly about Max Elton, as though anticipating his immediate flight.

But anything resembling Jerry Osborne was not to be seen. He had vanished, as though the earth had swallowed him.

"Herr Elton," shouted the commander of the warplane, "where has gone your infernal countryman?"

"Well, truly it is no business of mine to guard him. D'you imagine I've hidden him in my jacket pocket?" replied Elton coolly.

He was as greatly amazed as the rest by Jerry's abrupt disappearance.

Snapping violent expletives, the officer rushed to where his craft rested, bawling orders.

"Herr Director, what has happened?" inquired an eager voice, and a young officer of the German Imperial Air Corps leaned from the seat of a small biplane that had alighted near to and just before the frenzied break-up of the group of men, and had been listening and looking curiously.

"An Englishman, a prisoner, captured with the Herr Elton, has vanished. He was here a minute—half a minute ago!" half a dozen voices informed the young man.

"A half minute. Sapperment! Then he cannot have gone far," was the answer. "If he be on the ground, as he must be, I ought to see him."

And with a twist of his hand the officer set his engines working, and, with a brief run, the biplane rose in the air, and began moving in leisurely, widening circles.

Little attention was paid him, but Elton and one or two others idly watching saw an extraordinary happening upon that biplane. They saw—for the machine was not more than twenty feet in the air—the head and shoulders of a man rise suddenly behind the pilot's seat, an arm raised, and even caught the sound of a crashing blow. The biplane wobbled, dropped a few feet, hesitated, and then recovered itself as the mechanism again came under control.

But the guiding hand was not that of the German officer. His body was lying in a crumpled heap, sideways across the seat. And then the 'plane, with elevated front, swept upwards in a wide curve. Before the astonished watchers could collect their thoughts it had soared high, and was moving at a swift pace across the boundary of the flying park.

"Der Engländer! Der Fliegende Engländer!" yelled frenzied voices.

Elton smiled, laughed, and then broke into a full-throated:

"Bravo, Jerry! Oh, well done!"

"Hope I haven't hit the chap too hard," Jerry said to himself, as he went flying over the town of Wesel, the 'plane moving easily, and responding to his control.

To tell the truth, he had struck without reckoning the force used. He was excited. Of excitement he had plenty lately, but this was the climax. It had needed some nerve to slip from the group where no one was paying any attention, cross twenty yards of open ground, slip around the far side of the biplane, which had attracted his attention as it alighted, and climb so softly to the vacant seat behind the pilot without attracting the latter's attention. But he had done it. He had perfectly understood Von Preusser's reference to taking care of Elton. In an instant he had made up his mind. The officer's eagerness to search for the lost prisoner had saved him being knocked on the head, and pitched from his seat—Jerry's first intention. He had bettered it, not much to the German's advantage.

"One thing," went on Jerry, turning for a brief moment to look behind him, "I've got a start, anyway, and that's worth something."

There would be pursuit, of course, and it was not likely the 'plane he had commandeered so audaciously was the fastest in the flying park; but to be captured after pursuit was better than quietly submitting to walk away a prisoner. And with freedom is always hope. And if he did win freedom—well, it should go hard if he could not devise some plan to get Max Elton freed also.

He was vague in his geography of Wesel, but somewhere west he judged was Holland or Belgium, and west he steered accordingly. In a few minutes he was across a wide river, the Rhine for certain, and flying across a flat, sandy, almost treeless country. But he thought he could see hills and dark splashes that meant trees in the distance.

No pursuit as yet.

But the fourth time he glanced back he caught sight of a moving speck amid the clear atmosphere. He gave his attention to the 'plane. Five minutes later a second glance showed the speck much nearer, and a second and third behind it. All his too scanty knowledge of aircraft Jerry brought into play.

And suddenly his engines stopped working. And they could not be coaxed to continue.

He had learned what to do. Keeping his head, he began to 'plane downwards, guiding towards a belt of trees. In timber there is hope of concealment. And, more perhaps by luck than judgment, he came to earth well placed and easily, within fifty yards of the edge of a wood.

For the wood he made at a run. But first he stopped to look at his passenger. The German was still senseless as the blow behind the ear had left him, but Jerry took the precaution to fasten both hands and feet together. He reckoned himself too far to have been seen by any pursuing 'plane.

(This Grand Serial will be concluded shortly.)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 318.

NEXT
WEDNESDAY—

"THE HOUSEMASTER'S PERIL!"

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of
Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

OUR SPECIAL WEEKLY FEATURE



For Next Wednesday,

"THE HOUSEMASTER'S PERIL!"
By Martin Clifford.

This grand, long, complete story of Tom Merry & Co., of St. Jim's, deals with a grave peril which threatens Mr. Railton, the popular master of the School House, and also brings out in a strong light the splendid qualities and keen detective instinct of Kerr, of the famous New House Co. The mysterious notices that appear on the school gateway first attract the attention of the keen Scottish junior, and when the case takes a serious turn the amateur detective is ready and willing to take it up. Thanks to him, and to the sturdy juniors who back him up so readily, a tragedy is averted, and

"THE HOUSEMASTER'S PERIL!"

becomes a thing of the past.

A SPLENDID OFFER TO ENTERPRISING READERS

Some time ago I mentioned on this page a scheme which I had instituted whereby Colonial readers could make a very substantial addition indeed to their weekly income simply by doing a little "missionary work" for "The Gem" Library and its companion papers amongst their friends. I started a special department to assist my Colonial chums who wished to take advantage of this scheme, and this department has been kept busy ever since in showing my enterprising Colonial readers how to begin their work; and not only giving them a free start, but actually putting a sum of money in their pockets to commence with!

The address I asked Colonials to write to for particulars of this scheme was "The Export Department," "The Gem" Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C."

Now, the success of this scheme, together with the numerous letters I have received from readers living in the British Isles asking to be allowed to participate in it, has led me to make special arrangements for extending it.

I now offer to every reader living in any small town or village in the British Isles a chance of making a very handsome

CASH ADDITION

indeed to his or her weekly income by devoting a portion of leisure time each week to the congenial work of advancing the interests of "The Gem" Library and its companion papers. The steady increase in the number of new friends that the four famous companion papers—"The Gem" and "Magnet" Libraries, "The Penny Popular," and "Chuckles"—are making each week has naturally caused these papers to stride ahead, and it is my wish that my loyal and energetic chums should reap a share in this prosperity. To take advantage of my new scheme, readers should write at once to:

"Sub-Agency," 24, Tudor Street, London, E.C.,

and mention the name of this paper. Each applicant will then receive full particulars of the scheme, and can then decide whether to take advantage of the offer or not.

My chums should take particular note of the address given above, and should remember that they do not commit themselves to anything or place themselves under any obligation whatever by sending for particulars of this interesting and advantageous scheme.

ANOTHER AUSTRALIAN LEAGUE.

Master C. Van de Ven, Box 1,086, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, is forming a "Gem" League in the district of St. Kilda, and would like to hear from any readers interested.

HOW TO TRAIN DOGS TO DO TRICKS.—No. 3.

Public Performances.

Some of the feats of the performing dogs are, in reality, the simplest. They appear to be wonderful because the trainer conveys to the audience the idea that the dog really understands something that is said to him. Thus, a row of half a dozen handkerchiefs of different colours will be placed in different parts of the stage, and the dog will be told to pick up any colour mentioned by the audience. This is a more simple matter than it appears to be. The dog is taught to walk from one handkerchief to the other—they are usually placed at different points in a circle—and to pick up a handkerchief when the trainer moves his position on the stage, or makes some little signal, such as the snapping of his second finger against his hand. The audience do not hear the signal, and if they see the trainer walk from one side of the stage to the other they do not connect that movement with the trick. But the dog knows it, and stops at the handkerchief near which he was standing when the signal was given.

In the same way a dog can be apparently taught to distinguish between the figures printed on cards. This in itself would not be much of a feat from the showman's point of view, and therefore it is usually improved by being turned into an arithmetic lesson. The dog will be asked to say the answer to "twice two," and when he gets near the figure "four" the trainer gives the cue, and the dog picks up the card.

The Folly of Cruelty.

Most of the tricks one sees performed by dogs on the stage are taught by means of this system of signalling, but when a dog has to take part in a "scene," as though he were a human being, he is led through the "business" until he knows by constant repetition exactly what is required of him. The utmost patience is needed, and the careful trainer never makes one lesson too long. He knows by the manner of the dog he is teaching exactly how long the lesson should be.

One often hears the question: Aren't all performing dogs used rather cruelly during their training? Possibly some of the dogs that perform marvellous feats of high jumping may be "persuaded" over the obstacles by means of a whip, but I know of no other feat that can be taught by a man who is unkind to his charges. On the contrary, once lose your temper with a dog and strike him, and you have undone all the lessons you have taught him. A dog must be punished for fighting, chasing chickens, and other similar canine faults, but that is quite a different matter from punishing him because he is slow at learning a lesson. Most dogs will do what you want them to do when they know what that is. Once a dog knows that, he will be as pleased as a child in showing off his accomplishment, and no compulsion is needed to get him to perform. He regards his tricks as a good game well learned, and his greatest delight in life is to play that game with his master.

(A Special Article next week on "The Navy as a Profession for Boys," by Admiral Fremantle.)

The Editor

A Cash Prize for Every Contributor to this Page.



Our Weekly Prize Page.

LOOK OUT FOR YOUR WINNING STORYETTE

ONE FOR JOHNNIE.

Taking a stroll down the garden walk, a woman was horrified to see her son standing on his head against the wall.

"Johnnie, you wretch!" she cried. "What are you doing now?"

"Standing on my head," replied Johnnie. "Didn't you tell me to play at something that wouldn't wear my boots out?"—Sent in by J. C. Hare, Grimsby.

MOTOR-BUS CHIVALRY.

The 'bus had stopped at Charing Cross, and many passengers had alighted. Liza Jones was one of them, and as she walked across Trafalgar Square she turned towards her companion, a burly costermonger.

"Say, Bill, did yer see that bloke wot was a-sitting nex' to me in the 'bus?" she asked.

"Yes," replied Bill.

"Well, 'e was a perfec' gentleman, 'e was. Saw I looked tired, so he made his missus stand up and give me 'er seat!"—Sent in by Miss Edith M. Douglas, Bucks.

A NEW FISH.

He gave it up as a bad job at last. He had been fishing for some considerable time, and was about to leave when he noticed a small boy carrying under his arm a stick with a piece of cord attached to the end. On the cord was a pin, and fixed to this was a worm. The boy fished for a few minutes, and at length caught a good-sized fish. In his enjoyment, he made straight for home and showed it to his mother, who said:

"What kind of fish do you call it?"

"I dunno!" was the reply. "But the man next to me called it the bloomin' limit!"—Sent in by K. Baker, Twickenham.

WHY HE TOOK THE BUCKET.

The captain of a large steamer was once making up his crew for a long voyage, when a seaman came up.

"I want to sail with you, sir," he said.

"All right, my man," said the captain. "And where have you sailed before?"

"P. & O., to Australia, sir."

"What countryman?"

"An Oirishman," was the ready response.

"Well, you must get a character."

The character was obtained, and as the Irishman was presenting it, another seaman came up, and said he wanted to join the crew.

"What line were you on before?" said the captain.

"Cunard, sir."

"What countryman?"

"English, your honour."

"All right, go forward."

Shortly afterwards as the two were swilling the decks with buckets, in a very heavy sea, the Englishman was swept overboard, bucket and all. Pat, seeing this, finished his job, and made for the captain's office.

"Come in!" said the officer, hearing Pat's rap. "What's up now?"

"You moind Bill Wilkins, the Englishman and Cunarder?" queried Pat.

"Yes, surely, man."

"You took him without a character, didn't you?"

"I believe so. Well, what of it?"

"Well, he's now gone off with your bucket."—Sent in by F. Fowden, Manchester.

YOU CAN NEVER TELL.

It showed that Mr. Harry Hawkins possessed a spirit of pushfulness when he added to his business as vendor of vegetables, the making and selling of pork sausages.

Into the ingredients or merits of the sausages let us not enter, nor did Hawkins commit himself regarding the quality of his wares in the notice he painted outside his shop:

"Pork Sausages. Our Own Make."

But former purchasers in the locality had emphatic opinions on the subject. One morning, very early, the maker of breakfast delicacies found, to his astonishment, the sign altered to: "Pork Sausages. Our Own Moke."—Sent in by Miss K. Train, South Shields.

NOT ALWAYS!

Agent to Crowd: "Ladies and gentlemen, this liquid will remove stains from anything."

Interested Onlooker: "I know something it won't shift."

Agent: "All right, out with it, my friend!"

Onlooker: "Why, remove Staines out of Middlesex."—Sent in by A. Worton, Staffs.

SANDY'S RETORT.

Yankee: "I'll have you to know, stranger, that I belong to Chicago."

Sandy: "'Deed, an' wha'd hae thoct it? Frae the way ye've been speaking, I thoct Chicago belonged to you."—Sent in by A. McIntyre, High Shields.

HOT AIR.

Horticultural Gentleman: "You say here, in this article of yours, that you have cultivated hothouse lilac bushes that have attained the height of over fifty feet."

Expert: "Yes. Why?"

Horticultural Gentleman (musingly): "Only I wish I could lilac that."—Sent in by J. Pepper, Weston-super-Mare.

ONLY COMMONSENSE.

"Mary Ellen," said old Toskins to his wife, "it is my opinion that these modern newspapers does some powerful stupid things."

"What is wrong now, Samuel?"

"Well, look at this 'ere. They say 'Portrait of Tom Jones, by himself.' What's the use of that? Everybody can see very well that he's by himself, because there ain't no one else in the picture."—Sent in by Thomas Aleock, Sheffield.

A GOOD OFFER?

Having apparently fallen on evil times, an actor visited a wardrobe dealer's establishment with the idea of disposing of one of his garments. Ten shillings was the offer, but the actor would not hear of it. He sought fresh fields, and came across a "rag-and-bone" shop. After telling a powerful tale to the man behind the counter, he put his parcel down on the scales. The merchant at once weighed it.

"Two pounds ten, sir," he said.

"That will do nicely," said the actor.

The merchant, after a hurried departure to the back of his shop, returned and said:

"I'm extremely sorry, sir: I have no toffee left, but will a balloon do?"—Sent in by A. H. West, Wallington.

MONEY PRIZES OFFERED!

Readers are invited to send **ON A POSTCARD** Storyettes or Short, Interesting Paragraphs for this page. For every contribution used the senders will receive a Money Prize.

ALL POSTCARDS MUST BE ADDRESSED
The Editor, "The Gem" Library, Gough House,
Gough Square, Fleet Street, London, E.C.

THIS OFFER IS OPEN TO READERS IN ALL PARTS OF THE WORLD.

No correspondence can be entered into with regard to this Competition, and all contributions enclosed in letters, or sent in otherwise than on postcards, will be disregarded.

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